

“You’ve seen at several chocolatiers enormous boxes of chocolates, thirty to forty centimetres long and fifteen centimetres wide? Well, my wife bought a good supply of them and we have every morning a large tureen-full of chocolate. We eat lots of it.” Also, if it’s any consolation, he doesn’t appear to have got on famously with his son Georges.

Stove is firmly of the belief that more of Franck’s works are worth remembering now—his especial favourite seems to be *Les Éolides*, but others rate highly, including the *Violin Symphony*. But it was with the organ that Franck really triumphed, his career dovetailing with the development of the modern-day pipe organ, and he was one of its most significant early explorers and innovators. The centenary of his death in 1990 helped to spark up interest in his lesser-known works, and Stove provides a final chapter on “Posthumous Fortunes” and a useful appendix on the role of “authenticity” in Franck performance.

The book is not quite for the ordinary reader, but having said that, it would be a huge compliment to give someone a copy of it. It would be a way of saying: “You have sufficient general education and interest in music to make this of more than passing interest to your good self.” (Just don’t give one to the Abbot of St Michael’s Abbey, Farnborough, UK, because I’ve already done that.)

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## MICHAEL GIFFIN

### The Kosher Messiah

*The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ*  
by Daniel Boyarin  
The New Press, 2012, 224 pages, \$31.95

As Jewish-Christian dialogue evolves, the landscape is changing dramatically, and in unforeseen ways, as the methodological insights of the last two hundred years bear their inevitable fruit, as old assumptions are being questioned. One assumption goes like this: Christianity appropriated the Old Testament, a Jewish text, to interpret the New Testament, a post-Jewish text. This assumption is hard to defend, now that we have a better understanding of early Christianity as initially a movement within first-century Judaism, of how Jewish the New Testament really is, and of

Jesus’ kosher and halakhic context: that is, how he observed the Law while debating the Law.

As many Jewish scholars have been writing on this subject for several years now, what does Boyarin’s *The Jewish Gospels* offer that’s new? Two things stand out. First, he provides a compelling new perspective on Jesus’ relationship with the Pharisees by arguing that, during the Gospel accounts of the conflict between them, Jesus was being a kosher traditionalist from Galilee and the Pharisees were being kosher radicals from Jerusalem: the Jewish equivalent of head office back then. Second, he challenges the assumption that Christianity adopted ideas from Greek philosophy because Jewish monotheism, and the specificity of the Jewish covenant, couldn’t accommodate its universal vision. He says his story “is one of possibilities cut off by authorities”. He tries to reclaim some of these possibilities, which the Rabbis and the Fathers cut off along the way, as Judaism and Christianity developed their antithetical identities.

The four Gospels are traditionally interpreted as describing issues that separated Christians from Jews; however, Boyarin argues they really describe issues Jews were arguing among themselves. For example, as it relates to how Jesus kept kosher, his exegesis of Mark 7:1–23 shows us what’s really being debated: the “tradition of the elders” as transmitted by Jesus and his contemporaries in Galilee versus the “tradition of the elders” as allegedly re-worked by the Pharisees and scribes in Jerusalem: a Judean city, not a Galilean city. We say “allegedly” because we can’t judge the historical accuracy of Jesus’ arguments with the Pharisees, or of Pharisaic practices generally, we can merely notice the presence of a halakhic debate, and notice the current trend towards interpreting Gospel references to “the Jews” as meaning “the Judeans” as opposed to “the Galileans”.

What did Jesus mean when he said: “whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile”? What did Mark mean when he interjected soon after: “Thus he declared all foods clean”? Boyarin argues there’s a vast difference between Jesus declaring all foods clean (which he did) and Jesus declaring all foods permissible (which he didn’t). We won’t understand this argument unless we notice the distinction between kosher laws and purity laws. Kosher refers to laws of permissibility or impermissibility as defined by the Bible and later rabbinic literature. Laws governing purity and impurity are a separate system that apply to a different sphere of life; laws to do with touching various objects, such as dead humans, or humans who have not washed properly, as well as other

causes of impurity such as skin diseases or particular bodily secretions.

Boyarin suggests the Pharisees were arguing that hand-washing had to be done a new way, with a loose hand-over-fist motion, and that food itself contaminates, an argument that blurred kosher laws and purity laws, and they had come up from Jerusalem to convince the Galileans. In protesting this new policy from head office, in asserting that food doesn't make the body impure, Jesus is upholding his traditional Galilean understanding of the Law. As Boyarin concludes:

When put into its historical context, the chapter is perfectly clear. Mark was a Jew and Jesus kept kosher. At least in its attitude to the embodied practices of the Torah, Mark's Gospel does not in any way constitute even a baby step in the direction of the invention of Christianity as a new religion or as a departure from Judaism at all. Mark is best read as a Jewish text, even in its most radical Christological moments.

How radical were those moments, Christology (high or low) being the theology of the person, nature and role of Christ? Put another way, did the messianic claims Jesus applied to himself, or his followers applied to him, really constitute a break from Judaism? As there was no fixed, monolithic Judaism to break from in the first century, and there was only dialectical tension, it's difficult to speak of a break. For Boyarin, the question isn't whether Jesus is the Messiah, since that's a matter of Christian faith; it's whether the Messiah can be divine. In exploring this possibility, he retrieves the Binitarian aspects of Jewish belief in the Second Temple Period, which prefigure the Trinitarian aspects of Christian belief. His retrieval begins with a reflection on what *Messiah* means in the Old Testament—an anointed king or high priest with a close relationship with the God of Israel—before reflecting on the messianic claims of the New Testament and showing how they are intimately related. He believes Mark was philologically aware of the Old Testament context when using terms such as “Son of God” and “Son of Man” and understood the claims being made when applying them to Jesus as Christ.

Naturally, Boyarin provides a close reading of Daniel Chapter 7, where the prophet has a vision where “one like” a Son of Man arrives on clouds of heaven before the Ancient of Days who gives him dominion, glory and kingdom over all peoples, nations and languages. As the idea of a second god as viceroy to God the Father is one of

the oldest theological ideas in Israel, it follows that ideas about God we identify as Christian aren't innovations. By the first century a people had for centuries been talking, thinking and reading about a new king, a son of David, who would redeem them from Seleucid and Roman oppression, and they had come to think of that new king as a second, younger, divine figure on the basis of Daniel's reflection on an ancient tradition. When the followers of Jesus found the empty tomb, and understood him as the risen Christ, it was because they had a narrative that led them to expect such an appearance. The appearance didn't give rise to the narrative. They may have been creative with the narrative but it was still part of the Jewish textual and inter-textual world of the first century.

This question of narrative creativity is central. We know the Bible is multi-layered, was written over many hundreds of years, and Jews and Christians omitted material that didn't meet specific criteria during their similar-but-different canonical processes. We acknowledge that, if the New Testament authors were creative with their canon, the Old Testament authors were also creative with theirs, so it's unwise to suggest a Christian fact is a Jewish fiction. In the academic world, all we have to work with are texts with subtexts, pretexts and contexts. If there's a “myth” of the Messiah we can trace its archaeology to Daniel's vision, canonised by both Jews and Christians, and to deuterocanonical texts. To highlight this point, Boyarin gives us a close reading of passages from the Book of Enoch and Fourth Ezra, both of which depend on Daniel in different ways, to remind us of other Jewish groups expecting a Messiah known as the Son of Man. In Enoch, the Son of Man would appear to become divine (apotheosis). In Ezra, the Son of Man would appear to become human (theophany). The important point here is that both traditions co-existed in the Second Temple Period.

In Enoch and Ezra, Boyarin sees two different strands of the Jewish imagination, one in which the ancient Binitarianness of Israel's God is preserved and transformed, and one in which that ancient Binitarianness has been suppressed, living side-by-side in halakhic tension. In the New Testament, he notices a similar tension between the Son of Man becoming divine (apotheosis) and the Son of Man becoming human (theophany) which helps him make sense of the story of Jesus: his incarnation, baptism, transfiguration, ministry, miracles, death, resurrection and exaltation. For Boyarin, it's almost as if the New Testament authors have intentionally woven together two stories into the one plot: a first story of the God who became man, came down to

earth, and returned home; a second story of the man who became God and ascended on high. This tension, this doubleness of the Jesus story, parallels the tension between different Christologies, low and high, and explains the trajectory of what the Fathers would come to define as orthodox and heterodox. Whether they are orthodox or heterodox, however, all ideas about Christ are old; the only new idea is the declaration that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of Man. That, of course, is an enormous declaration with fateful consequences.

It's widely held that the idea of a suffering Messiah, who atoned for the sins of the world, was an after-the-fact response by Christians to rationalise the embarrassing reality of Jesus' humiliation and suffering. According to this view, the crucifixion set Christianity in motion as a new non-Jewish religion. It's also widely held that Christians distorted the original meaning of Isaiah 53—supposedly an allegory for the collective suffering of Israel—by opportunistically interpreting it as an allegory about the Messiah as an individual. Boyarin rejects this view. He argues that the idea of a suffering and atoning Messiah wasn't alien to Judaism; it was current among Jews until the modern period; it's deeply rooted in Jewish texts; it's one aspect of an entrenched messianic expectation. He's not claiming that Jesus and his followers contributed nothing to the story of a suffering Messiah; he's claiming that their innovation, if indeed they innovated, was within the spirit and method of ancient Judaism, not a departure from it.

At least as an idea, if not as a fact, Boyarin demonstrates the Jewishness of the suffering and atoning Christ in two ways. First, by showing how the Gospels use traditional midrashic reasoning to develop the idea and apply it to Jesus: for example, the Jewish author of Mark obviously pored over the Hebrew scriptures and interpreted every detail in order to understand what the Messiah would look like and what to expect when he came. This explains why Mark 8 is absolutely clear about equating the suffering and atoning Christ with the Son of Man in Daniel 7. Second, by showing

how common the idea of a suffering and atoning Messiah was among rabbinic Jews, from the time of the Talmud onwards, using examples from the Palestinian Talmud, the Babylonian Talmud, various medieval Jewish commentators, early modern Kabbalists, and by noting the dissenting voice of an intellectual giant from Spanish Jewry. His point is that neither Judaism nor Jews have ever spoken with one voice on this question. In the Gospels such theological ideas have been derived from the Torah in its broadest sense. There's no Christian notion of a Messiah versus a Jewish notion of a Messiah but only one complex and contested messianic idea shared by Mark, Jesus and the entire midrashic community of Jews. The description of Christ predicting his own suffering, and the fact of that suffering occurring, doesn't contradict the Jewishness of Christianity.

Boyarin is a challenging scholar. Not everyone wants to explore the "possibilities cut off by authorities". For many it's more comfortable sticking with the Judaism of the Rabbis and the Christianity of the Fathers, assuming the twain shall never meet, and blaming everything on Rome, Constantinople or Geneva. But Boyarin isn't someone on the fringe. He's at the centre of where Jewish-Christian dialogue happens to be at present. And he's in good Jewish company. Many of his insights have been flagged by Christian scholars over the last few decades, including Benedict XVI, but inter-faith sensitivities dictate that their insights will only become mainstream through Jewish scholars who understand the New Testament as a precious Jewish window. We aren't quite at the stage where Jewish scholars can take the lead in biblical studies, and teach Christians what the New Testament means, but that stage has already begun with the appointment of Professor Levine in the United States, and there's no reason why we can't have hundreds of Jewish professors teaching New Testament all over the Western world.

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