TEMPLE AND IDENTITY IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND IN THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY: REFLECTIONS ON THE “PARTING OF THE WAYS”

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Was the year 70 CE really a watershed for emerging Christianity? How did early Christian communities, both Jewish and Gentile, react to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple; and how did that event affect the formation of their identities as communities, or the identity formation of their individual members? These questions are embedded in the general debate on the relevance of the year 70 CE, the end of the Jewish War, and particularly the destruction of the Herodian Temple, for the history of Judaism. Within this context, the development of

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2 Since the term “Christianity” can be used only *cum grano salis* for the early Jesus movement, I use the term (as well as the term “Judaism”) without presupposing any fixed dogmatic “system” or presuming a mutual exclusiveness of both terms. In any case, the note in Acts 11:26 that the members of the Jesus group in Antioch were called Χριστιανοί suggests that already at an early stage this community was visible to outsiders as a group that could in some way be distinguished from the local synagogue, with some Χριστός making the difference. Similar processes might have happened elsewhere.

emerging Christianity, which started as a Jewish Messianic movement, deserves special consideration. Did the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple affect Christians as well as Jews, and potentially not only in Palestine but all over the Mediterranean Diaspora? And how is the so-called “parting of the ways,” the process of separation between the emerging church and the synagogue, related to the events of the year 70 CE and the loss of the cultic center of early Judaism?

These issues call for consideration of a wide range of texts and problems, which cannot be dealt with in detail in a single contribution. In the present article, I will first give a brief and general sketch of the relationship between the Temple (and eventually its destruction) and early Christian identity formation. For that purpose, I will mainly draw on the distinction between pre-70 and post-70 writings. In the second part, I will focus on the Johannine corpus, i.e., the Gospel of John and the three Epistles, as a test case for identity formation in Asia Minor in the post-70 period. Here we will ask what factors contributed to the split between the local synagogues and the Johannine communities and what was decisive for the particular community identity developed within the Johannine tradition.

We will see that the impact of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple on early Christian identity was rather limited. Other factors

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7 The views developed here differ widely from those of S.G.F. Brandon, The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church (London, 1951), who tended to place the decisive turning point within early Christianity in the events of the year 70 CE, when Jewish Christianity lost its center. But his dichotomy between Palestinian Jewish Christianity and Pauline Gentile Christianity was already outdated when the book appeared and cannot be maintained in the light of more recent research. A very different approach was taken by L. Gaston, No Stone on Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels (Leiden, 1970), who presupposes that the first