JEWs AND CHRISTIANS IN THE FIRST CENTURY. 
THE STRUGGLE OVER IDENTITY*

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ABSTRACT
The early church's theological differentiation and social separation from Judaism were caused by elements that were actually native, and sometimes integral to Judaism itself. The diversity within Judaism allowed people to respond in diametrically opposite ways to two major issues. The first was christology. Was Jesus, or was Jesus not God's unique eschatological agent—Lord, Messiah, son of man, incarnate Wisdom, the final sacrifice for sin—and as such was he raised from the dead and exalted in heaven? Secondly, and related to one's answer to the first question: what was the role of Torah, and were gentiles who thought that their faith in Christ excluded Torah obedience, members of the covenant community? As the increasingly gentile church focused on christological faith and marginalised the importance of the Torah, they developed an exclusivist faith and both drew on sectarian tendencies within Judaism (exemplified in the books of Enoch and some of the Qumran literature) and claimed, ironically, that they, and not the Jews, were the true Israel.

1 INTRODUCTION

The issue of communities and trajectories in early Christianity raises a set of basic questions about identity. Among people whom we easily label 'Jews' and 'Christians,' who was it that thought they were Jews, and in what respect? Who in the other category did they think were not Jews, and why?

Three well-known historical facts lead us to pose these questions. First, the

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earliest Christians were Jews—by virtue of their ethnicity or earlier conversion and with respect to their self-understanding. Secondly, these Jewish Christians oriented themselves by their relationship to Jesus of Nazareth and thereby defined themselves over against the rest of the Jewish people. Thirdly, within a few decades, even as Christianity retained much from the categories and traditions of its mother religion, it developed, in various stages and different places, into a religion that differentiated itself theologically from Judaism and separated itself socially from its mother communities.

It is the thesis of this paper that the church's differentiation and separation from Judaism were caused by elements that were native, and sometimes integral, to Judaism itself. Thus, the process involved an identity crisis within Judaism, as individuals and groups, acting on impulses and elements that were part of their mother's genetic composition, struggled over the question of genuine and legitimate lineage. First century Judaism was a highly diverse phenomenon, and it was precisely this diversity that facilitated the identity crisis.

We are likely to take the separation between Jews and Christians too readily for granted: to suppose that it was inevitable, its grounds obvious and compelling. I wish to show how plausibly Jewish the early Christian alternative was, and to indicate in a broad and synthetic way some of the major instances in which the development of Christianity was an extension of currents which were already visible within Judaism, but which had the potential for creating division.

In sections 2 and 3, I will focus on the two major issues in dispute—Christology and Torah—indicating the elements in Judaism that played a role in the discussions and debates between 'Jews' and 'Christians.' In section 4, I will show how the polar tendencies of inclusivity and exclusivity in Jewish tradition played themselves out in these first century religious and social events.

We must state two qualifications at the outset. First, we have no way of knowing how widespread the Jewish debate over Christianity was in the first century. For a substantial part of Judaism, especially in places where there was no Christian mission activity, it may well have been a non-issue. Secondly, Jewish responses to Christian claims must have varied—from ignoring the claims, to marginalising Christians socially, to expulsion from the synagogue.

Our investigation is complicated by two major lacunae in the sources. First, we have no first-century Jewish texts that indisputably make polemical references to the Christians. Secondly, we have no documents composed by the 'Jewish Christian' opponents of Paul and others with his viewpoint. In the first instance, I shall infer from extant Jewish sources how some Jews might have responded to Christian claims to be the right interpreters of the tradition. In the second case, with caution we can use the Pauline writings to infer some of the positions taken by Paul's opponents.
2 CHRISTOLOGY IS CONSTITUTIVE

2.1 By definition, Jesus is Sine Qua Non
That the first ‘Christians’ were Jewish followers of Jesus of Nazareth is indisputable. At the very least, Paul attests this in 1 Cor 15:5-7. Thus, while it may seem tautological, it is worth emphasising that Christianity begins among Jews who are distinguished from other Jews by virtue of their belief in the special status or role(s) of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, from the beginning certain Jews (i.e., Christian Jews) isolated a particular factor as crucial to their self-identity as Jews.

The fact that Jesus made a decisive difference in these peoples’ lives and self-understanding does not, however, exclude the possibility, or even likelihood, that they may have been associated with some Jewish group or sect, or attached to another charismatic leader or teacher, before their association with Jesus. Parallels between the New Testament and the Qumran documents may point in this direction. I have argued that the references to Upper Galilee in 1 En 6-16 may bear on our explanation of the rise of Christianity (1981b:590-600), and Rainer Riesner has used these observations to argue that Bethany beyond the Jordan, the site of John’s preaching according to Jn 1:28, should be identified with Batanea (1987). That Jesus (and his disciples) were associated with John the Baptist is evident from the account of Jesus’ baptism. What factors may have led Jesus to begin his own ministry and certain disciples of John to associate with Jesus before or after the death of either of these leaders is uncertain. In any case the phenomenon is not unknown in Judaism at this time. Qumranic references to false teachers and, notably, to the ‘Man of Lies’ suggest a division in that sect that was related to tensions between two (or more) prominent teachers.1 It seems likely to me that some of the earliest Christians came from an apocalyptic group or movement located in the area of Galilee (Nickelsburg 1981:599).2 The fact that Ac 9:1-20 (and perhaps Gl 1:17) identifies Damascus as the location of the Christians whom Saul opposed may point in the same direction, indicating a connection either with Galilee or with persons that may have been related to the group that produced the Damascus Document (CD 6-7; see Nickelsburg 1986:353).

2.2 Christology: Interpretations of Jesus derived from Judaism
Whatever their provenance within Judaism, the first Christians defined them-

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1 On false teachers, see especially 1QH 4:5-5:4. On the ‘Man of Lies,’ see the summary of the discussion in Murphy-O’Connor 1986:141.
2 Freyne (1988: 187-90) is hesitant to locate the origin of the tradition attested in 1 Enoch in the area of Upper Galilee in which it is allegedly set. However, the specifics of the geographic references indicate accurate knowledge of the area at some point in the transmission of the tradition, Nickelsburg 1981b:582-83.
selves with reference to Jesus. More specifically, their relationship to him focused on his death and resurrection, however one defines the latter (see 2.2.2 below). This focus is evident in the early creeds, formulae, and traditions imbedded in the Pauline corpus (e.g., Rm 1:3-4; 4:24-25; 10:9; 1 Cor 15:3-7). These texts understand Jesus' significance largely in terms of a range of Jewish expectations and interpretations of tradition. The early Christians responsible for the composition of these texts understood their identity as Jews or as converts to the Jewish tradition to be bound up with Jesus because his death and resurrection realized, embodied, or fulfilled significant elements of Jewish religion.

2.2.1 The Resurrection as Jesus' Vindication

Early Christian formulae in the Pauline epistles and their parallels elsewhere in the New Testament generally pair Jesus' death and resurrection. Sometimes these events are simply coordinated; Jesus died and rose (1 Th 4:14). Elsewhere, Jesus' death is the negative event carried out by humans which God reverses in the resurrection; God raised Jesus from the dead. This formulation is carved from the Jewish tradition of the persecution and vindication of the righteous one (Nickelsburg 1972:48-111). Especially striking is the story in Wis 2 and 5, based on Is 52-53 (1972:62-66). Its protagonist is the wise and righteous spokesman of the Lord, whose enemies conspire to destroy him because he chides them for transgressions of the Law. The similarity with gospel traditions about Jesus 'the preacher' is evident. In any case, these formulae explain Jesus' condemnation and death as an evildoer by asserting that they were reversed when God vindicated Jesus' activity by raising him from the dead.

The resurrection has consequences broader than the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Especially striking is the formula 'the God (or him) who raised (the Lord) Jesus from the dead' (e.g., Rm 4:24; 8:11), which redefines 'the God who brought Israel up out of Egypt' as the God of the resurrection (Michel 1963:127, n 3). In these texts, the resurrection is a salvific action that supersedes the Exodus and defines the church as Israel.

2.2.2 The Resurrection as Jesus' Exaltation

With few exceptions, the New Testament closely associates Jesus' resurrection with his exaltation to a position of high authority in heaven. In some cases, as in Phlp 2:6-11 and the Epistle to the Hebrews, Jesus' transcending of death is synonymous with his exaltation, and there is no separate resurrection event (Georgi 1964:292; Schillebeeckx 1979:535-36; Attridge 1989:406). Other texts envision three events: death, resurrection, and exaltation.4

3 For a related usage, cf the recasting of Is 63:11 at Hb 13:20.
4 The pattern is particularly explicit in Luke-Acts. In the Fourth Gospel the death/exaltation pattern in the Farewell Discourses has been overridden by the presence of the
This exaltation is evident in the accounts of Jesus' resurrection appearances, most of which are cast in a form analogous to prophetic call stories, with Jesus taking the role traditionally played by God or God's angel (Hubbard 1974). In Mt 28:18-20, Jesus asserts that he possesses the authority that Dn 7 envisioned for the enthroned son of man. In Lk 24:36-49, he commissions his apostles to preach to the gentiles. In Jn 20:19-23, he dispenses the Holy Spirit and grants authority to forgive and retain sins, and in chapter 21 he charges Peter to feed his sheep and lambs. Other gospel narratives sometimes identified as transformed resurrection accounts are also call stories (Mt 16:16-19; Lk 5:1-11). In Gl 1:12-17 and the three accounts in Ac 9, 22, and 26, Paul's vision of the risen Christ presumes divine glory and describes the commission to preach to the gentiles (Munck 1959:11-35). Revelation 1-3 is an extended epiphany with a commission to write to the seven churches. All of these texts describe or presume the exaltation and authoritative status of Jesus the risen one. This exaltation must be understood, first, in terms of the suffering/vindication pattern to which I have made reference (2.2.1). It is by virtue of his exaltation in heaven, as judge or accuser of his persecutors, that the righteous one in the Wisdom of Solomon is understood to have been vindicated by God. The one who claimed God as his father now stands among the angels, the heavenly 'sons of God,' and his previous criticisms of his opponents are seen to have been justified (Nickelsburg 1972:58-68).

Nonetheless, the interpretation of Deutero-Isaiah's pattern of the exaltation and vindication of the servant—though it is cast in the form of a story about an individual—refers to a type (Georgi 1964:272), namely, the righteous teacher (cf Dn 12:3, Nickelsburg 1972:68-70). It is a story repeated many times. However, in the New Testament use of this pattern of suffering and exaltation with reference to Jesus, the protagonist is rendered unique because the exalted Jesus is identified with certain unique exalted figures in Jewish tradition. The titles and roles associated with these figures vary. The major honorific titles are Christ, Lord, Son of God, and Son of Man.

The use of 'Christ' seems most often to indicate that the exalted one fulfills Jewish expectations about an anointed king (the Lord's Messiah/Anointed One). In some cases, the application of this title to Jesus denotes his Davidic descent and, hence, refers to his earthly existence and activity. Nonetheless, the use of the term with reference to the exalted Jesus (e.g., Ac 2:36; perhaps Lk 24:26) suggests that it is related to the traditions now attested in the Parables of resurrection accounts in chapters 20-21.

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Enoch (1 En 48:10; 52:4; Nickelsburg 1987:58-65). In such New Testament texts, it is as the heavenly exalted one that Jesus fulfills Jewish expectations about the Lord's Anointed One.

'Lord' is perhaps the most frequent title employed to describe Jesus' status as the exalted one. Here we leave out the disputed question as to whether, and to what extent, kyrios derives from a Jewish or non-Jewish environment (Fitzmyer 1979:115-16). Of importance is its association with the resurrection qua exaltation. This is perhaps most explicitly attested in the parallelism of Rm 10:9:

If you confess with your mouth that 'Jesus is Lord,'
and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,
you will be saved.

Son of God is a complex, multivalent term in the New Testament (Fossum 1992). In the Fourth Gospel and elsewhere, it refers to the pre-existent heavenly being who becomes incarnate. However, in the creed in Rm 1:3-4, it appears to refer to Jesus' status by virtue of the resurrection. In its corresponding usage in Jewish texts, it defines members of the heavenly court (sons of God/sons of Heaven). Wisdom 2 and 5 compare the righteous one's claims to be a son of God with his exaltation among the heavenly sons of God (Nickelsburg 1972:59-60).

2.2.3 The Exalted One Who Will Come as Judge
If these titles denote Jesus as the one who is presently exalted in heaven by virtue of the resurrection, they can also refer to his future function as God's appointed judge of humanity. Very early Aramaic tradition embodies the honorific title 'Lord' in the formula marana tha, 'Our Lord, come!' (Fitzmyer 1979:123-30). Present exaltation points to a future advent. The association of the advent of God's Son with the judgment is clear in 1 Th 1:10. God's Son rescues the righteous from the wrath of the coming judgment.

Son of Man is the title of Jesus most explicitly associated with his advent and with his function as God's judge. The title, which is limited almost exclusively to the gospels, is drawn from the stream of tradition first attested in Daniel 7, but revised and nuanced in the Parables of Enoch (Nickelsburg 1992b:138-40, 142-46). This conflated tradition interprets the Danielic figure with reference to Second Isaiah's Chosen One, the Servant of the Lord, and also with reference to biblical oracles about the Davidic king, specifically Ps 2 and Is 11. Thus the son of man/Chosen One/Anointed One is a heavenly figure seated on God's glorious throne, who is the vindicator of the oppressed righteous, and the one who will condemn their enemies, the kings and the mighty.
2.2.4 Jesus's Sacrificial Death

By interpreting the resurrection of Jesus as his vindication and seeing his exaltation as a major step toward the establishment of God’s justice and universal sovereignty, early Christians employed traditional Jewish symbols both to nullify the scandal of the cross and to explain how their faith in Jesus and their christocentric world view recognised the eschatological culmination of Jewish religion. Jewish traditions offered early Christians another way to integrate the death of Jesus into the heart of their religion. They could celebrate the crucifixion as a positive rather than a negative event.

From this viewpoint, however wrong and unjust the death of Jesus may have been, it was a death that served as a sacrifice or ransom or expiation in behalf of others. The range of terms, which cannot concern us here, is largely cultic in its origins. This interpretation of Jesus' death appears very early in the tradition. It is enshrined in the Eucharistic formula (1 Cor 11:24-25) and is cited by Paul as part of the tradition that he received regarding Jesus' death and resurrection (1 Cor 15:3; cf. Gl 1:4). The notion also occurs in Rm 3:24-26 and 4:25, as well as Mk 10:45.

The precise origin of the conception is disputed. Traditionally, it has been traced to the language of Is 53:10 (see, e.g., Jeremias 1967:700-17). Recent discussion has contested this notion. Morna Hooker has played down the role of the Servant Songs in the New Testament (1959). Moreover, Sam K. Williams has argued that this set of conceptions was drawn from classical Greek thought (1975:137-202). In my view, one cannot eliminate Jewish influence or an origin in connection with Is 53. The Deutero-Isaianic servant tradition is far more influential in pre-Christian Jewish thought than Hooker recognizes or allows, as the evidence from the Wis 2-5 and 2 Macc 7 indicates. In the latter case, the story of the innocent deaths of the seven brothers and their mother functions in the larger text as the pivotal event that causes God’s wrath to turn to mercy and facilitates the victories of Judas Maccabeus (7:37-38; 8:5). This idea and the use of cultic language are more explicit in the rewritten version of the story in 4 Macc (17:20-22). While the tradition from Is 53 can be used to develop a pattern of suffering and exaltation, with no reference to vicarious death (Wis Sol 3:6), I believe that the evidence supports the conclusion that this biblical text was foundational in Christian speculations about the vicarious nature of Jesus' death. The evidence cited by Williams strongly suggests the influence of concurrent Greek notions. In such a case, Jewish Christians with a Hellenistic orienta-

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7 Williams discusses 2 Macc 7 at some length (1975:77-90); however, his interpretation of 2 Macc 7:37-38 does not, in my view, take sufficiently into consideration both the place of this story in the whole scheme of 2 Macc and the parallels between this story and the parallel account of Taxo and his sons in the Testament of Moses 9-10 (Nickelsburg 1972:95-102). Seeley's discussion of 2 Macc 7 is much more perfunctory (1990:87-88).
tions are explaining Jesus' death in light of what they understand to be their Jewish heritage. Jesus is the fulfillment of Scriptural prophecy, and his death as the event that sums up the functions of the Temple cult and renders them unnecessary.

2.2.5 Critiques of the Jerusalem Temple
Language about Jesus' death for others was consonant with another set conceptions, although the two need not be linked. I refer to a broad-ranging set of critiques directed against the Temple. They are attested in various strata of 1 Enoch (for chs 6-16, see Nickelsburg 1981b:582-87 and Suter 1979; on chs. 85-90 and the Apocalypse of Weeks, 93:1-10; 91:11-18, see Hengel 1974, 2:180), the Qumran literature (1QS 8:1-10; CD 1:3-12; Nickelsburg 1986:342-45), and possibly the Testament of Moses (Goldstein 1973:48-50). Thus, when Paul speaks of the Christian community as Temple (1 Cor 6:19), the gospels describe Jesus' critique of temple and priesthood (Mark 11:15-19; Jn 2:13-22), and the author to the Hebrews argues that the whole system is null and void, these Christian authors are drawing on a strain of Jewish tradition that stems from the beginning of the Hellenistic period and quite possibly from the return from the Exile.

2.2.6 Summary
While we cannot here sort out all the strands of tradition, the following appears to have been the case. Early Christians oriented their world view around the belief that the crucified Jesus was exalted in heaven. There he ruled as Lord and Christ and prepared to return as God's appointed judge, who would vindicate and reward the righteous and punish their oppressors (if they had such) and the rest of the wicked of this world. They also attached positive value to Jesus' death as a means of dealing with human sin. The categories from which these beliefs were drawn are thoroughly Jewish: the suffering and exalted servant of the Lord; the Lord's Anointed One; the one like a son of man enthroned as the executor of God's reign. Thus these Christians related their self-understanding as heirs of the Israelite tradition to their identification of the crucified and risen Jesus with the aforementioned figures of Jewish expectation. Jesus the crucified, risen, and exalted one was the key to their understanding of their tradition and the polar star by which they oriented themselves. In their view, being a Jew required that one recognise Jesus as the fulfillment of these expectations; to believe in the crucified and exalted Christ was to acknowledge the realisation of God's promises to judge all flesh and to extend the divine reign throughout the cosmos.
2.3 Alternative Jewish responses and reflexes

Thus far we have looked at the many ways in which early Christians explained Jesus' death and resurrection and explicated their faith by drawing on Jewish traditions and ideas. Jesus and the religion that centered on him reprised, summed up, and brought to an eschatological culmination, in their view, the heart of Jewish religion and its bases in the Scriptures of Israel and its traditional interpretations. Their faith in Jesus and its proclamation were wholly consonant with significant aspects of their Israelite heritage. For others, however, the nascent Christian religion stood in disjunction with the faith of Israel. For a variety of reasons, they read the tradition differently and thus saw Jesus of Nazareth and his followers in a very different light. One did not have to be a Christian to be a true Jew; indeed, to be a Christian might seem inconsonant with one's Judaism. As we explore these issues, we need to remember, again, that first century Judaism was not a monolith. There were many reasons for many Jews to take a path quite different from the one that was trod by the followers of Jesus.

2.3.1 The resurrection

The first century was a time of high eschatological expectations among the Jews. The manuscript remains from Qumran and the mass of other apocalyptic and non-apocalyptic literature from this period indicates that many Jews felt they were living in the time toward which prophetic prediction pointed and in which God would move history and the cosmos into a new age. For many the resurrection of the dead would be a central event in this crucial period. 8

This general picture notwithstanding, eschatology did not govern the world view of all Jews. The belief in a coming judgment, a resurrection, and a new age grew out of a sense of deprivation and disenfranchisement and spoke eloquently to a deep-seated faith in God's justice even when one's world attested chaos, injustice, and the triumph of evil (Nickelsburg, 1972). However, for the rich and the powerful, the establishment, or even those who felt that life was not all that bad, eschatology was not a living, forceful part of their world view. Resurrection was relatively new on Israel's religious horizon. And even if one accepted it as 'an article of faith,' there had to be compelling reasons for supposing that the resurrection might have begun. Or more important, one had to be convinced of the injustice of Jesus' death to accept the possibility of his resurrection. The situation was intensified by the fact that, by all New Testament accounts, appearances of the risen Christ were limited almost exclusively to those who were already convinced of Jesus' special character. The exception is Saul of Tarsus. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that many Jews

did not buy into the proclamation of the early church. Even if resurrection was part of their religious worldview as Jews, there might be good and understandable reasons for them to be skeptical. They could see themselves as good and faithful Jews without accepting the validity of the claim of other Jews that Jesus of Nazareth was risen from the death and exalted in heaven as Lord and Christ.

2.3.2 Alternative Models for the Messiah
That 'the Jews expected the Messiah' is now generally recognised to be a cliche that is neither meaningful nor able to be substantiated (Collins & Nickelsburg 1980; Neusner; Green; and Frerichs 1987). Eschatologically oriented Jews had a variety of expectations about the future. Yet the fact remains that one such expectation involved the restoration of the Davidic dynasty. Among texts preserved for us, the most detailed and eloquent expression of such a belief is Psalms of Solomon 17. The scion of David will drive the Romans into the sea, gather the dispersed tribes of Israel, purify Jerusalem, and dispense justice among the people. The language is heavily dependent on royal oracles in the Psalms and the prophets (Nickelsburg and Stone 1983:165 notes), and while it has heavy 'religious emphases,' the picture is strongly political and nationalistic. In these respects it follows the letter of the ancient tradition much more closely than the interpretation in the Parables of Enoch (above, 2.2.3). Thus, with considerable justification, messianically oriented Jews might well dismiss Christian claims about Jesus the risen and exalted Messiah. In so doing, they were not straying from their received tradition, and in significant ways, they were adhering more closely to it than the revisionists who wrote the Enochic oracles and the latter-day followers of Jesus who took up that strand of messianism.

My point is to emphasise that even among messianically oriented Jews, there were serious differences of opinion about the eschatological scenario. Tradition-bound Jews could be either open or closed to the viability of Christian claims about Jesus the Messiah. Each would feel that they were in line with the faith of their forbears and the tradition of the prophets.

2.3.3 Jesus' sacrificial death and the temple
We have noted some Jewish prototypes for Christian formulations about Jesus' death in behalf of others. Such ideas were a special expression of Jewish ideas, an articulation of one's understanding of Jewish tradition, and thus an embodiment of one's identity as a Jew. Nonetheless, such an assertion by a first-century Jewish Christian was not without its problems and its opponents in the Jewish community. The analogies that I have cited above are related to specific situations. The representative, expiatory deaths of the Maccabean martyrs served a limited purpose at a particular time, according to the texts of 2 and 4 Maccabees. God's wrath against the apostate Hellenising of the Jews was turned
to mercy. But then the temple was purified, and the cult was restored. Christian texts about Jesus' death for others take a whole different approach and make universal and lasting claims. Jesus replaces the temple and cult, and his death has consequences for all humanity. We are witnessing a complete devaluation of temple and cult. Jewish adherents of Jesus have no further need of the institutions that were once central to their religious self-understanding. Not surprisingly, other Jews thought that these people were wholly out of line with the tradition. As we have noted, there were important precedents for the devaluation of Temple and cult, notably in the Enochic and Qumran literature. This defuses the criticism that Christian viewpoints in this respect were 'Christian' rather than 'Jewish.' Nonetheless, many first century Jews would have criticised and marginalised the Qumranites and dismissed the viewpoint of the Enochic literature.

The Epistle to Hebrews provides a laboratory case of the point I am making in this section and in the paper in general. The death and exaltation of Jesus are central and focal. Through his death, Jesus served as high priest and enacted the supreme, one time, permanent sacrifice that renders the temple and its cult superfluous. The author explicitly employs the old symbol system, but restructures it according to eschatological principles that are christologically oriented. The events relating to Jesus are integral to the enacting of the new covenant foretold by Jeremiah. Behind this Christian text lurk the questions: what is real Judaism? who is the real Jew? The title 'To the Hebrews' is to the point. The author's thesis would have been highly debatable among people equally convinced that they were Jews.

2.3.4 Summary
Jesus of Nazareth was, of course, foundational to the self-understanding of first century Christians. Interpretations of his significance were expressed through symbols and traditions that were thoroughly Jewish, although at times this was a Judaism with strongly Hellenistic coloration. Thus, Christians saw themselves as standing in the Jewish tradition. Other Jews, for a variety of reasons well grounded in Jewish tradition, either rejected the symbols appropriated by the early Christians, or disputed the validity of applying them to Jesus. Thus they were able to consider themselves to be faithful Jews without accepting the Christian premise and its interpretation. Christology was a serious point of dispute among some first century Jews. For Christians Jesus' status as God's unique eschatological agent was a sine qua non for their identity as heirs of the Israelite tradition. For non-Christian Jews, their Jewish identity required no such confession. Nonetheless, we need not suppose that such Jews would have excommunicated Christian Jews simply because of their christological belief. There were many instances of persons who claimed to be, or were acclaimed as messiah. These claims raised eyebrows; sometimes they had dire consequences,
or it was feared that they would. But, in themselves, messianic claims were not blasphemous or heretical.

3 TORAH IS A MAJOR POINT OF CONTENTION

3.1 Torah is fundamental to Judaism
If respective attitudes toward Jesus of Nazareth were a point of debate among persons claiming Jewish religion as their lineage, observance and non-observance of the Torah was a second major issue, and one with much more potential for schism. It may seem gratuitous to emphasise the point, but it is difficult to exaggerate the extent to which the observance of the Torah was central and constitutive for Judaism. In the Bible itself—and not simply in the Pentateuch—the Torah was integral to the notion of covenant, and election implied the obligation to obey God's will. In the literature of the Greco-Roman period, persons who disengaged themselves from this obligation were described as 'sinners,' a term applied generically to gentiles (cf Ps Sol 1:1; 2:1; 17:5). While opinions differed as to what constituted obedience to the Torah, the obligation to obey Torah was itself not in dispute among people who took their Jewish identity seriously.9 Judaism without Torah was a contradiction in terms.

3.2 Jewish views about Gentiles and the Torah
While Jews agreed to the principle that obedience to the Torah was their obligation, the conditions under which non-Jews might find favor with God were a matter of considerable dispute. Could gentiles be 'saved' apart from the covenant? Could and should they be brought into the covenant? To what extent was it necessary that they obey the stipulations of the Torah, and which ones? My purpose here is not to enter the debate about 'God-fearers' or the extent of Jewish 'missions' to the gentiles in the ancient world. I shall, rather, summarise the spectrum of opinion evident in Jewish literature from the Greco-Roman period. It will provide a context for the topic with which this paper is concerned.

The Hebrew Bible itself is not of one mind on this subject. I limit myself to later texts. Second Isaiah sees Israel as a light to the nations (Is 49:6), and Isa 60:1-2 (whether from Second or Third Isaiah) envisions the gentiles flowing to Jerusalem to share in that light. Ezra and Ruth represent opposite poles in post-exilic Jerusalem, the former demanding that Jews divorce their gentile spouses, the latter describing how David's great grandfather had married a Moabite. In the book of Jonah the prophet had to be dragged kicking, screaming, and

9 For a perceptive treatment of the variety in Judaism, particularly as it pertains to the Torah, and especially circumcision, see Smith 1980.
sulking to fulfill the divine command to preach repentance to the gentile Ninevites.

Jewish literature of the Greco-Roman period is fascinating for its vacillation between the inclusive and exclusivistic poles. The stories in Daniel 1-6 depict Mesopotamian monarchs acknowledging the universal power and sovereignty of the God of Israel (Nickelsburg 1981a:19-30), and in Bel and the Dragon the Babylonians fear that Cyrus ‘has become a Jew’ (v28). A similar attitude toward gentile monarchs and rulers is evident in the sections that frame Wis 1-6 (1:1-5; 6:1-25). Whether in fiction or actuality, these rulers are exhorted to act justly, and they are warned that divine judgment will ensue if they do not fulfill this obligation.

Jewish apologetic literature, represented by the Sibylline Oracles and the Letter of Aristeas, has a more positively oriented approach to the subject (Collins 1985:164-70). Gentiles who avoid major sins—idolatry, murder, and sexual promiscuity—will be the beneficiaries of God’s blessing. Fundamental, as in the Danielic stories, is the recognition of the universal sovereignty of the true God; idolatry denies that sovereignty, as does persecution of God’s people and injustice more broadly construed. To acknowledge the sovereignty of the great God and avoid the sins of murder and sexual promiscuity does not make one a Jew, but it constitutes a situation outside the covenant in which the blessing of the universal God is operative. In the Letter to Aristeas, the sages explain that for gentiles, Jewish food laws are an allegory that recommends the virtues of righteous conduct.

The books of Enoch and the story of Joseph and Aseneth offer a different set of alternatives. In the former instance, at least where the text is explicit, the salvation of the gentiles requires their acceptance of the Enochic Torah (Nickelsburg 1982). In Joseph and Aseneth the daughter of an Egyptian priest disavows her people and religion, rejects her idols and idolatrous food, and marries Joseph, the son of God, thus becoming the prototype for proselytes who flee for refuge to the God of Israel (Nickelsburg 1984b:69). The parallels to the Abraham stories (not least the apocryphal stories about his conversion from idolatry) indicate that Aseneth is seen as a true Israelite; indeed Jacob is depicted as her father (22:9).

In summary: Jewish literature attests two different views about gentiles and the Torah. 1) If they acknowledge the sovereignty of Israel’s God and avoid the great sins, they will receive God’s favor even if they are not included in the covenant. 2) To receive divine blessing, gentiles must associate with Israel and obey the Torah. These two Jewish alternatives are important for our topic, because, to no small extent, early Christian discussions about the Torah reflect

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10 As parallels to Aseneth’s change of name, Burchard (1965:112-21) cites Gen 17:5, 15; 32:28. On the apocryphal Abraham stories, see below 3.3.1.
3.3 Christian debates about the Torah

3.3.1 The Pauline literature

That Paul saw his identity bound up with his Jewish lineage and religion is indisputable. More particularly, he emphasises his call from the God of Israel, that he should stand in the line of the prophets (Munck 1959:11-35). That call, picking up on elements in Jr 1 and Is 49, directs him to preach among the gentiles. At this point the issue becomes complex with reference to the Jewish models suggested above.

According to Paul, obedience to the Torah, specifically circumcision and food laws, is not required of gentiles. This viewpoint fits the model spelled out in the apologetic literature. Although Paul makes reference to certain commandments in the decalog, by and large his outline for a God-pleasing life is spelled out with reference to abstract vices and virtues that parallel Greek catalogs and the general view of Jewish apologetic literature.!

Where Paul differs significantly from the apologetic model is in his insistence that gentiles who follow his program are adopted as children of Abraham and sons of Abraham’s God. The covenantal promises to Abraham are fulfilled as both Jews and gentiles are brought into one community, in which obedience to the Torah is not the hallmark of one’s identity as a member of the covenantal community (Stendahl 1976:23-40). He spells this viewpoint out in detail in Gl 3, Rm 3-4, and Phlp 3:4-9; in Galatians and Romans he does so on the basis of careful exegesis of the Torah itself.

When first we hear Paul discussing this matter, he has been about his work for more than a decade and a half; we have no examples of his early preaching among gentiles. His first writings on this subject are born of controversy precisely over the issue of gentile Torah observance. However, before looking briefly at that controversy, we may offer some speculation. Paul’s detailed usage of the Abraham traditions in his letter to Galatian gentiles is remarkable. He takes for granted that they know the traditions, and he argues on the basis of them. I suggest that Abraham had played a role in Paul’s preaching even before the proper interpretation of the figure of Abraham had become a point of controversy between Paul and his opponents. This is not surprising. In texts ranging from Jubilees (second century B C E) to the Apocalypse of Abraham (post-70 C E), the patriarch is cited as an example of a gentile who converts from idolatry.

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11 On these catalogs, see Betz, 1979:281-83. Similar lists appear in a Palestinian Jewish document such as 1QS 4:2-6, 9-11 and structure the narrative in the Jewish/Christian Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.
(and astrology) to the worship of the one God.\textsuperscript{12} It seems likely that Paul employed these traditions in his preaching among the gentiles. In so doing, his call for conversion from idolatry and the requirement (we may suppose) that they avoid other great sins would have been consonant with the approach of the apologetic literature.

Precisely how and when controversy erupted over the gentiles' Torah observance is unclear. Why should it have erupted? Paul's general approach was a traditional one. In any case, by the time Paul writes Galatians, the controversy is full-blown and bitter, and the apostle is espousing a viewpoint that we have not seen in the Jewish literature: gentiles are heirs of Abraham and recipients of the promises and blessings mentioned in the Torah.\textsuperscript{13}

Central to the argument is the somewhat bizarre claim that the 'seed' promised to Abraham was Jesus the Christ and not Isaac (Gl 3:16). In a word, Paul's attitude about the Torah is bound up with his christology. His call was from the risen Son of God, and his gospel relating to gentiles and Torah is justified on the grounds of this divine call. Thus the debate about Torah is tied up with the issue discussed in our first section. The issue is made more complex by Paul's polemical assertions in Galatians that the Torah is now passe for both Jews and gentiles (Gl 3:17-4:6; Stendahl 1976:86-87). The argument is extended in Romans, where, the covenants and promises notwithstanding, one's Jewish lineage is irrelevant (2:1-3:20). Like John the Baptist before him (Mt 3:9/Lk 3:8), Paul asserts that Abrahamic descent does not count in a situation where all humanity must repent.

The sources provide only a sketch of the controversy between Paul and his opponents, but they indicate a debate over identity. James, Peter, and John agreed to Paul's program for missionising the gentiles without the requirement of Torah observance, although they appear to have been observant themselves (Gl 2:9-13; Betz 1979:105-108). Others took a stricter line, requiring circumcision and observance of food laws. The requirement of circumcision indicates that the issue was membership in the community identified with Abraham (Genesis 17). Thus, whatever the details, this is a controversy over who is and who is not truly an heir of the Israelite tradition. To that extent, and certainly with reference to Paul's exegetical tour de force in Galatians, the opponents of Paul had a strong case for maintaining that Paul had abandoned the religion of his ancestors. However noble Paul's intentions to convert gentiles from the idolatry and immorality of paganism, he was out of line if he maintained that such conversion entitled these people to be considered members of the covenant community without their observance of the Torah. For these Jewish Christian

\textsuperscript{12} See very briefly my discussion (Nickelsburg 1981a:294-95).

\textsuperscript{13} For attitudes about the salvation of gentiles in Jewish apologetic literature, see above 3.2. Those texts, however, do not claim that such gentiles become Jews.
opponents of Paul, Paul's viewpoint was not a corollary of their belief that Jesus was God's eschatological agent. Just as important, Jews who did not accept the christological premise (for reasons indicated in 2.3 above) would have considered Paul's program sheer nonsense, if not apostasy. He had no grounds for claiming that gentiles could consider themselves to be Israelites apart from the Torah.

3.3.2 Paul's predecessors
These last observations lead us to what appears to have been the position of Paul himself before his acceptance of the gospel. His autobiographical accounts in Gl 1:12-17 and Phlp 3:2-11 juxtapose his own Torah piety and his persecution of the church, and this strongly suggests a connection between the two. Paul's persecution of Christians was connected with their attitudes about the Torah (pace Hultgren 1976). (Although we must be cautious about the historicity of the account, Ac 7-9 describes a similar juxtaposition; this persecution is triggered in connection with Stephen's claim that Temple and Torah are no longer viable.) The chain of events appears to have been as follows: certain early Christians claimed that Torah observance was no longer necessary under certain conditions. They made the claim in the name of Jesus, whom they believed was God's eschatological agent, perhaps specifically the messiah. Paul engaged in some form of persecution because as a pious Jew he rejected the notion that Torah observance was unnecessary and because he did not accept their christological premise. Paul's encounter with the risen Christ vindicated the christological faith of his opponents and legitimated its corollary. As a result, Paul became the outstanding advocate and most eloquent theoretician for the position that previously he had vigorously opposed.

Jewish Christian mission activity among gentiles is a logical setting for the development of a theology that devalued the Torah. The Pauline mission from Antioch is set in the context of a vigorous congregation (13:1), and it seems plausible that a mission among gentiles was already underway before his association with the group. In any case, the Christian formulations that Saul opposed are most easily placed among Christians who were preaching a Torah-less gospel among gentiles. Paul's subsequent prominence in the church should not obscure the hints in Acts and elsewhere that other Jewish Christians were working among gentiles. It is noteworthy that in the first account of Saul's call in Ac 9, the call to preach among gentiles is mediated through Ananias and is not given directly to Saul.

14 For a cautious discussion, see Hill 1992:137-38.
3.3.3 Pre-Markan traditions

It lies beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the historicity and nature of Jesus' alleged controversies over the Torah. Mark's preservation of traditions about such controversies indicates that debate over the role of the Torah was a significant fact of life in the circles that generated and/or transmitted these traditions to Mark, and that the issue continued to be significant for Mark and his readers. In the stories we see Christians (disciples of Jesus) arguing with Pharisees over specific issues in the Torah and Jewish piety: sabbath observance; fasting; association with sinners; handwashing rituals.

Since the stories are set specifically in the life of Jesus, it is difficult to know what the precise issues may have been among the Christians who transmitted these stories. But there are some hints. The sabbath controversies focus on Pharisaic halakah and do not counsel complete abrogation of sabbath observance (2:23-3:6). Jesus' table fellowship with sinners also fits well with a Pharisaic distinction between righteous and sinners (2:15-17). The story about fasting (2:18-22) is problematic (Muddiman 1992:774-76). The controversy over handwashing in Mk 7:1-23 recalls the debacle recounted in Gl 2:11-14. The interpretation of the event in Mk 7:14-23 indicates that, at least for Mark, the issue is not handwashing, but the propriety of eating non-kosher food (Carlston 1968).

What is Mark's point? Does he claim that Jewish food laws are no longer valid for Jewish Christians? This was the viewpoint of Paul and, evidently, Peter at first; both eat with gentiles (Gl 2:11-12). But it seems to have developed in the context of the gentile mission. That gentiles were a major component in Mark's audience is widely recognised, and it appears that the present passage speaks to this situation.

Because it is a story about the life of Jesus, Mark's gospel depicts Torah controversy as an inner-Jewish conflict. Jesus and his disciples interact with Jews, and Jesus' abrogation of laws and customs is opposed by the scribes and Pharisees, who demand to know the source of his authority to overthrow (in their view) the Torah. The religion of Israel is bound up with Torah observance, and a true teacher of Israel would never counsel to the contrary. The scribal interpretation of Jesus' exorcisms is an attempt to undercut the whole of Jesus' ministry, by making him an agent of Satan (3:22).

This story of inner-Jewish conflict is told for an audience living several decades after the death of Jesus. The author makes the point that the Son of God, the Davidic scion, taught that the ancestral religion could be practiced with serious compromises being made with respect to Torah and traditional piety, and without the Temple cult, which God had brought to an end in an act of judgment against its leadership (11:15-17; Nickelsburg 1980). In fact, he reflects a generation of conflict between Jewish Christians and Pharisaic Jews. In that conflict, the latter claimed to preserve and defend the faith, while early
Christians, whether Jews or converts, argued that it was they who preserved the true religion. And now, Mark maintains, it is the gentiles who are the heirs of the religion that many in Israel have perverted and misused.

3.3.4 Matthew: A Jewish Christian gospel
Matthew represents a self-conscious attempt to place Jesus of Nazareth in the context of Jewish tradition. Jesus' genealogy documents his status as 'son of Abraham' and 'son of David' (1:1), and the numerous formal quotations of Scripture indicate how he fulfilled prophecies uttered by God's spokesmen (van Segbroeck 1972). At points the author introduces elements of the Torah into the story he received from Mark. The generalising conclusion of the handwashing story is eliminated in 15:20; Jesus has abrogated this particular ritual and not food laws in general (Carlston 1968:90). The 'Sermon on Mount' provides guidelines for the practice of elements in Jewish piety: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting (6:1-21; cf. Tob 12:8). Yet the book retains and emphasises Mark's bitter controversy with the Pharisees, and the opening words of John the Baptist raise the basic question of concern in this paper: who is the true child of Abraham?

Finally, as we continue to see, the issue is tied to the authority of Jesus. It is he who has the last word in the book, which is really its presupposition. It is the exalted Jesus who has all authority in heaven and on earth and whose commandments are binding for 'all nations' (28:16-20). It is the disciples—who acknowledge that he is the Davidic Messiah, the Son of God, and the voice of heavenly Wisdom (Suggs 1970)—who are the true heirs of the Israelite traditions. The Pharisees and scribes, and the high priestly establishment, who opposed his interpretation of the tradition and rejected him as Wisdom's spokesman, have brought down the wrath of God on 'the people,' whose tradition and promised inheritance have been given to 'another nation' that bears fruits (Trilling 1964:53-96; Hare and Harrington 1975).

3.3.5 John: Logos, Wisdom, and Law
For the author of the Fourth Gospel the story of Jesus, his controversy with 'the Jews,' and his acceptance by a few of them, can be presented as a christological appropriation of the Jewish myth of Wisdom (Brown 1966:cxxii-cxxv). Sirach 24 expounds the notion that Wisdom has been embodied in the Torah, which is expounded by the sage. According to 1 En 81-82, the Enochic Torah is the presence of heavenly Wisdom. Similarly, the author of Jubilees claims to promulgate halakah that had been copied from the heavenly tablets and dictated to Moses by angels (Nickelsburg 1984:100). In the Fourth Gospel this complex of ideas has been replaced by the assertion that Wisdom became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. True religion transcends Jewishness. Torah has been replaced by
divine grace and truth, which became flesh in Jesus (1:14, 17), who is not simply Wisdom's spokesman, the persecuted prophet, but the very presence of the Logos, the Son of God. In order to emphasize the gravity of the situation, John's Jesus is explicit about his identity as God's Son. To be a true child of the God of Israel one must believe that Jesus is his son. Debates about Torah testify to Jewish unbelief.

3.4 Summary
I have argued that the first century identity crisis among 'Jews' and 'Christians' revolved, to no small extent, around an argument about the ongoing validity of the Torah and its indispensability to the religion of Israel. Whatever debates may have taken place between the historical Jesus and contemporary religious teachers and authorities, the issue broke into the open with reference to the gentile mission. The impulse for that mission was twofold. 1) Jewish tradition was itself open to the notion that God would deal favorably with 'righteous gentiles.' 2) Jewish Christians saw in the eschatological event of Jesus a compelling reason to pursue such a mission with vigor and dispatch. Now was the time when gentiles were to join Jews in worshipping God in spirit and in truth.

Paul and his predecessors, contemporaries, and successors became embroiled in controversy because they maintained that gentile converts were Israelites and that the eschatological realization of Israel's mission could take place apart from Torah observance. The warrant for this was the authority of Jesus, the exalted Christ, Lord, and Son of God. To no small degree that authority was seen to have existed already in the earthly ministry of Jesus, who was the very presence of Wisdom.

Arguments from the Torah itself, quotations from Scripture, and the Jewish roots of christology cited in section 2 were among the Jewish resources employed by early Christians as they defended the viability of their claims to be the true heirs of Israel's tradition. Most radical was their transformation of the Jewish myth of Wisdom, by which they located Wisdom's presence not in the Torah, but in Jesus.

4 PATTERNS OF INCLUSIVITY AND EXCLUSIVITY

Our discussion of competing views about the need for Torah observance indicates that it will be profitable to consider in more detail the alternative inclusive and exclusive Jewish views about who were members of the covenant community.\(^\text{15}\) The alternatives are already present in the Hebrew Bible.

\(^{15}\) This section as a whole summarises Nickelsburg 1985.
4.1 Third Isaiah: Between universalism and a divided Israel
As we have noted, both Second and Third Isaiah indicate an openness to the gentiles (3.2). Gentiles will flow to Jerusalem, and the new Temple will be 'a house of prayer for all the nations' (56:7). Paradoxically, however, the prophet draws a line within Israel between the chosen, God's servants, and the wicked. The servant (singular) is no longer identified with Israel; it is pluralised to refer to certain persons within Israel (Nickelsburg 1972:20; Hanson 1975:44). The notion of a remnant is, of course, much older, but the chapters of Isaiah will form a foundation for later Jews' sectarian notions, and their language has influenced texts in 1 Enoch, Jubilees, and the Testament of Moses, to name a few (Hartman 1974:32-33; Nickelsburg 1972:20-21, 33; 1992a:583-84).

4.2 Sectarianism in post-biblical texts
The terms 'sect' and 'sectarian' have been employed in many different ways in the literature (Miller 1979). In the present context I use them as shorthand to describe a group that considers itself to be the sole recipients of salvation. Such groups may, for example, see themselves, and only themselves, as entitled to the name 'Israel' or 'the chosen.'

4.2.1 The Books of Enoch
The Enochic texts are a parade example of the tendency at work in Third Isaiah. In both the Animal Vision (chs 85-90) and the Apocalypse of Weeks (93:1-10; 91:11-17), the post-exilic period is an evil time. According to the former text, the cult of the second Temple is polluted from its inception and remains so (Nickelsburg 1981a:93-94). The latter does not even mention the second Temple and refers only to a 'perverse generation.' Both texts, however, envision a religious awakening, when the blind sheep of the Israelite flock will begin to open their eyes, and wisdom will be given to the righteous chosen (90:6; 93:10; cf also 5:8; Nickelsburg 1985:74-78). Similarly, the Epistle of Enoch (92-105) criticises certain lying teachers who lead many astray (98:9-99:10) and promises that in the end time, the Enochic books, which are the deposit of heavenly wisdom (chaps. 81:1-82:3), will be given to the eschatological community of the righteous (104:12-13; Nickelsburg 1982:341-43). In tension with this sectarianism, which applies titles traditionally used of Israel to a group constituted around a sectarian, eschatological Torah, is a remarkable openness to 'all the sons of the whole earth,' who will be accepted as part of Israel, if they abandon their idols, acknowledge the Most High God, and accept the Enochic Torah (10:21; 90:37-38; 91:14; 100:6; 105).

4.2.2 Qumran Sectarianism
The Qumran Damascus Document presents a scenario similar to that in the
Enochic apocalypses (Nickelsburg 1986:342-45): a religious awakening and conversion in the post-exilic period, aided by the ministry of the Teacher of Righteousness (CD 1:3-12). For the members of the Qumran sect, the true Israel is coterminous with their group, which is defined as the righteous and the chosen. They have been constituted as the true community of the end-time by means of the revealed true interpretation of the Torah mediated through the Teacher and the revealed interpretation of the Prophets. Through its righteous deeds the community functions as temple and cult, working expiation in a polluted land (1QS 8:1-10).

Thus, 1 Enoch and Qumran attest the development of a sectarianism which finds salvation in an eschatological revelation. For Enoch, but not for the Qumranites, this inner-Israelite sectarianism is balanced by a vision in which the whole of humanity will be purified and restored to the unity intended by the Creator (1 En 90:37-38).

4.3 Early Christianity: Sectarianism and universalism

In my view early Christianity quickly develops a religious viewpoint that is very close to Enochic sectarianism. On the one hand, salvation is limited to those who accept the eschatological revelation (the Gospel); on the other hand, this salvation will encompass gentiles as well as the chosen of Israel. Here I can only schematise the pattern in some of its occurrences.

4.3.1 Paul and his opponents

For Paul—like the Qumran community, the writers of 1 Enoch, and John the Baptist before him—all humanity stood under God's indictment (cf Rm 3:20 with 1 En 81:5, Käsemann 1980:88). In the Gospel he saw the revelation that promised salvation for Jews and gentiles who accepted it. Like all of his predecessors, salvation was from the tradition of Israel. Different from the Qumranites, but like the Enochic authors, this salvation could be embraced by the gentiles. Different from all of these traditions, observance of the Torah was not necessary for the gentiles. In this respect, his ‘Judaising’ opponents were closer to the Enochic prototype.

Paul's view is especially remarkable, because, his mission to the gentiles notwithstanding, he envisioned that in the end Israel would come to faith in Christ and be saved (Rom 11:23-32; Munck 1956). As a Jew he anguished over the unbelief of the covenant people from whom the messiah had come. In a remarkable tour de force, he explained this unbelief as a clever divine device that facilitated the mission to the gentiles. However, his sense of God's justice would not let him conclude that Israel would be excluded from the covenant. It was a rich and remarkable viewpoint that would not be shared by his successors a few decades later (notably Matthew, Luke, and Justin Martyr, Dialogue with
4.3.2 Stories in Q
Here as in Paul salvation is limited to those who accept the eschatological proclamation. Different from Paul, Jesus is the proclaimer rather than the one who is proclaimed. However, there is room for gentiles, while children of the kingdom are cast out (Mt 8:11-12/Lk 13:28-30). The language is general and well on the way to a broad exclusion of Israel. This state of affairs appears also in stories that indicate a division within Israel itself, but in an inverted way. People who by any standard would be called righteous reject the proclamation, while sinners embrace it. This odd state of affairs is a paradigm for the situation with Jews and gentiles. The righteous correspond to the Jews as a whole, while the sinners correspond to the gentiles. Originally left out, they are now the insiders. The movement within Q toward a contrast between gentiles and Israel in general will be worked out systematically in Matthew and Luke.

4.3.3 Matthew
The pattern of wholesale Israelite rejection and gentile acceptance is explicated in detail in Matthew (Trilling 1964). The infancy narratives contrast the unbelieving ‘king of the Jews’ with the worshipping gentile magi. The mission of the twelve in Israel fails, and so the risen Lord sends them to ‘all the nations.’ The juxtaposition and editing of parables in 21:28-22:14 emphasise the contrast between Jewish rejection and the inclusion of the outsiders. In 27:24-25, ‘the people’ themselves reject Jesus in the presence of his gentile advocate. The third part of the Pauline pattern has been lost; a future Jewish turning to faith in the Messiah has dropped from sight.

4.3.4 Luke
The Third Gospel attests roughly the same pattern. Salvation is of Israel. At first pious Jews do believe (ch 2), but resistance develops, and it is sinners and Samaritans who are the heroes of the piece. As in Matthew, at the end Jesus commissions the disciples to preach to the gentiles. The resistance of the Jews continues in Acts and stands in contrast to the gentiles’ acceptance of the gospel.

4.3.5 Summary
These texts attest the development of a pattern already seen in sectarian Jewish literature. Salvation belongs to a defined group who are constituted by an eschatological revelation. In the case of the church, that revelation is the gospel about Jesus. This gospel, as we have seen earlier, is understood as the culmination of Israelite religious tradition. In the beginning, the gospel divides between Jews and Jews. This is so already in Paul’s time and is probably to be seen in
the gospels with their contrast between the disciples and the rest of Israel. However, the macroperspective of the Matthew and Luke is that Israel as a whole has been superseded by the gentile church.

4.4 Gentile-Jewish inversion: A Jewish sectarian heritage
This state of affairs attests a remarkable phenomenon that is precisely to the point of this paper. The church is born of an Israelite mother. The first Christians were Jews who believed that their proclamation attested the fulfillment of Israel’s religion. As the century moved to its conclusion, the church grew, mainly through its mission to the gentiles. As new generations arose, the church became almost exclusively a gentile community. Yet it maintained that it was the true Israel, with the true interpretation of Israel’s scripture and traditions. The Jewish people did not understand their own heritage, whether it pertained to messianic promises or the place of the Torah.

As astonishing as this state of affairs is, its origins lie, once again, in the Jewish tradition itself. On the religious, social landscape of antiquity, the early church resembles a sect not unlike that of Qumran, though with a viewpoint closer to that in 1 Enoch. Different from the broader, more inclusive strains that can be perceived in the Hebrew Bible and Judaism, it limits salvation to those who accept its exclusive claims about the uniqueness of Jesus. For all of the breadth inherent in its proclamation to Jews and gentiles, its terms for inclusion are remarkably narrow and exclusive. There is one proclamation which one must accept in order to belong to the community of the saved.

Apart from the specific content of its proclamation, the early church breaks from its Jewish sectarian prototypes in two significant respects. First, in the view of the church, Israelite religion becomes, for all intents and purposes the exclusive property of gentiles. Secondly, observance of the Torah, which is arguably the core of that Israelite religion, drops out of sight. A historian of religions will perceive here an astonishing transformation: christology replaces Torah observance; but the Church claims to be the true Israel.

4.5 A Scholar’s postscript
The history of Christian scholarship on Judaism is a commentary on this state of affairs. The handbooks have been structured according to Christian categories such as eschatology and messianism (Klein 1978), and discussions of Torah have been governed by the Pauline categories of law and gospel as these have been refracted through Reformation and post-Reformation polemics against medieval Catholicism (Sanders 1977:33-59; Nickelsburg 1978:163-64).

All of this tends to obscure the situation that I have attempted to elucidate in this paper. First century Judaism was a remarkably diverse phenomenon, which could breed Pharisees, Essenes, children of Enoch, and Christians of various
sorts—all of whom claimed to be faithful to their mother religion. The appearance of Jesus of Nazareth precipitated an identity crisis in Judaism whose repercussions are still with us. That crisis turned into a bitter family feud which had many lasting, tragic results. Historians of Christian origins might ponder how to penetrate the mists of almost twenty centuries and better understand the details of the crisis and the causes of the feud. In such understanding and empathy lies the promise and possibility of reconciliation and healing.

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