

○ REVIEW OF DANIEL BOYARIN'S *BORDER LINES: THE PARTITION OF JUDAEO-CHRISTIANITY*

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Michael Carden reviews *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, by Daniel Boyarin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

I have long been an admirer of Daniel Boyarin's work and so when the chance came to review this book I wasted no time in taking it up. I was not disappointed. *Border Lines* is an important book that contributes rich insights to Christian studies, Jewish studies, biblical studies and cultural studies. It is also very well-written, making it both enjoyable and accessible for general readers and students interested in these areas, as much as for specialists. In part, the book's insights derive from the perspective Boyarin brings, that of a 'diasporic rabbinic Jew' with 'a powerful libidinal commitment to... rabbinic Judaism as practiced for nearly the last two millennia' who, nevertheless, is strongly 'drawn to', indeed is 'in love' with many aspects of Christianity (pp. ix-x). Boyarin's position echoes my own, a Catholic with a similarly powerful libidinal commitment to Catholic Christianity who is likewise drawn to, even in love with rabbinic Judaism and who has, through this 'desire for' and encounter with 'a different other' (p. x), discovered greater depths, dare I say (existential) truths, in my own tradition.

In this book, Boyarin reads a range of Jewish and Christian texts from the early centuries CE to chart the discursive practices that would establish the boundaries of what would be Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism. He draws on post-colonial theory, especially the insights of Homi Bhabha – 'the hybridity of cultural identifications and the instability of dominating cultural paradigms' (p. 15) – in his project. Boyarin's starting point is that prior to the division, there were no characteristics that could be described as uniquely Jewish or Christian, 'a perspective that refuses the option of seeing Christian and Jew, Christianity and Judaism, as fully formed, bounded, and separate entities and identities in late antiquity' (p. 7). These boundaries and formations were established by the heresiologists. Boyarin argues that 'a significant part of the function of heresiology, if not its proximate cause, was to define Christian identity' (p. 4). This process triggered a matching project on the part of the Rabbis of the 2nd and 3rd centuries to 'transform Judaism into a Church... with its orthodoxy and its heresy, supported in large part by rules of faith' (p. 29). What gives Boyarin's work greater power and depth is that he writes conscious of a new excluding heresiology at work in his own tradition (and again I read Boyarin conscious of a new excluding heresiology rising in my own).

Boyarin's argument is developed in three parts. The first, 'Making a Difference: The Heresiological Beginnings of Christianity and Judaism', comprises chapters 2 and 3. In chapter 2 Boyarin begins by reading the representations of Jews and the construction of Judaism in the work of Justin Martyr. The Judaism found in Justin's work is not a real opponent or an accurately described entity but rather a construction on Justin's part against which he can map the essentials for him of what it means to be Christian. A crucial part of this Christian essence is Logos theology, which Justin presents as uniquely Christian and rejected by Judaism. Boyarin then turns from Justin to the Mishna and the Tosefta and the concept of *minut* or heresy found there. He argues that it is appropriated from Christian heresiology. Like the Jew in Justin's texts, the *minim* are

not an actual 'representation of Jewish Christians... but a rhetorical construct for the production of a Jewish religion or church' (p. 30). Chapter 3 briefly analyses the role of apostolic succession, 'the claim to an unbroken chain of tradition from a foundational moment of revelation and a founding figure of the religious group' (p. 30), as a means for establishing orthodoxy in both Christianity and Judaism. Boyarin argues that 'the rabbinic movement should be considered on the model of a Hellenistic philosophical school... (a)t about the time that Christianity began to transform itself from a collection of philosophical schools... into an orthodoxy, the rabbis were making the same attempt' (p. 85). This is not a question of one influencing the other, but rather these Rabbinic and orthodox Christian processes are appropriating 'textual ideas, images, and representations from a shared developing pool' (p. 66). They are 'ecotypes of each other' (p. 67).

In the second section, 'The Crucifixion of the Logos', Boyarin returns to Logos theology, which Justin would make the cornerstone of Christian distinctiveness, to show that it was instead 'the religious koine of Jews in Palestine and the Diaspora, their theological lingua franca' (p. 126). This section, incorporating chapters 4-6, I found to be totally engrossing as it challenges a suite of orthodoxies, religious and academic, and opens up intriguing new possibilities, not least in the realm of biblical studies. Boyarin begins in chapter 4, by reading the Prologue to John as a midrash on Genesis 1, which takes as an intertext Proverbs 8. In Boyarin's reading, John 1:1-5 'is a shared or Koine 'Jewish' nonchristological midrashic expansion of Genesis 1:1-5 along the lines of Logos/Memra theology' which is then 'followed by a christological' (identifying the Logos with Jesus Christ) 'interpretation and expansion of this inherited midrash' (p. 97). I found Boyarin's reading very cogent, demonstrating John to be one of the 'most "Jewish" of Gospels' (p. 104). Boyarin argues that what is the new departure in John is not its Logos theology but that the Logos 'is incarnated as Jesus, the Christ' (p. 104). I would agree and add also that it is not the notion of incarnation as such (which I now believe to be as 'Jewish' as the Logos) but the specific identification of it in Jesus of Nazareth. For those surprised by the notion of the Jewishness of the Logos, Boyarin proceeds in chapter 5 to chart the 'Jewish life of the Logos' (p. 112). He examines Logos theology in Philo, the Targumim and other Jewish texts (including the figure of Metatron) and convincingly demonstrates that binitarianism or Two Powers in Heaven was very much the norm in the Jewish milieu that informed Jesus and the early Christian movement. In chapter 6, Boyarin then examines how the heresiologists, both Christian and Rabbinic, transformed Logos theology into a mark of difference. Justin has claimed the Logos as essentially Christian and the rabbis cooperate by 'identifying Two Powers in Heaven as the arch-heresy' (p. 146). In doing so the 'Rabbis... thus participated in the discursive work of the making of Christian orthodoxy, while the Christian heresiologists... similarly participated in the discursive work of the making of orthodox rabbinic Judaism' (p. 146). It strikes me that this project continues today in theological and biblical studies, amongst both 'liberal' and 'conservative' Christians. Put crudely, for 'conservatives' it is crucial that the Logos/Son, together with the trinitarian/manifold nature of the deity, be a distinctive Christian revelation stemming from Jesus. 'Liberals', on the other hand, stress the 'Jewishness' of Jesus and, therefore, of his 'simple' Jewish monotheism in contrast to the later Gentile Christian invention of the incarnate Logos and the trinitarian/manifold deity as part of the deification of Jesus. Both sides collaborate in keeping the Logos and the manifold deity (and incarnation) well and truly outside of the realm of 'Jewishness'.

The final section, 'Sparks of the Logos: Historicizing Rabbinic Religion', comprises two chapters. In chapter 7, Boyarin reads the Babylonian Talmud and its redaction as marking a

major rupture and transformation of rabbinic Judaism, in which the major 'salient phenomenal differences between the Judaism and the Christianity of the end of late antiquity are put into place' (p. 33). Boyarin examines the Yavneh legend and its role in crystallizing the characteristic discursive forms of rabbinic orthodoxy – 'interpretative indeterminacy and endless dispute' (p. 156). The Yavneh legend is a later construction projected back into the first century, indeed there are several layers to the legend representing various shifts from the second century to the final redaction of the Babylonian Talmud, in which Yavneh is conceived 'as the ecumenical council of Fathers who transmitted the immortal (but ever-growing and shifting) body of the Oral Torah' (p. 196). Boyarin's readings of Talmudic stories are perceptive and illuminating but he goes further to show how these processes are likewise happening in Christianity in the representation of the council of Nicaea.

Nevertheless, despite these similarities, Boyarin argues that Judaism and Christianity, as they finally emerge, 'were not in the end two species of the same genus' (p. 32). In chapter 8, he turns his attention to the development of the notion of religion in the Christian empire. Boyarin reads selected 4th and 5th century Christian texts and Talmudic passages employing the notion of hybridity. Christians are now in the process of inventing their identity as a religion, for which 'religion itself had to be invented as well' (p. 206). Central to this project is the religious hybrid/heretic, 'distinguishing Judaizing heretics from orthodox Jews... functions... to make and mark the border between Christianity and... a Judaism it is, in part, inventing' (pp. 206-207). Hybridity is in the air of the Christian empire because Boyarin shows that the emperor Julian turns it back on Christianity and tries 'to reinstate the binary of Jew and Greek' and naming Christianity itself as 'an admixture, a syncretism' (p. 210). Julian, of course, was correct. To reconcile Jew and Greek, slave and free, female and male, Christianity must itself be a hybrid of those binaries. Admixture and syncretism underpin the Christian project. However, while Christianity invented religion and thus provided a space in the Christian empire for Judaism to exist as 'a genuine, though wrong religion from which conversion was possible' (p. 218), the transformation of rabbinic Judaism, marked by the final redaction of the Babylonian Talmud, went in the other direction. The dictum, 'an Israelite, even though he sin, remains an Israelite' (b. Sanhedrin 44a, cited 224), becomes the principle of Jewish identity so that there is 'now virtually no way that a Jew can stop being a Jew, since the very notion of heresy was finally rejected and Judaism... refused to be... a *religion*' (p. 224). I found this chapter very engaging and couldn't help but reflect on the struggles of identity formation and politics amongst sexual minorities. I was reminded how in many ways bisexuality functions discursively as a hybrid unsettling the boundaries of homosexuality and heterosexuality. As gay man, I have long thought that these community struggles carried a curious echo of the ancient struggles shaping early Christian communities. From a historical perspective, too, Boyarin's analysis of the creation of the category of religion in the Christian empire made me wonder how much it might have laid the framework for the space provided for the Peoples of the Book in the later Islamic empire. Although by the Ottoman period, has Islam reversed the process and redefined Christianity as an ethnicity or collection of ethnicities comparable to Jewish ethnicity?

As I said earlier, Boyarin's book and this review are both framed by a consciousness of new excluding heresiologies that impact on both author and reviewer. In my own case, as a gay Catholic, I am aware of discursive moves on the part of the Vatican to make homosexuality (and

presumably bisexuality, the issue is same-sex attraction) a permanent category of heretical otherness that has the capacity to render holy orders invalid (a notion, I would argue, imported from right-wing US Protestantism). However, the history of same-sex attraction and its abjection in Christian history is one dominated by the spectre of the closet. (At the same time, one of the depths or existential truths of Catholicism is a rich queerness and profound discomfort with the heteronormative). The dynamics of the closet mean that we can never know how many priests, bishops, pontiffs over the centuries have been same-sex attracted, let alone identify them all. We can only be sure that there are very many. If these discursive moves are successful how many priests, bishops, pontiffs and their sacraments, ordinations and consecrations are retrospectively rendered invalid? The entire edifice of priesthood and apostolic succession is consequently dissolved, Roman, Eastern and other. Catholicism is brought to an end.

In Boyarin's case he writes knowing that now he 'and other Jews who dissent from Jewish support for Israel are being labeled heretics' (p. xiv). And yet, ironically, Boyarin is truer to his tradition than those who would expel him. It could be argued that the Zionist project is a (not inevitable) result of that long ago rabbinic refusal to make Judaism a religion. Nevertheless, Zionism began opposing rabbinic orthodoxy, which held that only the Messiah could restore the people to the Land. But the former has now co-opted the latter, reversing the old orthodoxy with possibly fatal results. Like Boyarin, I am 'beggared' by the 'spectacle' of the new religious/rabbinic Zionism 'making common cause' with 'right-wing Protestant presidents, Southern Baptist fundamentalist preachers' (p. xii) and other forms of what I regard as particularly morbid, pathological, even suicidal forms of Christianity (thus indulging in my own heresiology – but many of these groups place Catholicism in the category of the Left Behind). These ostensible Christian allies view the Zionist project as the means to a Holocaust beyond Hitler's wildest dreams and the stage for an apotheosis that makes Hale-Bopp mere child's play. One dream shared by Christian endtimer and religious Zionist alike is the restoration of the Temple (perhaps a more impelling dream for the former than the latter). Boyarin's book shows Rabbinic Judaism came into being in the space created following the Temple's destruction. Even were the Temple's restoration not to involve the destruction of the Islamic shrines on the Temple Mount (surely a suicidal venture if ever there was one), it would certainly bring the nearly two thousand year tradition of rabbinic Judaism to an end.