Anti-Jewish rhetoric is entwined in the very formation of Christianity. In the words of Miriam S. Taylor, this rhetoric reflects "an internal logic in which the invalidation of Judaism emerges as a theoretical necessity in the appropriation of the Jewish God and the Jewish Bible for the church. . . . The church’s portrayal of Judaism is expressed in terms of a dualism opposing Christians and Jews which is built into the very logic and into the very structure of Christian teaching."¹ The Church Fathers perceive holiness in zero-sum terms: only one religious community can stand in a unique relationship with the divine and can possess the authoritative understanding of divine revelation. Judaism must be wrong if Christianity is right, and it is essential to prove that Judaism is wrong because of the fact that Jews lay claim to the same God and the same Biblical texts as do Christians. Discourse about the meaning and continued applicability of Biblical law in general and Biblical food restrictions in particular figures prominently in Christian anti-Jewish rhetoric.

As we observed in the previous chapter, Church Fathers declare that Jewish adherence to Biblical dietary law reflects the falsehood of Judaism’s “carnality” and the failure of Jews to appreciate the true allegorical meaning of the Old Testament. These traits stand in opposition to Christianity’s embrace of the spirit and of Truth itself. Consumption of all foods defines Christians as “not-Jews” and affirms the authority of New Testament statements about food, such as, “For the pure all things are pure” (Tit. 1.15; cf. Mark 7.19, 1 Tim. 4.4). Figure 8 displays another dualistic representation of Christian and Jewish food practices, found in an early thirteenth-century Bible moralisée.² The offering of the Eucharistic Host, which becomes the body of Christ, the “lamb of God,” is contrasted with the carnal Jewish offering of a physical lamb, which Jews raise up toward heaven in a futile gesture and then slaughter in accordance with
Jewish law. As Sara Lipton observes, “The Christian sacrament appears elevated, open, and clean, whereas the Jewish ritual appears hunched, closed, and bloody.” The scroll carried by the woman in the center of the image, a personification of the Jewish community, completes the contrast: it states that Synagoga, through her very adherence to Jewish food practices, “spurns the law” that she thinks she obeys. Precisely because the Jews understand Biblical law literally, they fail to observe it properly. Indeed, adherence to Jewish food practices constitutes the reason for Jewish rejection of everything that the Eucharist symbolizes: the image’s caption states that Syn-
agoga “treated the preaching of the faith with contempt on account of her legalistic sacraments.” Only members of the Holy Church truly understand God’s nature and correctly adhere to God’s law. God, we shall see, demands abstention solely from *eidōlothuton*—and food associated with Jews.3

Most of the foreign food restrictions we have encountered thus far mark the otherness of foreigners without defining those foreigners in any detail. Daniel’s refusal to eat the Babylonian king’s food, for example, indicates that We are not Them but conveys no information either about the king or about the substance of the difference between Jews and gentiles. Similarly, many Rabbinic foreign food restrictions highlight the truism that gentiles are non-Jews but, in the process of doing so, portray gentiles as nondescript nonentities. Prohibitions against food offered to idols define the difference between Us and Them to a degree—They worship idols, while We worship God alone—but the fact that both Jewish and Christian authorities are able to distinguish gentiles from their idolatry indicates that even these regulations do not ascribe specific significance to gentile identity. Christian prohibitions of food associated with Jews, in contrast, serve to define Judaism as the very antithesis of Christianity, arguably to a greater degree than other Christian laws relating to Jews.4

These restrictions highlight the opposition between Us and Them, an opposition which contributes to the construction of Christian identity: not only are We not Them, We are Their mirror image and Our rituals (e.g., the Eucharist) are the mirror image of Theirs (e.g., kosher animal slaughtering). Discourse about food associated with Jews reveals the styles in which Christian authorities imagined Jews and the ways these authorities employed that image as a foil against which to define Christianity itself.

The foreign food restrictions we will examine in this chapter are among the thousands of “canons” (from the Greek *kanon*, rule) promulgated in late antiquity and the Middle Ages by individual bishops or, more frequently, by councils of clerics. The high Middle Ages witnessed both increasing papal influence over canon law in the Latin West and the development of canon law as a science in the nascent European universities. Medieval scholars rightly perceived a qualitative difference between the “old law” promulgated before the twelfth century and the “new law” that succeeded it. The present chapter focuses on “old law,” especially that of the fourth through ninth centuries; we will explore subsequent Christian discussions about foreign food restrictions in chapters 12 and 13. The geographic scope of this chapter extends from Spain to Sasanid Babylonia. I have chosen not to organize this material along geographical lines because the same themes and rhetorical techniques appear across the breadth of Christendom.

Christian foreign food restrictions define Jews in two different and, indeed, contradictory ways: as equivalent to or worse than heretics, which is to say insiders gone horribly bad, and as equivalent to or worse than idolaters, which is to say the ultimate outsiders. As we examine each set of these portrayals in turn, however, we will
discover that they frequently share a common feature: the ascription of impurity to Jews and their food. This similarity reflects the fact that both conceptions serve to define Judaism as the antithesis of orthodox Christianity, which constitutes the true successor to the mantle of Biblical Israel’s holiness. In the third section of this chapter, we will explore both the ways in which impurity rhetoric contributes to Christian portrayals of Jews and the ways in which the internal logic of this rhetoric itself shapes the nature of Christian foreign food restrictions. Examination of the impurity rhetoric used by Christian authorities of the early Middle Ages also affords us an opportunity to consider the way such rhetoric functions in Jewish sources.

JEWS IMAGINED AS HERETICS (ONLY WORSE):
PROHIBITIONS AGAINST COMMENSALITY

The clerics gathered in Elvira, whose heightened concern about Jews we encountered in chapter 7, promulgate the earliest attested Christian foreign food restrictions relating to Jews. These clerics regard Jews and heretics as equivalent in canons about sexual intercourse (cc. 16, 78), but they single out Jews in a pair of food-related canons:⁵

49. Those who possess [agricultural produce], which they received from God with an act of thanksgiving, are warned not to let Jews bless their produce, lest their blessing render ours ineffectual and weak. If anyone dares to do so despite this prohibition, he shall be cast out from the church completely.
50. Indeed, if any of the clergy or the faithful takes food with Jews, it is decided that he shall be kept from communion in order that he be corrected as he should.⁶

The first of these canons expresses the incompatibility—indeed, the oppositional relationship—between Christianity and Judaism. Jewish blessings, the clerics at Elvira warn, counteract the effect of Christian blessings, and anyone who would allow Jews to offer their blessings over Christian food has no place within the Christian community. Because Christianity and Judaism stand in mutual opposition, Christians must also shun commensality with Jews. Those who eat with such outsiders are, fittingly, forbidden from eating with insiders, as “communion” in Elviran canons refers to social as well as sacramental participation in the Christian community.⁷ These clerics embrace Paul’s message that communion defines community, and they wield the prohibition of commensality not only as a means of disciplining wayward Christians but also as a means of segregating Jews from Christian society.

Both of these canons, like the canon on marriage to Jews discussed in chapter 7, employ Pauline language that was not originally directed toward Jews. The language of canon 50 is reminiscent of Paul’s instruction not to share food with Christ-believing sinners (1 Cor. 5.11), yet Paul permits eating with those who do not belong to the Christ-believing community. The application of Paul’s commensality
prohibition to Jews reflects the equation of Jews and heretical Christians expressed in Elviran canons about sexual activity and also suggests that Elviran clerics regard Jews as sinners who have an especially pernicious influence upon the Christians with whom they interact. Canon 49 expresses this fear through its allusion to 1 Tim-
othy, which speaks of a time to come in which some will renounce the faith by paying attention to those who demand abstinence from food “which God created to be received by the faithful with an act of thanksgiving” (1 Tim. 4.3). The clerics gathered at Elvira understand this prophecy to refer to Christians who accommodate Jewish food-related practices, and they thus imagine Jews as “those who hypocritically speak falsehood” and convey “the teachings of demons” (4.1–2).9 The consistent use of Pauline language in Elviran canons about Jews demonstrates that their authors are concerned with what Jeremy Cohen aptly terms “the hermeneutical Jew,” a construct derived not from social interaction but rather from scholarly engagement with sacred texts. The hermeneutical Jew is a figure imagined for the purpose of serving as a foil for the construction of Christian identity.10

Christian clerics, like their Rabbinic counterparts, prize the establishment and preservation of proper categories. In contrast to the Rabbinic focus on classifying foodstuffs, however, Elviran authorities are interested solely in the classification of foreigners. Their classificatory system reveals a spectrum of foreigners ranging in danger from mostly harmless gentiles to utterly abhorrent idolatrous priests; Jews are positioned closer to the latter than the former, defined as similar to yet more dangerous than Christian heretics. As ecclesiastical concern about idolatry waned, Jews came to occupy the negative extreme of this spectrum.

Authorities from across the Christian world of late antiquity express in their own ways the conception of Jews as especially threatening analogues to heretics and, through the extension of Paul’s teachings, promulgate their own prohibitions against commensality with Jews. A Syriac canon composed in the 530s by the anonymous Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) author of the “Canons from the East” (i.e., Babylon) bars all Christians who eat with Jews from partaking of the Eucharist. The preceding canon, in contrast, merely reprimands clerics who eat with heretics and says nothing about laity engaging in such behavior.11 A similar juxtaposition of prohibitions against commensality with heretics and with Jews appears in the canons of the Council of Epaone, convened in 517 in Burgundy:

15. If a cleric of elevated rank should participate in the meal of any heretical cleric, he shall not have the peace of the Church for the duration of a year; if junior clerics do so, they shall be flogged. As for the meals of Jews, our law has prohibited even a layperson [from participating]. Whosoever has become defiled by the meals of Jews shall not break bread with any of our clerics.12

Here again, interaction with Jews is clearly more objectionable than interaction with heretics. There is no reason to presume that the authors of these canons were fa-
familiar with the canons from Elvira. Rather, the similarities in their images of the Jew reflect the fact that these images derive from a common set of sacred texts and serve the common agenda of oppositional Christian self-definition.

The Council of Epaone was one of six councils convened in the regions of Gaul between the late fifth and mid-seventh century to prohibit commensality with Jews. The Council of Mâcon (convened in 581 or 583), like that of Epaone, prohibits participation in Jewish meals on penalty of expulsion from all association with Christians, and declares that the offender has been “defiled by [Jewish] impieties.” The prohibitions of commensality with Jews promulgated at the Third Council of Orleans (538) and the Council of Clichy (626 or 627) are accompanied not by the rhetoric of offensive defilement but rather by concern about Christian inferiority to Jews. Specifically, these councils prohibit Jews from owning Christian slaves and forbid the marriage of Christian women to Jewish men.

References to both inferiority and impurity appear in the earliest Gallic canons regarding commensality, promulgated at the Council of Vannes (in Brittany, ca. 461–91) and, in slightly altered form, at the Council of Agde (in Narbonne, 506). The latter version of this canon ultimately became a centerpiece of medieval Latin canon law regarding commensality with non-Christians.

All clerics [added at Agde: and laity] should henceforth avoid the meals of Jews, nor should anyone receive them at a meal. Since they do not accept the common food served by Christians, it would be unbecoming and sacrilegious for Christians to consume their food. This is because they would judge what we eat with the permission of the Apostle to be impure and because clerics [Agde replaces “clerics” with “Catholics”] would begin to feel as though they were inferior to the Jews if we were to consume what they serve while they disdained what we offer.

The prohibition of commensality with Jews, including inviting Jews to Christian meals, is here justified by means of two distinct rationales, both based on the fact that Jews adhere to food restrictions absent from Christianity. It is sacrilegious for Christians to participate in any meal that accommodates Jewish conceptions of food impurity, and it is unbecoming for Christians to participate in an exchange of food that, because of the asymmetry involved in accommodating the demands of Jewish norms, might generate feelings of inferiority on the part of Christians.

Gallic councils address Jewish food more often than any other issue associated with Jews. This frequency is especially striking because some of the councils that prohibit commensality took place in regions where there were no Jews with whom to share meals. The use of impurity-related rhetoric in many of these canons also calls for an explanation, as such rhetoric is absent not only from otherwise comparable Eastern and Elviran commensality canons but also from the Pauline text that inspired these prohibitions. It makes sense that bishops would object to the accommodation of Jewish dietary norms on the grounds that Christians ought not be sub-
servient to demands made by Jews, but why should the very fact that Jews judge certain food to be impure matter to Christians, and for what reason might the consumption of Jewish food result in the defilement of the Christian? Examination of Augustine's teachings regarding Manichean dietary practices sheds light both on the use of impurity-related rhetoric in many of the commensality prohibitions articulated in Gaul and on the frequent condemnation of shared meals with Jews.

Manicheism, a religion with affinities to Christianity and Zoroastrianism that Catholics regarded as a heresy and a serious threat, promotes an especially stringent set of food restrictions. The proponents of this tradition whom Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) engages in disputation cite Biblical passages, including the Apostolic Decree, as prooftexts supporting Manichean practices (Answer to Faustus 31.2, 32.3). Augustine, seeking to reclaim the Bible for Catholic orthodoxy alone, denies legitimacy to all ingredient-based food restrictions, even the prohibitions against blood and bloody meat which earlier Church Fathers endorse (32.13; we will examine this passage more closely in chapter 11). The Apostolic Decree's food restrictions originally functioned as a means of distinguishing the Christ-believing community within its gentile surroundings: We abstain from Biblically taboo foods which They (i.e., Greeks) eat. Augustine, seeking to distinguish the orthodox from the heretical, dismantles these prohibitions in order to define Christianity in terms of its absolute and principled rejection of ingredient-based dietary restrictions: We interpret the Bible properly and therefore eat all foods, whereas They (i.e., Manicheans) do not.

Augustine accompanies his rejection of Manichean dietary practices with a sharp jab at Manicheans themselves for adhering to such norms. Employing the Pauline dictum, “For the pure all things are pure, but for the defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure” (Tit. 1.15), Augustine asserts that only true Christians, those who regard all food as pure, are themselves intrinsically pure. The preoccupation of Manicheans with the impurity of food, in contrast, reflects the “defiled” state of the Manichean mind—a state, Augustine explains, that stems from Manicheism's heretical beliefs about the body of Christ (Answer to Faustus 6.6). More broadly, Augustine asserts that the very act of distinguishing “pure” and “impure” foods in the Christian era manifests one's failure to understand the true significance of Christ; the judgment of food constitutes an act of blasphemy and thus a defiling offense in its own right (19.10, 31.4).

The logic of Augustine's teachings about the meaning of Biblical food restrictions and the implications of regarding certain foods as impure applies not only to Manicheans but also to Jews. This logic accounts for the rhetoric employed by Catholic clerics in Gaul. Jewish judgment of food, the clerics at Vannes and Agde maintain, embodies the Jews' rejection of Christ, reason enough for Christians to abstain from meals in which consideration of Jewish dietary norms plays a role. The clerics gathered in Epaone and Mâcon draw on the language of offensive defile-
ment which Tit. 1.15 applies to those who deem certain foods to be impure. Just as Augustine regards Manicheans who adhere to norms of dietary purity as defiled, these clerics treat Christians who partake of a meal prepared in accordance with such norms to be defiled.

The clerics at Epaone, strikingly, do not assert that those who share meals with heretics are similarly defiled, perhaps because Arians, the local “heretics,” did not adhere to distinctive dietary regulations. No Christian authority, moreover, expresses concern about commensality with gentiles. Indeed, Augustine actively encourages such behavior: “People living in this world, after all, cannot help living with others of that sort; nor can they win them for Christ, if they altogether shun their company and conversation.” Foreign food restrictions highlight the degree to which, especially in the absence of idolatrous gentiles and impurity-obsessed heretics like the Manicheans, Jews constitute a class unto themselves.

Gallic anticommensality canons, even those that do not explicitly associate Jews with heretics, follow Augustine in defining everyone who contests the meaning of the Christian Bible as a heretic, subject to Paul’s prohibition against shared meals with Christian sinners. Augustine’s definition of Catholic Christianity as a religion intolerant of dietary regulations also accounts for the striking frequency of Gallic prohibitions against commensality with Jews. Over the course of the fifth and sixth centuries, Catholics and Arians competed for control of Christianity in Gaul; as Catholics gained ascendancy in any given region, they convened a synod to establish laws for it and mark their dominance. Prohibitions of commensality appear disproportionately in the canons of these initial councils. This pattern suggests that bishops regarded the rejection of Biblical dietary laws, and thus of shared meals with the paradigmatic contemporary adherents of these laws, the Jews, as a significant component of what it means to be Catholic: We are those who anathematize Jewish food practices. Jews, these clerics feel, constitute a heretical foil crucial to the construction of orthodox identity even when they are not present in the local Christian community. While there is no evidence that the term Jew functions as a code word for Arian in the canons of Gallic councils, condemnation of Jews nevertheless advances the cause of Catholic orthodoxy because proponents of that orthodoxy were able to brand their opponents as “judaizers” and thus, by definition, not truly Christian.

The commensality prohibitions we have examined thus far define Christian orthodoxy in contradistinction to Judaism, imagined to be an especially dangerous Christian heresy. To be a full member of Christian society, a participant in its ritual and nonritual meals, is to abstain from sharing meals with Jews and, especially for Catholics, to reject Jewish food restrictions. An oath imposed on Jewish converts by Catholic authorities in seventh-century Visigothic Spain encapsulates these diametrically opposed conceptions of Christianity and Judaism. After an extensive declaration of Catholic faith, the converts declare that they
reject, abominate, and execrate the Jewish rite and its festivals, Sabbath, and circumcision of the flesh, with all its superstitions and other observances and ceremonies.

We promise that we shall live under Catholic law, eating common food with Christians, with the exception of food which our nature and not superstition rejects, for “all creatures of God are good” [1 Tim. 4.4]. We promise that neither we nor all those on whose behalf we make this covenant shall have any association with Hebrews who have not yet been baptized, and we vow not to participate or intermingle with them in any commerce, conversation, or any sort of fellowship until they too, by God’s mercy, shall attain the grace of baptism. 

Life “under Catholic law,” according to this oath, is exemplified through the consumption of all foods, in accordance with Pauline teachings as understood by Augustine, and through avoidance of interaction with Jews. Just as Rabbinic Sages define adherence to Biblical dietary laws as emblematic of Jewish identity and employ foreign food restrictions as a means of emphasizing the centrality of these laws, Christian authorities view the anathematization of such laws as emblematic of Christian identity and express this rejection through restrictions on Jewish food. These restrictions remind new and old Christians alike that their identity depends upon the rejection not only of Jewish dietary practices but also of social intercourse with Jews and participation in Jewish festivals.

JEWS IMAGINED AS IDOLATERS (ONLY WORSE): PROHIBITIONS AGAINST UNLEAVENED BREAD AND OTHER FOODS

Prohibitions of commensality that associate Jews with Christian heretics effectively subsume Jews under the canopy of Christianity in order to more forcefully exclude them from Christian communion, perhaps because their authors regarded Judaism as uncomfortably close to Christianity to begin with. Prohibitions against foods associated with Jewish holidays, in contrast, define Jews as the ultimate outsiders, equivalent to if not worse than idolaters on account of their rejection of Christ. Both sets of prohibitions establish Judaism as an intrinsically impure antithesis of Christianity, but each constructs its hermeneutical Jew from a different set of proof-texts. As a result, each highlights a different aspect of Jewish—and thus Christian—identity. Although logically incompatible, Christian authorities nevertheless had no qualms about associating Jews with heretics and idolaters alike. The clerics of Elvira, we have seen, depict Jews through allusion to Pauline statements about both sinful Christians (c. 50) and unbelieving idolaters (c. 16). As Averil Cameron observes, “What may seem now to be distinct and separate sets of issues—Christianity versus Judaism, Christianity in relation to polytheism, the true as opposed to ‘false’ beliefs within Christianity—were close together in the minds of early Christians and approached in very similar ways. Naturally the edges became blurred.”

More than
merely blurring the edges, however, Christian foreign food restrictions reflect the
equation of Jews with heretics and idolaters, even as they bear witness to a narrowing
focus of Christian concern toward Jews alone. Perhaps because of Latin Catholic
antipathy toward food-specific dietary restrictions, prohibitions targeting Jewish
holiday foods appear predominantly in canons from Greek- and Syriac-speaking
communities in the Near East.

The earliest attested prohibition of foods related to Jewish holidays appears in a
mid to late fourth-century collection associated with the Council of Laodicea, a col-
lection that contains a variety of food-related canons.28

37. It is not permitted to accept festival-related things sent from Jews or heretics
or to celebrate their festivals with them.
38. It is not permitted to receive unleavened bread from Jews or to take part in their
impieties.
39. It is not permitted to celebrate Greek festivals with Greeks or to take part in
their godlessness.29

The authors of these canons, who equate Jews, heretics, and adherents of Hellenis-
tic religions, express concern about Christian participation in the holidays of these
outsiders. They single out as particularly problematic the acceptance of holiday-
related gifts (of food? the text is ambiguous) and matzah, the unleavened bread Jews
bake for Passover. The so-called “Canons of the Apostles,” a late fourth-century col-
lection reliant in part on Laodicean material, similarly prohibits Christians from
fasting with Jews, celebrating their holidays, or accepting “gifts associated with
their festivals, such as unleavened bread or anything similar to this” (c. 70).30

The Apostolic Decree’s prohibition of food offered to idols seems to be the model
that underlies Christian prohibitions of Jewish holiday-related foodstuffs. This con-
nection is made explicit in a canon from the Council of Isho’yahb I, Patriarch of
the (Nestorian) Church of the East (585), which declares that food associated with
the festivals of Jews, heretics, and pagans “is a portion of that which has been set
aside for their sacrificial offerings” (c. 25).31 Just as the conflation of Judaism and
heresy renders Jews subject to Paul’s prohibition against commensality with sinful
Christians, the conflation of Judaism and paganism results in the notion that Jew-
ish holiday foods are equivalent to food offered in idolatrous sacrifice.

Concern about “pagan” festivals and about heretics remains strong in Isho’yahb’s
sixth-century Church of the East, which was situated in the Zoroastrian-dominated
Sasanid Empire and enmeshed in an intense rivalry with (Jacobite) Syrian Ortho-
dox Christianity. Prohibitions against the sacrificial meat of pagans also appear after
the Arab conquest in a set of Syriac canons from Antioch, formerly a part of the
Roman Empire.32 After the Christianization of the Roman Empire, however, ec-
clesiological authorities within its bounds rapidly dismiss paganism and its rituals as
irrelevant, and they tend not to address heretics by means of food restrictions either. Judaism and its holidays, however, remain a persistent concern throughout Christendom—even, as we have seen, in places without Jews.

Prohibitions against food offered to idols disappear entirely from Greek-language canons by the end of the fourth century, only to be replaced by prohibitions against food associated with Jewish holidays. The Canons of the Apostles, for example, prohibits consumption of meat from carrion and other animals whose blood was not drained but neglects to mention meat offered to idols (c. 63). Likewise, bishops convened in Constantinople by Justinian II at the Council in Trullo of 692 state, “Divine scripture has commanded us to abstain from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication,” editing *eidōlothuton* out of the Apostolic Decree (c. 67). In their canon addressing Christian association with Jews (c. 11), however, these bishops make a point of prohibiting consumption of the Passover matzah.

Unleavened bread takes the place of *eidōlothuton* as the foodstuff whose rejection defines Christian identity because Christian authorities come to imagine Judaism, not idolatry, as the primary antithesis of Christianity.

It is probably no coincidence that the shift in Christian self-definition from “We believe in one God (unlike the Greeks)” to “We believe in Christ (unlike the Jews)” occurs during the period in which disputes over Christology divided rival factions claiming the title of Christian orthodoxy. As we observed above, condemnation of the Jews indirectly furthers the agenda of clerics able to brand their Christian opponents as “judaizers.” Condemnation of Jewish matzah may indirectly serve to highlight the danger inherent in accepting the unleavened bread of the Eucharist from the wrong cleric.

Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373) expresses eloquently the horrors associated with matzah and the Jews who prepare it. The refrain of Ephrem’s nineteenth “Hymn on Unleavened Bread” declares that Christ’s body, which unleavened bread itself symbolizes, has rendered the Jews and their matzah obsolete. Nevertheless, the text of the hymn makes clear that both Jews and matzah pose grave dangers to Christians.

Do not take, my brothers, that unleavened bread from the People whose hands are filthy with blood,
Lest the filth that fills their hands cling to that unleavened bread.
Although meat is pure, no one eats from that which was sacrificed to idols because it is defiled—
How impure therefore is that unleavened bread which the hands that killed the Son kneaded!
It is abhorrent to take food from a hand that is defiled with the blood of animals—
Who, then, would take from that hand which is completely defiled by the blood of prophets?
Let us not, my brothers, eat along with the drug of life the unleavened bread of the People which is, as it were, a drug of death.
For the blood of Christ is served in the unleavened bread of the People and dwells in our Eucharist.
The one who received it in our Eucharist received the drug of life. The one who ate it with the People received the drug of death,
Because that blood, which they cried out might be upon them, is served on their festivals and their Sabbaths,
And whoever associates himself with their festivals, upon him as well is the spattering of the blood. 37

Jews, according to Ephrem, are impure on account of the defilement generated by the murder of prophets and, especially, of Christ himself. That defilement besmirches all who participate in Jewish festivals and clings to the unleavened bread which Jews prepare, presented here as equivalent to an idolatrous sacrifice. Indeed, matzah embodies the blood of Christ itself, the blood which Jews called as a curse upon themselves and their descendants (Matt. 27.25). Ephrem also alludes in this passage both to the Apostolic Decree and to Paul’s warning to the Corinthians that one cannot partake of both the body of Christ and the sacrificial food of idolaters (1 Cor. 10.16–21).

Two sermons pseudonimously ascribed to Ephrem warn that those who eat with Jews and idolaters will also join them in hell. 38 Christ alone possesses the keys to eternal life; by definition, pseudo-Ephrem teaches, all other religions are satanic and traffic in that which is impure and abominable. The clerics at Elvira and the author of the “Canons from the East” prohibit commensality with Jews by analogy to Paul’s prohibition against eating with sinful Christians. These sermons, drawing on Paul’s teaching, “You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons” (1 Cor. 10.21), instead define Jews as idolaters.

Paul, Church Fathers, and the Elviran clerics are careful to distinguish gentiles from their idolatry. Nothing, these authorities emphasize, is wrong with gentiles themselves, and Christians must abstain only from association with a specific act which only some gentiles perform. Rhetoric equating Jewish food with eidōlothuton, in contrast, applies to all Jews uniformly. Ephrem justifies the prohibition against matzah by reference to the act of crucifixion, for which every Jew bears personal responsibility. A sermon attributed to Caesarius, Catholic bishop of Arles (d. 542), does the same but extends that prohibition to all foodstuffs associated with Jews: “The food and drink of the Jews is sacrificial, cursed just as they cursed the Lord, since they crucified their God and Lord; therefore it is cursed, it has borne their faithlessness.” 39 Similarly, Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) prohibits consumption of all “bread, wine, or similar items” prepared by Jews on the grounds that they have been touched by “the impure hands of the Jews”; Jacob warns that even a Christian who borrows a Jew’s wine press or the like may “become defiled by those who are sinners.” Excepting cases of necessity, those who eat Jewish food “shall be cast out from the Church of God and from association with the faithful as one who is impure and despised and abominable, and they shall be numbered among the Jews until...
they purify themselves through repentance.” Unleavened bread may be the paradigmatic foodstuff expressing the Jews’ rejection and crucifixion of Christ, but all Jewish food is forbidden as if sacrificed to idols because it all bears the curse and the stigma of impurity under which Jews are imagined to live.

The first of John Chrysostom’s *Discourses against the Jews*, preached in Antioch in 386, offers valuable insights into the logic underlying rhetoric that brands Jews, their holidays, and their food as idolatrous and impure. Chrysostom (d. 407), whose sobriquet attests to the power of his “golden tongue,” attacks the popular belief that Jews are holy and worthy of emulation by citing scripture to prove that Jews are dogs and stiff-necked beasts who refused the yoke of God. Because they are ignorant of the Father and crucified the Son, they plainly do not worship God; their synagogues must therefore be places of idolatry and dwellings of demons (1.3). Because they abuse and do violence to the scriptures, moreover, the Jews are “exceedingly impure and accursed.”

So it is that I exhort you to flee and shun their gatherings. The harm to our weaker brothers is not slight; providing an excuse for the Jews’ madness is no small matter. For when [your brothers] see you, who worship the Christ whom [the Jews] crucified, reverently following Jewish ritual, how can they fail to think that everything the Jews do is the best? How can they not think that our ways are worthless when you, who accept Christianity and follow its practices, run to those who degrade them? Paul said: “If others see you who have knowledge eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their consciousness is weak, be emboldened to eat food sacrificed to idols?” [1 Cor. 8.10] And I say: If others see you who have knowledge come into the synagogue and watch them blow trumpets, might they not, since their consciousness is weak, be emboldened to admire Jewish practices? (1.5.7)

Chrysostom, deceptively appropriating Paul’s anti-*eidolothuton* rhetoric, charges that Christian “knowers” who choose to attend Jewish rituals place their weaker brothers at risk just as they would by entering an idolatrous temple. Demons, he continues, dwell in the synagogues and, more ominously, in the souls of the Jews themselves. Jews possess “impure souls” and have become so accustomed to bloodshed that they sacrifice their own children to the demons (1.6). Moreover:

They killed the Son of your Master, yet you have the audacity to come together with them? The one whom they killed has honored you by making you as His brother and co-heir, yet you dishonor Him by honoring those who murdered and crucified Him and by attending their festival gatherings? You enter into their profane place and pass through their impure doors and share in the table of demons—for that is what I am persuaded to call the fast of the Jews after the God-slaying. How can those who have set themselves in opposition to God be anything but worshippers of demons? (1.7.5)

In this sermon, John Chrysostom offers a banner example of the hermeneutical Jew. He weaves together stock rhetorical accusations and a range of Biblical prooftexts.
to construct a monstrous antithesis of Christianity and thereby persuade his flock to avoid participation in Jewish festivals. Chrysostom structures his argument along the lines of 1 Corinthians 8–10, first encouraging his audience to avoid synagogues for the benefit of those with a “weak consciousness” and later demonstrating that participation in Jewish festivals—tantamount to sharing in “the table of demons”—is anathema for one who believes in Christ. In his second discourse, Chrysostom presses this point further: “After you have gone off and shared with those who shed the blood of Christ, how is it that you do not shudder to come back and share in his sacred banquet, to partake of his precious blood?” (2.3.5). Paul, of course, intended his instructions to the Corinthians to apply specifically to practices associated with traditional Hellenistic religion. According to Chrysostom, however, “the impiety of the Jews is equal to that of the Greeks, while their guile is much more dangerous” (1.6.4). Jews, not Greeks, constitute the true threat to Christianity, so Christian identity is now defined by avoidance of Jewish rituals even more than by abstention from idolatrous rites.

THE LOGIC AND IMPLICATIONS OF JEWISH IMPURITY

Whether they portray Jews as the ultimate outsiders on account of their rejection of Christ or the most threatening of insiders on account of their willful misinterpretation of the Bible, Christian prohibitions of food associated with Jews define Judaism as antithetical to Christianity: if Christians are “1,” Jews are “-1” even as gentiles are merely “0.” The rhetoric of impurity plays a significant role in rendering Jews in a more negative light than gentiles and, indeed, serves to place Jews at the negative pole of the Christian spectrum of humanity. This function reflects the fact that the impure is that which can never be holy and, indeed, must be kept far removed from that which bears the mantle of holiness; the mundane, in contrast, poses no threat to the holy. The ascription of impurity to an entire class of people finds no precedent in the New Testament. Paul, after all, does not brand Christian sinners as impure when prohibiting commensality with them, and Acts refers only to “the defilement that comes from idols” (Acts 15.20), not to the defilement of idolaters themselves.

The forcefulness of Christian impurity rhetoric with respect to the Jews stems in no small measure from the way in which Christian authorities collectively conflate the three types of impurity described at the end of chapter 2. Jews are defiled because they shed blood—most notably the blood of Christ—and because they embrace false beliefs about God and the dietary laws. These timeless offenses result in a permanent state of intrinsic impurity, vividly expressed by Chrysostom through the image of Jewish synagogues and souls infested by demons. As Ephrem the Syrian and Jacob of Edessa make clear, Jewish impurity is especially dangerous because, like certain forms of circumstantial pollution, it is contagious: Jewish food, espe-
cially but not exclusively symbolically significant foodstuffs, takes on the impurity of its preparers, and those who eat such food become “Jews” by association. By marshaling attributes of all three types of impurity found in Biblical literature and coupling them with attributes that the Christian Bible associates with other objectionable groups, Christians construct a Jew who is more negative than the sum of his attributes. This hermeneutical Jew functions as a magnet that attracts negative depictions precisely because the Jew is imagined to be the polar opposite of true Christianity and thus the embodiment of everything which Christians do not want to be themselves.  

Because ecclesiastical authorities intertwine their self-definition as Christians with their hermeneutically derived definition of Jews, however, the nature of the imagined Jewish foil carries with it profound implications for the identity and proper behavior of Christians. By asserting that Jewish blessings have the power to counteract those of Christians (c. 49), for example, the clerics gathered at Elvira imagine Jews as powerful and Christians, consequently, as vulnerable. The ironic implications of Christian imagination regarding Jews are especially evident in prohibitions of Jewish foods premised on rhetoric regarding Jewish impurity. We have seen that Christian authorities like Jacob of Edessa and the clerics gathered at Epàone insist that Christians, to maintain their own identity as the holy people, must avoid the impure food of Jews whenever possible. Of course, Titus 1.15 also teaches, “For the pure all things are pure,” and no less an authority than Augustine defines Christianity by its rejection of the notion that food can be impure. The inexorable logic of rhetoric about Jewish impurity, however, nevertheless demands, even from heirs to the Augustinan tradition, an embrace of the notions that Jewish food is impure and its consumption by Christians forbidden.  

As Paul himself observes regarding the “weak” Christ-believers of both Rome and Corinth, food truly is forbidden to those who imagine it as impure or idolatrous. The logic and implications of Jewish impurity are expressed clearly in the work of Agobard, archbishop of Lyons from 816 to 840. Agobard draws together the various strands of thought about Jews and their food we have been following in this chapter, along with many of the texts we have examined, in his treatise On Jewish Superstitions. He cites the prohibitions against commensality promulgated at Agde, Epàone, and Mâcon (§§4–6), as well as the example set by Hilary of Poitiers, who not only refused to share meals with Jews and heretics but even refrained from greeting them in the street (§2). On the basis of these and other sources from late antiquity, Agobard continues, “one ought to direct greater denunciation toward fellowship with Jews—behavior which must be cursed and avoided—than toward fellowship with other heretics because, although all properly deserve to be denounced for being hostile toward the truth, those who express greater hostility are especially deserving.” After all, he observes, heretics only dissent from some of the Church’s tenets and thus are only partial blasphemers, but the Jews proclaim falsehoods about
everything, blaspheming against Christ and his Church in their entirety and cursing Christ at every available opportunity (§9). Agobard, who is unfamiliar with Greek and Syriac sources, does not interpret restrictions against Jewish food as extensions of the New Testament’s prohibition of food offered to idols. Like Chrysostom and Ephrem, however, Agobard portrays Jews as infested by “the impure spirit of idolatry” and asserts that Jews are more abhorrent than either Biblical unbelievers like the Amalekites or contemporary pagans like Muslims; indeed, Jews are nothing less than the Antichrist (§§19–22).

The theme of Jewish impurity is a consistent refrain in On Jewish Superstitions. Agobard, introducing his discussion of canons about the Jews, summarizes their contents as follows: “Every Christian must avoid completely all association with Jews, who are intrinsically most impure” (§3). He devotes the bulk of this treatise to a presentation of scriptural evidence demonstrating the need for such avoidance, with particular attention to the avoidance of Jewish food. The charge of Jewish impurity introduces this presentation:

Because they are so greatly and in so many ways polluted by the defilement of mind and deed, through them are fulfilled directly the words of the prophet Haggai. On God’s order, he asked the priests: “If someone polluted by a corpse touches any of these”—clearly referring to “bread or meat or wine or oil or any other food” [Haggai 2.12]—“is it not impure?” The priests replied and said, “It is impure.” Thereupon Haggai said, “That is how this people and that is how this nation appears before me, says God, and likewise all of the works of their hands” [Haggai 2.13–14]. (§11)

Haggai, prophesying metaphorically, blurs the line between the noncontagious offensive defilement resulting from Israelite sinfulness and the contagious circumstantial pollution caused by contact with corpses. Agobard takes Haggai’s words literally and deduces from them the charge that both Jews and their food are contagiously impure on account of Jewish sinfulness. The theme of impurity returns once more at the climax of Agobard’s discourse on Biblical prooftexts. Even though scripture permits sharing meals with unbelievers, Agobard declares, this permission cannot be applied to the Jews because their food is impure. “We know the food of those who are impure is impure because of their sinfulness in mind and conscience. For how could their food not be impure, how could their granary and storehouses not be cursed?” (§24). This definition of Judaism and Jewish food underlies Agobard’s insistence that Christians may not consume meat or wine prepared by Jews, despite the fact that none of the canonical sources that Agobard adduces contain such prohibitions. Amulo (d. 852), Agobard’s successor to the see of Lyons, states explicitly that Jewish wine is prohibited because it “has become polluted by their activity.”

Jeremy Cohen makes a compelling case that Agobard’s anti-Jewish rhetoric is an element of the archbishop’s broader concern for establishing a properly ordered Christian empire, a concern that dominated Agobard’s career. Jews, Agobard as-
serts, occupy an inappropriate position in Carolingian society and are the beneficiaries of imperial privileges which they do not deserve. In Cohen’s words, Agobard believes that “imperial Jewish policy has resulted in nothing less than the disgrace of Christianity, which numerous Christians aggravate when they persist in eating with the Jews and spending time in their company.” Agobard expresses no desire to eliminate Jews from the realm, but he is vociferous in demanding that Jews be put in their proper place as despised witnesses to the truth of Christianity. The very definition of Christianity as the positive polar opposite of Judaism necessitates legal and rhetorical measures, foreign food restrictions prominent among them, that accomplish this task. The degree to which impurity rhetoric advances Agobard’s agenda—and, indeed, that of so many other Christian authorities of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages—belyes Mary Douglas’s famous definition of impurity as “matter out of place.” Quite the contrary, Christian assertions that Jews are impure, and the foreign food restrictions that derive from such assertions, function as a means of placing Jews where they belong within the proper social order: at the negative pole of the Christian worldview and in an inferior position within Christian society.

The absence of comparable impurity rhetoric in Jewish discourse about foreign food restrictions offers further indication that Jewish authorities do not perceive the difference between Us and Them in antithetical terms and do not treat gentiles as a foil against which to construct Jewish identity. Within the worldview exemplified in such discourse, gentiles are not impure (−1 on our spectrum), but rather merely mundane (0); consequently, gentiles merit little attention in their own right. Both Qumranic and Rabbinic authorities, like their Christian counterparts, ascribe impurity to the food of Jewish heretics in the process of defining orthodoxy in contradiction to a heretical foil. Ultimately, however, the Sages come to view Christianity not as a heretical offshoot of Judaism but rather as an archetypical gentile religion. For that reason, at the same time Christians begin to treat Jews as the primary foil against which to define Christian identity, Talmudic Sages dismiss Christianity as having no particular significance for the construction of Jewish identity. Both sets of authorities engage in the process of imagining not only their own community but also those outside its bounds, yet they do so in fundamentally different styles. The role which impurity rhetoric does or does not play in these acts of imagination reveals significant information about Jewish and Christian styles of thought about foreigners and, we will see in part IV, Islamic styles of thought on this subject as well.

THE DOGS AND THE CHILDREN,
THE IMPURE AND THE HOLY

Discourse about foreign food restrictions serves to express both Jewish and Christian ideas about the proper place of Jews and gentiles within an ideal society. Hel-
lenistic Jews of Alexandria imagine themselves as members of a distinctly holy community nevertheless integrated into the broader society; they interpret Biblical dietary laws as a means of marking their distinctiveness but refrain from endorsing foreign food restrictions. Judeans, in contrast, employ foreign food restrictions as a means of emphasizing through symbols and social practice not only Jewish distinctiveness but also the divide that separates Jews from gentiles, the holy from the mundane. This divide remains fundamental in Rabbinic literature about foreign food restrictions, in which the most significant characteristic of non-Jews is the very fact of their non-Jewishness.

The food-related discourse we have examined in the last three chapters reflects the ways in which Christian authorities transformed the Jew-gentile dichotomy in the process of defining a new religious community that, although positioned outside of both categories, nevertheless lays claim to the mantle of Israel’s holiness. This transformation is apparent in the two epigraphs that introduce part III. Jesus’ own unwillingness to eat with gentiles and his reluctance to “take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs” by ministering to a gentile woman (Matt. 15.26) dissolves within a generation or two of his death into an embrace of commensality among Jewish and gentile Christ-believers. Such behavior symbolizes the unified nature of a Christ-believing community in which the differences between Jews and gentiles have become inconsequential; as Paul teaches, “In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith” (Gal. 3.26). Foreign food restrictions nevertheless continue to mark the distinctions between Christians and idolaters on the one hand and Christians and Jews on the other. As notions of the proper social order shift, foreign food restrictions are dismantled and constructed accordingly.

With the Christianization of the Roman Empire, the distinction between Christians and idolaters receded in the minds of many Christian authorities, but such was not the fate of the distinction between Christians and Jews. As Chrysostom and, later, Agobard assert on the basis of Jesus’ words to the gentile woman, ‘Although those Jews had been called to sonship, they degenerated to the level of dogs, while we who were dogs received the strength, through God’s grace, to cast off our former irrationality and to rise to the honor of sons’ (Chrysostom, Discourses 1.2.1; cf. Agobard, On Jewish superstitions §11). Jesus, like the later Sages (T. Ḥul. 1.1), understands his community to be a Jewish one and employs animal imagery as symbolic of the mundane status of gentiles. Christians, in contrast, define themselves in opposition to Judaism and imagine Jews as analogous to animals in order to reinforce their assertions that Jews are impure and thus cut off from the holiness associated with Biblical Israel.\(^{58}\)

Imagined foreigners are not unique to Christian discourse. The Sages, we have seen, imagine gentiles in various contexts related to foreign food restrictions to be obsessive performers of libation and sexual perverts, as well as helpful neighbors. The common need to imagine foreigners, however, in no way predetermines the
nature of the resulting image. The choice by Jewish authorities to imagine gentiles as generally insignificant and the choice by Christian authorities to imagine Jews as gravely dangerous are both just that: choices. These choices reflect the ways in which religious authorities imagine the identity of their own community and, more specifically, the ways in which they stake their claim to holiness. Islamic authorities make yet different choices about the way they portray foreigners, reflecting a different set of ideas about identity and holiness.

The ways in which Jews and Christians imagine foreigners relate to a Biblical notion that both communities embrace: “Israel” possesses a monopoly on holiness and an exclusive relationship with the divine. Each community lays claim to the title of Israel in its own fashion and imagines its outsiders accordingly. The Qur’an, in contrast, rejects the very premise that underlies Jewish and Christian claims. It makes no difference who constitutes verus Israel if, as the Qur’an asserts, Israel is not the bearer of intrinsic holiness and God has not established an exclusive relationship with a single people. The Qur’an thus sets the stage for a third style of imagining the identities of Us and Them, one in which the possession of an authentic relationship with the divine, and thus the claim to a measure of holiness, is not necessarily limited to a single community.