

# Synagogue Influence on Paul's Roman Readers

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## 1. The Question

Paul seems to assume that the first readers of Romans enjoyed substantial knowledge of Israel's scriptures. Does he know that these (predominantly Gentile) readers had longstanding associations with (predominantly Jewish) communities where Israel's sacred texts were kept, read and proclaimed? Is there a discernible relationship between the hermeneutical assumptions of Paul's correspondence and the social and historical reality of Roman Christianity?<sup>1</sup>

Whether or not the contingent circumstances of Paul and his readers is *the* interpretive key that unlocks the letter's many appropriations of scripture,<sup>2</sup> one might still wish to know how much we can say for sure about the relationships-channels of communication, meetings, patterns of influence-between the early Roman Christians and their non-Christian Jewish contemporaries. Thus, a historical question animates this

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<sup>1</sup>A contingent purpose for Romans has been increasingly axiomatic since F. C. Baur's seminal essay, *Über Zweck und Veranlassung des Römerbriefs und die damit zusammenhängenden Verhältnisse der römischen Gemeinde*, in *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* 3 (1836), 59-178. See W. Wiefel, "The Jewish Community in Ancient Roma and the Origins of Roman Christianity," in *The Romans Debate* (rev. ed.; Hendrickson, 1991) 85; A. J. M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans* (Fortress, 1991) 4; Chrys Caragounis, "From Obscurity to Prominence: The Development of the Roman Church between Romans and 1 Clement" in K. P. Donfried and P. Richardson, eds., *Judaism and Christianity in First Century Rome* (Eerdmans, 1998), 246-47, 263.

<sup>2</sup>Doubtful is R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (Yale, 1989), 35: "To read Romans in light of conjectures about its historical purpose within Paul's ministry is, by contrast, a surprisingly unsatisfying speculative exercise." Similarly dubious is J. R. Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 34: "A reader-focused approach to Paul's use of scripture in Romans that depends heavily on a reconstructed *historical* audience is clearly inadequate by itself for interpreting the letter on historical, let alone literary or theological, grounds." Even more disinclined to put stock in any reconstruction of the situation in Rome is Luke T. Johnson, *Reading Romans*, 196 (see pp. 196-199) who sees Paul's comments as "hypothetical/typical," addressing "chronic issues facing the first urban Christians" and not as "a specific response to a crisis in the Roman church or churches." Johnson's findings rest, in part, on the striking contrast he sees between the "thicker" discussion of the actual situation in Galatians and in 1 Corinthians, and the more "muted" and "vague" remarks in Romans.

paper: what can we know about the historical relationship between church and synagogue in mid-first century Rome? How much has the synagogue shaped, schooled and influenced Paul's earliest Roman readers?

## 2. Historical Contingencies in First Century Rome

### 2.1. The Edict of Claudius

At some point during the rule of Emperor Claudius (41-54 C.E.) some, perhaps many, Jews were expelled from Rome.<sup>3</sup> Orosius (385-420), in *Historiae Adversum Paganos* (7.6.15-16), dates the expulsion to Claudius' 9<sup>th</sup> year or 49, during the period (47 - 52) Claudius was campaigning to restore Rome's ancient rites and constrain foreign cults:

7.6.15 Anno eiusdem nono expulsos per Claudium urbe Iudaeos Iosephus refert. sed me magis Suetonius mouet, qui ait hoc modo: Claudius Iudaeos impulsore Christo adsidue tumultuantes Roma expulit; 16 quod, utrum contra Christum tumultuantes Iudaeos coherceri et conprimi iusserit, an etiam Christianos simul uelut cognatae religionis homines uoluerit expelli, nequaquam discernitur.<sup>4</sup>

Dio Cassius (c.160-c.229), possibly referring to the same episode, dates it early in Claudius' reign and describes it as a ban on public meetings:

τούς τε Ἰουδαίους πλεονάσαντας αἰτίαις, ὥστε χαλεπῶς ἂν ἄνευ ταραχῆς ὑπὸ τοῦ ὄχλου σφῶν τῆς πόλεως εἰρχθῆναι, οὐκ ἐξήλασε μὲν, τῷ δὲ δὴ πατρίῳ βίῳ χρωμένους ἐκέλευσε μὴ συναθροίζεσθαι.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a rigorous treatment of the sources and circumstances related to the edict, see Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Eerdmans, 1998), 157-201.

<sup>4</sup> Josephus reports, 'In his ninth year the Jews were expelled by Claudius from the city.' But Suetonius, who speaks as follows, influences me more: 'Claudius expelled from Rome the Jews constantly rioting at the instigation of Christ [*Christo*].' As far as whether he had commanded that the Jews rioting against Christ [*Christum*] be restrained and checked or also had wanted the Christians, as persons of a cognate religion, to be expelled, it is not at all to be discerned." ET from Dixon Slingerland, "Suetonius Claudius 25.4, Acts 18, and Paulus Orosius' *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII: Dating the Claudian Expulsion(s) of Roman Jews* (JQR, 1992), 137.

<sup>5</sup>E. Cary's translation (LCL): "As for the Jews, who had again increased so greatly that by reason of their multitude it would have been hard without raising a tumult to bar them from the city, he [Claudius] did not drive them out, but ordered them, while continuing their traditional mode of life, not to hold meetings." G. Lüdemann, *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles. Studies in Chronology* (Fortress, 1984) 164-171, claims Dio's support to date the expulsion to 41 C.E. Most (e.g., F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* [Eerdmans, 1951], 342-343; B. Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 541) distinguish the ban from the expulsion as two separate historical events.

Since several aspects of the expulsion may bear on early Roman Christianity and, in particular, on early relations between church and synagogue, a closer look at the evidence is called for.

## 2.2. Chrestus and Christus.

Presumably the imperial expulsion punished those who were fomenting chaos in the capital. For many scholars, Suetonius' use of "Chrestus" suggests that the tumult raged between *Christian* and *non-Christian* Jews. Suetonius (or his source) adopted the alternative spelling for *Christus-Chrestus* being a common Roman name—and mistakenly thought Jesus was actively aggravating the *status quo* in Rome during the reign of Claudius.

Though widely held,<sup>6</sup> this view is not without problems. On the face of it, Suetonius does not link the conflict to teachings or debates *about* Chrestus but rather to Chrestus' *personal presence*.<sup>7</sup> That Suetonius knows enough to refer to *Christiani*, with an *i*, is clear from *Nero* 16.2. Nor does Luke, at Acts 18:2, hint that Aquila and Prisca were Christians at the time they were forced to leave Rome.<sup>8</sup> Luke may take the couple's prior Christian allegiance for granted since he says nothing about their conversion *after* meeting Paul. But it is equally possible that the pair offered Paul lodging simply because they shared a trade and sought strength in numbers. Sustained contact with Paul may have led to their conversion.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, we are hard pressed to show that Luke was aware of any Jewish/Christian tensions in Rome. Neither the Roman authorities who interrogate Paul—Gallio (Ac 18),

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<sup>6</sup>For defense of the now-common equation of *Chrestus* and *Christ*, see Wiefel, "The Jewish Community in Ancient Rome and the Origins of Roman Christianity," in *The Romans Debate*, 92-93; Wedderburn, *Reasons*, 54-59; T. Schreiner, *Romans*, 12-15; B. Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 540-541; Rudolf Brändle and Ekkehard W. Stegemann, "The Formation of the First 'Christian Congregations' in Rome in the Context of the Jewish Congregations," in Donfried and Richardson, *Judaism and Christianity*, 118. It is assumed by many, including L. T. Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Crossroad/Herder, 1997), 4.

<sup>7</sup>Nanos 378-79; Slingerland, 136-137; Benko, "The Edict of Claudius of A.D.49 and the Instigator Chrestus" *TZ* 25.6 (1969), 406-418.

<sup>8</sup>Aquila is called "a certain Jew" (τινα Ἰουδαῖον; Acts 18:2), not, say, a "certain disciple," to parallel the expression Luke uses a chapter later to refer to Paul's presumed brothers in Christ (τινας μαθητάς in Ac 19:1).

<sup>9</sup>For the claim that Prisca and Aquila were *already* Christians, see Wiefel, "Jewish Community," 93; Wedderburn, *Reasons*, 54. Questioning this assumption is Nanos, *Mystery*, 377, following Stephen Benko, "Edict," 413.

Felix (Ac 24), Festus (Ac 25) and Agrippa (Ac 26)—nor the prison officials in Rome (Ac 28) seem aware of a recent imperial edict against Christian Jews, nor are these officials inclined to see a Jew like Paul as a threat to public order.<sup>10</sup> Acts depicts Paul arriving in Rome and meeting with Jewish leaders who turn out to be only vaguely aware of the Christian “sect” and its reputation, and genuinely, even positively, curious about Paul’s Gospel (Ac 28:21-22).<sup>11</sup> If the expulsion was official state retaliation for intra-Jewish debates about Jesus, it is hard to explain why Luke wouldn’t exploit the point, given how often Acts chronicles other episodes of Jewish rejection of Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, even if the term does refer to Jewish disputes *over Jesus* as so many contend, it remains to decide what exactly the intra-Jewish dispute was about. Two possibilities merit consideration.

- a. whether or not to acknowledge Jesus as Israel’s Messiah
- b. whether or not to include Gentiles among God’s people in the name of Jesus without their observing the Law.

It is easy to imagine the first question provoking hostilities in Jerusalem where religious leaders might feel directly indicted. But would debates about the Messiahship of Jesus provoke a major, even violent, disturbance in Rome? Conversely, one can readily imagine that the second question—about the validity of a law-free gospel—would rile law-observant Jews in Rome, whether they identified with Jesus Christ or not. That is, if the edict of Claudius constitutes evidence that a “Pauline” form of Christianity had made inroads in the capital by, or before, 49 C.E.,<sup>13</sup> the battle lines might not separate pro- and anti-Jesus forces, but rather pro-law Jews (Christian or not) and law-free Jews and Gentiles.

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<sup>10</sup> Similarly Nanos, *Mystery*, 377-78.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. M. Nanos, *Mystery*, 375-378.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Nanos, *Mystery*, 376. This point is weakened if, with Ernst Haenchen, “The Book of Acts as Source Material for the History of Early Christianity” in L. Keck and J. L. Martyn, eds., *Studies in Luke-Acts* (Fortress, 1980), 258-278, p.278, we see Luke willfully understating the Christian presence in Rome to give Paul credit for introducing Christianity to the capital.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Wedderburn, *Reasons*, 57-58. Perhaps earlier if, with Francis Watson, we imagine that the ban on public meetings in 41 CE (chronicled by Dio Cassius) was an earlier attempt by Claudius to address the same problem. See F. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach* (Cambridge; SNTSMS 56) 93. Watson contends elsewhere (“The Two Roman Congregations: Romans 14:1-15:13” in *The Romans Debate*, 209) that “Gentile Christianity at Rome is . . . Pauline Christianity” in the sense that Paul’s own converts and associates (esp. those mentioned in Rom 16) were responsible for establishing a law-free form of Christianity in Rome.

These objections are by no means decisive but they should give pause to those who take the *Chrestus-Christos* connection as firmly established.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, it is quite possible that an otherwise unknown Chrestus stirred up enough nationalistic, even Messianic, fervor among Roman Jews to incur imperial wrath and provoke expulsion. There may have been, that is, tensions in the Roman Jewish community of the fifties that had nothing to do with Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>15</sup> If so, then to use the expulsion of *Jews* as the cornerstone of one's historical reconstruction of Jewish-*Christian* relations in Rome may be unwise.

### 2.3. The Scope of the Expulsion.

Another relevant consideration is the scope of the expulsion. How many Jews were affected? Estimates of the Jewish population in Rome during the 1st century range from 15,000 to 50,000, making Jews one of the largest groups of foreigners in the capital.<sup>16</sup> These numbers are cobbled together from clues and hints in the sources, and the margin of error is no doubt wide,<sup>17</sup> but it is difficult to imagine so large a population being forcibly removed from the city. It is one thing to pass an edict but quite another to enforce it.<sup>18</sup>

Of course Jews, like other imperial subjects, were not all treated equally under the law. Some could be expelled easily; others not without due process.<sup>19</sup>

**Slaves:** punishable by master or state.

**Peregrini** (free-born foreign subjects) and **Latini Iuniani** (manumitted slaves without full citizenship): intermediate classes who could be expelled by magistrates without trial.

**Citizens:** could only be expelled after conviction in criminal court.

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<sup>14</sup>Similarly D. Slingerland, "Chrestus: Christus?" in A. J. Avery-Peck, *New Perspectives on Ancient Judaism* 4 (UPA, 1989), 43.

<sup>15</sup>So Marcus Borg, "New Context," 211-212; Judge and Thomas, "Origin," 86; Nanos, 379-380; Benko, "Edict," 412ff.. In response Wedderburn, *Reasons*, 55, asks whether a growing, potentially destabilizing political movement wouldn't have drawn a much harsher reaction from Rome than mere expulsion.

<sup>16</sup>James S. Jeffers, "Jewish and Christian Families in First-Century Rome," in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome*, 129-130.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Brändle and Stegemann, "Formation," 120. For Rome under Augustus, see Josephus, *Ant.* 17.299-303; *War* 2.280; under Tiberius, see Suetonius, *Tiberius* 36; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.81-84; Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.85.

<sup>18</sup>Walters, "Romans, Jews and Christians," 177, n.11, cites Tacitus' reference to an ineffectual Senatorial edict to expel astrologers from Italy (*Annals* 12.52).

<sup>19</sup>Leonard Rutgers, "Roman Policy toward the Jews: Expulsions from the City of Rome during the First Century C.E." in JCFRCR, 97-98.

If most Roman Jews came from the lower classes and thus were more susceptible to deportation orders (but also more difficult to monitor), some had acquired citizenship and enjoyed a measure of legal protection.<sup>20</sup> Philo's sweeping account of the situation in Rome is relevant here:

How then did he look upon the great division of Rome which is on the other side of the river Tiber, which he was well aware was occupied and inhabited by the Jews? And they were mostly Roman citizens, having been emancipated; for, having been brought as captives into Italy, they were manumitted by those who had bought them for slaves, without ever having been compelled to alter any of their hereditary or national observances.<sup>21</sup>

Further uncertainty about the scope of the expulsion is tied to the fact that the relevant portion of Suetonius-*Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultantes Roma expulit*-may be translated two ways.<sup>22</sup>

- i. "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome."
- ii. "He expelled from Rome the Jews constantly making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus."

The first reading implies that most, even all, Jews were embroiled in the tumult, as one might also infer from the language of Acts 18:2: προσφάτως ἔληλυθότα ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας . . . διὰ τὸ διατεταχέναι Κλαύδιον χωρίζεσθαι πάντας τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἀπὸ τῆς Ῥώμης.

The second reading might restrict the expulsion to those causing the disturbance.

Luke's contention that *all* Jews had to leave Rome doesn't create a problem for this view since his hyperbolic use of πᾶς is well established elsewhere in Luke-Acts.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps, then, the expulsion only targeted a minority of the city's Jewish population, say, only a handful of ringleaders<sup>24</sup> or the members of only a few synagogues.<sup>25</sup> A small

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<sup>20</sup>On the socio-economic status of Roman Jews, see James S. Jeffers, "Jewish and Christian Families," 129-131.

<sup>21</sup>Embassy §155. Trans., C. D. Yonge (Hendrickson, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., Lane, 204; Nanos, 374. The first of these follows J. C. Rolfe's *LCL* translation, Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*.

<sup>23</sup>See Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1; 2:5; 3:18; 8:1, etc. Cf. Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1998), 106, 539; R. Riesner, *Paul's Early Period*, 192.

<sup>24</sup>Tentatively, J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, (Word, 1988), xlix. Brändle and Stegemann, "Formation," 126 suggest that the edict only affected *Christians* Jews.

<sup>25</sup>William Lane suggests that perhaps only Jews from one or two synagogues out of some 11-15 in the city were forced out. Similarly Nanos, 376, who cites Slingerland, *JQR* 83 1/2 (1992) 127-144, in support

scale expulsion would explain why other historians of the period (Luke excepted) fail to mention it.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.4. The Aftermath

Scholars are agreed that in the earliest stages Christianity across the empire spread outward from the synagogue.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the first Jesus followers in Rome would almost certainly have been Jews, proselytes and god-fearers with strong Jewish ties.<sup>28</sup> By the mid-fifties, however, most Christians in Rome (or, at least, most of Paul's addressees) seem to be ethnically Gentile, as the following excerpts from Romans demonstrate.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>1:5</sup> through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, <sup>6</sup> including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

<sup>1:13</sup> I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles.

<sup>9:3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup> They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; <sup>5</sup> to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah,

of a limited expulsion of a subset of troublesome Jews. Cautioning against underestimating the scope of the expulsion is R. Riesner, *Paul's Early Period*, 200; cf. 192-193.

<sup>26</sup>Tacitus is silent. He first mentions the Roman Christians in his account of the Great Fire of 64 C.E., and shows no awareness of their role in any earlier controversies. Josephus mentions the expulsion under Tiberius in 19 C.E. (*Ant.* 18.81-84) but knows, or notes, nothing about one under Claudius. It hardly seems necessary, however, to conclude on this basis (as does, e.g., H. J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* [JPS, 1960], 27), that the expulsion didn't happen. See further E. A. Judge and G. S. R. Thomas, "The Origin of the Church at Rome: A New Solution?" *Reformed Theological Review* 25 (3, 1966) 81-94, p. 86; Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 379-80.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Wolfgang Wiefel, "Jewish Community," 89: "the mission of early Christianity was usually started in synagogues" and, for evidence of this pattern, see Ac 13:42-47; 14:1-6; 17:1-5; 18:4; 19:8-9. Wiefel (*ibid.*, 89, n.37) suggests that "Luke's somewhat schematic sequence [in Acts] may still, in principle, be an accurate portrayal of early Christian missionary practice."

<sup>28</sup>Note the mention in Acts 2:10 of "visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes." Cf. A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Reasons*, 50; James C. Walters, "Romans, Jews and Christians," 176. For secondary literature supporting the Jewishness of early Roman Christianity, see Lane, 203 nn.16 & 18.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. Johnson, *Reading Romans*, 5; R. Brändle and E. Stegemann, "Formation," 124. On the predominantly Gentile Christian audience of Romans, see Wiefel, "Jewish Community," 93 (contra Ropes and Lietzmann); J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, xlv-l. Cf. Ambrosiaster (375 C.E.) *Ad Romanos*.

<sup>11:13</sup> Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry <sup>14</sup> in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them. <sup>15</sup> For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead! . . . <sup>17</sup> But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, <sup>18</sup> do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. <sup>19</sup> You will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” <sup>20</sup> That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. <sup>21</sup> For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you. . . <sup>24</sup> For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree. . . <sup>28</sup> As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; . . . <sup>30</sup> Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, <sup>31</sup> so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. .

<sup>15:15</sup> Nevertheless on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God <sup>16</sup> to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>16:25</sup> Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages <sup>26</sup> but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith.<sup>31</sup>

Romans 7:1—γινώσκουσιν γὰρ νόμον λαλῶ—should probably not be taken as counter evidence. On the contrary, as James Dunn suggests, “the fact that Paul could assume a reasonable knowledge of the Torah strengthens the likelihood that the bulk of gentile converts had previously been adherents to the Jewish synagogues in Rome or elsewhere.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, Paul could assume that *all* of the Jews and *most* of the Gentiles who first read or heard his letter “knew” the Law.

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<sup>30</sup> See also 15:8-13.

<sup>31</sup> Trans. NRSV (Thomas Nelson, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> *Romans 1-8*, 359.

Paralleling this evidence from the body of the letter is the list of names in chapter 16.<sup>33</sup> Of the 26 people mentioned by name in Romans 16:3-15, Paul identifies only three of them as his συγγενεῖς (cf. 16:7, 11). Since it is difficult to explain why Paul would call only some Jews his kins(wo)men, and since Paul had clear theological interest in emphasizing the ethnic status of any Jewish believers in the Roman church—they would constitute further proof of Paul’s remnant argument (Romans 11:1-5)—it is reasonable to conclude that a substantial majority of Paul’s named acquaintances in Rome were Gentile.<sup>34</sup>

How did this demographic reversal take place? Was the Gentile majority caused by a slow, steady infusion of converts or does it owe much to a sudden, mass deportation of Jews? If the evidence that Claudius ordered this expulsion to punish Jewish disputes *over Jesus* is inferential and relatively weak, and if we know neither the scope of the expulsion nor precisely who was affected, it follows that it is precarious to suggest how, if at all, this expulsion altered Jew-Gentile relations in the church(es) at Rome. The fact is that we really don’t know what impact the edict had on the composition, structure, leadership and governance of the Christian community in Rome. Nor can we say with confidence what it was like for Christian Jews like Prisca and Aquila<sup>35</sup> to return from exile and (re-)connect with fellow believers in the capital.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>For the idea that Romans 16 was not originally part of the letter see T. W. Manson, “St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans-And Others,” in M. Black, *Studies in the Gospels and Epistles* (Manchester, 1962; 225-241, now in *The Romans Debate*, 3-15; E. J. Goodspeed, “Phoebe’s Letter of Introduction,” *HTR* 44 (1951) 55-57. This view, however, has fallen on hard times. See further A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Reasons*, 12-18; Peter Lampe, “The Roman Christians of Romans 16” in K. P. Donfried, ed., *The Romans Debate*, 217-221; J. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (Word, 1988), 884; T. Schreiner, *Romans* (BECNT: Baker, 1998) 6-10.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. Peter Lampe, “The Roman Christians,” pp.224-25 (& n.38) who concludes that “most people in the Roman church were of Gentile origin but had lived as sympathizers on the margins of the synagogues before they became Christian.” Paul’s theological interest are not considered by Karl P. Donfried, “A Short Note on Romans 16” in *The Romans Debate*, 44-52, who argues (against W. Marxsen, with H. Leon) that the names in Romans 16 “could easily belong to Roman Jews” (48). Donfried’s inscriptional evidence does show that Roman Jews often took non-Jewish names, but this insight can hardly be inverted to claim that people with non-Jewish names (in Romans 16) are probably Jewish! In a category of their own are Aquila and Prisca, whose Jewishness (his, at least) is attested in Acts 18:2. This pair heads Paul’s list of contacts in Rome and are called not συγγενεῖς but συνεργοί, Paul’s associates in mission. Their special, cherished status may be why Paul doesn’t call them *kins(wo)men*, or it may be that since Prisca is Gentile, the term can’t rightly be applied to them both. That a Jew is host to one of Rome’s largely Gentile house churches (Rom 16:5) should caution us against overstating racial tensions.

<sup>35</sup>Prisca and Aquila, whose expulsion from Rome is noted in Acts 18:2, are back in the capital in the mid-fifties when Paul writes Romans 16:3.

<sup>36</sup>See W. Wiefel, “Jewish Community,” 94; Leon, 27-28.

Enthusiasts of the *Chrestus* = *Christ* hypothesis, of course, would beg to differ. They contend that the shift from predominantly *Jewish* origins to predominantly *Gentile* membership was likely a direct consequence of (or greatly accelerated by) the expulsion: once Jewish Christians were forced out of the capital, the city's church(es) came under the leadership of Gentiles. This, in turn, explains the Jew-Gentile tensions in the church at the time Paul wrote Romans several years after the expulsion: the non-law-observant Gentile leadership resented the sudden influx of returning, law-observant Jews. Wolfgang Wiefel explains:

“Expulsion of Jews from Rome also meant *the end of the first Christian congregation* in Rome, which up until then had consisted of Jewish Christians. In Paul's letter to the Romans, written a few years after these events, we meet a *new congregation*.”

“[Jewish-Christians returning to Rome] found a ‘*new*’ Christian congregation *completely different* in organizational structure and spiritual outlook from the *old* one which had existed in the synagogue.”<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, James Walters:

When Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians (who lived like Jews) returned to Rome after the edict had lapsed, they encountered Christians whose socialization had changed markedly. Not only were Christians assembling in house churches that were independent of Jewish gatherings, these house churches were populated by persons who-for the most part-no longer observed Sabbath and dietary laws and who were not eager to resume such behaviors, as Romans 14:1 – 15:13 indicates.<sup>38</sup>

These are bold claims. In the space of five or six years, and largely due to an imperial edict and physical separation, the roles of Jew and Gentile within the Roman church have been reversed. Undoubtedly, the broad appeal of this proposal is tied to its putative ability to explain Paul's argument in Romans (esp., Rom 9-15). The question is whether the tensions Paul addresses in these chapters requires so great a rift or whether evidence for a “monolithic hostility” (Nanos' phrase) toward Roman *Jewish* believers is lacking. A reasonable case can be made, it seems to me, that the situation Paul addresses does not hint at a recent upheaval or sudden crisis as much as it suggests

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<sup>37</sup>“Jewish Community,” pp. 93 and 96, with emphasis added.

<sup>38</sup>J. C. Walters, “Romans, Jews and Christians,” 178.

the strain of different opinions developing within communities concerned with proper belief and behavior for the people of God. Nor do Christian gentiles (wild olive branches) appear to be in positions of authority in Rome to a greater degree than Christian Jews (the root that supports the branches).<sup>39</sup>

Whether or not Nanos is right to imagine the predominantly Gentile Roman church remaining under the aegis of the (non-Christian) Jewish synagogue, it may indeed be the case that

the tensions addressed in Romans . . . are precisely the kinds of tensions that would have been unfolding in synagogues as the Christian adherents grew in number and developed a subgroup identity (with additional meetings in their homes for worship and instruction).<sup>40</sup>

### 3. The Synagogue: Matrix of early Roman Christianity?

The evidence considered thus far fails to show that Jews and Jewish Christians were engaged in hostile, public debates in the Rome of the late 40s C.E. Perhaps it is premature to declare a full-scale “parting of the ways” between synagogue and church. The little we do know about Claudius’ edict and its aftermath should caution us against presuming that a Roman Christian community once dominated by Jews came suddenly, due to intra-Jewish hostilities and imperial edict, to be dominated by Gentiles who, before long, resented Jewish repatriation after the death of Claudius. To adopt this perspective is to hang one’s interpretation of Romans on a catena of unproven inferences:<sup>41</sup>

- a. the *inferred* impact (Gentile dominance in the Christian community, triumphalism, elitism)
- b. . . . of the *presumed* return (after Claudius’ death)
- c. . . . .of *large numbers* of Christian Jews who were *likely* expelled in 49 C.E.

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<sup>39</sup>Mark Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 381.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 384.

<sup>41</sup>Scholars reluctant to factor the edict of Claudius into the historical setting of Romans include Mark Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 372-387; J. R. Wagner, *Heralds*, 34; J. Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford, 1996), 333; Leonard V. Rutgers, “Roman Policy toward the Jews: Expulsions from the City of Rome during the First Century C.E.” in K. P. Donfried and P. Richardson, eds., *Judaism and Christianity in First Century Rome* (Eerdmans, 1998), 105-06; Steve Mason, “‘For I am not ashamed of the Gospel’ (Rom 1.16): The Gospel and the First Readers of Romans” in L. A. Jervis and P. Richardson, eds., *Gospel in Paul* (JSNT Sup 108; Sheffield: JSOT, 1994) 254-287.

With so much focus on the expulsion, it is tempting to exaggerate signs of ethnic resentment, schism and social distance and, perhaps, to miss signs of overlap, Jew-Gentile interaction and positive Jewish influence on early Roman Christianity. Correspondingly, without the conceit of Claudius' edict dominating the skyline, we may be more able to see in Rome's Jewish community—its synagogues, leadership and practice—signs of the impact or influence they might have had on the Jesus movement.

### 3.1. Roman Synagogues

No synagogue structures survive from ancient Rome. A few miles away, however, on the outskirts of Ostia, Rome's ancient port, the remains of a hall, 25 x 13 meters in size, mark the site of a 4<sup>th</sup> c. synagogue. The earliest layers of this site may date from the reign of Claudius and suggest an earlier public building suitable for synagogue services. If so, this would not merely be the oldest known synagogue building in the Diaspora; it would all but guarantee the existence of similar, dedicated structures in nearby Rome.<sup>42</sup> This need not mean that every "synagogue" or "prayer (house)" in Rome was, in our period, a dedicated building with distinctive architecture; limited resources and legal constraints would mean that some Jewish congregations would gather in multi-purpose buildings that would offer archaeologists few clues as to the range of their utilization.

Indirect support for 1<sup>st</sup> c. Roman synagogue buildings comes from Roman catacomb and *hypogea* inscriptions. A survey of about forty inscriptions identifies some ten different synagogues, at least four of which probably existed in the 1<sup>st</sup> c.: three are named after people (Augustus, Agrippa, Volumnius) and the fourth, called the "Synagogue of the Hebrews," is perhaps the first in the city.<sup>43</sup> If we are right about the 1st century dating of these four synagogues, we should probably assume there were others, perhaps many others, given the size of the Jewish population in Rome and assuming a situation somewhat analogous to the one in Alexandria as described in Philo's *Embassy*.

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<sup>42</sup>On the date and function of the structure, see Anders Runesson, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora: A Response to L. Michael White" *HTR* 92 (1999), 409-433. Runesson is responding to L. Michael White, "Synagogue and Society in Imperial Ostia: Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence," *HTR* 90 (1997) 23-58, reprinted in Donfried and Richardson, eds., *Judaism and Christianity*, 30-68). White contends that the building was erected in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. as a two-story private insula and not adapted for synagogue use until the late 2<sup>nd</sup> c. Agreeing with Runesson's 1<sup>st</sup> century date is A. T. Kraabel, "Unity and Diversity among Diaspora Synagogues" in Lee I. Levine, ed., *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity*, 49-60, p.51.

<sup>43</sup>L. Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 97; cf. Wiefel, "Jewish Community," 90.

the populace being excited still more . . . cut down some of the synagogues (and there are a great many in every section of the city), and some they razed to the very foundations, and into some they threw fire and burnt them . . . without caring for the neighbouring houses.<sup>44</sup>

Most or all of these synagogues were likely located in the Trans-Tiber region of Monteverde, a densely populated and relatively poor part of the city.<sup>45</sup> We should not, however, conclude that Roman Judaism was uniformly destitute or devoid of honor. There would have been significant economic disparities from one synagogue to the next. We should also imagine different organizing principles at work: some groups would gather for convenience, others due to a shared profession, others because of a shared country of origin.<sup>46</sup> To name synagogues after figures like Augustus and (probably Marcus) Agrippa (d.12 B.C.E.) likely signals collective gratitude for measures that made Jewish life in the Diaspora more tolerable. It may also suggest political savvy, communal vigor and self-confidence.<sup>47</sup>

Almost certainly this predominantly blue collar, high-density region of the city, this vibrantly Jewish enclave, was also home to the earliest Christian gatherings-hybrid assemblies of messianic Jews, proselytes and sympathetic god-fearers glad to advance beyond the rank of outsider. To the extent that the first generation of Roman Christians emerged from within this context, we should expect them to follow some of the same patterns, gathering in diverse, household groups here and there across the district. That Paul nowhere refers to “*the church at Rome*” should come as no surprise, for “the Christian house congregations shared the same sort of fragmented existence as the wider Jewish community.”<sup>48</sup>

### 3.2. Synagogue Leadership and Organization

I am aware of no evidence that Rome’s Jews were governed by a single arch-counsel, Sanhedrin or gerousia. Inscriptions mention many synagogue officials-there are some fifty references to the *archon* alone-but nothing suggests these rulers had more than

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<sup>44</sup>§132. Trans. C. D. Yonge (Hendrickson, 1996). Cf. §156 on the synagogues in Rome.

<sup>45</sup>Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 265. Cf. Philo, *Embassy*, 155, who locates the Jews in this region.

<sup>46</sup>L. Levine, “The Second Temple Synagogue,” in *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity*, 15.

<sup>47</sup>Peter Richardson, *Augustan-Era Synagogues in Rome*, in *Judaism and Christianity*, 29.

<sup>48</sup>Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, lii.

local authority. Evidently each synagogue was autonomous and could adopt its own distinct practices, with varying degrees of accommodation to Roman culture.<sup>49</sup>

According to Wolfgang Wiefel, the inscriptional evidence, taken together, points to:

a diverse community of individually structured congregations whose esteemed officials are responsible for their religious and social functions. But we have also noticed the absence of a single, controlling organization supervising the individual synagogues. There is no organizational head such as the ethnarch in Alexandria who, together with a council of Jews, represented all other Jews before the authorities.<sup>50</sup>

Into this decentralized, unsupervised situation came Christian missionaries who would have gained access to individual synagogues without needing official sanction. Whether they would be welcomed or shunned would have been determined on a case-by-case basis.

Mark Nanos' assessment of Jewish-Christian relations in Rome includes the claim that Paul, in Romans 13:1-7, calls Roman Christians to submit to *synagogue*, rather than *state*, authority. Few have found this reading persuasive, no doubt in part because it must attach unlikely meanings to some of Paul's words (e.g., μάχαίρα in 13:4; cf. Nanos, 310-314) and because Paul's call for submission makes no obvious reference to behaviors that are specifically Jewish. Not only is there no clear evidence (unless we find it in this passage) that Paul saw the Christian community in Rome or elsewhere as *under the religious authority* of synagogue leadership, but the absence of a centralized governing council that spanned Rome's many synagogues would make a call for Christians to submit to governing *religious* authorities odd and, perhaps, inscrutable to his readers.<sup>51</sup> Most likely, then, "synagogue influence" on the emerging Christian movement was not top-down and coordinated, but bottom-up and *ad hoc*.

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<sup>49</sup>See Levine, TAS, 265-266.

<sup>50</sup>W. Wiefel, "Jewish Community," 91. Similarly, Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Were Pharisees and Rabbis the Leaders of Communal Prayer and Torah Study in Antiquity? The Evidence of the New Testament, Josephus, and the Early Church Fathers," in H. C. Kee & L. H. Cohick, eds., *Evolution of the Synagogue: Problems and Progress* (Trinity, 1999) 89-105, who describes the synagogue as "predominantly a democratic lay organization" (p.103) with no central office (Pharisaic or otherwise) empowered to set and enforce standards.

<sup>51</sup>Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 289-336. The only counter evidence *might* be Acts 28:17, 21-25 in which Luke says Paul called together those who are preeminent ("first") among the Jews. Are these official (elected, appointed, authorized) leaders?

This does not mean, however, that Mark Nanos' lonely voice in the wilderness should be completely ignored. Nanos contends that the (predominantly) Gentile recipients of Romans were

to be found within subgroups of believers in Jesus, still entirely located within the synagogues of Rome and functioning in lively, sometimes distressing contact, in view of the expectations of the Jewish community (or communities) regarding conduct appropriate for them.<sup>52</sup>

Nanos' proposal would explain how Paul's Gentile readership could be in direct, regular, meaningful contact with real (not merely theoretical) non-Christian Jews. He contends that his proposal can also explain a number of otherwise problematic dimensions of Paul's epistle, including:<sup>53</sup>

- Paul's positive statements about the Law (Romans 3:1-2; 7:12-16; 9:4)
- Paul's hope of provoking positive jealousy among his Jewish kinsmen (Rom 11:13-14)<sup>54</sup>
- Paul's concern for "the one who is weak in faith" (ὁ ἀσθενῶν τῇ πίστει; Rom 14:1)<sup>55</sup>
- the absence of any instructions to church leaders<sup>56</sup>
- Paul's assumptions about his readers' knowledge of Scripture (Rom 7:1; 15:4; etc.)<sup>57</sup>

Though ingenious, Nanos' proposal is not without its problems at the level of detailed exegesis, as Thomas Schreiner, among others, has pointed out.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, after all the exegetical dust has settled, there may be good reason to grant the claim that both Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome had far more contact with the synagogue than is often assumed. For our purposes, the relevance of this point relates particularly to the Gentiles' sustained exposure to Israel's Scriptures.

### 3.3. Public Reading of Torah

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<sup>52</sup>Mark D. Nanos, "The Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience Addressed in Paul's Letter to the Romans," *CBQ* 61 (1999), 284; cf. 295, 297, 304.

<sup>53</sup>See M. Nanos, "The Jewish Context," 297-303.

<sup>54</sup>M. Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 247-251.

<sup>55</sup>M. Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 85-165.

<sup>56</sup>Contrast 1 Clement's considerable interest in church officials, on which see Caragounis, "From Obscurity to Prominence," 274-277.

<sup>57</sup>M. Nanos, "The Jewish Context," 289.

<sup>58</sup>See the index entries for "Nanos, M. D." in T. Schreiner, *Romans*.

There seem to have been three more or less standard elements to the synagogue service of the pre-70 period—precisely the same three activities known to be central to synagogue services in the talmudic period (c. 200 \* 600 C.E.). They are: communal prayer, sermon and public reading of Torah.<sup>59</sup>

For the first—communal prayer—evidence for standard patterns in pre-70 synagogue gatherings is admittedly sparse, though the name προσευχή (“*house of prayer*”), used widely for synagogues in the Diaspora, strongly suggests that prayers were among the ritual elements of the gathering.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps it was because Diaspora participants did not often visit the Temple where prayer was a daily occurrence that organized prayers found their way into the liturgical life of local communities.<sup>61</sup> The absence of established patterns of public prayer might explain why the few surviving pre-70 synagogue structures do not all face Jerusalem: Torah-reading alone did not call for a Jerusalem orientation.

It is similarly difficult to pin down patterns in the early use of synagogue homilies, both in terms of form and content.<sup>62</sup> Unlike prayer and preaching, however, the evidence for regular, public reading of Torah in pre-70 synagogues is solid. Not only is the Jews’ centuries-old regard for Torah well documented<sup>63</sup> but Josephus, Philo, the New Testament, rabbinic literature and archaeological evidence concur that “scriptural readings constituted the core of contemporary Jewish worship in the synagogue” during the late 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period.<sup>64</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. Theodotus inscription, for example,

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<sup>59</sup>Lee I. Levine, “The Second Temple Synagogue: The Formative Years,” in Lee I. Levine, ed., *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity* (ASOR, 1987), 7-31; TAS... ; James Strange, “Ancient Texts, Archaeology as Text, and the Problem of the First-Century Synagogue,” in H. C. Kee & L. H. Cohick, eds., *Evolution of the Synagogue: Problems and Progress* (Trinity, 1999) 27-45. For the talmudic period, see Avigdor Shinan, “Sermons, Targums, and the Reading from Scriptures in the Ancient Synagogue,” in Levine, *Synagogue in Late Antiquity*, 98-110.

<sup>60</sup>Communal prayer, however, need not mean *set recitations* with *fixed texts* and unison performance. See E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE – 66 CE* (Trinity, 1992) 202-208.

<sup>61</sup>Levine, “Second Temple Synagogue,” 19-23; M. Hengel, “Proseuche und Synagoge” in J. Gutmann, ed., *The Synagogue, Studies in Origin, Archaeology and Architecture* (Ktav, 1975), 27-54. Levine, *ibid.*, 22, conjectures that in the Gentile context of the Diaspora the term *proseuche* was more overtly religious and descriptive than *synagogue*. Strange, “Ancient Texts,” 29-30, posits some form of set prayer in 1st c. synagogue liturgy.

<sup>62</sup>TAS 134; Levine, “The Second Temple Synagogue,” 17-18.

<sup>63</sup>E.g., *Letter of Aristeas* 176-177, *1 Maccabees* 3:48; 12:9 (cf. *2 Macc.* 8:23), Josephus, *War* 2.229-31 (par. *Ant.* 20:115-117), *War* 2.292.

<sup>64</sup>L. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 134, 138; E. P. Sanders, *Judaism*, 197-202. See *Jos. Contra Ap.* 2.175; *Ant.* 16:43; Philo *Embassy* 155-56; *Dreams* 2.127; *Hypothetica* 7.12; *Every Good Man is Free* 81-

our best archaeological evidence on the subject, identifies a three-fold purpose for one particular Jerusalem synagogue: “for reading the Law and studying the commandments, and as a hostel . . . for the needs of itinerants from abroad.”<sup>65</sup> As the need arose, Torah reading would have been accompanied by Greek and/or Aramaic translation,<sup>66</sup> as well as Haftarah readings (cf. Lk 4; Ac 13) and expository homilies.

Specificity as to the form and frequency of Torah reading in the late 2nd Temple period, however, has proven elusive. We are hard pressed to know, for example, how early Torah reading became a weekly affair. Nevertheless, the practice of reading holy texts, repeatedly and liturgically, would set Judaism apart from Greco-Roman paganism where no such practice was to be found,<sup>67</sup> and would insure that Jews, proselytes and regularly attending god-fearers would be exposed to substantial portions of the Torah and, quite possibly, the Prophets and Psalter as well.

Beyond public reading of, and aural exposure to, Scripture, we have good reason to expect that levels of literacy (however defined) would be higher among Jews and synagogue-influenced Christian Gentiles (i.e., God-fearers) than in Greco-Roman society at large. Josephus assumes that the Law enjoins parents to teach children to read and to know both the laws and the deeds of their forefathers: Καὶ γράμματα παιδεύειν ἐκέλευσεν καὶ τὰ περὶ τοὺς νόμους καὶ τῶν προγόνων τὰς πράξεις ἐπίστασθαι.<sup>68</sup> The Testament of Levi is equally adamant about the need for biblical literacy: διδάξατε . . . ὑμεῖς τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν γράμματα ἵνα ἔχωσι σύνεσιν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ ζωῇ αὐτῶν ἀναγινώσκοντες ἀδιαλείπτως τὸν νόμον τοῦ θεοῦ. Quite apart from the high cultural value Jews attached to literacy, public reading and formal study, the earliest Christians may have felt added pressure to read and understand Israel’s scriptures to be able to defend the legitimacy of their claims.<sup>69</sup>

82 [on Essene practice]; *Creation* 128; Lk 4:16-22; Ac 13:14-15; 15:21. See also idem, “The Second Temple Synagogue: The Formative Years” in L. I. Levine, ed., *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity* (Fortress, 1987) 7-31.

<sup>65</sup>Cited in Levine, “Second Temple Synagogue,” 17. See also Alan Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (Sheffield, 2000) 110-111.

<sup>66</sup>Levine (ibid., 139) takes the production of the Septuagint as evidence for Torah reading practices in 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E. Alexandria.

<sup>67</sup>See Levine, ibid., 139, notes 81-82; H. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* (Yale, 1995), 18-19.

<sup>68</sup>C. Ap. 2.204. Cf. Ant. 4.211 and see M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, vol. 1. (Fortress, 1974) 78-83, and additional sources cited there.

<sup>69</sup>See Harry Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 7-20.

Whether or not Paul's extensive and intensive use of Scripture in Romans should be counted as further evidence for a Roman Christian community with strong ties to the synagogue and its reading practices is difficult to judge. But surely Paul's frequent and sophisticated appeals to scripture count for something. Did Paul cite scripture in part to remind Gentiles of the fundamentally *Jewish* nature of his Gospel? Did Paul assume that the letter, as it circulated, would be read in dozens of strikingly diverse house-churches, each with its own distinct pattern of interaction with the local synagogue, its practice and its resources? Could Paul assume that many, even most, churches adopted synagogue readings practices? The answer to all these questions may well be Yes.

### **3.4. Synagogue as Model and Context for Emerging Christianity**

To what extent did early Roman Christians inherit and perpetuate practices of Scripture reading, study and prayer from Judaism? Wayne Meeks was perhaps first to compare systematically Paul's communities with a range of contemporary groups and organizations: the Roman *household*, the *voluntary association*, the *synagogue* and the *philosophic* or *rhetorical school*.<sup>70</sup> Various scholars have defended one or another of these groups as the best model for understanding the formation and identity of the earliest Christian churches.

Already in 1975 John Gager turned to the structure of the Diaspora synagogue for help in explaining early Christian use of scripture, leadership, liturgy and social order. More recently, both James Burtchaell and Judith Lieu have flagged the importance of the Jewish synagogue in the formation of Paul's churches. For Burtchaell, the relevant continuity concerns the officers presiding over the liturgy; for Lieu, the synagogal matrix of the early church was what encouraged the conversion of many Gentile "God-fearers" to Christianity.<sup>71</sup> In this context, the provocative thesis of Mark Nanos—that Romans

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<sup>70</sup>To Meeks' list we might add the secret societies that guarded the *ancient mysteries*. Cf. R. S. Ascough, *What Are They Saying About the Formation of Pauline Churches?* (New York: Paulist, 1998) and Bruce N. Fisk, "Paul: Life and Letters" in S. McKnight and G. Osborne, eds., *The Face of New Testament Studies* (Baker, 2004), pp.314-315 and sources in notes 120 & 121.

<sup>71</sup>J. G. Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1975); J. T. Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities* (New York: Cambridge, 1992); J. M. Lieu, "Do God-Fearers Make Good Christians?" in S. E. Porter, P. Joyce and D. E. Orton, *Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder* (Biblical Interpretation Series 8; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 329-

addresses (predominantly Gentile) Christians who continued to move in (predominantly non-Christian) Jewish synagogue circles-has encouraged us to consider ways the synagogue and its leadership may have continued to influence the Roman church for some time after the Christian gospel made inroads.<sup>72</sup>

Almost certainly, Jew-Gentile-Christian relations in Rome were complicated in more ways than we can imagine. If Gentile “God-fearers” in the Diaspora could display a “broad range of degrees of attachment” to Judaism,<sup>73</sup> a similar diversity likely marked Jewish-Christian relations in the period before the proverbial “parting of the ways.” One might imagine Jewish attitudes towards Christians falling on a continuum ranging from exclusion to embrace:

|                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hostile opposition and exclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• for theological reasons related to Gentile inclusion without circumcision, dining practices and the enforcement of food laws. (Ac 15: 1-2; 22-23)</li> <li>• for hermeneutical reasons related to the battle to interpret Israel’s scripture</li> <li>• for Christological reasons related to Jesus’ alleged status as Messiah</li> <li>• for political reasons related to the potential for conflict, political instability and Roman reaction</li> <li>• for cultural or linguistic reasons that have little to do with specifically Christian convictions</li> </ul> |
| <i>Ignorance</i>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>some were probably completely unaware of Jesus and the early Christian movement. (With perhaps 50,000 Jews in Rome, a few hundred Christians would amount to roughly 0.5%.)</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <i>Benign</i>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>some were physically / geographically / culturally distinct from the house</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

345. On the disputed category of ‘God-fearers’ (cf. Acts 10, 13, 16-18) within first century Judaism, see esp. J. A. Overman and R. S. MacLennan, eds., *Diaspora Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of, and in Dialogue with, A. Thomas Kraabel* (SFSHJ 41; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992); John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, 2000), 264-270. For a concise summary of the debate and references in both Jewish and Roman sources to the phenomenon, see J. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, xlvii-xlviii.

<sup>72</sup> M. Nanos, “The Jewish context of the Gentile audience addressed in Paul’s Letter to the Romans” *CBQ* 61 (2, 1999) 283-304, and idem, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 75, 84, 85-165. Nanos’ proposal thus moves beyond the consensus view, illustrated by J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, liii, that the Roman Christians “were not yet clearly distinguished from the wider Jewish community.”

<sup>73</sup> John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (Eerdmans, 2000), 270; J. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, xlvii.

|                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>indifference</i>                      | <p><i>synagogues / churches where Jesus' followers met.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>some were unable to meet together due to the physical constraints imposed by the meeting place</i></li> <li>• <i>some were unaware of significant differences between Jesus' followers and other sects in Rome, perhaps because many Christians adhered faithfully to all essential aspects of Judaism.<sup>74</sup></i></li> <li>• <i>some may have been inclined to co-exist with other, diverse and even conflicting expressions of Judaism</i></li> <li>• <i>some were disinterested because the Jesus movement represented such a small percentage of the synagogue population in Rome, and lacked the political clout of the older branches and sects</i></li> </ul> |
| <i>Sympathy, affirmation and embrace</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>because of geographical links to Palestine or approval of Jesus' teaching</i></li> <li>• <i>because Jesus' followers were turning Gentiles toward Israel's God</i></li> <li>• <i>some may have supported an inclusive, less nationalistic brand of Judaism</i></li> <li>• <i>some would have acknowledged that Jesus was Israel's Messiah.</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

As for Roman Christian attitudes towards Judaism, we might well imagine that followers of Jesus displayed a similarly broad range of perspectives. Given the cultural and theological diversity of their world, some Jews and God-fearers who felt drawn to Jesus Christ might have gathered in synagogues and homes to explore their new loyalties without ever realizing that their emerging convictions represented a direct challenge to the broader Jewish community.<sup>75</sup>

#### **4. The Answer**

We conclude with six broad statements that summarize our preliminary findings. It remains to be seen whether they will stand up to scrutiny and, if they do, how much exegetical payoff we should expect from them.

<sup>74</sup>On a "Judaizing Christianity" in Rome, see A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Reasons*, 51 who cites Ambrosiaster. Wedderburn counts Hebrews, if addressed to the church at Rome (Heb 13:24), as evidence that Christians in Rome were feeling drawn to abandon their loyalty to Jesus and fellow-Christians (10:25) by turning or returning to non-Christian synagogue attendance.

<sup>75</sup>J. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, xlvi.

- 4.1. Although most of Rome's many synagogues were located in the Trans-Tiber quarters, they differed widely in configuration (neighborhood? profession? origin?), practices, rituals and degree of openness to non-Jews and Christians.
- 4.2. There was no central rulership among Jews across Rome; each synagogue or prayer house had independent status and local leadership.
- 4.3. An impressive number of Gentiles were attracted, again in varying degrees (ranging from curiosity to conversion), to the beliefs and rhythms of Judaism. These adherents likely frequented-some perhaps even subsidized-synagogue buildings and attended religious services.
- 4.4. A central pillar of synagogue ritual in our period was the reading, study and (most likely) teaching of Torah. It is reasonable to assume the stability of additional elements including Haftarah readings, prayers and homilies.
- 4.5. Some scholars tend to overstate the ideological gaps between non-Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles in Rome during our period. For the years prior to Paul's Roman epistle, the burden of proof should probably be on those who wish to argue for a wide chasm between Jewish and (largely Gentile) Christian communities with little opportunity for mutual influence.
- 4.6. There is reason to suspect that prevailing synagogue patterns, including the public reading and study of Torah, influenced and shaped the culture of early Christianity in Rome. Gentile followers of Jesus would vary widely in their familiarity with Torah, depending on the resources, leadership and practice of various synagogues and depending on the extent, intensity and duration of their contact with a particular Jewish community.