ON THE JEWISH BACKGROUND OF CHRISTIANITY*

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Any discussion of the Jewish background of Christianity may easily be organized around three historical figures, on the one hand, and three ways of defining Jews, on the other. Namely, the story of early Christianity is easily organized around the names of John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth and Paul, and the definition of Jews in antiquity—"Who was a Jew?"—is just as easily organized around three separate criteria: place (Jews as Judaeans), pedigree (Jews as children of Jews), and religion (Jews as adherents of Judaism, which is a complex of belief and practice). What I would like to suggest, however briefly, is that Christianity appeared as a result of the confluence of certain processes in poles of the Jewish world represented, respectively, by John, Jesus and Paul. These processes, I will suggest, undermined the importance, for the definition of a person as being Jewish, of Jewish place, of Jewish pedigree, and also of the practical side of the Jewish religion, thus allowing for the appearance of a type of Judaism that defines its adherents by common belief alone.

First the poles: John, Jesus and Paul are products of different parts of the ancient Jewish world. John and Jesus were both from Palestine, but from different parts: John seems to have been from the south and also to have been associated (directly or indirectly) with Qumran,[1] Jesus was from the Galilee. Later we will see something of the different foci of these two settings. Now it is enough to note that we may assume that Aramaic was the main language in Palestine, although

* This paper is, to a large extent, an updated and revised version of the introductory chapter to my 1992 *Studies* (below, n. 36).

[1] By which I mean that whereas prior to the Qumran discoveries we had no way of explaining the historical background that produced John, today Qumran can do that for us, although we have no way of knowing the precise channels or nature of his relationship to it. Most of what is essential here was already said a few years after the Scrolls started appearing; see W. Brownlee, "John the Baptist in the New Light of Ancient Scrolls", in: *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (ed. K. Stendahl; New York: Harper, 1957) 33–53. For a later discussion, based on another generation's worth of publications of texts and studies, see R. L. Webb, "John the Baptist", in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* 1 (2000) esp. 420–421.

probably some Hebrew, and perhaps even some Greek, should also be assumed[2]—and that sets both John and Jesus off from Paul. For the latter was clearly associated with the Hellenistic diaspora (with which we know of no connections of John or Jesus): he was from Tarsus (Acts 9:11), which was "no mean city" (ibid. 21:39), a center of Hellenistic culture on the southeastern coast of modern Turkey, his career was mostly in the Hellenistic diaspora, and Greek was clearly his first language, whatever Aramaic and Hebrew he may have also picked up.[3]

As for the three criteria of being a Jew—this requires some initial exposition. Today we are used to debates about "Who is a Jew?" because often it happens that two criteria, pedigree and religion, do not agree one with another. Most usually, the questions arise concerning people of non-Jewish birth who desire to be Jews by religion, and the question becomes one of the legitimacy or sincerity of this or that conversion process. Sometimes, inversely, the question refers instead to someone of Jewish birth who does not adhere to the Jewish religion or even adheres to another religion, such as the famous case of Daniel Rufeisen ("Brother Daniel"), a Polish Jew who had become a Catholic monk and wanted to gain Israeli citizenship via Israel's Law of Return that grants that right to "Jews."[4] In antiquity, however, there was also a third criterion that complicated matters, for the word "Jew"—*Yehudi* in Hebrew, *Ioudaios* in Greek, *Yehudai* in Aramaic—meant, first of all "Judaean."[5] Accordingly, when someone claimed to

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[2] See Ch. Rabin's chapter on Hebrew and Aramaic and G. Mussies' on Greek in: *The Jewish People in the First Century*, II (Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum, 1/2, ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern; Assen: van Gorcum, 1976) 1007–1039 and 1040–1064.

[3] This is amply testified by his writings, whatever one thinks of the claim that he was also educated in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3). See W. C. van Unnik, *Tarsus or Jerusalem: The City of Paul's Youth* (London: Epworth, 1962); W. W. Gasque, "Tarsus", in: *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6 (1992) 334.

[4] See, in general: S. Z. Abramov, *Perpetual Dilemma: Jewish Religion in the Jewish State* (Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ., 1976). For a fascinating modern initiative and anthology on this issue, see: B. Litvin, *Jewish Identity: Modern Responsa and Opinions on the Registration of Children of Mixed Marriages: David Ben-Gurion's Query to Leaders of World Jewry—A Documentary Compilation* (ed. S. B. Hoenig; Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1970).

[5] Josephus preserves, in *Against Apion* 1.179, quite an eloquent and authoritative example of this understanding, in a passage from Clearchus of Soli that quotes Aristotle as having explained that philosophers in Coele-Syria are called *Ioudaioi* because they reside in that part of Syria which is called *Ioudaia* (Judaea); for text and commentary, see M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, I (Jerusalem: Israel

be a Jew in antiquity, or others called a person a Jew, it might mean that he or she was from Judaea, or of Jewish descent, or an adherent of the Jewish religion—or any combination thereof.[6]

The First Temple Period

Speaking quite generally, as the current framework requires, it seems that although all three criteria of being a Jew were always around to some extent in antiquity, each had a period in which it made the most sense and, therefore, was dominant. The first half of the first millennium B.C.E., the period of the First Temple, seems to have been a period in which the territorial criterion dominated. This was the period in which the Torah spoke repeatedly of its laws applying both to the *'ezraḥ* and to the *ger ha-gar betokhekhem*—to native-born people and to people who came to live among us (Exodus 12:49; Numbers 15:16; etc.): what matters is *where*—in Whose jurisdiction (cf. Deuteronomy 32:8–9 and Judges 11:24!)—you live. Similarly, this was the period in which David is said to have complained to Saul that by forcing him to flee "God's ancestral land" he is being forced to worship other gods too (1 Sam 26:19), just as the exiled temple singers quoted in Ps. 137 say that they it doesn't make sense for them to sing "songs of Zion" in a foreign land; after all, songs of Zion are "the Lord's songs" and singing them abroad makes as little sense as raising the French flag in the middle of London. Or, for a final example, this is the period in which Ruth is said to have undertaken her commitment that "your people shall be my people and your God—my God" (1:16) only upon moving to the land of Israel. Before that it would have been an impossible or meaningless statement.

Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974) 49–52. In general see, on this point, S. Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38 (2007) esp. 457–480.

[6] See D. R. Schwartz, "'Judaean' or 'Jew"? How Should we Translate *Ioudaios* in Josephus?", in: *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World: Jüdische Identität in der griechisch-römischen Welt* (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 71, ed. D. R. Schwartz, J. Frey, and S. Gripentrog; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 3–27.

This attitude, which is bespoken by other biblical texts as well,[7] made perfect sense for a period in which the Jews, or the Israelites as we were then called, had a sovereign state in their own land and did not have a diaspora. In such a period, it made sense to say that we are the people of a certain land. After the Babylonians destroyed the monarchy and the first temple, however, in the sixth century B.C.E., and exiled huge numbers of Judaeans to Babylonia, all that changed. Namely, if hitherto there had been a sovereign Israelite state (or two) in Palestine and no diaspora to speak of, from then on, there was (with a Hasmonean exception) no sovereign Jewish state and there was a diaspora—and quite a large one: in those days, just as today, more people recognized as Jews by themselves, and by others, live outside of the land of Israel than within it. So although the territorial definition of being Jewish was not discarded, it made less sense, and another one—not totally new, of course, but now more prominent—came to the fore: pedigree. Jews are now perceived, first of all, as people who are of Jewish *birth*.[8] Thus, for example, the Jewish author of the Book of Esther imitates reality by having the villain's wife, Zeresh, refer to the Jews as *zera ha-yehudim* (Esther 6:13)—those of Jewish *seed*. Jews did the same: this is the period in which Ezra and Nehemiah move to forbid intermarriage because it constitutes, as Ezra 9:2 puts it, in explaining the expulsion of non-Jewish wives, a defilement of the Jewish *seed—zera ha-qodesh*.[9]

We should note, in this context, that this is a point of view that made perfect sense not only as a fallback position, since the land no longer worked to define the collective, but also because what the Jews

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[7] Note esp. 2 Kings 17, where "the God of the land" (vv. 26–27) compels new settlers transplanted to northern Israel to worship Him.

[8] There was another option, tried out already in the Persian period: constituting the Jews as a voluntary community of people committed to common rules; so Nehemiah 10. But that played only a secondary role in the Persian period. Later, however, it would basically provide the precedent for sectarianism. See esp. M. Smith, "The Dead Sea Sect in Relation to Ancient Judaism", *New Testament Studies* 7 (1961) 347–360 = idem, *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh*, I (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 130, ed. S. J. D. Cohen; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 168–183.

[9] On this episode see, most recently: S. Japhet, "The Expulsion of the Foreign Women (Ezra 9–10): The Legal Basis, Precedents, and Consequences for the Definition of Jewish Identity", in: *Teshurah Le-'Amos: Collected Studies in Biblical Exegesis Presented to 'Amos Hakham* (ed. M. Bar-Asher, N. Hacham, Y. Ofer; Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2007) 379–401 (in Hebrew).

did have, in the absence of a state, was a Temple: the Persians (who took over from the Babylonians) allowed the Jews a Temple, and it was of course run by Jewish priests. Their prestige in this period is very obvious in numerous contemporary texts, including the panegyrics in Malachi 2:4–7; their status is also indicated by various epigraphic finds, such as coins minted by high priests in the Persian period.[10] Since, however, Jewish priests are defined by their birth, their dominant status in this period meant that pedigree in general was very important in this period: the priests' status proved that descent was not a bagatelle, something indifferent like the color of one's hair. That is: if mere descent from Aaron was good enough to define priests and give them special status and nearness to God, and mere descent from Levi (although not via Aaron) was good enough to give the Levites too more sanctity and prestige than other Jews, it made sense to go on the same way and posit that descent from Abraham, that is—a Jewish pedigree—was good enough to define Jews in general. Which is precisely the point of view bespoken by Ezra, when he spoke of the difference between Jews and non-Jews as being between those who are of *zera ha-qodesh* and those who are not.

Hellenism, Hellenistic Diaspora, and Paul

The arrival of Hellenism, in the person of Alexander the Great and his successors, put an end to the Persian period and brought another criterion to the fore. For Hellenism—Greek culture in the East—by its very nature undercut the importance of place and pedigree, and instead focused upon the importance of culture.[11] Beginning with the late fourth century B.C.E., the world in which the Jews lived became filled with people called "Greeks" although they had never lived in Greece, and although they were of non-Greek descent. Rather, they were called Greeks because they spoke Greek and adopted Greek

[10] See Y. Meshorer, *A Treasury of Jewish Coins* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, and Nyack, New York: Amphora, 2001) 14–17.

[11] For an oft-quoted passage to this effect from Isocrates, *Panegyricus* 50, which praises Athens for turning "Hellenes" into a term that denotes those who share Greek culture, not just Greek *physis*, see S. J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Hellenistic Culture and Society 31; Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1999) 132.

culture—they did what Greeks did and abstained from doing what Greeks abstained from doing. They had schools, gymnasia, in which children of whatever place and pedigree were turned into "Greeks" by education and training. Of course, we need not exaggerate here, neither regarding the Greeks' motives (they came to the East to seek fame and fortune, not with a cultural mission), nor with regard to the rate of the process of Hellenization of the East; as Tarn summed up both sides of the matter, "The Greeks came to Egypt to grow rich; so far as they could they transported to Egypt their own life, and for a century did not mix freely with the Egyptians".[12] Nevertheless, the Greek culture was one that allowed others to become Greeks, and that happened.

And the Greeks were successful and respectable—and so it became reasonable and even attractive for Jews to think of themselves in similar terms: if the Greeks are Greeks not because of Greece or Greek blood but because they adhere to "Hellenism", we must be Jews because we adhere to "Judaism". This, in turn, created a need to define "Judaism" in a way that never previously existed—and that explains how it could happen that Jewish sects appeared in the Hellenistic period.[13] Which is, of course, the period and the context in which we should look for the Jewish roots of Christianity.

Turning first to the Hellenistic diaspora, where Paul was born and raised,[14] we find, first of all, that by its nature it undercut, for Jews, the importance of a Jewish *place*. Jews who lived abroad could not subscribe, easily, to the notion that there was any place in the Jewish world that was holier than other places, because to do so would make them second-class Jews, and no one wants to be that. So although

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[12] W. W. Tarn (with G. T. Griffith), *Hellenistic Civilisation* (London: Arnold, 1952[3]) 201.

[13] Josephus mentions Jewish sects for the first time in the context of the middle of the second century B.C.E.—*Antiquities* 13.171–173. Of course, there are various reasons that explain *why* it happened that Jewish sects appeared then. Especially we must remember that they appeared during that exceptional sub-period of the Second Temple period during which the Jews had a sovereign state. See A. I. Baumgarten, *The Flourishing of Jewish Sects in the Maccabean Period: An Interpretation* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 55; Leiden: Brill, 1997). My point here is that whatever reasons called for their appearance, they could not have appeared as long as "being Jewish" was conceived of as something defined not by one's decisions, but by such physical givens as location and pedigree.

[14] Cf. above, n. 3. For my understanding of Paul, see "Paulus aus jüdischer Sicht," in: *Paulus der Jude: Seine Stellung im christlich-jüdischen Dialog heute* (ed. Sung-Hee Lee-Linke; Frankfurth am Main, 2005) 115–125.

the Bible very frequently calls the Temple of Jerusalem "the house of God", diasporan Jewish texts frequently refer to God as "the God of Heaven".[15] Similarly, diasporan Jewish texts frequently underline the importance of *prayer*, which was available to them, rather than sacrifice—which was not, since it was limited to the Temple of Jerusalem. To cite just a few examples, that reflect the type of culture with which Paul grew up, I can note that an Alexandrian Jewish work of the first century B.C.E. that survived in the Apocrypha, the Wisdom of Solomon (18:20–25), claims that Aaron prayed to save Jews who were in danger of dying, whereas the biblical account of that event (Numbers 16:41–50) has him sacrificing incense. Similarly, 3 Maccabees has the book's two turning points both revolve around prayers by priests (Chs. 2 and 6), although one of them was the high priest in Jerusalem and could also have sacrificed, just as Philo, an Alexandrian Jewish philosopher of the first century C.E., Paul's older contemporary, generally speaks of the Temple priesthood as "praying and sacrificing" although only the latter was particularly characteristic of the Temple.[16] Similarly, in connection with the reference in Psalm 46:4 to "the city of God" Philo explains that the true Temple is in the heart of the sage, or in the whole world—and that since the Holy City is called "Jerusalem", which he interprets to mean "he who sees peace" (*yireh shalom*), any person whose soul is at peace can be characterized as a holy city.[17] So when we find Paul, in his epistles, saying that Christians are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20), in the "Jerusalem which is above" (Galatians 4:26), thus leaving the earthly Jerusalem behind and making the Temple available as a metaphor for the Christian community (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16), or for the individual Christian

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[15] On this epithet as "characteristic of the Seocnd Commonwealth" see A Rofé, "An Enquiry into the Betrothal of Rebekah", in: *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorf zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. E. Blum, C. Macholz and E. W. Stegemann; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990) 28 (with much evidence from the Bible, Elephantine papyri, apocrypha and Dead Sea Scrolls). It is particularly the Diaspora's existence, in this period, that engendered the usage. See D. R. Schwartz, *2 Maccabees* (Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008) 47.

[16] See D. R. Schwartz, "Philo's Priestly Descent", in: *Nourished with Peace: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmel* (edd. F. E. Greenspahn, E. Hilgert and B. L. Mack; Chico, California: Scholars, 1984) 162.

[17] Philo, *On Dreams* 2.248–251 (in H. Lewy, *Philo: Philosophical Writings* [Oxford: East and West Library, 1946] 81–82). See, in general: V. Nikiprowetzky, "La spiritualisation des sacrifices et le culte sacrificial au temple de Jérusalem chez Philon d'Alexandrie", in his: *Études philoniennes* (Paris: Cerf, 1996) 79–96.

(1 Corinthians 6:19), which entails calling upon them to make their whole bodies into "living sacrifices" (Romans 12:1), we may understand that he is reproducing the type of thing he probably heard in the Hellenistic Jewish community of his youth.[18] True, given his Christian belief and polemical situation he may have been, or become, more extreme and consistent about this than others. But the main elements were already in place.

If Jewish life in any diaspora undermines the importance of a Jewish *place*, Jewish life specifically in the Hellenistic diaspora also undermined the importance of Jewish pedigree. For the Hellenistic world was a universalist world; anyone could become a Greek by obtaining the proper education. In such a world, Jews would be hard put to go on viewing themselves as a closed *zera ha-yehudim*, and they didn't: we find, in the Hellenistic and especially in the early Roman period, the period in which Christianity appeared, abundant evidence of Jewish proselytism,[19] as Philo proudly notes,[20] just as we also find some of Jewish apostasy (3 Maccabees 1:3; 2:31; 7:10–15; Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.100).[21] That is, Jews and others must have been increasingly aware that Jewish birth was neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for "being Jewish"—and many Jews were proud about such universalism, and adamant about it. Thus, for example, the author of 2 Maccabees—a Hellenistic Jewish work of the second century B.C.E., probably written in Alexandria—underlines his claim that many non-Jews, including Greeks, were upset when a Jewish high priest was murdered; after all, he was "a man", and his death outraged all good people (4:35–36; so too ibid., 4:49);[22] something similar appears, in a similar diasporan context, in 3 Maccabees 3:8–10. Similarly, to revert to the passage of the Wisdom of Solomon cited above, it characterizes Aaron, whose prayers saved the Jews, not as a priest but as "a righteous man" (18:21). And so on. When Paul pounds his hand on the table about

[18] Or in the Hellenistic Jewish circles in which he moved in Jerusalem—as we may assume given his background. Cf. Acts 6:9 for the way Jews of the Hellenistic diaspora had their own circles in Jerusalem.

[19] On Gentiles becoming Jews in antiquity, to various extents, see Cohen (above, n. 11) 140–174; also Stern (above, n. 5) 2.103–106.

[20] *Life of Moses* 2.17–24 (Lewy [above, n. 17] 103–104).

[21] See S. Etienne, "Réflexion sur l'apostasie de Tibérius Julius Alexander", *Studia Philonica Annual* 12 (2000) 122–42.

[22] Compare Acts 10:1, where the opening introduction of Cornelius as "a man" guarantees that, in the end, he will be accepted into the Christian community.

all believers being "sons of Abraham" (Galatians 3:6–9), and insists that there is no distinction to be made between Jews and Greeks for all are one (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11), he is totally in line with this same approach.

So much for place and pedigree; the context and circumstances of Jewish life in the Hellenistic world were such as to undermine their significance greatly, and Paul may well be understood as a consistent expression of that tradition. That leaves us with the law, the Torah. What was its status in the Hellenistic diaspora? Here matters are more complex, but nevertheless it seems clear that a few factors served to undermine its importance. I'll mention three such factors.

The social factor. Observing Jewish law in a mixed environment is something that can be quite difficult—dietary restrictions, separate calendars, and other issues impose difficulties and also create barriers, which were at times accompanied by hostility. In the Epistle to the Ephesians (2:14), for example, one of Paul's disciples speaks of a "wall of hostility" that used to divide Jews from Gentiles, and similar phrasings in *Letter to Aristeas* 139 ("walls of iron")[23] and 3 Maccabees 3:4 show that such language, and feeling, were not rare.[24]

Cultural relativism. Jews typically defended their laws, in the Hellenistic world, by presenting them as the law-code of a venerated ancient legislator, Moses, and/or as the ancestral laws (*patrioi nomoi*) of the Jews.[25] That way the Jews were able to compare their own practices to those of other peoples; just as the Cretans followed the laws of Minos, and the Spartans—those of Lycurgus, and they all had their ancestral practices which were legitimated by their antiquity, the Jews followed those of Moses and their own ancestors. In this connection, accordingly,

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[23] See R. Feldmeier, "Weise hinter 'eisernen Mauern': Tora und jüdisches Selbstverständnis zwischen Akkulturation und Absonderung im Aristeasbrief", in: *Die Septuaginta zwischen Judentum und Christentum* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zumNeuen Testament 72, ed. M. Hengel and A.M. Schwemer; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1994) 20–37.

[24] For some Roman expressions of this, see Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 361 (Gaius throws at the Jews the hostile question, "Why do you not eat pork?") and Tacitus, *Histories* 5..4.1 ("The Jews regard as profane all that we hold sacred; on the other hand, they permit all that we abhor").

[25] For the assumption, in this connection, that old is good and older is better, see: P. Pilhofer, *Presbyteron Kreitton: Der Altersbeweis der jüdischen und christlichen Apologeten und seine Vorgeschichte* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/39; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1990). See also B. Schröder, *Die 'väterlichen Gesetze': Flavius Josephus als Vermittler von Halachah an Griechen und Römer* (Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 53; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1996).

Jews also wrote much literature singing the praises of Moses as a wise leader and legislator. However, in doing this they employed something that turned into a boomerang, because this argument, which is meant to defend the respectability of Jewish law, amounts to saying that Jewish law is just as respectable as other law codes—and doesn't really give an explanation why one should adhere to this one rather to one more popular, followed by his non-Jewish neighbors too, and thus avoid the social difficulties adhering to particularism. And the same may be said of the third factor:

Spiritualization. Given the Greek tendency to seek the essence of things, Greeks, as opposed to Hebrews, were used to speaking of the *physis* of things as opposed to their *logos*—their meaning, their essence. For the Greeks, among whom the Jews lived in the period we are discussing, if Jewish laws were to be respectable, they had to be meaningful—to have some meaningful essence. Thus, for example, if it is forbidden to eat a certain animal, that cannot be simply because the Bible says it's an unclean animal; rather, if this law is to be respectable the Bible must have a *reason* to forbid it, there must be something bad, something to be avoided, about the animal. Jews in the Hellenistic world were hard at work at this type of issue, finding reasons for the commandments (what later would be called *taamei hamitzvot*)—explaining what symbolic lessons this and that law taught. Thus, for example, an Alexandrian Jewish work of the second century B.C.E. (the *Letter of Aristeas*) explains (in §§141–155) that Moses ordered that the Jews abstain from eating birds of prey (so he characterizes the relevant prohibitions, although the Bible offers no such hint and only lists forbidden birds) so as to teach them not to live as predators upon their fellow men. Similarly, the same book argues, Moses' requirement that we eat only animals that chew their cuds was meant to remind us that when we learn things we must go over them time and again. Philo does much more of this, sometimes quite impressively, sometimes less so.[26] This is meant to defend the law. However, it does so by making the law into a pedagogue (as Paul was eventually to call it—Galatians 3:24), and as we all know, when children grow up they no longer need pedagogues. Thus, for example, while we might agree that pedagogically it is useful to tell children that we don't eat hawks so as to teach

[26] See H. A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, II (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ., 1948) 200–267.

us not to live like them, I bet we all assume that, as adults, we could eat hawks every day and still not live as predators like them. So at best what we have here is a Jewish claim that Jewish laws are good ways of teaching universal values—thus creating the question why we should learn those values this way in particular, or, in any case, why we should go on practicing these values after we know them.

Moreover, it may be noted that Philo himself compares, quite properly, the laws to the body and the laws' meaning to the soul.[27] The laws pertain to real things (such as the food we eat and the purity of our bodies), but their meanings are spiritual. In a world that distinguishes between the two, and ascribes a higher value to the latter, it will have been difficult, even without social difficulties and cultural relativism, to maintain adherence to the former. It is this tension, between the exalted and worthy spirit and the lowly body, which lies at the bottom not only of Paul's (or a disciple's) condemnation of the physical objects of Jewish law as mere shadows of things to come, with no real substance (Colossians 2.16–17), but also of Paul's own frustration and anguish in Romans 7, where he blames his body for his inability to do what his spirit wants and fulfill the law, which too is, really, spiritual.

All in all, while perhaps extreme it is perhaps not so surprising that Philo's own nephew grew up to be among the most famous apostates of Jewish history, commander of Titus' army at the siege and destruction of Jerusalem.[28]

To summarize: the world of the Hellenistic diaspora tended in various ways to undercut the importance of all three parameters of Jewish existence: place, pedigree, and law. This well prepared the way for Paul, who would build a religion that left all three behind, focusing instead upon faith alone.

Qumran and John

Turning now from the Hellenistic Diaspora to the Qumran community, it is important to see that despite all the differences between such large and cosmopolitan Hellenistic cities as Alexandria and Tarsus,

[27] *On the Migration of Abraham* 89–93 (Lewy [above, n. 17] 40–41). On this passage, see D. M. Hay, "Putting Extremism in Context: The Case of Philo, *De Migratione* 89–93", *Studia Philonica Annual* 9 (1977) 126–142.

[28] Josephus, *War* 6.237; see above, n. 21.

on the one hand, and a tiny and isolationist desert community, on the other, several factors served to bring about, in Qumran, developments very similar to those we have observed, and underlined, in the world of Hellenistic Judaism. The most obvious point pertains to the undercutting the importance of *place:* Qumran too was a place of exile. Those who lived there did not participate in the cult of the Temple in Jerusalem; they called themselves "the exiled of the desert" (*golei hamidbar*—opening of *War Scroll*; cf. *Damascus Document* 4:2–3) and awaited an eschatological return to Jerusalem. In the meantime, moreover, they considered their own community as a site of holiness, and—as Paul—they used Temple imagery to describe it: the sect was "an eternal plantation[29]—a holy house for Israel and a holy of holy foundation for Aaron" (*Manual of Discipline* 8:5–6); "a holy house for Aaron…and a communal house for Israel who walk in perfection" (ibid. 9:5–6). That is, using language that compared their community to the Temple complex, which distinguished between the courts accessible to lay Israelites and those holier ones accessible to priests alone, the Qumran author expressed the belief that the divine presence was in the midst of his own community. God, he held, would rather be in the house composed of His true servants than in some particular place—especially if the latter, in Jerusalem, was (as they held) mismanaged.[30]

Again, the circumstances of Qumran undermined the importance of Jewish *pedigree*, for—as is shown especially by the last columns of *Pesher Habakkuk*—they considered the worst people in the world to be the "wicked priests" in Jerusalem. But since those priests had the same Aaronite descent as the good priests of Qumran, the clear implication was that descent doesn't mean much. If both good people and bad people can be of the same descent, it is obvious that pedigree is indeed no more important than the color of one's hair. This explains why we find, at Qumran, a new way of defining people: alongside of (and perhaps for some: instead of) categorization into priests, Levites, Jews and

[29] That is, firmly enrooted—used in connection with the Temple in Exodus 15:17 and 2 Samuel 7:10.

[30] See B. E. Gärtner, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 1; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1965); G. Klinzing, *Die Umdeutung des Kultus in der Qumrangemeinde und im Neuen Testament* (Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments 7; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1971).

non-Jews, categories which are based upon differential descent,[31] we read quite prominently of Sons of Light and Sons of Darkness—a metaphorical way of talking simply about good people and bad people. And as the central Qumran discussion of this makes clear (in the treatise in the *Manual of Discipline*, cols. 3–4), "all of mankind" (*kol b'nei ish*) are divided up the same way, between Sons of Light and Sons of Darkness, so being a Jew doesn't really matter much.[32]

As for the third parameter, Jewish law, here too Qumran led—if by different routes—to conclusions similar to those we saw in the world of Hellenistic Judaism, and of Paul. True, Qumran demanded very strict and full adherence to the Jewish law—what the scrolls frequently term *temim derekh*—"perfection of way". However, as we all know, those who insist the most on full observance of the law are often the ones most conscious of their own sinfulness—of their own inability fully to observe the law. If you ask a hundred monks and a hundred other men on the streets of Paris whether they consider themselves sinful, probably more of the monks will answer in the affirmative than the usual men on the street will—for the former are usually more exacting, the latter more prone to forgive themselves. The men of Qumran were monks—they lived celibate lives in a harsh climate and under very strict discipline, and one text after another reveals their unforgiving awareness of their own sinfulness. This can easily lead to (or stem from) and despair, a dualistic attitude that condemns one's flesh that is contrary to one's spirit—and the result will be, just as for Paul in Romans 7, a yearning to be released from the struggle caused by the demands imposed by the Law upon a body that cannot fulfill it—certainly not "perfectly". Any sectarians who did not seek release via suicide could resolve this problem only by leaving the sect or by yearning for the eventual abrogation of the Law.[33]

As stated at the outset, just as Paul can be traced to the Hellenistic Diaspora, John the Baptist can be traced to Qumran. We don't

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[31] These castes are seen clearly, for example, functioning just as we would expect them in a priestly community, in *Damascus Document* 14:3–6.

[32] For the way this point of view was reflected in eschatological views, that focused upon such universal figures as Melchizedek and the "Son of Man", see D. Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988) 186–192.

[33] The latter seems to be indicated by *Manual of Discipline* 9:9–11, which requires sectarians to persevere in the observance of the "first ordinances which the members of the community were taught" until "the coming of the prophet and the messiahs of Aaron and Israel".

know if he was there, or if his friends or neighbors were and told him all about it; one way or another, numerous points make it clear that Qumran is the background against which John is to be understood. To point to some of the basic points of this, we may note that John too was active in the Judaean Desert, preached an intense apocalyptic message of an imminent end and called for repentance before it was too late, preached the relative unimportance of Jewish descent (saying that it's no big deal to be a "son of Abraham" because God can make even stones into sons [Matthew 3:9//Luke 3:8]—apparently punning with the Hebrew *avanim* and *banim*), demanding the sharing of property (as was practiced in Qumran) and, of course, immersion in water, baptism—which was very prominent at Qumran as well. And there are other points as well (see n. 1). Thus, in contrast to scholars of the pre-Qumran era, who were very hard put to suggest any historical context for John the Baptist, if today we ask what produced the person who was, according to the Gospels, the teacher and first model of Jesus of Nazareth, the answer is clearly the Jewish community south of the Dead Sea, whose scrolls were found beginning in 1947, or some other very similar context. Since, as we have seen, this sect drew conclusions similar to Paul's about the insignificance of Jewish place and Jewish descent, tending to spiritualize and universalize them, and since as Paul it also tended to view the law as a problem, we can well understand that John, whether a Qumran graduate or a Qumran dropout or merely one it influenced directly, would preach similar messages. And he was the teacher of Jesus of Nazareth.

Galilee and Jesus

As for Jesus himself, it seems that his Jewish background was again a different one. Not the Hellenistic Diaspora, and not Qumran, but rather the Galilee and Jerusalem are the places we find him, and the problems which seem to have exercised him, and eventually to have gotten him into prominence but also into trouble, and thus brought about his arrest and execution, were of another type altogether. Jesus preached the coming kingdom of God, which for Jews meant the coming restoration of the kingdom of David; his message was a messianic message, and messianism was something that was, primarily, political: the *mashiaḥ* is an anointed king of the Davidic line, and who-

ever preached its restoration was preaching the restoration of Jewish sovereignty—which entailed, of course, the end of Roman rule.

At this point, accordingly, we must say something, if ever so brief, about Jewish political notions in the Second Temple period. The important point is that the Bible typically calls the Temple "the House of God", and while above we saw that Jews in the Hellenistic Diaspora and in Qumran tended not to take that seriously, preferring God to dwell in heaven, or in their own midst wherever they were, the fact is that the Temple still existed and many Jews did take it seriously as the House of God. However, since the God of the Bible was also the true king of Israel (and flesh and blood kings were at best His agents), it followed that the Temple of Jerusalem was considered to be a royal palace, and so Jerusalem was the capital city of a Jewish *state*—all of which means, that the Temple was the axis of a political theory that created a Jewish state that competed with Roman rule in Judaea. Jews who subscribed to this political theory—and there were many of them—could not accept Roman rule in Provincia Judaea without betraying God's rule of His holy Land, because they both were in the very same territory.[34] True, the Romans (as already their vassal, Herod) tried to defuse this conflict by respecting the Temple and by creating an additional capital of the province, in Caesarea, so as to allow the Jews their religious capital far away from the political and administrative capital of Roman rule. However, many Jews, including numerous Galileans,[35] were not willing to limit God's claims to the religious sphere, rendering also unto Caesar alongside of Him; they wanted Him fully to be king, and the land to be His—just as the Bible says. This inevitably led to conflicts between the Jews and the Romans, and after many smaller conflicts finally the Great Rebellion of 66–73 C.E. settled

[34] Note, in this connection, that Herod's massive expansion and renovation of the Temple and of Jerusalem, just a few decades before Jesus' career, served, paradoxically, to make the contradiction between them, on the one hand, and Roman rule, on the other, all the more salient. See my "One Temple and Many Synagogues", in: *Herod and Augustus* (IJS Studies in Judaica 6, ed. D. M. Jacobson and N. Kokkinos; Leiden: Brill, 2009) 358–398.

[35] One notes, for example, "Judas the Galilean" and his clan, "the Galileans" of Luke 13:1, whose blood Pilate "mixed with the sacrifices", and "the Galileans" who appear throughout Josephus' *Life* as his steadfast supporters during his tenure as rebel governor of the Galilee. See, in general: F. Loftus, "The Anti-Roman Revolts of the Jews and the Galileans", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 68 (1977/78) 78–98.

the problem once and for all by bringing about the destruction of the Temple. From then on only one king ruled in Judaea—the Roman emperor via his branch office in Caesarea. Henceforth it was the Tenth Legion, not the God of Israel, who resided in Jerusalem.

Where did Jesus stand on these issues? It is hard to say, of course, because there is much contradictory evidence in the Gospels.[36] On the one hand, he is portrayed as a pacific and cheek-turning preacher and healer, hardly the type of person who could threaten Rome. On the other hand, he did preach the coming kingdom of God, i.e., of Israel, and so many of his believers thought he was the coming king that he came to the attention of Pontius Pilate who therefore did to him what any Roman governor had to do—writing upon his cross that he was King of the Jews. However incomplete that characterization of Jesus' message was, there is no reason to imagine that it was not correct. That is, there is good reason to think that whatever moral preaching also characterized Jesus, his messianic message, like that of various other Galilean leaders in the first century, was one with the usual political implications mandated by the Hebrew Bible, and that is what his followers understood just as it is what Pilate understood.

If that's the case, then one might have expected Jesus' movement to disintegrate with his death. The scene on the way to Emmaus according to Luke 24:13–27, in which his disappointed followers say they had thought he would bring redemption to Israel but his crucifixion had dashed their hopes, makes perfect sense.[37] What made the difference for Jesus' followers was their belief that they met him alive after he had been executed. The belief in resurrection is the very basis of Christian belief, and it makes all the difference. It guaranteed that their movement would last beyond his death; indeed, it gave a major orientation to the message of Christianity, because basically what it preaches is that by joining Jesus one can, like him, defeat death and obtain eternal life—but not in this world, not as a subject of Rome. If Jesus' earliest followers first understood the resurrection messianically, expecting it

[36] On "Jesus and the Zealots" in modern scholarship, see D. R. Schwartz, *Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 60; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1992) 128–146.

[37] For the naturalness with which the death of the leader entails the dissolution of the movement, see Acts 5:37: "he [Judas the Galilean, an anti-Roman rebel] also perished, and all who followed him were scattered". For first-century rebellious movements that disappeared upon Roman police action, see also Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.98, 171–172.

would herald the restoration of Israelite monarchy in the Holy Land (Acts 1:8),[38] soon they would find the way to sublimate that hoped-for salvation into something individual and other-worldly.

John, Jesus, Paul

Indeed, on the superficial level, there is not much that links Jesus' political message—a promise of the coming restoration of the kingdom of Israel—to those of John and Paul, those of the Hellenistic Diaspora and Qumran. Their messages, preached in exile, dealt with the problems and hopes of Jewish individuals. In fact, as we have seen, they tended to focus upon human individuals in general, universally, whereas Jesus' message was preached in the heartland and capital of Judaea and dealt with the problems and hopes of the Jewish nation. On that level, therefore, while we can easily understand how followers of John and Pauline types could turn into a single movement,[39] for such a movement to adopt belief in Jesus would seem to be a radical rewriting of his message.

On a more basic level, however, it is not surprising that Jesus' followers ended up forming a movement that unified them with followers of John and Paul. For although resurrection implied the body's return to life, what was essential about the resurrection of Jesus was that it showed, more generally, that one can live after death. But for many Jews, life after death was understood, under Hellenistic influence, not as resurrection (of body and soul) but, rather, as the release of the soul from the body—the body could stay in the grave, while the soul was freed. That is, achievement of life after death meant, for many or most Jews, proof that the soul is separate from the body—but this separation of body from soul also lies at the basis of everything we have seen about Hellenistic Judaism and Qumran Judaism, namely, about Paul and John. This is quite simple. To say that sanctity is not limited

[38] See my "The End of the *gê* (Acts 1:8): Beginning or End of the Christian Vision?", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 (1986) 669–676.

[39] Although it probably was a longer and last irenic process than the easy cooptation portrayed in Acts 19:1–7. For the suggestion that "the thin thread of the community following John" managed to maintain its separate identity until the third century, see K. Rudolph, "The Baptist Sects," in: *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, III (ed. W. Horbury, W. D. Davies, and J. Sturdy; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1999) 481.

to any specific place or pedigree is to say that it is not the *physis* of things that matter, but, rather, their *logos*—but if sanctity can be found anyplace, and in any person no matter what seed created him or her, then it follows that it is not part of the body, but only found within it. And as for the law, for both Paul and Qumran it was their bodies that frustrated their souls' desire to observe the law,[40] so the notion that their soul could be freed from their bodies, as Jesus' defeat of death showed, was quite welcome.

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To summarize: Christianity arose due to the belief of Jesus of Nazareth's followers that they met him alive after he was dead. That belief, whatever explains it, is an historical fact. But having said that, what is important for historians is that although that belief arose in a world in which many Jews in Palestine were occupied by the political and theological problems associated with Roman rule in God's kingdom, many other Jews, especially visible to us today in the literature of Qumran on the one hand and the Hellenistic diaspora on the other, were used to universalizing and spiritualizing away the values of Land and People. Rather, they were more concerned with the problems of the individual Jews vis–à–vis Jewish law, for the worlds and circumstances in which *they* lived placed question marks of various types alongside that law and its observance. In particular, we noted that some of these issues amounted to the problematic of the distinction between body and soul—something quite understandable in the Hellenistic world. When the hopes associated with Jesus by his first followers, that he would solve the political and theological problems associated with Roman rule in God's kingdom, turned out to fail, but nevertheless Jesus was believed to have overcome his own death as an individual, it was natural for Jews of the Qumran and Hellenistic type to adopt him as an indication that God had finally intervened in history to point them to a new way—what they were to call a new covenant, which had, in "the fullness of time", replaced the earlier one. For other Jews, who either did not believe that Jesus had been resurrected or shrugged their shoulders at it and refused to draw any such innovative conclusions, it remained to go on living our lives with the tensions:

[40] For poignant expressions from both, see, respectively, Romans 7:14–24 and *Manual of Discipline* 11:9–11.

- between having God all over but nevertheless having something special in Zion;
- between being people but nevertheless being Jews;
- and between having a perfect law but only imperfect ability to fulfill it, torn as we are between our conflicting wills and drives.

All of these are but aspects of our having both bodies and souls—something we Jews learned of especially from the Greeks. What distinguishes us from Christians is our refusal to sign onto the soul alone, which is, for example, why we don't have monks or consider them ideal types, why we ascribe religious significance to the type of foods that nourish our bodies, why we consider birth to define Jews and our priests (*kohanim*) differentially, why we ascribe religious significance to the Holy Land, and the like. One important element in that refusal is our refusal to believe, or to ascribe significance to, the claim of some of our first-century ancestors that they met again their leader, alive in this world, after he had been executed.