

ks. Andrzej P. Perzyński*
Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University
in Warsaw

Jewish-Christian Relations in the Patristic Literature

III Introduction

Christians and Jews live in the same world, under the same skies. For the last two millennia they have shared a history, at once with each other and alienated from one another. For a long time, the Jewish-Christian relationship was one of confrontation and theological warfare, with sad consequences for the Jewish people. The relationship was not dialogical but an interchange of monologues. In the beginning of the Christian era, Jews and Christians were brothers, separated but within one family, discussing points of religious commitment: the missionship of Jesus, his divine vocation, the concept of the Messiah, the Christ. The separation later on progressed in a number of stages.

The first one was a theological misunderstanding, that is, Paul's one-sided view of Israel, developed and restated by Church Fathers and medieval thinkers. Israel was denied a role in God's design; Christianity was the new Israel, the fulfillment of hope. This denial was based on a theology, the "teaching of contempt" (Jules Isaac, in a book of that title), which negated Israel's mission, a view which led to violence and the separation of the Jewish community from society at large. The teaching was a denial of the Jewish testimony, the right to be different in the witness to God. Another aspect of separation was political, the recognition and acceptance of Christianity by Constantine (fourth century), establishing Christian religious supremacy in the Western world. The fate of Jews was thereby stamped for many centuries, imposing upon them second class citizenship, alienating them from European history and condemning them to prejudice and persecution.

* <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2955-0909>

||| Church Fathers

The existence of Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims is documented throughout the literature of the early Church Fathers, but there is a considerable degree of confusion or ambiguity on the groups described¹. The early Church Fathers² often present a somewhat convoluted picture of groups of Jews who believed in Jesus and often to apply one term to identify various groups. The information found in the patristic literature complicates the task of the modern reader hoping to construct a reasonable picture of Jewish groups which embraced Jesus' messianic claims in the post Bar Cochba period³. Part of the complexity can be seen in the manner that the Church Fathers referred to Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims.

For example, Justin Martyr (100–163/67) appears to have known about several different groups made up of Jewish Jesus believers but does not assign a name which notes the supposed differences between them. Irenaeus of Lyons wrote about the Ebionites, but in contrast to other writers did not perceive distinctions in this group. Likewise, Tertullian (155–222) and Hippolytus of Rome (170–235) do not distinguish between one type of Jewish group which believed in Jesus and another. Like Irenæus and Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian is focused much more on the threat from heresy than on that of the Jews. While Marcion accuses the Church of being too Jewish, Tertullian affirms the basic continuity of the Old and New Testaments, and points out that Christ upheld the Sabbath and other Jewish practice, since he came “not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it.”

Origen (185–254) does record differentiation between Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims within the general term of Ebionites.

¹ K. Hruby, *Juden und Judentum bei den Kirchenvätern*, Zurich 1971.

² The early church fathers and apologists lived and wrote in the second and third centuries (Apostolic Fathers). Early Christianity covers the period from its origins (c. 30–36) until the First Council of Nicæa (325). This period is typically divided into the Apostolic Age (c. 30–100) and the Ante-Nicene Period (c. 100–325).

³ The revolt in Judea broke out in 132 C.E., probably in response to the emperor Hadrian's empirewide ban on circumcision, his attempt to establish a Greco-Roman city (*Aelia Capitolina*) where the Jewish holy city had stood, and his intention to build a temple to Jupiter Capitolinus on the site of the previous Jerusalem Temple. The leader of the revolt, bar Kosiba, called bar Kochba (“Son of the Star,” a messianic title, cf. Num 24:17) by his supporters, but bar Koziba (“Son of the Lie” = “Liar”) by his detractors, also failed. See J. Ciecieląg, *Powstanie Bar Kochby 132–135 po Chr.*, Zabrze 2008.

The most significant distinctions between groups of Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims are provided by Epiphanius of Salamis (315–403), who noted the existence of Ebionites, Nazarenes, and Elkasites⁴.

|| Justin Martyr and Jewish Followers of Jesus

The first description outside of Ignatius' general comments denigrating Judaism and Jewish observance among Christians at the end of the first century is found in the writings of Justin Martyr, a Church Father of the second century. Justin's record on the matter is known as the *Dialogue with Trypho*⁵. Justin describes an individual named Trypho as a Jewish refugee escaping the onslaught of Roman punitive actions against Jews following the failed Bar Cochba revolt (132–135). There has been some speculation on the actual existence of Trypho and whether Trypho is, in fact, nothing more than a straw man conceived by Justin to engage in philosophical debate on the messiahship of Jesus and the collective Jewish rejection of that idea. Whatever the case, it appears reasonably sure that Justin's dialogue does it present some valid knowledge of the existence of Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims, and of distinctions between them.

⁴ Josephus reports four main schools of Judaism: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots. The earliest followers of Jesus were known as Nazarenes, and perhaps later, Ebionites, and form an important part of the picture of Palestinian Jewish groups in late 2nd Temple times. The Ebionite/Nazarene movement was made up of mostly Jewish/Israelite followers of John the Baptizer and later Jesus, who were concentrated in Palestine and surrounding regions and led by "James the Just" (the oldest brother of Jesus), and flourished between the years 30–80 C.E. Ebionites were in theological conflict with other streams of early Christianity. As a result, our knowledge of them is fragmentary, originating primarily from the polemics of the early Church Fathers. So the term Nazarene is probably the best and broadest term for the movement, while Ebionite (Poor Ones) was used as well, along with a whole list of other terms: Saints, Children of Light, the Way, New Covenanters, et al. Later, when Christianity developed in the 3rd and 4th centuries and gradually lost its Jewish roots and heritage, largely severing its Palestinian connections, Roman Catholic Church historians began to refer to Ebionites and Nazarenes as two separate groups. For further reading, see H.-J. Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity*, Philadelphia 1969; A.F.J. Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition*, Leiden 1992.

⁵ B. Altaner, A. Stuiber, *Patrologia. Życie, pisma i nauka Ojców Kościoła*, tłum. P. Pachciarek, Warszawa 1990, pp. 130–131; Th. Stylianopoulos, *Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law*, Missoula, MT 1975.

“Trypho inquired again: “If a man, aware that this is so, after he has also plainly known that this is the Christ, and believed and obeyed Him, wishes to keep these also-shall he be saved?” “And I: In my opinion, Trypho, I say that such man will be saved, unless he strenuously does his very utmost to persuade others – I mean those Gentiles who have been circumcised by Christ from their error – to keep the commandments that he does, saying that they will not be saved unless they keep them. For this is what you yourself did at the beginning of our discussion, declaring that I shall not be saved unless I keep them.” He answered: “Why then do you say: “In my opinion, such a man shall be saved?” Are there any who say that such persons shall not be saved?” “There are, Trypho,” was my reply, “and persons who are bold enough not even to join with such in conversation or meals; with whom I myself do not agree. But if they, because of the weakness of their minds, desire to keep such of Moses as are now possible – which we perceived were appointed because of the hardness of the people’s heart – while they still hope on this Christ of ours, and also desire to keep these ordinances of the practice of righteousness and of piety which are everlasting and in accordance with nature, and choose to live with Christians and believers, as I said before, without persuading them either to receive circumcision like themselves, or keep Sabbath, or to observe other things of the same kind – I declare that we must fully receive such, and have communion with them in all respects, as being of one family and as brothers”.⁶

The indication that two types of Jews who supported Jesus’ messianic claims are reflected in the discussion is clear. The critical distinction here lies in how these two groups approach the question of Gentile participation in circles made up of Jewish followers of Jesus. This distinction seems historically valid in light of the different approaches on the matter evident in the book of Acts. That this matter would have continued to be a significant point among Jews who supported Jesus’ messianic claims is not surprising, given all the repercussions and consequences that either approach entailed. What is not clear, however, is that there were, in fact, two groups as such, or that the radically different approaches toward non-Jews would have caused a schism

⁶ Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 47.1–4. Quoted from J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius*, London 1957, pp. 68–69. Trypho described a Christianity characterized by the following practices: the keeping of the Sabbath, circumcision, observation of the new moons, and ritual purification after touching anything unclean or engaging in sexual intercourse. *Dialogue with Trypho* 46.2.

of such magnitude as to divide Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims on this point solely. There is also a possibility that another factor differentiated some Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims from non-Jews who followed Jesus or from other Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims. Justin writes:

'For there are some, my friends,' I said, 'of our race, who admit that he is Christ, while holding him to be a man of men; with whom I do not agree, nor would I, even though most of those who have [now] the same opinion as myself should say so'⁷.

According to Ray Pritz, this strongly worded statement on Justin's part is an indication that there were, in fact, Jewish Jesus followers that held a different Christology than his own. In contrast to his tolerant attitudes to Jews who believed in Jesus which did not engage in Judaizing Gentiles, Christology could not be compromised. R. Pritz concludes from this statement that Justin delineates between two kinds of Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims by Christological grounds.

One group, Pritz contends, maintains a doctrinal approach to Gentiles and low Christology comparable to a group referred to by other church fathers as Ebionites. Another group, according to Pritz, differs only from Justin's doctrinal positions because of their adherence to the Torah. Pritz's attempt to so readily characterize or couch the other group, in line with Justin's sense of orthodoxy is problematic, however. There is not a clear sense that the groups in question do in fact form two distinct parties in contention with each other. There is also an assumption that the four descriptive elements Justin records are necessary to be paired as follows: Judaizing Gentiles and low Christology; non-Judaizing of Gentiles and high Christology. Pritz argues for this view based on the descriptions of later Church Fathers who do categorize Ebionites by the first two pairs. The problem with this view, however, is that until Epiphanius in the fourth century CE, we do not see a clear distinction regarding Ebionites and Nazarenes. Critical to Pritz's monograph is the contention that the Nazarenes were a Jewish group which supported Jesus, as Pritz notes, who continued in the apostle's doctrine. Pritz's desire to formulate the Nazarenes in light of Christian orthodoxy may skew the evidence extractable from Justin.

⁷ R.A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, Jerusalem 1988, p. 20.

III Ireneus about Ebionites

The earliest reference to Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims as Ebionites is found in the writing of Irenaeus (140–202), Bishop of Lyons, in the second half of the second century CE. Irenaeus provides the following description of the Ebionites:

Those who are called the Ebionites agree that the world was made by God, but their opinions with respect to the Lord are similar to those of Cerinthus and Carpocrates. They use the Gospel according to Matthew only, and repudiate the Apostle Paul, maintaining that he was an apostate to the Law. As to the prophetic writings, they endeavor to expound them in a somewhat singular manner; they practice circumcision, persevere in those customs which are enjoined by the observance of the law, and are so Judaic in their style of life, that they even adore Jerusalem as if it were the house of God⁸.

Irenaeus' description of the Ebionites is important because he describes their attitude toward Paul and their perception of his theology. Anti-Pauline or less than enthusiastic attitudes toward Paul were likely existent during the 1-st century among Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims which did not necessarily reject open engagement with non-Jews. The anti-Pauline sentiment becomes an essential characteristic of Ebionites whenever they are represented again in later church literature. The natural assumption is that a rejection of Paul necessarily entailed a Judaizing approach to non-Jews. Few if any scholars have considered the possibility of an anti- or non-Pauline stance, yet a non-Judaizing approach to non-Jews.

III Origen and Jewish Followers of Jesus

Origen, the Christian philosopher of the third century, century, also mentioned Jews who believed in Jesus in one of his apologetical works against paganism. This work, titled *Contra Celsum*, is his response to pagan criticisms against Christianity authored by Celsum, who wrote in the mid-2nd century. Origen's answer served a point-by-point rebuttal of Celsum. A passage in *Contra Celsum* denotes an accusation by Celsum

⁸ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1: *The Apostolic fathers*, edited by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, Grand Rapids, MI 1979, pp. 351–352.

made against Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims for abandoning the Torah. To this Origen responds:

Notice, then, what he [Celsum] says to Jewish believers. He says that deluded by Jesus, they have left the law of their fathers, and have been quite ludicrously deceived, and have deserted to another name and another life. He failed to notice that Jewish believers in Jesus have not left the law of their fathers. For they live according to it and are named from the poverty of their interpretation of the law. The Jews call a poor man Ebion, and those Jews who have accepted Jesus as the Christ are called Ebionites. Moreover, Peter seems to have kept the customs of the Mosaic law for a long time, as he had not yet learnt from Jesus to ascend from the letter of the law to its spiritual interpretation. This we learn from the Acts of the Apostles, for on the day after the angel of God was seen by Cornelius, enjoining him to send to Joppa to Simon surnamed Peter... See here how Peter is shown still keeping the Jewish customs about clean and unclean things, and from what follows it is clear that he needed a vision so that he would share the doctrines of the faith with Cornelius, who was not an Israelite according to the flesh, and those with him, because he was still a Jew and was still living according to the traditions of the Jews, despising those outside of Judaism... It was appropriate that those sent to the circumcision should not abandon Jewish customs⁹.

In this passage, Origen provides little detail on the Ebionites, other than a reference to the origin of their name. They eventually authored their gospel, the Gospel of the Ebionites. It appears that the Ebionites received their name from the Hebrew word *Ebion*, meaning poor, by the early apostolic fathers, who regarded them as having severe poverty concerning an understanding of the Scripture. Whatever the case, the Ebionites appear to be characterized by their adherence to Mosaic law¹⁰.

The scholar Joan Taylor believes Celsum's comments regarding the abandonment of Jewish observances by Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims as definitive evidence of the decreasing number of Jews who followed Jesus' teachings. Origen's response appears to refute this perspective, though it certainly cannot be derived from the passage that Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims were numerically significant. Nevertheless, Origen knew of them and perhaps even had contact with

⁹ H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, Cambridge 1953, pp. 66–67.

¹⁰ Origen's response to Celsus' attack was clearly a repudiation of paganism rather than a confrontation with Judaism. Origen took up the cause of Jew and Christian together, attacking pagan accounts of human origins as well as their system of sacrifices, while asserting the legitimacy of that of the Jews. He defended Judaism against false accusations, affirmed the veracity of biblical accounts of Jewish origins, and asserted that the Jews, above all other nations, held a position of privilege before God.

them. More importantly, he points to them as part of his response to Celsum, a move that would not appear as likely if the number of Jews who believed in Jesus had fallen to insignificant levels. Origen provides further elaboration on the Ebionites and their views on the virgin birth.

Let it be admitted, moreover, that there are some who accept Jesus, and who boast on that account of being Christians, and yet would regulate their lives, like the Jewish multitude, in accordance with the Jewish law – and these are the twofold sect of the Ebionites, who either acknowledge with us that Jesus was born of a virgin, or deny this, and maintain that he was begotten like other human beings..."

The assumption that is typically made is that the support or denial over the virgin birth of Jesus is naturally connected to the proposition that Jesus was either a man or divine. Ray Pritz continues his contention that the first groups of Ebionites holding more conservative perspectives are Nazarenes:

This reference to the two kinds of Ebionites must remind us of the testimony of Justin, and it is not without significance that here again they are to be separated on the basis of Christology, and that one of the two sects holds the orthodox line in the disputed matter while the other denies anything divine in Jesus' origins. If the more orthodox Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims (who can only be faulted for keeping the Law) are Nazarenes, then we have an early misuse of the name Ebionite to include all Jewish Christian Law-keepers¹².

Ray Pritz is once again too quick to designate one group as wholly embracing the orthodox line. Regarding the virgin birth, it is important to remember that in Markan gospel there is no account of the birth of Jesus, or of any aspect of Jesus' life before the commencement of his ministry. The same is the case with the book of John, though the allusions to divine origin are quite clear. Arguing that the more orthodox Jews who believed in Jesus are Nazarenes appears to be part of Pritz' attempt to connect the descriptions of the Nazarenes given by Epiphanius to other groups, in the hope of connecting them back to the original Jerusalem church. A definite link is not necessarily unlikely but needs further support to buttress this view. There has been some suggestion that a split between one group of Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims and

¹¹ *Contra Celsum*, chapter 61.

¹² R.A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish...*

some groups later designated as Ebionites occurred during the rise of the bouthis and his conflict with Simon, son of Cleopas¹³.

The church historian Eusebius provides additional information on the Ebionites.

[...] They held him (Christ) to be a plain and ordinary man who had achieved righteousness merely by the progress of his character and had been born naturally from Mary and her husband. They insisted on the complete observance of the Law and did not think that they would be saved by faith in Christ alone and by a life in according with it. But there were others besides these who have the same name. They escaped the absurd folly of the first mentioned, and did not deny that the Lord was born of a Virgin and the Holy Spirit, and but nevertheless agreed with them in not confessing his pre-existence as God, being Logos and Wisdom...They were equally zealous to insist on the literal observance of the Law. They thought that the letters of the Apostle (Paul) ought to be wholly rejected and called him an apostate from the Law. They used only the Gospel called according to the Hebrews and made little account of the rest. Like the former, they used to observe the Sabbath and the rest of the Jewish ceremonial, but on Sundays celebrated rites like ours in commemoration of the Savior's resurrection¹⁴.

Eusebius' description is the most extensive before Epiphanius' lengthy record. The adherence to the Torah by these Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims is similar to the portrait given by other church fathers. What is perhaps most interesting is Eusebius' description of a purportedly much more complex array of Christology among Jews believed in Jesus. There were some Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims, according to Eusebius, which denied the virgin birth and viewed Jesus as an ordinary man. In contrast to them, other Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims affirmed the virgin birth but did not support the idea of Jesus' pre-existence as God. This statement is the most noteworthy of Eusebius' observations. Eusebius places all Jewish Christian groups differing on Christology under the realm of one name. The critical failure of Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims now appears to lie, in Eusebius' view, in a Christology that failed to lie in consonance with a growing monolithic Christology in his day. The specific reference to Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims failing to affirm Jesus as pre-existent God is, I believe, the first such statement made by a church father, and is likely the product of the increasing attention given to creedal formulation in Eusebius' day. As I mentioned

¹³ R. Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early*, Edinburgh 1990, p. 90.

¹⁴ K. Lake, *Eusebius – The Ecclesiastical History*, Cambridge 1926, pp. 261–263.

before, the descriptions of Christology held by Jews who supported Jesus can produce a rather complex matrix of differing affirmations and rejections. Affirmation of a virgin birth does not imply the status of pre-existent deity. Rejection of a virgin birth does not necessarily imply the negation of the former.

||| **The Ebionites and Nazarenes according to Epiphanius of Salamis**

The Ebionites continued to survive well into the fourth century, as the writings of Epiphanius bear witness. They were mentioned in conjunction with the several other groups, such as the Sampsenes, the Ossenes, and the Elkasites.

At first Ebion, as I said, stated that Christ is from the seed of a man, namely Joseph. But for some time now his followers, as though they had given their minds to an inconsistent and impossible line of thought, have been differing from each other in what they say about Christ. I think likely that from the time when the false prophet Elxai joined them, the one (I explained) was with those called Sampsenes, Ossenes, and Elcesæans, they like he have taught some fantasy about Christ and the Holy Spirit. For some of them say that Christ is Adam, the first to be made and given life by the breadth of God. Others of them say that he is from above, but created before everything, being a spirit and above the angels and Lord of all, and is called Christ, and has been allotted the world there. He comes here when he wants, as when he came in Adam, and when, putting on the body, he appeared to the patriarchs. Having come to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he came also in the final days, put on Adam's own body, appeared to them, was crucified, and ascended. But also when they wish, they say: not at all, but the spirit which is Christ came into him and put on him who is called Jesus... They too accept the Gospel of Matthew, and like the followers of Cerinthus and Merinthus, they also use it alone. They call it the Gospel according to the Hebrews, to tell the truth because Matthew alone in the New Testament expounded and declared the gospel in Hebrew and in Hebrew letters¹⁵.

Epiphanius of Salamis (315–403) gives most of the knowledge concerning Jews who supported Jesus' messianic claims bearing the name Nazarenes in the fourth century. These Jewish followers of Jesus took their group name from the village of Jesus' youth, Nazareth. However, the name *Nazorean* or *Noztrim* in Hebrew draws its meaning from a much

¹⁵ Ph.R. Amidon, *The Panarion of St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis*, Oxford 1990, p. 95.

broader source of identity and reasoning. The word used in rabbinic tradition for the act of taking an oath or for the act of guarding is the Hebrew word *linzor*, which serves as the Hebrew root for the word *Notzrim*. Baba Batra 91b states concerning the Rechabites:

These potters (*yotsrim*) are the descendants of Jonadab the Rechab, who keep (*nostrim*) the oath of their descendants (Jeremiah 35:6–8) to drink no wine, to lay out no vineyard or other plantation, not to till the soil, nor to build houses to dwell in them.

The connotation of being Guardians or Defenders of the Covenant of Torah fits in not only with the account in Acts 21 of those Zealous for the Torah but also with other groups to link a geographical location with a relative theological significance. The Samaritans similarly did this by calling themselves Shamerine instead of Shomronim. Shamerine implies those who were Keepers.

Epiphanius listed the Nazarenes as a heretical group in his work entitled *Panarion*, or *Against Heresies* and continued:

[...] These sectarians applied to themselves the name not of Christ or even the name of Jesus, but of Nazarenes. Now at that time all Christians alike were called Nazarenes, although for a short time they were also called Jessæans before the disciples began to be called Christians at Antioch...The aforementioned sectarians... are in every respect Jews and nothing else. Now they use not only the New Testament but also the Old Testament, just as the Jews do. For they do not reject the legislation, the prophets, and the books called by the Jews ‘the writings,’ as do those already mentioned. Nor do they hold anything different, but confess everything willingly according to the teaching of the Law, and as the Jews do apart, that is, from believing in Christ. For they confess the resurrection of the dead and that everything was produced by God; they acknowledge one God and his child Jesus Christ. They are highly trained in the Hebrew language. For they read in Hebrew all of the Law, the Prophets, and what are called “writings”, meaning the books in verse, as well as Kings, Chronicles, Esther, and all the rest, just as the Jews certainly do. In this alone do they differ from the Jews and the Christians: “From the Jews in the believing in Christ, and from the Christians in being bound still to the Law, to circumcision and the Sabbath and the rest. But concerning Christ, I cannot say if they too, drawn to the wickedness of the sect of Cerinthus and Merinthus mentioned earlier, regard him as a mere human being, or if they affirm what is true: that he was born of Mary through the Holy Spirit. The Nazarene sect exists in Beroea near Coele Syria, in the Decapolis near the region of Pella, and in Bashan in the place called Cocaba, which in Hebrew is called Chochabe. That is where the sect began, when all the disciples were living in Pella after they moved from Jerusalem since Christ told them to leave Jerusalem and withdraw because

it was about to be besieged, For this reason, they settled in Peraea and there, as I said, they lived... They are every respect enemies of the Jews. For not only do the children of the Jews hate them, but rising in the morning, at midday, and in the evening, three times a day saying, 'God curse the Nazarenes.' The reason is that they especially resent them because although they are of Jewish stock, they preach that Jesus is the Messiah, which is in opposition to those who are still and who do not accept Jesus. They have the complete Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew. For there is no doubt that it is still preserved by them in Hebrew writing, just as it was originally written"¹⁶. Epiphanius later continued by noting other communities of Nazarenes still existing during his time¹⁷.

It appears that a portion of Matthew accompanied the traditional cyclical readings of the Torah and the Prophets. According to Ray Pritz, Epiphanius recorded the acceptance of the New Testament as part of their Scriptures. However, Epiphanius only refers to the existence of Matthew, and it should not be assumed that this group had any other gospel or epistle in their possession. They were not accused of imposing Torah observance upon Gentile believers. It appears that the only reason that they were included in this work is because of their Torah observance.

||| The Nazarenes according to Jerome

Another witness of the fourth century was the famous Roman biblical commentator Jerome¹⁸. The writings of this Church Father provide some of the complete information of the Nazarenes and their gospel. The Nazarenes appeared several times throughout his writings, yet the real attitude of Jerome concerning the Nazarenes is quite difficult to ascertain. Around the year 375 CE near Beroea, Jerome studied Hebrew from a "believing brother from among the Hebrews."

Jerome often refers to the commentaries of the Nazarenes as an authoritative source to draw from when interpreting certain passages, yet he also repeated the statements of Ignatius and Justin Martyr concerning those who practiced Judaism and believed in Jesus. In the year 404, in a letter to St. Augustine, Jerome commented:

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 90, 92293.

¹⁷ R. Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus*, New York 1996, p. 348.

¹⁸ B. Altaner, A. Stuiber, *Patrologia. Życie...*, pp. 519–530.

What shall I say of the Ebionites who pretend to be Christians? Today there exists among the Jews in all the synagogues of the East a heresy which is called that of the Minaeans [Minim] and which is still condemned by the Pharisees: [its followers] are ordinarily called “Nazarenes”; they believe that Christ, the Son of God, was born of the Virgin Mary, and they hold him to be the one who suffered under Pontius Pilate and ascended to heaven, and in whom we also believe. But while they pretend to be both Jews and Christians, they are neither¹⁹.

Despite the generally negative tone of Jerome’s statement, a critical point of historical truth may be drawn from this passage. Jerome stated that the Nazarenes held Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary. The significant contention once again arose from their lifestyle as Jews. The interpretation of Isaiah that Jerome referred to in his commentary stands as one of the most important sources for revealing the temperament of individual Jews who supported Jesus’ messianic claims towards other Judaism. Though Jerome never referred to this work as a Targum per se, these commentaries bear significant traces of Targumic knowledge and methodology. Throughout these commentaries, there can be sensed a degree of animosity between the

Jews who supported Jesus’ messianic claims and the rest of the Jewish community, not altogether different from the tension found in passages from the Talmud concerning the Minim, i.e., Jewish sectarians.

||| The Nazarenes according to Augustine

Even though several Church Fathers had spoken disapprovingly of them, and that Epiphanius had included them among his list of heretical groups, Augustine’s authority may have led to their final rejection. Augustine loathed those Jews who felt it necessary to observe the Torah.

If one of the Nazarenes, or Symmachians, as they are sometimes called, were arguing with me from these words of Jesus that he came not to destroy the Law, I should find some difficulty in answering him...Those people, moreover, whom I allude to, practice circumcision, and keep Sabbath, and abstain from swine’s flesh and such like things according to the Law, but to fulfill it... Do you to like a Jew or a Nazarene, glory in the obscene distinction of being circumcised? Do you pride yourself in the observance of the Sabbath? Can you congratulate yourself on being innocent of swine’s flesh? Or can you boast of

¹⁹ *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Nazarenes”, JewishEncyclopedia.com. The unedited full-text of the 1906 *Jewish Encyclopedia*, p. 194.

having gratified the appetite of the Deity by the blood of sacrifices and the incense of Jewish offerings?²⁰

They continued in the instruction of the Torah, including the commandment of circumcision, the observance of Shabbat, and the abstention from unclean foods. Augustine wrote elsewhere accusing the Nazarenes of having opposed the Gospel to the Gentiles:

Some believers of the circumcision who did not understand this were displeased with the tolerant arrangement which the Holy Spirit effected through the apostles... These are the people of whom Faustus speaks under the name of Symmachians or Nazareans. Their number is now very small, but the sect still continues²¹.

||| **Anti-judaic sentiments and attitudes**

There are two foundational attitudes that have tended historically to fuel a certain level of anti-Jewish sentiment and negative attitude towards Judaism among the Christians from the 4th century onwards. The first of these was the position of theological supersessionism attested in some of the New Testament and patristic writings, especially those using the typological imagery of the movement from Old to New as being the passage from shadow to reality. The second was the spreading out of an early Christian interpretation (based upon a certain exegesis of Mt. 27, 25) that the entire nation of Israel was responsible for the death of Christ.

Anti-Judaism in Byzantium took both literary and popular forms. With some few exceptions, such as Clement of Alexandria (c.150–c.215), the major patristic writers evidence a considerable degree of anti-Jewish biases. Scholars have noted that the tension that existed between the communities, as evidenced in the production of this type of literature, may also witness to the degree of “interrelation” that must have been happening – and which alarmed the clerical leaders and literary elite, eliciting their literary products of apologia. Many treatises *Adversus Judæos* (Against the Jews) from the early church theologians continued this attitude and hardened it in later ages, especially when the familiarity

²⁰ *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Ph. Schaff, vol. 4: *St. Augustin*, Grand Rapids, MI 1978, p. 240.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 246.

between church and synagogue (that can be presumed as a feature of daily life in the cities of the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity) became more and more a thing of memory.

Among the writers of this genre can be noted Melito of Sardis (died c. 180), who in *Peri Pascha* (mid-2nd century) suggests that because the Jews did not recognize God in the person of Jesus, then God “Unchose” them. Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (second half of the 2nd century) also argued in turn that the common Jewish people were misled by their teachers who misinterpreted the prophetic texts of the Old Testament, and for this reason the Gentile Christians irreversibly “replaced” Israel. Origen in *Against Celsus* insisted on the fact that the Kingdom of God was given to Christians by virtue of being taken from the Jews, who nevertheless remained God’s chosen people until the time that they shall be returned to obedience to Christ, an event which will occur at the final *Apokatastasis*, humanity’s eschatological return to God.

After 380, when Christianity became the official religion of the Byzantine Empire, the image of the Jews among the church gradually deteriorated, and their political position deteriorated as well. In his *Eight Homilies Against the Jews* (386–7), John Chrysostom with fiery rhetoric accused the Jews of the greatest crimes. Since they killed the Lord, Chrysostom argued, the demons dwell in them and in their synagogues. Since they are guilty of deicide, he said, then God hates them, and their synagogues are “assemblies of animals.” Such rhetoric has, sadly, often been used to inflame anti-Semitism in Christian history; the more eirenic and respectful view of the Apostle Paul and other fathers of the church being forgotten in favor of this alone.

In this case, and perhaps other examples of violent anti-Jewish rhetoric (e.g., Ambrose of Milan (339–397), indignant in the case of the burning of the synagogue of Callinicum, where the local bishop was commanded by the emperor to make restitution to the local Jewish community, and Ambrose rebuked him for supporting the “enemies of Christ”; or Cyril of Alexandria (c. 376–444), who reacted to the burning of the Alexander church by rioting Jewish factions in his city), local political tensions between two lively communities can perhaps explain the abrasiveness of the language (Greco-Roman rhetoric always needing to be contextualized). But it left a record that tended to become absolutized. Byzantine state legislation, while offering limited protection to Jewish members of the empire, also put a heavy burden on them, so much so that many scholars left for the more welcoming environment of Babylon.

In 483 Theodosius II promulgated the revised code of laws that reflected many Jewish-orientated prescripts: Jews were forbidden to retaliate against converts from their number to Christianity; Jews were no longer allowed to own Christian slaves; and they were not allowed to hold posts in the imperial administration. Justinian went further: in 553 Novella 146 banned the publication of rabbinic interpretations and demanded the use of languages other than Hebrew in the imperial synagogues; Jews were strongly “urged” to go beyond the historical (plain literal) meaning of the biblical text, and the Mishnah was prohibited from being read in the synagogues because it was not part of the sacred books.

||| Conclusion

Jewish-Christian relations as a subject of study could be described as a child of the twentieth century. As a scholarly discipline and a mode of dialogue between religious communities it is a discourse that is still in its infancy compared to the traditions of the academy and the classical subjects that have been studied both in universities and in religious circles. And it is in sharp contrast to the long history of relations between Jews and Christians in earlier centuries, marked often by social exclusion, hostility, or a scholastic dialogue that often had little to do with the equality or intellectual honesty expected today. Given this radical change in the relations between the two faith communities, the process both of learning the language of dialogue and of understanding how to express the encounter is slow and sometimes thwart. The events of the past century have brought questions to bear on the nature of God, the very role of religion in society, and the responsibility of one community to another not only in what it does but also in what it says and teaches.

Relacje żydowsko-chrześcijańskie w literaturze patrystycznej

Artykuł składa się z następujących części: Wprowadzenie; Ojcowie Kościoła; Justyn Męczennik i żydowscy naśladowcy Jezusa; Ireneusz o ebionitach; Orygenes i żydowscy naśladowcy Jezusa; Ebionici i nazarejczycy według Epifaniasza z Salamin; Nazarejczycy według Hieronima; Nazarejczycy według Augustyna; Antyjudajstyczne nastroje i postawy; Konkluzja. Poddano analizie pisma wybranych Ojców Kościoła, którzy wypowiadali się na temat relacji żydów i chrześcijan. Wielu Ojców Kościoła odnosi się do ebionitów („ubogich”), tj. wczesnego nurtu judeochrześcijańskiego. Ich nazwa nawiązuje do słów

Kazania na górze: „Błogosławieni ubodzy w duchu, bo do nich należy Królestwo Niebios” (Mt 5,3). Najstarsze odniesienie do grupy, która mogła być ebionitami, znajduje się w *Dialogu z Żydem Tryfonem* Justyna Męczennika. Innym podobnym nurtem wyraźnie obecnym w literaturze patrystycznej są nazarejczycy. Jak wiadomo, jest to nazwa nadana pierwszym chrześcijanom w *Dziejach Apostolskich*. Później (pisze o nich m.in. Hieronim i Augustyn) to także jedna z grup chrześcijańskich wywodzących się z Jerozolimy, zachowująca Prawo Mojżeszowe i żydowskie tradycje obrzędowe, jak na przykład obżezanie. Wielu Ojców Kościoła systematycznie zajmowało się judaizmem, odrzucając go. Istniała cała gałąź literatury patrystycznej składająca się z antyżydowskich pism „*Adversus Iudeos*”. Jest faktem, że po pojawieniu się Chrystusa judaizm nadal istniał, był bowiem dla Ojców wyzwaniem, w odpowiedzi na które uzasadniali oni chrześcijańskie pojmowanie wiary. Po tragicznej i wielowiekowej historii antyjudaizmu i rozchodzenia się dróg żydów i chrześcijan, w dzisiejszym Kościele żyjemy w epoce dialogu, którego ikoną jest soborowa deklaracja „*Nostra Aetate*”.