

**Jens Schröter, Benjamin A. Edsall,
and Joseph Verheyden, Eds.**
*Jews and Christians – Parting Ways
in the First Two Centuries CE?*
Reflections on the Gains and Losses of a Model

(Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter, 2021, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die
neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 253), hardcover, 409 pp.

JOEL MARCUS

jmarcus@div.duke.edu

Duke University, Durham, NC 27708

This edited volume goes back to a 2019 conference at the Faculty of Theology of Humboldt University in Berlin which aimed to critically assess the thesis that Judaism and Christianity underwent a decisive “parting of the ways” in the first two centuries CE. After an introduction by the editors (1-10), the contributions are as follows: Christoph Marksches, “From ‘Wide and Narrow Way’ to ‘The Ways that Never Parted’? Road Metaphors in Models of Jewish-Christian Relations in Antiquity” (11-32); Anders Runesson, “What Never Belonged Together Cannot Part: Rethinking the So-Called Parting of the Ways between Judaism and Christianity” (33-56); Jan N. Bremmer, “*Ioudaismos, Christianismos* and the Parting of the Ways” (57-87); Jens Schröter, “Was Paul a Jew Within Judaism? The Apostle to the Gentiles and His Communities in their Historical Context” (89-119); Matthias Konradt, “Matthew within or outside Judaism? From the ‘Parting of the Ways’ Model to a Multifaceted Approach” (121-50); Kylie Crabbe, “Character and Conflict: Who Parts Company in Acts?” (151-83); Jörg Frey, “‘John within Judaism?’ Textual, Historical, and Hermeneutical Considerations” (185-215); James Carleton Paget, “The Epistle of Barnabas, Jews and Christians” (217-47); Benjamin A. Edsall, “Justin Martyr without the ‘Parting’ or the ‘Ways’” (249-72); Paul R. Trebilco, “Beyond ‘The Parting of the Ways’ between Jews and Christians in Asia Minor to a Model of Variegated Interaction” (273-306); Joseph Verheyden, “Living Apart Together: Jews and Christians in Second-Century Rome – Re-visiting Some of the Actors Involved” (307-45); and Tobias Nicklas, “Jews and Christians? Sketches from Second Century Alexandria” (347-79). Each essay begins with an abstract in German and ends with a bibliography, and the book

concludes with a list of contributors and indices of ancient sources, modern authors, and subjects.

As several of the contributors note, the phrase “the parting of the ways” was first applied to the separation of early Christianity from its Jewish subsoil by the philo-Judaic English cleric James Parkes in a 1934 work that bore the significant subtitle, *A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism*. The term was thus conceived as a weapon against anti-Judaism, deliberately opposing the view of Adolf von Harnack that the church quickly (by the end of the first century), naturally, and rightfully separated from its Jewish parent (see 16-17, 217-18). Several of the contributors, however, believe that the term has unfortunate connotations, implying that Judaism and Christianity are two separate and unitary entities that inevitably and irrevocably parted, leaving no room for further meaningful interaction (see, for example, pp. 28, 94-95, 114, 250 n. 7, 252-53). Whether those are necessary implications of the term is questioned by other contributors (for example, Trebilco [275]), who note that some recent skepticism about it stems from a postmodern distrust of essentializing definitions and master narratives (222) and that it is commonly used in other areas of religious studies without pejorative implications (309 n. 3).

Nor is this the only topic upon which the contributors to the volume disagree. Edsall, for example, argues that Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* was not trying to create a distinction between Christianity and Judaism, as Daniel Boyarin has alleged; rather, Edsall points out, Justin at one point acknowledges that some people known to him are *both* Christians *and* Torah-observant Jews (*Dialogue* 46:1-47:1). Rather than arguing that Christians were a new people, distinct from Israel, Justin, according to Edsall, was trying to show that there had always, from Sinai on, been a division *within* Israel, and that the Christians were just continuing that division into the present. For Edsall, then, Justin's treatment of Judaism and Christianity emphasizes continuity rather than discontinuity. Verheyden, however, expresses skepticism about Edsall's reading, pointing out that Justin's claim that Christians are “Israel” (*Dialogue* 123:6-7) “immediately raises the ire of Trypho” (341 n. 97). The editors' apparent tolerance for such a diversity of opinions on such a complicated and disputed subject is commendable, and they have generally done a good job of cross-referencing the articles to each other. Less pleasing is the fact that their volume contains a number of typos and instances of awkward “translation English.”

One can learn a lot from each of the essays in this collection, but in the reviewer's opinion two in particular stand out. Carleton Paget's analysis of the *Epistle of Barnabas*, one of the most anti-Jewish documents in the history of the church, begins with a masterful introduction that brings much-needed clarity to the “parting of the ways” discussion. He then proceeds to apply these considerations to the case of Barnabas, emphasizing both the author's attempt to devalue Jewish interpretations of the Law and thus to separate Christianity from Judaism, and his acknowledgement that other Christians do not agree with him but claim that the covenant is “both theirs and ours” (4:6). Trebilco's essay is a comprehensive survey of the archaeological and literary evidence for Jewish-Christian interactions in Asia Minor in the first four Christian centuries. Although Carleton Paget tends to be

more on the “parting of the ways” side of the spectrum and Trebilco on the “ways that never parted” side (to allude to the title of an influential book edited by Adam Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, *The Ways that Never Parted* [2003], which many of the authors of this collection cite approvingly), both are good enough scholars to not only acknowledge but also give due weight to the evidence for the other position. Thus, even in an article whose title begins with “Beyond ‘The Parting of the Ways,’” Trebilco devotes six dense and heavily footnoted pages to negative interactions between Jews and Christians in Asia Minor. Carleton Paget, on the other hand, while decrying the tendency of “ways that never parted” partisans to assert without evidence that the situation “on the ground” was the opposite of the division suggested by literary sources, nevertheless acknowledges that the rhetoric of Barnabas itself suggests that the author was “seeking to change a blurred vision—the covenant is both theirs and ours—which is perhaps the norm” (244).

I conclude this appreciative review by noting two omissions: First, there are essays on Asia Minor, Rome, and Alexandria, but none on Syria. Indeed, the eastern part of the Roman empire gets short shrift in the volume, except for occasional references to Antioch on the Orontes. Yet my own research in recent years has suggested that it was in Syria as much as anywhere that Jews, Christians, and Jewish Christians rubbed up against each other in the early Christian centuries, as illustrated for example by the Pseudo-Clementine literature, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, and the Didascalia Apostolorum. Second, although both the “parting of the ways” and the “ways that never parted” approaches emerged at least in part out of concerns about anti-Judaism, there is very little conscious or consistent reflection in this volume on hermeneutical questions, except for acknowledgements that anti-Judaism is bad (the essays by Frey and Verheyden are partial exceptions). But what do we *do* with the anti-Jewish material in our religious tradition, especially when it is part of our sacred scripture (all but one of the contributors to this volume were, at the time of writing, either members of faculties of theology or associated with a research institute at Australian Catholic University)? Here this learned volume leaves us mostly in the dark.