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# Placing Paul: Institutional Structures and Theological Strategy in the World of the Early Christ-believers\*

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## 1. Approaching the Question: Introducing Institution Criticism

You need a body to locate a soul. Likewise, theology cannot be understood apart from the concrete and tangible practises and enculturated customs from which it emerges and which it, in turn, inspires and interprets. Since no person is an island, and an individual's actions and thoughts evolve and take form as a consequence of a complex dynamic in which socialisation, experience, and innovation are all entangled, it follows, arguably, that in order to understand and appreciate the forms of thinking we call theology<sup>1</sup> we need to take seriously the various institutions and collectivities within which – and in relation to which – this thinking emerges. This basic conviction underlies the approach to theological analysis taken here, which pays close attention to institutional realities as explanatory categories. In order to bring these methodological aspects into sharper focus, I have called this approach ‘institution criticism’, and we shall apply it here in order to shed light on some aspects of the larger issue

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\* This article is based on a paper given at the Annual Meeting of the Swedish Exegetical Society in Uppsala, September 2014. I am grateful to the participants for their comments. My thanks are also due to Richard S. Ascough and Mark D. Nanos, who read and commented on the penultimate draft of the study.

<sup>1</sup> This is not the place for a full discussion of the definition of ‘theology’. Here, I will use the term as referring to patterns of thought, which in one way or another make claims about perceived realities based on the premise of the existence and relevance of the divine. The term is used descriptively, thus, and does not carry within it any normative implications.



of Paul's location vis-à-vis Judaism.<sup>2</sup> Using Gal 3:28 as a test case, it will be argued that Paul's theology can be shown to be patterned on and determined by a pre-existing (Jewish and Graeco-Roman) institutional reality with which the addressees were already familiar when Paul wrote. A theology thus formed emerges as a three-dimensional construct, within and through which the recipients would not only be able to intellectually understand the message but also experience it as a lived reality.

For our purposes in this paper, I will define institution as 'an organised collective conceptual space intertwined with socio-economic and political dimensions of everyday life'.<sup>3</sup> Such a definition emphasises the fact that institutional structures shape mental constructions of reality in the interface between abstract and conceptual processes on the one hand and the

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<sup>2</sup> The approach might be said to be related to, but not identical with, contextual theology. While contextual theology is often understood as constructive and involves normative claims, institution criticism is analytic and descriptive, aiming at a kind of understanding that does not in and of itself relate to or encourage any particular contemporary social, political, or religious convictions or actions. Of course, institution criticism can be used against itself, since it has evolved in a specific academic institutional setting commonly called 'religious studies'; methods are, as much as conclusions, embedded in and therefore also partly explained by the specific settings in which they take form. For discussion, see Anna Runesson, *Exegesis in the Making: Postcolonialism and New Testament Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), esp. 36–39; see also Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, 'Re-assembling Jesus: Rethinking the Ethics of Gospel Studies', in *Mark and Matthew II: Comparative Readings: Reception History, Cultural Hermeneutics, and Theology*, ed. Eve-Marie Becker and Anders Runesson (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 311–34. By contrast, contextual theology, especially its constructive element, is explicitly and purposefully intertwined with and nurtured normatively by lived socio-religious and political experiences outside the academic world. Institution criticism can be used on various genres of text, including letters and narrative text. It can be combined with other methods that focus on a certain stage in the history of a text, for example its final form, and is dependent on the date and location of the text to be analysed. Institution criticism differs from, e.g., form criticism (in its various variants), which builds on rather vague assumptions about context and certain dynamics involved in transmission of tradition. Institution criticism has, further, a different purpose than form criticism, in that it is interested in understanding and explaining certain patterns of thinking as they appeared at a specific point in time and in a specific place, i.e., it aims at responding to how and why questions; it is not interested in historical 'authenticity' beyond the place and time in which the thought patterns in question occur. The approach will be described in more detail, including more extensive discussion of aspects of space as space relate to institution, in a forthcoming monograph: Anders Runesson, *From Jesus to Paul: Institutional Structures and Theological Strategy in the World of the Early Christ-believers* (in preparation).

<sup>3</sup> This definition is discussed in more detail and in relation to other suggested definitions, from Max Weber onward, in Runesson, *From Jesus to Paul*.



tangible and physical on the other.<sup>4</sup> The construction of reality, theological or otherwise, among members of institutions such as those we are interested in here should thus be understood as intertwined with and a reflection of institutional structures. In addition, we need to note that within the collective conceptual (and physical) arena provided by the institution, various roles and identities are formed and enacted in ways specific to the particular nature of the institution in question. This means that the status that follows with such roles is institution-specific, and cannot be generalised as valid outside of that institutional setting. A slave, for example, could achieve certain official status within the early Christ-movement, but at the same time, outside the institution that created the organisational, conceptual and physical conditions for that status, lack any independent formal or personal decision-making power or status.<sup>5</sup> In that sense, institutions such as those we are interested in here may provide an alternative world in which life can be re-imagined and social relationships transformed. It goes without saying, but should still be noted, that interaction

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<sup>4</sup> Ancient institutions and spatial analysis has been foregrounded in several recent studies. The most relevant of these for the purposes of the present study are those focussing on Graeco-Roman and Jewish associations. See especially the work of Richard S. Ascough, *Paul's Macedonian Associations: The Social Context of Philippians and 1 Thessalonians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Philip A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); Philip A. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009); Peter Richardson, *Building Jewish in the Roman East* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2004), 207–21; Richard Last, 'Communities That Write: Christ-Groups, Associations, and Gospel Communities', *NTS* 58 (2012): 173–98; Richard Last, *The Pauline Church and the Corinthian Ekklesia: Greco-Roman Associations in Comparative Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2015). See also Edward Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places: Almost Exclusively Houses?* (London: T&T Clark, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Cf., e.g. the female slaves identified by Pliny the Younger as 'deaconesses' as he subjected them to torture in order to extract information from them regarding the activities of the *Christianoi* (*Ep.* 10.96.8: *Quo magis necessarium credidi ex duabus ancillis, quae ministrae dicebantur, quid esset veri, et per tormenta quaerere*). *Ministra*, the word translated as deaconess, may refer to a woman dedicated to the service of a deity, an attendant in a temple, or similar, i.e., an official role within an institution which carried within it certain expectations and (relative) authority (cf. P. G. W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], *ad loc.*). On the office of deacon as a leadership role in the earliest Christ-groups, cf. Rom 16:1–2, and discussion by Bengt Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles* (Lund: Gleerup, 1978), 100–102, and Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 943–45.

that took place within a specific institution may have been unthinkable in other spheres of society.<sup>6</sup>

We should also note that physical space, while an important component in the formation of members' identity,<sup>7</sup> should be understood as secondary in relation to institution as conceptual space. That is, the nature of the institution takes precedence over the space in which meetings take place. A public institution may gather in open-air settings as well as in various forms of public architecture.<sup>8</sup> *Collegia*, or associations, may gather in temples as well as in private houses, and, if funding is sufficient, in purpose-built edifices.<sup>9</sup> For us, this means that it is problematic to assume that the fact that Paul's assemblies could be held in private houses<sup>10</sup> would have decisive implications for how we conceive of the nature of those assemblies, and the same is true of first- and second-century synagogues.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This does not mean, of course, that such interaction between individuals of different status would not, over time and depending on the number of members, influence the public and private spheres of society.

<sup>7</sup> On the sociology of space, see, e.g., Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson, *The Social Logic of Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Susan Kent (ed.), *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space: An Interdisciplinary Cross-Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For studies on the ancient world from this perspective, see Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Shelley Hales, *The Roman House and Social Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); cf. Shelley Hales and Tamar Hodos, eds., *Material Culture and Social Identities in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Inge Nielsen, *Housing the Chosen: The Architectural Context of Mystery Groups and Religious Associations in the Ancient World* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> There are numerous examples of this from antiquity. Of special interest in this regard is the fact that political institutions could move from one type of structure to another, without implications for the nature of the institutions themselves. See, e.g., Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 146–51.

<sup>9</sup> Ostia provides ample evidence of such purpose-built association buildings. For discussion, see, e.g., Gustav Hermansen, *Ostia: Aspects of Roman City Life* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1982), esp. 55–87 (plans provided).

<sup>10</sup> See Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Phlm 2; cf. Col 4:15. Regarding other possible meeting places of Christ-groups, see Adams, *Earliest Christian Meeting Places*.

<sup>11</sup> Synagogues could be housed in renovated private settings, as revealed in the Stobi inscription (Anders Runesson, Donald D. Binder and Birger Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue From its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book*, AGJU 72 [Leiden: Brill, 2008], henceforth abbreviated *AnSySB*, no. 187), but also in space designed for association use, as on the Greek island of Delos (*AnSySB*, no. 102) and in Ostia in Italy (*AnSySB*, no. 179). On occasion, scholars have overinterpreted the fact that gatherings took place in diverse spaces, as

Now, if we look at the larger question of ‘Paul and Judaism’,<sup>12</sup> this problem has often been addressed in the past using strategies that aim to delineate a certain Pauline theology, and then compare and contrast that theology with a rather monolithically construed entity designated ‘Judaism’. ‘Judaism’, in such studies, tends to function rhetorically as a sort of dark background against which Paul’s thinking emerges as revolutionary, as an expression of a new era, even, in the world of human ‘religious’ thinking and behaviour. What I want to do here is, by contrast, to look at some key aspects of certain patterns of thought discoverable in Paul’s letters as intertwined with the institutional realities in which he had his being, and note how and why they differ, not from ‘Judaism’, but from Jesus and his program. As we shall see, approaching Paul from such an institutional perspective will challenge common ways of construing his relationship to both Judaism and Graeco-Roman society.<sup>13</sup> What has often

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if such different architectural settings would indicate different stages in institutional formation. The space within which gatherings took place was dependent on several factors, not least economic, so that while it is fairly certain that most groups would strive towards congregating in purpose-built non-domestic architecture, those of insufficient economic means would have to make do with other kinds of spaces, even if they had a fully developed institutional structure, including officials, rules, and exclusion mechanisms. In the case of Jewish associations, it is instructive to note that the oldest archaeological evidence we have access to is of non-domestic architecture (Delos and Ostia), while some of the later evidence (Stobi) shows that Jews could gather in (renovated) domestic space too, depending on their financial situation. Of course, this is still the case today, as Jews may gather in all types of architecture, from apartment buildings to monumental edifices.

<sup>12</sup> For a critique of this way of phrasing the question, see Mark Nanos, ‘Paul and Judaism: Why Not Paul’s Judaism?’ in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle*, ed. Mark Douglas Given (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010), 117–60. See also the contributions in Mark Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm (eds.), *Paul Within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015); Paula Fredriksen, ‘Judaizing the Gentiles: The Ritual Demands of Paul’s Gospel’, *NTS* 56 (2010): 232–52.

<sup>13</sup> Previous studies of lasting value focussed on understanding the early Christ-movement in urban (social) context include several seminal studies published on the larger Diaspora milieu in which Paul was active, most notably Wayne A. Meeks’ classical work *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). Cf. more recently Reinhard von Bendemann and Markus Tiwald, *Das frühe Christentum und die Stadt* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2012). More sociologically oriented works include Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982). For recent studies emphasising gender perspectives, see Caroline Osiek and Margaret MacDonald, *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006); Margaret MacDonald, *The Power of Children: The Construction of Christian Families in the Greco-Roman World* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014). On the importance of understanding the Graeco-Roman city as a setting in which Judaism and Christ-belief took form and was lived, see Paula Fredriksen, *August-*

been understood as sharp ‘religious’ boundaries appear to dissolve when studied in institutional setting. As a consequence, while there are significant differences between Jesus and Paul, the image of Paul as a pioneering revolutionary thinker divorcing ‘Christianity’ from ‘Judaism’ turn out to be in need of reconsideration, as his ideas emerge more as a variant on a common theme than as a break with tradition.

In order to make this case, we need to set the scene by first introducing the varied ‘bodies’ in which the soul of Judaism dwelled, focussing on synagogues. Then, in order to put Paul in perspective, we shall look at the type of institution in which Jesus proclaimed his message, before we continue to read an influential passage in Paul as entangled in and explained by an institutional setting very different from those in which Jesus was active. We shall end with a few comments about the implications of this type of analysis for key Pauline themes such as the much-discussed topic of ‘justification by faith’.

## 2. Judaism and the ‘Synagogue’

Steve Mason noted in an essay a few years ago that what we call ‘religion’ did not exist as such in antiquity, but that aspects of it were expressed in a number of different areas of life.<sup>14</sup> Important for our purposes here is the understanding of ‘religion’ as referring to a ‘fabric’ in which ethnic groups, god(s), law, and land are interwoven and form a pattern that makes political, social, economic, and cultural sense of the world. That is, we are dealing with an understanding of the world in which a specific ethnos was associated with a certain god (or gods), a certain law, and a certain land. These basic building blocks were common to most forms of Judaism in antiquity (as they are still today). The construal of each of these aspects of ‘religion’ and their inter-relationship will result in differ-

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*tine and the Jews: A Christian Defence of Jews and Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 3–102. What the present study seeks to do is more narrowly defined: to work explicitly with analysis of theology, its origin and nature, in relation to first-century institutional structures.

<sup>14</sup> Steve Mason, ‘Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History’, *JSJ* 38 (2007): 457–512. More recently, Brent Nongbri has published a study with a wider scope, discussing the category ‘religion’ and how it has been used, problematically, in the modern world to describe both cross-cultural and historical phenomena: *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).



ent approaches to Jewish life and thought. Thus, such constructs may explain differences between, for example, Pharisees, Essenes, Sadducees and other groups. The most dynamic component among the four is the law, the interpretation of which is at the heart of the understanding of the other aspects of god, land, and people.

As we know from Philo, Josephus and the texts included in the New Testament, as well as from inscriptions, law was read, taught, and discussed in institutions designated by a number of terms that we translate into English with one single word: ‘synagogue’.<sup>15</sup> Thus, understanding what a ‘synagogue’ was in antiquity is crucial for our understanding of the interpretation of law, and, by implication, for deciphering the dynamics of Jewish group formation, ideology, and conflict.<sup>16</sup> A few words on defining ‘synagogue’ are, then, in order, before we can proceed.

Behind the many terms for ‘synagogue’ we find in the first century two basic kinds of institution: a local public civic institution on the one hand, existing where Jews were in administrative control in the land of Israel, and an association type of institution, i.e., a Jewish association, which could be found both in the Diaspora and in the land, on the other.<sup>17</sup> With regard to the former of these two types of institution, the public (civic) synagogue, ancient architectural parallels, noting especially the feature of stepped benches lining three or four of the walls of the assembly hall, include buildings within which Graeco-Roman political institutions held their meetings, the βουλευτήρια and ἐκκλησιαστήρια.<sup>18</sup> The closest mod-

<sup>15</sup> There were, with some overlap, 25 Greek, Latin, and Hebrew terms for ‘synagogue’ around the turn of the era. Of these, 17 terms were Greek. For source material, see the terminological index in *AnSySB* (cf. note 11 above).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Anders Runesson, ‘Entering a Synagogue with Paul: Torah Observance in First-Century Jewish Institutions’, in *Torah, the New Testament, and the People of God: Studies in Honour of Stephen Westerholm*, ed. David Miller and Susan Wendell (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), forthcoming.

<sup>17</sup> For comprehensive discussion and definitions, see Anders Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue: A Socio-Historical Study*, ConBNT 37 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001). For definition and categorisation of Jewish and Graeco-Roman institutions as ‘associations’ in an ancient Mediterranean setting, see Philip Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 25–53; Harland, *Dynamics of Identity*, 25–47; Philip Harland, *Greco-Roman Associations: Texts, Translations, and Commentary. II. North Coast of the Black Sea, Asia Minor* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 2–3; cf. Richardson, *Building Jewish*, 207–21.

<sup>18</sup> As suggested already by Yigael Yadin, ‘The Synagogue at Masada’, in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, ed. Lee I. Levine (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 19–23 (20 n. 1); Zvi Ma’oz, ‘The Synagogue of Gamla and the Typology of Second-Temple

ern architectural parallel in terms of its internal fixtures (placement of benches) is most likely the British parliament, the spatial arrangement of which reveals how the room is meant to be used: speeches, announcements, debate, discussion etc. This type of public Jewish institution, designated by synagogue terms such as συναγωγή and ἐκκλησία, served administrative and judicial purposes as well as what we would call ‘religious’ functions. Torah was read, taught and discussed publicly on Sabbaths, when both men and women gathered together. This type of institution had its origins in the city gates of Persian-period Yehud, where Torah was, on occasion, read in what was then the public-political space of a given city, for the same type of all-inclusive audiences.<sup>19</sup>

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Synagogues’, in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, ed. Lee I. Levine (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 35–41 (41); plans of the second-century BCE Priene ἐκκλησιαστήριον and the Herakleia βουλευτήριον in Gideon Foerster, ‘Architectural Models of the Greco-Roman Period and the Origin of the Galilean Synagogue’, in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, ed. Lee I. Levine (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 45–48 (45). See also Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 55. The evidence for roofed ἐκκλησιαστήρια is somewhat sparse since such gatherings of the δῆμος could be and often were held in large spaces such as theatres (note, however, the mention of an ἐκκλησιαστήριον in inscriptional evidence: *IDelos* 1498 [160–150 BCE]; see Ralph J. Korner, ‘Before “Church”’: Political, Ethno-Religious, and Theological Implications of the Collective Designation of Pauline Christ-Followers as *Ekklēsiāi*’ [PhD diss., McMaster University, 2014], 80, 268 n. 901). The architecture of the βουλευτήρια is more interesting; see Kostof, *History of Architecture*, 146–47; plan on p. 151. Discussing the Athenian βουλευτήριον, which could hold 700 people, Kostof notes that, for these buildings, ‘[t]he main design worry was to ensure that the interior posts needed to carry the roof obstructed the sightlines as little as possible’ (147). This was also one of the main problems in ancient synagogue construction. One does not, therefore, have to theorise about the Jerusalem temple as a (‘religiously’ motivated) template for synagogue design to explain the placement of columns in the latter, as James F. Strange and Donald Binder have suggested (James F. Strange, ‘First Century Galilee from Archaeology and from the Texts’, in *Archaeology and the Galilee: Texts and Contexts in Graeco-Roman and Byzantine Periods*, ed. Douglas R. Edwards and C. Thomas McCollough [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997], 43; Donald D. Binder, *Into the Temple Courts: The Place of the Synagogue in the Second Temple Period* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999], 220–26); these assembly halls outside the Jewish tradition had no direct architectural (or ‘religious’) connections with the Jerusalem temple, but may well have influenced Jewish assembly hall design.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Neh 8:1–12: ‘Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law [...] the Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense,

The public synagogue institution, in which local scribes had important civic, and thus also religious, functions, existed, for obvious reasons, only in areas where Jews were in charge of administrating city life, i.e., in Galilee and Judaea. Given the general rule that towns were most often not ethnically mixed,<sup>20</sup> people involved in meetings and activities in public synagogues were Jews. These local governing institutions of the land were thus indissolubly intertwined with the land as such, as well as with Jewish ethno-religious identity and Jewish law. They functioned as primary loci for the formation and preservation of Jewish identity.<sup>21</sup>

In places where Jews were not in charge of city administration, that is, in the Diaspora, institutions designated by synagogues terms (again, e.g., συναγωγή, προσευχή, ἐκκλησία) were understood as associations (*collegia*) and categorised as such by Roman authorities. The closest modern institutional parallel would be, e.g., voluntary ethno-religious associations such as the Portuguese Association of St Michael the Archangel in Hamilton, Canada. As Philip Harland has argued,

certain social dimensions of group life among Judean (Jewish) gatherings and Christian congregations, including issues of identity, are better understood when we place these groups within the framework of unofficial associations in the Greco-Roman world. Despite their position as cultural

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so that the people understood the reading' (vv. 2–3, 7–8). One may note that there is an additional gathering reported for the study of the law with a more narrow selection of people after the first public gathering: Neh 8:13–15 ('On the second day the heads of ancestral houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to the scribe Ezra in order to study the words of the law'). Cf. 2 Chron 17:7–9. Evidence for public *weekly* reading of Torah is, however, much later. For full discussion, see Runesson, *Origins*, 237–400.

<sup>20</sup> While urban centres such as Sepphoris and Tiberias, and also the northern town of Caesarea Philippi, would be more likely to include some non-Jewish inhabitants (sparse archaeological evidence attests to this; see Mark A. Chancey, 'The Ethnicities of Galileans', in *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods*, vol. 1: *Life, Culture, and Society* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014], 112–28 [122–23]), rural areas were more homogeneous. On the Jewish character of Galilee in the first century, see Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> On ancient nationalism and the Jewish people, see David Goodblatt, *Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Goodblatt points to mass dissemination of biblical texts, retention of the Hebrew language, and the priestly caste as key constitutive factors in the formation of ancient Jewish nationalism. One may note here that priests were prominent not only in the Jerusalem temple setting, but also in synagogues. For discussion, see Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 519–29.



minority groups, synagogues and congregations should not be studied in isolation from analogous social structures of that world.<sup>22</sup>

The ancients understood society as materializing in three basic spheres of life: the public, the domestic, and the in-between sphere inhabited by the associations.<sup>23</sup> What we may call ‘association synagogues’, or ‘Jewish associations’, claimed a place in Mediterranean society along with other Graeco-Roman associations beyond the roles and functions related to the domestic and private on the one hand, and the public and official on the other.

While the origins of this type of Jewish organizational form surely lie in the diaspora, we find Jewish associations serving the interest of specific Jewish groups also in the land. Philo mentions the συναγωγή of the Essenes,<sup>24</sup> and the Theodotos inscription in Jerusalem is another of these examples,<sup>25</sup> as is ‘the synagogue of the Freedmen’ mentioned in Acts 6:9.<sup>26</sup> When believers in Jesus emerged on the scene of history, they eventually began to organize themselves along similar lines. Such groups, marked by as much diversity as other Jewish groups, could gather in private houses or as subgroups within already existing buildings used by synagogue communities. What eventually emerged as Christianity/‘the

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<sup>22</sup> Harland, *Dynamics of Identity*, 25.

<sup>23</sup> Hans-Josef Klauck, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003). Klauck, however, misconstrues the nature of the associations in terms of their relationship to the πόλις. For a critique of Klauck in this regard, see Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations*.

<sup>24</sup> Philo, *Prob.* 80–83 (*AnSySB*, 40).

<sup>25</sup> *AnSySB*, no. 26.

<sup>26</sup> *AnSySB*, no. 18. The Greek here is not entirely clear (ἀνέστησαν δέ τινες τῶν ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τῆς λεγομένης Λιβερτίνων καὶ Κυρηναίων καὶ Ἀλεξανδρέων καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ Κιλικίας καὶ Ἀσίας συζητοῦντες τῷ Στεφάνῳ). We have either a ‘synagogue of the Freedmen’ within which we find members from different geographical locations (Cyrenians etc.), or one may understand συναγωγή to apply to each of the following geographical locations, so that we have in total five synagogues/associations mentioned here. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 358, understands the passage to refer to one synagogue of freedmen, whose members came from different diaspora locations (taking καὶ in the first instance as adverbial). Note, more importantly, the highlighting in the passage of social identity and geographical network/background as significant for membership identification.

church' and Judaism/rabbinic synagogue, i.e., what we today know as two separate religions, began their lives as such associations in Late Antiquity.<sup>27</sup>

The historical Jesus, however, and his earliest followers, proclaimed the message of the kingdom not in association settings but in Jewish public space in the land,<sup>28</sup> a context quite different from the institutional environment we associate with Paul and, later in history, with 'Christianity' and 'Judaism'. There is a significant institutional gap between the earliest phase of the Jesus movement and the later church, thus, and this gap necessitated some serious theological work as the movement morphed into an unofficial association in the Diaspora from having been a religio-political presence on the public scene in Galilee and Judaea.

### 3. Jesus, Kingdom, Synagogue

The public/civic synagogues were key to the administration of the land, and provided a network within which local populations could experience that they were part of a nation, that they were 'citizens', if you like, despite the fact that the land was split up under different rulers approved by Rome.<sup>29</sup> The temple in Jerusalem provided a focal point for such national

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<sup>27</sup> Since what we call (non-Jewish) Christianity and (rabbinic) Judaism today were formed in association settings, it is not easy to prove that Judaism and Christianity, understood in this way, ever belonged together in a common institutional milieu (and thus it is equally difficult to argue that there ever was a 'parting of the ways' between them). This has implications for how we reconstruct early relations (conflicts, co-existence etc.) between Jews and (non-Jewish or Jewish) Christ-believers. This is not the place, however, to develop such implications further.

<sup>28</sup> So most clearly John 18:19–20: 'Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret."' On these verses, see Birger Olsson, "'All My Teaching was Done in Synagogues" (John 18,20)', in *Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel: Essays by the Members of the SNTS Johannine Writings Seminar*, ed. G. Van Belle, J.G. Van der Watt and P. Maritz (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 203–24. See also the paradigmatic and summarizing presentations of Jesus' proclamation in Galilee in Matt 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:39; Luke 4:14–15, 44 [Judaea]. This approach of engaging the Jewish people in public political space stands in sharp contrast to the sectarian theology known from the Dead Sea Scrolls, which is focused on saving the few rather than aiming for a mass movement through activities in public settings.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. the strategy to establish and maintain national identity through teaching law locally in 2 Chron 16:7–9. However, in the first century there is little evidence of direct political channels through which Jerusalem officials controlled other parts of the country in this

identity, but the distinctiveness of various forms of Jewish identity was shaped and played out locally, based on local interpretation of Jewish law.<sup>30</sup> The importance of this network of public synagogues through which the land was governed locally can hardly be overstated, since it provided an arena for maintaining a sense of common identity, which included a retained focus on Jerusalem.<sup>31</sup> The political unity of the land

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way, and interpretation of law was left to local town and village officials. For discussion, see Runesson, *Origins*, ch. 4.

<sup>30</sup> For discussion of local interpretation of Torah in synagogues, see Runesson, 'Entering a Synagogue with Paul'.

<sup>31</sup> The 2009 discovery of the first-century synagogue at Magdala (= Taricheae; Hebrew: Migdal) provides archaeological evidence for such a connection between synagogues and the Jerusalem temple. In the synagogue, the earliest ever found displaying mosaic floors, the excavators discovered a large carved stone block of unknown purpose. The imagery on the stone is related to the Jerusalem temple and is executed in such a way that it makes it likely, in my view, that the stone was a three-dimensional representation of the temple itself. The most detailed discussion of this stone block hitherto published is Donald D. Binder, 'The Mystery of the Magdala Stone', in *A City Set on a Hill: Essays in Honor of James F. Strange*, ed. Daniel Warner and Donald D. Binder (Mountain Home, AR: BorderStone Press, LLC, 2014), 17–48. See also Mordechai Aviam, 'The Decorated Stone from the Synagogue at Migdal: A Holistic Interpretation and a Glimpse into the Life of Galilean Jews at the Time of Jesus', *NovT* 55 (2013): 205–20. One of the earliest presentations of the synagogue is found in Jürgen K. Zangenberg, 'Archaeological News from the Galilee: Tiberias, Magdala and Rural Galilee', *Early Christianity* 1 (2010): 471–82. See also Marcela Zapata-Meza, 'Neue mexicanische Ausgrabungen in Magdala', in *Bauern, Fischer und Propheten – Galiäa zur Zeit Jesu*, ed. Jürgen K. Zangenberg and Jens Schröter (Darmstadt: von Zabern, 2012), 85–98; Mordechai Aviam, 'Zwischen Meer und See – Geschichte und Kultur Galiläas von Simon Makkabäus bis zu Flavius Josephus', in *Bauern, Fischer und Propheten – Galiäa zur Zeit Jesu*, ed. Jürgen K. Zangenberg and Jens Schröter (Darmstadt: von Zabern, 2012), 13–38; Dina Avshalom-Gorni and Arfan Najjar, 'Primeros resultados por parte de la Autoridad de Antigüedades de Israel', *El Pensador* 1.5 (2013): 40–45. Lee I. Levine, *Visual Judaism in Late Antiquity: Historical Contexts of Jewish Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), briefly mentions the synagogue (and the stone block), noting the link between synagogue and temple (55–56, 337–38). For more comprehensive discussion, see Jordan Ryan, 'Magdala', in *Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry and Lazarus Wentz (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2013); Jordan Ryan, 'Public and Semi-Public Synagogues of the Land of Israel During the Second Temple Period', *El Pensador* 1.5 (2013): 32–39; Jordan Ryan, 'Second-Temple Period Public Synagogue of the Land of Israel and the Function of the Magdala Synagogue', in *The Magdala Excavation Project: Preliminary Interpretations From an Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Marcela Zapata Meza and Rosaura Sanz-Rinçon (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2015), forthcoming. Most recently, Richard Bauckham and Stefano De Luca published an important discussion of Magdala, including the synagogue and the decorated stone block, summarising the present state of research: 'Magdala As We Now Know It', *Early Christianity* 6 (2015): 91–118. As Mark A. Chancey, 'The Ethnicities of Galileans', in *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods*, vol. 1: *Life, Culture, and Society* (Minne-

had been lost after the death of Herod I, but we should keep in mind that Jesus and his contemporaries were raised by parents and socialised in communities that had themselves experienced that unity under one king. Synagogue institutions provided a space within which individuals and groups, not only officials, could express discontent and urge action.

For our purposes here, we may note the very high probability that anyone who proclaimed the coming of a kingdom in this type of conceptual space, in Galilee and in Judaea,<sup>32</sup> would inevitably have been understood as announcing, in one way or another, the religio-political reunification and restoration of the nation.<sup>33</sup> In this regard, the setting itself provides a hermeneutical key to such proclamation, which cannot be ignored without the loss of historical precision.<sup>34</sup> Thus, talk about the kingdom of the God of Israel in the religio-political and administrative centres of the land of

apolis: Fortress, 2014), 121, notes: ‘The presence of a symbol so closely related to the temple points to the importance of that institution for the Galilean Jews who gathered here’.

<sup>32</sup> Mark and Matthew chronologically and geographically divide Jesus’ proclamation into two phases, with Jesus being active in Galilee before leaving for Judaea. John has Jesus travelling back and forth, proclaiming his message in public synagogues in both regions as well as in Samaria. Luke merges these traditions, having a clear focus on Galilee while still mentioning that Jesus taught in the synagogues of Judaea (Luke 4:44; on the meaning of ‘Judaea’ as referring here to the entirety of the land rather than the specific region see, e.g., Joseph Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 556–58). For discussion of the representation of synagogue institutions in the Gospels and in relation to the historical Jesus, see Anders Runesson, ‘The Historical Jesus, the Gospels, and First-Century Jewish Society: The Importance of the Synagogue for Understanding the New Testament’, in *A City Set on a Hill: Essays in Honor of James F. Strange*, ed. Daniel Warner and Donald D. Binder (Mountain Home, AR: BorderStone Press, LLC, 2014), 265–97. A brief overview is available in Anders Runesson, ‘Synagogue’, in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 903–11.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Acts 1:6.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Halvor Moxnes’ emphasis on place as an explanatory category; *Putting Jesus in His Place: Radical Vision of Household and Kingdom* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2003). While it seems that some non-organisational institutions were challenged by Jesus, as Moxnes argues, it is noteworthy that the synagogue, as an institution, was not, but was in fact used a key platform for the proclamation of the kingdom. As administrative institutions in a time period when religion and politics were not understood as separate spheres of society, the conceptual space provided by public synagogues meant that local expressions of ethnic identity, or peoplehood, were formed in relation to ideological perceptions of, and realities associated with the land in a hermeneutical setting that was, at its core, sustained by the public reading of divine law. In other words, the public synagogue institutions of the land provided a forum where the four intertwined aspects of what we call ‘religion’, as discussed by Mason – ethnos, land, law and God – could materialise in a very concrete sense.



Israel would inescapably have been interpreted as having what we would call political and national implications for the people of Israel. While ideas about other nations may have had some place in such discourses, they could never be more than peripheral, ultimately filling the function of focussing attention on the Jewish nation; its past, present, and future.<sup>35</sup>

We see this overall dynamic involving ethnic identity in relation to land and law being played out in Matthew's Gospel. In this text, Jesus requires his disciples to proclaim in word and deed the kingdom *only* in the land of Israel – designated as such by Matthew – excluding Samaria and other non-Jewish areas.<sup>36</sup> Institutionally, Matthew's story is historically embedded in Galilee and Judaea like few other New Testament texts, and this has consequences for how the theology, and missiology, of the text is developed.<sup>37</sup> It is likely that Matthew preserves historical data better than other gospels with regard to the overall setting in which the historical Jesus proclaimed his message.<sup>38</sup>

The question is now if proclamation such as that of the historical Jesus can at all be exported beyond (the political entity of) the land of Israel. It would seem that significant adaptations and adjustments, loss of political urgency being among them, would be required if this were to be done. The answer to the question depends to no small degree on how we reconstruct the shift in the nature of the Jewish institutional structures, from the land to the Diaspora. If kingdom proclamation to Jews within local political institutions governing the land is to be communicated to Jews living outside of the land, with the understanding that it carried implications for

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<sup>35</sup> It is also worth noting, as we consider the structure of these institutions, that since the current moment and tradition as expressed in Torah were interpreted through open discussion and debate, as also synagogue architecture indicates, such a message could spread fast and be regarded as undermining the current status quo. This would have threatened those who benefitted from maintaining status quo, so that conflict would have been unavoidable. Cf. Chris Keith, *Jesus Against the Scribal Elite: The Origins of the Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), who contrasts the social status of Jesus with that of the officials working in these institutional settings; the status discrepancy in and of itself would have been enough to create conflict, regardless of the message proclaimed.

<sup>36</sup> Matt 10:5–7: ‘Go nowhere among the gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, “The kingdom of heaven has come near.”’

<sup>37</sup> Cf. the tradition reported in Acts 1:6–7.

<sup>38</sup> The establishment of the Matthean ἐκκλησία, however, is certainly a later tradition which is given legitimacy through placing in Jesus' mouth its founding idea (Matt 16:18; 18:17). This later institutional reality matches, as will be clear below, the so-called great commission in Matthew 28:18–20, where disciples are told to go beyond the land.

them too, this had to be done in institutions which had no political or administrative functions related to the society in which they were situated. Furthermore, as many other Graeco-Roman associations,<sup>39</sup> these Jewish associations would have had among their numbers people from various ethnic backgrounds (sometimes called God-fearers). Somewhat simplified, the earliest Jewish Christ-believers travelling beyond the land with the kingdom message were thus faced with two major hermeneutical problems:

(a) How should a religio-political message entangled with a specific land be proclaimed outside that land in an unofficial institution lacking political functions? Will the shift in institutional setting in itself automatically lead to loss of political urgency? Will it require ‘spiritualisation’ of the message?

(b) How should a message focussed on the restoration of the nation of a specific ethnic group be proclaimed in a setting in which people of various ethnic backgrounds were present, who, to varying degrees, were loyal to the God of that ethnic group? Can issues relating to peoplehood, or ‘citizenship’, be renegotiated?

None of these questions was relevant in the religio-political institutional settings in which Jesus operated and proclaimed the kingdom. Indeed, it is quite unlikely that any of them – or the theological solutions triggered by them – would have ever been brought up had the movement not spread beyond the land and its public synagogues. Given that these two problems, which are of key importance for Paul, arose as a direct consequence of the shift in institutional setting from land to Diaspora, we need, arguably, to understand the foundation of Paul’s theology as developing from attempts at solving them. Indeed, the *very idea* of a ‘gentile mission’ is best explained not by any original theological need, but by institutional structures necessitating theological response.

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<sup>39</sup> See John S. Kloppenborg and Richard S. Ascough, *Greco-Roman Associations: Texts, Translations, and Commentary 1: Attica, Central Greece, Macedonia, Thrace*, BZNTW 181 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011): Mixed associations with both citizens and immigrants (noncitizens): *IG II<sup>2</sup> 1316* [= *GRA I 16*] (Piraeus, 272/271 BCE); *IG II<sup>2</sup> 1323* [= *GRA I 31*] (Athens, 194/193 BCE); *IG II<sup>2</sup> 1324* [= *GRA I 32*] (Piraeus, ca. 190 BCE) (?); *IG II<sup>2</sup> 1327* [= *GRA I 35*] (Piraeus, 178/177 BCE); *SEG 36:228* [= *GRA I 38*] (Attica, 159/158 BCE); *SEG 42:157* [= *GRA I 41*] (Athens, ca. 116/115–ca. 95/94 BCE); *IG II<sup>2</sup> 1012* [= *GRA I 42*] (Athens, 112/111 BCE); *IG II<sup>2</sup> 2361* [= *GRA I 52*] (Piraeus, 200–211 CE); *SEG 46:744* [= *GRA I 65*] (Edessa, 51 CE); *CIL 3.633* [68] (Philippi, II CE); *SEG 46:800* [= *GRA I 72*] (Pydna, 250 CE); *SEG 42:625* [75] (Thessaloniki, 90–91 CE); *IG X/2.1 259* [= *GRA I 76*] (Thessaloniki, I CE); *ICiliciaBM II 201* (before 69 CE [= *GRA I 150*]).

## 4. Christ as Association in Paul's Three-Dimensional Theology

What, then, does all this mean for our study of Paul? Analytically, sociology and anthropology should precede theology. Theology is, arguably, better understood if studied as an integral part of the intricate social web in which human beings exist and without which human behaviour can hardly be explained. From this perspective, Paul's globalised Christ emerges, as we shall see, as patterned theologically on the association model, an institutional model that was 'portable' and did not depend on political bodies and ethnic identity for its survival. One could say that, in this sense, these associations, which existed before Paul's arrival on the historical scene, functioned ideologically somewhat like the earth Naaman the Syrian brought with him to his homeland when he returned there after having been cured from his skin disease by Elisha in Israel; the interconnectedness between God and land necessitated a solution in which Naaman's newfound loyalty to the God of Israel could be expressed.<sup>40</sup> In a similar way, ideology connected with the land could be retained in Jewish Diaspora associations, which, as we see in several inscriptions and papyri, were often regarded as holy space;<sup>41</sup> the holy land became 'portable', so to speak,<sup>42</sup> so that the God of Israel could be worshipped outside of the land of Israel as the law was read and discussed every sabbath.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> 2 Kgs 5:17–18. As Luke 4:27 indicates, the story of Naaman was remembered and used by Christ-believers in the first century to make ethno-theological points.

<sup>41</sup> On synagogues as holy space, see Steven Fine, *This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the Synagogue During the Greco-Roman Period* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998); Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*. While these scholars view synagogues both in the Diaspora and in the land as sacred precincts, in my view the evidence allows for such an understanding of synagogues only in the Diaspora. For discussion of holiness in connection with ritual washings as related to synagogues, see Anders Runesson, 'Water and Worship: Ostia and the Ritual Bath in the Diaspora Synagogue', in *The Synagogue of Ancient Ostia and the Jews of Rome: Interdisciplinary Studies*, ed. Birger Olsson, Dieter Mitternacht and Olof Brandt, SSIR.4° 57 (Jonsared: Åström, 2001), 115–29. On the understanding of sacred space as related to synagogues in Josephus, see Andrew R. Krause, 'Rhetoric, Spatiality, and the First-Century Synagogue: The Description and Narrative Use of Jewish Institutions in the Work of Flavius Josephus' (PhD diss.; McMaster University, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> Not halakhically, though; the land of Israel itself required some specific laws to be observed there, which did not apply outside of the land.

<sup>43</sup> The reading of law in synagogues in the Diaspora is evidenced in literary sources such as Philo, Josephus, and Acts; for texts and translations, see *AnSySB*). Here one may compare with the idea of the Talmud as portable land, as discussed by Daniel Boyarin in a



These developments within Diaspora Judaism were thus general and triggered by the Diaspora experience *as such*, as it involves the four aspects of people, land, law and God in places beyond the homeland where the navel of the world was, in the Jewish worldview, located: the Jerusalem temple. It is within this larger Diaspora matrix Paul needs to be understood, as he interprets the implications of the Christ event for the world. For Paul, the ‘portable’ elements of Judaism were held together in the ‘*in Christ*’ concept,<sup>44</sup> whose theological nature was, in turn, compatible with, indeed built upon, the structures of the associations. The concrete basic institutional form of the association gave stability to the reconfiguration and globalisation of the Christ figure and gave members *a sense of theology as lived reality*.

As is well known, Paul’s favourite designation for the people who belonged to the movement that he was working to expand was ἐκκλησία. Now, this term, which traditionally referred to Graeco-Roman public political institutions, was used by other Jews too, both for public institutions, i.e., what we would call public synagogues,<sup>45</sup> and, less often, as a designation for Jewish associations.<sup>46</sup> Theologically, for Paul, the people who were members of his ἐκκλησίαι existed ἐν Χριστῷ, ‘in Christ’.<sup>47</sup> In other words, to be ‘in Christ’ is for Paul equivalent to belong to the ἐκκλησία of Christ.

In brief, Paul describes what it means to be a member of his ἐκκλησία, theologically, in the following way. To live ‘in Christ’ is to have joined

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paper delivered at Uppsala University in 2014. I am grateful to Rebecca Runesson for stimulating conversations on this topic as applied also to the first century and Christ groups in the Diaspora.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. the reception of Paul in Col 1:17: ‘in him all things hold together’.

<sup>45</sup> This is evident not least in Josephus’ use of the term. For discussion, see Krause, ‘Rhetoric, Spatiality, and First-Century Synagogues’.

<sup>46</sup> For this use of the term in Philo, see *AnSySB*, nos. 201, 202, 203, and comprehensive discussion in Korner, ‘Before “Church”’.

<sup>47</sup> E.g., Gal 1:22; 1 Thess 2:14. Note also the expression ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ (2 Thess 1:4; 1 Cor 1:2; cf. 1 Tim 3:5) and the notion that the ἐκκλησία lives in the father and the Christ (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1). On the corporate nature of being ‘in Christ’, see also Rom 12:5. Cf. the reception of Paul in Eph 1:22–23; Col 1:24, where ἐκκλησία is described as the body of the Christ. Christ can also be described as the head of the ἐκκλησία, i.e., as an integral part of the larger entity (Eph 5:23; Col 1:18). The expression ἐν Χριστῷ occurs 76 times in the New Testament, and all but three (1 Pet 3:16; 5:10, 14) are found in the undisputed and disputed letters of Paul. Ἐκκλησία occurs 114 times in the New Testament. While it is mentioned most frequently in the Pauline corpus (61 times), the term is also used in Matthew’s Gospel, Acts, Hebrews, James, 3 John, and Revelation.

the life of the Spirit (Rom 8:2; cf. Col 3:3; 2 Tim 1:1), which is eternal and given by God for free (Rom 6:11, 23). In this conceptual space, members will have access to God's love (Rom 8:39; cf. Phil 2:1–5; 1 Tim 1:14; 2 Tim 1:13) and grace (1 Cor 1:4; cf. Eph 2:7; 2 Tim 1:9; 2:1). Indeed, people who are 'in Christ' even stand in God's presence (2 Cor 2:17; cf. 2 Cor 12:2; Eph 2:6). For this to be possible there needs to be a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; cf. Eph 2:10), where people can walk with God as 'sons of God' ἐν Χριστῷ (Gal 3:26). The reference to creation signals that God's intentions go beyond the Jewish people, although Paul construes non-Jewish access to this new creation through reference to Abraham, the forefather of the Jewish people; it is 'in Christ', i.e., in the ἐκκλησία, that non-Jews will have access to the blessings promised to Abraham (Gal 3:14; cf. Eph 2:13; 3:6). Since 'in Christ' God is reconciling God-self with the world (2 Cor 5:19; cf. Eph 4:32) – i.e., God is recreating the world so that human beings can walk in God's presence – life 'in Christ' keeps the member safe from condemnation in the final judgment (Rom 8:1; cf. 2 Tim 2:10).<sup>48</sup>

As noted earlier, Torah was read on a weekly basis both in the land and in the Diaspora. Paul, finally, claims that the direct relationship with God that those who are 'in Christ' enjoy leads to a clarity of sight with regard to the understanding holy scriptures that does not exist outside Christ (2 Cor 3:14). Only in his ἐκκλησία can scripture be properly understood.

All of this takes place 'in Christ' and thus also in the institutional space of the ἐκκλησία (1 Thess 2:14; Gal 1:22). Contrary to the concept of ἐν Χριστῷ, however, the ἐκκλησία is more than a theological notion; it is also an institutional reality. Ἐν Χριστῷ language *theologises* this institutional reality. The institutional character and structure of the ἐκκλησία must thus be thought of as correlating with the theological construal of the Christ. This, if the social is to take analytical precedence over the theological, leads to a situation in which association structures, which as institutional phenomena predate Paul, will constitute basic defining parameters as Paul theologically reconfigures the Christ figure as a global category.

In order to illustrate this socio-theological situation, we shall discuss a well-known passage in Paul, in which his theological claims, rather than being a radical departure from his Jewish and Graeco-Roman context, in fact mirror a Jewish association setting, which in turn differed from how

<sup>48</sup> This does not, however, mean that members will escape suffering on earth, as is evidenced by Paul's own suffering. In this regard, cf. the reception of Paul in 2 Tim 3:12–17.

social roles were construed in public Graeco-Roman society on the one hand and in domestic settings on the other: Gal 3:28. In this passage, Paul famously claims that, '[t]here is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.'<sup>49</sup>

Looking at membership patterns in Graeco-Roman associations they could vary, some being reserved exclusively for women,<sup>50</sup> others exclusively for men.<sup>51</sup> Many, however, were open to both men and women,<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> For a brief comment on this text in relation to Jewish associations, see *AnSySB*, 13. Cf. Rom 10:12 ('For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him'); 1 Cor 12:13 ('For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit'). See also Col 3:11 ('In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all'). Note that only Galatians has included the gender category; the other passages focus on ethnicity and social identity. On the reception history of Gal 3:28, see Pauline Nigh Hogan, *"No Longer Male and Female": Interpreting Galatians 3:28 in Early Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2008).

<sup>50</sup> Cf. the cult of the Bona Dea. This cult was performed annually on the highest political level as a state matter for the benefit of the Roman people; at such times men were excluded and the ritual was presided over by the chief magistrate's wife and the Vestal Virgins. Sources beyond the literary describe the circumstances surrounding the cult differently; slaves and freed persons are often indicated as worshippers, men could be among the dedicants, and children could also be members of *collegia* dedicated to this cult. These discrepancies do not have to be interpreted as contradictory in nature, but simply as indicating that people from lower social strata were involved in the cult of a goddess, which they knew to be of importance also for the aristocracy and the state as a whole. For discussion of the cultic celebrations of the Bona Dea among the associations, see Hendrik H. J. Brouwer, *Bona Dea: The Sources and a Description of the Cult* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 372–85.

<sup>51</sup> E.g., the Mithras cult.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Kloppenborg and Ascough, *Graeco-Roman Associations: Syll<sup>3</sup>* = AGRW 121: 'When entering this house let men and women, free people and household slaves, swear by all the gods ...' See also *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 2358 [= *GRA I* 40] (Athens, ca. 135 BCE?); *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 1365/66 [= *GRA I* 53] (Laurion, ca. 200 CE); *SEG* 46:800 [= *GRA I* 72] (Pydna, 250 CE); *Syll<sup>3</sup>* [= *GRA II* 117] (Philadelphia, II–I BCE). On women in associations generally, see *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 1298 [= *GRA I* 20] (Athens, 248/247 BCE); *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 1292 [= *GRA I* 26] (Athens or Piraeus?, 215/214 BCE); *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 2354 [= *GRA I* 30] (Athens, ca. 200 BCE); *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 2358 [= *GRA I* 40] (Athens, ca. 135 BCE?); *SEG* 54:235 [= *GRA I* 47] (Epano Liosia, ca. 50 BCE); *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 1365/66 [= *GRA I* 53] (Laurion, ca. 200 CE); *IG VII* 688 [= *GRA I* 57] (Tanagra); *CIG II* 2007f [= *GRA I* 66] (Hagios Mamas, II CE); *Philippi II* 340/L589 [= *GRA I* 71] (I–II CE?); *IG X/2.1* 260 [= *GRA I* 81] (Thessaloniki, III CE); *IPerinthos* 57 [= *GRA I* 88] (II CE?); *IKyme* 37 [= *GRA II* 105] (late I BCE or early I CE); *IJO II* 36 [= *GRA II* 106] (Kyme or Phokaia, III CE); *SEG* 28:953 [= *GRA II* 108] (Kyzikos area, ca. 25–50 CE); *IJO II* 168 [= *GRA II* 113] (Akmoneia area, late I CE or early II CE); *TAM V* 1539 [= *GRA II* 117] (Philadelphia, ca. 100 BCE); *TAM V* 972 [= *GRA II* 123] (Thyateira, ca. 50 CE); *ISmyrna* 653

and this included the diaspora synagogues, as we also know from Josephus.<sup>53</sup> The same can be said about the social and the ethnic aspects. Within the context of an association, slave and free could interact in ways they could hardly do in other spheres of ancient society.<sup>54</sup> While some associations were founded around cults originating as specific ethnic cults, such as the Egyptian Isis cult, ethnic diversity in the membership could emerge as a result of a general appreciation in a given place of a specific god or goddess as exceptionally powerful.<sup>55</sup>

The state of things was similar in Jewish associations in the Diaspora, where the existence of the so-called God-fearers indicates comparable de-ethnosizing processes even before the arrival of the Jesus movement. As for slaves, we know from the Bosphoran kingdom inscriptions that they were manumitted in synagogue settings (προσευχαί), and that their continued loyalty to the Jewish community was stated as a condition of their freedom.<sup>56</sup> In other words, Graeco-Roman *and* Jewish associations allowed for an alternative world to be enacted, in which roles could be construed beyond the ethnic, social, and gender parameters that determined interaction between people elsewhere in society. In Gal 3:28, Paul invests such inclusive institutional structures with theological content in order to explain what he believes to be the reality of being an ἐκκλησία ‘in Christ.’

Paul thus approved of the basic institutional realities with which his targeted audience was already familiar; indeed within which they all already lived and breathed and had their being. Association membership structures and the type of (mixed) interaction that follows from them captures, contrary to official public institutions and social roles in the domes-

(I–II CE [= *GRA* II 138]); *ISmyrna* 728 [= *GRA* II 140] (II CE); *SEG* 17:503 (Miletos, late III BCE or II BCE [= *GRA* I 143]); *TAM* III 4 and 62 [= *GRA* II 147] (Termessos, II CE); *ICiliciaDF* 46 (I–II CE [= *GRA* II 153]).

<sup>53</sup> See, e.g., *A.J.* 14.256–258 (*AnSySB*, no. 109); 14.259–261 (*AnSySB*, no. 113). Cf. a Jewish woman’s release of her slave in a synagogue (προσευχή) as witnessed by an inscription from Panticapaeum in the Bosphoran Kingdom (*AnSySB*, no. 126).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. the inscriptions listed above, n. 52. For Roman citizens, freedmen, and slaves, see *CIL* 3.633 [= *GRA* I 68] (Philippi, II CE).

<sup>55</sup> On the aspect of expansion (mission) in such cults, see Anders Runesson, ‘Was there a Christian Mission Before the Fourth Century? Problematizing Common Ideas about Early Christianity and the Beginnings of Modern Mission’, in *The Making of Christianity: Conflicts, Contacts, and Constructions*, ed. Magnus Zetterholm and Samuel Byrskog (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 205–47.

<sup>56</sup> For sources, consult the index in *AnSySB*. See also discussion of these inscriptions in Harland, *Graeco-Roman Associations*.



tic sphere, what it means to live ‘in Christ’, to be part of the ἐκκλησία destined for the goal of the alternative world of the coming kingdom.<sup>57</sup>

The hermeneutics involved here are similar to those ascribed to Paul in Acts, where he is depicted as taking an already existing cult on the Areopagus as a point of departure for explaining the nature and importance of the Jewish deity he is now proclaiming (Acts 17:22–31).<sup>58</sup> Analogically, in the same way as the Lukan Paul can tell the Greeks that, ‘What you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you’, we could say that the Paul of the letters informs the Galatians in 3:28 that ‘what you unknowingly do as you organise yourselves and assemble in these associations, this I proclaim to you as charged with a deeper (theological) meaning’.<sup>59</sup>

The Pauline understanding of the identity of Christ as the ἐκκλησία is thus based on, not formed in opposition to, Jewish and Graeco-Roman organisational forms. The ἐκκλησία, the physical and institutional form of the Christ – the institution that manifests the Christ so that its members can be said to be living ‘in Christ’ – is, therefore, by necessity, an expression of a diasporic Jewish organisational and religious identity, as much as Christ himself is re-imagined as a globalised diasporic Jewish messiah. Paul thus saturated diasporic institutional structures with messianic-theological meaning as a means to proclaim his message in ways that could not only be understood *intellectually* by his target audience, but also *experienced* as a lived reality. This dual strategy, extracting theological significance from existing organisational forms, would have reinforced and retained among members the content of the theological message. The

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. the related argument, based on a different approach, in Mark D. Nanos, ‘The Question of Conceptualization: Qualifying Paul’s Position on Circumcision in Dialogue with Josephus’ Advisors to King Izates’, in *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, ed. Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 105–152.

<sup>58</sup> Note Acts 17:23: “‘For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god’. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.’” Cf. Acts 17:28: “‘In him we live and move and have our being’”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we too are his offspring.””

<sup>59</sup> One may also compare with the hermeneutics of John’s Gospel, as this text relates Jesus to already existing Jewish rituals and festivals, which are then charged with additional (theo-ritual) meaning. This type of hermeneutics is based on the presupposition that the rituals and organisational forms referred to are understood by all, author as well as audience, as valid; without such shared views the claims in question would lose their rhetorical force.

institution is transformed into a theological edifice, within which members live and move and have their being.

But with this identification of Christ as association (ἐκκλησία) follow theological and halakhic questions, especially with regard to the mixed ethnic identities of the members and the role of the Jewish law, as the latter is dependent on the former. It is reasonable to assume that Paul's thinking regarding these issues, ethnic identity and law, developed *as a consequence of the institutional setting in which he was active*, rather than the other way around, that theological innovation would have created, *ex nihilo*, a need to reinvent institutional structures. In fact, what we see in Jewish and Graeco-Roman sources pertaining to associations prevent the latter hypothesis; Paul is thoroughly embedded conceptually and institutionally in Diaspora Judaism. The implication of this is, then, that the much debated issues of Paul's understanding of law and related concepts, such as righteousness, need to be understood in some way as *secondary* to the socio-institutional realities described.

Once ethnic groups already present in the Jewish associations have been theologically subsumed under the category Christ, consideration of the law has to follow, since it is intertwined with the Jewish *ethnos*. 'In Christ', then – not outside Christ – the law is continually understood as salvific, as Paul also stresses in Rom 3:31. Members of the ἐκκλησία are said to stand in the presence of God, and this is not possible without the purity that is required and fulfilled by observance of the law *in Christ*. For, as Cecilia Wassén has shown in a recent study on the Dead Sea Scrolls and Paul, you have to be pure even in a metaphorical temple.<sup>60</sup> The holy can never co-exist with the impure. The ἐκκλησία, and the individual bodies within the ἐκκλησία, can therefore be construed as sacred space,<sup>61</sup> fit for the presence of God. The holy space of the ἐκκλησία theologically turns the already sacred synagogues into a 'new creation', a portable holy

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<sup>60</sup> Cecilia Wassen, 'Do You Have to Be Pure in a Metaphorical Temple? Sanctuary Metaphors and Construction of Sacred Space in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Paul's Letters', in *Purity, Holiness, and Identity in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Carl S. Ehrlich, Anders Runesson and Eileen Schuller (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 55–86. Cf. Annette Weissenrieder, 'Do you not know that you are God's Temple? Towards a New Perspective on Paul's Temple Image in 1 Corinthians 3:16', in *Contested Spaces: Houses and Temples in Roman Antiquity and the New Testament*, ed. David L. Balch and Annette Weissenrieder (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 377–411.

<sup>61</sup> 1 Cor 1:2; 3:16–17; 6:17–19; 2 Cor 1:1; 6:16. Cf. Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 9:13–14; Phil 1:1; 4:21. See also the reception of Paul in Eph 1:22–23; 2:19–22; 3:10; 5:27; Col 1:2, 4; 1 Tim 3:16.

land, if you like, where God again can walk among humans, and members, as a consequence of God's presence, can understand all the mysteries of the holy scriptures that remain hidden to outsiders.

For Paul, non-Jews and Jews alike will have the law, which Paul defines as love (Rom 13:8–10), fulfilled in this space as it is channelled through the Spirit, which works 'in Christ', directly from God into human hearts (Rom 5:5). In this conceptual space, then, while gentiles must remain gentiles they do fulfil what the law requires even to the point of (metaphorical) circumcision (Phil 3:3),<sup>62</sup> and they become part of the people of God, or 'citizens', as Ephesians would later have it.<sup>63</sup> 'Faith' (πίστις) in this theological equation, becomes the tool applied by, or in, humans to open them up for this pouring of law observance ('righteousness') into their lives. 'Justification by faith', which is a kind of summary statement of this theological process that was initially triggered by the reality of mixed membership in the synagogues, is thus *not replacing the law, but allows for the law to be fulfilled by all*, regardless of ethnic identity.<sup>64</sup> With such a pattern of thought, Paul manages to have the theoinstitutional cake and eat it too.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> 'For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh.' It may be noted that, contrary to later interpretations of Paul, circumcision and the Jewishness that follows with it is regarded as something desirable, something related to salvation, even for those who were not Jews. The metaphorical use of 'circumcision' here should not be understood as rejection of the (physical) ritual itself, including its meaning and identity-shaping function. Rather, for Paul, non-Jews enter the people of God and share in the promises *as if* they were circumcised as Paul and his fellow Jewish Christ-believers were. The expression is another way of reinforcing that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek in terms of salvation 'in Christ', a theological position which does not remove the actual ethnic identities of the people who belong within (cf. 1 Cor 7:18). For further discussion of Philippians from an inner-Jewish perspective, see Mark D. Nanos, 'Paul's Polemic in Philippians 3 as Jewish-Subgroup Vilification of Local Non-Jewish Cultic and Philosophical Alternatives', *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 3 (2013): 47–91.

<sup>63</sup> Eph 2:19: 'So then you are no longer strangers and resident aliens (πάροικος), but you are citizens (συμπολίτης) with the saints and also members of the household of God.'

<sup>64</sup> On Jewish identity and the non-Jewish in Paul's thought, cf. Paula Fredriksen, 'Judaizing the Nations: The Ritual Demands of Paul's Gospel', *NTS* 56 (2010): 232–52; Mark D. Nanos, 'Paul's Non-Jews Do Not Become "Jews," But Do They Become "Jewish"?: Reading Romans 2:25–29 Within Judaism, Alongside Josephus', *Journal of the Jesus Movement in its Jewish Setting* 1 (2014): 26–53 (<http://www.jjmjs.org/issues.html>).

<sup>65</sup> Further implications relevant to specific themes in Pauline theology in relation to the program of the historical Jesus are discussed, from an institution-critical perspective, in Runesson, *From Jesus to Paul*.



## 5. Concluding Thoughts

What have we found then, as we have applied an institution-critical approach to the larger problem of Paul's relationship to Jesus and Judaism? First of all, when the question is approached from the perspective of the institutional settings in which Paul was active, it becomes clear that Paul is deeply embedded in a Jewish Diaspora culture, which itself was influenced by and very much part of a wider Graeco-Roman association culture. This can be summarised in a simple chart (Figure 1).

Judaism cannot therefore, arguably, be treated as a 'background' when we seek to understand Paul. Instead, Paul emerges as a Jew who proclaims a form of Diaspora Judaism that allows for preserved ethnic diversity within its institutional and theological discourses. In this setting, Paul's theology materialises as indissolubly intertwined with the structural and conceptual realities in which it was formulated. Several of the key issues in the study of Paul that have been debated especially since the Reformation, such as the place of the Jewish law in the greater context of the theme of justification by faith, surface as enculturated responses to a specific setting rather than as theological innovation *ex nihilo*, or as a direct continuation of the proclamation of the historical Jesus, who had no need for such theology to make his point and gather a following. Indeed, few, or none, of the questions Paul tried to solve in his associations were institutionally relevant in the public (civic) synagogue institutions of the land. While Jesus worked within what we may call national parameters, as also evidenced by his interest and actions in the Jerusalem temple, Paul's hermeneutic seems more related to a form of empire, as he allows for full 'citizenship' for people of diverse nationalities in his globalised ἐκκλησία. Loyalty to the 'emperor' Christ can be expressed fully even by the ἔθνη of the 'provinces'.

Of course, none of this says anything about the value of potential spiritual truths inherent in these aspects of Pauline theology. To be sure, my aim has not been to 'de-spiritualise' or invalidate Pauline theology – μὴ γένοιτο! – but rather to seek answers to questions about how theology is shaped in and by context. This I have done taking as point of departure the basic conviction that theology is best understood when conclusions are founded on integrated analyses, which take into account the body when it searches for a soul.

Figure 1. Defining Paul’s Institutional Setting: Synagogues as Civic Institutions and Associations

