

A MOST RELIABLE WITNESS

ESSAYS IN HONOR OF
ROSS SHEPARD KRAEMER

Edited by
Susan Ashbrook Harvey
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Shira L. Lander
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“If It Looks like a Duck, and It Quacks like a Duck . . .”:

On Not Giving Up the Godfearers

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With her characteristic concern for terminological clarity and methodological rigor, Ross Kraemer has recently issued a swingeing critique of the use of the term “Godfearer” in academic discussions of Roman antiquity’s “interstitial Gentile persons” who engaged in some way with Jewish practices. The meanings of θεοσεβής vel sim. are various, she argues, as well as ambiguous and uncertain, the category itself undertheorized, its utility fatally compromised by its confusions.¹ I continue to think that the term is both useful and usable, its range of meanings fittingly elastic, its attestation in ancient evidence of various sorts as secure as our evidence usually gets. Rather than turn the present essay into the second half of a

1. Ross Kraemer, “Giving up the Godfearers,” *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 5 (2014): 61–87. The essay recapitulates some of her earlier discussion in *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender, and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 179–232. Kraemer’s objections in her shorter piece cluster around four main points: (1) *Rigidity of the category*: Scholars use the term “Godfearers” as a “sweeping static category” with “a single, static meaning” (p. 62). (2) *Diversity of the actual larger phenomenon*: The whole category of “godfearing” is “conceptually and theoretically flawed,” because no such term exists for other such boundary-crossing behaviors (e.g., we have no set term for “paganizing” Jews or for “Christianizing” pagans). The focus on this one putative group seems to confer a unique status on them, whereas such cross-cult activity in ancient Mediterranean society “appears to have been widespread” (p. 62). (3) *Diversity of motivations*: “The motivations for such practices are likely to have been diverse and situational” (p. 62), presumably not only or always “pious,” which is one of the other, nonspecific meanings of the term. Finally, (4) *False utility*: Just because modern historians find the term “Godfearers” useful does not mean that it should be used. On the contrary, in light of the problems reviewed above, “this utility is unacceptable justification for its continued employment” (p. 62). I will address her points in the course of this discussion.

dialogue between a lumpner and a splitter, however, I propose to reframe “god-fearing” with a different set of considerations. In the cities of Roman antiquity, how did gods and humans interact?

My Ph.D.—like that of my *alta soror*, Ross—is in a specialization that, in antiquity, did not actually exist: the ancient Mediterranean knew no such thing as “religion.”² In Greco-Roman antiquity, gods and humans formed vertically integrated family groups, and what we think of as “religion”—relations between divinity and humanity—ancients saw as a set of protocols inherited across generations, “ancestral custom.”³ From the “micro”-level of the family to the “macro”-level of the city, ancient gods ran in the blood. For this reason, pantheons coincided with (variously sized) human groups, from the individual domestic unit⁴ to the wider *γένος* or *ἔθνος*. Proper awareness of and appropriate deference to superiors within this numinous-human hierarchy were deemed *pietas* or *εὐσέβεια*; one’s *πίστις* or *fides* expressed one’s loyalty to these bequeathed practices and to the divine-human and intra-human relationships that they articulated.⁵ Harmonious relations—showing respect, and being seen to show respect—began at the hearth and extended outward to the city, to the larger empire and, thence, to the cosmos itself. Enacting these arrangements at the micro-level was pious common sense; at the macro-level, it was tantamount to safeguarding the *pax deorum*.⁶

These relations were conceived of “realistically”: deference was a public and observable behavior as much as an attitude or an idea. At the micro-level the bride, entering her husband’s household, assumed responsibility for what were for her new ancestors and new gods. So too with an adopted son.⁷ At the *polis*-level, citizens were imagined as blood

2. On the nonexistence of our category of “religion” in antiquity, and for the ways that ethnicity coordinated with cult and with family practices, see Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 6–15; on the whole issue, see Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

3. The usual terms for designating pious behavior include this idea of “family” inheritance: *mos maiorum*, *ta patria ethē*, *paradoseis tōn patrikōn*, *fides partum*, *hoi patrioi nomoi*, and so on.

4. On domestic cult, see esp. *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity* (ed. John Bodel and Saul M. Olyan; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008); also Caroline Johnson Hodge, “Married to an Unbeliever,” *HTR* 103 (2010): 1–25.

5. Thus, according to Plato, *eusebeia* involves proper deference to both gods and parents (*Resp.* 615c; see discussion in Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 4–5); and the properly pious wife in Plutarch (*Mor.* 140D), defers to her husband in deferring to his gods.

6. On enlisting the gods’—or the God’s—support in defense of the empire, see esp. John H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), esp. 292–93.

7. The ritual creation of obligations to new gods and new ancestors through marriage and/or adoption gives us our closest contemporary correlations to the effects of “converting” to Judaism; see Paula Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement: Ideas in the Study of Chris-

relations (thus, outsiders were ἀλλόφυλοι); when negotiating treaties with other cities, common ancestors were discovered, so that the parties under agreement themselves became "kin."⁸ At the level of empire, this family organization also held sway: positioning himself as the empire's *pater*, Augustus through the worship of his *genius*, turned his new political unit into a single, vast, multiethnic οἶκος or *domus* or "family."⁹

The city itself, post-Alexander, was thus a sort of family-based "religious" institution. Urban well-being depended on heaven's beneficence, and thus the organs of city government were in effect media for showing respect to the presiding god(s). These gods structured both urban time and urban space. Dedicated festivals, celebrating seasons sacred to divine patrons celestial and imperial punctuated the civic year. The venues of these celebrations—the town council, the theater, the circus, the stadium—held altars to and images of the gods. Household calendars and domestic space replicated in miniature these civic structures, wherein celebrations of the life-cycle—adulthood, marriages, naming ceremonies—also invoked and honored presiding deities. The gods were everywhere, not only in the public and private buildings of ancient municipalities but also on insignia of office, on military standards, in solemn oaths and contracts, in vernacular benedictions and exclamations, and all throughout the curricula of the educated. It was impossible to live in a Greco-Roman city without living with its gods.¹⁰

How did diaspora Jews (or Jews in mixed or pagan-majority Palestinian cities) cope in this god-congested environment? Jews knew that these other gods existed: their own sacred Scriptures said as much. "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods (ἐν θεοῖς)?" Moses asked (Exod 15:11 LXX). True, these other gods were in the Jewish view less exalted than Israel's god. "The θεοί of the nations are δαιμόνια," sang the Psalmist (Ps 95:5 LXX): a δαίμων was specifically a lower, cosmic god. But Moses, in Exodus, seemed to counsel that these deities be treated with some courtesy: "Do

tian Origins Whose Time Has Come to Go," *SR* 35 (2006): 231–46. On Roman adoption, see Michael Peppard, *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in Its Social and Political Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 50–60.

8. Christopher P. Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy in the Ancient World* (Revealing Antiquity 12; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

9. Peppard, *Son of God*, 60–67, on empire as family.

10. Tertullian fulminates against the gods' omnipresence particularly in *De Spectaculis* and in *De Idololatria*, in the latter treatise specifying also private family festivities (16), the insignia of civic office (18), military standards (19), education (10), oaths, contracts, and vernacular expressions (20–23). Mishnah *Avod. Zar.* 1:3 names the Kalends (a winter festival eight days after the solstice), the Saturnalia (eight days before the winter solstice), and the *kratasis* (days celebrating imperial accession to office) as well as imperial birth days and death days as "the festivals of the gentiles"; see esp. Fritz Graf, "Roman Festivals in Syria Palestina," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture* (ed. Peter Schäfer; 3 vols.; TSAJ 93; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998–2002), 3:435–51.

not revile the gods (θεοός)" (Exod 22:28 LXX). Commenting on this verse, Philo of Alexandria remarked, "Reviling each others' gods always causes war;" and he went on likewise to encourage respect for pagan rulers, "who are of the same seed as the gods" (QE 2.5). The images of the gods might be nugatory (1 Cor 8:4; 10:19; cf. Wis 7:17; 13:1; 15:2–3), but the gods themselves were real. "Indeed," Paul noted to his community in Corinth, "there are many gods and many lords" (1 Cor 8:5–6).¹¹

Their ancestral traditions put Jews in a potentially awkward situation: Israel's god famously demanded that his people worship him alone. And, despite dealing daily with all these other gods, Jews in the diaspora—if we can trust the pagan complaints about them—do generally seem to have drawn the line at λατρεία, excusing themselves (to the occasional irritation of their contemporaries) from performing acts of public cult.¹² Nevertheless, whenever they joined in civic social and cultural life—in council meetings, in law courts, and whether as participants in or as spectators at theatrical performances or musical, rhetorical, or athletic competitions—Jews were present when these gods were celebrated, and Jews were members of those bodies whose municipal duties required showing honor, publically, to the gods.¹³

How did these Jews manage? Our inscriptional and papyrological evidence in particular should caution us against taking at face value the confluence of classical ethnographers' complaints of Jewish ἀσέβεια

11. On the normative polytheism of ancient monotheism, see Paula Fredriksen, "Judaizing the Nations: The Ritual Demands of Paul's Gospel," *NTS* 56 (2010): 232–52, here 240–41; further eadem, *Augustine and the Jews*, 6–20. On Jews respecting pagan gods, see Pieter van der Horst, "'Thou Shalt Not Revile the Gods': The LXX Translation of Exodus 22:28 (27). Its Background and Influence," *Studia Philonica* 5 (1993): 1–8.

12. Pagan complaints of Jewish *asebeia* are assembled in Menahem Stern, ed., *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (3 vols.; *Fontes ad res Judaicas spectantes*; Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1974–84); for anti-Jewish ethnographic slurs more generally, see Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 440–91. The principle of Jewish exemption from public cult was so well established that emperors, attempting to recruit Jews into onerous service in the civic curiae, stipulated that civic liturgies should not "transgress their religion" (*Digesta Iust.* 50.2.3.3, text with translation and analysis in Amnon Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987] 103–7); and Jews were explicitly excused from worship of the emperor (*y. Avod. Zar.* 5.4 [44d]).

13. Inscriptional material on Jews as ephebes, town counselors, and officers in gentile armies is assembled in Margaret Williams, *The Jews among the Greeks and Romans: A Diasporan Sourcebook* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998) 107–31. Two recent discussions of Hellenistic Jewish acculturation may be found in John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 B.C.E.–117 C.E.)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) and in Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). Perhaps these Jews, like Tertullian, were prepared to draw a distinction between being present at (private, domestic) sacrifices and actively participating in them (*De Idol.* 16). For more on Jews in pagan places, see the next note.

and ἀμιξία, rabbinic prescriptions in *Avodah Zara*, and modern notions of "orthodoxy" or of "monotheism." Different Jews negotiated their responsibilities differently. The ephebes Jesus son of Antiphilos and Eleazar son of Eleazar appear in a first-century inscription that was itself dedicated to Heracles and Hermes, the gods of the gymnasium. A papyrus fragment of roughly the same period alludes to an athlete whose "Jewish load" (circumcision) publicly emphasized his Jewish identity precisely when his prowess in foot racing publicly expressed his Greek identity. One inscription, a synagogue manumission, invokes the god of Israel at its beginning while closing with the witness of Zeus, Gaia, and Helios; another, marking a tomb, likewise commemorates funds to be distributed on Passover, Pentecost/Shavuot, and Kalends. Jews in the city of Miletus reserved seats in the theater; they turn up elsewhere in hippodromes and odeons; they both watched and acted in pantomime performances. These sites host divine-human interactions as well as intrahuman ones.¹⁴

If we find Jews in pagan places, we no less find pagans in Jewish places. Some traveled to the temple of the Jews' god in Jerusalem, where they collected in the largest courtyard.¹⁵ Others, closer to home, appear variously engaged in diaspora Jewish activities, most specifically in and around the Jews' "ethnic reading houses," their prayer-houses or synagogues. These pagans range across a broad spectrum of activity, from occasional contact, to the voluntary assumption of some Jewish ancestral practices, to major benefaction and patronage.¹⁶ The first point to note

14. On this gymnasium inscription, see Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (135 B.C.–A.D. 75)* (rev. and ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Martin Goodman; 3 vols. in 4 pts; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973–87), 3:130–31; Barclay, *Diaspora*, 234–35. On Jews as athletes and gladiators (thus contestants in dedicated events), see Allen Kerkeslager, "Maintaining Jewish Identity in the Greek Gymnasium: A 'Jewish Load' in CPJ 3.519," *JSJ* 28 (1997): 12–33; more recently, Zeev Weiss, *Public Spectacles in Roman and Late Antique Palestine* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 195–226. Pothos son of Strabo in his synagogue inscription invokes both the god of Israel and the Greek divine witnesses: Is Pothos himself, then, a Jew or a godfearer? See Irina Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting* (Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting 5; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 111–16, with full text of the inscription on p. 239; and Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 113–23. On the endowment of Glykon, whose inscription mentions Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Kalends, see, most recently, Walter Ameling, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis* (3 vols.; TSAJ 99, 101, 102; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2004), 2:414–22, no. 196. Ameling concludes (p. 422) that either ethnic ascription, Jewish or non-Jewish, is plausible. This ambiguity is itself an important historical datum: "ethnic boundaries" were obviously not patrolled borders.

15. On the pagan presence in the temple precincts, see Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 3:309–13; see too E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 72–76.

16. On synagogues as "ethnic reading houses," see Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 13. The literature on the godfearers is enormous, the primary materials no less varied than the behav-

about these crossover activities is that they seem to have been ad hoc, voluntary, and not all that unusual: after all, the pagan–Jewish foot traffic went in both directions. The second point to note is that such mutual and fluid arrangements—pagans (and, eventually, gentile Christians) in Jewish places and Jews in pagan (and, eventually, in gentile Christian) places was on the evidence both extremely widespread and extremely socially stable: for centuries into the Common Era, well into the post-Constantinian period, ideologues of separation—Christian literati, bishops, emperors, and rabbis—all still complain about it. In the cities of Mediterranean antiquity, it seems, often if not always, no fences made good neighbors.¹⁷

How do we identify all these ancient actors as they comfortably cross these ethnic/cultural/“religious” lines? And do the data themselves give us any assistance in this effort? Some ancient formulations emphasize the “ethnic” aspect, though what we think of as “religious” behaviors would also be entailed: Jews can act “gentilely” or “paganly” (ἔθνικῶς) and pagans can act “Jewishly” (Ἰουδαϊκῶς) (Gal 2:14); non-Jews can “Judaize”

iors that they record. For older discussions, see Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 3:150–76; Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 483–501; Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Hellenistic Culture and Society 31; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 175–97; and the extensive note in Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, 2:103–7. See, more recently, Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations,” 232–52; Terence L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135 CE)* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007). Gentile Christians also later complain about pagan Judaizing: Tertullian: some pagans keep Sabbath and Passover but also worship at their own altars (*Nat.* 1.13, 3–4); Commodian: the *medius Iudaeus* runs between synagogue and altar, behavior that the Jews are wrong to tolerate (*Instruct.* 1.37.10); Cyril of Alexandria (fifth century): some men call themselves θεοσεβείς while following consistently neither Jewish nor Greek custom (*De Adoratione* 3.92.3). Levine collects and analyzes epigraphical and archaeological evidence for pagan presence in Jewish communities (*Ancient Synagogue*). The famous Aphrodisias inscription lists in separate categories “proselytes” and “godfearers,” some of whom are town councillors. Its redating from the third to the fourth/fifth century raises the interesting possibility the some of the “god-fearing” town councillors might be not pagans but Christians; see Angelos Chianotis, “The Jews of Aphrodisias,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 21 (2002): 209–42; Fergus Millar, “Christian Emperors, Christian Church and the Jews of the Diaspora in the Greek East, C.E. 379–450,” *JJS* 55 (2004): 1–24.

17. Non-Jews continued to frequent Jewish community gatherings even after they became Christian: Origen (ca. 230, Caesarea) tells his Christians not to discuss in church questions they heard raised the day before in synagogue, and not to eat meals in both places (*Hom. Lev.* 5.8; *Sel. Exod.* 12.46); John Chrysostom, notoriously before the high holidays in 387 in Antioch: Christians fast, keep Sabbath, go to synagogue, take oaths in front of Torah scrolls, co-celebrate Passover and Sukkot (“When did they ever feast on Epiphany with us?”). Church canons forbid such co-celebration on through the Visigothic and Byzantine period in the seventh century: see primary material gathered in Amnon Linder, *Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997); see too the essays collected in Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

and Jews can "Hellenize."¹⁸ Other formulations emphasize the "religious" aspect, but they thereby entail an ethnic aspect as well. In this second category, in first- and second-century Hellenistic Jewish literary sources, we find pagans who "fear god;" and in later inscriptions, third through fifth century (and most dramatically in Aphrodisias), we find non-Jews who are identified as "godfearers."¹⁹

As with the English, so with the Greek: sometimes "godfearing" simply means "pious," indicating nothing particularly about ethnicity. But sometimes, and especially in Jewish contexts, "godfearing" indicates what we might elsewhere find designated as "Judaizing" (e.g., as in Josephus, *J.W.* 2.18.2). Its "religious" cast notwithstanding, "godfearing" also connotes "ethnic" behaviors. This is all to say that we are looking at, and endeavoring to speak about, ancient Mediterranean phenomena; and in that cultural context, gods and humans formed family groups, and cult is another expression of ethnicity.

When can we as historians know which kind of "godfearer"—a pious person full stop, or a voluntarily Judaizing pagan—our ancient evidence bespeaks? As usual, we have to consider critically each case, without expecting complete agreement among our different interpretive arguments. Sometimes the "ethnicity"—thus, also, the "religious" orientation—of an inscription or (especially) of an incantation will elude us, thus reinforcing the larger social-historical interpretive point: different peoples mixed with and borrowed from each other.²⁰ But sometimes we will find in our evidence a Roman synagogue benefactor (such as Julia Severa) or a Septuagint-celebrating pagan (Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.41–42) or a non-Jew who rests on the Sabbath (as in Juvenal's satire). Such pagans are "sym-

18. On this last point, see Nongbri's remarks, *Before Religion*, 46–50.

19. Thus, the famously Judaizing father in Juvenal's satire "fears" the Sabbath (*metuentem sabbati patrem*; *Sat.* 14:96); Josephus speaks of *σεβόμενοι* who contribute to the temple (*Ant.* 14.7.2); Acts features *φοβούμενοι* and *σεβόμενοι*; inscriptions mention *θεοσεβής*. While problematizing all this literary and inscriptional evidence, Kraemer reviews it in "Godfearers," 63–82.

20. "Magic" is a great opportunity for cross-ethnic/"religious" sharing, in part because of the eminent practicality of its goals. Origen notes that the names of the patriarchs are "so powerful when linked with the name of God that the formula 'the god of Abraham, the god of Isaac, the god of Jacob' is used not only by members of the Jewish nation . . . but also by almost all those who deal in magic and spells" (*Cels.* 4.33). On the difficulty in discerning the "ethnicity" of spells, see further Joseph E. Sanzo, "'For Our Lord Was Pursued by the Jews . . .': The (Ab)Use of the Motif of 'Jewish' Violence against Jesus on a Greek Amulet (P. Heid. 1101)," in *One in Christ Jesus: Essays on Early Christianity and "All that Jazz," in Honor of S. Scott Bartchy* (ed. David Matson and K. C. Richardson; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 86–98. Recently, Mika Ahuvia has explored a fascinating case of a Jewish female adept who calls on Babylonian goddesses to mediate her spell: see "Israel among the Angels: A Study of Angels in Jewish Texts from the Fourth to Eighth Century CE." (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2014), 171–78.

pathizers” or (to use another contemporary term) “Judaizers.” The particular inscription or mosaic or literary reference itself might not designate these Judaizing non-Jews specifically as “godfearers.” But as historians, might we?

I think so. “Godfearing” is one of those terms, like “Judaizing,” that is both emic and etic: that is, one of its ancient cultural definitions maps closely onto its modern, academic one. Historiographically, “godfearing” can serve us as an identifier for a long-lived and internally various subgroup that evinced a broad range of behaviors (pious, political, practical) across this specific ethnic divide: the one between Jewishness and everything else.

Of course, “to Persianize” (Μηδίζειν) or “to Egyptianize” would likewise indicate crossover behavior between “everything else” and a particular ethnic/religious group. “Godfearing” specifically—that is, pagan Judaizing—is significant to historians of ancient Mediterranean religions, however, because of the ways that it complicates our conceptualization both of Roman-period Judaism and of ancient Christianity. If so many and such different diaspora Jewish communities over so great a stretch of time so readily accommodated such a broad range of interests and involvements from pagan neighbors, a standing separateness cannot be presupposed, for example, to account for Paul’s remarks in Galatians 2, or for “Peter’s” in Acts 10.²¹ Pauline communities need not be imagined as having the sort of biblical literacy crash courses that would be the envy of modern Methodists.²² And the later gentile Christian pattern of keeping Saturdays as the Sabbath, or of fasting on Yom Kippur, or of taking oaths before Torah scrolls need not be explained by appeal to a sudden interest, via the “Old Testament,” in Jewish practices, but can be seen for what it is: a long-lived social pattern within the Greco-Roman city.

Diaspora Jewish involvement in pagan cult and culture also needs to be seen, and to complicate our conceptualization of Roman-period Judaism and of ancient Christianity. We do not have a contemporary term for this ancient (and entirely unremarkable) Jewish behavior in the way that

21. N. T. Wright mirror-reads especially Gal 1:13–14 to construct a diaspora Judaism sharply contrasting with the “Christian” Paul (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God* [2 vols.; Christian Origins and the Question of God 4; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013], e.g., 89, 93, 177, 194 and passim); Philip F. Esler conjectures that diaspora synagogues would have fought against the *ekklēsiai* because of their “potentially idolatrous practice” of mixed table fellowship (*Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul’s Letter* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003], 101) ignoring all the abundant evidence of Jewish/non-Jewish social, thus religious, interactions.

22. The addressees of all of Paul’s letters are pagans who, up until forging their commitment to the god of Israel through the gospel, were actively involved in worship of their native deities, but who were sufficiently familiar with Israel’s sacred Scriptures so that key terms and ideas—e.g., messiah, kingdom of God, law, Moses, David, the prophets—must have already meant something to them. Godfearers fit both of these criteria.

we do, with "godfearing," for the corresponding pagan behavior. Terms such as "assimilated" or "not orthodox" come from much later periods of European Jewish history, and inevitably embody anachronistic value judgments. (And "Hellenized" seems too non-specific: after Alexander, what eastern Mediterranean culture was not to some extent "Hellenized"?) Still, the nonexistence of an ancient term for "paganizing Jews" does not, it seems to me, require that we let go of an existing ancient term for "Judaizing pagans."

These normal Jewish negotiations with the majority culture should also complicate our construction of what it meant for a pagan to "become" an "ex-pagan" — a "convert" in our modern terms, a *προσήλυτος* (and that only eventually) in Hellenistic Greek.²³ If native Jews (such as, perhaps, Pothos [Ameling, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis*, 1:303–7]) summoned lower gods to witness synagogue manumissions, or if one (such as Moschos son of Moschion [Ameling, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis*, 1:177–80]) placed inscriptions honoring foreign gods in foreign temples while identifying himself as "Ιουδαῖος," how uninvolved with his former gods need a *προσήλυτος* actually have been? And what would it mean, via ritual actions, to change ancestors and ethnic groups? What, indeed, would it mean in antiquity "to convert"?

These are important and interesting questions, none of which I can address in the space remaining here. But, given the difficulties that we have when speaking of all these mixing and mingling gods and humans, it seems overfastidious to shelve our hybrid emic/etic term that *can* still work, should we choose to let it, to identify some of these ancient actors: a "godfearer" is a pagan who voluntarily assumes (like the sympathizing father in Juvenal's *Satire* 14), or who supports (like the patron Julia Severa, who builds the οἶκος for Acmonia's Jews [Ameling, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis*, 2:348–55]), or who utilizes (like the adept who invokes "the god who was a pillar of fire by night" in order to work his spell, PGM 11.3,007–85) some aspects of Jewishness, which eo ipso implies some degree of contact both with (local) Jews and (thus and also) with their god. As an identifying category, such a term may indeed be "sweeping," but so is the phenomenon that it names.

For all the reasons reviewed above, then, but especially for this last one, I would not give up the "godfearers."

23. Matthew Thiessen, "Revisiting the *προσήλυτος* in 'the LXX,'" *JBL* 132 (2013): 333–50.

