

The Politeuma in the Heavens and the Construction of Collective Identity in Philippians

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The letter to the Philippians is marked by two peculiarities, one of which is not shared with any of the other undisputed Pauline letters. Firstly, Paul does not address or refer to the Christ-followers here with the term *ἐκκλησία*.¹ Secondly, only in this letter does Paul refer to the *πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς* as the place where the Christ-followers are rooted. The omission of the term *ἐκκλησία* and the unique occurrence of *πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς* as collective label for the Christ-followers leads to the question whether some contextual factors lead to these peculiarities.²

Whatever the reasons, the question of how Paul addresses the Philippians and how he provides them with a sense of shared or collective identity needs to be considered, since the sense of collective identity is certainly also related to a name or label which designates a group as distinct from others. Concerning the importance of this, Philo had emphasized that “for in the destruction of the temple there is reason to fear that this man, so fond of

¹ The two instances where the term appears refer generally to Paul’s activity against them before he joined the Christ–movement (3:6); and in 4:15 he refers to other Christ–groups as *ἐκκλησία* rather than the Philippians. The other letter in which the recipients are not addressed or referred to as an *ἐκκλησία* is Romans.

² About the omission of *ἐκκλησία* see Kathy Ehrensperger, “Citizens of Heaven and Residents of Philippi but no *ἐκκλησία*?” in *Polis and Ekklesia: Investigations of Urban Christianity*. Vol. 3: *Roman Philippi*, eds. James R. Harrison and Larry L. Welborn (Atlanta: SBL, 2018), 63–78; for the wider Roman context see Yair Fürstenberg, “Introduction,” in *Jewish and Christian Communal Identities in the Roman World*, ed. Yair Fürstenberg (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1–24, and Sylvie Honigman, “The Ptolemaic and Roman Definitions of Social Categories,” in *Jewish and Christian Communal Identities in the Roman World*, 25–74.

innovation and willing to dare the most audacious actions, will also order the general name of our whole nation to be abolished” (ἅμα γὰρ τῇ τοῦ ἱεροῦ καταλύσει δέος μὴ καὶ τὸ κοινὸν τοῦ ἔθνους ὄνομα συναφανισθῆναι κελεύσει ὁ νεωτεροποιὸς καὶ μεγαλοουργὸς ἄνθρωπος [*Leg.* 194]). He implies that the destruction caused by the war against Rome was devastating enough, but the abolition of the name of the Jewish people would be even worse, as it would put them at risk of losing their sense of collective identity.

In this article I will focus on the unique term *πολίτευμα*, referring to the collective identity of Christ-followers in Philippians (3:20), exploring possible reasons and implications for the use of this term in the context of the colony. An indicator to this context may be found in the verses immediately preceding the use of the term, that is, in the reference to the “enemies of the cross of Christ” (3:18–19).³ I will demonstrate that these “enemies of the cross of Christ” are most likely non-Jews, and that Paul’s implicit warning to the addressees (v. 17) not to orient their behaviour on these is taken as an indication that contributes to the understanding of the peculiar use of *πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς* in this letter. I will explore the possible implications of the use of this label for the collective identity shaping processes for those from the nations in Christ in Philippi arguing that this points to a “small world” social network, not in opposition to Jewish groups but rather in analogy to these, a kind of cosmopolitanism within, but distinct from the ‘big world’ network or cosmopolitanism of the Roman Empire.⁴

The Enemies of the Cross — with Minds Set on Earthly Things

Since the assertion Paul gives to his addressees that they are rooted in a *πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς* is preceded by the reference to the “enemies of the cross of Christ” the question of the identity of these enemies seems paramount for understanding this collective identity term. They are characterized by a string of negative labels, not only are they “enemies of the cross of Christ,” but “their god is the belly, their glory (is) in their shame, their minds are set on earthly things,” and thus they are doomed to destruction. There has been a controversial debate about who these enemies might have been — whether they are the same as those

³ Cf. Also Mark D. Nanos, “Out-Howling the Cynics: Reconceptualizing the Concerns of Paul’s Audience from his Polemics in Philippians 3,” in *The People Beside Paul: The Philippian Assembly and History from Below*, ed. Joseph A. Marchal (Atlanta: SBL, 2015), 183–221.

⁴ On the importance of social networks for the transmission not only of goods but also ideas, see Anna Collar, *Religious Networks in the Roman Empire: The Spread of New Ideas*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 5–39.

labelled dogs, etc., in 3:2, mostly identified as Jewish or Judaizing Christ-followers, or whether there is another group of opponents in view here.⁵ In my view it is hardly credible to think of two or more problematic groups in Philippi. However, the arguments presented here for the identity of the “enemies of the cross” are not dependent on the identification of those people mentioned in v. 2.

When trying to identify the “enemies of the cross,” the Roman imperial perception of crucifixion is an important indicator in my view. Christ-followers were part of a group, which was inspired by someone who had been executed on a Roman cross. This could hardly be seen as an expression of loyalty to the hegemonic power of Rome. The cross was certainly a means to exercise terror over conquered provinces, which was precisely the purpose of the crucifixion of Jesus from an imperial Roman perspective. It is the perspective which Cicero summarized in *Pro Rabirio* 5:16 as follows:

The mere word “cross” should be removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen, but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears. For it is not only the actual occurrence of these things or the endurance of them, but liability to them, the expectation, indeed the mere mention of them, that is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man.

These “enemies” most likely are people who would not consider loyalty to someone crucified desirable. It has been argued that they might be former insiders who have turned away from the movement, especially with reference to the tears Paul sheds for them.⁶ This cannot be entirely ruled out, although the tears do not necessarily indicate emotional attachment. Tears shed by men in a public or semi-public situation in Greek, Roman, and later rabbinical tradition could express a number of different things, especially in the performance of speeches. In later Jewish tradition tears would be seen also as expressing aspects

⁵ E.g. Mikael Tellbe, “The Sociological Factors behind Philippians 3:1–11 and the Conflict at Philippi,” *JSNT* 55, (1994): 97–121. An alternative proposal has been suggested by Jerry Sumney, who agrees that there can hardly be two different groups of opponents in view, but he still sees those of v. 2 as possibly Judaizing non-Jews, and considers “the enemies of the cross” as identical with those of v. 2. Cf. Jerry L. Sumney, “Studying Paul’s Opponents,” in *Paul and his Opponents: Advances and Challenges*. ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 7–58.

⁶ Cf., e.g., Demetrius K. Williams, *Enemies of the Cross of Christ: The Terminology of the Cross and Conflict in Philippians* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2002), 210–17.

of the relationship to the divine.⁷ More likely than being an expression of personal sadness for these “enemies of the cross,” it is possibly an expression of being shaken by the thought that their behaviour inevitably leads to destruction.⁸ Paul may have hoped that he could convince them of the message of Christ, and may have been disappointed that he had not been able to do so. This of course implies that they were known to Paul and the Philippians; that they were part of the latter’s social context. As such they could either be former Christ-followers from the nations — or more likely godfearers, interested in this *εὐαγγέλιον*, but who had never turned entirely away from being loyal to other deities. These sympathizers or godfearers had some knowledge of Jewish tradition, but continued to practice their diverse ancestral cult traditions alongside some participation in and learning of Jewish teaching and practices.⁹ The earliest Christ-followers from the nations were most likely people who had some interest in Jewish traditions before hearing the message of the dawning of the messianic age in the Christ-event. It could well be that there were godfearers around the Christ-following group in Philippi who had not taken the step to exclusive loyalty to the one God Paul considered a non-negotiable dimension of becoming part of the Christ movement.

According to Paul the fate of “the enemies of the cross” is destruction (*τὸ τέλος ἀπώλεια*, 3:19). Now he never uses this term, nor the notion of destruction, for his fellow Jews who are not convinced by the Christ message, but only for non-Jews outside of the Christ-movement.¹⁰ As he notes e.g. in Romans, “All who have sinned apart from the law will also **perish** apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law” (“Ὅσοι γὰρ ἀνόμως ἤμαρτον, ἀνόμως καὶ ἀπολοῦνται, καὶ ὅσοι ἐν νόμῳ ἤμαρτον, διὰ νόμου

⁷ Hezser notes that “Although weeping and crying are universal expressions of emotion, their forms, contexts, and reasons are culture-, time-, gender-, and group-specific.” Hezser, Catherine, *Rabbinic Body Language: Non-Verbal Communication in Palestinian Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 219.

⁸ Cf Hezser, *Rabbinic Body Language*, 219–29.

⁹ Cf also Paula Fredriksen, “If it Looks like a Duck, and Quacks like a Duck....: On Not Giving up the Godfearers,” in *A Most Reliable Witness: Essays in Honor of Ross Shepard Kraemer*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey et al. (Providence, RI: Brown University, 2015), 25–33.

¹⁰ The use of *ἀπώλεια* in Rom 9:22 in my view is evidence that Jews are not yet in view here; the objects of wrath are those who confuse demons or images with God, hence their worshipping practice is wrong (Rom 1.23) .

κρίθῃσονται Rom. 2:12).¹¹ Jews who do not share in Paul's perception of the Christ-event are being judged in his view, but they are not being destroyed. Together with the label "enemies of the cross" this is an additional indicator that Paul has non-Jews in view here, as equally in the opening of the chapter in Phil 1:28, where he admonishes the addressees "to not be terrified by those who hold opposite positions, for them this is evidence of destruction, but of your deliverance, and this (comes) from God" (και μη πτυρόμενοι ἐν μηδενὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀντικειμένων, ἥτις ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς ἔνδειξις ἀπωλείας, ὑμῶν δὲ σωτηρίας, καὶ τοῦτο ἀπὸ θεοῦ).¹² Interestingly, in the previous verse 1:27, he admonishes them that ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε. There seems to be a connection between the terms used here with reference to destruction (1:27–28) and how the addressees should live their lives (πολιτεύομαι), and the reference to the "enemies of the cross" whose end is destruction (ἀπώλεια 3:18-19) which is followed by the assurance of the addressees belonging to a realm labelled πολίτευμα (3:20). I will come back to this below, but for now will continue to consider further indicators to the identity of the "enemies of the cross."

To refer to these "enemies of the cross" as those whose god is the belly may refer to a lack of self-mastery, or an attack on gluttony. It has even been suggested that Paul may have specifically Epicureans in view, or that these are such unspecific *topoi* that nothing really can be gained from these references except that these people oppose the Pauline stances or he opposes theirs.¹³ However, even though these are stereotypical *topoi*, they are used in a specific context for a specific purpose. Hence the fact that Paul argues from within Jewish tradition has to be taken into account. Karl Olav Sandnes, in his detailed study, has conclusively demonstrated that there is no evidence that the adherence to kosher laws was considered something like belly worship by

¹¹ Cf. also 1 Cor 5:5 (παραδοῦναι τὸν τοιοῦτον τῷ σατανᾷ εἰς **δλεθρον** τῆς σαρκός, ἵνα τὸ πνεῦμα σωθῇ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦ κυρίου); 1 Thess 5:3 (ὅταν Ἦ λέγωσιν· εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια, τότε αἰφνίδιος ἄ αυτοῖς ἐφίσταται) **δλεθρος** ὡσπερ ἡ ὠδὴν τῆ ἐν γαστρὶ ἐχούση, καὶ οὐ μὴ ἔκφυγῶσιν).

¹² Wojtkowiak also sees this as a decisive indicator for identifying who Paul has in view, and is of the opinion that they cannot be part of the community as this would contradict Paul's perception of *ekklesia* space as sin-free space. Members of the community would not be referred to in the terminology of destruction, hence they must be outsiders, in Wojtkowiak's view former Christ-followers, which would explain the emotional aspect here in the language of weeping. Heiko Woytkowiak, *Christologie und Ethik im Philipperbrief: Studien zur Handlungsorientierung einer frühchristlichen Gemeinde in paganer Umwelt*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 196.

¹³ Cf. Angela Standhartinger, "Join in imitating me' (Philippians 3:17): Towards an Interpretation of Philippians 3," *NTS* 54.3. (2008): 417–35, 429.

anybody at the time.¹⁴ So whatever the precise reference, the reference to the belly does not refer to Jewish practice. In conjunction with the other qualifications it rather forms a cluster of indicators pointing in a different direction.¹⁵

Sandnes has drawn attention to a number of Jewish texts concerning the belly. He notes that in 3 Macc 7:10–11, Jews who under the pressure of the Ptolemaic king had voluntarily been disloyal to their God and his law are characterized as τούς γαστρὸς ἔνεκεν τὰ θεῖα παραβεβηκότας προστάγματα (those who had for their bellies' sake transgressed the divine ordinances [3 Macc 7:11]). The non-observance of the Torah and disloyalty to God are here brought in connection with the belly rather than observance of food laws and loyalty to the one God. Although this narrative depicts the behavior of loyal and disloyal Jews in a situation of pressure, it needs to be noted that the topos of the belly refers to disloyalty to God.¹⁶

Interestingly Philo makes a similar connection in his interpretation of the Exodus narrative, where Egypt represents bodily desires, also in relation to food/meat, that is the belly (*Migr.* 14–15). This focus cannot be reconciled with loyalty to the one God (*Migr.* 18).¹⁷ Passover is thus described in analogy with this notion and in contrast to pagan *symposia* as a festival “not to indulge the belly with wine and viands, but to fulfil with prayers and hymns the custom

¹⁴ Sandnes, notes that “There is, however, no external support for this view; nowhere in Graeco-Roman or Jewish sources is the belly a reference to people who are devoted to Jewish customs in general and dietary laws in particular.” *Belly and Body in the Pauline Epistles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 145.

¹⁵ Cf. also Mark Nanos, “Paul’s Reversal of Jews Calling Gentiles ‘Dogs’ (Philippians 3:2). 1600 Years of an Ideological Tail Wagging an Exegetical Dog?” in id. *Reading Corinthians and Philippians withing Judaism. Collected Essays of Mark D. Nanos* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 111–41, 167–70.

¹⁶ As Sandnes notes, “Since New Testament scholars often take Paul’s belly-dicta as referring to observance of food laws, it is relevant to make a brief comment on this here. As we have argued, the relationship between the belly and dietary laws in this text by no means favours an identity between the two. On the contrary, 3 Macc 7:11 militates against such an identification. The belly is here the power which overturns the divinely given food laws. Since this text refers to transgressing the dietary laws, it is hardly a relevant analogy for Paul, who is supposed to be blaming those who continued to observe the food laws. From the perspective of this text, it is rather Paul who is a candidate for being called a belly-devotee.” *Belly and Body*, 100.

¹⁷ See references in Sandnes, *Belly and Body*, 112: *Migr.* 77, 151–2, 154, 160, 202; *Her.* 315–16; *Congr.* 83–4; *Agr.* 88; *Sacr.* 48; *Post.* 96, 155.

handed down by their fathers” (*Spec.* 2:148). This coheres with Sandnes’ observation of a clear association of true festivals being directed only and exclusively to God, with due adherence to the Torah, guided by self-mastery and restraint, thereby giving due honour to God alone. Pagan festivals on the other hand are perceived as the epitome of vice, including the uncontrolled lust of the belly and what is below (*Cher* 91–97).¹⁸ Sandnes argues, “To Philo, belly-devotion is not mentioned at random or by accident, it belongs to the very centre of what Jewish faith and piety are aimed at fighting.”¹⁹ Significantly the question of the belly is an issue of belonging. Belly devotion or enslavement are perceived to be a clear indication of an earthly identity, whereas self-mastery guided by the Torah is indicative of heavenly belonging (*Spec.* 4:112). In *Virt.* 175–86 Philo explicitly states that the relation to belly-based desires, that is belly devotion, is a sign of paganism, the belly thus being indicative of non-Jewish identity. The best way for non-Jews to master desires is by embracing Jewish tradition, that is, by a transformation of identity. The proselyte turns away from the “pleasures of the belly” (*Virt.* 182), from vice to virtue in that “participation in all other virtues must inevitably follow the giving due honour to the living God” (*Virt.* 181). As Sandnes notes, “the belly is the great divide between Judaism and paganism.”²⁰ If this can be established for Philo, the assumption that a similar implication is involved in Paul’s reference to the “belly” in Phil 3:19 is not too far-fetched.

This is supported by further examples. An indirect analogy to the relation between eating, drinking, and idolatry can also be found in the *Letter of Aristeas*. After an outline of idolatrous behaviour in 134–38 and the futility of worshipping created images and statues, it is argued that with reference to the Jews, “the leading Egyptian priests, having looked carefully into many matters, and being cognizant with (our) affairs, call us ‘men of God.’ This is a title that does not belong to the rest of mankind but only to those who worship the true God. The rest are men not of God but of meats and drinks and clothing” (*Ep. Arist.* 140). Although not explicitly mentioning the belly, Aristeas closely connects the mere “earthly” behavior of eating, drinking, and clothing with idolatry.

¹⁸ Sandnes notes that “In *Ebr.* 95–96, Philo returns to the disobedient son who adds sin to sin. His whole life is spent in endless drunkenness. Philo says that he makes a god of his body...which he immediately connects with the Golden Calf episode (Exod 32).” Sandnes, *Belly and Body*, 147.

¹⁹ Sandnes, *Belly and Body*, 113.

²⁰ Sandnes, *Belly and Body*, 120.

The conclusion from this overview must be that Jewish traditions concerning the belly point towards people who do not adhere to the Torah, who are not loyal to the one God, and are identified with the worshipping of other gods, that is people who are not Jewish. Even where inner-Jewish issues are presented as in 3 Maccabees, the concern represents the divide between Judaism and polytheism, as identified by Sandnes, rather than a derogatory presentation of Jewish tradition. If Paul really meant that adherence to food laws is identical to belly devotion he would have turned the prevalent Jewish notions upside down. Since Mark Nanos has conclusively demonstrated that this is not the case concerning the “dogs” in 3:2, it would be rather strange to find such a distortion here.²¹

Paul’s reference should be read in analogy to these Jewish traditions in the first place. As is evident, although gluttony and self-mastery are *topoi* prominently discussed in Greek and Roman discourses, they should here be understood primarily in relation to the Jewish cultural encyclopedia before considering what Greek Jewish literature also has in common with the Greek and Roman encyclopedias.²² The references to the “enemies of the cross” as seeking earthly things (τὰ ἐπιγεια, 3:19) in conjunction with the reference to belly devotion is very much in tune with Jewish perceptions of pagans noted above; and that their honour is in their shame could manifest the perverted perception of pagans, possibly godfearers who seek honour by honouring other deities, and thus in Paul’s perspective actually shame themselves.

The attraction to continued cult practice is not as strange as it appears when considered from the perspective of Greeks and Thracians in the colony. Since cult practice and political loyalty were one and the same in the period in question, the adherence to such practices could be seen as cohering with, and submitting to, the publicly displayed Roman dominance and ideology. In Roman perception in particular, such practice would be seen as a means to guarantee belonging to the colony. This is all the more true if we take into account that the *Colonia Julia Augusta Philippensis* was entirely Roman dominated, as architecture and inscriptions of the 1st century demonstrate. The institutions were in the hands of Roman citizens, who to a significant number were veterans or descendants of veterans. Thus, even though the majority of the

²¹ Nanos, “Paul’s Reversal.”

²² Cf. Kathy Ehrensperger, *Paul at the Crossroads of Cultures: Theologizing in the Space-Between* (London, New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 39–62.

population was Greek and Thracian,²³ the power of definition, politically, socially, and ideologically, was entirely in Roman hands. There is no evidence for a Greek elite as in some Greek cities under Roman rule, or evidence of Greek perceptions of events of the time. So from the earliest time of Christ-following groups in Philippi there is no evidence for any public agency from a Greek or Thracian perspective. It seems that the local population suffered the fate of colonized people. They lived under the condition of Roman rule, without any possibility to participate in civic public life, economically under pressure (cf. Paul's reference to the poverty of those in Macedonia 2. Cor 8:1-2),²⁴ and faced with the ever-present affirmation of Roman power and glory in the visual display of inscriptions and statues. Since Roman citizenship is attested in many inscriptions a need to assert this privilege possibly over against the local population might have existed in the colony. It highlighted that those so honoured had their place of belonging not in this conquered region but at the centre of power, the sacred city of Rome itself. Thereby those holders of Roman citizenship could consider their realm of belonging as being in another world than the world of their everyday life; they could see themselves as belonging to the centre of the realm perceived as having been favoured by the gods, evident in the hegemonic power of Rome.

Participating in this privileged realm, even if only as second-class inhabitants of this colony, could hardly be avoided, and to a certain extent might even have been attractive for the local Greek and Thracian population. They might have considered it beneficial to participate in a realm where peace, well-being, and liberation were promised by the guarantors of Roman rule. Hence in order to have at least some access to these benefits, participation in the official cults could be desirable, even if alongside these, local cults of course flourished, as long as they did not clash with Roman interests. Maintaining peace with the gods — local and Roman — through the demonstration of loyalty to them was considered paramount to being loyal to Roman rule.

The specific reference to the “enemies” as “enemies of the cross of Christ,” their devotion to the belly and earthly things, and their status as colonized people indicates that they most likely are and remain loyal to other deities. They remain or try to become embedded in their local social networks

²³ Cf. Peter Oakes, *Philippians: From People to Letter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 55–76.

²⁴ Robert Brawley, “An Alternative Community and an Oral Encomium: Traces of the People in Philippi,” in *The People Beside Paul: The Philippian Assembly and the History from Below*, ed. Joseph A. Marchal (Atlanta: SBL, 2015), 223–46 (225–29).

and they try to remain or become related to the big global, social, political, and cultic network of Rome that spans the Mediterranean, possibly hoping to gain benefits by belonging to this network despite their most likely non-elite status. The addressees from the nations are being warned that they should not orient themselves on such people who continue to be involved in the hegemonic power system by participating in pagan cult practices.

Since the identity of the “enemies of the cross” can be established with reference to Jewish traditions, it is evident that the assertion of belonging to a *πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς* should also be seen in relation to these in the first place. It is to such Jewish narratives and discourses of belonging that I will now turn to explore in what sense they could have served as possible analogies for Paul’s discourse of belonging for the Christ-followers from the nations in Philippi.

To Be and Not to Be — Part of “this World”: Jewish Negotiations of the Roman Empire

Despite the fact that Jews were certainly part of the cultural and socio-political world of the Roman Empire and Greek culture in the late Second Temple Period of the Western Diaspora and as well as Judea and Galilee, the Greek Jewish traditions that evolved are not primarily, and in all instances, evidence of assimilation but indicate rather sophisticated ways of playing and not playing the game of acculturation, as Tessa Rajak has called it.²⁵ The Jews thereby maintained their distinct identity and their small world networks of social, cultural, and economic exchange within the global network of the Roman Empire.²⁶ A clear distinction is made in Jewish discourses between this global empire, its hegemonic power, its claims to superiority due to divine election, and its ideology of eternal rule on one the hand, and Jewish perceptions of the world as ruled by their God, the creator of the universe, on the other. Although to some extent Roman rule is accepted, and cultural traditions are appropriated, these are hardly ever entirely embraced, certainly not as granted by their gods, or God. Critical distancing from Roman claims can also be formulated by Greek writers. Dionysius of Halicarnassus challenged Roman claims to divine favouritism stating that “she (Rome) in the course of time arrived at world domination, and this not through reference for the gods and justice and every other virtue, but through some chance and the injustice of Fortune, which

²⁵ Tessa Rajak, *Translation and Survival: The Greek Bible of the Ancient Jewish Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); cf. also Maren Niehoff who affirms that “being influenced by Greek literature is not tantamount to adopting Greek identity,” Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 135.

²⁶ Cf. Ehrensperger, *Paul at the Crossroads of Cultures*, 105–38.

inconsiderately showers her greatest favours upon the most undeserving.”²⁷ This counters claims such as those formulated by Cicero who asks, “who, once convinced that divinity does exist, can fail at the same time to be convinced that it is by its power that this great empire has been created, extended, and sustained?... but in piety, in devotion to religion, and in that special wisdom which consists in the recognition of the truth that the world is swayed and directed by divine disposal, we have excelled every race and every nation.”²⁸

It should not come as a surprise that, for instance, Philo also presents a critical attitude to such Roman claims. Already Erwin R. Goodenough was of the view that Philo could not speak openly, having instead to be realistic as far as Roman domination is concerned.²⁹ Philo does not often directly refer to the Roman Empire or Rome, and hardly mentions Roman customs, laws, or characteristics as he does with Greek, Egyptian, Persian, or Chaldean traditions. Only in *In Flaccum* and the *Legatio ad Gaium* are Rome or Roman protagonists directly in view. It is necessary to read Philo between the lines to arrive at an understanding of his attitude to Roman rule. Thus, although Philo praises the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius as representative of rulers who respect Jewish “rights,” this is actually an indirect critique of the current ruler Caligula who does precisely the opposite.³⁰ Philo may have appreciated the relative stability provided by Roman rule, but he never affirms Roman claims that their rule was the result of divine providence. Divine providence (*πρόνοια*) rather sustains, and provides for the functioning of the universe, caring especially for the well-being of the Jews.³¹ It is never mentioned in relation to any other people but the Jews, who are protected by God when they are put at risk by the Romans (*Legat.* 220). Thus, Berthelot concludes that “Philo never writes that God helped the Romans conquer so vast an empire, that it was achieved by His will, that He stood by their side, or anything of the kind.”³²

²⁷ *Ant. Rom.* 1.4.2, trans. E. Cary, LCL.

²⁸ *De haruspicum responsis* 19, trans. N. H. Watts, LCL 339–40. Further examples could be noted here as, e.g., Aelius Aristides’ Panathenaic Oration; cf. also the discussion in my *Paul at the Crossroads of Cultures*, 77–90.

²⁹ Howard L. Goodhart, and Erwin R. Goodenough, *The Politics of Philo Judaeus: Practice and Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938).

³⁰ This has already been argued by Goodenough, *The Politics of Philo Judaeus*, 10–11 and 19–20.

³¹ See, e.g., *Sobr.* 63, *Her.* 58, *Decal.* 58

³² Katell Berthelot, “Philo’s Perception of the Roman Empire,” *JSJ* 42 (2011): 166–87, 179.

Whatever the Romans had achieved was granted to them by Fortuna (τύχη) in Philo's view, a view similar to that of some Greek authors implying that there is no intrinsic value to what has been granted by her. What has been granted by Fortuna has nothing to do with God's will. Power over others granted by her should never be misused, since all human beings are created equal, hence "this gift of Fortune is against Nature and against the standard of justice in the law of God."³³ If Roman rulers misuse their power over Jews they are implicitly presented as actually acting against God's law. Implicitly challenging Rome are also Philo's references to the *topos* of the instability of empires. In *De Iosepho* he mentions the passing rule of Egyptians, Persians, Parthians, and Macedonians but avoids to refer explicitly to Rome. He nevertheless implicitly indicates that the Macedonians have now been subdued and pay tribute imposed on them by their masters, which is in fact an indirect pointer to Rome. Philo concludes, "so much do human affairs twist and change, go backward and forward as on the draught-board."³⁴ Even more explicit is his uptake of the traditional *topos* of passing empires in *Quaest. Gen.* 4.43:

...when the Persians ruled land and sea, who expected that they would fall? And again, when the Macedonians (ruled)? But if anyone had dared to say so, he would most certainly have been laughed at as a fool and a simpleton. And no less necessary a change awaits those nations that opposed them, though they have become illustrious and conspicuous in the meantime; so that those at whom (others) laughed are beginning to laugh (at them), while those who laughed are becoming (an object of) laughter for thinking that things which are by nature mobile and changeable are immobile and unalterable.

The reference to "those nations that opposed them" can hardly mean anybody other than the Romans. And although this is not something that could be formulated in plain speech at the time, it is evident that Philo does not buy the ideology of the divinely ordained Roman hegemonic power with its claim to last eternally.

The critique is even more explicit if Rome is considered to be in view in *De Planatione* 67–68, where Philo critically refers to the "proud boasting" of those who have acquired imperial power, bringing city, country, nation, or even all the earth's regions under their control. Even if these boasters extended their

³³ Berthelot, "Philo's Perception," 180.

³⁴ *De Iosepho*, 136.

empire to the realm of the upper air (an entirely impious idea), they would be nothing but ordinary citizens compared with “great kings who received God as their portion; for the kingship of these as far surpasses theirs as he that has gained possession is better than the possession and he that has made than that which he has made.”³⁵ The Jews are those who have received God’s portion, superior in their kingship to Roman rule. Although messianism is not Philo’s topic, there are indications that he nevertheless anticipates that Israel will not be subordinate forever. He can refer to Israel as a lily which will blossom when the other flowers have faded away (*Quaest. Ex* 2.76). The spiritual visions expanded in *De Praemiis et Poeniis* cannot be reduced to the level of the soul but keep the concrete socio-political dimension in view. Similar to the Animal Apocalypse of Enoch (*1 En.* 85–90) and other Jewish writings, the punishment of the nations who had oppressed the Jews is certainly in view also in Philonic writings.³⁶

Roman rule not only could cause problems for Jews at the socio-political level, but the claim to be the people, divinely ordained to rule the world forever clashed diametrically with Jewish perceptions of the world as God’s and of their specific role within the purpose of their God. This tradition was prone not to buy into Roman ideology and constituted by its mere existence an implicit counter-narrative to Roman claims.³⁷

³⁵ “Let those cease their proud boasting who have acquired royal and imperial sway, some by bringing under their authority a single city or country or nation, some by having over and above these, made themselves masters of all earth’s regions to its fullest bounds, all nations, Greek and barbarian alike, all rivers and seas unlimited in number and extent. For even had they, besides controlling these, extended their empire, an idea which it were impious to utter, to the realm of the upper air, alone of all things made by the Creator to enjoy a freedom untouched by bondage — even then, they would be reckoned ordinary citizens when compared with great kings who received God as their portion; for the kingship of these as far surpasses theirs as he that has gained possession is better than the possession, and he that has made than that which he has made.” *De Plantatione* 67–68.

³⁶ E.g. *Praem.* 115.

³⁷ As noted above, of course there were others who distanced themselves from the Roman claims, but this was mainly so in terms of philosophical arguments or critical stances against particular rulers. (Cf. James Harrison, *Paul and the Imperial Authorities at Thessalonica and Rome* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011], 177–85). In the case of the Cynics which are often referred to as such a group, I am cautious in attributing too much weight to them for a number of reasons I can only mention briefly here: the actual evidence for their significance is rather sparse in that the texts that refer to them or discuss them date between three to five hundred years after their claimed existence; the reports are legendary and fit the image of a polarising agenda for contemporary purposes of the later writers. Thus their teaching has to be reconstructed from fragments, as part of

However, a counter-narrative is not necessarily counter-cultural. As in Philo and other writings, this alternative narrative, this alternative symbolic universe could be expressed in relation to Greek and Roman cultural concepts, without weakening the sense of Jewish identity as distinguishably different. This alternative perception of the world, under the providence of the one God had social implications of course — and their existed together with this alternative narrative or symbolic universe a social network throughout many parts of the Roman Empire and beyond through which Jews in the Diaspora, east and west and in Judea and Galilee, were continuously connected and in constant contact, exchanging information, goods, support, etc.³⁸ Jerusalem may have been geographically distant, but was mentally very present as the center of the world for Jews.

Thus, there existed a Jewish narrative, which claimed that Rome was not the entire “world” nor did it rule eternally, but was an empire for a limited time only. For them the real rulership was not in the hands of Rome, but God’s, and their ultimate loyalty not to the Roman emperors but only to their God. He was the Creator of the universe; the order he had set was the order of the “kosmos.” He was the overarching parameter on which they oriented themselves, putting some critical distance to any claims of earthly power.

But the “world,” kosmos or mundus, was the claimed horizon of imperial power. Narratives and philosophical discourses considered the position of humans (free-born educated men) in relation to this worldwide network dominated by Roman rule. Since free-born Roman male citizens were part not only of their local networks, but with the expansion of Roman rule eventually of “the world,” concepts of citizenship as a citizenship of the “world”/kosmos/mundus (κοσμοπολίτης/mundanus) were appropriated also in

Stoic texts in particular. This teaching, and the claims about the Cynics, do not refer to a communal movement or a communal organization; it rather relates to the individual and concerns the finding of a happy life. Rather than seeing the Cynics as the direct target of Paul’s warning against “dogs” in Phil 3:2, I think that there were ideas “in the air” alongside others which may or may not have resonated with Paul’s arguments here. Cf. also Lukas Bormann, *Philippi. Stadt- und Christengemeinde zur Zeit des Paulus* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 148–49.

38 Cf. Anna Collar, “Rethinking Jewish Ethnicity through Social Network Analysis,” in *Network Analysis in Archaeology: New Approaches to Regional Interaction*, Carl Knappett ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 223–245. More generally see Greg Woolf, “Only Connect? Network Analysis and Religious Change in the Roman World,” *Hélade* 2.2 (2016): 43–58.

Stoic philosophical discourses in early imperial Rome.³⁹ Significantly such cosmopolitan concepts enabled imperial rulers to bind local elites into their networks of power, bridging gaps of distance and difference. However, it needs to be noted that cosmopolitan notions served precisely the purpose of integrating local elites into the system of imperial rule. As such it was an elitist notion serving the maintenance of power over vast geographical territories.⁴⁰

Philo taps into such discourses, and takes up the notion referring to Adam or Moses as *κοσμοπολίτης*. But it has been noted that Philo uses “Stoic vocabulary and themes as philosophical building blocks, but did not seek to record Stoic doctrine.”⁴¹ Thus he distances himself from certain Stoic cosmopolitan perceptions when he states that:

For some men, admiring the world itself rather than the Creator of the world, have represented it as existing without any maker, and eternal; and as impiously as falsely have represented God as existing in a state of complete inactivity, while it would have been right on the other hand to marvel at the might of God as the creator and father of all, and to admire the world in a degree not exceeding the bounds of moderation. (*Opif.* 7)

Philo’s notion of the *κοσμοπολίτης* implies someone who adheres to the Torah in a perfect way, the Torah being seen as identical with the law of this perfect world as created by God.⁴² The universe of this *κοσμοπολίτης* is ordered according to the Torah, rather than by Roman Law or rulership. Hence he is a citizen of a non-imperial world, a citizen not of this “world” in that sense. The *κοσμοπολίτης* of Philo is actually at least in tension if not in opposition with the imperial order in that he actually orients himself not on imperial rule and the divine claims associated with it, but on the Torah and the God who gave his

³⁹ Cf. discussion in Daniel S. Richter, *Cosmopolis: Imagining Community in Late Classical Athens and the Early Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 87–134.

⁴⁰ Cf. Myles Lavan, Richard E. Payne, and John Weisweiler, eds. *Cosmopolitanism and Empire: Universal Rulers, Local Elites and Cultural Integration in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 8–12, 22–25.

⁴¹ Tamara T. Chin, “What is Imperial Cosmopolitanism? Revisiting the Kosmopolitēs and the Mundanus,” in *Cosmopolitanism and Empire: Universal Rulers, Local Elites, and Cultural Integration in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*, 129–51, 134.

⁴² *Opif.* 3:142, 143.

people this gift.⁴³ To be a cosmopolitan in Jewish tradition according to Philo means being part of a world which differentiates itself from imperial rule. It means to be part of a particular people and its particular social and symbolic universe, including its small social network. When it is claimed that the particular guidance given to the people Israel in the Torah is actually the order of the universe, of course a universal claim is made. But it is one that does not abstract from the particular since it is rooted in this specific tradition.⁴⁴

For Philo, and most likely not only for him, Jewish identity was rooted not in this world of Rome but in another realm, the realm of God.⁴⁵ This was their realm of belonging, and rooted in this realm they had negotiated their way of life under the changing conditions of different empires. This was not something new for them; Jews had to negotiate their way of life under similar conditions since the Babylonian conquest at least. There were variables of course due to different conditions under each rule, but the principle of playing and not playing the game of acculturation had been part of their tradition for centuries.⁴⁶ The conditions under Rome for them were merely a variation of that game. They had learned to retain their loyalty to God and live according to the guidance provided by him despite divergent, hegemonic claims at the military, political, as well as ideological level by powers under whom they were forced to live.

⁴³ On Philo's acculturation and distancing cf. also Seth Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 42–44.

⁴⁴ Cf. Chin, "What is Imperial Cosmopolitanism?," 136.

⁴⁵ Although different and at a later period, also in Josephus this trajectory of critical distancing can be found. Cf. John Barclay, *Against Apion. Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, Vol 10*. (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Tessa Rajak, "Friends, Romans, Subjects: Agrippa II's Speech in Josephus's *Jewish War*," in *Images of Empire*, ed. Loveday Alexander (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 122–34. Despite temporary Roman rule which Josephus attributes to God's will, he affirms that "the providence of God is concerned to preserve them from such a misfortune; nor will it permit any such calamity to come upon them whereby they may all perish; but some small misfortunes, and those for a short time, whereby they may appear to be brought low, may still befall them; but after that they will flourish again, to the terror of those that brought those mischiefs upon them" (*Ant.* 4.128). The Jews are and remain "beloved of God" (θεοφιλεῖς *BJ* 5.381).

⁴⁶ Cf. Rajak, *Translation and Survival*, 125–209.

They were organized socially in different ways in different parts of the Roman Empire, as associations possibly in some areas, as *politeumas*⁴⁷ in others, gathering in assembly halls, houses, and purpose-built buildings called *proseuche* or synagogues.⁴⁸ Their sense of belonging did not depend on the particular form of organization, but decisive for all of them was the relation to their God and living according to Torah. They were his people and he was their God. This was critical for their collective identity, and this was their bond of belonging. It was not rooted in this earthly realm but in the heavenly realm, wherever they lived. This does not mean that their way of life was identical everywhere at all times. Local traditions, formed in interaction with their cohabitants around the Mediterranean and the Ancient Near East of course led to different forms of a Jewish way of life, like today. Greek traditions and Aramaic traditions were not identical, but also not detached.⁴⁹ To be a *κοσμοπολίτης* in this tradition implies to be rooted in the world seen as God's creation, created in diversity, not in sameness. Hence this cosmopolitanism is a cosmopolitanism of particularity and diversity. It could also be called the cosmopolitanism of the small world which, to maintain its network of connections and communication, made use of the media and networks of the big world of Rome, and beyond.

The material and literary evidence of Jewish presence and travels in many parts of the empire attests to their ability (like that of other minorities) to use the "global" network of roads, bridges, and the relative security of the sea, which in the first instance were built and secured to facilitate movements of the Roman legions,⁵⁰ for their own good.⁵¹ This is also Paul's world, the world to which he belonged. In that sense he can be called a *κοσμοπολίτης* of the small-world network who perceived the world in a vein similar to Philo's *κοσμοπολίτης*.

⁴⁷ See James M.S. Crowley, Klaus Maresch, eds. *Urkunden des Politeuma der Juden von Herakleopolis* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2001); Sylvie Honigmann, "Politeumata and Ethnicity in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt," *Ancient Society* 33 (2003): 61–102.

⁴⁸ Cf. Anders Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue: A Socio-Historical Study*. (ConBNT 37; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001); Anders Runesson, Donald D. Binder, and Birger Olsson. *The Ancient Synagogue: From its Origins to 200 c.e. A Source Book*. (AJEC 72; Leiden: Brill, 2008).

⁴⁹ Cf. e.g. Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁵⁰ Collar, *Religious Networks*, 46–53.

⁵¹ Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Collar, *Religious Networks*, 146–223.

An Alternative Realm of Belonging — for Christ-Followers from the Nations

The fact that Paul could travel vast distances in the eastern Mediterranean is due to precisely these small-world networks of Jewish communities who made use of the big network for their own purpose. And as much as this existing Jewish small-world network provided the means and template for Paul's travels to bring about the *ὑπακοήν πίστεως ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν* (Rom 1:5), so too did the notion of an alternative realm of belonging provide a template for those who were now also considered people of God, but as representatives of the nations, through Christ.⁵²

Although it is of course important to consider Paul's reference to the *πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς* in the context of its use in the public realm, especially of Greek cities under Roman domination in the first centuries, I am not concerned here with a precise definition of the term,⁵³ but for the purpose of this paper will

⁵² Cf. William S. Campbell, *The Nations in the Divine Economy. Paul's Covenantal Hermeneutics and Participation in Christ* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2018), 225–97.

⁵³ Whether *πολίτευμα* refers to citizenship per se or rather to a communal body is controversially debated. Arzt–Graber has argued that here the term means “citizenship.” Peter Arzt–Graber, “Die Stellung des Judentums in neutestamentlicher Zeit anhand der Politeuma–Papyri und anderer Texte,” in Jens Herzer, ed., *Die Auslegung des Neuen Testaments im Lichte der Papyri* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2013), 127–58. Niebuhr is of the view that for Paul it has its origin in the Jewish *πολίτευμα* concept (Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, *Heidenapostel aus Israel: Die jüdische Identität des Paulus nach ihrer Darstellung in seinen Briefen* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992], 102). Angela Standhartinger has recently presented strong arguments against the notion of citizenship implicit in the term, noting that according to political theory and practice of antiquity the term designates a body of citizens with political rights. Belonging to a *πολίτευμα* implies “per definitionem” that the person is actively involved in the politics of the respective group: Angela Standhartinger, “Apocalyptic Thought in Philippians,” in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Tradition and the Shaping of New Testament Thought*, Benjamin E. Reynolds, Loren Stuckenbruck, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 233–43, 239. Wojtkowiak argues that it can be translated as both “*Gemeinwesen*” or “*Bürgerschaft*,” which in his view does not exclude the notion of citizenship. Heiko Wojtkowiak, *Christologie und Ethik im Philipperbrief: Studien zur Handlungsorientierung einer frühchristlichen Gemeinde in paganer Umwelt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 209. For an in-depth analysis of the function of the concept see also Thomas Kruse, “Ethnic Koina and Politeumata in Ptolemaic Egypt,” in *Private Associations and the Public Sphere*, Vincent Gabrielsen, Christian A. Thomsen, eds. (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 2015), 270–300. The main point for my argument is the expression of a place of belonging; whether this is expressed as citizenship or a form of accepted civic

focus mainly on the aspect of collective belonging which resonates with various aspects and uses of the term apart from its precise legal implications in specific places. However, I think Sanger’s description of the range of meanings is helpful to be remembered here:

The word *politeuma* is frequently used in the Greek language, and has a wide spectrum of meanings. It can, for instance, refer to a “political act” or appear as a term for “government,” “citizenry,” or “state.” As a technical term *politeuma* can, in the context of a Greek city-state or *polis*, also refer to the political leading class of citizens as a sovereign body with specific rights. Therefore, in an oligarchic constitution the word refers to a section of the citizenry; in a democratic one to the entire citizenry. However, the word, as a technical term, is not just restricted to the political organization of a classical Greek *polis*, but can also be applied to name a specific and organized group of persons within an urban area. In this context we are dealing, apart from one exception (namely a *politeuma* of soldiers in Alexandria [...]), with minorities whose ethnic designation is pointing to a migrant background. The members of such a *politeuma* were concentrated in a certain district of a town, which was initially foreign to them and where they lived as an ethnic community.⁵⁴

This description indicates that the term can refer to a corporate entity within a wider entity. Paul would most likely have been familiar with such a concept, even if not with the technical details. In certain cities, as is evident from the documents of Herakleopolis concerning the Jewish *politeuma*, this was a known form of collective belonging, whatever the precise legal details. There are two aspects which might explain the use of this term in relation to the Philippians. One is specifically local; the other has its roots in the Jewish small-world network or cosmopolitanism depicted above.

organization, the crucial point is that with the term *πολιτευμα* a collective aspect of belonging is expressed.

⁵⁴ Patrick Sanger, “The Politeuma in the Hellenistic World (Third to First Century B.C.): A Form of Organisation to Integrate Minorities,” in Julia Dahlvik, Christoph Reinprecht, and Wiebke Sievers, eds. *Migration und Integration: Wissenschaftliche Perspektiven aus sterreich* (Vienna: KMI, 2013), 51–68, 52.

a. *The Local Context*

In the first century the Greek and Thracian population was excluded from citizenship in their own city; city citizenship in Philippi was bound up with Roman citizenship, that is, citizenship in a city far away, through the allocation of the Roman citizens resident in Philippi to the *tribus Voltinia*. One could only be a *civis Philippensis* as a *civis Romanus*, thus the citizenship in the city of Philippi had its roots, or origins in another place, in a city some distance away, possibly unfamiliar to many of its colonial citizens. This was combined with the *ius Italicum*, which granted great privileges to the Roman population (exemption from taxes, tributes, and duties, the right to prosecute civil lawsuits [*vindicatio*], acquire [*manicipatio*], own [*usucapio*], and transfer [*in iure cession*] property). Hellerman has argued that this points to a clear distinction between citizens and non-citizens, with respective status difference and all its implications.⁵⁵ If we consider negatively then what non-citizens, that is, the majority of the population, were unable to attain, a rather grim situation emerges. Not only were they not able to participate in the governing of their own city, and acquire honour and status according to the *cursus honorum*, they actually had to carry the main financial burden of the colony, did not have equal standing before the law, and could not freely deal with property. As noted above, this may well result in an economic situation where it was difficult to meet the needs of everyday life. Thus we find in Philippi a population constituted partly of citizens, whose citizenship was rooted and had its origin far away in Rome, and partly of Greeks and Thracians who, from a Roman perspective, were aliens in their own city. Rights, status, and to a significant extent also economic means, were unequal goods distributed along these citizenship lines. Although possibly local Greek and Thracian associations granted some kind of status and organizational means for self-identification, their function was limited, and cannot be compared to the power, privileges, and status of the Roman citizenship body in the city. Moreover, the right to set up associations (*collegiae*) and gather as assemblies was granted by the Roman magistrates and such rights were only granted if considered useful for the *colonia*, meaning that even such groups of potential self-identification could only exist at the mercy of Roman rule.

The link of the Philippian citizenship with Rome, a place far away from the actual place of living, may have provided an analogy Paul could refer to as a

⁵⁵ Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor*, 115. Note also his reference (114) to the loss of citizenship by Dio, “To the disenfranchised, life seems with good reason not worth living, and many choose death rather than life after losing their citizenship,” *Or* 66.15

paradigm of belonging for the Christ-followers from the nations of that colony. Although they are deprived of belonging to the Roman citizenship body, and thus of a “collective body of belonging” in which they could actively participate, Paul assures them that they do have a realm of belonging. Although it too is located somewhere beyond the boundaries of their local place of living, it is nevertheless as real as the Philippian civic belonging of Roman citizens that had its origin in Rome.⁵⁶ The assertion that they too are part of, and actively participate in, a “civic community” seems in tune with the lack of such possibilities for Greeks and Thracians in the Roman social and symbolic universe of the colony. Since active participation in the social, political, and cultic public affairs of their city was not an option available to the majority of the population, the term *πολίτευμα* could have provided Greek and Thracian Christ-followers with an alternative to the Roman status of belonging that free-born men as Roman citizens of the colony enjoyed.⁵⁷ With the term *πολίτευμα* Paul refers to a collective entity where active rights within a city to manage internal affairs could be exercised.⁵⁸ Although not (yet) evident for everyone in the here and now, these Philippian Christ-followers are given assurance of status and belonging to a collective body that could be seen to provide an analogy to the Roman model, but clearly distinct from it, if not as a clear alternative to it.

Read in the wider context of the letter, it is part of Paul’s attempt to teach these former pagans the way of life in Christ in their particular Roman-dominated context, which excludes them as Greek and Thracian non-citizens from active participation in civic life, and thus deprives them of the possibility of finding a place in the narrative of belonging, as well as the power structures of the colony. Paul tries to show them that the ways and means by which such integration and belonging to the colony could be achieved would be contrary to the ways in Christ. Embracing the Roman narrative of their divinely ordained eternal rule, including the values of competing for honour and status at the

⁵⁶ I think the proposal of Föster, Säger to translate *ὑπάρχω* as “has its roots/or origin” is more appropriate than translating it with “is,” cf. “Ist unsere Heimat im Himmel?,” 165.

⁵⁷ The fact that e.g. in the association of the cult of Silvanus Roman designations for office holders were used indicates that alternatives for active participation and the acquisition of status and honor was aspired to by those who were hindered from ever climbing the respective ladder of the Roman *cursus honorum*. As Hellermann notes, “Titular mimicry is indicative of the social value replication characteristic of non-elite groups in the Roman world.” Hellermann, *Reconstructing Honor*, 102.

⁵⁸ Thomas Kruse, “Das jüdische Politeuma von Herakleopolis in Aegypten,” in *Volk und Demokratie im Altertum* Vera V. Dement’eva, Tassilo Schmidt, eds. (Göttingen: Ruprecht, 2010), 93–106, 97.

expense of others, was contrary to life in Christ. As Christ-followers they were now part of a *πολίτευμα* which was rooted beyond the realm of Philippi, but unlike the Roman colonists' *tribus Voltinia*, their group was not rooted in Rome, but *ἐν οὐρανοῖς*. For the addressees, these real-life local aspects could have resonated with the use of the term *πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς*, possibly taking up some of their everyday concerns and pressures.

b. Πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς – and the Jewish Small-World Networks

In addition, rather than as an alternative to these contextual aspects, Paul's social and symbolic universe, what I have also referred to as small-world network cosmopolitanism, is possibly on his part the primary context of *πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς* as a term of belonging. As mentioned above, it is evident that Jewish communities related to each other through extensive social networks, small-world networks,⁵⁹ that also provided the hubs for Paul's travels. The messianic satellite groups of Christ-followers from the nations did not exist in isolation nor did they establish a particularly new way of networking in the Roman Empire. Socially, they were based on, and tuned in with existing networks of communication and travels in these early days, certainly those of Jewish communities in the western Diaspora.⁶⁰ These groups were part of the Jewish small-world networks of the first century even if they developed into something else over the course of time.

Moreover, Jewish tradition had developed not only such social networks, like other minorities; they also had, as noted, narratives of belonging, which provided them with an alternative to the dominating imperial narrative. Philo's example demonstrates that even when integration to the Roman system is considered the beneficial and rational choice to make, it did not lead to accepting the Roman ideological claims at face value. Far from it; it is evident that Philo (and others) affirmed precisely the difference of the ultimate realm of belonging of those who were in Josephus' words the people beloved by God (*θεοφιλεῖς*). They belonged not to the earthly but to the heavenly realm (*Spec* 4.112). Inasmuch as the notion of a *πολίτευμα* may resonate with the world the

⁵⁹ Cf. also Collar, "Rethinking Jewish identity," 243.

⁶⁰ Cf. Mark Nanos, "To the Churches Within the Synagogues of Rome," in *Reading Paul's Letter to the Romans*. ed. Jerry L. Sumney (Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 11–28. Some recent analyses of Paul's network underestimate or even ignore this most relevant factor in Paul's networking, depicting his activities and patterns in isolation rather than as part of Jewish life of the time. Cf. e.g., Dennis C. Duling, "Paul's Aegean Network: The Strength of Strong Ties," *BTB* 43.3 (2013): 135–54.

addressees are familiar with, it is this Jewish discourse of belonging that Paul activates — now for those Christ-followers from the nations. The innovative aspect of Paul’s affirmation that their *πολίτευμα* is rooted in the heavens is not this notion per se, as it is a familiar Jewish affirmation of belonging under imperial domination. The innovative aspect is that Paul affirms this realm of belonging also for those from the nations in Christ. He extends this realm of belonging to former pagans, who had turned away from idols to serve the true and living God (1 Thess 1:9). Through Christ, they too now belong to the realm of God, the God of Israel, and thus should not and cannot associate in any way with the key markers and practices of belonging to the “big” world of the empire by sustaining it through cult practices of other deities. Although this would safeguard them from trouble and suffering, it is incompatible with their belonging to the *πολίτευμα* rooted *ἐν οὐρανοῖς*. Trying to do so would in fact align them with the “enemies of the cross.” By being in Christ, they cannot seek such integration via loyalty expressions to other deities.

They are assured that they were rooted in a *πολίτευμα*, and thus had a place where they belonged. Excluded from the dominating narrative of belonging and deprived of their own voice in the civic and public affairs of the colony, Paul assures them of their own voice and their specific way of life as followers of Christ. That they are admonished to *μόνον ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε* (1:27) is thus related to this realm of belonging, to this *πολίτευμα* which is rooted *ἐν οὐρανοῖς*. And it is evident now that the mentioning of opponents (*ἀντικειμένοι*) and destruction (*ἀπωλεία*) immediately after this admonition (1:28) indicates the same link as the one between the “enemies of the cross” and the *πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς*. Like for Jews, whether in Christ or not, this is the realm that also now provides these Christ-followers from the nations with orientation for their lives in the here and now. As rooted in this heavenly realm, they are empowered to become agents of their own lives in Christ, despite living under the conditions of domination imposed by colonial rule. If these conditions lead to suffering and hardship, this is not due to their deprived status in the colony, thus not to be eschewed or valued as being signs of shame but rather the opposite. As members of the *πολίτευμα* rooted *ἐν οὐρανοῖς* such struggles are precisely evidence of God’s grace (Phil 1:28-30).

Conclusion

Having started with asking why Paul used this unique term, *πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς*, as the realm of belonging for Christ-followers from the nations in the letter to the Philippians I have demonstrated that this actually makes perfect sense when specific contextual factors are considered in conjunction with Paul’s own context within the Jewish traditions of his time. Since Greek and Thracian

inhabitants were deprived of a realm of belonging as full citizens of the *colonia* in which they lived, Paul tries to give them assurance of belonging and collective identity by linking them to the long-established Jewish notion of being rooted in the realm of God. That the terminology also resonates with Greek and Roman philosophical discourses of belonging is thereby not denied, but in my view these are secondary analogies and echoes here. In some cases, as demonstrated, the analogies to Greek and Roman perceptions actually provide a different note to the one I tried to make heard in my analysis. I have found Paul involved in a cultural translation process, trying to communicate what belonging to Christ meant in language and perceptions that would resonate with the specific context of the addressees. His perception and language, however, is firmly rooted in his particular world, the Jewish small-world network of a cosmopolitanism of a different kind. What actually happened in the communication process between Paul and the addressees is another matter. It is impossible to know what aspects of Paul's notions they would have heard, those of their primary "world," be it Greek, Thracian, or Roman or those of Paul's Jewish tradition; possibly aspects of both. But I consider it vital to try to hear the Jewish sound in Paul's formulations, the cultural encyclopedias, which resonate there as well as those of the Christ-followers in Philippi. In my view the specific tune Paul tried to play for these addressees from the nations can be heard more clearly as in tune rather than in opposition to Jewish traditions of the first century. The realm of belonging in which they are rooted, their identity as Christ-followers from the nations, then is a variation of a theme of Jewish tradition rather than an entirely new tune. They too are now rooted in the *πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς*.