

Jewish Christianity

FACTIONAL DISPUTES IN THE
EARLY CHURCH

HANS-JOACHIM SCHOEPS

Translated by DOUGLAS R. A. HARE

FORTRESS PRESS Philadelphia

A translation of DAS JUDENCHRISTENTUM

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Translator's Preface

Hans-Joachim Schoeps, Professor of the History of Religion at Erlangen University in Bavaria, is well known to New Testament scholars in the English-speaking world, but his work is little known to non-specialists because so little has been translated. His study of Paul has received considerable attention since its appearance in translation (*Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, trans. Harold Knight [London: Lutterworth Press, and Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961]). Just as deserving of attention is Schoeps's lengthy study of Jewish Christianity, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judentums* (Tübingen, 1949). Many of his conjectures and conclusions in this book have been contested, but it remains one of the most significant contributions of our century to the study of the early Jewish church. It is not this work which is here presented, but rather a much smaller volume, *Das Judentum*, published by Professor Schoeps in 1964 in a popular paperback series ("Dalp-Taschenbücher," Vol. 376 [Bern and Munich: Francke Verlag]). It presents the main conclusions of the earlier book without the massive documentation necessary in scholarly research. *Jewish Christianity* will thus introduce the non-specialist to Schoeps's results and at the same time enable the specialist to observe minor shifts in Schoeps's position and his response to the reactions of dissenting scholars after fifteen years of continued study (see, for example, the note on p. 43!).

A glossary has been provided to help the non-specialist with some of the unfamiliar terms found in the book. For a fuller discussion of these and other terms relating to Jewish

religion, the reader may consult G. F. Moore's classic study, *Judaism in the First Three Centuries of the Christian Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927), or the more recent introduction by Joseph Bonsirven, *Palestinian Judaism in the Time of Jesus Christ*, translated by William Wolf (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964).

The bibliography is substantially the same as that in the German edition. The titles of a few studies have been omitted when not directly cited in the text and not easily available in this country. English translations have been cited where available and some English titles have been added. Because the name of the publisher is normally omitted from European bibliographies, making it extremely difficult to identify the publisher of books which are not obtainable in this country, I have adopted the policy of citing the publisher only for those books published in the English-speaking world.

It should be noted that Professor Schoeps himself has supplied several additional notes and made a few improvements in details for this translation.

In the work of translating I have been ably assisted by Gisela Thumel Kutz (Mrs. John Kutz), who received her theological education in the German universities. Mrs. Kutz read the entire manuscript and made many helpful suggestions. Her familiarity with German idioms has rescued a tyro from many blunders, for which the readers, as well as the translator, will continue to be grateful.

I would also like to record here my gratitude to two colleagues: Professor Eberhard von Waldow, who graciously assisted me before the help of Mrs. Kutz became available, and Professor Ford L. Battles, who kindly agreed to examine my renderings of Latin quotations.

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Foreword

My book *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums* was published by J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, in 1949 after ten years of preliminary study. Now, after an interval of fifteen years, during which I have come to see many things more clearly, I have attempted to extract its most important conclusions from the mass of evidence, text-critical discussions, and special investigations (on account of which the earlier book remains indispensable) and to present them in a more popular form for the benefit of a wider public. While appreciating the studies which have appeared during this interval, I have retained my original conclusions in all important respects. The subtitle of this book, however, indicates a shifting of my approach and of my special interests.

The research method which I employ has become somewhat out of fashion, now that Barthians, Bultmannians, Qumran experts, and the purveyors of "pan-Gnosticism" carry on their battles over world-views in an area which in reality can be illuminated only by the approach of the history of religions and the history of ideas. Since the older I get, the more disgusted I become with polemics, I have completely given it up, except for a few remarks in extreme cases. In any case, the expert can learn from my statements the positions I have taken in specific disputes; the non-expert has no need of this knowledge.

In this book I have omitted references, parallels, and digressions except for the most essential, but I have indicated in the notes where a more thorough discussion, including

references to sources, may be found in the larger volume. For this new publication I have taken over many passages from the earlier book without alteration or with insignificant abbreviation, since I feel no need to change them and cannot express any better what I want to say.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Previous works by H. J. Schoeps are cited as follows:

<i>AfZ</i>	<i>Aus frühchristlicher Zeit</i> (Tübingen, 1950)
<i>Studien</i>	<i>Studien zur unbekanntenen Religions- und Geistesgeschichte</i> (Göttingen, 1963)
<i>Theologie</i>	<i>Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums</i> (Tübingen, 1949)
<i>UJG</i>	<i>Urgemeinde–Judenchristentum–Gnosis</i> (Tübingen, 1956)

Other Abbreviations:

<i>Ant.</i>	Josephus, <i>The Antiquities of the Jews</i>
<i>Bell.</i>	Josephus, <i>The Jewish War</i> (<i>Bellum Judaicum</i>)
<i>BZNW</i>	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>Coniect. Neotest.</i>	<i>Coniectanea Neotestamentica</i>
<i>Eccl. Hist.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>EJ</i>	<i>Eranos-Jahrbuch</i>
<i>Ep. Petri</i>	The letter of Peter which stands at the beginning of the Pseudo-Clementine <i>Homilies</i>
<i>GCS</i>	<i>Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte</i>
<i>Hom.</i>	The Pseudo-Clementine <i>Homilies</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>The Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>

Abbreviations

<i>MPG</i>	J. P. Migne, <i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca</i>
<i>MPL</i>	J. P. Migne, <i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina</i>
<i>Nov. Test.</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i> (journal)
<i>Pan.</i>	Epiphanius, <i>Panarion</i>
par.	parallel(s)
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>Rec.</i>	The Pseudo-Clementine <i>Recognitions</i>
<i>REJ</i>	<i>Revue des Études Juives</i>
<i>Symb. Bibl. Ups.</i>	<i>Symbolae Biblicae Upsalienses</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	G. Kittel, <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , translated by G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964-)
<i>TL</i>	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
<i>TR</i>	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i>
<i>TU</i>	<i>Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur</i>
<i>Vig. Chr.</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
<i>ZKG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZRGG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte</i> , edited by H. J. Schoeps

Tractates of the Mishnah are abbreviated according to the list supplied in Herbert Danby's *The Mishnah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 806.

Introduction: The Beginnings of Christianity

The Jewish Christianity with which this study is concerned existed in the period of the ancient church and constituted but one group and doctrinal tendency among many. As a clearly defined entity it first appeared in the second century; its separate organization and ideological formation may have begun with the year of the Jewish Christian exile, A.D. 67–68, when part of the group, under the shadow of the approaching war which was to destroy the Jewish nation, decided to emigrate to Transjordan. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that this Jewish Christian or Judaistic movement had its origins in the earliest beginnings of the primitive church. Since the Jewish Christian tradition included some of the first followers of Jesus and their physical descendants, this group claims the special attention of the historian. Granting the possibility that their understanding of Jesus and his life and teaching was extremely one-sided or even twisted and distorted, it is nonetheless one of the possible ways of understanding him which were open to the primitive church.

What the many-sided world of the first century really looked like, what role a Judaism which was increasingly fissiparous played in it, and again, what role was played within Judaism by that band of followers of the Galilean messianic pretender, Jeshua ha-Nozri (Jesus of Nazareth)—about these matters we still cherish notions which do not fit the facts and which are not really fair to the spirit of that age.

To be able to describe adequately the changing intellectual climate of the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire in the age of the Caesars would require above all historical study which takes an unprejudiced look at all the literary materials of the period. We are still far removed from such an approach today. If we had such a study, it would certainly lead to different perspectives and, above all, to greater reserve in doctrinal statement. For example, we must not postulate a fully developed conceptual system for the period when the Christian groups were first taking form but rather accept as typical of the spirit of the age in which Christianity had its beginning precisely the variable, accidental, and even contradictory elements which we encounter so frequently in the books of the New Testament. The New Testament exegetes are especially guilty in this regard. They frequently treat the Gospel writers as if they were university lecturers and regard Paul as a fully matured professor of theology, as if these writers presented a carefully conceived intellectual system with every statement they made! This is precisely what the New Testament writers did not do. Thus the exegetes pursue with great ingenuity a task which is suspect and in reality futile. In spite of 150 years of modern critical research, they have seldom correctly perceived the weak role played by Judaism in the ancient world and the slight significance which the *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, the object of their study, had for its contemporaries. For the most part, they look back at Christian beginnings from a point of view derived from a later period and thus read into the earlier situation standards which are actually foreign to it. On the other hand, the student who has been schooled in the history of religions or the history of ideas endeavors to understand each situation in itself and in this way to be fair to all the possibilities inherent in the situation, without allowing himself to be led astray by the question of what finally resulted from it.

It seems to me that research of this kind, which is more concerned with achieving impartiality, is more helpful in the attainment of knowledge in this area than the exegesis which, for the most part, peers through ecclesiastically colored glasses and never correctly assesses its proper object, the New Testament canon. The canon must surely be regarded as a tendentious, contrived product of the second century, by means of which the group which emerged victorious from the early battles over the direction to be followed by the Christians reinforced its view of things. Of the literary documents which were then extant, only those which were regarded as acceptable were canonized; everything else was set aside and, for the most part, disappeared. This process provides a poor basis for answering the question "What really happened?" Nevertheless, it does enable us in various ways to recognize that which may be regarded as more or less historically certain.

In particular, far too much credence has been given to the Acts of the Apostles, a literary work which is based upon a variety of sources, traditions, and fragmentary reminiscences, and which actually represents the accepted view of Christian beginnings held by only one of the parties of early Christianity, namely, the victorious party. As a matter of fact, this reconstruction of Christian beginnings grew out of the necessities of a much later historical situation. One who is accustomed to assessing documents in terms of their tendencies must regard Acts as a product of the second or third generation of Christians. It pursues an obvious dogmatic goal and to that end it cultivates the already powerful tendency to create legends and refashions persons as well as events according to its standards and conceptions.¹ In the same way the canonical Gospels weave together events and interpreta-

¹ Cf. M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Heinrich Greeven, trans. Mary Ling and Paul Schubert (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956).

tions into a tangle which cannot be unraveled since the Gospels are separated from the events which they report by generations as well as by catastrophes. Nevertheless, they are and will remain our principal sources, without which we would know hardly anything about the life of Jesus and about what happened after his death, i.e., about the beginnings of Christianity. One must not, however, see all this through dogmatically focused glasses; we must not study New Testament Christology using norms derived from Chalcedon, or measure the Pauline letters against the Reformation doctrine of justification, and so on.

There is thus one self-evident duty incumbent upon students of the history of religions or the history of ideas: to study the statements of vanquished groups as carefully and to take their value as evidence as seriously as one does those of the canonical New Testament. What has been said concerning the value of the canonical sources obviously holds equally true with respect to the sources of the Ebionite apocryphal works: They derive from a period which is long *post eventum*. They too are characterized by the tendentiousness of a party. As will be shown, they are in part simply reactions to the point of view represented by the Great Church and frequently presuppose knowledge of the canonical Acts. Nevertheless, we shall consider them in quite another way than they have been treated in the past; we shall make use of the image of the common past which they reflect, in order to attain a more realistic picture of the beginnings of Christianity. Granted that in details this picture is often fantastic, *mais l'histoire est merveilleuse!* In my larger work on Jewish Christianity² I was reluctant to draw radical conclusions. Further investigation of this early period has, however, made it clear that this reluctance was not justified.

² *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums* (Tübingen, 1949).

Before we can begin with our topic itself, it is necessary to sketch with a few quick strokes that which preceded Jewish Christianity in time and thus establish the framework in which the formation of separate groups in the primitive church developed, along with the attendant struggles over which direction the church was to follow.

When Jesus of Nazareth, who had claimed to be the Messiah of the Jews, met his end on an executioner's cross in A.D. 30 or 33, his followers were convinced that their Rabbi was an instrument of God, perhaps the prophet whom Moses had said would come "like him," perhaps the *bar enosh* (the Son of man) who would appear on the clouds of heaven, perhaps the *ebed* (Servant of God) who, according to Isaiah, would have to bear suffering for many—perhaps all these together and perhaps something else again. At first, the followers of Jesus remained together as a distinct group (just as the followers of John the Baptist had done before them), in accordance with the wishes of their master that his twelve apostles share a common table. For the first ten to fifteen years, right up to the Apostolic Council, the *haberim* of Jesus, known at first as *Nozrim* and later also as *Christianoi*, probably remained simply one of the numerous groups in the framework of contemporary Judaism, engaged in the polemics between the movements of that day but remaining essentially undisturbed. (The Jewish Christian special tradition reports that a controversy of this kind occurred in the seventh year after Jesus' death; see below, pp. 40 ff.) It is true that a tumultuous conflict originated in the Hellenistic synagogue of the *Nozrim*, i.e., among followers of Jesus from the Greek Diaspora whose origin was evident both in their speech and in their world-view and perhaps also in a freer attitude toward the law (Acts 6–7). This conflict left its mark on the life of the apostle Paul, but the crisis soon passed. The *haberim* of Jesus expanded rapidly, gaining converts both in priestly circles (Acts 6:7) and among the Pharisees (Acts

15:5). There was no real conflict with the Jewish population as a whole or with the Sadducee-dominated Sanhedrin. The latter, it is true, had shared in the condemnation of Jesus and had adjudicated in the case of the liberals or Hellenists (Stephen, Acts 6–7), but it now apparently inclined to the wisdom of Rabbi Gamaliel, who counseled the court to permit freedom, i.e., to wait and leave the future in the hands of God. Thus the Acts of the Apostles reports concerning the early period of the primitive church that the church in all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace (9:31).

Seen from the inside, the state of affairs was quite different. Already at an early date there appeared fundamental differences of opinion which gradually hardened into movements, traditions, and factions. These factions can still be identified today on the basis of the narratives of the canonical Acts and the epistles of the New Testament. As might be expected, the central points of dispute concerned: (1) the estimates and evaluations of the person of the Master, who had not been with them for many years (this was later called Christology) and (2) the establishing of who had been appointed by him as apostles and were thus authorized to speak in his name and make decisions. Further points of dispute were: (3) what was the essential content of his message, and, associated with this, (4) what was to be demanded from newly received followers, especially those coming out of paganism? These factions, which relied on the authority of influential spokesmen, came out into the open for the first time at the so-called Apostolic Council, which is probably to be placed in A.D. 48–49.

The question of particular interest to the historian is: What can really be established concerning the earliest beginnings of Christianity, i.e., what are the indubitably oldest data for the history of Christianity? With Erich Seeberg, I believe that they are the *paradoxeis* from and concerning Christ, i.e., the bits of information from traditional material which Paul,

whose letters are substantially older than the Gospels, transmitted. They are chiefly two: the primitive Christian confession of I Corinthians 15:3 ff.—the germ cell of the Apostles' Creed—and the tradition concerning the Lord's Supper in I Corinthians 11:23 ff. From these two there appears that which should be self-evident, even though it was not self-evident to liberal theology fifty years ago: at the beginning of Christianity stands Christ. He appeared *first* to Peter, which is the basis for Peter's lasting preeminence in the church, and then to the Twelve—this should be regarded as historical fact. That this vision came to be understood as resurrection on the third day is already theological interpretation. The similarly reported appearance to James, the Lord's brother, may have originated in a competing tradition. These appearances are of central importance because they established rights and were connected with the formation of congregations and churches. The other *paradosis*, the pre-Pauline tradition concerning the Lord's Supper, also points to the appearances. According to the narrative of institution in I Corinthians 11:23 ff., Jesus informed his disciples at the Last Supper that after his death he would continue the table-fellowship of his earthly days by means of a "new eating and drinking, which can be called sacramental," so that the Lord remained "present among them in a divine way."³ The proclamation of "the new order in my blood" can be designated as the act upon which the Christian church is founded.

In addition to these Pauline traditions the Gospel writers naturally also report various items which must certainly have been an essential part of the faith in the earliest period. Thus it may be taken as an established fact that Jesus applied the Danielic myth concerning the Son of man to himself, that he saw the messianic announcement of the suffering of the

³ Cf. L. Goppelt, *Die apostolische und nachapostolische Zeit*, in *Die Kirche in ihrer Geschichte*, Bd. 1 (Göttingen, 1962), p. 31.

Servant of God in Isaiah 53 reflected in his own fate, and that he understood his death as an atoning death (Mark 10:45). That he regarded himself as the messianic Son of man is beyond question; it is clearly demonstrated by his confession before the high priest, without which the trial of Jesus cannot be understood at all. Surely the beginnings of the development which led to the church's Christology lie here.

The claim that Jesus was the messianic Son of man was, however, open to other interpretations, one of which was provided by the Jewish Christians, or Ebionites. They acknowledged neither a divine sonship nor a preexistence nor a virgin birth. They differed from others in their views of the commission concerning the formation of congregations, they had a different concept of apostolic legitimacy, they threw themselves into a struggle with the Gentile Christian majority over the question of the missionary task, and they held completely different ideas concerning what constituted the cardinal points of the gospel message. In what follows we shall be concerned with these matters.

We must begin, however, with questions: What do we really know about these Jewish Christians? What literary sources are there concerning them, what Jewish Christian writings are extant, and what is the final outcome of their history? Then we must ask how they described the common Christian past; i.e., to the extent that the Ebionite "Acts" can still be identified, what was their point of view? Then we shall examine their distinctive teachings in detail, and, finally, indicate their place in the development of tradition.

The Jewish Christians as an Historical Phenomenon

A. Names and General Information¹

“Jewish Christians” in the broadest sense signifies all Christians of Jewish blood. As the designation of a group this name is ambiguous and open to misunderstanding. There were Jewish Christians, such as Paul and the Gospel writers, who prepared the way for the Gentile Christian church. Then there were Jewish Christians who, being proud of their origin, formed separate groups within the churches and sometimes, perhaps, established congregations alongside the Gentile Christian churches of the Great Church. Finally, there were Jewish Christians—also known as Judaists—who gradually separated themselves from the majority and had a history of their own. In what follows we shall be concerned only with this last group, which in the long run was regarded as heretical by the developing Great Church.

In this book, therefore, “Jewish Christianity” is used not as a designation of origin but as the designation of the point of view of a party. Consequently, not every statement of a Christian of Jewish descent can here be regarded as Jewish Christian.² The word “party” comes from the Latin *pars*,

¹ *Theologie*, pp. 8–25.

² The weakness of the book by Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, trans. and ed. John A. Baker (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, and Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1964), is that, while it presents a wealth of material, it confuses the two types.

meaning "part." The Jewish Christians were a part of early Christianity—and not the least interesting part—which very early came into opposition and conflict with the other parts. This did not hold true of the other wing of Jewish Christianity, i.e., the Christians of Jewish origin who remained in the Great Church. In his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* (chap. 47), Justin, writing about the middle of the second century, distinguished two groups of Christians of Jewish origin: moderates who remained within the church and, especially in the Diaspora congregations, exercised a Judaizing influence on the formation of Christian doctrine and morality; and extremists who refused to live with Gentile Christians who would not incorporate the Jewish law into their faith in Christ.

There were probably such Jewish Christians, who had separated themselves from the rest of Christianity because they combined faith in Christ with Jewish legal observance, in many places (Rome, Egypt, Mesopotamia, etc.) and for a long time. We have a clear profile only of the Jewish Christians of Palestine-Syria, who insistently emphasized their connection with the original cell of Christianity in Jerusalem and Galilee. From their circles also come the literary remains (to be discussed presently), upon which we are able to rely mainly for our presentation. The Jewish Christians "had independent theological and literary traditions, and represented from the turn of the second century to the third century a group which was independent of the 'Great Church' and whose outward form does not conform with the usual heresiological characterization."³

The names under which these Jewish Christians appear in the lists of sects provided by the Church Fathers were originally honorable names in the New Testament but their meanings had since deteriorated. *Ebionim* or "Ebionites" is a re-

³ Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*, with a supplement edited by Georg Strecker (2d ed.; Tübingen, 1964), p. 274. A translation of this volume is in preparation.

hebraized ancient title of honor which the remnant of the primitive church adopted, probably after their flight from Jerusalem, on the basis of Jesus' beatitudes concerning the "poor" (Matt. 5:3; 11:5; Luke 4:18; 6:20). There was no one named "Ebion" who served as father or godfather of the sect, as later Church Fathers (Hippolytus, Tertullian, Epiphanius, and others) mistakenly supposed. The name was chosen by the sect in accordance with a traditional pattern (e.g., *Perusim* = Pharisees, *Sadduqim* = Sadducees). Later the hatred and satire of opponents reduced "Ebionite" to a nickname and term of abuse (the "poor in spirit," the "poor in faith in Christ") so that the Jewish Christians themselves avoided it. They continued, however, to appeal to their voluntary disposition of possessions (following Acts 4:34 f.) and associated their poverty with the ideal of holiness; indeed, Paul had already spoken of the "poor among the saints at Jerusalem" (Rom. 15:26).

The second term, "Nazoreans," may originally have been actually used since it is attested to not only in Acts 24:5, "the sect of the Nazarenes" (*he ton Nazoraíon haíresis*), but also by the hebraized *Nozrim* in the *Birkath ha-Minim* (the petition against the heretics) in the Jewish Eighteen Benedictions. This name, long used in Syria to designate Christians in general, was probably not derived from the place Nazareth, but should be considered as a substantive formed from the root *nsr*, meaning "to keep," "observe," so that those who bear the name are to be thought of as "observers of secret traditions."

Both terms are encountered in the Church Fathers, but they nevertheless refer to the same group, although, in my opinion, Epiphanius clearly distinguishes between them. The Elkesaites, with whom the Nazoreans probably merged at a later period, have a wholly different origin. Besides these, we also encounter the names Galileans, Jessaeans, and, in the later Latin Fathers, Symmachians, since Symmachus, the Bible translator, belonged to their party, as we shall see

shortly. They seem also to have borne the designation *Tobim* (*agathoi*) as a special title of honor, according to some passages.

The Church Fathers who have reported about these Ebionites/Nazoreans were seldom eyewitnesses of the communal life of these groups. They based their reports largely upon hearsay and upon the documents which had become known to them. Thus we can thank Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Origen, Eusebius (whose *Ecclesiastical History* has preserved fragments from the memoirs of the Jewish Christian Hegesippus, who belonged to the Great Church), Epiphanius, and Jerome for some factual material, upon which we must depend, despite the many contradictions therein. The two Church Fathers named last have given us the fullest accounts. The *Panarion* (*contra haereses*) of Bishop Epiphanius of Salamis is especially important; it is intended to be a *kibotion iatrikon* (a medical box for use against wild beasts and snakes, i.e., heretics; *Prooem.* 1.1,2). Epiphanius treats the Nazoreans in chapter 29 and, in detail, the Ebionites in chapter 30. They are confused in various ways, it is true, and often jumbled together, but the accounts are nevertheless partially verifiable by means of the information provided by the Pseudo-Clementine narrative.

That the "patriarch of orthodoxy," as Epiphanius was called, had in any event a positive knowledge of the Ebionites, and that the original Clementines, in some form or another, were connected with them, I believe I have irrefutably demonstrated.⁴

The Church Fathers' accounts are essentially polemical in nature, intended less to present than to refute. The synagogue, however, in relation to this group which stood between it and the church, pursued the still more effective tactic of steadfastly ignoring its opponents. The weapon chosen

⁴ *Theologie*, pp. 457-79.

by the Pharisaic rabbinate was extreme and hence effective. The vanquished not only died out but were buried under a blanket of silence. Hence the surprise provided us by the Dead Sea Scrolls. After two thousand years the desert sand yielded up parchment scrolls revealing credal positions which, from the point of view of the religious development which led to the Mishnah, were heterodox, belonging to a group which was a precursor of the Ebionites. Nevertheless, there remains in the Talmud and Midrash so much anonymous and pseudonymous polemic against the Ebionites that some of the factual material can be utilized. The Jewish Christians, or Ebionites, are included among the *minim* (heretics), of whom it was once said that they were worse than idolaters, for the latter deny God without knowing him while the former know him yet nevertheless deny him (Rabbi Tarphon, about A.D. 100 according to *Tosefta Tractate Shab.* 13.5). The Ebionites appear especially as *poshei Israel* (apostates from Israel) and occasionally also as Korahites, since Korah was the prototype of heresy against Moses. In the second and third centuries, both the apologetic Midrash and the Haggadah which embellishes the Bible contain some items which probably refer to them. Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and Rabbi Jehuda ben Ilai especially appear to have debated with them and thus to have had direct contact. Through their polemic these rabbis have also indirectly attested to a series of specific Ebionite doctrines.

B. The Jewish Christian Literature

We can speak of a literature which is properly Jewish Christian, or Ebionite, only with certain reservations since it is extant only in fragments or in an edited form in later writings. Much of the literature, accordingly, is not directly accessible, but must first be identified on the basis of its character. The extant fragments represent primarily the

gospels which originated in and were used by the Jewish Christian congregations. Because of the meagerness and inconsistency of the patristic testimonies, the literary reconstruction of these gospels is exceedingly difficult. Their contribution to the enlargement of our knowledge of Jesus' life is slight; their positive historical worth consists in their indication of certain views of primitive Jewish Christianity.

(1) *Jewish Christian Gospels*.⁵ Modern research has generally differentiated between an Aramaic *Gospel of the Nazoreans* and a Greek *Gospel of the Ebionites*. Both originated in the first half of the second century, are inclined to paraphrase like the Targums, and are greatly dependent upon the canonical Matthew, which probably derived from Jewish Christian circles in the Great Church. The tendency of these gospels to conflate different logia is striking. As far as the few extant fragments permit conjecture, one may assume that it is a matter of different editions of the same work, that is, of various stages in the literary history of the Matthew-tradition. This tradition is known to Irenaeus and Hegesippus, but also even to Origen, Eusebius, and Epiphanius. What is disputed is the question of whether or not this Ebionite gospel tradition has preserved material derived independently from Q, the "sayings source" which also underlies the canonical Matthew. In any event, specific tendencies of heretical Ebionitism (vegetarianism, hostility toward the sacrificial cult, opposition to Paul, etc.) are reflected in these fragments. A third Ebionite gospel, the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, which originated in Egypt and is witnessed by several Church Fathers, is still more fragmentary and can here be left out of account. The recently discovered Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas* seems to presuppose the Aramaic *Gospel of the Nazoreans* as does also the early medieval apocryphal work *Toledoth Jeshu*, a caricature which may be described as a Jewish counter-gospel.

⁵ *Theologie*, pp. 25–30, 366–80.

(2) *The Translation of the Bible by Symmachus.*⁶ The Greek version of the Old Testament prepared during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161–180) by Symmachus, who according to patristic testimony belonged to the Ebionite faith—probably coming from Samaria—has come down to us with the majority of its fragments through the fourth column of Origen's *Hexapla*. The fragments of Symmachus were first drawn upon as a source for the knowledge of Ebionite theology by the present writer. Symmachus was as familiar with rabbinic biblical interpretation as he was with the culture and mythology of the Hellenistic world. A penchant for apocalyptic and secret prophecies—he discovered the future destiny of his Ebionite church in Ecclesiastes 12:5⁷—is as characteristic of Symmachus as the exile's practice of praying toward Palestine and an anti-Gnostic attitude.⁸ Since Symmachus was a polished translator and stylist, his influence extended beyond the Ebionite circle to Jerome's Latin vulgate.

(3) *Pseudo-Clement.*⁹ For the reconstruction of Jewish Christian doctrinal ideas and historical views, the Pseudo-Clementine novel represents our most important source. The literary situation, however, is exceedingly complex. The so-called Pseudo-Clementine writings originated in the third or fourth century. The *Homilies* and *Recognitions*, two post-Nicene recensions of an earlier work which, regrettably, has been lost, permit us to detect the remains of one or more Ebionite sources which have been reworked in this novel.¹⁰ Bishop Epiphanius (*Pan.* 30.15.1 f.) is an important witness in support of the view that the original Clementine writings, now no longer extant, are to be associated with the Ebionites.

⁶ *Theologie*, pp. 33–37, 350–80.

⁷ *Theologie*, pp. 355–60.

⁸ Connected proof for all this is given in my studies of Symmachus in *AfZ*, pp. 82–119 (A: Traces of Ebionite theological ideas in his translation of the Bible; B: Mythology in Symmachus; C: Symmachus and Midrash).

⁹ *Theologie*, pp. 37–61, 457–79; *Studien*, pp. 80–83, 91–97.

¹⁰ The *Recognitions* are extant not only in a Latin version (Rufinus) but partially in Syriac as well.

The literary character of the body of writings which are preserved for us is very complex. In view of the nearly hopeless situation from which we must begin and in which we must seek to discover the sources of a lost original version of a novel which has been reworked in two different ways from different points of view, no source-critical ingenuity can possibly delimit the texts in question in a convincing way and reconstruct their original context. In my *Theologie*, I attempted to restore in rough fashion one of these sources: the lost but well attested *Kerygmata Petrou* ("The Preaching of Peter"). I now regard a simplified procedure as admissible and more promising, viz., that of considering separately those parts of the novel in both recensions which clearly were heterodox Jewish Christian in character—the heterodox catalogue in *Recognitions* 3.75 is of service, although it is secondary—to the extent that they are attested to as such by other sources (the rabbinic writings, Symmachus, and the Church Fathers, especially Epiphanius).

It is a matter, then, of lectures on doctrine (the *Kerygmata Petrou*) delivered by the biblical Peter—constituting ten books according to the fictitious catalogue, but probably originally seven—in which special themes of Ebionite theology were treated, themes such as "the True Prophet," the true and false passages of Scripture, the canon of syzygies, all of which were impossible for the Great Church. The *Kerygmata Petrou* are also concerned with dialogues between the biblical Peter and Simon (Marcion), in which there is unambiguous polemic against Gnostic views, and with narrative material which apparently represents the remains of an Ebionite historical work with bits of speeches woven in. This historical work began with the creation of the world and continued to the apostolic age and disputes between Peter and Paul.¹¹ It seems to me that an Ebionite "Acts of the Apostles"

¹¹ A Jewish Christian *Book of Adam* seems also to have been utilized (*Rec.* 1.27–35); cf. *AfZ*, pp. 1–37.

underlies this outline of the development of the history of salvation. According to Epiphanius, one chapter of this Ebionite "Acts" may have been called "The Ascents of James" (*Anabathmoi Iakobou*). For the Ebionite self-consciousness and their particular view of history the Ebionite "Acts" was of fundamental significance. The texts claim to be documents deriving from the physical descendants of Jewish Christians belonging to the original church in Jerusalem.

Of special interest is the letter of Peter which introduces the Clementine writings, with its appended adjuration, since it seems to represent a piece of the original writing which has not been altered as much as other parts.

These analyses of the history of the material, which reclaim about 25 per cent of the preserved text as being of Ebionite origin, are necessary because we are here dealing with a highly undependable historical novel which consciously poses as *pseudistoria* (false narrative).¹² Its author or redactor, living in the third century, compiled the work from various written sources and also indulged in fantasy (in this he was even a poet). We cannot argue with him about what he has suppressed or left out, but must allow the critical, scientific analysis to be applied to the form of the text which lies before us. Nevertheless, we may proceed on the basis of a principle formulated by the poet Werner Bergengruen from his own experience, namely, that an author always needs many more building stones than can be used.

¹² At last, Georg Strecker, *Das Judenchristentum in den Pseudoklementinen* (TU 70 [Berlin, 1958]), has carefully dealt with the literary problems of this novel. It may be regarded as an established fact that the author of the original work—probably a Jewish Christian of Syria—wrote about A.D. 260. The homilist, who wrote about A.D. 330, was apparently an Arian, while the recognitionist, writing after 360, may have been orthodox.

An Outline of the History of Jewish Christianity¹

We have already stated that, as a group with a separate destiny and distinctive doctrinal views, Jewish Christianity first appeared at the moment of its organizational separation from the rest of primitive Christianity. To this extent, Epiphanius is quite correct when he dates the origin of the Ebionites and Nazoreans at the time of the capture of Jerusalem (*Pan.* 30.2.7; 29.5.4). And yet it is not a contradiction when he at the same time attributes the beginnings of the Nazoreans to the earliest period of the primitive church in Jerusalem, directly after the death of Jesus (29.7). Both dates are correct, depending upon whether one is speaking of the beginning of Ebionitism as an institution or of its spiritual beginnings.

If we here exclude their own traditions, which will be presented in the next chapter, and direct our attention exclusively to the information provided by the New Testament canon, especially by the Acts of the Apostles, then one fact at least emerges as certain. At the so-called Apostolic Council of A.D. 48/49, described by Paul in Galatians 2 and, with some divergence due to Lucan tendency, in Acts 15, an extremist Jewish Christian group in the primitive church came into prominence: "some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees" (Acts 15:5), whom we may regard as the ancestors of the later Ebionites. They are probably to be identified with Paul's "false brethren secretly brought in"

¹ *Theologie*, pp. 256–305.

(*pareisaktoi pseudadelphoi*, Gal. 2:4) who appeared in Antioch (although Schmithals is of a different opinion). These intruders made life miserable for Paul even in Corinth; they presented letters of commendation from the primitive church in Jerusalem, letters probably written by extremists and not by James himself (II Cor. 3:1). They insisted on introducing themselves as "servants of righteousness" (*diakonoi dikaiosyne*, II Cor. 11:15). Described in Acts as "zealous for the law" (*zelotai tou nomou*, Acts 21:20), they charged Paul with apostasy several years later in Jerusalem. This segment of the primitive church may well be regarded as the first Ebionites.

In the controversy at the Apostolic Council concerning whether or not the new Christian church must proceed in accordance with Jewish customs in its mission for proselytes, the Ebionites represented the rigorous rabbinic position of the school of Rabbi Shammai: they regarded *soteria* (salvation) as dependent upon circumcision. As Jews who believed in the Messiah, they could acknowledge no other answer to the question than that a pagan could become a Christian only through reception into the Jewish covenant of election by means of circumcision. Their point of view did not prevail, however, for the council decided in favor of the view of Paul, their direct opposite: the *nozri* from the Gentiles, the *Christianos*, need not submit to circumcision or take upon himself the "yoke" of the commandments. They were even less successful in pushing through their demand for full observance of the kosher laws; it was felt that it was more important to make possible table-fellowship with the Gentiles.² Hence the so-called stipulation of James [or "Apostolic Decree"] was regarded as an ample concession: the new Christians from the Gentile world were obliged to observe

² The incident at Antioch (Gal. 2:11 ff.), in which Paul asked Peter, "Why do you compel Gentiles to Judaize?" and Peter then changed sides, probably occurred before the Apostolic Council.

only the Noachide minimal law. This arrangement, however, did not last long.

The point of view of the "Christian Pharisees" of Acts 15 was merely one of several in the primitive church and hardly that of James, the head of the church, who apparently adhered to a middle position. The fact that this point of view did not prevail appears to have made the Jewish Christian primitive church suspect for the first time in the eyes of the Jews. The missionary practice of the church's majority, i.e., their treatment of the matter of Gentile converts, apparently brought into question the right of Christians to belong to Israel. This point was never really settled and the judicial murder of James, who fell victim to his old Sadducaic opponents, was an indirect result.

As far as we can tell, James the brother of Jesus, by disposition a mediator, was the guarantee of the church's unity; with his death the era of schisms began. The second and third generations idealized the person of James the Righteous and projected their own ideal upon this universally revered figure in order to invest him with full authority as their champion. He was elevated to "Pope of Ebionite fantasy" (Theodore Zahn). The Jewish Christian legends, reported by Hegesippus and preserved by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* (2.23.6), made him a vegetarian, a teetotaler, and an ascetic, in accordance with their own style of life: they claimed that he prayed so long in the temple for the forgiveness of the sins of his people that his knees became calloused like those of a camel. Because of this excess in intercession he seems to have been honored as a kind of paraclete and to have received the honorary titles *ho dikaios* ("the Righteous") *kai oblias*.³

³ The obscure word *oblias* was probably badly coined by Hegesippus to represent *shaliach* ("apostle"). The later Ebionites probably distinguished James from all other apostles by calling him "the righteous apostle" and giving him precedence over the others. Cf. my discussion in *AfZ*, pp. 120–25, 301.

We have two very different accounts of the martyrdom of James. Josephus dates the event A.D. 62/63, Hegesippus in the year 66. For various reasons the account of Josephus is to be preferred. Even if it has been interpolated, it must be closer to the historical event.⁴ Josephus (*Ant.* 20.9.1) reports that James was summoned before the court as a “transgressor of the law” by the Sadducaic high priest, Ananus the Younger, and that he was condemned and stoned. This provided the occasion for the Pharisaic opponents of Ananus to formally protest to the new procurator, Albinus. There seems to have been a close relationship between the martyrdom of James and the Jewish Christian emigration to Pella.

In Ebionite tradition the death of James and the dispersion of its members came to be closely associated, as the prophecy inserted by Symmachus in his translation of Ecclesiastes 12:5 makes clear.⁵ Moreover, since Hegesippus also knew a scriptural proof, which probably originated in their circles, that the death of this “righteous one” had been prophesied in Isaiah 3:10, we know that at least the later Ebionites, as thorough biblicists, saw the death of James as well as their own history reflected in Holy Scripture. According to Hegesippus, they related the catastrophe of A.D. 70 to the murder of James and interpreted it as a divine judgment upon the Jews. From Symmachus’ treatment of Ecclesiastes 12:5 we learn only that the death of James occurred in tumultuous circumstances (*terror in via*), which preceded the Ebionite dispersion. One must presume that it was a matter of open hostility on the part of the Jews toward this community, now deprived of its leader.

⁴ Cf. now also A. Böhlig, “Zum Martyrium des Jakobus,” *Nov. Test.* 5 (1962), 209, who introduces into the discussion as of some help the *Apocalypse of James* found among the Nag Hammadi documents. Probably Valentinian, this apocalypse stands in the Hegesippus-tradition. The *Gospel of Thomas* presents James as the one to whom the apostles are to go after the ascension of Christ.

⁵ *Theologie*, pp. 355–60.

The shadow of the approaching catastrophe of A.D. 70, the hostility of the Jews, and, not least, the internal disagreements with Paulinists contributed to the Ebionites' decision to leave their native city, Jerusalem. According to the account of Eusebius (*Eccl. Hist.* 3.5.2 f.), the immediate cause was a secret prophecy in the style of Jewish apocalyptic, an oracle concerning the coming destruction of Jerusalem which was communicated to the leaders of the church in a vision and on the basis of which they abandoned the city even before the war broke out. The Ebionites seem to have understood the flight itself in the light of the saying of Jesus preserved in Matthew 10:23, according to which the Parousia would occur before the disciples had gone through all the cities of refuge in Israel. All this is possibly reflected in the canonical apocalypse (Matt. 24:15–28 and par.), which must have been contained also in the Jewish Christian gospels.⁶

Concerning the exodus of the primitive church in A.D. 66 or 67 to the area east of the Jordan,⁷ we have two independent accounts from Eusebius and Epiphanius, as well as two *vaticinia post eventum* from the Pseudo-Clementines utilized for the first time in my *Theologie*. The picture of the flight of the woman to the wilderness in the Revelation of John (12:6) might possibly be an allusion to the flight to Pella. From Epiphanius we know that the Ebionites possessed an apocryphal book ascribed to the apostle John.

Eusebius and Epiphanius, for their part, depend upon sources which lie much nearer to the events but which are no longer accessible to us. Agreeing in the essential points,

⁶ *Studien*, pp. 69 f.

⁷ The attempt recently made by S. G. F. Brandon and Georg Strecker to treat the flight to Pella as unhistorical is so absurd that I will not discuss it. It is a kind of criticism which refutes itself. Cf. *Studien*, p. 71, and in addition the opinion of M. Hengel, *Die Zeloten* (Leiden and Cologne, 1961), p. 307; also L. E. Elliott-Binns, *Galilean Christianity* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1956), pp. 66 ff.

they inform us that the goal of the flight was the pagan city of Pella beyond the Jordan in Peraea or, to use the archaic term retained by Epiphanius, the Decapolis. Both also affirm that the migration to Peraea was a total one and that Christians fled over the Jordan not only from Jerusalem but also from other cities and villages. That Palestine was at that time completely emptied of Christians is, however, certainly an exaggeration on the part of Eusebius.

The two passages referring to the exodus to Pella in the Ebionite "Acts of the Apostles," as reconstructed from the Pseudo-Clementines, are independent of these accounts. *Recognitions* 1.37 (Syriac version) and 1.39 (Latin version of Rufinus) report that the wisdom of God led those who believed in him to a safe place in the country before the outbreak of the war. The war, which would not come unexpectedly but which would verify the prediction of the True Prophet, would result in the destruction of non-believers. The Jewish war and its tragic consequences were evidently regarded as predicted by Jesus, and his Parousia was expected immediately after A.D. 70, when the prophecy of the destruction of the Temple and the abolition of sacrifice, emphasized in the teaching of the Ebionite Jesus, had been fulfilled. The "abomination of desolation" prophesied by Jesus would be visible for all as proof that he was the True Prophet (*Rec.* 1.64; *Hom.* 3.15). And, finally, the true gospel—the Ebionite gospel—would be sent out only after the destruction of the holy city, for the refutation of future (!) heresies (*Hom.* 2.17).

With respect to these accounts I had already observed in my earlier study: "Who else in the whole of Christendom would have been interested in appealing to this event and placing it of all things at the center of an account of the history of salvation except the posterity of these exiles, the separated Jewish Christians or Ebionites, who, it is true, ap-

pear to be removed by a considerable period of time from the moment of their separation.”⁸

The Jewish Christians moved to Pella in Transjordan, and thus the rest of the history of this portion of the primitive church took place in a land foreign to that of their origins.⁹ It may be asked why the Jewish Christian community chose the Transjordan area while Jewish emigration went to cities such as Jamnia and Lydda which were less remote.

The chief reason for this choice was presented by Ernst Lohmeyer in his study *Galiläa und Jerusalem* (1936): the primitive church had its real roots in Galilee, the country native to Jesus’ family, which is never mentioned in the reports of the Jerusalem-oriented Acts of the Apostles only because it had been “Christian territory” (*terra christiana*) for a long time. The argument from silence, viz., that Luke never reports traditions about Christianity in Galilee, makes it clear that we must seek there the headquarters of early Jewish Christianity. The brothers of Jesus worked out of Galilee in their mission, as I Corinthians 9:5 seems to suggest; the church in Damascus may have been founded by them even before the persecution involving Stephen. Julius Africanus reports (Eusebius, *Ecccl. Hist.* 1.7.14) that Jesus’ relatives had spread the gospel everywhere starting from the Jewish villages of Nazareth and Cochaba. This suggests

⁸ *Theologie*, pp. 447 f. On the basis of another passage in the novel (*Hom.* 2.17), which states that the true gospel would be sent out for the refutation of future heresies for the first time after the destruction of the holy city, the judicious critic Bernhard Rehm, in his “Zur Entstehung der pseudoklementinischen Schriften,” *ZNW* 37 (1938), 154, concluded that speaking here is a group of men “which traced its origin to those Jewish Christians who fled from Jerusalem both before and after the destruction of the city.”

⁹ The idea of the Danish scholar Johannes Munck, who denies that the Ebionites were connected with the primitive church and adopts the hypothesis that they derived from a schism in the post-apostolic Gentile church, seems to me to be without foundation.

that the Decapolis was Jewish Christian missionary territory at an early date, i.e., before the Christians from Jerusalem moved into this city which was abandoned by the Jews at the beginning of the war.

Still another consideration favors this possibility. At the very beginning of his ministry Jesus directed his attention to Galilee in order to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1 that a great light would dawn upon the territory of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali and upon the way to the sea, upon Peraea and Galilee of the Gentiles. The citation of this Isaianic prophecy in Matthew 4:15 can be interpreted to mean that the Evangelist understood the land of promise, the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, to be situated *beyond* the Jordan (*peran tou Iordanou*), although the prophet actually meant both Upper and Lower Galilee.¹⁰ In this case, the primitive community would have moved into precisely that region which Matthew regarded as Isaiah's land of promise, and to which Jesus, when in Capernaum, preached his sermon on the kingdom of heaven. However one connects the phrases in Matthew's text, the area "beyond the Jordan" belongs to the land of promise. Clearly this enlarged Galilee was regarded by the Evangelists, as it had been by the prophets, as the land of eschatological fulfillment. It is in this area that Mark 14:28 and 16:7 and parallels locate the resurrection of Jesus and the coming messianic kingdom as well.¹¹

In the Jewish Christian gospel this geographical relation-

¹⁰ In the first century the eastern border of Galilee was by no means firmly established. Places east of the Sea of Gennesareth, such as Gadara—which was actually somewhat farther east than Pella (*Bell.* 3.3.1)—were regarded by Josephus as lying in Galilee. Pella, in northern Peraea, was so close to Scythopolis in the southern part of Lower Galilee that one could count it as part of the land of Zebulun in the wider sense. Lohmeyer also operates with a similarly expanded Galilee, in which he seems to include the Decapolis.

¹¹ *Studien*, pp. 75 f.

ship probably played an even greater role. Jerome¹² tells us that in the interpretation of Isaiah prevailing among both the Hebrews who believed in Christ (Ebionites) and the Nazoreans (of Beroea) the passage is understood to mean that Jesus proclaimed the gospel first for the benefit of this land designated by Isaiah 9:1, i.e., the land in which they themselves then resided. And if Jesus' preaching, originating in Capernaum, caused the great light to dawn upon the land "beyond the Jordan," how much more obvious the fulfillment when his congregation settled down in that land! It is probable that they also expected his Parousia to occur precisely in this region, for the tradition that the messianic redemption would begin in Galilee is found also in rabbinic and cabalistic sources, although, admittedly, these are of later date.

Practical concerns, however, must also be taken into consideration. The cities of eastern Palestine are ancient Hellenistic cultural centers of the Alexandrian period. From the time of Alexander Jannaeus to Pompey they were under Jewish rule and thereafter were allied in a free Hellenistic union of cities (the Decapolis). And the church, which had already been strongly Hellenized in Jerusalem, appears

¹² In *MPL* 24.125, it is said by the "Hebrews who believe in Christ" (*Hebraei credentes in Christum*) that the people of the territory designated by Isaiah as that "which formerly was in the darkness of error" (*quae prius in tenebris versabatur erroris*) are the first to see the light of the gospel of Christ, and that beginning with this people the gospel will spread to all nations. Further in the same passage we read: "The Nazoreans venture to explain this passage as follows: When Christ came and his preaching was glittering, especially the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali was delivered from the errors of the scribes and Pharisees, and he struck off from its neck the very burdensome yoke of Jewish traditions" (*Nazoraei . . . hunc locum ita explanare conantur: Adveniente Christo et praedicatione illius coruscante prime terra Zabulon et terra Naphthali Scribarum et Pharisaeorum est erroribus liberata et gravissimum traditionum Judaicarum jugum excussit de cervicibus suis*). The words "*gravissimum traditionum Judaicarum jugum*" may refer to the law of sacrifice abominated by the Ebionites. The succeeding statements praising Paul's apostolate are the special material of the community in Beroea.

to have understood and spoken Greek as much as Aramaic.¹³ Eastern Palestine was, moreover, the safest place the Jewish Christians could choose in this troubled period. According to Schumacher's topographical studies, Pella is a typical example of a hiding place, lying hidden in a valley on the edge of the Transjordanian high plateau. The Greek cities of the sparsely populated east were under Roman protection but beyond the sphere of political influence, on the periphery of the cultural area, bordering on Arabia. The Roman emperors built military roads there too, and constructed strongholds to protect these cities on the eastern edge of the Empire. The geographical situation was not unfavorable; the great highway from Scythopolis to Damascus went through Pella, which was situated where the road crossed into Transjordan, and in the time of Trajan the extensive commerce of that era must have brought great prosperity to Pella.¹⁴ Pella itself had an abundant water supply¹⁵ with fertile environs, and the Jordan was not far away. Not far on the other side of the Jordan were the places associated with the origins of Christianity, such as Nazareth and Capernaum, which had probably not completely lost their Christian congregations, despite the Jewish war.

¹³ Concerning the Hellenizing of the Ebionites in their later Hellenistic settlements disclosed by their literary works, cf. Theodore Zahn, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons* (Erlangen, 1888), II, 732; A. Schmidtke, *Neue Fragmente und Untersuchungen zu den jüdenchristlichen Evangelien* (TU 37 [Leipzig, 1911]), p. 234. The *Kerygmata Petrou* was undoubtedly composed in Greek and not in Aramaic. Neither Jews nor Jewish Christians in Peraea appear to have spoken Hebrew in our period. According to Epiphanius (*Pan.* 29.7), the Nazoreans could still read the Old Testament in Hebrew, but their everyday language was Aramaic. This seems, however, to hold true only for the special situation in Beroea.

¹⁴ Cf. H. Guthe, *Die griechischen Städte des Ostjordanlandes* (Leipzig, 1918), p. 26.

¹⁵ This is substantiated by Pliny, "rich with its waters" (*aquis divitis*, *Natural History*, 5.18.74—*Bibliotheca Teubneriana* 46.392). Cf. also G. Schumacher, *Pella* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1895), pp. 31 ff.

Pella,¹⁶ 260 feet above the Jordan, diagonally across from Scythopolis, thus became a chief center of Jewish Christianity which had hitherto been Palestinian, and it probably remained an important location in the following centuries. One could call it the Jamnia of Ebionitism. After the war, some of the exiles (Epiphanius: *hoitines*) and the church's bishop, temporarily returned to Jerusalem, but at the end of the Bar Cocheba revolt, when Jerusalem was transformed into a Roman city from which Jews were excluded, this episode came to an end and the settlement at Pella must have received a new wave of immigrants. The Jewish Christians apparently expanded from Pella into the rest of Peraea,¹⁷ i.e., the whole territory east of the upper Jordan. Johannes Weiss asserts: "That the church here subsisted not merely as an intimidated flock in hiding, but continued its communal living and its propaganda, is undoubtedly probable."¹⁸

The second most important location of Jewish Christians, according to Eusebius and Epiphanius, was the city of Cochaba. It is not certain whether the Cochaba mentioned by Julius Africanus is identical with this one. If this second Cochaba was founded from Pella, we may assume that this new settlement was named after the home city of earlier generations. Eusebius, who extends Basanitis almost to Damascus, locates this Cochaba west of Damascus, but it should probably be located between Abila and Adraad, on the basis of statements by Epiphanius. Harnack identifies it with Ashtheroth-karnaim, modern-day Tel el-Ashari. In this case also it was situated in Basanitis, about twenty Roman miles (eighteen miles) north of Pella.

¹⁶ The name probably derives from the birthplace of Alexander the Great in Macedonia; it is probable that his soldiers founded the city. Today it is the site Khirbet Fahil.

¹⁷ Josephus (*Bell.* 3.3.3) says that Peraea is larger than Galilee although sparsely populated, and a very rugged territory. He describes it as comprising the area from Pella in the north to Machaerus in the south, and from the Jordan east to Rabbath Ammon.

¹⁸ *Earliest Christianity*, trans. F. C. Grant (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), II, 716.

According to Epiphanius (*Pan.* 30.18.1), the Ebionites lived “in Batanaea and Paneas, and especially in Moabitis and Cochaba, in Basanitis beyond Adraea,” i.e., they had settled practically the entire border zone separating Syria from Arabia—admittedly a rather narrow strip of land—extending from Damascus to the southern tip of the Dead Sea in a north-south strip. Under these circumstances they must also have expanded into Arabian Nabataea. What Epiphanius (*Pan.* 29.7) reports concerning the Nazoreans, who, according to him, also inhabited Pella and practically the same territories, is muddled and of no use as a source. As Schmidtke has plausibly suggested,¹⁹ the kernel of chapter 29, which alone is of historical value, is the report that the Nazorean heresy found in Beroea derived from Coele-Syria. The Nazoreans of Beroea should probably be regarded as Jewish Christians of the Damascus congregation who were exiled to the north and who only later became associated with the Transjordanian descendants of the primitive church.

Apart from this remote settlement in Beroea, then, it turns out that the Ebionite communities of the second, third, and probably also the fourth, centuries inhabited the territory east of the Jordan. This area, which had an abundant water supply in the vicinity of the Jordan but farther east was traversed by numerous stretches of wasteland, contained few cities. Even its northernmost part was regarded by the Church Fathers as belonging to Arabia. In Transjordan, the Ebionites found Essenes (*Ossaioi*), who according to Epiphanius (*Pan.* 19.1) also lived in Peraea, and other Jewish baptismal sects, who had preceded them in migratory flight from the bustle of the world. The few cities were Greek in character, but outside the cities the plateau, with its mixed population, must have been dominated by the old Semitic popular religion of the Moabites and Nabataeans. From the time of Alexander Jannaeus the number of Jews in the

¹⁹ *Op. cit.* (p. 27, n. 13), pp. 124 ff.

area was considerable but their geographical distribution during our period is unknown. Catholic Christianity did not penetrate this area for a long time; its establishment in eastern Palestine cannot be affirmed for the period before the middle of the third century. As we shall see, Catholic bishops in Pella are mentioned for the first time in the fifth century.

All in all, this territory was quite remote and not a particularly favorable place for missionary expansion. It is true that the Ebionites appear to have had ties with the western side of the Jordan for a long time. We have certain knowledge of this, however, only for the period A.D. 70–135; the Talmud testifies that a Jewish Christian named Jacob came from Kefar Suchnin north of the Plain of Battof in Galilee and had a discussion with Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus—soon after A.D. 100—in or near Sepphoris, the chief city of Lower Galilee, which surely had a Jewish Christian congregation. From the Midrash on Ecclesiastes (1:25; 7:26), we learn further of the existence of a congregation in Capernaum which exhibited missionary activity. Rabbi Hananiah, nephew of Rabbi Joshua, was temporarily converted by the *minim* who lived there (*ca.* A.D. 110). Hegesippus reports (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 3.20) that during the reign of Domitian (81–96) relatives of Jesus (*desposynoi*) from Galilee who owned a small farm were interrogated as descendants of David, i.e., as presumptive revolutionaries, but were released; these must have been leaders of congregations in Galilee. Yet there must have been Jewish Christians in Galilee even *after* A.D. 135,²⁰ as we can show on the basis of Haggadah of Rabbi Judah ben Ilai in Lower Galilee in the middle of the second century, and from the disputes of Jacob

²⁰ Not until the reign of Antoninus Pius did the life of Jews born in Galilee become bearable again. Around the year 145, the restrictions imposed by Hadrian upon the practice of Judaism were lifted by the edict of toleration of Antoninus. For the Roman sources, cf. Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, trans. John Macpherson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1885–90), Div. I, Vol. II, p. 292.

from Neburaiah near Tyre with Rabbi Haggai at the beginning of the third century. Caesarea on the Mediterranean seems to be the one metropolis where the Ebionites had a congregation, for the *Kerygmata Petrou* employs the fiction that the sermons of Peter were dispatched from Caesarea. There Jerome found the *Gospel of the Hebrews* (*de Vir. Ill.* 3; *Adv. Pelag.* 3.2). Symmachus also was associated with this city, and he may have actually lived and died there.²¹ But the great mass of Jewish Christians must have lived on the other side of the Jordan, for only on this basis can it be explained why the Gentile Christian teachers and bishops in Palestine had so little contact with them. Justin and Eusebius had little knowledge of the Jewish Christians based upon personal contact. Origen was able to report direct knowledge of them only after moving to Caesarea in A.D. 232; in his journey to Bostra he traveled through the area in which they lived.

As far as we can tell, the emigration of the Jewish Christians did not alter their relationship to Palestine at all. Like all Jews, they regarded their form of life as *galuth* (exile) and Palestine as the Holy Land. This is evidenced by the fact that immediately after the end of the war they attempted to return home, and by the testimony of Irenaeus a century later that they still prayed toward Jerusalem, consequently in a southwesterly direction, not facing east as did other Christians. Finally, we must mention the use of the honorary title *threskeia* (cult, religion) as a designation for Palestine in the translation of the Bible by Symmachus.²² Palestine and religion here appear to be identical concepts; the Holy Land is holy to the Ebionites as the "land of revelation."

²¹ It is interesting that Symmachus calls the area of his brothers in the faith *to methorion to anatolikon* (the border-country in the east; Ezek. 47:8). Galilee always means for him border-country (Isa. 9:1, Joel 3:4, *oria*; Ezek. 47:8, *methorion*). This indicates that he lived neither in northern nor eastern Palestine. The tradition witnessed by Epiphanius points to Samaria as his place of origin.

²² *Theologie*, pp. 361-65.

The exodus into Transjordan took place under the second Ebionite bishop, Simon (Simeon) bar Clopus. According to the report of Hegesippus, he was chosen bishop directly after the death of James when the relatives of Jesus assembled with the surviving apostles and disciples to elect a successor (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 3.11.1). As a cousin of Jesus and James, Simon bar Clopus was apparently the next of kin. The parallel with the principles of succession in Islam, where blood-relationship with Fatima and Ali (daughter and cousin of Mohammed respectively) plays a similar role, is striking. With Harnack we can see the "idea of a caliphate" expressed in these relationships.²³ If the third bishop, Justus, should also prove to be a relative—this cannot be determined with certainty—we could definitely speak of a dynasty of Jesus. That Jesus' family, referred to as the *desposynoi* because of their relationship to "the Lord," i.e., those who were closest to the messianic throne, occupied a prominent position in the Ebionite community is also attested by another account of Hegesippus (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 3.20.6). According to Hegesippus, two grandsons of Jude the brother of Jesus—according to a later source (Philip of Side), Jacob and Zocher (i.e., Zechariah)—were interrogated by the emperor Domitian and after their release governed their congregations until the time of Trajan. Finally, Julius Africanus (died after A.D. 240), who was born in Jerusalem, tells us that the *desposynoi* possessed a genealogical table which apparently traced their descent from David, although Herod had burned the Jewish archives containing the genealogical records in order to obliterate the stigma of his own lowly origin (*Eccl. Hist.* 1.7.13 f.).

But back to Simon bar Clopus: According to the dating of James's death, he acceded to the episcopal seat of James between 63 and 66. Soon thereafter, Hegesippus tells us, the

²³ H. von Campenhausen, however, emphatically denies this in his "Die Nachfolge des Jakobus. Zur Frage eines urchristlichen Kalifats," *ZKG* 63 (1952), 133 ff.; reprinted in *Aus der Frühzeit des Christentums* (Tübingen, 1963), pp. 135 ff.

unity (virginity) of the church was defiled by the appearance of heretical teaching. Of Simon himself we know only that he led the congregation to Pella and at some point after the war returned with part of the congregation to the land which had been stripped of "holy men." The number of those who returned was probably not very great, for Epiphanius reports a visit of the emperor Hadrian to Jerusalem—perhaps in A.D. 117—at which time he found seven poor synagogues and a tiny church on Mount Zion.

It is quite clear that the relationship between the Jewish Christians and the Jews, who must have regarded the former as "traitors," did not improve in the following period but rather became even more adverse. If the question of their right to belong to the synagogue was still undecided before A.D. 70, it appears that about the year 90 further participation in the worship of the synagogue was denied to those who had given up the Jewish messianic expectation. The Gospel of John, written at this time, reports that the Jews had agreed to exclude from the synagogue anyone who recognized Jesus as the Messiah (John 9:22). According to John 12:42 and 16:2, the Christians were regarded as *aposynagogoi*, i.e., as excommunicated, excluded not only from the synagogal worship but also from the Jewish nation. The rabbinic prohibition forbidding discussion with the Jewish Christians was also issued in this period.²⁴ Thereafter the Christians were called "children of hell" (*Abodah Zarah* 17a). Decisive, however, was the fact that they remained excluded from the synagogue services when, under the patriarchate of Gamaliel II in Jamnia (ca. A.D. 80–110), the *Birkath ha-Minim* (the malediction against heretics) was formulated. The original text, composed by Samuel the Small under commission from the Sanhedrin, appears to have been: "May the apostates have no hope, may the dominion of wickedness be speedily uprooted in our days, may the *nozrim* and *minim* quickly

²⁴ The sources are given in *AJZ*, p. 153.

perish and not be inscribed together with the righteous. Blessed art thou, the Eternal, our God, who crushes the wicked." At the same time, other measures were taken with the Jewish Christians in mind, measures such as the prohibition of the recitation of the Decalogue in the daily worship, a practice which was apparently of special importance to them.

The position of the Jewish Christians who returned to the Holy Land seems to have been completely impossible, for their relationship to the Romans seems to have been little better than their relationship to their compatriots. Loyal Jews regarded them as apostates, while the Roman occupying forces saw them as Jews, despite their defection, and thus as potential rebels. In the tenth year of Trajan's reign, A.D. 107, according to Jerome's chronicle, their elderly bishop Simon suffered crucifixion when a politically colored charge was brought against him. He was executed by Trajan's governor Atticus as a descendant of David (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 3.32.3-6). With his death the period of heresies and schisms within Ebionitism began.

According to Eusebius (*Eccl. Hist.* 5.12), up to the year 135 there were fifteen bishops of the circumcision who succeeded one another and who possessed all the marks of a kind of monarchical episcopate over the congregations of the Jewish Christian church.²⁵ With the fall of Bether, the last Jewish stronghold, in A.D. 135, the revolt led by the Jewish partisan Bar Cocheba which had lasted for three and one-half years came to its end. This year thus definitely marks the end of the Jewish Christian congregation of Jerusalem. According to the list of bishops provided by Eusebius, their last bishop, Judas, resided there until the eighteenth year of Hadrian's reign (A.D. 134-135). Tradition ascribed to this last bishop the surname Kyriakos, which appears to bring him

²⁵ The number can hardly be correct. Perhaps bishops of other congregations are included in this list. Cf. *Theologie*, pp. 286 f.

into relationship with Jesus' family. The next bishop in the episcopal seat of James, Mark by name, was not of Jewish origin. The new congregation in Aelia Capitolina, as the Romans now called Jerusalem, had no contact with the brethren in Transjordan. Hadrian's extreme policy, expressed in the prohibition of circumcision (which applied to Jews and Jewish Christians alike), was further strengthened at that time when the Edict of Hadrian made it a capital offense for members of the Jewish people—Christian or not—to enter Jerusalem and its environs. Later emperors repeatedly renewed this edict.

The Jewish Christians in Palestine did not participate in the Bar Cocheba war. The reason is not hard to guess: it was because of Bar Cocheba's messianic claim which was accepted by the majority of the people and by its rabbinic leadership headed by Rabbi Akiba. Those who believed in Jesus could see here only an intolerable rivalry. The question of who was the True Prophet had already been decided for them; and they did not share the belief in reincarnation held by the Elkesaites. This was probably the reason for the bloody persecution of the "apostates" by Bar Cocheba's supporters, reported by Justin and Jerome. In the persecution of 135, conducted by their own people, the last Jewish Christian martyrs of whom we have knowledge perished. In Jerusalem, however, Jews and Christians were in the same boat, or, as Eusebius expressed it: If half the citizens were destroyed by Titus, the other half were banished by Hadrian. It was probably another headlong flight for the Jewish Christians, for they had to leave behind their greatest relic, the bishop's chair upon which James had sat and which was exhibited in Jerusalem as a precious relic even in the time of the emperor Constantine. The persecutions during and after the year 135 constituted the end of both the Jewish state and Palestinian Jewish Christianity.

For the external history of the Ebionite communities in Transjordan after 135 we possess few direct testimonies. We do know, however, that they continued their mission in a limited way and that in this new homeland, which was practically untouched by international commerce, they held their own for a long time—some 300 to 350 years. Their tendency to heretical schism, following the customary sectarian fate, probably produced further schisms or separate lines of development which taken together were not viable. The statement of Epiphanius (*Pan.* 30.14) that “Ebion” was a “many-headed monster” is significant. The sharp rivalry of long-lived baptismal sects such as that of the disciples of John, with which the Jewish Christians had to deal already in the first century according to *Recognitions* 1.60, or the Elkesaites, who were vigorously proselytizing in the third century, in addition to divisions in Jewish Christianity itself, brought about the gradual disintegration of Ebionitism. The actual dissolution of the Ebionite congregations in Transjordan is hidden in obscurity. If the Talmudic passage *Baba Kamma* 117a were to be read, “Rabbi Huna ben Judah entered the place of the Ebionim,” it would provide evidence of the existence of Ebionite settlements as late as the first half of the fourth century. It has recently been conjectured that the persecution of Christians by Diocletian, as described by Lactantius (*De mortibus Persecutorum* 34.1), was directed especially against the Jewish Christians and resulted in an almost complete eradication.²⁶ Since Epiphanius gives us information concerning the existence of an Ebionite settlement on Cyprus about the year 375, we may suppose that the Ebionites fled from their hostile environment to this island

²⁶ J. L. Teicher, “The Dead Sea Scrolls: Documents of the Jewish-Christian Sect of Ebionites,” *JJS* 2 (1950–51), 93 f. Teicher takes the unusual wording of the Galerian edict—*ut etiam Christiani, qui parentum suorum reliquerant sectam* (“that even Christians, who had abandoned the sect of their parents”)—as an allusion to the Jewish Christians.

which had been forbidden to Jews since A.D. 117. In the west around 360, Ambrosiaster and Marius Victorinus knew Symmachians, and as late as about 400 Augustine had knowledge of Symmachians and Nazoreans. Augustine identifies these groups with each other and explicitly states that remnants of them persisted to his own time—presumably he means in North Africa. In Syria, however, according to a statement by Theodoret of Cyprus who was certainly well-enough informed about this region, the Ebionites were no longer in existence as autonomous groups about the year 450. It was at this time that Pella became an episcopal see of the Great Church.

When their theological views and their solutions to the question of Jewish legal reform did not win approval on any side, and when the force of their eschatological expectation was gradually sapped by the fact of the delay of the Parousia (a fact which was not offset by any distinctive sacramental mysticism), the Ebionites, because they did not become part of the Catholic church, disappeared in the variegated conglomeration of religions in the Near East, probably actually combining with the Elkesaites in their closing period, as Epiphanius contends. In any case, we have no further information concerning their actual whereabouts. The Pseudo-Clementine writings which they used seem to have been taken over by the Arian party. As for their religious doctrines and views of faith, we see these reappearing—modified and recast to some extent, in the direction of a more closely connected system—in Islam, the third and up to now the last revealed religion in world history based upon the Bible. The relationship between Islamic doctrine and Ebionitism will be discussed in the last chapter of this book.

The Ebionite Portrayal of History

A. Events of Early Christian History in the Light of Later Jewish Christianity

Now that we have described the historical development of the Ebionites we must turn to a related question, viz., how the Ebionites themselves viewed their past. The pertinent material is provided by those parts of *Recognitions* 1 which we have attributed to the Ebionite "Acts of the Apostles," a writing to which Epiphanius witnessed (*Pan.* 30.6.9; 16.7) but which, unfortunately, is no longer extant. In any event, these portions are older than the Jewish Christian parts of the Pseudo-Clementines which have been called the *Kerygmata Petrou*. This has been confirmed by Georg Strecker, who sees a separate source, which he designates "AJ II," behind these passages. To the extent that these texts—including some scattered passages which the author of the novel has placed elsewhere—are concerned with the apostolic age, we may use them to show how the later Ebionites viewed certain disputes in the primitive church. Apparently, some special traditions concerning these disputes were preserved in their circles. The historical value of these traditions is, of course, highly problematical.

Their portrayal of the apostolic age was apparently intended to oppose the Lucan presentation of history. While other apocryphal acts of apostles tend to fill out with legend and creative fantasy the obscurities and lacunae in Luke's

narrative, the Ebionite "Acts" has a different goal. The fragments which we can identify permit us to see that we have here a bitter, polemical presentation opposed to the Lucan history, which glossed over the antagonisms, for the same situations in the common Christian past are seen in a completely different light and depicted in a different manner. Thus, from the parts of the Clementines which can be attributed to the Ebionite "Acts" we receive the following information concerning the organization of the primitive church in Jerusalem after the death of Jesus, information which goes beyond and diverges from what we learn from the New Testament:

(1) It is not Peter, as in Luke's presentation, but James the brother of Jesus, who appears as head of the community. He is made Bishop of Jerusalem by Jesus himself (*Rec.* 1.43). Peter has to submit to James annual reports in writing concerning his speaking and other activity. The *Kerygmata Petrou* are presented as such reports, whether this form derives from the original or from the fiction of the novel. In any case, Peter and all the other apostles are subordinate to James, are sent out by him as emissaries of the new messianic faith, and must render account of their missionary activity to him. According to the letter of Peter which introduces the Clementines, the teachers of the church—a group of seventy or seventy-two disciples, apparently modeled on the Jewish Sanhedrin—were ordained by Bishop James and his successors and remained subordinate to him. Thus the bishop as *monarches* stood at the head of the church's hierarchy. Holding the highest office and the highest teaching authority, he issued *testimonia* (letters of accreditation) indicating that one who had been approved (*probatus*) was "fit and faithful for the preaching of the word of Christ" (*idoneus et fidelis ad praedicandum Christi verbum, Rec.* 4.35). Accordingly, there was in this literature a kind of monarchical episcopacy, as it must have existed in the Transjordan Ebionite com-

munity in the second century, and it was claimed that this kind of episcopacy prevailed in the era of the primitive church. Since there is a series of independent testimonies from the ancient church—and not merely the Hegesippus tradition—which regard James as the first bishop of Jerusalem, this was not necessarily an invention.¹ Holl, Harnack, Peterson, Cullmann, and especially Stauffer see the actual state of affairs reflected in these historical reminiscences. Others, such as Theodore Zahn, have spoken of James as “the Pope of Ebionite fantasy.” Without dealing in greater detail with this problematical situation that so aggravates the search for the origin of ecclesiastical law, it is sufficient to establish here that the Clementine presentation is not necessarily unhistorical.

(2) The Clementines further affirm that at Easter in the seventh year after Jesus’ death—probably a Sabbatical Year (40/41?)—a kind of general assembly of the primitive church was held in Jerusalem and was presided over by James. Even though this is an isolated account, one must not consider it unhistorical, as does Eduard Schwartz. It is reported that following this assembly there was a public debate with the Jews, actually, that is, with the various religious parties (Sadducees, Samaritans, Pharisees, disciples of John) and professional groups (scribes, priests). Such a discussion with the Jews on the part of the primitive church—which appears in this account as a unity, without internal differences—is not in itself improbable. Nor is it unlikely that in practice it turned out to be a discussion with individual groups representing professional interests and religious parties. All this has been thoroughly examined in my earlier book.² At the request of the Jewish priests a single issue was raised for discussion, viz., whether or not Jesus was the prophet promised by Moses according to Deuteronomy 18:15, the eternal Christ (*Christus aeternus*, *Rec.* 1.43).

¹ *Theologie*, pp. 125 f.

² *Theologie*, pp. 384–405.

The reports concerning the progress of the debate (*Rec.* 1.54–65) are badly mutilated. We hear too little of the actual arguments brought against the new messianic community by the various parties (*haireseis*), and somewhat more concerning what was said to refute them. In any event, the catchwords which have been preserved can be recognized as being in agreement with the doctrinal positions which we know on other grounds to be characteristic of these parties.

There is a matter which I was unable to explain in 1947 but which has since been elucidated in a way which could not have been anticipated before then, viz., that the Sadducees are so strangely presented in the novel (*Rec.* 1.54) that the portrayal in essential points (e.g., the repeated assertion that they originated in the first century B.C.) cannot possibly fit the classic religious party of Josephus. In the Jewish Christian source which was reworked by the author of the novel they were probably designated as Zadokites; it was said of them that they had separated themselves from the people as “the just” (*iustores*) and had originated “almost as early as the time of John”!

Even more interesting is the appearance of the disciples of John as a distinct group in *Recognitions* 1.60 (the Syriac version at 1.54 states that they were numerous), a group which likewise made messianic claims on behalf of their master and vigorously opposed the Jesus-community. This account of an early conflict involving rival messianic claimants, which is unique outside the New Testament tradition, argues, in my opinion, in favor of a certain historical substance for the whole narrative.³ A dispute so deadly would

³ In *Hom.* 2.23 f., a passage independent of this one, John the Baptist appears as *hemerobaptistes* (“daily baptizer”) and the founder of a sect. Dositheus and Simon Magus are said to have been his pupils. In addition, the syzygies-canon of the Clementines attacks John and his disciples. Regarding its strict anti-Johannine tendency, cf. *Theologie*, p. 163, and now also O. Cullmann, *Christology of the New Testament*, trans. S. C. Guthrie and C. A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), pp. 41 f.

perhaps be left unmentioned; it would not be an invention. Also supporting the historicity is the fact that the Baptists and Essenes are not mentioned in the usual lists of heresies (Hegesippus, Justin, etc.); apparently, the Jewish Christians regarded themselves as the spiritual heirs of these groups. *Recognitions* 1.37 appears to refer to the Essenes (*recta sententia paucorum*, i.e., right opinion of a Jewish minority), as Hilgenfeld and Lehmann already observed in their time.

To this dispute with the parties (*haireseis*) *Recognitions* 1.66–71 attaches an independent piece which may have once had the superscription *Anabathmoi Iakobou* (“Ascents of James”). Here it is reported that James, as head, with the apostles and the whole congregation, goes to the Temple (*Rec.* 1.66: *Iacobus ascendit ad templum = anabathmoi Iakobou*), where a huge crowd has been waiting for them since midnight. The controversy of the Ebionite “Acts” now culminates in the description of a public debate between James and the high priest Caiaphas, while the crypto-Christian Rabbi Gamaliel (cf. Acts 5) is introduced as a kind of moderator of the assembly. The text at this point (chap. 69) is unfortunately badly mutilated and preserves for us only catchwords, representing themes in James’s speech: the earlier history of the messianic prophet in Israel, the twofold Parousia of Jesus, the institution of baptism, and apparently also statements concerning the Temple, sacrifice, and altar fire.

When one now attempts to reconstruct the speech of the original source, which the original Clementine novel has quite clearly divided up, placing part in the mouth of Peter, part in the introductory statement concerning the history of salvation (*Rec.* 1.27–43), and part in the doctrinal insertion of *Recognitions* 1.44b–53, the reconstructed speech parallels remarkably Stephen’s speech in Acts 7.⁴ The speech of

⁴ The attempted reconstruction is presented in detail in *Theologie*, pp. 408–12, 441–45.

Stephen is already under suspicion in the view of many scholars. Goguel, Jackson, Sahlin, and others have expressed their doubts. Martin Dibelius likewise points out that the most conspicuous characteristic of this speech is the unrelatedness of its main section. The parallelism of the two speeches can be described as follows: in both there is a sketch of the history of salvation from the patriarchs to Sinai; in both the transition from the prophet Moses to the messianic prophet is made by means of Deuteronomy 18:15 (Acts 7:37; *Rec.* 1.36); in both the sacrificial cultus is deprecated as the cause of idolatry (Acts 7:41 ff.; *Rec.* 1.35); and, finally, in both there is polemic against Solomon's construction of a temple and in favor of the tabernacle (Acts 7:44–50; *Rec.* 1.38). This central section of Stephen's speech, which is doctrinally totally unique both in the New Testament and in the literature of the ancient church, has, as far as I know, only a single parallel in terms of content, viz., this passage of the *Recognitions* which we have attributed to the Ebionite "Acts." This gives pause for thought! In my book I proposed an explanation for this which I will not repeat since all theologians immediately see red when the historicity of the alleged Hellenistic deacon Stephen is questioned.⁵ In any case, we have in the speech of the Ebionite "Acts," whether it was delivered by James, Peter, or someone

⁵ Even if one regards Stephen as historical, it must be clear that he was not only a representative of a synagogue for Greek Jews but also, as his designation as a "Hellenist" seems to imply, not orthodox—loyal to the law—representing instead a kind of liberal, emancipated Judaism. Luke strongly emphasizes that Stephen was a pneumatic (Acts 6:5; 7:55); this probably included the idea that he could conduct himself autonomously with respect to the law's demand for total obedience. The most recent presentation of W. Schmithals, *Paul and James*, trans. D. M. Barton (Naperville: Allenson, 1965), pp. 16–37, points in this direction. One must not, however, see in these Stephen-Hellenists of Acts 6–7 mere antinomians; rather, their critical stance toward the law was related solely to the laws pertaining to the cult and sacrifice, as Luke's version of the speech makes clear. In any event, this resulted in Stephen's martyrdom, for the persecution of the Stephen-Hellenists by the Jews was "an absolutely necessary act of national and religious self-defence" (Schmithals, p. 26).

else, a counterpart to Stephen's speech in Acts 7, as seen by the marked anti-cultic tendency which they have in common. I regard it as a dereliction of duty on the part of the exegetes when they pass by this unique parallel without showing any interest in it.⁶ The fragmentary reminiscences of the Ebionites which are preserved in the Clementines, i.e., the separate tradition of the Jewish Christians, are clearly related to the same speech and to the events accompanying it.

The speech of James has a very dramatic point of departure. The *homo quidam inimicus* ("a certain enemy")—all interpreters agree that Saul/Paul is meant here—forces his way into the Temple with some others, reviles the bishop James as a disciple of a magician (the reproach used by the scribes in the debate against Jesus [*Rec.* 1.58]), and incites the people. He himself becomes violent and finally throws James down from the highest step of the Temple to the bottom, from where James is carried away half dead. As a result, the congregation of Jesus decides to flee to Jericho.

As is well known, the Lucan Acts makes the narrative of Stephen's martyrdom the occasion for the entrance of Saul, the Pharisaic delegate, into the history of the primitive church. While 7:58 ascribes to Saul a significant part in the stoning of Stephen and 8:1 (cf. also 22:20) passes over the details of his role with the statement "Saul consented to his death," the Ebionite "Acts" explicitly makes Paul responsible for the fall of the speaker from the Temple step. The speaker, however, was not the Hellenistic deacon Stephen but the head of the whole community, James the brother of Jesus. This certainly reminds one of Hegesippus' narrative of the death of James which is to be dated twenty-five years later (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 2.23.4–18); but Hegesippus may

⁶ It may be remarked in passing that there are still other similarities, such as the use of the primitive title "Son of man" by Stephen—he is the only one who uses it in Acts—and by the Jewish Christian Hegesippus (cf. *Theologie*, pp. 79 f.).

have employed the Ebionite "Acts" as a source, just as the Clementines do.

At any rate, the Ebionite "Acts" must have contained a narrative parallel to the events which according to the canonical Acts were connected with the death of Stephen (7:57—8:3). The subject in both cases is the first pogrom directed against Jewish Christianity. The exact circumstances and the causal connections are so differently reported in the two cases, however, that one must consider the possibility of different strands of tradition rather than dispose of the problem the easy way (i.e., by saying that the Ebionite narrative is secondary and the product of theological bias; it represents the filling in of the Lucan lacunae by means of Ebionite fantasy, and so forth).

According to the Ebionite "Acts," the events proved more incriminating for Paul than Luke allows us to see, inasmuch as Paul both originated and executed a plot to murder the head of the church, James the brother of Jesus. In both accounts, however, it is through Paul that a persecution is loosed against the primitive church. According to the Ebionite "Acts," this led to a temporary exodus of the Jewish Christians to Jericho, while Peter even fled as far as Damascus.

The question of whether this account is true or at least nearer to the truth than the account in the canonical Acts cannot be answered. We cannot even pose the question, for we do not learn "how it really happened" from either presentation. But whoever is interested in the primitive Christian era must take note of the other side, viz., the Ebionite portrayal of the origins of their church, even though Christian faith can do nothing with it and may be embarrassed or even scandalized by it. Moreover, an *Apocalypse of James* has turned up among the Gnostic writings discovered at Nag Hammadi which has induced its editor, A. Böhlig, to declare that "the traditions concerning James and Stephen

belong together.”⁷ This means that, despite all my opponents, my view is the correct one!

The persecution which follows the death of Stephen in the Lucan Acts of the Apostles remains for us rather obscure. Since there are no reliable clues, all suggestions concerning the date of the event are mere speculation. The Ebionite “Acts” dates both these events and the conversion of Paul in the seventh year after Jesus’ death, which is five years later than is usually assumed. If this is true, it will simplify a problem in the chronology of Paul’s life, for the puzzling empty period of A.D. 38–44 disappears. The visit to Jerusalem which occurred three years after the conversion thus took place in A.D. 43, and the “relief visit” with Barnabas reported in Acts 11:30 and 12:25 is usually placed in the year 44.

From *Recognitions* 1, then, we have the following facts as the Clementine contribution to the reconstruction of the history of primitive Christianity, i.e., facts derived from the separate Ebionite tradition concerning events in the earliest period of the church which appear to correspond with the events narrated in Acts 7:1—8:3 and 9:1–3:

- Assuming that the Crucifixion occurred in 33, the first persecution of the primitive church took place in the year 40.

- The occasion was not the speech of the deacon Stephen but a speech of James the brother of Jesus.

- This speech gave blunt expression to the anti-cultic tendency of Jesus’ gospel, a tendency which has been suppressed by Luke; but in other respects, this speech, like its parallel in Acts, was concerned with the expectation of Jesus’ Parousia as conceived in the Son of man theology.

- A murder plot on the part of the Pharisaic delegate Saul unleashed a persecution of the primitive church and resulted in its temporary exodus to Jericho.

⁷ *The Origins of Gnosticism: Colloquium of Messina 13–18 April 1966*, ed. U. Bianchi (Leiden, 1967), p. 138.

B. Contra Paulum: The Dispute about the Apostolate

In another passage related to this narrative, the Ebionite "Acts," with its retrospective view of the conflict over Paul in the primitive church, provides valuable additional material which shows clearly the position of Paul's Judaistic opponents in the early church. The passage is *Homilies* 17.13–20, which is characterized by a marked anti-Paulinism even after the patristic consensus in favor of Paul. In this dialogue between Peter and Simon (Paul) we apparently possess an important fragment of the tradition concerning the arguments with which "certain men from James" (*tines apo Iakobou*) in Galatia (Gal. 2:12) and the so-called Christ party in Corinth (I Cor. 1:12) may have contested the legitimacy of the Apostle to the Gentiles. Before we present this, however, it is advisable for us to bring to mind the original idea of apostleship prevailing in Jerusalem, as Luke portrays it.

According to Luke 6:13 and parallels, Jesus conferred the title "apostle" on his twelve disciples at the very beginning of his public ministry. The lists giving the names of the disciples are set forth by the Synoptic Gospels as by Acts. The apostles received their status from Jesus himself, with whom they traveled about. The risen Christ appeared to them (according to Matt. 28:18 ff.) and commanded them to go into all the world. Luke also ends his Gospel (24:47–49) and begins the Acts of the Apostles (1:8) with the missionary commission to the Twelve as Jesus' witnesses (*martures*). It is quite clear that the title of apostle, indicating the highest status in primitive Christianity, was reserved for the Twelve by the Synoptic authors. It is my opinion that this Synoptic viewpoint reflects the oldest view of what constitutes a Christian apostle.⁸ The apostles are those who

⁸ *Contra* H. von Campenhausen's helpful investigation "Der urchristliche Apostelbegriff," *Studia Theologica*, 1 (1947), 105 f. Campenhausen is of the opinion "that Luke follows later linguistic usage in his narrative and then erroneously attributes this usage to Jesus himself and to the period of his earthly life."

stood closest to the historical Jesus and who must therefore be regarded by believers as the authentic eyewitnesses of the events of his life and everything that happened after his death. Even Paul seems to grant at least the fact that there were those in Jerusalem who had been apostles "before him" (Gal. 1:17). It was thus a closed circle, composed of those witnesses (*martyres*) who had been associated with the teaching of the earthly Jesus and who alone had eaten and drunk with the risen Christ (Acts 10:41). In contrast with these, Paul, by virtue of his Damascus encounter, became only one of the witnesses of the Resurrection, and not a witness of the earthly life of Jesus.

The question concerning the essential marks of an apostle (*apostolos*) must have given rise at an early period to a conflict in earliest Christianity. The Twelve, along with James, apparently considered the eyewitness position of the one who had been chosen by Jesus, i.e., the association with Jesus, as the exclusive and excluding characteristic of the apostolic status. This view is supported by the narrative of Acts 1:21 ff., reporting the substitutionary choice of Matthias, which clearly indicates that the college of the Twelve was regarded as closed. Accordingly, a first attack on Paul's office occurred in Galatia, where it was claimed that his office was not of the same kind or of the same worth as that of the original apostles since he had not had any physical association with the earthly Jesus. W. G. Kümmel conjectures that no one thereby contested the Pauline vision of the risen Christ but only the claim that by it he had been called to the mission to the Gentiles.⁹ In any event, the apostleship of this latecomer must have been problematic from the beginning. The author of Acts, a member of Paul's party, takes pains to derive Paul's apostolic authorization, *post factum*, from the congregation in Antioch by which he had been sent

⁹ *Kirchenbegriff und Geschichtsbewusstsein in der Urgemeinde und bei Jesus, Symb. Bibl. Ups. 1* (Uppsala, 1943).

out (Acts 13:1 ff.), or, more precisely, from Barnabas who, according to Acts 9:27, introduced Paul to the primitive church. This idea of apostleship, however, represents a totally different standard from that which was accepted in Jerusalem. Actually, Paul himself had confronted the primitive church with an entirely new conception of apostleship, a conception which was so constructed that he could use it to demonstrate his own legitimacy.

Over against the principle of belonging personally to the narrowest circle of Jesus' associates, as enunciated by the primitive church (Acts 1:21 f.), Paul set the principle of the new post-messianic period, according to which apostleship no longer depended upon association with Jesus according to the flesh but only upon the fact of being a witness of the Resurrection (II Cor. 5:16).¹⁰ And this must have meant for him a special calling, a sending and commission by the risen Christ directed especially to him. That is, he believed himself commissioned to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:1; 11:13; Gal. 1:16; 2:6-8; etc.). By God's will he was called to be "an apostle of Jesus Christ," as stated in the introductions to most of his epistles, having the office of the "servant of Christ" (*doulos Christos*), who is a tool in God's hands.¹¹ To his opponents in Galatia he retorted that his apostleship was independent of men since it had originated in a separate revelation of Christ which was imparted only to him (Gal. 1:1-12). His apostleship did not derive from human authorization ("not from men nor through a man") but uniquely from the commission of Jesus Christ and his divine Father (Gal. 1:1). It had pleased God to re-

¹⁰ This conception has been frequently advocated since Baur; in recent times Lietzmann, Schlatter, Sass, and Käsemann have seen in this passage concerning the unimportance of the Christ "according to the flesh" (*kata sarka*) the basis of the Pauline idea of apostleship.

¹¹ Cf. G. Sass, "Zur Bedeutung von *doulos* bei Paulus," *ZNW* 40 (1941), 31 f. A. Fridrichsen, *The Apostle and His Message* (Uppsala, 1947), p. 3, asserts: "When Paul in Romans introduces himself as a *kletos apostolos* he characterizes himself as an eschatologic person."

veal his Son in or to Paul (*apokalypesai ton huion autou en emoi*), and from this revelation Paul's apostleship was derived (Gal. 1:16). Even those in Jerusalem were compelled to recognize his equality with the older apostles.¹²

Paul thus advocates an *expanded* idea of apostleship which also includes those who have received a special commission from the risen Christ.¹³ For Paul, the apostolic circle evidently included others beyond the Twelve, James, and himself. "Who may have belonged to it, in Paul's view, besides Peter and Paul himself we cannot say with certainty."¹⁴ In any case, there could have been serious disagreement concerning the membership of this or that missionary.

Although Paul thus understood the apostolate to be something quite different from what those in Jerusalem saw it to be, he nevertheless recognized the Jerusalem apostles as "pillars" (*styloi*).¹⁵ The battle over his apostolic prestige in Galatia and Corinth, however, finally led him to claim that he was the last and decisive member of the apostolic circle (I Cor. 15:8 ff.). He made this claim over against the tradition of the primitive church (I Cor. 15:3b-5), which apparently maintained that the appearances of the risen Christ had ceased with the appearances to the Twelve and James.¹⁶

This conflict is developed to its full extreme in the presentation of the *Kerygmata Petrou*, which reproduces similarly the point of view of the Judaistic opponents of Paul.

¹² For details see Rengstorff, "Apostolos," *TDNT* 1, 442; and G. Sass, *Apostelamt und Kirche* (Munich, 1939), pp. 23 f.

¹³ Cf. Kümmel, *op. cit.* (p. 48, n. 9), p. 7.

¹⁴ Cf. von Campenhausen, "Der urchristliche Apostelbegriff" (see above, p. 47, n. 8), p. 106.

¹⁵ C. K. Barrett, "Paul and the 'Pillar' Apostles," in *Studia Paulina in honorem J. de Zwaan* (Haarlem, 1953), p. 13, proposes that we understand the *styloi* eschatologically as "the pillars of the eschatological temple." The text betrays no evidence of this.

¹⁶ So also K. Holl, "Der Kirchenbegriff des Apostels Paulus in seinem Verhältnis zu dem der Urgemeinde," *Gesammelte Aufsätze II* (Tübingen, 1928), pp. 44 ff.

Their old enemy, the *homo quidam inimicus* (*Rec.* 1.70), here appears under the pseudonym "Simon."¹⁷ This "Simon who is also Paul" (*Simon qui et Paulus*) is for them "a certain deceiver" (*planos tis*, II Cor. 6:8), "the enemy" (*ho echthros*, Gal. 4:16), and a "false apostle" (*pseudapostolos*) who taught "apostasy from Moses" (*apostasis apo Mouseos*) and proclaimed a false gospel. As true apostle, Peter opposes him in a debate which exposes him.

In a public debate in Laodicea (invented by the author of the novel), reported in *Homilies* 17, Peter asserts in a manner characteristic of the Judaizers that Paul cannot have seen the risen Christ at all. It is clearly the same principle established by Peter at the time of the election of Judas' successor according to the canonical Acts (1:21 ff.), viz., that only eyewitnesses of the earthly Jesus could be considered for election to the apostolate. Here we find adherence to Jerusalem's rigorous limitation of the apostolic office to the circle of the Twelve; a thirteenth apostle was as unthinkable as a thirteenth month in the year (*Rec.* 4.35). The "visions" and "revelations of the Lord" (*optasiai* and *apokalypseis Kyriou*) to which Paul pointed constituted no claim to objective truth since they were merely subjective experiences. Indeed, the Clementine Peter even reviles them as manifestations of an evil demon or a lying spirit. In response to a question of Simon/Paul, whether the direct revelation of God through a vision (*optasia*) is not more convincing (*hikanotera*) than evidence dependent upon human experience (*enargeia*), Peter argues in *Homilies* 17.14–19 approximately as follows: "Personal acquaintance with and personal instruction by the True Prophet provides certainty; visions leave one in uncertainty. For they can also proceed from a deceiving spirit (*pneuma planon*), who feigns to be what he is not." Peter then illustrates his point by referring to a

¹⁷ The use of pseudonyms in the Clementine novel derives from complex motives; in this connection cf. *Theologie*, pp. 418–42.

series of biblical visions, which were actually dreams. The righteous man, he continues, does not need visions in order to learn what he ought to do. "To the pious man in the earthly body truth comes not in dreams or visions (*en horamati e optasia*) but is granted to him in full consciousness. In this way the Son was revealed to me by the Father. Thereby I know from my own experience the importance of revelation (*tis dynamis apokalypseos*). The moment that the Lord asked who men held him to be, I said immediately, 'You are the Son of the living God' (Matt. 16:14). And he who declared me thereby blessed informed me that it was the Father who had revealed it to me. From that time I have known what revelation is: the discovery of truth without instruction, without a vision and dreams (*adidaktos aneu optasias kai oneiron*, chap. 18)."

Then the Clementine Peter gives this a polemical application when, in spite of his skepticism concerning visions of Christ, he for the moment concedes to his opponent the possibility of such a vision, and then continues: "If Jesus has become known to you through visions, then it is only in such a manner as Jesus gives them in anger to his antagonist (*hos antikeimeno ho Iesous orgizomenos*).¹⁸ How then can one be qualified for the teaching office by means of instruction received in a vision? And if you protest, 'It is possible,' then why did the Master spend a whole year¹⁹ with us who were awake? How are we to believe you when you say that he has really appeared to you? And how can he really have appeared to you, since you think precisely the opposite of his teaching? If, however, by means of one hour's instruction you have become an apostle, then also proclaim his dis-

¹⁸ The scriptural basis is Num. 12:6-9, where God angrily informs Aaron and Miriam that if a prophet arose from them this prophet would reveal himself to them through visions and dreams. To Moses, on the other hand, God would appear in visible form as a friend.

¹⁹ The interval of time here is surprising: one year, not three as in the canonical text.

courses and expound them, love his apostles, do not quarrel with me, for I was with him. You have opposed (*anthes-tekas*; cf. Gal. 2:11, *antesten*) me, a firm rock, the bedrock foundation of the church (*sterea petra kai themelion ek-klesias*; cf. Matt. 16:18). If you were not my adversary, you would not slander me and revile my preaching, so that I am not believed when I declare that which I received directly from the mouth of the Lord himself, as if I were a condemned man (*kategnosmenos*; cf. again Gal. 2:11) and you were the one who was highly extolled. When you call me *kategnosmenos*, you indict God, who revealed Christ to me; you attack him who praised me as blessed on account of this revelation. But if you do in fact want to work for the truth, then first learn from us what we have learned from Jesus, and become as a disciple of the truth our co-worker (*synergos hemon*, chap. 19; cf. I Cor. 3:9, *theou gar synergoi*)."

Whoever reads this speech of the Clementine Peter for the first time immediately perceives two things. First, the Peter of the New Testament has become Paul's most vehement adversary; a bitter Judaistic recollection of the scene in Antioch clearly underlies this.²⁰ Second, we have here in one speech all the arguments of the Judaists reflected in the Pauline epistles.²¹ There is no doubt that this polemic is expressed in a diction and is associated with ideas and expressions which emerged at the earliest in the second century. Apparently this speech was at the time directed against the Gnostics, who appealed to the Pauline visions. It also seems

²⁰ It may be regarded as established, however, that this is legendary. There is no real evidence in support of the old Tübingen point of view, viz., that Peter exhibited an anti-Pauline activity in the Judaistic sense, or even that the quarrel in Antioch resulted in an actual break between the two men. Cf. H. Windisch, "Das Urchristentum," *TR* 5 (1933), 291 ff.

²¹ The well-known reproaches raised against him in Galatia and Corinth, concerning which Paul gives us only hints: he preaches another gospel (Gal. 1:7), which is obscure (II Cor. 4:3); he distorts the word of God (II Cor. 4:2); he has another spirit (II Cor. 11:4); his call to be an apostle is questionable (II Cor. 3:5); and so forth.

to me to be certain that the author of this artistic literary document had in front of him the Pauline epistles and the canonical Acts, and that we are therefore dealing here with a much later anti-Paulinism. Nevertheless, I believe we are justified in assuming that the old arguments of the Judaists against Paul have been used and preserved here. These arguments gain force and coherence from their use in this literature.

The Judaistic opposition was clearly not directed primarily against the Damascus experience of the apostle but against his continuing appeal to this vision (and probably to others as well) for the purpose of legitimating his apostolic status and confirming his gospel, which diverged from the preaching of the older apostles. In this literature again it was a matter of a fundamentally different conception of what constituted an apostle of Christ, as we have already been able to establish on the basis of the New Testament sources as the contrast between Paul and the Twelve.²² But here the Judaists, who considered association with and instruction by the historical Jesus as the one essential characteristic of apostleship, advance to the attack. They deny that visions and revelations qualify one for the apostolate, they indignantly reject Paul's claim (II Cor. 5:16!), and consequently also reject his claim that he understands Jesus' message better than Peter, as Simon/Paul actually asserts in the Clementine text (*Hom. 17.4, hos hypo optasias autou ton logon*). They polemicize against the reliability of visions, which are unverifiable and in which a spirit unrelated to God may be re-

²² The view that the idea of apostleship long remained open and only at a late date (II Peter) became identified with the Twelve (so G. Klein) is not in accord with the historical development of thought. The controversy concerning whether apostleship should be conceived narrowly or broadly resulted in definite positions at an early date, as our texts show. Schmithals' view that the apostolic office derived neither from Judaism nor from the church but rather from Gnosticism is arbitrary fantasy.

vealed.²³ For genuine revelation consists in the discovery of truth without visions or dreams! The phrase *hos antikeimeno ho Iesous orgizomenos* suggests the conjecture that here, by the turning around of his own words, Paul is set forth as the *antikeimenos* ("adversary") concerning whom he himself had warned the Thessalonians (II Thess. 2:4).

Of more decisive importance, however, is the claim of the original apostles that there was no other gospel than the one which Jesus' disciples had learned from Jesus himself. One could see that Paul was a false apostle simply by the fact that he did not teach and expound the discourses of Christ; his thought was the very opposite of Jesus' teaching. Thus it is stated in *Recognitions* 2.55: "Whoever does not learn the law from teachers but instead regards himself as a teacher and scorns the instruction of the disciples of Jesus is bound to involve himself in absurdities against God." For this reason Peter, whose apostolic office was founded upon the Lord's promise (Matt. 16:17 f.), also attacked Paul and exposed him in this debate as the *antikeimenos*, the great adversary.

Since Paul was viewed at least by the descendants of the early Judaists as the adversary, as the *echthros* ("enemy"), indeed, even as the Antichrist (*Rec.* 3.61), it is probable that he was so regarded by the early Judaists themselves. Over against Paul, Peter, who in one passage is designated "true apostle of a true prophet" (*alethous prophetou alethes apostolos*, *Hom.* 20.19), and James, the head of the church, represented in the Ebionite view the true, lawful kerygma

²³ The distaste for dreams found in the literature (which is strongly influenced by the Old Testament) and therefore also in the group which produced it probably goes back to such passages as Deut. 13:3: "Do not listen to the words of the one who has dreams, for the Eternal, your God, desires to test you etc"; Zech. 10:2, "Dreamers speak vanity," and so on. See further, *Theologie*, p. 426, and E. L. Ehrlich, *Der Traum im Alten Testament* (Berlin, 1953).

(*nomimon kerygma*).²⁴ Just as the “hostile man” (*echthros anthropos*) while still a Jew agitated for a cultically falsified Mosaic religion, so also did he later become an enemy of all law. Just as by his intervention he had already frustrated the endeavors of the primitive church and James to convert the Jews to “the Mosaic law, restored through Jesus the Prophet” (*lex mosaica per Jesum prophetam reformata*), so also after his conversion did he remain the persecutor of the true law. On this basis, *Recognitions* 4.34 / *Homilies* 11.35 makes the pronouncement that henceforth “no apostle, teacher, or prophet” shall be received who has not laid his kerygma before James. Of Simon/Paul it is said that he “came with the pretense of proclaiming the truth in the name of our Lord, but actually sowing error.” He is viewed as a representative of the negative “female” prophecies (*Hom.* 2.17). Georg Strecker, who has published the most recent study of this literature, has therefore quite correctly observed: “The avowal of the legalistic kerygma (*Ep. Petri* 2.3) inevitably led to the challenging of the legitimacy of the Pauline proclamation.”²⁵

It seems to me that one can better understand the position of the Judaistic opponents whom Paul encountered in his missionary congregations, especially in Galatia and Corinth where inspectors from the primitive church were at work,²⁶

²⁴ In other passages of the novel there are further statements alluding to Paul’s teaching. His “lawless and foolish teaching” (*anomos kai phylarodes didaskalia*) is ridiculed (*Ep. Petri* 2). Simon/Paul claims that he has been able “to learn from the law what the law did not know” (*ex lege discere quod nesciebat lex, Rec.* 2.54).

²⁵ Strecker, (*op. cit.*, p. 17, n. 12), p. 196.

²⁶ Cf. E. Käsemann, “Die Legitimität des Apostels,” *ZNW* 41 (1942), 52: “It was as ‘apostles’ and at the same time also inspectors, that they (Paul’s opponents) were sent out by the primitive church, which regarded itself as the authentic successor of the central Jewish community.” R. Bultmann, *Exegetische Probleme des zweiten Korintherbriefes* (*Symb. Bibl. Ups.* 9 [Uppsala, 1947]), and “Gnosis,” *JTS* n.s. 3 (1952), 19, held the intruders at Corinth to be Jewish Gnostics, perhaps from Alexandria. The older position represented by Käsemann can hardly be said to have been shaken by Bultmann.

if one consults the Clementine material. This literature, it is true, is not to be regarded as primary documentation, but even in its present form, in which the material has been twice reworked and is certainly garbled, it provides us with an illuminating secondary source. The arguments used against Paul were subsequently drawn upon by the heirs of Paul's opponents for use against Marcion and the Gnostics. In addition, the reworked and expanded Ebionite "Acts" was minced through the paper mill of an ancient novel-factory.

I would regard the Clementine narrative as confirmation of the fact that the Twelve, along with James and the Christians in Jerusalem, reserved apostleship and the teaching office to the elect eyewitnesses, i.e., those who had been closely associated with the historical Jesus, and consequently conceded to Paul at most the function of a *synergos hemon* ("a co-worker with us"). It is important for us to know more precisely the position of Paul's Judaistic opponents, since it can show us how greatly Paul's position was contested and questioned in primitive Christianity.²⁷ Paul and Pauline theology constituted at that time only one possibility, one direction among several, and perhaps not always the most important. The historians generally see only the historical outcome, i.e., the forces in a conflict which emerge victorious, while the groups which are overcome slip into obscurity. Those who are contemporary with the events do not know what the future holds. To Paul's opponents it would likely have seemed improbable if someone had told them that Paul and his gospel would be victorious and conquer the world while they themselves would be left behind and even be branded as heretics a few generations later. The dogmatic

²⁷ In his missionary congregations Paul naturally encountered other opponents besides the Judaists of the Ebionite type. With the help of the Deutero-Pauline writings we can easily recognize the Gnostic teachers and their erroneous teachings. Cf. E. Percy, *Die Probleme der Kolosser- und Epheserbriefe* (Lund, 1946); and G. Bornkamm, "Die Häresie des Kolosserbriefes," *TL* 73 (1948), cols. 11-20.

judgment of the theologian, whose faith is threatened when a certain justification is granted to the viewpoint of the vanquished party by this time declared heretical, need not be adopted by the historian of religion. That Paul had the truth and his opponents were in error is not the case! Nor can one say that Paul understood the person, intention, and teaching of Jesus better than the Pharisaic Jewish Christians of Jerusalem. In my book on Paul I have attempted to present a study of Paul's theology as a whole and his position within primitive Christianity, a study which is not based on religious faith but employs the approach of the history of religions.

The Ebionite View of Christ

A. The Oldest Form of the Ebionite Proclamation

Having established which passages of the Pseudo-Clementines are oldest and which thus refer back from the Ebionites of the second and third centuries to the "Judaists" of the primitive church in Jerusalem, we now wish to extract the doctrinal quintessence from this material and ask: What emerges from the great doctrinal disputes with the Jewish religious movements as the "Christian point of view"? To this end the extremely complicated literary relationships of the individual speeches and counter-speeches of the novel must be left out of account so that we may concentrate on the question of what the spokesmen of the primitive church delivered as Christian doctrines and beliefs in *Recognitions* 1.54–65. The fact that here all twelve apostles are speaking makes it obvious that this is a literary scene created by the author of the novel. The Ebionite version of the apostolic proclamation, as seen *post eventum* in the Clementine portrayal of the movement, contained the following points:

(1) Jesus is the prophet like Moses whose coming the latter prophesied (Deut. 18:15). Both worked signs and wonders. Jesus, however, is more than a prophet; he is the Messiah. As such he was also greater than his greatest predecessor, John the Baptist.

(2) Jesus taught the resurrection from the dead and himself arose from the dead. Jacob had already prophesied a

twofold Parousia in the Shiloh prophecy (Gen. 49:10; cf. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 52.1). Jesus had appeared the first time in humility but he would return in glory to judge the wicked and to receive the pious "into the fellowship and society of the Kingdom" (*in consortium regni societatemque*, Rec. 1.49).

(3) Water baptism is necessary for the forgiveness of sins and entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Without it "the prerogative of a good life and an upright disposition" (*bonae vitae et rectae mentis praerogativa*, Rec. 1.55) would effect nothing. Jesus had established baptism as a means of purification and atonement in the place of the bloody animal sacrifices derived from the pagans. In so doing he merely effected that which even Moses had desired: the abolition of the animal sacrifices.

(4) Jesus prophesied the destruction of the Temple and the "abomination of desolation" because the Jews were clinging to the sacrificial cult even after his proclamation. The Gentile mission became necessary because of the Jews' lack of faith, since the conversion of the Gentiles will precede the second coming of Jesus.

Such is the content of the original apostolic proclamation as it is presented in the Ebionite historical work. It was these points and no others which the apostles made in their response to the various Jewish religious movements in the public debate concerning the Christ, according to the Ebionite document. Accordingly, this was the content of the faith of the Christian Pharisees of Acts 15:5, the ancestors of the Ebionites. Or, more precisely, they thought that the men to whose authority they appealed, James and Peter, held the same beliefs they did. It is probable that these four points drawn from the Pseudo-Clementine novel represent the oldest form of the Ebionite testimony to Christ. The gulf between these beliefs and the doctrines of other groups and movements in the primitive church is not yet a wide one.

Even radical skepticism cannot deny the probability that this represents the teaching of Pharisaic Jewish Christianity in Jerusalem.

B. The Further Development of Ebionite Theology

On the basis of other fragments of the *Kerygmata Petrou* which are not as primitive, and from other sources, we know something about the development which occurred in Ebionite theology with respect to the doctrine of the person of Christ and the content of Christ's teaching. The deviation from the doctrinal point of view of the Great Church, by virtue of which Ebionitism was stigmatized by the latter as "heresy," apparently developed only after the exodus to Transjordan, during the exile in Pella.

(1) *The Person of Christ*.¹ As the Righteous One (*saddiq*), the only man who has completely fulfilled the law, Jesus has been appointed to be the Christ (Hippolytus, Origen, Epiphanius). "Had another likewise fulfilled the precepts of the law, he too would have become Christ, for by like deeds other Christs (*Christoi*) could occur," reports Hippolytus concerning their faith (*Philosophumena* 7.34.1 f.). Jesus, moreover, fulfilled the law as *man*, not as Son of God (*huios theou*) but as Son of man (*huios anthropou*). He was consecrated for Messiahship and endowed with the power of God not through real preexistence but through the act of adoption which was announced in Psalm 2:7 and which occurred at the time of his baptism, i.e., through the Holy Spirit present in the water of the baptismal bath. This "adoptionism"—in *Recognitions* 1.48 it is said that Jesus is he *qui in aquis baptismi filius a deo appellatus est* ("who in the waters of baptism was called Son by God")—developed from ideas current in the primitive church, according to which it was the baptismal act, described at length in the

¹ *Theologie*, pp. 71–78.

Jewish Christian gospels, which first elevated Jesus to the status of being “beloved Son of God.” This elevation took place as the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and entered into him. Jewish Christianity clearly knows as little of a supernatural birth as of a soteriological interpretation of Jesus’ death on the cross, such as the view which regarded Jesus as a vicarious atoning sacrifice. Since they rejected bloody sacrifices altogether as crass paganism (see below, pp. 82 ff.), the Ebionite Jesus can neither have taught this nor by his death have put his seal on it—in contrast with the tradition of the primitive church preserved in I Corinthians 15:3. On the same basis they celebrated the Lord’s Supper as a mere remembrance of table-fellowship with Jesus and replaced the cup of blood with a cup of water (according to Irenaeus and Epiphanius). The Clementines, which know no cup, give special emphasis to the breaking of bread with the sprinkling of salt, the salt symbolizing the incorruptibility of God’s covenant with Israel. Another result of the belief in the mere humanity of Jesus (psilanthropism) was that even that which the Great Church regarded as self-evident, viz., the sinlessness of Jesus, was not accepted by them, since their gospel allowed Jesus himself to admit unwitting sins or sins of ignorance.² Consequently, the Clementines know no other Christology than the adoptionism of the *appellatio* (“calling”) to divine sonship of the one who was born as a man.³

(2) *The Doctrine of the Son of Man and Millenarianism.*⁴ The Ebionite Jewish Christians certainly confessed Jesus as “the Son of man.” The title “Son of man,” which seldom occurs outside the Synoptic Gospels and is not found in the

² *Theologie*, p. 77.

³ With respect to their doctrine of the creaturely origin of the Son of man, F. Scheidweiler, *Deutsches Pfarrerblatt* (1952), p. 291, expresses the opinion: “In all probability we have before us in the Christology of the Ebionites the original conception of Christ.”

⁴ *Theologie*, pp. 78–89.

Qumran writings, appears not only in the Resurrection narrative of the Ebionite gospel (the appearance of the Son of man to James) but also in the tradition concerning James preserved by Hegesippus. Apparently they did not use the title "Christ." According to the report of Eusebius (*Eccl. Hist.* 2.23.13), James, responding to the question of the scribes and Pharisees, "What is the 'door of Jesus'?" replied: "What do you ask me concerning the Son of man? He sits in heaven at the right hand of the great Power and will come on the clouds of heaven." It is thus the view of the Son of man of the primitive church, which is connected with Psalm 110:1 and which we know from the confession before the Sanhedrin (Matt. 26:64), which here lives on unchanged. James's allusion is obvious when he repeats his brother's response. Jesus, transformed into the apocalyptic angelic figure of the Son of man who comes down out of the clouds of heaven, the one who brings the era of salvation, will come again to judge the living and the dead. This is the expectation concerning the Son of man cherished by James and his congregation, still unchanged thirty years after the death of Jesus, according to Hegesippus. It is presented in the same way in Book 7 of the *Kerygmata Petrou*, which perhaps goes back to this period, where James teaches a twofold appearance of the Messiah, one in humility and another, still to come, in the glory of the coming Kingdom for the judgment of the pious and the godless (*Rec.* 1.63). No real veneration of the Son of man is found in the Clementine novel, however, since the latter knows the titles only in a colorless way. The expectation of the epiphany of the Son of man made them millenarians who in their expectations concerning the future were closer to the Jews than to the church, which rejected and condemned apocalyptic excesses ever more strongly as time went on. Ebionite usage appears to have finally rendered the title "Son of man" unusable by the church. In any case, other titles directly superseded it.

Since the expectation of the Son of man exhibits angelic features derived from its origin in apocalyptic (Daniel, Enoch), the statement made by third-generation relatives of Jesus (the *desposynoi*) to the Roman emperor possesses a special significance in relation to the expectation of a supernatural angelic kingdom led by the Son of man. There are allusions in the Church Fathers which suggest that the Ebionite Jesus was equated with an angelic being. Tertullian, for example, gives such an interpretation (*De carne Christi* 14). Apparently they held the adoptionist view that the Christ, who entered into Jesus "from above" at the baptism, was an angelic being who took up residence in Jesus. Epiphanius (*Pan.* 30.16.4; cf. also, however, *Rec.* 16.4) also reports that according to Ebionite belief Jesus was one of the archangels and was appointed Lord over the whole creation including the angels (one is here reminded of the angelic cult of the Epistle to the Colossians). They apparently believed that Jesus had actually been transformed by his exaltation to heavenly Messiah into a kind of supernatural angelic being, and their millenarian expectation looked for him to bring a supernatural angelic kingdom at the time of his return.

The apocalyptic-eschatological character of the Ebionite expectation of Christ or Son of man can be seen indirectly in Book 6 of the *Kerygmata Petrou* which places the archangel Christ, who will have lordship in the age to come, over against the devil, the lord of this world. For Jesus, who by his natural generation and birth is a "mere man," had been exalted and then transformed into the Lord (*kyrios*) of the angelic armies, indeed, into the archangel appointed over all creation. It is no accident that the Church Fathers, speaking of the expectation of an imminent second coming, report that the Ebionites—also called by them *nostri Judaicantes* ("our Judaizers") and *Semijudaei* ("half-Jews")—expected this to be followed by the descent of a magnificent new Jerusalem from heaven. For this reason Jerome chides them in his

commentary on Isaiah as millenarians who were grossly sensual.⁵

In the area of eschatology, the Ebionites apparently firmly adhered to the belief in the resurrection of the dead, as also the rabbis report concerning certain *poshei Israel* (*Midr. Teh.* 31.24). Similarly, the Ebionite scribe Symmachus introduced the expectation of an imminent resurrection of the dead in various passages of the biblical text.⁶ This was an element of their millenarian expectation which could not be given up because of its relationship to their conception of the Son of man. Now, however, they had come to the end of the cities of Israel without the return of the Son of man (Matt. 10:23), all Christians up to this point had tasted death (in spite of Matt. 16:28), the generations of great-grandfathers, grandfathers, and fathers had gone to their graves, and the events of the End (Matt. 24:34) were continually being postponed. The frustration of these expectations—the delay of the Parousia—did not have the same result among the Ebionites as it did on the Catholic side in the consolidation of the institutional church. It meant rather that with the slackening of eschatological tension in the fourth and fifth centuries the Ebionite movement came to its end. The delay of the Parousia made possible the development of the Catholic church, but the Ebionite communities which derived from the primitive church in Jerusalem were not able to survive this brute fact since they had deliberately remained at a more primitive stage of Christology, a stage based on the expectation of the Son of man.

(3) *Jesus—New Moses.*⁷ The humanity of Christ and the expectation of the Son of man do not, however, completely define the Ebionite idea of the soteriological figure. The Ebionites also employed the picture of a *prophetic Messiah*,

⁵ *Theologie*, pp. 82 f.

⁶ *Theologie*, p. 86.

⁷ *Theologie*, pp. 87–98, 113–16.

asserting on the basis of Deuteronomy 18:15–22 that Jesus was the new Moses. The expectation of a new Moses was very much alive in many Jewish circles in the first century. The messianic belief of Jewish Christians in the early period, as in the late, was that the True Prophet had come in the person of Jesus. This must have sharply differentiated them from Jews who continued to direct their attention to the future. The belief developed by them on the basis of Deuteronomy 18:15–22 is this: He will spring “from your midst, from your brothers,” consequently he will be an Israelite and moreover a true prophet concerning whom it is said, “I will put my words in his mouth” and he will speak to them “everything which I (God) will command him.” This “true prophet”—“Him you shall heed!” (v. 15)—will have unconditional authority; God will avenge disobedience to his words (v. 19). The criterion by which the true prophet can be distinguished from the false is the fact that all his words will come true (vv. 21 f.) while the false prophet will perish in his falsehood (v. 20).

This significant passage is applied to Jesus of Nazareth in the canonical Acts too, not only in the sermon of Peter in 3:22–24, but also in the defense of Stephen (7:35–37); but this application retains its real meaning and importance only in the Jewish Christian *Kerygmata Petrou*, the source lying behind the Pseudo-Clementines. Here it was developed into an official doctrine concerning “the True Prophet.”

The *Kerygmata Petrou* broadly describes what is common to the two figures. As prophets, they both worked signs and wonders, both were lawgivers, both chose twelve apostles and seventy-two disciples for the transmission of their teaching—and as a result the Ebionite Sanhedrin had seventy-two members. As the prophesied True Prophet, however, Jesus had become the only one who could illuminate the souls of men. The Clementines present the striking image of the world as a house filled with the smoke of ignorance, error,

and vice, a world which the True Prophet must enter in order to fling open the door so that the light of the sun may shine in it again (*Hom.* 1.18 f.; *Rec.* 1.15 f.).

There seems to have been a dispute within Ebionitism concerning whether or not the messianic status ascribed to Jesus gave him a position above that of Moses, quite apart from their ranks as prophets. In one passage (*Rec.* 1.59) this is affirmed and justified, but on the whole the *Kerygmata Petrou* places them on the same level. Jesus, as we shall see, purified and fulfilled the Mosaic institutions (*Rec.* 1.39), but both taught compliance with the same law. For this reason they could regard following Jesus as identical with fulfilling the law of Moses.

By developing the parallelism between these two soteriological figures, the Ebionites were led to significant conclusions with respect to religious toleration in the post-classical era. They associated the teaching of Moses and the teaching of Jesus by means of the idea of a primordial religion (*Ur-religion*). Both were sent by God to establish covenants with mankind. Just as Moses was the teacher of the Jews, so Jesus was the teacher of the Gentiles (*Hom.* 2.52). Since the two kinds of teaching are identical, God accepts everyone who believes in either of them (*Hom.* 8.6). Conversion to Jesus, therefore, is for them precisely the same thing as conversion to God and to the Jewish law. This Ebionite federal theology, apparently formulated in response to Paul's conception of the history of salvation, is a belief found only in Ebionitism. At an early date they evidently conducted a mission seeking converts to the Covenant of Sinai as it had been reformed by Christ, regarded as the basis for the salvation of the whole world.⁸ They must have propagated this religion, which existed independently of the religions of the church and the synagogue, before the middle of the second century; otherwise, the author of the *Epistle of Barnabas*

⁸ *Theologie*, pp. 296–305.

would hardly have warned against "certain people" who affirm that Judaism and Christianity belong in the same covenant (*Barn.* 4.6).

This expectation of ancient Jewish Christianity that the two great religions from which it derived would be brought together in a morality of good works was not realized, and for good reason, since neither Judaism nor Christianity can be reduced to mere moralism, even if both agreed in affirming such a religious universalism. The Christ which the Great Church confessed was for them not the True Prophet but the Lord and the Savior. Just as little did rabbinic Judaism permit discussion of a reform of the Mosaic law. The belief of the primitive church in Palestine and of the Ebionites in Transjordan that Jesus Christ is the new Moses has been condemned to remain unproductive by the church throughout her history; yet the economy of salvation presupposed in this belief, namely that, expressed in modern terms, *God established two covenants with mankind through the revelations on Sinai and Golgotha which in the last resort are nonetheless one*—this striking interpretation of the coexistence of Judaism and Christianity in world history represents a conviction of Ebionite Jewish Christianity which remains worthy of note even today.

(4) *Later Development of the Doctrine of the True Prophet.*⁹ In the course of later development this view that Jesus was the new Moses became associated by the Ebionites with an Adam-myth derived from the heterodox Judaism of that time and this caused the doctrine of the True Prophet to be discredited as Gnostic. At first this involved only the view, familiar also to Paul, that Christ is the New Adam, inasmuch as the first man, Adam, was the first manifestation of the True Prophet. This is confirmed for us as the "doctrine of the Symmachians" even by the late author Victorinus Rhetor (*In Epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* 1.19 [MPL 8, col.

⁹ *Theologie*, pp. 98–112.

1155]). This sounds strange at first, but it has legitimate parallels in rabbinic Haggadah which apparently at an early date ascribed a divine light-nature to Adam before the fall. The "brightness of Adam," frequently referred to in the Haggadah, is the same thing as the divine nature of man or the image of God in man preserved after Adam's fall only in a few chosen figures. Prophecy seems to have been conceived of already at an early period as a residuum of the original divine light.

Concerning the True Prophet Adam, it is fancifully stated in the *Kerygmata Petrou* that he had inhaled the breath of divinity and thus foreknew everything, and, as prophet, had predicted everything, all the more since he had been anointed with the oil of the Tree of Life.¹⁰ Even complete freedom from sin is affirmed for Adam on the assumption that otherwise the divine Spirit in him would have sinned (*Rec.* 3.20 f.).¹¹ This is entirely unique in the literature of the ancient church and it contradicts what we find in the literature of Gnosticism. The *Kerygmata Petrou* presents a view of history which transfers the Fall to the eighth generation of mankind and makes it the fall of the children of Seth. The basis for this, which lies in a peculiar angelology and demonology, I have discussed elsewhere.¹²

¹⁰ *Theologie*, pp. 100–10.

¹¹ In *UJG*, p. 49, I made a remark which I would like to underline once again: "It seems to me that it is significant that the Enoch literature makes no mention at all of the fall of Adam, but instead speaks at length of the ruinous effect of the evil angels upon the whole human race. It almost looks as if the fall of the angels of Genesis 6 superseded the fall of Genesis 3 as an answer to the question 'Whence evil?' in the apocalyptic conventicles which produced and read these writings. In any case we are dealing here with a piece of Jewish Christian Haggadah which may have been inspired by Jewish apocalyptic but which is nonetheless *their own*, by means of which a central theological point of the Ebionites was supported." I will add that this glorifying of the first Adam can also have an anti-Pauline reference, since in their eyes Paul had "run down" the first in favor of the second Adam.

¹² *AfZ*, pp. 10 ff.

In Adam, accordingly, the divine Spirit (*theion pneuma*) of true prophecy was active, but it was also active in other figures of Jewish salvation-history. The old Haggadah (*Haggadah 12b*) speaks of seven pious men who are the seven pillars upon which the world rests. And all seven are alike in that each is a *saddiq* (righteous man), i.e., a true prophet. Also, the picture of the wandering Shekinah (the glory of God) was widely known and frequently associated with the seven righteous men. The names change, but the patriarchs and Moses are constant members of the group; in them the glory of God returns to the earth after the sins of the earliest period had driven it away. The later cabala developed these views into a doctrine of the reincarnation of the original man *Adam Kadmon*: "In this picture of the world each pious man is the incarnation of one of Adam's members, which he purifies through his pious conduct."¹³

The doctrine of the metamorphosis of the Shekinah or the True Prophet, which we find in the Pseudo-Clementines (*verus propheta ab initio mundi per saeculum currens*, "the True Prophet, from the beginning of the world hastening through the age," *Rec. 2.22*), manifests, however, no tendency toward hypostasizing as yet. Rather it is merely said that the True Prophet changes names as he changes figures; he has always been present, and he reveals himself to the one who confidently awaits him. According to God's decree, however, he came to rest forever in the Messiah. The same is found in the Jewish Christian gospel, which attributes to God the saying that the divine Spirit (*theion pneuma*—*fons omnis spiritus sancti*, "the source of every holy spirit"), awaited in all prophets, has now entered the Messiah: *Tu enim es requies mea* ("You are indeed my rest"). Apparently, the Ebionite conception is that the Spirit of Christ, or the *theion pneuma* or the Shekinah, was active in Adam and since that

¹³ Cf. G. Scholem, "Seelenwanderung und Sympathie der Seelen in der jüdischen Mystik," *EJ* 24 (1955), 55 ff.

time has passed over into certain bearers of revelation, who thereby constituted a succession.

In the most detailed passage of the *Homilies* (17.4 = *Rec.* 2.47) Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses are named as members of the series which begins with Adam and ends with the Messiah. As I stated in my earlier study, the texts betray a certain vacillation between manifestation and incarnation as the mode of the presence of the Shekinah in the bearers of the Spirit of revelation, who are, in any event, brought into a unity through this Spirit.¹⁴ It is clear, however, that according to Jewish Christian teaching the Spirit of revelation, after previous appearances, became incarnate in the Messiah, Jesus, and there found its complete realization (*Rec.* 1.60). The corollary of this formulation was that the Spirit who was thus confined to the named bearers of revelation no longer moved freely and accordingly played no role in Jewish Christianity. Consequently, there seems to have been no pneumatic movement in their congregations.¹⁵

This Ebionite Haggadah concerning the cyclical succession of the Spirit of revelation may have a syncretistic flavor but it had several parallels in the Great Church as well as important aftereffects.¹⁶ In my opinion there are no grounds for regarding this motif of the gradual progress or alteration into different figures of the True Prophet as Gnostic, Iranian, or Manichean.¹⁷ It was found in Judaism and can therefore

¹⁴ *Theologie*, p. 107.

¹⁵ Cf. H. von Campenhausen, *Kirchliches Amt und geistliche Vollmacht in den ersten 3 Jahrhunderten* (Tübingen, 1953), pp. 197 f.

¹⁶ Its influence extends from Elkesai, the Mandeans, Mani, and Mohammed, to the Shiitish Imam-doctrine of the Hadith, which Jehuda Halevy, with the conception of a series of steps of the *Injan elohi* (*Amr ilahi* among the Arabic philosophers), translated back into Judaism.

¹⁷ The view that Gnostic speculation has here been adopted is claimed over and over again, most recently by R. Schnackenburg, "Die Erwartung des 'Propheten,'" *TU 73* (1959), 638 f. Since there are derivations and developments of various kinds, it is at most a matter of analogies, not a matter of homologies and not a matter of material being taken over.

easily have been represented in Ebionitism. We have here a piece of Jewish Christian Haggadah in which material which was perhaps originally foreign has long since been fused with the rest.

It is characteristic of the Pseudo-Clementines that this doctrine is synthesized with the Moses-Christ parallel. The entire argument concerning the six or seven pillars of the Old Testament who are closely associated with the Messiah Jesus by means of the Spirit of the True Prophet possesses a clearly anti-Gnostic character.¹⁸ This is the application: the revelation occurring in Jesus is the same as that shared by the pious of Israel's history. Precisely in opposition to Marcion's sundering of the two Testaments, Ebionitism insists on the full identity and unity of true Judaism and true Christianity by means of the Spirit of the True Prophet. The idea of the changing figure of the Prophet has been appropriately described as "highly old-fashioned Jewish Christian." The True Prophet and not the God-Man is the bearer of the divine will for the Ebionites. For Jewish Christianity, oriented exclusively toward the divine monarchy, it was inconceivable that there could be any other kind of revelation. The exclusion of any further revelation, after the True Prophet has appeared to the world for the last time in Jesus, is a decisive feature in the specifically Ebionite form of this belief, although it can certainly degenerate in the fight against Gnosticism as is forcefully demonstrated by the reincarnation doctrine of the Elkesaites. This could never mean for them the hypostasizing of the Messiah Jesus to the rank of actual divine sonship. Having appeared first in an incomplete way in the prophets of the Old Testament, the "True Prophet" has reached completion in the Messiah Jesus and has come to rest "for ever."

¹⁸ Concerning the vacillation between the number seven, sacred to the Jews, and the number eight of the Christians, cf. my statements in *Theologie*, pp. 105 f. Their scribe Symmachus, moreover, sees expressed in Mic. 5:4 eight modes of appearance among men of Adam-Christ; cf. *AfZ*, p. 86.

What was really of greatest importance for the Pseudo-Clementines was that the "eternal law" (*nomos aionios*), which had been given to Adam at the time of the Creation, had been renewed by Moses and elevated to eternal validity through the Messiah Jesus. The next chapter will indicate what this means. The other pillars or bearers of revelation, however, who in contrast to Jesus possessed no foreknowledge (*prognosis*), fell far behind him. But they were all witnesses and confessors of the Jewish confession of faith concerning the "monarchy of God" (*monarchia tou theou*), based on the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4), which affirms that the Eternal is one God only (*Hom.* 3.5 f.). God cannot rule jointly with others (*heterois synarchein*, *Hom.* 2.43). Whoever does not believe that there is only one God does not possess a monarchistic soul (*Hom.* 2.42).

The Content of the Message of the Ebionite Christ I

Having dealt with the person of the Ebionite Christ, we must indicate in this chapter how the later Ebionites understood the content of Christ's message.

The Ebionites saw Jesus as a reformer of the Mosaic law. In particular, he condemned and rejected the sacrificial cult. His messianic mission culminated in the abolition of bloody animal sacrifice and accordingly he annulled the laws which dealt with sacrifice while otherwise remaining loyal to and observant of the Mosaic law. Since Jesus in the Synoptic tradition appears as an opponent of the scribes, not of the priests as were the prophets of old, the Jesus of the Ebionites who protests against sacrifice appears to us as a strange and unfamiliar figure. Nevertheless, the Ebionite position can appeal to a few sayings, such as Mark 12:33 and Matthew 9:13 and parallels, in which the prophetic protest against sacrifice (Hos. 6:6) is taken up. The Ebionite Jesus, however, also rejected the Temple cult as such and pronounced it to be an illegitimate perversion of the portable tabernacle which God really desired. This, of course, has no support in the Synoptic tradition, but since this train of thought is found even in the speech of Stephen it must at least have been a theme

discussed in the period of the primitive church.¹ The "Hellenists" (see p. 43, n. 5) were apparently more open to critical thinking about the cult. In any case, the fact that the argument of Acts 7, at least in the form of the antithesis tabernacle versus temple, stands quite alone in the New Testament canon and recurs in the entire literature of the ancient church only in the Ebionite *Kerygmata Petrou* gives us pause for thought and compels certain conclusions.

These points which have been presented in a preliminary way must now be considered in greater detail. To begin with, there can be no doubt about the strict, even rigorous, legalism of the Ebionites. They explicitly advocated a "lawful kerygma" (*nomimon kerygma*) and in accordance with this the Church Fathers regarded their combination of law and gospel as the distinctive mark of their heresy. Thus Origen believed that Ebionitism consisted in the imitation of Jesus' strict observance of the law with the result that the Ebionites would not disturb their faith in circumcision at all by accepting the name of Christ. According to Epiphanius, the Ebionites regarded circumcision as a commandment expressly imposed on those who would follow Christ, on the basis of Matthew 10:25. Apparently the conjunction of circumcision and baptism was characteristic of Ebionitism in the eyes of the surrounding world. Much the same can be said of their observance of the Sabbath and many other Ebionite customs.²

Furthermore, the picture of Jesus presented by the Jewish Christian gospels, to the extent that it can be reconstructed on the basis of the fragments which I have discussed,³ was char-

¹ Naturally one cannot affirm an anti-cultic tendency for the primitive church as a whole since according to Acts they participated in the Temple services, as Marcel Simon quite properly points out, *Les Premiers Chrétiens* (Paris, 1952), pp. 44–55. If one accepts the report of Hegesippus, even James is not to be credited with an anti-cultic speech in his old age. We are really concerned only with the group of so-called Stephen-Hellenists.

² *Theologie*, pp. 135–43.

³ *Theologie*, pp. 143 ff.

acterized by a definite tendency to reduce as much as possible the differences between Jesus and the Pharisees in the sharp conflicts over the law which the Synoptic Gospels have transmitted. Jesus was made to appear as a Jew who was loyal to the law and who, as Hippolytus reports, taught the pure "righteousness of the law" (*dikaiosyne ek nomou*) without even contesting the Pharisaic principle of tradition. Consequently, the Ebionite gospel regarded Matthew 5:17 as the statement of Jesus' messianic program, according to which Jesus' basic intention was to fulfill the law; he annulled only that which really did not belong to the law. Jesus was thus seen by the Jewish Christians as a reformer, whose will they sought to follow concretely.

The real Ebionite accomplishment consisted, therefore, in the attempt to reform the Jewish law. For this reason their wrestling with the Old Testament is more interesting and more productive than that of the second-century theologians of the church and even than that of Marcion, their direct opposite. The really creative contribution of the Ebionites to religion lay in their internalization of the Old Testament law. On the one hand they wanted to purge it of falsifications, and so they abbreviated and lightened it; on the other hand, they wanted to augment it and make it more difficult by intensifying that which was essential.

This ambivalent treatment of the law was based on the assumption that some passages in the Torah were not as original as others and were in fact later falsifications. The True Prophet had instructed his own concerning these passages. False pericopes are contained in the genuine "tradition of Moses" (*paradosis Mouseos*) because God's will was consigned to oblivion by means of evil instruction, erroneous interpretation, and many other causes (*Hom.* 1.18; *Rec.* 1.15). Thus, it was charged, the forefathers were responsible for the fact that the revelation had not been transmitted without falsification; because the law had been lost (*Hom.*

3.47), the revelation had become burdened in later editions with additions which were contrary to God's will. In keeping with this, Epiphanius also reports (30.18.7) that the Ebionites acknowledged only certain parts of the Pentateuch. In any event this conception is of the greatest importance for the Ebionites, for they drew from it far-reaching conclusions.

What was the origin of this theory of the false pericopes developed in the *Kerygmata Petrou* and identified as Ebionite by Epiphanius? My conjecture is that it derived from the tradition of the Christian community at a very early period, where such an understanding of the Bible must have arisen. This is suggested by the following clues: The statement of Matthew 15:13 occurred also in the Ebionite gospel. The context indicates that this saying was employed to support their theory of false pericopes in the Scriptures (such a use of the saying is certainly not found in the canonical Gospel!). In *Homilies* 3.52 it is stated: "The sacrifices, the monarchies, the female prophecies, and other such things came in which were not instituted by God. For this reason he (Jesus) said: 'Every plant which the heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up.'" Thus, in their gospel, Matthew 15:13 represented the announcement of Jesus, the True Prophet, concerning the rooting out of the false pericopes. The prophets of the Old Testament had anticipated such ideas. The Septuagint version of Isaiah 29:13 was employed in this anti-Pharisaic sense in the same chapter of the canonical Matthew (15:9): they teach as doctrines statements which are merely human commandments. We can easily surmise that this statement occupied an even more important position in the *Gospel of the Nazarenes* and the Ebionite gospel, and that the Ebionite Jesus connected his oral exposition of the false pericopes, which attacks the teaching authority of the Pharisees, with this word of Isaiah as a secret teaching. Thus the Ebionite gospel or the Ebionite exegesis

of this gospel will have derived the theory of the false pericopes from Matthew 15:1-14.

Further statements of the prophets which greatly helped the Ebionite theory and which rabbinic exegesis in our period tended to avoid are: Jeremiah 8:8, "The false pen of the scribes has changed the law into a lie"; Ezekiel 13:9, which states that prophets who see delusion or prophesy deception shall not be enrolled in the register (canon) of the house of Israel; and the affirmation of Ezekiel (20:25) regarding sacrifice, that there are prescripts which are "not good." This last statement may have stood in the Nazarene gospel or in the Ebionite gospel, for, besides the citation in the *Didascalia* (135.16), the *Toledoth Jeshu* misrepresented this verse polemically. Although there is no convincing evidence for the utilization of these striking verses in their gospel, we nevertheless have a whole series of actual logia from the Ebionite gospel which make it clear that this theory is as old as their gospel and that Jesus must therefore have been regarded by Jewish Christian circles in the primitive church as the one who originated this doctrine. These logia, which we will identify and interpret in a moment, prove only that the Ebionites, like the Sadducees and the apocalyptists, opposed the doctrine of Scripture of the Pharisees. The Ebionite opposition is unique, however, since though it is Christian it nevertheless bases its opposition in the theory of the false pericopes. But we must follow their train of thought a step further in order to understand it fully.

In view of the fact that each man can now find in the Bible whatever he wants as a result of the falsifications (*Hom.* 3.9), how is order to be restored where there is chaos? The Ebionite answer, which can be deduced from logia contained in their gospel, is: Jesus, who was the True Prophet, *did* restore order and transmitted the knowledge of this ("the mystery of the Scriptures," *to mysterion ton graphon*, *Hom.* 2.40; cf. 3.4, 28; 17.10; 19.20) as secret instruction to Peter

and through him to the Ebionite congregations. By this time the apostles were regarded as the legitimate interpreters of those things in Scripture which are not clear (*non manifeste scripta sunt*, “not clearly written,” *Rec.* 1.21). This oral tradition is provided with a slogan, through which Christ directs believers to the mystery of the falsifications of Scripture, namely that true and false are mixed together, in the apocryphal saying of the Ebionite gospel, *ginesthe trapezitai dokimoi*, which may be freely paraphrased, “Become honest money changers who are able to distinguish between genuine and false coins, i.e., pericopes (*Hom.* 2.51).

This statement is found three times in the *Kerygmata Petrou* (2.51; 3.50; 18.20), and in all three passages the text includes another saying of Jesus, the variation of which from the canonical text (Matt. 22:29; Mark 12:24) has never been properly understood. In the latter saying we possess a logion typical of the Ebionite gospel, a logion which places the theory of the false pericopes back into the mouth of Jesus himself—on the occasion of his discourse against the Sadducees. This enables us to identify the theory—a secret teaching of Jesus—as a tradition from the early Jewish Christian community. The logion reads: “For this reason you are deceived, not knowing the true things of the Scriptures, on account of which you are ignorant of the power of God.”⁴ The variant “the true things of the Scriptures” (*ta alethe ton graphon*) is unique, and, as the context shows, is employed as the antonym of “the false things of the Scriptures” (*ta pseude ton graphon*), and thus may be rendered here as “the true pericopes”: “You err for this reason, that you do not recognize the true pericopes in the Bible, on account of which [the canonical text has no causal connective here] you also do not recognize the power of God.” The True Prophet transmitted the instruction (“the mystery of

⁴ *Dia touto planasthe me eidotes ta alethe ton graphon, hou hein-eken agnoeite ten dynamin tou theou.*

the Scriptures”) concerning *where* in the law the false pericopes (*pericopai pseudeis*) were only to a few “independently sensible persons” since the false pericopes constitute a testing of faith (*peira pisteos*) and would only upset the multitude (*Hom.* 2.39). Here again we come upon the esoteric character of the Ebionite teaching, a secret tradition, for the well-disposed (*eugnomones*) regarded as originally Mosaic and subsequently Petrine (*Hom.* 3.10, 50). All the heavy-laden, whom Jesus invited to come to him according to Matthew 11:28, signify for the Ebionites those who seek the truth and do not find it (*Hom.* 3.52). Because of their capacity for making distinctions they are the sons of the Kingdom (*hoi huioi tes basileias*) for whom the good things (*ta agatha*) are prepared (*Hom.* 3.5). The scribes and Pharisees (*Grammateis kai Pharisaioi*) were originally the legitimate incumbents of the seat of Moses (*kathedra Mouseos*, *Hom.* 2.38; 3.47), the true experts in the law (*Hom.* 3.51; 11.28; 18.15), the initiated who possessed the knowledge (*gnosis*) with which to distinguish between the true and the false in the Scriptures. They betrayed their calling—so the Ebionites, i.e., the *Kerygmata Petrou*, understood Jesus’ saying of Matthew 23:13 and Luke 11:52—by throwing away the key of the Kingdom which had been entrusted to them, the key which opens the gate to eternal life, and so made access impossible for those who wanted to enter.⁵ For this reason Jesus arose from the “seat of Moses” and restored “that which was hidden from times immemorial (*ta ap’ aionos en krypto*) to the worthy (*axiois*)” through his proclamation (*Hom.* 3.19).⁶ They are now the experts with respect to “the good basis of the Scriptures” (*to eulogon ton graphon*, *Gospel of the Ebionites* 61). This is the *mysterion mou kai tois emois*

⁵ The motif of the key is common in Judaism. Often possession of the key is made to depend on knowledge of Torah and fear of God (*Shab.* 31 a/b; *Sifre Deut.* 32 on Deut. 32:25).

⁶ “Seat of Moses” refers to the office of teaching the oral tradition in the succession which goes back to Moses.

of Symmachus (at Isa. 24:16) and of the *Gospel of the Ebionites 59b* (= *Hom.* 20.20). The idea that the scribes and Pharisees, the official bearers of the oral tradition, had forgotten parts of the true teaching while a later teacher could restore them appears at first sight very peculiar and unique, but it seems to have been a rabbinic theme—at least it has parallels in the rabbinic literature, naturally without the special application of the Ebionites.⁷

In the *Kerygmata Petrou* the idea was changed as follows. The eternal law (*nomos aionios*, *Hom.* 8.10) was inscribed by God's hand on the world at the Creation as the first teaching delivered to mankind (*Hom.* 9.19). It was known to Adam (*Hom.* 3.48) and revealed anew to Moses, but it became increasingly obscured through errors until finally, through Jesus, it was elevated to eternal validity. The standard for the proclamation of Jesus is the distinction between what is genuine and what is false in the law. For the Ebionites, therefore, to believe in Jesus means to be instructed by him concerning the law and to obtain the "knowledge of the secrets" (*gnosis ton aporreton*, *Hom.* 18.15), i.e., "the more secret understanding of the law" (*secretior legis intelligentia*, *Rec.* 1.74), of which Christ is the sole expositor (*Rec.* 1.21). This law was inscribed on the Creation (*Hom.* 3.48) for the Creation is a "document written with God's hand" (*to tou theou cheirographon*, *Hom.* 3.45), or God's *diagraphe* (*Hom.* 1.18). Interpretations were given along with the law when it was revealed (*Hom.* 2.38); these were obscured only through false precepts of the devil. The *Kerygmata Petrou* unequivocally rejects the idea of a natural religion without a historical revelation.

Which, then, are the false precepts that did not originally belong to the law but were fraudulently added, and which have been removed by the True Prophet? As we have seen, *Homilies* 3.52 programmatically names "the sacrifices, the

⁷ For further details, see *Theologie*, p. 154.

monarchy, and the female prophecy and other such things” as ordinances which are not from God. These must now be considered in greater detail.

A. The “Alleviation” of the Law

(1) *The Sacrificial Cult*.⁸ Of primary importance is the bloody animal sacrifice, abolished by Jesus. According to *Recognitions* 1.35 ff., the real point of Jesus’ mission is the annulling of the sacrificial law combined with complete loyalty to and affirmation of the rest of the Mosaic law. Animal sacrifice, it is claimed, was permitted on a temporary basis by Moses only because of the people’s hardness of heart; Jesus abolished it and replaced the blood of sacrificial animals with the water of baptism. Thus the logion of Matthew 5:17 reads in the *Gospel of the Ebionites*, with a characteristic alteration: “I have come to annul sacrifice, and if you will not cease to sacrifice the wrath will not turn from you.” It is not impossible that the historical Jesus once uttered a statement of this kind, for such a saying would not be found in their gospel without some basis. At least some of the Jewish Christians must have understood Jesus’ policy of not changing anything in the law as not covering the regulations concerning bloody animal sacrifice. Heaven and earth—so reads *Homilies* 3.52 on the basis of the “Judaistic” statement of Matthew 5:18—have not passed away, but the sacrifices, the monarchy, the female prophecies, and all such things which have not belonged to the divine law and consequently have proved false, have passed away in the catastrophe of A.D. 70.

Ernst Lohmeyer has suggested that the tradition concerning Jesus which lay before Matthew and Mark (not Luke) was strictly anti-cultic, “on account of which we never read in the gospel tradition any observation to the effect that the same law which one reveres and observes as the will of God

⁸ *Theologie*, pp. 155–59.

also contains the cultic regulations which one repudiates.”⁹ Accordingly, one must consider the possibility that in this respect the Ebionites were actually orthodox pupils of Jesus who rejected the sacrificial cult so emphatically because their master had already done so. Lohmeyer thought that there was a firm connection between Jesus’ struggle against the cult and the attitude of the first Christians.

Whether or not one agrees with Lohmeyer, the Ebionites’ appeal to Jesus on the question of sacrifices may have had some basis in fact. In any event, the reason the Ebionites were bound to reject emphatically the Pauline soteriology, which conceived of Jesus’ death as a bloody, atoning sacrifice, becomes even clearer. In their view, Christianity had been freed from the Jewish sacrificial worship not through the universally efficacious sacrifice of the Son of God, as the church which followed Paul believed, but rather through the water of baptism whereby Jesus had extinguished the fire of the sacrificial cult.

Concerning the genesis of this Ebionite antipathy toward sacrifices it may only be noted here that in Jesus’ day there was probably still a hazy recollection that the sacrificial legislation was the product of Josiah’s reform and of the exilic age and had been inserted into the Mosaic legislation for the first time under Ezra. This is supported by the statements of the *Kerygmata Petrou* and the note of Epiphanius which affirm that according to Ebionite belief Moses received a Pentateuch *different* from the present one; the latter, written a thousand years after Moses, has been falsified.

It is very interesting and curious that they employed an almost-modern Pentateuchal criticism in the statement of *Homilies* 3.47 that the law was set down in writing after Moses’ death “by someone” (the Yahwist?) and approximately five hundred years later was rediscovered in the Temple (Josiah’s reform, Deuteronomy); after another five hun-

⁹ *Kultus und Evangelium* (Göttingen, 1942), p. 125.

dred years it perished in the flames (under Nebuchadnezzar), then was written down again (Priestly Code, under Ezra), with the result that in successive drafts it became more and more falsified. The correctness of the approximate figure of one thousand years for the period from Moses to Ezra is startling. In any event, we may regard it as certain that the Ebionite theory of false pericopes did not come out of the blue but derived from ancient recollections that the extant version of the Torah was not identical with the Sinai version but had been distorted by additions and alterations. The Ebionites were as justified—especially in relation to their Sadducaic contemporaries—as Amos and Jeremiah in relation to the priests of their day in maintaining that the Sinai legislation was originally non-cultic and that it was the post-Deuteronomic Priestly Code which introduced the many sacrificial commandments into the Torah for the first time, wrongly giving Jewish religion a cultic character. The Ebionite hostility toward the cult, which was forcefully confirmed by the painful experience of the destruction of the Temple in the year 70 (cf. *Rec.* 1.46), had, however, even more important connections as far as the history of religions is concerned. These will be treated in Chapter 7.

Their hostility toward the cult of animal sacrifice clearly manifests their tendency to restore the original Pentateuch, purged of false pericopes. Whether or not they actually created such a purged Pentateuch or employed it in their congregations cannot be demonstrated from the available sources. Their scribe Symmachus translated all the questionable passages along with the rest, so it is not likely that they used a purged Pentateuch. The only certain thing is that they denied the revelatory character of many passages of the Pentateuch.

(2) *The Monarchy*.¹⁰ Statements concerning the monarchy are not nearly as numerous as the prescriptions con-

¹⁰ *Theologie*, pp. 242–47.

cerning sacrifice, but for the Ebionites of the Clementine novel the monarchy was so suspect that the biblical sources concerned with its institution were also branded as false pericopes. According to *Recognitions* 3.52, the monarchy was not part of the original content of the law. Apparently because of the wars conducted by them—*Homilies* 3.62 identifies monarchy and war—the kings were placed in a category different from that of the favorably depicted period of peace of the Judges (*Rec.* 1.38). The era of the Judges is glorified by the Ebionites as romantically as the era of the tabernacle. In *Recognitions* 1.38 the ancient Israelite kings were called “tyrants rather than kings” (*tyranni magis quam reges*), since for royal ambition (*pro ambitione regia*) they had built the Temple on the Place of Prayer (i.e., the site of the tabernacle). David’s intention and preparation are taken as facts, in accordance with the portrayal of Chronicles. In *Homilies* 3.24, the kings are made responsible for the bloodshed of war. Finally, *Homilies* 3.52 explains that the Israelite monarchy passed away because it was not a divine ordinance. This deprecation of the monarchy, which Epiphanius also stressed (30.18.4) has been called “remarkable.” Perhaps it will seem less remarkable if one remembers that according to the account in the books of Samuel the Israelite monarchy was regarded ambivalently from the beginning because of the high regard for pure theocracy. The prophet Hosea, who worked in the northern kingdom, seems to have rejected the institution of the monarchy as an act directed against God: “They have appointed for themselves kings, but without my will; they have chosen princes, but without my knowledge” (Hos. 8:4). The monarchy appears to have become the object of sharp criticism again in our period, the first centuries of the Christian era. The Haggadah of the third century felt it necessary to respond to this criticism. Mention is made of scoffers who have poured scorn on the memory of David, indicating that even the choice of David as

king was being criticized. The apologetic task was taken up in particular by the rabbi who was redactor of the Mishnah and his school. David's bloodshed and adultery were the primary objects of reproach. With the Bathsheba incident in mind it is said concerning him: "Is there any salvation for the man who stole the sheep, killed the shepherd, and knocked Israel to the ground? God gives him no help!" (*Pes. R. Kah. 10b* and par.). It is hardly likely that the Mishnah (*Meg. 3.10*) would have ruled that the Bathsheba narrative should neither be read nor translated in public services unless there had been some external cause.¹¹

Perhaps even more severe is the criticism of King Solomon, who on one occasion is explicitly included among those who have no share in the world to come.¹² The reason for his being included among the most notorious sinners is apparently his transgression of the law concerning kings in Deuteronomy (17:17) through his polygamy. The incriminating charge which was of central importance to the Ebionites, viz., that Solomon had constructed the Temple, is not found in contemporary Jewish sources. Here we must go back to the eighth century B.C., i.e., to the protest of the prophet Nathan in II Samuel 7 against the house of God planned by David. Behind this protest lay apprehension concerning the Bāalizing of Yahweh, for the God of Israel was not tied down geographically and did not inhabit definite places as did Baal. This idea that the construction of a stone temple perverted the Mosaic religion, because God desired nothing but the portable tabernacle for the wandering people of God, apparently had an apocryphal survival in nomadic circles—from the Rechabites through the Essenes to the Ebionites. In the statements of the Stephen of Acts (Acts 7:44–50)

¹¹ *Theologie*, p. 243.

¹² The sources are cited in *Theologie*, p. 244, n. 3.

this hostility toward the Solomonic Temple and its cult broke out anew, with the claim that the legitimate location for the cult willed by God was the tabernacle with the Ark of the Covenant as a portable traveling sanctuary. It is even asserted that the Temple cult constituted a lapse into idolatry. And the view that royal arbitrariness had erected a temple as in heathen cultic practice, replacing the true worship of God, revived among the Jewish Christians of the *Kerygmata Petrou*—and only among them (*Rec.* 1.38). God himself pronounced judgment, however, in the destruction of the Temple in the year 70. This destruction occurred, it was claimed, because the Israelites would not recognize that God had brought the time of the Temple cult and its sacrifices irrevocably to an end with the appearance of the True Prophet (*Rec.* 1.64).

Here the background of the Ebionite hostility toward the Israelite monarchy is made explicit. In their eyes, Solomon was discredited primarily because he had built the Temple. Their opposition to King David was based not only on revulsion for adultery, regarded as one of the worst sins, but also on a certain tendency toward pacifism that was related to their aversion to war and bloodshed which they denounced as the result of false prophecy (*Hom.* 3.25).

A further result of this aversion may also have been that Jesus never appears in the Ebionite testimonies as the “Son of David.” Both the infancy narratives and the genealogy are missing from their gospels since they were not interested in the genealogical descent of Jesus from David; indeed, this descent was explicitly contested. Not without reason was the kingdom of Jesus they expected described as “heavenly and angelic”; the Ebionite Jesus never lays claim to a monarchy in Israel. The restoration of the throne of David was no longer associated with the Ebionite conception of the Son of man after all hopes for a political, messianic kingdom had been so completely frustrated by the events of 70 and 135.

(3) *The Validity of Prophecies*.¹³ In the third place, the prophecies of the prophetic books of the Bible were strangely disparaged by the Ebionites. Irenaeus states that they speak of the prophets "in a most peculiar way" (*Adversus Haereses* 1.26.2), while Epiphanius repeatedly speaks of the "Ebionite abuse of the prophets." As a matter of fact, the Ebionites of the Pseudo-Clementines did not regard the biblical prophets as inspired, and they believed that the literary prophets represented a kind of prophecy which was different from and inferior to the prophecies in the sevenfold series of the "True Prophet," discussed in the preceding chapter. In fact, they were regarded by the later Ebionites as "deluded" (*peplane-menoi*) because they had been considered worthy only on the basis of temporary ecstasy (*Hom.* 3.13) and could not always distinguish between truth and falsehood in their visions (2.7), while in the true pneumatic prophets the great and holy Spirit of Prophecy was continually at work (3.13). Absolute knowledge requiring no external mediation marks the True Prophet and exalts him above all men (2.10). He knows all things that have been, that are, and that are yet to be (*Hom.* 2.6). This foreknowledge (*prognosis*) enabled Jesus to predict the destruction of the Temple and the events which accompanied it (*Hom.* 3.15), while the predictions of the literary prophets by no means all came true. The latter thus did not manifest the messianic characteristic of Deuteronomy 18:22.

The Jewish Christian source employed by the Clementines expressed the difference in status between true and false prophets—also distinguished as male and female prophets—in the distinctive doctrine of the syzygies which speaks of pairs of aeons. I have shown that the canon of the syzygies of the Clementine novel is not Gnostic, despite certain correspondences, but a formulation constructed by the Ebionites themselves which has Jewish roots in spite of syncretistic

¹³ *Theologie*, pp. 159–69.

touches.¹⁴ The doctrine of the syzygies, with its *male-female* polarization, is apparently an ancient rabbinic conception.¹⁵ According to this doctrine, every thing or event since the Creation was provided with an opposite, in accordance with the model of man and woman. Thus the true, male prophets were provided with their counterparts in the false, female prophets who, after man reversed the order of the syzygy in the Fall, preceded and prepared for the appearance of the former. This is the *secret* of the syzygy (*Hom.* 2.15). The doctrine of the syzygies may have arisen on the basis of the simple observations of these Bible readers who wanted an explanation of why John the Baptist preceded Jesus and why the hostile man, Paul, preceded—in the mission—the true apostle, Peter. In the history of the patriarchs they had already discovered that since the Fall the evil preceded the good in birth: Cain preceded Abel, Ishmael preceded Isaac, Esau preceded Jacob, the priest Aaron preceded the lawgiver Moses, and so forth (*Hom.* 2.16).¹⁶ These “false prophets” are called “female” by the Ebionites because, twisting the saying of Jesus concerning John (Matt. 11:11, the first among those born of women); they identify the Old Testament prophets with those born of woman, who are weaker than and inferior to the “Son of man” (*filius hominis* or *filius viri*) who does not derive from woman. The Virgin Birth is thus here again indirectly rejected.

The female prophets, indeed, are not completely devoid of the prophetic Spirit, but they have nothing which compares to the teaching and insight of the True Prophet. Their voices are manifold, ambiguous, and contradictory (*Hom.* 3.24). The true prophecy derived from Adam, on the one hand, hates all sacrificial cult and all the bloodshed of wars, and

¹⁴ *Theologie*, pp. 161 f.; *UJG*, pp. 56–61.

¹⁵ Cf. Louis Ginzberg, *On Jewish Law and Lore* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), p. 190.

¹⁶ Cf. the article by O. Cullmann, “*Ho opiso mou erchomenos*,” *Coniect. Neotest.* 11 (1948), 26 ff.

promises the coming of the male aeon: righteousness, the forgiveness of sins, and peace. The female prophecy derived from Eve, on the other hand, remains in the grip of earthly things and promises only earthly fortune; it wants to rule through power, is full of falsehood, is the cause of wars, was responsible for polytheism, and clings to bloody, sacrificial worship, which is compared to menstruation. While male prophecy teaches the law, female prophecy (Paul!) propagates the abolition of the law (*Hom.* 3.23). It corresponds to the transitory world (*Hom.* 2.15) though it pretends to possess *gnosis*, but it leads those who follow it only into error and death (*Hom.* 3.24). To this series belong Aaron in the wilderness, Elijah on Carmel, and even John the Baptist, who preached baptism with fire and who is placed over against Jesus as the precursor of the Son of man and as Jesus' "female" antitype.¹⁷

Behind the John-Jesus syzygy, moreover, there may be concealed an ancient polemic of the primitive church against the competing disciples of John, which we will not discuss here. More interesting is the extreme *depreciation of the female element*, whereby Adam is affirmed to be completely free from sin, and Eve is depicted as the representative of the sinful principle *per se*. Since there is no revulsion for woman in Gnosticism, we are here dealing with a unique stream of ideas which, with its depreciation of the present aeon as "female" in contrast to the coming "male" aeon, constitutes a cosmological pessimism. This part of the dualistic doctrine of the syzygies set forth in *Homilies* 20.2 derives from special material employed by the author of the *Kerygmata Petrou* or the author of the novel. I have found comparable ideas only in Zervanite literature.¹⁸

¹⁷ In support of the view that these ideas were current as late as the Mandeans, cf. the evidence provided by Kurt Rudolph, *Die Mandäer* (Göttingen, 1960), I, 93.

¹⁸ *Studien*, pp. 104–6.

All things considered, it may be assumed that the Bible of the Ebionites contained the prophetic books and the wisdom literature just as it contained the false pericopes of the Pentateuch, but the full revelatory character of these was denied and their authority was diminished because of the Ebionite appeal to Jesus' own position. In the final analysis, the depreciation of the prophets and their books was also based on the dogma of the True Prophet. The corollary of this dogma was necessarily the depreciation of all other prophets revered by the synagogue and the church, since otherwise these could become competitors of Jesus, who was regarded not as God's Son but "only" as the messianic prophet. Even Ezekiel's warnings concerning false prophecy which is not fulfilled (13:1-9) seem to have been employed by them against the canonical prophetic books. "Prophets who see falsehood and prophesy deceit" shall be excluded from the register of the house of Israel, in accordance with Ezekiel 13:9. Jeremiah likewise warned of the false pen of the scribes which changes the law into a lie (Jer. 8:8). Thus, the lesser esteem with which the literary prophets were regarded in contrast with the divine revelation contained in the Torah of Moses can be developed from the prophets themselves. Nevertheless, the ultimate cause of the Ebionite depreciation of the prophets is probably to be sought in the disillusionment resulting from the non-fulfillment of the ancient predictions of the prophets about a political Messiah.

The Church Fathers were dumbfounded by this strange doctrine of the inferior inspiration of the prophetic books.¹⁹ The rabbinic literature also preserves a reaction. In *Midrash Tanhuma B 8b* we read: "The Israelites said to Asaph, 'Is

¹⁹ Cf. H. von Campenhausen, *op. cit.* (p. 32, n. 23), p. 176, who points to the grades of revelation corresponding to the degree of inspiration in this milieu. He also notes that the apocryphal *III Corinthians* contains polemic against people who will make no use of the prophetic writings.

there a second Torah, since you say in Psalm 78:1, "Hear, my people, my teachings?" Asaph answered, 'The *poshei Israel* say that the prophets and wisdom writings are not Torah, but we do not believe them.'” The plural *toroth* in Psalm 78:1 and also in Daniel 9:10 is here taken as proof that prophets and Hagiographa are also Torah, although this is denied by the "*poshei Israel*." This is probably an allusion to the Ebionites, since their theories have no counterpart in the Palestinian synagogue during this period.

(4) *Offensive Passages in Scripture*.²⁰ We must consider, finally, those things which are included under the rubric "and others of the same kind" in *Homilies* 3.52. As is well known, it is the *anthropomorphic* statements in the Bible which the Ebionites find objectionable, especially all the statements concerning God's attributes, actions, and active as well as passive emotions. The belief that God is subject to emotions derives from a wholly uncritical assumption (*Hom.* 18.19) which was frequently attacked by Jewish Hellenism, especially by Philo. As examples of divine emotions and anthropomorphic phrases in Scripture the *Kerygmata Petrou* cites the statements which suggest that Adam could become like God, that God lies, tempts, repents, grieves, is jealous, hardens his heart, lives in a tent or even in darkness and thunder, craves sacrifices, and so forth. All these are passages which provided the Simon Magus of the Clementine novel with material for a Marcionite doubt concerning the God of the Old Testament. For it was Simon/Marcion's distinction between a supreme God and the Creator of the world and his depreciation of the latter by means of anthropomorphic passages in Scripture which brought about the catalogue of false Scripture passages in the *Kerygmata Petrou*. These passages, cited by Simon, are conceded by Peter but explained in the Ebionite way so as to preserve the sovereignty of the true God.

²⁰ *Theologie*, pp. 169-76.

Corroboration for a series of biblical expressions decried in *Homilies* 2.43 f. is found in characteristic translations of Symmachus, which seek to remove the anthropomorphisms.²¹ But while Symmachus attempted to remove the occasional offense by paraphrasing and reformulating in order to save problematical passages for the Ebionite Bible, the *Kerygmata Petrou* proceeded more radically and simply struck them out as false pericopes. The reason is clear; the picture of the absolutely perfect God cannot contain any anthropomorphisms or anthropopathisms if it is to provide the basis for the Jewish Christian ideal of the imitation of God. In characteristic fashion *Homilies* 2.43 asks: "If one discovers any unworthy features in the picture of God, who will strive after piety? If God deliberates with himself, changes his mind, and repents, who then will think perfect thoughts, who will hold to his beliefs? If he is jealous, who will abstain from sparring with his rival?"

It is therefore only a matter of consistency when the *Kerygmata Petrou* finally enunciates the proposition: "Everything which is said or described concerning God is false" (*Hom.* 2.40).

Not only scriptural passages making offensive statements concerning God but also all passages reporting unworthy or immoral deeds concerning the Old Testament worthies recognized by the Ebionites, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, are declared to be "false scriptures" (*pseudagrapha*). Adam's fall, Noah's drunkenness, the polygamy of Abraham and Jacob, Moses' homicide and his association with pagan priests, etc.—all these are simply rejected as false. It is approximately the same collection of passages which has continually furnished arguments for anti-Semites, ancient as well as modern. Epiphanius (30.18.9) reports that, in response to the question of why they had rejected so much Pentateuchal material concerning the patriarchs, such as the narratives

²¹ *AfZ*, pp. 82 ff.

about the use of meat and sacrificial customs, the Ebionites simply said that Christ had so revealed it to them. This is naturally taken as referring to their knowledge of the false pericopes. The real basis for this puristic attitude must be that the individuals who manifest the True Prophet must be completely unblemished, since the distinction between them and the literary prophets, such as Hosea, who married a prostitute, would otherwise be untenable. The somewhat narrow *sedaqah*-morality of the Ebionites required this. In these arguments we can recognize the rationalism which is characteristic of their critical biblicism.²²

B. The Tendency of the Theory of the False Pericopes and Its Echo in Rabbinic Literature²³

We have thus reached the conclusion that the passages of Scripture denounced by Christ, the True Prophet, as false pericopes are primarily those which give instructions concerning the bloody animal sacrifices and the institution of the monarchy, together with all the anthropomorphic statements concerning God and unworthy narratives about the men who manifested the True Prophet. The rest of the Torah apparently remained as legally binding on the Jewish Christians as before. Only the revelatory character of the prophetic books of the Old Testament canon seems to have been impaired or even rejected. The genuine pericopes of the law of Moses remained in force and consequently so did the overwhelming majority of positive and negative commandments. As the eternal law of God it can be neither annulled by enemies nor falsified by a scoundrel (Paul? *Hom.* 8.10).

But what was the point of the theory of the false pericopes? First, it must be observed that the biblical criticism of the *Kerygmata Petrou* is thoroughly permeated with rationalism, its distinctive feature. One could in fact refer to it as a

²² Strecker, *op. cit.* (p. 17, n. 12), p. 169, has also noted this.

²³ *Theologie*, pp. 176-79.

sample of an ancient Enlightenment. In addition to this, however, the theory of the false pericopes must have been a real necessity for the Ebionites; such a complicated theory could hardly have arisen without some direct cause. One thinks of Marcion and his rejection of the divine origin of the Old Testament. It seems probable that the *Kerygmata Petrou* was intended to provide an answer to Marcion's teaching, perhaps also to that of his pupils of Apelles' breed, inasmuch as the *Kerygmata Petrou*, influenced by Marcion's arguments, abandons that which is untenable in the Old Testament in order to be able to save that which is essential. Since Marcion's teaching penetrated Christian congregations everywhere in the fourth decade of the second century, the theory of the false pericopes may be regarded as representing the Ebionite contribution to the great intellectual struggle. This would indicate that the *Kerygmata Petrou* was written in the middle of the century. In this case, the deletion of the laws of sacrifice and the expunging of anthropomorphisms and unworthy passages would be interpreted as a concession to Marcion's point of view for the purpose of overcoming the Marcionite threat on the basis of the Old Testament itself.

In any event, the deletion of the laws of sacrifice, or, more precisely, a portion of these laws since most had already been suspended by historical circumstances, must in itself have caused quite a stir. For it was the fact that here Jews—and Jews they were, although they believed in Christ—were not “merely” reinterpreting parts of the law allegorically but discarding them outright and as *kophrim b'ikkar* (those who deny a fundamental teaching of Judaism), campaigning against them on a theoretical basis which sharply emphasized among the rabbis of the second century the dogma *torah min ha-shomayim*; this is indicated by the important Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 10.1, which denies any part in eternal life to those who deny the heavenly origin of the Torah, i.e., the Torah as a whole.

The pseudonym *Korah* seems to be an allusion to the movement referred to here, which denied the divine origin only of certain passages or laws of the Torah, and not the whole Torah. (*Tanh. Num.*, Buber edition, p. 46; *Koh. Rabbah* 10.2). According to Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 10.3, which, it is true, is contradicted elsewhere, they have no portion in the world to come. Even the Letter of Jude (v. 11) of the New Testament and the *Didascalia* (chap. 23) know Korah as the one characterized as the prototype of heresy because of his *antilogia* against Moses, a sign and an illustration of the downfall of heresies.

Rabbi Jehuda ben Ilai, who taught around the middle of the century in the fourth generation of Tannaim, appears to have had special contact with the Ebionites, a fact which has never been truly appreciated. He worked in Lower Galilee, in Usha, near Tiberias. In a *mashal* he explicitly attacks people who maintain that Moses had acted falsely in the Torah and had produced statements which God had never commanded (*Lev. Rabbah* 31.4, commenting on Lev. 24:2; and, anonymously, *Sifre Deut.* 26, on Deut. 3:23, and *Deut. Rabbah* 2.42, on 3:23). Nevertheless, Jehuda ben Ilai himself appears to have been infected by other beliefs of the Ebionites, for it is he who declares that there is a difference between the prophetic gift of Moses and that of the other prophets: Moses observed divine truth continuously as if in a single mirror, but what the prophets saw was reflected by nine mirrors (*Lev. Rabbah* 1.14, deduced from Num. 12:8 and Hos. 12:11). He even asserted that the Pentateuch should not be bound together with other books of the Bible in a single volume (*Baba Bathra* 13b)—which clearly reveals Ebionite influence. While he passionately attacked the supposition that there were false pericopes within the Pentateuch, his statement that Moses himself could not have written the last verses of the Torah (*Baba Bathra* 15a; cf. with this *Hom.* 3.47!) nevertheless attests to how greatly he must have

wrestled inwardly with the Ebionite point of view. As further evidence for this we may cite his definition of the purpose of the sacrificial cult, viz., to bring peace to the world; (*Tos. Meg.* 3.7); in particular, the sacrifices of atonement will blot out Israel's sins of idolatry (*Tos. Parah* 1.4). Again, there is his emphasis on the fact that the institution of the monarchy is commanded by the Torah in Deuteronomy 17:15 which presupposes that this had been questioned (*Sifre Deut.* 67, on Deut. 12:10). Also significant is the rule he lays down in *Kiddushin* 49a and parallels concerning how anthropomorphisms and blasphemous misunderstandings of the Bible are to be avoided by means of a freely paraphrasing translation. His formulation reads: "Whoever renders the verse of the Bible in its unaltered form is a liar; whoever makes additions is a blasphemer." All this shows clearly that Jehuda ben Ilai must be considered the most important teacher of the law among the late Tanna'im where Ebionitism is concerned.

In concluding this chapter we must again emphasize that for the later Ebionites the real point of Christ's message was the reformation of the Mosaic law. They were convinced that they were judging the law on the basis of Jesus himself; they saw in his life and teaching the real fulfillment of the Mosaic law. What was of divine origin, he confirmed; what was not, he annulled. The knowledge of this, the "mystery of the Scriptures" (*Hom.* 2.39; 3.4, 28; 17.10; 18.20), was transmitted by Jesus, the Christ, to the apostle Peter and through him to the Ebionite congregations, while "Simon who is also Paul" was reproached by them for having tried "to learn from the law what the law did not know" (*ex lege discere quod nesciebat lex, Rec.* 2.54).

For the Ebionites, the practice of theology meant defining in detail and elevating to binding halakah the subtractions and additions, the alleviations and intensifications which, they believed, were commanded by Jesus. They believed

that in this way they would be able to restore the unity between the law and the will of God so as to achieve through the “righteousness based on good works” (*dikaiosyne ex ergon*) the “better righteousness” demanded by Jesus, the True Prophet.

The Content of the Message of the Ebionite Christ II

As heirs of the Hellenists associated with Stephen, the Ebionites diminished the Jewish law by removing some of its cultic requirements. On the other hand, as heirs of the "Christian Pharisees of Jerusalem," they intensified its demands, in order to achieve the righteousness demanded by the True Prophet. They believed that good works contribute to the salvation of the soul and will receive their reward (*Hom.* 8.5). The question of the works of righteousness seems to have received special attention in the eighth book of the *Kerygmata Petrou*, the contents of which are suggested by the catalogue of themes given in *Recognitions* 3.75. The righteousness of works (*dikaioisyne ex ergon*) belonged not only to the anti-Pauline point of view, as we know it from the slogans of the Judaistic opponents of Paul in Galatia, Rome, and Corinth, but also to the point of view of the Pseudo-Clementines and the Ebionites known by the Church Fathers.

A. The "Intensifications" of the Law

(1) *The Prohibition of Meat.*¹ The Ebionites required abstinence from meat, and this was apparently related to their rejection of the bloodshed involved in animal sacrifice.

¹ *Theologie*, pp. 188–96.

This dogmatic vegetarianism undoubtedly represents an intensification of the Mosaic food laws. It is well known that these laws permit the eating of the meat of an animal only after its blood has been drained. In many passages the Torah prohibited the eating of blood, in accordance with the ancient oriental conception that the soul of a living thing resided in the blood (cf. Lev. 17:11). The practice of bleeding slaughtered animals must have seemed inadequate to the Ebionites. They based their vegetarianism on the commandment of Genesis 9:4, "the flesh with its soul, its blood, you shall not eat," which was observed as early as the twelfth generation of mankind. Proceeding on the basis of this biblical point of view, they achieved a more rigorous practice than that prescribed for the Jews by the Mosaic food laws. Since the ritual incision does not completely drain the blood of the slaughtered animal, they preferred the radical solution of complete abstinence in order to conform completely to the biblical commandment. In their rigorism they probably extended the prohibition to the use of fish of any kind; this seems to be reflected in a rabbinic controversy.² To support their vegetarianism they appealed to old Jewish traditions, according to which Adam and men who lived before the Flood were permitted to eat meat; they maintained, however, that the consumption of meat was contrary to nature (*para physin*, *Hom.* 8.15).

The abhorrence of bloodshed and any use of blood is a characteristic feature of the *Kerygmata Petrou*. Anxiety concerning the possibility of eating meat offered to idols and the related fear of demons who enter man through unclean foods may also have contributed to total vegetarianism. It is interesting to note that as a result of this they reinterpreted the regulations of the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15 in a demonological way.³ They even extracted from Numbers

² *Theologie*, pp. 189 f.

³ *Theologie*, p. 303; *AfZ*, pp. 78 f.

11:30 ff., the passage in which God in his anger destroys at "the graves of the craving" the Israelites who have eaten the flesh of quails, a scriptural proof that vegetarianism is God's expressed will—a scriptural proof which, to my knowledge, is unique. The Ebionite ideal of vegetarianism—which is not to be confused with the Marcionite vegetarianism based upon opposition to the works of the Demiurge—resulted in "corrections" in the portraits of several historical figures. They portrayed Peter as a vegetarian who lived only on bread and olives (*Hom.* 12.6; *Rec.* 7.5). For James, however, whom they depicted in much the same way, there are other accounts which indicate that he was an ascetic and had taken a vow of fasting.⁴ Just as they alleged that the patriarchs of the Old Testament and Moses abstained from "animal things" (*empsycha*), so they also claimed that Jesus himself became a vegetarian when, according to the Ebionite "Acts," he declined the suggestion that he eat meat at the Passover. In all these "corrections," which in part are clearly contradicted by the biblical accounts, we see the Ebionites' tendency toward radicalism; they wanted to manifest their "better righteousness" (Matt. 5:20) by the intensification of the Pharisaic practice of the law.

(2) *The Value of Poverty.*⁵ The "better righteousness" of the Ebionites is further manifested in their cherishing of that virtue which their name reflects: *poverty*. Since possessions constitute an occasion for sin, poverty had already become an ideal for the *Bene Zadok* of the Dead Sea.⁶ The practice of having no property, i.e., poverty with respect to this world's goods—the so-called primitive Christian "love-communism"—had already been established briefly with full compliance in the earliest period of the primitive church in Jerusalem under the slogan "all things in common" (Acts

⁴ *Theologie*, p. 195.

⁵ *Theologie*, pp. 196–202.

⁶ Cf. H. J. Kandler, "Die Bedeutung der Armut im Schrifttum von Chirbet Qumran," *Judaica*, 13 (1957), 193–209.

4:32—5:11). Apparently, the view that the end of history was imminent made any kind of earthly possession seem unimportant and unnecessary. Moreover, the earliest Christians may have maintained that Jesus chose especially those who were poor in material things (the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount) and ascribed to them the possession of the Kingdom. The special "Ebionite" passages of Luke (6:20—24; 12:33; 14:33; chap. 16) appear to derive from circles of the poor in Palestinian Jewry, i.e., from those who appear in Paul's writings as "the poor among the saints in Jerusalem" (*hoi ptchoi ton hagion en Ierousalem*, Rom. 15:26).

Second-century Ebionitism held fast to this position. It is characteristic of the Ebionites of that period, however, that they permitted the ideal of poverty, which was originally purely eschatological, to harden into law. For the Ebionites there was an inner connection between poverty and righteousness, as is seen in the moralistic-legalistic embellishment of the pericope of the Rich Young Ruler in the Ebionite "Acts." The fact that Jesus here establishes an ideal of perfection makes the poverty movement in the primitive church perfectly understandable. According to Epiphanius, the later Ebionites on Cyprus about the year 377 still appealed to the position taken by their ancestors in Jerusalem who had laid all their possessions at the feet of the apostles (*Pan.* 30.17.2). Apparently, the social conditions of the later Ebionites were extremely impoverished and wretched—an inevitable result of the decision of their forefathers in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the Clementines allow us to see that for the Ebionites it was not so much the possession of goods itself which was sinful but rather the greed (*pleonexia*) for ever new possessions and for becoming rich. They maintained, however, that the kingdom of heaven had been promised to the poor.

At any rate, the requirement of poverty, as an obligation inherited from the primitive church, appears to derive from

the same tendency toward abstinence (*egkrateia*), the purpose of which was to effect by radicalizing the Mosaic law a "breakthrough" for what the law is meant to communicate: the pure will of God. Such an asceticism having to do with possessions was never sanctioned in official Judaism. It is only conceivable on the basis of the "better righteousness" of the Jewish Christian messianic community, which understood the symbolic content of its name to represent a genuine, viable obligation and realized it in the voluntary renunciation of possessions.

(3) *Purity Regulations and Baptismal Practice.*⁷ Finally, the complex of *tahara* commandments in Leviticus 15 concerning ritual cleanness and uncleanness played a special role among the Ebionites. The failure to distinguish between the clean and the unclean was for them the mark of a life alienated from God, according to *Homilies* 15.10. Epiphanius (*Pan.* 30.2) reports that the Ebionites handled nothing that belonged to foreigners; this was apparently due to the fact that they constantly feared defilement or demonic pollution which they attempted to counter by means of minute rites of purification. As a result, their purification practices, especially the ritual immersion-baths, went beyond what was prescribed by the Pharisees and thus represented also a radicalization of the understanding of purification prevalent in rabbinic Judaism. At the same time, these practices represented a position remote from that of the canonical Jesus, who precisely in a discussion concerning purity had attacked the regulations of the scribes as "regulations of the external worship of God" (Mark 7:1–23 and par.).

The Peter of the Clementine novel fastidiously observes the rules disputed in the rabbinic schools concerning the washing of hands. He washes his hands after contact with foreigners, before and after eating, before prayer, and on other occasions. According to Epiphanius, the Ebionites

⁷ *Theologie*, pp. 202–11.

appealed to the example of the apostles in support of their daily lustrations. They saw an interrelation between ritual and moral purity. Rabbinic sources also show knowledge of groups which, with their daily washings, have intensified or at least more rigorously interpreted the rabbinic law. According to *Tosefta Yadaim*, the "morning bathers" say to the Pharisees, "We bring this charge against you, that you pronounce the name of God in the morning without bathing." In *Berakhoth* 52a, the custom of these morning bathers of taking an immersion-bath after nocturnal pollution is rejected as going too far. But these purificatory rites are so important to the Ebionites as demanded by the will of God that they declare that all who neglect them are duped by the devil (*Rec.* 6.11 f.). In their opinion these washings are apotropaic in the highest degree since through them the demons can be driven out.

Immersion in the "water of life," i.e., water from a perennial stream or spring or from the sea, is implied in the special conception of baptism held by the Ebionites. For them baptism has a threefold meaning. First, it is an initiation rite through which one is received into the Ebionite congregation. As such it is like a rebirth. Consequently, baptism is compared to a pure wedding garment (*endyma*, *Hom.* 8.23), for it effects a catharsis and obligates one to do good works and to eradicate conscious sins.

Secondly, the water of baptism frees man from appetite, which is compared to the bite of a rabid dog (*Hom.* 4.21; 13.14; etc.),⁸ and thus from the power of the demons. Behind this stands the belief that the mystical power of this water takes away sins. The unbaptized will not be admitted to the heavenly kingdom but one who is born again by means of baptism becomes God's heir by doing good works. *Homilies* 11.25 states: "Do not suppose that you shall obtain the

⁸ For this symbolism, regarded by E. Peterson as Elkesaite, cf. his *Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis* (Rome, Freiburg, and Vienna, 1959), pp. 221 ff.

hope without baptism, even if you were the most righteous of all the upright men who ever lived. Perhaps someone will say: What, then, does it contribute to piety to be baptized in water? In the first place, because you do what God commands; in the second place, because you transform your first birth which derived from sexual lust and thus are able to attain salvation. Otherwise it is impossible." In straightforwardness and clarity this doctrine of baptism is not at all inferior to that of the Catholic church; its tone, however, is somewhat different—it is a piece of law, a legal necessity.

The third, and for the Ebionites the most important, meaning of baptism with flowing water is, however, that Jesus substituted it for the sacrificial fire which the high priest had formerly kindled for the atonement of sins. It was Jesus "who, by the grace of baptism, extinguished that fire which the high priest used to kindle for sins" (*qui ignem illum quem accendebat pontifex pro peccatis restinxit per baptismi gratiam, Rec. 1.48*).

Here the sacramental character of Ebionite baptism is evident; it is the soteriologically necessary substitute for the old temple sacrifice. The power of baptism with living spring water lies therefore in the extinguishing of the fire, the superseding of sacrifice, and the purifying of the man who receives it in becoming an Ebionite. Similar beliefs may have been held in other baptismal circles as well.

This manifold understanding of baptism marks the Ebionites as belonging to a long tradition shared by baptist sects on the periphery of Judaism. In their exodus from Palestine the Ebionites came into geographical proximity, and probably also into competition, with these groups. Otherwise, their water-mysticism is hard to understand—they revered water as the original element of creation which had been ordained by God for the rebirth of mankind. They believed that one who is baptized is protected by the water; a magical formula protects him against fire (*Hom. 11.26; Rec. 6.9*). Accord-

ing to Genesis 1:2, water received the principle of its motion from the blowing *pneuma* (wind or spirit) and the spirit came from God; thus in their thought water and spirit become exactly identical. It is certain, however, that Ebionite baptism was an *unrepeatable* rite for initiation and rebirth which was accompanied by the invocation of the name of Jesus, while the daily washings were ritual lustrations for purification from defilements. This understanding of baptism permitted the Ebionites to remain related to the Great Church and clearly distinguished Ebionite baptism from the repeated baptism of the Elkesaites, which has justly been called a "magical healing rite." The idea that Jesus had viewed baptism as superseding the sacrificial cult was certainly unknown to the church, since it saw in Jesus not the messianic prophet but the Son of God. Thus it remained a characteristic feature of Ebionitism that Ebionite reformation of the law and baptismal faith in Jesus were closely related to one another.

(4) *Evaluation of the Ebionite Theory of the Law.*⁹ We have thus seen that the food laws, the possession of goods, and the purity regulations are the areas selected by the Ebionites from the total content of the Torah for intensification beyond Pharisaic halakah. In obedience to the teaching of the True Prophet, they wanted to surpass the Pharisaic way of life. Christians as well as Jews regarded this rigorous legalism as the chief characteristic of the Ebionites. Such Christians as Ambrosiaster assumed that the Ebionites were Pharisees. Similarly, on the other side, Resh Laqish, one of the Palestinian Amoraim who flourished around 250, declared that the fire of hell has no power over the *poshei Israel* since they are, "like a pomegranate" (Song of Sol. 4:3), full of good works (*Erubin* 19a; *Hagigah* 27a). Such praise from the mouth of this rabbi, who is known to have been discriminating in his judgments, testifies to their high degree

⁹ *Theologie*, pp. 211-18.

of faithfulness to the law. This statement can hardly refer to any other Jewish heretical group.

Underlying their intensifications as well as their alleviations of the law, their additions as well as their omissions, is one clear intention: to bring to expression the will of God as the ultimate purpose behind the Scriptures (*ta alethe ton graphon*, "the truth of the Scriptures") and so restore the lost unity between the law and the will of God. Finally, as Jewish Christians they assessed the law on the basis of Jesus; in his life and teachings they saw the real fulfillment of the Mosaic law.¹⁰ That which was divine in it, he confirmed; that which was in opposition to God, he destroyed. For the Ebionites, to do theology simply meant to develop this proposition in detail.

Disregarding for the moment the motif of voluntary renunciation of property, which may derive from a specific historical situation and which for the later Ebionites was a matter of *fact*, i.e., real poverty, probably even social indigence, we may conclude that there appears to have been an inner connection between the abrogation of the sacrificial cult, the abstinence (*egkrateia*) from meat, and the repeated baths for purification. We have already attempted to make this clear: it is the fear of demonization associated with bloodshed and the use of blood, which in turn is related to the element of fire in the cult of burnt offerings, and faith in the purifying power of flowing water. Here we encounter two *fundamental* motifs which are hard to explain. These motifs were probably current in the Essene community and

¹⁰ It is not in itself improbable that the words of Jesus transmitted by the Ebionites produced halakoth, with the result that their religious practice, based on appeal to Jesus' words, departed from rabbinic halakah in specific matters. Thus the Talmud has a narrative—although a distorted one—which reports that a Jewish Christian from Kefar Zechaniah or Zuchnin in Galilee employed the parabolic saying concerning the real impurity (Matt. 15:17) to establish in Jesus' name a halakah concerning latrines for high priests in a dispute with Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (*Ab. Zar.* 16b; cf. par. in *Koh. Rabbah* on 1.8; *Tos. Hullin* 2.24; etc.).

they most likely derived from early Israelite nomadism, having been conveyed to the Ebionites by a subterranean stream of tradition outside the official Jewish religion. This can be postulated without difficulty for the wilderness areas of Palestinian Transjordan. We shall examine these relationships in the following chapter.

It is contrary to all historical sense to assume that the Ebionites combined alien conceptions with Christianity with Essene assistance since these allegedly alien conceptions were so central in the Ebionite religious system, indeed, provided the foundation on which the system was built. It is more probable that in second- and third-century Ebionitism we have a conservative, early form of primitive Christianity which was excluded from the tradition of the Great Church. In this matter, research would do well to return to the Tübingen point of view, which can now be justified on the basis of the above statements. The following conception must have had its origin among the twelve apostles and the first disciples of Jesus: Jesus came as the messianic prophet to teach us the deeper meaning of the messianic law, i.e., the true will of God. This means that they must have believed that the law contained falsifications, that the bloody sacrificial cult derived from these, and that baths for purification are recommended. In the century following Jesus' death the religious system of the *Kerygmata Petrou* developed from these rudiments and moved toward a new way of life for Jewish Christianity, *a third religion between the church and the synagogue*. We have reconstructed what remains of this religion, depending largely on the two recensions of the Clementine novel.

The Ebionite treatment of the Mosaic law, which has been the theme of this chapter, is undoubtedly the most interesting and the most original part of this religious system. It altered and narrowed the original teaching of Jesus concerning the law in a different way than Paul did; it de-eschatologized it, but not the way the early Catholic church did. The informa-

tion we can glean from the heresiological literature of the church concerning the genuine teaching of the Ebionites is just as inadequate and just as lacking in understanding of the underlying motives as the statements concerning them in the rabbinic sources—or, for that matter, as the rabbinic statements concerning the Sadducees and Essenes. We have only meager fragments of the debates and struggles which occurred before consolidation produced the Mishnah on the one side and the dogma of the church on the other. The victorious parties—the Catholics and the Pharisees—had no interest in preserving the arguments of their opponents. Neither side was interested in recording or even remembering the debates with the Ebionites, the group which confronted both of the victorious parties without merely being on the defensive. Their own literature, however, has been lost except for the fragments treated in this study.

B. Organization and Community Life¹¹

In this chapter, however, belongs also the question of what we really know concerning the organization of the congregations east of the Jordan after the year 135, especially concerning the structure of their community life. We can draw up a rough outline on the basis of the letter of Peter to James which serves as an introduction to the Clementine novel. This is probably the only piece of Ebionite writing of the late second century now extant whose original text has been changed only slightly.¹² From it we learn particulars concerning the Ebionite teachers and the teaching profession in general. Their teaching order was composed of seventy elders (*Ep. Petri* 2; cf. also *Hom.* 2.38), like the Jewish Sanhedrin whose number from ancient times had been seventy or

¹¹ *Theologie*, pp. 289–96.

¹² The letter is, of course, wrongly attributed to the historical Peter—and, indeed, by people who had an interest in ascribing their own views to Peter.

seventy-two (cf. Num. 11:16) and whose establishment was regarded as important as the revelation of the whole Torah, according to *Tanhuma B.* on Numbers 11:16. According to *Recognitions* 1.40, which reflects the tradition as it was formulated by the later Ebionites, the institution goes back to the True Prophet Jesus himself, who in addition to the twelve apostles chose seventy-two other trustworthy disciples in conformity with the Old Testament prototype.

Carl Schmidt rightly maintains: "The selection of these men by Jesus signifies as it were the establishment of the Jewish Christian academy of teachers who exercise their teaching office in the spirit of the True Prophet."¹³ According to the fiction of the *Kerygmata Petrou*, the "word of truth" (*logos aletheias*) laid down in this book constitutes the material in which all who would undertake the teaching office are instructed (*Ep. Petri* 2; *Hom.* 2.38). According to the letter of Peter which introduces the Clementines, no one may function as a teacher who has not first learned the correct use of these writings by the way of the *diadoche*—as even the *Pirke Aboth* recognizes. Therefore they are transmitted in secret with due precautions in order to protect the continuity of the teaching, the "fruit of the truth" (*karpos tes aletheias*). So shall the unity of the faith so highly esteemed among the Jews—one God, one law, one hope (*heis theos, heis nomos, mia elpis*)—be guaranteed (chap. 1). Of special interest is the procedure by which new recruits become members of the teaching order. Since we lack any corresponding information concerning the method of co-opting members for the rabbinic schools in this period, we may assume that they operated under the same or at least similar principles as those employed by the Jewish Christians. Consequently, we have here material which is important also for the history of Jewish religion.

¹³ *Studien zu den Pseudo-Clementinen*, TU 46/1 (Leipzig, 1949), p. 319.

The aspirant to the teaching office in the Ebionite congregations, who must be "good and pious" (*agathos kai eulabes*) and, of course, "circumcised and faithful" (*emperitomos pistos*, chap. 4), must be taught and tested for six years, during which time the teaching will be transmitted to him little by little.¹⁴ The ordination of the candidate, which constitutes his reception into the teaching order, takes place in a solemn ceremony presided over by the bishop and involves the acceptance of carefully defined obligations. The candidate is led to flowing water where he stands to make his declaration with an appeal to the elements.¹⁵ This practice goes back to an *agoge Mouseos* ("practice of Moses," *Ep. Petri, Contestatio* 1), which seems to presuppose a similar practice among the rabbis.¹⁶ The new teacher then receives the *Kerygmata Petrou* from the hand of the bishop, and must take a solemn oath (*epimartyria*) not to let these books of doctrine fall into the hands of anyone who has not been called to the office but to transmit them only to approved men of the same character and to other candidates for the teaching office under the same conditions and with the consent of the bishop. (May we conclude that the same practice prevailed in the period immediately following the literary fixation of the Mishnah—which had previously been oral, and therefore secret?) As the books are delivered, the four elements—

¹⁴ Jewish sources provide us with no information concerning the period of learning and preparation required for rabbinic ordination at this time. *Sotah* 22*b* mentions forty years as the age required for the ordination of Talmudic scholars. This certainly permits a long period of preparation.

¹⁵ C. Schmidt, *op. cit.* (p. 110, n. 13), p. 321, sees here "a parallel to the baptismal rite."

¹⁶ We know only a little concerning the ancient practice of the *semihah* (the laying on of hands) as employed in the ordination of rabbis, a practice which goes back to Num. 27:16 ff. and Deut. 34:9. By the second century it had been taken over by the patriarch (*Nasi*), the Jewish counterpart of the Ebionite bishop (cf. *j. Sanh.* 19*a*). The other practices reported by the letter of Peter are not known for the Jewish ordination of teachers. During the persecution under Hadrian the laying on of hands was strictly prohibited.

heaven, earth, water, and air—are apparently invoked as witnesses to the oath that in the case of subsequent withdrawal, approaching death, or long journeys (during which the teacher will not always carry them with him), the books will be deposited with the bishop for safekeeping. This means, therefore, that the *Kerygmata Petrou* was originally a secret literature, esoteric instruction of the Ebionite Jesus for his true disciples, who were permitted to hand it on to new candidates for the teaching office only under the strictest security regulations. It was believed that this was the only way the teachers of Christian Judaism could preserve and transmit the secret canon of the truth.

The teaching office—the existence of which is also confirmed by Epiphanius—depends upon ordination by the bishop and continues to be subordinate to him. The bishop thus stands as *monarchos* at the head of the hierarchical organization of the community. Even Peter, who according to the *Kerygmata Petrou* possesses only the status of a teacher of the law, must accordingly submit himself to James. Thus it appears that in the time of the author of the *Kerygmata Petrou*, i.e., late in the second century, the Ebionite congregations, like the Catholic, were led by monarchical bishops. The statement in *Recognitions* 4.35 that all admissions to the apostolate to the Gentiles require a letter of accreditation (*testimonium*) issued by James or his successor suggests the kind of monarchical episcopacy claimed by those who succeeded the bishops named in the succession list for the see of Jerusalem, and who presumably resided in Pella. But naturally we cannot be certain of this.

We learn very little concerning the cultus of the Ebionite congregations from the Church Fathers. Epiphanius, who has in mind the Cyprian congregation at the time of his episcopate, tells us that they called the buildings in which they worshiped “synagogues,” that they were subject to presbyters, and that they designated their chief congregational

officers *archisynagogoï* (*Pan.* 30.18.2). The statement of Epiphanius in *Panarion* 30.2.6 suggests that the Ebionites called their members *parthenoi* (cf. Rev. 14:4).

From Irenaeus we learn that they strictly observed the *qibla* toward Jerusalem and that they celebrated the Lord's Supper with bread and salt and with water instead of wine mixed with water (*Adv. Haer.* 5.1.3; cf. *Pan.* 30.16.1). Their substitution of salt, a symbol of incorruptibility, for the cup could be understood as representing their adherence to the eternal validity of the covenant with Israel. Origen's polemic against circles hostile to the cup appears to be addressed to the Ebionites.¹⁷ Epiphanius also points out that the Ebionites observed this ceremony in slavish imitation of the church's Eucharist, as an *annual* festival (like the Jewish Passover) in commemoration of the death of Jesus.

Baptism apparently had the same central significance among the Ebionites as in the orthodox church. The belief that baptism also drove out evil spirits is associated with their practice of exorcism and their special beliefs about demons, which I have submitted to detailed investigation elsewhere.¹⁸

Ebionite legalism, which impressed itself upon all the regulations for the ordering of their life, has received special attention in our study whenever it was a matter of their intensification of the Mosaic laws. It is also a commonplace of patristic allusions. For example, we learn from Irenaeus that, in addition to directing their prayers toward Jerusalem, they adhered to *circumcision* (*Adv. Haer.* 1.22.2). According to Epiphanius (*Pan.* 30.32.10) circumcision was so important to them that, as in Pharisaic halakah, it superseded even the Sabbath. The Midrash reports that the Ebionite Jacob of the village of Neburiah near Tyre advocated that circum-

¹⁷ *CCS* 11, 197. So Johannes Betz, "Der Abendmahlskelch im Judentum," in *Festschrift für Karl Adam* (Düsseldorf, 1952), p. 121.

¹⁸ *AfZ*, pp. 38–81.

cision be permissible on the Sabbath even for proselytes, and justified it exegetically (*Koh. Rabbah* 7.26). In most of the Church Fathers the Ebionites' great emphasis on Sabbath observance is associated with their use of circumcision. Yet according to Eusebius (*Eccl. Hist.* 3.27.5) there were also Jewish Christians who celebrated the Sabbath with the Jews and Sunday with the Christians. It is not certain whether the *nozrim*, because of whom one shall not fast on Sunday (*Taanith* 27b), are to be indentified with these Jewish Christians. It is probable, however, that the statement in the late *Yalkuth Shemoni* that the *poshei Israel* gather for the prescribed prayers each morning and evening and observe the Jewish fast days is an allusion to the Ebionites. These allusions make it clear that in their way of life—apart from their messianic faith—the Ebionites were not easily distinguished from Jews. Consequently Ambrosiaster took them for heterodox Pharisees. Nor is it surprising that, as Epiphanius reports (*Pan.* 30.18.2), they called their bishop *archisynagogos* and spoke of their “synagogue” instead of using the word “church” (*ecclesia*). For them, Palestine continued to be the Holy Land, called “religion of the example for all nations” in the translation of Symmachus at Jeremiah 3:19 and Ezekiel 20:6, 15.

It is characteristic of the *Kerygmata Petrou* that it sees the life obedient to the law as guaranteed by the fulfillment of many individual commandments (*mandata*), believing that the doing of good works is the proper demonstration of piety. The Ebionite Jesus demands that his followers exhibit “the lawful way of life” (*nomimos politeia*). He healed the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician only after the mother had been converted to this way of life (*Hom.* 2.19). In terms of content, the better righteousness, as practical morality, suggests: “If you love your brethren, you will take nothing from them but will rather give to them from your possessions; you will feed the hungry, give a drink to the thirsty, clothe the

naked, care for the sick, help those in prison as much as you can, receive strangers gladly into your dwellings, hate no one" (*Hom.* 3.69 and par.). All this is in agreement with the ethical catechetics of the second-century church, especially the *Didache*.

In the last analysis, however, Ebionite morality is based on the ancient Jewish doctrine of the "fear of God," which is the first of God's commandments because it is the basis and presupposition of the whole law (*Hom.* 17.11, 12). "Anyone who does not fear does not believe in a future judgment," the Clementine Peter exclaims. Without the fear of God there are no good works. As water extinguishes fire, so the fear of God destroys the evil impulse. This protest is raised by Peter against Simon; the intention is undoubtedly to strike at Marcion's attack on the Jewish doctrine of the fear of God, i.e., his claim that one ought not to fear God but rather to love him. In the debate with Simon, Peter goes so far as to suggest, as only a Christian Jew could—and despite Matthew 22:37—that the greatest commandment in the Torah is the fear of the Lord which God has decreed (*Hom.* 17.7). The capacity to choose the fear of God has in the divine plan been given over to the freedom of man; man is capable of free decision (*Hom.* 2.15–18; *Rec.* 3.52 f.).

Firsthand reports concerning the way of life followed by the Ebionite congregations are lacking. Epiphanius' information, e.g., concerning their encouragement of early marriage for young men to prevent immorality and their steadfast belief in monogamy which nevertheless permitted remarriage up to seven times (contrary to the practice dominant in the church), was drawn, apart from a few details based on his own observation, from his copy of the Ebionite writing which served as the basic source of the Clementine novel.¹⁹

¹⁹ Cf. *AfZ*, pp. 282 ff.

The Church Fathers are of no help to us in assessing the spiritual vitality of the Ebionite congregations. The extant remnants of the Ebionite literature permit us to recognize, as we have seen, that an active literary life and a developed theology flourished east of the Jordan. Ariston of Pella and Symmachus may represent only individual cases of Ebionite biblical scholarship. In any event, the author of the *Kerygmata Petrou* enables us to gain real insight into the struggles which the Jewish Christians had with the Marcionite church and its threat to their existence during the middle and late second century. They also appear to have continued to conduct a planned missionary operation, so that perhaps all of eastern Syria may have temporarily been Ebionite. There does not seem to have been any mission of the Great Church in this region for a long time. As Bauer-Strecker also emphasizes, the Ebionites held a commanding position in Syria and may by no means be regarded—as they were by Rome—as a “sect.”²⁰ Even Augustine said of the Nazoreans of his period that they compelled the Gentiles to Judaize. But Augustine thought that what was still permissible in Paul’s day was in his own day reprehensible and the mark of heresy.²¹

In this context, however, we must make a fundamental observation. If we have in this book treated later Jewish Christianity for the most part as a relatively united phenomenon, we must now state that this is merely the result of the inadequacy of our sources. We simply do not know what the actual historical situation was. The distinctions made by the Church Fathers do not provide us with very much to start with. It must have become evident to those who have read the earlier chapters that the views of the Jewish Christianity of the *Kerygmata Petrou*, the Jewish Christian gospels, Symmachus, and those reflected in the few rabbinic allusions,

²⁰ *Op. cit.* (p. 10, n. 3), p. 265.

²¹ *Theologie*, pp. 296–304.

etc., do not always coincide. I will not venture to say anything with certainty beyond a few necessarily vague statements, e.g., that Justin's distinction between moderate and strict Jewish Christians may be traced to an even later period, at least in relation to proselytes. But the fact that Jewish Christianity manifested greater and greater disunity with respect to teaching, faith, and manner of life as time went on seems to have been the principal cause of its final downfall.

In this investigation we have been concerned with the period in which Ebionitism was in full bloom, i.e., the second and third centuries. Baur and Hilgenfeld in their day considerably overestimated the significance of the Ebionites for this period; the Ebionites no longer exercised an active influence in the development of the church at this time. In the critical work of Ritschl and Harnack, on the other hand, the pendulum swung too far in the other direction. Harnack tried to eliminate Jewish Christianity entirely from the history of Christian doctrine; he incorrectly assessed the "impudent but influentially impotent experiment" of the *Kerygmata Petrou* and woefully misjudged the intellectual significance of this religious system.²² Yet in one of his later works Harnack revised his position—implicitly—and conceded to Jewish Christianity its proper place: as the direct opposite of the Marcionite church in the second century, it represented "in a sovereign and exclusive manner" a Christianity which was the "real completion of the old religion by fulfilling a promise which had been given."²³ But the insight that the Ebionitism of the second century was still so intellectually alive that it was really capable of leading the decisive debate with the Marcionites was, unfortunately, one which the revered master of the history of doctrine and the rediscoverer of Marcion failed to grasp.

²² *Dogmengeschichte* (4th ed.; Tübingen, 1909), I, 33.

²³ "Die Neuheit des Evangeliums nach Marcion," in *Christliche Welt* (1929), p. 362; reprinted in *Aus der Werkstatt des Vollendeten* (Giessen, 1930), p. 128.

The Place of Jewish Christianity in the History of Religion

A. The Earlier History of Hostility Toward the Cult¹

We suggested above that there was a subterranean relationship connecting Rechabites, Essenes, and Ebionites.² This relationship is of special importance in any discussion of the earlier history of hostility toward the sacrificial cult which undoubtedly lay behind the marked antipathy exhibited by the Ebionites. In terms of the history of ideas, we may say that Jewish Christian antagonism toward the law of sacrifice is directly descended from statements of the prophets on this subject. The statements of the prophets, on the other hand, can only be understood when one remembers that the standardization of the sacrificial cult is the product of later Israelite history; it occurred, at the earliest, in the era of Manasseh (698–643 B.C.). Consequently, the Mosaic origin of the cultic laws is a fiction, or, to employ Ebionite terms, the product of false pericopes. In spite of overstatement in the declarations of Amos 5:25 and Jeremiah 7:22 that God did not command any sacrifices at the time of the exodus from Egypt, these statements show an awareness that the regulated sacrificial cult was a recent institution introduced by the

¹ *Theologie*, pp. 220–33.

² Above, p. 86.

priests. Actually, the cult was relatively unimportant up to the time of Jeremiah, and it was by no means regarded as the result of divine revelation. And in Ezekiel we find the devastating statement that the sacrificial system has statutes which are "not good," and "commandments by which they cannot continue to live" (20:25 f.).³ This seems to me to be the ultimate origin of the Ebionite doctrine of the false pericopes.

The same thing can be said of the protest against the "Baalizing" of Yahweh, which was prompted by the building of the Temple and which resulted in the exodus of those who were truly religious into the wilderness. This was true of the Rechabites in the era of the classical prophetic movement, and of a segment of the Essenes, the extreme *hasidim* of the Hasmonean period. The ancient wilderness-ideal of the prophets may have been the determining factor for the exodus of the Rechabites and the Essenes, viz., that the wilderness is a place of grace (Jer. 31:2), that it is God himself who calls men out into the wilderness (Hos. 2:14), and that he will build a road there (Isa. 43:19). The nomadizing groups were especially predisposed in favor of that part of the prophetic preaching which expressed hostility toward the cult.⁴ The Rechabites had a negative attitude toward the sacrifices and the Temple, an attitude which can also be seen in the Essenes and which finally recurs in Ebionitism as a developed theory.

I have discussed elsewhere the sources which suggest the possibility of a genealogical relationship between the Rechabites and the Essenes.⁵ It is much more certain that there was a relationship between the Essenes and the Ebionites, as

³ A similar tendency is exhibited by Jer. 8:8: "The false pen of the scribes has changed the law into a lie."

⁴ Apocalyptic may also have had its "life-situation" (*Sitz im Leben*) in these groups. *Enoch* and *Jubilees* especially may be suspected of having such an origin, as I have already pointed out in *AfZ*, pp. 34 ff.

⁵ *Theologie*, pp. 247-52.

Epiphanius affirms. There seems to be an allusion to this relationship in *Recognitions* 1.37, where an Essene-Ebionite tradition is suggested and to which appeal is made (“for right opinion with liberty belongs to the few,” *paucorum namque est recta cum libertate sententia*).

Philo and Josephus—who have knowledge of the Essenes only for the last fifty years of their approximately two-hundred-year existence—depict the Essenes as people who dwell in the cities on the periphery of the Holy Land, who abhor property and riches and who therefore employ a kind of community of goods. They have a high regard for abstinence from pleasures, prescribe daily washings for purification, and revere the lawgiver Moses most highly, next to God himself. Moreover, they seem to have rejected animal sacrifice and to have had reservations about the Jerusalem Temple.

Now, because of the new discoveries from the Dead Sea area which seem to go back to Essene circles, the covenant (*ezah*—perhaps the original etymology for “Essene”; cf. *Studien*, pp. 34 f.) of the *Bene Zadok* has become of central interest. We are dealing here with a very priestly, legalistic community, but it seems to have had a peculiarly ambivalent relationship with the Temple and the sacrificial cult.⁶ Still other parallels, such as the common ideal of poverty, the strong emphasis on purification, the parallels between their soteriological figure, the Teacher of Righteousness (*more sedeq*), and the True Prophet, similar rites of initiation into membership in the community, and others, make an historical relationship between the two movements very probable. As early as the time of Jesus’ public ministry, ideas of the Essene-Qumran type may have permeated the atmosphere of Jerusalem and consequently may have entered the primitive church at an early date. Certainly this was true *after* the migration, since Jewish Christians must have come upon

⁶ *UJG*, pp. 81 f.

Essene settlements in Transjordan, with which, according to Epiphanius, complete amalgamation took place.

Although the nature of the contacts cannot be established with absolute certainty, it may at least be assumed that the remnants of the pre-Christian Essenes had personal as well as intellectual contact with the Ebionites from the time of their migration into the area east of the Jordan. Either they confirmed the Ebionites in opinions they already possessed, or they passed on to them directly their traditions of hostility toward the cult. Various authors call Ebionitism "a mixture of Essenism and Christianity," following the old Tübingen pattern, and they are correct to the extent that Essenism must be regarded as the bearer of and direct link with ancient Jewish minority traditions, which were better preserved on the periphery of Judaism than at its center. Consequently, I am of the opinion that the beliefs of the Rechabites, Essenes, and Ebionites were in fact historically related.

B. The Ebionite Struggle with Gnosticism⁷

The actual situation of the separated Jewish Christianity of the second and third centuries is more important, it seems to me, than the earlier history of the Ebionite hostility toward the cultus, which has proved difficult to reconstruct. Although it is disputed in various quarters, I am convinced that it can be demonstrated with certainty that the Ebionites offered front-line opposition to the powerful movement of pagan Gnosticism. From the fragments of the ten books of the *Kerygmata Petrou* which are still extant—proceeding from the catalogue of *Recognitions* 3.75—we see that this work, which originated in the second half of the second century, was a polemical writing composed by a scholarly Ebionite. Underlying it, obviously, were literary documents, which were brought together for the purpose of making an

⁷ *UJG*, pp. 61–67.

effective attack against the dangers of Gnosticism, especially Marcionitism. At least eight of the ten books, according to their titles and contents, tended to be anti-Gnostic.

I see no point in renewing the debate concerning the complicated literary situation presented by the Clementine novel, into which the *Kerygmata Petrou* has been incorporated. Here it is only necessary to point out that themes of Jewish tradition have been employed in this literary work for the purpose of attacking Gnostic opponents. And the reason that they can be so employed is that they constitute answers to questions raised by the Gnostics. They are answers drawn from the intellectual content of the Bible in response to questions which had become matters of general concern in the second century of the Christian era. We shall here present a concise survey of these answers.

(1) *Monotheism or polytheism* is the theme of the dialogue of the fourth book of the *Kerygmata Petrou*. Here the magician Simon is attacked by Peter, the spokesman for the Ebionites. In these dialogues, however, Simon represents not "Simon who is also Paul" but the whole of Gnosticism, including Marcion. Moreover, according to patristic testimony, Marcion had a direct connection with the historical Simon Magus through the Simonian Cerdo.⁸ Simon repeatedly affirms the existence of two gods (e.g., *Rec.* 2.36–46; *Hom.* 4.13; 18.1 f.): the highest God (*anotatos theos*) and the creator of the world (*demiourgos*) who, according to *Recognitions* 2.57, having been entrusted by the good God with the creation of the world, finally passed himself off as the good God. In *Homilies* 18.1–3 Simon declares that the two cannot be identical since one God could not be both good and just. The possibility "that the same is good and just" (*hoti tou autou estin agathon einai kai dikaion*) must first be proved to him. He maintains that, as Matthew 19:17 shows, Jesus refers to the good Father-God in heaven

⁸ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.4; Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 4.11.2.

and not to the “just” Jewish Creator-God. Now this is thoroughly Marcionite.⁹ It is as champion of the *monarchia tou theou* (the “single rule of God”) that Peter opposes him, responding with the Jewish teaching that goodness and justice are two *middoth* of the highest God. In *Recognitions* 3.38 he declares that there could be no goodness at all without justice, and in *Homilies* 4.13 he asserts that God is both judge and forgiver of sins in one person since he is by nature good and just (*te physei agathos kai dikaios*). The Clementine Jesus confronts the Gnostic Simon with the *Shema*, the Jewish confession of faith (*Hom.* 3.57). Similarly, we read in *Homilies* 3.10, in a paraphrase of Deuteronomy 4:35, “Because he is one, this God created the world and there is no other apart from him” (*hoti heis estin, theos houtos ton kosmon ktisas kai allos ouk estin plen autou*). God could not “rule jointly with others” (*heterois synarchein*, *Hom.* 2.43); whoever does not believe that there is only one God (*heis theos*) does not have a “monarchistic soul.”

(2) Since the Gnostic polemic against the unity of God is based on the Old Testament (*Hom.* 8.16)—Simon collects all the passages in which, in his opinion, the Demiurge betrays that he is not the only and highest God; e.g., Genesis 1:26, Deuteronomy 4:34, and Psalm 81:1—the Ebionite defense permitted the utilization of the *theory of the false pericopes* (*Kerygmata Petrou*, the second half of Book 1). By means of this theory all ambiguous and erroneous biblical passages which assert things unworthy of God (e.g., lack of foreknowledge) and all anthropomorphisms are to be expunged so that Marcion will not be able to gloat over the pettiness, weaknesses, incongruities, and spitefulness (*pusillitates, infirmitates, incongruentiae, malignitates*) of the Creator-God. Thus we have in *Homilies* 2.43 f. a catalogue of twenty-four biblical passages which compromise the character of God.

⁹ The references are given in *Theologie*, p. 308, n. 1.

Since the Ebionites maintained that this doctrine of the false pericopes was part of Jesus' gospel, they also attempted to explain the absurdities of the Old Testament on the basis of Jesus' words in the New Testament. I have demonstrated elsewhere that we are dealing here with a specifically anti-Marcionite polemic.¹⁰ Similarly, the eighth book of the *Kerygmata Petrou*, which is concerned with self-contradictory sayings of Jesus and their resolution, had to do with the defense against Gnostic interpretation of the Gospels and allegorical reinterpretation (as in the *Pistis Sophia*). The procedure followed by Marcion and other Gnostics of basing their teaching on biblical citations is characterized as follows by the Clementine Peter: "The Scriptures do not lead astray, but reveal the evil disposition which lies hidden in each one like a snake and which is predisposed to oppose God. Each one approaches the Scriptures with his disposition which is like wax, and he impresses his disposition like wax on the Scriptures, since he finds in them all his own ideas about God. Now since everyone finds in the Scriptures whatever he may happen to think about God, some derive from them the figures of many gods, but we find there the picture of the true God, since we recognize the true type on the basis of our own shape" (*Hom.* 16.10).

(3) "Whence evil, and why?" (*unde malum et qua re*) was, as Tertullian asserted,¹¹ a burning question in all Gnostic movements, indeed, the real basis of their "heresy," which resulted from the fact that they meditated too long on it. In *Homilies* 19–20 (Book 6, and in part also Book 2, of the *Kerygmata Petrou*) a very strange conception of the *origin of evil* is developed at length. It is claimed that evil has its origin in a mingling of antagonistic elements which is foreseen by God but which is nonetheless independent of him. The function of this conception is to counter the Gnostic

¹⁰ *Theologie*, pp. 173 f.

¹¹ *De Praescr.* 7; *Adv. Marc.* 1.2.

doctrine of an aboriginal principle of evil by explaining evil in a way which harmonizes better with biblical ideas. The Clementine teaching, which I have developed more fully elsewhere,¹² is a wholly unique attempt to solve the problem of theodicy, i.e., the problem of how God can be acquitted of responsibility for the origin of evil without lessening his dignity as creator of the entire universe. The usual solution in Judaism as well as in Christianity is that a primeval “defection of the devil” (*abscessio diaboli*) took place, or, on the other hand, that man is responsible for evil. When the latter suggestion is pursued further, however, it leads to the assumption that matter is essentially evil. The Clementine solution, which rejects the explanation that evil derives its continuing influence from Adam’s Fall, and instead prefers to derive it from the eighth generation of mankind (the fall of the sons of Seth), is a fruitful way of getting beyond the unchanging puzzles of the theodicy problem. At the same time this solution so effectively guarded the important position of the freedom of choice (in part, Book 6), insisting that in the world-conflict between good and evil man is *autexousios*, i.e., capable of free decision (*Hom.* 2.15–18; 7.3; 20.2, and elsewhere), precisely in order to oppose Gnostic *heimarmene* (fate) and the Gnostic doctrine of the fallen condition of the world, that they can even ascribe this freedom of choice to the devil at the end of the world.

(4) Similarly, the Ebionite doctrine of the *syzygies* (Book 6) is to be interpreted as an answer to Gnostic dualism, particularly to the teaching of Marcion. Some insight is to be gained from the observation, which has frequently been made (Hilgenfeld, Lehmann, Harnack), that Apelles, the disciple of Marcion, presented a similar conception in his *Syllogisms*. (In his work a subordinate god, the “fiery angel” [*angelus igneus*], is the inventor of the false pericopes; according to *Homilies* 2.38, the Evil One [*poneros*] created them “for a

¹² *AfZ*, pp. 40–45.

justifiable purpose.”) Even if the question of priority cannot be settled, it remains true that the *Kerygmata Petrou* as well as Apelles created a *via media* between Marcion’s complete rejection of the Old Testament and the church’s tradition. According to the *Kerygmata Petrou*, the principle of the syzygies affirms that good did not enter history suddenly, as did Christ, the good God, in Marcion’s thought,¹³ but that error itself is herald of truth and the latter is therefore essentially a reaction against error. Adolf Hilgenfeld’s comment is apt: “That which was true in Gnostic dualism was taken up in the monism of Jewish Christianity.”¹⁴ The inner contradiction in the ethico-physical world and the opposition between right and wrong in human life are explained by Gnosticism in terms of two original divine principles. In the theory of the syzygies these contradictions are derived from God himself, who, in spite of his unity, permitted everything that was created to go forth in contrasts. He regulated the dualism, however, and exhibited the universal law of the syzygies in historical personalities.¹⁵ For *monas ousa to genei duas estin* (“being a unity generically, it is yet a duality,” *Hom.* 16.12).

(5) Finally, the central doctrine of *the True Prophet* (Book 1) also has an anti-Marcionite aspect since it presents the Messiah Jesus as related to the great figures of Old Testa-

¹³ Cf. Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 1.19: “In the fifteenth year of Tiberius, Christ Jesus, the saving Spirit, deigned to come from heaven” (*Anno XV Tiberii Christus Jesus de caelo manare dignatus est, spiritus salutaris*); 4.7: “He declares that in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius he descended into Capernaum, a city of Galilee; assuredly from the Creator’s heaven, into which he had previously descended from his own heaven” (*Anno XV principatus Tiberiani proponit eum descendisse in civitatem Galilaeae, Capharnaum; utique de caelo creatoris, in quod de suo ante descenderat*).

¹⁴ A. Hilgenfeld, *Die clementinischen Recognitionen und Homilien nach ihrem Ursprung und Inhalt* (Jena, 1848), p. 196.

¹⁵ In this connection, Hilgenfeld rightly remarks, *ibid.*, pp. 282 f.: “It is impossible to attain a correct insight into the nature of this system as long as one does not conceive the doctrine of the syzygies in this special way.”

ment religion, who were already messengers of the Shekinah inasmuch as the same divine Spirit (*theion pneuma*) was already operative in them. And this was all the more necessary inasmuch as many Gnostic movements, such as the Cainites (who were much more radical than Marcion), had rejected the Old Testament as religiously worthless and had presented the scoundrels of the Bible as instruments of the Light-World, while "the righteous," such as Enoch, the Patriarchs, and, especially, Moses, were in their view lost beyond recovery. Consequently, the strong parallel between Moses and Christ in Ebionite thought is to be understood apologetically; its function is to bring together true Judaism and the revelation brought by Jesus, in opposition to the Gnostics. The affirmation formulated in *Homilies* 8.7, that Moses and Jesus proclaimed the *same* teaching, that love of Moses and Jesus is the highest attainment in religion, and that the man who understands the old as well as the new is the one blessed by God, undoubtedly also has an anti-Marcionite aspect. The complete identification of Moses and Jesus, of the Old Testament and the New Testament, in terms of content, is the most radical position possible in opposition to Marcion or the Cainites. For, in contrast to the doctrine of the Demiurge, the God about whom Jesus taught was none other than the God revealed in the Old Testament. Thus Jesus is seen as teaching the doctrine in the ninth book of the *Kerygmata Petrou*, namely, "that the law which has been given by God and which alone can make peace is righteous and perfect" (*quia lex quae a deo posita est iusta sit et perfecta et quae sola possit facere pacem, Rec. 3.75*).

These are the most important doctrinal positions of an anti-Gnostic type held by the Ebionites of the Pseudo-Clementine novel. It is self-evident, of course, that those who fought against Gnosticism had to deal with questions raised by the Gnostics—how could they have fought with them otherwise? Only a strong bias permits the conclusion that

the Ebionites were Gnostics because they dealt with Gnostic themes. Hans Jonas, for example, seriously maintains such a view, and thus regards even Origen and Plotinus as representatives of Gnosticism. In the Clementine novel, however, Simon, the figure who represents all of Gnosticism, concedes to his opponent Peter that he is fully aware that all he is going to say will horrify his debating partner and will appear to the latter as wild blasphemy (*Rec.* 2.37). The Gnostic speaker here indicates the great distance he feels exists between Gnosticism and Jewish Christianity. Similarly, the unimaginative, rationalistic Clementines speak of "the spirit of madness" (*pneuma lysses*) which objects to their demand for baptism (*Hom.* 11.26). In essence, Gnosticism is divine intoxication without wine (*theia kai nephaliios methe*). In the eyes of their opponents Gnosticism was indeed an intoxicating drink, but a most abominable one! It is for these various reasons that the nineteenth-century scholar August Neander stated: "We must place the tendency of the Clementines, as not belonging itself to Gnosticism, but as representing the extreme Jewish point of view, over against the system of Marcion. The extreme point of Judaism, most directly opposed to the Marcionitic heresy, we consider to be this: the Clementines recognize in Christianity *nothing that is new*; Christianity is only a restoration of the pure religion of Moses."¹⁶ This is how August Neander opposed Ferdinand Christian Baur more than 120 years ago! And in this matter Neander's perception was sharper and his assessment more accurate than that of his opponents. The fact that Baur's mistakes, occasioned by the contradictory and frequently utterly confused allusions of the patristic heresiologists, are lovingly tended and preserved from one generation to the next speaks for the great scientific reputation which Baur rightly possesses. His followers, first his close disci-

¹⁶ *General History of the Christian Religion and Church*, trans. Joseph Torrey (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1853), I, 395.

ples, then Ritschl, Harnack, and Bousset, and recently Oscar Cullmann and Rudolf Bultmann, have kept on telling the fairy tale about "the Gnostic viewpoint of the Pseudo-Clementines" and have firmly believed it. Since the catchword "demythologizing" is frequently misapplied today—certainly to the dismay of its author!—it would be a good thing to use the postulate correctly for once. Let us therefore demythologize the "Gnostic Ebionites." That is to say, there never were any—at least not in Syria and Palestine. The Elkesaites were a totally different phenomenon, despite certain connections.

On the basis of an unbiased approach, then, it turns out that it was the posterity of the primitive church of Jesus, the descendants of the Judaists of Jerusalem, who stood in the breach to defend the truth of Christianity for the common cause when, in the middle of the second century, the young Christian church was confronted by a sudden deluge of Gnostic ideas. Marcion and Valentinus proceeded to form counter-churches and no one could know what the outcome of this life-and-death struggle would be. It was apparently the Jewish Christians who led the intellectual battle in the front lines and held off the onslaught of the enemy. The clever Church Fathers, however, wrote their learned works against heresies—except for Justin's lost books—only much later, at a time when the whole struggle had subsided or was all over. It is important to make clear that according to all indications the fight against the Simonians, the Marcionites, and so forth, at least on Syrian soil, was led not by orthodoxy but by Ebionitism. In my earlier work I called this "a *new* finding for church history."¹⁷

The whole controversy concerning the Gnosticism or anti-Gnosticism of the Pseudo-Clementine novel would collapse if we could agree upon a *uniform* terminology. As a world-

¹⁷ *Theologie*, p. 306.

view, Gnosticism is always pagan; it always means self-salvation of man through right knowledge. "Its peculiar character is roughly that of a theosophy combined with an anthroposophy."¹⁸ Certainly Gnosticism may have adopted both Jewish and Christian elements, just as, conversely, Judaism, Christianity, and Ebionitism may have taken over Gnostic elements. For this reason it is necessary to speak of an increasing syncretism for the second and third centuries which characterized the Ebionites of the Clementine novel too. But after all, syncretism is not the same as Gnosticism. Even the heterodox Judaism of the early Christian era took over a number of syncretistic elements. It is, however, linguistically as well as historically incorrect to proceed on this basis to speak of a "Gnostic Judaism." For in the last analysis Gnosticism always represents the same world-view and cannot be transformed into the doctrine of salvation of a God of revelation who claims absolute authority and requires of those who believe in him the fear of God due from the creature. This, however, is the position of the Ebionites, as of the Jews and Christians.

C. The Hostility of Jews and Christians Toward the Ebionites¹⁹

Nevertheless, for both Jews and Christians the Ebionites remained the objects of suspicion and hatred. The proclamation of the reform of the law by Jesus, the True Prophet, severed the Ebionites irrevocably—probably against their will—from the religion of the Jewish people, who could not even consider the possibility that the Mosaic tradition had been falsified because such a possibility threatened their entire existence. "They know God and deny him" (Rabbi Tarphon). "They create hatred, enmity, and schism"

¹⁸ So A. Böhlig, "Synkretismus, Gnosis, Manichäismus," in *Katalog zur Ausstellung "Koptische Kunst"* (Essen, 1963), p. 43.

¹⁹ *Theologie*, pp. 315–25.

(Rabbi Ishmael). These are opinions of Tannaites at the beginning of the second century, occasioned by a controversy concerning the sacred writings of the *minim*, who are here, as the context shows, apparently Ebionite Christians. Furthermore, Psalm 139:21 f. was applied to the Ebionites: "Shall I not hate those who hate thee, and quarrel with those who quarrel with thee? With perfect hatred I hate them; they are as enemies to me" (*Shab.* 116a and par.). At that time, as Justin also reports, all discussions with Christians were prohibited by the rabbis (*Dialogue with Trypho* 38.112). The judgment concerning them was by now fully established: as apostates from Israel they were regarded as even more reprehensible than pagans (e.g., *Tos. Baba Mezia* 11.33). Thus, more was involved in the situation than was supposed by Jacob Burckhardt, who has suggested that the Jews were "much too powerful and too proud" to have dealings with the Ebionites.

From the point of view of orthodox Judaism, the Ebionite theory of the law represents the classical case of heresy, understood by the rabbis as transgression of the commandment of Numbers 15:39, "You shall not follow after your own heart" (*Sifre ad loc; Berakh.* 12b and par.). For this reason the *Birkath ha-Minim* of the *Shemoneh Esreh*, the prayer addressed to heaven for their speedy destruction which was formulated at the beginning of the second century, was the premature but only possible response from Judaism against those who held the key to a reform of Judaism, a reform which might have enabled Judaism to escape its fate of self-isolation which was just beginning.

The same judgment was meted out to the Ebionites from the Christian side. The earliest statement from the Gentile Christian side, which admits the existence of separate Jewish Christian communities but wishes to suppress them, appears to be John 10:16, a passage which may be attributed to the redactor of the Fourth Gospel, who wrote about 135. In

the course of the second century, in the decades between Justin and Irenaeus, the Ebionites must finally have been pronounced enemies of the *hygiainousa didaskalia* ("sound doctrine," Titus 2:1), teachers of error and heretics, after they themselves had first introduced "the idea of heresy" into the ancient Christian outlook with their anti-Pauline polemic. As Walter Bauer helpfully points out, "the arrow quickly flew back upon the archer."²⁰ The Gentile believers had simply turned the tables and had counted as "heresy" the practice of the Mosaic religion by the descendants of the primitive church, a right guaranteed to them at the Apostolic Council. This "advance" from the original position made the history of the Christian church possible. Thus, the voluntary self-exclusion of the Jewish Christians from the development which occurred in Gentile Christianity (and not merely because the Gentile Christians were in the majority) actually soon resulted in their becoming a sect, because of their legalism, the weakness of their Christian beliefs concerning salvation and redemption, and the fact that the Parousia which they expected did not occur. They lingered on physically as well as intellectually only through inbreeding, despite their inclination toward world mission. Above all, however, it was their "law inherited from the fathers" (*nomos patrios*), wisely abandoned by the Gentile church, which could not displace the various nationalisms of the Gentiles even if it tried. The intolerant Jewish Christian movement which was known to Justin and which is the only one we regard as Ebionite, with its combination of Mosaic law and faith in Christ—an abbreviated law and an unsoteriological faith in Christ, to be sure—was bound to remain in isolation. From the very beginning Ebionitism was destined to be buried in the graveyard of the sects which flourished and died in the era of the ancient church. Their position midway between church and synagogue had no future once

²⁰ *Op. cit.* (p. 10, n. 3), pp. 238 f.

the victory of Gentile Christianity had been determined through the success of the Pauline mission. From the very beginning, the Gentile Christian majority could not grant them the right to exist. Jerome expressed the church's verdict concerning them in a terse formula: "But as long as they desire to be both Jews and Christians, they are neither Jews nor Christians."²¹ Their point of view, he suggests, constitutes a "most vicious heresy" (*haeresis sceleratissima*).

Perhaps, however, it was really the Ebionites who preserved most faithfully and most adequately represented the heritage received from important circles in the primitive church in Jerusalem, even though the decrease in eschatological tension in the later period distinguished them from their spiritual ancestors. Certainly the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*, which we have come to know, is a very abbreviated and occasionally quite curious gospel, designed to suit the ideas of the puristic moralists of east Jordan, who deliberately lived outside the mainstream of history. Yet must we not assume that there were many primitive Christian customs, doctrines, and beliefs which were soon forgotten in the Great Church or which were sacrificed to the desire to expand into the wider world, but which were preserved in the narrow confines of Syrian sects and lived on precisely because of the legalistic petrification which ultimately occurred there? Did not a part of the primitive Christian message therefore receive further development in accordance with its original tendencies among these dispersed Palestinians? Did they not quite justly regard the advances made by the church on the soil of the Gentile Diaspora, the so-called Hellenization of Christianity, as an estrangement from their Palestinian origins? Were they not perhaps the real heirs, even if they became extinct? It is not the office of the historian, not even of the historian of religion, to make such value-judg-

²¹ *Sed dum volunt et Judaei esse et Christiani, nec Judaei sunt nec Christiani, MPL 22, 924.*

ments, especially judgments made on the basis of faith, instead of stating bare facts. In any event *this* must hold, viz., that the Ebionites, as the physical descendants of the first disciples—including Jesus' own relatives—were the bearers of a legitimate tradition inasmuch as theirs was clearly one of the many possible ways of development which were open to the early church. From this perspective, what does "heresy" mean? And the idea that the heretics preserved and represented the original truth is by no means only a modern opinion; Augustine was indignant at this "absurdity," which had been advocated as a principle by Rhetorius, an otherwise unknown founder of a sectarian group. But on another occasion the same Augustine also said that schisms in the faith never issue from "insignificant, small minds" but always from "great men." Observation of world history and church history enables us to *state as fact* only "that even the guardian of the old can become a heretic when the development goes too far beyond him."²²

And yet the historian of religion cannot be content with merely stating this fact of world history. He must attempt to comprehend more fully what has happened. This is possible only by viewing the situation from the opposite position. Thus the real basis for the opposition to Paul on the part of the Jewish Christians was undoubtedly the fact that, since Christianity seemed to them to be essentially "the Mosaic law restored through Jesus the Prophet" (*lex mosaica per Jesum Prophetam reformata*), they abhorred Paul as the enemy of the law. The tragic fate of Paul's message is well known. It was reinterpreted in many ways; in its unaltered and unabbreviated form it was nowhere understood in early Christianity. Its distinctive feature, the doctrine of justification by faith, which leads to the "mysticism" of being "in Christ" (*en Christo*) and, connected with this, to the total abrogation of the Mosaic law, *without* any distinction be-

²² W. Bauer, *op. cit.* (p. 10, n. 3), p. 238.

tween ritual and ethical parts, was not utilizable for the developing Catholic church. For the Pauline proclamation presupposed not Gentile *anomia* ("lawlessness") but rather Jewish zeal for the law. It really applied only to Jews of similar religious zeal, such as Paul himself. But the Ebionites, for whom alone Paul's message was really appropriate, went the other way of ritual reform and the intensification of the ethical part of the Mosaic law. And the Gentiles, with whom alone the Great Church was primarily concerned after the Jewish secession, were simply not in a position to understand the Pauline theology. Their primary need above all others was for a law, a consciousness of what is permissible and what is not, what is right and what is wrong. The discipline of the law was for them not merely a brief stage of development, as it was for Paul himself, but rather the primary achievement of the new faith. As K. R. Köstlin correctly noted over a century ago, "the Pauline need for freedom from the law lay infinitely beyond their point of view."²³ Consequently, the Peter of the *Kerygmata Petrou* can successfully follow after Paul (Simon) in his journeys and find fertile soil for his discourses in Pauline missionary congregations, for the ethical need of Christians converted from paganism could ultimately not be met by Paul. Even from his letters we see that his missionary congregations tended toward the external character of formal legalism, either in the direction of ritual, as in Galatia, or of asceticism, as in Rome and Corinth.

The church itself, as is well known, approved neither the Pauline nor the Jewish Christian pattern. It chose a middle road and arrived at firm regulations, dogmas of faith, and rules for the conduct of life which have now stood for nearly two thousand years. The second-century movements of protest, Ebionitism and Marcionitism, were left behind and

²³ "Zur Geschichte des Urchristentums," in *Theologische Jahrbücher*, ed. F. C. Baur (1850), p. 37.

eventually perished. Since that time Christians have commonly believed that it is possible for people of Jewish extraction to be members of the church and that it is necessary to conduct a mission to the Jews, but that there can be no organized national church for Jewish Christians since racial and national barriers have been abolished in the church. The church is and remains the "church of Jews and Gentiles"; in this point Paul prevailed: "There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). in accordance with Romans 11:26, the church expects the complete redemption of Israel to occur in the Last Days; when the full number of the Gentiles have entered, all Israel will embrace the church of Christ. In the *Gelasianum* the church prays for this: "Grant that the fullness of the whole world may pass into the sons of Abraham and into the worthiness of Israel" (*praesta ut in Abrahae filios et in Israeliticam dignitatem totius mundi transeat plenitudo*).

Thus has the place of Jewish Christianity as an integral entity within the history of the Christian religion been defined. The Ebionites had their historical place in primitive Christianity and they have their dogmatic place in Christian eschatology. In the meantime, the Jewish Christians are, as a great Jewish thinker has written, "in the first respect an anachronism, and in the second a paradox."²⁴

D. The Continued Influence of the Jewish Christians²⁵

The Ebionites finally disappeared in the fifth century in eastern Syria. Many of their central doctrines, however, appear to have survived in the conglomeration of religions of that time and then, in the period of Monophysite quarrels, to have entered Arabia by means of the Nestorians. That is to say, the Arabian Christianity which Mohammed found

²⁴ Franz Rosenzweig, *Briefe* (Berlin, 1936), pp. 552 ff.

²⁵ *Theologie*, pp. 334-42.

at the beginning of his public activity was not the state religion of Byzantium but a schismatic Christianity characterized by Ebionite and Monophysite views. From this religion many beliefs flowed in an unbroken stream of tradition into the proclamation of Mohammed.

These connections are not very clear and are difficult to establish. Only the most important of them can be briefly cited here. The entire syncretistic baptismal sect of the Elkesaites evidently originated with a revelation from a prophet Elxai in the third year of Trajan's reign, A.D. 100, in "the land of the Parthians." At that time, the Parthian sphere of influence extended to eastern Syria. This long-lived group, which prayed toward Jerusalem (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 19.3.5 f.) but really belonged to paganism, seems to have supplied the connecting link with the Mandeans, who were also a baptizing sect. The Mandeans, like several other sects, also exhibited the Ebionite hostility toward the sacrifices and the Temple.²⁶

In any case, many Ebionite beliefs and customs may have been preserved in the mixed population of Syria and Mesopotamia as regional traditions which shaped not only Nestorian Christianity but also the still later Islamic Shi'ah sects (Druses, Nusairis, Yezidis). A considerable number of references concerning circumcision, baptismal customs, lustrations, depreciation of the female element, and the pork-taboo are provided in a book which recently appeared.²⁷ Even the

²⁶ Cf. the references given by Rudolph, *op. cit.* (p. 90, n. 17), I, 94, 240 f. and II, 378 f.; further, Lady E. St. Drower, "Adam and the Elkesaites" (*TU* 79 [1961]), pp. 406 ff. Eric Segelberg, *Masbuta, Studies in the Ritual of the Mandaean Baptism* (Uppsala, 1958), pp. 174 ff. is more cautious in his conclusions. The statement of Epiphanius, *Pan.* 19.1, that the Elkesaites go back to pre-Christian Essenes, is vague.

²⁷ Klaus Müller, *Kulturhistorische Studien zur Genese pseudoislamischer Sektengebilde in Vorderasien* (Munich dissertation, 1964; Wiesbaden, 1967).

depreciation of the female element, a motif which is seldom encountered elsewhere, recurs among the Nusairis. Just as strange and otherwise difficult to explain is the glorification in Ebionite fashion of the sinless First Adam among the Yezidis. Müller sees in these groups of strongly rural character the remains of the ancient Ebionites and Elkesaites.

The Ebionite conception of the True Prophet must have been directly operative in the proclamation of the prophet Mohammed himself, just as it had also been taken over by the Mandeans and the Manicheans. It also recurs in Islam—and even with the characteristic series of seven, known also by Mani (Heralds of the Light-Mind), who, however, supplies a different cast of players.²⁸ Mohammed's series of messengers includes Noah, Lot, Moses, three Arabian messengers, and Abraham. As in Ebionitism, the names that are missing are precisely those which we would rank first in a prophetic series: Elijah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and so forth. The fact that Adam is not mentioned is probably accidental, for in *Sura* 3.58 he is, in good Ebionite fashion, placed alongside Jesus. Particularly important, however, is the fact that Abraham became for Islam the Imam of all believers; neither Jew nor Christian, he serves as the link joining Jewish Christianity and Islam. The covenant with Abraham unites all believers at a stage *prior* to Torah and gospel. It was the reconstruction of this covenant which Mohammed saw as his task. The fifth *Sura* (5.48–59), especially, sounds like the extension of the Jewish Christian theology of the covenants to the population of Arabia through Mohammed, the new messenger of God. That is, behind the Islamic idea of a series of prophets is a completely universal conception related to Ebionitism: the prophets are

²⁸ For the prophetic succession of Manicheism, now see C. Colpe, *Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (Göttingen, 1961), p. 163.

humanity's representatives, with whom God makes a covenant. Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed are in the narrowest sense the contracting parties of the divine covenant. The truth of each earlier messenger—as the Elkesaites also believed—is taken up into the proclamation of the one who follows, so that Mohammed brings together all the truth conveyed through them.

In addition to the conception of the True Prophet, which according to Islamic doctrine originated in the primordial heavenly book, there is the doctrine of the absolute unity of God, i.e., his monarchical character excluding any kind of Trinity, which is just as characteristic of Mohammed as of Ebionitism. In the Pseudo-Clementines religion is defined as follows: "This is religion, to fear him alone and to believe only the Prophet of Truth" (*Hom. 7.8*). This definition is so constructed that Islam could find in it its own confession of faith. According to Islam, Mohammed, as the Prophet of Truth, is the legitimate successor of Moses and Jesus in the mission of illuminating mankind. This extensive similarity in structure between Jewish Christianity and Islam explains why the population of the countries bordering Arabia, areas permeated with Monophysitism and Nestorianism, could so quickly become Mohammedan.

In addition to these, Islam took over a number of elements of the Jewish doctrine of the law in the special form given them by Ebionitism. This is true of the specifically Jewish rites of baptism and purification, and of the practice of directing prayers in a specific direction, originally northward, toward Jerusalem, until the Prophet, for the purpose of distinguishing the two groups, established at Medina the new practice of directing prayer toward Mecca, i.e., toward the Kaaba. A certain dependence upon Jewish Christianity may also be seen in the Mohammedan food laws, which have

their origin in the regulations of the Apostolic Decree.²⁹ The particular conception of false pericopes—Uzair (Ezra), especially, falsified the Jewish Scriptures (*Sura* 2.70, 154, 169, 207, etc.)—likewise played a fairly important role in Mohammed's consciousness of being sent to restore the original law. Later Islamic theologians also know a tradition of crude anti-Paulinism which is quite in the temper of Jewish Christianity; this, too, calls for an investigation of the course of the tradition.

When all is said and done, then, Mohammed, too, reverted to the ancient law. If it was possible for Jewish Christianity to have a new law in addition to the ancient law, there was certainly "also room for something still newer after the new."³⁰ For in the understanding of Jewish Christianity, the new law is in fact identical with the oldest law of all. Like the Ebionites, Mohammed wanted to correct the falsehoods which had crept into the law and to effect a reformation which would restore the original. To be sure, a full demonstration of the relationship between Mohammed and the Ebionites is not possible, but the line of tradition has been established. And thus we have a paradox of world-historical proportions, viz., the fact that Jewish Christianity indeed disappeared within the Christian church, but was preserved in Islam and thereby extended some of its basic ideas even to our own day. According to Islamic doctrine, the Ebionite combination of Moses and Jesus found its fulfillment in Mohammed; the two elements, through the agency of Jewish Christianity, were, in Hegelian terms, "taken up" in Islam.

²⁹ This impression is strengthened by the tenth-century manuscript of 'Abd al-Jabbar, recently discovered by S. Pines in an Istanbul library (see Bibliography). In this Islamic writing long passages are quoted from a lost Ebionite work which tells about the Apostolic Council and especially about the controversy over the food laws. Marc Philonenko, "Le Décret apostolique et les interdits alimentaires du Coran," *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie religieuses*, 1967, pp. 165 ff., believes that the Islamic pork-taboo in particular goes back to ancient Jewish Christianity, with the Syrian *Didascalia* serving as the connecting link.

³⁰ Adolf Schlatter, "Die Entwicklung des jüdischen Christentums zum Islam," *Evangelisches Missionsmagazin*, 1918, p. 252.

Glossary

- AMORAIM** Rabbis of the period following the publication of the Mishnah, whose commentaries on the latter are contained in the Talmud.
- DECALOGUE** The Ten Commandments.
- DEMIURGE** In Platonic and Gnostic thought, a subordinate god responsible for the creation of the world.
- HABERIM** Literally “associates,” members of a religious association.
- HAGGADAH** Plural, Haggadoth. Literally “narration.” Exposition of Scripture whose purpose is primarily edification, comfort, or exhortation rather than the substantiation of rules of conduct. Rabbinic Haggadah sometimes followed the biblical text closely, but at other times the biblical text served only as a point of departure (as it does in many modern sermons!).
- HAGIOGRAPHA** The books belonging to the third division of the Hebrew Old Testament, i.e., the books not included in “The Torah” or “The Prophets.”

- HALAKAH** Plural, halakoth. Rule(s) of conduct supported by the rabbis. Used collectively to designate the legal portions of rabbinic literature as opposed to Haggadah.
- HASIDIM** Literally “pious.” In Maccabean times the term designated a sect noted for its rigorous piety and strict observance of the Torah.
- IMAM** Model, pattern, leader, etc. An Islamic term having many applications.
- KERYGMATA
PETROU** The Preaching of Peter, the hypothetical source underlying the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions*. While scholars may disagree in their reconstructions, there is general agreement that such a source did exist, and that it derived from Jewish Christian circles in the second century A.D.
- MASHAL** A truth substantiated by an illustration; a wise saying, fable, or allegory.
- MIDDOTH** Literally “measurements.” Used in reference to the attributes of God.
- MIDRASH** Plural, Midrashim. Literally “exposition,” i.e., of Scripture. While the rabbinic Midrash may be either halakic or haggadic in content, its avowed purpose of expounding Scripture distinguished it from rabbinic compilations which are primarily legal in structure and focus, such as the Mishnah.

MILLENARIAN	Pertaining to the belief that the Messiah will reign for a thousand years prior to the final resurrection and Last Judgment.
MISHNAH	Literally “teaching” or “repetition.” Used to designate both individual legal traditions and the normative collection of legal traditions published <i>ca.</i> A.D. 200 by Rabbi Judah the Patriarch.
NOZRIM	The Hebrew equivalent of the Greek <i>Nazoraioi</i> , a designation for the followers of Jesus.
PARACLETE	Intercessor or mediator.
PENTATEUCH	The Books of Moses, the first five books of the Old Testament, known in Hebrew as the Torah.
PERICOPE	A passage of Scripture constituting an identifiable unit.
QIBLA	The direction faced in prayer. An Islamic term.
PARADOSIS	Plural, <i>paradoseis</i> . Tradition(s), material transmitted orally.
PAROUSIA	Literally “presence” or “coming.” Used by Christians primarily of the second coming of Christ.
SEDAQAH	Literally “righteousness.” In rabbinic usage the term frequently denotes charity, almsgiving.
SHEKINAH	The Divine Presence.

- SYZYG** A pair of complementary realities or abstractions, frequently regarded as male and female.
- TALMUD** Literally "learning." Commentary on the Mishnah by rabbinic scholars of the third, fourth, and fifth centuries A.D. There are two compilations: the Jerusalem or Palestinian Talmud, and the Babylonian Talmud.
- TANNAIM** Anglicized, Tannaites. Rabbis of the period prior to the publication of the Mishnah.
- TARGUM** A translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Aramaic.
- TORAH** Literally "instruction." Used primarily as a designation for the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. "Law" is the usual, although inadequate, English rendering.

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