

If not Christians, What?

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Default

This paper provides the Christianity Seminar with guidance in deciding what word(s) and or phrases to use to describe the early movement we have been studying and are writing about in *After Jesus before Christianity*. It draws and builds upon Hal Taussig's paper of last Spring 2019, "The (In)Appropriateness of 'Christian' in the First Two Centuries CE" and the votes taken at that time.

Hiding in plain sight is a problem that goes to the heart of understanding early Christianity. The problem: When did the Christians first think they were Christian? And there is a corollary: If it is not until later, what do we call "them" in the meantime? To understand this problem, we must untangle a large and knotted jumble of issues.

Modern scholarship has used the word "Christian" to describe the movement and religion that derives from Jesus. It describes who they were and are. If more precision is needed, one puts "Christians" in quotes or refers to "early Christians" or "medieval Christians." But the underlying assumption remains the same. There is a thing identifiable as Christian or Christianity from the beginning. The Christianity Seminar has directly and repeatedly challenged this assumption. The problem becomes, what do we call them or it?

Two Strategies

Two basic strategies traditionally have been employed for dealing with this issue. The first ignores the problem, while the second acknowledges the problem but pretends it does not matter. Both strategies have negative repercussions.

Paul the Christian

The assumption that Paul was a Christian bedevils the understanding of Paul. The fundamental methodological problem in Pauline studies is the unquestioned assumption that he was a Christian. By not questioning this assumption, the traditional meaning of Christian is automatically and unthinkingly read into the Paul's situation. This blocks his being a Jew. As Krister Stendhal long ago argued, Paul was not converted but called. Converted assumes that Paul changed from being a Jew to becoming a Christian. Called, which is Paul's language in Galatians 1:15, maintains that Paul belongs to the long line of Israel's prophets.

This fundamental distinction is shot through Pauline studies, obfuscating the real situation. The Christianization of Paul has distorted and hidden his essential Jewishness. The interpretation of Gal 2:14 provides a clear example. Paul accuses Cephas: "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you

compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (2:14 NRSV) Hans Deiter Betz's analysis of this passage in his influential Hermeneia Commentary *Galatians* is typical of the traditional understanding.

By changing back to the observance of Jewish custom and law, the Jewish Christians have only reversed their emancipation from Judaism. When they gave up the observance of the Torah, they also admitted that as a Christian one can be saved without the Torah. Returning to the Torah cannot simply eliminate that first step of denying the existence of Torah observance. (Betz, p. 112)

As Brigitte Kahl shrewdly notes about Betz's analysis, "to live like a Gentile" means "to live like Christian" (p. 30). Cephas's hypocrisy lies in asking Gentiles to live like Jews. Betz's interpretation keeps the traditional model firmly in place equating Gentile with Christian and understanding it as opposed to Judaism. Betz clearly sees Cephas and Paul at the meeting in Jerusalem abandoning Judaism in favor of Christianity, but then at Antioch Cephas reneges. However, the Christian assumption produces an inappropriate, anachronistic misreading of Paul. Paul did not convert from Judaism to Christianity nor did Christianity even exist at this period.

Moreover, Kahl notes, this reading destroys the rhetoric of Paul's argument. Since Paul is confronting Cephas face to face, we expect a strong rhetorical attack. Instead as Kahl remarks, "Paul all of a sudden becomes exceedingly polite, diplomatic, and pussy-footed." Instead of confronting Cephas, Paul gives him "a limp and very strangely worded applause for being a good Christian" (p 31) This misreading results from misunderstanding the Greek *ethnikōs* as "Gentile," i.e., Christian, not Jewish.¹

The rhetoric of Paul's argument suggests that *ethnikōs* should be understood in a negative sense as an insult to Cephas. This Greek word root does have a negative sense in the New Testament. A better translation would be, "If you, though a Jew, live like a one of heathen nations and not like a Jew, how can you compel the heathens to live like Jews?" Once the Christian assumption is challenged and replaced, a very different Paul emerges.

The deeply embedded assumptions of the signified "Christian" determines Betz's interpretation without his being aware of it. He assumes that Paul is a Christian, and therefore must reject Judaism. His interpretation is predetermined by using Christian without examining its presuppositions.

¹ The *OED* confirms this definition: "Of or pertaining to any or all of the nations other than the Jewish." The newer *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* adds the note about Christian: "a person of a non-Jewish nation or of non-Jewish faith *especially* : a Christian as distinguished from a Jew." Stanley, "Neither Jew nor Greek," has argued, "there was simply no such thing as a 'Gentile' in the ancient world" (105).

Christianity in the Beginning

A second strategy involves admitting the problem but denying that it has any effect. This strategy is evident in William Tabbernee's "Introduction" to *Early Christianity in Contexts* in dealing with what he takes to be the very beginning of Christianity. "Christianity began in Jerusalem with a group of Jewish followers of Jesus about 30 CE" (p. 21) and then immediately adds, "At the time, of course, Christianity was not known as 'Christianity.'" The author never addresses who they were known as or whom they might have thought themselves to be. Instead the broad brush of the signified Christian is used to wipe away the problem. Putting Christianity in scare quotes does not solve the problem. Tabbernee's strategy is also an interesting take on the master narrative. Christ does not establish the Christian church, but the anonymous "group of Jewish followers of Jesus," which represents the scholarly character of the volume in that it knows that the master narrative is problematic.² Yet the author does not reflect on the anomaly of the Jews founding Christianity, a religion that by dictionary definition is not Jewish, even anti-Jewish. What we see here is a modification of the master narrative, but the master narrative remains firmly in place. The thing called Christianity is there from the beginning.

Without critically examining the Christian assumption, one is trapped into the traditional understanding of "Christian." This assumption will inevitably insist that the problem is the founding of a new religion and see that new religion as distinct from Judaism. A more radical solution than scare quotes or modest tinkering with the meaning is necessary.

Dictionary as Signified

Because "Christian" and "Christianity" have the weight of tradition, some will argue that we must and should continue to use them as the generalized words for the phenomenon we are studying. But compromise is dangerous because of the way language operates. We must also ask more precisely, what does "Christian" mean?

Ferdinand Saussure's simple semiotic model works well to help us answer this question. The sign is made up of two parts—the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the physical sound, word, or image and the signified is the mental construct. The signified is a cultural-social construct that comes with a language system. What dictionaries do when defining a word is construct the signified. When the signifier "Christian" is employed, the signified is supplied by the English language.³ Let us see how this plays out.

² This might be because of Rudolf Bultmann's famous dictum: "*The message of Jesus is a presupposition for the theology of the New Testament rather than a part of that theology itself.*" *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:3.

³ The signified is the same in all modern Western languages.

The *Oxford English Dictionary*, generally considered the authoritative historical dictionary of the English language, offers a good guide to the signified of Christian. The first definition of the noun “Christian”⁴ is straightforward.

One who believes or professes the religion of Christ; an adherent of Christianity.

This definition from the latest online version of the *OED* was written by the dictionary’s first editor James Murray and published in 1889. The definition was not revised in the second edition of the *OED* (1989), nor in the new *OED* online, which is slowly but surely undergoing continuous revision. Murray’s definition bears a striking resemblance to Samuel Johnson’s definition of 1755 (*A Dictionary of the English Language*).

[A] professor of the religion of Christ.

The latest edition of *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary* (2020) is very similar

[O]ne who professes belief in the teachings of Jesus Christ

The *American Heritage Dictionary* (2012) follows in the same lineage.

Professing belief in Jesus as Christ or following the religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus.

This indicates a very stable definition and signified from Johnson in 1755 to today. The definition represents a certain common sense; of course, “Christian” has to do with “Christ.”

This almost makes the definition circular. In the case of both Johnson and Murray, the meaning of Christian was obvious. They lived in a Christian nation and empire. It was assumed. The definition of Christian is deeply imbedded with the religion of Christ. They are identical. This also implies that Christianity began with Christ.

Interestingly the *OED* definition of “Christ,” also written by Murray and not since revised, does not mention the Christian religion or Christ founding a religion. That is in accord with good dictionary practice, or otherwise the definitions would be truly circular.

The *OED* distinguishes two meanings. The first would appear to be the Jewish definition although it is not designated as such.

The Messiah or ‘Lord’s Anointed’ whose advent was the subject of Jewish prophecy and expectation.⁵

⁴ I am setting aside “Christianity” because its signified works out in an almost identical fashion.

The second definition refers to Jesus directly and has two subdefinitions:

- a. The title given to Jesus of Nazareth, as embodying the fulfilment of Messianic prophecy and expectation.
- b. Used as a common noun with reference to the character or office of the Christ as a divinely appointed Ruler and Saviour.

This second definition is in fact equivalent to the religion of Jesus.

There are several things to note about the *OED*'s definition of "Christian." As already noted, it identifies Christian and Christianity with Christ, not surprisingly. But it does this in a particular way. It implies or assumes that Christ is the founder of a new religion, which religion is based upon or starts with the life and teachings of Christ. This also implies a break with Judaism from the very beginning. It may not be explicitly supersessionist, but implicitly it is. The definition of Christian also harbors imperialist ambitions. Not only was it written in imperialist Great Britain, but it supports empire. As the fifth subdefinition of the adjective has it: "Human as distinguished from brutal." To be a Christian is to be "human" or civilized. So, there is a great deal lurking in the signified of "Christian."

The signified of the English signifier "Christian" is in full support of the master narrative of Christianity and is indeed a summary encoding of the master narrative. The signified of "Christian" is like the hole to Alice's wonderland—it opens up and implies the whole of the master narrative. The problem of dealing with the signified of Christian is difficult because it goes to the foundation of how language operates, and that operation takes place outside of our consciousness. It is nearly impossible to use the word "Christian" without invoking the master narrative. Therefore, we must look for some other alternative.

Essentialism

We face in this naming issue a methodological problem that has plagued our project and in my judgement is *the* key methodological issue we face. The naming problem unmasks the essentialist thinking that has determined the understanding of Christianity since at least Irenaeus.

For Plato the essence precedes or pre-exists existence. It is eternal, perfect, and changeless. What we see in this world is defective and error prone, yet it reflects that perfect other world. Our senses perceive these perfect forms but only in a reflected way. This model is often referred to as essentialism.⁶ When one says that Christianity was

⁵ But there is an interesting parenthetical phrase: "(Only in versions of the New Testament and direct references to it; in the Geneva and 1611 versions often preceded by *the*.)" This indicates the "Christ" as word only operates within a Christian context.

⁶ I dealt with this issue in my paper "What Categories are Left?" pp. 112-18, Fall 2014 Meeting of the Christianity Seminar.

founded in Jerusalem even though the word was not then in use, as Tabbernee did, that is essentialist thinking. The essence of Christianity was there before it was fully evident. A colleague asked me a couple of years ago, “if we can’t call it Christianity, what can we call it?” The “it” is the essence, essentialist thinking. There is no “it.” There are only peoples going about making meaning.

Dealing with this problem requires of us a whole new way to thinking. Irenaeus implanted essentialism in the DNA of Christianity, just as Plato has embedded essentialism into the DNA of Western thought. It constitutes a major struggle to free ourselves of this intellectual habit. Darwin showed the way when he defined a species (traditionally defined as an essence) as the characteristic of a population.⁷ We in the Christianity Seminar have been following this same trajectory in rejecting the master narrative of Christianity, seeing the essence of Christianity as there from the beginning, and studying instead how these various groups fashioned meaning and life within the world in which they lived. To fall back on any single word or phrase is most likely to fall victim to essentialist thinking. We need a variety of words or phrases.

Christianus/Christianos

Surely some will say, there were Christians in the first century. What about Acts 11:26, “at Antioch the disciples were first called Christians” (see also Acts 26:28). So, what’s the problem? There are three notable problems: the earliest extant usage of the word; how to translate the word; and what, exactly, the word might mean?⁸

Translation/Transliteration

The Greek word *Christos* translates the Hebrew word *Messiah*. Both words mean “anointed with oil.” In Greek this translation does not mean much because Greeks did not anoint their kings as did Hebrews, therefore *Christos* (Anointed) always reminds a Greek speaker that the term is a foreign, Hebrew title. Eventually the root meaning of “anointed” begins to slip away and *Christos* more or less becomes Jesus’ name without strong titular overtone. But it never completely loses the connotation of Anointed. But *Christos* becomes less important than other titles, especially *kurios* (lord) or *hyios* (son).

The Latin *Christus* is not a translation but a *transliteration*. The Latin simply takes over the letters of the Greek word, adding a Latin nominal case ending (-*us* for -*os*).

The Greek *Christianos* (“Christian”) uses the noun *Christ-* meaning “anointed” with the Latin adjectival suffix -*ian-*, indicating that it is a Latin loanword; -*os* is the Greek case ending.

⁷ Ernst Mayr, *What Evolution Is*, p. 75, argues that Darwin’s real intellectual breakthrough was his rejection of essentialism in favor of studying a population. Our way forward is exactly the same.

⁸ Taussig, “The (In)Appropriateness,” dealt with the usage of this word in the first and second century but did not deal with the issues of translation and meaning.

The Latin *Christianus* (“Christian”) employs the transliteration *Christ-* from the Greek *Christos*, plus adjectival suffix *-ian-* and the case ending *us*.

The English words “Christ” and “Christian,” through several intermediary languages, continue the transliteration initiated by Latin.

The transliteration produces a vacated signified, i.e., the signified can be filled with a new and different references. “Christ” no longer means “anointed” but as the *OED*’s second subdefinition of “Christ” in reference to Jesus indicates, “Used as a common noun with reference to the character or office of the Christ as a divinely appointed Ruler and Saviour.”

Several points to observe. The Latin loanword status indicates the word perhaps evolved in a Latin context. All the early uses also indicate that it is an outsider’s word, a type of nickname.

Earliest Usage

The dating of Acts has been in flux. Traditionally the author of Acts was Luke, a follower of Paul and thus Acts was written before the destruction of Temple, some argued even before Paul died, since the last chapter of Acts does not report Paul’s death. Critical scholarship denied Lucan authorship, although it has affirmed that the author of Acts is the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke. The generally agreed upon dating was somewhere around 85 CE. But that consensus has been challenged by Richard Pervo and the Acts Seminar’s dating for Acts of *circa* 125. The Christianity Seminar has accepted this conclusion. Thus, Acts is no longer the first extant occurrence. There are four other candidates for the honor: 1Peter 4:16, Didache 12:4, Ignatius, and Pliny the Younger.

Recent scholarship has increasingly dated 1Peter in the second century, perhaps as late 175, as Taussig did (p. 24). So, rule 1Peter out.

Didache is notoriously difficult to date, but the current version surely dates from after 125. Its knowledge of various New Testament writings, especially Matthew and Acts, clearly supports this later date. So, rule out Didache.

That leaves only Ignatius and the Roman writer and governor of Bithynia and Pontus, Pliny the Younger. Since Ignatius employs the term around 113-7 CE, Pliny writes in 111 CE using the term in Latin *Christianus*. Thus, the earliest extant usage is by a non-follower (he is not a pagan—such a designation is appropriate only much later) of Jesus. Furthermore, it is in Latin. Thus, *Christianos* is a second century usage and the earliest extant usage is not Greek but Latin. This is intriguing since the Greek word *Christianos* is a Latin loanword.

The earliest extant usage is in Latin, not Greek, and it is used by Pliny, an outsider, as an apparently bureaucratic term. Thus, the Greek *Christianos* probably is derived from the Latin. Furthermore, since the emperor Trajan replies to Pliny using the same term, it indicates that both Pliny and Trajan know its meaning. Therefore, we

obviously have here not the first usage. How much further the term goes back is hard to know, but probably not much before 100 CE, otherwise a usage would most likely have turned up.

Pliny's Letter to Trajan:

"It is a rule, Sir, which I inviolably observe, to refer myself to you in all my doubts; for who is more capable of guiding my uncertainty or informing my ignorance? Having never been present at any trials of Christians, I am unacquainted with the method and limits to the observed either in examining or punishing them (*Letters* 10:96

There are two problems in this translation. "Trial" is an over-translation. More exactly it is a questioning or investigation. "Trial of Christians" risks implying the later situation of the formal trials and persecutions of Christians. This over-translation demonstrates the subtle power of the master narrative. Pliny is a governor in a remote province of the Empire who is not quite sure what he is doing. Nothing particularly organized is going on here. His letter simply demonstrates the common brutality of the empire. The over-translation once more demonstrates how easily anachronistic assumptions can slip in

More importantly, the second problem is just what does *Christiani* signify? Certainly not Christian in the sense of an established religion nor in the sense of the signified of the English word Christian. The Latin adjectival suffix *-ian-* means "an adherent of" or "belonging to the party of." This same Latin adjectival form occurs in Mark 3:6 with *Hrōdianoī*, traditionally translated as "Herodians."⁹ A better translation of *Christiani* would be "adherents to the party of Christ." But "Christ" is also problematic because its English signified inevitably suggests a Christological assumption, which Pliny cannot have. So perhaps *Christiani* should be translated as "adherents of the Anointed." But since the Latin does not translate the signifier *Christos* but transliterates it, the most accurate translation is "Adherents of *Christus*" or "Party of *Christus*." The transliteration should be allowed to stand as a Latin transliteration.

The transliteration *Christus* makes little sense in Latin and I suspect Pliny understands it as a foreign Jewish sounding name. The translation of *Christiani* as "adherents or party of *Christus*" suggests that Pliny assumes the defendants belong to a Judean sect who are followers of a *Christus*. So rather than assuming these folks are

⁹ For the evidence, see Meier, "The Historical Jesus and the Historical Herodians." p 142, for the relatively infrequent use in Greek of this Latinized form in the early second century. Besides Herodians, there is also evidence for *Kaisarianoi* meaning sometimes Caesar's troops and at other times adherents or partisans of Caesar. Less frequently, *Pompeianoī* meaning adherents of Pompey. The adjectival form *-ianoī* becomes very frequent in later Greek.

Christians representing a new, non-Judean religion, he assumes they are a type or party of (maybe deviant) Judeans.¹⁰

“Adherent to the party of Christ” invokes the problematic vacated signified “Christ.” We must reiterate that the signified of the English signifier Christ does not correspond with the Greek signified of *Christos*. We should reject the continued convention of “Christ” as the English equivalent of the Latin transliteration of “*Christus*.” “Anointed” is the accurate translation of *Christos*. Once again, the signified of the English “Christ” is not the same as the Latin signifier *Christus* in the first two centuries. We should leave the Latin signifier as it is: *Christus*.

A New Translation

How do these new translations with their new meaning aid in understanding other early uses of *Christianos*?

Acts

Acts 11:25-6

Barnabas then went to Tarsus to seek out Saul, whom he located and brought back to Antioch, where they worked together in the community and instructed a huge number. Indeed, it was in Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first labeled adherents of the Anointed (*Acts and Christian Beginnings*, adapted).

Traditionally this has been the classic proof-text for “Christian.” The Acts Seminar’s translation reads “Christians” in quotes, whereas I have substituted “adherents of the Anointed.” The Acts Seminar’s putting “Christians” in quotes is an example of the second strategy dealt with above. The scare quotes indicate there is a problem, but then they go on as though it does not matter. *Christianoi* is not the author of Acts’ preferred term for the early community and here they are called *mathētai* (disciples, students, or followers). The Greek aorist passive infinitive implies this is a naming by someone else, not a name they claim. Interestingly, this naming is associated with reintroducing Paul back into the narrative. The Acts Seminar sees this usage of *Christianoi* as evidence that Acts was written in the second century (p. 136).

Acts 26:27-8

“Do you believe the prophets, Your Majesty? Of course you believe them.”

Agrippa replied, “Are you trying to make me an adherent of the Anointed in such short order?” (*Acts and Christian Beginnings*, adapted)

¹⁰ The problems with “Jew” and “Judaism” are parallel to those with “Christian” and “Christianity.”

The Acts Seminar translation used “Christian,” this time without quotes. This highly dramatic exchange between Paul and Agrippa involves Paul calling upon the prophets as proof for his claim that the Messiah must suffer and die. He does not quote any scriptures, but only insists that the prophets back this claim. Paul argues that he knows Agrippa believes the prophets, that is, he is a faithful Judean. A strong theme in Acts is that the followers of Jesus and Paul are faithful Judeans (e.g., Acts 24:14). So, Agrippa’s response does not have the sense of asking whether Paul is suggesting he should move *away from* being a Judean to join a new religion but make a move *within* Judeanism. Since Agrippa already believes in the prophets, he now should acknowledge that Jesus is the Anointed prophesied by those prophets. The traditional transliteration posing as a translation hides this dynamic and inserts the traditional Christian trope of conversion.

Tacitus

The Roman historian and senator Tacitus wrote his *Annals* around 116, shortly after Pliny’s letter to Trajan. In dealing with great fire in Rome during the reign of Nero, he mentions *Chrestiani* and *Christus*. There are numerous problems with this passage including the spelling. The best evidence appears to be that it is *Chrestiani* (acc. pl), and not *Christiani*. The *i/e* substitute is common.¹¹ Some have also argued that it is a later Christian addition to Tacitus’ text, but this argument has not found wide acceptance.¹² Assuming that it is original, it makes an interesting addition to our argument.

Tacitus reports that Nero affixed the blame for the fire on a group “loathed for their vices whom the crowd styled Christians” (Annals 15). He then goes on to note that the group was named for *Christus*. Our proposed translation for Latin usage of “adherents of *Christus*” or “adherents of *Chrestus*” works very well.

He also notes that this “pernicious superstition” had arisen first in Judaea, a clear indication that it is Judean and then spread to Rome, “where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue.” Tacitus was an upper-class snob. As much as he hates Nero, he hates these foreign superstitions even more. Referring to the adherents of *chrestus* as superstitious is a trope which Pliny also employs. Furthermore, this trope is often employed by Roman writers in reference to Judeans.¹³ This clearly ties *Christianus* to Judeanism.

A number of scholars have noticed that Tacitus associates *Christianus* with Judaism (in their terms), but then argue that his purpose is distinguish it *from*

¹¹ In the later third and fourth centuries various Latin followers of *Christus* would make a word play on *chrestus*, which means “good.” There is no evidence that Tacitus knows or intends the word play.

¹² John Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 1:168-171 deals with all the relevant issues.

¹³ Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia*, is the classic study on this topic.

Judaism.¹⁴ But it seems more likely that he is making a distinction *within* various types of Judeans. *Christianus* is type of Judean.

This passage also with Acts 11:26 is often used to prove that “Christian” and “Christianity” are established usage before 70 CE. What it really indicates is that Pliny, Tacitus, and the author of Acts share a common early second century Roman bureaucratic term.

Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr is an important character in the later construction of the master Christian narrative. He was born in Judea around 100 CE, converted to the Jesus movement, and became what would later be called the first apologist for the movement. (In the initial section of his *Dialog with Trypho* he gives a description of his education and his move towards the Jesus movement.) After experimenting with various philosophical schools, he eventually ended up in Plato’s camp. Significantly, while becoming a Jesus follower, he remained a Platonist, much like Augustine who converted to Christianity, while remaining a Neo-Platonist.

Writing somewhere between 147 and 160 CE, Justin is the first member of the Jesus movement to use *Christianos* extensively.

In the Spring 2019 Christianity Seminar Meeting, both David Wilhite and Robert Miller addressed Justin’s attitude to Judaism. Miller terms it “anti-Judaism,” while Wilhite terms it “de-Judaizing.” Employing the terms of Judaism and Christianity, both see Justin as seeking to replace Judaism with Christianity, what would later be called supersessionism. Wilhite compares Justin to Marcion and notes that while Justin is fiercely anti-Jewish, Marcion is not. Wilhite speculates that this is because Marcion from Pontus comes from a form of Christianity that does not know Judaism or Israel’s scriptures, that he only encounters those scriptures in Rome. Miller also notes that Justin, while opposing the Greek philosophers, does not attack them with the vitriolic antagonism with which he attacks the Jews. After all, the dialogue is with Trypho, a Jew, not with a Greek philosopher. Why is he not equally antagonistic to Greek philosophers?

Our suggested new translation of *christianos* with its new understanding helps at precisely this point. Justin, an adherent of the Anointed, is contesting with Trypho, the Judean, for the heritage of Israel. This comes out in his terminology. Judeans are “carnal Israel,” and the adherents of the Anointed are “spiritual Israel.” Being a Platonist, for Justin “carnal” is bad and “spiritual” is good. Israel’s scriptures look forward to Jesus the Anointed, so the followers of the Anointed are the true interpreters of those scriptures. Why? Because they have the “spiritual” (i.e. true) interpretation, while Judeans have the “carnal” (i.e., false) interpretation.

¹⁴ E.g., James Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, p. 56

It may be a quibble with both Wilhite and Miller, but Justin is not so much “de-Judaizing” or “anti-Jewish” as he is claiming his group his group is true to the heritage of Israel and the Anointed. He is attempting to erase the other Israel. Contesting for the correct interpretation of Israel’s heritage, a debate within Israel, is shifting into an effort to erase carnal Israel in favor of spiritual Israel. Justin still thinks that his group of adherents to the Anointed is within Israel, but it is Judean, the true, spiritual, i.e., real Judean. Trypho is a false Judean.

What to Call Them?

Hal Taussig in his spring 2019 Christianity Seminar Paper established the very infrequent use of *Christiano* in the second century. Because of its infrequent usage, to use Christian and Christianity as the primary terms to refer to the movement during the second century is inappropriate. This gives us three important reasons to reject its usage. First, its infrequent usage in the second century implies a uniformity that does not exist. Second, the signified of Christian invokes a field of meaning that is inaccurate and anachronistic. Third, it is part and parcel of essentialist thinking.

If we cannot call the folks in the first two centuries “Christians,” what can we call them? That is the question. There are several possibilities, all with problems.

Jesus Movement

Gerd Theissen popularized the term *Jesus movement* in scholarly circles to designate the group before it became identified as Christian. It is derived in English from the German title of his book *Die Sociologie des Jesusbewegung* (1977). Ironically the title of the English translation for his book missed the point: *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (1978). The two different titles demonstrate the difficulty of the problem and the resistance that will probably be met by any proposed change. It also underscores the importance of making the change.

There are several problems with Theissen’s proposed term. “Movement” may suggest more organization or unity than was present and Theissen and other scholars tended to limit the phrase to the first two generations.

I really do not think this latter point is critical. Our audience is not scholarly, so scholarly usage may not be a real issue. I think the first point is the more serious one. “Movement” suggests organization, unity, and directionality that oftentimes would be inappropriate, but that at other times would be appropriate. Therefore we should pay close attention to context.

Another problem is with the use of “Jesus.” Theissen saw this term as associated with the teaching of Jesus, as in the Q-folks and for some it conjures up the historical Jesus as opposed to the Christ of faith.

The problems with Theissen's proposal suggest that there are two aspects to consider. First, whether to use Jesus or Christ, and second what other noun should be used to produce an appropriate compound phrase?

Christ

Christ as in "Christ people" as a substitute for Christian has the advantage of echoing the word it is replacing. That is also its disadvantage. Christ suggests that the ultimate goal of the group or movement is Christological. The most serious and fatal problem for me is that the signified of "Christ" always implies the Christian religion and I see no way to explain this away. "Christ" is always a transliteration, not a translation. It simply will not do to say that we are not using the word in that way. Language does not work that way. The signified is a social cultural convention. Along this same line, for many of the general public "Christ" implies the divinity of Jesus. Remember, its signified was long ago vacated and refilled. And we are writing for the general public.

Using "Anointed," as the *Authentic Letters of Paul* did, might be a suitable workaround. Anointed has the advantage of being a translation and not a transliteration. We might consider something like "the people of the Anointed" or "Believers in the Anointed," as in the Pauline phrase.

Jesus

"Jesus" as the potential to be more neutral, not directly implying a Christological direction. This Christological lack is also viewed by some of the general public as denying the divinity of Christ, a frequent complaint if one speaks too much of Jesus. Jesus also implies the historical Jesus, which is clearly not a concern of the first two centuries. Even with its problems, Jesus seems workable.

Compounds

There does not appear to be one word that works best. The context should determine the emphasis needed. This suggests a variety of terms, used in both the singular and plural which would fit with the diversity of the first two centuries. Having worked through the four completed chapters of *After Jesus Before Christianity*, the following five words seem most appropriate:

- Adherents
- Followers
- Movement(s)
- People(s)
- Group(s)

Proposal/Protocal

- 1) The Latin *christianus* should be translated as "adherents of *Christus*."

2) The Greek *christianos* should be translated as “adherents of the Anointed.”

3) As Taussig’s paper argued, the adherents of the Anointed referred to and addressed themselves in a variety of ways. They did not settle on one term nor did they seem interested in settling on one term. Neither should we. *Where the document we are considering uses specific terms to refer to themselves or their readers, we should use those terms, e.g., Migrants in the case of 1Peter or Paul’s phrase “those who are in the Anointed.”* We should not bland out their variety with a single term. As Taussig has pointed out, when we set aside the generalizing “Christian” and look with new eyes, we will discover the whole variety of self-designations they employ.

4) *Where the writing under consideration gives us no lead, we should still use a variety of terms reflecting the diversity of intention of the first two centuries. Context should determine usage.* Thus, we can mix and match from column A and column B to the form the compound that best fits the context.

A	B
Anointed	adherents
Jesus	followers
	people(s)
	group(s)
	movement(s)

In the actual writing of the chapters for *After Jesus Before Christianity*, we no doubt will discover words to add to columns A and B.

These two paragraphs from early in the “Introduction” to *After Jesus Before Christianity*, demonstrate the variety and range of nuance possible.

The wildly different portraits of early **Jesus¹⁵ people** in the first and second centuries and who they are show how much is in flux—even in hot debate—among the **people who follow Jesus**. This is not the only surprising and confusing aspect of people connected to **Jesus movements**.

The wildly different portraits of early **Jesus groups** in the first and second centuries and who they are show how much is in flux—even in hot debate—among the **adherents of the Anointed**. This is not the only surprising and confusing aspect of people connected to the **Jesus movement**.

These two paragraphs from Chapter Six, “Gender and Jesus Peoples,” again illustrate the range of meaning possible with this method.

¹⁵ The editors had agreed to use “Jesus” until the Seminar had properly dealt with the problem now under consideration.

As case studies on gendered possibilities for authority and leadership in the early **Jesus groups**, *Gospel of Mary* and 1 Timothy are complete opposites. On the one hand, *Gospel of Mary* affirms that Jesus upheld women as equal, even superior, leaders. The goal of this **Jesus group** was the attainment of true humanity, outside of a male-female binary. On the other hand, 1 Timothy appeals to Genesis 2-3 to deny women any right to activity within the **Jesus groups**: women are to be seen but not heard, and preferably not seen, either. Surely 1 Timothy would fall into the category of “adversary” mentioned in *Gospel of Mary*!

What are we to do with these opposing writings when attempting to understand the **Jesus groups** of the first two centuries?

The shifting between singular and plural allows a precision and avoids lumping these very different groups into a generic one size fits all and asks the reader to view their separateness and difference. By shifting “groups” to “movement” or even “movements” in the second paragraph instead of remaining with “groups,” we would gain an even more precise level of nuance.

These four proposals require in our writing a level of precision and care of usage and meaning and nuance that the univocal Christian obscures and wipes out. This potentially is a real gain.

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