

Reading New Testament Texts within Judaism

Edited by
MARIDA NICOLACI
CARMELO RASPA
FRANCESCO BONANNO

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament*
559

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Networks of Jesus-Followers
from among Jews and Gentiles

edited by

Marida Nicolaci, Carmelo Raspa,
and Francesco Bonanno

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This volume brings together the proceedings of a conference held at the Theological Faculty of Sicily in Palermo in March 2024, within the framework of a broader research project launched in 2022/2023 and co-funded by the Theological Faculty and the National Service for Higher Studies in Theology and Religious Sciences of the Italian Episcopal Conference. That project has since reached a provisional conclusion with a conference on *The Gospel according to Mark and Its Synoptic Receptions within Judaism* (March 13–14, 2026), which sought to apply the interpretive framework developed in 2024 to the study of specific texts, such as the Synoptic Gospels.

When the conference was held in 2024, the debate on the *within Judaism* perspective was at a particularly vibrant and rapidly expanding stage. Between the 2024 conference and the publication of these proceedings, moreover, scholarly discussion has continued to develop – indeed, in some respects quite considerably – through numerous publications, virtual meetings, and various international seminars and research units. This volume therefore reflects the state of the discussion at a particular moment, registering its achievements, its tensions, and also the questions that remain open. It will be interesting to see how the discussion will continue and what shape it will take in the years ahead. Whatever direction it may follow, the debate on the *within Judaism* perspective has helped not only to redress interpretive tendencies that had long stood in need of correction, but also to bring more fully into view what is at stake for both its proponents and its critics. In this sense, it has opened up a much-needed space for discussion, fostering a conversation that is historically more nuanced and methodologically and hermeneutically more self-aware.

We now entrust this volume to the scholarly community in the awareness that it reflects a particular stage in an ongoing discussion, but at the same time with the conviction that it may offer useful points of reference for its further development. Particular attention has been paid to the critical or dissenting voices that raise important issues and that, as editors, we have sought to engage with in the most careful way possible, allowing them to prompt a reconsideration of the paradigm itself, even as we recognize its heuristic value. In no way should the fundamental methodological and interpretive choices underlying the research project and this volume be ascribed to those who, whether proponents or critics of this trend, have generously contributed to it and do not, in every case, represent a single common position. When the Introduction speaks in the first-person plural, it does so from our standpoint as editors, not on behalf of all the contributors.

At the conclusion of our research project, we would like to thank not only our colleagues in the Department of Biblical Studies for their trust and support, but also Dr Emilia Re, whose tireless energy and technical expertise made possible the excellent organization of the conference from which this volume derives. We also wish to express our sincere gratitude to Prof. Jörg Frey for accepting the conference proceedings for inclusion in the prestigious WUNT series, and to the editorial team at Mohr Siebeck for their unfailing and meticulous support at every stage of the volume's preparation. While any remaining oversights or inaccuracies are, of course, our responsibility, our thanks are also due to Dr Brandon Massey, who revised the English version of the contributions originally written in Italian and Spanish, thereby contributing significantly to the clarity and linguistic consistency of the volume as a whole, and to Dr Tuomas Rasimus, who prepared the indices of authors, ancient sources, and subjects, and whose careful reading further improved the editorial accuracy of the volume.

Palermo 1.4.2026

Marida Nicolaci,
Carmelo Raspa,
and Francesco Bonanno

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Introduction

MARIDA NICOLACI, CARMELO RASPA,
and FRANCESCO BONANNO

Un avvenimento si interpreta, sul piano storico,
con ciò che precede, non con ciò che segue.¹

The volume we are pleased to present brings together the contributions offered at the first international conference devoted to reading the Texts of the New Testament *within Judaism*. Held in Palermo on 22–23 March 2024, the conference marked the second phase of a research project carried out by the Department of Biblical Studies of the Theological Faculty of Sicily, aimed at developing a systemic analysis of the ongoing paradigm shift on two interrelated fronts: the historiography of the so-called Christian origins and the exegesis of New Testament texts. From a historiographical perspective, the metaphor of the *parting of the ways*, despite its resilience, has gradually proven inadequate for offering a sound representation of the intertwined past of Jews and Jesus-believers (Jewish or not in genealogical terms) in the Greco-Roman context of the early centuries, and even more so during the period in which the New Testament texts came into being.² On the exegetical level, reading New Testament authors and texts “beyond the parting of the ways paradigm”³ has meant re-evaluating the conflicts crystallized within the texts not as signs of an incipient or already completed separation between two supposedly distinct religious groups, “Jews”

¹ Paolo Sacchi, “Il mio cammino tra Antico Testamento, Apocrifi, Apocalissi e Vangeli,” in *Sophia* 9.2 (2017), 229.

² Cf. the proceedings of the Colloquium held on March 2023 as the first step of the project: *Oltre la ‘separazione delle vie’: Nuovi modelli interpretativi delle origini cristiane*, ed. Marida Nicolaci, Oí Christianoí 43 (Trapani: Il Pozzo di Giacobbe, 2024). Despite its well-known limitations, Markus Tiwald and Markus Öhler, “Parting of the Ways’ – A Problematic Metaphor: Introduction to the Volume,” in *Parting of the Ways. The Variegated Ways of Separations between Jews and Christians*, ed. Markus Tiwald and Markus Öhler (Leiden: Brill Schöningh, 2024), xiii, say they decided “to retain the metaphor in the title of the volume while also insisting on the pluriformity of these processes.”

³ See, for instance, Anders Runesson, *Judaism for Gentiles: Reading Paul Beyond the Parting of the Ways Paradigm*, in collaboration with Rebecca Runesson, WUNT 494 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), esp. 40–57.

and “Christians,” but rather as expressions of an intra-Jewish identity conflict, intensified by the inclusion of gentiles in the groups of Jesus-believers.

The shift from an approach based on taxonomies and classificatory systems foreign to ancient sources – such as that centered on the modern concept of religion⁴ – to one grounded in categories congruent with the cultural and cultic map of ancient peoples – such as that of ethnicity⁵ – has been decisive. The more one reflects on the ethnic identity of Jesus-followers in the first two centuries, the more stimulating and fruitful it becomes to read individual New Testament texts not against the background of or in relation to Judaism, but precisely “as specific expressions of Judaism, as part of one (diverse) trajectory among several others within a pluriform ethnoreligious tradition that displayed, as did other trajectories, various levels of openness to non-Jews;”⁶ not in terms of their later reception in a Christian canon (*reception history*), but from the perspective of their historical and literary genesis (*inception history*).⁷ *Within Judaism* has come to represent, in the most concise way, this perspective on the texts and on the communicative act they establish: a “catchall category for readings that treat New Testament texts as expressions of early Judaism.”⁸

As Judith Lieu has rightly pointed out, the two expressions – *within Judaism* and *parting ways* – “draw on a different conceptual metaphor:” the former relies on the container metaphor (suggesting inclusion, boundaries, and internal space), while the latter evokes the path/journey metaphor (implying movement,

⁴ See Judith M. Lieu, “‘The Parting of the Ways’: Theological Construct or Historical Reality?” in *JSNT* 56 (1994), 108; Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion. A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2013); Carlin A. Barton and Daniel Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion. How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); James Carleton Paget and Judith M. Lieu, “Religion or Appropriate Categories for Christianity,” in *Christianity in the Second Century: Themes and Developments*, ed. James Carleton Paget and Judith M. Lieu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 19–21; John S. Kloppenborg, *Christ’s Associations. Connecting and Belonging in the Ancient City* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2020), 10–18.

⁵ See Katherine M. Hockey and David G. Horrell, ed., *Ethnicity, Race, Religion: Identities and Ideologies in Early Jewish and Christian Texts, and in Modern Biblical Interpretation* (London: T & T Clark, 2018); David G. Horrell, *Ethnicity and Inclusion: Religion, Race, and Whiteness in Constructions of Jewish and Christian Identities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020); Erich S. Gruen, *Ethnicity in the Ancient World: Did It Matter?* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020); Luca Arcari, “L’etnicità come ‘discorso’ e la distinzione giudaica nel mondo greco-romano. Per ripensare la ‘separazione delle strade’ tra giudaismo e cristianesimo,” in Nicolaci, *Oltre la separazione*, 57–86.

⁶ Anders Runesson and Daniel M. Gurtner, “Introduction: The Location of the Matthew-within-Judaism Perspective in Past and Present Research,” in *Matthew within Judaism: Israel and the Nations in the First Gospel*, ed. Anders Runesson and Daniel M. Gurtner (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020), 3.

⁷ Thus, in their introduction, Karin Hedner Zetterholm and Anders Runesson, ed., *Within Judaism? Interpretive Trajectories in Judaism, Christianity and Islam from the First to the Twenty-First Century* (London: Lexington Books; Fortress Academic, 2024), 1.

⁸ John Van Maaren, “How Can the New Testament Writings Be within Judaism? Distinguishing Ways of Asking and Answering the Question,” *ZNW* 114 (2023): 264–303, here 302.

divergence, and direction). “The validity or otherwise of one metaphor cannot establish or undermine” that of the other.⁹ They can however be complementary or intersecting in framing the complex historical and social entanglements between early Jesus’ followers and (other) Jews and, indeed, they are, as reflected in contemporary scholarly narrative. The pattern of publications over the past twenty years does, in fact, suggest a close correlation between the ongoing historiographical paradigm shift and the rapid emergence of an exegetical perspective that is gaining increasing traction and eliciting growing interest and engagement among New Testament scholars.¹⁰

As early as 2005, the former Baptist minister who had converted to Judaism, Julie Galambush, published a kind of didactic “book-by-book discussion of the New Testament and its authors,” entitled *The Reluctant Parting: How the New Testament’s Jewish Writers Created a Christian Book*.¹¹ She argued that the New Testament writings were the product of Jesus’ followers “who not only lived, thought, and worshipped as Jews, but took it for granted that their movement had a Jewish future,” while also expressing at times in their writings “a deep-seated rancor, born in the anguished parting between one Jewish group and another.”¹² Without abandoning the metaphor of separation altogether, Galambush redefined its subjects in relation to the specific times and texts in question: not two abstract religious entities still non-existent – Judaism and Christianity – but Jewish groups engaged in a process of internal differentiation, within which the New Testament writings also need to be understood. In these texts, “each author pushes the boundaries of his Jewish identity; none consciously abandons it.”¹³ The conviction that the texts of the New Testament are diverse expressions of Judaism is shared by scholars who, on the basis of more

⁹ Judith Lieu, “The ‘Parting of the Ways’: Heuristic Model or Metaphor?” in *Oltre la ‘separazione delle vie’*, 35–36 with reference to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

¹⁰ A correlation between the crisis of the historiographical model expressed by the ‘parting of the ways’ metaphor and the growing number of studies interpreting New Testament texts *within Judaism* is identified, for example, in the editorial by Jens Schröter in *Early Christianity* 14 (2023): 1–7. See also, for instance, the explicit correlation in Matthias Konradt, “Matthew within or outside of Judaism? From the ‘Parting of the Ways’ Model to a Multifaceted Approach,” in *Jews and Christians – Parting Ways in the First Two Centuries CE? Reflections on the Gains and Losses of a Model*, ed. Jens Schröter, Benjamin A. Edsall, and Joseph Verheyden, BZNW 253 (Berlin; Boston: de Gruyter, 2021), 121–150.

¹¹ Julie Galambush, *The Reluctant Parting. How the New Testament Jewish Writers Created a Christian Book* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), xx.

¹² *ibid.* See also p. 305: “Regardless of its origins, the New Testament is no longer a Jewish book. Technically, it never was one, since the collection of twenty-seven writings into a single canon was undertaken long after Jews and Christians had parted company. [...] The New Testament is a collection of books, each of them originally Jewish. The New Testament’s journey from a set of Jewish books to a sacred collection used exclusively by non-Jews has fundamentally changed – and distorted – its authors’ portrayal of Jews”.

¹³ *The Reluctant Parting*, xxi.

sophisticated and nuanced analyses, interpret them from a *within Judaism* perspective, without necessarily tying this to a historical judgment concerning the authors' ethnic identity.

The idea of approaching New Testament texts as Jewish literature is not, strictly speaking, entirely new;¹⁴ what is new, however, is the level of theoretical and critical reflection it is now attaining. In addition to a growing body of publications, the past two years have seen a rising number of virtual conferences devoted to this trend, promoted by the Enoch Seminar, which have fostered fruitful dialogue among the various scholars engaged in the discussion.¹⁵ All this certainly encourages a systemic examination of the methodological and substantive issues raised by the *within Judaism* approach, within an academic dialogue that goes beyond the circle of its most passionate proponents and brings into conversation historians and exegetes of varying sensibilities – including, as we have tried to do in this volume, scholars who do not identify at all with the *within Judaism* approach – all nonetheless interested in identifying both the heuristic potential and the limitations of this framework.

Among the open issues are terminological problems (which terms to use when referring to the realities and actors involved, avoiding anachronisms while still being able to communicate effectively),¹⁶ matters of definition (e.g., what does it mean “to be within”?¹⁷ What is meant by “Judaism”?¹⁸ Who or what is being discussed as *within Judaism*?¹⁹), methodological questions (e.g., who determines, how, and based on which shared scholarly criteria, the “inside” or “outside,” the “boundaries of Jewishness,”²⁰ and the Jewishness of a text?), and, most significantly, hermeneutical issues: does the evaluation of a New Testament text as Jewish (or “more Jewish”?) tell us something about the text itself, about the

¹⁴ See, for instance, Robin J. Scroggs, “The Judaizing of the New Testament,” in *The Chicago Theological Seminary Register* 76 (1986): 36–45, who concluded his reflection on the history of research of the preceding two decades as follows: “Hellenistic Judaism is the appropriate perspective from which to look at the New Testament. We could also turn this around to suggest that as far as the first century is concerned, the best witness to synagogal Hellenistic Judaism is the New Testament” (quote from 44). In 1986, therefore, he could state that “for Luke-Acts, Christianity is Judaism” and that “virtually all the authors of the New Testament were Hellenistic Jews. If the author of Luke-Acts was Jewish, then perhaps *all* authors were Jewish” (43)!

¹⁵ See the YouTube channel <http://www.youtube.com/@enochseminar9445>.

¹⁶ See Adele Reinhartz, “What’s in a Label? ‘Jews,’ ‘Judaism,’ and ‘Jewish’ in the Study of Antiquity,” in Hedner Zetterholm and Runesson, *Within Judaism*? 35–48.

¹⁷ Does it mean being Jews by birth, by conversion, or does it mean practicing Judaism?

¹⁸ Beyond terminological issues, what is the referent of Judaism? An ethnic group? And if so, is it defined genealogically or on the basis of other criteria, given the polythetic nature of the concept of ethnicity? Is it a system of practices and beliefs?

¹⁹ A New Testament author? And does this refer to the actual author or the implied one, or both? Or is the reference to the recipient (real and/or implied)? Are we speaking of individuals or groups? In themselves or thanks to their interaction through literature?

²⁰ Cf. John Van Maaren, *The Boundaries of Jewishness in the Southern Levant 200 BCE – 132 CE. Power, Strategies, and Ethnic Configurations*, SJ 118 (Berlin; Boston: de Gruyter, 2022).

interpretive gaze of the reader, or about both at once? What theological agendas or biases underlie the trend? What is the interpreter's standpoint and angle of vision?²¹ Does reading the texts *within Judaism* mean recognizing an indisputable historical fact and interpreting the texts in the only historically plausible and accurate way?²² Or is it rather a response to an ethical imperative (to reject any form of anti-Jewish rhetoric), a theological one (to affirm the irrevocability of God's election of Israel, even from the standpoint of Jesus-believers), or a dialogical one (to remove the stumbling blocks posed by the apparently most "anti-Jewish" New Testament texts to contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue)?²³ If it were not for the significant hermeneutical problem posed by the centuries-long history of the reception of these texts within a Christian canon – and within a supersessionist framework – would we even be asking ourselves, in any meaningful way, whether these texts do or do not belong *within Judaism*?²⁴ Is the question truly historical in nature, or does it stem from the need to come to terms with a history of interpretation shaped by a largely gentile Christianity and its supersessionist theology? One might well reverse the question: is grappling with this reception history not, in fact, a way of correcting a serious distortion

²¹ Cf. Jörg Frey, "Anti-Judaism, Philosemitism, and Protestant New Testament Studies: Perspectives and Questions," in *Protestant Bible Scholarship: Antisemitism, Philosemitism and Anti-Judaism*, ed. Aryen F. Bakker, René Bloch, Yael Fish, Paula Fredriksen, and Hindy Najman (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 149–181: "We cannot escape the hermeneutical circle, namely, that our interpretations involve us in matters of personal identity and group interests. My plea is that we should be openly aware of this rather than pretending to represent an objectivity that in reality cannot be maintained" (174).

²² See, e.g., Runesson, "What Does It Mean," 300: texts such as Matthew, Acts or Paul's epistles "historically ... belong among the literary treasures of the Jewish people;" Magnus Zetterholm, "The 'within Judaism' Perspective – Why Does It Matter?," in Hedner Zetterholm and Runesson, *Within Judaism*? 16: "the 'within Judaism' perspective is a theoretical perspective intended to constitute a framework for the historical study of the early Jesus movement ... It is, however, not aimed at developing new normative theological systems or facilitate Jewish-Christian relations. Nor is the aim to domesticate problematic texts and thus make them useful in a Christian context. It is, of course, fully possible that the results of the 'within Judaism' perspective can be used for all the purposes mentioned above, but that is not the primary aim."

²³ This apprehension is expressed by Frey, "Anti-Judaism," 166: if avoiding the perpetuation of distorted views of Judaism in the exegesis of the texts is a crucial and worthy ethical task, "some of Christianity's earliest anti-Jewish statements stand in its canonical texts," and therefore caution is needed not to expunge or dismiss too easily – with textual emendations or arguments of a historical nature (intra-Jewish debate, not anti-Jewish) and semantic nature (e.g., in the case of the Johannine "Jews") – those passages that are troubling because they "explicitly contradict the new approaches and viewpoints advocated, post-Holocaust, by churches today," and yet are also foundational: "The ethical struggle to avoid anti-Jewish effects in churches and society can only be applauded, but the desire to safely integrate those texts 'within Judaism' can neither remove the dangerous elements from the text nor exculpate the texts or their authors from the dangers of undue generalization" (173).

²⁴ See Runesson, "What Does It Mean," 302: "Would those who authored the texts without accessing the binary terminology we are used to, 'Judaism' and/versus 'Christianity', have understood the 'within-question' at all?"

(a “colossal misreading”),²⁵ a means of restoring the correct order of factors in the historical process, and thereby putting ourselves in a position to understand these texts as, historically, they must be understood?²⁶

The perspective is undoubtedly relevant, yet it is essential to probe thoroughly its methodological objections, conceptual tensions, and hermeneutical challenges, as well as to closely examine the textual data that seem most resistant to the new paradigm. Even if the Jewishness of the New Testament texts were nothing more than a truism – something so historically evident that, once the reader’s perspective shifts, it would in fact be the opposite that would require proof²⁷ – the analytical validity of the *within Judaism* approach would still remain to be demonstrated, insofar as both the container metaphor (*within*) and the very definition of the container (*Judaism*) can be called into question, the latter being deeply dependent on the historiographical framework employed by the reader.²⁸ One should not overlook the fact that, in order to disentangle once and for all the historical-genetic meaning of the texts from the history of their reception as a Christian canonical collection, the *within Judaism* paradigm invokes precisely the notion of Judaism that some would prefer to discard, and which – as Steve Mason has aptly put it – originated largely as “the standard Christian suitcase-label for a system of belief.”²⁹

²⁵ Steve Mason, “Paul without Judaism: Historical Method over Perspective,” in *Paul and Matthew among Jews and Gentiles. Essay in Honour of T.L. Donaldson*, ed. Ronald Charles (London: T&T Clark, 2021), 12.

²⁶ Cf. Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 157: “Christianity hijacked not only the Old Testament but the New Testament as well by turning that thoroughly Jewish text away from its cultural origins among the Jewish communities of Palestine in the first century and making it an attack on the traditions of the Jews, traditions that ... it sought to uphold and not destroy, traditions that give the narrative its richest literary and hermeneutical context.”

²⁷ For Zetterholm, “The ‘within Judaism’ Perspective,” 15, the burden of proof should lie with those who argue the opposite: “Unlike the traditional position, which assumed a very early separation from Judaism, the ‘within Judaism’ perspective operates with the notion that until proven otherwise texts in the New Testament should be considered Jewish texts (regardless of the ethnic identity of the author, which in some cases may be unclear), reflecting the ideas of an apocalyptic, messianic movement in the first century CE ... It is fully possible that some texts in the New Testament represent a movement ‘outside Judaism’ and the purpose of the research is to determine whether this is the case.”

²⁸ Cf. Runesson, “What Does It Mean,” 307: “If first-century ‘Judaism’, which is a category that organises the world and facilitates communication, i.e., an abstraction, was a diverse phenomenon, and if we consider the fact that what has often been understood as the most iconic or ‘authentic’ form of Judaism (usually and anachronistically a form of Rabbinic Judaism) in reality was just one variant among many, in fact, even a minority position, against what should we measure Paul, the Gospels, or Revelation in order to understand their relationship to the category ‘Judaism’?” See also Reinhartz, “What’s in a Label?” 37–39; Steve Mason, “Paul without Judaism,” especially 14–26.

²⁹ Mason, “Paul Without Judaism,” 19: “Granted that most ancient texts did not survive, the surviving evidence is sufficient for us to trace the development of *ιουδαϊσμός* with some confidence, from a rarely needed action-noun to the standard Christian suitcase label for a system of

The volume, in both its rationale and its four-part structure, is thus formally and substantially intended to assess the *within Judaism* perspective – particularly in terms of its heuristic potential, that is, what “it does”³⁰ – by engaging the theoretical issues outlined above, but also New Testament topics and texts that are frequently cited to show that not everything emerging from these writings can be easily explained *within Judaism* without losing sight of “the dramatic newness that is intrinsic to Jesus and the faith of his followers.”³¹ The intention is not to confirm a predetermined thesis but to explore, at the level of the texts, the implications of the widely recognized inadequacy of assuming a sharp and early opposition between ‘Jews’ and ‘Christians,’ as if they were already distinct collective identities with clearly defined boundaries from the outset. Instead of presupposing such a boundary at the outset, we shift the starting point to within the very process of differentiation triggered by the various groups of Jesus followers, thereby restoring a broader range of interpretive possibilities. In this sense, the paradigm functions not as an ideological lens but as a counterfactual corrective: it exposes where and how the evidence resists inclusion, and it is precisely through such resistance that the paradigm demonstrates its heuristic value.

The first section addresses contested issues that we consider crucial, transversal, and systemic within the debate, and which, for that reason, deserve to be fully

belief. The new Christian meaning explains the absence of the word from Judaeon texts, where it did not and could not have indicated a faith system.” As for the discussion, see also Philip La Grange Du Toit, “Was Paul Within Judaism, Within Israel or Within Israel’s Messiah?” in *Religions* 15.10 (2024) <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15101217> and Reinhartz, “What’s in a Label?” 41 who however concludes that “there are good reasons to maintain the usage of ‘Jews,’ ‘Judaism,’ and ‘Jewish’ in historical discourse about antiquity, despite the specter of anachronism.”

³⁰ See Karin Hedner Zetterholm and Anders Runesson, “Introduction. The ‘Within Judaism’ Perspective – An Emerging Paradigm Shift,” in Hedner Zetterholm – Runesson, *Within Judaism?* 2: “An important aspect of the ‘within Judaism’ perspective is, we believe, that this label *does* something, rather than *is* something. In other words, the label ‘within Judaism’ signals the emergence of a wider interpretive and historical paradigm, which has been shown to be dynamic and exceptionally productive, moving the field forward in significant ways, including for those who would not, ultimately, define themselves as ‘within Judaism’ scholars.”

³¹ Donald A. Hagner, “Another Look at ‘The Parting of the Ways,’” in *Earliest Christian History: History, Literature, and Theology. Essays from the Tyndale Fellowship in Honor of Martin Hengel*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Jason Maston, WUNT II 320 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 382; see also 394: “Jesus, fully the Jew, at the same time repeatedly exhibits a shocking newness in his acts and deeds. In Jesus we have only the adumbrations of what is to come. But in retrospect they are unmistakable enough and they are ultimately inseparable from his personal identity. It is little surprise that the Jewish authorities perceived him as a threat to the central, fixed elements at the heart of Judaism.” See also, though from a completely different perspective, S. Mason, “Paul Without Judaism,” who asks: if Paul was really so deeply embedded within Judaism, as the Radical New Perspective claims, where does the mutual conflict with other Jews (or with other Jesus-followers who understand Jewish identity differently) come from? “The evidence of Paul’s letters (Phil 3; 2 Cor 10–13; Galatians) and early legacy (James 2:14; Acts 21:20–28; 2 Pet 3:15–16; Marcion, Ebionites, pseudo-Clementines) show that many of his contemporaries did not find him simpatico. Paul reciprocated their disdain ... Where did such conflicts come from, if he was clearly devoted to Judaeon ancestral customs?” (12).

articulated in the form of scholarly dialogue: (a) issues of method and definitions emerging from the history of research; (b) the Jewish ethnicity with regard to the tension between shared identity and the multiple ways it was negotiated within the multiethnic context of the Roman Empire; (c) the Jewish ethnicity with regard to the interaction with gentiles, at the time when the New Testament writings were taking shape, viewed both in terms of social realities and literary representations; and, (d) the semantics and implications of the adjective “new” in relation to the covenant, as in the reception of Jer 31:31–34, studied comparatively in Qumran literature and New Testament texts in order to assess whether a radical discontinuity is to be considered conceptually or rhetorically intrinsic to the ‘new’ and, if so, in what way.

The three subsequent sections – ideally inspired by the well-established framework the Department of Biblical Studies uses for research on individual biblical books (tradition, redaction, theology)³² – address, by way of exploratory sampling, three types of issues related to the trend: (a) the meaning to be ascribed to the polemic that emerges from some texts as it relates to ethnic identity, traditions, and institutions as *loci* of conflict and/or differentiation between Jesus-believers and other Jews; (b) the significance of the communicative act performed by Jesus-believers through writing and through their employment of specific literary genres, such as those represented in the New Testament corpus, with regard to their identity construction; and, (c) the possibility of understanding, in intra-Jewish terms, the development of a specific messianic configuration of worship, confession of faith, and lifestyle practices, as attested in the New Testament sources. The second and fourth sections, in particular, aim – directly or indirectly – to shed light on the dynamics of conflict in the rhetorical construction of the identities of Jesus-believers in relation to (other) Jews, as reflected in the texts.

The structure of the volume, which does not focus on a single New Testament text but rather outlines a reading path ideally applicable to each of them, stems from the desire to test the heuristic potential of the *within Judaism* approach against the texts themselves and the issues that most significantly challenge the idea of reading them as Jewish literature. It is not based on any prior judgment about the ethnic identity of authors or recipients, but explores the construction of identity enacted in and through the texts, especially where it challenges binary oppositions. The metaphor of “parting of the ways,” which suggests a binary

³² See Giuseppe Bellia and Angelo Passaro, ed., *Libro dei Proverbi. Tradizione, redazione, teologia* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1999); idem, *Il libro del Qohelet: Tradizione, redazione, teologia* (Milan: Paoline, 2001); Angelo Passaro and Giuseppe Bellia, ed., *The Book of Wisdom in Modern Research: Studies on Tradition, Redaction, and Theology*, Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies Yearbook 2005 (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2005); idem, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira. Studies on Tradition, Redaction, and Theology*, Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies 1 (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2008).

opposition between Jews and Christians imagined as traveling on two different and irreconcilable paths, is only one of many possible metaphors, and not necessarily the most effective, even if it has been both useful and influential in the historiographical debate of the past thirty years. Other metaphors may be proposed, grounded in different representational models that highlight the porosity of boundaries, the complexity of identities and social dynamics, and their textual crystallization. Wolfgang Grünstäudl, for instance, preferred “party of the ways” over “parting and partings.”³³ Continuing provocatively with a paranomastic pun, we would say that in this volume we have instead chosen to look at the texts – and the social situations they represent – in an exploratory and non-exhaustive manner, as rhetorical attestations not of how Jesus-believers and (other) Jews *parted ways*, but of *the way they were* together during the period in which the various New Testament texts emerged.

In this sense, to read the New Testament texts *within Judaism* is to fully acknowledge the possibility that conflict – even in its most virulent textual expressions and despite a reception history shaped by supersessionist and anti-Jewish readings – may nonetheless reflect an intra-Jewish, non-binary dynamic of identity: a way of being *within Judaism* within the Greco-Roman gentile world.³⁴

What at this stage is only an exploratory core sampling of certain texts, we hope may become a way of interrogating each New Testament text in its own right.

First Section: *Quaestiones Disputatae*

The two-voiced dialogue that opens the first section of the volume surveys the state of the art of publications on New Testament texts *within Judaism*, with particular attention to several controversial theoretical issues. The *status quaestionis* presented by Gabriele Boccaccini is framed by a significant excursus through the history of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity as conveyed and represented also in the hermeneutics of New Testament texts: from the indifferent hostility of the patristic and medieval periods to the Lutheran controversy, which crystallized the image of Judaism as a legalistic and obsolete religion opposed to a Christianity based on grace; from the phase in which, around the mid-seventeenth century, post-biblical Jewish sources became a

³³ Wolfgang Grünstäudl, “Ertragene Alterität. Anmerkungen zur theologischen Differenzkonstruktion in frühchristlicher Literatur,” in *Konstruktionen individueller und kollektiver Identität II. Alter Orient, römische Antike, frühes Judentum, frühes Christentum*, ed. by Karin Finsterbusch and Eberhard Bons, BThS 168 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), esp. 217–222.

³⁴ Cf. Paula Fredriksen, “Paul Within Judaism Within Paganism,” *Religions* 15.10 (2024): <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15111396>.

mere “footnote” useful to New Testament philology, to the construction of the concept of an “intertestamental history” governed by a markedly canonical perspective (not yet entirely abandoned); from the recovery of Judaism (albeit represented in monolithic and decadent terms) as the religious background of Christianity in the nineteenth century, to the recognition of the rich plurality of Second Temple Judaism after the tragedy of the Holocaust and the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls; and finally to the emergence of the expression *within Judaism* first in historical research on Jesus, then in the exegesis of Paul, and ultimately in the study of individual New Testament texts, which can now be fully regarded as Jewish literature of the Second Temple period: a paradigm shift that, for Boccaccini, constitutes “a decisive turning point in the history of the research.” Although enthusiastically embracing this “novel trend,” which he himself anticipated some thirty years ago, Boccaccini identifies several conceptual and methodological issues that cannot be avoided. First and foremost is the existence of two strands within the trend that have yet to engage in serious conversation with each other: are the writings of the New Testament to be considered Jewish texts as a kind of initial axiom, or is that status the conclusion of a case-by-case investigation? If the latter, then what conceptual definition of Judaism and its boundaries should be employed to determine and assess the intra-Jewish positioning of each individual text? Conversely, if one were to forgo any prior definition of Judaism, how should the Jewishness of the New Testament writings be articulated? On chronological grounds (i.e., because they were composed before the Bar Kokhba revolt and/or before the so-called “parting of the ways”)? On the basis of the Jewish ethnicity of authors and recipients (a notion that itself requires considerable problematization)? Other conceptual issues also await clarification and further development. For example, how does the *within Judaism* perspective account for New Testament texts that some regard as overtly anti-Jewish? And how does it avoid the risk of perpetuating binary models whereby affirming the Jewishness of the texts is taken to deny their belonging to Christianity, and vice versa? Boccaccini clearly sides with those who view *within Judaism* not as the end result of research but as its point of departure. What remains to be seen is how the inclusion of the New Testament texts within the corpus of Second Temple Jewish literature will ultimately reshape historical and theological representations of Jewish thought in the first and second centuries CE.

Picking up and expanding on the open questions raised by Boccaccini, Wolfgang Grünstäudl – who describes himself as “someone who is not, at least not yet, member of any camp of the ‘within Judaism’ debate” – begins by affirming that anachronism in reconstructing the past is not merely a risk but an inevitable feature of historical imagination: “There is, indeed, no ‘beyond’ of anachronical descriptions of the past, as we always bring ourselves to the party.” He thus engages, one by one, the conceptual issues and methodological challenges

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