

ABSTRACT

Asceticism, the Sage, and the Evil Inclination:
Points of Contact between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity

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In Jewish Christian comparative studies there exists a need to explore in more detail the ways in which Jews and Christians interacted religiously and socially in late antiquity. The thesis of this dissertation is that asceticism, the sociological and religious role of the sage, and the anthropological belief in the evil inclination are three aspects shared between predominate groups of Jews and Christians in late antiquity. So far no scholarship has joined these three, inter-dependent areas in Jewish-Christian comparative studies.

Chapter Two examines the ways that Jews and Christians did not utterly “part ways” religiously or socially in late antiquity. Evidence of their interaction can be seen in *adversus Iudaeos* literature, catechetical material, liturgies, biblical exegetical practices, civic and ecclesial legislation, and various archaeological remains.

Chapter Three examines the foundations of Christian asceticism and monasticism, especially in Egypt. This chapter critiques the traditional historical reconstructions of monastic origins, with special attention given to the theory that monasticism was an effort by ascetics to become living martyrs. Finally this chapter discusses how the Sayings are

a product of the long tradition of ascetic wisdom made especially popular from the fourth through sixth centuries across the Roman Empire.

Chapter Four examines the ways Jewish literature speaks to the practice of asceticism. The chapter is divided into three sections: pre-rabbinic Jewish ascetic practices, rabbinic ascetic practices, and the theological and sociological roles of the sage.

Chapter Five examines the shared anthropological views of the self and the evil inclination within rabbinic Judaism and ascetic Christianity. It can be said that nearly all of Christian ascetic praxis and rabbinic ascetic praxis is an effort to subdue the evil inclination and evil impulses.

This dissertation acts as a contribution in the advancement of scholarship concerning Jewish and Christian theology in late antiquity. By studying the ways Jews and Christians shared similar practices, the theological history of both groups is further illuminated and understood.

Asceticism, the Sage, and the Evil Inclination:
Points of Contact between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity

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This dissertation is dedicated to my family and the risen Christ who enabled me to undertake this three-year process. My wife's unconditional support through many absent days and nights, and my children's welcomed interruptions, kept my eyes "focused on the prize."

οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολή Ἰουδαίου τε καὶ Ἑλλήνος, ὁ γὰρ αὐτὸς κύριος πάντων,
πλουτῶν εἰς πάντα τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους αὐτόν

Romans 10:12

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

An exciting area of research exists in the relationship of Judaism and Christianity in late antiquity. While work has been done highlighting the similarities, and especially the differences, of each religion on particular issues, patristic scholarship overall has not paid enough attention to their relationship.¹ Scholars in the previous few decades have taken note of this lack of attention. Robert Wilken has warned us that patristic “scholars have grown so accustomed to interpreting the development of patristic theology in relation to Hellenism that they may have overlooked the role of Judaism.”² Philip Rousseau has noticed how “the historian of Christianity must more and more take account of the Jewish past.”³ The scholar must certainly take the entire historical context into account. Yet, some historical influences were stronger than others, depending upon the region, time, and circumstances of the literature and people involved. “[W]e must investigate a wealth of antecedent: pagan, of course; but heterodox also; and above all, Jewish. These are the areas of inquiry that should stimulate the history student today.”⁴

Naturally, not considering the role of Christianity in the history of Judaism can be deleterious for Judaic studies. James Montgomery notes this well:

¹ Relevant bibliographic references will be given in each respective chapter, depending upon the argument being made.

² Robert Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis and Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 2.

³ Philip Rousseau, “Christian Asceticism and the Early Monks,” *Early Christianity* (1991): 121.

⁴ Rousseau, “Christian Asceticism and the Early Monks,” 122.

[T]here is the exposition of a profound element common to both Judaism and Christianity, in lack of recognition of which justice is ill done to both; for the Christian is misled as to his origins, and the Jew falls short of his own religious tradition. No historian may be able to calculate the respective proportions of this dynamic element in the long histories of Synagogue and Church. Whatever his prejudices and preconceptions and those of his age, he has to reckon with its tremendous weight in praxis and theory in the life of both.⁵

This problem is especially seen when one examines how studies have typically presented an anti-ascetic, or non-ascetic, view of (especially rabbinic) Judaism. Eliezer Diamond responds to this correctly: “[G]iven the Jewish predilection to see itself as nonascetic [*sic*], it is necessary and important to establish a continuum between Christian behaviors commonly labeled as ascetic and rabbinic ascetic praxis, which . . . share the same sensibility of self-denial in the pursuit of spiritual excellence.”⁶

Therefore, it is clear that comparative studies⁷ within Judaism and Christianity have room for growth. One area of research that deserves more attention is asceticism. The thesis of this dissertation is that asceticism, the perception and role of the sage, and the anthropological belief in the evil inclination are three aspects shared between predominate groups of (but not all) Jews and Christians in late antiquity.⁸ So far no

⁵ James Montgomery, “Ascetic Strains in Early Judaism,” *JBL* 51 (1932): 213.

⁶ Eliezer Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists: Fasting and Asceticism in Rabbinic Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 20. This dissertation will explore more than rabbinic texts.

⁷ John Walton’s definition of “comparative studies” is helpful: “Comparative studies constitutes a branch of cultural studies in that it attempts to draw data from different segments of the broader culture (in time and/or space) into juxtaposition with one another in order to assess what might be learned from one to enhance the understanding of another,” *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 18. His ten principles of comparative study are also helpful (see *idem.*, 26-27).

⁸ “Asceticism” will be understood as “the deliberately voluntary, abstemious or supererogatory behavior a person or community chooses in order to increase the capacity for experiencing salvation, obtaining a virtue, or in response to sin” (see chapter three). Diamond makes a similar argument in his work concerning rabbinic asceticism (though his overall end and means is different from ours): “[T]he question is whether one can find enough points of contact between rabbinic and Christian asceticism to conclude that they are conceptually similar and therefore capable of illuminating each other. My answer to this question is affirmative, based in part on the similarities between the asceticism of the rabbis and that of

scholarship has joined these three, inter-dependent areas in Jewish-Christian comparative studies. These three areas should be discussed together because of the logical and practical connection between them. The problem (evil inclination), solution (natural asceticism), and practitioner (sage) are intimately linked concepts. This dissertation seeks not only to analyze three areas where praxis or perception is similar, but to examine if and how their practices are similar in their significance.

Some aspects of these three areas can be explained by a common biblical tradition. Other aspects seem to be explained by contemporaneous social and religious contact in Palestine and Egypt. Knowing why they are similar is often difficult to determine. Researchers in comparative religious studies know well how methodology is crucial when attempting to determine influence in either direction.⁹ However, an illuminating study can still take place even if causation or direct influence cannot be demonstrated.

Concerning Christian asceticism, this dissertation will primarily utilize the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (“the Sayings of the Fathers”) as its foundation. The Sayings are comprised of two very similar anthologies of wisdom sayings from Christian sages that emerged in the fifth century. These formative and vastly influential documents give readers a glimpse into how numerous Christian ascetics, both in the desert and in the

the desert fathers” (*Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 20). However, this dissertation will not argue, as Diamond does, that rabbinic Judaism should be considered an “ascetic religion.” Rather, it will be argued that there were certain rabbis that performed acts of asceticism which can be compared to contemporaneous Christian ascetics.

⁹ Cf. Günter Stemberger’s comments: “[I]n many cases the question of dependences and borrowings has yet to receive methodologically flawless treatment: citations of rabbinic opinions in the Church Fathers have often been assumed in cases that actually represent parallel developments from the same presuppositions. Here, too, one must always examine who is citing whom, or indeed whether a citation is present at all. Moreover, the many-layered nature of Palestinian Judaism in the rabbinic period has not been sufficiently considered, and the possibility of Christian traces on the rabbinic side has been either rejected *a priori* or too easily assumed” (*Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 2nd ed., trans. Markus Bockmuehl [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996], 49).

villages and cities, understood the role of asceticism, the significance of ascetics and monks, and the chief reason why such rigorous behavior was necessary (viz., to subdue the evil inclinations).

The Jewish literature that will be used for this thesis will vary depending upon the argument being made. Concerning the possible foundations, or incipient forms of Christian monasticism, primarily the Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha, along with examples given by Philo (viz., the Therapeutae) will be explored. Concerning the ways in which certain contemporaneous Jews practiced similar forms of asceticism alongside Christians, we will explore the Talmuds and related rabbinic literature.

This dissertation argues the following to demonstrate how late antique Christians did not maintain strict social and religious boundaries with their Jewish neighbors: (1) a similar social and religious environment which promoted similar ascetic practices; (2) the increased role and perception of the biblical sage in late antiquity, which was often linked with ascetic practices; (3) the increased role that wisdom played as necessary to increase piety in both Jewish and Christian minds; (4) the shared anthropological beliefs that each person was a unity of two, morally responsible halves, and that each person possessed an evil inclination which required some form of rigorous behavior to protect the purity of body and (especially the) soul. The role of the sage included passing on the necessary wisdom in the form of oral and written tradition that Jews and Christians needed not only to interpret the Bible correctly, but to achieve necessary levels of piety in anticipation of God's judgment.

With their varying degrees of shared geographical and chronological placement, Jews and Christians often nuanced their practices and beliefs in reaction to each other.

Jews and Christians certainly did not answer questions concerning the requisite conditions necessary to achieve salvation in the same way; nor were their perceptions of the sage identical. Just among Christians, ascetic praxis has never been uniform. The same is true of Jews (Second Temple period and beyond). Therefore, one should not expect such widespread and varying religious identities to mimic each other in every way. However, certain similarities in social patterns, behavior, beliefs, and goals demonstrate that each camp should not be examined in isolation.

This dissertation is certainly not espousing the belief that only Jews and Christians influenced one another. They were both participants in a broad Mediterranean culture that influenced them both in various ways and in various degrees. However, numerous studies already exist that explore the ways Hellenic/pagan beliefs and practices influenced Judaism and Christianity, and this study is not concerned with Hellenic influence.

Chapter Two will examine the ways that Jews and Christians did not utterly “part ways” in late antiquity. They did not utterly part ways in their social interaction with each other, nor in their religious identities. This chapter will explore the many ways that the social and religious boundaries between Jews and Christians were blurred by examining both literary and non-literary evidence. Evidence of their interaction can be seen in *adversus Iudaeos* literature, catechetical material, liturgies, biblical exegetical practices, civic and ecclesial legislation, and various archaeological remains. This chapter will also explore the broader Mediterranean milieu both Jews and Christians shared, which served to be a conducive environment for amicable relations between both camps.

Chapter Three will examine the foundations of Christian asceticism and monasticism, especially in Egypt. This chapter will critique the traditional historical reconstructions of monastic origins, with special attention given to the theory that monasticism was an effort by ascetics to become living martyrs. It will then be emphasized how the Christian ascetic and monk had always been actively involved in civic life to varying degrees, which helps to place them alongside their Jewish neighbors. Finally this chapter will discuss how the Sayings are a product of the long tradition of ascetic wisdom made especially popular from the fourth through sixth centuries across the Roman Empire.

Chapter Four will examine the ways Jewish literature speaks to the practice of asceticism. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section explores how pre-rabbinic Jewish literature demonstrates evidence of asceticism which could have served as influential to nascent Christian ascetics. Particular attention will then be given to a concrete example of Jewish asceticism during nascent Christianity, the Therapeutae. The second section will explore some practices among certain rabbis that are similar to contemporaneous Christians. It will not be argued that rabbinic Judaism is ascetic, but that there is evidence that certain rabbis praised or practiced various forms of asceticism which held a similar significance for contemporaneous Christians. The final section will argue that rabbis and Christian ascetics in late antiquity served common theological and sociological roles. Attention will be given to their shared facility at holy places, a shared respect for sages by the populace, and a shared enthusiasm and perception of the wisdom offered by the sages.

The final chapter will examine the shared anthropological views of the self and the evil inclination within rabbinic Judaism and ascetic Christianity. The view of the self for both groups could be described as a moderate anthropological dualism. This description is demonstrated in the biblical tradition, the rabbinic tradition, and in the way Christian ascetics described the self in the Sayings. Furthermore, both groups believed that inside of every single person is an evil inclination or disposition which has existed since Adam. Because of the indelible link of the body and soul, the evil inclination affected both. It can be said that nearly all of Christian ascetic praxis and rabbinic ascetic praxis is an effort to subdue the evil inclination.

This dissertation acts as a contribution in the advancement of scholarship concerning Jewish and Christian theology in late antiquity. Perhaps this study will offer a foundation from which to draw further specific examples of the ways in which both Jews and Christians continued to practice religion in propinquity. By studying the ways Jews and Christians shared similar practices, the theological history of both groups is further illuminated and understood.

CHAPTER TWO

Interaction between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate, in broad terms, that Jews and Christians in late antiquity interacted with each other religiously and socially in their daily activities.¹ Lorenzo Perrone's understanding of religious interaction will be assumed throughout the chapter (and dissertation):

Religious interaction . . . results from the conviction that the social boundaries of individual religious communities, with the traditions that they carry, are not impermeable. If only for the reason that they coexist in the same geographical and historical environment, each community measures itself against the others, thus fixing respective religious identities, even through this comparison. In short, interaction simply means relations—active and passive—with “others” belonging to a different religious community.²

This is especially true when both religious traditions share much of the same sacred Scripture and theological presuppositions. However, scholars are divided over two fundamental issues: to what degree and in what ways were Jews and Christians relational in late antiquity? This chapter now prescinds two conflicting camps in tandem: those who argue for minimal contact due to a “parting of ways,” and those who argue for mutual contact and development.

¹ *Spätantike* is typically reckoned among scholars to extend from circa fourth century to seventh century. This chapter will demonstrate that Jews and Christians did not interact because of sudden political or geographical changes in the fourth century; they were always in contact to certain degrees. Therefore, examples will not be limited to the fourth-seventh centuries.

² Lorenzo Perrone, “Monasticism as a factor of religious interaction in the Holy Land during the Byzantine period,” in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Interactions and Conflicts in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak ben Zvi, 1998), 69.

Models of the Their Relationship

The Traditional Model: A “Parting of Ways”

The relationship between Jews and Christians at any time in the history of the two religions is difficult to describe. This is especially true of the first few centuries of the Christian Era because of the nature of the evidence. Despite the various, complex issues involved in describing the relationship between Jews and Christians, certain scholars suggest a complete split in contact and influence. In this model Judaism and Christianity, as religious entities, had a clear “parting of ways” at some time before the end of the second century.³ In this model, it is primarily meant that Jews and Christians “parted ways” in their religious identities. The precise date of a split in religious identity is debated: ca. 28-30 with the teachings of Jesus (which divided Jesus’ Palestinian movement from other Palestinian Jews); ca. 50 with the separation of Gentile, Diaspora churches from Jewish churches in Palestine; ca. 70 with the destruction of the Temple⁴; ca. 135 with the exclusion of Jews from Aelia Capitolina and the exchange of Christian

³ The amount of literature discussing a “parting of ways” is immense. The following studies are instrumental in this discussion: James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue* (London: Soncino, 1934); James D.G. Dunn, ed., *Jews and Christians: the parting of the ways, A.D. 70 to 135: the Second Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism, Durham, September, 1989* (Tübingen: Paul Siebeck, 1992), although Dunn seems to contradict the entire notion of “parting” in his conclusion, p. 397-98; James D.G. Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2006); Abraham Cohen, *The Parting of the Ways: Judaism and the Rise of Christianity* (London: Lincolns-Prager, 1954); Richard Bauckham, “The Parting of the Ways: What Happened and Why,” *Studia Theologica* 47 (1993): 135-51; Vincent Martin, *A House Divided: The Parting of the Ways Between Synagogue and Church* (New York: Paulist, 1995); Annette Y. Reed and Adam H. Becker, “Introduction,” in *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Y. Reed (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 1-33.

⁴ This seems to be the most popular option. Thus, “It seems to me that down to the year 70, and especially where Christians who were free from the law attempted to win gentiles to their religion, Christianity disengaged itself as clearly as possible from Judaism and its approach because of an instinct for self-preservation . . .” Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, trans. Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins, ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 238.

leadership from Jews to Gentiles; ca. 200 with the more formalized Jewish and Christian hostilities.⁵ In the traditional model, ancient Judaism and Christianity are well-defined religious entities; where one ends and the other begins is (somewhat) easy to determine. The separation of the two religions is typically centered upon theology or praxis.⁶ In this model Christianity is typically conceived of as a “child” of the “parent” Judaism.⁷ If one can determine what constituted mainline Judaism, or at least construct the common threads that run through various Jewish groups, then one can determine where Christianity strayed from it.⁸

Talmudic material sheds very little light on any possible evidence of interaction. The patristic material is typically apologetic and tendentious. Therefore, the absence of much explicit material stating Jewish-Christian contact is seen as evidence of historical reality. The assumption is: if there is no (or not much) explicit mention of interaction, then there was none. Furthermore, since the work of Harnack, *adversus Iudaeos*

⁵ Paula Fredricksen, “What ‘Parting of the Ways’?: Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City,” in *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Y. Reed (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 35; Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Judaism and Christianity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 6-7; Marcel Simon, *Vetus Israel*, trans. H. McKeating (Portland: Vallentine Mitchell & Co. Ltd., 1996), 67-69.

⁶ E.g., Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways*; Wolfram Kinzig, “‘Non-Separation’: Closeness and Co-operation between Jews and Christians in the Fourth Century,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 45 (1991): 27-29. One would think that scholars would appeal more often to the divergence of what each camp considered to be sacred scripture as evidence of separation.

⁷ E.g., Peter Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbala* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 217-43; Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 1-3 mentions this common belief.

⁸ E.g., see E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1977); L.H. Schiffman, *Who was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1985); Philip S. Alexander, “‘The Parting of the Ways’ from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism,” in *Jews and Christians: the parting of the ways, A.D. 70 to 135: the Second Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism, Durham, September, 1989*, ed. James D.G. Dunn (Tübingen: Paul Siebeck, 1992), 2.

literature⁹ is usually understood as serving two purposes: (1) helping the needs of self-definition in the Christian community; and (2) fending off pagan attacks.¹⁰ Modern scholars seem to emphasize the belief that this literature was used for intramural needs. For example, Miriam Taylor states that the Jews in this literature are “symbolic figures who play an essential role in the communication and development of the church’s own distinctive conception of God’s plans for His chosen people, and in the formation of the church’s cultural identity.”¹¹ The Jews represented are feckless literary constructs, not actual agents who impinge on the vitality of any Christian community. Therefore, this expansive literature is nugatory in understanding Jewish-Christian relations in late antiquity. While in reality, if and when Jews and Christians of various kinds did have contact, it was with vituperation. The “ways” were “parted” for good.

Revisionist Models: Ways that Barely Parted

An understanding of Jewish-Christian relations that is predicated upon a distinct rupture at some point before the end of the second century has come under much criticism. Scholars are now presenting radically different historical reconstructions than

⁹ *Adversus Iudaeos* (*Against the Jews*) is the title given to specific works refuting Jewish beliefs and practices by certain patristic authors (e.g., by Tertullian and Augustine), but is used by scholars to refer to a *genre* among patristic authors used to refute Jewish theology and practice (whether imaginary or actual). Since modern scholarship on this literature is divided over how to understand the Jews being refuted (whether they are real or imaginary), it is unclear if the title for this genre is helpful.

¹⁰ Harnack especially argued that this literature was a defense against pagans. See A. Harnack, *Die Altercatio Simonis et Theophili nebst Untersuchungen über die antijüdische Polemik in der alten Kirche* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1883), 57, 64-65. Cf. A. C. MacGiffert, *Dialogue between a Christian and a Jew* (Marburg, 1883), cited in William Horbury, *Jews and Christians: In Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 202; G. F. Moore, “Christian Writers on Judaism,” *HTR* 14 (1921), 198. For this literature as strengthening self-identity, see esp. David Rokeah, *Jews, Pagans and Christians in Conflict* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1982), esp. 209-12; Judith Lieu, “‘The Parting of the Ways’: Theological Construct or Historical Reality?” *JSNT* 56 (1994): 101-19; David Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, and the Literary Construction of the Jew* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1994); Miriam S. Taylor, *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity: A Critique of the Scholarly Consensus* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995).

¹¹ Taylor, *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity*, 4-5.

their predecessors. Existing cultural, geographical, literary, exegetical, and historical data is being used in an attempt to understand the complex relationship each religion shared. Before an examination of some of the evidence scholars present in support of interaction can take place, it is necessary to turn to the most common critique of the model offered by early twentieth-century scholars.

The most common critique is one of definition: How does one define, and who defines, what constitutes “Jew” and what constitutes “Christian”?¹² Should one define them according to the ecclesiastical historiography, Talmudic literature, or according to modern constructs?¹³ Concluding that Jews and Christians had a clean departure assumes that what was historically “Jewish” and “Christian” is neat and lucid. However, the cultural, religious, and archaeological data presents a more turbid picture. Labels (e.g., “heretics,” “Judaizers,” etc.) were used more for apologetic or polemical purposes than for defining religious identity according to modern, anachronistic social and anthropological models.

Contemporary scholars are now using various metaphors for describing the consanguinity between Jews and Christians in the first few centuries. Whether they are

¹² E.g., Alexander, “‘The Parting of the Ways’,” esp. 4-6; Boyarin, *Dying for God*, esp. 8-10; Boyarin, *Borderlines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 17; Boyarin, “Semantic Differences; or ‘Judaism’/‘Christianity’,” in *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Y. Reed (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 67-74.

¹³ Martin Goodman produces charts that graphically explain various ways of defining their relationship: e.g., according to church historians (like Eusebius), according to rabbinic texts, according to social relationships, according to their self-perception, etc. See his “Modeling the ‘Parting of the Ways’,” in *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Y. Reed (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 119-29. Georg Strecker, “Appendix 1: On the Problem of Jewish Christianity,” in Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, trans. Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins, ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 242-43, notes how many modern scholars still follow ecclesiastical authors with their relegation of certain groups (viz., the “Jewish-Christians”).

conceived of as two ever-widening circles,¹⁴ points on a spectrum,¹⁵ or something else, the traditional *Stammbaum* model is being abandoned. Instead of speaking of a parent-child relationship, there are scholars who speak of the two religions as “siblings.”¹⁶ Scholars have moved in this direction for two main reasons: (1) both were formed from within the matrix of first-century Judaism(s), and (2) both underwent fundamental changes in the fourth century. Each reason will now be explored in turn, and an assessment of each will be given.

(1) Judaism of the first and second centuries has been typically presented in terms that presented Judaism as a monolithic religion. Contemporary scholars speak differently about Judaism: Judaism is best understood as a multi-faceted religion that allows a wide spectrum of belief and practice (hence the common reference to “Judaisms” among certain scholars¹⁷).¹⁸ Late antique Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism both find their roots within the matrix of first and second century Judaism.¹⁹

¹⁴ Alexander, “‘The Parting of the Ways’ from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism,” 2.

¹⁵ Boyarin, *Dying for God*, esp. 8-10; *Borderlines*, 17-22; “Semantic Differences,” 74-85.

¹⁶ Scholars often speak of them as “twins,” “fraternal twins,” or simply “siblings.” E.g., Alan Segal, *Rebecca’s Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); Hayim Perlmutter, *Siblings: Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity at Their Beginnings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989); Gabriele Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought, 300 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991). Conversely, Daniel Boyarin suggests that “the kinship metaphors need to be abandoned” since they imply separation. See his *Dying for God*, 8.

¹⁷ E.g., Jacob Neusner, *Judaism when Christianity Began: A Survey of Belief and Practice* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), esp. 4-6, *et al.* It will be assumed in this dissertation, along with Stuart Miller, that while there are differences, a common core can be seen. Hence, his nomenclature: “complex common Judaism,” rather than “Judaisms.” See Stuart Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique Eretz Israel* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 21-28.

¹⁸ Much archaeological evidence exists which demonstrates Talmudic ideals were not followed by many Jews. E.g., see the varied evidence demonstrated in Erwin Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). This will be discussed later in the chapter.

¹⁹ The debate concerning whether or not a straight line can be drawn from Pharisaism to rabbinic Judaism is well known and cannot be discussed here. Jacob Neusner acknowledges competing “Judaisms,”

(2) Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity underwent change and crystallization in the fourth century. It is now more common to call both religions, “fourth-century” religions.²⁰ The reason for calling them by this label is mostly predicated upon three factors: (1) political changes for Christianity and Judaism,²¹ (2) literary production by Jews and Christians,²² and (3) great, influential thinkers in Judaism and Christianity.²³ Jacob Neusner also sees major changes in some key areas of Jewish thought: “the generative exegetical method, the critical symbol, [and] the teleological doctrine.”²⁴ All

but considers *rabbinic* Judaism “flourishing” even in the first century (e.g., see his *Judaism when Christianity Began*, 6-10). Many others disagree: what would become normative in the late third and fourth centuries is certainly not normative from the first century. However, scholars still speak to some degree of a “proto-rabbinism” before the third century since rabbinism did not come from a vacuum and because rabbinic Judaism would eventually become normative. E.g., see Alexander, “‘The Parting of the Ways’ from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism,” 3; or Gabrielle Boccaccini, *Roots of Rabbinic Judaism: An Intellectual History, from Ezekiel to Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), who believes that the roots of rabbinic Judaism go back centuries, but only crystallize in response to the priestly aristocracy and the fall of the Temple in 70 AD. The period between 70 and 135 is typically called “formative Judaism,” while after 200 C.E. it is called “normative Judaism.” The Council of Jamnia is probably most significant because it coalesced several sects of Judaism (twenty-four according to *y. Sanh.* 10.6 [29c]). That is, they decided that differences no longer led to, or sustained, splinter groups. For more, see Shaye J.D. Cohen, “The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 55 (1984): 27-53; Charles Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Character Formation and Decision Making in Matthew 5-7* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 5, nt. 12.

²⁰ Jacob Neusner is referenced the most for this labeling, and he is the only scholar who spends time explaining what he means by it. See, e.g., Jacob Neusner, *Major Trends in Formative Judaism: Third Series: The Three Stages in the Formation of Judaism* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), 77. For other brief references to this label, see Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue*, 153 (even though he believes the two “parted ways” mostly in the second century, see p. 95); Günter Stemberger, *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land: Palestine in the Fourth Century* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 1; Rosemary R. Ruether, “Judaism and Christianity: Two Fourth-Centuries Religions,” *Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion* 2 (1972): 1-10; Boyarin, “Semantic Differences,” 66.

²¹ E.g., the expulsion of Jews from Jerusalem/Aelia, the change in legal status of Christianity, the dismantling the Jewish leadership from 415-429 (e.g., Codex Theodosianus 16.8.22, 27), etc.

²² E.g., the completion of the Mishnah, various Gemara, the Palestinian Talmud, Christian histories by Eusebius, Sozomen, etc.

²³ E.g., Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, or Rabbi bar Nachmani, Papa, and Ashi, etc.

²⁴ Neusner, *Major Trends in Formative Judaism*, 77-85. The “method” involved a re-reading of the history of Judaism (and its Scriptures); the “symbol” was now the Torah; the “teleology” was a developed understanding of the role of the Messiah. On the other hand, Rosemary R. Ruether, “Judaism

these changed primarily because of the political situation, viz., the change of Christianity to a *religio licita*.²⁵ Therefore, Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism are “siblings” born from the major political, literary, and theological developments of the late fourth and early fifth centuries.

Assessment

Before an examination of the constructive evidence for Jewish-Christian contact is given, it is necessary to respond to the issues raised above. Concerning the two issues at stake when labeling Judaism and Christianity “siblings” and “fourth-century religions,” the following must be said: (1) It will be assumed in this study that the two religions are indeed “siblings.” Jews and Christians could find similarity in their theological foundations (e.g., commitment to Yahweh and His covenantal promises) and praxis (e.g., an emphasis upon Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18). Jews and Christians could also find distinction in their theology (e.g., the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus) and praxis (e.g., formation of separate communities which met on different holy days and the celebration of Eucharist). Of course, the level of similarity and dissimilarity varied from group to group and community to community. Most (if not all) polemical literature

and Christianity,” 1-10, understands Christianity and Judaism as “fourth century” religions because they have radically opposing theological developments. According to Ruether, Christianity was composed of two primary groups of people: monks (who hated sexuality, pleasures, and most-of-all, impure family ties) and bishops (who were rigid, unforgiving people obsessed with orthodoxy and punishing dissidents). Conversely, Judaism was composed of two primary groups of people, rabbis and the common folk, who were both interested in the Spirit of God, community, and thriving family relationships.

²⁵ Neusner defends his labeling of Christianity as a “fourth century religion” the most. He believes that the move of Christianity from an illegal to legal status set in motion several fundamental events in history: (1) the conversion of Constantine; (2) Julian’s plan to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem; (3) the slow “depaganization” (Neusner’s term) of the Empire, which included attacks on pagan temples and synagogues; (4) the Christianization of Palestine; (5) creation of the Talmud of Israel, symbolized by Genesis Rabbah. See Neusner, *Major Trends in Formative Judaism*, 79, 81-85; also see his *Judaism and Christianity in the Age of Constantine* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 14-23.

should be understood primarily as an *intramural* discussion, regardless of the “us and them” vocabulary used. It was indeed a “sibling rivalry.”

(2) A nuanced response must be given to the labeling of Christianity and Judaism as “fourth century” religions. If by “fourth century religion” one means that the fourth century served as a canonical or theological standard for later centuries, that much can be argued in Christianity.²⁶ However, even if canonical authority is given to fourth century Christianity in the minds of patristic authors, it does not mean that modern scholars need to be so convinced.²⁷ For Judaism, understanding the fourth century as having a dominate canonical authority is not so easily demonstrated, especially since the vastly influential Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds were not completed until a few centuries later. If Judaism is labeled as a “fourth century religion” primarily because Christianity became the legal religion, then this methodology is certainly suspect: there is little reason to define a religion according to what happens in other religions.

However, if by “fourth century religions” one means that neither Christianity nor Judaism was generative or theologically substantial until the fourth century, then there is little reason to be convinced. Counterexamples and legitimate responses can be given to

²⁶ This is especially the case with fourth-century Nicæan orthodoxy, which for many patristic authors in late antiquity became the “golden age” of theological formulation. D.H. Williams speaks to fourth century theological primacy: “[T]he post-Constantinian period in accordance with God’s providence played a foundational part in the development of biblical exegesis and the church’s most pivotal teachings. In more vigorous terms, I am claiming the late patristic period functioned as a kind of doctrinal canon by which all subsequent developments of theology were measured up to the present day. The great creeds of the period, the development of Trinitarian and Christological theology, the finalization of the biblical canon, doctrines pertaining to the human soul and being made in the image of God, to the fall and redemption, to justification by faith, and so on, find their first and (in many cases) enduring foothold in this period” (*Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants*, [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999], 136). Yet, it is unclear if this is what scholars intend by the label, “fourth century religion” (esp. since scholars [cf. nt. 20] usually do not explain exactly what they mean by this label).

²⁷ One does not want to commit the same tendency of (especially) eighteenth and nineteenth century scholars who followed too easily the theology promulgated in ecclesiastical historians (e.g., in their relegation or dismissal of “heretical” groups, or in their propensity to present Judaism as legalistic).

all the three factors given above (pp. 7-8). (1) The change of Christianity to a legal religion, and especially its establishment as the state religion when Nicaean theology was held as the standard in 380 (Emperor Theodosius, *CTh* 16.1.2), seem to be the most common reasons for modern scholars' tendency to label both religions as products of the fourth century. Political changes for Christianity and Judaism were certainly greater in the fourth century than in previous centuries, but political changes do not determine religious legitimacy, either for their self-understanding or the historian's reconstruction of them. While political changes can certainly affect and influence a religion, there is little reason to believe that political changes are inherently determinative in defining a religion.

(2) Literary production by Jews and Christians certainly increased in the fourth century. However, the Torah (and Mishnah) and New Testament are the foundational documents of each religion. There is little reason to see fourth century literature as more valuable than any other literature produced by either group. Nearly every century has seen the production of literature, and throughout history each religion has grown and adapted to their socio-political milieus. (3) Influential thinkers in Judaism and Christianity flourished in the fourth century, but like the production of their literature, influential thinkers had already existed for centuries. Enormous theological influence was had by many Christian thinkers, including Paul, Tertullian, and Origen. The schools established by Hillel and Shammai in the first and second centuries were enormously influential for late antique Judaism.

Therefore, this study will operate under the assumption that while both religions shared enormous growth and change in late antiquity, they are both born of first-century

Judaism, and have continued to grow even to this day.²⁸ “The ‘parting of the ways’ between Judaism and Christianity was never complete; there were always, as it were, overgrown tracks running criss-cross between the two roads.”²⁹

The greatest problem for those who want a clean split between the two religions is this: no one knows what a “clear split” would look like. This author can find no scholar who argues for criteria that will help us know when a split is accomplished.³⁰ The lack of a definable goal demonstrates the weakness of their methodological assumptions.

Scholars rightly note that a major problem of believing in a clear split of two religions is the problem of how to define what constitutes either “side” of the split. Available evidence certainly suggests that the historical reality involved more than the ideals of the halakhic regulations,³¹ and more than the presentation of the Jew in *adversus Iudaeos* literature.³² In other words, defining “Jew” and “Christian” is a complex issue, and cannot be simply accommodated by apologetic or polemic language of either side.

²⁸ “Born of first-century Judaism” simply means that their fundamental theology began to diverge, beginning with the messianic claims of the primitive Palestinian Christians. Hence, this chapter is suggesting something very dissimilar than Marcel Simon: “From the Church’s beginnings, and certainly from the time when St. Paul made it conscious of its own independence, it was in conflict with Judaism. The struggle from the outset is a struggle between two distinct religions, and the close ties that existed between them only made their mutual hostility the more implacable.” *Verus Israel*, 135. Simon assumes too much distinction, which he must, to buttress his argument of heated rivalry between the two religions.

²⁹ Wolfram Kinzig, “Jewish and “Judaizing” Eschatologies in Jerome,” *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire*, eds. R. Kalmin and S. Schwartz (Leuven: Peters, 2003), 409-29, quote on p. 426.

³⁰ This problem implicitly plagues such literature, as certainly can be seen in *Jews and Christians: the Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135: the Second Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism, Durham, September, 1989*, edited by James D.G. Dunn. With repeated phrases like, “this could be the decisive moment,” or “this could be the century they split,” one is left with the impression that no one is sure what the final goal would look like.

³¹ Alexander, “‘The Parting of the Ways,’” 4-6.

³² This “available evidence” will be presented and explored later in this study.

This is certainly true of the nebulous terminology often used in this discussion, “Jewish Christians” or “Christian Jews.”³³ This study will not join the debate, nor single out “Jewish Christian” authors or documents³⁴ precisely because there is no way to utilize this nomenclature without violating the same problems mentioned above. This is not to suggest that there were not ethnic Jews who believed in Jesus’ atoning death and resurrection and still followed kashrut and attended a synagogue. However, the common way of understanding this group is by making them some “half-breed” that is unwelcome by either monolithic camp, since they are not “Jewish enough” and because they oppose the “orthodox” Church. Georg Strecker says it well:

The simplistic, dogmatically determined classification of Jewish Christianity as a heresy which confronts the “great church” as a homogenous unit does not do justice to the complex situation existing within legalistic Jewish Christianity . . . Not only is there “significant diversity” within the gentile Christian situation, but the same holds true for Jewish Christianity.³⁵

Instead of arguing that these are the lone rangers of late antiquity, it will be assumed in this chapter that classifying this group as another religious phenomenon

³³ The work on this topic is immense. The classic studies include: Jean Danielou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, trans. John A. Baker (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1964); A.F.J. Klijn and G.J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (Leiden: Brill, 1973); Hans Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity: factional disputes in the early church*, trans. Douglas R. A. Hare (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969); Peter J. Tomson and Doris Lambers-Petry, eds., *The Image of the Judaeo-Christian in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Ray Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988).

³⁴ Patristic literature singles out several “groups”: e.g., Ebionites, Nazorenes, Elchesites, Cerinthians, and Symmachians (see Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*; Pseudo-Clement, *Hom., Recog.*; Eusebius of Caesarea, *HE*; Philastrius, *Liber De Haeresibus*). They, or their predecessors, still exist in the fourth century. Epiphanius (*Panarion* 29.7; PG 41:31B) enumerates four locales: Beroea in Coele-Syria, the Decapolis, Pella, and Kokhaba (cf., Jerome, *de Viris Illustribus* 3, who says Nazarenes live in Beroea). Yet, modern classification of these groups is anachronistic and uncertain. Epiphanius, Eusebius, Jerome and others are not unified in their descriptions or nomenclature. Scholars have long noticed the confusing and multifarious ways authors (esp. Epiphanius) use terms like *Iudaioi* and *Hebraios*. E.g., see N. R. M. de Lange, *Origen and the Jews: studies in Jewish-Christian relations in third-century Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 29-33; Burton L. Visotzky, *Fathers of the World: Essays in Rabbinic and Patristic Literatures* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1995), 134-35.

³⁵ Strecker, “Appendix 1: On the Problem of Jewish Christianity,” 285.

independent of the two monolithic religions called “Judaism” and “Christianity” is an historical façade. Religion in the ancient world just simply did not work like this, and the impossibility of forcing anachronistic classifications is demonstrated in modern scholarship. For over 150 years of scholarship on this topic, there is still no consensus concerning the identity, features, or nomenclature of these groups. Matt Jackson-McCabe agrees: “Despite repeated attempts to clarify the category, contemporary scholars have little or nothing to say with a unified voice regarding the specific features or structural patterns that distinguish Jewish-Christianity as a class from other forms of ancient religion.”³⁶

However, at some point in the discussion concerning how to define who was Jew and who was Christian in antiquity, scholars must be clear about their assumptions and limitations and work within that framework. It will not be helpful to state that all categories are anachronistic (and therefore useless), or all definitions nebulous. Therefore, this study will follow, in general terms, Daniel Boyarin’s linguistic model of “wave theory”: the belief that these two religions experience innovation, convergence and divergence, as a stone makes waves in the water.³⁷ The common “body of water” on which they exist is the cultural and theological foundation both share. Where the *Stammbaum* model attributes commonalities between the “branches” to a common “trunk,” this theory suggests that commonalities exist because the “branches” are still in contact. Developments or changes in either religion are not examined based upon pre-

³⁶ For a history of research and critique of this terminology, see Matt Jackson-McCabe, “What’s in a Name? The Problem of ‘Jewish Christianity’,” in *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Groups and Texts*, ed. Matt Jackson-McCabe (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 7-38, quote on p. 9.

³⁷ Boyarin, *Dying for God*, esp. 8-10; idem, *Borderlines*, 17-22; idem, “Semantic Differences,” 74-85. Literary examples of such convergence and divergence might include the Didache and the Epistle of Barnabas.

determined separation, but rather, upon a common foundation that allows mutation. With a common cultural and religious environment, Judaism and Christianity in late antiquity can be conceived as points on a continuum:

On the one end were the Marcionites . . . who believed that the Hebrew Bible had been written by an inferior God and had no standing for Christians and who completely denied the “Jewishness” of Christianity. On the other were the many Jews for whom Jesus meant nothing. In the middle, however, were many gradations that provided social and cultural mobility from one end of this spectrum to the other.³⁸

In this way, various groups have gradations of membership. “[W]hile both have central members (which can be different at different time and even at the same time for different groups), there will be a semantic (and in this case, therefore, social) chain that connects the most central and salient members to others.”³⁹

The strengths of this model might include: (1) helping us not assume that Judaism and Christianity were remote or distinct entities; (2) helping us conceive of their relationship along more fluid, organic, rather than rigid, categories; (3) allowing for real differences to exist between groups along the spectrum without assuming they share nothing in common; and (4) it assumes that the primary criteria of “gradation” was theology, which is based primarily upon internal evidence (i.e., what they say), not external evidence (i.e., what one says about them).

The weaknesses of this model might include: (1) it is limited in describing groups that might share beliefs of certain groups far removed from each other on the spectrum; (2) similarly, it promotes a false sense of “linear” progression of thought; and (3) a new continuum would need to be established for each region (city?) of the Roman Empire,

³⁸ Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 8.

³⁹ Boyarin, *Borderlines*, 25.

since theological development within each tradition could be radically different depending upon the region. When this chapter (and dissertation) uses any evidence in the discussion of Jewish-Christian relations, such evidence will be considered part of this wide spectrum of religiosity. Furthermore, the use of this model does not preclude the use of secular literature or culture as a possible influence among Jews or Christians.

Evidence of Jewish-Christian Contact

In order to support the claim that religious and social boundaries were fluid between Jews and Christians, it is beneficial to explore evidence from the following areas: (a) Christian literary evidence; (b) secular and religious legislation; (c) aspects of Mediterranean culture; and (d) Jewish literature.⁴⁰ This section will now explore these areas in tandem to present explicit and implicit evidence that demonstrates interaction between Jews and Christians. This evidence is not intended to be exhaustive, but representative. The first evidence to be discussed is *adversus Iudaeos* literature.

Christian Literary Evidence

The amount of scholarly opinion available on *Adversus Iudaeos* literature is immense, and a detailed analysis is unnecessary for the goal of this chapter.⁴¹ Rather, it is only necessary to explore the ways, if any, *adversus Iudaeos* literature can be used as

⁴⁰ Wilken and Stemmerger use some or all of these categories. See Robert Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis and Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 10-12; Stemmerger, *Jews and Christians*, 2-4.

⁴¹ Along with Simon's, *Verus Israel*, see the enormous work (and literature cited therein) of Heinz Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld (1.-11. Jh.)*, 4th ed. (New York: P. Lang, 1999) and Andrea Külzer, *Disputationes Graecae Contra Iudaeos*, ed. Karl Krumbacher (Stuttgart & Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1999). For the historical reality of Jewish-Christian dialogue represented in these texts, see M. Waegeman, "Les traités *adversus Iudeos*: Aspects des relations judéo-chrétiennes dans la monde grec," *Byzantion* 56 (1986): 295-313.

evidence of interaction between Jews and Christians. The chief question that concerns us is this: Should *adversus Iudaeos* literature be dismissed, or can (parts of) it be used to inform us that Jewish interaction with Christians necessitated Christian literary responses? It is first necessary to examine why certain scholars deny the usefulness of this literature.

Adversus Iudaeos Literature is not evidence. As was discussed above, many scholars believe the Jews represented in this literature to be nothing more than rhetorical devices used to serve the needs of the Christian community.⁴² Two modern, representative voices in this camp are those of Miriam Taylor and David Olster. Even though both authors spend most of their energy attempting to debunk the revisionist view (i.e., those who do *not* dismiss this literature), those efforts will not be discussed here. Rather, what is most pressing is how Taylor and Olster answer the question, in what way was *adversus Iudaeos* literature actually used? Miriam Taylor believes that since Jews still existed in the world, viz., Jews who refused to convert to Christianity, Christians struggled with the veracity of their own faith.⁴³ Therefore, Christian leaders created *ex nihilo* a theological “straw-man” Jew to refute. The assumption is that since Christians cannot “compete” theologically in the real world against the real, live Jew, they must conjure theologically-anemic Jews to conquer. In this model, *adversus Iudaeos* literature,

⁴² See n. 10.

⁴³ Taylor, *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity*, 44-45. Taylor’s overall attempt is to disprove what she labels the “conflict theory” of Marcel Simon and many who follow him, not to answer this question. She believes the pendulum has swung too far. In an attempt to give vitality back to the ancient Jewish communities (something Harnack sapped them of), Simon (and others) present Judaism as a belligerent and thriving community in late antiquity. This attempt, she believes, only makes the triumph of Christianity even greater (and increases anti-Semitism), since now Christians have defeated a formidable enemy. Critiques of her assessment will be given below.

especially in the form of the dialogue genre,⁴⁴ is used to bolster the faith of the Christian communities because the mere existence of Jews is a real, direct threat to the Christian faith.

Or on the other hand, David Olster believes *adversus Iudaeos* literature is used to deal with either Pagan persecution, or with political and social defeats.⁴⁵ It was the fall and corruption of Roman culture, and the mass social upheaval across the Roman Empire, and the invasion and attacks of the Arabs that caused Christians to compose fictions of Jews losing in exegetical arguments. Olster claims that Christians were well apt at using these fictive, Jewish constructs because (apparently all) Christian authors were trained within the Greco-Roman educational milieu. They learned in their Greco-Roman education common pagan rhetorical arguments against the Jews.⁴⁶

Furthermore, Olster believes that every major attempt at using this corpus as evidence of interaction fails because of one major flaw: they all follow Harnack's example of separating political from theological.⁴⁷

Both Harnack and his detractors have assumed that the broadest socio-political question that the dialogues addressed was the relationship of Jews and Christians, and this only because it bore directly on the religious significance of the dialogues. And from Parkes to Déroche, scholars have asked the same question: How to read the dialogues so that their historicity can be preserved?⁴⁸

⁴⁴ E.g., *Dialogue with Trypho* (Greek, second century), *Dialogue of Athanasius and Zacchaeus* (Greek, fourth century), *Dialogue of Simon and Theophilus* (Latin, fifth century), and *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila* (Greek, sixth century). See William Varner, *Ancient Jewish-Christian Dialogues: Athanasius and Zacchaeus, Simon and Theophilus, Timothy and Aquila Introductions, Texts and Translations* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press Ltd, 2005).

⁴⁵ E.g., Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 10-20.

⁴⁶ Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 8-12.

⁴⁷ Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 14-21.

⁴⁸ Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 19.

Therefore, according to Olster, reading this literature as motivated by religious concerns clearly misses the point of these texts. To understand the actual use of these texts, one must move beyond the question of religion and explore the political situations in which they arose.

Olster does believe that Jews and Christians had contact: “Jews and Christians debated; Jews and Christians had extensive social contacts.”⁴⁹ Yet, the image of the Jew in the Byzantine authors was constructed “to meet contemporary social needs, and . . . these needs were not inspired by Jewish-Christian theological debate or social relations The Jew was a rhetorical tool to express gentile social and political obsessions.”⁵⁰ The dialogue genre in *adversus Iudaeos* literature offers “views of Byzantine social and psychological reaction to defeat, not a record of Judeo-Christian debate.”⁵¹ Moreover, the Jew in sixth and seventh century *adversus Iudaeos* literature was used not really for religious apologetic, but for political purposes. Even though his study focuses upon sixth and seventh century texts, he still makes broad statements related to all *adversus Iudaeos* literature, regardless of the century of composition. “The ad hominem argument that runs through early Christian literature . . . was the foundation not only of a theological refutation of the Jews but also of a racial vindication and political legitimization of the Christian Romans, their religion, and their Empire in a time of crisis.”⁵² Let us now respond to the views of both Taylor and Olster.

⁴⁹ Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 19.

⁵⁰ Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 19.

⁵¹ Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 13.

⁵² Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 19.

Assessment. Taylor's belief that *the mere existence of Jews* posed an overwhelming threat to the Christian faith is impalpable. This particular major threat to the faith of Christian communities is strikingly absent from patristic literature. For Taylor's argument to be true, one should see in other Christian literature evidence of internal doubt and confusion over the recalcitrance of the Jews. Yet, such evidence does not exist. Taylor would be correct in assuming that the existence of Jews was a threat if only she presented that threat in the form of an attraction to participate in Judaism. In fact, as will be seen below, the lure of the synagogue and Jewish culture (and many pagan cults for that matter) was a threat to many Christian communities. Yet, Jewish culture and religion was a threat to Christian communities (or at least to Christian leaders) because Christians were in direct contact with Jews, not because Christians spoke of the distant, virtual Jew, still alive in the world. While her criticisms of many contemporary scholars (whether in their methodology or conclusions) might have certain merits, her attempt at offering a more probable historical situation for this literature falls short.

Olster's argument that politics should be understood as the impetus for this literature has merely gone too far. In Olster's attempt to refute scholars who have posited only a theological cause for *adversus Iudaeos* literature, he has simply replaced it with a political cause.⁵³ Why must there be only one cause for the rhetoric involved?⁵⁴

⁵³ Though he does not dismiss all language about Jews as mere rhetoric. Andrew S. Jacobs (*Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004]), also appeals to the political motivation of the Christians as the primary lens through which one should read ancient polemical literature. "[T]o be Christian meant, for the first time, to possess power. Power over the Jew, a theological ideal with deep roots in Christian doctrine, came to dignify imperial power over a Christianized universe" (207). No doubt Christians exercised imperial power over the Jew, but is this a significant reason for the polemic vocabulary in Christian literature, even for centuries *before* Christians held such authority?

⁵⁴ This "either-or" mentality (either rhetorical fictions or historical reality) of both Taylor and Olster has been criticized often by scholars. Taylor's work in particular has garnered the most vehement protest. Many reviews of her work (and this common argument) exist: e.g., Wolfram Kinzig, "Review of

Moreover, examining the literature reveals that the primary arguments revolve around exegesis, not politics or mere rhetorical arguments. Olster is certainly correct in believing that Byzantine (and earlier) literature is not strictly based upon actual debates with Jews. In other words, no stenographic record of a live debate exists. Two things need to be said in response: (1) allusions to actual debates or conversations do exist in several documents (shown below); (2) just because this literature is not based upon stenographic records, it does not mean that actual debates or conversations with Jews have not informed the authors who write the literature.

Olster criticizes virtually every contemporary scholar on this subject because they simply cannot get past the “religious significance of the dialogues.”⁵⁵ Yet, Olster ignores the predominant religious nature of every dialogue. Put another way, if one were to take away the religious vocabulary and tone of nearly every document, then barely any literature would be left. For Olster’s argument to be true, then there should exist a consistent argument and style of rhetoric using political jargon because a *topos* is being employed in *adversus Iudaeos* literature. Yet, such evidence does not exist. Even if one grants that religion intertwined with civic life in the ancient world, there is no reason for authors of *adversus Iudaeos* literature to argue to such a large extent over exegesis. Had Olster explored the many ways that Jewish communities thrived alongside Christian communities, rather than focusing merely on Arab invasions and the fall of Rome, he

Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity,” *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 48 (1997): 643-49; James Paget, “Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity,” *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 1 (1997): 195-225; for some of the weaknesses in Olster’s argument, see Cyril Mango, “Roman Defeat, Christian Response, and the Literary Construction of the Jew: Review,” *Catholic Historical Review* 81, no 4 (1995): 638-39.

⁵⁵ Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 19.

would have hopefully seen how the political and social situation in late antique Judaism was one of great opportunity to interact with Jews.

Olster then continues a commonly-held view amongst those who believe the Jews to be merely rhetorical fictions: “What the debate whether early Christian authors were anti-Judaic or anti-Semitic reveals is how modern Christian scholars, like the authors of the anti-Jewish dialogues, have used the image of the Jew to pursue agendas at once social, political and religious.”⁵⁶ Therefore, according to Olster, if one speaks of Jewish vitality, interaction, or even Jewish persecution of Christians,⁵⁷ this person is probably an anti-Semite. Anti-Semitism is odious and should be rejected. Yet, if evidence leads one to believe in interaction, Jewish vitality, etc., then surely this conclusion must not be condemned as being motivated merely by anti-Semitism.

Adversus Iudaeos Literature is evidence. Foremost, the most natural questions concerning this corpus are: why speak *to pagans* about the folly of their philosophies and religions by refuting Jews?⁵⁸ How can patristic authors speak of specific exegetical and behavioral practices if no Jewish influence was experienced in that community?⁵⁹ Moreover, there seems to be no other pagan or religious literature that consistently speaks against others, or is used merely for the community who reads such literature, by using a

⁵⁶ Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 20.

⁵⁷ Granted, explicit references to Jewish persecution are fewer than references to Christian persecution. An example of Jewish persecution of Christians is seen in the *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*. The Jewish author speaks explicitly of Jacob’s beating Christians, burning them alive, etc. (89). *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, ed. G Nathanael Bonwetsch, *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, Philologisch-historische Klasse, n.s. 13 (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1970); in Latin, idem., (Berlin: Weidmann, 1910). For more, see Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 161.

⁵⁸ See n. 10.

⁵⁹ For a similar argument see e.g., Simon, *Verus Israel*, 138; Vincent Déroche, “La polémique anti-judaïque au VI^e et au VII^e siècle: Un memento inédit, les *Képhalaia*,” *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991): 275-311.

“straw man” caricature conjured from nowhere.⁶⁰ The presence, persistence, and multiple genres of this literature must be addressed.

Moreover, the common assumption among scholars like Taylor and Olster that this literature is all the same (whether in form, audience, rhetoric, *topos*) cannot be sustained. While commonalities do exist, there is no one genre or argument common to all. From the Epistle to Barnabas (ca. 120) to Διάλεξις κατὰ Ἰουδαίῳν (ca. eighth or ninth cent.),⁶¹ no single argument is used. Whether it is in epistolary (e.g., Barnabas), sermonic (e.g., Augustine, Aphrahat, John Chrysostom), dialogical (e.g., *Trypho*, *Timothy and Aquila*, *Athanasius and Zacchaeus*), exegetical (e.g., Origen, Tertullian), poetic (e.g., Ephraim), or apologetic form (e.g., Eusebius), *adversus Iudaeos* literature does not fit one *topos* or genre. This is even more striking when one looks at the vast differences in provenance, language, socio-political situation, and time each document was written.

Where one does find commonality in this literature, it is typically centered upon three issues: (1) Christology, (2) rejection and criticism of the ritual law, since it has been abrogated with the coming of the new covenant, and (3) the rejection of the Jews and the welcoming of the Gentiles.⁶² At all times, the primary foundation of the debate rests upon exegesis. To demonstrate the necessary coming of the Messiah in Jesus, the abrogation of the ritual law, and the enormous growth of a Gentile church, every

⁶⁰ Of course Jews (and Christians) are often caricatured and dismissed as “obviously” obtuse and purblind to the true meaning of Scripture. This chapter is not arguing for particular instances of this; it is arguing against an overall “straw-man” *fiction*. This chapter is further opposing the belief that this “fiction” was created from nowhere to combat Jews whom Christians supposedly did not even have serious contact with in the first place.

⁶¹ “Dialogue or Debate with the Jews,” which is also cited by its Latin title, *Adversus Iudaeos Disputatio*; PG 89:1203-72. Of course, this is no longer technically in “late antiquity,” but the point here is simple and necessary. For several centuries, arguments against Jews varied.

⁶² Simon, *Verus Israel*, 156-78; Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 13.

Christian author appeals to the Hebrew Scriptures. Even if socio-political situations gave rise to certain writings across the Roman Empire, the refutation given is religious in nature.

Even though the primary concern in this chapter is how *adversus Iudaeos* literature is directed towards Jews, it is important to note that exegetical arguments changed depending upon the supposed audience. Using the Bible to prove one's point differs widely from Jewish audiences to Gentile audiences. Wilken correctly notes that "though the Scriptures were employed in works directed to the Greeks, they are not nearly so central to the argument and are handled in a considerably different manner."⁶³ This can be noticed easily in works such as Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*. Trypho accuses Christians of living as the heathen, since they do not keep most of the rituals of the Jews (e.g., 10). Justin's argument focuses upon the fact that Christians do not break Roman or Jewish law. Moreover, Jews did not know the Scriptures because they were spiritually blind (e.g., 9:1). But when Justin targets the Jews in particular, his arguments cover several topics (11 ff.): circumcision, Sabbath, the descent of the Spirit on Jesus, Christ's death and resurrection, etc.⁶⁴ The difference in method and content can also be seen in Eusebius' works, the *Demonstratio* (to Jews) and his *Preparatio Evangelica* (to Gentiles). The difference can be seen in Augustine's works, e.g., *Adversus Iudaeos* and *De Civitate Dei* I-X.

⁶³ Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 13.

⁶⁴ Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 14-15. Even if Justin's work is a rhetorical literary production, his deliberate switch from Gentile to Jewish arguments is noticeable. Real Jewish influences can sometimes be seen in later dialogues. See William Varner, *Ancient Jewish-Christian dialogues: Athanasius and Zacchaeus, Simon and Theophilus, Timothy and Aquila: introductions, texts, and translations* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 2004).

In order to counter the arguments that Jesus did not fulfill many of the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament (amongst other reasons), Christians used a spiritual or allegorical exegetical “method.”⁶⁵ It is important to note that Christians did not create this exegetical practice *ex nihilo*. Jewish exegetes were already reading their Scriptures this way. For example, Origen tells Celsus not to accept “certain allegorical and typical methods of interpretation” from the Jews because their use of these “methods” led to false cosmogony and law.⁶⁶ While the use of such methods might be held in common by various Christian authors, they usually differed widely in their provenance and reason for writing. A few examples will demonstrate the point.

In Alexandria Origen wrote in part against Jewish interpretations of Scripture in *De principiis*.⁶⁷ In Carthage Tertullian wrote *Adversus Iudaeos*, supposedly written to clarify points that were made in a debate between a Christian and a Jewish proselyte which lasted all day and had gotten out of control (1.1).⁶⁸ In Hippo Regius Augustine wrote against Jews in *Adversus Iudaeos* because Jews were attacking Christians on the grounds that Christians were not following the law but still appealing to the Old Testament.⁶⁹ In Caesarea (Maritima) Eusebius wrote a huge apology against the Jews,

⁶⁵ Patristic commentators certainly used other “methods,” but this one was usually used when responding to Jewish counter-exegesis. Quotations (e.g., “methods”) are used because modern, systematic methodologies are anachronistic for authors in late antiquity. For an overview of the role of spiritual exegesis, see John J. O’Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); for a comprehensive overview of patristic exegesis, see Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity*, with special contributions by various scholars, 2 vols. (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 2004).

⁶⁶ *Contra Celsus* 6.29 (ANF 4, 586).

⁶⁷ The following is based on Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 15-21.

⁶⁸ 1.1 (ANF 3, 151).

⁶⁹ Also, cf. *Epistle* 196, *Ad Ascellicum*.

the *Demonstratio Evangelica*, also arguing for the Christian right to hold on to the Old Testament without following all its rituals.⁷⁰ In Antioch John Chrysostom preached vehemently against Christians who were participating in many Jewish rituals and festivals. In Persia Aphrahat wrote against the Jews in similar ways: abrogation of Jewish rituals and law, Christology, etc. He also spoke against particular issues in his community, viz., how Jews take offense at Christian asceticism.⁷¹ The anonymous (Jewish) author of *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* (ca. seventh cent.) demonstrates intimate knowledge of Jewish argumentation, social activities, intramural debates among Jews, and affinities with Jewish apocalypticism.⁷² This short survey demonstrates that across the Roman Empire (e.g., Carthage, Alexandria, Antioch, Caesarea) and beyond (e.g., Persia), Christians often demonstrated knowledge of some Jewish practices or interpretations in a local situation. Moreover, exegesis is the dominant method used when countering (perceived) Jewish arguments. Therefore, examining *adversus Iudaeos* literature demonstrates that it is much more diverse than some scholars like to suggest. Even though commonalities exist, the intricacies of the arguments often changed according to the needs of the author. “The discussions varied from place to place and author to author.”⁷³

Finally, this literature was aiming for many types of audiences: Christian, Greek, Roman, and Jewish. When considering those works aimed “at Jews,” the goal is not to

⁷⁰ It is also called *Apologia*. Only ten and half of twenty books are extant.

⁷¹ *Demonstration* 18.1; cf. 22.25.

⁷² See Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 160-61.

⁷³ Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 37.

demonstrate the historicity of the Jew that is presented in the work or to demonstrate this literature was written to Jews. Simon is correct:

Primarily, it is not even a matter of deciding whether these writings were actually addressed to Jews. Put in this way, the question is almost unanswerable. The real question to decide is whether or not the Judaism with which these works come to grips represents a real threat to the Church . . . It is the devices of the Jews and the drawing power of the synagogue that they are designed to meet.⁷⁴

It is necessary to perorate the discussion thus far. This section is attempting to reconstruct the most probable historical situation that would give rise to this literature. It should be assumed that this literature did help Christians distinguish themselves from their Jewish neighbors, and thus aid them in their sense of having faith in the “right” religion. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this is primarily, or only, for internal use *without influence from actual contact with Jews*. That is, overall, these documents should not be seen as rhetorical fictions created to serve the needs of Christian communities. If Christians had no contact with Jews, they would have no need to distinguish themselves.

The evidence thus far has demonstrated that this literature (1) is not limited to genre, style, geography, or content; (2) is not written to paint a picture of what an historical “Jew” would be; (3) is not written merely, or predominately, to answer political situations. Rather, this chapter thus far has argued that *adversus Iudaeos* literature should not be dismissed as mere fictions and thus historically irrelevant because (1) its mere existence for centuries across many languages and provenances makes no sense if Jewish interaction was not occurring; (2) though in general agreement, their arguments were nuanced and sometimes quite different depending upon the need; (3) their arguments

⁷⁴ Simon, *Verus Israel*, 145.

were almost exclusively dependent upon religious, especially exegetical, issues. The most likely historical situation for the Christian need to counteract Jewish arguments is the existence, and vitality, of Jewish congregations and objections to Christian beliefs. This argument will be further buttressed in the remainder of this chapter.

Revisionist scholars rightly notice that mining the literature itself for evidence of Jewish-Christian interaction is not enough.⁷⁵ “The literary works dealing with Judaism, however, are not sufficient evidence for the interaction of Jews and Christians during the period.”⁷⁶ Let us now examine many other areas in ancient literature that demonstrate contact between Christians and Jews.

Catechism. Catechism shares features with *adversus Iudaeos* literature (e.g., different locales and purposes with common exegesis). A few examples from catechetical instruction will demonstrate the point.⁷⁷ Gregory of Nyssa believes that τῆς κατηχήσεως λόγος is the duty of church leaders.⁷⁸ While it is the teaching that saves those who hear it, the manner of the instruction is not the same for each situation. The teaching must adapt the person or group’s background so as to meet the specific needs of the audience.⁷⁹ Nyssa’s catechesis begins by asking questions that lead to supporting an

⁷⁵ Simon, *Verus Israel*, 138; Fredricksen, “What ‘Parting of the Ways’?”, 36-37.

⁷⁶ Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 25.

⁷⁷ Catechetical procedures in the first three centuries is difficult to demonstrate due to the dearth of available evidence. This is probably because catechesis was given and received orally and by memory (e.g., Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, tells his students throughout “to listen” and “memorize this faith.”) For more on catechism, see Michel Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate: The First Six Centuries* (New York: Sadlier, 1979); Thomas M. Finn, *From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997); Gary G. Porton, *The Stranger Within Your Gates: Converts and Conversion in Rabbinic Literature* (Chicago: University Press, 1994).

⁷⁸ *Address on Religious Instruction*, preface (The title is Λογος κατηχήτικος, PG 45:1).

⁷⁹ Cf. (Ps.) Hippolytus’ *Apostolic Tradition*, 15-16.

argument. Supporting arguments are crucial because the audience may have faulty understandings of God and tradition which need to be disabused (e.g., the Greek's polytheism or the Jew's disbelief in the only begotten Son). Similarly, Cyril of Jerusalem notices the differences in arguments needed to persuade Greeks and Jews.⁸⁰ Athanasius in Alexandria also separated his arguments against the Jews and the pagans (Jews: concerning Jesus as the suffering, dying, and rising Messiah; Gentiles: concerning the foolishness of the cross and God becoming human).⁸¹ Basil of Caesarea bifurcated his arguments appropriately (Jews: concerning the *imago dei* and the unity of God; Gentiles: concerning the unity of God vs. polytheism).⁸² In all these cases, the anti-Jewish arguments are deliberately formed in contradistinction from the Gentiles. It is important to remember that this literature was written for actual catechumens, not to bolster Christian feelings of superiority because imaginary Jews or Gentiles were being corrected. This literature demonstrates that Christian leaders had practice with and

⁸⁰ E.g., *Catechetical Lectures* 13.37; 4.2; 12.27-29 (PG 33); or his *Pascal Homily* 4.4. The following is based on Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 23-25.

⁸¹ *Oratio De incarnatione Verbi*, Jews: 33-40; Gentiles: 41-56 (beginning in PG 25:152D).

⁸² E.g., *Homiliae in Hexaemeron* 9.6 (beginning in PG 29b:204).

precedent for Jewish converts and their arguments.⁸³ Moreover, the arguments all have something to do with the Jewish misunderstanding of their own Scriptures.⁸⁴

Liturgy. Though Christian liturgy took on a different form and style in the later centuries of the Roman Empire, its roots have always been in Judaism.⁸⁵ The move from synagogal liturgy, prayer, lectionary readings, *et al.* to Christian manifestations is natural: the earliest Christians were all Jews. Synagogal leadership under head leaders (e.g., *archisynagogue*, elder, *et al.*) would carry over naturally into the nascent church, as can be seen in the New Testament.⁸⁶ The Church's struggle to distinguish itself while holding onto certain Jewish practices and beliefs can be seen in the church's struggle over

⁸³ There are references to conversion on both sides spread throughout the literature. E.g., Jerome writes of Serapion mentioning a Domnus, who went to the side of the Jews during persecution (*de Viris Illustribus* 41); In Canon 2 of Gregory of Nyssa's canons to St. Letoïus, he says that those who willfully turn to Judaism are to be disallowed communion (The Canonical Epistle of St. Gregory); Gennadius of Massilia (fifth cent.) tells us that Isaac, a converted Jew, wrote two works: *On the Holy Trinity* and *On the Incarnation of the Lord* (*de Viris Illustribus* 26); Jerome says that there were plenty of Jewish men, especially in Jerusalem, who have converted to Christianity (*Apologia Adversus Libros Rufini*, 2.33); *Codex Justinianus* 1.7.1 says that Christians who convert to Judaism will have their property confiscated; Socrates Scholasticus, *HE*, 21, speaks of a converted Jew who was ambitious of being made bishop and still held too much of his Jewish practices.

⁸⁴ It is important to note again that this chapter is not arguing that Christians were always—or ever—right in their criticism of Jewish exegesis. Rather, two facts are being emphasized: Christians believed their responses to Jews were based upon exegesis, not politics, and Christians had some actual knowledge of Jewish counterarguments. Surely both Christians and Jews learned about each other's objections because of both sides gaining “converts.” This situation is implied in Ignatius' letter to the Philadelphians: “But if anyone interprets Judaism to you, do not listen to him. For it is better to hear about Christianity from a man who is circumcised than about Judaism from one who is not” (6.1; Cyril Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers* [New York: Rockefeller, 1996], 109).

⁸⁵ For more, see W.O.E. Oesterley, *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy* (Gloucester: P. Smith, 1965); P. Sigal, “Early Christian and Rabbinic Liturgical Affinities,” *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 63-90; Eugene J. Fisher, ed., *The Jewish Roots of Christian liturgy* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990); G. Kretschmar, “Early Christian Liturgy in the Light of Contemporary Historical Research,” *Studia Liturgica* 16 (1986-87): 31-53; Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman, eds., *The Making of Jewish and Christian Worship* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1991); Paul F. Bradshaw, “The Search for the Origins of Christian Liturgy: Some Methodological Reflections,” *Studia Liturgica* 17 (1987): 26-34.

⁸⁶ E.g., “chief synagogue leaders”: Acts 13:15; “elders”: 1 Tim. 5:1, 17, 19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1, 5; 2 John 1:1; “overseers”: Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2. For more on Christian use of Jewish models of leadership, see J.T. Burthcheall, *From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Officers in the Earliest Christian Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

its Scripture and its liturgy.⁸⁷ As early as the *Didache*, Christian responses to, and incorporation of, Jewish *halakhah* and liturgy can be seen. Christians must fast on different days than the Jews, pray different prayers than the Jews, but pray three times a day like Jews do.⁸⁸ The Model Prayer (Matt 6:9-15; Lk 11:2-4), recited by Christians since the first century, shares similar emphases to the ancient Jewish liturgical prayers (maybe specifically to the *Kaddish*).⁸⁹ Christian prayers in late antiquity often mimic the prayers (*tephillah*) of the Jews.⁹⁰ Scholars have long noted that *The Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Didascalia*, and *Apostolic Constitutions* 7-8 demonstrate strong affinities with Jewish practices and beliefs (e.g., ethical behavior, ordination of priests, baptismal procedures, prayer forms [*piyyut*], *et al.*; cf. the poetical sermons [*Kontakion*] of Romanos in the

⁸⁷ G. Kretschmar, "Die Kirche aus Juden und Heiden," in *Juden und Christen in der Antike*, eds. J. van Amersfoort and J. van Oort (Kampen: Kok, 1990), 9-43, speaks of Christian's use of liturgy as a mark of delineation.

⁸⁸ *Didache* 8; cf. Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10; Epiphanius, *Adv. Haer.* 29.9; *m. Ber.* 4:1.

⁸⁹ One cannot know if the *Kaddish* existed in the first century, nor can one be certain that Jesus' prayer parallels the *Kaddish* sufficiently to show close ties. This is why it can only be said that certain emphases are common with the rabbinic *amidah*. Thus, Sigal, "Early Christian and Rabbinic Liturgical Affinities," 73-75.

⁹⁰ For more, see C. Di Sante, *Jewish Prayer: The Origins of Christian Liturgy* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1991); R.T. Beckwith, "The Daily and Weekly Worship of the Primitive Church in Relation to Its Jewish Antecedents," in *Influences juives sur le culte chrétien*, eds., *et al.*, R.T. Beckwith (Leuven: Abbaye du Mont César, 1981), 89-122. For an overview of *piyyutim*, see Jefim Schirmann, "Hebrew Liturgical Poetry and Christian Hymnology," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* (1953):123-61.

fifth-sixth centuries).⁹¹ From the dating of Easter to 14/15 Nisan⁹² to the physical direction one prayed, Jewish influence can be seen. “Set times and fasts, liturgical structures and lections, forms of prayer and praise, both private and communal, again and again show that Jewish precedent was fundamental in setting the pattern of Christian worship.”⁹³

Allusions in Origen, Jerome, and Eusebius. Scholarship concerning Jewish influence on Christian authors is immense and complex.⁹⁴ There are literary allusions to

⁹¹ For commonalities in the early centuries, see Sigal, “Early Christian and Rabbinic Liturgical Affinities,” 64-73. For examples in late antiquity, see Z. Malachi, “Jewish and Christian Liturgical Poetry: Mutual Influences in the First Four Centuries,” *Augustinianum* 28 (1988): 237-48. For a detailed look at the often-cited *Apostolic Constitutions*, see D.A. Fiensy, *Prayers Alleged to Be Jewish: An Examination of the Constitutiones Apostolorum* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985). Scholars have also long noted the many pseudepigraphal works that were influenced by Judaism, or upon a Jewish *ur-text* (e.g., *First and Second Enoch*, *Jubilees*, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *Apocalypse of Elijah*, and the *Pseudo-Clementine literature*, *et al.*). To see how Christians copied and promulgated such texts, see M.A. Knibb, “Christian Adoption and Transmission of Jewish Pseudepigrapha: The Case of 1 Enoch,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Periods* 32 (2001): 396-415.

⁹² Eusebius records a letter that Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, wrote concerning how the bishops of Asia practiced Easter on Passover because many of the original disciples (who lived and/or died in his region) practiced it thus: “All these kept the fourteenth day of the passover according to the gospel, never swerving, but following according to the rule of faith (κανὼνα τῆς πίστεως)” (*HE* 5.24.6 [LCL 153, 507 (Lake)]). Celebrating the Christian Pasch on Passover is also attested in Cilicia (Athanasius, *Ad Afros* 2) and Syria (Socrates *HE* 5.22). Boyarin posits that Christians would probably have to get the new date every year from the Jews since the date was not static (*Dying for God*, 14).

⁹³ Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70-170* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 222-57, quote on p. 229.

⁹⁴ Historically, scholars have appealed to Aphrahat and Ephraim the Syrian as two clear examples of Jewish contact. However, determining explicit dependence is impossible. For Aphrahat, see Jacob Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: the Christian-Jewish argument in fourth-century Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 1971). Dependence (perhaps not on contemporaneous Judaism) on Jewish exegesis can be seen in Ephraim. See Sten Hidal, *Interpretatio Syriaca: die Kommentare des Heiligen Ephräm des Syrers zu Genesis und Exodus mit besonderer Berücksichtigung ihrer auslegungsgeschichtlichen Stellung* (Lund: Gleerup, 1974); Trygve Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11 in the genuine hymns of Ephrem the Syrian: with particular reference to the influence of Jewish exegetical tradition* (Lund: LiberLäromedel/Gleerup, 1978). For Jewish influence on Syrian authors (esp. Theodore of Mopsuestia) see Abraham Levene, *The early Syrian fathers on Genesis. From a Syriac ms. on the Pentateuch in the Mingana collection* (London: Taylor's Foreign Press, 1951); idem, “Pentateuchal Exegesis in Early Syriac and Rabbinic Sources,” *Studia Patristica* 1 (1957): 484-91. For an overview of scholarly research on this topic, see Judith Baskin, “Rabbinic-Patristic Contact in Late Antiquity: A Bibliographic Reappraisal,” in *Studies in Judaism and its Greco-Roman Context* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 53-80.

dialogue or interaction between Jews and Christians among prominent Christian exegetes. The following section will look briefly at three of them: Origen, Jerome, and Eusebius.⁹⁵

The polyglot Origen (ca. 185-254 in Alexandria) speaks of specific dialogues which he had with Jews on a few occasions. His leadership at the catechetical school in Alexandria brought him in contact with the enormous Jewish population.⁹⁶ Not only Origen, but his congregation was apparently in close contact with the Jews: he fumes over Christians who celebrate with the Jews on Saturday and then participate in church on Sunday.⁹⁷ He has some knowledge of what Jews say to their proselytes during Jewish “catechism.”⁹⁸ He is aware of their exegetical arguments against Christians, saying things like: “And I remember on one occasion, at a disputation held with certain Jews

⁹⁵ Origen, Jerome, and Eusebius are mentioned because their explicit references are useful for our discussion. Also see Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 28-30. Jerome, Origen, Rufinus, and Augustine are examined in Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews*, 56-100, though Jacobs spends most of his time on Jerome. Jacobs understands all polemic language as rhetoric for the Christian view that Christians were the dominant group in the Roman Empire. Jacobs answer to the seeming paradox (manifested well in Jerome, of using Jews for knowledge, while simultaneously defaming Jews) by suggesting that Jerome is merely practicing academic imperialism. “Jerome’s literary production was an academic discourse of power, suited to the ideological turn of the post-Constantinian Christian empire” (60). It is unclear how Jerome’s use of the Jews for knowledge demonstrates a Christian’s superiority to them.

⁹⁶ For a detailed discussion of Origen’s knowledge of Jewish exegesis and contemporaneous customs, see De Lange, *Origen and the Jews*; Gustave Bardy, “Les traditions juives dans l’oeuvre d’Origène,” *Revue Biblique* 34 (1925): 217-52. A. McGuckin, “Origen on the Jews,” in *Recent Studies in Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 23-36, believes that “it may well be the case that the significance of the points of convergence there are between Origen and the rabbinic interpreters are really provided, by his day, more from the shared Hellenistic hermeneutical method and the partially shared sacred text than from any real ecumenical connection” (32). Yet, this section will primarily use examples that speak of dialogue, rather than examining possible exegetical influence. For a discussion of the Christian community in Alexandria at the time of Origen, see Attila Jakab, “Alexandria et sa communauté chrétienne à l’époque d’Origène,” in *8th International Colloquium for Origen Studies* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 93-104.

⁹⁷ *Homily on Leviticus*, 5.8.

⁹⁸ See *Contra Celsus*, 2.3-4. He says things like, “. . . who makes this Jew of his address his fellow-citizen and the Israelite-like converts in the following manner . . .” (3) or “The Jew, then, continues his address to converts from his own nation thus . . .” (4) (ANF 4, 430-31).

who were reputed learned men, having employed the following argument in the presence of many judges.”⁹⁹ Surely this is more than mere prosopopeia. Or: “Now, whether we are conversing with the Jews, or are alone with ourselves, we know of only one and the same God.”¹⁰⁰ Concerning if the “Son of God” was prophesied in the Old Testament:

A Jew, however, would not admit that any prophet used the expression, “The ‘Son of God’ will come;” for the term which they employ is, “The ‘Christ of God’ will come.” And many a time indeed do they directly interrogate us about the “Son of God,” saying that no such being exists, or was made the subject of prophecy.¹⁰¹

Origen also tells Julius Africanus (chronographer and student at the Alexandrian catechetical school) that Origen’s text-critical work on Old Testament documents has been fruitful in discovering several minor errors in the copies that the churches have. As a result, “when we notice such things, we are forthwith to reject as spurious the copies in use in our Churches, and enjoin the brotherhood to put away the sacred books current among them, and to coax the Jews, and persuade them to give us copies which shall be un-tampered with, and free from forgery!”¹⁰² Christians are to go to the Jews for “un-tampered” copies of the Old Testament. Later in the same document, Origen tells Africanus that he interested in comparing the Hebrew with the LXX:

And I make it my endeavor not to be ignorant of their various readings, lest in my debates with the Jews [πρὸς Ἰουδαίους διαλεγόμενοι] I should quote to them what is not found in their copies, and that I may make some use of what is found there, even although it should not be in our Scriptures. For if we are so prepared for them in our discussions, they will not, as is their manner, scornfully laugh at

⁹⁹ *Contra Celsus* 1.45 (ANF 4, 415); cf. *Contra Celsus* 2.29; 2.54.

¹⁰⁰ *Contra Celsus* 6.29 (ANF 4, 586).

¹⁰¹ *Contra Celsus* 1.49 (ANF 4, 418). Celsus thinks that the controversy between Jews and Christians is a waste of time, since both believe that God would send a Savior, but they simply disagree over when the Savior would come (*Contra Celsus* 3.1).

¹⁰² *Epistle to Africanus* 4 (ANF 4, 387).

Gentile believers for their ignorance of the true reading as they have them.¹⁰³

Origen is assuming that not only he shares some scholarly relationship with other educated Jews, but that Christians in the churches have some contact with the Jews and are even being swayed by Jewish teachers. Origen wished the Jews did not know their Scripture as well as Christians do since the Jews' arguments influence the "little faith of unstable and temporary believers."¹⁰⁴ He knew of Jewish converts, who call themselves "Ebionites," who believe in Jesus and have not deserted the law of their fathers.¹⁰⁵ In Origen's debates ("controversies") with the Jews, he wants to know all the variants to help buttress his arguments.¹⁰⁶ It is also important to Origen that the Jews do not "laugh at Gentile believers."¹⁰⁷

Another exegete and translator of the Bible, Jerome (ca. 347-420), often alludes to interaction with Jews.¹⁰⁸ Certain Jews studied the New Testament such that they could

¹⁰³ *Epistle to Africanus* 5 (ANF 4, 387; PG 11:60).

¹⁰⁴ *Contra Celsus* 1.49 (ANF 4, 418).

¹⁰⁵ *Contra Celsus* 2.1 (ANF 4, 429).

¹⁰⁶ *Epistle to Africanus* 5 (ANF 4, 387); Jerome supports this: *Ap. Adv. Lib. Ruf.*, 2.36.

¹⁰⁷ *Epistle to Africanus* 5 (ANF 4, 387).

¹⁰⁸ Many of Jerome's comments concerning the Jews seem to be modeled off of images of the Pharisees in the New Testament. See Günter Stemberger, "Hieronymus und die Juden seiner Zeit," in *Begegnungen zwischen Christentum und Judentum in Antike und Mittelalter*, eds. Detrich-Alex Koch and H. Lichtenberger (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 347-364. Scholarship has given both negative and positive appraisal's of Jerome's use of Hebrew (and perhaps his interaction with actual Jews). For an overview of how scholars have appraised Jerome's knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish conventions, see Michael Graves, *Jerome's Hebrew Philology: A Study Based on his Commentary on Jeremiah* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), esp. 1-12. Graves states that "although Jerome owed his philological method to the pagan grammarians, he learned the Hebrew language itself primarily from Jewish sources. The nature of these sources, and Jerome's access to them, also had a profound impact on his Hebrew scholarship" (194). The following examples given above are based upon Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 28-30, 51-53.

locate a passage more quickly than Christians.¹⁰⁹ Jerome hires a Jew from the synagogue to teach him Hebrew at night.¹¹⁰ He knows of “Jews who believe in Christ,” and who want to be “both Jews and Christians.” They believe in Christ and keep all the commandments of the Law.¹¹¹ Jerome defends his use of a Jewish doctent by drawing attention to the fact that other Christian exegetes had done the same:

Origen himself, and Clement and Eusebius, and many others, when they are discussing scriptural points, and wish to have Jewish authority for what they say, write: “A Hebrew stated this to me,” or “I heard from a Hebrew,” or, “That is the opinion of the Hebrews.” Origen certainly speaks of the Patriarch Huillus who was his contemporary . . . and he makes no scruple of inserting in his commentaries on the Hebrew Scriptures the views of the Hebrew teachers.¹¹²

He seems to be aware of certain Jewish exegetical arguments against the Christians.¹¹³ Jerome is ridiculed for being too influenced by the Jews since Jerome’s belief about the resurrection seems to be predicated upon Jewish conceptions of resurrection.¹¹⁴ Jerome’s knowledge of contemporaneous Judaism is certainly linked with some anti-Semitic tendencies.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ *Commentariorum in Isaiam* 11.1 (PL 24.561).

¹¹⁰ His teacher was Baranina. See *Epistle* 84; *Apologia Adversus Libri Rufinum* 2.12 (PL 23:435-36).

¹¹¹ *De situ et nominibus locorum Hebraicorum* 112 (PL 23.888C).

¹¹² *Adversus Rufinum* 1.13 (NPNF2 3, 489-90).

¹¹³ *Apologia Adversus Libri Rufinum* 2.33; *Commentariorum in Habacuc* 2.3.3 (CCL 76A:623).

¹¹⁴ *Adversus Rufinum* 1.7; cf. 1.30. For a detailed study of rabbinic and some non-rabbinic (viz., Josephus) influence on Jerome’s exegesis, see Jay Braverman, *Jerome’s commentary on Daniel: a study of comparative Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Hebrew Bible* (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1978).

¹¹⁵ E.g., see Ralph Hennings, “Rabbinisches und Antijüdisches bei Hieronymus E. 121, 10,” in *Christliche Exegese zwischen Nicaea und Chalcedon*, ed. J. van Oort and U. Wickert (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992), 49-71.

Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 265-340) directly quotes major and minor Jewish authors (e.g., Flavius Josephus, Philo of Alexandria, Pseudo-Aristeas, Aristobulus, Artapanus, Eupolemus, *et al.*).¹¹⁶ Eusebius not only knows past Jewish authors, he mentions occasions of contact with contemporaneous Jews (e.g., he heard a Jew (Ezechias) commenting on Isaiah 7:10-17,¹¹⁷ and he witnessed Jewish attacks on Jesus' divinity¹¹⁸). Even though Eusebius does not have many explicit mentions of contemporaneous Jews, Eusebius' overall silence is to be expected in apologetic works.¹¹⁹ Even still, his overall tenor toward Jews is much more cordial than other authors.¹²⁰ The major city of Caesarea had a mixed population, including a strong Jewish presence.¹²¹ Not only were major cities like Caesarea cosmopolitan, but most small villages and towns had mixed populations. Eusebius mentions hundreds of towns, villages, and cities by name. For many of the locations, he even tells us what constitutes the population, whether all Christian, Jewish, or Samaritan. It is probable that Eusebius

¹¹⁶ Sabrina Inowlocki, *Eusebius and the Jewish Authors: His citation technique in an apologetic context* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 20-26.

¹¹⁷ *Eclogae propheticae* 178. 21.

¹¹⁸ *Eclogae propheticae* 215. 29.

¹¹⁹ Inowlocki, *Eusebius and the Jewish Authors*, 133; also see A. Kofsky, "Eusebius of Caesarea and the Jewish-Christian Polemic," in *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics Between Jews and Christians*, ed. O. Limor and G. Stroumsa (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Siebeck), 1996), esp. 59-84. A similar argument is made by certain scholars for the relative silence of Christian interaction in Talmudic literature.

¹²⁰ Inowlocki, *Eusebius and the Jewish Authors*, 133, whose point is based on Ulrich von Jörg, *Euseb von Caesarea und die Juden : Studien zur Rolle der Juden in der Theologie des Eusebius von Caesarea* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1999), esp. 146ff.

¹²¹ Lee Levine, *Caesarea under Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), esp. 61-106.

assumes that nearly all villages and towns have mixed populations, which is why he only labels a select few as particularly Christian, Samaritan, or Jewish.¹²²

Various Literary Allusions. There are also sporadic allusions or explicit statements of interaction spread throughout the patristic literature. The following examples will demonstrate the point.¹²³ Ignatius tells the Magnesians that it is “absurd to speak of Jesus Christ and practice Judaism (ἰουδαΐζειν) (10.3).¹²⁴ In the fourth century Epiphanius had a discussion with Rabbi Isaac of Constantia.¹²⁵ Theodoret of Cyrus (ca. 393-457) says that he had debates with Jews in most cities of the East.¹²⁶ Jews ridiculed the Christian bishop Sophronius of Jerusalem (560-638) because of his ignorance of the Bible.¹²⁷ Isidore of Seville, in Spain (ca. 560-636), is also aware of Jewish objections to Christian exegesis.¹²⁸

On the whole, John Chrysostom’s sermons (ca. 386-387 in Antioch) are mainly interested in castigating the Jews (viz., his theological version of them) and exhorting fellow Christians to abstain from all that is Jewish. Granting the tendentious nature of his tirades, there are references that only make sense if there is some degree of historicity.

¹²² For all of Eusebius’ references, see Benjamin Isaac, “Jews, Christians and others in Palestine: The Evidence from Eusebius,” in *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World*, ed. Martin Goodman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 65-74.

¹²³ The following is based on Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 28-30, 51-53.

¹²⁴ Michael W. Holmes, trans. and ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek texts and English translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

¹²⁵ *Vita sancti Epiphani* 1.52 (PG 41:87d).

¹²⁶ *Epistle* 113.

¹²⁷ Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 29.

¹²⁸ *De fide catholica ex Veteri et Novo Testamento contra Judaeos* (PL 88:449-538).

He speaks of several things in his sermons that demonstrate or imply Jewish-Christian interaction, especially the apparently overwhelming appeal of Jewish piety, rituals, and synagogues.¹²⁹ The following examples from his *Κατὰ Ἰουδαίων* (commonly referred to as *Against the Judaizing Christians*) will demonstrate the point. Many in his congregation really respected the Jews and thought their way of life venerable (1.3.1; 1.6.5). A proclaimed Christian tried to get a woman to come join him in a synagogue to swear an oath because Jewish oaths were respected more than others (1.3.4-5,7). “Judaizers” still exist in his community (1.4.4). Christians are not to encourage or allow “closet” Jewish sympathizers who participate in any Jewish custom (1.4.6-8). Some share fasts with the Jews (1.5.1). Some believe the synagogue to be a holy place (1.5.2). He exhorts them to stop going to Jewish gatherings and synagogues (1.5.7,8). He is not to blame if anyone goes to the spectacle of the Trumpets, rushes off to the synagogue, goes up to the shrine of Matrona (a Jewish healing spot), takes part in fasting, shares in the Sabbath, or observes any other Jewish ritual great or small (1.8.1). He encourages the Christians to go see that the Jews are not keeping the fasts at the proper time (4.3.8-9). Christians must stop going to the synagogue to listen to the trumpeters play (4.7.4-5). He encourages Christians to ask the Jews why they fast, and then gives them a pre-determined response (5.1.5). The Temple of God will be destroyed “by constantly rushing off to the synagogue, by a conscience which is inclined toward Judaism, and by

¹²⁹ The following studies have proved helpful: John Chrysostom, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, trans. Paul W. Harkins (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1979); Fred Allen Grissom, *Chrysostom and the Jews: studies in Jewish-Christian relations in fourth-century Antioch*, Thesis (Ph. D.) Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1979; Wayne A. Meeks and Robert Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the first four centuries of the common era* (Missoula: Scholars Press for the Society of Biblical Literature, 1978); Robert Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: rhetoric and reality in the late fourth century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

the untimely observance of the Jewish rites” (6.7.3).¹³⁰ In another work, Chrysostom believes that clergy should be prepared to debate Jews (and Manicheans).¹³¹ Chrysostom’s situation should not be dismissed as idiosyncratic to Antioch, as other evidence suggests the appeal the Sabbath and synagogue had on Christians in cities across the Empire.¹³²

Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 315-386) is aware of some exegetical arguments used against the Christians by the Jews.¹³³ The learned ascetic Isidore of Pelusium (ca. 375-450), mentor to Cyril of Jerusalem, wrote over two thousand letters in his lifetime.¹³⁴ In his letters there are copious instances of Jewish and Christian interaction. Isidore tells his audience things like, “Tell the Jew who has come to dispute with you about the divine incarnation (τῆς θείας σαρκώσεως),”¹³⁵ or “tell the Jew who disputes with you.”¹³⁶ He often writes to preachers and bishops to help them counter Jewish arguments. Though

¹³⁰ Epiphanius also writes about Jews (“Nazoraeans”) who believe that Jesus is the child of God and the Messiah, read from the New Testament and Old Testament, yet still uphold the Sabbath and the law. They are fluent in Hebrew and still read Scriptures, including the original version of Matthew, from the Hebrew. They are hated by the Jews because of their belief in Jesus as the Messiah, and are prayed against three times a day by Jews (Philip R. Amidon, trans., *The Panarion of St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis: Selected Passages* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990], 29.7.1-6; PG 41).

¹³¹ *De Sacerdotio* 4.4 (PG 48:666).

¹³² In Oxyrhynchus, Egypt a wife petitions her husband because he supposedly shut the door on her when he discovered she had been going to church on the Sabbath (P. Oxy. Vi.903). In Milan Augustine declared that there would be a riot if Christians were discovered to be keeping the Sabbath (which apparently assumes some were keeping it; *Epistolae ad Galatas expositio* 35.5; CSEL 84, 103-04); Colin H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), 57.

¹³³ *Catechetical Lectures* 13.7.

¹³⁴ Around two thousand letters are still extant. Everett Ferguson, “Isidore of Pelusium,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed., ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 593.

¹³⁵ *Ep.* 1. 141 (PG 276c-d).

¹³⁶ *Ep.* 1. 310 (PG 78:361c).

the arguments typically revolve around exegesis, there were other points of dispute. For example, some Jews made fun of the Christian practice of substituting bread for an actual sacrifice when Christians celebrated Eucharist. They debate over the identity of the unnamed prophet in Deuteronomy 18. Moreover, certain Jews believed that John 21:25 was a ridiculous exaggeration.¹³⁷

These examples demonstrate that several Christian leaders often dealt with the appeal of Jewish rituals, prayers, festivals, and other synagogal activities. The untrained Christian must be equipped by the clergy in matters of exegesis and theology since their Jewish counterparts were astute interlocutors. At other times, Christians are encouraged to approach their Jewish counterparts for information concerning various issues (e.g., garnering trustworthy texts, knowing which days to fast, etc.). According to these examples, Christians were influenced by Judaism in two major ways: (1) Christians based chief portions of their liturgy and festivals according to Jewish precedent; (2) to the dismay of Christian leaders, many Christians observed Mosaic dietary laws and participated in Jewish activities.¹³⁸ These examples demonstrate the appeal that Jewish practices still had in various regions of the Empire from the third through sixth centuries, and the length to which Christian authors went to aid their congregations in dealing with such an appeal.

¹³⁷ *Ep.* 1. 401; 2. 99; *Ep.* 3. 112; *Ep.* 4. 26.

¹³⁸ Simon, *Verus Israel*, 306. Simon calls those in the second camp (as if these two were always separate camps) “Jewish-Christians.”

Ecclesiastical and Imperial Law

Ecclesiastical Law. Works such as the *Didache*, the *Apostolic Tradition*, and the *Apostolic Constitutions* demonstrate how the Church has held certain procedural regulations as “canonical” alongside certain theological beliefs (e.g., the *regula fidei*). However, it was at the councils that canon law became formalized. While the council might discuss major theological issues of the day, discussion would also occur concerning procedural issues such as qualifications for office, church domains, clerical discipline, penance, and what to do with those who wanted to be reunited after a schism. “Canonical decisions on matter of discipline, organization, and liturgy were subject to change, whereas matters of faith affirmed in the creeds were considered unalterable.”¹³⁹

The church councils produced copious regulations concerning Jewish-Christian contact. The following examples will demonstrate the point.¹⁴⁰ The Council of Elvira (at Elliberis, Spain in ca. 306) states that Christians cannot marry Jews unless the Jews are willing to convert (Canon 16); Christians could not accept hospitality from Jews (Canon 49); Christians could not have their fields blessed by Jews (Canon 50). The Synod at Laodicea (at Phrygia Pacatiana in fourth century) mentions several regulations: Christians cannot receive food from the Jews nor participate in their festivals (Canon 37); Christians cannot share unleavened bread with Jews (Canon 38); Christians must not cease to work on the Sabbath like the Jews do (Canon 29). The Code of Canons of the African Church (at Carthage in 419) says that Jews cannot bring charges against (Christian) freedmen

¹³⁹ These regulations for church procedure would be gathered and canonized in the West (e.g., Dionysius Exiguus’ *Liber canonum* and *Liber decretorum*, together making the *Dionysiana*) and East (e.g., John the Scholastic’s *Collectio L titulorum* or the *Nomocanon XIV titulorum*) and would form the basis of procedure in the medieval ages. John E. Lynch, “Canons, Canon Law,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed., ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 211.

¹⁴⁰ The following is from NPNF2 14.

(Canon 129). The Council of Chalcedon (451) demands that Christians not marry Jews (Canon 14). The Council in Trullo (at Constantinople in 692) declared that Christians in Armenia must stop boiling meat within the sanctuary like the Jews do (Canon 99). Furthermore, Christians are not to have any common dialogue with Jews, summon them in illness, receive any medicines from them, or even bathe with them (Canon 11). The Apostolic Canons (sixth century) says that Christians cannot keep any festival with the Jews, or receive any gift from them that is associated with a feast (Canon 70); Christians cannot light the candles in synagogues (Canon 71).

Imperial Law. Especially for the Eastern Church, imperial legislation also dealt extensively with church regulations. Much that was declared in imperial law drifted into ecclesiastical law. For these reasons, a hard line should not often be drawn between ecclesiastical and imperial legislation in the fourth through seventh centuries.

There are numerous examples in civil legislation that demonstrate implied or explicit interaction between Jews and Christians. The Codex Justinianus (*CJ*; also known as *Corpus Juris Civilis*; ca. 529-534) contains both *Codex Theodosianus* (*CTh*; ca. 429-438) and the fourth-century private collections of *Codex Gregorianus* and *Codex Hermogenianus*.¹⁴¹ Civil legislation primarily proscribes acts of destruction or anything what would cause social bedlam. Specifically, curbing the hostility between Jews and Christians is often the goal (usually the attack on synagogues by zealous Christians).

¹⁴¹ For more, see Wolfgang Kunkel, *An Introduction to Roman Legal and Constitutional History*, 2nd ed., trans. J.M. Kelly (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1975); Amon Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987); idem, *The Jews In the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997).

Still, other laws deliberately limited the power of the Jews (even though many laws were welcomed by the Jews, such as not serving in the army).¹⁴²

However, many aspects of Judaism that were affected fell under two major areas: the synagogue and the patriarchate. “The aim of the double assault was therefore to limit, or if possible, to abolish the autonomy of the Jewish communities, their jurisdiction and their religious worship, and to abolish the patriarchate, the keystone of the national organization, representing national unity after the destruction of the Jewish state.”¹⁴³ Many of the laws against Jews necessitate that Jews and Christians were in close contact. The following examples will demonstrate the point.¹⁴⁴

Jews cannot purchase or be given Christian slaves. If they do have Christian slaves whom they circumcise, then they are to be set free and the Jewish owner is to be killed (*CJ* 1.10.1; 1.9.16; *CTh* 16.9.1). If a Christian becomes a Jew, then his property will be confiscated (*CJ* 1.7.1; *CTh* 16.8.7). Christians cannot marry Jews and Jews cannot marry Christians (*CJ* 1.9.5). When Jews celebrate Haman, they cannot do anything to defame the Christian religion, including burning crosses (*CJ* 1.9.11; *CTh* 16.8.18). When innocent, Jews are not to be attacked (nor should they attack Christians) (*CJ* 1.9.14; *CTh* 16.8.21). Disputes between Jews and Christians should not be handled by Jewish elders, but by the civil courts (*CJ* 1.9.15; *CTh* 16.8.22). Jews are forbidden to hold imperial offices, lest they be able to judge Christians; and new synagogues could not

¹⁴² Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule* (New York: Schocken, 1976), 216.

¹⁴³ Avi-Yonah, *The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule*, 217.

¹⁴⁴ For English translation, see Clyde Pharr, *The Theodosian code and novels and the Sirmondian constitutions: A translation with commentary, glossary, and bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952).

be built (*CJ* 1.9.18). Jews who flee to the church for asylum because of delinquent debts will be shut out (*CJ* 1.12.1; *CTh* 9.45.2).

Both ecumenical and civil regulations demonstrate that Jews and Christians were interacting in quotidian life. Some Christians believed that Jewish blessings and vows were more effective than others, which means they actually knew what and how Jews gave blessings. As late as the end of the seventh century, it can be seen that Christians were drawn to festivals in the synagogues, which means they were aware of Jewish activities, heard their liturgy, and participated with them in prayer. Both sides knew each other well enough that ecumenical regulations constantly outlaw marriage between the two.¹⁴⁵ If Jews and Christians only fought each other, there would be no reason to prohibit their marriage. Jews certainly had complaints against each other; they attacked each other; they took each other to court. They did this because they lived in proximity with each other. Conflict was part of what they experienced, not the whole. “Consequently, it is necessary to view violent incidents as simply one facet of a many-sided relationship.”¹⁴⁶ This relationship is even more facile to see when one situates their lives within their contemporaneous culture.

Greco-Roman Culture

It is imperative to remember that the study of Jewish-Christian relations is not simply an endeavor to examine and classify abstractions (viz., “Judaism” and

¹⁴⁵ Certain rabbis also prohibit the same types of things for Jews (not selling or buying from Christians, doing business with them, teaching them, etc.). E.g., see Tosefta *Hullin* 2:20-21.

¹⁴⁶ Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 125.

“Christianity”). Rather, this study concerns Jews and Christians as actual humans who were part of a shared culture. Michael Hilton says it well:

My assumption is that the relationship between Judaism and Christianity is in essence a relationship between Jews and Christians, between the families, the people and the communities who have owned and held those faiths. When people live side by side there are bound to be cultural influences, and often in the study of Judaism culture and religion are very closely related.¹⁴⁷

Jews and Christians shared one crucial element: they were both part of the greater Greco-Roman culture. They shared many aspects: e.g., close population densities, similar economic situations, Greek language, and urban life.

Population Densities. There is no doubt that Jews were heavily populated in Egypt (viz. Alexandria)¹⁴⁸, Palestine, and Syria.¹⁴⁹ Hellenization can be seen throughout Jewish settlements by way of the predominant use of Greek, education and participation in the gymnasium, participation in plays and musicals at the amphitheatre, participation in the Roman military, etc. Even though exact demographics cannot be known,¹⁵⁰ it can be seen that even in Palestine, most Jews lived in urban areas. “Considering that the urban communities were, unit by unit, more populous than the villages, it seems probable that

¹⁴⁷ Michael Hilton, *The Christian Effect on Jewish Life* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1994), 4.

¹⁴⁸ Numerous studies exist concerning the epigraphical and archaeological evidence of their population. See e.g., H.Z. (J.W.) Hirschberg, *A History of the Jews in North Africa*, 2nd rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1981); André N. Chouraqui, *Between East and West: A history of the Jews of North Africa*, trans. Michael M. Bernet (Phil.: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968). For ancient literary evidence, see Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 39-53.

¹⁴⁹ Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium*, 245: “Jews are very numerous (παμπληθεῖς) in every city, Asia and Syria” (LCL 379, 126-27 [Colson]). This is not to exclude places like Rome or Babylon; the three places listed are especially helpful for the scope of this dissertation.

¹⁵⁰ This fact is due both to the changing population of the region because of political and economic reasons, and to the scant and imprecise nature of any available numbers (e.g., Josephus or Philo). For more, see Avi-Yonah, *The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule*, esp. 15-34, and R.S. Bagnell and B. Freier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. 53-57.

over half the Jewish population in the coastal plain and beyond the Jordan had adopted a way of living characteristic of the Jews of the Diaspora.”¹⁵¹ Their strength in population is matched only with their presence in the economy.

Economic Life. Jews were involved in nearly every aspect of the economy.

Agriculture was the most common economic source, though other trades and skills were

used.¹⁵² Most Jews in Palestine were connected with trading, selling apparel, or

producing food.¹⁵³ Jews (along with Christians in late antiquity) were part of nearly

every strata of economic strength in the Roman Empire, changing with each *polis* or

village.¹⁵⁴ In addition to the literary evidence of their jobs and lucre (e.g., in the

Mishnah), various inscriptions and epitaphs also speak of numerous jobs held by Jews.¹⁵⁵

There is every reason to believe that most Jews experienced life in urban areas bustling

¹⁵¹ Avi-Yonah, *The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule*, 18. Jacob Neusner believes that since the Mishnah does not say much about city life, Jews in both Palestine and Babylonia “were not a city people” (“The Experience of the City in Late Antique Judaism,” *Reconstructionist* 50 [1985]: 10-15, quote on p. 13). Neusner does not cite any literary, archaeological, epigraphical, or other evidence to check if the Mishnah is the most historically accurate portrayal. He believes Jews lived in cities elsewhere, but since the Mishnah was written by rabbis, and the rabbis do not speak much of the city (or, a real version of one), then no rabbis (or their disciples) lived in any city. Yet, the Mishnah contains an entire Order (*Kodashim*) on the sacrificial rites of a Temple that no longer existed.

¹⁵² Avi-Yonah, *The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule*, 19-25. The Mishnah forbids thirty-nine kinds of work to do on the Sabbath (*m. Shabbat* 7.2): 18 concerning farming and food preparation, 13 concerning textiles, 2 concerning building, and 6 concerning all other crafts and trades.

¹⁵³ Daniel Sperber, *The City in Roman Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9-47; Avi-Yonah, *The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule*, 22, cites several examples. Also see Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 38-39.

¹⁵⁴ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 38-39. For their strength in Alexandria in particular, see Attila Jakab, *Ecclesia alexandrina*, 2nd ed. (Berne: Peter Lang SA, 2004), esp. 24-34 and works cited therein.

¹⁵⁵ See P.W. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs* (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1991), 85-101, esp. 99-101; Avi-Yonah, *The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule*, 22-23. Epitaphs mention bakers, hawkers, dyers, mechanics, cobblers, painters, etc. Of course, the *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum* lists copious examples (see Jean Frey, *Corpus of Jewish inscriptions: Jewish inscriptions from the third century B.C. to the seventh century A.D.* [New York : Ktav Pub House, 1975]).

with economic exchange between Christians, Greeks, Romans, and others.¹⁵⁶ The marketplace was the center of pedestrian life.¹⁵⁷ In addition, Jews held prominent places within the local clubs, councils, and Imperial offices.¹⁵⁸

The fact that Christians were also heavily involved in nearly every aspect of social and economic life is hardly worth mentioning. Tertullian says it well when he responds to Roman charges that Christians do harm to Roman society since Christians do not participate in it (and are “useless” or “unproductive” [*infructuosi*]):

How in all the world can that be the case with people who are living among you, eating the same food, wearing the same attire, having the same habits, under the same necessities of existence? . . . So we sojourn with you in the world, abjuring neither forum, nor shambles, nor bath, nor booth, nor workshop, nor inn, nor weekly market, nor any other places of commerce. We sail with you, and fight with you, and till the ground with you; and in like manner we unite with you in your travels—even in the various arts we make public property of our works for your benefit. How it is we seem useless in your ordinary business, living with you and by you as we do, I am not able to understand.¹⁵⁹

What is most important to notice here is the fact that persons from every religious background could easily interact—and know each other’s culture—at locations besides a “holy place.”

¹⁵⁶ In an effort to establish boundaries with non-Jews, rabbis are specific in the types of items that Jews could sell and purchase from non-Jews. There is no way of knowing how much the non-rabbinic Jew adhered to these rabbinic regulations. See the discussion in Sacha Stern, *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 140-46.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. John Chrysostom, *Adversus Iudaeos*, 1.4.7., who says that the Jews walk barefoot in the marketplace and laugh much.

¹⁵⁸ Lee Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 590. E.g., the inscriptions at Sardis speak of *Sardianoī* (“citizens of Sardis”), *bouleutes* (members of the city council), and *comes* and *procurator* (both Imperial offices).

¹⁵⁹ *Apologeticum* 42 (ANF 3, 49; CSEL 69). A very similar argument is made in the *Epistle to Diognetus*, 5: “For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity . . . But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly paradoxical method of life” (ANF 1, 26; PG 2:1173).

Greek Language. In these atmospheres, Greek was the vernacular. A fundamental commonality among nearly all Jews and Christians in this period was the Greek language. Although Hellenistic *culture* is usually denounced in Jewish literature, the use of Greek is espoused.¹⁶⁰ Inscriptions in Palestine and Syria demonstrate the high usage of Greek among Christians and Jews.¹⁶¹ Greek was the language of both commerce and education. Many Jews availed themselves of Greek education (cf. Josephus, Philo, etc.), and were proud of their close relationship with certain Greek or Roman cities.¹⁶² The *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* paints a social picture of the seventh century where most Jews are literate (42-43), Jews founded schools (63), and schools have their own exegetical traditions (62-63).¹⁶³ Archaeological remains throughout Rome and the Diaspora demonstrate that (certain) Jews were aware of popular pagan myths and images.¹⁶⁴ Outside of Palestine, 70% of inscriptions are in Greek; in Palestine between 55-60% of the inscriptions are in Greek.¹⁶⁵ Not only was Greek crucial to daily life in education and commerce, it was needed for their religious practice

¹⁶⁰ E.g., *m. Sotah* 7:1; *m. Meg.*, 1:8; *b. Sota* 49b, *b. Bava Kamma*, 83a; Hilton, *The Christian Effect*, 227-28; Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, 294-95.

¹⁶¹ William Horbury, *Jews and Christians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 215.

¹⁶² Even in the first century, Paul is proud to be both a citizen of Tarsus and a Roman citizen, in addition to being trained according to the most rigorous Jewish education under Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 21:39; 22:3; Phil. 3:4). Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 38. For rabbinical acceptance of Greek education and the use of Greek, see Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Life and Manners of Jewish Palestine in the II-IV centuries C.E.* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1942).

¹⁶³ For more, see Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 160.

¹⁶⁴ Leonard V. Rutgers, "Archaeological Evidence for the Interaction of Jews and Non-Jews in Late Antiquity," *American Journal of Archaeology* 96 (1992): 101-118.

¹⁶⁵ Only in Jerusalem are the Greek and Semitic inscriptions in equal proportion. Surprisingly, the well-known rabbinic necropolis (and burial place of Rabbi Judah haNasi) at Beth She'arim, Israel, records over 75% of inscriptions in Greek. Most of the Greek used is "very poor and vulgar," so Van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, 22-24, quote on p. 24.

and worship. In diaspora Judaism, Greek became the main language of the synagogue from an early date; in Palestine Greek and Aramaic were rival vernaculars. Jewish Scripture had to be translated to Greek (e.g., LXX, Aquila's version,¹⁶⁶ etc.) and into Aramaic (by the meturgeman and amora in the synagogue, and codified in the Targums). There is no reason to believe that any writings penned originally in Hebrew remained esoteric to the Jewish population since the Jewish population demanded translations.

Civic Life. Where was the Greek language, civic education, commerce, and religion practiced the most? The city. Churches were predominately composed of Greek-speaking Greek, Roman, and other converts who knew civic life well.¹⁶⁷ Two primary aspects of civic life that guaranteed a quick and easy exchange of ideas are found in the cramped living quarters of any city and the accessible mobility of information across the Roman Empire. With such high densities of populations in cities, privacy was a luxury experienced by few. Whether at the bathes, in apartments that overlooked the marketplace, or even at public toilets, ancient civic life was certainly public life.¹⁶⁸ Political, religious, and any other gossip or fad could easily travel in such crowded areas. Moreover, mobility across the Roman Empire via sea or land meant that information travelled frequently and with celerity.¹⁶⁹ One should not conceptualize different races

¹⁶⁶ There is reason to believe that Aquila's Greek translation of the TaNaK was made in response to the Christian adoption of the Septuagint.

¹⁶⁷ E.g., Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 15-39.

¹⁶⁸ For a great look at the cramped, unclean, and public life for the average city-dweller, see Sperber, *The City in Roman Palestine*; or, for the New Testament era, see James Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1999).

¹⁶⁹ Michael B. Thompson, "The Holy Internet: Communication between Churches in the First Christian Generation," in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 49-70; Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 16-19.

and religions in their own isolated bubbles. The average person in the Mediterranean culture would not necessarily feel isolated.

Greeks considered the *polis* the center of religious activity.¹⁷⁰ Religious rituals used to evoke and appease the gods were thoroughly mixed with the activities of quotidian civic life.¹⁷¹ Religious activities were blended with the pedestrian because the gods were involved with every aspect of life.¹⁷² In civic life, Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Christians, all experienced various aspects of other religions. With certain exceptions, all *xenoi* were welcome to, and usually did, participate in aspects of Greco-Roman festivals and rituals.¹⁷³ Where people were forbidden attendance was in the activity around the altar.¹⁷⁴

Synagogues. Christian leaders and church regulations were constantly curtailing Christian activity in Jewish synagogues, festivals, and rituals (see p. 36ff.), which meant that many Christians were indeed participating in a variety of Jewish events. And nearly

¹⁷⁰ E.g., Christine Sourvinou-Inwood, "What is *Polis* Religion?" and "Further Aspects of *Polis* Religion," in *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion*, ed. R.G.A. Buxton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 13-55.

¹⁷¹ Plato tells us that all men with right feeling, at the beginning of every enterprise, whether small or great, call upon god (*Timaeus*, 27c [PL 2104]). Religious and sacred were mixed conceptions. Some examples: in Athens, homicide trials were held in the sanctuary (*Ath. Pol.* 57.4); political buildings held sacred structures (*Xen. Hell.* 2.3.52, 53, 55). See Sourvinou-Inwood, "What is *Polis* Religion?", 23.

¹⁷² Robert Garland, *Daily Life of the Ancient Greeks* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 131, says it well: "There was hardly any human activity or undertaking that was not susceptible to divine influence." Our discussion cannot here join the debate of whether or not our literary sources are true examples of actual "daily life" in ancient Greece. One must assume that on the whole, the society that created the literature must have divulged itself into its literature. For a similar notion, see Simon Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 4-5.

¹⁷³ Sourvinou-Inwood, "Further Aspects of *Polis* Religion," 48-51.

¹⁷⁴ The sacrifice was to be shared between the god(s) and the particular *genos*, which is why *xenoi* could not participate. See Sourvinou-Inwood, "Further Aspects of *Polis* Religion," 50-51; Fredricksen, "What 'Parting of the Ways'?", 52-53. Of course, even the pagan religions prohibited their adherents into the most "holy" chambers; only the priests were allowed.

all of these events centered on the synagogue. A striking difference between the Temple and the synagogue is the welcoming of *xenoi* into the congregation. At the synagogue, anyone could hear liturgies, prayers, poems (*piyyutim*), sermons, Scripture reading (and interpretation, *targum*), songs, and festivals celebrated by the entire community.¹⁷⁵ It is important to remember that synagogues were not governed by the Judaic elite. There is no evidence that Pharisees (pre-70) or rabbis (post-70s) dominated synagogal leadership. The lack of rabbinic monopoly on doctrine and practice is demonstrated as late as the seventh century in *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*.¹⁷⁶ Even if certain synagogues recited the *birkat ha-minim*, there is no centralized synagogal enforcement.¹⁷⁷ The absence of rabbinic or synagogal enforcement is more acute when one remembers that the curse was *rabbinic* in origin.¹⁷⁸ Rabbinic names and particular rabbinic ideas are all but absent from inscriptional evidence concerning synagogues.¹⁷⁹ The synagogue was always an

¹⁷⁵ Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 2-3.

¹⁷⁶ For more, see Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 160.

¹⁷⁷ This is very important to remember when examining the enormous literature concerning the identity of the *minim* ("sectarians"). Even if it can be demonstrated that certain synagogues used this in their literature, it cannot be demonstrated that some (many? most? all?) synagogues practiced it (or rather, that it had any effect). William Horbury probably goes too far ("Extirpation and Excommunication," *Vetus Testamentum* 35 (1985): 13-38). For more, see Shaye Cohen, "Were Pharisees and Rabbis the Leaders of Communal Prayer and Torah Study in Antiquity?," in *Evolution of the Synagogue: Problems and Progress*, eds. Howard C. Kee and Lynn H. Cohick (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), 89-105. This paralogism is common in patristic studies. For example, what Athanasius labeled as canon in the Encyclical of 367 cannot be demonstrated to be the standard across the Roman Empire and beyond.

¹⁷⁸ Put another way: This curse only held real authority when the one who spoke it (or said "amen" at the end) disagreed with the rabbinic principle that gave rise to the curse. If there was no rabbinic leadership or enforcement, and no clear meaning of who the *min* were, then any Christian could recite the curse and not feel alienated. For more, see Alexander, "'The Parting of the Ways,'" 9-10, nt. 13, 14.

¹⁷⁹ S.J.D. Cohen, "Epigraphical Rabbis," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 72 (1981/82): 1-17. Religious leadership mentioned in inscriptions never mentions a rabbi, though persons designated as "rabbi" (probably not a technical title) can be donors. Cohen concludes, "[N]ot only did diaspora Jewry have no Rabbis of its own, it also did not look to Israel for Rabbinic leadership" (15). Is it telling that the *Amei haAretz* (i.e., the "people of the land" = average Jews) are said to have hated the rabbis more than non-Jews hated the rabbis (*b. Pesah* 49b)?

autocratic institution: a *bet am* (“house of [the] people”; *b. Shabbat* 32a). This meant that actual practices could (and did) differ from synagogue to synagogue, always being open to the various influences and customs of the neighborhood in which it was situated.¹⁸⁰

Jews welcomed various aspects of pagan culture as any Mediterranean person would. This is seen especially in synagogues in both Byzantine Palestine and in the Diaspora.¹⁸¹ Synagogues provide some of the best available evidence that Jews were able to blend various aspects of surrounding culture into their own religious expression. Inscriptions are almost always in Greek (and Aramaic in Palestine), artwork reveals various cultural borrowings, titles of synagogue officials are almost always in Greek (e.g., *archisynagogue*, *archon*, *prostates*, *pater* or *mater synagogues*, or *phrontistes*), and synagogues were often built from the money of pagans (e.g., Panticapaeum in the Bosphorus was built by a high official).¹⁸²

Not only were Christians drawn to Jewish customs, but pagans could be heavily influenced.¹⁸³ The synagogue was often the central location of that attraction. Greeks

¹⁸⁰ Thus, “The larger social, cultural, and religious contexts of each Jewish community probably had a decisive role in shaping not only its artistic and architectural features, but also the functions and practices within the various synagogues.” Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 279.

¹⁸¹ Paintings, inscriptions, epitaphs, *et al.* all point to the fact that Jews deliberately used their surrounding culture in their worship, without any apparent reticence. In other words, one can still be “Jew” and speak, participate in, and use much that is considered pagan or even Christian. This is the same picture presented from both pagan and Christians concerning their own particular practices.

¹⁸² Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 589-91.

¹⁸³ E.g., Josephus says of Jews in Antioch: “[T]hey were constantly attracting to their religious ceremonies multitudes of Greeks, and these they had in some measure incorporated with themselves.” (*Bellum Judaicum*, 7.45; LCL 210, 519 [Thackeray]). Tertullian accuses the pagans for changing their customs because of the Jews: “By resorting to these customs, you deliberately deviate from your own religious rites to those of strangers. For the Jewish feasts on the Sabbath and “the Purification,” and Jewish also are the ceremonies of the lamps, and the fasts of unleavened bread, and the “littoral prayers,” all which institutions and practices are of course foreign from your gods” (*Libri duo ad Nationes*, 1.13 [ANF 3, 123]). Augustine cites Seneca (*De Civitate Dei*, 6.11) as saying, “The customs of this detestable race [i.e., Jews] have become so prevalent that they have been adopted in almost all the world. The conquered have imposed their laws on the conquerors . . . At least they know the origins of their ceremonies: the greater

had been attracted to Judaism for centuries. For example, the New Testament speaks of pagans who adhered to much that was Jewish but would not be circumcised. They are known to have worshipped alongside Jews in the synagogue (e.g., Acts 13:16, 26: “Brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and *those among you fearing God*” [οἱ ἐν ὑμῖν φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν]; 16:14: Lydia, from Thyatira, is a “worshiper of God” [σεβομένη τὸν θεόν]; 18:7: Titius Justus has a house next to a synagogue, and he is called a “worshiper of God” [σεβομένου τὸν θεόν]). In late antiquity, there exists archaeological evidence of “God-fearers” or sympathizers to Judaism across the Roman Empire. Most of the names mentioned are either Greek or Roman, and often times various trades are mentioned for their professions. By far the dominant gender attested to become a Jewish proselyte or God-fearer was female (proselyte = ± 50%; God-fearer = 80%).¹⁸⁴ The third century stele in Aphrodisias, Asia Minor, speaks of fifty-four “God-fearers” and three proselytes involved with a *Patella* (soup-kitchen) connected to a synagogue.¹⁸⁵ The well-known inscriptions at the theater in Melitus, Asia Minor, reserve seats for the “God-fearers,” and a manumission inscription at Panticapaeum speaks of “the synagogue of the Jews and the God-fearers.”¹⁸⁶ Even still, one did not have to go inside the synagogue to

part of our people have no idea of the reason for the things they do” (trans. Henry Bettenson [London: Penguin Books, 1972], 261).

¹⁸⁴ Van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, 136. The preponderance of women might be because of the less stringent (and painful?) demands required of male converts.

¹⁸⁵ Joyce Reynolds and Robert Tannenbaum, *Jews and God-fearers at Aphrodisias, Greek Inscriptions with Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1987), n. 13.

¹⁸⁶ Thomas Braun, “The Jews in the Late Roman Empire,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 27 (1998): 142-7, esp., 157.

experience Jewish culture. Like many Greek religious and civic rituals in the ancient world, Jews also held feasts and participated in festivities outdoors.¹⁸⁷

The synagogue, even if it were originally a neutral place, was considered something sacred by both Jews and certain Christians in late antiquity.¹⁸⁸ Certain Christians respected the synagogues as “holy” and venerable (due to the Torah shrine; cf. discussion above concerning John Chrysostom, p. 37f.). Synagogues emerged throughout Palestine and the Diaspora in the Byzantine period: their august majesty (they often dwarf nearby churches, like at Capernaum), prominence (the common patronage of wealthy pagans, and its widespread community involvement), and sheer numbers (over one hundred excavated so far) demonstrate the wide vitality of Jews across the Roman Empire in late antiquity.¹⁸⁹ There is little evidence to suggest that Jewish influence and prominence diminished in late antiquity.

Therefore, it can be demonstrated that in practice, people from nearly every region, race, and religion had open access to most any religious experience they chose.

There was no need to suppose that different “missionaries” were sent out from any

¹⁸⁷ Fredricksen, “What ‘Parting of the Ways’?”, 51-53. Fredricksen gives a few examples, such as Tertullian, in *de Ieiunio* 16, mentions that Jews gather (outside) by the sea to celebrate feast days; Chrysostom laments that Christians are celebrating feasts, rituals, and fasts with the Jews (throughout *Against the Judaizers*).

¹⁸⁸ *Synagogue* (“house of assembly”) is hardly used in the latter centuries. Rather, *proseuche* (“[house of] prayer”) is used throughout the evidence. Numerous examples in literature and inscriptions point to the fact that the perception of the sacred nature of the synagogue increased in late antiquity. The synagogue is called, “holy place” (*hagios topos*), “holy congregation,” or a holy *havurah* (or association). Moreover, it was demonstrated above that certain Christians considered it thus (mainly because of the torah shrine), and legislation was passed to protect it probably because of this view. See Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 220-21; Steven Fine, *This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the Synagogue during the Greco-Roman Period* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997). Viewing the synagogue as “holy” fitted nicely with the ancient belief of the people, items, and churches that were considered “holy.” See Peter Brown, “Art and Society in Late Antiquity,” in *The Age of Spirituality: A Symposium*, ed. K. Weitzmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 17-27.

¹⁸⁹ Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 196, “[P]ractically all Palestinian synagogues known to date from archeological excavations stem from the Byzantine period.”

religious camp, which is most likely why so little is spoken of them in literature. The “mission field” was next door; the “missionary” (understood to be one who exposed others to his or her own religious convictions) was any religious adherent who participated in quotidian civic life. In reality religious affiliation and participation was not exclusive: the average pagan, Jew, and Christian could still be in one camp but participate in other religious activities. There is no need to believe in heavy Jewish proselytizing.¹⁹⁰ “[A] better approach would be to view Judaizing tendencies as evidence of extensive socioreligious [*sic*] intermingling and, more importantly, as nonexclusive communal self-definition.”¹⁹¹ Mediterranean culture was such that religious ideas were best spread and exchanged in the city because that is where nearly all religious interaction occurred. Religious beliefs and activities could not help but be known in Mediterranean civic life.

Rabbinic Literature

Finding explicit evidence of Jewish responses to Christianity in Talmudic literature is notoriously difficult. It is difficult for at least three reasons: (1) most Jewish literature extant from late antiquity is rabbinic, and the authors were almost solely concerned with the Written and Oral Torahs; (2) the genres represented among this literature do not arise from contemporaneous pastoral concerns like Christian literature often does; (3) references to *min* and other terms of exclusion and apostasy are not

¹⁹⁰ See Martin Goodman, “Proselytising in Rabbinic Judaism,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 40:2 (1989): 175-85, and Sacha Stern, *Jewish Identity*, 88-95. For a broad look at “conversion” in the Roman world, see Goodman’s seminal work, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1994).

¹⁹¹ Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, 124. Haas is speaking of Alexandria, but his sentiment is true of broader civic life. Jewish sources do not demonstrate an attitude of active proselytising, nor the need to do so.

always easy to determine if Christians in particular are in view.¹⁹² Even when evidence is found, scholars have typically dismissed such evidence. However, there has been a recent movement among scholars to reassess the literature without a predetermined conclusion that “critical” equals “not historically accurate.” Evidence is being considered in a new light.¹⁹³ The historical situation forces us to ask: Does it really make sense that contemporaneous Jews felt no pressure to respond to their Christian neighbors? The fact that the Palestinian Talmud and contemporaneous Midrashim do not distinguish clearly between paganism and Christianity is probably best explained by the rabbinic conception that Christianity had simply replaced paganism within Rome. “[P]erhaps their own view of themselves meant that the transition from paganism . . . to Christianity was not so significant as to warrant a reaction different from that against the earlier paganism.”¹⁹⁴ However, scholars are not limited to silence over this issue. Not only is it possible that key themes developed in response to Christians in broad terms (e.g., views of the Messiah, use of the Old Testament, identity of the true Israel,¹⁹⁵ etc.), there are a few explicit references to particular Jewish responses.

¹⁹² See e.g., R. Kalmin, “Christians and Heretics in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity,” *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994): 155-70.

¹⁹³ A great example of this new movement is Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). He addresses in his introduction the pattern among scholars to be pre-determined minimalists and responds: “I start with the deliberately naïve assumption that the relevant sources do refer to the figure of Jesus unless proven otherwise. Hence, I put the heavier burden of proof on those who want to decline the validity of the Jesus passages” (7). Schäfer presents a very probable historical situation for many key themes in the Talmudic literature concerning Jesus and views of Christians.

¹⁹⁴ Stemberger, *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land*, 287-89. Stuart Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Eretz Israel* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 462-63, has a similar view: rabbinic Judaism was long established before the burgeoning of Christianity and its sages did not feel the need to respond as if a new, devastating challenge had suddenly arisen.

¹⁹⁵ E.g., in *Midr. Song.* 7.3.3, the author responds to the certain portions of the nations who claim that *they* are Israel. Almost certainly this refers to Christians (and perhaps Samaritans). For more, see Sacha Stern, *Jewish Identity*, 49. *Genesis Rabbah* and *Leviticus Rabbah* (ca. fifth-sixth cents.) also have much to do with determining the true Israel.

Specific rabbinic responses to Christians and Christian exegesis are scarce.¹⁹⁶

However, scholars do not need many explicit references to rabbinic responses to believe interaction occurred. The family members and students who lived in the ancient household (*domus*) were the chief instruments through which rabbinic ideals were spread throughout the cities and countryside. Stuart Miller says it well: “Whatever the extent of [the rabbis’] actual influence, it was not predicated upon the number of interactions they actually had with their neighbors. Rather, it was a function of their ability to define further their way of life for themselves and especially for the members of their extended households, who lived it and thereby promoted it.”¹⁹⁷

Certain rabbis, like Rabbi Abahu and Rabbi Idit, were known to defend rabbinic beliefs.¹⁹⁸ There are times when the refutations seem to be deliberately against Christians and their beliefs. Christians are probably the target in Tosefta Hullin 2:20-21, where buying from them, selling to them, being healed by them, or teaching their children is prohibited.¹⁹⁹ There is a second-century story of Jacob almost healing Rabbi Eleazer ben Damah from a snake bite in the name of Jeshua’ ben Pantera, but being stopped by a

¹⁹⁶ For a close look at how rabbis and Christians responded to key exegetical concerns, see M. Hirschman, *A Rivalry of Genius: Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996).

¹⁹⁷ Stuart Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Eretz Israel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 464.

¹⁹⁸ E.g., “R. Eliezer said: Be diligent to learn the Torah and know how to answer an Epikoros [= a pun, meaning one who denies the commands of God] . . . R. Nahman said: He who is as skilled in refuting the Minim as is R. Idith, let him do so; but not otherwise” (*b. Sanh.* 38b [Jacob Schachter, trans., *Sanhedrin* (London: Soncino Press, 1988)]).

¹⁹⁹ The story right after this text refers of a certain Jacob of Kefar Sekhania who heals in the name of Jesus ben Pandera (common name of Jesus of Nazareth; see *b. 'Abod. Zar.* 28b; *y. 'Abod. Zar.* 2.2; *b. Sabb.* 104a). See Chernick, “Some Talmudic Responses,” 402.

fellow rabbi because no one is to be healed by the *minim*.²⁰⁰ Rabbi Abahu, based on Num. 23:19, argues that anyone who claims to be God, or the Son of Man, or that he will rise up to heaven, is lying because it is not accomplished.²⁰¹ Rabbi Abahu later responds simultaneously to a certain *min* concerning why the Sabbatical year was needed, and to another *min* concerning why Ezekiel had to lie on his sides for several years. Rabbi Abahu says that because Israel sinned, they were exiled (not abandoned), and Ezekiel was punished because his suffering cleansed Israel from its sin.²⁰² The statement that they were exiled, and not divorced, could be in response to the typical Christian belief that God has abandoned Israel. A similar sentiment is expressed when Rabbi Saphra must answer one *min*'s question concerning Amos 3:2 (a *locus classicus* for patristic claims that Israel had been rejected, and punished, by God).²⁰³ Because of debates with Christian exegetes in Palestine, Rabbi Abahu says that rabbis in Palestine must study Scripture more thoroughly.²⁰⁴

Conclusion

The chapter has demonstrated, in broad terms, that Jews and Christians interacted with each other in late antiquity religiously and socially in their daily activities.

Christians and Jews not only still had contact, what constituted “Jew” and “Christian”

²⁰⁰ *b. 'Abod. Zar.* 27b. Scholars note that this is the (common) rabbinic way of referring to Jesus. It probably refers to the Jewish belief that Mary had an adulterous relationship with a Roman soldier named *Panthera* (e.g., see Origen *Contra Celsus* 1.28,32.)

²⁰¹ *y. Ta'an.* 2.1.

²⁰² *b. Sanh.* 39a.

²⁰³ *b. 'Abod. Zar.* 4a. Braun, “The Jews in the Late Roman Empire,” 165. Amos 3:2: “You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities” (NASV).

²⁰⁴ *b. 'Abodah Zarah* 4a.

was also somewhat fluid. The traditional model of a clear “parting of ways,” whether concerning social interaction or strict religious boundaries, cannot be sustained when held under historical scrutiny. Language used on both sides that distinguished between heterodox and orthodox, Christian and Jew, or even Jewish-Christian, held a certain historical truth to them, though they were always used within ideological literature to distinguish “other.” After examining the beliefs and practices of various groups of Jews and Christians, one can be confident that within the practice of Judaism and Christianity, much freedom of expression was experienced. Religious boundaries were not rigid.

Lorenzo Perrone rightly states:

Religious interaction in its highest and most profitable sense obviously depended then, as now, upon attitudes possessed of an analogous disposition of *caritas* toward others . . . [E]ven within Byzantine monasticism in the Holy Land . . . such behavior toward those ‘alien’ to the *societas christiana* would not have been lacking—inspired . . . by the awareness of having a common Father.²⁰⁵

Christian authors needed to respond to the vitality and “temptation” of Judaism for centuries in their sermons, letters, and in entire works devoted to refuting Jewish beliefs and practices. Catechetical lectures were nuanced to deal with Jewish objections and presuppositions. Christian liturgy demonstrates the strong influence that Judaism had on its inception and continuation. Certain key leaders dealt with Jewish arguments and customs, both reacting to them and learning from them. Both civic and ecclesial legislation speaks to the continued interaction between Jews and Christians.

Moreover, it can be seen in the Mediterranean world that several key features made a basically-amenable relationship possible and at times, demonstrable. The features of urban life, the role of Greek education and language, the necessities of economic vitality, and the positive, attractive perception of the synagogue all guaranteed

²⁰⁵ Perrone, “Monasticism as a factor of religious interaction,” 93.

that Jews and Christians practiced their respective religions in general peace and proximity.

Finally, though more scarce than one might like, instances spread throughout rabbinic literature can be seen that speak of the need to respond to Christians. Not only were certain practices apparently done in reaction to Christians, but battles were had over how to exegete certain passages. Certain rabbis were known for their apologetic work against *min* in general, and Christians, in particular.

This chapter has given copious implicit and explicit examples which attempt to serve as evidence that Jews and Christians did not maintain strict social and religious boundaries in late antiquity. Three aspects that were not explored thus far in this discussion are asceticism, the sage, and the evil inclination. The following chapters of the dissertation will examine these three areas in order to provide more evidence of Jewish-Christian relations. We will begin with the development and character of Christian asceticism and monasticism, especially in Egypt and Palestine.

CHAPTER THREE

Egyptian and Palestinian Asceticism and Monasticism in Late Antiquity

Introduction

When examining asceticism and monasticism within Egypt and Palestine in the third through sixth centuries, it is necessary to examine the *Apophthegmata Patrum* and the *Adhortationes Patrum*.¹ These documents not only form the foundation of nearly all subsequent literature concerning ascetic wisdom, but also demonstrate copious, often times idiosyncratic, beliefs of Christians who renounced the world. Viewing these documents within their theological and literary milieu provides one the necessary matrix in which these documents should be read. This chapter will demonstrate that many traditional thoughts concerning Christian asceticism and monasticism must be cleared away and reconstructed before a comparison between Christian and Jewish ascetic practices can take place. The purpose of this chapter is: (1) to examine how asceticism and monasticism, particularly in Egypt and Palestine, served as the cultural and theological foundation of the Sayings; and (2) to explore the formation, usage, and characteristics of the Sayings. The first section begins by discussing what will be meant by the terms “asceticism” and “monasticism” throughout the chapter, before moving to a discussion of the origins and development of Christian asceticism and monasticism in late antiquity.

¹ The Alphabetical, Systematic, and Anonymous collections will be referred to collectively as “the Sayings.”

Origins and Development

Defining Asceticism and Monasticism

The search for the origins of Christian monasticism is a much-debated and nebulous endeavor. There are several issues that must be considered when speaking of monastic origins: e.g., there is no universally-held definition of “asceticism” or “monasticism”; the relationship between asceticism and monasticism in late antiquity is so fluid that differentiating the two is often impossible; ascetic practices among Christians antedate monasticism²; and ancient usage of “monk” (*monachos*) was different from modern usage. It is sometimes difficult to discern a “generic” ascetic practice from a more “formalized” monastic practice.³ Therefore, “it is a mistake to separate ‘monasticism,’ still extremely fluid at this period, from the ascetic movement in general, and there is no doubt that ascetic ideas and practice percolated through society as a whole.”⁴ Moreover, attempting to construct a possible (or actual) historical situation is

² See R. Murray, “The Features of the Earliest Christian Asceticism,” in *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp*, ed. P.N. Brooks (London: SCM Press, 1975), 65-77; A Hamman, “Les Origines du monachisme chrétien au cours des deux premiers siècles,” in *Homo Spiritualis: Festgabe für Luc Verheijen, OSA zu seinem 70. Geburtstag*, ed. et al., C. Mayer (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag 1987), 311-26.

³ Susanna Elm agrees, but in a slightly different manner: “To be sure, communal forms of asceticism, in other words monasticism, have always been judged to be an evolution, the ‘higher form’ of asceticism. But since this is clearly a value judgment made consciously by later sources, the methodological distinction between asceticism and monasticism is not only unnecessary but anachronistic, and thus counter-productive when examining the very early forms of the movement” (“*Virgins of God*”: *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994], 14).

⁴ Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity AD 395-600* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 73. Apparently (some?) ancient people could separate who were monks and who simply practiced asceticism (probably because of their dress and where they lived). For example, an ascetic from a village who was praised as having reached a “higher state of life than many of the other monks,” humbly refused to be compared to “the monks” because he was unworthy (*Hist. Monach.* 14.11-14; PL 21.387-462; Norman Russell, trans., *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* (Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 1980). In *Anony.* 161 (Benedicta Ward, ed., *The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers: Systematic Sayings from the Anonymous Series of the Apophthegmata Patrum* [Oxford: Cistercian Publications, 1986]; Nau 294), it is

often difficult in ascetic literature since this literature was often used to entice and exhort its audience by the spiritual capacities of the heroes described within. In this sense, this literature was hagiography, or spiritual propaganda.⁵

This discussion must begin by defining “asceticism” (from ἀσκέω). Though used first in ancient Greek to refer to the capacity “to work” or “to fashion,” then later “to exercise” or “to discipline,” it was Philo who probably brought its usage to patristic literature.⁶ For the purposes of this dissertation, “asceticism” (and its derivatives) will be defined as the deliberately voluntary, abstemious or supererogatory behavior a person or community chooses in order to increase the capacity for experiencing salvation, obtaining a virtue, or in response to sin.⁷ This dissertation will not assume a distinction between “essential” and “instrumental” asceticism, since it is difficult to demonstrate in the

said: “Two brothers by blood (lit., “flesh”) went to live in a monastery. One was an ascetic (ἀσκητής) and the other was very obedient (ὑπακοὴν μεγάλην) [i.e., to an abbot as a monk].”

⁵ Thus, Philip Rousseau, “Christian Asceticism and the Early Monks,” in *Early Christianity: Origins and Evolution to A.D., In Honour of W.H.C. Frend 600*, ed. Ian Hazlett (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 117. One might call this literature “protreptic.”

⁶ E.g., see Hans Windisch, “askeō,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:494-96; G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 244. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 1.7, *Stromateis* 1.5; 4.22; Origen, *Against Celsus* 7.48; cf. Josephus (*Ant.* 20.11.2§264-65), who uses *askesis* to speak of interpretation and knowledge of the Torah. Steven D. Fraade, “Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible Through the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 1.253-55.

⁷ Thus concurring with part of Fraade’s definition in “Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” 1.257: “(1) the exercise of disciplined effort toward the goal of spiritual perfection (however understood), which requires (2) abstention (whether total or partial, permanent or temporary, individualistic or communalistic) from the satisfaction of otherwise permitted earthly, creaturely desires.” Eliezer Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists: Fasting and Asceticism in Rabbinic Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9-10, understands this definition to be too broad, since he believes there are some examples (e.g., *kashrut*) which apply to all of rabbinic religious praxis and are for “the goal of spiritual perfection.” Therefore, the definition “must involve the voluntary acceptance of a spiritual discipline that is not binding on one’s larger religious community” (10). For Diamond’s critique to be correct, one must first agree with Diamond that *kashrut* is followed because the person practicing it is seeking “spiritual perfection.” Secondly, Diamond is assuming “larger religious community” to be *rabbinic* Jews. If this is not the “larger religious community,” and if “Judaism” is, then Fraade’s definition works fine. In other words, if Diamond’s *proviso* is correct, then we must agree upon who and what defines “larger religious community.”

Sayings any notion of “essential” asceticism.⁸ This chapter (and dissertation) will concentrate on what is believed to be the primary, but certainly not only, form of asceticism practiced by Christian ascetics and monks (particularly as represented in the Sayings): natural asceticism, i.e., that form of asceticism that “reduces material life to the utmost simplicity, restricting [the] physical needs to a minimum, but not maiming the body or otherwise deliberately causing it to suffer.”⁹ Christian ascetics could certainly do “negative” things to their body in order to curb any temptation or to pay penance for sin, but the primary method used by Christian monks was abstention, moderation, and depletion (e.g., of sleep, food, sex, *et al.*). While Christian ascetics could practice renunciation, they could also perform acts of charity and mercy as a sign of their ascetic piety (e.g., the incredible hospitality offered by monasteries across the Empire, or by particular individuals like Euphemia, her daughter in Amida, and sister Mary in Tela, as recorded by John of Ephesus¹⁰), and perform certain repeated behaviors (e.g., chanting or repeating Scripture) with the goal of salvation, obtaining a virtue, or defeating some

⁸ Diamond emphasizes such a distinction throughout his work. He defines “essential” asceticism to occur when “self-denial itself is seen as inherently spiritually salutary,” while “instrumental” asceticism “involves the passionate commitment to a spiritual quest so consuming that one feels it necessary to minimize or eliminate worldly pursuits and pleasures because they detract from or distract one from one’s godly objectives” (*Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 12). Instrumental asceticism might be understood as asceticism which is a means to an ends, or peripheral. Diamond believes that rabbinic Judaism “is significantly different” from Christianity because rabbinic asceticism “is largely incidental and instrumental rather than essential” and “it could co-exist—though uneasily at times—with involvement in the social, economic, and familial spheres” (*idem.*, 16). Diamond’s distinction seems too strong. It is difficult not to see how any ascetic behavior is not a means to an end, and thus, “instrumental.” The Sayings certainly represent asceticism *not* merely as the state of self-denial for its own sake, but as that which occurs when one seeks to possess all the Christian virtues (hence, not “essential”). Furthermore, it will be demonstrated below, that Christian ascetics were certainly part of social and economic life (though the desert ascetics were not part of “familial spheres”).

⁹ The six-hundred-page collection of papers (*Asceticism*) concerning all types of asceticism practiced in the ancient world is insightful and comprehensive. This quote comes from that collection: Kallistos Ware, “The Way of the Ascetics: Negative or Affirmative?” in *Asceticism*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 9.

¹⁰ Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity*, 73.

particular sin. The Sayings do not use the term ἀσκέω or its derivatives that often. This is one of the main reasons why scholars argue over what constitutes “asceticism”: ancient sources do not use the term pervasively.

It is imperative to remember: anyone could practice some form of asceticism in the Mediterranean world; one did not have to become a monk to do so (e.g., in Christianity Origen is a case-in-point).¹¹ Ascetic men and women are attested throughout literature in late antiquity and the role of “virgin of God” was widely popular.¹² Furthermore, asceticism is a broad phenomenon, of which monasticism is a part. Greek philosophers had long emphasized the role of asceticism in their pursuit of both obtaining health and in the attempt to focus all of one’s faculties to the spiritual. The contemplative life for the ancient philosopher was an ascetic life.¹³ In broad terms, the same can be said of Christian asceticism, since the ancient understanding of philosophy was a way of

¹¹ It is safe to say that in late antiquity, ascetic practices could be found among people of nearly all economical and educational levels. E.g., “In a village there was said to be a man who fasted to such a degree that he was called ‘the Faster’.” (*Alph. Eudemon* 8 [Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Cistercian Studies 59; Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984)]).

¹² Urban ascetics were probably seen the most in the city, among other things, with individual celibates or communities of celibates. The anonymous text in the fourth century, *Περὶ πάρθευος*, has as its chief goal sexual purity via celibacy which is not aimed at monks. It concludes: “So, you who wish to live piously, put to silence the appetites of the flesh . . . Let us conquer evil with virtues, lest we be found among the evil. ‘Let us purify ourselves of every defilement of flesh and spirit,’ in order that, appearing pure before the Pure one, we may receive the pure crown through Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom be glory to the Father from ages to ages. Amen.” (140, 151-52) Teresa M. Shaw, trans., “Homily on Virginity,” in *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 42-43. There is no mention of hermits or monasteries in the sermon. While the author does not condemn marriage, the author exhorts parents not to prohibit their children from choosing to live as virgins. For more on this document and its view of women, see Elm, “*Virgins of God*,” 34-39.

¹³ Porphyry, his disciple Plotinus, and the broader groups (e.g., Stoics, Pythagoreans) are examples. For an overview of how philosophy was considered both a intellectual system and spiritual endeavor, see Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), esp. 159ff. For more on how the ancient pursuit of the philosophical life included asceticism, see chapter four.

life.¹⁴ For several key thinkers (e.g., Philo, Origen, and Basil) asceticism was understood as a natural outworking of the inward, “philosophical” pursuit of the holy person.¹⁵ Yet, for Jews and Christians, there existed several key differences in the suppositions and goals of the “way of life,” such as the belief in a sovereign God who would judge actions according to a revealed law (in Torah or Christ), and who demanded obedience and humility because of the covenant given (Jews) or because of the example of Christ in the Passion (Christians). “Here [i.e., practicing humility and suffering because it united the Christian ascetic with the *passio* of Christ], the practice of the virtues takes on a completely different meaning.”¹⁶ Finally, while the pagan philosopher was to be guided at all times by reason, the Jewish and Christian ascetic understood reason to be guided not by the self, but by Scripture and the divine presence.¹⁷

While any individual could practice some form of asceticism, monasticism is typically used in a more formal sense. Monasticism involves ascetic practices by individuals or communities who have withdrawn (whether physically or socially) from

¹⁴ This is Hadot’s primary thesis in his works. For an overview of this thesis, see his *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), esp. 264-76.

¹⁵ Hadot claims, “Like Greek philosophy, Christian philosophy [e.g., in Justin, Clement, Origen, or Evagrius] presented itself both as a discourse and as a way of life . . . [and for certain Christian authors] reading texts is a ‘spiritual’ process [which is] closely related to the progress of the soul. The philosophical notion of spiritual progress constitutes the very backbone of Christian education and teaching,” (*What is Ancient Philosophy?*, 240). While this might be true of formal teachers (like those associated with catechetical schools), a philosophical impetus for spiritual progress it is not represented in the Sayings. Hadot admits this when he speaks of those who fled to the desert: “They were not educated people, and any connection to philosophy was quite remote from their thinking” (idem., 242).

¹⁶ Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, 248. Hadot also lists similar salient differences between Christians and pagans.

¹⁷ It is interesting that some (pagan) “philosophers” come and ask Christian monks what makes them different: “‘What do you, in the desert, do more than we? You fast, and we also fast; you watch, and we also watch; and all you do, we do also. What more do you who live in the desert do?’ The old man said to them, ‘We hope in the grace of God and we guard our thoughts.’ They said to him, ‘We are not able to do that.’ Edified, they took their leave” (*Anony.* 211 [Ward]; Nau 368).

society, and who follow certain similar behavioral patterns.¹⁸ A monk could often be distinguished by his or her appearance (e.g., the “habit” or robe worn).¹⁹ A final demarcation of a “general” ascetic from a monk is in the degree to which an ascetic put him/herself under the tutelage of another ascetic or monk. Ascetics were generally free; monks were tied to a particular *abba* or *amma*. The original usage of the term μοναχός will be discussed below.

Traditional Models Concerning Christian Monasticism

One can still find emphasis in (what will be called) traditional scholarship upon two features of late antique monasticism: (1) it suddenly appeared in the fourth century, and (2) it developed in a linear progression from ascetics who lived alone (eremitic, following Antony), to ascetics who gathered in quasi-communities (lauras) or full communities (coenobiums, following Pachomius).²⁰ For some, monasticism burst onto the scene because Christians sought ways to demonstrate their rigorous piety in response to the influx of Christians in the fourth century.²¹ Where once they had the option to run

¹⁸ “To transform these primitive ascetics into monks two developments were necessary: (1) withdrawal from the congregation, (2) common discipline and rule” (Owen Chadwick, trans., “The Conferences of Cassian,” in *Western Asceticism* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958], 16). Cf. Abba Piamun: “Monastery means the spot, the place where the monks live. Coenobium means not only where they live but how they live, the kind of rule they adopt. And monastery can be used to mean a hermit’s cell, coenobium cannot be used except where a number of brothers are dwelling together in unity.” Cassian, *Conferences*, 18.10 (Owen Chadwick, trans., “The Conferences of Cassian,” in *Western Asceticism* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958]).

¹⁹ More will be said about this (e.g., concerning the Therapeutae, p. 141f.; or the monks, p.172).

²⁰ James Goehring notes this pattern of oversimplification in “traditional” presentations (*Ascetics, Society, and the Desert* [Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999], 13). For some who present this over-simplified picture, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 110-12; Roland Bainton, *Christendom: A Short History of Christianity and Its Impact on Western Civilization*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 1:104-5.

²¹ E.g., Michael A. Smith, “Christian Ascetics and Monks,” in *Introduction to The History of Christianity*, rev. ed., ed. Tim Dowley (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 212-24; Williston Walker et al., *A History of the Christian Church*, 4th ed. (New York: Scribner, 1985), 153.

toward martyrdom to demonstrate their commitment, now they ran toward the desert.²²

Scholars often argue that monasticism began in rural areas: ascetic practices began with those who lived, or who wanted to live, away from civilization.²³ For others, monasticism began primarily in reaction to the organized Catholic Church.²⁴ Or perhaps ascetic practices were predicated upon the psychological response of Christians and pagans to a sense of “anxiety” experienced by Greeks and Romans in late antiquity²⁵, or a sociological response to religious needs of Syria and Egypt.²⁶

Revisionist Model Concerning Christian Monasticism

Unfortunately, much of what these traditional views presuppose cannot be supported by historical inquiry. The historical reconstruction of monasticism that originates from eremitic to coenobitic, and from rural to urban, is both naive and untenable.²⁷ Moreover, one can be confident that ascetic manifestations arose

²² E.g., E. E. Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr: The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1950).

²³ E.g., W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 421-24.

²⁴ E.g., Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (2 vols.; San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1975), 1.223-24.

²⁵ E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 31-36.

²⁶ E.g., Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in late Antiquity,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80-101.

²⁷ Certain contemporary scholars often make this critique. E.g., Rousseau, “Christian Asceticism and the Early Monks,” 117; Andrea Sterk, *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church: The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 14-15. William Harmless says it well: “Where did monasticism come from? The stock answer, still found in textbooks and encyclopedias, has been: (1) the founder of monasticism was Antony; (2) the founder of cenobitic monasticism was Pachomius; and (3) the birthplace of monasticism was Egypt. Let me be blunt: these standard textbook claims are wrong. Do they hold some grain of truth? Yes. But put together, they give the impression that monasticism has well-known origins, traceable to one or two individuals and to a single region. This ‘big bang’ theory of monastic origins simply does not stand up to critical scrutiny” (*Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], 418).

independently not only in the Latin West and Greek East, but also in the Syriac/Aramaic East.²⁸ It demonstrates that the ideology presented in the ascetic literature, especially the *Vita Pachomii* and *Vita Antonii*, holds sway over many interpreters, both modern and ancient.²⁹ Yet, the *Vita Antonii* mentions that Antony placed his sister in the care of well-known virgins, and Antony, himself, sought out a respected ascetic for him to emulate.³⁰ Before Antony, the *Vita Antonii* tells us no Christian ascetic had lived alone in the

²⁸ Thoma K. Kathanar, "Early Christian Monastic Origins: A General Introduction in the Context of Syriac Orient," *Christian Orient* 13 (1992): 139-163. In Syria, the Stylites were a community of monks made famous by Symeon the Elder (388-412), when he left the community to live on top of pillars. Eustathius, bishop of Sebaste (ca. 300-377), made asceticism mainstream in Asia Minor, and influenced the practices of Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus. After living as a monk in Syria and Egypt, Basil began his own monastery and rule (358-364) in Neocaesarea, emphasizing communal monasticism, obedience to leadership, and community service. Hilarion (293-371) began (or was instrumental in the beginning of) the monastic tradition in Gaza after hearing of Antony. Martin of Tours (316-397) began a monastery in Gaul. For more, see James Goehring, "Monasticism," in *The Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), 773. Burton-Christie assumes a connection that simply cannot be supported. He assumes that Jewish-Christianity and certain texts in the New Testament were the foundation of both Egyptian and Syrian monasticism, and therefore, Syrian and Egyptian monasticism were closely connected at a very early date. While his first premise is probably true, it does not follow that they were connected at an early date or influenced each other until the fifth and sixth centuries; Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 39-40. Symeon the Stylite's fame is mentioned in the Sayings (*Alph.* Gelasius 2)

²⁹ Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert*, 13-35; "The [modern] image of Antony as the father of Christian monasticism is but a product of Antony's subsequent success multiplied in turn by the success of the *Vita*," p. 20; idem., "The Dark Side of Landscape: Ideology and Power in the Christian Myth of the Desert," in *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography*, eds. Dale Martin and Patricia Miller (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 136-49. This is also true, *mutates mutandis*, for Syrian monasticism. Its hagiographic literature, along with *Vita Antonii*, has greatly influenced historians. See Sidney H. Griffith, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism," in *Asceticism*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 220-45.

³⁰ *Vita Antonii* 3 (PG 26.837-976); NPNF2 4; Robert C. Gregg, trans., Athanasius, *The Life of Anthony* (Classics of Western Spirituality; New York: Paulist Press, 1980); Robert T. Meyer, trans., *The Life of Saint Antony* (Westminster: Newman Press, 1950). Thus, J.C. O'Neill, "The Origins of Monasticism," in *Making of Orthodoxy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 273-74; Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert*, 19.

desert.³¹ Antony was loved by all those who knew him in the village.³² What becomes so striking about Antony's early life is the fact that he actually *left* the city.³³ The assumption was that Christian monks and ascetics were already considered part of the city life (even if they lived at its periphery).³⁴ Concerning Pachomian monasteries in Upper Egypt, the *Vita Pachomii* explains that Pachomius' mentor, Palamon, was also *already* an abbot surrounded by a community.³⁵ Concerning Palestinian monasteries, Eusebius tells us that the bishop Narcissus of Jerusalem, reacting to the struggle of improving those in his congregation who were less than rigorous in their piety, fled to the

³¹ This fact is confirmed by Cassian: "When they joined together they were known as coenobites, and their cells and habitations were called coenobia. This was the earliest kind of monk; first in time and in the grace of God; and for many years, until the time of Abba Paul and Antony, it remained the only kind." Cassian, *Conferences*, 18.5 (Chadwick).

³² *Vita Ant.* 4. Certainly, Antony was not the first ascetic in the ancient world to live alone in the desert. The ancients did not have to know of Antony in order to be inspired to live a hermit's life. For example, Josephus tells us in his autobiography, *Vita* 2 (LCL 186, 5-7), that in his youth (mid-first cent.), Josephus followed an ascetic, Bannus, for three years. Bannus lived in the desert, only wore clothes that grew from trees, only ate food that grew naturally from the ground, and bathed in cold water frequently in order to keep his chastity.

³³ Thus, Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert*, 21. This fact is made clear from the *Vita Antonii*. One cannot help but think that a major factor in the success of the *Vita Antonii* is the novelty of a man who renounced the world to the degree that he did. Macarius (*Alph.* Macarius 1) and Amoun (*Hist. Laus.* 8) practiced their asceticism on the outskirts of the village, rather than the desert. For more, see G.E. Gould, "The *Life of Antony* and the Origins of Christian Monasticism in Fourth-Century Egypt," *Medieval History* 1:2 (1991): 3-11.

³⁴ In ascetic literature fleeing the city was tantamount to fleeing temptation (more below).

³⁵ *Vita Pachomii* 12-13. For translations of the various versions, see A.N. Athanassakis, trans., *The Life of Pachomius* (Missoula: Scholars, 1975); L.T. Lefort, *S. Pachomii vitae bohairice scriptae*, CSCO 89 (1925); idem, *S. Pachomii vitae sahidice scriptae*, CSCO 99-100 (1933-1934); F. Halkin, *Sancti Pachomii vitae graece* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1932); L.T. Lefort, *Les Vies coptes de saint Pachome et de ses premiers successeurs* (Louvain: Bureaux du Muséon, 1943); idem, *Oeuvres de s. Pachome et de ses disciples*, CSCO 159-169 (1956); A. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* (Kalamazoo: Cisterian, 1980-1982), Vols. 1-3; Amand Boon, *Pachomiana Latina* (Bibliothèque de la Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique 7; Louvain: Bureaux de la Revue, 1932); Armand Veilleux, trans., *Pachomian Koinonia: The Lives, Rules, and Other Writings of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples*, 3 Vols. (Cisterian Studies 45-47; Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 1980); J.E. Goehring, *The Letter of Ammon and Pachomian Monasticism* (Berling: De Gruyter, 1986); Philip Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

Judean desert in the early third century.³⁶ A century later, Jerome tells us that Hilarion, a native of Thavatha near Gaza, was part of a regular group of Christian pilgrims when he visited Antony and returned to Palestine a monk.³⁷ The *Vita Charitonis* tells us that before Chariton founded his Palestinian monastery at Pharan in 330, about six miles northwest Jerusalem, there were already hermits who populated Calamon, south of Jericho.³⁸ Yet, it was not until Euthymius' efforts in the fifth century that Judean monasticism really flourished.³⁹ Hilarion, Chariton, and Euthymius built upon that which came before them, even if each was instrumental in the development of particular branches of Palestinian monasticism.⁴⁰

There are other examples of ascetics and monks in the early fourth century. Cyril of Jerusalem addressed monks during a catechism in the middle of the fourth century.⁴¹

³⁶ Eusebius, *HE* 6.9.8; John Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine 314-631* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 154.

³⁷ Jerome, *Vita Sancti Hilarionis*, 3 (PL 23. 29-54). The connection between Palestinian monasticism and greater Christendom was already well-established by Hilarion's era. Thus, Derwas Chitty, *The Desert a City* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), 48. Certainly Hilarion was the founder of several new, influential monasteries that would thrive for centuries; but, the monastic movement already existed. Scholars have long noted the discrepancy between the two original "founders" of Palestinian monasticism: Hilarion or Chariton.

³⁸ Gérard Garitte, *La vie prémétaphrastique de S. Chariton* (Bulletin de l'Institut historique Belge de Rome; fascicule 21, 1941), 13, 26.3-5; also in Leah DiSegni, trans., "The Life of Chariton," in *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 393-424.

³⁹ Cyril says that "all the desert was colonized by his [Euthymius'] seed" (*Kyrillos* 24.4), trans. Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ*, 157.

⁴⁰ This is why scholars are content to say that Christian monasticism in Palestine appeared simultaneously with other movements. E.g., A. Guillaumont, *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien*, *Spiritualité orientale* 30 (Begrolle-en-Mauges, 1979), 217; A. Vööbus, *A History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient, v. 1: The Origin of Asceticism* (Louvain: Peeters Publishers & Booksellers, 1958), 2:111-17; Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ*, 155.

⁴¹ Called μονάζοντες in relation to their chastity in *Cat. Lect.* 4.24; 12.33; 26:12 (NPNF2 7); also see F.L. Cross, ed., *St. Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments* (London: SPCK, 1951); cf. Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 48.

There is also evidence of early σπουδαῖοι (“devotees”), proto-monks, who gravitated around holy sites, like the Church of the Resurrection.⁴² Therefore, according to ancient literature, Antony was certainly not the founder of Egyptian monasticism; Pachomius was certainly not the founder of semi- or communal monasticism; and Hilarion cannot be demonstrated to be the founder of Palestinian monasticism. Each person was instrumental in a particular version of Christian monasticism, and idiosyncratic communities or disciples followed each of them. However, Christian ascetic practices, and some of their monastic manifestations, are more ancient than these key figures.

Monk as City-Dweller

It is well-known that Jews in late antiquity that wished to withdraw from society for various reasons regarding purity did so *within* society. Instead of physically leaving, most Jews who lived in urban centers sought table fellowship with select persons who adhered to rigorous ritual purity.⁴³ Unfortunately, it is still assumed in literature that Jewish asceticism should not be compared (or with much qualification) to Christian asceticism because, it is believed, Christian asceticism is only (or best) understood as persons who fled the city to practice self-denial.⁴⁴ The following section seeks to argue that the predominant manifestation of Christian asceticism was that which was practiced within urban areas, similarly to their Jewish neighbors.

⁴² Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 48.

⁴³ Groups such as the Pharisees, Essenes, various sages and rabbis as attested within rabbinic literature demonstrate this fact. For more, see Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 11-12.

⁴⁴ E.g., this is assumed in Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 11-12.

The first extant usage of μοναχός (papyrus dated June 324 from Egypt) speaks of an urban ascetic.⁴⁵ A certain μοναχός named Isaac helps the διάκονος Antoninus settle a dispute concerning a cow's destruction of a citizen's property. In this context, μοναχός is apparently a recognized title for a *urban* ascetic, who is working alongside a deacon in *secular* affairs. Ascetic literature continuously speaks of monks in civic life, especially by the end of the fourth century. In other words, the existence of monks in the city in late antiquity was not a *late* occurrence, as if monasticism began in the desert and moved to the city generations later, but a reality already set by monks for centuries (at least in Egypt).⁴⁶ A few examples will demonstrate the point. Let us first examine the account given in the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* and then move to the Sayings and other various sources.

In the prologue of the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* (394-95),⁴⁷ the anonymous author (traditionally Rufinus of Aquileia) gives a glimpse into the monastic landscape of Egypt. In the region of Nitria, monks are located in more remote places. Yet in the Nile valley region, the author speaks of innumerable monks, primarily located

⁴⁵ E.A. Judge, "The earliest use of monachos for 'Monk' (P Coll Youtie 77) and the origins of monasticism," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 20 (1977): 72-89. The term "monk" probably implied celibacy from its early pagan usage. For more, see Françoise E. Morard, "Monachos, Moine: Histoire du terme grec jusqu'au 46 siècle: Influences bibliques et gnostiques," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 20 (1973): 332-411.

⁴⁶ The same is true for the rabbinic sage. Rabbis were associated with cities and villages long before late antiquity. For more see Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tubingen: J C B Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1997), 157-65, and Stuart Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Eretz Israel* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 446-66. This is important to establish before one can reasonably compare Jewish and Christian asceticism and wisdom.

⁴⁷ This records a visit to several locations in Egypt; eleven cities are listed. Antony died in 356, so by the second generation after Antony, the Egyptian landscape had exploded with monks. This document (and *Historia Lausiaca* by Palladius) cover much of the same information, while this document contains one of the most overt emphases upon ascetic women in contemporaneous literature. For more on the role of women in this document, see Elm, "Virgins of God," 311-30.

in or near population densities (Scetis and Nitria were forty miles southwest of Alexandria):

Their number is past counting. There are so many of them that an earthly emperor could not assemble so large an army. *For there is no town or village in Egypt and the Thebaid* which is not surrounded by hermitages as if by walls [i.e., prayers blocking out evil] . . . *Some* of them live in desert caves, others in more remote places. . . Those in the remotest places make strenuous efforts for fear anyone else should surpass them in ascetic practices. Those living near towns or villages make equal efforts, though evil troubles them on every side, *in case they should be considered inferior to their remoter brethren* (emphasis mine).⁴⁸

It is important to note that (1) there are too many monks to count⁴⁹; (2) monks are said to exist primarily in or near cities and villages, while only *some* live in remote places; (3) those in the desert are aware of the ascetic practices of those monks in the towns; and (4) the ideology of the desert is already assumed (hence, “in case they should be considered inferior to their remoter brethren”), though it is uncertain if this ideology represents the historical belief of those in Egypt. However, concession is made for the urban monks, since they have greater “evil” to overcome, being part of society. Among other temptations, the laudation monks would receive from those in the city could lead to pride, which is destructive to the goal of spiritual perfection.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Hist. monach.*, prol., 10-11 (Russell). Benedicta Ward is probably correct in assuming the *Hist. monach.* is an actual record of a journey, though this certainly does not mean that everything recorded actually happened. See her introduction to *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Norman Russell (Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 1980), 4-5. Derwas Chitty generally trusts Palladius’ *Lausiaca History* over Rufinus, but still trusts Rufinus’ report to some degree: “[*Historia monachorum*] is full of wonders, and the writer was extremely gullible. But most of his wonders are given at second hand: and the contrast between the style and thought of the different monks whose words he gives us suggests that he does give these faithfully to the best of his ability” (*The Desert a City*, 51).

⁴⁹ Though specific amounts are given with particular leaders. E.g., Abba Or oversaw one thousand monks (*Hist. monach.* 2.1), Abba Ammon oversaw three thousand monks (*Hist. monach.* 3.1), and Abba Apollo oversaw five hundred monks (*Hist. monach.* 8.2).

⁵⁰ E.g., John of Lycopolis: “One should not be puffed up about one’s own achievements but always be humble and flee to the farthest parts of the desert if one realizes that one is becoming proud. For living near villages has often harmed even the perfect . . . Many of our own brethren have experienced something

These numerical figures might be inflated. Yet, we will not dismiss them implicitly because they are given in texts with other incredible claims. There is no reason to assume that because the ancient authors wrote about the miraculous (and because modern investigations of history preclude the miraculous), whether it occurred in the city or the desert, they intended for their works to be understood as simply *fictitious* “propaganda.”

The ancients were well aware that the average person could not raise the dead,⁵¹ summon serpents,⁵² transform female horses back to little girls,⁵³ or walk on water,⁵⁴ in the desert or anywhere else.⁵⁵ Ancient authors of ascetic literature believed that what they witnessed was miraculous, and therefore, evidence that these monks were reaching (or had reached) spiritual perfection. Miracles were not a sign that the laws of nature had been broken, but that God’s power had broken through this holy man or woman.⁵⁶ They further understood that the average person was not quick to believe the fantastic or extraordinary. They knew that readers could approach such stories with incredulity. For

similar and through arrogance have failed to reach their goal” (*Hist. monach.* 1.31 [Russell]); references in the Sayings concerning this belief are given below.

⁵¹ *Hist. monach.*, epil. 1.2. Not everyone who died was resuscitated, e.g., *Alph.* Gelasius 3.

⁵² *Hist. monach.* 9.6; or make dragons flee, *Alph.* Theodore of Pherme 23. Sometimes the animals got the best of the monks, like *Anony.* 237 (Ward), where the monk had been eaten by a hyena.

⁵³ *Hist. monach.* 27.17.

⁵⁴ *Alph.* Bessarion 2.

⁵⁵ E.g., “One would not believe their ascetic practices, which surpass human capabilities.” *Hist. monach.*, epil. 1.1 (Russell).

⁵⁶ Thus, Benedicta Ward, “Signs and Wonders: Miracles in the Desert Tradition,” *Studia Patristica* 17, pt 2 (1982): 539-42.

example, the author of the *Historia monachorum* speaks of the monk John, as told by the priest Apelles:

The father [Apelles] told us these and other even more marvelous stories about this saint [John]. They are so very extraordinary that we have not written them all down—not because they are not true, but because some people will be skeptical. As for us, we were fully convinced because many great fathers told us these things and had seen them themselves with their own eyes.⁵⁷

Compare this to Jerome's account of Paul of Thebes: "What I relate then is so strange that it will appear incredible to those who do not believe the words that 'all things are possible to him that believes.'" ⁵⁸ Regardless of one's views of the miraculous, it should not be assumed that ancient writers, or more importantly, their audience, were "extremely gullible" (Chitty's phrase, nt. 37). "The only answer to the question of whether the miracles really happened is that the writers believed they did. There are no grounds for imputing fraud, deception, or invention to the . . . hagiographers."⁵⁹ Nor should it be assumed that these ancient authors had precise numbers, as if they had gone from town-to-town counting.

⁵⁷ 13.12 (Russell); Cf.: "We have come to you from Jerusalem for the good of our souls, so that what we have heard with our ears we might perceive with our eyes—for the ears are naturally less reliable than the eyes—and because very often forgetfulness follows what we hear, whereas the memory of what we have seen is not easily erased but remains imprinted on our minds like a picture" (*Hist. monach.* 1.19 [Russell]). Or: "Some things I wrote down after personal investigation, the rest I have heard from the holy fathers." (*Hist. Laus.* Pref. 5 [*The Lausiaca History of Palladius*, trans. W. K. Lowther Clarke (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1918, 1-34)]). The ancients, like people today, knew that personal, eye-witness testimony was the best form of evidence, especially when trying to defend the miraculous. This is why the New Testament constantly appeals to non-Christians and Christians with eye-witness testimony both to what Jesus did and what happened to Jesus (e.g., Acts 4:20: "[F]or we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."; 1 Cor. 9:1: "[H]ave I not seen Jesus our Lord?"; 1 Cor. 15: 3-8; 1 John 1:1: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life . . ."; *et al.*).

⁵⁸ Jerome, *Vita Pauli* 6 [PL 23.17-30]; NPNF2 6; M.L. Ewald, trans., "Life of Paul, Life of Hilarion, Life of Malchus," *Early Christian Biographies* 15, ed. R.J. Deferrari (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1952), 217-297. It is debated if Paul of Thebes was an invention of Jerome, even though Jerome claims that he received information about Paul of Thebes from Antony's disciples, Amathas and Macarius (*Vita Pauli* 1).

⁵⁹ Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ*, 219-20.

There are other references in patristic literature to ascetics and monks living in urban locations. The following section will explore a few of them. (1) From earliest times, there is evidence of males and females living celibate lifestyles as a form of asceticism.⁶⁰ Urban ascetics, especially celibate men and women, dominated much of the patristic author's mind.⁶¹ Both men and women were influential in the monastic foment in the fourth century. Jerome speaks of several important women who developed monasteries alongside men (e.g., Paula, Paulina, Blaesilla, Eustochium, Rufina, *et al.*).⁶² (2) Jerome lauds the eremitic and coenobitic monastic life, while he abhors the urban monks of Karanis. This type of monk was actively involved in both quotidian civic and church activities. Though Jerome vitiates them because he considers them belligerent and over-dressed, his chief complaint is that they do not take orders well.⁶³ (2) Julian detests a group of urban ascetics that he calls the "impious Galileans," the ἀποτάκται,⁶⁴

⁶⁰ E.g., Matt 19:12; Justin, *I Apology* 15; Athenagoras, *Plea* (Πρεσβεια Περι Χριστιανων) 33; Tatian, *Oratio Ad Graecos* 32f.

⁶¹ E.g., Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 31; Tertullian, *Apologia* 9; idem., *De Virginibus Velandis*; Origen *Contra Celsum* 1.26; Pseudo-Clement, *Two Epistles Concerning Virginity*, Methodius, *The Banquet* (Συμπόσιον τῶν δέκα παρθένων), *et al.* Thus, "It is difficult to underestimate the importance and the position of virgins and of widows . . . who lived a life of seclusion. All the Fathers took an interest in them and writings, letters, and tracts intended for them occupy an important place in the literature of the period" (Adalbert Hamman, "The Turnabout of the Fourth Century: A Political, Geographical, Social, Ecclesiastical, and Doctrinal Framework of the Century," in *Patrology* IV, ed. Angelo Di Berardino [trans. Placid Solari; Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1986], 27). For more on the role of women in late antique Christianity, especially in the monastic culture, see the essays in Elizabeth A. Clark, *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), esp. 23-264, and Joan M. Peterson, trans. and ed., *Handmaids of the Lord: Contemporary Descriptions of Feminine Asceticism in the First Six Christian Centuries* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1996).

⁶² E.g., Jerome, *Epistle* 58. For more in the role of ascetic women in late antiquity, especially the role of Roman aristocratic women, see Anne Hickey, *Women of the Roman Aristocracy as Christian Monastics* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987). Hickey believes that Roman aristocratic women were drawn to Christian asceticism because of a general ambiguity concerning "cultural norms" for women in Roman society, which was intertwined with Christian roles for women as matrons and virgins within aristocratic families. In short, Christian asceticism gave Roman aristocratic women a "feminine norm."

⁶³ Jerome, *Ep.* 22.34 (CSEL 54, 196-97); Judge, "The earliest use of monachos for 'Monk,'" 79.

⁶⁴ Based on Jesus' command "to renounce" [ἀποτάσσειται] in order to be his disciple (Lk 14:33).

which is his moniker for the Cynics.⁶⁵ These monks live as small communities in houses.⁶⁶ (3) Though Epiphanius speaks of the ἀποστολικοὶ as a heretical monastic sect in Phrygia, Pamphylia, and Cilicia, Egeria speaks of them (*aputactitae*) as an orthodox segment of the church population, known for their fasting and frequent visits to Jerusalem to celebrate the Encaneia (commemorations of new churches).⁶⁷ (4) Mention has already been made of the civic monks linked with some of the earliest monks, the eremitic Antony, and the coenobitic Pachomius. (5) Literature also speaks of specific cities, like Oxyrhynchus, where it is said that urban monks appeared to outnumber the secular inhabitants.⁶⁸ Monasteries filled the entire city, both inside and outside the city walls.⁶⁹ In the *Vita Antoni* 3, it is said that all who had already literally followed Jesus' command "to sell everything" (Matt 19:21) lived in solitude near "their own village." (6) Palladius says that he "visited many cities and very many villages, every cave and all the desert dwellings of monks" and travelled throughout "the Egyptian desert and Libya, the Thebaid and Syene, near which last are the so-called Tabennesiots, and again in Mesopotamia, Palestine and Syria, and the districts of the West—Rome and Campania

⁶⁵ Judge, "The earliest use of monachos for 'Monk'," 79-80.

⁶⁶ Julian [The Apostate], *Ep.* 224B = *Or.* 7.18; cf. Libanius, *Or.* 30.8; Judge, "The earliest use of monachos for 'Monk'," 79. Renunciants, usually celibate, who lived in cities in communities were already present in Syria. These "Sons and Daughters of the covenant" were often supported by wealthy individuals. Such a situation is assumed in Methodius, *The Banquet* (Συμπόσιον τῶν δέκα παρθένων) 1.1 (PG 18: 27-220; ANF 6, 309), where virgins are addressed. Thus, Robin L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1989), 602. For monastic instruction given to Syriac-speaking monks, see the work of the bishop of Edessa, Rabbula, *Admonitions to Monks* (R.H. Connolly, "Some early rules for Syrian monks" *Downside Review* 25 (NS 6) [1907]:152-162).

⁶⁷ J. Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 3rd ed. (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1999); men and women involved, 23.3, 23.6; 39.3; fasting in 28.3, 41. Judge, "The earliest use of monachos for 'Monk'," 80.

⁶⁸ *Hist. monach.* 5.3; there were an estimated ten thousand monks and twenty thousand nuns, *Hist. Monach.*, 5.6 (Russell).

⁶⁹ *Hist. monach.* 1.1. There are many more examples of urban monks and/or desert monks dealing with urban locations listed in Judge, "The earliest use of monachos for 'Monk'," 80-84.

and thereabouts.”⁷⁰ (7) Palestinian monastic settlements, evidenced in literature and archaeology, demonstrate that monks did not settle too far from cities, particularly because of the need for water. Moreover, Judean and Egyptian monasticism was largely dependent upon their capacity to trade, sell, buy supplies, and especially in Palestine, to “convert” visitors and pilgrims from afar.⁷¹ Palestinian monks wanted seclusion, but not too much. A complex and efficient intranet of paths and monasteries kept Palestinian monks connected. By the fifth and sixth centuries, monks not only actively participated in church life and theological politics in and around Jerusalem, but they also revered and visited the holy sites, particularly the city of Jerusalem.⁷² “Jerusalem—the Holy City—dominated the consciousness of the monk from the start. The monks of the Palestinian desert had a double vocation. They were both pilgrims and monks.”⁷³ The monk in late antiquity had become an integral part of civic life: “He has become institutionalized, and

⁷⁰ *Hist. Laus.* Prol. 5 and 1 (Clarke).

⁷¹ Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period*, trans. Jeffrey M. Green (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 2. “Many of the Judean desert monks were originally pilgrims to the holy places. Indeed, the monastic movement in the Judean desert may be regarded as a direct continuation of the mass pilgrimage movement to Palestine” (236). The Sayings are replete with examples of the monks going in and out of towns and villages to sell their baskets, ropes, and other crafts, while buying bread and more material (e.g., *Alph.* Isidore the Priest 7; Macarius the Great 1; Pistamon 1; Sisoës 16; Philagrius 1; *Anony.* 7.7 [Columba Stewart, trans., *The World of the Desert Fathers: stories and sayings from the Anonymous Series of the Apophthegmata Patrum* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1986)]; Nau 45).

⁷² Thus, Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period*, 10. The literature often refers to the more remote locations of monks as “the desert of the Holy City,” which demonstrates the perception of Jerusalem “as a spiritual and administrative center” (10). By “holy sites” it is meant those major sites spread throughout Palestine (e.g., Church of the Nativity), and those minor sites along the roads, often connecting monasteries with major holy sites. For more, see Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period*, 223-34.

⁷³ John Binns, “The Distinctiveness of Palestinian Monasticism: 450-550,” in *Monastic Studies: the Continuity of Tradition*, ed. Judith Loades (Bangor: Headstart History, 1990), 13.

works within the context of ecclesiastical, political and social life. The holy man is placed within urban society, as an essential part of it.”⁷⁴

As has been demonstrated, though monastic involvement in secular and ecclesiastical affairs waxed in later centuries, their involvement had always existed in varying degrees. Christian asceticism has always been practiced by Christians within the city, at its periphery, and in some cases, apart from the city. When an ascetic did travel into the desert alone, it was a rare phenomenon.⁷⁵ Archaeological evidence confirms this reality: “The monasteries in the [esp. Palestinian] cities were inserted within the urban texture and were attached to large ecclesiastic complexes.”⁷⁶ Thus, one can say with confidence that “by the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century AD ascetic communities had developed in urban centers . . . [M]onasticism originated as an urban phenomenon.”⁷⁷

“The Desert”⁷⁸ as Ideology

If Christian ascetics and monks were commonplace in urban life from at least the late third century (though probably earlier), then from where does the ideology of the

⁷⁴ Binns, “The Distinctiveness of Palestinian Monasticism,” 16.

⁷⁵ The Sayings often preface such phenomena as special, such as “In Lower Egypt there was an anchorite who was well-known because he dwelt in a solitary cell (μονοκελλίον) in the desert.” (*Anony.* 57 [Ward]; Nau 189). As this saying illustrates, these monks always attracted the very attention they were seeking to avoid by going into the desert.

⁷⁶ M. Ben-Pechat, “Baptism and Monasticism in the Holy Land: Archaeological and Literary Evidence (fourth to seventh centuries),” in *Christian Archaeology in the Holy Land: new discoveries: essays in honour of Virgilio C Corbo, OFM*, ed. Giovanni Claudio Bottini, Leah Di Segni, and Eugenio Alliata (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1990), 502.

⁷⁷ Elm, “*Virgins of God*,” viii-ix.

⁷⁸ While the term ἡ ἐρήμος can describe the actual desert, and often did for the sages represented in the Sayings, the arid landscape is not always the emphasis. Rather, the barren-ness is emphasized, hence the common translations, “wilderness” or “deserted places.”

desert come (viz., that the desert is the principal location one finds spiritual perfection)? First of all, there were monks who actually lived in the desert, whether completely alone (eremitic, though rare), or in within some proximity to other monks (semi-eremitic, *laura* or *coenobium*). It was rare to live secluded in the desert because of the hardships and temptations one had to endure without any other help. For example, one young monk who had shown great progress wanted to leave his community:

After a short time it happened that the monk began to say to his abbot, “Please let me go into the desert (*in eremo*).” The abbot said, “My son, don't think of it. You can't endure austerity like that (*non potes sufferre talem laborem*), or the skill and temptation of the devil. When you are tempted in the desert, there is no one to comfort you in the troubles which the devil stirs up.”⁷⁹

However, “the desert” was also used ideologically as a *topos* in ascetic literature. The mythic idea of the “desert” was mixed in popular consciousness with metaphors from the Old Testament (esp. Elijah's and Elisha's theophanies and miracles in the desert; 1 Kgs 19:4ff) and Hellenism.⁸⁰ Like images of the sea in the Jewish mindset, the wilderness was a place of chaos, an “accursed place.”⁸¹ Moreover, images of John the Baptizer's preaching (Matt 3:1//) and Jesus' temptation (Matt 4:1-11//), both taking place in the wilderness (ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ), are certainly foundational to the monastic view of the

⁷⁹ Sys. 7.24 (Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks* [=Verba Seniorum of Pelagius and John] [London: Penguin Books, 2003]); PL 73:897D.

⁸⁰ E.g., A. Guillaumont, “La conception du desert chez les moines d'Égypte,” *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 188 (1975): 3-21; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 216; David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁸¹ Thus, E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 216; S. Talmon, *The Desert Motif in the Bible and in Qumran Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966).

desert.⁸² Paul had told them that warfare was not against “flesh and blood” but against powers and spiritual hosts in “this present darkness” (Eph 6:12).⁸³ And this warfare was sure to take place in the desert, where demons, talking animals, revelations by God, and miracles were experienced. Like Jesus in his temptations, the spiritual elite battled with Satan on a daily basis in the desert, as they sought to transform their bodies and their thoughts: “A great anchorite said, ‘Why do you fight me like this, Satan?’ Satan heard and said, ‘It is you who fight me so greatly.’”⁸⁴ Therefore, if an ascetic author wanted to emphasize the spiritual acumen and vigor of a monk, they could easily evoke the power, mystery, and spiritual battleground known as “the desert.”

It was not until the *Vita Antonii* that the desert environs took on a mythic, ideological, and necessary qualification in ascetic literature. This work will form the paradigm for almost all subsequent ascetic literature in this regard. However, it is imperative to note how the Sayings give us a positive representation of *urban* ascetics, or respect given by urbanites to monks. For example:

It was revealed to Abba Anthony in his desert (ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ) that there was one who was his equal in the city (ἐν τῇ πόλει). He was a doctor by profession and whatever he had beyond his needs he gave to the poor, and every day he sang the Sanctus with the angels.”⁸⁵

A secular man of devout life came to see Abba Poemen.⁸⁶

⁸² E.g., “[Hermits] have not remained satisfied with defeating the attacks which the devils secretly plan in human society, but have been ready to meet them in open war. That is why they have penetrated courageously into the fastnesses of the desert, like John the Baptist who remained in the desert all his life, or Elijah and Elisha and the others whom St. Paul mentioned,” Cassian, *Conferences*, 18.6 (Chadwick).

⁸³ Antony encourages his fellow ascetics with this verse from Paul (*Vita Antonii* 21).

⁸⁴ *Anony.* 7.5 (Stewart; Nau 35).

⁸⁵ *Alph.* Antony 24 (Ward); PG 65:84B. The term ἔρημος will be consistently translated as “desert” in the Sayings. The term ἡ πόλις will be consistently translated as “city” in the Sayings.

⁸⁶ *Alph.* Poemen 109 (Ward).

Abba John the Dwarf said, “There was a spiritual old man who lived a secluded life. He was held in high estimation in the city and enjoyed a great reputation.”⁸⁷

A monk of the Thebaid received from God the grace of ministry, to serve the poor as they had need. In a village (ἡ κώμη) once he happened to be holding a love-feast.⁸⁸

Two Fathers asked God to reveal to them how far they had advanced. A voice came which said, “In a certain village in Egypt there is a man called Eucharistus and his wife who is called Mary. You have not yet reached their degree of virtue.”⁸⁹

An old man said, “There was an old man living in the desert who served God for many years and said, ‘Lord, let me know if I have pleased you.’ He saw an angel who said to him, ‘You have not yet become like the gardener in such and such a place.’ The old man marveled and said to himself, ‘I will go off to the city to see both him and whatever it is that he does which surpasses my work and toil of all these years.’”⁹⁰

In Abba Or's neighborhood there was a villager (κώμης) named Longinas, who gave a great deal away in alms. He asked one of the Fathers who came to see him to take him to Abba Or. The monk went to the old man and praised the villager (τὸν κώμητα), saying that he was good and gave many alms.⁹¹

Usually, the urban area was to be avoided because of the temptations that came with it. It was generally assumed that city life easily led one to sin. For example:

He [anonymous monk] thought that the enemy rejoiced at his ruin, and he wanted to despair, because he had sorely grieved the Spirit of God, and the holy angels, and the venerable fathers, many of whom had overcome the devil though they lived in towns.⁹²

Amma Syncletica said, “There are many who live in the mountains and behave as if they were in the town, and they are wasting their time. It is possible to be a

⁸⁷ *Alph.* John the Dwarf 38 (Ward).

⁸⁸ *Syst.* 13.12 (Ward). The term ἡ κώμη will be consistently translated as “village” in the Sayings.

⁸⁹ *Alph.* Eucharistus the Secular 1 (Ward).

⁹⁰ *Anony.* 2.11 (Stewart; Nau 67).

⁹¹ *Alph.* Or 6 (Ward); PG 65:437D.

⁹² *Syst.* 5.41 (Ward).

solitary in one's mind while living in a crowd, and it is possible for one who is a solitary to live in the crowd of his own thoughts.”⁹³

A priest of Pelusia heard it said of some brethren that they often went to the city, took baths and were careless in their behavior. He went to the *synaxis*, took the habit away from them . . .⁹⁴

Two brothers went to a town to sell what they had made. In the town they separated, and one of them fell into fornication.⁹⁵

Abba Isidore went one day to see Abba Theophilus, archbishop of Alexandria and when he returned to Scetis the brethren asked him, “What is going on in the city?” But he said to them, “Truly, brothers, I did not see the face of anyone there, except that of the archbishop.” Hearing this they were very anxious and said to him, “Has there been a disaster there, then, abba?” He said, “Not at all, but the thought of looking at anyone did not get the better of me.” At these words they were filled with admiration, and strengthened in their intention of guarding the eyes from all distraction.⁹⁶

He [Poemen] also said, “David wrote to Joab, ‘Continue the battle and you will take the city and sack it.’ Now the city is the enemy.”⁹⁷

These sayings demonstrate that it was the negative spiritual aspects of urban life that rural, Christian ascetics abhorred. On the other hand, rural inhabitants in general could enjoy or participate in the benefits of certain aspects of urban life, especially in fourth-fifth century Egypt.⁹⁸

⁹³ *Alph. Syncletica* 19 (Ward).

⁹⁴ *Alph. Poemen* 11 (Ward).

⁹⁵ *Syst.* 5.27 (Ward).

⁹⁶ *Alph. Isidore* 8 (Ward).

⁹⁷ *Alph. Poemen* 193 (Ward).

⁹⁸ Rousseau rightly notes: “[W]e should note a readiness in the rural areas to share in the prosperity, status, and intellectual vitality of town life” (*Pachomius*, 9).

Reconstructing the Origins of Monasticism

What can be said then about traditional beliefs on monastic origins? Traditional theories involving psychological or sociological responses, desires to be a martyr, or simply to heed literally Jesus' call to "leave everything," are not mutually exclusive.⁹⁹ Certainly individuals could have had their own reasons for practicing Christian monasticism. Yet, it is crucial to note that there is no evidence to suggest that the monastic movement progressed from solitary ascetics in the desert to communal monks gathered around one leader.¹⁰⁰ Nor do we have evidence to suggest that monasticism came from an unexplainable "big bang" in the late fourth century,¹⁰¹ although there was certainly a fomenting of the number of monks in this century. Rather, Christian monasticism had always been latent, and visible, within ascetic practices of Christians (and of course, Jews, Greeks, and Romans) who were part of quotidian civic and ecclesial life.

Reaction to the Church

If ascetic tendencies, and their broad individual and communal manifestations in monasticism are not caused by particular individuals or socio-political events, then there is no need to posit one, single reason for the rise of monasticism. For example, if monasticism was the church's reaction to something within in the Church, then why is there no evidence to suggest this? J.C. O'Neill says it well:

⁹⁹ Thus, Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1993), 2-3.

¹⁰⁰ See evidence on pages 67-71. For more on the literary myths associated with Pachomius' influence on coenobitic monasticism, see Goehring, "The Origins of Monasticism," 28-29.

¹⁰¹ Thus, Goehring, "The Origins of Monasticism," 35: "The 'big bang' lies not in one or more historical events, but deep beneath the historical plane of ancient Mediterranean culture."

It monasteries originated at the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth century, where is the great monastic protest against a church that had proved so dangerous a place in which to attain salvation that men and women had to flee the cities and towns in which she was now so firmly established and take to a common celibate life, without private possessions, in the desert?¹⁰²

Scholars have long noted how well the monks and clerical leadership related to one another in certain areas.¹⁰³ “Indeed, by the sixth century, under Justinian’s rule, the penetration of monks into the ecclesiastic hierarchy increased all over the empire. This process was prevalent in Palestine already in the fifth century, especially with Saint Euthymius and his disciples.”¹⁰⁴

Monasticism as Living Martyrdom

The same critique can be said of the widely-popular notion that monasticism was understood as a living martyrdom. David Keller represents this common sentiment: “Just as Christian martyrs had given their lives under Roman persecution (red martyrdom), leaving the inhabited world for the desert became a new form of martyrdom after Christianity became a religion endorsed by the empire (white martyrdom).”¹⁰⁵ E. E. Malone’s dissertation in 1950, *The Monk and the Martyr: The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr*, has been heavily influential in monastic scholarship concerning the theory of

¹⁰² O’Neill, “The Origins of Monasticism,” 272.

¹⁰³ There are many examples in ascetic literature of powerful leadership becoming monks or leaders going to and from monastic settlements in their towns and in remote places (e.g., Jerome, Basil, Augustine, Origen, Athanasius, Gregory, bishop Peter of Alexandria, nameless bishops [e.g., *Anony.* 6.6 (Stewart)], *et al.*).

¹⁰⁴ M. Ben-Pechat, “Baptism and Monasticism,” 502; Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 82, 96.

¹⁰⁵ *Oasis of Wisdom: The Worlds of the Desert Fathers and Mothers* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), 5.

Christian monasticism as a form of martyrdom. His evidence is worth examining.¹⁰⁶ Not only are monastic origins argued in his dissertation, but so are implicit assumptions about the influences and goals of Christian monasticism. As long as historians continue to believe that monks across the Empire became monks because they wanted to live as martyrs, and no contemporaneous practice in Judaism resembles this motivation, then it can lead to the improper view that the motivations for Christian monks were unlike their Jewish neighbors.¹⁰⁷

The evidence that Malone gives which is directly related to his primary thesis is focused on a few sources. A précis of his evidence might look as follows: (1) Origen valued martyrdom as utter perfection (along with Ignatius, Clement, Tertullian, and most patristic authors), and since Origen was an ascetic, and “the early monastic writers made a careful study of the writings of Origen,” then the basis of monasticism was “spiritual martyrdom”¹⁰⁸; (2) Antony wanted to die a martyr, but instead chose asceticism¹⁰⁹; (3) Pachomius wanted to be a martyr but could not be one, and in a dream, a figure told him to endure a “little martyrdom” before he should die¹¹⁰; (4) the Greek author of the *Vita Pachomii* says that Gentile Christians saw the suffering of the martyrs and then began living as monks¹¹¹; (5) there is one reference to Macarius referring to the cell of two

¹⁰⁶ Every scholar that discusses the role of monk as martyr references this work, even though similar arguments were made before Malone. E.g., Hippolyte Delehaye, *Sanctus: essai sur le culte des saints dans l'antiquité* (Bruxelles: Société des bollandistes, 1927), 104-42.

¹⁰⁷ Jewish motivations for ascetic practices will be examined in chapter four and five.

¹⁰⁸ Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 14-26, quote on p.15.

¹⁰⁹ *Vita Antonii* 46-47; Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 44-46.

¹¹⁰ Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 46-48.

¹¹¹ *Vita Pachomii*, prol.; Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 51-52.

brother monks as a *martyrion*¹¹²; (6) Clement speaks of being a martyr to various virtues¹¹³; (7) Basil speaks of Christians becoming “martyrs in will.”¹¹⁴

Although Malone discusses many other topics concerning the espousal of *physical* martyrdom among patristic authors, the concept of athletic discipline (which is much more applicable when discussing monasticism), and other periphery topics, it is only in these few references that he tries to link monasticism explicitly with martyrdom. Malone (and those who follow him) often makes two common paralogisms: (1) scholars assume that martyrdom was typically understood metaphorically; and (2) since martyrdom and monasticism both had as their goal, perfection, and martyrs certainly reached perfection, scholars assume that one had to become a monk to be like the martyr in order to reach perfection.

Let us respond to Malone’s evidence listed above, while noting these two common paralogisms.

Malone relies on the following syllogism:

1. Origen promulgates spiritual perfection, with its apex in martyrdom.
2. Ascetics and monks pined for spiritual perfection.
3. Ascetics and monastic authors (predominately) read Origen.
4. Therefore, ascetics and monastic authors became monks (or understood monasticism) as a “spiritual martyrdom.”

This conclusion does not follow logically because premise three is invalid and because it cannot be demonstrated that monks changed the meaning of martyrdom to involve physical death to spiritual death. Though Origen was popular in ascetic circles, it cannot

¹¹² *Alph. Macarius* 33; Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 53.

¹¹³ *Strom.* 4.4.; Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 9.

¹¹⁴ *Hom. 19 in sanctos XL martyres* (PG 31, 508B); Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 9, nt. 28.

be demonstrated that he was as widely read as Malone *needs* him to be. Even if it could be demonstrated that ascetic *authors* were so dependent upon Origen, it does not follow that the huge mass of illiterate monks were so influenced. It is also telling that Origen never claimed asceticism to be “spiritual martyrdom” (Malone’s favorite phrase).¹¹⁵ Nor can it be demonstrated that monks used Origen’s understanding of martyrdom as perfection to understand their asceticism. Origen certainly believes in spiritual discipline and the goal of perfection. However, the entire reason Origen (and other patristic references) grieve the fact that martyrdom could not come after persecution is because it involves *physical* death.¹¹⁶ Why the despair? If monasticism was the natural substitute (or metaphor), then there would be no reason not to say it. Furthermore, monastic ideals and the ideals of patristic authors who espouse martyrdom are similar: perfection. However, this does not mean that monks decided to become monks because they needed some way to have a “spiritual martyrdom.” In other words, one did not have to reach perfection via martyrdom: there was more than one way to perfection, as the Sayings demonstrate so well.¹¹⁷

(2) It is crucial to read what the *Vita Antonii* actually says about Antony’s desires when Antony goes to Alexandria: “And he longed to suffer martyrdom, *but not being*

¹¹⁵ This author cannot find any reference to this phrase or idea in Origen, and it is certainly not in Malone’s references of Origen. A.E.D. Van Loveren comes to the same conclusion on this point, and cannot find this idea of “spiritual martyrdom” until *Vita Antonii*. See his “Once again: “the monk and the martyr”: St Anthony and St Macrina,” *Studia Patristica* 17, pt. 2 (1982): 528-538.

¹¹⁶ If martyrdom were understood to be “spiritual,” it would also signify a distinctive move in the etymology of the word, “martyr,” in that it would be the first time someone could “die for the faith” without another human as the cause. In other words, martyrdom would now be “voluntary” and “self-inflicted,” and surely this is a breach from its historical usage.

¹¹⁷ Even still, not all monks believed death was the ultimate form of perfection. Cf. “[T]he summit of perfection and blessedness consists not in working miracles but in pure charity. All else will pass away, charity will abide.” Cassian, *Conferences*, 15.2 (Chadwick).

willing to give himself up [i.e., to the courts in order to be martyred], he ministered to the confessors in the mines and in the prisons.”¹¹⁸ It is unclear to us how one can pine for martyrdom, yet when given the opportunity, decline the offer. The author comments that Antony would return to his cell and live “daily as a martyr to his conscience.”¹¹⁹ Again, the *author’s* view dominates here: it is the author who believes that Antony lived daily as a martyr, dying to the self.¹²⁰ We never hear of Antony deciding to live as a monk because he could not be perfected via martyrdom. Rather, Antony *denied* becoming a martyr so that he might take care of others. The author’s emphasis upon Antony’s desire to be a martyr is simply a rhetorical move to illustrate Antony’s devotion to God: a devotion as rigorous as a martyr. Van Loveren concludes: “Finally, one may conclude—contrary to E.E. Malone and others—that Anthony did not regard himself as a spiritual martyr, but rather, just like Origen, considered his efforts an approach to or a preparation for martyrdom.”¹²¹

(3) Pachomius believed that he was able to accomplish the “confession of martyrdom,”¹²² apparently via asceticism (though we are not explicitly told how he accomplished this). It could just as easily mean that Pachomius reached the place of spiritual readiness required for martyrdom via asceticism. Malone then cites a reference to monks living near Pachomius who wanted to die for Christ but could not.¹²³

¹¹⁸ *Vita Antonii* 46 (NPNF 2, 209).

¹¹⁹ *Vita Antonii* 47.

¹²⁰ The same is true in Athanasius’ *Doctrina ad monachos* [PG 28: 1421].

¹²¹ A.E.D. Van Loveren, “Once Again,” 532.

¹²² Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 48.

¹²³ E. Budge, *The Paradise, or Garden of the Holy Fathers* (London: 1907), 1:301; Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 49.

Interestingly, Pachomius admonished them *not* to think those thoughts [i.e., longing to die for Christ], but instead, live in such a way that would please Christ and thus, they could make it in heaven like the martyrs. Like we saw with Origen, spiritual perfection is not achieved only via martyrdom.

(4) The author of *Vita Pachomii* tells us that the Gentiles who saw the devotion of the martyrs and became Christians did not become monks because they saw contemporaneous martyrs, but because they wanted to be like those spiritual heroes mentioned in Hebrews 11:37-38, some of whom were killed because of their faith.¹²⁴ The author tells us that the monks were in no way inferior to the martyrs; he never says that the monks sought to replace martyrdom with monasticism.¹²⁵

(5) The reference to the cell of the two brother monks who died as being a *martyrion* is also not about them living as martyrs. The cell is not referred to as a place of martyrdom until *after* they have physically died.¹²⁶

(6) Clement of Alexandria does speak of a “gnostic martyrdom,” where the Christian lives a faithful life in perfect obedience:

If the confession to God is martyrdom, each soul which has lived purely in the knowledge of God, which has obeyed the commandments, is a witness both by life and word, in whatever way it may be released from the body,—shedding faith as blood along its whole life till its departure.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Hebrews 11:36-40: “Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy—wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. ³⁹ And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (RSV).

¹²⁵ *Vita S. Pachomii*, prol.; Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 51-52.

¹²⁶ *Alph. Macarius* 33. It might be important to notice that it is called this even though no other human killed them.

¹²⁷ *Stromata* 4.4 (ANF 2, 412).

Clement continues in the same passage that when Jesus says that “whoever leaves his mother and father” (Matt 11:29), Jesus is:

not indicating simple martyrdom, but the gnostic martyrdom, as of the man who has conducted himself according to the rule of the Gospel, in love to the Lord (for the knowledge of the Name and the understanding of the Gospel point out the gnosis, but not the bare appellation), so as to leave his worldly kindred, and wealth, and every possession, in order to lead a life free from passion.

In this way, a person who follows Jesus’ commands faithfully (and literally), that person is acting as a martyr, apparently because that person is dying to renunciation and a passion-free existence. Notice how Clement never mentions asceticism or monasticism; he is speaking of any Christian who renounces everything.

(7) Finally, Basil (the Great) of Caesarea speaks of becoming “martyrs in will,” in that the person would be willing to die if the chance were given, but does not die, and is still given the same reward in heaven.¹²⁸ Basil is saying nothing about monasticism. He is admonishing Christians to strive to have the same type of devotion to Christ that martyrs have so that Christians can achieve the same reward.

What we see in all these references by Malone is that (1) with the possible exception of Clement’s “gnostic martyrdom” (though no explicit or implicit mention of asceticism or monasticism is made), the author of *Vita Antonii*’s comment concerning Antony, and Gregory of Nyssa’s description of his sister in the *Vita Macrina*,¹²⁹

¹²⁸ *Hom. 19 In sanctos quadraginta martyres* (PG 31.508B).

¹²⁹ Van Loveren examines this document (“Once Again,” 532-34); Malone makes no mention of it. Gregory describes his sister, who appeared to him in three dreams, as “the remains of a holy martyr [who] had been ‘dead to sin,’ but illuminated by the grace of the indwelling spirit.” English translation available in V. Woods Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Ascetical Works: The Life of St. Macrina* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 159-91. For an overview of the life of Macrina, see Elm, “*Virgins of God*,” 78-105.

martyrdom was not understood in late antiquity in a “spiritual sense.”¹³⁰ Even if the *Vita Antonii*, Clement, and Gregory of Nyssa did, they do not represent the origins of monasticism across the Empire, especially since their writings come one or two generations after monasticism began flourishing. At least through the end of the fourth century, Mediterranean people believed that one had to die physically to become a martyr. (2) Martyrdom was a sure way to achieve spiritual perfection, but not the only way, which means that there was no *need* to posit a metaphorical martyrdom. (3) What is necessary for the metaphor of “spiritual martyrdom” to work (at least at its inception) is the desire to die for Christ, but the lack of an opportunity to die. Not only is there no monastic literary evidence to support this phenomenon, but there are several counter examples. Key leaders such as Antony and Pachomius did not seek monasticism because they were unable to be martyred. In fact, as we saw above, Antony denied the opportunity to die and Pachomius exhorted certain disciples not to pine for death!¹³¹ Even when martyrdom is praised and related to monasticism (e.g., *Vita Antonii*), we see no reason to see this as a cause for the entire movement of monasticism in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, or beyond. Moreover, and most importantly, when we read the ascetic literature, particularly in the Sayings, the motivation to live or die as the martyrs is

¹³⁰ Thus, “Let me be clear in this context: neither Clement of Alexandria nor Origen nor Methodius of Olympus yet considered asceticism an equivalent to martyrdom,” Van Loveren, “Once Again,” 534. Rather, martyrdom was only reserved for the spiritual elite. Even still, it is imperative to see that this still does not give us an answer to the question of monastic origins. Rather, it lets us know how monastic heroes would be perceived by the greater Mediterranean audience, especially when martyrs were scarce.

¹³¹ It is intriguing: Jerome claims that the Christians would often pray to be killed by the sword for the name of Christ (*Vita Pauli* 2), and then conveys that his chief protagonist *fled* from persecution by absconding to a mountain (*Vita Pauli* 5). Another example can be found in Eusebius’ story concerning Alcibiades, who was *discouraged* to practice his asceticism before his martyrdom because it caused offense to others (*HE* 5.3.1-3).

strikingly absent.¹³² There were similarities between the monk and martyr in volition. Both gave up their lives (in some sense, though in radically different ways) for their devotion to Christ. It is tempting to commit the non sequiter of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. Yet, similarities between two events that seem to occur seriatim—with no primary evidence—do not constitute causation. In public consciousness, the monk did replace, to some degree, the prominence once held by the martyr.¹³³ However, when we look carefully at the evidence, we are left with nothing to make a monk's actions dependent upon his or her desire to become a "living" martyr.

Rather, we do hear texts constantly speaking of Christians (this includes those in and outside of cities, from Origen to Antony) doing what they thought Jesus commanded them to do: "If you wish to be perfect/complete/mature [τέλειος], go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."¹³⁴ It seems as if most (if not all) monks were trying to live on earth "as true citizens of heaven," awaiting Christ's return as loyal disciples,¹³⁵ not

¹³² The only references this author has been able to find in ascetic literature that might connect monasticism with martyrdom from monastic authors is in (1) the late fourth century text by Cassian: Piamun said, "The coenobite, patient under his discipline, continuing steadfastly in his chosen way, never to obey self-will, becomes crucified daily to the world, a martyr while he is still on earth," Cassian, *Conferences*, 18.7 (Chadwick); and (2) the sixth century text, *Barsanuphius and John, Letters from the Desert: A Selection of Questions and Responses*, trans. and Intro. by John Chryssavgis (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 9: "To renounce one's proper will is a sacrifice of blood. It means that one has reached the point of laboring unto death and of ignoring one's own will" (*Letter* 254). However, neither text tells us that this was the *motivation* for monasticism.

¹³³ Goehring is accurate in saying that the "monk replaced the martyr as Christian hero," but this certainly does not mean that is *why* people chose to become monks in the first place. "Monasticism," 769.

¹³⁴ Matt 19:21 (translation mine). Antony, who grew up with affluent parents, heard this in church and was convinced that Jesus was speaking directly to him (*Vita Ant.* 2). References to monks being "perfect" and/or seeking perfection (alluding to Jesus' command) pervade ascetic literature (e.g., Nilus 4: "He also said, 'Go, sell all that belongs to you and give it to the poor and taking up the cross, deny yourself; in this way you will be able to pray without distraction'"; cf. *Anony.* 1.5 [Stewart]; Nau 46)

¹³⁵ *Hist. monach.*, prol., 5, 7 (Russell); this could be an allusion to Phil. 3:20: "But our citizenship is in heaven, from which we eagerly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Yet, granting scriptural

reactionaries or rebels,¹³⁶ or those frustrated at Christ's delay,¹³⁷ or those frustrated by their failed opportunity to die as martyrs. Apparently, as hard as this might be for scholars to grasp, most monks became monks simply because they thought it was the proper thing to do to be a disciple of Jesus: "Thus, therefore, whoever from among you does not renounce (ἀποτάσσειται) everything that belongs to himself is not able to be my disciple."¹³⁸

Conclusion

One could certainly be an ascetic or monk and still live in or near the city, as they always had. Evidence demonstrates that by the fourth century, monks were found all over the country side and cities. So why the waxing of monks in the late fourth century (particularly in Egypt and Palestine)? There are probably several factors for this growth, three of which are most demonstrated in the literature itself: (1) many were drawn to "the desert" (whether literal or figurative) because ascetic literature appealed to people's spiritual needs (viz., God's new world of love and forgiveness was being established in the desert through the works of great holy ascetics), independently of any other pressure

allusion, does this not fit the historical situation better than the alternatives? Would there be any reason for the ancient authors *not* to tell us of their "real need" to flee the church or seek living martyrdom? Interestingly, this is how Philo describes the Therapeutae, as "citizens of heaven and of the world" (*Vita Cont.* 90 [LCL 363, 169 (Colson)]).

¹³⁶ Cassian reports that Piamun said of the hermits: "Their motive for choosing the solitary life was not cowardice nor intolerance of community living, but a wish to advance further in the contemplation of God." Cassian, *Conferences*, 18.6 (Chadwick).

¹³⁷ E.g., Goehring ("Monasticism," 769-70), posits that monasticism was in response to (1) the "delay of the second coming of Christ" and (2) the growing worldliness of the Christians in the fourth century. Yet, there is no evidence to suggest that (1) the "delay of the parousia" was a pressing concern for any (or most) Christian(s), or that (2) the late antique Church was somehow more "worldly" than the previous *three centuries*, and if it were, that this was the impetus for thousands of people across the Empire to flee to monasteries.

¹³⁸ Luke 14:33 (translation mine).

or cause;¹³⁹ (2) many fled to escape persecution (*ἀναχωρήσις*),¹⁴⁰ or taxation; and (3) previous monastic groups of Jews converted and stayed in their solitude or communities, or Jewish ascetic practices served as the primary Christian ascetic precedent, which was already established by not conforming to city life. So whatever the reason one would initially become a monk, s/he stayed a monk for one chief goal: the belief that renouncing worldly ways helped one achieve spiritual perfection by transformation in Christ.¹⁴¹ Ascetic practices were idiosyncratic, though there was the general belief that though people practiced their asceticism in different ways, their spiritual capacity was fueled by the same source.¹⁴² Their aim was to keep God as their chief source, goal, and motivation at all times.¹⁴³

The monks went without sleep because they were watching for the Lord; they did not speak because they were listening to God; they fasted because they were fed by the Word of God. It was the end that mattered, the ascetic practices were only a means . . . All ascetic effort, all personal relationships, life in all its aspects, was to be brought slowly into the central relationship with God in Christ. All the

¹³⁹ E.g., Sozomen, *HE* 1.12.11, argues that many people became monks after having read various philosophers. Philo (*Vita Contemplativa* 18-20) deliberately explains that the monks (Therapeutae) who pervade the cities and nearby areas of cities, especially Alexandria, do so *not* because of misanthropy or because of some major attraction, but because they desire to be around people who will not keep them from their spiritual goals. It must be remembered that the requirements to become an ascetic were simple: renounce that which prohibits spiritual perfection. As one monk said: “Someone repented and became an ascetic” (*Anony.* 8.8 [Stewart]; Nau 88).

¹⁴⁰ E.g., Paul of Thebes who fled Decius and Valerian’s pogroms (Jerome, *Vita Pauli* 2); cf. Sozomen, *HE* 1.12.11.

¹⁴¹ The goal of ascetic life will be argued more fully in chapter five. It will be more evident how both Jews and Christians had a similar goal.

¹⁴² E.g., “Abba Poemen said that Abba John said that the saints are like a group of trees, each bearing different fruit, but watered from the same source. The practices of one saint differ from those of another, but it is the same Spirit that works in all of them” (*Alph.* John the Dwarf 43 [Ward]).

¹⁴³ This goal was shared by many in Christendom (and outside of it). E.g., R. A. Edwards and R. A. Wild, eds. and trans., *The Sentences of Sextus* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1981): “Think about God more often than you breathe” (289); Charles G. Browne and J.E. Swallow, trans., “Gregory of Nazianzus: The Theological Orations,” in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward Hardy (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954): “For we ought to think of God even more often than we draw our breath.” (27.5).

means to this end were just that, means and no more; they could be changed or discarded as necessary.¹⁴⁴

The Literary Milieu and Formation of the Sayings

Christian Ascetic Literature in Late Antiquity

Stories of the “holy man (and woman)” in Palestine, Egypt, and Syria spread like wildfire.¹⁴⁵ The monk took on several roles, especially in the perception of the public. Because tales that regaled the miraculous work and perspicacity of the monks spread throughout the Empire, people from across the Empire visited to see these celebrities first-hand. “In this period one might say that pilgrimage was booming, whether to the holy places themselves, or to the shrines of saints or holy men, especially those which housed famous relics.”¹⁴⁶ There are countless examples of visitors leaving changed: often changed to become monks themselves. Visits to the holy land (i.e., Palestine, and parts of Egypt and Syria) apparently began quite early, though its overwhelming

¹⁴⁴ Benedicta Ward, *The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers: Systematic Sayings from the Anonymous Series of the Apophthegmata Patrum* (Oxford: Cistercian Publications, 1986), xxv, xxvii.

¹⁴⁵ The classic work on the role and perception of the “holy man” in late antiquity is Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80-101, reprinted, with additional notes, in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 103-52. Cf. idem, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971-1997,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6:3 (1998): 353-76. Brown conceives of the holy man in anthropological terms as a rural patron, one who defuses tensions among villagers. Peter Brown makes the monks of Syria the prime (if not only) real “celebrities” of the ascetic world, since “the holy man in Egypt did not impinge on society around him in the same way as in other provinces . . . [Y]et the ferocious independence, the flamboyant ascetic practices, the rapid rise and fall of reputations, and the constant symbiosis with the life of the surrounding villages—these are the distinctively Syrian features that were welcomed in Byzantine society (“The Rise and Function,” 82). In later reflection, Brown correctly recognizes that his distinction between village and remote “holy man” was too stark and that monks across the Empire were not known simply because they departed society physically, but spiritually (“The Rise and Function, 1971-1997,” 345ff). Moreover, as our study thus far has demonstrated, monks were found throughout cities, villages, and remote places. Finally, it is quite difficult substantiating the claim that Syrian ascetics were the only “stars,” since the literature attests to pilgrimages and ascetic journeys which are *primarily* to Egyptian and Palestinian destinations. Brown might find Syrian monks more attractive because of their flamboyance, but ancient Christians, evidenced in extant literature, were not so swayed.

¹⁴⁶ Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity*, 77.

popularity would not come until late antiquity.¹⁴⁷ The writing of pilgrimage narratives, i.e., literature written concerning a pilgrimage or visit to certain monasteries with the intent of bolstering the faith of the audience, was fomented in the fourth century when the Christian audience grew exponentially with the political freedom offered under Constantine.¹⁴⁸ Pilgrimage narratives, though largely based upon historical locations and activities, still present ideological biases which demonstrate the hagiographic nature of the narratives. They create sacred spaces and locales for the devotional reader.¹⁴⁹

The earliest extant evidence of pilgrimage literature¹⁵⁰ comes from the anonymous traveler known as the Bordeaux Pilgrim, since he traveled from Bordeaux

¹⁴⁷ Eusebius tells us that Melito of Sardis (d. ca. 180) went to Palestine and maybe the Sinai peninsula to verify biblical data (*HE* 4.26.14). Later, Alexander (d. 251) was made bishop of Jerusalem while on pilgrimage there (*HE* 6.11.2). Eusebius (*Vita Constantini* 3.26) and Paula and Eustochium (Jerome, *Ep.* 46) assume that pilgrimages to Palestine occurred from the church's earliest days. Sozomen (*HE* 2.1) believed that pilgrimages to certain places in Palestine was difficult for some years since pagans covered them with dirt or erected new buildings to pagan gods on top of the sites (Paul Bassett, "Pilgrimage," in *The Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson [New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999], 922).

¹⁴⁸ See Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 2.40, in *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Drei Jahrhunderte*, ed. I.A. Heikel GCS 7 (1902), 58, and letters in 3.30 and 52 (*GCS* 7 [1902], 91, 99) (John Wilkinson, "Jewish Holy Places and the Origins of Christian Pilgrimage," in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. Robert Ousterhout [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990], 43). Wilkinson argues convincingly that Christian pilgrimage was predicated upon Jewish pilgrimage and the cherished tradition of honoring dead heroes by visiting their tombs on the anniversary of the heroes' deaths. It is evidenced in Jewish literature and in the New Testament. Therefore, pilgrimage, in some incipient form, had existed for centuries before the Bordeaux Pilgrim. On the other hand, Maribel Dietz argues that pilgrimage "was the offspring of a peculiar form of a monasticism based explicitly on ascetic travel and wandering" in order to gather stories of holy people, rather than based upon the desire to see a particular locale ("Itinerant Spirituality and the Late Antique Origins of Christian Pilgrimage," in *Travel, Communication and Geography in Late Antiquity: Sacred and Profane*, ed. Linda Ellis and Frank L. Kidner [Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2004], 125-134, quote on 125).

¹⁴⁹ Andrew S. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 105-38.

¹⁵⁰ This section is not considering here the pre (or para-) Christian narrative, *Description of Greece*, by Pausanias (ca. 2nd cent.), though it gives scholars a great glimpse into how an ancient person wrote about the Hellenistic geography ideologically. Christian Habicht, *Pausanias' Guide to Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 8-13; Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews*, 105-07. For the earliest pilgrimage narratives see P. Geyer, ed., *Itinera Hierosolymitana Saeculi iii-viii*, CSEL 39 (1898); P. Geyer et al., eds., *Itineraria et Alia Geographica*, CCSL 175, 176 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1965).

(modern-day southwest France) to Palestine in 333. His journey apparently followed a common route used by Roman military personnel and post deliverers (*cursus publicus*) since he mixes comments about relay posts (*mutationes*) and hostels (*mansiones*) with tales of certain biblical sites.¹⁵¹ The most well-known pilgrimage comes from the fourth-century Pilgrimage of Egeria, a (probable) nun from northwestern Spain, who traveled to Palestine and Sinai, visiting many monks and locations throughout Egypt, Galilee, Judaea, and even remote places.¹⁵² She concludes her three-year pilgrimage in Jerusalem, where she speaks specifically about the liturgy practiced there and specifically identifies six churches.

Besides pilgrimage literature, literature that focused upon particular people (*Vitae Patrum*) also spread vigorously, some of which we have already mentioned (e.g., the *Vita Antonii*, the *Vita Pachomii*, Jerome's *Vita Pauli* and *Vita Sancti Hilarionis*). In the fourth and fifth centuries stories concerning the lives and wisdom of the great ascetics abound in works such as the *Vita Antonii*, the *Vita Pachomii*, Cassian's *Collationes*¹⁵³, Evagrius' *Praktikos*¹⁵⁴, Palladius' *Historia Lausiaca*¹⁵⁵, and the *Historia monachorum*.¹⁵⁶ All of

¹⁵¹ P. Geyer and O. Cuntz, eds., *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, CCSL 175 (1965), v-xiii, 1-26; A. Stewart, trans., *Itinerary from Bordeaux to Jerusalem* (London: Palestine Pilgrims Text Society, 1887); L. Douglas, "A New Look at the *Itinerarium Burdigalense*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996): 313-333.

¹⁵² A. Franceschini and R. Weber, eds., *Itinerarium Egeriae*, CCSL 175 (1958), 29-103; H. Pétré, ed., *Éthérie: Journal de voyage*, SC 296 (Paris: Cerf, 1982); G. Gingras, *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage* (New York: Newman, 1970); J. Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 3rd ed. (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1999).

¹⁵³ Boniface Ramsay, trans. and ed., *John Cassian: The Conferences* (*Collationes Patrum XXIV*) (New York: Paulist Press, 1997); NPNF2 11, 161-621.

¹⁵⁴ John E. Bamberger, trans., *Evagrius Ponticus, The Praktikos: Chapters on Prayer* (Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 1981).

¹⁵⁵ R.T. Meyer, trans., *Palladius: The Lausiak History* (New York: Newman Press, 1965).

¹⁵⁶ André-Jean Festugière, trans., *Sozomène: Histoire ecclésiastique* (Paris: Editions Du Cerf., 1983).

these documents included collections of wisdom traditions passed on via the monks, though none of them were exclusively concerned with carrying on an oral tradition. They were more sophisticated and crafted. The wisdom tradition given in them fits the overall narrative and theology of each particular author. “The tradition of early desert monasticism reached the West chiefly through the writings of Cassian, though it was also known through the works of Jerome, Rufinus, and Palladius. These men knew the desert, and they knew, often at first-hand, the oral tradition of the *Apophthegmata*. They systematized it, interpreted it, and presented it as they understood it.”¹⁵⁷

However, a totally new genre in Christian literature emerged near the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries manifested in two similar collections of wisdom sayings from Christian monks who were primarily from Scetis, Nitria, and Alexandria. Within the extant, contemporaneous Christian literature, these collections stand out as inimitable.¹⁵⁸ The documents contain recollections of actual conversations between a (usually younger) person seeking the *rhema* or *logos* of an abba/amma/elder.¹⁵⁹ Although “abba” or “amma” was typically reserved for an elder, it was primarily used as an honorific title given to monks who were held in high esteem because of their spiritual acumen.¹⁶⁰ For example,

¹⁵⁷ Ward, trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, xx.

¹⁵⁸ Thus, Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 92-95.

¹⁵⁹ Often times a phrase like, “speak/give me a word,” began the conversation (e.g., *Alph.* Cronius 1; Matos 11, 12; Or 7; Poemen 69, 111; Pistus 1; Serapion 2; Sisoës 35; Theodore of Pherme 14, 20).

¹⁶⁰ Typically women were to be avoided at all costs because of sexual temptation. For those women who were able to withstand the harsh environs, and achieve a “masculine” soul, they were held in high esteem as “ammas” (e.g., Syncletica and Theodora). For an overview of how women are viewed in the Sayings, see Elm, “*Virgins of God*,” 253-82.

Joseph told this story: Once when we were sitting with Poemen, he talked about ‘abba’ Agathos. We said to him: “He is a young man, why do you call him ‘abba’?” Poemen said, “His speech is such that we must call him ‘abba.’”¹⁶¹

The desert fathers provided their audience spiritual wisdom, biblical interpretation, and miraculous works. What we have in these collections are not abstractions or theological encyclicals, but case-specific instructions of an *abba* or *amma* to his hearer.¹⁶² In most cases, the context of the original saying is ignored or forgotten; there is no attempt to provide an overall narrative. Moreover, there is no attempt to reconcile sayings that seem to be contradictory.

Textual Tradition

The textual history of the Sayings is a well-known morass of complexity.¹⁶³ The Sayings exists in copious languages and numerous manuscripts. Two major collections of the Sayings garnered scholarly attention in the seventeenth century with their publication.¹⁶⁴ In 1615 Heribert Rosweyde published the first manuscript, in Latin, as

¹⁶¹ Sys. 15.40 (Ward).

¹⁶² Though we cannot agree with Ward when she says these statements are not meant to be “an explanation or a consoling suggestion,” we can agree with her when she says that these sayings are “records of practical advice” (Ward, trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, 249, xx). It is unclear why these two descriptions are mutually exclusive. She does characterize each saying as “a word that is truly life-giving if it is not discussed or argued over, but simply received and integrated into life” (249). It is uncertain how she comes to this conclusion based upon the sayings themselves. In any case, the assumption in this dissertation is that the individual sayings are wisdom sayings that were used to give moral advice and biblical interpretation.

¹⁶³ For more, see Wilhelm Bousset, *Apophthegmata: Studien zur Geschichte des ältesten Mönchtums* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1923); J.-C. Guy, *Recherches sur la tradition grecque des Apophthegmata Patrum* (Bruxelles : Société des Bollandistes, 1962). The effort to solve the textual dilemma was first attempted by Theodor Hopfner, *Über die koptisch-sa'idischen Apophthegmata patrum Aegyptiorum und verwandte griechische, lateinische, koptisch bohairische und syrische Sammlungen* (Wien: A. Hölder, 1918).

¹⁶⁴ Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 85-86.

part of his *Vitae Patrum*.¹⁶⁵ The manuscript was organized topically into twenty chapters organized upon theme. Ward's English translation has eighteen chapters,¹⁶⁶ comprising 656 sayings: Progress in Perfection (twenty-three), Quiet (sixteen), Compunction (twenty-seven), Self-Control (seventy), Lust (forty-one), Possessing Nothing (twenty-two), Fortitude (forty-seven), Nothing Done for Show (twenty-four), Non-Judgment (twelve), Discretion (one hundred-eighteen), Sober Living (fifty-four), Unceasing Prayer (fifteen), Hospitality (fifteen), Obedience (nineteen), Humility (eighty-nine), Patience (nineteen), Charity (twenty-five), Visions (twenty). This gave rise to the commonly-used title, Systematic collection. However, in the earliest manuscripts of this collection, the title typically used for itself is *Adhortationes Patrum*, while the Western church has usually called this collection the *Verba Seniorum*.¹⁶⁷ This Latin text is a translation of a non-extant Greek original, by deacon Pelagius and subdeacon John in the mid-sixth century. This is the earliest extant copy we have of either collection, and it is the most influential text on western monasticism.¹⁶⁸

Another collection contains much of the same material included in the *Adhortationes Patrum/Verba Seniorum*. This manuscript, published in 1677 by J.B. Cotelier as part of his *Ecclesiae Graecae monumenta*, was written in Greek and arranged

¹⁶⁵ H. Rosweyde, *Vitae Patrum* V, VI (Antwerp: 1615); reprint, Migne, PL 73:855-1022. The Greek Systematic collection can be found in J.-C. Guy, trans. and ed., *Les Apophtegmes des Pères: Collection systématique*, 3 vols., *Sources chrétiennes* 387, 474, 498 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf., 1993).

¹⁶⁶ Ward's chapter eighteen ("Visions") conflates Rosweyde and Migne's sections eighteen through twenty.

¹⁶⁷ Chadwick, *Western Asceticism*, 35-36; Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 85.

¹⁶⁸ Chadwick, *Western Asceticism*, 35; Harmless, "Remembering Poemen Remembering: The Desert Fathers and the Spirituality of Memory," *Church History* 69, no. 3 (2000): 485.

alphabetically according to the *abba* (or *amma*) or protagonist.¹⁶⁹ The collection is known according to two alternative Greek titles, *Apophthegmata Patrum* or *Paterikon*. In the prologue of Cotelier's manuscript we learn that this collection originally had an "appendix" of hundreds of anonymous sayings. However, this anonymous collection was not known until F. Nau published the reconstructed *Apophthegmata Patrum* and Anonymous collection together.¹⁷⁰ Modern scholars refer to this collection as the Alphabetico-Anonymous, or simply, Alphabetical, collection. Most of these manuscripts date from the ninth to twelfth centuries.¹⁷¹

Important questions have been asked of both collections and there exists a general consensus on the salient points.¹⁷² (1) In *what language* were these collections collected and edited? Jean-Claude Guy proposes a situation that seems to be the scholarly consensus: (1) monks gave particular words of wisdom to people in both Coptic and

¹⁶⁹ J.B. Cotelier, *Ecclesiae Graecae monumenta I* (Paris: Muguet, 1677), 338-712; reprint, Migne, PG 65:71-440. For the supplement to this collection, see J.-C. Guy, *Recherches sur la Tradition grecque des apophthegmata patrum* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1962). In the colophon of one of the Latin editions of this collection, extant on an eleventh-century (ca. 1071-72) manuscript (Paris, Fonds, Grec, 1598), as published by Guy, *Recherches sur la Tradition Grecque des Apophthegmata Patrum*, 8, John tells us what he did in preparation of the collection: "I gathered together the Paterikons of other monasteries (lit., "lauras") . . . and examined them to the best of my ability . . . I arranged them in alphabetical order making them into two books, twelve letters in one and twelve letters in the other."

¹⁷⁰ F. Nau, ed., "Historie des solitaires égyptiens (MS Coislin 126, fol. 158f)," Nos. 133-36, *Revue d'Orient Chrétien* 13 (1908): 47-57, 266-83; 14 (1909): 357-79; 17 (1912): 204-11, 294-301; 18 (1913): 137-40. Further attempts have been made to correct the Greek textual situation after Bousset, especially by J.-C. Guy, *Recherches sur la tradition*. Even though Guy uses some new manuscripts and makes minor changes to Bousset's work, Guy admits that he does not part radically with Bousset.

¹⁷¹ Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 85-86.

¹⁷² The most influential scholarship concerning the formation of the *Apophthegmata* is found in Lucien Regnault, "Aux origines des collections d'Apophthegmes," *Studia Patristica* 18 (1989): 61-74, idem, "Les Apophthegmes des peres en Palestine aux V^e-VI^e siecles," *Irenikon* 54 (1981): 320-30; idem, *À l'écoute des pères du désert aujourd'hui: Apophthegmes des pères traduits et commentés* (Solesmes : Editions de Solesmes, 1989); Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*; Antoine Guillaumont, "L'enseignement spirituel des moines d'Égypte: La formation d'une tradition," in *Études sur la spiritualité de l'Orient Chrétien*, (Begrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1996), 81-92.

Greek; (2) these sayings spread from cell to cell in an incipient oral tradition; (3) in small increments, and due to the popularity of the sayings, small groups of sayings were written (examples of which can be found in Evagrius and Cassian)¹⁷³; (4) eventually an effort was put forth to compose a single *corpus*, the “Alphabetical,” linking particular sayings with their author¹⁷⁴; (5) oral tradition continued to influence and enlarge the corpus, especially with the inclusion of anonymous sayings; (6) eventually the collection of sayings was systematically arranged according to theme.¹⁷⁵

This is a phenomenal feat when we remember that most of the monks mentioned in the collection were illiterate or only knew Coptic.¹⁷⁶ The oral sayings were probably originally spoken in Coptic or Greek, but when collected, edited, and written, they were translated into Greek. Once written, they were quickly translated into many languages (e.g., Latin, Syriac, Aramaic, etc.). The amount of material that exists in the Sayings speaks both to the power of the ancient person’s memory in an oral culture and to the

¹⁷³ Moreover, in the Prologue to the Alphabetical collection, it is admitted by the editors: “We have investigated and gone through as many books as we could find.” (*Alph. Prol.*).

¹⁷⁴ It is often argued that the Alphabetical Collection came first, though both collections arose at nearly the same time. Guy, *Recherches sur la tradition*, 190-200, argued that the Greek Alphabetical-Anonymous and Greek Systematic developed independently, while Chitty demonstrated how Guy’s argument will not explain the Latin version, which must represent an earlier version of the Greek we now have (Chitty, “The Books of the Old Men,” 18-19). S. Rubenson argues that the Alphabetical-Anonymous and Systematic collections arose independently in different regions and in different languages. If anything, he argues, the Systematic Collection arose first. See his *The Letters of St. Antony: Origenist Theology, Monastic Tradition and the Making of a Saint* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1990), 145-52. For more on this issue of relationship, see F.M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 44-46; Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 7-9.

¹⁷⁵ Guy, *Recherches sur la tradition*, 231-32. It should not be assumed that this schema suggests that no outside sources were used for the sayings, or that sayings were not “mislabelled” (especially with Poemen). Some sayings probably came from Christian authors or various myths popular in late antiquity. For more, see Marek Starowieyski, “Remarques sur les sources de quelques apophthegmes des pères du desert,” *Studia Patristica* 18 (1989): 293-98.

¹⁷⁶ Thus, Bousset, *Apophthegmata*, 76-77.

wide popularity of the sayings. There were certainly scholar-monks (e.g., Arsenius, Barsanuphius and John, *et al.*), but even some of them could not communicate well with other monks.

One day Abba Arsenius consulted an old Egyptian monk about his own thoughts. Someone noticed this and said to him, “Abba Arsenius, how is it that you with such a good Latin and Greek education, ask this peasant about your thoughts?” He replied, “I have indeed been taught Latin and Greek, but I do not know even the alphabet of this peasant.”¹⁷⁷

(2) *When were they collected?* Scholars agree that the written collections first appeared at the turn of the fifth and sixth centuries. This is the *terminus ad quem* because other Christian authors quote or reference the collections by this time.¹⁷⁸ For example, (1) in chapters 23 and 44 of the *Vita Melaniae Junioris* (ca. 383-439),¹⁷⁹ the “Lives of the Fathers” is referenced and some direct quotes are given; (2) chapters 19, 21, and 24 in Cyril of Scythopolis’ *Vita S. Euthymii* (sixth cent.)¹⁸⁰ references several sayings from the Sayings; (3) “talks” with the monk, Zosime, who lived at Caesarea, Palestine are known in Evagrius Scholasticus’ *HE* (4.7; ca. 535-600) and Dorotheus of Gaza’s *Spiritual Works*

¹⁷⁷ *Alph.* Arsenius 6 (Ward); *Syst.* 15.7 (Ward).

¹⁷⁸ The following is based on Lucien Regnault, “Les Apophthegmes des peres en Palestine aux V^e-VI^e siecles,” 320-30; cf. Jean-Claude Guy, “Les Apophthegmata Patrum,” *Théologie de la vie monastique: études sur la tradition patristique* (1961): 73-83; idem, *Paroles des anciens: apophthegmes des Pères du desert* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1976). There is a story concerning Abba Irene, who, after having absconded to Gaza to avoid the barbarians, arrived in Gaza and was given a copy of “τὸ Βιβλίον” by his Abba concerning “οἱ Πατέρες” (PG 87c: 2909c; Regnault, “Les Apophthegmes des peres en Palestine aux V^e-VI^e siecles,” 329). It is unclear to what this “Book of the Fathers” refers.

¹⁷⁹ SC 90; E.A. Clark, *The Life of Melania the Younger: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (New York: Mellen, 1984); Jerome, *Letter* 143.2; Augustine, *Letter* 126; idem, *On the Grace of Christ* 1.1.

¹⁸⁰ PG 64:595-734; R.M. Price, trans., *Cyril of Scythopolis: The Lives of the Monks of Palestine* (Kalamazoo: Cisterian, 1991).

(ca. 540),¹⁸¹ which include numerous references taken from the Sayings; (4) there are copious references to the Sayings given in the *Correspondence of Barsanuphius and John* (sixth cent.) which begin with phrases like, “in the Fathers it is said,” or at other times, the saying is simply given its proper reference (e.g., “Abba or Amma X said . . .”)¹⁸²; (5) besides its references to Zosime, Dorotheus of Gaza’s work references at least forty sayings from the Alphabetical collection and fifteen from the Anonymous collection with common introductions as, “The Fathers said,” or, “It is known in the *Gerontikon*”; (6) several key abbots and their disciples who are known to have lived, starting in the fourth century, in Palestine have over sixty sayings in the Sayings (e.g., Silvanus and his disciples have twenty-six sayings). These examples demonstrate that the Sayings were completed by the late fifth to mid-sixth centuries. Moreover, it is further easy to see when one compares the smaller collections of sayings (e.g., those found in the writings of the Syriac monk Isaac of Scete,¹⁸³ or those found in chapters 13 and 14 of the *Collectio monastic* Ethiopian¹⁸⁴), which do not contain Palestinian monks, with the Sayings, which contains over sixty references to them. Finally, the number of sayings that can be

¹⁸¹ Beginning in PG 88:1610; L. Regnault and J. de Préville, eds., *Oeuvres spirituelles*, SC 92 (1963), 542-43; Eric Wheeler, trans., *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings* (Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 1977).

¹⁸² PG 86:892-901; 88:1812-20; John Chrysavgis, trans., *Letters from the Desert: Barsanuphius and John: A Selection of Questions and Responses* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003).

¹⁸³ This collection has some sayings not included in the Alphabetical or Systematic. J. Chrysavgis and R. Penkett, *Abba Isaiah of Scetis: Ascetic Discourses* (Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 2002), esp. ch. 8; René Draguet, *Les cinq recensions de l'Ascéticon syriaque d'abba Isaïe* (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus, 1968); CSCO 289-90, 93-94; idem, “A section isaïenne of apophtegmes in Karakallou 251,” *Byzantion* 35 (1965), 45-50; cf. idem, *Byzantion* 32 (1962), 53-61.

¹⁸⁴ V. Arras, CSCO 238, 83-126; CSCO 239, 62-93. This collection also has some sayings that do not exist in the Alphabetical or Systematic. There are about twenty-four parallels with material in the Alphabetical collection. Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 21.

determined to occur after Chalcedon (451) are scarce. All of these factors make it highly likely that the Sayings were written sometime in the last half of the fifth century.¹⁸⁵

(3) *Where* were they collected? Although most of the sayings originate from Egypt (e.g., Scetis, Nitria, Alexandria, *inter alia*) and Palestine (e.g., Gaza and Jerusalem), they were collected in Palestine, probably in the intellectual environment of Gaza.¹⁸⁶ This hypothesis is supported by many factors. For example: (a) As was just demonstrated, unlike other sayings-material in other regions, these collections contain over sixty monks born, or who lived, in Palestine; (b) the Sayings were also known throughout (ascetic) literature written in Palestine; (c) St. Basil of Caesarea, well-known in Palestine, is mentioned a few times¹⁸⁷; (d) many translations appeared within a short period of time, including an Aramaic version of sayings that existed in Palestine.

Concerning the hypothesis that Gaza, in particular, is the locale of their collecting and editing, Chitty speaks of Gaza as:

a region of high intellectual caliber to which leading monks from Egypt withdrew at a time when in dogma as in politics Christians were weighed down with a sense of impending disaster, and would more than ever wish to ensure the survival of a record of those great days of monks which some of them could remember from their earliest youth.¹⁸⁸

There had long been a strong connection between Gaza and Egypt. Besides the numerous evidence of monks coming from Egypt to Gaza (and surrounding areas) in the Sayings and other hagiographic literature, we know that a well-traveled road, nearly 200

¹⁸⁵ Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 11-13.

¹⁸⁶ The following is from Regnault, *Les Apophtegmes*, 320-30; Chitty, *The Books of the Old Men*, 20; Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 86-87.

¹⁸⁷ *Alph.* Basil 1; Cassian 7; *Sys.* 18.19.

¹⁸⁸ Derwas Chitty, "The Books of the Old Men," *Eastern Churches Review* 6 (1974), 20.

miles long, had long existed, connecting Jerusalem with Alexandria.¹⁸⁹ The monastic environment in Palestine had long been more educated and thoughtful.¹⁹⁰ In the *Correspondence of Barsanuphius and John* (Gaza; 6th cent), there are numerous references to the writings of Origen, Didymus the Blind, and Evagrius of Pontus.¹⁹¹ Gaza's longstanding academic environment, along with the fact it was used as a refuge for monks fleeing barbarian invasions, make it the most likely location for the collecting and editing of the Sayings.

(4) *Why were they collected?* Multiple reasons are posited by scholars. This section will present the most common reasons given, and an assessment of the options will follow. (a) Much of the Egyptian monastic community was forced to relocate, many of whom settled in Palestine, because of the various invasions in northern Egypt in the 5th century.¹⁹² For example,

Abba John said of Abba Anoub and Abba Poemen and the rest of their brethren who come from the same womb and were made monks in Scetis, that when the

¹⁸⁹ Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ*, 157-58. Evidence for strong connections between Egypt and Palestine is replete in ascetic literature. E.g., see Samuel Rubenson, "The Egyptian Relations of Early Palestinian Monasticism," in *The Christian heritage in the Holy Land*, ed. et al., Anthony O'Mahony (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995), 35-46.

¹⁹⁰ Cyril of Scythopolis refers to the monks of Palestine as "more lettered" in *Life of Cyriacus* (14) and *Life of Sabas* (ch. 83); R. Price, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* (Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 1990); Chrysavgis, trans., *Letters from the Desert*, 46.

¹⁹¹ Chrysavgis, trans., *Letters from the Desert*, 46. One of the disciples of these two Old Men (Barsanuphius and John), Dorotheus of Gaza, directly cites the Sayings at least fifty-five times. He seems to be the first person to refer to the Sayings as *The Gerontikon* (i.e., *The Book of the Old Men*). Moreover, Dorotheus is the only witness to the saying attributed to Basil in the Sayings. Was Dorotheus (partly) responsible for the collecting and editing of the Sayings? See *idem*, 50.

¹⁹² There were a series of invasions in the area. Scetis was first destroyed in 407-8, then 434, and Nitria fell soon after. See Evelyn-White, *The monasteries of the Wâdi 'N Natrûn, Part II: The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1932), 150-67; J.-C. Guy, "Le Centre monastique de Scété dans la littérature du V^e siècle," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 30 (1964): 129-47.

barbarians came and laid waste that district for the first time, they left for a place called Terenuthis until they decided where to settle.¹⁹³

Now there was a barbarian invasion and the old man went to live in lower Egypt.¹⁹⁴

For several monks, the invasions were either used by God as judgment, opportunities for God to demonstrate his power, or opportunities for the monk to demonstrate his or her faithfulness. For example:

At Scetis Abba Moses used to say, “If we keep the commandments of our Fathers, I will answer for it on God's behalf that the barbarians will not come here. But if we do not keep the commandments of God, this place will be devastated.”¹⁹⁵

One of the Fathers asked Abba Sisoës, “If I am sitting in the desert and a barbarian comes to kill me and if I am stronger than he, shall I kill him?” The old man said to him, “No, leave him to God. In fact whatever the trial is which comes to a man, let him say, ‘This has happened to me because of my sins,’ and if something good comes say, ‘It is through the providence of God.’”¹⁹⁶

It was said concerning Abba Daniel, that when the barbarians invaded Scetis and the Fathers fled away, the old man said, “If God does not care for me, why still live?” Then he passed through the midst of the barbarians without being seen. He said to himself therefore, “See how God has cared for me, since I am not dead. Now I will do that which is human and flee with the Fathers.”¹⁹⁷

One day, when the brethren were sitting beside him, he [Moses] said to them, “Look, the barbarians are coming to Scetis today; get up and flee.” They said to him, “Abba, won't you flee too?” He said to them, “As for me, I have been waiting for this day for many years, that the word of the Lord Christ may be fulfilled which says, ‘All who take the sword will perish by the sword.’” They said to him, “We will not flee either, but we will die with you.” He said to them: “That is nothing to do with me; let everyone decide for himself whether he stops or not.” Now there were seven brothers there and he said to them, “Look, the barbarians are drawing near to the door.” Then they came in and slew them. But

¹⁹³ *Alph. Anoub* 1 (Ward).

¹⁹⁴ *Alph. Arsenius* 34 (Ward).

¹⁹⁵ *Alph. Moses* 9 (Ward).

¹⁹⁶ *Alph. Sisoës* 34 (Ward).

¹⁹⁷ *Alph. Daniel* 1 (Ward).

one fled and hid under the cover of a pile of rope and he saw seven crowns descending and crowning them.¹⁹⁸

The Sayings were written once they relocated in order to preserve the wisdom of the desert. (b) Moreover, there are sayings which speak of the laxity among some in the monastic community. Scholars often posit that they were written to revitalize their monastic brothers and sisters.¹⁹⁹ For example,

A hermit said, “The prophets wrote books. Our predecessors came after them, and worked hard at them, and then their successors memorized them. But this generation copies them onto papyrus and parchment and leaves them unused on the window-ledge.”²⁰⁰

Abba Poemen said, “Since Abba Moses and the third generation in Scetis, the brothers do not make progress anymore.”²⁰¹

He [Antony] also said, “God does not allow the same warfare and temptations to this generation as he did formerly, for men are weaker now and cannot bear so much.”²⁰²

Moreover, it seems as if the first generation did not suffer from homosexual temptations.

However, the second and third generations were so tempted.

He [Isaac] also said to the brethren, “Do not bring young boys here. Four churches in Scetis are deserted because of boys.”²⁰³

He also told the brothers about the devastation of Scetis. He said, “When you see cells built beside the swamp know that the desolation of Scetis is near; when you see trees planted there know that it is at the door; when you see boys there take your sheepskins and go away.”²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁸ *Alph.* Moses 10 (Ward).

¹⁹⁹ E.g., Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 66-67, “Physical insecurity and a sense of moral decay now gave impetus to the work, with the fear lest the great Old Men and their times should be forgotten” (67).

²⁰⁰ *Syst.* 10.117 (Ward).

²⁰¹ *Alph.* Poemen 166 (Ward).

²⁰² *Alph.* Antony 23 (Ward).

²⁰³ *Alph.* Isaac 5 (Ward).

²⁰⁴ *Syst.* 18.11 (Ward).

(c) The Sayings were then disseminated among the spiritual pilgrims in Palestine for exhortation and encouragement; which, as we said above, probably explains the copious translations. (d) Or one might posit multiple, varied reasons. Burton-Christie lists several factors as the impetus for the Sayings' inception:

The dispersion of great numbers of monks from Egypt to Palestine and the permanent loss of that world, the break of the Egyptian Monophysite monks from the orthodox cause, the growth of a large literate population of monks who could benefit from reading the words of the ancient monks, and the perception that the ancient fervor was waning, combined to motivate certain Palestinian monks to gather the disparate sayings together into one large collection . . . The dispersion [caused by the barbarian invasions in Egypt], together with the refusal of the majority of Egyptian monks to accept the Council of Chalcedon and their decision to organize themselves along ethnic lines, no doubt quickened the realization on the part of some that Egyptian monastic heritage was in danger of being lost.²⁰⁵

As we can see, no consensus exists concerning the question of why the Sayings were written. Whether its monastic migration (flee to Palestine, especially Gaza), moral laxity (among newer generations), or political (pro- or anti-Chalcedon or Monophysite controversies), scholars are not settled on this issue. What suggestions are most convincing?

The fact that so many monks fled Scetis and Nitria and went to Palestine is almost certainly a leading cause of the writing. This cause only works if we believe, as the scholarly consensus presents, that oral traditions survived and fomented in the intra-network of cells spread throughout the Nile Valley and Alexandria. If there is no matrix in which the oral tradition can survive, it seems probable that one would want to write the oral tradition to guarantee its survival. Graham Gould interprets the fact that the majority of the Sayings focuses upon Egyptian monasticism to be an indication that the individuals or communities who gathered the Sayings were most concerned with preserving the

²⁰⁵ Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 87.

identity or cohesion of pre-diaspora monasticism.²⁰⁶ Graham Gould also argues that the relative lack of concern with laity or clergy, and the relative silence concerning Pachomian communities, suggests an attempt to keep a pre-diaspora identity.²⁰⁷ Though this is possible, it seems Gould is reading too much into the material. An emphasis upon Egyptian monasticism could just as easily be explained by the fact that most of the wisdom that had been collected (oral and written) thus far was simply primarily from pre-diaspora monks. In other words, the compilers simply worked with the material that already existed, which, *de facto*, was primarily concerned with pre-diaspora monasticism.

Whatever the exact reason, monastic migration alone does not seem to be a sufficient cause.²⁰⁸ However, if there is something in the literary or cultural environment of Palestine that would serve as a galvanization of its writing, then one would be more convinced of this cause. In fact one does find such an influence in the environment. As will be explored in chapter four, because of the long-standing cultural and theological interaction between Christians and Jews, especially with the great perception of “holy men and women” and a love of wisdom literature, having *written* wisdom material would be desired.

²⁰⁶ Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 13. Gould concludes: [The Alphabetical compiler] wanted first and foremost to edify and instruct his readers in the virtues of the monastic life, but his achievement, and, it may be maintained, his purpose also, was to provide a permanent record of the historical development of a monastic community” (17). Again, it is uncertain why the compiler’s own words are not good enough for scholars. The compiler tells us that he intends on giving his audience spiritual literature that will aid them in their pursuit of the monastic life (*Alph. Prol.*). Secondly, it is unclear how the Sayings record “the historical development” (Gould’s phrase) of the monastic community in any way.

²⁰⁷ Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 14. Gould argues this, apparently, because it fits into the overall argument in his work that the Sayings are primarily concerned with the relationship between master and disciple (his title is misleading).

²⁰⁸ Though Scetis and Nitria were abandoned at first (and some resettled not long afterward), other areas in Egypt and Alexandria were not, not to mention the numerous monasteries that filled the Palestinian and Syrian countryside.

The “moral laxity” cause seems unconvincing for several reasons: (a) There are few references to this phenomenon in both the Sayings and other literature. It would be much more convincing if it could be shown in other contemporaneous authors that this moral laxity was experienced in various places in Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. The references to moral laxity given, with the exception of the one saying by Poemen (“the third generation after Scetis”), are not specific as to the time (though we know it was *before* the formation of the Sayings).²⁰⁹ Moreover, this statement by Poemen says nothing about moral laxity anywhere else besides Scetis. Finally, is it reasonable to suppose that the first generation(s) of monks did not suffer from homosexual temptation?²¹⁰ Even if the first generation was less, or not, tempted, the enormous waxing of monks in the later generations makes the possibility of temptation much more likely. In other words, it is highly probable that the temptation was always there, but was manifested more with the addition of many more monks.

²⁰⁹ Antony was already speaking of the weakness which characterized contemporaneous monks within his own lifetime (“He [Antony] also said, “God does not allow the same warfare and temptations to this generation as he did formerly, for men are weaker now and cannot bear so much” [*Alph.* Antony 23 (Ward)]). Scholars who argue for this cause make the leap of assuming that because some monks spoke of previous generations being more spiritually mature, then this must be the reason for the formation of the Sayings in the fifth century. There is no reason for this leap to be made. Moreover, should this talk not be considered necessary in oral traditions; viz., to glorify the “former days”? For more talk about the “former days,” see *Alph.* Elias 2; John the Dwarf 12; Ischyron; Macarius 25. One wonders what the tens of thousands of monks in the fifth and sixth centuries (i.e., those who were so “weak” and immoral) thought of such statements from their ancestors.

²¹⁰ There is no reason to believe that most of the forty-one sayings in the Systematic Collection in chapter five, “Lust,” come after the first generation and are not concerned with homosexual temptation. Abba Carion (2nd gen.) said, “A monk who lives with a boy, falls, if he is not stable; but even if he is stable and does not fall, he still does not make progress.”; cf. *Alph.* Carion 3; cf. John the Persian 1; Matoes 11; Poemen 176; Sys. 10.90 (Ward). *Alph.* John the Dwarf 4 (Ward): John the Dwarf said, “He who gorges himself and talks with a boy has already in his thought committed fornication with him.”

This is not to suggest that it is impossible that later generations of monks were not as rigorous in their *askesis* than their ancestors.²¹¹ Yet, it is anachronistic to use sayings that came many years before the formation of the Sayings as the reason for the collection of the Sayings. Moreover, with such a burning concern for moral rectitude, one would expect this moral laxity to be spoken of more in the literature beyond a few sayings, in any of the Prologues to the collections, or in other contemporaneous, ascetic literature. Finally, these sayings of moral laxity were spoken before the diaspora ever occurred.²¹² That is, in the sayings concerned with moral laxity, the dispersion has nothing to do with it, nor do we find any indication that the monks thought a huge written collection of wisdom sayings would help them.

Theological and politically-motivated causes are also unconvincing. Although a small group of sayings speak directly about “Arianism,”²¹³ Origenism,²¹⁴ the Synod at Chalcedon,²¹⁵ or Monophysitism,²¹⁶ the overall tenor of the Sayings is neutral in regards to church politics or theological debates. This is not say that the monks in the Sayings

²¹¹ This is especially emphasized in the Ethiopic collection (13.16, 22, 23, 27, 38, 47, 70; 14.37, 59. Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 16.

²¹² *Pace* Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 16. Moreover, what specifically would have helped monks live a more rigorous life by the *writing* down of this tradition? In other words, if some of the head monks *already* thought that newer generations were lax in their morality and vigor, when any new monk already had access to small, written, collections of wisdom along with large oral traditions, what would make them think that the newer generations would be better off if they had a large collection in written form?

²¹³ *Alph.* Sisoës 25.

²¹⁴ *Alph.* Lot 1. Dioscorus (one of the four Tall Brothers), Epiphanius (bishop of Cyprus), Theophilus, and Isaac were all involved in the debate concerning Origenism, though none of their sayings speak of it.

²¹⁵ *Alph.* Gelasius 4. Longinus is also known for opposing Chalcedon, though none of his sayings speak of it.

²¹⁶ *Alph.* Phocas 1.

did not care about staying faithful to what they believed was considered “orthodoxy.”

For example,

The hermits used to say, “God demands this of Christians: to obey the inspired Scriptures, which contain the pattern of what they must say and do, and agree with the teaching of the orthodox bishops and teachers.”²¹⁷

For this literature to be used as support for a particular side, we would certainly expect more than a few explicit references on these issues in a collection of over a thousand sayings. Compared to the tendentious literature being written by other contemporaneous authors (cf. Antony’s harangue against the Arians in *Vita Antonii* 69), the Sayings are quite dispassionate.

Burton-Christie does suggest a cause that seems most convincing: when the great oral traditions made their way to Palestine, especially Gaza, they were met by a much more literate and educated kind of monk. Examples can be seen in various places. For example, in the *Life of Cyriacus* (ch. 14) and *Life of Sabas* (ch. 83), Cyril of Scythopolis refers to the monks of Palestine as “more lettered.”²¹⁸ When visitors would visit Antony, Antony would ask Macarius to let Antony know whence they came by certain “code words”:

If you see them inclined to be careless, say Egyptians; but when they are more serious and studious, say from Jerusalem . . . Now when he said to him “They are Egyptians,” the holy Antony would say to him: “Prepare some lentils and give them a meal,” and he would utter a prayer for them and say good-bye. But when he said “from Jerusalem,” he would sit up all night, talking to them about salvation.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Sys. 14.13 (Ward).

²¹⁸ R. Price, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* (Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 1990); Chrysavgis, trans., *Letters from the Desert*, 46.

²¹⁹ *Hist. Laus.* 21.8 (Clarke).

Isaiah of Scetis' *Ascetic Discourses*, written to ascetics and monks in Palestine (sixth cent.) demonstrates that his auditors were "literate, possessing books in their cells, and in some instances wealthy, having slaves. Some of them were even married and had children."²²⁰ In an environment such as this, with literate monks who were much more accustomed to *reading* their ascetic wisdom literature and Bible, it would have been facile for these monks to prefer texts.²²¹

Finally, it should be added that the landscape of Christian literature had seen a major waxing in the fourth and fifth centuries concerning ascetic wisdom. We should not underestimate the influence that *other* publications had on the Sayings being published, especially since ascetic literature held such wide popularity.²²² Clergy and laity desired the spiritual wisdom promulgated in this literature. Christians from all over the Empire read this material, as the copious translations bear witness. In fact, it seems quite probable that the thousands of visitors who travelled the long distance to Egypt in order to hear their wisdom, sought written accounts of such wisdom to take back home. These

²²⁰ J. Chryssavgis and R. Penkett, "Introduction," in *Abba Isaiah of Scetis: Ascetic Discourses* (Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 2002), 29.

²²¹ There are literate monks in Egypt, but they are the minority. For example, Gelasius 1 says that Gelasius had a leather Bible (containing both Old and New Testaments) worth eighteen silver pieces. He placed it in the church so that any of the other brethren could read it. The only other references to monks reading are: Epiphanius said, "Reading the Scriptures is a great safeguard against sin." (*Alph.* Epiphanius 9 [Ward]); Euprepus said that he has "read many books before" (*Alph.* Euprepus 7 [Ward]); Abba Ammoun of Rhaithou said that he read the Scriptures (*Alph.* Sisoës 17); One of Sisoës' disciples read from a letter of Athanasius (*Alph.* Sisoës 25); Abba Sisoës read from the New Testament (*Alph.* Sisoës 35); Serapion could read (*Alph.* Serapion 1). Cf. The Palestinian, Silvanus (and his disciples) apparently read (*Alph.* Silvanus 5); Theon was able to read Greek, Latin, and Coptic (*Hist. Monach.* 6.3). Mark, the Disciple of Abba Silvanus 1, tells us that Mark was a scribe.

²²² Rufinus alone wrote and translated numerous works devoted to Christian wisdom and/or monastic ideals in the fourth century. If there is any literary work that could serve as a precursor to the genre represented in the Sayings besides the *Avot*, it is the Latin translation of *Sentences of Sextus* by Rufinus.

small collections could serve as the foundation of the Sayings, as represented in the Prologue to the Alphabetical collection.

To perorate what seem to be the most convincing causes for the formation of the Sayings: (1) The destruction of many of the key monastic settlements in Egypt meant that the ascetic wisdom of the fathers no longer had the necessary framework for the sustaining and promulgation of the huge body of oral tradition which existed among the cells. (2) The ascetic-wisdom tradition came in contact with a much-more literate Christian audience than those in Egypt. (3) The Palestinian monks who collected and edited the Sayings were inspired to codify the Sayings because they had already experienced years of interaction with Jewish religious trends (see chapter two), which included the highly regarded role of the salvific wisdom offered by the holy man or sage (see chapter four). In fact, the chief attraction this literature had on its audience was its capacity to offer saving wisdom.²²³ This particular spiritual appetite was probably influenced by the growing numbers of Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries, the expansion of monasteries across the Empire (and into Persia), and the increased literary production of Judaism in Palestine (e.g., with the publication of the Jerusalem Talmud in ca. 350; the Babylonian Talmud in ca. late fifth century; Palestinian Gemara in fourth and fifth centuries). In the mass of fresh spiritual material being produced and circulating among the Empire, especially in Palestine, the Sayings was a perfect fit.

(5) *Why this genre? Are there literary precedents?* Scholars have had very little to say concerning the *genre* of the Sayings: “Care should therefore be taken to read the

²²³ “[The Sayings] are meant to inspire and instruct those who want to imitate their heavenly lives, so that they may make progress on the way that leads to the kingdom of heaven,” *Alph.* Prologue (Ward). Cf. The Lausiac History was written “with a view of stirring to rivalry and imitation those who wish to realize the heavenly mode of life and desire to tread the road which leads to the kingdom of heaven.” (Pref. 1; Clarke).

sayings in terms of the genres into which they were formed by scribes and editors who consciously presented them to a reading world as texts.”²²⁴ The process of collecting, translating, and writing the oral traditions was momentous. The Sayings are best described as an anthology of wisdom sayings from Christian ascetics. As Peter Brown says, the Sayings represent “the last and one of the greatest products of the Wisdom Literature of the ancient Near East.”²²⁵ The Sayings are widely diverse in their topics; diverse in their geographical locales; diverse in their speakers; and diverse in their answers. However, they are unified in that they are a record of practical wisdom given for the audience to *do* and to *perform*; they are not meant to be received merely as theological abstractions.²²⁶ In other words, the final collectors and editors of the Sayings apparently collected and edited the Sayings in an effort to present the Sayings as wisdom literature. Important questions remain, e.g.: Was this decision simply the most conducive genre for the content? Might there have been an influence for the Palestinian editors of the Sayings?

As has been established, there is no other Christian literature that fits the same characterization of “Christian wisdom literature.” We know that the Sayings uses other sources (e.g., Evagrius, Cassian, the *Hist. Monach.*, and *Laus. Hist.* are all quoted).²²⁷ Ruth Frazer and Burton-Christie believe that the collections took their form because of

²²⁴ Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 89-90.

²²⁵ Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 82.

²²⁶ Cf. Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 89-90, 95. They stand in stark contrast to the philosophical ruminations of Gregory of Nyssa.

²²⁷ Thus, Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 5.

one particular literary influence, the *Vita Antonii*.²²⁸ Frazer implicitly assumes that because the *Vita Antonii* was known to many of the monks, then the *final editors* were also equally influenced.²²⁹ Since Frazer believes the Sayings are primarily didactic in focus, and the *Vita Antonii* is the primary didactic literature available to the editors of the Sayings, then any “models” that the *Vita Antonii* uses can be found in the Sayings. She labels these models, *exhortation*, *exposition*, and *eulogy*.²³⁰ She further argues that certain literary “patterns” or “forms” found in the *Vita Antonii* can also be found in the Sayings. These units are: (1) documentary details of a life from youth to death, (2) apophthegms with *logia*, (3) the dialogue paradigms, (4) testimonial anecdotes, and (5) lengthy discourses.²³¹

However, there are difficulties with this proposal: (1) It is difficult to see how either the three “models” or the five literary patterns are not available in many other ascetic texts that antedate the Sayings. Granting the importance of the *Vita Antonii*, why link this particular *Vita* to the formation and editing of the Sayings? (2) Why are there are no explicit mentions of this link in the Sayings or other contemporaneous literature?²³² (3) If Antony’s life and wisdom is the foundation of the Sayings, why does

²²⁸ Ruth Frazer, “The Morphology of Desert Wisdom in the Apophthegmata Patrum” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1977); Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 90-92.

²²⁹ Frazer, “The Morphology,” 152.

²³⁰ Frazer, “The Morphology,” 117-29.

²³¹ Frazer, “The Morphology,” 152.

²³² The only mention of the *Vita Antonii* mentioned in the Sayings is found in *Alph*. Peter of Dios: “Peter, priest of Dios, when he prayed with others, ought to have stood in front, because he was a priest but because of his humility he stood behind saying, ‘This is what is written in the life of Saint Anthony.’ He did this without annoying anyone” (Ward). However, this has nothing to do with why or how the Sayings developed into the genre that it did.

Antony not play a more prominent role in the Sayings?²³³ Poemen (whether it is an actual person or combination of people) plays the prominent role. (4) It would be much easier for us to believe a connection existed between *Vita Antonii* and another *Vita*, but to conceive of it as the basis of the Sayings (viz., in this disparate genre) seems untenable.

Some of the models and literary forms offered are also mimicked in early Jewish literature. Frazer admits that precedent for the “dialogue literary form” can be found in other sources, including rabbinic literature. “Yet, the traditions are so remote in origin and, except for the biblical literature, without evidence of cultural contact, that it is difficult to see in these recurrent dialogue situations a pattern resembling those of rabbinic, philosophical, or ecclesiastical dialectic.”²³⁴ This thesis argues contrary to these two points: (1) it is the final form created by the editors, not the origin of the traditions, which had the most impact on the formation of the Sayings, and (2) it is precisely because we have evidence of “cultural contact” in Palestine and Egypt (at minimum) between Jews and Christians that allows for interaction and influence.

Conclusion

The search for Christian monastic origins leaves one with no clear answers. James Goehring is correct: “One may still discover influences on specific forms of asceticism and trace various paths of development, but the quest for the “origins” of

²³³ There is no doubt that Antony is a crucial figure in the origins of the monastic movement in Egypt. Antony has thirty-eight sayings attributed to him (cf. Sisoës’ fifty-four sayings), and several times he is held in high esteem (e.g., *Alph.* Isidore the Priest 6; John the Eunuch 2; Nesterus 2; Poemen 75, 87, 125; Sisoës 9).

²³⁴ Frazer, “The Morphology,” 136.

Christian monasticism should be let go.”²³⁵ Scholars should cease attributing to Antony or Pachomius credit for something that is not theirs to claim. Both were certainly very influential in Egypt, Palestine, and to some degree Syria, but neither were the founders of monasticism. The literary and archaeological evidence simply does not allow for such a neat picture of early monasticism. Across the Empire, in various languages and locales, Christians—long before Christianity was made a *religio licita*—took the commands of Jesus literally. In an effort to live as spiritually mature Christians, and for many, in an effort to obtain salvation, Christians restricted their activities to that which would guarantee their success. Anything that got in the way of their spiritual progress had the potential to be discarded: whether it was sleep, sexual relations, visits to the marketplace, visits with certain types of people, consuming certain food, participation in entertainment, or even living in the city.

Of course, Christians could demonstrate their ascetic tendencies in differing degrees. Some would literally “sell everything” and give it to the poor in the hopes that an indigent life could help them not be tempted by wealth. Some went so far as to leave the city. Ascetic Christians were already living on the peripheries of villages and towns by the time Antony decided to leave the city completely. His devotion served as a catalyst for others who wished to devote themselves to such a degree. Others fled to the desert because they were escaping persecution or taxation. Still others simply followed the customs that their Jewish ancestors had already established. In any case Christian monasticism would become widely popular as stories of the elite ascetics made their ways out of the cells and into the cities. Desert monks would become both the heroes and

²³⁵ “The Origins of Monasticism,” 35. O’Neill (“The Origins of Monasticism,” 286), argues that the search for origins should be abandoned because “Christianity always had its monasteries, as did the Judaism from which it sprang.”

superstars of the ancient Christian church; they were the church's elite ascetic. By the late fourth century, monasticism had become a phenomenon within and outside of the city limits. By the fifth century, a huge network of monks existed from northern Syria to the Upper Egypt, and from Asia Minor to Rome.

People from all over the Empire flooded monasteries. The *Hist. Monach.* and *Hist. Laus.*, not to mention the church historians, tells of tens of thousands of monks across the Empire both in monasteries and participating in councils and religious celebrations at holy sites. Stories of miracles and great words of wisdom passed along the intranet of monasteries across the Empire. Both monks and non-monks obtained and promulgated sayings of the great sages, both in written and oral form. They made pilgrimages to Palestine and Egypt to see the holy sites and the holy men and women who were reaching spiritual perfection. Christian monks became the ideal Christian.

Out of this movement within Christianity came the Sayings. Non-monks and monks were elated to receive the wisdom of the monks. Reaching spiritual perfection (or pursuing it) gave much authority to the monks' sayings in the minds of the hungry audience. The Sayings represents for us a collection of wisdom sayings that serve a dual purpose: they preserve for us ancient, raw wisdom traditions handed on for centuries, and they preserve for us an ancient, Christian wisdom devotional used by Christians across the Empire. The Sayings gives us a rare glimpse into what spirituality for many in late antique Christianity looked like, and the degree to which a late antique person longed for wisdom from their sages.

CHAPTER FOUR

Jewish Asceticism and the Role of the Sage

Introduction

In the third and fourth centuries ascetic practices fomented across the Empire, as is demonstrated in Greek and Roman philosophical schools.¹ As Pierre Hadot says of this period:

Philosophy . . . took on the form of an exercise of the thought, will, and the totality of one's being, the goal of which was to achieve a state practically inaccessible to mankind: wisdom. Philosophy was a method of spiritual progress which demanded a radical conversion and transformation of the individual's way of being.²

A parallel foment occurred within Christianity. Whether practiced individually, in small groups, or in communities, Christians practiced their asceticism primarily in urban areas or close to urban areas, just as nearly every ascetic did in the ancient world.³

¹ Thus, Lawrence M. Wills, "Ascetic Theology Before Asceticism? Jewish Narratives and the Decentering of the Self," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 4 (2006): 905.

² *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), 265. Hadot admits there are differences between pagan and Christian foundations for change (viz., the gospel), but overall, Hadot sees in the Christian ascetic movement an almost wholesale adoption of pagan philosophical ideals rooted in Stoicism and Neo-platonism. Hadot makes no mention in his works of even a remote influence from Jews (even Josephus and Philo are nearly completely removed of their Judaism). Conversely, considering the broader Stoic influences on Christianity, Everett Ferguson believes that "whatever the similarities in Christian and Stoic ethical thought and household maxims, these instructions are placed in such a fundamentally different worldview as to give them a different significance" (*Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003], 368). Ferguson sees fundamental differences in Stoicism's utterly immanent god (pantheism), different understanding of time, comparatively-shallow understanding of sin, lack of any understanding in immortality or resurrection, *et al.*

³ One should not imagine that hermits, cenobites, and urban monks never had contact. Rather, the evidence suggests they stayed in contact (e.g., *Alph.* Arsenius 26; Carion 2; Joseph of Panephris 3; John the Dwarf 1; Sisoës 10, 48; Sys. Lust 28). Jerome tells us that the hermit Antony sent seven letters to various monasteries in Coptic (*de Viris Illustribus* 88; Bernadette McNary-Zak, *Letters and Asceticism in*

While remote desert dwellers were uncommon before Antony's time, certainly by the fifth and sixth centuries monks had made "the desert a city."⁴ By the time the Sayings were being collected and edited, monks, the ascetic elite, could be found in both cities and remote places, actively involved to varying degrees in both civic and theological affairs.

Due to the long heritage of urban life, the average Christian ascetic would have come in contact with, and perhaps been influenced by, several types of religions and philosophies: pagan (e.g., Pythagoreans, Stoics, Cynics),⁵ various "peripheral" Christian groups,⁶ and even Jews.⁷ Scholars have long noticed various patterns of influence from western Greco-Roman philosophies to East Asian religions, but typically none of them

Fourth-Century Egypt [New York: University Press of America, 2000], 4). Egyptian and Palestinian monasticism also had close contact, though their practices and communities are not identical.

⁴ *Vita Antonii* 14 (PG 26:865).

⁵ E.g., Porphyry's *Vita Pythagorae* and *De Abstinencia*, Iamblichus' *De Vita Pythagorica*, and Philostratus' *Vita Apollonii*. Anthony Meredith examines these three authors' views with the *Vita Antonii*, and the writings of Basil and Gregory of Nyssa. He concludes that there are similarities in the pagans' and Christians' descriptions of ascetics and sometimes general morality, but, especially when compared to the motivations and activities of Antony, pagan asceticism differed on several salient points. See his "Asceticism—Christian and Greek," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 27 (1976): 313-32, esp. 313-23, 330-32.

⁶ E.g., Manichaeism and Gnosticism(s), etc. Rousseau, "Christian Asceticism and the Early Monks," 120-21. In *Sys.* 13.11, a Manichaean priest converts to "orthodoxy" after having received a warm welcome and meal by a monk. In *Alph.* Theodora 4, Amma Theodora speaks with a Manichaean concerning the body, and how after it is put under physical discipline, one can see how the body is made for God. Cf. *Hist. Laus.* Prol. 11; 37.8.

⁷ E.g., *Therapeutae* of Alexandria, the Essenes, the "proto-monks" of the desert, whose details are scattered throughout literature. Rousseau, "Christian Asceticism and the Early Monks," 121-22. The nature of this "influence" is difficult to determine and will be discussed in more detail in the first section of this chapter. Harmless believes that attempting to determine influence from an outside source (whether Buddhism, Judaism, or Manichaeism) implies that Christian monasticism must be an "external accretion" and "unnatural to Christianity" (*Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], 439). Instead, Harmless believes that Christians always had ascetic examples in Jesus and Paul. Yet, were Jesus and Paul not Jews? Christians at the time of the Essenes (and *Therapeutae*?) already practiced fasting (e.g., Matt 6:16, 18; Didache 1:3; 8:1), various forms of sexual restraint (e.g., Matt 19:12; cf. Didache 1:4), and material renunciation (e.g., Acts 2:45; cf. Didache 1:5; 4:8).

are understood to be the determinative influence.⁸ This ascetic foment has led Goehring to state: “Influences from Judaism, Greco-Roman philosophy, and oriental religions are certainly present in Christian monastic development, but the widespread ascetic impulse in this era led to parallel practices and lifestyles that were fairly common.”⁹

However, it is tempting to assume that “parallel practices and lifestyles” implies parallel foundations, intentions, or goals. Primary material demonstrates that while superficial observations might look identical, such an assumption would be false. Differences in motivation and theological goals are worth exploring. Moreover, examining more closely Jewish and Christian similarities concerning asceticism and monasticism is warranted at least because the two most important locales represented in the Sayings (Egypt and Palestine) are the two most heavily populated locations of Jews outside of Babylon in late antiquity. There have been scholars who have argued for some degree of determinative Jewish influence. Dodds states that “if there was a model, it was probably Jewish rather than pagan.”¹⁰ Burton-Christie assumes that Christian asceticism “developed in continuity with the various ascetic currents that characterized the life of the early church, particularly in areas with a strong Jewish influence.”¹¹

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section explores the similarities between ascetic behavior given in early Jewish literature (primarily Second-Temple period) and later Christian ascetics. Furthermore, the structural and behavioral

⁸ Ascetic practices in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism were well established by this time, all which antedate Christianity by centuries. Connection with these groups is difficult to establish.

⁹ Goehring, “Monasticism,” 769.

¹⁰ Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, 31. Dodds examines several examples of pagan ascetics (viz., eremitic) and rightly concludes that pagan examples differ widely from Christian examples.

¹¹ Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 39.

patterns of the Therapeutae will be considered in relation to later Christian ascetics. It will be suggested that isolated, semi-communal, and communal Jewish ascetics possibly set the precedent, in germinal form, for Christian ascetic development (viz., either by Jewish converts or oral tradition). The second section will briefly explore some practices among certain rabbis (Tannaitic and Amoraic¹²) that are similar to the practices of contemporaneous Christians. It will not be assumed or argued that rabbinic Judaism is ascetic, but that there is evidence that certain rabbis praised or practiced various forms of asceticism which held a similar significance for contemporaneous Christians. The final section will briefly explore some specific ways that Jewish and Christian sages held similar social and theological functions (viz., how they served at the holy places, held similar roles in their communities, and promulgated wisdom that was highly valued).¹³

¹² In respect to the tradition and teachings of the rabbis, the Talmudic literature distinguishes between the Tannaim (Aram., *tanna*, from Heb., *shanah*, “to repeat,” i.e., the oral traditions) and Amoraim (Heb., *amar*, “to say, comment,” i.e., on the traditions of the Tannaim). The Tannaic period (ca. 70-200) extends roughly from the generations of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai to Rabbi Judah haNasi, and the Amoraic period (ca. 200-500) extends roughly from the generations of Abba Arika to Mar bar Rav Ashi. Spanish-Jewish philosopher, Abraham Ibn Daud developed the subdivisions of the Tannaitic period into five generations and the Amoraic period into seven generations. The Saboraim (ca. 500-700) were the editors of the Babylonian Talmud, followed by the Geonim (ca. 600-1000). See Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 2nd ed., trans. and ed. Markus Bockmuehl (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 7. For dating the generations of rabbis, see idem., 65-100. Also see Isaiah M. Gafni, “The Historical Period,” in *The Literature of the Sages*, vol. 1., ed. Shmuel Safrai (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 20-34.

¹³ As will be seen throughout the chapter, “sage,” “holy person,” “monk,” and “ascetic” are not necessarily synonymous. Yet, as demonstrated in the literature, the person who held supererogatory restrictions upon him/herself and dedicated fastidious attention to the studying and ruminating upon Scripture (an ascetic, or in the formal sense, the monk), this person was perceived by the public as a “sage” or “holy person, saint, or righteous one.” In late antiquity for both Jews and Christians, two chief components of the saints’ attraction were in their capacity for piety and Scriptural-based wisdom.

Jewish Ascetic Practices

Misrepresentations of Jewish Asceticism

Asceticism in the history of Judaism is typically ignored or misrepresented by scholars.¹⁴ For example, one scholar of Christian monasticism, James Goehring, presents all Jewish ascetic practices as manifestations of an eschatological belief system that separated this age from the age to come.¹⁵ In this way, asceticism only prepares the body in ritual purity for the new age. He argues that eschatological preparation may have influenced certain periphery or sectarian groups (like “Jewish-Christians” or Essenes), but is widely different from the Platonic philosophical ideal of all late antique monks. It is important to respond to Goehring’s simplifications: (1) not all Jews (or Jewish ascetics) were only driven by eschatological presuppositions, no more than Christian ascetics were only driven by it; and when Jews were, they compare quite well to their Christian counterparts; (2) Jews were not immune to pagan philosophical influences; (3) Christian monks (esp. in the Sayings) often understood their asceticism as eschatological preparation; and (4) Christian monks typically did not share the sharp dualism between body and soul as Plato promulgated.¹⁶ Yet, as will be seen below and in chapter five,

¹⁴ This began in the early nineteenth century. There has been an overwhelming neglect of allowing for asceticism in the history of Judaism. This trend is noticed, and many references are given of studies in Judaism which ignore or misrepresent asceticism, in Allan Lazaroff, “Baḥyā’s Asceticism Against Its Rabbinic and Islamic Background,” *The Journal of Jewish Studies* 21 (1970): 11-13, and Eliezer Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists: Fasting and Asceticism in Rabbinic Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7-9.

¹⁵ Goehring, “Asceticism,” in *The Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), 127.

¹⁶ More will be said in chapter five. It is enough to note now that Christian ascetic division of body and soul was anthropological, not metaphysical, and their distinction cannot mean, without evidence, that they were influenced by the philosophical teachings of Plato. The distinction made between body and soul is Jewish in origin (or at least, “flavor”), and was used extensively by Christians. Asceticism as preparation for the New Age is replete in the Sayings.

both rabbinic Jews and ascetic Christians shared basic assumptions about their bodies and God. Montgomery said it well many years ago:

[The ascetic principle in Judaism and Christianity] has not as its basis the Greek (Platonic, Neo-Platonic) distinction of matter and spirit which in final analysis came to condemn the former as the seat of evil or even essentially evil . . . Here it is the contrast between the Holy God and that which is not God, i.e., between Spirit and non-Spirit (cf. Is 31:3) . . . This distinction is not physical in character . . . it is the distinction between God and the creature, yet the latter possessing the possibility of holiness, for it is God's creation and not essentially evil (cf. Rom 8:19ff).¹⁷

It is imperative to remind ourselves how asceticism was typically practiced in the ancient world: "For the ancients, including Jews, *askēsis* was not simply the *negative* denial of world, body, sense, pleasure, and emotion, but the willful and arduous training and testing, often through abstention from what was generally permitted, of one's creaturely faculties in the *positive* pursuit of moral and spiritual perfection."¹⁸ Thus, asceticism involves the deliberate renunciation of things and the proactive pursuit of some things (e.g., biblical knowledge) for the pursuit of holiness.¹⁹

Scholars in pre-rabbinic and rabbinic Judaism usually ignore ascetic practices in Judaism. These scholars typically assume that asceticism is manifested only in negative patterns of self-mortification, predicated upon the philosophical view of an evil body; and when ascetic practices are evident in Judaism, they are seen as isolated events caused by idiosyncratic situations. Contemporary Jewish reluctance for producing any legitimate study of Jewish asceticism is typically driven by one or two things: (1) theological: God

¹⁷ James Montgomery, "Ascetic Strains in Early Judaism," *JBL* 51 (1932): 212-13.

¹⁸ Fraade, "Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism," 1:257.

¹⁹ Cf. "[Asceticism] is a discipline of the body and soul in order to reach greater spiritual and moral heights. It is not just bodily deprivation by itself, but rather bodily deprivation for a higher purpose . . . Ascetic acts must be voluntary, and as opposed to simple acts of self-deprivation must serve a higher purpose," (Lazaroff, "Bahyā's Asceticism Against Its Rabbinic and Islamic Background," 14, 15-16.

made humans, which means that our bodies are “good,” and any system that presupposes our bodies are bad or evil cannot be compatible to Jewish anthropology; or (2) apologetic: because the scholar is being influenced by personal, apologetic suppositions. Steven Fraade says it well: “The predominately negative view of *askēsis*, which Jewish scholars hold in common with modern culture and which they appropriate for their own apologetic purposes, blinds them either to admitting its existence or to according to it anything but a negative role.”²⁰

Two representative, influential works that speak of Jewish asceticism and fall to a misconception of the nature of Christian asceticism and apologetic concerns are Yitzhak Fritz Baer’s *Israel Among the Nations*²¹ and Ephraim E. Urbach’s *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*.²² Baer argues that the “early pietists” represented in rabbinic literature were those who joined biblical prophetic ideals with Greek ascetic ideals of Plato, Cynics, *et al.*²³ They strove for spiritual perfection through discipline so that their community would form the ideal society predicated upon faithful fellowship and a shared economy. The portions of the Mishnah and Talmud that do speak of asceticism are the

²⁰ “Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” 260.

²¹ *Yisra’el ba-’Amim* (Jerusalem: Mosad Byalik, 1955). Fraade, “Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” 1:258. For another critique of Baer and Urbach’s view, see Lazaroff, “Baḥyā’s Asceticism Against Its Rabbinic and Islamic Background,” 11-13, 16-20.

²² *Hazal, pirke emunot ve-de’ot*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1975); Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); Fraade, “Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” 1:258-60; Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 8-9. Diamond characterizes their debate: “Baer defines asceticism as . . . ‘moral striving,’ which takes the forms of self-education, character development, service to God, and boundless generosity toward others, all of which can be found in Second Temple and rabbinic Judaism. Urbach, on the other hand, associates asceticism with dualism, mortification of the flesh, and the creation of an elite class of ascetics.”

²³ Baer, *Yisra’el ba-’Amim*, 20-57. Baer considers the foundation of the “ascetic Torah” to be the statement attributed to Simeon the Just, “By three things is the world sustained: by the Law, by the [Temple]-service, and by deeds of loving-kindness” (*m. Abot* 1:2 [Danby]). Fraade, “Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” 1:258.

remaining literary remnants of the “early pietists.” These “early pietists” influenced many others, including Philo, Pharisees, Essenes, and even early Christian monastic groups. Urbach responded negatively to Baer’s work positing that when ascetic practices are present in Judaism, they are limited to negative reactions to particular historical events.²⁴ Urbach argues that asceticism, represented in Philo, Plato, and the patristic authors, is solely based upon the dualistic separation of soul and body, where the goal is to liberate the soul from the body (hence, a Platonic ideal).²⁵ This asceticism, he claims, is completely absent from pre-rabbinic and rabbinic writings.

Though both works contribute to one’s understanding of Jewish asceticism, their methodological problems are conspicuous.²⁶ Baer’s attempt to discover ascetic traits in pre-rabbinic times from rabbinic sources is dubious at best. Furthermore, his broad definition of asceticism includes too many references to be of use at times. On the other hand, Urbach’s presentation of Christian asceticism is simply wrong. As has already been stated, while Christian ascetic authors can presuppose a moderate dualism, such anthropology is not representative of Platonism, but Judaism.²⁷

²⁴ Urbach, *The Sages*, 12, 444-48. Fraade, “Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” 1:258-60.

²⁵ E.g., Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, 220-25, who believes that the many examples of bifurcation manifested in rabbinic material “resemble[s] those of Philo, only he, following Plato, distinguishes in man not two but three parts: the body that is fashioned from clay, the animal vitality that is linked to the body, and the mind that is instilled in the soul, this being the Divine mind.” (221). It is difficult for us to see how this trifurcation resembles anything within rabbinic or non-rabbinic material. Jewish and Christian conceptions of the body will be examined in chapter five.

²⁶ Critiques of Baer and Urbach can be found throughout secondary literature, including reviews in journals. E.g., see Fraade “Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” 1:259-60; also Michael L. Satlow, “‘And on the Earth You Shall Sleep’: *Talmud Torah* and Rabbinic Asceticism,” *Journal of Religion* 83, no. 2 (2003): 206-07.

²⁷ More will be said in chapter five concerning anthropology in Jewish sources and the Sayings. It will be demonstrated that the rabbinic understanding of the *yēšer hā-rā* (יֵצֶר הָרָע), the “evil inclination” or “evil impulse” that dominated much of the theology of the Jewish sage fits nicely into the anthropological outlook expressed within the Sayings. Thus, “It is precisely man’s weakness that serves as a reason for

Asceticism in Non-rabbinic Literature

It is necessary now to demonstrate that Judaism was not immune to asceticism. To the contrary, it will be demonstrated that there are numerous references to the practice of, and encouragement to participate in, various forms of asceticism. Furthermore, the best way to compare Jewish ascetic practice and theology with the germinal stages of Christian asceticism is to examine contemporaneous Jewish literature. We will begin by examining Apocryphal literature and then move to the Pseudepigrapha, using the criteria of asceticism given in chapter three (esp. pp. 62-63).²⁸ There are times when ascetic practices are related to grieving when the person experiences some loss; such examples will not be included in this discussion. Conversely, we will consider those instances when grieving (and other related acts) is involved and it has nothing to do with material loss (e.g., extreme penitence, or supererogatory behavior in response to sin, which is also very common among Christian ascetics).²⁹

intensifying the demand for the suppression of human passions. A man must force himself to subjugate his inclination” (Urbach, *The Sages: The Concepts and Beliefs*, 471-83, quote on 479).

²⁸ Categories also given in Fraade, “Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” 1:261-63. Also see Montgomery, “Ascetic Strains in Early Judaism” and Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists* (who states that Fraade’s work has proven “particularly helpful” (7, 9-11). The following categories could be equally applied to Christian asceticism (esp. in the Sayings).

²⁹ Fraade could have done a little better job of distinguishing when ascetic practices simply accompany grieving over a certain loss. When the significance of the ascetic practices is merely related to the loss of the Temple (or the like), it is best to distinguish them from other acts of asceticism. E.g., mourning the Temple’s destruction: 2 *Baruch* 9:2 (“[W]e rent our garments, and wept and mourned, and fasted for seven days” [*OTP* 1:623, Klijn]).

Apocrypha

In the Apocrypha³⁰ ascetic practices are employed (1) to prepare one for a vision or revelation: e.g., Dan 9:3 (“Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and supplications with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.” [RSV]); 10:3 (“I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks.”[RSV]), 12; (2) to accompany supplication to God for revelation, healing, protection, or wisdom: e.g., Jud 4:7-13 (“And every man of Israel cried out to God with great fervor, and they humbled themselves with much fasting . . . they all girded themselves with sackcloth . . . And all the men and women of Israel, and their children, living at Jerusalem, prostrated themselves before the temple and put ashes on their heads and spread out their sackcloth before the Lord . . . They even surrounded the altar with sackcloth and cried out in unison, praying earnestly to the God of Israel . . . the people fasted many days.”[RSV]); 1 Macc 3:47-51 (47-48: “They fasted that day, put on sackcloth and sprinkled ashes on their heads, and rent their clothes. And they opened the book of the law to inquire into those matters about which the Gentiles were consulting the images of their idols.” [RSV]); 2 Macc 13:10-12 (12: “When they had all joined in the same petition and had besought the merciful Lord with weeping and fasting and lying prostrate for three days without ceasing, Judas exhorted them and ordered them to stand ready.” [RSV]); Tobit 12:8 (“Prayer is good when accompanied by fasting, almsgiving, and righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than much with wrongdoing. It is better to give alms than to treasure up gold.” [RSV]); and (3) to abstain from passions and appetites so one can guard against sin: e.g., 4 Macc 1:30-35 (30-32: “For reason is

³⁰ It is assumed that Daniel was written or edited ca. 165 BC, and hence useful for this discussion, though it is not considered apocryphal or pseudepigraphal.

the guide of the virtues, but over the emotions it is sovereign. Observe now first of all that rational judgment is sovereign over the emotions by virtue of the restraining power of self-control. Self-control, then, is dominance over the desires [τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν]. Some desires are mental, others are physical, and reason obviously rules over both.” [RSV]). Ascetic practices mentioned in this literature usually involve one or a combination of the following: (a) fasting³¹; (b) various dietary restrictions: e.g., Dan 10:2-3, 12; (c) abstaining from washing or anointing: e.g., Dan 10:2-3; (d) abstaining from sex: e.g., Jud 8:5 (“She set up a tent for herself on the roof of her house, and girded sackcloth about her loins and wore the garments of her widowhood.” [RSV]); Wisdom of Solomon 3:13 (“For blessed is the barren woman who is undefiled, who has not entered into a sinful union; she will have fruit when God examines souls. [RSV]); and *Jubilees* 50:8.

Pseudepigrapha

The Pseudepigrapha represents a compendium of various kinds of documents: apocalypses, sapiential literature, histories, *et al.* The documents were written between the second cent. BC and third cent. AD. Our analysis will be synthetic. Asceticism can be described in order : (1) to prepare one for a vision or revelation: *Apocalypse of Abraham* 9:7 (“But for forty days abstain from every kind of food cooked by fire, and from drinking of wine and from anointing (yourself) with oil.” [OTP 1:693, Rubinkiewicz]); 4 Ezra 5:13

³¹ Nearly every reference listed mentions fasting; it was certainly the chief ascetic practice. In addition to the texts already mentioned: Jud 8:5-6 (6: “She fasted all the days of her widowhood.” [RSV]); Philo *De Specialibus Legibus*, 2.195: [Why Moses called the Sabbath, the Sabbath] “First, because of the self-restraint (ἐγκράτειαν) which it entails; always and everywhere indeed he exhorted them to show this in all the affairs of life, in controlling the tongue and the belly and the organs below the belly, but on this occasion especially he bids them do honor to it by dedicating thereto a particular day. To one who has learnt to disregard food and drink which are absolutely necessary, are there any among the superfluities of life which he can fail to despise, things which exist to promote not so much preservation and permanence of life as pleasure with all its powers of mischief?” (LCL 341, 428-29 [Colson]).

(“[I]f you pray again, and weep as you do now, and fast for seven days, you shall hear yet greater things than these.” [OTP 1:532, Metzger]); 5:20; 6:30, 35; 20:5-6 (“Therefore, go away and sanctify yourself for seven days and do not eat bread and do not drink water and do not speak to anybody.” [OTP 1:627, Klijn]); *Martyrdom of Isaiah* 2:7-11 (10-11: All of them were clothed in sackcloth . . . they had nothing with them, but were destitute, and they all lamented with a great lamentation because of the going astray of Israel.” [OTP 2:158, Knibb]); (2) to accompany supplication to God for revelation, healing, protection, or wisdom: e.g., 2 *Baruch* 9:2, 20:5-6 (5: “Therefore, go away and sanctify yourself for seven days and do not eat bread and do not drink water and do not speak to anybody.” [OTP 1:627, Klijn]); *Testament of Joseph* 3:4 (“For those seven years I fasted, and yet seemed to the Egyptians like someone who was living luxuriously, for those who fast for the sake of God receive graciousness of countenance. If my master was absent, I drank no wine; for three-day periods I would take no food but give it to the poor and the ill.” [OTP 1:820, Kee]); 4:8; (3) to repent for intentional and unintentional sins: e.g., *Testament of Judah* 15:4 (“Since I repented of these acts, I consumed neither wine nor meat until my old age, and I saw no merriment at all.” [OTP 1:799, Kee]); *Testament of Reuben* 1:10 (“I repented before the Lord: I did not drink wine or liquor; meat did not enter my mouth, and I did not eat any pleasurable food. Rather, I was mourning over my sin, since it was so great.” [OTP 1:782, Kee]); *Testament of Simeon* 3:4 (“Out of the fear of the Lord I chastened my soul by fasting for two years.” [OTP 1:786, Kee]); *Testament of Moses* 9:1-7 (6: “We shall fast for a three-day period and on the fourth day we shall go into a cave, which is in the open country.” [OTP 1:931, Priest]); *Life of Adam and Eve* 5-6 (“Eve said to Adam: “My lord, tell me what is penitence and how long should I perform it? . . .

Adam said to Eve: ‘You cannot do as much as I, but do as much so that you might be saved. For I will do forty days of fasting. You, however, arise and go to the Tigris River and take a stone and stand upon it in the water up to your neck in the depth of the river. Let not a word go forth from your mouth since we are unworthy to ask of the Lord for our lips are unclean from the illicit and forbidden tree. Stand in the water of the river for thirty-seven days. I however, will do forty days in the water of the Jordan. Perhaps the Lord will have mercy on us.’”[*ABAW* 14.3:185-250, Custis]); (4) to abstain from passions and appetites so one can guard against sin: e.g., *Apocalypse of Elijah* 1:13-22 (15-18: “Remember that . . . the Lord created the fast for a benefit to men on account of the passions and desires which fight against you so that the evil will not inflame you . . . The one who fasts continually will not sin although jealousy and strife are within him” [*OTP* 1:738, Wintermute]); *Letter of Aristeas* 15-55; 1 *Enoch* 108:8-9 (“Those who love God have loved neither gold nor silver, nor all the good things which are in the world, but have given over their bodies to suffering—who from the time of their very being have not longed after earthly food, and who regarded themselves as a (mere) passing breath. And they have observed this matter, the Lord having put them through much testing; then he received their pure spirits so that they should bless his name.” [*OTP* 1:88, Isaac]). These last two reasons for ascetic behavior share the most commonality with later Christian praxis (esp. in the Sayings). Ascetic practices mentioned in this literature usually involve one or a combination of the following: (a) fasting³²; (b) various dietary restrictions: e.g.,

³² Nearly every reference listed mentions fasting; it was certainly the chief ascetic practice. In addition to the texts already mentioned: *Jud* 8:5-6 (6: “She fasted all the days of her widowhood.” [RSV]); Philo *De Specialibus Legibus*, 2.195: [Why Moses called the Sabbath, the Sabbath] “First, because of the self-restraint (ἐγκράτειαν) which it entails; always and everywhere indeed he exhorted them to show this in all the affairs of life, in controlling the tongue and the belly and the organs below the belly, but on this occasion especially he bids them do honor to it by dedicating thereto a particular day. To one who has learnt to disregard food and drink which are absolutely necessary, are there any among the superfluities of

Apocalypse of Abraham 9; 4 Ezra 9:26 (“[A]nd there I saw among the flowers and ate of the plants of the field, and the nourishment they afforded satisfied me.” [OTP 1:545, Metzger]); 12:51 (“So the people went into the city, as I told them to do. But I sat in the field seven days, as the angel had commanded me; and I ate only of the flowers of the field, and my food was of plants during those days.” [OTP 1:551, Metzger]); *Martyrdom of Isaiah* 2:7-11(11: “And they had nothing to eat except wild herbs (which) they gathered from the mountains . . . And they dwelt on the mountains and on the hills for two years of days.” [OTP 2: 158, Knibb]; *Testament of Joseph* 3:4-5; *Testament of Judah* 15:4; *Testament of Reuben* 1:10; cf. Matt 3:4 (John the Baptist); (c) abstaining from washing or anointing: e.g., *Apocalypse of Abraham* 9; (d) abstaining from sex: e.g., *Testament of Naphtali* 8:8 (“There is a time for having intercourse with one’s wife, and a time to abstain for the purpose of prayer.” [OTP 1:814, Kee]); *Testament of Issachar* 2; 3:5 (“[P]leasure with a woman never came to my mind.” [OTP 1:803]); 7:2, 3; *Testament of Joseph* 3:4-5; 4:1-2; 9:2; (e) wearing coarse or simple dress: e.g., *Martyrdom of Isaiah* 2:7-11 (OTP 2: 158, Knibb); and *Testament of Issachar* 4:2.³³

The following might be said concerning the evidence given above³⁴: (1) ascetic practices are often performed in order to separate the person from what is considered ritually unclean (e.g., sex, food, etc.)³⁵ and unethical (e.g., certain passions or appetities);

life which he can fail to despise, things which exist to promote not so much preservation and permanence of life as pleasure with all its powers of mischief?” (LCL 341, 428-29 [Colson]).

³³ Cf. Matt 3:4 (John the Baptizer); *Josephus Vita* 2.11 (Bannus).

³⁴ Fraade, “Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” 1:262 and footnotes.

³⁵ Restricting sex in order to become ritually clean is established in the Old Testament (e.g., Exod 19:10, 15; Lev 10:9; 15:18; 1 Sam 21:5-6; cf. *m. Yoma* 1:1).

(2) an anthropological dualism where the “soul” is always preferred over the “body”³⁶; (3) often suffering is welcomed as a sign of righteous behavior by God, whether it is done to the person or if the person initiates the “suffering”³⁷; and (4) ascetic practices could be done temporarily or permanently.

Christians, primarily in monastic communities, copied and edited Jewish Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and apocalypses.³⁸ It is certainly possible that at least some of these texts, especially from Daniel, served as the example of ascetic behavior for both Jews and Christians. For example, the angel told Daniel (10:12) that Daniel’s prayers were heard and he was able to have a vision of God because Daniel “humbled himself” and sought to understand God. The Hebrew uses the Hitpa’el form of עָנָה, “and humbled yourself” (וַלָּהֵת עָנִיתָ or ταπεινωθήσῃς), which is best translated, “force into submission” or “inflict pain upon (one’s self).”³⁹ Montgomery believes that this passage “was the classical precedent for the subsequent praxis of visionaries and apocalyptists in Jewry as well as in the Church in resorting to fastings, vigils, and the like, in order to procure divine illumination.”⁴⁰ This is probably an overstatement, but it is likely that Daniel’s experience of the divine after physical submission served as a model for both Jews and Christians. As an anonymous monk recalled:

³⁶ Fraade says, “The strongest dualism expressed in this literature is in Wisdom of Solomon 9:15, where a corruptible body weighs down the soul, preventing it from discerning wisdom, which comes through the spirit from God. This is still not Plato’s image of the soul imprisoned in the body,” “Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” 1:281, nt. 35.

³⁷ E.g., *Psalms of Solomon* 3:3-9; 7:3-8; 8:29-40; 10; 13:5-9; 16:14-15; 1 *Enoch* 108:7-10.

³⁸ O’Neill, “The Origins of Monasticism,” 273.

³⁹ Thus, Montgomery, “Ascetic Strains in Early Judaism,” 189; TDOT 6, 888-902.

⁴⁰ Montgomery, “Ascetic Strains in Early Judaism,” 189.

It was said of an old man that for seventy years he ate only once a week. He asked God about the interpretation of a saying of Scripture, and God did not reveal it to him. He said to himself, “I have given myself so much affliction without obtaining anything, so I will go to see my brother and ask him.” But while he was closing the door behind him to go to see his brother, *an angel of the Lord was sent to him who said*, “These seventy years you have fasted have not brought you near to God, *but when you humiliated yourself* (ἐταπείνωσας, same as Dan. 10:12) by going to see your brother, I was sent to tell you the meaning of this saying.” When he had fully replied to his search into the Scriptures he withdrew from him.⁴¹

One must assume that the theological presuppositions represented in these texts also represent, to some degree, the theological presuppositions of the audiences to whom this literature was written. These examples demonstrate that the Judaism represented in most of its literature from third century BC. to the third century AD. was not only open to ascetic practices, but that it often assumed they were the prerequisite for relating to God. It also assumes that not everyone performed these acts, whether by choice or ability, and hence, not everyone was able to achieve the same spiritual condition. Moreover, the asceticism represented in these texts is only understood within a relationship with a particular God represented within a particular biblical history of which they thought they were a part. Finally, it is important to note how these numerous examples present a striking similarity to both the practices and significance of later ascetic behavior presented in the Sayings.

While Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical literature paints a broad picture of ascetic practice and theology among various kinds of Jews from third century BC. to the third century AD, only two concrete examples exist of Jewish communities who practiced asceticism: those in Egypt and those at Qumran. Since the Sayings are mostly based upon Egyptian monasticism, and because Egyptian Jewish asceticism resembles Christian

⁴¹ *Anony.* 182 [Ward]; Nau 314.

asceticism more closely than Qumran asceticism, we will limit our focus to the Jewish ascetic community in Alexandria, Egypt.

Therapeutae

St. Antony left Alexandria for solitary life in the 260s. In the same few decades of Antony's communities, several independent communities formed in Nitria, Kellia, and Scetis, all within sixty kilometers of each other. All three communities existed on the outskirts of Alexandria. Nitria existed on the edge of Lake Mareotis. Interestingly, Philo speaks of a vibrant Jewish, ascetic community that existed in the first century throughout the districts of Alexandria, and especially near Lake Mareotis. It is worth exploring the features of this Jewish ascetic group since this same region will be the seedbed from which all later, Egyptian Christian ascetic communities come.

Philo is aware of Jews, “who, regarding laws in their literal sense . . . are over punctilious (ὀλιγόρρησαν)”⁴² and who have detached themselves from society, while apparently still living in urban areas. Philo says that these men live

as though they were living alone by themselves in a wilderness (ἐν ἐρημιᾷ), or as though they had become disembodied souls, and knew neither city nor village (πόλιν μήτε κώμην) nor household nor any company of human beings at all.⁴³

These urban ascetics, according to Philo, are at stage one in a slow, ascetic maturation:

“For the practical comes before the contemplative life (πρακτικὸν τοῦ θεωρητικοῦ βίου); it is a sort of prelude to a more advanced contest; and it is well to have fought it out first.”⁴⁴ Philo distinguishes between the “practical course of life” of the Essenes versus

⁴² *De vita contemplative* 89 (LCL 289, 183 [Colson and Whitaker]).

⁴³ *De migratione Abrahama* 90 (LCL 289, 182-83 [Colson and Whitaker]).

⁴⁴ *De fuga et inventione* 6.36 (LCL 275, 28-29 [Colson and Whitaker]).

the “speculative life” of the Therapeutae in Egypt.⁴⁵ Our focus will be on the Therapeutae.

Philo wrote an entire work dedicated to describing the ascetic practices of the Therapeutae in Egypt (and to demonstrate by contrast, how pagans so often live in vice).⁴⁶ There is reason to believe that the Therapeutae were truly a “monastic” group of ascetics, especially because of the locale given to them (in and around Alexandria, while the more rigorous gather around Lake Mareotis), even if Philo’s description of them could be idealized.⁴⁷ Philo states that when he describes the Therapeutae, he will “not add anything of [his] own procuring to improve upon the facts as is constantly done by poets and historians . . . but shall adhere absolutely to the actual truth.”⁴⁸ Philo tells us that these type of people “exist in many places in the inhabited world [and] may be met with in many places,” whether they be Greek, “barbarian,” or Jew, but “it abounds in Egypt in each of the nomes (νόμων) as they are called and especially around Alexandria there is the greatest number of such men in Egypt, in every one of the districts, . . . and especially around Alexandria.”⁴⁹ Yet, the elite from among settle around Lake

⁴⁵ Concerning Philo’s representation of the Essenes, see *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 75-91 (LCL 363, 52-63 [Colson]); Concerning the Therapeutae: Philo, *De vita contemplative* (LCL 363, 112).

⁴⁶ *De vita contemplative* (LCL 363, 112-69).

⁴⁷ *De vita contemplative*, 21. It must be remembered that the silence of other sources concerning the Therapeutae (except Sozomen, who used Philo; *Hist. Eccl.* 1.12) could be the result of the destruction of Jewish literature in Alexandria. Philo was kept by Christians only because of his biblical commentary (primarily by the priest Pamphilia). F. Daumas, “La ‘solitude’ des Thérapeutes et les antécédents égyptiens du monachisme chrétien,” in *Philon d’Alexandrie, 11-15 Sept. 1966* (Alexandria: Le Philon, 1966), 347-48.

⁴⁸ *De vita contemplative*, 1 (LCL 363, 113 [Colson]). Of course this does not mean that he is, in fact, recounting his information without agenda, flaw, or deception.

⁴⁹ *De vita contemplative*, 21 (LCL 363, 125 [Colson]).

Mareotis.⁵⁰ Philo says that there are more than 4000 Therapeutae.⁵¹ The Therapeutae may have learned from various Egyptian literature and schools of thought how to keep silence before God, ascetic praxis, and detach from society. However, the Therapeutae were apparently the first to live such social detachment to the degree they did.⁵² Moreover, their intentions and goals were unlike their pagan neighbors. Even if Philo wants to pit them against philosophers (e.g., Anaxagoras and Democritus), one can see from his description of the Therapeutae several key differences, the most of which is the Therapeutae's desire to seek God with their whole life, predicated upon the Old Testament.

Their name is derived from the Greek (θεραπεύω) meaning “to heal”; yet their healing is not physical, which one can find in the cities by physicians, but spiritual in that they can cure all types of vice.⁵³ Their goal is to see “the living God,” not because of some outside motivation, but because they possess a “heaven-sent passion of love.”⁵⁴ Because they have such a strong desire for “a deathless and blessed life . . . they abandon their property to their sons or daughters or to other kinsfolk.”⁵⁵ Philo tell us of where they lived: “Instead of this [living in cities because of the disturbances there] they pass their days outside the walls pursuing solitude in gardens or lonely bits of country, not from any acquired habit of misanthropological bitterness but because they know how

⁵⁰ *De vita contemplative*, 22.

⁵¹ *De vita contemplative*, 75.

⁵² Daumas, “La ‘solitude’ des Thérapeutes,” 354-57.

⁵³ *De vita contemplative*, 2.

⁵⁴ *De vita contemplative*, 12 (LCL 363, 119 [Colson]).

⁵⁵ *De vita contemplative*, 13 (LCL 363, 121 [Colson]).

unprofitable and mischievous are associations with persons of dissimilar character.”⁵⁶

These kind of people flee any temptation they have, and instead, commit to each other as a new community with one purpose apart from the mundane.⁵⁷ As we saw above, most of the Therapeutae did not leave the city, but rather only the elite actually left the city [Alexandria] and dwelt around Lake Mareotis (present-day Mariout).⁵⁸ They live in simple houses⁵⁹; study various sacred scriptures (especially the psalms and the prophets) near their shrine, or “holy place”⁶⁰; abstain from all sorts of food and drink beyond what is necessary to sustain life during the day⁶¹ (and when they do eat or drink, it is only at night⁶²); and pray at least twice a day together.⁶³ They also compose hymns to God in various rhythms, modeled upon the techniques handed down to them in writings from “ancient men.”⁶⁴

They stay by themselves in “monasteries” for six days, but on the seventh day, come together to pray, worship, and be taught by the elders.⁶⁵ Both men and women are involved, though they are separated somewhat during the seventh-day service by a small

⁵⁶ *De vita contemplative*, 20 (LCL 363, 125 [Colson]).

⁵⁷ They lived near each other for protection and because of the fellowship they wish to cultivate; *De vita contemplative*, 24.

⁵⁸ *De vita contemplative*, 22.

⁵⁹ *De vita contemplative*, 24, 38.

⁶⁰ *De vita contemplative*, 25, 28.

⁶¹ *De vita contemplative*, 25, 37.

⁶² *De vita contemplative*, 34. Though, of course, fasts are often taken (35).

⁶³ *De vita contemplative*, 27.

⁶⁴ *De vita contemplative*, 29, 80.

⁶⁵ *De vita contemplative*, 30.

partitioning wall.⁶⁶ At the end of every seven weeks, they gather together⁶⁷ in white garments to have a proleptic meal expected in the new age⁶⁸, leaning on coarse rugs made of papyrus.⁶⁹

They are holy not because they offer sacrifices, but because they sanctify their minds (διάνοιας).⁷⁰ They avoid cities (τὰς πόλεις) but live in villages (κωμηδὸν) because they know the sins of the city people would have a “deadly effect upon their souls.”⁷¹ Some work on the land, others do crafts to ensure peace with neighbors.⁷² They do not hoard gold or silver but only keep what is necessary for basic living.⁷³ “They stand almost alone in the whole of mankind in that they have become moneyless and landless by deliberate action rather than by lack of good fortune”.⁷⁴ They share housing and finances.⁷⁵ They do not make weapons⁷⁶ and do not own, and abhor those who own,

⁶⁶ *De vita contemplative*, 74. This is apparently the only mention of a dividing wall used in Jewish buildings among all of Judaism in this era. G. Peter Richardson, “Philo and Eusebius on Monasteries and Monasticism: The Therapeutae and Kellia,” in *Origins and Method: Toward a New Understanding of Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Honor of John C. Hurd*, ed. Bradley H. McLean (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 350-51.

⁶⁷ *De vita contemplative*, 65, 71-72, 75.

⁶⁸ *De vita contemplative*, 66.

⁶⁹ *De vita contemplative*, 69.

⁷⁰ *De vita contemplative*, 75-76.

⁷¹ *De vita contemplative*, 76.

⁷² *De vita contemplative*, 76.

⁷³ *De vita contemplative*, 77.

⁷⁴ *De vita contemplative*, 77 [LCL 363, 167 (Colson)].

⁷⁵ *De vita contemplative*, 84-86.

⁷⁶ *De vita contemplative*, 78.

slaves.⁷⁷ They practice ethics on the basis of their fathers⁷⁸; meet in synagogues and sit in rows according to age (youngest in front).⁷⁹ They listen to a teacher (who teaches slowly and repeats himself often⁸⁰) expound upon some sacred scripture primarily in an allegorical method⁸¹, cheer and applaud when he is done, and then sing a hymn.⁸² They then continue to celebrate throughout the night with singing and dancing.⁸³

In Philonic fashion he calls this way of life a “philosophy.”⁸⁴ Philo finishes his description by saying:

So much then for the Therapeutae, who have taken to their hearts the contemplation of nature (φύσεως) and what it has to teach (i.e., the theological side of nature), and have lived in the soul alone (ψυχῇ μόνῃ), citizens of Heaven and the world⁸⁵, presented to the Father and Maker of all by their faithful sponsor Virtue, who has procured from them God's friendship and . . . true excellence of life, a boon better than all good fortune and rising to the very summit of felicity.⁸⁶

The features of this coenobitic (or laurite) group are striking when compared to Christian monastic communities which will form in the third century. Their social separation—with the intention of avoiding the temptation to sin—is the chief reason represented in the Sayings for Christian ascetics. Other features which can be compared:

⁷⁷ *De vita contemplative*, 79.

⁷⁸ *De vita contemplative*, 80.

⁷⁹ *De vita contemplative*, 81.

⁸⁰ *De vita contemplative*, 76.

⁸¹ *De vita contemplative*, 78.

⁸² *De vita contemplative*, 79-80.

⁸³ *De vita contemplative*, 83-84.

⁸⁴ *De vita contemplative*, 88.

⁸⁵ The *Historia monachorum* describes the Christian monks of Egypt the same: “But while dwelling on earth in this manner they live as true citizens of heaven” (Prol., 5 [Russell]).

⁸⁶ *De vita contemplative*, 90 (LCL 363, 169 [Colson]).

the renunciation of property, the isolation of the members during the week, constant fasting and prayer, meeting on Saturdays for a shared meal and worship service, study of Scripture, submitting to the authority of, and the tradition handed down by, the elders, wearing simple clothes, using coarse material to lay on, and not sacrificing.

We do not know when the Therapeutae ceased to exist. There is no reason to believe that they ceased to exist by the end of the first century (to parallel the cessation of the Qumran community), especially if Philo is correct in stating that they exist as a movement across several areas. It is possible that this Jewish ascetic community served as a model or precedent for the later Christian monastic movement. Their geographical propinquity, social structure, and ascetic behavior suggest an intriguing connection.

Some early church historians believed the Therapeutae were the model for Christian ascetics in their era. Eusebius mislabels the Therapeutae “Christian”⁸⁷ because of their resemblance: “the regulations that are still observed in our churches, even to the present time” closely resemble the acts of the Therapeutae.⁸⁸ Eusebius believed that Philo was describing ascetics in his own time: “Moreover, from his very accurate description of the life of our ascetics (τὸν βίον τῶν παρ’ ἡμῖν ἀσκητῶν) it will be plain that he [Philo] not only knew but welcomed, revered, and recognized the divine mission of the apostolic men of his day, who were, it appears, of Hebrew origin, and thus still preserved most of the ancient customs in a strictly Jewish manner.”⁸⁹ This implies

⁸⁷ *HE* 2.17.4 (LCL 153, 146).

⁸⁸ *HE* 2.17.1 (LCL 153, 145).

⁸⁹ *HE* 2.17.2 (LCL 153, 144-47 [Lake]). This fits with O’Neill’s conjecture that certain Christian monks were once Jewish monks. Harmless (and certain other scholars) believes that such a description by Eusebius merely demonstrates Eusebius’ bias that asceticism must have originated with the apostles (and thus, “Hebrew”) (*Desert Christians*, 437-38). While this might be the case, it does not seem to explain why Eusebius says that Philo’s description of the Therapeutae describes contemporaneous Christian ascetics. If

that Christian ascetic communities existed when Eusebius wrote this (early 300s), which antedates other literary evidence that suggests Christian monastic communities began between 330-340.⁹⁰

Sozomen concurs with Eusebius. Sozomen's commentary on Philo's description of the Therapeutae is similar: "He [Philo] describes their dwellings, their regimen, and their customs, as similar to those which we now meet with among the monks of Egypt."⁹¹ Here, the Christian monks of Egypt in Sozomen's day (ca. 400-450) resembled closely Philo's description of the Therapeutae (first cent.). Sozomen also believes that Philo is describing certain Christian monks who were formerly Jewish monks: "In this narrative, Philo seems to describe certain Jews who had embraced Christianity, and yet retained the customs of their nation."⁹²

However, scholars are not so easily convinced of influence or precedent. Hirschfeld believes that "[Christian monastic] roots are to be sought in Jewish asceticism, either in the solitary life in the desert of Nazirites like John the Baptist, or in the communal life of such sects as the Essenes in the Judean desert and the Therapeutae in Egypt."⁹³ However, he sees "no evidence of continuity between Jewish practice [in the Therapeutae] and the beginnings of Christian monasticism," just as in Palestine a "time

Eusebius was merely interested in linking Christian ascetics with the apostles, why connect them with *Egyptian* Therapeutae (even *if* they are Jewish)?

⁹⁰ G. Peter Richardson, "Philo and Eusebius on Monasteries and Monasticism: The Therapeutae and Kellia," 344.

⁹¹ *HE* 1.12 (PG 67:893; NPNF2 2, 248).

⁹² *HE* 1.12 (PG 67:893; NPNF2 2, 248).

⁹³ Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period*, 1.

gap” separates the Essenes from the Christian monasteries.⁹⁴ Harmless sees “formidable chronological, theological, and ascetical gaps” if one were to compare the Therapeutae with Egyptian monasticism.⁹⁵ Black also sees no connection between these examples with later Christian ascetics.

If a historical connection did exist between the Essenes and later forms of Christian asceticism or monasticism, cenobitic or of the eremite type, one would expect to find some historical evidence for it. It may be that the Palestinian Essenes were incorporated in the later Palestinian Christian sects: but, apart from the claims of Eusebius that the *Therapeutai* were Christian, not Jewish, monks or hermits, so far no connection has been found between the group of Jewish ascetics at Lake Mareotis and later forms of Christian asceticism in Egypt.⁹⁶

There are other scholars who do believe the two movements have continuity. Rousseau argues that “the references [concerning Essenes and Therapeutae] to village settlement, manual labor, a structured community with a hierarchy of authority, and regular discussions of sacred teachings under the guidance of a superior cannot be dismissed as unconnected with later monastic patterns.”⁹⁷ Daumas also believes there to be a connection: “We remain convinced that [the Therapeutae] cleared the way for Christian monasticism, which would be born and developed in the same region, if not completely in the same place.”⁹⁸ The same is true for Diamond: “[W]e should remember that the monastic communities of Egypt and Palestine were, to a significant

⁹⁴ Idem.

⁹⁵ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 435.

⁹⁶ M. Black, “The Tradition of Hasidaean-Essene Asceticism: Its Origins and Influence,” in *Aspects du judéo-christianisme: Colloque de Strasbourg 23-25 avril 1964* [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965], 32.

⁹⁷ Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 15.

⁹⁸ “Nous demeurons convaincu qu’ils ont frayé la voie au monachisme chrétien qui devait naître et se développer dans la même région, sinon tout à fait au même endroit.” Daumas, “La ‘solitude’ des Thérapeutes,” 358.

degree, the spiritual descendants of the ascetic communities of Qumran; and that the sages, while rejecting thoroughgoing asceticism, nonetheless partook of its spirit of systematic self-denial in the pursuit of spiritual perfection.”⁹⁹

There seems to be no reason to use phrases (cited above in quotes) like “spiritual descendants,” “roots,” “partook of its spirit,” or “clearing the way,” if some form of causal relationship does not exist. However, scholars who argue for connection, such as Rousseau, Daumas, and Diamond, do not say much about the nature of that connection. Of course they are right not to speak too confidently about a relationship that seems to be separated by a certain chronological gap.

It is certainly possible that Christian monasticism developed independently in Egypt, while incidentally possessing numerous qualities similar to their Jewish ancestors. “It may be that the resemblances are indirect, fortuitous, or unexceptional—there are only so many ways to build and organize a monastery.”¹⁰⁰ Yet, when one considers the cumulative impact of (1) the nature of the social structure represented among the Therapeutae and Christian monastic groups, (2) the nature of the ascetic practices performed as evidenced among the Therapeutae (and in the Pseudepigrapha), (3) the theological assumptions concerning God, Scripture, and the role of sin, (4) the emphasis upon ethical purity, especially as it relates to one’s interaction with society, (5) the

⁹⁹ *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 134.

¹⁰⁰ Richardson, “Philo and Eusebius on Monasteries and Monasticism: The Therapeutae and Kellia,” 355.

geographical propinquity of the two movements, and (6) the striking similarities in living structures,¹⁰¹ a certain level of continuity or precedent seems possible.

If one were to speculate on the nature of influence given by the Therapeutae, what type of continuity or precedent seems possible? (1) *Conversion*: There were Jewish members of the Therapeutae (or Essenes?) who converted to Christianity and continued their asceticism, handing down ascetic traditions to their students. It is not too far fetched to believe that Jewish communities could have been enveloped within Christianity.¹⁰² Most of the Jewish books that were kept through the centuries by Christians were not merely from the Old Testament.

Are we to believe that these secret books were taken into Christian churches, kept safe there for two centuries, and then removed again to monastic libraries? Is it not more likely that Jewish communities with libraries became Christian and preserved the secret books there, in the one place, until modern scholars discovered them, still in monasteries where they had always been?¹⁰³

(2) *Oral or Literary Influence*: Knowledge of the Therapeutae (and Essenes?), especially carried on by Jewish neighbors and Jewish converts, influenced later Christians monks in their formation.

Of course, one can only speculate if causation of influence exists. Though Richardson is ultimately uninterested in causation, he rightly speculates:

Is it plausible that Christians in an earlier period (second century? or early third century?) knew of the group, and that they found themselves attracted to it? In

¹⁰¹ G. Richardson's analysis between Philo's description of the Therapeutae's habitat and the archaeological evidence which exists at Kellia demonstrates several striking similarities. See his "Philo and Eusebius on Monasteries and Monasticism: The Therapeutae and Kellia," 353-54.

¹⁰² Cf. "It is, in fact, not unlikely that Essenism (including its 'monastic'-type institution) was swallowed up in the Christian Church, though not without leaving traces on its constitution," Black, "The Tradition of Hasidæan-Essene Asceticism," 30.

¹⁰³ O'Neill, "The Origins of Monasticism," 272. O'Neill also believes this to be true concerning the Essenes. "The books never wandered; only the allegiance of the monks changed, from the nameless Teacher of Righteousness to the named Messiah, Jesus Christ" (280).

such a scenario the attractions would be the quality of the life, its emphasis on celibacy and virginity, its attentions to the contemplative spiritual life, and the devotion of the group to scripture and worship. . . . It is not expected, nor commonly said, but the points of similarity are surprisingly exact.¹⁰⁴

The following section shifts focus. Even if later Christian monastic communities carried on Jewish precedents, then they carried on a part of Judaism that apparently died off among late antique Jews. One wonders why Jews did not continue to form ascetic communities in late antiquity like they had at Alexandria and at Qumran. Though rabbinic sages and their students lived in communities, their communities were unlike what came before them. The ways in which particular rabbis shared similarities with contemporaneous Christian ascetics will be explored in the following section.

Rabbinic Material

The rabbinic material is complex and multifaceted. It should not be assumed in this massive conglomerate of various legal and narrative material that any form of univocal beliefs concerning ascetic practices will be found. However, there are several instances where ascetic practices are mentioned, both in positive and negative ways. It will not be assumed or argued that rabbinic Judaism should be understood as an ascetic religion.¹⁰⁵ Rather, this section is only concerned with noticing some ascetic practices that were performed by certain rabbis which are compareable to those performed by Christian ascetics.

Diamond compartmentalizes rabbinic asceticism into a few categories: (1) the ascetic discipline associated with Torah study (both in the study of Torah and what was

¹⁰⁴ G. Peter Richardson, his "Philo and Eusebius on Monasteries and Monasticism: The Therapeutae and Kellia," 356-57.

¹⁰⁵ However, this is the precise goal of Diamond's monograph, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*.

neglected because of that study); (2) the rigor and renunciation of this-worldly things in an effort to obtain next-worldly things; (3) the repeated appeal to *Qedûšâ* (קדש; “holiness” or “sacredness”) and *Perišût* (פרשות; “make distinct” or “separate”); and (4) fasting.¹⁰⁶ This section will only briefly highlight some of the texts which seem most appropriate in comparison with contemporaneous, ascetic Christians: suffering for studying the Torah, the role of separation or holiness, and fasting.

(1) In the first century we hear Josephus describing Torah study as *askesis*:

But they give him the testimony of being a wise man who is fully acquainted with our laws, and is able to interpret their meaning; on which account, as there have been many who have done their endeavors with great *askesis* (περι τὴν ἄσκησιν ταύτην μόλοις) to obtain this learning, there have yet hardly been so many as two or three that have succeeded therein, who were immediately well rewarded for their pains.¹⁰⁷

Michael Satlow argues that studying the Torah (*talmud torah*) was a key component, and not merely incidental, to Jewish asceticism: “[E]specially Palestinian rabbis of antiquity (ca. 70 C.E.—500 C.E.) saw ascetic praxis as an essential component of *talmud torah* . . . For the rabbis, *talmud torah* was the ascetic practice par excellence, a ‘physical and mental process of ordering the self.’”¹⁰⁸ There are (later) rabbinic texts that seem to support this thesis. For example, the Amora “Resh Lakish said: ‘The words of the Torah

¹⁰⁶ These are the main headings in his work, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*. This section has been informed by Diamond’s work, as well as by Fraade, “Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” 1:269-77.

¹⁰⁷ Josephus, *Ant.* 11.2§264-65 (LCL 326 [Whiston]).

¹⁰⁸ Satlow, “‘And on the Earth You Shall Sleep,’” 205. He continues, “My argument is that *talmud torah* is a perfect example of *askesis* in the context of late antiquity.” At times similar to Philo’s separation of a higher and lower part of the soul, the rabbis understood the studying of the Torah as a way (but not *the* way) to achieve the highest capacity of piety by engaging the rational part of the soul (idem., 221). Though it is unclear how studying the Torah as a form of *askesis* must necessarily imply that the sage was bifurcating the soul like Philo or Plato. Diamond understands suffering involved in Torah study to be instrumental or incidental (*Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 21-33).

can endure only with him who sacrifices himself for it,' as it is said, 'This is the Torah, when a man dies in a tent' (Num 19:14)."¹⁰⁹ The Avot mentions several Tannaim making references to "toiling" or "working" in their pursuit of Torah.¹¹⁰ The Amoraim in the sixth chapter of Avot also speak to studying the Torah as leading to moderation in sexual intercourse, the capacity of not complaining when one receives God's chastisements, and working for their sages.¹¹¹ Two Amoraim in *Gen. Rab.* speak of the sufferings that come in life, and how the sufferings caused by Torah study are a blessing (or "sufferings of love").¹¹² The nature of the self-imposed suffering varies in rabbinic literature, but could include sexual restraint or even celibacy.¹¹³ Whether one understands these statements to be essential to the study of Torah or not, it is clear enough that a number of rabbis believed that self-imposed suffering (whatever that means) was not considered *opposed* to rigorous study of the Torah, but a necessary part of it. It seems clear that suffering, in and of itself, is not the goal. Rather, suffering which is linked to Torah study is a kind of righteous suffering. This aspect of suffering for Torah study should be considered a type of *askesis*, in that it fits nicely into the definition used in this dissertation (see p. 64f.). Christian ascetics in the Sayings could certainly relate to suffering for studying Scripture (e.g., in intense vigils with no sleep, etc.), but they differ in the degree to which they performed acts of *askesis* for Scripture. While studying Scripture was certainly

¹⁰⁹ *b. Shabbath* 83b.

¹¹⁰ *m. Avot* 2:14-16.

¹¹¹ E.g., *m. Avot* 6:5.

¹¹² *Gen. Rab.* 92:1.

¹¹³ *m. Avot* 6:5 speaks of moderation in sex; R. Ben Azzai was known to be celibate (or abstinent during marriage; *b. Yebamoth* 63b); R. Eliezer had quick, dispassionate sex so that he would not be goaded to lust at women (*b. Nedarim* 20a-b). For more, Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 35-48 (cf. the few references to the loss, or non-pursuit of, wealth in 64-71).

paramount in the pursuit of achieving the virtues, studying Scripture does not seem to hold the same centrality among Christian ascetics.

(2) Throughout Judaism's history, the pursuit of holiness was always understood as a form of separation and distinction from the mundane. When certain ascetic praxis was done, it was often done in relation to an understanding of being holy. They were to be a "kingdom of priests" and a "holy nation" (Ex 19:6) because YHWH is "holy" (קדוש) (Lev 19:2). This means that the Jews should be separate (פרט).¹¹⁴ This forms the basis of ethical and ritual purity within Judaism.¹¹⁵

Though an unlikely source, Epiphanius' *Panarion* (written ca. 380), might give us a glimpse into what certain contemporaneous Jews were doing with regard to their pursuit of holiness or separation. Epiphanius says that the Pharisees "were called Pharisees because they were separated from the others by the additional religious observances which they had taken on themselves. For *Phares* (Φάρες, from פרט) in Hebrew means 'separation' (ἀφορισμός)."¹¹⁶ His description could be influenced by his awareness of fourth century rabbinic practice, rather than an accurate portrayal of first century Pharisaism:

But the Pharisees also held to doctrines in addition to what they did, living as they did a *superior way of life* (πολιτείας μείζους). For some of them, when they *disciplined themselves* (ἡσκουν) and set themselves to *practice virginity* (παρθενίας) or *continence* (or "sexual restraint"; ἐγκρατείας) for ten or eight or

¹¹⁴ The call to the rabbinic Jews to be a "holy" people can be found throughout the literature, e.g., *Lev. Rab.* 24:4; *Sifre Deut.* 104 (on 14:21); y. *Yebamoth* 2.4 (3d); Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 75-91; Fraade, "Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism," 1:284, n. 66. This is probably the origin of the word, "Pharisee."

¹¹⁵ A useful discussion can be found in E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief 63 BCE-66 CE* (London: SCM Press, 1992), esp. 214-30.

¹¹⁶ Philip R. Amidon, trans., *The Panarion of St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis: Selected Passages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 16.1.7; PG 41:249B.

four years, would *pray continuously*, and would insist on engaging in this more *strenuous effort* in order to keep from being affected by anything bodily or suffering a shameful bodily flow through dreams while unconscious. So some of these people liked to use a plank only about seven and a half inches wide upon which they placed themselves in the evening, so that if they fell asleep and tumbled to the ground, they would wake up again to pray, and thus *live without sleep as much as possible*. Others gathered pebbles and strewed them under themselves so as to be irritated by them and not fall into deep sleep, but be forced to stay awake. Still others made a bed of thorns for the same purpose. They fasted twice a week, on Monday and Thursday. They tithed the tithe, gave the firstfruits, the thirtieth and the fiftieth parts, and were most exact in offering the sacrifices and prayers.¹¹⁷

Epiphanius describes ascetic behavior which is understood as the manifestation of a pursuit of separation or holiness, something carried on in various degrees by the rabbis.¹¹⁸ Some rabbis were known for their rigor in separation or abstinence from certain indulgences: “When Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, the glory of the Law ceased and purity and abstinence died.”¹¹⁹ Separation or abstinence could be used as a stage on the journey toward spiritual perfection. A representative text would be:

Our Rabbis taught: The words, “Thou shalt keep thee from every evil thing” (Deut 23:10), mean that one should not indulge in such thoughts by day as might lead to uncleanness by night. Hence R. Phineas b. Jair said: “Study leads to precision, precision leads to zeal, zeal leads to cleanliness, cleanliness leads to restraint or abstinence, restraint leads to purity, purity leads to holiness, holiness leads to meekness, meekness leads to fear of sin, fear of sin leads to saintliness, saintliness leads to the [possession of] the holy spirit, the holy spirit leads to life eternal (or “resurrection from the dead”) and saintliness is greater than any of

¹¹⁷ *The Panarion of St. Epiphanius*, 16.1.2-5 (Amidon); PG 41:248B-C. There is reason to believe that there were Tannaim and Amoraim who also fasted on Mondays and Thursdays, e.g., y. *Pesahim* 4.1 (30d); b. *Shabbath* 24a; b. *Ta'anit* 12a. Cf. Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 104-05.

¹¹⁸ Besides physical separation, פְּרִיט could be used to describe ritual impurity (m. *Sotah* 9.15; *Sifra* Tazri'a, Pereq 12.7 (67d); y. *Ma'aser Shenit* 5.1 [55d]; y. *Hagigah* 2.7 [78c]), idolatry and heresy (y. *Sanhedrin* 10.2 [28d]; b. *Avodah Zarah* 50a; *Exod. Rab.* 6.5), and forbidden sexual relations (*Gen. Rab.* 46.3) and food (y. *Nazir* 5.2 [51d]; b. *Hullin* 74a; b. *Keritot* 21b, 22a); Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 85, 177-78.

¹¹⁹ m. *Sotah* 9:15 (Danby); b. *Sotah* 49b.

these, for Scripture says, “Then Thou didst speak in vision to Thy saintly ones” (cf. Ps 89:19).¹²⁰

For rabbis Judah b. Pazi and Joshua ben Levi, Lev. 18 (concerning forbidden relations) was placed next to Lev. 19 (concerning holiness) because it demonstrates that forbidding sexual relationships on certain occasions is considered holy.¹²¹ Concerning certain restrictions in marriage, Raba said, “Sanctify yourself by that which is permitted to you,”¹²² in order to demonstrate that a “form of holiness is forbidding to oneself that which is normally permitted.”¹²³ R. Joshua said that in order to have boys, one “should sanctify himself at the time of intercourse.”¹²⁴ R. Eleazer says that whoever holds a voluntary fast is a holy man.¹²⁵

We also know that large groups of Jews practiced separation or abstinence after the destruction of the Temple, even though there were those who spoke against such wide-spread practice since it was too rigorous for the majority.

Our Rabbis taught: When the Temple was destroyed for the second time, large numbers in Israel became ascetics, binding themselves neither to eat meat nor to drink wine . . . My sons, come and listen to me. Not to mourn at all is impossible,

¹²⁰ *b. 'Avod. Zar.* 20b (A. Mishcon, trans., *Abodah Zarah* [London: Soncino Press, 1988]); cf. *m. Sotah* 9:15. The rabbinic ideal is seen in this statement as well: “When Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, the glory of the Law ceased and purity and abstinence (*perishut*) died” (*m. Sotah* 9:15 [Danby]; *b. Sotah* 49b).

¹²¹ R. Pazi: *y. Yebamoth* 2.4 (3d); R. Levi: *Lev. Rab.* 24:6; also, Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 78. After the flood, Moses is said to have abstained from sex and it is considered an act of holiness (*Gen. Rab.* 35:1).

¹²² *b. Yebamoth* 20a.

¹²³ Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 78. Rabbinic Judaism is aware of the implicit contradiction in the command to enjoy God’s gifts, especially coitus, while the ways one enjoys such pleasures can impede a person’s spiritual growth; see Fraade, “Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” 1:274-75.

¹²⁴ *b. Niddah* 71a; cf. *b. Shebu'ot* 18b.

¹²⁵ *b. Ta'anit* 11a.

because the blow has fallen. To mourn overmuch is also impossible, because we do not impose on the community a hardship which the majority cannot endure.¹²⁶

Though strict Nazirite practice became extinct in 70 AD, the Nazirite vows became paradigmatic for other types of vows and ascetic behavior.¹²⁷ Though sometimes spoken of in negative terms,¹²⁸ partaking in the Nazirite restrictions, when done properly and with proper motivations, is a good thing. For example, in *Num. Rab.* 10:15, R. Elizer says that one who abstains from wine sins against his own soul. Yet, the Midrash continues, “If a man who deprives himself of the pleasure of wine requires atonement, how much more so a man who afflicts himself in all matters!”¹²⁹

(3) The chief ascetic practice of the rabbis was fasting (לצום). Fasting involved one’s whole attention (since they typically held *complete* fasts). “R. Eleazar also said: Fasting is more efficacious than charity. What is the reason? One is performed with a man’s money, the other with his body.”¹³⁰ It was known that certain Jews took voluntary fasts: e.g., “Ashian the Tanna’ of the school of R. Ammi enquired of R. Ammi: May one who is keeping a [voluntary] fast take a taste?”¹³¹ It was certainly practiced during the

¹²⁶ *b. Baba Bathra* 60b; cf. *m. Sotah* 15 (where it says that people were put to shame and walked with covered head, and violent men prevailed).

¹²⁷ Steven Fraade, “The Nazirite in Ancient Judaism (Selected Texts),” in *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 214-15.

¹²⁸ *m. Nazir* 3:6; *y. Berakoth* 7.2 (11b). There are references to rabbis in the Talmudic and Mishnaic material that speaks against those who participate in Nazirite vows, but they seem to be opposed to the impetuous or non-committal nature of those who take the vows. Some texts are ambiguous.

¹²⁹ Judah Slotki, trans., *Midrash Rabbah: Numbers*, vol. 1 [London: Soncino Press, 1983]; cf. *b. Ta’anit* 11a-b. The debate among the rabbis was whether or not a Nazirite was a “sinner.” Though certain rabbis spoke against the vows of Nazirites, they also praised them: e.g., “But a Nazirite who remains ritually clean is not termed a sinner” (*b. Nazir* 3a; B.D. Klein, trans., *Nazir* [London: Soncino Press, 1988]).

¹³⁰ *b. Berakoth* 32b. The rabbis did not concur with the significance or appropriateness of fasting. E.g., “Samuel said: Whosoever fasts [for the sake of self-affliction] is termed a sinner” (*b. Ta’anit* 11b).

¹³¹ *b. Berakoth* 14a.

holy days. For the purposes of this study, giving special attention to some references of fasting that are not directly related to the holy days will be instructive. The following examples are illustrative.

(1) Fasting could be used to conquer particular sins associated with the evil impulse: e.g., after a tablet fell from Heaven with truth written on it, “they ordered a fast of three days and three nights, whereupon he [i.e., the evil impulse of idolatry] was surrendered to them.”¹³² (2) Fasting could be used to gain divine wisdom: e.g., Rabbi once had to respond to a *min*’s question, so “Rabbi spent those three days in fasting” in order to prepare for an appropriate answer.¹³³ (3) Fasting could be rendered useless if not participated by all: e.g., one rabbi believed that “sinners” should fast with the righteous: “R. Hana b. Bizna in the name of R. Hisda the pious: A fast in which none of the sinners of Israel participate is no fast.”¹³⁴ (4) Fasting could be used as a form of repentance or to gain divine mercy: e.g., “R. Meir said: Adam was a great saint. When he saw that through him death was ordained as a punishment he spent a hundred and thirty years in fasting, severed connection with his wife for a hundred and thirty years, and wore clothes of fig [leaves] on his body for a hundred and thirty years.”¹³⁵ “On the day when Rabbi died the Rabbis decreed a public fast and offered prayers for heavenly mercy.”¹³⁶ “For one day the strap of his [R. Huna] phylacteries was [accidentally] reversed, whereupon he sat

¹³² *b. Yoma* 69b; *b. Sanhedrin* 64a.

¹³³ *b. Chullin* 87a.

¹³⁴ *b. Kerithoth* 6b.

¹³⁵ *b. Eruvin* 18b; or an eight-day fast in *b. Abodah Zarah* 8a.

¹³⁶ *b. Kethuboth* 104a.

fasting forty days.”¹³⁷ (5) Fasting could be used to ward off evil events: e.g., “Raba b. Mehasia also said in the name of R. Hama b. Gorias in Rab’s name: Fasting is as potent against a dream (i.e., one which would provide an evil portent) as fire against tow.”¹³⁸ (6) Some rabbis were known for supererogatory fasting: e.g., R. Abaye was known to be a faster.¹³⁹ “That righteous man [R. Hiyya b. Ashi] fasted all his life, until he died thereof.”¹⁴⁰ (7) Fasting could be used as a form of supplication for other people or events: e.g., “Our Rabbis have taught: If one fasted on account of some visitation and it passed, or for a sick person and he recovered, he should nevertheless complete his fast.”¹⁴¹ “For R. Zadok observed fasts for forty years in order that Jerusalem might not be destroyed, [and he became so thin that] when he ate anything the food could be seen [as it passed through his throat.]”¹⁴² (8) Fasting could be used to make the mind forget: e.g., “When R. Zera emigrated to Palestine, he fasted a hundred fasts to forget the Babylonian Gemara, that it should not trouble him.”¹⁴³ Therefore, fasting could be used for several things, including repentance, atonement, to increase the efficacy of prayer, mourning, supplication for others, and in the pursuit of garnering heavenly wisdom.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁷ *b. Moed Katan* 25a.

¹³⁸ *b. Shabbath* 11a; *b. Ta’anit* 12b.

¹³⁹ *b. Shabbath* 33a.

¹⁴⁰ *b. Kiddushin* 81b.

¹⁴¹ *b. Ta’anit* 10b.

¹⁴² *b. Gittin* 56a.

¹⁴³ *b. Baba Metzia* 85a.

¹⁴⁴ This section has left out fasting when its involved strictly with mourning, though this occurrence is not too common in the rabbinic period. For an overview of the role of fasting, see S. Lowy, “The Motivation of Fasting in Talmudic Literature,” *The Journal of Jewish Studies* (1958):19-38; Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 93-132.

This section has briefly explored the ways in which particular rabbis practiced various forms of separation and restraint in matters of social interaction, food, ritual purity, sex, and rigorous study. Rabbis did not seek to leave society; they sought to live as holy within society. Rather than forming their own communities in the desert, rabbis and their disciples utilized ascetic practices in a different venue. Because of the serious devotion to Torah study, various forms of suffering were brought upon one's self. Such suffering was to be welcomed. Because of the biblical mandates (esp. to priests) to remain "holy" and "separate" for God, rabbis continued to develop the ways in which a person could remain holy through ritual and ethical purity. Seemingly, virtually any daily activity was to be categorized as that which furthers or detracts from a person's purity and holiness. This is certainly the case with the chief (and perhaps only universal) ascetic practice, fasting. Fasting was not only part of the holy days, it was practiced by various rabbis for several different reasons. Ascetic practices were not universal (i.e., they were practiced by select rabbis), though they could be practiced by large groups or individuals.¹⁴⁵ Thus, we see that rigorous Scriptural study, separation or abstinence for the purpose of holiness, and fasting, were three aspects of rabbinic asceticism that can be compared to contemporaneous, ascetic Christians.¹⁴⁶

There are some salient differences between rabbis and ascetic Christians, of which this conclusion draws attention to only two. Without demonstrating Christian ascetic

¹⁴⁵ This is one of the major reasons why believing that rabbinic Judaism was an ascetic religion seems an overstatement. However, Diamond argues rigorously that "asceticism, in its incidental, instrumental, and essential forms, is part of the fabric of rabbinic Judaism" (*Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 133).

¹⁴⁶ Two chief aspects shared between rabbis and ascetic Christians, and not discussed thus far, is in their views of anthropology and the evil inclinations. These final two areas deserve an entire chapter, and will be examined in chapter five.

examples, it is at least possible to state that Christian ascetics held a much more stringent view of sexual renunciation. They did not share the rabbinic struggle between God's blessing (and command) of coitus and the possibility that coitus could cause one to stumble or take one away from Torah study. Both rabbis and ascetic Christians believed that coitus could be detrimental and should be restricted when necessary; they disagreed in regards to the *degree* to which one must go to escape the possibility of sin. Among rabbis, sexual restraint (or even celibacy) was practiced apparently by the minority; among ascetic Christians it is nearly universal.¹⁴⁷ (2) As will be seen in the final section of this chapter and in chapter four, meditation and Scriptural interpretation was crucial in the spiritual life of the ascetic and monk. Yet, while Christian ascetics highly valued Scripture, it was not the chief focus of pursuit. Where rabbis might suffer certain things in their pursuit of Torah study, Christian ascetics, along with their study of Scripture, would suffer for many additional pursuits.¹⁴⁸

The first section argued that Jewish asceticism in its literature and in its concrete example in Egypt served as a possible precedent and influence for nascent Christian

¹⁴⁷ Though, it should be not be argued that Christian ascetics "hated" the family or detested coitus. Christian ascetics, as evidenced in the Sayings, renounced families and coitus because it usually led one to lust or fornication. For the classic study on the role of sexual renunciation among late antique Christians, see Brown, *The Body and Society*.

¹⁴⁸ One might also add to this list of differences the eventual goals among rabbinic and Christian ascetics. Diamond makes a distinction between the goals of Christian ascetics and the rabbis. While he believes that Christians sought "salvation," the "rabbis, in turn sought through their acceptance of ascetic self-restraint the blessing of the world to come. The asceticism that is the focus of [Diamond's] . . . work is self-denial in the pursuit of a spiritual ideal that transcends all forms of earthly self-gratification" (*Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, 15-16). However, this dissertation assumes that "salvation" and "blessing of the world to come" to be synonymous. Granted, it is certainly the case that Christians use "salvation" language much more than the rabbis, and it is not clear to what degree the rabbis thought hell to be a realistic possibility for themselves (while Christian ascetics apparently did think it a possibility). Diamond's distinction is also confusing in light of his statement at another point that Christian and rabbinic ascetic praxis share "the same sensibility of self-denial in the pursuit of spiritual excellence" (idem., 20). Here, Diamond assumes that "salvation" (p. 15) means the same as "spiritual excellence" (p. 20). The discussion concerning the degree to which rabbinic Judaism understood itself to be a religion of "salvation" is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

monasticism. The second section argued that a few salient ascetic practices existed among both rabbis and Christian ascetics in late antiquity. This final section will argue that rabbis and Christian ascetics in late antiquity served common theological and sociological roles.

*The Sage*¹⁴⁹

Facility at Holy Sites

Certain monks and Jews were respected as guides at the holy sites.¹⁵⁰ Christian pilgrims who visited Palestine and Egypt participated in religious ceremonies and feasts at sites that told the Old Testament narrative. The *Itinerarium Egeriae* demonstrates the crucial role that monks played at both traditionally Jewish and Christian sites.¹⁵¹ Sites associated with the Old Testament greatly outnumber sites associated with the New Testament.¹⁵² One should assume some sort of collaboration with the Jews at sites

¹⁴⁹ While scholars often use the term “holy man” (following Peter Brown’s seminal article) to emphasize certain ancient person’s perception as charismatic miracle worker (e.g., *Vita Char.* 14, where Chariton attracts pagans and Jews because of his miracles), a chief component of his or her role was to offer highly valued wisdom or biblical interpretation. This aspect of their function will be emphasized, hence the term, “sage.” The remaining section will demonstrate this point.

¹⁵⁰ Thus, Lorenzo Perrone, “Monasticism as a factor of religious interaction in the Holy Land during the Byzantine period,” in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Interactions and Conflicts in the Holy Land*, ed. A. Kofsky and G. Stroumsa (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak ben Zvi, 1998), 71; Doron Bar, “Rural monasticism as a key element in the Christianization of Byzantine Palestine,” *HTR* 98, no. 1 (2005): 49-65.

¹⁵¹ Perrone, “Monasticism as a factor of religious interaction in the Holy Land during the Byzantine period,” 71.

¹⁵² Wilkinson counts the instances in the *Itinerarium Egeriae* and other sources. Egeria’s travels speak of sixty-six places associated with Old Testament, thirty-three with the New Testament. She only visited four New Testament places, but visited nineteen tombs associated with the Old Testament. John Wilkinson, “Jewish Holy Places and the Origins of Christian Pilgrimage,” in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. Robert Ousterhout (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 44-45.

associated with Old Testament figures.¹⁵³ This collaboration took place not only with Jews and Christians concerning the location and significance of the site, but also between the countless Jewish and Christian pilgrims who visited the site.¹⁵⁴ This kind of collaboration, or at least, mutual adherence to a sacred site, is known at the sanctuary surrounding the oak at Mamre in the fifth century.¹⁵⁵ Sozomen tells us that at Mamre, religious festivals were celebrated by Christians, Jews, and pagans by burning incense, offering sacrifices, praying, eating, and abstaining from sex. There is little reason to doubt that open religious interaction at such a site was not common at sites across Palestine when a site was revered by both Jews and Christians.¹⁵⁶ Chapter two argued that open religious expression and collaboration was commonplace in the ancient Mediterranean, of which Mamre is a specific example.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, there is evidence that fairs, celebrating festivals associated with a holy place, were common among Jews

¹⁵³ This is not to assume that Christians, Jews, and Samaritans always agreed when locating a particular site, as multiple duplicates in the landscape demonstrates.

¹⁵⁴ Much literature has been written on the role of ascetic travel. A great overview can be found in Maribel Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims: Ascetic Travel in the Mediterranean World, A.D. 300-800* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

¹⁵⁵ Sozomen, *HE* 2.4 (PG 67.948c). Mamre (Terebinth) was the traditional spot that Abraham entertained three angels (Gen 18:1ff).

¹⁵⁶ Monks and Jews also “interacted” in violence, like the riots in Jerusalem galvanized by Syrian monks led by Barsauma, against Jews going to the Temple in 438. See F.M. Abel, *Histoire de la Palestine depuis la conquête d’Alexandre jusqu’à l’invasion arabe, II: De la guerre juive à l’invasion arabe* (Paris, J. Gabalda, 1952), 334-35. Scholars have long drawn attention to such riots at the expense of discussing how they could get along.

¹⁵⁷ There are only a few explicit references in ascetic literature of monks interacting with Jews. E.g.: “I knew an old Palestinian named Gaddanas, who lived in the open air in the region round the Jordan. Some Jews once set about him in a fanatic outburst, in the region round the Dead Sea, and came against him with sword drawn. And this incident occurred. When a man lifted up his sword and wished to use it against Gaddanas, the hand of him who had drawn it was withered up, and the sword fell from the hand of its wielder” (*Hist. Laus.* 50 [*The Lausiaca History of Palladius*, trans. W. K. Lowther Clarke (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1918, 1-34)]).

and Christians across Palestine. For example, the fair at Hebron on December 26, the day of the Deposition of Jacob and David, was celebrated by both Jews and Christians.¹⁵⁸

Attraction of the Sage

In the late antique Mediterranean world, both Christian hagiographic literature and Jewish literature demonstrates the enormous attraction that biblically-immersed, pious men and women had in the Mediterranean world.¹⁵⁹ “[W]hile the holy man needed other people, every community, large or small, also needed its own holy man; he might not be called upon very often, but his presence and his holiness were essential.”¹⁶⁰ Though it is impossible to know what the “average ancient person believed” at any one time, it is nevertheless appropriate to deduce that the popularity of hagiographic literature is an indication of the attraction great Christian and Jewish saints had for their constituents. This attraction is seen in the numerous copies and translations of Christian ascetic literature as well as Jewish literature, including the Jewish novel (e.g., Greek

¹⁵⁸ *Antonini Piacentini Itinerarium* 30 (CC 175, 144); For more examples, see Wilkinson, “Jewish Holy Places and the Origins of Christian Pilgrimage,” 50.

¹⁵⁹ Thus, Perrone, “Monasticism as a factor of religious interaction in the Holy Land during the Byzantine period,” 72. Of course, the Mediterranean world had long had a special place reserved for the holy man in various ways. No doubt certain stories of the Greek or Roman saint or sage would be evoked in the consciousness of both Jews and Christians when their own heroes were promulgated. For more on Greek and Roman sages, see Graham Anderson, *Sage, Saint, and Sophist: Holy Men and their associates in the Early Roman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁶⁰ Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity*, 75. Scholars often draw attention to the wider appeal of the Mediterranean sage. E.g., “From the Hellenistic period onwards, the ‘wise man’ seems to have become an ideal set up by almost all philosophical schools,” Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1997), 131. Cf. R. A. Edwards and R. A. Wild, eds. and trans., *The Sentences of Sextus* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1981): “If you honor a philosopher, you will honor yourself” (219); “Whoever does not love a sage does not love even himself” (226); “After God, honor the sage” (244); “Do not allow a philosopher to be slandered” (259); “After God, honor the philosopher as a servant of God” (319).

Esther, Judith, and *Aseneth*),¹⁶¹ and by the popularity of the holy person or sage purported in the works themselves (e.g., the *Hist. Monach.* and *Hist. Laus.*). It was the rabbinic and Christian ascetic student who longed for their wisdom the most. Both groups had a major influence not only on the sage's actions, but also on some of their beliefs, which were nuanced and demonstrated according to the needs of the student.¹⁶²

Not every ascetic or monk was considered a sage, but nearly every sage practiced some form of asceticism.¹⁶³ In the ancient world the role of the sage for Jews and Christians was tied to the perception that sages had reached high(er) levels of piety as achieved via various forms of *askesis*. Of course there were varying degrees of “fame” or popularity, but the basic functions of the sage and monk were homologous. The rabbi and monk were held in enormous respect as teacher or sage (חכם in Talmudic literature).¹⁶⁴ One cannot forget what formed the basis of all the Sayings: people going to

¹⁶¹ The Jewish novels were popular literature across the Empire. They all demonstrate various ascetic practices. “In several of these novels we find a strikingly similar scene, the woman's scene of repentance, prayer, and symbolic rebirth. At a turning point near the middle of the narrative, but before the climax, the heroine commences a process of self-abasement and cleansing,” in Wills, “Ascetic Theology Before Asceticism?,” 908. Wills lists these references as the “turning points” in the narrative: Greek Esther 14:1-2; 15:1-2,5; Judith 9:1,10:1-4; *Aseneth* 10:9-11,14-17; 14:14-15.

¹⁶² This is obvious enough in Christian ascetic literature. For this fact in the Jewish world, see Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Eretz Israel*, 339-393: “Non-rabbinic and rabbinic members of the household regularly rubbed shoulders, allowing for rabbinic attitudes, ideas, and especially halakhic views to permeate domestic life. The influence, however, worked in both directions . . . [T]he larger household, *especially its non-rabbinic members*, played an important, indeed crucial and recognized, role in the process of formulating *halakhot* that pertained to the home and family in the rabbinic world . . . [and the non-rabbis] acted like a network . . . that spread the rabbinic way of life” (339; emphasis his).

¹⁶³ Rabbinic Judaism certainly shows how the role of sage emphasized rigor and purity, even though the level of achievement or goals of rigor were not the same for each sage. Thus, Ephraim E. Urbach, “Class-Status and Leadership in the World of the Palestinian Sages,” *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 2 (1968): 3.

¹⁶⁴ There are other terms for sage in rabbinic literature, but חכם is the best generic term. It is used in reference to a particular rabbinic class. Urbach, “Class-Status and Leadership in the World of the Palestinian Sages,” 1-37; Steven D. Fraade, “The Early Rabbinic Sage,” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Purdue (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 418. Determining what characteristics constitute a “sage,” whether or not rabbis and sages were synonymous, and what particular role “sages” played in the formation of the rabbinic literature is not easily discernable.

a monk “to hear a word”; and the foundation of all the rabbinic material: rabbis passing on instruction. Yet, scholars have not focused much attention on the fact that both Jewish and Christian sages shared much in common. Guy Stroumsa says it well:

Oddly enough, the role of the Talmudic sage and his relationship with his best students (the *talmidê ḥakamim*) has not been compared either to that of the abbot, or *gerōn*, or to that of the philosopher. One wonders at this strange absence of the Talmudic sage in the comparative history of the formation of elites in the Roman world. . . To be sure, the Talmudic sage is not the exact equivalent of the monastic spiritual guide. Nevertheless, even a superficial analysis of the sage’s status would easily detect numerous and significant parallels with the role and ways of both the philosopher and the hegumen.¹⁶⁵

In fact it is reasonable to say that it was in their role as teachers that rabbis and Christian ascetics exercised their authority the most. The teaching relationship between abba and disciple is at the core of the Sayings.¹⁶⁶ Philip Rousseau rightly believes that “the central expression of authority within ascetic society was the relationship between masters and disciples. The ascetic was seen above all as a teacher—that was his (or occasionally her) ‘function.’”¹⁶⁷ Rousseau places the authority of the Christian ascetic

For a close examination of how this term is used in rabbinic literature, see Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 130-37.

¹⁶⁵ Guy G. Stroumsa, “From Master of Wisdom to Spiritual Master,” in *Religion and the Self in Late Antiquity*, ed. et al., David Brakke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 186.

¹⁶⁶ “The relationship is seen as a form of training through obedience on which as disciple’s attainment of the virtues and qualities which are the aim of the monastic life was directly dependent—and which directly affects his standing before God as well” (Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1993), 27. However, Gould believes that “teaching takes places in the context of a personal relationship, which makes great demands on both parties involved” (26). Though the relationship between monks and their disciples was predicated upon a “personal relationship,” it is not true that the monastic fathers in late antiquity, including the copious examples in the Sayings, had to be in a “personal relationship” before acting as spiritual guide, nor was there evidence of any “great demands” placed upon the abba in each situation (e.g., the various visitors who simply wanted a “word” [e.g., Poemen 109]; or the many bishops and clergy who sought out the wisdom of the abbots, but then returned home).

¹⁶⁷ Philip Rousseau, “Ascetics as mediators and as teachers,” in *The cult of saints in late antiquity and the Middle Ages: essays on the contribution of Peter Brown*, eds., J.D. Howard-Johnston and Paul A. Hayward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 54. Cf. Urbach, “Class-Status and Leadership in the World of the Palestinian Sages,” 10-11: “[I]n [the Second Temple-era sage’s] personality, in his wisdom and in his deeds did the source of his authority find full expression.”

within the social matrix of the *schola*, the world of the *paidagogos* . . . Here was the *milieu* that the Christian ascetic wished to capture, to colonize, to redefine. One is hardly surprised at either the ambition or the success, when one observes how, even in the secular eye, rigorous morality went hand in hand with the right to teach.¹⁶⁸

The rabbinic sage is also best understood as a product of his Hellenistic educational milieu. “Post-Maccabean Judaism adopted the most important idea of Hellenism, that of *paideia*, of perfection through liberal education.”¹⁶⁹ However, it is very difficult to substantiate that Christian ascetics, monks, or rabbinic sages, in general, “wished to capture, colonize, or redefine” anything when it came to social authority structures.¹⁷⁰ This does not mean that the late antique monk and rabbi did not, in fact, redefine the educational and spiritual infrastructure. Rather, as the disciples in each camp participated in the new movements, the Christian and Jewish sage redefined social structures and liberal education.

In late antiquity, the pursuit of wisdom was a spiritual endeavor. “Side by side with his properly didactic role, the Talmudic sage is also a spiritual master. Or rather, for the rabbi (the Talmudic sage), just as for the philosopher (the Hellenic sage), the path of wisdom is also a spiritual path.”¹⁷¹ For both the Jewish and Christian sage, the pursuit of

¹⁶⁸ Rousseau, “Ascetics as mediators and as teachers,” 55. Rousseau mentions *Codex Theodosianus*, 6.21.1; 13.3, 5-7; 14.9.3.

¹⁶⁹ Elias Bickerman, “The Historical Foundations of Post-Biblical Judaism,” in *The Jews, Their History*, 4th ed., ed. Louis Finkelstein (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 111.

¹⁷⁰ The Sayings do not demonstrate that Christians were seeking power or administrative offices (especially since they typically *fled* ecclesial offices). The same is true of the rabbi. Thus, “As individuals they [the sages] participated also in the work of the institutions and endeavored to influence them, but at the same time they did not regard themselves as an elite seeking power and leadership, but as one that served as an exemplar” (Urbach, “Class-Status and Leadership in the World of the Palestinian Sages,” 10).

¹⁷¹ Stroumsa, “From Master of Wisdom to Spiritual Master,” 186.

wisdom was not a mere intellectual pursuit, even if it could lead one to temperance and virtue. Rather, it was intimately linked with salvation offered by YHWH.¹⁷²

Though Christian ascetics and monks could be perceived as “philosophers,” in that the pursuit of wisdom offered by God was the highest form of philosophy,¹⁷³ the Sayings demonstrate that the role of philosopher was not easily adopted by Christian sages. Unlike Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Origen, Philo, the *Vita Antonii*’s portrayal of Antony, or the *Sentences of Sextus*,¹⁷⁴ the Sayings do not represent a strong desire to present the monk as philosopher. There are only three explicit references to philosophy or philosophers in the Sayings: one positive,¹⁷⁵ one neutral,¹⁷⁶ and one negative.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Thus, Stroumsa, “From Master of Wisdom to Spiritual Master,” 190: “[T]he wisdom [Hellenic intellectuals] seek is of quite a different nature, and so are the ways to seek it. *Soteria* is the goal much more than *episteme*. To be sure, one comments on the texts (the biblical texts rather than those of Plato or Aristotle), but the aim is to put them into practice in order to be saved. The new wisdom is less dialectical than apodictic in nature. This transformation goes a long way in explaining the development of the literary genre of apophthegms among the monks.” Here, the use of YHWH is to emphasize that Jews and Christians demarcated their source of salvation as ultimately coming from the God of Israel.

¹⁷³ E.g., see Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, esp. 237-52.

¹⁷⁴ *The Sentences of Sextus* (Edwards and Wild) identifies the ascetic as a philosopher or wiseman (φιλόσοφος/σοφον) copious times. E.g., 275, 284, 287, 293, 294, 302, 306, 308, 310, 322, 363b, 403, 415b, 416, 417, 418, 421-423, *et al.*

¹⁷⁵ “Abba Isidore of Pelusia said, ‘To live without speaking is better than to speak without living. For the former who lives rightly does good even by his silence but the latter does no good even when he speaks. When words and life correspond to one another they are together the whole of philosophy (φιλοσοφία)’” (*Alph.* Isidore of Pelusia 1 [Ward]; PG 65:221D).

¹⁷⁶ John the Dwarf speaks of philosophers (who study at Athens) in an analogy about how monks should take insults: “The old man said that there were three philosophers who were friends.” (*Alph.* John the Dwarf 41 [Ward]).

¹⁷⁷ “It was said that some philosophers came one day to test the monks. Now one of the monks passed by clothed in beautiful garments, and the philosophers said to him, ‘Come here,’ but he, in anger, scorned them. Another monk, a Libyan, passed by, and they said to him, ‘You old scoundrel of a monk, come here,’ and they compelled him to come. They gave him a box on the ear, but he offered them the other cheek. At once the philosophers arose and prostrated themselves before him, saying, ‘Truly this is a monk.’ Then they sat him down in their midst and questioned him, ‘What do you, in the desert, do more than we? You fast, and we also fast; you watch, and we also watch; and all you do, we do also. What more do you who live in the desert do?’ The old man said to them, ‘We hope in the grace of God and we guard

However, this does not mean that the monks were not considered to be masters of wisdom. Yet, their wisdom was not like that of the pagan philosophers. The monks themselves explicitly appeal to desiring wisdom numerous times,¹⁷⁸ but it is wisdom that is informed by Scripture, divine revelation, or more often, that which comes from a life given to rigorous piety in anticipation of God's judgment. Their wisdom is a godly wisdom; it is derivative. For example,

She also said, "It is good to live in peace, for the wise man (or "sensible one"; φρόνιμος) practices perpetual prayer. It is truly a great thing for a virgin or a monk to live in peace, especially for the younger ones."¹⁷⁹

The same Abba Isidore said, "It is the wisdom (σύνεσις) of the saints to recognize the will of God."¹⁸⁰

The same hermit [Poemen] said, "Poverty, suffering and wise discernment (*discretio*) are the three parts of a hermit's life. It is written that there were these three, Noah, Job and Daniel. Noah is the type of those who own nothing, Job of those who are suffering, Daniel of those who judge wisely. Where there are these three qualities, there God dwells."¹⁸¹

She also said, "It is written, 'Be wise (φρόνιμοι) as serpents and innocent as doves.' (Matt. 10.16) Being like serpents means not ignoring attacks and wiles of the devil. Like is quickly known to like. The simplicity of the dove denotes purity of action."¹⁸²

He also said, "The beginning and the end is the fear of the Lord. For it is written, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (Ps. 111:10) and, when

our thoughts.' They said to him, 'We are not able to do that.' Edified, they took their leave" (*Anony.* 211 [Ward]; Nau 368).

¹⁷⁸ It appears in the Sayings often; e.g., *Alph.* Nilus 5; Silvanus 6; Agathon 10; *Sys.* 2.4 (Ward); 5.4 (Ward); 9.78 (Ward); 11.26 (Ward).

¹⁷⁹ *Alph.* Theodora 3 (Ward); PG 65:201C.

¹⁸⁰ *Alph.* Isidore 9 (Ward); PG 65:221C.

¹⁸¹ *Sys.* 1.14 (Ward; PL 73:856D); cf. 1.22.

¹⁸² *Alph.* Syncletica 18 (Ward); PG 65:428A.

Abraham built an altar the Lord said to him, ‘Now I know that you fear God’ (Gen. 22:12).”¹⁸³

The fact that the wisdom offered by the Jewish and Christian sage was redemptive in nature can be demonstrated not only in the type of wisdom they offered, but in the relationship the sage had with his or her disciple. The obedient relationship a student shared with his master involved more than simply following rules or acts of piety. As one abba said, “An old man said, ‘He who lives in (lit. “sitting under”) obedience to a spiritual father finds more profit in it than one who withdraws to the desert.’”¹⁸⁴ The assumption is that obedience, something crucial for the monk to develop, could not be learned if one lived in isolation. The authority and saving power offered by the sage was only fully realized within the teacher-disciple relationship. This placed obligations on both the teacher and the student.¹⁸⁵ Obedience to the abba or amma could be seen as the redemptive activity necessary especially for younger monks. For example,

The old men used to say, “If someone has faith in another, and hands himself over to him in complete submission, he does not need to pay attention to God's commands but he can entrust his whole will to his father. He will suffer no reproach from God, for God looks for nothing from beginners so much as renunciation through obedience (διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς σκυλμόν).”¹⁸⁶

Similarly, though with less emphasis upon the role of “salvation,” the rabbinic teacher-disciple relationship, especially in the disciple’s obedience given to the master, was

¹⁸³ Sys. 11.24 (Ward).

¹⁸⁴ *Anony.* 163 (Ward); Nau 296.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. *The Sentences of Sextus* (Edwards and Wild): “Do not accept someone as a philosopher unless you trust him completely” (258).

¹⁸⁶ Here, the emphasis is upon “beginners,” *Anony.* 158 (Ward); Nau 290; cf. *Alph.* Isaiah 2. Stories that emphasize a person’s great obedience to the abba or amma are also demonstrated in the Sayings (e.g., *Anony.* 161 [Ward]; *Alph.* Saius 1; Basil 1; John, Disciple of Abba Paul 1; Mark, Disciple of Abba Silvanus 1; *Anony.* 1.5§46 [Stewart]).

foundational to the rabbinic understanding of the spiritual sage.¹⁸⁷ It was assumed that the master had the authority to lead all his disciples to harm or to righteousness.¹⁸⁸ In several places, the rabbi can be portrayed “as the very embodiment of Torah: ‘Anyone who sees a sage die, [it is] as if he sees a Torah scroll that was burnt.’”¹⁸⁹ This is not to assume that the young ascetic or the rabbi’s student received God’s favor *through* the sage or only because of the sage (rather, that was only through obedience to Torah or through Christ), but because the wisdom given and exemplary life modeled for the student guaranteed appropriate piety and responses to God. In this capacity, the Jewish and Christian sage shared common roles in society: biblical guide and (redemptive) moral exemplar.¹⁹⁰

Late antique monks understood themselves as distinct from their brothers and sisters who were not as rigorous in their piety, yet understood themselves as part of the Body of Christ, from which they experienced their overall community. At no time would the Christian ascetic or monk understand him/herself as independent from the Church. The exact same is true for the late antique rabbi and the Jewish community. The Patriarchate for many years would establish sages as the heads of communities, where

¹⁸⁷ E.g., the *Avot* has numerous references to obtaining disciples, searching for teachers, and the responsibilities that come within that relationship (e.g., 1:1, 7, 13, 14, 17 *et al.*).

¹⁸⁸ E.g., *m. Avot* 1:11, where sages who have not been careful with their words *cause* their disciples “to drink” from the “evil waters” of the sages and die.

¹⁸⁹ Satlow, ““And on the Earth You Shall Sleep,” 218, quoting *y. Mo’ed Katan* 3.7 (83b). Cf. Martin Jaffee, “The Oral-Cultural Context of the Talmud Yerushalmi: Greco-Roman Rhetorical Paideia, Discipleship, and the Concept of Oral Torah,” in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, ed. Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr/Siebeck, 1998), 27-61.

¹⁹⁰ Hezser’s remarks are appropriate: “Rabbinic authority may . . . be defined as personal authority based on each rabbi’s individual reputation combined with authority based on his role as Torah teacher and sage” (*The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement*, 454).

they were considered responsible to the communities they served.¹⁹¹ Within the greater society, Christian and Jewish sages were perceived of as a particular class of people.

They were exemplars, which often put them at odds with the masses. Steven Fraade says it well:

[Any Jewish group] distinguish[es] themselves from that larger Jewish society by virtue of such [ascetic] practice and are inevitably in some tension with it as a result, whether or not that was their intent. This tension is especially noticeable in the texts of ancient rabbinic Judaism, as the rabbinic sages of late antiquity saw themselves on the one hands as a spiritual, intellectual, and leadership elite and on the other hand as deriving from Israelite society as a whole, for which they sought to provide realizable models for collective Jewish practice.¹⁹²

The Jewish and Christian sage by nature lived somewhat on the fringes. Each obeyed the message revealed by God to their particular people group, but manifested their response to that revelation in more rigorous behavior than the majority of their kindred (whether through education, abstention, charity). In addition to their distinctive functions within respective societies, the clothes they wore would also distinguish them from greater society and add to the perception that the Christian and Jewish sages were in a distinct class of their own. Urbach's remarks are pertinent:

In the very pattern of a spiritual-national administration that combined, with the teaching of Torah and the clarification of the *Halakha*, the management of communal affairs . . . determin[ing] ranks of hierarchy and. . . carrying out ceremonial functions, and projected an image of the Sage not only as a teacher and guide, who draws people nearer the Torah and occupies himself with good works, but also as an appointed leader of the community. . .—in all this are to be seen the elements that gave a distinctive status to the Sages as a separate class, a class whose members were recognizable “by their walk, their speech and by the cloaks they wore in the street” (*Sifre Devarim*, §343). This distinctiveness severely strained relations between the Sages and the ignorant folk.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Urbach, “Class-Status and Leadership in the World of the Palestinian Sages,” 23.

¹⁹² Fraade, “The Nazirite in Ancient Judaism (Selected Texts),” 213-14.

¹⁹³ Urbach, “Class-Status and Leadership in the World of the Palestinian Sages,” 26-27. Epiphanius describes the dress of the Pharisees: “They went about in the aforementioned clothes of the Scribes, that is the shawl and the other styles of dress and feminine garments with wide boots and sandal

The rabbinic sage was called upon by society to rule on both civic and theological cases.¹⁹⁴ The Christian monk was also seen as the person who was able to answer questions on such broad topics as theology and civic disputes. Of course, the level of civic involvement experienced by a sage depended upon where s/he lived, in, near, or out of the city.¹⁹⁵

The rabbi and the Christian monk were the best available guides for interpreting Scripture within this teacher-student relationship. Scripture was the foundation of the entire ascetic endeavor for both Jews and Christians. The use of Scripture was one of the definitive demarcations between Jews and Christians and any pagan ascetic practitioner in the ancient world. Wisdom offered by the ancient Christian and Jewish sage was held in esteem in that it came from a person who was steeped in Scriptural values. Their wisdom was dependent upon their relationship with God as ascertained within some ascetic practice.

The role of rabbi as biblical interpreter is assumed, as rabbinic material is chiefly concerned with biblical interpretation handed down from the Jewish fathers. Before the Tannaitic period, the charismatic figure (e.g., prophet or miracle worker) was the chief

thongs" (*The Panarion of St. Epiphanius*, 16.1.6 [Amidon]). Average Christian ascetics and monks could be known for the modest dress and commonly-worn "habit" (e.g., *Alph.* Joseph of Panephysis 7, 8, 12; Cronius 5; Eucharistus the Secular 1; *Sys.* 10.79 [Ward]; cf. Basil's communities).

¹⁹⁴ Thus, Jacob Neusner, *Judaism and Christianity in the Age of Constantine* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 24.

¹⁹⁵ This does not mean that monks could not help a dispute in the city, although they lived in the desert. It just means that their level of involvement would not be as great as one who lived in the city on a regular basis. E.g., see *Alph.* Gelasius 2 (where Simeon the Stylite settles a domestic issue); *Hist. Monach.* 8.30-31, 36, where Apollo twice settles a dispute between two warring villages over land; 14.5-7, where Paphnutius absolves a woman's debt in the city; 14.14, where a village ascetic settles every dispute brought to him; *Barsanuphius and John*, 669-73, which speak about repaying loans, testifying in the courts, and dealing with lawyers (*Barsanuphius and John, Letters from the Desert: A Selection of Questions and Responses*, trans. and Intro. by John Chryssavgis [Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003], 175-78). Rabbinic sages were found in nearly every type of city, town, and village. For more, see Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Eretz Israel*, 178-210.

conduit through which the people received wisdom. Rabbinic theology vitiated the role of the charismatic leader and instead replaced it with the biblical sage.¹⁹⁶ The rabbis presented their particular biblical interpretive lenses, manifested in the “Oral Torah,” as the means by which their audience could understand the written Torah. In a similar fashion, for those who sought the wisdom of the abbas or ammas, their wisdom served as a double authority, an “Oral Scripture” that was the lens through which one should read the Scriptures.¹⁹⁷ For the disciple of the wisdom of the Christian ascetic sage, his or her wisdom was held in high esteem *alongside* the Bible. Their interpretation was the lens through which one should read the Bible. As Burton-Christie says, “Words, then, written and spoken, from Scripture and the elders, were basic to the quest for salvation in the desert.”¹⁹⁸ These few examples from the Sayings will demonstrate how abbas or ammas were presumed to seek or have great biblical acumen.¹⁹⁹

Some brothers once came to Zeno and asked him, “What is meant by the text in the book of Job, ‘Heaven is not pure in God's sight’ (Job 15:15)?”²⁰⁰

A brother asked Poemen, “What is the meaning of the text, ‘Whoever is angry with his brother without a cause (Matt. 5:22)?’”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁶ This understanding is generally accepted. E.g., Alan J. Avery-Peck, “The Galilean Charismatic and Rabbinic Piety: The Holy Man in Talmudic Literature,” in *The Historical Jesus in Context*, ed. et al., Amy Jill Devine (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 150; Ephraim E. Urbach, “The Talmudic Sage—Character and Authority,” in *Jewish Society through the Ages*, ed. H.H. Ben-Sasson and S. Etlinger (New York: Schocken, 1969), 116. It is important to stress that rabbinic sages were also known at times to perform great feats or the miraculous. Yet, it was the miracle worker’s piety, as best demonstrated by their adherence to the Torah that gave them the ability to perform miracles.

¹⁹⁷ Examples are replete throughout the ascetic literature, especially in the Sayings (e.g., *Alph. Poemen* 119, 209). For more, see Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 110-11.

¹⁹⁸ Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 111.

¹⁹⁹ References to the pursuit of Scripture and biblical interpretation are replete throughout all the ascetic literature (e.g., in *Hist. Laus.*, Cassian, etc.).

²⁰⁰ *Sys.* 10.22 (Ward).

²⁰¹ *Sys.* 10.47 (Ward).

A hermit was asked, “What is meant by the text “Narrow and strait is the way” (Matt. 7:14)?”²⁰²

Amma Theodora asked Archbishop Theophilus about some words of the apostle saying, “What does this mean, ‘Knowing how to profit by circumstances’?” (cf. Col. 4:5; Phil 4:12)²⁰³

A brother said to Abba Cronius, “Speak a work to me.” He said to him, “When Elisha came to the Shunamite, he did not find her busy with anyone else. So she conceived and bore a child through the coming of Elisha” (2 Kings 4). The brother said to him, “What does this mean?”²⁰⁴

Another brother questioned him in these words: “What does, ‘See that none of you repays evil for evil’ mean?” (1 Thess. 5.15)²⁰⁵

Abba Joseph said of Abba Poemen that he said, “This saying which is written in the Gospel: ‘Let him who has no sword, sell his mantle and buy one,’ (Luke 22.36) means this: let him who is at ease give it up and take the narrow way.”²⁰⁶

This is not to deny the virtue of humility when interpreting Scripture. For some, claiming ignorance was considered more virtuous. For example:

One day some old men came to see Abba Anthony. In the midst of them was Abba Joseph. Wanting to test them, the old man suggested a text from the Scriptures, and, beginning with the youngest, he asked them what it meant. Each gave his opinion as he was able. But to each one the old man said, “You have not understood it.” Last of all he said to Abba Joseph, “How would you explain this saying?” and he replied, “I do not know.” Then Abba Anthony said, “Indeed, Abba Joseph has found the way, for he has said: ‘I do not know.’”²⁰⁷

Whether or not one had the authority to teach others about the Scriptures, the study of Scripture among Christian ascetics was considered a form of spiritual discipline. Even among the majority who could not read Scripture and had to remember what they

²⁰² *Sys.* 10.84 (Ward).

²⁰³ *Alph.* Theodora 1 (Ward).

²⁰⁴ *Alph.* Cronius 1 (Ward).

²⁰⁵ *Alph.* Poemen 34 (Ward). Cf. Peter the Pionite 2.

²⁰⁶ *Alph.* Poemen 112 (Ward).

²⁰⁷ *Alph.* Antony 17; cf. Arsenius 42; Pambo 9; *Anony.* 229 [Ward]).

heard (e.g., at *synaxis* each week), ruminating and implementing Scripture was an integral and necessary part of their ascetic routine. Numerous sayings speak to this reality.²⁰⁸ For example:

He [Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyprus] also said, “Reading the Scriptures is a great safeguard against sin.”²⁰⁹

He also said, “Ignorance of the Scriptures is a precipice and a deep abyss.”²¹⁰

Then he [Macarius] said, “How do you fast?” He [Theopemptus] replied, “Till the ninth hour.” “Practice fasting a little later; meditate on the Gospel and the other Scriptures, and if an alien thought arises within you, never look at it but always look upwards, and the Lord will come at once to your help.”²¹¹

Christian and Jewish sages were understood to be the “fathers” or “mothers” of their constituents. The role of father or mother and teacher were coterminous.²¹² It is striking that the Christian ascetics were called “abba” or “amma,” since abba is from the Hebrew and Aramaic (אבא). In the Syriac Church “abba” referred to monks, bishops, and clergy.²¹³ It is clear to see how “abba” was typically used as a technical term, meaning “one who teaches.”²¹⁴ Similarly, “Rabbi” comes from the Hebrew adjective (רבי) for

²⁰⁸ E.g., *Alph.* Antony 3, 19; Sisoës 17; *Sys.* 10.94; *Anony.* 95 (Ward); cf. “And they learn all the Scriptures by heart” (*Hist. Laus.* 32.12; cf. 37.1; 47.3; 58.1).

²⁰⁹ *Alph.* Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyprus, 9 (Ward).

²¹⁰ *Alph.* Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyprus, 11 (Ward).

²¹¹ *Alph.* Macarius 3 (Ward).

²¹² Throughout the letters in *Barsanuphius and John*, the two are often linked by implication or title (e.g., “spiritual father and teacher,” 844).

²¹³ Burton L. Visotzky, *Fathers of the World* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1995), 2.

²¹⁴ *ABD* 1, s.v. abba; Visotzky, *Fathers of the World*, 2. Irenaeus says it well, “For when any person has been taught from the mouth of another, he is termed the ‘son’ of him who instructs him, and the latter [is called] his ‘father’” (*Adv. Haer* 4.41.2; ANF). Six rabbis bear this title specifically, while there are other references in the Mishnah to this word given in an honorific manner. See C.H. Kasovsky, *Thesaurus Mishnae* (Jerusalem: Massadah Pub., 1956-1960), I, 5, s.v. abba; Visotzky, *Fathers of the World*, 1.

“great,” which renders “rabbi” or “ribbi” as “my great one,” or euphemistically as “my teacher or master.”²¹⁵ It is used when the specific relationship between master-disciple is being emphasized. Both “abba” and “rabbi” are used metaphorically to mean “one who instructs.” If Christians were going to retain Hebrew or Aramaic terms, there is no reason they should not have used the term “rabbi” when speaking to their ascetic fathers and Christian leaders.²¹⁶ Conversely, the same is true for the Jewish insistence of the use of “rabbi”: why not use the term “abba” or “ab” for particular Jewish teachers more often?²¹⁷ It seems that the titles “rabbi” and “abba” were adhered to by both parties in deliberate reaction to the other.²¹⁸ One wonders if Jews and Christians adhered to their idiosyncratic titles in order to distinguish religious affiliation in a world full of sages.

Wisdom Literature

Christians, primarily in monastic communities, copied and edited Jewish Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and apocalypses.²¹⁹ Though there are examples of Christians altering the Jewish texts (e.g., *Paraleipomana Jeremiou* [4 Baruch]), typically small glosses or minor alterations were done to the text. While it is often difficult to

²¹⁵ E.g., see Hershel Shanks, “Origins of the Title ‘Rabbi,’” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 59 (1968-69): 152-57; E. Lohse, “ῥαββί, ῥαββουνί,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds., G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:961-65.

²¹⁶ It is nugatory to cite Matt 23:8-9 as justification for this practice, since Jesus also instructed his disciples *not* to call anyone on earth “Father” (“But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.” [RSV]). Thus, Visotzky, *Fathers of the World*, 2. Cf. E. Budge, *The Paradise, or Garden of the Holy Fathers* (London: 1907), I, 301, where Pachomius is called, “Rabba.”

²¹⁷ It is interesting that the Mishnah tractate, (*Perkei*) *Avot*, meaning “(Chapters or Sayings of the) Fathers,” was not called *Perkei Rabbonim*.

²¹⁸ Michael Hilton, *The Christian Effect on Jewish Life* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1994), 239; Michael Hilton and Marshall Gordian, *The Gospels and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1988), 1-5.

²¹⁹ O'Neill, “The Origins of Monasticism,” 273.

demonstrate when Christians copied and edited the Jewish texts, we know that for many documents, it must have been in the first few centuries.²²⁰ The influence from Jewish apocalypses can be seen in the way Christian ascetics were viewed. The names of the monks, the visions they have, and the apocalyptic themes they present, can all be understood inside of a Jewish apocalyptic matrix.²²¹

The wisdom and interpretation offered by the “fathers” in both traditions were highly valued.²²² The Christian scribes copied and preserved their documents according to Jewish tradition. It is well known that throughout the Middle East, Jews preserved their documents in jars.²²³ The *Assumption of Moses* speaks to this: “To preserve the book which I have delivered unto thee thou shalt place them in an earthen vessel.”²²⁴ Moreover, Christians and Jews buried damaged or heretical texts, rather than destroying them, in case the name of God be defamed. “If the hypothesis is accepted that Christians adopted the Jewish institution of a Genizah or depository for manuscripts, it would also

²²⁰ M.A. Knibb, “Christian Adoption and Transmission of Jewish Pseudepigrapha: The Case of 1 Enoch,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Periods* 32 (2001): 396-415. Some texts, like 1 Enoch, were used by Christians from earliest times, since the Christians who used them were converted Jews (e.g., 1 Enoch as referenced in Jude and possibly 1 Peter 3:19-20; *Laus. Hist. Prol.* 16, quotes from Sirach 19.30; cf. the *Ascension of Isaiah*).

²²¹ David Frankfurter, “The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity: Regional Trajectories,” in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, ed. James C. VanderKam and William Adler (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 129-200.

²²² This is axiomatic in both traditions, as there would be no ascetic or rabbinic literature at all if the “father” or “mother’s” wisdom was not valued. Some specific examples are telling. E.g., “Being very learned and loving literature she [Silvania] turned night into day by perusing every writing of the ancient commentators, including 3,000,000 (lines) of Origen and 2,500,000 (lines) of Gregory, Stephen, Pierius, Basil, and other standard writers. Nor did she read them once only and casually, but she laboriously went through each book seven or eight times. . .” (*Hist. Laus.* 55.3 [Clarke]).

²²³ Colin H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), 7.

²²⁴ R.H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 2:415; Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt*, 7.

explain why a collection such as the Chester Beatty or Bodmer includes manuscripts of differing date and, occasionally, more than one copy of the same books.”²²⁵

This is not to assume that the majority of the papyri come from large depositories. Rather, the converse is true: most of our extant papyri come from the houses spread throughout cities, towns, and villages. Moreover, most of the copies are on scraps of paper or in small books.²²⁶ By the end of the third century, it became much more common to carry “pocket codices” typically on parchment, rather than papyrus. Extant pocket codices can measure from 15x11 cm. down to 7x5 cm. They could be quite decorative (e.g., P. Oslo. Inv. 1661) and even have letters written in various colors (e.g., P. Oxy. V. 840).²²⁷ “These are best regarded not as amulets but as devotional handbooks for the well-to-do . . . Their pagan counterparts were the miniature rolls of epigrams or love-poems written in elegant hands, designed to be easily carried and easily concealed.”²²⁸

These miniature books contained content from all types of literature, including Tobit (P. Oxy. xv. 1779), the Acts of John (P. Oxy. xiii. 1594), the Acts of Peter (P. Oxy. vi. 850), Acts of Paul (P. Oxy. vi. 849), the *Shepherd of Hermas* (P. Ant. 1.13) Revelation (P.

²²⁵ Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt*, 7-8. Interestingly, a sixth-century fragment (T-S AS 139.1 Recto) of Augustine’s *De Sermonibus Domini in Monte* (2.24) was found in the Cairo Genizah, where it had been used as a palimpsest by a Jewish scribe to write masoretic lists (website: <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/Taylor-Schechter/fotm/may-2007> [accessed March 21, 2009]).

²²⁶ Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt*, 9.

²²⁷ P. Oslo. Inv. 1661 published by L. Amundsen in *Symbolae Osloenses* 24 (1945): 121ff, where it also discusses many other pocket codices. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt*, 11.

²²⁸ Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt*, 11. He also cites John Chrysostom’s *Homily* 72, which states that ladies wore small texts of the Gospels around their necks.

Oxy. xvii. 1783), and 4 Esdras (P. Oxy. viii. 1080).²²⁹ As far as we can tell, these texts were for personal use; they held no cultic significance.²³⁰ These small codices apparently contained the portions of texts that were especially important to the carrier and could be used to evoke the entire passage.

Ascetic literature also manifests the practice of writing or collecting (small) books for personal use. For example:

Having lived there two years, in the third year he [Evagrius] entered the desert . . . And he made 100 prayers; and he wrote during the year only the value of what he ate—for he wrote the Oxyrhynchus characters excellently. So in the course of fifteen years having purified his mind to the utmost he was counted worthy of the gift of knowledge and wisdom and the discerning of spirits. So he composed three holy books for monks, called *Antirrhetica*, in which he taught the arts to be used against demons.²³¹

“Come here, lady, and then I will explain the matter to you. The marriage which we have contracted has no special virtue. Let us then do well by sleeping in future each of us separately, that we may please God by keeping our virginity intact.” *And drawing from his bosom a little book*, he read to the girl, who could not read at all, in the words of the apostle and the Savior, and to most of what he read he added all that was in his mind and explained the principles of virginity and chastity.²³²

Again there was a certain Juliana, a virgin of Caesarea in Cappadocia, said to be very learned and most faithful. When Origen the writer fled from the uprising of the pagans she received him, and supported him for two years at her own cost and waited on him. *I found this written in a very old book of verses*, in which had been written by Origen's hand: “I found this book at the house of Juliana the virgin at Caesarea, when I was hidden by her. She used to say that she had received it from Symmachus himself, the Jewish interpreter.”²³³

²²⁹ Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt*, 11.

²³⁰ Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt*, 15.

²³¹ *Historia Lausiaca* 38.10 (Clarke).

²³² *Hist. Laus.* 8.2 (Clarke).

²³³ *Hist. Laus.* 64.4 (Clarke).

In another very old book inscribed with the name of Hippolytus, a disciple of the apostles . . .²³⁴

But it is necessary to insert in this little book the lives of men like this, for the safety of the readers.²³⁵

The editors of the *Alphabetical collection* tell us that they perused several books of sayings in order to write their corpus:

We have investigated and gone through as many books (βιβλία) as we could find, and we have placed the results at the end of the book.²³⁶

The popularity of collections of wisdom material is manifested in the ancient world. Collections such as the *Sentences of Sextus* were well respected and referenced by various pagan authors in order to goad their audience to a more virtuous life.²³⁷ It is only fitting that Christians and Jews would have their versions of wisdom material. Pilgrims would often leave the Middle East with both oral tradition and manuscripts.²³⁸ As has already been discussed, late antiquity saw the writing of the Sayings, correspondence and wisdom from Abba Isaiah of Scetis, Barsanuphius and John, Abba Zosimus, and others. It is only natural to believe that the Sayings, for Christians, and these *Avot* and *Avot de*

²³⁴ *Hist. Laus.* 65.1 (Clarke).

²³⁵ *Hist. Laus.* 25.6 (Clarke).

²³⁶ *Alph. Prol.* (Ward); PG 65:73C.

²³⁷ Robert L. Wilken, "Wisdom and Philosophy in Early Christianity," in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Robert Wilken (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1975), 162-65. Diogenes Laertius collected sayings of philosophers, and Epicurus and Epictetus exhorted their followers to meditate on wisdom sayings constantly in the pursuit of the philosophical life. See Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, 244.

²³⁸ Egeria collected manuscripts from Edessa concerning King Abgar's letters from the bishop (*Itinerarium Egeriae* 19.19). Orosius took back a Latin translation of the account of the discovery of St. Stephen's relics (*Epistula de inventione corporis S. Stephani martyris*, PL 41:805-808). See Maribel Dietz, "Itinerant Spirituality and the Late Antique Origins of Christian Pilgrimage," in *Travel, Communication and Geography in Late Antiquity: Sacred and Profane*, ed. Linda Ellis and Frank L. Kidner (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2004), 130.

Rabbi Nathan, for Jews, filled such a need for written wisdom.²³⁹ The small size of the *Avot* allowed it to travel easily. Likewise, the Sayings, in their various sizes and collections, “created, in essence, portable desert wisdom, making it possible for Egypt to be carried around the Empire.”²⁴⁰

Conclusion

This brief survey demonstrates that there were various ways that Judaism and Christianity had points of contact throughout late antiquity. Examples given in the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and Philo demonstrate that Judaism represented in nearly all its literature from third century BC to the third century AD. was not only open to ascetic practices, but that it often assumed they were the prerequisite for relating to God. This broad survey demonstrates that while Jews and Christians did not share exact similarities in their communal behavior (this did not happen even among Christian monastic groups), they certainly shared similarities in their ascetic practices: abstaining from coitus at certain times, restricted diets, fasting, rigorous Scriptural study, flight from society, repentance, and an emphasis upon prayer. It was also argued that the Therapeutae might have served as a model or influence for emergent Christian monasticism either by conversion or literary (or oral) tradition.

²³⁹ M.B. Lerner states that “to this very day, *Avot* is one of the most important documents for any study dealing with rabbinic teachings and theology” (“The Tractate *Avot*,” in *The Literature of the Sages*, ed. Shmuel Safrai [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987], 1:273). It is possible that the *Avot* (completed ca. 300) was written in response to Christian neighbors: “It could have been done in view of rising Christianity. The purpose might have been to demonstrate that Judaism is not an exclusively nomistic religion, but also possesses ethical-theological values and principles which are of equal importance. Hence it could have been an apologetic move against Christian attacks on Pharisaic Nomism as being the essence of Judaism” (Alexander Guttman, “*Abot*: Its Place in Rabbinic Literature,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, n.s. 41, no. 2 [1950]: 188-89, quote on 189).

²⁴⁰ William Harmless, “Remembering Poemen Remembering: The Desert Fathers and the Spirituality of Memory,” *Church History* 69, no. 3 (2000): 518.

Rabbinic ascetic practices that resembled Christian ascetic practices might include the various kinds of suffering involved with the study of Torah, the behavior that accompanies the need to stay “holy,” and the significance of fasting. These practices held differing degrees of importance in each group. Certain rabbis restrained from sex for limited periods, and some remained celibate (whether married or not) in their pursuit of holiness and study of Torah. However, for Christian ascetics, nearly all of them were celibate.

Furthermore, there is ample evidence to suggest that from among such pious people, the sage emerged as an elite class within society. The sage’s wisdom was predicated upon the assumption that s/he had attained high levels of piety in the biblical tradition. Their piety was typically reached because of the great strains the sages took to become both pious in their beliefs (hence the assiduous biblical study), and also in their actions (hence the ascetic behavior). Christian and Jewish sages were being perfected not simply by fortitude or virtue, but by the biblical tradition.

CHAPTER FIVE

Anthropology and the Evil Inclinations

Introduction

When one examines the theological presuppositions represented in the Sayings and (especially rabbinic) Judaism, one is immediately faced with a similar, distinctive anthropology. In order to understand why certain Christians and Jews believed that rigorous behavior and study were necessary to achieve necessary levels of piety in anticipation of God's judgment, one must understand how each camp understood the self (*inter alia*). While this chapter will not explore in any great detail how their pagan neighbors understood the self, it will explore two aspects of Christian ascetic and rabbinic anthropology which cannot be demonstrated as primary features of pagan anthropology.¹ This chapter seeks to demonstrate that rabbinic literature and the Sayings feature two salient anthropological beliefs: (1) the unity of the self in two parts, and (2) the belief that every person is compelled to sin because of inherent evil inclinations or impulses. This chapter will explore each aspect seriatim, starting with the understanding of "self" in rabbinic literature.

¹ It should be easy to see throughout the chapter that the crucial aspects of rabbinic and Christian ascetic anthropology which they shared differed from their neighbors in significant ways. The author of *Hist. Laus.*, at least, understood that even though some ascetic practices were similar to those of their neighbors, their goals were radically different. E.g., "Pythagoras, Diogenes and Plato drank water; so did the Manichaeans and the rest of the band of *soi-disant* philosophers, and yet they reached such a pitch of vain-glory in their intemperance that they failed to know God and worshipped idols," *Hist. Laus.*, Prol. 11 (W.K. Lowther Clarke, trans., *The Lausiack History of Palladius* [New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918], 43-44).

Anthropology: The Self as Body and Soul

In Rabbinic Literature

Scholars of Jewish history typically understand the Old Testament's anthropology in monistic terms, and believe that later developments within Judaism diverge from the biblical example and present a dualistic anthropology.² Whether or not rabbinic thought is directly influenced by the biblical tradition, typical rabbinic anthropology presented personhood as a whole in two distinct parts: *body* (typically rendered גוף) and *soul* (or living being, נפש; usually הַ נְפֹשׁ in the LXX) or *spirit* (רוח or נשמה).³ Rabbis “theoretically distinguished between the different terms for soul, but were not strict in their usage, because in parallel sources the terms are interchangeable . . . they were not particular about distinguishing [them] . . . since the distinction had no practical application.”⁴ In interpreting the Torah, rabbinic Jews typically understood personhood

² This position is not utterly convincing. For example, Urbach says, “In the Bible a monistic view prevails. Man is not composed of two elements—body and soul, or flesh and spirit . . . The whole of man is a living soul. The creation of man constitutes a single act” (Urbach, *The Sages*, 214). What Urbach calls “two elements,” one could call “anthropological dualism.” The biblical reference Urbach uses (the *locus classicus*) as his foundation (Gen 2:7) actually demonstrates that God’s creative act was certainly in two parts: *from the ground* (בְּתוֹלַת הָאָרֶץ) Adam gained the form of a body, and *from God* came the breath of life which animated the body into a living being (לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה). Just because biblical authors could use nephesh (נֶפֶשׁ; see BDB, 6251) to refer to the whole person does not mean that they could not, or did not, distinguish between a person’s body and soul.

³ It seems to be that it was common to believe that the רוח describes the living vitality of man from God before it enters into man, and once it does, it is called the נֶפֶשׁ (e.g., *Sifre Numbers* 139). One explanation of these key anthropological terms (and two other infrequent terms) can be found in Genesis Rabbah 14:9, where the נֶפֶשׁ represents the physical living part of man (“blood”); the רוח is the vitality of man; the נִשְׁמָה is the part of man which breathes. For an overview of the different vocabulary used in Talmudic literature, see Nissan Rubin, “The Sages’ Conception of the Body and Soul,” in *Essays in the Social Scientific Study of Judaism and Jewish Society*, ed. Jack N. Lightstone and Simcha Fishbane (Montreal: Concordia University, 1990), 53-55.

⁴ Rubin, “The Sages’ Conception of the Body and Soul,” 55.

as a *discrete unity* formed in the image of God.⁵ This (moderate) dualism was anthropological in nature, not metaphysical.⁶ As will be demonstrated below, rabbinic theology held no place for the pre-existence of souls.⁷ Only the relationship between the body and soul will be explored since this directly relates to the later discussion of Christian ascetic anthropology.

There is no clear reference in the Tannaitic period of the body being responsible for someone's sin. R. Ishmael believed that Ben Dama, who died from a serpent's bite just before a *min* was about to attempt to heal him, was blessed because Ben Dama was pure in body and soul.⁸ Rabbi Hillel believed that the body should be taken care of since

⁵ Rabbinic anthropology is a complex issue and has been addressed in several studies. This chapter will not explore several issues which might be considered under the heading of Jewish "anthropology," such as the *imago dei* (a prominent theme in rabbinic literature), the role of humans as caretakers of creation, or rabbinic attempts to resolve the tension of God's sovereignty vs. humanity's free will. This study has benefited especially from the following: Michael L. Satlow, "'And on the Earth You Shall Sleep': *Talmud Torah* and Rabbinic Asceticism," *Journal of Religion* 83, no. 2 (2003): 206-07; George Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927-30), 1:445-59, esp. 451-53; Emero Stiegman, "Rabbinic Anthropology," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* 2, no. 2 (1979): 487-579; Rubin, "The Sages' Conception of the Body and Soul," 79-92.

⁶ It is somewhat common to call their dualism "moderate" in that their distinction does not imply incompatibility or pre-existence. Put another way, their dualism was not related to Platonic or Manichaean dualism. This nomenclature is also used in Rubin, "The Sages' Conception of the Body and Soul," 47.

⁷ When one examines the corpus of rabbinic material, a general shift in four major aspects of anthropology might have occurred around the mid-second century (after the Bar Kochba revolt). The four aspects are: (1) the relationship between the body and soul, (2) the question of the soul's pre-existence, (3) the fate of the body-soul after death, and (4) reward and punishment. This is the subject of Rubin's article, "The Sages' Conception of the Body and Soul," who gives a chart of its development on p. 80. It is Rubin's thesis that in all four aspects a shift occurred at the same time because rabbis were experiencing some type of social change, and the phenomenological sociology of the rabbinic class led naturally to their particular change in beliefs (cf. Rubin's belief that the Sadducees remained monistic because they were aristocratic). Rabbis, as part of the rabbinic class, did not want to react as radically as the Judean ascetics or remain monistic. Rubin never tells us what great social changes after the Second Revolt he has in mind, nor why those particular changes caused the rabbis to change (except that he thinks the rabbis were "responsible leaders," 92). It is difficult, with often limited and ambiguous examples in rabbinic literature, to assume that such a clear change in thought occurred for numerous rabbis at the same time, to know why such social changes would cause such a simultaneous change, or to know what particular characteristics of the rabbinic class logically or sociologically led them to change their beliefs.

⁸ *b. Avodah Zara* 27b. Rubin, "The Sages' Conception of the Body and Soul," 57-58, seems to imply that this reference (and lack of other explicit mentions) means that no rabbi in this period believed

it was created in the image of God.⁹ Other rabbis concurred, which led to the concurrent belief in the resurrection and equal judgment of the soul and body in the afterlife.¹⁰

Rabbi addresses this issue at least on one occasion:

Antoninus said to Rabbi: “The body and the soul can both free themselves from judgment. Thus, the body can plead: The soul has sinned, [the proof being] that from the day it left me I lie like a dumb stone in the grave [powerless to do aught]. Whilst the soul can say: ‘The body has sinned, [the proof being] that from the day I departed from it I fly about in the air like a bird [and commit no sin].’ He replied, ‘I will tell thee a parable . . . So will the Holy One, blessed be He, bring the soul, [re]place it in the body, and judge them together, as it is written, He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people: He shall call to the heavens from above-this refers to the soul; and to the earth, that he may judge his people-to the body.’”¹¹

In this example, both the body and soul have equal status and equal accountability before God in judgment. They are considered as one because they are judged as one. This text says nothing about the body and soul’s innocence while the person was alive, but rather, that the body and soul were separate *post-mortem* and therefore not responsible for the other half during that short time. Whether or not the body or soul is innocent *post-*

that the body would be responsible the condition of a person’s soul. This seems unconvincing; the entire Jewish (or even rabbinic) class cannot be herein described. It might be illustrative that during the time of Hillel, Paul “beats his body” (ὁπωπιάζω μου τὸ σῶμα; 1 Cor 9:27) into submission, and believes that others who commit harsh treatment of the body via asceticism (ἀφειδίαι) “indeed have the show of wisdom” (λόγον μὲν ἔχοντα σοφίας) (Col 2:23).

⁹ *Lev. Rab.* 34:3; also Urbach, *The Sages*, 227, and Rubin, “The Sages’ Conception of the Body and Soul,” 56. Rubin understands the Hillel’s statement to be evidence that there existed no opposition of the body and soul in the Tannaitic period. This statement seems too strong; Hillel is only making an *a fortiori* argument for the need to do more for the human body (made in the image of God) than the pagans do in the washing of their statues. Christian ascetics, as will be seen, also speak of taking care of the body, while simultaneously believing in the opposition of body and soul.

¹⁰ Made clear in texts such as *Tosefta Sanh.* 13:3-5; Rubin, “The Sages’ Conception of the Body and Soul,” 56-57.

¹¹ *b. Sanh.* 91a-b (H. Freedman, *Sanhedrin* [London: Soncino Press, 1988]). Similar stories are found elsewhere in rabbinic literature. E.g., *Tosefta Sanh.* 13:3-5; *Lev. Rab.* 4:5 (J. Israelstam, trans., *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus* [London: Soncino Press, 1951], 54): “He [God] will bring the soul and force it [lit. throw it] into the body, and judge both as one.”

mortem, God, in this rabbinic text, says that no excuses will be granted to either part: they will be judged together.¹²

Interestingly, instead of distancing their beliefs from the biblical account (which for so many modern scholars represents an utterly monistic anthropology), several Amoraim actually predicate their dualistic anthropology on the biblical account. The Amoraim interpret the creation of Adam in two stages, and thereby emphasize the duality of all humanity.¹³ For example:

[Rabbi Judah ben Bathyra says,] In the first hour the dust of which he [Adam] was made was collected; in the second the model after which he was formed was created; in the third the soulless lump [i.e., body] of him was made; in the fourth his limbs were tied together; in the fifth orifices were opened in him; in the sixth a soul was added to him . . .”¹⁴

R. Johanan b. Hanina said: The day consisted of twelve hours. In the first hour, his [Adam's] dust was gathered; in the second, it was kneaded into a shapeless mass. In the third, his limbs were shaped; in the fourth, a soul was infused into him;¹⁵

R. Simai used to say further: Both the soul and the body of creatures created from heaven are from heaven; both the soul and the body of those creatures created

¹² Rubin (“The Sages’ Conception of the Body and Soul,” 57-58) sees this story as an example that in the Tannaitic period rabbis did not think that the body could sully the soul. First, this one story cannot be used to represent all Tannaim. Second, this story implies the exact opposite; if the body had no effect on the soul, then why the need for the excuses given by the body and soul that they were separated? The assumption is that if the body and soul cannot argue separation, then they could be influenced by each other to sin.

¹³ Though, of course, duality is not demonstrated merely in rabbinic thought among Jewish authors. Josephus seems to be influenced by a more Platonic ideal when he says, “The bodies of all men are indeed mortal, and are created out of corruptible matter; but the soul is ever immortal, and is a portion of the Divinity that inhabits our bodies (*War* 3.8.5 §372 [Whiston]). Yet, Josephus does not believe that a person stays divided: “[T]heir houses and their posterity are sure, that their souls are pure and obedient, and obtain a most holy place in heaven, from whence, in the revolution of the ages, they are again sent into pure bodies” (idem., §374).

¹⁴ ARNA 1 (*Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*; Judah Goldin, trans., *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*, ed. Julian Obermann [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983], 11, cf. idem., p.13).

¹⁵ *b. Sanh.* 38b (Jacob Shachter, trans., *Sanhedrin* [London: Soncino Press, 1988]).

from the earth are from earth, except for that one creature, man, whose soul is from heaven and whose body is from the earth.¹⁶

In the Amoraic period there exists an increased mention of the body being “impure.”¹⁷

Furthermore, in the Amoraic period there exists an apparent shift in rabbinic understandings of judgment. While one Tanna (e.g., *b. Sanh.* 91a-b, see p. 179) speaks of equal judgment of body and soul as one, the Amora R. Hiyya says that while the soul and body *both* sinned, and will *both* be standing before God in judgment, only the soul will be judged since the soul is from the upper [i.e., heavenly] realms.¹⁸ Later rabbis could speak more specifically about the role of the body becoming a detriment to the condition of the soul. This seems to be implied in this saying:

Always bear in mind that the Holy One, blessed be He, is pure, that his ministers are pure and that the soul which He gave you is pure; if you preserve it in purity, well and good, but if not, I will take it away from you.¹⁹

Thus can be seen in rabbinic theology a close unity between body and soul. What one does in the body can have a direct influence upon the soul.²⁰ Only at death is a soul separated from its body, yet even that separation is short-lived since they will be reunited in a resurrected body.

¹⁶ *Sifre* Deut. 306 (on 32:2) (Reuven Hammer, trans., *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986]); also in Urbach, *The Sages*, 220-21.

¹⁷ *Eccl. Rab.* 5:10 speaks of how only the soul is taken by God since that is the only part from Him (cf. *Lev. Rab.* 4:5); In *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael* (Tractate Shirata) 5, the body is called “impure” and the soul, “pure”; Rubin, “The Sages’ Conception of the Body and Soul,” 59-60.

¹⁸ *Lev. Rab.* 4:5. Rubin, “The Sages’ Conception of the Body and Soul,” 59-60.

¹⁹ *b. Niddah* 30b (I. Epstein, trans., *Niddah* [London: Soncino Press, 1988]); cf. the same sentiment in *Lev. Rab.* 18:1. In *b. Hagigah* 16a, the Sages say that man’s soul will testify against the man, and man’s limb’s will testify against the man.

²⁰ Examples of sinful behavior that can affect the soul will be discussed in the second part of the chapter concerning the evil impulse.

In The Sayings

Christian ascetics in the Sayings speak of the body (τὸ σῶμα) and the flesh (ἡ σὰρξ) to speak of the outer person. Body is used consistently as the general, physical self.²¹ Flesh could be used to designate the epidermis,²² as a metaphor for familial relationships,²³ or as a metaphor for the sinful aspect of the person.²⁴

The inner part of a person which makes moral decisions, concentrates, or feels can be described as the (1) heart (ἡ καρδία), (2) soul (ἡ ψυχή), or (3) spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα).²⁵ It is important now to explore how these three words are used and how they are interpreted in ascetic anthropology. (1) The “heart” is used extensively in the Sayings as the locus of feelings, attitudes, and moral decisions.²⁶ (2) In the Sayings (and in most

²¹ A closer look at the role of the body will be done below.

²² E.g., *Alph.* Antony 20; John the Dwarf 45; Hyperechius 4, where he refers metaphorically to eating “the flesh” of a fellow monk because of gossip.

²³ *Alph.* Cassian 8; Phocas 1; *Anony.* 161 (Ward; Nau 294).

²⁴ E.g., *Alph.* Antony 33; John the Dwarf 34; John the Eunuch 3; *Sys.* (Ward) 5.2; 5.5; 7.8; *Hist. Monach.* 20.3.

²⁵ In the *Patrologia Latina*, these three terms are given their Latin equivalents: *cordis*, *anima*, and *spiritus*. Since the *Patrologia Latina* text by Pelagius and John is predicated upon a non-extant Greek original, our study will focus on the Greek terms employed. The Holy Spirit is referenced several times (e.g., *Alph.* Zacharias 2, 3; John the Dwarf 12; In *Alph.* Antony 30, possessing the Holy Spirit allows Antony to see the future), though this chapter is concerned with the way “spirit” is used in ascetic anthropology.

²⁶ E.g., *Alph.* Antony 33; Arsenius 25 (PG 65:96B) whose ἡ καρδία no longer has peace; 28 (PG 65:97A) says that Arsenius prays that God would remove memories from τῆς καρδίας μου; Ammonas 4 (PG 65:120C) says that a monk should have the world of the publican in τῇ καρδίᾳ; Alonius 1 (PG 65:133A) says a person must say in his τῇ καρδίᾳ that there is only God and myself; Benjamin 1 (PG 65:144D) says that he imagined in τῇ καρδίᾳ; Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyprus (PG 65:164C) says a monk should have prayer and psalmody continuously in τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ; Euprepus 4 (PG 65:172C) says a monk should have a καρδίαν of iron; Zeno (PG 65:177D) says that “The Faster’s” ἡ καρδία burned within him; John the Dwarf 9 (PG 65:205D) wonders what a monk has in his τῇ καρδίᾳ because the monk is laughing at the *agape* meal; idem., 10, believes that when the Holy Spirit descends into τὰς καρδίας of men they are renewed; Isidore the Priest (PG 65:221C) says the worst evil suggestion is to follow one’s καρδία, which he equates with his own λογισμῶ. It is also common in the Sayings to say things like, “if a monk does not think in his heart that he is a sinner” (e.g., Moses 12).

other ascetic literature), the chief object to be protected from sin was the soul.²⁷ The soul is the only part of ascetic anthropology that is referenced more than the heart.²⁸ It seems generally to have been understood that the angels took one's soul at death to Heaven.²⁹ There also seems to have been agreement that the soul would be united with a resurrection body (either before or after judgment in the kingdom of heaven), though there is relatively little discussion of the kingdom of heaven.³⁰ Judgment, not the kingdom of heaven, is the chief eschatological focus in the Sayings. The soul was to be protected because a person's soul (not the thoughts or feelings) would be judged.³¹ When the body is contrasted with something, it is typically the soul.³² (3) When τὸ πνεῦμα is used, it refers to (a) spirits which cause one to sin (i.e., demons; e.g., of fornication),³³ (b)

²⁷ E.g., *Alph.* Antony 27, 29, 33; Arsenius 28; Evagrius 1, 4; Elias 1; Macarius the Great 7, 12.

²⁸ E.g., Gregory the Theologian 1 (PG 65:145B) says to have right faith in τῆς ψυχῆς; Pambo 205; Zeno 7 (PG 65:177C) says that a person must pray from the ψυχῆς for one's enemies; Isaiah 7 (PG 65:181C) believes that a ψυχὴν can follow its own will (like in Cronius 1; Poemen 36; Syncletica 17); Abba John (Theodora of Pherme 10, PG 65:189B) believes that the works of τῆς ψυχῆς were once paramount in Scetis (idem., 11, says the works of τῆς ψυχῆς are doing the commandments of God); Theodora 3 (PG 65:201C) says that τὴν ψυχὴν can be weighed down by indifference or apathy and sapped of strength along with the body; John the Dwarf 15 (PG 65:208D) says a brother believes his ἡ ψυχὴ is bruised with wounds; idem., 16, says that a τῆς ψυχῆς wishes to be converted; Isidore of Pelusia (65:224A) says that love of possessions can drive the ψυχὴν to evil; Longinus 5 (PG 65:257B) believes that the ἡ ψυχὴ is the source of the passions (like Poemen 8, 93, 100); Matoes 4 (PG 65:289D) says that Satan, even though he does not what precise passion that is needed to overcome ἡ ψυχὴ, still tempts it by various sins (as in Orsisius 2; Syncletica 7, 24); the common remedy for a negligent or sinful soul is "the fear of God" (e.g., Euprepus 5; Orsisius 1, 2; Poemen 57, 65; Rufus 1; *Anony.* [Ward] 5, 6).

²⁹ E.g., Theophilus the Archbishop 4; John the Dwarf 40.

³⁰ E.g., Evagrius 1; Theodora 10 (in Ward); Macarius the Great 7; Poemen 76; Paphnutius 2; Spyridon 2; *Anony.* (Ward) 4,

³¹ E.g., *Alph.* Ammonas 1; Apollo 1; Theophilus the Archbishop 4.

³² E.g., "Abba Daniel also said, 'The body (τὸ σῶμα) prospers in the measure in which the soul (ἡ ψυχὴ) is weakened, and the soul (ἡ ψυχὴ) prospers in the measure in which the body (τὸ σῶμα) is weakened'" (*Alph.* Daniel 4 [Ward]; PG 65:156B).

³³ *Alph.* Nisterus 1 (PG 65:305D) speaks of the "spirit of vain-glory" (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς κενοδοξίας); Macarius 3 (PG 65:264A) speaks of the "spirit of fornication" (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πορνείας); *Alph.* Sarah 2 also speaks of the "spirit of fornication." Cf. the "spirits of evil" (i.e., demons) in *Alph.* Theophilus 4 (PG

an attitude or mindset of poverty,³⁴ (c) or spiritual beings (though not explicated, probably still alluding to demons).³⁵ Abba Or can use these different usages of “spirit” in the same saying:

He used to say this, “Do not speak in your heart against your brother like this: ‘I am a man of more sober and austere life than he is,’ but put yourself in subjection to the grace of Christ, in the “spirit (πνεύματι) of poverty” and genuine charity, or you will be overcome by the “spirit (πνεύματι) of vain-glory” and lose all you have gained.”³⁶

What is not found is the usage of τὸ πνεῦμα as another part of the soul. The best translation for τὸ πνεῦμα in the Sayings is probably “attitude” or “mindset,” when it is not referring to spiritual beings.

65:200B). This practice is common in the New Testament (e.g., Mk 1:23, 26, 27; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 13; 6:7; 7:25; 9:17, 20, 25).

³⁴ Usually the few times “spirit” is used to mean a disposition or attitude, it is quoting or alluding to Matt 5:3. E.g., *Alph* John of the Thebaid 1, which quotes Matt 5:3; *Alph*. John the Dwarf 34 (PG 65:216B), where each person should live in “poverty of spirit” (ἐν πτωχείᾳ πνεύματος) and in “spiritual asceticism” (ἀσκήσει πνευματικῇ). Jesus exhorts his disciples to stay vigilant: “indeed, the spirit (πνεῦμα) is willing, but the flesh (σὰρξ) is weak” (Mk 14:38//). Here, read among the backdrop of rabbinic and ascetic usage, πνεῦμα could be understood as one’s “attitude,” “determination,” or “consciousness” (cf. Mk 2:8; 8:12; John 11:33; 13:21; Rom 11:8; cf. 1 Cor 5:3,4). John 19:30 (καὶ κλίνας τὴν κεφαλὴν παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα; cf. 1 Cor 5:5) is the only reference of πνεῦμα in the gospels resembling one’s life force.

³⁵ *Alph*. Macarius the Great 2, where Macarius thinks that two men are spirits; In *Alph*. Milesius 2, monks must ask a man if he is a human or spirit.

³⁶ PG 65:440C; *Alph*. Or 13 (Ward).

The dominant way to describe the source of moral choices and struggles is the mind, thoughts, attitude, or mindset (usually ὁ νοῦς,³⁷ ἡ διάνοια,³⁸ or ὁ λογισμός³⁹ and their derivatives). This fact is important later in the chapter, once the understanding of the evil inclination is discussed. The thoughts, attitude, or mindset of a person is closely linked with the status of the soul, and their terms are often used interchangeably. For example,

Abba Gerontius of Petra said that many, tempted by the pleasures of the body, commit fornication, not in their body but in their thoughts (κατὰ διάνοιαν), and while preserving their bodily virginity, commit prostitution in their soul (κατὰ ψυχὴν). “Thus it is good, my well-beloved, to do that which is written, and for each one to guard his own heart (καρδίαν) with all possible care” (Prov. 4. 23).⁴⁰

[W]eep and groan in your heart (τῇ καρδίᾳ); test yourselves, to see if you are worthy of God; despise the flesh (τῆς σαρκὸς), so that you may preserve your souls (τὰς ψυχάς).

Abba Poemen also said, “If Nabuzardan, the head-cook, had not come, the temple of the Lord would not have been burned (2 Kings 24:8f.): that is to say, if slackness and greed did not come into the soul (τὴν ψυχὴν), the mind (ὁ νοῦς) would not be overcome in combat with the enemy.”⁴¹

³⁷ E.g., *Alph. Agathon* 8 (PG 65: 112B), where bodily asceticism protects τοῦ νοῦς (the soul or consciousness); *Alph. Abraham* 3 (PG 65:132C), where Abraham is contemplating in τὸν νοῦν αὐτοῦ; *Alph. Evagrius* 3 (PG 65:173D) says not to get attached to people so that ὁ νοῦς will not be distracted; cf. *Alph. Elias* 6; *Theonas* 1; *Isaac the Theban* 2; *Cronius* 2; *Sisoës* 17, 19; *Tithoes* 1 (PG 65:428B) speaks of his ὁ νοῦς being rapt into heaven.

³⁸ E.g., *Alph. Agathon*. 10 (PG 65:112C), where it is said that Agathon is σοφὸς διανοητικῶ (“wise in understanding”; Ward translates this, “wise in spirit”); *Alph. John the Dwarf* 31; *Cyrus* 1; *Poemen* 135 speaks of having a “vigilant mindset” (νηφούσης διανοίας).

³⁹ E.g., *Alph. Agathon*. 18 (PG 65:113C), where Agathon calms the judging of others in his ὁ λογισμός; *Alph. Ammonas* 6 (PG 65:121A) speaks of how one should walk without anxiety of τοῦ λογισμοῦ; *Alph. Gelasius* (PG 65:152B-C) says Gelasius was in danger having his ὁ λογισμός enslaved by possessions; *Alph. Theodore of Pherme* (PG 65:192B) says that he wants his τὸν λογισμὸν to be filled with God; cf. *John the Dwarf* 11. Ward always translates ὁ λογισμός as “spirit.” This choice of word does not seem to be best, since modern parlance often equates “spirit” with “soul.”

⁴⁰ *Alph. Gerontius* 1 (Ward translates διάνοιαν as “spirit”); PG 65:153A-B.

⁴¹ *Alph. Poemen* 16 (Ward); PG 65:325C.

Even more, observe your thoughts (διαλογισμοῦς), and beware of what you have in your reflections (τὰς ἐνθυμήσεις) and your ruminations (τὰς ἐννοίας), knowing that the demons put ideas into you so as to corrupt your soul (τὴν ψυχὴν) by making it think (λογίζεσθαι) of that which is not right, in order to turn your spirit (or mind; τὸν νοῦν) from the consideration of your sins and of God.⁴²

Here one discovers a typical example of how the ascetic's thoughts can lead to the corruption of the soul. Just as physical exercises (e.g., fasting, kneeling, lack of sleep) helped redeem the body, mental exercises (e.g., meditation,⁴³ chanting,⁴⁴ or singing⁴⁵) helped redeem both the mind and soul. For example:

He also said, "It is a great thing to pray without distraction but to chant psalms without distraction is even greater."⁴⁶

It was said of the same Abba John that when he returned from the harvest or when he had been with some of the old men, he gave himself to prayer, meditation and psalmody until his thoughts were re-established in their previous order.⁴⁷

A brother asked Abba Poemen, "How should I live in the cell?" He said to him, "Living in your cell clearly means manual work, eating only once a day, silence, meditation . . ."⁴⁸

⁴² *Alph.* Elias 4 (Ward); PG 65:184C. The personification of the soul as something which "thinks" is common in the Sayings since there existed in their anthropology the belief that the inner chambers of the person was the center of decision-making. This notion is similar with rabbinic thought.

⁴³ E.g., *Alph.* Achilles 5. Of course, meditation was the chief spiritual practice of the pagan philosopher as well. For Stoic philosophers, "the exercise of meditation is an attempt to control inner discourse, in an effort to render it coherent. The goal is to arrange it around a simple, universal principle: the distinction between what does and does not depend on us, or between freedom and nature" (Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold Davidson, trans. Michael Chase [Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1995], 85). Such a goal was foreign to the ascetics in the Sayings.

⁴⁴ E.g., *Alph.* Apollo 2; Eulogius the Priest 1, 2; *Anony.* 63 (Ward).

⁴⁵ E.g., *Alph.* Syncletica 8.

⁴⁶ E.g., *Alph.* Evagrius 3 (Ward).

⁴⁷ *Alph.* John the Dwarf 35 (Ward).

⁴⁸ *Alph.* Poemen 168 (Ward).

Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said to him, “Abba, as far as I can I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace and as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?”⁴⁹

Practice fasting a little later; meditate on the Gospel and the other Scriptures, and if an alien thought arises within you, never look at it but always look upwards, and the Lord will come at once to your help.⁵⁰

It is important now to summarize what can be said of the self as represented in the Sayings. Foremost, no one should expect a univocal presentation of such an abstract concept in such a diverse compendium of sayings. However, while it is difficult to discern universal views on a particular aspect of a person, there seem to be themes. One might imagine such a visual representation:

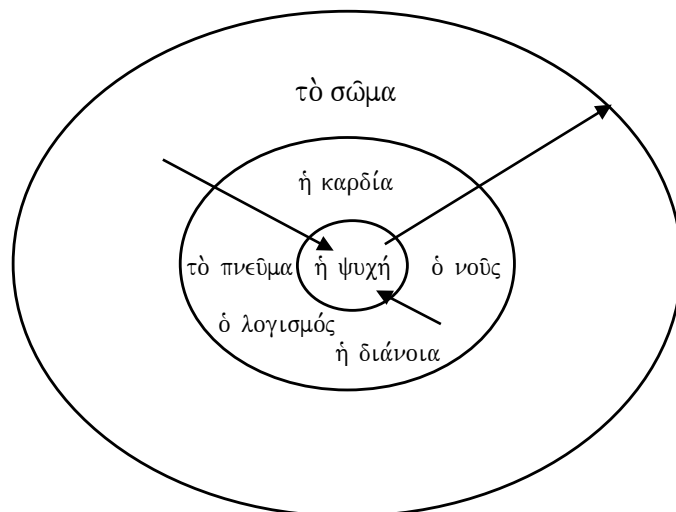


Figure 1. A pictorial representation of anthropology in the Sayings.

The central, precious aspect of a person is the ἡ ψυχή. From the soul comes various emotions, passions, evil impulses, and evil thoughts which affect all other aspects of a

⁴⁹ *Alph.* Joseph of Panephris 9 (Ward).

⁵⁰ *Alph.* Macarius the Great 3 (Ward). Cf. 4 Macc 1:30-35 (30-32: “For reason is the guide of the virtues, but over the emotions it is sovereign. Observe now first of all that rational judgment is sovereign over the emotions by virtue of the restraining power of self-control. Self-control, then, is dominance over the desires [τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν]. Some desires are mental, others are physical, and reason obviously rules over both.” [RSV]).

person.⁵¹ When the demonic attacks, its worst attacks are toward the soul. Typically, the nature of those attacks are to find what passions or temptations were already inherent in the person's soul and exploit them. Yet, one did not need the demonic to behave sinfully; the corrupted will was usually the cause. The entire goal of the demonic, and the final outcome of the corrupted self-will, was sin. Furthermore, both sinful thoughts and sinful behavior in the body sullied the soul. That is, the potential to sin flowed both *from* the soul and *to* the soul (as represented in the arrows).

Both evil and the person's corrupted self-will sought to use ἡ καρδία, ὁ νοῦς, ὁ λογισμός, ἡ διάνοια, and sometimes τὸ πνεῦμα to ensure sinning. This is why the second layer, where the thoughts and attitude of a person occurred, was so crucial: it was the buffer between the sinful self-will and the temptations of the body. Thoughts served a dual purpose: they protected the person from acting out the temptations that existed in the soul (i.e., from within); they protected the soul from the sinful behavior of the body (i.e., from without). Though at times, thoughts can also be the source (like the soul or body) of sinful thoughts or behavior.

It is now necessary to reflect on a fuller understanding of the role of the body in Christian asceticism. The final outer layer, τὸ σῶμα, like the soul, could be used by evil or the corrupt self-will to behave sinfully. The goal was *not* to rid the person of the body, but to rid the person of the sin associated with the body, since that sin directly affects the

⁵¹ The next section will discuss the nature of these passions and the corrupt will. Again, this is quite different from the Stoics. Hadot tells us that the Stoics paid close attention to the present moment as a chief spiritual exercise, because “it frees us from the passions, which are always caused by the past or the future—two areas which do *not* depend on us” (his emphasis, Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 84-85). The Christian ascetics certainly believed that the passions originated in the present and *was* dependent upon each person's soul.

soul.⁵² All ascetic behavior for the body acts as a wall, or buffer, for the soul. E. R. Dodds manifests a common erroneous sentiment when he says that “contempt for the human condition and hatred of the body was a disease endemic in the entire culture of the [late antique] period,” which was most extreme mainly among Christians and Gnostics.⁵³ For the Christian ascetics in the Sayings, physical discipline was merely a means to an end: ensure piety and a pure soul to avoid God’s judgment. In this way, the body could be understood to be responsible for the soul. As Peter Brown says, “Seldom, in ancient thought, had the body been seen as more deeply implicated in the transformation of the soul; and never was it made to bear so heavy a burden . . . It could not enjoy the distant tolerance that Plotinus and many pagan sages were prepared to accord it, as a transient and accidental adjunct to the self.”⁵⁴ Acts of privation and deliberate physical suffering did not demonstrate a hatred for the body; it demonstrated the love of it.⁵⁵

Renunciation and privation were also the means by which a body itself received salvation, and ultimately, a new, glorious, resurrection body.⁵⁶ Fasting brought a person

⁵² As has already been demonstrated, quite similar notions can be found in rabbinic literature. E.g., “The purity of the soul is not something immutable but the outcome of the life of the whole man, both body and soul; hence the interest of the Sages in the human body,” Urbach, *The Sages*, 225.

⁵³ E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 35. That Plato and his students emphasized a low view of the body is well known. In Plato’s dialogue, *Phaedo*, Socrates speaks to the need of separating the body from the soul. “All the arguments in the *Phaedo* . . . show that the goal of this philosophical separation is for the soul to liberate itself, shedding the passions linked to the corporeal senses, so as to attain to the autonomy of thought” (Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 94).

⁵⁴ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 235-36. Brown concurs when responding to Dodd’s statement: “Far from confirming this view, the mood prevalent among the Desert Fathers implicitly contradicts it,” (*The Body and Society*, 222).

⁵⁵ Origen concurs with the common Christian sentiment that flesh is not naturally evil or tainted. He counters Celsus on such a point: “For that which is properly impure, is so because of its wickedness. *Now the nature of body is not impure*; for in so far as it is bodily nature, it does not possess vice, which is the generative principle of impurity” (*Contra Celsus* 3.42 [ANF 4, 481]).

⁵⁶ Thus, Brown, *The Body and Society*, 222.

back to the “natural state” of equilibrium in appetites and helped to fight off other sinful desires⁵⁷; abstinence brought a person back to self-sacrificing love, not lust; repetitive manual labor brought a person back to controlled thoughts of a person’s sinfulness and his or her need for forgiveness. The body was made by God and for God; it allowed one to work, pray, worship, and perform acts of charity. The body should be taken care of in this regard; causing too much damage should be avoided.⁵⁸ It is just necessary to force the body into submission to make it useful for God. As Amma Theodora said, “Give the body discipline (Δὸς τὸν νόμον τῷ σώματι) and you will see that the body is for him who made it.”⁵⁹

There is no example in the Sayings of an extreme metaphysical dualism assuming that the body is something to be tolerated or abused just long enough to escape into the pure, spiritual realm.⁶⁰ The Sayings certainly speaks to the separation of body and soul, but when it does, it is always because of physical death. There are no references granting immortality *only* to the soul. Both rabbinic Jews and Christians believed that the soul

⁵⁷ Cf. *Apocalypse of Elijah* 1:13-22 (15-18: “Remember that . . . the Lord created the fast for a benefit to men on account of the passions and desires which fight against you so that the evil will not inflame you . . . The one who fasts continually will not sin although jealousy and strife are within him” [*OTP* 1:738, Wintermute]).

⁵⁸ This is assumed in many of the Sayings, e.g., “For, our body is like a cloak (ἱμάτιον): if you take care of it, it lasts, but if you neglect it, it is damaged” (*Anony.* 42 [Ward]; Nau 174); *Alph.* Arsenius 24; Agathon 10.

⁵⁹ *Alph.* Theodora 4 (Ward); PG 65:204A.

⁶⁰ Of course there is evidence of a strong (Platonic?) dualism in certain other Jewish and Christian authors. E.g., Josephus says in Eleazar’s speech: “[F]or this last (i.e., death) affords our souls their liberty, and sends them by a removal into their own place of purity, where they are to be insensible of all sorts of misery; for while souls are tied down to a mortal body, they are partakers of its miseries; . . . for the union of what is divine to what is mortal is disagreeable” (*War* 7.8.7 §344 [Whiston]).

would receive a resurrection body in the new age.⁶¹ The soul and body must be reunited in a resurrection since they are understood as both necessary parts of the self. For example,

Have pity on what you have made because you are good and merciful; on the day of the resurrection (*die resurrectionis*) you will raise up even the bodies of those who are not.⁶²

But keep the day of resurrection (ἡμέρας ἀναστάσεως) and of presentation to God in remembrance also. Imagine the fearful and terrible judgment.⁶³

Another of the old men questioned Amma Theodora saying, “At the resurrection of the dead, how shall we rise?” She said, “As pledge, example, and as prototype we have him who died for us and is risen, Christ our God.”⁶⁴

The old man said, “Rest again, until the day of resurrection.”⁶⁵

⁶¹ This was already covered above for the rabbis (see esp. *Berakoth* 60b [Simon]: “Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who restores souls to dead corpses”). Other Christian authors can appeal to the Resurrection as motivation for proper behavior. “Now those men gained nothing, but let us take pains to gain by having the Resurrection continually sounded in our ears,” John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*, Homily 45:3 (NPNF 14, 162-163). Ascetic literature can do the same. E.g.: “Examine yourself, then, dear brother. What more can you do? Take notice of this thought. What do you have in the eyes of God? You cannot do anything to conceal it in that hour. The one who speaks will not pay attention to the human will. When the Resurrection comes, each person will be raised so they may account for the behavior, which they have worn like a garment, whether righteous or sinful. His conduct will be known and his place will be determined,” Abba Isaiah, *Ascetic Discourses* 22 (John Chrysavgis and Pachomios Penkett, trans., *Abba Isaiah of Scetis, Ascetic Discourses* [Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 2002], 169); earlier Isaiah says, “The one who believes that his body will, by nature, arise on the day of resurrection is obliged to care for and cleanse it from every impurity” (idem., 117). The belief in a resurrected body distinguished Christian ascetics from the Sadducees and Essenes (e.g., Josephus *Antiquities* 18.1.5; *Wars* 2.8.10-11; cf. Rubin, “The Sages’ Conception of the Body and Soul,” 51-52).

⁶² Sys. 5.41 (Ward); PL 73:887C. Cf. “My soul deserves hell. Have pity on me, for you are gracious to your creatures, for on the day of the resurrection (τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς ἀναστάσεως), you willed to awaken even the bodies which no longer have life,” *Anony.* 43 (Ward); Nau 175.

⁶³ *Alph.* Evagrius 1 (Ward); PG 65:173B. This is the common Greek expression in the Sayings for “day of resurrection.”

⁶⁴ *Alph.* Theodora 10 (Ward).

⁶⁵ *Alph.* Macarius the Great (Ward); cf. *Alph.* Spyridon 2. Pagan philosophers also emphasized focusing on one’s death, but they did not mean what Christians and Jews meant: judgment by a righteous God. Pagan philosophers (esp. as represented in Stoicism) focused on their deaths “as an attempt to liberate [them]selves from a partial, passionate point of view—linked to the sense and the body—so as to rise to the universal, normative viewpoint of thought, submitting [them]selves to the demands of the Logos and the norm of the Good. Training for death is training to die *to one’s individuality and passions*, in order to look at things from the perspective of universality and objectivity (emphasis his)” (Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 94-95).

A hermit said, “If it were possible to die of fear, all the world would perish with terror remembering the coming of God after the resurrection (*post resurrectionem*).”⁶⁶

A hermit was asked by a brother why, when he stayed in his cell, he suffered boredom. He answered, “You have not yet seen the resurrection for which we hope, nor the torment of fire.”⁶⁷

These Christian ascetics believed that God would judge them both by what they had done in the body and by the condition of their soul. The soul was not exempt from God’s judgment because of any sin committed in the body. This is why both groups spoke about the judgment of God acting as an impetus for both righteous behavior and thoughts. For example,

Keep in mind your future death, remembering that you do not know at what hour the thief will come. Likewise be watchful over your soul.⁶⁸

He [Evagrius] also said, “Always keep your death in mind and do not forget the eternal judgment, then there will be no fault in your soul.”⁶⁹

Even so the monk ought to give himself at all times to accusing his own soul, saying, “Unhappy wretch that I am. How shall I stand before the judgment seat of Christ? What shall I say to him in my defense?” If you give yourself continually to this, you may be saved.⁷⁰

What is represented then, is an anthropology and theological worldview associated with the body that much more closely resembles (rabbinic) Jewish trends, rather than Platonic or Stoic (including Philo, Clement of Alexandria, or Basil of Caesarea). The soul is not bifurcated or trifurcated into rational and irrational parts. Like

⁶⁶ Sys. 3.21 (Ward); PL 73:863D (this is the same word used in each Latin reference); cf. *Anony.* 4 (Ward).

⁶⁷ Sys. 7.28 (Ward).

⁶⁸ *Alph.* Rufus 1 (Ward).

⁶⁹ *Alph.* Evagrius 4 (Ward).

⁷⁰ *Alph.* Ammonas 1 (Ward).

the rabbis, Christian ascetics represented in the Sayings understand the moral person to be a unity of two parts: body and soul.⁷¹ “Life in the desert [for Christian ascetics] revealed, if anything, the inextricable interdependence of body and soul.”⁷² No metaphysical or ontological distinction is made between soul, heart, or mind. As has already been noticed, this moderate anthropological dualism professed by ascetic Christians and rabbinic Jews is distinct from their pagan neighbors. Guy Stroumsa also concurs:

Without denying the evident elements of continuity between Greco-Roman and Early Christian thought, *we must recognize a major discontinuity in the very concept of person* that is closely related to some fundamental traits of Christian theology . . . They are linked to the implications, direct and indirect, of the relationship of body/soul in a religion that insisted, *like Judaism*, on the unity of man, created by God as the conjunction of soul and body, and expecting the resurrection of the body . . . *Manifestly, such an anthropology went against various current or acceptable Greek conceptions* (in particular the Platonic ones), according to which the human being was first of all the human soul or mind (emphasis mine).⁷³

⁷¹ This ascetic anthropology must have been influential in the Christological formulations of the latter part of late antiquity. Brown concurs: “Theologians of ascetic background, throughout the fourth and fifth centuries, would not have pursued with such ferocious intellectual energy the problems raised by the Incarnation of Christ, and the consequent joining of human and divine in one single human person, if this joining had not been sensed by them as a haunting emblem of the enigmatic joining of body and soul within themselves,” (*The Body and Society*, 236). This means that implicitly, it was the Jewish heritage and foundation of Christian ascetic anthropology which helped shape such ideas (cf. Chalcedon’s phrase, “*in duabus naturis inconfuse, immutabiliter, indivise, inseparabiliter*”).

⁷² Brown, *The Body and Society*, 236.

⁷³ Guy G. Stroumsa, “From Master of Wisdom to Spiritual Master,” in *Religion and the Self in Late Antiquity*, ed. et al., David Brakke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 185. This is a very different conclusion from other scholars. E.g., “The rabbis adapted from their cultural world not only their anthropology but also the solution to the problem that anthropology posed,” in Satlow, ““And on the Earth You Shall Sleep’,” 225.

Inclination to Sin, or the “Evil Inclination”

Another similarity in thought that is related to each camp’s conception of anthropology is the concept of an evil inclination or impulse.⁷⁴ This impulse or tendency is what gives a person the capacity to sin.⁷⁵ This idea is presented as both a state-of-being (i.e., a “disposition”) and as individual impulses and inclinations. It is demonstrated in the Old Testament and in pre-rabbinic sources typically by the use of the term יצר (*yeṣer*) or heart (לב), since both are concerned with the inner thoughts or moral choices within a person.⁷⁶ It will be demonstrated that the two chief biblical texts used by Jews and Christians are Gen 6:5: “The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination (וכל-יצר) of the thoughts of their hearts (מחשבת לבו) was only evil continually (רע כל-היום; NRS),” and Gen 8:21: “[T]he LORD said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination (יצר) of the human heart is evil (לב האדם רע) from youth” (NRS). The former passage (6:5) speaks of the יצר as a collective noun, representing the varied evil thoughts or impulses; the latter passage (8:21) speaks of יצר as a disposition or state-of-

⁷⁴ The most helpful study on this issue, and the one still cited the most by modern scholars, is Frank Porter, “The Yeṣer Hara: A Study in the Jewish Doctrine of Sin,” in *Biblical Semitic Studies: Critical and Historical Essays by the Members of the Semitic and Biblical Faculty of Yale University* (New York: Scribner’s, 1901), 93-156.

⁷⁵ Cohen, “Original Sin as the Evil Inclination,” 502, defines the evil inclination as “a divinely created aspect of human nature bequeathed to every individual, it has the capacity to overcome man’s reason with irrational passion and lead him to the worst of sinful acts. Man must therefore seek to subdue—not to obliterate—it by pursuing the life prescribed in God’s revealed law, with the goal of channeling it and directing it towards worthwhile ends.”

⁷⁶ The word יצר is formed from the verb (יצר) which means, “to form” or “to fashion,” and is often used with regards to a person’s body parts (e.g., Gen 2:7, 19), or the formation of thoughts in the mind of humans or God (e.g., Gen 6:5; 2 Kgs 19:25; hence the various translations: e.g., “imagination,” “thoughts,” “nature,” “predilection,” “impulse,” or “inclination”); see BDB 4094 and 4095.

being. We will see below that this double usage of יצר (as impulses and as a disposition) is how rabbis use יצר.

Other biblical references speak of the “heart” as being the center of evil thoughts or desires. Moses says in Deut 10:16 that the people need “to circumcise the foreskin of their hearts.” Jeremiah also speaks to this condition repeatedly. The people walked in the stubbornness of their “evil hearts” (לִבָּם הָרַע; 3:17; 7:24; 11:8; 18:12), though they needed to wash their “evil hearts” (4:14), since their “evil hearts” are where “wicked thoughts” (מַחֲשַׁבוֹת אֲוִיךָ) dwell (4:14; cf. Deut 15:9a; 1 Chron 28:9; Ps 139:23; Mk 7:21//; Heb 4:12).

The concepts of an inherent evil disposition and inherent evil impulses exist in pre-rabbinic sources. However, unlike the fairly consistent use of יצר in the Old Testament to describe an evil disposition or impulse, there is no single word or phrase used in Greek sources in the same manner. The author of Sirach (2nd cent. BC) speaks of the struggle of knowing that sin is pervasive in humans, while acknowledging humans were made by God. The author of Sirach tells us that God is not to blame for humanity’s sin, since He created them and left them in the power of their own inclination or free will (ἐν χειρὶ διαβουλίου αὐτοῦ; 15:14). It is said that a proud person has an “evil plant” (φυτὸν . . . πονηρίας) inside them (3:28). An “evil soul” (ψυχὴ πονηρὰ) destroys a person (6:4). It is possible for evil to overtake a person (7:1). Evil is devised or part of a person’s schemes (11:33; 17:31). The author asks that God remove (evil) desire (ἐπιθυμίαν) from him. The author ponders why God would allow the evil imagination (πονηρὸν ἐνθύμημα) to be formed in order to cause deceit throughout the land (37:3). The heart is the center of good and evil, life and death, though the tongue controls them

(37:17-18, though the Lord is said to be the source of good and bad, and life and death in 11:14).

The Dead Sea Scrolls also demonstrate the belief in the (evil) *yeṣer* and its relationship with a stubborn or evil heart (cf. the prophet Jeremiah's view above).⁷⁷

Statements throughout the scrolls are similar to this:

No man shall wonder in the stubbornness of his heart, to err following his heart, his eyes, and the plan of his inclination [יֵצֶר]. He shall rather circumcise in the Community the foreskin of the inclination [יֵצֶר] (and) a stiff neck (alluding to Deut 10:16 and 30:6).⁷⁸

The Evil Impulse in Rabbinic Material

The common phrase used to express the inner inclination or nature to sin in rabbinic sources is יֵצֶר הָרַע (*yeṣer hara'*; as opposed to the good disposition, יֵצֶר הַטוֹב).

The evil *yeṣer* is the cause for various sins.⁷⁹ (1) The sins of the flesh are a dominant manifestation of the power of the evil impulse. In this capacity, the evil *yeṣer* can be accurately translated as “passion.”⁸⁰ Humans are tempted to lust and perhaps commit fornication.⁸¹ Other various sins or unrighteous thoughts associated with the evil *yeṣer*

⁷⁷ 1QS 2:15, 16; 3:3; 9:4; 1:6; 1QH 5:5-6, 31-32; 1:19-21; 15:13; CD 3:1, 2, 5-18 [where it causes angels to sin]; 8:8-19, *et al.*

⁷⁸ 1QS 5:4-5, English translation from E. Qimron and J. Charlesworth, in James Charlesworth, ed. *et al.*, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts with English translations, vol. 1: Damascus Document, War Scroll and Related Documents* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 20-21. Thus, A. Edward Milton, “‘Deliver Us From the Evil Imagination’: Matt 6:13b in Light of the Jewish Doctrine of the Yêser Hârâ,” *Religious Studies and Theology* 13, no 1 (1995): 56.

⁷⁹ Porter, “The Yeṣer Hara: A Study in the Jewish Doctrine of Sin,” 111-15.

⁸⁰ Porter, “The Yeṣer Hara: A Study in the Jewish Doctrine of Sin,” 111.

⁸¹ *b. Sanh.* 45a (Shachter): “Rabbah said: We have it on tradition that evil inclination moves a man only towards what his eyes see”; “R. Akiba mocked at those who could not withstand the *yeṣer*, but he was saved from falling before the tempter in the form of a woman only by heavenly intercession”; also see R. Meir in *b. Kiddushin* 81a; 36b; *b. Sukkah* 51b-52b; cf. *b. Sabb.* 62b, where women act haughty and cause men to be aroused because of the evil impulse.

are: (2) hating their fellow humans because of pride or greed⁸²; (3) revenge or avarice⁸³; (4) intense anger⁸⁴; (5) objection to the Torah⁸⁵; (6) the disbelief in judgment after death⁸⁶; (7) committing idolatry⁸⁷; (8) causing one to steal⁸⁸; and (9) profaning the name of God.⁸⁹

The power of the evil *yeṣer* is demonstrated in various ways.⁹⁰ The evil *yeṣer* renews itself in people every day; it overmasters them daily and attempts to kill them; and without the help of the Holy One, humans would be powerless against it.⁹¹ It starts small during youth, but grows with age.⁹² There are sayings that demonstrate that the stronger a person is, the greater the person's moral struggles will be.⁹³ R. Eliezer the

⁸² *m. Avot* 2:11 ("R. Joshua said: The evil eye and the evil nature (יצר) and hatred of mankind put a man out of the world." [Danby]).

⁸³ *Sifre* Deut. 33 (on 6:6); *Lev. Rab.* 23:11.

⁸⁴ *b. Sabb.* 105b; *b. Yoma* 69b; *m. Avot* 4:2.

⁸⁵ *Sifre* 86a; *b. Yoma* 67b.

⁸⁶ *m. Avot* 4:2.

⁸⁷ *b. Yoma* 69b; *b. 'Abodah Zarah* 17a-b; *b. Niddah* 13b (Slotki): "Rab stated: 'A man who willfully causes erection should be placed under the ban.' But why did he not say, 'This is forbidden'? Because the man merely incites his evil inclination against himself. R. Ammi, however, stated, 'He is called a renegade, because such is the art of the evil inclination: Today it incites man to do one wrong thing, and tomorrow it incites him to worship idols and he proceeds to worship them.'"

⁸⁸ *b. Shabbath* 156b, where R. Nahman b. Isaac (or his brother) steals a bite of dates because of the evil impulse.

⁸⁹ *b. Chagigah* 16a.

⁹⁰ *b. Succah* 52 a-b.

⁹¹ *b. Succah* 52b; *b. Kiddushin* 30b.

⁹² *Gen. Rab.* 22:6; *Eccl. Rab.* 4:13.

⁹³ E.g., *b. Kiddushin* 36b, where Abaji said that for the scribes, as those who are greater than their neighbors, has a stronger *yeṣer*.

Great believed that proselytes possessed a strong evil *yeşer*, and must be guarded against.⁹⁴

The evil *yeşer* is limited to humans, not to angels, and remains active in this lifetime, not in the New Age.⁹⁵ The evil *yeşer* is active in humans at birth,⁹⁶ and leaves them at death.⁹⁷ Talmudic literature promotes the idea that God is the creator of the evil *yeşer* (and good impulse),⁹⁸ even though there are rabbis who believe God repented of ever making it.⁹⁹ At least one rabbi believed that even though the evil *yeşer* caused one

⁹⁴ *b. Baba Mezi'a* 59b.

⁹⁵ *Lev. Rab.* 26:5 (cf. *Gen. Rab.* 9:4); *b. Berakoth* 17a; *b. Shabb.* 89a. It was generally understood that animals do not have the evil impulse (e.g., *b. Erubin* 18a), though at least one rabbi believed they did, considering they kick and bite (*b. Berakoth* 61a). Moreover, the discussion of the evil *yeşer* is limited to men, not women.

⁹⁶ *Gen. Rab.* 34:10; *b. Sanh.* 91b. One rabbi believed that the evil inclination began at the point of the father's insemination of his mother (e.g., ARNA 16 [Goldin, 85]; Hebrew in Hans-Jürgen Becker, ed., *Avot de-Rabbi Natan: Synoptische Edition beider Versionen* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006], esp. 162-71).

⁹⁷ ARNA 16 (Goldin, 86): "So, too, the evil impulse says: 'Since all hope for me is lost in the world to come, I shall destroy the whole body'"; *b. Sanh.* 103a (Shachter): "R. Hisda also said in the name of R. Jeremiah b. Abba: What is meant by the verse, 'There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling'? 'There shall no evil befall thee, the evil impulse shall have no power over thee'; cf. *Exod. Rab.* 41:12; *Num. Rab.* 17:6; *b. Succah* 52a.

⁹⁸ *b. Berakoth* 61a: "R. Nahman b. R. Hisda expounded: What is meant by the text, 'Then the Lord God formed (וַיִּצֶר) man?' [וַיִּצֶר is written with two yods] to show that God created two inclinations, one good and the other evil"; *b. Sanh.* 91b (Shachter): "Antoninus also enquired of Rabbi, 'From what time does the evil impulse (or Tempter) hold sway over man; from the formation [of the embryo], or from [its] issuing forth [into the light of the world]?!'—'From the formation,' he replied. 'If so,' he objected, 'it would rebel in its mother's womb and go forth. But it is from when it issues.' Rabbi said: This thing Antoninus taught me, and Scripture supports him, for it is said, 'At the door [i.e., where the babe emerges] sin awaits'." (*Gen* 4:7); ARNA 16 (Goldin, 83): "It is said: By thirteen years is the evil impulse older than the good impulse. In the mother's womb the evil impulse begins to develop and is born with a person . . . Thirteen years later the good impulse is born"; *b. Kiddushin* 30b.

⁹⁹ *b. Ta'anit* 66a; *b. Succah* 52b; *Tanch.*, *Gen* 6:6.

to sin, it also goaded humans to build houses, trade, and have children.¹⁰⁰ Some rabbis believed humans are to bless God with both the evil and good impulses.¹⁰¹

There are times when the evil *yeṣer* is made synonymous with the Evil Tempter, or Satan. The personification of the evil *yeṣer* represents a real, external threat which must be defended or fought off.¹⁰² It entices people while they are alive and will testify against humans at judgment.¹⁰³ The evil *yeṣer* is called a foreign god,¹⁰⁴ and even equated with Satan.¹⁰⁵

There are rabbis who believe that the evil *yeṣer* did not rule in every person. R. Yose the Galilean states that God has taken away the evil *yeṣer* for the righteous and they are given the good *yeṣer*; the wicked are removed of their good *yeṣer* and only receive the evil *yeṣer*; while those in the middle have both impulses and must choose between the two and are in return, judged by the impulse one chooses.¹⁰⁶ R. Nahman b. Isaac assumes

¹⁰⁰ *Gen. Rab.* 9:7; *Eccl. Rab.* 3:11. The Christian ascetic Cassian believed that even though the carnal desire should be subdued, like *Gen. Rab.* 9:7 and *Eccl. Rab.* 3:11, the carnal impulses serve some purpose, mainly “perpetuating the race, and raising up children for posterity,” John Cassian, *Conferences* 7.3 (NPNF2 11, 249).

¹⁰¹ *b. Berakoth* 9.5.

¹⁰² *b. Shabbath* 63b; *b. Nazir* 45b: Simon the Just speaks of how his evil inclination assailed him, seeking to drive him from the world. Satan is often the cause of sinful behavior. E.g., *b. Gittin* 52a: “There were two men who, being egged on by Satan, quarreled with one another every Friday afternoon. R. Meir once came to that place and stopped them from quarrelling there Friday afternoons. When he had finally made peace between them, he heard Satan say: Alas for this man whom R. Meir has driven from his house!”

¹⁰³ *b. Succah* 52b.

¹⁰⁴ *b. Shabbath* 105b: “R. Abin observed: What verse [intimates this]? There shall be no strange god in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god; who is the strange god that resides in man himself? Say, that is the Tempter [יָצֵר]!”

¹⁰⁵ *b. Baba Bathra* 16a: “Resh Lakish said: Satan, the evil impulse (יָצֵר רָע), and the Angel of Death are all one.”

¹⁰⁶ ARNA 32 (Goldin, 130); and a similar story in *b. Berakoth* 61a. Cf. *Eccl. Rab.* 4:15-16, where people are classified only into two groups: the righteous (with only the good impulse) and the wicked (with

that some (at least in the prophet Jeremiah's time) were able to conquer the evil *yeṣer*.¹⁰⁷

Yet, for (most of) the rabbis, the evil *yeṣer* is an overpowering reality.¹⁰⁸ It is so overwhelming that some believed that it could be used as an excuse for sin before God.¹⁰⁹

Some rabbis believe that the evil *yeṣer* should be turned into something good, or at least, be used for good along with the good *yeṣer*.¹¹⁰ For most of the rabbis, the evil *yeṣer* is something to be subdued and suppressed. God made this clear in Gen 4:7: humans are “to master” (תִּמְשָׁל) sin.¹¹¹ By conquering it, humans might receive a reward.¹¹² Conquering the evil *yeṣer* when its influence can be felt demonstrates a

only the evil impulse); *b. Baba Bathra* 17a believes that only Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were not controlled by the evil impulse.

¹⁰⁷ *b. Baba Bathra* 9b.

¹⁰⁸ E.g., ARNA 16 (Goldin, 83): “When a man bestirs himself and goes off to some unchastity, all his limbs obey him, for the evil impulse is king over his two hundred and forty-eight limbs. When he goes off to some good deed, all his limbs begin to drag. For the evil impulse within man is monarch over his . . . limbs, while the good impulse is like a captive in prison”; ARNA 16 (Goldin, 86): “Rabbi Judah the Prince says: . . . With the evil impulse it is as when two men enter an inn and one of them is seized as a brigand . . . So, too, the evil impulse says: ‘Since all hope for me is lost in the world to come, I shall destroy the whole body’”; *b. Nedarim* 32b: “R. Ammi b. Abba also said: What is the meaning of, ‘There is a little city, etc.’? A ‘little city’ refers to the body; and ‘a few men within’ to the limbs; ‘and there came a great king against it and besieged [it]’ to the evil impulse; ‘and built great bulwarks against it,’ to sin; ‘Now there was found in it a poor wise man, to the good impulse; and he by his wisdom delivered the city, to repentance and good deeds; yet no man remembered that same poor man, for when the evil impulse gains dominion, none remember the good impulse.’”

¹⁰⁹ E.g., *b. Sanhedrin* 105a: “Rabbah b. Bar Hana said: The prophet urged Israel, ‘Return and repent.’ They replied, ‘We cannot: the evil impulse rules over us. He said to them, ‘Curb your [evil] desires.’ They replied, ‘Let His God teach us [how to do it].’” Cf. ARNA 16 (Goldin, 86): [Rabbi Simeon ben Yoḥai said,] “So shall Israel plead before the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘Master of the Universe, Thou knowest that the evil impulse stirs us up.’”

¹¹⁰ Porter, “The Yeṣer Hara: A Study in the Jewish Doctrine of Sin,” 125-26.

¹¹¹ E.g., *b. Kiddushin* 30b.

¹¹² *m. Yoma* 69:6.

person's great moral strength.¹¹³ Conquering it also honors God greatly both in this life and in the next.¹¹⁴

Talmudic literature is unclear if the evil *yeṣer* was originally evil, or simply an impulse that man corrupted. Rather than believing that Adam *created* the evil *yeṣer*, the common belief seems to be that Adam merely manifested the evil *yeṣer* first. Porter believed that the “Jews never regarded the idea that the *yeṣer* became evil solely through man's sin as adequate. It does not appear that its rise was traced to Adam's sin. It must rather have explained his sin.”¹¹⁵ Porter's first statement seems too strong because this issue is not clearly considered in rabbinic material. Yet, there does not seem to be any mention that Adam's use of the evil *yeṣer* *causes* any other humans to use the evil *yeṣer*. Even though there seems to be no notion of original sin, it can still be argued based on the evidence given that rabbis did not believe in an “even fight” between two competing inclinations. The fact that the good *yeṣer* is hardly mentioned, along with the generally-held belief in the overwhelming, pervasive draw of the evil *yeṣer*, seems to demonstrate that rabbis believed humans were more likely choose sin than to choose the good.

¹¹³ *m. Avot* 4.1 (Danby): “[Ben Zoma said,] ‘Who is mighty? He that subdues his [evil] impulse (יִצְרוֹ)’; ARNA 23 (Goldin, 101): ‘And to him who subdues his evil impulse, it is accounted as though he had conquered a city full of mighty men . . . And the mighty are none other than the strong in Torah.’” Cf. *Gen. Rab.* 22:6, where the evil inclination is described in athletic terms as something that comes to fight you. The only way to fight it off is by the words of Torah. *b. ‘Abodah Zarah* 19a: “Happy is the man that feareth the Lord: Does it mean happy is the ‘man’ and not the woman? — Said R. Amram in the name of Rab: [It means] Happy is he who repents whilst he is still a ‘man.’ R. Joshua b. Levy explained it: Happy is he who over-rules his inclination like a ‘man.’”

¹¹⁴ *b. Sanhedrin* 38b: “R. Joshua b. Levi said, ‘He who sacrifices his [evil] inclination and confesses [his sin] over it, Scripture imputes it to him as though he had honored the Holy One, blessed be He, in both worlds, this world and the next.’”

¹¹⁵ Porter, “The Yeṣer Hara: A Study in the Jewish Doctrine of Sin,” 118.

What were people to do in their struggle against the evil *yeṣer*? For some, the only victory possible was one divinely given.¹¹⁶ In one's prayers, each person should ask God for deliverance.¹¹⁷ Sometimes, as in the case of R. Chija, praying to be delivered from the evil *yeṣer* was not enough.¹¹⁸ Acts of kindness helped subdue the evil *yeṣer*.¹¹⁹ R. Levi b. Hama believes that each person should, in his or her fight against the evil *yeṣer*, incite the good *yeṣer* to fight.¹²⁰

Primarily, it was studying, living, and embodying the Torah that subdued the evil *yeṣer*.¹²¹ Rabbi Simeon ben Eleazar said the "evil impulse (יצר הרע) is like iron which

¹¹⁶ y. *Berakoth* 4:2 (7d): "May it please you, O Eternal, my God and God of my Fathers, that You may break and remove the yoke of evil inclinations from our hearts since so You created us to do Your will, and we are required to do Your will," Heinrich Guggenheimer, trans., *The Jerusalem Talmud: Tractate Berakhot* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2000), 365. In *Lev. Rab.* 35:5 the Torah and the evil inclination are compared to stones, because the Torah was written on stone tablets (Ex 24:12) and the evil inclination was the "stone heart" that God would remove (Ezek. 36:26).

¹¹⁷ b. *Berakoth* 17a: "Mar the son of Rabina on concluding his prayer added the following: 'My God, keep my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking guile. May my soul be silent to them that curse me and may my soul be as the dust to all. Open Thou my heart in Thy law, and may my soul pursue Thy commandments, and deliver me from evil hap, from the evil impulse and from an evil woman and from all evils that threaten to come upon the world';" b. *Berakoth* 60b (Simon) says that one should pray: "And may the good inclination have sway over me and let not the evil inclination have sway over me. And deliver me from evil hap and sore diseases, and let not evil dreams and evil thoughts disturb me"; and one should also pray (idem.): "And may it be Thy will O Lord, my God, to habituate me to Thy law and make me cleave to Thy commandments, and do not bring me into sin, or into iniquity, or into temptation, or into contempt, and bend my inclination to be subservient unto Thee, and remove me far from a bad man and a bad companion, and make me cleave to the good inclination and to a good companion in Thy world"; b. *Succah* 52b.

¹¹⁸ b. *Kiddushin* 81b (even after praying, R. Hiyya b. Abba still succumbed to the evil intentions). This is apparently due to the common belief that the evil impulse was too inherent within each human (e.g., ARNA 16).

¹¹⁹ b. *Avodah Zarah* 5b; b. *Baba Mezi'a* 32b: "Come and hear: If a friend requires unloading, and an enemy loading. One's [first] obligation is towards his enemy, in order to subdue his evil inclinations. Now if you should think that [relieving] the suffering of an animal is Biblically [enjoined], [surely] the other is preferable! — Even so, [the motive] 'in order to subdue his evil inclination' is more compelling [lit., "better"]."

¹²⁰ b. *Berakoth* 5a.

¹²¹ b. *Avodah Zarah* 5b: "R. Johanan said on behalf of R. Bana'ah: 'What is the meaning of the verse, "Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth the feet of the ox and the ass?"' [It means this]: Blessed is Israel; when they occupy themselves with Torah and acts of kindness their inclination is mastered by them, not they by their inclination, as it is said, 'Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters.' For

one holds in a flame. So long as it is in the flame once can make of it any implement he pleases. So too the evil impulse: its only remedy is in the words of the Torah.”¹²²

Another rabbi said, “If God created the evil inclination, He also created the Torah as its antidote [lit., “spices”].”¹²³ Satlow is probably right when he argues that that the study of the Torah for the rabbis is the equivalent to what non-Jewish philosophers did to make the soul pure. Satlow believes that the “*Talmud Torah* required the same mental and physical discipline demanded by the non-Jewish study of philosophy. Body and soul, working together in a disciplined (i.e., ascetic) fashion, can help a man overcome his evil inclination.”¹²⁴

Two things should be noticed. First, the evil impulse is not located within the person’s body or flesh, though it can have a profound effect upon the body. Rabbinic discussion concerning the evil impulse is always linked with the metaphor of the “heart”

what is meant by ‘sowing’ but doing kind deeds, as it is said, ‘Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap according to mercy’; and what is meant by ‘water’ is Torah, as it is said, ‘Oh ye who are thirsty come to the water.’ [The phrase,] that send forth the feet of the ox and the ass, [was explained in the] Tanna debe Eliyyahu thus: ‘In order to study the words of the Torah one must cultivate in oneself the [habit of] the ox for bearing a yoke and of the ass for carrying burdens’”; *b. Sotah* 21a: “Said R. Joseph: A commandment protects and rescues [from the evil *yeṣer*] while one is engaged upon it; but when one is no longer engaged upon it, it protects but does not rescue. As for [study of] Torah, whether while one is engaged upon it or not, it protects and rescues”; cf. *b. Kiddushin* 30b; *b. Succah* 52b, where it is said that the Law is like water which will wash away the *yeṣer*; *b. Sanh.* 38b; *Gen. Rab.* 22:70. For some rabbis, there is no mention of abdicating the evil inclination because it is so entrenched in humans, even from the point of the father’s insemination of the mom. E.g., ARNA 16 (Goldin, 85).

¹²² ARNA 16 (Goldin, 86). Goldin’s use of “evil impulse” is kept for יצר הרע.

¹²³ *b. Baba Bathra* 16a.

¹²⁴ Satlow, “‘And on the Earth You Shall Sleep,’” 215. Satlow briefly explores the ways that non-Jewish philosophers controlled their bodies to purify the souls. He argues that pagan philosophers, much like the rabbis, were primarily concerned with using the intellect and ascetic practices to allow the rational part of the soul to gain hegemony over the irrational part of the soul. He argues that this conception is evidenced (much earlier) in Philo’s thought (e.g., *Legum Allegoria* 2.2, 6 [LCL 1:225, 229]). However (*contra* Satlow), there are significant distinctions from his pagan examples: the notion of the evil impulse, the obligatory role of the Torah (and not mere intellectual effort), a holistic understanding of the soul (rabbinic anthropology does not support so easily the pagan model of rational vs. irrational parts of the soul), and the purpose and eventual goals of ascetic practices (acceptance by God as evidenced at the resurrection and judgment of non-Jews). The same could be said of the Christian ascetic mindset, with changes made in the means (via good works and Christ’s atoning work) and eschatological schema.

(לב), i.e., the locus of a person's decision making and thoughts—the moral center. This is explicitly mentioned in Gen 6:5 (“the thoughts of their hearts”; מַחְשַׁבַּת לִבּוֹ).¹²⁵

Second, rabbinic texts never speak of this concept in philosophical terms; their discussions are linked to the biblical vocabulary.¹²⁶ There is little discussion of how the evil impulse(s) arose; there is much discussion concerning how one should treat the evil impulse(s). Moreover, though there are references to the good *yeṣer* in rabbinic literature, compared to the evil impulse, very little is discussed. When compared to the biblical usage of the *yeṣer*, the rabbinic usage is not distinct in its emphasis upon two competing *yeṣers*, nor in the linking of “thoughts” with matter of the heart, but a distinction in the greater emphasis in theological discussions and partial personification of the evil *yeṣer*.¹²⁷

In conclusion, the *yeṣer* in rabbinic thought “is hardly other than a name for man's evil tendencies or inclinations, the evil disposition which as a matter of experience exists in man, and which it is his moral task to subdue or control. It does not contain a metaphysical explanation of the fact, a theory as to its source or nature.”¹²⁸ This evil tendency or inclination is the chief cause for a person's sinful behavior. Each person is

¹²⁵ The link between the evil יצר and the heart is found in several places in the Old Testament (cf. Ps 55:15; 140:2; 141:4; Jer 3:17; 4:14; 7:24; 11:8; 18:12) and rabbinic literature. E.g., *b. Berakoth* 61a (Simon): “Rab said: The evil inclination resembles a fly and dwells between the two entrances of the heart.” For more, see Porter, “The Yeṣer Hara: A Study in the Jewish Doctrine of Sin,” 110-11.

¹²⁶ Thus, “[I]n later discussions of the *yeṣer* the question at issue is not the speculative question of the relation of body and soul to the fact of sin, but the religious question of the relation of God and man to sin, and the practical question of the way of escape and victory,” Porter, “The Yeṣer Hara: A Study in the Jewish Doctrine of Sin,” 108.

¹²⁷ Porter, “The Yeṣer Hara: A Study in the Jewish Doctrine of Sin,” 36.

¹²⁸ Porter, “The Yeṣer Hara: A Study in the Jewish Doctrine of Sin,” 132.

morally responsible for one's behavior, but the evil impulse is so inherent and powerful that it is impossible (according to almost every rabbi who mentions it) to abdicate.

It will be demonstrated below that Christian ascetic literature also seems to draw from the Old and New Testament metaphors, while it presents similar emphases as the Talmudic literature. Of course, ascetic Christians used the LXX, and exploring the Greek terms used will help us in our discussion. In the LXX the Greek terms used to translate יצר differ, but center upon terms meaning “thought” or “inner considerations.” When speaking of the inner thoughts of the heart, ἡ διάνοια (“thought” or “consideration”) can be used in place of יצר (e.g., Gen 6:5 [τις διανοεῖται ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ]; 8:21 [ἡ διάνοια τοῦ ἀνθρώπου]; 24:45 [ἐν τῇ διανοίᾳ, which translates אֱלֹהֵי לֵבִי] and 1 Chron 29:18 [ἐν διανοίᾳ καρδιάς]; cf. Gen 27:41; 45:26; Deut 29:17; Jos 5:1; 22:5). At other times ἐνθύμημα (i.e., “thoughts” or “reasons”) is used for יצר (e.g., 1 Chron 28:9). In Jeremiah 4:14, the “evil thoughts” are translated as διαλογισμοὶ πόνων (“evil considerations” or “evil intentions”). The LXX demonstrates the common use of various Greek words that express an evil “thought,” “consideration,” or “intention” to translate the biblical concept of the evil *yešer*. The person's intention or thoughts derive from within a person and greatly influence or determine a person's moral choices.

It will be instructive to examine New Testament concepts similar to those represented thus far. There is no Greek synonym used in the New Testament for יצר. However, the sentiment can be demonstrated in a few places. The Markan Jesus assumes that out of the heart comes evil thoughts (ἐκ γὰρ τῆς καρδιάς ἐξέρχονται διαλογισμοὶ

πονηροί).¹²⁹ Paul speaks of the inadequacy of human will to accomplish righteousness because of the inner struggle with the “law of sin”:

For I know that nothing which is good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I have the will, but I cannot accomplish the good . . . I see another law in my bodily limbs that wages war with the law of my mind, and imprisons me to the law of sin (τῷ νόμῳ τῆς ἁμαρτίας) which dwells in my bodily limbs.¹³⁰

Paul’s struggle between two mutually exclusive “laws” seems very close to what we have seen thus far in Jewish literature.¹³¹ However, his particular choice of metaphors (“law of sin” vs. “law of my mind”) is foreign to later Jewish thought. This reference does draw attention to the fact that Paul understands the “law of sin” to be so inherent and powerful that it is untreatable with his own will power.¹³² This is also apparently why Paul sees the need to “circumcise the heart by the Spirit” (Rom 2:29; cf. Deut 10:16). In 1 Cor 7:37 Paul links the need to control one’s sexual desire (θελήματος) with the condition of the heart (cf. the need to flee from “youthful desires” (νεωτερικὰς ἐπιθυμίας) and obtain a “pure heart” in 2 Tim 2:22). The author of Colossians admonishes his audience to kill evil desire (ἐπιθυμίαν κακὴν; 3:5; cf. Eph 4:22). Thus, one discovers in

¹²⁹ Mk 7:21; cf. Matt 12:34; Heb 10:22. It is also possible that the evil impulse is that which Jesus is referencing at the end of the Model Prayer. It is common for scholars to propose that Jesus is referencing the final, eschatological testing by Satan. Yet, rabbinic literature often blurs the distinction between “the evil impulse” and the *personification* of the evil impulse, Satan (hence, τοῦ πονηροῦ), and often pray to be relieved from it as if it is evil (Cf. The end of one prayer in *b. Berakoth* 17a and 60b (Simon): “[D]o not accustom me to transgression; and bring me not into sin, or into iniquity, or into temptation, or into contempt. And may the good inclination have sway over me and let not the evil inclination have sway over me”; cf. *idem.*, 17a: “[D]eliver me from evil hap, from the evil impulse and from an evil woman and from all evils that threaten to come upon the world.”) In this schema, Jesus is not talking about eschatological testing; he is referencing each person’s personal struggle with the evil inclination. This would render the ending, “and do not bring us into temptation, but rescue us from the evil inclination” (Matt 6:13, translation mine). Milton concurs, “Deliver Us from the Evil Imagination,” 52-67.

¹³⁰ Rom 7:18, 23 (translation mine).

¹³¹ Porter disagrees. He believes that understanding Paul’s struggle as comparable to the evil and good impulses in rabbinic thought to be too “remote” (“The Yeḥer Hara: A Study in the Jewish Doctrine of Sin,” 134-35).

¹³² Paul can also speak of the “desires of the flesh” (ἐπιθυμίαν σαρκὸς) in a similar fashion, see Gal 5:16.

Paul a close link between sinful desires or passions which derive from within a person's heart (or "mind" or "thoughts") and the need to fight such desires. We see in Pauline literature the greater use of ἐπιθυμία for something comparable to the evil *yeşer*.

James seems to use ἐπιθυμία as a Greek synonym for the evil *yeşer*. James says that each person's temptation is not caused by God, "but everyone is tempted, being lured and entrapped by his own desire (ὕπὸ τῆς ἰδίας ἐπιθυμίας; 1:14)."¹³³ Here, James reflects the belief that the (corrupt) "inner desire" of the heart gives rise to various temptations, then habits ("sin which is fully grown," 1:15), and leads one to death. How one reacts to the inner desire, whether subdued or encouraged, demonstrates if the person will receive a negative or positive judgment by God.¹³⁴

Later Christian Tradition

There is reason to believe that certain Christian authors, and especially Christian ascetics represented in the Sayings, held a similar view of the inner struggle to subdue the passions which derive from an evil inclination.¹³⁵ Christian ascetic literature manifests a keen sense of thoughts and dispositions which were derived from deep within a person.

The basic assumption was that evil thoughts or cravings came from within a person

¹³³ Translation mine.

¹³⁴ Joel Marcus concurs: "Thus the *peirasmós*, 'testing,' about which James speaks in 1:2-4, 12-14, can be seen as the testing action of the evil inclination. This testing can have one of two results: either the inclination can be resisted, with the result that a person becomes perfect (1:2-4, 12), or it can be yielded to, with the result being sin and death (1:13-15)," Marcus, "The Evil Inclination in the Epistle of James," *CBQ* 44 (1982): 610.

¹³⁵ E.g., Christian authors outside of the Sayings demonstrate the notion. John Chrysostom said keeping the day of judgment at the forefront of one's mind is crucial because "such reflections will restrain our (evil) impulse (*animi nostri impetum coercebit*) more strongly than any bit" (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*, Homily 45:3 [NPNF 14, 163]; PG 59:255). Gregory the Great wrote to Fantinus and instructed Fantinus to tell him of any bishop or clergy who is sinning due to the instigation of the "evil inclination or disposition" (*aculeus pravae mentis irritat*) (PL 77:1307A; Gregory the Great, *Registrum Epistolarum* 14, Epistle 4 [NPNF2 13, 103]). Cf. the "*pravae mentis*" in PL 11:1208A; 17:0389D.

which could be embraced and cause one to sin, or denied.¹³⁶ Inner cravings gave rise to certain temptations.¹³⁷ Though ascetic literature does not employ one technical term or phrase like *יצר הרע*, nor is there much discussion of a battle between two opposing inclinations, they could describe evil impulses or desires within the heart or mind.¹³⁸ That is, instead of the technical phrase used by the rabbis, Christian ascetics speak of the same evil inclination using biblical vocabulary (while still maintaining similarities in their beliefs with the rabbis). The following section will explore the various concepts related to the evil inclination used in the Sayings. We will first explore the the ascetic understanding of “passions/cravings,” and then explore the understanding of evil “thoughts.”

Two relatively synonymous terms used which closely resemble the evil *yeşer* is “passion or desire” (πάθος) and “craving or desire” (ἐπιθυμία).¹³⁹ The evil passions or

¹³⁶ This is a common sentiment in ascetic literature. E.g., Abba Isaiah, *Ascetic Discourses* 16 (John Chrysostom and Pachomios Penkett, trans., *Abba Isaiah of Scetis, Ascetic Discourses* [Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 2002]), 122: “Let your heart be wise in its thoughts, and you will not be burdened by them, for the one who fears them is weakened by their weight.”

¹³⁷ As one brother asked a monk, “If it happens that someone gives way to temptation (πειρασμὸν) in consequence of some impulse (ἐνέργειαν) or other, what may befall him through those who are scandalized (σκανδαλισθέντας) by it?” (*Anony.* 45 [Ward]; Nau 177).

¹³⁸ This is not to suggest that the rabbis *only* used *יצר הרע*, as the evidence demonstrated otherwise. The rabbis also used biblical vocabulary throughout their literature to speak of the evil inclination.

¹³⁹ Unless the context of the particular passage demands differently, the English terms “passion” and “desire,” respectively, will be used consistently for these two Greek words. It is well-known that pagan philosophers also emphasized the role of abdicating the “passions” (esp. the Stoics). While Christian ascetics might have been influenced by the Stoics, this section is arguing that Christians did not need pagan philosophy for such beliefs. The biblical and rabbinic beliefs in an evil inclination is a more likely source or influence.

desires could cause one to covet,¹⁴⁰ become angry,¹⁴¹ hate,¹⁴² feel *accidie* (ἀκηδία; i.e., weakness, apathy or indifference),¹⁴³ or most certainly, to lust¹⁴⁴ or fornicate.¹⁴⁵ These deep-seated desires could not be avoided in a person's lifetime.¹⁴⁶ Perhaps following the lead of the Apostle Paul, they could be referred to as the desires or impulses "of the flesh" (as opposed to "natural" impulses of eating, sleeping, etc.).¹⁴⁷ Most often, ascetic literature spoke of desires or passions as those evil cravings deriving from *within* a person.¹⁴⁸ For example,

¹⁴⁰ In *Sys.* 10.81 a monk has the impulse to covet a pot.

¹⁴¹ *Sys.* 2.23, Isidore is said to have curbed his impulses of anger and lust for forty years. Cf. *Alph. Syncletica* 13; *Alph. Hyperechius* 3; *Sys.* 4.28, 49; *b. Sabb.* 105b; *b. Yoma*, 69b.

¹⁴² *Alph. Syncletica* 13.

¹⁴³ *Alph. Poemen* 149; BDAG, 35-36.

¹⁴⁴ All of chapter five in the Systematic Collection speaks to the temptation of lust. Specifically, see *Sys.* 5.2, 4 (where thoughts of lust are called a "common enemy to us all"), 9 (where Poemen says that he and his fellow monk are "full of lust"), 12 (where lust is "like a fire burning day and night in his heart"); *Sys.* 7.26; cf. *b. Sanh.* 45a; *b. Kiddushin* 81a; 36b; *b. Sukkah* 51b-52b; cf. *b. Shabb.* 62b.

¹⁴⁵ *Alph. Phocas* 2.

¹⁴⁶ This is the assumption throughout ascetic literature. E.g., *Sys.* 5:16 (Ward): "We cannot make temptations vanish, but we can struggle against them." *Alph. Abraham* 1 (Ward) explains how Abraham corrects a monk who thinks that he has conquered all the passions. Abraham demonstrates that "the passions continue to live; it is simply that they are controlled by the saints." Cf. *Alph. Poemen* 161.

¹⁴⁷ *Alph. John* 34 (τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τῆς σαρκός; PG 65:233A); *Alph. John the Eunuch* 3; *Alph. Poemen* 72 (τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρχός; PG 65:340B).

¹⁴⁸ Abba Poemen called them "passions of the soul" (e.g., *Alph. Poemen* 8). The goal of abdicating the passions could be called ἀπάθεια (e.g., *Alph. Evagrius* 6). Yet ἀπάθεια, with its Stoic overtones of complete "passionlessness" in a divided soul, was not adopted easily within the Christian ascetic mindset. Evagrius' saying in the *Alph.* represents his tendency to use this language, along with his usage in other works (e.g., *The Praktikos*). Yet, others within the Sayings do not endorse such language. Cassian, Jerome, and Augustine prefer to use Latin phrases (viz., *puritas cordis*). For more on this issue, see Jeremy Driscoll, "Apatheia and Purity of Heart in Evagrius Ponticus," in *Purity of Heart in Early Ascetic and Monastic Literature*, ed. Harriet Luckman and Linda Kulzer (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 141-162; Juana Raasch, "The Monastic Concept of Purity of Heart and Its Sources, V. Symeon-Macarius, The School of Evagrius Ponticus, and The Apophthegmata Patrum," *Studia Monastica* 12 (1970): 32; Mark Sheridan, "The Controversy over ἀπάθεια: Cassian's Sources and His Use of Them," *Studia Monastica* 39 (1997): 287-310 (cited in Driscoll, "Apatheia and Purity of Heart," 142).

A brother asked Abba Sisoës, “What shall I do about the passions?” The old man said, “Each man is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire” (James 1:14).¹⁴⁹

Another brother questioned him [Poemen] in these words: “What does, ‘See that none of you repays evil for evil’ mean?” (1 Thess. 5.15) The old man said to him, “Passions work in four stages—first, in the heart; secondly, in the face; thirdly, in words; and fourthly, it is essential not to render evil for evil in deeds. If you can purify your heart, passion will not come into your expression; but if it comes into your face, take care not to speak; but if you do speak, cut the conversation short in case you render evil for evil.”¹⁵⁰

A brother said to Abba Sisoës, “How is it that the passions do not leave me?” The old man said, “Their tools are inside you; give them their pay and they will go.”¹⁵¹

He [Isidore of Pelusia] also said, “The desire for possessions is dangerous and terrible, knowing no satiety; it drives the soul which it controls to the heights of evil. Therefore let us drive it away vigorously from the beginning. For once it has become master it cannot be overcome.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ *Alph. Sisoës 44* (Ward). Dorotheos of Gaza believed that some souls held a predisposition toward particular passions, and only one offense could mean a habit for life. E.g., “[S]ometimes we find a (certain) passion attached to a soul (ἐπιόρεπὼς ἔχουσα ψυχὴ περὶ πάθος). If it indulges that passion only once, there is immediate danger that it will turn into a fixed habit (ἐξιν ἐλθεῖν)” (PG 88:1748B; Dorotheos of Gaza, “On Cutting Off Passionate Desires Before They Become Rooted Habits of Mind,” in Eric Wheeler, trans., *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings* [Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 1977], 180).

¹⁵⁰ *Alph. Poemen 34* (Ward). Dorotheos of Gaza speaks similarly: “When passionate thoughts (οἱ ἐμπαθεῖς λογισμοὶ) arise in the soul therefore, they are brought to light; this means that the workers of iniquity, viz. the inordinate passions, appear, in order that they can be completely destroyed forever and ever. For whenever passionate desires reappear in the mind of those who put up a fight, they are utterly and immediately rejected . . . First passionate desires arise in the mind, and then the underlying passion comes to light and they are destroyed. All this applies to contestants [for the heavenly crown]. But we who give way to the sins and are always satisfying our passions, never recognize the passionate desires that spring up, or the underlying passions they reveal, so that we can combat them, but we remain under their sway” (Dorotheos of Gaza, “On Enduring Temptation Calmly and Thankfully,” in Eric Wheeler, trans., *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings* [Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 1977], 197; PG 88:1770B).

¹⁵¹ *Alph. Sisoës 6* (Ward).

¹⁵² *Alph. Isidore of Pelusia 6* (Ward); cf. *Alph. Longinus 5* compares the inner passions to the blood inside of a woman, evidenced during childbirth.

Monks could also speak, to a lesser extent, of passions as those things which were done on the *outside* of a person.¹⁵³ Passions were sometimes personified (without linking them to the demonic), just as the evil *yeşer*.¹⁵⁴ Whether from within or without, passions were the things to be destroyed— not the body. When the body was disciplined, it was only to conquer the passions. As Abba Poemen said, “We have not been taught to kill our bodies, but to kill our passions.”¹⁵⁵

Similar to the biblical examples, evil thoughts (πονηρός λογισμός) could be described in a similar fashion to passions and desires.¹⁵⁶ Evil thoughts were typically directly linked with a person’s spiritual condition (i.e., with the condition of the soul). Each person was to control his or her thoughts so that any evil thought which arose would not grow into fruition. For example,

A hermit said this about evil thoughts, “I beg you, my brothers, control your thoughts as you control your sins.”¹⁵⁷

However, you should realize that as soon as you intend to live in peace, at once evil comes and weighs down your soul through *accidie* (ἀκηδίαις), faintheartedness, and (evil) thoughts.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ *Alph.* Arsenius 9; *Alph.* Agathon 1; *Sys.* 11.1, where Arsenius refers to the “passions of the body”; and in 11.12, Theonas refers to the “bodily passions.” Cassian believed that some sins (like envy and covetousness) do not derive naturally from within, but are adhered to easily because “of the free choice of a corrupt and evil will,” John Cassian, *Conferences* 7.5 (NPNF2 11, 250).

¹⁵⁴ E.g., as something that “attacks” a person; *Alph.* Sisoës 22 (Ward): “Abba Joseph asked Abba Sisoës, ‘For how long must a man cut away the passions?’ The old man said to him, ‘Do you want to know how long?’ Abba Joseph answered, ‘Yes.’ Then the old man said to him, ‘So long as a passion attacks you, cut it away at once.’; cf. *Anony.* 10.2 (Stewart). Cf. John Cassian, *Conferences* 7.5 (NPNF2 11, 250).

¹⁵⁵ *Alph.* Poemen 184 (Ward). Cf. *Hist. Monach.* 1.25.

¹⁵⁶ Πονηρός λογισμός will be consistently translated as “evil thoughts.” Cassian believed that the impulses of the mind (i.e., thoughts) could be described as spiritual in that they do not derive from the flesh, even though they weaken the strength of the flesh (John Cassian, *Conferences* 5.4).

¹⁵⁷ *Sys.* 10.92 (Ward); cf. *Sys.* 12.8.

¹⁵⁸ *Alph.* Theodora 3 (Ward). Cf. Abba Isaiah, *Ascetic Discourses* 29 (John Chrysavgis and Pachomios Penkett, trans., *Abba Isaiah of Scetis, Ascetic Discourses* [Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 2002]), 238, who says, “Woe to us, for evil and impure thoughts are rejuvenating our sins, and we do not discern when God withdraws himself and impure spirits arrive!”

I sit in my cell and I am aware of evil thoughts coming against me, and when I have no more strength against them, I take refuge in God by prayer and I am saved from the enemy.¹⁵⁹

Of all evil suggestions, the most terrible is that of following one's own heart, that is to say, one's own thought, and not the law of God.¹⁶⁰

Evil desires and habits can be curbed if caught early enough. If they are not restrained early, they will grow exponentially because of humanity's natural predilection to sin.

There are rabbinic stories which speak of the gradual downward slope that can occur when one gives into the evil inclination.¹⁶¹ The same is true for Christian ascetic literature. For example, Dorotheos of Gaza says:

So it is with our passions (τὰ πάθη): insofar as they are small to start with, we can, if we want to, cut them off with ease. If we neglect them as mere trifles they harden, and the more they harden, the more labor is needed to get rid of them.¹⁶²

He continues encouraging his readers on how to stop the habit of indulging the passions:

If he examines himself on every point and takes care to repent of every fault and correct it, he begins to diminish the evil. And if he used to commit nine faults, he commits eight, and so with God's help he cuts them off in a short time and does not allow his evil inclinations (τὰ πάθη) to harden (or "become strengthened"). For there is great danger for the man who falls into the habit of indulging his evil

¹⁵⁹ *Alph.* John the Dwarf 12 (Ward); cf. 16, where the soul (or "inward chamber" in his parable) is tempted to give into the passions which derive within a person. Cf. *Alph.* Longinus 1. Dorotheos of Gaza gives a similar description: "Happy the man who seized the things generated from you (ὁ τὰ παρὰ σοῦ γεγόμενα), 'the enemy,' i.e. the evil thoughts (πονηροὺς λογισμοὺς), not giving them a chance to grow strong in him and constrain him to evil deeds, but immediately, while they are still in their infancy, before they are fed and grow strong against him, flings them down on the rock, which is Christ" (PG 88:1740; Dorotheos of Gaza, "On Cutting Off Passionate Desires Before They Become Rooted Habits of Mind," in Eric Wheeler, trans., *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings* (Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 1977), 175).

¹⁶⁰ *Alph.* Isidore the Priest 9 (Ward); cf. *Alph.* Poemen 142 (Ward).

¹⁶¹ E.g., When the Israelite men gave into their passion and had sex with the Moabite or Midianite women (cf. Num 25), it led to loss of sexual constraint, and eventually, to idolatry (see *b. Sanh* 106a; *y. Sanh* 10:2, 28d).

¹⁶² PG 88:1737C; Dorotheos of Gaza, "On Cutting Off Passionate Desires Before They Become Rooted Habits of Mind," in Eric Wheeler, trans., *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings* (Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 1977), 174.

inclinations (πάθους), because as we said, such a man, even if he desires it, is not able alone to cast off his evil inclination (περιγενέσθαι τοῦ πάθους) unless he has help from some of the saints.¹⁶³

One monk was having a problem stealing repeatedly and Dorotheos questioned his intentions. The young monk replied, “Pardon me, but I don’t know why. Yet, I simply just (feel the need to) steal.” Dorotheos then encourages his readers:

You see then what happens when a man gets the habit of giving in to his passions (τὸ ἔχειν πάθος ἐν ἔξει)? . . . He knew it was evil, he knew that he was doing wrong, he was troubled and wept over it, and all the same the unfortunate man was dragged along by his evil habit (κακῆς συνηθείας), which he had made for himself by his previous negligence . . . virtue and vice are formed in the soul by repeated actions, and ingrained habits.¹⁶⁴

The Sayings demonstrate this view. For example,

A hermit used to say, “A lustful thought is brittle like papyrus. When it is thrust at us, if we do not accept it but throw it away it breaks easily. If it allures us and we keep playing with it, it becomes as difficult to break as iron.”¹⁶⁵

He [Poemen] also said, “When self-will and ease become habitual, they overthrow a man.”¹⁶⁶

In ascetic literature, especially in the Sayings, it is common to make demons or Satan synonymous with evil thoughts. It is important to note that while, like rabbinic theology, evil impulses could be caused by Satan or personified as a “god,”¹⁶⁷ Christian ascetic theology put much more emphasis upon the role of Satan and his demons. What is

¹⁶³ Dorotheos of Gaza, “On Cutting Off Passionate Desires Before They Become Rooted Habits of Mind,” in Eric Wheeler, trans., *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings* (Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 1977), 178; PG 88:1744B.

¹⁶⁴ Dorotheos of Gaza, “On Cutting Off Passionate Desires Before They Become Rooted Habits of Mind,” in Eric Wheeler, trans., *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings* (Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 1977), 179; PG 88:1745A-B.

¹⁶⁵ Sys. 5.33 (Ward).

¹⁶⁶ Alph. Poemen 83 (Ward).

¹⁶⁷ b. Shabbath 105b; b. Baba Bathra 16a.

different is not their worldviews; rather, it is the Christian ascetic's increased emphasis upon the role of evil spiritual forces. Satan and his demons attack a person primarily at the person's inner capacity to make moral decisions, i.e., the heart, mind, or soul.¹⁶⁸ At times the Sayings demonstrate the belief that a person's soul naturally leans toward evil and the demons merely take notice and tempt accordingly. For example,

Matoes said, "Satan does not know which passion will seduce the soul, and so he scatters his tares in it without direction. At one time he throws in the seeds of lust, at another the seeds of slander, and the rest in the same way. Wherever he sees a soul drawn towards one of the passions, he concentrates on that. If he knew what was most tempting to a soul, he would not scatter such a variety of temptations."¹⁶⁹

Still, other sayings suggest that evil thoughts are placed into a person from outside of himself (primarily from the demonic).¹⁷⁰

Two Sources for Sin

The Sayings suggest that there are two sources for evil impulses within an ascetic: (1) demons and (2) an evil inclination caused by a corrupt will (i.e., a disposition). It is often difficult to determine when a clear distinction is being drawn.¹⁷¹ For example,

Abraham, who was a disciple of Agatho, once asked Poemen, "Why do the demons attack me?" Poemen said to him, "Is it the demons who attack you? It is not the demons who attack me. When we follow our self-will then our wills seem like demons and it is they who urge us to obey them. If you want to know the kind of people with whom the demons fight, it is Moses and those like him."¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ This is not to suggest the demons or Satan do not appear often in the Sayings in outward, physical manifestations. Yet, when they do appear, their primary goal is to tempt the ascetic concerning an inward struggle (e.g., lust, greed, anger).

¹⁶⁹ Sys. 10.35 (Ward); cf. *Alph.* Matoes 4.

¹⁷⁰ *Alph.* Poemen 21; *Alph.* Paphnutius 4; Sys. 5.13 (Ward): "Nothing troubles the demon of lust more than laying bare his urgings."

¹⁷¹ E.g., in Sys. 5.4 a monk struggles with the "demon of lust," but refers to that temptation also as a "lustful thought" (cf. 5:13).

¹⁷² Sys. 10.62 (Ward).

Ascetic literature often manifests the conception of a twisted will or nature. Christ (in the incarnation and His teaching) was sent to rescue us from humanity's twisted will or nature in order to bring us back to our "natural" condition. Adam was the first to demonstrate the corruptibility of the human will. The influential fifth-century monk, Abba Isaiah of Scetis, speaks clearly on this issue:

[I]n the beginning, when Adam was created, God placed him in Paradise with healthy senses that were established according to nature (*naturae congruentibus*). When Adam listened to the one who deceived him, all of his senses were *twisted* toward that which is contrary to nature (*in habitum naturae contrarium converse sunt*), and it was then that he fell (lit., "cast down") from his glory (*ipse et gloria sua dejectus est*) . . . however . . . The Word . . . [became] completely human, and became in every way like us . . . in order that he might . . . transform that which is contrary to nature to the state that is according to nature . . . that we may stay in the natural state in which God created us.¹⁷³

Isaiah continues concerning the natural state of a person's desires, as they were before Adam lost his glory.

The person, then, who wishes to attain this natural state removes all his carnal desires (*is omnis carnis suae amputate voluntates*), in order that God might establish in him in the state according to nature. Desire is the natural state of the intellect because without desire for God there is no love . . . the enemy (*inimicus*) twisted (*mutavit*) this [natural desire for God] into a shameful (or "filthy"; *foedam*) desire, a desire for every impurity.¹⁷⁴

Isaiah of Scetis believes that within each person is a natural will, or disposition, that naturally pursues the love of God. Isaiah later says that ambition, anger, hatred, and pride are all "natural" passions of a good will, but they have all been corrupted.¹⁷⁵ The

¹⁷³ PG 40:1107; Abba Isaiah, *Ascetic Discourses 2* (John Chryssavgis and Pachomios Penkett, trans., *Abba Isaiah of Scetis, Ascetic Discourses* [Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 2002]), 43.

¹⁷⁴ PG 40:1107-08; Abba Isaiah, *Ascetic Discourses 2* (John Chryssavgis and Pachomios Penkett, trans., *Abba Isaiah of Scetis, Ascetic Discourses* [Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 2002]), 43-44.

¹⁷⁵ PG 40: 1107-08; Abba Isaiah, *Ascetic Discourses 2* (John Chryssavgis and Pachomios Penkett, trans., *Abba Isaiah of Scetis, Ascetic Discourses* [Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 2002]), 44-45. Isaiah's discussion of how the passions are not naturally evil, but are a corrupted good, has been explored by Kallistos Ware, "The Meaning of 'Pathos' in Abba Isaia and Theodoret of Cyrus," *Studia Patristica* 20

problem is not having desires; the problem is the focus of a person's desires. All of these attributes are inherent to all humans.¹⁷⁶

Isaiah of Scetis believes that to have "Adam's nature" means *not* to give in to sin or its causes.¹⁷⁷ In fact, the passions inherent to everyone demonstrate that humans have been "born of Eve," while the virtues demonstrate that humans have been born through the Holy Spirit and are reclaiming their Adamic nature.¹⁷⁸ Yet, this natural will has been made "unnatural" because "the enemy" (i.e., the demonic) has twisted each person's good, natural desires for that which is not natural or good. Isaiah assumes that Adam's disobedience somehow affected humanity, but there is no clear explanation of that influence. Humanity's present predilection to sin is blamed on "the enemy" and each person's own selfish desires, not Adam's disobedience. The focus in Isaiah of Scetis, much like rabbinic theology, is that Adam's disobedience had an indescribable "meta-impact," but is not the cause of each person's predilection or choice to sin. Nor does Adam's sin circumvent God's judgment.

In the sixth century and in the region of Gaza, Dorotheos generally shared Isaiah's view:

(1989): 315-22. Ware compares Isaiah's use of "passions" (i.e., some evil passions can be used for good) with some similar beliefs concerning the evil inclination represented in rabbinic literature (idem., 321).

¹⁷⁶ PG 40:1108B. Of all the creatures on the planet, only humans have lost their true nature. Animals still act as God made them. See Abba Isaiah, *Ascetic Discourses* 8 (John Chryssavgis and Pachomios Penkett, trans., *Abba Isaiah of Scetis, Ascetic Discourses* [Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 2002]), 89.

¹⁷⁷ Abba Isaiah, *Ascetic Discourses* 8 (John Chryssavgis and Pachomios Penkett, trans., *Abba Isaiah of Scetis, Ascetic Discourses* [Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 2002]), 94, and *Discourse* 17 (idem, 134): "If your heart is distracted and you do not know how to control it, then it is your behavior that leads it to distraction, either willingly or unwillingly, inasmuch as it is contrary to the nature of Adam."

¹⁷⁸ E.g., see Abba Isaiah, *Ascetic Discourses* 19 (John Chryssavgis and Pachomios Penkett, trans., *Abba Isaiah of Scetis, Ascetic Discourses* [Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 2002]), 144.

In the beginning, when God created man he set him in paradise *adorned with every virtue* (ἀρετῇ) . . . When he [Adam] disobeyed . . . and *fell from a state in accord with his nature* (φύσει) *to a state contrary to nature* (καί ἦν ἐν τῷ παρὰ φύσιν), i.e. a *prey to sin*, to . . . *pleasures of this life* . . .; and *he was mastered by them*, and became a slave to them through his transgression . . . There was no more piety (θεοσέβεια)¹⁷⁹ . . . For then the Enemy deployed all his wickedness so that sin ruled. The good God, then, gave the law as a help, for their conversion, for putting right what was evil, but they did not reform. He sent the prophets, but they were able to do nothing. For evil prevailed . . . evil was not in one member, or in one place, *but in the whole body*. It took in the whole soul and all its powers . . . *Everything was a slave to sin, everything was under the control of sin*¹⁸⁰ . . . Then at last the good, man-loving God sends his only begotten Son . . . He took our very substance and took his origin from our race and *he became a New Adam, like the Adam he himself had formed*. For he *renewed man in his nature, restored the depraved senses and sensibility of human nature to what it had been in the beginning*¹⁸¹ . . . Therefore, The Man [Jesus] gave us instructions . . . *which purify our passions* (καθαριούσας καὶ ἀπ’ αὐτῶν τῶν παθῶν ἡμῶν) *and those evil dispositions which come from our inner man* (αὐτῶν τῶν κακῶν διαθέσεων τοῦ ἐντὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡμῶν) . . . he has given us the power to do good if we desire to and no longer to be dragged down into sin, so to speak, by force.¹⁸²

In another sermon, Dorotheos continues:

[V]irtue belongs to the nature we possess; the seeds of virtue are ineradicable. I say, therefore, that insofar as we carry out what is good, we generate for ourselves a habit of virtue—that is, we take up a state *proper to our nature*, we return to a state of health which belongs to us . . . to the normal state of *health which belongs to our very nature*. In the case of vice it is entirely different, by doing repeatedly what is evil we acquire a habit which is *foreign to us*, something *unnatural* (emphasis mine).¹⁸³

Here one finds a similar emphasis upon Adam’s natural state, like every human’s, which became corrupted through disobedience. Unlike Isaiah, Dorotheos does not blame “the

¹⁷⁹ PG 88:1617-18; Dorotheos of Gaza, “On Renunciation,” in Eric Wheeler, trans., *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings* (Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 1977), 77.

¹⁸⁰ Idem., 78; PG 88:1618-19.

¹⁸¹ Idem., 79.

¹⁸² Idem., 80; PG 88:1622-24.

¹⁸³ Dorotheos of Gaza, “On Cutting Off Passionate Desires Immediately Before They Become Rooted Habits of Mind,” in Eric Wheeler, trans., *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings* (Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 1977), 180.

enemy” at all in Adam’s choices. He does blame both “the enemy” for leading humans’ habit of sinning, though sin itself acts like an outside force which overpowers the will.¹⁸⁴ Christ’s atoning work and instruction allows humans the capacity to overcome their twisted wills achieved by the habit of sinning. Therefore, similar to Isaiah of Scetis, one does not find in Dorotheos’ thought the belief that humans were excused in their sinning because Adam sinned. Humanity’s sin is not Adam’s fault. Humanity’s inner evil dispositions come from the inside, and are so inherent, habitual, and forceful, that humanity need Christ’s enabling to subdue them.

It is impossible for someone struggling against his evil desires (θλίψιν τῶν παθῶν) not to suffer affliction from them. The agents of the passions, as Abba Sisoës says, are inside you (ἐνδοθέν σου εἶσι); pay them a deposit and they bring you under their power. By ‘agents’ [of passions or vices] he means their causes. In so far as we are attached to these and seek fulfillment in them we cannot escape being led captive by evil thoughts, while we are led forcefully—against our intention—to fulfill them because we have already willingly delivered ourselves into their hands.¹⁸⁵

The Sayings do not present speculations on when or how the human will became corrupt to the same degree as Isaiah of Scetis or Dorotheos of Gaza. There are references to an ascetic’s need to abstain from what is unnatural. For example,

Abba Poemen said, “God has given this way of life to Israel: to abstain from everything which is contrary to nature (τῶν παρὰ φύσιν), that is to say, anger, fits

¹⁸⁴ “He freed him from slavery to sin which had mastered him by force. For with violence and tyranny the Enemy was leading man to sin, reluctantly, without really wanting to sin, as the Apostle speaking in our person says, “I do not the good which I would but the evil I would not, that I do.” Idem, 79. And later, “In so far as we are attached to these and seek fulfillment in them we cannot escape being led captive by evil thoughts, while we are led forcefully—against our intention—to fulfill them because we have already willingly delivered ourselves into their hands. (Dorotheos of Gaza, “On Enduring Temptation Calmly and Thankfully,” in Eric Wheeler, trans., *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings* (Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 1977), 195; PG 88:1765B)

¹⁸⁵ Idem.

of passion, jealousy, hatred and slandering the brethren; in short, everything that is characteristic of the old man.”¹⁸⁶

Here, one notes quickly how the notion of acting contrary to nature resembles both Isaiah and Dorotheos (except Isaiah believed that hatred was part of the good, natural part of the person, which is now corrupted). The goal of the ascetic, then, is to return to a pre-disobedient condition. Unlike rabbinic discussions, there is no suggestion in the Sayings of when this sinful condition began within a person (e.g., *in utero*).¹⁸⁷ It is noticeable that Adam is not blamed for anyone else’s sin or as a cause for sin.

One reference in the Sayings to the “old Adam” has an ambiguous meaning:

The old man [Poemen] said to him, “Don’t you sometimes have something of the old Adam in you?” The priest said, “I have my share of the old Adam.” The abba said to him, “Look, you are just like the brethren yourself; if you have even a little share of the old Adam, then you are subject to sin in the same way.”¹⁸⁸

Perhaps what is meant by the “old Adam” is Adam’s spiritual condition before he disobeyed. Each person had the “old Adam” within him/herself. Since each person had the pristine nature within, it meant that it was very easy to fall. On the other hand, it could also be a metaphor for the Adam who sinned, which means that because humans are like Adam in that regard, we should expect to sin.

If Poemen’s reference to Adam is in relation to Adam’s sin, it is unique. The few remaining references in the Sayings emphasize the pre-disobedient, glorious state of Adam.

¹⁸⁶ *Alph.* Poemen 68 (Ward); PG 65:337C. It is interesting that Poemen equates his fellow Christian ascetics with “Israel.”

¹⁸⁷ Cassian believed that the natural “impulses of the flesh” can be seen in children, years before they can legitimately decide between good and evil (*Conferences* 7.3).

¹⁸⁸ *Alph.* Poemen 11 (Ward).

They said of Abba Pambo that he was like Moses, who received the image of the glory of Adam when his face shone. His face shone like lightening and he was like a king sitting on his throne.¹⁸⁹

He said, “Forgive me, Fathers, but if someone has obtained purity, everything is in submission to him, as it was to Adam, when he was in Paradise before he transgressed the commandment.”¹⁹⁰

The Sayings do not speculate on why people’s dispositions are corrupt; they simply assume it. They do not blame Adam’s sin for humanity’s current condition. There is no speculation concerning why Adam fell (his own will or evil influence).¹⁹¹ As has been seen thus far in the Sayings, there is the pervasive view (also in Isaiah, Dorotheos, and Talmudic literature) that humanity’s sinfulness is a mysterious combination of human’s own evil impulses and evil’s influence to follow those impulses.

It is also often difficult to tell if a monk thinks the demonic introduced the evil temptation or if the demonic merely takes a desire and corrupts it.¹⁹² For example,

Abba Pityrion, the disciple of Abba Anthony said, “If anyone wants to drive out the demons, he must first subdue the passions; for he will banish the demon of the passion which he has mastered. For example, the devil accompanies anger; so if you control your anger, the devil of anger will be banished. And so it is with each of the passions.”¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ *Alph.* Pambo 12 (Ward).

¹⁹⁰ *Alph.* Paul 1 (Ward).

¹⁹¹ The only saying that comes close to naming a cause blames food, not the will or evil (*Alph.* Isidore the Priest 1).

¹⁹² E.g., *Sys.* 5.19; *Alph.* Cronius 2 (Ward); PG 65:248B: “The old man [Abba Cronius] said, ‘If the demons attempt to capture a man’s mind (νοῦν) through his own impetus (or constitution) (ἀφορμῶν), they draw him in this manner until they lead him to an invisible passion.’” Cf. *Anony.* 136 (Ward).

¹⁹³ *Alph.* Pityrion 1 (Ward). Cf. Pityrion, Antony’s chief disciple, was known to have great discernment concerning spiritual warfare and the passions. “He said that there were certain demons which followed the passions and often made us disposed to do evil. ‘Therefore, my children,’ he said to us, ‘whoever wishes to drive out the demons must first master the passions. For whichever passion one overcomes, one also drives out its corresponding demon. You must conquer the passions step by step in order to drive out the demons which belong to them. There is a demon which follows gluttony; if you gain control over gluttony, you will drive out its demon’ (*Hist. Monach.* 15.2b-3).”

Even when a demon or Satan is to blame for a person's sinful thought or behavior, like rabbinic thought, it is still the individual's responsibility to fight it off and curb the desire within. At no time did a person lose free will. This was the assumption in Christian asceticism; each person was responsible for what was done in the body and soul.¹⁹⁴

As one monk said,

When the demons sow thoughts in your heart, and you feel this, don't listen to your heart, for that is the demons' suggestion. Though the demons are careful to send thoughts to you, they do not force you to accept them. It is up to you to receive or reject them.¹⁹⁵

An ascetic's capacity to decline the temptation or passion can only exist by the enabling of God's grace.¹⁹⁶

Interestingly, Christian ascetic theology held that the goal was to conquer passions, not to excise them. One Abba believed that if a monk was strong enough, the passions of the heart were to be welcomed and conquered; if a monk was weak, the

¹⁹⁴ Even though God implanted most of our impulses, He is not to blame for what humans do with impulses (John Cassian, *Conferences* 7.4 [cf. 2.6]). This is typically what Cassian assumes, though he also believes that the demons can implant impulses (*Dialogues with Sulpitius Severus* 3.15). Even still, at all times, each person has the freedom of will to accept or decline the desires that arise from within (John Cassian, *Conferences* 7.8).

¹⁹⁵ Sys. 5.32 (Ward). Dorotheos of Gaza concurs: "Before a man gives way to his passions (τὸ πάθος), even if his thoughts mount an assault against him, he is always a free man in his own city and he has God as an ally" (Dorotheos of Gaza, "On Enduring Temptation Calmly and Thankfully," in Eric Wheeler, trans., *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings* [Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 1977], 196; PG 88:1768A). 4 Maccabees asserts the belief that everyone has the free will to deny sinful desires, and the capacity to do so is found in our reason: 4 Macc 1:30-35 (30-32: "For reason is the guide of the virtues, but over the emotions it is sovereign. Observe now first of all that rational judgment is sovereign over the emotions by virtue of the restraining power of self-control. Self-control, then, is dominance over the desires [τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν]. Some desires are mental, others are physical, and reason obviously rules over both." [RSV]). *M. Avot* 3.16 says, "All is foreseen, but freedom of choice is given; and the world is judged by grace, yet all is according to the excess of works [that be good or evil]" (Goldin).

¹⁹⁶ Sys. 5.4 (Ward): "No one can endure the enemy's clever attacks, nor quench, nor control the leaping fire natural to the body, unless God's grace preserves us in our weakness. In all our prayers we should ask for his mercy to save us, so that he may turn aside this scourge which is aimed even at you"; 5.10 says that Amma Sarah was tempted to lust for thirteen years but never asked for it to leave, only for God's strength to conquer it (cf. 5.11, 17); 5:40 says that the temptation of lust is something that could not "be conquered" by a monk's efforts alone.

passions of the heart were to be avoided at their inception.¹⁹⁷ Most believed that conquering the passions at any stage was paramount. As Abba Joseph of Panephrisis said, “I am a king today, for I reign over the passions.”¹⁹⁸ Another abba said that, “For we do not have to uproot the passions, but resist them.”¹⁹⁹ Yet, when monks would celebrate the conquering of a particular passion or craving, they were encouraged to ask God for more (evil) desires or temptations. Struggling with evil thoughts and temptations was considered a gift from God because it allowed a person both to grow and realize their dependence upon God.²⁰⁰ This is why Evagrius said, “Take away temptations and no one will be saved.”²⁰¹ Other monks concurred. For example,

Abba Poemen said of Abba John the Dwarf that he had prayed God to take his passions away from him so that he might become free from care. He went and told an old man this: “I find myself in peace, without an enemy,” he said. The old man said to him, “Go, beseech God to stir up warfare so that you may regain the affliction and humility that you used to have, for it is by warfare that the soul makes progress.” So he besought God and when warfare came, he no longer prayed that it might be taken away, but said, “Lord, give me strength for the fight.”²⁰²

Conquering (but not abdicating) inner temptations and passions of the heart could be done by two chief things: meditation upon Scripture and ascetic disciplines (e.g., manual labor, prayer, etc.).

¹⁹⁷ *Alph.* Joseph Panephrisis 3.

¹⁹⁸ *Alph.* Joseph of Panephrisis 10 (Ward); Cf. *Hist. Monach.* 8.15.

¹⁹⁹ *Anony.* 35 (Ward); Nau 167.

²⁰⁰ *Sys.* 5.4, 15.

²⁰¹ *Alph.* Evagrius 5 (Ward).

²⁰² *Alph.* John the Dwarf 13 (Ward).

If the monk falls into temptation, and turns to the Lord, he has the best materials; that is, meditation on the law of God, psalmody, work with his hands, prayer, and silence, which are the foundations of his building.²⁰³

The old man [Abba Moses] was asked, “What should a man do in all the temptations and evil thoughts that come upon him?” The old man said to him, “He should weep and implore the goodness of God to come to his aid, and he will obtain peace if he prays with discernment. For it is written, “With the Lord on my side I do not fear. What can man do to me?” (Ps. 118:6).²⁰⁴

She [Syncretica] also said, “Just as the most bitter medicine drives out poisonous creatures so prayer joined to fasting drives evil thoughts away.”²⁰⁵

Evagrius said, “Some of our predecessors used to say that a dry and regular diet combined with love will soon bring a monk to the harbor where the storms of passion do not enter.”²⁰⁶

Abba John the Dwarf said, “If a king wanted to take possession of his enemy's city, he would begin by cutting off the water and the food and so his enemies, dying of hunger, would submit to him. It is the same with the passions of the flesh: if a man goes about fasting and hungry the enemies of his soul grow weak.”²⁰⁷

²⁰³ Sys. 5.18; cf. *Alph.* Macarius 20; John of Lycopolis said, “try through *ascesis* to free the appetites from passion” (*Hist. Monach.* 1.29 [Stewart]). Abba Isaiah, *Ascetic Discourses* 16 (John Chrysostom and Pachomios Penkett, trans., *Abba Isaiah of Scetis, Ascetic Discourses* [Kalamazoo: Cisterian Publications, 2002]), 120-21, says that ascetics need to “train our mind in godly study, righteousness, and prayer, that these may protect us from falsehood when it approached us. Let us purify our heart and body from sinful desire, that we may be saved from impurity when it approaches us”; he later says that “study, with godly fear, protects the soul from passions,” and “loving ascetic labor is a way of hating the passions” (idem, 124). Isaiah draws a slight distinction between the intellect and soul, though there seems to be no hegemony.

²⁰⁴ *Alph.* Moses 6 (Ward); cf. *Alph.* Theonas 1; *Alph.* Syncretica 8.

²⁰⁵ *Alph.* Syncretica 3 (Ward). Cf. *Apocalypse of Elijah* 1:13-22 (15-18: “[T]he Lord created the fast for a benefit to men on account of the passions and desires which fight against you so that the evil will not inflame you . . . The one who fasts continually will not sin although jealousy and strife are within him” (*OTB* 1:738, Wintermute).

²⁰⁶ Sys. 1.4 (Ward).

²⁰⁷ *Alph.* John the Dwarf 3 (Ward).

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that in late antiquity rabbinic Jews agreed with Christians ascetics (as represented in the Sayings) concerning the anthropological understanding of the self. The self was understood as a composite unit of two halves, co-equal by their creation by God, co-equal in their moral responsibility before his judgment, and co-equal in their reunification by God at the resurrection. While both groups believed that both the body and soul would be judged by God, it was demonstrated that Christian ascetics put much more emphasis upon the judgment of the soul. Both groups believed that the body should be cared for since the body was made by God and was needed to perform acts of charity, eat, and study.

Furthermore, this chapter sought to demonstrate how both groups believed in an inherent predilection to sin. It could be spoken of as a state-of-being or disposition (esp. as a “corrupt will” in the Sayings), or more commonly, as an impulse or desire which caused one to sin. The evil inclination was thought to be so strong that only deliberate, austere measures could actually control the evil within. One might say that Christian ascetics (esp. in the Sayings) believed that nearly all ascetic praxis—all the poverty, fasting, working, praying, Scriptural memorization, charity, *et al.*—was to subdue the evil impulses. Rabbinic Jews also performed various ascetic acts to conquer the evil impulses: prayer, meditation on Torah, scripture memorization, acts of charity, *et al.* It is also clear that the Christian ascetics represented in the Sayings performed greater acts of renunciation and austerity than the rabbis and Jewish sages.

There are a few references in Talmudic literature that demonstrate optimism regarding the possibility of overcoming the evil disposition in a person’s lifetime, but the

majority of rabbis did not hold such hope. The Sayings promoted no such hope of excising the evil disposition, though conquering the various evil impulses and desires which arose from it was possible. Both groups believed that the evil inclination was so inherent and powerful that rescue ultimately could only come from outside of a person or at death.

Both rabbinic and Christian ascetic literature speaks to the effects of Adam's sin on humanity. They both believe that his disobedience somehow affected humans or creation, though no specific affects are given. They both believe that Adam's state before the Fall was what God intended for humans. While Talmudic literature suggests that the evil inclination was inherent to Adam like it is in every person, the Christian ascetic literature examined gives different answers. Either Adam was influenced by evil (Isaiah), his own evil will (Dorotheos), or, usually, no such speculation was given (the Sayings). All the literature examined demonstrates the belief that Adam's sin is not an excuse for humanity's sin or the cause of sin. God's judgment of each person will not be predicated upon Adam's disobedience. Rather, each person will be held individually responsible with the same evil inclination.

Their diagnosis was similar in two chief ways: (1) probably predicated upon Old Testament passages (and personal experience), both believed in an inherent evil disposition which led one to participate in evil impulses, and (2) both believed that they held an intimate relationship with the God of the Bible who acted as both merciful and righteous judge. Interestingly, both believed similar things concerning the evil inclination which was not derived from particular Old Testament passages. Their moral conduct was not part of a universal, pantheistic *logos* which permeated all creation.

Rather, they would be held accountable to a personal God of history who would bring this age to a close and judge them according to strict standards of morality as defined by Scriptures.

Their prognosis was both different and similar. Their prognosis was different in that they held different views concerning the means by which one was to conquer the evil impulses. Christians believed that only the saving activity of the incarnated Son of God could ultimately redeem humanity from the power of the evil inclination; rabbinic Jews (especially) believed that only when a person was utterly transformed by the Torah could one overcome the power of the evil inclination.

Their prognosis was similar in at least two ways. (1) Both groups believed that God's enabling presence or grace was helpful in their pursuit of conquering evil impulses, but that this was not enough to avoid God's judgment. In other words, neither group claimed special status when considering their judgment (viz., Jews, for being God's chosen covenant people; Christians because of Christ's atoning work in His incarnation and death). Both believed deeply in their claim to divine mercy, but neither believed that it alone would save them from God's judgment. That is, what made their prognosis similar is that both groups held a high view of human responsibility. *M. Avot* 3.16 (Goldin) summarizes this combination of God's grace and human responsibility: "All is foreseen, but freedom of choice is given; and the world is judged by grace, yet all is according to the excess of works [that be good or evil]." Special status before God because of the Torah or Christ had to be matched with the individual's thoughts and behaviors. No notion of *sola gratia* is present in any of the material covered in this chapter. (2) Furthermore, their prognosis was similar in that both groups believed that

their struggle over sinful desires was part of a long biblical tradition. These Christian and Jewish sages believed themselves to be part of a long flowing stream of biblical saints who paved the way before them in their struggle. Their heroes were not wandering Cynics, Pythagoreans, or Stoics, but Moses, Elijah, Daniel, and John the Baptizer.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Modern scholars are drawing more attention to the need for both patristic and Jewish scholars to study each other's history alongside one another. This dissertation has sought to offer three aspects of commonality between Judaism and Christianity in late antiquity. We have argued that asceticism, the perception and role of the sage, and the evil inclination are three areas shared in common for various groups of Jews and Christians in late antiquity.

Chapter two sought, in broad strokes, to demonstrate that there are copious implicit and explicit references to the continued interaction between Jews and Christians in late antiquity. Much of the evidence is implicit in nature. This chapter sought to extrapolate from various literary and archaeological evidence a probable historical picture. While studying similarities in praxis and belief between both groups is possible even if no such interaction could be demonstrated, demonstrating interaction makes their comparison even more warranted. A few things were demonstrated from the evidence given: (1) There is good reason to believe that Jews and Christians had both amicable and acrimonious relations in the first several centuries. Social and religious boundaries remained somewhat fluid in late antiquity. This fluidity is explained by at least three major reasons: (a) Christians could not, and did not wish to, remove themselves completely from their Jewish ancestry because of the deep religious respect given to the Old Testament; (b) because there were varied groups of Jews who believed in the gospel

(whatever that might mean for each group); and (c) because there still existed a great attraction to Jewish customs and beliefs, typically centered upon the synagogue. (2) Jews and Christians, in general, shared commonalities that allowed for easy communication and mutual interaction (e.g., Greek language, education, commerce, urban life, etc.).

Chapter three sought to demonstrate a few salient points of late antique Christian asceticism and monasticism: (1) Common “textbook” answers to the formation and development of Christian asceticism and monasticism is caricatured. The varied ancient sources present a broad movement across the Roman Empire that attracted people from all sorts of backgrounds, literate and illiterate, poor and rich, male and female. (2) Instead of reconstructing Christian asceticism and monasticism as “big bang” phenomena in the desert, it should be understood first and foremost as an urban phenomena which spilled out to the desert. When it did move to the desert, in under three generations, there were tens of thousands of monks across the Nile River Valley. They had created an enormous trade-route for baskets, ropes, and crafts, and a transit system for oral tradition encompassing biblical interpretation and wisdom sayings. Placing Christian asceticism and monasticism chiefly within their proper urban context (whether it be village or city), places them within the predominate locale of ascetic practices performed by both pagans and Jews. (3) A close examination of a dominant theory of monastic development was critiqued, viz., the motivation to become living, “spiritual” martyrs. It was shown that there is little evidence for the first four centuries that anyone thought of martyrdom as metaphorical, or “spiritual.” This fact is necessary to clarify so that comparing Jewish and Christian asceticism will not be obviated. (4) Finally, the development of the Sayings was discussed in order to demonstrate the wide influence and popularity that

wisdom sayings had in the ancient world. This popularity was part of a wider movement, as was certainly the case among rabbinic wisdom (as demonstrated in chapter three). Similar to Jewish sages, the sages represented in the Sayings offered biblical interpretation, a kind of “second canon” or “interpretive lens” through which one could understand Scripture’s meaning, along with sagacious words which helped its hearer embrace the virtues and prepare for judgment.

Chapter four sought to demonstrate that there is good reason to speak of ascetic similarities between Judaism and Christianity because there were Jews who practiced various forms of asceticism in the Second Temple and rabbinic periods. The following points were emphasized in the first section: (1) Instead of caricaturing either Jewish asceticism or Christian asceticism, scholars should continue to explore the similarities (and differences) between both groups. (2) Similar to Christianity, ascetic practices were not performed by pre-rabbinic or rabbinic Jews *en masse*, but rather, by certain minority groups and individuals. (3) The Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha demonstrated numerous ascetic practices that can be found throughout the Sayings: fasting, restraint and self-denial in matters of eating, drinking, and sex, wearing coarse clothing or having austere living conditions, and fleeing to the desert. (4) The Therapeutae represent (certain) Jewish ascetics who left the cities to form communities devoted to renunciation and restrictive behavior, including the positive pursuit of embodying the Torah through study, memorization, and learning from elders. (5) Both of these factors (#3 and #4) led to the conclusion that it is possible that Jewish asceticism, whether through Jewish converts or through oral and literary tradition, served as an influence for nascent Christian monastic communities. The second section sought to demonstrate that (1) certain rabbis also

performed acts of renunciation and supererogatory behavior, though they lived in urban areas. Yet, within urban areas, they also formed small communities where the assiduous study of the Torah, and the practice of various ascetic practices, was emphasized. The role of suffering for studying the Torah, the ascetic behavior associated with holiness, and fasting were all briefly explored. This evidence suggests that both contemporaneous Christians and rabbis could practice forms of self-denial in order to garner, among many things, God's favor, forgiveness, and to receive the blessing of the world to come. (2) Rabbis and Christian ascetics primarily differed in the degree to which asceticism was practiced (e.g., Christians were more austere concerning sexual restraint, large groups of Christians lived in the desert, *et al.*). Nor do we have evidence that Second Temple or rabbinic Jews shared the widespread popularity Christian monks had in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, or Asia Minor. The final section sought to demonstrate the common perception of the sage among rabbinic and Christian circles. Sages were primarily perceived as the best available guides to understanding Scripture and a virtuous life. The wisdom they had to offer was spread by oral tradition initially, but was eventually codified into written form, where it was used as devotional material.

Chapter five sought to demonstrate two salient points: (1) a fundamental belief represented in rabbinic literature and the Sayings is an anthropology which believes in a unity of self in two halves: body and soul. Both the body and the soul are morally responsible before God. The Sayings emphasize a greater moral responsibility to the soul, since, when judgment is spoken of, it is the soul which is judged. However, in both traditions, both body and soul must be guarded from outside influences and temptations, hence the need to separate from the profane in culture (i.e., be "holy"). (2) Most of all,

the self must be guarded from the influence of the evil disposition (i.e., as a “state of being”) and evil inclinations (i.e., individual passions) that arise from within a person. Adam’s disobedience in the garden demonstrated that he also was mastered by the evil inclination. Adam’s disobedience is not the cause of humanity’s sin. Rather, his disobedience demonstrates how humans have lost their true nature (Christians) or it demonstrates how inherent the evil inclination is (rabbis). Both agree that to some degree, Adam’s disobedience had a “meta-impact” on humanity and even creation, though his precise effect is not made explicit. Both agree that the body is not inherently sinful or irredeemable; rather, it must be disciplined. Both believe that humanity on its own cannot overcome the evil disposition or impulses. Humans must be given divine enablement. The evil inclinations cause various types of sin. Whether evil causes, or simply goads, such inclinations, it is the moral responsibility of the person to do whatever it takes to subdue the evil inclination. Hence, various forms of asceticism are practiced as the common means taken to subdue the evil inclinations.

In Jewish-Christian comparative studies, various evidence has been given by recent scholars to demonstrate that Jews and Christians maintained various levels of interaction in late antiquity. This dissertation has sought to offer evidence thus far not explored: the practice and significance of asceticism, the religious and sociological roles of the sage, and the anthropological and theological roles of the evil inclination and impulses. We see in these three areas similar development in Jewish and Christian theology and praxis in late antiquity. While at times Judaism might have set the precedent for Christianity, Jewish and Christian development seems to have developed alongside one another.

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