

## JUDAISM AND THE RISE OF CHRISTIANITY: A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

E.A. Judge

### Summary

*Romans did not see Christianity as part of Judaism. They objected to Jewish proselytisation but did not link Christians with it. In Rome (under Nero) Christians presented an unrelated novelty. Their name is a Latin formation, implying public factionalism. The Jews at Antioch must have successfully kept their distance for it to be coined at all. Nerva's making the Jewish tax optional licensed the Jewish life-style. This latitude was never extended to Christians nor claimed by them. The clear dividing line in civil practice implies the tax was based on lists supplied by the synagogues.*

### I. Introduction

In the first presentation at the Sydney symposium on 'The Parting of the Ways',<sup>1</sup> A.D. Crown spoke of their taking 'a long time to move apart'. In the first century Christianity was 'part of Jewish pluralism'. This view would be widely endorsed amongst twentieth-century specialists in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> But the extant Roman observers

---

<sup>1</sup>Sponsored by the Council of Christians and Jews, 9 August 1993. The present article is an amplified version of the second presentation at the symposium, prepared and revised independently of Professor Crown's paper. Both were published in the *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* 7.2 (1993).

<sup>2</sup>J.D.G. Dunn, in J.D.G. Dunn (ed.), *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways AD 70-135* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992) 367, sums up the discussions amongst the 13 participants at the Second Durham/Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism as follows: "'The parting of the ways", properly speaking, was very "bitty", long drawn out and influenced by a range of social, geographical, and political as well as theological factors. On the one hand, we must beware of thinking of a clear or single "trajectory" for either Christianity or Judaism; and we should also avoid using imagery which necessarily implies an ever widening gap between Christianity and Judaism. On the other hand, "Christianity" *did* emerge from a Jewish matrix.'

Nothing I say here need detract from that observation at the level of the close dependence of Christians on Jewish thought. But in not attending to the fact

failed to link the Christians with the Jews in any way at all. First-century Romans reacted strongly to Jewish proselytisation.<sup>3</sup> But they did not bring the same objection against the Christians. By the end of the century the Jews had won the recognised civil status that was to define Jewish communal identity down to our own day. Their right to live differently was secured by a tax. Yet it seems to have occurred to no one that such a solution could be applied to the Christians. Such puzzles, never raised let alone solved, lurk as traps in our path as we hasten to rewrite the history in the image of our own time. Did the ways part before those on them noticed it? Did anyone force the pace?

## II. The Jews at Rome

The Hasmonaeans secured for the Jews the status of friends of the Romans (1 Macc. 8; 12:1-4; 14:24-40; 15:15-24). This gave them standing against other Hellenistic powers. But the Jews took it further than the Romans had bargained for. Some took up residence in Rome within a year of the renewal of the treaty in 140 BC. They were banished, 'because they attempted to transmit their sacred rites to the

---

that Roman observers do not seem even to have noticed the connection, one misses a vital clue to the social reality of separation at a much earlier stage than would be implied by the history of ideas.

<sup>3</sup>Goodman (*The Parting of the Ways*, 33) stresses that 'in contrast to the silence on the subject of proselytism in gentile texts before AD 96, there survives a series of comments, mostly very unfavourable, about such conversions in texts written in the early 2nd century AD.' He refers to authors who identify the formal conditions of becoming a proselyte (Epictetus, *ap. Arrian, Diss.* 2:9:20, c. AD 108; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5.2 in the first decade of the 2nd century; Juvenal *Sat.* 14.96-104, after AD 127 = M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* [Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974] Vol. II, 301, where the father who stopped short at 'God-fearing' is distinguished from the son who went the whole way). But I have the support of Stern in taking the passages I treat below as (earlier) reactions to proselytisation even though the writers are not so explicit about the formalities.

Romans' (Valerius Maximus 1:3:3 = Stern I:147). Although we have this only from an epitome of Valerius, himself an excerptor, there lies behind it the thorough (lost) history of Livy. A second epitome says the Jews 'attempted to infect the Roman customs with the cult of Jupiter Sabazius'. The easiest explanation of this is that Romans had been attracted by Jewish Sabbath-practice, and had begun to copy it, a phenomenon that would become well attested.

A century later Horace, the satirist, defends his criticism of people's lives on the analogy of the Jews (*Serm.* 1:4:143 = Stern I:127):

This is one of those lesser frailties I spoke of, and if you should make no allowance for it, then would a big band of poets come to my aid—for we are the big majority—and we, like the Jews, will compel you to join our crowd.

Even if the numerical claim is tongue-in-cheek, the analogy is clear. The Jews exercised group solidarity, and talked you into changing your life-style, like it or not, just as Horace hopes to do with his sermons. After the capture of Jerusalem by Pompeius in 63 BC, it is assumed many Jewish prisoners had passed into slavery in Rome. A generation later, in Horace's day, they would have been transforming their status through the liberal Roman practice of emancipation, creating the extensive series of Roman synagogues attested by the inscriptions. But there were missionaries also (Mt. 23.15):

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

Josephus (*Ant.* 18:81-85) describes such a case. A Jewish con-man, exiled from Jerusalem for breaches of the law, set himself up at Rome as an authority on the Mosaic code. He and his team attached themselves to Fulvia. When this noble Roman lady, who had already become a proselyte, 'began to meet with them regularly, they urged her to send purple and gold to the temple in Jerusalem. They, however, took the gifts and used them for their own personal expenses. . . .' When the scandal broke, four thousand Jewish Romans

were conscripted for military service in malarial Sardinia. Those who refused service on grounds of conscience were punished. The non-Roman Jews were all expelled. This occurred in AD 19 under Tiberius, held up by Philo as a regular champion of Jewish rights (by contrast with his heir, Caligula). The striking point is the readiness of a Roman convert to send funds to her new mother-city. A generation later St Paul tapped the same goodwill on behalf of 'the saints in Jerusalem' (Rom. 15:26). What attracted Romans to Judaism?

The philosopher Seneca reveals (*Ep.* 108:22 = Stern I:189) that in his youth he had gone in for vegetarianism, but stopped when it was in danger of being taken as loyalty to 'some foreign rites' that were 'at that time (*sc.* AD 19?) being inaugurated'. In a lost work he later criticised the popularity of Jewish practice, especially the waste of one day in seven (cited in Augustine, *Civ.* 6:11 = Stern I:186):

The customs of this vicious race have gained such influence that they are now received throughout the world. . . The Jews, however, are aware of the origin and meaning of their rites. The greater part of the people go through a ritual not knowing why they do so.

This is clear recognition (and by a highly competent observer) of the key to the distinctive character and interest of Jewish tradition. Roman cultic practice was largely inexplicable even to Romans. But Jewish daily life was the conscious replication and commemoration of the historical experience of the people, which had been made the vehicle of authoritative moral instruction. The world is no longer seen as a natural cycle, in which humanity is embraced, but personal experience, choice and commitment are placed at the centre of life.

The Roman contemporaries of Seneca and St Paul found this challenging. The satirist Persius (5:176-184 = Stern I:190) describes the ambitious politician, exploiting the public festivals for popularity, but privately riveted by the lamps and fish that he saw on 'the day of Herod' each week, 'turning pale at the Sabbath of the circumcised'. What was he worried about? Conversely Petronius (frag. 37 = Stern I:195) describes the Jew who abandons circumcision, is excluded

from his people and joins the Greeks, where he no longer needs to ‘tremble at the fasts of Sabbath imposed by the law’. Why had it all become a burden? Neither Persius nor Petronius knows exactly what he is talking about. But they are authentic witnesses to the fact that Jewish obedience in mid-first-century Rome was becoming a test in the life of Jews and Gentiles alike.

### III. The Christians at Rome

It is to precisely this time that the first Roman allusions to Christians refer (is Petronius also referring to one?) We know from the New Testament that they arose as a movement within Judaism, sharing the same zeal for proselytisation, and for comparable reasons. Yet the Roman reaction to them fails to register these features at all. The Roman writers do not connect them with Judaism in any respect.

Suetonius (*Nero* 16:2) has a summary list of social disorders or malpractices that Nero tidied up. Between the over-ambitious fast-food outlets and the costly practical jokes of chariot-racing stars appear the Christians, ‘a class of people practising a novel and threatening superstition’. *Superstitio* implies cultic irregularity, in this case actively injurious (*malefica*, a term sometimes alluding to the particularly dreaded practice of magic). Tacitus (*Ann.* 15:44:4) also charges the Christians with *superstitio*. It is ‘deadly’ (*exitiabilis*), and people hate them for their ‘outrages’ (*flagitia*). Like a disease, Tacitus implies, it keeps breaking out, even at Rome—but he does not know how it spreads.<sup>4</sup> The contrast with Judaism is clear. An ancient

---

<sup>4</sup>Tacitus knows it began in Judaea, yet we should not take this as showing that he regarded it as a phenomenon within Judaism. The territorial term is not a substitute for the name of the people in Tacitus. It is a reasonable assumption that he had treated the long procuratorship of Pilate in the missing part of Book 5, which explains why he can introduce Pilate in Book 15 without mentioning at first where he had been procurator. The reference to Judaea comes in the following sentence, where it is given as the source of the problem. Tacitus was of course (see *Hist.* 5) thoroughly familiar with the fact that Judaea contained both Jews and Greeks, and that there was conflict between them.

Dunn (*The Partings of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* [London: SCM, 1991] 241) says that his description of the Christians in *Ann.* 15:44:4 ‘parallels his earlier description of the Jews and suggests he himself thought of these “Christians” as Jews’ (whom he had described quite knowledgeably and with historical awareness in *Hist.* 5:4:1 and 5:5:1). But that would surely have led him to name them as ‘Jews’. The vague phrase *genus hominum* (‘a class of people’) plainly displays his lack of any correlation with people he had already treated. This also counts against the assumption of R. Syme (*Tacitus*. [Oxford: Clarendon Press:

national tradition, which contemporaries thought they understood well, is quite the opposite of superstition. The sticking point in the case of Judaism was that Romans should not be caught up in foreign practices. But it is not suggested that Christians are foreign. They should of course be following Roman practices too. Since no one knows what in fact they do at their meetings, it must be criminal. This was still all that Pliny knew fifty years after Nero. While governing Bithynia, he had people denounced to him as Christians, but did not know whether this was the offence in itself or whether the implied crimes had to be proved (*Ep.* 10:96:3):

I asked them whether they were Christians. When they admitted it, I asked twice more, warning them of the punishment. Those who persisted I ordered to be executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever it was they were admitting to, their stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy deserved to be punished.

As a conscientious administrator, Pliny could not leave the matter there. Those who recanted told him what in fact had happened at the meetings. There was indeed an oath taken (the usual basis for a criminal plot), but it actually specified the crimes they were pledging themselves not to commit. They sang a hymn to Christ, 'as though he were a god'. (Pliny knew of course that he had been executed by Pilate as a malefactor, so there was no question of his being divine; *cf.* Tacitus, *Ann.* 15:44:4.)

---

1958], Vol. II: 469, n. 2) that 15:44:4 is 'one of a series of spaced incidents' designed to culminate in the Jewish insurrection of 66 (for which of course the *Annals* do not survive).

The story was sufficiently improbable (and those who told it had an obvious interest in giving an innocent account of their past) that Pliny judged it necessary to get the truth from two servant-girls by torture. They were called ‘ministers’, he notes. All he got was ‘depraved, immoderate superstition’—no doubt a theological lecture—which solved nothing. It would not matter except that the ‘infection’ was spreading, even in the countryside. Trajan wrote back to confirm Pliny’s action in executing recalcitrants. But there was to be no initiative taken by the government, and anyone could escape their fate ‘by sacrificing to our gods’ (*Ep.* 10:97:1).

The official position is clear, and remained so for the next two centuries. Incomprehensible as the activities of Christians were, they could be tolerated providing (as Romans) they did not abandon their national duty of sacrifice to the Roman gods. The Romans had always understood and accepted that this was impossible for Jews, for whom exemption was secured. Why did they not see that the Christians stood in the same tradition, and were often themselves Jews into the bargain? There is no hint that anyone ever tried to suggest such a solution. As Suetonius notes, what the Christians did was not only dangerous, but ‘novel’.

This term makes it clear that Suetonius was not aware that he was referring to the Christians (as most people assume) when he reports (*Claudius* 25:4): ‘He expelled the Jews from Rome because they were persistently rioting at the instigation of Chrestus.’ Certainly later Christians liked the idea of spelling ‘Christ’ as ‘Chrestus’, since that means ‘good’. But we face here not only the ignorance of Suetonius, but of every other potential source. Tacitus clearly also assumed the Christians emerged for the first time under Nero, fifteen years later.<sup>5</sup>

The New Testament sources register no trace of a conflict within the Jewish community at Rome at the earlier stage, though both Acts and Paul are deeply sensitive to this issue. Acts 18:2 relates how Paul fell in with refugees from the expulsion of AD 49 at Corinth, without a hint that the trouble had been over the preaching of

---

<sup>5</sup>Tacitus is not fully extant for AD 49, and the text of Cassius Dio is fragmentary, but in either case the way the Christians are eventually introduced implies that they had not been treated under that year.

Christ, nor necessarily implying that Aquila and Priscilla were already believers. Acts 28:21 has the Jews at Rome expressing personal ignorance of any problem over gospel preaching when Paul arrived there, and encouraging the usual audience for him amongst the synagogue community (v. 23). Paul's (earlier) letter to the Romans treats the relations of Jews with Gentile believers on the grand scale without any allusion to practical problems, which would surely have been tackled if there was a local history of them. It is significant that only Romans amongst Paul's major letters is not written to a 'church'. This is surely because the believers in Rome had still not broken with the synagogue community. That was what happened in other places only after Paul's arrival.

The expulsion of AD 49 had therefore probably been the result of agitation in the Jewish community on other grounds. 'Chrestus' is a common enough name, and apt for a populist leader, being of servile associations, and also current amongst Jews. Given the atmosphere of political expectations in mid-first-century Judaism, we may even allow the possibility of another leader with Messianic aspirations having briefly emerged.<sup>6</sup>

#### **IV. The Parting of the Ways**

Nevertheless the parting of the ways, at least in other places, had certainly occurred prior to Nero's action in AD 64. We may note it as early as thirteen years after the execution of Jesus. It was in Antioch, about that time, that the name 'Christian' was devised (Acts 11:19-20, 25-26):

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. . . Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him he

---

<sup>6</sup>E.A. Judge and G.S.R. Thomas, 'The Origin of the Church at Rome: A New Solution', *Reformed Theological Review* 25 (1966) 81-94.

brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

This is the first time that the ‘church’ is referred to outside Jerusalem and the Jewish homelands. As emerges from Paul’s comments (Gal. 2:1-3), as well as Acts (15:1), this circle of believers had dropped the circumcision of converts, a requirement later to be abandoned by the Council in Jerusalem against the insistence of the Pharisees in the church there (Acts 15:5).

The name ‘Christian’ can hardly have been invented by orthodox Jews, since it concedes the messiahship of Jesus. Its suffix implies the word was coined by speakers of Latin. One must think of members of the Roman administration, army or business community who were strong in the Syrian capital. The Greek-speaking synagogues in Rome used the Greek suffix *-esioi* in their names. The suffix *-ianus* constitutes a political comment. It is not used for followers of a god. It classifies people as partisans of a political or military leader, and is mildly contemptuous. The young knights whom Nero engaged to applaud at his performances were dubbed ‘*Augustiani*’ (Suetonius, *Nero* 25:1; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15:14). In Jerusalem it was the ‘Herodians’ who had questioned Jesus on loyalty to Caesar (Mt. 22:16; cf. Mk. 12:13; 3:6). One of the disciples at Antioch, Manaen (Acts 13:1), was perhaps an ‘Herodian’; he had been ‘a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch’.

The name ‘Christian’, then, may well have arisen from the questions posed for Romans over the political loyalty of the followers of Christ. This would fit the sharp reaction of Herod Agrippa II to Paul’s challenge. ‘You need not think you can make a Christian of me so quickly’, he retorted (Acts 26:28), embarrassed no doubt by the presence of the new governor, Festus, in whose audience chamber at Caesarea this exchange took place.<sup>7</sup>

The First Epistle of Peter shows why Christians accepted the name they had not sought. It identified them with Christ, and

---

<sup>7</sup>J. Taylor, ‘Why Were the Disciples First Called “Christians” at Antioch? (Acts 11,26)’, *Revue Biblique* 101 (1994) 75-94.

especially with the misrepresentation he had suffered (1 Pet. 4:14-16):

If you are vilified because of the name of Christ, you are blessed. . . If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a stirrer. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed. . .

Two more centuries of cross-purposes are foreshadowed in this formula. But our problem is to envisage how it was possible for Romans to invent the new classification of 'Christian' in the first place, when the term had unacceptable implications for both Jews and Christians, and created a clear-cut distinction between them that flew in the face of the aspirations of those pursuing either way.

Since we have only the most oblique allusions to the matter in the later Jewish sources, and there is disagreement over the dating of various works in the New Testament (the major primary source for both ways in the first century), I posit the following broad sequence of events:

1. Unknown followers of the apostles at Antioch open up the Jewish heritage to Gentiles without requiring circumcision, which creates a crisis for the apostles as well as for the synagogues.
2. The conditional endorsement of this at the Council of Jerusalem results (in various places at different times) in synagogue bans and/or the withdrawal of the apostles' followers into new churches.
3. The Jewish authorities (where possible) use their civil standing to dissociate themselves from the churches, which go underground, and can thus be discovered by the Romans as a threat.

According to Acts the initial reaction of the Jewish authorities to the preaching of the apostles (and the healing of a lame man at the gate of the Temple) had been to put a stop to it inasmuch as it cast doubt on the policy that had led to the execution of Jesus (Acts 5:30). There

had been however no secure ground for action, given the popular support for the apostles (4:21). In the Sanhedrin, the Pharisee Gamaliel had argued successfully for leaving them alone (5:38).

The matter had come to a head, however, following a dispute amongst the 'Hellenist' Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and the province of Asia (6:6, 9). The name of their synagogue (that 'of the Freedmen') implies that they were in the tradition of those whose families had passed through servitude to Romans into the possession of that citizenship, or at least of 'Latin' rights. One of them, Stephen, had been accused of blasphemy 'against Moses and God', and in particular of saying that Jesus would destroy the Temple and 'change the customs which Moses delivered' (6:14). He had replied with a history of the prophetic tradition of criticism of the reigning culture, condemning those who had persecuted the prophets, and now killed 'the Righteous One' (7:52). The stoning of Stephen had led directly to Paul's commission to hunt down the disciples and arrest them (8:3). He takes the responsibility for this upon himself: 'unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God' (1 Cor. 15:9).

As a Roman citizen, freeborn himself (Acts 22:28) but no doubt of freedman descent, and a Cilician (22:3), Paul will have been well aware of the circles around the synagogue of the Freedmen, though he was educated as a Pharisee under Gamaliel in Jerusalem.

He presumably therefore at least endorsed, and may well have stimulated, the distinctively extra-Jewish phenomenon that caught the eye of Romans at Antioch. One must also suppose a strong reaction against it by the regular Jewish community, who could hardly have been unaware of the conflict in Jerusalem. Yet there is no hint of public action by the Jews in Antioch.

For Jerusalem, however, Acts now registers the political intervention of Herod Agrippa I, who executed James 'the brother of John', and 'when he saw that it pleased the Jews', arrested Peter also (12:2, 3). Acts implies (11:30; 12:25) that Paul was in Jerusalem during these events, but without suggesting any link between them and the (unknown) events at Antioch which had led the governing

circles there to coin the name 'Christians'.

From this stage the reader of Acts and the Pauline epistles can readily sense the mutual recrimination and rejection that developed, especially in the wake of Paul's mission. It is clear that he saw a grand purpose in this, that would eventually unite Jewish and Gentile believers—the 'grafting in' of new branches to Israel's olive tree, and the restoration of the old ones (Rom. 11:17-24). To this end he was willing to precipitate local breaches with the synagogues. They in turn took action against the churches, the Jewish members of which faced the prospect of being 'excluded from the synagogue' (Jn. 9:22; 16:2). The very appearance of this apparently technical term shows that there was more going on than what can be concluded from the disciplinary practice attested in the later Jewish sources.<sup>8</sup>

We must leave a good deal of space for unknown events, for circumstances peculiar to particular places, and above all for the emotional recoil that will have driven people apart more decisively than either formalities or ideals may have required. A socially clear-cut separation from an early stage must be assumed if we are to explain the fact that Romans seem to have been unaware of the links between Jews and Christians.

---

<sup>8</sup>L.H. Schiffman (*Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish Christian Schism* [Hoboken: Ktav, 1985] 60) stresses that while the benediction against the *minim* sought to exclude Jewish Christians from active participation in the synagogue service, it in no way implied expulsion from the Jewish people. A.F. Segal (*Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1986] 150) says: 'in synagogues following the rabbinic rule, sectarians may have been cursed, but they were not bodily removed from the synagogue.' The problem for us is that we lack any historical treatment of these matters from the Jewish side in antiquity. But E. Bammel (*Judaica: Kleine Schriften I* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1986] 265-283) argues that the 'Jew' of Celsus is an actual 2nd-century apologist. He accuses the Christians of 'having departed to another name and life-style'. See also W. Horbury, 'Messianism among Jews and Christians in the Second Century', *Augustinianum* 28 (1988) 71-88, with Bammel's article in the same volume on 'Die Anfänge der Kirchengeschichte im Spiegel der jüdischen Quellen', pp. 367-397.

## V. The Jewish Tax

When Domitian began to impose the Jewish tax ‘with the utmost rigour’ (Suetonius, *Dom.* 12:2) it was not only clandestine Jews who were caught. People who were not circumcised but ‘yet lived as Jews’ were prosecuted, perhaps for treason against the Roman people (Cassius Dio 67:14:1-3, 68:1:2). That this policy caused serious alarm amongst prominent people at Rome is clear from the protracted celebration on the coins of its cancellation by Nerva in AD 96: FISCIVDAICI CALVMNIA SVBLATA (‘Jewish Tax Misrepresentation Removed’). Martin Goodman has proposed that the decision to tax only those who wished to count as Jews established a new principle of Jewish identity that has lasted until our own time.<sup>9</sup> Although the tax began as the penalty for national defeat (in AD 70), from AD 96 it came to be valued by Jews as their public licence to live by their own rules. As Tertullian observed, it won for the Jews *vectigalis libertas*, ‘liberty through taxation’ (*Apol.* 18).

An episode recorded by Matthew (the tax collector) (17:24-27) both excuses the sons of the kingdom from any obligation to pay the temple-tax (of Jesus’ day), and at the same time invites them to pay it so as to avoid offence. Why did Christians not take this as their cue to pay the Jewish tax (which had switched the old temple-tax to the rebuilding of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus)? It would have spared them two centuries of misunderstanding and haphazard persecution.

So far as I know the possibility is never suggested in our sources. Yet there is no lack of evidence for an on-going interest of Christians in synagogue life. The Jews in Smyrna even offered sanctuary in the synagogues to Christians obliged to sacrifice under the edict of Decius in AD 250 (*Martyrdom of Pionius* 13). One may suppose that collection of the Jewish tax was based upon synagogue lists. Thus although the reform of Nerva seemed to promise each individual the option of paying, once it became clear that it was in effect a privilege, the Roman authorities would have been concerned

---

<sup>9</sup>‘Nerva, the *fiscus Judaicus* and Jewish Identity’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 79 (1989) 40-44.

that it should not be exploited by those not entitled to it. It was always the case that the Caesars, like Roman magistrates of any age, put great weight on the solidarity of the Roman community in sacrificing.<sup>10</sup> The Jews were exempt, for clear, historic reasons.

From the Roman perspective, then, we may conjecture that it was in the national interest, having noticed (for whatever reason) the distinctive identity of 'Christians' from their very early contact with them, to institutionalise the demarcation from Judaism in a way that would not jeopardise the *pax deorum*. Individuals might indeed be permitted to adopt Judaism. But the government would be very content for such transfers of allegiance to be limited to those who took up the full commitment to the Jewish law, as certified by the competent authorities on it.

---

<sup>10</sup>E.A. Judge, 'The Beginning of Religious History', *JRH* 15 (1989) 394-412.