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Christian Judaizing in Asia Minor: Revelation, Ignatius, and Justin Martyr



THAT SOME GENTILE CHRISTIANS were attracted to Judaism and practised Jewish customs in Asia Minor is indicated clearly in letters by Ignatius of Antioch, Syria, during his travels through Asia Minor and in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*. Justin provides one of the most explicit references to Christian judaizing in early church literature, proving that ecclesiastical leaders continued to grapple with the vitality of diaspora Judaism and its attraction for Christians in the middle of the second century CE. The compelling evidence for the existence of the phenomenon in Asia Minor found in the writings of Ignatius and Justin Martyr helps to elucidate two anomalous statements made in the Book of Revelation—another Asia Minor document written approximately twenty years earlier than the date of Ignatius's correspondence. These statements, which are usually understood to be polemics against Jews or Jewish Christian opponents, are better interpreted to be the author's reaction to Christian judaizers. Since it is the earliest of the documents investigated in this chapter, it is with the Book of Revelation that I begin.

The Book of Revelation

IN THE SECOND AND THIRD CHAPTERS of the Book of Revelation are obscure accusations embedded in letters addressed to two churches in Asia Minor: Smyrna and Philadelphia. The author of Revelation accuses his opponents there of falsifying their identification as Jews, for which he calls them members of a “synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9; 3:9). Scholars typically understand these statements to be Christian slander of local Jews, and so have viewed them as evidence that the Christian community represented by the Apocalypse of John was engaged in vigorous conflict with Jews and Judaism toward the end of Emperor Domitian's reign (c. 95 CE).¹ In this chapter I demonstrate that Gentile Christians who were attracted to Judaism and became attached to the synagogue are the target of the accusations in Revelation (2:9 and 3:9) and that, instead of reflecting a

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struggle between Jews and Christians, these verses reflect an internal Christian controversy.

Revelation 2:9 and 3:9

The accusations found in two of the messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor that follow the introduction in the first chapter of the Book of Revelation come prior to the throne vision presented in chapters 4 and 5. The first accusation (Rev. 2:9) is taken from the letter to the church in Smyrna:

I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander (βλασφημίαν) on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not (τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς καὶ οὐκ), but are a synagogue of Satan (συναγωγὴ τοῦ Σατανᾶ). Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

The second (Rev. 3:9) is taken from the letter to the church in Philadelphia:

I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those of the synagogue of Satan (συναγωγῆς τοῦ Σατανᾶ) who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying (τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται)—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.

In both letters, the author of Revelation accuses those who “say that they are Jews and are not” of committing “blasphemy” (βλασφημίαν) and lying, and identifies them as members of the “synagogue of Satan” (συναγωγῆς τοῦ Σατανᾶ).² This harsh reprimand conveys the author’s anger and sense of betrayal by the actions of these people. The identity of “those who say that they are Jews and are not” is believed by most scholars to be a reference to Jews in Smyrna and Philadelphia.

Jewish Persecution of Christians?

Many scholars view Revelation 2:9 as reflecting a situation in which Jews in Smyrna were delivering members of the Christian community into the hands of the Romans.³ Yarbrow Collins (1986: 312–13) asserts:

In favor of understanding “those who call themselves Jews” as members of the local Jewish community or synagogue in Smyrna is the juxtaposition of the reference to them with the prediction that some Christians in Smyrna will be detained in prison pending trial in the near future. This juxtaposition suggests that the “synagogue of Satan” are instigators of legal action against the persons whom John is addressing.

For Yarbrow Collins, it can only be Jews who would induce legal action against Christians. For her, Christian judaizers would not be a threat to other Christians: “No matter how strong the tension between an allegedly judaizing Gentile Christian group and the group loyal to John the prophet, it is unlikely that members of one Christian party would accuse members of another Christian subgroup before local or Roman authorities. The former would be too vulnerable themselves to take such a step” (1986: 313). Those who claim to be Jews and those who are perpetrating the persecution, however, are not necessarily the same people (Wilson 1995: 163). Nor does it make any more sense that *Jews* from either Smyrna or Philadelphia would accuse Christians who imitated the Jewish lifestyle before local or Roman authorities, as they too were dependent on the Romans for their well being and the right to live their own lives according to Jewish law.

Scholars who postulate that Jewish persecution of Christians occurred in Asia Minor rely on the Book of Acts and the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* as evidence for such action (Hemer 1986: 67; Schüssler Fiorenza 1973: 572; Sweet 1990: 85; Yarbrow Collins 1986: 313). These scholars hold that the Jews were allied with Rome and would denounce Christians and that, with Jewish co-operation, the Christians of Smyrna were thrown into jail to await trial (Yarbrow Collins 1985: 204). Schüssler Fiorenza, for example, argues that: “[a]n example of this bitter hostility of the Jews against the Christians in Asia Minor can be seen in the decisive role that the Jews of Smyrna played in the martyrdom of Polycarp” (1973: 572).⁴ A closer look at the material from this period typically used as evidence for the argument that Jews persecuted Christians suggests that more caution needs to be used before drawing conclusions. In this regard, Sanders states that: “the evidence that we do have of any kind of Jewish denunciation of Christians is limited, ambiguous, and inconclusive” (1993: 186).

The evidence from Acts—usually used as proof that such denunciation of Christians occurred—includes the accounts of Jewish accusation of Christian teachers before local authorities (Acts 17:6–8) and the Roman governor (Acts 18:12–17). But there are also accounts of Pagan accusations against Christians; for example, Acts 19:21–40 describes a riot in Ephesus led by the worshippers of Artemis, and Acts 16:19–24 describes the arrest of Paul and Silas in Philippi by the Pagan owners of the exorcised slave girl. These examples suggest that, at the time the author of Acts wrote his narrative, delation was a regular occurrence and anyone might accuse Christians or other vulnerable people for a bit of money. Sanders points out that the schematization of Paul’s missionary activities in Acts—whereby Paul goes first to a synagogue, where he is eventually rejected, and

then turns to Gentiles, who accept his message—is of questionable historical accuracy (1993: 181). It fits into Luke’s theme of wanting to show how God’s salvation has gone from the Jews to the Gentiles in Christianity. Sanders justifiably concludes that: “[f]rom both Revelation and Luke-Acts it is possible to glean some evidence about relations between Christians on the one hand and non-Christian Jews on the other. Clearly there is hostility and name-calling here, but there is in reality very little evidence of... Jewish denunciation of Christians to Roman and civic authorities” (1993: 186; also Hare 1967: 163; Simon 1986: 120).

The description of the martyrdom of Polycarp has numerous parallels to the circumstances surrounding the death of Jesus, rendering its historical value very doubtful. The author, for example, records that Polycarp “waited to be betrayed as also the Lord had done, that we too might become his imitators” (*Mart. Pol.* 1.2), and that, similarly to Jesus, he was betrayed by one of his own (i.e., a house slave [*Mart. Pol.* 6:1]). Further, he reported that the police captain (εἰρηναρχος) who arrests Polycarp is called Herod (*Mart. Pol.* 6:2),⁵ and that Polycarp makes his entrance into the city riding an ass (*Mart. Pol.* 8:1). The author states that the Jews cry out “with one accord”⁶ (ὁμοθυμαδόν) for Polycarp to be burned alive at the stake. As Sanders observes, “Maybe some Jews had something to do with Polycarp’s martyrdom; I could not prove the contrary. But I certainly do not trust this account, and I have to question the historical acumen of those who do” (1993: 319 n.95).⁷ While the hostile description of Jews in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* no doubt reflects the Christian author’s perception of the Jews of Sardis as rivals, the portrayal of Jews as inciters of persecution against Christians ought not to be trusted. While Lieu allows for the possibility that “rivalry and competition could sometimes lead to outbreaks of disturbance and that such disturbances would provoke measures which led to or were seen as ‘persecution’” between Jews and Christians, she too argues against the broad generalizations about Jews initiating persecution against Christians, since evidence for it “is hardly to be found” (1996: 91). The case for Jewish persecution of Christians in the form of accusations before the Roman authorities is not as strong as some scholars suggest.

“Those Who Say That They Are Jews and Are Not”

Other scholars argue that the conflict reflected in the Book of Revelation concerns the spiritual status of Christians and their appropriation of the Jewish heritage. These scholars maintain that the author of Revelation challenges the claim by Jews in Smyrna and Philadelphia to Jewish identity because he understands Christians to be the “true” Jews (Borgen 1996;

Cohen 1993; Ramsay 1994; Sanders 1993; Schüssler Fiorenza 1973; Sweet 1990; Thompson 1986; Yarbrow Collins 1985; Yarbrow Collins 1986).⁸ The argument that, in 2:9 and 3:9, the author of Revelation is asserting that Christians are the authentic Jews (Ἰουδαῖοι) does not correspond, however, with the usual way Christians expressed their ownership of Israel's inheritance. In such formulations, the tendency was for early Christian authors to use the term "Israel"—as demonstrated by Justin—and not the term "Jew." The term "Israel" was adopted by Christians more slowly than were other Jewish terms (i.e., "people," "elect," "brethren"). For a long time after these other terms were used by Christians to describe themselves, "Israel" continued to be applied to Jews in their "spiritual" capacity as the exclusive "people of God" (Richardson 1969). The Christian claim to be the true, new people of God occurred gradually over a period of nearly two centuries. The idea is adumbrated in certain early documents, such as some of the Pauline letters (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:32) and the Gospel of Matthew (21:43) and Luke-Acts (e.g., 9:2). With the passage of time and their fading expectation that Jews would accept their message, Christians became bolder in their claims to the legacy of Israel. Such forthrightness is effectively demonstrated in the *Epistle of Barnabas*, as discussed, for example, where the author asserts that the covenant in fact belonged to the Christians, and that it had never been inherited by the Jews. But even there, "Israel" is not equated with Christians or Christianity.⁹ The first explicit claim by Christians that they had replaced the Jews as the true people of God occurred in the mid-second century CE, in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, where he forcefully argues that Christians were the "new Israel" (11.5; Richardson 1969: 9ff).¹⁰ The argument that Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 are in effect assertions that "the Christians were now the true Jews" (Hemer 1986: 67) would be more compelling if these statements had used the term "Israel" rather than "Jew."

The fact that the author instead used the word "Jew" (Ἰουδαῖος) in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 indicates that the issue at stake is ethnicity rather than spiritual status. The use of the term Ἰουδαῖος to refer to ethnicity by Epictetus, a contemporary of the author of Revelation, substantiates this understanding of the meaning of the term in Revelation (Arrian, *Diss. of Epictetus* 2.19-21; Stern #254):

Why, then, do you call yourself a Stoic, why do you deceive the multitude, why do you act the part of a Jew when you are Greek? Do you not see in what sense men are severally called Jew, Syrian, or Egyptian? For example, whenever we see a man facing two ways at once, we are in the habit of saying, "he is not a Jew, he is only acting the part." But when he adopts the attitude of mind of the man who has been baptized and has made his choice,

then he both is a Jew in fact and is also called one. So we also are counterfeit “Baptists,” ostensibly Jews, but in reality something else.

Epictetus, as Cohen notes, is “interested in the correct application of names, and knows of people who act the part of Jews, are called Jews, but are not Jews” (1993: 34). According to Epictetus, only when the person has decided to convert and undergo ritual immersion is that person in fact a Jew; until then, he is only “acting” the part of a Jew—behaviour that, unfortunately, Epictetus does not describe, but probably involved maintaining Jewish customs in varying degrees.

The author of Revelation employs the term “Jew” in the same way as Epictetus does, that is, to refer to Jewish ethnicity. The opponents referred to in 2:9 and 3:9—identified as part of the “synagogue of Satan” in Smyrna and Philadelphia—are claiming to be of Jewish ethnic identity but are not. The most logical and obvious interpretation of John’s accusations, therefore, is that he was referring to Gentiles who falsely claimed to be Jews and followed a Jewish lifestyle (Gager 1985: 132; Gaston 1986: 42–43; Wilson 1995: 163).¹¹

These Gentiles could have been non-Christian Gentiles, but the hostile tone of the accusations would make more sense if the judaizers were Christians. In his study on social conflict, Lewis Coser argues that the closer the ties are between two opposing groups, the more intense is the conflict: “If individuals witness the breaking away of one with whom they have shared cares and responsibilities of group life, they are likely to react in a more violent way against such ‘disloyalty’ than less involved members” (1956: 69). John’s strong condemnation of “those who say that they are Jews and are not” reveals the deep sense of betrayal and animosity that he feels towards these fellow Christians who have deviated from what he considers to be acceptable behaviour. The demonic characterization of an opposing group in intramural disagreements is not unusual in Jewish and Christian literature. For example, the Qumran sect condemns Jews who are not part of their sect to be part of “the congregation of traitors” (*CD* 1.12) while, in the War Rule, the sons of light fight against “the company of the sons of darkness, the army of Satan” (*CD* 1.1). The Thanksgiving Hymns furthermore state that their opponents are “an assembly of deceit, and a horde of Satan” (2.22). In a letter to Smyrna, Ignatius warns fellow Christians, “he who does anything without the knowledge of the bishop is serving the devil” (*Smyrn.* 9.1; cf. Collins 1985: 210).

Ignatius’s letters to Philadelphia and Magnesia, as I demonstrate below, provide evidence for the existence of judaizers in the same geographical area and time period as Revelation. This evidence reinforces the understanding of these judaizers in Revelation as Christians. The situation reflected in the

Book of Revelation is a conflict among Christians, who, perhaps at one time, were members of the same Christian congregation as the author.

Christians who were interested in addressing an eclectic collection of concerns—including Jewish-Christian relations and eschatological events—edited the originally Jewish Sibylline Oracles during the middle of the second century. Oracle 7 makes an intriguing warning about false prophets of the end days “who putting on the shaggy hides of sheep will falsely claim to be Hebrews, which is not their race” (οἱ μὲν δυσάμενοι προβάτων λασιότριχα ῥινά Ἑβραῖοι ψεύσονται, ὃ μὴ γένος ἔλλαχον αὐτοί) (Oracle 7, lines 134–35 in Charlesworth 1983: 413; the Greek is from Geffcken 1967). Collins understands the “shaggy hides of sheep” to be a reference to the dress of Hebrew prophets who prophesy falsely (1983: 413). There might be a connection here with the warning in the Gospel of Matthew 7:15: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing (ἐν ἐνδύμασιν προβάτων) but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” The term ‘Hebrews’ “may well be used in a spiritual sense or merely be an allusion to Rev. 2:9, 3:9” (Collins 1983: 409). The excerpt from Oracle 7 conveys a sense of immediacy; Gager observes that this passage “clearly indicates a rivalry in which one group is attacked for falsely assuming the name ‘Hebrews’” (1972: 94). There are several different possibilities for who the Hebrews are and which groups are involved. This warning might have been made by a Christian of Jewish birth (a Jewish Christian) to Christians of Gentile origin, who were claiming to be Hebrews and possibly members of the “true Israel” (Gager 1972: 95; Geffcken 1902: 34 ff). The struggle would also make sense if it occurred between Gentile Christians regarding their own legitimacy or between non-Christian Jewish groups. Wilson speculates whether these passages in the Sibylline Oracles related to Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 in the sense that they refer to the same situation addressed by these verses in Revelation: “that is, does the poet have a particular reason to single out Gentile Judaizers as a threat to his community?” (1995: 104). If verses 133–39 of Oracle 7 are taken at face value, it is possible to understand them to mean Gentiles who are pretending to be Jews. The phrase ὃ μὴ γένος ἔλλαχον αὐτοί can be translated as “which race they did not take themselves” or “which race they did not receive themselves,” perhaps indicating that the Hebrew pretenders stopped short of converting to Judaism and truly becoming part of the Hebrew γένος. These people, “by speaking with words,” were attempting to “persuade the righteous and those who propitiate God through the heart” (Oracle 7, lines 136–38)—unsuccessfully, according to the author. Perhaps the Hebrew pretenders were trying to persuade others to live like Jews? The Christian author of Oracle 7 might be criticizing Gentile Chris-

tians who participated in Jewish practices, likening them to false Israelite priests or prophets. Understanding lines 133–39 as the author’s hint at Gentile Christians falsely claiming to be Jews makes as much sense as other interpretations that scholars have offered. Unfortunately, there is insufficient evidence to say more.

Why Might Asia Minor Gentiles Have Judaized?

Eusebius reports that Emperor Domitian (81–96 CE) instituted a time of persecution of Christians and was worse than Nero “in enmity and hostility to God” (*Hist. eccl.* 3.17). Quoting Hegesippus, Eusebius tells the story of Domitian’s attempt to get rid of all of the descendants of David by having the grandsons of Jude—said to be the brother of Jesus—brought before him; when he saw that they were lowly farmers with callused, labour-hardened hands, Domitian let them go “and issued orders terminating the persecution of the church” (*Hist. eccl.* 3.20). This story, if accurate, suggests that Christians experienced persecution during Domitian’s reign, at the time when the Book of Revelation may have been written.

Pliny the Younger provides further evidence for the ill-treatment of Christians during Domitian’s reign. In a letter to Trajan, Pliny reports that he encounters people who had ceased to be Christians “two or more years previously, and some of them even twenty years ago” (*Ep.* 10.96). Twenty years prior—about 113 CE—would place the latter Pliny experience within the reign of Domitian. Persecution may have forced these individuals to stop professing their Christian faith. Perhaps, like Domnus whom Eusebius reported took sanctuary among Jews during a time of persecution in the early third century CE (*Hist. eccl.* 6.12), certain Gentile Christians who feared local persecution took refuge during Domitian’s reign by identifying themselves as Jews.¹²

The Jews of Rome and cities in Asia Minor—and Syria, as discussed in chapter 4—enjoyed a number of legal privileges and at times attained social and economic distinction under Roman rule. Judaism had achieved recognition as a *religio licita* in Roman law when, between 49–44 BCE, Julius Caesar prohibited all *collegia* within the empire except for the ones that had existed since antiquity; Judaism was included among the exceptions. This policy was perpetuated by Augustus.¹³ Josephus furthermore quotes in *Antiquities* from two important decrees: in the one to Sardis issued by Lucius Antonius, the son of Mark Antony, the Jews are granted the right to build their own place of prayer, to try their own cases, and to obtain approved food (*Ant.* 14.235); the other was issued by the people of Sardis themselves to confirm the right of Jews to gather in their own place of worship, to have judicial authority among themselves, and to

have appropriate food brought in by local market officials (*Ant.* 14.259–61).¹⁴ Jews living in Ephesus apparently ate kosher food, worshipped regularly, sent money to Jerusalem, and refused to perform public duties on the Sabbath (*Ant.* 14.226; cf. 14.263–64). Jews in Laodicea in Phrygia observed the Sabbath and other customs (*Ant.* 14.241–42) and in Miletus, Ionia, they kept the Sabbath, tithed their produce and kept other rites as well (*Ant.* 14.245). As Richardson observes, “[l]ocal communities of the Diaspora were able to preserve their way of life against the weight of opinion in many of the cities in which they settled, and they had official sanction for this preservation” (1996: 96).

Stephen Wilson poses an intriguing motivation for Gentile Christians to have decided to judaize: “Could it not be that some Christians in Asia Minor were identifying themselves with the Jews in order to avoid official harassment, given that the Jews had a more stable and established position in the Roman world?” (1995: 163). Wilson’s suggestion assumes that judaizing on the part of these Gentile Christians was a calculated decision to seek protection from Roman persecution. Certainly this may be how the author of Revelation perceived the situation. It is impossible to know from the text whether their decision to live like Jews was taken prior to the outbreak of trouble, as a result of contact with Jews and attraction to Jewish customs, or as a result of persecution. Nor is it possible to know whether Gentile Christians would actually attain immunity from Roman hostility through judaizing. The official sanction protecting Jews described above may have been a powerful incentive for Gentile Christians, who perhaps were already inclined toward a Jewish lifestyle, to deepen their attachment to Torah observance during sporadic persecution of Christians by Roman authorities.¹⁵ The perspective of the author of Revelation may have been that certain Gentile Christians called themselves Jews to avoid the difficulties associated with identifying themselves as Christians. His sense of betrayal—and perhaps his fear that further defection by Christians seeking to avoid suffering would ensue—may have impelled him to categorize these defectors as members of the “synagogue of Satan.”

If the interpretation of the references in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 that John is referring to Christian judaizers is correct, then these accusations do not reflect a struggle between Jews and Christians but, rather, a conflict among Christians. The author of the apocalypse expresses hostility toward Gentile Christians who adopt Jewish customs and call themselves Jews, perhaps to avoid persecution. From his perspective, this behaviour is unacceptable, perhaps because he fears the impact it might have on members of his own community, for they too could decide to compromise their convictions.

Ignatius on Christian Judaizers

OTHER LITERARY EVIDENCE FROM ASIA MINOR substantiates this understanding of the accusations in Revelation. A few years after John wrote his seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor, Ignatius wrote seven letters of his own to Asian churches. The two sets of letters share similar concerns, address the same or nearby locations in Asia, and can be used to elucidate the situation both writers faced in Asia Minor (Gaston 1986: 42; *contra* Yarbrow Collins 1986: 312). I suggest that the “composite picture” resulting from Ignatius’s writing lends credence to the interpretation suggested above for Revelation 2:9 and 3:9, and indicates that Christian judaizing was a persistent phenomenon in Asia Minor in the late first and early second century CE.

Just as Barnabas struggled with Gentile Christian infatuation with Judaism, so too some twenty years later did Ignatius of Antioch. Ignatius’s correspondence indicates that he encountered this perturbing phenomenon while travelling through various cities in Asia Minor. Given the evidence for the manifestation of Christian judaizing in Syria, however, it is plausible that his strong reaction reflected in his letters to Magnesia and Philadelphia represents the continuation of an ongoing struggle with judaizing that began earlier in Antioch, Syria. It is impossible to be certain. In this chapter, I show that his letters bear details pertaining to Christian judaizing, but in the Asia Minor communities alone.

Eusebius places the letters of Ignatius in the reign of Trajan (98–117 CE; *Hist. eccl.* 3.36), which seems to be an appropriate date for two reasons. First, in his letters to Christian churches in Asia Minor, Ignatius defends the authority of the bishop; the frequency of requests for obedience to the bishop as well as the urgency of Ignatius’s tone indicate that the office of bishop was not yet firmly established there.¹⁶ As such, a relatively early date—such as the one Eusebius offers—for the writing of these letters seems right (Bauer 1971: 70; Schoedel 1993: 289). Second, the context of the letters, with their expression of Ignatius’s desire to establish the administrative superiority of one bishop, best corresponds to a time of upheaval: “as long as a harmonious spirit pervades the community, a council of those with similar status can take care of it without difficulty ... according to the abilities of each” (Bauer 1971: 62). According to the letters of Pliny, which he wrote to the Emperor Trajan in c. 110–13 CE, Christians in Bithynia experienced a tumultuous and unstable situation, and it is possible that local unrest occurred in other areas of Asia Minor as well.

Asia Minor or Antioch? One Group or Two?

Some scholars believe that Ignatius's letters actually reveal more about the situation of Christian communities in Antioch, Syria, than in Asia Minor. Paul Donahue, for example, argues that Ignatius simply applies his experience in Antioch to Asia Minor since "his responses to various problems are too consistent, too much a part of his own theological outlook, to have arisen on the spot, under such trying conditions" (1978: 81-82; also Bauer 1971: 67; Corwin 1960). On the other hand, Barrett argues that "on the whole, Ignatius gives the impression that he is dealing with a situation that he has encountered on his travels in Asia, rather than with one he has long known and recalled from the days of his settled ministry in Antioch" (1976: 240; also Gaston 1986: 36; Molland 1954).

A combination of each of the views described above best fits the situation: Ignatius addresses the troubles he meets along his journey through Asia Minor, but the opponents he encounters there were not new to him. Given the evidence for judaizing Christians in late first century CE Syria, Ignatius probably confronted them already in Antioch. Statements made in the *Epistle of Barnabas* and the *Didache*, as I postulated earlier, certainly seem to indicate that judaizing among Gentile Christians was deemed very problematic by certain Syrian ecclesiastic leaders; evidence from the Pseudo-Clementine literature demonstrates that judaizing was actually encouraged by other church leaders. At the same time, Ignatius's detailed and vivid descriptions of the circumstances in Asia Minor in *Magnesians* and *Philadelphians* strongly support the view that in these letters, he addresses tangible circumstances he met on his journey through Asia Minor.

Further debate has ensued over whether Ignatius encountered two groups of heretics (docetics and judaizers) or one (docetic judaizers).¹⁷ Molland confidently states that "there can be no doubt... that Ignatius accuses the same persons of Judaism as well as docetism," and indeed the majority of modern scholars seem to agree (Barrett 1976; Gaston 1986; Lightfoot 1989; Wilson 1995: 361 n.96). My view, however, is that, when Ignatius addresses the judaizing Christians in *Magnesians* and *Philadelphians*, his criticism is aimed at judaizing alone. What scholars have understood to be evidence of docetism in these letters is simply Ignatius worrying that the corollary of judaizing will be non-belief in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus (Schoedel 1993: 303). His letter to the Smyrnaeans contains criticism against docetics and a description of them that distinguishes them from judaizers (*Smyrn.* 5.1):

There are some who ignorantly deny him, but rather were denied by him, being advocates of death rather than of the truth. There are they whom nei-

ther the prophecies nor the law of Moses persuaded, nor the gospel even until now, nor our own individual sufferings. For what does anyone profit me if he praise me but blaspheme my Lord, and do not confess that he was clothed in flesh?

These docetics are not judaizers, since Ignatius explicitly says that these people have no interest in the Mosaic law. On his journey through Asia Minor, Ignatius probably encountered, or heard about, different types of problematic behaviours and beliefs, among both judaizing Christians and docetic Christians. His letters to the Magnesians and the Philadelphians, which contain evidence of Christian judaizing, are the focus of the following investigation.

Ignatius's Letter to the Magnesians

Ignatius wrote his letter to the church in Magnesia from Smyrna. While he did not visit the city, he did consult with representatives from Magnesia (*Magn.* 15.1); he had already viewed the situation in Philadelphia by the time he wrote to the Magnesians.

Magnesians 8–10 form the core of the letter. Ignatius instructs his readers: “Be not led astray by strange doctrines or by old fables which are profitless. For if we are living until now according to Judaism (εἰ γὰρ μέχρι νῦν κατὰ Ἰουδαϊσμὸν ζῶμεν), we confess that we have not received grace” (*Magn.* 8.1). This is reminiscent of Paul’s warning: “You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace” (Gal. 5:4). Ignatius’s use of the phrase “living until now according to Judaism” can be understood in two different ways: either he is referring to Christians from prior generations, such as Jesus’ disciples, who were intimately involved with Judaism; or he is referring to contemporary Christian judaizers who observe Jewish rituals. In the context of this letter as a whole, as well as what we later learn from the letter to the Philadelphians, the latter interpretation seems best. As Wilson suggests (1995: 165), *Magnesians* 8.1 helps to clarify the identity of the group of judaizers:

It could refer to earlier generations of Christians who had been closely tied to Judaism, but it seems to refer to the Judaizers of Ignatius’s day, that is, Gentiles, who formerly (and presently) lived like Jews and expounded Judaism.... Most obviously they would have been former God-fearers or sympathizers, who had been attached to the synagogue, had now joined the church, and had brought with them the predilections of their former existence.

Ignatius’s instruction to his readers not to be “led astray by strange doctrines or by old fables which are profitless” (*Magn.* 8.1) is reminiscent of

statements made in documents that may be associated with the region of Asia Minor during the early second century CE. Certain provocative verses in the Pastoral letters—New Testament documents dating to the early second century CE—reflect the lively presence of Judaism, along with a distinct sense that it is being promoted among Christians, particularly among Gentiles. For example, the author of 1 Timothy warns his readers “not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies” (1 Tim. 1:4); he also mentions that certain members have “deviated [from] a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5) to engage in “meaningless talk, desiring to be teachers of the law (θέλοντες εἶναι νομοδιδάσκαλοι), without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions” (1 Tim. 1:6–7; cf. Titus 3:9). The term νομοδιδάσκαλοι, which occurs elsewhere only in Luke (5:17) and in Acts (5:34), might best be understood as referring to teachers of the Mosaic law, thereby connecting the opponents in this document with Judaism (also see 1 Tim. 1:8–9). It may be significant that the subsequent part of the verse states that these “teachers of the law” (νομοδιδάσκαλοι) do not understand “either what they say or the things about which they make assertions” (1 Tim. 1:7b). The fact that verse 7a states that they desired to be teachers of the law (θέλοντες εἶναι νομοδιδάσκαλοι) may indicate that these individuals had no real claim to that title or function. Perhaps the reference is to Gentiles who cause turmoil among Gentile Christians because they seek to draw interest in the law but, from the author’s perspective, are incompetent in their teaching of it.¹⁸

In his letter to the Magnesians, Ignatius equates “living according to Judaism” with living according to “strange,” “old,” and “profitless” doctrines (*Magn.* 8.1). By asserting that the prophets “lived according to Jesus Christ,” Ignatius denies them even their Jewishness (*Magn.* 8.2):

For the divine prophets lived according to Jesus Christ. Therefore they were also persecuted, being inspired by his grace, to convince the disobedient that there is one God, who manifested himself through Jesus Christ his son, who is his Word proceeding from silence, who in all respects was well-pleasing to him that sent him.

Ignatius expresses a rather extreme perspective. He essentially “Christianizes” Judaism, and denies that Judaism made any contribution whatsoever toward the implementation of God’s plan.

Ignatius implies that one of the Jewish rituals kept by the judaizers of Magnesia was observance of the Sabbath (*Magn.* 9.1):

If then they who walked in ancient customs came to a new hope, no longer living for the Sabbath, but for the Lord’s Day (μηκέτι σαββατίζοντες, ἀλλὰ κατὰ κυριακὴν ζῶντες), on which also our life sprang up through him and

his death,—though some deny him,¹⁹—and by this mystery we received faith, and for this reason also we suffer, that we may be found disciples of Jesus Christ our only teacher.

Schoedel suggests that Ignatius is referring to the early disciples who became (Jewish) Christians (1985: 123) but, in light of the radical Christianization of the prophets in the previous sentence (*Magn.* 8.2), Ignatius probably is referring to ancient Jews here. Observance of the Sabbath by contemporary Christians is not explicit but is strongly implied (Bauer 1971: 88). According to Ignatius, if the Jews described in the Hebrew scriptures were actually Christians who discontinued the observance of the Sabbath, then why should present-day Christians observe the Sabbath? Paul Trebilco (1991: 28–29) suggests that *Magnesians* 9.1–2

was probably prompted by pressure from some Christians in favour of Sabbath observance. Whilst many details of these passages are difficult to interpret, it is clear that Ignatius is talking about Christians in Magnesia who were observing Jewish customs. Ignatius does not say that they are converted Jews, and so, if we assume that the situation was comparable to the one at Philadelphia, we can suggest that again it was the uncircumcised who were also Judaizing here.

Jack Sanders has a different understanding of the situation, suggesting that the congregation of the Magnesian church included both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians and that it was *Jewish* Christians who continued to observe the Sabbath. This attempt by Jewish Christians “to be both Christians and Jews” troubled Gentile Magnesian Christians, who brought the matter to Ignatius’s attention. Thus, according to Sanders, it was Gentile Christians who “felt that the Jewish Christians should give up their Jewish ways” (1993: 187). While Jewish Christians might have been present in Magnesia and might have had influence on non-Jewish members of the congregation, I contend that the evidence points toward *Gentile* judaizing as the problematic phenomenon at Magnesia.

Miriam Taylor argues that “Ignatius’ anti-Jewish passages are not injunctions against judaizing, but rather illustrative arguments directed at the dissenters to whom Ignatius addresses his main appeal” (1995: 35). The problem, according to Taylor, was docetic heretical Christians, not judaizers, so that, in *Magnesians* 8.1, for example, Ignatius was not warning his readers about judaizing or Judaism, but “is here drawing an illustrative parallel between the ‘vain doctrines’ of the Docetists, and the way of ‘Judaism’” (Taylor 1995: 35). She furthermore asserts that “the reference to worship on the Sabbath is not a warning against ‘Sabbatizing,’ but once again, an illustrative comment describing the transformative power of Christ’s advent” (Taylor 1995: 36). Taylor claims that Ignatius

wished, in effect, to warn his readers that doceticism was invalid and false by drawing a parallel between it and Judaism since, as she contends, “all Magnesians Christians would no doubt be familiar with the church’s anti-Jewish tradition which held that the ‘Jewish’ way was abrogated, outdated, and constituted an admission that one was not inspired by the ‘grace’ of Christ” (Taylor 1995: 35). This rather bold assumption on Taylor’s part is contradicted by the cumulative evidence in both Magnesia and Philadelphia that precisely the opposite was so: Christians in these two cities were behaving in ways that indicated that they by no means considered the “Jewish way” to be nullified.

In fact, Ignatius explicitly discourages judaizing. He writes in *Magnesians*: “It is monstrous (ἄτοπὸν) to talk of Jesus Christ and to practise Judaism (ἰουδαΐζειν). For Christianity did not base its faith on Judaism, but Judaism on Christianity, and every tongue believing on God was brought together in it” (10.3). Schoedel understands Ignatius’s reference to those who based their faith on Christianity to be “the first generation of Jewish Christians” (1985: 126); however, this verse is better understood to be another manifestation of Ignatius’s radical Christianization of Jewish history, and an indication that he perceived the prophets to be Christians, rather than Jews (Grant 1966: 64). From a retrospective point of view, Ignatius is completely denying any historical contribution by Judaism by suggesting that Christianity and not Judaism is the foundational faith. Essentially, he is eliminating the need for Judaism, as if deleting it from the divine plan. Significantly, the statement indicates that Christians at Magnesia are practising Judaism (*Magn.* 10.3).

From Ignatius’s perspective, then, the problems in Magnesia consisted of a lack of support for the bishop and the holding of separate meetings (*Magn.* 4.1; 7.1-2); more significantly, some Gentile members of the congregation were judaizing (*Magn.* 10.3; 8.1), which might have included keeping the Sabbath instead of, or in addition to, Sunday (*Magn.* 9.1).

Ignatius’s Letter to the Philadelphians

Ignatius actually spent some time with the Philadelphian congregation—as indicated in his letter to the Philadelphian church (3.1; 7.1)—and therefore was able to view the situation in that city personally. A verse that is relevant to this discussion of Christian judaizers states: “But if anyone interpret (ἑρμηνεύη) Judaism to you do not listen to him; for it is better to hear Christianity from the circumcised than Judaism from the uncircumcised” (*Phld.* 6.1).²⁰ The reference to hearing “Christianity from the circumcised,” probably indicates the presence of Jewish Christians, but the intriguing reference at the end of this statement indicates that there were

Gentiles (i.e., the “uncircumcised”) in Philadelphia who “explained” or “interpreted” Judaism. If so, Ignatius declares that Jews who explain Christianity are preferable to Gentiles who discuss Judaism. The fact that these Gentile Christians were apparently approaching people within the congregation and “explaining” Judaism to them suggests that some proselytizing was occurring (Lightfoot 1989: 264). To those who are approached by any such person, Ignatius instructs “do not listen to him” (μη ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ) (*Phld.* 6.1).

Wilson notes that this sentence indicates that “some (if not all) of the judaizers were Gentile in origin” and that this is the “plain sense” of the statement (1995: 164). Indeed, scholars who do not take this sentence at face value attempt to explain that, instead, Ignatius was referring to a Jewish group which, in an attempt to attract converts, dropped the circumcision requirement. Consequently, these scholars have offered some rather bizarre explanations as to the identity of these Jews. Schweizer, for example, suggested that they had come under the influence of Pythagorean ideas (1976: 249), while Hoffmann postulates that they were Marcionites who were being critical of Judaism (1984: 57–63), and Barrett offers the explanation that “there was in Philadelphia a Jewish group, almost certainly unorthodox in its Judaism” and “we cannot expect to be well informed” about such “fringe groups” (1976: 234–35).²¹ Donahue makes the odd suggestion that this statement does not mean that the judaizing opponents were not circumcised but that “the law-free gospel does not permit distinctions among Christians” (1978: 89).

Schoedel concludes that “no one was actually recommending circumcision, and the issue had probably been injected into the debate by Ignatius under the influence of Pauline models” (1985: 203). But Schoedel need not offer this explanation, since circumcision is simply not an issue. Nowhere else does Ignatius raise the topic of circumcision, which surely he would have if he was concerned with it. As Wilson asserts, “the terms circumcision and uncircumcision in *Phld.* 6.1 are simply a convenient way of referring to Jews and Gentiles” (1995: 164). The same distinction is used in Ephesians: “you Gentiles by birth, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by those who are called ‘the circumcision’” (2:11) and is also found in *m. Nedarim* (3.11; cf. Marcus 1989).²²

What Ignatius means by “interpreting” Judaism is not entirely clear: perhaps these Gentiles were promoting the observance of Jewish rites and customs. Ignatius gives some indication of their behaviour when he writes “For I heard some men saying, ‘if I find it not in the charters in the Gospel I do not believe (ἐὰν μὴ ἐν τοῖς ἀρχαίοις εὖρω ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ οὐ πιστεύω),’ and when I said to them that it is in the Scripture, they answered me, ‘that is exactly the question’” (*Phld.* 8.2). Ignatius is describing an argument he

had with his opponents involving their dependence on the Hebrew scriptures for direction in what they believe. The statement should be understood as “If I do not find it (the point at issue) in the archives, I do not believe it (because it appears) in the Gospel” (Lightfoot 1989: 271ff; Schoedel 1985: 207). It is generally agreed that the reference to “charters” or “archives” is to the Hebrew scriptures.²³

The last line—“that is exactly the question”—may indicate that the opponents were not satisfied with Ignatius’s attempt to prove his point from the Hebrew scriptures. He therefore appeals to “an even higher authority,” Jesus Christ (Schoedel 1985: 208; Grant 1966: 106). Wilson suggests that “from the immediate context it is clear that ‘expounding Judaism’ did not involve promoting Judaism in general. Rather, the judaizers had a particular view of the scriptures, and were especially inclined to dispute any Christian beliefs that they could not find in them (*Phld.* 8.1-2; 9.1)” (1995: 165). According to Gaston, Ignatius’s identification of “their teaching as ‘Judaism’ probably has to do more with their use of the LXX to support their doctrines than with their Christian worship on the Sabbath. The fact remains that this ‘Judaism’ is taught by the uncircumcised” (1986: 38). Schoedel notes that Ignatius did not include observance of Jewish customs such as circumcision or the Sabbath in his verbal struggle with his opponents in Philadelphia: “Perhaps, then, all that Ignatius means to say is that his opponents’ preoccupation with Scripture prevented them from keeping Christ in the center of the theological stage to his satisfaction” (1985: 209). It seems logical, however, that if these Gentiles relied on Jewish scripture to direct their behaviour, they would have been aware of the ritual obligations of the Mosaic law and might have felt themselves obliged to carry out certain rituals. The ensuing dispute about scripture, therefore, likely involved the promotion of Judaism, specifically in terms of whether Christians should be obliged to keep Jewish customs.

Taylor is right to criticize Paul Donahue’s identification of the opponents as Jewish Christians (1995: 33; Donahue 1978). The focus is not hearing Christianity from Jews (“the circumcised”), but hearing Judaism from Gentiles (“the uncircumcised”),²⁴ as Lightfoot states: “In this case the teachers would be represented, not as Jewish Christians, but as Gentile Christians with strong Judaic tendencies. This seems the most natural interpretation” (1989: 264). For Ignatius, furthermore, those who do not speak of Jesus Christ are “tombstones and sepulchers of the dead” (*Phld.* 6.1). Clearly he does not take lightly the compromising of (his version of) Christianity.

That the judaizers were part of the Christian community in Philadelphia is inferred by Ignatius when he describes how he was almost deceived by the judaizers (*Phld.* 7.1-2).²⁵ When he cried out that the bishop was to be

obeyed, it is possible that his cry was not prompted by “the Spirit” but by his prior knowledge of the situation in the congregation.²⁶ At any rate, it is clear that the judaizers were at the Christian meeting when he gave his response and that they were part of the Christian congregation (Schoedel 1985: 205; Wilson 1995: 165). The closing of the letter indicates that Philo and Rheus Agathopous, two messengers who likely informed Ignatius that all was well in Antioch (*Phld.* 10.1), were treated badly by some members of the Philadelphian congregation (*Phld.* 11.1); perhaps Ignatius and those who thought like him were not completely accepted by the congregation. Schoedel observes that: “It is now easier to understand why the freshly confident Ignatius must proceed as cautiously as he does in this letter. People in Philadelphia were still on good terms with judaizers and their disapproval of the messengers (and of Ignatius himself) required rebuttal” (1985: 214). Judaizing may have been more troubling to Ignatius than to anyone else in the community; in fact, other members of the Philadelphian congregation may not have viewed such proclivities to be deviant at all.

The situation in Philadelphia, according to Ignatius, was one in which people whom I identify as Gentile Christians were teaching Judaism (*Phld.* 6.1) and were relying too heavily on the Hebrew scriptures (*Phld.* 8.2). It seems furthermore that they held a separate Eucharist service (*Phld.* 4.1) from the one in which Ignatius was involved.²⁷ The specificity of his comments regarding the situation in Philadelphia reinforces the assertion that Ignatius was dealing with actual circumstances he encountered on his journey through Asia Minor, rather than simply projecting issues he had experienced in Antioch.

On his trip through Asia Minor, Ignatius encounters judaizers in Philadelphia and hears about their existence in Magnesia. He expresses great concern about how this phenomenon has caused and will continue to cause divisiveness within the Christian congregations of these cities. Interestingly, in his struggle against judaizers, Ignatius does not describe the Passion in a way that is hostile to the Jews—unlike Melito of Sardis and other apologists of the second century—and he does not vilify Jews in general. My interpretation is that this apparent contradiction arises because Jews are not causing the problem—Christian judaizers are.

While it is true that Ignatius does not denounce Jews generally, in his own way, he denies the Jewish scriptures and history any intrinsic validity. Just as Marcion, whose possible connection with judaizing is discussed in the next chapter, also does not allow for any contribution to Christianity by Judaism through his presentation of Christianity as completely separate from Judaism, with a different and superior God, different scrip-

tures and different Messiah, Ignatius denies Judaism any worth or contribution *as Judaism* because, for him, Jewish history is Christian history and Jewish prophets are Christian. Such is the extent of his appropriation of things Jewish. In this, Ignatius does not recognize even a limited historical role for Judaism.²⁸

Gentile Christians in Asia Minor may have continued with prior practices of Jewish rites adopted when they were God fearers on the periphery of the synagogue: they simply did not change their lifestyle when they became Christians (Wilson 1995: 165; also Munier 1993: 406). Or, perhaps in the setting of a vibrant diaspora Judaism, Gentile Christians became exposed to Judaism through social interaction with Jews.

Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*

JUSTIN MARTYR—BORN IN NEAPOLIS (ancient Shechem, modern Nablus) in Samaritan territory in about 100 CE (1 *Apol.* 1.1)—was brought up a Gentile and was not circumcised (*Dial.* 28.2), appears not to have known Hebrew,²⁹ and was not familiar with the Bible prior to his conversion to Christianity (*Dial.* 2–8). The conversation between Justin and Trypho terminates with Justin indicating that he would soon set sail (*Dial.* 142.2), probably to Rome (Williams 1930: *x*). He was martyred in that city sometime between 162 and 168 CE, when Junius Rusticus was prefect of Rome (Chadwick 1964/65: 278; Harnack 1904: 274–84). Justin wrote the *Dialogue* sometime after the Bar Kochba revolt; he states that Trypho, his Jewish opponent, was in Ephesus because he had fled from the revolt in Judea, and it is in Ephesus that the dialogue supposedly took place (*Dial.* 1.3; 9.3; also Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 4.18.6). Possible dates for the document range from the mid-130s to c.160 CE.

The *Dialogue with Trypho* describes a conversation between the Christian Justin and the Jewish Trypho. Scholars have debated extensively whether this conversation actually took place and whether Trypho was a historical person. Harnack is of the view that, by the time Justin wrote, there was little or no exchange between Jews and Christians; the *Dialogue*, according to him, then, does not reflect a real polemic against the Jews, since, by the time Justin wrote, the battle had already been won by the Christians (1913: 47–98). Chadwick suggests, on the other hand, that “we are being given an essentially veracious autobiography, even if Justin’s memory, looking back some twenty years, is likely to have foreshortened and compressed the story. Like the rest of us, Justin is remembering the past in a way that the present requires” (1964/65: 280; Trakatellis 1986: 297). Barnard calls Trypho “a Hellenistic Jewish layman who combined the cul-

ture and inquiring spirit of the hellenistic world with a knowledge of traditional Jewish exegesis and haggadah. He has no knowledge of the Hebrew language but knows accurately the Septuagint version of the Old Testament” (1964: 398). Goodenough, however, considered Trypho to be “in many respects a straw man, who says the right thing in the right place” and who never truly challenges Justin or throws him off his argument (1923: 90).

Whether the dialogue actually occurred and whether Trypho was a real person is not, for my purposes, a crucial matter. Wilson aptly suggests that what is more important is “whether Trypho is a plausible representation of at least one strain of Judaism and whether the *Dialogue* gives a proper sense of the issues and the arguments that would have concerned Jews and Christians engaged in debate in the mid-second century” (1995: 260). Scholarly consensus holds that the opinions exchanged in the *Dialogue* are realistic, as Justin does appear to be knowledgeable about Judaism. For example, he describes a phylactery (*Dial.* 46.5), is familiar with post-biblical details about Jewish rituals on Yom Kippur (*Dial.* 40.4), and is aware that the Septuagint is read during services in synagogue (72.3). Justin travelled extensively and so had opportunities to become familiar with different Jewish communities; Trypho may represent a combination of Judaisms that Justin encountered (MacLennan 1990: 64, n.62). Using Trypho as a tool, Justin raises issues relevant to the relationship between Jews and Christians at that time.³⁰

The dialogue between Justin and Trypho is set, shortly after the Bar Kochba revolt, likely in Ephesus.³¹ Strabo describes Ephesus as the greatest commercial centre of Asia Minor north of the Taurus range (*Geog.* 14.1.24).³² The environment in this metropolis was remarkably diverse. Although the remains of a synagogue are yet to be found in Ephesus itself, there is archaeological and literary evidence that Jewish communities flourished throughout Asia Minor during the second century CE.³³ Two thousand Jewish families from Babylon were settled in Lydia and Phrygia by Antiochus III in about 210 BCE. The privileges granted them by Caesar’s lieutenant Dolabella in 44 BCE (*Ant.* 14.225–27) were confirmed by the civic authorities and by Augustus and his lieutenants (*Ant.* 16.162–68, 172ff) and it is likely that the Jewish community in Ephesus benefitted from this political protection. MacLennan notes “the Jews had a large community which apparently was not very cordial either to Paul or to Justin. Throughout the *Dialogue*, Trypho’s Jewish companions laugh at Justin or walk away in amazement and disgust (see *Dial.* 16.4; 9.2; 8.2; 56; 122)” (1990: 70). By the end of the first century, different Jewish groups called Ephesus home, and various Christian groups were also represented

in the city, including disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1-7) and converts instructed by Paul (Acts 19:8-10; Köster 1995: 133).

Christians Are the “True Israel”

In the dialogue Justin proclaims: “[W]e are the true and spiritual Israelitish nation, and the race of Judah and of Jacob and Isaac and Abraham” (Ἰσραηλιτικὸν γὰρ τὸ ἀληθινὸν, πνευματικὸν, καὶ Ἰούδα γένος καὶ Ἰακώβ καὶ Ἀβραάμ) (*Dial.* 11.5), and “[W]e shall inherit the Holy Land together with Abraham, receiving our inheritance for a boundless eternity, as being children of Abraham because we have like faith with him” (*Dial.* 119.5; cf. 123.7; 124.1; 135.3). This is the first time in Christian literature that such an explicit claim concerning Christians being the “true Israel” and thereby replacing the Jews was made (Richardson 1969: 9).

Justin’s statements explicitly express a view that took time and required a distinctive theological setting to develop. In Christian literature prior to the middle of the second century, the substitution of the Jews by Christians as the people of God is only implied. The tendency is present in the Gospel of Matthew, for example, but as Richardson notes, “this identification is difficult to attain for it is still an *intra muros* struggle. The Christian community is no longer tied to the institutions of Israel, but it shies away from making the rupture complete by transposing titles” (1969: 189). There are likewise traces of the idea of the Christian Church as the “new” or “true” Israel in 1 Peter, Hebrews and Pauline letters, but the complete appropriation of the term “Israel” is not reflected in any of the New Testament documents.

Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho* reflects a very different understanding of the relationship. Expressed for the first time in extant Christian literature is the idea that Gentile believers in Jesus replaced the Jews as the chosen people of God. By the middle of the second century, the hope had waned that Jews would turn to Christianity in large numbers; by their rejection of the Gospel, the Jews relinquished their inheritance and Gentile Christians claimed it. Richardson observes (1969: 204) that:

As long as the Church was viewed as a community gathered from Gentiles and Jews, it could not readily call itself “Israel.” But when it was sharply separated from both, and when it had a theory that Judaism no longer stood in a continuity with Israel *ante Christum*, and when Gentiles not only could take over other titles but in some cases could claim exclusive rights to them, then the Church as an organizational entity could appropriate “Israel.”

Christians and the Law

Trypho, in *Dial.* 10.3, expresses surprise that Christians say that they worship God and consider themselves “to be superior to other people” but do not separate themselves “in that you keep neither the feasts nor the sabbaths, nor have circumcision...you yet hope to obtain some good from God, though you do not do His commandments.” In one of his harshest responses to Trypho’s criticism of Christian non-observance of the Mosaic law, Justin (*Dial.* 16.2) sides with Rome against the Jews:

For the circumcision according to the flesh, that was from Abraham, was given for a sign, that you should be separated from the other nations and us, and that you alone should suffer the things you are rightly suffering now, and that your lands should be desolate and your cities burned with fire, and that foreigners should eat up the fruits before your face, and none of you go up unto Jerusalem.

Circumcision, says Justin, was commanded of the Jews to set them apart for suffering (also *Dial.* 28.4; 92.2-3; 137.1). He also argues vehemently against the adoption of this practice by Christians: “You, indeed, who are circumcised in your flesh have need of our circumcision, but we, possessing this, have no need of that” (*Dial.* 19.2), since, if circumcision were necessary, God would not have created people prior to Abraham uncircumcised.³⁴ Justin explains that Christians would be circumcised and would observe the festivals and Sabbaths “if we did not know the reason why it all was enjoined even on you, namely, because of your transgressions and hardness of heart” (*Dial.* 18.2).

Food laws, according to Justin’s understanding, were given to the Jews because they tended to forget God: “He charged you too to abstain from certain foods, in order that even in your eating and drinking you may have God before your eyes, since you are prone and apt to depart from the knowledge of Him” (*Dial.* 20.1).³⁵ And regarding the observance of Sabbath, this too was given as a sign “because of your sins and those of your fathers” (*Dial.* 21.1ff). Elsewhere Justin writes: “In the same way He commanded offerings because of the sins of your people, and because of their idolatries, and not because He was in need of such” (*Dial.* 22.1ff). According to Justin, it was no longer necessary to observe any of the law: “For if before Abraham there was no need of circumcision, and before Moses none of keeping the Sabbath, and of festivals, and of offerings, neither in like manner is there any need now, after the Son of God, Jesus Christ” (*Dial.* 23.3).

Why Talk Torah to Gentiles?

Throughout the *Dialogue*, Justin argues that the Mosaic law was created to address the moral weaknesses of the Jewish people, and that it was created for them alone: other peoples were not obligated to keep these commandments. Claudia Setzer (1994: 146) raises important questions regarding the motivation behind the contents of this document:

Why did these debates take place? Justin is himself a Gentile and by the time of his writing, Christianity is largely Gentile. Why is he still arguing with Jews about who is the true Israel and whether or not the commandments should be observed? These do not seem to be issues which would interest the Roman government or the gentile populace in their evaluation of Jews.

In response, Setzer offers the following: “The debate may represent simply the search for self-understanding and self-definition. Yet it is possible that Jews and Gentiles are competing for gentile converts” (1994: 146). Although this latter proposal approaches the correct answer, neither of these explanations is completely satisfactory.

A more reasonable motivation for Justin to deal with issues regarding the law is because he was cognizant of the fact that *Gentile Christians* were interested in Torah observance. At the beginning of chapter 46, Trypho asks Justin: “If some even now desire to live in accordance with the precepts of the Mosaic law (βούλωνται φυλάσσοντες τὰ διὰ Μωσέως διαταθέντα), and yet believe that the crucified Jesus is the Christ of God and that to him it has been given to judge without exception all men, and that his kingdom is eternal, could they also be saved (δύναται καὶ αὐτοὶ σωθῆναι)?” In his response—which extends into chapter 47—Justin delineates four different types of Christians (of both Jewish and Gentile origin) who follow the law, and discusses whether he deems them to be accepted (“saved”) or not:

- Jewish Christians who followed the Law but continue to believe in Jesus and live with Christians without trying to convince them “either to receive circumcision like themselves, or to keep sabbath, or to observe other things of the same kind” are to be accepted (*Dial.* 47.2).
- Jewish Christians who believe in Christ but “in every way compel those who are of Gentile birth and believe on this Christ to live in accordance with the law appointed by Moses, or choose not to have communion with them that have such a life in common” are not accepted (*Dial.* 47.3).
- Gentile Christians “who follow their advice and live under the law, as well as keep their profession in the Christ of God will I suppose, perhaps [or probably] be saved (σωθήσεσθαι ἴσως ὑπολαμβάνω)” (*Dial.* 47.4).

- Former Gentile Christians who “once professed and recognized” Jesus as Messiah but “for some cause or other passed over (μεταβαίνω) into the life under the Law” and deny Jesus “cannot, I declare, in any wise be saved” (*Dial.* 47.4).

Justin’s third and fourth responses indicate that he was familiar with the phenomenon of Christian judaizing; that is, he is explicitly aware that some Gentile Christians in his congregation observed Torah. The Gentile Christians practised the law and maintained Christian beliefs, while the former Gentile Christians defected from the Christian church altogether to join the synagogue and live as Jews.³⁶ Regarding these apostates, Wilson observes that “this is the clearest reference to such a group in early Christian sources” (1995: 166).

It seems clear that Justin is commenting on issues with which he was personally familiar. Trypho’s question, which precipitates this discussion, is in the conditional form (εάν δέ τινες), as are the other stipulations within the discussion. Wilson reasonably observes that “the conditional is perfectly normal on the lips of partners in a dialogue, and could still refer to types of Christian known to both” (1995: 166).³⁷ Skarsaune notes that Justin not only made use of traditional material in his writing but added and expanded these texts and arguments when he deemed it necessary; he suggests that Justin is “very much on his own in the concluding chapters 46ff concerning the observance of the Law by Jewish Christians” (1987: 426).

It is significant that Justin accepts the observance of Mosaic law by Jewish Christians, as long as they do not try to persuade other Christians to do likewise, as well as by Gentile Christians, albeit reluctantly. It seems that he views Gentile Christians who observed Jewish customs as dissidents rather than apostates; that is, he considers them as erratic members of the church but members nonetheless, and deems them worthy of being saved.³⁸ In his acceptance of Christian judaizers as being legitimately within the Christian fold, Justin demonstrates more tolerance than earlier Christian writers who encountered this phenomenon, such as Ignatius, the author of Revelation, and even Paul himself.

According to Justin, certain Gentile Christians (i.e., the third group in the list) judaize because they have been persuaded (πειθομένους αὐτοῖς) to live under the law (ἐπι τὴν ἔννομον πολιτείαν). “But if any of your people, Trypho, profess their belief in Christ, and at the same time force the Christian Gentiles to follow the Law instituted through Moses, or refuse to share in communion with them this same common life, I certainly will also not approve of them” (*Dial.* 47.3). According to this statement, Christians judaize because Jewish Christians convince them to. Perhaps these Jewish Christians threatened that they would not associate with the

Gentiles unless they complied. Unfortunately, Justin is less forthcoming regarding why certain Christian judaizers abandon their faith and “switch over” to Judaism (i.e., the fourth group). He simply says that they do so “for some cause or other (ἡτινιοῦν αἰτίᾳ)” (*Dial.* 47.4).

Justin is obviously frustrated by continued law observance by Gentile Christians; to impede the spread of the phenomenon, he declares that he does not approve of Jewish Christians who attempt to influence Gentile Christians “to be circumcised like themselves, or to keep the Sabbath, or to perform any other similar acts” (*Dial.* 47.1).³⁹ This declaration indicates that circumcision and Sabbath observance were among the Jewish rituals maintained by Gentile Christians in Justin’s area. These two rites are frequently mentioned in connection with Gentile Christians in other Christian documents from Asia Minor, such as Paul’s letter to the Galatians, Ignatius’s letter to Magnesia, and the letter to the Colossians.⁴⁰ It is furthermore interesting to note, as Wilson observes, that Justin is “noticeably harsher in his judgment of those who propagate Jewish observance than of those Gentiles who succumb” (1995: 166).

Justin describes a mixed community of Jewish and Gentile Christians with these variations:

- Christians (Justin does not specify whether they are of Gentile or Jewish origin) who refused fellowship with law-observant Jewish Christians;
- law-observant Jewish Christians who were putting pressure on Gentile Christians to maintain some Jewish rituals;
- some law-observant Jewish Christians (perhaps from the previous group) who refused fellowship with Gentile Christians;
- Jewish Christians who did not observe the law;
- Gentiles who became Christians, began observing the law and eventually rejected Jesus as Messiah;
- Gentile Christians who observed the law (i.e., Christian judaizers); and
- Gentile Christians who did not observe the law.

This description affords a valuable glance into the constituencies of an early Christian community. Justin was personally familiar with a wide spectrum of conduct manifested by Christians of both Jewish and Gentile origin that he categorizes according to their acceptability for salvation. He is aware that some of them—Gentiles who became Christians, described above—became so enmeshed in Jewish practices that they eventually abandoned their faith in Christ, thereby straying beyond the limits of the Christian community altogether. These latter individuals, whom he declares could not “in any wise be saved” (*Dial.* 47.4), succumbed completely to Jewish ways. Perhaps this departure is precisely what other Christian

leaders in both Asia Minor and Syria feared and fought with such ferocity: that Gentiles who had faith in Jesus but began to observe Jewish customs would eventually abandon their belief in Christ and become Jewish converts.

The Audience of the Dialogue

The portrayal of the relationship between Jews and Christians that emerges from Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* is complex and multi-dimensional. On the one hand, Justin presents his Jewish partner in the debate as polite, gentle and open-minded; on the other hand, he frequently mentions the Jews cursing Jesus and believers in Jesus, and persecuting Christians. He takes the radical step of explicitly claiming the title "Israel," the chosen people of God, for Christians alone, and even appropriates Jewish scripture because, in his view, Jews do not understand it. He argues against Jewish ritual and attributes the bestowal of the law by God on the Jews to their moral decrepitude. Yet there remains within Justin hope for the salvation of the Jews, as he does not completely abandon them to a horrible fate; for example, "I hope that some one of you can be found to belong to [the seed] which...is left over unto eternal salvation" (*Dial.* 32.2; also 14.8; 35.8; 38.2; 39.2; 44.1; 102.7; 108.7). Most importantly for my purposes, Justin not only acknowledges that sometimes Gentile Christians succumbed to persuasion from fellow Jewish Christians to follow Jewish law, but he accepts Christian judaizers as legitimate members of the ecclesiastical community.

A strong and vibrant Jewish presence existed in the Roman Empire, particularly in Asia Minor. Justin was faced with explaining the relationship between Christianity and Judaism to a Gentile audience that was familiar with and attracted to Judaism. In *Dial.* 23.3, Justin addresses Trypho "and those who wish to be proselytes (καὶ τοῖς βουλομένοις προσηλύτοις γενέσθαι)," saying "[a]bide as you have been born (μείνατε ὡς γεγέννησθε)." ⁴¹ This was the message Justin wished to communicate to the Gentile Christian readers of his *Dialogue* who were attracted to Judaism: "Stay as you are. Do not become circumcised, do not observe the Sabbath, or other rites of the law." ⁴²

In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin describes a dichotomous Christian community containing Christians of Jewish and Gentile origin both observing parts of the Mosaic law. While he accepts Christian judaizers as part of the legitimate ecclesiastical community, he denies the salvation of those Gentile Christians who begin to maintain certain Jewish customs and eventually abandon their faith. For these Gentiles, Christianity is a transitional, temporary state between paganism and Judaism. Justin directs

most of his animosity and judgment toward *Jewish Christians* who, through their threats of ceasing to associate with non-judaizing Gentile Christians, compel Gentile Christians to observe Jewish practices such as circumcision and the Sabbath. He disapproves of this process and wishes to prevent its occurrence. To try to curtail their influence, Justin denies the salvation of such Jewish Christians.

Interestingly, Justin does not deny the salvation of Christian judaizers who maintain their faith in Jesus. By grudgingly accepting them as members of the Christian congregation, Justin was being more tolerant than several other early Christian writers who deal with this phenomenon in Asia Minor. His tolerance likely was prompted by a self-serving purpose: by accepting Christian judaizers within the Church, Justin sought to prevent their Christian identity from being merely transitory. If welcomed within the Christian congregation, perhaps they would not become proselytes to Judaism.

Gentile Christian interest in Judaism angered the authors of these texts, prompting them to denigrate Jews and Judaism, a reaction that has contributed significantly to anti-Jewish attitudes among members of the early Christian Church. The Book of Revelation reflects a situation where Gentiles live like Jews. Ignatius encounters Christian judaizers who wish to adhere to certain Jewish customs and ways of thinking while maintaining membership in the church. Christian judaizing was such an urgent and troubling concern for Justin Martyr that Gentile Christians with this proclivity are apparently the primary readers toward whom the *Dialogue with Trypho* is directed. His aspiration for Gentile Christians was that they would remain as they were and not become judaizers. If they did succumb in some measure to the persuasion of the Jewish Christians, Justin accepted them as legitimate members of the Christian church as long as they retained their faith in Christ.

The Asia Minor documents discussed here each contain statements that directly connect Christians with Judaism or Jewish behaviour. In Revelation 2:9 and 3:9, Christians are accused of falsely identifying themselves as Jews and are called a “synagogue of Satan”; in *Philadelphians* 6.1, Ignatius indicates that he had been hearing “Judaism from the uncircumcised”; and, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin describes how certain Gentile Christian members of his congregation “lived under the Law” (47.4). Each of these authors was responding to the existence of Christian judaizing within his respective community.

