

οἱ πιστεύοντες: An Early Christ-Group Self-Designation and Paul's Rhetoric of Faith

RYAN S. SCHELLENBERG

*Methodist Theological School in Ohio, 3081 Columbus Pike, Delaware, OH 43015,
USA. Email: rschellenberg@mtso.edu*

Although it is widely recognised that οἱ πιστεύοντες was a self-designation of the early Christ groups, this is not reflected in scholarship on Romans and Galatians, where the participle is usually taken as a generic substantive. Such a rendering obscures the force of Paul's rhetoric, which presupposes the status of οἱ πιστεύοντες as a shared self-designation and mobilises it in an effort to naturalise Paul's claims regarding the exclusive justificatory value of his addressees' πίστις. Accordingly, in Rom 3.22 and Gal 3.22, where οἱ πιστεύοντες appears in close connection with πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, it is unlikely that the latter phrase designates Christ's own faithfulness.

Keywords: believers, faith, *pistis Christou*, subjective genitive, Paul

That οἱ πιστεύοντες was a self-designation of the early Christ groups is not disputed. In the judgement of James Dunn, 'believers' was in fact 'the first collective term to be used of the emergent community'.¹ Though perhaps not verifiable, the claim is plausible enough. In 1 Thessalonians, generally deemed the earliest extant text to derive from the nascent movement, Paul can speak without pause of 'all the believers (πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν) in Macedonia and Achaia' (1.7); twice he designates his addressees simply 'you believers' (ὕμῖν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν, 2.10, 13). As Theresa Morgan observes, this use of οἱ πιστεύοντες 'without introduction and without an object' is intelligible only if the phrase 'is understood as referring, distinctively and designatively, to Christians'.²

1 J. D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem* (Christianity in the Making 2; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 9; so also C. Spicq, *Vie chrétienne et pèlerinage selon le Nouveau Testament* (LD 71; Paris: Cerf, 1972) 15–19.

2 T. Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 235; likewise P. Trebilco, 33

The denominative use of οἱ πιστεύοντες and its functional equivalent οἱ πιστοί has recently been examined by Morgan as well as by Paul Trebilco.³ I need not replicate their work here. The burden of this short study is rather to consider its implications for understanding Paul's πίστις rhetoric in Romans and Galatians – rhetoric, I will argue, that presupposes and seeks to mobilise his addressees' prior investment in faith(fulness) as a distinguishing characteristic and identity marker. This use of οἱ πιστεύοντες has implications too, we will see, for the ongoing debate regarding πίστις (Ἰησοῦ) Χριστοῦ in the letters of Paul. These two phrases – οἱ πιστεύοντες and πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ – appear in close connection both in Gal 3.22 and in Rom 3.22. The status of the former phrase as a self-designation familiar to Paul's audience is, I suggest, central to the force of Paul's rhetoric in these passages and explains their apparent redundancy. It also makes a subjective-genitive reading of πίστις Χριστοῦ difficult to sustain.

1. A Curious Discrepancy

The substantive participle οἱ πιστεύοντες appears in its plural form ten times in the undisputed letters of Paul.⁴ Six of these occurrences are in 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians; the NRSV renders all but one of these nominally – 'the believers' (1 Cor 14.22 bis; 1 Thess 1.7; 2.10, 13).⁵ Strikingly, it translates none of the four occurrences of the phrase in Romans and Galatians this way, employing instead, in each case, a relative clause: 'those who believe' (Gal 3.22; cf. Rom 4.24); or, for πάντες οἱ πιστεύοντες, 'all who believe' (Rom 3.22; 4.11).⁶

This curious pattern is replicated in scholarship on these two sets of letters. Occurrences of the phrase in 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians are only

Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 79–80, 90.

3 Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 234–41; Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity*, 68–121.

4 The singular participle appears five additional times, only in Romans (1.16; 4.5; 9.33; 10.4, 11). Since in my judgement it cannot decisively be demonstrated that the singular was used as a self-designation by Paul or others in the mid-first century, I exclude these from my analysis. It is suggestive here that in 1 Corinthians, Paul sets the plural οἱ πιστεύοντες in opposition to οἱ ἄπιστοι (14.11) but consistently chooses ἀδελφός or ἀδελφή, not ὁ πιστεύων, when contrasting an individual believer with these same ἄπιστοι (6.6; 7.12, 14, 15). On the more varied usage in Acts, which nevertheless always retains a collective sense, see Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity*, 104.

5 The exception is 1 Cor 1.21, where the NRSV has 'those who believe'.

6 As demonstrated by 1 Thess 1.7, where the NRSV has 'all the believers', the presence of πᾶς is not the determining factor here, although it is true that πᾶς is often used with an articular substantive participle when that participle has a generic meaning. See BDF §413(2).

occasionally deemed worthy of comment; still, interpreters consistently take οἱ πιστεύοντες in these letters denominatively.⁷ According to Abraham Malherbe, '[t]he present participle is substantival and became a common way to describe Christians.'⁸ Likewise, Raymond Collins asserts: "Those whom we call Christians Paul calls "believers".⁹ This reading is, so far as I can determine, uncontested.

When, however, one comes to Romans and Galatians – whether the commentaries or the voluminous literature on πίστις – one finds almost no reference to the status of οἱ πιστεύοντες as a self-designation. It is not that this exegetical possibility is raised and then dismissed. It is simply not entertained. Treatments of Rom 3.22 are exemplary. Commentators seldom use the noun 'believers' – a term which, despite its other faults as a translation, does at least have the merit of suggesting a group self-designation.¹⁰ Instead, πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας is generally translated with a relative clause: 'all who have faith';¹¹ 'all who believe';¹² 'alle, die glauben'.¹³ Even Dunn, who, as we have seen, is well aware of the use of οἱ πιστεύοντες as a self-designation and, exceptionally, notes it in his treatment

- 7 Among the many who render the phrase 'the believers' without comment are H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 242; J. A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 32; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) 521. Cf. M. Dibelius, *An die Thessalonicher 1–II; an die Philipper* (HNT 11; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1937³) 4–5, 8–9.
- 8 A. J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 32B; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 116.
- 9 R. F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (SP 7; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999) 105. Likewise B. Rigaux, *Saint Paul: Les épîtres aux Thessaloniciens* (EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1956) 385; E. Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (BNTC; London: Black, 1972) 105.
- 10 As often noted, 'believe' gives the misleading impression that πιστεύω chiefly denotes cognitive assent. See e.g. C. Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 82.
- 11 R. Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 278.
- 12 C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; ICC 32; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975⁶) 1.203; J. A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993) 346; R. N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016) 413.
- 13 M. Wolter, *Der Brief an die Römer* (Röm 1–8) (EKKNT 6/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener/Ostfildern: Patmos, 2014) 250. Note, though, that 'Glaubenden' and 'Gläubigen' are somewhat more common in German commentary on these passages than 'believers' is in English, perhaps because these terms remain cognate with 'Glaube'. E.g. P. Stuhlmacher, *Der Brief an die Römer* (NTD 6; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989¹⁴) 57; U. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (Röm 1–5) (EKKNT 6/1; Zürich: Benziger/Neukirchener-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978) 187; E. Lohse, *Der Brief an die Römer* (KEK 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003¹⁵) 131. On German- vs English-speakers' proclivities in this regard, see F. Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015²) xlii–xliii.

of this verse, renders πάντες οἱ πιστεύοντες here ‘all who believe’.¹⁴ More to the point, there is no suggestion, in Dunn or elsewhere, that Paul’s use of a shared term of self-reference might be of significance for understanding the rhetoric of these passages.¹⁵ In sum, what is taken for granted in exegesis of 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians is all but forgotten in scholarship on Romans and Galatians.

One need not look far for the cause of this discrepancy. As noted above, the manner in which Paul uses οἱ πιστεύοντες in 1 Thessalonians requires us to assume that the phrase was already familiar to Paul’s addressees: it appears without explanation and, importantly, in contexts where no particular argumentative weight rests on the πίστις of these πιστεύοντες (1.7; 2.10, 13). The same can be said of its two occurrences in 1 Corinthians (1.21; 14.22). Particularly striking is 14.22, where οἱ πιστεύοντες is set in opposition to οἱ ἄπιστοι – evidently a familiar designation for those outside the assembly (cf. 6.6; 7.12–15; 10.27).¹⁶ Again, there is no particular emphasis here on the faith (or faithlessness) of those so designated. Paul is simply naming insiders and outsiders.

Not so in Galatians and Romans. Here the phrase invariably occurs in contexts where πίστις is indeed of special importance to Paul’s argument. In Rom 3.22 and Gal 3.22, οἱ πιστεύοντες are the beneficiaries of a righteousness that comes by πίστις and not by the law (cf. Rom 4.5; 9.32–3; 10.4). In Rom 4.11, οἱ πιστεύοντες are righteous descendants of Abraham, who himself was characterised by τῆς δικαιοσύνης τῆς πίστεως even before he was circumcised. In 4.24, the same righteousness reckoned to Abraham on account of his πίστις is reckoned to ‘the believers’ (τοῖς πιστεύουσιν). Note that each of these occurrences is readily explicable without appeal to the status of the phrase as a self-designation: Paul simply refers, one might assume, to the decisive characteristic of those who benefit from God’s newly revealed righteousness – namely, their ‘faith’. Indeed, were there no other evidence that the phrase functioned as a self-designation, one could hardly make a case for such usage on the basis of these texts alone.

As we have seen, however, there is other evidence. Given the early and unselfconscious use of the phrase by Paul, as well as its widespread use in later Christian texts (including those of Roman provenance), there is no reason to doubt that Paul’s Galatian and Roman addressees were familiar with its use as a self-designation.¹⁷ Thus, although interpreters are right to intuit that

14 J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (WBC 38A; Dallas: Word, 1988) 167; cf. *idem*, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 384.

15 A limited exception here is K. F. Ulrichs, *Christusglaube: Studien zum Syntagma πίστις Χριστοῦ und zum paulinischen Verständnis von Glaube und Rechtfertigung* (WUNT 11/227; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007) 37, 96, 142, 150, 176. See below for further discussion.

16 Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 236; Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity*, 82–3.

17 Of the occurrences noted by Trebilco, the following are particularly compelling as instances of denominative use: Mark 9.42; 16.17; Acts 2.44; 4.32; 5.14; 15.5; 18.27; 19.18; 21.20, 25; Eph 1.19;

οἱ πιστεύοντες functions differently in these two sets of letters, the difference is not that in Galatians and Romans the phrase lacks denominative force. What has changed here is rather that in Galatians and Romans, unlike in 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians, Paul has burdened it with argumentative weight.

Consider Rom 4.24. Paul has, in the preceding verses, been describing the remarkable πίστις of Abraham (vv. 16–22) – his steadfast confidence in God’s own faithfulness.¹⁸ Despite the ‘already deadness’ of his own body (τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σῶμα [ἤδη] νεκρωμένον) and the corresponding νέκρωσις of Sarah’s womb (v. 19), Abraham maintained his unwavering faith in the God who makes the dead alive (θεοῦ τοῦ ζωοποιούντος τοὺς νεκρούς, v. 17). Paul will go on to assert that his Roman addressees too have faith in a God who brings life from the dead – an allusion, of course, to the resurrection of Jesus – and that they too are thus reckoned righteous (vv. 23–5). The hinge in his argument here is a Janus-faced exegesis of Gen 15.6, the citation of which concludes his story of Abraham and simultaneously begins his account of the Romans’ justification. Insofar as it is the climax of his Abraham story, Paul reads the text literally: Abraham’s πίστις ‘was reckoned to him as righteousness’ (v. 22). But, as is his wont, he finds in these words a more immediately pertinent (viz. eschatological) referent too:¹⁹

Now it was not written for his sake only that ‘it was reckoned to him’, but also for us (ἡμῶς), to whom it is about to be reckoned – the believers (τοῖς πιστεύουσιν) in the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead (ἐκ νεκρῶν). (Rom 4.23–4)

Again, if one did not already know that οἱ πιστεύοντες was a self-designation, nothing in the use of the phrase here would invite such a reading. Once it is so

Heb 4.3; 1 Pet 2.7; Herm. Sim. 8.3.3 (69.3); 9.19.1 (96.1); 9.19.2 (96.2); 9.20.1 (97.1); 9.21.1 (98.1); 9.22.1 (99.1); 9.23.1 (100.1); 9.24.1 (101.1); 9.25.1 (102.1); 9.26.1 (103.1); 9.27.1 (104.1); 9.28.1 (105.1); 9.29.1 (106.1); 9.30.2 (107.2). All are absolute uses of the plural substantive participle, in the present, aorist or perfect. Cf. R. Bultmann, ‘πιστεύω κτλ.’, *TDNT* vi.214; BDAG s.v. 2.b.

18 As Theresa Morgan observes, ‘the quality which most naturally evokes *pistis* is *pistis* itself’. *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 217. Cf. F. G. Downing, ‘Ambiguity, Ancient Semantics, and Faith’, *NTS* 56 (2010) 139–62, at 156–8.

19 Cf. B. Schliesser, *Abraham’s Faith in Romans 4: Paul’s Concept of Faith in Light of the History of Reception of Genesis 15:6* (WUNT 11/224; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007) 387–8. On Paul’s eschatological hermeneutic more generally, see D.-A. Koch, *Die Schrift als Zeuge des Evangeliums: Untersuchungen zur Verwendung und zum Verständnis der Schrift bei Paulus* (BHT 69; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986) 315–21; R. B. Hays, ‘The Conversion of the Imagination: Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians’, *NTS* 45 (1999) 391–412, at 398–402; H. Wendt, ‘Galatians 3:1 as an Allusion to Textual Prophecy’, *JBL* 135 (2016) 369–89, at 377–8, 386–7.

recognised, however, its rhetorical force becomes clear. By appealing to a shared self-designation that echoes the language of Gen 15.6, Paul naturalises his eschatological exegesis of the text, verifying for his addressees its applicability. It is not only that he finds the faith of his Roman addressees prefigured in the passage; he all but finds them named there (cf. Rom 4.3–5): Abraham ‘believed’; they are ‘believers’.²⁰ This is just the sort of verbal coincidence that Paul found exegetically productive. If his addressees share his sensitivities in this regard, then it becomes difficult for them to quibble with his conclusion (i.e. δικαιωθέντες ... ἐκ πίστεως, Rom 5.1) – that is, at least so long as they wish to maintain this self-identification.

2. οἱ πιστεύοντες and the πίστις Χριστοῦ Debate

Among the most frequently invoked arguments in favour of the subjective rendering of πίστις Χριστοῦ, wherein the phrase designates Christ’s own faithfulness, is the redundancy that seems to result from taking Χριστοῦ as a genitive of object.²¹ In four key passages (Gal 2.16; 3.22; Rom 3.22; Phil 3.9; cf. Rom 1.17), Paul uses forms of πίστις and πιστεύω twice or even three times in a single sentence, with πίστις (Ἰησοῦ) Χριστοῦ as one instance in each. Why, it has been asked, should Paul repeat himself in this way? The solution, for many, has been a division of labour among the various πιστ- terms, with verbal forms (and ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει in Phil 3.9) referring to the faith of the believer and πίστις (Ἰησοῦ) Χριστοῦ to the complementary faithfulness of Christ. Richard Hays has given this reading its classic formulation: ‘those who receive life “out of” Christ’s faith in turn trust in him ... and live their lives also in a manner characterized by faith’.²²

Hays’s conviction has not, of course, settled the matter. As subsequent scholarship has demonstrated amply, one interpreter’s redundancy is another’s emphatic repetition.²³ Yet what appears to have escaped notice here is that in two of these passages the putative redundancy in fact results from Paul’s use in close proximity to πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ of οἱ πιστεύοντες, a substantive participle that, as we have seen, his addressees will have recognised as a shared self-designation:

20 Cf. Ulrichs, *Christusglaube*, 205.

21 For summary and bibliography, see R. B. Matlock, ‘The Rhetoric of πίστις in Paul: Galatians 2:16, 3:22, Romans 3:22, and Philippians 3:9’, *JSNT* 30 (2007) 173–203, at 174–6; M. C. Easter, ‘The *Pistis Christou* Debate: Main Arguments and Responses in Summary’, *CurBR* 9 (2010) 33–47, at 38–9. Exemplary for our purposes is L. T. Johnson, ‘Rom 3:21–26 and the Faith of Jesus’, *CBQ* 44 (1982) 77–90, at 79: ‘Why should Paul add *eis pantas tous pisteuontas* [in Rom 3.22], if he has just said, “through faith in Jesus Christ”?’

22 R. B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11* (SBLDS 56; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1983) 202. Cf. Longenecker, *Romans*, 415.

23 See esp. Matlock, ‘The Rhetoric of πίστις’; Ulrichs, *Christusglaube*, 37–41.

But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ for πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας. (Rom 3.21–2, NRSV)

Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law. But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ might be given τοῖς πιστεύουσιν. (Gal 3.21–2, NRSV)

As K. F. Ulrichs has seen (uniquely, so far as I am aware), the participle here functions not to specify a generic type – ‘those who have faith’ – but rather to name the letters’ addressees: οἱ πιστεύοντες.²⁴ The repetition of πιστ- items in these passages is not, then, merely redundant, nor even simply emphatic: ‘[I]st hier keineswegs tautologisch formuliert, insofern Paulus πίστις und οἱ πιστεύοντες als genau definierte Begriffe verwendet, die nicht einfach wegen des gemeinsamen Stammes πιστ- nivelliert werden können.’²⁵

This is surely correct. And yet Ulrichs stops short, I think, of fully appreciating the rhetorical force of the appellation here. Paul is not just naming his addressees; he is using the name of his addressees as leverage, attempting to clinch his argument by invoking their own self-identification and thus their own sense of themselves as ‘the faith-full’.²⁶

In each passage, Paul asserts that righteousness comes not ἐκ νόμου, but ἐκ/διὰ πίστεως. To bolster his argument, he invokes a familiar term, a self-designation already adopted by his addressees and, crucially, one that echoes his key term πίστις – as if to say: ‘Our righteousness is by faith; it is not for nothing that we are called “the faith-full”.’ In short, Paul seeks to naturalise his claim regarding the exclusive justificatory value of πίστις by exploiting that word’s etymological connection with an uncontroversial term of self-reference, and, what is more, a term that encapsulates a valued sense of shared identity, that distinguishes ‘us’ (οἱ πιστεύοντες) from ‘them’ (οἱ ἄπιστοι).²⁷ As in Rom 4.24, here too Paul’s addressees can only quarrel with his conclusion by disavowing what has become a key component of their group identity.

As a rhetorical move, this repetition would be especially effective if the πίστις in the former phrase (πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) were the same as – or, at least,

²⁴ Ulrichs, *Christusglaube*, 96, 176.

²⁵ Ulrichs, *Christusglaube*, 176.

²⁶ As Morgan notes, the fact that it became the functional equivalent of the substantive adjective οἱ πιστοί strongly suggests that οἱ πιστεύοντες was understood to connote not in the first place belief but rather trust and/or faithfulness. Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 240.

²⁷ Cf. Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity*, 118–20; Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 238–40 and *passim*.

could be conflated with – the πίστις implied in the latter (οἱ πιστεύοντες). The self-designation οἱ πιστεύοντες is in the active voice and thus clearly refers to ‘faith’ exercised by Paul’s addressees. Accordingly, one would expect his addressees also be to the subject of the implied verbal action in the phrase πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. To say ‘You are called οἱ πιστεύοντες, after all!’ makes a considerably stronger impression if Paul has been referring to his addressees’ πίστις than if he has been referring to Christ’s. Whether this be deemed a decisive point for the interpretation of the passages or only a suggestive one will depend on the degree of rhetorical astuteness one is in the habit of attributing to Paul.

What, then, of πίστις Χριστοῦ? I can hardly render a full verdict on the question in this short study. Still, if we are correct to infer from the phrase’s rhetorical connection with οἱ πιστεύοντες that this πίστις is exercised by Paul’s addressees, then clearly we do not have here a subjective genitive. It remains possible to construe Χριστοῦ as the object of πίστις – ‘faith in Christ’. Although other objections remain – not least the relative oddity of using the genitive to indicate the object of πίστις,²⁸ as well as the fact that Paul generally describes believers as putting their faith in God, not in Christ²⁹ – advocates of this reading need not be troubled by the seeming redundancy of Rom 3.22 and Gal 3.22. (Whether Gal 2.16 and Phil 3.9 are redundant or emphatic will no doubt continue to be disputed.)

Still, given the difficulties that attend both objective and subjective interpretations, I do think it is worth entertaining another possibility, namely, that the genitive Χριστοῦ designates neither the subject of the verbal action implied in the term πίστις nor its object, but otherwise specifies that the πίστις in question is of the sort that pertains to Christ.³⁰ It is, after all, only the conventions of the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate that suggest a binary conception of the force of the Greek genitive.³¹ When Paul speaks in Phil 1.27 of ‘the faith of the gospel’ (τῇ πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου), commentators may have difficulty specifying with precision what the genitive implies, but do not find themselves constrained to

28 G. Howard, ‘The “Faith of Christ”’, *ExpTim* 85 (1974) 212–15, at 212–13; though see R. B. Matlock, ‘Detheologizing the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate: Cautionary Remarks from a Lexical Semantic Perspective’, *NovT* 42 (2000) 1–23, at 17–20.

29 S. K. Williams, ‘Again *Pistis Christou*’, *CBQ* 49 (1987) 431–47, at 434–5.

30 For a brief review of scholarship that advocates a ‘third view’, see P. M. Sprinkle, ‘Πίστις Χριστοῦ as an Eschatological Event’, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (ed. M. F. Bird and P. M. Sprinkle; Milton Keynes: Paternoster/Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009) 165–84. Notice that this is a proposal quite distinct from the suggestion that the genitive suggests both the faith of the believer and Christ’s corresponding faithfulness. Cf. Downing, ‘Ambiguity, Ancient Semantics, and Faith’, 139–41, 160.

31 Cf. Ulrichs, *Christusglaube*, 19–23. On the genitive in general, still instructive is A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919³) 493–4.

construe ‘the gospel’ as either the subject or the object of ‘faith’.³² In fact, the best rendering here may be the one that least succumbs to the temptation to resolve artificially the inherent vagueness of the construction, which perhaps indicates nothing more specific or profound than that the πίστις in question is the kind associated with ‘the gospel’.

And perhaps this is all that πίστις Χριστοῦ means too. As Benjamin Schliesser has seen, particularly suggestive for understanding what Paul means by the phrase is the curious language of Gal 3.23–6, where Paul recalls a time before the ‘coming’ of faith (πρὸ τοῦ δὲ ἐλθεῖν τὴν πίστιν) and speaks of its recent ‘revelation’ (ἀποκαλυφθῆναι) as a new mode of relating to God.³³ This is just how Paul speaks too of the coming of Christ and the implications thereof (3.19, 24; 4.4–7).³⁴ We might do best, then, to conclude that what makes πίστις specifically πίστις Χριστοῦ for Paul is simply that, as a new possibility for divine–human accord, it arrives in consort with and as a consequence of Christ (cf. Rom 3.21–6; 5.1–2).

3. Conclusion

Distinctive though the appellation οἱ πιστεύοντες may be, the early Christ groups were by no means unique in cultivating faith/fidelity as both a prized virtue and a key marker of group identity. Oaths of loyalty – whether to the emperor or the Republic, one’s army commander or a clandestine cult – were powerful social forces, for they harnessed and sacralised a widely shared moral commitment to loyalty, fidelity and honour.³⁵ When, therefore, the early Christ groups professed their allegiance to Jesus as κύριος (Rom 10.9; 1 Cor 12.3), referred to one another as brethren, and sealed their sacred covenant with a blood ritual (1 Cor 11.25; cf. Rom 3.25), they were communicating their πίστις in a recognisable idiom.³⁶ By self-identifying as οἱ πιστεύοντες, they were also staking their honour on it. Once committed, they must ‘stand firm in the faith’ (1 Cor 16.13; cf. Phil 1.27) or else expose themselves as fickle and faithless.

32 E.g. G. D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 167: ‘appositional genitive’; J.-N. Aletti, *Saint Paul: Épître aux Philippiens* (EBib 2/55; Paris: Gabalda, 2005) 105–6: ‘généatif d’origine’, ‘généatif objectif’ or ‘généatif d’apposition ou épexégétique’.

33 B. Schliesser, ‘“Christ-Faith” as an Eschatological Event (Galatians 3.23–26): A “Third View” on πίστις Χριστοῦ’, *JSNT* 38 (2016) 277–300. And see P. Oakes, ‘Pistis as Relational Way of Life in Galatians’, *JSNT* 40 (2018) 255–75, at 265, 271–2.

34 Schliesser, ‘“Christ-Faith” as an Eschatological Event’, 285; Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 230–1.

35 See C. A. Barton and D. Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016) 74–9. And, more generally, Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 36–175.

36 For blood oaths, see e.g. Sallust, *Cat.* 22, with Barton and Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion*, 75–9.

Paul's rhetoric in Romans and Galatians presupposes, I have argued, his addressees' prior investment in πίστις as a distinguishing characteristic and group-identity marker. This is most explicit when Paul invokes his addressees' self-designation as οἱ πιστεύοντες. But it is worth considering how it bears on Paul's rhetoric of faith more generally as well. What is novel for his Galatian addressees, for example, is not Paul's emphasis on faith, but rather his assertion that if faith is the grounds of righteousness, then gentile 'works of law' are not only extraneous but retrograde. Paul knows that his addressees consider themselves 'the faith-full'. And so, to dissuade them from gentile circumcision, he seeks to portray the practice not only as opposed to faith (Gal 2.20b–21; 3.11; 5.2–6) but also as fundamentally faithless – even, indeed, an act of bad faith, a feeble failure to stand firm (1.6; 4.12–20; 5.7–12; 6.12). This is not, Paul implies, behaviour worthy of οἱ πιστεύοντες.