Introduction

Traditional Models and New Directions

by

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For those who seek the origins of our modern conceptions of Judaism and Christianity as ultimately related yet essentially distinct religions, the idea of the “Parting of the Ways” proves powerfully attractive, offering a reassuringly ecumenical etiology of the religious differences between present-day Christians and Jews.¹ In this model Judaism and Christianity are likened to two paths that branched off from a single road, never to cross or converge again.² Even as their common origin is affirmed, the allegedly fundamental distinction between the two is explained as a result of a mutual decision, long ago, to part their fates and go their separate ways.

Scholars still debate the determinative catalyst for this “Parting” and whether or not such a split was inevitable.³ Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that there was a fateful turning point in the first or early second century CE, after which “there were no relations between Jews and Christians except hostile ones.”⁴ As a result, most research on Late


² I.e., as illustrated by Figures 1 and 2 in Martin Goodman’s piece in this volume, “Modeling the ‘Parting of the Ways.’”


Introduction

Antiquity and the early Middle Ages has progressed on the assumptions that (1) Judaism and Christianity developed in relative isolation from one another and (2) the interactions between Jews and Christians after the second century were limited, almost wholly, to polemical conflict and mutual misperception.

Our literary and archaeological data, however, attest a far messier reality than this unilinear spatial metaphor allows. Contrary to the “Parting” model, our sources suggest that developments in both traditions continued to be shaped by contacts between Jews and Christians, as well as by their shared cultural contexts. Even after the second century, the boundaries between “Jewish” and “Christian” identities often remained less than clear, consistent with the ambiguities in the definition of both “Jew” and “Christian.” Likewise, attention to the entire range of our extant evidence suggests that the continued diversity of Judaism and Christianity found expression in the variety of ways in which Jews and Christians interacted in different geographical, cultural, and social contexts. Accordingly, a growing number of scholars have begun to challenge the “Parting” model, citing its methodological paucity, its inadequacy as an historical account, and its inability to explain much of our primary evidence. Spurning the simplicity of the notion of a single, early, and decisive separation between the two religions, many have turned to explore new approaches for understanding the relationship(s) between Jews and Christians in the centuries after their purported “Parting.”

The present volume seeks to further the discussion and debate about the “Parting of the Ways” by demonstrating what we stand to gain by approaching Judaism and Christianity as “Ways that Never Parted” or, in other words, as traditions that remained intertwined long after the Second Temple had fallen and the dust had settled from the Jewish revolts against Rome. Whereas most treatments of early Jewish–Christian relations focus on the first and early second centuries CE and/or limit their discussions to the conflicts of later centuries, the articles in this volume consider the points of intersection, sites of interaction, and dynamics of interchange between Jews and Christians in the period between the Bar Kokhba Revolt and the rise of Islam. Rather than approaching Judaism and Christianity as monolithic entities that partook in a single act of separation, we here attempt to illuminate the broad range of regional and cultural variation in the encounters between different biblically-based religious groups including Jews and Christians, but also those so-called “Jewish Christians” and “Judaizers” who so strain the dichotomous definitions of modern scholarship. In the process, we hope to highlight the value of studying Judaism and Christianity as traditions that continued to impact one another, in constantly changing but consistently meaningful ways, throughout Late Antiquity and into the Middle Ages.


6 Ignatius’s comments in Magnesians 10.3 often serve as the representative example for those who claim that “Jew” and “Christian” became clear-cut and mutually exclusive religious identities in the first century CE. However, counter-examples abound, both from this period and well beyond; see Lieu, “Parting of the Ways,” 110–14; Daniel Boyarin, “Semantic Differences; or ‘Judaism’/’Christianity’,” in this volume.


8 Important critiques of this model include Boyarin, Dying for God: Lieu, “Parting of the Ways”; P. S. Alexander, “The Parting of the Ways” from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism,” in Jews and Christians, 1–26; Steven Katz, “Issues in the


9 Lieu, for instance, stresses that “The problem with the model of the ‘parting of the ways’ is that, no less than its predecessors on the pages of Harnack or Origen, it operates essentially with the abstract or universal conception of each religion, whereas what we know about is the specific and the local” (“Parting of the Ways,” 108).

10 One refreshing exception to this tendency is the volume, Christian–Jewish Relations through the Centuries, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Brook W. P. Pearson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), in which contributions about Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages bridge the usual gap between discussions of the New Testament and of the modern period.

From Supersessionism to Common Origins and “Parted Ways”

In speaking of the “Parting of the Ways” as an historical model, we here mean to denote the notion of an early and absolute split between Judaism and Christianity, but also the “master narrative” about Jewish and Christian history that pivots on this notion. In its basic parameters, this narrative can be summarized as follows: in the first century CE, Judaism was characterized by great diversity, and the Jesus Movement was still negotiating its relationship to Jews and Judaism, both inside and outside the (still fluid) boundaries of its own communities. As a result, Christ-believers of both Jewish and non-Jewish ethnicities engaged in a range of exchanges with non-Christian Jews, such that even the conflicts between them were typically predicated on close contact and competition. In the wake of the destruction of the Second Temple and the Bar Kokhba Revolt, however, the two religions decisively institutionalized their differences. With the Jerusalem Church’s alleged flight to Pella, apostolic “Jewish Christianity” lost its last bastion of authority, and the church would thenceforth be dominated by the antinomian “Gentile Christianity” espoused by the apostle Paul and embraced by non-Jews throughout the Roman Empire. Concurrent with the church’s geographical shift from the Land of Israel to the urban centers of the eastern Mediterranean, Christianity emerged as a fully independent system of belief and practice, self-defined as non-Jewish in its theology, its ritual practice, and the ethnicity of its adherents. Instead of dwelling on contemporary forms of Judaism, followers of this religion turned to grapple with their ambivalent relationship to Greco-Roman culture. From that point onwards, Judaism’s relevance for Christian self-definition would be limited to the Jewish scriptures that the church appropriated as its Old Testament and to the “literary Jews” of the Christian imagination, constructed from biblical paradigms to serve as pawns in intra-Christian debates.

According to this “master narrative,” the parallel developments in Judaism were no less momentous or monolithic.12 With the rise of the rabbinic movement, it is asserted that the diversity of Second Temple Judaism all but disappeared. The “Council of Yavneh,” allegedly convened by Rabban Gamaliel II around 90 CE, put an end to sectarian disputes among the Jews; not only were the Pharisees/Rabbis empowered as the leaders of the whole nation, but they expelled the Christ-believers who remained in their midst by means of the birkat ha-minim (“blessing [= curse] on the heretics”). Under the religious leadership of the Rabbis, Jews would choose to live in self-imposed isolation from the rest of the Greco-Roman world, just as indifferent to Christians and “pagans” as these Gentiles allegedly were to Jews and Judaism. Even when the Roman Empire became Christian and the enemy “Esau/Edom” truly took on the garb of a brother, Christians and Christianity remained far outside the bounds of Jewish concern, interest, or even curiosity, such that classical Judaism successfully resisted any influence from Christian traditions, beliefs, or practices. And hence—according to the view of early Jewish and Christian history that still dominates the scholarly discourse—these two religions came to be separate, conflicting, and categorically different, even despite their common origins in Second Temple Judaism.

The historicity and plausibility of many elements in this account have been questioned in recent years. For instance, the very concept of a mutual “Parting” owes much to the claimed correspondence between rabbinic traditions about the institution of the birkat ha-minim at Yavneh (b. Berakhot 28b–29a) and early Christian traditions about the expulsion of Christ-believers from synagogues (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). However, Peter Schäfer, Daniel Boyarin, and others have convincingly established that the “Council of Yavneh” was a much later construct, rather than an historical event.13 As such, scholars can no longer point to 90 CE as the end of all early intra-Jewish diversity nor appeal to the birkat ha-minim as a Jewish counterpart to (and cause of) Christian anti-Judaism. At the same time, New Testament scholars such as Raymond Brown have shown that the Judaism of the Jesus Movement was hardly limited to a single, Torah-observant “Jewish Christianity” in conflict with a single, antinomian “Gentile Christianity,” dismissing the traditional assumption that early Christian attitudes towards the Torah were wholly determined by ethnicity.14 Likewise, Gerd Lüdemann and others have deconstructed the

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12 For a more extensive account of the (rabbinic) Jewish side of the story of the “Parting of the Ways,” see Schiffman, “At the Crossroads,” 115–56.


myth of the Jerusalem Church’s flight to Pella, thereby shedding doubt on the widespread view of the demise of authentically apostolic “Jewish Christianity” during the first Jewish Revolt. Furthermore, a variety of scholars have demonstrated that a critical reading of our late antique and early medieval sources does not support any simple model of separation; for even those authors who most vigorously assert the mutual exclusivity of “Judaism” and “Christianity” provide us with many clues about the continued complexity of the situation “on the ground.”

Nevertheless, the notion of the “Parting of the Ways” continues to influence contemporary scholarship, particularly with regard to the relationship between Jews and Christians after the second century. When faced with cases in which Jews and Christians clearly interacted, scholars tend to presume as a matter of course that any post-“Parting” contacts must have been exceptional in nature and polemical in thrust. When common traditions are discovered in Jewish and Christian sources, it is usually assumed that these are isolated examples of the unidirectional “influence” of one self-contained entity on another, as opposed to the products of any substantive intercredal interchange or the fruits of their common participation in a shared cultural or discursive context.

Evidence that Judaism continued to hold an attraction for some Christians is typically explained away as the idiosyncratic propensities of isolated and individual Judaeizers, who are merely “exceptions to the rule” in a church to which “living” forms of Judaism had long become irrelevant. Likewise, evidence for the existence of authors and groups who blurred the supposedly firm boundaries between “Jewish” and “Christian” identities is lumped together under the rubric “Jewish Christianity” and dismissed as an anachronistic remnant of an age long past. In short, our data for the complex relationship between Judaism and Christianity in the late antique and early medieval periods are too often read through assumptions about their “parted ways.”

To understand the enduring popularity of the concept of the “Parting of the Ways,” it is helpful to consider its origins in the reaction against the supersessionist views that once dominated research on post-biblical Judaism and Christian Origins. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the academic discourse on these topics was dominated by Protestant Christian voices, and most scholars viewed Jesus as the founder of a new religion that was, from the very moment of its inception, categorically opposed to the Judaism of its time. Reading the triumphalism of ancient Christian literature as an expression of historical fact, they reconstructed post-biblical Judaism in the image of a religion ripe for replacement by emergent Christianity. The result was the so-called Spätjudentum (“late Judaism”) described by influential historians such as Wilhelm Bousset (1865–1920) and Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930): an allegedly ossified system of belief and practice, a pale reflection of Israel’s glorious patriarchal and prophetic past, a legalistic religion purportedly devoid of spiritual value and lacking in any attraction for non-Jews. Inasmuch as this “late Judaism” was dismissed as largely irrelevant to the subsequent growth of the church, it is perhaps not surprising that so few students of Christianity felt any need to peer over – let alone to cross – the disciplinary boundaries that separated


16 On the problems with the generalizations about the early demise of “Jewish Christianity,” as well as the traditional concept of “Jewish Christianity” more broadly, see the contributions by Frankfurter, Gager, and Reed in this volume.

17 The repeated efforts by certain Christians to discourage others from adopting Jewish practices (e.g., Didascalia 26), frequenting synagogues (e.g., Origen, Homilies on Leviticus 5:8; Chrysostom, Homilies Against the Jews, passim), and even calling themselves “Jews” (e.g., Augustine, Epistle 196; Cyril of Jerusalem, Cat. 10:16). See further: Judith Lieu, Image and Reality: The Jews in the World of the Christians in the Second Century (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), esp. 39–56; Robert Louis Wilken, John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), esp. 66–94; Gager, “Dangerous Ones in Between.”

18 In most modern scholarship, it is only the “mother religion”, Judaism that exerts “influence” on the “daughter religion” Christianity. For the methodological problems with this tendency (and the scholarly category of “influence” more broadly), see Peter Schafer, Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabala (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002), 217–43, esp. 229–35.


21 A related trend is the tendency to depict Christianity – even in the apostolic period – as a Greco-Roman cult with no special link to Judaism at all; see the discussion in Stanley E. Porter and Brook W. R. Pearson, “Why the Split? Christians and Jews by the Fourth Century,” Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism 1 (2000): 103–7.
them from their counterparts in the field of Jewish History.22 And, indeed, in light of the bleak image of Judaism once current in Christian scholarship, the lack of movement in the other direction should surprise us even less.23

The metaphor of “parted ways” has some precedent in scholarship from this period: in at least one case—a 1912 collection of essays entitled The Parting of the Roads—The title of a work compares post-biblical Judaism and early Christianity to two divergent paths, even as the articles therein remain mired in the supersessionist assumptions of the time.24 The image of “parting” did not become linked to a competing model until decades later, when questions about the origins of anti-Semitism were brought to bear on the study of the New Testament and early Christianity. For this, the key figure was James Parkes (1896–1981), a British clergyman who over his lifetime produced a number of books on Jewish–Christian relations and the history of anti-Semitism.25 Parkes’ interest in these topics was first sparked in the late 1920s, in reaction to the rise of anti-Semitism among nationalist students across Europe.26 In 1930 he published the first of his many books: The Jew and his Neighbor, an exploration of the history of anti-Semitism, which approaches the

22 Important exceptions include August Friedrich Gfröner in the nineteenth century (see e.g. Kritische Geschichte des Urchristentums [2 vols.; Stuttgart: Schweizerbart, 1835]) and George Foot Moore in the early twentieth (see esp. his seminal article “Christian Writers on Judaism,” on which see below).

23 The most important exception is Abraham Geiger (1810–1874), whose books were widely read by Christian scholars at the time; furthermore, his approach to Jesus and early Christianity in Das Judentum und Seine Geschichte (3 vols., Breslau: Schletter, 1864–71) and other works prefaces many of the “new” postwar developments discussed below; see further Heschel, “Image of Judaism,” 225–32; eadem, Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1989).

24 F. J. Foakes Jackson, ed., The Parting of the Roads: Studies in the Development of Judaism and Early Christianity (London: Arnold, 1912), cited in Lieu, “Parting of the Ways,” 101, as an “anticipation” of the concept of the “Parting of the Ways.” Despite the supersessionist stance of the book as a whole, it is notable that the contribution of Ephraim Levine (“The Breach between Judaism and Christianity”) attempts “to trace the narrative of religious progress to the point where Judaism and Christianity parted company” (p. 285) and dates this development to 70 CE—contrary to the view of this development as the result of Paul’s genius in understanding Jesus’ true message as found, for instance, in the introduction to the book (pp. 11–12).


massacres of Jews during the First Crusade (1096 CE) as the background to the debates about the “Jewish Question” in his own time.27 For his Oxford doctoral thesis, Parkes sought to uncover the very roots of the phenomenon of anti-Semitism by going back to the period of Christian Origins and by attempting to pinpoint the initial moment of Christianity’s separation from Judaism. The result was his influential 1934 book, The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue.28

By the time of its publication, Parkes’ scholarly work on the prehistory of modern anti-Semitism had become even more relevant to the contemporary situation. On May 1, 1934, the Nazi party periodical Der Stürmer issued a special fourteen-page publication accusing Jews of using Christian blood in their Passover baking and other rituals.29 In the same month of the same year, Parkes began the preface to his book with the following words:

The publication of a study of the causes of anti-Semitism needs neither justification nor explanation at the present time. But a word may be said of the material offered in the present work. The progress of events from the mediæval ghetto to modern Europe is fairly well known. That the roots of the present situation lie in the mediæval past is generally agreed. The present work tries to go a stage further, and to answer the question: why was there a mediæval ghetto?30

Insofar as The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue analyzed the period of Christian Origins as part of a broader inquiry into the causes of modern anti-Semitism, this book represented a radical departure from contemporaneous research on the New Testament, “late Judaism,” and early Christianity, which continued to view these topics through the lens of Christian beliefs about the church’s deserved status as the new and true Israel. Whereas such studies tended to assume the distinctiveness of Christianity vis-à-vis Judaism even in the lifetime of Jesus, Parkes stressed the continuity of the two in the apostolic age and prioritized the question of the precise moment of their divergence thereafter.


29 The Nazi appropriation of the blood libel myth, together with other traditional tropes of anti-Semitism, led many to seek the origins of Nazi anti-Semitism, despite its special virulence, in the Christian past. On this particular myth, see A. Dundes, ed., The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore (Madison: U. of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

30 Parkes, Conflict, vii.
The resultant account of early Jewish-Christian relations anticipated, in nearly every detail, the “Parting” model that now dominates research on these topics. Most notable is the third chapter, which, in fact, bears the title “The Parting of the Ways.”31 Countering assertions about the inherent theological differences between Judaism and Christianity with a socio-political analysis of the events between the birth of Jesus and the Bar Kokhba Revolt, Parkes concluded that “the definite separation into two religions took place toward the end of the first century,”32 and he argued that “the end of the first century is the time of the definite emergence of Christianity as a new religion.”33 Although Parkes himself most often spoke of this critical moment as “the separation,”34 he can be credited with innovating, articulating, and popularizing the concept of the “Parting of the Ways” as we now know it.35 This model, in short, owes its origins to the integration of study of Christian Origins into the historiography of anti-Semitism/anti-Judaism, whereby Christian hostility towards Jews (both modern and medieval) forms the impetus and background for inquiries into the very emergence of Christianity as a religion distinct from Judaism.36

The horror of the Holocaust prompted even more scholars to seek the ancient roots of modern anti-Semitism and to integrate such concerns into research on the New Testament literature.37 In the process, Parkes’ theories about the “separation” of Christianity from Judaism at the end of the first century CE have become increasingly influential, challenging the

32 Parkes, Conflict, 91.
33 Parkes, Conflict, 92.
34 Terms like “the separation” and “the split” would also be used by Marcel Simon in his seminal 1948 book Versus Israel: Étude sur les relations entre chrétiens et Juifs dans l’Empire Romain (135–42) (Paris: Editions de Boccard, 1948); English version: Versus Israel: A Study in the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire, AD 135–425, trans. H. McKeating (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986), xiv. Notably, Simon chooses to begin his inquiry “at the moment when the Church became fully conscious of its own autonomy and universal mission” (p. xii), which he dates to 135 CE, arguing against an earlier date of 70 CE (pp. xiv–xvi, plus his response to critiques of this choice in his 1964 Postscript, pp. 386–88).
36 Parkes’ theories echo the narratives about Jesus and Christianity told by earlier Jewish scholars already in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see n. 23 above). Most notable is Heinrich Grätz’s influential Geschicte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart (first published in 1853–1875; revised English version: History of the Jews, trans. B. Löwy [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1891–98]). For Grätz, Jesus was an earnest – albeit unlearned and misguided messianic – Galilean Jew (2:151–68), and his original followers were observant Jews who differed from other Jews only in their peculiar messianic beliefs (2:168–70). Paul, however, took it upon himself to “destroy ... the bonds which connected the teachings of Christ with those of Judaism” (2:229), and he “conceived Christianity to be the opposite of Judaism” (2:230; emphasis added). Nevertheless, the separation of the two did not occur until the original “Judaic Christians” succumbed to the blasphemous errors of their “pagan”/“heathen” counterparts and began to exalt Jesus as more God than man (2:370) – a development that Grätz dates shortly after the destruction of the Temple and the Council of Yavneh. Grätz finds evidence for this break in the composition of the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews, which he reads as a letter from these “Judaic Christians” to the rest of the Jews, proclaiming their separation (2:371). In his view, it was this that brought an end to “the development of Christianity as a branch of Judaism, drawing sustenance from its roots” (2:365). Although the basic outline evokes the “Parting” model of Parkes and later thinkers, the story of Christianity’s emergence as a distinct religion is here told in terms of Paul’s creation of a “pagan”/“heathen” belief-system with no real relationship to Judaism, on the one hand, and the later apostasy of “Judaic Christians,” on the other. Notably, we find essentially the same viewpoint in G. Alon’s widely-used survey of early Jewish history, The Jews in their Land in the Talmudic Age, 70–640 C.E., trans. G. Levi (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1980–1984); see esp. p. 296 on Paul and the triumph of Christianity as the “victory that transformed Christianity into a Gentile religion” and pp. 305–7 on the self-separation of “Jewish Christians” from Judaism (which he, like Grätz before him, credits to the “dilution” of their Judaism from increased contact with “Gentile Christians,” here adding their alleged refusal to participate in the Jewish Revolt against Rome).
earlier consensus that Jesus himself (or, alternately, Paul) instituted Christianity’s complete independence from Judaism.

This shift has been facilitated by a sea change in the study of post-exilic Judaism, also formulated in response to the events of World War II. Already in 1921, George Foot Moore published a scathing critique of the latent anti-Judaism/anti-Semitism in the scholarly discourse on so-called “late Judaism.” Such concerns, however, did not have a real impact on the practice of scholarship until the postwar period — when reflections on the Holocaust intensified scholarly efforts to expose the prejudices of past research and when the foundation of the state of Israel heightened the cognitive dissonance between the bleak image of post-biblical Judaism once prevalent in Western scholarship and our ample evidence for the vitality of the Jewish tradition throughout its history. In response, scholars such as Marcel Simon took on the task of correcting the distorted views of post-biblical — and even rabbinic — Judaism in scholarship on early Christianity, exposing the theological biases that shaped the old stereotypes of the Synagogue as sapped of all spiritual vitality and offering a new view of the Jewish religion as a vital force that continued (at least until Constantine) to compete vigorously with Christianity.

Whereas Judaism was once treated as the
deservedly dispossessed heir to the biblical heritage claimed by the church, the earliest Christian communities are now approached as a part of the landscape of first-century Judaism and thus — in a striking reversal of nineteenth-century paradigms — as evidence for the rich diversity and continued vitality of the Jewish tradition in Second Temple times. Many scholars (particularly in Israel, North America, and Great Britain) have profitably revisited the issue of the “Jewishness” of Jesus, and some have even challenged long-held beliefs about Paul’s attitudes towards Torah-observance and the chosenness of the Jews. Likewise, New Testament specialists have increasingly strived to resist the temptation to view these writings through the lens of their current status as Christian Scripture; rather than assuming that these texts evoke a full-fledged “religion” (i.e., “Christianity”), a growing number of studies now treat

emphatic added). Also notable is the term “middle Judaism,” on which see Gabriele Boccaccini, Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought, 300 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

This shift is perhaps best exemplified by the fascinating fate of Emil Schürer’s Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi (originally published as Lehrbuch der neuestenzeitlichen Zeitgeschichte [Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1874]; with revised and expanded editions, under the new title published in 1886–1890, 1901–1909). Although Schürer’s own versions are steeped in the stereotypes about “late Judaism” that were prevalent in nineteenth-century German scholarship, a new English version was produced by Geza Vermes and Fergus Millar in 1973 (The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.E.—A.D. 135) [3 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973]). Vermes and Millar re-revised, edited, and updated Schürer’s work to serve as a reference book for a new scholarly context, and the resultant volumes — now shorn of the anti-Jewish rhetoric of the originals — are used in university courses on early Judaism, as well as in courses on the New Testament.


Postwar developments also paved the way for the new rapprochement between Christian scholars and Jewish scholars in recent years. In this, another contributing factor was the publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which helped to open a space in which much needed interdisciplinary dialogue could flourish. In the library of the Qumran community, experts in Second Temple Judaism, early Christianity, and Rabbinics alike have found sources that shed new light on key issues and debates in their respective fields. Furthermore, these newly unearthed sources have exposed the dazzling diversity of Second Temple Judaism and the profound continuities that connect it with both rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity. Whereas scholars of Jewish history once countered Jewish stereotypes about “late Judaism” with claims about a single, normative (and most often Pharisaic) Judaism of pre-rabbinic times that led inexorably to the Mishnah and Talmud, both Jewish and Christian scholars now speak of “Judaisms” or a “multiform Judaism,” of which the


46 Much is also owed to prominent Jewish scholars of the New Testament and early Christianity in the postwar period, such as David Flusser.

47 We here point to the publication—and not the discovery—of the Dead Sea Scrolls as the key factor, since the controversies attendant on the latter were certainly not conducive to such dialogue.


49 The term “Judaisms” has been popularized by the works of Jacob Neusner (see e.g. his comments in *Studying Classical Judaism: A Primer* [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1991], 33), whereas the term “multiform Judaism” was spread by Robert A. Kraft’s seminal article “The Multiform Jewish Heritage of Early Christianity,” in *Christianity, Judaism and other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, ed. J. Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 174–99. Further discussion of this issue can be found in Kraft’s essay in this volume.


Christianity to be approached as authentic religions in their own right, with equally strong links to the biblical and Second Temple Jewish heritage that they share. As such, this model proves palatable to Jews and Christians alike: the former can affirm the Jewish origins of Christianity even as they deny any Christian influence on the development of classical rabbinic Judaism, while the latter can claim a profound continuity with pre-Christian Jewish history even as they affirm the essential originality of the (Gentile) Christian message. Moreover, the notion of the “Parting of the Ways” fits well with contemporary ecumenical concerns, providing a foundation for inter-religious dialogue and buttressing popular appeals to a common “Judeo-Christian” ethic.

At the same time, however, the theory of a single, pivotal moment of separation has effectively established a boundary between the study of Jewish–Christian relations in the first century and inquiries into Jews and Christians thereafter. If scholars of first-century Judaism and Christianity must now strive to describe a complex reality – in which the boundaries of “Jewish” and “Christian” identities remained fluid and in which neither “Judaism” nor “Christianity” were monolithic entities – scholars of a later period are assured that such problems were already settled by the second century CE. With the “Parting of the Ways,” it is alleged that “Jew” and “Christian” became firmly established as categorically distinct communal identities, Torah-observance and Christ-belief became mutually exclusive religious options, and living forms of Judaism became as irrelevant for Christians as Christianity had allegedly always been for Jews. In other words, by the time that the Mishnah was redacted and the early Church Fathers composed their enistles and apologies, “Judaism” and “Christianity” had, at long last, become what we now know them to be: different in essence and by definition.

Problems with the “Parting” Model

Interestingly, the problems with this particular application of the “Parting” model were already acknowledged by Parkes in the 1930s. In light of the late antique evidence for the ongoing interactions between Jews and Christians, Parkes qualified his theory of an early “separation” with the following assertion:

While, therefore, we may correctly date the actual separation from the end of the first and the beginning of the second century, we should be wrong to assume that the distinction which we can now observe between Christians and Jews represents the situation as it appeared to those living at the time. He thus admits that this initial – yet somehow “actual” – moment of separation did not birth Judaism and Christianity as we now know them. That, in his view, did not happen until much later, during the fourth century CE:

Though neither [Judaism or Christianity] were born in this century, yet both owe more to its outstanding leaders than to any other similar group of contemporaries, and both are to this day, in many ways, fourth century religions. At the same time that Parkes laid the groundwork for theories about an early and decisive split between the two religions, he thus pointed to the limitations of this schematization of early Jewish–Christian relations and to the problems involved in drawing a sharp dividing line between the pre- and post-“Parting” periods. Even more striking is the fact that his argument for a first-century “separation” already contained the seeds for recent critiques of this model, which frequently point to the fourth century as the critical era for Jewish and Christian self-definition.

As is clear from the discussion above, these qualifications were not heeded by the many scholars who have adopted and developed Parkes’ notions about the early and final break between Judaism and Christianity. The apparent reason is somewhat ironic: consistent with his influential assertion of a decisive split in the tannaitic/subapostolic period, few of these scholars have even investigated the relevant evidence from the third century, let alone the fourth. And, when dealing with sources from these eras, they have tended to ask different questions, shaped by different...
assumptions about the scope, character, and significance of Jewish-Christian relations.\(^57\)

Even when working with sources from the first and early second centuries, proponents of the “Parting” model are often faced with the same problem: much of our evidence simply does not fit into this appealing and clear-cut narrative, thereby necessitating an increasing number of qualifications. James Dunn, for instance, takes a theological approach to the issue in his book *The Partings of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, he treats each point of doctrinal difference between the Jesus Movement and “mainstream” Judaism as one “Parting of the Ways” among many, which unfolded simultaneously on multiple fronts during the late first and early second centuries.\(^58\) In his later volume, *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways*, 70–135 CE, Dunn is forced to tackle the social and historical questions that such assertions inevitably raise. In response, he notes that the decisive moment of separation was actually "bitty" in its progression and that, while an inevitable development, it may or may not have been inevitable at the time, and it may or may not have appeared inevitable to those who lived through it.\(^59\) Like the qualifications posed by Parkes decades earlier, those offered by Dunn may serve, in the end, to dilute the explanatory power of the model as a whole — and, as a result, to raise questions concerning its heurism for historical research and its undue influence on the contemporary practice of scholarship.

There is no doubt that the metaphor of “parting ways” still proves helpful when dealing with certain aspects of the relationship between Jews and Christians in the first centuries of the Common Era. Most notably, it helps us to grasp the radical impact of the failure of the two Jewish Revolts against Rome, the destruction of the Second Temple, and the disappearance of any vestige of a Jewish state on the structure of Jewish society, Christian attitudes towards their Jewish contemporaries, and Christian biblical interpretation, as well as the perception of Judaism by non-Jews in the Roman Empire. Insofar as this model emphasizes the shared context of historical catastrophe from which both rabbinic Judaism and proto-orthodox Christianity developed, it also draws our attention to ways in which these movements forged their identities in contra-distinction to one another, thereby constructing lasting images of each other as wholly "other."

Although heuristic for some purposes, the “Parting” model frustrates our analysis of many types of evidence concerning Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Above, we noted a series of recent findings that have served to shake, if not topple completely, the pillars of proof on which the claimed historicity of this theory is perched. Perhaps more perplexing is the fact that the “Parting” model has remained influential even though most scholars now reject its major presupposition: the equation of rabbinic Judaism and proto-orthodox Christianity with “Judaism” and “Christianity” in a global sense.

Few experts in early church history would now deign to make such sweeping generalizations when discussing inner-Christian developments in the first and second centuries CE, or even the third and fourth. In the decades since Walter Bauer’s seminal 1934 book, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (and particularly since its English translation in 1971),\(^60\) research on early Christianity has increasingly acknowledged the methodological problems involved in treating Western Christian orthodoxy as the only, or even the predominant, form of Christianity in the Roman Empire prior to the Council of Nicaea (or outside the Empire, before or after).\(^61\) The field of Jewish Studies has been somewhat slower to abandon the idea that late antique Judaism consists only of rabbinic Judaism. Nevertheless, recent research has undermined the traditional view of the Tannaim as authoritative figures who immediately succeeded in establishing their vision of Judaism as

\(^{57}\) This is exemplified by Simon, who takes 135 CE as the starting point for his inquiry into the conflicts between Judaism and Christianity, conceived of as two distinct entities (*Verus Israel*, xiv–xvii).

\(^{58}\) See n. 3 above.

\(^{59}\) See Dunn’s conclusion to *Jews and Christians*, esp. 367–68. Faced with Philip Alexander’s emphasis on the historical contingency of the developments that led to the distancing of the two traditions, in an article in the same volume (“Parting of the Ways,” esp. 24–25), Dunn offers an assertion of the inevitability of Christianity’s “Parting” from Judaism, albeit paired with a question that poignantly exposes the historically problematic nature of this line of inquiry: “A critical question is the extent to which our judgments on these issues are formed more by hindsight than by historical data. With the benefits of hindsight, we see that certain developments and corollaries were inevitable; but were they so at the time?” (p. 368; emphasis added).


normative throughout the Land of Israel, let alone the Diaspora. When discussing the relationship between the two religions, however, many scholars of Rabbinics and Patristics are still surprisingly willing to embrace the concept of a global, one-time separation between “Judaism” and “Christianity” in the tannaitic/subapostolic period, which allegedly affected interactions between Jews and Christians across a broad range of geographical locales, social settings, intellectual discourses, and cultural milieux.

No less problematic are the effects of the “Parting” model on the practice of scholarship. As is often the case, the dominant historical assumptions mirror the configuration of disciplinary boundaries, and both have served to reinforce one another. Just as late antique Judaism and Christianity are commonly approached as self-contained entities in conflict, so this split is replicated in the relationship between the fields of Rabbinics and Patristics.

The assertion of a decisive “Parting” enables scholars in both fields to continue engaging in their research without serious attention to developments on the other side of the disciplinary divide. In effect, the notion of the “Parting of the Ways” has thus served


64 Perhaps the most ironic example of this tendency is Hershel Shanks, ed., Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: A Parallel History of Their Origins and Early Development (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1992), a collection of essays that—with the sole exception of James Charlesworth’s contribution—approaches the two traditions as completed isolated entities that are only “parallel” insofar as their disparate and unconnected histories can be juxtaposed. See Jacob Neusner’s review in JARV (1993): 771–83, esp. 776–81, and Martin Goodman’s in JJS 44 (1993): 313–14.

65 On the general lack of contact between the fields of Rabbinics and Patristics, as well as the important exceptions to this pattern, see Burton Visotzky, Fathers of the World: Essays in Rabbinic and Patristic Literatures (Tübingen: Mohr, 1995), 5–27. On

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to justify and to reify the traditional split between these fields of study in a manner no less marked than older supersessionist models.

It is perhaps not coincidental that, as more and more scholars have sought to bridge this gap, the challenges to the “Parting” model have mounted. Doubts about its heurism and historical soundness have emerged from the fray of various scholarly debates: questions about the “Parting” model have been raised in the ongoing discussions about the exact nature of Christian polemics against Jews and Judaism. During the course of analyzing specific texts, some scholars have been led to seek more sophisticated approaches to comparing Jewish and Christian traditions and new ways to explain the parallels between them. Others, pursuing specialized inquiries into particular figures, groups, and locales, have highlighted a number of specific cases and places for which the “Parting” model proves more misleading than useful. At the same time, an increased awareness about methodological and theoretical advances in the broader academic discourse about human society and culture has led a growing number of scholars to stress the paucity of the “Parting of the the complicity of Patristics and Rabbinics scholars in maintaining this boundary, see Boyarin, Dying for God, 7; also Alexander, “Parting of the Ways,” 2–3.

66 One important milestone was the three-volume collection of essays on Jewish and Christian Self-Definition, edited by E. P. Sanders (vol. 1) with A. I. Baumgarten and Alan Mendelson (vol. 2) and with Ben F. Meyer (vol. 3), and published from 1980–1983; although Judaism and Christianity are here treated in separate volumes (i.e., vols. 1 and 2), these collections have facilitated dialogue between scholars in the two fields.

67 A number of important works have recently been written on the discourse of Christian anti-Judaism, as considered from sophisticated sociological and literary perspectives; see Liu, Image and Reality, esp. 277–90; O. Limor and G. Stromsø, eds., Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Christians and Jews (Leiden: Brill, 1996). Note also the contributions by Becker, Cameron, Fredriksen, Gibson, and Jacobs in this volume.

Ways" as a metaphor for describing the dynamics of religious self-definition and the interaction between groups. By acknowledging that neither tradition was univocal in its stance towards the other, scholars have exposed the fascinating diversity of belief and practice that continued to characterize both Judaism and Christianity, illuminating the broad spectrum that stretched between their respective "orthodoxies" and exploring the persistently complex dynamics of Jewish-Christian relations.

Beyond the "Parting of the Ways"

In our view, the recent challenges to the "Parting" model hold great potential for enriching scholarship on Judaism and Christianity alike, serving as a necessary corrective to past research and as a constructive basis for future studies. Like any metaphor, the idea of the "Parting of the Ways" proves valuable only insofar as it aids scholars in interpreting the literary and archaeological evidence at hand. Like too many models, it has gained such an aura of normativity that it is often treated as an axiom or a standard against which our data should be measured, rather than as a conceptual tool whose value rests solely in its usefulness or as a point to be proved (or disproved) from analyses of the relevant data.

With the present volume, we hope to aid in opening the way for a fresh approach to our primary sources and to help to create a space in which new models can be forged. Our choice of title is deliberately provocative. We do not intend to imply that the relationships between Jews and Christians remained static, as if somehow frozen in the early first century CE. Neither do we mean to downplay the many conflicts, misperceptions, and polemics that have marked Jewish-Christian relations in both pre-modern and modern times. Rather, we wish to call attention to the ample evidence that speaks against the notion of a single and simple "Parting of the Ways" in the first or second century CE and, most importantly, against the assumption that no meaningful convergence ever occurred thereafter. On one level, our title should thus be read as a challenge to the conventional wisdom: what happens when we approach our evidence from a different perspective, treating the "Parting of the Ways" as a principle that needs to be proved rather than presupposed?

As recent research has shown, the data can support theories about a variety of different "Partings" at different times in different places; even with regard to the Roman Empire, a strong case has been made that the fourth century CE is a far more plausible candidate for a decisive turning point than any date in the earlier period. It is, however, perhaps less profitable to debate the exact date of the "Parting" than to question our adherence to a model that prompts us to search for a single turning point that ushered in a global change for all varieties of Judaism and Christianity, in all communities and locales. What proves significant is that attempts to "part" Christianity from Judaism did not cease with the moment of their alleged success, whenever that moment might have been. For example, the essential difference between Judaism and Christianity continued to be asserted and reasserted and reasserted again by proto-orthodox and orthodox church leaders, thereby suggesting that the incompatibility of Jewish and Christian "ways" remained less than clear for others in their midst. Herein lies the second meaning of our title: we suggest that Jews and Christians (or at least the elites among them) may have been engaged in the task of "parting" throughout Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, precisely because the two never really "parted" during that period with the degree of decisiveness or finality needed to render either tradition irrelevant to the self-definition of the other, or even to make participation in both an unattractive or inconceivable option.

Even more telling, in our view, is the fact that nearly all "partings" in these centuries are followed by new (and often surprising) convergences. Within certain realms, it seems that these two "ways" never fully parted. Even when and where they did, new paths often emerged to mediate new types of interchange between Jews and Christians, and new areas of common ground could be established, thereby posing ever new threats to those who promoted an idealized view of these identities and communities as hermetically sealed off from one another. On another level, one can thus propose that the "ways" never parted inasmuch as developments in Judaism and Christianity still remained meaningfully intertwined long after the second century, parting and joining and parting and joining again for many centuries thereafter.

Even as the "Parting" model still remains regnant, a new understanding of how late antique Jews and Christians related and interrelated with one another is slowly yet steadily developing. It is, however, neither the right time nor the right place to propose a new model to replace the old. As older models are repeatedly dismantled, defended, deconstructed, and debated, new ones will likely emerge to fill their place — and, in fact, more than several alternatives have already been suggested. As is clear from the example of postwar scholarship on Second Temple Judaism and Christian Origins, the period between the initial voicing of doubts about

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70 This issue is discussed in a number of the articles herein; see esp. the contributions of Boyarin, Gibson, Kraft, and Jacobs.

71 See n. 56 above.

the conventional wisdom and the emergence of a new opinio communis is an important and exciting time that offers unique opportunities to approach familiar sources with fresh eyes, to bring new or overlooked sources into the discussion, to explore untired methodologies, and to bring the findings of specialist research firmly to bear on the musings of the generalist.

It is in this spirit that we offer the present volume. The articles herein express a variety of positions. Some of our contributors accept the basic contours of the “Parting” model but seek to reconfigure its parameters or limit its application to certain cases; others argue that it must be abandoned entirely. In our view, much of the value of the current debates about the “Parting of the Ways” lies in the fact that scholars have free rein to explore issues of interchange, identity, and influence without straining to relate specific texts, figures, and events to any one framework of assumptions (whether old or new). And, whichever way the reader chooses to interpret our title, it is this that we intend to express by our subtitle: the need to focus with renewed energy and intensity on Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, before settling on any new generalizations about Judaism and Christianity during this period.

Summary of Volume Contents

The volume begins with an article by Paula Fredriksen, aptly entitled “What ‘Parting of the Ways’? Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City.” Fredriksen here demonstrates the inadequacy of the “Parting” model as a description of the lived experience of Jews, Christians, and “pagans” in the Roman Empire and, in the process, opens a new perspective on the Christian contra Iudaeos tradition. First, she points to the essential differences between “pagan” anti-Judaism, which was an extension of a more general disdain for foreigners, and Christian anti-Judaism, which was rooted in a reaction against continuing interactions between Jews and Gentiles (both “pagan” and Christian). She then turns to the question of a possible Jewish mission to Gentiles – an idea often conjured by modern scholars to account for the vitriol of Christian hostility towards Jews, inasmuch as they jar with the social dynamics of ancient urban culture. In the process, Fredriksen highlights the continuity in the interactions between Jews and Gentiles in the centuries between Alexander of Macedon and Augustine of Hippo. She proposes that this situation persisted even after the Christianization of the Empire; in her view, it ended only with the decline of the urban culture of the ancient Mediterranean between the fifth and seventh centuries CE, when socio-political developments led to the gradual erosion of long-lived civic patterns and to the development of a new social reality, built upon the ideology of separation in the contra Iudaeos tradition.

Daniel Boyarin’s “Semantic Differences, or ‘Judaism’/Christianity’” offers an alternative to the conventional view that “Christianity” was born from a second-century “Parting of the Ways” with “Judaism.” Boyarin here considers how the categories of “Judaism” and “Christianity” functioned in antiquity, by integrating recent scholarship on the changing meanings of “Jew” and “Judaism” with theoretical insights from the fields of linguistics and postcolonial criticism. He demonstrates that, prior to Christianity, the term “Jew” was an ethnic appellation, in the same sense as “Greek,” the term to which it was most often opposed. The category only became meaningful in a purely “religious” sense when countered with a new opposing term, namely, “Christian.” Consequently, there was no static entity “Judaism” from which early Christians could choose to “part ways,” precisely because the emergence of “Judaism” as a “religion” (as opposed to a culture which was an inextricable component) only occurred “when Christianity separated religious belief and practice from Romans: cult from culture.” Boyarin then stresses the hybrity of late antique culture and likens the range of biblically-based forms of religiosity in the first centuries of the Common Era to “dialects” that preceded the definition of official “languages.” Likewise, the construction of “Judaism” and “Christianity” as mutually exclusive “religions” was initiated by proto-orthodox Christian and early rabbinic Jewish heresiologists, but not actualized or officialized until the Christianization of the Roman Empire.

The practices of definition and categorization also form the focus of Robert A. Kraft’s essay, “The Weighing of the Parts: Pivots and Pitfalls in the Study of Early Judaisms and their Early Christian Offspring.” In his view, the recent challenges to the conventional wisdom about the early “Parting” of Judaism and Christianity serve as “an invitation to look more closely at the micro-histories behind that ‘common knowledge’.” Kraft thus questions the selectivity that has lead scholars to deal with the relationship between “early Judaism” and “early Christianity” solely on the basis of their classical forms, and he points to the many more “parts” that need to be “weighed” in an analysis of the religious landscape of Late Antiquity. At the same time, he stresses the limits of modern labels