

The Effect of the 1st Century Jewish Christians

It is normally assumed that the followers of The Way in the 1st century were a uniform group of believers despite their different races or statuses in life. The only deviation from this were the Judaizers¹ who worked to bring gentile Christians under the Torah, a group which Paul fought vehemently against.² These may seem to most Bible readers to be a few people here and there, but this is not the case. These Jewish Christians were a driving force in the Greco-Roman world of the 1st century.

It appears that the shift from the initial movement's basis around a relationship with the Living God, in community with others, to a formal religion with rituals and a Eucharist³ may have originated with the Jewish Christians (Judaizers). These had a more appealing version of Christianity for the pagan worshippers who were used to polytheistic religion which had a set of ceremonies and rituals.

“An interesting situation developed when Christian missionaries appeared and targeted as their first audience the ‘god-fearers’⁴ and those pagans attracted to Jewish monotheism who frequented the synagogues. A competition apparently developed between the ‘Pauline’ missionaries who defined Christianity as a ‘third thing’ not assimilable to Judaism, but allowing full membership without the need for circumcision or Torah observance, and equally numerous or influential Jewish-Christian missionaries claiming that Jesus as the messiah had preached a ‘both/and’, rather than ‘either/or’ relation to Judaism and the Law, and holding out the prospect of full incorporation (involving circumcision) into the much older and more prestigious institution of ‘common Judaism’ – thereby to receive protection from Roman persecution under the ‘umbrella’ of the privileges granted to the Jews, which the ‘Pauline’ Christians could not offer. This would have been a difficult decision for Hellenes⁵ thinking of coming over to Christianity one way or another. As Bird⁶ makes clear, conversion was more than an intellectual choice, but involved giving up one’s family, customs, country, and social identity for a whole new set. Common Judaism already had rituals, customs, and other symbolic markers in place to receive them and support them during hard times and second thoughts. Pauline Christianity’s strength was here a weakness. A recent development, it advertised its freedom from circumcision, law, and land, and how it was open to all. Only at first glance would this have appeared an unqualified attraction; at the very least it would require more maturity, courage, and mutual charity to make it viable. As Bird concludes: ‘(T)he degree and intensity levels of commitment required for conversion to Christianity were not essentially different from that required for conversion to Judaism. Instead, the mechanism for expressing that commitment in Christianity was redrawn around a new set of symbolic identifiers (e.g., faith in Christ, baptism, binitarian worship, eucharist, etc.) that required less drastic and more subtle changes in a convert’s disposition towards his or her cultural environment than compared to what Judaism usually required for conversion.’ (p. 156)”⁷

Very interesting.

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1 – This word was first used in English in 1582

messianicpublications.com/daniel-botkin/who-were-the-judaizers-the-jerusalem-council-of-acts-15

2 – Acts 15:1

3 – The Eucharist developed in the 1st century before the Roman Catholic Church which should be news to many Protestants.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eucharist#Early_Christian_sources

4 – A gentile who checked out the Jewish religious system

5 – An ancient Greek

6 – Michael F. Bird, author of the book being reviewed.

7 – Patrick Madigan (2013) Review of “Crossing Over Sea and Land: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period”

The Heythrop Journal LIV (2013) p:120-121

www.academia.edu/26610954/Christianity_in_the_Greco-

Roman_World_A_Narrative_Introduction_By_Moyer_Hubbard_Pp_xix_320_Peabody_MA_Hendrickson_Publishers_2010_24.99