Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 80

Burton L. Visotzky

Fathers of the World

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Herausgegeben von
Martin Hengel und Otfried Hofius

80

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Essays in Rabbinic and Patristric Literatures

by

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J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) Tübingen

Die Deutsche Bibliothek – CIP-Einheitsaufnahme

Visotzky, Burton L.:
Fathers of the world: essays in rabbinic and patristic literatures / by Burton L. Visotzky. – Tübingen: Mohr, 1995
(Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament; 80)
ISBN 3-16-146338-2 978-3-16-157293-7 Unveränderte eBook-Ausgabe 2019
NE: GT

The book was typeset by ScreenArt in Wannweil using Times typeface, printed by Gulde-Druck in Tübingen on non-aging paper from Papierfabrik Buhl in Ettlingen and bound by Heinr. Koch in Tübingen. Printed in Germany.

ISSN 0512-1604

Acknowledgements

It is my pleasure to acknowledge the many scholars and institutions that have assisted me in writing this book. The essays in this volume were written during the last decade. For all those years and more I have had the privilege of being on the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. It is truly the residence of a host of disciples of the sages who love the Torah. Daily I give thanks to God that I am among those who dwell at the Seminary. One could not ask for better teachers, colleagues or students. Among those whom I explicitly wish to thank are the late former chancellors Louis Finkelstein and Gershon Cohen. The current chancellor, Ismar Schorsch, has been extremely supportive, as have been his successive provosts, David Kogen, Raymond P. Scheindlin, Ivan Marcus and Menahem Schmelzer. I must also acknowledge my debt to the Abbell Research Fund of the Seminary for the generous financial support I have received and without which this book could not have been written.

In addition to JTS, two other institutions have hosted me during my writing and research. The Oxford Centre for Post-Graduate Hebrew Study invited me to be a visiting scholar in 1985–86. I particularly wish to thank Geza Vermes and Sebastian Brock for their warm hospitality during that stay. In the same year I was a visiting fellow of Clare Hall, University of Cambridge, where I was subsequently honored with life membership. I feel Clare Hall is a true home. I would like to thank N. R. M. de Lange and Profs. Henry Chadwick and Christopher Stead for their cordial welcome that year. My old friend Marc Hirshman not only shared the Cambridge experience with me, but was a student and colleague with me at JTS. He has sharpened my mind in both Rabbinic and Patristic literature.

My friends and colleagues of the Upper West Side Collegium Syriacum, particularly Shaye J. D. Cohen and the late Prof. Morton Smith should also be acknowledged, as should my now retired neighbors, Raymond E. Brown and J. Louis Martyn. It will be clear to the reader that the blessings I have received are in abundance. But, my thanksgiving would be incomplete if I did not acknowledge my perennial debt to my late teacher, Prof. Rabbi Saul Lieberman.

The many other colleagues and research assistants who have aided me in my work are thanked in the notes to the individual chapters. This volume

has also benefited by the bibliography prepared by Kelly Washburn, the careful proof-reading of Jennifer Kraft and the meticulous typing of the indices by Efrat Halevi. To all of the above my thanks, yet the burden for errors remains my own.

Most of the chapters originally appeared in various journals, which are duly noted in the List of First Publications. "Mary Maudlin Among the Rabbis," was to have appeared in a volume edited by Phyllis Trible and Deirdre Good. Alas that volume has been unduly delayed and I pray that it will come out soon with my contribution appearing there as a reprint instead of an original.

This book is dedicated to the memory of Eleanor and Meyer Visotzky, mother and father of my world.

New York City BLV

Contents

Fathers of the World: An Introduction

They were the fathers of the world. In their successive generations they begat rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. They fathered the transition from Temple and sacrifice to synagogue and study. They fathered the New Testament, churches, ecclesiastical order and ultimately, empire. Separately and together they fathered the transition from a pagan western world to a monotheistic (if not monolithic) Judeo-Christian culture. From the late first through the fifth centuries, these two groups of men reshaped the hellenistic culture bequeathed to them by Alexander the Great, his tutor Artistotle and their political and philosophical successors. A new world was begat by these fathers, a unique hybrid of biblical religion and Hellenism, Temple cult and academy. Two great religions were birthed by these fathers of our world.

Among the Jews the title, father, was used as an honorific, it denoted respect and authority. So the second century Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai can ask of the schools of the Hillel the Elder and his colleague Shammai, "How could the fathers of the world (*avot ha'olam*) disagree about the order of creation of heaven and earth; when in my opinion ..."[1] Or the title can denote philanthropy, as in the case of a certain father-of-the-Jews (*abbah yudan*) and his wife in Antioch who gave charity even when their fortunes took a turn for the worse. There was another giver called father-of- chicanery (*abba ramoi*) who used a bit of deception to get the Jews of Botsra to increase their charitable pledges (by witholding his own pledge) and then offered a matching grant.[2] It seems to have been a title, perhaps like Rabbi, for the late first century Abba Sha'ul and certain of his likenamed colleagues.[3] And, in a variety of forms, it served as a proper name for many of the sages of the Jews.[4]

Christians, too, used the term father. Jesus warns his disciples, "But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher and you are all

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[1] Lev. Rabbah 36: 1, ed. Margulies, 835, and parallels cited by Margulies, ad loc.

[2] Lev. R. 5: 4, ed. Margulies, 110–114. The former is associated with early second century rabbis, the latter with an early third century rabbi.

[3] Pirqe Avot 2: 8 and many other places in the Mishnah. Six other Rabbis of the Mishnah bear this title, see C. H. Kasovsky, *Thesaurus Mishnae* I, 5, s. v. Abba.

[4] See the onomastica and concordances to rabbinic literature, s. v.

brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven" (Matthew 23: 8–9). Nevertheless the term persisted. In New Testament Greek (and Latin), father means teacher (see the warning about usage in I Cor. 4: 15) and in the late second century Irenaeus explains, "When anyone has been taught from the mouth of another he is termed the son of him who instructs him, and the latter is called his father" (*Adv. Haer.* 4, 41, 2). First bishops, then all ecclesiastical writers were given the title.[5] In the Syriac Church, the Hebrew/Aramaic *abba* referred to clergy, whether monk, bishop or abbot (the term does persist, even in English).[6]

Of course, in both the Church and Synagogue God was granted the title Father. In Hebrew, Latin, Greek, Syriac and Aramaic the fathers of the world prayed to the Father of the World, Our Father in Heaven, the Father of Mercy. But our concern in this volume is not for the Master and Creator of all, but for God's creatures, those lesser, mortal fathers. Despite their mortality, they live on. It was they who translated biblical intolerence into ecclesiastical and then, temporal power. It was they who shaped our Western worldview. It was they who molded pagan philosophy into a monotheistic mode. The process, however, was exceedingly complex. Just as the fathers were changing Hellenism to fit the demands first of Jewish law and lore, and then of Christian theology and doctrine; so Hellenism had its pervasive effect on the fathers of the world. To lose sight, even for a moment, of the influence of Hellenism on both religions, is to misunderstand completely their relationships to one another and to the *oecumene* in which they flourished.[7]

In the West and to a large extent of the East (up to the limes with the Persian/Sassanian Empire, which includes all of Palestine and some parts east) Judaism and later, Christianity, were Greco-Roman phenomena – however unusual or suspect they may have been in pagan eyes. To say it bluntly, the rabbis were Hellenists, much as were the Church fathers. Many

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[5] On the term in the New Testament, see, now, *ABD* 1, s. v. abba. It is appropriate to add here the concerns of feminist scholars, most recently ably represented by Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Theology in Mark and Q: Abba and 'Father' in Context," *HTR* 85 (1992) 149–74. It is good early on in this book to apologize for the patriarchalism of the title – it makes no claims to the role of men and women in the modern, or even ancient era. It does, however, represent the ways the fathers of church and synagogue referred to themselves in their own literature. For the later Church use I follow J. Quasten, *Patrology* I 9–12.

[6] For Syriac usage, see the entries in R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, s. v.

[7] For the Church this proviso has been taken for granted as long as there has been a distinction between Judaism and Hellenism. Now, however, it must be restated, particularly vis-a-vis Judaism. The classic statement of the issue is Martin Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus, Studien zu ihrer Begegnung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Palastinas bis zur Mitte des 2. Jh. vor Chr.* (Tübingen, 2nd ed., 1973). The annotated bibliography and collection of articles edited by Henry Fischel, *Essays in Greco-Roman and Related Talmudic Literature* (New York, 1977) is also indispensible.

of the rabbis, if not most, were schooled in the same elementary educational system, learning letters and grammar in the same ways as their pagan counterparts. As Rabban Shime'on ben Gamaliel recalls, "There were one thousand students in my father's household. Five hundred learned Torah and five hundred learned the wisdom of the Greeks (viz. grammar and rhetoric)." This, for Jews associated with rabbinic Judaism and the patriarchate. One presumes other, less observant Jews to have been "properly educated" as well.[8] For the Church fathers, at least up to the reforms of Julian (361–363 CE), all education in letters was hellenistic education.[9] It is essential when comparing rabbinic and patristic literatures to view them both as products of this hellenistic milieu.

We will return below to the problems greco-roman rhetoric presents in the comparative study of rabbinic and patristic literatures. For the moment, some consideration must be given to the broader issues such comparisons raise. First and foremost among them is the simple question: What is to be compared? Since the literatures preserved are radically different genres this is a pertinent question. Church literature includes gospels, acts, epistles and apocalyptic among New Testament and patristic writings. Other patristic genres include homilies, commentaries and later, catanae. For the rabbis there is commentary, homily and Talmud.[10] For the most

[8] B. Sota 49b. For the Rabbis this is a complex claim not yet fully established in the secondary literature. See Hengel and Fischel, ibid, and see the materials collected in H. Z. Dimitrovsky, ed., *Exploring the Talmud* I (New York, 1976). Add to this the evidence amassed in S. Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1965), esp. 1–67 (he comments on the quote on pp. 1 and 20f.) and see also his *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1962), passim. A late fourth century Palestinian patriarch sent his son to Antioch to study with the famous rhetor, Libanius. See M. Schwabe, "Letters of Libanius to the Patriarch of Palestine," [Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 1/2 (1930) 85– 100. A monograph on hellenistic rhetorical practices in rabbinic education, especially the role of grammar and elementary rhetoric, remains a desideratum.

[9] The classic remains H. Marrou, *Histoire de l'Education dans l'Antiquite* (Paris, 1977: 7th ed). More recently, S. F. Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome* (Berkeley, 1977), who does not, however, treat Christian (or Jewish) education explicitly. For the latter part of the period under study the influence of rhetors such as Libanius in Antioch (where church fathers, imperial officers and at least one of the Palestinian Jewish patriarch's sons [see previous note] studied together) has long been acknowledged. George Kennedy's works on the subject should be noted, e. g.: *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World* (Princeton, 1972), *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill, 1980), *Greek Rhetoric Under Christian Emperors* (Princeton, 1983) and *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, 1984).

[10] This list is representative and surely not meant to be exhaustive. On some aspects of comparison of seemingly similar rabbinic and patristic genres see M. Hirschman, "The Greek Fathers and the Aggada on Ecclesiastes: Formats of Exegesis in Late Antiquity," *HUCA* 59 (1988) 137–65 and, idem., *Mikra and Midrash: A Comparison of Rabbinics and Patristics* [Hebrew] (Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1992). It is not the place here to determine the varieties of genres each literature encompasses.

part there is little point in comparing such disparate genres, so the issue of "documentary integrity" cannot apply at this level. Rather, individual traditions within documents will be compared.[11]

This still allows questions about the extent of knowledge that the rabbis may have had about the New Testament – either as a document or through its traditions. I have little doubt that the rabbis knew that something called the New Testament existed, but I am dubious that they read it as such. Rather, they cited sections and traditions that they had seen or heard in other contexts. If the rabbis mention a text it is possible that they heard it preached or more likely heard about it being preached. This means that the rabbis will always be quoting New Testament out of context. Further, the rabbis are most likely to hear the current local reading of a New Testament verse. Using rabbinic parlance, they are more likely to know the *drash* on a verse of the New Testament than to have any clue as to its *pshat*.[12]

This is less so the case regarding more contemporary Church literature. I think the rabbis may well have had a better grasp on patristics. Again, I am dubious that they actually studied or even read such works. But, the rabbis lived in a Holy Land regularly frequented by and significantly populated by Christians.[13] The period they lived in was contentious – hot issues of canon, trinity, mariology, heresiology and hamartology were regularly, publicly, vociferously debated. Theological, doctrinal and creedal orthodoxies were being defined and Palestine was a battleground of ideas. The rabbis could not avoid some fair knowledge of Church issues. Nor could they resist probing those issues for weaknesses and opportunities for polemic.[14] So, the student of rabbinic literature would do better to expect the rabbis to know patristics than that they would know New Testament. It follows that more profitable comparisons may be made between rabbinics and patristics than other Church literatures.

Does this hold equally true from the Christian side? This question provides a good control for the hypothesis above. At first blush, the abun-

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[11] Within individual Jewish or Christian religious traditions the concept of "documentary integrity" makes some sense and Jacob Neusner's cautions, first raised in his review of Ed P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia, 1977) are given passing attention – that is to say traditions are considered within the redactive critical framework of the document in which they are found. Once a redactive date and/or bias is established for a given unit of tradition it is then compared to a parallel in the literature of the sister religion.

[12] A case in point is argued below in "Trinitarian Testimonies."

[13] On Palestine as a Christian Holy Land, see, now, Robert Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven, 1992).

[14] This is a motif in the articles which follow. See "Trinitarian Testimonies," "Overturning the Lamp," "Mary Maudlin," and "Anti-Christian Polemic" for examples of rabbinic knowledge of debated issues in the Church and rabbinic willingness to exploit those very points in their encounters with Christians.

dance of studies which use rabbinics as "New Testament background" would seem to belie this contention. Jewish and Christian scholars eagerly plunder rabbinic literature to show the Jewish background of Jesus or Paul or even of gentile New Testament characters or books.[15] While this is methodologically dubious at best and possibly even pernicious,[16] it is nevertheless welcome. For far too long scholars have ignored the "Jewish problem" when studying New Testament. Although rabbinic literature may not be entirely apposite for its study, it is a breath of fresh air, possible only since World War II and Vatican II, that Christian scholars grapple with the problem of Jewish background. The bias of those who considered it a question of *Spätjudentum* is no longer welcome in the academy. We will have to endure inappropriate methodology for yet another generation until a surer means of using rabbinics or some other literature is discovered.[17] In the meanwhile all the usual caveats for the use of rabbinic literature in the study of New Testament must be recited ad nauseum (but not here).

Use of rabbinic literature for the study of patristics is as rare as use of patristics for the study of rabbinics. Since each is an arcane literature studied most often by those with a deep religious commitment, a certain narrowness of scholarly vision still holds sway. This is, of course, exacerbated by the methodological necessity for a scholar in Greek, Latin or Syriac texts to master Hebrew and Aramaic (and vice versa). Needless to say, those who move with assurance over such broad ground are few – their bibliographies will be discussed at the end of this chapter. This condition persists despite the testimony of Church Fathers like Origen and Jerome to their reliance on Jewish sources. It is enough for now to note that works like Louis Ginzberg's *Die Haggada bei den Kirchenvätern* come but once in a century.[18]

In both Rabbinic and Patristic literatures, methodological considerations loom large. Two discussions are called for here: first, a brief mention of methods and issues common to both disciplines separately (that is to say, rabbinics and patristics each require recognition of these matters whether or not they are being compared). Second, a lengthier discussion on prob-

[15] See, for example, the review of Lachs' *Rabbinic Commentary to the New Testament* or "Trinitarian Testimonies," below.

[16] As in the case of Paul Billerbeck's *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch.*

[17] A recent example of careful, well intentioned scholarship of this ilk is *The New Testament and Christian-Jewish Dialogue: Studies in Honor of David Flusser* ed. M. Lowe, *Immanuel* 24/25 (1990), with Flusser's bibliography published there, too.

[18] 1899–1935. Full bibliographic detail and some discussion may be found in Baskin, "Rabbinic-Patristic Exegetical Contacts in Late Antiquity: A Bibliographical Reappraisal," in W. S. Green, ed., *Approaches to Ancient Judaism* V (Atlanta, 1985) 53–80.

lems in comparing the two literatures follows, with special attention to the singular disturbances Hellenistic rhetoric provides to interfere with the comparison. Other methodological issues between rabbinic and patristic literatures are considered in the individual studies in this volume.

Both rabbinic and patristic literatures have suffered from a lack of critical editions of primary texts. Happily, this lacuna is being addressed in a variety of publications, doctoral dissertations and electronic databases. It is becoming easier to search for manuscript readings, phrases, bibliography and the like in both fields. Common research tools, such as a scriptural index to the literatures are either completed or now in publication. The ongoing task of updating dictionaries and concordances to account for these findings is also underway. By the end of the twentieth century anyone with sufficient computer memory will be able to access and search basic texts in both rabbinics and patristics.

Research tools are not, however, research; nor is memory interpretation. Historiography and exegesis are also in methodological flux. Techniques and schools of criticism, long common or now developing in Bible study are slowly being introduced in the fields of rabbinics and patristics. Redaction criticism, form criticism, rhetorical criticism, post-modern literary criticism in general and feminist interpretation in particular, combine with a more general interest in a history of religions approach, use of sociological techniques and social history methods in both fields.[19]

In the comparison of rabbinic and patristic literatures, a number of areas have garnered interest. Some recent studies have focussed on biblical verses and their subsequent interpretation in Church and synagogue.[20] This is a useful, if narrow, avenue of research. Key verses, particularly those that betray an overall attitude or *Weltanschauung*, are mined for material. Often, regrettably, little more than listings of the traditions are presented. Still, it is an important first step in the history of traditions and exegetical

[19] See most recently: in rabbinics, Judith Hauptman, "Contemporary Talmud Research," *Association for Jewish Studies Newsletter* 43 (Spring, 1993) – a brief general overview of trends – and my "Six Studies in Midrash and Methods," *Shofar* 10 (1992) 86–96. In patristics, see the first two numbers of the *Journal of Early Christian Studies* (Spring and Summer, 1993), where many of these methods are featured in the articles and noted in the book reviews.

[20] e. g. Sebastian Brock's studies of Syriac traditions on Hebrew scriptural themes in *Le Muséon* 87 (1974) and onward (e. g. vol. 99, 102) consistently compare the Syriac Father's interpretations with Greek and Latin Fathers and with rabbinic traditions. Jay Braverman, *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel: A study of Comparative Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Hebrew Bible* (CBQ Monograph 7, 1978), Judith Baskin, *Pharoah's Counsellors: Job, Jethro, and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition* (Brown Judaic Studies 47, 1983), Steven Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation: Pre-Israelite Hero and History in Postbiblical Interpretation* (SBL monograph 30, 1984) and Jeremy Cohen, *"Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It": The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca, 1989); to name a few. See Baskin, "Rabbinic-Patristic Exegetical Contacts" for more on this specific area.

study. Even more needs to be done in the exploration of whether these particular exegetical traditions are influenced by or in dialogue with one another.[21]

Other studies have traced parallel stories or *chriae* and their use in patristic and rabbinic literature.[22] Still others, small and large, have taken up a common theme.[23] Here, too, methodological limitations impose themselves. The larger works tend to cover such vast ground that it is impossible to do justice to more than one religious tradition. While the citation of rabbinic works in a study of patristic attitudes is welcome (or a study of patristic works in a scholarly tome on rabbinics), there is a need for such attention to become a regular part of scholarship. Translations of the primary materials are in sufficient abundance that linguistic barriers are no longer an excuse for overlooking the "other side's" point of view. Nevertheless, the only work that readily comes to mind which gives equal weight to both rabbinic and patristic tradition, and its theme demands such, is Marcel Simon's groundbreaking *Verus Israel*.[24]

When rabbinic and patristic literature on a given topic is patently polemical, hearing both sides of the argument is an absolute requirement. To list but one side is to indulge in the biases that characterized Church and Synagogue during centuries past. Rehearsing only one side confirms prejudice, study of both sides advances scholarship. In other instances, materials when simply juxtaposed can be seen to be polemical. In rarer instances, rabbinic and patristic writings will be in dialogue. The distinc-

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[21] The small literature available now on Song of Songs comes to mind. All of the works cited below presume some sort of dialogue, apologetic or polemic. Careful reading of the primary sources does not demand these conclusions, however. Each of the sources may have been composed in isolation from the other traditions. See, Y. Baer, "Israel, The Christian Church and The Roman Empire ...," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 7 (1961), 79–149; E. E. Urbach, "Homiletical Interpretations of the Sages and the Expositions of Origen on Canticles, and the Jewish-Christian Disputation," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22, 248–275 (a translation of the Hebrew, first published in *Tarbiz* 30 [1961]); R. Lowe, "Apologetic Motifs in the Targum to the Song of Songs," in A. Altmann, ed., *Biblical Motifs* (1966), 159–96; R. Kimelman, "Rabbi Yohanan and Origen on Song of Songs," *HTR* 78 (1980) 567–95. Mention of these works, each of which deals with Origen's writings on the Song of Songs, requires note of N. R. M. deLange, *Origen and the Jews* (Cambridge, 1976).

[22] E. g., see below, "Hillel, Hieronymus and Praetextatus".

[23] Small: e. g. my "Mortal Sins," below. Large, e. g. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988) and Robert Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven, 1992). As each of the latter two titles indicate, the primary interest is on patristic thought, the references to rabbinic are cursory.

[24] *Versus Israel: Etude sur les relations entre Chretiens et Juifs dans l'empire Romain* (Paris, 1948). A recent, smaller work which takes up a theme that demands working across the boundaries of rabbinic and patristic literatures (and considers Roman legal codes and epigraphy) is Louis Feldman, "Proselytism by Jews in Third, Fourth and Fifth Centuries," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 24 (1993) 1–58.

tion here between polemic and dialogue is largely one of attitude. Polemic presumes the other is Other, in opposition, to be refuted. Dialogue, that rarest of religious discourses, presumes mutual progress can be made toward understanding of a verse, an issue, a point of theology, perhaps even one another. It is never easy to discern when a two sided approach will reveal polemic, when dialogue. Unfortunately, it's a reasonably safe bet methodologically to assume that the literatures are polemicizing against one another.[25]

The question of dialogue and polemic is only one side of a larger question in the comparison of rabbinics and patristics. The existence of parallels between the literatures raises vexing methodological questions. Although there are many kinds of parallels which may be considered, only larger units of parallel traditions are dealt with in these studies.[26] Further, the precise usefulness of such parallels needs to be considered.[27] Although Tertullian was kvetching about "a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic and dialectic composition," his question may well be asked regarding the comparison of patristic with rabbinic literatures, "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"[28]

Often in the past, studies of parallels focussed on the question of direction or who borrowed from whom. There is little doubt that this is an important contribution to knowledge in general, and the consequence of influences must not be overlooked. Indeed, my assertion above that the Rabbis were Hellenists much as were the Church Fathers, can only be made due to a century of research tracing hellenistic influences into

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[25] Scholars must also recognize their own biases. In doing so it may be possible for study of ancient polemic to lead to modern dialogue. This admission of hope is part of my disclosure of bias, necessary for (though readily apparent to) the readers of these essays. I write in the hope of dialogue, even as I write as a scholar who pretends to objectivity and dispassionate scholarship. There is no disguising my position as a scholar of rabbinics, first and foremost. The work of this volume, while it considers rabbinic and patristic literatures together to be mutually illuminative, has as a primary goal the exegesis of rabbinic literature. Finally, I am an ordained Conservative rabbi, writing in the late twentieth-century United States. The openess to ecumenism in America, my position as a tenured faculty member at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and the title of the chair I hold there: Appleman Associate Professor of Midrash and Interreligious Studies, my status as visiting faculty in the past decade at Union Theological Seminary, Princeton Theological Seminary, Oxford and Cambridge Universities, all these and more attest to the earnestness with which I undertake this volume (published by a German house, under the combined editorship of Protestant and Catholic scholars). This bias cannot help but be writ large throughout these pages.

[26] Morton Smith, *Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels* (Philadelphia, 1951) makes a variety of distinctions among types of parallels which remain useful guidelines in comparative studies.

[27] Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *JBL* 81 (1962) remains a useful starting point for any discussion of this issue.

[28] De Praescr. Haer. 7. I am using the felicitous translation of H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), 102.

rabbinics by means of parallel traditions. Yet the very literature on the subject[29] teaches us caution in using parallels to trace influences. Often the bias of a researcher affects his or her conclusions in this regard. Saul Lieberman's famous studies on the relationship of hellenistic hermeneutic devices to rabbinic modes of exegesis were marred by his reluctance to admit outright that certain rabbinic halachic norms were derived from hellenistic practice.[30]

In comparisons between Judaism and Christianity, a variety of biases have been indulged. Parallels have been adduced to show Jewish origins for many Christian institutions or Christian origins for later Jewish ones.[31] Paul Billerbeck's *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* uses parallels selectively to portray rabbinic Judaism as the natural inheritor of the doomed works righteousness Pharisaism Matthew descries and John condemns. All in all, the question of "Who Borroweth?" or "Which Came First?" produces results which confirm the prejudices of the biased researcher. This is not to say that there are not some few studies that genuinely attempt to trace the history of a religious idea without parochialism. Modern historiography, however, would have us err to the side of caution.

What, then, may be gained by the comparative study of rabbinic and patristic literatures? What can parallels in the varied *opera* teach us? First and formost, the existence of parallels is indicative of a general milieu. This is not to say that one text necessarily provides "background" for another. It does, however, give a generally impressionist viewpoint of the era in question. Scholars are a bit like lepidopterists, requiring – in the interests of good method – that the butterfly be pinned down for proper study. However, there genuinely are occasions when all one can do is identify what's there, floating in the air, without pinning it down. It isn't exact scholarship, but it teaches us how to view the field of butterflies. That's why I use the term impressionist. When we get up close the picture we thought we were looking at dissolves into a field of dots. Knowing the limitations of the research is as important as caution in the exercise of method.

There is more, yet, that parallels can teach us. How the traditions are used, how they are reshaped, *mutatis mutandis*, by rabbinic Judaism and Christianity teaches us a good deal about the tendencies of the redactors of the traditions. Jews and Christians will, necessarily, treat a tradition about

[29] Cited in brief above, n. 8.

[30] *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1962) 47–82. Lieberman was willing to state that aggadic exegetical devices were borrowed by the rabbis from the Greeks. He exercised excessive scholarly caution, however, for halachic norms and could not bring himself to conclude (though adducing better evidence than he had for aggadic materials) that the rabbis borrowed certain means for determining Jewish law.

[31] S. Spiegel, *The Last Trial* (New York, 1967), an English translation of the Hebrew original, 1950, carries wonderful examples of both types of triumphalism.

the advent of the Messiah in a very different way. Using the common tradition, we can observe the differences. It is in that observation (and not in the mere commonality) that the history of religions may be written. Or, there may be a common story (chria) about a pagan who wishes to convert. How the story has the pagan characterize the pinnacle of grandeur in the given religion tells us how the story-tellers of an era viewed their grandees and spun myths about them.[32] In other words, the very methods that redaction critics use to analyze the traditions history of a story within Judaism *or* Christianity can be profitably employed to analyze a tradition in both Judaism and Christianity.

Rabbinic and patristic literatures share certain methodologies, both in their exegetical approach to Scripture as well as in their individual units of didactic literature, the lives of their saints. As mentioned above, the genre of the hellenistic chria assures that a certain commonality of form will be observed.[33] When St. Jerome grumbles about the temerity of Praetextatus who offended Pope Damasus by teasing him, "Make me bishop of Rome and I will at once be a Christian," he uses the chria to express his pique. It is not surprising to find a parallel chria in a story of Hillel and a would-be convert.[34]

Pagans, Christians and Jews looked upon their leadership as a source of wisdom, privileged lineage and enviable wealth. As St. Augustine observes, "jealousy boils up only against clergy, especially bishops, whose authority is seen to bulk the largest and who are thought to use and enjoy church property as if they owned it themselves."[35] In rabbinic circles, Hillel – a mythic founding father *par excellence* – is of good lineage,[36] but famous for his poverty.[37] Even after he became the great leader/scholar, he remained poor.[38] This points up the reality in both synagogue and church that wealth and lineage were sought as qualifications for – and not as consequences of – ecclesiastical office. As Ramsay MacMullen puts it, "considerations of a material sort ... often appear to have been decisive in the selection of late Roman church leaders ... judged to be of the right

[32] See the discussion in "Hillel, Hieronymus and Praetextatus." See, now, on Praetextatus, L. Michael White, "Finding the Ties that Bind: Issues from Social Description," *Semeia* 56 (1991) 3–22.

[33] The basic work on the chria in rabbinic and greco-roman rhetoric is by Henry Fischel and may be found in the collection he edited, *Studies in Greco-Roman and Related Talmudic Literature*.

[34] See below, "Hillel, Hieronymus and Praetextatus."

[35] Ep. 125; here using the translation of Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire* (New Haven, 1984), 53. His description is a major source for what follows.

[36] p. Taanit 4:2 (68a), where R. Levi reports him to be of Davidic descent.

[37] b. Yoma 35b

[38] b. Sotah 21a.

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