Brothers or Rivals? Disagreements between the Judaic and the Christian communities in Tertullian's *Adversus Iudaeos*

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Die gemeinsame Herkunft des Christentums und des Judentums kann nicht in Frage gestellt werden. Das Christentum, das am Anfang von den Zeitgenossen als eine jüdische Sekte betrachtet worden war, wurde zu einer neuen Religion, zu derer Anhängern immer mehr Personen aus der Reihe der „Heiden", die nichts mit der jüdischen Tradition und Religion zu tun hatten, hinzukamen. Die Unterschiede zwischen den christlichen und jüdischen Gemeinschaften endeten oft mit gegenseitigen Vorwürfen und Anklagen. Indessen war die christliche Gemeinschaft oft dazu gezwungen, um sich vor diesen Anklagen zu schützen und zu beweisen, dass das Christentum eine messianische Religion sei, die von Gott, dem Vater selbst versprochen wurde. Tertullian (160?- nach 220) ist einer der lateinischen Predigern, die durch ihren Diskurs die göttliche Herkunft und den Primat der christlichen Religion zu beweisen versuchten, und somit die polemische jüdische Rhetorik verärgerten. In Adversus Iudaeos von Tertullian erscheint die Typologie der Brüder (die Juden und die Christen), die sich in der Erbschaft der göttlichen Versprechen unterscheiden.

Schlüsselwörter: Tertullian, Adversus Iudaeos, Antijudaismus.

The Judaic origins of Christianity cannot be called into question. Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, was born and raised in a Judaic family, and later on, he would preach the Lord's gospel among the Jews. Belonging to the Judaic community, he lived his life according to the laws and religious traditions of that community, being observant of its traditional rituals, participating in the religious festivities and in the official prayers held in churches or synagogues. Nevertheless, he was, at the same time, a harsh critic of those traditions from the very beginning, deprecating those practices which, in his view, were only diminishing the depth, personal aspect and vitality of one's relation to God (Cassarini 2003: 146.). Throghout the Gospel of Matthew one can observe both Jesus' attachment to the Jewish community and his strong critical attitude towards that attachment (*Mt. 7*). Moreover, Matthew, the apostole also presents the way Jesus' mission extended and came to fruition, in line with the process of his message – first being spread only among the Jews – later on becoming universal (*Mt. 28–30*). Harmonious as the relation between Jesus Christ and the Judaic community may have been at first,

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in time minor ruptures appeared which gradually became deeper, eventually leading to a complete rejection on the part of the Jews. In the *Acts of the Apostoles*, starting from the 12th chapter, this change appears in the form of a shift from the emphasis on Judeo-Christianity and aposlte Peter to concentrating on the heathen converted to Christianity and apostle Paul. This rupture is not only a historical fact but also an important moment from an ideological point of view, one that, directly or indirectly, lead to the religious debates between the Judaic and Christian communities – a debate that culminated in odious deeds and events on both sides. At the basis of these debates stood the problem, or rather the old dilema, built around the following question: is the Christian religion just a 'branch' of Judaism or is it rather a reality with its own identity? Pragmatically the question reads as follows: are those converted to Christianity obliged to subject themself totally to the rules of Moses? Apostle Paul felt the gravity of this question on his own skin during his missionary travels.

After the second world war Christianity felt the obligation to reformulate its relation to Judaism and to clerify its role in the appearance and development of anti-Judaism. In his book entitled *Verus Israel* published in 1947, Marcel Simon tries to shed light on the nature of the relationship between the Christian and Judaic communities in the period between 135-425. According to him, the vitality of the Judaic community was the prime mover of the Christians' antisemitism (Simon 1986: 232). Simon builds up a historical and hermeneutical model, a theory of conflict, based on the fact that the Jewish community played – or at least tried to play – an important role in ancient society which inevitably led to its conflict with the Christian community. Largely accepted by reaserchers, this theory differs considerably from the one represented by the Dutch theologian, A. Harnack. Based on Christian dogmatism, Harnack's interpretation attributes the rise and victory of Christianity to its God-given superiority (Harnack 1908: 47-71). Later on, Simon tries to correct this error of his by approaching the problem from a historical point of view, one lacking the former's teological partiality. Despite the differences existing in their views, the two theoreticians both meassure the vitality of a religious community by the amplitude or rapidity of its spreading as a result of missionary activities. They only differ in defining the limits of this vitality: while Harnack claims that the vitality of the Judaic community started to decline after the demolition of the church of Jerusalem, Simon argues that the decline started only at the end of the 2nd century, acknowledging at the same time the lack of sufficient data regarding Judaic proselytism (1986: 274). The Talmud does not offer any insight into the matter, moreover, neither the ancient nor the Christian writers mention a lot more about it (Simon 1986: 278-79). After having studied the work of Saint Justin, Paul Donahue comes to the conclusion that the phenomenon of Judaic proselytism is very hard to define (1973: 79). Despite this difficulty, both Harnack and Simon hold that a hereditary proselytism must have existed in Judaism. The sources regarding Judaic proselytism may be scarse, but they are not completely absent. We can even find a suggestive example of it in The Dialogue

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with Trypho[1]. In addition, the starting point which led Tertullian to compose a discourse against the Jews is another example: *a Christian and a Jewish proselyte have had a dispute recently. After having studied the texts more carefully, I find it proper to elaborate in writing all those issues which could not come to the surface in that dispute* (Iud. I. 1.)[2] Based on her doctoral dissertation, Miriam S. Taylor's book entitled *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity: A Critique of the Scholarly Consensus*, after synthesizing all those theories, or part of them, which she considers to be real or at least probible, identifies four different types of anti-Judaism: 1. an anti-Judaism based on competition, 2. a conflictual anti-Judaism, 3. a hereditary anti-Judaism, 4. a symbolic anti-Judaism. This work is important not only because it synthesizes previous studies but also because it approaches the topic from a new point of view by creating a tipology.

Without the aim of criticyzing the categories set up by Taylor or denying their accuracy, we would like to present here another tipology, a very frequent one in the narratology and rhetorics of the early Church, that is, a primate defined by fraternity. The majority of scholars from both prior and after the second world war missed to emphasize the fraternal character of the two religious communities. This fraternal character in no way means the lack of competition or conflict between the Judaics and the Christians, it only rejects an automatic attribution of mutual hate to them.

In Saint Paul's letter to the Galatians there is a narrative passage regarding this fraternity between the Jews and the Christians: *For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free (Gal. 4. 22-31).*

It was necessary for apostle Paul to make this clarification, for even the Galatians converted to Christianity by the apostle himself started, probably under the influence of the Jews or the Judeo-Christians, to subject themselves to the rigours of Moses' law (circumcision, etc.) as if their baptism had not been valid

[1] This opinion is also shared by Simons 1986: 282-283, Gager 1983: 61 and Donahue 1975: 174-179.

[2] Excerpt translated by me.

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enough without the observance of the Judaic laws and traditions. By the explication and interpretation of this passage apostle Paul tries to confer on the Christian community a religious continuity that starts with the patriarch Abraham: the Lord promises different destinies to the two brothers who are born from different mothers but have the same father. Hagar and his son called Ishmael represent the Old Testament and its people, while Sarah and his son named Isaac are considered to be the ancestors of the Christians and represent the New Testament.

There exist, however, other interpretations of this passage as well. In the rabbinic literature Isaac is the fruit of an alliance made between God and Abraham, while Sarah and his son represent the Jews whom God, based on that alliance, has promised many descendants and a land of their own (*Gen. 17, 2–6*). Having been exiled because of their personal conflicts with Sarah, Hagar and his son Ishmael are considered to be the ancestors of the Islam (a theory accespted by the Islamists as well). Despite the differences in interpreting this passage of the Bible, this type of the two brothers with different heritage remained constant in the discourse of the common era's first centuries.

In his dialogue with Trypho, the martyr Saint Justin alludes to this theory of fraternal duality, however, he does not venture into its detailed interpretation (Dial. 134.2.). In spite of the strong rivalry between the two religious communities – a rivalry present mostly in the vision of some theoreticians – Christians were aware of the common origins of the two religions, and they could not deny this common past, not even in their self-definition as a religious community with an identity of its own.

This typological approach to the problem can also be found in the discourse of the patristic writer Tertullian. Named Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus in Latin, but later anglicised as Tertullian, he was born in Carthage sometime after 150 AD in a heathen family and was converted to Christianity about 193 AD. Tertullian partook in a very good education: he studied law, rhetoric, (Eus. Hist. 2, 2, 4.), medicine and philosophy (De carne 20, De anima 25, Adv. Marc. 2. 16.). He produced several writings in Greek and Latin (unfortunately, those written in Greek did not get preserved for posterity) and now he is considered to be the founder of the Latin ecclesiastic language (Hoppe 1897). In North Africa where Terullian was born and lived the most part of his life Christian communities had already existed in the 1st century as a result of their having become Christians through various chanels (Telfer 1961: 512-17. Daniélou 1978). At the same time, the region had also been inhabited by a considerable number of Jews (Berger 1892:164; Delatre 1895; CIL VIII. 14101, 14104). We may easily come to the conclusion, then, that Tertullian must have known the nature of the relationship between the two religious communities qiute well. One shouldn't be surprised, knowing the writer's sanguine character, at his somewhat pathetic attitude towards this relationship, as it is illustrated in the following famous quotation: *Synagogas iudaeorum fontes presecutionum.* (Scorpiace 10.). In his rhetorical work entitled *Adversus Iudaeos* (Against the Jews) his attitude is much more moderate, though. This controversial

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work[3] of Tertullian, built on the rules of rhetorical theory, deals with the topic of fraternal duality in a most prudent and shrewd way. Influenced by neo-Sophism – which had a real influence on 2nd century rhetoric – Tertullian proposed to write a *declamatory controversy* (Geoffrey 2008: 36-38) the topic and finality of which was different than in the case of the pagan writers of his time. The starting point of his discourse was a real, or at least probable situation: a Christian and a Jewish proselyte having a dispute. The writer's main objective was to compose a multipurpose discourse containing essential evidence as to the primacy of Christianity over Judaism.

In the *naratio* Tertullian lays the basis of his argumentation: "*God has promised Abraham that in his seed shall be blessed all the peoples of the world and that Rebekah shall give birth to two nations: the Jews, that is, the nation of Israel, and us, the heathens"* (Iud. 1.3). He tries to support this idea by putting the emphasis on Rebekah's narrative and leaving almost completely out the details of the promise made to Abraham, probably being aware of the possible effects of his hardly sustainable interpretation on a redoubtable Jewish adversary.

Before his death, Abraham was looking for a wife for his son Isaac and, with the help of God, he found Rebekah. Soon after the wedding Abraham died (*Mois. 25, 8*). After 20 years of marriage Rebekah gave birth to twins: Esau and Jacob. Being the oldest one and dearly loved by his father, Esau seemed to have all the chances to get his father's blessing to inherit the most part of the family's fortune, and more importantly, to inherit God's promises made to Abraham. Jacob, however, (a sheperd by occupation) being Rebekah's favorite son, and thus urged by his mother and her promises made to God before the birth of the twins, bought, through a dubious transaction, the possibility to join his brother in his rights of the first born (*Mois. 25, 29-34*), earning the blessing through a famous hoax (*Mois. 27, 21-27*).

Nevertheless, Jacob and his descendants (his 12 sons) were always considered to be the ancestors of the Jews, something they were very proud of. Tertullian, as by a *retorsio criminis*, tries to prove that, in fact, Christianity and Christians are the inheritors of God's promise to Jacob, while Jews are the descendants of Esau.

In his discourse Tertullian constructs his argumentation on his personal interpretation of God's promise to Rebekah: "*Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."* (Gen. 25, 23). In Tertullian's interpretation *the older* are identified with the Jews who had been the first to know God's grace, while *the younger* are the Christians (heathens converted to Christianity) who got to know God's grace much later, as it is well known. This equation leads to the conclusion that the Jewish who have always been unfaithful to God's orders are the ones to serve the Christians. Tertullian sustains his argumentation with exemplifying the unfaithfulness of the Jews with instances of

[3] About the disputes on its authenticity see Pap 2013: 96-102.

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searching for other gods, worshiping idols and even telling them such things as follow: *"This is your god, O Israel that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" (Ex. 32, 1-4).* He also underlines the fact that this behaviour was not an isolated case. Later on, in Jericho they repeated the same act of unfaithfulness, worshipping idols, even Baal (*1. Imp. 18, 16-46*). At the same time, Tertullian admits that Christians were not exempt from idolitry either, but continues on saying that after getting to know God's truth, they rejected all that was wrong and never returned to the same vice again (were he to live today, he would think otherwise). In the rhetor's vision the possibility of a nation so unfaithful to become the inheritor of God's promises can never occur. So he argues that, having reached the limit of his tolerance for their infidality, God revealed his grace to others who were more worthy of his legacy. To prove his point, in the 5th chapter called *refutatio* Tertullian mentions the story of the two brothers, Cain and Abel, a widely known biblical sequence, where the sacrifice of *the youngest* (a sheperd himself) is welcome by God, but the sacrifice of *the oldest* is rejected. Then the elder son kills the other one out of jelousy. Following Tertullian's way of thinking, one can easily guess his interpretation of this biblical sequence: the youngest son representing the Christians while the elder one representing the Jews. To support his view, the rhetor quotes the prophets and from the psalms: *"The multitude of your sacrifices — what are they to me?" says the Lord. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? (Is. 1, 11-12).*

"I am not pleased with you," says the Lord Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands." (Mal. 1, 10)

This might suggest that God rejected not only Cain's sacrifices but the ones offered by his descendants' as well (who were, according to Tertullian, the Jews) while the sacrifices offered by Abel were accepted even though he had not been circumcised. In the New Testament Abel appears as the first martyr (*Mt. 24, 35-36 Luc. 11, 50*), a precursor of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Ev.12.24). From this it is yet another step towards the idea of *the Jews being the killers of Christ*. Tertullian, however, does not make that step and leaves this accusation out of his argumentations. One might wonder why he would act that way. For, certainly he was not ignorant of any of the facts: he knew very well all those passages in the New Testament which these accusations are built upon. On the contrary, it is one of his lost works from which we know that Melito of Sardis was a person with great reputation among the Christians in the 2nd century. It also needs to be mentioned, though, that, in his work entitled *Peri Pascha*, written at a time when the persecution of the Christians had reached an alarming level, Melito's accusations aimed not at punishing the Jews but at protecting the Christians against the Romans by transfering the guilt of Christ's death from Pilate to the Caiaphas and king Herod.

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Tertullian fails to use this accusation simply because it did not fit into his argumentations for two reasons:

1. His intention to present the Christians and the Jews as being brothers born from the same mother (it is for this that he omits to give any details on the confirmation of God's promise through Abraham and his sons) would have been compromised by a generalizing, slanderous accusation.

2. Despite the fact that his discourse was primarily addressed to the heathens converted to Christianity, he was aware that it would be read by the Judeo-Christians as well, and what is more, it would inevitably reach the community of the Jews, a community quite large in North Africa and Carthage. That is why Tertullian resorts to use a rather reserved tone – a tone not so characteristic of him, one might say – so that his work could please all of his readers.

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