

NEGOTIATING THE JEWISH HERITAGE OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

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Any discussion of the dialogue between Jews and Christians in the twenty-first century must begin with some historical perspective as to what the traditional Christian view has been concerning the relations of Jews and followers of Jesus in the first century. In the first half of the twentieth century, for instance, the dominant Christian view was the following: on the one hand, there was one clear Judaism—viewed through the lens of Paul’s critique of the law and represented by the Pharisees as depicted in Matthew—and on the other hand, one clear Christianity as a new entity that had separated from Judaism. If there was any disagreement among the first Christians, it was only that between the “correct” party—those who followed Paul—and the “incorrect” party—those who followed James in retaining Jewish law. How the divorce between Judaism and Christianity took place is treated in the book of Acts, which was taken as a historically accurate record of the intransigence of Jews in the face of Paul’s preaching of the message of Christ. True, there were ambiguous passages throughout the Gospels, such as:

When Jesus saw that he [the scribe] answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” (Mark 12:34)

Jesus said to them, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it.” (Matt. 23:2-3)

But these could be explained away by interpreting them in light of Paul’s letters and Acts.

Over the last century, scholars have moved away from this simple view of the relation of ancient Judaism and early Christianity to a much more complex view, questioning almost every part of the description above. In the first half of the twentieth century, some Christian scholars argued that the variety of early Christian groups did not evolve out of one unified body of followers of Jesus, or even from the two divergent paths of “Paul Christians” and “James Christians.” Rather, from the earliest period, there were already widely divergent practices and beliefs, without any clear sense of an agreed-on center. This challenge to a trunk-with-branches view of early Christian groups gave more weight to the “branches,” groups formerly regarded as smaller, marginal, too Eastern, or heretical. Walter Bauer was a leading figure in this development; more recent scholars who exemplify this approach include James Robinson and Helmut Koester; Jack Sanders; and Stephen Wilson.

For instance, whereas it was traditionally assumed that the four Gospels were narrative depictions of a Jesus who taught essentially what Paul said in his letters using different language, now one had to take seriously the differences among the authors and audiences of these texts. The varied emphases that were found among the four Gospels, or between Paul’s letters and Revelation, or between Acts and Jude, or between canonical texts and early Christian texts from outside the canon, came to be seen as reflective of widely divergent movements and eddies in this new religious movement. Scholars might retain the theological preferences of their own traditions, but in colleges and universities, and even in seminaries, the historical narrative no longer seemed like a tree with a clear trunk and branches, but followed the pattern of tubers and vines—widely propagating members with little clear order or lines of development.

In this process, Christian texts from outside the New Testament canon, even those that had been considered “heretical,” came to be viewed as having an equal claim in the *historical* reconstruction of early Christianity, regardless of their theology. There was a larger and larger patchwork of groups, and a clear history of origins and development became ever more difficult to reconstruct. Very basic questions about the history of Judaism and Christianity were also introduced: Has the early Eastern history of Judaism and Christianity, all the way from Syria to India and later to China, been ignored as a result of the Western focus of much of the Christian church and of Judaism? To be sure, the Eastern church also included Paul in its canon, but was the relation between eastern Christians and Jews vastly different from that of their Western counterparts (Foltz)?

But another, parallel shift was also underway. In the last half of the twentieth century, scholars proposed a similar proliferation in the number of Jewish groups as well. Before about 1960, many scholars would have described Judaism in the first century as divided into three parties—Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes—based on a description of Judaism by the first-century Jewish historian Josephus (*J.W.* 2.117–66). But the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a new appreciation for the differences among the many Jewish texts of the period, and a growing realization that early rabbinic views were not authoritative for all Jews compelled scholars to recognize the wide variety of Jewish groups, beliefs, and practices (see Cohen 2006; J. J. Collins; Nickelsburg). The classic nineteenth-century history of the Judaism of this period by Emil Schürer (1886–1890) was enlarged in each of the many subsequent editions by the inclusion of more variety in terms of texts, theology, and practices.

Jewish scholars were also motivated by a desire to participate fully in the public discourse on the nature of religions. Judaism, they argued, should be studied in our colleges and universities as an important religious tradition alongside Christianity and other world religions. After World War II and the Shoah, or Holocaust—the genocide of six million Jews—there was an added motivation for both Jews and Christians: a more searching engagement about the origins of Jewish-Christian relations in the ancient world. If the historical assumptions behind a presumed Christian superiority could be challenged, then Christians, Jews, and others would have a chance of living in peace in the twentieth century and afterward without the corrosive effects of stereotypes derived from a misreading of ancient evidence.

Corresponding to the recognition of ancient variety was a new variety among the modern scholars who were studying it as well. During the twentieth century, there arose a full participation of Christian scholars in the study of Judaism and Jewish scholars in the study of Christianity—along with scholars from other religious backgrounds or with no religious affiliation at all. By the second half of the twentieth century, it came to be quite expected that New Testament scholars would know something about rabbinic literature and that Jewish historians of the Roman period would know something about the New Testament and early church. By the end of the twentieth century, there was not just one or two but a number of important studies on the New Testament by Jewish scholars and a number of important studies on rabbinic Judaism by Christians.

The situation at the end of the twentieth century, then, was drastically different from that at the beginning. Influenced by challenges in the social sciences, philosophy, and literary criticism, new issues came to be raised that only made the comparison more complicated, but in many cases, more interesting to modern audiences. Formerly, scholars compared Judaism and Christianity as two clearly defined bodies of people with separate identities, but increasingly many scholars realized that more elite voices within Judaism—for instance, the chief priests, Josephus, or Philo—were being unfairly compared to the less elite forms of Christianity—Mark or the sayings source of Matthew and Luke. The nonelite layers of the Christian movement seemed more revolutionary when compared with the aristocratic voices within Judaism, yet a comparison of Jewish prophetic movements (such as those reported in Josephus) to more elite Christian texts like Hebrews would look very different. Which is the “proper” comparison? Should popular movements among Christians be compared with popular movements among Jews, and more elite texts among Christians with elite Jewish authors, say, Hebrews with Philo? And further, would a female Christian who was the slave of a Christian master have had more in common with her master, or with a Jewish woman who was the slave of a Jewish master, or a female worshiper of Isis who was the slave of a master who worshiped Isis? The effects of geographical distance were also relevant, as both Jews and followers of Jesus were found in communities stretching well over a thousand miles, from Spain to the East, assimilating in each case to vastly different local customs. It was becoming increasingly difficult to define clearly separate bodies of “Jews” and “Christians.”

The earlier consensus, then, might have compared the “three parties” of Judaism—Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes—and the “two parties” within Christianity—Pauline Christians and “Jewish Christians”—a comparison that could be depicted in this way:

Jewish groups:	1 1 1
Followers of Jesus:	1 1

But by the end of the twentieth century, in recognition of the great variety of subgroups, the comparison would appear more like this:

Jewish groups:	1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1
Followers of Jesus:	1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1

If many Jewish groups maintained strict observance of Torah, so did many followers of Jesus. If many followers of Jesus believed that the end of time was near, so did many Jewish groups. If many followers of Jesus believed that the community of believers was bathed in the holiness of God in a way that made the Jewish temple superfluous, so did some Jews. And finally: If the death of Jesus was the theological affirmation that supposedly separated Christians from Jews, what do we make of the fact that some followers of Jesus did not emphasize his death and some Jewish texts (for example, 4 Maccabees) did emphasize the death of Jewish heroes? Similarities and differences among the groups in *both* rows above introduced new challenges for comparing “Judaism” and “Christianity.” The Gospel of Matthew, for instance, was clearly critical of Pharisees—*one* of the Jewish groups in the row above—but was it possible that Matthew was actually more similar to Pharisees than he was to Paul? The simple question of the relation of “Jews” and “Christians” could no longer be answered without pressing a more specific question: *Which* Jews? *Which* Christians?

Incorporating this new consensus concerning a variety of groups among Christians and among Jews, some scholars toward the end of the twentieth century began charting the history of the “partings of the ways” or the “divorce” between Judaism and Christianity (e.g., Dunn 1991; Townsend). A title that exemplified the new consensus of variety was James D. G. Dunn’s *The Partings of the Ways* (1991), but challenges to the “new consensus” were, of course, inevitable. Dunn’s title was countered by a collection of conference papers called *The Ways That Never Parted* (Becker and Reed; see also Boyarin). This volume asked: At what point were the followers of Jesus thoroughly parted from “Judaism” or “Israel”? True, differences among Jewish or Christian subgroups could be discerned, but could the line above of Christian subgroups really be clearly distinguished from the Jewish line? Thus it is somewhat ironic that, after a century of new studies emphasizing the distinctions among different Jewish groups and different Christian groups, some of the heirs of that consensus would amend it by deemphasizing the boundary line *between* Judaism and Christianity. As more and more subgroups were divided off, they began to fill out the *overall* circle of “Judaism and Christianity” approximately equally. It is even suggested that texts that seem at first to affirm a clear, separate identity are in some cases overstating the distinction, or even creating the illusion of separation, imposing distinctions that may barely exist, in order to instill a clearer sense of identity. (This may be true, for example, of Matthew.) As we learn from modern identity studies, the strongest assertions of difference, or the strongest assertions of a good “We” and an evil “Other,” often appear between groups that are similar to each other, and almost indistinguishable by outsiders (Wills). Although this newest development appears at first to undo the previous consensus about

variety and difference, it actually carries it forward by demonstrating that there is a wide, overlapping spectrum of beliefs and practices among Jews *and* followers of Jesus, and yet the differences that we perceive among groups and subgroups does not result in one clear line *between* Jews and followers of Jesus. Some Christian groups would admittedly be more clearly separated from Judaism—for example, the implied audience of the Letter to the Hebrews—but others would be more ambiguous in their separation than once thought. Again, it is as if the two lines of groups above should be merged into one indistinct set.

The Continuing Demand for Comparison, Despite the Complexity of the Data

While recognizing all of these challenging new questions, the effort to draw general conclusions about the relations of Jews and Christians continues, and is indeed necessary for a dialogue between Jews and Christians in the twenty-first century. The demands of modern Jews and Christians for dialogue have required some general observations about the first century in order to proceed. Some of the older conclusions still inform the present, more complex discussions among Jews, Christians, and others, and can be used as starting points.

Douglas R. A. Hare, for instance, divided the different assessments of Judaism found in the New Testament into three types. Some polemic in the Gospels is simply a critique of Jewish institutions by people who were, after all, also Jews. This he termed “prophetic anti-Judaism,” the critique by a prophetic figure of his or her own institutions. (Even this use of the term *anti-Judaism* seems to separate the prophet from the people and imply that the prophet is *not* Jewish; it is tantamount to referring to Martin Luther King’s “anti-Americanism.” George Michael Smiga [12–13] tried to address this terminological problem.) According to Hare, Jesus himself would have fit in this category, and might be compared to figures such as Socrates, who, although he criticized his fellow Athenians, was not “un-Greek” or “anti-Greek.” Nor did his students suggest that they must create a new entity in which to explore his philosophy (though Plato did eventually leave Athens to advise the king of Syracuse in a failed experiment to establish a “philosopher’s state”). Other polemic in the New Testament, however, became progressively harsher, and pronounced a final condemnation on those Jews who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. Hare termed this “Jewish-Christian anti-Judaism.” Unlike the previous category, this type represents a division of groups within Judaism that is at the point of divorce, and the polemical language reflects the tension of being “mid-divorce” (Townsend). A third type is “gentilizing anti-Judaism,” and is truly postdivorce: the critique of Judaism as a whole by gentile Christians (Wilson, 110–42, 258–84). Authors in this category are no longer realistically concerned with the conversion of Israel. It can be debated which texts of the New Testament or the early church would fall into these categories, but many scholars would consider the Gospel of Matthew as the first type, a prophetic critique of some (or even most) Jews from within Judaism; the Acts of the Apostles as a text of the second type, which condemns Jews for not accepting the message of Jesus as Messiah; and the Epistle to the Hebrews as an example of gentilizing anti-Judaism. But any of these might be and have been debated. Only if we could

interrogate the authors could we be sure where they stood on key questions of the relations of the subgroups in a constantly differentiated Judaism.

In addition to historians and biblical scholars, theologians also entered into the dialogue and introduced terminology to define the various positions that Christians have taken in regard to their relation to Judaism. “Supersessionism” describes the traditional Christian view that in Jesus and Paul we find the belief that Judaism was superseded by God’s new dispensation in Christ and the church. (Some New Testament scholars use the compound term rejection-replacement.) But even a doctrine of supersessionism can be more or less negative about the validity of the Jewish covenant. Does the old covenant have any continuing role in God’s dispensation, or is it simply the precursor to Christianity (Novak; see also Soulen)? A so-called dual-covenant theology has arisen among liberal Christians, which is the notion that God’s new dispensation in Christ did not cancel out the existing covenant with Jews. In this view, there are still two covenants operative, and thus there is no supersessionism, but rather a continuing coexistence of parallel covenants. Some passages from early Christian authors might be adduced in support of this position (see below concerning Paul).

Yet this overture only calls forth new questions. Even if Christians developed a benign view of the continuing validity of God’s covenant with Jews, that does not begin to address the relations of Christians with religions other than Judaism. Jewish-Christian dialogue is an important beginning, but only a beginning, to dialogues with other faiths, and this should not be forgotten in discussions of the history of Jewish-Christian relations. Although it is understandable that Jewish leaders have often engaged in dialogue with Christian leaders in order to ameliorate the effects of antisemitism, for many Jews it would be unacceptable to achieve a recognition of God’s continuing covenant with Jews if other religions still remained in a less favored status. In the twenty-first century, a broader notion of religious acceptance, beyond a “dual-covenant theology,” has often arisen.

With these and similar analyses in mind, in the late twentieth century, scholars of the New Testament, including many Jewish scholars, proposed sweeping changes in regard to how the New Testament texts themselves evaluated Judaism. Vermes, Fredriksen, and Levine (17–52) returned to the Gospel accounts and Acts and argued that recoverable evidence about the historical Jesus depicts a teacher who may have *argued* about Jewish law—not surprising for a Jewish teacher—but who probably remained fairly observant to the end. A great deal of consensus has gathered around this view. If Jesus did reject certain aspects of Jewish law that were advocated by others, such as the Pharisees—again, not surprising for any non-Pharisaic Jew—he never made a blanket rejection of the markers of Judaism. Otherwise, why would Paul have been forced to argue so strongly with the disciples who actually knew Jesus (Galatians 1–2)? Some of Jesus’ claims in the Gospels might actually constitute a *stricter* than usual observance of Jewish law, an “ultraorthodox” position! (These cases are sometimes ambiguous, and identifying something or someone as more or less orthodox is always a relative question—who defined the norm? Yet Jesus’ rejection of divorce in Mark 10:2–12, or his constraints on accepted Jewish law in Matt. 5:17–48, could be considered a stricter “fence around the Torah” than that which became the norm in rabbinic literature. See also Vermes [80–81], and on the apparent exception in Mark 7:19, see below.)

It is likely that any observer in the year 30 CE would not have considered Jesus a “Reform” Jew (admittedly an anachronistic term), but more probably, a “strict” or “pious” Jew. As noted above,

a compelling argument was also made that the Gospel of Matthew, although formerly viewed as “anti-Jewish” (“Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” Matt. 23:13), was actually more anti-*Pharisaic* (Harrington, 1–3; Wills, 101–32). That is, Matthew does not perceive the movement of the followers of Jesus as opposing Judaism, but as opposing some within Judaism, especially Pharisees. To be sure, it is stated in Matthew that at the end, the gentiles will come in (28:19), but that is true of many Jewish texts as well. Matthew does not betray a “Pauline” critique of Jewish law and remains observant to the end.

Even if Jesus and the Gospel of Matthew assumed a continuing adherence to Jewish law, it has been assumed that Paul had irrevocably altered this situation by instituting a mission to gentiles without the law. But now this assumption as well has come in for a major reevaluation. The so-called new perspective on Paul has questioned the chasm that Christians have traditionally perceived between this apostle and the Judaism of his day (Dunn 1983). For the new-perspective scholars, Paul was more a missionary theologian than an abstract theologian or a psychologist of the human condition, and was rarely setting up an opposition between “Jews” and those in Christ. Rather than critiquing and rejecting Judaism as a form of legalism and “works righteousness” at odds with God’s plan, almost all of Paul’s apparent references to “Jews” are more likely referring to those *in the Jesus movement*, whether originally Jewish or gentile, who oppose his mission to gentiles without the law. This raises a challenging question: If gentiles had been allowed to enter freely into his churches without adhering to Jewish law, would Paul have voiced any reservations about the law for Jews at all?

The debate over the new perspective has been significant. The new perspective represents a direct challenge to strongly held tradition, and yet has achieved a large following. Still, conservative Protestant theologians have opposed it, and even those scholars who have self-identified as part of the new perspective can be divided into two groups, a moderate new perspective and a radical new perspective (Wills, 179–82). The distinction is based on how far they would push the questioning of the older consensus. The moderate new-perspective scholars hold that Paul was much less critical of Judaism than once thought. Says E. P. Sanders (552), whom we might consider a moderate new-perspective scholar: “In short, this is what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity.” That is, God (in Paul’s view) is not “displeased” with Jews, Judaism, or Jewish law, but has simply, by the death of Christ, created a new door for all, both Jews and gentiles, to enter into the graces of God. The *discontinuity* between Judaism and Christianity is thus drastically reduced. This shift alone unsettled much Protestant tradition.

But the radical new-perspective scholars go further and argue a version of the dual-covenant theology mentioned above. For Paul, the death of Christ did indeed open a new door of access for gentiles that did not require Jewish law, but the old door for Jews remained open as well—without Christ and with the law still in effect! God was not closing one door to open a new one, but was opening an option for gentiles parallel to the one for Jews (Eisenbaum). Paul’s letters are ultimately unclear on this question, but Eisenbaum’s conclusions may be correct. However, as above with dual-covenant theology, the same demurrer still applies: even if Paul envisioned a two-door access, for gentiles in Christ without the law and for Jews with the law only, he is quite explicit that gentile religion (apart from belief in Christ) is degraded and alienated from God (Rom. 1:2; Gal. 4:8; see

Wills, 179–82). There is no “newer perspective” on Paul that could soften his condemnation of the gentile religions, and in the twenty-first century this becomes a fundamental challenge for interfaith dialogue. (It would be speculative to try to imagine what Paul’s views of Islam might have been, although the parallels to Paul’s theology are significant. In Islam, Jesus is the Messiah of God, born of a virgin, who performed miracles, and the revelation in Islam came to a prophet who was also “last of all, as to one untimely born” [cf. 1 Cor. 15:8]. But even if, continuing this imaginative exercise on the analogy of the “two-covenant” understanding described above, we were to imagine Paul countenancing a third covenant, with Islam, what would we say of the status of other religions?)

Now, many passages in Paul, especially in Romans, would appear to fly in the face of the radical new-perspective scholars, but in each case an alternative interpretation is possible that would at least make this dual-covenant reading a plausible option. Consider the much-discussed case of Rom. 10:4: “For Christ is the end [*telos*] of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” Like the English “end,” *telos* can be translated as either “point of cessation” or “goal”; does Paul mean that Christ will bring the covenant of law to an end, or that Christ will constitute the goal of that law *for gentiles*? The interpretation of individual passages sometimes also comes down to whether Paul is speaking principally about Christ or God. For example, in Rom. 9:33, Paul quotes Isa. 8:14–15; 28:16.

See, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make people stumble, a rock that will make them fall,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

Is Paul referring here to Christ, as Christian tradition has generally held, or, like the Isaiah passages he quotes, to *God’s* role in establishing Jerusalem? Note here that the Greek pronoun for “him” could equally be “it,” that is, the stone (a masculine noun in Greek). Which is the center of Paul’s vision, Christ or God? Is it necessary for Jews to have faith *in Christ*, or faith *in the promises of God for gentiles*? The radical new-perspective scholars point out that in Romans, Paul speaks of both.

Quite often, we see that the debate narrows to a microanalysis of individual verses. Indeed, interpretation can only proceed one passage at a time, and yet, if at each stop alternative understandings are possible, then the decision about the whole becomes more difficult to adjudicate. But for this, as for any important and difficult issue, the positions of scholars and of laypeople will likely not be based on “decoding” one or two passages, but rather on general dispositions to the texts. However, it is possible that the undisputed letters of Paul, really only about seventy-five pages in the English translations, simply do not unambiguously reveal Paul’s view on this question. That in itself would still be news. If the supersessionist position were really so central to Paul’s theology, should it not be easy to establish it in the letters without question? If the overall impression of ambiguity is sustained, does that not at least suggest that the assurance with which earlier interpreters spoke of Paul in supersessionist ways was unwarranted? If one sets aside the *later* Christian tradition on supersessionism, does the same view disappear in Paul’s letters?

The issues found in the Gospel of John have also come under scrutiny. Unlike Matthew, which focuses its polemic stridently on the Pharisees, John equally insistently refers to opponents as “Jews”—*Ioudaioi* in Greek—which can also be translated “Judeans” (that is, those from Judea, where

Jerusalem was located). How does one explain the intense anti-Judaism of John, where it is stated that *Ioudaioi* are the “children of the devil” (8:44)? Was the audience of John an “introversionist sect,” which turned the promise of salvation inward to a small group of followers who no longer identified with the *Ioudaioi*, meaning Jews who revered the temple authorities in Judea (Wills, 133–66; Reinhartz, 25; Kittredge, 49–63)? Or is the Galilean origin of the Gospel of John at play here, and should *Ioudaioi* be translated not as “Jews” but as “Judeans,” those members of Israel who lived in Judea and exercised some control over the members of Israel (which may include Samaritans) who lived in Galilee and Samaria? Whatever sociological theory is asserted to explain the *Ioudaioi* in the Gospel of John, the text seems to express a polemical separation that is different from Matthew on one hand or Paul on the other. The distinction between good and bad people, or even good and evil people, is even stronger in John than in Paul or Matthew.

For twenty-first-century audiences, it is difficult to come to terms with the strong polemics voiced in our sacred texts. Should modern readers, both Christian and Jewish, simply conclude that the ancient writers of the now-sacred texts took group identity too far? Consider a passage from the Hebrew Bible and a passage from the New Testament.

When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter . . . and he clears away . . . the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, . . . then you must utterly destroy them. (Deut. 7:1-2)

You [Jews] are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth. . . . He is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44, referred to above)

One can imagine asking, “If you knew a Hittite well (or a Jew well), would you say that?” (On the ambiguity of these designations, see Wills, 21–51, 133–66.) But the many varieties of early followers of Jesus means that *different* lines were being drawn in the sand to differentiate groups, and while they defined the fissures between most Jews and followers of Jesus, they also defined serious breaches among different followers of Jesus. Would Paul, Matthew, or John have placed *each other* among the saved, or among the damned?

The Gospel of Mark as a Test Case

At the same time that bold new assessments were being raised in regard to the relations of Jews and followers of Jesus in Matthew, Paul, and John, there was relatively little rethinking of the situation in the Gospel of Mark, and this Gospel could become a test case for the *old* view. It has long been assumed that, *regardless of the original meaning of Paul’s letters*, Mark understood Paul as Paul’s followers did. The following assumptions seemed secure:

1. Mark was influenced by Paul and inherited a Pauline doctrine of faith.
2. Mark reflected a mission that was like Paul’s; in Mark, Jesus moved into gentile territory to demonstrate an openness to gentile converts (Mark 7–9).

3. Mark must have been a gentile, because there are inaccuracies in regard to Jewish practice in the passion narratives and elsewhere, and Mark explains basic Jewish practices, often inaccurately (7:3-4).
4. Jesus is depicted as rejecting kosher laws across the board (7:19).

Now, however, these conclusions have also been challenged. First, it is not at all clear that Mark knew Paul's theology of faith *in contrast to law*. Faith was a constant element in the Hebrew Bible and also in the Jewish discourse of the period. The Hebrew word *'aman* ("to believe, have faith") and its related forms (in Aramaic as well) can be found behind the use of "amen" in liturgy and are related to the word truth (*emet*, derived from *'aman*), and to the "faithful ones" (*ne'emanim*) among the Pharisees (*m. Demai* 4:6). In Neh. 9:38, the restored community in Jerusalem joins in a "faith covenant" (*'amanah*). The use of this root by Jews speaking Hebrew or Aramaic, and of the *pist-* root by those speaking Greek, only increases in the Hellenistic period. Thus, although the use of the language of "faith" and "believing" in Mark is pronounced, *it was also common in Judaism*, a fact that is almost totally ignored in assessments of Jewish-Christian relations in the first century. Further, the language of "faith" and "believing" in Mark is not explicitly contrasted with law as Paul would have it; it is used in the same way as other Jews were using it. (Parallels between Mark and Paul are often listed, but the Pauline passages are almost all found in Romans. Were Paul's words in this letter carefully chosen to respond to the *Jewish* discourse on faith in which that community would have been schooled?)

Second, although in Mark, Jesus does move into territories occupied by gentiles, these were also (with one exception, 7:1) part of the ancient borders of Israel. The Maccabees and their descendants had already conquered these lands in order to reestablish the boundaries of ancient Israel; so might we regard Jesus' itinerary in Mark as also reconstituting "Israel"? Jesus also heals gentiles, but so had the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 5); was the latter also "gentilizing" Israel? Third, Mark's Gospel does seem to include many *apparent* inaccuracies concerning Jewish practices, but these, too numerous to mention, are in some cases found in other Jewish texts or taken over in the "Jewish" Gospel Matthew, and other cases are much less clear than once thought (A. Y. Collins).

Last, we come to the argument that has often seemed conclusive: Mark's apparent cancellation of all kosher laws in Jesus' debate with the Pharisees and scribes at 7:1-23. The relevant verses are displayed here side by side with the equivalent section of Matthew. The parallel columns allow one to read Mark's words closely while at the same time noting the differences found in Matthew's treatment of this important issue. (Luke and John do not include this passage.)

Mark 7:1-23 (in part)

¹ When the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, ² they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them.

³ For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders;

⁴ and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.

⁵ So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?”

[Several scriptural and legal arguments follow here.]

¹⁴ He called the people to him again and said,

¹⁵ “There is nothing outside a person which by going in can defile, but the things which come out are what defile.

¹⁸ Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile,

¹⁹ since it enters not the heart, but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?”

Thus he declared all foods clean [literally, “Thus he cleansed all foods”].

²⁰ And he said, “It is what comes out of a person that defiles.

²¹ For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, ²² adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly.

²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Matthew 15:1-20 (in part)

¹ Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem,

and said,

² “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands before they eat?”

[Several scriptural and legal arguments follow here.]

¹⁰ He called the people to him and said,

¹¹ “It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles.

¹⁷ Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth

enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?

¹⁸ But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles.

¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.

²⁰ These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”

Mark's words here are traditionally interpreted in a "Pauline" way, that is, that Jewish law now no longer applies among the followers of Jesus. However, challenges to that interpretation of this passage have also arisen. Jesus' debate with Pharisees about eating food with unwashed hands may not be a rejection of Jewish law but a debate *within* Judaism. Mark here may actually have Jesus endorse the majority Jewish position against the stricter Pharisees. Was the view Mark attributes to Jesus actually more typical of Jewish practice in the first century than the Pharisees'? One also notices that the run-on sentence in 7:3-4 may have resulted from the combination of a simple, and accurate, statement about Pharisees and additional comments about practices of "all the Jews" that were added later. (Note that these verses are not present in Matthew.) But Mark's explanation of Jewish customs may also not be as out of place in Jewish discourse as once thought (A. Y. Collins, 345; Regev 2000, 180–81, 188–89). To be sure, the passage indicates (if it was not inserted later in its entirety) that Mark is including gentiles in the audience of the Gospel, but it does not necessarily reveal a gentile *author*. Mark's reference to the practices of "all the Jews" certainly seems to distance himself from them, but we encounter here a hidden problem with English that affects interpretation. An English-speaking Jew might say, "All Jews do such-and-such," but not "All *the* Jews do such-and-such." The English definite article has the power in this construction to separate off the group in question and to distance the speaker from the group. In Greek, however, usage of the definite article is often quite different from English, and it is not clear that it would distance the speaker in this way. Did Mark mean, "All Jews wash their hands"—which could include Mark—or "All *the* Jews wash their hands"—which seems to distance the Markan Jesus from the Jews?

The last half of this passage has also been reassessed. The central statement—"There is nothing outside a person which by going in can defile, but the things which come out are what defile"—may not be a rejection of purity concerns, as long supposed, but simply an insistence that *moral* purity is as important, or even more important, than *ritual* purity. The prioritizing of moral motives over observance was well known in the Jewish background (Mic. 6:6-8, Hosea 6:6), but the insistence that Jewish observance remains in effect as well is also found in New Testament texts: "You Pharisees tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds, and neglect justice and the love of God. It is these you ought to have practiced, *without neglecting the others*" (Luke 11:42; Klawans, 147–48).

But Mark also broadens the discussion by the insertion of 7:19c, "thus he declared all foods clean" (*katharizōn panta ta brōmata*). This awkward and intrusive phrase, which does not appear in Matthew (the section as a whole, as noted, is lacking in Luke and John), may have been inserted later in the textual history of Mark (Booth, 49–50, 62–65), but even if these were Mark's own words, it is also possible that this clause has an entirely different meaning. The Greek literally says, "Jesus *cleansed* all foods," but translators, stumped by what that would mean, have chosen a paraphrasing translation that made perfect sense in the twentieth-century consensus: "Jesus declared all foods clean." This translation means that the "Pauline" Jesus was instituting a new policy canceling all kosher laws. However, in the ancient period, it was sometimes stated, in both Jewish and Christian texts, that at the end of time, for the special, saved community, there would be a *cleansing* of foods, vessels, or people. From Ezekiel (36:22-31) to Zechariah (14:16, 20-21) to *1 Enoch* (10:17—11:2) to Qumran (1QS 4:20-21), there are discussions of a shower of purity on the saved community, however that community is described (see also *Jub.* 1:17, 23; 4:26; 50:5; *Abot R. Nat.* B 42; *b. Erub.*

100b; Regev 2000; 2004). Indeed, with this notion in mind, one may look at other passages in Mark as well. Consider Jesus' healing of a leper, phrased in terms of "cleansing" (the *kathar* root in Greek).

A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can cleanse me [*katharisai*, cf. 7:19, discussed above]." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be cleansed [*katharisthēti*]!" Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed [*ekatharisthē*]. After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing [*katharismos*] what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." (Mark 1:40-44)

Although this passage is often understood, from the perspective of *later* Christianity, as the rejection of purity laws about leprosy, a close reading reveals that Jesus miraculously returns the leper to a state of being clean, but does nothing to alter the Jewish laws concerning purity. In fact, the man is instructed to go to the temple to make the offering that Moses commanded (Leviticus 14). The point is important. Technically, in Jewish law, a leper is not pure until after the temple offering is made, but the point of Mark's story is that purity is now made miraculously available as an eschatological event (see Regev 2000; 2004). In the similar but not identical case in the Hebrew Bible mentioned above (2 Kings 5), the prophet heals Naaman the Syrian from his leprosy. But just as it is not generally suggested in Jewish or Christian tradition that Elisha is opening Israel to gentiles, it is also not suggested that he is canceling Jewish purity laws concerning leprosy. And Mark is not the only Christian text to describe an end-time cleansing of the saints; in an otherwise puzzling passage, Paul finds a new cleansing in the community members themselves; note the juxtaposition of "cleansing" with holiness language (the *hag-* root in Greek):

The unbelieving husband is made holy [*hēgiastai*] through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean [*akatharta*], but as it is, they are holy [*hagia*]. (1 Cor. 7:14; see Johnson Hodge)

So just as the leper in Mark 1:40-45 is *cleansed*—purity rules are *not* abrogated—and in 1 Corinthians 7 an unbelieving spouse is made holy and the children cleansed, so in Mark 7 it is likely that in anticipation of an eschatological change, Jesus *cleanses* foods, as the Greek actually states. Thus, even if this verse was in Mark's original text, it may not have meant that Jewish kosher laws were being rejected, but that for this community, there is at the end of time a dispensation of purity that overwhelms impurity, and also defeats "impure spirits," Mark's more Jewish term for "demons." If, as Zech. 14:20 says, all vessels can be rendered pure at the end of time, and if, as 1 Corinthians 7 says, spouses can be rendered holy, why not lepers in the community, and foods? At the end of time, all heaven breaks loose, but only on the holy community, the *hagioi* ("saints"). There is a division of humanity for a simultaneous cleansing and judgment. The canceling of Jewish food laws, which is how Acts 10, for instance, has been traditionally interpreted, has been too hastily read back into Mark (see also Rom. 14:20).

This passage, then, which had been treated by scholars as a clear confirmation of the Pauline theology at the center of Mark, is much more ambiguous than was once supposed. Paul's letters were often used to justify a gentile mission and identity, but was Mark part of that development

(as were Luke and Acts), or was it, like Matthew, part of that segment of the movement, perhaps the larger part, that had not abrogated Jewish law? What was once considered unlikely in regard to Mark now seems quite possible.

Conclusion

A common theme here is that Matthew, Paul, John, and Mark were likely much more rooted in Jewish tradition than Christians have generally assumed. The net effect of these newer investigations is to make discussions among Jews, Christians, and others much more unsettled, but also much richer. Much uncertainty has arisen about each old consensus, and this may seem daunting to contemporary audiences. But there is now a possibility of a wholly *new* dialogue, one that goes back to both the Jewish and Christian sources and asks again what the texts might have meant and what the relations were—both within each body and between the two bodies. The seeds of modern anti-Judaism and the Holocaust can still be seen in some of the ancient texts, but the varied relations also reveal the truth that the story is complex, and it includes many alternative visions of how religious subgroups could respond to each other. There is not just one blueprint for “the relations of Judaism and Christianity” in the first century.

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