

Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds. *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews And Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007. 410 pages, \$29.00.

The aim of this volume of essays is “to call attention to the ample evidence that speaks against the notion of a single and simple ‘Parting of the Ways’ between Judaism and Christianity in the first or second century CE, and most importantly, against the assumption that no meaningful convergence ever occurred thereafter” (22). There are seventeen articles in this collection, including the substantive Introduction. The “Introduction” offers a clear understanding of the issue of mutually distinctive “Judaism” and “Christianity” and the changes in our understanding of how it came about. We offer here a review of four contributions, each of which works with a different kind of evidence.

Paula Fredriksen’s contribution, “What Parting of the Ways?” focuses on the contrast between the ideal of ancient Orthodox Christian writers who nurtured a *contra Iudaeos* tradition and the realities of life in an ancient Mediterranean city. In the religious atmosphere of those cities, the basic rules for co-existence were, first, an expectation that people would remain loyal to the gods and religious traditions of their own ethnic group and that they would expect others to do the same, even if they found other practices objectionable or inferior. Second, since the lives of people of so many different origins were so intertwined, it was expected that people of one religious tradition would participate in the religious practices of other people with whom they lived. What this multi-religious culture found objectionable was not participating in the religious activities of another group, but *conversion*, the act of abandoning your ancestral religion for that of a group other than that from which you came.

How then do we account for literary expressions of Christian anti-Judaism and claims of being persecuted by Jews in this climate? Fredriksen proposes that these expressions are the product of the effort of formerly pagan Christian intellectuals to define themselves over against Jews with whom they were competing for the same scriptural texts; they were directed at persuading Gentile Christians to cease mixing with their Jewish neighbors, also in the service of self-definition. This contrast between the rhetoric and the reality obtained until the ancient city became increasingly brutalized under the pressure of Visigoths, Franks, and eventually Muslims in the fifth through the seventh centuries. By this point, “in learned Christian imagination, ‘the Jew’ represented the religious outsider par excellence” (62).

Daniel Boyarin offers us conceptual innovations drawn from linguistic usage and theory that alter our understanding of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. One of these conceptual innovations is that of the wave theory of how dialects and languages come into being. The image is that of pebbles thrown into a pond, each of which generates concentric circles of ripples that do not only diverge but converge. This is opposed to the image of the family tree, which allows only for divergence. Accordingly, we may picture “an assortment of religious ‘dialects’ throughout the Jewish world that gradually developed structure as clusters through diffusion” (76). Among these dialects were a variety of Christian ones that came to interact and converge around

the phenomena they shared. In this way one or more Christian dialects precipitated out, as did other groups within the Jewish mix. The wave image accounts for the ongoing differentiation within Christianity despite the attempts beginning in the fourth century to create uniformity. It also allows for ongoing convergence between Christian and other Jewish groups around things that they shared. Consequently, it was not “via a separation . . . but via choices made by different groups of different specific indicia of identity, and the diffusion and clustering of such indicia” that led groups gradually to “congeal” into Judaism and Christianity. But “it was only with the mobilizations of temporal power . . . in the fourth century that the process can be said to have formed ‘religions’”. One might say that Judaism and Christianity were invented to explain the fact that there were Jews and Christians” (77).

In “A Convergence of the Ways? The Judaizing of Christian Scripture by Origen and Jerome,” Alison Salvensen studies the translation and commentary work of Origen and Jerome for their role in establishing the Hebrew text of the Christian Old Testament as authoritative in the gentile church and for gentile Christian reliance on and regard for Jewish writings and scholars. Origen, for example, shared the Jewish dissatisfaction with the LXX. He found the manuscripts of the LXX to be lacking in the quality established for texts of the classics in Alexandria. He also noted the care Jews took in copying Hebrew texts. He therefore undertook the prodigious project of producing the Hexapla, a work that placed in parallel columns the Hebrew text current among Jewish copyists, the Septuagint, and the Jewish revisions of Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus. Origen, whose Hebrew was not very good, made good use of the “Three” to help him revise the LXX on the basis of the Hebrew text. The result was a “Hebraization of the Christian Bible” (242). The work of both Origen and Jerome supply some of the evidence for continuing interaction between Jews and Christians considerably past the traditional date of the “parting of the ways.”

Daniel Stoekl Ben Ezra (“Whose Fast Is It? The Ember Day of September and Yom Kippur”) considers the evidence for a continuing influence of Jewish liturgical observance on the Christian Church in Rome as late as the 6th century. The starting point for the exploration is a sermon of Pope Leo the Great (440-461 C.E.) on a fast in the Seventh Month in which the pope expresses his confidence that “what was first the Jewish fast will become Christian by your observance” (259). Leo mentions a detail that that he could have known about only through direct observation, namely the Jewish practice of going barefoot. The author concludes, “Competition with and influence from the Jewish Yom Kippur plausibly explains the dominance of the Old Testament readings and the focus on repentance and propitiation” (278).

The more knowledgeable preachers become about realities scholars are uncovering about relationships in the early centuries, the more sensitive they will become to our distorted way of speaking about the conflicts, and the more they will nurture a rich understanding and embrace of the wide scope of our common heritage.

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