

Paul and Judaism

Introduction: Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity

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The fourth meeting of the project “Jews and Judaism in Japan” took place on September 24, 2016 (Sat.) 13:00-17:00, and included a public lecture followed by a workshop, both delivered by professor Moriyoshi Murayama and associate professor Etsuko Katsumata, scholars of the School of Theology, Doshisha University. The theme of the research meeting was “Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity: Mutual Influence.” Each scholar presented the subject through his or her research perspective, indicating the way in which Judaism and Christianity shared texts and values, and showing where these religions started diverging from each other during the said period.

The recent decade or two have indeed witnessed an increase in studies trying to reveal the historical and religious developments of Late Antiquity that separated Christianity from Judaism and created two completely different religions.¹

Prof. Murayama indicated how the establisher of Christian beliefs, Paul of Tarsus, revered Judaism, and how his writings reveal his roots in one of the different Jewish sects that flourished during late antiquity Judaism, becoming the main stream of Christian thought. Prof. Murayama shows how themes in Jewish thought, mostly originating in the Hebrew Bible, such as universalism, God’s judgment, observance of the Law (Jewish Halacha), were newly interpreted by Paul, paving the way for Christianity as an independent religion. These two religions each tried to maintain its separate identity and thus one of the important questions raised by the two groups was its attitude towards foreigners, or to be more precise: whom each religious group accepted as belonging to its group of believers, if at all.

Prof. Katsumata focused mainly on the perspective regarding these issues of the Jewish community at the time. After introducing the absence of Paul in Jewish rabbinical texts of the time, she referred to Paul’s interpretations of the Jewish law in the case of pure food, or more critically, the freedom to observe Jewish law in general. This question

led her to discuss the attitude of Jewish sources to foreign worship or religions, and “Gentiles” in general, while treating the issues of food and idolatry. She pointed out, based on rabbinical texts, the fact that these issues prompted the question of flexibility in obeying Jewish law and the fact that the biblical law offers freedom of choice to the believer. In her conclusions, she suggested that the Jewish rabbinical group chose strict fulfilment of the law as interpreted by the Rabbis, while Christianity offered by Paul, opened itself to freedom of choice whether to observe the law, observe it in part or later not observe it at all, in order to accommodate the multitudes of non-Jews.

Consequently, both presenters touched each in their own way of reading the texts, on similar issues that arose during Late Antiquity, of how, when Judaism was on the verge of change as a result of the dismantling of its main religious institutions, one religious group managed to evolve into a competing religion within several hundred years.

This meeting, we hope, is the beginning of joint efforts by scholars in the field of Late Antiquity, at CISMOR and the School of Theology of Doshisha University, to present the conclusions of their research to the Japanese scholarly community as well as the Japanese public.

Note

- ¹ For example, see CISMOR *Conference on Jewish Studies 5: Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages* published (2012): <http://www.cismor.jp/jp/archives/coe/> 出版物/ユダヤ学会議/. See the article by Peter Schäfer, “Jewish Responses to the Emergence of Christianity,” pp. 120-134. See also the series *Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* published by Brill, and established by Martin Hengel since 1976 (with its volumes in the last five years).