

Pagans, Jews and Christians

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Judith Lieu, John North and Tessa Rajak, ed., *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (London-New York 1992), xviii + pp. 198. Maps.

This book contains the fruits of a series of Ancient History Seminars held at the Institute of Classical Studies in London. The editors identify a problem in the religious history of the first centuries of the Roman Empire: the triumph of Christianity in its struggle with paganism seems to the editors and their colleagues to have obscured the role of Judaism. The Jews were there at the beginning and were still there much later. Yet their point of view and their role dropped out of sight; the participants in these seminars want to restore the Jews to their place in the process that led to the Christianization of the ancient world. Since the roots of what the editors see as a distortion of the historical record are in their view theological no less than historical they have enlisted the collaboration of scholars from a variety of disciplines: Ancient History, Jewish Studies, Theology and Semitic Philology.

Were the Diaspora Jews really as strictly separated from their neighbours as is sometimes suggested? This question is addressed by Tessa Rajak (T.R.). The distinctiveness of Jewish custom was noted by both Jewish and pagan writers in antiquity and undoubtedly had something to do with such (often self-imposed) restrictions on *connubium* and commensality as existed in varying ways at different times and in different places. Jews were represented by some pagan (and, curiously, even by some Christian) writers as misanthropic and unwilling to share in the social activities of their non-Jewish fellows. Even so, as T.R. points out, both before and after the destruction of the Second Commonwealth we have ample evidence of the role played by Jews in the pluralistic societies of the countries of their dispersions as well as in the ancient homeland of the nation.

T.R. notes the ubiquity of the Jews in the cities of the eastern empire; by the middle of the first Christian century they had spread to the West too. Their synagogues were more than merely places of worship; they seem, at least sometimes and in some places, to have been centres of communal social life in a wider sense. Did the life in their communities cut them off from the life of their city?

If so, what factor in the make-up of their communities was responsible for the separation? T.R. rightly begins with a discussion of rabbinic Judaism. She notices the importance attached by the Rabbis to the study of revealed Scripture and the accompanying oral tradition. The systematic ordering of readings from the Law and the Prophets, together with communal prayer in the synagogues, became the centrepiece of Jewish worship and took the place, in Palestine and elsewhere, of the sacrificial ritual in the service of the Temple when this was no longer functioning; hence the importance of the Synagogue as well as of the Rabbis.¹ The Synagogue, the keeping of the Sabbath, circumcision, certain dietary restrictions, perhaps some compliance with the laws of ritual purity, will have characterized Jewish communities in the Diaspora and will in one way or another have connected Diaspora Jews in their individual life style as well as in their communal observance with rabbinic Judaism in Palestine. With all this, T.R. is right in refusing (partly because of the state of our sources) to over-emphasize the authority of rabbinic Judaism in hellenistic Jewry; what we do know entitles her to judge that Diaspora practice points to what she calls a minimal Judaism, which need not imply a high degree of self-segregation. Even this, of course, will have made the Jews a distinct group. How distinct a particular Jewish community was and remained must in each case have depended on local circumstances and on the degree of adaptation to surrounding society.

In examining the shared characteristics of Jewish diaspora communities T.R. concentrates on two features. First, what happened on the boundaries of the community? She notes the ease with which pagan and Christian sympathizers attached themselves to Jewish communities, even if they did not always go the whole way towards becoming Jews; and there were, of course, also wholehearted proselytes. The other issue highlighted by T.R. is the question of the principles that governed Diaspora Jews in conducting their communal affairs. Here, while perhaps giving unduly fashionable prominence to the discussion of the role of women in hellenistic synagogues, she has much to say that is of more general import, such as, *e.g.*, the interesting observation that some crossing of boundaries (in both directions) was connected with patronage; and that that may on occasion have led outsiders to become benefactors of synagogues. This, T.R. shows, we may learn from the honorific titlature found on Jewish inscriptions,

¹ This is well understood by T.R., though it is odd to read here that "rabbinic Judaism, and perhaps also its beginnings, [were] in some way a response to the Christian challenge". Though T.R. notes that no such purpose is made explicit, this seems to me a complete misreading both of the history and of the character of rabbinic Judaism; but nothing in T.R.'s argument depends on this and I suspect that this remark itself is no more than an amiably willing even if entirely unnecessary response to the challenge of the historiographical task that the editors have set themselves, namely to look constantly for the interaction of the three religious positions of paganism, Judaism and Christianity.

where the title of *archisynagōgos* is used when the honorands might be men or women, Jews or pagan “sympathizers”, or even young children.

Comparatively little attention has been paid in scholarly literature to the early life of the Pharisee Saul, who had been a disciple of R. Gamliel, was a persecutor of the Christians, then became a Christian himself and changed his name to Paul. Since understanding Paul the Christian apostle is impossible without understanding his Jewish roots, Martin Hengel (M.H.) here, in a short paper entitled “The Pre-Christian Paul”, examines the apostle’s Jewish and Pharisaiic past. Relying on the autobiographical elements in Paul’s writings Hengel stresses the testimonies that connect Saul the Pharisee with Jewish Palestine. It is only Luke (in Acts) who describes Paul as a Diaspora Jew and as a citizen of Tarsus and of Rome. Hengel argues that it is impossible to separate Paul’s Jewish from his Greek education: both are connected with the Synagogue. In Acts Paul is cited as describing himself as “from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city”. While accepting the claim that the apostle was a Roman citizen (the ancestors of the family may have been freed captives), M.H. argues that, since in a Greek polis citizenship was only rarely bestowed on an alien, Paul is likely to have been born a member of the Jewish community in Tarsus, but that *Tarseus* and *politēs* (as in the Septuagint) denote only the place of origin, not full citizenship in it.

According to Acts Paul claimed to have been brought up in Jerusalem and to have been a disciple of R. Gamliel; that he was a Pharisee, the descendant of Pharisees, living the life of a Pharisee. H. notes that though Paul’s own testimony betrays a somewhat different tendency — he seems to stress the distance from his past — the information gleaned is on the whole very similar. We are told that Paul was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, that he had been circumcised on the eighth day, that he had lived righteously under the Law and that he had been a persecutor of the church, that he had indeed been a Pharisee² and a *Talmid Hakham*. Hengel himself, after examining the evidence both of Acts and of Paul’s own writings, judges that Paul’s mother tongue was not Aramaic but Greek; that he moved to Jerusalem not in his earliest youth but after he had had an elementary Jewish and Greek education in the Diaspora; that he was a pupil of

² I am a little worried by the translation of Philippians 3.5 by “according to the Law a Pharisee” (p. 36; but cf. p. 34: “as to the Law”). The Greek words can quite easily and normally bear, and the context surely requires, the meaning “as for my attitude to the Law, a Pharisee”. Though Jerome translates *secundum legem Pharisaeus* and Luther “nach dem Gesetz ein Pharisäer”, the Authorised Version has “as touching the law, a Pharisee” and the New English Bible, correctly and even more unambiguously, “in my attitude to the law, a Pharisee”. The Law decided whether or not a man was a Jew; but being a Pharisee (or a Sadducee or anything else of that kind) was not determined by the Law but by one’s attitude to the Law.

R. Gamliel in Jerusalem; that he was a Pharisee; and that he had been familiar with the Greek Bible from his earliest childhood. Hence, he can speak about Paul as a Pharisaic Hellenist, whose spiritual home was the Greek-speaking synagogue. It is this background which explains, according to Hengel, Paul's conflict with the Christian group of "Hellenists", a conflict which turned him into a persecutor. To have become a persecutor of the Christians Paul must have had some sort of authority; Hengel daringly conjectures that that authority derived from his having a teaching function in a Greek-speaking synagogue; and he finds that the zeal that made him persecute the Christians was the same as that with which he later preached the crucified and risen Christ.

Hengel also has some very valuable remarks on the questions whether there were any Pharisees in the (hellenistic) Diaspora and whether there existed, outside Alexandria, any intensive Jewish school activity. What did Pharisaic study look like in the first half of the first century in Jerusalem? Wisely, Hengel is cautious in discussing this problem. He warns against anachronistic retrojection of models formed from reading later reports. Some of his own important findings, carefully arrived at and cautiously expressed, relate to the pluralistic nature of Jerusalem before the destruction and to the affinity of the greater part of Pauline theology to the Pharisaic school. However, he warns against looking for analogies between Paul's Epistles and Jewish writings only from within the rabbinic fold. Here again he reminds the reader of the pluralism characteristic of pre-70 Judaism. Thus he finds parallels with apocalyptic texts, with Qumran writings, with the Essenes. No less interestingly and importantly, Hengel finds that pluralism was a characteristic not only of Judaism as a whole but of Pharisaism in particular, too. "The spiritual climate [of Pharisaism] in Jerusalem was rather different from that in Jabneh, Usha, or Tiberias".

Like T.R., Martin Goodman (M.G.) is concerned with the crossing of boundaries. He re-examines the notion that the missionary urge in early Christianity was inherited from contemporary Judaism. He is sceptical about the claims made for the importance of Jewish proselytization. As the title of his paper indicates ("Jewish Proselytizing in the First Century") Goodman's case is meant to be restricted to the first century, but inevitably the force of his arguments and the reader's worries about them, invade the preceding and succeeding centuries too.

Goodman recognises the simple fact of the existence of proselytes from comparatively early times on; and equally the openness to newcomers that is clearly visible still in the first century. He argues, not implausibly, that passive acceptance must not be confused with active mission.

He cites the literary evidence of large-scale forced conversion; there is the strong probability that slaves in Jewish households were routinely or often converted to the faith of their masters; there are individual cases of conversion induced by persuasion of one kind or another, *e.g.* by making marriage conditional

on the gentile partner's acceptance of the Jewish faith³ and certain features of hellenistic Jewish literature as well as explicit statements in pagan and even Christian authors seem to point in the same direction. Though all this and more is admitted by M.G., he makes a valiant attempt to discredit it as evidence for Jewish missionary activities. Not unnaturally he begins with the famous passage Mt 23:15 "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves". M.G. admits that the meaning is plain. Though he hedges this by noting that Luke omits the statement, and that in any case it may reflect the special (missionary) interest of Matthew, he does see that for Matthew's audience the statement had a clear and unambiguous meaning, namely that Pharisees would be eager to make, as M.G. (like Matthew) puts it, "one proselyte". Here is the rub: though it is, of course, clear to him as it must be to other readers (and he cites such readers) that "one proselyte" is a rhetorical way of saying "even one proselyte", and though he does not deny this, he lets the question stand to prepare his own readers for what seems to me a not altogether plausible suggestion, namely that Matthew is speaking of Pharisees endeavouring to bring Jews to the Pharisaic persuasion rather than Gentiles to Judaism. The meaning of Matthew's statement is plain; and it is supported by a great deal of other evidence fairly quoted by Goodman himself.

Goodman may well be right in assuming that much, perhaps most, if not all, of Jewish hellenistic apologetic and propaganda literature was written for Jewish readers. This contention, however, is not, as G. seems to think, strengthened by the fact (important in itself, but for other reasons and for other uses) that practically all the Greek writings of Jews, including the Greek Old Testament and the Apocrypha, survived only in the Christian Church. (He is on safer ground when he points to the apparently almost universal pagan ignorance of these writings.) There is also a certain weakness in comparing Jewish attitudes towards gentile converts in the first century (generally very sympathetic) with, possibly, even greater Christian openness (the Christians were, at that time, of course, themselves all converts): the proper standard of comparison clearly is that of widespread inherited pagan attitudes towards strangers. In spite of such relatively insignificant reservations, it is well worth pondering a good deal of Goodman's detailed critique of some of the standard theses concerning Jewish missionary activity. I have nowhere else read such fresh, incisive, and often persuasive arguments devoted to demolishing long-held common opinions about the causes, motivations, and procedures connected with Jewish proselytization. Yet one is still left with the nagging question: even if Goodman is right in arguing that the Jews of that time lacked an incentive for proselytizing, and even if we accept that

³ I believe it is a somewhat rash retrojection of modern conditions to argue, as M.G. does, that "it is *a priori* probable that in antiquity, as now, the majority of conversions to Judaism took place to facilitate a marriage".

therefore they did not engage in large-scale missionary activity (the two claims are not identical), we still are left with the fact that by all accounts the numbers of Jews both in the empire and in countries beyond its limits were very large. How exactly these numbers (or even approximations to them) are to be computed is a question that must be left to speculative demographers. But can one doubt that they were larger than can be explained by emigration from an overpopulated homeland, by the Jewish aversion to abortion, contraception and infanticide or other interpretative artifices invented by ancient Jewish propagandists and spilling over even into the literature of their opponents? Except for Jewish loyalty to the faith of their fathers nothing is more characteristic of Jewish exiles than their clinging to their inherited languages⁴ which in all ages tend to survive among Diaspora Jews for many generations and even centuries in alien allophone surroundings. Yet as early as the third century B.C. the Jews in Alexandria, and presumably elsewhere, needed a Greek translation of the Law; unlike the Jews of Elephantine in the fifth century they did not preserve the Aramaic (or Hebrew) speech of their Palestinian forefathers. Perhaps their forefathers were not Palestinians? Perhaps not Jews? For many centuries the language of the vast majority of Jewish inscriptions in the Diaspora (if we discount the odd Hebrew formulaic expression) was Greek (even in the West!). A good deal of Jewish literature in the hellenistic and Graeco-Roman age was written in Greek. What does all this tell us about the likely ethnic and geographic origin of many, perhaps most, of the Diaspora Jews?

The Jews were not strangers in a pagan world. That they were has been said by many Christian writers, most influentially, at least outside theological circles, by Schürer. In the introduction to her valuable paper on "History and Theology in Christian Views of Judaism" Judith Lieu (J.L.) quotes Marcel Simon's forceful denial of an assertion which clearly owed much to Christian understanding of what some writers to this day call "Spätjudentum", "late" Judaism, but which was in reality early rabbinic Judaism that grew to maturity in the very period that was regarded by Christian historians as the time in the history of Israel in which the Jews had played out their part and had no further function in God's dispensation for this world except that of remaining as a testimony to the prophecies of doom and disaster to come on those who had denied their Saviour.

That early Christian anti-Judaism sowed the seed of modern secular anti-semitism is a thesis that has been much discussed in recent decades, for reasons that are likely to have more to do with the experience of our own days than with the disinterested study of the history of the past. However that may be, it can hardly be doubted that the millennial preaching of hatred, imputation of guilt,

⁴ This is true even though these languages are of non-Jewish origin, such as Aramaic, German, Spanish; indeed, Greek itself remained in Jewish use in the Latin West for a long time after the first Greek-speaking Jews had come there.

name-calling, and, when the persecuted sect had become the triumphalist Church dominant in the empire, persecution, oppression, and expulsion, prepared the ground for what came in the end. Judith Lieu goes back to the early Christian centuries and finds the beginnings of Christian anti-Judaism in the New Testament, with especial virulence in the Fourth Gospel. The earliest non-biblical writers, e.g. Ignatius (martyred ca. 110 A.D.), hand on the tradition to patristic literature. The foundation of anti-Jewish argument is, from the very beginning, the claim of the new Church that it, and not the Jewish people, is the true Israel, the inheritor of God's promise, the repository of His grace. It was the representatives of this *Verus Israel* that wrote countless works entitled *adversus Iudaeos*. The Jews had broken their covenant with God, had denied the Messiah, and thus had forfeited their inheritance. Their present sufferings, the destruction of their Temple, their dispersion in foreign countries, were the punishments for their sins and were thus seen to bear witness to their wickedness. There is much to be learned from the Fathers about the commonplaces of anti-Jewish propaganda. These can be traced through Tertullian and Origen and Eusebius and Jerome and Augustine and countless others, orthodox Christians and anathematized heretics alike.

J.L. has some interesting points to make on these *topoi*. The Diaspora was, of course, much older than Christianity and the destruction of the Temple; and thus, neither in logic nor in history the consequence of the destruction; nor could it be the punishment for the denial of the new religion.⁵ Why did the sinful Jews continue to exist? Augustine knows the answer to this question: they must continue in this world as a testimony to Christian truth. J.L. also cites the violent Christian reaction to Julian's plan for rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem, a plan which, if realised, would have undermined an essential part of the Church's case, and she quotes the interesting argument that that was indeed part of the Apostate's intention.⁶

There are other equally interesting lessons to be learned from this paper. Judaism was more of a problem for Christianity than Christianity for Judaism. That may well be a reason for the fact that there is so much more about Jews in Christian sources than about Christians in Jewish sources. Thus, what the Fathers write in their polemical works about the Jews often provides valuable information about Jewish life in late antiquity. J.L. also explains that what we read as anti-Judaism is often really an attack on Judaizing Christian heretics. She

⁵ It is, incidentally, interesting that the "Dispersion-as-punishment-for-sin" motif is not a monopoly of Christian thought about Judaism: it is known to the Jews from the time of the prophets; and in our days Jews still say in their prayers to their Maker and to themselves: "it is because of our sins that we have been exiled from our country ...".

⁶ See on this also Fergus Millar in his contribution to this collection, pp. 106-7 and 115-6.

rightly warns her readers that we must ask not so much how clear the boundaries are between Christianity and Judaism but rather who is drawing them and for whom.

Fergus Millar (F.M.) (“The Jews of the Graeco-Roman Diaspora between Paganism and Christianity, A.D. 312-438”) discusses the history of the Jews in the Christian empire from the conversion of Constantine to the promulgation of the Theodosian Code. The beginning of this era marks a radical change in the position of the Jews in a society in which till then they seem to have been treated better than the Christians, at least in theory: in the pagan empire they could expect toleration of their *barbara superstitio* because that was legitimated by long-lasting tradition. *Mos maiorum* was a good argument to rely on in the Roman world. Christians, most of whom by now were of Gentile stock, had been suspected of subversive tendencies. Unlike the Jews they could not, after their separation from the communion of Old Israel, justify themselves by reference to ancestral custom, and they had had a harder time than the Jews — at least in normal circumstances. Now the emperor was a Christian; and the Church, jealously guarding its exclusive possession of the Truth, began translating into practice that hostility to the mother religion for which in literary polemics it had long before laid the foundation.

We read here of synagogues that had been built by Jews and were destroyed by Christians to be replaced by churches: this was the fate of synagogues in many places, for instance in Stobi, Apamea, Gerasa, and far away in the west, in the town of Mago on the island of Minorca (where the Jewish population was forcibly converted)⁷. We hear of uneasy coexistence, conflict, and violence, much of it at “street level”, but often incited by preachers of the Gospel some of whom were destined for Sainthood. (It is, of course, interesting that the same Christian leaders were also active in anti-pagan agitation and violence. The violence visited upon Hypatia, on other pagans and indeed on Christian heretics is closely bound up with the activities of Theophilus and his nephew Cyril who succeeded him as Patriarch of Alexandria.) We learn about pagan and Christian attitudes to and curiosity about Judaism; and we are reminded of the difficulties inherent in the source materials: “There is so little testimony by Jews, which explicitly or implicitly looks outward to the ... conflicts and ... changes which

⁷ *Epistola Severi* in Migne PL XX 731-46; XLI 821-32; and see E.D. Hunt in *JTS* 33 (1982), 106-123, all quoted by F.M. pp. 119-20. Severus remarks (PL XLI, col. 825, section 10) that the *libri sancti* were removed from the synagogue by the Christians *ne apud Iudaeos iniuriam paterentur*: this is translated “allegedly to protect them from the Jews themselves”. I suspect that these words may really mean something rather different: it was feared that the books might suffer injury not at the hands of the Jews but rather while in the possession of the Jews (*apud Iudaeos*) because the latter themselves were in continued danger of being attacked.

were taking place around them”; and, as for the patristic sources, F.M. points out, the question must always be asked whether these writings reflect the historical reality of contemporary Jewish communities or the Christian image of Judaism derived from reading the Old Testament.

F.M. also asks interesting questions: “Was the Mishna known to the Jews of the Diaspora”? Did their Rabbis prepare commentaries on it? Indeed, did they have Rabbis? Or was theirs a Judaism different from that in Palestine and Babylonia? He finds that the title “Rabbi” in one form or another is found in various places and at various times; and similar or equivalent terms in Greek or Latin are also attested: *hierēus*, *sophodidaskalos*, *nomomathēs*, *mathētēs sophōn*⁸ and *legis doctor* (this Latin term is found both in the east, in Palestine, and in the far west in Spain).

In discussing fourth-century Judaism F.M. makes a number of interesting points that I can do no more than mention here. He observes that though the religious debates between pagans and Christians involved Judaism, Jews do not seem to have taken part in these disputations. “Rabbinic Judaism in the Holy Land was itself a bilingual [Greek and Hebrew/Aramaic] activity”. It is interesting and welcome that he concludes this from the Christian reports of exchanges between Jews and Christians (for instance, among the latter, Jerome) rather than relying on the overstated arguments from isolated and over-interpreted passages in rabbinic literature that have been so prominent in some scholarly writing over the last half century. He reads the tractate *Aboda Zara* (“Idolatry”) and notices that both the Mishna and the Palestinian Talmud dealing with it are not concerned with the nature of pagan worship but with the question how to conduct a Jewish life in a largely pagan context. He notes a fundamental change in the religious climate beginning in the 380s and affecting pagans, heretics and Jews (as well as Samaritans) alike. This change found expression in various ways: destruction of synagogues and pagan temples, imposition of disabilities, confiscation of property, mob riots; but it becomes most clearly visible in imperial legislation. Nevertheless, at no point was Judaism placed outside the law. And F.M. reaches the interesting conclusion that “the period of unresolved tensions between pagans and Christians may have been a relatively favourable and prosperous one for the settled Jewish communities of the Graeco-Roman Diaspora.

It is a particular virtue of this collection that it includes two distinguished papers on the non-hellenic East. Han Drijvers writes on “Syrian Christianity and Judaism” and Michael Weitzman on “From Judaism to Christianity: The Syriac Version of the Hebrew Bible” (an especially felicitous title for a paper that deals with the most “Jewish” of all ancient versions).

⁸ This, rather than *sophodidaskalos* (p. 101), seems to be the nearest equivalent of *Talmid Ḥakham*.

It is good to be reminded here that Syria was an area in which two international civilisations met more intimately than anywhere else. Aramaic was as important in this area as Greek. This had been true long before the coming of Christianity. We learn here that all Old Syriac inscriptions from the first three Christian centuries are of Gentile origin, and that some of them show traces of a literary tradition. Drijvers tells us that Edessa, the Blessed City, was called the Athens of the East: there, in a famous school, philosophy and rhetoric were taught, and Greek works were probably read in Greek, though the teaching was mainly in Syriac. Drijvers also points to a continuous translation activity in both directions. The works of the famous Bardesanes in the second century were written in Syriac, but were soon, perhaps in his lifetime, translated into Greek. It is a most remarkable fact that "every one of the Christian works written in the region between Antioch and Edessa during the second and third centuries is known in Greek as well as in a Syriac version". Drijvers presents the challenging argument that Syriac is not a culture different from Greek: both languages "are expressions and vehicles of the same Hellenistic civilisation". Of the many nationalities that made up the mixed population of Syria D. reports that the Jews may have been the best-defined group with established boundaries: and that "they were as hellenized as the rest of the population".

It was from Antioch that Christianity spread to Edessa. Here pagans, Christians and Jews lived together. Drijvers makes the point that religious texts, by their very nature, stress differences; life creates bonds. It is, curiously, in magical texts rather than in other literary remains or in inscriptions, that Drijvers finds the evidence for the shared middle ground of various ethnic and religious groups.

Legends and legendary figures aside, there stands out, among Syrian Christian thinkers, as early as the second century, Tatian the Assyrian, a pupil of Justin Martyr. He was the author of the *Diatessaron*, a harmony of the four canonical gospels (which was read in both Syriac and Greek and was supplanted in liturgical use only towards the end of the fourth century), and a violently anti-hellenic work addressed to the Greeks (*Oratio ad Graecos*). Founder of the rigorously ascetic sect of the Enkratites, he held heretical opinions which seem finally to have caused the eastern church to distrust the *Diatessaron* and to put the Peshitta into common use. His theological doctrines were, of course, connected with his ascetic tendencies; but there is more than that in his writings to shock the reader: Drijvers reports here that Incarnation and Crucifixion are absent from Tatian's theology; one must wonder at the fact that he remained so influential a figure in Syrian Christianity. Drijvers sees the reason for this in his ascetic doctrines which seem to have exerted a particularly strong attraction on the mainstream of Syrian Christianity. It is not without interest that, according to Drijvers, he exercised also an enormous influence on Manichaeism.

In large areas of Syria the Marcionites formed the majority of Christians: the blasphemous distinction between God the Creator and the unknown hidden God

of Grace led to the jettisoning of the Old Testament and of parts of the New Testament. It is clear that Pauline developments in Christian theology did not inevitably lead to such excrescences; but it does look likely that the pronounced anti-Judaism of Marcion and other Christian gnostics owed something to the influence of Paul.

We read here also about Bardesanes and his work (or the work of his School) in defence of Free Will; of the apocryphal Acts of Judas Thomas; about the dualism of the Manichaeans of whom Drijvers interestingly says that while they held negative views of our world their view of man was rather optimistic; it is through asceticism that man is able to save himself and his divine essence. They were active in missionary work. Their widespread success seems to have led to orthodox reaction of which the *Doctrine of Addai* is said to be an illustration: this work recounts the foundation legend of Syrian Christianity, embodying the famous apocryphal correspondence between Abgar V Ukkama, King of Edessa, and Jesus. Eusebius translated part of this into Greek (in the *Ecclesiastical History*), allegedly from a Syriac original in the royal archive. Drijvers makes a persuasive case for seeing in this legend clear anti-Manichaean propagandist aims.

Drijvers has much that is sensible and wise to say about the touching imaginings of some scholars who saw in Edessene Christianity the purest form of the faith, in its language that of Jesus himself, in Edessa, the "Blessed City", a repository of pristine traditions untainted by the corrupting influences of Hellenism. But, Drijvers tells us, Edessa was as hellenized as the rest of Syria, its Christianity was no different from that of Antioch. Sobriety of scholarship here easily overcomes fantasizing nostalgia.

Edessa had a Jewish community. Drijvers estimates that they made up perhaps twelve percent of the population; the estimate is based on the number of known Jewish funerary inscriptions. The numbers involved are very small (four out of fifty are Jewish); and it seems unsafe to rely on this as a base for the estimate. A safer argument would seem to be the retention of much traditional Jewish material in Syriac literature. Drijvers is undoubtedly right in dismissing the notion that this points to an important role of the Jews in the Christianization of Edessa. But might one not wish to argue that this phenomenon would seem to indicate a substantial Jewish presence there? It is interesting that, as Drijvers notes, in the entire body of Christian literature from the Syrian region and from Edessa in particular Jews are seldom mentioned.

Drijvers may well be right in thinking that, even if the Peshiṭta shows signs of being influenced by Jewish *targumim*, this is not a decisive indication of the Jewish origin of the Peshiṭta. But, again, one may wish to urge that it does indicate a Jewish presence; and more than merely numerical presence. For some reason that I find difficult to understand Drijvers emphasizes "a certain Christian

colouring"⁹ of the Syriac version; but that is, of course, only what one would expect. The really interesting thing about the Peshiṭta is the residue of Jewish, masoretic, readings in it; and this, again, is best explained, not indeed necessarily by postulating Jewish origin, but certainly by assuming Jewish influence resulting from close contacts; and in fact, Drijvers himself postulates such contacts: he remarks that some Syriac-speaking Christians, who were mostly of Gentile origin, were more attracted by Judaism than Jews were by Christianity. The polemic of Ephrem against Jews and Judaizers, quoted by Drijvers, seems to point in the same direction; and Drijvers points out that the Syrian Christians took over a substantial part of Jewish writings for their own use, and notes that this implies regular contacts at all levels. He also notes that in time attitudes changed: in the fourth century, especially after Julian, anti-Jewish feeling became stronger; in the fifth century he records attacks on Jews and destruction of synagogues.

The question of the origin and religious context of the Peshiṭta is also discussed by Michael Weitzman. He carefully examines the arguments for a Jewish or a Christian context. The evidence for the use by the translators of a Hebrew consonantal text as their *Vorlage*, does not, he rightly points, out demonstrate Jewish authorship; he is similarly unwilling to see proof of Jewish origin in the examples of Jewish exegesis that are to be found in the Peshiṭta. He thinks that scholars have frequently exaggerated the significance of the numerous verbal parallels between the Peshiṭta and Jewish targumim. Such parallels, in his view, rather indicate a common exegetical tradition, which "may have lived on in a Christian community of Jewish descent". On the other hand, Weitzman finds the arguments in favour of a Christian context equally inconclusive. Some of these arguments he finds factually wrong; others, such as specifically "Christian" features of the translation, he would wish to counter by arguing that they may be due to, e.g., the influence of the Septuagint, or to the possibility that some features that appear to be exclusively Christian may have existed also in certain currents of Judaism. One argument that one misses here is that based on the certainty that Christian features are to be expected in a translation used for many centuries in the Christian Church: after all, the Septuagint, as we have it, exhibits clear evidence of being used by Christians. Its Jewish origin cannot be doubted; but its present Christian colouring is surely as obvious as that of any other ancient version, including the Peshiṭta?

Weitzman offers an interesting solution to the problem: we must rid ourselves of thinking in terms of the monolithic alternatives "Judaism" and "Christianity". He reminds us that not all Judaism was rabbinic. The various strands of Judaism varied in their attitude to the Law, to the calendar, to liturgical arrangements and many other things. The detailed argument contained in the examination of the Peshiṭta is difficult to summarise. Weitzman concludes that

⁹ Could "Christian" possibly be a misprint for "Jewish"?

the Peshiṭta is of non-rabbinic Jewish origin. If so, he asks, how did it become the Bible of the Syriac Church? I must confess that I find this question less worrying than he seems to do. For, assuming that the Peshiṭta is indeed of non-rabbinic Jewish origin, why should we be surprised by the reception of that translation in the Church? Was not the case of the Septuagint similar? Weitzman's own answer is that the origins of the translators' religion may lie in a popular anti-cultic movement that went back to biblical times; this movement very early replaced the sacrificial service of the temple by a prayer-cult; and Jews whose practice was confined to the prayer-cult and who did otherwise not observe Jewish ritual, could well come to adopt Christianity; and this, Weitzman thinks, may be the case for the community represented by the [translators of the] Peshiṭta. Weitzman offers this reconstruction with some reserve. I feel bound to say that I think that reserve is justified. The case he makes, in his detailed examination of the evidence, seems to me strong though not decisive. It is not, I think, in need of an entirely speculative reconstruction of the putative background of the translators. Sometimes one must be content with establishing or coming near to establishing a fact; it is not always given to us to know the causes of facts or of events: but we do know that the facts exist, that the events happened. The case for being content with limited results seems to me especially strong here, because, as I have argued above, if the Peshiṭta really is of Jewish origin, we have a parallel fact in the Septuagint.

In the final chapter of this collection John North writes on "The Development of Religious Pluralism". Here his main theme is the place of pagans in the religious history of the period. In a way, he argues, this theme is central to the conception of the book as a whole: for it is obvious that an exploration of the character of Diaspora Judaism and of its relationship to other groups must take account of the religious situation in the Roman Empire as a whole. How did pagans, Christians and Jews socially interact with each other? What is the nature and the extent of their mutual intellectual influence? Such questions need to be treated not in isolation, separately from each other, but comprehensively. Can we grasp, asks North, any overall picture of the religious life in what was still, at the beginning of the period under discussion, a pagan world?

His starting point is A.D. Nock's distinction between the religious life of the Empire and that of the preceding centuries. A new experience, that of conversion, is recognised as characterizing a profound difference, not between the pagan world and the Christian world, but making its appearance as early as Paul on the road to Damascus in the first century and in Augustine's religious struggles with himself centuries later. But this, North argues, is only a starting point. It presupposes an existing religious situation which itself needs to be placed in its context of social change; conversion must not be treated merely as an individual psychological event.

Nock had seen a profound gulf between the old and the new: Christianity had come and paganism was going. His thesis clashed with theories that saw the origins of Christianity in pre-Christian mystery cults. North notes that the terms of the debate have changed, particularly because of the change in the interpretation of the pagan mystery cults. But, he reasonably argues, the collapse of older theories does not entail total separation between developments in the Judaeo-Christian tradition on the one hand and paganism on the other. Surviving literature testifies to mutual awareness and interchange in the Empire and outside its boundaries. Conversion, he says, could not have taken place without mutual contact, even conflict and resentment.

It is in the lack of an overall framework of interpretation that he sees the weakness of such theories as that the rise of Christianity can be explained as the result of the decline of paganism or as the response to mass neurotic anxiety in the troubled times of the third century.

In the pagan Greek and Roman world religious practice was integral to civic life. But there were no differentiated religious institutions; there were no alternatives to the cults provided by clan, tribe or city. Religious commitment was not the outcome of individual choice. North proposes to look at the religious history of the period as a development from religion embedded in the city state coextensive with the belief system and the religious practice of the whole community to religion as choice of different groups within society, choice between different doctrines, between different religious practices, between different attempts "to make sense of the absurdity of human experience". He cites modern analogies suggesting the model of the market place of ideas, in which the progress from embedded monopolistic state religion to differentiated religion chosen by individuals or groups within a pluralistic society is analogous to that from economic monopoly to the free market of a competitive society. In the ancient city state religion and city were sustaining each other; when choice replaced monopoly pluralism would destroy the situation in which society as a whole authenticated a single common view of the world. The competitors in this market were far from having a common conception of how this "market" was to be regulated. Thus the Christians were addressing themselves to a universal public; the Jews were more restrained in offering their message to the Gentile nations: "the pagans sometimes show more interest in breaking up the market-place than in competing with the other salesmen". On the whole, North finds that the market-place model is only partially illuminating and prefers thinking instead in terms of interactions, occasionally but not always competitive, between different groups.

The role of the Jews, and even more that of the Christians, is seen by some as crucial in the process of differentiation. Judaism itself had changed in Palestine from a unitary religion to a set of competing groups, sects, schools. The Christians, emerging from this differentiated religiously pluralistic situation of Palestinian Jewry, provided a starting point for the differentiation of religious

life in the Gentile world. North rejects this simple view: it ignores the role of Judaism in interaction with the pagans before the coming of Christianity. Judaism had established a presence, and there were already Gentiles associated with the Jews to whom the Christian preachers could appeal. Thus "some form of interchange between [different] religious groups was part of life in the Greek cities of the east by the first century". He also notes that it is difficult to separate the religious changes from wider social changes and particularly movements of population. Hence, because of the presence of foreign captives, slaves, migrants, the cities of the Roman Empire contained mixed populations with mixed religious traditions coexisting more or less peacefully. North also stresses the internally generated tendency in pagan life towards the differentiation of religious groups. This, he shows, predates the coming of the Christians.

He finds that, tested against a variety of criteria, the degree of separation found with respect to Jews and Christians is greater than that of the various pagan mystery groups, which unlike the adherents of the two Palestinian religions, had no difficulty in combining their own distinctive cults with acceptance of civic ceremonial.

North also examines the thesis that early Christianity acted as a vehicle for social or political protest. He notes, however, that the evidence available does not support the contention that Christianity was basically a religion of the enslaved or exploited. He thinks the religious history of the period is best understood as one in which a new situation had come into being, in which the individual had to make his own choices, in which the exercise of religious authority became more contentious than it had been in the traditional pagan world. This is said to have created competition between religious groups based on voluntary commitment which had not existed before. This competition affects all the participants in it. The role of the Christians here is particularly significant: their enthusiasm to persuade outsiders into the fold was unprecedented. This is seen as the most radical contribution of Christianity to the process of change within the history of the time. In a sense, paganism was not a religion before it became one in response to the challenge of Christianity; it was "a religion invented in the course of the second and third centuries, in competition with Christians, Jews and others" who were seeking converts from among the pagans. North quotes here the acute observation of Bowersock that the notion of Hellenism, as it was used in the fourth century, was intended to function as a reminder that the pagan tradition did not have to be understood in the terms implied by Christian polemic, but could include the whole of the intellectual and artistic tradition of the classical world.

In the story of interaction of religious groups the role of Jewish communities, though ambiguous, was important. North notes that they lacked the single-minded clarity of the Christian mission as well as what he calls the embedded strength of the pagans. He returns here to some of the questions discussed by

Goodman concerning the missionary activities of Jews in various periods. But it is North's principal aim in this chapter to examine the transformation of religious life in the whole of the Mediterranean area in this period. One important aspect of this was the existence of a system of interacting and competing religions between which individuals had to choose. This new situation had implications for the individuals and for the groups to which they belonged or which they chose to join, as well as for society as a whole. The result was conflict but also creativity, which as North stresses, was not confined to the Christians; but it was their notion of an active mission to convert others that gained them the initiative and forced others to react.

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