

on viticulture and olive production, another on a Middle Bronze Age pottery from Askoi, and the third on the trophy inscription from Kition, as well as three specialized studies regarding Stager's own excavations at Ashkelon complete this fine volume.

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Skarsaune, Oskar, and Reidar Hvalik, eds. *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007. 930 pp. Hardcover, \$49.95.

"They just don't fit very neatly; they never did." This quotation, describing the peculiar nature of the Jewish believers in Jesus, is put as epigraph of the preface and situates the perspective of the book: a collection that brings together a series of studies focusing on the Jewish believers in the first five centuries C.E. Initiated by Torkild Masvie, director of the Caspari Center of Biblical Studies in Jerusalem, this project began with seminars in Tantur, Israel (2000) and in Cambridge, England (2001). The book evolves in six parts.

In Part 1, the Introduction, the contributors (Oskar Skarsaune and James Carleton Paget) struggle with the problems of definition; the genesis of the classic and old term "Jewish Christian" is traced in Antiquity and discussed in regard to the history of research. Definitions are indeed difficult to determine, as they depend on whether the ethnic or the religious aspect is taken as a criterion for the construction of that definition. Is the Jewish Christian a Jew who accepted Jesus as his Messiah and still kept the traditional Jewish lifestyle, as Torah observer, or is he a Jew, simply because of his birth, with or without the Torah? This definition is further complicated by the multifaceted nature of Judaism and the historical fact that the early Jewish Christian never defined himself as such.

In Part 2, the contributors (Richard Bauckham, Donald Hagner, Reidar Hvalvik, and Peter Hirschberg) examine the place and the meaning of the Jewish believer in Jesus in the NT. The Jerusalem church under the leadership of James represents the earliest manifestation of Jewish Christianity, taking a variety of names such as "the holy ones" (Acts 9:13), "the church of God" (1 Cor 15:9), and, especially, "the Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5). The community's life and practice that revolves around the temple and in smaller groups at home, is made up of two groups: the Hellenists, generally more liberal, essentially from the Diaspora, and the Hebrews, more conservative and of Palestinian origin. A number of the Jewish members of the Jerusalem church are listed and identified ("prosopography"). The issue of Paul's Jewish background in connection with his Christianity is analyzed. Was Paul "called," thus remaining fundamentally a Jew, or did he "convert" to a new religion? The specific tension that characterizes Paul's specific theology and practice is examined through Paul's dialectic thinking between continuity and discontinuity, Law

and Salvation, Old and New. The contradictory testimony of the book of Acts and the Pauline letters about the historical and theological figure of Paul leads to the conclusion of “a multifarious, complex and tense person” (153). Here also is given a list of Jewish Christians who became connected to Paul and his mission. The evidence of Jewish believers in Jesus in Rome can be established on the basis of Paul’s letter to the Romans, where we find not only explicit references to the Hebrew Scriptures and the dietary requirements of Torah, but also the designation of named Jewish Christians (see esp. chaps. 14-16). The impact of this Jewish presence is also attested to in the epistle to the Hebrews, as well as in the first letter of Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas. The Jewish element in Roman Christianity will then disappear, but not without leaving a vivid memory registered even in the mosaic decoration of a Roman church. As for the Jewish Christians in Asia Minor, they are reflected in the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation; for these works allude to the same geographical and temporal setting, while sharing Jewish-Christian themes that suggest “a similar spiritual background” and “even a common origin” (218).

In Part 3, the contributors (Craig A. Evans, Torleif Elgvin, Graham Stanton, and Oscar Skarsaune) examine what could be recognized as Jewish Gospels inside the NT such as Matthew, and outside the NT in works such as the *Gospel of the Hebrews* (known by Origen of Alexandria), the *Gospel of the Ebionites* (known by Epiphanius), the *Gospel of the Nazoraeans* (known by Jerome), and as fragments of Jewish Gospels, mostly preserved on papyrus. These writings display a number of minor tendencies (enrichment of biblical narratives with Jewish halakic traditions and reflections of Jewish piety and wisdom) and more significant tendencies (validity of the Law, both written and oral; restoration of Israel; adoptionist Christology; and enhancement of the status of James, the brother of Jesus). Jewish-Christian authors are also detected in the editing of OT pseudepigrapha such as the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. The presence of Jewish-Christian elements is discussed in regard to scholarly contributions and a nuanced view is offered that assumes the difficulty of the identification of these elements (“puzzles remain,” 324), and yet recognizes the evidence of the distinctive views of the Jewish believers in Jesus. Finally, fragments and traditions of Jewish-Christian literature quoted and used by some Greek and Latin Fathers (Irenaeus, Hegesippus, Africanus, Origen, and, especially, Justin Martyr) are “the richest source for reconstructing Jewish Christian sub-texts”). They betray a common place of origin, the land of Israel, and display a family resemblance.

In Part 4, the contributors (Oscar Skarsaune, Wolfram Kinzig, and Gunnar af Hälström) search for Jewish-Christian groups from the information provided by the Church Fathers. These groups are generally described as “sects” or “schools” and are normally named after their founder. From the testimony of Irenaeus, Origen, and Eusebius, we may learn about the

Ebionites, whose name is either attributed to their founder Ebion or to the Hebrew word *'ebion*, (“poor”). They generally do not believe in Mary’s virginity and prefer instead to emphasize the Davidic origin of Jesus and his perfect obedience to the Law as the main reasons for his messiahship. They tend to use the Gospel of Matthew and do not consider Paul’s letters authoritative. They practice circumcision and are Torah observers. The Nazoreans, who are mentioned only in Epiphanius and Jerome, owe their name either to the Hebrew word *naẓir*, referring to the group of Israelites who consecrated themselves to God, or to the town of Nazareth, the hometown of Jesus, their Messiah. Like the Ebionites, they observed the Law, although they did not recognize the pharisaic validity of the oral tradition, celebrated the Sabbath, and may have performed sacrifices. Unlike the Ebionites, they believed in the virginity of Mary and professed a high Christology. Besides these two well-established groups, ancient writings report the dubious existence of teachers and groups (Cerinthus, Elkesaites, and Sampseans), which are not easy to identify and present a clear Gnostic leaning.

In Part 5, the contributors (Oscar Scarsaune, Sten Hidal, Lawrence Lahey, Anders Ekenberg, Philip S. Alexander, and James F. Strange) gather further information about the Jewish believers in Jesus from other literary sources, Patristic, Christian-Jewish dialogues, liturgical and rabbinic, as well as archaeological evidence. The coverage of Patristic literature is not comprehensive, essentially focusing on the few cases in which Jewish believers are significant enough to retain attention. Ignatius, like Justin Martyr, knew Jewish believers who were circumcised and Torah observers, although they did not require the same from Gentile Christians. Celsus was also aware of the Jewish origins of Christianity, but does not provide us with much information on Jewish believers after the NT period. The unusual cases of Polycarp of Smyrna and Melito of Sardis as probable Jewish Christians are considered in the context of the discussion about the Christian Passover celebration in Asia (“Quartodeciman” thesis). Epiphanius gives evidence of Jewish believers in the Land of Israel; one of them, Joseph of Tiberias, is a former prominent Jew well versed in the Law and probably a pupil of the great Hillel. Jerome testifies to his numerous contacts with Jews who helped him in the Latin translation, as well as with Jewish believers while he was in the Syrian Desert, and later when he stayed in the Land of Israel. He refers to one of them as his mentor, who taught him Hebrew. Upon the testimony of Gennadius, in his supplement to Jerome’s *Illustrious Men*, we know about Isaac, a Jewish believer who was active in the politics of the Roman Church and who wrote a tract on the issues of trinity and incarnation. The existence of Jewish believers is also attested to through the numerous reports of mass conversions of Jews among Cretans (Socrates of Constantinople), Seracens (Sozomen), Minorca (Severus of Minorca). The same testimony is recorded in documents relating to the many Christian-Jewish dialogues that were organized until the sixth

century and ended up generally with the conversion (forced or not) of many Jews (among others is the famous Aquila of the Septuagint, and converts from Persia, Carthage, and Patmos). The liturgical texts (*Didache*, *Odes of Solomon*, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, and the *Apostolic Constitutions*) also reflect the active involvement of Jewish Christians, as they obviously contain elements borrowed from Jewish tradition, thus presupposing the existence of Christians of Jewish origin with a tendency toward adopting the observance of the whole Torah. In Rabbinic literature, the evidence of Jewish Christianity is difficult to determine: first, because of its “loud” silence about it, a paradoxical clue suggesting its importance, and second, because it covers four hundred years. Tannaitic sources witness to the first Jewish response to the emergence of the sect through a series of measures taken against the legitimacy of the reading of the Gospels and the abandonment of the Torah. The Amoraitic sources witness to the emergence of a rabbinic theology of Christianity, addressing theological issues of the divinity of Jesus, the two Torahs, and questioning the messiahship of Jesus. Archaeological evidence for the presence of Jewish-Christian believers is even more difficult to ascertain because of the lack of clear criteria to identify them as Jewish Christian. The crosses and Greek letters “*Chi-Rho*” on ossuaries are not clear signs of Christian origin and could be interpreted otherwise. The presence of ritual baths (*miqveh*) in churches or in venerated caves is ambiguous and could as well betray a Jewish origin. This difficulty accounts for the fact that we had to wait until the fourth century to get a recognizable iconography, distinctive from its Jewish counterpart.

In Part 6, the Conclusion, Oscar Skarsaune synthesizes the various contributions and draws lessons from their observations: (1) The variety of Jewish believers, due to different milieus or times, could be of significance to modern Jewish believers. (2) The artificial character of the category of Jewish Christianity, since before Constantine and on the reality of the ground, Jewish Christians do not exist as a distinctive category. (3) The well-documented strong proximity between Jews and Christians suggests a situation that challenges and obliges to reevaluate the traditional paradigm of the parting of the ways. (4) The Jewish-Christian believers cannot be found as clearly defined sects. (5) Jewish Christians can be found in the Land of Israel, where they lived closely together with their nonbelieving Jewish neighbors, and in the Roman and the Persian Diasporas, where the synagogues were attended by Gentile God-fearers, and where they tended to mingle with Gentile Christianity. (6) Contrary to conventional wisdom, and along the lines of Rodney Stark’s suggestions, the percentage of Jewish believers in the church seemed to have been much higher than we thought, and more numerous in the East than in the West. (7) As a result of the Constantinian revolution in the fourth century, the church “experienced total change” that did not do justice to the original picture of early Christianity (772). (8) Jewish Christianity, here defined by ethnicity rather than by theology (versus Bauer’s paradigm), is as well represented on the Pauline

side, free from the Law, as it is on the other side, still attached to the Law. This last observation is of significance, for it obliges us to reconsider the nature of Jewish-Christian relations and to reevaluate the role played by the Jewish Christians in the ultimate formation of traditional Christianity.

Undoubtedly this collection brings a thorough analysis of the history and the theology of Jewish Christianity in the formative period of traditional Christianity. The examination of the various facets of this movement with all its complexities and nuances makes a significant contribution for a better understanding of the factors that played a role in the parting of the ways, while it makes us aware of the importance of the Jewish-Christian presence.

Yet the question still remains, and this study has made it even more acute: if it is true, as one of the contributors puts it, that “whereas in the first centuries of the Common Era the Jewish Christians may even have outnumbered the Gentile Christians” (487), how do we explain, then, that “by the fourth century Jewish-Christian groups no longer appear to have played a significant role”? If the positive curve of the Jewish-Christian growth that is noticed by Rodney Stark is suddenly reversed by the fourth century, the question should be raised about the real reason for this disruption.

Also the recent works on the Jewishness of Paul, which invites to a reevaluation of his theology of the Law (100), should confirm some of the conclusions of these studies, namely, that the Jewish-Christian movement may well have been more united than we generally think and was, after all, not so much divided on the issue of the Law (49). For it was their attachment to the Torah more than their messianism that defined them as Jews (see Jacques Doukhan, *Israel and the Church, Two Voices for the Same God* [Hendrickson, 2002], 41). Could it be that under the impact of the “Constantinian Revolution” Christianity, for the sake of success among the Gentiles, was led to threaten the very nerve of Jewish identity, namely its reference to Torah, and in the process lost the force of its proclamation among the Jews? For Jewish Christians, who were still able to entertain close relations with Judaism in spite of the endeavors of the leaders of both sides, precisely because of their faithfulness to the Law, had by then virtually disappeared from the scene.

If Pannenberg is correct in his endorsement on the back cover of the book that the understanding of the early relationship between Jews and Christians “should also have an impact on contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue,” then this discussion should also, by implication, revisit the issue of the Law. This new enterprise will not only help us to better understand what happened in the past, but should also revive contemporary Jewish-Christian relations, with the fresh contributions of contemporary Jewish Christians.