"WHEN HE ARRIVED IN ROME, HE EAGERLY SEARCHED FOR ME!" (2 TIM 1,17) FRIENDS, FOES, AND NETWORKS IN 2 TIMOTHY

Korinna Zamfir[1]

Abstract. The antagonistic discourse of 2 Timothy divides the community into two camps: the truthful believers and the heterodox opponents of Paul. Emphasis on cohesion, on the strong links between Paul and friends and delineation from those depicted as dangerous outsiders strengthen group identity. However, perspectives from network theory show that Christ-believers did not belong to impermeable camps. Proximity, multiplex social relations (shared family, neighbourhood, or occupational ties, worship, and commensality) created opportunities for communication and exchange. Weak ties bridged the gap between various clusters, shaping networks akin to small worlds, allowing for interactions across partisan lines and for more inclusive forms of identity.

Keywords: 2 Timothy, opponents, network theory, small world.

2 Timothy names a remarkable number of persons, close friends, co-workers and acquaintances of Paul and Timothy, as well as heterodox teachers, deserters, and utter enemies. In the narrative world of the epistle, which advances a particular interpretation of Paul several decades after his lifetime, the characters and personal details are incorporated in an antagonistic discourse. This creates group identity and allegiance to contemporary leaders by contrasting the orthodox, faithful disciples to the heterodox, disloyal camp. Scholarly discussions quite often take this position for granted, focusing on the opponents, and attempting to reconstruct their presumed heterodox teachings.

This paper will follow a different track. Taking distance from this polarizing discourse, I will focus instead on connections and interactions. As the epistle postdates Paul, the characters, and their interactions (inspired by earlier epistles

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[1] Professor of Biblical Studies, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj, Romania / Research fellow, Discipline Group Old and New Testament, University of Stellenbosch / Adjunct Fellow, Centre for Advanced Studies Beyond the Canon, University of Regensburg. Contact: emilia.zamfir@ubbcluj.ro; kori_zamfir@yahoo.com.

and traditions close to Acts, or fictitious) may not be used to identify historical events. But within the narrative world, beyond the dichotomic perspective, they point to a complex network, which may provide a sense of what relationships may have looked like in early communities of Christ-believers. The characters, whether historical, like Paul, Timothy, Prisca and Aquila, Luke, and others, or fictitious, are envisaged as connected by many ties, on the move between the cities of Asia Minor, Macedonia, Achaia, Dalmatia, and Rome, interacting, cooperating, working, struggling, clashing, or fleeing.

This image of a complex network has struck me while exploring the opponents in 2 Timothy with an eye to Chantal Mouffe's agonistic interpretation of the political.[2] Mouffe argues that antagonisms are inherent to society and have a decisive role in constructing collective identity. The confrontation of conflicting, irreconcilable perspectives is a power struggle aiming to impose a certain order. These antagonistic relationships, Mouffe maintains, lead to the definition of a collective identity, grounded precisely on difference and opposition, on friend-foe relationships.[3] Obviously, setting up boundaries has a decisive role in the construal of identity.[4] In that sense, 2 Timothy emphasises indeed antagonism and exclusion, and delineates the group of orthodox believers from those labelled as heterodox and immoral, as adversaries to be avoided. Two distinct camps seem to be strictly set apart. But when analysing the characters in relation to geographic information, a very different picture starts to emerge.

In what follows, I will attempt to retrieve the web of relationships imagined by 2 Timothy in the light of network theory, to propose a more nuanced perspective on the way early communities functioned. I will argue that representations of a community, which define belonging and exclusion along the lines of orthodoxy and heterodoxy are overly (and probably intentionally) simplistic. Network theory helps deconstructing this antagonistic understanding of the group, show-

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[2]   "'Beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message!' Antagonisms and Identity-Construction in 2 Timothy", in *Antagonismen in neutestamentlichen Schriften. Studien zur Neuformulierung der "Gegnerfrage" jenseits des Historismus* (Beyond Historicism – New Testament Studies Today), ed. Stefan Alkier, Leiden: Brill, 2021, 162–173.

[3]   Chantal MOUFFE, *Agonistik. Die Welt politisch denken*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, ²2016, 21–43 (24–26, 31, 39); ead., "Democratic Politics and Conflict: An Agonistic Approach", *Política común* 9 (2016) http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/pc.12322227.0009.011.

[4]   Judith M. LIEU, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World*, Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 98.

ing how the discourse overemphasises the bonds between certain nodes in the network, while overlooking others and obscuring thereby the complexity of ties that cross the border of the two imaginary camps.

Fundamentals of network theory

Network theory comprises a broad spectrum of approaches sharing the insight that biological, physical, social / sociocultural aggregates are networks (mathematically speaking, graphs), in which individual elements (nodes, vertices) connected by ties (edges, links) interact and allow the diffusion of contents (flows).[5] As intuitive and self-evident as this seems, network theory is not a commonplace, but relies on mathematical/statistical models. Social sciences use the theory to understand and model social networks and phenomena pertaining to human interactions.

In any network, nodes have various numbers of connections (various degrees). Some nodes may be well connected, sharing with others a large number of ties, accounting thus for the higher degree of *density* of a network or a cluster.[6] Density also involves a high degree of overlap between shared connections: an overlap between the mutual acquaintances and friends of two nodes or individuals. Highly connected nodes have a high degree of *centrality*; they may be described

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[5]   On the fundamentals and the numerous applications of network theory: Albert-László Barabási, *Linked. The New Science of Networks*, Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2002; Albert-László Barabási, with Márton Pósfai, *Network Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Stephen P. Borgatti, Virginie Lopez-Kidwell, "Network Theory", *The SAGE Handbook of Social Network Analysis*, ed. John Scott and Peter J. Carrington, Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2011, 40–54; Anna Collar, "Network Theory and Religious Innovation", *Mediterranean Historical Review* 22.1 (2007), 149–162 (150–155); John S. Kloppenborg, "Social Networks and the Dissemination of Elective Cults", *Early Christianity* 10.2 (2019) 121–156 (129–132). Its use in social studies represents only a tiny part of its applicability. Network theory is employed in epidemiology, computer science, ecology, economics, finances, labour market studies, analyses of cultural networks, of citations in scholarly works, of the spread of information and news etc.

[6]   On the density of a network, as depending on the number of connections: Mark S. Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties", *American Journal of Sociology* 78.6 (1973) 1360–1380 (1370); id., "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited", *Sociological Theory* 1 (1983) 201–233 (201–202); Kloppenborg, "Social Networks", 130.

as hubs. Certain nodes may be interconnected through multiple bonds, through several forms of social connections, a feature called *multiplexity*.[7] Multiplexity usually results in *strong ties*. Ties facilitate exchange and the flow of positive or negative contents. Strong ties involve sharing more time, more commonalities and resources. Strong ties create closed and stable networks or cliques (a term without pejorative sense here), translated into a high clustering coefficient. The efficacy and speed with which flows pass from a node to others largely depend on the length of the path, i.e. the distance between two nodes.

One of the influential models explaining the distant spread of content was proposed by Mark Granovetter, who emphasised the importance or 'strength' of weak ties in bridging loosely connected networks and allowing for the diffusion of information, innovation, and resources between networks.[8] Although it may seem counterintuitive, he found that weak ties, not strong ones – acquaintances, not close friends – contribute foremost to the dissemination of information outside one's own network, as they function as bridges between networks.[9]

Another important paradigm, the *small world model* of Duncan Watts and Steven Strogatz indicates that even in large networks where most members would be poorly connected ('sparse networks'), where nodes would have only a few lateral links to their neighbours, the addition of small number of weak links, of 'short cuts' to distant nodes increases considerably the connectedness of the network.[10] In social networks, the *average path length*, the average number of links in the shortest path between two nodes, represents the average number of friendship ties in the shortest sequence connecting two individuals.[11] The less connections are required to reach another individual, the shortest the path is,

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7   Lois M. VERBRUGGE, "Multiplexity in Adult Friendships", *Social Forces* 57.4 (1979) 1286–1309; Kloppenborg, "Social Networks", 130.

8   "The Strength of Weak Ties", esp. 1364–1366, 1370–1371; ID., "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited", 201–233; BARABÁSI, *Linked*, 42–44.

9   GRANOVETTER, "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited", 222; BARABÁSI, *Linked*, 42–44.

10 Duncan J. WATTS, Steven H. STROGATZ, "Collective Dynamics of "Small–World" Networks", *Nature* 393 (1998) 440–442; BARABÁSI, *Linked*, 49–53. Only a very small number of such short cuts would be sufficient to produce, through random rewiring, a highly clustered network (graph), with short path length, typical for the small-world model. On "short cuts": WATTS, STROGATZ, "Collective Dynamics", 441, fig. 1.

11 WATTS, STROGATZ, "Collective Dynamics", 441, fig. 2.

and the easier it becomes for information to spread. The clustering coefficient, on the other hand, indicates the degree to which any friends of a member are also friends of each other.[12]

Several points emerge from this discussion. a) Women are thought to have lesser mental capacities; therefore they are less suited for education. b) The education of women is subject to derision and contempt. Learned women are commonly considered vain, conceited, and ridiculous, a reason for which girls should not receive (too much) instruction. c) Women need to be taught in order to fulfil their fundamental role: to be able to manage their household, support their husband and raise their children. d) Appropriate household management is fundamental for a well-ordered human existence, for society as a whole; therefore the role of women is essential. e) Women should be educated because their virtue is equal to that of men, courage, a typically male virtue, included.

The network flow model of Stephen Borgatti and Virginie Lopez-Kidwell envisages the social network as an infrastructure consisting of similarities, social relations and interactions, which allow the transmission of flows (flows may be positive, like information, knowledge, or resources, or negative, such as diseases or gossip).[13] *Similarities* are the first requisite; they comprise physical and social proximity (a shared space and belonging to the same group or social category), as well as immaterial correspondences like shared values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. Similarities effect *social relations*: these are connected to certain roles (pertaining to kinship or institutional relations) or express a cognitive or affective relationing, like knowing or (dis)liking someone. While role-based social relations are in certain sense public and more or less symmetrical, cognitive / affective relations are private and may be asymmetrical. Social roles lead to *interactions*, i.e., events such as verbal interaction (communication / talking with the other, or fighting with someone), commensality, trade or other. Interactions make the transmission of content, i.e., the flow, possible. Flows include the exchange of resources, information, but also diseases within the network.[14] While it may be self-evident, it is worth emphasising here the importance of spatial / physical proximity for relations and interactions to develop. Proximity enhances communication, a point that will be important for our topic.

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12 WATTS, STROGATZ, "Collective Dynamics", 441.
13 BORGATTI, LOPEZ-KIDWELL, "Network Theory", 44–45.
14 BORGATTI, LOPEZ-KIDWELL, "Network Theory", 44–45.

Networks are dynamic structures, subject to change and loss. They may grow, through the addition of new nodes and links, but they may also break down. Thus, removing a critical number of nodes and/or links leads to the network breaking down into several smaller, disconnected clusters, a phenomenon known as percolation.[15] As Barabási remarks, "once the fraction of removed nodes reaches a critical threshold, the network abruptly breaks into disconnected components. In other words, random node failures induce a *phase transition from a connected to a fragmented network*."[16]

Network theory has been used successfully in recent years to explain the spread of religious innovation in general,[17] and the adoption of belief in Christ in particular. Thus, John Kloppenborg has shown in two important articles and in his recent book on *Christ's Associations* (2019) how occupational and religious networks (professional guilds and cult groups) provided opportunities for the dissemination of the Christ-cult, through both local and translocal (weak) links.[18] Spatial proximity played an important role, as it facilitated the creation of networks.[19] Members of associations were often bound through multiple links (through kinship, professional, religious and ethnic bonds, gender, legal status etc.), and ties of friendship, affection and trust played a major part.[20] Belonging to several associations increased the likelihood that a cult would spread. Patronage, spatial contiguity, and travel for trade allowed associations to intersect, and this must have been true for the early communities of Christ-believers, as well.[21] Kloppenborg insists on the social gain, the acquisition of symbolic capital associated with the network. "Network structure facilitates the flow of certain properties, most importantly social capital, trust, a sense of belonging and worth, and

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[15]   Barabási, *Network Science*, Section 8.2.

[16]   Barabási, *Network Science*, 277 (emphases mine).

[17]   For the role of networks in the dissemination of ancient cults see also: Collar, "Network Theory and Religious Innovation", 149–162; for contemporary cults, already Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, "Networks of Faith: Interpersonal Bonds and Recruitment to Cults and Sects", *AJS* 85.6 (1980) 1376–1395.

[18]   Kloppenborg, "Social Networks", 121–56; id., "Recruitment to Elective Cults: Network Structure and Ecology", *NTS* 66 (2020) 323–350; id., *Christ's Associations. Connecting and Belonging in the Ancient City*, New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2019.

[19]   Kloppenborg, "Social Networks", 144–147.

[20]   Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations*, 56.

[21]   Kloppenborg, "Social Networks", 140–149.

competences or skills relevant to the nature of the network."[22] Acquiring social capital plays an important role in recruitment to cults.[23] Beyond social and material gain, belonging creates a powerful corporate identity.[24]

Building on these insights, I will attempt to reconstruct the network(s) presupposed by 2 Timothy, focusing notably on a few issues: the impact of spatial proximity on communication and the creation of ties, the influence of weak links and the small world model on understanding the relationships and interactions between members, and the role of the antagonistic discourse in inducing percolation and a phase transition from a connected to a fragmented network.

I shall argue that all those mentioned in the epistle belong to a complex network where most of the individuals are connected to various degrees. The author overlooks the connections between certain members of the group, symbolically cuts off the ties between characters, depicting them as belonging to entirely different spheres, as either orthodox or heterodox, as pious or evil. The discourse aims thus to produce a phase transition resulting in the disconnection between the 'orthodox' and the 'heterodox' cluster.

Perspectives from network theory. Friends and foes of Paul as nodes of networks

Close reading: Connected and on the move

The close reading of 2 Timothy reveals a net of people connected to Paul and Timothy. They are envisaged on the move between the various points of a wide geographic network, which comprises Rome and the cities in Asia Minor (notably Ephesus, but also Miletus and Troas, and further East, the cities of Galatia), Achaia, Macedonia and Dalmatia. They are all nodes of a large social network, connected to various degrees among each other, as well. Onesiphorus, who has rendered abundant service to the Apostle at the time he was in Ephesus, hastens to visit Paul in his Roman captivity (1,16-18; 4,19). Given the way the recollection of past interactions between Paul and Onesiphorus is formulated ("you know very well"), Timothy is also envisaged as someone who has been in contact with

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[22] Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations*, 56; see also 95 ("Social capital is an 'emergent' feature of social networks, in the sense that it "'emerges' in network relationships.").

[23] Kloppenborg, "Social Networks", 127–129; "Recruitment", 341–342.

[24] Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations*, 143.

Onesiphorus earlier in Ephesus.[25] Timothy himself should hasten to join Paul who suffers heroically in his captivity (4,9.21), but not before taking with him Mark, who had also been serviceable to Paul (4,11), and stopping on his way in Troas, to fetch Paul's cloak and book rolls he had left at Carpus' (4,13). Paul lets Timothy know that he has sent Tychicus to Ephesus, probably to replace him during his absence (4,12).[26] Tychicus will become thus a reference point for all those in Ephesus.[27] Among the collaborators in Ephesus we also find Prisca and Aquila (4,19) and the unnamed faithful men to which Timothy should entrust the deposit (2,2). We also learn of former friends of Paul who have turned into deserters: 'all those in Asia', in particular Phygelus and Hermogenes (1,15).

In Rome, allegedly only Luke (4,11) is on the side of Paul, a detail contradicted a little later by the reference to the numerous Roman believers sending greetings to Timothy, both named (Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia) and unnamed (the probably gender-inclusive ἀδελφοί; 4,21).[28] At any rate, several others have been earlier in Rome, but left, for good or bad reasons: Crescens to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia, probably to preach the Gospel,[29] while Demas deserted the Apostle out of love for this world, going to Thessalonica (4,10).[30]

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[25] Not only the narrative of 1 Timothy, but, more importantly, 1 Cor 4,17; 16,10 suggest a stay of both Paul and Timothy in Ephesus (also Acts 19,22). As Timothy is the co-sender of the two genuine captivity letters, Philippians and Philemon, this may indicate the same, in case we go with an Ephesian provenance (at least for Phil), but the question is highly disputed.

[26] Alfons WEISER notes the concern to underscore the geographic breadth of Paul's apostolic-missionary network and his concern for ensuring continuity. *Der zweite Brief an Timotheus* (EKK XVI/1) Düsseldorf: Benzinger / Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2003, 318.

[27] Tychicus seems to play a similar role in Tit 3,12, as one of those who could replace Titus during his absence.

[28] On the problems related to the identification of the various names: Raymond F. COLLINS, *1&2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary* (NTL), Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002, 179–181.

[29] Lorenz OBERLINNER, *Die Pastoralbriefe*. II. *Kommentar zum zweiten Timotheusbrief* (HThKNT XI/2), Freiburg: Herder, 1995, 169; I. Howard MARSHALL, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (ICC), Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999, 816; Walter L. LIEFELD, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999, 297.

[30] OBERLINNER, *2. Timotheusbrief*, 169. Demas' failure is all the more serious, as it occurs at a dramatic moment, when Paul is facing martyrdom. LIEFELD believes Thessalonica may have been his home (*1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 297).

We also learn of other friends in various other locations, like Erastus in Corinth, and Trophimus, left behind in Miletus (4,20). Relatives are mentioned, too, – the mother and grandmother of Timothy, Eunice and Lois (1,5), the household of Onesiphorus (1,16; 4,19), and the families of the γυναικάρια (3,7).

But other characters also emerge, as opponents (ἀντιδιατιθεμένοι, 2,25; cf. 4,15) and enemies of Paul and Timothy. False teachers, like Hymenaeus and Philetus (2,17) are named,[31] aside the men who intrude into households and take hold of the ignorant women (3,6-7), and other unnamed false teachers (4,3). Alexander, the coppersmith, is singled out as someone who has done a lot of harm to Paul and to the teaching; Timothy is therefore instructed to be on guard against him (4,14-15).[32] The nature of the harm he inflicted on Paul (probably during his stay in Ephesus) remains unknown, but his antagonising Paul expects divine judgement.[33]

If we focus merely on the discourse of the epistle, we are left with the impression of two distinct camps with very different values and attitudes, with little, if anything to share with each other. Paul, Timothy and friends, the trusted collaborators and true believers are models of faith and morality, epitomised by the virtue of piety (3,12). Conversely, an elaborate polemic (3,2-9.13) describes the opponents, heterodox teachers and foes as deceitful, displaying piety, but lacking its power, burdened with the worst sins. The charges undermine their credibility, by questioning their moral integrity (2,16.18; 3,2-7.13) and their teachings (3,8;

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[31] Philetus is otherwise unknown. On Hymenaeus and Philetus: Jürgen Roloff, *Der erste Brief an Timotheus* (EKK XV), Zürich: Benzinger / Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1988, 105 (Hymenaeus as ordained leader); Oberlinner, *2. Timotheusbrief*, 97–98; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 413, 751.

[32] 1 Timothy 1.20 names (an) Alexander with Hymenaeus. While the name was rather common, it is striking that both epistles to Timothy condemn an Alexander. It makes sense to connect these passages to (the tradition in) Acts 19 about the riot of the Ephesian silversmiths (cf. 19,33, where the role of Alexander is unclear). On the identity of the Alexanders named in 1 and 2 Timothy: Oberlinner, *2. Timotheusbrief*, 175–176 (although essentially, a paradigmatic character); Weiser, *2. Timotheusbrief*, 322–323; Collins, *1&2 Timothy and Titus*, 284–285; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 413, 821; Roloff, *1. Timotheus*, 105 (an ordained minister).

[33] Ceslas Spicq suspected that he had arranged for the arrest of Paul in Ephesus and would have continued his pursuit against Paul in Rome, acting as Judas against Jesus. *Épîtres pastorales* II, Paris: Gabalda, 1969, 816–817. However, this is essentially guesswork.

4,3-4), expectedly deterring others from joining them, and strengthening cohesion around the leaders the author seeks to confirm.[34] Timothy and the faithful disciples are repeatedly contrasted to the latter group and invited to dissociate themselves from these (2,14.16.23; 3,5; 4,15).

Network theory, however, sheds a quite different light on the situation. All these characters belong in fact to several clusters of a broad social network, interconnected through multiple ties, firstly within their own group, but also beyond that, through shared religious beliefs,[35] friendship, in some cases a common provenance, ethnic belonging, kinship, neighbourhood, and probably also professional ties (which would have involved belonging to various professional associations). Thus, while the epistle understandably focuses on shared spiritual values, other relationships also connected members of the early Christ-cult. Multiplexity resulting from shared values and multiple social connections obviously strengthens the ties and implicitly the cohesion of the groups or clusters. Beyond spiritual values proper, two particular aspects may be considered: sharing at table and occupational ties.

Worship at table[36] played a central role in the life of a community and in identity formation. Importantly, proximity during worship and commensality would have allowed for interaction: shared (cultic) meals would have brought many of the members to the same table. Venues must have been various – certainly not only houses, but workshops of artisans, shops, shared spaces in *insulae*, *taber-*

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[34] On polemics against the opponents in the Pastoral Epistles: Ceslas SPICQ, *Épîtres pastorales* I, Paris: Gabalda, 1969, 86–88; Robert J. KARRIS, "The Background and Significance of the Polemic of the Pastoral Epistles", *JBL* 92.4 (1973), 549–564; Andrie DU TOIT, "Vilification as a Pragmatic Device in Early Christian Epistolography", *Focusing on Paul: Persuasion and Theological Design in Romans and Galatians*, ed. Cilliers Breytenbach and David S. Du Toit, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007, 45–56; Martin DIBELIUS, Hans CONZELMANN, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Hermeneia), Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972, 8.

[35] These include the Gospel of Paul (1,8.10; 2.8), belief in divine election by grace (1,9), in the manifestation and resurrection of Christ, in future resurrection and immortality (1,10; 2,8.18), the final epiphany (Parousia) of Christ and divine judgement (4,1.8), holding to the good deposit of faith (1,12.14), and dedication to Christ.

[36] On the concept: Dennis E. SMITH, *From Symposium to Eucharist. The Banquet in the Early Christian World*, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003, 176, 179.

nae, or rented spaces (as in the case of other associations).[37] Most of these spaces would have allowed people to intersect on various occasions, not only during worship proper. It is easy to imagine that working in a common space, frequenting a shop or living in the same *insula* would have allowed people to share information about a forthcoming worship at table. As worship and commensality played a major role in creating close ties, unsurprisingly, the most drastic way to severe ties was the exclusion of members from such occasions. While not spelled out, the exclusion of Hymenaeus and Alexander from the community (1 Tim 1,20, both characters also found in 2 Timothy) must have meant precisely the exclusion from worship and commensality.[38]

Occupation may also be considered as a factor creating ties within the community and building bridges to other networks. While this was not an issue of interest for the author, at any given time some community members would have shared the same occupation or trade and could have belonged to the same guild. 2 Timothy does not mention the occupation of Aquila and Prisca (4,19) but Acts 18,3 refers to them as tentmakers (σκηνοποιόι), an occupation they have apparently shared with Paul. Lampe thinks that Aquila manufactured tents for private use and did not belong to an association of *tabernacularii* that would have provided tents for the army.[39] Whatever their background, in the light of Acts at least three people seem to share the same occupation. 2 Timothy identifies Alexander as χαλκεύς (a coppersmith or, more generally, a metalworker).[40] He is thus pos-

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[37] On venues: Edward ADAMS, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places – Almost Exclusively Houses?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), esp. 137–202 (for the PE: 37–39). See also KLOPPENBORG, *Christ's Association*s, esp. 104–105, 116–119; David G. HORRELL, "Domestic Space and Christian Meetings at Corinth: Imagining New Contexts and the Buildings East of the Theatre", *NTS* 50 (2004) 349–369.

[38] MARSHALL, *Pastoral Epistles*, 414: handing one over to Satan (cf. 1 Cor 5.5) must have become standard language denoting excommunication from the church. Also Benjamin FIORE, *The Pastoral Epistles* (SP 12), Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007, 52 (exclusion from the community).

[39] Peter LAMPE, *From Paul to Valentinus. Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003, 187–189.

[40] A New Testament hapax, in the LXX χαλκεύς designates a variety of metalworkers (Gen 4,22; Isa 41,7; 54,16; 2 Chr 24,12; Neh 3,32; Sir 38,28).

sibly envisaged as belonging to a guild of metalworkers in Ephesus.[41] Again, it is not the historical accuracy that matters, but the way characters are envisioned as linked to others through occupational ties. Regardless of whether this Alexander existed, metalworkers were very probably among the Christ-believers in Ephesus, given the importance of the occupation in the city and in the region.

Given the fictitious setting, we cannot be sure that all these characters are historical or that the narrated events are genuine. In fact, it is extremely hazardous to attempt to reconstruct communities and historical interactions from prescriptive texts, which are meant to construct reality.[42] But the historicity of these details is not really relevant for the argument. Regardless of the veracity of the names or other details, what matters is that the narrative world puts forward interpersonal relations, conflicts, travels, and encounters – social relations and interactions (Borgatti, Lopez–Kidwell) –, ultimately a picture that allows the modelling of a network. And networks match reality far better than an antagonizing discourse. Thinking in terms of networks raises awareness about the complexity of the relationships between early Christ-believers. It makes us realize that those envisaged here as faithful to Paul cannot be really disconnected from those labelled as opponents or heterodox teachers. While singled out as outsiders, the 'opponents' also belong to the network, alongside those regarded as orthodox and loyal. These two groups may be envisaged to a point as two distinct clusters of a network, but they are not, as the author would have it, two disconnected networks.

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[41] Mikael Tellbe, *Christ-believers in Ephesus: A Textual Analysis of Early Christian Identity Formation in a Local Perspective*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009, 77, n. 83. The character in 2 Timothy may have resulted from the conflation of Demetrios, the silversmith and Alexander (Acts 19,24.33). On (a guild of) metalworkers (χαλκεῖς) in Ephesus in relation with the temple of Artemis: IEph 1384A [=PH247846], probably from the reign of Trajan. Marshall assumes that he belonged to a guild of coppersmiths in Troas (cf. CIG 3639=I.Alexandreia Troas 122), *Pastoral Epistles*, 821 (following Jerome Quinn). Kloppenborg mentions further guilds of metalworkers in other regions: I.Beroia 27, naming a coppersmith and goldsmiths among the devotees of Theos Hypsistos (*Christ's Associations*, 76), a *syntechnia* of coppersmiths in Hierapolis (ibid., 35, 272).

[42] On texts producing communal identity and constructions of reality: Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 27–30, 37.

Paul and Timothy – a strong, multiplex, central tie

The letter focuses on Paul and Timothy. The two main characters, although set apart by physical distance, are closely bound by intense friendship related to a long common history, a shared mission and longstanding collaboration in the service of the Gospel, by ties of fictive kinship (Timothy is the beloved child of the apostle, 1,2; 2,1), and knowledge of the other's family (1,5). They share the same beliefs and values: they identify as athletes of faith and soldiers of Christ (2,1.3-6), ready to suffer hardship, without being ashamed of the chains of the Apostle (1,8.12; 2,15, cf. also Onesiphorus, 1,16-18). Shared recollections and emotions also bring them together: Paul remembers Timothy in his prayers, conjuring up his tears and sincere faith (1,3-5), and reminds him to rekindle in himself the gift of God that lives in him through Paul's laying on of hands (1,6). All these considered, Paul and Timothy are connected by a strong tie. Their relation is also characterized by multiplexity.

The strong, multiplex tie connecting Paul and Timothy also involves the significant overlap of their connections: *many of the acquaintances of either Paul, Timothy or other close friends are quite likely acquaintances of each other as well.* (In the Pastoral Epistles, the same is true for the relationships between other characters as well, such as Onesiphorus, Titus, Luke and Mark.) This intuitive observation is confirmed by the numerous names and details Paul mentions to Timothy as part of a shared knowledge. They are thus very highly connected nodes or hubs, with a major role in transmitting information within their network.[43] In other words, the link between Paul and Timothy is characterized by centrality. This link is first and foremost one that provides for cohesion within the group. But each of them also has a very large number of stronger or weaker ties with numerous persons in various other geographic locations.

While the other persons are treated as marginal actors, with a positive or negative relationship to Paul and Timothy, an analysis of the relationships of these persons, taking geography as a starting point, will result in a quite different picture.

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[43] On highly connected nodes or hubs: COLLAR, "Network Theory", 152, KLOPPENBORG, "Recruitment", 327–328.

Troas as hub and the importance of weak links

On his road to Rome, Timothy encountering Carpus in Troas may seem an irrelevant detail, but a look at the map reveals that all those who were at some point in Ephesus/Asia (like Prisca and Aquila, Onesiphorus, possibly Mark) and had to travel to Rome or to Athens and Corinth via Macedonia, necessarily passed through Troas. Alexandria Troas became a Roman colony enjoying *ius italicum* under Augustus, a development that contributed to the importance of the city. The Roman harbour, somewhat smaller than that of Ephesus, but slightly larger than Cenchrae, was located at the intersection of major sea-roads, one stretching to Macedonia (Thessalonica), Athens and Rome, the other connecting the Black Sea to southern Asia Minor and the Eastern Mediterranean.[44] Troas was therefore an important hub for travellers and trade, almost impossible to circumvent for anyone travelling to these destinations.[45] From this perspective, Carpus (4,13, whether a real person or a literary character standing for persons with such role) becomes much more important than a chance keeper of cloaks and scrolls. In terms of network analysis, the ties of various persons to Carpus are probably weak links: they involve travelling people who encounter him occasionally, perhaps on the recommendation of mutual acquaintances. But precisely such links become important bridges between networks situated geographically apart, which facilitate the transmission of information, ideas and material support.[46] More significantly, Carpus had to be known to many of those travelling over Troas, *whether friends of foes* of Paul and Timothy. As mobility could hardly be an attribute of those of the 'orthodox' camp, those belonging to the 'orthodox' and the 'heterodox' group shared at least one acquaintance (one 'Carpus'), who

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[44] Stefan FEUSER, "The Roman Harbour of Alexandria Troas, Turkey", *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 40.2 (2010) 256–273 (256, 257, 259, 271). On the importance of the city see also Elmar SCHWERTHEIM, "Die Beinahe-Hauptstadt des Römischen Reiches: Neue Forschungen und Ausgrabungen in Alexandreia Troas (Türkei) erhellen die Geschichte der antiken Stadt", *Antike Welt* 36.4 (2005) 63–68.

[45] This is also reflected in the genuine epistles: according to 2 Cor 2,12-13, Paul had searched for Titus in Troas.

[46] On the importance of weak ties in transmitting information, innovation, and resources, and their role of bridges between networks: GRANOVETTER, "The Strength of Weak Ties", esp. 1364–1366, 1370–1371; ID., "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited", 201–233; BARABÁSI, *Linked*, 42–44.

not only mediated between distant locations, but was also a bridge between the two postulated camps.

The Ephesian 'corpus permixtum'

The situation in Ephesus is even more telling. Aside Paul and Timothy, with obvious ties to the city,[47] as seen, 2 Timothy places here Onesiphorus and his household, Tychicus and probably Mark.[48] Prisca and Aquila are also (inaccurately) located in Ephesus.[49] We could also add with some caution Trophimus (whom Paul has left ill in Miletus; 4,20), as Acts 21,29 calls him 'the Ephesian'.[50] Most likely Hermogenes and Phygelus (singled out from "all those in Asia" who have abandoned Paul) are also (imagined as) based in Ephesus.[51] Hymenaeus and Philetus, who allegedly "deviated from the truth by saying that resurrection has already taken place" (2,17–18), should also be located here. Otherwise, they would not fall under the 'jurisdiction' of Timothy, who had to settle the matters in Ephesus. Paul's worst enemy, Alexander, should also be searched for in Ephesus, given Paul's advice to Timothy to beware of him.

Considering all these characters, it becomes clear that Ephesus is not only a hub for Paul's (past) ministry, for Timothy and friends, but also the location of

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[47] Cf. 1 Tim 1,3, not to mention the genuine epistles (1 Cor 15,32; 16,8.10) and Acts 18–19.

[48] Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 159. According to Marshall, he must have been with Timothy or in a place would pass in his way (*Pastoral Epistles*, 818). Michael Theobald assumes instead that he would have been located in Colossae, cf. Col 4,10: *Israel-Vergessenheit in den Pastoralbriefen. Ein neuer Vorschlag zu ihrer historisch-theologischen Verortung im 2. Jahrhundert n. Chr. unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Ignatius-Briefe* (SBS 229), Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2016, 184). But this would have meant quite a detour for Timothy.

[49] Rom 16,3 indicates that they were in Rome before Paul had reached the city. Rightly, Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 159; Weiser: *2. Timotheus*, 329–330 (adding other inconsistencies regarding the personalia of ch. 4). The detail could have reminded readers of 1 Cor 16,19; cf. also Acts 18,18–19.

[50] Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 159.

[51] It would make little sense to look for a different city, given the centrality of Ephesus in the mission of Paul in all extant traditions.) Leaving aside the question of historicity, the text alludes to an event that has occurred while Paul was in Asia (Ephesus) than to one that has happened in Rome. Oberlinner, *2. Timotheusbrief*, 57–58.

those who appear as antagonists of Paul. It is difficult to assess the size of the various groups and house churches in Ephesus around the turn of the century.[52] Most probably different communities existed, reclaiming different founding or leading figures, loosely connected among each other, counting a few dozens of people. This corresponds to Paul Trebilco's assessment of the relationships between various groups, based on Peter Lampe's concept of *fractionation*.[53] Several smaller groups of Christ-believers or house churches co-existed, without central coordination, but most certainly not entirely separated and unconnected. They had to have some knowledge of each other and share some information, a situation Trebilco calls "structural fractionation but with (only) some links between groups".[54] Although this 'fractionation' refers to house churches and does not fol-

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[52] On the difficulty to estimate the number of members in early communities, an issue largely related to the place where groups assembled for worship, i.e. the available space and implicitly the economic status of first-century Christ-believers: KLOPPENBORG, *Christ's Associations*, 98–123. For Corinth in the lifetime of Paul Kloppenborg approximates between 15–30 members (106), less than the ca. 50 calculated by J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983, 155–158. For Ephesus, Stefan WITETSCHECK reckons with several smaller assemblies of 10–15 people (*Ephesische Enthüllungen* 1. *Frühe Christen in einer antiken Großstadt. Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Frage nach den Kontexten der Johannesapokalypse* (BiTS), Leuven: Peeters, 2008, 377–378). Tellbe advances a broad range, between 500–2000 believers at the end of the first century, out of ca. 200000 inhabitants, based on a survey of scholarly positions, with Thomas ROBINSON (*The Bauer Thesis Examined: The Geography of Heresy in the Early Christian Church*, Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen, 1988) at the lower end, and Mattias GÜNTHER (*Die Frühgeschichte des Christentums in Ephesus*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995) advancing the higher number. Communities arguably had little awareness about each other (*Christ-believers in Ephesus*, 47). 2000, however, seems far too high. David A. DESILVA counts ca. 0,5% of the population, representing a "very modest success", which would result in 1000–1200 Christians in 40–48 groups, with an average of 25 persons in a house church (*A Week in the Life of Ephesus*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020, 77).

[53] LAMPE, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 357–365; Paul TREBILCO, "Studying "Fractionation" in Earliest Christianity in Rome and Ephesus", *Reflections on the Early Christian History of Religion – Erwägungen zur frühchristlichen Religionsgeschichte* (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 81), ed. Cilliers Breytenbach and Jörg Frey, Leiden: Brill, 2013, 293–333 (notably his option 2; esp. 298–307).

[54] "In option 2 the house churches are independent, but knowledgeable about each other's existence. There would be some cooperation between house churches, involving matters

low the doctrinal divide, Trebilco also mentions it with respect to the opponents challenged by the Pastoral Epistles. While helpful, this model unintendedly preserves the appearance that belonging, interaction and opposition occurred with the conservation of the boundary between the 'orthodox' and the 'heterodox'. However, quite certainly, people located in Ephesus, belonging to groups reclaiming the heritage of Paul, were not connected only within their own cluster, and isolated from all those belonging to the other groups. (I refer here strictly to different Pauline groups, without including those associated with the Johannine writings, or other founding figures.)

Staying with the narrative of 2 Timothy, this means that we find in the same Ephesian setting people as different as Timothy *and* Alexander, Onesiphorus *as well as* Hymenaeus and Philetus, Prisca and Aquila, *as well as* Hermogenes and Phygelus, perhaps Mark *as well as* the teachers who intrude into households, and their 'victims', the 'silly little women'. No doubt, some people may have belonged to denser clusters, in which members were bound by strong ties, as friends with similar views and values, providing for higher cohesion. But it is highly unlikely that ties connected only the 'good' and the 'evil' among each other, within their respective clusters. In any comparable network, at least some people located in the same area are connected. Proximity increases interactions, communication and enhances the creation of ties beyond the borders of one's own group. The same must have been true for people belonging to the Ephesian network.

Looking beyond the aspect of proximity, the small world model indicates that only a few weak links to persons outside the reference-group (outside the cluster), would increase the connectedness (the clustering coefficient) of the network. It is not difficult to imagine that at any given time at least a few people were connected through weak links with other persons outside their cluster. Consequently, they necessarily interacted and possibly shared interests and sympathies across 'camps' with at least some people. And precisely the weak links were responsible for the flow of information, perhaps religious innovation (alternative interpreta-

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such as each knowing details of when and where other groups met (and so, for example, instructing visitors about this), and the passing on of information from one group to the next. This would not imply formal relationships and coordination between leaders." (TREBILCO, "Studying "Fractionation"", 298). Fractionation may be misleading to a point, as it may suggest a secondary fragmentation that breaks off an initial unity, but this is not the point. Conversely, Trebilco argues for a gradual development from loose connections to a higher degree of unitary coordination.

tions of certain matters that came to be labelled as heterodox). In fact, the very injunctions to Timothy to avoid such people make sense precisely when ties and contacts are taken for granted.

The antagonising discourse conceals and attempts to dismantle this complex Ephesian network. The 'friends of Paul' are expected to avoid and beware of those labelled as foes (the 'Alexanders'). In terms of network analysis, this corresponds to the phenomenon of percolation: the removal of a critical number of nodes from the network by severing some ties will break down the network into several unconnected clusters, a phase transition from a connected network to a disconnected one. At this point the divisive discourse becomes reality.

The elusive Roman network

In Rome the focus is on Paul, those with him (Luke) and those joining the apostle there (Onesiphorus, Timothy, Mark). The city is a hub connecting Roman believers (Eubulus, Pudens, Linus and Claudia, and the unnamed brothers and sisters, 4,21) with those coming from different parts of the Empire, and those who have spent some time there, but have recently departed (Demas, Crescens, Titus). A competent reader would also remember some of the names mentioned in Rom 16. Yet, interestingly we hear nothing of Epaenetus ("the first convert in Asia", 16,5, possibly also from Ephesus[55]), Mary, Andronicus and Junia, Ampliatus, Urbanus, Stachys, Apelles, the household of Aristobulus, Herodion, the household of Narcissus, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus and his mother, Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas (vv. 5-15), let alone of Junia from Chenchreae/Corinth (16,1–2), who had also visited Rome. We ignore the reasons for which 2 Timothy does not mention any of these collaborators and friends of Paul but introduces unknown characters of little consequence in 4,21.[56] Probably, naming prominent collaborators would have eclipsed Paul as the apostle with unique authority. A plethora of friends would have also contradicted the image of the solitary apostle

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[55] Peter Stuhlmacher, *Brief an die Römer*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989, 220; Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 159.

[56] Theobald argues that the author of the PE knew a shorter version of Romans, that did not include chs. 15–16 (*Israel–Vergessenheit*, 146–151). But some references are best explained by a knowledge of these chapters (e.g., 4.20, as allusion to Rom 16,23; 4,10 as a reference to Rom 15,19).

facing death (almost) fully abandoned. Yet, remembering the persons known from Romans highlights the probable breadth and density of the Roman network at any given time.

What matters most is that Paul and Timothy, as well as people like Onesiphorus, Luke, Mark, Titus, Demas and Crescens are emblematic figures who remind of the links between believers in Rome, Ephesus and the various other areas mentioned earlier.[57] This creates a significant interconnectedness between networks separated by long distance. And while this is not explicitly stated, it would be entirely unrealistic to imagine that only the friends of Paul in Rome and Ephesus could be connected, whereas the Ephesians labelled as antagonists and foes could not have been linked to the Roman believers. Why should we imagine that (people like) Hymenaeus and Philetus, Hermogenes and Phygelus or Alexander did not have acquaintances between the brothers and sisters in Rome?

The picture may be further complicated by asking about Paul's potential foes in Rome. For some reason, 2 Timothy does not mention any such characters. Demas, for the worst, has abandoned Paul, but is not portrayed as his enemy. Yet, a look at Rom 16,17–20 reminds of those whom the historical Paul regarded as opponents, who had taught a flawed doctrine and created divisions. In 2 Timothy the battlefield between orthodoxy and heresy seems thus to have moved entirely to Ephesus. Rome is dominated by the lofty person of the Apostle, yet another unlikely representation of the Roman communities.

Peripheral (?) networks

In spite of its importance in the Pauline mission, Corinth appears only marginally in 2 Timothy, in a fleeting reference to Erastus who remained in the city (4,20; an intertextual allusion to Rom 16,23). But to a competent reader the names of Prisca, Aquila and Erastus may also evoke Corinth as another significant network, comprising all those who have stayed in the city: Titus (cf. 2 Corinthians), Apollos (1 Cor 3,4-6; 16,12), Crispus, Gaius and the household of Stephanas (1 Cor 1,14-16, Rom 16,23), as well as Timothy, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, Tertius and Quartus (Rom 16,21-22).

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[57] Luke, Mark and Demas are taken from Phlm 24 and Col 4,14. For some reason, Aristarchus and Ephaphras (Phlm 23–24) are omitted.

The brief references to Titus travelling to Dalmatia and Crescens to Galatia, meant to emphasise the breadth of the Pauline mission, continued now by his faithful collaborators, point indirectly to further networks. These characters seem to function as weak links widening even more the net of connections. Crescens, otherwise unknown, is connected to one of the major areas of Pauline mission.[58] Conversely, a major character, Titus is dispatched to Dalmatia, a territory not mentioned elsewhere under this name. 'Dalmatia' probably conjures up Paul's mission up to Illyricum (Rom 15,19).[59] (The changed designation may reflect the division of the province of Illyricum into Dalmatia in the South and Pannonia in the North.[60]) Demas' flight to Thessalonica evokes another important network of the Christ-cult.

It is not difficult to imagine that at the turn of the century numerous connections existed between Corinth, Ephesus and Rome, but also the cities of Galatia, Macedonia and perhaps as far as Dalmatia. These links hardly respected the boundaries between friends and opponents of Paul.

It would be quite impressive to visualise all the names linked to different regions as nodes sharing various connections within a network (even when some of these characters may be fictitious, and, in the same time, we ignore so many

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[58] However, THEOBALD seems to prefer the variant reading "Gallia", preserved in the ℵ and C (*Israel-Vergessenheit*, 206–207, following Timo GLASER, *Paulus als Briefroman erzählt. Studien zum antiken Briefroman und seiner christlichen Rezeption in den Pastoralbriefen* (NTOA 76), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009, 254. WEISER, conversely, thinks that the *v.l.* is not well attested (*Der zweite Brief an Timotheus*, 318, n. 9).

[59] WEISER, *2. Timotheusbrief*, 318, n. 10; OBERLINNER, *2. Timotheusbrief*, 169. Conversely, THEOBALD assumes that since the author knew a shorter version of Romans, the reference to Dalmatia would not rely on Rom 15.19: *Israel-Vergessenheit*, 207–208; also 146–151.

[60] The date of the division of Roman Illyricum is disputed. Daniel DZINO favours an early Tiberian period, but notes that Pannonia was still called Illyricum in 60 (*Illyricum in Roman Politics 229 BC–AD 68*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 159-160). Marjeta ŠAŠEL-KOS argues that the two parts were "officially called Dalmatia and Pannonia at the latest under Vespasian": "Illyria and Illyrians", *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah09128; see also her "Pannonia or Lower Illyricum?", *Tyche. Beitrage zur Alten Geschichte, Paryrologie und Epigraphik* 25 (2010) 123–130. It would be interesting to know whether the shift from Illyricum (Rom 15.19) to Dalmatia (2 Tim 4.10) reflects awareness of the changing name.

other names of real people). Individuals like those named here – as residents or as travellers, created a vast social network, which had a major role in transmitting versions of the Gospel through local as well as translocal links.

Conclusion

The antagonistic discourse of 2 Timothy splits the community into two camps. The orthodox, truthful leaders and believers should have nothing to share with those labelled as heterodox: the latter are portrayed as sinners, as opponents and enemies of Paul and of the Gospel. By emphasising the strong links between Paul, Timothy, and friends, the author aims to create closed and stable clusters (cliques). Emphasis on cohesion strengthens group identity,[61] further consolidated by the refusal of ties with those depicted as dangerous outsiders. However, both the friends and the antagonists of Paul and Timothy in Ephesus and elsewhere, far from belonging to impermeable camps, shared many more connections than the author would allow. Physical proximity, multiplex social relations – shared family, neighbourhood, or occupational ties, worship, and commensality – created opportunities for interaction and exchange. Early groups of Christ-believers necessarily included members with weak ties bridging the gap between various clusters, responsible for shaping networks more akin to a small world, allowing for interactions across partisan lines and for more inclusive forms of identity. No doubt, they also facilitated the diffusion of ideas and different perspectives on faith matters.

The geographic perspective shows that weak ties were also decisive in connecting networks in different cities, constructing a large geographic network stretching between Ephesus, Troas, Miletus, Thessalonica, Rome, Corinth and the cities of Galatia and Dalmatia and elsewhere, turning the Empire itself into a small world.

Polemical texts blur the distinction between an antagonising discourse and a more complex reality where people do not belong to strictly separated, impermeable groups, but may be bound by ties across camps. To be sure, discourse is able to produce a divisive reality: to put it in network terminology, it may induce percolation and a phase transition from a connected network to fragmented, un-

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[61] On the relationship between group identity and strong ties: Collar, "Network Theory", 151.

connected groups. Words matter. They have the power to bring people together or to divide.

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