



Protestant Theological University

Review of: Udo Schnelle, Die getrennten Wege von Römern, Juden und Christen: Religionspolitik im 1. Jahrhundert n. Chr. (Tübingen: Siebeck 2019)

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Jewish Studies

Udo Schnelle, *Die getrennten Wege von Römern, Juden und Christen: Religionspolitik im 1. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), ISBN 9783161568268; 212 pp., € 29,00.

In this book Udo Schnelle develops a twofold argument. First, Schnelle holds that, following a very short “Anfangsphase (ca. 30–50 n. Chr.)” (187), the separation between Jews and Christians set in with Paul’s missionary activity, which marked the rise of Hellenistic, Antiochene Christianity as the dominant stream in the development of Christianity. Thus, according to Schnelle, Jews and Christians formed separate groups already in the 1st century CE. Second, Schnelle posits that Roman politics of religion constituted the decisive factor in the separation between Jews and Christians.

Already in the first pages of the book, Schnelle rejects the notion of a prolonged “parting of the ways,” writing that “[e]inen gemeinsamen Weg ... kann es nur gegeben haben, wenn immer *zwei* in gegenseitiger Anerkennung und Akzeptanz ihn ... gegangen sind!” (9). The seven chapters that follow aim to show that, in the case of Judaism and Christianity, this was not the case. Rather than a parting of the ways Schnelle reckons that Jews and Christians “sind nie gemeinsame, sondern von Anfang an getrennte Wege gegangen” (190).

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 develop different sides of Schnelle’s argument. In chapter 2, Schnelle treats Roman politics vis-à-vis Jews and Christians, arguing that both groups had good reasons not to be confused for the other. On the one hand, the fragile tolerance most Roman emperors displayed towards the Jews would urge the Jews to dismiss Jesus followers, who were often perceived as a threat to the imperial order, as their co-religionists. On the other, the institution of the *fiscus iudaicus* under Vespasian triggered Christians to distance themselves from Jews.

Chapter 3 concerns Jewish attitudes towards the Jesus movement. Primarily a paraphrase of Acts supplemented with material from Paul’s letters, this chapter holds that Jews from the outset perceived Jesus followers, who venerated a victim of the Roman legal system and one cursed according to Jewish law (cf. Deut 21:23 LXX and Gal 3:13), as a threat to the power

balance between Jews and Romans. Thus, rather than a variety of Judaism Jews conceived of the Jesus movement as blasphemy (55). Paul occupies a central role in Schnelle's argument: assuming that Paul persecuted the Jesus followers because he considered the idea of a crucified Messiah to go against God's holiness, Schnelle holds that the converted Paul makes the cross he resented the cornerstone of his theology and so marks Christianity's break away from Judaism (48–52).

Chapter 4 deals with the politics of religion within nascent Christianity. Schnelle identifies three main streams in the Jesus movement: the *Urgemeinde* in Jerusalem, the Galilean Jesus movement, and the Hellenistic community in Antioch. Whilst the first two streams represent the earliest form of the early Jesus movement, the Hellenists soon won the day. As a result, Christianity broke away from its Jewish roots and developed into a new, universal, missionary religion that developed its own organisational structures, terminology, thought world, and literary genres (i.e., the gospels).

Chapters 5 and 6 are devoted to two more marginal issues: Jewish Christianity ("Judenchristentum") and the ongoing crystallisation of Christianity as a distinct religion in the 2nd century CE. Schnelle conceives of Jewish Christianity—Jesus followers who sought to hold fast to Jewish laws and customs—as the "ursprüngliche und älteste Gestalt" of Christianity (130), but also reckons with a reinterpretation of original Jewish Christianity in the wake of the more universal (or, in Schnelle's terms, Hellenistic) aims of the Pauline and Antiochene missions. Several writings now part of the New Testament, most prominently the gospel according to Matthew, would attest both to the prominence of Jewish Christianity and to its subsequent reinterpretation. The separation between Jews and Christians, present from the beginning, consolidates in the 2nd century CE. Particularly in the work of the early apologists Schnelle recognises "ein neues Selbstverständnis: Die Christen sehen sich als bedeutende Gruppe innerhalb der Gesellschaft dauerhaft in die Geschichte gestellt" (144). In the wake of this new self-understanding, the New Testament canon and ecclesial structures emerged. Chapter 7 covers Schnelle's methodological assumptions (183–86)—somewhat surprisingly at this stage of the book—and summarises the argument of the book in ten theses.

Schnelle has written an informative book and presents a cogent argument. Given the current tendency to read the majority of New Testament writings "within Judaism," Schnelle's argument may even at times come off as slightly polemical. This is not necessarily a problem, of course: Schnelle amply documents his views with primary sources and so gives his readers much to digest and consider. At the same time, this book invites several

questions. To begin with, the lack of extensive engagement with theories that contradict Schnelle lend an essayistic quality to his argument. To give one example: this reader would be interested to learn how current debates on the non-Jewish audiences Paul addresses with his letters (think, for instance, of Paula Fredriksen's work) would affect Schnelle's proposals. Moreover, Schnelle is correct to raise the issue "ob Polemik in Texten als Streit oder als Bruch verstanden wird" (185) in his final chapter, but this question plays no significant role in his main argument. Here, a broader engagement with Jewish primary sources rather than a reconstruction of Jewish attitudes on the basis of New Testament writings (chapter 3) would have been helpful. The Qumran scrolls or the works of Philo and Josephus—to mention but a few significant Jewish works from the period covered by Schnelle—do not appear in the book. As a result, Schnelle's observations on the Jewish context of the Jesus movement remain preliminary.

All things considered, Schnelle provides his readers with a clear argument that may address some potential pitfalls in Jewish readings of the New Testament. In order to be fully convincing, however, Schnelle's case would benefit from more elaborate engagements with the work of proponents of such Jewish readings as well as Jewish primary sources.

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