

13. Daniélou, Jean, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity, The Development of Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea, Volume One*, Translated and Edited by John Baker (The Henry Regnery Company 1964)

This has got to be my all-time favorite book on the subject. I carried it around with me as a most prized possession and quoted from it regularly in church meetings when I was at the height of my state of belief in my adopted religion, Mormonism. Then I loaned the book to a fellow believer and never saw it again. I moved away and sent him a note asking for it, he called to say he would find it and mail it. Never saw it again until this Freke and Gandy incident jarred it back into my awareness and caused me to go to a university library to get it in my hands again for a few weeks. It is a wonderful piece of work, and from what I have read of more modern books, they come to the same conclusions that, basically, Daniélou came to not quite 40 years ago. So, it is a trustworthy source still!

But now, about 27 years later for me, does it read the same as it did back in the mid-seventies? Sure it reads the same, but I don't read it the same. Then I was convinced that there was an original Christianity that Mormonism had restored to the earth. So I read focused on those things that were the same as, or at least similar to, what fit my understanding of (esoteric, no doubt) Mormonism.

And the material that did not fit? I ascribed it to the errors of men already corrupting the original purity of the original Christian message and church with its liturgy and its several peculiar, and near-Mormon, ordinances in addition to baptism and the Eucharist. Now, I cannot read that selectively, so I get a whole new picture from this second reading of this very, very good book.

Now I see that one book I am also reading does a similar thing to what Daniélou did, and that I did, and it makes me grin. That book is Streeter's (item # 34), and in that book he says that in his studies of Primitive Christianity he finds several disparate organizational models that resemble the current catholic, Episcopalian, and presbyterian approaches, so all should be happy to find itself represented in what were the earliest layers of Christianity. That is cute, similar to my seeing all these proto-Mormon idiosyncracies in Jewish Christianity as proof of claims of Mormon correctness. But it begs the question as to whether or not there was an original structure, one set into motion and prescribed by Jesus. Crossan, of course (item # 10), says "no," that Jesus was and remained an itinerant teacher expressly to avoid such development. Küng also says "no" (see item # 24). But what does Daniélou say? He doesn't say, but also doesn't contradict a belief in the answer being "no," he is totally focused on the theology of the earliest Christians, not so much their charge or charter from Christ.

To my surprise, Daniélou declares the theology of the very earliest Christians to have within it an implicit understanding in the divinity of Jesus Christ. This is in contrast to one of its longer-surviving Jewish-Christian sects (heretical), the Ebionites, who produced much literature and are therefore better known. The orthodox earliest Jewish Christian group, sometimes called the Nazarenes, was James' community of Christ-believing Jews and converts in Jerusalem. In a footnote on page 8, where he discusses this branch or orthodox Jewish Christianity, Daniélou clears up a considerable mystery for me (if he is right): the reason there is confusion about the role of Peter and James in the Jerusalem church is that James was the resident authority and Peter was an itinerant (missionary) authority. There seemed to already be an organization with resident master-servants (in imitation of Christ who taught that the leader

serves the flock) and itinerant missionaries (also in imitation of Christ's own ministry).

But let's get into Daniélou's book with a focus on the questions at hand: were the first Christians Gnostics? Was Paul a Gnostic? Daniélou does have a resounding and reverberating "no" for both those questions.

Daniélou's opus is still, after all I have read on this long list, the epitome, the supreme authority, on what was believed by the Christians that Paul was persecuting. He called them Jewish-Christians. They may have been an accepted part of the Judaic community as suggested by Crossan (Item # 10), even if they fell afoul of the temple hierarchy appointed by and collaborating with Rome (also see Küng, Item # 24).

So, were they Gnostics? No.

Before we get too deep into the Gnostics and Daniélou's Jewish Christians, there is something I need to share about Daniélou: he is apparently a believer, a modern Christian. I suspect that may color some of his judgments, but I am not sure that matters for the purposes at hand.

What brought this up? One thing I missed in my first reading is a statement at the very end of the book. Like Streeter in his book (Item # 34), Daniélou assures his modern Christian readers that the theology of the Jewish Christians contained full-bodied versions of what they believed regarding many key pillars of their faith. This struck me as odd for two reasons. Others I had read gave me the impression that it was Paul that added some of these items to Christianity. But more than that, the reason I loved the book in the 70's is that it was proof to me that my selected faith, Mormonism, was reflected in the theology of Jewish Christianity, not normative modern Christianity. Here is what Daniélou wrote

on page 408, it is the last paragraph of his book:

If, therefore, we would in this age bring to troubled mankind the salvation which only Christ can give, we could do worse than ponder the vision of Jewish Christianity, for which saving faith meant the knowledge that there was indeed wisdom in things, the certainty of the fulfillment of God's Grand Design ordained from the foundation of the world; for which Christ was Lord not only of the heart but of the heavens; for which Baptism was a partaking in the cosmic conquest of evil; and for which the ultimate hope was to follow the Son into the heavenly places and to hear the Thrones and Dominations cry, 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates: and the king of Glory shall come in.'

Reading this paragraph several times flicked on a little light for me. This is Daniélou's testimony of his own faith. Through the book there are other enigmatic statements, they, I now see, are likely also statements of personal conviction, not the outcome of scholarly analysis.

What does Daniélou think of Paul? Lots of things. When he explains what Jewish Christians are he makes a point of it being a diverse lot with three basic categories. The way he defines these allows, to my surprise, even Paul to be a Jewish Christian! This is a statement from pages 7 and 8:

It will be best to begin by defining exactly what is meant by the term 'Jewish Christianity', for it has three possible references. First, it may designate those *Jews who acknowledge Christ as a prophet or a Messiah, but not as the son of God*, and thus form a separate class, half-way between Jews and Christians. Perhaps the best known of this group are the Ebionites, but they are by no means alone. Between the years A.D. 40 and 70

the Jewish world was disturbed by a wave of political and messianic excitement, and the propaganda associated with this movement exerted a strong influence on the young Christian communities, which may possibly have been responsible for the various groups with which Saint Paul clashed in Corinth, Colossae and Galatia. . . .

Paul is remembered well from these clashes by the Jewish Christians of this stripe. Decades later they described Paul as an evil wizard, the darkness that went to the gentiles to be followed later by the light of Christ. They equated him to Simon, the Magus from Samaria, a Gnostic who had run-ins with Peter (like Paul did). They also made verbal war on John the Baptist. Why, because by the time they were writing their treatises, John's followers and Jesus' followers were divided and the animosity between them was strong (see page 72 for Daniélou's discussion on all of this).

Among this first type of Jewish Christians, Gnostic dualism made its inroads, according to Daniélou. So, Christian Gnosticism was born among 'syncretists' who were numbered among the types of Jewish Christians that spawned the Ebionites. Where Ebionism and Gnosticism was well-mixed was among the followers of Elkesai, known later as the Elkesaites. Daniélou says more on this on page 8.

Let's move to the second type of Jewish Christian, on pages 8 and 9:

The second possible reference for the term 'Jewish Christianity' is *the Christian community of Jerusalem*, dominated by James and the tendencies for which he stood. This community was perfectly orthodox in its Christianity but remained attached to certain Jewish ways of life, without, however, imposing them on

proselytes from paganism. Until A.D. 70 the church of Jerusalem enjoyed considerable prestige, so that Paul had to struggle to get his views accepted; and indeed, it was only after the fall of the city that the Pauline position definitely gained the upper hand. Nevertheless, in spite of their differences there was always a basic unity underlying their different attitudes.

I liked that statement, it made sense, until the last sentence. That seems incredible. Perhaps it is a bone thrown at modern believers, such as Daniélou himself. I suspect it is a statement of personal conviction like the last paragraph of the book is.

James' Christians were known as Nazarenes, according to Daniélou, and after the fall of Jerusalem they faded away leaving several written works behind just as the first category of Jewish Christians did.

On page 9 we finally get to the type of Jewish Christian that Paul may be classed as (but also see Armstrong, item # 3):

Finally, a third possible reference of the term 'Jewish Christianity' is a type of *Christian thought expressing itself in forms borrowed from Judaism*. In this sense the term covers a much wider field. It does not necessarily involve any connection with the Jewish community, but includes, in addition to the groups already mentioned, men who had broken completely with the Jewish world, but who continued to think in its terms. . . .

Bloom's "The American Religion" book (Item # 4) observes that modern American Christians see themselves as the true Israel and speak using Jewish imagery. This would make them Jewish Christians. Daniélou would grant that, but

makes the point quite clearly on page 10 that although all three types of Jewish Christianity are his subject, the third type restricted in time to "*the expression of Christianity in the thought-forms of Later Judaism.*" 'Later Judaism' is the type of Judaism extent from the time of Christ through the time of the Apostolic Fathers, according to Daniélou.

But it is not just a time-slice that determines the classification of an ancient document as being Jewish-Christian, it is its content. And some of the early Fathers of the church, such as Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, though not Jewish Christians in the first or second sense, purport to convey traditions of "the Elders" meaning they have a direct connection to traditions passed on from the earliest Christians. Daniélou explains this on page 11.

So, does Daniélou hint at Paul being a Gnostic? No, in fact he defends him against that charge quite convincingly. On page 365, for example, he suggests that where Paul uses the word gnosis, he is well within the envelope within which that word is used among some Jewish-Christian groups:

Another characteristic feature of Jewish Christianity is the importance of <gnosis>. [Daniélou uses Greek here, and I am not about to change fonts and imitate him.] The expression occurs in Saint Paul, and attempts have been made to regard this as a 'Gnostic' element in him. Gnosis in Saint Paul, however, is the knowledge of eschatological secrets . . .[more Greek] . . . revealed in Christ; and this, as has often been remarked already, is a specifically Jewish conception, being indeed an essential factor in apocalyptic writing, which consists in the revelation of eschatological secrets and of the heavenly world, and is the true speculative theology of Judaism at the time of Christ. Far from this being an effect of 'Gnosticism,' the facts are rather that

Gnosticism adopted the expression, and interpreted it both in its content and meaning in a heterodox manner, combining it with foreign, oriental or Hellenistic conceptions.

The discoveries at Qumran have confirmed this view decisively, for gnosis as the knowledge of divine secrets plays a very important part in them.

Daniélou did not defend Paul against the charge of being a Hellenizer, on page 26. Clearly he was that, and it was what made him anathema to various Jewish-Christian groups who felt Jesus was not doing away with the law but restoring it to its original purity. On this point, the Ebionites are cited on pages 63 and 64, where they claim

. . . that Jesus did not wish to suppress the Law – this was the work of Paul, their great adversary, ‘the man that is our enemy’ of the *Preaching*. They claim to defend the true thought of Jesus against the deformation to which Paulinism subjected it. But on the other hand they see Jesus as a reformer of the Law who brings it back to the true ideas of Moses. As it exists in Judaism the Law seems to them to be mixed with elements of diabolical origin which are of a later date than Moses. The elements to be rejected are primarily the Temple worship and, in particular, bloody sacrifices. These [sic] seem to derive from a Jewish heterodoxy which pushes to its logical conclusion the Essene break with the official cultus.

So what we have in this one paragraph is a direct link between the Ebionites, heterodox Jewish Christians, and the Essenes, heterodox Jews. Daniélou makes several links evident between these two sects. On pages 56 and 57 he covers the Ebionite and Essene common use of ritual bathing. Ebionites had baptism as the primary initiation

ritual, both Ebionites and Essenes practiced a daily ritual bath. They used unleavened bread and water in the Ebionite Eucharist, the exclusion of wine showing Encratite rather than Essene influence. The Ebionites and Essenes flatly rejected parts of the Pentateuch, denying all aspects of the idea that temple blood sacrifice had ever been commanded by God.

Ebionites, Daniélou says, should not be confused with the Nazarenes, the community to be considered orthodox, led by James in Jerusalem. Ebionites did leave a literature behind that is vital to understanding orthodox as well as Ebionite early Jewish Christianity, however. It almost takes a scholar to subtract from their accounts the special pleadings that identify the authors as Ebionites. What is left over, however, is very reliable insight into the Christian community, especially in later books based on earlier ones; like the *Clementine Recognitions* (my personal favorite) written over a basis provided by apocryphal books purporting to tell of the *Preaching of Peter* and the *Journeys of Peter* (see pages 58-60).

But why am I on Ebionites? Because it is in their documents that we learn of the mild form of dualism that was common in all branches of Jewish Christianity. Not the very Gnostic and thoroughgoing dualism between the demi-urge, an evil power, and God, but a recognition that God created two powers, and placed both in Adam and all humans, challenging us to choose which to honor and follow. They loved the God of creation, Gnostics despised this inept and falsely proud lesser divinity. These are serious differences. Real differences.

The *Clementine Homilies* are used by Daniélou to illustrate Ebionite dualism, which is identical to Essene dualism. On his pages 61 and 62, and the "Evil One" has been placed in

charge of this world, the "Good" is in charge of the next world. The big difference between these statements and similar Gnostic statements is that here God is the one who appointed this. That was a cosmic dualism come to earth where: "Each of these seeks to dispossess the other. Every man has the power to obey whichever of them he pleases." And there you have it, the explanation of evil in the world and the freedom to choose to be on the evil or the good side. This dualism carries all through history with good and evil appearing side by side or in succession: Adam good, Cain bad, Abel good, etc. This dualism carries right into their own time with Peter good and Paul bad. Interesting.

But where it gets more intriguing is when it is carried into the hearts of humans. Here, even though they despise Paul, they are on his wavelength, a wavelength taken as proof of Gnosticism by Freke and Gandy, but considered genuine Jewish-Christian belief by Daniélou. I'll quote selectively from his discussion of "The Two Spirits" on his pages 357 through 362:

One of the most important features that Jewish Christianity received from Judaism, and more particularly from Essene circles, was the doctrine of the Two Spirits. This has already been examined in its cosmological aspect and in its place in catechesis, and now it must be considered from the point of view of spirituality. Essentially it expresses the existence of a dual orientation in the human soul. This is sometimes seen as a conflict of two tendencies, and is similar to the doctrine of the two *yesserim*, which existed in Judaism at the time of Christ and was to endure in the rabbinic tradition. The doctrine may be studied in *II (4) Esdras*, where it is particularly prominent. The place of the *yesser* is in the heart, and the evil *yesser* was in the heart of Adam from the beginning (4:30). It is not sin,

but a propensity to sin, and for this reason its origin can be attributed to God. Adam's consenting to it established its domination over him and his descendants.

It may be that this doctrine of the two *yesserim* is to be found in *Saint Paul*. It certainly appears in a developed form in Jewish Christian writers, as, for example, in the following passage from the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*: "Two ways hath God given to the sons of en, and two inclinations, and two kinds of action . . . and two issues" (*Test. Asher I, 3*).

Daniélou goes on to carry this imagery into the angels of light and darkness familiar to readers of Essene documents. My point is made, however. When Paul talks about warring tendencies inside himself he is being a good Jewish Christian. When he attributes one to the flesh and the other to the spirit, he is being a good Hellenist. He gets close to Gnosticism but does not seem to me to cross the gulf fixed between the Gnostics and Jewish-Christians, the gulf of the latter giving responsibility to God for the establishment of this darker tendency in the human heart, and the former distancing the evil creator by making him one of the most distant emanations deriving ultimately from God. So, is that a gulf? Hmm. Maybe it is, because what it boiled down to is a difference over the acceptance of much of the Pentateuch, and especially its God, and the rejection of same. Gnostics clearly rejected the God of the earliest books of the Old Testament, and most of what those books had to say. Pauline and early Jewish-Christians accepted the world- and humans- creating and then legislating God of the Old Testament. But some Jewish Christians, heterodox perhaps, rejected part of the law, while Paul wrote the law off as a temporary measure to point a people to Christ's perfect sacrifice, ending obligations to the law.

One more thing about Paul. Daniélou defends him, but allows him to be seen as a Hellenizer. So does Küng (see item # 24). Both these men are believing Catholics. They see there is a continuity of their own religion with the ministry and teachings of Paul. Does that make them biased towards Paul? I don't think so. I think they give a very objective "other side" to the story, one that is historically quite compelling.

Finally, at the beginning I said I was surprised to hear that there was recognition of the divinity of Christ in the early Christian community since I thought it was a later (Pauline) development. Why? Because I took the *Clementine Recognitions* at face value, and projected their views of Christ (an Ebionite view of Christ as prophet and Messiah) onto all of Jewish Christianity. Even back in the '70's when I was reading Daniélou, I already knew what he said on the subject, which is a lot, but I rejected that and believed the author of the *Clementine Recognitions* instead. It was convenient to do so, I tried to really make it fit my prejudices, and the partial result is a point of discussion under item # 36 by van Luik (neither a book nor a scholarly item, but I did it and feel a need to confess).

At the end of a chapter on angelology in early Christianity and its contemporary late Judaism, Daniélou says on page 146 that the eternal nature of Christ and the Holy Spirit was symbolically representing in characterizing them as angelic envoys from the father to humankind. Daniélou suggests that the misinterpretation made of this imagery led to its deletion from the catholic church's thought in the fifth century when the war with Arianism was won. (See Item # 32 on the day that Christ became God). Arius, saw this angelology alluding to the role of Christ as proof of his subordinationist views (denying the trinity mystery, and

instead posing three separate entities, a hierarchy of three with God the father at the top). So, what exactly did the earliest Christians believe with respect to Christ and Godhood?

Daniélou spends chapter 5 on this topic with a discussion of the Name, which he follows from the Old Testament into the works of the Jewish and Jewish-Christian apocalyptic writers of the time of interest. He spends much time on the writings with Ebionite pedigree because they give the clearest message about the Name of God sustaining both the creation and the believer in Christ who is the carrier of the Name, or power, of God.. At least that is my interpretation of his pages 147 through 153. He then goes into detail about the significance of the Name concept in baptism, and links that usage of the term in documents describing that rite as leading back to the idea in the *Clementine Homilies* that suggest that in the early community Christ was seen as the Name, or Word (as in John), which signifies the power of God, or how God exercises that power in the universe and world..

Daniélou goes on in this lengthy chapter citing other documents, including some Gnostic ones he suggests are not off the mark from orthodoxy since they match what John says in the Gospel by that name. What Valentinus did was take a legitimate Jewish-Christian viewpoint and Hellenize it and thereby made it fit his Gnostic view (page 159). For me that was interesting, and many pages of citations and discussions boiled down to this for me, taken from pages 158-159:

This ineffable Essence of the Father is however manifested to men through the Son. The Father has given him the name. This means that the Son has the same nature as the Father. It is also stated that he has

'proceeded from the Father' and that 'he is the father', so that there is no difference in nature between the father and the Son. The Son not only has the Name, he is the name. Hence the Name means God not only in himself, but also as manifesting himself, the sense which the expression has in the Old Testament. Moreover, this Name is a person; it stands for the Son, and is identical with him. Thus the Name refers to the Son under three aspects at once; as having the divine nature; as the one in whom the divine nature manifests itself; and as a person distinct from the Father.

Daniélou isn't done with the topic by a long shot, but I am. Much of this discussion on the name as proof of the Jewish-Christians seeing Christ as divine is based on writings clearly Ebionite, so I am a bit puzzled over the assertion that they are heterodox because they do not see Christ as Divine, they see him as prophet and Messiah only. I went back to pages 56 through 58 to see that the Ebionites believed Christ received his injection of the Name so to speak, at the time the dove descends on him at his baptism. The first quote is from page 57, the second from page 58:

Jesus is a man like ordinary men, born of an ordinary marriage. But Christ, who is the good principle existing from the beginning, rested on him at the moment of baptism, in the form of a dove. Nor is this Christ the Son of God, but a higher archangel, the one whom the *Rule of the Community* calls the Prince of Light. . . . Thus Jesus is a prophet who is assisted by the Angel of Good.

The Holy Ghost who comes down in the form of a dove is said 'to descend and enter into Jesus'. This is appropriate to an adoptionist theology and is in keeping with Essene theories about the action of the Holy Ghost

on the prophets. There is also the mention of 'a great light' which 'shone about the place'. This is not Ebionite, but occurs in Tatian's *Diatessaron*.

[Note that on pag 231 Daniélou asserts that "the presence of the light of glory at the Baptism is a primitive datum."]

So, when it comes to the divinity of Christ are we splitting hairs over the Angel of Good and the Essence of God? I suppose so. But the more important idea is that the Ebionites thought Jesus was not a miraculously conceived or born being, and that seems to be an important distinction making them heterodox. What did the Jewish-Christian mainstream believe on this issue? Read Daniélou's Chapter Seven and you will know. Apparently a very complex theology and cosmology was current in the Jewish-Christian orthodox belief system. That theology/cosmology has Jesus descending unnoticed from the highest heaven through the lower heavens because he changes into the form of the angels guarding each heaven and knows the passwords that let him pass through. Finally and miraculously, accompanied by signs and wonders attending his "birth" (it is miracle-ized and painless in some accounts, after a bright light dims and people again can see, he is simply there and his mother cares for him), he enters this abode in the chain of being, earth. His baptism signifies his going to the realms below the earth and freeing those righteous who are captive there. He does do that upon his death, but we'll not go to that chapter in Daniélou. We will discuss it again in items # 30 and 36.

So his seeming to be like any other child suckling his mother's breast was part of the overall plan to have him be unrecognized and not known for who he really was as he passed through the hierarchy of the domain of being. Perhaps the idea is, and this is my own speculation, that had

he revealed himself, as Himself, there would be no need for learning to seek and find the voice of the Spirit within, and exercising faith. As Paul said, faith is what saves, not certainty. However that may be, I am satisfied, now that early Jewish Christians believed in the divinity of Jesus. Whether that divinity was his at birth or came upon him at baptism divides the orthodox from the heterodox, as does the question of the nature of the birth: plain/regular or virgin/miraculous.

I could get into a lot more substance than I have from Daniélou. But the main points of this inquiry into who the earliest Christians were have been addressed. Daniélou will be mentioned again where I discuss my own writings (unpublished) from the mid-seventies, below, at item # 36 .