Jewish Responses to the Emergence of Christianity[1]

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Common wisdom has it that belief in the unity and uniqueness of God has been one of the firmly established principles of Jewish faith since time immemorial. This belief is considered to be forever recorded in the solemn beginning of the biblical *Shema'*, one of the daily prayers in Jewish worship: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone (*YHWH ehad*)."[2] Since the latter part of this declaration can also be translated as "the Lord is one," it contains *in nuce* an acknowledgment of Israel's God as the one and only God, with no other gods beside him, and is simultaneously a recognition of him as the one and undivided God, that is, not consisting of multiple personalities. This peculiar character of the Jewish God is generally captured under the rubric "monotheism"—although the view is becoming ever more accepted that such a category is highly problematic for the biblical period, let alone for those periods coming after the closure of the Hebrew Bible. The authors of the Hebrew Bible no doubt tried very hard to implement and enforce the belief in the one God in its double sense, but they also faced considerable resistance and were constantly fighting off attempts to thwart their efforts and—inspired by the customs of Israel's neighbors—to sneak in ideas that ran counter to any strict interpretation of monotheism. Thus it appears that the very notion of monotheism as a monolithic and stable entity is misleading and that we need to distinguish between the rigid and programmatic *rhetoric* of monotheism as opposed to its much less rigorous *practice*.

The rabbis of the Talmudic period after 70 C.E. encountered an even more complex environment. Regardless of how much they assumed and insisted on their God's unity and uniqueness, they were surrounded by people for whom such an idea was highly contested territory. The Greeks and Romans were amazed by the claim of a God reserved solely for the Jews, this exclusivity underscored by the Jewish God's strict aniconic character and a complete lack of images depicting him. The well-meaning among them nevertheless tried to integrate this elusive God into their pantheon as some form of *summum deum* or "highest heaven," whereas the mean-spirited parodied the Jewish beliefs or plainly concluded that the Jews must have been the worst of atheists.[3] The emerging Christian sect set out to elaborate the notion of the one and only God in terms of first a binitarian and then a trinitarian theology—that is, they took the decisive step to include God's Son in the godhead, later followed by the inclusion of a third divine figure,

the Holy Spirit. And the various groups that are commonly subsumed under the label "Gnosis" embraced the Neo-Platonic distinction between the absolutely and uniquely transcendent God (the first and highest principle) and the demiurge (the second principle) responsible for the mundane creation, which could easily (and derogatorily) be identified with the Jewish creator God.

The rabbis were certainly aware of such developments and responded to them. The rabbinic literature has preserved a wealth of sources that portray the rabbis as engaged in a dialogue, or rather debate, with people who present views that run counter to the accepted or imagined rabbinic norm system. Generally, these dialogue partners—commonly subsumed under the category *minim*, literally "kinds (of belief),"[4] that is, all kinds of people with divergent beliefs— are presented as opponents whose ideas need to be refuted and warded off; hence the customary translation of *minim* as "heretics" (because their ideas deviate from the norm established by the rabbinic majority). It goes without saying that these "heretics" did not escape the attention of modern scholarly research, which, from its inception, was focused on—if not outright obsessed with—identifying this elusive group of people that caused the rabbis so much trouble. The respective sources have been collected and exhaustively analyzed, more often than not with the explicit goal of identifying *the* particular and peculiar heretical "sect" behind each and every individual source. In other words, it was the implicit and unquestioned assumption of most of the relevant scholarship that within the wide spectrum of rabbinic sources we are indeed dealing with clearly defined boundaries between what was regarded as an accepted set of ideas and what was not regarded as such—hence, with boundaries between "orthodoxy" and "heresy"—and that almost all the varieties of heresies can in fact be identified as belonging to this or that heretical group.

The scholarly standard, still largely valid today, has been set by two major works: Travers Herford's *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*[5] and Alan Segal's *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism*.[6] Quite distant in time and methodology, both nevertheless share—in retrospect—a rather naïve confidence in our ability to pin down the heretical "sects" addressed in the sources. Herford arrived at "Christianity" as the main target of rabbinical ire in a relatively effortless fashion, whereas Segal, with his more sophisticated methodological equipment and a much broader perspective, tried to mark out the full range of possibilities—from "paganism" in all its varieties through a more differentiated "Christianity" (Jewish Christians, gentile Christians, God-Fearers, Hellenized Jews) to "Gnosticism," this latter (in the vein of Hans Jonas) in still quite undifferentiated form. Despite its undoubtedly great progress in both methodology and results, *Two Powers in Heaven* remains trapped in that all too

rigid straitjacket of definable "religions," "sects," and "heresies" that know and fight each other with an equally well-defined set of ideas and beliefs.

This impasse was readdressed only recently, thanks above all to the work of Daniel Boyarin. In his book *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*[7] as well as in a series of articles,[8] Boyarin repeatedly and forcefully maintains that not only is the effort to identify the various heretical "sects" a vain one; moreover, and more importantly, he holds that there were no such heretical groups as well-defined entities distinct from the rabbis. In fact, when exposed to Christian ideas in particular, the rabbis were arguing not against an enemy from the outside but rather from within, that is, against their own colleagues who seemed unduly impressed with certain Christian views. He even goes so far as to suggest that we regard Christianity not as a "sect" within ancient Judaism against which the rabbis fought but as an integral part of the rabbinic mind-set. Much as I agree with the proposition (no well-defined heretical "sects" as opposed to "rabbinic Judaism"), I believe that Boyarin grossly overshoots the mark with respect to the conclusions he draws. In his desire to integrate Christianity into rabbinic Judaism he in fact blurs the boundaries and cavalierly disregards chronological and geographical (Palestinian versus Babylonian) distinctions (this becoming particularly obvious in his dealing with the Enoch-Metatron traditions, to which I will refer later).

But still, Boyarin has opened a window and allowed a fresh breeze to reinvigorate the scholarly debate about the *minim*. Indeed, it remains an important question as to what extent the rabbis were active partners in these discussions with the *minim*, that is, whether our rabbinic sources only reflect the fending off and repulse of such "heretical" propositions or whether they reveal hints that the (or rather some) rabbis were actively engaged in expanding the borderlines and softening the all too rigid idea of the one and only God. Phrased this way, the question does not assume that the discussions preserved in our rabbinic sources reflect the controversy of firmly established "religions"—"Jewish," "Pagan," "Christian," "Gnostic," or other—but allow for still fluid boundaries within (and beyond) which a variety of groups were competing with each other in shaping their identities. From this follows of necessity that the rabbis, in arguing against "heretics," were not always and automatically quarreling with enemies from the outside—however hard they may have tried to give precisely this impression—but also with enemies from within, that is, with colleagues who entertained ideas that the rabbis were fighting against.

In what follows I will present a couple of examples for the rabbis' discussions with the "heretics." In so doing I will indeed start with the assumption that the boundaries between "orthodoxy" and "heresy" have been fluid for a long time or, to put it differently, that the impact

of the various "heresies" was crucial to the rabbis in shaping their own identity. With regard to the "heresies," a picture is about to emerge that is much more diffuse than has been previously thought—with fluid boundaries even between the heretical groups and sects—and that renders fruitless any attempt to delineate these boundaries more sharply. Yet it seems safe to say that the main "opponents" of the rabbis were "Pagans" on the one hand (that is, Greco-Roman polytheism in all its diversity) and "Christians" on the other (again, in all its heretical variety and with its own struggle to define its identity).[9] This means that, whereas the emerging Christianity defined itself by making recourse to contemporary Judaism as well as to all kinds of groups and movements within itself, the emerging rabbinic Judaism defined itself by making recourse to *Christianity* (as well as to all kinds of groups and movements within itself). To be more precise: even the phrase "within itself" is ultimately misleading, since this "itself," far from being a stable entity, is the unknown quantity that we aim to describe. In other words, the paradigm of our unknown quantity is in constant flux and not always the same (i.e., not always either a straight "Judaism" or a straight "Christianity"). Depending on the context, it sometimes *is* "Christianity," and sometimes it is *inside* "Judaism"—with the "inside" and "outside" categories becoming ever more blurred.

If we take paganism and in particular Christianity as the most common determiner of those heresies confronting and shaping rabbinic Judaism, we find that the rabbis reacted in two ways: repulsion and attraction. Many of the debates between the rabbis and the heretics betray a sharp and furious rejection of ideas about God that smack of polytheism in its pagan or Christian guise, the latter making do with just two or three gods—that is, developing a binitarian or trinitarian theology. But such ideas were by no means alien to ancient Judaism: the frequent attacks against polytheistic tendencies in the Hebrew Bible forcefully demonstrate that the authors of the biblical books had good reason to attack polytheism; and the biblical and postbiblical speculations about "Wisdom" (*hokhmah*) and the "Word" (*logos*) prove beyond any doubt that Judaism was open to ideas that accepted divine or semi-divine powers next to God. Hence, one could regard their elimination with mixed feelings, and indeed, some rabbis were resistant to the Christian usurpation of their ideas and insisted that not only did they *originally* belong to them but that they *still* belonged to them. This re-appropriation of originally Jewish ideas about God and (semi) divine powers apart from him took two forms. First, certain Jewish groups elevated figures such as Adam, the angels, David, and above all Metatron to divine status, responding, I suggest, to the Christian elevation of Jesus; and second, other groups revived the idea of the suffering servant/ Messiah and his vicarious suffering despite (or because of) its Christian appropriation.

Of the many relevant sources I will focus here on David and Metatron.

David

We all know the famous biblical passage in the Book of Daniel that describes the vision of God ("the Ancient of Days") on his throne in heaven (Dan. 7:9):

> (7:9) I beheld till *thrones* were set in place, and the Ancient of Days (*'atiq yomin*) took his seat. His garment was like white snow, and the hair of his head was like pure wool. *His throne* was fiery flames, and its wheels were blazing fire.

If we read this verse with the eyes of the rabbis, we immediately discover a problem: why were thrones (in the plural) set in place when only one person (the Ancient of Days) takes his seat? Would he sit on several thrones? Hardly, since "*his throne* was fiery flames." What then about the other thrones? The easiest answer to this question (which in all likelihood is presupposed in the biblical text) would be that the other thrones were prepared for the members of the heavenly court—since the continuation in verse 10 explicitly states that the court sits down (presumably on the other thrones):

> (7:10) A river of fire streamed forth from before him; thousands upon thousands served him, and myriads upon myriads stood attending him. The court sat down and the books were opened.

Yet this seemingly simple solution to the problem is not the one the rabbis adopt. One possible answer is given by Rabbi Aqiva in the Babylonian Talmud:

> As it has been taught [in a Baraitha]: One (throne) was for him [God] and the other one was for David—these are the words of Rabbi Aqiva.

But Aqiva is immediately refuted by another rabbi:

> Rabbi Yose said to him: "Aqiva, how long will you make the Shekhinah profane?! Rather, one (throne) was for justice (*din*) and the other one was for mercy (*tzedaqah*)."

And yet another rabbi adds:

> Said Rabbi Eleazar b. Azariah to him [Aqiva]: "Aqiva, what have you to do with the Aggadah?! Confine yourself to the (study of) Nega'im [leprosy] and Ohalot [impurities spread by a corpse]! Rather, one was a throne and the other one was a footstool: a throne to take his seat on it, and a footstool in support of his feet." [10]

This is a remarkable exchange, put into the mouth of three rabbis of the early second century C.E.—R. Aqiva, R. Yose (the Galilean), and their slightly older contemporary Eleazar b. Azariah.

Aqiva takes the plural of "thrones" in Daniel 7:9 literally and argues that if thrones were set up, then we are dealing with at least two thrones, that is, in addition to the throne for the Ancient of Days there must have been another throne for someone else, and this someone else was David. In other words, from Daniel 7:9 we learn that in fact one throne in heaven was set up for God and another for David. R. Yose vehemently disagrees with this exegesis proposed by Aqiva. He doesn't tell us what it is that he disapproves of, but we can guess at it. No, he argues, this evokes dangers that we would do best to avoid: the two thrones are not, God forbid, for God and David; rather, they are for two different attributes of the same God—the divine attributes of justice and mercy. For the third rabbi, Eleazar b. Azariah, this is still dangerous enough, and he prefers the rather simplistic explanation that one throne was for God to sit on it and the other one his footstool.

But why Aqiva's suggestion of David, and why was this perceived as dangerous? Since we are dealing with an exegesis of Daniel 7, which, following the vision of God on his throne, introduces the Son of Man, it is most likely that David in R. Aqiva's exegesis is not just the earthly King David but the Son of Man as the Davidic Messiah. So, what Aqiva is actually saying with his exegesis is that the thrones placed in heaven were reserved for God and the Messiah-King David. Although Daniel mentions God (the "Ancient of Days") only as taking his seat, we must infer from the plural of "thrones" that David also took his seat on the throne reserved for him.

This is no doubt a powerful—and extremely dangerous—solution to the problem raised by the plural of "thrones." I cannot trace here the history of the idea of the Son of Man (*bar enash/ben adam*) in ancient Judaism.[11] Suffice it to point to its climax in the New Testament in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus tells the High Priest:

> And you will see the Son of Man
> seated at the right hand of the Power
> and coming with the clouds of heaven.[12]

Jesus—whether it be the historical Jesus or Mark's Jesus is irrelevant for our purpose—candidly identifies himself here with the Son of Man of Daniel, explicitly referring to Daniel 7:13. The "Power" (*dynamis*) is a designation for God—in rabbinic Judaism the power or authority of the God who reveals himself (*gevurah* in Hebrew).[13] Yet unlike Daniel, he refers to another biblical verse, namely, Psalms 110:1, where it says:

> The Lord (*YHWH*) says to my lord (*adoni*):[14] "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."

This is the famous psalm verse that would become part and parcel of the Christian doctrine of the *sessio ad dexteram* [sitting at the right hand of God].[15] The speaker, of course, is God, and the addressee is David, originally the Davidic king or a descendent of the Davidic dynasty. Yet what is at stake here is not some Davidic king but the Messiah as the descendant of David, that is, the Davidic Messiah. Among the various messianic expectations of ancient Judaism, the Messiah from the house of David definitely embodies that which would become the norm—certainly in the New Testament. The complicated genealogy of Matthew 1 makes it unambiguously clear that Jesus, the Messiah, is a descendant of the house of David, and a number of passages in the New Testament explicitly refer to our psalm verse in connection with the resurrected Jesus.[16] No doubt then, it is the Messiah Jesus, the offspring of David, who is portrayed as the "other" lord who takes his seat at God's right hand in heaven. And no doubt either that precisely this implication of the possible identification of the Son of Man with Jesus immediately sets off an alarm bell with R. Aqiva's rabbinic opponents (R. Yose and R. Eleazar b. Azariah), who try to defuse any such implication in R. Aqiva's exegesis—because it threatens to evoke that (in their view) most dangerous and detested of all heresies, Christianity, in its most provocative form. Both Jews and Christians shared a belief in the Davidic Messiah, and when Aqiva has his Messiah take his seat next to God in heaven, all rabbinic fences erected against this particular heresy are pulled down—with incalculable consequences for rabbinic Judaism.

So what we have here in the Babylonian Talmud is rabbinic polemics against Christianity, Christianity in its very essence, with the Messiah Jesus competing with the Jewish Messiah. But two points are crucial here. First, the polemic is directed against a rabbi (no less a rabbi than R. Aqiva), that is, we are confronted with *inner-Jewish* polemics. R. Aqiva's exegesis (certainly not the historical R. Aqiva of the second century C.E. but R. Aqiva as the symbol or the front man of certain rabbinic circles) reflects ideas circulating *within* rabbinic Judaism, ideas that were fervently contested and rejected by other rabbis. And secondly, such ideas appear only in the Babylonian Talmud and not in Palestinian sources. It is the Babylonian Talmud, I argue, that clearly reflects not just a dispute with Christian doctrines but a dispute with doctrines about a second divine or semi-divine figure next to God that found followers among the rabbinic fold in Babylonian Judaism. It is most likely that our discourse in the Babylonian Talmud even presupposes knowledge of the New Testament as a canonical text.

Metatron

My second example of the simultaneous attraction and rejection of originally Jewish ideas that were usurped, so to speak, by Christianity, is the figure of Metatron. But this one is much more complicated than the previous one. As is the case with the Davidic Messiah, it refers back to an original Jewish tradition, the pre-diluvian patriarch Enoch, but unlike the Davidic Messiah it *changes* the originally Jewish tradition in its attempt to *answer* the Christian message. Let me briefly explain this:

We know of the patriarch Enoch from the biblical book of Genesis. Unlike the other patriarchs (before him and after him) he lived "only" 365 years, and the Bible doesn't explain why; it just says:[17]

> 21 And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begot Methuselah.
> 22 And Enoch walked with God after he begot Methuselah three hundred years, and begot sons and daughters.
> 23 And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years.
> 24 And Enoch walked with God, and he was not; for God took him.

Hence, Enoch's life was apparently terminated by God because "God took him." But why did God "take" him? While the Hebrew Bible doesn't answer this question, the post-biblical Enoch literature tries to give an answer. It takes the phrase "Enoch walked with God" literally by arguing that God wanted him to be with him; and since God doesn't walk on earth any longer, Enoch must have ascended to heaven and stayed with God in heaven. This is what we learn from the First (Ethiopic) Book of Enoch (Book of the Watchers),[18] the Similitudes or Parables of Enoch,[19] and the Second (Slavonic) Book of Enoch:[20] in order to stay with God in heaven Enoch needed to be transformed into an angel. The same is true for the much later Third (Hebrew) Book of Enoch (3 Enoch), which most likely dates from the post Talmudic period, that is, somewhere between the seventh and ninth century C.E.

But 3 Enoch goes much farther than any of its predecessors. There, Enoch ascends to heaven, is transformed into an angel and stays with God—yet this transformation is unheard of before. When Enoch appears in the highest heavens, the angels oppose the presence of "one born of a woman" among them, but God explains to them that this particular human being is "the choicest of them all" and that he is destined to serve his "throne of glory".[21] Before he can begin his service—with the new name Metatron instead of Enoch (Metatron probably meaning "the one sitting next to the throne of God")—a process of transformation needs to take place, and this

is described in great detail: he is infused with divine wisdom,[22] enlarged and increased in size to enormous dimensions, and equipped with seventy-two wings and 365,000 eyes.[23] Then God provides him with a throne similar to his own throne of glory, placed at the entrance of the seventh palace, and has a herald announce that he is appointed God's servant as prince and ruler over all the heavenly forces. All the angels and princes of heaven are admonished:[24]

> Any angel and any prince who has anything to say in my [God's] presence should go before him and speak to him. Whatever he says to you in my name you must observe and do.

So Metatron becomes God's representative in heaven, his deputy and second in charge. Since he understands not only all the secrets of creation but also the "thoughts of men's hearts",[25] we might even conclude that not just the angels but also human beings are well advised to turn to him as the deputy and representative of God.

His transformation not yet finished, God fashions for him a majestic robe and a kingly crown and calls him his "Lesser YHWH (*YHWY ha-qatan*) . . . because it is written: My name is in him (Ex. 23:21)."[26] He inscribes on Metatron's crown the letters by which heaven and earth were created,[27] and all the angels in heaven fall prostrate when they see his majesty and splendor.[28] And then comes the ultimate transformation:[29]

> At once my flesh turned to flame,
> my sinews to blazing fire,
> my bones to juniper coals,
> my eyelashes to lightning flashes,
> my eyeballs to fiery torches,
> the hairs of my head to hot flames,
> all my limbs to wings of burning fire,
> and the trunk of my body to blazing fire.

In order to be transformed from the human being Enoch into Metatron, the highest angel in heaven, Enoch's human existence must be annihilated and turned into an angelic being of fiery substance. This procedure is reminiscent of what we are told in the 1st and 2nd Books of Enoch, but in none of these apocalypses does an angel come as close to God—not just in distance but also in his physical appearance and, above all, his rank—as does Metatron in 3 Enoch: he is enthroned (almost) like God, he looks (almost) like God, he has (almost) the same name as God, he knows all the heavenly and earthly secrets, including the thoughts of human beings, and he is worshiped (almost) like God. In sum, he is the perfect viceroy, who acts on behalf of God and to whom God has given unlimited power.

As was the case with David, the rabbis perceived such an unprecedented elevation of a human being as dangerous and couldn't leave it uncontested. A case in point is a midrash in Bereshit Rabba that the editor of one manuscript inserted into the text:

> Enoch walked with God. And he was not,[30] for God took him (Gen. 5:24).
> R. Hama b. R. Hoshayah said: ("And he was not" means) that he was not inscribed in the books of the righteous but in the books of the wicked.
> R. Aibu said: Enoch was a hypocrite, acting sometimes as a righteous, sometimes as a wicked man. (Therefore) the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: While he is (still) righteous I will remove him from the world.
> R. Aibu (also) said: He judged (that is, condemned) him on New Year, when he judges the whole world.[31]

But what was so dangerous about Metatron's elevation to the "Lesser God"? Scholars normally resort to the danger inflicted on Judaism as a "monotheistic religion."[32] This is true enough, but what precisely does it mean? As I mentioned at the beginning, "Monotheism" is a notoriously vague category that has never been monolithic and easy to define, neither in the Hebrew Bible nor in the subsequent Jewish tradition. I believe we can go a step further. Metatron was elevated by God to the highest angel in heaven, superior to all the other angels, and sharing with God all the divine attributes (name, size, throne, wisdom, and so forth). There is only one other figure on whom similar qualities are lavished: Jesus Christ. And indeed, some scholars have invested great effort into discovering some kind of heavenly *Makro-Anthropos* in the Second Temple period that prefigured the New Testament Jesus and that might be connected with Jewish speculations that came fully to the force in 3 Enoch.[33] Others, most notably Daniel Boyarin, wish to go a step further and see in Metatron a representative of the so-called "binitarian" theology, that is, a theology within the very heart of early (pre-Christian) Judaism, that develops the notion of two divine powers sharing among them the "divinity" (most prominently the hypostasized "Wisdom" and "Logos"). It is not the place here to discuss Jewish binitarianism, but whereas there can be no doubt in my view that pre-Christian Judaism (and not only Philo) was indeed sympathetic to such ideas and that the Christian adaptation of Wisdom and Logos speculations put an end to this sympathy,[34] I do not think that Metatron belongs to this illustrious company.[35] The title *YHWH ha-qatan* is unique to 3 Enoch and needs to be explained first and foremost within the parameters of the historical setting of 3 Enoch—unless one wants to claim that this particular tradition is much older than the rest of the material collected in 3 Enoch (which would be very difficult, to say the least) or to conjure up the chimera of "phenomenological" versus "historical" evidence.

If we take the rather late date of 3 Enoch seriously and do not ignore the chronological and geographic setting of the macroform (as I said before, chronologically 3 Enoch belongs to the post Talmudic period, and geographically most likely to Babylonia), the most obvious point of reference is clearly the New Testament. There is every reason to believe that the Babylonian Jews knew the New Testament, either directly, through the Diatessaron (the "Harmony" of the four Gospels composed by Tatian, presumably in Syriac) or the New Testament Peshitta (the Syriac translation of the four separate Gospels), or indirectly, through the medium of Syrian Church Fathers such as Aphrahat or Ephrem;[36] after all, Syriac and Babylonian Aramaic are closely related Aramaic dialects. Hence, I would like to turn the tables and suggest that instead of seeing 3 Enoch's Metatron as part of the fabric from which the New Testament Jesus emerged we try to understand the figure of Metatron as an *answer* to the New Testament's message of Jesus Christ. In this context, Guy Stroumsa has drawn our attention to the famous hymn in Paul's letter to the Philippians,[37] where it is said of Jesus[38] that he

> (6) though he was in the form of God (*en morphē theou*),
> did not regard equality with God
> as something to be exploited,
> (7) but emptied himself,
> taking the form of a servant (*morphēn doulou*),
> being born in human likeness.
> And being found in human form,
> (8) he humbled himself
> and became obedient to the point of death –
> even death on a cross.
> (9) Therefore God also highly exalted him (*hyperypsōsen*)
> and bestowed on him the name
> that is above every name (*to onoma to hyper pan onoma*),
> (10) so that at the name of Jesus
> every knee should bend,
> in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
> (11) and every tongue should confess
> that Jesus Christ is Lord,
> to the glory of God the father.

If we read this text in light of the Metatron traditions in 3 Enoch, some striking parallels become apparent—and some no less conspicuous differences. Christ, though conceived of in the "form of God," did not insist on his equality with God but rather assumed the "form of a servant (or slave)" and hence of a human being. After he died, God exalted him, that is, raised him from

the dead, gave him the name "above every name," whereupon all heavenly and earthly beings worshiped him and acknowledged him as the "Lord." The movement here is from the top down (from Christ's divine existence to his human form) and then again from the bottom up (from his human existence back to his original divine form). The latter movement is caused by God, exalting Jesus after his death and bestowing on him the most powerful name, that is, the name of the Lord. In Metatron's case there is only one movement, from the bottom up: he begins as a human being that, however, does not die but is exalted by God to heaven to assume there his angelic and almost divine function as God's deputy and viceroy, appearing in the form and with the attributes of God, bearing God's name, and worshiped by the angels. Ironically, it is in this state that he is called, together with the name of God, "servant." Hence, despite the similarities, the Metatron tradition suggests a dramatic reversal of the New Testament narrative. We do have a God-like figure, it posits, but this figure did not first originate in heaven and then relinquished its divinity in order to become human; on the contrary, this figure was fully human and chosen by God to be transformed into a divine being and to assume its function as God's servant and as the judge of angels and humans alike.

Another noticeable parallel appears in the letter to the Hebrews:[39]

(3) He [Jesus] is a reflection of God's glory (*apaugasma tēs doxēs*)
and the exact imprint of God's very being (*charaktēr tēs hypostaseōs autou*),
and he sustains all things by his powerful word.
When he had made purification for sins,
he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high,
(4) having become as much superior to angels (*kreittōn genomenos tōn anggelōn*)
as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Here Jesus is conceived as God's reflection and hypostasis—in a language obviously derived from the Jewish Wisdom speculation, as we know it in particular from the female figure in Proverbs 8[40]—who returns to his divine origin after having purified humanity from their sins. Upon his return to heaven, God assigns to him a throne next to him and a special name (presumably the name of God). Both these qualities mark him as superior to all the angels, and the text continues to stress precisely this superiority: God calls him alone "my son" (v. 5),[41] the angels are asked to worship him (v. 6),[42] his throne is forever (v. 8),[43] he will remain forever (v. 11),[44] and he is asked to sit at God's right hand (v. 13).[45] The analogies and differences are very similar to those in the letter to the Philippians, though with a closer parallel here between Jesus' and Metatron's superiority to the angels.

So one could ultimately argue that Metatron indeed adopts the role of Jesus Christ, yet without the mythical and—for the Jewish reader—unacceptable package deal of Jesus' divine origin and human birth, let alone his cruel death on the cross. The savior quality of that divine figure, so dominant in the New Testament, is no doubt also present in the Metatron tradition: Metatron knows, and apparently judges, all the secrets in the hearts of his former fellow humans on earth.[46] This function of Metatron obviously stands in tension to the traditional role of the Messiah, but this tension seems to be deliberate (3 Enoch wants to have it both ways: the traditional messianic expectation as well as Metatron's new role)! To some extent, Metatron's powerful figure in 3 Enoch—*responding*, as I propose, to the Christian message—completes and concludes the movement of the Merkavah mystics, the earliest manifestation of Jewish mysticism: the ascent to heaven of some individuals has become unnecessary, or rather was replaced by that unique human being who ascended to heaven and then did not return but stayed there forever. With Metatron in heaven, there is no longer any need to send human representatives to heaven to assure the earthly community of God's continual love for Israel. Not unlike the Christians, 3 Enoch claims, we now have our own representative forever in heaven to take care of us—a savior who is one of us, true man and new God.

Notes

1) This article summarizes some of the ideas in my new book *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012).

2) Deut. 6:4.

3) On this, see my *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 34ff.

4) Sometimes other terms are used, such as *tzadoqim* (literally "Sadducees"—of course not identical with the historical Sadducees), "nations of the world" (various "nations" representing various beliefs, also synonymous with "pagans"), or *apiqorsin* ("apostates"). On the latter, see recently Jenny R. Labendz, "'Know What to Answer the Epicurean': A Diachronic Study of the *'Apikoros* in Rabbinic Literature," *HUCA* 74 (2003), pp. 175–214.

5) R. Travers Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1903; reprint Jersey City, N.J.: Ktav, 2006).

6) Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977).

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

8) Daniel Boyarin, "The Gospel of the Memra: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue to John,"

HTR 94 (2001), pp. 243–284; id., "Two Powers in Heaven; or, The Making of a Heresy," in Hindy Najman and Judith H. Newman, eds., *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 331–370; id., "The Parables of Enoch and the Foundation of the Rabbinic Sect: A Hypothesis," in Mauro Perani, ed., *"The Words of a Wise Man's Mouth Are Gracious" (Qoh 10,12): Festschrift for Günter Stemberger on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), pp. 53–72; and the as yet last incarnation of this article, id., "Beyond Judaisms: Meṭaṭron and the Divine Polymorphy of Ancient Judaism," *JSJ* 41 (2010), pp. 323–365. It is no easy task for the reader to cleave his or her way through Boyarin's rather longish articles to figure out what is new, all the more so as Boyarin is engaged in an endless debate with the secondary literature rather than with the sources.

9) I include what is called "Gnosis" or "Gnosticism" in the category of "Christianity," following the trend in recent scholarship that is reluctant to distinguish between "Christianity" and "Gnosis" as two stable entities that can neatly be separated.

10) *Babylonian Talmud,* Sanhedrin 38b.

11) See on this in more detail, Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus*, pp. 73ff.

12) Mk. 14:62; and see Mt. 26:64; Lk. 22:69.

13) Cf. Arnold Goldberg, "Sitzend zur Rechten der Kraft: Zur Gottesbezeichnung Gebura in der frühen rabbinischen Literatur," *BZ* NF 8 (1964), pp. 284–293 = id., ed. Margarete Schlüter and Peter Schäfer, *Mystik und Theologie des rabbinischen Judentums. Gesammelte Studien I* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), pp. 188–198.

14) In both cases the Septuagint translation of "lord" is *kyrios*.

15) See Christoph Markschies, "'Sessio as dexteram': Bemerkungen zu einem altchristlichen Bekenntnismotiv in der Diskussion der altkirchlichen Theologen," in id., *Alta Trinità Beata* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), pp. 1–69.

16) Cf. Acts 2:34f. ; 1 Cor. 15:25 ; Eph. 1:20 ; Heb. 1:13.

17) Gen. 5:21-24.

18) Dated to the late 3rd century B.C.E.

19) Dated to the late 1st century B.C.E.

20) Dates to the 1st century C.E.

21) Peter Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981), § 10.

22) Ibid., § 11.

23) Ibid., § 12.

24) Ibid., § 13.

25) Ibid., § 14.

26) Ibid., § 15.

27) Ibid., § 16.

28) Ibid.,§ 18.

29) Ibid., § 19.

30) Lit. for "then he was no more," as translated above.

31) Bereshit Rabbah 25:1.

32) See, e.g., most recently Alan Segal, "Religious Experience and the Construction of the Transcendent Self," in April D. DeConick, ed., *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism* (Atlanta, GA, and Leiden: Society of Biblical Literature and Brill, 2006), p. 29.

33) See Gedalyahu G. Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ," *HTR* 76 (1983), pp. 269-288; Jarl E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), pp. 266-291; DeConick, "What Is Early in Jewish and Christian Mysticism?" in id., *Paradise Now*, p. 19; James R. Davila, "Melchizedek, the 'Youth,' and Jesus," in James R. Davila (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 267ff.; Moshe Idel, *Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), pp. 108ff.

34) On this, see in particular Boyarin, above, n. 7.

35) On this, see my *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 322ff.

36) On this, see the discussion in my book, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), especially pp. 122ff.

37) Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God," pp. 282ff.

38) Phil. 2:6-11.

39) Hebr. 1:3-4.

40) See Peter Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 23ff.; Wisdom as *apaugasma* in Wisdom of Solomon 7:26, see id. *Mirror of His Beauty*, p. 35.

41) Referring to Ps. 2:7; 2 Sam. 7:14.

42) Referring to Deut. 32:43 (only in the LXX, not in the Masoretic text).

43) Referring to Ps. 45:6 (the throne there is God's throne!).

44) Referring to Ps. 102:26.

45) Referring to Ps. 110:1.

46) *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 14.