

Beyond a First-Century Rupture: The Legal and Institutional Emergence of Judaism and Christianity as Distinct Religions

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II. Introduction

Few questions in early Christian and Jewish studies have generated more sustained debate than when, and in what sense, Judaism and Christianity became separate religions. These conventional models often locate the “parting of the ways” in the first century, either in the aftermath of Jesus’ death, the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE, or the alleged rabbinic consolidation at Yavneh. In this conventional view theological divergence between the two quickly produced institutional rupture, and Christianity arose as a distinct religion over against Judaism within the apostolic era or the generation that follows. More recent scholarship has challenged this account. This scholarship argues that Jewish and Christian identities remained intertwined far longer than earlier traditions allowed and that retrospective accounts of early separation often project later religious categories onto an earlier and more fluid historical and social landscape.

This debate seeks to answer the fundamental question: When did Judaism and Christianity come to function as distinct, socially recognized, and legally defined religious communities rather than as competing Jewish sects within a shared covenantal world? One difficulty in answering this question lies in the absence of clear criteria for what constitutes “separation.” Theological disagreement in ancient writings alone does not necessarily produce distinct religions, nor automatically entail institutional rupture. In this study, we will distinguish between three connected but distinct phenomena: differentiation, stabilization, and codification. Differentiation refers to the emergence of theological, ritual, and linguistic distinctions between communities that may still share overlapping social networks and institutional frameworks. Codification refers to the recognition and regulation of communal boundaries through legal, political, or authoritative institutions. Stabilization describes the consolidation of these

communal boundaries into durable and widely recognized religious identities that are no longer fluid or easily interchangeable.

This distinction between the emergence of a new religion and the emergence of a new religion in itself is important in the context of the ancient Mediterranean world, wherein religious identity was typically embedded in ethnicity, civic belonging, and ancestral custom rather than defined as a discrete and autonomous religion in the modern sense. Judaism in the Roman Empire was recognized as a legally protected *ethnos* with ancestral practices. Whereas the Jesus movement initially appeared as one sect among many within the varied landscape of Second Temple Judaism. The question, therefore, is not simply when theological differences emerged, as these are well documented. But when Judaism and Christianity came to function as distinct, legally and institutionally defined religious communities.

This paper argues that the separation between Judaism and Christianity did not occur as a decisive first-century rupture, but emerged gradually and culminated in the fourth century, when imperial legislation and institutional consolidation legally codified and stabilized the two communities as distinct religions. This paper will argue this by examining first-century sectarian pluralism, second- and third-century rhetorical boundary formation, and the transformative effects of fourth-century imperial patronage and rabbinic consolidation. This study contends that theological differentiation preceded the institutional religious separation of Christianity and Judaism by several centuries. Only in late antiquity did differentiation become codified in law and stabilized as separate religious identity.

II. Differentiation Without Separation: The First Century

If the separation between Judaism and Christianity occurred in the first century, one would expect to find evidence of this institutional rupture, legal distinction, or socially stabilized religious boundaries in the lifetime of Jesus, in the aftermath of Jesus' death, or after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE. However, when evaluated against the criteria outlined above, the first-century evidence suggests not codification or stabilization, but differentiation within an already diverse Jewish landscape.

First-century Judaism was characterized by what many scholars have described as sectarian pluralism—a condition in which multiple Jewish groups advanced competing interpretations of Torah, temple practice, and eschatological hope while still operating within a shared covenantal and ethnic framework.¹ Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, apocalyptic groups, and various resistance movements, while all being considered a form of “Judaism,” had many ideological differences and yet were not considered separate “religions.”² The early Jesus-following movement can be accurately described as one sect among others in Judaism. Being distinguished by its confession of Jesus as Messiah, yet still embedded within Jewish symbolic, ritual, and scriptural worlds.³

The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE undoubtedly intensified these internal Jewish debates. The loss of the Temple required reconfiguration of authority, practice, and interpretation for all Jewish groups. There is little evidence that this crisis immediately produced

¹ James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 2006), 23.

² Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 80.

³ Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2007), 20.

a decisive institutional rupture between Jews and those Jews who confessed Jesus.⁴ The narrative of a formalized rabbinic expulsion of the Jesus movement at Yavneh, once invoked as the decisive moment of separation, in actuality rests on later rabbinic traditions whose historical reliability for the late first century remains highly contested.⁵ This proposed expulsion and the tradition surrounding the *Birkat ha-Minim* that is frequently understood as an anti-Christian liturgical exclusion cannot be accurately dated due to later redactions that occurred generations after 70CE. This makes it hard to definitively place this work and the associated tradition in the immediate post-Temple period. Even if these anti-Christian applications developed in the first century, the available evidence does not demonstrate enforcement universally or an institutional rupture.

***fiscus Judaicus* Case Study**

The Roman administration struggled to define these who people groups as well. Early references to Christ-believers in Roman sources tell us about Roman perception of these “Christians” but they themselves have major questions about them. Pliny in his letter to Trajan did not know what Christians legally were and asked the emperor how to handle them, and aligned them with the distinction that they refused to sacrifice to the Roman gods.⁶ This ambiguity within Roman perception of the Jesus movement sect is also seen in the administration of the *fiscus Judaicus*. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, Vespasian imposed a tax upon Jews throughout the empire in place of the former Temple tribute.⁷ Suetonius later reports that under Domitian the tax was rigorously enforced, even requiring investigation into whether

⁴ Becker and Reed, *The Ways That Never Parted*, 5, 80

⁵ Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 33.

⁶ Pliny the Younger, *Epistles* 10.96–97; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44.

⁷ Cassius Dio, *Hist. rom.* 66.7.2.

individuals were “living as Jews.”⁸ In the historical writings of Suetonius, there is a lack of a clearly differentiated category for Christians being distinct from Jews in the late first century. This ambiguity complicated by the presence of Torah-observant Christ-followers into the second century who would be identified as “living as Jews”.⁹ Without a formally defined Christian category within Roman fiscal administration, religious boundaries were not juridically codified. The *fiscus Judaicus* thus reflects Roman administrative ambiguity rather than stabilized separation for distinct religions. Christianity in the first century possessed no imperial recognition, no legal status, and no defined institutional boundaries that would mark it as a distinct religion in Roman society.¹⁰

Evaluation: Differentiation Develops within Ambiguity

The first-century evidence demonstrates theological and rhetorical differentiation, but not legal codification or institutional stabilization. The Jesus-following movement emerged within the matrix of Jewish sectarian pluralism. Internal tensions intensified within this matrix but they did not yet crystallize into the kind of juridically enforced and socially stabilized separation that would characterize later centuries.

III. Intensified Differentiation and Partial Consolidation in the Second and Third Centuries

If the first century reflects differentiation within a shared Jewish matrix, the second and third centuries marked an intensification of boundary consciousness alongside the progressing consolidation of institutional authority. Both emerging rabbinic Judaism and developing

⁸ Suetonius, *Dom.* 12.2.

⁹ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.23–25; Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 47.

¹⁰ Judith M. Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 32–33.

Christian communities undertook significant processes of internal structuring during these centuries. These developments strengthened communal self-definition, but did not yet amount to the juridical codification or socially universal stabilization that would characterize the fourth century.¹¹

Episcopal Consolidation and Christian Institutional Formation

The second century witnessed the increasing prominence of episcopal leadership within Christian communities. The letters of Ignatius of Antioch repeatedly emphasize unity under a single bishop as the guarantor of orthodoxy and communal cohesion.¹² By the late second century, Irenaeus appealed to apostolic succession and episcopal lineage as mechanisms for identifying legitimate teaching and combating heresy within the developing Jesus movement.¹³ These developments indicate that institutional consolidation is beginning.

This was happening while Christian writers began articulating sharper distinctions between their communities and other Jewish groups. Ignatius warned against “Judaizing,” and insisted that Christians must not “live according to Judaism.”¹⁴ Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* framed Christian claims as the fulfillment of Israel’s Scriptures, presenting the church as the inheritor of the biblical promises.¹⁵ Such texts demonstrate heightened rhetorical differentiation and the continued construction of theological boundaries, highlighting how early Christian identity was not a static inheritance but an ongoing process of construction shaped through definitive stances and self-definition.¹⁶ Rhetorical opposition, therefore, does not itself

¹¹ See Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek?*, 31; Becker and Reed, *The Ways That Never Parted*, 7.

¹² Ignatius, *Eph.* 6.1; *Magn.* 6.1; *Smyrn.* 8.1.

¹³ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 3.3.1–3.

¹⁴ Ignatius, *Magn.* 8.1–10.3.

¹⁵ Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 11–47.

¹⁶ Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek?*, 113.

create legal separation of groups. Christian communities continued to lack Roman recognition and operated without a stable juridical category distinct from other religious groups unlike Jews or adherents to other pagan religions. This was evident by how they were not distinguished as Christians in Roman prosecution, but instead prosecuted under a governor's discretion.¹⁷

Rabbinic Consolidation and the Mishnah

Parallel developments occurred within post-Temple Judaism. The destruction of Jerusalem destabilized priestly authority, temple-centered practice, and dissolved many sectarian groups within Judaism. This necessitated the reconfiguration of religious leadership and legal interpretation.¹⁸ Rabbinic teachers gradually emerged as influential interpreters of Torah, and by the early third century, the redaction of the Mishnah (c. 200 CE) represented a significant effort to preserve and systematize halakhic tradition.¹⁹

The Mishnah reflected an important step toward institutional consolidation within Jewish life, but it does not present itself as a new or separate religion over against Christianity. Rather, it represents an internal effort to define Jewish practice and authority in a post-Temple context. Rabbinic teachings fought against emerging heresies that developed gradually and do not reflect an immediate or universal expulsion of Christ-believers in the late first or early second century.²⁰ The tannaitic and later amoraic sources in which categories such as *minim*²¹ appear were redacted well after 70 CE and reflect evolving efforts to define communal boundaries in response

¹⁷ A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 13–15.

¹⁸ Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 131, 224.

¹⁹ m. Avot 1:1; see also Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 227–228.

²⁰ Adiel Schremer, *Brothers Estranged* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 79.

²¹ The Hebrew term *minim* (sing. *min*) appears in tannaitic and later rabbinic literature to designate sectarians or heretics. Its referent is debated and likely varied by context; it cannot be securely restricted to Christians in the first or second centuries. See Steven T. Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C.E.," in *Judaism and Christianity in the First Century*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 53.

to multiple forms of sectarian diversity reappearing within Judaism, not solely Christianity. Rabbinic influence was not yet universal across the Jewish diaspora, and rabbinic courts did not possess the coercive enforcement mechanisms, even if they had them. The consolidation of teachings in the Mishnah represents a partial step toward stabilization but does not signify an institutionalized or demarcated religious boundary vis-à-vis Christian communities.²²

Rhetorical Boundary Formation in Christian and Jewish Texts

The second and third centuries also reveal a growing distinction of teaching in both Christian and Jewish sources. Christian apologists increasingly depicted Judaism as incomplete or superseded, while rabbinic literature developed categories such as the *minim*. But this rhetorical boundary-making should not be confused with complete social separation, as polemical clarity often masks complex and overlapping social realities.²³ The existence of anti-Jewish and anti-Christian rhetoric suggests debate over shared Scriptures and shared symbolic worlds and histories rather than the presence of two fully stabilized and mutually recognized religions. Identity construction was underway, but distinct religious identities were yet to be established.

The Quartodeciman Case Study

The Quartodeciman controversy of the late second century illustrates the ongoing work of episcopal consolidation. Christian communities in Asia Minor, following a tradition associated with the apostle John, observed Pascha²⁴ on the fourteenth day of Nisan following the Jewish

²² Dunn, *Partings of the Ways*, 303.

²³ Adiel Schremer, *Brothers Estranged*, 22-23.

²⁴ *Pascha* (Gk. Πάσχα) refers to the early Christian celebration of Christ's death and resurrection, observed in relation to the Jewish Passover calendar. The English term "Easter" is a later development and anachronistic for the second century.

calendar.²⁵ Other churches, particularly in Rome, chose to celebrate the resurrection on the following Sunday. When Polycarp of Smyrna met with Anicetus of Rome in the mid-second century, disagreement over this practice did not lead to a rupture; the two remained in communion despite their differing observances.²⁶

By the end of the century, after the passing of Polycarp, Bishop Victor of Rome attempted to impose uniformity and threatened excommunication against the Quartodeciman churches.²⁷ This tension within the Jesus movement reflects heightened institutional consolidation and increased boundary consciousness, particularly regarding dependence on Jewish calendrical reckoning. This controversy also demonstrates that separation was not yet stabilized. The dispute of following the Jewish calendar unfolded within Christian networks rather than between fully distinct religions, and no imperial authority enforced the decision. The Quartodeciman debate exemplifies a stage of differentiation and consolidation that had not yet matured into a stabilized, codified, and religious separation.

Evaluation: Consolidation Beginning, But Without Stabilization

The second and third centuries reveal substantial progress toward internal consolidation for both Christian and rabbinic circles. Episcopal authority, emerging canon consciousness, apostolic succession claims, and the codification of the Mishnah reflect efforts to stabilize communal identity and practice. At the same time, rhetorical differentiation intensified as each community articulated its theological self-understanding, often in opposition to the other.

²⁵ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.23.1–5.

²⁶ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.16–17.

²⁷ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.9–18.

Yet separation remained incomplete. While Judaism possessed a form of legal definition, Christianity remained identified as a cult. Identified for prosecution and defined mainly by their refusal to sacrifice to Roman gods.²⁸ In addition, neither group had its boundaries universally stabilized across the Mediterranean world, the Rabbinic authority “were not in any position to impose their will on the rest of Judaism immediately...”.²⁹ The processes of differentiation and consolidation were advancing, but the decisive moment of juridical codification and social stabilization still lay ahead.

IV. Imperial Codification and the Stabilization of Religious Separation in the Fourth Century

If the second and third centuries reflect increased differentiation and continued institutional consolidation, the fourth century introduces a fundamentally new variable: imperial power. Constantine’s accession and the gradual Christianization of Roman governance caused Christianity to move from a voluntary association to an imperially supported institution. It is at this juncture that the separation between Judaism and Christianity begins to assume a codified and socially stabilized form.

Constantine and the Reconfiguration of Religious Authority

The Edict of Milan (313 CE), preserved in the works of Lactantius and Eusebius, granted Christians legal toleration and restored confiscated property.³⁰ Christian communities were recognized for the first time as lawful corporate bodies within imperial administration. Although

²⁸ Pliny the Younger. *Epistulae*. 10.96–97

²⁹ Dunn, *Partings*, 303–304.

³⁰ Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum* 48; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 10.5.2–14.

this edict focused more broadly on toleration, its practical effect was to remove Christianity from the category of illicit superstition and cult and place it within a protected legal space.

The Council of Nicaea (325 CE) continued to demonstrate the new alignment of imperial authority and ecclesial structure. In Constantine's letter following the council, he explicitly urged uniform celebration of Easter and argued that it was inappropriate for Christians to follow the reckoning of "the Jews."³¹ The decision to detach Christian calendrical observance from Jewish calculation was not just theological; it had the endorsement and enforcement of Rome. Rhetorical differentiation, present in earlier centuries, now received institutional backing under Constantine.

Under Constantine and his successors, bishops increasingly functioned in legal capacities. Ecclesiastical courts were granted limited juridical authority, and this service elevated Christian clergy to public prominence and popularity.³² Christianity was no longer constructing its identity solely through rhetorical differentiation or ecclesial consolidation; it was being codified and beginning to define itself within Roman governance.

Legal Differentiation in Imperial Legislation

The later fourth century intensified this transformation. The Edict of Thessalonica (380 CE), issued by Theodosius I, declared Nicene Christianity the empire's normative faith.³³ Subsequent legislation, preserved in the *Codex Theodosianus*, defined religious categories with an increased precision.

³¹ Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 3.18–20.

³² See *Codex Theodosianus* 16.2.1–6 (on clerical privilege and ecclesiastical jurisdiction).

³³ *Codex Theodosianus* 16.1.2 (Edict of Thessalonica, 380 CE).

Laws restricted Jewish proselytizing, regulated synagogue construction, and penalized conversion from Christianity to Judaism.³⁴ Intermarriage prohibitions and legal penalties concerning religious affiliation reflect an empire now invested in maintaining confessional boundaries. Such measures did not invent these theological differences that most likely existed for centuries; rather, they formalized and enforced them within imperial law.

Religious identity now carried explicit legal consequences. Christianity enjoyed imperial favor and institutional privilege; Judaism, while legally tolerated, was constrained within defined civic limits. The Roman legal system now distinguished clearly between Christian orthodoxy and other religious communities for the first time.

Rabbinic Judaism in a Christian Empire

During the same period, rabbinic Judaism continued its own internal consolidation. While the Mishnah (c. 200 CE) had represented an earlier stage of halakhic systematization, later developments in Palestinian and Babylonian Talmudic traditions reflect expanded reasoning in identification and communal organization.³⁵

The distinctions between imperially backed Christianity and legally restricted Judaism contributed to the stabilization of these distinct communal identities. Participation in Christian ecclesial structures increasingly implied exclusion from Jewish communal life and vice versa—not merely rhetorically, but legally and socially.³⁶ Boundary maintenance was no longer a matter of theological argument only; it was reinforced by civic order.

³⁴ Codex Theodosianus 16.8.1–7 (restrictions concerning Jews); 16.8.7 (prohibition of conversion to Judaism).

³⁵ m. Avot 1:1; b. Berakhot 45a (on rabbinic authority and communal practice).

³⁶ Adiel Schremer, *Brothers Estranged*, 22–23.

Council of Nicaea Case Study

The Council of Nicaea (325 CE) illustrates how this differentiation became codified under imperial authority. One of the topics at the center was again the calculation of Pascha. In his circular letter following the council, Constantine urged that Christians must not follow “the practice of the Jews” in determining the date of Easter. He described it as improper that Christians should “have anything in common with that most hostile people.”³⁷ This language reflects the same rhetorical differentiation common in earlier centuries, yet its significance lies in its institutional context. Unlike the Quartodeciman controversy of the second century, the Nicene decision was not merely an intra-ecclesial dispute but an imperially convened and endorsed settlement. The calendrical separation of Christian Pascha from the Jewish calendar was now reinforced by imperial and ecclesial authority.

The Nicene decision thus marks a qualitative shift. What was once contested within Christian networks has now become standardized throughout imperial Christianity and defined as distinct from Judaism. Differentiation was no longer sustained solely through theological argument or episcopal persuasion; it was embedded in the structures of governance itself. Nicaea exemplifies the transition from consolidation to codification. The boundary between Judaism and Christianity. What was long rhetorically articulated now acquired institutional force and administrative backing. This contributed to the stabilization of distinct religious identities within the Roman world.

³⁷ Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 3.18–20.

Evaluation: From Differentiation to Stabilization

The fourth century marks a decisive shift from differentiation and an incomplete consolidation to the codification and stabilization of two separate religions. Earlier centuries witnessed theological polemic, episcopal structuring, halakhic redaction, and increased boundary consciousness. Yet only with imperial endorsement and legal enforcement did Christianity and Judaism emerge as mutually recognized and structurally distinct religions within the Roman world.

Separation was not the product of a single event in the first century. It was the cumulative outcome of gradual differentiation, culminating in fourth-century juridical codification and imperial stabilization of opposing religions. The “parting of the ways” was not an event but a process—one that reached maturity only when imperial power rendered religious boundaries were fully developed and legally consequential.³⁸

V. Conclusion: Codification, Stabilization, and the Historical Maturation of Religious Separation

This paper argues that the separation between Judaism and Christianity did not occur as a decisive first-century rupture, but emerged gradually and culminated in the fourth century, when imperial legislation and institutional consolidation legally codified and stabilized the two communities as distinct religions. This claim does not deny the presence of theological disagreement, rhetorical conflict, or internal consolidation in earlier centuries. Rather, it locates the decisive transformation not in the apostolic period but in late antiquity, when differentiation became enforceable, socially stabilized, and distinct.

³⁸ Becker and Reed, *The Ways That Never Parted*, 7; Adiel Schremer, *Brothers Estranged*, 22-23.

The first century reveals theological and communal differentiation within an already pluralistic Jewish landscape. Jesus-followers functioned as one sect among others in this Jewish landscape. Neither Jewish nor Roman evidence demonstrates a clearly institutionalized or legally recognized rupture in the aftermath of 70 CE. Yavneh and the Birkat ha-Minim themselves cannot accurately point to a first-century rupture due to note redactions within these traditions in later centuries.

The second and third centuries continued to develop intensified rhetorical boundary formation and growing internal consolidation in both the rabbinic and Jesus Movement. Episcopal authority, apostolic succession, canon consciousness, and the redaction of the Mishnah all reflect efforts toward communal stabilization. Early Christian and rabbinic texts articulated increasingly explicit distinctions, but these developments remained largely rhetorical and intra-communal. There was no enforcement of this separation, and no universally recognized legal distinction existed between Judaism and Christianity.

In the fourth century, the situation changed significantly. Constantine's patronage, the Council of Nicaea, the Edict of Thessalonica, and subsequent legislation in the *Codex Theodosianus* embedded Christian identity within imperial law. Religious affiliation now carried juridical consequences. Judaism and Christianity emerged as mutually recognized and structurally distinct communities within the Roman legal imagination. Differentiation became codification; consolidation became stabilization.

Historiographical and Theological Implications

This conclusion carries several important implications. First, it reframes the interpretation of the New Testament and other early Christian literature. If separation was not stabilized in the

first century, then polemical passages in the New Testament or early Christian writings must be read as disputes within a larger Jewish sectarian pluralist conversation rather than as reflections of fully external religious opposition. Texts such as the Gospel of John, Matthew's arguments against the Pharisees, or Pauline arguments about Torah observance now can be seen as intra-Jewish debates that can be understood like other Jewish writings in the second temple era as distinct arguments between Jewish sects. Recognizing this historical proximity guards against projecting later distinctions backward into the apostolic age.

Second, this model challenges supersessionist narratives that assume an early and definitive displacement of Judaism by Christianity. If Judaism and the Jesus movement remained historically entangled for centuries, then theological claims of replacement are not original to the first century but represent developed later institutional differentiation and imperial codification. This is significant theologically, and the emergence of Christianity is no longer represented as the immediate result of divine rejection or covenantal transfer from the people of Israel; it emerged as a distinct religion, historically mediated and politically conditioned, centuries after Jesus was on the earth. locating separation prematurely in the apostolic age reinforces this common Christian theology that often narrates salvation history in ways that marginalize Israel's ongoing covenantal significance.³⁹ Likewise, these historically anchored revisitation of the separation opens the door for rethinking Jewish-Christian relations—including those articulated within post-supersessionist and Messianic Jewish framework including the establishment of a bi-lateral ecclesiology⁴⁰

³⁹ R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 9, 30, 32.

⁴⁰ Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 3-5, 211-212.

Third, this framework of understanding cautions against anachronistic uses of the terms “Judaism” and “Christianity.” In the first and second centuries, while rhetoric was developing, these were not yet fully stabilized categories in either social practice or imperial religious distinction. To speak of “two religions” in the apostolic era risks importing fourth-century realities into earlier centuries.

Finally, this study clarifies how Christian or Jewish “religion” itself emerges as a juridically meaningful category within the Roman world. The fourth century was not the first to mention theological disagreement, but it made religious boundaries administratively consequential. In doing so, it transformed fluid communal identities into legally clear cut identities that were the subject of confessions. The “parting of the ways” was less a single historical moment than a long process of disagreement that resulted in clear demarcations being drawn by an imperial power.

Understanding separation as a gradual, uneven process culminating in late antique codification does not diminish the real theological differences between Judaism and Christianity. But it situates those differences within their proper historical development. The divide between synagogue and church was not born fully formed at the destruction of the Temple; it hardened over time, reaching maturity only when imperial and ecclesial authority clearly demarcated religious identity and rendered it in law.

The “parting of the ways” was therefore not an event but a historical maturation—a process whose decisive crystallization occurred not in the first century, but in the fourth.

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