Two Thousand Years Too Early

A Structural Reading of Jesus's Coordination Principles

Mats Heming Julner

April 5, 2026

Abstract

The teachings of Jesus Christ contain identifiable coordination principles: flat network topology, self-sovereign origin, distributed cognition without resolution, attestation without judgment, explicit and revocable authorization, and permissionless participation. These principles have been recognized and partially implemented throughout history, by early Christian communities, Quakers, Anabaptists, and others, but have consistently failed to scale beyond small groups. This paper argues that the failure was not philosophical but technical. Coordination without central authority requires enforcement, and enforcement without cryptography requires delegating to humans, who accumulate power. Cryptography does not eliminate coordination failure. It removes one of its primary structural causes, and introduces, for the first time, a viable mechanism for enforcing coordination rules without delegating authority to any individual or institution.

The author identified authorization as a missing architectural layer in digital systems, a layer every digital system already assumes but has never explicitly modeled, and built two open-source, open-standard implementations of that layer: Explicit Authorization, which formalizes individual sovereignty through cryptographic enforcement of consent, and Compute Substrate,

which implements collective sovereignty through distributed cognition without authority. These systems were developed independently of this paper's argument. The structural reading of Jesus's teachings presented here is offered on its own terms and does not depend on those systems for its validity. The author retains no proprietary interest in their adoption. Readers should weigh the argument accordingly.

I. The Scaling Problem

Every serious attempt to organize human cooperation faces the same tension: coordination requires rules, rules require enforcement, and enforcement concentrates power. The institution created to enforce the rules becomes the dominant actor in the system it serves.

Authority is what happens when enforcement requires a human.

This is not a failure of intent. The Franciscans, the early Quakers, the kibbutz movement, and dozens of other communities began with explicit commitments to flat, non-hierarchical organization. They understood the problem. They tried to solve it through culture, commitment, and careful design of social norms. They failed. Not immediately, but consistently, for the same structural reason.

The reason is scale. Within groups of roughly 150 people, peer-to-peer trust is sufficient for coordination. Reputation is legible. Defection is visible. Social pressure functions as enforcement without requiring a dedicated enforcement apparatus. Beyond this threshold, coordination requires rules that strangers can rely on, and those rules require enforcement that does not depend on personal relationship (Dunbar, 1996).

At that point, the institution emerges. It begins as a servant of the coordination system and becomes its master. This is not moral corruption. It is structural inevitability given the available technical primitives.

The question is not whether these principles are desirable. It is whether they are implementable at scale without reconstructing authority. Historically, they have not been. The claim of this paper is that this failure was technical, not philosophical.

The history of coordination without authority is not a history of failed ideas. It is a history of missing mechanisms.

II. The Teachings as Coordination Specifications

The missing mechanisms are identifiable. And they have been described before, with surprising precision.

A structural reading of Jesus's teachings does not require claims about divine inspiration or supernatural intent. It requires only that we ask: what coordination problems do these principles address, and do they address them coherently?

The answer is that several core teachings map precisely onto problems that distributed systems theorists have formalized only in the last half-century. This is not evidence of mystical foresight. It is evidence that the coordination problems are real and old, and that someone thinking carefully about human organization would encounter them.

Each teaching can be read as a constraint on coordination systems: what must be disallowed structurally for authority not to emerge.

Flat Network Topology

> *"You are all brothers. Call no one father, call no one rabbi, call no one teacher." — Matthew 23:8–10*

The explicit rejection of hierarchical titles is an architectural specification. It describes a network with no privileged nodes: no administrator, no root

authority, no supernodes. Every participant has equal standing. This is not a statement about humility; it is a description of topology.

Hierarchical authority structures concentrate both power and the incentive to preserve that power. Flat networks distribute both. The teaching identifies the structural source of institutional capture and prescribes against it directly.

Distributed Cognition Without Resolution

> *“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.” — 1 Corinthians 14:29–31*

The passage specifies four things simultaneously: anyone may propose, responses take the form of weighing rather than deciding, the output serves observers without binding them, and no node has resolution authority over others. This is not a description of democratic voting, which produces binding outcomes, nor of market pricing, which resolves into a single number. It is a description of distributed cognition where proposals accumulate weight and the network’s output remains advisory.

Systems that aggregate distributed intelligence almost always couple aggregation to consequence: the highest-ranked prediction wins a reward, the majority vote determines policy, the oracle triggers execution. This coupling creates authority at the aggregation layer. Whoever influences the ranking influences outcomes, creating adversarial pressure and strategic behavior rather than honest inquiry. The moment aggregation produces a binding outcome, it becomes authority.

The passage prescribes against this coupling structurally. Weighing is not deciding. Learning and encouragement are not obligation. The outputs of distributed cognition exist for participants to use in their own judgment, not to replace that judgment (Julner, Compute Substrate, 2026).

Attestation Without Resolution

> *“Judge not, that you be not judged.” — Matthew 7:1*

Where the Corinthians passage describes how a network should aggregate distributed cognition, this teaching specifies what individual participants should not do: claim the authority to resolve truth for others. The distinction is between the network’s architecture and the role of the node within it.

Resolution is the mechanism through which nodes accumulate authority. A participant who can determine correctness for others becomes a privileged node regardless of what the formal protocol specifies. Over time, those who resolve accumulate deference, and deference becomes institutional power. A system that permits attestation but forbids resolution eliminates authority at the node level as well as the protocol level.

Explicit, Revocable Authorization

> *“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” — Matthew 22:21*

The structural reading suggests something precise: you can participate in institutional systems without surrendering sovereignty to them. Engagement with an institution is contextual and bounded, not total.

Most coordination systems require surrendering control to participate. Once surrendered, that control is difficult to recover. The teaching specifies that participation and sovereignty are separable: you can give Caesar what belongs to Caesar without giving him everything.

Self-Sovereign Origin

> *“The kingdom of God is within you.” — Luke 17:21*

The structural reading is precise: sovereignty is internal and distributed, not externally conferred. Each participant holds standing in the coordination system as an inherent property, not as something granted by

an institution and revocable by one. There is no authority that admits or expels. Participation does not require permission from any existing node.

This is the architectural foundation the other teachings assume. Flat topology only works if no node can claim the authority to grant topology. Attestation without resolution only works if no node can claim the authority to validate other nodes' standing. The teaching specifies that sovereignty originates at the individual level and cannot be transferred upward without consent.

The Nicaea inversion of this teaching is the clearest example of deliberate capture. By making Jesus uniquely divine, the Council had the effect of making "the kingdom of God is within you" difficult to read as originally stated. Direct access was replaced by institutional mediation. Sovereignty was relocated from the individual to the institution. The structural threat of this teaching to centralized authority is why it required the most careful theological neutralization.

Permissionless Participation

> *"Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." — John 8:7*

No node in a distributed system has perfect information or perfect behavior. The teaching draws the structural conclusion: no node therefore has the standing to unilaterally exclude another. Participation cannot be made conditional on the judgment of any existing participant. The network must remain open by design, not by policy.

This is censorship resistance stated as a coordination principle. A system that grants any participant the power to exclude others has created a privileged node, regardless of what the protocol specifies. Exclusion authority concentrates. The only architecturally stable position is that inclusion is permissionless and exclusion requires no single actor's

approval. Bad actors are handled through distributed attestation and reputation, not through centralized judgment about who may participate.

III. The Historical Evidence

The timing is worth noting. The teachings attributed to Jesus emerged during the reign of Augustus, the emperor who transformed Rome from a republic into an empire and made centralized authority structurally legible for the first time. The Principate was not just more power. It was power made explicit, systematized, and visible across a vast territory. For anyone living under it, the logic of concentrated authority was no longer abstract. It was the organizing fact of daily life.

This context suggests that Jesus's teachings were not a random moral philosophy but a direct structural response to a newly visible problem. Augustus made authority legible. The teachings that followed can be read as diagnosing its mechanism and describing an alternative architecture. They are precise in ways that suggest observation of a specific system, not general ethical intuition. This is interpretive rather than documentable. But the text itself preserves the connection.

The connection is not only structural but textual. Luke 2:1 opens with Augustus issuing a census decree, the Roman state asserting authority over every person in the known world. It is authority at scale. It then immediately follows with the birth of Jesus. The sequence is explicit: total administrative authority first, then the emergence of a figure whose teachings undermine the foundations of authority itself.

It does not argue this. It does not need to. The ordering itself is the argument.

The pattern itself is not unique to that moment. Bitcoin emerged nine weeks after the 2008 financial crisis made the fragility of centralized finance

visible to everyone. The problem had become legible enough to motivate a systematic solution. Legibility of a problem tends to produce attempts to solve it.

If this reading is correct, the Constantinian capture was not merely institutional self-interest. It was the system recognizing an existential threat. Augustus had built the most sophisticated authority structure the ancient world had seen. The teachings diagnosed it. Constantine brought that diagnosis inside the system and neutralized it.

The coordination principles described above have been recognized and partially implemented throughout history. But their fate divides into two distinct patterns: organic drift at scale, and deliberate institutional capture. Both are instructive, but they are not the same thing.

Organic Drift: Quakers and Kibbutzim

The Quakers, emerging in seventeenth-century England, rejected clergy and institutional hierarchy entirely. Their early meetings were genuinely flat: any participant could speak, no one held formal authority, decisions emerged from collective discernment. This worked at small scale. As Quakerism spread, recorded ministers, formal structures, and eventually denominational organization emerged, not through corruption but through the pressure of scale. Enforcement required people, and people with enforcement roles accumulate authority.

The kibbutz movement provides a cleaner modern example (Ostrom, 1990). Early kibbutzim were founded on radical equality: collective ownership, rotating labor, decisions by assembly. They worked at small scale. They consistently formalized as they grew. The largest today operate with professional management and differentiated wages. No one planned this. The scaling pressure produced it.

Deliberate Capture: Constantine and the Council of Nicaea

The early Christian communities are a different case (Ehrman, 2003). Before institutional consolidation, they were organized as loose networks of house churches with rotating leadership and shared resources. They were flat, peer-to-peer, and explicitly anti-hierarchical. What happened to them was not organic drift. It was deliberate transformation with identifiable actors and specific decisions.

When Constantine made Christianity the state religion in 313 CE, the structural problem was immediate: how to build a governing institution around an anti-institutional teaching. The Council of Nicaea (325 CE) produced doctrinal decisions that, taken together, systematically neutralized the teaching's anti-institutional content.

The pattern is consistent with structural incentives rather than isolated theological decisions. Jesus's unique divinity is emphasized in a way that makes imitation structurally impossible, so his teachings about the kingdom being within you require institutional mediation rather than direct access. The kingdom is redefined as a future destination rather than a present mode of coordination, deferring implementation indefinitely. And despite Jesus's explicit rejection of hierarchical titles, an elaborate church hierarchy is constructed and declared legitimate (Pagels, 1979).

Each doctrinal move maps onto a structural threat to institutional power. This does not require assuming cynicism. But the outcome was systematic: the teaching was preserved in text while being rendered unreadable in its original sense. The institution most constrained by it became its custodian and its interpreter.

The pattern is consistent: without a non-human enforcement mechanism, flat coordination either collapses into hierarchy or is replaced by it. The Quakers drifted. The early church was captured. The kibbutzim formalized.

In each case, the institution that emerged to enable coordination at scale became the dominant actor in the system it serves.

The closest historical articulation of why this happens came from Leo Tolstoy. In *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* (1894), he argued that Jesus taught coordination without coercive authority, that institutional Christianity had inverted this teaching, and that recovering it required abandoning institutional intermediaries. Tolstoy understood the structural problem clearly. He had no way to solve it.

Tolstoy was not alone in this reading. John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus* (1972) argued that Jesus's teachings constituted a concrete political program rather than an otherworldly spirituality, and that Constantine's capture of Christianity had obscured a fundamentally anti-hierarchical social vision. Jacques Ellul, in *Anarchy and Christianity* (1988), made the case directly: that anarchism, defined as the nonviolent repudiation of coercive authority, most closely matched the teaching of Jesus, and that the institutional church represented a profound inversion of that teaching.

What appears across these moments is not coincidence but structure. Authority does not disappear because it is rejected. It disappears when it is no longer embedded. Augustus centralized authority and made it visible. The teachings that emerged in response questioned its necessity at the structural level. Bitcoin separated money from institutional control by removing the need for a trusted intermediary. Each moment follows the same logic: a problem becomes legible, and a response attempts to remove it from the architecture rather than simply resist it.

This pattern is not confined to history. It is re-emerging in digital systems, where coordination, knowledge, and execution have remained structurally entangled with authority. What Bitcoin separated for money can now be formalized more generally: an explicit authorization layer, where action is no longer implied by time, sequence, or inclusion, but must be continuously

and independently valid. Not a change in who decides, but a removal of decision as a structural property of the system itself.

This paper does not claim to have discovered the structural reading. Tolstoy, Yoder, Ellul, and the Christian anarchist tradition established it through philosophical reasoning alone. What this paper adds is a technical observation: their diagnosis was correct but their prescription was unimplementable. Not because the principles were wrong, but because the required enforcement primitive did not exist. Cryptography is not the validation of their argument. It is the infrastructure their argument was waiting for.

IV. Why They Failed: The Missing Technical Primitive

For two thousand years, this remained a visible constraint without an implementation mechanism.

The standard explanation for the failure of flat coordination movements is human nature: people seek power, communities become complacent, idealism fades. This explanation is not wrong, but it is incomplete. It treats the outcome as a moral failure when it is better understood as a technical one.

The Quakers did not fail because they became corrupt. They faced a genuine engineering problem: how do you enforce coordination rules across a large group of strangers without creating an enforcement institution that accumulates power?

Before the late twentieth century, there was no good answer. Enforcement required trust, and trust required either personal relationship (which does not scale) or institutional delegation (which concentrates power). The only

available tool for coordination at scale was the institution, with all its attendant pathologies.

Institutional enforcement requires someone to determine violations, someone to decide responses, and someone to carry them out. Each function creates a node with elevated authority. Multiply across a large organization and you have reconstructed hierarchy from the bottom up, regardless of original intent.

The teachings prescribed against exactly this: judge not, call no one father, build on unchanging foundations. But prescription without enforcement mechanism is advice, not architecture. The rules will be enforced by whoever holds enforcement power, and those people will accumulate authority in the process. The missing primitive was enforcement without an enforcer.

Cryptography provides the first viable mechanism to implement this primitive: rules that execute automatically, that cannot be modified by any single actor, that require demonstrable consent for any delegation, and that make authority explicit rather than implicit.

This primitive did not exist before the development of public-key cryptography, digital signatures, and distributed consensus protocols in the late twentieth century. It was not available to the Quakers, the Anabaptists, the early Christians, or Tolstoy. Each of them diagnosed the problem correctly and lacked the tools to fix it.

V. What Cryptography Changes

Cryptography does not eliminate the coordination problem. It changes the terms on which it must be solved.

The changes can be stated precisely. Cryptographic systems do not eliminate human nature, social pressure, or coercion. What they do is

remove authority from the protocol layer itself, making it structurally impossible for the rules to be captured by any single actor.

Bitcoin demonstrated that enforcement can exist without central operators. But it did not eliminate authority. It relocated it. Consensus outcomes still determine what is accepted as valid. This is coordination secured without central control, but not coordination without authority. The distinction matters.

Individual Sovereignty: Making Authorization Explicit and Revocable

The most significant contribution of cryptographic coordination systems is not technical efficiency. It is accountability. Current systems hide authority inside protocol mechanics. Temporal ordering becomes permission. Inclusion in a sequence becomes legitimacy. Institutional practice becomes binding without anyone claiming responsibility.

Explicit authorization inverts this. Every delegation of authority must be accompanied by verifiable proof of current consent. Every action taken on behalf of a participant requires a valid, time-bounded authorization signed by that participant. There is no implicit permission, no standing authority, no assumed consent (Julner, Digital Sovereignty Through Explicit Authorization, 2026).

Authority is not removed by eliminating coordination itself. It is removed by requiring continuous, verifiable consent for every act of coordination.

But authorization is only explicit if it can be withdrawn. When you grant authority to an institution in a traditional system, recovering that authority requires the institution’s cooperation. Accounts can be frozen. Permissions persist past their intended duration. What was offered conditionally becomes held unconditionally. Explicit authorization without revocation is not sovereignty. It is a more legible form of surrender.

Cryptographic revocation dominance resolves this. A properly designed system enforces as a mandatory invariant that revocation must dominate prior consent: any explicit withdrawal of authorization renders any previously issued permission unusable, regardless of remaining validity window or executor cooperation. The grantor's ability to revoke is structurally stronger than any grantee's ability to retain. This is individual sovereignty: not freedom from coordination, but cryptographic guarantee that any coordination you participate in requires your current, bounded, revocable consent.

Collective Sovereignty: Separating Cognition from Authority

The second contribution addresses the "judge not" problem at scale. Distributed systems have historically coupled computation to consequence: a model's output triggers an action, a ranking determines a reward, a prediction resolves a market. This coupling creates authority at the computational layer. Whoever controls the computation controls the outcomes.

It is now technically possible to build systems that aggregate distributed cognition without granting any of that cognition the power to act. Proposals and attestations are recorded. Rankings emerge from aggregated weight. But the protocol does not interpret, decide, or execute. Meaning exists only to external observers. Authority, interpretation, and action remain entirely outside the system (Julner, Compute Substrate, 2026).

This is the structural implementation of "judge not": not as a moral aspiration requiring human restraint, but as an architectural property of the system. The network cannot judge because it has no mechanism for judgment. Any external system that acts on its outputs must explicitly own that decision. This is collective sovereignty: shared reference without shared control. The system produces structure without producing obligation.

On the Value of Non-Resolution

A common objection is that systems which do not resolve outcomes produce no value. This assumes coordination must culminate in decision. In practice, many domains benefit from shared reference without enforced conclusion: scientific discourse, intelligence analysis, and open inquiry among them. In such contexts, the ability to observe structured disagreement without forced resolution is not a limitation but a feature. The system's role is not to decide, but to make the state of knowledge legible.

What Cryptography Cannot Do

Cryptographic systems reduce the attack surface for institutional capture at the protocol layer. They do not prevent authority from reconstituting at social layers above the protocol.

Bitcoin's mining pool concentration and Ethereum's validator concentration demonstrate that permissionless protocols can still centralize through social and economic dynamics. The protocol does not prevent this; it only ensures that the centralization is not structurally embedded at the rule level. Power can still accumulate, but it must do so explicitly, visibly, and against the protocol's design rather than through it.

Cryptography makes enforcement possible without human authority. Whether systems still produce authority through their outcomes is a separate design question. Cryptography removes structural authority. It does not remove social power.

This is better than what we have today. It is not a permanent solution. It is meaningful progress on a problem that has remained structurally unsolved since the first flat community attempted to scale.

VI. Conclusion

The teachings attributed to Jesus contain coherent coordination principles: flat topology, distributed cognition without resolution, attestation without judgment, explicit and revocable authorization, self-sovereign origin, and permissionless participation. These principles have been recognized repeatedly throughout history. They have been partially implemented by communities that understood them clearly. They have consistently failed to scale. Not because the principles are wrong, but because enforcement without cryptography requires delegating to humans, and humans who hold enforcement power accumulate institutional authority.

One observation follows directly from this reading. A figure who taught that no one should be called father, that the kingdom is within each person, that sovereignty requires no institutional mediation, was not founding a religion. The teachings contain no institutional intent. What emerged in his name was not a fulfillment of the teaching but a response to it: an institution formed precisely to contain a structural idea that threatened the authority structures of its time. The capture of Christianity is not incidental to its history. It is the central data point.

Cryptography provides, for the first time, a viable mechanism for enforcement without an enforcer. It makes authority explicit rather than implicit, revocable rather than sticky, and unable to hide inside protocol mechanics. It does not solve the coordination problem permanently. Social layers above any protocol can still reconstruct authority. But it removes the structural inevitability of that reconstruction and forces any accumulation of power to be visible and claimed.

The historical significance is limited but real. For two millennia, the coordination principles described above existed as texts requiring interpretation and communities requiring faith. They now exist, partially, as executable architecture. The experiment is no longer purely philosophical.

Whether cryptographic coordination systems succeed, whether they actually prevent institutional capture at scale, whether they produce durable coordination without authority, remains an open empirical question.

For two thousand years, the constraint was visible but unimplementable. That is no longer true.

References

Dunbar, Robin. *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language*. Harvard University Press, 1996.

Ehrman, Bart. *Lost Christianities*. Oxford University Press, 2003.

Ellul, Jacques. *Anarchy and Christianity*. Eerdmans, 1988.

Julner, Mats Heming. *Authorization as a Missing Layer in Digital Systems*. 2026.

Julner, Mats Heming. *Digital Sovereignty Through Explicit Authorization*. 2026.

Julner, Mats Heming. *Compute Substrate: A Permissionless Computation Layer Without Authority*. 2026.

Ostrom, Elinor. *Governing the Commons*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Pagels, Elaine. *The Gnostic Gospels*. Random House, 1979.

Tolstoy, Leo. *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*. 1894.

Yoder, John Howard. *The Politics of Jesus*. Eerdmans, 1972.