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Judaean and Christ-Follower Identities: Grounds for a Distinction

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In *NTS* 62.3 (July 2016) David Horrell argued that certain passages in 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Peter 3 showed 'ethnicising' traits among the early Christians. He set this result against an alleged trend in scholarship that would distinguish and disparage a closed ethnic Judaism in relation to a new spiritual-universal Christianity. The present authors' work was proffered as representative of this trend, even though no evidence was cited for such a connection and their work moves in a very different direction. Leaving aside Horrell's interpretation of the New Testament passages for reasons of space, this article takes up the larger question of Judaean and Christ-movement identities by reconsidering the position of *Ioudaioi* and Christ-followers in the early Roman Empire. Using different but convergent (social-scientific and historical-philological) methods, we find that *ethnos*-language was everywhere applied to the Judaeans, that this reflected normalcy and exchange with the world, and that Judaeans thus met the criteria of an ethnic group. Early Christians had no such recognised place. Their voluntary associations largely rejected *ethnos*- and *polis*-commitment or identity. Neither Judaean openness to the world nor Christian alienation supports the position that Horrell attributes to us.

Keywords: ancient Judaism, Christian origins, *ethnos*, ethnic group, ethnicise, voluntary association, Paul, Pliny the Younger, Minucius Felix, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Celsus, Porphyry, Julian

In *NTS* 62.3 (July 2016) David Horrell presented an elegant study of selected phrases in 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Peter 3 that show, he argued, 'ethnicising' tendencies among early Christians. The study's elegance comes in part from the ease with which Horrell changes the level of zoom: from a remote perspective on large questions of our world – ethnic identity, neo-liberalism and ingrained

Christian bias against Judaism – to a minute analysis of these New Testament phrases and then back to the big issues. Half of the study discusses the global stakes of Horrell's exegesis, in debate with scholars who allegedly maintain a quasi-Marcionite (this is our label) dichotomy between a merely physical, local Judaism and a transcendent, spiritual Christianity.

Between those exospheric questions and the tropospheric exegesis of Paul and Peter, so to speak, Horrell finds an unwholesome mesosphere in New Testament scholarship. This consists of 'a recurring and persistent depiction', 'namely a dichotomy between an ethnically particular Judaism and a trans-ethnic, inclusive, universal Christianity'.[1] Invoking the need for 'critical vigilance' against such a dichotomy, given the appalling history of Jewish–Christian relations, Horrell means to unravel it. He offers his readings of 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Peter 3 as evidence for the 'ethnic reasoning' that he and others have found in early Christian texts.[2] A brief survey of ethnicity theory in conjunction with the exegesis leads him to posit the constructed nature of ethnicity and, hence, the ever-present possibility of new ethnic formations. This encourages him to find in 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Peter 3 ethnic groups in the making.

Horrell stresses that he is not arguing simplistically that early Christianity was ethnic, but rather that everything was 'fuzzy and overlapping' and complex, and that this situation renders any clear category distinctions doubtful.[3] The fuzziness does not inhibit him, however, from concluding forcefully:

> By finding in earliest Christianity the paradigm of supposedly trans-ethnic inclusion, such scholarship, against its explicitly tolerant and ecumenical intentions, may both reflect and legitimate the assumed superiority of a Christian model of 'tolerant' social inclusion promoted in secularised form – and often with 'intolerant' force – by the globally powerful countries of the white Christian West.[4]

Had Horrell confined his argument to 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Peter 3, we would not have responded. But we were amazed to find *our* publications completing a short list of 'landmarks', from F. C. Baur through James Dunn and N. T. Wright, which supposedly perpetuate 'this dichotomy'. Horrell's proposal that no matter what we have actually argued, our investigations can 'both reflect and legitimate a Christian model' of superiority over ethnic Judaism, is deeply unsettling. Evidently communication has failed. We have indeed found that observers in antiquity knew Judaeans and Christ-followers to be two different kinds of group, but this difference was not in the Christians' favour. We cannot accept

1 D. G. Horrell, 'Ethnicisation, Marriage and Early Christian Identity: Critical Reflections on 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Peter 3 and Modern New Testament Scholarship', *NTS* 62 (2016) 439–60, at 441.
2 Horrell, 'Ethnicisation', 443–4.
3 Horrell, 'Ethnicisation', 458.
4 Horrell, 'Ethnicisation', 460.

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that to make any such distinction, on sound historical grounds, is to play with the fire of global white exploitation. Our historical research gives no consolation to supersessionist or any other anti-Jewish views.[5]

Our actual biases, to the extent we are aware of them, are along the following lines. If we may take as a reference point Mason's scheme of history's bifurcation during the nineteenth century into social/social-scientific (aggregative, model-, type- and pattern-seeking) and humanistic (historicist, particularist, philological) streams,[6] Esler's boat is in the former and Mason's in the latter. We are both concerned with how things actually were two thousand years ago, but we ask different kinds of questions and use different criteria to answer them.

Since readers may easily consult our earlier work, we have not recycled it here.[7] Instead we re-examine in our different ways the two sides of the dichotomy that Horrell laments: Judaean vis-à-vis Christ-follower identities. To keep the article within manageable limits, we respond on this issue alone, not to his ethnicising interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Peter 3. Suffice it to say that we understand both passages to be preoccupied with the imminent overturning of this world and the creation of a new one, a frame that would be hard to square with an ethnicising Christ-movement settling in to the world.

We hope that this investigation will both respond to Horrell and contribute to the larger discussion about 'ethnic reasoning' in ancient Christianity, which he also mentions.[8] Our questions, in the works that Horrell cites, are not theological – though Esler pursues theological interests elsewhere. They are not about the 'essential' nature of Christianity or Judaism, in the mind of God or a social scientist. They

5 For a recent attack by one of us on supersessionism, see P. F. Esler, 'Giving the Kingdom to an *Ethnos* That Will Bear its Fruit: Ethnic and Christ-Movement Identities in Matthew', *In the Fullness of Time: Essays on Christology, Creation and Eschatology in Honor of Richard Bauckham* (ed. D. M. Gurtner, G. Macaskill and J. T. Pennington; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016) 177–96, at 196.

6 S. Mason, *Orientation to the History of Roman Judaea* (Cascade Series; Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2016).

7 For a sample, see P. F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); *idem*, 'From *Ioudaioi* to Children of God: The Development of a Non-Ethnic Group Identity in the Gospel of John', *In Other Words: Essays on Social Science Methods and the New Testament in Honor of Jerome H. Neyrey* (ed. A. C. Hagedorn, Z. A. Crook and E. Stewart; Social World of Biblical Antiquity, Second Series, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007) 106–37; S. Mason, 'Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History', *JSJ* 38 (2007) 457–512.

8 E.g. D. K. Buell, *Why This New Race? Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); C. Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); L. L. Sechrest, *A Former Jew: Paul and the Dialectics of Race* (LNTS; London: T & T Clark, 2009); C. W. Concannon, *'When You Were Gentiles': Specters of Ethnicity in Roman Corinth and Paul's Corinthian Correspondence* (Synkrisis; New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2014).

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are about the real conditions that existed two millennia ago. Mason tends to ask about ancient discourse, Esler about fruitful social-scientific models, but we agree in seeking to understand an alien ancient landscape. It should quickly become clear why our work could not promote a notion of Christian sublimity over against a merely ethnic Judaism.

1. The Judaean *Ethnos*: Particular but not Particularist

Before the Christians' rise, Judaeans were renowned for their homeland, for their mother-*polis* Jerusalem as the jewel of the Orient (Pliny, *HN* 5.70), for their close ties with Julio-Claudian imperial power, for their wars from 66 to 136 CE, and for their flourishing, diverse and widespread civilisation. These associations continued long after Jerusalem's destruction.

1.1 *Social-Scientific Considerations*

From a social-scientific viewpoint, Judaeans were thus an ethnic group. Current understanding of ethnic identity is still indebted to anthropologist Fredrik Barth, who proposed that an ethnic group's sense of itself *as a group* came first, with the members selecting (changing) cultural features (as a boundary) to separate themselves from other groups.[9] So understood, ethnicity was a field of ascription and identification used by certain groups to organise their relationships with other groups. But what made a group *ethnic*? Barth suggested that an ascription of someone to a social category is ethnic in character 'when it classifies a person in terms of his basic, most general identity, *presumptively determined by his origin and background*'.[10] Yet there are more indicators of ethnic identity than this, and John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith have suggested the following:

(a) a common proper name to identify the group;
(b) a myth of common ancestry;
(c) a shared history or shared memories of a common past, including heroes, events and their commemoration;
(d) a common culture, embracing such things as customs, language and religion;
(e) a link with a homeland, either through actual occupation or by symbolic attachment to the ancestral land, as with diaspora peoples; and
(f) a sense of communal solidarity.[11]

9 F. Barth, 'Introduction', *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (ed. Fredrik Barth; London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969) 9–38.
10 Barth, 'Introduction', 13 (emphasis added).
11 J. Hutchinson and A. Smith, 'Introduction', *Ethnicity* (ed. J. Hutchinson and A. Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 3–14, at 6–7.

These must be regarded as diagnostic, not constitutive, of ethnic identity to accord with Barth's ascriptive and interactive approach.[12]

The Smith and Hutchinson scheme includes 'religion' among the elements of indicator (d), a common culture; in other words, ethnic identity is more inclusive than 'religion' and different from it. 'Religion' is, however, a problematic category when applied to the ancient Mediterranean world.[13] Nevertheless, phenomena involving belief in the interactions between gods and human beings (which some might label 'religious' and others not) certainly were an important part of life at various levels in the first-century CE Mediterranean world: especially the empire, ethnic groups, city-states, voluntary associations and families.

The role of divine–human interactions in ethnic groups can be illuminated by comparison with modern phenomena. Claire Mitchell, for example, has written of the part religion plays in the Unionist and Nationalist ethnic identities of Northern Ireland.[14] Her basic point is that religion can be more important than has generally been recognised. Nevertheless, ethnic identity and religion remain separate: some Unionists are Roman Catholics and some Nationalists are Protestants. Similarly, the recognisably ethnic Kurds (for whom the homeland is the dominant ethnic indicator) include Muslims, Christians and Yazidis.[15] It makes little sense in social-scientific terms to homologate ethnic and 'religious' identities in the manner that Horrell assumes.

Claire Mitchell found some Northern Irish Protestants downplaying or eschewing aspects of their ethnic identity as they became more 'religious', with a focus on saving souls and conversion, in what they regarded as the 'end times', of which the Good Friday Agreement could be a sign.[16] While this focus upon the 'religious' aspects of an ethnic identity is understandable, the prospect that a 'religious' identity could become an ethnic one, which is central to Horrell's notion of 'ethnicisation', seems implausible in social-scientific terms, *if indeed it ever occurs*.

Horrell uses the term 'ethnicisation' to designate the process whereby writers like Paul and the author of 1 Peter allegedly attributed ethnic features to the early Christ-movement. This is a strained use of 'ethnicisation'. The word is, indeed,

12 Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans*, 43.

13 See W. C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991; first published 1962); B. Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013); and C. A. Barton and D. Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

14 C. Mitchell, 'Beyond the Ethnic Marker: Religion and Social Identification in Northern Ireland', *Sociology of Religion* 66 (2005) 3–21 and 'The Religious Content of Ethnic Identities', *Sociology* 40 (2006) 1135–42.

15 On the Kurds, see D. E. King, *Kurdistan on the Global Stage: Kinship, Land and Community in Iraq* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014).

16 Mitchell, 'Religious Content', 1147–8.

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employed in social-scientific discussion, but usually in relation to either the development of an ethnic self-understanding[17] or the use of ethnic markers to legitimate national identities.[18] Horrell derives the concept from a work by Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann, *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*.[19] But Cornell and Hartmann describe the development of an ethnic identity in the service of nation building, in line with these approaches, not the transformation of 'religious' to ethnic identity.[20] 'Ethnicisation' has at times been used in relation to religion, but in a very restricted sense. Thus Bassam Tibi, while acknowledging that Islam is not an ethnic identity, uses 'ethnicisation' to explore how Islam can be presented in Europe by outsiders.[21] And Fredrik Holst shows how religion can become subject to processes of ethnicisation to support nationalism.[22] Accordingly, the notion that the members of a 'religious' group such as the early Christ-movement would themselves use ethnic indicators – other than in a fictive sense aimed at appropriating and redeploying aspects of Judaean collective memory and tradition (as Paul does in Galatians and Matthew in 21.43)[23] – to explain their identity seems at odds with the social-scientific literature on 'ethnicisation'.

Horrell is right in stating that our investigations, using different methods, found ancient writers distinguishing the Judaean *ethnos* from Christ-worshipping groups, as different kinds of phenomena. We were both reacting against the continuing scholarly practice of comparing Judaism and Christianity as two *religions*, or two species of a recognised genus – as mother vs daughter, legal vs illegal, legalistic vs spiritual, closed vs missionising 'religions', or as overlapping Judaisms and Christianities.[24] By our different paths we found ancient Judaeans

17 W. L. Yancey, E. P. Ericksen and R. N. Juliani, 'Emergent Ethnicity: A Review and Reformulation', *American Sociological Review* 41 (1976) 391–403.

18 J. Hogan, 'Staging the Nation: Gendered and Ethnicized Discourses of National Identity in Olympic Opening Ceremonies', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 27 (2003) 100–23. Also see F. Holst, *Ethnicisation and Identity in Malaysia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012).

19 Horrell, 'Ethnicisation', 445.

20 Horrell, 'Ethnicisation', 445.

21 B. Tibi, 'Ethnicity of Fear? Islamic Migration and the Ethnicization of Islam in Europe', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 10 (2010) 126–57.

22 F. Holst, *Ethnicisation*.

23 See P. F. Esler, 'Paul's Contestation of Israel's (Ethnic) Memory of Abraham in Galatians 3', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 36 (2006) 23–34 and 'Giving the Kingdom', 194–6.

24 E.g. J. Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1934), seeing them as 'two religious organisations' (33), though Christianity as a sect of Judaism that gradually became a religion and in turn reduced Judaism to a sect; E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM, 1977); A. F. Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986): '[T]he time of Jesus marks the beginning of not one but two great religions of the West' (1); T. M. Finn, *From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity*

and Christ-followers viewed in antiquity as different *kinds* of group. In our view, the word 'Judaism' is a distraction from first-century realities. But a crucial point missed by Horrell is that it was the millions-strong *ethnos,* the Judaean ethnic group in social-scientific terms, that enjoyed a universally acknowledged place and general respect. The mere scores (?) of Christ-followers who met in private houses or (as Edward Adams insists)[25] in other buildings in a *polis*, whose leaders at least faced ongoing problems with local authorities, obviously struggled to explain what kind of group they were. They knew that they *seemed* bizarre, inward, secretive and dangerous to the moral order of the *polis*[26] (see below). Our explorations of this distinction in ancient thinking did not, therefore, elevate a sublime Christianity over a restrictive Judaism, much less place one religion over against another, as a review of some representative evidence will now show.

1.2 *Historical and Philological Considerations*

That the ancients understood Judaeans to be an *ethnos* (or Latin *gens*) is an evidentiary fact. But Hecataeus, Herodotus, Polybius, Poseidonius, Alexander Polyhistor, Strabo, Philo, Pliny, Josephus, Plutarch, Origen, Eusebius and dozens of others did not consider such a label stultifying. *Ethnos* (with correlatives γένος, νόμοι, πάτρια, δίαιτα, μητρόπολις, τὰ ἱερά) was the default term for a group of people from some place that was unified by ancestry, laws, customs, taboos, diet and cultic worship – features readily comparable with the ethnic indicators of Hutchinson and Smith. Everyone belonged unavoidably to an *ethnos*, by virtue of their birth (*genos*). Loyalty to one's *ethnos* was an axiomatic virtue. It was a source of pride to be part of a famous *ethnos*, with a renowned mother-*polis*, and especially one that attracted admiring interest. Although the (philological) criteria for identifying an ancient *ethnos* are different from those of the social sciences, the *ethnē* known from the ancient Mediterranean generally qualify as ethnic groups also in social-scientific terms.[27]

(Mahwah: Paulist, 1997): 'Out of the innumerable religions and religious movements of the Greco-Roman world, only two – one the mother, the other the daughter – outlasted the Roman Empire to survive into the present: Judaism and Christianity' (91); P. Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012): 'This is a book about … boundaries within religions' (1).

25 E. Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places: Almost Exclusively Houses?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

26 E.g. S. Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); M. Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986); R. L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (revised edition; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

27 See P. F. Esler, 'Judean Ethnic Identity in Josephus' *Against Apion*', *A Wandering Galilean: Essays in Honour of Sean Freyne* (ed. Z. Rodgers with M. Daly-Denton and A. Fitzpatrick McKinley; Leiden: Brill, 2009) 73–91.

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From Hecataeus of Miletus and Herodotus in the fifth century BCE through Stephanus' *Ethnica* in the sixth century CE, surviving ancient texts show a fascination with the *ethnē* of the *oikoumenē* (or *orbis terrarum*), with their diverse laws and customs. Judaeans obviously belonged in this category and were included without hesitation whenever the opportunity arose. Everywhere they are called an *ethnos* or *genos* (cf. Latin *gens*, *natio*): in an inscription on the remains of a statue from the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias reading ἔθνους Ἰουδαίων, where Judaeans appear alongside other *ethnē* under Rome's *imperium*;[28] in Plutarch's account of Pompey's triumph, during which, we are told, inscriptions were borne with the names of fourteen eastern *genē* (to recall Latin *gentes*?), including those of Palestine, Phoenicia, Arabia and Judaea (*Pomp.* 45.1–2); in the triumphal inscription for Titus on the arch from the Circus Maximus;[29] in Latin literature generally;[30] in the Hasmonean court history 1 Maccabees and the thematically different 2 Maccabees;[31] in the title of Greek *Jubilees*;[32] throughout the New Testament;[33] and – most prominently – in Philo and Josephus.

According to the TLG,[34] *ethnos* and *Ioudaios* appear in the same breath 1,091 times by the time of Eusebius, who himself accounts for well over half of these occurrences (623).[35] Another 164 are in Origen. But Philo and Josephus already use 'the *ethnos* of the Judaeans' (τὸ [τῶν] Ἰουδαίων ἔθνος) as a default category.[36] For them there is certainly nothing debilitating about this label. It rather confirms the Judaeans' established, ancient place among the peoples of the *oikoumenē*.

The *Letter of Aristeas* illustrates the point. Here the Judaeans are both a particular (not particular*ist*) people, with intriguingly distinctive laws, and fully open to the world, their elite class being well versed in the common *langue*. They are a γένος (*Arist.* 6) – since Herodotus' time a virtual synonym of *ethnos*,

28 R. R. R. Smith, '*Simulacrum Gentium*: The *Ethne* from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias', *JRS* 78 (1988) 50–77, at 57 and Plate VIII for Judaeans (his term) among others.

29 *CIL* VI.944: *gentem Iudaeorum* [*Titus*] *domuit*.

30 Cicero, *Prov. cons.* 10.3; Columella, *Rust.* 3.8; Pliny, *HN* 5.66–7 (by context and with 7.97–8; 13.47); Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.8

31 1 Macc 8.23–7; 10.25; 11.30–3; 12.3, 6; 2 Macc 4.35; 10.8.

32 Greek *Jub.* 1.1: Moses delivers the Law to the Judaean *ethnos*.

33 Matt 21.43; Luke 7.5; 23.2; John 11.48–52 (4 times); 18.35; Acts 10.22; 24.3, 10, 17; 26.4; 28.19.

34 www.tlg.uci.edu.

35 For Eusebius' deep interest in *ethnos* status and effort (e.g. *Praep. ev.* 1.5.3) to cast Christians as an *ethnos*, see A. P. Johnson, *Ethnicity and Argumentation in Eusebius' Praeparatio Evangelica* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

36 E.g. Philo, *Mos.* 1.7, 34; *Decal.* 96; *Spec.* 2.163, 166; 4.179, 224; *Virt.* 212, 226; *Prob.* 75; *Flacc.* 1, 45, 179, 191; *Legat.* 117, 160, 184, 194, 207, 210, 256, 373; *Hypoth.* 6.10; Josephus, *B.J.* 1.1; 2.197, 202–83; 6.17, 330, 342; 7.423; *A.J.* 7.456; 11.123, 184–5, 270, 272, 285, 303, 323, 340; 12.6–7, 135, 141, 357, 412, 417–18; 13.1, 48, 126–7, 143, 166; 14.196, 212, 248, 306, 320; 15.15, 179, 383; 16.56, 158, 162; 17.174, 330; 18.378; 19.278, 284–5, 309; 20.111; *C. Ap.* 1.137; 2.43.

underscoring shared descent[37] – with unique ancestral laws, customs and a homeland anchored in Jerusalem. This story is one of inter-*polis* diplomacy, which includes the freeing of migrant Judaean slaves and their families. The Ptolemaic court's campaign of 'fostering culture' (8) leads it to desire a copy of the 'highly philosophical and pure' laws of the Judaeans (10, 30–1). Jerusalem and its temple, described in loving detail (83–120), are understood to be the home of Judaeans around the world. By a concerted effort (175), scrupulously respectful of Judaean customs (181–2), the king's men persuade Jerusalem's high priest to send seventy-two emissaries for the translation of their ancestral volumes (33–46).

It turns out, of course, that the seemingly peculiar customs of the Judaeans reflect the very laws of nature (143–71). The learned ambassadors from Jerusalem worship the same divine source of life as every other nation, though each uses a different name for that ultimate being (16). In *Aristeas* we thus encounter a Judaean author's vision of the dialectic between the proudly distinctive laws of his *ethnos*/*genos*, which admit of no adulteration (cf. Sparta), and the Judaeans' fluent participation in a universal human discourse.

That Philo and Josephus write in the same spirit as *Aristeas* – a text of crucial importance to both, and Josephus' alleged inspiration for the *Antiquities*[38] – is a point we need not labour. Both writers combine loving interest in the detailed laws and customs of their *ethnos*, which cannot be compromised, with confident participation in the great themes of Greco-Roman culture. They agree that the laws of Moses epitomise the laws of nature, inculcating in Judaeans virtues recognised by all humanity.[39] Josephus shares with Philo, and earlier Aristobulus, the conviction that Pythagoras and Plato must have derived much of their wisdom from Moses.[40]

Philo and Josephus also delight, with the author of *Aristeas*, in the attraction that their laws and customs hold for other *ethnē*, who everywhere show signs of wanting to embrace them. Attraction to foreign ways – Greek, Egyptian, Spartan – was a familiar phenomenon in antiquity, if often criticised as disloyal,[41] and Josephus shows due contempt for those who abandon Judaean ancestral

37 Cf. C. P. Jones, 'ἔθνος and γένος in Herodotus', *CQ* 46 (1996) 315–20. *Genos* is, however, a much more flexible term than even *ethnos*. In *Aristaeas* it can refer to the human *race* (17, 190, 208, 259), the female gender (250), or any *class* or kind of object (63, 66, 75, 97, 165).

38 Philo, *Mos.* 2.25–41; Josephus, *A.J.* 1.9–13; 12.11–118 (a leisurely paraphrase of the original).

39 Cf. Philo, *Opif.* 1.3; D. T. Runia, *On the Creation of the Cosmos according to Moses* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); D. T. Runia, G. E. Sterling and H. Najman, *Laws Stamped with the Seals of Nature: Law and Nature in Hellenistic Philosophy and Philo of Alexandria* (Providence: Brown University Press, 2003); Josephus, *A.J.* 1.20–6.

40 *C. Ap.* 1.161–8; cf. the second-century BCE Aristobulus in Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 7.14; 8.10; 13.12.

41 Herodotus 4.76–80 with Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.269; Thucydides 1.132.1–2; Celsus in Origen, *Cels.* 5.41.

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customs.[42] But he and Philo stress the welcome that the Judaean *ethnos* extends to foreigners who wish to adopt their ways.[43] Says Philo (*Virt.* 102–3):

> Having *legislated* for fellow-members of the *ethnos*, he [Moses] holds that newcomers must be deemed worthy of every privilege, because they have left behind *blood-affiliation, homeland, customs* (γενεὰν μὲν τὴν ἀφ᾽ αἵματος καὶ πατρίδα καὶ ἔθη), *sacred rites and temples of the gods, the gifts and honours too*, having undertaken *a noble migration* … He directs those of the [Judaean] *ethnos* to love the newcomers, not only as friends and relatives, but as themselves in body and soul.

As for Josephus, *Antiquities*' long exposition of the laws and their after-effects reaches its climax in the nerve-racking account of Adiabenian royalty's bold embrace of Jerusalem. Their love of Judaean law puts their lives in peril because local Adiabenian nobles consider such a foreign allegiance treasonous (*A.J.* 20.17–96). We get a taste of the nobles' grievance from other non-Judaean observers who comment with revulsion on attraction to Judaean laws. They show the opprobrium that such courageous 'migrants' could face from their own people.[44] But there is nothing in this evidence to suggest that being such an admired *ethnos* closed the Judaeans off from interaction with the Greco-Roman world – certainly not in comparison with early Christ-followers.

We pause to summarise thus far. David Horrell's article deplores a dichotomy in New Testament scholarship between a merely 'ethnic Judaism' and a Christianity seen as transcendent: supra-ethnic, spiritual and inclusive. Inspecting the first half of this dichotomy confirms that Judaeans were understood to be an *ethnos*/*genos*. The category was obvious to writers throughout the Hellenistic-Roman period, Judaeans and others. Anyone who investigates the way ancients thought and spoke will find the same evidence; this is not a hypothesis. But it was good to be a famous and admired *ethnos*. There was nothing disparaging about the category. As we now turn to the other side of the dichotomy, our question is how the earliest Christians were seen in relation to the stable and accepted category, *ethnos*.

1.3 *Ethnos and Ethnicity: How Subjective?*

First we must clarify a methodological point. Horrell, we have seen, cites recent theorising about *ethnicity* and *ethnicisation* purportedly to establish that

42 Josephus, *A.J.* 4.131–58; 5.98; 16.176–8; *B.J.* 7. 47–53 (Antiochus of Antioch); *A.J.* 20.100 (Tiberius Alexander of Alexandria), 143 (Drusilla, sister of Agrippa II).

43 Josephus, *B.J.* 2.[454], 463, 560; 7.43–5; *C. Ap.* 2.280–6.

44 Valerius Maximus, *On Superstition*, in M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences, 1974), 1.357–60 (no. 147); Epictetus in Arrian, *Diatr.* 2.9.20; Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.85; *Hist.* 5.5; Suetonius, *Tib.* 36; Juvenal, *Sat.* 5.14.96–106; Cassius Dio 37.1.1; 57.18.5a; 60.6.6; 66/67.14.2 with 67/68.1.2.

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new ethnic groups can form from 'religious' groups, then teases out 'ethnicising' indications from phrases in Peter and Paul. Accordingly, for him, Christians were in the same domain as Judaeans – granted the pervasive fuzziness, overlaps and indeterminacy. By these criteria it seems that any ancient group could, under licence from modern ethnicity studies (on his doubtful interpretation of this research), express feelings of kindred affection and pronounce themselves an *ethnos*. Our criteria are not so subjective. We cannot see that a Christian author's phrasing or its possible implications, even Eusebius' plain assertion that Christ's arrival initiated a new Christian *ethnos* (*Hist. eccl.* 1.4.2), altered the conceptual-discursive bank that had led Poseidonius, Strabo, Pliny and Tacitus, and Aristaeas' author, Philo and Josephus, to speak of Judaeans as an *ethnos*.

Our own distinct approaches converge on the point that *ethnē* were not, and ethnic groups are not, just any group of people who felt or feel close to each other. In texts we may still study, even though they offered no definitions of their terms, *ethnē* were associated with a place, and with the laws and customs that had taken formative shape there in the homeland (*patris*). In terms of the Hutchinson and Smith indicators mentioned above, (d), common culture, and (e), a link to a homeland, were prominent everywhere. This does not mean, as is often suggested, that to translate *Ioudaios* as 'Judaean' gives the word a merely 'geographic' connotation. *Ioudaios* was an ethnic designation, referring – like the name of every other ethnic group in the ancient Mediterranean – to a people connected with a homeland, whether they happened to be living there or not.

This place–people link underlies Tacitus' digression on Judaean laws and customs, which concerns all *Iudaei* everywhere, when he is about to describe the fall of their mother-*urbs* Jerusalem (*Hist.* 5.2), or Cassius Dio's third-century portrait of the Judaeans (37.1.1–3). Although the simplest kind of environmental determinism – place of origin determines an *ethnos*'s character – had been tempered from the start by the realisation that custom (*nomos*) and constitution (*politeia*) could work against nature, the assumption that the homeland of an *ethnos* (and its mother-*polis*) uniquely reflected its character remained basic to ethnographic discourse.[45] As Pseudo-Scylax's *Voyage* (late fourth century BCE) shows with terse clarity (e.g. 85–106), it was possible for an *ethnos* to lack a *polis*, if it had a nomadic or village-agricultural character.[46] But the prominent *ethnē* of the civilised world (throughout Greece and Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt) had

45 For environmental determinism, see Herodotus 2.2–182; 4.46–82 and (*ca.* 300 BCE) *Airs, Waters, Places*, e.g. 24. For analysis: J. Rives, *Tacitus: Germania* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 16–20; R. Thomas, *Herodotus in Context: Ethnography, Science and the Art of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 75–134; J. Marincola, *Greek Historians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 52–3.

46 Text, translation and commentary in G. Shipley, *Pseudo-Skylax's Periplous: The Circumnavigation of the Inhabited World* (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2011).

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poleis or *mētropoleis*. The *patris* was the only place in the world where the unique laws and customs, calendar and festivals, worship, defining institutions, system of governance, citizenship and magistrates of an *ethnos* held sway. In other *poleis* they were foreign minorities.

Judaeans fit this discourse in an exemplary way. Just as characterisations of Egyptians, Britons, Germans, Scythians and Persians – by insiders and outsiders – reverted to their homelands, so too discussions of Judaeans fused the character of the *ethnos* with its *patris* Jerusalem and *chōra* Judaea, the only places where the Judaeans' calendar, laws and prohibitions (e.g. of pork and human imagery) held sway.[47] When they lived outside their defining homeland, Judaeans like other minorities had to make the best of it in each local context.

2. Early Christians not an *Ethnos* – but not universal or inclusive either

2.1 *Paul and the First Christian Generation*

The earliest Christian texts we possess, Paul's first letters, provide a vivid sense of the group identity he was cultivating among his new communities. The very first surviving lines from this prominent Christ-follower reveal a rootless itinerant entrusted with what he called 'The Special Announcement' (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, 1 Thess 1.5). Its most salient content is that 'those who trust' must prepare themselves for immediate evacuation. Despite harassment and ridicule from their townsfolk, they must persevere in trust and lead sexually pure, blameless lives if they are to join the soon-returning Christ in the clouds. In this way these chosen ones will escape the divine wrath that is about to fall on others (τὸν ῥυόμενον ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ὀργῆς τῆς ἐρχομένης, 1.10).[48]

In the interval before Christ's return, the urgent hope for tropospheric deliverance creates an oppressive air of conflict with mundane *poleis*. Paul's arrival in Thessalonica, he recalls, was framed by enormous conflict (1.6), after he had already suffered grievous insult in Philippi (2.2). But this conflict is, he assures his faithful community, the plight of all trusters. There will be tremendous pressure on them to abandon their hope before the day of rescue (3.3–4). They should at least take comfort that they are imitating Paul, receiving from their compatriots the same sort of harassment that the Judaeans, his people, had given him (2.14–16). Opposition from local citizenry is, indeed, the main reason for this first letter. Paul has been desperately worried that after his departure they might have abandoned their newfound trust in his message (2.17–3.5). Timothy's return to him

47 Josephus' *Antiquities* and *Apion*, both devoted to explicating the antiquity of the Judaean *ethnos* and the nobility of its laws, are anchored in Jerusalem, the temple and the priesthood (even though Josephus has been living in Rome for decades).

48 1 Thess 1.4–10; 2.17–3.13; 4.13–21; 5.1–11, 23; cf. 1 Cor 1.7–9; 7.25–35; 15.12–57; Gal 1.4.

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with assurances – along with their polite questions about when Christ will return and what will happen to any who have died beforehand (4.13; 5.1) – consoles Paul. He writes to advocate continuing patience and hope (3.6–13) and to address their questions, albeit with little new information to offer.

When we observe that early Christ-followers were a different kind of group from the Judaean *ethnos*, in relation to ancient and social-scientific categories alike, this is part of what we mean. A single-issue salvation circle located themselves, and were placed by outsiders, in fundamental opposition to settled *ethnos–polis* life, which the Christ-followers expected soon to go up in flames. Other Christian leaders would see things differently, to be sure, and settle in for the *longue durée*, while accommodating themselves in various ways to life in the world, but Paul's vision of Christ-following would remain prominent – until today.

Paul's other letters find him in custody and facing torture, from local authorities or Judaean expatriate communities,[49] as he denounces a world rapidly disintegrating before the 'day of Jesus Christ'.[50] All that counts in the interim is the 'new creation' in Christ, for which he himself has given up all his former commitments and identities.[51] To those who tell him to get a life, or perhaps allow his followers to join the established Judaean *ethnos* by (male) circumcision, he is scathing in reply (Phil 3.2–11). He concludes: 'Our political community exists *in the heavens*, from where we are awaiting a saviour, Lord Jesus Christ' (Phil 3.20).

Paul's commitment to The Announcement, which promises imminent rescue from the world and its ways, puts him in opposition not only with civic authorities but also, or especially, with Christ-followers who see things differently. He calls them accursed servants of Satan and false apostles, who from self-serving motives teach a different Jesus. Their end too will be destruction.[52]

These febrile communities are difficult to compare with the politically engaged intellectual banqueting of Aristaeas, Philo and Josephus. Although Christ-movement communities offered a new superordinate identity to their Judaean and non-Judaean members, we never imagined that the anti-*ethnos* and anti-*polis* tendencies visible in their texts revealed superior spiritual sophistication or universal inclusiveness. Certainly ancient outsiders did not see them that way.

2.2 *Pliny the Younger – and Social Science*

If Paul's letters are the first glimpses we catch of Christ-followers, the correspondence of Pliny the Younger (*ca.* 110 CE) provides the earliest outsider's impressions. Pliny's letters are valuable because no one was better informed

49 Phlm 8–23; 1 Cor 4.9–13; Phil 1.13–26; 2 Cor 11.23–7.

50 1 Cor 1.7–8; 1.17–2.5; 3.13; 7.31; 15.12–58.

51 Phil 3.4–16; 2 Cor 4.3–4; 5.16–21; Gal 1.13–17; 3.23–8.

52 1 Cor 3.10–15; 4.14–21; Phil 1.15–17; 3.2–21; 2 Cor 2.1–11; 10–13; Gal 1.6–10; 2.4, 11–14; 4.12–20; 5.7–12; 6.13, 17; cf. Acts 21.20–36.

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about imperial affairs. Points of interest in Pliny's letter to Trajan about the Christians (*Ep.* 10.96) include these: (a) they are locals of all social ranks (*ordines*), identifiable as Christians only by the evidence of informers and interrogation – having no distinctive ethnic traits or Judaean connections; (b) there are several varieties of them (*plures species*); (c) Pliny knows the name 'Christian' and its association with crimes, the nature of which he hints at, but not what members normally do in meetings; and (d) they are plainly a voluntary association of local citizens and villagers.

Greek and Latin had several overlapping terms for voluntary groups, clubs, fraternities or associations (e.g. θίασοι, σύνοδοι, ἑταιρίαι, αἱρέσεις; *collegia*, *sectae*, *factiones*, *hetaeriae*), the connotations of each varying with situation and literary context.[53] Although the issue deserves closer examination, the members of such groups undoubtedly derived a distinctive identity from belonging to them. In terms of the social identity theory of Henri Tajfel and John Turner,[54] each individual gained a 'social identity' from membership. Such identity has three dimensions: cognitive (the knowledge of belonging to the group and sharing its beliefs), emotional (how one felt about belonging to such a group) and evaluative (how one rated one's membership here in relation to that of out-groups). These variables provide a useful point of entry into the voluntary associations. Generally speaking, these associations were 'organized around an extended family, the cult of a deity or hero, an ethnic group in diaspora, a neighbourhood, or a common trade or profession'.[55] Most of them met for the purposes of sociability (especially focused in regular common meals) and practised some cultic activity.[56] All of them had office-bearers. The fact that they frequently voted honours to certain members and established written membership lists suggests that they afforded their members 'a sense of belonging, honor, and achievement'.[57]

53 On associations, see e.g.: R. S. Ascough, *Paul's Macedonian Associations: The Social Context of Philippians and 1 Thessalonians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); P. A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); *idem*, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians: Associations, Judeans, and Cultural Minorities* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2009); J. S. Kloppenborg and R. S. Ascough, *Greco-Roman Associations: Texts, Translations, and Commentary*, vol. I: *Attica, Central Greece, Macedonia, Thrace* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011); P. A. Harland, *Greco-Roman Associations: Texts, Translations, and Commentary*, vol. II: *North Coast of the Black Sea* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014); R. S. Ascough, *Associations in the Greco-Roman World: A Sourcebook* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012).

54 For an overview of social identity theory, see P. F. Esler, 'An Outline of Social Identity Theory', *The T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* (ed. J. B. Tucker and A. B. Coleman; London: Bloomsbury, 2014) 13–39.

55 Kloppenborg and Ascough, *Greco-Roman Associations*, 1.

56 Kloppenborg and Ascough, *Greco-Roman Associations*, 5.

57 Kloppenborg and Ascough, *Greco-Roman Associations*, 6.

One could easily discuss – in relation to each association in its context – the cognitive, emotional and evaluative dimensions of belonging to it. It is evident, however, that in every instance, except that of an ethnic group meeting in a diaspora setting (the exception that proves the rule), the group identity and the members' social identity were not ethnic. This is clearly the case even where all members were co-ethnics (such as in the many instances from Athens),[58] since they must have derived an identity different from their ethnic group or there would have been no point in membership.

But the point is even clearer when the membership comprised people from different ethnic groups.[59] For as soon as one asks, 'What is the ethnic group of these people sitting around the table and partaking of the common meal?', one realises that the question is meaningless. Such groups were demonstrably trans-ethnic in character. Setting Christ-movement groups alongside Greco-Roman associations immediately brings out the similarities with them, even though we must be alert for differences.[60] Even if all the members were (originally) Judaean, their group identity must have been different; where the group was a mixture of Judaeans and non-Judaeans this must have been the case a fortiori. A remarkable proof of that difference is that only a few years after the crucifixion Paul was persecuting the ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ and trying to destroy it (Gal 1.13).

In a well-known letter (*Ep.* 10.33), Pliny asks Trajan that Nicomedia be allowed a *collegium* of firefighters, strictly limited in size and frequency of meeting, to prevent the recurrence of devastating fire. Trajan denies his request, recalling the damage that *factiones* have wrought ('whatever name we give them, on whatever justification'). Experience confirms, the emperor reflects, that 'whenever men are drawn together in a common cause they soon become a tight association/fraternity' (*qui in idem contracti fuerint, hetaeriae eaeque breui fient*), and that means trouble (10.34).

Back in his letter about Christians (*Ep.* 10.96), Pliny assures Trajan that their influence on the region's *poleis* has dropped dramatically since he implemented the order to ban *hetaeriae* (presumably all *collegia* in view of 10.34), which stopped Christian meetings also. Their character as a voluntary association is confirmed by details of language. Already *former* Christians have declared that they abandoned the group three or even twenty-five years ago, and they happily make the customary sacrifices now. Pliny and Trajan agree that people should

58 See Kloppenborg and Ascough, *Greco-Roman Associations*, 17–280.

59 Examples include a group of Sarapis devotees in Thessalonica (Kloppenborg and Ascough, *Greco-Roman Associations*, no. 77, 357–62), a group engaged in mysteries in Cyme (Harland, *Greco-Roman Associations*, no. 105, 86–94) and a group of Anubiasts in Smyrna (ibid., no. 136, 298–302).

60 As for possible differences, we might ask: did Christ-movement groups charge membership fees? Did other associations manifest charismatic phenomena in their cultic acts?

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be given space for repentance (*si sit paenitentiae locus*, 10.96.10), not executed straightaway. None of these attributes matches membership of an *ethnos* or *gens*, from which people do not come and go. These are the traits of voluntary association – and dissociation.

What exactly the members of Christ associations should call themselves while living in the world before their heavenward ascent remained unclear. Paul's ubiquitous *ekklēsia* and his 'brothers and sisters' language would endure, the latter inviting scorn because of the liberties it suggested among men and women not actually related.[61] Noteworthy is the by-play in Acts between Tertullus, who pitches the Nazarenes as a faction or school (αἵρεσις), and Paul, who insists that they are rather The Way (24.4, 17; cf. 9.2; 18.25–6).

2.3 *Later Christian Perspectives*

We conclude this survey by looking at three cultured Christian writers around 200 CE – Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and Minucius Felix – and then at four Greco-Roman authors who describe both Judaeans and Christ-followers. The Christian authors vary considerably in language, style and literary temperament, but they agree in renouncing the world of *ethnē* and *poleis*, which no longer has value in light of the supervening revelation in Christ. All three respond forthrightly to outsiders' perceptions that Christianity is a recent innovation, and their demand that Christians return to loyalty to *ethnos*, *polis* and ancestral custom.

Clement's *Exhortation* is a frontal attack on *ethnos* identity and loyalty. He argues from a Johannine, quasi-gnostic position that sees salvation largely in terms of spiritual illumination in this world,[62] made possible by the deposit of truth in Christ's incarnation of the *Logos* (cf. John 1.1–18). This inner truth brings freedom from the *daimones* (= gods) of the *ethnē*. In this scheme, humanity's problem is the ignorance, darkness and error of the cosmos, which blind people to the truth, though truth is now available through Christ's light from heaven (*Protr*. 11). Although it seems recent, Christian truth is paradoxically much older than what people perceive as 'ancient' in mere *ethnos* custom. Christ's 'new melody' expresses a Reason or Doctrine (*Logos*) that antedates time itself (*Protr*. 1). The gods of the *ethnē* are risible latecomers by contrast, mere deified humans who 'fell on *poleis* and *ethnē* like plagues' (*Protr*. 3.1). Clement mocks the *ethnē* and their competitive claims to antiquity (*Protr*. 1).

61 Tertullian, *Apol*. 39.8; Minucius Felix, *Oct*. 9.1–3.

62 *Protr*. 1: 'Let truth shine her rays of light … upon those wallowing in the darkness, and deliver humans from their error … to point them to salvation' (translation (modified) from G. W. Butterworth, LCL). The final paragraph (in *Protr*. 12) presents the Christian life as a never-ending series of revelations, and 'destruction' apparently as moral-spiritual enslavement to the ways of the *ethnē*.

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The climax of his work (ch. 10, 72P) confronts the demand for *ethnos* loyalty – namely, that it is unreasonable to abandon 'custom ... handed down to us from the fathers' (ἐκ πατέρων ... παραδεδομένον ἡμῖν ἔθος). Clement puns on the contrast between custom (συνήθεια), which is merely a seductive drug, and truth (ἀλήθεια). In the circle of Christ's truth, *ethnos* allegiance is dissolved: 'there is no barbarian nor Judaean nor Greek, nor male nor female, but only a new human being transformed by God's holy spirit' (*Protr*. 11, 87P). Clement's closing exhortation does not hold back (12.91P):

> Let us then steer clear of custom! Let us steer clear of it like a dangerous headland, the threatening Charybdis, the Sirens of legend. It throttles the human, turns him from truth, leads away from life. Custom is a snare, a trap, a pit, an evil indulgence.

The mast to which Odysseus bound himself on Circe's advice, to secure himself against the Sirens' sweet song (*Od*. 12.50–3, 153–91), is now the Cross. Clement's repudiation of the classical *ethnos–polis* paradigm is complete.

Tertullian agrees in rejecting the *ethnos–polis* foundations of classical society. He sarcastically challenges 'these oh-so-pious champions and avengers of laws and ancestral institutions' about their own scrupulosity (*Apol*. 5–6), rejecting out of hand any identification of the nations' various laws with truth. Strikingly he does not deny Christian novelty or strangeness, but embraces them. The Christians are indeed a *secta* (his preferred term, eighteen times in the *Apology*) – group, faction, school – which 'most people know to be quite new ... as we ourselves openly declare' (*quam aliquanto novellam ..., plerique sciunt, profitentibus nobis quoque*, 21.1). And the *secta* is named for its recent founder, Christus (3.6; 21.36), dating only from the time of Tiberius. Tertullian writes the *Apologeticus* to defend this particular *secta*, nevertheless, from unfair treatment (1.1). Addressing 'officials of Roman *imperium*', he argues that comparable groups (*factiones*, *hetaeriae*) are left in peace even if they behave obnoxiously, whereas the virtuous and harmless Christians face endless harassment.

Tellingly, comparison groups for Tertullian include philosophical schools and groups of physicians, grammarians and cooks, which are likewise named for their founders (3.6) – so the name itself should cause no ridicule. But philosophical groups have a secure place, though they howl against *polis* norms, the gods or the emperor himself (ch. 46). Tertullian pleads that the Christian *secta* be included among the legal *factiones* and left alone. The only reason to ban *factiones* is fear of political agitation, but Christians have no interest in *polis* affairs. Their *factio* devotes itself to piety and discipline – in preparation for the imminent end of the age (chs. 38–9).

Tertullian feels compelled to explain the Christ-followers' non-observance of Judaean law. The reason he is not embarrassed about the novelty of the

Christian *secta*, it transpires, is that it rests on the foundation of this ancient, formerly great *gens* or *genus* (*ethnos*), which however proved unviable. The Judaean *gens* used to enjoy divine favour, national greatness (*generis magnitudo*) and royal splendour, he opines. But that *gens*-project failed when they lost divine favour. With Jerusalem's destruction their *gens* was allegedly replaced by the new voluntary *secta* established by its *auctor* Christ. This community is therefore, emphatically, not a *gens*. It comprises trusters in Christ drawn from all *gentes*, that is, from all ethnic groups (21.4–6):

> How badly they [Judaeans] failed ... their final state nowadays (*exitus hodiernus*) would prove ... Scattered, wanderers, exiles *from their own sun and sky*, they roam the earth without a king either human or divine. They are not permitted to greet their ancestral homeland (*terram patriam*) even by a provision for visitors – not a single footprint ... God would choose for himself much more faithful worshippers, from every *gens*, *people, and place*, to whom he would transfer his favour (*ex omni iam gente et populo et loco cultores sibi adlegeret deus multo fideliores in quos gratiam transferret*).

In Tertullian's imagination, then, the solution to Judaean failure in their homeland is not a new *ethnos* in a new homeland, but a voluntary association that is trans-ethnic in the manner Horrell decries and is defined solely by common trust in Christ and the promise of deliverance from the classical world order.

Tertullian's appeal sounds Pauline in its insistence that Christians have no home in this world (*Apol.* 1.2):

> [Truth (*veritas*)] knows that, leading an alien existence on earth, she readily finds enemies among strangers, whereas her pedigree, dwelling-place, hope, reward and honour are in the heavens (*genus, sedem, spem, gratiam, dignitatem in caelis habere*).

The liveliest expression of this heavenly orientation comes in Tertullian's *On Spectacles*. Here he denounces core institutions and activities of the *polis* – theatre, drama, games, amphitheatre – as demon-filled pits of disgrace and filth (*Spect.* 1–28). He can renounce classical life because the greatest spectacle ever is about to be revealed: the coming of the Lord in triumph to establish the heavenly *civitas* of New Jerusalem (ch. 30). This event will see the existing world with its proud genealogies and silly claims to antiquity consumed in a conflagration, which will also liquefy the Christians' haughty persecutors.

M. Minucius Felix's *Octavius* is remarkable for the persuasive rhetoric that the author allows both disputants, the Christian Octavius and his Roman antagonist Caecilius. Although the Roman will ultimately join the Christian *secta* in a rather anticlimactic ending (40.2), his vigorous opening arguments recall Plato's Socrates, Epicurus, Cicero, Celsus and Marcus Aurelius, among others. They marry profound philosophical *uncertainty* about the real nature of the universe,

which leads Caecilius to reject hubristic Christian claims to knowledge, with respect for the multifarious ancestral traditions found in the world – partly on the utilitarian ground that they provide inducements to morality (5.2–5).

Octavius exploits famous philosophers and sharp reason to make the easier, negative side of the Christian case against polytheism and diverse national customs: they cannot all be *true*! In rebuttal, Caecilius anticipates Neoplatonism – not to mention Edmund Burke against the French Revolution and Benjamin Disraeli against Europhile 'Gallomania' – when he insists that each nation's ancient tradition, which has evolved with its character through uncountable ages, must not be swept aside by a merciless reason. It is right and proper that each nation should cherish its unique gods, cults, calendar and festivals. These deserve the respect of citizens and outsiders alike (6.1–3; 8.1–4). Caecilius in turn ridicules the motley *factiones* of Christ-people, who withdraw from *polis* duties and public life, meet in secret and avoid the daylight rituals of their homeland (8.5; 9.1–4; 10.1–4). Their belief that the world is about to be consumed in fire, and they alone will survive, is arrogant nonsense (11.1). Octavius counters that nations and peoples (*gentes nationesque*) are mere human constructions, not recognised by God. God regards humanity as one (33.1).

Minucius Felix's *Octavius* thus confirms a general picture, shared by Christian insiders and outside observers around 200 CE, that early Christ-followers rejected the laws and customs of the nations (*ethnē*, *genē*; *gentes*, *nationes*) that undergirded the classical paradigm. They found their identities in the new, voluntary association of Christ-devotion.

2.4 *Later Outside Observers*

In the space allowed by a journal article we cannot consider every piece of evidence or the possible implications of a particular author's turns of phrase. But broad confirmation of the distinction we are making comes from four prominent authors who discuss both Judaeans and Christians: Tacitus, Celsus, Porphyry and Julian. None of them was much enamoured of the Judaeans. In taking their deity to be the only one, Judaeans appeared to them intolerant and unwilling to mix with others.[63] Nevertheless, all four writers recognised the Judaeans as an established *ethnos*/*gens* that enjoyed a respectable place in the *oikoumenē*. The Christians were something else entirely, and had no such place in the world. They gathered to worship an executed criminal who was supposed to deliver their group alone from the *cosmos*. For this absurd belief they were willing to abandon their proper obligations to ancestral and *polis* custom. This was obviously troublesome behaviour.

Tacitus, for example, recognises the Judaeans' established place in the world. In the fifth book of his *Histories*, he describes the origin of this *gens* and its

63 Julian, *C. Gal.* 116a–b, 131b–d, 168b–c, 171a, d–e, 176a–c, 184b–c, 198b.

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renowned *polis* (*famosae urbis*) (5.2–3), then its customs (5.4–5) and homeland (5.6–8), as a prelude to his now-lost account of Jerusalem's destruction. While admitting that he finds the Judaeans' customs repugnant, Tacitus allows that their antiquity demands respect (*antiquitate defenduntur*) (5.5). His use of Egyptians and Romans as *comparanda* for the Judeans confirms his understanding of their established place, though he laments the attractions of their foreign ways among the 'worst sort' of Romans and others.

Contrast Tacitus' language when he describes Christians in the *Annals* (15.44). This 'mob despised for their shameful acts' (*per flagitia invisos vulgus*), called Christians, take their name from a man named Christus, who was executed by Pilate under Tiberius (cf. Tertullian's defence). The man's death spawned a 'lethal superstition' (*exitiabilis superstitio*), which has spread – like Pliny's *contagio* – from Judaea throughout the world. Its criminal members undoubtedly deserve severe punishments (*sontes et novissima exempla meritos*), though Nero's savagery towards them evoked sympathy. This language is a world away from the same author's description of Jerusalem, its people and their ancient laws, which have much more in common with his portraits of Germans and Britons.

The same contrast appears more vividly still in the philosopher Celsus, whose mid-second-century *True Doctrine* is fortunately preserved in Origen's third-century rebuttal, *Against Celsus*. Celsus respected the customs of all *ethnē*, in their colourful variety and under their various deities. He cherished Pindar's maxim, '*nomos* is king of all' (Origen, *Cels*. 5.40). Although he regularly slighted the Judaean *ethnos* for its exclusiveness and allegedly mean origins (1.14, 22–3, 26; 5.41–2), like Tacitus, he was also sure of its place in the world, now a century after Jerusalem's fall (5.25, cf. 41):

> The Judaeans, after becoming a unique *ethnos* (ἔθνος ἴδιον γενόμενοι), enacted laws in keeping with their local conditions, and guard them until even now. In preserving their way of worship – which, whatever its actual form, is ancestral (πάτριον δ' οὖν) – they act *just like other people*. Each pursues its ancestral ways (ὅτι ἕκαστοι τὰ πάτρια), no matter what kind happen to have been established … and it is not pious to dissolve what has become customary/legal in each place from the beginning (παραλύειν δὲ οὐχ ὅσιον εἶναι τὰ ἐξ ἀρχῆς κατὰ τόπους νενομισμένα).

Contrast the same author's view of Christians (5.33):

> I shall ask them where they came from, and who is the founder of *their* ancestral laws (πόθεν ἥκουσιν ἢ τίνα ἔχουσιν ἀρχηγέτην πατρίων νόμων). 'No one', they state. But *that* [place, i.e. Judaea] is where they issued from, and they themselves can adduce no teacher or leader from any other place. Yet they broke from the Judaeans!

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Origen responds forcefully to this charge of abandoning law and custom, in the vein of Clement, Tertullian and Minucius Felix. Things began in Zion, yes, but 'in the last days the worship of God through Jesus Christ has shone out'. This new teaching is for *all the nations* (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη). 'We have become sons of peace through Jesus Christ, … *rather than* of ancestral customs' (ἀντὶ τῶν πατρίων) (5.33). Origen plainly agrees with Celsus on the premise: we have indeed abandoned *ethnos* affiliations. They differ only about the meaning of this fact.

Still Origen gives Celsus his due, and so preserves valuable information about the rejected philosopher's outlook. Says Celsus: 'There is nothing amiss when each *ethnos* worships according to its own customs. We have found considerable difference in each *ethnos*, and yet each of them appears to deem its own way preferable' (5.34). Origen even tries to summarise Celsus' views (5.35):

> All people ought to live according to their ancestral ways (τὸ δεῖν πάντας ἀνθρώπους κατὰ τὰ πάτρια ζῆν), and they are never blamed for this. But the Christians have abandoned their ancestral ways (Χριστιανοὺς δὲ τὰ πάτρια καταλιπόντας). And since they happen not to be an *ethnos* like the Judaeans, associating themselves with the teaching of [the Judaean] Jesus *is* culpable.

Celsus had complained that the Christians' following of Christ – the most ignoble sort of teacher anyway (e.g. 5.52) – was eating away at the social-political fabric. They disdained *ethnos* and *polis* obligations in favour of their irrational view that God, like a cook, would burn the rest of humanity and spare them alone (5.14; cf. 7.9)!

The eminent Neoplatonist Porphyry (late third century) followed in the same tracks. Although Jerusalem was by now long since destroyed, his *On Abstinence* included Judaeans alongside Egyptians, Syrians and various Greeks as examples of the disciplined life 'by *ethnos*' (*Abst.* 4.2). He much admired Judaeans, and their school of Essenes in particular, leaning on Josephus for a lengthy description (*Abst.* 4.11–14). Porphyry is probably more famous today, however, for his anticipation of modern historical criticism in his lost work against the Christians (*Contra Christianos*). There, to judge from the indignation of Christian writers over the next two centuries, Porphyry must have mocked his former Christian beliefs unsparingly. If Macarius Magnes preserved the philosopher's voice,[64] that mockery included scorn for Christian other-worldliness:

64 Fragments from Eusebius, Epiphanius, Theodoret and others are assembled in A. von Harnack, *Porphyrius: Gegen die Christen* (Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse 1; Berlin: Reimer, 1916). Harnack used, with due caution, Macarius Magnes' defence against an unnamed Neoplatonist *Apocriticus* as evidence for Porphyry's views. An influential article by T. D. Barnes ('Porphyry *Against the Christians*: Date and Attribution of Fragments', *JTS*, n. s. 24 (1973), 424–42) rejected this use of Macarius. More recently, however, R. J. Hoffmann has reviewed the evidence and produced *Porphyry's Against the Christians: The Literary Remains* (New York: Prometheus, 1994)

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> [Paul] very clearly says 'We who are alive' [1 Thess 4.17]. For it is now three hundred years since he said this and nobody – not Paul and not anyone else – has been caught up in the air. It is high time to let Paul's confusions rest in peace![65]

The Emperor Julian, finally, is important because of his knowledge of both Christian and outsider views. His effort to rebuild the temple was intended not only to destroy a pillar of Christian self-understanding but also to deny Christians the one legitimate reason (by his lights) they might cite for not participating in animal sacrifice: that this was permitted only in Jerusalem's temple, which is no more (Julian, *C. Gal.* 351d, 324c–d).[66]

With Caecilius, Celsus and Porphyry, Julian relishes a world of diverse *ethnē*, each having produced a constitution suited to its nature. Julian stresses the developing notion that each nation and its ways are protected by its guardian god, the Hebrew deity watching over the Judaeans (*C. Gal.* 116a–141d). His challenge to Christians is thus to choose an *ethnos*-affiliation and support it fully: either, preferably, that of their native Greek *poleis* or that of the Hebrews/Judaeans. This is his opening appeal (*C. Gal.* 42e–43b) and he repeats it until the end (305d): 'Why is it, I repeat, that after deserting us [Greeks and Romans] you do not accept the law of the Judaeans or abide by the sayings of Moses?' Again, 'Why do you not practise circumcision?' (351a). In Julian's view, Christians have concocted a bizarre and empty mixture of the worst elements from the Judaean and Greek worlds, without accepting any *ethnos*'s laws, customs, traditional sacrifice, or honour of a regional god (209d, 238a–b, 253a–291a). They have no place in the world.

Like the others, Julian chides the Hebrew *ethnos* itself for recognising only its deity and not accepting that each *ethnos* has its own guardian-god (*C. Gal.* 141c–d). Nevertheless, he concedes (306b):

> The Judaeans agree with the [other] *ethnē*, except in supposing that there is only one god. That is their peculiar thing, alien to us, but all other matters are in common with us: the sanctuaries, sacred spaces, sacrificial altars, purifications, and particular observances, concerning which we differ from each other either not at all or only trivially.

Christians 'are neither Hellenes nor Judaeans, but of the sect of the Galileans' (43a, 333d). 'Just like leeches, they suck the worst blood from that source [Judaeans] and shun the purer [Greek]' (191c). They must either return to their

on the premise that 'Porphyry is at least the inspiration and, in some cases, the actual critical voice of the pagan philosopher' cited by Macarius (p. 23).

65 Hoffmann, *Against the Christians*, 69–70.

66 We follow the Loeb numbering and rearrangement of the fragments, in W. C. Wright, ed., *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, 3 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1923) III.319–428.

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native *ethnos-polis* obligations or have the courage of their convictions and join their teacher's *ethnos*: the Judaeans. Otherwise their activities are subversive of civilisation.[67]

Conclusions

Our research suggests that literate antiquity understood the Judaeans to be an ancient *ethnos* with a famous *polis–patris* and ancestral customs, or an ethnic group in modern parlance. Christ-followers, whether apocalyptically oriented or not, were different in kind and status. Encompassing members from various ethnic groups, they met in private houses or other buildings to worship their *auctor*, Christ, perhaps to prepare themselves for his imminent return. That new identity defined them completely and, according to knowledgeable ancient authors on all sides, overwrote their former *ethnos–polis* loyalties.

While we have no quarrel with efforts to find 'ethnic reasoning' in particular early Christian texts, we consider such language fictive. It does not make the Christians an *ethnos* in common perception or in social-scientific understanding, but represents a bold raid on Israelite tradition to use its *topoi* in the service of a very different identity.

However that may be, we reject any co-option of our research for triumphalist Christian perspectives. It could with less violence undergird a Zionist outlook, according to which the Jewish people had an ancient and secure place in their land, whereas Christians were a homeless offshoot, worshipping a mere man and widely deemed superstitious. But our aims are neither theological nor political. Wishing to understand the past as it was may seem naive, but we think it possible to advance understanding through methodical investigations, without despairing that biases render all communication impossible. We welcome criticism of our actual arguments: that Judaeans viewed themselves and were viewed as an established *ethnos* in the *oikoumenē*, fully engaged with it, whereas many early Christ-followers viewed themselves and were seen by others as a voluntary association alienated in crucial ways from the *oikoumenē*.

67 *C. Gal.* 42e–43b, 49a–c, 96c–e, 100e–106e, 194d–202a, 253a–e, 305d, 314c–e, 319d–320c, 343c–358e.

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