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Constructing a Christ-centred identity: A social identity reading of the Epistle to Titus

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The Pastoral Epistle to Titus offers both theological insights and practical guidance for Christ-followers on the island of Crete, a context moulded by enduring public reputations and persistent negative cultural stereotypes. This article applies the Social Identity Theory (SIT) to explore how the letter to Titus intends to transform the Cretan identity through *comparative fit*, *normative fit*, salience and theological dispositions. A social-rhetorical analysis demonstrates how the epistle to Titus redefines social structures by transferring the emphasis on social categories to divine χάρις. The text challenges personal self-esteem and external prejudice by emphasising virtues that contrast the dominant vices and present a Christ-centred identity that challenges the Cretan negative prototypicality and discrimination. This article argues that the epistle to Titus presents a purposeful strategy to reconstruct the social identity within a culturally contested context.

Contribution: The contribution to scholarship lies in the integration of theological analysis with SIT, providing new insights into the dynamics of early Christ-following identity formation.

Keywords: Titus Epistle; social identity theory; salience; *comparative fit*; *normative fit*; vilification; paronomasia; *Haustafeln*.

Introduction

The Epistle to Titus appears to be unique in the New Testament, *inter alia* because it was written to Titus, who was an early Gentile convert (see also Gl 2:3), and thus perhaps even could be seen as a prototypical *test case* example of how Gentiles could be reconciled to God *without adopting Jewish ethnic identity markers* (see Powell 2018:415). The letter contains a concise theological affirmation and provides pastoral guidance intended to shape acceptable conduct for Christ-followers within the unique environmental ubiety of Crete (Wallace 2010; contra Robertson 2024:9, 124).[1] Written to the Christ-following ingroup located in the social-cultural context of Crete (Porter 2020b:469), where honour, shame and group distinctiveness played a pivotal role in shaping perception and interaction (Tt 1:12). The Titus Epistle advances a persuasive case for analysing how a Christ-centred identity is formed and preserved in relation to social norms. Within this context, the dynamics of group identity provide a constructive structure for understanding the epistle's theological emphasis and moral instruction. The Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides a useful heuristic tool for exploring these identity-forming dynamics.

Social identity theory

Social Identity Theory was developed in the field of social psychology (cf. Haslam, Reicher & Platow 2020:49–50; Russell 2020:3–4) by Henri Tajfel and John Turner and refers both to SIT as initially developed by Tajfel and later expanded with Social Categorization Theory (SCT) by Tajfel's student and colleague Turner. In the guild, SIT is used as an umbrella term that includes both Tajfel and Turner. Social Identity Theory is, in other words, not one theory as such but contains different perspectives (see eds. Tucker & Kuecker 2020). Social Identity Theory was first used in New Testament Studies by Philip Esler in the early 1990s. Since then, this approach has grown significantly in New Testament Studies (see eds. Tucker & Kuecker 2020). It explains how individuals develop an awareness of identity as members of a specific social group (Hogg & Abrams 1999:8). According to SIT, individuals categorise their self-concept and that of others in distinct social ingroups and outgroups by means of social categorisation and social comparison (Esler 2003:20; Haslam et al. 2020:50–52; Turner 1987:51–54).

1.Robertson (2024:124) is not referring to Cretans but to 'early readers of the letter' and applies Pierre Nora's concept of '*lieux de memoire*' [sites of memory], which does not presuppose an actual Cretan context for the letter but leaves the destination or context open.

This categorisation proposes that individuals derive a part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups, and the respective group's salience – the degree to which a group identity becomes prominent in a specific context – is influenced by a group's salience. The salience of a social category is, in view of Turner's SCT, determined by two attributes: *comparative fit* and *normative fit*. The former refers to how differences are perceived between different groups. The larger these differences in comparison with the perceived prototypical ingroup, the larger is the degree of *comparative fit*. Consequently, it all depends on whether the similarities between distinct groups are notable enough for the individual to categorise them as part of a certain group in relation to outgroups (see Turner & Reynolds 2012:403–404). *Normative fit* refers to the extent an individual conforms to the normative structure of expected prototypical behaviours and values of the ingroup they belong to or represent. *Comparative fit* addresses the question of whether group members exhibit sufficient shared characteristics to maintain unity vis-à-vis outgroups. *Normative fit*, on the other hand, pertains to the degree to which ingroup members align with the group's normative prototypicality. *Comparative fit* and *normative fit* relate to prototypes. The concept prototype refers to the abstract notion of values and ethos that define a group's identity, and for that reason, people are not prototypes (Van Knippenberg & Hogg 2003:245). People can act in 'prototypical' ways and be 'exemplars' of the groups they represent (Esler 2022:33).

Both *comparative fit* and *normative fit* are closely related to the sense of how well an individual aligns with their self-concept in a distinct context (cf. Haslam et al. 2020:62–64).[2] Through identifying and emphasising what is important to the reader, a memory or meaning is created that resonates with the reader, which will bring about salience – either *comparative* or *normative fit* or both – within a specific context (eds. Tucker & Kuecker 2020:65; cf. Porter 2020a:453–454; Reicher & Sani 1998:269).

Category salience and group behaviour are intimately linked through cognitive motivation (Hogg & Turner 1987:337–338). This implies that individuals form groups and conduct themselves in a defined manner based on how they categorise themselves relative to the salient social categories. As Haslam et al. (2020) argue:

> [C]ategory salience depends on what group best distinguishes who we are from who we are not, so the question of what position best defines the group is also a function of what distinguishes 'us' from 'them' – and, again, this is formally captured by the concept of *meta-contrast*. (p. 79)

The meta-contrast principle is defined as the tendency that people tend to positively portray the ingroup and negatively portray outgroups in exaggerated ways. 'Salience' is the aspect of an individual's identity initiated by the surrounding context and setting. What is relevant and pertinent within a particular context must be distinct and self-evident, which creates perceptions that resonate with the intended reader.

Thus, when a social category becomes salient, it activates social comparison against which groups examine themselves relative to other groups to enhance and maintain their distinctiveness. These comparisons lead to negative social stereotypes with generalised negative perspectives about outgroup members and encourage prejudice or negative attitudes towards outgroup members (cf. Jackson 1993:395–413). This prejudice consequently leads to behavioural discrimination and vilification of outgroup members. To preserve a positive self-concept, groups seek a positive distinctiveness by emphasising positive attributes that differentiate the ingroup from the outgroup. These attributes strengthen ingroup cohesion and overemphasise the outgroup's perceived differences as expressed in meta-contrast principles. A typical cognitive bias associated with the outgroup homogeneity is the disposition towards greater openness to, or recognition of, ingroup differences. In other words, the outgroup is viewed through a narrowly defined negative stereotype, whereas the ingroup is viewed as a far more positive stereotype.

Together, these processes, which are embedded in salience (*comparative* and *normative fit*), combined with the SIT's outgroup homogeneity effect of prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping, construct group identity and intergroup relations (cf. Reicher & Sani 1998:268–269). As a heuristic tool, SIT offers valuable insights into the social and theological dynamics in the Titus Epistle and leads to heuristic questions such as: What does the text reveal about *comparative fit* and *normative fit*?; and how does the text overaccentuate negative outgroup categorisation and intensify positive ingroup categorisation in meta-contrasting manners?

Theological dispositions

The Titus Epistle is viewed as comprising one of 'the richest theological concentrations in the New Testament' (Collins 2002:299; Wall & Steele 2012:332). The author of Titus makes use of theological dispositions to establish salience that creates a *comparative fit* that intends to reconstruct the identity and behaviour of the Christ-following ingroup.

Theobald (2017) summarises the theological emphasis of the Titus Epistle as the soteriological revelation of God's grace, which brings salvation to all people, as he states: 'Denn erschienen ist die Gnade Gottes – allen Menschen Heil bringend (σωτῆρος; Tt 2:11) – *so lautet der 'fundamentale Glaubenssatz'* (Theobald 2017:305). Genade (2007) identifies five themes associated with the Christology, namely Jesus Christ as Saviour (2007:29), Jesus Christ as God (2007:30–32), God as Saviour (2007:32–34), God's Sovereignty (2007:34) and the role the Holy Spirit plays in salvation (2007:34–35). Themes that are embedded in the Titus Epistle and represent sound doctrine that functions as a means of self-identification to promote the collective identification over individual or subordinate groups on Crete.

The theological dispositions can, firstly, be outlined as the Divine trichotomy[3] of God [θεός], Jesus Christ ['Ιησοῦ

3.The Divine trichotomy in the Titus Epistle is distinct from the dogmatic Trinitarian and/or Trinity, which arose from pre-Nicaean Christological debates and resulted in

Χριστοῦ] and the Holy Spirit ([πνεύματος ἁγίου] Tt 3:5). As Mounce (2000:447) argues, this passage in Titus refers to God the Father as 'planner and initiator (Tt 3:4), Jesus Christ as agent of redemption (Tt 3:6) and the Holy Spirit as instrument of regeneration and renewal' (Tt 3:5; cf. also Knight 1992:338). Collins (2002:314) argues that Titus 2:13 is one of the earliest texts that used divine language to refer to Jesus ([Ἐπεφάνη γὰρ ἡ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ] Tt 2:11). The epiphany describes the revelation of God in the manifestation of Christ (Tt 2:11–14) that implicitly and inseparably connects God and Christ (Engelmann 2012:131; Saarinen 2008:182). The bond between God and Christ is not only embedded in grace (see χάρις 2:11; 3:7) but also further enhanced and extended in the philanthropy (3:4) of God, which is manifested in Christ and became a reality for the Cretan Christ-followers in 'the Holy Spirit (3:5) as the Holy Spirit [is] the power of God's work' (Collins 2002:365). Although this is not a formal Trinitarian affirmation, the trichotomy concept is embedded in the Titus Epistle (Robertson 2024:119). As Wall and Steele (2012) argue, the shared salvific roles between God, Christ and the Holy Spirit correlate with Trinitarian thoughts (2012:363–364).

Secondly, the theological dispositions include the manifestation of God (Tt 2:13; 3:4) and are known (Tt 1:3) through the Titus Epistle's author that teaches sound doctrine and divine grace (Robertson 2024:119–124). These terms express an authoritative divine presence, which was present in both the Hellenistic and Jewish traditions, where the latter emphasises external revelation of God (Collins 2002:202; Mounce 2000:421–422). The epiphany revolves around the salvific God ([χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ σωτήριος πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις] Tt 2:11) and Jesus Christ (Tt 2:13–14), who bring salvation to all ([σωτήριος πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις] Tt 2:11; cf. Saarinen 2008:182). God's manifestation extends beyond past promises (Tt 1:2), present teaching ([ἐν τῷ νῦν αἰῶνι] Tt 2:12) and future hope (Tt 1:1, 2:12) to inspire the Christ-followers to live modestly, justly and godly (Tt 2:12) as the ἐκλεκτοὶ θεοῦ (Tt 1:1). Χάρις (2:11; 3:7) is both theological and practical and becomes visible through the response of the Christ-followers to the gospel (Malina & Pilch 2013:89–90). The epiphanies in Titus 2:11–14 and 3:4 emphasise the saving will and final judgement of God and the defining of the eschatological hope of the Christ-following group (Saarinen 2008:181–184).

Through the application of SIT, one should observe that the ἐκλεκτοὶ θεοῦ are called upon to model an identity and ethos that distinguish them as the ingroup, separate from the outgroup. Where these values coincide with the Greco-Roman philosophical texts in the *Umwelt*, the difference between them lies primarily in the motivation for the group's identity and ethos. The ingroup's values (like modesty, justly, godly, etc.), in terms of the SIT's *comparative fit*, not only reduce the perceived differences and create social cohesion within the ingroup but also elevate the perceived difference of the outgroup, who are not ἐκλεκτοὶ θεοῦ (Tt 1:1) and are not motivated by the same implied identity and ethos. The future eschatological hope for salvation, in which the Christ-following ingroup will share, binds the ingroup and sets

the Doctrine of the Trinity after the Council of Nicaea (McGrath 1997:19–20).

boundaries towards the outgroup. Ingroup members share in God's larger narrative plan that is aimed at missionally reaching the whole world (see Du Toit 2014).

Thirdly, the theological dispositions include a message of salvation. Through the continuous use of 'our saviour' referring to both ὁ θεὸς (Tt 3:4) and Χριστός Ἰησοῦς (Tt 1:4; 2:13; 3:6), the redemptive theme of God as source and Christ as means of salvation is emphasised ([θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ] Oberlinner 1980:196–203). Salvation is embedded in the mercy ([ἔλεος] Tt 3:5) of God and perceived through new birth and renewal ([παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως] Tt 3:5), by the grace of God (Tt 3:5–7) directing the Christ-following group to live modestly, justly and godly (Tt 2:12) as members of the ἐκλεκτοὶ θεοῦ (Collins 2002:312; Genade 2007:130; Tt 1:1; Theobald 2017:321). Divine χάρις (Tt 2:11; 3:7) is an epiphany that appeals to all to reject godlessness and embrace godliness, which results in the hope of eternal life (Saarinen 2008:181–184; Wall & Steele 2012:352). Salvation is not earned by humans but granted through the philanthropy ([φιλανθρωπία] Tt 3:4) of God and His mercy ([ἔλεος] Tt 3:5) through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (Mounce 2000:434), who transforms outgroup members into ingroup Christ-following heirs (Knight 1992:335). The ἐκλεκτοὶ θεοῦ are transformed into God's possession, justified by grace and assured of salvation despite their former outgroup categorisation (Tt 3:3–7; Wall & Steele 2012:256). As election and the reception of grace emphasise ingroup categorisation and positive self-esteem, they construct a shared identity in contrast to the outgroup, which is not elected or has not experienced grace. An implied meta-contrast principle is seen in this dualistic cognitive framework.

Fourthly, the theological dispositions include soteriology and emphasise Jesus Christ as the means of salvation. This soteriological theme emphasised by key terms like grace (Tt 2:11; 3:7) and righteousness (Tt 2:12; 3:7) displays the gift of God that restores the Cretan Christ-following group to an acceptable, interpersonal and divine relationship regardless of social status (Malina & Pilch 2013:83). This is a pivotal message in an ancient paternalistic and stratified dyadic context. Grace extends beyond socio-political systems and brings unity within the Cretan *Haustafeln* of elders (Tt 1:5–9; 2:2), women, youth and slaves (Tt 2:3–10) and the wider social-political structures on Crete (Tt 3:1). The prototypicality of the Christ-following ingroup is defined *inter alia* by terms such as σώφρονας ([sensible] Tt 1:8; 2:2; 2:5) and εὐσέβειαν ([godliness] Tt 1:1) (sound mind and respectful religious conduct). Marshall and Tower (1999:143) emphasise that εὐσεβῶς characterises the 'whole of a life in Christ'. Malina and Pilch (2013:84) argue that σώφρων is a sane, reasonable attitude, and ἀσέβεια (godlessness) is religious indifference opposing this respectful conduct. Εὐσεβῶς refers to a continuous respectful relationship with God, which is enabled by the Holy Spirit, which renews through baptism and rebirth (Tt 3:5–6) and transforms the ingroup members' moral character (Lampe 1961:813; Mounce 2000:439). Malina and Pilch (2013) further argue

that ἀσέβεια is a rejection of the respectful religious and social order and, together with κοσμικὰς ἐπιθυμίας ([worldly desires] Tt 2:12), emphasises self-sufficiency as opposed to divine grace. On the other hand, χάρις is personified in Christ and constructs the Cretan Christ-following group's identity (Robertson 2024:126–127) and transforms the individual's life in a positive trajectory. This χάρις (Tt 2:11; 3:7) emphasises the grace of God as an unearned favour that brings salvation (Tt 2:11) through the self-sacrifice of Christ (Tt 2:14). This χάρις enables the Christ-following group to live righteously and godly in the present age (Tt 2:12b), forming the centre of the Christ-following group's social identity and their perceived social boundaries.

Fifthly, the theological dispositions include an eschatological theme, which is embedded in the interrelated concept of ἐλπίς (Tt 1:2; 2:13; 3:7) and ζωῆς αἰωνίου (Tt 1:2; 3:7). Hope is not just a future expectation but also a present fullness of a life through Christ reaching its completeness at the second coming of Christ (Knight 1992:284; Mounce 2000:380). Righteous living is emphasised by the unchanging promise of God ([ἀψευδὴς θεός] Tt 1:2; Wall & Steele 2012:355). The Titus Epistle's eschatology derives from terms like πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων ([eternity] Tt 1:2) and καιροῖς ἰδίοις ([appointed times] Tt 1:3), which emphasise the incarnation and presence of Christ as the central feature of the Cretan Christ-following group's identity (Tt 1:1–2). Although recognising a future fulfilment, the emphasis remains on the present age (νῦν, Tt 2:12 refers to the here and now) as the Cretan Christ-following group lives between the visible manifestations (Tt 2:13–14; 3:4) of God and the godlessness [ἀσέβεια] of the world and its worldly desires ([κοσμικὰς ἐπιθυμίας] Tt 2:12). This embodied eschatology emphasises that the eternal promises of God have been fulfilled in the Saviour ([σωτῆρος ἡμῶν] cf. Tt 1:3; 1:4; 2:10; 2:13; 3:4; 3:5), constructing the present as an age of salvation where a righteous (Tt 2:12, 3:7) relation with God is possible despite the brokenness of the world.

Within the Christ-following ingroup, Paul is presented as a prototypical[4] ingroup member, as he is described as δοῦλος θεοῦ, ἀπόστολος δὲ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Tt 1:1). This salvific work is embedded in both Christ ([σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ] Tt 2:13) and God ([σωτῆρος ἡμῶν θεοῦ] Tt 3:4) and is the central driving force that emerges from the theological dispositions and creates the salience of the social identity of the Christ-following group and functions as a comparative fit for the group's collective social identity.

4.Esler (2022), in referring to leadership prototypes in 2 Corinthians, distinguishes between prototypicality and exemplarity (Esler 2022:ad loc 56 of 634), where the former refers to what extent an individual represents a group's primary identity and portrays the group's norms, values and ideas defining group membership (Esler 2022: ad loc 57–61 of 634). The latter emphasises an individual's ability to influence and inspire others to follow their example (Esler 2022:ad loc 61–66 of 634). Esler (2022: ad loc 58 of 634), in discussing the leadership prototype in 2 Corinthians, and in respect to prototypicality, states: 'the psychological foundation for being a member of a group was the cognitive act of defining oneself as a member of that group […] Having taken this step, the member then ascertains the attributes attached to group membership and aligns himself or herself with them. The people who are able to supply reliable information about the definition of group membership, especially those seen as prototypical of the group, are those who wield influence among the membership' (Esler 2022: ad loc 58 of 634). For the places, Esler (2022) discusses exemplarity or exemplar in the hardbound copy, see Esler (2022:31, 32, 35, 36, 40, 56, 70, 195, 235). Previously, Esler (2003:172–173, 224) also discussed the difference between prototypes and exemplars in his work on Romans. For a definition of prototype, see Esler (2003:172).

The Cretan *Haustafeln* (Household tables)

The *Haustafeln* were a social structure of the collectivist ancient Mediterranean world and focused on the moral, ethical and religious health of the household, which was extended to the Cretan πόλεις. In the household, the emphasis was on the οἰκονομία as a *topos*[5] that included three crucial pairs of relationships, namely husband and wife, parent and children and master and slave. This emphasised the authority and subordination within these relations, which represent aspects of the *normative fit* within the ancient Mediterranean paternalistic context.

Although the *Haustafeln* were common in the Mediterranean world, there were clear differences between various social contexts (cf. Barton 1996; Bauman-Martin 2004; Crouch 1972; Hering 2007). This difference emphasised the partial *normative fit* for that context. In Crete, it was not different. The *Haustafeln* reflected the social-political structures of the island.

The author of the Titus Epistle uses three different *Haustafeln* (Tt 1:5–9; 2:1–10; 3:1–2; see Von Lips 1994:267) to present 'a series of crosscutting groups with specific prototypical behaviour for each group' (Porter 2020b:721) to establish a shared understanding and narrative that the Cretan Christ-following group can relate to, thus constructing a new salience and a strong sense of identity within the Cretan Christ-following group.

The first *normative fit* that the author emphasises in the Cretan Christ-following group is the *Haustafel* in Titus 1:5–9 that focuses on πρεσβύτερος (Tt 1:5) and ἐπίσκοπος (Tt 1:7) used interchangeably (Theobald 2017:209–211; Wall & Steele 2012:340). Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders who must be ἀνέγκλητος [irreproachable], which is a quality that is required of the πρεσβύτερος and the ἐπίσκοπος. This quality emphasises that the distinction between them might be in relation to functions of the same individual rather than distinct offices (Collins 2002:322; Mounce 2000:390). While the πρεσβύτερος refers to an honour-embedded status based on age, ἐπίσκοπος emphasises the functional oversight role of ensuring household honour and faithfulness in the οἶκος, which was the fundamental unit of the Cretan society. The term καθίστημι (Tt 1:5) is often misunderstood as ordination, but a more accurate understanding will be 'to put in charge' (Mounce 2000:387) and reflects authority embedded in kinship and social structures (Brown 2013:54). As steward of God ([εἶναι ὡς θεοῦ οἰκονόμον] Tt 1:7), the function of the ἐπίσκοπος is to encourage ([παρακαλεῖν] Tt 1:9) and correct behaviour ([ἐλέγχειν] Tt 1:9) according to the truth of the promises of God while embodying χάρις and virtues like being self-controlled (Tt 1:8) and expressing godliness

5.*Topos* refers to a set of statements or proverbs on the same subject, related to a collective theme and reinforced by repeated key words (cf. Bradley 1953:243). The distinctive feature of *topos* is that it consists of more than one sentence with the same subject, as seen in the traditional associated *Haustafeln* pericopes (Col 3:8-4:1, Eph 5:22-6:9 and 1 Pt 1:3-37; cf. Brunt 1985:495) and the non-traditional associated pericopes (Rm 13:1-7 and Tt; cf. Von Lips 1994:264–266) in the New Testament. For an overview of the *Haustafeln* and *topos*, cf. McDonald (2011:65–90).

([εὐσεβῶς] Tt 1:6; 1:12; 2:12b). By emphasising stewardship, supervision and moral leadership (not distinct honorific offices, cf. Balcer 1977:252–254) in the *Haustafel*, the author constructs a social identity that contrasts legitimate overseers with disruptive, illegitimate teachers.

In the second *Haustafel* in the Titus Epistle (Tt 2:1–10), the author expands this understanding and narrative to construct a Cretan Christ-following salience with *normative fit* to a wider Cretan *Haustafel* defined by age, gender and social status.

Older men ([πρεσβυτέρους] Tt 1:5) are described more generally than the ἐπίσκοπος in Titus 1:5–9. The πρεσβύτας are exhorted to embody virtues like νηφάλιος [temperate], σεμνός [honourable], σώφρων [moderate] and to be 'healthy in faith, love, and steadfastness' ([ὑγιαίνοντας τῇ πίστει, τῇ ἀγάπῃ, τῇ ὑπομονῇ] Tt 2:2; Mounce 2000:409). These virtues were common in the Mediterranean world and linked to public reputation and personal integrity, which demonstrate respect and guidance (Campbell 1994:66; Collins 2002:324; Malherbe 2008:271–282).

Older women ([πρεσβύτιδας] Tt 2:3), with emphasis on the κατάστημα of the older women, must live with ἱεροπρεπής [befitted holiness] – a hapax legomenon formed from ἱερος [temple] and πρεπεῖν [to be fit] – with cultic association tied to the Cretan religious culture and priestly imagery (Moorey 2019:53–56; Mounce 2000:410). This behaviour of the πρεσβῦτις emphasises the faith-orientated identity of older women that must be filled with the theological dispositions of the Christ-following ingroup.

Younger women need to be encouraged to purity ([ἀγνός] Tt 2:5), a term that is originally associated with the divine but applied in this *Haustafel* as moral conduct within the Cretan Christ-following group (cf. Mounce 2000:411). The younger women are instructed (Tt 2:4) to be discreet, love their husbands and love their children ([ἵνα σωφρονίζωσιν τὰς νέας φιλάνδρους εἶναι, φιλοτέκνους] Tt 2:4) and, by doing so, reflect the religious collectivism and ethical standard of the Christ-following ingroup.

Younger men are encouraged to exercise self-control ([σωφρονεῖν] Tt 2:6), which was a pivotal virtue closely linked to the wider Mediterranean cultures and the Christ-following ingroup. The portrayal of Titus as a young prototypical ingroup member (Tt 1:4) emphasises the continuity of the virtues within the Cretan Christ-following ingroup.

In the last part of this *Haustafel,* slaves (δοῦλοι) are addressed with empathetic inclusiveness and are instructed to obey their master, not as enforcement but as part of the household cohesion (Genade 2007:100–101). Paul's identification with δοῦλος θεοῦ (Tt 1:1) links all the Cretan Christ-following group members to shared salience with higher ethical standards embedded in God as Saviour (Tt 2:10).

An underlying theme through the *normative fit* of this *Haustafel*, defined by age, gender and social status, is the virtuous expression of being of sound judgement, self-controlled and showing moderation ([σωφρονεῖν] Tt 2:6), which emphasises trustworthiness and is a linguistic thread tying this *Haustafel* together (Porter 2020b:472). This corresponds with the Stoic concept of οἰκείωσις – moving from self-interest to compassion for others – reinterpreted with the theological disposition and the χάρις for the Cretan Christ-following group (Engberg-Pedersen 2000:33–44; Saarinen 2008:179).

Thus, the *Haustafel* in Titus 2:1–10 constructs a superordinate family metaphor to create a collective Cretan Christ-following ingroup identity that emphasises the theological dispositions embedded in the *normative fit* of the Cretan society.

The last *Haustafel* in the Titus Epistle is the πόλις *Haustafel* in Titus 3:1–2. This *Haustafel* focuses on the wider socio-political system on Crete and includes the Cretan Christ-follower group and the non-Christ-following groups. The words describing authority in this *Haustafel* are ἀρχαῖς (feminine plural dative of ἀρχή, ῆς f.) and ἐξουσίαις (feminine plural dative of ἐξουσία, ας f.). The meaning of these words varies in the context in which they are used (Louw & Nida 1988:35, 92). Mounce (2000) argues for a personified distinction where ἀρχαῖς refers to the earthly rulers, while ἐξουσίαις refers to an impersonal structure or system of authority. Both these words are in the dative form, and thus the object of 'Ὑπομίμνησκε αὐτοὺς ἀρχαῖς ἐξουσίαις ὑποτάσσεσθαι' ([remind them to be submissive to the rulers and authorities] Tt 3:1).

In this *Haustafel*, the author refers to seven vices and virtues in Titus 3:1–2 (NIV):

> [1]Ὑπομίμνησκε αὐτοὺς ἀρχαῖς ἐξουσίαις ὑποτάσσεσθαι, πειθαρχεῖν, πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἑτοίμους εἶναι, [2] μηδένα βλασφημεῖν, ἀμάχους εἶναι, ἐπιεικεῖς, πᾶσαν ἐνδεικνυμένους πραΰτητα πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους. [[1]Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good,[2] to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate and to show true humility toward all men.]

Through these vices and virtues, the author constructs an ethical structure embedded in Cretan life, which reflects the Roman imperial values that defined the cultural context of antiquity (Wall & Steele 2012:358). But as argued above, the implied motivation for these actions stems from an identity in Christ that might be viewed by outgroups to be a form of inclusive ethos shared with the adequate values of the Graeco-Roman world. However, the motivation for this inclusive ethos is fundamentally different. Christ-followers are called to be exemplary and submit themselves to the social system in which they find themselves and to be ideal citizens (Tt 3:1–2), extending good works and gentleness *to all people* [πᾶσαν ἐνδεικνυμένους πραΰτητα πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους].

The *Haustafeln* in Titus thus counter the notorious outer-Cretan stereotype, summarised in Epimenides' quote (Tt 1:12): 'Κρῆτες ἀεὶ ψεῦσται …' [Cretens are always liars …],

which reflects the negative perception of the Cretan non-Christ-following group as untrustworthy (Gray 2007:207–309; Porter 2020b:472) and which will be discussed subsequently. The *Haustafeln* thus define the prototypical behaviour, which is ideal for the Cretan Christ-following group that contrasts with these negative stereotypes on Crete.

Cretan identity, prejudice and discrimination

The superordinate Cretan identity was constructed by culture, ethnicity and mythology, which influenced how inhabitants and outsiders perceived Crete (Prent 2005:242–244). This identity was complex and expressed diverse social and political realities.

Outer Cretan identity: Most literary sources that discuss Cretan identity are from an external perspective (Robertson 2024:58; Wallace 2010:363). These sources, as SIT helps us to see, tend to depict Cretans as a single, homogeneous group characterised by strong communal values with relatively elevated status for women compared to other Greek regions (2024:72). This pan-Cretan identity was partly constructed by Cretan traders who modified their practices to match the expectations of their trade partners, which formed a generalised external identity and ethnic notion of 'Greekness', reinforcing stereotypes. Many of these non-Cretan authors based their views on one or just a few πόλεις and are missing the important intra-island variations and local customs (Erickson 2011:383).

Inner Cretan identity: As would be expected from SIT insights, an ingroup like the Cretans would speak positively of themselves and make use of prototypical figures in positive ways. An important figure representing the inner Cretan identity is Epimenides, who was a legendary Cretan seer, prophet and sage cited by the Titus Epistle's author in Titus 1:12 (Strataridaki 1991:207–214; see Callimachus' *Hymn to Jove*; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 1.10, *Epimenide*; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* [i. 14]). Epimenides combined mythological and mortal aspects and was renowned on Crete as a purifier, healer, poet and wise man. The role as wise man (σοφός) reflects the Greek tradition of charismatic leaders who manage society through wisdom and moral guidance (Raaflaub & Van Wees 2009:418, 424; Szegedy-Maszak 1978:208).[6]

The infamous Epimenides quote 'Κρῆτες ἀεὶ ψεῦσται …' (Tt 1:12) first appeared in Callimachus' hymn (Strataridaki 1991:222) and must be understood within its religious and metaphorical context responding to the human fallibility and the need for guidance (1991:222). Unfortunately, this quote was misused by non-Cretans to reinforce negative stereotypes, which contradicts Crete's own mythic and cultural self-understanding (1991:216). This misuse of the

6.See Wallace (2010:374), who also points to a more varied, flexible, resilient and adaptable Cretan identity in different periods in history (Wallace 2010:363–365, 369). This supposes that the inner Cretan identity did not conform to negative external stereotypes (Robertson 2024:67–72; Wallace 2010:374).

Epimenides quote and the negative stereotype of Cretans being corrupt, indulgent and treacherous continued through the Classical and later periods. Despite this, Epimenides remained a symbol of wisdom [σοφός] and self-control [σωτῆρος] for centuries, which embodied Crete's inner identity of moral guidance, even if the island's outer identity was compromised by external judgement.

The author of the Epistle to Titus emphasised this outer identity and the negative interpretation of Epimenides' quote in dealing with the prejudice and discrimination against the Cretans. The author uses paronomasia as a rhetorical device to vilify the Cretan identity and construct a contrasting positive Cretan-Christ-following identity. From the perspective of SIT insights, it is clear that the negative stereotyping of outsiders about Crete is turned around in a form of social identity entrepreneurship to create a positive ingroup identity that directly counters negative stereotypes against the ingroup. Genade (2007) argues:

> Vilification is a persuasive technique used by an author or speaker to present opposing parties or their viewpoints in a negative light, by magnifying some aspects of character or propositional weakness, with a view to influence an audience to disassociate themselves [*from*] the opposition or the viewpoint and associate themselves with or endorse the position or person of the speaker or writer. […] The vilification procedure is facilitated by several additional techniques, such as implicit contrasting. That which is contrasted is not made obvious within a sentence. In other words, the author gives no linguistic clues that a contrast is being made. Instead, the author provides the information in such a manner that the hearer or reader, almost intuitively, 'sees' the glaring contrast within the larger discourse unit'. (pp. 78–79)

Through paronomasia between sound doctrine ([τῇ ὑγιαινούσῃ διδασκαλίᾳ] Tt 2:1) and unsound doctrine ([ἀνυπότακτος, ματαιολόγος, φρεναπάτης] Tt 1:10; αἱρετικὸν; Tt 3:10) of the respective teachers, the author of the Titus Epistle emphasises the necessity to transform the Cretan non-Christ-following group's negative behaviour – especially the destructive attitude to the οἶκος and Cretan society as a whole, characterised by ἀσέβεια and κοσμικὰς ἐπιθυμίας (Tt 2:12).

Genade (2007:78) argues that the rhetorical intention is to gain approval (trust) of the readers while shaming and humiliating the opponents. This supposes positive distinctiveness for the Cretan Christ-following group and prejudice and discrimination for the non-Christ-following group.

Titius 3:1–3 illustrates it distinctly with seven virtues in Titus 3:1–2, which are embedded in the Cretan Christ-following group's identity (ethos and ethics), while Titus 3:3 contrasts these virtues with seven vices (see Table 1):

Vilification is a well-known rhetoric technique in Hellenistic rhetoric (Genade 2010:1–5). In the Titus Epistle, vilification

TABLE 1: Virtues and vices in Titus 3:1–3.

Virtues	Vices
ὑποτάσσεσθαι ἀρχαῖς καὶ ἐξουσίαις [to be subject to rulers and authority]	ἀνόητοι [foolish]
πειθαρχεῖν [to be obedient]	ἀπειθεῖς [disobedient]
πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν [...] εἶναι [to be ready for every good work]	πλανώμενοι [led astray]
μηδένα βλασφημεῖν [to speak evil of no one]	δουλεύοντες ἐπιθυμίαις καὶ ἡδοναῖς ποικίλαις [slaves to various passion and pleasures]
ἀμάχους εἶναι [to be peaceable, not quarrelsome]	ἐν κακίᾳ καὶ φθόνῳ διάγοντες [living in malice and envy]
ἐπιεικεῖς [be gentle]	στυγητοί [hateful, detestable]
πᾶσαν ἐνδεικνυμένους πραΰτητα πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους [to show perfect courtesy towards all people]	μισοῦντες ἀλλήλους [hating one another]

is used to create the need and the intent for change (Malina 2008:55). The protreptic dimension invites the reader to move towards a specific identity and ethos, while the apotreptic dimension wants the reader to move away from a specific identity and ethos. In between lie a transformation and the ability to respond from the perspective of a renewed identity. This transformation, whether of an individual or a group, announces the coming kingdom of God as it is embedded in the theological dispositions that define what is embodied in the ἀλήθεια, a technical term for the theological dispositions preached (cf. Mounce 2000:379). Thus, vilification is essential in the Titus Epistle to activate a meta-contrast thesis - antithesis structure, which enables social comparison and proclaiming the superiority of the Christ-following ingroup over the non-Christ-following outgroup.

The author stresses that every member of the Christ-following group, including himself, once belonged to the inferior outgroup: 'Ἦμεν γὰρ ποτε καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀνόητοι, ἀπειθεῖς, πλανώμενοι, δουλεύοντες ἐπιθυμίαις καὶ ἡδοναῖς ποικίλαις, ἐν κακίᾳ καὶ φθόνῳ διάγοντες, στυγητοί, μισοῦντες ἀλλήλους' ([for we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another] Tt 3:3). The theological dispositions have transformed the Cretan Christ-following ingroup from 'ἀνυπότακτοι, ματαιολόγοι καὶ φρεναπάται' ([insubordinate, idle talkers and deceivers] Tt 1:10) to become κληρονόμοι (heirs; Tt 3:7). As heirs, they are now ἐκλεκτῶν θεοῦ (Tt 1:1) and members of the Cretan Christ-following ingroup family and bearers of the embodied ἀλήθεια. Thus, conceptually and cognitively, this meta-contrast creates a sense of two distinct 'families' and evokes the conceptual family metaphor (see Lakoff & Johnson 2003).

Conclusion

The Titus Epistle illustrates how theology and social identity processes interact to form and sustain a distinctive Christ-following ingroup on Crete. In this regard, SIT serves as an important heuristic tool and contributes to knowledge development in New Testament studies. The epistle reframes the Cretan identity, which is embedded in cultural self-assurance obscured by enduring negative stereotypes, by

redefining identity through the grace of God, and thereby, the letter moves the group from a culturally suspect negative 'Cretan' stereotype to a positive Christ-centred moral example. The inclusive ethos refers to the way a group presents itself in relation to the larger Graeco-Roman society in which it functioned. The Titus Epistle is not sectarian because the Cretan Christ-following group's Christ-centred motivation is outwardly expressed through values shared with the wider Graeco-Roman world (e.g. Tt 3:1–2). This enables the Cretan Christ-followers to integrate with society and even excel in exemplary social values[7] (see Du Toit 2012, 2014:340–356).

Social Identity Theory offers insights into this process using the dynamics of *comparative fit* – that is, distinction from surrounding groups – and *normative fit* – that is, living with values that fit the local social structure. Through these dynamics, salience is created in which a clear and compelling group identity is embedded not in ethnicity but in God and Christ as superordinate principles.

The author of the Titus Epistle uses paronomasia – a sharp contrast between vices and virtues (e.g. Tt 3:1–3) – to emphasise transformation in Christ as a counter-discourse. Through the rhetorical strategy of vilification, the author wishes to emphasise the transformation from the outgroup to the ingroup, characterised by Christ-following virtues. This clear contrast emphasises the prejudice and discrimination against Cretans by reconstructing an identity narrative and Christ-centred transformation. Instead of the stereotype 'Κρῆτες ἀεὶ ψεῦσται…' (Tt 1:12), the Titus Epistle emphasises an ingroup devoted to truth, godliness, respect and trustworthiness. The Titus Epistle does not participate in or sustain the negative discourses about Cretans but wants to transform them and in the process wants the Cretan Christ-following group to become witness to the transformational power and grace of God and Jesus Christ.

This new Christ-centred identity rests on a theological disposition of God as Saviour, Christ as Redeemer and the Holy Spirit as the one who renews. Grace (χάρις) is the starting point and sustaining power for moral change that touches every layer of Cretan life – from leader to servant, from household relation to public life. The result is a positively projected and redefined Christ-centred identity on Crete – an identity that transcends old divisions, builds a positive and distinctive reputation and shows virtues that honour God but also challenge social systems and reconstruct the negative stereotypes around the Cretan Christ-following group.

7. The enhancing of the Cretan Christ-following group within the socio-political structures in the example of slaves in 2:1–9 as Du Toit (2012) argues: 'This appealing metaphor [*sic*] appears in Titus 2:10 in connection with the behaviour required of Christian slaves. Although the outsiders are not specifically mentioned, they are implied. Titus 2:9–10 reminds us of the New Testament *Haustafel*, [...] [*a*]ddressing the slaves, they are exhorted to be submissive to their masters, to please them without 'back-talking' (cf. μὴ ἀντιλέγοντας) or pilfering and to show that they can be fully trusted 'in order that they can adorn (ἵνα κοσμῶσιν) the teaching of God our Saviour in every way'. By their positive behaviour the slaves should make the gospel attractive to those outside' (2012:5).

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R.P.M. was responsible for conceptualisation, methodology, writing, review, and editing. J.K. was responsible for conceptualisation, methodology, project administration, writing, review and editing, and supervision.

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