

# Post-Supersessionism: Introduction, Terminology, Theology

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## 1. Introduction

This Special Issue of *Religions* is dedicated to exploring post-supersessionist readings of New Testament writings. As such, the key underlying assumption of contributors will be that the original writers wrote through non-supersessionist “lenses”. As a guest editor, my priority in this editorial is to explore terminology and to offer and deconstruct definitions of that terminology within the context of post-supersessionist conversations.

Post-supersessionist readings, in their essence, explore how the New Testament text/book under consideration serves theologically, ideologically, socially, culturally, and/or politically to emplace Jews and Gentiles, who are followers of the Jewish *Christos*/Messiah, into God’s eternal covenant with Israel.

Supersessionist readings, on the other hand, approach those same textual artifacts with the assumption that they are seeking to replace, displace, or supersede ethnocultural Israel with the multiethnic followers of Jesus the Jewish *Christos*, that is, with the universal “church”. (“c/Church” is an anachronistic English translation of the Greek word *ekklēsia*).

This editorial serves as an introduction to this Special Issue and seeks to clarify terminology and theology relevant to the ensuing discussions on the interplay between Judaism(s) and early *Christos*-followers living in the Roman empire. Many of the contributors to this Special Issue are also contributors, along with me, to the series entitled *New Testament After Supersessionism* (Cascade Books; Eugene, OR, USA). Their articles comprise a distillation of their book project’s key findings and arguments. The balance of this editorial represents a selective replication of material from the Introduction to my volume on *Reading Revelation After Supersessionism* (2020).<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Post-Supersessionism: Overview

While there are a variety of nuances scholars bring to a definition of post-supersessionism, the following is helpful given its breadth and succinctness:

[A] family of theological perspectives that affirms God’s irrevocable covenant with the Jewish people as a central and coherent part of ecclesial teaching. It rejects understandings of the new covenant that entail the abrogation or obsolescence of God’s covenant with the Jewish people, of the Torah as a demarcator of Jewish communal identity, or of the Jewish people themselves . . . [which] address the question of ongoing Jewish particularity, and the relationship of interdependence and mutual blessing between Jew and gentile in Messiah.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, (as an irreducible minimum,) supporters of the post-supersessionist perspective contend that the “Church” does not displace or replace historic Israel but rather is emplaced within Israel. A variety of academic categories fit underneath the post-supersessionist theological “umbrella”, so to speak. Those categories associated with studies of the apostle Paul’s writings include the so-called “Radical Perspective on Paul” (for example, Ehrensperger 2004, p. 39; Zetterholm 2009, pp. 127–63; Eisenbaum 2009, p. 216), also known as the “Beyond the New Perspective on Paul” (BNP)<sup>3</sup> and, more recently, as the “Paul within Judaism Perspective” (see especially, Nanos 2015, pp. 1–29 but also Runesson 2015, pp. 53–78).

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They each argue that, for Paul, Israel and the “Church”, that is, the universal, multi-ethnic community of Christ-followers, are distinct yet covenantally related socio-religious entities.<sup>4</sup> As such, so the argument goes, by faith in the Jewish *Christos*, gentiles qua gentiles share with Torah observant Jews qua Jews in God’s salvation history with historic Israel.<sup>5</sup>

William Campbell gives greater clarity as to how a post-supersessionist reading of Paul, in particular, lends itself to an affirmation of the continuation of social and ethnic identity among the diverse followers of the Jewish *Christos*. He states (Campbell 2006, p. 99) that “The church and Israel [are] related but separate entities which should not be dissolved or merged in such a way that the sub-group identity of the one is lost or unrecognized”.<sup>6</sup>

With respect to Pauline Christ-followers, Campbell (2006, p. 99) argues that they would not have seen themselves as some sort of new, a-cultural, universal association which is disconnected from its Jewish roots. Rather, the multi-ethnic members of Paul’s *ekklēsiai* (“assemblies/communities/congregations/“churches”) would have viewed themselves as remaining Jews and other ethnicities who, while ethnically diverse, are united under the transforming influence of Christ and who express that diverse unity within their individual cultures.<sup>7</sup>

Campbell (2006, p. 66) contends, therefore, that Paul is a non-sectarian, Jewish reformist who sought to establish groups that were theologically united with yet socially distinct from the greater synagogue community, but who still accepted Jewish ethno-religious identity markers in their worship of the Jewish *Christos*.<sup>8</sup>

The need for a non-supersessionist re-reading of New Testament writings comes more clearly to the fore in Kendall Soulen’s (1996, p. 1) observation that, “For most of the past two millennia, the church’s posture toward the Jewish people has come to expression in the teaching known as supersessionism, also known as the theology of displacement”.<sup>9</sup> A supersessionist posture is not simply a theological exercise, however. Supersessionist theology inevitably translates into attitudes and actions. Some of these attitudes and actions have resulted in anti-Judaistic and even anti-Semitic attacks against those of a Jewish heritage.

### 3. Supersessionism, Anti-Judaism, Anti-Semitism

Terrence Donaldson has succinctly identified the three-way interplay between text, action, and attitude not least through his analysis of three interrelated but distinct terms that are used in discussions on Christian self-definition(s): supersessionism, anti-Judaism, and anti-Semitism. Terrence Donaldson (2016, p. 6) provides some definitional clarification for these three terms:

If anti-Semitism refers to hateful attitudes and actions directed toward Jewish people per se—that is, an ethnic, social, and often political phenomenon—and if anti-Judaism refers to statements and formulations designed to defend and bolster Christian claims about themselves by denouncing what were perceived as Jewish counter-claims—that is, a theological and socio-religious phenomenon—then supersessionism refers to the kind of Christian self-understanding that might be seen to undergird such anti-Judaic rhetoric and anti-Semitic activity.

Donaldson brings to the forefront the importance of understanding how throughout history the foundational and formative nature of supersessionist assumptions have informed and deformed Christian attitudes and actions towards their Jewish “cousins”. Donaldson (2016, p. 6) gives helpful definition to the term supersessionism: “Supersession describes a situation where one entity, by virtue of its supposed superiority, comes to occupy a position that previously belonged to another, the displaced group becoming outmoded or obsolete in the process. The term thus properly applies to a completed process of (perceived) replacement”. In other words, broadly defined, the term “supersessionism”, which is otherwise known as “replacement theology” or “fulfillment theology”, holds that the “promises and covenants that were made with the nation of Israel . . . now allegedly belong to another group that is not national Israel” (Vlach 2010, p. 10).

Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho the Jew (early second century CE) is one historical example of this replacement/supersessionist theology at work in anti-Judaistic ways. Justin comments that "you Jews" (11.2) no longer are foundational to the church since it is primarily a Gentile entity (11.7–23) and thus as the "the true spiritual Israel" (11.5), it no longer adheres to the old law and covenant since they have become "obsolete", and have been "abrogated" and replaced by a new law and covenant (11.2–4) reflected in the appended Scriptures, which are no longer "yours, but ours" (29.2). However, even Justin realizes that this supersessionist impulse inherently accedes priority of place to the Jews (Dial. 23, 30). Thus, rather than grant credibility to the first covenant, Justin undermines it by suggesting to Trypho the Jew that the old Israel and its institutions never had divinely authorized credibility in the first place since "your circumcision of the flesh, your Sabbath days, and, in a word, all your festivals . . . were imposed upon you, namely, because of your sins and your hardness of heart" (Dial. 18.2) (Donaldson 2016, p. 7).

### 3.1. Supersessionism: Interpretive Approaches

Chris Zoccali (2010, 23ff.) highlights two basic approaches taken by supersessionist interpreters. First is the approach represented by Ernst Käsemann who sees discontinuity between the "church" and historic Israel. Thus, Torah observance and faith in Jesus as Messiah are incompatible. Second is the general approach represented by J. D. G. Dunn (1998, p. 508) (see also, Wright (1991, p. 237) and Donaldson (1997, p. 306)). He champions the view that there is continuity in salvation history between the "church" and historic Israel. Thus, Torah observance and faith in Christ are compatible for Jews who have become Christ-followers.

There are some who would position N. T. Wright into the supersessionist camp. Wright would disagree, though. He (Wright 2013, 2.825–834) sees his approach as reflecting a "middle view", which he calls "incorporative christology". He (Wright 2013, 2.1212) argues that those Jews who do not believe in Jesus as their *Christos* "have not been 'replaced' or 'disinherited' or 'substituted'". His "incorporative christology" emphasizes that, for Paul, Jesus is the continuation of Israel in the latter days and that all Christ-followers, whether messianic Jews or gentiles, together compose latter-day Israel.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, Wright affirms that there is only one redeemed people of God/family of Abraham and that Jesus the Jewish *Christos*/messiah is the only eschatological mediator of salvation.<sup>11</sup> As such, he does not affirm a two covenant system (Torah and Jesus).<sup>12</sup>

Even if Wright is correct that technically his view is not supersessionist, it would still seem to hold socio-cultural ramifications. His "incorporative christology" raises the question as to the value that Jewish ethnic identity would have held not least within the multi-ethnic *ekklēsiai* of Paul's and John's Christ-followers. This question comes to the forefront in Wright's view that all ethnicities are incorporated into the Jewish national identity "Israel" through faith in the Jewish *Christos*, Jesus of Nazareth. However, I suggest that Paul in particular does not view the corporate identity "Israel" as being transferable to gentile communities of *Christos*-followers. Rather, it is his distinctive use of the term *ekklēsia* as a trans-local, corporate identity for his multi-ethnic communities (Jews and gentiles) that served to incorporate gentiles into the *qāhāl* (supra-local *Ekklēsia*) of Israel (during its desert wanderings) even though they are not part of the ethnic 'am (nation/Israel) of the Jewish people.

### 3.2. Supersessionism, Anti-Judaism(s), Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?

The corpus of the New Testament in general has been tied to anti-Semitic (or anti-Judaic) interpretations throughout the ages, which some have claimed even formed interpretive foundations upon which were built theological justifications for the Holocaust. These are high interpretive stakes indeed. However, these stakes are not only planted within modern history. Ancient historical readings are also affected. Dunn (1999, p. 179) observes that if anti-Semitic "attitudes are already inseparable from the scriptures on which they are based . . . [then] does the attitude of post-70 NT documents indicate that the final

breach, the decisive parting of the ways between Christianity and (rabbinic) Judaism has already happened?" Any answer to Dunn's question requires a nuanced review of Jewish and "Christian" relations relative to region, historical era, source reliability (e.g., elite bias in literary artefacts) and in the avoidance of anachronistic terminology (e.g., Christian, Christianity).

#### 4. Definitions: Religion, Judaism(s), Jew/ishness, Christianity, Christian, Church/*Ekklesia*

##### 4.1. Religion

Modern (re)constructions of ancient "Judaism" and "Christianity" imply some sort of cohesive social reality called "religion", which was somehow separable from one's ethnic, cultural, national, and familial value structures. This is an anachronistic historical reconstruction. With respect to the term "religious", Bruce Malina (2009, p. 170) states that "the social institutions known as religion and economics did not exist as discrete, self-standing, independent institutions in antiquity. In antiquity, there were only two focal, freestanding social institutions: kinship and politics, yielding domestic economy, domestic religion, political economy, and political religion". Anders Runesson (2012, p. 213) suggests three social levels upon which "religion" "played out" in antiquity: "a. Public level (civic/state/empire concerns); b. Semi-Public level/Association level (voluntary groups/cults and their concerns); c. Private level (domestic, familial concerns)". Steve Mason (2007, pp. 482–88) identifies six aspects of "religion" that apply to each of Runesson's three social levels, which were intrinsically interconnected in everyday life in early antiquity: *ethnos*, cult, philosophy, kinship traditions/domestic worship, astrology/magic and voluntary association (*collegia/thiasoi*). Thus, unlike modern terminological usages, one can see the veracity in Brent Nongbri's (2013) claims that in antiquity there was no conceptual category that could be designated as "religious" as opposed to "secular"; all of ancient life was inextricably interwoven with religiosity. Thus, when speaking of first century realities, the terms "Judaism" and "Christianity" are reductionist and inappropriate.

##### 4.2. Judaism(s)

If one does choose to speak of "Judaism", then the most one can intend thereby is the definition of "common Judaism" offered by E. P. Sanders (1992, pp. 11–12): "common Judaism [is] that of the ordinary priest and the ordinary people ... Common is defined as what is agreed among the parties, and agreed among the populace as a whole". More specifically, Sanders (1992, p. 241) states that "common Judaism" is the convergence of four beliefs among first century CE Jews: "belief that their God was the only true God, that he had chosen them and had given them his law, and that they were required to obey it" and that "the temple was the visible, functioning symbol of God's presence with his people and it was also the basic rallying point of Jewish loyalties". John Barclay (1996, p. 430) claims that among Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora, "common Judaism" continued the "biblical demand for 'monolatry' ... [that is,] Jews may worship God only according to Jewish traditions".

Notwithstanding the common belief structure that undergirded the various sects within "common Judaism", the elephant in the room still needs to be addressed: "What exactly are we talking about when we talk about 'Judaism'?" (Boyarin 2019, p. xi). I have already suggested that there was no such thing as a religion that could be separated from the three social levels that were interconnected in everyday life realities such as *ethnos*, cult, philosophy, kinship traditions/domestic worship, astrology/magic, and voluntary association (*collegia/thiasoi*).

However, the question still needs to be asked as to whether within the ethnic/cultural life of Jews/Judeans there was such a thing as a consistent, integrated religious/ritualistic category one could call "Judaism"? Many biblical studies scholars have shifted away from using the term "Judaism" and taken to talking about "Judaisms" instead. That there are "Judaisms" is true not least from a diachronic perspective on the development of Jewish

ethno-religious culture throughout the centuries (e.g., Second Temple Judaism, rabbinic Judaism, medieval Judaism). A synchronic analysis of the Second Temple period reveals sectarian diversity (e.g., Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, Therapeutae) within the unity of what Sanders calls “common Judaism”.

Despite this unified diversity, Boyarin (2019, p. xi) claims it is still problematic to use the term “Judaism”: “There is no word in premodern Jewish parlance that means: ‘Judaism’ . . . [and that] when the term *Ioudaïsmos* appears in non-Christian Jewish writing—to my knowledge only in 2 Maccabees—it doesn’t mean ‘Judaism’, the ‘religion’, but the entire complex of loyalties and practices, including dress, speech and also sacrifice, that mark off the people of Judea (what we now call ‘Jewishness’)”. Boyarin (2019, p. xi) cites the apostle Paul as a prime example. He notes that “although [Paul nee Saul], for sure, [is] a *Ioudaios* and remaining one forever, he only uses *Ioudaïsmos* as something from which he has distanced himself, from which he is other as it is (now) other to him; it clearly no longer has for him quite the sense it had in Maccabees”.

#### 4.3. Jew/ish/ness

While Boyarin provides a succinct definition of “Jewishness” (as a definition of *Ioudaïsmos*), Mark Nanos offers a more expansive definition, one which integrates universal continuity with particularized diversity, as does Sanders in his definition of “common Judaism”, that applies across the diversity of “Judaism(s)”, so to speak. Nanos suggests that (Nanos 2014, pp. 27–28):

[T]he adjective “Jewish” is used both to refer to those who are Jews ethnically and to the behavior generally associated with the way that Jews live, albeit variously defined, such as by different interpretations of Scripture and related traditions, different views of who represents legitimate authority, and different conclusions about what is appropriate for any specified time and place. The behavior can be referred to by the adverb “Jewishly”, and as the expression of “Jewishness”. In colloquial terms, one who practices a Jewish way of life according to the ancestral customs of the Jews, which is also referred to as practicing “Judaism”, might be called a “good” Jew.

Throughout this study, I will use the term “Jew/Jewish” rather than “Judean”, in contradistinction to Steve Mason’s approach. Mason (2007, pp. 457–512) asserts that *Ioudaikos* is better translated as “Judean” rather than the traditional “Jewish”. Mason applies the same rationale to his choice to translate *Ioudaios* as “Judean” rather than as “Jew”. Anders Runesson (2008, pp. 64–70) provides a judicious critique of Mason’s position, particularly as it relates to (1) Mason’s “terminological distinction between ancient contexts . . . and the late antique and modern situation”, and (2) “the name of the place associated with Jews”, that is Judea.

#### 4.4. Christian

Steve Friesen (2006, p. 142) speaks to the problem of using the term “Christian” anachronistically when reading John’s Apocalypse: “Our use of ‘Christian’ to describe Revelation is a powerful and pervasive retrojection that warps our analysis of the first century by subtly redefining the churches as opposed to, and superior to, Judaism”. Although his use of the anachronistic term “church” lessens the force of his critique, in another (earlier) article (Rudolph 2005, pp. 351–73), he enacts his critique by using John’s own terminology such that he uses “saints” to talk about Christ-followers and “assemblies”, rather than “church”, when translating *ekklēsiai*.

In this book, the term “Christ-followers” (also known as followers of the Jewish *Christos*/messiah) functions as a technical designation for members of the Jesus movement during the first century CE. I have chosen to use “Christ-follower” rather than “Christ-believer” because it represents not just beliefs but also practice. I reserve use of the term “Christian” for Late Antique Christ-followers (most of whom no longer valued or understood their Jewish roots as followers of Jesus as the *Christos*/Jewish Messiah).



In this respect, I would also translate the four New Testament occurrences of the Greek term *Christianos* as “Christ-follower”, rather than as “Christian” (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet 4:16; Did. 12:4).<sup>13</sup> It is of interest to note that while both the book of Revelation and the epistle of 1 Peter are addressed to Christ-followers in Asia Minor, they do not use the same group identity terminology. 1 Peter uses the pluralistic identity *Christianoi* for his predominantly Jewish Christ-followers in diasporic Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Roman Asia and Bithynia (1 Pet 1:1). John uses the collective term *ekklēsia*, but never *Christianoi*, for his (predominantly Jewish) associations in Roman Asia (Rev 2–3). What might be a potential rationale for this social identity phenomenon?

While the absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence, it is instructive to note that the term *Christianos* only occurs in the book of *Acts* when other ethnicities are depicted as being allowed entrance into a Jewish sub-group of Christ-followers whose apostolic loyalty lies with the apostles in Jerusalem (e.g., Greeks in Antioch, 11:26; Herod Agrippa (Idumean) and Festus (Roman) in Palestine; 26:28).<sup>14</sup> If this silence represents social reality, then one can see why Paul did not use *Christianos* as a social identity for his Christ-follower associations. He required a group identity moniker that had no socio-religious ties to the apostles in Jerusalem. The word *ekklēsia* would have allowed him to keep his multi-ethnic Christ-followers socio-religiously connected to the Jewish roots of Jerusalem-loyal Christ-followers, while at the same time implicitly tying them to his apostolic authority and to the fulfillment of his divinely mandated mission to those of non-Jewish ethnicity. If Paul is distinctive among the early apostles in having adopted *ekklēsia* as an ongoing group identity, then John’s use of *ekklēsia* when addressing the seven Christ-follower associations in Roman Asia implies that those communities had existing socio-religious ties to the apostolic authority of Paul, rather than to Peter and/or James.<sup>15</sup>

To what do I attribute the above thesis? In *Acts*, we are told that the sub-group identity *Christianoi* originated in Antioch. Its genesis occurs only after the exodus of exclusively Jewish *Christos*-followers from Jerusalem to faraway regions such as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Cyrene. They were escaping the persecution in connection with Stephen’s martyrdom. Of these, some Jewish *Christos*-followers from Cyprus and Cyrene stopped telling the Gospel only to Jews (11:19) and shared it with Greeks in Antioch, with the result being that “a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord” (11:20).

If that is the case, then what might have been the prior group identity of those Jewish *Christos*-followers from Jerusalem? Some scholars suggest that they self-designated pluralistically as *hoi hagioi* (“the holy ones”).<sup>16</sup> However, it would seem that with the addition of Greeks (gentiles), their exclusively Jewish identity moniker (*hoi hagioi*) would no longer have been tenable for this newly formed multi-ethnic association of *Christos*-followers in Antioch. The term *Christianoi* would have been quite fitting given the new socio-ethnic realities of the Antiochean community. First, it maintained their indelible rootedness in a Jewish heritage (i.e., followers of the Jewish messiah/*Christos*). Second, its semantic range was broad enough to allow for gentile inclusion (i.e., *Christianos* indicates a follower of the Jewish *Christos*, while maintaining boundary permeability regarding the ethnicity of that *Christos*-follower).

However, as I have already suggested, *Christianoi* could not function universally as a group designation, especially for those *Christos*-followers committed to the gentile mission of Paul. This is true not least in respect of the fact that the *Christianoi* of Antioch held their primary apostolic allegiance with the apostles of Jerusalem (e.g., Acts 11:19; 1 Peter 4:16). Thus, Paul would have needed a new collective group identity for his gentile mission. Paul chose *ekklēsia*.<sup>17</sup>

If *ekklēsia* was “free” as a Jewish communal identity in the hellenized Diaspora, as Trebilco (2011, p. 456) suggests, then it would have served Paul’s missional needs admirably given its roots within both Greek and Jewish civic cultures. Paul’s use of *ekklēsia* as a sub-group designation appears to have gained traction by the late first century CE given its use by other Christ-follower sub-groups, such as the communities of Matthew (Matt 16:18; 18:17), the “elder” John (3 John 6, 9), and the “prophet” John (Rev 2–3). Given that John

also addresses his letter to *ekklēsia* associations, it would seem logical to assume that any scholarly findings relative to the social, political, and religious implications of Paul having designated his communities as *ekklēsiai* should also serve to inform our understandings of Greco-Roman and Jewish perceptions in Roman Asia of John's *ekklēsiai* to whom he addresses his "revelation of Jesus Christ".

#### 4.5. Christianity

It is in late antiquity that we see the political mission of (the almost exclusively gentile) Christ-followers reach its pinnacle with the edict of Theodosius I that all subjects of the Roman empire should worship the Christian God (380 CE). Daniel Boyarin (2003, p. 77), among others,<sup>18</sup> claims that this formal decree represents the birth of "religion" as a separate social category and of a "religion" that is now known as "Christianity".<sup>19</sup> Institutional representation of this "religion" fell to "the Catholic Church" (*katholikē ekklēsia*),<sup>20</sup> with the religious rituals being enacted within purpose-built structures that also were called "churches" (*ekklēsiai*). This fourth century CE conception of *ekklēsia* as a religious organization and as religious buildings ("church"), however, was a far cry from how the word *ekklēsia* ("assembly") is used in the New Testament.

#### 4.6. Church/Ekklēsia

As I have just noted, "church" is not a helpful translation for the Greek word *ekklēsia*. The late antique addition of the concepts of "organization" and "building" to the semantic domain of *ekklēsia*, which the English word "church" also includes, makes "church" an anachronistic term. As such, in this book, I will either transliterate the Greek word (*ekklēsia*) or translate *ekklēsia* as "assembly/gathering/meeting". The civic *ekklēsia* of Classical, Hellenistic, and Imperial timeframes was a regularly convened, juridically defined event during which members of the *dēmos* (the gathered citizenry)<sup>21</sup> assembled at a particular time (e.g., every 36 or 39 days (Classical Athens)) and location (e.g., agora (civic market place)) to carry out specific governmental functions as directed by the *boulē* (civic councilors). There is a long history of interaction between *boulai* and *dēmoi* within *ekklēsiai* as described in both literary and epigraphic sources. These date from the 5th century BCE into the Imperial period. Literary sources include but are not limited to Plato (429–347 BCE),<sup>22</sup> Xenophon (c. 430–355 BC),<sup>23</sup> and Plutarch (c. 46–120 CE).<sup>24</sup> Epigraphic sources that mention *ekklēsiai* span the centuries (5th century BCE to the early 3rd century CE) and hail from geographically diverse regions such as the Aegean Islands (e.g., Delos),<sup>25</sup> central Greece (e.g., Delphi),<sup>26</sup> and Asia Minor (e.g., Pisidia<sup>27</sup> and Caria<sup>28</sup>).<sup>29</sup>

The English words "assembly/gathering/meeting" have a broad enough semantic domain to communicate the three primary meanings of *ekklēsia* found within Greek (epigraphic and literary), Jewish (literary), and Christ-follower (literary) sources: (1) a formal or informal assembly/gathering/meeting for discussion and decision-making purposes; (2) a temporary group designation (*ekklēsia*) during the duration of that group's gathering within an *ekklēsia* (assembly/gathering/meeting); and (3) only in Philo (Virt. 108) and in New Testament writings is *ekklēsia* used as a permanent, ongoing group designation even when they disperse at the conclusion of their *ekklēsia* ("assembly").<sup>30</sup> This third fact means that the Greek semantic domain for *ekklēsia* was insufficient by itself to fulfill Paul's need for a group identity by which to designate in an ongoing fashion his sub-group of Christos-followers. Only in Philo do we find extant evidence of an ancient precedent for Paul's *ekklēsia* identity project: a semi-public association that self-identified in an ongoing fashion as an *ekklēsia*.

However, one might ask what rhetorical end this third meaning of *ekklēsia* served relative to the mission of Christos-followers generally and the gentile/Greco-Roman mission of Paul specifically? *Ekklēsia* is used in Jewish sources as a supra-local descriptor (the "assembly/congregation" of Israel during their desert wanderings) and as a local descriptor (a Jewish sub-group/association, e.g., Philo, Virt. 108; cf. Hebrew equivalent

qāhāl in 4QMMT, the Damascus Document [CD 7:17, 11:22, 12:6]).<sup>31</sup> This reality suggests the possibility also of identifying *ekklēsia* as a Jewish synagogue/community term, not only as a Greek civic term.

The Jewish and Greco-Roman backgrounds for *ekklēsia* usage are both of equal importance in providing missional relevance for Paul's communities with Greco-Roman and Jewish outsiders (and insiders). However, the civic Greek *ekklēsia* in and of itself could not provide Paul with a sufficient precedent for permanently designating a non-civic group (e.g., an association) as an *ekklēsia*. This is because there is no extant example in the inscriptional, papyrological, or literary records of a non-Jewish association self-designating collectively as an *ekklēsia*.<sup>32</sup> There is only one source that holds promise in this regard, and it is a Jewish literary one (Virt. 108).

The above supra-local and local Jewish usages of the term *ekklēsia* gave Paul a ready-made solution for a key ethno-religious conundrum: If gentiles could not collectively assume the designation "Israel" yet, through faith in the Jewish *Christos*, could share in historic Israel's covenantal benefits, then Paul's designation of his multi-ethnic communities as *ekklēsiai* provided them with an inherently Jewish collective identity other than "Israel" by which he could institutionally integrate gentiles qua gentiles into theological continuity with Torah observant Jews qua Jews.<sup>33</sup>

In other (Hebrew) words, in analogous fashion to the supra-local identity of God's people during the desert wanderings (i.e., the *Ekklēsia* of Israel), gentiles can become part of the qāhāl<sup>34</sup> (the socio-political *Ekklēsia* /assembly (of Israel)) but not part of the 'am (the ethnic people/nation of Israel).<sup>35</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

It was my intent in this editorial to provide an introduction to this Special Issue on post-supersessionist readings of New Testament writings. My key priority in this regard was to clarify terminology and theology that is relevant for discussions on the interplay between Judaism(s) and early *Christos*-followers in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman *imperium*. In order better to facilitate that end, I have replicated the appropriate sections on terminology from my volume *Reading Revelation After Supersessionism* that is published in the series *New Testament After Supersessionism* (Cascade Books). Specifically, it was my goal to explore how our terminological choices either assist or resist our ability theologically, ideologically, socially, culturally, and/or politically to emplace Jews and Gentiles, who are followers of the Jewish *Christos*/Messiah, into God's eternal covenant with Israel. It is my hope that one's ability more clearly to read New Testament texts through non-supersessionist "lenses" has been enhanced as a result of this introduction.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The ensuing content is republished from Korner (2020, pp. 5–26) and is used with permission ([www.wipfandstock.com](http://www.wipfandstock.com)).
- <sup>2</sup> Cited from the webpage of the Society for Post-Supersessionist Theology ([spostst.org](http://spostst.org); accessed on 15 October 2019), which is also the definition of post-supersessionism cited for the Cascade book series, *New Testament After Supersessionism*.
- <sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the similarities and differences between scholars in the New Perspective and Beyond the New Perspective (BNP) "camps", see Tucker (2011, pp. 7–10). BNP scholars include but are not limited to William S. Campbell, Kathy Ehrensperger, Anders Runesson, Magnus Zetterholm, Mark Nanos, David Rudolph, Pamela Eisenbaum, John Gager, Stanley Kent Stowers, Lloyd Gaston, Krister Stendahl, Markus Barth, Markus Bockmuehl, and J. Brian Tucker (Tucker 2011, p. 8).
- <sup>4</sup> David Rudolph argues for the inclusion of a Messianic Jewish perspective in Christian theology (Rudolph 2005, pp. 58–84). Rudolph envisions a five-fold post-supersessionist perspective which Messianic Jews would bring to Christian theology: "(1) God's covenant fidelity to the Jewish people, (2) that Jesus was Israel's Messiah and participated in the unique identity of the God of Israel, (3) that the *besorah* (gospel) was for Jews and Gentiles, (4) that Jesus-believing Gentiles were full members of God's people without becoming Jews, and (5) that Jesus-believing Jews should continue to live as Jews in keeping with Israel's calling to be a distinct and enduring nation" (<http://mjstudies.squarespace.com/about-post-supersessionist/>; accessed 29 January 2012).



- 5 Zoccali states that Nanos and Campbell appear to presume that “while the church existed for Paul under the umbrella of Israel, in as much as it consists of Jewish and gentile Christ followers it can equally be seen as a larger entity encompassing both Israel and the nations” (Zoccali 2010, p. 135). See also Nanos (2000, p. 221) and Campbell (2006, p. 138). For a volume which extensively explores the inter-relationship between first century CE Jewish Christ-followers and a Jewish heritage, see Skarsaune and Hvalvik (2007, pp. 3–418).
- 6 Campbell notes that one cannot merely distinguish Israel from the Church in the conviction that God’s purposes for historical Israel are not yet fully realized. One must rather establish to what degree Israel and the (predominantly gentile) church universal are mutually distinct entities in Paul’s theology.
- 7 For an assessment of Campbell’s argument, see Korner (2009) for an on-line review of Campbell (2006).
- 8 Campbell makes this point very clear in his analysis of Paul’s discussion on the weak and the strong in Romans 14:1–15:13. Campbell (2010, p. 188) states that Paul “feels obliged to make it clear that accommodation to those living a Jewish way of life, far from being in conflict with his gospel, is demanded by it, if the conviction of fellow Christ-followers so requires”.
- 9 Justin Martyr (second century CE) is one example. Justin promotes the view that his followers and their social and cultural identities supersede those of Trypho and his fellow Jews.
- 10 The importance of this topic to Wright is evident in the fact that he dedicates his largest chapter of his two-volume work to it (chapter 10, 268 pages) and a significant section of the next chapter (chapter 11, 225 pages) (Wright 2013, 2.774–1042 and 2.1043–1268, respectively).
- 11 Wright (2013, 2.830) claims that “Paul sees Jesus . . . [as] the True Jew, the one in whom Israel’s vocation has been fulfilled”.
- 12 For one example of a “two-covenant” perspective, see Eisenbaum (2009).
- 13 *Did.* 12:4 uses *Christianos* as insider terminology to instruct an itinerant preacher that he should live “as a *Christianos* . . . not idle” (πῶς μὴ ἀργὸς μεθ’ ὑμῶν ζήσεται Χριστιανός).
- 14 For an extensive review of the term *Christianos*, see Trebilco (2012, pp. 272–97).
- 15 For my rationale for claiming that Paul originated the use of the term *ekklēsia* as an ongoing group designation in the Jesus Movement, see Korner (2017a, pp. 156–73).
- 16 For a detailed discussion of the term *hoi hagioi* and its use as a group identity by early Christ-followers loyal to or associated with Jerusalem, see Trebilco (2012, pp. 104–37). *Acts* and some of the Pauline epistles both imply that *hoi hagioi* is an actual sub-group designation adopted by non-Pauline communities in the early Jesus Movement (e.g., *Acts* 9:13; *Rom* 15:25, 26, 31). Trebilco (2012, p. 134) argues that the Aramaic-speaking Christ-followers referenced in *Acts* originally chose to self-designate as *hoi hagioi* because of that term’s historic association with the eschatological “people of the *hoi hagioi*” in *Daniel* 7.
- 17 This point becomes even more convincing if one grants the point that the use of *ekklēsia* in *Acts* is evidence of provincialism (not anachronism) on the part of the redactor (Luke?) for the sake of clearer regionally specific communication to his benefactor, Theophilus. Theophilus’s potential residence was in Macedonia, which had provincially distinct ways of naming an *ekklēsia* (i.e., *ennomos ekklēsia*; cf. *Acts* 19:39). See a full discussion on the phrase *ennomos ekklēsia* and its connection to the Hellenic regions of Phokis and Thessaly, near Macedonia, in Korner (2017a, pp. 159–60).
- 18 Brent Nongbri (2013) argues that the absence of the “secular” in pre-modern, non-Western contexts makes “religion” a uniquely modern, Western concept. For a judicious critique of Nongbri’s conceptual paradigm, see Laughlin and Zathureczky (2015, pp. 235–36).
- 19 Boyarin’s argument for the birth of “religion” as a social category is not a social-scientific argument based on the differentiation of proscribed descriptive and prescribed redescriptive discourse (e.g., Nongbri). Rather, he bases it upon the historically specific context of the fourth century CE. See Daniel Schwartz (2014, pp. 91–99), however, who offers fourteen examples from Josephus, where the Greek word *threskia* is best translated as “religion” rather than as a religious activity such as “worship”, “cult”, or “ceremony”.
- 20 Inscriptional occurrences of *katholikē ekklēsia* include references (1) to a building (*Pan du désert* 27; 340/1 CE: ὁ κατασκευάσας ἐνταῦθα καθολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν); (2) to an institutionalized organization (*IGLSyr* 5 2126; n.d.; [ὡς ἐνετύπωσεν(?) ὁ θεοτίμητος Γρηγόριος ἡμῶν πατριάρχης], [κατὰ τοὺς ἱεροὺς κανόνας(?) τῆς καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας]); and (3) in the non-universal sense, to a regional community of Christians (*RIChrM* 235; Makedonia [Edonis], Philippi; fourth century CE: τῆς καθολικῆς καὶ ἀποστολικῆς ἀγίας ἐκκλησίας Φιλιππησίων).
- 21 When the term δῆμος (*dēmos*) occurs within an enactment formula (e.g., ἔδοξε δῆμῳ) that was motioned and approved before an ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*), δῆμος always refers to the body of the full citizenry in Athens that was gathered for the purpose of conducting civic business (Rhodes and Lewis 1997, p. 93).
- 22 Plato writes about a civic *ekklēsia* thirteen times.
- 23 Xenophon mentions a civic *ekklēsia* twenty times.
- 24 Plutarch speaks of a civic *ekklēsia* 142 times.
- 25 For example, *IDelos* 1502 (Delos, 148/7 BCE) reads, δεδόχθαι τεῖ [βουλεῖ τοὺς λαχόν]τας προέδρους εἰς [τὴν ἐπιούσαν ἐκκλησίαν] χρηματίσαι περὶ [τούτων].

- 26 For example, *FD* III 4:47 (Delphi, 98 CE).
- 27 For example, *Mon. Ant.* 23.1914.259, 172 (Pisidia, Sagalassos, fourth/third century BCE).
- 28 For example, *BCH* 1972, 435–36 (Caria, found at Aphrodisias, second/first century BCE).
- 29 For discussion of *ekklēsia* mentions in Greek inscriptions, see esp. [Korner \(2017a\)](#), pp. 22–79).
- 30 See my full analysis of how *ekklēsia* was used in Greek, Jewish, and Christ-follower contexts ([Korner 2017a](#)).
- 31 Within CD, *qēhal* occurs at 7.17 (“the King is the assembly”), 11.22 (“trumpets of the assembly”), and 12.6 (“he may enter the assembly”).
- 32 See my discussion in [Korner \(2017a\)](#), pp. 52–68).
- 33 By “gentiles qua gentiles”, I mean that gentiles could become fully constituted followers of the Jewish *Christos* without being required to become Jewish proselytes and/or take up any one, or all, of the Jewish covenantal identity markers such as circumcision, dietary restrictions, and festival observances.
- 34 Within the ancient *qāhāl*/*ekklēsia* there were those who were not members of the people of Israel (*‘am*). Not dissimilarly, Paul’s *ekklēsiai* comprised individuals who belonged to the people of Israel (i.e., the ethnically defined *‘am*) and individuals who did not belong to the *‘am*/ethnic Israel. This provides at least one rationale for why *ekklēsia* functioned well as a group designation for Paul’s communities: *ekklēsia* had the ability to create a collective entity (in the Jewish *Christos*) without erasing distinction between Israel and the nations.
- 35 See further in [Korner \(2017b\)](#), p. 128).

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