

Was there a Christian Mission Before the Fourth Century? Problematizing Common Ideas about Early Christianity and the Origins of Modern Mission

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1. Introduction

A couple of years ago, a Christian Swedish weekly magazine, *Kyrkans Tidning*, published an interview with the Chair of the Jewish community in Stockholm, Lena Posner Körösi.¹ The topic discussed was a debate that had arisen following a suggested change in regulations, which would prevent fundamentalism and ensure that all programs and activities associated with the synagogue would be firmly based on and communicate democratic and pluralistic values. All activities associated with the synagogue should be evaluated from this perspective. The majority supported the suggested change, but some members had concerns, fearing that the introduction of such a paragraph may result in censorship and suppression of minority views.

The background for the change is said to have been several (unrelated) events taking place among Jewish communities in Sweden, among which were a conflict over the attempted hiring of a teacher for the Jewish School in Stockholm who belonged to the ('Ultra-Orthodox') Chabad movement, as well as a crisis following services in the synagogue in Lund held by The Jewish Centre there; the services had been egalitarian with regard to women's and men's participation and tasks. Protests against these services were said to have come from The Mosaic Community of Lund as well as the orthodox Jewish Community of Malmö, the latter having signed the tenancy agreement for the apartment in which the Lundensian synagogue services were held.²

In addition to these events, the Chair of the Jewish Community of Stockholm widens the perspective and refers to international developments in Europe as the reason for the synagogue's suggested change of regulation. Orthodox rabbis, she is quoted as claiming, are moving to Eastern Europe in order to missionise among Jewish communities; they are even sometimes "tangibly taking over synagogues."³

This is, of course, a very interesting claim, regardless of the frequency of such purported attempts to influence and change Jewish ways of life. Indeed, the interview highlights the significance of institutional aspects of Jewish life in relation to questions of mission and national and international connections between Jewish communities. This is, as it happens, precisely what we see in the ancient material, as we investigate the phenomenon of mission among Jews and (Jewish or non-Jewish) Christ-believers. The present paper intends to address questions related to Jewish mission (sometimes referred to in the scholarly literature as 'universalism'⁴) and the origins of Christian mission, all firmly set within the Graeco-Roman world.

¹ Cecilia Jaensson Wallander, "Debatt kring stadgar mot fundamentalism," *Kyrkans Tidning* 41, 11-17 oktober (2007) 10.

² According to the article, this led to the closing of the Lund Synagogue.

³ "Hon [Lena Posner Körösi] syftar på de ortodoxa rabbiner som flyttar till östra Europa för att missionera bland judiska grupper, sprida sin syn och till och med handgripligen ta över synagogor."

⁴ I have discussed elsewhere the use of the terms 'universalism' and 'particularism' in biblical studies, and believe that these expressions are too vague and therefore misleading: Anders Runesson, "Particularistic Judaism and Universalistic Christianity? Some Critical Remarks on Terminology and Theology," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 1 (2000) 120-44 [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2004]. Also published in: *Studia Theologica*, 54:1 (2000): 55-75. See further below.

While there have certainly been many attempts in history to formulate theologies of mission and define the duties of the Christian in this regard, it is no exaggeration to claim that the post-holocaust era has brought with it for the Western Christian churches radical reassessments of Jewish and Christian relations in light of the role Christian theology played in the horrendous events taking place in Europe during the Second World War. Since Christian theologies of mission more broadly relate to and find inspiration and key texts in the New Testament, the relationship between Christ-believers and other Jews and non-Jews in the ancient world is pushed to the centre of the stage. Given that this raises historical questions—and history is a powerful tool in contemporary theological and political narratives—New Testament scholars have engaged these issues in new ways in recent years. This paper is meant as a contribution to this discussion.

We shall proceed as follows. The first part of the paper (sections 2-4) deals with questions of methodology, definitions, and basic point of departure, as decisions made on such issues will determine much of the outcome of the investigation. We shall then proceed to investigate mission in the ancient world, Graeco-Roman and Jewish (including Apostolic-Jewish), on three socio-political levels, all of which are evidenced in ancient sources as structuring society: the private, the semi-public, and the public areas of life (sections 5-7). The concluding section (8) will summarise some of the main findings and deal briefly with the contemporary situation in relation to ancient evidence. A main focus throughout the paper, indeed, what drives the argument, is a persistent insistence on the inextricability of the 'religious' and the political, and the consequences of such insistence for our understanding of 'mission' in antiquity.

2. Mapping the Area: Initial Steps

Several important studies on Jewish Mission and related topics have been published the last 20 years or so.⁵ Two of these, in particular, emphasise the importance of defining carefully various phenomena related to our topic, and reserve the term 'mission' for a specific activity: evidence of an organised active pursuit to convince non-members to become members of the religion of Judaism.⁶ In the comparison with Christianity, Martin Goodman adds the word 'universal' and asks (in vain) for non-Christian evidence for a 'universal proselytizing

⁵ Louis Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions From Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Martin Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); James Carleton Paget, "Jewish Proselytism at the Time of Christian Origins: Chimera or Reality?" *JSNT* 62 (1996) 65-103; Scot McKnight, *A Light Among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein (eds.), *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004). Terence L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish patterns of Universalism (to 135 CE)* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007). For additional studies, especially scholars critical to the theory that Jews missionised non-Jews in the first centuries of the Common Era, see Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, I, 93, n. 8. From the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies has come three recent publications with relevance for our topic: Terence L. Donaldson (ed.), *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Caesarea Maritima* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000); Richard S. Ascough (ed.), *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Sardis and Smyrna* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005); Leif E. Vaage (ed.), *Religious Rivalries in the Early Roman Empire and the Rise of Christianity* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006).

⁶ McKnight, *Light*; Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*.

mission.⁷ Some scholars have even argued that we should abandon the term 'mission' completely, due to its theological and anachronistic content.⁸

While careful categorisation of the primary sources is crucial to enable meaningful and supportable conclusions based on a wide range of fragmentary comments and hints in the material, many types of definitions bring with them quite serious problems, some of which haunt all investigations into 'origins-questions.' One of the most basic issues concerns the problem of the level of anachronism inherent in the question itself.

All the questions we ask as historians initially take as point of departure specific and culturally determined ideas about the world, worldviews, religion, terminology (which carries within it and perpetuates specific views) etc. The same is true for scholars studying contemporary cultures which are not their own. Once we immerse in the relevant source material, such ideas are relativised, sometimes radically changed, and the question needs to be re-phrased, terminology re-thought. Theories then need to be formulated, the material 'translated' in ways that make sense in the modern world. The hermeneutics of these processes are complex and hard to entangle.

One example may suffice. How much should we let the modern phenomenon, which origins or antique form we seek, control our conclusions? In synagogue studies, e.g., it was common for a while among some scholars to take as point of departure 4th or 5th century architectural forms and then conclude that, since these specific forms were not present in the first century, no synagogues existed in the first century. Other scholars would, in response, claim that one has to 'de-construct' (not in the Derridaean sense) the 5th century form and then trace specific individual elements back to earlier periods in order to find earlier variants of synagogue architecture. Such a procedure would also enable a reconstruction of developments over time within the same institutional setting.

It is my contention, then, that it is a methodological mistake to define too narrowly a phenomenon and then measure other phenomena against it as either matching or not matching, especially when this is done in a comparison between them over time. Rather, we need to focus on and define a general culture, in our case a general culture of mission, in which diverse but related phenomena occur. When we proceed in this way, I would argue, we shall find that the earliest mission, in its various types within the Jesus movement and other Jewish movements as well as within the Graeco-Roman world generally, are intertwined in such a way that 'the unique' needs to be understood as variants on a theme.

This paper shall proceed accordingly. The comparative material includes (literary, inscriptional and archaeological) evidence relating to Jews (including Apostolic Jews), non-Jewish Christ-followers as well as adherers of other Graeco-Roman cults. Since we speak of 'religion' and 'mission' in specific and culturally determined ways, reflecting our own modern understandings, it is of importance to begin our investigation by challenging the idea that these phenomena were understood in the same way in antiquity. Although quite common a perspective, it is incorrect to state, as A.D. Nock does, that "[t]he Jew and the Christian offered religions as we understand religion; the others offered cults."⁹

⁷ Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 6-7.

⁸ Leif E. Vaage, "Ancient Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success: Christian, Jews, and Others in the Early Roman Empire," in Vaage (ed.), *Religious Rivalries* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006) 3-19, esp. 9-17.

⁹ A.D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933) 16.

3. Changing the Facts on the Ground: The Creation of ‘Religion’ (and ‘Christianity’)

I have argued elsewhere that the formation of Christian identity (and later the emergence of Islam) involved decisive developments that affected modern understandings of what constitutes ‘religion,’ and, by implication, have distanced us significantly from the first century Mediterranean world.¹⁰ For our purposes here, the key element is the process by which second century non-Jewish Christ-believers actively divorced what we would call their ‘religious identity’ from what they would call ‘Judaism,’ which included a disentanglement of the connections between the ethnos (Jews), their land and law, and their God.¹¹ This meant, in effect, that the cult of the Jewish ethnos, to which, according to many members of the Jesus movement, non-Jews had been invited as non-Jews, was re-interpreted, or rather re-created, in the likeness of philosophies and Graeco-Roman mystery cults, several of which had gone through a similar development in earlier periods. This was a step unforeseen by Paul, who maintained—and in Romans 9-11 emphasised—the ethnic boundaries and the central position of the Jewish people in (and even outside) the new movement.

Similar (but not identical) developments, in which an ethnic component was original but became relativised, can be seen in several of the Mysteries, e.g., the Egyptian mysteries of Isis and Osiris, Greek Eleusinian mysteries, and the Persian Mithras cult. Their membership was open and, like other mysteries, basically egalitarian (with the exception of the Mithras cult, in which no women participated). People with different ethnic identities could participate in various such mysteries, without neglecting their cultic obligations in other (social and political) contexts.

For Judaism, there was the possibility for non-Jews of conversion as well as adhering more loosely to the God of Israel (the so-called god-fearers) within a synagogue community context. This, however, did not mean that the ethnic, and therefore national components were

¹⁰ Anders Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity: Paul, Ignatius, and Theodotus I,” in Bengt Holmberg (ed.) *Exploring Early Christian Identity*, WUNT 226 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 59-92. See also Steve Mason’s persuasive study (although I disagree regarding on the translation of *Ioudaioi*): “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38 (2007) 457-512. Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 73, writes: “[P]urely religious affiliation allegedly discovered in the ancient world may be an anachronistic illusion.... Religion as we understand it did not exist in the ancient world.” See also Paula Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement: Ideas in the Study of Christian Origins whose Time has come to Go,” *Studies in Religion* 35:2 (2007) 231-246.

¹¹ Ignatius would be the earliest example of this development. On the relationship between these aspects of ethnos, land, law, and god generally in the Graeco-Roman world, see Mason, “Categorization.” The connection between these aspects within Judaism has led several scholars to argue for the translation of *Ioudaioi* as ‘Judeans’ rather than ‘Jews’; see, e.g., Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, 40-76, especially 68-74; Mason “Categorization,” John Barclay, “Constructing Judean Identity after 70 CE: A Study of Josephus’s *Against Apion*,” in Zeba A. Crook and Philip A. Harland (eds.), *Identity & Interaction in the Ancient Mediterranean: Jews, Christians and Others* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2007) 99-112, especially 110-112, and n. 20. John Kloppenborg, “Judaeans or Judean Christians in James?” in Zeba A. Crook and Philip A. Harland (eds.), *Identity & Interaction in the Ancient Mediterranean: Jews, Christians and Others* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2007) 113-135, 113, n. 2 writes: “Throughout this paper I use the rather awkward locution ‘Judean’ and ‘Judeans’ rather than ‘Jewish’ and ‘Jews’ in order to underscore the fact that in the first century CE, the term *Ἰουδαῖος* is still primarily a marker of geographical origin or domicile (like Kitian, Phrygian, Lydian, etc.), rather than a designation of the beliefs held by such persons.” While I do not agree with this translation on the basis of current self-definition among Jews, I understand the emphasis on these aspects of Judaism as a valid and very important point necessary to avoid anachronisms in the analysis of the first century.

compromised or lost.¹² Rather, converting to Judaism implied taking upon oneself all aspects that belonged to a people, including the law. Conversion meant a merging into another ethnos.¹³ Even for those who did not convert (and thus did not undergo circumcision if male), the Jewish people was at the centre of the worship of the God of Israel; such individuals remained in their original ethnic self-identity, an identity which allowed them to worship this god just as well as other gods (just like people could be members of multiple mysteries and associations without compromising loyalty to anyone of them.)

In brief, as Steve Mason notes, what we call ‘religion,’ was, in antiquity, integral to at least six areas of life: ethnos, cult, philosophy, familial traditions/domestic worship, voluntary association (*collegia/thiasoi*), and astrology and magic.¹⁴ Since Jews and Christ-believers, whether Jewish or not, lived in this cultural setting, we need to ask the question about mission in relation to each of these areas. Although Jews surely were unique enough to be recognised as a specific group (as we know from Graeco-Roman writings), as Klauck says, “[a]n outsider could have the impression that Jewish groups were like cultic associations that came from the East and venerated a highest god, and the same is true of the Christian communities in the Graeco-Roman cities.”¹⁵

The wider contextual frame for our inquiry thus forces us to abandon our modern category of ‘religion’—and the idea of a mission of a ‘religion’—and ask for comparative material related especially to ethnos,¹⁶ national and domestic cults, associations and mystery cults, philosophy.¹⁷ Activities related to these phenomena were played out on basically three levels of society: the public, the private, and the in-between semi public sphere where associations existed.¹⁸ This means that we have to analyse the evidence of ‘mission’ from a variety of perspectives that are triggered by these social levels, including political and national aspects and motivations. None of these levels can be said to communicate more authentic expressions of what we would call ‘religiosity’ than another.

In the following, we shall ask what the inappropriateness of the category of ‘religion’ for the first century situation means for our understanding of ‘mission’ and the nature of such phenomena. Since the Jesus movement, Apostolic Judaism,¹⁹ was ‘religionized’ into ‘Christianity’ in Late Antiquity, we shall, consequently, have to abandon several conceptions related to ‘Christianity’ too in order to reconstruct first century scenarios. Goodman is certainly correct when saying that the history of scholarship often reveals an unconscious

¹² Cf. Shaye Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 137; also quoted by Barclay, “Constructing,” 110, n. 16.

¹³ That this was not unproblematic in antiquity is clear from discussions in, e.g., rabbinic literature. Some authorities maintained that some laws should not be followed by proselytes (because they were not ethnically Jews), whereas other rabbis argued that a proselyte was like a Jew in every respect, and that all laws and rituals should apply equally to them as to any other Jew. Some rabbis rejected the idea of accepting proselytes at all (b. Yev. 47b, 24b), while others embraced converts (b. Ber. 57b; b. Ned. 32a; b. Shabb. 31a). Several texts mention mission (m. Avot 1:12; b. Pes. 87b; Gen. R. 39:14; Gen. R. 84:4; Gen. R. 90:6, cf. 91:5; Eccl. R. 8:10).

¹⁴ Mason, “Categorization,” 482-88. See also Philip Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations: Claiming a Place in the Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2003) 61.

¹⁵ Hans-Josef Klauck, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) 54.

¹⁶ Cf. Fredriksen, “Mandatory,” 232: “gods run in the blood; cult is an ethnic designation/ethnicity is a cultic designation.”

¹⁷ Of these categories, Mason has suggested that philosophy comes closest to what we refer to as ‘religion’ today; see “Categorization,” 486. We shall return to this below.

¹⁸ See Klauck, *Context*, part 1.

¹⁹ For the terminology, see Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity,” 72-74.

“Christianization of the study of ancient religions.”²⁰ However, it is equally important to note that ancient cults and varieties of Judaism, including Apostolic Judaism, have been religionized. Here we have then, two major pitfalls threatening to turn our investigation into a gazing at our own reflection at the bottom of the well: the religionizing of ‘Christianity’ and the Christianization of the Roman Empire.

Space—and time—do not allow for all of the aspects concerned to be dealt with; we shall, however, discuss some of the key features that will highlight the distinctive nature of the first century situation in relation to later developments.

4. Pre-Christian Mission Beyond ‘Religion’

4.1 Defining ‘Mission’

The term ‘mission’ has, as so many other terms used in scholarship, recently been called into question as anachronistic and basically theological in nature.²¹ I would still use ‘mission’ in the sense of ‘the intent and/or strategies used to influence others, passively or actively to change their views and/or their behaviour’. With such a lowest-common-denominator definition, it is fairly easy to show that missionary activities took place among Graeco-Roman groups as well as among various Jewish groups, including Apostolic Jews. We need, therefore, to develop a more nuanced lens, so that the evidence can be categorised into meaningful groups of material; such groups of material can then be used for comparative analysis.

I have argued elsewhere for at least three basic categories, which are wide enough not to impose anachronistic or culturally isolating limits on the sources which would make it difficult to compare various aspects as well as trace developments and influences between different groups of people.²² I shall include some examples from Judaism, to clarify what is meant; we shall return in the main body of the paper to discuss Graeco-Roman traditions.

Mission

- Proselytising Mission
 - Refers to attempts by members of one group to convince non-members to join their group. (Examples include Eleazar the Galilean, who, contrary to Ananias, insisted on the circumcision of the King of Adiabene; Josephus, *A.J.* 20.34-48. We find also, in this category, the forced circumcision practiced by some of the Hasmonean rulers as they annexed conquered areas.)
- Ethno-Ethic²³ Mission
 - Refers to attempts by members of one group to influence the behaviour and/or worship of non-members, without asking them to join the group. (Examples would include the thought pattern revealed in the Book of Jonah; it seems, also, that Ananias and another anonymous Jew mentioned by Josephus may have engaged in such mission: *A.J.* 20.34-48.²⁴)

²⁰ Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 3.

²¹ See, e.g., Vaage (ed.), *Religious Rivalries*, especially the editor’s contribution “Struggle for Success.”

²² Runesson, “Particularistic Judaism and Universalistic Christianity?”

²³ I have modified this term somewhat from my original proposal ‘Ethic-Religious mission’.

²⁴ It is not entirely clear whether Ananias promoted a proselytising mission in general, and just made an exception strictly for the king, for political reasons. With regard to Izates’ mother, Helena, it is implied in the story that she had become a full convert to Judaism; see discussion in Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*, 334-335.

- Inward Mission
 - Refers to attempts by a member of a group to influence the behaviour and/or worship of other members of the larger group to which they all belong. (Examples of this type of mission are legion, both in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and throughout Jewish and Christian history.)²⁵

Each of these types of mission can be divided into two basic categories: active or passive. The former would involve active outreach to the targeted individuals or groups, but does not have to be planned and executed by a larger group; individuals could also be active in this regard, without explicit institutional or other authority or financial support behind them. Passive mission refers to a pattern of though expecting others to change their behaviour and/or cultic status as a consequence of the individual missionary's, or group's, way of life and other activities. For example, some Jews expected that non-Jews would join them on their own accord when the time was right and God would reinvent the world.²⁶

A brief summary of these definitions of mission in relation to social levels in chart form may look as follows:

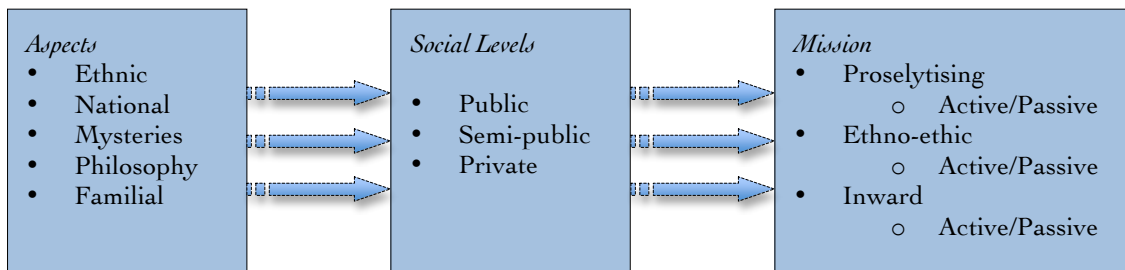


Figure 1. Parameters and Analytical Lenses

4.2 Outlining Parameters and a Mode of Procedure

If we now bring together what we have said in the two previous sections, we may outline a methodological strategy for tackling questions of ‘mission’ in antiquity, and thereby also the origins of later Christian mission. I have four points.

1. What we call ‘religion’ was, in antiquity, played out on three social levels:
 - 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).
2. On these levels, respectively, various aspects of what we call ‘religiosity’ were triggered. For example:
 - a. Civic, national, ethnic, colonial aspects were triggered on the public level.
 - b. Aspects of individual salvation and/or morality, sometimes ethnic aspects, were triggered on the semi-public level.

²⁵ Cf. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 5: “On a social scale broader than that of the household, Jews, Christians, and pagans from time to time, alike took it for granted that *within* societies religious deviants had to be brought into line, if necessary by force, to avert the hostility of the divine and disaster for all.”

²⁶ We find such expectations in the book of Isaiah, but also with the historical Jesus, partly in Matthew and in John.

- c. Aspects of daily life activities and how they are intertwined with various forms of the divine, familial and ancestral protection and well-being, were triggered on the private level.
3. Each level and the aspects it triggers need to be dealt with in terms of various forms of 'mission and expansion.'
4. As we analyse mission, understood as either proselytising, ethno-ethic, or inward, we need to keep separate,
 - a. intentions on the part of the group or individual as stated in our sources on the one hand, and
 - b. actual practices and techniques applied by these people on the other. (Techniques and strategies used can be identical between different groups while at the same time the intentions and goals of respective group may be different; still, the use of similar strategies may tell us something about the cultural mindset of both groups and how to win new members.)

In the following, we shall deal first with the role of the house as an 'underground' facilitator for the spreading of cults. Much focus in the study of mission has been put on semi-public and public levels of society; the private sphere had, however, an important role to play precisely when cults spread, as a channel for change that was often resisted on the public level. We shall then continue with evidence related to the semi-public and public levels and see how mission is played out there. Needless to say, there are no sharp boundaries between these three spheres of ancient life; seen as concentric circles, with the core circle being the private level, the shift between circles as they expand beyond each other would be a grey muddled area.²⁷ Still, the ancients did distinguish between them in word and deed,²⁸ and the movements that can be discerned between them, both between the private and the semi-public, and between the semi-public and the public, are of key importance to our quest for understanding ancient mission and expansion.

5. The Private Sphere: The Role of the House in Spreading a Cult

The private sphere triggered a range of cultic acts associated with the well-being and protection of the family (which could range between the nuclear family to others involved in the household, e.g., slaves); household gods and house altars were involved for all but the Jews—and those non-Jews (god-fearers and Christ-fearers²⁹) who interpreted their allegiance to the God of Israel in exclusive terms. Daily rituals around, e.g., meals as well as life cycle rituals for individuals involved in the household were in focus.

At first glance, it seems inappropriate to speak about forms of mission in this setting, since the focus is on individual family units and their interests in securing the benevolence of the gods with regard to their own safety and wellbeing. One could certainly speak of inward mission within the family unit to ensure correct sacrifices and behaviour, but this would be of little interest here and almost of a matter-of-course nature. For our purposes, taking seriously

²⁷ For example, rituals and cultic acts related to death permeated all three levels of society.

²⁸ Cf. John Scheid, who notes the legal aspects: "Religions in Contact," in Sarah Iles Johnston (ed.), *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide* (Cambridge: Harvard University press, 2004) 113.

²⁹ The term refers to non-Jewish adherers to Jewish communities following the pattern advised by Paul. They were like god-fearers, but theologically with full membership 'in Christ.' See Runesson, "Inventing Christian Identity," 73.

the nature of cultic acts as intimately and inextricably intertwined with political and other matters of importance to state and society, it is more significant to point at what happens between the levels in terms of the aim at controlling or influencing people's cultic acts. There are two directions of influence that should be noted: 1) Actors on the public scene wanting to control private cultic rituals on the one hand, and 2) private individuals who feel a need to expand, or allow the expansion of, their own worship beyond the immediate context of their household.

In the first case, the will to influence moving in the direction from the public to the private, the reason for action is simply to protect the state and society by ensuring that pollution following an incorrectly performed sacrifice in the domestic sphere should never happen. Plato, e.g., wants to rule that sacrifices in the private sphere must be forbidden. If someone feels he or she wants to sacrifice, such sacrifices must be brought to and performed by experts: the priestly personnel at public temples.³⁰ Since the aim here is at protecting shared space and communal life (the state), the type of mission should be defined as inward: political boundaries are, just as much as any group boundaries, what delimits the aim and the (suggested) actions taken. Whether effective or not, such inward mission, policing if you like, aimed at controlling cultic behaviour was most likely present from time to time in Graeco-Roman society empire-wide.³¹ 'Polytheism' was not the same as 'tolerance' or 'religious freedom' as we understand these terms today.

In the second case the movement is in the opposite direction: the will to influence other's cultic behaviour (mission) begins within the private household and expands beyond it into the (semi-) public sphere. Two examples are especially instructive here. The establishment of the Egyptian cult of Sarapis on Delos in the third century BCE,³² and the modification and opening up of a private cult of Agdistis to people beyond the household in Philadelphia, Asia Minor (first century BCE).³³ Both of these examples have been treated at some length by others; our interest here is to note the movement itself from the private to semi-public spheres of society.

In the case of Sarapis cult on Delos, we find some important ingredients that may be generalisable. An individual, a priest from Egypt named Apollonius, brings a cultic statue of Sarapis with him to Delos and sets it up in his rented (private) house. Later on, his grandson, Apollonius the Younger, had a dream in which the god commanded him to construct a temple for him. There was an increase of adherents to the cult preceding this move; Klauck suggests these were immigrant Egyptians.³⁴ There is no reference, however, specifically to the ethnic identity of the new adherents. The temple is met with local resistance, legal proceedings follow, but the grandson is vindicated; the temple, which has been excavated (Sarapeion A³⁵), stands.

We have no explicit evidence of missionising efforts of any of these three men, but we know that this cult, foreign to Delos, grew. Michael White notes that, as a result of the

³⁰ Plato, *Leg.* 10.909d-910d. Note the suggested death penalty for impiously performed sacrifices in the private realm.

³¹ Such 'policing' of cultic behaviour also extended into the semi-public level of society, i.e., associations. See further below.

³² IG XII/7 506; IG XI/4 1299; plan of the remains of Sarapeion A: Philippe Bruneau and Jean Ducat, *Guide de Délos* (3rd edition; Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1983) No. 91, fig. 71. Cf. Sarapeion C: *ibid.* No. 100 (fig. 82).

³³ SIG 3/985 = LSAM 20. Cf. Knock, *Conversion*, 216-217; Klauck, *Context*, 64-68; White, *Social Origins*, 1:45.

³⁴ Klauck, *Context*, 64.

³⁵ Bruneau and Ducat, *Guide de Délos*, No. 91.

establishment of Sarapeion A, “Egyptian cults grew in popularity, with three different temples and a position of prominence in that region of the island known as the ‘terrace of the foreign gods’”³⁶ If the Apollonius family recruited worshippers in an Egyptian immigrant setting, these efforts would have to be defined as inward mission with the ethnic component carrying the explanatory force.

The crucial event for understanding what happened, however, is the building of the temple.³⁷ This act may be seen, in and of itself, as propagating the ‘effectiveness’ of this god to others, using culturally attuned strategies of establishing a presence in public space in a setting that is not ethnically connected to the god in question. Doing so would reduce the space on the sacred island dedicated to other gods. Such a move can hardly be understood without assuming, at least to some degree, that the Sarapis worshippers aimed at expanding even beyond their own ethnically defined members; they must have thought of the power of their god to extend beyond their own people, a wish on the part of the god to be present in and control other parts of the world in addition to Egypt (and travelling Egyptians). Proselytizing mission, in other words.³⁸

Important to note here, however, is that we find no political authority behind this expansion; the expansion is not the initiative of a nation. Still, the spread of the cult through the building of the temple was met with local resistance. Such resistance may well have been grounded in fears that the balance would be disturbed; local gods were pushed back and had their power sphere threatened. This would make for unhappy gods, and unhappy gods would make for unhappy humans.³⁹ Somehow, however, perhaps through the proven power of Sarapis, this cult was accepted and added to others, even achieving prominence with additional temples build.⁴⁰ As this process proceeded, the ethnic identity of the members of the cult was weakened and eventually understood as unimportant, even though the Egyptian origin of the cult was never concealed or forgotten.

In the case of the development of a private cult of the goddess Agdistis in the household of a certain Dionysius in Philadelphia we see yet another example of how household cult could expand beyond the original parameters of the house.⁴¹ In this inscription, we see what Klauck calls a “modernising” of the cult leading to the reduction of the prominence of the goddess and the inclusion of a “larger Graeco-Hellenistic pantheon with visible altars and images.”⁴² With this follows ethical rules related to medical ethics, which emphasises the position and importance of the family. At the same time, the household opens up to others who would like to join worship in this manner. These new worshippers were, according to Klauck, probably drawn from neighbouring and related households. Whether these new members were won via close household networks or not, we see here the establishment of a voluntary association of a cultic nature.⁴³ We may safely assume that this expansion of the private cultic activities to

³⁶ White, *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture*, vol. 1 (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1990) 33.

³⁷ Cf. the documentation on papyri of a dream of a certain Sarapis worshipper, Zoilos, who, in 257 BCE, was told in a dream to erect a temple for the divinity in a city in Asia Minor (Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 28).

³⁸ Again, proselytizing mission is not necessarily defined as exclusive in nature; joining one such group does not have to exclude membership in other associations or cults. The term proselytising only indicates, positively, the aim and result of including new members in ones own group.

³⁹ Cf. Fredriksen, “Mandatory,” 232.

⁴⁰ Sarapeion B (*GD* No. 96) and Sarapeion C (*GD* No. 100).

⁴¹ SIG 3/985 = LSAM 20.

⁴² Klauck, *Context*, 68.

⁴³ For a categorisation of associations, see Philip Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations: Claiming a Place in the Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2003) 28-53, esp. 44-52.

include a larger group of likeminded people was the result of some sort of spreading of the word among neighbours and beyond. This means proselytising mission on a semi-public level, although most likely not systematised or on a larger scale. The ethical component of the modified cult probably had some attraction, and those involved most likely would have wanted to spread these ideals.

These and other examples indicate that 'private' in antiquity did not mean what we understand by 'private' today. In antiquity, cult in the private sphere would have an impact on society at large, and so could not be isolated or left without some control. In modern day Europe and North America, the rhetoric of 'private' in terms of religion is used to de-politise religion, effectively separating different spheres of society, compartmentalising society, and thereby neutralising 'religion' and 'religious rites' as unimportant for the protection of the state.⁴⁴ This has implications for how mission is understood.

In sum, in terms of *intentions* we may conclude that people involved in public affairs could argue for a (corrective) inward mission directed to the private sphere in order to protect state and society. The *strategy* was to argue for the issuing of laws that could be used when enforcing compliance with state demands. What the authorities would call law and order, those who were targeted would call persecution. From an analytical point of view, we may note the close connection between mission, law and persecution. We shall return to this when discussing the public sphere.

The *intensions* of the Apollonius family on Delos and Dionysius' household in Philadelphia in Asia Minor were to promote the cult of specific deities, without insisting on exclusiveness. There are no signs indicating that any of them aimed at transforming society via the cult, although the moral code in the Philadelphia case combined with expansion beyond the household comes close to such an aim. The *strategy* for expansion of the Sarapis cult was to claim a place in public space by building a temple to the god; in the Philadelphia case we see modifications to the cult as well as architectural rearrangements within the house to accommodate worship in a temple like setting.

For Judaism, worship was collective, and whatever took place in the household would be within an inner-Jewish frame of reference. We have no direct evidence of mission on this level, since we have no early evidence of private houses being renovated into association buildings.⁴⁵ However, the very construction of cultic buildings such as synagogues would have been perceived as claiming space and recognition, in brief, promoting the god, in society. The main difference between such Jewish construction and Greco-Roman expansion is the ethnic aspect, which was maintained within Jewish communities. We shall return to this in the following section, which shall deal with the semi-public level. We shall also suspend treatment of Christ-believers to that section.

⁴⁴ This in turn has often resulted in lack of sensitivity on the part of the authorities in various nations in relation to the worldview(s) of religious groups, some of which have never accepted such compartmentalisation of private and communal life. This is not, however, the place to expand further on this issue.

⁴⁵ While Michael White has previously argued that the Ostia and the Delos synagogues were examples of such renovations of private houses for synagogue use, these conclusions were incorrect as has been shown in several studies of these buildings by Anders Runesson, Donald Binder, and Monika Trümper. These buildings, which are our oldest remains of Diaspora synagogues, were constructed for (semi-)public use from the beginning. The earliest evidence of renovations of private space is the Stobi inscription from the late second century. See Anders Runesson, Donald D. Binder and Birger Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue From its Origins to 200 CE: A Source Book* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), Nos. 179, 102, 187.

6. The Dynamic Space In-Between: Associations and Mysteries

As is well known, various forms of associations (*collegia/thiasoi*) — “smaller than the city...yet larger than the family”⁴⁶ — flourished in first century Graeco-Roman society.⁴⁷ Such groups began to develop around the time after Alexander the Great, then representing a new phenomenon in the ancient world. Although all associations included cult of some sort, we shall here be dealing with those who established their membership around a specific cult, and whose identity was “expressed in terms of devotion to the deity or deities”⁴⁸

While the old perspective has been that associations came into being as a result of a feeling of alienation among ordinary people in relation to larger political and administrative structures as empires were established, this ‘origins-explanation’ can no longer be maintained without modification.⁴⁹ Instead, associations often reflected a sense of belonging within ancient society and the structures of the polis; they took part in a system of benefaction integral to Graeco-Roman society.⁵⁰ Membership was primarily drawn from non-elite strata, but we find dependency on civic and imperial elites, mainly as benefactors, sometimes as leaders.⁵¹ There seems to have been at least some sort of relationship between specific cults in different places around the Mediterranean, creating a sense of connectedness beyond the local cultic community to which the individual belonged.⁵²

This does not mean that cultic associations were unproblematic from the perspective of the state. As Goodman notes, the worship in some associations of foreign gods could be seen as not integral to a stable society and, in fact, as constituting a “positive threat.”⁵³ How, then, were such cults spread, and what was the purpose of spreading them?

We have already addressed the issue of introducing foreign cults and the movement from the private to the semi-public level of society. The question of mission in the present section relates to why and how associations on the semi-public level of society developed strategies to influence others and establish, maintain, and expand their membership.

There is some literary evidence of initiates of Graeco-Roman cultic associations who, as they travelled, expanded the influence of their god(s) by establishing associations in new

⁴⁶ Klauck, *Context*, 42.

⁴⁷ The most comprehensive and recent study and categorisation of associations is found in Harland, *Associations*; see especially 28-53.

⁴⁸ Harland, *Associations*, 44.

⁴⁹ The older dominant view is represented by Klauck, *Context*, 43-44.

⁵⁰ See Harland, *Associations*, 89-112: “The inscriptional evidence from Asia provides a concrete illustration of the continuing importance of the polis and its structures as a locus of identity, cooperation, and competition from members of many associations and guilds, reflecting various social strata of society. These groups were often participants in civic vitality, not symptoms of decline” (112).

⁵¹ Harland, *Associations*, 52.

⁵² Cf. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 27-28.

⁵³ Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 17. Cf. Harland, *Associations*, 161-173.

places.⁵⁴ It is quite clear also from archaeological evidence that new cults spread and were established all over the Roman Empire.⁵⁵

Understanding the expansion of cults within social context may direct our attention to the system of benefaction, and how associations competed to establish themselves through winning the favourable attitude of wealthy benefactors. Other strategies for claiming a place included establishing and embellishing separate association buildings, perform public processions, and, as Beck words it, set in motion spectacle, with the aim of promoting the deity.⁵⁶ Beck continues: “cults of this type may not have proselytized systematically, but they certainly proclaimed systematically.”⁵⁷

While we should be aware that proclaiming divinities in these ways was not done exclusively in order to secure and extend membership, such aims must surely be included, not least from a social perspective (economic realities are, after all, also realities, and associations were dependent upon them too). In other words, when we try to answer the question of why certain cults proclaimed their gods in these ways, we may note several intentions that all come together, for the worshippers, in the will to secure protection and safety for oneself and the group’s members by expanding the influence of a specific god. Proclaiming the effectiveness of a god was in and of itself an act of piety, and proselytising mission was the understood (side?)effect of such strategies.

Not all cults would follow a similar pattern, Mithraism being the most obvious exception. While Mithraism certainly expanded and spread over the empire, it was not by such explicit means as those described above. Rather, spread of the cult was achieved by “commendation of friend to friend, by co-option among likeminded adult males in delimited social contexts; also that, in all likelihood, recruitment among kin and via patron-freedman relationship played a significant part.”⁵⁸ Though the strategy is different, it would be, as I see it, a distortion of the picture of what happened not to call this proselytising mission. The intention needs to be kept apart from the strategies used in the analysis. Also, we need to note that proselytising mission need not entertain exclusivist claims; membership in one cult would not necessarily exclude membership in another.

The intentions of those who spread Graeco-Roman cults may not have been to penetrate into the public sphere of society and change the religio-political status quo on a state level. Yet,

⁵⁴ One example is Livy’s (famous) description of the rapid spread of a Bacchic association among men and women, coming to Rome from Etruria (*History of Rome*, 39.8-19). Even some elite individuals from “noble families” became members (13). Livy, who presents the initiates as immoral criminals committing all sorts of horrible crimes, tries to explain the spread of the cult by referring to the attractions of wine and feasting (8). The cult was eventually forbidden in Rome and Italy, and all Bacchic shrines were destroyed, exempting only those where there was an ancient altar or sacred image. Those who needed to gather to perform the rites had to secure permission from both the praetor and the senate (18). Note also the conversion story in Apuleius’ novel *The Golden Ass*, and the Isiac procession in 11.7-11.

⁵⁵ See examples discussed by Richard S. Ascough, “A Place to Stand, A Place to Grow’: Architectural and Epigraphic Evidence for Expansion in Greco-Roman Associations,” in Leif Vaage (ed.), *Religious Rivalries: in the Early Roman Empire and the Rise of Christianity* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006) 78-98, and Roger Beck, “On Becoming a Mithraist: New Evidence for the Propagation of the Mysteries,” in Leif Vaage (ed.), *Religious Rivalries: in the Early Roman Empire and the Rise of Christianity* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006) 175-194.

⁵⁶ Beck, “Becoming Mithraist,” 176. Beck notes that similar events of miracles etc. were ascribed to Christianity in ancient sources; this is interpreted by many scholars as a major source of Christianity’s success in its mission.

⁵⁷ Beck, “Becoming Mithraist,” 176.

⁵⁸ Beck, “Becoming a Mithraist,” 193. Beck refers to Rodney Stark’s very similar description of both modern recruitment to new religious movements and his theory of the rise of Christianity.

we know that some of these foreign gods reached into the public sphere. The last important ones to achieve such success in Rome were Isis and Sarapis, who became public deities in the first century CE.⁵⁹ In the case of Sarapis, we thus have evidence of a cult who had the ability to successfully move both between private and semi-public contexts (the Delos example discussed above), and then between the semi-public and public spheres of society. We shall return to this below since one (transformed) offshoot of a Apostolic-Jewish group managed not only to attain public status, but also to do it with exclusive claims to preserving a stable society.⁶⁰

A word on philosophy before turning to Judaism. Goodman discusses a few important aspects of philosophy and mission, although he tends to define away the conclusions that would seem to follow from his description.⁶¹ Philosophers spread their ideas to others and wanted universal enlightenment; they wanted to change the lives and attitudes of others. Some of them formed or belonged to philosophical schools (e.g., Pythagoreans and Epicureans), others did not seem to form collectivities into which new members could be included (e.g., Stoics, Cynics). An effect of their activities could, for those who listened, be a radical break with the past, a conversion experience, resulting in life-long adherence to the philosophical school in question.⁶²

Although no uniform pattern emerges, it seems to me that in order to describe what went on, the word mission need to be applied. As with the cults discussed above, no ethnic component is involved in terms of entrance requirement. Goodman talks about educational mission, as he defines it, and rejects the term proselytising mission. It would seem more appropriate, as I see it, to allow for both terms in order to cover the spectrum.⁶³

In any case, we find in Graeco-Roman society not only a multitude of cults and philosophies, but also that members of, or adherers to, these groups tried to convince others to join them in one way or the other, either in a community or by changing their ways of life as a consequence of believing in the missionised teachings. Movements go from the private sphere into the semi-public, as well as between cults and philosophies in the semi-public sphere. While philosophies may entertain and missionise exclusive claims, cults were not exclusive in terms of demands on members.

Where does Jewish mission fit in this overall picture? Answering this question, we need to note, firstly, that Judaism was a state cult with Jerusalem as its centre. The temple tax reminds us that this state cult was to be adhered to by everyone belonging to the ethnos, wherever they lived in the world. In the Diaspora, Jewish communities were understood as associations, however, and this presents us with an interesting scenario. Mission, as we shall see, could take place on both levels with an interesting link between them.

There can be no question that non-Jews converted to Judaism, both by free will and as a consequence of the use of force. We also know of a group of non-Jewish individuals, commonly referred to as 'sympathisers' or 'god-fearers,' who were more loosely connected to

⁵⁹ Cf. Scheid, "Contact," 121.

⁶⁰ Cf. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 18.

⁶¹ Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 32-37.

⁶² As described by third century CE historian Diogenes Laertius (4.16-17).

⁶³ The question is whether one would need to be able to point to a group and membership in order to use the term 'proselytising.' Cf. modern New Age movement, which is rather hard to define and display various forms. Yet, individuals may act as missionaries who want everyone to adhere to specific sets of beliefs and behaviours without requiring group membership. Since the aim is to have people leave their old worldviews and attain new ones, it seems logical to speak of proselytism.

Judaism within Diaspora synagogue contexts. Although we have important material dating back to around, and even before, the Babylonian exile, conclusive evidence (literary and epigraphic) begins to emerge in the first century BCE and extends into the Talmudic period. In terms of attitudes, the nature of the sources reveals positive remarks (by Jews), negative reactions (by non-Jews and Jews), and neutral mentions of ‘proselytes’.⁶⁴ The material, in this regard, is similar to what we have seen with regard to Graeco-Roman mission in the semi-public sphere: we have clear evidence of movements between cults and philosophies. The question is, then, how that movement came about.

I would suggest the following line of argument on the semi-public level. The Jews of the Diaspora were well integrated in Roman society at this time (around the first century BCE and CE), and archaeological and epigraphic evidence indicate that Jews took part in society in much the same way as non-Jews.⁶⁵ This means that they constructed their association buildings (“synagogues”) adapting to local architectural styles,⁶⁶ and they took part in the same system of benefaction as everybody else. This system implies competition among associations in securing funding for building projects. When Jews in Ostia introduced a gift to the synagogue with the words *Pro salute augusti[-orum]*⁶⁷ (for the health of the emperor[s]), they claimed a place in Roman society, proclaiming the God of Israel as relevant to that society.⁶⁸ Displaying the name of benefactors, who could be Jewish or non-Jewish, would not only honour the benefactor but also make a public statement that the Jewish community *and its God* has been found important in the eyes of influential citizens.⁶⁹ This would create attention (and attraction) in and of itself. In addition, the ‘cultic’ building itself functioned ‘rhetorically’ in much the same way, making a statement to all those who lived in the city.

Although we do not hear of public processions in the case of the Jews, we have access to literature intended for non-Jewish readers, like Josephus *Contra Apionem* (as well as *Antiquitates judaicae*) which elevated Judaism as superior to non-Jewish ways of life and proclaimed the God of Israel as powerful for non-members, able to give protection and happiness to anyone who would worship him. The God of Israel is in control of world history, and converts will be rewarded.⁷⁰ As Mason states, “[w]hether Judaism was a missionary religion or not, Josephus tried to be a Judean missionary in Rome.”⁷¹

⁶⁴ For source material and brief discussions of it, see Louis Feldman and Meyer Reinhold, *Jewish Life and Thought Among Greeks and Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1996), 123-135 (conversion) and 137-145 (‘sympathisers’/‘God-fearers’). For inscriptions, see Margaret H. Williams, *The Jews Among the Greeks and Romans: A Diaspora Source Book* (London: Duckworth, 1998) 169-179 (includes inscriptions). See also Menahem Stern, *GLAJJ*.

⁶⁵ This is one of the main arguments of Harland, *Associations*.

⁶⁶ For discussion and bibliography for synagogues before 200 CE, see Runesson et al., *Ancient Synagogue*.

⁶⁷ For the plural reading *augustorum* (AUGG), see David Noy, *JJWE* 1, No. 13; Anders Runesson, “The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia: The Building and its History from the First to the Fifth Century,” in Birger Olsson, Dieter Mitternacht, and Olof Brandt (eds.), *The Synagogue of Ancient Ostia and the Jews of Rome: Interdisciplinary Studies* (ActaRom-4°, 57. Stockholm: Paul Åström, 2001) 29-99, 86, n. 322.

⁶⁸ Note also that sacrifices for the emperor were made in the Jerusalem temple.

⁶⁹ An interesting example is the Julia Severa inscription: see Runesson et al., *Ancient Synagogue*, No. 103.

⁷⁰ So Mason, “Social and Literary Context”; for the argument regarding *Antiquitates judaicae*, see esp. 147-48. Mason concludes regarding *Contra Apionem* that “both the form and content of the tract, not to mention the creative energy it reflects, are best understood if Josephus was here continuing his effort to further interest in Judean culture—including a recommendation of conversion” (159). An important aspect here is Mason’s analysis of the genre of *Contra Apionem*, which he concludes should be identified as *logos protreptikos*, a genre used by later Christian apologists with the purpose to “draw people away from traditional philosophy and into Christian groups that now understood themselves as philosophies” (171). Earlier, Per Bilde had also identified *Contra*

Seen together, archaeological, epigraphic, and literary sources indicates that Jews interacted with non-Jews in ways that would have signalled to non-Jews that joining this group and worshiping the God of Israel was encouraged and would bring benefits to the person who became a member. We are looking in the wrong direction when we understand proselytising mission to be limited to modern methods of conversion in contemporary Christian contexts. Within the ancient context, we find that Jews used techniques that would make sense to their neighbours in terms of encouragement to join their communities.

Thus, many Jewish communities and also individuals seem to have been intentionally proselytising in the first century CE: this is indeed the most likely explanation for the many proselytes we hear of in the sources, as well as the God-fearer phenomenon itself.⁷² As to the latter, the following may be said. If cults and philosophies attracted adherers and members, then it is likely that the use of the same or similar techniques of proclamation would attract both new full members to Judaism and people who would expect and take for granted a non-exclusive membership. Since full conversion demanded exclusive membership and rejection of other gods and ones native tradition, indeed it was perceived as the joining of another ethnos, its laws and its way of life, including support for Jerusalem,⁷³ those who would take for granted non-exclusive adherence to various cults and associations would continue to do so within a synagogue context. Such individuals were not turned away by Jewish communities. Rather, as a sign of acculturation, they were incorporated loosely and this eventually gave rise to the idea that various subsets of laws, minimal requirements, should apply to them as non-Jews.⁷⁴

The phenomenon of God-fearers is thus a result of Jewish insistence, contrary to, e.g., Egyptian Isis worshippers, on the ethnic—and therefore public and national—aspect of their identity, in a semi-public Graeco-Roman context. As we see in some cases, such a status could even be missionised (the Adiabene case), reminding us of much earlier traditions in the Book of Jonah that would demand compliance with Jewish ethno-ethnic standards without conversion to the Jewish people. We note, therefore, that Jewish mission could also be of the ethno-ethnic type, not only proselytising.

The exclusive membership was unique, although vaguely related to philosophies, rather than cults (it seems Josephus played on this relationship when presenting Judaism to non-Jews). Combined, however, with the ethnic aspect (and the laws that came with it), this evoked strong negative feelings among some Graeco-Roman authors. The following quote from Tacitus regarding non-Jews who convert to Judaism is revealing:

The other customs of the Jews are base and abominable, and owe their persistence to the depravity; for the worst rascals among other peoples, *renouncing their ancestral religions*, always kept sending tribute and *contributing to Jerusalem*, thereby increasing the wealth of the Jews... . Those who are converted to their ways follow the same practise [of cutting themselves off from other peoples] and the earliest lesson

Apionem as an example of missionary literature: *Flavius Josephus Between Jerusalem and Rome* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) 120.

⁷¹ Mason, "Social and Literary Context," 173.

⁷² Cf. Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.282-84.

⁷³ Cf. Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5.1-2.

⁷⁴ Cf. different rabbinic traditions regarding Adam (*Gen. R.* 16:6; *Deut. R.* 2:25; *Num. R.* 14:12) and Noah (*b. San.* 56a-b; *Gen. R.* 34:8; *Deut. R.* 1:21) as well as special regulations for non-Jews once the Messiah has come (*Gen. R.* 98:9). Adam, Noah, Abraham and Jacob are all mentioned as receivers of a different number of laws in *Exod. R.* 30:9. See also Acts 15:20.

they receive is to *despise the gods, to diown their country*, and to regard their parents, children, and brothers as of little account (*Hwt.* 5.5.1-2).

For our purposes it is of interest to note that, within synagogues in the Graeco-Roman world, Jewish communities could engage in mission, both proselytising and ethno-ethnic, that placed the God of one of the defeated nations at the centre of their worldview, with loyalty directed to its capital, Jerusalem, and to Jewish law.⁷⁵ With this in mind, it is reasonable to assume that the God-fearers won would far outnumber the proselytes.⁷⁶

Behind missionary attitudes and practices lay convictions that the God of Israel was the God of the whole world, and that he controlled, ultimately, world history. The Hebrew Bible abounds in statements to this effect, especially in Psalms, but also in some of the prophets. Worshipping such a God would make sense also to people who were not Jews. Since the ethnic aspect is connected to the land and to the public sphere, and has implications for Apostolic-Jewish mission, we shall return to this in the next section. Suffice it to note that whereas we have seen movement between the private and semi-public sphere as we discussed Graeco-Roman cults, here we find tensions with political overtones arising from the interrelationship between the semi-public and public spheres. Such tension is, in fact, accentuated in Apostolic-Jewish mission.

While we do not find general evidence of Jewish mission indicating movement from the private sphere to the semi-public in the first century, Apostolic-Jewish mission, although focussed on the semi-public arena, was also connected in certain respects to the private sphere. It is clear from Paul's letters that Christ-believers could gather in homes, just as we have seen that some Graeco-Roman cults did.⁷⁷ To what extent these homes were remodelled⁷⁸ in the earliest period is impossible to say, although we have one example, perhaps the earliest, from Capernaum of a private house in which one of the rooms was transformed into a cultic room, or association room.⁷⁹ Apostolic Jews as well as Christ-fearers were also found in synagogues as subgroups, a fact which both makes sociological sense and is confirmed by Acts.⁸⁰ In terms of apostolic Judaism, it is safe to say that it spread via a network of synagogues and with the 'subversive' help of private houses.

This is both similar to and different from the spread of Graeco-Roman cults. The similarity lies in the use of the private house as a 'platform' for introducing new cultic elements. The difference is, of course, that Apostolic Jews and non-Jews were closely related to synagogues and had a network in place that could be used, whereas new Graeco-Roman

⁷⁵ Cf. Seneca, *De Superstitione*, quoted by Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 6.11: "The vanquished have given laws to their victors" (*GLAJJ*, I. No. 186).

⁷⁶ The fact that the exclusivity of philosophies would be reserved mostly for the elite, and non-exclusivity of the cults and associations would be embraced by the greater number of the population, supports such a conclusion too.

⁷⁷ See, e.g., 1 Cor 16:9; Philemon 2; Rom 16:5; all discussed by Paul Trebilco in his contribution to the SNTS seminar in Lund 2008, 7-8.

⁷⁸ Cf. above the changes made to the house of Dionysius in Philadelphia.

⁷⁹ See Anders Runesson, "Architecture, Conflict, and Identity Formation: Jews and Christians in Capernaum From the 1st to the 6th Century," in Jürgen Zangenberg, Harold W. Attridge, and Dale Martin (eds.), *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee: A Region in Transition*. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007) 231-57. Although this house may indicate a broader pattern, it should be noted that in this case we are dealing with a specific site remembered as related to an apostle (and Jesus); it soon developed into a pilgrimage site.

⁸⁰ Cf. here, e.g., the work of Mark D. Nanos with regard to Rome (*The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996]) and Galatia (*The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002]).

cults that were introduced via the private sphere had to construct buildings themselves and create community networks in the semi-public sphere.⁸¹ This process had already been achieved, to a large degree, by Jewish communities before the arrival of Apostolic Judaism in the first century.⁸² The spread of apostolic Judaism is, therefore, intimately intertwined with the social networks established by other Jews, as well as earlier and other Jewish missionary activities among non-Jews, which had created active interest in Judaism.

In brief, the techniques used by apostolic Jews, as far as they were new, were embedded in the matrix created by Jews before and around them. Most of this early mission must be defined as inward mission, since it was carried out within a network of synagogues and directed to the audiences there, including god-fearers who were worshipper of the God of Israel already.⁸³ In fact, reading Acts, Paul's letters and the Johannine letters, for example, there is very little evidence of a proselytising mission that extends beyond Judaism and the synagogue context. Even such an obvious example of proselytising mission as Paul's Areopagus speech needs to be seen in this context:

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. *So he argued in the synagogue* with the Jews and the devout persons (ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις καὶ τοῖς σεβομένοις), and also in the marketplace (ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ) every day with those who happened to be there. Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities." (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) *So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus* and asked him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means." (Acts 17:16-20)

It is telling that Paul is said to be upset about non-Jewish cult in Athens, and that his *first* reaction is to go to the synagogue and debate this with *the Jews and 'the devout,'* the latter likely referring to god-fearers. Since he is also said to have gone to the marketplace, the agora, the author likely assumed his readers to understand that what Paul would be arguing about in the synagogue context would be the necessity of preparing non-Jews for the eschaton by instructing them to reject their gods and turn exclusively to the God of Israel. Proselytising mission, then, necessitated inward mission. As the speech that then follows at the Areopagus indicates, eschatological concerns provided Paul with his incentive for proclaiming the effectiveness and importance of his God. It should be noted, however, that while Paul is said to have spoken informally to people in the agora, the programmatic proselytising speech in the public space of the Areopagus comes, in the narrative, as the result of Paul having been brought there by non-Jews: he is not presented as going there on his own initiative. The primary context of mission remains the synagogue, even when non-Jews are concerned.

While the social reality and techniques used by apostolic Jews are to be seen within the larger context of other missionary activities in the Graeco-Roman world, the Apostolic-Jewish

⁸¹ Cf. the case of the introduction of Sarapis cult on Delos, as discussed above, and the spread of the Bacchanalia in Italy in the second century BCE as recounted by Livy (*Hist. of Rome*, 39.8-19).

⁸² Cf. Acts 15:21.

⁸³ Cf. the work of Rodney Stark here, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco; Harper Collins, 1997). Adele Reinhartz's critical discussion of Stark's theory is important: "Rodney Stark and 'the Mission to the Jews'," in Leif Vaage (ed.), *Religious Rivalries: in the Early Roman Empire and the Rise of Christianity* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006) 197-212.

intention, ideology and aim were different in some key respects. This is related to the public sphere and imperialism, to which we now therefore turn.

7. Claiming the World: Colonialism as Theo-Political Pattern for Proselytizing Mission

Up till now we have dealt with the private and semi-public spheres of Graeco-Roman society, also noting how they are interconnected both with each other and with the public sphere. Many foreign gods, originally having entered Roman society via private cult, were eventually incorporated in Roman public religion. The intention behind distinguishing between these levels of society in the analysis is not to argue for isolation between them, but allow for new insights to emerge as we focus on each level at a time.

In this section of the paper, I would like to put the emphasis on mission seen from a public perspective, highlighting both movements emanating from the state going outward, as well as movements coming from semi-public associations directed inward towards the heart of the empire. The central interpretive key used in the discussion is—and should be—a serious focus on the undisputable fact of the inextricability of what we call ‘religion’ and political realities in the ancient world. This means, among other things, that whatever is done against the gods is done against the state, and vice-versa, what the state does involves the gods of the state. Let us begin with the latter.

7.1 Conquest and Mission

The victories of the Roman Empire, the very building of the empire, was an achievement resulting from collaboration between one people and their gods. Reinforcing Roman rule over other peoples also meant the expansion of the rule of Roman gods; Rome “ruled by Jupiter’s will.”⁸⁴ This did not, however, mean that the gods of the conquered peoples were always rejected. Rather, Roman piety could materialise in the ritual of *evocatio deorum*, asking gods of besieged cities to leave the cities before the conquerors dealt the fatal blow which would lay the walls and buildings in ruins.⁸⁵ The gods could then be taken to Rome, and be made to serve Roman interests. The point I would like to make is, quite simply, that conquest and empire building was in and of itself a form of mission, indeed, we could say a modified proselytising mission. The boundaries of the ‘group’ were the same as the political boundaries, and the incorporation of people from outside the empire into the empire meant the expansion of the realm and power of the Roman gods.⁸⁶ In this way, order is upheld and empire sustained. Since the Romans were said to seek world dominance, this is indeed, to use Goodman’s terminology, a form of ‘universal’ proselytising mission. Interestingly, the only form of Graeco-Roman cults that Goodman would consider to identify as a “proselytising religion” was “the

⁸⁴ Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading* (London: T&T Clark, 2000) 110; see also 39-40.

⁸⁵ See John Kloppenborg, “*Evocatio Deorum* and the Date of Mark,” *JBL* 124:3 (2005) 419-450.

⁸⁶ This perspective is often (anachronistically) overlooked in studies on mission, which mostly proceed from a post-enlightenment perspective of ‘religion.’ However, although quite different in nature from Roman imperialism, the same basic theological logic applies to, e.g., the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648) wars in Europe and the rhetoric behind protestant, not least Swedish, expansion. This is so despite the fact that we can discern factors other than ‘religious’ creating and sustaining the conflicts. (Being a Swede, at that time, was equivalent to being a Lutheran Christian according to the internal theological logic of the state church system.)

imperial cult, the worship of the emperors.”⁸⁷ Implied in this mission was the adoption of “a specific frame of mind—namely, loyalty to the Roman state.”⁸⁸ In the context of the present discussion, such a conclusion follows naturally from a wider empire perspective and makes (ancient) sense. In sum, then, we have here a universal proselytising mission, claiming the world as the possession of specific gods, with the centre located in Rome.

With this as wider context, we see the importance of including violence and military conquest in our discussion of mission: such aspects are, indeed, inherent to the phenomenon of mission itself when we consider it as it played out in the public sphere of ancient societies. Directing our attention to Jews and Judaism, such a claim is confirmed. Contrary to Scott McKnight’s statement that “force” is not “worthy of consideration in a study on missionary activity,” violence is very much part of the problem.⁸⁹

Especially instructive is the policy of forced conversion under John Hyrcanus (135-104 BCE), Aristobulus I (104 BCE), and Alexander Jannaeus (104-78 BCE). After having conquered Idumaeian territory in his third military campaign, Hyrcanus forced the Idumaeans to undergo circumcision and keep Jewish law, since the area was now considered to be Jewish.⁹⁰ After him, Aristobulus I conquered the Ituraeans and likewise forced these people, if they wanted to remain in the land (now defined as Judaea), to undergo circumcision and follow Jewish law.⁹¹ Finally, Josephus tells us that Alexander Jannaeus destroyed Pella because of their refusal to follow the “national customs of the Jews,” thereby implying a policy similar to Hyrcanus’ and Aristobulus I’s.⁹²

Noting, as we did earlier, the connection between land, law, god and people, Salo Baron’s comments on these episodes are interesting. If the areas conquered were regarded as, historically, part of the Jewish nation, the motive behind the forced conversions may have been to prevent the profanation of the land through worship of other deities.⁹³ Seen from a wider perspective, it simply made political sense to protect the land and honour the god by enforcing divine law in annexed territories. As with Roman conquests, force is part of such mission, although specifics of Jewish law and history formed the unique aspects of the process in the Hasmonean case. Contrary to Roman imperialism, however, the Hasmonean conquest was restricted to what was understood to be Jewish territory historically; we find no ‘universal’ mission in this specific case, as we do with the Romans.

In fact, it is interesting to note that despite repeated claims in the Hebrew Bible that the God of Israel is the God of the whole world, and thus that the nations, ultimately, are

⁸⁷ Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 30-32. “In some ways, then, the imperial cult in the early Roman empire was a fine example of a proselytising religion, if... it is justified to treat the varied forms of emperor worship found in different areas of the empire as disparate manifestations of a single cult” (31).

⁸⁸ Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 31.

⁸⁹ McKnight, *Light*, 77. McKnight refers to the forced conversions under the Hasmoneans, but he also mentions Judith 14:10, Esther 8:17 under his heading “force” (68).

⁹⁰ Josephus, *A.J.* 13.257-258; cf. 15.254. Strabo also mentions the conversion of the Idumaeans (*Geography* 16.2.34), as does Ptolemy the Historian, *History of Herod*, quoted in Ammonius, *Concerning the Difference of Related Words*, no. 243; the latter of the two authors explicitly mentions force as the method of conversion. Hyrcanus’ destruction of the Samaritan temple on Gerizim should be seen in this context too (*A.J.* 13.254-256).

⁹¹ Josephus, *A.J.* 13.318-319. Timagenes, as quoted by Josephus (*ibid.* 13.319), confirms the conversions but does not mention force.

⁹² *A.J.* 13.397.

⁹³ Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952) 167. Gedaliah Alon, *Jews, Judaism, and the Classical World: Studies in Jewish History in the Times of the Second Temple and Talmud* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977) 187, argues that the notion of the uncleanness of non-Jewish territory was of pre-Hasmonean origin, and that impurity in this regard was related to worship of other gods.

dependent on Israel's God,⁹⁴ we hear of no military campaigns intended to ensure such dominion. Israel is even told that it should missionise to the non-Jews (clearly expressed in Pss. 9:12; 96:3, 105:1),⁹⁵ and we see similar attitudes in Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah.⁹⁶ In Isa 66:18-24 we have an explicit description of how active proselytising mission to nations other than Israel is to be carried out in an eschatological future. Other traditions are less clear and may refer to active ethno-ethnic mission (cf. the Book of Jonah as a model for this pattern of thought).

There is a tendency in the sources to link theo-political ideas about the God of Israel being the God of all nations, an eschatological future when this conviction shall materialise as experienced reality when all peoples shall worship in Jerusalem, and a final divine judgment which will make it possible. The scenario also involves the restoration of Israel. Although eschatology and mission are not always connected (cf. the Qumran community), the two often go hand in hand. When they do, and when eschatological realities are felt to be near at hand, political dimensions are triggered and strategies developed to realise them. We shall now turn to Apostolic Judaism, to illustrate this point.

7.2 Restoration and Counter-Colonialism: The Margins Strike Back

Space will not allow detailed presentation of the evidence regarding mission and the historical Jesus. It seems to me, however, that the current consensus that Jesus was concerned only with the Jewish people and not the non-Jews is correct. The Kingdom of God, the undisputed centre of Jesus preaching, healing and exorcist activities, fits within a restoration-theological frame in which the goal is a reunited Kingdom of Israel.⁹⁷ It seems equally clear, however, that Jesus expected the restoration of Israel to lead to a renewed world, and thus that the nations, indirectly, would be affected.⁹⁸ Jesus' inward mission may thus have had wider or global intentions, implicitly, but this is difficult to prove. Many of Jesus' followers, on the other hand, were quite explicit in this regard, in terms of intentions and aims.

A revealing summary of such aims is put in Jesus' mouth in Acts 1:6-8:

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will *restore the kingdom to Israel* (ἀποκαθιστάνεις τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ Ἰσραήλ)?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power (δύναμις) when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and *to the ends of the earth* (εἰς ἕσχατου τῆς γῆς)."

For the author, the restoration of Israel is intimately connected to the reinvention of the world, and the latter must precede the former, it seems. For the latter to happen, active mission is necessary, and the entire world is the task. The politics here are clear: the God of Israel is, through the voice of Jesus, claiming the world as his dominion. What was visioned in Psalms

⁹⁴ See, e.g., Psalms 9:12; 18:50; 22:8; 46:11; 47:9; 48:11; 57:10; 67:2-3; 82:8; 87:4-6; 96:3, 5; 98:2, 4; 105:1; 108:4; 110:6; 113:4; 117:1; 126:1-2; 145:12.

⁹⁵ Arnold A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 1:105-106 and 2:681, 726, dates all three Psalms in the postexilic period, but suggests that Ps. 96 may contain older parts, and that Deutero-Isaiah may be dependent on its 'universalism.'

⁹⁶ The following passages are relevant: Isa 45:9ff, 22-23; 49:6-7, 22-23; 52:10; 61:5-6. Note also mission aspect in Isa 54:4-5; 56:1-8.

⁹⁷ Cf. Acts 1:6.

⁹⁸ Metaphors like 'light of the world' and 'salt of the earth' (Matt 5) demand interpretations concerned with global realities, but do not imply active proselytising mission.

is said to be about to be realised in a world dominated by other gods, the gods of the Roman Empire. The claim made is within the same theo-political empire-logic as the Romans lived by, with the difference that Apostolic Jews will work for exclusive rule of one God alone. More importantly, the strategy of expansion is to use non-military means to achieve a military, or political, goal. As we see as the story of Acts unfolds, this means a focus on the semi-public sphere for the spread of the cult, primarily within synagogues, but with the aim of reaching beyond and into Rome itself.

What we see, then, is a mirror image of empire, but reversed in terms of the strategy used to reach the goal. The intention and aim is the same, the strategy different. Acts is a description of how to ‘attack’ the gods of Rome with the expectation of taking over the empire, i.e., the world. If Rome’s gods fall, then Rome will fall and be replaced by Jerusalem, which will, finally, be realising theo-politically its true nature as the centre of the world.

The same colonial pattern is found in Matthew’s gospel.⁹⁹ While Jesus before his death is quoted as prohibiting expansion outside Judaea (Matt 10:5-6), and thereby reflecting more of the same concerns as the Hasmoneans,¹⁰⁰ the power and authority to rule the world is achieved as a result of the cross and the empty tomb:

And Jesus came and said to them, “*All authority in heaven and on earth* (πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς) has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of *all nations* (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to *obey everything that I have commanded you*. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age (ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος)” (Matt 28:18-20)

Read within the cultural context of the first century Mediterranean world, far from the Sunday school flannel boards, the intensive theo-political force of this text is unmistakable. Nothing less than the entire world, i.e., what was at the time ultimately in the hands of Roman gods, is claimed.¹⁰¹ All peoples shall be conquered for the God of Israel, but without military means or violence. Again, the aim is a mirror image of the empire and its strategies for domination; the strategy is different: the take-over of the public realm in Graeco-Roman society via a war waged on the gods and beginning in the semi-public sphere. In the end, all nations shall obey what Jesus’ has taught his own people, which is, according to the Matthean narrative, the Jewish law.¹⁰²

The last point deserves attention. If Jewish law shall be observed by all nations, this implies conversion to Judaism, including circumcision for men,¹⁰³ and a giving up of non-

⁹⁹ Cf. Johns Riches, “Matthew’s Missionary Strategy in Colonial Perspective,” in John Riches and David C. Sim (eds.), *The Gospel of Matthew in its Roman Imperial Context* (London: T&T Clark, 2005) 128-142; see especially the sections on “Political Claims” and “Territorial Expansion” (137-141).

¹⁰⁰ Though without military force as part of the strategy; see further below.

¹⁰¹ A realisation of the offer Jesus had rejected from the devil in Matt 4:8-9: Πάλιν παραλαμβάνει αὐτὸν ὁ διάβολος εἰς ὄρος ὑψηλὸν λίαν καὶ δείκνυσιν αὐτῷ πάσας τὰς βασιλείας τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὴν δόξαν αὐτῶν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ: ταῦτά σοι πάντα δώσω, ἐὰν πεσῶν προσκυνήσῃς μοι. The implication of the offer is that the devil controls these territories, which were under Rome’s dominion; the implication is clearly that Matthew identifies Rome’s gods with the devil. Fighting off the devil, then, implies fighting the Roman Empire to liberate the world from the devil’s rule (via Roman gods). Cf. Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading* (London: T&T Clark, 2000) 110-111.

¹⁰² See, e.g., Matt 5:17-6:24, 7:21; 19:17; 22:36-40; 23:23.

¹⁰³ Several scholars have read this text as demanding conversion and circumcision, i.e., proselyte status, of converts to this apostolic Jewish group. See especially David Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 247-255.

Jewish culture. This, it seems to me, is indeed the culmination of the message of Matthew. The story begins with a group of non-Jews from the East, the magi, recognising that the legitimacy of the Jewish king extends also over themselves (Matt 2:1-12); then we hear of a centurion (from the West, one might add), who recognises and need the power of the Jewish Messiah (Matt 8:5-13). We also meet a Canaanite woman (the historical enemies of the Jews¹⁰⁴), who, rightly in the eyes of Jesus, identifies her place in relation to the Jewish people and their Messiah as a dog eating crumbs falling from its master's table (Matt 15:21-28). This is set within a general portrayal of non-Jews in Matthew which is negative, non-Jews representing everything that good Jews should not be or do.¹⁰⁵

In other words, Matthew presents us with a generally negative picture of the non-Jewish world, in which the only exceptions to the rule are individuals representing eastern and western power and wisdom, as well as the historical enemies of Israel—and all are subordinating themselves to the Jewish Messiah. The centripetal force of the eschatological realisation begins with Jesus during his lifetime, but when all authority on earth has been achieved after his death and resurrection, when sin and its political consequences are eliminated (cf. Matt 1:21), the world shall obey the law of the God of Israel.

Further support for this reading is found in Matthew's version of the Gadarene demoniacs (Matt 8:28-34). This story tells us how non-Jewish culture is erased as Jesus enters non-Jewish cities and their surrounding areas. The demoniacs live among ritually unclean tombs and the demons are eventually sent into ritually unclean swine, which are drowned in the water.¹⁰⁶ Since Jesus explicitly forbids mission among non-Jews in 10:5-6, the demoniacs' identity is narratively to be understood as Jewish.¹⁰⁷ The two Jews in a non-Jewish area live in a ritually unclean environment, including issues of food and sacrificial animals. As Jesus approaches this non-Jewish area—in the holy land¹⁰⁸—the Jews living there are liberated from impurities: the tombs, the swine, and the demons are associated with an area that needs to be liberated.

The non-Jewish majority ("the city") reacts negatively as their culture (their concern was with the swine rather than the disappearance of the demons) is being erased in the sea (θάλασσα) into which the swine disappeared, and they consequently ask Jesus to leave their area.¹⁰⁹ Demons and pigs go together, and the defiled land is cleansed as Jesus approaches it as "the Son of God." The story is concerned, in this case, with Matthew's holy land and its status, but in 28:19-20 the disciples are told to conquer the entire world with Jewish law in what must have been understood as much the same way.

For Matthew, further, Jerusalem is the holy city and thus the centre of the world;¹¹⁰ the world, in turn, is just about to find out that this has been the reality all the time. Since the

¹⁰⁴ See W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew*, 3 vols. (T&T Clark: London, 1991) II:547.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. e.g., Matt 5:47; 6:7. See also Sim, *Christian Judaism*.

¹⁰⁶ Note also that swine were common sacrificial animals in non-Jewish cults.

¹⁰⁷ And more specifically as 10:6 states, they would be what the author considers to be "the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

¹⁰⁸ Gadara was located in the Decapolis, but would have been part of Matthew's 'biblical Land'/the holy land; cf. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001) 23-24.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Mark's very different version of this story.

¹¹⁰ Jerusalem was regarded as holy by Matthew both before and after Jesus' death; see Matt 4:5; 27:53. In Matt 5:35 it is stated that the earth is Israel's God's footstool, and that Jerusalem is "the city of the Great King." It is hard to imagine a more explicit statement of where the world's centre is—and by implication, where it is not.

empire in fact works with the devil to achieve world dominance (see footnote 101 above), God's judgment and rule will mean liberation for all.

Matthew's perspective is quite close to the Christ-believing Pharisaic Jews in Acts 15:5 in terms of circumcision of non-Jews. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, Mattheans were most likely Christ-believing Pharisees breaking away from the larger Pharisaic community.¹¹¹ This would explain both Matt 23:2-3 and the critique of Pharisaic mission (23:15).

A final example of Apostolic Jewish mission is found in Paul. In the interest of space we shall only note that Paul's view of the way Jewish proselytising mission should be carried out differed significantly from Matthew's. For him, non-Jews must remain non-Jews, and thus the renewed world would consist of both categories, all worshipping the God of Israel. A unity on diversity, with Israel at the centre as the cultivated olive tree from whose rich root non-Jewish individuals 'in Christ' are fed (Rom 11:17-24). Still, Paul's aim was the same: via semi-public networks to 'attack' Graeco-Roman gods and ultimately replace Rome with Jerusalem as the world's centre.¹¹² The 'imitation' of empire is also evidenced in his determination to visit—and missionise—Spain, representing the western end of the earth and the empire.¹¹³

In conclusion, Apostolic-Jewish mission was formed after Roman imperialism, but reversed the strategy to achieve world dominion. Eventually—and oddly—this strategy actually worked, and this one cult on the semi-public level was picked by later Roman rulers who made it into exclusive state religion for the preservation of society.¹¹⁴ By then, however, 'Christianity' had developed far beyond Apostolic Judaism in many significant aspects, and mission was now Christian mission, not Jewish mission.

8. Conclusion: From Jerusalem to Rome—A One Way Ticket

Was there, then, a Christian mission before the fourth century? In the end, the answer to this question is to some degree a matter of definition. There is good reason to make a distinction between Apostolic-Jewish and Christian mission and place the origins of the latter no earlier than the second century; its full development on all levels of society, however, comes only in the fourth century. How should we explain this development?

I have argued in this paper that Jesus and the earliest Jesus movement were involved in eschatologically motivated variants of Jewish mission, working with strategies and within an ideological matrix familiar to other Jews. Jewish mission, then, was carried out in the first century, not only by Apostolic Jews, but also by others within Judaism. In addition to the specific source material which is best explained by this theory, including an individual missionary as Josephus,¹¹⁵ this perspective is confirmed on a more general level by Graeco-Roman material. A key aspect of our approach has been to methodologically isolate three social levels of ancient societies, the private, semi-public and public levels, and read the evidence for mission in each of these contexts respectively. While we see examples of movements between the private and semi-public sphere, the competition is played out mostly

¹¹¹ Anders Runesson, "Re-Thinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations: Matthean Community History as Pharisaic Intragroup Conflict," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127:1 (2008) 95-132.

¹¹² For the Jewish people as a centre in Paul's theology, see Rom 9-11; the central position of Jerusalem is evidenced, e.g., in the Jerusalem collection, 2 Cor 8-9, Rom 15:25-28.

¹¹³ Rom 15:28.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 18.

¹¹⁵ So Steve Mason, as discussed above.

on the semi-public level. From there, cults could also penetrate into public religion, which, eventually, was precisely what happened with Christianity as it became a 'religion.'

I have described the development of Christian identity in this regard elsewhere and shall not repeat that discussion here.¹¹⁶ Key aspects were the 're-categorisation' of Christ-belief as an association with a nature similar to that of other cultic associations or philosophies,¹¹⁷ excluding altogether ethnic identity as a parameter for membership. This development is found in Ignatius, but developed from then on quite rapidly, most likely since other eastern cults had already travelled the same route and the pattern was familiar to people.

This did not mean the disappearance of Apostolic Judaism and its missionary activities. While Justin Martyr accepted Apostolic-Jewish forms of beliefs and practices, he expressed concerns about their (inward) mission, which he states must cease.¹¹⁸ Apostolic Jews may have continued to emphasise the connection between people, land, law and God, as did other Jews, but the crucial step for Christ-belief to gain access to the Roman public sphere had already been taken at the very moment non-Jewish adherers in the second century divorced Christ-belief from its ethnic dimension. In the fourth century, the exclusive nature of this form of non-Jewish Christianity proved to be a politically powerful tool, even to the point where it could be brought in as state religion. The journey from Jerusalem to Rome had succeeded, but in ways neither Paul or Luke, nor Matthew could have imagined. Instead of a return ticket with a triumphal procession in Jerusalem in sight, developments along the way turned out to be of a one-way nature.

As Theodosius I begins his persecution of Graeco-Roman cults at the end of the fourth century, aiming at protecting and preserving the empire in collaboration with the God of Israel (interpreted non-ethnically as the Christian God), we come full circle, so to speak. We have seen this form of mission and its theo-political logic before in the public sphere, both in Rome and with the Hasmoneans. Christian mission on this level eventually results in the issuing of laws restricting Jews in their communal life and, after centuries, the eradication of the last of the Graeco-Roman cults.¹¹⁹ While Rome in the first century ruled by Jupiter's will, they now ruled by the will of the Christian God, with much the same ingredients involved: military power, coercion, issuing of restricting laws. The force of the mission was, compared to earlier periods, enhanced by the exclusive nature of the religion, with destruction of *all* other temples and cults.¹²⁰ Most of this mission is to be defined as inward mission, played out where Rome had already secured political power.

Christian mission carried out after this point in the semi-public and private sphere, although equally exclusive in its claims, was often but not always in agreement with the public mission; conflicts and inner-Christian persecution resulted. There is no need or space here to reiterate the history of Europe that followed, other than to mention the conflicts and wars that followed in the footsteps of the reformation, and the refugee problem that was created (many of whom came to North America), as well as the role of Christian mission in Western

¹¹⁶ Runesson, "Inventing Christian Identity."

¹¹⁷ For the relationship between mystery cults and philosophy in this regard, see, e.g., Günter Bornkamm, "μυστήριον," *TDNT* 4:808-810.

¹¹⁸ Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 47.

¹¹⁹ For the latter process, see Eric Sauer, *The Archaeology of Religious Hatred in the Roman and Early Medieval World* (Stroud: Tempus, 2003). Laws relating to Jews are conveniently collected in Amnon Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation: Edited with Introductions, Translations, and Commentary* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987).

¹²⁰ Sauer, *Archaeology*.

colonialism in general—and its force in later countering of colonial strategies as we see in Liberation Theology. What really stands out throughout history is the close connection between mission and violence in various forms as we enter the public sphere. It seems inevitable, regardless of the type of cult.

Today most Christians (and others) think of mission as divorced from politics, as a religious phenomenon, some would say an offer of a gift, taking place in the private sphere of society. As with contemporary Jewish mission, most forms of such mission is inward mission, attempts to reinvent, or ‘defend,’ what one believes to be true forms of worship. While Jewish proselytising mission is debated regarding the first century, all agree that it existed in Late Antiquity but disappeared sometime after the Talmudic period. Today, as we noted in the introduction, inward mission is common, although the events described in the article quoted are more rare perhaps. It is interesting to note that this type of inward mission, attempts to ‘take over synagogues,’ comes closest to much of what we see in the New Testament. We should perhaps also note that some Jews, although they are few, would argue for proselytising mission today.¹²¹ Others, also few, would actively engage in ethno-ethic mission of the seven Noahide commandments.¹²²

Most discourses on contemporary Christian mission within the churches emphasise missionary outreach as a key task for Christians, not seldom claiming it to be inextricably linked with Christian identity.¹²³ Further, the basic assumption behind almost all theologies of mission is a de-ethnocized and replacement-theological paradigm. Lately, however, intensified since the 1960s, an inner-Christian debate has surfaced as to how ‘mission’ is to be defined.¹²⁴ The background for this discussion touches upon the relationship between Western colonialism/imperialism and the spread of Christianity along with Western culture as well as the church’s involvement in local culture and attempts in many places in non-Western countries in the wake of Vatican II (1962-1965) to realise visions of inculturation and emphasise the necessity of localised understandings of Christian faith and life. In our age of globalisation on many levels when cultures and religious traditions meet on a more frequent basis than ever before, such discussions are by no means destined to fade, but rather to escalate.

¹²¹ See, e.g., L.J. Epstein, “Why the Jewish People Should Welcome Converts,” *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought*, 43:3 (1994) 302-312.

¹²² Although few would actively missionise Noahide commandments, many feel an obligation to supply information about this form of worship if asked by non-Jews. See, e.g., J. David Bleich, “Teaching Torah to Non-Jews,” *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 2:18 (1980) 192-211. An example of former Christians who converted to Noahide ‘religion’ is a group called Emmanuel, in Athens Tennessee. This group was founded in 1990 by a former Baptist pastor, J. David Davies. He is seen by some as the *de facto* leader of Noahides worldwide. On the development of the doctrine of Noahide commandments, including discussion of its reception in Christianity, see the standard work of Klaus Müller, *Tora Für die Völker: Die Noachidischen Gebote und Ansätze zu ihrer Rezeption im Christentum* (Berlin: Institute Kirche und Judentum, 1994).

¹²³ Cf., e.g., *Ad Gentes*, ch. 24, §23: “Although every disciple of Christ, as far in him lies, has the duty of spreading the Faith,(1) Christ the Lord always calls whomever He will from among the number of His disciples, to be with Him and to be sent by Him to preach to the nations (cf. Mark 3:13).” and ch 6, §35: “the whole Church is missionary, and the work of evangelization is a basic duty of the People of God.”

¹²⁴ This is true also of Sweden, where the world’s largest Lutheran church has its home. See, e.g., the work of Biörn Fjärstedt, then director of The Church of Sweden Mission, later bishop of Gotland, *Missionen skiftar ansikte: Missionsteologi i tiden* (Stockholm: Verbum, 1991), a book that generated debate involving both scholars and laypeople. For a recent discussion of mission, including New Testament perspectives, see David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991).

In conclusion, then, Christian mission as we understand it today evolved fully with the creation of the category of 'religion' in Late Antiquity. The inherent tensions and the pattern of empire distinguishable already in the first century, in the New Testament, present a theological challenge to the modern postcolonial world. The task ahead of us is interdisciplinary in nature and ought to involve not only theologians but also exegetes of the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible, as well as scholars of early Judaism and Patristics.