

ANDERS RUNESSON

Judaism for Gentiles

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament
494*

Mohr Siebeck

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Reading Paul Beyond the Parting
of the Ways Paradigm

In collaboration with

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For Rune and Lisbeth Svenson

Salt of the earth

and in memory of Ann-Marie Christiansson (1931–2021)
whose work among the less fortunate throughout her life
has always been, and remains, an inspiration

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Prologue

For the historian it is a worthy goal to show us
a past as complex as the present.
Martha Himmelfarb¹

My first academic encounter with Paul was angry. Perhaps “academic” is not quite the right word, since this confrontation took place in a religious studies course in high school. And it wasn’t Paul I was angry at; it was Augustine. Or rather, the authors of the (otherwise excellent) textbook, who seemed to present the latter’s interpretation of Romans 9–11 as if it were Paul himself speaking.² How could anyone possibly read these chapters as a theological tractate on predestination? I couldn’t understand it, and for some reason this upset me. I think it may have had something to do with the fact that I found the idea of a god somewhere beyond time determining the fate of human beings – and then judging them based on actions they couldn’t control – peculiar and ethically challenging.³ It may also be that, more generally, in the context in which I transitioned from childhood into adulthood in Sweden in the mid-1980s, a thoroughly secularized society, such theological or philosophical ideas were downright bizarre and embarrassing, as was, indeed, the very thought that God (undefined, but by default the Christian God) could be anything but a figment of human imagination, the outcome of naïve wishful thinking. Regardless, the Pauline text itself seemed to me to be about something else, about the Jewish people understood from the perspective of a writer I, at the time, understood as a Christian.

¹ Martha Himmelfarb, “The Parting of the Ways Reconsidered: Diversity in Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations in the Roman Empire: ‘A Jewish Perspective,’” in *Interwoven Destinies: Jews and Christians Through the Ages*, ed. Eugene J. Fisher (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 47–61, here 57.

² Rudolf Johannesson and Martin Gidlund, *Vägar och livsmål: Religionskunskap för gymnasieskolan*, 3rd ed. (Stockholm: Verbum, 1979; in Swedish), 167.

³ As if truth – or a god – somehow had to be ethically acceptable to humans to be believed. Today, I would argue for a close relationship between truth, in its ultimate otherwise concealed forms, and patterns of human and divine behaviour. This is not the place to delve deeper into this subject, however, but cf. discussion below in Ch. 13. (To be fair to Johannesson and Gidlund, they do acknowledge that Augustine’s thoughts on predestination are debated, and that he is more nuanced than many of his readers would lead us to think.)

I channeled my indignation into a term paper I wrote together with a friend, arguing my case in ways only an 18-year old can.⁴ Paul was not writing about any doctrinal issue here, or predestination (as the church had understood it); neither was he presenting his solution to the problem of theodicy or discussing his philosophy of history, all of which had been suggested, too, in the (limited) literature I had read. Instead, I was convinced, Romans 9–11 represented Paul’s attempt at explaining “the relationship between God’s promises to Israel and [the theology of] righteousness through faith,” claiming that there is no contradiction between these two theological entities.⁵ Partly assisted by Anders Nygren’s commentary on Romans from 1947,⁶ I argued that the process supposedly involving divine rejection of the part of Israel that did not accept Jesus as the messiah (Rom 9:30–10:21) was not to be understood as final, but in fact creates the preconditions for the ultimate redemption of Israel as a whole (Rom 11:1–36).⁷

While I certainly would word many of the things I wrote then differently today – quite a few of my statements in that essay still make me cringe – I include this brief autobiographical note to highlight the issue of bias that is today debated especially in relation to the so-called Paul within Judaism (PwJ) perspective. In this debate, some scholars who do not identify with such readings of Paul accuse scholars convinced otherwise of unhistorical interpretations biased in favor of Jewish/Christian dialogue, especially in light of the catastrophic events during World War II and the churches’ attempts thereafter at changing their relationship to the Jewish people for the better.⁸ The third section in Chapter 1 below is dedicated to problems involved in such discussions of bias. In anticipation of that conversation, and in the interest of transparency, recognizing that scholarship is situated,⁹ it may be worth noting already at this point, though, that someone who has never heard of religious dialogue but wants to understand Paul beyond normative church teachings that he finds awkward – such a person can in fact unintentionally end up with a reading that is somewhat similar to some aspects of the PwJ perspective. Bias is inevitable, including my own as described above, but it is difficult to identify and associate with certain results, and should, in any case, never be used as an excuse for abandoning historical discourse or avoiding to engage historical claims with historical argu-

⁴ Torbjörn Sjöholm and Anders Svenson, “Paulus.” Term paper (Kristianstad: Söderport-skolan, 1986; in Swedish).

⁵ Sjöholm and Svenson, “Paulus,” 14–15.

⁶ Anders Nygren, *Pauli brev till romarna*, *Tolkning av Nya testamentet* 6, 2nd ed. (Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelses bokförlag, 1947; in Swedish).

⁷ Sjöholm and Svenson, “Paulus,” 15.

⁸ See below, p. 32–33.

⁹ Cf. the more detailed discussion on situated scholarship by Eric C. Smith, *Jewish Glass and Christian Stone: A Materialist Mapping of the “Parting of the Ways”* (London: Routledge, 2018), 1–6.

ments. In many ways, the present volume continues my early attempts at finding a way back to Paul's voice.

Over the years, I have become convinced that, if our aim is to conjure up a historical Paul based on the letters he wrote, and if we proceed with this project through placing him in a historical and institutional first-century, pre-Rabbinic socio-religious context, then what emerges from the shadows of the past is a Jew proclaiming a Jewish understanding of redemption to non-Jews as divine judgment awaits them around the corner; a Judaism for gentiles to save the world. I have also become convinced through engagement in inter-religious relations and dialogue since the early 1990s that such PwJ readings may assist contemporary Christians as they reposition constructively and in life-affirming ways the Jewish people in their theologies and in their encounters with Jews and Judaism, understanding anew the interdependence of Jews and Christians in their efforts to reimagine the world and build a better future. Likewise, I'm persuaded that Jews learning more about Paul as part of their own pre-Rabbinic history are in a better position to appreciate the ways in which their traditions are intertwined with, and thus also dependent on those they share with Christians. Further, as for contemporary philosophers working with Paul – Jewish, Christian, or secular – while their mission is not and should not be historical readings of Paul, a more clearly articulated awareness of Paul as the historical Jewish Other may influence in productive ways the political dimensions of their discourses. The same, I believe, is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of political discourse more generally, as recent debates on circumcision in Europe and North America have shown when Paul is called upon to support certain legislation.¹⁰ But, and this is a point elaborated further in Chapter 1, the usefulness of exegesis in the contemporary does not invalidate or undermine the historian's profession. Rather, clarifying the orientation and direction of such uses helps us to conceptualize the nature of the historical as related to but unbound by the present, sharpening the tools we use, and, indeed, legitimizing historical research beyond denominational preferences.

It is on the basis of such considerations the present volume is structured, combining essays discussing theology, bias, and terminology with historical chapters placing Paul in context. While far from claiming the final word in the interpretation of Paul in his own time and his use in theology and other contemporary contexts, this book aims to situate the apostle to the nations in the past and present beyond recourse to more traditional understandings of the process usually, and problematically, referred to as the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity.

The book has four parts, which describe a narrative trajectory combining foci on the present context in which research takes place, including issues relating to

¹⁰ On this, see discussion in Ch. 1 below, p. 29–30.

bias, theology, and terminology (Part I), the past that the historian reconstructs and in which we place Paul and those who came after him, from the first to the fifth centuries (Parts II and III), and, finally, a suggested reading of the first-century apostle for a twenty-first century theology, applying insights from the previous chapters (Part IV).

As will be discussed further in the Epilogue, the book's narrative sequence, the *via expositionis*, is not identical to the research process, the *via inventionis*. The latter process, in my view, should ideally follow an "archaeological" procedure starting with the work to be done at the surface before proceeding through the various historical layers. Such a procedure allows us to look carefully at the questions we ask in our contemporary context before we follow them down the rabbit hole, noting along the way how the historical settings we pass through will change the way we perceive our initial query. After an initial attempt at destabilizing common assumptions and uses of terms more generally (I: "Approaching Paul"), it seemed to us better, however, to proceed chronologically when presenting the research, so that the reader may move from Paul into the period when what we call Judaism and Christianity emerged (II: "Reading Paul," and III: "After Paul"). Since most readers of Paul wish to understand him because they believe that what he writes provide explanatory input into the human quest for knowledge about issues of ultimate concern, and since it is not self-evident exactly what a historically reconstructed first-century figure has to do with contemporary theology, the final section suggests a way to integrate this Jewish thinker into Christian theology, with special attention given to theology of religion (IV: "Theologizing Paul"). The chapter included in that section picks up on some of the issues discussed in Chapter 1 and 8, and thus contributes to the wider frame for the collection as a whole.

Taking a closer look at and summarizing the chapters, the following can be said. The purpose of the chapters in Part I, *Approaching Paul*, is to discuss some of the concepts and themes that have had a significant impact on our understanding of the historical Paul, both in terms of methodological strategies and the terminological minefields that lay between us and Paul. Approaching Paul, we need to acquire first of all a sense of where we stand, our own time and place, and perhaps most of all our own wishes for the journey ahead. Without considering such aspects of historical study, our efforts to enter into the process of defamiliarization, which is key to any historical investigation, are easily frustrated, and we are bound to end up gazing at our proverbial mirror image at the bottom of the well. As exegetes and historians, we need to not only delve deeply into the particular problems and aspects of a text that happens to interest us; our relationship to the ancients also requires of us that we take a step back and consider the larger historiographical and methodological contexts that have determined which questions we ask, how we ask them, and what language we use

to answer them. If we do not first attend to such larger issues, the framework for our exegetical inquiries risks skewing the results of our labor.

The chapters that make up Part I, then, constitute the backbone of the more specific work on Paul to follow in Part II. Or perhaps better: they may be approached as an invitation to reposition and reorganize some of the important scenes of the landscape, the backdrop, in which we conjure up the historical Other; the historical Paul. While the issues dealt with in this section are certainly not comprehensive, they are meant to contribute to, a) a foregrounding of our intentions as historians, b) new ways of speaking of historical phenomena we think we know based on current discursive habits, and c) a destabilizing of common ideas about what went on in antiquity more generally as this first-century Jew launched his effort to save the nations from destruction in the soon to come divine judgment. Reflection on matters such as this will, regardless of the conclusions we draw, have important consequences for how we read the letters and understand the person.

Chapter 1 (“Understanding Paul as a First-Century Jew in the Twenty-First Century”) highlights two of the basic convictions upon which the book as a whole rests. First, that historical discourse is possible and legitimate, contains within it an ethical dimension, and constitutes an important part of contemporary theological, philosophical, and other conversations in which recourse to the past is perceived as useful. Second, as the historical always represents the Other in relation to the present, historical study requires analysis of developing trajectories and changes in discursive habits, which constitute assumed links between the past and the present. More often than not, such developments over time describe a pattern where (a) is related to (b), and (b) to (c), but where (c) has very little to do with (a). Uses of the past in the present, in normative contexts, are therefore often subjected to imaginative hermeneutical efforts aiming to establish essential continuity between the ancient and there here and now, cultivating a sense of familiarity and thus ownership.

Consequently, historical understanding of Paul necessitates, I believe, a discussion of terminological issues highlighting key problems and assisting us in the task of *defamiliarizing* ourselves with historical ways of speaking of, relating to, and categorizing the world. This is the purpose of Chapter 2 (“Particularistic Judaism and Universalistic Christianity?”), as some of the most common terms used in relation to Paul – “universalism” and “particularism” – are problematized and shown to be unhelpful, indeed misleading, in the study of ancient Judaism and Christianity. The topic of Chapter 3 (“Was there a Christian Mission Before the Fourth Century?”) follows from this, as “mission” is deeply intertwined with such terminology. Here, my aim is to undermine common ideas about what “mission” was or could have been in antiquity. Paul is, very likely, the most famous “missionary” in Christian history, and much of what has been done and proclaimed throughout the centuries has held forth this

person as an example to follow. While, traditionally, Christian scholarship on “Paul the missionary” has served the purpose of positively asserting Christian uniqueness, many scholars today, including Jewish researchers, affirm the uniqueness but without the theological approval. This is likely because mission today, intertwined as it has been with colonial practices, has been seriously challenged on ethical grounds. In the early 1900s (and later), however, several Jewish and Christian scholars argued in favor of the existence in antiquity of Jewish missionary activities.¹¹ At that time such activity was perceived of more generally as indicating the strength of a “religion,” which may explain, at least partly, aspects of these discourses.¹² In this chapter, I suggest a definition of “mission” and argue that phenomena usually collected under this umbrella-term were quite common in antiquity, also among Jews and other Greco-Roman cults. The “missionary” practices that can be reconstructed from Paul’s letters and other texts authored within the Jesus movement, including Acts, were variants on a theme, I suggest, rather than a unique, idiosyncratic phenomenon bursting forth from the minds of a few followers of this Messiah. Of course, if we understand Paul and other Christ-followers at this time as Jews proclaiming a form of Judaism for gentiles, what we see in these texts are, indeed, examples of “Jewish mission.” “Christian” mission, on the other hand, develops in Late Antiquity in partly other directions, which signal more clearly continuity with

¹¹ See, e.g., George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, vol. I: *The Age of the Tannaim* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927); Bernard J. Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1939); Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 1. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952). Pau Figueras, “Epigraphic Evidence for Proselytism in Ancient Judaism,” *Immanuel* 24/25. *The New Testament and Christian–Jewish Dialogue: Studies in Honor of David Flusser* (1990), 194–206, claims, referring to a range of scholars, that “[i]n the periods of the late second temple, the Mishnah and the Talmud, Jewish proselytism is a well established fact” (194); so also Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interaction from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). Note the tendentious argument by D. Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im Neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (Berlin: Verlag von Reuther & Reichard, 1903), about Jewish mission, which he understood as existing in the Second Temple period but then being replaced by Christian mission after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple: “das Christentum nahm den Judentum die Mission mehr und mehr aus der Hand [...] Das Judentum wird eine Religion der Observanz und des absoluten Beharrens. Das Christentum wird der Erbe des Judentum” (86). Most scholars would understand Jewish mission to be active in the Talmudic period, if not before; cf. Martin Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pointing to the third century as the beginning of real Rabbinic interest in mission to non-Jews (152). For the view that Judaism was probably never missionary, see Shaye J.D. Cohen, “Conversion to Judaism in Historical Perspective: From Biblical Israel to Postbiblical Judaism,” *Conservative Judaism* 36.4 (1983): 31–45.

¹² As the quote from D. Wilhelm Bousset in n. 11 above shows, ideas about the non-existence of Jewish mission after the fall of the Jerusalem temple have been used supersessionally to explain the “victory” of Christianity over “Late Judaism,” the former about to take over the world as the latter recedes into the shadows of its own community.

the phenomena with which we are more familiar today. Chapter 4 (“Entering the Conversation on Paul: Was he a Christian and did he Attend Church?”) closes Part I with a discussion of how we imagine Paul as we speak of him in English and other languages today.

While the chapters in Part I are targeting more general topics with specific relevance for Paul, Part II, *Reading Paul*, narrows the scope to placing Paul in specific contexts and interpreting his letters in those contexts. The purpose of Part II is to show that through reconstructing, from sources other than Paul, first-century Jewish institutional and other spaces and placing Paul in them, Paul materializes not in contrast to those settings but as a Jewish person participating in a Jewish discourse aiming at transforming the non-Jewish world. There is no “Christianity” yet to be found in Paul’s time. Having answered the question in the title of Chapter 4 in the negative, Chapter 5 (“Entering a Synagogue with Paul: First-Century Torah Observance”) is an invitation to shift the conceptual setting from a Christian to a first-century Jewish social and discursive world, and to understand Paul’s Torah observance in institutional contexts beyond the Rabbinic halakhah that later came to define Judaism.

Elaborating on the importance of the institutional settings available to Paul for a historical understanding of him, Chapter 6 (“Paul’s World: Women, Men, and Power”) then argues that mixed membership and women leadership in the *ekklēsiai* Paul took an interest in was not only a matter of fact but also not unique to Christ-groups. While followers of Jesus could organize in different types of associative settings, some of which were exclusively male, others exclusively female, and yet others mixed – the latter being the most common – other Jews and non-Jews did the same. Contrary to much previous research, the argument here is that such women leadership positions in some Christ-groups should not be construed against a “dark background,” neither in Greco-Roman society more generally, nor in Jewish contexts more specifically. Christ-followers were very much part of and integrated into the institutional patterns that existed before they arrived on the scene of history. This chapter thus highlights that by paying close attention to the nuanced “layers” that existed in ancient society, we also gain a more plausible understanding of the diverse roles women played in antiquity, roles that included association leadership, participation in guilds and trade networks, as well as elite patronage. Such insights hold significant bearing when we consider the different ways in which women appear in the Pauline letters, and how we should interpret these.

Understanding the socio-institutional integration of Paul in Jewish and Greco-Roman society leads not only to a more realistic reconstruction of his behavior and the various instructions he sent to the groups he interacted with but may also shed light on the theology he gives expression to in his letters. Chapter 7 (“Placing Paul: Understanding Theological Strategy in Institutional Context”) is devoted to this topic, focusing especially on Gal 3:28 and arguing that Paul is

here theologizing common aspects of associative settings. The effect is a “three-dimensional” theology; the embodied experience of being “in-Christ” in such settings reinforces the ideology surfacing in these verses, and vice versa: the asserted theology explains, controls, and legitimizes the organizational structure of the group as an expression of the eschatological reality proclaimed.

Chapter 8 (“Paul’s Rule in all the *Ekklēsiai*: Finding a Core in his Message”) continues the search for historical Pauline theology. The point of departure for this chapter is the hypothesis that, even if a systematic theology as a modern approach is beyond the range of ancient intellectual habits, understanding ambiguous passages in Paul’s letters requires the identification of a core consisting of key ideas on the basis of which they may be approached. The argument is made that when Paul speaks of a “rule” identified as his own and applied to all Christ-groups (in which he has influence), such a rule contributes to locating aspects of that socio-theological core. First Corinthians 7:17–24 therefore takes center stage in this quest, the analysis of which highlights Paul’s critical understanding not only of ethnicity but also of the relationship between the work of God’s spirit and the human response it stimulates. A reaction which aims to improve on God’s initiative through making individuals ethno-ritually and socially more acceptable in the eyes of God is, for Paul, tantamount to rejecting grace itself, and therefore also the Christ.

As the chapters outlined above will show, submitting Paul to first-century conditions and environments in no way removes him from his Jewish identity and social context, but rather confirms him as a Jewish thinker with an urgent message for non-Jews. This message reveals concerns not to introduce a “parting” between “religious” groups, but in fact the opposite. Chapter 9 (“Paul and the Joining of the Ways”) argues that the ultimate goal of the Pauline program is to establish common ground between Jews and non-Jews and through this unity in diversity produce a world ready to meet the final judgment of the God of Israel, the outcome of which will initiate a new era of human existence through a transformation of creation as such.

This Pauline program aimed at unity in diversity under one God cannot, however, carry the explanatory weight of that which happens next, when joining is turned into parting and ethnic groups are redefined as religious communities. We simply cannot explain the emergence of Christianity based on first-century readings of Paul. In order to understand this eschatologically oriented person and our current relationship to him it is necessary to re-direct our attention to the complex processes extending over several centuries in which apostolic and non-apostolic Jews and non-Jewish Christ-followers come to define their cultic identity and Otherness in relation to one another. As we engage these developments, the historical Otherness of Paul in relation to all Late-Antique parties involved will also emerge, implicitly, in greater clarity. The aim of Part III, *After Paul*, is to engage various relevant developments in this regard. In

the three chapters included here, we shall thus focus on some – but far from all – of the key aspects involved as we try to draw the initial lines of a map through which we can orient ourselves in this territory that lay the foundations for what was to come in the medieval and modern periods.

Chapter 10 (“Jewish and Christian Interaction from the First to the Fifth Century CE”) lays the groundwork for understanding these processes through an analysis of interaction between Jewish and non-Jewish Christ-followers and other Jews until the fifth century, showing how changing social and institutional parameters affect what we would call the “religious.” Archaeological remains are used together with literary texts as issues dealt with include not only Late-Antique Christian “Judaizing” but also Jewish “Christianizing” during a period when the empire tries to turn itself into a mono-religious political culture. Within this broader context, Chapter 11 (“Inventing Christian Identity”) then traces more specifically the historical trajectory from Paul to Theodosius I, who, attacking and persecuting Greco-Roman (‘pagan’) ancestral traditions, elevated (non-Jewish) Christianity to state cult. Finally, in Chapter 12 (“The Rise of Normative Judaism and Christianity”), issues of normativity are addressed in relation to the discursive and physical violence that emerges when the theological and the colonial merge. In these processes, and the reactions to them, the two related but distinct traditions we know today as Judaism and Christianity begin to materialize, marginalizing other expressions of the cult of Israel’s God. The key – indeed classic – question here is the same as the historical concern that underlies the volume as a whole, placing Paul at its center: How did it come to pass that a small messianic movement in the first century, whose leader had been executed by the Roman Empire, rose to power in that same Empire just a few centuries later and was proclaimed state cult in a process which involved an absolute rejection of Judaism, including its messianic forms? The answer to this question, it is argued, will show that not only is the search for the origin of Christianity dependent on the study of Judaism, but also that the rise of Rabbinic Judaism, and thus also of modern forms of Judaism, cannot be understood in isolation from Christianity.

Part IV, *Theologizing Paul*, shifts the focus to modern theological receptions of Paul, in this way bringing us back to the present and the issue of possible uses of a first-century Paul in contemporary theological and political contexts. Chapter 13 (“Reforming the Reformer: Reading Paul with Luther in Contemporary Europe and Beyond”) began its life as a conference presentation in Bratislava, Slovakia, where, as in many other places in Europe and the US today, anti-Semitism is a reality and anti-Jewish theology is as widespread as its preachers seem unaware of its potential disastrous consequences. The focus on Luther here is motivated not only by the European context but also by the undeniable influence the Reformer has had on theology and its historical claims far

beyond the Lutheran churches.¹³ The chapter takes as point of departure that theology for the Reformer, as for so many other interpreters of holy scriptures, is not a disinterested intellectual exercise but a matter of life and death. Drawing on insights from especially Chapters 1 and 8, this essay suggests, tentatively, how Luther can be used against Luther in the search of a life-affirming Christian theology of Jews and Judaism. Theology is always about choice, and with choice comes responsibility. In light of such responsibility, a theological imperative is formulated.

In the Epilogue, finally, I offer a wider discussion of the aims and implications of the volume as a whole. Expanding on themes discussed in Chapter 1, this section orbits questions related to history, text, and intentionality as beyond the normative, since the normative – like choice – always resides in the present. A complicating factor is that history has, in our time, received an authoritative voice based on (secular) methodologies not controlled by doctrinal or ideological parameters, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, reconstructing historical meanings by definition results in conclusions that simply do not fit contemporary matrices of rationality and reasonableness. Our ability to read a first-century Paul in the twenty-first century depends, then, entirely on how we choose to solve the hermeneutical difficulties that follow from this conundrum of which we, ourselves, happen to be part. And this, in turn, makes historians dependent on theologians and philosophers just as much as theology and philosophy are conditioned by the historical.

The research presented in this book has been in the making for many years. Chapters 1 and 13 are new and offered here for the first time, as are the Prologue and Epilogue; the remaining chapters (2–12) represent significantly revised and updated versions of thoughts that have previously appeared in different forms elsewhere.¹⁴ Bringing these studies together here creates, it is hoped, a coherent narrative through the combination of a range of inter-related research trajectories, all of which shed light, from different angles, on the historical Paul and his audiences and thus offer the reader more than the individual parts would be able to when read in isolation. Some approaches and analytical lenses reappear in several chapters, as they represent a basic point of departure for discussing the

¹³ Of course, the Catholic church has its own problems in this regard, even as reforms have taken place continuously since the Second Vatican Council. One of the problems is, as Michael Peppard, “Paul Would be Proud: The New Testament and Jewish–Gentile Respect,” *TS* 76.2 (2015): 260–279, here 269–271, points out, that the official teaching of the church does not reach enough people in the pews. One solution that Peppard points to, beyond educating those who preach, is the necessity of lectionary reform (270–271); on this, see also Eileen Schuller, “Biblical Texts about Purity in Contemporary Christian Lectionaries,” in *Purity and Holiness in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Memory of Susan Haber*, ed. Carl Ehrlich, Anders Runesson and Eileen Schuller, WUNT 1.305 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 283–300.

¹⁴ For details, see List of Original Publications.

different themes treated. Among these are found consideration of terminology and its role in historical reconstruction, attempts at moving beyond what we today call “religion,” an insistence on the inseparability of “religion” and politics, a focus on ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman institutions, both civic and unofficial associations, analyses of multiple types of source materials associated with distinct (but often overlapping) spheres of ancient society (public/semi-public/private), and the role of ethnicity and de-ethnosizing processes related to ancient Mediterranean cults for understanding the emergence of what became Christianity. While we have removed some of the introductory discussions on issues such as these from the studies as they originally appeared in order to avoid repetition, adding cross-references where appropriate, we have felt it necessary at times to retain some of this material across some of the chapters, so that the reader will not be forced to move back and forth too much between the different sections of the book. This, we hope, will also facilitate for those who wish to read chapters in a sequence other than the one chosen here.

I would like to thank the following publishers for permission to incorporate material here in revised and adapted form that they had previously brought to readers in different incarnations: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, Sheffield Phoenix Press, Eerdmans, Mohr Siebeck, Eisenbrauns/Penn State University Press, Fortress Press, Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, HarperCollins/Zondervan, *Collegium Patristicum Lundense*, and the Swedish Exegetical Society.

This book would never have seen the light of day without the encouragement, learning, discernment, and editorial skills of Rebecca Runesson. Applying her insight, wit, and enthusiastic ingenuity to every single chapter, her incisive critique has forced me to reflect deeper and nuance my thinking; to modify, rephrase, delete, and to add. Thank you, Rebecca, for all your work with, and your unfailing confidence in, this project. I am also deeply grateful to Rachel Runesson, Noah Runesson, Martin Sanfridson, my wife Anna Runesson, and my parents, Rune and Lisbeth Svenson, for engaging me in continuous discussions about the complexities of the historical and its relationship to the present as well as to theology and life; the ultimate mystery. It is to my parents and to my late aunt, Ann-Marie Christiansson, whose lives to me and to so many others have embodied and continue to elucidate the spirit of 1 Cor 13:1–13, I dedicate this book. Whatever the contribution to scholarship this volume might represent, it would have been much poorer without your perceptive input.

While my wrestling with Paul began in some modest sense during my high-school years as described above, there is one person to whom I owe the greatest depth of gratitude for challenging and repositioning my perspective on Paul through the study of his letters in light of Second Temple Judaism and later Rabbinic literature: Göran Larsson, Docent in Jewish studies at Lund University, and former director at the Swedish Theological Institute in Jerusalem where my wife and I studied in 1993. While Göran, who in 1990 received the

Raoul Wallenberg Humanitarian Award “for his dedication to encouraging greater understanding and respect between Christians and Jews,” never published much of his teaching on Paul, he was one of the pioneers of what we would now call the Paul within Judaism perspective, arguing readings of this apostle to the nations already in the 1980s that would later surface in scholarship and become important components of many academic conversations.¹⁵ Thank you, Göran, for sharing so generously your exegetical insights and for moving the field forward for all of us who were your students.

Since most of the chapters below began their lives many years ago, I have accumulated a significant debt of gratitude to colleagues and students at the three universities where I have worked: Lund University, McMaster University, and the University of Oslo, where I currently teach at the Faculty of Theology. No list of people from whose learning I have benefitted can come close to being exhaustive, especially not as an understanding of Paul requires so much more than reading only Paul, but it would be remiss of me not to mention at least some. In addition to all the students, especially in my classes on “Paul and Christian Origins” and “Paul and Pauline Theology,” I want to thank the following colleagues, in chronological and alphabetic order, not forgetting that many of those conversations that started in the 1990s have continued over the years. From Lund: Samuel Byrskog, Bengt Holmberg, Dieter Mitternacht, Birger Olsson, Karin Hedner Zetterholm, and Magnus Zetterholm; from McMaster: Daniel Machiela, Eileen Schuller, Stephen Westerholm, and Peter Widdicombe; and from Oslo: Svein Åge Christoffersen, Hallgeir Elstad, Werner G. Jeanrond, Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, Ole Jakob Løland, Marius Timmann Mjaaland, Halvor Moxnes, Karin B. Neutel (now at Umeå University), and Aud V. Tønnessen. I also want to acknowledge, especially, the privilege of learning from my doctoral students over the years: Wayne Baxter, Jonathan Bernier, John Bolton, Wally V. Cirafesi, Ralph J. Korner, Andrew R. Krause, Jordan J. Ryan, John VanMaaren, and Amanda Witmer.

Two conference contexts have been especially inspiring for me as I have worked on things Pauline. First, the Society of Biblical Literature’s (SBL) *Paul Within Judaism Section*, of which I have been part since its beginning in Atlanta

¹⁵ Larsson’s most significant publications have been on the Tosefta, on Exodus, and more generally on Jewish/Christian relations. See, however, Göran Larsson, “*The Jews, Your Majesty*” (Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies and Research, 1989), a short booklet for a Christian lay audience in which Larsson presents some of the key aspects of his approach to the Jewish/Christian reality, including his thoughts on Paul in that context. This short text was originally published in Swedish in 1988, and then, also in Swedish, revised and expanded into a book in 2018: *Judarna, Ers Majestät! Skrifter om judisk och Kristen tro och tradition 5* (Lund: Arcus, 2018). Some of the headings reveal that the same themes that are currently at the forefront of PwJ debates have a longer history, such as: “The Gentile Problem,” “Should Jews Become Gentiles?” and “The Gentiles: Grafted on Israel” (pp. 28, 32, and 35, respectively, in the English edition).

in 2010, then under the leadership of Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm. While my time on the Steering Committee came to an end some years ago (as it does after a certain number of years, according to SBL rules), I continue to benefit from the rich annual program that is offered by this group, now under the leadership of Kathy Ehrensperger and Karin Hedner Zetterholm. I want to extend a special thank-you to William S. Campbell, Kathy Ehrensperger, Paula Fredriksen, Mark Nanos, and Magnus Zetterholm for many engaging discussions, both at the SBL and at numerous other occasions and conferences. The other setting from which I have benefitted very much is the *Social History and the New Testament* Seminar of the Society for New Testament Studies (SNTS), which I have co-chaired together with Markus Öhler and Hermut Löhr since 2009. Our lively and friendly discussions on a wide range of issues have led me to multiple new insights, and for this I am grateful. A special thanks to J. Albert Harrill and John S. Kloppenborg, both of whom have offered several thought-provoking papers in this Seminar on Pauline literature and associations in relation to Christ-groups, respectively.

For some reason, the Nordic countries have for many years produced Pauline scholars who have moved the field forward in directions that in various ways nurture a Paul within Judaism perspective. Well-known pioneers include, but are by no means limited to, Johannes Munck (Aarhus University, Denmark), Krister Stendahl (Uppsala University, Sweden; later Harvard University), and Nils Alstrup Dahl (University of Oslo, Norway; later Yale University). While there certainly is no unified Nordic School of Pauline studies, there is enough commonalities in terms of how Paul is approached to inspire and consolidate new ways of cooperation in this part of the world. Jacob P.B. Mortensen (Aarhus, Denmark), Karin B. Neutel (Umeå, Sweden), Runar Thorsteinsson (Reykjavík, Iceland), and I have therefore been working on establishing the *Nordic Society for the Study of Paul and Judaism*, which will be launched in 2022. I'm grateful to my colleagues for including me in this process, as we aim to stimulate further scholarship on this apostle to the nations in light of the ancestral customs to which he himself dedicated his life.

Finally, I want to acknowledge some of the several scholars who have not yet been mentioned, but from whose work and through conversations I have learned, and who has influenced in different ways my reading of Paul, Judaism, and the so-called parting of the ways issue: František Ábel, Richard S. Ascough, Giovanni Bazzana, Daniel Boyarin, Terence L. Donaldson, Neil Elliott, Philip A. Harland, Matt Jackson-McCabe, Richard Last, Judith Lieu, Shelley Matthews, Laura Salah Nasrallah, Matthew V. Novenson, John S. Kloppenborg, Stanley E. Porter, Adele Reinhartz, Karl Olav Sandnes, Matthew Thiessen, and Cecilia Wassén. I am also very grateful to Daniel M. Gurtner, who has assisted me with format issues, indices, and bibliography with exceptional acumen. Thanks are also due to Markus Kirchner, Editorial Assistant for Theology, Jew-

ish Studies, and Philosophy at Mohr Siebeck, for his careful work and his patience, and to Jörg Frey, the editor of WUNT, for accepting the book in this fine series.

Let me end where I began, with that term paper on Paul back in the 1980s. While I hope (!) that I have progressed in my thoughts on Paul since then, and I feel convinced that a historical understanding of Paul, with all its hermeneutical implications, is dependent upon reading practices that locate him within a first-century, pre-Rabbinic, Jewish (institutional) world and worldview, I'm certainly not done with Paul. I'm still perplexed by the ways in which he formulates arguments and applies his ancestral traditions to make his points. There is still more than one passage where I do not quite see in which direction he wants to move his audience. It is a humbling experience, reading Paul, but one that triggers further attempts at understanding, continuously challenging what has become familiar – old ideas in new iterations, including my own. I'm also puzzled by his early reception within and beyond the New Testament, and how it relates – or not – to the historical Paul. While some re-readings clearly transfigures him into a gentile apostle aiming to turn the world away from Judaism, I'm not at all as sure as some others seem to be that this early reception, in all its aspects and without exception, leads to a place “outside Judaism.”¹⁶ One thing is certain, though, and that is that progress in thought require discussion and diversity; a creative tension between perspectives, and a willingness to be wrong for the sake of reaching beyond oneself and one's favorite beliefs. Most importantly, as history has shown, it really does matter how we read Paul, collectively. It is worth the effort, therefore, to return again and again to Paul, in continuous conversation with others. Let me end, then, with a big thank-you to Torbjörn Sjöholm, with whom I wrote that term paper in 1986 and who helped me start this life-long project, which has turned out to matter also to me, personally.

Oslo, February 18, 2022

Anders Runesson

¹⁶ Indeed, here I'm intrigued, but not convinced, by Steve Mason's most recent contribution to the study even of Paul himself as being “outside Judaism”: Steve Mason, “Paul Without Judaism: Historical Method over Perspective,” in *Paul and Matthew among Jews and Gentiles: Essays in Honor of Terence L. Donaldson*, ed. Ronald Charles, LNTS 628 (London: T&T Clark, 2021), 9–39.

Part I

Approaching Paul

Translation – interpretation: the two are inseparable,
and they take place within the complex webs of ideology and culture.

Scott S. Elliott and Roland Boer, “Introduction,” 2.

1. Understanding Paul as a First-Century Jew in the Twenty-First Century

The Problem of Relevance, Bias, and Approach

1.1 The Nature of the Text and the Search for a Persuasive Paul

For almost two millennia, readers of the texts eventually included in the New Testament have been trying to figure out Paul. Indeed, this struggle with his words begins already within the New Testament itself. While Acts portrays with ease a Torah-observant, Pharisaic-messianic Paul working in partnership with James and the other leaders in Jerusalem,¹ the author of 2 Peter famously admitted that the apostle to the nations was difficult to understand.² From that moment on the debate has ebbed and flowed on all things Pauline; on obedience to state authority,³ on the role of women in society and as leaders in assemblies,⁴ and on the status of Jews and Judaism in God's plan in light of the Christ event,⁵ just to mention a few of the many topics of contention related to these texts of the New Testament Canon. Quite obviously, it matters how we read Paul. History has shown us that it matters. For clergy, scholar, and lay person, the letters of this elusive figure hold weight and continue to draw in new readers.

¹ E.g., Acts 15:1–35; 21:17–26; 22:1–3 (cf. how another follower of The Way, Ananias of Damascus, is described as a Torah-observant Jew too, respected by all the Jews in that city, 22:12); 23:6 (note here the context, in which Paul, the self-described Pharisee, argues against the chief priest Ananias based on Torah, accusing him of breaking the law, and then apologizing when he discovered that he himself, unknowingly, had done the same, 23:2–5). On Acts as the earliest witness to a “Paul-within-Judaism” perspective, see Matthew Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 167–169.

² 2 Pet 3:15–16: “So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures” (NRSV). Indeed, while Paul may have been convinced that he wrote clearly, was always right, and did everything right as he embodied his calling to save the nations (cf. Paula Fredriksen, “Paul, the Perfectly Righteous Pharisee,” in *The Pharisees*, ed. Joseph Sievers and Amy-Jill Levine [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021], 112–135), ultimately, he admitted the limits of what we as human beings can know: 1 Cor 13:8–13; Rom 11:33–36.

³ Rom 13:1–14. Cf. Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 289–336.

⁴ Rom 16:1–4, 6–7 (on v. 7, see Eldon J. Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005]), 12, 13.

⁵ 1 Cor 7:17–20; Rom 3:31; 7:12, 14, 22; 8:4 (cf. 5:5; 13:8–10); 11:26–29.

But if it is as easy for us to agree as it was for the ancients that, yes, it does matter how we read Paul, then the questions of “Why?” and “For whom?” become inescapable. In fact, not only are they unavoidable, but they touch on issues critical to the entire enterprise of interpreting – and thus extending and transforming the lives of – the ancient texts as such. They reveal, too, if asked with some persistence, the considerable diversity of our interpretive incentives, motivations otherwise often concealed as we foreground in our academic conversations matters of theory and method. Indeed, the “Why?” and “For Whom?” may, ultimately, shed light on the complex problem of the art of persuasion (in which all academic writing engages) and the dynamics involved as changes of opinion occur; dynamics which often, it seems, have more to do with answers to these questions than to the various levels of strength of the reasoning presented. As Elias J. Bickerman noted, referring to an observation by Vico (1668–1744), “people accept only the ideas for which their previous development has prepared their minds, and which, let us add, appear to be useful to them.”⁶ Indeed, in the “Why?” lies embedded the very definition of exegesis, as the process of careful analytical study to produce *useful* interpretations of texts.⁷ In other words, exegesis may, or even should, be understood as a hermeneutical exercise intimately related to needs experienced in the here and now. Disregarding the needs that gave rise to the questions (“Why?”), which the exercise is

⁶ Elias J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 305.

⁷ On this definition, see Douglas Stuart, “Exegesis,” in *ABD* 2:682–88, here, 682. While Stuart’s discussion, in my view, contains some claims about exegesis that need further discussion and is rather narrowly focused on contemporary exegesis (in the 1980s) to the exclusion of earlier exegetical traditions, including the ancient and medieval periods, the entry does contain insights that may still be useful to think with, critically. For other definitions of exegesis, set within the context of postcolonial studies, see Anna Runesson, *Exegesis in the Making: Postcolonialism and New Testament Studies*, *BibInt* 103 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 51–88. On hermeneutics and early biblical interpretation until the Enlightenment, see Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (London: SCM Press, 1994), 15–43; Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 60–123. For Jewish biblical interpretation, including how it relates to interpretive strategies in the early Jesus movement, see also Karin Hedner Zetterholm, *Jewish Interpretation of the Bible: Ancient and Contemporary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012) and Serge Ruzer, *Mapping the New Testament: Early Christian Writings as a Witness for Jewish Biblical Exegesis*, *JCPS* 13 (Leiden: Brill, 2007). Although quite “light” on the level of detail in its discussion of the history of exegetical approaches and their entanglement (or not) with the theological enterprise before the 1800s, and with a rather accentuated focus on the period around 1800 as a game-changer explaining modern approaches, Dale B. Martin, *Biblical Truths: The Meaning of Scripture in the Twenty-First Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), provides a (post-modern and Marxist) take on the issue of making (orthodox Christian) sense of the bible. He does this in a way that is meant to destabilize ideas privileging the “finding” of ancient meaning as necessary before moving on to establishing “what the text means today” (see especially pp. 1–37, referring to Krister Stendahl’s famous distinction between “what it meant” and “what it means” [2, 9], and compare the discussion in Jeanrond, as referenced above).

meant to provide answers to, would threaten to undermine our ability to appreciate the relationship between what it is we seek, how we seek it, and the interpretations we produce – as well as our ability to persuade (“For Whom?”). In this chapter, which is meant to provide a frame within which to read the chapters that follow, we shall discuss some of these issues as they relate to scholarship on Paul, focusing on relevance, bias, and approach, since such themes are often commented upon in discussions of Paul and Judaism but rarely dealt with more extensively. In order to do this, we shall begin by considering the nature of the text as it is fundamentally – and variously – understood by its readers.

It is not unreasonable to assume that, for whatever reason, and on a most basic level, most readers of Paul seek to understand the truth in, of, or about his texts. But what is truth?⁸ While such an issue is far more complex than the parameters of this study and my own limited expertise would allow to expound – not even Jesus was willing to give a straightforward answer to this question when asked!⁹ – a few words here may still be helpful in order to provide a hermeneutical context for the discussion to follow.

As we approach the interpretive task of reading Paul in the twenty-first century, I suggest that we first need to contemplate what we believe this ancient text is or represents. It seems to me that we have two basic options here, on a fundamental level:¹⁰ Either the text is or has the potential to disclose the Word of God to the reader,¹¹ a position which in turn assumes the truth claims inherent in the idea and practice of canonization and therefore by implication constitutes an acceptance of the development of the church tradition within which the Chris-

⁸ This question has received renewed attention in New Testament studies recently, for example in Kavin C. Rowe, “What if it were True? Why Study the New Testament,” *New Testament Studies* 68 (2022), 144–155. For Rowe, the most glaring silence in the current scholarly study of the biblical texts when its meaning and purpose are discussed is that few dare to claim that, “we should study the NT because it might tell the truth about God” (144). See further below.

⁹ As implied by his silence before Pilate in John 18:38. But cf. the claim in John 14:6, where truth is presented as entangled with “walking” and “life.” See also discussion in Ch. 13 below, and cf. Rowe, “What if it Were True?” 153–154.

¹⁰ Of course, isolating two basic options threatens to conceal the many variants of approaches to these texts within and between these options that interpreters have favored throughout history and still do today; cf. Rowe, “What if it Were True?” My point here, however, is simply to cast the net as wide and generally as possible in order to enable a discussion of the historical in the theological; of issues of ultimate concern in light of how we can be just to the texts.

¹¹ The second position is the one taken by Luther, who distinguishes between the biblical text as text, which is not the Word of God, and the text’s ability to disclose the Word of God to the (faithful) interpreter. Cf. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 33, building on Gerhard Ebeling, “Die Anfänge von Luthers hermeneutik,” in Gerhard Ebeling, *Lutherstudien*, vol. 1 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1971), 1–68, here 36. See also the discussion by Raymond E. Brown, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible: How a Modern Reading of the Bible Challenges Christians, the Church, and the Churches* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 1–22 (“The Human Word of the Almighty God”).

tian canon was formed. Or, the text is understood as an ancient text like any other ancient text, devoid of revelatory content, or spiritual sense. While the vast majority of all readers of Paul today and throughout history approach his letters from the former perspective – it’s not really about understanding Paul, but about understanding God and God’s will, through Paul – the latter approach, focused only on understanding Paul historically or using his writings in other contemporary contexts based on a secular understanding of their nature, is by no means isolated from the former but has developed from its recognition of the theological value of the historical and the political.

In terms of the historical, already the New Testament texts themselves display not only an interest in but an urgency to communicate what their authors were convinced “really happened,” along the way rejecting what they understood to be false rumors, or suggesting what should be defined as appropriate behavior in their here-and-now based on events that had occurred in the past.¹² The interpretive dynamics triggered between “what happened” and “what it means” is then developed further in Late Antiquity and in Medieval Europe, most famously distinguishing between the four senses of Scripture. Originating from the time of John Cassian (360–435) and Augustine (354–430) but becoming more widespread in the Medieval period, these include the literal (historical), the allegorical, the tropological (moral), and the anagogical (eschatological) senses. From the perspective of this type of hermeneutical platform, the texts were/are considered to yield truth on all of these levels, as pedagogically summarized in a Medieval verse, which was circulated as late as in the sixteenth century:

The letter shows us what God and our fathers did;
The allegory shows us where our faith is hid;
The moral meaning gives us rules of daily life;
The anagogy shows us where we end our strife.¹³

¹² See, e.g., Matt 28:15, where *Ioudaioi* should certainly be translated “Judeans,” referring to the population of a geographical (and political) area (cf. R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 1106); 1 Cor 11:23–34. Of course, these authors also understood Jewish Scripture to convey, historically, what once happened, and found in these events truths about the meaning both of the events themselves and the more recent developments associated with Jesus and his followers. On the historical in Christian theology, cf. discussion in Krister Stendahl, *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 11–44.

¹³ *Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria. Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.* English translation by Robert M. Grant, in Robert M. Grant with David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 85. Cf. Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l’Écriture*. Vol. 1.1. Théologie 41 (Paris, Aubier, 1959), 23–26. The poem is attributed to Augustine of Dacia (d. 1285), a Scandinavian Dominican, and his *Rotulus pugillaris*, which precise date of publication is unknown. For a critical edition of the Latin text and translation into Danish, see Augustinus de Dacia, *Rotulus pugillaris*. Genudgivet og oversat af Christian Troelsgård (København, 2021; available online: http://www.jggj.dk/rotulus_LatDan.pdf); here 6–7.

While allegorical interpretation of biblical texts has been hugely influential, scholarly authorities, such as Hugh of St. Victor (1097/1099–1141) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), emphasized the importance and priority of the historical, or literal meaning for all other understandings of the text.¹⁴ It is key, Hugh argues, that,

[f]irst you learn history and diligently commit to memory the thruth of the deeds that have been performed, revieweing from beginning to end what has been done, when it has been done, where it has been done, and by whom it has been done. For these are the four things which are especially to be sought for in history – the person, the business done, the time, and the place.¹⁵

As for history, the term is understood by Hugh in an extended sense:

But if we take the meaning of the word more broadly, it is not unfitting that we call by the name “history” not only the recounting of actual deeds but also the first meaning of any narrative which uses words according to their proper nature.¹⁶

In light of such an understanding of history, Reventlow emphasizes that Hugh, stresses the unconditional necessity of first setting philological and historical foundations over against those who “want to philosophize immediately” [...] [H]e strongly urged his students to work their way up methodologically from philological and historical knowledge to the level of allegorical understanding.¹⁷

It is not difficult to see how such emphases on the literal, or historical, make their way into the Reformation period, when Luther, after initially accepting the idea of the four-fold senses of Scripture then turns against it and redefines the hermeneutical enterprise. In this process, Luther foregrounds the literal/

¹⁴ Hugh, however, distinguished between three senses of Scripture, not four: the historical, the allegorical, and the tropological. For a brief discussion of Hugh, see Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation. Vol. 2: From Late Antiquity to the End of the Middle Ages*, trans. James O. Duke, Resources for Biblical Study 61 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 160–170.

¹⁵ Did. 6.3. Translation by Jerome Taylor, *The Didascalion of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts. Translated with an Introduction and Notes*, RC: SS 64 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

¹⁶ Did. 6.3.

¹⁷ Reventlow, *Biblical Interpretation*, 2.165, 170. See also Grant, *History*, 86, 87, who notes that Thomas Aquinas was of the same opinion, over against, e.g., many of the Franciscans, who placed equal emphasis on all four senses. Cf. Peter Lombard’s prologue to Romans, where he insists that “[t]o understand things more fully, one should first seek their beginning. For only then can one more easily give an account of the purpose of something, having first learned its origin.” (English translation by Ian Christopher Levy et al., *The Bible in Medieval Tradition: The Letter to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013], 59). Martin, *Biblical Truths*, 4–5, slightly misrepresents the cultural location of such methodological prioritization of the historical in the theological project when pointing to the modern period for its origin. Better, it seems to me, would be to acknowledge the very real methodological developments between the “periods” (of course, there never were “periods” in history), but at the same time note continuity in concern and approach. See further below.

historical as the precondition for a spiritual sense, the latter of which can only emerge for the faithful interpreter.¹⁸ While Luther's approach to the revelatory character of biblical texts differed from those of many other catholic exegetes, both contemporary and those before him, Luther was thus not the first to understand the importance of the historical for theology. Importantly, a historical understanding of the text for Luther is not immediately related to the faith-status of the interpreter, whereas revelation – the disclosure of the Word of God, which is essentially Christological – is dependent on a macro-hermeneutical decision on the part of the interpreter in favor of *spiritus*.¹⁹

For Luther, then, the full meaning of the biblical texts emerges from an interpretive matrix modelled on two senses of Scripture, which correspond to two ways of being in the world: *coram mundo* (according to the world) and *coram deo* (according to God). The latter is, one could say, interrelated with the former in the interpretive enterprise in that the historical/literal can be arrived at apart from the spiritual, arguably creating a hermeneutical space where knowledge, regardless of religious and other traditions, such as interpretations by Jewish scholars and humanists, may be taken into account and incorporated into Christian theology.²⁰ Seeking understanding of the historical through listening to the Other was not new to the sixteenth century, though. Determining the historical sense of a biblical passage from the Hebrew Bible in dialogue with the work of Jewish scholars, for example, was a matter of course already to authorities like Jerome. The practice continued well into the Middle Ages, as Grant observes. Indeed, some, such as Andrew of St. Victor (d. 1175), even foregrounded Jewish interpretations of the historical sense in his own work, at times explicitly favoring these over against those of his own Christian predecessors.²¹

From a twenty-first century Christian theological point of view, then, as Western biblical studies developed from the above hermeneutical trajectories and was further filtered through the academic culture fostered by the Enlight-

¹⁸ See above, n. 11.

¹⁹ Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 33. As Jeanrond notes, Luther's reasoning here is circular: reading biblical texts provokes an existential decision for or against "spirit" (macro-level), and only on this basis can the interpreter move on to detailed theological, or spiritual, interpretation on the micro-level.

²⁰ Or, as Brown argues in his *Critical Meaning*, x, taking such a view to what many would understand as its logical conclusion, historical knowledge "does not come from revelation," making the search for historical knowledge independent of the religious or non-religious orientation of the interpreter, while still being useful for the theologian. Indeed, as Brown notes, biblical scholarship "is not an option but a necessity, and its results are critical for Christians, the Church, and the Churches" (ibid.).

²¹ Grant, *History*, 84–85. On Andrew of St. Victor as a biblical interpreter, with special attention to his Jewish sources, see Gerry A. C. Hadfield, "Andrew of St. Victor, A Twelfth Century Hebraist: An Investigation of his Works and Sources." A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Theology of the University of Oxford (Oxford, St. Hugh's College, 1971), esp. pp. 142–162.

enment,²² it is hardly surprising, and it does not seem entirely unreasonable either, that, a) current theological sense-making projects include serious consideration of historical understandings of biblical texts; that, b) consequently, theological hermeneutics is indirectly dependent on historical methodologies and discourses, which are themselves unrelated to the interpreter's denominational priorities or normative aspirations; and that, c) the literal can never be the endpoint of the theological enterprise, as it seeks insight and locates truth both within and beyond the historical.²³

Turning now to the second approach based on foundational convictions related to the nature of the text mentioned above – understanding Paul's letters as ancient literature like any other ancient literature with no concern for their potentially revelatory properties – its relationship to its theological parent body may be clarified as an exclusive focus on the area of study under (b), the historical.²⁴ Such a narrowing of the focus does not, however, define this approach as less concerned with the issue of usefulness, as we shall return to discuss in more detail below. Historical Biblical studies, and for our purposes in this book, Pauline studies, whether as part of the theological enterprise or undertaken in isolation from it, may be described as an “ecumenical”²⁵ conversation room of sorts, in which is cultivated a common set of game rules and tools for reconstruction independent of religious or non-religious concerns and identities.

²² Of course, as the historical-critical project developed in especially the 19th and 20th centuries, there have been tensions between scholarship and church, just as such tension was accentuated during the period of the Reformation in the 16th century. Such tension is created not only based on diverging epistemological and philosophical preferences, but is, arguably, related to the issue of authority, which in turn is intertwined with the institutional context in which the interpretive activities are carried out. Strained relations, however, do not negate the fact that from their earliest existence, historical claims have been part of the church's message; history as such is not the issue. For discussion of the rise of the modern historical-critical method, see, e.g., Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Theology and Historical-Critical Method From Spinoza to Käsemann* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); cf. Sheila Greeve Davaney, *Historicism: The Once and Future Challenge for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006); Martin, *Biblical Truths*, 3–30.

²³ This has been so not only throughout the history of the church, but was so already for the authors of the New Testament texts themselves, including Paul, as they turned to the Jewish Scriptures to seek a divinely revealed understanding of the Jesus event and its implications. Examples of the latter are, of course, too numerous to list, but see, e.g., Gal 4:24 (cf. discussion in Dieter Mitternacht, *Forum für Sprachlose: Eine kommunikationspsychologische und epistolärrhetorische Untersuchung des Galaterbriefs*, ConBNT 30 [Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1999], 220–225); Matt 4:14; Acts 15:15. The historical/literal, as claimed or reconstructed, is a necessary but not sufficient factor in the theological interpretation, as also emphasized by Krister Stendahl, “Dethroning Biblical Imperialism in Theology,” in *Reading the Bible in the Global Village: Helsinki*, ed. Heikki Räisänen et al. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 61–66.

²⁴ I will return below to other “secular” readings and uses of Paul, beyond the historical.

²⁵ In the widest sense of that word; from the Greek *oikoumenē*, referring to the inhabited earth (*gē* being implied).

The chapters in the present volume are meant to contribute to the conversation on Paul some of my thoughts on the historical (as in [b] above), adding only in Part IV reception-historically oriented suggestions about how a first-century Paul might make a difference for those in the twenty-first century who regard his letters as in some sense theologically authoritative. One of the main points I want to emphasize here, however, is that *usefulness* is not what distinguishes contemporary theologically, philosophically, or politically oriented applications of Paul from historical research on this apostle to the nations. History, too, is constructed within a contemporary matrix in which it performs certain roles. Rather, it is the shift in analytical attention from one focal point to another that allows us to differentiate between history, reception, and application, and that initiates the reconfigurations in the discursive game rules that follow with such a shift.

Since current discussions of the Pauline correspondence and its situatedness relative to Judaism have generated further conversation of these issues, as well as on bias as related to especially the historical when considered in terms of its usefulness, and even its possibility, I will address some aspects of these questions in what follows, arguing that the historical is both theoretically legitimate as distinct from the contemporary, and deeply meaningful for precisely this reason. I will then suggest a way forward, which highlights the importance for our understanding of the historical Paul the much larger question of the so-called parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity, taking us centuries beyond the apostle, towards the medieval period.

1.2 History and Its Usefulness: Paul Within and Beyond Christianity

It is, for different and sometimes conflicting reasons, in the interest of all players involved – Christians, Jews, Muslims, agnostics, atheists – that the nature of the continuously developed, negotiated, and refined game rules for historical research maintain the fundamental characteristic of being applicable across any denominational divide,²⁶ since the ancients, as history, can never be owned, only interpretively applied and used as part of other meaning-making projects, theological or otherwise.²⁷ It is this *use*, the usefulness of exegetical conclusions, that defines “exegesis” and grounds any exegetical practice in the here and now,

²⁶ On the continual development of historical criticism, see John J. Collins, *The Bible After Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 3: “Historical criticism has always been a process rather than a technical method..., it has always been a work in progress, whose design and orientation are constantly subject to change.”

²⁷ I have published some further thoughts on this issue in Anders Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew: The Narrative World of the First Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), xiii–xxxii, so will not repeat that discussion here.

establishing the conversation between the past and the present that we call the historical. It would be a mistake, then, to think that only those involved in the theological enterprise would be caught up with issues related to the usefulness of the historical, as exegesis *as such* is intertwined with the contemporary, regardless of the existential preferences of its practitioners. On the contrary, the “ecumenical” arena on which historical meaning is construed is a space where needs are identified and shared interests developed across whatever aisles there may be. Catholic,²⁸ Lutheran, Reformed, Evangelical, and Orthodox Christians from around the world²⁹ engage in exchange of knowledge and insight with one another and with Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Messianic Jews, as well as with Muslims, Agnostics, and Atheists, just to name a few of the conversation partners involved.³⁰ In other words, while basic convictions among the exegetical community about the fundamental nature of the texts may be incompatible, ideas about their usefulness in certain settings may converge, bringing reception – what the texts have done, do, or are envisaged to be able to do through us – onto center-stage as their historical meaning is explored.

²⁸ In terms of the engagement of the Catholic church in *modern* critical study of the bible, Brown, *Critical Meaning*, ix, identifies three basic phases of the 1900s, of which the first was dominated by its rejection (1900–1940), the second by a reluctant acceptance, with some effects visible in the Second Vatican Council (1940–1970), and the third, during which he sees “the painful assimilation of those implications [of historical criticism] for Catholic doctrine, theology, and practice” (1970–2000). Other Christians have joined the conversation more recently, including Orthodox scholars. The latest addition is likely that of Muslim scholars, still at the very beginning of making their voices heard in the context of biblical studies; see, e.g., Reza Aslan, *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Random House, 2013).

²⁹ The scholarly community is still struggling with turning itself truly global, experiencing even at the beginning of the twenty-first century a heavy emphasis on voices from Western cultures. Despite the best of intentions and a range of measures taken to implement further and deeper the ideal of a global scholarly conversation, even the major societies, such as the Society of Biblical Studies (SBL) and the Society for New Testament Studies (SNTS), struggle to achieve their goals in this regard. But the future for both societies looks very promising. Challenges along the way will include theoretical and methodological issues, for sure, as different epistemologies meet and engage in conversation and debate. In this regard, and from a postcolonial perspective, the work of R.S. Sugirtharajah has been important for moving the field forward (see, e.g., *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001]; idem, ed., *Still at the Margins: Biblical Scholarship Fifteen Years after the Voices From the Margins* [London: T&T Clark, 2008]). See also Mary F. Foskett and Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan, eds. *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006).

³⁰ Of course, outside the academic world, non-Christians have used New Testament writings in various ways in their own projects, sometimes negatively, but also, as in Gandhi’s case, in positive normative ways. See, e.g., William W. Emilsen, ed., *Gandhi’s Bible* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2001), in which is collected many of the references Gandhi made to the Hebrew Bible and New Testament in his writings and speeches. While the Gospel of Matthew, and especially the Sermon on the Mount, is at the center of much of Gandhi’s engagement with biblical texts, the Pauline corpus is by no means marginal to his thinking; see pp. 143–164, covering Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and 1 Thessalonians.

The historical Paul matters, thus, because he is useful to people from various backgrounds and for a variety of reasons, some of which overlap across religious, denominational, and socio-political interests. But before we move on to identify some of the concerns that stimulate the formation of new interpretive “guilds” that operate across the aisles, there is yet another aspect of the historical project that I suggest should be part of the discussion, which relates to the accessibility of the historical and the ethical dimensions related to the project as such.

While ethics and normativity are usually thought of as issues activated in relation to the usefulness of exegesis, it seems to me that the historical project in and of itself carries within it an ethical dimension, intertwined with a fundamental aspect of the hermeneutical. For in the historical, like in other contemporary cultures not our own, we find the Other; the ones who are not like us, who do not speak like us, who do not act like us. Our initial decision to want to hear voices other than our own is, at its core, an ethical decision; a decision implying a sense of humility, a willingness to listen, and a recognition of the intrinsic value of the Other as a person, apart from whatever we believe they can help us with. It is also an acknowledgement of our own limitations and our need of the Other to make sense of, and at times challenge and change the world we inhabit, as we reach for and aim to translate the historical into contemporary idiom for application. This will-to-knowledge and insight, paired with the willingness to listen that comes with respect for the otherness of those we seek to understand, be it Paul or those he portrayed as his opponents, is a hermeneutical posture without which the historical project would be seriously destabilized. History is not only about methodology and interests; it is also about attitude. At its core lies the question: “How can we be just to the text?”³¹

No one can claim perfection, of course, in any of this; truth in history is, as it is in science and, indeed also in theology,³² necessarily provisional. But there is, when encountering the past, a significant epistemological and attitudinal difference between the absolutizing of relativism,³³ and the desire to seek, with oth-

³¹ Werner G. Jeanrond, private communication, December 5 2021. While our conversation concerned hermeneutical issues much wider than the historical, I believe this question very much applies to the exegetical endeavour too, as embedded within the broader concern to understand ourselves as interpretive and relational beings.

³² Cf. Martin, *Biblical Truths*, 37.

³³ A somewhat oxymoronic position to take, some would say, and also, others would add, when generalized and politicized as in our time, an understanding of that which we ostensibly would share (such as evidence-based knowledge about what happened in the US capital on January 20, 2017, or on January 6, 2021), which effectively undermines the foundational discourses and processes on which are built the societies we inhabit, and which we interpret and debate.

ers,³⁴ the voice of the Other.³⁵ Depending on the fundamental choice taken with regard to this issue, two very different discourses emerge, creating separate playing fields with different game rules which, at their core, are incompatible. It seems to me that the idea that the nature of all exegesis, in one way or another, is limited to the individual and autobiographical leads to a rather pessimistic worldview in which communication is, ultimately, rendered impossible.³⁶ From such an epistemological posture emerges, it would seem, a landscape in which isolated selves can do little more than to project themselves onto textual canvases, denying the Other any autonomous power to assist them in their meaning-making projects; indeed, reducing the dynamic space created as a reader breathes life into letters to little more than an echo-chamber amplifying voices utterly foreign to any ancient soundscape. What, then, if this be true, would happen to scholarly interaction? Would it not turn into an exercise amounting to little more than an argument between people about people, in essence a proxy war fought on Pauline land, which suffers accordingly, and innocently? I, for one, would aim for a different path. I choose to believe, and feel reassured by experience, that the will to understand may carry the disciplined self beyond the walls within which are found the soothing but sepulchral comfort offered by alternating mirror images, and out into the previously unknown. Such an approach in

³⁴ As historian and public intellectual Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (London: Vintage, 2015), 153–154, has pointed out, it is neither superior intelligence nor better tool-making abilities that distinguish homo sapiens from other animals, making it possible for her to conquer the planet. Rather, it is her extraordinary and unique ability to cooperate flexibly with large numbers of individuals beyond her own immediate group. As he puts it: “Intelligence and toolmaking were obviously very important as well. But if humans had not learned to cooperate flexibly in large numbers, our crafty brains and deft hands would still be splitting flint stones rather than uranium atoms.” Arguably, what is true in physics and other fields is, *mutatis mutandis*, valid for history too: cooperation beyond one’s own group is a necessary condition enabling progress.

³⁵ Cf. Stephen J. Chester, *Reading Paul with the Reformers: Reconciling Old and New Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 1–2: “Historical criticism is the better of these alternatives, for skepticism about the possibility of validity in interpretation is itself vulnerable to skeptical evaluation. To interpret with validity is difficult and challenging. Nevertheless, we insist it is impossible because ultimately the only voices we can bear to hear speaking are our own. For all its weaknesses, historical criticism does at least genuinely *seek* to hear the other.” On historical criticism in a postmodern age, see also Collins, *Bible After Babel* (above, n. 26), and cf. Stendahl, “Dethroning,” 63: “I am now aware that also description is an imaginative and creative task. But I remain critical of those who use the impossibility of objectivity as a license for not trying, and for not raising questions, like: What did Paul mean, or think, or intend – or think that he thought? And what did the recipients of his epistles hear him say? Nor does the stating of one’s presuppositions, what now is called ‘where I come from,’ dispense the scholar from the descriptive task, however imaginative the descriptive process might be.”

³⁶ Pace Dorothy Jean Weaver, *The Irony of Power: The Politics of God within Matthew’s Narrative* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2017), xiii.

no way simplifies things, methodologically, but it does imply that communication is, in a real sense, meaningful.³⁷

If we, then, allow for the possibility of the historical – understood as an exercise in interpretive approximation and cross-cultural translation within an ethically charged discourse from which, methodologically, the theologically normative has been excised along with ideologically oriented concerns for its contemporary reception, allowing participation in the conversation for any and all regardless of their personal, political, religious or non-religious circumstances and preferences – if we allow for the historical defined accordingly, which historical Paul matters the most to us, as we select our object of study? The answer seems obvious: the one who we perceive to be the most powerful force for whatever contemporary project we are invested in (reception). In cultures where historical claims – paired with a preference for original meanings, all embedded in social settings where the canonical carries weight – are perceived as rhetorically effective, that means the first-century Paul of the seven undisputed letters, sometimes seen also in Acts, but rarely, many would say, in the disputed letters.

Other historical, canonical and non-canonical, perceptions of Paul, including those of the early second century, Late Antiquity, the Medieval, Reformation, and Modern periods, lack, for us, the persuasive power which lies embedded in portraits based on the Seven – effectively creating a historical canon within the Christian normative canon – *unless* they can be claimed to reflect in one way or another the Paul of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. Why would there otherwise be such debate about, e.g., Reformation readings of Paul, if the first-century Paul would not have a hermeneutical advantage above Luther's – an advantage that, somewhat ironically, is dependent on and ultimately developed from the latter's own interpretive approach?³⁸

³⁷ I believe Martin, *Biblical Truths*, 33–34, may overstate his case as he outlines his position as a self-designated postmodernist, claiming as the basis of his epistemological conviction that certainty, or firm, secure and incontrovertible knowledge, can never be had. Few of those who see the value of the historical would disagree with this. Certainty does not define the historical, and certainty in the historical defines neither theology nor revelation or, for that matter, salvation. Similarly, as Martin claims that “it is interpretation ‘all the way down,’” and that “there is no ‘meaning’ ‘back there’ in history or ‘in the text’ to be uncovered *before* ‘interpretation’ can then take off. It is all interpretation” (33), few historians, or theologians arguing for the importance of the historical, would, perhaps with some modification of the wording, disagree. Uncovering historical meaning – the voice of the Other – is itself an interpretive exercise, just as all cultures not our own are understood by us only through an act of interpretation based on our own location and experiences. This does *not* mean, however, that cross-cultural communication is impossible or that nothing outside ourselves can, or should, be approached and understood on its own terms through approximation and correlation. It is methodology (and posture) “all the way down.”

³⁸ Those resisting Reformation readings of Paul as incompatible with the first-century Paul must still, of course, acknowledge that the very fact that we are able to distinguish between these Pauls on historical grounds depends on the hermeneutical and epistemological

Historical claims have roles to play even in contemporary approaches moving beyond the historical and into the philosophical. This is evident from the fact that, while several philosophers have recently appropriated Paul for their meaning-making projects,³⁹ few of them have, despite their turn away from historical discourse, chosen to give priority to, e.g., the Acts of Paul, the Correspondence between Paul and Seneca, or the Apocalypse of Paul (*Visio Pauli*).⁴⁰ Even for those who do not belong to the religious tradition which normatively defines the canonical, the canonical/historical Paul may thus still be useful, creating a discursive platform for non-religious (normative) conversations.⁴¹ Indeed, as the work of Karin B. Neutel shows, Paul carries weight also beyond philosophical debates and religious communities, as historical claims about what he really meant on the issue of male circumcision are appropriated in current political debates in Europe and the US on whether the performance on underaged children of this ritual, crucial to both Jews and Muslims, should be banned.⁴²

foundations once laid by the Reformers themselves. The most eloquent spokesperson for the “Lutheran Paul” – as being an echo of the first-century Paul – is, in my view, Stephen Westerholm. See especially his *Perspectives New and Old on Paul: The “Lutheran Paul” and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), and the chapters on Paul in, idem, *Law and Ethics in Early Judaism and the New Testament*, WUNT 383 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017). While there were several portraits of Paul among the Reformers on the one hand, and there was some continuity between the Medieval and the Reformation periods on the other, Chester, *Reading Paul*, 4–5, has argued that what happens as the Reformers interpret Paul represents a sufficiently sharp departure from their past, and from their contemporary colleagues within the Catholic tradition, that we can speak of a “shared exegetical grammar” on the part of the former.

³⁹ See, e.g., Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: La fondation de l’universalisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), translated into English by Ray Brassier: *Saint Paul: The foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Jacob Taubes, *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus: Vorträge, gehalten an der Forschungsstätte der evangelischen Studiengemeinschaft in Heidelberg, 23.-27. Februar 1987* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1993). Translated by Dana Hollander as *The Political Theology of Paul* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004). For analysis and discussion of Pauline reception in philosophy, see the recent work of Ole Jakob Løland: *The Reception of Paul the Apostle in the Works of Slavoy Žižek* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018); idem, *Pauline Ugliness: Jacob Taubes and the Turn to Paul* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020). See also Karl Olav Sandnes, *Var Paulus Kristen? Har kirken forstått hans teologi og tro?* (Oslo: Efreml Forlag, 2021), 235–237; in Norwegian, and Magnus Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul: A Student’s Guide to Recent Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 196–200.

⁴⁰ For an introduction, information on manuscripts, editions, and an English translation of these texts, see J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation Based on M. R. James* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁴¹ For a wider application of such explorations, see the contributions in Anna Glazova and Paul North, eds., *Messianic Thought Outside Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

⁴² Karin B. Neutel’s project is entitled *The Letter, the Spirit, and the Foreskin: Perceptions of Paul in the Contemporary Debate on Male Circumcision*. On this topic, see esp. Karin B.

The historical voice of Paul, as understood by politicians and reconstructed by historians, is thus active in current ethically and politically charged debates and decision-making processes with direct relevance for how societies structure themselves in terms of the coexistence of people belonging to different religious communities. For those versed in Jewish/Christian relations this is not news.⁴³ Throughout Christian history, Paul has been called upon as Christian identity has been supersessionally defined in innumerable sermons, when pogroms have been launched, and anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic legislation has been put in place.⁴⁴ It is no coincidence that Jewish New Testament scholar Mark D. Nanos dedicates his monograph on Galatians “To the victims of the Shoah,” and adds:

I want to acknowledge the victims of certain interpretations of Paul’s voice, especially those who have suffered the Shoah. Their suffering cannot be separated from prejudices resulting from those interpretations anymore than it can be wholly attributed to them.⁴⁵

Neutel, “Shedding Religious Skin: An Intersectional Analysis of the Claim that Male Circumcision Limits Religious Freedom,” in *The Complexity of Conversion: Intersectional Perspectives on Religious Change in Antiquity and Beyond*, ed. Valérie Nicolet Anderson and Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, Studies in Ancient Religion and Culture (Sheffield: Equinox, 2021), 21–39. See also the online essay, “Not in the Body,” the *Crossing and Conversion* forum on *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere* (2018) <https://tif.ssrc.org/2018/04/23/not-in-the-body/>. Regarding historical aspects, cf. eadem, “Circumcision Gone Wrong: Paul’s Message as a Case of Ritual Disruption,” *Neot* 50.2 (2016), 373–396, and the special issue of *JJMJS* on circumcision edited by her: *JJMJS* 8 (2021). See also Peppard, “Paul Would be Proud,” 273–275, who mentions more specifically the situation in Germany, Sweden, and Denmark.

⁴³ Covering a range of topics, the contributions to Stanley E. Porter and Brook W.R. Pearson, eds., *Christian-Jewish Relations Through the Centuries*, JSNTSup 192 (London: T&T Clark, 2004) span the entire period from the first to the 21st century and may serve the purpose of giving an (eclectic) overview of some of the issues and developments. Very helpful as a reference work is Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn, eds., *A Dictionary of Jewish–Christian Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁴⁴ This is mostly a European and Russian phenomenon, but anti-Jewish discourses developed in Europe spread beyond its borders through colonialism and mission. In order to understand receptions of Paul in this regard it is crucial to gain a deeper comprehension of Jewish history mainly in Europe, not only in Late Antiquity but perhaps especially from the Spanish inquisition onward. On this period, see most recently Einhart Lorenz, *Jødenes historie i Europa: Fra den spanske inkvisitionen til mellomkrigstiden* (Oslo: Dreyers Forlag, 2020; in Norwegian), which reconstructs developments which eventually culminated in the disaster of Nazism and the unfathomable losses of lives and cultures that it entailed. On this period, to complement Lorenz’s reconstruction, see also Martin Goodman, *A History of Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 353–534, and combine this with the important chapters on the relevant time period in David Biale, ed., *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002). For a brief overview of Christian anti-Judaism, or anti-Semitism as the author prefers to name these irrational attitudes and deeds, see Eric W. Gritsch, *Martin Luther’s Anti-Semitism: Against his Better Judgment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 1–31. On the Holocaust and Christianity, Carol Rittner, Stephen D. Smith, and Irena Steinfeldt, eds., *The Holocaust and the Christian World: Reflections on the Past, Challenges for the Future* (London: Kuperard, 2000) provides a starting point, leaving room for reflection beyond the historical.

⁴⁵ Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul’s Letter in First-Century Context* (Min-

While not all scholars concerned with re-reading Paul explicitly recognize in their writings their own ethos, many feel the same urgency for a call to improved relations between Jews and Christians, as they understand their historical work to have relevance for the effort of countering the continuing presence of anti-Judaism in churches and societies. Christian anti-Judaism did not disappear after the Second World War, and anti-Semitism is certainly not only a far-right problem; it extends from right to left on the political spectrum, and it is currently on the rise in both Europe and North America.⁴⁶

neapolis: Fortress, 2002), ix. Daniel R. Langton, *The Apostle Paul in the Jewish Imagination: A Study on Modern Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 89, describes Nanos's contribution to Pauline studies as located within the context of an "interest and concern for harmonious interfaith relations."

⁴⁶ This situation includes Scandinavia, where I currently live and work. For Sweden, see the study by Henrik Bachner, *Återkomsten: Antisemitism i Sverige efter 1945* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1999; in Swedish), English summary on pp. 468–478. See also the analysis of Jewish self-perception in Sweden just after the war, with special attention given to Zionism and the effect in Sweden of the creation of the state of Israel, in Karin Sjögren, *Judar i det svenska folkhemmet: Minne och identitet i Judisk krönika 1948–1958* (Stockholm: Symposium, 2001; in Swedish), English summary on pp. 175–184. While Bachner treats anti-Semitism in the post-war situation, Lars M. Andersson's monumental study of caricatures of Jews in Swedish comic press presents a historical context covering the pre-war years between 1900 and 1930: *En jude är en jude är en jude... : Representationer av 'juden' i svensk skämtpress omrking 1900–1930* (Nordic Academic Press, 2000; in Swedish), English summary on pp. 589–598. As Andersson shows, the anti-Semitic sentiments expressed in the press during this period was part of a process to create a Swedish national identity, which took shape within the larger anti-Semitic culture that developed in Europe at the time. "Swedishness" was construed as the opposite to Jewishness, such that anti-Semitism became important for the project of describing that which was considered Swedish. Considering the fact that Sweden had a state church at the time (and until 2000; the Church of Sweden, Lutheran), it is interesting, if disturbing, to note that this type of hermeneutics has characterized Christian identity formation from Late Antiquity onwards too; being Christian has been understood as the opposite of being Jewish. Or as the Humanist Erasmus (1466–1536) wrote: "If to hate the Jews is the proof of genuine Christians, then we are all excellent Christians" (quoted from Gritsch, *Luther's Anti-Semitism*, 24.) The history of the Jews in Norway is described in the classic work by Oskar Mendelsohn, *Jødenes historie i Norge gjennom 300 år*. Republished with an Introduction by Espen Søbye (Oslo: Forlaget Press, 2019 [1969–1986]). See also the population report by the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies, edited by Christhard Hoffmann and Vibeke Moe, *Attitudes towards Jews and Muslims in Norway 2017. Population survey and minority study*. Most recently, see Amy-Jill Levine, who gave the Nils Alstrup Dahl Memorial Lecture at the Faculty of Theology in the University of Oslo in 2019, published as, Amy-Jill Levine, "When the Bible becomes Weaponized: Detecting and Disarming Jew-hatred," *ST* (2021): 182–204. For Denmark, see Martin Schwarz Lausten's study on Danish Christian views on Jews, as represented by bishops, priests, and university theologians in the first half of the 19th century, and the position of Danish Jews in the Danish constitution: *Frie jøder? Forholdet mellem kristne og jøder i Danmark fra Frihedsbrevet 1814 til Grundloven 1849* (Copenhagen: Anis, 2005); in Danish, German summary on pp. 565–575. Gritsch, *Luther's Anti-Semitism*, 4, comments on "the new anti-Semitism," and notes in this context the issue of the prohibition of kosher slaughter in Norway and Sweden, as well as in Switzerland.

Taken together, these examples (several more could be added) show that in many contexts in which the historical is an integral part of the theological, the historical/canonical Paul is critical not only to Christians and Philosophers (Jewish, atheist, or otherwise), but also, secondarily and more generally, to Jews and Muslims living in societies where Christians constitute the majority.⁴⁷ This is the context within which most scholars of Paul work, and which contributes to the forming of interpretive alliances across denominational divides when new historical understandings of his letters are analyzed into being. One of these coalitions is the relatively recent trajectory initially referred to as the Radical Perspective on Paul, but which is now better known as Paul Within Judaism (PwJ).⁴⁸ This is not the place to expound on the history of Pauline interpretation, and how PwJ relates in more detail to previous scholarship.⁴⁹ My concern here is simply to highlight this interpretive “guild,” if we may call it thus, as precisely one such coalition of Pauline scholars whose “members” come from very diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds, including but not limited to Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed, Pentecostal, and Evangelical Christians, as well as Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Messianic Jews, agnostics and atheists. So, one might ask, what exactly brings these scholars, these historians and exegetes, together? In light of some of the critique levelled against PwJ, suggesting that these are scholars who are so preoccupied with post-holocaust Jewish/Christian relations that their historical analyses of Paul result in little more than veiled ideological musings intended for consumption in contemporary religious dialogue settings,⁵⁰ a few words on the issue of collec-

⁴⁷ Cf. Langton, *Apostle Paul*, 19, commenting on the perceived ambivalence in the Pauline correspondence towards the law and the Jewish people: “For the historically-sensitive Jew, however, the issues of Paul’s teaching and influence, as derived from his letters and from the Book of Acts, have become central to the quest for an understanding of the roots of Christian enmity towards the Jew. Upon such verses could be said to hang the history of the Jewish people in the Christian world.” While Christians need to deal also with islamophobia (and Muslims need to work actively to counter negative and false stereotypes of especially Jews but also of Christians), Christians have a special and primary responsibility to understand better their relationship to Jews and Judaism. The urgency of the matter lies not only in the reality of Christian anti-Judaism in history and today, but also in the fact that Christian holy scriptures, most of which are shared with Jews and all of which deal with Jews and Judaism in one way or another, are read publicly so regularly and on a global scale that not a single minute passes by without something pertaining to Jews and Judaism is communicated in Christian settings somewhere on earth. What Christians teach on Judaism matters.

⁴⁸ This is also the name of a Section at the Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Studies, which had its initial meeting (then under the name of Paul and Judaism) in Atlanta in 2010. The trajectory has, however, a somewhat longer history, developing insights from scholars such as Krister Stendahl, Franz Mussner, John G. Gager, and Stanley Stowers; see Jacob P.B. Mortensen, *Paul Among the Gentiles: A ‘Radical’ Reading of Romans*, NET 28 (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag, 2018), 21–28, and, for a more extensive discussion, Magnus Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul*, esp. 127–163.

⁴⁹ For this, see Magnus Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul*.

⁵⁰ So N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013),

tive bias are in order. For, while individual bias exists here as much as in any other scholarly activity, it is, in my view, misleading to claim that the perspective *as such* is a result of a collective, biased approach to the Pauline corpus.

1.3 Paul Within Judaism: The Issue of Collective Bias

Beginning with motivation, I believe it is fair to say that what brings Paul Within Judaism scholars together is, more than anything else, that they, independently and/or in conversation with one another, have reached the conclusion that, broadly speaking, previous academic (and traditionally Christian) interpretations of Paul fail to convince historically when the letters – the Seven – are read within a first-century Jewish and Greco-Roman setting, i.e., the setting in which Paul’s thinking was formed and into which he spoke. Based on extensive elaboration of the variegated forms of Judaism that were around when Paul wrote, and considering the nature of ancient Mediterranean societies, most if not all conclude, from different perspectives and based on a variety of different types of arguments (on which not everyone agrees⁵¹) that the Paul of the undisputed letters was and remained a Jew, practiced a specific form of Judaism, and turned exclusively to non-Jews with a message which included them in a larger supra-local community of Christ-oriented Jews without formal “conversion,” i.e., without them becoming Jews. A joining of the ways rather than a parting of the ways, thus; an idea and a process that are further emphasized by the fact that terms like “Christianity” and “Christians” were not invented when Paul wrote – there was no “Christianity” to which Paul could have “converted” from Judaism, or to which his followers could have turned from their local (non-Jewish) cults. The movement, propelled by apocalyptic-eschatological fervor, went in the other direction. Preparing for the End, Paul argued into existence and also

1129; see discussion by Paula Fredriksen, “Review of N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013),” *CBQ* 77 (2015): 387–391, esp. 389. For an analysis of N.T. Wright’s reading of Paul as supersessionist – despite his own claims that his reading is not supersessionist – see Joel Kaminsky and Mark Reasoner, “The Meaning and Telos of Israel’s Election: An Interfaith Response to N.T. Wright’s Reading of Paul,” *HTR* 112:4 (2019): 421–446.

⁵¹ As noted also by Mortensen, *Paul Among the Gentiles*, 28–29. A common misunderstanding is precisely this, that all who identify with the PwJ perspective would agree on all aspects in their reconstructions. Perhaps nowhere is this clearer than in the common critique of PwJ, mostly from Christian scholars, concerned with the so-called Sonderweg approach, i.e., the idea that Paul would have reckoned with two salvific trajectories, one for Christ-followers and another for Jews who have declined the Christ offer. While some scholars aligned with PwJ perspectives do argue that this is what Paul aims to communicate (e.g., Lloyd Gaston, John G. Gager, Pamela Eisenbaum), others do not (Krister Stendahl [*pace* Mortenson, *Paul Among the Gentiles*, 23], Mark D. Nanos, Paula Fredriksen, Magnus Zetterholm). I count myself among the latter.

embodied the idea that he himself together with other Jewish Christ-followers constituted the core of Israel, a remnant,⁵² and into this remnant gentiles were invited, *qua* gentiles,⁵³ to join the Jews in a redemptive project made possible by the life, death, and, crucially, resurrection of Jesus the messiah. These are historical conclusions, based on historical arguments, and should therefore be debated as such, referring to historical methodologies and revealing weaknesses in historical argumentation. Sweeping accusations about ideological motivations are unwarranted and unhelpful; like most *ad hominem* arguments, they do not bring the discussion forward.⁵⁴

Second, not all PwJ scholars are involved in Jewish/Christian dialogue. Indeed, not all even identify as Christian or Jewish. In fact, while the reconstructions offered that align with basic PwJ interpretations as outlined above may be perceived as useful by those who advance them, they understand this usefulness in very diverse ways. Thus, third, considering that exegesis and historical reconstruction constitute an inter-subjective conversation, it is in fact rather surprising to see such overall agreement on a Jewish Paul between people with such diverse backgrounds and socio-religious and political preferences. If anything, this diversity in itself may speak in favor of the historical value of the reconstructions offered, and a confirmation that historical discourse, with its specific game rules, is actually capable of moving the conversation forward. It is, after all, not long ago that exegesis was undertaken in comparative isolation, based on denominational preferences, so that it was possible, sometimes even easy, to tell, e.g., Lutheran exegesis from Catholic.

Fourth, also following up on the second point above, some of those involved in Jewish/Christian dialogue, both Jewish and Christian scholars, feel hesitant towards reading Paul, or any New Testament text, as Jewish texts, or “within

⁵² See especially William S. Campbell, “‘A Remnant of Them Will Be Saved’ (Rom 9:27): Understanding Paul’s Conception of the Faithfulness of God to Israel,” *JJMJS* 2 (2015): 79–101.

⁵³ But note here the discussion of conversion in Paul against the background of Philo’s discourse about proselytes by Per Jarle Bekken, *Paul’s Negotiation of Abraham in Galatians 3 in the Jewish Context: The Galatian Converts Lineal Descendants of Abraham and Heirs of the Promise*, BZNW 248 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021). There is a tension here in Paul between the idea that non-Jews must not be ethnically joined to the Jewish people, on the one hand, but on the other that they nevertheless should be thought of, when in Christ, as being made children of Abraham, and thus heirs of God’s promise to Abraham; a theological position made reality through ritual enactment, with clear ethno-religious overtones. “Grace,” thus, as intertwined with inheritance, seems therefore indeed to be an ethnic category in Paul, just as it is in Matthew, even though, in my opinion, Matthew and Paul differ in their approach to gentile inclusion; see Anders Runesson, “Beyond Universalism and Particularism: Rethinking Paul and Matthew on Gentile Inclusion,” in *Paul and Matthew Among Jews and Gentiles*, 99–111.

⁵⁴ Such accusations could, of course, easily be turned back on the accuser, trapping him or her in the texture of the larger non-historical discourses in which their own reconstructions have been formed. See, e.g., Fredriksen on Wright, in “Review of N.T. Wright,” 387.

Judaism,” as such readings may be perceived to potentially blur contemporary boundaries between Jews and Christians, boundaries which they perceive to be important for the respective identities of both traditions as they have developed over the centuries.⁵⁵ This hesitance emerges from a similar basic understanding of the historical as part of the theological that we have discussed above, but which construes this relevance differently. Where others may see ground for mutual understanding between Jews and Christians today based on common historical roots, these scholars are wary that basic foundations of their own tradition, foundations that are perceived to serve their communities well, might be challenged in unwanted ways. A problem with either reaction and suggested use, positive or negative, is, however, as we noted above for Christian tradition (p. 23) – and in this case, what is true for Christian interpretation is true also for Jewish – that history can never be the end-point in theology or more generally in hermeneutics activated for contemporary application. One can, objectively speaking, never enter the same river twice, which leaves hermeneutical movement as the only interpretive solution to the (normative) problem of continuity. We can learn from history; we cannot, by definition, be bound by it.⁵⁶

Importantly, then, responding to the criticism of a collective bias, fifth, we must conclude that it is the historical, what the medieval exegetes would have

⁵⁵ Cf. Jennifer Nyström, “Reading Romans, Constructing Paul(s): A Conversation Between Messianic Jews in Jerusalem and Paul Within Judaism Scholars,” (Ph.D. Thesis, Lund University, 2021), 40: “contemporary [Jewish/Christian] dialogue is built on the sharp distinction between the two faith systems in their developed forms of Rabbinic Judaism and Gentile Christianity. David Novak, a prominent Jewish theologian active in dialogue circles, argues for this strict boundary by claiming, ‘The ultimate truth claims of Judaism and Christianity are not only different but mutually exclusive.... One cannot live as a Jew and a Christian simultaneously.’ Messianic Jews blur this boundary line by being perceived as being both-and – ‘the dangerous ones in between.’” The quote from Novak is from David Novak, *Talking with Christians: Musings of a Jewish Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 6. The phrase “the dangerous ones in between” is from John G. Gager, “Jews, Christians and the Dangerous ones in Between,” *Interpretation in Religion*, ed. Shlomo Biederman and Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *Philosophy and Religion 2* (New York: Brill 1992), 249–257. One may note here that Novak in his distinction between Judaism and Christianity echoes Ignatius of Antioch, *Magn.* 10:3, a passage postdating Paul by a century (or more, depending on the dating preferred) and identified by many scholars as the earliest indication of a “Christian” identity understood as separate from and incompatible with Judaism.

⁵⁶ Or, as Brown, *Critical Meaning*, x (cf. 1–44), argues, from a Christian perspective: “[W]hile the biblical ‘word of God’ is inspired (and thus *of* God and not merely about Him), every *word* of it comes from human beings and is conditioned by their limitations. Because of the human element, one needs scientific, literary, and historical methods to determine what the ancient authors meant when they wrote – that knowledge does not come from revelation. But the meaning of the Bible as the Church’s collection of sacred and normative books goes beyond what the authors *meant* in a particular book. Not only scholarship but also church tradition and teaching enters into the complex issue of what the Bible *means* to Christians.” On Brown’s understanding of “meant” and “mean” as interaction between the literal, canonical, and biblical senses, where the literal is best defined as “a conscience and control” and the normative is placed with the biblical, see esp. pp. 30–35.

called the literal sense, that is bringing these researchers together – either as self-professed PwJ scholars or as aligning with PwJ reconstructions but unwilling to submit to labels, as such by their very nature carry their own problems and generalizations⁵⁷ – *not* a shared hermeneutical program or theological or ideological configurations aiming at addressing specific contemporary social, religious or theological issues. Simply put, PwJ scholars do not want the same thing with their first-century Pauls. Indeed, they not only come from different backgrounds and entertain varying concerns related to the contemporary; even as they agree on the historical, they sometimes stand in direct opposition to one another and reject both the specific applications of the other as well as the basic hermeneutical presuppositions that led to those applications. It is enough to point to the differences between the hermeneutical sensitivities and theological positions of Lutherans and Evangelicals, or between Orthodox and Messianic Jews, to demonstrate this point.⁵⁸

More could be said, of course. Indeed, this development of a genuinely diverse group of scholars agreeing on fundamental issues of historical interpretation and reconstruction – a phenomenon which is quite recent in biblical studies more generally, and certainly a far cry from previous periods when interpretive *Schulen* with their denominationally more narrowly defined contours were formed on the European continent – could be a topic of study in its own right. What I would like to focus on here, however, in order to situate the present book not only in the scholarly discussions but also on the larger canvas of how Paul lives on in the twenty-first century, is that despite the differences among PwJ researchers, it is clear that a first-century Jewish Paul does open up, in the twenty-first century, for cross-denominational, cross-religious/non-religious, philosophical and political conversations and insights that move discussions forward also in the theological/ideological and normative fields within the groups to which the respective scholars belong.

In this regard, and in the spirit of transparency that is so important to the academic enterprise, especially as bias is discussed, in my view perhaps the most interesting potential for constructive work based on historical analysis lies embedded in Jewish/Christian relations and dialogue, but also more generally in the field of theology of religion.⁵⁹ Not only do we find with a first-century

⁵⁷ Runar Thorsteinsson, for example, does not explicitly label his work as PwJ, but has still produced a seminal study contributing to this interpretive trajectory: *Paul's Interlocutor in Romans 2: Function and Identity in the Context of Ancient Epistolography*, ConBNT 40 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2003); cf. the edited volume by Rafael Rodriguez and Matthew Thiessen, dedicated to discussing Thorsteinsson's thesis: *The So-Called Jew in Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016).

⁵⁸ On the attention that the historical PwJ perspective has received among Messianic-Jewish religious leaders, see the nuanced study by Nyström, "Reading Romans, Constructing Paul(s)."

⁵⁹ Joshua Ezra Burns, *The Christian Schism in Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Cam-

Jewish Paul in the twenty-first century an opportunity for Christians to reflect deeply on the hermeneutical options that might spring from a description of themselves as wild olive branches being nurtured by an olive tree⁶⁰ which roots and trunk – both the Old and New Testaments, metaphorically – are Israelite and Jewish. Jews, too, are presented with an occasion to engage their history and the textual treasures that it has produced as involving also those texts that were appropriated by non-Jews, the New Testament just as much as the Tanach. The insight that Paul and other New Testament texts are indeed part of Jewish history in the same way as Jesus and the early Jesus movement more generally may lead to a change in educational strategies where the New Testament becomes integrated along with other contemporary Jewish texts, as well as later Rabbinic texts, in Jewish-studies courses. If the teaching of history is the goal, that would certainly be necessary.

While Paul's writings may not be normative for the absolute majority of Jews, they are for Christians. Thus, taking seriously the historical task of their interpretation may open up ways for a deeper mutual understanding and respect between Jews and Christians beyond the Christian supersessionism and its socio-political effects, which developed from the second century onwards, and which has had, and continues to have, a normative effect on both Jews and Christians as they define themselves as not the other.⁶¹ It may also problematize

bridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 17, captures the sentiment well, as he outlines how he hopes his study will be received. While the task he has set before him is strictly historical – his “principal objective is to document a misunderstood chapter of the Jewish experience in antiquity” – he also writes “as a Jew committed to [his] religion and to the collective welfare of [his] people.” He considers “theological dialogue between Christian and Jew a matter of paramount importance to both,” but he does not claim to “engage in constructive Jewish theology vis-à-vis Christianity, much less in constructive Christian theology vis-à-vis Judaism.” Rather, his sole aim in his work is “to improve the foundation of knowledge informing those vital conciliatory efforts.” See also Stendahl, “Dethroning,” 61, who identifies “*the* most crucial challenge to the Christian theology in the years ahead” to be “[h]ow to shape a Christian theology of religions, and how to find the proper role of biblical studies in that creative task.” Such interests in the contemporary does not, of course, in and of itself mean that historical methodology has been undermined. Historical arguments should be critiqued, as noted above, using historical tools.

⁶⁰ Rom 11:17–18.

⁶¹ The theological form of triumphalism that goes under the name of “supersessionism” (from Latin, *supersedere*, “to sit above” or “be superior to”) is variously defined. I use the term in the same sense as R. Kendall Soulen, “Supersessionism,” in *Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Kessler and Wenborn, 413–414, “to refer to the traditional Christian belief that since Christ's coming the Church has taken the place of the Jewish people as God's chosen community, and that God's covenant with the Jews is now over and done. By extension, the term can be used to refer to any interpretation of Christian faith generally or the status of the Church in particular that claims or implies the abrogation or obsolescence of God's covenant with the Jewish people.” (413) Soulen has been a driving force behind the creation of the recently (2018) established *Society for Post-Supersessionist Theology* (<https://www.spostst.org/>), which, through research and discussion, is dedicated to overcoming, globally, Christian supersessionism as defined above. In 2008, Soulen wrote: “To date, North Atlantic Chris-

the common but historically untenable idea that Jewish history and Judaism can be understood in isolation from the processes that led to the rise of Christianity.

Reading Paul as a first-century Jew in the twenty-first century could thus open up for new ways of understanding current relationships between Jews and Christians, and offers material for Jews to re-envisage their pre-Rabbinic history. There are, however, also interesting developments discernible in intra-Christian ecumenical relations taking place on different levels as a consequence of the academic trajectory under discussion. As is well known, unfavorable caricatures of Jews and Judaism have been used by various Christian denominations, perhaps most famously by Luther, as rhetorical weapons aimed at delegitimizing other Christians (for Luther, the vitriol was aimed at Catholics disagreeing with him), or admonishing in sermons and written tractates congregants not to behave in ways considered sinful. “The Jews,” or “the Pharisees” become a metaphor for the (Christian) Other, the one from whom the speaker or writer wants to distance themselves.⁶² As long as historical scholarship continues to perpetuate caricatures of Jews and Pharisees through feeding to-be pastors and priests stereotypes deeply engrained in churches, especially in countries where Christianity has been or still is the dominant or state religion, division, estrangement, and antagonism will prevail; between Jews and Christians, and between Christian denominations.⁶³

It is therefore interesting to see new developments in this context, based on historical readings not only of Paul but also of other parts of the New Testament as Jewish texts. As historical aspects of the texts surface in Christian settings in this way, functioning as “a conscience and control,”⁶⁴ invective using Jews and Judaism to delegitimize others become rhetorically problematic, as also the ethical dimensions of the whole issue are highlighted in the process.⁶⁵ Indeed, in some settings, through re-readings of Paul, first-century Judaism

tians have taken the initiative in seeking post-supersessionist ways to express Christian faith; the long-term viability of their efforts will depend in part on whether and to what degree Christians in South America, Asia and Africa also begin to consider and address the fundamental theological issues at stake” (“Supersessionism,” 414).

⁶² Indeed, in traditionally Christian countries like the Scandinavian, “Jew” is sometimes used even today among younger people as a slur, although such practices are not as widespread in society as they were in the last century. It is, however, still very common for priests and pastors in their sermons to refer to “Jews” or “Pharisees” in order to exemplify ethically problematic behavior. Considering Scandinavia’s Lutheran heritage, this is as unsurprising as it is lamentable. Cf. discussion in Levine, “When the Bible Becomes Weaponized,” 182–204.

⁶³ Ecumenical implications of reading Paul are also commented on by Brant Pitre, Michael P. Barber, and Jon A. Kincaid, *Paul, A New Covenant Jew: Rethinking Pauline Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 3.

⁶⁴ Brown, *Critical Meaning*, 33.

⁶⁵ Many would refer here to Matt 7:3; cf., on another topic, the same use of this verse in Hubert G. Lock, “On Christian Mission to Jews,” in *The Holocaust and the Christian World*, ed. Rittner, Smith, and Steinfeldt, 204–206, here 206. As Brown, *Critical Meaning*, 43, suggests, “Harmony between the Church’s stance and the views of the biblical authors helps to

emerges as an ecumenically beneficial meeting point for Christians from different denominations, a positive space where agreement is sought and shared points of departure are established, theologically and otherwise.⁶⁶ Considering the immense importance of Paul for Christian theology – “other than Jesus, no figure has exerted more influence on Christian thought”⁶⁷ – re-reading Paul based on reconstructions more historically attuned to first-century Judaism has potential for progress in relationships between Christians as well as between Jews and Christians, as these hermeneutical processes in many ways are intertwined.

In sum, then, I find suggestions about a collective bias among PwJ scholars and those aligned with them unconvincing. Needless to say, this does not mean that PwJ scholars individually, myself included, are not at risk of making mistakes, such that ideas about the usefulness of Paul unduly influence the historical discourse. But such risks apply to all scholars of Paul, and, of course, to all scholars everywhere at any time and in any field.⁶⁸ The very idea of an open, denominationally unrestricted scholarly conversation is precisely to address such issues of individual bias in inter-subjective searches for historical voices. This is why all forms of diversity among scholars in terms of background and identities is key to the academic project as such. Indeed, as initially noted in this section, it is the interpretive proximity of their historical conclusions that have brought PwJ scholars together, not their religious belonging or theological preferences. We must allow for a hermeneutical situation in which a reader of Paul, whatever their background, simply find more traditional understandings of Paul incoherent or more or less “off,” experiencing such readings as contrasting

assure the Church of its apostolic continuity; occasional lack of harmony can remind the Church of the vicissitudes of history and of human limitations.”

⁶⁶ This happens in dialogue settings, but also elsewhere. One recent example is the online “Paul within Judaism group” initiated in 2015 by Dick Pruijsma, former Secretary General of the International Council of Christians and Jews, on behalf of the Council for Jewish/Christian relations of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, and dedicated to furthering ecumenical goals in the Netherlands. Scholars active in this group included, e.g., Paula Fredriksen, Peter Tomson, Mark D. Nanos, Frantisek Abel, and myself. While the group ended its work in 2016, the material produced was used in further developments which in 2019 led to a resource center for the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, providing pastors with assistance related to biblical interpretation beyond supersessionism and anti-Judaism (hosted here: <https://www.joods-christelijke-dialoog.nl/deuidaging/>; see also <https://www.joods-christelijke-dialoog.nl/index.php>). Related developments can be seen in popular Christian literature. One among many examples of this, from the Swedish context, is a recent book by Thomas Sjödin, a Pentecostal, who engages in discussion of Judaism with a Lutheran scholar and priest, Göran Larsson, former Director at the Swedish Theological Institute in Jerusalem, and a Catholic nun, Sister Sofie. Notably, appreciation of and respect for contemporary Judaism are also cultivated in such intra-Christian interaction. See Thomas Sjödin, *Det händer när du vilar* (Örebro: Libris, 2013; in Swedish), where the Sabbath is at the center of the conversation and the focus is insight and inspiration, not appropriation.

⁶⁷ Brant Pitre, et al., *A New Covenant Jew*, 2.

⁶⁸ As Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age*, ix, noted for the field of history, “In truth, without ignorance and arrogance, who would dare to publish a historical work?”

with what seems to be “the plain meaning” of the text. The present volume itself represents a historical quest of mine, which began with such questioning of traditional readings; it aims to contribute to the conversation precisely a reconstruction of what Paul may have meant beyond later doctrinal considerations unrelated to the context in which he wrote. Seeking this one historical voice among many others, I have become increasingly convinced that we need to read Paul “outside Christianity” and “within Judaism,” if it is the first-century self-proclaimed apostle to the nations we aim to understand.⁶⁹

Once realized that the Paul of the New Testament is, indeed, not like us, speaks a different language, thinks differently, and behaves differently, the question of what happened in the time period between him and us emerges as one of the fundamental issues that needs to be addressed before we can hope to appreciate what this person meant to communicate in his own world. Arguably, as every historical question takes its point of departure in the here and now, the historian needs to address the present just as much as the past. This brings us to the issue of the so-called parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity, a field of inquiry inescapable to the historical project of translating Paul into twenty-first century academic idiom. A few words on these historical processes are in place, then, to which the terminology of “parting” is often and, in my view, problematically applied,⁷⁰ in order to set the stage for the chapters to come and provide a rationale for why this book places studies on Paul in the wider context of the “parting” issue.

1.4 Excavating Paul: Beyond the Parting of the Ways Paradigm

Regardless of whether we understand Paul as “within” or “outside” Judaism, there are a few fundamental issues in need of consideration before we can decide on the matter, and among these the following appear to me the most general and basic: *When* does something stop being something and become something else, and *who* decides when that happens and on *what* basis? It goes without saying, but still needs to be contemplated, that in order to address such a question one needs to be cognizant of two entities and as much as possible of the in-between

⁶⁹ With “Judaism” I do not mean modern Judaism, since all mainstream variants of Judaism today emerged from Rabbinic Judaism, a form of Judaism that did not exist when Paul wrote. I shall return to elaborate on this in the following section.

⁷⁰ See most recently the contributions in Jens Schröter, Benjamin A. Edsall and Joseph Verheyden, eds., *Jews and Christians – Parting Ways in the First Two Centuries? Reflections on the Gains and Losses of a Model*, BZNW 253 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), all of which undermine, from different perspectives, traditional approaches to this complex problem, and note the illuminating discussion by Matt Jackson-McCabe, *Jewish Christianity: The Making of the Christianity–Judaism Divide*, AYBRL (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), esp. pp. 144–183.

that could be perceived of as somehow linking them through a process of change or appropriation. The question is exceedingly complex, but contains, arguably, two basic components: a chronological/contextual parameter, and the issue of properties related to essence; the nature of a thing. A significant aspect of this whole problem is concerned with language and communication, categorization being at its core. A simple example from the very different field of Norwegian architectural history will illustrate and generalize the point.

The iconic Norwegian wooden stave churches are well-known to most people with an interest in Scandinavia more generally, or European Medieval church buildings more specifically. These architectural gems, constructed as the Viking Age gave way to the Medieval period and Catholic Christianity gradually undid the Norse pantheon, are usually identified by the centrally placed four columns (“staves”), the bearing elements creating the gathering space for the local community.⁷¹ Carvings adorning both the interior and exterior mix elements from Norse religious culture with those more clearly belonging to the new faith. But even a cursory browsing of a catalogue over these churches reveals that forms and art vary significantly,⁷² including in the way they use staves. Indeed, Borgund stave church, often considered the archetype of this architectural tradition⁷³ – the ideal example signaling the uniqueness of the “class” of stave churches – turns out to be rather unique itself, as few of the others included in the class of stave churches sport all of its features.⁷⁴ The question then becomes: When is a stave church not a stave church anymore, and who decides this and on what grounds? What is the “essence” of a stave church, its *sine qua non*, that allows us to understand it as such and compare it with others in the same category? What is the relationship between the unique and the universal as the issue of classification is considered?⁷⁵

This example (and one could of course add many more from other fields of study) has only one purpose: to move discussions of particulars to the level of generalization and classification; to patterns of human perception and commu-

⁷¹ Cf. the brief discussion of definition in Sine Halkjelsvik Bjordal, “‘Om denne haves intet mærkværdigt’: En tekst- og kunnskapshistorisk studie av stavkirkene på 1700- og 1800-tallet,” (PhD dissertation, University of Oslo, 2021; in Norwegian), 13–14.

⁷² See, e.g., the convenient overview in Jiri Havran, *Norwegian Stave Churches: A Guide to the 29 Remaining Stave Churches*. English translation by Tim Challman (Oslo: ARFO, 2010). On the diversity of these churches as related to the very definition of them as a class or category, see by Peter Anker, *Stavkirkene: Deres egenart og historie* (Oslo: J.W. Cappelens forlag, 1997; in Norwegian), 18, and 182–221, where discussion relates the question of definition to the issue of origin and development.

⁷³ As Havran, *Stave Churches*, 46, notes: “Borgund is the stave church of the stave churches and is the most authentic of them all. ... [I]t stands as the very symbol of stave churches.”

⁷⁴ See figs. 1 and 2 below.

⁷⁵ There are, of course, answers to these questions in the literature on these churches, but these are of less interest here, as we are only interested in the general issues involved in identification and classification. But see further discussion below.

nication, as well as to notions of local phenomena as in essence embodiments of universal categories, all of which are active components of any theory explaining historical relationships between Judaism and Christianity. From this horizon, there is little difference between Judaism, Christianity, and stave churches; it is simply history and how we speak it into existence. For at the heart of the question of the nature of Paul's letters, his convictions and behavior, lies the problem of the universal and the unique, of the essential and of variation, of the original and of adaptations, and of categorization; all of which are fraught with conceptual difficulties. While we cannot go into detail here – we shall rather point to problems and ask questions, leaving more comprehensive discussion to the chapters that follow – I suggest that the debate on Paul being either within or outside Judaism would benefit from focusing more strongly on the following parameters, keeping in mind our own twenty-first century socio-religious and political location.

First, the obvious: If we formulate our problem as “was Paul within, or did he leave behind the Judaism of his time?” our question requires, before we even begin to read the Pauline correspondence, a definition of a) “Judaism,” and b) “religion,” as Judaism is today considered a religion, within which conceptual frame we also include Christianity and other religions.⁷⁶ Further, it stands to reason that if Paul left something behind he must have created or joined something else. Hence, we need to define that something, and then show both that Paul belonged within it and that this belonging for him eliminated the need for that which was left behind. To clarify by example: W. H. C. Frend's assessment of the nature of the early Jesus movement in relation to Judaism is representative of many, as he claims that, “all Christianity at this stage [the late-first century] was ‘Jewish Christianity,’” and then introduces ambivalence through the follow-up statement: “But it was Israel with a difference.”⁷⁷ The difference Frend perceives is summarized effectively as “first and foremost” being that “no Jew could have accepted Jesus Christ ‘as God’,” adding immediately that “this was what the Christians were doing.”⁷⁸ There are a lot of assumptions to unpack in these sentences which, while controlling the narrative and deciding the outcome, are not offered up for debate. We shall discuss such issues in more detail in chapters 2 and 3, as well as in Part II. Here, I shall note just a few questions setting the stage for the analysis of Paul to follow.

⁷⁶ On this, see the helpful and most recent discussions by Jens Schröter, “Was Paul a Jew Within Judaism? The Apostle to the Gentiles and His Communities in Their Historical Context,” in *Jews and Christians* Schröter, Edsall, and Verheyden, 89–119, and Jan N. Bremmer, “*Ioudaismos, Christianismos* and the Parting of the Ways,” in *Jews and Christians*, ed. Schröter, Edsall, and Verheyden, 57–87. For discussion of Paul and “religion,” see Brent Nongbri, “The Concept of Religion and the Study of the Apostle Paul,” *JJMJS* 2 (2015): 1–26.

⁷⁷ W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 123.

⁷⁸ Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 123.

How do we decide what a first-century Jew, self-identifying as a Jew, could or could not think concerning the divine? If first-century “Judaism,” which is a term, or category that organizes the world and facilitates communication, an abstraction like the Norwegian stave churches, was a diverse phenomenon,⁷⁹ and if we consider the fact that what has often been understood as the most iconic or “authentic” form of Judaism in reality was just one form among many, in fact, even a minority position (as the Borgund stave church is in the context of other stave churches), against what should we measure Paul in order to understand his relationship to the category “Judaism”? Why is it that we often seem to need an archetypal, or “most authentic” something, against which to

⁷⁹ The diversity of Judaism at this time has been elaborated upon by scholars for a long time, but it has become increasingly emphasized in recent decades. Most importantly, the previously common assumption that Rabbinic Judaism took over and defined Judaism immediately after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE has been thoroughly disproven. Synagogue scholars such as Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) and other historians of the first few centuries of the Common Era rather point to the fourth century or later periods for the rise of Rabbinic Judaism. See discussion in Günter Stemberger, “Die Umformung des palästinischen Judentums nach 70: Der Aufstieg der Rabbinen,” in *Jüdische Geschichte in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit. Wege der Forschung: Vom alten zum neuen Schürer*, ed. Aharon Oppenheimer, with assistance of Elisabeth Müller-Luckner (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999), 85–99. As Stemberger concludes commenting on the idea of the rise of the rabbis after 70 CE: “Was immer es schon an neuen Entwicklungen gegeben hat, war nicht mehr als eine Saat, die erst viel später Früchte brachte.” (99). The source material speaking to the diversity we call Judaism is both archaeological and literary. The literary evidence is well introduced by Daniel M. Gurtner, *Introducing the Pseudepigrapha of Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020). Sources available in translation include James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983, 1985); and Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov, eds, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013); Donald W. Parry and Emmanuel Tov, in Association with Geraldine I. Clements, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader*. 2 Vols. 2nd ed. (Leiden Brill, 2014); Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, 4 vols. (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983–2003). To this, of course, should be added the writings of Philo and Josephus. Jewish groups, their beliefs and practices, are discussed by most scholars of the New Testament and Second Temple Judaism in some shape or form, but see especially Albert I. Baumgarten, *The Flourishing of Jewish Sects in the Maccabean Era: An Interpretation*, JSJ-Sup 55 (Leiden: Brill, 1997); E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM Press, 1992); Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*. With a Foreword by James C. VanderKam (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); and, more recently, Michael E. Stone, *Secret Groups in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). On the archaeological remains, see David A. Fiensy and James R. Strange, eds., *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods*. 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014–2015); Stuart S. Miller, *At the Intersection of Texts and Material Finds: Stepped Pools, Stone Vessels, and Ritual Purity among the Jews of Roman Galilee*, JAJSup 16 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2015); Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of the Holy Land: From the Destruction of Solomon’s Temple to the Muslim Conquest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Eric M. Meyers and Mark A. Chancey, *Alexander to Constantine: Archaeology of the Land of the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

compare what then necessarily becomes a deviation? What are the methodological considerations behind such interpretive decisions?

It is revealing – and again representative of much traditional scholarship on first-century Judaism – that Frend speaks of “orthodox Judaism” as being in opposition to the Christ-movement, as an assumed mainstream form of Judaism to which the Christ-movement, also assumed to be monolithic, could be compared.⁸⁰ Indeed, Frend claims that Jesus himself, according to Luke, behaved like a “Rabbinic disciple” in the Jerusalem temple, fulfilling “the essence of the religion of the Old Testament.” While some scholars may still refer to Jesus as a rabbi,⁸¹ such categorization, arguably, invites anachronism, as it may signal that, a) Rabbinic Judaism existed at the time of Jesus, b) “Old Testament religion” would be a historically identifiable phenomenon, from which it, c) would be possible to distil an essence, and that d) Jesus would be aligned with this essence of the Old Testament as well as the ideals of Rabbinic discipleship, which in turn, e) would connect Rabbinic discipleship with the essence of Old Testament religion.⁸² But if, from a historical point of view, there is no such thing as an essence of “Old Testament religion” – or of Second Temple Judaism or “New Testament religion” – and orthodox and/or Rabbinic Judaism did not exist in the time of Paul, then we need to approach the issue of Paul and Judaism from a different perspective.

What, for example, would the outcome be if we instead asked: Which ancestral customs, traditions, and texts do Paul refer to as self-evidently authoritative when he builds the arguments that he expects his readers to be convinced by? Who else among Paul’s contemporaries in the Mediterranean world referred to the same customs and texts as authoritative when they aimed at convincing their addressees? Which ancestral customs are considered to work against God’s plans for Paul’s addressees, the nations, and, crucially, which traditions are used to make that case? Which ancestral traditions and customs in the Mediterranean world nurtured ideas about an anointed king, to rule Israel and the nations (treated as two entities, one specific and the other general)? If Paul had to identify the god of whom he speaks to the nations, claiming that god’s authority over all, what would he have called him? And what does Paul’s self-identification as an apostle to the nations⁸³ imply about his understanding of the ethnic

⁸⁰ Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 122–123.

⁸¹ See, e.g., Bruce D. Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2000).

⁸² Inadvertently, perhaps, since Frend does not seem to otherwise draw a straight line of continuity between Rabbinic Judaism and the “Old Testament.” It is, however, still common in various non-academic settings to think of (Rabbinic) Judaism as more closely related to Israelite religion than the first-century Jesus movement.

⁸³ Rom 1:5; 11:13; 15:16; Gal 1:15–16; 2:2, 8–9; 1 Thess 2:16.

composition of the world, and his own current location within that composition?⁸⁴

Such questions, which could be asked also of the disputed Pauline letters, open up for considering the nature of the wider discursive context within which Paul formulated and communicated his message, simultaneously (indirectly) indicating which other Greco-Roman ancestral customs, traditions, and texts were available to him, but of which he – and, from his perspective, his audience – had no use. My point is this: The answers to questions such as these allow us to construct the general outlines of, and name, a category within which Paul defines himself, and which he understands to contain the rhetorical force needed to convince his audience. This may be done, then, without having to posit a set of criteria isolating an entity which itself is pluriform, fluid, and adjustable, or drawing up a methodologically ambiguous and arbitrarily selected ideal image of an authentic and fixed category against which to compare the content of the letters. Or, to put it differently, the multiple variations of the ancestral customs we designate “first-century Judaism” are expressions of a recognizable theme, but there is no original, “authentic,” “ideal,” “fixed,” “pure” or universally accepted authoritative melody on which variations elaborate. There is no “starting point”; we have only variations. Or, again, to switch the metaphor to another field, text criticism, where many scholars are leaving behind the idea of an Urtext, from which variants grow and against which variations can be measured, and instead speak of textual fluidity and manuscript culture. A quote from David C. Parker is especially pertinent in this regard: “[T]he attempt to produce an original form of a living text is worse than trying to shoot a moving target, it is turning a movie into a single snapshot, it is taking a single part of a complex entity and claiming it to be the whole.”⁸⁵ Replacing “text” with “Judaism” or “Christianity” in the quote further illuminates the problem, and shows how fraught with conceptual hazards the issue is.

Returning to Frend, the traditional approach of singling out certain beliefs (in Frend’s case that Jesus was divine) as non-compatible with “Judaism,” is problematic, then, for at least two basic reasons. First, such claims are only valid until similar beliefs are found in other texts, which are defined as belonging within the discursive category identified as Jewish. Apart from the fact that our modern understanding of what monotheism entails is not applicable to antiquity,⁸⁶ Jewish traditions of two powers in heaven pre-date Paul, and undermines

⁸⁴ Cf. Gal 2:15.

⁸⁵ David C. Parker, “Textual Criticism and Theology,” *ExpTim* 118:12 (2007): 583–589, here 586; quoted from Hugo Lundhaug and Liv Ingeborg Lied, “Studying Snapshots: On Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology,” in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Liv Ingeborg Lied, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* 175 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 1–19, here 1.

⁸⁶ As noted by many scholars, including Paula Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement: Ideas

the factual basis of the claim; there were more variations on this theme.⁸⁷ Most other belief-oriented criteria that have been set up by scholars to distinguish “Christianity” from “Judaism” have met a similar fate.⁸⁸ Second, and more importantly, the very urge to outline a fixed set of beliefs or practices as criteria for comparative purposes is incompatible with the nature of the source material, which is pluriform, fluid, and adjustable within the discursive context of Jewish ancestral customs oriented around the God of Israel, and lacks for the time period in question a normative center that we as observers could identify as accepted by all.⁸⁹

in the Study of Christian Origins Whose Time has Come to Go,” *SR* 35.2 (2006): 231–246, here 241–243.

⁸⁷ For discussion, see, e.g., Peter Schäfer, *Two Gods in Heaven: Jewish Concepts of God in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020); Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: The New Press, 2012). Cf. Andrei Orlov, *The Glory of the Invisible God: Two Powers in Heaven Traditions in Early Christianity, Jewish and Christian Texts in Context and Related Studies* 31 (London: T&T Clark, 2019). Further, in the Persian period, the God of Israel seems to have had a consort at his temple in Elephantine, Egypt. For discussion and bibliography, see Marlene E. Mondriaan, “Anat-Yahu and the Jews at Elephantine,” *JSem* 22.2 (2013): 537–552; a translation of the papyri is found in Bezalel Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English: Three Millennia of Cross-Cultural Continuity and Change* (Leiden: Brill, 1996). The question here is: If the God of Israel had a consort at Elephantine, why should this not be understood as a variation of Israelite religion/Judaism? (What else would it be?) And who would decide this – adherents to this variation of Israelite/Jewish ancestral customs in antiquity, other Jews in antiquity who disagreed with this practice and worshipped this god without a consort, later representatives of other normative definitions of “Judaism,” or modern scholars aiming to understand ancient phenomena and ritual patterns related to the God of Israel?

⁸⁸ This is also true when practices and worship, rather than patterns of thought, are referred to as criteria, as the Jerusalem temple has often been seen as the lowest common denominator of that which is called Jewish. Such a criterion, however, is problematized by the several other Jewish temples for which we have sources, including, for the Persian period, Elephantine, and the Roman period, Leontopolis. For sources on and discussion of Jewish temples outside Jerusalem, see Anders Runesson, Donald D. Binder, and Birger Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue from its Origins to 200 CE: A Source Book*, *AJEC* 72 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 274–294. Hereafter *ASSB*.

⁸⁹ This search for a center in Judaism to be used as a watershed measuring “Christianity” as something other is quite common in the literature, perhaps most famously as outlined by James D. G. Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (SCM Press, 2006) as the four pillars of Judaism (monotheism, election/land, Torah, and temple). See also W. D. Davies’s interesting discussion of such approaches in *Christian Engagements with Judaism* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), 15–40, asking, “[w]hat is it within Judaism as its ‘center’ or ‘essence’ without which it ceases to be itself?” (15), only to reject such terminology as misguided, instead choosing to speak of “the heart” of Judaism (39). Recognizing the “immense complexity and variety” as well as the contextually shifting phenomenon of Judaism, Davies suggests that the core of E. P. Sanders’s pattern of covenantal nomism points in the right direction in the definition of Judaism, as its different components receives different emphases and expressions based on factors of time and place (38). In the end, Davies still opts for a “center,” though, as he points to a pattern of divine grace as having found expression in all forms of Judaism. This center is, however, not understood as a criterion that distinguishes Judaism from Christianity,

It seems to me that it is the self-professed loyalty to the God of Israel that best keeps all of the variant expressions following from such allegiance together as a category, beyond ancient or modern normative attempts at defining one variant or another as the exclusive owner of the theo-ritual discourse, and allows us to speak of a variety of ancient phenomena as Israelite ancestral customs, or Yahwistic traditions.⁹⁰ But this criterion does not solve entirely our problem, as the variegated expressions of this allegiance to the God of Israel may then be subdivided into other major forms, within which in turn are found multiple further subdivisions that relate in one way or another on a fundamental and institutional level to one of them. The first of these are Samaritanism and Judaism, with their respective foci on Mt Gerizim and Jerusalem.⁹¹ Insofar as Christians, Jews, and Samaritans are considered to worship the same God – and most would agree that they do – Christianity too represents a form of Yahwism. But this shared allegiance to the same deity does not make Christianity a Judaism any more than it makes Judaism a Samaritanism or vice versa.⁹²

Mutatis mutandis, adding a focus on Jesus identified as a messiah, a shared allegiance between Paul and Christianity to the same deity and this god's messiah does not make Paul a Christian (or Christianity Pauline). There simply was no third entity when Paul wrote which simultaneously indicated otherness in relation to both Jewish ancestral customs and other Greco-Roman traditions. On the contrary, as Paula Fredriksen asks rhetorically: “[W]ould the participants in this moment of the movement, whether they were Jews or Gentiles, think of Christianity as anything other than the true form of Judaism, or as the right way of reading the Jewish scriptures, or as the latest and best revelation

but as something that unites them, identifying grace as the very “ground for their mutual respect” (40). While an admirable position within Jewish/Christian dialogue, one could add that nurturing respect between adherents of different religions should extend beyond that which is shared. In any case, finding a core of beliefs and practices shared by most does not exclude from the definition of Judaism those who do not match all the parameters of that core.

⁹⁰ See below Ch. 11 p. 273. It is perhaps the normative impulse that causes the historian the most trouble, as it is intertwined with power and sometimes hard to detect. This is especially true with regard to the right to define the insider and outsider. The issue becomes acute when this right is moved from religious authorities to the academy and its historically defined criteria. Indeed, according to the modern orthodox definition of who is a Jew, a solid number of converts to other variants of Judaism – including their children – while understanding themselves as practicing Jews fall outside that definition, with halakhic consequences.

⁹¹ While previous scholarship has often understood Samaritans as a Jewish sect such reconstructions have been shown to be untenable. Rather, Samaritanism and Judaism grew from within and represent variants of Yahwistic traditions. For discussion, see Reinhard Pummer, *The Samaritans: A Profile* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), esp. 9–25; Étienne Nodet, *Samaritains, Juifs, Temples*, CRB 74 (Paris: Gabalda, 2010); Magnar Kartveit, *The Origin of the Samaritans*, VTSup 128 (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Gary N. Knoppers, *Jews and Samaritans: The Origin and History of their Early Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁹² The same, of course, is true of Islam.

from Israel's god in keeping with his ancient promises to his people?"⁹³ I have found no evidence in Paul that would lead me to answer this question in the affirmative, which, in turn, suggests to me that the emergence of Christianity needs to be understood from a vantage point other than that provided by the Pauline writings.

A similar point is made by Karl Olav Sandnes in his most recent book, addressing the issue of Paul and the so-called parting of the ways. He concludes: "Paul was a Jew, both ethnically and religiously – if we can phrase it in such terms. This is not something he ever leaves behind. On the contrary, this is the point of departure for almost everything he writes."⁹⁴ Paul himself never meant to form a "church" separated from Judaism. The development that led to such a situation must be explained based on factors beyond Paul, Sandnes argues, the reception of Paul, since the Pauline correspondence in itself, despite the sometimes radical claims contained within them, cannot carry the full explanatory weight of this turn of events. To understand the so-called "parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity," then, we need to study not only Paul but also *reactions* to Paul.⁹⁵ These reactions could and did vary based on a multitude of factors, not only group belonging but also depending on what individuals, including those in leading positions in assemblies, would benefit from.⁹⁶

As for Paul himself, the discursive space that his letters conjure up is so interwoven with traditions cherished and embodied by Jews (not Samaritans, Zoroastrians, or worshippers of Mithra, Isis, Serapis, or Zeus) that it seems to me hard to escape the conclusion that it is into this space – a Jewish space – that he invites non-Jews on terms generated (by himself and other Jews) specifically for

⁹³ Fredriksen, "Mandatory Retirement," 235. She adds, within brackets: "This list of identifiers is of course a paraphrase of Romans 15." See also Sandnes, *Var Paulus Kristen?*, 210: "The question of the relationship between Paul and Christianity must be asked based on the fact that there was no Christianity in Paul's time." (In Norwegian; my translation).

⁹⁴ Sandnes, *Var Paulus Kristen?*, 224 (my translation).

⁹⁵ Sandnes, *Var Paulus Kristen?*, 220. See also the contributions in Isaac W. Oliver and Gabriele Boccaccini, eds., *The Early Reception of Paul the Second Temple Jew: Text, Narrative and Reception History*, LSTS 92 (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), covering the first two centuries.

⁹⁶ On a more general level, the metaphor of mountains and valley noted by Smith, *Jewish Glass and Christian Stone*, is in many ways apt. Depending on where one is located, one will perceive the mountains ("Judaism" and "Christianity") or the valley connecting them, differently. And, for our current purposes in this book, one will read or hear Paul in different ways and for different purposes depending on whether one is located among the elites working to define "religious" belonging or among the grassroots where boundaries and their purposes are less clear. Elaborating on and modifying the metaphor somewhat, from the Medieval period onwards the landscape looks more like a Norwegian fjord with mountains on either side: the mountains connect, but deep down below the surface, making inhabitable only the shores and hillsides. Notably, these fjords were not the result of a tsunami-like event, but of the slow movements of glaciers changing the landscape as they passed through and melted, opening a way for sea water to fill the valleys they left behind.

them. Likewise, I fail to find clues in these letters that would suggest that Paul, in this process, intended to re-enact an exodus for Jews, rescuing them from their ancestral traditions and leading them into a gentile promised land.⁹⁷ The Jewish ancestral traditions are precisely what carries within them the salvific force now shared also with the gentiles. What Paul the apostle to the nations offers his addressees is best described, then, as (a particular form of) Judaism for gentiles, for those who are not Jewish like himself. The chapters to follow, I hope, will clarify further why. Key insights that follow from the arguments to be made may be summarized in a few points:

a) First, we cannot speak of Christianity (which today is defined, in its mainstream forms, as non-Jewish Christianity) as parting ways with Judaism (which today is defined, in its mainstream forms, as Rabbinic Judaism), since we cannot prove that non-Jewish Christianity ever belonged institutionally together with Rabbinic Judaism. b) Before the emergence of Rabbinic Judaism, Paul played an important part in construing a form of Judaism adapted for non-Jews. c) There are no signs in Paul's letters that his addressees understood themselves as practicing anything else than a (Christ-oriented) form of Judaism, which nevertheless differed from Judaism as practiced by Jews.⁹⁸ On the contrary, what Paul found problematic with his (non-Jewish) addressees was that it made sense to them that to be *en Christō* equaled practicing Judaism *as Jews would do*, i.e., they perceived – not unreasonably based on their socio-religious context – continuity between ethnic status and the practice of a people's ancestral customs.⁹⁹ d) The invention of Christianity as a tradition separate from Judaism (i.e., when *Christianismos* is explicitly talked about as not *Ioudaismos*, as incompatible

⁹⁷ As indicated not least by the olive-tree metaphor in Romans 11.

⁹⁸ While in my view it is not possible to prove in detail that Paul's position equaled the perspective of Acts (e.g., Acts 15:1–21), Acts too embraces such a solution to the gentile problem: two forms of Judaism, applied to Jews and non-Jews respectively. Outside the Jesus movement we hear of a similar position, that non-Jews can practice a form of Judaism without circumcising and becoming Jews, in Josephus's story of the conversation of the royal house of Adiabene (*A.J.* 20.34–48). It is also clear from this passage that not all Jews would agree that such practice of Judaism by non-Jews was desirable or even possible, claiming that it would evoke the wrath of the God of Israel. As I have argued elsewhere, Matthew's Gospel likely represents such a view on gentile inclusion (Runesson, *Divine Wrath*, esp. 373–388, 411–428). For discussion of the passage in Josephus, see Terence L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135 CE)* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 333–338; Mark D. Nanos, "Paul's Non-Jews Do Not Become 'Jews,' But Do They Become 'Jewish'?" Reading Romans 2:25–29 Within Judaism, Alongside Josephus," *JJMJS* 1 (2014): 26–53.

⁹⁹ Cf. Genevive Dibley, "The Making and Unmaking of Jews in Second Century BCE Narratives and the Implication for Interpreting Paul," in *Israel and the Nations: Paul's Gospel in the Context of Jewish Expectation*. Edited by Frantisek Abel (Lanham: Lexington/Fortress Academic, 2021), 3–23, here 3: "It is clear from their desire to become circumcised that the gentile-Jesus-followers of Galatia understood their faith in Jesus as the Christ to have affectively constituted their conversion to Judaism."

with *Ioudaismos*) can be proven to have occurred only after various institutional parting processes had already taken place *within* Judaism, between Christ-oriented Jews and other groups of Jews. e) While the creation of the entity *Christianismos*, which is said to stand in opposition to the practicing of Jewish ancestral customs, materialized in different ways in different places at different times, it is possible to reconstruct two basic patterns of development from the source material: One in which non-Jewish Christ-followers belonging institutionally with Jewish Jesus followers parted ways with them, and another in which non-Jewish patterns of Christ devotion appeared in variously organized groups (associations) independent of Jewish institutions or Jewish missionaries. f) While Paul was called upon to legitimize developments in both of these trajectories, these groups of non-Jews understood, contrary to the historical Paul, Jewish ethno-religious identity as theo-ritually irrelevant. It is here that we find the key difference between what became Christianity on the one hand, and Paul's Judaism for gentiles on the other. The latter recognizes the enduring validity of the covenant between Israel's God and the Jewish people, both within the Christ movement and outside it (Romans 11), while the former understands the new reality they experience with the coming of the Christ to unmake *Ioudaismos*, implying the deconstruction of the covenants associated with it. While Paul spoke of redemption and salvation for both Jews and gentiles, *as* Jews and gentiles, *Christianismos* developed a more particularistic approach, by and large restricting the kingdom to the members of their *ekklēsiai*.

None of this means, of course, that Paul's writings could not or should not be considered authoritative outside of the conceptual and ritual space from within which he reimagined the ancestral traditions of his people and their relevance for the world, as we discussed above. The Pentateuch, too, is considered normative not only by Jews but also by Samaritans and Christians.¹⁰⁰ But, even though normative use of Paul and other biblical writings defines aspects of what makes a Christian, Christian use of Paul does not make Paul a Christian any more than Christian use of Isaiah or Amos would turn these prophets into believers in Jesus.¹⁰¹ Commitment to the God of Israel expressed through loyalty to Jesus is

¹⁰⁰ Even though the Samaritan textual traditions differ somewhat from the Jewish. See Benyamin Tsedaka and Sharon Sullivan, eds., *The Israelite Samaritan Version of the Torah. First English Translation Compared with the Masoretic Version* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

¹⁰¹ Traditionally, of course, the church has often understood precisely these prophets and others, including Abraham, to stand within the Christian (Catholic) definition of "faith," and for all intents and purposes treated them as belonging to the church. It is easy to see how such interpretive decisions can carry over and be applied to the New Testament as well, so that Paul, or the New Testament as a whole, become a proponent of "Catholic faith," as Nicolas of Lyra has it in his commentary on Romans 9:3 and 11:27, respectively. While from a historical perspective the normative-imaginative hermeneutics of such claims are clear when applied to texts predating Jesus and his movement, it is the argument of this book that a critique of such

not what creates Christianity, but *reactions* to Paul, both from those (Jews and non-Jews) who rejected him and those (Jews and non-Jews) who embraced him, play an important part in the much larger puzzle that, when completed, reveals a landscape within which we eventually find Judaism and Christianity.

As separate entities, Jews and Christians – just as much as Jews and Samaritans, Muslims and Christians – continue to interact throughout the centuries, shaping one another in various ways even today. The development of Christianity and Judaism as their own entities cannot, therefore, be determined or explained by levels of contact between individuals or groups identifying as one or the other. Rather, as I will argue in several of the chapters to come, we need to turn to the institutional realities these people inhabited, and which determined many of the parameters for interaction, to be able to see more clearly what it is that happens in the first few centuries of the Common Era. This is precisely where the study of synagogues and associations, of civic and semi-public institutional space emerges as key to the task of understanding inner-group and inter-group relationships and what they may mean for the invention of the religions we are concerned with here. Understanding the dynamics of these contexts will then shed light on the historical Paul and his writings; what happened to them during his lifetime and how they were appropriated after his death.

Returning to the example of the Norwegian stave churches referred to above for comparison regarding issues of definition and categorization may again, by way of summary, be helpful. Heuristically, discursive activities can appear quite similar to architectural forms, so that thinking about the latter may shed light on how we approach the former, here configured as the nature of Judaism in the time of Paul, and the nature of Paul's writings. Historical discussions of Paul in his context, read in light of historical discussions of stave churches in their context, may then be aligned as follows, as historical problems.

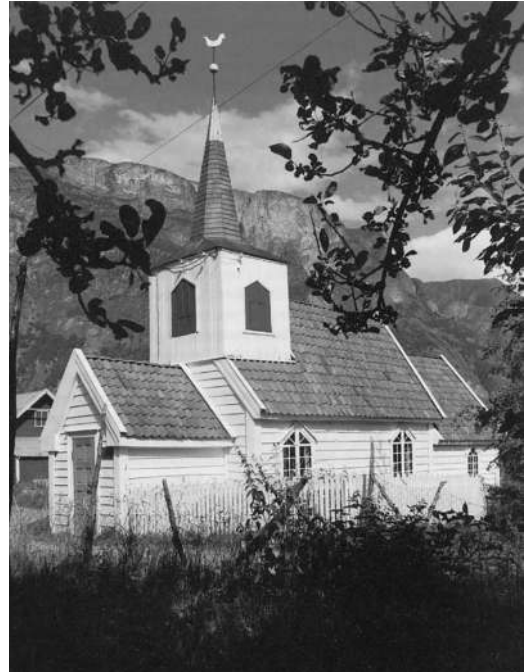
As noted, the stave churches present us with considerable diversity in their original forms. They were also, however, continually developed and adjusted to meet the requirements of later centuries, adding pulpits, benches and other features as a result of the Reformation and, externally, modified in their design according to need and fashion. The classification and definition of these edifices is also complicated by their prehistory, as well as by the fact that Norwegian scholars tend to approach the issue of definition and terminology somewhat differently than Swedish, Danish, German, and English-speaking scholarship.¹⁰² The fact that we now speak of stave churches as a class thus depends on consideration of a variety of factors and decisions, based on their prehistory, their “reception history,” and terminological decisions intertwined with discus-

hermeneutics when applied to Paul leads to a historical within-Judaism, not a within-Christianity, understanding to the apostle.

¹⁰² Anker, *Stavkirke*, 182–188.

sions in both of these fields.¹⁰³ Indeed, as Anker notes, the many and considerable differences between the churches categorized as stave churches require scholars to define them even further into subgroups, based on architectural plans, mode of construction etcetera.¹⁰⁴ What keeps these churches together as a category is, ultimately, that they represent *a specific way of constructing a building*.¹⁰⁵

To illustrate the point: Today, while many would immediately recognize the Borgund stave church as a stave church, few would guess that the Undredal church belongs to the same category, or class.



Figures 1 and 2. Borgund (ca. 1200) and Undredal (13th century) stave churches, Norway.

Entering the Undredal church, however, which is only 13 meters in length from entrance to chancel, the careful observer will find that the eastern part of the nave is constructed with four corner staves and vertically placed wooden planks, a structure which dates back to the 13th century.¹⁰⁶ These features are the defining aspects of the building, which places it in the same category as the Borgund church.

¹⁰³ See esp. Anker, *Stavkirken*, 18–28, 182–221.

¹⁰⁴ Anker, *Stavkirken*, 18.

¹⁰⁵ Anker, *Stavkirken*, 18.

¹⁰⁶ Anker, *Stavkirken*, 94–95.

If we, *mutatis mutandis*, apply this situation to the “architectural” parameters involved (including pre-history and reception history) as we study the historical Paul in the context of the so-called parting of the ways problematics, some similarities emerge which may shed light on what is at stake in the conversation. Perhaps the most obvious point of contact is the diversity in form, where few features reoccur across every entity in the category, not even specific uses of staves, in the case of stave churches, which, while always there, vary in number, size, and decoration between the edifices. With what, then, in the discussion of first-century Judaism and Paul should we liken these discussions of stave churches, relative to defining elements?

It appears to me that what the various uses of staves are for the identification of stave churches (including consideration of pre-history and later adaptations), ethnic reasoning is for the identification of Jewishness in the first century, including Paul. In other words, ethnic reasoning endorsing Jewish identity – however defined or located in relation to any other elements of the ancestral traditions considered relevant – as an active component with the help of which a person or group organizes the world theo-ritually decides classification; it represents, fundamentally, *a specific way of constructing a discursive (and socio-ritual) space*. If such reasoning includes capacity also for people who are not identified as Jewish, we are, then, still dealing with a Jewish phenomenon, Judaism for gentiles; this is so whether we speak of Josephus’s story of the royal house of Adiabene (Ananias’s position) or Paul. It is a Jewish space constructed for non-Jews, in which ethnicity still matters to the degree that without it, this type of edifice falls. Replacing Jewish ethnic reasoning – the staves of ancient Jewish discourse – changes the very foundation of the structure; it affects the core, the *sine qua non* for the entire edifice, regardless of the number of additional features that remain the same (theology, rituals, etc.), and results in a different type of building.

Taking our allegorical musings yet another step, thinking about Paul alongside Undredal stave church may clarify some further aspects of the conclusions drawn in the chapters to come. For we tend to approach Paul in much the same way as we react when visiting Undredal. At first, we see a historic, but still familiar image, easily categorized along with other more recent phenomena. It is only upon entering the edifice that we discover the foundational elements and the Otherness of the structure, leading us to align it with a different set of features and categorize it differently than we would have based on the characteristics that speak more to issues of continuity over time.

Further, the Borgund stave church, which we assign to the same category as Undredal, heuristically functions in ways much the same as whatever “authentic” mental image we have of Second Temple Judaism. For example, historically, scholars have referred uncritically and anachronistically to Rabbinic Judaism to understand both Jesus and Paul in context. But Rabbinic Judaism does not

belong within Second temple Judaism, even though it preserves aspects of various forms of Judaism from that time. Pharisaic Judaism has been seen, too, as emblematic of Judaism, mostly reconstructed based on stereotypes found in the New Testament and in Rabbinic literature.¹⁰⁷ But just as the Borgund edifice is only one among many in its category, and not as such, in its entirety, with its many specific characteristics, the defining element of the category, there is no specific form of Second Temple Judaism whose many features apply to all the variants included in the category and can serve as its “flagship.” Rather, the delineation of the category, as describing a historical and chronologically bounded phenomenon, is based on various applications of Jewish ethnic discourse and variegated references to and embodiments of ancestral customs identified as relevant to that which is understood, by the actors themselves and/or us,¹⁰⁸ as Jewish.

Not forgetting that the art and architecture of the stave churches represent a shift from one historical epoch to another, merging elements of Norse religion and (Catholic) Christianity, Second Temple Judaism likewise embodies a complex landscape of features merging aspects of what has been traditionally called Hellenism and Judaism. This merging of various elements from different cultures is not in any way exclusive to either the early or later phases of the Jesus movement but is part of what characterized Judaism at the time. But just as other modes of building churches in medieval Norway materialized – without staves and in stone – concomitantly with the continued use of the stave churches, new ways of constructing discursive space around the Christ figure, beyond and in opposition to Jewish ethnic reasoning, appeared alongside Jewish forms of worshipping the God of Israel through allegiance to Jesus already in the second century. Many stone churches shared certain artistic and architectural features with the stave churches, and in this way may be perceived to be in dialogue with them.¹⁰⁹ In a similar way, while representing a different way of constructing and institutionally manifesting religious discursive space through rejection of Jewish religio-ethnic reasoning, emerging Christianity may still be perceived of as being in dialogue with Jewish messianic traditions through its appropri-

¹⁰⁷ As has been pointed out by many scholars, it is notoriously difficult to reconstruct Pharisaism. For discussion, see Jacob Neusner and Bruce D. Chilton, eds., *In Quest of the Historical Pharisees* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), and more recently Sievers and Levine, eds. *The Pharisees*.

¹⁰⁸ The issue of who has the right to name and define a phenomenon is key, of course. While the historian must always consider the self-definition of the historical other and/or the historical outsider’s naming of a contemporary group, it is, in the end, the responsibility of the historians themselves to categorize the phenomena they study and give arguments supporting their choices.

¹⁰⁹ For example, the type of stave church which has a raised central space, the so-called column stave churches (“søylestavkirker”), finds a parallel in stone churches of the basilical form with their elevated nave, as noted by Anker, *Stavekirkene*, 23.

tion and adaptation of selected Jewish ancestral customs. But such appropriation and adaptation does not make Christianity a Judaism. Conversely, it is precisely the retaining of, and the institutional manifestation of Jewish religio-ethnic reasoning, combined with a specific (and innovative) mode of application of Jewish ancestral customs, that allow for the categorization of Rabbinic Judaism as a form of (post Second Temple) Judaism, and align it terminologically with other forms of Judaism in antiquity.

In terms of categorization, then, one cannot say, in my view, that Christianity is a form of Judaism any more than one can identify a twelfth-century stone church as a stave church, despite them being in discursive dialogue with one another; *Christianity represents a different way of constructing a discursive (and socio-ritual) space.*¹¹⁰ In other words, they are different genera of Yahwistic tradition, just like Samaritanism and Islam. Christianity was forged through an actively promoted shift in genus, one could say, and this shift was legitimized, fundamentally, through antithetical speech and art orbiting a central assertion: rejection of Jewish religio-ethnic discourse, and thus of Judaism, whether messianic or other. Christian appropriation and use of (other) select Jewish ancestral traditions as building blocks in the formation of separate institutional and discursive space in and of itself played a subordinated role *as incentive* for designing difference. These traditions were active components already within the Jewish Jesus movement, and did not, in that framework, mark alienation from, but rather solidarity with, other forms of Judaism. However, as these traditions became shared between what had been formed as two institutionally separate entities, “Judaism” and “Christianity,” they were re-configured within larger discourses of theo-ritual difference, cementing antagonism as theological truth. Uniqueness and difference had to be invented, on both sides, precisely because the same traditions were claimed for different projects.

Many of these inventions of difference are today studied and dismantled through historical argument. What is even more interesting to many of the scholars involved, however, is the development that began to take form with the Second Vatican Council, which speaks, *within Christianity*, to the issue of the legitimacy of Jewish ethno-religious discourse *within Judaism*. This development represents nothing less than a reversal of a trend beginning in the second century; the unmaking of *the* central hub in the construction of the Christian.

But the goal of this contemporary move within Christianity is *not* to dismantle or redefine Christianity, since the theological legitimacy of Jewish religio-ethnic discourse is designed as Christian theology about a neighbor and their house. The theological move itself may, however, lead to a rediscovery of Christian distinctiveness as construed not based on a rejection of a specific Oth-

¹¹⁰ Pace Gabriele Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought 300 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

er, but on precisely a constructive relationship to them. Such a rethinking of Christianity will not undo the so-called “partings process” – the entities will remain distinct, as Christianity will retain for itself its basic understanding of its own ethno-religious position. But it will lead to a new understanding of the very core of the distinctiveness of the Christian tradition as *dependent on* the continued covenant between the God and the people of Israel, without the church therefore being, itself, part of Israel. In a similar way, there is ample room within Judaism to rethink positively the position of Christianity relative to itself.¹¹¹ History can never be the sole component of such projects, but still has an important function to fill in problematizing normative assertions based on outdated historical claims. If the present book can in some way assist such processes, in addition to adding a voice to the academic conversation, its ultimate purpose would be realized.¹¹²

In sum, it is the contention of this volume that the study of the larger issue of the so-called parting of the ways and the formative role of institutional spaces in these processes are crucial to the reconstruction of the historical Paul and the understanding of his writings. This is so precisely because such study allows us to appreciate Paul as the Other; as not a figure we would immediately be familiar with or feel aligned with, whether we are Jews or Christians or philosophers aiming to change the politics of our societies. To understand Paul, arguably, we need to recognize what created “us” and our perception, our way of reading, i.e., reactions to Paul, not Paul, and, in that process, being just to the text, reflect on how we then create and continue to shape Paul in ways we find useful.

Such processes of appropriating historical individuals or groups for contemporary projects considered significant for challenging or strengthening identity or status is, of course, by no means new. One of the more well-known examples is Eusebius’s identification as Christian texts and groups that we today unproblematically categorize, historically, as (non-Christian) Jewish, such as Philo’s description of the Therapeutae.¹¹³ Comparing how Eusebius goes about to achieve such a Christian identification with how the church has appropriated Paul in its theological structuring of the world may be quite instructive, especially as history becomes a tool to deconstruct the normative, and in the process itself becoming a critical component in alternative master narratives. The difference, though, between these hermeneutical projects, the religious and the historical, is that while the former is controlled by authorities belonging within and aiming to nurture their own religious tradition in relative isolation from the

¹¹¹ Some work has been done in this regard, and continues to be done. See, e.g., Michael S. Kogan, *Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹¹² My position is, in this regard, similar to Joshua Ezra Burns’s; see above, n. 59, and the Epilogue below.

¹¹³ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* II.xvi–xvii.

Other, the historical represents an opportunity to reinvent the contemporary through dialogues methodologically unrestrained by confessional parameters.

For the theologically oriented historian, while the reconstruction of the first sense of Scripture, the historical, may not in itself represent revelation,¹¹⁴ perhaps the collective process of unveiling aspects of the past may tell us something about the divine, as the conversation necessarily brings us out into the open and requires us to listen to the Other, whether it is the historical Paul or those assisting us in finding him. In any case, it is my aim on the pages to follow to address historically the problem of the nature of what Paul may have aimed at communicating, and, doing so, to approach this task from a perspective that takes seriously the larger issue of the so-called parting of the ways as a methodologically necessary context for such questions.¹¹⁵

To return, finally, to our initial question of defining the truth about Paul:¹¹⁶ What is, then, the ultimate nature of his correspondence, his thinking, in the context of Judaism? As I have noted elsewhere, in my view – and I know of few scholars who wouldn't agree – no one has articulated it better than E.P. Sanders in his 1977 magnum opus *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.¹¹⁷ It is in this spirit I, too, offer up the chapters in the present volume for discussion, with the hope that, far from being intended as the final word on the matter, they may perhaps stimulate new thoughts.

¹¹⁴ See p. 22, 35 above.

¹¹⁵ Noting here also the complexities involved as we ask the question in the first place. Jonathan P. Berkey's approach in his study of the formation of Islam can be applied also to the issue of Paul and the origins of Christianity: "The question of what it means to be a Muslim requires, I believe, a dynamic answer. Had the question been posed to Muhammed, his answer (if indeed he would have understood the question) would have been quite different than that of a jurist in Baghdad in the ninth century, or of a Sufi mystic in Cairo in the fifteenth. From a historical perspective, no answer is better than any other, and none has any value except against the background of the larger historical factors that produced it." (*The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], ix).

¹¹⁶ Above p. 19.

¹¹⁷ E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 30, 32, 430; cf. index under "Truth, ultimate" (p. 627).

2. Particularistic Judaism and Universalistic Christianity?

Critical Remarks on Terminology and Theology

2.1 Terminology and Theological Pitfalls

As several researchers have repeatedly pointed out, terminology may contain theological or ideological pitfalls. This is easily illustrated by looking at ambiguous or problematic terms used by scholars in the study of ancient Judaism and Christianity. One of the more well-known examples is the term coined by D. Wilhelm Bousset at the beginning of the last century, designating Judaism at the turn of the Common Era as “Spätjudentum” or “late Judaism.”¹ As is obvious today, this term was the result of the theologically biased views of the author, but it may also have led readers to unwittingly adopt the author’s theological presuppositions about ancient (and modern) Judaism.² As Loren T. Stuckenbruck recently argued, “[n]ot to be dismissed as a matter of ‘semantics,’ expressions frequently applied, even in the present, to Judaism before and around the turn of the Common Era cannot be easily disentangled from the sometimes misleading ideologies they reflect.”³

When we discover such terminological pitfalls, it is essential that we not only critique them but also start thinking about new terms and categories that would succeed better in conveying the historical. Such work on terminology is, and must be, an ongoing process. Often, though, older terms are kept in play as scholars move toward new agreements, even if sometimes definitions are added that question the presuppositions inherent in the terms used. This may cause

¹ Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter*.

² The basic assumption behind the term *Spätjudentum* was that Christianity had supplanted Judaism; the proper designation for Judaism must, then, indicate that its time was running out. The term is thus a vehicle for what is often called supersessionist theology, or replacement theology. Very few scholars, if any, use it any more, being aware of the theological problems inherent in it. See also the discussion of Bousset’s work by Lutz Doering, “Wilhelm Bousset’s *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter*,” *EC* 6 (2015): 51–66, which confirms Bousset’s general contempt for Jewish scholars (pp. 53, 65–66), and notes the “highly ambivalent” character of his scholarship (p. 65).

³ Loren T. Stuckenbruck, “What is Second Temple Judaism?” in *T&T Clark Encyclopedia of Second Temple Judaism*, Vol. 1. Edited by Daniel M. Gurtner and Loren T. Stuckenbruck (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 1–19, here 2.

problems and slow down interpretive progress. The path to a new consensus on how we speak about and describe ancient Judaism has been quite protracted. Today we have left behind “late Judaism” but are still struggling to find new designations. Several terms exist side by side in the scholarly literature: “Early Judaism,” “Ancient Judaism,” “Middle Judaism,”⁴ “Second Temple Judaism,” and so on. Indeed, even the term “Judaism” itself is debated.⁵

Less obvious cases of misleading terminology, which often disclose the subjective position, or bias, of the author are the terms “universalism” and “particularism.” The problem with these terms is their vagueness, a vagueness that, as shall be argued below, renders them unsuitable for scholarly work, unless one is willing to define what they mean every time they are employed.⁶ In this chapter, my aim is to show that “universalism” and “particularism” are terms that mislead us into making historical claims that are untenable upon closer examination, and that they should therefore be abandoned. They simply cannot define the aspects of “religion” they are supposed to describe, and they are unable to distinguish differences or show similarities between traditions. This, it will be argued, is the case both at the level of analysis and when results are to be presented.

In order to substantiate this argument and suggest a way forward, I will propose a new set of terms that are, in my view, more adapted to the present state of research, with its emphasis on the diversity evident within ancient Judaism more generally and the New Testament more specifically. With the hope of contributing in some modest way to alleviating the problem of ambiguity in historical research, these terms are intended to be more precise and open up for new ways of categorizing patterns of thought, and thus to facilitate more detailed (and new) answers to old questions. The proposed set of terms is meant to be used at the level of both analysis and synthesis, since it is exceedingly difficult

⁴ This term was suggested by Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism*, but few have followed his suggestion.

⁵ See below, Ch. 11.

⁶ The problems inherent in these terms have been discussed before. In 1961 Gösta Lindeskog, referring to Bengt Sundkler and Johannes Munck, states that “[t]here has been some discussion concerning the terms universalism and particularism, and it has been argued that these terms, coined by liberal theology, have no real correspondence in biblical thinking” (“Israel in the New Testament: Some Few Remarks on a Great Problem,” *SEÅ* 26 [1961]: 57–92, here 66 n. 6). Later in the same note Lindeskog nevertheless states that, “[r]ightly understood, the terms universalism and particularism are still available as approximately corresponding to biblical thinking” (p. 67). The difficulty inherent in these terms is, however, shown also by the work of Albert Schweitzer, who, sensing their inadequacy, feels a need to further define “universalism” into sub-categories (cf. Albert Schweitzer in *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1930], 176, speaking of “Missions-Universalismus” and “Erwartungs-Universalismus”). The many issues triggered by the use of “universalism” and “particularism” in studies appearing much later than Schweitzer and Lindeskog show that the basic problem was never solved, and a new set of terms is indeed needed for scholars to avoid misunderstanding one another and the ancient texts themselves.

to find synthesizing terms that do not also violate the many and diverse aspects of our subject. Finally, I will give some examples of how the suggested terms can be applied to a selection of texts, including the Pauline writings. These examples are based on preliminary investigations and are included only to show how the study of these aspects of “religion” can benefit from new terminology. I do not claim to have the final answer as far as the application of the terms to these texts is concerned, as each example would require monograph-length discussion. The aim of this chapter is not primarily the analysis of these texts but rather the use of terminology. As for the Pauline literature, later chapters will argue more substantially in favor of the interpretive choices made here.

2.2 *The Terms “Universalism” and “Particularism” in Current Usage*

Commenting on Matt 28:16–20, Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh write that “[t]he move away from Israelite particularism was prepared for by Jesus’s interactions with outsiders.”⁷ Perhaps at first glance such a statement may seem unproblematic, terminologically speaking, especially since it fits neatly into aspects of current scholarly views. But a second reading prompts a number of important questions about what views of ancient Judaism and Christianity lie behind this way of phrasing claims and conclusions. First, “particularism” is used here in connection with missionary activity (Matt 28:19–20). Mission, thus, is another word for universalism, because particularism, its opposite, designates the lack of the activity that Matthew endorses, namely, to “go and make disciples of all nations.” These authors’ perception of the terms “particularism” and, implicitly, “universalism” is, therefore, that they denote *non-missionary and missionary activity respectively*. Second, Malina and Rohrbaugh define “mission” as the reaching out to people not belonging to the “religion” promoting the mission, with the purpose of converting them to that “religion.” This is what we, with Martin Goodman’s terminology, may call “proselytizing mission.”⁸ Third, they claim that Judaism more generally was not involved in such missionary activity, while the Jesus movement was. There are several problems with, on the one hand, this use of the term “particularism” and, on the other hand, the treatment of “Israelite” religion as a unified whole that can easily be placed in opposition to Matthew’s Gospel. These two difficulties are connected, but I will treat them separately, beginning with the former.

⁷ Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 166; cf. 412. (In the second edition of the book from 2003, p. 141, this sentence has been re-written, and, indeed, Malina and Rohrbaugh’s reading of these Matthean verses has been significantly revised.)

⁸ For this and other possible definitions of mission, see Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 3–6.

Malina and Rohrbaugh are not alone in understanding “particularism” as corresponding to a non-missionary attitude and practice. Indeed, “universalism” is commonly used to denote proselytizing mission, and “particularism” is considered its opposite.⁹ But other expressions can replace these terms, while maintaining the same assumptions. To take one example from 1963, Robert Davidson summarizes Snaith’s view on Second Isaiah with the following words: “Thus the phrase ‘*mishpat* for the nations’ expresses a vigorous religious *nationalism*, and not a *missionary* zeal.”¹⁰ “Nationalism,” or “religious nationalism,” is used here in the same way as Malina and Rohrbaugh use “particularism” – as an opposite to missionary activity. We find the same use of the words in Stephen G. Wilson’s 1973 monograph on Luke-Acts.¹¹ However, Wilson does not deny that there were “proselytizing efforts” on the part of Judaism, but distinguishes these efforts from “the concept of mission as it developed in the early Church.”¹² In his view, this distinction with regard to mission reveals the difference between Jewish nationalism and Christian freedom from nationalism. Louis Ginzberg’s use of the terms “particularism” and “nationalism” should, however, make us more cautious about mixing these terms: “The Messianic ideal, as preached by the prophets and taught by the Rabbis, is against particularism but not nationality [...] The Messianic hopes of the Pharisees were as we have seen universalistic, yet at the same time, national.”¹³ I will return to this issue below, discussing also Davidson’s use of the word “paradox” in an effort to solve the problem of what, for some scholars, appears contradictory.

Describing Judaism as it developed after the exile, Calvin J. Roetzel cites W.D. Davies and argues that “the post-exilic history of Judaism became the

⁹ See, e.g., Kenneth W. Clark, “The Gentile Bias in Matthew,” *JBL* 66 (1947): 165–172. On p. 165 Clark mentions “Jewish particularism” as one of the reasons why some scholars understand Matthew as Jewish, or, as he puts it, a converted Jew. At first, it is difficult to know what Clark means by this, but the answer comes in the next section, where he contrasts Matthew’s “Great Commission,” with “Jewish particularism,” the latter denoting its opposite. “Particularism” is thus understood in the same way here as in Malina and Rohrbaugh, namely as the opposite of a proselytizing mission.

¹⁰ Robert Davidson, “Universalism in Second Isaiah,” *SJT* 16 (1963): 166–185, here 170 (my italics). Snaith’s interpretation is contrasted with the interpretation made by Sigmund Mowinckel and H.W. Robinson, that in Second Isaiah there is clear evidence of missionary activity (168).

¹¹ Stephen G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts*, SNTSMS 23 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973). On p. 3 Wilson uses “nationalism” in the same way as he uses “particularism” on p. 21. His statement on p. 3 is characteristic of much of New Testament scholarship: “Finally they [i.e. the Jews] were limited by a nationalistic approach, since for them there was an inseparable connection between religion and national custom – an attitude from which, if at first a little reluctantly, the early Church did eventually break free.”

¹² Wilson, *Gentiles and the Gentile Mission*, 2.

¹³ Louis Ginzberg, “The Religion of the Jews at the Time of Jesus,” in *Origins of Judaism, Normative Judaism*, vol. 1, part 2 ed. Jacob Neusner (New York: Garland, 1990), 1–15. Quotations from pp. 8 and 9.

history of a ‘fenced’ community.”¹⁴ In articulating this opinion, Roetzel uses the terms “particularism,” “nationalism,” “exclusivism” and “universalism.” But Roetzel is not only referring to a missionary zeal or the lack of it. Instead the terms denote a much wider field of thought that can be described as *attitudes towards Gentiles*.¹⁵ This is the second and also most widely used meaning of these terms, including the complementary terms “nationalism” and “exclusivism.”¹⁶ Roetzel is aware of the fact that there were different views within Jewish tradition on these issues, but chooses to emphasize what he calls “particularism” as a descriptor for the entity Judaism. This problematic simplification is, in my view, aided by the vague and broad nature of the terminology employed, as I shall demonstrate further below.

Turning to Ferdinand Hahn and his classic *Mission in the New Testament* from 1965, which is often cited by scholars dealing with our subject, we find definitions of the terms in question similar to Roetzel’s. In the second chapter of his book, which, significantly, is entitled “Jesus’s *Attitude* to the Gentiles” (my italics), Hahn argues that the “particularistic” sayings in the Gospel traditions are to be rejected as inauthentic. He basis this on the claim that Jesus was open to Gentiles. In saying this, he does not mean that Jesus actively approached Gentiles proclaiming the kingdom. On the contrary, he states that “Jesus, indeed, performed his own works on Israel, and did not in any way carry on a ‘mission to the Gentiles’.” He continues: “No actual commission or order was given about a mission to the Gentiles [...] yet Jesus, by proclaiming to Israel the Kingdom of God, preached the claim and the salvation of God for everyone to hear, and even the Gentiles heard the news.”¹⁷ The argument is that Jesus, in working for the salvation of Israel, also worked for the salvation of the whole world. There is thus no contradiction between the claim that Jesus did not go directly to the Gentiles and the fact that he apparently still had a mission to accomplish in relation to them. For Hahn, Jesus’s power to cast out demons is a sign that his mission “leads far beyond every particularist horizon.”¹⁸

We note, then, that the terms “universalism” and “particularism” may carry not only the explicit meaning of missionary or non-missionary activity, but also the more general meaning of a certain attitude towards Gentiles. Still, it is obvi-

¹⁴ Calvin J. Roetzel, *Judgement in the Community* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 59–60.

¹⁵ For discussion orbiting this terminology, see David C. Sim and James S. McLaren, eds., *Attitudes to Gentiles in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, LNTS 499 (London: T&T Clark, 2014).

¹⁶ Cf. Robert Eisenman and Michael O. Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1992). On p. 187 they use the expression “nationalistic xenophobia” to describe the sectarian movement reconstructed from the sectarian writings among the Dead Sea Scroll. The expression refers to the general attitude in this movement towards Gentiles.

¹⁷ Ferdinand Hahn, *Mission in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 39.

¹⁸ Hahn, *Mission in the New Testament*, 33.

ous that “universalism” has positive connotations and “particularism” is regarded as somehow negative. These terms are thus not applied neutrally or descriptively, but carry within them value judgments. Further, “universalism” is almost always applied to Christianity (or Jesus, or the Jesus movement), and “particularism” to Judaism (defined as something other than the Jesus movement), no matter which “authentic traditions” are referred to or what aspects of the texts are emphasized.¹⁹

There are, to be sure, scholars who have noted the imprecision of these terms and have suggested further definitions. In his article “Proselytes or ‘Righteous Gentiles’?,” Terence L. Donaldson distinguishes between three kinds of universalistic strains.²⁰ Under the heading “Patterns of Universalism,” he designates these strains as (1) proselytism, (2) the doctrine of righteous Gentiles, that is, that Gentiles could be regarded as righteous without becoming Jews, and (3) the pattern of thought traditionally called the eschatological pilgrimage of the nations, or, as he prefers to call it, “Zion eschatology.” I will return to Donaldson’s study. Here, I merely note that the recognition of the complexity and diversity of ancient Judaism has led to the necessity of clarifying further what, more precisely, is meant by “universalism.”

Something similar happens in Alan F. Segal’s study “Conversion and Universalism: Opposites that Attract.”²¹ In this article, Segal notes that “the Christian community designed its understanding of universal mission in the first century, as it dealt with the issue of the conversion of the Gentiles. Conversely, Rabbinic Judaism designed its *specific understanding of universalism* in the second and third centuries, as it dealt with the issue of remaining Jewish in a hostile world” (my italics).²² Segal thus uses (the positively charged) word “universalism” to describe the sentiments of both Christianity and Judaism. In order to do this, however, he has to explain the term and call it “a specific understanding of universalism.” Such a modifier could of course also have been used to describe Christianity’s outlook, but since Christianity traditionally has been designated “universalistic” (and Judaism as “particularistic”), Christianity has become the standard point of reference. If other patterns of thought are to be called universalistic, they have to be defined from the Christian horizon.

¹⁹ This problematic differentiation has contributed to, among other things, the perception that the categories “Judaism” and “Christianity” were somehow “incompatible” even as early as the time when Paul was active. See discussion in, e.g., William S. Campbell, “Perceptions of Incompatibility between Christianity and Judaism in Pauline Interpretation,” *BibInt* 13 (2005): 298–316.

²⁰ Terence L. Donaldson, “Proselytes or ‘Righteous Gentiles’?,” *JSP* 7 (1990): 3–27. See also idem, *Judaism and the Gentiles*.

²¹ Alan F. Segal, “Conversion and Universalism: Opposites that Attract,” in *Origins and Method: Towards A New Understanding of Judaism and Christianity*, JSNTSup, 86, ed. B.H. McLean (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 162–189.

²² Segal, “Conversion and Universalism,” 162.

Such (implicit) hermeneutical operations happen at the level of terminology. In terms of historical reconstruction, Segal has convincingly shown that “the easy contrast made between the early Christian community and the variety of Jewish sects does not work. It is not just a question of Jewish parochialism being replaced by Christian universalism.”²³ Indeed, a “major point [is] that the NT evinces the same ambivalence on the issue of the inclusion of Gentiles as do the other Jewish sects.”²⁴ As for the term “universalism,” then, it is used to designate different, “favorable” attitudes to Gentiles,²⁵ these different attitudes to outsiders seemingly being positive enough to deserve the label. This is so regardless of whether the discussion is about the inclusion of Gentiles into Judaism or Christianity, or whether the question of salvation is the topic under consideration.

At this point we may conclude, then, that different aspects of the relationship between Jews/Christians and Gentiles can be, and have been, designated by the same term: “universalism.” Arguing that the Rabbinic doctrine of righteous Gentiles should be called “universalistic” means that a religious pattern of thought that recognizes outsiders as good enough for the coming kingdom, for life in the world to come, is “universalistic.” Thus, a tradition need not engage in a “universal” mission to earn the title “universalist” according to this use of the term. On the other hand, it could be inferred from the above that a pattern of thought that does not recognize this righteous status of outsiders may be called “particularistic.” This would be the case for Jewish groups, including especially the Pauline Christ-groups, which promoted a “universal mission” operating under the conviction that the world was in the hands of evil powers, and claimed that the only way for the nations to escape divine condemnation would be to join their group. When the terms are used in this way, *they mean exactly the opposite of what Malina and Rohrbaugh meant by them.* The Jesus Movement (or more correctly: some of the Christ-groups) now represent a “particularistic” stance because they do not allow for salvation outside their own tradition; other Jewish groups, however, would have to be understood as exemplifying “universalistic” traditions.²⁶

²³ Segal, “Conversion and Universalism,” 163.

²⁴ Segal, “Conversion and Universalism,” 162.

²⁵ See Segal, “Conversion and Universalism,” 175, where he distinguishes between the issue of conversion and salvation; salvation is not always connected to conversion.

²⁶ To be sure, it is true that some texts in the Christian canon express the perspective here attributed to Jewish groups not accepting Jesus as the Messiah. I will return to this below, giving here just one example: 1 Tim 4:10. (Cf., e.g., the comment of Robert A. Wild, “Commentary on 1 Timothy,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Edited by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy (London: Chapman, 1993) 896–899, here 898: “[This is] one of the strongest biblical affirmations of God’s universal salvific will. Believers enjoy a special, but not a unique, claim”). In the history of the Church, however, a dominant theme, expressed by Cyprian’s famous dictum, has long prevailed which excludes from salvation people not belonging to the Church: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. On the com-

One could even go further and argue that the only truly “universalistic” religion is a tradition that sees all religions as acceptable ways to reach salvation, whichever way “salvation” is defined. Then, to be sure, one ends up outside the theologies of religion that can be found in Judaism and Christianity, and both of these religions would, accordingly, have to be called “particularistic” because of their lack of inclusivity. We can, however, find this kind of thinking both in ancient times, in certain strains of Greco-Roman tradition, and in contemporary societies, e.g., in Hindu religious thought. “Syncretism,” to be sure a problematic term in and of itself, may also be called a kind of “universalism,” because of its ability to incorporate different traditions into a single framework. History is replete with instances of such merging of traditions, the Christianization of Sweden at the end of the first millennium being one of them. Before Christianity became all-pervasive in society, some individuals and groups would approach the emerging pluralistic situation created by Christian missionaries by simply incorporating Christ into the already existing Norse pantheon.

Returning to the first-century Roman world, these examples are meant to highlight the three main points of this section:

1. There are several meanings attributed to the terms “universalism” and “particularism,” and scholars use them in different ways.
2. Since the meanings of the terms are poorly defined, scholars operationalize them, it seems, based on their theological presuppositions. Regardless of how the terms are used, “universalism” has positive connotations and “particularism” has negative.
3. The vagueness of the terms allows this subjective use and enables them to become tools for problematic interpretations of the aspects of “religion” that define the relationship between the insider and the outsider.

Before considering other ways of approaching the analysis of Judaism and Christianity in relationship to their respective Other, I want to briefly return to Robert Davidson’s study mentioned above in order to give yet another reason why historical reconstruction need to move beyond more traditional terminology. As pointed out earlier, Davidson notes the very different interpretations of “universalism” or “particularism” in Second Isaiah made by Mowinckel (universalism/missionary activity) and Snaith (religious nationalism/non-missionary activity). He finds truth in both of these interpretations, and solves the problem by suggesting that we are confronted here with a “paradox.”²⁷ “Particularism” and “universalism” are not opposites, but rather describe “tension

plexity of Jewish and non-Jewish dynamics and interactions in Pauline groups, see also Mark D. Nanos, “How Could Paul Accuse Peter of ‘Living *Ethné-ishly* in Antioch (Gal 2:11–21) If Peter Was Eating according to Jewish Dietary Norms?” *JSP* 6 (2017): 199–223.

²⁷ Davidson, “Universalism in Second Isaiah,” 173–85.

points in the paradoxical Old Testament doctrine of mission.”²⁸ Importantly, he then notes that “the same paradox of particularism and universalism appears in the New Testament.”²⁹ The paradox is this: “At precisely the point at which the note of particularism, we might say religious nationalism is heard, a note of universalism is likewise sounded.”³⁰

Although I would perhaps phrase it somewhat differently, I believe Davidson is correct when he concludes that, “[t]o neglect this paradox leads to a failure to recognize the true dimension of the missionary interest in the Old Testament and to the drawing of too simple a distinction between Judaism as a nationalistic and early Christianity as a missionary faith.”³¹ I am not convinced, however, that the question of “universalism” and “particularism” needs to be described as a paradox. Rather, a case could be made that it is only as long as we use these terms, foreign to the texts themselves but very much at home in our own modern world, that the paradoxical seems to emerge. Applying another set of terms and categories better able to describe these complexities in the ancient world may in fact remove the sense of paradox that we may experience when we encounter the historical.

2.3 *More Precise Terminology: A Suggestion*

The diversity and complexity of attitudes towards Gentiles in ancient Judaism is today a basic point of departure in scholarship. The same diversity applies to the Jesus movement and early Christianity. We have already touched upon this above,³² here I want to develop some of these thoughts in order to clarify further what is at stake.

One issue that has long been a stumbling block among scholars of the New Testament is the historical Jesus’s attitude to Gentiles. The core of the problem seems to lie in the rather odd circumstance that parts of the early Jesus Movement, and later the emerging majority Church, directed its primary missionary activity towards non-Jews, while in the Gospels the “founder of the Church,” as Christians often conceptualize Jesus, does not appear to have had any over-

²⁸ Davidson, “Universalism in Second Isaiah,” 176.

²⁹ Davidson, “Universalism in Second Isaiah,” 183.

³⁰ Davidson, “Universalism in Second Isaiah,” 176. As examples of this tension in the New Testament, he refers to Paul’s letters. I would add, among other texts, Acts 1:6–8, where the issue of the restoration of the kingdom of Israel is addressed; immediately after replying to the disciples’ question, (implicitly) confirming to them that this will happen but rejecting any kind of timetable for these processes, the Jesus of Acts sends his disciples to “the ends of the earth,” to be his witnesses.

³¹ Davidson, “Universalism in Second Isaiah,” 175.

³² See, e.g., Segal, “Conversion and Universalism”; Sim and McLaren, eds., *Attitudes to Gentiles*.

whelming desire to “missionize” people who were not Jewish.³³ So, opinions vary. On the one hand, we have scholars like Friedrich Spitta, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, who argues that already when Jesus set off with the aim to transform the world he knew he directed his mission in such a way as to include Gentiles. According to this type of interpretive trajectory, Jesus becomes, in a sense, the first Christian missionary.³⁴ On the other hand, we find scholars like Stephen Wilson arguing that Jesus did not intend to promote a Gentile mission at all.³⁵ Between these poles we find several middle positions.

One of these middle positions is that of Cecil John Cadoux, resembling a solution that Davidson might have preferred: Jesus focused on Israel only, but this was in order to prepare them for their task of addressing non-Jews in a second phase.³⁶ Cadoux’s aim is to find a balance between “particularism” and “universalism” in much the same way Davidson did with Second Isaiah.³⁷ The majority position among scholars today, if such a position can be identified, seems to be that Jesus himself did not actively address his message to non-Jews, even if scholars differ as to why he limited himself in this way. Strangely enough – or not – we rarely find Jesus being called “particularistic,” and claims that his views represent a narrow, religious nationalism are almost non-existent in the literature.³⁸ When certain scholars describe the very same attitude on the part of “Judaism,” however, and more specifically Second Temple Judaism or Rabbinic Judaism, this (negative) terminology is immediately triggered.

The diversity of opinions on the position of non-Jews in Jesus-oriented interpretations of Judaism comes through clearly in the texts later included in the New Testament. This, and the fact that these views on non-Jews align well with those of other Jewish groups, has been noted by many scholars, including Segal (see above) and E. P. Sanders.³⁹ We need only to think of the differences in opin-

³³ For example, it is revealing that Morna D. Hooker’s article “The Prohibition of Foreign Missions (Mt. 10.5–6),” *The Expository Times* 82 (1971), 361–365, is included under the heading “Uncomfortable Words.”

³⁴ Friedrich Spitta, *Jesus und die Heidenmission* (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1909).

³⁵ Wilson, *Gentiles and the Gentile Mission*, 18.

³⁶ Cecil John Cadoux, *The Historic Mission of Jesus* (London: Lutterworth, 1943). Cf. Michael F. Bird, *Jesus and the Origin of the Gentile Mission* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 3.

³⁷ Cf. J. Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations* (London: SCM Press, 1958). Having surveyed the evidence in Chapters 1 and 2, he concludes in the beginning of Chapter 3 that “Our study has thus landed us in what appears to be a complete contradiction. We have found, on the one hand, that Jesus limited his activity to Israel, and imposed the same limitation upon his disciples. On the other hand, it has been established that Jesus expressly promised the Gentiles a share in the kingdom of God” (p. 55).

³⁸ See, e.g., Hooker, “The Prohibition of Foreign Missions,” 364, who is very careful not to describe Jesus as particularistic: “But the concentration of Jesus’ mission upon Jews is not to be interpreted as a ‘particularist’ attitude over against the idea of ‘universalism.’ For what was at issue was not so much a question of privilege as of responsibility.”

³⁹ E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 212–221.

ion and practices between Jesus, Paul, Acts, and Matthew to realize that solutions to the gentile problem were not a given among the early Christ-followers; we have no unified response among the movement's first adherents and leaders. We should be careful not to read back into the first century the later Church's position, when it had become a predominantly non-Jewish institution and a solution (problematically) claiming Paul as its originator had proven the most popular. The same is true of Judaism; the diversity existing before the rabbis does not equal what the rabbis eventually settled on, even if certain trajectories of thought connecting the rabbis to their predecessors are possible to discern.

The diverse Jewish understandings of the place of non-Jews relative to themselves and their God is well documented. I have already mentioned Terence Donaldson's work and that of David Sim. Sanders finds six different strands of thought concerning Gentiles in the biblical prophets, all of which are also discernible in different ways in later Jewish literature.⁴⁰ It is simply not possible to label these diverse traditions "universalistic" or "particularistic." Rather than trying to squeeze these diverse attitudes to the Other into the matrix provided by these two terms, the task before us should be to first isolate the variants represented in the texts, and from there create categories and terms that are more attuned to this material.

In my view, there are at least three different but equally important aspects of our problem that should be considered when studying these issues. These patterns of thought are not possible to pack into the traditional terminology of "universalism" and "particularism," since they may occupy different positions in relation to each other in different texts, something which these two terms would inevitably conceal. The views on the Other I am thinking of are found orbiting issues related to ethnicity, salvation, and mission, and each of these categories needs to be further defined:

a. *Ethnicity*

This aspect concerns ethnic aspects of "religious"⁴¹ group identity, and the attendant perceived prospects within groups of receiving or not people not belonging to the same ethnic group. Broadly speaking, there seems to be at least three possible positions a group can settle on in this regard:

1. *Closed-Ethnic Religion*. This position understands the cultic activities of a group as closed off to outsiders, and no conversions are possible. There is an identification between the ethnic group and what we would call its religious identity.

⁴⁰ Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 212–218.

⁴¹ I am using "religious" and "religion" here in order to be able to generalize the suggested terminology across time and place, fully aware of the problems inherent to the term when applied to the ancient period; see, e.g., Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

2. *Open-Ethnic Religion*. The same identification is made between a people group and cult as above, but here we find conversion to be possible; there are (ritual) ways for people not belonging to the ethnic group to become members of the group and participate in its cult. These “converts” then identify with, and are identified by others as belonging to, the same ethnicity as other members.
3. *Non-Ethnic Religion*. This position does not recognize as religiously valid any ethnic identifiers whatsoever. People of different ethnic backgrounds form religious groups around common beliefs and practices in relation to which ethnicity is of no theo-ritual consequence.

b. *Salvation*⁴²

A second aspect of a “religion’s” construction of its relationship to the Other is that of salvation. Here, we find two main views:

1. *Salvation-Inclusive Religion*. This theological posture recognizes the possibility of salvation, in whichever way it is defined, for people not belonging to the in-group; salvation is not thought of as reserved for members only. In this category ethics and behavior are often considered more important than theo-ritual positions or membership, i.e., the salvific status of people of other religious backgrounds are considered based on ethical and behavioral standards nourished by the in-group.
2. *Salvation-Exclusive Religion*. The boundaries of a religion (membership) are, more or less, considered to be the boundaries of salvation.

c. *Mission*

By “mission,” I mean the intent and/or strategies used to influence others, passively or actively, to change their views and/or their behavior.⁴³ This rather wide definition includes activity directed toward people belonging to the same ethnic group or religion as the missionaries themselves, but who are in one way or another found wanting by the latter. In his critical work *Mission*

⁴² I use this term in the widest possible sense, as referring to any and all divinely ordained positive implications, pre- or post mortem, of belonging to, or conforming to the expectations of, a religious group.

⁴³ The importance of defining what is meant by “mission” can be seen in the article of Schuyler Brown, “The Mission to Israel in Matthew’s Central Section (Mt. 9.35–11.1),” *ZNW* 69 (1978): 73–90. One of Brown’s arguments for not calling this passage “The Missionary Discourse” is that “the term ‘missionary’ has certain connotations in contemporary language which obscure [the] evangelist’s purpose” (73 n. 1). Recently, there has been an increased interest in the technical aspects of “mission,” perhaps better described using the word recruitment. For example, John S. Kloppenborg’s work on the role of social networks and the importance of understanding the social mechanisms at work in the ancient city adds much needed nuance to the at-times vague notions of successful Christ-oriented “missionary activity” that still surface in scholarship from time to time; see John S. Kloppenborg, “Recruitment to Elective Cults: Network Structure and Ecology,” *NTS* 66 (2020): 323–350. See also discussion below, Ch. 3.

and *Conversion*, Martin Goodman has presented a number of different types of mission.⁴⁴ Here, I will limit the discussion to three types important for my purpose, employing a slightly modified version of Goodman's suggestions. These three types are then subdivided into *active* and *passive* expressions of mission. This means that "type" refers here to the purpose of the mission, and "active" or "passive" refer to the manner or method of the mission (viz., whether any active missionary efforts are carried out, if the mission is thought to be carried out by God alone, or if mission is thought of as indirect, a result of group members' general behavior, understood as attracting others).⁴⁵ This last distinction might seem superfluous, but it will prove helpful when we look closer at different strands of traditions. The three basic types of mission that I find important to distinguish between are as follows:

1. *Proselytizing Mission*. This type is what we usually have in mind when missionary activity is discussed. Its purpose is to incorporate outsiders into the group represented by the missionary, often through certain rituals. The kind of ritual used has no importance in this context, only that it is considered effective in changing the status of the person(s) missionized. It is inconsequential, then, whether the ritual is, e.g., "Jewish circumcision" or "Christian baptism."
2. *Ethno-Ethic Mission*. There is a certain kind of mission carried out by different groups both in antiquity and today that does not have as its goal to make people formally "convert." Instead the purpose is to influence and change the behavior and/or cultic habits of others, without suggesting they should join the group represented by the missionary. While conversion is not part of the aim, the change sought is still defined by the missionary's own approach to ethical and other issues, including forms of worship that are understood to have religious significance within their group but beyond its membership.

⁴⁴ Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*.

⁴⁵ Cf. Wilson, *Gentiles and the Gentile Mission*, 1–2. Wilson wishes to distinguish between "universalism" and "mission" in the Hebrew Bible, claiming that the former designates what I call "passive mission" and reserving the latter for what we have called "active mission." The reason for this, as he rightly observes, is that "[t]he idea that God is Lord of all creation may be an essential presupposition for universal mission, but the idea of mission is not, at least for the Old Testament, a logical implicate of universalism." Further, he argues that the movement is centripetal rather than centrifugal – Gentiles will come to Zion, Israel need not go to the Gentiles. Wilson is probably correct here as well, but, in my view, the problem is that he looks at the *method* of the mission when deciding what should be called "mission" and what should not. I believe it is more helpful to concentrate on *purpose* when choosing terminology, and the purpose in both cases is somehow, by means of different methods, to make the Gentiles honor the God of Israel. Whether this is done actively or passively is a question of further distinctions *within* the concept of mission. A non-missionary stance would rather be exemplified by someone who does not believe that their religious traditions have any larger meaning or purpose for people not already belonging to their own group.

3. *Inward Mission*. This type refers to efforts made to influence individuals or groups within the larger community to which missionary and missionized alike belong in order to persuade those addressed to comply with the missionaries' views on certain aspects of their shared tradition. This type of mission is likely the most common. Sometimes, however, its effects may lead to a point where different opinions are no longer able to co-exist within a larger group. In such cases, a beginning of a parting of the ways of sorts may be discerned, in which two strands of a tradition become two distinct groups, either within the same religion or, over a longer period of time, as two independent religions; like children born of the same mother.⁴⁶ A further distinction can be made between two kinds of inward mission: (1) A mission with the stated purpose of "correcting" how people understand and practice their religion by referring to known traditions, and (2) a mission aiming to introduce new elements or doctrines that alter a tradition, but which does so in such a way that members do not perceive the reforms to constitute a break with their basic identity as members.

These three aspects of how religious groups may perceive of and relate to the Other, and the categories that I have suggested in connection with them, can, I believe, be useful tools in the study of ancient Judaism's and Christianity's ways of relating to people not belonging within their own groups. Further distinctions and nuance are possible, of course, but it is more important, I believe, to note that there are no neat divisions exactly along these lines in every text from the time period we have an interest in here. Hopefully, though, the suggested categories are specific enough to be of help in the analysis of theologies of religion in ancient Judaism and Christianity. Before concluding, it may be of some interest in the service of clarity to apply these terms to a few texts in order to show how they can be used and how they function in relation to each other.

2.4 *The New Terminology in Use*

Perhaps the best way to begin an overview of this kind is by considering the figure who has played a historical role in both Jewish and Christian traditions: Jesus. Taking as point of departure that Jesus did not direct his mission to non-Jews,⁴⁷ and, further, very likely had no such intention, his activities can be

⁴⁶ Cf. Alan F. Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 1, who, noting the difference between Second Temple Judaism and Rabbinic Judaism, describes Judaism and Christianity as twins.

⁴⁷ See above and compare F.W. Beare, "The Mission of the Disciples and the Mission Charge: Matthew 10 and Parallels," *JBL* 89 (1970): 1–13. Referring to Rom 15:8, Beare states that the prohibition of foreign missions "is not out of keeping with the actual practice of Jesus." At the same time he notes that the prohibition itself would have been completely unne-

labelled as *inward mission*. Jesus addressed his own people and aimed to influence contemporary Jewish society with his specific understanding of what the current moment in Jewish history – the imminent arrival of the kingdom of heaven – required in terms of repentance, of *teshuvah*. This understanding was, to a great deal, based on traditions already known to him and his audience, but there were nevertheless new ways in which his interpretation of the Torah combined these traditions that made him the leader of one of the several Jewish groups we know of from the Second Temple period. Therefore, his activities are best described as inward mission aimed at introducing a specific understanding of Judaism, or perhaps better, an understanding of Judaism adapted to the (apocalyptic) moment that he was convinced was at hand (subgroup c.3.[2]).

Regarding Jesus's attitude to non-Jews, there is little evidence to go on in terms of the ethnic aspect. We have sayings like Matt 23:15 which, if signaling Jesus's own attitude, seems to be quite critical of bringing in proselytes. This verse could, however, also be interpreted as a critique of *Pharisaic* proselytes, and not more generally a denunciation of proselytism as such. On the other hand, we have several sayings that mention Gentiles in a positive way (again, Matthew would give us some information, in 2:1–12; 8:5–13; 15:21–28). None of these examples, however, indicate anything about Gentiles converting to Judaism, or becoming Jews; they tell us only about non-Jews, real or imagined, who are convinced of the power of the god of the Jews to change the world they live in, if only they subordinate themselves to him and his agent, the messiah. Perhaps one way of solving the problem with the ethnic aspect would be to look first at the aspect of salvation.

Based on how Jesus was remembered in the Gospels and in Acts, it seems possible that Jesus somehow counted on the inclusion of (at least some) non-Jews in the world to come.⁴⁸ The question, then, is whether these non-Jews would be admitted as proselytes, i.e., as (messianic) Jews, or as “righteous Gentiles,” that is, as individuals expected to be part of the redemptive end-time processes without “conversion.” Donaldson argues that according to several Jewish texts, Gentiles were likely not required to join the Jewish people at the end of time in order to escape destruction. While we cannot be sure, it seems probable, in my view, that Jesus thought along similar lines with regard to the

essary in the time of Jesus and thus “reflects a time in the life of the early church after the issue of the Gentile mission had been joined, or when it was at least contemplated” (8–9).

⁴⁸ The positive statements about non-Jews in Matthew just mentioned, and there are others, would seem to indicate an attitude according to which at least those people among the nations who approached Jesus were not thought of as destined for annihilation, which, in turn, may suggest that at least Matthew thought of them as having a share in the world to come. Cf. how Acts 1:6–8 combines outreach to the nations with the (re-)establishment of the kingdom of Israel. It is difficult to know how much of this reflect the historical Jesus. At the very least, however, it seems clear that no followers of Jesus remembered his proclaiming of the kingdom to mean the destruction of all non-Jews.

eschatological salvation of Gentiles *qua* Gentiles; “righteous Gentiles.” He just did not understand his mission to include making that happen.⁴⁹

In line with this argument, and based on the assumption that Jesus understood himself to be sent only to his own people, it is difficult to find evidence for any active ethno-ethnic mission on his part. On the other hand, perhaps we could talk about a *passive* mission, on the assumption that Jesus would have thought that non-Jews would be drawn to the messiah of Israel “automatically” when they saw what this god was doing for his people (as the metaphor “a light to the nations” in Isa 42:6–7, cf. Matt 5:14, seems to imply).⁵⁰ While Matthew’s Gospel does seem to require that non-Jews, after Jesus’s resurrection, become proselytes, i.e., Jews, as they join the Jesus movement,⁵¹ most other texts remembering Jesus do not interpret him in this way. It seems reasonable to conclude that the historical Jesus did not require such “conversion,” but would still think of non-Jews who approached him and accepted his authority as possibly receiving a share in the world to come. At the very least, if we are to believe what the Gospels claim, non-Jews were given access to some of the benefits of the kingdom during their life-time (healings, exorcisms). Thus, one might argue that Jesus’s theology of religion was *salvation inclusive* (subgroup b.1), and that it is not impossible that the ethnic aspect is best described as a *closed-ethnic stance* (subgroup a.1).

Paul’s position is somewhat more difficult to define because he, contrary to Jesus and as a self-proclaimed apostle to the nations, primarily directed his mission to non-Jews. To the degree he also spoke to his own people,⁵² it would have been a message consisting of two basic themes: that the messiah had arrived and that this would have implications for the nations, who, consequently, should be told (in a way Paul himself thought appropriate). In his (we may assume, limit-

⁴⁹ Donaldson, “Proselytes or ‘Righteous Gentiles’?” Cf. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 217, who argues to the contrary that the most general expectation in Judaism probably was that non-Jews would ultimately have to go through circumcision. The idea of the “righteous Gentile” is connected to the broader discussion on “god-fearers,” which, though contested (see A. Thomas Kraabel, “The Disappearance of the God-Fearers,” *Numen* 28 [1981]: 113–126), is able to account for both textual and epigraphic evidence of non-Jews associating themselves in different ways with Jewish associations in the diaspora (see *IMilet* 940=AGRW 183). See John G. Gager’s rebuttal of Kraabel’s study: John G. Gager, “Jews, Gentiles, and Synagogues in the Book of Acts,” *HTR* 79 (1986): 91–99, and Paula Fredriksen, “If It Looks like a Duck, and It Quacks like a Duck. . . : On Not Giving Up the Godfearers,” *A Most Reliable Witness. Essays in Honor of Ross Shepard Kraemer*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey et al. BJS 358 (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2016), 25–34.

⁵⁰ Cf. the expression of Schweitzer in *Mystik*, 176, that we discussed briefly above: “Erwartungs-Universalismus” (“expectant universalism”). This expression underlines the eschatological aspect, but does not solve the other problems I have discussed here.

⁵¹ On this, see further below.

⁵² Romans 9–11 seems to imply that he did have such conversations with his fellow Jews; cf. 1 Thess 2:14–16, and see Markus Öhler, “The Punishment of Thirty-Nine Lashes (2 Corinthians 11:24) and the Place of Paul in Judaism,” *JBL* 140.3 (2021): 623–640.

ed) engagement with his own people, Paul's mission should be categorized as an inward, active mission aimed at introducing a new understanding of Judaism (subgroup c.3.[2]). There is no indication, or terminology, in his letters suggesting that Paul was inaugurating a new "religion," and it seems clear that he is not even suggesting his message would necessitate institutional differentiation within Judaism; such differentiation rather resulted from the conflicts generated around the new elements he wanted to introduce (cf., e.g., 1 Cor 7:17–20; Rom 11:1).⁵³

When turning to non-Jews, however, Paul falls between the types of proselytizing mission (subgroup c.1) and ethno-ethic mission (subgroup c.2).⁵⁴ This is because he would not allow Gentiles to join the Jewish people (for men, by means of circumcision), and so would not allow them to keep the Torah the same way Jews were (cf. Gal 5:2–3). He nevertheless seems to have thought that the meaning of Torah was fulfilled in them through the work of the Spirit, which in turn materialized, for them, primarily in certain behavior thought to be approved by the God of Israel (cf. Gal 5:22–23; 6:8–10; Rom 5:5), but also in the absolute requirement that they as non-Jews should abandon their own ancestral gods and worship, exclusively, the God of Israel.⁵⁵ Sanders phrases it somewhat differently: "Gentiles should not accept those parts of the law which distinguish Jew from Greek."⁵⁶ This may be somewhat misleading, though, since worshiping the God of Israel only was *the* central (ritual) part of the law and precisely what *did not* distinguish Jew from non-Jew.

Having said this, though, we do find Paul requiring a rite of conversion – baptism – of non-Jews in order for them to become part of the *ekklēsia*; to be *en Christō*, "in Christ." His mission to the nations is thus not ethno-ethic, neither is it fully proselytizing. It is a rather odd combination which gives some access, but not full access, to the group to which Paul himself belongs, the Jewish people. This "hybrid" solution is likely explained by his specific vision of the eschaton, in which Gentiles need to stay Gentile in order for the world, as it was coming to its end, to represent the theological idea that the God of Israel is the God of the whole world (cf. Rom 3:29–31).⁵⁷

⁵³ A modern (heuristic) parallel would be to study the (institutional) parting of the ways between Orthodox, Reform and Conservative Judaism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

⁵⁴ But cf. the recent study by Bekken, *Paul's Negotiation*, who argues, based on a comparative study of Philo's construal of proselytism, that Paul indeed should be understood as incorporating non-Jews fully, as proselytes, in Israel.

⁵⁵ This latter point is emphasized by Paula Fredriksen, "Judaizing the Nations: The Ritual Demands of Paul's Gospel," *NTS* 56 (2010): 232–252.

⁵⁶ Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 217.

⁵⁷ It may be that Paul thought, or had come to think after having had his vision of the Christ, that non-Jews simply could not join the Jewish people, that circumcision would be useless, as Matthew Thiessen has argued in his important monograph *Paul and the Gentile Problem*. But if this were so, another question arises: Why would Paul be so adamant that his

Contrary to what is generally believed concerning the ethnic aspect, then, I suggest on the basis of texts like Gal 5:2–3, 1 Cor 7:17–18, and Romans 9–11 that Paul’s Judaism is best labelled *closed-ethnic* (subgroup a.1).⁵⁸ It is not non-ethnic because Paul still claims that the “natural olive tree” is made up of Christ-oriented Jews, and the non-Jews in Christ are like “a wild olive shoot” (Rom 11:1–5, 17–21). This metaphor indicates a clear distinction between Jews and non-Jews along religio-ethnic lines, even “in Christ,” with very real theo-ritual and social consequences.⁵⁹ In Paul, later generations of (non-Jewish) Christians found legitimization for their non-ethnic position on inclusion, but judging from his letters, Paul would not have endorsed such a theological move.

Concerning the aspect of salvation, Paul is again an intricate read. In terms of non-Jews, he seems to represent a *salvation exclusive* stance (subgroup b.2).⁶⁰ But as he turns to the theme of the salvation of his own people Israel, and, more specifically those among them who have declined the offer to join his messianic groups, this shifts to a *salvation inclusive* position (cf. Rom 11:25–29). Indeed, it seems as if Paul has inverted the Jewish eschatological expectation that claimed that, in the end, gentiles will come to Zion and join the Jewish people in worship of the God of Israel. Instead, it is now the Jews whom God has made sure would not join Paul and the other Jesus followers (Rom 11:25), who play this role in the eschatological drama, but with a much stronger effect. Their not joining the Jesus movement is resulting in reconciliation (*katallagē*) for the world, and when the end comes, their inclusion in salvation (*pas Israēl sōthesētai*, Rom 11:26) will lead to life for the dead (Rom 11:15). Paul’s salvation-exclusivism appears, then, to be balanced by an eschatological expectation focused on the salvation of the Jewish people as such.⁶¹

non-Jews must not become circumcised, if circumcision had no effect? How would we explain the claim in Gal 5:3, indeed the tone of Galatians as a whole? I find Genevive Dibley’s critique of Thiessen’s argument compelling in this regard: “Making and Unmaking of Jews,” 3–23.

⁵⁸ The fact that Paul would not allow Gentiles to become Jews when they joined his movement suggests that his stance is best described as closed-ethnic. However, the unity between the different parts of the people of God described in the olive-tree metaphor in Rom 11 results in a religious system which includes both Jews and Gentiles, though they do not share the same status. (It seems as if this idea and practice of a “unity in diversity” may have been one of the reasons for the so-called “parting of the ways” and, eventually, the creation of a new “religion.” But this was not, I believe, Paul’s intention; on this, see further ch. 9 below)

⁵⁹ See esp. Rom 11:18 (gentile Christ-followers are dependent on Jewish Christ-followers and thus on Judaism); Rom 11:24 (a *qal vahomer* argument; non-Jews have been incorporated against nature, *para physin*, a process much more difficult than it would be for the natural branches, those representing a process in accordance with nature, *kata physin*).

⁶⁰ But see C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Moffat New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932), 183–187, and note esp. the chart on p. 187, where Dodd outlines an argument in favor of the salvation not only of all Israel, but also of all humankind.

⁶¹ As many others (but not all; see Ch. 1, p. 33, n.51) identifying with the Paul within Judaism perspective, I do not believe Paul proclaimed more generally a two-way solution to the

Turning now to Matthew's Gospel, the type of mission, the ethnic aspect, and the aspect of salvation seem to change during the narrative journey from chapters 1 and 2 to chapter 28. Changes in these aspects related to the Other are thus identifiable as part of the message Matthew aims to proclaim through his story and how it develops. The very existence of non-Jews in the Matthean narrative has led some scholars to assume that ethnic inclusiveness is part of the Gospel's message, i.e., what we would designate as an open-ethnic stance. Yet there is no evidence of proselytes in the text prior to ch. 28. This suggests that the main part of the Gospel has a *closed-ethnic* character (subgroup a.1). Further, before the resurrection, Matthew is very clear that there should be no mission to Gentiles, nor to Samaritans.⁶² Jesus's mission in Matthew is thus a case of an *inward mission*, introducing new elements in the religious tradition (subgroup c.3.[2]), although Matthew emphasizes more than the other Gospels Jesus's continuity with Moses and the prophets. The innovation is, quite simply, that the kingdom has now drawn near, and with this comes certain requirements in terms of how the Torah should be kept. Along with this view, in the main part of the Gospel there is a *salvation-inclusive perspective* with regard to non-Jews (subgroup b.1); Gentiles receive their share of the covenant blessings without any demand for conversion, and, depending on how they have approached followers of Jesus, they may even have a share in the world to come (Matt 25:31–46).⁶³

In the final verses of the final chapter, however, something happens. Suddenly Christ-oriented Jews (up till now only Jews could be full members of the Jesus-group in Matthew's story) are commanded to carry out a mission to non-Jews. The purpose of this mission is to include Gentiles in the Jesus group, but not as Gentiles. The common understanding of this passage is that baptism is the rite of conversion that allows these people to enter the Christ-movement, and that this ritual, similarly to how its efficacy is construed today, would not affect or transform their ethnic status.⁶⁴ David C. Sim, however, argues that “[o]n the much debated questions of whether the male Gentiles were circumcised

problem of salvation, one for non-Jews and one for Jews, the latter of which would have no relationship to the Christ. It seems clear, though, that Paul does make a distinction to the degree that there is no plan B for non-Jews who do not join the Jesus group, but there is one for Jews who decline this Christ-option. Indeed, for Paul, Israel, the people of God, is part of this whole process leading up to the End; their salvation is not a plan B, it is integral to plan A.

⁶² Matt 10:5–6; 15:24.

⁶³ E.g., Matt 8:5–13 and 15:21–28. For extensive discussion of Matt 25:31–46 in this regard, see Runesson, *Divine Wrath*, esp. 414–428.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 596: “For those who enter the school of Christ, baptism is the rite of initiation.” Further, he argues that baptism was required also for Jews, and that Jews are to be included in the so-called Great Commission, a view which is today problematized: see Terence L. Donaldson, “‘Nations,’ ‘Non-Jewish Nations,’ or ‘Non-Jewish Individuals?’” in *Matthew Within Judaism: Israel and the Nations in the First Gospel*, ECL 27, ed. Anders Runesson and Daniel M. Gurtner (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020), 169–194.

and whether all Gentile converts were expected to follow the whole Torah, it is almost certain that the answer is yes on both counts [...] This means that those Gentiles who became Matthean Christians became Jews in the process.”⁶⁵ Following Sim, it is probable that all male members of Matthean groups were circumcised, and at least the proselytes were also baptized.⁶⁶ To be sure, the text does not mention circumcision explicitly, but several indications point us in that direction, not least the fact that the disciples are ordered to teach the nations everything that Jesus had taught the disciples, and that teaching is exclusively focused on the Jewish law in its entirety (cf. Matt 5:17–19).⁶⁷ As the narrative progresses, the Matthean mission thus changes direction at the same time as the ethnic aspect is also transformed. Matthew’s Gospel is completely dominated by an *inward mission* accompanied by a *closed-ethnic* perspective up until the very end, when, after Jesus’s resurrection, everything shifts to a *proselytizing mission* (subgroup c.1) and an *open-ethnic* stance (subgroup a.2).

The problem of salvation is more difficult to solve. On the basis of mission type, it is possible to make more or less qualified guesses. It could be argued that, in a group that promotes a proselytizing mission, it is likely that a salvation-exclusive position lies behind and motivates such activity. Then again, if there is an inward mission, it is possible that the group views salvation in an inclusive way; there is no real need for carrying out a mission to outsiders if they can be seen as having other paths to salvation. The problem is, though, considering the narrative progress of Matthew’s Gospel, whether a *salvation-inclusive view* (subgroup b.1) remains valid throughout the Gospel, even after the type of mission changes in Ch. 28. In my opinion it does.⁶⁸

Turning to other Jewish groups, my first example will be the covenanters at Qumran and elsewhere, as reconstructed through the sectarian writings among the Dead Sea Scrolls, a movement with sharp community boundaries. These sectarians believed that Jews not belonging to their group were bound to per-

⁶⁵ David C. Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” *JSNT* 57 (1995): 19–48, here 45. Cf. Amy-Jill Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 185: “it is likely that male gentile members of the church engaged in the rite of circumcision.”

⁶⁶ No Jews are baptized in Matthew’s story after Jesus takes over John the Baptist’s mission.

⁶⁷ For discussion, see Runesson, *Divine Wrath*, 30–36, 378–381.

⁶⁸ A way to argue for this may be to study the Matthean pericope regarding the final judgment, which follows, in the narrative chronology, after the mission command in Matt 28:19–20. The most important text that claims a salvation-inclusive stance in Matthew is Matt 25:31–46, interpreted as referring solely to Gentiles (so, e.g., Daniel. J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina 1 [Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991], 358–360). This text defines the criteria of divine judgment as based on deeds of loving-kindness performed in relation to Jesus’s disciples; there is no demand either for *pistis* or for conversion. The Gentiles who are allowed into the kingdom are approved as *Gentiles* on the basis of their deeds of compassion. See also above, n. 61.

ish.⁶⁹ If this was said of fellow Jews, how much more of Gentiles!⁷⁰ These secularists may, then, be labelled as a rather clear case of *salvation-exclusivism* (subgroup b.2). It goes without saying that they did not engage in any mission to non-Jews, and if we find a mission at all (I doubt it), it was directed to their own people. In terms of mission type, they can thus be designated as either *non missionary* or as somehow involved in an *inward mission*, probably *passive* (subgroup c.3). The ethnic aspect is, however, not closed to Gentiles as one might expect, but open, since the group recognized the inclusion of proselytes. Proselytes did not, however, enjoy the same status as Jews, which sets the covenanters apart from the majority view in later Rabbinic Judaism.⁷¹

Rabbinic Judaism was the result of the bringing together of many different strands of traditions. This means that there are several divergent opinions on many topics, including the status of outsiders. Finding a majority position is, then, not the same as finding *the* Rabbinic stance with respect to a certain question; if the Rabbis had room for diversity, we do well in acknowledging that they did not have the same view as many have today on what constitutes unity. Concerning the aspect of mission, there are, not surprisingly, different answers and attitudes. There are texts which speak of a *proselytizing mission* (subgroup c.1),⁷² but there are also traditions that are highly negative towards receiving proselytes.⁷³ Taken together, these different opinions suggest that certain groups within Rabbinic Judaism promoted a proselytizing mission, but that other

⁶⁹ See, e.g., Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 217. Sanders argues that the covenanters at Qumran are not to be seen as representative for Jewish views of outsiders. That statement has something to do with how many members this group had; the larger the group, the more reason there is to see these views as representative for the Judaism of the time. Cf., e.g., Hartmut Stegemann, *Die Essener, Qumran, Johannes der Täufer und Jesus* (Freiburg: Herder, 1994).

⁷⁰ Cf. Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 382.

⁷¹ Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 383.

⁷² b. Pesah. 87b. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 139, argues to the contrary that this text is not about missionary activity. Despite his arguments, I believe that a case can, indeed, be made that it is. *Genesis Rabbah* contains several passages about well-known persons from the Hebrew Bible portrayed as missionaries: 39:14 (Abraham and Sarah), 91:5 (Joseph). See also 84:4, 90:6. *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, compiled considerably later than *Genesis Rabbah*, contains a passage claiming that the only negative thing about the proselytes is that they did not come of their own accord, i.e., that there had to be a Jewish mission to convert them. If these texts in fact refer to Jewish proselytizing mission, we may conclude that such a mission was present, one way or the other, from at least the time of the compilation of the Babylonian Talmud until about 900 CE.

⁷³ See, e.g., b. Yebam. 47b. b. Yebam. 24b divides proselytes into different groups, claiming that many of them were not “real” proselytes. In the extra-canonical tractate *במסכת גריות*, the status of proselytes is discussed, and an attempt is made to solve the problem. Michael Higger argues in his *Seven Minor Treatises* (New York: Bloch, 1930), that this tractate, together with six others, was produced in the period following the compilation of the Mishnah. The common view, however, is that most of them date from the post-Talmudic period (see H.L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991], 252–253).

groups rejected this practice.⁷⁴ Turning to the ethnic aspect, groups that proselytized should be identified as *open-ethnic* (subgroup a.2), while groups that did not permit the reception of proselytes must be identified as *closed-ethnic* (subgroup a.1).

Connected to the ethnic aspect is that of salvation. In Rabbinic discussions, the issue of salvation focuses on the question of whether or not non-Jews can be considered righteous *as Gentiles* or not. Again, there are different opinions. Rabbi Eliezer, for example, says outright that there are no righteous Gentiles (t. Sanh. 13:2).⁷⁵ This view, however, is immediately contrasted with the opinion of Rabbi Joshua, who claims that there are Gentiles who have a share in the world to come. The view attributed to Rabbi Joshua, which is clearly *salvation-inclusive* (subgroup b.1), is the opinion of the majority,⁷⁶ but, again, the existence of a majority position does not make Rabbinic thinking uniform any more than it does in emerging Christianity. It should also be noted that the allowance that some Gentiles are righteous did not lead to the conclusion that every Gentile is righteous; the outsider is always considered from the viewpoint of the insider. This means that Rabbinic Judaism itself determines what is required of a Gentile in order to be called righteous. In this discussion there are different sets of laws especially designed for non-Jews. These laws varied in number from 6 to 30. The opinion that gradually became dominant was that the seven Noahide commandments provide the requirements expected of Gentiles,⁷⁷ and this doctrine is still the dominant one in contemporary Judaism.

Before concluding with some examples from the modern period, a brief look at a few of the books included in the Hebrew Bible may also be of some interest. Beginning with Ezra and Nehemiah, these texts are examples of solutions to a situation which is identified by the authors as socially and politically difficult, following the Babylonian exile. Their answer was to shut all doors and try to save what, in their view, was left. Accordingly, we find here a *closed-ethnic* (subgroup a.1) stance (cf., e.g., Ezra 9, 10; Neh 13:3) with a strong *inward missionary* activity aiming at restoring Jewish beliefs and practices (subgroup c.3.[1]).⁷⁸ But it is not as easy to distill from these texts their understanding of salvation. The

⁷⁴ For discussion, see Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*. See also Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, arguing against the view of Feldman and others sharing his opinion.

⁷⁵ See also, e.g., b. Hag. 13a, which states that the study of the Torah is forbidden to non-Jews, making it impossible for Gentiles even to know the ethical commandments or, what would develop as the dominant solution, the seven Noahide Laws. Cf. Exod. R. (compiled about 1000 CE) 30.12 stating that this prohibition made Aquilla become a proselyte, so that he would be able to study the Torah.

⁷⁶ See the discussion in Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 206–212.

⁷⁷ For an interpretation of this process, see David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983).

⁷⁸ This reaction has often been seen by Christian scholars as negative, since it excludes outsiders from the religious community based on ethnic belonging. For example, Davidson writes that “the totally negative attitude towards the non-Jewish world [...] was an attempt to

purpose of these books was primarily to reform the Jewish community, and thus they do not deal with the redemption of those outside of that group as a separate issue. Still, it is possible that they promoted a *salvation-exclusive* outlook (subgroup b.2).

The book of Jonah may be called a reaction against these views.⁷⁹ Jonah is sent to Nineveh to tell them what the God of Israel was about to do with them based on their poor life choices. But there is no proselytizing mission here; no “conversion” to Judaism is required, only a change of behavior, as defined by the author of this text. We may also note that these non-Israelites, as they repented, worshipped the God of Israel. Thus, we find in this text an *ethno-ethic mission* (subgroup c.2). This attitude to mission requires a *salvation-inclusive* stance (subgroup b.1), which is also shown by the fact that the city was spared. The ethnic aspect of the book of Jonah is not as easily defined. It could be classified as closed-ethnic (since non-Jews can live a righteous life without becoming Jews) or open-ethnic (even if there is no need for non-Jews to join the people of Israel, there is no prohibition stopping them from doing so). From the perspective of this text, a person or people need thus not belong to Israel to be able to worship the God of Israel in ways considered appropriate by the people of Israel. This, however, is not developed in any detail; rather, it is taken for granted as the basic premise of the story. It seems to me likely, though, that we have here is a *closed ethnic* position (subgroup a.1) since this missionary text lacks discussion of ethnicity in relation to proselytism.

Finally, a word on modern forms of Judaism and Christianity may put things in perspective, and signal the Otherness of the historical record but also some points of contact. The majority of Jewish groups today are not involved in a mission to non-Jews in any explicit way, though inward mission is as common as it has always been in most traditions; perhaps the efforts by especially the Chabad/Lubavitch community is the best example of this. Inward mission is, to be sure, also present in Christianity, but Christianity has, with different emphases in different periods of church history, always promoted a *proselytizing mission* (subgroup c.1). This probably has to do with its emphasis on a *salvation-exclusive* stance (subgroup b.2); if Christianity is the only path to salvation, Christian love – so it has been argued – demands that Christians do whatever they can to convert as many as possible. *Mutatis mutandis*, the Jewish missionary stance can likely be explained by its *salvation-inclusive* theology (subgroup b.1); if Jewishness is not an absolute criterion for salvation, proselyt-

destroy the paradox [...] It enthroned exclusiveness as an end in itself” (“Universalism in Second Isaiah,” 183).

⁷⁹ However, we must be careful not to make too sharp a distinction between these texts. Both Ezra and Jonah may be described as closed-ethnic, since Jonah only stresses the responsibility of the Jews for other peoples; Ezra and Nehemiah have a very different purpose, which is to focus on the post-exilic Jewish community.

izing mission will not be emphasized as strongly.⁸⁰ One may note, however, that some Jewish groups missionize the Noahide laws to those they identify as non-Jewish, a form of *ethno-ethnic mission* (subgroup c.2).

Concerning the ethnic aspect, Judaism is today, like the majority of ancient Jewish groups, *open-ethnic*. Christianity is today a *non-ethnic* religion. It is interesting to note that this is so despite the fact that very few texts in the New Testament, if any, can be argued to promote such a position. It is tempting to see here one of the reasons for the so-called parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity, although this process was much more complex and intertwined with several other social and political issues; Christ-followers left *closed-ethnic* or *open-ethnic* positions, proceeding via Paul's complicated variant of closed-ethnic/open-ethnic thinking (see above), which was influenced by what originally was *salvation-inclusivism* (Gentiles should remain Gentiles), to end up with a final position that lacked ethnic ties altogether. This, however, is not the place to elaborate further on these thoughts.⁸¹

2.5 Beyond the Universal and the Particular

In this chapter, I have argued that the simple distinction between universalism and particularism should be rejected. In their place, I have suggested a new set of categories, or terms, which proceed more closely from patterns of thought present in the texts themselves. These terms concern three main aspects of a theology of religion, and may be outlined as follows:

- a) The *ethnic aspect*. In this group we have focused on three possible variants: (1) closed-ethnic religion, (2) open-ethnic religion, and (3) non-ethnic religion.
- b) The second aspect is the *aspect of salvation*, and here we find two alternatives: (1) salvation-inclusive religion, and (2) salvation-exclusive religion.
- c) Finally, there is the *aspect of mission*. It is possible to define mission in more detail, but in this chapter I have chosen only three main types: (1) proselytizing mission, (2) ethno-ethnic mission, and (3) inward mission.

These three aspects may relate to each other in different more or less complex ways in different traditions. In other words, no automatic connections exist between them, entailing that the adoption of one stance in one aspect results in a certain stance in another aspect, even if some connections may sometimes be discernible.

⁸⁰ To be sure, these explanations are related to the religious texts of the respective tradition. Of course, one could (and should) also argue on a sociological level, and see how different conflicts, for example, have influenced the development of theology.

⁸¹ On this, see above Ch. 1, below, Ch. 3, and Part 3.

It is hoped that the approach suggested here will facilitate a more detailed analysis and description of ancient Judaism and early Christianity than the terms “universalism” and “particularism” allow for. As an example of the difference between the two sets of terms, it is possible to argue that a religion is universalistic if it can be labelled closed-ethnic, non-missionary, salvation-inclusive. In this case, one emphasizes the aspect of salvation. It is also possible to use the same label for a religion displaying non-ethnic, non-missionary, salvation-exclusive features; emphasis is then put on the ethnic aspect. Further, a religion which is open-ethnic, proselytizing, and salvation-exclusive may also be argued to be universalistic, placing emphasis on missionary activity. The examples could easily be multiplied.

A precise terminology is key to historical reconstruction. Thus, it is not possible without further definitions to describe ancient Judaism as particularistic and the New Testament or early Christianity as universalistic; such judgments simply fail to meet the requirement of clarity in historical discourse. Instead, this type of terminology shows only one thing, judging from how it has been used in scholarly literature, and that is, more often than not, the theological or ideological bias of the author; somehow particularism – regardless of its definition – almost always applies to Jewish texts but never to the New Testament in works by non-Jewish scholars.

On the other hand, it is not satisfying, in my view, to follow Davidson and others who try to avoid the simple distinction between universalism and particularism by saying that we are dealing with a paradox. To be sure, paradoxes are present in religions. But we should be careful not to claim to have found paradoxes where things look different from our modern perspective. In many cases, it could just as well be a question of trying to see matters from a different angle. In the case dealt with here, the paradox, arguably, was a paradox only while we lacked the terminology to describe the phenomena in a more distinct way. What looked like contradictory statements when one used overly broad terms resolved instead into the logical consequences of the inner relation between the three different aspects of religion we have discussed in this chapter.

Probing new ways of talking about things may thus turn out to be an important task for the study of ancient Judaism and Christianity and the relationship between them. This chapter has offered an attempt at updating the terminology we use when the Other is discussed in these traditions. In the next chapter, we shall take a closer look at one specific aspect, mission, and see where the approach described here might lead us in a more detailed analysis.

3. Was there a Christian Mission Before the Fourth Century CE?

Problematizing Common Ideas About Early Christianity

3.1 Jewish Mission Then and Now

A few of years ago, a Swedish Christian weekly magazine, *Kyrkans Tidning*, published an interview with the Chair of the Jewish community in Stockholm.¹ The topic discussed was a debate that had arisen following a suggested change in regulations, which would prevent fundamentalism and ensure that all programs and activities associated with the synagogue would be firmly based on and communicate democratic and pluralistic values. All activities associated with the synagogue would be evaluated from this perspective. The majority supported the suggested change, but some members had concerns, fearing that the introduction of such a paragraph may result in censorship and suppression of minority views. The background for the recommended amendment was said to have been several (unrelated) events and conflicts taking place among Jewish communities in Sweden, among which was a debate about an attempted hiring of a teacher for the Jewish School in Stockholm, who belonged to the (“Ultra-Orthodox”) Chabad movement. In addition to these Swedish events, the Chair of the Jewish Community widened the perspective and referred to international developments in Europe as also being among the reasons for the amendment. Orthodox rabbis, she was quoted as claiming, are moving to Eastern Europe in order to missionize among Jewish communities; they are even sometimes “tangibly taking over synagogues.”²

This is, of course, a very interesting claim, regardless of the frequency of such purported attempts to influence and change Jewish ways of life. Indeed, the interview highlights the significance of institutional aspects of Jewish life in relation to questions of mission and national and international connections between Jewish communities. As it happens, the scenario described is quite similar to what we see in the ancient material, as we investigate the phenomenon of mission

¹ C. Jaensson Wallander, “Debatt kring stadgar mot fundamentalism,” *Kyrkans Tidning* 41 (2007): 10.

² “Hon [ordföranden i judiska församlingen] syftar på de ortodoxa rabbiner som flyttar till östra Europa för att missionera bland judiska grupper, sprida sin syn och till och med handgripligen ta över synagogor.”

among Jews and (Jewish or non-Jewish) Christ-followers. In this chapter we shall continue the analysis presented in Chapter 2, narrowing down the focus of the investigation to questions related to Jewish mission (sometimes problematically referred to in the scholarly literature as “universalism”³) and the origins of Christian mission, all firmly set within Greco-Roman society and culture.

While there have certainly been many attempts in history to formulate theologies of mission and define the duties of the Christian in this regard, it is no exaggeration to claim that the post-holocaust era has brought with it for the Western Christian churches radical reassessments of Jewish and Christian relations in light of the role Christian theology played in the horrendous events taking place in Europe during the Second World War. Since Christian theologies of mission more broadly relate to and find inspiration and key passages in the New Testament, the relationship between Christ-followers and other Jews and non-Jews in the ancient world is pushed center stage. Given that this raises historical questions – and history is a powerful tool in contemporary theological and political narratives – New Testament scholars have engaged these issues in new ways in recent years. The present chapter is meant as a contribution to this discussion.

We shall proceed as follows. The first part of the chapter deals with questions of methodology, definitions, and basic point of departure, since decisions made on such issues will determine much of the outcome of the investigation. We shall then proceed to investigate mission in the ancient world, Greco-Roman and Jewish (including Apostolic-Jewish),⁴ on the three social levels we explored in the first section, all of which are evidenced in ancient sources: the private, the semi-public, and the public areas of life. The concluding section will summarize some of the main findings and deal briefly with the contemporary situation in relation to ancient evidence. A main focus throughout this chapter, indeed, part of the force of the argument, is the insistence on the inextricability of the “religious” and the “political,” and the consequences of this for our understanding of “mission” in antiquity.

3.2 Mapping the Area – Initial Steps

Several important studies on Jewish mission and related topics have been published the last 30 years or so.⁵ Two of these, in particular, emphasize the impor-

³ See above Ch. 2 for discussion of the terms “universalism” and “particularism” in biblical studies.

⁴ For this term, see p. 129 below.

⁵ Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*; Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*; James Carleton Paget, “Jewish Proselytism at the Time of Christian Origins: Chimera or Reality?” *JSNT* 62 (1996): 65–103; Scot McKnight, *A Light Among the Gentiles: Jewish Mis-*

tance of defining carefully various phenomena related to our topic, and reserve the term “mission” for a specific activity: evidence of an organized active pursuit to convince non-members to become members of the religion of Judaism.⁶ In his comparison with Christianity, Martin Goodman adds the word “universal” and asks (in vain) for non-Christian evidence for a “universal proselytizing mission.”⁷ Some scholars have even argued that we should abandon the term “mission” completely, due to its theological and anachronistic content.⁸

While careful categorization of the primary sources is crucial to enable meaningful and supportable conclusions based on a wide range of fragmentary comments and hints in the material, many types of definitions bring with them serious problems, some of which haunt all investigations into origins-questions. One of the most basic issues concerns the problem of the level of anachronism inherent in the question itself. All the questions we ask as historians initially take as point of departure specific and culturally determined ideas about the world, worldviews, religion, terminology etc., which carry within them and perpetuate specific views. The same holds true for scholars studying contemporary cultures which are not their own. Once we immerse in the relevant source material, such ideas are relativized, sometimes radically changed, and the question needs to be re-phrased, terminology re-thought. Theories then need to be formulated, the material “translated” in ways that make sense in the modern world. The hermeneutics of these processes are complex and hard to disentangle.

One example may suffice, to indicate some of the basic problems involved in studies of origins and historical developments: How much should we let the modern phenomena, which origins or antique form we seek, control our conclusions? In synagogue studies, for example, it was common for a while among

synagogue Activity in the Second Temple Period (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991); Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein, eds., *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, WUNT 1.127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004); Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*. For additional studies, especially scholars critical to the theory that Jews missionized non-Jews in the first centuries CE, see Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1.93, n. 8. From the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies have come three publications with relevance for our topic: Terence L. Donaldson, ed., *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Caesarea Maritima* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000); Richard S. Ascough, ed., *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Sardis and Smyrna* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005); Leif E. Vaage, ed., *Religious Rivalries in the Early Roman Empire and the Rise of Christianity*, ESCJ 18 (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006). See also Matthew Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Kloppenborg, “Recruitment to Elective Cults,” 323–350; Michael F. Bird, *Crossing over Sea and Land: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010).

⁶ McKnight, *Light*; Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*.

⁷ Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 6–7.

⁸ Leif E. Vaage, “Ancient Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success: Christian, Jews, and Others in the Early Roman Empire,” in *Religious Rivalries*, ed. Vaage, 3–19, esp. 9–17.

some scholars to take as point of departure fourth or fifth century architectural forms and then conclude that, since these specific forms were not present in the first century, no synagogues existed in the first century. Other scholars would, in response, claim that one has to de-construct the fifth-century form and then trace specific individual elements back to earlier periods in order to find earlier variants of synagogue architecture. Such a procedure would also enable a reconstruction of developments over time within the same institutional setting. I believe that it would be a methodological mistake, then, to define too narrowly a phenomenon and then measure other phenomena against it as either matching or not matching, especially when this is done in a comparison between them over time. Rather, we need to focus on and define a general culture, in our case a general culture of mission, in which diverse but related phenomena occur. When we proceed in this way, I would argue, we may find that early forms of mission, in their various expressions within the Jesus movement and other Jewish movements, as well as within the Greco-Roman world generally, are intertwined in such a way that what is often spoken of as “unique” rather needs to be understood as variants on a theme.

Focusing on the origins of Christian mission, our comparative material includes (literary, inscriptional, and archaeological) evidence relating to Jews (including Apostolic Jews), non-Jewish Christ-followers as well as adherents of other Greco-Roman cults. Since we speak of “religion” and “mission” in specific and culturally determined ways, reflecting our own modern understandings, we need to begin our investigation by challenging the idea that these phenomena were understood in the same way in antiquity. Although quite common a perspective, it is, in my view, misleading to state, as Arthur D. Nock does in his classic study on conversion, that “[t]he Jew and the Christian offered religions as we understand religion; the others offered cults.”⁹

3.3 *Changing the Facts on the Ground: The Creation of “Religion” (and “Christianity”)*

As I will argue in Chapter 11 below, the formation of Christian identity (and later the emergence of Islam) involved decisive developments that affected mod-

⁹ Arthur D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933), 16. Jonathan Z. Smith famously contested this logic in *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). In John S. Kloppenborg’s recent work on Christ groups, he provides a plethora of compelling evidence suggesting that analyzing these groups as full participants in the so-called marketplace of ancient associations highlights aspects of institutional structure, sociality, and economic practices that otherwise might remain hidden; see John S. Kloppenborg, *Christ’s Associations: Connecting and Belonging in the Ancient City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

ern understandings of what constitutes “religion,” and, by implication, have distanced us significantly from the first-century Mediterranean world.¹⁰ For our purposes here, the key element is the process by which second-century non-Jewish Christ-followers actively divorced what we would call their “religious identity” from what they would call “Judaism,” which included a disentanglement of the connections between the *ethnos* (Jews), their land and law, and their god.¹¹ This meant, in effect, that the cult of the Jewish *ethnos*, to which, according to many members of the Jesus movement, non-Jews had been invited as non-Jews, was re-interpreted, or perhaps better, re-created. It is the argument of this chapter, and the book as a whole, that this was a step unforeseen by Paul, who maintained – and in Rom 9–11 emphasized – the ethnic boundaries and the central position of the Jewish people in (and even outside of) the Christ movement. Similar (but not identical) developments, in which an ethnic component was original but with time became relativized, can, however, be seen in several of the Mysteries, e.g., the Egyptian mysteries of Isis and Osiris, the Greek Eleusinian mysteries, and the Persian Mithras cult.¹² Their membership was open and, like other mysteries, often basically egalitarian. People with

¹⁰ See also Steve Mason’s persuasive study (although I disagree regarding the translation of *Ioudaioi*): “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *JSJ* 38 (2007): 457–512. Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 73, writes: “[P]urely religious affiliation allegedly discovered in the ancient world may be an anachronistic illusion. ... Religion as we understand it did not exist in the ancient world.” See also Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement,” 231–246.

¹¹ Ignatius would be the earliest example of this development. On the relationship between these aspects of *ethnos*, land, law, and god generally in the Greco-Roman world, see Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism.” The connection between these aspects within Judaism has led several scholars to argue for the translation of *Ioudaioi* as “Judeans” rather than “Jews”; see, e.g., Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, 40–76, especially 68–74; Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” John M. G. Barclay, “Constructing Judean Identity after 70 C.E.: A Study of Josephus’s *Against Apion*,” in *Identity & Interaction in the Ancient Mediterranean: Jews, Christians and Others*, ed. Z. A. Crook and Philip A. Harland, New Testament Monographs 18 (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2007), 99–112, esp. 110–112, and n. 20. John S. Kloppenborg, “Judaeans or Judean Christians in James?” in *Identity & Interaction in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Crook and Harland, 113–135, writes (p. 113, n. 2): “Throughout this paper I use the rather awkward locution ‘Judean’ and ‘Judeans’ rather than ‘Jewish’ and ‘Jews’ in order to underscore the fact that in the first century C.E., the term *Ioudaioi* is still primarily a marker of geographical origin or domicile (like Kitian, Phrygian, Lydian, etc.), rather than a designation of the beliefs held by such persons.” While I do not agree with this translation on the basis of current self-definition among Jews, I understand the emphasis on these aspects of Judaism as a valid and important point that may help to avoid anachronisms in the analysis of the first century.

¹² The case of the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus – which originated in a specific geographic/ethnic space (Doliche) – is also relevant and interesting here, particularly when we take into consideration how extensively it was able to spread throughout the empire. As Anna Collar has shown, this spread was not fueled exclusively by the ethnic group that originally developed the cult; see Anna Collar, *Religious Networks in the Roman Empire: The Spread of New Ideas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 79–145.

different ethnic identities could participate in various such mysteries, without neglecting their cultic obligations in other (social and political) contexts.

In terms of those who adhered to Jewish ancestral traditions, there was the possibility for non-Jews of joining the Jewish *ethnos* (“conversion”) as well as adhering more loosely to the God of Israel (the so-called god-fearers) within a Jewish associative context. This, however, did not mean that the ethnic, and therefore “national” components were compromised or lost.¹³ Rather, “converting” to Judaism implied taking upon oneself all aspects that belonged to a people, including Jewish law. “Conversion” meant a merging into another *ethnos*.¹⁴ Even for those who did not fully shift their loyalty to the Jewish *ethnos* (and thus did not undergo circumcision if male), the Jewish people was at the center of the worship of the God of Israel; such individuals retained their ethnic self-identity, Greek or other, which often meant continued participation in non-Jewish cults too. In brief, as Steve Mason notes, what we call “religion,” was, in antiquity, integral to at least six areas of life: *ethnos*, cult, philosophy, familial traditions/domestic worship, associations, and astrology and magic.¹⁵ Since Jews and Christ-followers, whether Jewish or not, lived in this cultural setting, we need to ask the question about mission in relation to each of these areas. Although Jews were often distinctive enough to be recognized as a specific group (as we know from Greco-Roman writings), as Hans-Josef Klauck says, “[a]n outsider could have the impression that Jewish groups were like cultic associations that came from the East and venerated a highest god, and the same is true of the Christian communities in the Graeco-Roman cities.”¹⁶

The wider contextual frame for our inquiry thus forces us to problematize and abandon our modern category “religion” – and therefore also the idea of a mission of a “religion” – and ask for comparative material related especially to

¹³ Cf. Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 137; also quoted by Barclay, “Constructing,” 110, n. 16.

¹⁴ That this was not unproblematic in antiquity is clear from discussions in, e.g., Rabbinic literature. Some authorities maintained that certain laws should not be followed by proselytes (because they were not ethnically Jews), whereas other rabbis argued that a proselyte was like a Jew in every respect, and that all laws and rituals should apply equally to them as to any other Jew. Some rabbis rejected the idea of accepting proselytes at all (b. Yebam. 47b, 24b), while others embraced converts (b. Ber. 57b; b. Ned. 32a; b. Šabb. 31a). Several texts mention mission (m. 'Abot 1:12; b. Pesah. 87b; Gen. R. 39:14; Gen. R. 84:4; Gen. R. 90:6, cf. 91:5; Eccl. R. 8:10).

¹⁵ Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 482–488. See also Philip A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations: Claiming a Place in the Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 61.

¹⁶ Hans-Josef Klauck, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 54. See also Philip A. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians: Associations, Judaeans, and Cultural Minorities* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009).

ethnos,¹⁷ national and domestic cults, associations and mystery cults, and philosophy.¹⁸ Activities related to cult-oriented phenomena were played out, basically, on three levels of society: the public, the private, and the in-between, semi-public sphere where the unofficial associations had their place.¹⁹

This means that we have to analyze the evidence for “mission” from a variety of perspectives that are triggered by these social levels, including political and “national” aspects and motivations. None of these levels can be said to communicate more authentic expressions of what we would call “religiosity” than another.

In the following, we shall ask what the unsuitability of the category of “religion” for the first-century situation means for our understanding of “mission” and the nature of such phenomena. Since the Jesus movement, Apostolic Judaism,²⁰ was “religionized” into “Christianity” in late antiquity, we shall, consequently, have to abandon several conceptions related to “Christianity” too, in order to reconstruct first-century scenarios. Goodman is certainly correct when saying that the history of scholarship often reveals an unconscious “Christianization of the study of ancient religions.”²¹ However, it is equally important to note that ancient varieties of Judaism, including Apostolic Judaism, have been religionized. Here we have, then, two major pitfalls threatening to turn our investigation into a gazing at our own reflection at the bottom of the well: the religionizing of “Christianity” and the Christianization of the Roman Empire. Space does not allow for all of the aspects concerned to be dealt with here. We shall, however, discuss some of the key features highlighting the distinctive nature of the first-century situation in relation to later developments.

3.4 Pre-Christian Mission Beyond “Religion”

3.4.1 Defining “Mission”

The term “mission” has, as so many other terms used in scholarship, recently been called into question as anachronistic and basically theological in nature.²²

¹⁷ Cf. Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement,” 232: “gods run in the blood; cult is an ethnic designation/ethnicity is a cultic designation.”

¹⁸ Of these categories, Mason has suggested that philosophy comes closest to what we refer to as “religion” today; see “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 486. We shall return to this below.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Klauck, *Context*, Part 1.

²⁰ For this terminology, see p. 129.

²¹ Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 3.

²² See, e.g., Vaage, ed. *Religious Rivalries*, esp. the editor’s contribution “Ancient Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success: Christians, Jews, and Others in the Early Roman Empire,” 3–19. See also Kloppenborg, “Recruitment to Elective Cults,” 323–350, where the term “recruitment” is used as an alternative to “mission.”

I would still use “mission” in the sense of *the intent and/or strategies used to influence others, passively or actively, to change their views and/or their behavior*. With such a lowest common denominator definition, it is fairly easy to show that missionary activities took place among Greco-Roman groups as well as among various Jewish groups, including Apostolic Jews. We need, therefore, to develop a more nuanced lens, so that the evidence can be categorized into meaningful groups of material; such groups of material can then be used for comparative analysis.

I argued in the previous chapter for at least three basic categories, which are wide enough not to impose anachronistic or culturally isolating limits on the sources, which would make it difficult to compare various aspects as well as trace developments and influences between different groups of people. I shall include some examples here from Judaism, to clarify what is meant; we shall return later to discuss Greco-Roman traditions.

Proselytizing Mission

Refers to attempts by members of one group to convince non-members to join their group. (Examples include Eleazar the Galilean, who, contrary to Ananias, insisted on the circumcision of the King of Adiabene; Josephus, *A.J.* 20.34–48. We find also, in this category, the forced circumcision practiced by some of the Hasmonean rulers as they annexed conquered areas.)

Ethno-Ethic Mission

Refers to attempts by members of one group to influence the behavior and/or worship of non-members, without asking them to join the group. (Examples would include the thought pattern revealed in the book of Jonah; it seems, also, that Ananias and another anonymous Jew mentioned by Josephus may have engaged in such mission: *A.J.* 20.34–48.²³)

Inward Mission

Refers to attempts by a member of a group to influence the behavior and/or worship of other members of the larger group to which they all belong. (Examples of this type of mission are legion, both in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and throughout Jewish and Christian history.²⁴)

²³ It is not entirely clear whether Ananias promoted a proselytizing mission in general, and just made an exception strictly for the king, for political reasons. With regard to Izates’s mother, Helena, it is implied in the story that she had become a full convert to Judaism; see discussion in Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*, 334–335.

²⁴ Cf. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 5: “On a social scale broader than that of the household, Jews, Christians, and pagans from time to time, alike took it for granted that within societies religious deviants had to be brought into line, if necessary by force, to avert the hostility of the divine and disaster for all.”

As discussed in the previous chapter, each of these types of mission can be divided into two basic categories: active or passive. The former would involve active outreach to the targeted individuals or groups, but does not have to be planned and executed by a larger group; individuals could also be active in this regard, without explicit institutional or financial support behind them. Passive mission refers to a pattern of thought expecting others to change their behavior and/or cultic status as a consequence of the individual missionary's, or group's, beliefs and practices. For example, some Jews expected that non-Jews would join them, without being asked, when the time was right and the God of Israel would reinvent the world.²⁵

A brief summary of these basic definitions of "mission" in relation to other parameters involved in the analysis may look as follows:

<i>Aspects</i>	<i>Social Levels</i>	<i>Mission</i>
– Ethnic	– Public	– Proselytizing
– National	– Semi-public	→ Active/Passive
– Mysteries	– Private	– Ethno-ethic
– Philosophy		→Active/Passive
– Familial		– Inward
		→Active/Passive

Figure 3. Understanding "mission": Definitions and analytical Lenses.

3.4.2 Outlining Parameters and a Mode of Procedure

If we now bring together what we have said in the two previous sections, we may outline a mode of procedure for tackling questions of "mission" in antiquity, and thereby also the possible origins of what we today would call Christian mission. I would emphasize four points in this regard:

1. What we call "religion" was, in antiquity, played out on three social levels:
 - a. Public level (civic/state/empire concerns).
 - b. Semi-Public level/Association level (unofficial groups/cults and their concerns).
 - c. Private level (domestic, familial concerns).
2. On these levels, respectively, various aspects of what we call "religiosity" were triggered. For example:
 - a. Civic, national, ethnic, colonial aspects were triggered on the public level.
 - b. Aspects of individual and group salvation, or redemption, and/or morality, sometimes ethnic aspects, were triggered on the semi-public level.

²⁵ We find such expectations in the book of Isaiah, but also with the historical Jesus, partly in the Gospel of Matthew and in the Gospel of John.

- c. Aspects of daily life activities and how they were intertwined with various forms of the divine, familial and ancestral protection and well-being, were triggered on the private level.
3. Each level and the aspects it triggers need to be dealt with in terms of various forms of “mission and expansion.”
 4. As we analyze mission, understood as either proselytizing, ethno-ethic, or inward, we need to keep separate,
 - a. intentions on the part of the group or individual as stated in our sources on the one hand, and,
 - b. actual practices and techniques applied by these people on the other. (Techniques and strategies used can be identical between different groups while at the same time the intentions and goals of respective group may be different; still, the use of similar strategies may tell us something about the cultural mindset of both groups and how they thought they could win new members.)

In the following, we shall deal first with the role of the house as an “underground” facilitator for the spreading of cults. Much focus in the study of mission has been put on semi-public and public levels of society; the private sphere had, however, an important role to play precisely when cults spread, as a channel for change that was often resisted on the public level. We shall then continue with evidence related to the semi-public and public levels and see how mission is played out there. Needless to say, there are no sharp boundaries between these three spheres of ancient life; seen as concentric circles, with the core circle being the private level, the shift between circles as they expand beyond each other would be a grey muddled area.²⁶ Still, the ancients did distinguish between them in word and deed,²⁷ and the movements that can be discerned between them, both between the private and the semi-public, and between the semi-public and the public, are of key importance to our quest for understanding ancient mission and expansion.

3.5 The Private Sphere: The Role of the House in Spreading a Cult

The private sphere triggered a range of cultic acts associated with the well-being and protection of the family (which could range between the nuclear family to others involved in the household, e.g., slaves); household gods and house altars

²⁶ For example, rituals and cultic acts related to death permeated all three levels of society.

²⁷ Cf. John Scheid, who notes the legal aspects: “Religions in Contact,” in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. S.I. Johnston (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 112–126, see esp. 113.

were involved for all but the Jews – and those non-Jews (god-fearers and Christ-fearers²⁸) who interpreted their allegiance to the God of Israel in exclusive terms. Daily rituals around, e.g., meals, as well as life-cycle rituals for individuals involved in the household were in focus.

At first glance, it seems inappropriate to speak about forms of mission in this setting, since the focus is on individual family units and their interests in securing the benevolence of the gods with regard to their own safety and wellbeing. One could certainly speak of inward mission within the family unit to ensure correct sacrifices and behavior, but this may be of limited interest here. For our purposes, taking seriously the nature of cultic acts as intimately and inextricably intertwined with political and other matters of importance to state and society, it is more significant to point to what happens between the levels in terms of the aim at controlling or influencing people's cultic acts. There are two directions of influence that should be noted: 1) actors on the public scene wanting to control private cultic rituals on the one hand, and 2) private individuals who feel a need to expand, or allow the expansion of, their own worship beyond the immediate context of their household.

In the first case, the will to influence moving in the direction from the public to the private, the reason for action is simply to protect state and society by ensuring that pollution following an incorrectly performed sacrifice in the domestic sphere should never happen. Plato, e.g., wants to rule that sacrifices in the private sphere be forbidden. If someone feels they want to sacrifice, such sacrifices must be brought to and performed by experts: the priestly personnel at public temples.²⁹ Since the aim here is to protect shared space and communal life (the city or "state"), the type of mission should be defined as inward: political boundaries are, just as much as any group boundaries, what defines the aim and the (suggested) actions taken. Whether effective or not, such inward mission, policing if you like, aimed at controlling cultic behavior was most likely present from time to time in Greco-Roman society empire-wide.³⁰ "Polytheism," another problematic term, was not the same as "tolerance" or "religious freedom" as we understand these terms today.

In the second case the movement is in the opposite direction: the will to influence others' cultic behavior (mission) begins within the private household and expands beyond it into the (semi-) public sphere. Two examples are especially instructive here. The establishment of the Egyptian cult of Sarapis on Delos in

²⁸ The term refers to non-Jewish adherents to Jewish communities following the pattern advised by Paul. They were like god-fearers, but theologically with full membership "in Christ." See also Ch. 11 below, p. 271–272.

²⁹ Plato, *Leg.* 10.909d–910d. Note the suggested death penalty for impiously performed sacrifices in the private realm.

³⁰ Such "policing" of cultic behavior could also extend into the semi-public level of society, i.e., associations. See further below.

the third century BCE,³¹ and the modification and opening up of a private cult of Agdistis to people beyond the household in Philadelphia, Asia Minor (first century BCE).³² Both of these examples have been treated at some length by others; our interest here is to note the movement itself from the private to semi-public spheres of society.³³

In the case of the Sarapis cult on Delos, we find some important elements that may be generalizable. An individual, a priest from Egypt named Apollonius, brings a cultic statue of Sarapis with him to Delos and sets it up in his rented (private) house. Later on, his grandson, Apollonius the Younger, had a dream in which the god commanded him to construct a temple for him. There was an increase of adherents to the cult preceding this move; Klauck suggests these were immigrant Egyptians.³⁴ There is no reference, however, specifically to the ethnic identity of the new adherents. The temple is met with local resistance, legal proceedings follow, but the grandson is vindicated; the temple, which has been excavated (Sarapeion A³⁵), stands.

We have no explicit evidence of missionizing efforts of any of these men, but we know that this cult, foreign to Delos, grew. L. Michael White notes that, as a result of the establishment of Sarapeion A, “Egyptian cults grew in popularity, with three different temples and a position of prominence in that region of the island known as the ‘terrace of the foreign gods’”³⁶ If the Apollonius family recruited worshippers in an Egyptian immigrant setting, these efforts would have to be defined as inward mission with the ethnic component carrying the explanatory force.

The crucial event for understanding what happened, however, is the building of the temple.³⁷ This act may be seen, in and of itself, as propagating the effec-

³¹ IG XII/7 506; IG XI/4 1299; plan of the remains of Sarapeion A: Philippe Bruneau and Jean Ducat, *Guide de Délos*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Boccard, 1983), no. 91, fig. 71. Cf. Sarapeion C: *ibid.* no. 100 (fig. 82).

³² SIG 3/985 = LSAM 20. Cf. Nock, *Conversion*, 216–217; Klauck, *Context*, 64–68; L. Michael White, *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture: Volume I: Building God’s House in the Roman World: Architectural Adaptation Among Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1990), 45.

³³ We find examples of similar movement in Jewish associations. For example, ASSB no. 187 (=IJO I), an inscription from the synagogue at Stobi, relates how a *patēr tēs synagōgēs* gave up the bottom floor of his house to be used as a Jewish association, while retaining the upper level as his domestic space. This suggests that what had previously been a domestic space was now being transformed, or expanded, into associative space, something highlighted by the fact that the individual in question did not continue residing in the bottom portion of his house once it was changed into an associative sphere.

³⁴ Klauck, *Context*, 64.

³⁵ Bruneau and Ducat, *Guide de Délos*, no. 91.

³⁶ White, *Social Origins*, 33.

³⁷ Cf. the documentation on papyri of a certain Sarapis worshipper, Zoilos, who, in 257 BCE, was told in a dream to erect a temple for the divinity in a city in Asia Minor (Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 28).

tiveness of this god to others, using culturally attuned strategies of establishing a presence in public space in a setting that is not ethnically connected to the god in question. Doing so would reduce the space on the sacred island dedicated to other gods. Such a move can hardly be understood without assuming, at least to some degree, that the Sarapis worshippers aimed at expanding even beyond their own ethnically defined members; they must have thought of the power of their god to extend beyond their own people, a wish on the part of the god to be present in and control other parts of the world in addition to Egypt (and traveling Egyptians). Proselytizing mission, in other words.³⁸

Important to note here, however, is that we find no political authority behind this expansion; the expansion is not the initiative of a state or “nation.” Still, the spread of the cult through the building of the temple was met with local resistance. Such resistance may well have been grounded in fears that the balance would be disturbed; local gods were pushed back and had their power sphere threatened. This would make for unhappy gods, and unhappy gods would make for unhappy humans.³⁹ Somehow, however, perhaps through the proven power of Sarapis, this cult was accepted and added to others, even achieving prominence with additional temples built.⁴⁰ As this process continued, the ethnic identity of the members of the cult was weakened and eventually understood as unimportant, even though the Egyptian origin of the cult was never concealed or forgotten.

In the case of the development of a private cult of the goddess Agdistis in the household of a certain Dionysius in Philadelphia we see yet another example of how household cult could expand beyond the original parameters of the house.⁴¹ In this inscription, we see what Klauck calls a “modernizing” of the cult leading to the reduction of the prominence of the goddess and the inclusion of a “larger Graeco-Hellenistic pantheon with visible altars and images.”⁴² With this follows rules related to medical ethics, which emphasizes the position and importance of the family. At the same time, the household opens up to others who would like to join worship in this manner. These new worshippers were, according to Klauck, probably drawn from neighboring and related households. Whether these new members were won via close household networks or not, we see here the establishment of an unofficial association of cultic nature.⁴³ We may

³⁸ Again, proselytizing mission is not necessarily defined as exclusive in nature; joining one such group does not have to exclude membership in other associations or cults. The term proselytizing only indicates, positively, the aim and result of including new members in one’s own group.

³⁹ Cf. Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement,” 232.

⁴⁰ Sarapeion B (GD, no. 96) and Sarapeion C (GD, no. 100).

⁴¹ SIG 3/985 = LSAM 20.

⁴² Klauck, *Context*, 68.

⁴³ For a categorization of associations, see Harland, *Associations*, 28–53, esp. 44–52; Richard Last and Philip A. Harland, *Group Survival in the Ancient Mediterranean: Rethinking*

safely assume that this expansion of the private cultic activities to include a larger group of likeminded people was the result of some sort of spreading of the word among neighbors and beyond. This means proselytizing mission on a semi-public level, although most likely not systematized or on a larger scale. The ethical component of the modified cult probably had some attraction, and those involved most likely would have wanted to spread these ideals.

These and other examples indicate that “private” in antiquity did not mean what we understand by “private” today. In antiquity, cult in the private sphere would have an impact on society at large, and so could not be isolated or left without some control. In the Western world today, the rhetoric of “private” as applied to religion is used to de-politicize religion, effectively separating different spheres of society, compartmentalizing society, and thereby neutralizing “religion” and “religious rituals” as unimportant for the protection of the state.⁴⁴ This has implications for how mission is understood today, as opposed to in antiquity.

In sum, in terms of *intentions* we may conclude that people involved in public affairs could argue for a (corrective) inward mission directed to the private sphere in order to protect state and society. The *strategy* was to argue for the issuing of laws that could be used when enforcing compliance with state requirements. What the authorities would call law and order, those who were targeted may call persecution. From an analytical point of view, we may note, then, the close connection between mission, law, and persecution. We shall return to this when discussing developments in the public sphere.

The *intention* of the Apollonius family on Delos and Dionysius’s household in Philadelphia in Asia Minor was to promote the cult of specific deities, without insisting on exclusiveness. There are no signs indicating that any of them aimed at transforming society via the cult, although the moral code in the Philadelphia case combined with expansion beyond the household comes close to such an aim. The *strategy* behind the expansion of the Sarapis cult was to claim a place in public space by building a temple to the god; in the Philadelphia case we see modifications to the cult as well as architectural rearrangements within the house to accommodate worship in a temple-like setting.

For Jews, worship was collective and related to their *ethnos*, so that whatever took place in the household would be within an inner-Jewish frame of reference. We have no direct evidence of mission on this level, since we do not have early archaeological evidence of private houses being renovated into association

Material Conditions in the Landscape of Jews and Christians (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 9–13.

⁴⁴ This in turn has often resulted in a lack of sensitivity on the part of the authorities of various nations in relation to the worldview(s) of religious groups, some of which have never accepted such compartmentalization of private and communal life. This is not, however, the place to expand further on this issue.

buildings.⁴⁵ However, the very construction of buildings housing Jewish associations (“synagogues”) would have been perceived as claiming space and recognition, in brief, promoting the god, in society. We shall return to this in the following section, which shall deal with the semi-public level. We shall also suspend treatment of Christ-followers to that section.

3.6 *The Dynamic Space In-Between: Associations and Mysteries*

As is well known, various forms of associations (*collegia, thiasoi* etc.) – “smaller than the city ... yet larger than the family”⁴⁶ – flourished in first-century Greco-Roman society.⁴⁷ Such groups began to develop around the time after Alexander the Great, then representing a new phenomenon in the ancient world. Although all associations included cult of some sort, we shall be dealing here more specifically with those which established their membership around a specific cult, and whose identity was “expressed in terms of devotion to the deity or deities.”⁴⁸ While the traditional perspective has been that associations came into being as a result of a feeling of alienation among ordinary people in relation to larger political and administrative structures as empires were established, this “origins-explanation” can no longer be maintained without modification.⁴⁹ Instead, associations often reflected a sense of belonging within ancient society and the structures of the *polis*; they took part in a system of benefaction integral to Greco-Roman society.⁵⁰ Membership was primarily drawn from non-elite strata, but we find dependency on civic and imperial elites, mainly as benefactors, sometimes as leaders.⁵¹ There seems to have been at least some sort of relationship between some cults in different places around the Mediterranean, like-

⁴⁵ While White has previously argued that the Ostia and the Delos synagogues were examples of such renovations of private houses for synagogue use, these conclusions were incorrect as has been shown in several studies of these buildings by Anders Runesson, Donald D. Binder, and Monika Trümper. These buildings, which are our oldest remains of Diaspora synagogues, were constructed for (semi-) public use from the beginning. The earliest evidence of renovations of private space is the Stobi inscription from the late second century. See *ASSB*, nos. 179, 102, 187.

⁴⁶ Klauck, *Context*, 42.

⁴⁷ The most comprehensive studies on and categorization of associations are found in Harland, *Associations* (see especially 28–53), and Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations*. See also Last and Harland, *Group Survival*.

⁴⁸ Harland, *Associations*, 44.

⁴⁹ The traditional view may be represented by Klauck, *Context*, 43–44.

⁵⁰ See Harland, *Associations*, 89–112: “The inscriptional evidence from Asia provides a concrete illustration of the continuing importance of the polis and its structures as a locus of identity, cooperation, and competition from members of many associations and guilds, reflecting various social strata of society. These groups were often participants in civic vitality, not symptoms of decline” (p. 112).

⁵¹ Harland, *Associations*, 52.

ly creating a sense of connectedness beyond the local cultic community to which the individual belonged.⁵²

This does not mean that cultic associations were unproblematic from the perspective of the state. As Goodman notes, the worship in some associations of foreign gods could be seen as not integral to a stable society and, in fact, as constituting a “positive threat.”⁵³ How, then, were such cults spread, and what was the purpose of spreading them? We have already addressed the issue of introducing foreign cults and the movement from the private to the semi-public level of society. The question of mission in the present section relates to why and how associations on the semi-public level of society developed strategies to influence others and establish, maintain, and expand their membership. There is some literary evidence of initiates of Greco-Roman cultic associations who, as they travelled, expanded the influence of their god(s) by establishing associations in new places.⁵⁴ It is quite clear also from archaeological evidence that new cults spread and were established all over the Roman Empire.⁵⁵

Understanding the expansion of cults within social context may direct our attention to the system of benefaction, and how associations competed to establish themselves through winning favorable attitudes among wealthy benefactors. Other strategies for claiming a place included establishing and embellishing separate association buildings, performing public processions, and, as Roger Beck words it, setting in motion spectacle, with the aim of promoting the deity.⁵⁶ Beck continues: “cults of this type may not have proselytized systematically, but they certainly proclaimed systematically.”⁵⁷

⁵² Cf. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 27–28.

⁵³ Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 17; cf. Harland, *Associations*, 161–173.

⁵⁴ One example is Livy’s (famous) description in his Roman history of the rapid spread of a Bacchic association among men and women, coming to Rome from Etruria (*Hist.* 39.8–19). Even some elite individuals from “noble families” became members (*Hist.* 39.13). Livy, who presents the initiates as immoral criminals committing all sorts of horrible crimes, tries to explain the spread of the cult by referring to the attractions of wine and feasting (*Hist.* 39.8). The cult was eventually forbidden in Rome and Italy, and all Bacchic shrines were destroyed, exempting only those where there was an ancient altar or sacred image. Those who needed to gather to perform the rites had to secure permission from both the praetor and the senate (*Hist.* 39.18). Note also the conversion story in Apuleius’s novel *Metamorphoses*, and the Isiac procession in 11.7–11.

⁵⁵ See examples discussed by Richard S. Ascough, “‘A Place to Stand, A Place to Grow’: Architectural and Epigraphic Evidence for Expansion in Greco-Roman Associations,” in *Religious Rivalries*, ed. Vaage, 78–98, and Roger Beck, “On Becoming a Mithraist: New Evidence for the Propagation of the Mysteries,” in *Religious Rivalries*, ed. Vaage, 175–194. On the use of network theory to map such spread, see Kloppenborg, *Christ’s Associations*; Collar, *Religious Networks in the Roman Empire*.

⁵⁶ Beck (“On Becoming a Mithraist,” 176), notes that similar events of miracles etc. were ascribed to Christianity in ancient sources; many scholars interpret this as a major source of Christianity’s success in its mission.

⁵⁷ Beck, “On Becoming a Mithraist,” 176.

While we should be aware that proclaiming divinities in these ways was not done exclusively in order to secure and extend membership, such aims must surely be included, not least from a social perspective (economic realities are, after all, also realities, and associations were dependent upon them too). In other words, when we try to answer the question of why certain cults proclaimed their gods in these ways, we may note several intentions that all come together, for the worshippers, in the will to secure protection and safety for oneself and the group's members by expanding the influence of a specific god. Proclaiming the effectiveness of a god was in and of itself an act of piety, and proselytizing mission was the understood (side-?) effect of such strategies.

Not all cults would follow a similar pattern, Mithraism being the most obvious exception. While Mithraism certainly expanded and spread over the empire, it was not by such explicit means as those described above. Rather, spread of the cult was achieved by "commendation of friend to friend, by co-option among likeminded adult males in delimited social contexts; also that, in all likelihood, recruitment among kin and via patron-freedman relationship played a significant part."⁵⁸ Though the strategy is different, it would be, as I see it, a distortion of the picture of what happened not to call this proselytizing mission. In the analysis, the *intention* needs to be treated separately from the *strategies* used. Also, we need to note that proselytizing mission need not entertain exclusivist claims; membership in one cult would not necessarily exclude membership in another.

The intentions of those who spread Greco-Roman cults may not have been to penetrate into the public sphere of society and change the religio-political status quo at a state level. Yet, we know that some of these foreign gods reached into the public sphere. The last important ones to achieve such success in Rome were Isis and Sarapis, who became public deities in the first century CE.⁵⁹ In the case of Sarapis, we thus have evidence of a cult which had the ability to successfully move both between private and semi-public contexts (the Delos example discussed above), and then between the semi-public and public spheres of society.

⁵⁸ Beck, "On Becoming a Mithraist," 193. Beck refers to Rodney Stark's very similar description of both modern recruitment to new religious movements and his theory of the rise of Christianity. This does not mean that other associations would not engage in such methods too; there is some evidence that in fact they did. It seems to have been common to invite guests to club dinners, for example, and this may have functioned as a way to recruit them as new members. Such invitations are frequently found in Egyptian papyri (e.g., P.Tebt. III/2 894 and P.Tebt. I 118). A possible example of the effectiveness of such invitations comes from the financial accounts of a club in Philadelphia (?; Arsinoites), dated to ca. 2nd to 1st-century BCE, where a person called Thibron shows up once as a guest, and after that twice as a full member (SB III 7182; see lines 25, 65, 83). I am grateful to Richard Last for pointing this out to me. In other words, while associations generally would utilize various methods in both public and private space in order to recruit members, Mithraism spread in more private settings, through commendation of friend to friend.

⁵⁹ Cf. Scheid, "Religions in Contact," 121.

We shall return to this below since one (transformed) offshoot of an Apostolic-Jewish group managed not only to attain public status, but also to do it with exclusive claims to preserving a stable society.⁶⁰

A word on philosophy before turning to Judaism. Goodman discusses important aspects of philosophy and mission, although he tends to define away the conclusions that would seem to follow from his description.⁶¹ Philosophers spread their ideas to others and wanted universal enlightenment; they wanted to change the lives and attitudes of others. Some of them formed or belonged to philosophical schools (e.g., Pythagoreans and Epicureans); others did not seem to form collectivities into which new members could be invited (e.g., Stoics, Cynics). An effect of their activities could, for those who listened, be a radical break with the past, a “conversion experience,” resulting in life-long adherence to the philosophical school in question.⁶² Although no uniform pattern emerges, it seems to me that in order to describe what went on, the word mission needs to be applied. As with the cults discussed above, no ethnic component is involved in terms of entrance requirement. Goodman talks about educational mission, as he defines it, and rejects the term proselytizing mission. It would seem more appropriate, in my opinion, to allow for both terms in order to cover the spectrum.⁶³ In any case, we find in Greco-Roman society not only a multitude of cults and philosophies, but also that members of, or adherents to, these groups and cults tried to convince others to join them in one way or another, either in a community or by changing their way of life as a consequence of believing in the proclaimed teachings. Movements spread from the private sphere into the semi-public, as well as between cults and philosophies in the semi-public sphere. While philosophies may entertain and missionize exclusive claims, cults were usually not exclusive in terms of their requirements on members.

Where does Jewish mission fit in this overall picture? Answering this question, we need to note, firstly, that Judaism was an ethnically oriented state cult with Jerusalem as its center. The temple tax reminds us that this state cult was to

⁶⁰ Cf. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 18.

⁶¹ Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 32–37.

⁶² As described by third century CE historian Diogenes Laertius (*Vitae* 4.3.16–17). Philip A. Harland has argued that it can potentially be problematic to distinguish between philosophical movements/groups and associations in general, and points to their many overlapping practices and features, further problematizing the notion that we can separate philosophical groups from the general religious marketplace of the empire. See Philip A. Harland, “The Most Sacred Society (*Thiasos*) of the Pythagoreans: Philosophers Forming Associations,” *JAH* 7 (2019): 207–232.

⁶³ The question is whether one would need to be able to point to a group and membership in order to use the term “proselytizing.” Cf. the modern New Age movement, which is rather hard to define and displays various forms. Yet, individuals may act as missionaries who want everyone to adhere to specific sets of beliefs and behaviors without requiring group membership. Since the aim is to have people leave their old worldviews and attain new ones, it seems logical to speak of proselytism.

be adhered to by everyone belonging to the *ethnos*, wherever they lived in the world.⁶⁴ In the Diaspora, Jewish cultic groups were understood as what we would call unofficial associations, however, and this presents us with an interesting analytical scenario. Mission, as we shall soon see, could take place on both levels with an puzzling link between them. There can be no question that non-Jews sometimes joined the Jewish *ethnos*, either voluntarily or as a consequence of the use of force. We also know of a group of non-Jewish individuals, commonly referred to as “sympathizers” or “god-fearers,” who were more loosely connected to Judaism within Diaspora synagogue contexts. Although we have important material dating back to around, and even before, the Babylonian exile, conclusive evidence (literary and epigraphic) begins to emerge in the first century BCE and extends into the Talmudic period. In terms of attitudes to mission, the sources reveal positive remarks (by Jews), negative reactions (by non-Jews and Jews), and neutral mention of “proselytes.”⁶⁵ The material is similar to what we have seen when discussing Greco-Roman mission in the semi-public sphere: we have clear evidence of movement between cults and philosophies. The question is, then, how that movement came about.

I suggest the following reconstruction on the semi-public level. The Jews of the Diaspora were relatively well integrated in Roman society at this time (around the first century BCE and CE), and archaeological and epigraphic evidence indicate that Jews took part in society in much the same way as non-Jews.⁶⁶ This means that they constructed their association buildings (“synagogues”) adapting to local architectural styles,⁶⁷ and they took part in the same system of benefaction as everybody else. This system implies competition among associations in securing funding for building projects. When Jews in Ostia introduced a gift to the synagogue with the words *Pro salute august[orum]*⁶⁸ (for the health of the emperor[s]), they claimed a place in Roman

⁶⁴ The fact that Jews were forced to exchange the temple tax for Roman imperial tax after 70 CE and the temple’s destruction indicates that Greco-Roman society was aware of the fact that the temple tax had represented an allegiance to a specific state cult.

⁶⁵ For source material and brief discussions of it, see Louis H. Feldman and M. Reinhold, *Jewish Life and Thought among Greeks and Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1996), 123–135 (conversion) and 137–145 (“sympathizers”/“God-fearers”). For inscriptions, see Margaret H. Williams, *The Jews among the Greeks and Romans: A Diaspora Source Book* (London: Duckworth, 1998), 169–179. See also Menahem Stern, ed., *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism: Edited with Introductions, Translations and Commentary*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974–1984).

⁶⁶ This is one of the main arguments of Harland, *Associations*.

⁶⁷ For discussion and bibliography for synagogues before 200 CE, see *ASSB*.

⁶⁸ For the plural reading, *augustorum* (AUGG), see *JJWE* 1, no. 13; Anders Runesson, “The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia: The Building and its History from the First to the Fifth Century,” in *The Synagogue of Ancient Ostia and the Jews of Rome: Interdisciplinary Studies*, ed. Birger Olsson, Dieter Mitternacht, and O. Brandt, SSIR, 4° 57 (Stockholm: Paul Åström, 2001), 29–99, esp. 86, n. 322.

society, proclaiming the God of Israel as relevant to that society.⁶⁹ Displaying the name of benefactors, who could be Jewish or non-Jewish, would not only honor the benefactor but also make a public statement that the Jewish community *and* its god have been found important in the eyes of influential citizens.⁷⁰ This would create attention (and attraction) in and of itself. In addition, the cultic building itself functioned “rhetorically” in much the same way, making a statement to all who lived in the city.

Although we do not hear of public processions in the case of the Jews, we have access to literature intended for non-Jewish readers, like Josephus’s *Contra Apionem* (as well as *Antiquitates judaicae*), which elevated Judaism as superior to non-Jewish ways of life and proclaimed the God of Israel as powerful for non-members, able to give protection and happiness to anyone who would worship him. The God of Israel is in control of world history, and those loyal to this god will be rewarded.⁷¹ As Steve Mason states, “[w]hether Judaism was a missionary religion or not, Josephus tried to be a Judean missionary in Rome.”⁷² Seen together, archaeological, epigraphic, and literary sources indicate that Jews interacted with non-Jews in ways that would have signaled to non-Jews that joining this group and worshiping the God of Israel was encouraged and would bring benefits to the person who became a member. It would be misleading to understand proselytizing mission to be limited to modern methods of conversion in contemporary Christian contexts. Within the ancient context, we find that Jews used techniques that would make sense to their neighbors in terms of encouragement to join their communities.

Thus, many Jewish groups and also individuals seem to have been intentionally proselytizing in the first century CE; this is indeed the most likely explanation for the many proselytes we hear of in the sources, as well as the god-fearer phenomenon itself.⁷³ As to the latter, the following may be said. If cults and philosophies attracted adherents and members, then it is likely that the use of

⁶⁹ Note also that sacrifices for the emperor were made in the Jerusalem temple.

⁷⁰ An interesting example is the Julia Severa inscription: see *ASSB*, no. 103.

⁷¹ So Steve Mason, “The *Contra Apionem* in Social and Literary Context: An Invitation to Judean Philosophy,” in *Josephus’ Contra Apionem: Studies in its Character and Context with a Latin Concordance to the Portion Missing in Greek*, ed. Louis H. Feldman and J.R. Levinson, *AGAJU* 34 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 187–228; for the argument regarding *A.J.*, see esp. 147–148. Mason concludes regarding *C. Ap.* that “both the form and content of the tract, not to mention the creative energy it reflects, are best understood if Josephus was here continuing his effort to further interest in Judean culture – including a recommendation of conversion” (159). An important aspect here is Mason’s analysis of the genre of *C. Ap.* which he concludes should be identified as *logos protreptikos*, a genre used by later Christian apologists with the purpose to “draw people away from traditional philosophy and into Christian groups that now understood themselves as philosophies” (p. 171). Earlier, Per Bilde had also identified *C. Ap.* as an example of missionary literature, see his *Flavius Josephus Between Jerusalem and Rome*, *JSP-SUP* 2 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988), 120.

⁷² Mason, “Social and Literary Context,” 173.

⁷³ Cf. Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.282–284.

the same or similar techniques of proclamation would attract both new full members to Judaism and people who would expect and take for granted a non-exclusive membership. Since full “conversion” demanded exclusive membership and rejection of other gods and one’s native tradition – indeed such “conversion” was perceived of as joining another *ethnos*, its laws and its way of life, including support for Jerusalem⁷⁴ – those who would take for granted non-exclusive adherence to various cults and associations would continue to do so even as they were attracted to Jewish ancestral customs. Such individuals were not turned away by Jewish groups. Rather, as a sign of acculturation, they were incorporated loosely and this eventually gave rise to the idea that various subsets of laws, minimal requirements, should apply to them as non-Jews.⁷⁵ The god-fearer phenomenon should thus be seen as a result of Jewish insistence, contrary to, e.g., Egyptian Isis worshippers, on the ethnic – and therefore also public and “national” – aspect of their identity, in a semi-public Greco-Roman context. As we see in some instances, such status could even be missionized (the Adiabene case), reminding us of much earlier traditions in the Book of Jonah that would stress compliance with Jewish ethno-ethnic standards without those missionized being asked to join the Jewish *ethnos*. We note, therefore, that Jewish mission could also be of the ethno-ethnic type, not only proselytizing.

The idea of exclusive membership seems to have been unique, although vaguely related to philosophies rather than cults. (It appears Josephus alluded to this relationship when presenting Judaism to non-Jews). Combined, however, with the ethnic aspect (and the laws that came with it), this evoked strong negative feelings among some Greco-Roman authors. The following quote from Tacitus regarding non-Jews who were attracted to Jewish ancestral customs is revealing:

[T]he other customs of the Jews are base and abominable, and owe their persistence to the depravity. For the worst rascals among other peoples, *renouncing their ancestral religions*, always kept sending tribute and *contributing to Jerusalem*, thereby increasing the wealth of the Jews; ... Those who are converted to their ways follow the same practice, [of cutting themselves off from other peoples] and the earliest lesson they receive is to *despise the gods, to disown their country*, and to regard their parents, children, and brothers as of little account (Hist. 5.5.1–2).⁷⁶

For our purposes it is of interest to note that, within synagogue settings in the Greco-Roman world, Jewish groups could engage in mission, both proselytizing and ethno-ethnic, that placed the god of one of the defeated nations at the

⁷⁴ Cf. Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5.1–2.

⁷⁵ Cf. different Rabbinic traditions regarding Adam (Gen. R. 16:6; Deut. R. 2:25; Num. R. 14:12) and Noah (b. Sanh. 56a–b; Gen. R. 34:8; Deut. R. 1:21) as well as special regulations for non-Jews once the Messiah has come (Gen. R. 98:9). Adam, Noah, Abraham and Jacob are all mentioned as receivers of a different number of laws in Exod. R. 30:9. See also Acts 15:20.

⁷⁶ Trans. Moore, LCL.

center of their worldview, with loyalty directed to its capital, Jerusalem, and to Jewish law.⁷⁷ With this in mind, it is reasonable to assume that the god-fearers won would far outnumber the proselytes.⁷⁸

Behind missionary attitudes and practices lay convictions that the God of Israel was the God of the whole world, and that this god controlled, ultimately, world history. The Hebrew Bible abounds in statements to this effect, especially in Psalms, but also in some of the prophets. Worshipping such a god would make sense also to people who were not Jews. Since the ethnic aspect is connected to the land and to the public sphere, and has implications for Apostolic-Jewish mission, we shall return to this in the next section. Suffice it to note that whereas we have seen movement between the private and semi-public sphere as we discussed Greco-Roman cults, here we find tensions with political overtones arising from the interrelationship between the semi-public and public spheres. Such tension is, in fact, accentuated in Apostolic-Jewish mission.

While we do not find evidence of a general Jewish mission indicating movement from the private sphere to the semi-public in the first century, Apostolic-Jewish mission, although focused on the semi-public arena, was also connected in certain respects to the private sphere. It is clear from Paul's letters that Christ-followers could sometimes gather in homes, just as we have seen that some Greco-Roman cults did.⁷⁹ To what extent these homes were remodeled⁸⁰ in the earliest period is impossible to say, although we have one example, perhaps the earliest, from Capernaum of a private house in which one of the rooms was transformed into a cultic room, or association room.⁸¹ Apostolic Jews as well as Christ-fearers were also found in Jewish associations ("synagogues") as

⁷⁷ Cf. Seneca, *Superst.*, quoted by Augustine, *Civ.* 6.11: "The vanquished have given laws to their victors" (Trans. Gummere, LCL).

⁷⁸ The fact that the exclusivity of philosophies would be reserved mostly for the elite, and non-exclusivity of the cults and associations would be embraced by the greater number of the population, supports such a conclusion.

⁷⁹ See e.g., 1 Cor 16:9; Phlm 2; Rom 16:5; all discussed by Paul R. Trebilco in his contribution to the SNTS seminar "History and Theology of Mission in the New Testament: Global Challenges and Opportunities," Lund 2008.

⁸⁰ Cf. above the changes made to the house of Dionysius in Philadelphia.

⁸¹ See Anders Runesson, "Architecture, Conflict, and Identity Formation: Jews and Christians in Capernaum From the 1st to the 6th Century," in *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee: A Region in Transition*, ed. Jürgen K. Zangenberg, Harold W. Attridge, and Dale B. Martin, WUNT 210 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 231–257; Anders Runesson and Wally V. Cirafesi, "Art and Architecture at Capernaum, Kefar 'Othnay, and Dura-Europos," in *The Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries. 3 Vols. Vol. 3: From Celsus to the Catacombs: Visual, Liturgical, and Non-Christian Receptions of Jesus in the Second and Third Centuries CE*, ed. Chris Keith, Helen K. Bond, Christine Jacobi, and Jens Schröter (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 151–200. Although this house may indicate a broader pattern, it should be noted that in this case we are dealing with a specific site remembered as related to an apostle (and Jesus); it soon developed into a pilgrimage site.

subgroups, a fact that both makes sociological sense and is confirmed by Acts.⁸² In terms of Apostolic Judaism, it is safe to say that it spread via a network of synagogues and with the “subversive” help of private houses. This is both similar to and different from the spread of Greco-Roman cults. The similarity lies in the use of the private house as a platform of sorts for introducing new cultic elements. The difference is, of course, that Apostolic Jews and non-Jews were closely related to Jewish associations and had a network in place that could be used, whereas new Greco-Roman cults that were introduced via the private sphere had to construct buildings themselves and create community networks in the semi-public sphere.⁸³ This process had already been achieved, to a large degree, by Jewish groups before the arrival of Apostolic Judaism in the first century.⁸⁴ The spread of this type of Judaism is, therefore, intimately intertwined with the social networks established by other Jews, as well as earlier and other Jewish missionary activities among non-Jews, which had created an active interest in Judaism.

In brief, the techniques used by Apostolic Jews, to the extent they were new, were embedded in the matrix created by Jews before and around them. Most of this early mission must be defined as inward mission, since it was carried out within a network of synagogues and directed to the audiences there, including god-fearers who were worshippers of the God of Israel already.⁸⁵ In fact, reading Acts, Paul’s letters and the Johannine letters, for example, there is very little evidence of a proselytizing mission that extends beyond Judaism and the synagogue context. Even such an obvious example of proselytizing mission as Paul’s Areopagus speech (Acts 17:16–20) needs to be seen in this context:

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, as the author describes it, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he argued *in the synagogue* with the Jews and the devout persons [ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις καὶ τοῖς σεβομένοις], and also *in the marketplace* [ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ] every day with those who happened to be there. Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said, “What does this babbler want to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities.” (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) So *they took him and brought him to the Areopagus* and asked him, “May we know what this

⁸² Cf. here, e.g., the work of Mark D. Nanos with regard to Rome: *The Mystery of Romans*, and Galatia: *Irony of Galatians*.

⁸³ Cf. the case of the introduction of Sarapis cult on Delos, as discussed above, and the spread of the Bacchanalia in Italy in the second century BCE as recounted by Livy in his Roman history (*Hist.* 39.8–19).

⁸⁴ Cf. Acts 15:21.

⁸⁵ Cf. the work of Rodney Stark here, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1997). Adele Reinhartz’s critical discussion of Stark’s theory is important: “Rodney Stark and ‘the Mission to the Jews,’” in *Religious Rivalries*, ed. Vaage, 197–212.

new teaching is that you are presenting? It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means.”

It is telling that Paul is said to be upset about non-Jewish cult in Athens, and that his first reaction is to go to “the synagogue” and debate this with *the Jews* and “*the devout*,” the latter likely referring to god-fearers. Since he is also said to have gone to the marketplace, the agora, the author likely assumed his readers to understand that what Paul would be arguing about in the synagogue context would be the necessity of preparing non-Jews for the eschaton by instructing them to reject their gods and turn exclusively to the God of Israel. Proselytizing mission, then, necessitated inward mission. As the speech that then follows at the Areopagus indicates, eschatological concerns provided Paul with his incentive for proclaiming the effectiveness and importance of his god. It should be noted, however, that while Paul is said to have spoken informally to people in the agora, the programmatic proselytizing speech in the public space of the Areopagus comes, in the narrative, as the result of Paul having been brought there by non-Jews: he is not presented as going there on his own initiative. The primary context of mission remains the synagogue, even when non-Jews are targeted.

While the social reality and techniques used by Apostolic Jews are to be seen within the larger context of other missionary activities in the Greco-Roman world, the Apostolic-Jewish intention, ideology and aim were different in some key respects. This is related to the public sphere and imperialism, to which we now therefore turn.

3.7 Claiming the World: Colonialism as Theo-Political Pattern for Proselytizing Mission

Up till now we have dealt with the private and semi-public spheres of Greco-Roman society, also noting how they are interconnected both with each other and with the public sphere. Some foreign gods, originally having entered Roman society via private cult, were eventually incorporated into Roman public religion. The intention behind distinguishing between these levels of society in the analysis is not to argue for isolation between them, but to allow for new insights to emerge as we focus on each level at a time.

In this section, I would like to put the emphasis on mission seen from a public perspective, highlighting both movements emanating from the state going outward, as well as movements coming from unofficial associations directed inward toward the heart of the empire. The central interpretive key used in the discussion is – and should be – a steady focus on the inextricability of what we call “religion” and the political realities of the ancient world. This means, among other things, that whatever is done against the gods is done against the state, and

vice-versa; what the state does involves the gods of the state. Let us begin with the latter.

3.7.1 Conquest and Mission

The victories of the Roman Empire, the very building of the empire, was an achievement resulting from collaboration between a people and their gods. Reinforcing Roman rule over other peoples also meant the expansion of the rule of Roman gods; Rome “ruled by Jupiter’s will.”⁸⁶ This did not, however, mean that the gods of the conquered peoples were always rejected. Rather, Roman piety could materialize in the ritual of *evocatio deorum*, asking gods of besieged cities to leave the cities before the conquerors dealt the fatal blow, which would lay walls and buildings in ruins.⁸⁷ The gods could then be taken to Rome, and be made, one way or another, to serve Roman interests. The point I want to make is, quite simply, that conquest and empire building was in and of itself a form of mission, indeed, we could say a modified proselytizing mission.

The boundaries of the “group” were the same as the political boundaries, and the incorporation of people from outside the empire into the empire meant the expansion of the realm and power of the Roman gods.⁸⁸ In this way, order is upheld and empire sustained. Since the Romans were said to seek world dominance, this is indeed, to use Goodman’s terminology, a form of “universal” proselytizing mission. Interestingly, the only form of Greco-Roman cults that Goodman would consider to identify as a “proselytizing religion” was “the imperial cult, the worship of the emperors.”⁸⁹ Implied in this mission was the adoption of “a specific frame of mind – namely, loyalty to the Roman state.”⁹⁰ In the context of the present discussion, such a conclusion follows naturally from a wider imperial perspective and makes (ancient) sense. In sum, then, we

⁸⁶ Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading* (London: T&T Clark, 2000), 110; see also 39–40.

⁸⁷ See John S. Kloppenborg, “Evocatio Deorum and the Date of Mark,” *JBL* 124 (2005): 419–450.

⁸⁸ This perspective is often (anachronistically) overlooked in studies on mission, which mostly proceed from a post-enlightenment perspective on “religion.” However, although quite different in nature from Roman imperialism, the same basic theological logic applies to, e.g., the Thirty Years War (1618–1648) in Europe and the rhetoric behind protestant, not least Swedish, expansion. This is so despite the fact that we can discern factors other than “religion” creating and sustaining the conflicts. (Being a Swede, at that time, was equivalent to being a Lutheran Christian according to the theo-political logic of the state-church system.)

⁸⁹ Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 30–32. “In some ways, then, the imperial cult in the early Roman empire was a fine example of a proselytising religion, if [...] it is justified to treat the varied forms of emperor worship found in different areas of the empire as disparate manifestations of a single cult” (31).

⁹⁰ Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 31.

have here a universal proselytizing mission, claiming the world as the possession of specific gods, with the center located in Rome.

With this identified as the wider context, we see the importance of including violence and military conquest in our discussion of mission; such aspects are, indeed, inherent to the phenomenon of mission itself when we consider it as it played out in the public sphere of ancient societies. Directing our attention to Jews and Judaism, this is confirmed. Contrary to claims made by Scot McKnight that “force” is not “worthy of consideration in a study on missionary activity,” violence is very much part of the problem.⁹¹ Especially instructive is the policy of forced conversion under John Hyrcanus (135–104 BCE), Aristobulus I (104 BCE), and Alexander Jannaeus (104–78 BCE). After having conquered Idumae-an territory in his third military campaign, Hyrcanus forced the Idumaeans to undergo circumcision and keep Jewish law, since the area was now considered to be Jewish.⁹² After him, Aristobulus I conquered the Ituraeans and likewise forced these people, if they wanted to remain in the land (now defined as Judea), to undergo circumcision and follow Jewish law.⁹³ Finally, Josephus tells us that Alexander Jannaeus destroyed Pella because of the inhabitants refusal to follow the “national customs of the Jews,” implying a policy similar to Hyrcanus’s and Aristobulus I’s.⁹⁴

Noting, as we did earlier, the connection between land, law, god and people, Salo W. Baron’s comments on these episodes are interesting. If the areas conquered were regarded as, historically, part of the Jewish nation, the motive behind the forced conversions may have been to prevent the profanation of the land through worship of other deities.⁹⁵ Seen from a wider perspective, it simply made political sense to protect the land and honor the god by enforcing divine law in annexed territories. As with Roman conquests, force is part of such mission, although specifics of Jewish law and history formed the unique aspects of the process in the Hasmonean case. Contrary to Roman imperialism, however, the Hasmonean conquest was restricted to what was understood to be Jewish

⁹¹ McKnight, *Light*, 77. McKnight refers to the forced conversions under the Hasmoneans, but he also mentions Jdt 14:10, and Esth 8:17 under his heading “force” (p. 68).

⁹² Josephus, *A.J.* 13.257–258; cf. 15.254. Strabo also mentions the conversion of the Idumaeans (*Geogr.* 16.2.34), as does Ptolemy the Historian, *Hist. Herod.*, quoted in Ammonius, *Adfn.*, 243; the latter of the two authors explicitly mentions force as the method of conversion. Hyrcanus’s destruction of the Samaritan temple on Gerizim should be seen in this context too (Josephus, *A.J.* 13.254–256).

⁹³ Josephus, *A.J.* 13.318–319. Timagenes, as quoted by Josephus (*A.J.* 13.319), confirms the conversions but does not mention force.

⁹⁴ *A.J.* 13.397.

⁹⁵ Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 167. Gedalyahu Alon, *Jews, Judaism, and the Classical World: Studies in Jewish History in the Times of the Second Temple and Talmud* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), 187, argues that the notion of the uncleanness of non-Jewish territory was of pre-Hasmonean origin, and that impurity in this regard was related to worship of other gods.

territory historically; we find no “universal” mission in this specific case, as we do with the Romans. In fact, it is interesting to note that despite repeated claims in the Hebrew Bible that the God of Israel is the god of the whole world, and thus that the nations, ultimately, are dependent on Israel’s god,⁹⁶ we hear of no military campaigns intended to ensure such dominion. Israel is even told that it should missionize to the non-Jews (clearly expressed in Pss 9:12; 96:3, 105:1),⁹⁷ and we see similar attitudes in Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah.⁹⁸ In Isa 66:18–24 we have an explicit description of how active proselytizing mission to nations other than Israel is to be carried out in an eschatological future. Other traditions are less clear and may refer to active ethno-ethnic mission.

There is a tendency in the sources to link theo-political ideas about the God of Israel being the god of all nations, an eschatological future when this conviction shall materialize as experienced reality when all peoples shall worship in Jerusalem, and a final divine judgment which will make this possible. The scenario also involves the restoration of Israel. Although eschatology and mission are not always connected (cf. the sectarian covenants as reconstructed based on the sectarian writings among the Dead Sea Scrolls), the two often go hand in hand. When they do, and when eschatological realities are felt to be near at hand, political dimensions are triggered and strategies developed to realize them. We shall now turn to Apostolic Judaism in order to illustrate this point.

3.7.2 Restoration and Counter-Colonialism: The Margins Strike Back

Space will not allow detailed presentation of the evidence regarding mission and the historical Jesus. It seems to me, however, that the current consensus that Jesus was concerned only with the Jewish people and not the non-Jews is correct. The Kingdom of God, the undisputed center of Jesus’s preaching, healing, and exorcisms, fits within a restoration-theological frame in which the goal is a reunited Kingdom of Israel. It seems equally clear, however, that Jesus expected the restoration of Israel to lead to a renewed world, and thus that the nations, indirectly, would be affected.⁹⁹ Jesus’s inward mission may thus have had wider or global intentions, implicitly, but this is difficult to prove. Many of Jesus’s followers, on the other hand, were quite explicit in this regard, in terms of inten-

⁹⁶ See, e.g., Pss 9:12; 18:50; 22:8; 46:11; 47:9; 48:11; 57:10; 67:2–3; 82:8; 87:4–6; 96:3, 5; 98:2, 4; 105:1; 108:4; 110:6; 113:4; 117:1; 126:1–2; 145:12.

⁹⁷ A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 1.105–106 and 2.681, 726, dates all three Psalms in the postexilic period, but suggests that Ps 96 may contain older parts, and that Deutero-Isaiah may be dependent on its “universalism.”

⁹⁸ The following passages are relevant: Isa 45:9ff, 22–23; 49:6–7, 22–23; 52:10; 61:5–6. Note also the mission aspect in Isa 54:4–5; 56:1–8.

⁹⁹ Metaphors like “light of the world” and “salt of the earth” (Matt 5:13, 14) require interpretations concerned with global realities, but do not imply active proselytizing mission.

tions and aims. A revealing summary of such aims is put in Jesus's mouth in Acts 1:6–8:

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will *restore the kingdom to Israel* [ἀποκαθιστάνεις τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ Ἰσραήλ]?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power [δύναμιν] when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and *to the ends of the earth* [ἕως ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς].”

For the author, the restoration of Israel is intimately connected to the reinvention of the world, and the latter must precede the former, it seems. For the latter to happen active mission is necessary, and the entire world is the task. The politics here are clear: the God of Israel is, through the voice of Jesus, claiming the world as his dominion. What was envisioned in the Psalter is said to be about to be realized in a world dominated by other gods, the gods of the Roman Empire. The claim makes (ancient) sense within the same theo-political empire-logic as the Romans maintained, with the difference that Apostolic Jews will work for the exclusive rule of one god alone. More importantly, the strategy of expansion applied is to use non-military means to achieve a political goal. As we find when the story of Acts unfolds, this means a focus on the semi-public sphere for the spread of the cult, primarily within Jewish associations (“synagogues”), but with the aim of reaching beyond that context and into Rome itself.

What we see, then, is a mirror image of empire, but reversed in terms of the strategy used to reach the goal. The intention and aim are the same, the strategy different. Acts is a description of how to “attack” the gods of Rome with the expectation of taking over the empire, i.e., the world. If Rome's gods fall, then Rome will fall and be replaced by Jerusalem, which will, finally, be realizing theo-politically its true nature as the center of the world. The same colonial pattern is found in Matthew's Gospel.¹⁰⁰ While Jesus before his death is quoted as prohibiting expansion outside Judea (Matt 10:5–6), and thereby reflecting more of the same concerns as the Hasmoneans,¹⁰¹ the power and authority to rule the world is achieved as a result of the cross and the empty tomb (Matt 28:18–20):

And Jesus came and said to them, “*All authority in heaven and on earth* [πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς] has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of *all nations* [πάντα τὰ ἔθνη] baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the

¹⁰⁰ Cf. John K. Riches, “Matthew's Missionary Strategy in Colonial Perspective,” in *The Gospel of Matthew in its Roman Imperial Context*, ed. John K. Riches and David C. Sim, JSNTSup 276 (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 128–142; see esp. the sections on “Political Claims” (pp. 137–139) and “Territorial Expansion” (pp. 140–141).

¹⁰¹ Though without military force as part of the strategy, and excluding Samaria; see further below.

Holy Spirit, and teaching them to *obey everything that I have commanded you*. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age [ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος].

Read within the cultural context of the first-century Mediterranean world, the intense theo-political force of this text is unmistakable. Nothing less than the entire world, i.e., what was at the time ultimately in the hands of Roman gods, is claimed.¹⁰² All nations shall be conquered for the God of Israel, but without military means or violence. Again, the aim is a mirror image of the empire and its will to dominate. The strategy is, however, different: the take-over of the public realm in Greco-Roman society through a war waged on the gods, beginning, socially, in the semi-public sphere. In the end, all nations shall obey what Jesus has taught his own people, which is, according to the Matthean narrative, the Jewish law.¹⁰³

The last point deserves attention. If Jewish law shall be observed by all nations, this implies conversion to Judaism, likely including circumcision for men,¹⁰⁴ and a giving up of non-Jewish culture. This, it seems to me, is indeed the culmination of the message of Matthew. The story begins with a group of non-Jews from the East, the magi, recognizing that the legitimacy and power of the Jewish king extends beyond the Jewish people to include themselves (Matt 2:1–12); then we hear of a centurion (from the West, one might add), who recognizes and need the power of the Jewish Messiah (Matt 8:5–13). We also meet a Canaanite woman (the historical enemies of the Jews, according to Jewish scriptures¹⁰⁵), who, rightly in the eyes of Jesus, identifies her place in relation to the Jewish people and their Messiah as a dog eating crumbs falling from its master's table (Matt 15:21–28). This is set within the frame of a negative general portrayal of non-Jews in Matthew, non-Jews representing everything that good Jews should not be or do.¹⁰⁶

In other words, Matthew presents us with a generally negative picture of the non-Jewish world, in which the only exceptions to the rule are individuals rep-

¹⁰² A realization of the offer Jesus had rejected from the devil in Matt 4:8–9:

Πάλιν παραλαμβάνει αὐτὸν ὁ διάβολος εἰς ὄρος ὑψηλὸν λίαν καὶ δείκνυσιν αὐτῷ πάσας τὰς βασιλείας τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὴν δόξαν αὐτῶν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· ταῦτά σοι πάντα δώσω, ἐὰν πεσῶν προσκυνήσῃς μοι. The logic of the offer requires the shared belief that the devil controls these territories, which were under Rome's dominion; the implication is clearly that Matthew identifies Rome's gods with the devil. Fighting off the devil, then, implies fighting the Roman Empire in order to liberate the world from the devil's rule (via Roman gods). Cf. Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 110–111.

¹⁰³ See, e.g., Matt 5:17–6:24, 7:21; 19:17; 22:36–40; 23:23.

¹⁰⁴ Several scholars have read this text as requiring conversion and circumcision, i.e., proselyte status, of converts to this Apostolic Jewish group. See especially David C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community*, Studies of the New Testament and Its World (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 247–255.

¹⁰⁵ See W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew*, 3 vols. (T&T Clark: London, 1991), 2.547.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. e.g., Matt 5:47; 6:7. See also Sim, *Christian Judaism*, and Runesson, *Divine Wrath*.

resenting eastern and western wisdom and power, as well as the historical enemies of Israel – and all are explicitly said to subordinate themselves to this Jewish Messiah. The centripetal force of the eschaton begins with Jesus during his lifetime, but when all authority on earth has been achieved after his death and resurrection, when sin and its political consequences are eliminated (cf. Matt 1:21), the world shall obey the law of the God of Israel. Further support for this reading is found in Matthew’s version of the Gadarene demoniacs (Matt 8:28–34). This story tells us how non-Jewish culture is erased as Jesus enters non-Jewish cities and their surrounding areas. The demoniacs live among ritually unclean tombs and the demons are eventually sent into ritually unclean swine, which are drowned in the water.¹⁰⁷ Since Jesus explicitly forbids mission among non-Jews in 10:5–6, it is possible that the demoniacs’ identity is narratively to be understood as Jewish.¹⁰⁸ The two Jews in a non-Jewish area live in a ritually unclean environment, including issues of food and sacrificial animals. As Jesus approaches this non-Jewish area – in the holy land¹⁰⁹ – the Jews living there are freed from impurities; the tombs, the swine, and the demons are associated with a place that needs to be liberated.

The non-Jewish majority (“the city”) reacts negatively as their culture (their concern was with the swine rather than the disappearance of the demons) is being erased in the “sea” (*thalassa*), into which the swine disappeared, and they consequently ask Jesus to leave their area.¹¹⁰ Demons and pigs go together, and the defiled land is cleansed as Jesus approaches it as “the Son of God.” The story is concerned, in this case, with Matthew’s holy land and its status, but in 28:19–20 the disciples are told to conquer the entire world with Jewish law in much the same way. For Matthew, further, Jerusalem is the holy city and thus the center of the world;¹¹¹ the world, in turn, is just about to find out that this has been the reality all the time. Since the Roman Empire in fact works with the devil to achieve world dominance (see n. 102 above), God’s judgment and rule will mean liberation for all. Matthew’s perspective is quite close to the Christ-oriented Pharisaic Jews in Acts 15:5 in terms of circumcision of non-Jews. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, Mattheans were most likely Christ-following Pharisees

¹⁰⁷ Note also that swine were common sacrificial animals in non-Jewish cults.

¹⁰⁸ And more specifically as Matt 10:6 states, they would be what the author considers to be “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

¹⁰⁹ Gadara was located in the Decapolis, but would have been part of Matthew’s “biblical land”/the holy land; cf. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 23–24.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Mark’s very different version of this story (5:1–20).

¹¹¹ Jerusalem was regarded as holy by Matthew both before and after Jesus’s death; see Matt 4:5; 27:53. In Matt 5:35 it is stated that the earth is Israel’s God’s footstool and that Jerusalem is “the city of the Great King.” It is hard to imagine a more explicit statement of where the world’s center is – and by implication, where it is not.

breaking away from the larger Pharisaic community.¹¹² If correct, this would explain both Matt 23:2–3 and the critique of Pharisaic mission (23:15).

A final example of Apostolic Jewish mission is found in Paul. In the interest of space, we shall only note that Paul's view of the way Jewish proselytizing mission should be carried out differed significantly from Matthew's. For Paul, non-Jews must remain non-Jews, and thus the renewed world would consist of both categories, all worshipping the God of Israel. A unity in diversity, with Israel at the center as the cultivated olive tree from whose rich root non-Jewish individuals "in Christ" are fed (Rom 11:17–24). Still, Paul's aim was the same: via semi-public networks to "attack" Greco-Roman gods and ultimately replace Rome with Jerusalem as the world's center.¹¹³ The imitation of empire is also evidenced in his determination to visit – and missionize – Spain, representing the western end of the earth and the empire.¹¹⁴

In conclusion, Apostolic-Jewish mission was formed after Roman imperialism, but reversed the strategy to achieve world dominion. Eventually – and oddly – this strategy actually worked, and this cult on the semi-public level was adopted by later Roman rulers, who made it into exclusive state religion for the protection and preservation of society.¹¹⁵ By then, however, "Christianity" had developed far beyond Apostolic Judaism in many significant aspects, and mission was now "Christian mission," not "Jewish mission."

3.8 From Jerusalem to Rome – A One Way Ticket?

Was there, then, a Christian mission before the fourth century? In the end, the answer to this question is to some degree a matter of definition. There is good reason to make a distinction between Apostolic-Jewish and Christian mission and place the origins of the latter no earlier than the second century; its full development on all levels of society, however, comes only in the fourth century. How should we explain this development?

I have argued in this chapter that Jesus and the earliest Jesus movement were involved in eschatologically motivated variants of Jewish mission, working with strategies and within an ideological matrix familiar to other Jews. Jewish mission, then, was carried out in the first century, not only by Apostolic Jews, but also by others within Judaism. In addition to the specific source material, which, I believe, is best explained by this theory, including an individual missionary as

¹¹² Anders Runesson, "Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations: Matthean Community History as Pharisaic Intragroup Conflict," *JBL* 127 (2008): 95–132.

¹¹³ For the Jewish people as a center in Paul's theology, see Rom 9–11; the central position of Jerusalem is evidenced in, e.g., the Jerusalem collection, 2 Cor 8–9; Rom 15:25–28.

¹¹⁴ Rom 15:28.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 18.

Josephus,¹¹⁶ this perspective is confirmed on a more general level by Greco-Roman material. A key aspect of our approach has been to methodologically isolate three social levels of ancient societies, the private, semi-public and public levels, and read the evidence for mission in each of these contexts respectively. While we see examples of movement between the private and semi-public sphere, the competition is played out mostly on the semi-public level. From there, cults could also penetrate into the public sphere, which, eventually, was precisely what happened with Christianity.

We shall return to described in more detail the development of Christian identity in this regard in Chapter 11. Key aspects were the re-invention of Christ-cult as unrelated to traditional ethnic parameters, excluding altogether ethnic identity as a criterion for membership. This development is found in Ignatius of Antioch, but spread from then on quite rapidly, most likely since other eastern cults had already travelled the same route and the pattern was familiar to people. This did not mean the disappearance of Apostolic Judaism and its missionary activities. While Justin Martyr accepted Apostolic-Jewish forms of beliefs and practices, he expressed concerns about their mission, which he insists must cease.¹¹⁷ Apostolic Jews may have continued to emphasize the connection between people, land, law, and God, as did other Jews, but the crucial step for those orienting their cult around the Christ-figure in order to gain access to the Roman public sphere had already been taken at the very moment non-Jewish adherents in the second century divorced Christ-orientation from its ethnic dimension. In the fourth century, the exclusive nature of this form of non-Jewish Christianity proved to be a politically powerful tool, even to the point where it could be brought in as the cult of the Empire. The journey from Jerusalem to Rome had succeeded, but in ways neither Paul or Luke, nor Matthew could have imagined. Instead of a return ticket with a triumphal procession in Jerusalem in sight, developments along the way turned out to be of a one-way nature.

As Theodosius I begins his persecution of Greco-Roman cults by the end of the fourth century, aiming at protecting and preserving the empire in collaboration with the God of Israel (now interpreted non-ethnically as the Christian God), we come full circle, so to speak. We have seen this form of mission and its theo-political logic before in the public sphere, both in Rome and with the Hasmoneans. Christian mission on this level eventually results in the issuing of laws restricting Jews in their communal life and, after centuries, the eradication of the last of the Greco-Roman cults.¹¹⁸ While Rome in the first century ruled by Jupiter's will, they now ruled by the will of the Christian God, with much the

¹¹⁶ So Steve Mason, as discussed above.

¹¹⁷ Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 47.

¹¹⁸ For the latter process, see Eberhard Sauer, *The Archaeology of Religious Hatred in the Roman and Early Medieval World* (Stroud: Tempus, 2003). Laws relating to Jews are conven-

same ingredients involved: military power, coercion, issuing of restrictive laws. The force of the mission was, compared to earlier periods, enhanced by the exclusive nature of the religion, with destruction of *all* other temples and cults.¹¹⁹ Most of this mission is to be defined as inward mission, played out where Rome had already secured political power.

Christian mission carried out after this point in the semi-public and private sphere, although equally exclusive in its claims, was often but not always in agreement with the public mission; conflicts and inner-Christian persecution was the result. There is no need or space here to reiterate the history of Europe that followed, other than to mention the conflicts and wars that developed in the footsteps of the Reformation, and the refugee problem that was created (many of whom came to North America), as well as the role of Christian mission in Western colonialism in general – and its force in the later countering of colonial strategies that we see in the development of Liberation Theology. What really stands out throughout history is the close connection between mission and violence in various forms as we enter the public sphere. It seems inevitable, regardless of the type of cult.

Today most Christians (and others) think of mission as divorced from politics, as a religious phenomenon, some would say an offer of a gift, taking place in the private sphere of society. As with contemporary Jewish mission, most forms of such mission is to be defined as inward mission, attempts to reinvent, or “defend,” what one believes to be true forms of worship. While Jewish proselytizing mission is debated regarding the first century, all agree that it existed in late antiquity but disappeared sometime after the Talmudic period. Today, as we noted in the introduction, inward mission is common, although the events described in the article quoted are more rare perhaps.¹²⁰ It is interesting to note that this type of inward mission, attempts to “take over synagogues,” comes close to much of what we see in the New Testament. We should perhaps also note that some Jews, although they are few, would argue for proselytizing mission today.¹²¹ Others, also few, would actively engage in ethno-ethnic mission of the seven Noahide commandments.¹²²

iently collected in Amnon Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation: Edited with Introductions, Translations, and Commentary* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987).

¹¹⁹ Sauer, *Archaeology*.

¹²⁰ See p. 85, n. 1.

¹²¹ See, e.g., Lawrence J. Epstein, “Why the Jewish People Should Welcome Converts,” *Judaism* 43 (1994): 302–312.

¹²² Although few would actively missionize Noahide commandments, many feel an obligation to supply information about this form of worship if asked by non-Jews. See e.g., J. David Bleich, “Teaching Torah to Non-Jews,” *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 2:18 (1980), 192–211. An example of former Christians who converted to Noahide “religion” is a group called Emmanuel, in Athens Tennessee. This group was founded in 1990 by a former Baptist pastor, J. David Davies. He is seen by some as the de facto leader of Noahides worldwide. On the development of the doctrine of Noahide commandments, including

Most discourses on contemporary Christian mission within the churches emphasize missionary outreach as a key task for Christians, not seldom claiming it to be inextricably linked with Christian identity.¹²³ Further, the basic assumption behind almost all theologies of mission is a de-ethnosized replacement-theological (supersessionist) paradigm. Lately, however, intensified since the 1960s, an inner-Christian debate has surfaced as to how “mission” should be defined.¹²⁴ The background for this discussion touches upon the relationship between Western colonialism/imperialism and the spread of Christianity along with Western culture, as well as the church’s involvement in local culture and attempts in many places in non-Western countries in the wake of Vatican II (1962–1965) to realize visions of inculturation and emphasize the necessity of localized understandings of Christian faith and life. In our age of globalization, when cultures and religious traditions meet on a more frequent basis than ever before, such discussions are by no means destined to fade, but rather to escalate.

In conclusion, then, Christian mission as we understand it today evolved fully with the emergence of the category “religion” in Late Antiquity. The inherent tensions and the pattern of empire distinguishable already in the first century, in the New Testament, present a theological challenge to the modern postcolonial world. This challenge, which, in light of the role of religion in, e.g., the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine, is pressing, both ethically and analytically. The task ahead of us is interdisciplinary, too, as it ought to involve not only systematic theologians and exegetes of the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible, but also scholars of Patristics, Judaism, and Islam.

discussion of its reception in Christianity, see the work of Klaus Müller, *Tora für die Völker: Die Noachidischen Gebote und Ansätze zu ihrer Rezeption im Christentum* (Berlin: Institute Kirche und Judentum, 1994).

¹²³ Cf., e.g., the Roman Catholic document *Ad Gentes*, Ch. 24, §23: “Although every disciple of Christ, as far in him lies, has the duty of spreading the Faith, (1) Christ the Lord always calls whomever He will from among the number of His disciples, to be with Him and to be sent by Him to preach to the nations (cf. Mark 3:13).” See also Ch. 6, §35: “the whole Church is missionary, and the work of evangelization is a basic duty of the People of God.”

¹²⁴ This is true also of Sweden, where the world’s second largest Lutheran church has its home. See, e.g., the work of Biörn Fjärstedt, former director of The Church of Sweden Mission, later bishop of Gotland, *Missionen skiftar ansikte: Missionsteologi i tiden* (Stockholm: Verbum, 1991; in Swedish), a book that generated debate involving both scholars (e.g., Bengt Holmberg) and laypeople. For further discussion of mission, including New Testament perspectives, see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991).

4. Entering the Conversation on Paul

Was he a Christian and did he Attend Church?

4.1 Terminology as Translation

Over the last decades, scholars of the New Testament have increasingly pointed to the need to re-think the terminology we use in our analyses as well as in our teaching. Several terms have been asked to retire, as Paula Fredriksen has phrased it,¹ and leave room for new words and expressions that may help us to better grasp what was going on in the first-century Mediterranean world, a time and culture very distant from our own. As we have discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the terminological question is a key problem for historical studies generally, but it receives an additional level of urgency as we deal with texts that are religiously authoritative for people today. The politics of translation has, in this regard, received attention in recent scholarship, such as in Naomi Seidman's book *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* from 2006.² Matt Jackson McCabe's edited volume from 2007, *Jewish-Christianity Reconsidered*, and his more recent monograph *Jewish Christianity: The Making of the Christianity-Judaism Divide*, deal to a large extent with the problem of terminology, a particular form of translation, as we attempt to describe the phenomena usually, and in my view problematically, referred to as "Jewish-Christianity."³

¹ Paula Fredriksen, "Mandatory Retirement," 231–246. The potential of flawed terminology to mislead scholars to draw anachronistic or otherwise erroneous conclusions was pointed out already by Morton Smith, "Terminological Booby Traps and Real Problems in Second Temple Judaeo-Christian Studies," in *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh*, ed. Shaye J.D. Cohen, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 130/1 (New York: Brill, 1996), 1.95–103.

² Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Cf. the contributions to the discussion in Elliott and Boer, eds., *Ideology, Culture, and Translation*.

³ Matt Jackson-McCabe, ed., *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Texts and Groups* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007). In this volume, note especially the contributions by Jerry Sumney ("Paul and Christ-believing Jews Whom He Opposes") and John Marshall ("John's Jewish [Christian?] Apocalypse"); idem, *Jewish Christianity: The Making of the Christianity-Judaism Divide* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020). See also Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of the Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 15–16. Cf. the categorization of religious types in Runesson, "Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations," 95–132, here 105. On the origins, history, and use of the term "Jewish Christian" and "Jewish Christianity," see the informative survey by Matti Myl-

In this chapter, I would like to contribute to this discussion as it relates more specifically to Paul by focusing on two terms used in English translations of the New Testament and in historical analysis of texts included in this collection of ancient documents: “Christians” (including “Christianity”) and “church.” These terms are, in turn, related to how we use other words, such as “Jews,” “Judaism,” and “synagogue.” It will be argued that “Christians,” “Christianity,” and “church” are politically powerful terms that are inadequate, anachronistic, and misleading when we read Paul, serving contemporary needs in the formation of religious identities rather than helping us to describe Jewish and Greco-Roman society in the first century. A few words on the nature of terminology and possible pitfalls for translating historical phenomena are in order before we address the specific problems connected with these terms.

4.2 *Translating History: Colonizing the Past or Liberating the Dead?*

People engage in historical research for a variety of reasons, some of which may be compared to a traveler’s wish to encounter and learn about things unknown. Historians and travelers have something further in common with all of humanity, though, which problematizes the notion that the discovery of anything truly unfamiliar is possible. Each time new cultures are encountered, including lost historical landscapes, that which was previously unknown is immediately, with instinctive assistance from the observer’s previous experiences and socialization, accommodated within a pre-existing worldview foreign to the phenomena observed. With discoveries, as with all types of experiences, an instant and unceasing process of “translation” ensues in our brains as soon as we encounter the novel, aiming at turning it into something familiar, something we can relate to and understand.

This is, in fact, an important psychological process, a condition making it possible for human beings to function at all, making sense of the world around us. But this spontaneous hermeneutical mechanism, while psychologically necessary, also means that it is impossible, strictly speaking, for anyone to experience anything as truly *new*, since Otherness is instantly absorbed, embedded, and modified by the familiar, even as a “foreign object.” *New* discoveries, *new* understanding, are therefore, and must inescapably be, the result of our *conscious efforts to disentangle what we have encountered from the familiar that we know*. New insights are thus dependent on our willingness to de-familiarize ourselves with the phenomena we seek to understand; on our refusal to let our

lykoski, “‘Christian Jews’ and ‘Jewish Christians’: The Jewish Origins of Christianity in English Literature from Elizabeth I to Toland’s *Nazarenus*,” in *The Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity: From Toland to Baur*, ed F. Stanley Jones, *History of Biblical Studies* 5 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 3–41.

familiar, already in-use mindset and concepts control and categorize that which we encounter.⁴ While voluntary alienation and detachment may prove especially difficult as we deal with religiously authoritative texts, this is one of the basic mental processes that invite the use of method in the humanities and the social sciences more generally; method in itself is, however, not a guaranteed solution to the problem of our limited ability to move beyond ourselves, since its very own construction is also entangled in the mold of culturally determined contemporarities that surround us.⁵

Human perception is ego- and ethno-centric, and by implication therefore colonial in nature since we, as the center, violently structure and give form to the periphery, to that which is not us. We construct the Other in our own image, or distort encountered phenomena using perceived weaknesses in our own culture as building blocks in a process of Othering. Such colonial practices are at constant work in historical-critical biblical scholarship as much as in other historical disciplines. We need to make ourselves aware of these hermeneutical mechanisms that often go unnoticed and resist them if we seek understanding of the historical, the radical otherness of which is otherwise neutralized. This is a lifelong process. We need to listen before we speak, and radical listening leads to de-familiarization, the beginnings of historical research; listening to voices that are not our own, in a language that is not our own, in a world with a center that is not us.

Reconstructing and translating history inevitably begins and ends with language.⁶ When we de-familiarize ourselves with texts and other artifacts, we engage in a process of decolonizing the past, liberating the dead from the bondage

⁴ Cf. James D.G. Dunn's discussion of our "default setting" as we interpret the world around us and the biblical texts: *A New Perspective on Jesus; What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 80–82. Dunn writes, "A default setting, then, a computer's preset preferences, is a useful image of an established mindset, an unconscious bias or Tendenz, an instinctive reflex response. The point is that to alter the default setting, to change a habitual attitude or instinctive perspective, requires a conscious and sustained or repeated effort, otherwise without realizing it we revert to the default setting, to our unexamined predispositions" (82).

⁵ On method as part of that which needs to be disentangled, see chapter three, "The Theoretical Location of Postcolonial Studies," in Anna Runesson, *Exegesis in the Making*, esp. 36–39. See also Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, "Re-Assembling Jesus: Re-Thinking the Ethics of Gospel Studies," and Hans Leander, "Mark and Matthew after Edward Said," both studies published in Eve-Marie Becker and Anders Runesson, eds., *Mark and Matthew II. Comparative Readings: Hermeneutics, Reception History, Theology*, WUNT 304 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 311–334 and 289–309, respectively.

⁶ A word is a social agreement primarily related to contemporary, *not* past, realities, since the "now" is the only space we can, by definition, inhabit. Reconstruction of historical processes involves, like any translation, two languages: the ancient and the modern. Just as the two should not be conflated in the analytical process if we seek that which is not us, the resulting translation is by definition always an approximation since meaning is developed in context.

of our contemporary political identities. History, the reconstruction of silenced voices and the worlds they inhabited, always involves, therefore, both methodological and ethical decisions. One of the fundamental choices the historian has to make in this regard concerns the terminology applied as the analytical task is carried out, since the words we use tend to control the way we think.⁷

4.3 Changing the Architecture of the Conversation

Language is in many ways (heuristically) comparable to architecture. Via external, visible structures that are experienced and shared by others, we enter into edifices that influence our impression of reality. In architecturally constructed space, perception is reconfigured, our vision re-visioned, and whatever is focused upon within that space is seen and understood from within the landscape that we have entered and that encloses us. There is room for a variety of interpretations within the space created by the external structures, largely depending on our experiences prior to entering the space. Nevertheless, the structures still establish the points of departure for any discussion and provide the boundaries within which conclusions may ultimately be drawn.⁸

Scholarly terms and concepts, all of which are carriers for specific views and ideas, function in much the same way. They construct the “space” within which we focus on specific issues and topics in our conversations. Terminological edifices are built slowly over time and are not easily torn down. Now-unsustainable scholarly ideas from previous eras influence current discourses, because many of us still occupy the space created by the terminological walls, arches, and ceilings they have left behind. We need, therefore, to reconsider and discuss not only the conclusions we draw, but also the “architecture” within which we formulate them.

Since the answer to any question already lies, to a certain degree, within the question asked – the question forms the “room” in which we attempt to find the answer – the conclusions we give birth to become the offspring of the language we use. Terminology is pregnant with meaning that often goes unnoticed in the analytical process, which it nevertheless controls from within. Rethinking the way we speak may therefore result in the discovery of new landscapes. The terms we shall discuss are a couple of word-pairs that are of fundamental importance for our field since they determine much of both how questions are asked and what conclusions are drawn. These terms are, as noted above, “Christian”/“Christianity” (and “Jews”/“Judaism”) on the one hand, and “church”

⁷ On this challenge, cf. Smith. “Terminological Booby Traps,” 95, who notes that there is a “prejudice in favor of any established terminology; from infancy we have been trained to believe that what we have been taught is right. Moreover, this belief is convenient.”

⁸ See also below, Ch. 11, 261–262.

(and “synagogue”) on the other, and we shall begin our discussion with the former.

4.4 “Christians”/“Christianity”

When we talk about New Testament scholarship in general and Paul in particular, it has been the convention to say that one is studying (earliest) “Christianity” and/or (the early) “Christians.” Already at this point we have framed the shape and thus the likely outcome of the discussion, having established a firm link between, on the one hand, the modern phenomenon of mainstream (non-Jewish) Christianity and, on the other, whatever was going on in New Testament times and in Paul’s letters. Some scholars who feel the tension created by this language would modify such terminology and suggest that we speak of “Jewish-Christians” instead of just “Christians,” but such a hermeneutical move does not get us out of the modern paradigm, since it does not address the problem at its root.⁹

We must ask ourselves whether the earliest followers of Jesus would have recognized themselves as belonging under the umbrella term “Christianity,” the companion word of “Christians.” As is well known, the term *christianismos* does not occur in the New Testament;¹⁰ Paul offers no evidence that he had ever heard of “Christianity.”¹¹ *Christianos* occurs only three times, of which two are found in Acts (11:26; 26:28) and one in 1 Peter (4:16), both texts postdating Paul.¹² Paul neither speaks of himself nor describes others as *christianoi*.¹³ This means that, if we prefer to use emic terminology as we discuss what went on

⁹ For discussion of the term “Jewish Christian” and its inherent problems, see the studies listed in n. 3 above.

¹⁰ As opposed to *Ioudaismos* (Gal 1:13, 14).

¹¹ The first occurrence of the term *christianismos* is found in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, usually but not indisputably dated to the early second century, either during Trajan’s or Hadrian’s reign: *Magn.* 10:1–3; *Rom.* 3:3; *Phld.* 6:1. See William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 126. Cf. Alexei S. Khamin, “Ignatius of Antioch: Performing Authority in the Early church,” PhD diss., Drew University, 2007: “His [Ignatius] vividly imagined execution is configured as a kind of gladiatorial combat that resonates with the themes of noble death, sacrifice, and divine ascent. Ignatius attempts to construct a new solid identity, *Christianismos*, in opposition to *Ioudaismos*. Yet, the “Judaizers” invade Ignatius’s world, render the borders blurred and obliterate the dichotomy *Christianismos/Ioudaismos*.”

¹² Acts 11:26: “So it was that for an entire year they met with the *ekklēsia* and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called ‘*christianous*.’”; 26:28: “Agrippa said to Paul, ‘Are you so quickly persuading me to become a *christianon*?’”; 1 Pet 4:16: “Yet if any of you suffers as a *christianos*, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name.”

¹³ Cf. Pamela Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian: The Original Message of a Misunderstood Apostle* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009).

around Paul and his contemporaries, “Christian” and “Christianity” are off the table; these terms do not represent how these people defined what they were involved in.

If, then, from an emic perspective, these terms cannot be used, our only remaining methodological option is an etic terminological perspective, if we still want to use “Christian” and “Christianity” when we discuss Paul and his letters. In order to decide for or against an etic approach, however, we need to reflect on the fact noted above, that (historical) translation always involves two languages, and that we therefore first of all must consider current uses of the word “Christianity” to see if it is suitable for our purposes, if it matches what we believe is a reasonable historical reconstruction of Paul. What is it that inhabits the term “Christianity” today that makes it behave in certain ways in our discourses? What effects does the term have when we speak – what does it do? Which opposites does it invoke? Once such discursive patterns of effects and opposites have been mapped, not before, we may ask whether what is “inside” the term today can be said to be transferrable to ancient discourses, and, more specifically, to Paul’s letters.

Most people, Pauline scholars and others, would agree that the word “Christianity” in mainstream uses relates to people who belong to a specific “religion,” which locates Jesus at the center of their beliefs, rituals and behavior. In addition, there is, presumably, broad agreement about the fact that “Judaism” and “Jewish” belong among the phenomena that may be referred to in order to define what Christianity is *not*. Already with these two comments we have encountered major problems with regard to the suitability of “Christianity” as an etic descriptive term applied to first-century followers of Jesus.

First, the modern phenomenon of “religion,” which the term “Christianity” carries within it, and brings to all discourses into which it is invited, did not exist as such in antiquity, as has been shown by Steve Mason and others.¹⁴ If we use the term “Christianity” when we describe what is happening in Paul’s letters, we thus illegitimately impose our modern discursive habits on the ancient world and make it behave as if it shared Western, twenty-first century concerns as they relate to the divine. We create the Other in our own image and in this

¹⁴ Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 182–188. “Religion,” as we understand the term today, cannot be abstracted from but was integral to at least six categories of life in antiquity: *ethnos*, (national) cult, philosophy, familial traditions/domestic worship, unofficial associations (*collegia/thiasoi*), and astrology and magic. See also Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, 73: “Religion as we understand it did not exist in the ancient world, and the religious dimensions of human experience had a very different status.” For broader contemporary discussions of the term “religion,” see, for example, Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269–284; Russell T. McCutcheon, “The Category ‘Religion’ in Recent Publications: A Critical Survey.” *Numen* 42 (1995): 284–309; Sam Gill, “The Academic Study of Religion,” *JAAAR* 62 (1994): 965–975; Nongbri, *Before Religion*.

way force, in colonial manner, other related aspects of the texts to make modern, not ancient, sense.

Second, as noted, the application of this term to the Pauline correspondence also releases a chain reaction with regard to our understanding of other phenomena, which we – often instinctively – think of in order to define what “Christianity” is or is not. The key term in this regard is “Judaism.” Thus, in addition to the anachronistic use of “religion,” our contemporary habits impose on the ancients the modern idea (and the praxis that follows with the idea) of “Christianity” as not being “Judaism,” and “Judaism” as not being “Christianity.”¹⁵ Paul becomes, in one way or another, a “Christian,” and it only remains to discuss and debate the interpretive details that apply within that general religious concept, to find out what kind of “Christian” he was.

This general “conclusion,” clothed as a point of departure, as a research question, is accomplished already before any form of analytical work has been undertaken. Our terminology is pregnant with the conclusion, which, in due time, is delivered without much surprise. But just as in the case of anachronistic assumptions about “religion” as the content of Paul’s concerns, the colonized text refuses to cooperate fully, and tensions, which the terms “Christianity” and “Christians” themselves have created, are not resolved, leaving many scholars with an acute sense of uneasiness.¹⁶

Let us take our discussion one more step and consider the following. If, for the sake of the argument, we assume – against the evidence – that Paul in fact knew of the term *christianos*, as the author of Acts and 1 Peter did in the late first century, would this mean that we should translate the Greek *christianos* with the English “Christian”? That is, can we assume continuity in our translation simply because the English word is derivative of the historical Greek term? Obviously, the first point mentioned above about how the modern idea “religion” inhabits the English terms “Christianity” and “Christian” would militate against such a translation – for it is still a translation even if the word is the same in both languages – since it would lure us to think about Paul in ways Paul never would, despite his hypothetical use of the Greek term.

Let me illustrate this point with an example from 1 Corinthians 14:23: “If, therefore, the whole *ekklēsia* comes together and all speak in tongues, and idiots (*idiōtai*) or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind?” The question is *why* it is so obvious to us that the Greek *idiōtai* should *not* be

¹⁵ As noted above in n. 11, the earliest attempt at distinguishing “Christianity” from “Judaism,” as if these were two mutually exclusive entities, is found in the second-century letters of Ignatius of Antioch.

¹⁶ A number of scholars have, for example, abandoned usage of the term “Christians” when referencing members of early Christ-groups, in particular Pauline groups. See, for example, Kloppenborg, *Christ’s Associations*, Richard Last, “The Election of Officers in the Corinthian Christ-Group,” *NTS* 59 (2013): 365–381.

translated with the English “idiots.” The NRSV has “outsider” and KJV has “unlearned.” The Swedish translation from 1981, to take an example from a minority language, has the equivalent of the English “uninitiated.”¹⁷ Of course, it is because we know that the physical *form* of a word, the letters that make up a word, do not guarantee a fixed *meaning* over time and in different cultures and social settings. That is, we know that a word is like a vessel that we – unconsciously – fill with nuances, attitudes, and mindsets belonging to the time and context in which we happen to live. Meaning is not dependent on the form of the “vessel” but on the sounds, feelings, and discursive habits that people pour into it as it is made to perform its duties in different cultures.¹⁸ And this is, of course, the very reason in the first place why a first-century Jewish apocalyptically oriented individual like Jesus came to have billions of followers throughout history and around the globe today. The written words, or “vessels,” used to convey the message seem to function as links that connect us with the past. This creates a sense of historical continuity between our time and the time of the first followers of Jesus whilst the message itself is translationally inculturated in societies across the globe. The words and, more specifically, certain key terms such as “Christian” take on a role as historical stabilizers in the process of identity construction in contemporary communities.

The problem is, however, that while these words are thought to transport the ancient message to our time, in reality we are the ones filling the “vessels” with meaning, so that the flow of meaning goes more often than not from us to the historical text rather than from the text to us. For those who approach the text from a faith perspective this may not seem to pose an overwhelming hermeneutical problem since, with regard to the reading of religiously authoritative texts, divine revelation can be thought of as situated neither in the text nor with its readers but in the interpretive space that is brought into being as a result of the exchange of meaning between reader and text.¹⁹ Such processes of exchange

¹⁷ The Swedish word is “oinvigda.” (While *Bibel 2000*, the official Swedish translation of the Bible, funded by the state, was released in the year 2000, the translation of the New Testament from 1981 was kept intact when the new translation of the Hebrew Bible was added.) To give another example from a language spoken by more people than Swedish is, the Swahili translation (United Bible Societies, Union Version, 1952) reads “watu wajinga,” which may be translated into English as “ignorant persons.” In modern Swahili, however, this expression may be perceived as pejorative, as some have pointed out, noting that “watu ambao hawaelewi” would be a better translation. I am grateful to Victor Limbana for discussion of this issue.

¹⁸ Cf. the now classic critique of the *Theologische Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (TWNT = *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [TDNT]) by James Barr (*The Semantics of Biblical Language* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961], warning against etymologizing, as well as the dangers of illegitimate totality transfer.

¹⁹ It should be noted, however, that since the Enlightenment, and as a result of the Reformation in the sixteenth century that called for a “return to the sources” (*ad fontes*), historical readings of biblical texts have often come to be understood as religiously authoritative. Today, also in official church documents of the Catholic Church, historical understandings of theological issues are explicitly acknowledged as being of key importance, and, as a consequence,

should, however, cause the historian to worry, since their task is to fill these words with meaning that, in context, makes ancient, not modern, sense. The significance of the choice of terminology used in historical analysis cannot, in this regard, be overstated.

In such a situation, since it is often difficult to find “open” terminology that imposes a minimum of control on the analytical process, it is important that alternative terms are at least tested in order to allow for the possibility of new insights growing from reconstructions of different historical landscapes. If, then, the terms “Christian” and “Christianity” are deemed to lead us astray and invite anachronistic historical reconstructions and are, consequently, to be avoided, with what should we replace them?

The most natural point of departure for renewed terminological reflection around who Paul was and how he self-identified would be to speak not of “Paul the Christian” but of “Paul the Jew”; of Paul as someone who practiced “Judaism,” not “Christianity.”²⁰ I would further argue that, despite some recent studies which favor “Judean” over “Jew,”²¹ *Ioudaios* is best translated as “Jew.”²² Contrary to what became mainstream Christianity in Late Antiquity, Judaism never rejected the ancient connection between a people, their land, laws, and god(s).²³ Although Christians have, through the ages, tried to redefine Judaism as a “religion,” in the form of a negative mirror image of themselves, most Jews identifying with some form of mainstream Judaism never accepted this rewriting of their identity and have continued to understand their *ethnos* as intertwined with the Jewish law, the land, and the God of Israel.²⁴ On the one hand,

exegetical and historical-critical methods have been sanctioned by the church as tools with which theological truths and, by implication, divine revelation may be retrieved. See discussion in Anders Runesson, “Judging the Theological Tree by its Fruit: The Use of the Gospels of Mark and Matthew in Official Church Documents on Jewish-Christian Relations,” in *Mark and Matthew II*, 189–228. See also the discussion on the relationship between history and theology above, Ch. 1, and below, Ch. 13.

²⁰ See, for example, the discussion in John G. Gager, “Paul, the Apostle of Judaism,” in *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism*, eds. Paula Fredriksen and Adele Reinhartz (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 56–76; Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 7–8; Mark D. Nanos, “Paul and Judaism: Why Not Paul’s Judaism?” in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle*, ed. Mark Douglas Givens (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010), 117–160; Elliott, *Arrogance of Nations*, 15–16. See also Paula Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations,” 232–252.

²¹ So, for example, Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, 62–74; Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 457–512; Richard Last, “The Other Synagogues,” *JSJ* 47 (2016): 330–363. Cf. Benedikt Eckhardt, “Craft Guilds as Synagogues? Further Thoughts on ‘Private Judean-Deity Associations,’” *JSJ* 48 (2017): 246–260.

²² I will argue in favor of this translation at some length below in Ch. 11. See also Daniel R. Schwartz, “‘Judaean’ or ‘Jew’? How should we Translate *Ioudaios* in Josephus?” in *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World: Jüdische Identität in der griechisch-römischen Welt*, eds. Jörg Frey, Daniel R. Schwartz, and Stephanie Grippentrog, *AJEC* 71 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 3–27; Nanos, “Paul and Judaism,” 117–118, n. 2.

²³ So also Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 480–488.

²⁴ It is true, though, that some forms of Reform Judaism, originating in the nineteenth

the development of what came to be “Christianity,” thought of as something apart from “Judaism,” really began to take form only in the second century as far as the source material can tell us, and this creates an interruption in continuity between us and Paul, both with regard to the term and its content. On the other hand, the majority of the phenomena we call “Judaism,” in all their diversity and developments, have maintained the basic characteristic traits of their *ethnos* since before the time of Paul. These two considerations, based both on how the words under discussion were used in antiquity and how they are used today, establishes, in general terms, that speaking of Paul as a Jew practicing a form of Judaism is a more historically plausible point of departure for interpreting his letters than are the impressions that are communicated by the continued use of “Christian” and “Christianity.”

This does not mean, of course, that we should understand “Jewish” in essentialist terms as ahistorically referring to specific characteristics untouched by time and culture. As Daniel R. Langton has pointed out, we need to distinguish “between essentialist, ahistorical characteristics of Jewishness and historically and culturally determined characteristics of what constitutes Jewishness.”²⁵ The historical and culturally sensitive approach to the definitional – and terminological – problem means that the observer needs to focus on how “a society understands and represents Jews at any given time and place, in order to reconstruct the meaning of Jewishness in the subject’s own cultural environment.”²⁶ It is, in my view, more historically realistic, based on Jewish uses of “Jew” and “Judaism,” to try to reach an understanding of *what kind* of Judaism Paul was concerned with and tried to outline in his letters, rather than to speak of what he was doing using terms he never applied to himself or others.²⁷ In other words,

century, did redefine this relationship and began to self-identify more along the lines of what in Christian Europe were, at the time, mainstream understandings of “religion.”

²⁵ Langton, *Apostle Paul*, 12. Langton deals with the modern period, but his reflections regarding how to define “Jewishness” (pp. 9–12) are useful to consider also when we discuss the ancient period.

²⁶ Langton, *Apostle Paul*, 12.

²⁷ It is sufficiently clear in his letters, I believe, that Paul is proclaiming what a specific god, the God of Israel, has done in terms of his Messiah, Jesus, and how the meaning of this new situation applies to both Jews and non-Jews. The continuity between God and God’s people is emphasized strongly in Romans 9–11. Further, the centrality of Jerusalem to Paul is shown in several passages (Rom 15:18–19, 25–27, 31; 1 Cor 16:3; Gal 2:1–2). Regarding Torah, some scholars argue that, for Paul, the Jewish law was valid only for Jews, not for non-Jews joining the movement (cf. J. Brian Tucker, *You Belong to Christ: Paul and the Formation of Social Identity in 1 Corinthians 1–4* [Eugene: Pickwick, 2010]); see also Ch. 8 below. Other scholars interpret Paul as rejecting the law as invalid also for Jews (for a history of interpretation, see Magnus Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul*. But just as few would argue that Reform Jews are not Jewish because they have renegotiated the connection between Judaism and the land, this is hardly enough reason for understanding Paul, in his context, as self-identifying as something other than a Jew, proclaiming a specific form of Judaism. For further discussion emphasizing that Paul and his addressees practiced Judaism, see Mark D. Nanos, “Paul and Juda-

if Paul did not feel he needed to specify the newness of what he was proclaiming using a term that would distinguish his movement from “Judaism,” historians should take that as an indication that, at this time and in the culture in which he lived, Paul’s mission was a mission of a specific form of Judaism, which included the incorporation of non-Jews qua non-Jews.²⁸

In order to meet these two criteria, both a general belonging within the wider phenomena described as “Judaism” and an affiliation with a specific form of Judaism, Mark D. Nanos and I have suggested “Apostolic Judaism” as a descriptive term applicable to the early Jesus movement, including with respect to Paul and his communities. As such, Apostolic Judaism may be added to the list of other Judaisms, such as Pharisaic Judaism, Essene Judaism, Sadducean Judaism, and later, Rabbinic Judaism. The term aims at encapsulating all forms of Judaism that include Jesus as a central figure in their symbolic universe, as a key for the interpretation of what it meant for them to adhere to Judaism.²⁹

Regardless of whether a basic terminology that identifies Paul as a Jew practicing Judaism is unreservedly accepted or not by all scholars, even those scholars who hesitate about the value of a terminological change may still be interested in what might result in terms of historical conclusions from such a modification of basic perspectives. What would happen, for example, if we translated *christianoī* in Acts 11:26; 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16 with “messianics,” and understood the term in the same sociocultural manner as we do *Pharisaioi*? What would change, and what would remain the same – and why? Restructuring our shared terminological edifice will, undoubtedly, change the way we perceive of that which is inside the “building.”

I would like to illustrate the point of this chapter with one more example, namely the use of “church” as a translation of *ekklēsia*, since such translation goes hand in hand with the use of “Christian” and “Christianity” and to no

ism”; Mark D. Nanos, “Paul and the Jewish Tradition: The Ideology of the Shema,” in *Celebrating Paul, Festschrift in Honor of Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, O.P., and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J.*, ed. Peter Spitaler, CBQMS 48 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2012), 62–80.

²⁸ See, especially, Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations.” This is also how Acts portrays Paul, both from an outsider (18:14–16) and insider (13:14–42; 21:17–26; 23:6; 26:4–7) perspective. For later versions of Jesus-centered forms of Judaism and how they influenced Rabbinic Judaism precisely because they were understood as forms of Judaism by Jews, see Karin Hedner Zetterholm, “Alternative Visions of Judaism and Their Impact on the Formation of Rabbinic Judaism,” *JJMJS* 1 (2014): 127–153.

²⁹ As Karin Hedner Zetterholm, “Alternative Visions of Judaism,” points out, some of the later texts describe variants of Jesus-centered Judaism that included non-Jews without requiring circumcision for males, but still insisted that all, even these non-Jew, kept the Jewish law. The term Apostolic Judaism is also gender inclusive as it describes this form of Judaism based on the key figures of the early movement, the apostles, among which we also find women such as Junia (Rom 16:7).

small degree determines how we understand socio-institutional realities in the first century.

4.5 “Church”

As is well known, the term *ekklēsia* (“assembly”³⁰) is used in both Jewish and Greco-Roman texts referring to certain institutional settings or gatherings of people. In the Septuagint (LXX), *ekklēsia* translates the Hebrew *qāhāl*, which the NRSV almost always translates as “assembly” or, in a few cases, mostly in Psalms, as “congregation.”³¹ In the first century, however, *ekklēsia* could also be used as a designation for what we would call synagogue institutions.³² In Greco-Roman societies *ekklēsia* refers to public assemblies and the English translation is, again, usually “assembly.” As we look at English translations of the New

³⁰ Translated in German as “Volksversammlung.”

³¹ *Qahāl* is translated in the lxx using both *ekklēsia* and *synagōgē*. While the lxx also uses *synagōgē* when translating the related term *‘ēdā*, it never uses *ekklēsia* for *‘ēdā*. NRSV usually translates lxx occurrences of *ekklēsia* with “assembly” (Jdt; 1 Macc) but in Sirach both “assembly” and “congregation” are used (the latter six times). (Sir 26:5 is a special case, referring to the “gathering of a mob” [NRSV].)

³² Such references could be either to public synagogues or, less often, to semi-public Jewish associations. For the latter, see, e.g., Philo, *Spec.* 1.324–325; *Deo* 111; *Virt.* 108 (text and commentary in *ASSB*, nos. 201–203). As for public synagogue gatherings designated *ekklēsia*, see Josephus, who often uses this term (e.g., *A.J.* 16.62; 19.332; *B.J.* 1.550, 654; 4.159, 162, 255; 7.412; *Vita* 267–268). Sirach also applies the term frequently to the public assemblies of the land (e.g., 15:5; 21:17; 23:24; 31:11; 33:19; 39:9–10; 44:15). Cf. also LAB 11:8 (*ecclesia*; for text and commentary, see *ASSB*, no. 64); 1 Macc 14:18; Jdt 6:16; 14:6. On the definition of synagogue as a public institution, or assembly, with its origins in the Iron Age city gates, see Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 21–44; Donald D. Binder, *Into the Temple Courts: The Place of the Synagogues in the Second Temple Period*, SBLDS 169 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 204–226; Anders Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue: A Socio-Historical Study*, ConBNT 37 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001), 237–400. (Already the Targum understood the institution gathered in the city gate to be the same type of institution as the public institution called “synagogue” in the author’s own time; see *Tg. Neb.* Amos 5.12.) On the definition of the synagogue as a semi-public association, see Runesson, *Origins*, 169–235; Peter Richardson, *Building Jewish in the Roman East* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2004), 207–221. Since the terminology designating these two types of institution, the public and the semi-public, was not fixed at this time, both types were, interchangeably, called by the same names, all in all seventeen Greek terms (of which one was *ekklēsia*), five Hebrew terms, and three Latin terms (with some overlap; see the synagogue term index in *ASSB*, page 328). *ASSB* does not deal with all occurrences of *ekklēsia* as a synagogue term, and the aforementioned studies by Levine, Binder, and Runesson are also lacking in this regard. For full discussion of the use of this term in Greco-Roman and Jewish texts and inscriptions, including the New Testament, see Ralph J. Korner, *The Origin and Meaning of Ekklēsia in the Early Jesus Movement*, AJEC 98 (Leiden: Brill, 2017). For a specific treatment of Josephus’s use of *ekklēsia* as a synagogue term, see Andrew R. Krause, *Synagogues in the Works of Flavius Josephus: Rhetoric, Spatiality, and First-Century Jewish Institutions*, AJEC 97 (Leiden: Brill, 2017). The classic entry by K. L. Schmidt, “*ekklēsia*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 3.501–536, needs to be revised in light of more recent research.

Testament and, more specifically, of Paul's letters, things change drastically. Suddenly, we find "church" introduced as the English equivalent of *ekklēsia*. Why this *new* word "church," we may ask, to label the assemblies of Jesus's followers, when Paul, in his context, did not choose a *new* term for his addressees' gatherings but used one that was already in use by other Jews as well as by Greeks and Romans?

Answering that question, we need to redirect the spotlight for a moment to the term *synagōgē*, a word that in the NRSV is most often, but not consistently, translated as "synagogue." NRSV uses "synagogue" only as long as *synagōgē* refers to institutions that scholars think of as *not* being run by Jesus-followers. It is only as long as modern translators perceive of the institution in question to belong to the Other, with the Other identified as Jewish, that we find the translation "synagogue." Paul never uses the word *synagōgē*, but since *ekklēsia* as a term was applied also to Jewish synagogue institutions at this time, it is instructive to compare how translators work with *synagōgē* in relation to *ekklēsia*.

Reading Paul against the background of James and Matthew reveals how the terms *ekklēsia* and *synagōgē* are used in English translations of the New Testament, in particular the NRSV, to create the impression of two distinct and oppositional institutional contexts: "church" and "synagogue." This institutional separation is constructed on the basis of another anachronistic dividing line between "Christians" and "Jews," as if these were two distinct "religious" groups already at this time, as discussed above. The NRSV's *hermeneutic of separation* can be brought to light through a rather straightforward process of comparison. *Ekklēsia* occurs 114 times in the New Testament. The NRSV translates all but five of these with "church"; the five exceptions are found in Acts and Hebrews. In Acts, as the context makes clear, *ekklēsia* may refer to either Greco-Roman assemblies or to Israelite gatherings in the Hebrew Bible.³³ In Hebrews, we find a reference to a public assembly in Psalm 22 as well as to a future assembly of the saved in the heavenly Jerusalem.³⁴

Now, in terms of translation from one language and culture to another language and culture, the crucial question is this: When Paul uses *ekklēsia*, and this is done forty-four times in the undisputed letters,³⁵ should we assume that people thought of this institution in the same way as we do today when we hear the word "church"? If so, this would justify translating *ekklēsia* as "church." How-

³³ Acts 7:38; 19:32, 39. KJV has "church" in 7:38, but not in 19:32, 39, indicating continuity between the assembly of Israel in the Desert, led by Moses, and the institutions of the New Testament in which Christ-followers gathered.

³⁴ Heb 2:12; 12:23. KJV has "church" in both of these passages; the former emphasizes "Christian" continuity with the Psalms, the latter with the future assembly of the saved.

³⁵ The term occurs in all of the undisputed letters (Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon). In the disputed letters *ekklēsia* occurs eighteen times (in Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, and 1 Timothy). *Ekklēsia* is found most frequently in 1 Corinthians, where it occurs twenty-two times.

ever, while such a correlation between followers of Jesus in the first-century Mediterranean world and English-speaking Christians in the twenty-first century is implied by the NRSV, this interpretive decision is historically questionable for several reasons.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “church” as a “building for public Christian worship, esp. of the denomination recognized by the State (cf. chapel, oratory); public Christian worship.” Other meanings listed include a (Christian) “community or organization,” the “body of all Christians,” a “particular organized Christian society,” a “congregation of Christians locally organized into a society for religious worship,” and so on.³⁶ These definitions match the most common uses of the word “church” today. When we hear “church,” we associate the term with a *non-Jewish Christian religious* institution. But this was not what Paul and his contemporaries heard when *ekklēsia* was used. For them, *ekklēsia* could be a referent to a democratic-like Greek or Roman institution, a Jewish public institution, or a Jewish unofficial association.³⁷ These institutions were thus either civic (Greco-Roman or Jewish) or non-civic (Jewish associations); none of them were exclusively “religious” organizations.³⁸

We may be reasonably sure that when Paul used the term *ekklēsia*, he did so with a Jewish understanding of the term in mind, thus, to a degree, setting it apart from Greco-Roman uses.³⁹ This does not mean that the term did not resonate on the political register that was associated with Greco-Roman institutional settings.⁴⁰ The point that is important to emphasize here, though, is that using the word *ekklēsia* in the first century triggered an understanding of the phenomenon for Paul and the members of his assemblies that was intertwined with a Jewish (institutional) identity, which, in turn, was expressed within a larger pattern of Greco-Roman institutional culture. In light of this ancient terminological and sociopolitical context it becomes quite clear that the English translation “church” is inappropriate and misleading, since it conjures up not only a (modern) religious non-civic, non-political setting, but more importantly, imposes on the ancients a separate non-Jewish institutional identity for those who claimed Jesus to be the Messiah.

³⁶ Lesley Brown, ed., *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 1.399. Other, specialized uses of “church” in, for instance, the social sciences, have their own problems and need not detain us here.

³⁷ See n. 32 above.

³⁸ As noted above when discussing the terms “Christianity” and “Judaism,” “religion” as the phenomenon is defined today did not exist in antiquity. See the literature referred to in n. 14.

³⁹ See Korner, *Origin and Meaning of Ekklesia*, who makes this argument.

⁴⁰ In this context, it is important to note, as Kloppenborg has argued, that Greco-Roman associations were often engaged in a type of civic mimicry, where terminology employed at the civic level was imitated and applied at the association level; see Kloppenborg, *Christ’s Associations*, 278–305.

Since *ekklēsia* was used for different types of institutions, even within a Jewish setting, it is reasonable to assume that people sometimes had to specify the exact reference of the word, especially if a Jew was in conversation with non-Jews in the Diaspora with its diverse cultural and political milieus. This is probably the reason why Paul at two occasions seems to add what would otherwise – had *ekklēsia* obviously referred to a “Christian” institutional setting (a “church”) – be redundant information. In 1 Thessalonians and Galatians, respectively, Paul writes as follows:

For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the *ekklēsiōn* [i.e., assemblies/synagogues] of God *in Christ Jesus* that are in Judaea, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Judeans⁴¹ (1 Thess 2:14).

I was still unknown by sight to the *ekklēsiai*s [assemblies/synagogues] of Judea *that are in Christ* (Gal 1:22).

In other words, since *ekklēsia* in Jewish settings was used to designate synagogue institutions beyond those run by Christ-followers, Paul specifies for his non-Jewish addressees that what he is referring to are the assemblies, or synagogues, of those who, like the addressees, were “in Christ.” Far from denoting non-Jewish institutions, Paul’s use of *ekklēsia* indicates that as the “apostle to the nations” he is inviting non-Jews to participate in specific Jewish institutional settings, where they may share with Jews the experience of living with the risen Messiah, of living “in Christ.”

Such an approach in terms of institutional belonging matches well what Paul has to say in theological terms about the place of non-Jewish followers of Jesus in relation to Jews.⁴² They have been invited to join (a specific group of) Jews, not to replace them or their institutions, as if living “in Christ” for non-Jews necessitated a life in isolation from synagogues. The NRSV, however, overwrites this first-century institutional and theological approach and imposes, in colonial manner, its own twentieth-century theological worldview that not only builds on, but also – to the degree that the translation is used in normative Christian settings – proclaims the separation between “Jews” and “Christians.”

Looking beyond Paul, I have argued elsewhere that *ekklēsia* in Matthew (16:18; 18:17) should not be translated “church,” as NRSV has it,⁴³ but rather

⁴¹ On the translation of *Ioudaioi* as “Judean” in this verse, see below, p.269, n.33.

⁴² Cf. Rom 11:17–18; 1 Cor 7:17–24; Gal 3:28.

⁴³ Not only does NRSV translate *ekklēsia* in these verses with “church,” it also adds the word “church” to two passages, Matt 18:15, 21, where the word *ekklēsia* does not occur in the Greek text. In these passages “church” replaces the Greek *adelphos* (“brother”) in a move to use gender-inclusive language. Such a move is in and of itself to be commended on both historical and hermeneutical grounds, since the gender-inclusive English mirrors the reality behind the Greek (i.e., the rules listed were meant for both men and women). However, the use of “church” conceals another aspect of the reality behind the text, namely the Jewish character of the Matthean *ekklēsia*, and should therefore have been avoided.

“synagogue” or “assembly”; what we see in Matthew is the birth of a Jewish messianic association synagogue rather than a “Christian church.”⁴⁴ In James 2:2 and 5:14 we find additional comparative material for both *synagōgē* and *ekklēsia*. In these passages the theo-historical bias of the NRSV comes into sharp focus. Since the scholars behind the NRSV have agreed on the hermeneutical principle not to translate as “synagogue” any historical institution that is run by followers of Jesus, we read in James 2:2: “if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your *assembly*.” “Assembly” is chosen here despite the fact that the Greek *synagōgē* is used and NRSV always, without exception, translates this word as “synagogue” elsewhere in the New Testament. This interpretive strategy then allows the NRSV to translate the *ekklēsia* of James 5:14 with “church”: “Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the *church* and have them pray over them.” This translation effectively avoids the terminological overlap of and connection between the institutions of followers of Jesus and other Jews.

The politics of separation between “Jews” and “Christians” to which the NRSV gives expression is neither provoked by the sources, where synagogue terms overlap between those who followed Jesus and those who did not, nor always mirrored in other translations. While the modern Greek version of the New Testament from 1989 replaces *synagōgē* with “*synaxis*” in James 2:2,⁴⁵ and thus also avoids the Jewishness of the word “synagogue,” and Luther’s German translation, which has “Versammlung,” does the same,⁴⁶ the Swedish translation from 1981 has “synagogue” (“synagoga”),⁴⁷ and so has the Swahili translation of 1952 (“sinagogi”).⁴⁸ The United Bible Society’s Ivrit translation from 1976 translates “*bet haknesseth*” that is, “synagogue,” in James 2:2. Interestingly, the Ivrit translation of *ekklēsia* in James 5:14 is “*hakehila*,” which in modern Hebrew refers to a Jewish assembly or congregation, and not *knesiah*, which means “church.”⁴⁹ Thus, of the translations mentioned, only the Swedish (1981),

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Anders Runesson, “Behind the Gospel of Matthew: Radical Pharisees in Post-War Galilee?” *CurTM* 37.6 (2010): 460–471, here 462–464. For the relationship between Jewish institutions, see the chart in Runesson, “Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations,” 116.

⁴⁵ The Greek Bible Society (the ancient text with today’s Greek translation). *Synaxis*, which is the same word in English, refers to “a meeting for worship, esp. for the Eucharist” (Brown, *Oxford English Dictionary*, ad loc).

⁴⁶ *Die Bibel, oder die ganze Heilige Schrift des Alten und Neuen Testaments nach der Übersetzung Martin Luthers* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1970). However, *ekklēsia* in James 5:14 is translated *Gemeinde* (“community” or “congregation”), not *Kirche* (“church”).

⁴⁷ Bibel 2000. *Ekklēsia* in James 5:14 is translated *församling* (“community,” “congregation”).

⁴⁸ Biblia (Union Version; United Bible Societies, 1952). The translation of *ekklēsia* in James 5:14 is, however, *kanisa*, “church.”

⁴⁹ Reuben Alcalay, *The Complete Hebrew-English Dictionary*, 3 vols. (Tel Aviv: Massadah, 1990), ad loc.

the Swahili (1952), and the Ivrit (1976) choose terminology that explicitly suggests to their readers that James was probably addressing Jewish assemblies of followers of Jesus.⁵⁰

Is it not clear, in light of the above, that we need a new way of speaking about institutional phenomena that we encounter in our investigations of Jesus's followers and other Jews if we seek to avoid losing historical probability in our translations? Just as Acts 26:11 states that Paul persecuted people who believed Jesus was the Messiah *within* synagogues, for first-century writers like Paul *ekklēsia* did not refer to synagogue-external bodies of people, but either to synagogues, public or semi-public, or to messianic assemblies regardless of whether they gathered in the same institutional space as other Jews or in their own association synagogues.⁵¹ If we translate *ekklēsia* with "church," however, we infer that Pauline *ekklēsiai* were unique and incompatible with any other ancient institution, Jewish or Greco-Roman, since our contemporary discursive habits prohibit alternative historical interpretations; in the twenty-first century, a "church" cannot, by definition, exist within a "synagogue."

4.6 On Carrying One's Own Hermeneutical Burden

The use of the terms "Christian"/"Christianity" and "church" in Pauline scholarship misleads us to create the past in our own image and hinders historical investigations from reaching beyond that which is "us." We need to decolonize the past, and liberate the dead from the yoke of a hermeneutical burden that is ours to carry, not theirs. In the end, as we listen to and de-familiarize ourselves with the culture of the New Testament, our sense of being in a place that is not our own is a twenty-first century, not a first-century, problem to solve.

⁵⁰ Among English translations, it may be interesting to note, especially considering its translation method, that *The Bible in Basic English* (BBE), produced under the leadership of Hebrew Bible scholar Samuel H. Hooke in cooperation with Cambridge University Press and the Orthological Institute, presents us with an exception, as it translates *synagōgē* as "synagogue" in James 2:2.

⁵¹ For Pauline Christ-believers as subgroups within synagogues also consisting of Jews who did not belong to the Jesus movement, see Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans*; Nanos, "To the Churches within the Synagogues of Rome," in *Reading Paul's Letter to the Romans*, ed. Jerry L. Sumney, Resources for Biblical Study 73 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 11–28; Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*. As for the Gospels, the meting out of punishment in synagogues is also an irrefutable indication that Jesus's followers interacted with other Jews in shared synagogue settings. Only Matthew's Gospel includes additional evidence suggesting the creation of a separate association synagogue (an *ekklēsia*) run by messianic Jews, most likely former Pharisees, who made their own rules and administered punishment for disobedience; see Matt 18:15–18. For discussion of Matthew in this regard, see Runesson, "Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations."

In order to do so, we need to challenge, as I have suggested here, the ideology of distinct identities, religions, and institutions, which surface as the NRSV uses the terms “church” and “synagogue,” as well as when we speak of “Christians” and “Jews” in the New Testament. This challenge applies to the translation of the entire New Testament, but is especially problematic as we read Paul. Simply by listening to weekly readings from translations of the Bible, generations of churchgoers and Sunday school children internalize modern religious identity politics, as if these belonged in the first century. Then, if historically informed preachers would happen to describe a different and more historically attuned scenario when they explain the text, a scenario in which we find overlapping identities and institutions, such a scenario is immediately understood by the congregation as in tension with, or even contradicted by the Bible itself!

Since English is the research language for the majority of scholars in the world today, such an ideology of separation and incompatible identities, which originates with translations rather than with the ancient texts themselves, is easily incorporated in academic articles and monographs. Unconsciously, the language we use when we ask our questions, a language that has been shaped by the way we learned to speak as we grew up, almost forces us to “discover” a “Christian” Paul. But seeking to give voice to people and worlds that have been silenced by time and politics, the historian’s task is to go beyond – not to reinforce – contemporary religious identities, be they Christian or Jewish. The terminology used by the sources themselves invites us to understand Paul as practicing and proclaiming a minority form of (pre-Rabbinic) Judaism that existed in the first century. Such an invitation is, however, not the end of the research project; it is its very beginning. In the next chapter, we shall explore the implications of the argument made and enter, with Paul, not a church but a synagogue.

Part II

Reading Paul

People build institutions; but institutions shape people.

Paula Fredriksen, "Where Do We Go from Here?," 391.

5. Entering a Synagogue with Paul

First-Century Torah Observance

5.1 *Who is a Jew?*

If the preceding chapter problematized the use of terminology leading us to contextualize Paul as a church-attending Christian, and instead suggested that this apostle to the nations should be conceptualized as a first-century Jew, “Who is a Jew?” surfaces as the logical follow-up question. This deceptively simple question, so critical to understanding Paul in context, quickly opens up onto a hermeneutical quagmire, not only when put under the microscope in a scholarly lab but also when asked in an Israeli or British courtroom, as reports from the BBC and *The New York Times*, not to speak of debates between authorities within various Jewish denominations, have shown.¹

A few years ago, a Jewish publicly funded school in Britain turned down an applicant, who was a practicing Jew, on the basis that his mother had converted in a progressive synagogue and was therefore not regarded as Jewish according to the school’s classification of “Jewish,” which followed the orthodox definition of the chief rabbi Jonathan Sachs. The family sued, and the British Supreme Court eventually ruled that religious practice and faith must be the criteria for acceptance into any publicly funded “religious” school, not “ethnicity” – a thoroughly Christian perspective on “religion” to be sure. As Rabbi Yitzchak Schochet, the former chairman of the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue, commented, “having a ham sandwich on the afternoon of Yom Kippur doesn’t make you less Jewish.”

Still, however, the process of conversion itself, and its perceived validity or not by different denominations, show that the question “Who is a Jew?” quickly leads beyond ethnicity to the related questions of “What is Judaism?” and “Who gets to decide?” The answers to these questions redirect attention from what at the surface level seem to be straightforward assessments about ethnicity to issues about how to define Torah observance. Interpretation of Torah cannot

¹ Sarah Lyall, “Who Is a Jew? Court Ruling in Britain Raises Question,” *The New York Times*, November 8, 2009; Adam Mynott, “Row Rages Over Defining Who Is a Jew,” *BBC News Middle East*, July 20, 2010. In the BBC report it is claimed that “[i]n Israel uncertainty has excluded more than a quarter of a million people, who think they are Jewish, from full membership.” The quotes that follow below are from *The New York Times* article.

be divorced from the question of ethnicity; definitions of Jewish ethnicity and identity ultimately depend on and revolve around issues of interpretive authority related to Torah.

This is further emphasized by a comment made by Rabbi Danny Rich, the then chief executive of Liberal Judaism in Britain, that “[t]he Orthodox definition of “Jewish” excludes 40 percent of the Jewish community in [Britain].” The question “Who is a Jew?” may thus function as an entry point to the larger issue of how Torah observance is to be defined. In this regard, it is of some interest to note that these modern disagreements build on an understanding of Judaism that is Rabbinic. Despite the heated arguments and irreconcilable differences, the diversity described exists within a single more broadly defined view of what Judaism is and how halakic arguments should be construed.

This form of Judaism, Rabbinic Judaism, originated after 70 CE, but did not become mainstream Judaism until the fourth or fifth century at the earliest.² It did not exist when Paul formulated his view on what Torah observance should or should not be, or who should be regarded as included in the people of God and on what basis. In Paul’s day there was no single majority tradition within which Jews could agree or disagree. The closest thing to a majority Judaism at the time was what E. P. Sanders has called “Common Judaism,” which revolved around the Jerusalem temple rather than being engaged in construing identity through interpretation of Talmudic texts that did not yet exist.³ As for Jewish identity and the issue of conversion, there was a range of more or less defined options in synagogue settings, based on different understandings of ethnicity and Torah.⁴ There is a *qal va-homer* argument of sorts embedded here: If the modern situation, which builds on a broadly defined common understanding of Judaism as Rabbinic Judaism, reveals to us deep-seated diversity even in terms of core issues such as who is to be identified as a Jew, how much more so for the pre-70 CE period when we lack evidence of a majority form of Judaism based on specific understandings of Torah?

While the lack of a direct relationship between later Rabbinic (and modern) understandings of Torah observance, on the one hand, and pre-70 CE views of

² For an even later estimation of this development, see Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

³ E. P. Sanders suggested the concept of Common Judaism in his *Judaism: Practice and Belief*. See also E. P. Sanders, “Common Judaism Explored,” in *Common Judaism: Explorations in Second-Temple Judaism*, ed. Wayne O. McCready and Adele Reinhartz (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 11–23. For further discussion of Common Judaism in relation to more specific interpretations of Jewish life, see Runesson, “Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations,” 95–132; note especially the table on p. 105. See also the discussion of criteria for understanding Paul to be within or beyond “Judaism” above in Ch. 1.

⁴ See Donald D. Binder, “The Synagogue and the Gentiles,” in *Attitudes to Gentiles*, eds. Sim and McLaren, 109–125. For source material and analysis of interaction between Jews and non-Jews more widely, see Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*.

what constituted fidelity to the commandments, on the other, is chronologically and socio-institutionally unambiguous enough, such discontinuity often goes unnoticed in scholarship devoted to this time period. As Philip S. Alexander noted already in 1988, it is quite common among both Jewish and Christian scholars who discuss whether Jesus kept the law or not to take for granted that we know what keeping the law in the first century meant.⁵ More than thirty years later, the same basic assumptions still cause trouble in the field of Pauline studies. Alexander's point is worth quoting in full:

[T]he nature and content of the law of Moses in the time of Jesus is far from clear: it certainly cannot be identified *simpliciter* with the Pentateuch. It is hard to determine what non-biblical traditions it contained. And while the centrality of the Torah of Moses to Judaism cannot in principle be questioned, the meaning of that centrality is not self-evident. It was not necessarily the centrality of a coherent body of doctrine universally believed. It was more the centrality of a national symbol, which was acknowledged by all, but which meant different things to different groups. Individual understandings of the significance of the symbol may have varied considerably. It is hard to say what would, or would not, have been an "acceptable" attitude towards the Torah of Moses. The upshot of the analysis is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to lay down a base-line from which to measure Jesus' deviation from, or conformity to, the law. It is arguable that the whole problem of Jesus and the law, at least as traditionally stated, is misconceived.⁶

Now, if we apply this to Paul, a number of questions emerge. If Rabbinic Judaism, the mother of all forms of mainstream Judaism today, did not exist when Paul was around, within which context do we measure and understand Paul's interpretation of what Torah observance signifies, of what it means to "keep the law"?⁷ In which way was he different from other Jews, and, if he was different, from what kind of Judaism was he different? Would this difference, in whichever way it is defined, make him "un-Jewish," or should Paul rather be understood more along the lines of the modern diversity described above, as an expression of diversity within Judaism? Who would decide this and on what basis? When dealing with similar issues in relation to Jesus, Alexander focuses on two key questions, revolving around the existence or not of Jewish courts and their possible jurisdiction, as well as the problem of what law such courts would have been administering.⁸ As recent synagogue research has shown, court proceedings occurred within public synagogue settings, the same setting in which all

⁵ Philip S. Alexander, "Jewish Law in the Time of Jesus: Towards a Clarification of the Problem," in *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity*, ed. Barnabas Lindars (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1988), 44–58.

⁶ Alexander, "Jewish Law," 46.

⁷ See Alexander, "Jewish Law," 56: "[T]here was no universally acknowledged body of laws at the heart of Judaism in the time of Jesus."

⁸ Alexander, "Jewish Law," 46. As Alexander notes, the law of Rome provided a framework within which all other law functioned.

sources dating to this time claim that reading and teaching of Torah took place.⁹ Investigating Torah instruction and practice in the context of the ancient synagogue may thus prove helpful as we consider the nature of Paul's teaching.

In this chapter, I will discuss the nature of the first-century Jewish institutions that we call "synagogues." We shall then proceed to focus on what went on in them in order to set Paul's teaching in context. As we will see, although some of the practices in these institutions were continued within later Rabbinic Judaism, the evidence implies that Paul needs to be read beyond the paradigm suggested by Rabbinic writings.

5.2 Defining Torah Observance Beyond Rabbinic Institutions

As I have argued elsewhere, the many Greek, Latin, and Hebrew terms that designated what we today translate with one word as "synagogue" referred, in the first century, to two types of institution: the public "municipal" synagogue in the land, a civic institution, on the one hand, and Jewish associations, or association synagogues, which were primarily for members, on the other, the latter existing both in the land and in the Diaspora.¹⁰ Whenever we read the New Testament, or any other first-century text speaking of synagogues, we need to clarify which of the two types is referred to in order to avoid anachronistic reconstructions that reflect Rabbinic or modern definitions of "synagogue."¹¹ In the following, I first discuss public synagogue institutions and then association synagogues with a view to isolating information that will shed light on Torah observance as well as the context in which such observance was formed.

⁹ See especially Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 135–173. Josephus supports the fact that judicial hearings could take place in diaspora synagogues too, in *A.J.* 14.259–261. Furthermore, Greco-Roman associations could function as internal courts, as evidenced by the production of bylaws (see *AGRW*, nos. 299, 295, and 300).

¹⁰ For extensive treatment, see Runesson, *Origins*.

¹¹ Both types of "synagogues" were spoken of using the same terms, such as *synagōgē*, *proseuchē*, *hieron*, and *ekklēsia*. For example, Josephus and Ben Sira use *ekklēsia* for public institutions in the land, whereas Matthew uses the same term for the association he claims Jesus founded (Matt 16:18; 18:17). *Synagōgē* is also used for both municipal institutions (the Gospels) and private associations (Acts 6:9, the synagogue of the Freedmen; Philo, the synagogue of the Essenes). In a Diaspora context, Paul uses *ekklēsia* for assemblies of followers of Jesus, but Philo uses the same term for more open synagogues lacking specific denominational or sectarian identities. It is necessary, therefore, to look at the context when we determine which type of synagogue we are dealing with. Torah observance would have been conceived of differently in the different types of institution; indeed, the very existence of association synagogues catering to specific Jewish groups is an indication of the fact that these groups construed and maintained their identities around specific understandings of what constituted Torah observance. For sources in which the diverse terms for "synagogue" were used, see the index in *ASSB*. For *ekklēsia* as a synagogue term, see the extensive treatment in Korner, *Origin and Meaning of Ekklesia*.

5.2.1 Open to All: Torah in Jewish Civic Institutions

It is beyond doubt that Torah was of major importance for Jews in the first century, and that the public municipal institutions in the land of Israel, which ran the daily business of towns and villages and which were designated by synagogue terms, were places where Torah was read on Sabbaths for all to hear, without exclusion of women, lepers, people of so-called *mamzer* status,¹² or children. Torah was a public concern in Jewish society. This, Josephus insists to his Roman readers, makes the Jewish people the most law-abiding people of all. Indeed, the Jews were, he claims, ideal citizens; synagogues were referred to as proof of this.¹³ The practice of reading Torah every Sabbath seems to have been regarded, in and of itself, as a sign of Torah observance.¹⁴ Beyond this, however, evidence of forms of Torah observance in public synagogues is rather meager. There are a few things, though, that may shed light on the matter.

First, archaeological remains of first-century public synagogues in Israel may tell us something about how Torah was read and understood in some local towns and villages, and this may, in turn, inform us about how Torah observance was shaped in such settings. A synagogue building had stepped benches around all four walls, the focal point being the empty space at the center of the main hall; from there Torah was read.¹⁵ The interior design of the building suggests strongly that, like its closest modern architectural parallel, the seating arrangement of the British Parliament, it was made for interaction and debate. Reading Torah in such a setting would imply that whatever was read was discussed and debated by those present.

Village scribes most likely had prominent roles in these institutions, but we do not have information that would point to the exclusion of anyone present from either reading text or voicing an opinion.¹⁶ No specific group, such as the

¹² Contra Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*, 12–16, who anachronistically reads later (Rabbinic) definitions of *mamzer* back into the first century, and assumes without evidence that it has implications for synagogue attendance. There are no first-century sources indicating that the passage in Deuteronomy 23:2 was applied in any sense in any known public synagogue settings at the time. For other forms of exclusion mechanisms in specific, non-public (sectarian) communal settings, see Cecilia Wassén, “What Do Angels Have against the Blind and the Deaf? Rules of Exclusion in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Common Judaism: Explorations in Second-Temple Judaism*, ed. Wayne O. McCready and Adele Reinhartz (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 115–129.

¹³ See, for example, Josephus, *A.J.* 16.42–43 (*ASSB*, no. 119); 19.300–305 (*ASSB*, no. 193). Cf. Philo, for example, *Flacc.* 41–53 (*ASSB*, no. 138); *Legat.* 152–153 (*ASSB*, no. 164); *Hypoth.* 7.11–14 (*ASSB*, no. 162).

¹⁴ See Acts 15:21.

¹⁵ For a concise discussion of synagogue space, including viewshed analysis, see James F. Strange, “Archaeology and Ancient Synagogues up to about 200 CE,” in *The Ancient Synagogue from Its Origins until 200 C.E.* ed. Birger Olsson and Magnus Zetterholm, ConBNT 39 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2003), 37–62.

¹⁶ On scribes and scribal culture, see Chris Keith, *Jesus against the Scribal Elite: The Origins of the Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014); Giovanni B. Bazzana, *Kingdom of*

Pharisees, was in charge.¹⁷ Ideas about Torah observance shaped in such a context would be the result of interaction among the many rather than of the rulings of the few.¹⁸ Further, we have no evidence of centralized control from Jerusalem over these local institutions and their understanding and implementation of Torah.¹⁹ The lack of such centralized authority opens up for local variation regarding how Torah was interpreted.²⁰

Still, while these synagogues seem to have been relatively independent in terms of political influence from the capital and the temple authorities, we may infer from the art displayed in the buildings in which gatherings took place that, contrary to later centuries, first-century Jews interpreted rather strictly the command in Exodus not to make images of living beings.²¹ Further, the *mikvaot*, or ritual baths, and stone vessels found all over the land are indications of a shared understanding of Torah with regard to the purity rules of Leviticus.²²

Bureaucracy: The Political Theology of Village Scribes in the Sayings Gospel Q, BETL 274 (Leuven: Peeters, 2015); J. Dijkman, "The Village Scribe in Roman Egypt," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 116 (2003): 5–30.

¹⁷ See Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 41: "[T]he truth of the matter is, the Pharisees had little or nothing to do with the early synagogue, and there is not one shred of evidence pointing to a connection between the two. No references associate the early Pharisees (the 'Pairs' and others) with the synagogue, nor is there anything in early synagogue liturgy that is particularly Pharisaic."

¹⁸ This may also have been the case for association synagogues in the diaspora and the land, based on the observation that Greco-Roman associations – and therefore perhaps also association synagogues – would often only approve new bylaws when they had been ratified by every member of the association, which supports the idea that authoritative rules (or texts in this case) may have been discussed by the membership at large rather than a few elite members (see *AGRW*, no. 300; *P. Mich.* V 244).

¹⁹ We have no evidence from the first century mirroring the situation portrayed in 2 Chronicles 17:7–9, where it is stated that King Jehoshaphat sent traveling priests and Levites from Jerusalem to the cities of Judah to teach the people the law, using the "book of the law."

²⁰ On the issue of regional differences from a political perspective, see Alexander, "Jewish Law," 46–47. As Alexander notes, "by exercising self-discipline the Jews had the possibility of running a largely autonomous Jewish legal system within Roman Palestine." This, however, does not imply uniformity within the Jewish legal system: "It is possible that there was considerable variation in the detailed application of the law, owing to the force of local custom" (50).

²¹ See Exod 20:4 (cf. Deut 4:23; 5:8). Even the elaborate art on the so-called Magdala temple stone lacks representation of living creatures. For a discussion of the Magdala stone and its iconography, see Donald D. Binder, "The Mystery of the Magdala Stone," in *City Set on a Hill: Essays in Honor of James F. Strange*, ed. Daniel Warner and Donald D. Binder (Mountain Home, Ark.: BorderStone, 2014), 17–48. On Jewish art in antiquity, see Lee I. Levine, *Visual Judaism in Late Antiquity: Historical Contexts of Jewish Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), especially 31–65. Cf. Trygve N. D. Mettinger, *No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context*, ConBOT 42 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995).

²² On stone vessels, see Roland Deines, *Jüdische Steingefäße und pharisäische Frömmigkeit. Ein archäologisch-historischer Beitrag zum Verständnis von Johannes 2,6 und der jüdischen Reinheitshalacha zur Zeit Jesu*, WUNT 2.52 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993); Yitzhak Magen, *The Stone Vessel Industry in the Second Temple Period: Excavations at Hizma and the*

This matches well what we see in some first-century Jewish texts, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, Jubilees, and the Gospel of Matthew, namely, that purity concerns were very real in the time of Jesus and Paul, and that observance of Torah would have been understood as requiring various forms of ritual washings, even beyond what is stated in Leviticus. In a sense, one could say that purity practices in the first century could be understood as “enacted rewritten bible”; Torah observance was not about following verbatim the rules in Leviticus, but the text served as a point of departure for interpretations that structured various everyday real-life narratives.

Other forms of generally agreed-on Torah observance include the Sabbath commandment, although exactly how it was to be done, the definition of “work,” was a matter of dispute. Jesus’s healing/exorcism of a woman who was present at a synagogue meeting on a Sabbath, as described in Luke 13:10–17, resulted in rebuke from a synagogue leader (ἀρχισυνάγωγος), not because of the presence of a woman, or even the presence of a woman regarded as “bound by Satan” (Luke 13:16) in a synagogue assembly, but because this leader defined healing/exorcism as work.²³ Jesus disagrees with his definition (Luke 13:15–16), and the Jewish crowds agree with Jesus (Luke 13:17). The story shows that Exodus 20, possibly together with Genesis 1, might have been one of the passages

Jerusalem Temple Mount (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2002); Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee*, SNTSMS 118 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 67–68. While Deines’s study is helpful, I agree with Chancey that his thesis that the presence of stone vessels indicates Pharisaic influence is problematic. Regarding *mikvaot*, see Boaz Zissu and David Amit, “Common Judaism, Common Purity, and the Second Temple Period Judean *Miqwa’ot* (Ritual Immersion Baths),” in *Common Judaism: Explorations in Second-Temple Judaism*, ed. Wayne O. McCready and Adele Reinhartz (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 47–62, who conclude that “[t]he wide distribution of ritual baths reinforces Sanders’s assertion that the purity laws were generally obeyed by the Jewish populations” (62). See also Yonatan Adler, *The Archaeology of Purity: Archaeological Evidence for the Observance of Ritual Purity in Erez-Israel From the Hasmonean Period to Until the End of the Talmudic Era (164 BCE–400 CE)* (PhD Dissertation, Bar-Illan University, 2011); idem, “The Hellenistic Origins of Jewish Ritual Immersion,” *JSJ* 69.1 (2018): 1–21. On various understandings of (ritual and moral) purity, see Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²³ Note the difference between public synagogues and the sectarian community rules found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, as discussed by Wassén, “What Do Angels Have against the Blind and the Deaf?” As Wassén argues, the exclusion mechanisms targeting individuals with various forms of disabilities seem to be based on the conviction that evil forces were the root cause behind the disabilities and that by excluding the people afflicted the community was kept undefiled as it prepared for the eschatological battle against evil. Thus, people were excluded based on the community’s fear of demonic powers. Luke describes this public Galilean synagogue in a very different way. None of the individuals involved in the story find the presence of the woman in the midst of the community to be in any way inappropriate. All of them, including, implicitly, the synagogue leader, understand her liberation as appropriate. The problem is the halakic definition of “work” as it relates to the Sabbath.

that provided a textual hub around which communal Torah observance in public synagogue settings was defined.²⁴

Before we turn to the Diaspora, we should also note that the public synagogues, like earlier gatherings in the city gates of ancient Israel,²⁵ served a number of functions, in which specific interpretations of Torah observance would have been brought into play. I am thinking especially of court proceedings, which were located in such institutions.²⁶ Verdicts would have been based on specific understandings of Torah since, as Josephus notes, there was no distinction between religious and secular law.²⁷ While we lack details of the proceedings themselves, both the New Testament and the Mishnah describe one of the punishments that could be meted out in synagogues: flogging.²⁸ Flogging is mentioned as punishment in court settings only in Deut 25:1–3. It is possible, perhaps even likely, therefore, that the book of Deuteronomy played a role in how Torah observance was shaped in judicial settings in synagogues.²⁹

These are some of the meager results that can be reported with regard to Torah observance as it applies to the very context in which all sources claim Torah was read and taught to all Jews, that is, the civic institution designated by syna-

²⁴ Key passages dealing with the Sabbath commandment include, e.g., Gen 2:3; Exod 12:16; 16:23; 20:10. Such texts provided a point of departure for later interpretations of how more specifically the commandment should be fulfilled. We do not find in the first century an understanding of “true” observance of Torah as verbatim enactment of the letters of the law. Rather, fulfillment of Torah meant observance of what one regarded as the intent of the law, that is, the spirit of the law.

²⁵ For the origins of the synagogue in the land of Israel, see Runesson, *Origins*, 237–400. Cf. Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 21–44.

²⁶ For discussion, see Binder, *Temple Courts*, 445–450, who includes Diaspora evidence too; Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 30–32 (the city gate), 41 (the transition of such proceedings to synagogue institutions). See also pp. 3, 395–396. The New Testament, too, includes several passages indicating the presence of courts in synagogues (e.g., Matt 23:34; Acts 22:19). See also discussion in Alexander, “Jewish Law,” which outlines how law was administered locally and nationally in the land.

²⁷ Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.170–171. Cf. Binder, *Temple Courts*, 213, who notes that “religious law *was* civil law,” and points out that Josephus himself coined the very term “theocracy” (*C. Ap.* 2.165).

²⁸ Matt 23:34 (*ASSB*, no. 68; cf. nos. 65, 66); m. Mak. 3:12 (*ASSB*, no. 86).

²⁹ This does not imply that Deuteronomy itself constituted a law code; it certainly did not since it contained what has later been called haggadah and thus represents a different genre. Law codes likely existed, though, and as such they would have built their rulings on passages from authoritative texts like Deuteronomy combined with local custom. The genre situation is similar to what I have argued elsewhere is found in a comparison between Matthews Gospel and the Didache. While the former presents rulings on various matters, especially in chapter 18, this is done in narrative form. The Didache, however, refers to “the gospel” as it presents a community rule (Anders Runesson, “Building Matthean Communities: The Politics of Textualization,” in *Mark and Matthew I: Comparative Readings: Understanding the Earliest Gospels in Their First Century Settings*, ed. Eve-Marie Becker and Anders Runesson, WUNT 1.271 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011], 379–408). It might be of interest to note here that of the texts so far discovered at Qumran, copies of Deuteronomy appear to be the most popular, which may suggest its general standing (or simply its standing in this particular community).

gogue terms. This was the context in which Jesus was socialized, and in which he himself later taught. An important implication of the fact that public synagogues were independent and that supralocal authority structures were lacking is that ideas about what constituted Torah observance were not stable, but most likely varied between towns and communities depending on local tradition. Still, concerns about purity seem to have been almost universal, pointing to the importance of Leviticus in settings where Torah was read and taught. Also, Sabbath observance in the context of the synagogue, as well as the lack of figural art in all Second Temple synagogue buildings that have been excavated so far, point to the widespread importance of Exodus in the formation of Jewish communal identities. With regard to judicial proceedings and administration of law in court settings (within synagogues), Deuteronomy may have had some influence with regard to forms of punishment.

Shifting our focus to Jewish associations and the Diaspora, and, consequently, to Paul's context, things look different, although there is some overlap in certain areas.

5.2.2 *Members Only: Torah in Jewish Associations*

One of the most important factors for reconstructing first-century Torah observance in institutional settings in the Diaspora is the existence of community rules in Greco-Roman and Jewish associations.³⁰ Such rules stipulated what was acceptable behavior, but people's roles in certain rituals could also be regulated. In a Jewish setting, as shown by the Dead Sea Scrolls, the hermeneutical foundation for establishing a community rule was a specific understanding of Torah; the rule was understood to be an expression of communal Torah observance.³¹ I will return to this below, after considering the evidence more broadly.

Roman authorities understood Diaspora synagogues to be the same kind of institution as the Greco-Roman associations (*collegia*; *thiasoi*).³² Important for our purposes here are the Roman decrees, reproduced by Josephus, which were issued in response to local anti-Jewish developments.³³ In these decrees, all of

³⁰ John S. Kloppenborg has analyzed the ἀποσυνάγωγος passages in the Gospel of John in light of association rules ("Disaffiliation in Associations and the Ἀποσυνάγωγος of John," *HvTSt* 67. 1 [2011]: art. #962). In the case of John's Gospel, however, I am more inclined to agree with Jonathan Bernier, *Aposynagōgos and the Historical Jesus in John: Rethinking the Historicity of the Johannine Expulsion Passages*, *BibInt* 122 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), who understands these references to refer to public institutions in Jerusalem.

³¹ See Yonder Moynihan Gillihan, *Civic Ideology, Organization, and Law in the Rule Scrolls: A Comparative Study of the Covenanters' Sect and Contemporary Voluntary Associations in Political Context*, *STDJ* 97 (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

³² On synagogues as associations in the Greco-Roman world, see especially Harland, *Associations*; Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations*.

³³ For Jewish rights according to these Roman decrees, see Runesson, *Origins*, 468 n. 226. The texts, all found in Josephus, *Antiquities*, are reproduced and discussed in *ASSB*: nos. 93

which confirm Jewish communal rights, we learn something about the kinds of activities that took place in Jewish associations, and thus about how communal Torah observance was understood in the Diaspora.

In all decrees, the rights listed are said to be based on Jewish law and custom. Generally agreed-on forms of Torah observance according to these documents included the following aspects:³⁴

1. Communal gatherings of Jewish men, women, and children, in a place of their own.
2. Performance of “native, sacred, and holy rituals.”
3. Communal meals.
4. Celebration of customary festivals (New Moons,³⁵ Sukkot, Yom Kippur, possibly Hanukkah, public fasts).³⁶
5. Sabbath observance.³⁷
6. Collection of money for communal meals, and for sending to Jerusalem.³⁸
7. The resolving of legal suits among themselves.³⁹
8. The managing of first-fruits.⁴⁰
9. The offering of ancestral prayers and sacrifices (*thysiai*).⁴¹
10. The eating of special (kosher) food.⁴²

(Delos), 108 (Ephesus), 109 (Halicarnassus), 110 (Miletus), 113 (Sardis), 114 (Sardis), 120 (by Augustus; unspecified locations), and 180 (Rome). Although there has been some discussion about the authenticity of these decrees, they should be understood as presenting a basic historical outline of rights enjoyed by Jews.

³⁴ Sanders, “Common Judaism Explored,” 19–20, also relates these decrees to Common Judaism.

³⁵ On the observance of New Moons, see *ASSB*, no. 131 (Berenice). Cf. Num 28:11–15; Lev 23:24. For discussion, see Binder, *Temple Courts*, 416–18.

³⁶ See the “stated days” and “customary festivals” mentioned in the decrees of Halicarnassus (*ASSB*, no. 109) and Sardis (*ASSB*, no. 113). It may be noted that the Therapeutae, as a Jewish sect entertaining a specific understanding of Torah observance, gathered every fiftieth day for a communal feast (perhaps following the liturgical calendar of Jubilees?).

³⁷ As we know from other sources in Philo and Josephus, Sabbath observance included communal gathering for the reading and teaching of Torah.

³⁸ *ASSB*, no. 120; cf. no. 108 (Ephesus). On money collections in the context of association praxis, see John S. Kloppenborg, “Fiscal Aspects of Paul’s Collection for Jerusalem,” *EC* 8 (2017): 153–198.

³⁹ This implies that the Jewish law was the basis for judicial proceedings. As previously mentioned, there is precedence for associations solving legal disputes internally according to their own laws/bylaws. For example, *AGRW*, no. 299, a regulation from an association devoted to the crocodile god in the Fayum (Roman Egypt), states the following: “If one of our members brings a complaint against one of us to a military official, civil officer, or police officer (?), without first bringing the complaint before those of the House, his fine is twenty-five debens.”

⁴⁰ *ASSB*, no. 110 (Miletus).

⁴¹ *ASSB*, no. 113 (Sardis).

⁴² In the decree by the people and council of Sardis (*ASSB*, no. 113), which lists prayers and sacrifices as synagogue activities, it is also stated that the city’s market officials were responsible for bringing in food suitable for Jews.

These activities, several of which are confirmed by archaeological remains, inscriptions, and other texts, developed from a common understanding of what it meant to live like a Jew in the first-century Diaspora. Notably, the right to assemble on the Sabbath coincides with evidence that Torah was read, expounded, and discussed in synagogues on this day.⁴³ This indicates a common understanding in this regard between Diaspora synagogues and public synagogues in the land.

One of the activities mentioned, though, points to a different understanding of Torah observance in the Diaspora: sacrifice. While the Josephan passage mentioned above has been interpreted in different ways, other texts and archaeological evidence suggest a rather complex picture. Even though it has rarely had any effect on modern scholarship on Jewish identity and Torah observance, we have evidence of several Jewish temples in the Diaspora, the most famous being the Leontopolis and the Elephantine temples in Egypt.⁴⁴ While the Elephantine temple was destroyed in the late fifth century BCE, the Leontopolis temple was still in use during Paul's lifetime.⁴⁵ In fact, there never was a period in the history of the Jewish people when the Jerusalem temple was the only Jewish temple. The existence of these other temples indicates that the cult centralization as described in the Hebrew Bible was not understood by all to exclude the existence of temples outside the land. We must assume that Jews utilizing these temples saw their ritual practices in terms of obedience to Torah, just as much as the movement reconstructed from the sectarian writings among the Dead Sea Scrolls saw their rejection of the Jerusalem temple as following logically from radical Torah observance.

But we do not need to point only to these Jewish temples to prove diversity in this regard. Archaeological evidence, inscriptions, and papyri indicate that, just as Greco-Roman temples would have provided basins outside their entrances for the purpose of ritual washing before entering sacred space, many of the institutions we call synagogues also had water basins by their entrances for ritual purification. Indeed, papyri from Egypt speak of synagogues (*proseuchai*) as holy space, and there is a famous example of a water bill that indicates that the local synagogue used more water than a neighboring bath-house.⁴⁶ The distinction between temple and synagogue, both understood as sacred space, was not at all that clear in the first century.⁴⁷ Since we know from Philo and Josephus

⁴³ For example, Philo, *Somn.* 2.123–128.

⁴⁴ For sources on Jewish temples outside Jerusalem, see *ASSB*, nos. T1–T12.

⁴⁵ According to Josephus, the Leontopolis temple was meant to be the solution to a Jewish cult-centralization process in Egypt, implying the previous existence of numerous Jewish temples in the area. For discussion of the process in Egypt (and possibly elsewhere), in which Jewish temples were transformed into what we call synagogues, see Runesson, *Origins*, chap. 5, especially 436–459.

⁴⁶ *ASSB*, no. 149.

⁴⁷ See Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 86.

that reading and discussing Torah was the main activity in these institutions, the sacred nature of these buildings and the washing of hands before entering were likely seen as important aspects of Torah observance. This, in turn, indicates that ritual purity would have been a concern for Diaspora Jews when they gathered as Jews, in accordance with their “native laws and traditions.”

These features and activities of Diaspora synagogues were widely agreed on. There were, however, more exclusive Jewish associations too, both in the land and in the Diaspora: the synagogue of the Essenes,⁴⁸ the synagogue of the Freedmen in Jerusalem,⁴⁹ the associations implied in the community rule of the Didache, Matthew’s eighteenth chapter, and the letter of James, as well as the institutions of the Therapeutae.⁵⁰ The Pharisees should also be understood as forming an association.⁵¹ These groups construed Jewish communal identity and Torah observance differently, appealing to divine law for support for their specific practices.

In such settings there would be procedures in place for the exclusion of members who broke the rules of the community. We have such evidence in Matthew 18:15–18, for example, where reluctance to reconcile with other members would lead to exclusion. Paul is also clear about correct behavior in the associations he is writing to, and he appeals to Jewish law in order to outline acceptable as well as unacceptable conduct (e.g., Gal 5:19–23). The Community Rule, which is dated to the early first century BCE, also marks the boundaries of a dissident Jewish community.⁵²

As Cecilia Wassén has shown in a comparative study on the Dead Sea Scrolls and Paul,⁵³ such mechanisms of exclusion may be based on concerns about the

⁴⁸ Philo, *Prob.* 80–83 (*ASSB*, no. 40). Note that Philo understands these synagogues to be “sacred spots.”

⁴⁹ Acts 6:9 (*ASSB*, no. 18).

⁵⁰ On the Therapeutae, see Philo, *Contempl.* 30–33 (*ASSB*, no. 160).

⁵¹ The associations provide the closest analogy that can describe the organization of Jewish groups, including the Pharisees. Note the possible mention of a Pharisaic synagogue in Matthew 12:9 (discussion in Runesson, *Origins*, 355–357). Note also that Luke 14:1 speaks of a leader of the Pharisees, indicating the existence of a hierarchy, which in turn reveals institutional structures such as we may also find in other associations.

⁵² Cf. also 1QSa and 1QSb, as well as the Damascus Document with its complicated relationship to 1QS.

⁵³ Cecilia Wassén, “Do You Have to Be Pure in a Metaphorical Temple? Sanctuary Metaphors and Construction of Sacred Space in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Paul’s Letters,” in *Purity, Holiness, and Identity in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Memory of Susan Haber*, ed. Carl S. Ehrlich, Anders Runesson, and Eileen M. Schuller; WUNT 1.305; (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 55–86. See also the discussion in Stephen Westerholm, “Is Nothing Sacred? Holiness in the Writings of Paul,” in *Purity, Holiness, and Identity in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Memory of Susan Haber* ed. Carl S. Ehrlich, Anders Runesson, and Eileen M. Schuller; WUNT I 305; (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 87–99, which comes to slightly different conclusions in this regard.

(moral) purity of the community.⁵⁴ I would argue the same for the Matthean community.⁵⁵ For Pauline and Matthean communities, impurity resulting from sin (moral impurity) would have threatened the status of “the elect,” that is, the members of the associations in question. Such views make sense when understood within the wider context of a first-century Jewish communal worldview, in which Torah observance and related purity issues were a major concern.

5.3 *Paul and the Diversity of Pre-Rabbinic Judaism*

Entering a synagogue with Paul, then, what should we expect to encounter? Two key conclusions stand out. First, the institutional climate in which Torah observance was formed was open and non-static, lacking supra-local authority structures and thus allowing for local variation with regard to what constituted Torah observance and which texts would be important for establishing this. This is especially true for the municipal synagogue institutions in the land, but also for the more open among the Jewish associations in the Diaspora. The specific groups that assembled in separate, or more sectarian, associations maintained their own distinct understanding of ideal Torah observance. Any attempts at generalizing what Torah observance constituted in communal local-specific settings to apply to all or most Jewish communities are therefore inherently precarious and at risk of falling prey to what Donald D. Binder has called provincialism (cf. anatopism), a common methodological flaw across most historical disciplines.⁵⁶

Second, while generalizations should be avoided, there are some elements that stand out as common to most Jewish communities. Purity concerns, for example, seem to have been universally understood as important, both in the land and in the Diaspora, both among those who belonged to specific groups and those who did not, that is, the majority. If there is something that characterizes

⁵⁴ The moral purity of group members was also a concern for some Greco-Roman associations, see SIG/3. 985, discussed also above (pp. 96–97.), where members of a private Zeus cult are not even allowed to know – much less actually use – any spells that can be used for “evil,” such as love spells or abortion spells (... μη επωιδας πονερας μητε γινωσκειν μη[τε επιτελειν, μη] φιλτρον, μη φθορειον, μη [ατ]οκειον). This monitoring of what happens in the minds of members (i.e., what they can know or not know) is noteworthy and perhaps not that far removed from Jewish conceptions of moral purity, especially when concerned with the intentions behind ritual actions.

⁵⁵ Anders Runesson, “Purity, Holiness, and the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew’s Narrative World,” in *Purity, Holiness, and Identity in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Memory of Susan Haber*, ed. Carl S. Ehrlich, Anders Runesson, and Eileen M. Schuller; WUNT 1.305 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 144–180.

⁵⁶ Binder, *Temple Courts*, 89. The core problem lies in the temptation to generalize conclusions drawn based on local-specific evidence beyond the geographical or institutional range covered by that evidence.

“Common Judaism,” defined as beliefs and practices that the people and the priests agreed on, this is it. This understanding of Torah was shaped in institutions in which weekly reading, expounding, and discussion of Torah was a key activity.

Thus, contrary to Christian desires and educational programs, which tend to focus on prophetic texts as background material necessary for the understanding of the New Testament, various interpretations of the book of Leviticus seem to have been what influenced most people’s lives. Interestingly, Paul seems to have shared such concerns as he perceived his *ekklēsiai*, including the bodies of its members, as holy space, an abode within which the Spirit of God was to dwell.⁵⁷ Since, for Paul, one has to be pure even in a metaphorical temple, the apostle emerges as firmly embedded within first-century Jewish sensitivities in his understanding of Torah observance as meant to bring about conditions on earth that are acceptable to the God of Israel.⁵⁸ The keeping of the law, while for Paul subsumed under the category of Christ and enabled only through the active interference of the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5; 13:10; cf. 1 Cor 7:19), will produce behavior that does not defile the person morally (Gal 5:22) and so allows for God’s presence in the midst of those Jews and non-Jews who affiliate themselves with the Messiah (1 Thess 2:12; Rom 14:17).⁵⁹ Entering a synagogue with Paul would have meant affirmation of one’s fundamental understanding of the Jewish worldview, with the added announcement from the apostle that there was now a new way for Jews and non-Jews alike to be reached by God’s mercy as the kingdom was fast approaching.⁶⁰

We should perhaps also note, finally, the fact that the institutional setting that eventually gave rise to what is today known as Judaism and Christianity was not the public synagogues of the land in which Jesus proclaimed his message but

⁵⁷ See, for example, 1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:17–20; 2 Cor 6:16–18; cf. Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 1:2; 9:13–14; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; 4:21. It should be noted that many Diaspora synagogues were regarded as sacred space. See, for example, Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 86; Binder, *Temple Courts*, 32. What Paul is doing when he speaks of the *ekklēsia* as holy space where God dwells is to give already existing notions of holiness related to Jewish synagogue institutions an additional level of theological meaning.

⁵⁸ Note that Paul’s focus is on moral, rather than ritual, purity. See Klawans, *Impurity*, who compares Jesus and Paul, noting that while Paul seems uninterested in ritual purity “we still see some degree of continuity in his lasting interest in the notion of moral defilement” (156).

⁵⁹ Paul uses sacrificial language to emphasize the importance of his communities’ members being acceptable to God (e.g., Rom 12:1).

⁶⁰ See Westerholm, “Is Nothing Sacred?” 97: “Certainly there is enough similarity [between Paul and the Dead Sea Scrolls] to remind ourselves that Paul is not un-Jewish when he gives language rooted in the Temple cult a radically different application. Here, as throughout this paper, we see that Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ, retains a fundamental conviction that he held already as a zealous Pharisee: The holy God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is committed to creating a people to share in his holiness and, thereby, a people in whose midst he may live.”

the Jewish associations in which smaller groups decided what was to be defined as Torah observance. Paul would have had a leg in both institutional worlds,⁶¹ although debates about the eschatological processes he understood himself to be a part of soon became isolated in settings less conducive to open debate among people conversant in Jewish ways of understanding Torah. Reading Paul historically within his own institutional settings, we need to find ways of cutting across these later contexts in which the Church Fathers wrote and reach back into the conceptual and material world(s) of first-century synagogues. As we do so, we should expect to find, at times, opposing views on what Torah observance really means on a scale surpassing the diversity we find in modern forms of Rabbinic Judaism, as I noted at the beginning of this chapter, even when it comes to such controversial issues as the identification of who belongs within the people of God.

Another controversial issue in both academic and Christian normative debates concerns the problem of power and leadership in the world in which Paul lived and breathed and had his being; more specifically, interest has focused on the roles of women in these contexts. If Paul has been read as open to women leaders in the *ekklēsiai*, such discussions have often concluded that Paul has moved beyond what Judaism (and Greco-Roman society) could offer in terms of “inclusiveness.” Understanding Paul as a first-century Jew thus necessitates that such issues are addressed too, in order to make sense of his letters in their own socio-religious and institutional settings. In the following chapter, we shall therefore do just that and show that, in fact, women leadership did exist in the Pauline *ekklēsiai*, and that this is precisely one of the several aspects that anchors him firmly in his Jewish and Greco-Roman context.

⁶¹ Cf. most recently Öhler, “Punishment of Thirty-Nine Lashes,” 623–640.

6. Paul's World

Women, Men, and Power

6.1 Paul and his Female Apostles

There are many ways in which we can attempt to “place” Paul. In the next chapter, I will focus on the importance of institutionally locating Paul and his Christ-groups in order to more fully understand the historical context behind and the theological nuance of his writings. Another way to “place” Paul is by looking at the demographic make-up of those he surrounded himself with. Several chapters have already considered, from different angles, the ethnic constitution of Pauline groups, primarily with regard to the intermingling of people identifying and being identified as Jews and non-Jews, respectively. In this chapter, I turn to another question that has followed in the heels of Pauline scholarship, particularly in the last few decades, namely the question of the role that women occupied in the early Christ-groups. Establishing the role of women in early Christ-groups is key if we want to locate Paul in his own world, both in terms of institutional context (for example, not all ancient associations were open to both men and women), but also in terms of understanding the many women that appear both in Paul's own letters and in subsequent literature written by Christ-followers.

Ancient society was patriarchal, the Greco-Roman no less than the Jewish. This claim is often repeated in research literature and textbooks. Still, there are a number of primary sources (inscriptions, papyri, literary sources) that nuance our understanding of how women operated within this society, and the diverse roles that they could occupy.¹ Similarly, in various New Testament texts, including the Gospels and the Pauline letters, there are indications that the presence and active involvement of women in the early Jesus movement seems to have been the norm. This is noteworthy since the texts in question were written by men and in general present an androcentric worldview; and yet, armed with a hermeneutic of suspicion, it becomes clear that these same texts also be-

¹ On ancient patriarchy, see also the important discussion by Carol L. Meyers, “Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?” *JBL* 133 (2014): 8–27; cf. eadem, “Where the Girls Are: Archaeology and Women's Lives in Ancient Israel,” in *Between Text and Artefact: Integrating Archaeology in Biblical Studies Teaching*, ed. Milton C. Moreland. *Archaeology and Biblical Studies* 8 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 31–51.

tray knowledge of how women occupied important social roles and functioned as leaders in associative settings. The question of whether or not women occupied leadership roles in the early Jesus Movement has been intensely debated in scholarship, but an increasing majority of researchers would today assert that female leadership was possible in at least some Christ-groups. Those who allow for a more inclusive, and I would argue historically anchored, reading of the sources argue that female participation in and leadership of unofficial cult groups in antiquity was in fact quite common. This opens up for a number of questions. Were there female apostles in the first century CE? If so, how would this have been understood in the surrounding Greco-Roman and Jewish societies, of which Christ-groups were very much a part?

The case of Junia, a friend of Paul, is a revealing example of how evidence of female leadership has been treated by scholars and Bible translators. In Rom 16:7, according to many Bible translations, Paul sends greetings to a Jewish man called Junias who, together with a certain Andronicus, is described by Paul as a highly respected apostle. In the oldest Greek manuscripts, the name is written with capital letters, IUONIAN. This is either the accusative case of a woman's name, Junia, or a man's name, Junias, depending on where the accent is placed in the Greek. Because the oldest preserved texts lack accents, it is difficult to establish whether the name refers to a man or a woman. Despite this ambiguity, all sources point to the conclusion that it is a reference to a woman, as Eldon J. Epp, Wayne A. Meeks, Bernadette J. Brooten, and several other scholars have argued.² The male version of the name has no predecessor in Greco-Roman literature or inscriptions, and the Church fathers, with the possible exception of Pseudo-Epiphanius,³ seem to believe the name referred to a woman. Chrysostom (ca. 347–407) wrote the following in his commentary to Romans 16:7,

To be an apostle is something great! But to be outstanding among the apostles – just think what a wonderful song of praise that is! They were outstanding on the basis of

² Bernadette J. Brooten, “Junia ... Outstanding Among the Apostles?: (Romans 16:7),” in *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration*, ed. L.S. Swidler and A. Swidler (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 148–151; Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of its First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999); Epp, *Junia*; Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

³ Pseudo-Epiphanius, *Index Discipulorum*, 125.19–20. The *Index Discipulorum* also identifies Prisca as male, which should lead us to question if his labelling of Junia as male is also a mislabeling, especially in light of how most other ancient writers understood the name as female. Furthermore, there are real questions about the reliability of the *Index Discipulorum*, particularly on the grounds of authorship. While the text is ascribed to Epiphanius, many scholars believe it may have been written at a later date (see Andrea Hartmann, “Junia – A Woman Lost in Translations: The Name IOYNIAN in Romans 16:7 and its History of Interpretation,” *Open Theology* 6 [2020]: 646–660, here 651).

their works and virtuous actions. Indeed, how great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle.⁴

Looking at the Greek versions of the New Testament published from the time of Erasmus (1516) until the beginning of the nineteenth century, one may note that of 39 editions, only one (Alford 1844–1857, 1888) chooses to place the accent on the last syllable and in this manner create a male name. The others place the accent on the penultimate syllable, and thus interpret the name to be female.

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, however, something changes, and Junia becomes a man. Even as late as in Nestle-Aland's 27th edition of the Greek text from 1993, the apostle is referred to as Junias – a man; in the text-critical apparatus, however, the strong evidence in favor of a female name is listed. This has been corrected in the 28th edition (2013), which reads Junia. One wonders why the editors previous to the 28th edition chose to interpret the male version of the name as the preferred reading, when the majority of both historical and recent readers and editors of the Greek text have understood it as a female name. Perhaps there are other reasons for this move, reasons anchored more in (mis)conceptions of both ancient and modern gender roles than in the historical context and reception history of the text. Such (mis)conceptions are also obvious in a number of popular Bible translations, and they perpetuate the idea of an all-male apostleship in the first-century Jesus movement⁵ – an idea that has influenced many to understand modern Christian and Messianic-Jewish leadership as necessarily male as well. We should not forget, though, that a number of Bible translators have nevertheless chosen to keep Junia female. The influential *King James Version* (1611, with later revisions) uses Junia, as does the *New Revised Standard Version*. If we go beyond the more common languages used in Western academia, we may note that Yunia is used in the Swahili Bible (United Bible Societies 1952), and Junia in the Norwegian translation of 2011 (Bibelselskapet).

Since the majority of ancient witnesses and modern scholars agree that Junia was, in fact, a woman, this encourages further questions about the nature of apostleship in the first Christ-groups. If we can be almost certain that the person in question was a woman named Junia, can we be equally certain that she was an apostle? The Greek (ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις) can, grammatically speaking, be interpreted in two ways. One option is that Andronicus and Junia (who were probably a married couple and two of the early, pre-Pauline apostles, as cautiously suggested by Meeks⁶) were respected/well known *as* apostles, and

⁴ John Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.* 31.2.

⁵ Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 961–962, concludes after reviewing the historical evidence that “[d]espite its impact on modern translations based on Nestle-Aland and the UBS, it appears that the name ‘Junias’ is a figment of chauvinistic imagination.”

⁶ Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 132, cf. 1 Cor 9:5.

the other option is that they were respected/well known *by* apostles. This ambiguity may be used as evidence by those who are convinced that we are dealing with a woman, but who simultaneously believe that Paul would never address a woman as an apostle. All patristic commentators nonetheless interpret the two individuals mentioned in the text as *being* apostles (this interpretation falls closest to the natural meaning of ἐπίσημοι in this passage).⁷ This is also Chrysostom's interpretation, as we saw above.

The question of whether or not Junia was an apostle is compounded by the fact that scholars still debate exactly what Paul means when he uses the word "apostle."⁸ Based on both linguistic and patristic evidence, it is difficult to deny that Rom 16:7 refers to a man and a woman, Andronicus and Junia, whom Paul describes as highly respected apostles. Regardless of the meaning we attribute to the word "apostle," all can agree that for Paul the word represented the most important office in the early Christ-groups. This is evident in 1 Cor 12:28 (in the Greek text there is a clear hierarchy between the duties, indicating that "apostle" qualifies as the highest honor). In other words, according to the oldest sources we have about the early Jesus movement – Paul's undisputed letters – apostleship was the single most important position that anyone could have in the *ekklēsiai*, and both men and women were among those who had it.

Having said this, several follow-up questions surface, however. Was this view of men and women, where they could have the same titles and carry out the same duties, the norm in ancient society? Could women generally carry titles that men were honored with, and occupy leadership roles? Have we not been taught that men dominated ancient society on all levels? Why would the early Jesus movement be any different? Did Paul indeed allow women in his Christ-groups to occupy leadership roles that would not have been open to them elsewhere? Junia, and the scholarly dilemma she has often (albeit perhaps unmerited) brought with her, highlights the critical importance of not leaving gender out of the scholarly discourse on Paul. Depending on how we choose to answer the questions listed above, we may find that an analysis of the women that Paul mentions can actually provide us with crucial information about the place of the earliest Christ-groups in their surrounding societies. In what follows, I will attempt to account for whether or not Paul's Christ-groups were more "radical"

⁷ Epp, *Junia*, 69–78. See also C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2, IX–XVI, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), *ad loc*; Jewett, *Romans*, *ad loc*.

⁸ Working on this question, it would be important to note how and why Paul describes himself as an apostle: 1 Cor 1:1, 9:1–2, Gal 1:1, 15–17, Rom 1:1–5. See also discussion by Denis M. Farkasfalvy, "Prophets and Apostles': The Conjunction of the Two Terms Before Irenaeus," in *Text and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and the Early Church Fathers*, ed. W. Eugene March (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1980), 109–134; David Huttar, "Did Paul call Andronicus an Apostle in Romans 16:7?" *JETS* 52.4 (2009): 717–778; Michael H. Wallace and Daniel B. Source, "Was Junia Really an Apostle? A Re-Examination of Rom 16.7," *NTS* 47.1 (2001): 76–91.

about issues of female status and leadership than other groups at the time, and why the eventually emerging majority Church become such a male-dominated institution, despite having its genesis in a more gender-inclusive view of titles and leadership. But first, it is critical to establish the methodological bases on which such discussions may be carried out.

6.2 *Women in Ancient Society: How do we Ask the Question?*

When we discuss men, women, power, and social roles, we are not speaking about the “natural” roles of men and women in society, despite the fact that this is how our sources often present the situation.⁹ The ideologically and theologically motivated beliefs about men and women that we come across in various ancient sources are constructions of gender that often base themselves on the view that gender is dependent on a person's sex. While scholars today acknowledge that gender is a performative act based on societal norms and structures,¹⁰ it is key to historical reconstruction that we keep in mind that ancient conceptions of gender were different and most often essentialized. It is equally important to not view these ancient gender constructions through the lens of how European societies understood the role of women in the past. While it may be tempting to draw a parallel between the house-sequestered elite women of Athens and the female domesticity encouraged in Victorian England, we do ourselves no favors by simplifying ancient gender constructions in this (anachronistic) way.

The question of whether women in antiquity had access to social power is much too wide in its scope to be productive, and therefore needs to be specified in order to yield results. One way to do this is to begin by distinguishing between different identities that an ancient woman could espouse. Extensive work on the importance of intersectionality in feminist discourse has established the danger of assuming a universal female experience.¹¹ Therefore, it is crucial to distinguish between the different social, cultural, and spatial aspects that may have impacted ancient women's roles, identities, and access to leadership roles. In pursuit of this aim, there are several parameters that need to be established,

⁹ On Philo, who makes construes this distinction as natural in his writings, see, e.g., Dorothy I. Sly, *Philo's Perception of Women*, BJS 209 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2020), 179.

¹⁰ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal*, 40/4 (1988): 519–531.

¹¹ See Anna Carastathis, *Intersectionality: Origins, Contestations, Horizons* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016). For applications in Biblical Studies, see Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, “Towards an Intersectional Hermeneutics: Constructing Meaning with and not of Galatians 3–4,” in *Pauline Hermeneutics: Exploring the ‘Power of the Gospel’*, Lutheran World Federations Studies 2016/3, ed. Eve-Marie Becker and Kenneth Mtata (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlanganstalt, 2017), 85–97.

and these can be divided into two main groups. The first deals with factors influencing general differences in gender expectations:

- A) 1. Social strata
 2. Type of society (rural or urban)
 3. Marital status (married, unmarried, widow)
 4. Culture (broadly divided into eastern or western parts of the Roman Empire)

It is also important to include the differences that come with changing role expectations, laws, and rules at the different levels of society. In the same way that “religion” was expressed differently depending on where in society an individual was located in the Roman Empire, so also gender expectations fluctuated. Consequently, as I have argued in previous chapters, we need to distinguish between the following in our analyses:¹²

- B) 1. Civic level
 2. Private/domestic level
 3. Semi-public/association level

The parameters labelled (A) may be considered in comparative perspective. For example, a married woman [A3] from the upper strata of society [A1] in the Western part of the Empire [A4] can be compared to an unmarried woman [A3] from the lower strata of society [A1] in the Eastern part of the empire [A4]. However, the parameters under (A) should also be considered in conjunction with the relevant levels labelled (B). The opportunities for a married woman (A3) from the upper strata of society (A1) to occupy a position of power/leadership varied depending on whether she was active in the public, political sphere (B1), within an association (B3), or in the private, domestic sphere (B2). The same is true for an analysis of men.

It is, in my opinion, important that we keep these social spheres separated in our analysis, since it is not uncommon for scholars to study sources concerned with the public sphere of society and then apply their conclusions to the association level as well, despite the fact that the context offered very different options for both men and women.¹³ Generalizations such as these are especially prob-

¹² For a similar division, see Klauck, *Context*.

¹³ For example, Koenraad Verboven has argued that Roman businessmen who did not have access to the social capital available at the civic level (B1 according to my categories) due to their legal or economic status, could find equivalents to the activities that brought social capital on the civic level (such as patronage and leadership roles) at the association level (here B3). Because associations mimicked civic structures, they also afforded these men the opportunity to operate in roles that were closed to them at the civic level, but open at the association level (Koenraad Verboven, “The Associative Order: Status and Ethos Among Roman Businessmen in the Late Republic and Early Empire,” *Atheneum* 95 [2007]: 1–33).

lematic because it is at the association level that we find both Jewish and Christ-believing groups in the first century CE.

6.3 *The Public Sphere: Politics, the Right to Vote, and Civic Administration*

In the public sphere, free men with citizenship were those who enjoyed direct political influence through the right to vote and the ability to hold administrative offices. Greek and Roman societies differed structurally and on an administrative level since Greek culture was characterized by democratic processes whereas, following the fall of the Republic, Roman society was an autocracy. However, in both cases, free men with citizenship were heavily favored, whether in terms of the right to vote (Greek) or the ability to occupy public offices and administrative or governing posts (Roman). Since the focus here is on Paul's Christ-groups, we shall emphasize the civic structures operating under Roman rule, but keeping in mind that democratic ideas and practices continued to exist in many associations (B3).¹⁴

The population of Greco-Roman societies may be divided into three general sections: free men and women, freed slaves (men and women), and slaves (men and women). The majority of the population was not given the opportunity to influence society directly. Slaves, both men and women, could be freed and granted citizenship. In the case of freed slaves, only the freedmen could aspire to play an influential role in the public sphere, as women were in general excluded from the *polis*-administration. Freedwomen could marry citizens, and as such they would have come closer to the epicenter of civic power: the male citizen. From this, we can draw the conclusion that women had the lowest chance of influencing their society via voting or political influence. This conclusion is valid across the social specter; it affected those both high and low on the social scale, free individuals and slaves. A free woman had as little right to vote or hold civic offices as a male slave did.

This does not mean that women had no influence on their societies at all. In indirect ways, women could influence political decisions. Here, we must draw a line between women of different social and marital standings. Ancient (male/elite) authors were horrified at what they sometimes called "manly women," who, according to them, had an "improper" influence over political decisions; they were part of conspiracies and/or influenced decisions related to war. In cases such as these, we are dealing with women from the upper strata of society,

¹⁴ Larry Wellborn has argued that Pauline groups may very well have belonged to the genre of associations that continued organizing itself according to democratic processes, see Larry Wellborn, "How 'Democratic' Was the Pauline *Ekklesia*? An Assessment with Special Reference to the Christ Groups of Roman Corinth," *NTS* 65 (2019): 289–309.

who were married to, or mothers of, influential and important men. These men could be emperors or governors of Roman provinces (in both the East and the West), and their positions indirectly opened up the path for the women related to them to influence political decisions. For example, we may note how Berenice appears in official settings with King Agrippa in Acts 25:23, and how, according to Matthew 27:19, Pilate's wife attempted to sway his judicial decision-making.¹⁵

The political and administrative systems of Greco-Roman society were completely male-dominated, and democracy as we know it today did not exist. Ancient literature does, however, provide us with valuable information about high-ranking women. These texts act as witnesses for the fact that, despite the repressive civic structure, women still possessed the will to power and influence in areas that society tried to relegate beyond their reach. Many of these women were successful in their aspirations, despite a lack of powerful husbands or sons.

When we analyze women from different social strata, we come across another example of how women in antiquity influenced society. Wealthy non-elite women could still act as philanthropists or patrons and in this manner forge a platform for active and influential participation in society. In this context, marital status plays a minor role. There are examples of female patrons who were both married and unmarried, as well as widows. Legally, women had a valid claim to parts of their husband's fortune, but they could also be wealthy in their own right and sometimes they even supported their husbands.¹⁶ Women could therefore use their own financial assets – not only those of influential husbands or sons – to exercise a greater degree of power and influence in society.

By donating money to different undertakings, like for example building projects, these women could make a name for themselves, and they were often honored by those that benefited from their donations with honorific inscriptions and sometimes even statues. Such honors were displayed in public spaces, and therefore made these women more visible in civic society. In some of these inscriptions, women are honored with titles normally conferred on men, and there is some debate regarding how we should interpret these sources. These debates concern the next level of society that we will soon discuss: the association level. Were these titles merely honorary, or did the conferring of the title mean that women could occupy the same position as a man.¹⁷ Where political administration in a *polis* is concerned, the latter is highly unlikely when one considers the

¹⁵ The point here is not whether what is described actually happened, but that the storyteller believes that this is a realistic way of portraying a relationship between women and men at this social level.

¹⁶ Stegemann and Stegemann, *Jesus Movement*, 374–376.

¹⁷ For discussion, see Bernadette J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence*, BJS (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982). Cf. Tessa Rajak and David Noy, "Archisynagogoi: Office, Title and Social Status in the Greco-Jewish Synagogue," *JRS* 83 (1993): 75–93.

overwhelming evidence of a male-dominated governance system. However, in an unofficial association, the situation may not be the same as on the civic level, and therefore it is important to distinguish between leadership roles that women could occupy on the associative level (B3). But, before turning to women in associations, it is important to note the roles that women could occupy in civic religious practice.

Women were active in the Greco-Roman cultic life at various levels and fulfilled different roles. They could be priestesses and, in some cases, carry out sacrifices.¹⁸ Women could also have prophetic functions. A variant of this is the famous oracle of Delphi, where a woman, Pythia, answered the questions of visitors, who were often prominent men with political influence. Thus, this cultic setting reversed the gender roles of ancient society and placed the prophetic speech of a woman above the status of the male rulers who sought her advice. This institution lost its political power already during the Hellenistic era, but it continued to be used well into the fourth century CE. In Greek cities, the role of prophet was generally considered to be a female function.¹⁹ To remain in the favor of the gods was important in the political sphere as well as in the private sphere. However, one should be careful not to overemphasize the role of women in cultic settings. On the public level, men still dominated the scene, and the civic cultic sphere was intimately connected to the same structure as the *polis*, in which only men had public important roles. In sum, then, although women could have important roles in the cultic lives of the cities, men still ultimately held the reins.

6.4 *The Private Sphere: Women Inside and Outside the House*

Texts written by (male) authors in antiquity reveal that they considered the home as the right place for women in society. In these texts, we find descriptions of the different ways households could be constructed; women could even have their own section of the home, where men were commonly not allowed. This was only the case in the upper strata, though, not the lower; neither can we generalize this to be valid for all parts of the Mediterranean world. However, such a detail does reveal the extent of the separation between men and women in the Greco-Roman world, especially in Greek contexts. The separation was not only political, but in some cases it was also private, expressed in architecture and

¹⁸ Julia Severa of *GRA*, no. 113, for example, was a priestess in the local imperial cult (*MAMA* VI 263).

¹⁹ See Wayne B. Ingalls, "Ritual Performance as Training for Daughters of Greece," *Phoenix* 54 (2000): 1–20. Ingalls demonstrates that ritual and ritual-choral performance was seen as a relevant form of education for women in ancient Greece, highlighting that women actively participated in civic cultic activities.

domestic organization. Overall, we are looking at a relatively gender segregated society, where men and women were assigned different roles and different spheres. This does not mean, however that there was absolute gender segregation,²⁰ which is supported by our third set of sources. These sources relate not least to the professional lives of men and women (B3, see discussion below).

In Greco-Roman society, a woman was more often than not regarded as the man's "property," which also meant that her behavior as a wife or a daughter reflected back on the man. The public honor of the man was therefore linked to the manners and actions of the wife or daughter. If she crossed the boundaries of her assigned social role, this would reflect poorly on her husband or father, and could tarnish his reputation. It is difficult to ascertain how prevalent such an honor/shame system was in the different strata of society, and we also have to take cultural differences between geographic regions into consideration, which significantly complicates the situation. Role expectations varied according to a person's social location, but there would also have been differences between different geographical/cultural locations. In addition, the texts we have access to today were written by a small minority of men belonging to the literary elite, and as such they inevitably reflect the world that these men inhabited, one which was very different from the everyday lives of ordinary, non-elite families. Overall, this makes it very difficult to make generalized or universal statements about the roles of women in antiquity.

The literary constructions of female roles that we find in our elite sources must be balanced against what we know about the working lives of women. Among both the rich and poor, we find examples of women who work. Women could own estates, workshops, stores, shipyards, wine industries etc.²¹ From Ostia, we have an inscription mentioning a certain Julia Fortunata, who was involved in the lead pipeline industry, and there are also examples of women leading brick and stone cutting industries.²² Lower down on the social scale, we find examples of women who own or work in the weaving and textile industry (cf. Acts 16:14). Poorer women in the lower strata of society could be fisher(women), nail sellers, makers of wreaths, or saddle makers – like Paul's friend and companion Priscilla (Acts 18:2-3; she is also named in Rom 16:3 and 1 Cor 16:19). We also find examples of women working in hotels, as nurses, doctors, midwives, bakers, perfume-sellers, writers, and even as miners and gladiators. In the countryside, women often worked in the fields. Many working women

²⁰ Cf. Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

²¹ Stegemann and Stegemann, *Jesus Movement*, 375–377.

²² John S. Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations*, discusses a number of guilds that have female names listed on their *alba* (membership lists). He also notes, however, that cultic associations "had the capacity to attract the broadest spectrum of participants," including men and women; many were inclusive in terms of "legal and social statuses, genders, and ethnic identities" (29; cf. 31–32).

on the lower rungs of society were either slaves or freed slaves, especially in rural areas.

With this information in mind, we may draw several conclusions. Despite the fact that a few occupations were reserved for men (for example metal work), and some for women (for example textile production), the number of occupations which were open to both genders is striking.²³ We have already mentioned that Priscilla was a saddle maker, but we should also add that she shared this occupation with her husband Aquila. Paul had a related occupation. This must have meant that men and women often worked together, which problematizes the assumption of complete gender separation in ancient societies that would only have allowed minimal interaction between men and women. In everyday life, men and women met not only in the house but also in their professional lives.

It seems that the amount of interaction between the genders increases steadily as one moves lower and lower on the rungs of society, since slaves and freed women dominate the sources about women who work outside the home. Now, if we view society as a whole, this means that the majority of the female population in fact worked, since women who were born free constituted a minority of most populations. As we noted previously, the literary sources only reflect the upper stratum of society, and therefore provide us with a skewed view of women. Individuals in the work force practically never produced literary works, but a minority consisting of elite, literate men did, and it is from them we have inherited our view of what the "woman's role" in the home and in society consisted of.

The second conclusion we can draw from this is related to the fact that the majority of individuals in the work force were likely members of guilds. This means that women in the work force could also be part of these institutions, which had important social functions. This then effects the way we understand the role of women in society – wedged between the public-political and the private-associative. As we will see below, this observation is the key to understanding the role of women in Christ-groups as well as other Jewish and Greco-Roman groups.

6.5 Associations: Men and Women as Leaders and Members

Greco-Roman society was host to an extensive network of associations.²⁴ These are sometimes referred to as voluntary associations,²⁵ but are better named un-

²³ See, e.g., *CIL* 11.1355a,b, which reflects a guild of builder-carpenters that includes both male and female members (cf. Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations*, 66–67). The fuller profession was also typically open to both men and women.

²⁴ Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations*, 54.

²⁵ This term is borrowed from sociology, but it is not completely satisfactory for describ-

official associations, as we have also called them in previous chapters. They consisted of small face-to-face groups organized around a shared membership profile. For example, a cultic association of Atargatis would be organized around individuals who share an interest in the deity, and a neighborhood association on a certain street in Corinth would be organized around individuals who resided there. Associations were often organized around already-existent social networks, such as households, neighborhoods, and individuals who shared a profession (guilds). The term “association” is an etic term used by scholars to describe a socio-institutional phenomenon that characterized most urban, and also some rural settings in antiquity. The associations themselves describe their groups using diverse terminology such as *synodos*, *synagōgē*, *politeuma*, *thiasos*, and more. Previous scholarship assumed that the imperial ban on associations would have resulted in all associations requiring permission to exist. Recent studies have, however, problematized such claims based on the fact that only a very small number of associations publicized their imperial approval,²⁶ and the fact that associations appear to have continued to flourish despite the ban.²⁷ Ilias Arnaoutoglou has argued that “in modern legal terms...[this was] a provisional ban on gatherings and not...an overall ban on associations.”²⁸ Looking at both epigraphic evidence and Pliny the Younger’s description of Trajan’s suppression of an association of firemen, Arnaoutoglou argues that the ban was only used by Roman authorities to intervene irregularly, and even then, only to repress civil unrest and possible disturbances.²⁹

The issue is therefore not with associations themselves, but rather when associations became spaces wherein civil unrest or disturbances developed. Thus, Trajan wanted Pliny to disband the association of firemen not because they did not constitute a “licit” association according to the “ban,” but rather because the firemen could potentially create political and public unrest. It is interesting to note that when Pliny is writing to Trajan about a Christ-group he is investigating, the crime Pliny considers them to have committed is not related to the fact that they constitute an association, but rather because they appear to not be

ing ancient associations, since many of them, such as guilds, were in reality not voluntary in the sense we often use that word. On “association” as a second-order term, see Kloppenborg, *Christ’s Associations*, 18–19.

²⁶ These inscriptions were found in proximity to Rome, and thus it may indicate that the imperial ban had some effect in these areas, but failed to have effect in areas further away from the capital.

²⁷ The fact that not a single extant association from Egypt has any mention of whether they have imperial approval or not should indicate to us that it was not of any particular concern to them. This again supports the notion that the imperial ban did not have any greater measurable effect outside of Rome and cities close to Rome.

²⁸ Ilias Arnaoutoglou, “Roman Law and *Collegia* in Asia Minor,” *Revue Internationale des droits de l’Antiquité* 49 (2002): 27–44, here 41.

²⁹ Arnaoutoglou, “Roman Law and *Collegia* in Asia Minor,” 42.

willing participants in the imperial cult.³⁰ While the case of the firemen and the Christ-group demonstrate that previous scholarship's understanding of the so-called "association ban" has to be re-evaluated, it does indicate that Roman authorities were aware of the fact that associations could become breeding grounds for civil unrest and political disturbance, and that they were not afraid of disbanding associations that went down that road.

Such imperial measures reveal something about what an association was and how people organized themselves beyond the official political and administrative spheres of society. The fact that associations could become places that created civil unrest indicates that Roman rule exercised limited power over such groups. These groups could become places in which individuals who usually did not have a voice in society could organize themselves in ways that gave them influence, sometimes even beyond the limits of what the association originally intended.

There were several different types of associations, and they may be categorized according to the networks they forged or facilitated. Philip A. Harland has suggested five such basic categories:³¹

1. Household networks
2. Ethnic and geographic networks
3. Neighborhood networks
4. Occupational networks
5. Cult or temple networks

Slaves, freed slaves, and free citizens could all be members of the same association (even though there were also associations designated for each specific group, for example only for slaves or free citizens). An association thus provided a somewhat different context for interaction between men and women belonging to different social strata than the civic structure allowed for. Many associations were more egalitarian in this regard, one could say, although not, of course, in the modern sense of the word.

Among the varied occupational groups that made up different guilds, we invariably find working women. The guilds created a platform for interaction between men and women from a more equal point of departure than existed outside its institutional framework. Associations could meet in the large private houses of wealthy individuals, in rented space (such as temple dining rooms), in workshops and public baths, and in cemeteries. Wealthier associations could have purpose-built meeting houses constructed. There are several examples of

³⁰ The fact that any Christ-follower who sacrifices to the Emperor is freed suggests that this is the real issue at hand here; cf. Pliny the Younger, *Ep.*, 10.96–97.

³¹ Harland, *Associations*, 28–53, esp. 44–52; see also more recently Last and Harland, *Group Survival*, 9–13, and Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations*, 23–40. Cf. discussion above, Ch. 3, pp. 99–108.

such buildings in Ostia (e.g., the house of the *fabri tignarii*, the *collegium* of the woodworkers, or the house of the *fabri navales*, the *collegium* of the ship builders). Meetings were held privately, banquets were often hosted, and each association also included some sort of cult (not just associations that were exclusively meant for the worship of a specific deity). Many associations also offered social security by taking communal responsibility for the burial of deceased members, the granting of loans, and, in some cases, promises to take care of members if they were arrested.³² Of course, the ability of the association to financially afford such acts was based on the practice of each member paying a membership fee, which in many cases would accumulate to cover the expense of the member's funeral.³³ Social involvement like this was very common in antiquity.

People were sometimes members of more than one association, which was natural since one's profession alone more or less required participation in social and occupational networks connected to it. This could place Jews and (Jewish and non-Jewish) Christ-followers in a difficult position, since they worshipped the God of Israel exclusively and therefore could not participate in the non-Jewish rituals that presumably came with membership in guilds that carried out cultic activities aimed at other deities. In all likelihood, this created some tension and probably led to compromises in many cases.³⁴

For the purposes of this chapter, we may note that Jewish Diaspora groups were organized in patterns similar to other associations. Indeed, Roman authorities viewed Diaspora synagogues as associations, and as such they were permitted to exist, not least because they were old.³⁵ If we look closer at the role of women in these synagogues, we find that not only could non-Jewish men and women be honored as benefactors supporting the construction and renovation of Jewish community buildings,³⁶ Jewish women could also be given leadership titles otherwise only assigned to men.³⁷ Previously, scholars have assumed that

³² E.g. *P. Mich* V 243; *PCairDem* 30606; *PLond* VII 2193.

³³ See Richard Last, *Pauline Church and the Corinthian Ekklesia: Greco-Roman Associations in Comparative Perspective*, SNTSMS 164 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

³⁴ In 1 Cor 8:8, for example, Paul appears to sanction his members eating (non-Jewish) ritually sacrificed meat, which would most likely was necessary in terms of participating in guilds that held banquets to honor non-Jewish deities. See the comprehensive discussion in Martin Sanfridson, "Paul and Sacrifice in Corinth: Rethinking Paul's Views on Gentile Cult in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10" (Ph.D. Diss, McMaster University, May 2022).

³⁵ The *lex Iulia*, while banning many other types of associations, permitted groups that could claim old traditions, such as Jewish associations could. However, as we have already discussed, it is unlikely that the *lex* was actually implemented in the empire as a whole in any measurable way.

³⁶ E.g. *GRA* 113; *GRA* 106.

³⁷ E.g. *CIL* 166 reads: "Here lies Simplicia, mother [?] of the synagogue, who loved her husband. [Husband's name and office] of the synagogue set up (this inscription) to his own wife." (Brooten, *Women Leaders*, 60). Inscriptional evidence has also been uncovered for the female version of *archisynagōgos* (*CIL* 731c.). For more on such titles in the non-Jewish world,

these were simply honorary titles, void of any real leadership implications. However, this theory is problematic, and perhaps shaped by our understanding of later periods in European history when such leadership was impossible for women. An increasing number of scholars are today considering the possibility of women occupying leadership positions in various Jewish associations (“synagogues”). The movement of which we find traces in the Dead Sea Scrolls, too, with its different variations as reconstructed from the sectarian writings, has been contextualized as organizing along association patterns, and Cecilia Wassén has argued that women could be part of some decision-making processes in meetings conducted by members of the movement.³⁸ Furthermore, Eileen Schuller has shown that women in the movement could also occupy leadership positions.³⁹

In the same way, older theories claiming that men and women were separated in ancient synagogues have now been discarded. There are no examples of such partitions in any of the excavated synagogues, neither in Israel nor in the Diaspora.⁴⁰ The division of the cultic room into gendered spaces appeared first during the Middle Ages, and the influence of the Christian church on the synagogue in this regard seems likely. In antiquity, men, women, and children gathered in the same room for worship and meetings. There is only one text that describes a low partition between men and women during meetings. This is Philo's description of the sectarian synagogue of the Therapeutae in his work *De Vita Contemplativa*. This is a single case without parallels, and no archaeological evidence of the synagogues of the Therapeutae have been found.

If one views the synagogues of the Diaspora within the framework of Greco-Roman associations, such circumstances are not surprising. Associations offered a different type of setting for men and women to interact than was possible in the civic sphere. Female leadership was not common, but nonetheless it did exist in many regions around the Mediterranean, and there is extant inscriptional evidence which explicitly mentions women as leaders in associations.

6.6 Junia: Exception or Rule?

If we return now to the apostle Junia and the question of women in the early Jesus movement, we may draw several general conclusions. First, it should be

see Emily Hemelrijk, “Patronesses and ‘Mothers’ of Roman Collegia,” *CIAnt* 27.1 (2008): 115–162, but regarding the number of such women as higher than Hemelrijk suggests, see Last and Harland, *Group Survival*, 23–26.

³⁸ Cecilia Wassén, *Women in the Damascus Document* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005).

³⁹ Eileen M. Schuller, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: What Have We Learned Fifty Years on?* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

⁴⁰ Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*; Runesson, *Origins*.

noted that the first Christ-followers, like Junia, were Jews and therefore existed within synagogue contexts. As I argue extensively in other chapters of this book, the evidence available points to Christ-followers often constituting subgroups within non-messianic Jewish associations (“synagogues”), before eventually forming their own associations. This means that the earliest Christ-followers were socialized within an organizational structure wherein women had the possibility of interaction with other (male and female) members on somewhat equal terms and could, potentially, occupy leadership positions. We should therefore be wary of portraying the position of the first women Christ-followers against the background of Greco-Roman marginalization of women in the civic sphere of society. A more productive approach would be to seek an understanding of their position against the backdrop of the institutions in which they existed in their everyday life – that is, associations – the social space between the private and the public. From this perspective, the idea of women as leaders in Christ-groups emerges not as unique, but as belonging within a larger institutional pattern.

The claim that Christ-groups were more radical in this regard than their surroundings is a relatively common statement, and there could very well be a grain of truth in this. The reasoning behind such an argument is usually that Christ-groups were more charismatic than other associations, and as such were open to female leadership. Gender is then viewed as subordinate to charisma in the construction of leadership roles. We have examples from other centuries of charismatic women occupying important leadership roles in Christ-groups.⁴¹ However, such theories should be balanced against what we know about the synagogues of the first century – and associations in general – and the role of women there. A charismatic leadership definition cannot be the only factor behind the influence and prominence of women in the early Jesus movement. Perhaps the most important part of the answer lies in the fact that many ancient associations were *already* appointing women into leadership roles, and therefore it may have appeared natural for Jews and Christ-followers to do the same.

But what happened within the “majority church” that developed during the following centuries? Why did the leading women disappear? First and foremost, the emerging church re-defined itself as non-Jewish.⁴² In this complicated process, Christ-following non-Jews sometimes had to assert their right to form independent associations. To identify, e.g., as a non-Jewish cultic association supporting a network worshipping an eastern deity through its Christ-figure effectively meant that such groups were now identified as independent from Jewish associations, and thus could not claim the rights the Jews had already acquired in Roman society. There are various examples that indicate that

⁴¹ Cf. Prisca’s and Maximilla’s roles within the Montanist movement.

⁴² See discussion of the so-called parting of the ways issue in Part III below.

non-Jewish Christ-followers were mistreated and sometimes even executed because they adhered to this cult.⁴³ Had they stayed within Jewish associative settings, or “synagogues,” the risks could have been reduced, since Jewish ancestral customs were tolerated across most parts of the Roman Empire. Beyond groups dedicated to such ancestral customs, identifying as belonging to the Jewish *ethnos*, Christ-followers appeared to constitute a new (Eastern) cultic group, or superstition, whose members aimed to organize themselves, and this could be politically sensitive.

Because of this, it became more important for (non-Jewish) Christians to present themselves to the political authorities as law-abiding and orderly citizens within a stable organizational structure.⁴⁴ In all likelihood, it was during this process that Christ-followers increasingly started imitating gender roles in civic society and attempting to tone down various charismatic aspects of their worship. In such processes, which took place at different times in different places, women were given fewer and fewer opportunities to act as leaders. The pastoral letters may be a product of this development.⁴⁵ Additionally, as Christ cult became more integrated in Greco-Roman societies, some groups were able to move from functioning exclusively at the association level to also claiming a place on the civic level, which, as we discussed above, marginalized women and female leadership to a greater extent.

The discussion above about women in the ancient workforce is also relevant here. The higher status a woman had, the less likely she was to be part of the workforce. Thus, interaction between men and women was more common in the lower strata of society, and most – but not all – of our evidence points to the majority of the early Christ-followers being members of the lower strata of society. From this follows a greater openness for the active participation of women in the groups. When the (non-Jewish) Christian way of life spread to the upper social strata – even as far as to the political elite – this openness was reduced due to the culture of gender separation prevalent in that part of society. Changes in how Christ-followers defined leadership were also affected by the structural move from charismatic to institutional.⁴⁶ The desire to identify the movement as culturally “normal” and legitimate, and the spread of Christ-belief to the upper echelons of society, all contributed to the marginalization of women in the emerging majority church. This was the state the church found itself in when, before the end of the fourth century CE, it became the only tolerated religion in

⁴³ E.g. Pliny, *Ep.*, 10.96–97.

⁴⁴ Cf. 1 Peter 2:13–3:1

⁴⁵ On the Pastoral epistle and gender roles, cf. discussion by Korinna Zamfir, *Men and Women in the Household of God: A Contextual Approach to Roles and Ministries in the Pastoral Epistles*, SUNT 103 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013).

⁴⁶ Cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroads, 1983).

the Roman Empire. And this was the version of the Church that would subsequently be spread throughout the world.

In sum, while these processes were extended over time and varied from place to place, there is good reason to suggest, therefore, that women Christ-followers lost their right to the same titles and leadership roles as men in a process of social and cultural adaptation, i.e., in the process in which Christianity came into being as a religion separate from Judaism.⁴⁷

6.7 Women in Christ-Groups Before Christianity

As I have attempted to demonstrate, it is essential that the primary sources we use in our analysis be organized and categorized, since this helps us acquire a clearer view of ancient society and the role of women in its various social spheres and spaces. It seems evident that the Mediterranean region was dominated by what we would call a patriarchal culture, which becomes especially obvious when one studies its politics and cults. However, this does not mean that women were invisible in society, or that they had no opportunities to occupy leadership roles in various contexts. The material we have access to on women in the workforce and in associations are an important source of information attesting to this. Nonetheless, researchers are still debating the extent of women's influence in these different social settings. Many scholars, arguing from a minimalistic perspective, tend to emphasize the civic sphere, where the role of women was limited. However, as I have attempted to illustrate in this chapter, such a one-sided perspective provides us with a skewed and misleading understanding of the historical reality of most women in antiquity.

Due to limitations of space, the presentation of the Mediterranean world has, of course, been more of an overview, with little opportunity to delve into the details. I have not been able to discuss Jewish society in Judea and Galilee, for example, apart from some brief comments on the lack of gender partitions in Jewish civic institutions ("public synagogues"). To this we may add that there is evidence suggesting that women participated in public meetings of both a political and "religious" nature. We know less about the attitudes of the various association synagogues, even though later Rabbinic sources provide us with some

⁴⁷ Cf. Zamfir, *Household of God*. It is interesting here to note that the previously common idea that the silencing of women in Christ-groups was a result of a "re-Judaization" of the original Pauline message of equality between the sexes in fact has influenced also textual emendation, as shown by Karin B. Neutel, "Women's Silence and Jewish Influence: The Problematic Origins of the Conjectural Emendation of 1 Cor 14.33b–35," *NTS* 65 (2019): 477–495. As argued in the present chapter, the historical development seems to have been the reverse: women were increasingly marginalized in the historical and social movement away from Judaism and Jewish and non-Jewish associative settings and toward public political influence and institutions in the Greco-Roman world.

information about the Rabbinic view of the matter. I have also not discussed Jesus's attitude to women, which is a topic meriting its own chapter in another book. We may, however, note here that there were women among his followers, and that all four gospels identify the first witnesses of the resurrection as women – which is significant since the resurrection is the defining creed both in the earliest Jewish Jesus movement and in what later became the mainstream (non-Jewish) church. Several scholars link Jesus's attitude to women with the roles they would occupy in the first Christ-groups after his death.

Of course, we should be aware that (male) attitudes towards women as active members of Christ-groups could vary from place to place. Such differences existed early on in the history of the Jesus movement. We find evidence of this already in 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul attempts to balance an ideology of “equality” with the argument that women should be veiled when they prophesy or pray at gatherings, something the women of Corinth clearly did not feel obligated to do. The main take-away from this passage, however, should be that women *did* prophesy at gatherings, just as the main take-away from this chapter should be that despite sometimes contradictory views about women in Pauline literature, it remains clear that women *were* present, both as members of Christ-groups and, like Junia, as leaders and apostles.

So far in Part II, we have discussed how we construe the ancient world through the way we bring it into being with the terminology we use, and then moved on to recreate a Jewish and Greco-Roman institutional setting within which we can locate this apostle to the nations. This setting, as we saw in the present chapter, also explains the roles women could have in Christ-groups, as such positions surfaces in Paul's greetings to them. But if these institutional realities and the place of women within them anchors Paul firmly within Jewish (and Greco-Roman) society, what about Paul's theology? Is there a way in which we can find traces in his theological assertions of the institutional dynamics within which he formulated them? In other words, is there a connection between institutional structures and theological strategies in Paul's letters, and, if so, would such connections assist us in placing Paul in a Jewish setting? We now turn to this question.

7. Placing Paul

Understanding Theological Strategy in Institutional Context

7.1 Approaching the Question: Introducing Institution Criticism

You need a body to locate a soul. Likewise, theology cannot be understood apart from the concrete and tangible practices and enculturated customs from which it emerges and which it, in turn, inspires and interprets. Since no person is an island, and an individual's actions and thoughts evolve and take form as a consequence of a complex dynamic in which socialization, experience, and innovation are all entangled, it follows, arguably, that in order to understand and appreciate the forms of thinking we call theology¹ we need to take seriously the various institutions and collectivities within which – and in relation to which – this thinking emerges. This basic conviction underlies the approach to theological analysis taken here, which pays close attention to institutional realities as explanatory categories. In order to bring these methodological aspects into sharper focus, I have called this approach “institution criticism,” and we shall apply it here in order to shed light on some aspects of the larger issue of Paul's location vis-à-vis Judaism.² Using Gal 3:28 as a test case, it will be argued that

¹ This is not the place for a full discussion of the definition of “theology.” Here, I will use the term as referring to patterns of thought, which in one way or another make claims about perceived realities based on the premise of the existence and relevance of the divine. The term is used descriptively, thus, and does not carry within it any normative implications.

² The approach might be said to be related to, but not identical with, contextual theology. While contextual theology is often understood as constructive and involves normative claims, institution criticism is analytic and descriptive, aiming at a kind of understanding that does not in and of itself relate to or encourage any particular contemporary social, political, or religious convictions or actions. Of course, institution criticism can be used against itself, since it has evolved in a specific academic institutional setting commonly called “religious studies”; methods are, as much as conclusions, embedded in and therefore also partly explained by the specific settings in which they take form. For discussion, see Anna Runesson, *Exegesis in the Making*, esp. 36–39; see also Penner and Stichele, “Reassembling Jesus: Rethinking the Ethics of Gospel Studies,” 311–334. By contrast, contextual theology, especially its constructive element, is explicitly and intentionally intertwined with and nurtured normatively by lived socio-religious and political experiences outside the academic world. Institution criticism can be used on various genres of text, including letters and narrative text. It can be combined with other methods that focus on a certain stage in the history of a text, for example its final form, and is dependent on the date and location of the text to be analyzed. Institution criticism differs from, e.g., form criticism (in its various variants), which builds on rather vague assumptions about context and certain dynamics involved in transmission of tradition. Institu-

Paul's theology can be shown to be patterned on and determined by a pre-existing (Jewish and Greco-Roman) institutional reality with which the addressees were already familiar when Paul wrote. A theology thus formed emerges as a three-dimensional construct, within and through which the recipients would not only be able to intellectually understand the message but also experience it as a lived reality.³

For our purposes in this chapter, I will define institution as “an organized collective conceptual space intertwined with socio-economic and political dimensions of everyday life.”⁴ Such a definition emphasizes the fact that institutional structures shape mental constructions of reality in the interface between abstract and conceptual processes on the one hand and the tangible and physical on the other.⁵ The construction of reality, theological or otherwise, among members of institutions such as those we are interested in here should thus be understood as intertwined with and a reflection of institutional structures. In addition, we need to note that within the collective conceptual (and physical) arena provided by the institution, various roles and identities are formed and enacted in ways specific to the particular nature of the institution in question.

tion criticism has, further, a different purpose than form criticism, in that it is interested in understanding and explaining certain patterns of thinking as they appeared at a specific point in time and in a specific place, i.e., it aims at responding to how and why questions; it is not interested in historical “authenticity” beyond the place and time in which the thought patterns in question occur. The approach will be described in more detail, including more extensive discussion of aspects of space as space relate to institution, in a forthcoming monograph: Anders Runesson, *From Jesus to Paul: Institutional Structures and Theological Strategy in the World of the Early Christ-Followers* (in preparation).

³ My argument here thus runs contrary to the theologically driven hesitation in some previous scholarship to pair Paul and other Christ-groups with associations out of fear that this would undermine Christian uniqueness. As Halvor Moxnes, “Early Christian Communities as Associations: Tracing the Nineteenth-Century Roots of a Social Model,” in *Common Ground and Diversity in Early Christian Thought and Study: Essays in Memory of Heikki Räisänen*, ed. Raimo Hakola, Outi Lehtipuu, and Nina Nikki, WUNT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022; forthcoming) shows, even those, such as Carl Heinrici, who understood Christ-groups as associations did this with the caveat that this was so only with regard to form and structure, not “content.” Such distinctions between structure/form and content seems to me artificial, however, as theology and its meaning can be shown to be intimately intertwined with the institutional, and vice versa. I am grateful to Professor Moxnes for sharing the pre-publication version of his study with me.

⁴ This definition is discussed in more detail and in relation to other suggested definitions, from Max Weber onward, in Runesson, *From Jesus to Paul*.

⁵ Ancient institutions and spatial analysis have been foregrounded in several recent studies. The most relevant of these for the purposes of the present study are those focusing on Graeco-Roman and Jewish associations. See especially the work of Richard S. Ascough, *Paul's Macedonian Associations: The Social Context of Philippians and 1 Thessalonians*, WUNT 2.161 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Harland, *Associations*; Harland, *Dynamics*; Richardson, *Building Jewish*, 207–221; Richard Last, “Communities That Write: Christ-Groups, Associations, and Gospel Communities,” *NTS* 58 (2012): 173–198; Last, *Pauline Church*. See also Edward Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places: Almost Exclusively Houses?* LNTS 450 (London: T&T Clark, 2013).

This means that the status that follows with such roles is institution-specific, and cannot be generalized as valid outside of that institutional setting. A slave, for example, could achieve certain official status within the early Christ-movement, but at the same time, outside the institution that created the organizational, conceptual and physical conditions for that status, lack any independent formal or personal decision-making power or status.⁶ In that sense, institutions such as those we are interested in here may provide an alternative world in which life can be re-imagined and social relationships transformed. It goes without saying, but should still be noted, that interaction that took place within a specific institution may have been unthinkable in other spheres of society.⁷

We should also note that physical space, while an important component in the formation of members' identity,⁸ should be understood as secondary in relation to institution as conceptual space. That is, the nature of the institution takes precedence over the space in which meetings take place. A public institution may gather in open-air settings as well as in various forms of public architecture.⁹ Associations may gather in temples as well as in private houses, and, if funding is sufficient, in purpose-built edifices.¹⁰ For us, this means that it is

⁶ Cf., e.g., the female slaves identified by Pliny the Younger as "deaconesses" as he subjected them to torture in order to extract information from them regarding the activities of the *Christianoi* (Ep. 10.96.8: *Quo magis necessarium credidi ex duabus ancillis, quae ministrae dicebantur, quid esset veri, et per tormenta quaerere*). *Ministra*, the word translated as deaconess, may refer to a woman dedicated to the service of a deity, an attendant in a temple, or similar, i.e., an official role within an institution which carried within it certain expectations and (relative) authority (cf. P.G. W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], *ad loc.*). On the office of deacon as a leadership role in the earliest Christ-groups, cf. Rom 16:1–2, and discussion by Bengt Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles* (Lund: Gleerup, 1978), 100–102, and Jewett, *Romans*, 943–945.

⁷ This does not mean, of course, that such interaction between individuals of different status would not, over time and depending on the number of members, influence the public and private spheres of society as well.

⁸ On the sociology of space, see, e.g., Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson, *The Social Logic of Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Susan Kent, ed., *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space: An Interdisciplinary Cross-Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For studies on the ancient world from this perspective, see Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Shelley Hales, *The Roman House and Social Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); cf. Shelley Hales and Tamar Hodos, eds., *Material Culture and Social Identities in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Inge Nielsen, *Housing the Chosen: The Architectural Context of Mystery Groups and Religious Associations in the Ancient World* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).

⁹ There are numerous examples of this from antiquity. Of special interest in this regard is the fact that political institutions could move from one type of structure to another, without implications for the nature of the institutions themselves. See, e.g., Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 146–151.

¹⁰ Ostia provides ample evidence of such purpose-built association buildings. For discussion, see, e.g., Gustav Hermansen, *Ostia: Aspects of Roman City Life* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1982), esp. 55–87 (plans provided).

problematic to assume that the fact that Paul's assemblies could be held in private houses¹¹ would have decisive implications for how we conceive of the nature of those assemblies, and the same is true of first- and second-century synagogues.¹²

Now, if we look at the larger question of "Paul and Judaism,"¹³ this problem has often been addressed in the past using strategies that aim to delineate a certain Pauline theology, and then compare and contrast that theology with a rather monolithically construed entity designated "Judaism." "Judaism," in such studies, tends to function rhetorically as a sort of dark background against which Paul's thinking emerges as revolutionary, as an expression of a new era, even, in the world of human "religious" thinking and behavior. What I want to do here is, by contrast, to look at some key aspects of certain patterns of thought discoverable in Paul's letters as intertwined with the institutional realities in which he had his being, and note how and why they differ, not from "Judaism," but from Jesus and his program. As we shall see, approaching Paul from such an institutional perspective will challenge common ways of construing his relationship to both Judaism and Greco-Roman society.¹⁴ What has often been un-

¹¹ See Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Phlm 2; cf. Col 4:15. Regarding other possible meeting places of Christ-groups, see Adams, *Earliest Christian Meeting Places*. See also Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations*, 116–123.

¹² Synagogues could be housed in renovated private settings, as revealed in the Stobi inscription (ASSB; no. 187), but also in space designed for association use, as on the Greek island of Delos (ASSB, no. 102) and in Ostia in Italy (ASSB, no. 179). On occasion, scholars have overinterpreted the fact that gatherings took place in diverse spaces, as if such different architectural settings would indicate different stages in institutional formation. The space within which gatherings took place was dependent on several factors, not least economic, so that while it is fairly certain that most groups would strive towards congregating in purpose-built non-domestic architecture, those of insufficient economic means would have to make do with other kinds of spaces, even if they had a fully developed institutional structure, including officials, rules, and exclusion mechanisms. In the case of Jewish associations, it is instructive to note that the oldest archaeological evidence we have access to is of non-domestic architecture (Delos and Ostia), while some of the later evidence (Stobi) shows that Jews could gather in (renovated) domestic space too, depending on their financial situation. Of course, this is still the case today, as Jews may gather in all types of architecture, from apartment buildings to monumental edifices.

¹³ For a critique of this way of phrasing the question, see Mark D. Nanos, "Paul and Judaism," 117–160. See also the contributions in Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm, eds., *Paul Within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015); Fredriksen, "Judaizing the Nations," 232–252.

¹⁴ Previous studies of lasting value focused on understanding the early Christ-movement in urban (social) context include several seminal studies published on the larger Diaspora milieu in which Paul was active, most notably Meeks's classical work *Urban Christians*. Cf. more recently Reinhard von Bendemann and Markus Tiwald, *Das frühe Christentum und die Stadt* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2012). More sociologically oriented works include Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982). For recent studies emphasizing gender perspectives, see Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*; Margaret MacDonald, *The Power of Children: The Construction of Christian Families in the Greco-Roman World* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014). On the impor-

derstood as sharp “religious” boundaries appear to dissolve when studied in institutional setting. As a consequence, while there are significant differences between Jesus and Paul, the image of Paul as a pioneering revolutionary thinker divorcing “Christianity” from “Judaism” turn out to be in need of reconsideration, as his ideas emerge more as a variant on a common theme than as a break with tradition.

In order to make this case, we need to set the scene by first introducing the varied “bodies” in which the soul of Judaism dwelled, focusing on synagogues. Then, in order to put Paul in perspective, we shall look at the type of institution in which Jesus proclaimed his message, before we continue to read an influential passage in Paul as entangled in and explained by an institutional setting very different from those in which Jesus was active. We shall end with a few comments about the implications of this type of analysis for key Pauline themes such as the much-discussed topic of “justification by faith.”

7.2 *Judaism and “the Synagogue”*

Steve Mason noted in an essay a few years ago that what we call “religion” did not exist as such in antiquity, but that aspects of it were expressed in a number of different areas of life.¹⁵ Important for our purposes here is the understanding of “religion” as referring to a “fabric” in which ethnic groups, god(s), law, and land are interwoven and form a pattern that makes political, social, economic, and cultural sense of the world. That is, we are dealing with an understanding of the world in which a specific *ethnos* was associated with a certain god (or gods), a certain law, and a certain land. These basic building blocks were common to most forms of Judaism in antiquity (as they are still today). The construal of each of these aspects of “religion” and their inter-relationship will result in different approaches to Jewish life and thought. Thus, such constructs may explain differences between, for example, Pharisees, Essenes, Sadducees and other groups. The most dynamic component among the four is the law, the

tance of understanding the Graeco-Roman city as a setting in which Judaism and Christ-belief took form and was lived, see Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 3–102. What the present study seeks to do is more narrowly defined: to work explicitly with analysis of theology, its origin and nature, in relation to first-century institutional structures. Cf. Steve Walton, Paul R. Trebilco, and David W.J. Gill, eds., *The Urban World and the First Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017); Kloppenborg, *Christ’s Associations*; Last and Harland, *Group Survival*.

¹⁵ Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 457–512. More recently, Brent Nongbri has published a study with a wider scope, discussing the category “religion” and how it has been used, problematically, in the modern world to describe both cross-cultural and historical phenomena: *Before Religion*.

interpretation of which is at the heart of the understanding of the other aspects of god, land, and people.

As we know from Philo, Josephus, and the texts included in the New Testament, as well as from inscriptions, law was read, taught, and discussed in institutions designated by a number of terms that we translate into English with one single word: “synagogue.”¹⁶ Thus, understanding what a “synagogue” was in antiquity is crucial for our understanding of the interpretation of law, and, by implication, for deciphering the dynamics of Jewish group formation, ideology, and conflict. I discussed the issue of defining “synagogue” in chapter 5 above, highlighting the need to distinguish between Jewish public (civic) institutions (“public synagogues”) and Jewish associations (“association synagogues”). This understanding of the institution in question also forms the backdrop for my thinking in this chapter. What we may call “association synagogues,” or Jewish associations, claimed a place in Mediterranean society along with other Greco-Roman associations beyond the roles and functions related to the domestic and private on the one hand, and the public and official on the other.

While the origins of this type of Jewish organizational form surely lie in the diaspora, we find Jewish associations serving the interest of specific Jewish groups also in the land. Philo mentions the *synagōgē* of the Essenes,¹⁷ and the Theodotos inscription in Jerusalem is another of these examples,¹⁸ as is “the synagogue of the Freedmen” mentioned in Acts 6:9.¹⁹ When followers of Jesus emerged on the scene of history, they eventually began to organize themselves along similar lines. Such groups, marked by as much diversity as other Jewish groups, could gather in private houses or as subgroups within already existing buildings used by synagogue communities. What eventually emerged as Christianity/“the church” and Judaism/Rabbinic synagogue, i.e., what we today know as two separate religions, began their lives as such associations in Late Antiquity.²⁰

¹⁶ There were, with some overlap, 25 Greek, Latin, and Hebrew terms for “synagogue” around the turn of the era. Of these, 17 terms were Greek. For source material, see the terminological index in *ASSB*.

¹⁷ Philo, *Prob.* 80–83 (*ASSB*, no. 40).

¹⁸ *ASSB*, no. 26.

¹⁹ *ASSB*, no. 18. The Greek here is not entirely clear (ἀνέστησαν δέ τινες τῶν ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τῆς λεγομένης Λιβερτίνων καὶ Κυρηναίων καὶ Ἀλεξανδρέων καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ Κιλικίας καὶ Ἀσίας σὺζητοῦντες τῷ Στεφάνῳ). We have either a “synagogue of the Freedmen” within which we find members from different geographical locations (Cyrenians etc.), or one may understand *synagōgē* to apply to each of the following geographical locations, so that we have in total five synagogues/associations mentioned here. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYBC (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 358, understands the passage to refer to one synagogue of freedmen, whose members came from different diaspora locations (taking *kai* in the first instance as adverbial). Note, more importantly, the highlighting in the passage of social identity and geographical network/background as significant for membership identification.

²⁰ Since what we call (non-Jewish) Christianity and (Rabbinic) Judaism today were formed

The historical Jesus, however, and his earliest followers, proclaimed the message of the kingdom not in association settings but in Jewish public space in the land,²¹ a context quite different from the institutional environment we associate with Paul and, later in history, with “Christianity” and “Judaism.” There is, therefore, a significant institutional gap between the earliest phase of the Jesus movement and the later church, and this gap necessitated some serious theological work as the movement morphed into an unofficial association in the Diaspora from having been a religio-political presence on the public scene in Galilee and Judea.

7.3 *Jesus, Kingdom, Synagogue*

The public/civic synagogues were key to the administration of the land, and provided a network within which local populations could experience that they were part of a nation, that they were “citizens,” if you like, despite the fact that the land was split up under different rulers approved by Rome.²² The temple in Jerusalem provided a focal point for such national identity, but the distinctiveness of various forms of Jewish identity was shaped and played out locally, based on local interpretation of Jewish law.²³ The importance of this network of public synagogues through which the land was governed locally can hardly be overstated, since it provided an arena for maintaining a sense of common iden-

in association settings, it is not easy to prove that Judaism and Christianity, understood in this way, ever belonged together in a common institutional milieu (and thus it is equally difficult to argue that there ever was a “parting of the ways” between them). This has implications for how we reconstruct early relations (conflicts, co-existence etc.) between Jews and (non-Jewish or Jewish) Christ-believers. This is not the place, however, to develop such implications further, but we shall return to the issue in Part III below.

²¹ So most clearly John 18:19–20: “Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, “I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret.”“ On these verses, see Birger Olsson, ““All My Teaching was Done in Synagogues” (John 18,20),” in *Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel: Essays by the Members of the SNTS Johannine Writings Seminar*, ed. G. Van Belle, J.G. Van der Watt and P. Maritz, BETL 184 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 203–224. See also the paradigmatic and summarizing presentations of Jesus’s proclamation in Galilee in Matt 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:39; Luke 4:14–15, 44 [Judea]. This approach of engaging the Jewish people in public political space stands in sharp contrast to the sectarian theology known from the sectarian writings among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which are focused on saving the few rather than aiming for a mass movement through activities in public settings.

²² Cf. the strategy to establish and maintain national identity through teaching law locally in 2 Chron 16:7–9. However, in the first century there is little evidence of direct political channels through which Jerusalem officials controlled other parts of the country in this way, and interpretation of law was left to local town and village officials. For discussion, see Runesson, *Origins*, Ch. 4.

²³ For discussion of local interpretation of Torah in synagogues, see Ch. 5 above.

tity, which included a retained focus on Jerusalem.²⁴ The political unity of the land had been lost after the death of Herod I, but we should keep in mind that Jesus and his contemporaries were raised by parents and socialized in communities that had themselves experienced that unity under one king. Synagogue institutions provided a space within which individuals and groups, not only officials, could express discontent and urge action.

For our purposes here, we may note the very high probability that anyone who proclaimed the coming of a kingdom in this type of conceptual space, in Galilee and in Judea,²⁵ would inevitably have been understood as announcing,

²⁴ The 2009 discovery of the first-century synagogue at Magdala (= Taricheae; Hebrew: Migdal) provides archaeological evidence for such a connection between synagogues and the Jerusalem temple. In the synagogue, the earliest ever found displaying mosaic floors, the excavators discovered a large carved stone block of unknown purpose. The imagery on the stone is related to the Jerusalem temple and is executed in such a way that it makes it likely, in my view, that the stone was a three-dimensional representation of the temple itself. The most detailed discussion of this stone block hitherto published is Binder, "The Mystery of the Magdala Stone," 17–48. See also Mordechai Aviam, "The Decorated Stone from the Synagogue at Migdal: A Holistic Interpretation and a Glimpse into the Life of Galilean Jews at the Time of Jesus," *NovT* 55 (2013): 205–220. One of the earliest presentations of the synagogue is found in Jürgen K. Zangenberg, "Archaeological News from the Galilee: Tiberias, Magdala and Rural Galilee," *EC* 1 (2010): 471–482. See also Marcela Zapata-Meza, "Neue mexicanische Ausgrabungen in Magdala," in *Bauern, Fischer und Propheten – Galiäa zur Zeit Jesu*, ed. Jürgen K. Zangenberg and Jens Schröter (Darmstadt: von Zabern, 2012), 85–98; Mordechai Aviam, "Zwischen Meer und See – Geschichte und Kultur Galiläas von Simon Makkabäus bis zu Flavius Josephus," in *Bauern, Fischer und Propheten – Galiäa zur Zeit Jesu*, ed. Jürgen K. Zangenberg and Jens Schröter (Darmstadt: von Zabern, 2012), 13–38; Dina Avshalom-Gorni and Arfan Najjar, "Primeros resultados por parte de la Autoridad de Antigüedades de Israel," *El Pensador* 1.5 (2013): 40–45. Levine, *Visual Judaism*, briefly mentions the synagogue (and the stone block), noting the link between synagogue and temple (55–56, 337–338). For more comprehensive discussion, see Jordan J. Ryan, "Magdala," in *Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry and Lazarus Wentz (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2013); Jordan J. Ryan, "Public and Semi-Public Synagogues of the Land of Israel During the Second Temple Period," *El Pensador* 1.5 (2013): 32–39; and the discussion of Magdala in Jordan J. Ryan, *The Role of the Synagogue in the Aims of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017). See also Richard Bauckham and Stefano De Luca's important discussion of Magdala, including the synagogue and the decorated stone block, summarizing much of the present state of research: "Magdala As We Now Know It," *EC* 6 (2015): 91–118. As Mark A. Chancey, "The Ethnicities of Galileans," in *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods*, vol. 1: *Life, Culture, and Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 121, notes: "The presence of a symbol so closely related to the temple points to the importance of that institution for the Galilean Jews who gathered here".

²⁵ Mark and Matthew chronologically and geographically divide Jesus's proclamation into two phases, with Jesus being active in Galilee before leaving for Judea. John has Jesus traveling back and forth, proclaiming his message in public synagogues in both regions as well as in Samaria. Luke merges these traditions, having a clear focus on Galilee while still mentioning that Jesus taught in the synagogues of Judea (Luke 4:44; on the meaning of "Judea" as referring here to the entirety of the land rather than the specific region see, e.g., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX*, AYBC 28 [Garden City: Doubleday, 1982], 556–558). For discussion of the representation of synagogue institutions in the Gospels and in relation to the historical Jesus, see Anders Runesson, "The Historical Jesus, the Gospels, and First-Century Jewish Society: The Importance of the Synagogue for Understanding the New

in one way or another, the religio-political reunification and restoration of the nation.²⁶ In this regard, the setting itself provides a hermeneutical key to such proclamation, which cannot be ignored without the loss of historical precision.²⁷ Thus, talk about the kingdom of the God of Israel in the religio-political and administrative centers of the land of Israel would inescapably have been interpreted as having what we would call political and national implications for the people of Israel. While ideas about other nations may have had a place in such discourses, they could never be more than peripheral, ultimately filling the function of focusing attention on the Jewish nation; its past, present, and future.²⁸

We see this overall dynamic involving ethnic identity in relation to land and law being played out in Matthew's Gospel. In this text, Jesus requires his disciples to proclaim in word and deed the kingdom *only* in the land of Israel – designated as such by Matthew – excluding Samaria and other non-Jewish areas.²⁹ Institutionally, Matthew's story is historically embedded in Galilee and Judea like few other New Testament texts, and this has consequences for how the theology, and missiology, of the text is developed.³⁰ It is likely that Matthew

Testament,” in *A City Set on a Hill*, 265–297. A brief overview is available in Anders Runesson, “Synagogue,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 903–911. See now also the comprehensive study on the historical Jesus and ancient synagogues by Ryan, *Role of the Synagogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017).

²⁶ Cf. Acts 1:6.

²⁷ Cf. Halvor Moxnes's emphasis on place as an explanatory category; *Putting Jesus in His Place: Radical Vision of Household and Kingdom* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2003). While it seems that some non-organizational institutions were challenged by Jesus, as Moxnes argues, it is noteworthy that the synagogue, as an institution, was not, but was in fact used as a key platform for the proclamation of the kingdom. As administrative institutions in a time period when religion and politics were not understood as separate spheres of society, the conceptual space provided by public synagogues meant that local expressions of ethnic identity, or peoplehood, were formed in relation to ideological perceptions of, and realities associated with the land in a hermeneutical setting that was, at its core, sustained by the public reading of divine law. In other words, the public synagogue institutions of the land provided a forum where the four intertwined aspects of what we call “religion,” as discussed by Mason – *ethnos*, land, law and God – could materialize in a very concrete sense.

²⁸ It is also worth noting, as we consider the structure of these institutions, that since the current moment and tradition as expressed in Torah were interpreted through open discussion and debate, as also synagogue architecture indicates, such a message could spread fast and be regarded as undermining the current status quo. This would have threatened those who benefitted from maintaining status quo, so that conflict would have been unavoidable. Cf. Keith, *Jesus Against the Scribal Elite*, who contrasts the social status of Jesus with that of the officials working in these institutional settings; the status discrepancy in and of itself would have been enough to create conflict, regardless of the message proclaimed.

²⁹ Matt 10:5–7: “Go nowhere among the gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’”

³⁰ Cf. the tradition reported in Acts 1:6–7.

preserves historical data better than other gospels with regard to the overall setting in which the historical Jesus proclaimed his message.³¹

The question is now if proclamation such as that of the historical Jesus can at all be exported beyond (the political entity of) the land of Israel. It would seem that significant adaptations and adjustments, loss of political urgency being among them, would be required if this were to be done. The answer to the question depends to no small degree on how we reconstruct the shift in the nature of the Jewish institutional structures, from the land to the Diaspora. If kingdom proclamation to Jews within local political institutions governing the land is to be communicated to Jews living outside of the land, with the understanding that it carried implications for them too, this had to be done in institutions which had no political or administrative functions related to the society in which they were situated. Furthermore, as many other Greco-Roman associations,³² these Jewish associations would have had among their numbers people from various ethnic backgrounds (sometimes called god-fearers). Somewhat simplified, the earliest Jewish Christ-followers travelling beyond the land with the kingdom message were thus faced with two major hermeneutical problems:

- (a) How should a religio-political message entangled with a specific land be proclaimed outside that land in an unofficial institution lacking political functions? Will the shift in institutional setting in itself automatically lead to loss of political urgency? Will it require “spiritualization” of the message?
- (b) How should a message focused on the restoration of the nation of a specific ethnic group be proclaimed in a setting in which people of various ethnic backgrounds were present, who, to varying degrees, were loyal to the God of that ethnic group? Can issues relating to peoplehood, or “citizenship,” be renegotiated?

None of these questions was relevant in the religio-political institutional settings in which Jesus operated and proclaimed the kingdom. Indeed, it is quite

³¹ The establishment of the Matthean *ekklesiā*, however, is certainly a later tradition which is given legitimacy through placing in Jesus’s mouth its founding idea (Matt 16:18; 18:17). This later institutional reality matches, as will be clear below, the so-called great commission in Matthew 28:18–20, where disciples are told to go beyond the land.

³² See John S. Kloppenborg and Richard S. Ascough, *Greco-Roman Associations: Texts, Translations, and Commentary 1: Attica, Central Greece, Macedonia, Thrace*, BZNW 181 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011): Mixed associations with both citizens and immigrants (noncitizens): *IG* II² 1316 [= *GRA* I 16] (Piraeus, 272/271 BCE); *IG* II² 1323 [= *GRA* I 31] (Athens, 194/193 BCE); *IG* II² 1324 [= *GRA* I 32] (Piraeus, ca. 190 BCE) (?); *IG* II² 1327 [= *GRA* I 35] (Piraeus, 178/177 BCE); *SEG* 36:228 [= *GRA* I 38] (Attica, 159/158 BCE); *SEG* 42:157 [= *GRA* I 41] (Athens, ca. 116/115–ca. 95/94 BCE); *IG* II² 1012 [= *GRA* I 42] (Athens, 112/111 BCE); *IG* II² 2361 [= *GRA* I 52] (Piraeus, 200–211 CE); *SEG* 46:744 [= *GRA* I 65] (Edessa, 51 CE); *CIL* 3.633 [68] (Philippi, II CE); *SEG* 46:800 [= *GRA* I 72] (Pydna, 250 CE); *SEG* 42:625 [75] (Thessaloniki, 90–91 CE); *IG* X/2.1 259 [= *GRA* I 76] (Thessaloniki, I CE); *ICiliciaBM* II 201 (before 69 CE [= *GRA* I 150]).

unlikely that any of them – or the theological solutions triggered by them – would have ever been brought up had the movement not spread beyond the land and its public synagogues. Given that these two problems, which are of key importance for Paul, arose as a direct consequence of the shift in institutional setting from land to Diaspora, we need, arguably, to understand the foundation of Paul’s theology as developing from attempts at solving them. Indeed, the *very idea* of a “gentile mission” is best explained not by any original theological need, but by institutional structures necessitating theological response.

7.4 *Christ as Association in Paul’s Three-Dimensional Theology*

What, then, does all this mean for our study of Paul? Analytically, sociology and anthropology should precede theology. Theology is, arguably, better understood if studied as an integral part of the intricate social web in which human beings exist and without which human behavior can hardly be explained. From this perspective, Paul’s globalized Christ emerges, as we shall see, as patterned theologically on the association model, an institutional model that was “portable” and did not depend on political bodies and ethnic identity for its survival. One could say, perhaps, that in this sense these association synagogues, which existed before Paul’s arrival on the historical scene, functioned ideologically somewhat like the earth Naaman the Syrian brought with him to his homeland when he returned there after having been cured from his skin disease by Elisha in Israel; the interconnectedness between God and land necessitated a solution in which Naaman’s newfound loyalty to the God of Israel could be expressed.³³ In a similar way, ideology connected with the land could be retained in Jewish Diaspora associations, which, as we see in several inscriptions and papyri, were often regarded as holy space;³⁴ the holy land became “portable,”³⁵ so that the

³³ 2 Kgs 5:17–18. As Luke 4:27 indicates, the story of Naaman was remembered and used by Christ-followers in the first century to make ethno-theological points.

³⁴ On synagogues as holy space, see Steven Fine, *This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the Synagogue During the Greco-Roman Period* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998); Binder, *Temple Courts*. While these scholars view synagogues both in the Diaspora and in the land as sacred precincts, in my view the evidence allows for such an understanding of Jewish associations primarily in the Diaspora. For discussion of holiness in connection with ritual washings as related to synagogues, see Anders Runesson, “Water and Worship: Ostia and the Ritual Bath in the Diaspora Synagogue,” in *The Synagogue of Ancient Ostia and the Jews of Rome: Interdisciplinary Studies*, ed. Birger Olsson, Dieter Mitternacht and Olof Brandt, SSIR.4° 57 (Jonsered: Åström, 2001), 115–129. On the understanding of sacred space as related to synagogues in Josephus, see Krause, *Synagogues in the Works of Flavius Josephus*.

³⁵ Not halakhically, though; the land of Israel itself required some specific laws to be observed there, which did not apply outside of the land.

God of Israel could be worshipped outside of the land of Israel as the law was read and discussed every Sabbath.³⁶

These developments within Diaspora Judaism were thus general and triggered by the Diaspora experience *as such*, as it involves the four aspects of people, land, law and God in places beyond the homeland where the navel of the world was, in the Jewish worldview, located: the Jerusalem temple. It is within this larger Diaspora matrix Paul needs to be understood, as he interprets the implications of the Christ event for the world. For Paul, the “portable” elements of Judaism were held together in the “in Christ” concept,³⁷ whose theological nature was, in turn, compatible with, indeed built upon, the structures of the associations. The concrete basic institutional form of the association gave stability to the reconfiguration and globalization of the Christ figure and gave members *a sense of theology as lived reality*.

As is well known, Paul’s favorite designation for the people who belonged to the movement that he was working to expand was *ekklēsia*. Now, this term, which traditionally referred to Greco-Roman public political institutions, was used by other Jews too, both for public institutions, i.e., what we would call public synagogues,³⁸ and, less often, as a designation for Jewish associations.³⁹ Theologically, for Paul, the people who were members of his *ekklēsiai* existed *en Christō*, “in Christ”.⁴⁰ In other words, to be “in Christ” is for Paul equivalent to belong to the *ekklēsia* of Christ.

In brief, Paul describes what it means to be a member of his *ekklēsia*, theologically, in the following way. To live “in Christ” is to have joined the life of the Spirit (Rom 8:2; cf. Col 3:3; 2 Tim 1:1), which is eternal and given by God for free (Rom 6:11, 23). In this conceptual space, members will have access to God’s

³⁶ The reading of law in synagogues in the Diaspora is evidenced in literary sources such as Philo, Josephus, and Acts; for texts and translations, see *ASSB*). Here one may compare with the idea of the Talmud as portable land, as discussed by Daniel Boyarin in a paper delivered at Uppsala University in 2014. I am grateful to Rebecca Runesson for stimulating conversations on this topic as applied also to the first century and Christ-groups in the Diaspora.

³⁷ Cf. the reception of Paul in Col 1:17: “in him all things hold together”.

³⁸ This is evident not least in Josephus’s use of the term. For discussion, see Krause, *Synagogues in the Works of Flavius Josephus*.

³⁹ For this use of the term in Philo, see *ASSB*, nos. 201, 202, 203, and comprehensive discussion in Korner, *Origin and Meaning of Ekklēsia*.

⁴⁰ E.g., Gal 1:22; 1 Thess 2:14. Note also the expression *ekklēsia tou theou* (2 Thess 1:4; 1 Cor 1:2; cf. 1 Tim 3:5) and the notion that the *ekklēsia* lives in the father and the Christ (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1). On the corporate nature of being “in Christ,” see also Rom 12:5. Cf. the reception of Paul in Eph 1:22–23; Col 1:24, where *ekklēsia* is described as the body of the Christ. Christ can also be described as the head of the *ekklēsia*, i.e., as an integral part of the larger entity (Eph 5:23; Col 1:18). The expression *en Christō* occurs 76 times in the New Testament, and all but three (1 Pet 3:16; 5:10, 14) are found in the undisputed and disputed letters of Paul. *Ekklēsia* occurs 114 times in the New Testament. While it is mentioned most frequently in the Pauline corpus (61 times), the term is also used in Matthew’s Gospel, Acts, Hebrews, James, 3 John, and Revelation.

love (Rom 8:39; cf. Phil 2:1–5; 1 Tim 1:14; 2 Tim 1:13) and grace (1 Cor 1:4; cf. Eph 2:7; 2 Tim 1:9; 2:1). Indeed, people who are “in Christ” even stand in God’s presence (2 Cor 2:17; cf. 2 Cor 12:2; Eph 2:6). For this to be possible there needs to be a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; cf. Eph 2:10), where people can walk with God as “sons of God” *en Christō* (Gal 3:26). The reference to creation signals that God’s intentions go beyond the Jewish people, although Paul construes non-Jewish access to this new creation through reference to Abraham, the forefather of the Jewish people; it is “in Christ,” i.e., in the *ekklēsia*, that non-Jews will have access to the blessings promised to Abraham (Gal 3:14; cf. Eph 2:13; 3:6). Since “in Christ” God is reconciling God-self with the world (2 Cor 5:19; cf. Eph 4:32) – i.e., God is recreating the world so that human beings can walk in God’s presence – life “in Christ” keeps the member safe from condemnation in the final judgment (Rom 8:1; cf. 2 Tim 2:10).⁴¹

As noted earlier, Torah was read on a weekly basis both in the land and in the Diaspora. Paul, finally, claims that the direct relationship with God that those who are “in Christ” enjoy leads to a clarity of sight with regard to the understanding of holy scriptures that does not exist outside Christ (2 Cor 3:14). Only in his *ekklēsia* can scripture be properly understood. All of this takes place “in Christ” and thus also in the institutional space of the *ekklēsia* (1 Thess 2:14; Gal 1:22). Contrary to the concept of *en Christō*, however, the *ekklēsia* is more than a theological notion; it is also an institutional reality. *En Christō* language *theologizes* that institutional reality. The institutional character and structure of the *ekklēsia* must thus be thought of as correlating with the theological construal of the Christ. This, if the social is to take analytical precedence over the theological, leads to a situation in which association structures, which as institutional phenomena predate Paul, will constitute basic defining parameters as Paul theologially reconfigures the Christ figure as a global category.

In order to illustrate this socio-theological situation, we shall discuss a well-known passage in Paul, in which his theological claims, rather than being a radical departure from his Jewish and Greco-Roman context, in fact mirror a Jewish association setting, which in turn differed from how social roles were construed in public Greco-Roman society on the one hand and in domestic settings on the other: Gal 3:28. In this passage, Paul famously claims that, “[t]here is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”⁴²

⁴¹ This does not, however, mean that members will escape suffering on earth, as is evidenced by Paul’s own suffering. In this regard, cf. the reception of Paul in 2 Tim 3:12–17.

⁴² For a brief comment on this text in relation to Jewish associations, see *ASSB*, 13. Cf. Rom 10:12 (“For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him”); 1 Cor 12:13 (“For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit”). See also Col 3:11 (“In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all”). Note that

Looking at membership patterns in Greco-Roman associations they could vary, some being reserved exclusively for women,⁴³ others exclusively for men.⁴⁴ Many, however, were open to both men and women,⁴⁵ and this included Jewish associations (synagogues), as we also know from Josephus.⁴⁶ The same can be said about the social and the ethnic aspects. Within the context of an association, slave and free could interact in ways they could hardly do in other spheres of ancient society.⁴⁷ While some associations were founded around cults origi-

only Galatians has included the gender category; the other passages focus on ethnicity and social identity. On the reception history of Gal 3:28, see Pauline Nigh Hogan, “*No Longer Male and Female*”: *Interpreting Galatians 3:28 in Early Christianity*, LNTS 380 (London: T&T Clark, 2008); see also Karin B. Neutel, *A Cosmopolitan Ideal: Paul’s Declaration ‘Neither Jew Nor Greek, Neither Slave Nor Free, Nor Male and Female’ in the Context of First-Century Thought*, LNTS 513 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015).

⁴³ Cf. the cult of the Bona Dea. This cult was performed annually on the highest political level as a state matter for the benefit of the Roman people; at such times men were excluded and the ritual was presided over by the chief magistrate’s wife and the Vestal Virgins. Sources beyond the literary describe the circumstances surrounding the cult differently; slaves and freed persons are often indicated as worshippers, men could be among the dedicants, and children could also be members of *collegia* dedicated to this cult. These discrepancies do not have to be interpreted as contradictory in nature, but simply as indicating that people from lower social strata were involved in the cult of a goddess, which they knew to be of importance also for the aristocracy and the state as a whole. For discussion of the cultic celebrations of the Bona Dea among the associations, see Hendrik H.J. Brouwer, *Bona Dea: The Sources and a Description of the Cult*, Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l’Empire romain 110 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 372–85.

⁴⁴ E.g., the Mithras cult.

⁴⁵ Cf. Kloppenborg and Ascough, *Greco-Roman Associations: Syll³* = AGRW 121: “When entering this house let men and women, free people and household slaves, swear by all the gods ...” See also *IG* II² 2358 [= *GRA* I 40] (Athens, ca. 135 BCE?); *IG* II² 1365/66 [= *GRA* I 53] (Laurion, ca. 200 CE); *SEG* 46:800 [= *GRA* I 72] (Pydna, 250 CE); *Syll³* [= *GRA* II 117] (Philadelphia, II–I BCE). On women in associations generally, see *IG* II² 1298 [= *GRA* I 20] (Athens, 248/247 BCE); *IG* II² 1292 [= *GRA* I 26] (Athens or Piraeus?, 215/214 BCE); *IG* II² 2354 [= *GRA* I 30] (Athens, ca. 200 BCE); *IG* II² 2358 [= *GRA* I 40] (Athens, ca. 135 BCE?); *SEG* 54:235 [= *GRA* I 47] (Epano Liosia, ca. 50 BCE); *IG* II² 1365/66 [= *GRA* I 53] (Laurion, ca. 200 CE); *IG* VII 688 [= *GRA* I 57] (Tanagra); *CIG* II 2007f [= *GRA* I 66] (Hagios Mamas, II CE); *Philippi* II 340/L589 [= *GRA* I 71] (I–II CE?); *IG* X/2.1 260 [= *GRA* I 81] (Thessaloniki, III CE); *IPerinthos* 57 [= *GRA* I 88] (II CE?); *IKyme* 37 [= *GRA* II 105] (late I BCE or early I CE); *IJO* II 36 [= *GRA* II 106] (Kyme or Phokaia, III CE); *SEG* 28:953 [= *GRA* II 108] (Kyzikos area, ca. 25–50 CE); *IJO* II 168 [= *GRA* II 113] (Akmoneia area, late I CE or early II CE); *TAM* V 1539 [= *GRA* II 117] (Philadelphia, ca. 100 BCE); *TAM* V 972 [= *GRA* II 123] (Thyateira, ca. 50 CE); *ISmyrna* 653 (I–II CE [= *GRA* II 138]); *ISmyrna* 728 [= *GRA* II 140] (II CE); *SEG* 17:503 (Miletos, late III BCE or II BCE [= *GRA* I 143]); *TAM* III 4 and 62 [= *GRA* II 147] (Termessos, II CE); *ICiliciaDF* 46 (I–II CE [= *GRA* II 153]).

⁴⁶ See, e.g., *A.J.* 14.256–258 (*ASSB*, no. 109); 14.259–261 (*ASSB*, no. 113). Cf. a Jewish woman’s release of her slave in a synagogue (*proseuchē*) as witnessed by an inscription from Panticapaeum in the Bosphoran Kingdom (*ASSB*, no. 126).

⁴⁷ Cf. the inscriptions listed above, n. 52. For Roman citizens, freedmen, and slaves, see *CIL* 3.633 [= *GRA* I 68] (Philippi, II CE). For more on how associations could afford individuals of different status social and economic opportunities that were not accessible to them in society at large, see Verboven, “Associative Order,” 860–893.

nating as specific ethnic cults, such as the Egyptian Isis cult, ethnic diversity in the membership could emerge as a result of a general appreciation in a given place of a specific god or goddess as exceptionally powerful.⁴⁸

The state of things was similar in Jewish associations in the Diaspora, where the existence of the so-called god-fearers indicates comparable de-ethnosizing processes even before the arrival of the Jesus movement. As for slaves, we know from the Bosporan kingdom inscriptions that they were manumitted in synagogue settings (*proseuchai*), and that their continued loyalty to the Jewish community was stated as a condition of their freedom.⁴⁹ In other words, Greco-Roman *and* Jewish associations allowed for an alternative world to be enacted, in which roles could be construed beyond the ethnic, social, and gender parameters that determined interaction between people elsewhere in society. In Gal 3:28, Paul invests such inclusive institutional structures with theological content in order to explain what he believes to be the reality of being an *ekklēsia* “in Christ.” Paul thus approved of the basic institutional realities with which his targeted audience was already familiar; indeed, within which they all already lived. Association membership structures and the type of (mixed) interaction that follows from them captures, contrary to official public institutions and social roles in the domestic sphere, what it means to live “in Christ,” to be part of the *ekklēsia* destined for the goal of the alternative world of the coming kingdom.⁵⁰ The hermeneutics involved here are similar to those ascribed to Paul in Acts, where he is depicted as taking an already existing cult on the Areopagus as a point of departure for explaining the nature and importance of the Jewish deity he is now proclaiming (Acts 17:22–31).⁵¹ Analogically, in the same way as the Lukan Paul can tell the Greeks that, “What you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you,” we could say that the Paul of the letters informs the Galatians in 3:28 that “what you unknowingly do as you organize yourselves and assemble in these associations, this I proclaim to you as charged with a deeper (theological) meaning.”⁵²

⁴⁸ On the aspect of expansion (mission) in such cults, see Ch. 3 above.

⁴⁹ For sources, consult the index in *ASSB*. See also discussion of these inscriptions in Philip A. Harland, *Greco-Roman Associations: Texts, Translations, and Commentary. II: North Coast of Black Sea, Asia Minor*, BZNTW 204 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

⁵⁰ Cf. the related argument, based on a different approach, in Mark D. Nanos, “The Question of Conceptualization: Qualifying Paul’s Position on Circumcision in Dialogue with Josephus’ Advisors to King Izates,” in *Paul within Judaism*, ed. Nanos and Zetterholm, 105–152.

⁵¹ Note Acts 17:23: “For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.” Cf. Acts 17:28: “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’”

⁵² One may also compare with the hermeneutics of John’s Gospel, as this text relates Jesus to already existing Jewish rituals and festivals, which are then charged with additional

The Pauline understanding of the identity of Christ as the *ekklēsia* is thus based on, not formed in opposition to, Jewish and Greco-Roman organizational forms. The *ekklēsia*, the physical and institutional form of the Christ – the institution that manifests the Christ so that its members can be said to be living “in Christ” – is, therefore, by necessity, an expression of a diasporic Jewish organizational and religious identity, as much as Christ himself is re-imagined as a globalized diasporic Jewish messiah. Paul thus saturated diasporic institutional structures with messianic-theological meaning as a means to proclaim his message in ways that could not only be understood *intellectually* by his target audience, but also *experienced* as a lived reality. This dual strategy, extracting theological significance from existing organizational forms, would have reinforced and retained among members the content of the theological message. The institution is transformed into a theological edifice, within which members live and move and have their being.

But with this identification of Christ as association (*ekklēsia*) follow theological and halakhic questions, especially with regard to the mixed ethnic identities of the members and the role of the Jewish law, as the latter is dependent on the former. It is reasonable to assume that Paul’s thinking regarding these issues, ethnic identity and law, developed *as a consequence of the institutional setting in which he was active*, rather than the other way around, that theological innovation would have created, *ex nihilo*, a need to reinvent institutional structures. In fact, what we see in Jewish and Greco-Roman sources pertaining to associations prevent the latter hypothesis; Paul is thoroughly embedded conceptually and institutionally in Diaspora Judaism. The implication of this is, then, that the much-debated issues of Paul’s understanding of law and related concepts, such as righteousness, need to be understood as in some way *secondary* to the socio-institutional realities described.

Once ethnic groups already present in the Jewish associations have been theologically subsumed under the category Christ, consideration of the law has to follow, since it is intertwined with the Jewish *ethnos*. “In Christ,” then – not, in this case, outside Christ – the law is continually understood as salvific, as Paul also stresses in Rom 3:31. Members of the *ekklēsia* are said to stand in the presence of God, and this is not possible without the purity that is required and fulfilled by observance of the law *in Christ*. For, as Cecilia Wassén has shown in a study on the Dead Sea Scrolls and Paul, you have to be pure even in a metaphorical temple.⁵³ The holy can never co-exist with the impure. The *ekklēsia*,

(theo-ritual) meaning. This type of hermeneutics is based on the presupposition that the rituals and organizational forms referred to are understood by all, author as well as audience, as valid; without such shared views the claims in question would lose their rhetorical force.

⁵³ Wassén, “Do You Have to Be Pure in a Metaphorical Temple?” 55–86. Cf. Annette Weissenrieder, “Do you not know that you are God’s Temple? Towards a New Perspective on Paul’s Temple Image in 1 Corinthians 3:16,” in *Contested Spaces: Houses and Temples in Ro-*

and the individual bodies within the *ekklēsia*, can therefore be construed as sacred space,⁵⁴ fit for the presence of God. The holy space of the *ekklēsia* theologically turns the already sacred synagogues into a “new creation,” a portable holy land, if you like, where God again can walk among humans, and members, as a consequence of God’s presence, can understand the mysteries of the holy scriptures that remain hidden to outsiders.

For Paul, non-Jews and Jews alike will have the law, which Paul defines as love (Rom 13:8–10), fulfilled in this space as it is channeled through the Spirit, which works “in Christ,” directly from God into human hearts (Rom 5:5). In this conceptual space, then, while gentiles must remain gentiles they do fulfil what the law requires even to the point of (metaphorical) circumcision (Phil 3:3),⁵⁵ and they become part of the people of God, or “citizens,” as Ephesians would later have it.⁵⁶ “Faith”/trust (*pistis*) in this theological equation, becomes the tool applied by, or in, humans to open them up for this pouring of law observance (“righteousness”) into their lives. “Justification by faith/*pistis*,” which is a kind of summary statement of this theological process that was initially triggered by the reality of mixed membership in the synagogues, is thus *not replacing the law, but allows for the law to be fulfilled by all*, regardless of ethnic identity.⁵⁷ With such a pattern of thought, Paul manages to have the theo-institutional cake and eat it too.

man Antiquity and the New Testament, ed. David L. Balch and Annette Weissenrieder, WUNT 285 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 377–411.

⁵⁴ 1 Cor 1:2; 3:16–17; 6:17–19; 2 Cor 1:1; 6:16. Cf. Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 9:13–14; Phil 1:1; 4:21. See also the reception of Paul in Eph 1:22–23; 2:19–22; 3:10; 5:27; Col 1:2, 4; 1 Tim 3:16.

⁵⁵ “For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh.” It may be noted that, contrary to later interpretations of Paul, circumcision and the Jewishness that follows with it is regarded as something desirable, something related to salvation, even for those who were not Jews. The metaphorical use of “circumcision” here should not be understood as rejection of the (physical) ritual itself, including its meaning and identity-shaping function. Rather, for Paul, non-Jews enter the people of God and share in the promises *as if* they were circumcised as Paul and his fellow Jewish Christ-followers were. The expression is another way of reinforcing that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek in terms of salvation “in Christ,” a theological position which does not remove the actual ethnic identities of the people who belong within (cf. 1 Cor 7:18). For further discussion of Philippians from an inner-Jewish perspective, see Mark D. Nanos, “Paul’s Polemic in Philippians 3 as Jewish-Subgroup Vilification of Local Non-Jewish Cultic and Philosophical Alternatives,” *JSPL* 3 (2013): 47–91.

⁵⁶ Eph 2:19: “So then you are no longer strangers and resident aliens (*paroikos*), but you are citizens (*sympolitēs*) with the saints and also members of the household of God.”

⁵⁷ On Jewish identity and the non-Jewish in Paul’s thought, cf. Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations,” 232–252; Nanos, “Paul’s Non-Jews,” 26–53. With this type of theological argument, it follows that Paul can claim that he is not “under the law” (*hypo nomon*; cf. 1 Cor 9:20; Gal 5:18; Rom 6:13–15, 22; 7:6, 12, 14; 8:2–11, 14) since, a) *nomos* is under, or in, or materializes through the Christ, and b) is made available to humans through the Spirit, and c) Paul belongs to Christ, the Spirit being active through him; Paul is *en Christō*, and the risen Christ embodies the law. The Jewish *nomos* is thus not, for Paul, abolished or neutralized, since that would unmake the Christ himself and rob the Spirit of the very task it is said to perform in

7.5 Jesus and Israel, Paul and Empire

What have we found then, as we have applied an institution-critical approach to the larger problem of Paul's relationship to Jesus and Judaism? First of all, when the question is approached from the perspective of the institutional settings in which Paul was active, it becomes clear that Paul was deeply embedded in a Jewish Diaspora culture, which itself was influenced by and very much part of a wider Greco-Roman association culture. This can be summarized in a simple chart:

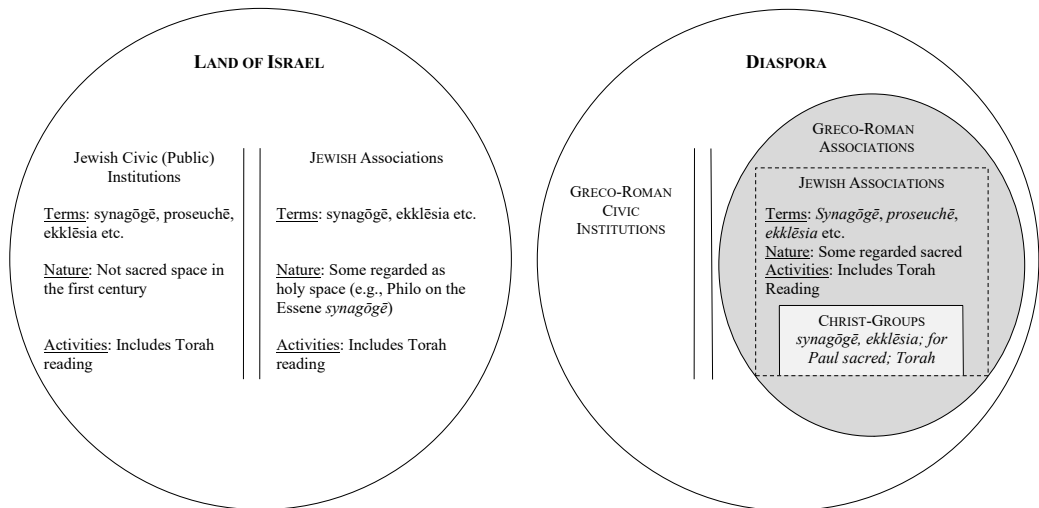


Figure 4. Defining Paul's institutional setting: Synagogues as civic institutions and associations

Judaism cannot therefore, arguably, be treated as a “background” when we seek to understand Paul. Instead, Paul emerges as a Jew who proclaims a form of Judaism that allows for preserved ethnic diversity within its institutional and theological discourses. In this setting, Paul's theology materializes as indissolubly intertwined with the structural and conceptual realities in which it was formulated. Several of the key issues in the study of Paul that have been debated especially since the Reformation, such as the place of the Jewish law in the greater context of the theme of justification by faith, surface as enculturated responses to a specific setting rather than as theological innovation *ex nihilo*, or as a direct continuation of the proclamation of the historical Jesus, who had no need for such theology to make his point and gather a following. Indeed, few, or none, of the questions Paul tried to solve in his associations were institutionally relevant in the public (civic) synagogue institutions of the land. While Jesus worked within what we may call “national” parameters, as also evidenced by his

human beings as it transforms them. Rather, its place in the universe is reconfigured as it is enabled through the Spirit. See also discussion in Ch. 8 below.

interest and actions in the Jerusalem temple, Paul's hermeneutic seems more related to a form of empire, as he allows for full "citizenship" for people of diverse nationalities in his globalized *ekklēsia*. Loyalty to the "emperor" Christ can be expressed fully even by the *ethnē* of the "provinces."⁵⁸

Of course, none of this says anything about the value of potential spiritual truths inherent in these aspects of Pauline theology. To be sure, my aim here has not been to "de-spiritualize" or invalidate Pauline theology – *mē genoito!* – but rather to seek answers to questions about how theology is shaped in and by context. This I have done taking as point of departure the basic conviction that theology is best understood when conclusions are founded on integrated analyses, which consider the body when it searches for a soul. How, then, is this institution, this multi-ethnic empire with its *ekklēsiai*, to be run? If theology is intertwined with institution, then we would expect that there would be rules that would institutionalize the diversity we see proclaimed. We would expect there to be a rule for all the *ekklēsiai* establishing unity within the diversity.

⁵⁸ In modern terms, if Jesus aimed to bring about a theocratic kingdom, re-establishing the monarchy, Paul understood himself as the minister of foreign affairs in an empire run by the Christ.

8. Paul's Rule in all the *Ekklesiāi*

Finding a Core in his Message

8.1 Is there a Core in Pauline Thought?

The letters of the apostle – or perhaps better: emissary – to the nations¹ have been interpreted in numerous ways through the centuries. For almost two thousand years, as indicated by Acts 21:20–26, one of the key elements in most readings of Paul has been Paul's understanding of the Jewish law and its validity (or not) after the coming of the Christ. This quest for the place of the law, and thus also of the Jewish people, in Pauline thought and practice is still a major issue in the scholarly debate.² While the absolute majority of interpreters of Paul through the ages have been (non-Jewish) Christians, this has begun to change in the last half-century or so. We are now in a situation in which no clear consensus exists on these matters; Protestants, Catholics, Jews from different denominational backgrounds, agnostics, and atheists, form new patterns of agreement and disagreement across confessional divides.³

For the historical study of Paul, therefore, the age-old question of a possible center in his writings, a hermeneutical hub around which Paul's theology turns as it addresses problems arising in the congregations he directs his correspondence to, becomes crucial. If such a theological core could be identified, we would have access to an interpretive key with which to unlock other ambiguous passages in his letters and so find more common ground on which to build continued discussions. While all agree that we do not find in Paul's writings a systematic theology in the modern sense, opinions differ regarding what exactly would constitute a theological and hermeneutical center of his thought, if such a core

¹ E.g., Rom 1:5, 13; 11:13–14; 15:16.

² Cf. Westerholm, *Perspectives New and Old*, who points to Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977) as a turning point in Pauline scholarship (xvii). On diversity of interpretation within Judaism, see Langton, *Apostle Paul*. For a discussion of scholarship on Paul, see Magnus Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul*. William S. Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*, LNTS 322 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), places the question in the bigger picture by relating the historical Paul to the emergence of what became Christianity. See also Matthew V. Novenson, "The Jewish Messiahs, the Pauline Christ, and the Gentile Question," *JBL* 128 (2009): 357–373; Matthew Thiessen, "Paul's Argument against Gentile Circumcision in Romans 2:17–29," *NovT* 56 (2014): 373–391. Paula Fredriksen, *Paul: The Pagans' Apostle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

³ See discussion in Ch. 1 above.

exists at all.⁴ This is where Paul's rule in all the *ekklēsiai* (1 Cor 7:17–24) provides us with a valuable point of entry into the apostles thought world.⁵ The rule is said to be universal; if we study what Paul has to say in this passage we may therefore be able to identify some of his core convictions.

Our guiding question in this chapter is thus: What exactly is it that Paul wants to communicate in 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 and why is this so important for him? We shall proceed as follows. A brief discussion of the structure of the passage leads to an analysis of the meaning of Paul's rule and the theology behind it in light of other undisputed Pauline letters. Finally, we shall place this theology in its socio-institutional setting in order to extract from that setting additional explanatory information that may assist us in understanding Pauline thought and practice.

8.2 Structure and Meaning

Emphasis and meaning are indicated to some degree in the structure of a passage. First Corinthians 7:17–24 is a carefully crafted pericope, in which the different elements describe a chiasmic-like pattern: (A) represents the universal rule, (B) the concrete implications of the universal rule, and (C) theological support adduced to reinforce the legitimacy of the individual rulings.⁶

The universal rule (A) is repeated three times in places inhabiting a maximum of rhetorical emphasis. The first repetition of the rule functions as a divider between two examples illustrating how Paul understands the rule to be implemented socio-ethnically (B₁) and socio-economically (B₂). Each example is followed by theological statements that underpin the behavior endorsed (C₁₋₂).

⁴ Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, WUNT 29, 2nd ed (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), claims that Paul is inconsistent; any search for a center of thought is futile. Cf. discussion in Westerholm, *Perspectives New and Old*, 164–177.

⁵ For discussion of this passage, see David J. Rudolph, "Paul's 'Rule in All the Churches' (1 Cor 7:17–24) and Torah-Defined Ecclesiological Variegation," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 5, no. 1 (2010). Cited November 22, 2021. Open Access: <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/scjr/article/view/1556>; Adam Gregerman, "Response to Papers Presented at the American Academy of Religion Conference," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 5, no. 1 (2010). Cited November 22, 2021. Open Access: <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/scjr/article/view/1559>. See also David J. Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23*, WUNT 2.304 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 75–88.

⁶ Translation follows New Revised Standard Version with some exceptions, as noted.

A However that may be, let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God has called you. This is my rule in all the *ekklēsiai*.

B₁ Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision.

C₁ *Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything.*

A Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called.

B₂ Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. But if you are able to become free, use instead freedom.⁷

C₂ *For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters.*

A In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God.

From this structure we may conclude that, based on an emerging supra-local authority structure for Christ-groups,⁸ Paul is reinforcing rules he believes to be theologically critical.⁹ Circumcision and socio-economic status function as key carriers for Paul's eschatological convictions; by investigating these carriers of meaning we might be able to access data revealing the hermeneutical hub around which core aspects of Paul's theology is built.

8.3 Theology and Socio-Ritual Behavior

The two problems, socio-ethnic and socio-economic status, which the universal rule aims at solving, indicate that Paul's thinking is "layered" hierarchically. When he encounters on the ground what he perceives to be problematic circumstances, he approaches them referring to what he believes are foundational (the-

⁷ Alternative translation: "Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever" (NRSV). For the present translation, cf. J. Albert Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity*, Hermeneutische Untersuchungen Zur Theologie 32 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 68–128, esp. 108–121. Slaves had, ultimately, no control over their own lives; change may occur with or without their consent.

⁸ With the growing network of interconnected communities of believers in Jesus in the Mediterranean world followed a need for some sort of intercongregational (supra-local) authority structure that could express, or regulate, the basic unity of the many and diverse local expressions of belief in Jesus that had developed.

⁹ *Contra* Gregerman, "Response," 3. Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYBC (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 306: "it is best to recognize [these verses] as formulating a principle on which the other more specific topics are based."

ological) principles, the implications of which are then applied to specific social contexts. The two rules on circumcision and slavery respectively show that some people in Corinth – and elsewhere (7:17) – interpreted the Christ-event as implying that (a) Jewish identity had become insignificant, and (b) slavery was a state in which an individual “in Christ” should not be (cf. Gal 3:28). For Paul, neither (a) nor (b) harmonized well with the acute eschatological reality through which he understood the present moment.

8.3.1 Circumcision

The rule itself is clear: those who are circumcised must remain so, and those who are not must not seek to become circumcised. What are the theological implications of this ruling? In his letters, Paul uses the word translated as “circumcised” as corresponding to the word “Jew.”¹⁰ While he understands both words to refer ultimately to a (positive) spiritual reality (Rom 2:25–3:4, 31; 4:9–12), which he connects with “faithfulness,” he does not reject the physicality of being circumcised or its implications for Jewish religio-ethnic identity (cf. Rom 3:1–4). Circumcision carries with it not only social implications but also spiritual significance. Paul may therefore describe circumcision as a “seal of righteousness.”¹¹ Circumcision is connected to peoplehood, and precisely for this reason it also relates to divine law (cf. Rom 4:16; Gal 5:3).¹² From this follows that when Paul declares that the circumcised must not reverse their circumcision, he rules that Jews “in Christ” must remain Jewish and keep the Jewish law, since keeping the Torah is inextricably intertwined with circumcision and ethnicity (Gal 5:3).¹³

Conversely, this principle leads to Paul’s insistence that the uncircumcised maintain their non-Jewish status; gentiles must not keep the Jewish law in the way Jews (should) do, since this law was given only to those who were circum-

¹⁰ For recent discussions on circumcision, especially as it relates to the Pauline correspondence, see most recently the Special Issue on circumcision, *JJMJS* 8 (2021), Cited November 22, 2021. Open Access: <http://www.jjmjs.org/>.

¹¹ Rom 4:11–12, where this is said in relation to Abraham and his faithfulness before and after circumcision. For Paul, this turns Abraham into the ancestor of both circumcised and uncircumcised; both categories are legitimate in Paul’s thought, unified by the category faithfulness (*pistis*; cf. Rom 15:8–9).

¹² On the connection between people, land, law, and God in ancient society, see Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 457–512.

¹³ Matthew Thiessen’s argument that there existed during the second temple period a strand of Jewish thinking which only understood eighth-day circumcision as valid for true ethnic belonging is interesting to note here, since if such understanding of circumcision were applied to Paul (see Thiessen, “Paul’s Argument,” 373–391), then the circumcision that is being spoken of here is not actually attainable for non-Jews. See Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*. While I am not yet convinced by this argument as it relates to Paul (see the critique by Dibley, “Making and Unmaking of Jews,” 3–23), the interpretive options that such a reading would open up are quite interesting.

cised.¹⁴ Does this mean that only those who adhere to the law as Jews do can keep God's commandments? If so, where would that place non-Jews in relation to salvation? Contrary to later developments in (non-Jewish) Christianity, this seems to have been the key question for most of the early Christ-groups.

As 7:19 (C₁) implies, "God's commandments" can be fulfilled both by those who adhere to the law the way Jews do *and* by those who do not. How is this possible? It can be achieved only if one adds an additional, overarching principle above the law, which can be effective both through the law and beyond it. The fulfilling of the commandments is then made dependent on that entity (cf. Rom 3:21–22). For Paul, this overarching "principle," or category, is the Spirit, which has been given both to those of *pistis* who adhere to the law as Jews do and to those who were never given the law (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Gal 5:5; Acts 10:45; 15:8–9).¹⁵ In addition, Paul refers to love as the essence of the law: "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom 13:10; cf. Gal 5:14). Then, by connecting the Spirit to love, Paul can state that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom 5:5; cf. 1 Cor 16:14). Therefore, since Paul believes that the Spirit has been given not only to those who were given the law, the custodians of the law, but also to those who do not belong to the Jewish people, it follows that the fulfilling of God's commandments, which are manifestations of what in their condensed form is called love (*agapē*), is made possible for all, both Jews and non-Jews as distinct groups.

This brings forth another key concept in Paul's thinking: faith, or faithfulness/loyalty (*pistis*). Both Jews and non-Jews may display the faith, or loyalty, to the God of Israel that enables this god to give humans the Spirit, which in turn channels love/law-fulfillment from God to humans, free of cost (1 Cor 7:23; Rom 3:24). Righteousness cannot, therefore, be achieved apart from faith/loyalty (Rom 1:17; 4:5; 5:21; 10:4; Gal 2:21; 5:5; Phil 3:9; cf. Rom 3:25); the law is, on its own, empty of the salvific force that will bring redemption in the end-times, but still necessary for that redemption; in other words, it is a necessary but not sufficient parameter in God's plan to bring the new creation into being. God will "justify the circumcised on the ground of faithfulness [*pistis*] and the uncircumcised through that same faithfulness [*pistis*]" (Rom 3:30). The fact that there is a hierarchy of theological levels – and faithfulness/trust is above the law – does not, therefore, lead to rejection of the law as such. Paul's point is the opposite: the law of the "Christ-empire" can now be fulfilled *also* by people who

¹⁴ On the importance of the particular within the universal, see Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*, 91–93. Cf. Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginnings of Christian Public Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 170–172; Tucker, *You Belong to Christ*, 245, n. 38.

¹⁵ See also David Horrell, *An Introduction to the Study of Paul*, T&T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies (London: T&T Clark, 2000), 64; Fredriksen, "Judaizing the Nations," 232–252, esp. 247–248.

are not Jewish, just in time for the overturning of the old order and the arrival of the new. This, indeed, is their only hope as divine judgment awaits; it is a gift of life offered in the present, extending from the old into the new, and it will save the nations on that day when it will all happen. Different hierarchical levels cannot cancel each other out but rather needs to build on one another. Therefore, Paul explicitly affirms the law's continued validity: "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Rom 3:31). Love is, thus, the salvific substance, since through it the Spirit makes the law happen.¹⁶

If we draw this pattern of thought as a chart, it may take the form shown in the figure below:

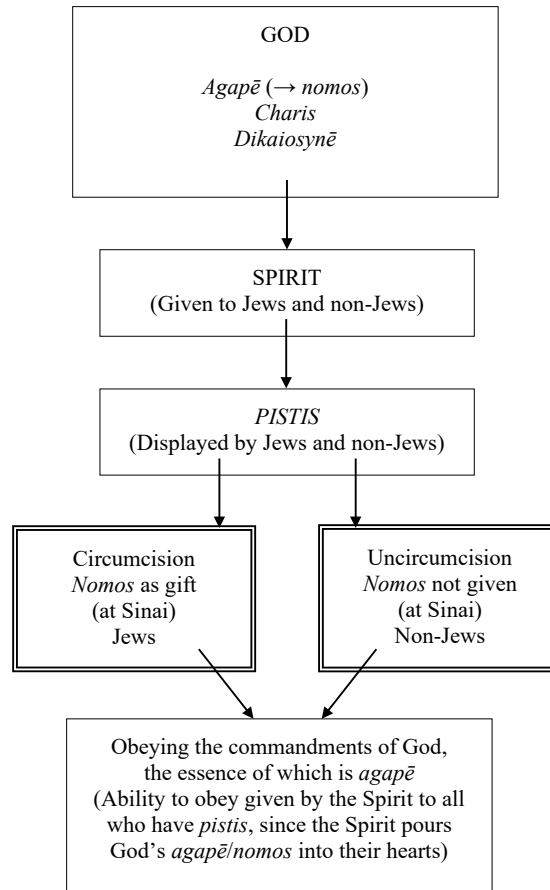


Figure 5. A hierarchical pattern of Paul's thought with special attention to the place of Jews, non-Jews, and the law in relation to obeying the commandments of God and salvation. The double-lined boxes represent the (visible) socio-ethnic differences between the two groups "in Christ." The single-lined boxes represent theological levels applicable to both groups.

¹⁶ Cf. 1 Corinthians 13. Love (*agapē*) is said to be stronger than faith (*pistis*) as a redeeming entity in that, on the basis of God's love, Paul extends salvation to Jews who do not share his trust in Christ: Rom 11:28–29.

In sum: Being Jewish or non-Jewish means nothing – *in relation to the keeping of the commandments and therefore also salvation* (1 Cor 7:19 [C₁]; cf. Gal 5:19–23; Rom 1:32; 13:13; 1 Cor 6:9–11).¹⁷ All that matters is faith/trust/loyalty (*pistis*), which opens up for the Spirit's salvific out-pouring of love (*agapē*), which becomes embodied as law in those who live through the Spirit. For Paul this does not change the fact that the world necessarily consists of two basic categories: the Jewish people (according to the irrevocable promise; Rom 11:29) and the rest of the world. Paul permitted no “conversion” between these socio-ethnic worlds, since such movement would negate God's acceptance of all regardless of ethnic identity. The unifying elements between these socio-ethnic worlds, that which creates a unity in diversity, are *pistis* and the outpouring of the Spirit on both.

8.3.2 Slavery

Paul's second example is both similar to and different from the question of Jews and non-Jews. The problem of slavery is a socio-economic question, not a question about ethnicity and the divine. Further, slavery is disconnected from the hermeneutical mechanisms of the circumcision-uncircumcision problematic in that enslaved individuals were restricted in their ability to make independent choices. What, then, is it that makes Paul think of these as two distinct yet related examples of how his universal principle should be implemented by all local *ekklēsiai*?

Contrary to the Therapeutai, who had withdrawn from society, Paul never challenged the social construct of slavery.¹⁸ The Therapeutai rejected slavery on the basis of the conviction that all human beings were created equal.¹⁹ While Paul may have agreed with this sentiment (as implied by 1 Cor 12:13; cf. Gal 3:28), this is not the point of departure for his theological argument. For Paul the key is eschatological – namely, that the Spirit had *already* been given to people who had *pistis*, who were loyal to Jesus, regardless of their social or socio-economic status.²⁰ To be a slave must therefore, based on experience, be ir-

¹⁷ Cf. Martin Sanfridson, “Are Circumcision and Foreskin Really Nothing? Re-Reading 1 Corinthians 7:19 and Galatians 5:6; 6:15,” *SEÁ* 86 (2021): 130–147, here 140–141.

¹⁸ On ancient slavery and manumission, see Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 278–282. Primary sources are conveniently collected in Tim G. Parkin and Arthur J. Pomeroy, *Roman Social History: A Source Book* (London: Routledge, 2007), 154–204.

¹⁹ Philo, *Contempl.* 70. Cf. the late second-/early third-century Roman jurist Florentinus (*Institutes*, book 9; *Digest.* 1.5.4.), who, as also Ulpian (d. 223) did, regarded slavery as being against nature but saw the socio-economic construct as functioning under the provision of *ius gentium* (“law of nations”).

²⁰ Note, however, that slavery was not always automatically equivalent to a certain socio-economic status vis-à-vis freeborn individuals. Slavery can also be understood as more of an issue related to social status, since there were slaves who occupied a higher socioeconomic

relevant in relation to salvation, since salvation is intertwined with the *agapē/nomos* that is channeled by the Spirit to those whose posture towards the Christ is *pistis* (Gal 3:28; Rom 10:12; cf. Acts 2:17–21). Striving to change one’s status in order to become more pleasing to God, however, would call into question God’s salvific care for all, as if slaves were somehow inferior by nature and unfit for the coming kingdom. In Paul’s theological logic, the rationale for ruling that slaves should not make every effort to become free is precisely that he regarded slaves as equal to the free in terms of their access to the Christ, and thus also to salvation (B₂; 1 Cor 7:21). By remaining in the condition in which one was when called by God, a person confirmed God’s blindness to status constructs as the world was coming to an end (cf. 1 Cor 12:12–14). The Spirit works across borders and turns all into slaves of Christ (C₂; 1 Cor 7:22–23).

How do we, then, explain Paul’s theology of ethnic and social equality? As argued in the previous chapter, theology is never created *ex nihilo*, but emerges in specific social and institutional settings. In order to shed more light on Paul’s rule in all the *ekklēsiai* we shall therefore anchor his thought in the Jewish and Roman social reality in which he lived.

8.4 Theology and Ecclesial Context

As we have seen above, Paul makes a distinction between the “spiritual” and the social, so that *pistis* (and therefore also the Spirit) is the only connecting point, which both transforms and preserves the social. Social structures are preserved in that, for Paul, people must remain both ethnically and in terms of social status where they were when called, giving slaves the option of change only if their masters so decide. Social life is, however, also transformed in that Paul consistently argues that these different social categories are, in relation to ultimate (eschatological) reality, without substance, since all are one “in Christ.” This oneness “in Christ” is, to be sure, a theological statement, but as such it cannot exist without social implications, a social frame.

It is clear that Paul envisioned and confirmed theologically the appropriateness of a socio-institutional context in which Jews and non-Jews, slaves and free, men and women, interacted without giving up their respective identities. This context was the *ekklēsia*: a local phenomenon connected via networks and an emerging supra-local authority structure, for which Paul made himself a spokesperson. The question is, what was this *ekklēsia*?

status than freeborn individuals. For example, the trusted slave of a wealthy senator would likely have more economic assets than a freeborn farmer. For more on the importance of looking at social capital rather than only economic factors when determining status in antiquity, see Kloppenborg, *Christ’s Associations*, 186–208.

Contrary to modern translations of *ekklēsiai* as “church,” the designation itself was used in the first century to refer to both Greco-Roman institutions and Jewish synagogues.²¹ Today, “church” indicates a non-political institution separate from the synagogue, which, as we argued in chapter 4 above, makes this word a misleading translation of *ekklēsia*. One cannot assume, on the basis of first-century uses of the term, that Pauline *ekklēsiai* were something other than, or disconnected from, synagogues.²² How, then, may we understand Paul's theology as related to socio-institutional contexts in his own time and culture?

As discussed above,²³ ancient society distinguished between three social spheres, in which what we call “religion” was enacted:²⁴ the public sphere, the domestic sphere, and the semi-public, unofficial associations.²⁵ Although Paul certainly aimed at an eschatological transformation of public society on the one hand (cf. Rom 4:13), and many followers of Jesus gathered in domestic space on the other (1 Cor 16:19), the social location for Pauline theology of equality seems more closely related to the association setting.²⁶ In most Greco-Roman associations membership was not restricted, allowing people with (maintained) different ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender identities to interact in ways that they would not be able to do in the public or domestic spheres of society. While all associations regardless of purpose would include cultic elements among their activities, some associations were dedicated exclusively to the cult of a specific deity.²⁷ It is not strange, thus, that the Diaspora synagogues were counted among the associations.²⁸ In such a setting it is entirely predictable that non-Jews would become members or be loosely associated with these Jewish associations, as is also evidenced by the existence of proselytes and so-called god-fearers. Institutional patterns allowing for women to have leading roles in synagogues also find an explanation in such a context, as we argued in Chapter 6.²⁹

When Paul refers to ethnic (Jew/Greek), socio-economic (slave/free), and gender (male/female) categories as he theologizes oneness “in Christ” (Gal 3:28), it is, as we argued in chapter 7 above, likely that the theology endorsed mirrored the institutional reality of the *ekklēsiai*. This would contribute to explaining the

²¹ While the Greco-Roman use of the term is well known, its use for synagogue institutions is rarely noted. For sources see the index in *ASSB*.

²² See Korner, *Origin and Meaning of Ekklēsia*.

²³ See Chs. 3 and 5.

²⁴ Cf. Klauck, *Context*.

²⁵ On associations, see Harland, *Associations*.

²⁶ Associations could utilize domestic space for their gatherings, especially early on in their existence before they could afford to construct separate buildings for this purpose. They could, however, also use other types of spaces for their gatherings, including rented spaces.

²⁷ For a typology of associations, see Harland, *Associations*, 28–53, and see discussion above, pp. 167–169.

²⁸ The situation was more complex in the land of Israel. See Runesson, *Origins*, 169–235.

²⁹ *ASSB*, 9, n. 19.

presence of female leadership in Paul's congregations,³⁰ Paul's insistence on maintained social identities within a setting of what we could think of as equality,³¹ and the general lack of explicit political rhetoric aimed at the public sphere of society. Paul's concern with supra-local networks and universal rules for the *ekklēsiai* also finds a home in the context of associations, since we have evidence among other cultic associations indicating similar "international" networks.³²

In sum, the eschatological reality in which Paul was convinced he lived took concrete institutional form in associative settings, which provided a matrix for a theology of maintained identity within a context of relative equality. Within such settings, Paul's thinking proceeded from experience to theology to supra-local rulings. Paul's unity-in-diversity theology in 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 is thus best described as the theologized consequence of an experienced situation in a specific type of institutional setting, in which non-Jews as much as Jews, slaves as much as free, expressed a posture of *pistis* in relation to Christ and displayed behavior that was interpreted to indicate that they had all, without distinction, been given the Spirit.

8.5 *The Spirit and the Universal Fulfillment of Jewish Law*

The fact that Paul maintained a two-category worldview consisting of Jews on the one hand and the rest of the world on the other is essential for the analysis of 1 Corinthians 7:17–24. As he had become convinced by (interpreted) experience that, now at the end of time, the Spirit had made no distinction between people based on socio-ethnic or socio-economic identity markers, but that God aimed for the salvation of all, Paul labored to convince Jews and non-Jews, slaves and free (and men and women), that *pistis* – not law in and of itself, or social status or gender – is the universal key to a righteousness given by God for free, based on the Messiah's sacrifice, which had achieved atonement (1 Cor 7:23; Rom 3:25). *Pistis* as key means trust as entrance-point for the Spirit, which pours God's *agapē/nomos* into human hearts (Rom 5:5) and fulfills the essence of God's commandments, which is *agapē* and therefore of utmost importance (1 Cor 7:19; Rom 13:10; Gal 5:14; cf. Rom 7:12; 9:31–32 and the figure on p. 200 above).

The law is thus upheld for Jews *and* made available to the rest of the world; *this* is the eschatological news. Salvation is from God both within *and* beyond Israel. For Paul, however, in no case can the law be fulfilled – and obeying God's commandments is everything – without the core elements of *pistis* and Spirit.

³⁰ Cf. Epp, *Junia*.

³¹ Cf. ASSB, 13.

³² Harland, *Associations*, 33–36; cf. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 27–28. See also above, Ch. 3.

Just as non-Jewish Christ-followers would show lack of trust in the power of the Spirit if they were to become Jews, Jews who had experienced the outpouring of the Spirit as Jews would contradict God's gift and promises if they gave up their Jewish identity as they turned in *pistis* to the Messiah. As for slaves, they were not, for Paul, subordinate by nature to the free, just as non-Jews and Jews together were part of God's salvific plan. Maintaining the status quo, therefore, would manifest God's boundless grace as the world was about to be transformed. This, arguably, would constitute one of Paul's core convictions; it surfaces in 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 but controls much of the theological argument in other letters as well.

As one ponders the historical Paul as well as his later interpreters through the centuries, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that, contrary to much that has been written, Paul is likely to have applied the universal rule of Jews remaining Jewish "in Christ" also to himself, if we assume that there is at least some consistency between his practice and his beliefs.³³ A study of Paul's rule in all the *ekklēsiai* seems, therefore, to add a supporting voice – this time Paul's own – to James's and the elders' exhortation in Jerusalem as they instruct a complying Paul in Acts 21:24: "Join these men; go through the rite of purification with them, and pay for the shaving of their heads. Thus, all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself observe and guard the law."³⁴

The chapters in this part of the volume have discussed Paul from a variety of perspectives, all of which, however, have understood him and his message from a "within-Judaism" perspective, i.e., from a perspective within which his letters make sense as (pre-Rabbinic) Jewish texts concerned with the status of non-Jews in this world and the world to (soon) come. I have not been able to find traces in Paul of a third category beyond Israel and the nations (*ethnē*), and thus the whole idea of a so-called parting of the ways process in which such a third category – Christianity – is created cannot be explained by Paul's writings alone. Indeed, it seems to me that Paul's entire project described a movement in the opposite direction, one in which previously parted ways were about to be joined.

³³ Paul was, after all, also circumcised (Phil 3:5). Cf. Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 88.

³⁴ See also Acts 28:17, On the representation of Paul in Acts in relation to the portrait that emerges from Paul's letters, see Reidar Hvalvik, "Paul as a Jewish Believer: According to the Book of Acts," in *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, ed. Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 121–153.

9. Paul and the Joining of the Ways

9.1 From Parting to Joining

“Paul and the Parting of the Ways” has a nice ring to it, the attractiveness of al-
literation merging with layers of historical claims and so, rhetorically, reinforcing
the legitimacy, as it were, of the quest itself. But at the core of the metaphor,
deep inside that very quest which it ostensibly describes but in truth controls,
lies hidden assumptions undermining the project as such, leaving us trapped in
the contemporary rather than illuminated by the historical. For he, the historical
Paul, knew not the word “Christian” and of “Christianity” he had never
heard. Whatever happened in that Damascene moment was embedded in and
interpreted by the mind of a self-proclaimed Israelite; indeed, a Hebrew and a
son of Abraham (Rom 11:1; 2 Cor 11:22; cf. Gal 2:15; Phil 3:4–5).¹

How odd for us as historians, then, if we ask for a parting between a known
and a void projecting back at us our own mirror image; between an ancient way
of being and our neighborhood church down the street. Paul was, indeed, not a
“Christian,” and he could not have left Judaism for some “Christianity.” This
has been shown by a range of scholars in study after study and argued from
several perspectives also in the present volume, so that we now have a founda-
tion from which we may proceed to deepen our understanding of this apostle to
the nations.² For the quest for the historical Paul, as the quest for the historical

¹ On Paul’s understanding of the meaning of “Israelite,” a group to which he says he him-
self belongs; Rom 9:3, see Rom 9:4–5: “They [i.e., Jews, also those who had declined the ‘in-
Christ’ offer] are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the
giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from
them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”

² Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian*. See also Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem*;
Fredriksen, *Paul*. The foundation for such historical readings of Paul was laid by several
scholars, beginning decades ago, including Krister Stendahl. (For a summarizing account of
his thinking, see his *Final Account: Paul’s Letter to the Romans* [Minneapolis: Fortress,
1995]). See also the work of Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans*, and more recently Kathy Ehren-
sperger, *Paul at the Crossroads of Cultures: Theologizing in the Space Between*, LNTS 456
(London: Bloomsbury, 2013) and William S. Campbell, *The Nations in the Divine Economy:
Paul’s Covenantal Hermeneutics and Participation in Christ* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018).
The history of research on Paul in this regard is helpfully discussed by Magnus Zetterholm,
Approaches to Paul. See also now Mortensen, *Paul Among the Gentiles*. The special issue on
Paul, *JJMJS* 5 (2018), evaluates the contribution by E. P. Sanders forty years after his *Paul and
Palestinian Judaism* and discusses the latest advances in Pauline scholarship. See also the con-
densed but illuminating overview of scholarship on Romans by Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Ar-
chaeology and the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 181–187, noting

Jesus, does not end, but rather begins with the insight that he was a Jew, practicing Judaism, indeed proclaiming Judaism.³ The task still pending is thus not *if*, but *what kind, how, and why?* This chapter is mostly concerned with the *how*, as it relates to the non-Jewish Other, touching also on the *why*. Some preliminaries will, in what follows, set the scene. I will then present a three-fold entry-point for understanding Pauline difference, before adding, at the very end, a word on how Paul tends to be approached today by most churches, and how this differs from the Paul of history.

If we accept that the Pharisees, like the rabbis after them,⁴ believed that there would be a resurrection from the dead,⁵ preceding the divine act of judgment necessary to set things straight as Heaven was about to interfere with human governance decisively and for good, then Paul's Pharisaic identity was not challenged but, in many ways, confirmed on the road to Damascus.⁶ It was a moment of blinding insight – rather than a calling – that time was much further ahead than he had previously assumed. Something was actually happening, and he, Paul, was drawn into a sequence of decisive events leading up to and preparing for the End. Critical for what subsequently developed into his calling were the small face-to-face groups, or associations, whose patron deity was the God

especially Stendahl's contribution, along with Stowers, as reconstructing a Paul "speaking within Judaism" (187).

³ See especially Fredriksen, "Judaizing the Nations," 232–252.

⁴ I am not claiming continuity here between the Pharisees and the rabbis, as if the former became the latter and, in that process, created the foundation of what eventually became modern forms of Judaism. On the contrary, as has been shown by several recent studies, not even the early rabbis traced their origins back to the Pharisees. Indeed, although some later rabbis did, it is not until the Jewish historians of the 19th century that the Pharisees receives the central and prominent place they now have in Jewish history. On this, see the illuminating studies by Günter Stemberger, "The Pharisees and the Rabbis" (240–254), Shaye J.D. Cohen, "The Forgotten Pharisees" (283–291) and Abraham Skorka, "The Perushim in the Understanding of the Medieval Jewish Sages" (292–301), all in Sievers and Levine, eds, *The Pharisees*.

⁵ On diverse expressions of such convictions in ancient Judaism, seen within its wider North African and Near Eastern context, see Alan F. Segal's magisterial work *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2004); on the period around the turn of the era, see 351–96 (the Pharisees discussed on pp. 379–382); on the rabbis, see 596–638. See also Claudia Setzer, *Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism and Early Christianity: Doctrine, Community, and Self-Definition* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). As Setzer notes, while there existed a great diversity of understandings of afterlife in Jewish texts from the second century BCE to the first century CE, "[t]he first time resurrection occurs as a doctrine by which others identify a certain group is the case of the Pharisees, reported by three sets of sources as a group that upholds resurrection" (18). For Josephus description of Pharisaic beliefs as compared to Paul, note *B.J.* 2.163 and 1 Cor 15 (Segal, *Life After Death*, 381). In Acts 23:6–9 Paul is portrayed as establishing a bridge between himself as a Pharisaic Christ-follower and other Pharisees precisely through a reference to the resurrection of the dead as a shared conviction. Quoting Setzer again, *ibid.*, 30: "Oddly, it sounds as if preaching resurrection is the offence and Jesus is incidental."

⁶ So also, Paula Fredriksen, "Paul, The Perfectly Righteous Pharisee," 112–135.

of Israel, worshiped by some through a Messianic lens.⁷ In terms of the latter, such groups were already spreading slowly but surely in the eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, and all the way to Rome. Catering, as did all associations, to diverse networks associated with neighborhoods, households, occupations, ethnic-geographical or immigrant connections, or cultic preferences,⁸ group membership in these institutions was often – but not always – mixed between Jews and non-Jews, slaves and free, men and women.⁹ It was within these types of institutional settings, habitually called “synagogues” or “congregations” by modern scholars, that the post-Damascene Paul’s sense of purpose was formed. It is not sociologically unreasonable to hypothesize, then, that the institutional structures within which Paul’s conceptual world was adjusted influenced the way in which his sense of time was modified, as well as his understanding of what now needed to be done in order to prepare for the inevitable.¹⁰

Among the numerous possible analytical entry-points emerging from a basic description of the Pauline context such as this, what interests us here, more specifically, is the ethnic diversity in membership that was common in these types of small groups, both Jewish and Greco-Roman.¹¹ In such a setting, the acute insight that the god of this specific ethnic group, the Jews, had initiated a cosmic and historical-political process leading to a final judgment and renewal of the entire world (cf. 1 Thess 4:13–5:11; Rom 3:25–31; 1 Cor 3:13–17; 4:5; 11:29–32; 15:49–56; 2 Cor 5:10), would very likely and instantly lead to questions about how this would affect those in one’s immediate context, those who in

⁷ On Christ-groups and other groups honoring the God of Israel as their patron deity understood within the overall institutional framework provided by ancient associations, see most recently the important work of Kloppenborg, *Christ’s Associations*, and Last and Harland, *Group Survival*. See also Markus Öhler, *Aposteldekret und antikes Vereinswesen: Gemeinschaft und ihre Ordnung*, WUNT 280 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

⁸ For discussion of this categorization of associations, see above, Ch. 5, and literature cited there.

⁹ Source material related to these types of groups are conveniently collected and analyzed in Kloppenborg and Ascough, *Greco-Roman Associations*; Harland, *Greco-Roman Associations*; John S. Kloppenborg, *Greco-Roman Associations. Vol. III: Ptolemaic and Early Roman Egypt*. BZNW 246 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

¹⁰ On the connection between Pauline theology and his various institutional settings, see also Ch. 7 above.

¹¹ See discussion above, Ch. 5. The de-ethnosizing processes taking place in the membership of other contemporary ethnic cults, such as the cult of Isis, which opened up ethnic deities for worship by people of various ethnic and geographical backgrounds, extending the reach of the deity beyond the people-group from within which the cult originated. There are many examples of such expansion of the membership base of worshippers. Note also the diversity in terms of gender and social status common in associations; cf., e.g., SEG 46:800=GRA I 72, which lists the names of members of a Zeus Hypsistos group in Pydna, Macedonia (inscription dated to 250 CE). The names include 31 men, 3 women; slaves, freed-people, citizens, and non-citizens. For an example of a predominantly, or exclusively, female group, members having enough wealth to make their own offerings to their gods, see, e.g., Philippi II 340/L589=GRA I.71 (dated to first or second century CE [?]).

various ways constituted the plausibility structure that maintained the meaning system within which everyone operated on a daily basis (cf. Rom 1:16–2:13).¹² In other words, these diverse small face-to-face groups, whose patron deity was the God of Israel, set the agenda for what issues were going to be the most pressing ones as people involved began preparing for the End. Theology, defined as the attempt to map and therefore also merge worldview and reality, thus inescapably had to place at the top of the agenda the fate of the non-Jews.¹³

The “why” of the urgency of the location of non-Jews in the present eschatological moment is, then, best, or at least first, answered sociologically. In most groups, based on their membership, the approach simply had to be “inter-ethnic,” or “global” in some sense of that word. But how, more precisely, this was theologized would differ depending on a number of factors, too numerous to list here. For Paul, it seems quite clear that, far from a parting of the ways in which entities split, or are urged to split, from one another, his vision was a *joining of the ways*; a process in which a “wild olive shoot” is grafted in “to share the rich root of the olive tree” together with the “natural branches” (11:17–18). But this metaphor, indeed the vision as such, is still so general that even Matthew’s Gospel could have included it, despite the fact that Matthew arguably, in terms of the non-Jewish other, entertained an end-time scenario quite different from that of Paul.¹⁴

The real issue in the early Jesus movement, after Jesus’s death,¹⁵ is not the “if,” or even the “why,” of gentile inclusion. We have no evidence that any followers

¹² “Plausibility structure” is sometimes defined in slightly different ways. For the purpose of this essay, I follow Bruce Karlenzig, “Plausibility,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. William H. Swatos Jr. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1998), who refers to “the sociocultural context or ‘base’ for meaning systems.” Cf. Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967).

¹³ In addition, based on the mixed membership of many associations, definitions would have been key from the very beginning of the movement of the position and status of slaves in relation to the free, as well as of women in relation to men; cf. discussion above, Chs. 6 and 8.

¹⁴ For a detailed discussion of the status of non-Jews in Matthew’s Gospel, see Runesson, *Divine Wrath*, 343–433. Matthew’s vision seems to be closest to that of Paul’s worst opponents, those he wished would “cut it all off” (Gal 5:12; cf. Acts 15:5). For a comparison between Paul and Matthew in this regard, see Anders Runesson, “Beyond Universalism and Particularism: Rethinking Paul and Matthew on Gentile Inclusion,” in: *Paul and Matthew among Jews and Gentiles. Essays in Honour of Terence L. Donaldson*, ed. Ronald Charles, LNTS 628 (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 99–112. It is of importance, though, to note that in the end Paul and Matthew had the same aim, namely to save the non-Jewish Other; they differed only regarding the methods to be used to achieve this goal.

¹⁵ The historical Jesus had not addressed this issue in any detail as far as the sources can tell us (on the contrary according to Matt 10:5–6), which also explains the fact that those who came after him seems to have been at a loss as to how to approach the problem when the movement began to spread beyond the Jewish people. This fact, again, speaks in favor of historical reconstructions of the spread of the movement primarily within settings already displaying mixed (ethnic) membership, whereas Jesus himself focused his operations on non-ethnic-

of Jesus rejected the idea that non-Jews should be made aware of the coming end of the world and offered a way to survive this turbulent transformation of creation.¹⁶ Rather, the issue was *how* exactly this should be done. It is around this “how?” that boundaries were drawn and conflicts arose; indeed, this is what constituted the core of the gentile problem, as any solution to it would have major implications for Israelite, or Jewish, self-understanding. Shedding further light on what is often referred to as Paul’s “universalism,” and how he got there – what changed when he joined the Jesus movement – will help us understand better what was at stake as this messianic movement spread from the land of Israel to take root in the Diaspora. Indeed, it may assist us in nuancing our perception of the distinctiveness of Christ-centered Judaism in relation to other forms of Judaism.

9.2 Universalism Through Particularism?

It is quite common to approach the study of the place of the gentile “other” in ancient Judaism, including in the Jesus movement, through the prism provided by the terms “universalism” and “particularism,” as we discussed and problematized above in Chapter 2.¹⁷ As argued there, instead of speaking of universalism and particularism, we may productively distinguish between three basic aspects of our question, each opening up for a limited number of reactive possibilities. To restate them, for convenience, I list them here under the respective aspect with some non-exhaustive examples in footnotes serving a heuristic purpose:

ly-mixed Jewish civic institutions (“public synagogues”) in the land. On this, see further discussion above, Ch. 7.

¹⁶ On the transformation of creation as a whole, cf. Rom 8:19–22. Such openness towards gentile inclusion in salvation – not necessarily in Israel – was quite common, though not universal, in other forms of Judaism, earlier than, contemporary with, and later than Paul. Some texts, however, quite obviously authored in a context of oppression by gentiles, envision the annihilation or enslavement of non-Jews in an eschatological future, and some trajectories, while allowing for the salvation of non-Jews did not allow for their incorporation into Israel as proselytes. It is on a map of such diversity of Jewish approaches to the religio-ethnic Other that we need to locate the Pauline solution, which was only one of several within the Jewish Jesus movement. Key publications discussing these issues are Donaldson’s, *Judaism and the Gentiles*; Sim and McLaren, eds., *Attitudes to Gentiles*.

¹⁷ Cf. Peder Borgen, “Proselytes, Conquest, and Mission,” in *Recruitment, Conquest, and Conflict: Strategies in Judaism, Christianity, and the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Peder Borgen, Vernon K. Robbins, and David B. Gowler, Emory Studies in Early Christianity (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 57, where he argues that the “sharp distinction between particularism and universalism does not do justice to the historical data [...] Particularism and Universalism are not mutually exclusive concepts when applied to Jewish and Christian history and self-understanding.”

1. Ethnic status
 - a. Closed-Ethnic religion (No converts accepted into an ethno-religious group).¹⁸
 - b. Open-Ethnic religion (Converts accepted into an ethno-religious group).¹⁹
 - c. Non-Ethnic religion (Rejection of ethnicity as a meaningful category in relation to group membership).²⁰
2. Salvation
 - a. Salvation-inclusive religion (People outside the group may be considered for salvation under certain circumstances, without conversion).²¹
 - b. Salvation-exclusive religion (The boundaries of the group mark the limits of salvation).²²
3. Mission²³
 - a. Proselytizing Mission (Aim: Incorporation of the missionized into the missionary's group).²⁴
 - b. Ethno-Ethic Mission (Aim: Modification of the behavioral patterns of people outside the missionary's group, but not through incorporation).²⁵
 - c. Inward Mission (Aim: Modification of the beliefs and practices of the missionary's own group).²⁶

¹⁸ E.g., the Book of Ezra; various strands of Rabbinic tradition; traditional forms of Samaritanism.

¹⁹ E.g., various other and more dominant strands of Rabbinic tradition; most modern forms of Judaism.

²⁰ Most modern forms of mainstream Christianity. Ancient cults such as, e.g., the widespread cults of Isis, Jupiter Dolichenos and Mithras, which were originally connected to an ethnic-geographic area, also developed to be unbound by ethnic requirements in terms of general membership. Even in such cases, though, it should be noted that ethnicity could still play a role within groups in terms of status and access to certain offices. For example, priests of the cult of Jupiter Dolichenos continued to be exported from Syria, although it seems these priests could, in turn, also train non-Syrians to become priests; see Collar, *Religious Networks in the Roman Empire*, 139.

²¹ Book of Jonah; Rabbinic tradition and most mainstream forms of Judaism today.

²² Cyprian's *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Such perspectives, in various forms, have often been the foregrounded in mainstream Christianity, even though other more inclusive trajectories have existed throughout Christian history and today.

²³ See discussion above, Ch. 3.

²⁴ Eleazer's position in Josephus story of the royal house of Adiabene (*A.J.* 20.34–48). The traditional Christian form of mission, today questioned in some Christian denominations understanding mission primarily as providing aid and relief during and after natural and political catastrophes, assisting others in need, and sharing knowledge and resources with nations in need of improving their infrastructure etc. (Matt 25:31–46 is often referred to in such contexts, suggesting that Matt 28:18–20 should be understood as referring back to, and enjoining, the embodied practices outlined there).

²⁵ E.g., the Book of Jonah; Ananias's position in Josephus story of the royal house of Adiabene (*A.J.* 20.34–48). For discussion of this Josephan text in relation to Paul, see Nanos, "Paul's Non-Jews," 26–53.

²⁶ The historical Jesus, but also the most common form of mission in Judaism, Christianity, and many other traditions.

To rehearse, as for mission, each of the three types may be subdivided into active and passive practices and postures. That is, mission in any of these categories can be understood as an effect not only of an active address to the person(s) missionized, but also an expected change of behavior of the outsider in light of their perception of the behavior of the ingroup itself; the former describing a centrifugal movement and the latter expecting a centripetal effect.²⁷ Since both active and passive versions of all types of mission existed in ancient Judaism, including the Jesus movement, this distinction adds further nuance as we read in context, aligning certain texts with others in ways otherwise invisible.

As we seek to better understand Paul's position on how to order the eschaton while preparing the nations for the coming judgment, organizing the complexities of the issues that arise according to this type of analytical framework reveals some interesting patterns of thought and how they developed as Paul joined the messianic movement. We shall discuss each of these aspects in turn.

9.2.1 Gentile Inclusion: Ethnicity

The issue of the relationship between the ethnic status of the worshipper and the nature of the deity worshipped lies, as we have noted, at the center of the complex problems facing the Jesus movement as it expanded in the Diaspora. This was not unique to the Jesus movement, though, as Judaism was at home in the Diaspora well before the arrival of Christ-followers, and other Greco-Roman cults connected with a specific people, like the Egyptian cult of Isis, had long experienced an increased interest from non-native worshippers.²⁸ The meshing together of traditions that had previously been ethnically-specific can also be seen in the Greek Magical Papyri, where aspects of Jewish traditions and worship appear in spells dedicated to Egyptian and Greek deities, and vice versa. Indeed, even in the archaeological record, as Leonard V. Rutgers pointed out almost thirty years ago and as has been confirmed by many since then, Jewish and non-Jewish individuals and groups intermingled in most areas of society,

²⁷ For example, the idea of gentiles being attracted to Zion when the time was right, without active Jewish missionary activity. Note also the different approaches within the Jesus movement, even sometimes in the same text (Matt 2:1–2; 8:5–13; 10:5–6; 15:21–28; 28:18–20). John's Gospel declares that love among insiders is a *sine qua non* for outsiders' recognition of their identity as followers of Jesus, implying that no missionary efforts will succeed without this criterion having been fulfilled first, presenting, thus, an understanding of mission as at its core centripetal and passive (John 13:35; cf. Isa 61:9).

²⁸ Physical evidence for this popularity can be seen in the Isis statues and temples erected in several port towns in Asia Minor (she became a patron deity of sailors and merchants among many other things), and in the establishment of two Sarapis cults on Delos. But the spread of these cults spanned the entire Mediterranean world; see discussion in R. E. Witt's classic work, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 46–58, 256–259; map on pp. 56–57. Lucien's *Metamorphosis* is of key interest here, as it describes in some detail rituals involved.

such that it is often “extremely difficult, if not impossible, for modern scholars to decide with which religion users of charms and amulets identified themselves.”²⁹

De-ethnosizing processes such as these, as related to membership profiles in group settings where ethnic deities were worshipped, were thus in the air when Paul began to develop an understanding of what his destabilizing Damascene experience might entail. His, as well as others messianics’ solutions to the gentile problem, should thus be understood as variations on a common socio-religious theme, rather than construed as an idiosyncratic reaction embedded in a unique and socially isolated process.

Paul’s original position on the ethnic aspect of our problem, at least if we are to believe Gal 5:11, was that of an open-ethnic perspective, which allowed for, perhaps even encouraged, non-Jews to join the Jewish *ethnos* as they opted to seek the favor of the God of the Jews: “Why am I still (*eti*) being persecuted, if I am still (*eti*) preaching circumcision? In that case, the offense of the cross has been neutralized³⁰ (*katargeō*).”³¹ The Paul we know from the letters, however, turned violently against those who declined to undergo the same change of mind he himself did, asking them to “cut it all off” rather than unsettle those whom he counted among his (gentile) friends (Gal 5:12). As Paul prepares the nations for the final divine reckoning, the order in which he is now convinced God wants to find the *ekklēsia* at the eschaton reflects the world as he knows it, i.e., divided up in two parts, representing the totality of humankind: Israel and the nations (1 Cor 7:17-18; Rom 3:29). As we argued in the previous chapter,

²⁹ Leonard V. Rutgers, “Archaeological Evidence for the Interaction of Jews and non-Jews in Late Antiquity,” *AJA* 96 (1992): 101–118, here 108. Although also mostly dealing with the Late-Antique period, there are many insights to be gained by reading Smith, *Jewish Glass and Christian Stone*.

³⁰ NRSV reads “removed.”

³¹ I will leave open here the question of whether this approach belongs to Paul’s previous or current life in Judaism, respectively. The point is the (major) shift from one position to another, a shift which the historical Paul beyond doubt went through and which was interpreted by him as of crucial importance for the order in which the God of Israel wanted to find the world before the arrival of the son of God and the final judgment. For the view that Gal 5:11 refers to Paul’s pre-Damascus approach to non-Jews, see Terence L. Donaldson, “Paul Within Judaism: A Critical Evaluation from a ‘New Perspective’ Perspective,” in *Paul Within Judaism*, ed. Nanos and Zetterholm, here 299, n. 39; so also, Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem*, 37–41. For a position that understands the passage to speak of both of Paul’s positions, and, consequently his change of mind, as belonging to the period after he joined the Jesus movement, see Douglas A. Campbell, “Galatians 5:11: Evidence of an Early Law-Observant Mission by Paul?” *NTS* 57 (2011): 325–347. See also the discussion by Karl Olav Sandnes, *Paul Perceived: An Interactionist Perspective on Paul and the Law*, WUNT 412 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 83–89, which moves in a different direction altogether, understanding the passage as countering an (incorrect) understanding and representation of Paul by his Galatian opponents, and thus not referring to a change of mind at all.

those who were called as Jews must thus remain Jews,³² and the same rule applies to the gentiles.

Why? A reasonable explanation for this pattern of thinking – in addition to the fact that this way of dividing the world was part of the Jewish worldview more generally, and also, for that matter, part of the way all ethnic groups understood their world³³ – would be that, for the Paul we know from his letters, if people began changing their status as a consequence of their new-found cultic loyalties, it would imply that God had overdone it when the Spirit had been eschatologically poured over them all *regardless* of their ethnic (or other) status. Indeed, a self-imposed obligation to make changes in one's status, post-Spirit reception, presumably in order to better fit into what one perceived to be God's plan, would be tantamount to a rejection of the Christ-event itself, which had inaugurated the final sequence of history before the eschaton, including the universal releasing of the Spirit. For an individual "in-Christ" to take such a step would indicate a fundamental lack of trust in the fact that the God of Israel was also the God of the nations (again, Rom 3:29). It would place the devotee outside Christ (Gal 5:4), jeopardizing salvation itself, as all lack of *pistis* would.³⁴

Paul's change of mind, having interpreted as divine Spirit possession what he encountered among ex-Pagan gentiles, as Paula Fredriksen has called the non-Jews heeding Paul's call,³⁵ is thus best described as a move from an open-ethnic approach allowing individuals from other ethnic groups to join the Jewish *ethnos*, to a closed-ethnic position, refusing, on theological grounds, non-Jews entry into the Jewish *ethnos*. To keep everything together, saving both Jews and non-Jews, Paul has to, and does, create an overarching category, a globalized Christ³⁶ – an emperor of sorts, ruling the nations – in which a salvific "unity in diversity" may be found.³⁷ It is critical to note here that Paul argues that his

³² Circumcision implying full Torah observance; cf. Gal 5:3.

³³ Such a worldview would not in and of itself prohibit an openness for individuals to cross ethnic boundaries and become proselytes, although some Jewish writings would reject this possibility. See Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*.

³⁴ For the connection between *ekklēsia*/association membership and salvation, see also Richard Last, "What Purpose Did Paul Understand His Mission to Serve?" *HTR* 104:3 (2011): 299–324, here 324: "For Paul, salvation comes to those 'in Christ,' and those 'in Christ' should identify themselves as different from others by virtue of their membership in a congregation of Christ-believers." See further below.

³⁵ Fredriksen, *Paul*, 74.

³⁶ Cf. Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*, 157, on Paul as constructing several sub-identities as a nested hierarchy of identity, "of which being in Christ is the primary."

³⁷ Interesting here is a comparison with Josephus's story about the events in Adiabene (*A.J.* 20.38–48), Ananias arguing (but not theologizing) that it is quite possible to "worship God without being circumcised, even though he [the king] did resolve to follow the Jewish law [τὰ πάτρια τῶν Ἰουδαίων] entirely" (20.41). One may add that even with Ananias's solution to a difficult political situation, following the law in this way without circumcision would require God's forgiveness; it is thus not presented by Josephus as an ideal or divinely ordained solu-

change of mind is vital for the deliverance of the nations; within the *ekklēsia* nothing less, nothing more than diversity will do. In other words, since salvation is found within the *ekklēsia*, ethnic diversity becomes a salvific category intertwined with and dependent on an institutional reality, which is, in its structures, theologized.³⁸ This leads us to the aspect of salvation and the question of whether Paul's letters display a coherent view on this matter, which may be categorized as either inclusive or exclusive.

9.2.2 Gentile Inclusion: Salvation

As noted above, our source material presents us with two basic attitudes: A salvation-inclusive and a salvation-exclusive position. To repeat, the former refers to the notion that individuals outside one's own group may attain salvation without joining the in-group (i.e., without conversion), and the latter suggests the opposite: outside the group, there is no salvation. Where between these two poles on the spectrum should we place this apostle to the nations?

We need to note, first of all, that Paul, as a Christ-follower, adopted a certain kind of salvation-inclusive position with regard to those among his own people who declined the offer of joining the "in-Christ" group (Rom 11:26, 28-29). Seen in first-century context, this is quite a remarkable stance, considering what Paul, as so many others of his contemporaries, had invested in making the claim for Christ as savior of all. There appear to be at least two key matters of conviction that explain this theological inclusiveness: a) For Paul, the God of Israel cannot abandon his promises (Rom 9:6, 14; 11:28-29). This foundational belief, surfacing most clearly in Romans,³⁹ seems to function as a hermeneutical hub from which other theological assertions extend like spokes on a conceptual wheel, moving the Pauline rhetoric in certain directions. b) The Jewish people is and will always remain a people, and to this ethnic group Paul himself belongs (Rom 9:3-5; Phil 3:5).

Seen in light of (a) above, it appears as if Paul's sense of a shared ethnic identity leads him to seeing peoplehood as a salvific criterion, indeed a *sine qua non* for inclusion in the coming kingdom. He is thus able to claim not only that, regardless of the current situation, in the end all Israel will be saved (Rom 11:26), but also that Israel – as an ethnic category, beyond those united "in-Christ" – is

tion ("He added, that God would forgive him, though he did not perform the operation, while it was omitted out of necessity, and for fear of his subjects"; 20.42). For Paul, of course, the opposite is true. On the other hand, Ananias's opponent, Eleazer the Galilean, would not be willing to count on such divine lenience, urging the king to undergo the operation, which he also did. For Eleazer, it is not enough to read the law, one must also practice it in all its parts (20.43-48; cf. Matt 7:21-23). On the Adiabene story, see Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*, and Nanos, "Paul's Non-Jews."

³⁸ See discussion above, Ch. 7.

³⁹ But cf. also the covenantal hermeneutics behind Gal 3:17.

playing, and will continue to play a decisive role as the world inches closer to the end; indeed, the part of Israel that has declined the “in-Christ” offer in fact makes possible reconciliation between the God of Israel and the nations, and, when that time comes, they will be instrumental to the process in which the dead will be resurrected (Rom 11:15).⁴⁰

This emphasis on ethnicity as a primary salvific category may explain why, when Paul theologizes the position of the nations, Abraham, together with the Spirit, become so important (cf. Romans 4, esp. v.11–12, 16–17; 8:14; Gal 3:6–9). Indeed, Christ in and of himself seems not to be enough to save the nations, as Paul in his theological argument also needs to make siblings of Jews and gentiles by referring both to Israel’s foundation, through Abraham, and the Spirit: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God [...] and if children, then heirs” (Rom 8:14, 17). Christ’s achievement, in the context of gentile inclusion, is to activate this eschatological process, unleashing the Spirit. It is not that gentiles now become Jews (cf. Gal 5:2–6), or that ethnic identity, including Jewish ethnic identity, is made null and void. If that would have been the case, the discursive function of Abraham would have been difficult to explain, as it requires the notion of distinct categories being unified, not nullified.⁴¹ Rather, it is the promise to Abraham, that he become the father of many people-groups, not only of Israel, which is now fulfilled.

For non-Jews, this type of theo-ethnic reasoning points to a salvation-exclusive stance,⁴² in which redemption coordinated by the God of Israel becomes salvifically dependent on the people of Israel, both those who had joined the Christ, and those who had declined this offer. Thus, as a consequence, as the eschaton approaches, those from among the nations who are not joined to Abraham, alongside Jacob, are doomed. This is, as far as I can see, the inevitable implication of the inheritance-approach Paul adopts as he aims to explain the basics of salvation; if not children, then not heirs (cf. Rom 8:17, and also 4:11, 16).⁴³ Contrary to the position of Jews who have declined the in-Christ offer, but who are still understood as children and, ultimately, therefore also heirs based on Israel’s God honoring their ancient promises (Rom 11:28–29), there is in Paul’s

⁴⁰ On the meaning of reconciliation (*katallagē*), cf. Paul’s use in Rom 5:11, where Christ is the subject.

⁴¹ That is, applying a different set of metaphors, Paul is not advocating a melting-pot scenario in which differences are mixed into a new, third entity, but rather a mosaic-style solution, in which the different colors of the tesserae are maintained but brought into a new pattern, contributing to an overall image in which such tesseral distinctiveness is a *sine qua non* for the art to make sense.

⁴² Cf. however, Dodd, *Romans*, 184–187, who argues that Romans 11 implies a full universal salvation for humanity, not only for Israel. (Note esp. the chart on p. 187).

⁴³ See Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); cf. Paula Fredriksen on the concept of the “eschatological gentile” in, *Paul: The Pagan’s Apostle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 73–77.

theology as far as I can see no plan B for the nations. Paul's pattern of salvation seems to be asymmetric in this regard. This emerges as an inescapable conclusion when his approach to redemption is studied through the prism of his theo-ethnic convictions, which lie at the very foundation of his theology of salvation and splits the salvific light of the Christ into a spectrum of colors. It is true that Paul mentions on one occasion that an unbelieving husband is made holy through his believing wife, and vice versa, and that their children therefore are holy (1 Cor 7:14). But apart from such specific cases – in which genealogical discourse still plays a decisive role⁴⁴ – Paul does not have much positive to say about non-Jews outside Christ.⁴⁵ In sum, Paul thus combines a closed-ethnic outlook with a salvation-exclusive stance as far as non-Jews are concerned, indeed an intriguing position to take, one which can only be explained by his globalized “in-Christ” theology combined with his theo-ethnic convictions.

Before we move on to the final aspect of Paul's approach to gentile inclusion as part of his plan to join the distinct ways of Jews and non-Jews, i.e., the issue of mission, just a word on the much debated and often misunderstood issue of dual covenants, or *Sonderweg*, in Paul's writings. In brief, the notion of a *Sonderweg* refers in this context to the idea that there would be – and Paul would be a witness to this pattern of thought – two paths to salvation: one for Jews, without Christ but with Moses, and one for gentiles, with Christ. While some New Testament exegetes, perhaps most famously Lloyd Gaston,⁴⁶ have indeed argued such a notion to align well with Paul's writings, this is not the position taken by most scholars, myself included, identifying with the Paul within Judaism perspective. To be sure, even in antiquity some Christ-oriented Jews argued precisely that Moses was for Jews and Jesus for non-Jews – and that those Jews who followed both Moses and Jesus lived in the best of worlds.⁴⁷ But this is not, in my view, what we see in Paul. The apostle to the nations does claim, though, that all Israel, meaning all Jews, will be saved, as a people, includ-

⁴⁴ The unbelieving spouse seems to relate to the believing partner as that partner relates to Israel through Abraham, but apart from the criterion of *pistis*. A theology of salvation by association, as it were.

⁴⁵ Contrary to Matthew's Gospel, which in 23:31–46 outlines a theology of salvation aligning quite closely to the Rabbinic concept of righteous gentiles. For discussion of this Matthean passage, see Runesson, *Divine Wrath*, 414–428.

⁴⁶ Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1987).

⁴⁷ Such claims are found in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* 8.5–7. For discussion, see Karin Hedner Zetterholm, “Jewish Teaching for Gentiles in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies: A Reception of Ideas in Paul and Acts Shaped by a Jewish Milieu?” *JMJS* 6 (2019): 79–82; cf. Annette Yoshiko Reed, “‘Jewish Christianity’ after the ‘Parting of the Ways’: Approaches to Historiography and Self-Definition in the Pseudo-Clementines,” in *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, TSAJ 85 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 189–231, here 213–217. On Jewish followers of Jesus, Reed writes: “Both H[omilies] 8 and R[ecognitions] 4 exalt those whom some scholars might call ‘Jewish Christians’ (or even ‘Christian Jews’) in the sense of people who view the Torah and the Gospels as equal in soteriological value” (217).

ing those who during their lives declined the “in-Christ” offer. God’s covenant with them stands (Rom 11:26–29).

When bringing up the reluctance of many Jews to accept the Jesus-offer, Paul refers this to the will of God – not to these individuals themselves, as if their sin, but rather as them being part of God’s plan for the world, a precondition for the process of the joining of the ways between Jews and non-Jews. Paul simply states that this is all part of the divine mystery; it is God’s secret (Rom 11:25, 33–36). In other words, while in reality, in the historical and socio-religious lives of the men and women involved, this means a Pauline acceptance of these two alternatives ways of being as paths ultimately leading toward redemption, in terms of the eschatological realization of that salvation and the mechanisms behind it, Paul prefers to remain silent and refer to God’s mysteries. And, as Krister Stendahl once said in a public talk at Lund University in the 1990s, rejecting the idea that he himself would identify with the two-paths solution, this silence on Paul’s part is hermeneutically significant.

9.2.3 Gentile Inclusion: Mission

Paul’s theology (and practice) of mission follows closely from his position on the ethnic issue, and therefore presents us with a complicated “in-between” scenario. As we noted above, proselytizing mission is based on the conviction that in order to be salvifically effective, the effort must result in the inclusion of the other – in this case the gentile other – into the group to which the missionary him or herself belongs. But since Paul has an ethnically based two-tier system, with two sub-groups (Jews and non-Jews) within his overarching group identity marker (“in-Christ”), this terminology needs to be somewhat modified. Paul does not – emphatically, as we have seen – want non-Jews to attain his own status as a Jewish member of the *ekklēsia*.⁴⁸ But he does want to include them precisely as non-Jews “in Christ,” and he does require them to leave behind their old cultic habits, not only their lamentable ethical behavior, since for Paul cult and ethics are intertwined (cf. Gal 2:15; 4:8–10; 5:16–21, 24; cf. Rom 1:23–24, 28–32).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ As noted above, for Paul there is a very real and, in terms of his theological worldview, functionally defined difference between Jews and non-Jews in the *ekklēsia*, so that any eradication of the ethnic boundary is understood as a contradiction of God’s will, a sign of lack of *pistis*, and, ultimately, a disqualifier as far as the kingdom is concerned (cf. Rom 3:1–4, 29–31; 1 Cor 7:17–24; Gal 5:3–4).

⁴⁹ Paula Fredriksen’s concept of the eschatological gentile is again helpful here: “*But the Kingdom’s pagans were a special and purely theoretical category*: they were ex-pagan pagans, or (to use the wiggle-room afforded by our two English words) ex-pagan gentiles. *Unlike* god-fearers, these pagans no longer worship their native gods. *Like* proselytes, these pagans would worship exclusively the god of Israel; *unlike* proselytes, these pagans would preserve

In other words, Paul's position cannot be described as proselytizing mission, since its purpose is not to fully include those missioned in the group to which he himself belongs, i.e., the Jewish-messianic core of the Jesus movement. Neither can it be described as ethno-ethnic mission, as Paul very much requires his non-Jewish converts to stop worshipping their old gods and join, exclusively, the cult of the God of Israel, i.e., the God of his own people; to become, *en Christō*, ex-pagan gentiles. His approach to mission, as reconstructed from his letters, falls just in-between these two variants. If we bring the above conclusion to bear on this situation, namely that Paul at one point embraced an open-ethnic stance towards gentiles, but that he had a radical change of mind and moved towards a closed-ethnic position (Gal 5:11), we find that his approach to mission aligns well with the ethnic aspect of his theology. Paul's practices related to gentile inclusion thus changed from proselytizing mission, which for him led to no persecution, to what we may call an inclusive ethno-ethnic missionary strategy, which did cause him suffering, indicating that his was a minority position.

What brought about this change of mind is difficult to say. If one assumes that the shift in Paul's theology and practice of mission followed after his Damascus moment, then one would have to add further factors explaining why he, specifically, came to this conclusion, since some members of the Jesus movement maintained that (male) non-Jews joining the Jesus movement had to be circumcised in the process of becoming full members.⁵⁰ There was no consensus on missionary practices in the first century; becoming a follower of Jesus did not automatically lead to a position on the matter. Likewise, if the change is understood as having taken place sometime after Paul became a Christ-follower, we would need more evidence in order to fully comprehend why he changed his mind. Was there a change of socio-religious setting? Was he convinced through certain people's arguments? Other people's authority seems not to have been enough for Paul to modify either his beliefs or his practices.⁵¹ Be that as it may. In the end, all we can say is that the Jew Paul engaged in a mission to save the non-Jewish world, and that the type of mission he applied as a tool grew from his convictions about the salvifically significant role of ethnicity as the world was coming to an end.

their own ethnicities and – another way of saying the same thing – they would not assume the bulk of Jewish ancestral custom (such as, for males, circumcision).” (Fredriksen, *Paul*, 74).

⁵⁰ E.g., Acts 15:5, noting here that these people, like Paul, are identified as Pharisees.

⁵¹ Critical changes of behavior of people within the movement, especially regarding the issue of ethnicity and different forms of belonging, are, of course, attested in the Pauline correspondence itself. When Cephas is accused of making changes to his behavior and missionary strategies in relation to non-Jews in Gal 2:11–14, switching to a stance aimed at making gentiles live like Jews (*iuodaizein*; Gal 2:14), Paul mentions social pressure from authorities, ultimately having their orders from James in Jerusalem, as the cause for his change of mind. On different views on the timing of Paul's own change of mind, see n. 31 above.

A final point before we conclude. As is clear from Gal 2:9, the Paul of the letters had a distinct appreciation for differences in missionary strategies as they applied to Jews and non-Jews respectively, declaring that Peter was assigned the task of the inward mission to their fellow Jews, while Paul himself was to take on the outside world: the nations. One may, of course, wonder why such a division would be necessary in the first place, if it would not have been for the fact that these missions were perceived of as different in nature, involving distinct practices and messages addressed to the respective audiences based precisely on their ethnic identity.⁵² Paul's acceptance of such different missions based on the missionized individuals' ethnicity speaks in favor of us understanding Paul's own view of the Christ-event to mean different things to Jews and gentiles respectively, as we have also argued above.⁵³ The implication of this is, of course, that Paul would have understood himself not to have lived like a gentile, but like a Jew, thus confirming what so many scholars who in one way or another identify with the Paul within Judaism perspective have argued for many years: Paul was a Jew, bringing a Jewish message of salvation to a non-Jewish world – a Judaism for gentiles – so that the ethnic Other, too, may survive the eschaton; indeed, so that the nations become a sacrifice that Paul, as if a temple priest, could bring to the God of Israel (Rom 15:16; cf. 12:1).

In the end, Paul's understanding of the state of the world and the role of Israel and the gentiles in the current moment and in the soon-to-come eschaton, as this is described in Romans 11, even suggests that he, the apostle to the nations, would no longer embrace a mission to the Jews. Not because he had given up on their salvation, or that he simply avoided the topic since it was not his task, but precisely because Paul was convinced that the status of Israel as he found it in his own days, with most Jews not joining the Jesus movement, was the work of the God of Israel; that it was part of this god's plan to bring both them *and* the nations to ultimate salvation. A mission to Jews, then, would seem to contradict

⁵² It can hardly be a matter of sheer convenience, since if the message would have been the same for all those missionized, a geographic division between the various Jewish missionaries would surely have been preferred.

⁵³ That Paul's rhetoric was not always easy to decipher even among his early readers is well known, as is also explicitly stated in 2 Pet 3:15–16, where the topic is the timing of the return of the Christ. More interesting for our purposes here is the evidence that some people also claimed that Paul was misunderstood precisely with regard to the issue of ethnic distinction as key to the adopted missionary strategies and their results. The rumors reported in Acts 21:20–22 rests on the assumption that Paul would not have made such a distinction, and taught not only non-Jews but also Jews not to circumcise, i.e., the very opposite of the practice of the Pharisaic Christ-followers of Acts 15:5, who also rejected ethnic-based distinctions within the Jesus movement, but from a different angle. This view is, however, rejected by both the highest authority in Jerusalem, James, and Paul himself, as these figures are portrayed in Acts, and thus clearly also by the author of Acts, as this author, as also the Paul of the letters does, argue for a unity in diversity within the people of God; a joining of the ways between Jews and gentiles.

God's plan for the present, and, indeed, undermine Paul's own work bringing the number of the gentiles destined for salvation to its full (11:25). In the meantime, awaiting the eschaton, Paul says, God's love for the entirety of Israel is firmly anchored all the way back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jakob, and can never be undone (Rom 11:28–29).⁵⁴ This, and not any human missionary activity, is the basis of Israel's salvation in Paul's thought.

9.3 From Joining to Parting

Having become convinced that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead – which was, as noted above, a confirmation of his Pharisaic belief in the resurrection of the dead⁵⁵ – and that this resurrection inaugurated the final sequence of history before Israel's God's decisive intervention in human governance and politics, Paul developed an understanding of his call to be the salvation of the nations, in their “full number” (Rom 11:25). Preparing the nations for the ultimate divine judgment act, after God had moved on from the long period of time when he had left sins unpunished (Rom 3:25–26), Paul sought to order the world so that it matched what he understood to be the state in which God wanted to find it. This meant, as Richard Last has argued,⁵⁶ primarily to organize institutions – associations – which reflected the diversity that he deemed salvifically appropriate. Not surprisingly, the basic form of diversity that took up most of the time and effort of the apostle to the nations was ethnic in nature, since salvation was, for him, an ethnic category. A joining of the ways between Jews and gentiles was for Paul thus not just a general wish to convince the world that the Christ had significance outside the Jewish people. The joining of the ways of the nations with those of the Jewish people lay at the very core of both his theological convictions and his socio-institutional program.⁵⁷

If we put aside the general and, in my view, analytically inappropriate terms “universalism” and “particularism,” and direct the spotlight to the details of how Paul perceived that things needed to change for his ideal vision of the eschatological order to materialize as he prepared the nations for divine judgment, the following tripartite pattern emerges. a) With regard to Ethnic Status, Paul moved from an open-ethnic stance to a closed-ethnic position, insisting on eth-

⁵⁴ Cf. Num 23:19.

⁵⁵ The phenomenon of resurrection in itself was likely not the problem for Paul before joining the movement, but rather the “now” and the “who,” the latter aspect also affecting and modifying various ideas about the messianic figure and this figure's role in Israel and the world.

⁵⁶ Last, “Purpose.”

⁵⁷ These two – theology and institution – were, for Paul, simply two sides of the same coin, the latter a manifestation of the former, and, consequently, serving as an embodied and constant reminder of the message he proclaimed. See discussion above, Ch. 7.

nic diversity *en Christō* in order to make visible his theological conviction that “God shows no partiality” (Rom 2:11). b) Shifting to the Aspect of Salvation, Paul adopted a salvation-exclusive position in his approach to the nations, keeping for Israel a salvation-inclusive vision, based on their location on his conceptual map as being instrumental to the salvation of the world as a whole. c) Finally, building on the other two aspects, Paul left behind his previous approach to mission as proselytizing and embraced instead an inclusive ethno-ethic mission, aiming to position the gentiles alongside, but distinguished from Jews like himself “in-Christ.”

In sum, then, for Paul the salvation of the world depended on a joining of Jews *as* Jews and gentiles *as* gentiles under the umbrella of the overarching “in-Christ” identity. This salvifically efficient arrangement makes institutionally tangible the core conviction that the God of Israel is the God of the whole world (Rom 3:29–31); an organizational proclamation through membership profiles that God will not be partial as he brings history as we know it to an end through a decisive judgment act (Rom 2:4–11; 10:12–13; 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28). This intense Pauline commitment to maintaining diversity within the *ekklēsia* – indeed, ultimately his particular theo-ethnic notion of divine mercy and justice – was, however, soon to be forgotten in the emerging mainstream (non-Jewish) churches. To put things in perspective, perhaps a brief and broad brush-stroke comparison may be useful, based on the three aspects we have explored above.

In terms of ethnic status, while Paul came to embrace a closed-ethnic position, the later mainstream churches rejected Jewish ethnicity as a salvifically significant parameter altogether and developed a non-ethnic stance.⁵⁸ As for Paul’s composite approach to salvation, maintaining Israel as a necessary category even outside Christ alongside his salvation-exclusive approach to the non-Jewish world, the churches to come abandoned complexity and nurtured primarily salvation exclusivism.⁵⁹ Finally, as much as Paul’s mission strategy, his inclusive ethno-ethic stance, was dependent on his position on ethnicity and salvation, the changing hermeneutics in the non-Jewish churches led to an adoption of a proselytizing mission.

It was especially the move to a non-ethnic position in the emerging mainstream churches that turned on its head the very point of departure not only for

⁵⁸ To be sure, such a position does not exclude application of ethnic discourse, understanding Christians as a “third-race.” On this, see Denise Kimber Buell, *Why this New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). The terminology applied here rather foregrounds the step away from a theo-ethnic focus on the people of Israel as *sine qua non* for the salvation of the nations, a focus essential to the earliest Jesus movement, including Paul, as it began expanding outside the Jewish people.

⁵⁹ It should be noted, though, that Cyprian (cf. above, n. 22) was never fully accepted, as some theologies have been more open than others. It was not until the Second Vatican Council, however, that such more open trajectories, also in relation to the Jewish people specifically, were developed more fully in depth and reach.

Paul's strategizing on gentile inclusion, but also the theological foundation behind it. What was for Paul an ethno-religious matter of course – that Judaism (in its Christ-oriented form) was the gift that would save even the non-Jews – morphed, in the hands of the Church Fathers, into an archetypal heresy. What began as a variant of Jewish teaching for gentiles was thus transformed into gentile teaching for Jews. Or, if a metaphor be allowed, the Jews who opened their home to receive and save the Other as the divine reckoning was approaching were themselves thrown out and declared unfit for the kingdom by those whom they had tried to rescue.

Remarkably, all of this could be and was done claiming support from Paul. Of course, the path eventually chosen by the majority was controlled by political, cultural, and socio-institutional forces unknown to Paul, but which became crucial as Christian theology mapped – and merged with – new religio-political realities. These forces, rather than Paul,⁶⁰ explain how and why Christianity reorganized the eschaton and created the salvific otherness between Jews and non-Jews that Paul sought to overcome. Analyses of the hermeneutical aerobics involved in this process, and their disastrous outcomes over centuries for the Jewish people in particular, may help us not only to understand better the Paul of history, but also the history of Paul, from Late Antiquity until today. Such understanding is bound to highlight our own choices as interpreters as well as the nature and discursive role of historical analysis itself for how we perceive of and shape the world. A self-reflective scrutinizing of our methods and motives – an academic response of sorts to the Delphic *gnōthi seauton*⁶¹ – is, after all, an integral part of the scholarly pursuit. Indeed, in this regard Abelard's approach, echoing Aristotle, still provides guidance insisting that questioning "is the first key to wisdom... For by doubting we come to enquiry, and by enquiry we perceive the truth."⁶²

In an effort to reach back in time and reclaim Paul's historical voice as a voice that is not simply an echo of our own, Parts I and II have worked towards reconfiguring the way we ask questions as we speak history into being, and we have done so alongside attempts at uncovering the (pre-Rabbinic) institutional

⁶⁰ Sandnes, *Paul Perceived*, 51, alludes to a similar hermeneutical dynamic, which removes Paul from direct continuity with the later theological choices of the churches: "It seems Paul's Damascus experience and his Gentile mission brought into being a theology that contributed to a process gradually moving toward a parting of the ways, although that was not at all his intention."

⁶¹ Perhaps, among the multifarious expressions of the reception of this dictum, the initial lines of Alexander Pope's poem *Know then Thyself* from *An Essay on Man, Epistle II*, catches best the sense fitting the context here: "Know then thyself, presume not God to scan//The proper study of mankind is Man."

⁶² Peter Abelard, prologue to *Sic et Non*, in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100–1375: The Commentary Tradition*, rev. edn., ed. A.J. Minnis and A.B. Scott (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 99–100. Quoted from: *The Bible in Medieval Tradition: The Letter to the Romans*, trans. and ed. Levy, et al., 31.

settings which constituted the matrices within which Paul's message was formed and communicated. Together, these chapters have yielded an image of the apostle to the nations as a Jew proclaiming a form of Judaism, of Jewish ancestral customs adapted for non-Jews, in order to save them from destruction as the world was coming to an end; to prepare them for the imminent universal judgment to be executed by the God of Israel. This portrait aligns in many ways with the current scholarship on Paul often labelled the Paul within Judaism perspective. The historical Paul is, however, rarely heard in later, contemporary settings where his letters are understood as in some way normative, including in Christian churches where the apostle is read on a weekly basis all year around. Why is it that so many have heard and still hear in these letters a Christian proclaiming a Jesus who ends Judaism, when it seems so clear to many historians that it is a Jew speaking, who rather desperately is trying to save non-Jews from annihilation? How can this hermeneutical conundrum be explained? Among many other factors, one of the key developments that has influenced our way of hearing and created current reading cultures, I believe, is the process often, and problematically, referred to as the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity, or between Jews and Christians. Since, compared to Paul, we are today on the other side of that process, having been socialized into a world in which "Jews" and "Christians," "synagogues" and "churches" refer to distinct religious identities and entities, in order to understand Paul as the historical Other we arguably also need to understand ourselves through studying that which lies, historically, between us and him. In Part III, therefore, we shall explore these developments that created us and our world, so that we can more easily discern, from a distance, Paul in his world. As we proceed with this task, we shall continue to keep the spotlight on ancient institutions and how they develop through the centuries, shaping the processes and interactions in which we take an interest.

Part III

After Paul

I will ask them where they have come from,
or who is the author of their ancestral customs. Nobody, they will say.

In fact, they themselves originated from Judaism,
and they cannot name any other source for their teacher and chorus-leader.
Nevertheless, they rebelled against the Jews.

Celsus, *apud* Origen, *Cels.*, 5.33.

10. Jewish and Christian Interaction from the First to the Fifth Century CE

10.1 Studying Jewish and Christian Interaction: Problems and Procedure

Issues relating to the nature and extent of Jewish and Christian interaction in antiquity are as complex as the available evidence is problematic and difficult to interpret. Indeed, the very terms “Jewish” and “Christian” themselves are awkward on several levels, all of which threaten to undermine the project of historical reconstruction. As we have explored in the preceding chapters, any use of terminology takes as point of departure how the words employed are understood in contemporary discourses, just as much as our historical questions necessarily proceed from the here and now. Approaching the problem of Jewish and Christian interaction in antiquity thus necessarily begins with reflection on what is assumed by the question. In which ways does the question control the way we seek and find our answers? I shall offer here just a few observations before we proceed to discuss the issues at hand.

First, in conventional discourses today, “Christianity” and “Judaism” are commonly listed together with other phenomena such as, e.g., “Hinduism” and “Buddhism,” all of which are treated as if they were examples of several “species” belonging to the genus “religion.” This way of construing “religion” as an overarching classification within which these traditions are organized has, however, been critiqued as an expression of a modern Western (ethnocentric) worldview; the category “religion” may fit some socio-cultural and religio-political contexts, while being quite foreign to others.¹ For the historian of what is today called “Judaism” and “Christianity,” this problem of categorization also reaches back in time, diachronically, potentially forging anachronistic assumptions about the past based on our understanding of our (local) present.² If “religion” as we commonly use the term today did not exist until late antiquity, as

¹ Cf. Jason Ananda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

² On the creation of the concept of “religion” in the Western world, see most recently Nongbri, *Before Religion*. On “religion” and its effects on readings of Paul, see also Nongbri, “The Concept of Religion,” 1–26.

Daniel Boyarin and others have argued,³ or even later,⁴ that means that the very question about interaction between what we would understand as religious groups, Judaism and Christianity, needs to be reconfigured to accommodate the period antedating the “religionization” of these traditions.⁵ This is true even if we choose to still use the term “religion”; we see certain developments between the first and fifth centuries in this regard, which need to be taken into consideration when interaction is analyzed.

At the heart of this complex of problems lies the issue of ethnicity, as intertwined with a geographical area (land), certain god(s), and specific, culturally embedded laws and customs.⁶ If Judaism does not refer to a system of beliefs and practices abstracted from ethno-cultural customs, but designates a way of life expressed in various spheres of society (domestic as well as public and the social space in-between, where we find the associations), we need to analyze any interaction between people belonging to this group and other similar groups taking into consideration ethnic identity as well as the nature of the interaction, as it takes place in various social loci where aspects of ethnicity are expressed.⁷

This brings us to a second problem, namely that “Christianity” as a “religion” comes into being sometime during the period targeted in this chapter, between the first and the fifth centuries. Originally, the movement that formed around Jesus, both before and after his death, was, as much as any other Jewish movement, such as those of the Pharisees or the Essenes, an integrated part of what we today call “Judaism.” Indeed, the term “Christianity” was used for the first time only in the second century.⁸ Strictly speaking, then, it is not possible to

³ Daniel Boyarin, “The Christian Invention of Judaism: The Theodosian Empire and the Rabbinic Refusal of Religion,” *Representations* 85 (2004): 21–57.

⁴ Nongbri, “The Concept of Religion.”

⁵ Boyarin argues that significant developments took place between the fourth and the fifth centuries, i.e. around the upper time limit for the present chapter, which he identifies as the “orthodox Christian invention of religion” (“Christian Invention,” 21).

⁶ Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 457–512.

⁷ This focus on ethnicity has led some scholars to suggest that we should speak of “Judeans” rather than “Jews” in this time period; see Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans*, 19–76; Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 457–512. For the view that the translation “Jew” should be retained, see below, Ch. 11. The issue is discussed extensively in *Jew and Judean: A Marginalia Forum on Politics and Historiography in the Translation of Ancient Texts* (Los Angeles: The Marginalia Review of Books, 26 August, 2014).

⁸ For discussion, see Ch. 4 above. The terminological shift away from using the term “Christians” to describe adherents of the Jesus Movement prior to the second century is a reflection both of an understanding that it is problematic to separate the early Jesus Movement from “Judaism” (Thiessen, “Paul’s Argument,” 373–391; William S. Campbell, “Differentiation and Discrimination in Paul’s Ethnic Discourse,” *Transformation (Exeter)* 30 [2013]: 157–168), but also from the perspective that if we approach early Jesus-oriented groups in the same way we approach other ancient Mediterranean associations, then it becomes anachronistic to assume the ideological uniformity indicated by the name “Christianity” before this is expressed in the sources themselves (cf. John S. Kloppenborg, “Disciplined Exaggeration: The Heuristics of Comparison in Biblical Studies,” *NovT* 59 [2017]: 390–414).

study “Jewish” and “Christian” interaction in the early period, without distorting the evidence through aligning it terminologically, socio-religiously, and politically with later historical periods. In brief, and in very generalized terms, what we see during the first five centuries is a gradual process, often ambiguous and never linear, in which the Jesus movement becomes ethno-culturally disembedded, losing central identity markers related to the Jewish *ethnos*, markers which emerging mainstream forms of Late-Antique Judaism maintained, nurtured and developed. Understanding of this process, which materialized in distinctive ways in different social, political and geographical loci, is of key interest to anyone engaged in studying interaction between members of the Jesus movement(s) and other Jews and non-Jews.

During the course of these developments, Christianity as we know it today as a tradition related to but separate from Judaism took form as a “religion.” The creation of “religion” as a system of beliefs and practices disentangled from aspects of ethnicity was thus contemporaneous with the emergence of Christianity (and, somewhat later, Islam).⁹ Non-Jewish Christians forged this new type of “religious” identity, but due to the Jewish ethno-religious roots clearly manifested in their holy scriptures, and the fact that many Christians seemed not to have been aware of any significant differences between Judaism and Christianity,¹⁰ the entire project needed “Judaism” as a negative comparative counterpart, a reversed “religious” mirror image against which “Christianity” would make religious sense as the only salvifically viable option. Christian supersessionism, i.e., the notion that Christianity and Judaism are mutually exclusive and that Christians have superseded Jews as the people of God, requires precisely two clearly identifiable and comparable religious categories to make theo-rhetorical sense. While Jews never internalized this image of their way of life as a “religion” – most mainstream forms of Judaism still maintain the key connection between *ethnos*, land, law and God – Christian discourses on Judaism, even in our own days, often construe Judaism assuming a universal relevance of the basic parameters of religious boundary making that apply within Christian

⁹ This does not mean that “ethnicity” as a discursive category became obsolete in Christian writings; cf. discussion by Buell, *Why This New Race*. Furthermore, it appears that leading up to this development in Christianity, a number of ancient Mediterranean groups, which had previously been strongly connected to certain ethnicities or geographical loci, began to find ways of becoming relevant for individuals with no prior connection to these. For example, the spread of the Isis cult around the Mediterranean basin led to an increased ethnic diversity within such groups, and yet the retention of Egyptian priests by Isiac cultic centers also speaks to a certain tension between open- and closed-ethnic approaches, as these groups navigated the changes inevitably brought about when a previously ethnically- or geographically-specific cult begins to transgress its former boundaries. On the diffusion of the Isis cult and the relevance of this for understanding the diffusion of Christianity, see Robert A. Wortham, “Urban Networks, Deregulated Religious Markets, Cultural Continuity, and the Diffusion of the Isis Cult,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 18 (2006): 103–123.

¹⁰ As witnessed by Chrysostom and several other sources contemporary with him.

communities. What we have here, then, and what makes the task of analyzing interaction in this specific case complicated, is an asymmetric historical relationship (an apples-and-oranges scenario, if you like) often terminologically concealed in the literature, but which is stretched out over centuries.

Even in cases of symmetrical relationships, however, it would be a mistake to understand interaction between individuals and groups, identified based on religious criteria, as motivated exclusively by religious concerns and identities. Identity is a complex phenomenon; actions rarely spring from concerns isolated to one aspect of human existence. What may seem to be religiously motivated interaction may, in reality, be better explained by other factors and interests. Further, one should also note that interaction may take different forms in different spheres of society, and that distinct types of source material will yield information about and help interpret contextually the evidence related to each. The major parameters to consider when interaction is to be analyzed can be summarized in a chart on based on the premise that for primary sources, each source type (e.g. legal material, inscriptions, papyri, literary texts, archaeological remains) should be examined noting especially what type of information can be extracted from it as related to the three social levels:

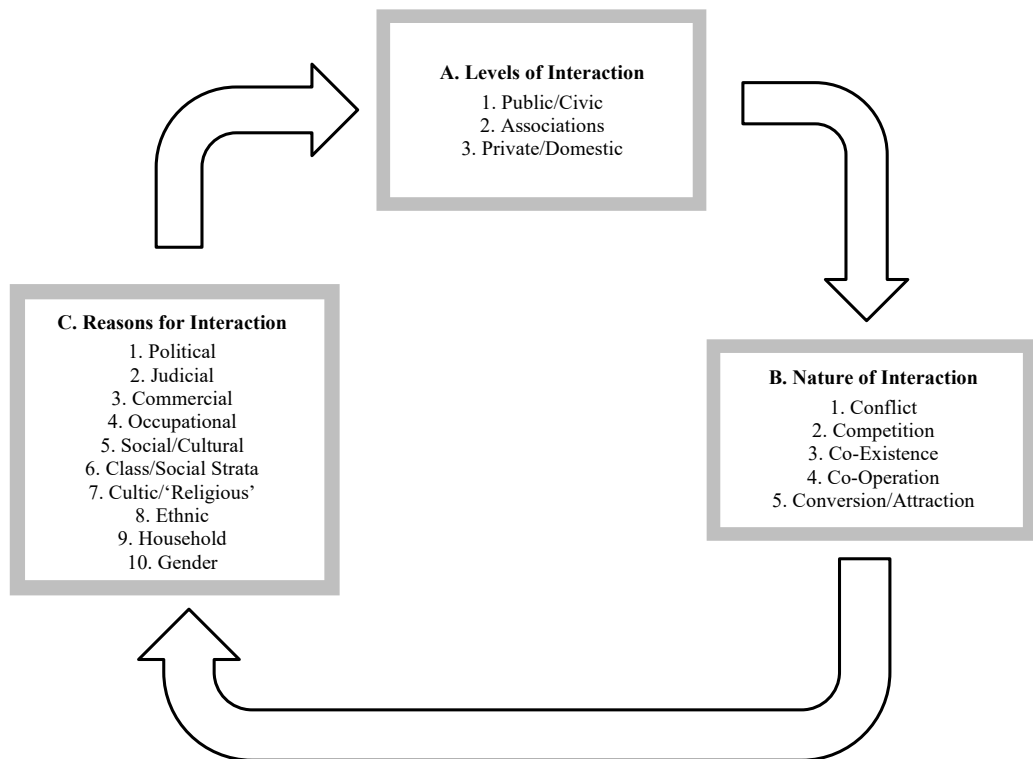


Figure 6. Examples of parameters to consider in the analysis of Jewish/Christian interaction.

Finally, it is of some importance, I believe, to keep in mind the larger Greco-Roman socio-political (and therefore also cultic) context in which interaction took place between groups and individuals adhering to some sort of worship involving the Jesus figure, whether Jews or non-Jews, on the one hand, and Jews who chose not to follow this messiah, on the other. This overarching public imperial matrix, in which our interaction was embedded and shaped, gradually changed over the centuries, so that during the timespan we are interested in here, one form of (Nicaean) Christ-cult rose to political prominence as all Greco-Roman cults were officially prohibited in 392 by Theodosius I. This, of course, did not mean that such worship of these gods disappeared; on the contrary, there is plenty of evidence that this process took several centuries to be implemented.¹¹ It does mean, however, that certain civic dynamics changed, eventually leading to transformed relationships between Jewish and Christian groups. The overall general development may be described in a simple chart:

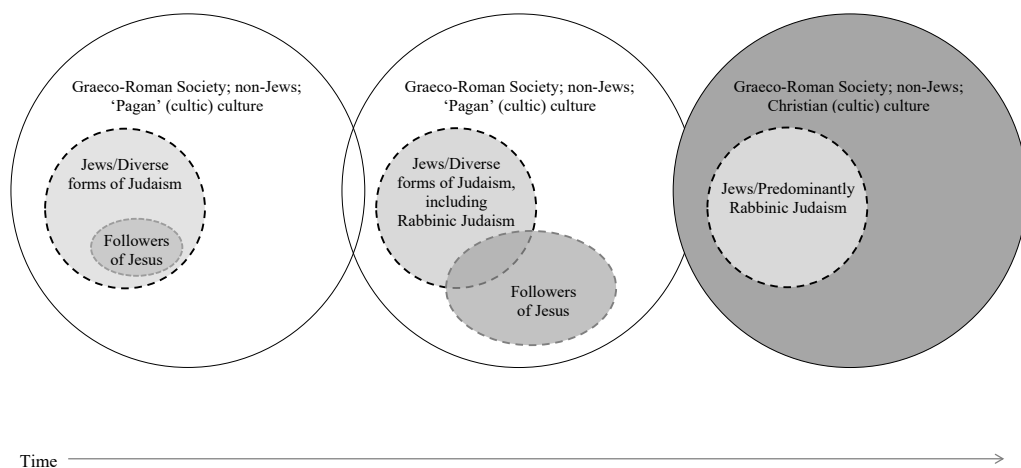


Figure 7. Schematic overview of the transformation of the imperial socio-political and cultic context in which interaction between Christ-groups, whether Jewish or non-Jewish, and other Jews took place, from the first to the seventh centuries CE.

At the same time as this form of politically empowered (non-Jewish) Christianity rose to prominence, we see in Jewish communities the rise of a particular form of Judaism, Rabbinic Judaism, gradually defining for most Jews what it meant to be “Jewish.” Again, this does not mean that other forms of Judaism had long since disappeared. Rather, in the struggle to (re-) define Judaism in a Late-Antique world where non-Jewish forms of Christianity claimed both Jewish holy scriptures and public political space, Rabbinic Jews reacted against alternative forms of expressing Jewishness, including Jesus-centered forms of Ju-

¹¹ For discussion of the archaeological evidence for aspects of this process see, e.g. Sauer, *Archaeology*.

daism, as they narrowed down what they understood to be appropriate modes of being Jewish.¹²

With these reflections in mind, we shall now proceed chronologically as we consider aspects of interaction (conflict, competition, co-existence, co-operation and attraction/conversion, in various combinations) within the general context described above. The chronological sequence will, however, be subordinated to a social criterion, so that developments are approached by looking at different spheres of society in turn, beginning with public, civic settings before moving on to associations and domestic contexts, respectively.

While literary texts will provide us with most of the source material, we shall also comment on other source types, such as archaeological remains. Doing so, we shall pay special attention to institutional settings within which attitudes towards the Other may have been shaped and enacted. Before concluding, we will comment on the process often, and in my opinion problematically, called the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity. Throughout, the deceptively simple questions, “Who is a Jew?” “Who is a Christian?” and, importantly, “Who decides?” will threaten to undermine, implicitly or explicitly, any overly neat categorizations, frustrating our desire for unambiguous answers.

10.2 Interaction in Public Civic Settings: Local, National, Imperial

The historical Jesus and the group of people that formed around him were active and proclaimed their message in the public, (religio-) civic institutions of the land of Israel that our sources use various terms to describe (e.g., *synagōgē*, *pro-seuchē*, *ekklēsia*), but which in modern English are called synagogues.¹³

The earliest evidence speaking of interaction between followers of Jesus (as well as Jesus himself) and other Jews in this type of public setting is found in the

¹² Cf. Karin Hedner Zetterholm, “Alternate Visions of Judaism and Their Impact on the Formation of Rabbinic Judaism.” *JJMJS* 1 (2014): 127–153. See also Reed, “‘Jewish Christianity’ after the ‘Parting of the Ways,’” 189–231; Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, “The Didascalia Apostolorum: A Mishnah for the disciples of Jesus,” *JECs* 9.4 [2001]: 483–509).

¹³ Runesson, “Historical Jesus,” 265–297. For extensive discussion of the implications of this institutional context for our understanding of Jesus’s aims, see Ryan, *Role of the Synagogue*. As we have discussed above in Ch.3, the same terms were also used to designate another type of institution, the Jewish associations. Contrary to Jewish associations, public synagogues existed only in villages, towns and cities where Jews were in charge of administration, and they belonged to the community, not to a specific Jewish interest group such as, e.g. the Pharisees (cf. m. Ned. 5:5). These institutions were open to all, men and women alike, and there is no mention of any restrictions with regard to the participation in meetings of any specific groups and/or individuals. Public synagogues also housed law courts and archives, and it is likely that they also, as evidence from the Diaspora suggests, functioned as treasuries and were the place where slaves were manumitted. For source material and discussion thereof, see *ASSB*.



Figure 8. The synagogue at Gamla, the Golan Heights, just northeast of Lake Tiberias; looking southwest. The building is dated to the first century BCE/CE. Note the architectural design, especially the stepped benches, and what it implies about the nature of the public meetings and interaction that took place in this type of space.

New Testament Gospels: Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John. While based on interpreted oral traditions predating the fall of the temple in 70 CE, these texts were authored in the late first century and, at points, signal concerns relevant to that time. There is no evidence, though, of any institutional or structural changes in local public synagogues/civic assemblies during the first and early second centuries, a historical circumstance making our task somewhat easier with regard to the issue of possible anachronisms in the texts. The political developments that eventually led to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, the key (religio-)civic institution in the earliest period, did affect, however, how the Jesus movement was perceived and treated by various leadership groups in Jewish society, both on what we may call a national level and in some local settings.¹⁴ From the pen of a Jewish author outside of the Jesus movement commenting on our topic from a first-century perspective, we have only two brief passages, of which one has been edited by a later Christian scribe: Josephus's *Antiquities* (18.63–64; 20.200). What can we say about interaction between the Jesus movement and Jewish and other authorities in the land based on this evidence?

¹⁴ On the term “nation” as applied to antiquity, see discussion in David Goldblatt, *Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1–27.

First, we need to distinguish between interaction in local synagogues in various parts of the land, on the one hand, and the institution of the Jerusalem temple, on the other; the latter was, in contrast to the local character of the former, the focal point for discourses on Jewish national identity. The temple authorities had, moreover, until 70 CE, cultic, and therefore also political, responsibility for the otherwise administratively separate parts of the land, governed, respectively, by Rome directly and, with some interruption, Herodian rulers until around 100 CE when all areas were brought under Roman provincial rule.

The evidence strongly suggests that the historical Jesus chose to interact with local Jewish communities primarily through their public institutions, the synagogues, and that in so doing, he attracted negative attention from the local leaders in charge.¹⁵ The reasons for conflicts between Jesus and these local scribal leaders were likely complex, and are not easily generalized. As Chris Keith has argued, it is probable that the mere fact that Jesus took on a role in these institutions otherwise held by the scribes probably triggered, in and of itself, significant discontent, regardless of the message proclaimed.¹⁶ One cannot ignore, however, that as local administrators in charge of, among other things, interpreting and teaching law based on local custom and tradition,¹⁷ these scribes would have been sensitive to the political dimensions of a message focused on bringing about a kingdom, which precluded current figures of authority from retaining their positions of power. While there are plenty of traditions speaking of Jewish crowds supporting and following Jesus, and we have some evidence of members of another Jewish group, the Pharisees, trying to save Jesus's life when he is threatened by the ruler of Galilee (Luke 13:31¹⁸), we have no positive remarks preserved directed at Jewish political rulers. Herod the Great is accused of trying to kill Jesus (Matt 2:13–17); Archelaos is a threat to Jesus's life (Matt 2:22); Antipas executes Jesus's closest ally John (Matt 14:1–12; cf. Luke 3:19), seeks to kill Jesus and is called a fox (Luke 13:31–32). Further, Jesus is revealed as the Messiah, the coming king, in Philip's territory, directly after which both Mark and Matthew have placed a section where Jesus discloses that he will be rejected by politically influential leaders and then killed (Mark 8:27–31; Matt 16:16–21; cf. Luke 9:20–22).

Such traditions indicate to us memories of a Jesus who stirred political unrest. Since his message was often proclaimed publicly in civic institutions (synagogues), the leaders in charge of those institutions were faced with the choice of rejecting or supporting the religio-political critique of power inherent in the message. While Matthew's gospel does indicate that some local scribes in fact

¹⁵ Ryan, *Role of the Synagogue*.

¹⁶ Keith, *Jesus against the Scribal Elite*.

¹⁷ See discussion in Ch. 7 above.

¹⁸ Cf. Acts 5:33–39 where we find a prominent Pharisee saving the lives of Jesus's disciples as they are threatened by members of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem.

joined his movement (Matt 13:52; 23:34; cf. 8:19), it seems improbable that many did, since such movements were likely seen as destabilizing an already delicate situation under Roman imperial influence. As for the region where Jesus was primarily active, Galilee, we also know that Antipas was a comparatively effective ruler, as far as the balancing act between Rome's demands (taxation) and popular unrest was concerned.¹⁹ This would hardly have been possible without some sort of co-operation, or at least not open hostility, between local and regional authorities.²⁰

This general picture of tension between Jesus and his followers, on the one hand, and local and regional civic authorities, on the other, is reinforced and intensified when the scene shifts to the national level, i.e., when Jesus and his followers interact with various authorities in Jerusalem. There is a general tendency in all the gospels, although more so in the Synoptics than in John, to describe Jesus and his movement as successful among the people ("the crowds") both in Galilee and Jerusalem, so that the majority of the Jewish people is portrayed in sharp contrast to the civic authorities.²¹ While the texts include a few critical comments related to the "crowds" (and Jesus's own disciples), and Matthew's gospel in particular is fiercely critical towards the Pharisees and vice versa, it seems clear that the historical Jesus and the earliest movement around him targeted specifically the civic authorities,²² both in Galilee and the surrounding areas and in Jerusalem.

Since in the ancient world human societies were understood as intertwined with and mirroring the cosmic realm, a "religious" message about a coming kingdom, especially when paired with claims that current leaders were illegitimate, would inevitably be seen as inciting revolt, as a threat to the status quo. Civic leaders would react accordingly, especially in Jerusalem where awareness of the sensitive situation caused by Rome's imperial presence was acute. From the perspective of these leaders, they themselves were, of course, legitimate authorities. Serving the God of Israel, they had been charged with the difficult duty of performing cultic and political tasks balancing between the threat of Roman intervention and popular riots and insurrection (cf. John 11:48–50; Acts

¹⁹ On Antipas's long rule, see Morten Hørning Jensen, *Herod Antipas in Galilee: The Literary and Archaeological Sources on the Reign of Herod Antipas and Its Socio-Economic Impact on Galilee*, 2nd ed., WUNT 2.215 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

²⁰ Several other Messianic claimants and their followers, all of whom threatened the status quo in the land in the first century, are mentioned by Josephus; none of them were, however, successful in their aims. For sources and brief discussion, see Craig A. Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011) 431–443; cf. Stegemann and Stegemann, *Jesus Movement*, 165–186.

²¹ E.g. Mark 2:2; 10:46; 11:18, 31–32; Matt 7:28–8:1; 19:1–2; 22:45–46; 26:3–5; Luke 4:42–44; 14:25; 22:2; John 7:31–32; cf. Acts 5:12–18.

²² I include the chief priests, elders and scribes employed in the temple administration among these civic leaders, since the temple was a political institution as much as a religious one.

5:27–28). From the perspective of Jesus and the people who joined him, the current conditions in the land – divided as it was into separate administrative units, ruled not by a Jewish king of the Davidic line but by Herodians and, even worse in the case of Judea and Samaria, by Rome directly – was evidence that God’s anger had been provoked and judgement was about to be executed.

It would seem from a political and military perspective that the Jewish authorities had little choice but to let the Romans handle the situation in the manner they always did with similar movements, through executing leaders and most of the followers,²³ and so save the people from destruction, as John’s gospel would also describe it (John 11:50). As we shall see below, it is likely that the Jesus movement continued to spread among Jews in the land long after the execution of Jesus, which in turn would explain the continued resistance against this group among many local leaders of civic institutions (synagogues), as noted by the gospels (Mark 13:9; Matt 10:17–18; 23:34; Luke 21:12). Josephus also reports that, in Jerusalem, the high priest Ananus, using the Sanhedrin as a legal tool, saw to it that James the brother of Jesus and some others, presumably also members of the movement, were executed (Josephus, *A.J.* 20.200).

If we summarize the interaction between members of the Jesus movement and Jewish civic authorities in the early period (first century), we may note the following. In terms of the nature of the interaction, the sources mention almost exclusively tension and conflict, which often led to punishment, presumably based on court proceedings. It is likely, however, that only such persons in the movement who were very vocal and were perceived as direct threats to social and political stability were targeted in such procedures; the majority of sympathizers would not have experienced this type of violence. We have no evidence of mass persecutions of followers of Jesus resulting in executions by Jewish authorities, but must assume a certain level of co-existence between members of this group and others in Jewish villages, towns and cities, especially in areas removed from political centers such as Jerusalem.²⁴

Why, then, did Jesus and the movement that followed him trigger this type of reaction with civic authorities? As noted above, while the basic reasons for these negative developments were very likely related to social dynamics involved when role expectations associated with the socio-economic status quo were disrupted, perhaps especially in Galilee,²⁵ it is impossible to ignore the political implications of the proclamation of a coming kingdom and how that would have

²³ See above, n. 20.

²⁴ Even in the case of Jerusalem, Josephus notes that when James was executed, other Jews, including King Agrippa, reacted negatively and rejected the whole procedure of assembling the Sanhedrin for this purpose (*A.J.* 20.201–203). This indicates that this was an unusual measure taken against members of the movement.

²⁵ See Sakari Häkkinen, “Poverty in First Century Galilee,” *HTS Theological Studies* 72 (2016): 1–9.

been perceived by civic leaders as threatening to destabilize the status quo. This latter reason for the conflict provoked by the Jesus-group would have been especially acute on the national level in Jerusalem, as Roman imperial interests would have made themselves known precisely in relation to such a religio-political ideology (cf. John 11:48–50). As we see from passages in the gospels and in Josephus, the reaction of the Jewish authorities involved was to activate judicial proceedings and refer to law in order to remove what they saw as a threat to continued relatively peaceful interaction with Roman imperial interests, which in turn was in all likelihood understood as a measure taken to save the Jewish people from destruction. For those members of the Jesus movement who were most vocal and attracted the attention of the authorities, the result could be some sort of corporeal punishment, such as flogging, a punishment meted out in synagogues according to the Mishnah,²⁶ and, on rare occasions, death. It may be of some interest to note that these types of conflicts have nothing to do with ethnicity, which later becomes an issue in other settings, neither with what we would call religious teachings, here understood as divorced from political concerns and as such would also be a site for negative interaction in later centuries.

When we move into the second century, our sources on interaction involving civic authorities and legislation become meagre, only to re-emerge in the fourth to sixth centuries with Christian legislation on Jews and Judaism in an empire where leading political authorities now embraced (non-Jewish) Christianity as state religion.²⁷ While historically, as we know from Josephus,²⁸ the Jews were accepted and enjoyed protection from civic authorities in Mediterranean societies in the early centuries,²⁹ things began to change slowly once Christianity had become politically empowered in the late fourth and fifth centuries. As Amnon Linder writes:

State intervention in typically “religious” Jewish matters resulted, therefore, from the general tendency of the state to penetrate areas of life in which it had not previously been involved and from the growing hostility toward Judaism and its institutions which intensified in direct proportion to the Christianization of the state.³⁰

²⁶ m. Mak. 3:12 (ASSB, No. 86); cf. Acts 22:19 (ASSB, No 73; cf. Nos. 19, 20).

²⁷ For sources, see Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*. The key texts are the *Theodosian Code* and the Justinian Corpus.

²⁸ Roman decrees on Jewish rights are reproduced in Josephus’s *Antiquities*; for texts, translations and comments, see ASSB, Nos. 93 (Delos), 108 (Ephesus), 109 (Halicarnassus), 110 (Miletus), 113 (Sardis), 114 (Sardis), 120 (by Augustus; unspecified locations) and 180 (Rome).

²⁹ With notable exceptions, including occasional flare-ups of violence against Jews in cities such as Alexandria. Cf. discussion by Tessa Rajak, “Jewish Culture in the Greek Speaking Diaspora in the Century after the Destruction: Hellenization and Translation,” *SEA* 80(2015): 39–41.

³⁰ Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, 87.

While in the first century conflicts between Christ-followers and other Jews could be brought to a non-Jewish court, only to be referred back to the Jewish community as a matter to be dealt with by the Jews themselves, later non-Jewish Christian imperial legislators produced laws aiming to circumscribe more generally Jewish interaction with others, especially Christians, in society, and Christians could not be judged by a court led by a Jew.³¹

To be sure, Christian imperial legislation on Jews and Judaism also contained positive aspects, a witness to the fact that legislators, understanding Judaism as a “religion” and categorizing it as such alongside Christianity, saw a close affinity between Judaism and Christianity, as opposed to “pagan” traditions.³² Importantly, Judaism was recognized as a “permitted religion,” protected as such in a law dated to 393 CE,³³ a legal tradition Christian legislators inherited from their “pagan” predecessors. As in earlier periods, in a law from 412 CE, Jews were exempted from performing duties on sabbaths and holidays.³⁴ Further, a law from 398 CE rules that Jews and their synagogues must be protected from Christian attacks.³⁵

With regard to synagogues, the centers of Jewish communal life, we see a declining pattern, however. As a *locus religionis* (“place of religion”), the synagogue enjoyed protection in several laws from the fourth century not only from attacks by Christians but also when local rulers prevented these buildings from being used. While this approach is distinguishable until as late as the early fifth century, more restrictive legislation began to emerge in 415 CE. At that time, Theodosius II, targeting Gamaliel VI, banned the building of new synagogues and ordered those in unpopulated areas to be destroyed; in 423 CE this was turned into general law.³⁶ With one atypical exception,³⁷ already existing synagogues were allowed to stand and, when needed, renovated. Other laws that restricted Jewish life in Christian society related to ownership and conversion

³¹ Cf. Acts 18:12–16, where the author recounts a story about a case involving Paul, in which the proconsul of Achaia, Gallio, refuses to be judge, implicitly acknowledging the Jesus movement as a Jewish group, and the Jewish community as having more autonomy than later centuries would allow them.

³² For example, regulations applied to officials in synagogues (referred to as “priesthood”) were treated in a way analogical to laws governing privileges of clergy in the church.

³³ This law was re-affirmed in 397 (Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, No. 27).

³⁴ Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, No. 40. However, a law from 408 CE explicitly prohibited Jews from mocking Christians during the celebration of Purim.

³⁵ Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, No. 21. This law was followed up by Theodosius II in 423, where the wording of the text reveals that the legislator understood such behavior not only to be unlawful but also to be un-Christian; Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, 1987), 86, and Nos. 47–49.

³⁶ Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, No. 47.

³⁷ In 535 CE, Justinian prohibited the maintenance of synagogues in North Africa, ordering these buildings to be converted into churches. See Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, 74.

of Christian slaves, intermarriage (law promulgated in 388 CE), the autonomy of Jewish legal systems, the level of involvement of Jews in administration (Jews were prohibited from entering into “state service” in 418 CE³⁸), and the extent to which Jewish lawyers could practice law.

Several of these laws, such as those relating to synagogues and intermarriage, were clearly meant to prevent Judaism from expanding. This, in turn, indicates that the opposite was in fact happening at this time; it is a reasonable assumption that legislation aims at preventing from happening phenomena and behavior that actually occur. We cannot, then, draw far-reaching conclusions about the general state of Jewish communities and Jewish-Christian relations based on a simplistic reading of legal sources only. After all, we know from archaeological remains that monumental synagogues were still being built at this time, and that there were a number of contemporary laws aimed at protecting Christianity from defamation and Christian rites from being profaned by Jews. Laws from 408 and 409 CE protect orthodox Christians from persecution by various “heretics,” Jews, and pagans in North Africa, for example.³⁹ It appears, thus, that the Jews were not an entirely marginalized and fragile minority even as late as in the fifth century.⁴⁰ Rather, we find in Jewish communities vocal groups which received proselytes and, at least in some places, even worked to expand their membership.⁴¹ It is also during this time, from the fourth century onwards, that we see Rabbinic Judaism emerge as mainstream Judaism, both in the land and in the Diaspora. This does not mean that other forms of Judaism, including Jesus-centered Judaism, immediately disappeared. As recent research has found, these other forms of Judaism likely contributed to shaping Rabbinic Judaism as the latter sought to clarify the boundaries of its communities. We shall return to this later in the chapter. Here we can note only that the success of the rabbis as they sought to promulgate a definition of Judaism that aligned with their own program may have attracted the attention of non-Jews as well, which would contribute to explaining laws issued against conversion and circumcision of non-Jews.

³⁸ Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, No. 45. Note that Jews could still serve in municipal offices and practice law, with some limitations.

³⁹ Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, Nos. 37, 38.

⁴⁰ Cf. Andrew Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 200–209.

⁴¹ On Jewish mission in the Talmudic period see, e.g. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*. Goodman notes that the rabbis developed an increased interest in proselytism in the third and fourth centuries. See also Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 342–415. Partly drawing on legal material from Late Antiquity, Feldman concludes: “Far from withdrawing into itself or restricting itself to a conflict built around the interpretation of sacred texts, Judaism boldly confronted the church” (Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 414). See also Claudia Setzer (*Jewish Responses to Early Christians: History and Polemics 30–150 CE* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994], 146), who argues that Jews and gentile Christ-followers competed for gentile converts. On mission, see also discussion in Ch. 3 above.

For a variety of different reasons, sources on interaction between followers of Jesus, whether Jews or non-Jews, and other Jews in the public, civic sphere of society, including judicial settings, speak mostly of conflict and partly of various levels of co-existence. It is of some interest to note that Christian legislation relating to Jews and Judaism understands Judaism as a “religion,” which means that the ethnic aspect, which is otherwise clearly visible in other sources as a matter of contention, is largely neutralized. This has both positive and negative effects. Among the former we find Jewish communities awarded privileges corresponding to those of Christian communities; among the latter, Jews may be, on occasion, placed together with others in the category “heretics.” In any case, it is the restrictive legislation that eventually wins the day and prepares the way for the marginalized status of the Jewish people in medieval Europe. While this is an important conclusion in and of itself, we should not mistake these sources for the “reality on the ground” in the period we are concerned with here. Even in restrictive and marginalizing legislation one can detect under the surface significant interaction between groups and individuals in private and semi-public contexts, including not only co-existence but also co-operation and attraction/conversion. We turn now to these other social settings.

10.3 Interaction Within and Between Associations

The above discussion concerned the interpretation of sources revealing attitudes and interaction as they pertain to the elite, i.e., a small but powerful minority of any ancient society. Often, while judicial institutions were empowered to implement ideologies embedded in law on the ground, the attitudes, practices, and habits of the vast majority of the population rarely aligned in any symmetrical way with those of the ruling classes. In order to reconstruct how people ordinarily related to one another, we need, consequently, to look beyond the elites. This leads us to not only consider evidence relating to individuals and the domestic sphere, but also to take into account sources that can tell us something about the social space in-between the private and the public, i.e., that space where we find what we may call unofficial associations.⁴² These organizations

⁴² This does not mean that elite individuals would not be involved in associative settings; they very much were, though benefactions etc. The point here, rather, is that these contexts allowed for a much wider membership aligning with non-elite strata of any given population. For collections of sources relating to associations in the Graeco-Roman world, see Kloppenborg and Ascough, *Greco-Roman Associations*; Harland, *Greco-Roman Associations*; John S. Kloppenborg, *Greco-Roman Associations*. Vol. III *Ptolemaic and Early Roman Egypt*, BZNSW 246 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020). See also the website of Harland, “Associations in the Greco-Roman world: An expanding collection of inscriptions, papyri, and other sources in translation” (<http://philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/>).

provided contexts in which smaller groups of people could relate to one another in ways that benefitted them in their various roles in society in different stages of life – and death. Interaction between individuals within such settings could take forms that were not possible to enact in other spheres of society, for example with regard to the gender and social status of the members. While some associations were for men only,⁴³ and others restricted access to women, many associations were mixed, containing members of both genders.⁴⁴ As members, slaves and free interacted, too, in ways that were not possible in either public or domestic settings.⁴⁵

As we have discussed above in chapter 6, categorizing associations according to the networks they supported is a helpful strategy in terms of identifying their relevance for and effect on people's lives.⁴⁶ There exists some overlap between such networks, and one should note, e.g., that while some associations were devoted exclusively to the cult of a certain deity, all associations included rituals expressing respect for and expecting benefits from the gods. Further, membership was not exclusive, so that a person could be a member of more than one association.

Jewish institutions, both in the Diaspora and in the land, building primarily on ethnic, and therefore also cultic connections, were designated by the same type of terms as we have seen above with regard to the public civic institutions in the land. Of these, *synagōgē* and *proseuchē* were the most common, but *ekklēsia* could also be used, especially, but not uniquely, by those Jews and non-Jews who were members of Christ-groups.⁴⁷ While in later centuries, *ekklēsia* came to be used exclusively by (non-Jewish) Christians as designating their religious institutions, and *Synagōgē* became synonymous with a Jewish institution, we cannot in the early period make distinctions between “synagogue” and “church,” or “Jews” and “Christians,” based on the institutional terminology applied by these groups.⁴⁸

⁴³ See, e.g., *SEG* 60:1332; *P.Lond.* VII 2193; *P.Mich.* V 244.

⁴⁴ See, e.g., *IG* II² 2358; *GRA* 113; *CIL* VI 10109; *IG* XII,5 186.

⁴⁵ For further discussion of the unique social opportunities enabled by the associative setting, see Verboven, “Associative Order,” 1–33.

⁴⁶ See pp. 167–169.

⁴⁷ See Korner, *Origin and Meaning of Ekklesia*.

⁴⁸ For discussion of these terms, see Ch. 4 above. Of course, these same terms were employed in different settings also by other Graeco-Roman institutions, which further highlights the necessity of abandoning preconceived ideas about the nature of ancient institutions based on later applications of this terminology. It should be noted that *synagōgē* was a term also used to designate non-Jewish associations, e.g. *GRA* I 86.



Figure 9. The synagogue at Ostia, Rome's harbor; looking west north-west. The building was likely used over the entire period covered in this chapter and so yields important evidence with regard to developments in art and architecture at this time. Synagogues in the Diaspora were understood as various forms of Jewish associations, all of which served a number of functions for their members, including providing a setting for the worship of the God of Israel.

The importance of the associations for our task can hardly be overstated, since they provide us with a setting in which followers of Jesus, whether Jewish or not, and other Jews, for various reasons, gathered and interacted with one another.⁴⁹ As participants in ancient Mediterranean socio-institutional cultures, Christ-followers and other Jews would likely have had to be involved in various types of associations, in addition to those devoted exclusively to the cult of their deity, the God of Israel. For example, those involved in trades and industries would presumably associate with others in guilds supporting relevant networks.⁵⁰ Thus, we cannot assume, in a manner somewhat analogical to modern day synagogues and churches, that all institutional settings in which we find Christ-believers and/or other Jews were devoted uniquely to various forms of

⁴⁹ On the categorization of (non-civic) synagogues as well as Christ-groups (remembering that the latter could be, in some cases, understood as sub-groups within the former) within the broader category of associations, themselves evidencing *diversity* within the category, see, e.g. Richardson, *Building Jewish*, 111–133, 207–221, and, more recently, Last, *Pauline Church*.

⁵⁰ In some cases, Jews involved in associations not exclusively dedicated to their deity may have brought aspects of Jewish customs with them to these culturally diverse groups, see Last, "Other Synagogues," 330–363.

worship of the God of Israel. Rather, the picture is complex and mixed, and it makes sociological sense to assume some frequency of positive interaction (not only co-existence but also co-operation) between Jews and Christ-followers in such settings, for purposes partly unrelated to their cultic identity and related beliefs.⁵¹ For a movement with some level of missionary intent and habits, such as the Christ-followers represent, this type of shared space provided a platform for interaction with “outsiders,” aiming at attracting them to join their (sub-) group. This kind of setting may thus help explain the “how” of the expansion of the Christ-movement both within and beyond the Jewish *ethnos*, depending on the membership profile of the relevant associations.

Neighborhood associations provide another intriguing social space where we must assume that, in certain locations, interaction between believers in Jesus and other Jews and non-Jews took place. One example may suffice to show the reasonableness of such an assumption. Based on research on the nature of the group of Christ-followers in Corinth in light of other associations, Richard Last has proposed that Paul’s use of *idiōtēs* in 1 Corinthians, a term designating a member of an association in other association contexts, may lead to the conclusion that there were members in, or individuals closely associated with the (neighborhood) association into which Paul spoke, who were not Christ-confessors (cf. *apistos*,⁵² 1 Cor 14:23, 24).⁵³ If one assumes the institutional setting to be a neighborhood association, and understands the group to which the letter is addressed as constituting about ten or so members, as Last does, this means that Paul is writing to a group of Christ-followers existing within a somewhat larger association with which it shares meeting space.⁵⁴ Indeed, the argument of 1 Cor 14:15–25 depends on the assumption not only of such shared space between those “loyal” to the Christ and those “disloyal,” but even the presence of the “disloyal” in gatherings where Paul’s addressees give expression to their loyalty to Christ, i.e., in cultic settings.

⁵¹ Human interaction is, of course, related to and intertwined with aspects of individual and group identities, including what we would call religious identity. For our purposes here, it is of some importance to note that “religious” identity is not the only factor involved when individuals and groups with specific religious identities interact. Cf. Éric Rebillard, “Late antique limits of Christianness: North Africa in the age of Augustine,” in *Group Identity and Religious Individuality in Late Antiquity*, ed. Éric Rebillard and Jörg Rüpke, CUA Studies in Early Christianity (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 293–318. We need to consider, as Rebillard phrases it (“Late antique limits of Christianness,” 293), how and when it matters in everyday life to express specific religious identities, or parts of those identities.

⁵² On the translation of *pistis* as referring to aspects of “loyalty” rather than “belief,” see Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). The meaning of *apistoi* thus carries a nuance of “those who are disloyal.”

⁵³ Richard Last, “Christ Worship in the Neighbourhood: Corinth’s *Ekklesia* and its Vicinity (1 Cor 14.22–5),” *NTS* 68 (2022) 310–325. See also Last, *Pauline Church*, 399–425.

⁵⁴ Last, *Pauline Church*, 20.

Now, while the suggestion of a neighborhood association setting for the Corinthian *ekklēsia* seems to me to be an attractive and socio-institutionally plausible hypothesis, solving as it does some of the difficulties in the text, we may go one step further and ask about the neighborhood itself; more specifically about who the other members might have been, those who were not Christ-followers. Of course, we enter here to some degree the realm of speculation, but there are some arguments in favor of attempting to identify this group. One possibility would be to assume these other members to be non-Jews, living in the same neighborhood. Another solution may be to understand this to be a Jewish neighborhood, and thus envisage a scenario in which some of the other members of the association are Jewish. There are several reasons why, in my opinion, the latter suggestion should be preferred.

First, as is the case in most societies today receiving immigrant populations, people from the same national or ethnic background tend, generally, to live in proximity to one another. The same pattern is found in relation to some Jewish Diaspora communities in antiquity, with explicit evidence from Alexandria and Rome.⁵⁵

Second, we know from other sources that non-Jews attended Jewish assemblies and worshipped the God of Israel, before and apart from the arrival of the Jesus movement,⁵⁶ and we know that non-Jewish Christ-followers continued this type of practice for centuries.⁵⁷ The boundaries between Jewish communities and “others” were, socio-institutionally, porous. Having individuals or groups of Christ-followers, non-Jewish and/or Jewish, in Jewish neighborhood

⁵⁵ In Rome, Jews lived primarily in the suburbs, first in Transtiberinum, and later in the Campus Martius and the Subura (see Richardson, *Building Jewish*, 114). According to Josephus, Jews in Alexandria lived mostly in the so-called Delta district (*B.J.* 2.495). This does not mean, of course, that there were no Jews living in other parts of the city, as Philo reminds us of as he notes that Jewish “prayer halls” (*proseuchai*) existed in each quarter of the city (*Legat.* 132). It is likely, then, that where such buildings were constructed, Jews lived close by, which in turn means that groups of Jews lived in each section of the city, likely in the same neighborhoods.

⁵⁶ On the existence of the so-called Godfearers, see most recently Paula Fredriksen, “If It Looks like a Duck,” 25–33. As Fredriksen notes, contra Ross Shepard Kraemer, “Giving up the Godfearers,” *JAJ* 5 (2014): 61–87, “the term is both useful and usable, its range of meanings fittingly elastic, its attestation in ancient evidence of various sorts as secure as our evidence usually gets” (Fredriksen, “If It Looks like a Duck,” 25). Just as other associations could have “strangers” among them as members – for example, not all members of the association of the purple-dyers may have been purple-dyers, but some individuals could have joined the group based on other connections, such as the network provided by the neighborhood in which the association met, cf. Last (*The Pauline Church and the Corinthian Ekklēsia*, 24–25) – non-Jews could frequent the meetings of Jewish ethnic groups, which were based on neighborhood or occupational connections.

⁵⁷ Fredriksen, “If It Looks like a Duck,” 30. For evidence, Fredriksen refers to Origen (*Hom. Lev.* 5.8; *Sel. Exod.* 12.46), and John Chrysostom. For discussion, see also Michele Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game: Gentile Christian Judaizing in the First and Second Centuries CE* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004).

associations, or other types of Jewish associations dedicated to the cult of the God of Israel, would, understood from the perspective of ancient Mediterranean societies, not be strange or unusual at all.

Third, as Rodney Stark has shown, it makes sociological sense to assume that Christ-groups spread first and foremost among Jews.⁵⁸ Fourth, another ancient text, Acts, often points to specifically ethnic connections among players prominent in the spread of the movement, even in Corinth itself where we also find an occupational connection mentioned (Acts 18:1–3). If we, then, read the Corinthian *synagōgē* mentioned in Acts 18:4, identified as the place of intense interaction between Paul and other Jews and non-Jews, as a neighborhood association dedicated to the cult of the God of Israel in a primarily but not exclusively Jewish neighborhood, we have reconstructed a scenario which makes ancient socio-institutional sense.⁵⁹

The relevance for our task of this example is to show that, overall, based on how ancient institutional patterns worked, interaction between Jews and believers in Jesus was likely frequent, much more so than is actually evident in the texts that have been preserved. Further, this interaction was probably more often than not positive, or collaborative, as is evidenced by the negative reactions it evoked for centuries among especially church leaders and legislators more concerned with establishing clearer boundaries between “Jewish” and “Christian” communities than the majority was prepared to accept.⁶⁰ This means that

⁵⁸ Stark, *Rise of Christianity*. While Stark may sometimes overstate his case, and some of his assumptions about the ancient material are problematic (cf., e.g. Reinhartz, “Rodney Stark and ‘the Mission to the Jews,’” 197–212), the overall case made remains a challenge to historians writing on Christian origins, especially when considered from the perspective of ancient institutions, which likely provided the networks needed for the spread of the group.

⁵⁹ On the connection between ethnicity and other identity markers as Jews gathered in “synagogues,” cf. the well-known passage in Tosefta, Sukkah 4.6, which describes “the great synagogue” in Alexandria. In this building, a huge basilica-like structure, people sat according to their occupation, which, as the text notes, facilitated for newcomers to identify people in the same trade and so be able to find ways of making a living. As noted above, “synagogue” should here be understood as incorporated under the genus association. This means that a Jewish synagogue institution could vary in its form, function and membership depending on the network it served. For example, a guild of Jewish weavers could be and was called a “synagogue”; the cult of that guild would likely be connected with the ethnic identity of the members, and thus directed to the God of Israel. Such cult consisted primarily of, as we know from other sources, reading, expounding and discussing Torah on Sabbaths, as well as of a number of other rituals performed weekly and on festivals. Cf. Lev. R.35:12, which mentions “the mine workers” [or: weavers, or: bronze-workers] synagogue’ in Lydda (Lod). As the editors of the English translation of Midrash Rabbah notes, “synagogues were often formed of members engaged in a particular craft,” Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds. *The Midrash Rabbah: Translated into English with Notes, Glossary and Indices*, 5 vols. Vol. 2: Exodus & Leviticus (London: The Soncino Press, 1977), 453. Thus, for centuries, in Jewish settings the term “synagogue” could refer to Jewish associations centered on ethnic, cultic and neighborhood connections as well as those drawing membership from occupational networks; all of them, though, would involve worship of the God of Israel.

⁶⁰ See n. 51 above. For Chrysostom, note *Against the Jews* 1.3, 4 (PG 48, 847, 848).

while interaction between Jewish and non-Jewish followers of Jesus and other Jews in the early period often took place within the same institutions (Jewish associations [“synagogues”] of various forms) interaction did not end with the establishment of separate institutional settings. Indeed, while we know of separate institutions attended predominantly or even exclusively by non-Jewish Christ-followers already in the early second century,⁶¹ as evidenced by Pliny the Younger,⁶² Jewish followers of Jesus continued for centuries to be present in institutional contexts where other Jews also gathered, even in Palestine. Their likely influence on the way Rabbinic Judaism was shaped as it rose to prominence further supports a historical reconstruction in which Jesus-centered forms of Judaism continued in existence long into late antiquity.⁶³ We shall return to say a few more words on this as we look briefly at interaction on the private/domestic level of society.

In sum, the sources on interaction between Jews and the Jesus movement in association settings reveal a complex picture, where co-existence, co-operation and attraction defined relationships for the majority, based on a number of factors, including neighborhood and occupational connections, even if conflict was also part of the picture, as already Paul’s letters, Acts, and Celsus’s Jew⁶⁴ show us. There is a clear tendency here, in light of the previous findings related to the public civic sphere, namely that literate leaders are struggling to achieve separate identities and institutional settings. In the process of doing so they create literature highlighting and marking the “religious” otherness of people behaving in ways they deem cultically inappropriate. In Christian literature, this is taken to the extreme as the rhetoric, evidenced in writings of various genres, including biblical commentaries, turns violently anti-Jewish.⁶⁵ While, as several scholars have argued, much of this anti-Judaism was in fact generated by inner-Christian conflict and attempts at limiting the influence of “heretics” – the Jews serving as a rhetorical tool – we see how such attitudes demanding separation and conflict evolve in identity-formation processes into subsequent

⁶¹ In addition to these institutions, many scholars also argue that several of the Pauline groups – though not all – consisted mainly or exclusively of non-Jews, see Gaston, *Paul and the Torah*; Ascough, *Paul’s Macedonian Associations*.

⁶² Pliny’s reference to changes in temple attendance and the food market – increased sales of meat – when people identified as Christians left their Christian convictions behind, reveals that they were not Jews to begin with; see *Ep.* 10.96. Cf. Ignatius of Antioch, who seems intent on bringing about precisely such a situation with regard to separate institutions, excluding Jewish modes of being a Christ-follower: *Magn.* 10:3. Justin Martyr, however, aims at overcoming enmity based on such different practices within the movement: *Dial.* 47.

⁶³ See discussion by Karin Hedner Zetterholm, “Alternate Visions,” 127–153; “Isaac and Jesus: A Rabbinic Re-appropriation of a Christian motif?” *JJS* 67.1 (2016): 102–120, especially 114–117.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., discussion by Setzer, *Jewish Responses*, 147–151.

⁶⁵ Jerome would be one well-known example, Chrysostom another. Augustine, however, represents a different attitude; see Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations,” 232–252.

anti-Jewish legislation addressing very real situations.⁶⁶ It would seem to me that, considering the workings of ancient societies, especially the associations, interaction between (a) Jewish and non-Jewish members of the Jesus movement, (b) Jewish members of the Jesus movement and other Jews, and (c) non-Jewish Christians and Jews who were not Christ-followers, was bound to be quite frequent and mostly positive in nature, based on various factors and connections both cultic and other. It was likely this type of general interaction on what is often called the grassroots level that generated a sense of urgency with the elite in these various groups, wishing, for political and other reasons, to establish and maintain uniform and separate social and religious identities and behavior. This general picture is confirmed when we look at evidence relating to the private/domestic sphere of society.

10.4 *Interaction in Private/Domestic Settings*

Proceeding to the private sphere of society, speaking of interaction between individuals is, to some degree, related to these individuals' interaction as members of the groups discussed above. The writings of the Church Fathers, for example, can be seen as representing leading voices in church institutions, although they give expression to views which are also their own, as individual Christians. I have chosen here to treat their writings primarily as representative of leadership attitudes within their respective communities, avoiding equating them with the people – the majority – they aim to influence. Apart from what may be said about interaction among individuals based on realities implied by the rhetoric and rulings in the public sphere and among associations, it is often difficult to identify attitudes and interaction between individuals, *as individuals*, especially in the domestic sphere and among people in general (the majority).⁶⁷ Under this heading I shall give only a few brief examples where the evidence suggests certain attitudes and possible patterns of interaction. Before doing so, we should perhaps state the obvious: individuals with diverse “religious” identities interacted – needed to interact – with one another in various ways in ancient societies, based on factors relating to aspects of identity other than those we call “religious.” Thus, when we discuss interaction under this heading, while we shall focus on interaction which is explicitly related to “reli-

⁶⁶ For discussion of rhetoric versus social realities, see Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews*. Cf. Christine Shepardson, “Between Polemic and Propaganda: Evoking the Jews of Fourth-Century Antioch,” *JJMJS* 2 (2015): 147–182.

⁶⁷ It is important to note that the distinction between associations and the domestic sphere implied by the headings is used here as a tool to distinguish between different types of evidence; it does not indicate that associations did not also exist in the domestic sphere, which they indeed did. Two examples of household/domestic associations include *GRA* II 117 and *AGRW* 323.

gious” aspects of people’s identities, this should not mislead us to think of people as if they were generally acting based solely on “religious” convictions.

If we look first at literary evidence, Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* seems to be an obvious source of information on our topic. It is difficult, however, to assess to what degree the text relates to a historical event. Do we find here examples of a “real” dialogue situation, a Jew and a Christian engaged in a polite discussion about issues like the “true Israel,” the status of Jewish law in Christian settings, and in what way, if at all, Jesus’s status as the messiah is proved by the holy scriptures? Or should we rather treat the dialogue as fictive, a literary phenomenon? While the dialogue may indeed be fictive, it seems to me best to understand the text as representing concerns that were real as Christ-followers, whether Jewish or not, and other Jews interacted intellectually.⁶⁸ If we read the text in this way, two things stand out.

First, the statements by Justin and his dialogue partner that Jewish leaders prohibit the members of their communities from interacting with Christians mirror the sentiments of Christian leaders as they try to control their congregations.⁶⁹ Such rules are, of course, evidence of the widespread practice of precisely such interaction among ordinary Jews and Christians. It seems, thus, that leaders on both sides aimed at foregrounding certain “religious” aspects of people’s identities, and prescribed separateness as a tool to maintain distinct communities and practices. However, the very fact that Trypho and Justin are described as engaging in an extended conversation implies, like the rules of separation mentioned in the text do, that such attempts at isolation by the leaders were unsuccessful among ordinary people.

Second, in *Dial.* 47 Justin explains that while some (non-Jewish) Christians avoid any contact with Jews who believe in Jesus as the Christ and keep the Jewish law, he himself is of the opinion that these Jews, too, will be saved. He continues to argue that if these Jewish believers in Jesus,

[c]hoose to live with the Christians and the faithful, as I said before, not inducing them either to be circumcised like themselves, or to keep the Sabbath, or to observe any other such ceremonies, then I hold that we ought to join ourselves to such, and associate with them in all things as kinsmen and brethren.

Indeed, Justin continues to affirm even the status of non-Jews who, as Christ-believers, have converted to Judaism and keep the law: “But I believe that even those, who have been persuaded by them [i.e. Jewish believers in Jesus] to ob-

⁶⁸ So also, Sean Freyne, *The Jesus Movement and Its Expansion: Meaning and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014). While not all scholars agree, this is the majority view, as Stephen G. Wilson (*Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70–170 C.E.* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995], 260–261) points out.

⁶⁹ Cf. discussion in Setzer, *Jewish Responses*, 144–146. On Justin, see also Wilson (*Related Strangers*, 258–284) and Freyne, *Jesus Movement and Its Expansion*, 334–340.

serve the legal dispensation along with their confession of God in Christ, shall probably be saved.”

This type of attitude may be interpreted as revealing a setting in which Jewish believers in Jesus shared, or wished to share, (institutional) space with non-Jewish Christians; Justin’s suggestions seem indeed to speak to the issue of how to relate to them in predominantly mainstream Christian contexts. The text also indicates that conflicts existed based on these very issues. In any case, it is clear that the views expressed by Justin were not shared by most leaders in the emerging mainstream church. In the end, what we see here might be an individual’s response to a (widespread) situation where mutual curiosity and willingness to engage in communication existed between Jews, including Jewish believers in Jesus, and non-Jewish Christians at the grassroots level, across what leaders understood as (“religious”) boundaries. Such interaction could be precisely what would have caused leaders on both sides to issue guidelines and rules aimed at curbing it. There is further evidence supporting the suggestion that this type of situation was, indeed, more widespread than scholars have previously thought.

We know from Chrysostom’s sermons that individuals continued to disregard rulings about behavior expected in Christian group (association) settings into the fourth and fifth centuries, and persisted in their practice of attending Jewish synagogues and practice aspects of Jewish law and customs. In fact, the adoption of Jewish practices by Christian individuals seems to have been at a high around the fourth century, triggering responses from various leadership bodies. As several scholars have pointed out, among these practices that leaders felt a need to prohibit we find the keeping of the Sabbath (and if worship took place on the Sabbath, the practice of not reading the gospels together with scriptures); rabbis blessing first fruits as Christians were harvesting; eating with Jews during their festivals; the eating of unleavened bread during Easter; celebrating Passover with Jews; entering a synagogue. Indeed, even Christian religious leaders were prohibited from celebrating festivals with Jews, and receiving unleavened bread from them.⁷⁰

The column fragment from Laodicea incised with a menorah and a cross, shown in *fig. 10* below, appears to reflect such practices, which disregard what later became boundary markers between religions. It should be noted that the cross has not been superimposed over the entire menorah, and that the menorah has not been erased. Rather, the cross replaces only the seventh, central candle. Reading this menorah and cross against the background of the rulings of the Council of Laodicea in 363 CE, which aimed at prohibiting practices such as those mentioned above, merging what these leaders thought of as distinct “Jewish” and “Christian” identities, yields interesting questions with regard to Jew

⁷⁰ Cf. discussion in Karin Hedner Zetterholm, “Jewishly-Behaving Gentiles and the Emergence of a Jewish Rabbinic Identity,” *JSQ* 25 (2018): 321–344, here 333–334.



Figure 10. A column fragment from Laodicea incised with a menorah and a cross. The column on which the menorah and cross were carved belonged to the lower colonnade of the Composite order in the two-storied Nymphaeum A. The nymphaeum was dedicated to Septimus Severus, repaired during Diocletian's rule, and finally destroyed in an earthquake in 494 CE.⁷¹

ish and Christian interaction, as also pointed out by the excavator of the site where the column was found.⁷²

Karin Hedner Zetterholm suggests, appropriately, that such legislation may not only reflect Judaizing tendencies among non-Jewish Christians, but, indeed, could be understood as indicating the presence of Jews in mainstream Christian communities, even in leading positions.⁷³ In other words, while scholars have often interpreted rules against Judaizing as a way to prevent non-Jewish Christians from taking up Jewish practices, along the lines of Paul's critique of such behavior, we may need to rethink the picture and allow for the possibility that Christ-oriented Jews to a much larger degree than previously thought were present in and influenced Christian communities.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Celal Şimşek, "A Menorah with a cross carved on a column of Nymphaeum A at Laodicea ad Lycum," *JRA* 19.1 (2006): 343–346, here 343.

⁷² Şimşek, "A Menorah with a Cross."

⁷³ Karin Hedner Zetterholm, "Jewishly-Behaving Gentiles," referring also to the author/redactor of the pseudo-Clementine literature as an example of Jesus-oriented Judaism intent on observing the Torah.

⁷⁴ Cf. discussion of Justin Martyr above; see also Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.26.2 and Origen, *Cels.* 5.61, 2.1, both of whom mention Torah observant Christians; cf. Karin Hedner Zetterholm, "Jewishly-Behaving Gentiles," 333. See also Paul R. Trebilco, "The Jewish Community in Ephesus and its Interaction with Christ-Believers in the First Century CE and Beyond," in *The First Urban Churches 3: Ephesus*, ed. J. R. Harrison and L. L. Welborn, Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series 7 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 93–126: "We need to

Now, it seems to me reasonable to assume a rather complex scenario arising from everyday interaction between people, in which we find on the grassroots level individuals that may be identified and categorized as follows: (a) gentile Christians who understood their “religious” identity to exclude what they identified as Jewish law, practices and customs; (b) gentile Christians who adopted selectively various Jewish customs and laws, without much thought given to what their leading theologians would understand as religious boundary markers; (c) gentile Christians who converted to Judaism, understanding their “religious” identity to include both adherence to Christ and the fulfilling of the Jewish law; (d) Jewish believers in Jesus, who observed Jewish law, as they had done already before joining the movement; (e) Jews who, retaining their Jewish identity, were “Christianizing,” i.e., Jewish individuals who adopted selectively some elements of Christian thought and symbols, without considering too carefully what their leading theologians and halakhic experts would understand as religious boundary markers; (f) Jews who understood their religio-ethnic identity to exclude what they identified as (non-Jewish) Christian beliefs and practices.

While categories (a)–(d) and (f) have received attention in scholarship, option (e), corresponding to option (b), has rarely been contemplated as far as I know. Still, not only would such behavior make sociological sense, there is also some archaeological evidence that, although difficult to interpret, may support the existence of individuals behaving in precisely this way.

In Sardis, a row of shops, dated to around 400 CE and backing onto the monumental synagogue and the bath and gymnasium complex, have yielded finds which have been understood as revealing the shop owner’s religious identity: Christian, Jewish, or pagan.⁷⁵ What interests us here is John S. Crawford’s interpretation of the *realia* found in the shops as evidence that Jews and Christians lived side by side in apparent harmony.⁷⁶ As Keir E. Hammer and Michele Murray have pointed out, there are some indications that may reveal a more

remind ourselves that many of the early Christ-believers were of course ethnically Jewish. When we consider what might be thought of as “Jewish ideas” among Christ-believers, we need to ask if they come from Jews or from Jewish Christians or from Gentile Christians who have adopted Jewish attitudes? Perhaps such ideas and practices came from Jewish Christians who of course continued to see themselves as Jews, rather than from non-Christian Jews.” This type of scenario would also match but take further the general approach of Rodney Stark regarding the spread of the Jesus movement in the early centuries.

⁷⁵ John S. Crawford, “Multiculturalism at Sardis: Jews and Christians live, work, and worship side by side,” *BAR* 22.5 (1996): 38–47, 70; “Jews, Christians and Polytheists in Late-Antique Sardis,” in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction During the Greco-Roman Period*, ed. Steven Fine (London: Routledge, 1999), 168–177.

⁷⁶ Contrasting, for example, the rhetorically violent anti-Judaism expressed in the second century by Melito in his *Peri Pascha*, On this text, see Lynn H. Cohick, *The Peri Pascha Attributed to Melito of Sardis: Setting, Purpose, and Sources*, BJS 327 (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2000).

complex situation.⁷⁷ Among the discoveries in a shop (E12–13) identified as Jewish based on the presence of two marble fragments incised with *menoroth*, we find also a weighing device which top is decorated with a cross. While Crawford assumes that the Jewish owner left the cross on his device instead of erasing it because it did not mean anything to him, Hammer and Murray have suggested what seem to me more probable explanations. Either the owner was a Jew who both knew and embraced what the cross meant, or he may have been a non-Jewish-Christian who was “Judaizing.” Pointing to the various rulings against Judaizing tendencies in the region, they lean towards the latter suggestion. The two interpretations may not, however, be mutually exclusive, since what is termed “Judaizing” in contexts within mainstream churches may in fact be caused by the presence of Jewish Christ-followers in those groups.⁷⁸ What seems unlikely, however, is the suggestion that a Jew in Sardis at this time, who owned a shop backing onto the synagogue, would not know or care about a symbol such as a cross, and therefore would not remove it.

Despite the inherent unlikelihood of a scenario in which a Jew in this time period would not recognize or care about Christian symbols, and so be happy to display them at home, this type of explanation has been common among archaeologists when Christian symbols have been found in spaces identified as Jewish. In En Gedi, for example, both Jewish and Christian symbols have been found on everyday items in Jewish homes, dated to the fifth or sixth century.⁷⁹ The excavator suggests that the Christian cross apparently had no significance for the Jewish owners of the house. Noting that there was a Christian settlement not far from the Jewish village, it seems more likely, however, that we may have here an example of our fifth category above: a Jew who adopted selectively some elements of Christian thought and symbols, without considering too carefully what their leading theologians and halakhic experts would understand as religious boundary markers; that is, a scenario mirroring what we find in mainstream Christian communities at other places, where leaders tried to curb Judaizing behavior.

A further example concerns the existence of a *ChiRho* monogram on a third/fourth-century lamp found in a Jewish catacomb in Beth She’arim.⁸⁰ Again, the excavator suggests that the symbol was either not noticed or known by the Jewish person who bought the lamp.⁸¹ While this is an interpretive option, of course,

⁷⁷ Keir E. Hammer and Michele Murray, “Acquaintances, Supporters, and Competitors: Evidence of Inter-Connectedness and Rivalry among the Religious Groups in Sardis,” in *Religious Rivalries*, ed. Ascough, 175–194.

⁷⁸ Cf. nn. 53–55 above.

⁷⁹ Yizhar Hirschfeld, *En-Gedi Excavations II: Final Report (1996–2002)* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2007).

⁸⁰ Hammer and Murray, “Acquaintances, Supporters, and Competitors,” 188.

⁸¹ Nahman Avigad, *Beth She’arim: Report on Excavations During 1953–1958* (Jerusalem: Masada Press, 1976), 188.

which, as Hammer and Murray note, may be more reasonable than in the later cases of the crosses, the cumulative effect of these findings should, at the very least, make us consider the sociologically likely scenario that Jewish individuals, just as much as non-Jewish Christian individuals, did not understand boundaries between religious options in the same way as their leaders did – or as we do today. The mosaic floor in the Beth Alpha synagogue may, further, indicate a similar disregard for boundaries between “Judaism” and “Christianity” enforced in later periods, even at the community level, and scholars are increasingly considering the likelihood that we find in Rabbinic literature attempts at countering alternative visions of Judaism, including Jesus-centered forms of Judaism.⁸²

Certainty with regard to the interpretation of the archaeological material cannot be had, of course. However, the almost consistent avoidance in the scholarly literature of the interpretations suggested here, indicating blurred boundaries not only for individual Christians but also for individual Jews, seems to indicate a certain bias in favor of distinct Jewish and Christian communities already in late antiquity, at least on the Jewish side of the equation. Such assumptions about clear-cut boundaries rather belong in the later medieval and modern periods, however, and supporting evidence for fixed (Rabbinic-) Jewish identities among ordinary people already in the period we are concerned with here is, in fact, largely lacking.

10.5 *Problematizing the so-called Parting of the Ways between Judaism and Christianity*

Many, or perhaps even most studies on Jewish and Christian interaction aim to say at least something on the issue of what is usually, and problematically, referred to as the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity.⁸³ Scholars often conclude, rightly in my view, that the process in which the distinct Jewish and Christian identities represented by mainstream forms of Judaism

⁸² See discussion in Karin Hedner Zetterholm, “Alternate Visions of Judaism,” 127–153. On Beth Alpha, see Karen Hedner Zetterholm, “Isaac and Jesus,” 116–117.

⁸³ For discussion and problematization of various aspects of these processes, see the contributions Becker and Reed, eds, *The Ways that Never Parted*, but also the earlier work by Raymond E. Brown, “Not Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity but Types of Jewish/Gentile Christianity,” *CBQ* 45 (1983): 74–79; Harold Remus, “‘Unknown and Yet Well-Known’: The Multiform Formation of Early Christianity,” in *A Multiform Heritage: Studies on Early Judaism and Christianity in Honor of Robert A. Kraft*, Scholars Press Homage Series 24 (Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1999), 79–93; Himmelfarb, “The Parting of the Ways Reconsidered,” 47–61; John G. Gager, “The Parting of the Ways: A View from the Perspective of Early Christianity: ‘A Christian Perspective,’” in *Interwoven Destinies: Jews and Christians Through the Ages*, ed. Eugene J. Fisher (New York: Paulist press, 1993), 62–73.

and Christianity today emerged was complex and extended over several centuries. We can no longer assume, as has been common, that Rabbinic Judaism stood prepared to take over responsibility for and define Judaism already in the wake of the fall of the Jerusalem temple; that process, in which Rabbinic Judaism was formed and became mainstream in Jewish societies, took centuries. Similarly, in a simultaneous process both parallel to and intertwined with the rise of Rabbinic Judaism, the formation of non-Jewish Christianity, the first explicit signs of which we find in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch,⁸⁴ was quite protracted, lasting beyond Nicaea.

What complicates the picture is the simple fact that we have to deal with the evidence we have access to on different levels, as we have attempted to do here (public/civic, associations and private/domestic), and differentiate between how people (the majority) usually tended to interact, and the patterns of behavior the leading figures (the minority) wished to enforce. Thus, institutional separation, which likely occurred quite early and represents a “parting” of sorts, is not an indicator of the creation of separate “religious” identities (“Jews” and “Christians”). Rather, such separation occurred *within* Judaism as Jesus-oriented Jews established associations in which the cultic component consisted of Christ-focused worship of the God of Israel. As the non-Jewish Christ-followers rose in number in such settings, we find further institutional separation, this time between Jewish and non-Jewish members of the Jesus movement. While this separation was likely the decisive process which eventually led to what we today call “Christianity,” as we have seen above it was by no means a straightforward development, and many individuals, both Jewish and non-Jewish, continued to express, in practice, an identity which blurred the boundary between what later became distinct categories for all: “Jew” and “Christian.”

We should also reckon with the likely scenario that alongside Jesus-oriented Jewish groups, which may have included among them non-Jewish members, we find non-Jewish associations, which had little or nothing to do with Jewish groups, but whose worship was centered around the Jesus figure.⁸⁵ These non-Jewish groups, together with those non-Jews who separated themselves from Jewish Christ-followers, carried within them the seed which evolved into modern Christianity. In the process, Jesus-centered forms of Judaism were marginalized from two directions – emerging mainstream Rabbinic Judaism on the one hand and non-Jewish Christianity on the other.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ On separation processes in Antioch, see Magnus Zetterholm, *The Formation of Christianity in Antioch: A Social-Scientific Approach to the Separation between Judaism and Christianity* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁸⁵ As evidenced by Pliny the Younger, see above, n. 62.

⁸⁶ For discussion of this process with a focus on archaeological remains, see Runesson, “Architecture, Conflict, and Identity Formation,” 231–257.

Throughout the first five centuries, then, the period covered in this chapter, interaction between people identifying as Jewish, whether believers in Jesus or not, and non-Jewish individuals and groups identifying as Christ-followers, was varied and complex. In brief, what prevents us from speaking of Jewish and Christian interaction in generalized terms is precisely this diversity, and the existence of individuals and groups identifying as Jews, but who engaged in Christ-centered worship of the God of Israel. “Jewish and Christian interaction” is, then, strictly speaking, from this perspective a medieval and modern, rather than a Late-Antique, phenomenon.

In the two remaining chapters of Part III, we shall continue the discussion of these various forms of interaction that led to the medieval and modern-day state of things where we find two kindred, partly overlapping but ultimately separate traditions engaging one another, directly and indirectly, as they consolidate their respective identities.

11. Inventing Christian Identity

From Paul To Theodosius I

11.1 A Simple Question to be Approached with Great Care

In Christian art of the Middle Ages, the synagogue and the church were often portrayed as opposites. The latter was frequently depicted as a victorious queen and the former as a defeated woman, sometimes being stabbed by one of the arms of the “living cross” on which Jesus hangs crucified.¹ Not only do such (barbaric) depictions assume the institutional and theological independence of Judaism and Christianity, they also affirm a close relationship between the two religions by claiming that the life of the one requires the defeat or death of the other.

Depictions such as these affirm centuries-old Christian theology: Christians replace Jews as the people of God. In order to substantiate such a claim, a common origin for both traditions had to be asserted: from the synagogue proceeds the Church, which then takes the place of the parent body. The idea of a common origin of Judaism and Christianity long served Christian triumphalist and supersessionist theologies.² However, the same notion was later, especially from the 1960s onwards, adopted by Christians with a very different theological agenda: interreligious dialogue. These more recent theological currents often refer to a common origin for Judaism and Christianity in order to emphasize positively the close relationship between Jews and Christians – and indeed, in so doing, they explicitly challenge earlier supersessionist theologies.³

The idea of a common origin for what became Judaism and Christianity has not only dominated different theologies of Jewish/Christian relations, it has also been, and still is, a very powerful construct in scholarly studies on Christian origins. Indeed, taking as their point of departure the two distinct categories of “Judaism” and “Christianity,” scholars have been intrigued by the question of when and where these two traditions separated. Since the beginning of

¹ Cf. Heinz Schreckenberg, *The Jews and Christian Art: An Illustrated History* (New York: Continuum, 1996), 64–66; see especially plates 5 and 6, as well as fig. 2.

² Cf. Judith Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 11–29.

³ Cf. Philip S. Alexander, “‘The Parting of the Ways’ from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism,” in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1–25.

the 1990s and the publication of James D. G. Dunn's *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways Between Judaism and Christianity*,⁴ this quest has often been referred to as a "parting of ways" that once were one and the same. Not seldom, scholars perceive of such a "parting of ways" as the key to understanding the origin of Christianity as a religion separate from Judaism. Judaism, on the other hand, is commonly understood as the continuous part of the equation, whose origins are essentially unrelated to the so-called "parting of the ways" question.⁵

Interestingly, very soon after Dunn and others had given the scholarly community this convenient way of referring to the historical process(es) under discussion, other specialists began to question the assumptions behind the metaphor. Daniel Boyarin, Paula Fredriksen, John G. Gager, Judith Lieu, Adele Reinhartz, Stephen G. Wilson, Magnus Zetterholm, and Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, the latter two editing a volume in 2003 entitled *The Ways that Never Parted*, all provide critical perspectives and reveal difficulties involved for the historian.⁶ Indeed, already in Dunn's 1992 volume, Philip S. Alexander states:

"When did Christianity and Judaism part company and go their separate ways?" is one of those deceptively simple questions which should be approached with great care. Though formulated in historical terms it cannot easily be answered within a narrow

⁴ The symposium leading up to the publication was held in Durham in 1989. The volume, edited by Dunn, was published by Mohr Siebeck in 1992 and republished by Eerdmans seven years later.

⁵ Cf., however, Segal, *Rebecca's Children*. Alexander, "Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism," 1–2, problematizes such oversimplifications. See also the very helpful charts in Martin Goodman, "Modeling the 'Parting of the Ways,'" in *The Ways that Never Parted*, ed. Becker and Reed, 119–129. There are multiple variants of such thought-structures, all of which, however, imagine a common origin of what are today two related but separate religions.

⁶ Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); idem, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Paula Fredriksen, "What Parting of the Ways? Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City," in *The Ways that Never Parted*; Lieu, *Neither Jew Nor Greek?*, 35–64; Adele Reinhartz, "A Fork in the Road or a Multi-Lane Highway? New Perspectives on the 'Parting of the Ways' Between Judaism and Christianity," in *The Changing Face of Judaism: Christianity and Other Greco-Roman Religions in Antiquity*, ed. Ian Henderson and Gerbern Oegema; Jewish Writings from the Greco-Roman Period (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006), 278–329; Wilson, *Related Strangers*; Zetterholm, *Antioch*; Becker and Reed, eds., *The Ways that Never Parted*. Other valuable recent contributions to the quest for Christian origins include Per Bilde, *En religion bliver til: En undersøgelse af kristendomens forudsætninger og tilblivelse indtil år 110* (København: Forlaget Anis, 2001); Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), especially chapter 4 (122–159); Jackson-McCabe, ed., *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered*. See also Stanley E. Porter and Brook W. R. Pearson, "Why the Split? Christians and Jews by the Fourth Century," *JGRChJ* 1 (2000): 82–119. For a recent discussion of the state of research on the so-called parting(s) question, based on the metaphors used in the debate, see Reinhartz, "Fork in the Road," 279–283.

historicist framework. It raises profound contemporary theological issues and, if not handled sensitively, can quickly become entangled in apologetics and confessionalism. Time spent on clarifying the structure of the question will not, consequently, be wasted.⁷

In this same spirit of “time not wasted,” I wish to present in this chapter some of my thoughts on how the question is constructed and what role terminology has had, and continues to have, in this construction.

After discussing terminological questions and suggesting some – I think decisive – adjustments, I shall continue to outline important events leading up to the modern situation in order to put things in perspective. In other words, the present chapter will discuss the way we ask the question about the origins of separate Christian and Jewish identities and then provide a general historical and interpretive frame within which local-specific developments may be understood.⁸

11.2 “Don’t Trust the Horse!” Terminology, Categories, and the Battle for Historical Precision

Language is in many ways comparable to architecture, as noted in chapter 4 above. Via external, visible structures that are experienced and shared by others, we enter into edifices that influence our impression of reality. In architecturally constructed space, perception is re-configured, our vision “re-visited,” and whatever is focused upon within that space is seen and understood from within the landscape that we have entered and which encloses us. There is room for a variety of interpretations within the frames provided by the external structures, largely depending on our experiences prior to entering the space. Nevertheless, the structures still establish the points of departure for any discussion and provide the frame within which conclusions may ultimately be drawn.

Scholarly terms and concepts, all of which are carriers for specific views and ideas, function in much the same way.⁹ They construct the “space” within which we focus on specific issues and topics in our conversations. Terminological edifices are built slowly over time and are not easily torn down. Yet, as has been pointed out by researchers before,¹⁰ now-unsustainable scholarly (and non-

⁷ Alexander, “Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism,” 1. Note also Lieu’s comment, *Neither Jew nor Greek?*, 15: “The ‘parting of the ways’ is a model and only one among a number of possible models ... It is not a model which would have made much sense to any of the participants or observers of the drama itself.”

⁸ Of course, multiple investigations of local-specific situations have provided the basis for the more general conclusions drawn here. See, e.g., Runesson, “Architecture, Conflict, and Identity Formation,” 231–257; idem, “Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations,” idem, *Divine Wrath*.

⁹ See also discussion in Part I above.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Smith, “Terminological Booby Traps,” 95–103. Note Smith’s warning:

scholarly) ideas and consensuses from previous eras influence current discourses because many of us still occupy the space created by the terminological walls, arches, and vaulted ceilings they have left behind. It is high time for us to re-consider and discuss not only the conclusions we draw, but the “architecture” within which we think them. Laocoon’s warning to the Trojans, *Equo ne credite*, should be heeded lest we inadvertently admit terms and categories pregnant with destruction into our theoretical constructs, inviting their eventual downfall.¹¹

While it is true that the complexity of the source material prohibits simplistic approaches to categories and labels with regard to the people and beliefs involved in the process in which we take interest, it is nevertheless crucial that steps are taken toward some more general categorizations that may reflect ancient rather than modern realities. Daniel Boyarin has referred to language as a heuristic tool for forming a new model that would describe the ancient situation. Transferring the Wave Theory to our field and referring to religious traditions as clusters of dialects, he is able to avoid assumptions about an original single source for what became two religions. Still, however, the use of traditional terminology creates problems.¹² To a certain degree, of course, using labels or models will always involve arbitrariness. Keeping this in mind, there are still, in my opinion, certain “places,” both as we travel diachronically back in time from the Middle Ages to the first centuries and as we journey synchronically within those early centuries of the Common Era, where differences coming to light are of such nature that they demand distinct names to avoid the confusion of phenomena that are more diverse than a single term allows for.

Although the term “religion” itself is a problematic but given point of departure for any investigation such as this, and the definition of this term may be seen as linked with the question of the invention of Christian identity and the so-called “parting of the ways” between Judaism and Christianity, we shall, in

“[T]here is a prejudice in favor of any established terminology; from infancy we have been trained to believe that what we have been taught is right. Moreover, this belief is convenient” (95); John G. Gager, “Paul, the Apostle of Judaism,” 56–76; Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement,” 231–246. See also Ch. 2 above.

¹¹ Vergil, *Aen.*, 2.48–49. This metaphor is borrowed from Anna Runesson, who uses it in a different context: *Exegesis in the Making*, 129.

¹² Boyarin, *Dying for God*; see also idem, “Semantic Differences; or, ‘Judaism’/‘Christianity,’” in *The Ways that Never Parted*, ed. Becker and Reed, 65–85, especially 76: “[V]arious Christian groups formed a dialect cluster within the overall assortment of dialects that constituted Judaism (or perhaps, better, Judaeo-Christianity) at the time.” Cf. Daniel Stökl ben Ezra, “On Trees, Waves, and Cytokinesis: Shifting Paradigms in Early (and Modern) Jewish-Christian Relations,” in *Interaction Between Judaism and Christianity in History, Religion, Art and Literature*, ed. Marcel Poorthuis, Joshua Schwartz, and Joseph Turner, JCS 17 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 127–139, who uses a different but quite productive metaphor, cytokinesis, assisting us in rethinking the processes under discussion, and Adele Reinhartz, who applies yet another metaphor, “Fork in the Road,” 280–295.

the interest of space, focus here on the latter two terms: “Judaism” and “Christianity.”¹³

The use of the terms “Judaism” and “Jews” to describe first century phenomena related to what is today called by the same names has been discussed with some intensity over the last 25 years or so.¹⁴ One of the reasons for this interest in the terms is undoubtedly theological and related to assumed anti-Jewishness in so-called “early Christian writings,” especially in the Gospel of John.¹⁵ While the theological implications of any choice of translation of these terms should not be denied, my interest here is historical and linguistic. One of the most thorough discussions of the topic to date is the 2007 study by Steve Mason: “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History.”¹⁶ This article is, in my view, a must-read for all biblical scholars and ancient historians.

In brief, Mason convincingly shows that, from an emic perspective, *Ioudaioi* in antiquity refers not to “Judaism” understood as a system of beliefs abstracted from ethnic and cultural customs, but rather indicates an *ethnic* group, its culture, and its politico-geographical homeland. “Judaism,” he emphasizes, came

¹³ For discussion of the term “religion,” see, e.g., Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” 269–284; idem, “Religion and Religious Studies: No Difference at All,” *Soundings* 71 (Summer/Fall 1988): 231–244; McCutcheon, “The Category ‘Religion’ in Recent Publications,” 284–309; Gill, “Academic Study of Religion,” 965–975; Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion After September 11*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). See also discussion by Brent Nongbri in, *Before Religion*, and, idem, “The Concept of Religion,” 1–26.

¹⁴ For thorough discussions, see, e.g., Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*; Sean Freyne, “Behind the Names: Samaritans, *Ioudaioi*, Galileans,” in *Text and Artifact in the Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Peter Richardson*, ed. Stephen G. Wilson and Michel Desjardins (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000), 389–401; Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, especially 19–76; *Studies in Religion* 33 (2004) is dedicated to the theme of names and naming in the ancient world and contains several helpful essays; Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 457–512; Last, “Other Synagogues,” 330–363. Note also Graham Harvey’s monograph, *The True Israel: Uses of the Names Jew, Hebrew and Israel in Ancient Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, AGJU 35 (Leiden: Brill, 2001). Although Harvey’s study, a revised version of his 1991 Ph.D. thesis, contains, in my view, some very problematic conclusions, it provides a helpful collection of source material and points to difficult questions involved in the interpretation and translation of the terms in question.

¹⁵ See, e.g., the contributions in Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt, and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, eds., *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001). Most recently, see Adele Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant: Jews and Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John* (Lexington/Fortress Academic, 2020); cf. Wally V. Cirafesi’s different reading of the Fourth Gospel: *John Within Judaism: Religion, Ethnicity, and the Shaping of Jesus-Oriented Jewishness in the Fourth Gospel*, AJEC 112 (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

¹⁶ See note 14 above. See also the three important and interconnected studies by David M. Miller, “The Meaning of *Ioudaios* and its Relationship to Other Group Labels in Ancient ‘Judaism,’” *CBR* 9.1 (2010): 98–126; “Ethnicity Comes of Age: An Overview of Twentieth-Century Terms for *Ioudaios*,” *CBR* 10.2 (2012): 293–311; “Ethnicity, Religion and the Meaning of *Ioudaios* in Ancient ‘Judaism,’” *CBR* 12.2 (2014): 216–265.

into being in late antiquity as a consequence of the religionizing (my term) of beliefs and practices along the lines of (non-Jewish) Christian self-understanding at that time. “Judaism,” thus understood, was a creation of non-Jewish Christians for polemical purposes. This construct mirrored the way Byzantine Christians understood their own religious identity, and so was a convenient rhetorical tool: whatever “Judaism” was, it was the opposite of “Christianity.” Comparison was made possible with such a construct, always to the advantage of “Christianity.”¹⁷ In reality, “religion,” as we often understand the term today, cannot be abstracted from but was integral to at least six categories of life in antiquity: *ethnos*, (national) cult, philosophy, familial traditions/domestic worship, (unofficial) associations, and astrology and magic.¹⁸

The conclusion Mason draws from his analysis of the ancient material is that, in order to reflect the historical ethnic/cultural aspects mentioned, *Ioudaioi* should be translated “Judaeans.”¹⁹ While I strongly agree with many or most of Mason’s arguments regarding the content of the term *Ioudaioi* in antiquity, this is the point where I must part ways with him, for several reasons. In brief, Mason’s findings regarding the ancient situation in fact support a terminological continuity, not a discontinuity, between ancient and modern Jews and Judaism. The problem with Mason’s argument lies not in his discussion of the ancient period, but in the understanding of Judaism in the modern period and the hermeneutics involved in translation.

If we introduce a terminological distinction between ancient contexts on the one hand, and the late-antique and modern situation on the other, we introduce what seems to be a false dichotomy between ancient and modern *emic* (Jewish) understandings of what it means to belong among the *Ioudaioi*. In fact, as Mason draws his conclusions, he inadvertently adopts a (late-antique, non-Jewish) Christian perspective on what it means to be a member of a “religion.” Despite his discussion of modern “Judaism,” he fails to recognize that the aspects he identifies as belonging to what he would prefer to call Judean ethnicity, culture, practice, beliefs etc. are, in fact, also integral to the self-understanding of most modern varieties of “Judaism.” Contrary to (late-antique and modern) Christian understandings of “religion” and “Judaism,” which often lack ethnic or national-specific²⁰ aspects as integral to specific worldviews and ritual prac-

¹⁷ Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” e.g., 512; but cf. 488 and the quote from Smith’s study (n. 70).

¹⁸ See especially the discussion in Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 482–488.

¹⁹ Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, draws the same conclusion but from a partly different perspective. Since the problem I wish to address here relates to the hermeneutics of translation, and the arguments and conclusions drawn can be applied to studies other than Mason’s, I shall, in the interest of space, limit the discussion here to Mason’s article.

²⁰ For the use of “national,” see the recent study by David Goodblatt, *Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

tices,²¹ Judaism, even after the destruction of its national cult center in Jerusalem, organized itself maintaining an essential historical continuity with regard to a shared religio-ethnic identity and a religio-political homeland.

When Mason argues for the introduction of a distinction between modern and ancient understandings of the meaning of *Ioudaioi*, he refers, in addition to the (problematic) argument above based on difference in the nature, or understanding, of “religion,” to the name of the geographical-political area and its importance for the choice of translation.²² The argument is this:

1. In antiquity, *Ioudaios* referred to, as did, e.g., *Aigyptos*, a person from a specific ethnic group, originating from, or having close connections to, a specific homeland: *Ioudaios* = of *Ioudaia*.
2. Today, Jews who would be asked where they come from would not answer “from Judaea,” since “the changes that produced our English word [i.e., Jew] *have removed any immediate association with a place*” (my emphasis).²³ Mason refers to Jews who may consider themselves to be from Poland, Russia, Yemen, or Iraq, and, since 1948, from Israel. The ethnonym that corresponds to, e.g., “from Israel” is not, Mason continues, “Jew,” but “Israeli.” The other nations would produce the corresponding designations Polish, Russian, Yemenite, and Iraqi. “If modern Israel had been called ‘Yehuda’, there would be Judaeans today ... (as in ‘the Judaeans community of Toronto’).”²⁴

There are, in my view, two main problems with this argument. In the ancient period, e.g., in the first century CE, there were more people identifying themselves as *Ioudaioi* living in the Diaspora than in the nation called Judaea. These *Ioudaioi* were from various nations, including Judaea, speaking various languages, and identifying themselves as related to various homelands of other ethnic groups. Consider Acts 2:5–11 in this regard:

²¹ The following example may serve as an illustration. Some years ago, I had a discussion with a Christian scholar (from a different discipline) in which he referred to some Jewish friends of his. He noted that these friends were atheists, but still called themselves Jews, a designation he then said that he rejected as invalid, due to the lack of “religious beliefs.” This example is telling: Christian majority culture defines what “religion” is and how it connects (or not) to ethnic aspects, such as those involved in Jewish self-identity. This definition is then applied to all other religious traditions. “Judaism” is seen by the Christian, who emphasizes “faith” as defining “religious identity,” as more or less devoid of defining ethnic and cultural aspects. If “religious” aspects are lacking the term “Judaism,” or “Jew” cannot be used, regardless of any understandings among Jews of their own identity. This is not far from the late-antique period, in which “Jews” not accepting “Christianity” were denied the recognition of other vital aspects of their identity. The acceptance of a Christian understanding of Jesus was the defining core of belonging to the people of God. If such beliefs were not included in one’s “religious identity,” all other aspects of ethnic belonging and a geographical-political homeland lose their value. We shall return to this below.

²² Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 489, 504.

²³ Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 489.

²⁴ Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 504.

Now there were devout *Jews from every nation* (ὑπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους) under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking *in the native language of each* (ἕκαστος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ λαλούντων αὐτῶν). Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans (Γαλιλαῖοι)? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language (ἕκαστος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ ἡμῶν ἐν ἧ ἔγεννήθημεν)? Parthians, Medes, Elamites (Πάρθοι καὶ Μῆδοι καὶ Ἑλαμίται), and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea (Ἰουδαίαν) and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes (Ἰουδαῖοί τε καὶ προσήλυτοι), Cretans and Arabs – in our own languages (ταῖς ἡμετέραις γλώσσαις) we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.

In other words, people identified as *Ioudaioi*, like today, could consider themselves, and be considered to be, from various nations (speaking various *native* languages), including Judea and Galilee, without this in any way leading to the conclusion that they would not be *Ioudaioi*. I fail to see the conceptual difference between the ancient period when Jews identified themselves as coming from “Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia,” even if they lived in Jerusalem, and the modern period, when Jews identify themselves as being from “Poland, Russia, Yemen, or Iraq,” even if they live in Jerusalem. In the ancient period, just as much as in the modern, such identification came with cultural differences and various native languages. Indeed, the application of the English term “Jew” has not meant the removal of an “immediate association with a place” any more than was the case for ancient Diaspora Jews, who were removed culturally and linguistically from their homeland, the land of Israel.²⁵

The second problem relates to the name of the place associated with Jews. Again we need to look at both the ancient and the modern period, since we are involved in translation from an ancient language and situation to a modern language and situation. Mason argues that the shift of names designating the area should have implications for our translation of *Ioudaioi*. In antiquity we find *Judeans* in and/or related to *Judea*. Today the land is called Israel, and therefore another term than “Judeans” is needed. In antiquity, however, this area was also called the “land of Israel.” Consider the following examples from various time periods up to the first century CE: *’adamath Israel* (Ezek 12:19); *’Eretz Israel* (2 Kgs 5:2; 2 Chr 2:17); *gē Israel* (Tob 1:4; Matt 2:20, 21).

There can be little doubt that the designation “land of Israel” referred to a geographic-political and cultural entity, the homeland of an *ethnos* (even though people identified as not being among the *Ioudaioi* also lived there). In the first century CE, the area also went under the designation Judea, the official Roman

²⁵ In fact, similar associations between Jews living in any country outside Israel and the modern state of Israel are nurtured also by modern anti-Semites, who, in the twenty-first century, attack Jews living in Scandinavia, Europe, South and North America, and other places on earth simply because they are Jews, when they perceive the government of Israel to be acting in immoral ways towards their neighbors.

name. The name could refer to either a limited area (the province), or the entire land, including the Galilee. Still, during this time we find the designation “Israelites” (*Israēlitēs*) frequently applied to designate the *ethnos* otherwise called the *Ioudaioi* (e.g., 1 Macc 7:13; Rom 9:4; 2 Cor 11:22²⁶; Acts 2:22; 4 Macc 18:5). In other words, in antiquity there was more than one designation for the area or the *ethnos*, and the different designations could be used in ways not corresponding directly to each other. In the same way, today, the fact that the nation is called Israel does not differ much in terms of usage from that of the ancient period. In modern “Israel” we find citizens belonging to the *ethnos* “Jews,” but we also find citizens of other ethnic belonging. In antiquity, someone speaking of “Judea” could designate the *ethnos* living there “Israelites.” Or the reverse: *Ioudaioi* were identified with their homeland, “the land of Israel.”

Further, Mason argues that *Ioudaioi* maintained the ethnic and cultural elements, as well as their connection to Jerusalem and the homeland, even after 135 CE.²⁷ Although, as Mason notes that Louis H. Feldman has pointed out,²⁸ *Iudaea* continued to be used after 135 as a designation of the area that was now officially called *Palaestina*, we still need to pay attention to the fact that the ethnic element and the connection between the *ethnos* and the homeland was maintained regardless of what the area was called. In other words, just as “Jews” may live in “Israel” today, *Ioudaioi* lived in *Palaestina* from the late second century onwards. For obvious reasons, it would be confusing to call the *Ioudaioi* living in late-antique *Palaestina* “Palestinians,” yet this is, as far as I can see, where we would end up should we follow the principles for translation laid out by Mason. Instead, when we translate *Ioudaioi* into English, we need to focus on the “content” of the term, and look for continuity and discontinuity between the ancient and modern period; between the source language and the target language.

While outsiders, mainly Christians, may eventually have come to talk about “Judaism” as a “religion,” in the sense Mason understands that word, in order to categorize Jews within their own worldview as divorced from a Jewish home-

²⁶ Mason notes that *Ebraioi* would be a modern way to refer to “Jews” in Greek, indicating that a new understanding of the religion necessitated a new terminology (“Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” n. 90). However, this term was used already by Paul in 2 Cor 11:22, as synonymous to “Israelite,” and it was also used in some later synagogue inscriptions from Rome (ca. 3rd–4th century: *JWE* vol. 2, nos. 2; 33; 578; 579).

²⁷ Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” e.g., 496.

²⁸ Louis H. Feldman, “Some Observations on the Name of Palestine,” *HUCA* 61 (1996): 1–23. See also Moshe Dothan, “Terminology for the Archaeology of the Biblical Periods,” in *Biblical Archaeology Today: Proceedings of the International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem, April 1984*, ed. A. Biran, et al. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1985), 136–139; David Goodblatt, “From Judeans to Israel: Names of Jewish States in Antiquity,” *JSJ* 29 (1998): 1–36. Runesson, *Origins*, 62–63, also discuss terminology and criteria in this regard.

land and a shared religio-ethnic identity,²⁹ Jewish self-understanding never adjusted to such outsider perspectives.³⁰ From an emic perspective, then, the terms “Jews” and “Judaism” still signal many of the central realities present already in antiquity. The idea of a Jewish homeland, related to the Jewish *ethnos*, was never abandoned; Jerusalem is still considered a religio-geographic center, the remains of the Western Wall of the former temple area being the most holy site for Jews.³¹ This religio-ethnic identity may be compared to, e.g., Samaritans, whose Samaritanism orbits not Jerusalem but Mount Gerizim as the most holy place. This *ethnos* lives in what was called Samaria in antiquity, located within the Roman province of Judea, an area now located on the West Bank.³²

In sum, then, based on Mason’s identification of central components of the identity connected to what in Greek was called *hoi Ioudaioi*, and noting that such components are still today central to the *ethnos* called *the Jews* in English, the terms “Jew,” “Jewish,” “Judaism” should be retained (with this content in mind) to designate this *ethnos* in antiquity as well as today, in order to avoid anachronisms.

This does not mean, however, that *Ioudaioi* should *always* be translated “Jews.” As is the case with all interpretation, the dynamics of one language rarely translate directly into another with a one-to-one correspondence. A single word in one language may, depending on context, refuse direct translation into another single word in the target language in a standardized way. In other

²⁹ It is worth noting that this Christian re-categorization of Judaism as a negative mirror image of itself for rhetorical purposes happens about the same time as Christianity is adopted by the ruling elite of the Roman Empire, which in turn begins its colonization of the Jewish homeland. Thus, the Christian view of Judaism as a “religion” divorced from ethnic and national elements is part and parcel of Christian anti-Jewish colonial theology. Cf. the discussion in Mason, “Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 504, which refers to Christian anti-Judaism, or “anti-Judean sentiments,” as related to this process.

³⁰ One should also note the impact of Islam in the 7th century onwards, in addition to Christianity, in this regard. Islam, like Christianity, is not based on the ancient relationship between *ethnos*-homeland-culture-ritual practices-beliefs. The combined force of these to “religions” paved the way for a general disconnect between *ethnos* and “religion,” a separation that was never adopted by Jews in the East, nor in the West.

³¹ The Jerusalem temple is of major significance for Rabbinic Judaism, which is the mother of all major varieties of modern Judaism. Contrary to what is sometimes claimed, the synagogue was never seen as replacing the temple, although it developed temple-related notions of sacred space. For a discussion of this latter point, see, e.g., Steven Fine, “Did the Synagogue Replace the Temple?” *BR* 12 (1996): 18–26, 41. As to the hope of rebuilding the temple, one may also note that some years ago, a huge menorah, which is said to be designed in ways making it fit to be installed in a re-constructed temple on the “temple Mount,” was placed by an unidentified Jewish group just west of the Western Wall, overlooking the Dome of the Rock. (The menorah has since been moved.) Most Jews would not be concerned with the rebuilding of the physical temple, however, but would, if religious, leave that to God.

³² For a discussion of Samaritan history, see Robert T. Anderson and Terry Giles, *The Keepers: An Introduction to the History and Culture of the Samaritans* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002); Pummer, *Samaritans*; Magnar Kvartrveit, “Theories of the Origin of the Samaritans: Then and Now,” *Religion* (2019): 1–14.

words, while ethnic and geographic-political aspects are always assumed in the term “Judean” or “Jew,” in first-century usage we sometimes find contexts which emphasize geographic-political meaning *to the exclusion* of a wider application of the term *Ioudaioi*, i.e., a narrowing of the usage of the term to apply only to Jews living in Judea, as opposed to, e.g., Jews living in Galilee. In the Gospel of John we find examples of such narrow geographic usage, which may be represented here by John 7:1.³³ Such nuances would not be lost on an ancient Greek-speaking audience, which would immediately think of one group of Jews living in one place as opposed to another group of Jews living elsewhere, without this in any way implying discontinuity in ethnic or other aspects of identity related to the overall group orbiting Jerusalem and its temple (whether it still stood or not). Without such distinctions between Judeans and Jews when we translate *Ioudaioi*, it would be difficult indeed to convey what was in many cases meant to describe tensions between Jews living in Judea and elsewhere (in the Gospels, most often Jews living in Galilee).³⁴

Turning now to “Christianity,” as already hinted at, things developed very differently and this needs to be reflected in our terminology, so as to do justice to the source material. Paul was an important figure in this regard, and Ignatius even more so. We shall return to their letters below. Here we shall focus briefly on a few terminological issues and their larger implications for how we understand the first century CE and late antiquity. At the heart of the problem lies the

³³ “After this Jesus went about in *Galilee*. He did not wish to go about in *Judea* because the *Ioudaioi* were looking for an opportunity to kill him.” The KJV, RSV, NRSV, NIV (and many other translations into other languages) all miss the point and mistranslate *Ioudaioi* here as “Jews,” despite the fact that the context would then imply that no “Jews” were living in Galilee at the time, which is demonstrably false. Another passage where choice of translation is of significant historical (and theological) importance, as shown by its reception history, is 1 Thess 2:14–16. In my opinion, the context makes quite clear that *Ioudaioi* in vv. 14 and 15 should be translated “Judeans,” since the point is that the Jew Paul is discussing suffering inflicted on Jewish Christ-followers in Judea by other Jews also living in Judea (note *symphyloetēs*, “compatriots,” in v. 14), as opposed to Jews living elsewhere (including Paul himself). “Judeans” thus signals part of the whole, a group of Jews within the totality of Jews, and the criterion for the selection is geographic-political.

³⁴ One such passage where choice of translation is crucial for the overall interpretation of a text is Matt 28:15. A comparison with modern examples may be instructive. Put side by side the ancient situation under discussion and the use of “England,” “English,” “Great Britain,” and “British” as terms referring to political areas. A paraphrase, with some historical significance, of John 7:1 indicates the problems: “After this William went about in Scotland. He did not wish to go about in England [not: Great Britain] because the English [not: the British] were looking for an opportunity to kill him.” For more complex discussions of terminology, language, countries, kingdoms, and provinces, the reader is referred to discussions, in English and in Dutch, of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. How would one be able to describe tensions between (North and South) Holland and other provinces in The Netherlands, the European part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, if one were to use the term “Holland,” as many do in English, as a synonym for The Netherlands?

inseparability of ethnic, cultural, national, and religious aspects of identity in antiquity.

“Christianity” as a term, has, in our culture and for more than a millennium, referred to a “religion” in the sense described by Mason (above); the term designates a generalization of various patterns of beliefs and practices that are embodied by individuals and groups in numerous cultures in a variety of ways, all of which place, in one way or another, Jesus of Nazareth at the center. More importantly for the present chapter, “Christianity” is *non-ethnic* with regard to its membership, rather than *open-ethnic* or *closed-ethnic*.³⁵ Christianity is therefore unrelated to a specific *ethnos*, as opposed to Judaism. In this regard, “Christianity” is fundamentally different not only from Judaism, but also from other forms of “religion” in the Greco-Roman world, including that of the first *Christianoi*.

The English terms “Christianity” and “Christians,” despite their Greek origin and the use of *Christianos* three times in the New Testament,³⁶ can be applied only anachronistically to a first-century context.³⁷ “Christianity,” in the modern sense of the term, comes into existence, rather, around the fourth century, with important developments taking place in the second century. Since this development of Christ-centered movements in late antiquity, which continues into the present, represents a fundamental discontinuity with religious phenomena of earlier periods in the Greco-Roman world, including Judaism, and since this shift in the understanding of “religion” is of vital significance to the formation of Christian identity and the so-called “parting of the ways” question, we need a language tool to indicate this difference. We need a term that distinguishes what *was* from what *became*.

While it is true that *Christianoi* was not an original designation for people claiming Jesus to be the Messiah (the author of Acts preferring, e.g., “the Way”), it became a primary descriptor before the aforementioned shift took place around the fourth century and later. Indeed, even when non-Jews had become a significant component of the membership referred to by this name, the term

³⁵ For these terms and a full discussion of their meaning, see Chs. 2 and 3 above. “Closed-ethnic” refers to “religions,” which membership is exclusive to a specific *ethnos*, and conversion is regarded as unwelcome or unacceptable due to the inextricable interwovenness of a specific god with a specific people. A “non-ethnic” stance is defined as one in which full and equal membership is unrelated to ethnic identities and concerns linked with such identities. An “open-ethnic” position maintains a crucial connection between a god and a people, but allows for conversion (which means, then, that a person from a different *ethnos* would leave his or her national, cultural and ethnic background and identity in order to join the history and identity of another people). In later Rabbinic literature we find both open-ethnic and closed-ethnic, but no non-ethnic positions. See also Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*.

³⁶ Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet 4:16. The earliest use of *Christianismos* is found in the second century: Ignatius, *Magn.* 10:1; cf. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 126.

³⁷ Cf. Gager, “Paul, the Apostle of Judaism.”

could still be used in a sense foreign to later uses. I suggest, therefore, that the *modern* English term “Christianity” be restricted to *modern* uses, i.e., post-late antique phenomena (with some pre-cursors before this time; see further below). For earlier periods, antedating the change in the thought and practice of “religion,” I would prefer to use a transliteration of the Greek: *Christianoi*.

In the second century,³⁸ people called *Christianoi* by outsiders could be either Jewish or non-Jewish, and they could have radically different opinions on practices and beliefs relating to their convictions about Jesus as Messiah. Still, at least as late as in the 90s and the early second century, outsiders, as well as insiders, would regard at least some of these groups as more than just related to Judaism: they would be expressions, or embodiments, of Judaism (cf. Acts 18:15; 22:12; 23:6). This would, to be sure, imply a strong affinity of such groups to Jewish cultural and ethnic aspects, including a recognition of the inalienable relationship between land, god, and people. Since such identities were Jewish ethno-religious identities, the word “Judaism” should be part of the term used for these groups. Mark D. Nanos and I have coined the term *Apostolic Judaism* to indicate a common religio-cultural and ethnic focus.³⁹ The designation matches other identifiers of specific forms of Judaism, such as Pharisaic Judaism, Sadducean Judaism, and Essene Judaism, as well as later Rabbinic Judaism.⁴⁰ Some of these Apostolic Jewish groups (e.g., Pauline communities) would argue that non-Jews could attach themselves to the Jewish *ethnos*, and become adopted without full conversion to this *ethnos* (which would have involved circumcision for men). Since such status is considerably different from the status of god-fearers, I would suggest the term *Christ-fearers* for these people, indicating

³⁸ Taking as point of departure that Acts and 1 Peter are to be dated to the early second century rather than to the late first century.

³⁹ We develop this in some detail in a co-authored book on Paul: *Paul and Apostolic Judaism* (still in progress). The term “apostolic” is not meant to refer to shared authority structures or uniform practices or beliefs. Rather, “apostolic” simply refers to a basic shared understanding of a Jewish ethno-religious center, i.e., a maintaining of the connection between *ethnos*–god–land. Within this shared (“religious”) worldview, various individuals and groups would hold different views on the specific implications following from belonging to a messianic community. A synonym to the term “Apostolic Judaism” would be “Christ-Centered Judaism.” While the latter term is useful, “apostolic” signals a greater specificity with regard to an identity that orbits Jesus rather than any other Messiah (“Christ”). The fact that the later (non-Jewish) church claimed, and claims, the apostles as the founders of what is, in reality, non-Jewish Christianity, might complicate hermeneutical and theological issues, but it does not change the historical fact that those called apostles in the Jesus movement, just like the prophets, were Jews and understood Jesus and their own roles in history from the perspective of a Jewish worldview. This includes also the female apostle Junia, mentioned by Paul, who was also Jewish (Rom 16:7); on Junia, see above, Ch. 6.

⁴⁰ Pharisaic, Sadducean, Essene, and Rabbinic Judaism are all convenient ways of referring to major trends, or “clusters of dialects,” in Jewish “religion” without therefore denying the diversity existing within each movement or group. Thus, just as in the case of “Apostolic Judaism,” no uniformity or shared authority structure is assumed when these terms are used.

their relationship to Apostolic Jews. Although not Jews, they would think of themselves as members of the people of God as defined by Apostolic-Jewish theology.

In the second century, however, one could also find insiders among those called *Christianoi* who would reject any overlap between the identity of the *Ioudaioi* and their own identity as *Christianoi* (e.g., Ignatius), foreshadowing late-antique developments. Because of this conscious separation from the culture and *ethnos* of the Jews (and we shall give a possible explanation below as to why and how this happened), such claims to a radically different identity need to be separated terminologically from various expressions of Judaism. I prefer to call such groups and individuals “proto-Christians.” I use “proto-Christianity,” then, to designate a cluster of beliefs and practices, adhered to by non-Jews (or Jews who rejected their Jewish ethno-religious identity), which relates to Jewish ancestral customs and makes use of the holy scriptures of the Jews, but is defined by ancient authors as being something other than Judaism, and its adherents as being “outside” of Judaism.

If we, in conversation with Martin Goodman,⁴¹ present the above categories and terms in a drawing (figure 11), excluding “Christianity” for the moment, the result may be shown as follows. (Note that Apostolic Jews could also be members of other Jewish associations, such as the Pharisees, as “messianic” subgroups. I have argued elsewhere that such circumstances explain the Matthean communities and the final redaction of that gospel.⁴² Cf. also, of course, Acts 5:33–39; 15:5; 23:6.)

In order to account for various relationships between all of these groups, including later Christianity, in a way that makes clear the distinctions between Jewish ancestral traditions and Greco-Roman ancestral traditions, I suggest that we summarize the former under a common heading: Yahwistic traditions.⁴³ We may further clarify and summarize the situation in a table as follows (figure 12):

⁴¹ Goodman, “Modeling the ‘Parting of the Ways’.”

⁴² Runesson, “Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations.”

⁴³ Cf. Runesson, “Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations,” 105. The category “Yahwistic Religions,” defined according to worship focus (deity; the God of Israel), includes additional religions such as, e.g., Samaritanism, “Christianity” (closely related to proto-Christianity), and Islam. This definition of the category is to be preferred to Boccaccini’s suggestion, which privileges Judaism; such a strategy neglects the ethnic criterion and brings together groups with separate and mutually exclusive identities under the heading of one of these groups. See Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism*, especially the chart on page 20, which includes both Samaritanism and Christianity along with other variants whose origins are claimed to be found in “Ancient” and “Middle” Judaism. He further states that “Christianity,” like “Rabbinism,” never ceased to be a Judaism (18). Cf. James Charlesworth’s critical remarks on this in the foreword to Boccaccini’s study (xviii).

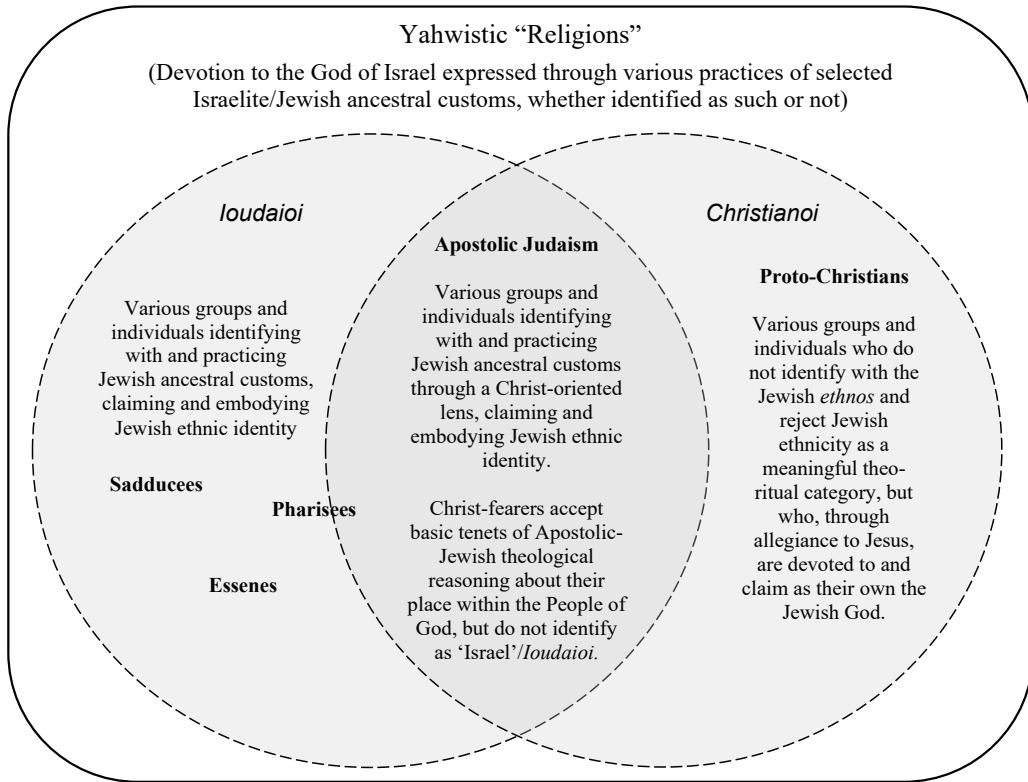


Figure 11. Conceptualizing first and second century *Ioudaioi* and *Christianoi* according to religious type and ethnic identity.

Type of Ancestral Tradition						
Yahwistic Traditions					Non-Yahwistic Traditions	
Jewish Ancestral Tradition			Non-Jewish Ancestral Tradition			[Greco-Roman Ancestral Traditions]
“Common Judaism”	Associations/Parties: ^[1]	Apostolic Judaisms and non-Apostolic Judaisms	Non-Jewish Christianities	Samaritanism ^[2]	Islam ^[3]	
["What the priests and the people agreed on"] ^[4]	Pharisaic Judaism; Essene Judaism; Sadducean Judaism	Matthean Judaism; Pauline Judaism	Ignatius; Irenaeus; Valentinians	Dositheanism	Shia; Sunni	

Figure 12. Forms of Yahwistic ancestral traditions in the context of other ancient Mediterranean traditions.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Notes to Figure 12: [1] Of course, this general distinction between Jewish followers of

While much more could be said, and more terminological ground could be covered, the above discussion and suggested categories may suffice to set the stage for returning to the question of the so-called parting of the ways and “early Christian identity formation” in relation to questions of *ethnos*, culture, land, and the God of Israel, i.e., in relation to what was “real” in various ancient social, religious, and political life-settings.

11.3 Re-thinking the Question

Framing the question of the origins of “Christian identity” as a “parting(s) of the ways between Judaism and Christianity,” which is often done, assumes what still needs to be proven, i.e., a common origin for the phenomena today summarized under the general categories of Judaism and Christianity. The ancient

Jesus and “other parties” is partly artificial and adapted to the present chapter. It is unsatisfactory as a general categorization, since it gives the impression that these other parties had things in common, which they did not necessarily have, and that these things would not be shared by apostolic-Jewish groups; apart from a rejection of Jesus as a messiah, which unites them, many other interpretations and applications of the shared ancestral traditions may have been and were the same between these other groups and various Christ-groups. More important, however, is to note that there were not always neat divisions between these movements and parties, and considerable overlap could exist between the groups. For example, we know of Pharisaic Christ-followers; Paul was one, of course (cf. Paula Fredriksen, “Paul, the Perfectly Righteous Pharisee,” 112–135), but see also Acts 15:5.

[2] Samaritans should not be regarded as a Jewish sect, but as an independent interpretation of Israelite religion: see Runesson, *Origins*, 388–394, and references there, especially the studies by J.D. Purvis and R.J. Coggins. See also Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002), 128: “Samaritanism was not Judaism, for the simple reason that the Samaritans did not recognize the true center.” Cf. the conclusion of Martin S. Jaffee, *Early Judaism* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1997), 138: “These parallels and contrasts lead to an unavoidable conclusion; *the Samaritan’s religious world is an example of a Judaic world that, in its own view as well as in the eyes of the Jews, is not part of Judaism.*” (Emphasis original). Jaffee discusses Samaritans under the heading “Israel but not Jews.” For useful introductions to Samaritan history, religion, and culture, see Alan Crown, Reinhard Pummer, and Avraham Tal, eds, *A Companion to Samaritan Studies* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993); Anderson and Giles, *The Keepers*; see also Pummer, *Samaritans*, esp. 1–169.

[3] I have included Islam here since current discussions on “the parting(s) of the ways” extend into the seventh century and beyond. According to some scholars, Judaism and Christianity had not fully parted ways when Islam emerged on the historical scene. See Becker and Reed, eds, *The Ways that Never Parted*. This conclusion is, of course, dependent on how the metaphor “parting(s)” is defined, and, indeed, if it should be used at all. See discussion by Lieu in *Neither Jew nor Greek?* 11–29, and Anders Runesson, “What Never Belonged Together Cannot Part: Rethinking the So-Called Parting of the Ways Between Judaism and Christianity,” in *Jews and Christians: Parting Ways in the First Two Centuries C.E.? Reflections on the Gains and Losses of a Model*, ed. Jens Schröter, David C. Sim, and Joseph Verheyden, BZNW 253 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 33–56.

[4] Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief*, 47.

situations categorized above represent a first step in the process of de-familiarizing ourselves with “what we know or expect to be the case”; of re-structuring the “architecture” within which we think. A next step in approaching these basic problems of identity formation is to look carefully at the question itself. If we do, and the assumptions behind the question are exposed, we are left with the task of re-phrasing the enquiry.

If separation, or “parting(s),” is defined as a process in which any positive interaction between Jews and Christians ceases, excluding the possibility that either tradition had any (positive) relevance to the self-definition of the other and further that participation in both traditions was an unattractive or inconceivable option,⁴⁵ then a “parting” between the two traditions has to be dated very late. We may even point to current Jewish/Christian dialogues as evidence of positive interaction that leads to further reflection within each tradition about their own identities as well as their relationship to others.⁴⁶ Indeed, we might even be forced to conclude therefore that no separation has yet occurred. Such a conclusion would, quite understandably, be controversial and inappropriate from the perspectives of many mainstream Jewish and Christian traditions.⁴⁷

We need, therefore, a sharper instrument in order to enable analysis of the situation in antiquity, since, obviously, something happened that led members of both traditions to identify themselves as not being members of the other.⁴⁸ While there was, for centuries, continuous interaction between “Jews and Christians,” and sometimes blurred boundaries between “synagogue and church,” mostly within non-elite strata, it is nevertheless clear that, institutionally and theologically, there existed distinct options for those who did not share this affection for dual membership. It is therefore necessary to begin our analysis as early as possible, in the first century, in order to understand how such options developed.

I would suggest that there are at least three main aspects of our problem that need to be taken into account before conclusions are drawn. Framed as questions, they are as follows. *First*, did there exist, at any point in time, common theological or halakhic fundamentals shared by people belonging to what would become “Christianity” and “Judaism”? This question calls attention to patterns, or types, of “religion.” *Second*, was there a point in time when people of both traditions shared ethnic identity, implying that some Jews eventually developed what became “Christianity” and thereby left their Jewish identity be-

⁴⁵ So Annette Yoshiko Reed and Adam H. Becker, “Introduction: Traditional Models and New Directions,” in *The Ways that Never Parted*, 22–24. Cf. Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 122–159, 277.

⁴⁶ Cf. the recent study by Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*.

⁴⁷ Obviously, for modern Messianic-Jewish minority groups, who define their identity as Christ-followers within Judaism, the “parting of the ways” question makes little sense.

⁴⁸ Both Jews and Christians; cf. Alexander, “Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism,” 2.

hind? This question addresses the critical aspect of ethnic identity as related to cultures, nations, and gods in antiquity. *Third*, did Jews and Christians once share an institutional setting, i.e., did they all exist within what has usually been called “the synagogue” (in the singular)? The last question is perhaps among the most misunderstood in traditional scholarship. It deals with institutional belonging as basic to any investigation into the matters with which we are concerned here.

These separate fields of investigation will, I believe, help us avoid a too-narrow approach (such as either primarily sociological or exclusively theological), and thus prevent us from producing answers based on a mere portion of the available evidence. It is also important to keep in mind the differences between elite and non-elite strata, as mentioned above. More options were available for people who were further from the centers of power. A brief discussion of each of the three questions may be instructive.

Type of “Religion.” While it is not helpful to isolate and use theological ideas as a basis for explaining a process of separation, neither is it advisable to ignore such factors. We need to discuss what E. P. Sanders has called patterns of religion,⁴⁹ including both a praxis-oriented criterion (Sabbath keeping, food regulations, purity concerns, festivals, tithing, focus on Jerusalem, all of which are essential to Jewish identity), and an analysis of core theological ideas. We need to understand what the priests and the people agreed on, “common Judaism” in Sanders’s words,⁵⁰ and how this related to convictions and practices within specific groups and associations.⁵¹

Ethnic Identity. Defining ethnicity is notoriously difficult.⁵² It is nevertheless clear that, as Mason has argued (cf. above), ethnic belonging is essential, politically as well as in terms of cult. For our purposes, it is instructive to note Acts 15 and 21 where ethnicity is the basis on which a variant “pattern of religion” is

⁴⁹ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 16–18. While Sanders focuses more on thought patterns than ritual, or cult, in this study, his later analysis, *Judaism: Practice and Belief*, strikes a better balance in this regard.

⁵⁰ Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief*, 47–49. Cf. Jacob Neusner, “The Formation of Rabbinic Judaism: Yavneh (Jamnia) from A.D. 70 to 100,” *ANRW* II.19.2. (1979), 1–42, 21: “[T]he beginnings of the rabbinic structure is to be located in the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. Before the destruction there was a common ‘Judaism’ in the Land of Israel, and it was by no means identical to what we now understand as rabbinic Judaism.”

⁵¹ See also discussion above, Ch. 1, and note that the notion of “common Judaism” does not contradict the emphasis there on the historical lack of a common core with which to compare Paul.

⁵² Ethnic identity is socially constructed and subjectively perceived, a myth of a shared descent, as someone phrased it. The literature on the topic is vast; cf. the discussion in Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, 40–76. John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 402, provides a basic working definition: “ethnicity,” he states, refers to “a combination of kinship and custom, reflecting both shared genealogy and common behaviour.”

created for non-Jews who believed Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah and who were convinced that this had consequences for themselves *as* non-Jews. In the same way we find in Paul an insistence that non-Jews remain non-Jews with regard to ritual and cultural behavior (e.g., 1 Cor 7:18).⁵³ In both cases, the people inventing this new pattern of communal and cultic behavior were Jews who did not themselves practice what they taught the non-Jews; the life-pattern they constructed was meant for people in the movement who were ethnically defined as non-Jews. We also find that ethnicity and religious behaviour was important for Roman authorities, especially under Domitian, who intensified the *fiscus Iudaicus* and related “the Jewish way of life” (*Ioudaikos bios*) to the crime of *asebeia*, or “impiety.”⁵⁴ Of course, this is the perspective of “religious” and political leaders. As is evidenced in Pauline letters and Roman texts, some people felt free to ignore any absolute relationship between ethnic identity and type of cult behavior. We shall return to reasons why this may have been the case. But there certainly is a core of shared assumptions regarding the relationship between *ethnos*, gods, land, and law. This is crucial for how we reconstruct the process in which what became “Christianity” was formed.

Institutional Belonging. “The synagogue,” and how ancient institutions referred to by this English term are defined, is of vital importance to our investigation, as we have also seen in previous chapters; indeed, this aspect is a *sine qua non* for any conclusions drawn regarding the so-called parting of the ways question. Summarizing the key points made previously, in the first century in the land of Israel, behind the (mostly Greek) terms used for what in English is translated “synagogue” we find two types of institution: a) The public (civic) village or town assembly, i.e., a “municipal” institution, which also included “religious” functions⁵⁵ and b) “association synagogues,” or Jewish associations: institutions in which groups with similar background, occupations, or specific interests and interpretations of Jewish life gathered (e.g., the Essenes, Philo, *Prob.* 81; the Theodotos inscription in Jerusalem; Acts 6:9).⁵⁶ These association synagogues related to each other, to the Jewish civic institutions, or public syn-

⁵³ Note, however, that this does not mean neutralizing the force of the commandments for non-Jews, only that these commandments were now understood to be fulfilled in different ways for them, through the direct assistance of the divine spirit. The Torah, thus, stands (cf. Rom 3:31; 5:5; 13:8–10).

⁵⁴ In the case of non-Jews acting like Jews, it could even lead to death sentences according to Dio Cassius (cf. 67.14; 68.2). On non-Jews imitating Jewish customs, cf. Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game*. Stegemann and Stegemann, *Jesus Movement*, emphasize that only matters relevant to Rome led to measures against sympathizers of Judaism. Examples of punishment of sympathizers under Domitian include Flavius Clemens and his wife Domitilla, and Acilius Glabrio.

⁵⁵ So also Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*.

⁵⁶ Cf. also Richardson, *Building Jewish*, 111–133, 165–221. For classification of associations and comprehensive discussion, see also Harland, *Associations*; Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations*.

agogues, and to the Jerusalem temple in different ways, and an analysis of this interaction is crucial for understanding processes of separation. As discussed in Chapter 3 above, in the Diaspora, what we call “synagogues” were understood as associations, but they often filled, with regard to internal Jewish affairs, many of the functions that the public synagogues filled in the land of Israel. There were, however, Jewish separatist groups in the Diaspora too, whose associations were meant for sectarian members only (e.g., the Therapeutae, Philo, *Contempl.*); such Jewish groups had, institutionally, parted ways with other Jews.⁵⁷

With these definitions and the three questions in mind, we may address the problem of identity in relation to the so-called parting(s) of the ways afresh. Was there ever a basic common theology and halakhah for what is today “Judaism” and “Christianity”? Was there a common ethnic identity? Did they ever share an institutional context?

First the obvious: the question of the “parting of the ways” takes as its point of departure modern Judaism and Christianity. We identify two religions that exist in our society, we assume that they once belonged together, and we ask how it came to happen that they parted ways. Modern Judaism in all its mainstream varieties developed out of Rabbinic Judaism. Rabbinic Judaism evolved as a coalition of Jewish groups sometime in the late first, early second century CE, but did not become dominant in Jewish society in Palestine until the fifth century at the earliest.⁵⁸ Until then, Rabbinic Judaism is best understood as an association with little influence outside its own group or in the public synagogue.⁵⁹

Thus, when proto-Christianity, in many ways the mother of modern (non-Jewish) Christianity, first appeared in the early second century, Rabbinic Judaism, the mother of modern Judaism, was still not in charge of the public institutions of the Jews. Proto-Christianity, and later “Christianity,” consequently evolved as a separate religion independent of what became Judaism with regard to institutional setting: at no point in time did this type of Christianity share institutional setting with Rabbinic Judaism. Neither is there a shared basic “religious pattern,” especially with regard to halakhah. (Of course, all basic concepts in Christianity are connected more or less tightly to Jewish thought [including the idea of a Messiah!].) But without the ethnic aspect, the cultural

⁵⁷ For *semneion*, the term Philo uses for this institution, as a synagogue term, see Binder, *Temple Courts*, 149–151. Cf. the list of synagogue terms in Runesson, *Origins*, 171–173; discussion of the synagogue of the Therapeutae is found on pages 455–458. All sources related to both types of synagogues are presented and discussed in *ASSB*.

⁵⁸ E.g., Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 466–498; Günter Stemberger, *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land: Palestine in the Fourth Century* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000). Cf. Schwartz, *Imperialism*, who emphasizes an even later date for Rabbinic dominance in Jewish society.

⁵⁹ See also the study by Burns, *Christian Schism*, which traces the ascent of the rabbi in Jewish society and offers an explanation as to how that was achieved.

and national aspects are lost, and so are halakhic regulations *qua* halakhah.) In terms of ethnic identity, Proto-Christianity and Christianity turned a radical rejection of any such connections with Jews and Judaism into a virtue.

In one sense, this answers our question of common origin: the Judaism and Christianity of the modern period and the Middle Ages never “parted ways” because they never belonged together in any of the three aspects mentioned earlier.⁶⁰ However, such a conclusion is only half the answer. After all, Jesus was a Jew and practiced a form of Judaism. We need to address the question of possible forerunners of late antique and medieval Christianity and Judaism, and provide an overall interpretive frame for understanding their developments.

11.4 The How, When, and Why of Christian Identity: Some Tentative Suggestions

Taking the above categories, definitions, and three basic questions as a point of departure, new aspects of the problem of Christian identity formation and the so-called parting(s) of the ways process emerge. It goes without saying that local-specific contexts and factors meant that things developed differently in different places. I have dealt in some detail with the Mattheans and the Gospel of Matthew elsewhere.⁶¹ Historically, the Apostolic-Jewish “pattern of religion” of that Gospel displays few connections with what later developed into proto-Christianity, even less so with modern Christianity. This form of Judaism at some point ceased to exist (just as did multiple other forms of Second Temple Judaism). In the present section, I focus on the larger picture, in which clues may be found that explain how the basic features of modern Christian identity came into existence. Doing so, I shall identify important stages in the development from the situation reflected in our earliest textual evidence, Paul’s letters, to the late fourth century, when Theodosius I proclaimed “Christianity” the religion of the empire.

In this complex historical process, I suggest three main stages of development are distinguishable that will offer a general interpretive frame, which may then be used for understanding more local-specific situations and processes. For matters of convenience, I shall structure the discussion around three individuals whose actions and thought bring together and crystallize significant contemporary religio-cultural traits: Paul, Ignatius, and Theodosius I. This is not to say that there ever was a necessary development from one to the other. Rather, as it happened, aspects of one were picked up and developed by another in ways

⁶⁰ Cf. the similar conclusion of Jacob Neusner, *Jews and Christians: The Myth of a Common Tradition* (London, SCM Press, 1991).

⁶¹ See above, n. 8.

mirroring concerns and strategies of the time. Only in hindsight is it possible to trace commonalities and impulses that connect the three in a pattern where aspects of A are taken up by B, and B is significant for C, but C has little or nothing in common with A.

With his acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, and after years of reflection, Paul most likely moved from an understanding of Judaism as an open-ethnic “religion,” or way of life, to a closed-ethnic, eschatologically motivated theological understanding of his ancestors’ traditions.⁶² The open-ethnic stance was certainly the most common Jewish position around the first century CE,⁶³ and this is also what we find with Pharisaic Christ-followers apart from Paul (Acts 15:5). In the Greco-Roman world such a position was not unheard of, but was often considered problematic since movement from one “religion”/ethnic group to another could be understood as disloyalty – even treason – if the old gods were abandoned completely. Paul’s shift in this regard comes through in his comment in Gal 5:11, that he had once preached circumcision (i.e., actively convincing non-Jews to join the Jewish *ethnos*) but no longer does so.⁶⁴ Indeed, the fundamental conviction of Paul, and in my view the key to understanding his theological position on law and *pistis*, is that all people must remain in the condition in which they were when they were called (1 Cor 7:17-20).⁶⁵ Due to the general relationship between *ethnos*, culture, and law articulated by Mason (see above), such a position would automatically exempt people not belonging to the *ethnos* of the Jews from keeping the law of Moses.⁶⁶

⁶² As opposed to a non-ethnic stance, which is, in my view, a common misunderstanding of Paul’s thought: see above, Ch. 2.

⁶³ For sources and commentary, see Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*.

⁶⁴ Without entering the debate about how well Acts represents Paul’s theological worldview, both the closed-ethnic stance and the open-ethnic position would have required Timothy’s circumcision, since his mother was Jewish (Acts 16:1–3; cf. Gal 5:3). A non-ethnic stance would not. One may also point to Acts 21:21–26.

⁶⁵ “However that may be, let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This is my rule in all the churches. Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision.” (1 Cor 7:17–18). Note that this is hardly a rule that may be followed or not, according to Paul, on the basis of social or political context. Circumcision is always connected to a belonging within, or joining, the *ethnos* of the Jews, and doing so implies adherence to the law of the Jews, i.e., the Torah of Moses, as explicitly claimed in Gal 5:3.

⁶⁶ The information given by Josephus about the events leading up to the circumcision of Izates of Adiabene (*A.J.* 20.34–48) provides an important context for understanding Paul in his first-century world. Ananias and Eleazar represent two different Jewish views on what should be required of non-Jews who wish to worship the God of Israel, the former insisting that circumcision was less important than worship, and the latter insisting that Izates could only worship the God of Israel as a Jew, referring to the Law of Moses. Although Ananias refers to political circumstances as reasons for Izates not to become a Jew, the point is that this is also a theologically acceptable solution. As Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*, 337, notes, the picture is one of a spectrum. Non-Jews may place themselves on various levels and

It seems quite clear that Paul's understanding of what it means to be "in Christ" (*en Christō*) reflects an eschatological worldview in which Jews and non-Jews, the latter by adoption via a hermeneutical elaboration of the story of Abraham in which the covenant is said to be open to more than one people (Romans 4),⁶⁷ together form the people of God. If this had not been the case, the God of Israel would have been the God of the Jews only, and not of all peoples (since circumcision would have included non-Jews in the *ethnos* of the Jews). Such a theology would go against a rather compact tradition in the Scriptures, stating that Israel's God is indeed the God of the whole world, and that conviction, or trust, is at the heart of the covenant (as proven by the Abraham story). In other words, while Apostolic (and other) Jews (Rom 11:18) and Jerusalem (Rom 15:19, 25–27; 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8:1–9:15) are always at the center for Paul, the hub around which the world turns, non-Jews need to join *as* non-Jews (Rom 3:27–31). In this way, and in this way only if the goal is the adoption of non-Jews as members of the people of God, the crucial connection between *ethnos*, culture, and law is kept intact (Rom 3:31).⁶⁸

Paul's Apostolic Judaism takes as point of departure the firm conviction that the Jews are the people of God, even when they do not join the Apostolic Jewish movement (Rom 11:28–29). The non-Jews are *adopted* in a sense described as "contrary to nature" (Rom 11:24), a fact that makes them vulnerable in a way Jews are not (Rom 11:26). Paul even states that reconciliation between non-Jews and the God of Israel is dependent on the main part of the Jewish people *not* accepting Jesus as the Messiah (*katallagē*, Rom 11:15). No such function is described for non-Jews who do not belong "in Christ," and, contrary to what is

worship the God of Israel as non-Jews. At the end of the spectrum, however, is circumcision, which results in the transfer of a (male) person's status from non-Jew to Jew; such a transfer has political implications. While Josephus seems to accept both Ananias's and Eleazar's positions on this matter, pointing to the fact that trust (*pisteuō*) in God is more important than being Jewish or not (so Donaldson, *ibid.*, 338), Paul puts equal emphasis on trust in God (interpreted as trust in his Messiah) for Jews and non-Jews, but rejects categorically circumcision of non-Jews. See further below.

⁶⁷ Paul's theological logic, as based on the Abraham story in Genesis, seems rather straightforward: a) Abraham interacted with God *before* and *after* he was circumcised, b) God established Abraham's righteousness *before* he was circumcised, c) achievement of righteous status is attributed to Abraham's *trust* in God, d) circumcision *confirmed* Abraham's status as righteous, based on trust. Therefore: e) Abraham is the father of both the uncircumcised (non-Jews) and circumcised (Jews) who trust in God in Paul's day (which is defined as trusting in the message that Jesus is the Messiah). Moving on from Romans 4 to Romans 11, Paul adds that because God loves the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), even those who do not trust in that message, but are, like Abraham, circumcised, remain elect and will be saved (Rom 11:28–29; 26). Non-Jews who do not trust in Jesus as the Messiah are not on Paul's eschatological radar; this reinforces the importance of circumcision–*ethnos*–law–God in Paul's letters, both within and beyond the Jesus movement. On the absolute connection between *ethnos*/circumcision and law in Paul's thought, see Gal 5:3.

⁶⁸ Cf. John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 263–264.

the case for Jews beyond Apostolic-Jewish membership (Rom 11:26), no salvation is envisioned for such non-Jews. For Paul, the basic difference *within* the people of God between Jews and non-Jews along the lines of ethnic-cultural identity was a *sine qua non* in the last days, and he urged both groups to accept this difference and keep the peace (1 Cor 7:17-20; Rom 15:7-12). Non-Jews must remain non-Jews, but they were, according to Paul, completely dependent on Jewish Christ-followers: “If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you” (Rom 11:18).⁶⁹

Thus, Paul always affirmed a basic characteristic shared by Mediterranean cultures, namely that *the gods run in the blood*, as Paula Fredriksen has aptly described it.⁷⁰ What changed for Paul as a Christ-follower in this regard was his view on the status of the category of *ethnos*: from an active openness to non-Jews joining the Jewish *ethnos*, to a rejection of this possibility based on an eschatological conviction. It is this very fact – the closed-ethnic stance combined with a) the conviction that non-Jews still need to worship the God of Israel and, no less important, b) they must not pay homage to the gods of their own *ethnos*, or any other gods related to family, city or empire – it is this fact that eventually leads to a situation in which identity and belonging can be re-interpreted as unrelated to the category of *ethnos*. Ignatius will serve us well as an example of such a hermeneutical step in the formation of a proto-Christian identity.

As is well known, what we would call “religiosity” today took various forms in the Greco-Roman world. In addition to ritual attention to multiple gods related to family, *ethnos*, city and empire, people could engage in cultic activities and be members of societies and cults *unrelated to their ethnic identity*. I am thinking here especially of the mystery religions, such as the Mithraic cult, or Mithraism, the Eleusinian mysteries, and the mysteries of Isis and Osiris, but also of the philosophical schools (e.g., Stoics, Cynics etc.).⁷¹ The mystery cults provided the *individual* with a setting focused on his or her salvation by means of a series of rituals leading to full membership and participation in sacrificial ceremonies. There was no apparent contradiction between participating in mystery cults on the one hand and attending to the gods of one’s *ethnos* on the other; these were just different parts of the “cultic universe” of the period.

While Paul emphasized the ethnic aspect of his Judaism as the center around which everything else turns, the closed-ethnic stance was confusing for non-

⁶⁹ So also Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans*, 175, n. 28, who relates this position to Lukan theology in Acts. See also Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, 298–305. Cf. Jewett, *Romans*, 686–687. For a refreshing and thought-provoking perspective on Rom 11, see also Stendahl, *Final Account*, 33–44.

⁷⁰ Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement,” 231–246, 232. She clarifies: “cult is an ethnic designation / ethnicity is a cultic designation.”

⁷¹ Cf. Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 486: “a category least likely to be connected with religion in our world, philosophy, was in its ancient form rather close to our religion.”

Jews in the Greco-Roman world (which is clear from Paul's polemic against his adversaries, not least in Galatians). Indeed, whereas Paul's model for non-Jews was constructed building on Jewish theological convictions, responding to an eschatological awareness, later non-Jewish readers understood his letters from a Greco-Roman socio-religious perspective. From such a perspective, the directive *not* to join the Jewish *ethnos* would naturally place Christ-belief in the context of other Greco-Roman cults and associations in which ethnic identity was backgrounded. Such understandings would, thus, "re-categorize" the identity of belonging within the Christ-movement, *from* the ancestral traditions of the Jewish *ethnos* to a Greco-Roman mystery cult, or a philosophy. As such, Judaism would become irrelevant, since Judaism was "categorized" along with other Greco-Roman *ethnic* cults.⁷² Just as a Roman would not mix the "category" of his or her national cult with a membership in a mystery cult or a philosophical school, he or she would not mix a Jewish national cult with a "religion" lacking a connection to a specific ethnic identity: to do so would be to confuse apples with oranges.

Such a "re-categorization" is, arguably, very close to what we see happening in the early second century, our first evidence being Ignatius's letters. For Ignatius, Christ-belief had nothing to do with Judaism. On the contrary, he writes that it would be absurd to confess Christ and adhere to Judaism at the same time.⁷³ The God of Israel was no longer the God of the Jewish *ethnos*. Christ-belief, according to Ignatius, was detached from any specific ethnic identity (the Jews were disinherited), and, as would be the case in the context of Greco-Roman ritual sensitivities, this meant that no ethnic concerns whatsoever were appropriate. The difference for Ignatius, and others of similar convictions, between mystery cults and membership among the Christ-followers was that there were absolutizing claims linked to the latter: adherence to Christ excluded participation in any other rituals. Ignatius's "religion," then, combined a basic Jewish "monotheistic"⁷⁴ characteristic (serve no other gods) with the "form," or

⁷² Cf. Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism," 489, who emphasizes the "universal tendency" of ancient non-Christian authors to discuss the *Ioudaioi* alongside other *ethnē*. "*Ioudaioi* were not often compared – as the Christians *were* compared (Celsus in *Contra Celsum* 1.9, 68) – with members of cults (e.g., of Mithras, Cybele, Isis) or voluntary associations."

⁷³ Ignatius, *Magn.* 10:2–3: "So lay aside the bad yeast, which has grown old and sour, and turn to the new yeast, which is Jesus Christ. Be salted in him, that no one among you become rotten; for you will be shown for what you are by your smell. It is outlandish to proclaim Jesus Christ and practice Judaism. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity – in which every tongue that believes in God has been gathered together." Note that the longer recension, usually dated to the fourth century, adds, as if needed, a clarification: "It is absurd to speak of Jesus Christ with the tongue, and to cherish in the mind a Judaism which has now come to an end. For where there is Christianity there cannot be Judaism." Cf. the "softer" position taken by Justin Martyr in *Dialogue with Trypho*, 47; the basic move away from ethnicity as a defining characteristic is, however, the same.

⁷⁴ Note Fredriksen's comments on this term ("Mandatory Retirement," 241–243). I use it

“category,” of de-ethnosized Greco-Roman mystery cults. This combination represents a fundamental shift in “religious” identity.⁷⁵

Ignatius’s martyrdom, therefore, had more to do with a refusal to attend to his duties in relation to his *ethnos*, city, and empire, than with any involvement with Jewish ancestral traditions, or for participating in a “mystery cult” or association more generally. It just did not make political sense for someone who was understood to be a member of a mystery cult to not also perform the rituals for the health of the emperor and the empire. What Paul presented us with was an innovative Apostolic-Jewish socio-theological solution to the place of non-Jews among the people of God in the last days. Ignatius’s “religion” takes Jewish themes and understands them within the socio-religious interpretive frame provided by the (non-ethnic) mystery religions. This matrix, *in and of itself*, invalidates Judaism because of the ethnic aspect. Proto-Christian identity, with its marked non-ethnic stance, now begins to take form. Proto-Christianity cannot be classified as Judaism, since the connection between god-people-land-law is considered void and precisely these features are key for defining ancient Judaism.⁷⁶ This re-configuration, effectively creating what we have chosen to call proto-Christianity, was needed for this movement to spread among the elite strata of Roman society. As long as Christ-belief was understood as related to a (conquered) people – Jews and Judaism – it could hardly be a political tool to be used by rulers with other ethnic (and thus also cultic) identities. “Categorized” with, e.g., Mithraism, rituals and beliefs centered on a Christ-figure who was given names, honors and titles belonging to emperors, history could take another turn.⁷⁷

here not to refer to beliefs that only one god exist, but rather that no other gods than one specific god must be served.

⁷⁵ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 15–16, notes that the first scholar who presented a comprehensive case for understanding Ignatius’s religion as closely related to mystery cults was Gillis Petersson Wetter, professor of New Testament Exegesis in Uppsala, Sweden, in the early 1920s (*Altchristliche Liturgien: Das christliche Mysterium* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1921]). There are, in my view, several reasons to return to Wetter’s study on this topic, not least because of his focus on the importance of ritual. My argument here, however, is not dependent on any specific conclusions regarding the importance of ritual in ancient cults. Rather, the connection suggested in the present study is based on the importance of ethnicity as related, or not, to specific forms of “religious” organizations.

⁷⁶ Note how closely related Christ-belief and the mystery religions are in the writings of Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian. Clement talks about initiation into the sacred (Christian) mysteries, and other mystery cults are severely critiqued (*Exhortation to the Greeks* (*Protrepticus*), 2, 12). It is quite clear from second-century writings that non-Jews who belong within the Christ-movement relate to their beliefs and practices using terminology shared with mystery religions and philosophy, respectively.

⁷⁷ To be sure, this should not be understood as if proto-Christians consciously “changed things” with the explicit purpose of making their religion acceptable to rulers; Ignatius’s martyrdom and his attitude to life generally should warn us against such conclusions. Rather, what happened provided the necessary ingredients to enable later Roman rulers to adopt “Christianity” as a religio-political tool.

On February 28, 380 CE Christianity, as it would develop in Medieval Europe, was born. This is not true, of course, in any absolute sense of that word. But Theodosius's edict of that year, issued independently of church authorities, that Nicene Christianity was to be the religion of the empire to the exclusion of all other forms of "religion," including other forms of Christianity, was indeed a crucial step in the development of Christian social and political identity.⁷⁸ All Greco-Roman ethnic-based religions and cults were, basically, outlawed, and Jewish communities were restricted in their communal gatherings.⁷⁹

What we see here is a re-entering of empire-wide religio-political concerns, such as those that were behind persecution of Christ-followers until the early fourth century and Constantine's reform. Now, however, the form of religion that was adopted as state religion was non-ethnic. In other words, a non-ethnic religious identity was required of all subjects (with some provisions made for the Jews), and such an identity was brought into the center of political affairs: the security and welfare of the empire was dependent on it. While this development took long to be firmly established, as also the archaeological record shows,⁸⁰ this is what fundamentally and for the future changed the phenomenon of "religion" into our modern concept. Ridding a vast empire, consisting of a multitude of ethnic and national identities interwoven with gods and the rituals that had been developed to please them, of the idea that people's ethnic identity was relevant to their relationship to the gods – and more specifically, there was to be worship of one God only – was simply unrealistic. Yet it worked, at a success rate of almost one hundred percent: only the Jews, despite Christian claims that their *ethnos* no longer had any relationship to their God, preserved the ancient understanding, once shared by Apostolic Jews too, of "religion."

This new religio-political culture was implemented over hundreds of years through persecution of adherents to Greco-Roman traditions ("pagans"), and discrimination of the Jews. For the Jews of Palestine, Christian rejection of the people-land-god principle meant colonization.⁸¹ This began already in the early fourth century, but was intensified in later centuries. The idea of a Christian Holy Land in Palestine, contrary to Jewish understandings, builds on an absolutizing and universalizing view of "religion" as non-ethnic at its interpretive and ritual core. Although Ignatius could not possibly have drawn the conclusions that were self-evident for Theodosius, we can see that the fundamental steps taken by him in de-ethnosizing belief in Christ, "categorizing" it among

⁷⁸ This ruling was not enforced, however, until eleven years later, when Theodosius explicitly prohibited all other cults, sacrifices, and temples.

⁷⁹ On Roman legislation on Jews and synagogues at this time and later, see Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*.

⁸⁰ See, e.g., Sauer, *Archaeology*.

⁸¹ For a recent and in-depth discussion of Christianity, empire, and the Jews in Palestine, see Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews*. See also Ch. 12 below.

the mystery cults, had direct implications for Christian empire building in later centuries. It goes without saying, however, that for Paul such developments would have been utterly inconceivable, although his Apostolic-Jewish approach to non-Jews and his closed-ethnic stance was a necessary factor without which Ignatius would not have been able to establish proto-Christianity.

If we, then, take a look at the three questions that we outlined above as a strategy for investigations into the so-called parting of the ways and the problem of Christian identity formation, the following can be said.

First, for Ignatius there is a fundamental difference between Jewish and proto-Christian patterns of “religion,” and this difference is based on opposing views of the role of the Jewish *ethnos* in Judaism and the lack of such a role among the *Christianoi*. For him, although he uses Jewish themes and ideas, there never was a time when “Christians and Jews” shared origins in this regard. The one abolishes the other from day one. Paul’s view is different indeed: the existence of the one is dependent on the other. However, Paul’s closed-ethnic position leads him to a distinct separation of Jews and non-Jews, so that the former never left their “religious pattern” (based on ethnic identity), and the latter were forbidden to share in the Jews’ halakhic practices that were specific for the Jewish *ethnos*. Thus, not even for Paul was there ever a time when Jews and non-Jews “in Christ” shared a pattern of “religion.” Needless to say, that also answers the question of an originally shared ethnic identity: at no time, as long as Paul (or the Jerusalem Council, Acts 15) was considered authoritative in his rulings, was there a shared origin (1 Cor 7:17–18). Ignatius’s writings imply that a Jew who wanted to join his movement had to leave his or her ethnic identity behind; he or she had to “convert.” Even if some Jews may have done this, and interpreted their “Messianic” identity as non-Jewish at its core, we have no evidence of this happening on a larger scale. On the contrary, this is unlikely since there was no alternative ethnic identity to convert to; joining a movement in the category of mystery cults without one’s own ethnic background would hardly have made sense for a Jew in the second century.

Finally, the institutional context: was there ever a shared sense of belonging in “the synagogue”? While Paul’s theology takes a social point of departure in a shared institutional context, the Jewish associative setting (indeed, Paul, in my view, does not make sense apart from such an institutional framework), Ignatius’s approach is entirely foreign to such a social setting. In other words, non-Jewish Christ-followers who accepted Paul’s teachings most likely existed within an institutional context shared with Jews, either in more open associations, such as those in which Paul, according to Acts, proclaimed his own message about the Messiah, or in separate Apostolic-Jewish associations, sharing space and leadership with Jewish Christ-followers. If there is any connection between message, theology, and institutional setting (and I believe that there is), those non-Jews most likely remained in such synagogue settings. Just as

certain, however, is that the type of organization Ignatius identified with could not, by definition, co-exist with an institutional setting such as an association where the ethnic identity of both people and god was part of what brought people together.⁸²

So, if we are to assume a common institutional origin, we must assume that non-Jewish Christ-followers who once were attached to various forms of Diaspora synagogues changed their understanding of “religious” identity quite radically in the direction described here with the help of Ignatius. This is possible, and the question that would follow would be: did such changes take place within more open Jewish synagogues and lead directly to separate non-Jewish associations (without Apostolic-Jewish presence), or was it a later development within separate Apostolic-Jewish synagogues?⁸³ There is no space here to argue the case, but several reasons suggest that the latter is the more sociologically plausible alternative. If so, we would find a first institutional “parting of the ways” *within* Diaspora Judaism, much like the establishment of a separate synagogue.⁸⁴ A second institutional split would be between Jews and non-Jews *within* the Christ-movement, as non-Jews rejected an identity based on attachment to the Jewish *ethnos*. It is also entirely possible that non-Jews organized themselves apart from any Jewish communities early on, and that such organizations were independent from the very beginning. In either case, the idea of a shared institutional setting in which occurs a split along the lines of “Judaism and Christianity” is so terminologically simplified that it can only mislead someone interested in early Christian identity formation and the origin of Christianity as a religion separate from Judaism.

11.5 *What has Not been Said, and What has*

It is customary to end by summarizing main conclusions. It seems to me that sometimes – especially as the topic at hand is susceptible to misunderstandings, and language more generally is a blunt tool for conveying ideas – it may be good to also direct the reader’s attention to what has *not* been claimed.

It has *not* been argued that Judaism was or is a uniform religion with an unbroken continuity from the first century CE (or earlier centuries) until today. Indeed, Second Temple Judaism was striking in its diversity in ways different

⁸² Cf. Paula Fredriksen, “How Jewish Is God? Divine Ethnicity in Paul’s Theology,” *JBL* 137 (2018) 193–212.

⁸³ Cf. Magnus Zetterholm, *Antioch*.

⁸⁴ Cf., e.g., the social location of the synagogue of the Therapeutae; we are dealing, then, with a Jewish group, with Christ-fearers attached to it, that decides to organize itself separately from other Jewish groups. This type of separation is also witnessed by the Gospel of Matthew, as noted above.

from the diversity of Judaism since. Rabbinic Judaism, the mother of modern mainstream variants of Judaism, began to develop only half a century after the Jesus movement was formed, and did not begin to dominate the interpretation of what Judaism was, or is, until the fifth or sixth century at the earliest: it was not mainstream Judaism during the period in which we have taken interest here, and it was not a Second Temple Jewish movement, as Apostolic Judaism was.⁸⁵ This process meant a major shift in Jewish “religious” identity, which developed in relationship – and opposition – to imperial Christianity. As Daniel Boyarin states, “Judaism ... is not the parent religion to Christianity; indeed, in some respects the opposite may be true.”⁸⁶ It is thus not possible to understand Judaism today without studying the development of late-antique Christianity. It *has* been claimed, however, that the main characteristic of ancient “religion” in the Greco-Roman world, namely the connection between *ethnos*-god-land-law, has been maintained in Judaism throughout history, including our own time. Since the Greek term *Ioudaioi* signals such aspects of ethnic identity, we need to argue for terminological continuity over the centuries and thus (except in special cases; see above) translate this term into English as “Jews.” In the same way, the “religious” life identified as Jewish in antiquity – and today – implies this connection between people-god-land-law; we should thus, in English, speak of “Judaism” with regard to both the ancient and modern periods.

It has *not* been claimed that there is an absolute discontinuity between various ways to shape “Christian identity” in the first century and in late antiquity, or in our own time. There is, regardless of how it is interpreted and lived, within all Christian churches today, as well as among first-century Christ-followers, a distinct focus on Jesus as Christ. Such “Christ-centrism” makes the various movements that adhere to it distinct and identifiable among and within other constructions of “religious” identities.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Cf. Jacob Neusner, “Formation of Rabbinic Judaism,” 1–42, 21: “[T]he beginnings of the rabbinic structure is to be located in the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.” See also Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 170: “A common error, for example, is to assume that rabbinic Jews = Judaism, that is, that after the Jewish War the rabbis rapidly became the dominant and representative strain within Judaism – in effect, the mainstream.”

⁸⁶ Boyarin, “Semantic Differences,” 65. He continues by asserting: “An increasing number of cutting-edge scholars are referring to the ‘fourth century as the first century of Judaism and Christianity’” (66). While this is certainly true in the sense that Rabbinic Judaism at this time differed considerably from variants of Judaism in the Second Temple period, one should not, however, neglect the major difference regarding ethnic identity between Judaism and Greco-Roman “religion” on the one hand, and Christianity on the other.

⁸⁷ The centripetal core-metaphor of Jesus as Christ has been and is always inculturated and embodied in various (social, political, economic, ethnic, national, geographical) contexts and worldviews, and transformed in terms of meaning during such processes. To take a modern example, it is well known that *naming* can be controversial and some Christian groups reject other groups’ claim to a Christian identity. Some years ago, in the early stages of the preparation for the presidential campaign in the United States, a person of some political importance who was interviewed on Canadian national television polemically claimed, with a certain

It *has* been claimed, however, that there was a major shift in how “Christian identities” were formed, beginning in the second century and culminating in the late fourth century. At the heart of this shift is the de-ethnosing of Judaism, which resulted in the rejection among “Christians” of all movements or phenomena labeled “Jewish.”⁸⁸ Socio-religiously, this removed non-Jewish Christ-followers beyond Greco-Roman ethno-religious “categories” into categories already inhabited by mystery cults and various philosophies. This change thus touches the core of how the ancients constructed “religious identities,” and it affected all mainstream constructions of “Christian identities” from antiquity down to the present.

It *has* also been claimed that since the time of Paul there were non-Jews among some of the Apostolic-Jewish groups who continued (for centuries) to understand their “religious” identity as dependent on their ethnic identity. These non-Jews accepted what we have called Apostolic-Jewish theological worldviews, including their own place in such worldviews *as* non-Jews. They were, thus, adherents of Apostolic Judaism without being Jews. In order to distinguish such non-Jewish identities from proto-Christian identities, which rejected everything Jewish (i.e., rejected the connection between *ethnos*-god-land), I have used the term Christ-fearers for the former.

From all this follows that it *has not* been claimed that Christ-centered movements in the first, second or fourth centuries were in any way uniform. It is particularly important in this regard to differentiate between various social strata; such differentiation affects conclusions about how diversity – or lack thereof – is constructed on different levels in society. On the other hand, *neither has* it been claimed that we may find behind every text (within or beyond the New Testament) interpreting Jesus of Nazareth various and distinct forms of “Christ-belief” or different communities of believers. Rather, it *has* been claimed that there are general patterns discernable in clusters of texts confessing

Republican candidate in mind, that Mormons were not Christians. Similar rhetoric may be found between mainstream churches and Jehovah’s Witnesses. From a scholarly perspective, however, it should be quite clear that both of these movements are to be categorized along with other expressions of Christian identities. Sociologically, Christian identities span the entire spectrum from sect and cult to denomination and state religion. Such perspectives should be kept in mind as we read polemics related to Christian identity in, e.g., patristic literature. As Himmelfarb, “The Parting of the Ways Reconsidered,” 57, points out, “As our experience today testifies, the existence of different kinds of Jews and Christians assures a variety of relationships between Jews and Christians. For the historian it is a worthy goal to show us a past as complex as the present.”

⁸⁸ It also influenced how “Judaism” was re-defined in the Christian world, namely, as divorced from the connection with the land, and with the God of Israel, as an integral part of the “people–god–land” theological equation. Such re-interpretation also served, it has been claimed, Christian imperial and colonial interests in Palestine. The rise of Christian anti-Judaism is, thus, closely connected not only to theological developments related to the socio-religious category of ethnic identity, but also to colonialism.

Jesus as the Messiah; some major differences between such clusters can be argued, and different groups with distinct identities may, as a consequence, be postulated.⁸⁹ Whether such distinct groups rejected each other based on their differences or accepted one another as tolerable variants within a larger movement is another question, one which has not been addressed in this study.⁹⁰

Returning to Medieval art and the representation of the synagogue as a defeated woman and the church as a victorious queen, we may ask what, more precisely, the metaphor is symbolizing. Does the depiction of Christian victory refer to an allegedly superior “religious system,” embodied in the independent institution of the church? It is when the ethnic aspect is brought to the fore that one realizes the horrifying consequences of Christianity’s struggle for a shared, and then appropriated, heritage with the Jews. Far from Paul’s eschatological vision of a unity in diversity, the children of his non-Jewish converts turned against their parents and cut themselves loose. This institutional separation between proto-Christians and Apostolic Jews and Christ-fearers was developed into, and cemented as, a theological schism by later Christians. Interestingly, it is precisely this type of non-ethnic Christ-belief that was persecuted by some Roman emperors, and then later became the official religion of the empire. As the empire’s religion, Christians could not, of course, acknowledge (Apostolic) Judaism as the center of the movement, the root of the olive tree, the very reason for their own holiness (Rom 11:16–17).

When we re-define the question of Christian identity formation and the so-called parting of the ways so that it deals, not with evidence of positive interaction and dual memberships, but with institutional belonging in combination with investigations into religious type and ethnic identity, we are pushed back into the first centuries and a complex and diverse development, of which we have discussed evidence associated with Paul, Ignatius and Theodosius I. Cen-

⁸⁹ For example, what is sometimes called Matthean Judaism is in fact a messianic form of Pharisaic Judaism, and as such was probably more widespread than has traditionally been thought; Matthew’s Gospel would have been a favorite among such groups. On the other hand, it is inconceivable that such groups would have been able to house people nurturing theologies such as those expressed in, e.g., the Pastoral Letters.

⁹⁰ As is seen in the writings of the Church Fathers from the second century onwards, rejection certainly became the norm. (Note, however, the more open position of Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, 47, which also implies distinct groups of Christ-followers.) The picture is more ambiguous as we change focus and look at the first century material. Ultimately, the formation of the New Testament canon brought together various strands of Christ-belief which, in and of itself, may be interpreted as a legitimization of some significant diversity. However, later theologies founded on the canonical texts invariably seem to harmonize differences and create uniformity – and, therefore, support exclusivity and social boundaries. It seems to me that the biblical canon leads, in more than one way and with the aid of historical-criticism, to a re-appreciation of theological diversity within the “people of God.” Judging from the parallel movements of dialogue and ecumenical conversations on the one hand, and the current role of historical criticism on the other, we are, arguably, observing the growth of an old olive tree. See discussion in Ch. 1 above.

tral to the question of Christian identity formation is, therefore, the problem of Apostolic Judaism and its disappearance.⁹¹ Switching perspectives, this question is connected with the rise of Rabbinic Judaism in the fourth to fifth century and later. The study of political, colonial, and social mechanisms behind these processes provides fruitful entries for a fuller understanding of the relationship between modern Judaism and Christianity and should be given more attention than has been the case in the past.

⁹¹ Cf. Runesson, "Jews and Christians in Capernaum," 254–257; Porter and Pearson, "Why the Split?," 114.

12. The Rise of Normative Judaism and Christianity

12.1 From Restoring a Kingdom to Destroying a Nation

Once upon a time in a world far away there were no Christians. Jews were relatively well integrated in Mediterranean societies, which most often accepted the God of Israel as one of the minor ethnic gods of the empire.¹ Rome even, albeit at times begrudgingly, respected this god's awkward attitude toward all other gods with whom the empire worked in partnership. This was so despite some less than peaceful interaction in the Jewish homeland, and occasional violent flare-ups in cities such as Alexandria. As Pompey's armies conquered the East, including Jerusalem, in the 60s BCE Jews resisted Jupiter's rule in various ways and eventually gave birth to what in Rome's eyes was a series of revolutionary movements attempting to retake control over their land. Among them were counted Theudas, the (Jewish) Egyptian, Judas from Sepphoris, Simon of Perea, and Judas the Galilean.² Jesus of Nazareth,³ who proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God, the redemption of Israel, was also among these disturbers of the status quo. His aim, as some of his later followers would phrase it in the Book of Acts, was to restore "the Kingdom to Israel."⁴ This message, which Jesus proclaimed in civic institutions such as the public synagogues of the various administrative subdivisions of land as well as the Jerusalem temple, institutions "where all the Jews come together,"⁵ was taken abroad by his followers after his death and spread there primarily in and through Jewish associations but also beyond such settings.

¹ On gods and their lives in ancient cities, see Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 3–102.

² For a convenient overview and brief discussion of these and other revolutionary Messiahs, see Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies*, 431–443. Most of the information we have on these developments comes from Josephus. For in-depth analysis of messianism during this period, see Matthew V. Novenson, *The Grammar of Messianism: An Ancient Jewish Political Idiom and its Users* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³ While all Gospels claim that Jesus grew up in Galilee, Matthew's Gospel alone identifies Jesus as a Judean living in self-imposed exile, first in Egypt and then in Galilee, persecuted by political authorities that want him dead. After campaigning about a year in Galilee, proclaiming the imminent arrival of the kingdom of Heaven and gathering a sizable crowd of followers, he returns to Judea with his people, aiming at Jerusalem. See esp. Matt 1:18–2:23; 19:1–21:17.

⁴ Acts 1:6.

⁵ John 18:20. On this passage, see Olsson, "All My Teaching," 203–224; cf. Ryan, *Role of the Synagogue*, 265–71; Cirafesi, *John Within Judaism*, 119, n. 146, 258, 274–275.

Ironically, despite the defeat of the Jews in the Jewish–Roman war some forty years after the empire’s execution of Jesus, and again in the wars of 117 and 135 CE, a few hundred years later, as the fourth century was coming to a close, the empire was run by Romans who, under the name “Christians,” worshipped the Jewish god, the God of Israel.⁶ And despite the fact that these rulers worshipped a Jewish god through the lens of a Jewish Messiah they had themselves executed, they introduced severe anti-Jewish legislation which aimed at circumscribing Jewish communal life and restricting interaction between Jews and Christians. On the orders of the emperor himself, Theodosius I, persecution also ensued against Greco-Roman cults.⁷

The purpose of these measures was to secure political stability and military strength based upon exclusive empire-wide worship of one god, a formerly minor ethnic god, the God of Israel, now the god of the multi-ethnic Roman Empire. The Jewish people, refusing to redefine their ethno-religious identity and relation to their god as *their* god, became a socio-theological problem for the Late Antique and Mediaeval church simply by being there and not converting. For most of the elite representing normative Christianity, the world was not theologically big enough for co-existence among Christians and Jews. For them, the nature of Christianity required, in its reinterpreted supra-ethnic form, the delegitimization of Judaism and its absorption into the new religion, which was, according to its theologians, in fact the religion of Abraham and his descendants.⁸ An anti-Jewish Christian discourse of contempt arose in the church to support and promulgate such claims. It was expressed not only in learned treatises for the religious elite but also in sermons and church art so that all, including the illiterate, could see and learn.⁹ One example, conveying with repugnant clarity such theology to the people, is the mediaeval so-called living crosses, which we discussed above in Chapter 11, where the arms of the cross upon which Jesus hangs crucified simultaneously crowns the church and stabs and kills the synagogue.¹⁰ In such images, which had their roots in the Late-Antique theology of the Church Fathers, the life of the church requires the death of the synagogue.¹¹

⁶ Even if by then this god had been somewhat redefined to fit the needs of a non-Jewish empire.

⁷ On this development, see also Ch. 11.

⁸ On the idea that Abraham and the other heroes of the Hebrew Bible were in fact adhering to (Catholic) Christian beliefs, see especially the commentary on Romans 9–11 by Nicholas of Lyra, Trans. Levy, et. al., eds. *The Letter to the Romans*, 220–245.

⁹ On the Jews in Christian art, and how such art has communicated a theology of contempt, see Schreckenberg, *Jews in Christian Art*.

¹⁰ See Schreckenberg, *Jews in Christian Art*, 64–66.

¹¹ Cf., e.g., Jerome on Matt 27:25–26, where “the Jews” choose the devil instead of God when given a choice by Pilate. There is no place in such theologies for Judaism/Jews existing alongside Christianity, even with minimal legitimacy. This mode of interpretation continued also among the reformers in the 16th century, including Luther, who claimed the Jews to be the

We all know the inherent dangers of such violent theological discourses, and how they eventually became one of the facilitating mechanisms as the Holocaust was planned and carried out in Europe's most well-educated country and beyond. But what were the circumstances under which they came into being? Which hermeneutical, social, and political mechanisms were active in this process, that turned on its head a Jewish messianic claim that Israel's long wait was over, that its redemption was near? How could Israel's redemption, the "restoration of the Kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6), become in normative Christian theology a violent longing for the disappearance of *Israēl kata sarka*?¹² Who benefited from such theology and how and why did it prevail?

In this chapter, I will focus on the period during which this type of theology was formed, and on ways in which Christian normativity – or "ought-ness" – was expressed and put into practice. In order to reconstruct what transpired between the first and the fifth centuries I will first discuss various strategies applied as theology was established "on the ground." Then, we shall proceed to look at evidence indicating colonial aspects of the project of generating normative Christianity, focusing on archaeological remains. Finally, the chapter concludes with some comments on certain New Testament texts that were used as tools in this process, asking whether the New Testament itself may be described as colonial in nature, as it lent itself so easily to such political practices.

12.2 *Bringing Normativity into Being: The Language of Oughtness*

Generating normativity is not an automatic process. It is intentional and always related in one way or another to power and its administrators. The outcome will depend on the level, type, and extent of the power exercised: informal, social, institutional, political, military, or colonial, or a combination of some or all of the above. Either way, the very idea of the normative contains within it a more or less clearly defined Other, i.e., a phenomenon that negatively legitimizes that which ought to be. In other words: without "heresy," there is no "orthodoxy."¹³ Attempts at establishing the normative can take many different forms. It may be a continuous battle within a movement, producing aggressive rhetoric against

devil's people: *Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi*, WA 53.587. (For an English translation of *Vom Schem Hamphoras*, see Gerhard Falk, *The Jew in Christian Theology: Martin Luther's Anti-Jewish Vom Schem Hamphoras, Previously Unpublished in English, and Other Milestones in Church Doctrine Concerning Judaism* [Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland, 1992]; the reference to Matt 27:25 is found in § 19, p. 171.)

¹² As Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, SNTSMS 10 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), explains, this expression refers to "Israel with all its customs, especially those customs which are past and gone because of Christ's sacrifice" (122).

¹³ But cf. Jonathan Klawans, "Heresy Without Orthodoxy: Josephus and the Rabbis on the Dangers of Illegitimate Jewish Beliefs," *JJMJS* 1 (2014): 99–126.

one's closest neighbors, or vicious conflicts that split a movement, or struggles between groups that never belonged together but exist in proximity to one another. The question is how normativity, once established, prevails. Exercise of authority is necessary, but perhaps more interesting is to ask how normativity is "spoken," and how such "languages" are developed. For historians of Jewish and Christian origins, the most obvious tool to examine would be the written word: letters, sermons, narratives, biblical commentaries and learned theological treatises. The process of canonization is, of course, a key factor in this regard.¹⁴ All that is spoken, however, is spoken in specific settings, under specific social, institutional, political, and other circumstances. For the process of establishing the normative, these conditions are equally or more important than the words themselves, since it is these contexts that infuse the discourses with legitimizing authority.

The immediate, more formal social construction embedding, supporting, and promoting that which "ought to be" is the institutional: hierarchies and how they are formed, employing actors from specific social locations.¹⁵ With this parameter follows another: art and architecture, used in the service of identity formation and maintenance. As grass-root movements move through social strata reaching into elite layers, as the Jesus movement did, the construction of space becomes an increasingly important rhetorical tool, since claims to socio-religious and political authority is expressed through architecture and, indeed, through city planning too. Finally, closely related to the institutional and the control of space, we need to consider coercion through colonization, achieved on the basis of, or through, military power which in turn is intertwined with discourses of religio-political normativity.

Parameters such as these combined to produced what we know as normative Christianity. Despite the importance of the textual, which is often highlighted as the rise of Christianity and Judaism is discussed, the institutional and archaeological evidence, art and architecture should thus not be forgotten. An "on-the-ground perspective" may develop our understanding of what really went on as this Jewish movement of Jesus followers turned into a non-Jewish religion ruling an empire within which Israel was one among a multitude of subjugated peoples. Since the synagogue was the center of much of Jesus's activities on the one hand, as we have discussed above, as well as the main target of Late-Antique and mediaeval Christianity's anti-Jewish rhetoric and physical attacks against Jews, it makes sense to pay attention to how this institution developed during

¹⁴ On canonization, see, e.g., Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Biblical Canon*, rev. exp. ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995). On political factors in the formation of Christian unity, see Samuel Rubenson, "Diversity and the Struggle for Unity," in *Jesus, The New Testament, and Christian Origins: Perspectives, Methods, Meanings*, ed. Dieter Mitternacht and Anders Runesson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 467–485, here esp. 469–473.

¹⁵ On the interplay between the institutional and the theological, see Ch. 7 above.

the early centuries as we search for clues that may help explain the birth-mechanisms of what became Christianity.

12.3 *Synagogues, Churches, and Empire*

The Gospels included in the New Testament repeatedly states that Jesus and his followers attended synagogues on Sabbaths, and in that setting tried to convince other Jews that the Kingdom was near.¹⁶ But what was a “synagogue” in the first century? What type of institution was it, and how did it change over centuries? I believe that in the answer to these questions lies a key to what happened between Christ-followers and other Jews, processes that led to later developments in which Jews and Christians became (related) strangers as Christianity rose to prominence in the Roman Empire.

As we have discussed above in Chapter 5 and have had reason to return to in several of the chapters above when looking at other specific themes, we need to distinguish between two different types of Jewish institutions designated by synagogue terms in antiquity in order to understand socio-religious and political developments: public, or civic institutions on the one hand, and associations on the other. While all Jews came together in public synagogues to make local decisions, carry out judicial proceedings, and read Torah on Sabbaths, smaller groups of Jews also organized themselves as associations, some of which, like the Essenes described by Philo,¹⁷ and the Pharisees, committing to specific interpretations of their ancestral traditions. While we do not know whether Jesus at one point in his life belonged to an association,¹⁸ it seems clear that he was not interested in establishing a new one himself, as he proclaimed his message of the kingdom mostly in public civic institutions and had adopted an itinerant lifestyle. His followers did so, however, after his death. We see this, e.g., in the Gospel of Matthew and the Didache, and we hear of such institutions also in Paul’s letters and in Acts.¹⁹ As such Christ associations began emerging in the mid- to late first century, which cultic activities orbited the God of Israel, worshipped through a Messianic lens, it is interesting to note that some of them

¹⁶ See, e.g., Matt 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:21, 39; 6:2; Luke 4:14–30, 44; 13:10–17; John 6:59; 18:20.

¹⁷ Philo, *Prob.* 80–83 (*ASSB* no. 40).

¹⁸ There is no evidence that he did, but he could, theoretically, working as a *tektōn* before he became an itinerant proclaimer of the kingdom, have been a member of an occupational guild/association. On such guilds, see Kloppenborg, *Christ’s Associations*, 32–37.

¹⁹ Matt 16:18; 18:18, where the group is designated *ekklēsia*. As Kloppenborg, *Christ’s Associations*, 41, points out, Matthew 5–7 and 18, as well as Didache 6–15, may be understood as having “elements of an association’s rule insofar as they elaborate behavioral rules for members (Matt 5–7) and disciplinary procedures for exclusion of members (Matt 18).” On Paul’s letters and Christ assemblies in Philippi, Corinth, Thessaloniki, see, *ibid.*, 81–91.

drew part of their membership from the Pharisees.²⁰ We shall return to this, noting here only that, for the Jesus movement, organizing themselves meant establishing leadership positions, community rules, and so on.²¹

If we look at Jewish associations (“synagogues”) at this time, then, Essene and Pharisaic Jews had their own institutional structures and leaders and Apostolic Jews had theirs. These institutions, these associations, thus, were independent of each other from the very beginning, except for those that were generated as the result of a split within an association. Most Jews who were members of an association would, however, still attend meetings in Jewish civic institutions wherever Jews were in charge of town and city administration (“public synagogues”). In these settings, they could, and would, debate their differences and attempt to convince one another – and others – of the best way to embody their shared ancestral traditions. Christ-followers then spread rather rapidly over the Mediterranean world in the second century onwards, first and foremost in places where Jews already lived and where there were Jewish associations (“synagogues”). In these associations they would proclaim their message about Jesus and his kingdom to their fellow Jews as well as to non-Jews who were often also present there (the so-called god-fearers). As they did so they also began organizing themselves in separate associations, gathering in private homes or as subgroups within existing buildings housing local Jewish groups.²²

In the second century, however, new developments begin to surface. In order to describe what seems to have happened, we need to widen the perspective and look at the larger Greco-Roman world. Mediterranean societies were inhabited not only by humans but also by their gods, the latter of whom were served by their humans through cults of various sorts. Some of these gods originated in specific geo-political places, such as Isis and Sarapis, who came from Egypt, and the Mithras cult which originated in Persia. These cults originally drew their membership from people who were associated with these regions. In antiquity, what today is called “religion” was thought of as connected closely with specific geographical locations, or nations, ethnic identities, and specific laws, so that we see a connection between land, law, people, and god(s), as Steve Mason has

²⁰ Paul is the clearest example (see most recently Paula Fredriksen, “Paul, the Perfectly Righteous Pharisee,” 112–135), but we hear of Pharisaic Christ-followers also in Acts 15:5. It is also quite likely that Matthew’s Gospel represents a position within the Jesus movement emerging from former Pharisees, i.e., Pharisees who, contrary to Paul, left their Pharisaic label behind when joining the Christ. On this, see Runesson, “Rethinking Early Jewish–Christian Relations,” 95–132.

²¹ For a discussion on the types of texts produced by associations, and how they were produced, in relation to Christ-groups, see Last, “Communities That Write,” 173–198.

²² For discussion of this process, see Ch. 3 above. It is also, of course, very plausible that these associations met in other spaces too, such as rented banquet halls, temple dining spaces, public baths, or in graveyards (which typically contained spaces for banqueting). See discussion by Adams, *Earliest Christian Meeting Places*.

argued.²³ Belonging to an ethnic group meant cultic allegiance with a specific god associated with this people and their land. The same was true for the Jewish people: the Jews, as much as everyone else, had their own land, their own law, and worshiped their own specific god. At some point, however, several cults began to attract worshippers from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds. The Isis cult, for example, grew to become extremely popular around the Mediterranean, eventually making it all the way to the Roman forum and becoming generally associated with sailing and merchantry. The significance of the ethnic identity of those who worshipped such gods was destabilized, and most anyone, regardless of ethnic belonging, could engage in these cults; non-Egyptians who found Isis to be a powerful god began paying cultic attention to her too.

We see similar developments taking place in associations dedicated to the cult of the God of Israel already before the arrival of the Jesus movement. Once Christ-followers entered the scene, the speed at which such diversification occurred increased. Since (Jewish) Christ-groups were interested in non-Jews for theo-eschatological reasons – a key component of the beliefs nurtured by Christ-groups was the conviction that the time when the world would be re-created was near, and the presence of non-Jews in Jewish settings confirmed this idea²⁴ – non-Jews were especially welcome, and important, as members. Acts 15 deals with how to handle such non-Jewish members, without losing sight of the fact that the heart of this messianic movement was Jewish. Paul does the same thing in Romans 11. At some point, and Ignatius of Antioch is our first explicit witness to this development, these non-Jews would cease to regard ethnicity as a (theologically) valid parameter and modified their symbolic and socio-institutional universe accordingly, just as many other Greco-Roman cults had already had their focus on ethnic identity markers decentered.²⁵

For these non-Jews, it would no longer be acceptable to claim that religio-ethnic Jewish status was necessary for, or even compatible with an acceptance of Jesus as the Christ. Ignatius says it outright: You cannot practice Judaism and be a “Christian” at the same time.²⁶ Institutionally, these gentile Christ-followers

²³ Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 457–512. See also discussion of the term “religion” by Kloppenborg, *Christ’s Associations*, 10–18.

²⁴ For this Jewish pattern of thought, in which non-Jews turning to the God of Israel signaled a radical, eschatological turn in world events, see Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*.

²⁵ It should be noted, though, that some aspects of ethnicity did continue to play a role in, e.g., Isaic groups. For example, the well-known inscription from the Isaic cult at Priene (LSAM, no. 36) states that the (local) priest of the Isaic cult at Priene was required to use the ritual expertise of an Egyptian priest of Isis in order to carry out certain sacrifices (for discussion, see Eftychia Stavrianopoulou, “Ensuring Ritual Competence in Ancient Greece. A Negotiable Matter: Religious Specialist,” in *When Rituals Go Wrong: Mistakes, Failure, and the Dynamics of Ritual*, ed. Ute Hüsken, Numen Book Series 115 [Leiden: Brill, 2007], 186–187). The requirement of the presence of an Egyptian priest in Priene suggests the continued relevance of ethnicity for Isaic ritual, at least at some cult centers.

²⁶ Ignatius, *Magn.* 10:3. On this development, see also Zetterholm, *Antioch*.

divorced themselves from Jewish Christ-groups in which it was maintained that Jewish identity was as a vital component of their cultic practice. This new development, following a pattern similar to that of many other cults around the Mediterranean, led to a rising popularity of Christ-orientation as disconnected from the Jewish *ethnos* and its ancestral traditions and practices (*Ioudaismos*). It was this form of non-Jewish Christianity (*Christianismos*) that found its way into the leading strata of Roman society and eventually to the emperor himself. And it was this form of Christ-orientation, associated with our English word “church,” that became state cult in the Roman Empire under Theodosius I in the 380s. There was no place in this type of theology, or in the institutions in which it was formed and maintained, for Apostolic-Jews and non-Jews. To the degree that Jewish and non-Jewish followers of Jesus had once gathered in the same associative spaces, this development can be described as a parting of the ways within ancient messianism (but not between “Judaism” and “Christianity”).

This process, which saw the rise of normative Christianity as we know it today took place over several centuries. It was, further, primarily a project of the elite – first the ecclesiastical and later the political together with the ecclesiastical. As late as in the sermons of the Antiochian priest and later archbishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom,²⁷ we witness the preacher’s frustration about the fact that grass-root Christians still understood their cultic identity to be intertwined with Judaism, and so felt free to attend both Christian churches and Jewish synagogues.²⁸ Synagogues at this time, however, had also, partly as a response to the rise of empire-backed Christianity, developed in new directions. When Jews in Palestine lost administrative control over their towns and cities, which were taken over first by Christians and later by Muslims, Jewish civic institutions (“public synagogues”) ceased to function as such. Local decision-making shifted away from Jews, and now took place elsewhere, administered by others whose authority was derived through different means. For Jews in Palestine, what eventually remained in terms of organizational options was the associative (“association synagogues”). Here Jews could gather for their own cultic and other purposes, maintaining and strengthening their identity in ways similar to what they had done and were still doing also in Diaspora settings. It is during this time that the rabbis rise to prominence in Jewish society, eventually becoming mainstream Judaism sometime between the fourth and sixth century.²⁹ And it is in this process that other Jewish groups, including the messian-

²⁷ Ca. 347–407 CE.

²⁸ These sermons were delivered by Chrysostom between 386 and 387 CE in Antioch; see *Adv. Jud.* I.3,4; PG 48, 847, 848. For discussion of the period in-between the New Testament and Chrysostom with a focus on Syria, see Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game*, 43–72. Origen, too, (*Cels.* 5.61) knew of Jews who believed in Jesus and observed Jewish ancestral practices, as did Irenaeus (*Haer.* 1.26.2) and Jerome (*Epist.* 112.13; *Situ* 112); see discussion in Karin Hedner Zetterholm, “Jewishly-Behaving Gentiles,” 333, and above, Ch. 10.

²⁹ The previously common assumption that the rabbis took control over Judaism immedi-

ic, lose the battle for Jewish normativity and become marginalized.³⁰ “Judaism,” in general terms, becomes defined as Rabbinic Judaism, just as “Christianity” becomes defined as non-Jewish (Nicene) Christianity. We know of Jewish variants of Christ-orientation existing in the second century, and even as late as in the fourth century,³¹ although their presence was in drastic decline, squeezed between Rabbinic and Christian discourses on the heretical, the latter being politically authorized and empowered by the empire.

12.4 *Christian Colonialism and Jewish Resistance*

There seems to be a clear connection between religio-political developments within the empire and what eventually became normative Christianity. We need, therefore, to look at how the empire, through colonial activities, embodied normative Christian discourses on the ground in order to appreciate more fully what transpired over the first few centuries of the Common Era. One of the key claims made by non-Jewish Christians as they worked to define their form of Christianity as the norm, was that the Jewish people had lost their special connection to the God of Israel and the land of Israel, and that the Mosaic law had been annulled after the coming of the Christ. The (non-Jewish) Christians were, the Church Fathers claim, the new, and true, people of God, dis-inheriting and replacing the Jews. Such theological supersessionism, expressed over and over again in sermons and theological tractates, also took concrete colonial form as the land of Israel was turned into a Christian Holy Land, beginning with the activities of Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena in the early fourth century. Monumental and commemorative churches were first built in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, then in other places in Judea, Samaria (on Mount Gerizim) and the Galilee.³² It is instructive in this regard to note the

ately after the fall of the temple 70 CE has been thoroughly rejected by recent research. See, e.g., Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*; Stemmerger, *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land*; Schwartz, *Imperialism*.

³⁰ This does not mean that such Jewish-messianic groups were without influence; indeed, it is likely that some aspects of Rabbinic Judaism developed as responses to claims made by Jewish followers of Jesus. For discussion, see Karin Hedner Zetterholm, “Alternate Visions of Judaism,” 127–153.

³¹ See, e.g., Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 47, and the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions*, originating in the 3rd century, reworked in the 4th, still transmitted in the 5th century. See esp. *Recognitions* 1.27–71. One may also refer to the writings of Church Fathers as they denounce such groups; we hear of Ebionites, Nazoraeans etc. Irenaeus complains: “They worship Jerusalem as if it were the House of God” (*Haer.* 1.26.2). For the *Recognitions*, too, Jerusalem was the Holy Place. See, e.g., Edwin K. Broadhead, *Jewish Ways of Following Jesus: Redrawing the Religious Map of Antiquity*, WUNT, 266 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), and Matt Jackson McCabe’s discussion of this volume in *SCJR* 8 (2013), 1–4 [<https://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/scjr/article/viewFile/5191/4675>].

³² On these churches, see most recently Jordan J. Ryan, *From the Passion to the Church of*

distribution of Jewish synagogues and Christian churches in Late-Antique Galilee, as Mordechai Aviam has done.³³ One may observe on such maps how (non-Jewish) Christian institutions cluster primarily in the northwest, but also how they begin to appear in the midst of Jewish towns and villages, such as Capernaum on the northern shore of Lake Tiberias. As it happens, the history of Capernaum, as reconstructed from the archaeological remains of a synagogue and a (commemorative) church located not more than 30 meters from one another, captures in miniature the larger developments in the empire, as (non-Jewish) Christianity appears in imperial form on the scene and finds new ways of embodying its political victory through religious architecture and spatial claims.³⁴ A closer look at this town will thus shed further light on the process in which Christianity and Judaism emerge in relation to one another.

Beginning with the synagogue, the white limestone edifice at Capernaum visible today dates from the late 5th century,³⁵ but underneath this synagogue, the excavators Virgilio C. Corbo and Stanislao Loffreda found the remains of what they claim is a first-century synagogue, constructed in local black basalt stone.³⁶ While we cannot go into detail here, the history of the synagogue(s) in Capernaum may, in my view, be reconstructed as follows:

the Holy Sepulcher: Memories of Jesus in Place, Pilgrimage, and Early Holy Sites Over the First Three Centuries. The Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries 7 (London: T&T Clark, 2021).

³³ Mordechai Aviam, "Distribution Maps of Archaeological Data from the Galilee: An Attempt to Establish Zones Indicative of Ethnicity and Religious Affiliation," in *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee*, ed. Zangenberg, Attridge, and Martin, 115–132.

³⁴ For a detailed analysis of the archaeological remains in Capernaum, set within the larger perspective of developments in the Mediterranean world, see Runesson, "Architecture, Conflict, and Identity Formation," 231–257. The presentation here builds on that discussion. See also the recent and important study by Wally V. Cirafesi, "A First-Century Synagogue in Capernaum? Issues of Historical Method in the Interpretation of the Archaeological and Literary Data," in *Judaïsme ancien/Ancient Judaism* 9 (2021): 7–48. On the Christian building, see now also Runesson and Cirafesi, "Art and Architecture at Capernaum, Kefar 'Othnay, and Dura Europos," 151–200; and, importantly, Ryan, *Memories of Jesus*, esp. 186–195, and Sharon Lea Mattila, "Capernaum, Village of Nahum, From Hellenistic to Byzantine Times," in *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods, vol 2: The Archaeological Record From Cities, Towns, and Villages*, ed. Fiensy and Strange, 217–257. Wally V. Cirafesi is currently undertaking major work on reconstructing the history of Capernaum and its key buildings, covering the time span under discussion here. Once published, this will be a significant contribution to scholarship on this ancient Galilean town: *Capernaum: Jews and Christians from the Time of Jesus to the Rise of Islam* (Lexington/Fortress Academic, 2023; forthcoming).

³⁵ So also Levine, *Visual Judaism*, 190, leaving open the suggestion by Jodi Magness, "The Question of the Synagogue: The Problem of Typology" in *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, pt. 3, vol. 4: *Where We Stand: Issues and Debates in Ancient Judaism. The Special Problem of the Synagogue*, ed. Alan J. Avery-Peck and Jacob Neusner, Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section I; The Near and Middle East 55 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1–49, here 18–38, that it may even date as late as to the sixth century. Ryan, *Memories of Jesus*, 193, n. 45., shares this view.

³⁶ See the excavation report by Virgilio C. Corbo, *Cafarnaon, vol. 1: Gli edifice della citta*

1. In the 1st century a synagogue is constructed of black basalt stone. These remains would be the synagogue in which Jesus would have attended Sabbath gatherings according to the New Testament Gospels.³⁷
2. Between the 2nd and 4th centuries, this synagogue was renovated and enlarged.
3. In the 5th century, the black basalt synagogue was destroyed and the monumental white limestone synagogue was constructed using the remains of the black synagogue as foundation.

Now, just south of the synagogue archaeologists found the remains of an octagonal Byzantine commemorative church. The proximity of the synagogue and the church has puzzled scholars ever since the discovery of these buildings. How was it possible for a church to be constructed so close to a synagogue? To complicate matters even more, when the archaeologists excavated below the Byzantine church they found remains of earlier churches, or perhaps better, applying the terminology used in the present book: Apostolic-Jewish association synagogues.

The octagonal church, constructed in the 5th century, replaced what was an earlier house-church, or house synagogue, dating from the 4th century. This edifice was, however, built around an older private house, in which one of the rooms was set aside for gatherings already in the late first century. Although no certainty can be had, of course, this house has been identified as the house of Peter. Be that as it may, what we can say with some confidence is that Christian tradition early on, before the fourth century when pilgrimage places became popular, identified this building as associated with Jesus and his first disciples. In other words, followers of Jesus likely gathered in this place already in the late first century, and continued to do so for several centuries.

If we compare the dates of the synagogues and the gathering place of the Christ-oriented group, we find an interesting pattern, which suggests the co-existence of Jews and Christ-followers, whether Jewish or not, from the first to the sixth century in this small town. But how are we to understand the nature of this co-existence? I propose the following historical reconstruction:³⁸

(Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1975), 8–169. For a slightly different, and in my view more convincing interpretation of the first-century remains, see Stanislao Loffreda, *Recovering Capernaum*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1993). See also the brief but nuanced discussion by Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 71; idem, “The Synagogues of Galilee,” in *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods, vol 1: Life, Culture, and Society*, ed. Fiensy and Strange, 129–150, here 144–145, and cf. Ryan, *Memories of Jesus*, 194, n. 50. The reconstruction below follows Loffreda regarding the first and second phases of the synagogue.

³⁷ According to Luke 7:5, the edifice was funded by a non-Jewish centurion, and would thus be an example of the system of benefaction so common in antiquity.

³⁸ See also Runesson, “Architecture, Conflict, and Identity Formation.”

1. In the first century, Jews gathered in the black basalt synagogue, which was a public synagogue, i.e., a Jewish civic institution. This was the synagogue that both Jesus and his followers would have attended.
2. In the late first century, what is now called the House of Peter had become a meeting place for Jews who understood their Jewishness through a Christ-oriented lens. This is indicated by late first-century modifications done to the central room in this building (Room 1).³⁹ This suggested reconstruction may receive further support if paired with information about the two buildings in the Gospel of Mark.⁴⁰ Such a gathering place is best described as a Jewish association, or an association synagogue. These Apostolic-Jewish followers of Jesus gathered in both assembly places, most likely. At this time, Capernaum was a Jewish town, run by Jews.
3. In the fourth century, an earthquake hit the area. The private house that had functioned as a gathering place for the Christ-centered Jews was turned into a more formal house “church”/synagogue (*domus ecclesia*). The center of this Christ-group’s building was still the same room in which the earlier Jewish Christ-followers had gathered (Room 1). While pilgrims now came in from other parts of the Mediterranean world, as witnessed by graffiti, the Christ-followers here seem still to have been mainly of Jewish origin. The town was still Jewish, if we are to believe Epiphanius.⁴¹
4. Then something drastic happens in the 5th century. The *domus ecclesia* was destroyed, and a new octagonal commemorative church was constructed in its place, following the latest in architectural style. This church was undoubtedly built by non-Jewish Christians.⁴² As far as we can know, Apostolic Jews disappear from the history of this place. The town of Capernaum expands, and remains of non-Jewish buildings and other artefacts abound from this period. Capernaum was now primarily a non-Jewish Christian pilgrimage town, and its administration was in the hands of non-Jews.
5. At around the same time, the limestone synagogue was constructed, possibly with the help of affluent and more powerful Jews of Tiberias. But this synagogue could not have functioned as a public administrative institution, since the town was now in the hands of (non-Jewish) Christians. Interestingly, the building adheres by and large, it seems, to Rabbinic norms, avoiding art displaying humans, the zodiac etc., motifs which were common in other contemporary synagogues.⁴³ While there are several ways of understanding the

³⁹ Uniquely for this building and this town at this time, the floor of Room 1 was plastered with six successive layers of beaten lime, indicating change in usage, which matches later uses of the room when we know that it was an assembly space for Christ-oriented persons.

⁴⁰ Mark 1:29.

⁴¹ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.11.9–10.

⁴² See discussion Runesson, “Architecture, Conflict, and Identity Formation.”

⁴³ On Jewish art in ancient synagogues, including the zodiac motif, see Levine, *Visual Judaism*, esp. 317–362. On zodiac motifs in synagogues, see also Jodi Magness, “Heaven on

construction of this building, it is possible to interpret the new synagogue as an act of resistance, in which the Jewish community claimed a place in this town.

6. If Rabbinic-oriented Jews were behind this move, and no Jewish public/civic institution had a place in this town anymore, this means that there was no longer any Jewish civic – or discursive – space left for those Jews who understood their Jewishness in Christ-oriented terms. In addition, Byzantine Christians had taken over the “house-synagogue” and constructed a (non-Jewish) commemorative church in its place. In brief, what was once a Jewish small town, the headquarters of Jesus, Peter, and some other disciples on the shores of Lake Tiberias had now become the battleground of two emerging world religions: (non-Jewish) Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism.

As this example, based on archaeological remains understood within a larger regional and historical frame, indicates, the rise of non-Jewish Christianity as normative, empire-backed Christianity was not a simple straightforward “victory” over “Judaism.” It was a complex process in which the winners also included Rabbinic Judaism, the mother of all modern varieties of mainstream Judaism. Those who lost the battle for influence, squeezed between the expanding giants of Rabbinic Judaism and non-Jewish Christianity, were the other varieties of Second Temple Judaism, including Christ-oriented Judaism.

12.5 Theological Violence and its Real-World Counterpart

The rise of non-Jewish Christianity was the result of several consciously applied strategies, of which colonial appropriation of the land of Israel, the Roman province of Judea re-named *Syria Palaestina* in 135 CE, was only one. This development, however, was one which matched well the theological notion that the Jews had now been replaced by non-Jewish Christians as the people of God, and lost their land. The process resulted in the loss of Jewish civic institutions, but also paved the way for the success of Rabbinic Judaism in what is known to us as “the synagogue,” an institution that originated as what we would call a Jewish association. This means that the process in which normative Christianity and Judaism arose was not, in fact, a parting of the ways process, simply because what is today mainstream Christianity and mainstream Judaism never belonged together institutionally. That which never belonged together cannot part.⁴⁴

Earth: Helios and the Zodiac Cycle in Ancient Palestinian Synagogues,” *DOP* 59 (2005): 1–52.

⁴⁴ I have developed this in some detail in Anders Runesson, “What Never Belonged Together Cannot Part: Rethinking the So-Called Parting of the Ways Between Judaism and

The first signs of what developed into Christianity as we know it today seems to have originated primarily in the second century in conflict with Jewish followers of Jesus within and beyond Apostolic-Jewish associations (“synagogues”), as Christ-cult became de-ethnosized and accepted as such by those with power and influence. Modern (Rabbinic) Judaism, on the other hand, has no roots within such messianic associations. Rather, mainstream Judaism today traces its origin back to Rabbinic associations, which were separate from and independent of other Jewish associations from the very beginning of the second century onwards.

Establishing facts on the ground through colonial ventures in *Syria Palaestina* resulted in the creation of a Christian Holy Land, which attracted steady streams of Christian pilgrims, one of many factors that contributed to the rise and perceived legitimacy of non-Jewish forms of Christianity. This process also started a reaction among Rabbinically oriented Jews, who resisted colonialism by re-claiming space and providing a strong link to Jewish history through the representation of temple-related symbols in synagogues, such as the menorah, the shofar, and incense shovel. Against the Christians in Capernaum, with their modern octagonal church architecture, the Jews in this town turned to more traditional architecture and temple-related art, utilizing for their building *spolia* from what, in the fifth century, represented age-old architectural designs.⁴⁵

The rise of normative Christianity and Judaism was thus a process involving two deeply intertwined histories that cannot be understood in isolation from one another. The strength of Rabbinic Judaism when it evolves into mainstream Judaism is what explains the frustration of empire-backed Christianity, as reality refuses to mirror its supersessionist theology. Such frustration then leads to rhetorical violence in word and art, such as the barbaric depictions of the so-called living crosses in the Middle Ages to which we have referred above.

Did this rhetorical violence that became intertwined with the colonial politics of the empire have its roots in the New Testament? The simple answer is yes.

Christianity,” in *Jews and Christians: Parting Ways in the First Two Centuries C.E.? Reflections on the Gains and Losses of a Model*, ed. Jens Schröter, David C. Sim, and Joseph Verheyden. BZNW 253 (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2021) 33–56; see also idem, “Beyond the Parting of the Ways: Institutional Contexts as Matrices for the Formation of Judaism and Christianity,” in *Negotiating Identities: Conflict, Conversion, and Consolidation in Early Judaism and Christianity (200 BCE–600 CE)*, ed. Karin Hedner Zetterholm, Anders Runesson, Cecilia Wassén, and Magnus Zetterholm (Lexington/Fortress Academic, 2022) 351–379.

⁴⁵ On the use of *spolia*, cf. Zvi Uri Ma’oz, “The Synagogue at Capernaum: A Radical Solution,” in *The Roman and Byzantine Near East: Some Recent Archaeological Research*, ed. J.H. Humphrey, JRSsup 312 (Portsmouth: JRS, 1999), 137–148. Cf. Benjamin Y. Arubas and Rina Talgam, “Jews, Christians and ‘Minim’: Who Really Built and Used the Synagogue at Capernaum – A Stirring Appraisal,” in *Knowledge and wisdom: archaeological and historical essays in honour of Leah Di Segni*, ed. Giovanni C. Bottini, L. Daniel Chrupcała, Joseph Patrich (Jerusalem: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 2014), 237–274.

But any text can be used beyond its context and intentions.⁴⁶ The inner-Jewish polemics preserved on the pages of what became the New Testament was transformed into anti-Jewish rhetoric as these texts were appropriated by non-Jewish Christians. When these Christians reached the centers of political power in Late Antiquity, this rhetoric could be transformed into reality and implemented, as is indicated by the emergence of anti-Jewish legislation and the creation of a Christian holy land.⁴⁷ We should note in this regard also the latent force of, for example, the so-called Great Commission in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 28:18–20), which was originally a Christ-oriented Jewish counter-colonial move against Roman culture and rule.⁴⁸ The same is true of Paul and his mission, which, however, took on a form different from that envisioned by Matthew. But in the hands of politically empowered Christians, such texts, describing an aim for global domination, turned into a new form of Christian colonialism with very direct and catastrophic results for Jews too. The use of these same texts by Europeans in later colonial projects shows how easily they lend themselves to warfare and violence, despite the fact that the texts themselves describe a non-violent proclamation of a message meant to prepare people for the coming divine judgment, in which the first shall be last and the last shall be the first.

In the end, the kingdom of God was side-tracked, one could say, and the kingdom of Rome, run with the claimed support of the former God of Israel, now the Christian God of the Empire, took over the land as a special possession, a holy relic of sorts. In this way, Christian pilgrimage supported on the ground the colonial aims of the empire, establishing a messianic connection between Rome and Constantinople and the Eastern province. Jesus's aim, according to his followers in the first chapter of Acts, to restore the kingdom of Israel, changed into its opposite in Roman hands. This also prepared the way, however, for the beginnings of modern Judaism, as Rabbinic Judaism evolved into mainstream Judaism alongside Christianity. Christian anti-Jewish theology, though, which took root during these processes and developed further in the Middle Ages, is still present today, as it entered the blood-stream of Christian doctrine and pedagogy. Historical research, then, may challenge such historicized theological master narratives, ancient and modern, through opening up for discussion the origins and socio-political dynamics of the normative. Theologians operating with history as one of several components in their analyzes should be invited into these discussions, as the transformation of the historical narrative is

⁴⁶ See discussion in Ch. 1 above.

⁴⁷ On this legislation, see Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*.

⁴⁸ On Matthew, see Anders Runesson, "Judging Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew: Between 'Othering' and Inclusion," in *Jesus, Matthew's Gospel and Early Christianity: Studies in Memory of Professor Graham N. Stanton*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner, Joel Willitts, and Richard A. Burridge, LNTS 435 (London: T & T Clark 2011), 133–151. See also discussion in Ch. 3 above.

bound to exert influence on, and change, what has for centuries been felt to describe both what the world is and how it ought to be.

In the following and last part of the book, I shall give an example of how Paul can be read theologically today, based on such renewed historical reconstructions as they have been presented in the preceding chapters. Key to this re-reading of Paul is, as I shall expand further, the claim that the legitimacy of Christian theological discourse rests, on a fundamental level, in its ability to embody the compatibility and complementarity of Christianity and Judaism, and generate reconciliation between Christians and Jews.

Part IV

Theologizing Paul

In antiquity it was daring, even audacious, for Jews such as Paul to read the gentiles into God's covenant. Some contemporary Christians have considered it no less audacious to read the Jews into the covenant, even when our own sacred scriptures point the way. For these reasons, Jewish–gentile relationships of intellectual and spiritual maturity remain the lifeblood of our respect and mutual flourishing.

Michael Peppard, "Paul Would be Proud," 278.

13. Reforming the Reformer

Reading Paul with Luther in Contemporary Europe and Beyond

13.1 Theology: A Matter of Life and Death

Theological inquiry was, for Luther, a matter of life and death. It was not an academic exercise, in which the quality of arguments could be tested and evaluated in a cold and disinterested manner, unrelated to the ultimate questions of human existence. Indeed, theology for him was intimately intertwined with survival in the presence of a holy God. Luther's own intense feelings of unworthiness, and his search for a merciful God, provided the very impulse that triggered some of his most fundamental discoveries. His readings of Paul's letters in particular led him to re-evaluate not only his own life, but also the theology of his church – the Roman Catholic Church – and the way Christianity was embodied in society.

As many scholars have pointed out, Luther was convinced, as was Paul, that he lived in the last of days, and that God's promises of ultimate redemption in the midst of climaxing evil, both within and outside the church, would soon come to fruition.¹ There is a deep sense of urgency in both Paul's and Luther's writings, and this urgency influenced what they thought must be done in their own respective contexts. In Luther's setting, this led to an emphasis on reading the biblical texts beyond church doctrine, as he believed the church had forgotten how to listen to the word of God as it was once given. There is, therefore, a historical claim of sorts, in Luther's interpretation of biblical texts. History, interpreted as a theological category, acquired a new type of force in theological discourses and was given such weight in relation to doctrinal concerns that the

¹ See, e.g. Marius Timmann Mjaaland, "Apocalypse and the Spirit of Revolution: The Political Legacy of the Early Reformation," *Political Theology* 14.2 (2013): 155–173; Michael Parsons, "The Apocalyptic Luther: His Noahic Self-Understanding," *JETS* 44.4 (2001): 627–645; Volker Leppin, "Apokalyptische Strömungen in der Reformationszeit," in *Apokalyptik und kein Ende?* ed. Bernd U. Schipper and Georg Plasger, Biblisch-theologische Schwerpunkte 29 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 79–91. Cf. 1 Thess 4:13–18, 1 Cor 15:51–58; Rom 13:11–14.

very authority structures of the church, and therefore also of society, were challenged.² The doctrine of *sola scriptura* emerged as a politically powerful tool.

Exegesis and historically oriented interpretive work on the bible did not begin, of course, with Luther and the Reformers.³ But with the Reformation something happens. The theo-historical game rules were transformed in a way that foreshadows later developments leading to modern forms of historical-critical study of the bible, which both Protestant and Catholic scholars, as well as scholars from a range of other Christian and non-Christian traditions, have embraced as detached from theological method. Even today, however, when the doctrine of *sola scriptura* has been thoroughly problematized, and the authority ascribed to history is understood in hermeneutically more complex ways than it was in the 16th century, one may still find claims, both in academy and church, that if we only were to find the original historical meaning of a text, or if we could reconstruct the historical Jesus or the historical Paul, such reconstructions would automatically carry within them normative power for contemporary theology and policy making.

We need to move beyond this type of reasoning, though, and address anew the core question about the role of history in normative Christian theology. What use does the church have of historical readings of biblical texts today, when history has become methodologically detached from theology?⁴ Wherein lies the authority of history, when its very nature and game rules have been discursively separated from the theologically normative? As postcolonial scholars have reminded us frequently in recent years, the question of historical biblical scholarship is, ultimately, a question of relevance.⁵ While some post-modern and postcolonial scholars have rejected historical-critical analysis as both intrinsically impossible and irrelevant, this seems to me to be both an overstatement of the implications of critical hermeneutics and a misrepresentation of what history, today, claims to be.⁶ Even more importantly, in an age where nu-

² Cf. Ralph Keen, "Political Authority and Ecclesiology in Melancthon's 'De Ecclesiae Autoritate,'" *Church History* 65.1 (1996): 1–14; Marius Timmann Mjaaland, "The Riddle of the Reformation and the Mystery of Revolution," in *Future(s) of the Revolution and the Reformation*, ed. Elena Namli (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 165–189.

³ See discussion above, Ch. 1.

⁴ Even if not always recognized in discussions of theology and its relationship to history (see, however, Stendahl, "Dethroning," 61–66), history and historical claims are powerful rhetorical tools today not only in theology and church but also in politics and in most other spheres of society, from international, to national and local levels. Tradition, as it were, is ripe with historical discourse, infusing political rhetoric with preferred sense-making. See further discussion in Ch. 1 above and the Epilogue below.

⁵ See discussion in Anna Runesson, *Exegesis in the Making*.

⁶ Following the work of Keith Jenkins and the school of cultural history, the kind of historical inquiry we pursue today is often sensitive to critiques that have previously been levelled by postcolonial scholarship, such as issues of universalism and "great men of history" approaches; see Keith Jenkins and Alan Munslow, *Re-Thinking History* (London: Taylor &

anced scholarly debates on relativism have been hijacked by certain politicians who aim at ruling their constituencies by creating confusion with “alternative facts,” this type of relativist hermeneutics may open up for destructive autocratic political, and therefore also theological, developments. The ethics of hermeneutically responsible historical reconstruction can hardly be stressed enough in situations such as those we experience today, in which basic democratic ideals and academic freedom are openly both questioned and dismantled, rhetorically and in practice, in many countries across the globe.⁷ In this context, the argument can constructively be made that history is an ally to truth,⁸ theologically and therefore also politically. In this intersection between the past and the present, the biblical texts, in all their complexities and embodied potential for projecting light or darkness, demand of us that we, condemned as we are to be free, choose: life above death, blessing above curse.⁹ And there is no choice without responsibility.

What is, then, the place of the biblical texts in theology, if theology relates to life as life relates to responsibility? What is the location of the exegetical endeavor within the theological? For most exegetes, the aim of their task has been and remains to translate into modern academic idiom ancient textualized sense-making projects, each of which represents, for the believer, a piece of reality in which is glimpsed the ultimate meaning of all reality.¹⁰ The undertaking of retrieving ancient meanings is, in and of itself, an interdisciplinary enterprise; an inter-subjective conversation. Exegesis is thus dependent on a set of common and hermeneutically refined game rules, which are applicable across religious, political, or ideologically divides, without subverting the discursive spaces in which such identities are formed and maintained. This means that while each contemporary theological construct emerges from within a specific denominational setting, it would be methodologically inappropriate to restrain

Francis, 2004). Cf. Alessandro Arcangeli, *Cultural History: A Concise Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2012).

⁷ See the dismal scenarios reported by *The Global State of Democracy 2021: Building Resilience in a Pandemic Era* (<https://www.idea.int/g sod/global-report>), and Freedom House’s report *Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege* (<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege>). Note also the implications on the right to think freely, including academic freedom, as reported in the recent annual report *Free to Think* by the Scholars at Risk’s Academic Freedom Monitoring Project (2021): <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/free-to-think-reports/>.

⁸ Echoing and adapting Luther, who in 1519 argued that history is “the mother of Truth” (*Leipzig Debate*, WA 2:250–383), and, in 1538, that, since God works through history (with grace and wrath), histories should “be written with the very greatest diligence, honesty, and truthfulness” (*Preface to Galeatius Fapella’s History* (AE 34:277–278). See discussion in Glen L. Thompson, “The Daughter of the Word: What Luther Learned from the Early Church and the Fathers,” *Perichoresis* 17.4 (2019): 41–56, here 48–50.

⁹ Cf. Deut 30:19, and see below, p. 316.

¹⁰ Echoing and adapting here Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957); idem, *The Courage to Be*. 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

the historical within a (denominational and theological) terminology to which it is foreign. Thus, various contemporary theologies may share universal convictions, which may or may not surface in identical ways locally. The historical, however, can never be claimed for contemporary meaning-making projects without a process which risks colonizing the ancients, asking them to perform to tunes unknown to them. There can never be a Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox, or Evangelical reading of an ancient text, *if* history is what is aimed for. The historical resides *outside* the denominational. Theologians from diverse communities may and should tap into the past, but they should do so acutely aware that ownership is beyond reach. This, indeed, is precisely why the historical can offer a level playing field, evoking voices that speak, dialogically, across contemporary boundaries.

An exegetical contribution to theology therefore lies on a different level, then, as participants in historical conversations may or may not have any denominational affiliations, and indeed, the very idea of the methodological relevance of such affiliations undermines the historical project as such. History and historical readings of authoritative texts find their relevance in relation to contemporary theological discussions rather through offering the reconstructed sound of voices *not* our own, echoing in acoustic environments now lost, but within which they once made religious and political sense. Understanding these voices in their own contexts is but one step, although an ethically responsible one, in the task of seeking new ways of appreciating the contemporary world through a theological prism. For what John P. Meier writes about the historical Jesus is true also for Paul: “The more we appreciate what Jesus meant in his own time and place, the more ‘alien’ he will seem to us.”¹¹ As Elna Mouton argues, the theological authority of the texts “lies in their referential power, in their ability to point beyond themselves, to an ultimate reality which they could only describe in limited and provisional ways.”¹² Such an approach to the theological authority of the biblical texts indeed resonates with what these writings themselves project, as the divine is sought and revealed, according to these texts, both within and beyond the written word.¹³ An exclusive focus on text in theology would, thus, just as a singular focus on history would, inevitably lead astray. Do we then overthrow the exegetical project and its place in the theological endeavor by such a claim? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold it.

From a (normative) theological perspective – which was what Luther was involved in as he claimed as true historical, or literal, readings of biblical texts – I

¹¹ John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Vol. 1: The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 200.

¹² Elna Mouton, *The Pathos of New Testament Studies: Of What Use are We to the Church?* (Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch, 2005) 17.

¹³ In history; in text; in personal revelation; in tradition; in other religious traditions. Revelatory diversity, one might say, is thus canonized. See further discussion below.

would defend the reasonableness of the assertion that any theology that takes as point of departure the proposition that a god exists, and aims at understanding the effects of the divine in a world inhabited by humans, needs to define, first of all, what a human is; anthropology and sociology joins, or even precedes, in this way, theology.¹⁴ Second, and this is what we shall focus on here, if theology operates based on the conviction that a deity is extant, it follows that it needs to consider, as noted, the various ways in which the divine reveals itself, i.e., the theologian needs to identify possible revelatory loci, where knowledge related to the divine may be found, and then proceed from there when outlining possible and ideally relevant patterns of thought in relation to these sources of insight.¹⁵

In Lutheran interpretive culture, the theological impulse is to focus particularly on the biblical as a primary revelatory locus, based on the foregrounding of the principle of *sola scriptura* in this tradition.¹⁶ But as these authoritative texts are scrutinized in search of the divine voice, it soon becomes clear that they point beyond themselves precisely when speaking of revelatory loci. In other words, the principle of *sola scriptura* necessarily leads, theologically, to a position in which revelation must be sought through, but therefore also beyond, the written texts, so that the principle simultaneously confirms and undermines itself like an impossible picture by Oscar Reutersvärd.¹⁷ Somewhat simplified, the texts considered theologically canonical themselves claim to identify the divine voice in: a) history, including the present (if God is the God of history, God is also the God of the present, since the ever-evolving present is part of history), b) tradition (continuous; the canon itself is part of this tradition and so

¹⁴ If one does not engage in understanding the human world in which the divine reveals itself to humans, it is, arguably, impossible to even approach an understanding of the divine, since the reception of the divine is dependent on the abilities of humans to perceive it. Interestingly, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, produced during the Second Vatican Council, also places substantial emphasis on defining what exactly a human is, and then uses this as a basis for theological rulings. Joseph Xavier has even noted that the document has an “anthropological concentration.” (Joseph Xavier, “Theological Anthropology of ‘Gaudium et Spes’ and Fundamental Theology,” *Gregorianum* 91/1 [2010]: 124–136, esp. pp. 124–125). See also Ch. 7 above on theology as intertwined with institutions.

¹⁵ Theology, thus, relates to life as map relates to territory, as already C.S. Lewis suggested in his *Mere Christianity*; these – territory and map – should not be confused.

¹⁶ This is, of course, not unique for Lutheran tradition. Official documents of the Catholic church outlines in some detail not only that, but also how the biblical texts and study constitute the core of theology. Cf. discussion by Thomas M. Bolin, “The Biblical Commission’s Instruction, *On the Historical Truth of the Gospels (Sancta Mater Ecclesia)* and Present Magisterial Attitudes Toward Biblical Exegesis,” *Gregorianum* 93/4 (2012): 765–784, where the understanding of the relationship between exegesis and theology is problematized based on a perceived distance, as expressed by Pope Benedict, between exegesis and theology.

¹⁷ On Oscar Reutersvärd and the impossible, see, e.g., Chris Mortensen, *Inconsistent Geometry*, Studies in Logic 27 (London: College Publications, 2010). Inconsistent objects are the outcome of our cognition; they do not exist externally in the world.

necessitates such a position), c) individual experience (the prophetic voice or the holy spirit), and d) other non-biblical, non-Israelite/Jewish traditions and experiences (e.g., as when the God of Israel speaks to King Josiah through Pharaoh Neco; 2 Chron 35:21).

If, then, in Lutheran tradition, revelatory loci are considered important in theological discourses, as filtered through the (impossible) principle of *sola scriptura*, which itself explodes the narrowly confined field where the divine can be experienced to include not only text but also extra-textual phenomena, then a new ecumenically oriented landscape opens up, in which other denominations are made visible, with which dialogue must be considered a *sine qua non* in the search for guidance and, ultimately, truth.

But where, when this conversation is opened up, is the authoritative tune found as the various voices combine into a choir? “What is truth?” as Pilate famously asked Jesus, without receiving an answer other than silence (John 18:38). It seems to me that the *sola scriptura* principle, again, leads us beyond the text itself, as the biblical texts appear to favor praxis-oriented definitions of truth. In the passage on how to recognize a true prophet, the Sermon on the Mount proposes that what is created through speech determines the truth of what was said, so that truth aligns with the good/life, and falsehood with evil/death (Matt 7:15-20).¹⁸ The good, in turn, is defined by the context in which speech is transforming reality, so that the effects of speech, and thus truth, must always be considered in, and analyzed from the point of view of the local here and now.

For the theologian seeking guidance and truth, and realizing the inescapability of choice and therefore also responsibility, Deuteronomy 30:19 echoes what is, ultimately, at stake: “I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.” This brings us back to what we noted initially about Luther’s approach to exegesis-driven theology: As a discipline concerned with the interpretation of ultimate reality, theology is, like truth, intertwined with matters of life and death. It is within this overall perspective, I would argue, that the role of history in theology should be considered and interpreted between self-consuming relativism and naïve objectivism, embedded as one voice among several in a larger discourse negotiating the perforated boundaries between lived experience and textual artefact.

¹⁸ For commentary on this passage, see Matthias Konradt, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, Übersetzt und erklärt*, DNDT 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 124–127; Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 120. Daniel Patte, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew’s Faith* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press, 1987), 99–100. For the use of these verses during the Reformation and later, see Howard Clarke, *The Gospel of Matthew and its Readers: A Historical Introduction to the First Gospel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 92–94.

Reading Paul with Luther in contemporary Europe and beyond, seeking to follow, and therefore necessarily to reform, the Reformer, the relationship between speech and its embodied effects on the understanding of truth arguably leads the interpreter to consider, with some urgency, the settings in which life, and therefore also truth, is threatened as a consequence of speech – theological or otherwise. It is no secret that anti-Semitism and xenophobia is on the rise in Europe and the US. Only in the last few years, people have been murdered not only based on their views and activism in favor of free speech, but, in the case of the Jews, simply because they were Jews, regardless of their political opinions. But terrorism is not alone in producing evil. We also see political parties on the rise, which engage in speech that leads to further tensions, including anti-Semitism. In light of Luther's well-known anti-Jewish writings, which were used with disastrous consequences as recently as the Second World War,¹⁹ theologians working in the Lutheran tradition have a special responsibility to react and respond to threats like this if theology is at all to be linked to reality as map is to territory.

Reading Paul with Luther as an exegete and historian may contribute to this larger task by focusing issues involving the Jewish people. Attempts at restoring Paul's first-century voice will lead us beyond Luther's anti-Jewish stereotypes and produce a more genuine and theologically legitimate contemporary dialogue between the past and the present, in which the future is formed. Indeed, reading Paul with Luther today, I suggest, may challenge contemporary churches to rethink their very identity as necessarily intertwined with diversity, as well as to consider the proposition that the concept of salvation perforates religious boundaries.

We shall proceed in two steps from here. First, in order to problematize Luther's understanding not only of Judaism, but also of Jewish identity in relation to confidence in Jesus as the Messiah, we shall look at how Paul, contrary to Luther, construes the ideal *ekklesia*, focusing on his first letter to the Christ-group in Corinth. Then, countering Luther's anti-Judaism, we shall consider the place in Paul's symbolic universe of Jews who declined the Christ option, concentrating our reading on his letter to the Romans. Finally, we shall conclude with a few words on Paul's thinking and how it may inform (Lutheran) theology today. In the following then, I shall attempt to theologially contextualize some of the historical discussions presented in previous chapters.

¹⁹ On the exploitation by the Nazis of Luther's writings, see the Berlin exhibition in relation to the 500 anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, "Überall Luthers Worte ..." reported on here: <https://religionnews.com/2017/10/19/berlin-exhibition-highlights-how-the-nazis-exploited-martin-luthers-legacy/>. (Accessed December 15 2021). See also Gritsch, *Luther's Anti-Semitism*.

13.2 Jewish Identity within the *ekklēsia*

One of Luther's most enduring realizations as he was reading Paul and searching for a merciful God, was that God had reached out to human beings *before* they were righteous, *before* they had attained a status acceptable to the kingdom. Since fellowship with a holy God requires human righteousness, such an insight must imply that righteousness was independent of human efforts, of "works of law" (cf. Rom 5:6-9), and instead based on "faith" (Greek: *pistis*, "faithfulness," "loyalty"). Even if Luther's insight came to him in the context of his own Roman Catholic tradition, and must be understood from that perspective, in the biblical text Luther saw this relationship between human effort and *pistis* as played out in terms of a contradiction between the Jewish law and Paul's gospel. It is easy to see how Luther then could go from a rejection of (Jewish) law to a rejection of Judaism and therefore also of Jewish identity as a salvifically viable category, especially considering his vast knowledge of the writings of the Church Fathers, in particular Augustine.²⁰

Paul, then, *must* have rejected his old identity as a Jew when he "converted" to "Christianity." For a Jew to be saved they must, consequently, give up their identity as a Jew and live like gentiles in Christ, i.e., the way Luther himself lived as a Christian. Despite passages like Acts 15 and the decision of the Jerusalem council, 1 Cor 7:17-24, and Romans 11, all of which could have inspired insights related to legitimate diversity, only one model – the non-Jewish one – seemed possible; one size fits all. This understanding of Paul and the requirements of salvation in relation to Jewish identity became the dominant mode of thinking in the churches for centuries. Only recently, and especially through the interpretations of Paul often but not always categorized under the label "Paul within Judaism," has it become increasingly clear that the Pauline texts themselves resist such readings, if they are studied from a first-century perspective and in the context of a more informed understanding of the diversity of Second Temple Judaism.²¹ Indeed, many scholars today note that not only did Luther understand Judaism poorly, he also – from a historical point of view – misread Paul in several important ways, thus misrepresenting the apostle to the gentiles even with regard to the very nature of the church itself.

No one would, of course, claim that Paul's letters are a straightforward read. The texts he wrote display complex patterns of thought, which sometimes seem to contain contradictory assertions.²² However, Paul arguably did leave in his

²⁰ On Luther's knowledge of the Church Fathers, see, e.g., Thompson, "The Daughter of the Word," 41-56. As Thompson points out, however, Luther used their writings freely, feeling obliged neither to imitate, nor to agree.

²¹ This is the point of departure for the multi-authored work edited by Nanos and Zetterholm, *Paul Within Judaism*.

²² As Räisänen argues in his *Paul and the Law*. Cf. 2 Peter 3:15-16.

texts important interpretive clues as to how he wanted to be understood. Important in this regard are the few places where Paul explicitly declares that what he is writing to a specific congregation is valid for all congregations. Foregrounding such universal rules as exegetical hubs to which interpretive spokes are attached, and around which the letters' hermeneutical wheel spins, may assist us in revealing some of Paul's core convictions. Then, other rather obscure texts can be read in light of such rules, and perhaps emerge more pixelated for use in our historical sense-making project.

For our purposes, 1 Cor 7:17–24 is a key passage here, as it describes in some detail Paul's understanding of the nature and identity of the *ekklēsia*, of that which morphed into what is today called "church." More precisely, as we discussed in chapter 8 above, we find here a carefully structured text, which outlines Paul's rather strict view on the importance of Jewish and non-Jewish identities *within* the Jesus movement. Let us therefore re-visit the diatribe-like rhetoric of the passage that we explored earlier,²³ and allow it to be mirrored in the way we present the text:

A. Let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This is my rule in all the churches.

B¹. Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision.

C¹. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything.

A. Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called.

B². Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever.

C². For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters.

A. In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God.

As is seen here, the all-important overarching rule that Paul requires his assemblies to follow, is one of unity in diversity. The thrice-repeated requirement is that everyone must remain as they were when called, i.e., when becoming followers of Jesus. Whatever one's status before one joined the movement, one must (not may) remain in it when joining a Christ-group (A).

²³ For more detailed discussion, see above, Ch. 8.

Then, for each example of how this rule may apply in the lives of those “in Christ,” we find a description of a certain original status, and then an explicit rule stating that that specific status must not change (B). The first of these examples is concerned with Jewish and non-Jewish identity – if you were a Jew when joining the Jesus movement, you must remain a Jew, i.e., live like a Jew and self-present as a Jew, in the movement, and the same goes for the non-Jews (B¹). The second example, B², does the same with social status.²⁴

As for maintaining Jewish identity within the Jesus movement, which is what interests us here, this implies for Paul continued Torah observance. We see this in Gal 5:3, for example, where Paul explicitly instructs non-Jews who feel that the logical extension of their cultic and ritual attachment to the Jewish Christ would be to go through circumcision (for men), and thus become Jews, as follows: “Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law (ὅλον τὸν νόμον ποιῆσαι).”²⁵ Returning to 1 Corinthians 7, we may note that after the general rule has been put forward and exemplified (A and B), a theological explanation is added, which legitimizes the rule itself (C¹ and C²). Again, what interests us here is C¹ and its implications for the issue of Jewish identity, as intertwined with law.

Our passage makes quite clear that Paul’s main concern is not with invalidating the law for Jews, but with finding a way for non-Jews (the uncircumcised, if male), to be counted as fulfilling God’s commandments, without being Jewish: “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but *obeying the commandments of God is everything*” (1 Cor 7:19).²⁶ What Paul seems to communicate is thus not that Jewish (ethno-religious) identity has lost its meaning in the Jesus movement, but that non-Jews can now, as the final judgment is around the corner, reach salvation just as much as the Jews. The question is how. In order to approach Paul’s thinking here, we need to consider how he understood the nature of Jewish law (*nomos*). Two passages emerge as important.

²⁴ As for slaves, they were not free to make their own choices, which presents a slightly different scenario. The Greek here, as we have noted above in Ch. 8, is open to different translations in this regard.

²⁵ This approach to Jewish identity within the Jesus movement is similar to what we see in Acts 15 and again in Acts 21. In Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council proclaims the universal rule in all Christ-assemblies to be that Jews must observe the Jewish law. This is repeated in Acts 21, where James informs Paul that there are tens of thousands (*myriads*) of Jewish followers of Jesus in the Diaspora, and they are all Torah observant. The problem in the early Christ-movement was not Jewish identity or Jewish law – these were a given – but how to deal with non-Jews when they wished to join this Jewish movement. Why would a law given to a specific people group be valid for those outside this *ethnos*? And if it should, in which way should this be implemented and applied – in full, or only parts of it? On Acts relationship to Paul in this regard, see Matthew Thiessen’s insightful concluding discussion in *Paul and the Gentile Problem*, 167–169, where he argues that the author of Acts in fact was the first to interpret Paul as “within Judaism.”

²⁶ Cf. Mark D. Nanos, *Reading Corinthians and Philippians Within Judaism*. Collected Essays of Mark D. Nanos 4 (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017) 49.

In Romans 13:10, Paul summarizes his view and states that, ultimately, love is the fullness of the law (πλήρωμα οὖν νόμου ἡ ἀγάπη). Therefore, he can also state in Rom 10:4, that Christ is the *telos* of the law (τέλος γὰρ νόμου Χριστὸς εἰς δικαιοσύνην παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι). The word *telos* is often translated as “end” in modern bibles (so NRSV), but such a translation is, at best, misleading, if “end” is understood in the sense of “ending something.” Such an understanding would imply, absurdly, that the Christ would here be said to be the end of *agapē*/love, if we follow Paul’s own definition of *nomos* as *agapē*. Rather, what is claimed here is, in my view, that Paul’s messiah is the fullness, or goal, of the law. This does not abolish or undermine or neutralize the Torah; it rather legitimizes and confirms the law, as Paul also emphatically claims in Rom 3:31 (“Do we then overthrow the law by this faithfulness? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law”). Upholding the law implies, of course, upholding and confirming Jewish ancestral customs and Jewish identity “in Christ.”

But how is this to apply to non-Jews, who are not allowed, as far as Paul is concerned, to adopt a Jewish identity as they turn to worship, exclusively, the Jewish God? As we argued in chapter 8 above, the answer seems to lie in Rom 5:5 and the role of the Spirit. For Paul, the Holy Spirit is the acting agent, allowing not only Jews but also non-Jews to fulfil the requirements of the law, which is, as we have said, *agapē*: “God’s love [i.e., God’s law; cf. Rom 13:10] has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” Since Paul is convinced that non-Jews have already received the Holy Spirit, without first becoming Jews, this means to him that God the creator, as the eschatological divine judgment is soon to materialize, has approved of them regardless of their ethnic or other status. But since for Paul the Jewish law “is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good” (Rom 7:12), its requirements must be fulfilled, just as 1 Cor 7:19 states: “obeying the commandments of God is everything.” If we take Paul’s definition of *nomos* as *agapē*, this makes theo-judicial sense, and should come as no surprise. This fulfilment is, then, made possible not only for Jews but also for non-Jews through the Holy Spirit, who pours God’s *agapē/nomos* into human hearts.

The significance of the death and resurrection of the Christ is, thus, the initiating of the end-time turbulence, and this process is accompanied by the releasing of the Spirit of God, which represents the very definition of God’s salvific will as related to all human kind, without distinction. The divine aim in this scheme – Christ’s sacrifice, the sending of the Spirit to all regardless of ethnic belonging or social status – is clear: both Jews, *as Jews*, and gentiles, *as gentiles*, now have the option, in the form of a gift,²⁷ of being sanctified and found righteous before God in preparation for the universal divine final judgment is to take

²⁷ On ancient gift-giving and its implication for the concept of “grace,” see discussion in John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

place. This sanctification of all who are “in Christ” is what will redeem them all “from the wrath of God,” as Paul writes in Rom 5:9.²⁸

In sum, then, far from abolishing the law or subvert Jewish identity, Paul is arguing that Jewish identity is confirmed “in Christ.” The news proclaimed by Paul as the apostle to the nations is that through the work of the Holy Spirit *even non-Jewish identity is confirmed as valid in Christ*, as long as non-Israelite ancestral customs in the form of worship of gods other than Israel’s are discontinued. Why is this so important for Paul? Why must Jews maintain their Jewish identity in Christ, and non-Jews theirs? Many interpreters have pointed to Romans 3:29-30, noting that for Paul, the God of Israel is the God of the whole world, as is also stated repeatedly in the Hebrew Bible.²⁹ If non-Jews were required to become Jews, that would falsify such statements, since, if so, God would only be the God of the Jews. For Paul, then, diversity is not a matter of choice: it is a theological necessity.

While this is, in my opinion, certainly true, there is an additional observation that may be made in relation to the issue of diversity, which may further explain why this is so important. If Paul is convinced that Jews must remain Jews, and gentiles must remain gentiles, as 1 Cor 7 so forcefully argues, this is because he is convinced that God poured the Spirit upon members of both groups, before any of them changed their identities.³⁰ Consequently, God must have approved of these separate identities, these ways of being, and all people can do is to accept this in trust (*pistis*); trusting God’s judgment.

Now, if a Jew, as a consequence of their joining a Christ-group, would give up their Jewish identity, or a non-Jew would go through the process of becoming a Jew (for men involving circumcision) after receiving the Spirit, then – and this is the key point – they would show that they lacked *pistis*, since they did not trust that God had already approved them for the end-time as they were when they

²⁸ On the sanctification of non-Jews specifically, cf. Rom 15:15–16: “...because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit [ἡγιασμένη ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ].”

²⁹ Most frequently in the Psalter, but also in the prophets. Psalm 67, e.g., expresses the idea that Israel’s God not only rules and judges the nations with righteousness (cf. Ps 22:28), but also that God’s blessings on Israel will be a sign onto other nations who will know God’s ways through aligning themselves with Israel (cf. Isa 49:6–7). That Israel’s God will judge the nations is abundantly clear in texts too many to cite (e.g., Ps 9:5–8; Amos 1:3–2:3; Isa 66:1–24). Israel, too, of course, will be judged (as is equally clear from the Psalms and the Prophets and other texts), but it is the universality of the divine judgment that is about to take place that concerns Paul as an apostle to the nations; creation as such is about to be transformed. For Paul, as for many of the texts included in the Hebrew Bible, universality does not mean erasure of difference, but the contrary: universality is expressed precisely through diversity. For discussion of these verses, see Jewett, *Romans*, 299–302; cf. Halvor Moxnes, *Theology in Conflict: Studies in Paul’s Understanding of God in Romans*, NovTSup 53 (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 223–224.

³⁰ Cf., e.g., Gal 3:2–6.

were found by the Spirit. Changing or shifting one's status in order to become acceptable to God is, for Paul, an outright rejection of God's grace. Indeed, such rejection of God's grace would amount to a kind of "works righteousness," aiming at improving upon what God had already achieved in Christ through the Spirit. Thus, Paul could write in Galatians 5:4 to those gentiles in Christ who would undergo circumcision that "you [...] have cut yourselves off from Christ"; they have, from Paul's perspective, "fallen away from grace [*charis*]."

In sum, far from how Luther perceived of Jewish identity and law in the church, Paul argued for his *ekklēsia* that trust in God was intimately tied to the idea of diversity within the people of God. Any removal of either Jewish or non-Jewish identity was tantamount to a rejection of the work of the Spirit, and thus of God's grace. Diversity was, for Paul, not optional but *required*.³¹ In his analysis of Romans 11, Peter Richardson puts it well as he describes Paul's understanding of the nature of the *ekklēsia*: "The Church has no existence apart from Israel and has no separate identity. It exists as an interim measure until the fullness of Israel [...] is brought in and grafted on (v. 23). Only then will the olive tree be full and ripe. The thought is distinctly Israel-centric."³²

But, if this was Paul's ruling regarding Jews *within* the Jesus movement, what about the Jews who declined the offer of joining these Christ-groups? How did Paul position them in relation to God and salvation in his worldview? After all, Luther's harshest attacks were directed against the Jews of his own days, as he rejected their status as the people of God and condemned them in the most violent of terms.³³ Would Paul have agreed with Luther? As we shall see, the opposite is true; the historical Paul's views on the topic stand in sharp contrast to the reformer's. A brief discussion will show how and why.

13.3 The Salvation of the Jewish 'Other': The Victory of God's Love

It is an interesting but somewhat depressing exercise to compare Luther's *On the Jews and their Lies* and *Von Shem Hamphoras*, both from 1543, with Paul's letter to the Romans, chapters 9–11. A full discussion of all the issues involved lie, unfortunately, beyond the purview of this chapter. Even so, it should be noted at least briefly at the very outset of any discussion of this topic, that Luther's hate speech against the Jews is so intertwined with his theological claims about the Jewish people as abandoned by God that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the violence from his theology. Therefore, it is important to be-

³¹ Cf. the similar conclusion based on Romans by Patrick McMurray, *Sacrifice, Brotherhood, and the Body: Abraham and the Nations in Romans* (Lanham: Lexington/Fortress Academic, 2021), 8, 95–132.

³² Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 130.

³³ *Von Shem Hamphoras*, 1543; cf. *On the Jews and their Lies*, 1543.

gin with the theological claims that legitimize the violence, in order to show that this type of theology is without foundation in Paul, and that, consequently, the violence is void of any form of supportive ideological structure from Luther's Holy Scriptures; it belongs with Luther's own person, and has no Pauline explanation outside it. Based on Luther's perspective on the role of Scripture in theology, if this can be proven correct it would invalidate the very core of his theological attitude to the Jewish people and their place in God's economy, and force, based on his own theological game rules, a reformation of the churches he left behind.

Paul's understanding of the position and salvation of the Jewish people, those who had not accepted Jesus as the messiah, stands in sharp contrast to Luther's. Paul, contrary to Luther, displays anguish and deep distress when contemplating the fact that many of his fellow Jews have not joined him in Christ. He begins his long argument on the topic in Romans 9–11 as follows:

I am speaking the truth in Christ – I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit – I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh.³⁴

Then, as he works his way through carefully laid out arguments, emphasizing that God, contrary to what Luther would later claim, has not abandoned his own people, he approaches the key question about the relationship between especially Gentile Christ-followers and Jews who had not joined the Jesus movement (Romans 11). This is a relationship structurally similar to that which Luther was concerned to elaborate on in his own time: the (gentile) Christian church and the Jews.

Admonishing gentile Christ-followers not to be arrogant towards Jews who had declined the offer to join the movement, Paul's argument unfolds something like the following in Romans 11. The fact that a large part of the Jewish people has rejected Jesus as the Christ is part of God's plan; it is not their own doing. God did this in order for non-Jews to be incorporated into the people of God, so that they, as branches from a wild-olive tree to be grafted into the olive tree – against nature,³⁵ but for their salvation – could share the rich olive tree (Rom 11:17–18). In fact, Jewish rejection of Jesus resulted, as per divine intention, in atonement (*katallagē*) for the world, and their taking in (*proslēmpsis*) by God will lead to life for the dead (Rom 11:15). God has thus *not* abandoned his people, and Paul is careful to state this explicitly, in Rom 11:29: “as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of the ancestors; for the gifts and the calling

³⁴ Rom 9:1–3.

³⁵ Rom 11:24.

of God are irrevocable.” Indeed, as Paul emphasizes in 11:25-26, once the full number of non-Jews have reached the goal, “all Israel will be saved.”³⁶

For Paul, then, the world consists of two groups of people: the Jews and the non-Jews. Among the Jews, he himself belongs among those who were chosen – a remnant³⁷ – and to which group has been added non-Jews who have accepted the Christ. The rest of the Jewish people maintain their status as elected by God, and God’s *agapē*³⁸ will keep them until the end comes; then, all Israel will be saved together with the non-Jews who have joined these Jewish followers of Jesus. It is important to note here, too, as Joel Kaminsky and Mark Reasoner do, that when Paul speaks of Israel as beloved for the sake of the fathers, this means that they are “beloved in their own right, not simply for the sake of Messiah Jesus.”³⁹

It is unsurprising that such theology, throughout the centuries, has been a hard pill for the church to swallow, since Paul so obviously places non-Jewish Christ-followers in a marginal position, comparing them to a wild olive shoot grafted – against nature and through their connection with Christ-oriented Jews – onto the rich olive tree, i.e., the people of Israel and their ancestors, from which they receive their nourishment.⁴⁰ As Paul writes to these gentile Christ-followers: “remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you” (Rom 11:18). How could a church which soon turned almost exclusively non-Jewish, and which condemned Jewish forms of Christ-orientation as heretical – and how could a 16th-century Luther – ever accept statements like this?

The solution for those who belonged and still belongs to streams of Christianity aligning with those Paul was admonishing in Rom 11:17–24 seems to have been a strategic backgrounding of verses such as these. Or, perhaps more often,

³⁶ It is somewhat difficult to determine what Paul may have meant with “full number,” as it relates to the end-time and the redemption that is promised to the nations. It seems to me that Paul is not speaking of individual salvation, as he in other parts of Romans and in his other letters outline criteria of judgment applying to individuals, and point to some, including some Christ followers, who will not make it. Rather, redemption seems to be related to (ethnic) people groups; Israel and all the other nations. While I have some trouble finding (consistent) statements in Paul on universal salvation for non-Jews, I find intriguing and still ponder C.H. Dodd’s suggestion in this regard: *Romans*, 183–188 (chart on p. 187). See esp. p. 184: “But if, instead of pressing such points pedantically, we look at the trend of the discussion, we observe (as I have already pointed out) that the arguments by which Paul asserts the final salvation of Israel are equally valid (in fact are valid only) if they are applied to mankind at large. [...] Whether or not, therefore, Paul himself drew the ‘universalist’ conclusion, it seems that we must draw it from his premises.” I am grateful to Professor Emeritus John C. Robertson of McMaster University, who many years ago suggested to me that Dodd is still an interesting companion to Paul.

³⁷ Rom 9:27; see discussion in Campbell, “‘A Remnant of Them Will Be Saved,’” 79–101.

³⁸ Rom 11:28.

³⁹ Kaminsky and Reasoner, “Meaning and Telos of Israel’s Election,” 446.

⁴⁰ Rom 11:17–18. Cf. Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian*.

a forced hermeneutical exercise combined with a foregrounding of passages that more easily lend themselves to the supersessionism that soon became the theological lifeblood of the church in her attempts at legitimizing her own existence as Jews and Judaism refused to either join or go away. Sawing off the branch on which it was sitting, the church chose to cut itself off from the nourishment Paul claimed that God had prepared for them: the Israelite path to redemption, beyond which apocalyptic nothingness lurked.

Heeding Luther's call to return to the sources – a theologized version of the Renaissance's *ad fontes* – the churches' holy scriptures, and there seek guidance for how to understand the present and the future, may lead the churches he left behind on a new path in their relationship to the Jewish people, a path that neutralizes the violence caused by Luther himself as he authored his disastrous attacks against the people who gave birth to his own savior.⁴¹

13.4 *The Theological Imperative: Choose Life*

Returning to basic Lutheran theological principles and reading Paul anew in contemporary Europe and beyond, how can a Lutheran church be true to its reformer? Any reading of a biblical text for theological purposes needs to carefully carve out what passages are chosen and emphasized, why, and for what purpose. This process should involve a deep sense of urgency, and aim at both understanding and influencing the world in, and for which, the theology is formed. As for Paul and Luther, normative theology is for the pious ultimately a matter of life and death, where truth, referring to the Matthean definition given in the beginning of this chapter, is aligned with life and judged based on what is created by its embodied proclamation.

What does it mean today to search, as Luther did, for a merciful God? Luther began his search based on his own personal experience, but the church is no longer in a position to focus narrowly on itself in such a way as to neglect the suffering of others, especially not when it has itself played a part in establishing the preconditions for that suffering. In this chapter, I have focused on one of the areas where many Lutheran churches are in profound need of reform, if they wish to align with Luther's principle of working with the biblical texts rather than cementing doctrines and theologies that are inherently destructive, and thus, in my Matthean-influenced view, false. Working towards reading Paul historically, on his own terms, will challenge many long-held ideas about the place of the Jewish people both within the church and beyond it. Diversity and the necessity of sharing responsibility for embodying truth is, indeed, built into the canon itself, as much as it was a reality in the early Jesus movement.

⁴¹ “[F]or salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22).

As for Paul, he found a merciful God not only in Christ, but also in relation to Jews who declined to join the movement, proclaiming God's everlasting covenant with them too. If a reading of Paul according to Lutheran text-oriented principles, and in light of the urgency of the current moment, leads to such conclusions, should not the voice of the historical Paul be heard in Lutheran churches, and be allowed to transform its theology? In Deut 30:19, a passage we have referred to above, God urges the people, when faced with the choice of life or death, to choose life.⁴² Based on the definition of truth discussed in this chapter, I suggest that such a theological imperative should be given a greater hermeneutical role in contemporary theological work by those who claim to be among God's people, especially when the Other is the topic under consideration. As this work extends beyond the Jewish people and includes other non-Christian traditions too in a more comprehensive theology of religions, Matthew's Gospel, perhaps even more than Paul, will provide a much-needed historical voice, challenging many long-held Christian assumptions about the nature of the churches' Holy Scriptures. But that is a topic for another book.⁴³

⁴² "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live."

⁴³ I am thinking here especially of Matt 25:31–46; for interpretation, see Runesson, *Divine Wrath*, 414–428.

Epilogue

Our age is not subject to the works of the past;
it is subject only to the dreams of the future
Robert Wilken¹

So, what have these essays, when understood in conjunction with one another, achieved? That will be up to the reader to ponder, of course. To the degree that authorial intention is granted a voice together with others in such deliberations, however, let me conclude this book with some reflections on its purpose.

While I have tried my best to listen to the Paul who lived the Mediterranean world two thousand years ago, as well as to several other individuals and groups – past and present – whom I believe provide a matrix within which his contours become clearer, this is not a book for those who seek the final word on who Paul was and what he meant, or those who already possess a full understanding of this self-proclaimed apostle. Rather, I have collected here some of my thoughts on Paul for those who are intrigued, like I am, not only by the person and his writings, but also by the discussions about him and the way he has been chosen by so many as an avatar of their own theological, philosophical, and political leanings; for those who feel that there is something wrong with the “traditional readings,” who don’t know what it is, but it’s there, like a splinter in the mind. It is my hope that at least some of the ideas presented here may contribute to furthering the conversation, not only for those whose thinking has already been prepared for such intellectual maneuvers by previous developments, as Vico would have asserted,² but perhaps also for those impelled simply by curiosity and an interest in seeking the historical Other.

There is no such thing as historical existence beyond the present, and so the life we breathe into the past as we assemble it from whatever scattered fragments left behind is dependent on us – our bodies, our networks, our society – for its survival, indeed, its actuality. This means, arguably, that the aim of any historical investigation always includes a purpose for the present. This is true also of this book, which objective is two-fold.

First and foremost, it is intended as a contribution to knowledge about Paul as the historical Other, whose meanings have morphed through the centuries

¹ Robert Louis Wilken, *The Myth of Christian Beginnings* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), 206.

² See above, p. 18.

as they have been re-enacted by the myriad hosts through whom his life has been extended and transformed. Apart from Jesus, few people have had such an immense impact on history as Paul. Considering the fact that Paul left behind for the world to read only a few letters, which he wrote to small groups of people at specific locations around the Mediterranean, people he knew or wanted to get to know and to influence, that is a remarkable achievement; this, in and of itself, is motivation enough for seeking to know more about him. To be sure, “achievement” often signals accomplishment based on intent, but this is not what we are talking about here. We may speak of making a fire without matches as a feat, but “achievement” is not the word we use when the flames turn into a wildfire. The historical aim of this book has been to explore what may indeed have been Paul’s intentions in the mid-first century, and how he may have been perceived back then as he worked to ignite Jewish eschatological fervor among the nations.

Such an investigation into the fragments from the past that provide the point of departure for the historical cannot be carried out, this volume claims, without serious consideration of what lies between us and Paul; the reality of the historical in the present and the present in the historical. In order to approach the historical, we need to understand how our contemporary images of the past were formed and “canonized,” who *we* are in relation to our object of interest: Paul and his writings.³ One of the most important entry points into a deeper appreciation of the otherness of the past is the gateway usually, and problematically, called the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity, a route which forces us to also consider the very way we speak Paul into being, the terminology we use. Just as Laura Salah Nasrallah and Karl Olav Sandnes have emphasized from different perspectives the importance of understanding those around Paul and after Paul to get closer to Paul,⁴ the present volume stresses, from a different angle also related to the recent work by Terence L. Donaldson,⁵ the importance, even the precedence of studying the larger processes that gave birth to the two religions we are familiar with today. Without the interpretive frameworks that emerge from such analyses of the first several centuries Paul will likely remain imprisoned within (and, some would say, enslaved by) the modern conceptual and terminological paradigms entertained by Christians, Jews, and others, making him look distressingly similar to our own mirror image, or that of those we define as our contemporary Other, those who we are

³ Cf. discussion by Halvor Moxnes, *Memories of Jesus: A Journey through Time* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2021).

⁴ Nasrallah, *Letters of Paul*; Sandnes, *Paul Perceived*; idem, *Var Paulus Kristen?* (Norwegian). Studying receptions of Paul also includes, of course, scholarship on Paul. On this, see Magnus Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul*.

⁵ Terence L. Donaldson, *Gentile Christian Identity from Cornelius to Constantine: The Nations, the Parting of the Ways, and Roman Imperial Ideology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020).

not. For this reason, as noted in the Prologue, while the *via expositionis* chosen here places Paul between chapters on terminological issues on the one hand, and “parting of the ways” discussions on the other to achieve a sense of chronology in developments, the *via inventionis* has been, and in my view should be for those interested in the past, reversed, so that Paul is read last. As in archaeology so also in history: there is no other place to start digging than the top layer, passing layer after layer on our way down through the centuries before we return to the present to incorporate our findings into the larger contemporary narratives from which we derive meaning and construe our sense of place.

This brings us to the second aim of this volume, which proceeds from the definition of history as a dialogue between the past and the present for the sake of the future,⁶ and responds to the basic question: What do *we* do with a first-century Jewish Paul proclaiming a form of Judaism for gentiles? Theologically? Philosophically? Politically? The question is accentuated by the fact that these Jewish writings are part of a canon considered normative by the world’s largest religion, Christianity, a religion that for more than a millennium and a half defined its independence and foundational truths through distancing itself from (their own definition of) Judaism.

To be sure, as discussed in Chapter one, there is nothing normative about the past. Normativity and all its variables materialize only in landscapes inhabited by the living, and so, it follows, does the responsibility that follows with constructions of the normative. The processes by which we feel bound to the past are not themselves the text, neither are they sanctioned by the text; they can be challenged and reshaped, opening up previously untraveled trajectories toward the future in dialogue with the present. (Or – for the disciple – is God not a God of the living but of the dead?⁷) This is, after all, what the texts themselves engaged in as they creatively absorbed their own pasts and reshaped their meanings in light of the present. Indeed, the idea that text, sacred or not, could freeze in time anything spoken or previously written seems to me more like a theo-political dream than a probing appreciation of the nature of our being in the world. Texts, as all artefacts, are silent until we perceive them and speak them, and thus, while rooted in soil foreign to us the past can never independently produce meaning. In fact, according to the New Testament itself, sacred text, while

⁶ Cf. Jimmy Hoke, *Feminism, Queerness, Affect, and Romans: Under God*, ECL 30 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2021), 2, who describes his book as “oriented toward the past, the present, and the future.” While Hoke emphatically “refuse[s] to uphold these temporal divisions,” however, I believe it to be crucial for discursive clarity and methodological precision to do just that. It is not that the past is not in the present, or the present not in the past, or that the future would be isolated from the pasts from which it emanated; life, and human perception of it, is more interwoven and complex than such distinctions allow for. For me, it is a practical issue about choosing focal points, each of which triggers overlapping but ultimately different discursive and communicative activities and strategies. See also discussion above, Ch. 1.

⁷ Matt 22:32.

standing in dialogue with the here and now, is secondary to the present in the theological process; theology rarely begins with the written word but cannot do without it either.⁸

As for the specific form of textual understanding that we define as historical, its purpose is to anchor meaning(s) in a specific time period and so delineate, through epistemological and methodological considerations, certain interpretive boundaries within which the reasonableness of specific reconstructions can be agreed upon regardless of the interpreter's theological or ideological leanings. In this regard, it may be useful, heuristically, to approach text interpretively as aligned with architecture,⁹ since text intentionally imposes certain parameters that limit and focus its audience's field of vision. As constructed space functions to assert power and control movement, so does text. But not in and of itself. The reasonableness of specific understandings – what can be seen and what is beyond the field of vision – is dependent on collective agreements on the purpose, and therefore also the method of reading.¹⁰ It is the combination of the “spatial” parameters of the text (letters, words, grammar, syntax) and the hermeneutical constraints agreed upon by reading collectives that produce the reasonable, which in turn, it follows, is valid only within the specific reading environments where these hermeneutics are applied.

In other words, the intentionality of text, or perhaps better, its will to assert power and control (discursive) movement, exercises its force and influence only in the local. Once de-localized, disconnected from native time and/or space, movement cannot be controlled since shifting rationalities, embedded in other (parallel) symbolic universes, determine anew what is reasonable. While every spatial and textual setting leaves room locally for multiple interpretive engage-

⁸ E.g., Acts 14:27/15:8, 14–15. As these passages describe, when the early Christ-groups were to handle an entirely new question untouched by their Messiah, such as the if and how of gentile inclusion in the movement, the author describes how God has acted first and offered the option of *pistis* and Spirit to non-Jews *before* the leaders of the movement had drawn up a theological map for whether such a thing would be appropriate, and if so, had created a halakhic instruction manual for how it should be done. *Then*, when they do understand what is happening as God's doing, they search their holy texts to find something that would speak to these new experiences. In Acts, they find what they need in the prophets (Acts 15:16–18). This then leads, in a second step, to the formation of new halakhah, or bylaws, outlining the preferred relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish followers of Jesus: Acts 15:19–21, 23–29. Cf. John 7:41–42, 52, where the author forwards – I would say a generic and sweeping – critique of interlocutors who focus in their understanding of the present too exclusively on the written word, and so miss the work of the Spirit which takes place right before their eyes. A similar critique of a too narrow approach to text and theology, and its lived variants, is, in Acts, put in the mouth of a Pharisee, indicating a shared understanding between Pharisees and the new movement emerging around Jesus of the basic hermeneutics of the divine in the world: Acts 5:34–39.

⁹ Cf. above, Ch. 4, p. 122.

¹⁰ Cf. Nasrallah, *Letters of Paul*, 10: “As feminist theorists often say, what you see depends upon where you stand.”

ments, movements, and arrangements within what is perceived as reasonable, it is only in the trans-local that the dynamic intentional force of (textual and architectural) structures may be fundamentally undermined, overturned, and ultimately replaced. It is, then, in the shifting of local temporal and spatial matrices that profoundly new meaning can not only be released from the rationality within which intentionality was born and formed, but also successfully influence other discursive worlds and convince its inhabitants. Ultimately, then, the reasonable has less to do with any inherent textual structures that were established to control interpretive movement than with the shifting rationalities within which a text becomes embedded, and which establishes new game rules for understanding and agreeing. For such a transition, indeed reinvention of a text to happen, the text needs to have attained some sort of authoritative status across space and time, beyond the meaning(s) extracted from the text; authority is, arguably, largely disconnected from meaning and develops through other hermeneutical processes related to application. The perceived usefulness of a text – regardless of any “inherent” meanings – across temporalities and spatialities thus constitutes the very definition of a classic/authoritative text.

Historically reconstructed understanding, which purpose is to fix meaning in a specific time period beyond the present, is thus in a way “unnatural” – not entirely unlike Mary Shelley’s monster – as it aims to move beyond meanings perceived to be reasonable in the culturally embedded here and now. Herein lies a crux. The paradigm for what is deemed reasonable in Western cultures circles back to and is nourished by the Enlightenment, which in turn sprang from the challenge of the Reformation concerning precisely what methods should be seen as authoritative in the search of (theological) truth. This is arguably the core issue at stake: history has, in our time, received an authoritative voice based on (secular) methodologies not controlled by doctrinal parameters, but reconstructing historical meanings by definition results in conclusions that simply do not fit contemporary matrices of rationality and reasonableness. The de-familiarization that is key to historical reconstruction must thus be met by the opposite hermeneutical strategy – accompanied by appropriate methodologies – in theology, philosophy, and politics: re-familiarization through re-contextualisation sensitive to the ultimate Otherness of the material claimed. What in past institutional settings was a single authoritative process merging the historical and the theological has, in Western cultures, been split up in two hermeneutical operations governed by distinct types of institutions; the historical and the (theo-)normative.

In other words, while claims about the past have always been part of both Jewish and Christian normative traditions, historical discourse as it developed and continues to develop after the Enlightenment is based on the idea and practice that history does not belong to and can therefore not be controlled by the normative, by denominational interests and goals. In this way, history is coun-

ter cultural. The modern success of historical reconstruction, measured through its perceived discursive legitimacy, has, however, led to its results often being accepted also within religious contexts, and so invested to some degree with normative value. It seems to me, though, as if such processes, in which historical and theological or ideological narratives merge, are sometimes initiated without deeper reflection on the fundamental differences between these respective discourses and their distinct systems of methods. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that throughout most of history the past has been understood as interwoven with aspects of divine agency and therefore also revelation, and thus in both theory and practice been perceived as owned by denominational players, whether they were a Paul, a Rashi, Ramban, or a Hugh of St. Victor; the reasonableness of the historical was (and in several interpretive collectives still is) interwoven with and controlled by socio-religious belonging. The orientation toward the past developed in the West since the Enlightenment cuts through and resists such ownership, however, and is therefore entirely dependent on that which we call academic freedom.¹¹ The emancipation of history from theology and politics may in turn energize and inspire change in the latter, since, to the degree historical voices are allowed in such conversations they are made dependent, at least partly, on listening to the Other.

The fundamental differences in reading practices between the historical, theological, and political does not mean, then, in my opinion, that the (reconstructed) past should not have a voice in contemporary meaning-making projects and other political processes. But it does mean that responsibility for whatever use Paul is put to in normative conversations resides with us, not with Paul. Paul, the historical, cannot solve our problems since he never lived them. Understanding Paul historically can, though, introduce Otherness into our theological, philosophical, and political projects, destabilizing our sense of the familiar and revitalizing our deliberations about the nature of truth; what it is and what it can do. But this requires that we move beyond the past when religious institutions made historical claims without historical method, and resist the contemporary inclination to theologize history without theological method.

As I think, then, of areas of potential use of the historical as reconstructed in this book, I can see none as urgent as that involving Jews and Christians across denominations engaged in dialogue taking place within the larger conversations between people of all faiths. As Krister Stendahl put it in his essay “Dethroning Biblical Imperialism in Theology” twenty-two years ago, defining “*the* most crucial challenge to the Christian theology in the years ahead: How to shape a Christian theology of religions, and how to find the proper role of biblical stud-

¹¹ To be sure, there are multiple other ways of reading academically and agreeing on the reasonable, which are also dependent on this freedom, but here I am concerned with historical discourses.

ies in that creative task.”¹² The second motivation behind the present book, beyond its historical foci on the first through the fifth centuries, and, indeed, beyond most of its pages, aligns with Stendahl’s, but wants to be equally clear about the need for such a journey on the part of Jews and Judaism, too, in relation to those whose religious thought and practice orbit the Christ-figure. In the words of Joshua Ezra Burns, I want to contribute to improving, through (non-denominational) historical discourse “the foundation of knowledge informing those vital conciliatory efforts” that take place today between Jews and Christians.¹³

Multiple scholars of Paul share this sense of urgency, and many – but not all – of them have come to identify their historical understanding of Paul as “within Judaism.” (Again, contemporary application and sense of urgency does not equal bias in historical reconstruction.¹⁴) As Laura Salah Nasrallah writes, “Paul’s letters, among other evidence, demonstrate Gentile interest in affiliating with Judaism. Reading Paul’s letters as evidence of and within the diverse Judaism of the first century CE allows us to put the brakes on Christian supersessionism, its dangerous outworkings still evident in anti-Semitism today.”¹⁵ Historical discourse and knowledge can never be enough in the struggle to root out the irrational, however, as both history and contemporary developments make us painfully aware of.¹⁶ This is why intensified discussion between historians, theologians, and philosophers, also on methodological and hermeneutical matters, has become so critical.¹⁷ As for Jewish/Christian dialogue specifically, historians need to understand the nature of theology, and theologians need to be able to decipher the historical, its methods and implications; its voice. The role of the historian in inter-religious dialogue is key, even if only as one player among many. For the labor to free the ancients from stereotypes, caricatures, and prejudice is discursively affiliated with and otherwise situationally at home

¹² Stendahl, “Dethroning,” 61 (emphasis original). See also Ch. 1, pp. 36–39.

¹³ Burns, *Christian Schism*, 17.

¹⁴ See discussion above, pp. 33–40. Cf. Amy-Jill Levine, “Concluding Reflections: What’s Next in the Study of Matthew?” in Runesson and Gurtner, *Matthew Within Judaism*, 449–466, here 465, who, reflecting on her own conclusion stated on the same page, asserts, “one can be biased and right” (465).

¹⁵ Nasrallah, *Letters of Paul*, 13.

¹⁶ It seems even Paul, when speaking in absolute terms, was aware of this state of things in his own time, as he aligns knowledge, together with prophesy and faithfulness (*pistis*), with nothingness when understood separately from the only posture he considered related to the ceaseless, the eternal: *agapē* (1 Cor 13:2; cf. vv. 8–9). Cf. Paula Fredriksen, “Divinity, Ethnicity, Identity: ‘Religion’ as a Political Category in Christian Antiquity,” in *Comprehending Antisemitism through the Ages: A Historical Perspective*. Vol. 3, ed. Armin Lange, Kerstin Mayerhofer, Dina Porat and Lawrence H. Schiffman (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 101–120, esp. 115–116.

¹⁷ One such initiative, bringing together scholars from different backgrounds and academic fields, is the new Society for Post-Supersessionist Theology, which held its inaugural meeting in 2018 (<https://www.spostst.org>).

in the environment spoken into existence through such dialogue. As Ross Shepard Kraemer puts it, “[c]areful historical work may not be sufficient to protect us from repeating our painful past, but its absence makes that even more likely.”¹⁸ History is a necessary but not sufficient condition for informed deliberations seeking the truth that deepens mutual respect, brings forth justice, and generates peace between people with intertwined histories, not only Jews and Christians, but also Samaritans and Muslims.

With this book, then, I wish to trigger questions and further discussion not only about the historical, but also about the nature of and relationship between history and the contemporary, about normativity, and about what it means more generally to bring ancient texts to life in the twenty-first century. I certainly have not answered all of these questions in these chapters; far from it. But I hope the discussions presented in the book, in extension to what has been said, will contribute to a renewed appreciation of the importance of such issues.

Ultimately, the present volume was born from asking over and over again, with Robert Wilken and many others, the question: “What does it mean that Christianity has a history?”¹⁹ What does it mean that Judaism has a history? And what does it mean that these histories are intertwined to the degree that the latter yielded texts, including the Pauline writings, considered sacred by the former and satisfying its need for an existential anchor, a textual hub around which a fundamental understanding of the world and the place of humans within it can revolve? As the present tense of these questions signals, answers are found neither in the past nor in the present, but in the creative conversation between them and the future, where opportunity and choice intersect and accountability is cultivated. For Wilken is right, there is no single trajectory of development from the depths of the past to the present, so that, if the disciple could descend into the abyss, they could bring back with them a formula for life, a detailed road map to follow.

The dialectic of past and present, tradition and innovation, permanence and change, runs through the whole history of Christianity. [...] Christians have, in their construction of the past, prized antiquity, stability, and permanence, but the historical record shows us quite another picture. [...] No matter how deeply we probe, how early we extend our search, we will never find an original faith. We can’t go home again, not only because the home we once knew has changed beyond recognition. No, there never was a home. From the beginning, Christians have been wanderers and pilgrims whose dream lies not in the past, but before them and all men – in the future.²⁰

¹⁸ Ross Shepard Kraemer, *The Mediterranean Diaspora in Late Antiquity: What Christianity Cost the Jews* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), xii.

¹⁹ Wilken, *Myth*, ix. Cf. the essays in C. T. McIntire, ed., *God, History, and Historians: An Anthology of Modern Christian Views of History* (New York: Oxford University press, 1977).

²⁰ Wilken, *Myth*, 185. See also discussion in Ch. 1.

The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of Judaism. What we speak into being is closer to us than any origin story is able to conjure up. As Rudolf Bultmann argued, “[h]istorical phenomena are not what they are in pure isolation, but only in relation to the future for which they have importance.”²¹ The real question is, then, for which future Paul, a first-century apocalyptically oriented Apostolic Jew, is important?

²¹ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology* (New York: Harper, 1957), 120.

List of Original Publications

The following chapters have been based on previously published studies, the findings of which have been revised and updated, and I gratefully acknowledge the permission of the publishers to include this material here:

Chapter 2: “Particularistic Judaism and Universalistic Christianity? Some Critical Remarks on Terminology and Theology,” *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism*, 1 (2000) 120–44; Chapter 3: “Was there a Christian Mission Before the Fourth Century? Problematizing Common Ideas About Early Christianity and the Beginnings of Modern Mission.” Pages 205–247 in *The Making of Christianity: Conflicts, Contacts, and Constructions*. Edited by Magnus Zetterholm and Samuel Byrskog. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012; Chapter 4: The Question of Terminology: The Architecture of Contemporary Discussions on Paul.” Pages 53–77 in *Paul Within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*. Edited by Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015; Chapter 5: “Entering a Synagogue with Paul: First Century Torah Observance.” Pages 11–26 in *Torah Ethics and Early Christian Identity*. Edited by Susan J. Wendel and David M. Miller. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016; Chapter 6: “Men, Women, and Power in Ancient Society and the Early Jesus Movement.” Pages 147–163 in *Jesus, the New Testament, and Christian Origins: Perspectives, Methods, Meanings*. Edited by Dieter Mitternacht and Anders Runesson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021; Chapter 7: “Placing Paul: Institutional Structures and Theological Strategy in the World of the Early Christ-believers,” *SEÅ* 80 (2015) 43–67; Chapter 8: “Paul’s Rule in All the Ekklēsiai (1 Cor 7:17–24).” Pages 214–223 in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations*. Edited by David J. Rudolph and Joel Willits. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013; Chapter 9: “Paul and the Joining of the Ways: Ordering the Eschaton, Preparing for Judgment.” Pages 25–48 in *Israel and the Nations: Paul’s Gospel in the Context of Jewish Expectation*. Edited by František Ábel. Lanham: Lexington/Fortress Academic, 2021; Chapter 10: “Jewish and Christian Interaction from the First to the Fifth Centuries.” Pages 244–264 in *The Early Christian World*. Second edition. Edited by Philip F. Esler. London: Routledge, 2017; Chapter 11: “Inventing Christian Identity: Paul, Ignatius, and Theodosius I.” Pages 59–92 in *Exploring Early Christian Identity*. Edited by Bengt Holmberg. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008; Chapter 12: “The Rise of Normative Judaism and Christianity: The Role of Politics in

the Formation of ‘Religion’ in Late Antiquity,” *Patristica Nordica Annularia* 30 (2015), 57–76.

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