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Stefan Szymik

Anti-Epicurean Polemics in the New Testament Writings



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Stefan Szymik

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in the New Testament Writings**

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Foreword to the English Edition

This book is a revised and updated English version of my postdoc dissertation (*Habilitationsschrift*) entitled *Problem polemiki antyepikurejskiej w pismach Nowego Testamentu*, which was submitted to the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL) twenty years ago and published by the KUL Scientific Press in the year 2003.

The revision of the Polish text deals with three important areas. First, the dissertation has significantly been shortened and minor topics have been removed. Second, it was necessary to update the literature concerning the Epicurean polemics in the New Testament, considering the years that have passed after the first publication. The third, and probably most important goal of the revision was to specify the conclusions drawn from the detailed analyses of particular biblical and non-biblical texts, as well as to form final conclusions. In this respect, my views have developed over the years. It now seems that contacts between Christians and Epicureans were considerably more frequent than has been assumed in various comparative studies. As a consequence, the presence of indirect anti-Epicurean rhetoric and polemics in the New Testament writings seems to be very likely.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have been involved in the “Excellent Science” project of the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education, in whose framework the work on modifying my monograph was conducted. Separate, sincere thanks go to the translator, Doctor Maria Kantor, for our fruitful collaboration and her valuable remarks.

Stefan Szymik

Introduction

The gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God (Mark 1:1), initially addressed to Jewish audiences in Palestine, was soon proclaimed also to pagan inhabitants of the Roman Empire. The death of Jesus Christ and the speech of Peter the Apostle in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1–36) as well as the intense activities of Christian missionaries first in Palestine, then in Syria and its capital Antioch, and farther in the cities of Asia Minor, Macedonia and Achaia happened within only a dozen or so years. During that time, the Good News also reached Rome to become a permanent marker in the cities of the Empire towards the end of the first century CE. The process of the Christianization of the Hellenistic-Roman world began, accompanied by the Hellenization and Romanization of the Christian religion. The origins of this unique inculturation were recorded in the writings of the New Testament, the fundamental document showing the rise, growth and spread of the Christian religion in the Roman Empire in the first century CE.

In the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, scholars shared a common conviction that the Hellenistic-Roman world had a decisive influence on the formation of the new religion. Hellenism, a historical and cultural phenomenon, was, on the one hand, a direct heir, conduit and sometimes interpreter of the ancient Greek culture of the classical period, and on the other hand, it influenced the citizens of the Roman Empire through the colloquial Greek language, literature and art, philosophical schools and religious trends.¹ This period of research into the New Testament and early Christianity was characterised by implementing the method of religious history (*Religionsgeschichtliche Methode*). The term was used to describe comparative studies of Christianity and ancient religions that generally placed, or at least derived from, all the essential components of Christianity in pagan beliefs. That is why it became necessary to ask about the attitude of Christianity towards Judaism, from which Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples, and also the first Christians, came. This seemingly trivial observation was and still is of great importance for research on the beginnings of Christianity and the sources of the new religion, because Christianity is a religion of two civilisations. Its homeland was Palestine and its mother – the Jewish nation with its spiritual heritage. Nevertheless, the new religion found numerous followers among the pagan inhabitants of the Roman

1 See Reinhold Bichler, *Hellenismus. Geschichte und Problematik eines Epochenbegriffs* (Impulse der Forschung 41; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983); Hans D. Betz, "Hellenismus," *TRE* 15:19-35; Heinz Heinen, *Geschichte des Hellenismus. Von Alexander bis Kleopatra* (München: Beck, 2003); Glenn R. Bugh, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Hellenistic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Empire. The recognition of the biblical and Jewish origins of the Christian religion is of great importance in the context of the issues discussed in this work.

The encounter between Christianity and the Hellenistic-Roman world led to contacts among the first Christians and the disciples of Epicurus, which Luke recorded. Narrating about Paul's stay in Athens, he preserved the memory of his disputes with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers conducted in the streets of Athens (Acts 17:18). The later writings of Christian apologists and Church Fathers also contain numerous testimonies of vivid polemics that accompanied the encounter between Christianity and the hedonistic philosophy of Epicurus.² Therefore, we can rightly ask whether Paul's episode with the Epicureans in Athens was the only one of its kind in the second half of the first century CE. Were other traces of the encounter between Christianity and Epicureanism left in the New Testament?

Until recently, the issue of Epicureanism has not been of special interest to NT scholars. Nevertheless, partial information on this subject can be found in the history of biblical exegesis. Numerous parallels between NT writings and pagan literature, including a small number of possible references to Epicureanism, were indicated by Johann J. Wettstein.³ Similarly, comparative analyses conducted by the historical and religious school at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries resulted in conclusions that considered Epicureanism a factor influencing Christian authors of the New Testament.⁴ The key scholar in the research on the manifestation of Epicureanism in the NT writings was Norman W. DeWitt, who, from the position of a classicist and humanist, devoted much attention to the issue. He formulated his research project as follows:⁵

Epicureanism served in the ancient world as a preparation for Christianity, helping to bridge the gap between Greek intellectualism and a religious way of life. It shunted the emphasis from the political to the social virtues and offered what may be called a religion of humanity. The mistake is to overlook the terminology and ideology of Epicureanism in

2 See Howard Jones, *The Epicurean Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1989), 94–116.

3 Johann J. Wettstein, *H KAINH ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ. Novum Testamentum Graecum* (vols. 1–2; Amstelaedami: Ex officina Dommeriana, 1751–1752; reprint Graz: akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1962); cf. Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* (vols. 1–3; Parisiis, 1641–1650). Note the project *Neuer Wettstein* of the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg; see Abraham J. Malherbe, “Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament,” *ANRW* 26.1:271–78.

4 See Anton Fridrichsen, “Epikureisches im Neuen Testament?” in Anton Fridrichsen, *Exegetical Writings. A Selection*, trans. and ed. Chrys C. Caragounis and Tord Fornberg (WUNT 76; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 217–20; cf. Werner G. Kümmel, *Das Neue Testament. Geschichte der Erforschung seiner Probleme* (München: Alber, 1970).

5 Norman W. DeWitt, *Epicurus and His Philosophy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), 8 and 337. See also Norman W. DeWitt, *St. Paulus and Epicurus* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1954).

the New Testament and to think of its founder as an enemy of religion.

Epicureanism ... was an integral part of a slow progression in society from Greek philosophy to Christianity.

The vocabulary of the New Testament exhibits numerous similarities to that of Epicurus.

Despite the very critical reception of DeWitt's theories, we cannot ignore them here as they have burdened research on Epicureanism in the New Testament for many years, and the influence of his scientific proposals is still recognisable today.⁶

However, the real development of studies on the *epicurea* in the New Testament has only taken place in recent decades, covering three different research areas. The first one, into which this work fits, concerns Epicurean terminology and thought in the NT writings, or in other words, the question of the confrontation of the Christian message with the Epicurean vision of man and the world. Although this issue appears frequently enough in various analyses of specific biblical texts or in short research contributions, there has been no comprehensive study of the topic so far. The second area of research, which is extremely popular and brings surprisingly interesting results, deals with the forms of social life manifested in Christian and Epicurean communities. The ancient institutions of learning that served as models for the first Christian communities, especially those founded by Paul, included schools of philosophy and rhetoric. Besides the Pythagorean school, it was the Epicurean *contubernium*, considered the prototype of the Christian community responsible for the education of its new members, that has been the focus of research (cf. *psychagoge*).⁷ The third and more formal area relating early

6 See Wolfgang Schmid, "Epikur," *RAC* 5:681–819, esp. 814–16; Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christian. The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 224 n. 62: "The rather undisciplined proposals put forward by de Witt 1954b may have done more to deter than to encourage serious scholarship in this area, despite the valuable observations scattered through the book"; John Ferguson and Jackson P. Hershbell, "Epicureanism under the Roman Empire," *ANRW* 36.4:2275; David E. Aune, "The World of Roman Hellenism," in David E. Aune, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament* (Malden, MA; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 15–37, esp. 31–33, commenting on DeWitt's theses: "A respected classical scholar finds similarities between Paul and Epicurus by atomizing the Pauline letters and highlighting phrases that have some parallel in the writings of Epicurus, with completely unsatisfactory results" (36).

7 DeWitt, *Epicurus and His Philosophy*, 31–32; and then Meeks, *The First Urban Christian*, 83: "There is much in the life of these communities that reminds us of the Pauline congregations"; cf. Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians. The Philosophical Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1988), 61–94, esp. 85–88; Clarence E. Glad, *Paul and Philodemus. Adaptability in Epicurean and Early Christian Psychagogy* (NovTSub 81; Leiden: Brill, 1995); David Konstan, "Friendship, Frankness and Flattery," in John T. Fitzgerald, ed., *Friendship, Flattery, and Frankness of Speech. Studies on Friendship in the New Testament World* (NovTSup 82; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 5–19; Paul Holloway, "'Bona cogitare'. An Epicurean Consolation in Phil 4:8–9," *HTR* 91 (1998): 89–96; James A. Smith, *Marks of an Apostle. Context, Deconstruction, (Re)citation and Proclamation in Philippians* (PhD

Christian communities to representatives of Epicurus' philosophy concerns parallel literary forms aiming at consolidating, transmitting and promoting their ideas and convictions. While these forms were common to the entire Hellenistic-Roman world, some scholars have pointed to recognizable and striking similarities between Christianity and Epicureanism.⁸

The content and scope of the present study have been specified in its title. The purpose of the study is to analyse NT texts in terms of polemic and anti-Epicurean rhetoric. To what extent and in what ways did Epicurus and his philosophical thought influence the first Christian Churches? What was the reaction of their members? Although in the New Testament there is only one account of the encounter between the Apostle Paul and the Epicureans (Acts 17:18), the probability of their contacts was high, given the popularity of Epicureanism in the Roman Empire in the first century CE. As a vital component of Hellenistic-Roman culture, Epicureanism should be taken into account in research on the New Testament, becoming a point of reference and part of the content of comparative analyses.

The subject of this study has led to the choice of the main research method, which is the historical-critical method, understood as a set of literary, philological, exegetical and theological analyses of the biblical text. This will allow us, as far as possible, to see the first Christians in their background, specific time and place.⁹ The results of literary and exegetical examinations will then lay down the

dissertation) (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 2000), 94–131; Troy W. Martin, "Live Unnoticed. An Epicurean Maxim and the Social Dimension of Col 3:3–4," in A. Yarbro Collins, ed., *Antiquity and Humanity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 227–44; J. Paul Sampley, "Paul's Frank Speech with the Galatians and the Corinthians," in John T. Fitzgerald et al., eds., *Philodemus and the New Testament World* (NovTSup 111; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 295–321; Voula Tsouna, "Epicurean Therapeutic Strategies," in James Warren, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 249–65.

8 Norman DeWitt, *Epicurus and His Philosophy*, 32; also Abraham J. Malherbe, "Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament," *ANRW* 26.1:304 "In writing this first Christian pastoral letter, Paul was creating something new, but in Epicurus he had a predecessor and in Seneca a contemporary who used letters as means by which to engage in pastoral care"; cf. Peter Eckstein, *Gemeinde, Brief und Heilbotschaft. Ein phänomenologischer Vergleich zwischen Paulus und Epikur* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2004); Hans D. Betz, "The Sermon on the Mount. Its Literary Genre and Function," *JR* 69 (1979): 285–97 idem., "Die Bergpredigt. Ihre literarische Gattung und Funktion," in Hans D. Betz, *Studien zur Bergpredigt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 1–16; Ruth Morello and A.D. Morrison, eds., *Ancient Letters: Classical and Late Antique Epistolography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Erlend D. MacGillivray, "Epitomizing Philosophy and the Critique of Epicurean Popularizers," *Journal of Ancient History* 3.1 (2015): 1–33; esp. Vincenzo Damiani, *La Kompendienliteratur nella scuola di Epicuro. Forme, funzioni, contesto* (Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 396; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021).

9 Martin Hengel, "Problems of a History of Earliest Christianity," *Bib* 78 (1997): esp. 132–133, 142. Cf. selected methodologies of the NT: Pierre Guillemette and Mireille Brisebois, *Introduction aux méthodes historico-critiques* (Héritage et projet 35; Montréal: La Corporation des Editions Fides, 1987);

basis for comparative analyses; hence, a special place has also been given to the comparative method, formerly known as the religionsgeschichtliche Methode. Its correct application – and this should be strongly emphasised – is a necessary condition for analysing and properly interpreting the results, and thus for formulating unambiguous conclusions.¹⁰

The comments made on the subject and purpose of the present work, including the methods used, have determined the structure and organisation of the material into six chapters, following the prism principle. The general view of Epicureanism and its influential presence in the first century CE (chapter I) have been refined and concretised, taking the form of detailed analyses of biblical texts in terms of the *epicurea* (chapters II–V), to finally present the problem of anti-Epicurean polemic in a comprehensive and systematic manner (chapter VI).

Chapter I, dedicated to Epicureanism in New Testament times, is preliminary. Besides a brief review of Epicurus' philosophy, it discusses the presence and impact of Epicureanism in the Roman Empire in the first century of the Christian era, with particular emphasis on the biblical-Jewish environment. In turn, chapters II–V provide detailed literary, exegetical and comparative-theological analyses of selected biblical texts with respect to the presence of Epicurean polemic: the Palestinian beginnings of the Epicurean question (cf. Mark 12:18–27; Matt 5–7), Paul's confrontation with the Epicureans and Stoics in Athens (Acts 17:16–34), the Epicurean infiltrations in the Pauline communities (1 Thess; 1 Cor 5–6; 1 Cor 15) and the context of the debate over the parousia (2 Pet 3:1–13). The last chapter presents the general characteristics of the anti-Epicurean polemics in the New Testament, including their theological dimension. Moreover, it systematises the results of the analyses carried out in the previous chapters and comprehensively evaluates the phenomenon of anti-Epicurean polemics in the writings of the New Testament.

The issues raised in the present study are certainly neither central nor the most important in research on the New Testament. However, undertaking them will allow for a fuller understanding of biblical texts and, above all, shed light on the little-known origins of the Church in its confrontation with the pagan world. Un-

Thomas Söding, *Wege der Schriftauslegung. Methodenbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Unter Mitarbeit von C. Münch (Freiburg: 1998); Wilhelm Egger and Peter Wick, *Methodenlehre zum Neuen Testament: Biblische Texte selbständig auslegen* (6., völlig neu bearbeitete und erweiterte Auflage; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2011).

10 See Karlheinz Müller, "Die religionsgeschichtliche Methode. Erwägungen zu ihrem Verständnis und zur Praxis ihrer Vollzüge an neutestamentlichen Texten," *BZ* 29 (1985): 161–92; Gerald Seelig, *Religionsgeschichtliche Methode in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart. Studien zur Geschichte und Methode des religionsgeschichtlichen Vergleichs in der neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft* (Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 7; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001); cf. Guillemette and Brisebois, *Introduction aux méthodes*, 351–92.

doubtedly, this question may be of interest to biblical scholars as well as other specialists dealing with antiquity.

Finally, the author expresses the hope that this publication will enrich our knowledge of the cultural and religious processes that accompanied nascent Christianity and the early Church of the first century CE.

I. Epicureanism in New Testament Times

Epicureanism was well known and going strong in the Roman Empire since it was propagated by Epicurus' numerous disciples and successors.¹ However, in the context of the problem posed, one should formulate an essential question about the scope of influence and reception of Epicurus' school, which came to be known as The Garden, at the time of forming of the New Testament writings. Scholars even speak of the crisis of the Epicurean school at the dawn of the Christian era.² Therefore, in addition to a brief presentation of Epicurus' philosophical views, which are the reference point and an element of comparative analyses in this work, we should consider, from the outset, the presence and reception of Epicureanism in the Roman Empire, with particular emphasis on the Empire's eastern areas in the first century of the Christian era. Apart from pagan sources, the stances of Jewish circles towards Epicurus and his philosophical thought provoke exceptional interest.

1. Epicurus and Epicureanism

The vast majority of historians have shown the dependence of Epicurus' philosophy on the historical period in which the founder of The Garden lived. The grandeur of Athens and other Greek cities had faded, and the Macedonian invaders were systematically conquering Greece. These military defeats were the outward expressions of the malaise that from the time of the Peloponnesian Wars onwards, had plagued the Greek community, cornered by ethical nihilism. Objective moral principles were denied. These changes also affected the Greeks' attitudes toward religion and religious practices. They rejected the Homeric gods or denied their providential roles concerning men and the cosmos; atheism partly replaced piety. The conquests

1 Apart from detailed studies, several classic works on ancient philosophy have been consulted. See Michael Erler, "Epikur – die Schule Epikurs – Lukrez," in *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie. Die Philosophie der Antike. 4.2: Die hellenistische Philosophie*, völlig neu bearb. Ausg., ed. Hellmut Flashar (Basel: Schwabe, 1994), 29–490; Giovanni Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica. 3. I sistemi dell'Età ellenistica* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1989), 3.157–300; Ashley A. Long and David N. Sedley, *Die hellenistischen Philosophen. Texte und Kommentare* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), 29–182; see also Robert W. Sharples, *Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics. An Introduction to Hellenistic Philosophy* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003).

2 This problem has been signalled by Giovanni Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica. 4. Le scuole dell'Età imperiale* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, ⁵1987), 4.53–57.

of Alexander the Great accelerated processes of political and social change in the Mediterranean basin.³

1.1 Epicurus and His Garden

Greek philosophy found itself in a new situation. It ceased to deal with the state and citizens' obligations to the state. In the world at that time, which was shaped politically and socially, philosophers no longer wanted to form citizens or influence the daily life of the Greek *polis* so philosophy became an instrument for achieving happiness in one's private life. Philosophical schools answered people's questions about their place in the emerging situation, and Epicurus responded to this issue. His philosophy was also born in the context of the characteristic transformations taking place in the Greek world at the turn of the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE.⁴

The life of the founder of Epicureanism is relatively well known, better than the lives of other ancient thinkers and philosophers.⁵ Epicurus was born in 341 BCE, on the Greek island of Samos, where his Athenian-born father Neocles was sent as a settler. Little is known about his mother. Epicurus' first studies of philosophy, at the age of fourteen, might be related to his journey to the Ionian city of Teos on the coast of Asia Minor, where Nausiphanes, a disciple of Democritus, taught. At the age of eighteen, Epicurus went to Athens to complete his compulsory two-year ephebes' military service, but it is not known whether or not if during this period he had the opportunity to study current philosophical trends.⁶ In 322, the Athenian settlers were expelled from Samos, and Epicurus' father had to seek shelter in Colophon. Epicurus joined him and spent the next fifteen years in Colophon in Lydia, then in Mytilene on the island of Lesbos, and finally in Lampsacus in the Hellespont. During his stay in Colophon, Epicurus might have arrived in Teos to listen to the lectures of Nausiphanes, an atomist. This period marked the beginning of Epicurus' independent work as a philosopher.⁷ Around 306, taking advantage of the favourable political situation, Epicurus moved with his disciples to Athens,

3 One can speak of the post-classical period in Greece. See Jones, *The Epicurean Tradition*, 2–13.

4 Eduard Lohse, *Umwelt des Neuen Testament* (NTD. Ergänzungsreihe 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 9 1994), 180; Graziano Arrighetti, *La cultura letteraria in Grecia da Omero a Apollonio Rodio* (Il mondo degli antichi 8.1; Roma; Bari: Laterza, 1989), 144.

5 André Laks, "Édition critique et commentée de la Vie d'Épicure dans Diogène Laërce (X 1–34)," in Jean Bolland and André Laks, eds., *Études sur l'Épicurisme antique* (CahPh 1; Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1976), 1–118; cf. André-Jean Festugière, *Epicure et ses dieux* (Mythes et religions 19; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1946), 25–35; Erler, *Epikur*, 62–74.

6 At the Lyceum, Epicurus could have listened to Theophrastus (Aristotle was in exile in Chalcis), while at the Academy – to Xenocrates, the second successor to Plato.

7 Whether the encounter with Nausiphanes took place earlier or later, Epicurus gained a thorough understanding of his atomistic theory.

where he founded a school of philosophy competing with the Academy as well as the Peripatetic and Stoic schools. From then on, Athens was his place of residence and work until he died in 270 BCE. It was exceptionally rare for Epicurus to leave the city; he would then keep in touch with his disciples by writing numerous and extensive letters.

From among Epicurus' great number of philosophical writings, only a few have survived.⁸ Apart from a brief summary of the most important principles of Epicureanism forming a set of tenants entitled the *Principal Doctrines* (Κύρια Δόξαι = *K.D.*), there are also three letters to his friends and disciples. These writings were transmitted through quotations by Diogenes Laërtius, who dedicated the tenth volume of his work to Epicurus and his philosophy.⁹ Diogenes presented a biography of the founder of The Garden, an outline of his philosophical doctrine, the aforementioned letters and a collection of sentences – the *epitome* of Epicurus' teaching.¹⁰ He also listed forty-one titles of Epicurus' lost works, out of which only a few fragments have survived to the present day, brought to light thanks to archaeological discoveries. These included several parts of the lost thirty-seven volume of *De natura* (Περὶ φύσεως), Epicurus' most important philosophical treatise.¹¹

For his disciples, Epicurus was a charismatic figure, inspiring and stimulating to follow. Admired for his ascetic simplicity, he lived a life of peace and quiet, far from the public and political affairs of the city. The life of the founder of The Garden illustrated his principle “live unnoticed” (λάθε βιώσας), which he asked his disciples to observe.¹² Epicurus' entire life was in fact lived in accordance with

8 See Hermann Usener, ed., *Epicurea* (Studia Philologica 3; Leipzig: Teubner, 1887; reprint Roma, 1963); Graziano Arrighetti, ed., *Epicuro: Opere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1973); *The Epicurus Reader. Selected Writings and Testimonia*. Translated and edited, with Notes, by Brad Inwood and Lloyd P. Gerson (Hackett Classics Series; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994).

9 Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Vol. 2: *Books 6–10*, trans. Robert Drew Hicks (LCL 185; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972; first published 1925), 528–678.

10 Cf. Usener, *Epicurea*, 1–81; he sequentially quotes the letters to Herodotus, Pythocles, Menoecus and *Principal Doctrines: Epistula ad Herodotum* (*Ep. Hdt.*), *Epistula ad Pythoclem* (*Ep. Pyth.*), *Epistula ad Menoecum* (*Ep. Men.*) oraz *Epicuri sententiae selectae* (*K.D.*). A similar collection of Epicurus' sayings, overlapping in part with *Principal Doctrines*, has survived in a 14th-century manuscript in the Vatican Library and is known as the “Vatican Sayings” (*Vat. Sent.*) or *Gnomologium Vaticanum*; cf. Damiani, *La Kompendienliteratur*, 76–92.

11 Francesca Longo Auricchio, “I papiri ercolanesi,” in *Epicuro e l'Epicureismo nei Papiri Ercolanesi* (Napoli: Ist. Ital. per gli Studi Filosofici, 1993), 29–32; a list of Epicurus' writings and their discussion are given by Erler, *Epikur*, 44–61, 75–125; cf. David Sedley, ed., “Epicurus, On Nature Book XXVIII,” *Cronache Ercolanesi* 3 (1973): 4–83.

12 See Geert Roskam, *Live Unnoticed* (λάθε βιώσας). *On the Vicissitudes of an Epicurean Doctrine* (Philosophia antiqua 111; Leiden: Brill, 2007). The translation “live hidden, unnoticed” is justified because the verb λανθάνω (here *imperativus aoristi*) is usually combined with a participle or attributive, which is rendered as a verbal form, while the verb as an adverb, so instead of “escape notice

his philosophical views. Respected as a benefactor, Epicurus had many friends and was considered a liberator from all religious bonds, fears and illusions that a religion could bring. Epicurus' charismatic influence and his teaching, aimed to set man free, led his contemporaries and followers to deify their master. His busts were venerated, and his birthday was solemnly celebrated, as he ordained in his will (Diog. Laert. 10.18). Like Socrates, Plato and Diogenes before him, Epicurus was also worshiped as a divine being (θεῖος ἀνὴρ) and treated by his disciples as a liberator or deliverer (σωτήρ) and god (*deus*).¹³

A characteristic feature of Hellenistic philosophical schools was their departure from the social context of the Greek *polis* and the state in favour of using the existing social structures for egalitarian purposes and the needs of philosophical schools. Also, for Epicurus, the hitherto civic virtues and state laws were of little importance, as they neither explained the mystery of human life nor gave it any ultimate end. According to Epicurus, only the instances which help attain a happy life were of prime significance. The state was useless for achieving this goal, while a philosophical school – in his opinion – was extremely useful. It was the only organ that could transmit the principles and norms of behaviour needed for personal happiness. Such a hidden life made it possible to make friendships and create a community of friends, the Epicurean φιλία, about which the founder of The Garden spoke.¹⁴

The Epicurean “garden” in Athens was a classic example of an ancient school of philosophy, with all its characteristic elements, including a vivid memory of the founder, communal life, fostering friendship, caring for the school's traditions and being separated from the surrounding city. The Garden of Athens implemented the main assumptions, goals and tasks of Epicurus' philosophy.¹⁵ The school was hierarchical, and its first head was Epicurus, who was also given the title “wise man.” Epicurus proposed a type of community life based on an “atheistic” and at the same

or detection” we read “live (βιώσας) hidden, unnoticed (λάθε)”; an adequate translation should be “live undetected, unnoticed,” which gives a better understanding of Epicurus' intention. See Henry G. Liddell, Robert Scott and Henry S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. with a Revised Supplement (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 1029.

13 The heroization and deification of Epicurus clearly appear in the work of the Roman poet and Epicurean Lucretius, entitled *De rerum natura* (Lucr. 1.62–79; 3.1–30; 5.8, 52). See Johannes Leipoldt and Walter Grundmann, eds., *Umwelt des Urchristentums. 1: Darstellung des neutestamentlichen Zeitalters* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 7 1985), 352, no. 11; first of all, see the latest publication: Marco Beretta, Francesco Citti and Alessandro Iannucci, eds., *Il culto di Epicuro. Testi iconografia e paesaggio* (Centro Studi. La permanenza del Classico 31; Firenze: Olschki, 2014); esp. Michael Erler, “La sacralizzazione di Socrate e di Epicuro” (pp. 1–14) and Francesca Longo Auricchio, “Il culto di Epicuro. Testi e studi: qualche aggiornamento” (pp. 39–64).

14 Festugière, *Epicure*, 36–70.

15 See Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica*, 3.172–76; cf. Erler, *Epikur*, 205–15.

time, ascetic friendship, which resulted from his philosophical doctrine. The Epicurean schools admitted students regardless of gender, origin, social status, race or economic differences. Epicureans lived a common life but did not share all things in common, as was sometimes assumed (Diog. Laert. 10.11).¹⁶ Of special importance was friendship (φιλία), more important than erotic love and sexual sensations. In the community, exceptional importance was also attached to the concern for disciples' spiritual development and the acquisition of virtues (ἄσκησις), including the related mutual fraternal correction. Younger members of the community were introduced to the master's teachings by more experienced members of the community who acted as their spiritual guides (θεραπεία). Epicurus emphasised the skill of remembering instructions, and thus he wrote short summaries of his doctrine, as if they were short catechisms (ἐπιτομαί) (Diog. Laert. 10.35–36). Epicurus' special merit was not the discovery of personal friendship or community life, as these forms of life had been known before him, but the creation of a community of friendly people – a community of friends. Epicurus considered such a community the only form of social life that was worthy of mankind.¹⁷

The Epicureans celebrated religious holidays and other holidays in honour of their founder and master. For example, each twentieth day of the month they celebrated Epicurus' birthday.¹⁸ They also maintained the traditions and religious customs of the Athenian community, kept not so much from a sense of piety but in keeping with the Epicurean concept of a happy life. Moreover, it was the duty of the Epicureans to promote their school and its philosophical ideas. For his part, Epicurus expressed his attachment to his philosophical school in his will, in which he regulated in detail its organisation and lifestyle (Diog. Laert. 10.16–22).

The school that Epicurus founded survived into the first century CE, experiencing periods of both splendour but also stagnation (Diog. Laert. 10.22–26). Several illustrious disciples died before Epicurus, among them Metrodorus and Polyaeus. Some left The Garden disappointed and became staunch opponents of their master,

16 A community of goods – according to Epicurus – assumed an element of distrust, while without mutual trust there is no real friendship; hence, there is no need for a community of goods among friends. The view of, for example, Pythagoras on this point was different; see Reginaldo M. Pizzorni, *Giustizia e carità* (2nd ed.; Roma: Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1980), 37; DeWitt, *Epicurus and His Philosophy*, 101–105.

17 Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica*, 3.261–63; Pizzorni, *Giustizia*, 34–38. For the topic of friendship in the Epicurean understanding, see Festugière, *Epicure*, 56–61.

18 Cf. Abraham J. Malherbe, “Self-Definition Among Epicureans and Cynics,” in Ben F. Meyer and Ed Parish Sanders, eds., *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*. Vol. 3: *Self-Definition in the Greco-Roman World* (London: SCM Press, 1982), 48: “Images of the founder were venerated, and this practice seems to have been integrated with Epicurean doctrine as part of a systematic plan to maintain cohesion and gain perpetuity for the communities and their teaching.”

such as Timocrates,¹⁹ brother of Metrodorus. After Epicurus' death, his successor was Hermarchus of Mytilene, who collaborated with Leonteus, Colotes and the historian Idomeneus, all three coming from Lampsacus. The next head of the school, Polystratus, was also a student of Epicurus. After him, the school was managed by the *scholarchs* who are not well known: Hippoclidides, Dionysius of Lamptraï and Basilides of Tyre, and in the second century BCE – Protarchus of Bargylia, Demetrius and Apollodorus, surnamed “Tyran of The Garden.” Zeno of Sidon, his student and successor, successfully taught in Athens till 78 BCE. His disciples included Philodemus of Gadara, an outstanding representative of Epicureanism in Rome during the Augustan Age. Another of Zeno's students was Phaedrus, who later succeeded him as the *scholarch* of the school in Athens. The last head of the Athenian school before its fall was Patro. As Reale writes,²⁰

Nella seconda metà del primo secolo a.C. il Giardino ad Atene era ormai morto (dopo Patrone non si ha più notizia di altri scolarchi, e si sa che il terreno su cui sorgeva il Giardino era stato venduto), ma il verbo epicureo si era ormai da tempo diffuso dovunque, sia in Oriente sia in Occidente.

1.2 Selected Aspects of Epicureanism

In a biblical study, there is no need to systematically present the philosophy of Epicurus, but it is, nevertheless, appropriate to discuss Epicureanism in general, primarily as a philosophy of life.²¹ Epicurus' philosophical system is an integral whole, and its particular sections are understandable only in relation to each other, bearing in mind that theoretical considerations and practical recommendations are interrelated, and sometimes difficult to separate. The following arrangement of Epicurus' philosophy is usually adopted: *canonica*, which can be regarded as explanations of the Epicurean criticism of cognition, *physica* being presentations of the Epicurean views of the cosmos and its nature – since Epicurean cosmology

19 For the topic of the apostates and oppositionists, see Erler, *Epikur*, 283–87.

20 Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica*, 3.270; cf. Jones, *The Epicurean Tradition*, 18–19; Damiani, *La Kompendienliteratur*, 137–53.

21 See the discussion: Erler, *Epikur*, 126–87; Long and Sedley, *Die hellenistischen Philosophen*, 29–182. David Sedley, “Epicurus and his professional Rivals,” in *Études sur l'épicurisme antique*, ed. Jean Bolland and André Laks (CahPh 1; Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1976), 119–59, presents Epicurus' attitude towards his great predecessors, Plato and Aristotle. It should be remembered that for a long time the philosophy of Epicurus was misinterpreted and misunderstood in terms of extreme hedonism, and reliable studies on his theory were only available in the last several dozen years. Cf. Dorothee Kimmich, *Epikureische Aufklärungen. Philosophische und poetische Konzepte der Selbstsorge* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993), 22–31.

is the foundation of ethical considerations, and *ethica*, the most important part of Epicurus' philosophical system, also occupying the largest part of his doctrine.²² In the context of our research, it is necessary to emphasise selected aspects and spheres of Epicurus' philosophical thought which have turned out to be relevant when confronted with biblical and Christian theological thought. These characteristic areas certainly include the question of the existence and nature of the gods, the problem of death and its related issues, as well as ethical and moral questions.²³

The foundation of Epicurus' philosophical thought is a concise summary of logical and theoretical-cognitive canons of thinking creating his philosophy's epistemological framework.²⁴ These reveal an extreme sensualism and Epicurus' completely empirical attitude towards reality. According to Epicurus, there are three criteria of truth. First, they include sensations that enable direct contact with the physical world and provide information about it. These are material contacts between sense organs and external objects. The latter, by sending atoms into space, appear to the recipient at a specific moment and under certain circumstances. Second, sensations provide the basis for the emergence of conceptions (more correctly, preconceptions – *prolepseis*), which are mental representations and images of things. The third criterion of truth and direct obviousness, according to Epicurus, is the experience of pleasure or pain, so-called “feelings” or “experiences.” Based on these three, it is possible to build opinions, in other words, judgments that have a smaller degree of certainty (Diog. Laert. 10.31–34).²⁵

In physics, Epicurus assumed a materialistic, atomistic and purely mechanical explanation of the cosmos.²⁶ According to the founder of The Garden, nothing comes into existence from what does not exist, and likewise, nothing can collapse into nothingness: the existing reality as a whole consists of bodies and the void, always the same, constant and closed. The simplest and indivisible bodies (atoms) can merge and create compound bodies. Atoms are in constant motion, and by

22 Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica*, 3.177–267.

23 Jones, *The Epicurean Tradition*, 22–24; cf. Hans-Josef Klauck, *Die religiöse Umwelt des Urchristentums. 2. Herrscher- und Kaiserkult, Philosophie, Gnosis* (1–2 vol.; KohlST 9.2; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1996), 2.116–23. Later published in one volume as *Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions*, trans. Brian McNeil (London – New York: Clark, 2000).

24 Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica*, 3.177–94; Long and Sedley, *Die hellenistischen Philosophen*, 91–105; cf. Jones, *The Epicurean Tradition*, 24–29.

25 See also Fritz Jürss, *Die epikureische Erkenntnistheorie* (Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur der Antike 33; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1991). An interesting example of Epicurus' epistemological ideas appears in the exegetical analysis of Matt 6:22–23 (see Chapter II).

26 Pierre-Marie Morel, “Epicurean Atomism,” in James Warren, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 65–83; cf. Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica*, 3.195–233.

moving in empty space at enormous speed, they bring about change, creation or evolution.

An important novelty in Democritus' materialistic system is Epicurus' concept of the "swerve" (*clinamen*): atoms, moving downwards, can swerve to the side at any time and place and collide with other atoms. Thanks to this, Epicurus could oppose the concept of necessity in the atomistic system and introduce the concept of freedom that was needed in his ethical system.²⁷

Epicurus claimed that there was an infinite number of cosmoi, similar or dissimilar to our cosmos, which, due to the movement of atoms, come into existence and then dissolve in time. Between the cosmoi are interworlds (*intermundia*). Although cosmoi come into existence and dissolve after reaching their culmination, the universe as a whole does not change since the number of constitutive elements of the universe (atoms) always remains the same. Moreover, according to Epicurus, there is no transcendent Mind or Builder – Demiurge in the universe; all things are subject to chance and blind fate. Being neither the work of intelligent beings (gods) nor the creation of necessity, the universe is and remains irrational as a whole and in its specific manifestations. In cosmology, Epicurus opposes the teleological position of Plato and Aristotle.

Man and his soul are material and made up of atoms; just like other entanglements of atoms, they have a definite end. Hence, there is no eternal soul, but only a mortal soul. According to Epicurus, not only the body dies, but the human soul also dies as it is composed of atoms and disperses upon death. At the moment of a person's death, the atoms separate from each other, and thus the sensations are extinguished, and where there are no sensations, there are no feelings and there is no fear: "Death is nothing to us; for the body, when it has been resolved into its elements, has no feeling, and that which has no feeling is nothing to us" (*K.D. II*).²⁸ The founder of The Garden banishes the fear of death, proving that at the moment of death, man ceases to exist and so does his soul. Epicurus' stance on the nature of man, his soul and mortality were of great importance to his ethical views²⁹ since the fear of death and the fear of the gods' wrath are "nothing to us." Epicurus removed not only the fear of death, but also put to death man's longing for immortality.³⁰

27 Ibid., 208: "Perciò non c'è dubbio che il *clinamen* sia stato introdotto per far spazio nell'universo atomisticamente concepito alla libertà, alla vita morale e alla possibilità di realizzazione dell'ideale del saggio." Cf. James Warren, ed., *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics. An Archaeology of Ataraxia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

28 Diog. Laert. 10.139; cf. 10.124 (*Ep. Men.* 124).

29 On the topic of souls in Epicurus' theory and its criticism, see Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica*, 3.220–23. At this point, Epicurus opposed the classical tradition of Greek philosophy.

30 See James Warren, *Facing Death. Epicurus and his Critics* (Oxford et al.: Clarendon Press, 2004); cf. Heinz-Michael Bartling, *Epikur. Theorie der Lebenskunst* (Hochschulschriften Philosophie 16; Cuxhaven: Junghans, 1994), 43–59; Jones, *The Epicurean Tradition*, 54–55. The cause of the Epicurean

As stated by Epicurus, ignorance of the scientific knowledge of the rules governing the universe also led to a misunderstanding of the true nature of the gods. Contrary to popular belief, Epicurus did not reject the existence of the gods, but corrected false ideas about them. His thought followed two directions: a criticism of philosophical representations of deities and a critique of images of the gods in folk beliefs. Let us add that the Epicurean critique of religion depended on Epicurus' ethical views, mainly on his desire to free man of fear of the gods and possible punishment after death.³¹

Epicurus rejected the existence of God the Creator – Demiurge, but accepted the existence of the gods since people believed in them from the beginning, and what is more, they had clear conceptions of them. The gods exist but do not live in this or that world, but reside in the space between the worlds (*intermundia*).³² Further, the number of the gods is infinitely great, which was postulated by the Epicurean principle of *isonomia*, or equal distribution (the law of equilibrium), for the number of immortal beings must be the same as that of mortal beings.³³ Epicurus also formulated a strict theory concerning the way the gods exist. They are human in shape, supremely happy and immortal beings (*Ep. Men.* 123). Although the gods do not need to sleep, they do breathe, need food and talk to one another, obviously in Greek. The gods must be human in shape because only in this form do they appear to humans, and there is no other more perfect form. The Epicureans even pointed to the existence of sexual differentiation between the gods. The happiness of the gods consisted in their absolute freedom from pain and anxiety, and this is because they live far away from people, in the *intermundia* where there are no clouds in the sky, no wind, no snow, no thunder, no human regrets – only eternal tranquillity. The gods live where nothing can disturb their peace and happiness.

disbelief in the afterlife was not only the desire to banish fear but also the world of affairs and the existence of evil in this world (see *Lucretius*, 5.195–234).

31 Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica*, 3.225–33; cf. Bartling, *Theorie der Lebenskunst*, 59–66. Epicurus followed the rationalist critique of religion that existed before him and was a common phenomenon under the early Empire, although it took various forms in philosophical schools. Objections were raised primarily to the traditional belief in the Homeric gods and the popular folk religion based on mythology. See Harold W. Attridge, “The Philosophical Critique of Religion under the Early Empire,” *ANRW* 16.1:45–46, 51–52; cf. Festugière, *Epicure*, 1–24, 71–101.

32 According to some contemporary authors, Epicurus believed that the gods only existed as thought-constructs, not as real bodies; they existed only in human minds as idealisations. Placing the gods in the *intermundia* resulted from Cicero's and Lucretius' interpretations of Epicurus' teaching. See Long and Sedley, *Die hellenistischen Philosophen*, 169–74; cf. Marie Simon, “Epikureismus und Epikureertum. Das Fortleben philosophischer Ideen,” in Elisabeth Ch. Welskopf, ed., *Hellenische Poleis. Krise, Wandlung, Wirkung* (1–4 vol.; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1974), 4.2050–53; Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica*, 3.231.

33 Jones, *The Epicurean Tradition*, 53; cf. Lohse, *Umwelt*, 180.