

# “When We Were Hebrews”: Situating Valentinian Voices in the Spectrum of Early Christian Attitudes Toward Judaism

Jordan J. Ryan

University of Dubuque | jordanryan@dbq.edu

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Throughout the second and third centuries, the increasingly Gentile church was faced with the issue of how it was to define itself alongside mainstream Judaism. The issue specifically manifests itself in this post-apostolic, pre-Nicene period through the question of how the Jewish heritage and content of the movement was to be understood and applied in practice by members of the fledgling church. This period is particularly crucial for the understanding of the development of Jewish-Christian relations in antiquity, as the self-definition of the church in relation to its Jewish heritage was in a state of active flux, with a variety of texts representing a spectrum of opinions on the understanding of the movement’s Jewish heritage and content.

The intent of this article is to contribute to the mapping of that spectrum by bringing the voices of two works typically identified as “Valentinian,” Ptolemy’s *Letter to Flora* and the *Gospel of Philip*,<sup>1</sup> into the discourse surrounding the place of Christianity’s Jewish heritage within Christian belief and practice. By casting thought on the Jewish heritage of Christianity of these “heterodox” works alongside that of the proto-Nicene

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<sup>1</sup> On the rationale for identifying Ptolemy as a “Valentinian,” see Christoph Marksches, “Valentinian Gnosticism: Toward the Anatomy of a School,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration*, ed. John Douglas Turner and Anne Marie McGuire (NHMS 44; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 401-438 (426-429). For a recent, balanced evaluation of the *Gospel of Philip* as a “Valentinian” text, see Minna Heimola, *Christian Identity in the Gospel of Philip* (Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 102; Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2011), in which the author rightly identifies *Gos. Phil.* as a “Valentinian” text, but notes that the author and his audience self-identified as “Christians.”

authors of the same period, I intend to draw out some surprisingly positive aspects of the attitudes towards the Jewish heritage of Christianity within these Valentinian texts. These positive attitudes, however, are mitigated by the more expected notion of the superiority of Christianity over its parent tradition, which is also found in the same texts.

### **Positions on Judaism and Jewish Practices in “Proto-Orthodox” Texts**

Modern scholarship has highlighted the astounding diversity of the post-apostolic, pre-Nicene era, and has, as a result, discerned a historical narrative which makes it difficult to speak of “orthodoxy” or even a “normative” Christianity in this period.<sup>2</sup> This diversity is directly witnessed by the multitude of preserved heresiological writings from the second and third centuries,<sup>3</sup> and even by archaeological material evidence dating to this period.<sup>4</sup> The Antioch incident related in the second chapter of Paul’s letter to the Galatians is indicative of early anxiety and disagreement over the issue of how the Jewish heritage and content of the movement was to be understood and applied in practice, which, as we shall see, carried on well into the second and third centuries.

By the time of Ignatius, the anxiety over the movement’s Jewish heritage appears to have been engaged full-throttle, and is expressed clearly in Ignatius’ warnings against “Judaizing” in his *Epistle to the Magnesians* 10.<sup>5</sup> In

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. just a few examples from across a wide spectrum of scholarly traditions: F.C. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, (London: SCM Press, 1971); James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); D. Jeffrey Bingham, “Development and Diversity in Early Christianity,” *JETS* 49, no. 1 (2006): 45-66; and Ramsay MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity AD 200-400*, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Ignatius, *Magn.* 10, Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, Tertullian, *Adv. Val.*, *Marc.*, Hippolytus, *Haer.*, and Epiphanius, *Pan.*

<sup>4</sup> Anders Runesson, “Architecture, Conflict and Identity Formation,” in *The Ancient Galilee in Interaction: Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity*, ed. Jürgen Zangenberg, Harold W. Attridge, and Dale Martin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007): 231-57; James F. Strange, “Diversity in Early Palestinian Christianity, Some Archaeological Evidences,” *ATR* 65, no. 1 (1983): 14-24; MacMullen, *Second Church*, passim.

<sup>5</sup> On Judaism and Ignatius’ opponents, see for example John Marshall, “The Objects of Ignatius’ Wrath: and Jewish Angelic Mediators,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 56, no. 1 (2005): 1-23; Jerry L. Sumney, “Those Who ‘Ignorantly Deny Him’: The Opponents of Ignatius of Antioch,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1, no. 4 (1993): 345-365; and Paul

this passage, which coincidentally contains the earliest known usage of "Christianity" (Χριστιανισμὸς) as something opposed to "Judaism" (Ιουδαϊσμὸς), Ignatius apparently advocates an abandonment of Judaism and Jewish practice: "Lay aside, therefore, the evil, the old, the sour leaven, and be changed into the new leaven, which is Jesus Christ." Of course, the very fact that Ignatius' letters evince some polemic against Judaizing forms of Christ-belief is a good indication of the existence of such forms of Christ-belief during his lifetime.<sup>6</sup> This serves in turn as a further indication of the variety of opinions held during this period regarding the content and applicability of Christianity's Jewish heritage.

Ignatius and his Judaizing opponents represent only a small portion of the spectrum of responses and opinions regarding Christianity's inherited Jewish tradition from this period. The *Epistle of Barnabas*, for example, in ch. 2, considers sacrifice to be abolished; in ch. 7 argues that the Day of Atonement ceremonies are simply intended to foreshadow Jesus' passion; in 9:3-5 states that "circumcision of the heart" is preferred to physical circumcision, which is understood to have come about through the misguidance of an evil angel; and in ch. 10, even interprets the dietary laws in a purely symbolic fashion.<sup>7</sup> Even more striking, *Barn.* 4:8 states that the Israelite covenant was broken from the moment that Moses descended from Sinai. When this idea is taken in tandem with the question asked in 13:1, "But let us see if this people is the heir or the former, and if the covenant belongs *to us or to them*" (Gk. εἰς ἡμᾶς ἢ εἰς ἐκείνους), it appears that the epistle's rhetorical aim is to claim Judaism's antique heritage solely for believers in Jesus.<sup>8</sup> If we take this to be the aim of the *Epistle of Barnabas*, its symbolic interpretation of the Jewish law begins to make sense as a means of discrediting the practice of the tradition as it was practised in the Judaism of the period, and claiming the tradition instead for those followers of Jesus who did not adhere to the literal practice of its statutes.

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J. Donahue, "Jewish Christianity in the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch," *Vigilae Christianae* 32, no. 2 (1978): 81-93.

<sup>6</sup> See also *Epistle to the Philadelphians* 6.

<sup>7</sup> On the peculiar legal interpretation of *Barnabas* and its relevance for Jewish-Christian relations, see William Horbury, "Jewish-Christian Relations in *Barnabas* and Justin Martyr," in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways*, ed. James D.G. Dunn, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 327-332.

<sup>8</sup> In accordance with Horbury, "Jewish-Christian Relations in *Barnabas* and Justin Martyr," 332.

Justin Martyr, by contrast, allows for Gentile believers in Christ to participate in such practices, so long as they do not attempt to persuade others to do the same.<sup>9</sup> This differs greatly from Barnabas' notion that the law was never meant to be performed literally, from Melito of Sardis' opinion that the law is rendered worthless and void by the coming of Christ,<sup>10</sup> and even more so from the virtual identification with Judaism and Jewish tradition espoused by Jewish Christ-believers, as is evident both through the textual and material evidence pertaining to second- and third-century Jewish Christ-belief.<sup>11</sup>

What thus emerges from the portrait of the so-called "proto-Orthodox" texts of the post-apostolic, pre-Nicene period is a spectrum or range of diverse opinions regarding the interpretation, application, validity and value of the Christianity's Jewish heritage. If scholarship on the history of Jewish-Christian relations is to speak with any faithfulness whatsoever to the historical reality of this period, then the diversity of pre-Nicene Christianity must be wholly accounted for. Paula Fredriksen, in speaking to the question of when the ways between Christianity and Judaism parted, has stated that both the answer and the question itself "depend upon what evidence we consider,"<sup>12</sup> and the present author is inclined to agree. The evidence of diversity regarding attitudes towards

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<sup>9</sup> *Dialogue*, 47. Cf. Horbury, "Jewish-Christian Relations in *Barnabas* and Justin Martyr," 337-345, especially 345.

<sup>10</sup> *Peri Pascha*, 224-244. On this, see Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 244.

<sup>11</sup> David Frankfurter has made a very strong case for the utilization of certain Jewish pseudepigraphical writings from this period as evidence for Jewish Christ-worship, pertaining particularly to the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and *The Ascension of Isaiah* in "Beyond 'Jewish-Christianity,'" in *The Ways That Never Parted*, ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 131-143. Regarding the material evidence for Jewish Christ-belief, see Runesson, "Architecture, Conflict and Identity Formation," passim, and Strange, "Diversity in Early Palestinian Christianity, Some Archaeological Evidences," passim. The classic treatment of Jewish-Christianity in material culture remains Bellarmino Bagatti, *The Church from the Circumcision: History and Archaeology of the Judaeo-Christians*, trans. Eugene Hoade (repr. ed.; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1984 [1971]). Bagatti's work has rightly been influential and seminal, but suffers from a number of problematic interpretations of the archaeological evidence, and is now somewhat dated. It should be read in light of the critique of the Bagatti-Testa school in Joan Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places: The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> Paula Fredriksen, "What Parting of the Ways?" in *The Ways that Never Parted*, ed. Adam H. Becker, and Annette Yoshiko Reed, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 61.

Judaism and Jewish practice thus far discussed points to a need for wider consideration of sources with relevance for the issue of the development of trajectories in the history of Jewish-Christian relations in this period. I suggest that we reach beyond the usual confines of the proto-Nicene sources and into the outlying regions of what the proto-Nicene sources considered to be heretical, into the regions of the demiurgic Christians.<sup>13</sup>

### **Demiurgic Christianity and Jewish-Christian Relations in Modern Scholarship**

Generally speaking, demiurgic forms of Christ-belief have tended to play a reduced role in the discussion surrounding the history of Jewish-Christian relations in antiquity. Although some works devoted to the history of Jewish-Christian relations in antiquity have at least a brief chapter dedicated to "Gnosticism,"<sup>14</sup> other survey volumes largely fail to treat the issue with depth, save for a few minor tangential references.<sup>15</sup> While some ground has certainly been gained since the turn of the millennium,<sup>16</sup> some work still remains to be

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<sup>13</sup> A brief note on the use of the term "Christian" and "Christianity" here: according to Justin, *Dialogue* 35, the demiurgists are both called and call themselves "Christian." Furthermore, as discussed below, "Christians" is also the self-identifying term used throughout the Gospel of Philip to refer to the group to which the author and intended audience belongs (cf. Heimola, *Christian Identity in the Gospel of Philip*, passim). Thereby, it seems best to refer to them as Christians rather than to invent a new term, since this is apparently what they were called, and what they called themselves, in antiquity. By "demiurgic Christianity," I mean the forms of Christianity that include belief in the Demiurge as a creator deity separate from the God proclaimed by Jesus, who is the "Father of All."

<sup>14</sup> For example, Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 195-221, and John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 160-173. Even in the case of Gager's work, the relevant chapter is actually specifically devoted to anti-Judaism in the proto-Nicene responses to Gnosticism.

<sup>15</sup> Notably, James Carleton Paget, *Jews, Christians and Jewish Christians in Antiquity*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), James D.G. Dunn, ed., *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), and Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> E.g., Birger A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity*, (Grand Rapids: Fortress Press, 2006); Carl B. Smith II, *No Longer Jews: The Search for Gnostic Origins*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004). See especially pp. 1-6 in this regard. Note, however, that Pearson is more concerned with Judaism and Gnostic origins than with the issue of Jewish-Christian relations in the second and third centuries. Smith, on the other hand, is concerned with relations between demiurgic Christ-believers and Jews in this period, as

done in order to bring the texts of the demiurgic Christ-believers into the scholarly discussion of the history of second- and third-century Jewish-Christian relations.

It is the purpose of this article to begin to map attitudes towards Judaism, Jewish practice, and Jewish tradition in the demiurgic texts amidst the diversity of opinions and attitudes expressed elsewhere by early Christ-believers toward the content of their inherited Jewish tradition. In so doing, I hope to draw attention to their voices within the spectrum of diverse opinion on this subject in the second and third centuries, and thus to expand the horizons of the scholarly discussion surrounding the historical reality and trajectories of Jewish-Christian relations in antiquity.

In order to approach this issue, two texts from the demiurgic tradition will be examined in light of their attitudes towards Judaism, Jewish practice, and the Jewish heritage of Christ-belief: Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora*, and the *Gospel of Philip*. Both of these texts have been associated with the Valentinian school.<sup>17</sup> The Valentinian tradition is of particular interest for our purposes because it appears that the Valentinians remained "within the fold," so to speak, of the mainstream church and did not separate from other Christ-believers.<sup>18</sup> Indeed,

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he sees the rise of Gnosticism as coinciding with and responding to the period of Jewish unrest in Egypt between 115 and 117 CE. However, despite the ground gained by his study, Smith is hesitant to treat the demiurgic texts themselves, due to the difficulties surrounding the dating of the Nag Hammadi texts, particularly their lack of historical references or allusions. He thus regards the Nag Hammadi codices as "less significant for the historical reconstruction of Gnosticism than are the works of the Christian heresiologists" (115).

<sup>17</sup> See n. 1 above. Further, see their classification in Ismo Dunderberg, "The School of Valentinus," in *A Companion to Second-Century Christian 'Heretics'*, ed. Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen, (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 64-99 (77-79, 88-91), and in Birger A. Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 160-161, 176-181. Moreover, Epiphanius, in his introduction to *Letter to Flora*, clearly regards Ptolemy as a Valentinian (*Pan.* 33.1.1).

<sup>18</sup> In the words of Dunderberg: "There is no evidence that Valentinus or any other Valentinian teacher was excommunicated in Rome in the second century" (Dunderberg, "The School of Valentinus," 95, and see also p. 72). Moreover, Victor, the Bishop of Rome from 189-199, had a Valentinian presbyter by the name of Florinus assisting him (cf. Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 385-396. Irenaeus also admits that previous attempts to refute the Valentinians had been unsuccessful, which is an indication of their continued presence within the church in his time (*Adv. Haer.* 4, Pref. 2). Indeed,

Tertullian even indicates that Valentinus himself was once a candidate for Bishop of Rome.<sup>19</sup> The Valentinian school of the second and third centuries thus probably represents a distinct mode of thought which existed within the body of the mainstream church,<sup>20</sup> and as a result, its opinions regarding Judaism and Jewish tradition have a particular claim to the ability to sit alongside those of the proto-Nicenes, and cannot be dismissed out of hand as "marginal."<sup>21</sup> As we will see, certain voices amongst the heterodox Christians of the second and third centuries express a somewhat positive attitude towards Judaism in comparison to the proto-orthodox texts briefly surveyed above.

### ***Letter to Flora and the Mosaic Law***

Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora* is concerned with the provenance and interpretation of the Mosaic Law. This makes it a good starting point for our discussion. We will begin with a brief descriptive overview of Ptolemy's position on the Jewish Law in order to highlight the aspects of the text that are most relevant to the topic at hand. We will then proceed with analysis and comparison with proto-orthodox texts in order to try to place it on the spectrum of Christian attitudes towards Judaism in the ante-Nicene period.

Ptolemy begins by describing two opposing views of the Mosaic Law which were held by Christians in his time. The first view is that the Law was ordained by God the Father,<sup>22</sup> which is the familiar view held by Jews, Jewish Christ-believers, and the proto-Nicene Gentile believers alike.<sup>23</sup> The second view is that the Law was ordained instead by "the adversary, the pernicious devil."<sup>24</sup>

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Epiphanius' comments that Valentinus was considered to possess some "piety and orthodox faith" (*Panarion*, 31) in Egypt and Rome indicates that the presence of Valentinianism within the mainstream church continued well into the fourth century.

<sup>19</sup> *Adv. Val.* 4.2. See Dunderberg, "The School of Valentinus," 72.

<sup>20</sup> Mainstream as opposed to, for example, the Marcionite church, which had decisively broken with the rest of the Christ-believers.

<sup>21</sup> Nor should they be, given the numerous known Valentinian teachers from this period. For a brief overview of these teachers, see Dunderberg, "The School of Valentinus," 76-83.

<sup>22</sup> *Pan.* 33.3.2.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Christoph Marksches, "New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus," *ZAC* 4 (2000): 225-254 (233-234).

<sup>24</sup> *Pan.* 33.3.2.

This is similar to the view of the Marcionites, and it has been suggested that Ptolemy is thus writing against the Marcionite view.<sup>25</sup>

However, there are some distinct differences here between what Ptolemy is arguing against and Marcion's beliefs.<sup>26</sup> Marcion considered the God of the Hebrew Bible to be distinct from Jesus' Father, and a lesser demiurgic creator,<sup>27</sup> but certainly did not see the Jewish scriptures as the product of the devil. In fact, Marcion held that there was truth in the Jewish scriptures, and even expected a Jewish Isaianic messiah to come who was distinct from Jesus.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, it is quite possible that Ptolemy had some Marcionite extremists in mind in saying this, insofar as Tertullian describes Marcion's creator God, the God of the Hebrew Bible, as an "evil" God, as opposed to the "good" God who is the Father of Jesus.<sup>29</sup> Whatever the case may be, it is clear that some Gnosticising forms of Christ-belief nevertheless saw the creation of the world as the work of the devil,<sup>30</sup> which would as a result allow for the Jewish creator God and his Law to be identified with the devil.

Ptolemy, however, rejects both of these interpretations. Because the Law is imperfect, it cannot belong to the perfect God,<sup>31</sup> but because it "abolishes injustice," it cannot have come from the devil either.<sup>32</sup> Ptolemy instead claims that the Pentateuchal Law comes from three sources: God, Moses, and the elders (*Pan.* 33:4.1-2). Ptolemy's logic that some of the Law comes from Moses is based upon the sayings of Jesus and states that some of the Mosaic Law is contrary to God's Law, on the basis that some of the Mosaic Law contradicts the words of

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<sup>25</sup> As held by, e.g., Sebastian Moll, *The Arch-Heretic Marcion* (WUNT 250; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2010), 16-17; 106-107; Uwe Kühneweg, *Das Neue Gesetz. Christus als Gesetzgeber und Gesetz: Studien zu den Anfängen christlicher Naturrechtslehre im 2. Jahrhundert* (Marburg: Elwert, 1993), 90.

<sup>26</sup> G. Quispel, "Le Lettre de Ptolémée à Flora," *Vigiliae Christianae* 2, no. 1 (1948): 28; cf. Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 87-90.

<sup>27</sup> On Marcion's two gods, see Tertullian, *Marc.* 1.2.

<sup>28</sup> *Marc.* 3.12., 3.6. See Heikki Räisänen, "Marcion," in *A Companion to Second-Century Christian 'Heretics'*, ed. Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen, (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 116-117.

<sup>29</sup> Tertullian, *Marc.* 1.2.

<sup>30</sup> Carpocrates and his followers come to mind in this regard. See *Adv. Haer.* 1.25. Cf. Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 134-135.

<sup>31</sup> *Pan.* 33.3.4.

<sup>32</sup> *Pan.* 33.3.5.



Jesus. For example, he quotes Matt 19:8 as proof that the Mosaic Law allowing divorce (Deut 24:1) contradicts the Law of God.<sup>33</sup> Notably, Ptolemy sees Moses as having created the Law out of necessity rather than his own inclination. The notion of Law given by the elders is similarly based upon a quotation from Matthew (15:4-5), and essentially echoes Jesus' rejection of the traditions of the elders in that passage.<sup>34</sup>

The Law which comes from God is itself divided into three subsections: (1) the pure, unmixed Law of God, which was imperfect but has been fulfilled by Christ;<sup>35</sup> (2) that portion of the law which is interwoven with injustice, which Christ has abolished;<sup>36</sup> and (3) those parts of the law which are purely symbolic and allegorical. For Ptolemy, the pure Law is confined to the Decalogue.<sup>37</sup> The law which is interwoven with injustice amounts essentially to those laws which involve retaliation, citing specifically Lev 24:17 and 20, laws of retaliation for murder and injury.<sup>38</sup> These laws are only interwoven with injustice insofar as the retaliator also commits injustice, but notably, he considers the law to still be just, except that it deviated due to "the weakness of those to whom it was ordained."<sup>39</sup> Finally, the symbolic law is largely that part of the law which deals with Jewish ethnic practices: offerings (meaning sacrifice, cf. 33:5.10), circumcision, the Sabbath, fasting, Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, etc.<sup>40</sup> For Ptolemy, these things were once to be physically manifested, but are now changed to be "images and allegories" since the "truth has been revealed," which refers presumably to the coming of Christ.<sup>41</sup> Sacrifice is understood in terms of spiritual praise and good deeds (33:5.10), circumcision is circumcision of the heart (33:5.11), and keeping the Sabbath means being inactive in wicked deeds (33:5.12).

Ptolemy's understanding of the Law in general is exemplified by his treatment of *lex talionis* (Lev 24:19-21). He considers *lex talionis* to have been abolished by Jesus, presumably in reference to the tradition preserved in Matt

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<sup>33</sup> *Pan.* 33.4.4-10. On this, see Quispel, "La Lettre de Ptolémée à Flora," 37-38.

<sup>34</sup> *Pan.* 33.4.11-13. Quispel has called this the weakest part of Ptolemy's argument, and I am inclined to agree, in "La Lettre de Ptolémée à Flora,"<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> *Pan.* 33.5.1.

<sup>36</sup> *Pan.* 33.5.1.

<sup>37</sup> *Pan.* 33.5.3.

<sup>38</sup> *Pan.* 33.5.4.

<sup>39</sup> *Pan.* 33.5.4-5.

<sup>40</sup> *Pan.* 33.5.8.

<sup>41</sup> *Pan.* 33.5.9.

5:38-42. It is, in Ptolemy's words, "intermingled with injustice," because it requires the second offender to repeat the original unjust act (33:5.4). Nevertheless, he insists that "this commandment [*lex talionis*] was and is just, though owing to the frailty of its recipients it was given in violation of the pure Law. But it is not in accord with the nature and goodness of the Father of all. It is perhaps appropriate, but is rather a matter of necessity" (33:5.5). This underscores the complexity of Ptolemy's approach to the Law. While he stops short of considering *lex talionis* to be in line with the goodness of God the Father of All, it is nevertheless just and appropriate as a matter of necessity due to human weakness. This sort of punishment, then, is meant to be preventive, and as Quispel has pointed out, a somewhat surprising recognition of the ancient Israelite conception of divine vengeance, a concept that is largely disregarded by Ptolemy's proto-orthodox contemporaries.<sup>42</sup> The result is a relatively nuanced perspective on even the aspects of the Law that Ptolemy regards as most problematic — *lex talionis* is neither good nor evil, but it is just.

Although Ptolemy does not consider the legislator-God, that is, the Demiurge who is the creator of the world, to be the highest deity, it is significant that he considers the legislator-God to be an intermediate between the high God (the Father of All) and the devil.<sup>43</sup> This legislator, the "Demiurge" (33:7.4) is neither good nor evil, but is instead characterized by justice (33:5.7).<sup>44</sup> As Giovanni Filoramo has put it, "for the Valentinians the Old Testament does not have to be rejected as the work of a blind, malevolent Demiurge."<sup>45</sup> The result of this is intriguing. Although Ptolemy does not see his form of Christ-belief as worship of the Jewish God, he has not cast their god in a particularly negative light, given the circumstances. While he has, on the one hand, essentially rejected the primacy of the Jewish God, he nonetheless still ascribes justice to the Jewish law and to its divine legislator.

Ptolemy's division of the Law of God into three categories is not without predecessors. Francis T. Fallon has quite rightly pointed out that Philo also considers the Decalogue to have come directly from God, as opposed to

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<sup>42</sup> Quispel, "Le Lettre de Ptolémée à Flora," 48.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Pan.* 33.7.3-4.

<sup>44</sup> On the mediating position of the Demiurge in *Letter to Flora*, see Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians"* (NHMS 60; Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2006), 119-121.

<sup>45</sup> Giovanni Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 118.

other laws which came through the prophets.<sup>46</sup> He gives the following passage as support:

This is all that need be said regarding the second five to complete our account of the ten oracles which God gave forth Himself as well befitted His holiness. For it was in accordance with His nature that the pronouncements in which the special laws were summed up should be given by Him in His own person, but the particular laws by the mouth of the most perfect of the prophets whom He selected for his merits and having filled him with the divine spirit, chose him to be the interpreter of his sacred utterances. Next let us pass on to give the reason why He expressed the ten words or laws in the form of simple commands or prohibitions without laying down any penalty, as is the way of legislators, against future transgressors. He was God, and it follows at once that as Lord He was good, the cause of good only and of nothing ill.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, Ptolemy's position that the Decalogue is in some way to be considered a purer form of revelation than the rest of the law is actually not a point of irreconcilable difference with Judaism, but is in fact a contact point.<sup>48</sup> We must note, nevertheless, some distance from the Judaism of Philo, in that Ptolemy's conclusion that there are two gods (God the Father of All, and the Demiurge) is completely alien to Philo. Thus, though it has some Jewish precedents in some respects, Ptolemy's approach to the Jewish Law still represents what we may call a non-Jewish position. That does not, however, necessarily mean that it is also anti-Jewish.

In *Letter to Flora*, Ptolemy grapples with the problem of what to do with a Law that he believes has been partly abolished by the Saviour, and that he believes to be mixed with elements that he considers problematic, while simultaneously recognizing that the Law abolishes evil (33:3.5), that Jesus came to fulfill it (33:5.1), and that Paul affirms its goodness (33:6.6; cf. Rom 7:12).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Francis T. Fallon, "The Law in Philo and Ptolemy," *Vigiliae Christianae* 30, no. 1 (1976), 48.

<sup>47</sup> Philo, *Dec.* 175-176.

<sup>48</sup> Note, however, that as Marksches points out, while the terminology and some elements of the thought on this matter in *Letter to Flora* originated in Jewish and Christian discussions, the specific solution that it presents belongs to Ptolemy ("New Research," 237).

<sup>49</sup> Here we must note, in accordance with Dunderberg, some distinct parallels in Ptolemy's thought to that of Marcion (*Beyond Gnosticism*, 88-89). It is clear that Ptolemy is nevertheless distinct from Marcion in many other respects, not the least of which is the

Strikingly, the belief that the Demiurge is the lawgiver provides Ptolemy with a solution to the problem of the relationship between Christ-belief and its Jewish heritage without needing to resort to anti-Judaism. He does not consider the Demiurge to be a malevolent being. To the contrary, the Demiurge is the arbiter of justice (33:7.5) and “the image of the better,” that is, of God the Father.<sup>50</sup> Thus, what we see in Ptolemy’s thought is a mediating course between the denigration of Christianity’s Jewish heritage (anti-Judaism) and full acceptance of Christian practice of the Law (Jewish Christianity).

It is worth noting which biblical texts apart from the Pentateuch that Ptolemy draws upon to make his case. In terms of New Testament texts, he frequently cites the Jesus tradition, as well as the writings of Paul. With the exception of the reference to John 1:3 in 33:3.6, Ptolemy’s references to the Jesus tradition are generally to the *Gospel of Matthew*.<sup>51</sup> This is probably because Matthew displays a particular interest in Jesus’ teachings on and about the Law (e.g., Matt 5:17-48), but Ptolemy’s reliance on a Jewish-Christian work like Matthew to make his point stands in stark contrast to the Marcionite canon, which included only an abbreviated version of the *Gospel of Luke*. Beyond the New Testament, Ptolemy makes reference to Plato’s *Timaeus* 28c3 (33:3.2), which is perhaps not entirely surprising given the relationship between

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fact that Ptolemy seems to recognize the Law’s religious value through allegorizing it, while Marcion does not (cf. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 89).

<sup>50</sup> Although it is not essential to the point being made here, it is worth noting that the relationship between the Demiurge and the Saviour (as well as, to a lesser extent, God the Father of All) in *Letter to Flora* has recently been the topic of some scholarly discussion and debate. See, for example, Christoph Marksches, “Individuality in Some Gnostic Authors: With a few remarks on the interpretation of Ptolemaeus, Epistula ad Floram,” *ZAC* 15 (2011): 411-430 (427-430); and Herbert Schmid, “Ist der Soter in der Epistula ad Floram der Demiurg?,” *ZAC* 15 (2011): 249-271; Tomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 122-124. This is driven in part by the fact that Ptolemy’s reference to the idea expressed in John 1:3 that the creation of the world belongs to the Saviour and that all things came into being through him raises questions about the relationship between the Demiurge, who is the creator deity, and the Saviour. Interestingly, this same passage, John 1:3, and its relevance for the issue of the relationship between Jesus and the Demiurge, is addressed by Heracleon, who holds that “All things were made through him” means that it was the Word who caused the Demiurge to make the world (Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 2.8).

<sup>51</sup> As noted by Dunderberg, Ptolemy appears to have accepted the authority of the Gospel of Matthew and Ephesians, both of which were rejected by Marcion (*Beyond Gnosticism*, 89).

Ptolemy's demiurgic Christ-belief and Platonism.<sup>52</sup> More interesting for our purposes is Ptolemy's citation of Isaiah 29:13 (33:4.13). He employs this quotation from Isaiah as a critique of the mixture of the traditions of the elders with the Law (33:4.11-12). The use of other Jewish scripture (here Isaiah from the *Nevi'im*) in order to critique the Law in this manner is striking. It is a very clear indication that Ptolemy has not rejected Jewish scripture wholesale, and that he presumably ascribes some value to the prophetic books.

We may draw a few conclusions from the discussion thus far. *Letter to Flora* exhibits a Gentile Christian tendency to keep away from "Judaizing" and from observance of the Jewish Law in the way that Jews traditionally observe it. However, it accomplishes this without denigrating Judaism or the Mosaic Law. Ptolemy attributes the Mosaic Law as a whole to the Demiurge rather than to God the Father of All (3:7.3-4), and concludes that the Law is not worthless, nor that it is evil, as it might be if it had come from the devil. Rather, it is *just* (33:7.5), though Ptolemy does not think that this means that it necessarily reflects the goodness and nature of God the Father of All himself (33:5.5).

### **Comparing Ptolemy and Barnabas: *Letter to Flora* in Context**

Ptolemy's symbolic reinterpretation of laws pertaining to ethnic Jewish practice is quite comparable to Barnabas' allegorical interpretation of many of those same practices. For instance, in *Barn.* 2:6, sacrifice is considered abolished, and is replaced instead with contrite worship in 2:10, in accordance with Ps 51:17. Another close point of contact is the interpretation of circumcision as circumcision of the heart (*Barn.* 9:3-5). Note, however, that for Barnabas, physical circumcision was taught by an evil angel (9:3), a concept which is nowhere present in *Letter to Flora*. In fact, William Horbury has convincingly argued that Barnabas' theory of the law is actually a theory of the Jewish way of life meant to expose Jewish practice as demonic illusion, thereby validating Christian practice.<sup>53</sup>

Such demonizing polemic is found nowhere in *Letter to Flora*, which explicitly states that the Law did not come from the devil (33:3.5). Even when Ptolemy considers law to be mixed with injustice, he sees this as coming about as a result of human weakness (33:5.5). Although both *Barnabas* and Ptolemy have espoused allegorical interpretations of the Law in order to justify the practice of

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<sup>52</sup> On this, see Winrich Löhr, "Christian Gnostics and Greek Philosophy in the Second Century," *EC* 3 (2012): 349-377 (358-359); Marksches, "New Research," 234-235.

<sup>53</sup> Horbury, "Jewish-Christian Relations in *Barnabas* and Justin Martyr," 331-332.

non-Jewish Christ-belief,<sup>54</sup> Ptolemy manages to do so without demonizing Jewish practice (contra *Barn.* 9:3) and without betraying or espousing any anti-Jewish paranoia pertaining to assimilation to Judaism.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Ptolemy does not degrade Moses, the Jewish lawmaker, but instead portrays him as allowing concessions, such as divorce, because of human weakness (33:4.8).<sup>56</sup> Moses' intention was thus necessary in order to prevent destruction (33:4.6-7). In fact, nowhere is there any explicit ill-will towards the Jewish people themselves to be found anywhere within the *Letter to Flora*. Ptolemy is thus able to reinterpret the Mosaic Law in a way that legitimizes non-Jewish practice and makes sense of the Law without resorting to outright anti-Judaism. His interpretation is, as we have noted, non-Jewish, but it remains a step removed from the full-blown anti-Judaism seen in some of the proto-orthodox texts discussed above.

It is important to note which aspects of the Law are allegorized in *Letter to Flora*. The laws that Ptolemy considers to be allegorical include the sacrificial laws, circumcision, the Sabbath, fasting, and the laws pertaining to Jewish festivals. These laws are the ethnic boundary marker laws, which in antiquity distinguished Jews from non-Jews. Ptolemy's allegorical approach allows him to affirm these aspects of the Law while also not holding that they must be practiced by Christians in the way that Jews practice them.

### **Attitudes Towards Jews and Judaism in the *Gospel of Philip***

The *Gospel of Philip* is of particular interest for our purposes as it contains several references to "Hebrews" as well as to "Jews," discusses the Jewish practice of circumcision, and contains discussion of Hebrew terms. Let us begin with the references to "Hebrews" and "Jews." Consider the following references:

A Hebrew makes another Hebrew, and such a person is called "proselyte." But a proselyte does not make another proselyte. (*Gos. Phil.* 51:29-30).

When we were Hebrews we were orphans and had only our mother, but when we became Christians we had both father and mother. (52:21-24).

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Horbury, "Jewish-Christian Relations in *Barnabas* and Justin Martyr," 335.

<sup>55</sup> *Barn.* 3:6, cf. Horbury, "Jewish-Christian Relations in *Barnabas* and Justin Martyr," 323.

<sup>56</sup> On this, see Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 81-82.

Some said, "Mary conceived by the holy spirit." They are in error. They do not know what they are saying. When did a woman ever conceive by a woman? Mary is the virgin whom no power defiled. She is a great anathema to the Hebrews, who are the apostles and [the] apostolic men. This virgin whom no power defiled... (55:24-32).

He who has received something other than the lord is still a Hebrew. (62:5-6).

If you say, "I am a Jew," no one will be moved. If you say, "I am a Roman," no one will be disturbed. If you say, "I am a Greek, a barbarian, a slave, [a] free man," no one will be troubled. [If] you [say], "I am a Christian," the [...] will tremble. (62:26-32).

No Jew [...] has existed. And [...] from the Jews. [...] Christians, [...] these [...] are referred to as "the chosen people of [...]" and "the true man" and "the son of man" and "the seed of the son of man." This true race is renowned in the world... (75:29-76:4).

### **Defining "Hebrew" in the *Gospel of Philip***

This data immediately raises questions concerning the identity of the "Hebrews." Is the author referring to literal, ethnic Hebrews (that is, Jews), or to something else? At the very least, we can say for sure that "Hebrew" is differentiated from "Christian," and that the two function as out- and in-group language, respectively.

Jeffrey Siker considers the term "Hebrew" in the *Gospel of Philip* to refer to "non-Gnostic Christians."<sup>57</sup> He makes his case primarily on the basis of two premises. First, he interprets the reference to the "Hebrews," who are "the apostolic men" of 55:30-31, to refer to non-Gnostic Christians.<sup>58</sup> Second, because *Gos. Phil.* refers on two occasions to "Jews," Siker concludes that

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<sup>57</sup> Jeffrey S. Siker, "Gnostic Views on Jews and Christians in The *Gospel of Philip*," *Novum Testamentum* 31, no. 3 (1989): 275-288 (277).

<sup>58</sup> Siker, "Gnostic Views," 277.

“Hebrew” must refer to something else, which he has already determined to be non-Gnostic Christians on the basis of 55:30-31.<sup>59</sup>

The second of Siker’s arguments is overstated, since it excludes the possibility that the author could have used both terms synonymously, or that “Jew” is used by the author to refer specifically to ethnicity, while “Hebrew” could refer to anyone espousing Jewish religious practice, including proselytes (cf. 51:29-30). That “Jew” is specifically used to refer to ethnicity is likely, given the context of the two occurrences of this term, since both occurrences appear in contexts specifically discussing race or ethnicity. In 62:26-32, the word appears immediately alongside the terms “Greek” and “Roman,” while in the fragmentary passage of 75:29-76:4, race and election appear to be the issues at hand.

Siker’s identification of “Hebrews” with “non-Gnostic Christians” has met some resistance. Stephen Wilson rightly observes that, in order to understand the use of the term “Hebrew,” it must be asked why the term was chosen in the first place.<sup>60</sup> He suggests that it points to the Jewishness of the referents in a particular sense beyond a simple retention of a positive attitude towards the Jewish God and scripture. Wilson lists five attributes of the Hebrews of *Gos. Phil.* on the basis of the internal evidence of the passages listed above: (1) they make proselytes, (2) they have only one parent, (3) they reject the Virgin Mary, (4) they fail to receive the Lord, and (5) it is implied that the author was once a Hebrew.<sup>61</sup> Although the reference to “apostolic men” in 55:30-31 seems to implicate Jewish-Christians, he notes that (non-Christian) Jews rejected the virgin birth. Moreover, if the “father” of 52:22 is taken to be Christ, whose coming is mentioned in the preceding sentence, then it would follow that those coming before the coming of Christ with only a mother would be Jews.<sup>62</sup> Ismo Dunderberg likewise regards Siker’s hypothesis as unsatisfactory on the basis of 55:27-30, because it is hard to see how non-Gnostic Christians as a whole can be identified as those cursing the virgin Mary.<sup>63</sup> Dunderberg suggests instead that the term “Hebrews” should be taken to refer to some Jewish-Christian groups, especially those who did not believe in the virgin birth.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Siker, “Gnostic Views,” 277-278.

<sup>60</sup> Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 201.

<sup>61</sup> Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 201.

<sup>62</sup> Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 201.

<sup>63</sup> Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 266-267.

<sup>64</sup> Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 267.



The considerable critiques of Siker's hypothesis described above lead me to conclude that, at the very least, the author's use of the term "Hebrews" is somewhat more complex than Siker allows. The term "Hebrew" is generally an ethno-racial term that might naturally be taken to refer to Jews or practitioners of Judaism.<sup>65</sup> While the particular usage of the term in *Gos. Phil.* may be more complex than that, it nevertheless begs the question as to why the author of *Gos. Phil.* would choose such a term in the first place. In other words, the fact that the author calls this particular group "Hebrews" at all is a datum worth considering. However, while Wilson is correct to point out that Jews rejected the virgin birth,<sup>66</sup> the reference to the "apostolic men" in 55:30-31 needs satisfactory explanation. This passage makes it problematic to simply identify the "Hebrews" as Jews in general, and points to a more complicated usage.

Could "apostles" and "apostolic men" refer to the apostles themselves, who were Jews? To be sure, the apostles' blindness to deeper truths and their misunderstanding of the identity of Jesus is a characteristic feature of "Gnostic" and "proto-Gnostic" tradition. Such ideas appear, for example, in *Gos. Thom.* 13, and *Gos. Mar.* 17:10-22. The blindness of the apostles also appears elsewhere within *Gos. Phil.*, at 64:1-9. Moreover, the word "apostle" is used referring to Philip, one of the Twelve in 73:8. Nevertheless, the situation is perhaps more complicated still. It is hard to read *all* of the passages listed above containing the term "Hebrews" as though they refer to the apostles. A mediating answer must be sought. It seems to be the case, based on the reference to the "apostles" and "apostolic men," that there is something distinctly *Christian* about this group. It has been suggested that, if the term "Hebrews" itself indicates that there is something *Jewish* about this group as well, then it might stand to reason that "Hebrews" refers to Jewish Christians.<sup>67</sup> If so, the polemic of these passages would be an intra-Christian polemic. When we take 52:21-24 into account, if "Hebrew" refers to a Jewish Christian, then the author and his audience would presumably identify as former Jewish Christians, a prospect which is both possible and intriguing but not entirely likely. When taken along with 62:5, it would rather seem as though "Hebrew" is a title that implies "incompleteness or

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<sup>65</sup> See Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 130.

<sup>66</sup> Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 201.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 267; Graham Harvey, *The True Israel: Uses of the Names Jew, Hebrew, and Israel in Ancient Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2001 [1996]), 142.

non-transformation,”<sup>68</sup> which might be applied to either non-Gnostic Christians in general, regardless of ethnic heritage, or to non-Christian Jews.

The notion that “Hebrews” in *Gos. Phil.* refers to Jewish Christians is tantalizing, since it would offer us a window into discourse, polemic, and relations between Jewish Christians and demiurgic Christians. Moreover, the author seems to imply that they and their intended audience were once “Hebrews” (52:21-24), which would indicate that they were Jewish Christians who converted to demiurgic (“Valentinian”) Christianity. However, *Gos. Phil.*, 62:5-6, which states that, “He who has received something other than the lord is still a Hebrew,” is difficult to comprehend if by “Hebrew” the author means “Jewish Christian.” This statement comes in the context of a discussion of faith as receiving and love as giving (61:36-62:6). The “lord” in this passage is clearly Jesus, as the discussion of the three names of the lord (“Jesus, the Nazorean, the Christ”) in 62:7-17 makes clear. In my opinion, if receiving the lord means believing in Jesus, then it is hard to see how not believing in Jesus makes one a “Hebrew” if a “Hebrew” is a Jewish *Christian*.

A nuanced understanding of the matter at hand has been presented by Hugo Lundhaug, who takes the term “Hebrew” to refer generally to Jews (so Wilson) in accordance with the various discussions of Jewish practices, such as sacrifice (54:36-55:5; 62:35-63:4), and circumcision (82:26, see below), but also recognizes that the apparently anti-Jewish polemic of *Gos. Phil.* is not exclusively nor primarily directed against Jews themselves.<sup>69</sup> Rather, “the text’s explicit references to Jews and Judaism may easily have been read as simultaneously associating contemporary inner-Christian opponents with the practices and beliefs of the Jews, with all the negative implications entailed by such an identification.”<sup>70</sup> Thus, the apparent anti-Judaism of *Gos. Phil.*’s criticism of “Hebrews” is actually primarily meant to be wielded against other Christians. In my opinion, this approach makes the best sense of the most data, as it is able to account for the anti-Jewish aspects of *Gos. Phil.*’s rhetoric, while also grappling

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<sup>68</sup> Gerald Leo Borchert, “An Analysis of the Literary Arrangement and Theological Views in the Coptic Gnostic *Gospel of Philip*,” (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1967), 182.

<sup>69</sup> Hugo Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis on the Soul* (NHMS 73; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 385-394. See also Matthew Twigg, “Esoteric Discourse and the Jerusalem Temple in the *Gospel of Philip*,” *Aries* 15 (2015): 47-80 (63-64, esp. n. 61).

<sup>70</sup> Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 393.

with the fact that some form of intra-Christian discourse seems to undergird the whole endeavour.

### **The Gospel of Philip and Judaism**

What can we determine about the attitude towards Jews and Judaism expressed in the *Gospel of Philip*? The matter is strikingly complex. It is an overstatement to suggest, as Isenberg has, that the *Gospel of Philip* "does not engage in any rhetorical invective against the Jews."<sup>71</sup> Jews and Jewishness function as out-group signifiers, and association with Jewishness (being a "Hebrew") is used as a means of criticism in intra-Christian discourse.<sup>72</sup> We should note, however, that there is a remarkable fluidity between the categories of "Hebrew" and "Christian,"<sup>73</sup> as a "Hebrew" can become a "Christian" (52:21-24) by receiving "the lord" (62:5-6). Furthermore, there is the matter of the "when we were Hebrews" passage in 52:21-24, which implies that the author and their audience were "Hebrews" but are now "Christians." The dichotomy between "Hebrew" and "Christian" here is noteworthy, as a "Hebrew" is clearly distinguished from a "Christian." Moreover, "Hebrews" are orphans with only a mother and no father, while "Christians" have both, implying a superior status for "Christians" over Hebrews. Nevertheless, the fluidity between the two categories is noteworthy, as "Hebrews" become "Christians."<sup>74</sup>

How should this passage be interpreted, and what does it mean for the study of Jewish-Christian relations? It is my opinion that this passage acknowledges Christianity's Jewish heritage. Directly preceding the "when we were Hebrews" statement in 52:21-24, in 52:19-20, the author writes, "Since Christ came the world has been created, the cities adorned, the dead carried out." The point seems to be that, prior to the coming of Christ, the authorial "we" were "Hebrews," but when Christ came, "we became Christians." Christ, it seems, is the "father" of 52:24. Thus, in saying "when we were Hebrews" the author is referring to a time before Christ had come, and thus to the Jewish roots

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<sup>71</sup> Wesley W. Isenberg, "The Coptic Gospel According to Philip," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1968), 193.

<sup>72</sup> On identity formation and out-group language in the *Gospel of Philip* in general, see Minna Heimola, *Christian Identity in the Gospel of Philip*, (Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 102; Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2011).

<sup>73</sup> Buell, *Why This New Race*, 130.

<sup>74</sup> On faith and ethno-racial identity in this passage, see Buell, *Why This New Race*, 132-133.

of Christianity, but now that Christ has come, they and their audience are “Christians” and no longer “Hebrews.”

For the *Gospel of Philip*, the difference between a “Hebrew” and a “Christian” amounts essentially to the reception of Christ. What the author is communicating is that, in their view, prior to the coming of Christ, there were no “Christians,” though there were “Hebrews.” Thus, Christianity did not exist prior to the coming of Christ, but Judaism did. In the author’s worldview, “Hebrews” precede “Christians,” but “Christians” supersede “Hebrews.”

The author places Judaism in an inferior position to Christianity, but nevertheless recognizes the Jewish heritage of Christianity and accords some value to Judaism by recognizing that “Hebrews” at least have a “mother.” Christianity, as conceived by the author, supersedes Judaism not by denigrating it or destroying it, but by making it complete with the addition of a father, who is Christ. While having Christ, and thus two parents, is understood by the author to be preferable to being an orphan with only a mother, it is nevertheless the case that having any parent at all is preferable to having none whatsoever. This accords some value to the status of Jews, albeit an inferior one to that of Christians. Certainly, this status is preferable to that of Gentiles, who, according to the author, have never even lived at all (52:16).

A hierarchy thus emerges in the *Gospel of Philip*, with the Christian on the top, the Jew beneath the Christian, and the Gentile at the bottom. It should go without saying that an adherent of any given tradition will naturally accord one’s own tradition the pride of place. We cannot, in other words, expect the author to see Judaism as superior or equal to his own tradition. The fact that any value at all is accorded to Judaism, as opposed to polemic or negative statements, is relatively positive, though backhandedly so, when compared with the negative assessment or lack of value assigned to Judaism and Jewish practice by *Barnabas* and Melito’s *Peri Pascha*. Perhaps most striking of all is the fact that the author and their audience appear to identify with pre-Christian Judaism, in metaphorically speaking of previously being “Hebrews” before Christ came.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> It is worth noting that the author says “when we were Hebrews,” not “when we were Jews,” and that both “Hebrew” and “Jew” appear within the *Gospel of Philip*. Whereas it seems that the author uses “Jew” to refer specifically to issues pertaining to ethnic Jews, “Hebrew” has much broader usage. It is out-group language used to refer to those in a pre-“Christian” state, primarily in the sense of historical “Hebrews” (that is, Jews and literal Hebrews prior to the coming of Christ), contemporary Jews, or Christians belonging to sects other than that of the author. On the use of “Hebrew” as opposed to

Although "Hebrew" functions generally as out-group language in the Gospel of Philip, the "when we were Hebrews" statement nevertheless recognizes Christianity's Jewish heritage and indicates some continuity and identification with pre-Christian Judaism.

A good point of comparison, also in the Valentinian tradition, to what we see in the *Gospel of Philip* can be found in the extant fragments of Heracleon's writings on the *Gospel of John* preserved by Origen. In his interpretation of John 4:21, Heracleon writes, "The mountain is the creation which the Gentiles worship, but Jerusalem is the creator whom the Jews serve. You then who are spiritual should worship neither the creation nor the Craftsman, but the Father of Truth" (Origen, *Comm. Jo.*, 13.96). The same ascending hierarchy seen in the *Gospel of Philip* seems present here. Gentiles worship the created order, Jews worship the creator, but "spiritual" Christians should worship the Father of Truth. Both Gentiles and Jews are mistaken, but Jews can at least recognize the work of the creator (the Demiurge), while Gentiles "serve wood and stone" (Origen, *Comm. Jo.*, 13.104). Moreover, Heracleon accords some status to Jews in commenting on John 4:22, saying "salvation and the Word proceeded from that race [Jews] into the world" and that "salvation has come about from the Jews," because Heracleon considers them to be "images of those who are in the Fullness" (Origen, *Comm. Jo.*, 13.115). Of course, Heracleon considers anyone who worships the creator (the Demiurge) to be in error (Origen, *Comm. Jo.*, 13.117), but nevertheless, there is a status and value conferred upon Judaism that is not accorded to Gentile religion.

This tripartite distinction is related to the Valentinian tripartite division of *hylics*, *psychics*, and the *spiritual*.<sup>76</sup> By associating Gentiles polytheists with the material (*hylics*), Jews with the *psychic*, and Christians with the *spiritual*, Jews are accorded some special distinction from Gentile polytheists, but are nevertheless situated below Christians.<sup>77</sup> Thus, the perspective on Judaism that emerges is somewhat positive relative to Gentile polytheism, but it is still considered to be inferior relative to Christianity. It is worth noting that Heracleon's distinction between Gentiles, Jews, and Christians is made primarily on the basis of his demiurgic belief. The separation between Gentiles and Jews

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"Jew" in the *Gospel of Philip* and in other early Christian texts, see Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 185-187; Harvey, *True Israel*, 129-143 (esp. 142-143).

<sup>76</sup> On this, see Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 141-142, 177. A similar division involving the triad of Gentiles, Jews, and Christians can also be found in the *Tripartite Tractate*.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. also *Tripartite Tractate* 109.24-113.1.

comes as a result of Jews' recognition of the work of the Demiurge, and thus, Jews worship the creator while Gentiles worship the created, according Jews a higher place. Similarly, the division between Christians and Jews comes about because Christians worship the Father of Truth, while Jews only worship the creator, the Demiurge. Thus, both the special recognition accorded to Jews over Gentile polytheists, as well as the author's belief in the superiority of Christianity, are rooted in and enabled by the Valentinian system.

### **Elements of Jewish Culture and Language in the *Gospel of Philip***

The *Gospel of Philip* utilizes and comments on elements of Jewish culture and practice in some interesting and surprising ways. One of the most notable examples is its interpretation of Abraham's circumcision: "When Abraham [...] that he was to see what he was to see, [he circumcised] the flesh of the foreskin, teaching us that it is proper to destroy the flesh" (82:26-29). The interpretive method of this passage seems to be to see Abraham's circumcision as undertaken in response to something that he learned that he would see, which should most likely be taken to be Christ.<sup>78</sup>

Siker considers this passage to be an "implicit critique of Judaism by using an Old Testament hero such as Abraham to bear witness to Christ from a gnostic perspective."<sup>79</sup> Perhaps, but I would offer what I consider to be a more nuanced perspective. In my opinion, what we see here is a reinterpretation of Jewish scripture pertaining specifically to Jewish ethnic practice, which seeks to validate non-Jewish practice while still retaining a connection to the Jewish scriptural heritage, much akin to what we have already seen in *Letter to Flora*. While this cannot be called "anti-Jewish" in the sense that it does not *critique* Jews or Judaism, it is nonetheless a method for validating the *rejection* of the Jewish ethnic practice of circumcision. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that Abraham, a figure closely associated with the Jewish covenant, is able to teach an important lesson here for "Christians" (as conceived by the author) about the fleshly giving way to the spiritual *through the act of circumcision*.<sup>80</sup>

Certain features of the *Gospel of Philip* indicate some contact with Judaism and Jewish culture, not least its puzzling fascination with the Hebrew language. On a few occasions, *Gos. Phil.* displays an interest in etymology,

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<sup>78</sup> Siker, "Jews and Christians in the *Gospel of Philip*," 282.

<sup>79</sup> Siker, "Jews and Christians in the *Gospel of Philip*," 282-283.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Jeffrey S. Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 153.

particularly in Hebrew and Syriac.<sup>81</sup> Although much has been made of the text's interest in Syriac words, particularly as this pertains to the dating and location of the text,<sup>82</sup> less has been made of the equally intriguing interest in the Hebrew language that the text demonstrates on at least two occasions. In 62:7-17, we read that the prior apostles had the following names for the saviour: "Jesus, the Nazorean, Messiah," and the text proceeds to discuss the Hebrew meaning of those words with varying veracity.<sup>83</sup> Elsewhere (60:10-15), there appears to be a Hebrew play on words based on the terms "Echmoth" and "Echamoth":

"Echamoth is one thing and Echmoth another. Echamoth is Wisdom simply, but Echmoth is the Wisdom of death which is the one which knows death, which is called the little Wisdom."

It is clear here that a play on words here is being made upon the Hebrew word for "wisdom," חֵכְמָה, and the Hebrew word meaning "death," מוֹת.<sup>84</sup>

It is difficult to determine what to make of this fascination with Hebrew. At the very least, it indicates some measure of contact and fascination with Jews and Jewish culture. Given the author's limited, probably second-hand knowledge of Hebrew, the use of Hebrew words does not necessarily lend credence to the theory that the community behind the Gospel of Philip is made up of former Jews.<sup>85</sup> It does seem, however, that the author not only had some contact with Jews and Jewish culture, but moreover, that the author saw some value in it. The etymological discussions in which the author engages may indicate some belief in the magical power of the Hebrew words, or at least, some

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<sup>81</sup> For an example of a discussion of Syriac etymology, see 56:3-15. For Hebrew, see 62:7-17.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, Siker, "Jews and Christians in the *Gospel of Philip*," 285-286, Foster, "The *Gospel of Philip*," 418, and Isenberg, "The *Gospel of Philip*," 141. However, Bas van Os has convincingly demonstrated that the use of Syriac words by no means indicates a Syrian origin for the text. See Bas van Os, "Was the *Gospel of Philip* written in Syria?," *Apocrypha* 17 (2006): 87-93.

<sup>83</sup> The meaning of "Jesus," from יֵשׁוּעַ is fairly accurate, as is the interpretation of מְשִׁיחַ as "Christ." The interpretation of "Nazarene" as "the truth," however, is puzzling. This is a strong indication that the author does not have good working knowledge of Hebrew or Aramaic. It is likely that any knowledge of Hebrew or Aramaic terms are second-hand, and as van Os writes, "neither speaker nor audience had enough knowledge of Aramaic and Hebrew to correct minor mistakes" (van Os, "Was the *Gospel of Philip* Written in Syria?," 93).

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1987), 336.

<sup>85</sup> As held by Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 201.

recognition of esoteric truth to be found in understanding the etymology of Hebrew words that are significant to the author's religious tradition. The author only makes something of these words because they see some value in their Hebrew roots.

All things considered, the *Gospel of Philip* is an interesting case to consider with regard to the issue of its attitudes towards Jews and Jewish practice. As I understand it, this text is written by a Gentile Valentinian Christian for other Gentile Valentinian Christians. However, the author accords some value to Jews and Judaism, especially in relation to Gentiles, but unsurprisingly grants higher value to Christians. This tripartite division of Gentiles, Jews, and Christians (in that order) is, as we have seen, a trend in Valentinianism witnessed also by Heracleon and the *Tripartite Tractate*, which is enabled by belief in the Demiurge. Moreover, the author of the *Gospel of Philip* recognizes the Jewish roots of Christianity and indicates some contact with Judaism through its fascination with the Hebrew language and through the use of the term "Hebrews."

On the other hand, it very clearly uses "Hebrews" as out-group language, and regards Christianity as superior to Judaism. Moreover, it follows the pattern seen in *Barnabas* and *Letter to Flora* of non-literal reinterpretation of Jewish scripture in order to validate a rejection of Jewish practice, though it manages to do so without actually denigrating Judaism and while still recognizing the importance of Abraham and of circumcision. On the whole, while we cannot claim that the *Gospel of Philip* has an entirely positive attitude towards Judaism, if we think about Christian attitudes towards Judaism as a sliding scale, then the *Gospel of Philip* seems to regard Judaism in a more positive light than we have seen in the proto-orthodox texts discussed above, though its author is perhaps not quite as positive in their outlook towards Judaism as Ptolemy.

### **Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Research**

Our examination of *Letter to Flora* and the *Gospel of Philip* has allowed us to place the attitudes of these Valentinian texts towards Judaism and Jewish practice alongside the proto-Nicene texts of the second and third centuries. Our findings have revealed a major point of similarity between the Valentinian texts and the *Epistle of Barnabas* in the strategy of allegorizing the Jewish scriptures in order to validate non-observance of Jewish ethnic practice. Both *Letter to Flora* and the *Gospel of Philip* reject Jewish practice. However, in both cases, Jewish tradition is accorded some value, even if its practices and its God are ultimately rejected. When we place these texts alongside other Valentinian texts such as the



fragments of *Heracleon* or the *Tripartite Tractate*, we see that the belief that the Demiurge is the creator God of Judaism allows for the Valentinians to place Judaism above Gentile polytheism, and to affirm its value in recognition of Christianity's Jewish heritage while simultaneously maintaining the superiority of Christianity over Judaism without resorting to the sort of outright anti-Judaism espoused by some of the proto-orthodox texts that we have surveyed.

This is not to say that the Valentinians had an overall positive attitude towards Judaism; this is far from the case. They clearly regarded Judaism as inferior to Christianity. Ptolemy, though viewing the Jewish God as a God of justice, still saw the God of Judaism as being inferior to his own. The tripartite division of Christians, Jews, and Gentile polytheists in *Gos. Phil.*, *Heracleon*, and the *Tripartite Tractate* evinces a similar view of Judaism's inferiority to Christianity, despite acknowledging its superiority over Gentile polytheism. In the *Gospel of Philip*, Judaism is viewed as something incomplete, as "Hebrews" are like orphans with a mother but without a father, while "Christians" have both a father and a mother. The use of "Hebrew" as out-group language should probably be regarded as a low-level expression of anti-Judaism. However, it is not the case that the Valentinian attitude towards Jews and Judaism can be described as wholly negative. For the Valentinians, Jewish tradition and Judaism is inferior to Christ-belief, but it is not worthless.

When we reflect on the fact that Valentinianism considers the Jewish God to be an inferior deity, the fact that *Letter to Flora* and the *Gospel of Philip* display lower levels of anti-Judaism is surprising when contrasted with the higher levels of anti-Judaism of some proto-orthodox authors who consider the Jewish God to be identical to the God of Christianity. On the other hand, Ptolemy and the author of the *Gospel of Philip's* assertions of the superiority of their tradition over Judaism are entirely unsurprising. These texts represent creative and relatively diplomatic manners of dealing with their tradition's Jewish heritage while nonetheless claiming the superiority of Christ-belief over Judaism and validating their rejection of Jewish legal practice and even the Jewish God. The juxtaposition of their voices alongside those of the more commonly examined proto-orthodox stream of thought adds some particularly vibrant colours to the spectrum of Christian opinions regarding Jews and Judaism in antiquity.

The conclusions drawn from this study serve to help expand current discussions about Jewish-Christian relations, especially concerning early Christian responses to Christianity's Jewish content and heritage by considering early Christian attitudes towards Judaism as a broad spectrum, and mapping some of the Valentinian texts and authors on that spectrum. By taking this

approach, rather than trying to develop a general overview of the “Gnostic” stance on Judaism, I hope to have avoided the pitfalls of overgeneralization and of pigeonholing. There is, however, much more work to be done in terms of mapping more texts and authors on that spectrum, especially those coming from the “heterodox” quarters of early Christianity. It is my hope that future research will continue to explore the complexity of the spectrum of Christian responses to Judaism in heterodox texts in order to fully grasp the breadth of Christian thought on Judaism and Jewish-Christian relations in the pre-Nicene period. Placing points on the spectrum that have previously been underconsidered will inevitably help to draw out the nuances of Jewish-Christian relations in the first three centuries.