

Isaac W. Oliver

Torah Praxis after 70 CE. Reading Matthew and Luke-Acts as Jewish Texts (WUNT, 11/355; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), XVI, 524 p. ISBN 978-3-16-152723-4.

The paradigm shift¹ in the field of the history of Jewish-Christian relations in the late Antiquity – from “The Parting(s) of the Ways”² to “The Ways that Never Parted”³ – already led scholarship even more far than those who produced this shift have imagined. Even Daniel Boyarin, who already in the 1990s considered almost the totality of the New Testament as Jewish texts, has made an exception for Luke-Acts, considering them Gentile Christian. Isaac Oliver in the present book shows that this is not the case: even Luke-Acts are Jewish. He wrote in a footnote: “I am delighted that after graciously agreeing to examine my research Boyarin no longer views Luke-Acts as Gentile Christian texts” (p. 15, fn. 46). Boyarin, too, in 2012 said in an interview: “I think that, in the New Testament, there is none non-Jewish text. Probably only the Acts – but there are scholars who claim that even the Acts are a Jewish text, and their arguments seems to me convincing.”⁴ It is clear that he meant Oliver – not the present book yet but the PhD thesis (2012) which it reproduces almost verbatim.

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- 1 In the very exact meaning of the term, which is introduced in 1962 by Thomas Kuhn.
 - 2 James D. G. Dunn's 1991 formulation in the title of his monograph *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, London, 1991; 2nd ed. 2006. According to this historiographical scheme, the definitive rupture between Judaism and Christianity took place during the second century and especially Bar Kokhba's revolt in ca 132–135. Before this, however, the Jesus worship and some other features of the Jesus movement were, supposedly, intolerable within the Second Temple Judaism. In the preface to the second edition, the author's attitude is softened.
 - 3 Mostly articulated by Daniel Boyarin since the late 1990s; he became as well one of the authors of the famous volume *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. A. H. Becker, A. Yoshiko Reed (Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum, 95), Tübingen, 2003. According to this approach, Christianity and rabbinic Judaism were born almost as the twins within the multifaceted Second Temple Judaism and were never completely separated until the fourth century. As Oliver quotes his teacher Gabriele Boccaccini, “[f]or a historian of religion, Rabbinism and Christianity are simply different Judaisms” (p. 3, fn. 7; from Boccaccini's *Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought, 300 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.*, Minneapolis, 1991, p. 18).
 - 4 English retroversion is mine; in Russian: “Я считаю, что в Новом Завете нет ни одного нееврейского текста. Разве что Деяния апостолов, но есть исследователи, которые утверждают, что и Деяния – еврейский текст, и их аргументы кажутся мне убедительными.” С. Парижский, Л. Жукова, “Даниэль Боярин: ‘Мы не выживем без революции’” [S. Parizhskij, L. Zhukova, “Daniel Boyarin: ‘We Will Not Survive without the Revolution’”], *Booknik*, 20 June 2012 <<http://booknik.ru/today/faces/boyarin>>.

Oliver formulates the aim of his book as “... to demonstrate that the authors of Matthew and Luke-Acts affirm the observance of the Mosaic Torah *in its totality*, a maximalist measurement and assessment of their Jewishness according to criterion of Torah praxis” (p. 15). Accordingly, he focuses his study on three major topics especially relevant to assessment of “Jewishness” of anything: Sabbath, kashrut, and circumcision. The three main parts of his book are “I. Sabbath Keeping in Matthew and Luke-Acts” (pp. 45–237), “II. Food Laws in Matthew and Luke-Acts” (pp. 239–398), and “III. Circumcision in Matthew and Luke-Acts” (pp. 399–451).

Oliver provides a very detailed analysis of each relevant episode and verse, each time with a detailed review of the modern scholarship (whereas, indeed, it is impossible to take into account everything written on any particular verse). Perhaps Oliver tends to go too deep into the details of minor textological hypotheses put forward in connexion with some particular decisions of the Synoptic Problem, because the value of his observations exceeds the value of their possible interpretations within the framework of a given textological hypothesis. If/when some of these hypotheses are gone, Oliver’s observations remain.

Oliver considers the differences between Matthew and Luke-Acts (and occasionally other New Testament authors) as belonging to different Jewish Second Temple period religious schools rather than “inventions” of (some part of) Christians. I consider this approach to be the only realistic one. Moreover, it seems to me that it is the unique one providing us with a chance to define the hypothetical object sometimes called “the Jewish matrix of Christianity.” It became clear now that, before the composition of the canonical Gospels, there were Jewish communities of believers in Jesus, which were different in many respects. Therefore, this “Jewish matrix” must be some “superposition” of different Jewish communities acquiring uneven weight in the process of “coagulation” of the Christian Church.

Two notes “in the margins,” both concerning the keeping of Sabbath and relevant to our understanding of the reality what Matthew and Luke have had to deal with.

Oliver concludes that Luke is more “irenic” towards the Jewish sensibilities in this field, thus avoiding “portraying Paul and other Jesus followers as performing the questionable acts (e.g., healings) on the Sabbath,” whereas “... Matthew’s reports of Sabbath controversies might reflect a particular stand, voiced in more aggressive and polemical terms against non-Matthean Jews” (pp. 235, 237). Such Matthew’s attitude seems to me as a middle way between Luke and John. I have had an occasion to compare the parallel Sabbath episodes in John and Matthew.⁵ I concluded that the very “sign”-structure of the

5 B. Lourié, “The Processions of My God’: The Liturgical Structure behind the ‘Signs’ in the

Gospel of John was initially based on Sabbath episodes, and each “sign” included some walking followed with some spectacular miracle. Partial convergence with the Matthean parallels resulted from later editorship. John’s treatment of Sabbath limitations, however, was enrooted in the calendrical tradition of the 364-day calendar where 1 Nisan falls on Sunday, and, therefore, the night of the Exodus (from 14 to 15 Nisan) falls on Sabbath (the night from 14 to 15 belongs to 14 Nisan); Sabbath, therefore, *requires* some “exodus”/walking, especially in the night. This calendrical tradition is presented in several Jewish Second Temple works (2 *Enoch*, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 3 *Maccabees*) and is the only one allowing performing literally Leviticus’s commandments on the counting the weeks for the Shavuot. Therefore, it must be considered as one of the authoritative ones, on the level of that of the *Jubilees* on the opposite pole.

My second marginal note is related to the same topic, namely, the possibility of discerning between the Sabbath worship and the Sunday worship in the earliest Christian epoch. Oliver (s. esp. pp. 72–78 and his analysis of the Sunday worship in Acts 20:7–12, pp. 222–232) follows the mainstream approach that considered the night between Saturday and Sunday – the original place of the main Christian weekly celebration – as belonging to Sunday. He mentions Harold Riesenfeld’s 1959 paper (p. 223, fn. 87)⁶ but only in connexion of interpretation of Acts 20:7–12 as taking place on Saturday evening, when, according to his own interpretation, “[w]ith the arrival of sunset, Sabbath traveling restrictions would no longer impede the Lukan Paul, a Torah observant Jew, from parting to his next destination” (pp. 224–225). However, Oliver does not mention Riesenfeld’s idea that the Christian Sunday worship was not a “substitution” of the previous Jewish Sabbath cult but a mere continuation of the Sabbath celebration. I have elaborated on this Riesenfeld’s idea taking into account additional sources proving, among others, that, even in the middle of the third century, there were Christians who continued to consider Christian Sunday worship as belonging to Sabbath (assuming beginning of Sabbath on Saturday morning).⁷ Indeed, in Acts 20:7, this is not the perspective of Luke who interprets the whole situation as taking place on the next day after Sabbath, as Oliver rightly points out. However, the historical situation could have been more complicated than its interpretation by Luke. The two manners of counting the beginning

Gospel of John,” in: *A View from a Bridge: In Honour of Annie Jaubert (1912–1980)*. II, ed. G. Dorival, H. Jacobus, B. Lourié (forthcoming).

6 Published in 1959 simultaneously in original Swedish and French (Oliver quotes the French tr.); there is also an English tr.: “The Sabbath and the Lord’s Day in Judaism, the Preaching of Jesus and Early Christianity,” in: H. Riesenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition: Essays*, Oxford, 1970, pp. 111–137.

7 B. Lourié, “Calendrical Implications in the *Epistle to the Hebrews*,” *Revue biblique*, 115 (2008), pp. 245–265, here 249–252.

of the day (from the morning or from the evening before the preceding nights) are both used in the Second Temple Judaism and, very probably, in the same communities (as now both of them are preserved in the actual Byzantine rite), which would have led to confusions but not always and not necessarily. To my opinion, the origin of the Sunday worship is to be considered as a variation of the Jewish cult of Sabbath within a Jewish milieu and not a non-Jewish alternative to Sabbath.

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