Religion, Ethnicity, and Way of Life: Exploring Categories of Identity

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Abstract: Recent scholarship has raised questions about some of the most basic categories traditionally used in the discipline of NT studies (and related fields), notably that of "religion," which has been argued to be anachronistic for the ancient world. The category of "ethnicity" has been proposed as a more appropriate label for Judaism (or Judean identity) of the time, though the early Christian movement is less often seen in these terms. Both categories, however, are shown to be modern constructions that cannot be neatly separated or unproblematically applied to early Jewish and Christian sources. In an attempt to avoid—or at least expose—some of the problems of such categorizations, the study focuses on terms related to "way of life," exploring some of the ways in which both Jewish and early Christian depictions of joining or leaving fit within this broad category. The results do not imply that we can dispense with our modern analytical categories, but they do suggest that distinct categorizations as *either* "religious" *or* "ethnic" are unlikely to prove convincing, and cannot form a basis for distinguishing the category of Jewish/Judean "ethnic" identity from that of early Christian identity.

Key Words: ethnicity • religion • Jewish identity • early Christian identity • 2 Maccabees • Philo • Josephus • 1 Thessalonians • 1 Peter

I. The Categories of Religion and Ethnicity

The critical discussions of recent years have led to a situation in which several of the terms that were ubiquitous in earlier scholarship on Christian origins are now very much in question. Jew, Judaism, Christian, Christianity: all of these

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have been argued to be anachronistic for the period of Christian origins, though in some cases (especially concerning the translation of *Ioudaios*) vigorous debate continues. Many recent works now avoid such terms, replacing them with alternatives such as Judean, Christ-follower, Jesus-groups, and so on.[1]

Yet this questioning of labels and categories also applies to some of the broader concepts with which our field has traditionally operated. "Religion," for example, is another of the common words of the vocabulary of scholarship on Christian origins that has been subjected to critique. It is now widely accepted that "religion," at least in the modern sense of the word, is an anachronistic concept for the ancient world. As Edwin Judge comments, "We merely retroject onto the Greeks and Romans something that has become necessary to our understanding of life, thus turning history into a hall of mirrors in which we contemplate ourselves under the illusion that we are looking at the Greeks and Romans."[2] There is no word in Greek or Latin that corresponds exactly to the modern notion of religion, though there are various words that overlap in some way with this broad domain: εὐσέβεια, δεισιδαιμονία, θρησκεία, *religio*, *pietas*, *supplicatio*, and so on. Carlin Barton and Daniel Boyarin, in a study focused in particular on *religio* (in Tertullian) and θρησκεία (in Josephus), illustrate the different meanings, uses, and nuances of such particular words, thus making the argument that to translate simply with "religion" obscures the richness and particularity of the ancient discourse.[3] More broadly, what we might identify as religion, it has often been pointed out, frequently had more to do with cultic practice and dutiful obligation than allegiance to a set of beliefs and doctrines, as the modern notion might be taken to imply,[4] though the dichotomy of "practice" and "belief" also needs to

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[1] For significant discussions among a potentially enormous list, see Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 12–13, 63–74; John H. Elliott, "Jesus the Israelite Was Neither a 'Jew' Nor a 'Christian': On Correcting Misleading Nomenclature," *JSHJ* 5 (2007) 119–54; Steve Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History," *JSJ* 38 (2007) 457–512; Anders Runesson, "The Question of Terminology: The Architecture of Contemporary Discussions on Paul," in *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* (ed. Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015) 53–77. The opening section of this essay shares some material in common with David G. Horrell, "Introduction," in *Ethnicity, Race, Religion: Identities and Ideologies in Early Jewish and Christian Texts, and in Modern Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Katherine M. Hockey and David G. Horrell; London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018) 1–20, esp. 2–7.

[2] See Edwin A. Judge, *Jerusalem and Athens: Cultural Transformation in Late Antiquity* (WUNT 265; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010) 264–75, esp. 264–66; quotation from 264.

[3] Carlin Barton and Daniel Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

[4] See, e.g., Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 20–21.

be questioned.[5] As Brent Nongbri has recently emphasized, this modern construction of the category of "religion" has a particular history and reflects its context of production in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: "[T]he idea of religion is not as natural or universal as it is often assumed to be. Religion has a history. It was born out of a mix of Christian disputes about truth, European colonial exploits, and the formation of nation-states."[6]

It is also worth stressing that this is not a difficulty that applies only to antiquity. Wilfred Cantwell Smith's classic study from 1962, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, spends considerable space arguing that the modern notion of religion is inappropriate and ill-suited to the ancient world, anticipating much of the more recent discussion. Yet Smith's book also has as one of its central arguments the claim that "religion" as a (specifically modern, Western, Christian) concept is confusing and inappropriate in the modern world too: "The word 'religion' has had many meanings; it . . . would be better dropped. This is partly because of its distracting ambiguity, partly because most of its traditional meanings are, on scrutiny, illegitimate."[7] Abandoning the term altogether may be too drastic a move, not least because we would probably need to invent some other (equally questionable, flexible) term to replace it, in order to denote the particular aspects of human behavior we wish to specify. It is hard to come up with an alternative word to capture what we might want to talk about in relation to this kind of topic. As Jonathan Z. Smith notes, having surveyed the complex history and varied definitions, "'[r]eligion' is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define"—but the term, as such, is crucial, he insists, in "establishing a disciplinary horizon."[8] Yet it remains the case that within this broad horizon, the category of religion is in danger of obscuring as much as it reveals.[9]

In the course of this recent scholarly discussion, one conceptual term that has become much *more* prominent is that of "ethnicity," much invoked in recent years, not least as a replacement for the allegedly anachronistic label of religion. Wolfgang Stegemann, for example, following the influential work of Steve Mason, has forcefully argued for what he calls a "change of perspective" (*Perspektivenwechsel*) in studies of Judaism at the time of Christian origins, a shift of paradigm

[5] See Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) 59–60.

[6] Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013) 154. See also the overview of the term's history and complexities in Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (ed. Mark C. Taylor; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 269–84.

[7] W. C. Smith, *Meaning and End*, 194. On the point that "religion" is not an ancient category but a modern Christian one, see 15–50.

[8] J. Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," 281.

[9] See Barton and Boyarin's discussion (*Imagine No Religion*, 5–6) of J. Z. Smith's comments.

away from a "religion-model" in favor of an "ethnicity-model" (*Ethnizitätsmodell*).[10] Yet, despite having etymological connections with one of the key ancient "people" words, the Greek ἔθνος, "ethnicity" as such is, like religion, also a modern concept, first used apparently in 1941 (though previous discussion in the 1930s had begun to talk of "ethnic groups").[11] Discussion of "ethnicity" also emerged in a particular historical context, at a time when the language of "race" had become especially and evidently problematic.[12] In the 1950 UNESCO statement on "the race question," for example, it is clear that "ethnicity" was favored and promoted in the period immediately after the Second World War because of what the UNESCO report describes as "the injustices and crimes which give such tragic overtones to the word 'race.'"[13] The report, interestingly, does not deny the existence of "races" as groups of "populations constituting the species *Homo sapiens*" (p. 5), distinguished by genes and physical features, but argues that, since these factual biological distinctions are frequently confused in popular usage with "[n]ational, religious, geographic, linguistic and cultural groups" (p. 6), "it would be better when speaking of human races to drop the term 'race' altogether and speak of *ethnic groups*."[14]

The list of features chosen here to exemplify the kinds of groups that should be identified as "ethnic"—national, religious, geographic, linguistic and cultural—corresponds quite closely to the kinds of characteristics that social scientists have identified as typifying ethnic groups. Richard Schermerhorn, for example, offers a concise and influential definition: an ethnic group is "a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood."[15] Schermerhorn's definition is adapted and extended in Anthony D. Smith's influential list of the characteristics of ethnic identity, first laid

[10] Wolfgang Stegemann, *Jesus und seine Zeit* (Biblische Enzyklopädie 10; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010) 180–236, with the words and phrases from 210, 216, 234. For a concise overview of the key arguments, see also Wolfgang Stegemann, "Religion als Teil von ethnischer Identität: Zur aktuellen Debatte um die Kategorisierung des antiken Judentums," *Kirche und Israel* 25 (2010) 47–59.

[11] See David M. Miller, "Ethnicity Comes of Age: An Overview of Twentieth-Century Terms for *Ioudaios*," *CurBR* 10 (2012) 293–311, here 296.

[12] See Werner Sollors, "Foreword: Theories of American Ethnicity," in *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader* (ed. Werner Sollors; New York: New York University Press, 1996) x–xliv, here xxix; and see p. x on the origin of "ethnicity" in the United States in 1941–42.

[13] UNESCO, "The Race Question. Text of the Statement Issued 18 July 1950," 1, http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001282/128291eo.pdf.

[14] Ibid., 6 (italics original).

[15] Richard A. Schermerhorn, *Comparative Ethnic Relations: A Framework for Theory and Research* (1970; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 12. Schermerhorn's definition is adopted, e.g., by Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann, *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World* (Sociology for a New Century; Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge, 2007) 19–20.

out in his 1986 work *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* and later summarized in a collaborative work with John Hutchinson. Smith identifies the following key characteristics:

1. a common *proper name*, to identify and express the "essence" of the community;
2. a myth of *common ancestry*, a myth rather than a fact, a myth that includes the idea of a common origin in time and place and that gives an *ethnie* a sense of fictive kinship, what Horowitz terms a "super-family". . . ;
3. shared *historical memories*, or better, shared memories of a common past or pasts, including heroes, events, and their commemoration;
4. one or more *elements of common culture*, which need not be specified but normally include religion, customs, or language;
5. a *link* with a *homeland*, not necessarily its physical occupation by the *ethnie*, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land, as with diaspora peoples;
6. a *sense of solidarity* on the part of at least some sections of the *ethnie's* population[16]

However, a list of standard characteristics such as this should not be taken to imply that "ethnicity" is a stable and consistent category of human identity that exists as such in human society, either in antiquity or in the contemporary world. One of the most widely shared convictions of recent social-scientific analysis of ethnicity is that such identities are social constructions, "generated by . . . people's beliefs and practices."[17] Ethnicity is a matter of custom, conviction, perception, and belief rather than one of biology or physiognomy. Indeed, recent work, notably by Rogers Brubaker, has pressed the case for a subjectivist and constructionist perspective still further: lists of characteristics such as Anthony Smith's should not be taken to imply that ethnic groups exist as a clearly defined and consistent category of human groups.[18] For a start, Brubaker is critical of what he terms

[16] John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, "Introduction," in *Ethnicity* (ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith; Oxford Readers; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 3–14, here 6–7; they refer to David Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985] chap. 2. In this introduction, they are summarizing the more extended discussion of the "foundations of ethnic community" in Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) 22–31, for whom the roots of modern nations are to be found in a model of ethnic community (x). NT scholars have frequently drawn on Smith's definition; see, e.g., Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, 43–44; Philip F. Esler, *God's Court and Courtiers in the Book of the Watchers: Re-interpreting Heaven in 1 Enoch 1–36* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017) 14; Love L. Sechrest, *A Former Jew: Paul and the Dialectics of Race* (LNTS 410; London: T&T Clark, 2009) 48–50; David G. Horrell, *Becoming Christian: Essays on 1 Peter and the Making of Christian Identity* (LNTS 394; Early Christianity in Context; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013) 159.

[17] Rogers Brubaker, *Grounds for Difference* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015) 48. See also Mark G. Brett, "Interpreting Ethnicity: Method, Hermeneutics, Ethics," in *Ethnicity and the Bible* (ed. Mark G. Brett; BIS 19; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 3–22, here 10: "Although *ethnie* can be exceptionally durable once formed, they are also symbolic constructions which have to be maintained by reiterated practices and transactions."

[18] See, e.g., Brubaker, *Grounds for Difference*, 48–84, esp. 48–49, 81–84.

"groupism," that is, "the tendency to take bounded groups as fundamental units of analysis."[19] Instead, he insists, the focus of study should be on how various kinds of potential basis for "groupness" are invoked and claimed in different circumstances. Rather than see the identification of a certain group as "ethnic" as having achieved any kind of explanation, Brubaker therefore, and crucially, argues that "[e]thnic common sense—the tendency to partition the social world into putatively deeply constituted, quasi-natural intrinsic kinds . . .—is a key part of what we want to explain, not what we want to explain things with."[20] As Brubaker remarks, "Ethnicity, race, and nationhood are fundamentally ways of perceiving, interpreting, and representing the social world. They are not things in the world, but perspectives on the world."[21] Rather than ask "what is race?" or "what is an ethnic group?," Brubaker therefore suggests that we should instead "ask how, when, and why people interpret social experience in racial, ethnic, or national terms."[22]

A second point Brubaker stresses is that ethnic or racial groupings are enormously diverse, such that it is much more important to investigate the specific forms and practices through which a group identity is constructed than to invoke a standard model to classify groups as "ethnic" or not. As he suggests, "It may be that 'ethnicity' is simply a convenient—though in certain respects misleading—rubric under which to group phenomena that, on the one hand, are highly disparate, and, on the other, have a great deal in common with phenomena that are not ordinarily subsumed under the rubric of ethnicity."[23] This helps us to see why any one of the features Anthony Smith lists—including "religion" and other features of cultural practice and way of life—may be more or less significant in constructing and sustaining a sense of identity as a people. Indeed, features such as religion or language, as well as notions of shared descent, history, and territory, cannot be separated off from the study of ethnicity, for it would then be hard to see what residual substance might be left to constitute the abstract conceptual notion of ethnic identity.[24] As Brubaker remarks, "[E]thnicity was constituted as an object of study precisely by abstracting from the specificities of language, religion, and other ascriptive markers such as phenotype, region of origin, and customary mode of livelihood."[25] In other words, "ethnicity"—even if we make it a prominent or fundamental category of analysis—does not exist beyond or separately from these various facets of human social life.

[19] Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) 2. See also Rogers Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups," *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 43.2 (2002) 163–89.

[20] Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 9.

[21] Ibid., 17.

[22] Ibid., 87.

[23] See ibid., 27.

[24] See ibid., 88.

[25] Ibid.

Moreover, despite certain shared similarities, what it means to hold a particular "ethnic" identity, at a certain time and place, is likely to be distinctive in certain respects, operative at various scales and variable according to context. What it meant to be—or to be regarded as—Greek, Jewish/Judean, or Epidauran, Thessalian, Cyprian, or Tarsian in antiquity, or to be English, Cornish, Chinese Malaysian, or Avambo today, cannot be answered or understood merely by checking a standard list of ethnic characteristics, but only by looking at the particular set of discourses and practices operative in relation to any of those identities and the ways in which they are claimed, attributed, or contested. As Teresa Morgan has shown, ancient "ethnic" terminology "is so multivalent that its meaning is likely to be highly specific to the context in which it is used"; and specific ethnic identifiers such as "'Greek,' 'Ionian,' or 'Egyptian' are equally slippery, referring to different groups of people in different contexts or the same groups differently defined."[26] Thus, to study ethnicity in antiquity—as, indeed, in the modern world—is to enter a fluid and flexible field of identity making, as Denise Kimber Buell has stressed, and one in which multiple identities could be assigned or claimed, displayed or invoked, and negotiated through modes of what Morgan, invoking a term from the field of linguistics, calls "code-switching."[27] Ethnicity was not a stable or singular categorization but a field of identity in which a person might claim, or be given, different "ethnic" labels in different times and contexts. As with religion, ethnicity is a category with which *we* make sense of the world, rather than an innate feature of the human world itself.

That leaves us with one final methodological issue to consider: the intersections between the categories of ethnicity and religion, both of which are, as we have seen, modern labels that cannot be used as if they were stable or self-evident categorizations ready-made for either the ancient or the modern world. Moreover, since religion is one of the characteristics included in definitions of ethnic groups, there is a clear sense of overlap between them. As Brubaker remarks, "[L]anguage and religion are both similar to ethnicity and nationalism and similarly intertwined with them."[28] This overlap is expressed, for example, in Paula Fredriksen's insistence that in antiquity "religious" practices and devotion are often intimately bound up with what we might call an ethnic sense of being a people. In Fredriksen's pithy formulation, "gods run in the blood."[29] In other words, as she puts it elsewhere, "[G]ods also attached to particular *peoples*; 'religion' ran in the blood . . . ethnicity expressed 'religion' (acknowledging the anachronism of both terms for

[26] Teresa Morgan, "Society, Identity, and Ethnicity in the Hellenic World," in Hockey and Horrell, *Ethnicity, Race, Religion*, 23–45, here 25.

[27] Buell, *Why This New Race*; Morgan, "Society, Identity, and Ethnicity," 34–38.

[28] Brubaker, *Grounds for Difference*, 88; see also 28, where Brubaker's notion of "ethnicity" is said "broadly to include both race as well as ethnicity-like forms of religion."

[29] Paula Fredriksen, "Mandatory Retirement: Ideas in the Study of Christian Origins Whose Time Has Come to Go," *SR* 35 (2006) 231–46, here 232.

our period), and religion expressed 'ethnicity.'"[30] This concise articulation of the integration of the religious and the ethnic should be nuanced, however, at least to clarify that "running in the blood" should not be taken to imply that "ethnicity" (and "religion") are thereby fixed or determined from birth. On the contrary, as we have noted above, both were part of a fluid and flexible field of identity construction, in which what Buell has influentially labeled "ethnic reasoning" may be variously deployed.[31]

Once again, this complex intersection of ethnic and religious identities is not only a feature of the ancient world, as Buell also makes clear.[32] Even there, of course, not every kind of "religious" allegiance carried equal weight so far as it concerned defining one's belonging to a particular "people."[33] But in the contemporary world, too, religion is often—though not always—bound up with ethnic identity and conflict. The violent conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina between Muslim Bosnians, Orthodox Serbs, and Catholic Croats is just one prominent recent example.[34] In another arena of modern conflict, in Northern Ireland, Catholic and Protestant serve as one marker of ethnic identity—though, as Claire Mitchell has shown, these religious identities should not be seen as *merely* markers of ethnicity, but rather as substantively contributing to people's constructed sense of identification, group categorization, and boundaries.[35]

[30] Paula Fredriksen, "What 'Parting of the Ways'? Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City," in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed; TSAJ 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 35–63, here 39. See also eadem, "Judaizing the Nations: The Ritual Demands of Paul's Gospel," *NTS* 56 (2010) 232–52, here 234–40; and Larry W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016) 78-79.

[31] As part of her study, Buell outlines "four primary ways in which religion functions in [ancient] ethnoracial discourse" and illustrates these strategies in early Christian texts: "(1) to mark differences between groups, helping to produce a collective civic or ethnoracial identity . . . ; (2) to enable ethnoracial transformation; (3) to establish connections between otherwise distinctive groups; and (4) to assert and regulate differences within groups." See Buell, *Why This New Race*, 41–62; quotations from 41.

[32] Ibid., 5–6, 21–29.

[33] See, e.g., Hurtado's discussion of "voluntary religion," notably the cults of Isis and Mithras (*Destroyer of the Gods*, 82–87).

[34] For an overview of the conflict, see Steven L. Burg and Paul S. Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (1999; repr., London: Routledge, 2015). It is interesting that it is "Muslim" in particular that is used as an essentially ethnic identifier in this context, "Muslim," "Serb," and "Croat" being designated as the three key identities in this conflict (see, e.g., Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia*, 16–34). For comparable references to this and the Irish example, among others, see Buell, *Why This New Race,* 6.

[35] Claire Mitchell, "Behind the Ethnic Marker: Religion and Social Identification in Northern Ireland," *Sociology of Religion* 66.1 (2005) 3–21; eadem, "The Religious Content of Ethnic Identities," *Sociology* 40.6 (2006) 1135–52.

II. Approaching Judaism and the Early Christian Movement

These methodological reflections raise questions about how we should categorize both "Judaism" (if we may call it that) and the Christian movement (if we may call it that) around the time of Christian origins (if we may refer to our time period in that way!). We might agree, for example, that Judaism is to be seen as a kind of ethnic tradition, but we would then equally need to stress that it is one in which what we call "religion" plays a very prominent role, as Love Sechrest has shown.[36] In other words, adherence to specific kinds of what we might define as "religious" practices and commitments plays a particularly significant role in constituting and exhibiting someone's identity as *Ioudaios*. Being a *Ioudaios* is also—granting the "ethnic" label for sake of argument—an ethnic identity that one could adopt through the process of becoming a proselyte, or whose traditions one could take on to various degrees through what Terence Donaldson calls "sympathization."[37] Conversely, one could be deemed an apostate.[38] Joining and leaving, in particular ways, are part of the range of possibilities—contested and debated to be sure[39]—for whatever constituted the variegated forms of Judaism in the first century.

The earliest Christian movement is clearly one that is expanding by means of conversions, albeit that there is no clear or common term to denote such "converts"—again a term that may be problematic in at least some of its common scholarly applications.[40] Paul, for example, uses ἀπαρχή ("firstfruit") twice (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:15); 1 Tim 3:6 uses νεόφυτος ("newly planted"); and Acts 13:43 uses προσήλυτος of converts to Judaism, but the term is not used of converts to Christ. For this reason alone, this movement cannot straightforwardly be called an ethnic tradition or a group-identity categorized as an "ethnicity." Indeed, strong rhetorical appeal is made in early Christian sources to its transcending of ethnic divisions, mostly famously in Gal 3:28. Yet, at the same time, the early Christian sources invoke ethnic language and categories in constructing the movement's own emerging sense of group-identity—engaging in various forms of "ethnic reasoning."[41] And ideas about the reproduction of Christian identity across the generations, especially in the context of the Christian household, soon begin to

[36] Sechrest, *Former Jew*, 54–109.

[37] Terence L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135 CE)* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007) 469–92.

[38] See Stephen G. Wilson, *Leaving the Fold: Apostates and Defectors in Antiquity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004) 23–65.

[39] See further Matthew Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[40] See, e.g., Fredriksen, "Mandatory Retirement," 232–37.

[41] See esp. Buell, *Why This New Race*.

emerge (see, e.g., Eph 6:4).[42] Insofar as ethnic identities are, as much recent social science emphasizes, constructed through discourse and social practice, not inherent in biological or physiological difference, we may at least wonder how far this suggests that early Christian identity is being constructed in ethnic-like ways, and what the significance of this might be.[43] The distinction between our own analytical categories and the language of our sources might be pertinent here: if we ask whether early Christian identity is an ethnic identity, the question sounds odd or requires a negative or convoluted answer. But if we ask whether the early Christians saw themselves, or were seen by others, as a people—when, where, how soon, in what ways, and so on—then the question might sound less incongruous, even if a complex and nuanced answer would still be required.

Given the complexities, inadequacies, and overlaps between the modern concepts of ethnicity and religion and the risks of shaping our reading of the evidence with our own modern analytical categories, I want briefly to explore another way to approach these issues—one that avoids, at least initially, doing so through these categories and the alternatives they represent but instead focuses on some of the terms and phrases evident in the sources themselves. While we should not be naïve about the extent to which all our historical enquiry is shaped by our own categories and concepts, and by the broader influences of our geopolitical contexts, we do well both to be self-critically reflective in the use of such categories and also as attentive as we can be to the language and concepts evident in our sources. As Barton and Boyarin comment:

> To comprehend another people in another time or place, it is important to be as self-conscious as we are able to be concerning our own categories and conceptions and

[42] On this topic, see further David 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; Daniel H. Weiss, "Born into Covenantal Salvation? Baptism and Birth in Early Christianity and Classical Rabbinic Judaism," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 24 (2017) 318–38.

[43] For an extensive analysis of the construction of early Christian identity in this way, see esp. Buell, *Why This New Race*; also eadem, "Rethinking the Relevance of Race for Early Christian Self-Definition," *HTR* 94 (2001) 449–76; eadem, "Race and Universalism in Early Christianity," *JECS* 10 (2002) 429–68; eadem and Caroline Johnson Hodge, "The Politics of Interpretation: The Rhetoric of Race and Ethnicity in Paul," *JBL* 123 (2004) 235–51; see also the earlier study of Judith M. Lieu, "The Race of the God-fearers," in *Neither Jew nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity* (Studies of the New Testament and Its World; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002) 49–68 (first published in *JTS* 46 [1995] 483–501). For other major studies, often building on or engaging with the work of Buell, see Caroline E. Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Sechrest, *Former Jew*; Bruce Hansen, *'All of You Are One': The Social Vision of Galatians 3.28, 1 Corinthians 12.13 and Colossians 3.11* (LNTS 409; London: T&T Clark, 2010); Cavin W. Concannon, *"When You Were Gentiles": Specters of Ethnicity in Roman Corinth and Paul's Corinthian Correspondence* (Synkrisis; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

> not to give our categories and conceptions any more epistemological privilege than we simply cannot help doing, not to impose them any more than we cannot help ourselves from doing. This self-critical consciousness helps us not only to stretch our imagination but also to understand how our concepts and categories organize and configure our own world.[44]

In an initial attempt to do this, I shall focus in particular on those terms and phrases that depict allegiance to either Jewish or Christian identity in terms of turning to or from a particular way of life.[45] This, in turn, will help us reflect again on the implications of our categories of ethnicity and religion.

III. Judaism as Way of Life: Selected Jewish Examples

It is unsurprising that the literature depicting the conflicts of the Maccabean era provides fruitful material for a consideration of Judaism in these terms, since these documents see the clash between "Judaism" and "Hellenism" precisely as one that threatens the integrity and continuance of the Jewish way of life. Indeed, one significant linguistic innovation that we owe to the author of 2 Maccabees—or, more specifically, to either the author of the original narrative, Jason of Cyrene, or his subsequent epitomist (see 2 Macc 2:23)[46]—is the word Ἰουδαϊσμός (2 Macc 2:21; 14:38). It is also in this text that we first encounter the word Ἑλληνισμός (2 Macc 4:13), to which Ἰουδαϊσμός stands in contrast and opposition. As Steve Mason has argued, the word Ἰουδαϊσμός should not, despite frequent comments to this effect, be taken simply as a newly coined designation for "the whole system of belief and practice of the Jews,"[47] as if "Judaism," as just such a system, had now been conceptually articulated. It remains a rarely used word even after this time.[48] Rather, as Mason has shown, Ἰουδαϊσμός represents "a certain kind of

[44] Barton and Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion*, 7.

[45] Invoking this phrasing also invites comparison with ancient philosophy as a "way of life," as influentially explored by Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995). Further comparison along these lines is beyond the scope of this article, though attention to "way of life" language might also illuminate why, in certain contexts, both Judaism and early Christianity might be depicted as philosophies or philosophical schools.

[46] On the composite nature of 2 Maccabees, and the issue of the relationship of our extant text to the earlier work of Jason, see Robert Doran, *2 Maccabees: A Critical Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012) 1–14; also, more briefly, Robert Doran, "2 Maccabees," in *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (ed. John Barton and John Muddiman; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 734–50, here 734–35.

[47] William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 118. On the frequency of such comments, see Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing," 465.

[48] A point noted in Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing," 465.

activity over against a pull in another, foreign direction."[49] "The contest," Mason continues, "becomes clearer when the author invokes Ἑλληνισμός, which is also not a static system or culture, but an energetic movement away from one's own traditions to embrace foreign ones: a 'Hellen*izing*.'"[50]

In 2 Maccabees, therefore, the threat posed by Hellenism is presented as equivalent to ἀλλοφυλισμός (2 Macc 4:13), that is, adopting the customs and practices of another φυλή or people group.[51] The relevance of this term for the particular issues about ethnicity and religion I discussed above is evident in the NRSV's translation of its two occurrences in 2 Maccabees: in 4:13 it is rendered as "the adoption of foreign ways," whereas in 6:24 it is "going over to an alien religion." The *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (*NETS*) evades the issue by using the word "allophylism," though this is glossed in a note as "alien ways."[52] One of the ways 2 Maccabees denotes the Jewish way of life is with the word ἀναστροφή, which can refer to a pattern of life or conduct, the orientation of one's behavior.[53] Standard terminology to refer positively to this way of life is with the adjective πάτριος and (plural) nouns such as ἔθη or νόμοι.

Away from the threat of perceived pressure to abandon one's ancestral way of life as a Jew, or in a context where the direction of travel is in the other direction, the transition that might be made between different ways of life is more positively depicted. Philo's description of the welcome that should be accorded to "incomers" to the Jewish community, for example, constitutes a rich description of a transition that encompasses a number of features commonly associated with ethnic identity. In *Virt.* 102 he refers to these "incomers" (τοὺς ἐπηλυτάς) as having abandoned "their kinsfolk by blood [γενεὰν μὲν τὴν ἀφ' αἵματος], their country [πατρίδα], their customs [ἔθη] and the temples [ἱερά] and images of their gods [ἀφιδρύματα θεῶν]" (*Virt.* 102; trans. Colson, LCL). As Philip Esler notes, it is striking how far the features of ethnic groups listed by Anthony Smith (and given above) are apparent here.[54] The comparable passage in *Spec. Leg.* 1.52 likewise mentions incomers having left "their country, their kinsfolk [συγγενεῖς] and their friends for the sake

[49] Ibid., 466. See also Mason's discussion of the verb ἰουδαΐζω/ἰουδαΐζειν (461–64). On the range of possible meanings for this verb, see also Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (HCS 31; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 175–97.

[50] Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing," 466.

[51] In 4:13, the word's only other occurrence in the LXX, ἀλλοφυλισμός stands alongside Ἑλληνισμός. T. Muraoka suggests "alien, foreign culture" (*Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* [Leuven: Peeters, 2009] 29, s.v. ἀλλοφυλισμός).

[52] See Joachim Schaper, "2 Makkabees," in *NETS*, 503–20, here 508, 511.

[53] On the range of meanings, see LSJ, s.v. ἀναστροφή. Mason helpfully observes that it generally indicates some sense of "inclination" or "turning toward" something ("Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing," 469 n. 21).

[54] Esler, *God's Court*, 17.

of virtue [δι᾽ ἀρετήν] and piety [ὁσιότητα]"—or "religion," as F. H. Colson translates it (*Spec. Leg.* 1.52; LCL). Clearly, "religion"—or religious practices, or whatever we label these particular facets of identity and cultural practice—is inextricably bound up in the various dimensions of what it entails to disidentify with one people and identify with another, in effect a process of both ethnic and religious reidentification (distinct from the category of those Philo calls "settler" [μέτοικος], who do not reidentify to the same extent; cf. *Virt.* 105). Awareness of the extent of rupture this involves perhaps helps to explain the emphasis Philo places on the reception such incomers should receive: they are to be loved (ἀγαπᾶν) "not only as friends and kinsfolk [συγγενεῖς] but as themselves [ἑαυτούς] both in body and soul . . . so that they may seem to be the separate parts of a single living being [ἓν . . . ζῷον] which is compacted and unified by their fellowship [κοινωνίας] in it" (*Virt.* 103; trans Colson, LCL; cf. *Spec. Leg.* 1.51–53; *Legat.* 210–11).[55]

Another interesting and significant depiction of the nature of such a change in way of life comes from Josephus's lengthy account of "how Helena, queen of Adiabene, and her son Izates became converts to Judaism" (Josephus, *A.J.* 20.2.1 §17; trans. Feldman, LCL]; the story extends from 20.2.1 to 20.4.3 §§17–96).[56] Despite this translation—"converts to Judaism"—it is important to note that Josephus does not use the terminology for proselytes (or the word for "Judaism") directly. The phrase translated above runs, εἰς τὰ Ἰουδαίων ἔθη τὸν βίον μετέβαλον, literally, "turned their life to the customs of the Jews" (cf. also 20.2.3 §35). What this process entails is briefly described as their being "taught . . . to worship God [τὸν θεὸν σέβειν] after the manner of the Jewish tradition [ὡς Ἰουδαίοις πάτριον ἦν]" (*A.J.* 20.2.3 §34). The subsequent discussion concerns Izates's desire to adopt this way of life fully by submitting to circumcision. This causes his mother concern because of its implications for his rule over his subjects: "if his subjects should discover that he was devoted to rites that were strange and foreign to themselves, it would produce much disaffection and they would not tolerate the rule of a Jew over them" (20.2.4 §39; cf. §47). That Izates *could* become a *Ioudaios* in this way, and would be recognized as such, is presumed by Josephus's account.

Thus, as John Barclay has recently noted, "for Izates to become a Ἰουδαῖος is not a private or (in our terms) a merely 'religious' decision: it identifies him fully with a 'foreign' people, and therefore rendered questionable his fitness to rule over

[55] On Philo's view of proselytes, see Edouard Will and Claude Orrieux, *"Prosélytisme Juif?" Histoire d'une erreur* (Histoire 11; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1992) 81–99; Michael F. Bird, *Crossing over Sea and Land: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010) 106–7.

[56] For recent discussions, see Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*, 334–38; Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing," 506–8; Mark D. Nanos, "The Question of Conceptualization: Qualifying Paul's Position on Circumcision in Dialogue with Josephus's Advisors to King Izates," in Nanos and Zetterholm, *Paul within Judaism*, 105–43; John M. G. Barclay, "Ἰουδαῖος: Ethnicity and Translation," in Hockey and Horrell, *Ethnicity, Race, Religion*, 46–58.

the people of Adiabene." Moreover, Barclay continues, "It makes little sense to describe this change as 'religious' *as opposed to* 'ethnic' . . . the change that Izates here undergoes concerns a package of social, cultural and national traditions, which includes a special way of worshipping God (and of thinking about God), but only as part of a holistic shift in ethnic identity."[57] Thus, as Mason has also stressed, "conversion" in such contexts is an inadequate and problematic term, deriving from the conceptual field of "religion," to describe something that entailed what was regarded as a going over from one people's way of life—including its cultic and "religious" dimensions—to those of another, in effect leaving one people and joining another.[58]

IV. Christ-Following as Way of Life: Selected New Testament Examples

Against the backdrop of such examples we may consider a few texts from the NT with similar questions and issues in view. I shall focus on two examples from the epistolary tradition: 1 Thessalonians, probably the earliest Christian text, representing Paul's activity in the earliest years of the movement, and 1 Peter, probably dating from near the end of the first century, so reflective of the second or third Christian generation.

Among the most discussed texts in 1 Thessalonians is Paul's compact opening summary in 1:9–10—perhaps best seen as Paul's own summary statement, rather than a pre-Pauline missionary tradition.[59] Paul describes the Thessalonians' response to his message in the following terms: "you turned [ἐπεστρέψατε] to God from idols" (1 Thess 1:9b).[60] As Traugott Holtz notes, this short summary does not merely deal with a specific theme or topic, but seeks to depict the conversion event as a whole.[61] Commentators frequently note that the verb ἐπιστρέφω is here a technical term for the process of conversion, as it is elsewhere in the NT, especially in Acts (e.g., Acts 9:35; 11:21; 14:15; 15:19, etc.): turning to God or to the Lord is an established expression in such contexts. Should we understand this "turning" as essentially a religious matter, or should it rather be seen to describe a broader change in "way of life" and a change in affiliation to a people? The same term is

[57] Barclay, "Ἰουδαῖος: Ethnicity and Translation," 51.

[58] Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing," 505–10.

[59] See Morna D. Hooker, "1 Thessalonians 1:9–10: A Nutshell—But What Kind of Nut?," in *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*, vol. 3, *Frühes Christentum* (ed. Hermann Lichtenberger; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996) 435–48.

[60] I am grateful to Mikeal Parsons for the prompt to consider the language of "turning" in 1 Thessalonians in relation to the topic of this article.

[61] Traugott Holtz, *Der erste Brief an die Thessalonicher* (EKKNT 13; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986) 54: "sie [sc. 1:9b–10] will . . . das ganze Bekehrungsgeschehen aussprechen."

used also in the classic tale of conversion in Jewish literature, the story of Joseph and Aseneth (11:11: καὶ ἐπιστρέψω πρὸς αὐτόν, "and I will turn to him").[62] In this romantic novel, Aseneth's conversion is bound up with her desire to marry Joseph and, more broadly, with joining his people: this turn, enacted through repentance and commitment to Joseph's God, makes their marriage legitimate. What may we say in relation to 1 Thessalonians about the kind of transfer—leaving and joining—that is in view?

Our brief discussion above about the nature of "religion" in the ancient world and the extent to which worshiping one's gods was bound up with a sense of identity as a people may already suggest that "turning to God from idols" is more than a matter of purely religious realignment, as if such commitments could be neatly separated from other aspects of identity and practice. Indeed, envisaging that kind of separation would require something like the modern attempt to distinguish between private religious commitment and public sociopolitical life.[63] Rather, the "turn" involves a more socially consequential withdrawal from a set of practices that were part of everyday life and constitutive of a sense of identity.[64] That this was the case is indicated in the letter by the report that the Thessalonians have suffered hostility from their people (τῶν ἰδίων συμφυλετῶν, 2:14). In other words, this transfer of allegiance has involved some kind of rupture with "their people," comparable to those we find in the accounts of Jewish proselytism presented by Philo and Josephus. One could describe them, echoing Philo's language, as having abandoned "their kinsfolk by blood [γενεὰν μὲν τὴν ἀφ' αἵματος] . . . their customs [ἔθη] and the temples [ἱερά] and images of their gods [ἀφιδρύματα θεῶν]" (*Virt.* 102). Or one might imagine them being accused of such things.

[62] The parallel is noted by many commentators on 1 Thessalonians, e.g., Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 32B; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 119; Holtz, *Der erste Brief an die Thessalonicher*, 57–58 ("Der wichtigste Vergleichstext"). Greek text is from Christoph Burchard, *Joseph und Aseneth* (PVTG 5; Leiden: Brill, 2003). Cf. also Tob 14:6: πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιστρέψουσιν ("all the nations will turn").

[63] On the story of the construction of that notion of separation, particularly in the emergence and definition of modern social science, see John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

[64] Cf. Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *1–2 Thessalonians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014) 108–9: "[I]n a society where cultic and social activities were intimately connected, there was nothing simple about turning to God from idols. Such a total renunciation of all pagan deities also meant a complete rejection of a variety of social events closely associated with the worship of these gods. . . . The conversion of the Thessalonian Christians involved a truly radical break with their previous way of life—a break that naturally incurred the resentment and anger of their fellow citizens (2:14)." Of course, it is open to question how far any individual converts did or did not make the kind of break that Paul's rhetoric implies, though the indications that they encountered opposition and hostility, assuming these too reflect some degree of social reality, imply some degree of noticeable disruption.

Recalling Philo's description of the detachment and reidentification undergone by the proselyte also prompts us to note the parallels in the depiction of the new community into which the convert has been welcomed. The positive counterpart to rejection by their (former) compatriots is the strong sense we gain from Paul's presentation in 1 Thessalonians that these converts have joined a new kinship group: they are now ἀδελφοί, a common identity that is frequently underscored in this letter, and in Paul's other undisputed letters.[65] And within this group, as Paul again stresses, there is an intensity of love, of φιλαδελφία (4:9). Indeed, Paul gives a particularly positive affirmation of the community in his declaration that they are θεοδίδακτοι—εἰς τὸ ἀγαπᾶν ἀλλήλους ("taught by God to love one another," 4:9), just as Philo urges that incomers to the Jewish community be "loved" (ἀγαπᾶν) such that they become fully part of "a single living being" characterized by κοινωνία (*Virt.* 103).

If ἐπιστρέφω, as the language of "conversion," depicts a wide-ranging rupture with a previous way of life, then the language of περιπατέω encapsulates the positive way of life to which the Thessalonian converts are now committed. Echoing in particular the Jewish use of such "walking" language to refer to the conduct of one's life, the "way" one should live, Paul recalls his urging them περιπατεῖν . . . ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ ("to walk . . . worthily of God," 2:12). This same language recurs in the headline of the ethical appeal to a way of life that is pleasing to God (4:1), characterized by sexual purity and intense community love, distinguished from that of τὰ ἔθνη (4:5), who are ignorant of God.

Our second NT example is the First Letter of Peter. Here, instead of the language of "walking" (περιπατέω), the author uses closely equivalent terminology from the ἀναστρέφω group.[66] The word ἀναστροφή, which we saw above in 2 Maccabees, is a particular favorite of the author of 1 Peter: six of its thirteen NT uses are in this letter, and they are of considerable interest for our topic. First, ἀναστροφή denotes the addressees' futile past way of life, received from their ancestors: it is this from which they have been redeemed (1:18: ἐκ τῆς ματαίας ὑμῶν ἀναστροφῆς πατροπαραδότου, "from your futile way of life inherited from your ancestors"). As in 1 Thessalonians there is evidence later in the letter that this involves abandoning various socioreligious practices—here concisely labeled τὸ βούλημα τῶν ἐθνῶν ("what the gentiles desire"; see 4:2–3; cf. Eph 4:22)—and that

[65] See further David G. Horrell, "From ἀδελφοί to οἶκος θεοῦ: Social Transformation in Pauline Christianity," *JBL* 120 (2001) 293–311, now also in idem, *The Making of Christian Morality: Reading Paul in Ancient and Modern Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019) 75–95; Reidar Aasgaard, *"My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!" Christian Siblingship in Paul* (JSNTSup 265; London: T&T Clark, 2004).

[66] As Malherbe comments, περιπατέω "is equivalent to the more Greek *anastrephein* . . . (cf. *anastrophe* . . .) or *politeuesthai*" (*Letters to the Thessalonians*, 152).

this has been a cause for surprise and hostility on the part of their compatriots (4:4: ξενίζονται . . . βλασφημοῦντες, "they are surprised . . . slandering").

Should this former way of life, from which the addressees have turned away, be reckoned as "religious" or as "ethnic"? To pose the question in this way might immediately suggest that the category distinction makes little sense here: if cultic and religious observances (such as the author criticizes as gentile idolatry in 4:3) are one facet of what constitutes ethnic identity, loyal membership of one's people group, then it is at least clear that turning to Christ cuts across, disrupts—indeed ends—this way of life. It is unsurprising that there was antipathy to such abandoning of ancestral customs and way of life.[67]

Correspondingly, then, ἀναστροφή also denotes the holy and good way of life that is required for the addressees of the letter (1:15; 2:12; 3:1–2). The turn away from their ancestral way of life corresponds to a positive commitment to "call upon" (ἐπικαλεῖσθε) God the father (1:17),[68] whose just and impartial scrutiny indicates that they should live the remainder of their lives (ἀναστράφητε) in fearful obedience. It is notable too that 1 Peter takes particularly emphatic steps toward identifying Christians as a "people" in the climactic declaration of 2:9–10: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession . . . God's people' (ESV; ὑμεῖς δὲ γένος ἐκλεκτόν, βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν . . . λαὸς θεοῦ). Drawing on various scriptural phrases, the author here combines all three people words—γένος, ἔθνος, and λαός—in a single verse, and initiates what became an influential designation of Christians as a γένος.[69] What those labeled *Christianoi* are to display in their pattern of conduct is ἡ ἀγαθὴ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφή ("good conduct in Christ," 3:16). Unsurprisingly, this way of life ἐν Χριστῷ is not—and could hardly be—described as "ancestral," unlike the appeals to τὰ πάτρια ἔθη we find in contemporary Jewish writers. But it is equally clear, I would suggest, that it cannot be placed in an entirely different *category* to such ancestral ways of life, since it requires, at least for gentile converts, an abandonment of a former (ancestral) way of life in order to participate in a new one—and it is precisely this, according to the author, that is the cause of surprise, resentment, and hostility on the part of their contemporaries. The warnings to Izates about the consequences of his shift from his own people's way of life into the Jewish way of life are comparable here.

V. Conclusions

Focusing on terms and depictions that refer to a way of life, and to the depictions of possible modes of change from one such way to another, these case stud-

[67] Cf. Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing," 462, 497–501.

[68] On the particular use of this verb in the context of invoking a divine name, see Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (3 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994) 2:44–46.

[69] See further Horrell, *Becoming Christian*, 133–63.

ies help to illustrate the extent to which there are significant similarities and overlaps in the ways in which early Jewish and Christian sources discuss what it means to join their way of life, and the ways in which change or reorientation disrupts previous identities—including those we might label "ethnic"—and in effect represents a kind of disaffiliation and reaffiliation: leaving one people and joining another. In neither case can the kind of disruption involved be entirely separated from the field of ethnic identity and discourse; but nor can it meaningfully be separated from what modern scholarship has defined as the domain of "religion." As our opening methodological reflections have suggested, a sense of being a "people" is unlikely to be straightforwardly categorizable as either ethnic or religious but may encompass both in complex and historically variable ways, and in ways that underline the fuzzy overlaps between both categories.

This does not mean to imply that Jewish and early Christian identities are essentially the same kind of "thing," whether we label that thing ethnicity or religion. Exploration and appreciation of the distinctive characteristics of each (overlapping and intimately related) set of traditions remains crucial. But presenting the categories of ethnicity and religion as if they were clear alternatives, or as if either one represented a stable category to which to assign either Jewish or early Christian phenomena is to impose our categories onto the sources. Shifting our categorization of ancient Judaism from a "religion model" to an "ethnicity model," as Stegemann and others propose—especially if we contrast that ethnicity model of Judaism with a non-ethnic model of earliest Christianity—may be to shift from one inadequate category distinction to another.[70] The terminology that clusters around the idea of turning to or from a way of life can help us, repeating the cautionary words of Barton and Boyarin, "to be as self-conscious as we are able to be concerning our own categories and conceptions and not to give our categories and conceptions any more epistemological privilege than we simply cannot help doing." Approaching our study through such terminology also suggests that ethnicity and religion, insofar as we need to use them, are blurry and overlapping categories in both ancient and modern contexts. Focusing our attention on the ancient terminology does not by any means imply that we can do our work without modern theoretical and social-scientific insight, or without deploying contemporary concepts and categories; but it does help us to see how the construction of identities is played out in our sources, often in ways that cut across and complicate our own analytical categories.

[70] For a recent defense of the category distinction, see Steve Mason and Philip F. Esler, "Judaean and Christ-Follower Identities: Grounds for a Distinction," *NTS* 63 (2017) 493–515. For my response to their specific arguments, see David G. Horrell, "Judaean Ethnicity and Christ-Following Voluntarism? A Reply to Steve Mason and Philip Esler," *NTS* 65 (2019) 1–20.