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The Planting and Uprooting of the Church: An Analysis of the Origin and Change of the
Nature of the Church During 33-200 CE.

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By

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Nearly two thousand years ago, at some time during the later half of the second century, a man donning the garb of a Greek philosopher walked the streets of Ephesus.¹ His name was Justin Martyr. A Jew by the name of Trypho approached Justin and began to carry out a dialogue, now recorded as Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, on the Christian faith.² The *Dialogue* consists mostly of Justin Martyr's exposition of Christian exegesis on old testament scriptures which, according to his hermeneutic, demonstrate Jesus to be the Christ and the Christians to be the bearers of the new covenant. This narrative is but one example of the varied interactions between Christians and Jews during the period of the early Church. Other interactions ranged from tolerance to the expulsion of Christians from the Jewish community, persecution, and murder. During the first two centuries, the Church morphed from an inner-Jewish phenomenon into a Gentile phenomenon, which tremendously affected Jewish-Christian relations. Conceived alongside and within the context of Judaism, the original Christian identity developed into a significantly distinct, Gentile identity. The Church's mission to the Gentiles proved to be the major changing force which increasingly consumed the Church over its first two centuries, shifting it away from its Palestinian-Jewish roots and more towards a Hellenized disposition. The Hellenization of the Church over the first two centuries proved to be the primary causation for its development into a Gentile phenomenon, distinguishing it from its Jewish origins.

Several scholars have researched the development of the Church and early Jewish-Christian relations; nevertheless, much of the scholarship fails to consider the affects

¹ Eusebius, 4.18.

² *Dialogue*, 1.

which Hellenism and the inherent distinction between the first church and Judaism had on the development of the Church. There are three historiographical camps with regard to the causation of change in Christian identity during the first two centuries of the Church; historians either view Hellenistic-Christian movement, the inherent distinction between the earliest church and Judaism, or the Jewish Wars as the major proponents Church development. Even though Adolf von Harnack acknowledged the contribution that Hellenism provided in paving the way for the rise of the Church, he cited Paul, rather than the Hellenistic movement itself (even though Paul was a Hellenist), as the reason for the movement of the Church away from its Jewish roots.³ Additionally, Harnack did not consider the affects that the inherent distinction between the early Church and ancient Judaism had on Jewish-Christian relations.⁴ Similar to Harnack, Martin Hengel's book, *The 'Hellenization' of Judea in the First Century After Christ*, depicted Hellenism as one of the major proponents of change within the Church, and did not attest to the intrinsic difference between the Jerusalem Church and the rest of Judaism prior to the Gentile mission.⁵

Unlike the previously mentioned scholars, the Jewish historian, R. A. Hare Douglas, noted the inherent distinction which Christianity bore from Judaism, but he did not regard Hellenism as a major fundamental which influenced Jewish-Christian relations.⁶ Regarding the first Christian community and its relations with non-Christian

³ Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, ed. and trans. James Moffatt (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 56-57.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵ Martin Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judea in the First Century After Christ*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1989).

⁶ R. A. Hare Douglas, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of the Christians in the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

Jews, Stuart Rosenberg's book, *Christians and Jews: The Eternal Bond*, also claimed a degree of distinction between the first Christians and non-Christian Jews.⁷ Nevertheless, Rosenberg did not account for the presence of the Hellenistic-Jewish-Christian community and its affects on the Church's development and its relations with Judaism.

In his book, *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, and Deviants: the First One-Hundred Years of Jewish-Christian Relations*, Jack T. Sanders viewed the First Jewish War (66-70 CE) as the main cause of separation of the Church from its Jewish roots, however he did not note the impact of Hellenism on Christian identity.⁸ Lastly, the authority which many other scholars either contend or agree with in the field of Jewish-Christian relations, Marcel Simon, also viewed the Jewish Wars, rather than Hellenism and the Gentile mission, as the major proponents of change in the development of the Church.⁹ All three of the previous categories of historiography neglect the Hellenistic movement or the inherent distinction between the Jerusalem Church and the rest of Judaism in analyzing the development of the Church.

At the time Christianity's inception, circa 33 CE, a plurality of movements within Judaism coexisted with a degree of toleration towards each other. Eusebius recorded the plurality of sects inherent in pre-70 CE Judaism: "Hegesippus also names the sects that once existed among the Jews: there were various groups in the Circumcision...they were these—Essenes, Galileans, Hemerobaptists, Masbotheans, Samaritans, Sadducees, and

⁷ Stuart Rosenberg, *Christians and Jews: The Eternal Bond* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1985).

⁸ Jack T. Sanders, *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, and Deviants: the first one-hundred years of Jewish-Christian Relations* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1993), 67.

⁹ Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations Between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135-425)*, trans. H. McKeating (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Pharisees.”¹⁰ The earliest Christian community, which shall be referred to as the Jerusalem community, upheld traditional Palestinian-Jewish values. The Pharisees, who also upheld traditional values, constituted the arch-opponents of Jesus and his disciples, which formed the first Christian community. Indicating the degree of integration between the Jerusalem community and the non-Christian Jewish communities, Luke reported, “Some of the believers...belonged to the party of the Pharisees.”¹¹ Although the Jerusalem Christians formed their own distinct community within Judaism, they continued to participate in Temple worship and ritual observances.¹² Luke records the first Christians’ recognition of the Temple as a rightful place of public worship: “they stayed at the temple continually praising God.”¹³ Although the first Christian community constituted a separate fellowship within the context of the synagogue, they later formed their own separate religious community as the Church became more distinct from Palestinian-Judaism.¹⁴

According to the disposition of the local assembly and its leaders, certain synagogues, prior to the Gentile mission, expelled Christians from their community. In the gospel of John, the Christians’ assertion of Jesus as the Messiah constituted the reason for the removal of Christians from the synagogue.¹⁵ James D.G. Dunn corroborated the Johanine text, relating that the Christian affirmation of Jesus as the *logos* was

¹⁰ Eusebius, 4.22.

¹¹ Acts 15.5 NIV.

¹² Travers R. Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (Clifton: Reference Book Publishers, Inc., 1966), 383.

¹³ Luke 24.53 NIV.

¹⁴ Rosenberg, 15.

¹⁵ Sanders, 43.

unacceptable in the synagogue community.¹⁶ One story from the Johanine text related how a man, healed by Jesus, was confronted by the Pharisees who “hurled insults at him and said, ‘You are this fellow’s disciple!’...and they threw him out.”¹⁷ The apostle John also recorded, “Many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue.”¹⁸ The Pharisees and other synagogue authorities, depending on their tolerance towards different Jewish sects as well as their disposition towards the Christian sect in particular, at times drove out Christians from the Jewish communities.

In cases of recent scholarship, one of the most controversial examples of Jewish hostilities towards Christians was the *birkat ha-minim*, which was used to call down a curse upon apostates who maintained connections with the synagogue. The controversy among scholars is whether the synagogues directed the curse towards Christians. The oldest extant version of the benediction, originating from the first century, was found in the Palestinian Talmudic text: “For the apostates may there not be hope if they do not return to Your laws. May the nosrim and the minim perish in a moment.”¹⁹ The word *nosrim* referred to Jewish-Christians, evidencing that some synagogues employed the *birkat ha-minim* against Christians.²⁰ Justin Martyr also attested to the cursing of Christians in the synagogues: “ye curse Him without ceasing, as well as those who side

¹⁶ James D.G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 231.

¹⁷ John 9.28,24 NIV.

¹⁸ John 12.42 NIV.

¹⁹ Sanders, 58-59.

²⁰ Hyam Maccoby, *Early Rabbinic Writings* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), 209. Also see Herford, 170.

with Him.”²¹ Hence, the *birkat* represented one of the ways in which the Jewish authorities drove Christians from the synagogue communities.

Despite the integration between the Jerusalem community and the non-Christian Jewish communities, upon the birth of the Church (circa 30 CE), a degree of separation was inherent between the two groups. John related that immediately after Jesus’ crucifixion, “the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jews.”²² Also, after observing the Jewish Sabbath, Christians gathered in their homes for the agape love feast, which bound the community together in fellowship.²³ Written circa 50 CE, the Epistle of James additionally emphasized the distinction between the earliest Christians and the non-Christian Jewish communities. James, writing around 50 CE, used the Greek word *synagoge*, translated as “meeting place,” as a designation for the meeting or the meeting place of the church.²⁴ It is significant that the Jerusalem Church considered itself as possessing the status of a synagogue community because it intimates that the Church viewed itself as an institution distinct from the non-Christian Jewish synagogues.²⁵

While the Jerusalem Church existed mainly as a Palestinian-Jewish phenomenon, the advent of Hellenistic-Jewish-Christians, that is Jewish-Christian groups originating from outside of Palestine, led to the initiation of the Gentile mission. The Jerusalem Church’s eschatology viewed the era in which they lived as approaching the Messianic age of the fulfillment of the scriptures, whereas Hellenistic-Jewish-Christian groups

²¹ *Dialogue*, 133.

²² John 20.19 NIV.

²³ Rosenberg, 15.

²⁴ Robert G. Hoerber, ed., *Concordia Self-Study Bible* NIV. (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 1896.

²⁵ Maccoby, 67.

perceived that the Messianic era had already arrived.²⁶ The first eschatology showed little if any disposition for a Gentile mission. However, the Hellenistic eschatology, influenced by the belief of universalism, encouraged the inclusion of the Gentile communities within the Church. Hellenistic-Jewish-Christian communities promoted the rejection of the Torah, separating themselves from Jewish communities.²⁷ Also rejecting traditional Jewish exegesis, which focused on a methodology to living rather than faith in Christ, Hellenistic-Jewish-Christians viewed themselves as possessing the only correct interpretation of scripture.²⁸ Martin Hengel, writing on the formative period of the Hellenistic Church related, “The fact that these Hellenists in particular accepted the new messianic eschatological message and continued to develop its form in a creative way probably indicates an intrinsic affinity to the Hellenistic world along with a universality which was already concealed in Jesus’ proclamation and activity.”²⁹ By the mid to late second century CE, Justin Martyr wrote, “of Christ and his proselytes, namely us Gentiles,” indicating that by that time, the Jewish mission no longer existed.³⁰

The initialization of Hellenistic-Jewish-Christianity, and hence also Gentile-Christianity, occurred during the 40s CE, prior to Paul’s missionary journeys. According to Eusebius, in corroboration with the Acts text, upon the martyrdom of Stephen, many Christians fled Palestine on account of persecution by the Jews. Eusebius and Luke both imply a Hellenic connection between Stephen and the scattering of persecuted Christians.

²⁶ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Christianity."
²⁷ Miriam S. Taylor, *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity: A Critique of Scholarly Consensus* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 104.
²⁸ Douglas, 15.
²⁹ Hengel, 44.
³⁰ *Dialogue* 122.

Eusebius wrote, “Some, as the...scripture says, traversed as far as Phoenice, Cyprus and Antioch, but they were not yet in a position to venture to transmit the word of faith to Gentiles.”³¹ The parallel account in Luke also described those whom Eusebius spoke of as “scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen.”³² The Hellenic identity of these disciples was revealed by their flight to Hellenic cities. The events which followed the dispersion of disciples support the theory that Hellenistic-Jewish-Christianity initiated the Gentile mission. Due to the ministry of the scattered disciples, “Faith in Christ had been received...by many other Greeks in Antioch.”³³ Luke noted that some of the disciples “went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also.”³⁴ These disciples, who had been scattered from the persecution associated with Stephen, initiated the main thrust of the Gentile mission. Luke thought that the newly initiated Gentile mission carried such significance that he also added, “the Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed,” implying that a significant number of Gentiles had never been accepted in the Church prior to the Antioch incident.³⁵

The final implication of the advent of the Gentile mission was found in the importance which the Jerusalem church addressed to the Antioch event. The Jerusalem church took special notice of what happened in Antioch and sent Barnabas there to recognize the Gentile-Christian community, which also indicated the beginning of the Gentile mission. If the Gentile mission had already begun, there would have been no need for Luke to give such special attention to the scenario of Acts 11. However, in the

³¹ Eusebius, 2.1.

³² Acts 11.19 NIV.

³³ Eusebius, 2.3.

³⁴ Acts 11.20 NIV.

³⁵ Acts 11.21 NIV.

chapter prior to Luke's recording of the Acts 11 scenario, Peter had already received a centurion into the Christian faith. The Jerusalem Church questioned his actions, which indicated that the Christian community had never accepted Gentile fellowship. Eusebius also recorded the initiation of Gentile-Christianity by Peter's conversion of Cornelius in Caesarea alongside of the conversion of the Greeks in Antioch.³⁶ Likewise, Luke's placement of the centurion's conversion immediately prior to the Antioch incident demonstrated that Jerusalem Church recognized the Gentile mission. Further evidence for the Jerusalem community's approval of the Gentile mission was given by Eusebius who recorded the acts of the apostles prior to the outbreak of the first Jewish revolt in 66 CE: "Such was a condition among the Jews, but the holy Apostles and disciples... were scattered throughout the whole world."³⁷ Nevertheless, part, if not the entirety of the Jerusalem congregation remained faithful to the Jewish mission: "Peter seems to have preached to the Jews of the Dispersion in Pontus and Galatia and Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Asia."³⁸ Hence, the Jerusalem Church ministered to Palestinian-Jews while Hellenistic-Jewish-Christians ministered to other Hellenistic-Jews as well as Gentiles.

Within two decades of the initialization of the Church, Hellenistic-Jewish-Christians had reached marginalized groups beyond mainstream Judaism, beginning the transformation of the Church from a Jewish phenomenon into a Gentile phenomenon. The apostle Philip, a Hellenistic-Jewish-Christian, evangelized among Samaritans and shared the gospel with an Ethiopian eunuch, as recorded by both Eusebius and Luke.³⁹

³⁶ Eusebius, 2.3.

³⁷ Ibid., 3.1.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Eusebius, 2.1, and Acts 8 NIV

These passages related how the Jerusalem Church, to which Philip belonged though he himself was a Grecian Jew, reached Hellenistic Jews. Hence, Hellenists had a strong presence within the Jerusalem church, and provided links to minister to Hellenistic Jews. Within a few years of the inception of the Church, Hellenists composed such a significant presence within the Jerusalem community that seven leaders among the Hellenists were chosen to assist in the administrative functions of the church.⁴⁰ The proclivity of Hellenistic-Christians towards universalism and syncretism also aided their ability to adapt the gospel to different cultural contexts. The Christian message had a “rapid and intensive effect” upon Greek-speaking Hellenists in Jerusalem, and led to the spread of missions elsewhere within the Hellenized Diaspora communities.⁴¹

Throughout the apostolic period, which is prior to the first Jewish revolt in 66 CE, the Jerusalem community and the Hellenized communities coexisted with each other. Neither of the communities asserted authority over the other. In 49 or 50 CE, the Jerusalem Church convened in response to the growing Gentile mission to decide how they should relate to the new Christians who did not observe Jewish ritual law. The Jerusalem Council’s decision to “not burden the [Gentiles] with anything beyond the following requirements...abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality” demonstrated the coexistence between the Jerusalem Church and the Gentile communities.⁴² This ruling neither weakened the attachment of the Jerusalem Church to the Torah nor discouraged Gentiles from joining

⁴⁰ Eusebius, 2.1, and Acts 6.1-7 NIV.

⁴¹ Hengel, 43-44.

⁴² Acts 15.28-29 NIV.

the church.⁴³ However, increasing hostilities between the Jews and the Romans soon emerged, vastly changing both Jewish-Christian relations as well as the Christian identity itself.

The First Jewish War, from 66-70 CE, served as the foremost episode during the first century which led to disassociation between Jewish and Christian communities. Producing detrimental effects on the Jerusalem Church, the First Jewish War initiated the decline in the visibility and status of Jewish-Christians. Jewish nationalism, political unrest, and messianic enthusiasm led to the persecution of both Christians and non-Christian Gentiles during the war.⁴⁴ The devastating defeat of the Jews, severe repression by the Romans, and the interruption of civil government also produced long lasting ignominy between Jews and Christians.⁴⁵ In light of the defeat of the Jews, the ancient custom of linking fortune and divine favor also widened the gulf between the Christian and Jewish communities.⁴⁶

Pogroms against the Jews and Jewish mobs acting against the Romans also escalated the tensions between Gentile-Christianity and Judaism during the 70 CE war. Eusebius wrote, “throughout Syria terrible disturbances followed the revolt of the Jews. Everywhere the Gentiles mercilessly attacked the Jews in the cities.”⁴⁷ Josephus similarly recorded the Roman massacre of Jews at Caesarea after the Jewish defeat of the Roman garrison at Jerusalem. “The inhabitants of Caesarea massacred the Jews who resided in

⁴³ Maccoby, 146.

⁴⁴ Douglas, 16.

⁴⁵ S. G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians, 70-170 C.E.* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995), 9.

⁴⁶ Robert Louis Wilken, “The Jews as the Christians saw them.” *First Things*, no. 73 (1997): 31.

⁴⁷ Eusebius, 2.26.

their city; within one hour more than twenty thousand were slaughtered, and Caesarea was completely emptied of Jews.”⁴⁸ Following the massacre of the Jews at Caesarea:

Parties of Jews sacked the Syrian villages and the neighbouring cities, Philadelphia, Heshbon...Gerasa, Pella, and Scythopolis...Gadara, Hippos, and Gaulanitis... Kedasa, a Tyrian village, Ptolemais, Gaba, and Caesarea...Sebaste... Ascalon... Anthedon and Gaza. In the vicinity of each of these cities many villages were pillaged and immense numbers of the inhabitants captured and slaughtered.⁴⁹

The First Jewish War did not limit conflict between Gentiles and Jews in Jerusalem only, but throughout the entire region. The violence surrounding Jewish communities during the war further alienated Jewish and Christian communities as the Christians sought to distance themselves from the fury of the war.

Between the First and Third Jewish Wars, both Christianity and Judaism were defined by movement towards centralization. Jesus’ teachings and writings were collected and written down while other New Testament documents were composed. In the 80s CE, Paul’s letters were accepted as canon by most of the Church, traditions developed, and Christianity expanded further into the Gentile world.⁵⁰ While Jewish leaders generally tolerated the “turbulent diversity” found in Judaism before the war, religious leaders sought uniformity among Jewish communities after 70 CE for the ensured survival of their culture.⁵¹ By virtue of clinging more tightly to the Torah, the rabbis prevented the dissolution of Judaism by the Christian faith, the Gnostics, and other

⁴⁸ Josephus, 2.18.1.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Sanders, 40.

⁵¹ Donald Senior, “Between Two Worlds: Gentiles and Jewish Christians in Matthew’s Gospel,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (1999): 1 <http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/shared/shared_main.jhtml; jsessionid = 5J1DJMJ3S4QXVQA3DILSFFWADUNBIIV0?_requestid=71677> (24 June 2003).

Hellenistic religious groups.⁵² The *Mishna*, a tradition of Rabbinic discussion of the Torah, became codified by the Pharisees as the pattern of Jewish religious thought and interpretation. Pharisaic authority also sought to end Christian influence within the synagogues.⁵³ The collectivization of authority of both the Christian and Judaic communities furthered the dissolution of ties between the two groups after the First Jewish War.

After the turn of the first century, both Jewish and Christian communities identified themselves as distinct from each other. Circa 100 CE, the author of the Epistle of Barnabas emphasized the exclusivity of Jesus and his teachings, making the Christians entirely distinct from the Jewish community. Although some Christians believed in a religious system that accepted both the old and new covenants, making Jews as well as Christians acceptable to God, most of the ecclesiastical leadership discouraged the dual covenant system: “Concerning the water [of Baptism], indeed it is written, in reference to the Israelites, that they should not receive that baptism which leads to the remission of sins.”⁵⁴ Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch at the turn of the first century, wrote about the powerlessness of Jewish law, heeding the church of Philadelphia, “if any one preach the Jewish law unto you, listen not to him.”⁵⁵ In the middle of the second century, the author of the Epistle of Barnabas also maintained, “we should not rush forward as rash acceptors of their laws.”⁵⁶ After 70 CE, the Church began to established a Gentile identity, moving further from its Jewish roots.

⁵² Simon, 374.

⁵³ Douglas, 128.

⁵⁴ Epistle of Barnabas, 11.

⁵⁵ Ignatius Epistle to Philadelphians, 6.

⁵⁶ Epistle of Barnabas, 3.

As church composition began to reflect a Gentile majority, the Gentile ecclesiastical leadership sought to define the Christian movement as distinct from Judaism. The Gentile-Christian leadership had no need to relate their beliefs with Judaism, excepting the Judaizers, some of whom were Gentiles. By the end of the first century, the Gentile mission ushered Christianity into a phase where the Church was becoming more of a Gentile movement than a Jewish movement. By the middle of the second century, the Jewish mission had been abandoned in lieu of the Gentile mission. Justin Martyr wrote in the mid-late second century, “rather among the Gentiles [than among the Jews] men should believe on Him.”⁵⁷ Martyr drew a sharp contrast between the Christian communities, as the bearers of the true covenant with God, and Jewish communities, which had lost favor with God, relating, “we, through the calling of the new and eternal covenant, that is, of Christ, might be found more intelligent and God-fearing than yourselves, who are considered to be lovers of God and men of understanding, but are not.”⁵⁸ Justin later characterizes Trypho, as well as Jews in general, as having a “most irrational mind,” implying that Jews’ intelligence did not compare to that of the Christians’.⁵⁹ Tertullian, writing between 198 and 208 CE, echoed Justin’s assertion on the difference between Christian and Jewish communities in declaring the election of the Christians as the new “people of God...by accepting the new law...and the new circumcision.”⁶⁰ The shifting of the Church towards Hellenism resulted in the creation of a Christian identity distinct from Judaism.

⁵⁷ *I Apology*, 31.

⁵⁸ *Dialogue*, 118.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁶⁰ Tertullian, 3.

One of the ways in which the Church developed its new identity during the post-apostolic period was through the expulsion of heretics, particularly Judaizers and Jewish-Christians. According to the Latin church father Jerome, Ignatius' epistle to the Smyrneans contained a quote from the gospel of the Nazarenes, indicating the acceptance of a Jewish-Christian sect which bore distinction from Judaism only in that they believed in Jesus as the Messiah.⁶¹ However, in reference to the Ebionites, another Jewish-Christian sect which embraced portions of the Law and were open to Gnostic influences, Ignatius prescribed, "do ye also avoid those wicked offshoots of his, (Satan's), Simon his firstborn son, and Menander, and Basilides, and all his wicked mob of followers, and worshippers of a man."⁶² While the determining factor that Ignatius employed in distinguishing between which Jewish-Christian groups were accepted and which ones were heretical is unclear, there are hints in other writings from the same period. The author of the Epistle of Barnabas connects the anti-Christ with Jewish-Christian groups who upheld the validity of both the old and new covenants.⁶³ Therefore, heretical Jewish-Christians were those who viewed Jewish law as a means of salvation. The significance of viewing the law as a means of acceptance by God erased the distinction between the old and new covenants, hence erasing the distinction between Jews and Christians themselves. This assertion is also validated by Justin Martyr who categorizes Jewish-Christians into four groups, two of which were heretical. One of these heretical groups were Jewish-Christians who sought to judaize others within the Christian community,

⁶¹ Ignatius Epistle to Smyrnaeans, 3.

⁶² Ignatius Epistle to Trallians, 11.

⁶³ Epistle of Barnabas, 4.

compelling them to obey Jewish law. The other group was composed of Gentile-Christian Judaizers who became Jews and renounced the Christian community.⁶⁴

Resulting from the Gentile mission and the First Jewish War, this disassociation between the Church and Judaism had become an undercurrent phenomenon by the turn of the first century. Ignatius of Antioch, writing around the turn of the first century, recognized Judaism as the foundation from which Christianity had built itself. However, he also affirmed that the initial foundation of Judaism was no longer part of the Christian movement, relating, “for Christianity did not embrace Judaism, but Judaism Christianity.”⁶⁵ Justin Martyr noted the differentiation which separated the Christian and Jewish communities. Christians perceived themselves as, “we from Christ, who begat us unto God...are called and are the true sons of God.”⁶⁶ Justin also declared, in reference to the Jews, that Christ “is denied by all...your nation.”⁶⁷ Hence, by the mid to late second century, the Jews had been completely disassociated from the Christian communities.

The Third Jewish War (132-135 CE) produced similar results for Jewish-Christian relations as did the First Jewish War. Enshrouded in the context of messianism, Bar Cocheba, the leader of the Third Jewish War, murdered Christians who failed to join his movement.⁶⁸ Prior to 132 CE, all of the bishops of the Jerusalem church had been Jewish-Christians, however the War led to the Gentilization of the Jerusalem church’s

⁶⁴ *Dialogue*, 47.

⁶⁵ Ignatius Epistle to Magnesians, 10.

⁶⁶ *Dialogue*, 123.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶⁸ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2 of *Ante-Nicene Christianity* (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1910), 37.

leadership.⁶⁹ On the Jerusalem church, Eusebius related, “the church in the city was now composed of Gentiles”.⁷⁰ The transition of the Jerusalem church into a Gentile community “underlined the fundamental incompatibility of Christians and Jews.”⁷¹ The continued Christian presence in some Jewish synagogues, however, demonstrated that there was no complete separation of Judaism and Christianity after 135 CE. This was due to the gradual spread of Rabbinic authority, which did not encompass the totality of Jewish communities until well beyond the second century.⁷² Jewish-Christians who remained members of the Jewish community often did not perceive a difference between themselves and non-Christian Jews.⁷³ Nevertheless, despite lingering connections between some Jewish and Christian communities, a majority of the Church was further separated from Judaism as an upshot of the Third Jewish War.

Christian religious practices also emphasized separation from the Jewish community. The Church’s worship assembly held on Sundays differentiated the Christian community from the Jewish community, which held its worship assembly on Shabbat (Saturday). Although Sunday worship observance dates back to the beginning of the apostolic period, as time progressed, it became less acceptable for Christians to intermingle with synagogues. Immediately following the Third Jewish War, the Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus recorded: “The Christians do not observe the same form of divine worship as do the Jews.”⁷⁴ The Epistle to Diognetus likewise recorded

⁶⁹ Eusebius, 5.12.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 5.12.

⁷¹ Simon, 67.

⁷² Wilson, 181.

⁷³ Michele D. Murray, “Playing a Jewish Game: Gentile Christian Judaizing in the First and Second Centuries CE” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 2000), 97.

⁷⁴ Epistle to Diognetus, 3.

ecclesiastical disdain for Jewish religious observance, pontificating that the practices of the Jews were “utterly ridiculous and unworthy of notice...who would deem this a part of divine worship, and not much rather a manifestation of folly?”⁷⁵ Along with the day of worship, the practice of fasting also identified distinction between Christians and Jews. Written during the late first century, the *Didache*, one of the earliest documents containing apostolic traditions, enjoined Christians to “let not your fasts be with the hypocrites...and do not pray as the hypocrites do.”⁷⁶ The Epistle of Barnabas also declared that God rejected Jewish fasts though the Christian fasts were accepted.⁷⁷ By the time of Justin Martyr, much of the ecclesiastical leadership viewed any Christian who attended Jewish assemblies as a heretic. Around 160 CE, Martyr wrote, “Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly.”⁷⁸ Nearing the turn of the century, Tertullian lambasted the Jews, declaring, “the Holy Spirit upbraids Jews with their holy days...says He, ‘My soul hateth.’”⁷⁹ Not only did Christian leaders distinguish between Jewish and Christian practices, but the ecclesiastical leadership also attested to the spiritual significance of those practices. Justin proscribed that true righteousness is not found in ceremonies and rites, but in the conversion of the heart.⁸⁰ In *An Answer to the Jews*, Tertullian writes, “it is not by earthly sacrifices, but by spiritual, that offering is made to God.”⁸¹ Hence, Christian leaders distinguished themselves as righteous and spiritually minded while the Jews were seen as carnal and earthly minded.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁶ *Didache*, 8.1-2.

⁷⁷ Epistle of Barnabas, 3.

⁷⁸ *I Apology*, 67.

⁷⁹ Tertullian, 3.

⁸⁰ *Dialogue*, 14.

⁸¹ Tertullian, 5.

The Christian view of persecution by the Jews also furthered the disassociation between the two groups. Metaphorically likening Christian and Jewish communities as the ways of light and darkness, respectively, the author of the Epistle of Barnabas characterized Jews as belonging to those “who persecute the good, those who hate truth.”⁸² The author of the Epistle to Diognetus reported, “[Christians] are persecuted by all...[they are] assailed by the Jews as foreigners.”⁸³ Jewish and Christian communities no longer recognized any connection between each other. Justin’s portrayal of Jews declared, “you hate us who hold these opinions...putting to death and persecuting those who confess the name of Christ.”⁸⁴ Justin also described the persecution by the Jews not only in terms of hating and seeking the death of Christians but also in seeking to destroy or confiscate Christians’ property.⁸⁵ However, Justin seems to contradict himself. Several times during the *Dialogue*, Justin Martyr noted the animosity which Jews directed towards Christians, while he also related, “for you have not the power to lay hands on us, on account of those who now have the mastery. But as often as you could, you did so.”⁸⁶ The most viable explanation for Justin’s characterizing Jews as hostile, despite their not having the means to persecute Christians, was the usage of a technique where he generalized all Jews as the same as those Jews who persecuted Christians in the past two centuries. Justin also recorded the spreading of calumnies by the Jews towards Christians: “You selected and sent out from Jerusalem chosen men through all the land to tell that the godless heresy of the Christians had sprung up, and to publish those things

⁸² Epistle of Barnabas, 20.

⁸³ Epistle to Diognetus, 5.

⁸⁴ *Dialogue*, 39.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

which all they who knew us not speak against us.”⁸⁷ The degree to which Jews exercised any hostilities against Christians was uncertain; however, the fact that Christian writers characterized Jews as hostile to the Christian movement caused further estrangement between the two groups.

The Mishna also attested to the growing rift between the Christian and Jewish communities during the second century. Rabbinic authority used Balaam as a symbol for Jesus, implying that Jesus and his followers, “have no part in the world to come.”⁸⁸ In Mishnaic writings, Balaam symbolized the chief corrupter of morality and Jewish religion.⁸⁹ Further evidence that the rabbis viewed Christianity as an apostate threat to Judaism was revealed by their calling Jesus “the deceiver.”⁹⁰ Written during the period in which Rabbinic opinion was formulated on Jesus, Matthew’s gospel also testified to this opinion of the Jews: upon the burial of Jesus, “the Pharisees went to Pilate,” calling Jesus a “deceiver.”⁹¹

Rabbis vehemently opposed interaction between Jews and Christians on any level:

Flesh...found in the hand of a Min it is forbidden for use. That which comes from a house of idolatry, lo! This is the flesh of sacrifices of the dead, because they say, ‘slaughtering by a Min is idolatry, their bread is Samaritan bread, their wine is wine offered [to idols], their fruits are not tithed, their books are books of witchcraft, and their sons are bastards. One does not sell to them or receive from them or take from them, or give to them; one does not teach their sons trades, and one does not obtain healing from them.’⁹²

The Rabbis sought to end all contact with Min, which included (though not exclusive to)

⁸⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁸⁸ M. Sanh. 10.2

⁸⁹ Herford, 67.

⁹⁰ T. Sanh. 10.11.

⁹¹ Matthew, 27.62-63.

⁹² t. Hul. 2.20,21. Min were Jewish heretics, though not necessarily Christians. Many references to “Min” were directed towards Jewish-Christians, such as in this example.

Christians. Referring to the books of the Min which contained “memorials,” that is the name of God, “R. Tarphan said, ‘May I lose my son! If they come into my hand I would burn them and their memorials too. If the pursuer was pursuing after me, I would enter into a house of idolatry, and I enter not into their houses... ‘I hate them with a perfect hatred.’”⁹³ Another example of Jewish hatred towards Christians was noted in Beruria, the wife of a prominent rabbi who lived in the mid to late second century retorted to a Christian, “The congregation of Israel, which is like a woman who hath not borne children for Gehenna (Hell), like you!”⁹⁴ The tradition of abhorrence with which many rabbis viewed Christians was dated prior to the second century. The Mishna records Rⁿ Gamliel, R Jehoshua, R. El’azar ben Azariah, and R. Aqiba confronting a Christian in Rome and calling him, “O most wicked,” literally meaning the most wicked man in the world.⁹⁵

Persecution, aside from the Jewish revolts, also proved to be a distinguishing factor in defining and developing the differentiation between the Jewish and Christian communities. According to Eusebius, following “the ascension of our Savior...the Jews at once contrived numberless plots against his disciples...the other Apostles were driven from the land of Judea by thousands of deadly plots. They went on their way to all the heathen.”⁹⁶ Assuming the accuracy of Eusebius’ statement, the development of Gentile-Christian communities resulted in part from Jewish persecution. Hostilities between Jews and Christians also arose from the rivalry between the two communities in pursuing

⁹³ T. Shabb. 13. 5

⁹⁴ b. Ber. 10a

⁹⁵ Shem. R., 30.9

⁹⁶ Eusebius, 3.5.

Gentile converts.⁹⁷ Paul corroborated Jewish resentment towards the success of the Christian Gentile mission, where he related that the Jews “displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles.”⁹⁸ Oddly, little evidence exists for the persecution of Christians by Jews after the apostolic period, which was ended by the First Jewish Revolt in 70 CE. There are only two extant examples of Jewish involvement in the persecution of Christians: the martyrdom of Simeon, the Bishop of Jerusalem in 109 CE and the martyrdom of Polycarp in 156 CE. Transcribed from the ancient Church historian Hegesippus, Eusebius recorded the martyrdom of Simeon.⁹⁹ Although the Romans executed Simeon, the bishop’s Jewish accusers were responsible for handing him over to the Roman authority. Aside from Polycarp, there is little evidence to support Jewish involvement in the execution of Christians after the Third Jewish War.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps the best explanation for the decline in Jewish persecution is found in noting the transition of the Jerusalem community into a Gentile-Christian community. Since the first Jewish-Christian community dwelled in Jerusalem, the central nerve of Judaism itself, this particular Christian community was exposed to those Jews who most carefully guarded the tenets of their identity. After the apostolic period, and especially after the Third Jewish War, the Jerusalem church became more Hellenized, removing their identity from the context of Judaism, thus reducing conflict with those who sought to preserve their traditional Jewish identity.

Largely, persecution affected the Christians in that it compelled them to further

⁹⁷ Rosenberg, 18.

⁹⁸ 1 Thessalonians 2.15-16 NIV.

⁹⁹ Eusebius, 3.32.

¹⁰⁰ Simon, 121.

disengage themselves from the Jewish communities. Gentile-Christian communities more easily viewed themselves as the covenant people of God as a result of disassociation from the Jewish communities.¹⁰¹ Hence, Gentile-Christian communities repudiated those things which were associated with Judaism. Extreme cases of this repudiation occurred in Melito of Sardis and Marcion. Melito of Sardis, who wrote during the late second century, demonstrated to be one of the most intense polemicists against Judaism of all the early Church writers prior to Chrysostom.¹⁰² However, prior to Melito of Sardis, Marcion went much further than any other known Church writer and set out to expunge everything in the Church that had any connection with Judaism.¹⁰³ His teachings, deemed heretical by other ecclesiastical leaders, pontificated that the Jewish God of the Old Testament differed from the Christian God of the New Testament and that the Jewish scriptures should be altogether abandoned. Although Jewish antagonism was not primarily responsible for the estrangement between Jewish and Christian communities, persecution was a major factor in the initiation of the Gentile mission and the Hellenization of the Church.

Nevertheless, the Jewish and Christian communities did not remain completely isolated from each other. Circa 160 CE, Justin Martyr wrote that Jews “daily...are becoming disciples in the name of Christ.”¹⁰⁴ Justin also attested that some Christians were forsaking the Church by joining the Jewish communities. Although Jewish leaders banned Christian books, Trypho, the Jew with whom Justin carried on his dialogue

¹⁰¹ Harnack, 59.

¹⁰² Hershel Shanks, ed., *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism*, (Washington, D.C., Biblical Archaeology Society, 1992), 171.

¹⁰³ Wilken, 29.

¹⁰⁴ *Dialogue*, 39.

observed, “your precepts in the so-called Gospel are so wonderful and so great, that I suspect no one can keep them; for I have carefully read them.”¹⁰⁵ Pointing out interaction between Jewish and Christian communities, Eusebius also indicated that Philo, a famous Jewish philosopher and writer from Alexandria, had been exposed to Christian teachings, noting, “this seems to have been said by a man who had listened to their expositions of the sacred scriptures.”¹⁰⁶ The fact that both Philo and Trypho had examined the writings of the Gospel intimates that there was indeed a degree of interaction between Christian and Jewish communities throughout the second century.

Initially, the Church bore a distinct Jewish identity. However, even at its inception, the Christian movement displayed a degree of independence from Judaism; hence, the Church was more than merely a Jewish sect. Among the first Christians were certain Hellenistic-Jews, though they operated within the Palestinian system, they also reached beyond mainstream Palestinian-Judaism to other Hellenistic-Jews, who in turn evangelized the Gentile populations at large.

The Gentile mission rapidly increased the number of Hellenistic populations in the church, who maintained a relationship with the Jerusalem Christians defined by equality and coexistence prior to 66 CE. However, the First Jewish War decreased the Jerusalem community’s prestige, bringing the Hellenistic and Gentile-Christian communities to the forefront of the Christian movement. The Third Jewish War accentuated the effects of the 66 CE war. Gentile-Christian church leaders and writers pursued the establishment of a Christian identity distinct from that of Judaism, further distinguishing

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰⁶ Eusebius, 2.17.

the Christian movement from its original Jewish context. By the end of the second century, ecclesiastical Church leaders viewed Jewish-Christians as heretics.

Relations between Jewish and Christian communities convey a significant amount of information on the development of the Church. Christianity, conceived within and intimately connected to the context of Judaism itself, inherently carried with it a distinction from the rest of the Jewish community. The feature of Hellenism, which was also present at the inception of the Christian movement, enabled the Church to expand quickly and effectively beyond its Jewish boundaries. These two features, the inherent distinction of the Church from the rest of Judaism and Hellenism, were the two primary causations of the development of the Church during the first two hundred years of its existence. Hellenism, however, proved to be the more influential of the two features, shifting Christianity away from its Jewish heritage. Favoring cultural syncretism, universalism, and cosmopolitanism, the Hellenistic Church expanded beyond traditional boundary lines, transcending ethnicity, cultures, states, provinces, and empires.

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