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REVIEW ARTICLE

Jewish Christianity Revisited

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Jewish ways of following Jesus. Redrawing the religious map of antiquity. By Edwin K. Broadhead. (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 266.) Pp. xix+451 incl. 37 figs. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010. €129. 978 3 16 150304 7; 0512 1604

The discussion of Jewish Christianity has entered a new phase stimulated in part by recent work in the area of ancient Jewish-Christian relations. Reflecting this shifting and more complex setting, in which almost all aspects of the subject have come under close scrutiny, books and articles about it have begun to proliferate.[1] Edwin K. Broadhead's contribution is another of these but comes at a propitious time when scholars engaged in the discussion perhaps need to take stock of where we have got to and where we might go.

Broadhead is of the view that those who were characterised by 'Jewish ways of following Jesus' are greatly underrepresented, misrepresented and undervalued in the ancient sources and in modern scholarship. It is the aim of his book to give weight to this conviction. Situating his work in recent discussion of Jewish-Christian relations, he is at pains to argue that

[1] See especially D. Boyarin, 'Rethinking Jewish Christianity: an argument for dismantling a dubious category (to which is appended a correction of my *Border lines*)', *Jewish Quarterly Review* ic (2004), 7–36; J. Carleton Paget, *Jews, Christians and Jewish Christians in antiquity*, Tübingen 2011; M. Jackson-McCabe (ed.), *Jewish Christianity reconsidered: rethinking ancient groups and texts*, Minneapolis 2007; A. Y. Reed, '"Jewish Christianity" after the "parting of the ways": approaches to historiography and self-definition in the Pseudo-Clementines', in A. Becker and A. Y. Reed (eds.), *The ways that never parted: Jews and Christians in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages*, Tübingen 2003, 189–232; O. Skarsaune and R. Hvalvik (eds), *Jewish believers in Jesus: a history*, i, Peabody 2007.

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one of the reasons why Jewish Christianity has tended to be overlooked or given an insufficient place in histories of Judaism and Christianity, lies in the paradigm that scholars have often used to characterise Jewish and Christian separation, namely the 'parting of the ways'. In this paradigm it is generally assumed that at a particular time (this can vary from the ministry of Jesus to the mid-second century) Christianity and Judaism emerged as separate entities, and that Jewish Christians quickly became a sort of hybridised and isolated minority, neither one thing nor another. But if we argue, as Broadhead does, following many others, that such a paradigm is bankrupt, and that the formation of 'Judaism' and 'Christianity' was a much slower, more complex process, then Jewish Christians need to be seen as one expression of that complex development whose marginalisation was in no way inevitable, and whose influence and importance was much greater than the extant sources would lead us to believe. This overarching conviction informs much of what Broadhead has to say.

The book has a clear structure. A discussion of the history of research, where some of the assumptions alluded to above are shown to have played their part, is followed by a chapter devoted to the most vexatious of problems, that of definition. Broadhead rejects the four traditional ways of defining Jewish Christianity (ethnic, doctrinal, oppositional and praxis-based) on the grounds that they are definitions imposed from outside and assume that there are a set of norms for being Jewish, that these norms are shared by a majority of Jews, 'and that modern scholarship has access to these standards of identification'. Rather he proposes what he holds to be a more flexible, polythetic definition. Jewish Christians, for Broadhead, are 'followers of Jesus who maintain a significant degree of Jewishness – they present themselves as faithful Jews standing in continuity, in both thought and deed, with God's covenant with Israel' (p. 57); and he continues, here glossing the word 'Jewishness': 'We can expect, as in Judaism in general, that the issue of how one maintains Jewishness while following Jesus continued to be complex, vague, and strongly debated.' The necessary vagueness of this definition, at least in what it asserts, is accompanied by comment on views that a Jewish Christian cannot hold, which include any idea that Israel is replaced or superseded by Christianity, all systems which replace the law, all allegorising or spiritualising interpretations of the law, and all Christological paradigms which call into 'question the basic integrity of monotheism' (p. 57).

The next section of the book is entitled 'Points of origin'. Jesus, not unpredictably, is placed firmly within a Jewish setting, and an attempt is made to argue for the Jewish Christian origin of the four major centres of early Christianity, Jerusalem, Rome, Alexandria and Antioch. A chapter then follows on Jewish Christian sources, including a discussion of the sayings tradition, sometimes called Q, and Matthew's Gospel, which,

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though oriented towards the Gentiles, is shown to contain many Jewish Christian traditions. In a new section we are introduced to the much-studied patristic sources for Jewish Christianity. Broadhead is at his best as he guides his reader through the many complexities which attend study of these convoluted and distorting texts. In the process he attempts to develop a set of hermeneutical rules, not dissimilar to those which operate in the study of the historical Jesus, to gain some sense of what, if anything, may lie at the historical core of these sources. His conclusions are generally modest (there is plausibility behind the idea of a distinct sect of Nazarenes [Broadhead draws attention to a late third-century inscription attributed to Shabor I of Persia from Aleppo in which both Christians and Nazarenes are referred to as being expelled from the city], some elements of the description of the Ebionites, and the presentation of some material from Jewish Christian gospels), but he is clear that 'the persistence and intensity of the patristic response' (to Jewish Christians) suggests the continued historical presence of Jewish Christian groups, and their implied threat. In this chapter Broadhead resists the temptation to posit a genetic relationship between different Jewish Christian sects, though he claims that in some geographic regions such relationships remain a possibility. This discussion is followed by a chapter on Jewish Christian sources, examining evidence for Jewish Christian Gospels and other material found especially in the *Pseudo-Clementines*. While Broadhead is clear that what can be discerned from these sources about Jewish Christianity, at least in detail, is limited, he argues that they give evidence, albeit oblique, for the ongoing interest of the so-called orthodox in Jewish Christianity, as well as a view of the entity as variegated, rich and enduring. Rabbinic sources are then discussed, and Broadhead, amongst a number of conclusions, argues, tentatively, for the view that Jewish Christians may have helped, indirectly, in the formation of Rabbinic Judaism. A new section is devoted to a lengthy and sober discussion of archaeological evidence for Jewish Christianity, in which the well-known Bagatti-Testa thesis is treated with the measured scepticism it probably deserves. Broadhead rounds off his book with a discussion of the 'parting of the ways' paradigm, showing its deleterious effect upon the assessment of Jewish Christianity:

> In most versions of this paradigm the separation between church and synagogue led to the triumph of Gentile Christianity and to the superseding of Judaism. Among those Judaism presumed to be trumped by the emerging orthodoxy of Gentile Christianity are the various expressions of Jewish Christianity – including that of the first communities of Jesus' followers. Critical analysis of the historical data suggests otherwise, and these insights require revisions to the religious map of antiquity (pp. 373–4).

The book ends with an extended conclusion summarising the contents of the work.

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This is a clear and thoughtful book. Broadhead's judgements are sober, and one is forever being made aware of the precarious nature of many of the conclusions arrived at and the difficulty of generalisation. In all of this Broadhead makes intelligent use of a range of primary and secondary literature. Particularly to be welcomed, as I have indicated, is the way in which he reveals how assessments of the place of Jewish Christianity are to some extent dependent upon the type of understanding one has of the development of ancient Jewish-Christian relations. His attempt to draw out the consequences of a different paradigm for the study of this subject, and the way in which his assessment of Jewish Christianity might contribute to that emerging paradigm, is bold and clearly articulated.

Inevitably, there are criticisms. On the highly contested question of the definition of the term, I wonder whether Broadhead has really provided us with a workable formula. Its flexibility, or what he terms its polythetic character, seems too vague to be applied. So what do we mean by 'a significant degree of Jewishness', especially when, as Broadhead is keen to remind us, the issue of Jewish identity is itself so complex? While Broadhead is right, I think, to question, for instance, the benefits of a praxis-based definition, he never comes clean about what might constitute the role of praxis in any definition, preferring simply to talk about an undefined 'wide-ranging set of practices' (p. 57). He goes on to note certain ideas which exclude an individual from being called a Jewish Christian without really stating how we can identify such ideas when we have no real information on these matters in the sources available to us. Did the Ebionites, for instance, have a supersessionist understanding of their religion? And did the Nazarenes entertain 'Christological paradigms that call into question the basic integrity of monotheism', whatever that might mean? And while Broadhead is right to criticise many scholars for engaging in a definition of the term that is etic rather than emic, in what sense is his definition emic, not least when one takes into consideration his own protestations about the considerable difficulty of arriving at an emically-based definition given the essentially etic (and hostile) character of the primary sources at our disposal? So, for instance, if we reject the view that so-called Jewish Christians are in some sense a hybrid, as Jerome, for instance, at one point suggests (*ep.* cxii.13), and we do this for good reasons, should we assume that they would have viewed themselves as Jewish or Christian? We cannot answer even this apparently simple question on the basis of the evidence available to us. After all, the loosening up of our understanding of the definition of Judaism in the ancient period, our strong sense of its diversity, makes it difficult to know at what point an ethnic Jew, however defined, who adopts positive views about Jesus, ceases to be Jewish and becomes Christian. One also wonders, at the end of book, what substantive difference Broadhead's more polythetic definition of the term has really made to the discussion and extent of the sources he deems

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Jewish Christian.[2] Very little, I would suggest. Most of the usual suspects are examined (and often with little attempt to show how they comport with Broadhead's definition), with very few additional sources called into play; and though the discussion of content is sympathetic, in the now traditional sense of accommodating as far as possible history's 'losers', little that is distinctive emerges from them. So Broadhead's engagement with the question of definition is helpful in what it critiques, but not in what it proposes, simply illustrating the hideous difficulty we encounter in the study of this constructed phenomenon.

Broadhead's major aim is to show how Jewish Christians have been misrepresented and underrepresented in the histories of ancient Christianity and Judaism. The idea of their underrepresentation is based heavily upon a critique of the 'partings' paradigm, which emerges out of a healthy scepticism of what one might term the 'official' account of Jewish-Christian relations as we find this indirectly conveyed in Christian *Adversus Judaeos* and rabbinic literature – life on the ground was different from the desired life contained within elite texts.[3] This is no doubt true, but the question is how different? Justin claims that his own liberal views on Jews who go on observing the law when they become Christians are the exception (*Dial.* 47); and we must wonder to what extent opinions in elite texts, which, admittedly not explicitly, serve to create the category 'Jewish Christian' (texts which, as Broadhead notes, date from the second century), both reflected and came to influence the unknowable ideas of the average Christian (and Jew).[4] Of course, Broadhead's case for 'underrepresentation' is not based solely upon this argument – in the context he makes much of the possibility that major centres of Christianity had Jewish Christian beginnings and Jewish Christian influences flowed from them; and of the implications of the attacks upon Ebionites, Nazarenes and others in the patristic literature. In relation to the latter Broadhead does not take as seriously as he might the somewhat derivative comments of many writers on

[2] For a discussion of the need for a polythetic definition of Jewish Christianity see Jackson-McCabe, *Jewish Christianity*, 33ff., here heavily dependent upon the work of J. Z. Smith.

[3] The seminal essay critiquing the 'partings' paradigm is J. Lieu, ' "The partings of the ways": theological construct or historical reality', in her *Neither Jew nor Greek: constructing early Christianity*, Edinburgh 2002, 11–30. A swathe of critical literature has followed this. See especially D. Boyarin, *Border lines: the partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Philadelphia 2004; Becker and Reed, *The ways that never parted*, noting especially here the introductory essay by the editors and the contribution of Boyarin; and A. Y. Reed, '"Jewish Christianity" as counter-history? The Apostolic past in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical history* and the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*', in G. Gardner and K. L. Osterloh (eds.), *Antiquity in antiquity: Jewish and Christian pasts in the Greco-Roman world*, Tübingen 2008, 173–216. Carleton Paget, *Jews*, 3–24, gives a summary of the shifting landscape of the debate with relevant bibliography.

[4] See Carleton Paget, *Jews*, 12–13.

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some of these sects, noted especially by Klijn and Reinink,[5] though he is clear that a writer like Epiphanius produces a picture of the Ebionites which is a distorting amalgam of a number of sources, motivated by a desire to interconnect various heresies.[6] Does this look like archaic puzzle work, or an argument with actual, and threatening, realities? Related to this point is Broadhead's failure to discuss the fact that so much of our supposedly more detailed information on Jewish Christians comes in late sources (from the fourth and fifth centuries). Daniel Boyarin explained this fact by positing an attempt to create a hybrid at a time when those in power were seeking to distinguish Jews from Christians as clearly as possible, and so reify the boundaries between the two.[7] Boyarin has been criticised by many for potentially disembodying Jewish Christians,[8] and there is validity in this view; but Broadhead does not discuss Boyarin's thesis.

Broadhead is keen throughout his book to repeat the view that if his thesis of the ongoing importance of Jewish Christianity is right then a new religious map of antiquity is required. But does he really discuss this matter in any depth, describe what the map might look like with a larger and more influential group of Jewish Christians? And surely what requires a redrawing of the said map, however grandiose that might sound, is not so much the idea of an enduring Jewish Christianity, however conceived, but rather the whole overarching alternative paradigm of the development of Jewish-Christian relations to which Broadhead subscribes, a gradual and complex forming of the ways (understood as Gentile orthodox Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism) and which enables him, at least in part, to breathe new life into the elusive body of Jewish Christians (rather than the other way round).

More could be said, some of it to do with omissions from his work. The book contains no discussion of Shlomo Pines's claims about the presence of information about Jewish Christians in medieval Arabic sources;[9] and I wonder whether Broadhead has sufficiently absorbed some of the work of O. Skarsaune as this is found in the first volume of *Jewish believers in Jesus*.[10] Others are of a niggling and specific kind, such as

[5] A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, *Patristic evidence for Jewish-Christian sects*, Leiden 1973.

[6] For a recent and succinct analysis of Epiphanius' description of the Ebionites see O. Skarsaune, 'The Ebionites', in Skarsaune and Hvalvik, *Jewish believers*, 450–61.

[7] Boyarin, *Border lines*, 207–10.

[8] See Reed, '"Jewish Christianity" as counter-history', 211.

[9] S. Pines, 'The Jewish Christians of the early Christian centuries according to a new source', in *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Science and Humanities*, ii, Jerusalem 1968, 237–309, repr. in G. Stroumsa (ed.), *The collected works of Shlomo Pines*, IV: *Studies in the history of religion*, Jerusalem 1996, 211–86.

[10] See n. 1 above. Skarsaune, who is the main contributor to the volume, is keen to broaden the number of early Christian authors one might term 'Jewish Christian', though this has a great deal to do with his own definition of the term.

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the issue of the Ebionite identity of Symmachus, apparently affirmed by Broadhead.[11] But when dealing with a subject whose tentacles reach into so many disputed areas, and whose very content is open to dispute, differences of opinion are unavoidable. In the end we should be grateful to Edwin Broadhead for having written a nuanced and thoughtful book which will be the starting point for future discussion of this most contested of subjects.

[11] On this see Skarsaune, 'Ebionites', 448, and relevant bibliography.

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The *Eusebius Essay Prize*, of £500, is offered annually for the best essay submitted on a subject connected with any aspect of early Christian history, broadly understood as including the first seven centuries AD/CE. Scholars in any relevant discipline (theology, classics, late antique studies, Middle Eastern Studies etc.), whether established in their field or graduate students, are encouraged to enter the competition. Submissions from younger scholars are particularly welcomed. The essay should not exceed 8,000 words, including footnotes, and for the coming year should be submitted by 30 September 2013. A judgement will be made at the end of November (the editors reserve the right not to award the prize if no essay of significant quality is submitted). The essay of the successful candidate will be published in the *Journal*, probably in the number appearing in July 2014. Other submissions entered into the competition may also be recommended for publication. All essays should be sent as two hard copies, prepared to journal style, to Mrs Anne Waites, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Robinson College, Cambridge CB3 9AN.

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