

# From Jesus Movement to Christianity: A Model for the Interpretation. Cohabitation and separation of Jews and Christians

## *Introduction*

The title of this meeting is: “Quand l’Église et la synagogue se sont-elles distinguées”. But two sub-titles are also indicated: “À la croisée des chemins” and “The Parting of the Ways Revisited”. Together they underscore the complexity of the problem, which obliges us also to investigate “*how*” and “*why*” the parting occurred. Judith Lieu, at the meeting of the G.E.R.I.C.O. group in Salamanca in 2004, also suggested that we have to ask ourselves “*Where*”, pointing out that the parting of ways may have taken place differently in different places.<sup>1</sup> Simon Mimouni, in two recent articles on the current state of studies on Christian origins, and Ancient Judaism,<sup>2</sup> has shown the great diversity existing among the nouveaux “paradigms” “paramètres” or “perspectives”, present in today’s research.

We believe that the proliferation of approaches is in some way a necessary effect of the acknowledgement of what anthropologists refer to as cultural complexity, a characteristic not only of the world in which Christianity was born, but also of our own, as reflected in the sub-title of a recent book: “Constructing the Historical Jesus in a Period of Cultural Complexity”.<sup>3</sup> Our research on the relationship between groups of Jesus followers and groups of Jews (*ioudaioi*) presupposes an anthropology of complexity that, on the one hand, submits to critique the concept of “identity”<sup>4</sup>, and, on the other, makes use of concepts such as “métissage”<sup>5</sup>, “hybridization”,<sup>6</sup> and “branchements”.<sup>7</sup> From the point of view of an anthropology of complexity, «groups exist from a certain point of view, but from another point of view they vanish». Cultural complexity, however, requires employment of different points of views and different models. As far as, for example, Jews<sup>9</sup> and followers of Jesus are immigrant in the great cities or regional groups in the Empire,<sup>10</sup> also an anthropology of globalization is useful in order to understand the creative reactions of local realities to processes of globalization and their process of integration and legitimation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lieu 2004, 218.

<sup>2</sup> Mimouni 2008a. 2008b.

<sup>3</sup> Moxnes – Blanton – Crossley 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Barth 1969, Remotti 1996, Baumann 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Amselle 1985.

<sup>6</sup> Canclini 1998, Bhabha 1994<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Amselle 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Eriksen, 2009, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Solin 1983; Noy 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Lyman 2003; Schwartz 2001, 104-194.

<sup>11</sup> Destro 2006.

For this reason, in our view, we should not excessively concern ourselves with finding an agreement among different paradigms or analytical perspectives. It is enough to ascertain some points of convergence. In the following pages, we shall propose, above all, two analytical models, or better, two perspectives: that of continuity/discontinuity and that of the different components of a religious system. These models are used in our analysis not as if they could represent reality. They are merely heuristic tools whose aim is to throw greater light on texts and history. Further investigation may modify them, contradict them or even turn them upside down.

### *The plurality of Christianities*

It is generally accepted that in the study of the relations between groups of Jesus followers and groups of Jews we must take account of the plurality of Christianities and Judaisms. In the words of Karen King,

«at the beginning of Christianity, nothing of what would later define it existed: no fixed canon, creed, or ritual, no established institutions or hierarchy of bishops and laity, no church buildings or sacred art. The story of Christian origins is the story of the formation of these ideas and institutions. It is a story fraught with conflict and controversy. Early Christians hotly debated the meaning of Jesus' teachings and his violent death; they experimented with ways of organizing their communities and determining who should be in charge: they disagreed about the roles of women and slaves; and they constructed boundaries between themselves and others in different ways, especially with regard to Judaism and Roman power. They developed distinct ways of contesting orthodoxy and heresy, and in so doing they created discourses of identity and difference that would pervade the West for millennia to come. Until recently, our information about these controversies came largely from the writings of the side that won and claimed for itself the title of orthodoxy. The views of other Christians were either refracted through the accounts of their detractors or lost to history. But this situation has changed dramatically with the discovery of ancient manuscripts written by the historical losers, the 'heretics'». «In order to comprehend the dynamic processes by which Christianity was formed, it is necessary to set aside the winner's account of that period and attempt to place ourselves in the midst of debates whose outcome was not yet certain».<sup>12</sup>

Pier Paolo Piovanelli could write that:

«Il serait même tentant d'observer que le XIXe et le XXe siècle, avec les innombrables redécouvertes des vestiges apocryphes du judaïsme et du christianisme anciens qui les ont ponctuées, ont été, d'une certaine façon, les équivalents de la période de l'Antiquité tardive... Après tout, en paraphrasant Shaye Cohen, il se pourrait bien que notre monde post-orthodoxe contemporain finisse par rassembler au monde pré-orthodoxe de l'antiquité».<sup>13</sup>

In terms of plurality, we must also underline that there were at least three different types of groups of Jesus followers: a. those constituted only by Jews; b. those constituted by Jews and non-Jews; and c. those constituted only by non-Jews. The relationship between groups of Jews who were not Jesus' disciples and groups of Jesus followers should be studied taking into account that both are to be viewed *as foreign* within the Roman empire or in Hellenistic or Roman cities. The two groups confront each other, in the same moment in which each of them is passing through its own process of integration with the surrounding environment. In fact, they experience integration processes that are asymmetric each with respect to the other, insofar as the Jews try to integrate themselves in the polis directly, while the followers of Jesus at the beginning integrate themselves only through the mediation of the Jews. In this sense they, at the beginning, undergo a phenomenon of privatization or loss of a clear identification, and only later do they show themselves publicly.

<sup>12</sup> King 2006, 1-2 see also Piovanelli 2007, 295.

<sup>13</sup> A. Frey - R. Gounelle (ed.), *Poussières de christianisme et de judaïsme antiques. Études réunies en l'honneur de Jean-Daniel Kaestli et Éric Junod*, Éditions du Zèbre,

1. *Continuity / discontinuity and religious systems*

Ten years ago, in the book *Come nasce una religione: antropologia ed esegesi del vangelo di Giovanni*,<sup>14</sup> we developed a heuristic model to understand how, when, and where, a group of Jesus followers could be considered as distinct from a Jewish group. The model was principally based on the concept of a “religious system”. According to the model, a religious system is essentially composed of at least three elements: a social group; a distinctive set of ethical, ritual, practices; and a worldview. It is not defined, therefore, by its ideas and worldview alone. A new religious system can take form only through a process of innovation and discontinuity. The model envisages that, in general, a religious system can be considered as separate or different from another, only in the presence of differences in all the elements of a system: in the social group, in socio-religious practices, and in conceptions or worldviews. Each one of the three factors must be contemporarily different. When a group of Jesus followers is distinct in all of these three elements from those that characterise a Jewish religious system, one can affirm that the former has become distinct or detached from the latter.

The sharing of common ideas (and even some religious practices) is not enough to maintain that there were no boundaries among the groups. Some Jews and some Christians may have shared similar conceptions (like belief in the resurrection, messianism, idea of the *logos*, etc.) and also similar religious practices (for example, the celestial journey), and yet may be distinct or even separate in terms of the groups of which they are members.

We prefer a scheme of discontinuity, as opposed to that “of continuity and tradition”. We do not presuppose that Christianity evolved from Judaism, as a sort of necessary development (as in the old idea of a salvation history from the Old to the New Testament, or in the idealistic story of the spirit, or in the positivistic progress towards what is good and better). We assume that Christianity was born as a “creation of discontinuity”, something not totally linked by tradition to what came before it. This should induce us to re-examine critically at least some aspects of the model of continuity implicit in the contested idea of the Jewish origins of Christianity (see Neusner ???).

In terms of discontinuity, instead of the question “how (or: when, why, where) Christianity was born”, we prefer to pose the opposite question of “how the different groups of Jesus followers conceived their own origin”. The model of a tradition growing through continuity is, in this way, replaced by the model of the creation of a religious system, which at a certain moment looks for legitimacy. Religious systems can make use of different criteria of legitimacy. One of them can be, sometimes, the “invention” of a tradition. History, however, consists not only and not principally of a non-interrupted traditional thread. For this reason it is more correct to assume for the history of Early Christianity the existence of discontinuous components. They are not only stages of an evolution, but also new beginnings, unprecedented religious forms and processes.

Karen King discusses the rather widespread phenomenon of adapting earlier texts, integrating, commenting and correcting them, which is similar to the connected phenomenon of writing works using the name of major figures of very early Christianity. She highlights the discontinuity exactly in «the appeal to antiquity as a criterion of legitimacy». It is well known that antiquity is a necessary element in the ancient world to provide publicly credentials for peoples, political actions, and religious movements.<sup>15</sup> Writers appealed to tradition to support their

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<sup>14</sup> Destro - Pesce 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Pilhofer, 1990; Destro-Pesce, 'Mise en histoire' and Social Memory,” in Thomas Drew-Bear, Mehmet Taslialan and Christine M. Thomas (Eds.), *Actes du 1er Congrès International sur Antioche de Pisidie* (Collection d'Archeologie et d'Histoire de l'Antiquité de l' Université Lumière - Lyon 2), Paris, de Boccard, 2002, 26-36.

arguments and tended to disguise innovations by presenting their ideas as the *continuation of traditions* or the exposition of its hitherto unperceived meaning.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. Social complexity. Correlation of the three factors of the system

1. The simple scheme of the three elements of a religious system must be applied, however, in all its complexity. When dealing with a social group, one cannot limit oneself merely to aspects of membership, if, for example, the group is comprised of only Jewish members, or only non-Jewish members, or both.

Social groups evidently take the form of (habitative, residential, urban-based) territorial settlements, set in the context of specific political and cultural units and forms of contact with other majority or marginal groups. A group defines in fact itself in terms of its localization, in terms of *the actual spaces* and buildings it occupies, and of their relevance and *function* in the general living context. The central point of the model is constituted by cohabitation. The members of a group characterise their environments through their relations of cohabitation.

It has become common to affirm that the first-century Jesus followers used to gather in households. However, this affirmation becomes misleading, if one does not take account of the fact that the houses used were of different kinds and had different functions. The first *Letter to the Corinthians* in 14,23 mentions an occasion of worship in which «all the *ekklēsia*» was gathered, which leads us to suppose that there were a number of partial meetings, taking place in different households. The *Third Letter of John* also presupposes a certain number of houses with diverse functions, that of Diotrophes and that of Gaius (where the Jesus followers gathered), but also the house where the Presbyter resided. Perhaps the latter served other functions too, for example, **for** the organisation of itinerant preachers, and, perhaps, the production of the community's texts (such as the *First Letter of John*).<sup>17</sup> In the *Acts of the Apostles* 19,9 we learn that Paul rented a building (the *schola* of Tyrannus), where he carried out his teaching activity. Were this an historic fact, we would have proof that, alongside the houses that hosted gatherings of a liturgical nature, there existed others with different utilizations. It is certainly important that the *Acts of Justin Martyr (Passio sancti Justinii et socii)* 3,1-4, of the second century, tell of the house he rented to perform his philosophical and theological teaching.

This calls for a clarification of the nature of the groups of Jesus followers, or of the so-called Christian "community". The fact that the Jesus followers in the earliest period of their expansion used houses, does not allow us to affirm, as Peter Lampe, and many others do, that «the first and ... the most fitting concept we have» to define the nature of the groups of Jesus followers «is that of *oikos*». In reality, this is mistaking the container for the content. Jesus followers *used* the *oikos*, they *are not* an *oikos*. They did not use private dwellings alone, as we have said. They are defined by a multiplicity of functions and modes of occupation of places. An undifferentiated concept, like that of "community", does not help to understand this multiplicity. The diverse terms encountered in the literature of the second century (*didaskaleion, scholē, ekklēsia, collegium, curia, laòs, conventiculum*) point to a certain indeterminacy of the Jesus followers' groups in the first two centuries.<sup>18</sup>

In studying the religious practices and worldviews of groups of Jews and Jesus followers, it is helpful to visualise a triangular relationship, in which the sides and angles of the triangle are not symmetric. Recent research has in fact made clear that Jews and Jesus followers were both often minorities within villages, cities, and socio-political organisations like that of the Roman empire. This means that the two types of groups were cohabiting and interacting – even though in a asymmetrical way - with each other within a Hellenistic-Roman environment that *critically* influenced them both. The summit of the triangle is determined precisely by this Graeco-Roman

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<sup>16</sup> King 2006, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Destro-Pesce 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Lampe 2003, 373.

cultural environment, which is often dominant, as well known, with respect to the other two. It is not enough to consider a bipolar relationship (between Jesus followers and Jewish communities), or to compare only two sides of the triangular relation. The characteristics of Jews and Christians largely depended on their distance or proximity to the main vertex, and not only on their reciprocal links, or on the relationship of “original - derivate”, “before - after” of one with respect to the other. Recent research has cast light on how the religious practices and conceptions of Jews and Christians, while at times highly distinctive, were *widely shared by other religious groups situated in the same areas*, or influenced by the same cultural traits (for example, sacrifice, prayer, contacts with the supernatural, such as ecstasy, heavenly journeys,<sup>19</sup> visions, dreams, etc.).

If we assume that the so-called “pagan” world was the main driving force of forms of settlement, spanning from the city to the village, we need to use a tool such as the notion of cohabitation, in a more specific way. The local dimension and an awareness of localised physical aspects are essential to obtain a sufficiently concrete idea of visible factors, which can be calculated in time, measured in styles and concrete forms of membership.

### 3. Cohabitation among groups living “face to face” and confronting themselves in the same territory

On a general theoretical level, one can start from the aims and instruments of cohabitation.

*a. Aims.* In cohabitation one assumes both a *sharing* and a *differentiation* of aims. As Tessa Rajak briefly puts it, «bond and boundaries are inseparable».<sup>20</sup> Some types of differentiation depend on the divergent aims that groups seek to attain:

- the aim may be that of “juridical integration” by means of special legislation that allows the exercise of specific rights (Josephus, *Ant.* XVI, 160-178; XIX, 278-291; XIV, 306-323; XX, 13).
- the aim may be that of a generic “egalitarian integration”, which guarantees the same rights and functions as those of other groups (see Lyman 2003; Josephus *Ant.* XVI, 174-178).
- the aim may be that of “hegemonic integration”. The ultimate hegemonic goal may be explicit or to various degrees dissimulated. It can be sought by manipulating institutions and common cultural elements. An example of dissimulation is that of Flavius Josephus, who in the *Jewish Antiquities*, systematically omitted the parts of the *Book of Daniel* that spoke of the fifth kingdom (*Ant.* X, 203 ff.) that of Israel’s hegemonic dominion of the world. An opposite example of explicitness is that of Christian millenarianism that openly speaks of the messianic reign and of the final dominion (see *Revelation* 20,3-7; 21,1-4.10.23-27; 22,1-5 and Justine, *Dialogue* 80,5).

Do cohabitations exist that do not involve common or shared aims? For short periods or in contingent situations there may be a non-sharing of aims. In ordinary life, there can exist periods of poor complicity or reciprocal indifference. Some cohabiting groups are intent upon mere survival, making a shield of their weakness and marginality, and creating pockets of separateness. In the long term, however, separateness is not easily maintainable.

According to a historiographic thesis, Christianity of the fourth century – with the Theodosian codex – is nothing more than a coherent development of original Christianity, which, for the outset, carried in its “nature” an urge toward political and religious world domination. A group of this kind cannot cohabit with other groups, sharing their aims. It would want to destroy or subordinate others.<sup>21</sup>

There is a (somewhat archaic) anthropological scheme that helps in understanding cohabitation with aims that are at least partially unshared. Robert Redfield<sup>22</sup> spoke of a great or small tradition. According to this scheme, differences exist at the level of “small tradition”, while

<sup>19</sup> Destro-Pesce 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Rajak 2001a, 461.

<sup>21</sup> Destro-Pesce, 1994.

<sup>22</sup> R. Redfield, *La piccola comunità. La società e la cultura contadina*, Torino, Rosenberg & Sellier, 1976 (Am. orig.: *The little community and Peasant society and culture*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1961).

uniformity prevails at the level of “great tradition”. In important questions, orthodoxy is distinguished from heresy and uniformity is required, while deviations are permitted in issues of day-to-day convenience (as in the case of the feast of the ram celebrated by the Christian minorities in the Muslim mountain villages of Lebanon).<sup>23</sup> Within this perspective, cohabitation becomes a value to be defended by means of special arrangements that pose no threat to the “great tradition”.

This scheme of cohabitation, although it cannot be indiscriminately accepted, contributes to providing a realistic view of cultural transmission (borrowings, exchanges, acquisitions), which is never a totalising event or act, without internal modulations. That is to say, a cultural scenario is made up of different elements, facets, signs and rules, single aspects of which can be adopted, rejected or transmitted.

*b. Cultural tools.* Cohabitation, where it exists in an enduring and stable way, always involves some form of “sharing” of cultural tools or implements. Such sharing can obviously be either minimal or of large-scale. The cohabitation of groups of Jews and Christians within the Roman-Hellenistic world involved the sharing of the same cultural instruments: spaces, texts, cosmological schemes, performances, religious practices (as prayer, heavenly journey<sup>24</sup>, visions, etc.).

## II. EXAMPLES OF COHABITATION IN CENTRAL AND PERIPHERAL AREAS OF THE EMPIRE

Cohabitation of different groups within the same area offers the possibility of reciprocal relationships, that can produce different and also divergent outcomes: from osmosis, to distinction and separation.

The definition of groups depends, as we have said, on their occupation of spaces. Alongside everyday habitative spaces, those destined to the *burial of the dead* are of great importance. In fact, one way of clarifying the reciprocal relationships, the distinction or inevitable separation among groups of Jesus followers (or Christians) and Jewish groups, invokes their modes of occupying spaces for the dead.

Burial sites present evidence spanning long time periods. Usually, these sites have been employed in the course of time by different users. The fact that a same area of inhumation has been used for a certain period of time by different groups with a number of different arrangements and perspectives, conveys over time an image of cohabitation. On the contrary, a burial place where the tombs of only one single group are located, may convey over time an image of separation.

Let us focus upon two areas of the Empire. One is urban, the other mainly rural. One is central (the city of Rome) and one peripheral (the Golan Heights). One had a “pagan” majority, the other was located in the land of Israel and, at least probably, had a Jewish majority.

### *1. Coexistence and separation of Christian and Jewish tombs in Rome*

1. In Rome, we examine the Christian and Jewish catacombs, above all on the basis of epigraphic documentation. Epigraphs are, by definition, a written material on public display, and are therefore signs of a definition of identity. According to Carlo Carletti,<sup>25</sup> an “epigraphy of the Christians” (as opposed to a Christian epigraphy) is only encountered starting from the third century on. This means that until this time, there was no manifestation of “Christian” identity in the places in which epigraphic production might have been encountered. The fact that for two centuries the Jesus followers (or Christians) did not produce “Christian” epigraphic material, in which “Christian” symbols were shown, could be a symptom of a lack of any need for their characterisation (as distinct or separate from the Jewish groups with whom they cohabitated).

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<sup>23</sup> Kanafani–Zahar 1999.

<sup>24</sup> Destro-Pesce 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Carletti 2008.

«In the pre-Constantine era», Rome shows the most consistent documentation of epigraphies, commissioned by Christians. «This production [began] around the time of Zephyrinus and Callistus (199-222) in the original areas of the catacombs.» But only 17% of the inscriptions show, according to Carletti, «expressly identitary modules [or formulas]» (Carletti 2008, 34-35).<sup>26</sup>

In the context of this paper, it is fundamental to observe that, while these “modules or formulas” certainly reveal the emergence of a “Christian” specificity, they do so in forms that are profoundly linked *both to Jewish and classical/pagan ones*.

Christian inscriptions show great similarity with Jewish ones, precisely in the use of the word “peace”. In fact, the expressions *pax, pax tecum, eirène soi* found in the funerary inscriptions of Christians are expressions akin to those of Jews. Their «most immediate model» is in Jewish funerary practice.... in the cemeteries of Jaffa, Bet Shearim, the ossuaries of Jerusalem and, in Rome, in the Roman catacomb of Vigna Randanini, of pre-Constantinian formation». For example, in *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum* 644, we encounter the expression: *Hic requiescit in pace bonae memoriae*. The cases are abundant: CIJ II, 892-960 (II-III Century); 993-1161 (II-IV century); 1210-1387 (II a.C.E. – II C.E.). The inscriptions on epigraphs reveal that the followers of Jesus employed the same funerary language that was distinctive of the Jews, and that, at least in this respect, in the first two centuries, they did not manifest their distinction from Jewish groups.

However, the Christian inscriptions are also related to “pagan” ones. They use an expression of greeting to the deceased that corresponds to the pagan expression. Pagan tombs bear the greeting *salve, ave, vale, chaire* which in Christian tombs was replaced by *pax, pax tecum, eirène soi*, which correspond to the classic module. In other cases we even observe the coexistence and juxtaposition of the “Christian” module with the “pagan” one, as in the case of *Leonti pax a fratribus vale* (Rome cemetery of Priscilla, marble slab ICVR IX 25319) (see also ICVR I 1261, 692; II 7274; IV 12839; VI 15871; VII 21527; IX 26037<sup>27</sup>).

The turning point in the epigraphic production of Christians came in the third/fourth decade of the fourth to fifth century.<sup>28</sup> An essential fact is that 94% of the inscriptions were funerary. This underscores the fact that the publicly “displayed image of tombs” is certainly decisive when speaking of cohabitation. When the cases are plentiful, we are allowed to imagine important aspects of inter-group relationships.

In this new period, together with the development of formulas of peace we have evidence of «development of an expressive style that translates into epigraphic formulas ... the founding motifs of the new faith». «The set of formulas is not the patrimony of all, indeed not even the majority [of Christians], but is concentrated in specific circles of the community, particularly the lay and ecclesiastic aristocracies, or emerges as a characteristic element of particular circumstances».<sup>29</sup> It could mean that only those of “higher class” tend to differentiate themselves. However, this is not certain: just because the “lower classes” have less or no spending power, we cannot assume on their part a lesser religious distinction from other religious groups. The new accentuation of identity can be summed up in five points:

a) The most eloquent aspect is the mention of *initiation rites* in funerary inscriptions. «The explicit references to baptism are about 80, ranging chronologically between around 330 and the mid-fifth century; those mentioning the *status* of pre-baptismal instruction (*catechumenus, audiens, candidatus, katêchoumenos, akroatês*) are just 10, while those referring to the newly baptised are more numerous (over 140)».<sup>30</sup>

Inscriptions that mention initiation bear witness to the differences «between the doctrine taught by the Church and its impact on the average Christian»:

<sup>26</sup> Carletti 2008, 35.

<sup>27</sup> See also Carletti 2008, 150.

<sup>28</sup> Carletti 2008, 49.

<sup>29</sup> Carletti 2008, 53.

<sup>30</sup> Carletti 2008, 53.

«the mature age of the newly baptised deceased (from 20 to over 70 years) lead us legitimately to suppose a deliberate postponement of baptism until the approach of death»...«Many embarked upon catechumenal instruction, but fewer completed it, as hotly denounced by Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose, and Augustine (*Cat.* 17,35-36; *In Ps.* 118, 20, 48-49; *Serm.* 47,17; *De cat. rud.* 5,9)».<sup>31</sup>

This fact probably testifies in favour of a non-distinction of Christians from their surrounding environment. This is one of the many confirmations that the social reality of the Christians cannot be deduced from theological texts alone.

b) «In place of *frater*, characteristic of the pre-Constantine era, the fourth and fifth centuries saw a rather wide spread of terms like *fidelis/fidelis in pace*, *fidelis facta*, *devotus*, *famulus dei*, *servus dei*, *ancilla Dei*, *ancilla Cristi*, *ancilla Domini*, *Theou doulos pistos*. It is always very important to note the regional differences in the processes of differentiation, contact, cohabitation, and identity construction. «In the Iberian peninsula, for example, with particular frequency at Merida, from the mid-fifth century on, there is an increasing frequency of the modulus *famulus dei/christi*».<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the use of these genitives points to a stronger sentiment of Christian belonging.

c) «In the western area, *christianus / christianos* are very rarely used. In Rome, no exemplars have been found prior to the middle fourth century. According to Carletti «in Sicily, and especially at Siracusa<sup>33</sup>, the use of *christianos*, much more frequent than in other centres, seems already to present itself as a deliberately distinctive term for members of the Church».<sup>34</sup>

The absence of presence of the term “Christian” (either in Latin or Greek) are ambiguous data, since its absence could point to a scarce need to underline an identity that was obvious in mainly Christianised environments, while its presence could stem from a need to underscore the difference perceived by a minority.

d) It was in the time of Damasus (366-384) that *places of worship* were built above the presumed tombs of martyrs, with the religious project of creating places for religious gatherings, even centres of pilgrimage, in competition with or as an alternative to the temples of non-Christian tradition religions. Around these martyrs’ tombs the so-called tombs *ad sanctos* were situated, because of the religious belief in the benefit obtained from proximity to a martyr’s sacred body. Those benefiting most were above all the aristocratic laity and priestly classes, who were able to guarantee this privilege for themselves, but also a multitude of anonymous members of the popular classes. In this way, the church that guarded the tomb of the martyr became the focus of Christian sepulchral complexes that had an undoubtedly Christian identity.<sup>35</sup>

e) Institutionalised burial places are reserved to Christians only from the second half of the fourth century. Only from the second half of the fourth century onwards, according to a prevailing historiographic conception, there is evidence in Rome of the existence of Christian catacombs, intended as institutionalised and reserved places for Christians. According to C. Carletti

“the progressive increase in numbers of communities ... posed new and complex problems, also of a practical nature, not only in terms of pastoral and catechistic activities, but also in the management and organisation of cemeteries”.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Carletti 2008, 54.

<sup>32</sup> Carletti 2008, 55.

<sup>33</sup> See inscriptions collected by Carletti 2008 nr: 86,89,135,144,193.

<sup>34</sup> Carletti 2008, 56.

<sup>35</sup> Rebillard 2003,113-118; Carletti 2008, 74-97.

<sup>36</sup> Carletti 2008, 97.



2. This historiographical tendency maintains that in the same period in Rome, we also have evidence of catacombs reserved for the burial of Jews. Both these historiographic theses have recently been cast in doubt.

Following Mark Joseph Johnson,

“an examination of Roman law and church decrees concerning funerary practices shows no legal basis for the forced separation of pagan and Christian burials. Nor is there any concrete evidence from patristic writers that such an action was universally banned in the early Church».

Archaeological evidence demonstrates that

«the development of Christian cemeteries from pagan burial grounds and (b) the fact that in the fourth century such mingling of Christians and pagans in the tomb still occurred. Therefore, paintings with pagan themes such as those in the Via Latina Catacomb in Rome may be taken at face value, without the need to find some underlying Christian meaning. Much has been written about the "pagan-Christian conflict" of fourth-century Rome and the gradual christianization of the largely pagan society. One aspect of this religiously polarized society which remains somewhat unclear is whether or not this conflict extended into the grave. That is, was it permissible in the fourth century for Christians and pagans to be buried side by side?».<sup>37</sup>

E. Rebillard, has written

«il semble bien que les chrétiens, comme les autres groupes religieux, n'aient pas eu de raisons religieuses pour privilégier une forme de sépulture commune, aux dépens de la sépulture familiale notamment. *Les pratiques funéraires et plus spécifiquement le choix d'une sépulture ne semblent pas avoir été, dans l'Empire romain, des éléments importants dans la construction d'une identité religieuse.* Si l'appartenance à un culte, une synagogue ou un Église n'a pas été un facteur déterminant dans le choix d'une sépulture, nous avons vu intervenir à plusieurs reprises l'appartenance à une association, ou college».<sup>38</sup>

The catacombs were supervised by *collegia of fossores* and were burial sites originally created and used by “pagans”. Subsequently, they were used by Christians and pagans together. In the fourth century, the situation seems to have changed, although Rebillard maintains that also in the fourth century the burial of pagans and Christians side-by-side continued in the smaller catacombs. In the large ones, where numerous Christian tombs are found, coexistence went on, and, above all, one certainly cannot speak of them as Christian cemeteries managed by the Church. The distribution and administration of Christian burials, according to Rebillard, was supervised by *collegia* of which Christians were members, even if they were “souvent des collègues de chrétiens sans être cependant des collègues chrétiens». Rebillard therefore poses two theses. First, the groups were not hostile:

«À travers le prisme des pratiques funéraires, il apparait en effet que les chrétiens, y compris au III<sup>e</sup> siècle, ne constituent pas des groupes fermés et hostiles ainsi qu'ils sont encore souvent décrits».

It existed therefore an

«interaction des chrétiens et des non-chrétiens dans une société dont les structures ne changent pas fondamentalement, ni au III<sup>e</sup> siècle avec la “crise”, ni dans la deuxième moitié du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle quand la religion chrétienne devient la religion de l'empereur».<sup>39</sup>

Secondly, the Church did not directly oversee the burials.

«Dans l'Antiquité tardive, le christianisme laisse en dehors de sa sphère ce qui concerne la sépulture des morts et même, dans une très large part, ce qui concerne leur mémoire».<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Johnson 1997, 37.

<sup>38</sup> Rebillard 2003, 49.

<sup>39</sup> Rebillard 2003, 200.

<sup>40</sup> Rebillard 2003, 200.

Rebillard's remarks have been widely contested as regards the idea that the Christian catacombs, from the fourth century on, were not Christian funerary sites supervised by the Church. However, it is another aspect that interests us: the previously mentioned fact that from the second half of the fourth century in the time of Damasus, forty Christian churches were erected above the tombs of presumed martyrs, around which well defined Christian burial sites were created. It means that not only the distinction, but also a marked separation of identity was – at this time - both clear and public. This denotes a deliberate intention to occupy and connote public areas with Christian symbols and practices.<sup>41</sup>

Also concerning the burial of the Jews in Rome the old thesis that «the Jewish catacombs were used only by Jews»<sup>42</sup> has been put into question.<sup>43</sup> T. Rajak could write:

«Evidently, the Roman catacombs were Jewish burial areas, and many Jews choose to be buried among their co-religionists. But have we any ground for seeing the separation of Jews in death either as total, or as dogmatic?»<sup>44</sup> «I have collected material on mixed burial from various Diaspora sites and had come to conclusions very similar to those now admirably presented in Rutger's recent study»<sup>45</sup>.

## 2. Coexistence of Christian, Jewish and "Pagan" tombs in the Golan Heights

1. We now consider a marginal area of the Roman empire, the Golan Heights. In 1996 Robert C. Gregg and Dan Urman<sup>46</sup> presented their analysis of epigraphic material found in the Golan area over a period of twenty-five years. The region is a largely rural area of the oriental part of the Empire, an area, therefore, of particular importance since «historians typically find the religious energies and dynamics of the Roman and Byzantine countryside more elusive and difficult to ascertain than those in the more urban (and more literary) centers».<sup>47</sup> In their book, Gregg and Urman maintain that the Golan epigraphic material imposed a revision of the usual

«images of how Jews and Christians lived out their "group definition" in geographical and social terms».<sup>48</sup>

Robert C. Gregg and Dan Urman's enquiry is based on forty-four sites «in the early centuries of the common era».<sup>49</sup> Of these sites, nineteen

«yield evidence of religiously mixed population (various combinations of two or three of the groups, Jews, pagans and Christians. On the other hand present data could support suggestions of exclusivity or avoidance at a number of sites; 17 of the 44 reserve traces of a single group».<sup>50</sup>

Gregg and Urman think that this second point is weaker than the previous one, based as it is on negative evidence.

The enquiry permits the authors to «sketch the continuing presence of Jews in the Golan during the period leading up to the time of the Arab Conquest».<sup>51</sup> It is therefore an area that particularly lends itself to studying the coexistence of Christians and pagans with Jews, in a context where the Jewish presence was far stronger, if not dominant.

<sup>41</sup> Rebillard 2003, 113-118; Carletti 2008, 74-97.

<sup>42</sup> Hachili, 1998, 266; Pergola 1997, 83-87.

<sup>43</sup> See Rebillard 2003, 31-39.

<sup>44</sup> Rajak 2001, 442-3.

<sup>45</sup> Rajak 2001, 443.

<sup>46</sup> See also Gregg 2000.

<sup>47</sup> Gregg – Urman 1996, 289.

<sup>48</sup> Gregg – Urman 1996, 289.

<sup>49</sup> Gregg – Urman 1996, 290.

<sup>50</sup> Gregg – Urman 1996, 299. This point is weaker than the preceding, based as it is on negative evidence.

<sup>51</sup> Gregg – Urman 1996, 291.

The evidence and inscriptions found in the Golan area show that in the villages where Z. U.Maoz (1981) believed only Jews resided, there lived in reality also “pagans” and Christians, while Jews lived in villages that he claimed were populated by Christians alone. The data that emerge speak

«against hostile or stand-offish relationships enforced by any boundaries, since Jews, pagans, and Christians clearly live throughout the region, and often in the same places. As our information thickens, it becomes more difficult to discern a settlement that is explicable in terms of religious or ethnic identity».<sup>52</sup>

2. In particular, we wish to emphasise a highly significant fact analysed by Gregg and Urman. The great majority of funerary inscriptions

«are inscribed with the same epitaph formula, the farewell exhortation *tharsei* (“have courage!”, “don’t be afraid!”), sometimes with the added consolatory word, *oudeis athanatos. none is immortal*. «The object of this formula ... is to exhort the deceased to face with courage the dangers of their passage in to their next world».<sup>53</sup> The wide use of the same funerary [formula].. seems more indicative of a *koinè* expression which the inhabitants of the region, regardless of religious affiliation, shared.<sup>54</sup>

«Most of the tombstones in our collection do not have religious symbols carved on them (the Christians were most likely to do so), but there are clear examples of Jewish (inscription 176) and Christian (inscriptions 30, 185, 224) employment of the *tharsei* formula. ... We may suppose that some of the epitaphs without symbols, but employing this formulaic admonition, were pagan burials (as in the unambiguous case of inscription 36\* in Fig.<sup>55</sup>

Essentially the study of Gregg and Urman demonstrates that, as far as human burial was concerned, in the Golan Heights, there were not separate spaces for each group, and that the dead were buried side by side, regardless of their religious affiliation. A second fact also emerges: the epitaphs employ the same expressive formulas regardless of religious affiliation.

The formula «Have courage, no one is immortal» [*tharsei* [or *tharei*, *thari*] *oudeis athanatos*] is found elsewhere on Jewish graves, at Bet Shearim and Rome<sup>56</sup>. According to Noy, this formula is found in Rome, only in the catacomb of Monteverde.<sup>57</sup> It is impossible to say whether it depends on the geographical origin of the deads, on an evolution in time of funerary formulas, or simply on changing trends among the workshops where the tombstones were engraved.

Marcel Simon points out that this formula, employed both by pagans and Christians, in Egypt, is encountered also in the variant: «don’t be sad no one is immortal in this life / in the world» (*mê lypês: oudeis athanatos en tô biô toutô /en tô kosmô*).<sup>58</sup> Basically, the same funerary formula was widely used by Jews, Christians and pagans for centuries. It is found both in burial sites seemingly reserved for one group alone (or at least where there was a strong concentration of single group burials), and in sites where the tombs belonged to different religious groups and were located side by side.

### 3. Evolution of distinctive spaces of habitation and integration

1. We have so far examined the osmosis and then the distinction among Christians and Jews in burial sites in Rome and in the Golan Heights. Let us now turn our attention to the spaces occupied by the living.

In defining a social group and its relationship with others cohabiting the same area, it is essential to consider of their strategies in finding spaces for their houses and their assemblies. The

<sup>52</sup> Gregg – Urman 1996, 299.

<sup>53</sup> B. Lifshitz citato da Gregg-Urman 1996, 300.

<sup>54</sup> Gregg-Urman 1996, 301.

<sup>55</sup> Gregg-Urman 1996, 300.

<sup>56</sup> See Noy 1995, vol 2, inscriptions nr. 99, 187, 557, 172, 31, 586.

<sup>57</sup> Noy 1995, 441.

<sup>58</sup> Simon 1981. Vol.I, 69.

studies of L.M. White on the origins of Christian architecture show as the evolution of the buildings used by the followers of Jesus are a clear symptom of the different grades and phases of their distinctive integration in the surrounding society. Only in a first phase the followers of Jesus are not distinct from the Jews, from this point of view. According to the well known synthesis of L.M. White),<sup>59</sup> in the early phase, the community meetings of the Jesus followers took place in so-called house churches. In a second phase, they made use of a building that can be defined as *Domus Ecclesiae*. The *Domus ecclesiae* was not externally identifiable as a Christian building, «yet the building was clearly known as the church edifice to the local authorities».<sup>60</sup> This is known for example from an Egyptian papyrus that contain street-by-street lists of buildings. The third phase was characterised by the *Aula Ecclesiae*, a «larger, more regular hall[s] of assembly», made necessary by the increasing numbers among Christian communities. By the end of the third century, some church buildings had become more prominent public edifices, as is clear on the basis of Porphyry's declaration (*Adversos Christianos*, Fragm. 76) that the Christians «erected great buildings» of their own «imitating the construction of temples».<sup>61</sup>

«The Constantinian innovation of basilical architecture, therefore, seems less abrupt. Although it surely represents a radically new imposition of scale and style on the architecture and aesthetic, it still depended on some continuity with earlier church buildings».<sup>62</sup>

The three phases of development of Christian architecture correspond to different grades of integration into society. The fact that the Jesus followers used private houses for their gatherings means that they were sub-groups of vaster social collectivities, either Jewish or pagan. At the beginning, their aim was not the establishment of their own territorial and juridical position within the cities and the empire. Their purpose was not to gain legitimacy as an independent and autonomous part of their contemporary society. In this early phase it is very difficult to distinguish Jesus followers from Jews.

In the second phase, we see the assumption of diverse functions by buildings (for example the baptismal function). Only in the third phase and then in the Constantinian period, first a need for legitimacy and then the effort to exert a hegemonic influence on society are manifested.

2. The data analysed by White allow us a comparison with a parallel evolution (from the use of private houses to the construction of monumental buildings) of Christian and Jewish architecture.

«A common thread for the diffusion of Jewish groups in the Diaspora, as with other foreign religious associations, was to move first into private quarters which over time were gradually adapted more to the peculiar needs of religious use in accordance with the social circumstances of the community».<sup>63</sup>

According to White, of six Diaspora Synagogues extensively excavated (up to 1990) five «were renovated from private domestic edifices, and in each case they had been houses typical of domestic architecture».<sup>64</sup>

The fact that the same evolution is present for other foreign religious groups, suggests a circular influence, but also a structural condition of the relationships between foreign groups and city, or Roman empire. This structural aspect is better clarified if attention is paid to non chronological coincidence of the correspondent phases of the evolution of Jewish and Christian architecture. In fact, synagogues became buildings that were clearly recognisable externally and then assumed monumental characteristics long before Christian buildings.

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<sup>59</sup> White 1996, 102-148.

<sup>60</sup> White I, 1996, 122.

<sup>61</sup> White I, 1996, 129.

<sup>62</sup> White I, 1996, 139.

<sup>63</sup> White I, 1996, 101.

<sup>64</sup> White I, 1996, 62.

The developments of Jewish and Christian architecture, and their temporal displacement, is crucial for understanding the relationship between Jews and Christians, because, in the early phase, when private houses were used, the relationships between groups of Jesus followers and groups of Jews were very, very close. Jesus' followers participated in religious gatherings in private houses while also participating in functions in synagogues. In fact, Jews in the same city possessed already synagogues that were clearly recognisable as such. In Corinth, for example, Jesus followers gathered in private houses, but also attended a synagogue that had existed for some time. In this case, as we said, the Jews were undergoing a more advanced phase of evolution of religious architecture, with marked and public signs of identity. When Christian buildings became more public and identified, the distinction grew stronger. As Christian buildings gradually transformed into the fulcrum of all religious and social functions of groups of Jesus followers, the distinction and separation between Christians and Jews was strengthened.

The change in the use of buildings: from house-Church to house of the Church (*Domus ecclesiae*) must also be considered in the light of another institutional evolution: the beginning of the monarchic episcopate. «De la fin du IIe siècle ... l'apparition de l'épiscopat monarchique et la professionnalisation du clergé qui l'accompagne»<sup>65</sup> also involved the beginning of a greater distinction of the groups of Jesus followers from other Jews. It is hardly by chance that Ignatius, the first exponent of the monarchic episcopate, made the first to attempt to differentiate a religious practice that he defined «to judaize» (*ioudaizein*) from a religious practice that should instead «Christianize» (*christianismos*).<sup>66</sup> All the same, we must not view the situation in terms of radical and absolute turning points: house-churches continued to exist, and Jesus followers continued to attend them, as clearly demonstrated in § 47 of Justine's *Dialogue* with Tryphon.

One modification that is parallel to these mutations in the Christian architecture is the change in the "ethnic composition" or origin of the groups of Jesus followers. This change takes place within the II century in different phases and geographical areas. It consists on the passage from groups of followers of Jesus constituted by Jews to groups constituted by non-Jews. These non-Jews regard now the Jews as external or outside their group.<sup>67</sup>

#### 4. Conclusions

Daniel Boyarin<sup>68</sup> and other scholars (for example the contributors to the volume *The Ways That Never Parted*,<sup>69</sup>) have emphasised the fact that the boundaries between Jews and Christians have often been artificially erected by theologians (heresiologists), and by both ecclesiastic and rabbinic authorities, in an attempt to separate peoples/persons who in reality were not separate. We have begun from the assumption that this analysis, with which we agree, requires integration. The distinction between theology and community norms, on the one hand, and social arrangements and "real" conditions of people, on the other, calls for research on non-literary (epigraphic and archaeological) sources, because this kind of evidence allows a better access to social relations among Jews and Christians.

We have attempted to put together material – precisely of an epigraphic character – that illustrates a concrete cohabitation (and its modalities, that is, with shared aims or without shared aims). We have chosen two areas in which to analyse effective cohabitation: one central (Rome) and one peripheral (the Golan Heights), and their places of aggregation in burial sites.

At this point, we can take a further step in the elaboration of our model. Within a territorial social structure, for example a city, some groups are independent of larger aggregates and also

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<sup>65</sup> Rebillard, 2003, 63

<sup>66</sup> Pesce 2005, 42-49; Mason 2009, 460-480.

<sup>67</sup> Destro-Pesce 2008.

<sup>68</sup> 2001, 2004, 2006a.

<sup>69</sup> Becker – Reed 2003.

among themselves, while others are merely sub-groups of a bigger one. They are encapsulated groups that do not exist independently of the larger group that contains them, but they may have their own specific characteristics. Sub-groups employ the tools and expressive modes of the majority group to which they belong. Their main characteristic is that they participate in the social life of society at large, thanks to the *mediation* of the group to which they belong.

Very briefly, our hypothesis is that until around end of the second century, the groups of Jesus followers were sub-groups of Jewish groups, and, however, they possessed some distinctive characteristics. But they are not “separate” groups. Also during the first two centuries, there existed, therefore, profound *bonds* between Jesus followers and Jews, *but also boundaries*. From the end of the second century onwards, we witness a strengthening of the distinction and also a separation, as the groups of Jesus followers are no longer, by and large, sub-groups of groups of Jews. This coincides with the building of places of worship that are identifiable as Christian. It is marked by the emergence of funerary epigraphy that shows some Christian traits (while still preserving strong affinities with Jewish and pagan ones), by the creation of distinct burial sites, by the development of monarchic episcopates in some cities, and, finally, by the ethnic differentiation among groups. However, when the boundaries became stronger with the passage of time, for example in the second half of the fourth century, exchanges and co-participation in daily life and ideas continued between Christians and Jews.

Finally, it must be borne in mind that situations varied among different geographical areas, and between urban and rural areas, while there were also displacements in the timing of these transformations.

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