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**ESSENTIAL PAPERS ON JUDAISM
AND CHRISTIANITY IN CONFLICT**
From Late Antiquity to the Reformation

Edited by Jeremy Cohen



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makes the assumption of a late date highly improbable, as the strong links with Qumran theology would then be hard to explain.

159. For a list of Greek and Hebrew equivalents, see the first edition of Flusser's article—ED.

160. See the interesting observation of Fridolin Stier, "Die Urkunden aus den Höhlen", *Hochland* 48, (1956), pp. 425-6: "So beginnt der Sektenkanon, in feierlichen, von der Fracht theologischer Termini überladenen Perioden. Im Alten Testament ohne Vorbild, gemahnt diese Sprache an manche Partien paulinischer Episteln [Röm., Eph.], S. Zeitlin charakterisiert diese Sätze verächtlich als blosses 'Wortgehäuf'. Es wäre besser, stilpsychologisch und formgeschichtlich zu fragen, welche Geistesverfassung hier wie bei Paulus solche Sätze prägte."

161. This summary lists only notions which actually occur in the NT; therefore the facile formulation "The Sons of Darkness" must be avoided.

162. This would be a highly improbable assumption if we were dealing with an obscure and unknown little sect without means of influencing Israel or the world. But the numerous points of contact with what had been known hitherto about the Essenes are a sufficient answer to this objection. The evidence of the influence of the Qumran covenants on other men is another sign of their Essene identity: the Essenes were, of course, the well known and influential.

163. Only John the Baptist is known to us, who has been recognized by numerous scholars as being close to the Sect, but not quite identical with it. Other "fellow travellers" are the author of *Duo Viae* (see note 107 above) and the author of the *Testaments of the Patriarchs*; both have a watered-down version of the Sectarian doctrine of double predestination.

2

Breaking Away: Three New Testament Pictures of Christianity's Separation from the Jewish Communities

Wayne A. Meeks

We have now become accustomed to say that earliest Christianity was a sect of Judaism. This is useful language: it helps us avoid some kinds of anachronism, and it may assist Christians to approach the painful history of Jewish-Christian relations with appropriate humility. Moreover, there is ancient support for this terminology. It was Josephus who depicted the "Jewish philosophy" as made up of three or four "sects" (*hairesis*, *Ant.* 13.171; *Vit.* 10-12; *B.J.* 2.162; their members *hairesitai*, *B.J.* 22.119, 124; cf. *Ant.* 18.11 *philosophia*). And the book of Acts, which like Josephus speaks of Pharisees and Sadducees as *hairesis*, also has outsiders occasionally speak of Christians as a *hairesis* (Acts 24:5, 14; 28:22).

However, there are some problems with the phrase. After all, in writing as he did, Josephus had an apologetic purpose for which we have to make allowance. We should not fall into the trap of thinking that all, or even the majority, of Jews in Josephus' time belonged to one of the "sects" he named, any more than a majority of non-Jews were Stoics, Platonists, or Epicureans. Further, while it may be appropriate to translate his *hairesis* as "sect," what he and Acts called by this term is not necessarily the same as what a modern sociologist means by "sect."

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To make matters more difficult, the sociologists have not had an easy time agreeing on a definition of the latter category. Finally, the book of Acts, too, had apologetic aims, and the picture its author drew of early Christianity may be distorted, or, at best, may not represent the whole movement.

For all these reasons, a fresh look at the evidence may be timely. In order to take account of some of the diversity of viewpoint present in the early Christian literature while still keeping the inquiry within reasonable bounds, I propose to examine three sets of documents: the Fourth Gospel, the letters of Paul and his disciples, and the Gospel of Matthew. All these are most likely earlier than Acts, and, of the Christian writings of the first century, they are the ones most intensively concerned with the question of Christianity's relationship to Israel. Each of them gives some reason for affirming that Christianity indeed *had* been a sect of Judaism, but we shall find that each looks back at that connection from a point just *after* a decisive break has occurred. The following questions may help to focus our inquiry: (1) With what kind of Judaism was each of these writers or groups of writers concerned? (2) What was the relation between the author's Christian community and that variety of Judaism? (3) In what social context was this interaction taking place?

THE JOHANNINE GROUPS AND "THE JEWS"

Although the Fourth Gospel is certainly not the earliest of our sources, it is a convenient place to begin, because despite the occasional obscurity of its symbolic language, it portrays the Jewish-Christian issue starkly and with peculiar intensity. The rupture between the followers of Jesus and "the Jews" is at the center of attention; it has manifestly shaped the Johannine groups' language and their perception of the world. These features of the Johannine universe have become so widely recognized in recent scholarship that there is no need for me to rehearse the evidence.¹

Even in the synoptic gospels there are predictions that Jewish authorities, among others, will persecute Jesus' followers (for example, Mark 13:9-13 and parallels). The comparable prediction in John 16:2, however, is rather different. On the one hand, the expected hostility is intensified—"the hour is coming when everyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God." On the other, instead of general chas-

tisement by "councils" (*synedria*) and "synagogues," Jesus here tells the disciples that "they will make you *apōsynagōgoi*." This peculiar expression occurs also in 9:22, where we are told that "the Jews had already decreed that if anyone confessed him [sc. Jesus] as Messiah, he would become *apōsynagōgos*," and 12:42, where the "many" leaders [*archontes*] who believed in Jesus did not confess that belief "on account of the Pharisees, lest they become *apōsynagōgoi*." Those fearful leaders are exemplified in this gospel by Nicodemus (3:1-21; 7:48-52; 19:39). The positive countertype is the blind beggar healed by Jesus in chap. 9; he boldly refutes "the Jews" (not otherwise identified) who interrogate him about Jesus, whereupon they "put him out" (9:34).

Louis Martyn's ingenious "two-level reading" of John 9 and other conflict stories in this gospel has been widely accepted in its general outline if not in all its details.² There is a broad consensus today that many aspects of the confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish authorities are projections into the narrative from the experience of the Johannine community. The evangelist has not only made Jesus prophesy such experiences, he or she has also adapted the stories circulating among these Christian groups into vignettes that provide *exempla* of good and bad faith. Consequently, we can use the dialogues and stories in John to learn something about the separation sometime in the last quarter of the first century between these particular Christian groups and the Jewish communities. It would help if we knew exactly where this took place, but unfortunately we have no direct evidence. Further below I shall make a tentative suggestion about the Johannine locale.

The Fourth Gospel has a great deal to say—much but by no means all of it negative—about *hoi ioudaioi*, which modern translations ordinarily render as "the Jews." A fair amount has been written about this usage, for it is puzzling in several respects.³ There are places, like John 7:1, when *hoi ioudaioi* is primarily a geographical term, and there is a strong contrast, which apparently carries some symbolic weight, between "the Galileans" and "the Judeans." It will not do, however, to treat the term as always merely geographical.⁴ Phrases like "the festival of the *ioudaioi*," referring to festivals in which "Greeks" from the Diaspora and Galileans (including Jesus) participate, require us to think of the term as designating something like a religious community. Anachronism may trip us up, however; it is important to remember that our concept "a religion" can hardly be expressed in Greek or Latin, for the

religious pluralism that was characteristic of the Roman empire was structured in a quite different way from our kind of pluralism. Cults traveled principally by the migration of people,⁵ and they tended to be identified by their place of origin: "the Syrian goddess" and the like.⁶ It may help to remind us that neither of our categories "religion" and "race" had been invented in antiquity if we translate *ioudaioi* as "Judeans," keeping in mind that "Judeans" may refer either to people residing in Judea or to a diaspora city's community of resident aliens whose origin was in Judea, and who preserved their identity by means of characteristic religious customs. In either case, the term is one more likely to be used by an outsider looking in than by a member of the community speaking within the group.

These considerations do not yet solve the problem of people like the blind man in John 9 who is indubitably both a "Jew" and a resident of Judea, but who is, along with his parents, distinguished from the *ioudaioi*. Von Wahlde argues that in such passages "the Judeans" are to be understood as "the [Jewish] authorities," and that all of the hostile references to "the Judeans" in John *may* be so understood.⁷ With what would this usage correspond in the real world? It is hard to imagine a situation in which someone resident in Judea would say, "The Judeans put me out of the synagogue." In a diaspora city, say Ephesus or Antioch, it is somewhat more plausible, since we may think of a Jew speaking to non-Jews.

Von Wahlde's survey focuses narrowly on the use of the term "the Judeans," so that he does not help us much to understand the dialectic between those so designated in John and other groups, especially "the Galileans" and "the Samaritans." It is that dialectic, however, which determines the meaning of these terms in the structure of the Johannine narrative. Jouette Bassler has made that particularly clear in her analysis.⁸ Correcting earlier work (including my own) which observed these symbolic oppositions but concentrated one-sidedly on the places so represented, Bassler points out that it is groups more than places in which the fourth evangelist is interested. "Galileans [and on one occasion Samaritans] symbolize those who receive the Word, Judeans symbolize those who reject it."⁹ Bassler also points out the inconsistency in the reconstructions of Johannine community history by R. E. Brown and J. L. Martyn who "have exhaustively combed the Gospel (and letters) for allusions to groups that figured [negatively] in the

community's history," but who nonetheless reject suggestions that "the Galileans" or "Samaritans" in the narrative prefigure real groups in the church's experience. Any reconstruction of the setting and history of the Johannine Christians must offer some explanation for the special and positive place accorded both the Galileans and the Samaritans in this Gospel.

There are a few more peculiarities of John's story which we should keep in mind before we try to deduce its geographical and social setting. First, the boundaries of the story are the boundaries of Israel. While *ioudaioi* is frequently used in a hostile sense, *Israel* is always used positively in this Gospel, which can describe Jesus' mission as to "gather into one the children of God who are scattered" (11:52). Now because the context makes it clear that these children include more than the *ethnos* of the Judeans, the reader may jump to the conclusion that gentiles are included. Yet in fact there is hardly a hint of a specifically gentle mission in John. We do hear of "Greeks," but it is the "diaspora of the Greeks" (7:35) and "certain Greeks of the pilgrims who came to worship at the festival" (12:20). That is, it is Greek-speaking Jews who are meant.¹⁰

Second, the imagery and structure of the Johannine argument are, despite contrary appearances, profoundly Jewish. The author of the Gospel, the community traditions he employed, and presumably his audience, if they understood what was being said, were intimately familiar with scripture and with a variety of interpretive traditions. To be sure, the evangelist uses the Jewish traditions in a way that Jews would regard as perverse, but his transformation of them presupposes familiarity.¹¹

Preliminary answers to our first two questions emerge from the clues we have recalled so far. What kind of Judaism is represented by the hostile "Judeans" of the Fourth Gospel? We cannot identify these Judeans with any of the various "sects" of Israel that we hear about in ancient sources. The Pharisees, for example, do have a leading role in the opposition to Jesus, but they seem a conventional group here, without distinguishing characteristics—in contrast to the situation in Matthew. This counts against an assumption that the Johannine communities took shape primarily vis-à-vis the formative rabbinic movement at Yavneh. Also against that assumption is the fact that the controversies in John do not turn centrally on practice, but on beliefs. Christian beliefs

about Jesus seemed blasphemous to the Judeans of John's gospel. This emphasis on beliefs does not mean that the traditions used in John do not retain a memory of controversy about practice. For example, the story of Jesus healing a paralytic (5:1-8) has at some point been converted into a controversy story by adding the note, "It was the sabbath that day" (5:9c-16). The controversy, however, does not lead to a pronouncement about what is the proper way to observe the sabbath, as for example the stories of Matthew 12:1-14 do. Instead, it leads to the much more severe accusation that Jesus "made himself equal to God" (5:17) and to a discourse on Jesus' relationship to "the Father." This observation does not help us much to discover just which group of Jews may have been in mind, however, for probably most Jews would have agreed that it was blasphemy for any human being to be called "God" in the sense the Johannine Christians meant when speaking of Jesus (10:33).¹²

If there are no grounds for identifying the opposing "Judeans" of John with "normative Judaism" or its "formative" predecessors at Yavneh, nevertheless we must recognize that, in the eyes of the Johannine community, the "Judeans" and their *archontes* were people who exercised power. The locus of their power, moreover, was in the synagogues, and it was sufficient to expel persons from membership, even to threaten their lives.

The relationship of the Johannine Christians to "Judaism," then, was a relationship with organized Jewish communities centered in synagogues. By the time the Fourth Gospel was written, these Christians were no longer connected with those communities. By the time when the three Johannine letters were written, there was no sign of any direct interaction with the synagogues, nor even of any interest in the issue of separation.¹³ Yet when the Gospel was written, the rupture with the synagogue remained in the sect's memory as the all-important crisis which had shaped the groups' identity and helped to shape their Christology. One might say that "the world" of the Fourth Gospel, in more than one sense, is the world of Judaism. It would be more accurate, however, to say that it is a world in which groups identified as "Judeans," "Samaritans," and "Galileans" interact. If we assume, for reasons mentioned above, that the Gospel's world is not a purely artful creation but reflects in some measure the real context in which the Johannine groups took their distinctive shape, then it is worth asking whether we can think

of a place or at least a kind of place where the Johannine fictions would correspond with reality.

External evidence does not take us very far. By late in the second century, some traditions connected the Fourth Gospel's author with Ephesus, but most recent students of John have been skeptical of these traditions. Even if we take them quite seriously, they do not answer the question of where the formative break between the Johannine communities and the "Judean" synagogues took place. We are left with the internal evidence, that is, the peculiarities of the Johannine narrative. Is it more plausible to think of it as having been produced in an urban, diaspora environment, or somewhere in the Land of Israel? Attempts to argue for a Palestinian or other bilingual provenance on the basis of a putative Aramaic *Vorlage*, which were popular a generation ago, have not been successful.¹⁴ The language of the evangelist and of the tradition upon which he immediately depended was Greek, and there is no reason to believe that Greek had not been the language of the Johannine groups for some time. Hence the chances are strong that we should look to some *polis* for the origin of this work. Maryn takes this for granted when he speaks of the events mirrored in the Gospel's stories as taking place in "the Jewish Quarter of John's city."¹⁵

Would controversies among "Judeans," "Samaritans," and "Galileans" have an immediate meaning to residents of a polis like Ephesus or Antioch? The more we learn from archaeology of the immigrant communities' organization in the Graeco-Roman cities, the more plausible such scenes appear. Especially, the existence of a substantial Samaritan Diaspora side by side with the Jews seems more and more certain. Tombstones found in Thessalonica have shown that there was a Samaritan community in that city as late as the second century C. E., and we know that there was a large Jewish community there.¹⁶ Just recently, inscriptions from the island of Delos dated to the second century B. C. E. have revealed a community who called themselves "Israelites of Delos, who offer first fruits at sacred Har Garzim."¹⁷ Their community center, if Philippe Bruneau is right, was less than one hundred meters from the Judean synagogue.¹⁸ The question whether "in this mountain" or "in Jerusalem" was the place to honor God (John 4:20) was evidently a question that could be argued on Delos as well as in Palestine, and presumably in any city where there was an organized Jewish as well as a Samaritan community.¹⁹

The "Galileans," however, pose more of a problem in such a setting. To be sure, it is possible that "Galileans" had already become a nickname for Christians, as it would be for the emperor Julian three centuries later and perhaps already in Epictetus (*Diss.* 4.7.6). Yet the "Galileans" in John are not simply identified with those who become Jesus' disciples. They are rather those who are receptive to the signs and word of Jesus. It is possible that the evangelist hit upon the symbolic use of the term by an ingenious blending of such an outsiders' nickname with reflection on the geographical setting of Jesus' career, but his work in that case would seem extraordinarily artificial. It is more straightforward to assume that "Galileans" as well as "Judeans" and "Samaritans" were known entities in the formative milieu of the Johannine community. It is not impossible that an association of immigrants from Galilee might have existed and been called "the Galileans" in one or another Mediterranean city in the Roman age, but I am aware of no evidence for such. A setting somewhere in Palestine thus seems more plausible.

There is one further aspect of the Gospel's imagery that speaks in favor of a Palestinian setting. If the primary Johannine milieu had been a large, cosmopolitan city, then it is strange that we hear no whisper in the Fourth Gospel about a dominant, pagan society. There is only the Roman governor who plays his necessary role. For those who picture the "Jewish Quarter of [a Graeco-Roman] city" after the model of the mediaeval ghetto, that may not seem surprising, but in fact Jewish life in Alexandria, Antioch, Sardis, Miletus, and Aphrodisias was nothing like that.²⁰ Yet for the Johannine Christians, as late as when the Gospel was written, "the world" into which they were sent, but to which they belonged no more (John 17:14–18), was a world dominated by the "Judeans."

The symbolic importance of Galilee and Samaria and the presence of what seem to be old local traditions from these areas in John some years ago prompted me to posit a Galilean provenance for the Gospel.²¹ My argument was simplistic in some respects, yet there are still good reasons for considering whether the Johannine groups took shape in Galilee even though we shall probably never be certain. The recent explorations by Eric Meyers and others show that some areas of Lower Galilee in particular might well provide just the socio-cultural mix which my analysis of the symbolism in John requires: the towns were both urbanized and hellenized; the community could relate closely with Samaria, Judaea,

and "the Diaspora of the Greeks"; strong Jewish communities were prepared to exercise firm discipline; and there was, of course, a quite positive sense for "the Galileans."²²

An alternative localization is that proposed by Klaus Wengst.²³ His analysis, though more detailed than mine can be here, parallels mine in most respects. There are two weaknesses. First, he does not pay adequate attention to the symbolism of the interaction among "Galileans," "Samaritans," and "Judeans" in the Johannine narrative which I have stressed above. However it would only strengthen the conclusions he reaches. Second, and more troublesome, he assumes that a "uniform, pharisaically defined Judaism" became normative in Palestine instantly after 70 C.E., and that it was that kind of Judaism the Johannine Christians confronted (Wengst, 42). Jacob Neusner's research argues persuasively that it was not until the Bar Kochba crisis that the thoroughgoing reinstitutionalization of life in the land of Israel began,²⁴ and I have argued above that the Johannine controversies do not seem essentially "halakhic."²⁵ Further, Wengst assumes a village rather than an urban setting, and one sufficiently uniform that exclusion from the synagogues would mean effective exclusion from social and economic life. There is nothing in the Fourth Gospel, however, which speaks directly of economic pressures. The Johannine Christians evidently were able to sustain their independent and increasingly sectarian existence. A *polis*, though not a very cosmopolitan one, as explained above, seems more plausible than a circle of villages. Finally, Wengst has assumed too quickly, with many students of John, that the expulsion from synagogues is explained by the imposition of the *birkat ha-minim* (Wengst, 52–57). It is time to recognize that the *birkat ha-minim* has been a red herring in Johannine research. Not only do questions remain about its date and the earliest form of its wording—not to mention questions of where and when it would have been effective after it was promulgated²⁶—the more fundamental issue for interpreting John 16:2 and John 9's depiction of the healed blind man's expulsion is whether these scenes have anything to do with the way the *birkat ha-minim* would have worked in practice. John does not speak of people who do not go to synagogue services because they cannot conscientiously say the prayers. It speaks of being put out of the synagogue. All we have to assume is that the *archontes* of the Jewish community in John's location had simply made up their minds to get rid of these trouble-making followers of a false Messiah.