

## JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

*Encountering the Rest of God: How Jesus Came to Personify the Sabbath*, by Henry Sturcke. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2005. Pp. 393. Paper. €34.50. ISBN 3290173518.

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The so-called parting of the ways between Judaism and early Christianity enjoys intense discussion among scholars. In this context, the dissertation of Henry Sturcke, submitted to the theological faculty of the University of Zurich and directed by Jean Zumstein, is a most welcome addition, because it focuses on a very particular topic that nevertheless is one of the central issues in the debate. Sturcke's question concerns the development of the abandonment of the Sabbath among Christians in favor of the celebration of the first day of the week as the Lord's Day. Sturcke is well aware that this was probably not a linear process and that different communities dealt in different ways with the Sabbath. However, as the title suggests, Sturcke is convinced that the roots of the abandonment of the Sabbath as the day of rest lie in the words and deeds of Jesus that might be interpreted as critical of the Sabbath.

The study is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is an introduction that lays out the subject of inquiry and provides a brief history of research on various aspects of the Sabbath. It then lays out the structure and method of the book and ends with Sturcke's main thesis. He aims to show that there is no single reason for the abandonment of the Sabbath observance, since this could not account for the diversity of early Christianity. Instead, he suggests a process that was catalyzed by the advent of the Gentile mission, the cooling of ardor of the first generations of Christians, and the impossibility of returning to Sabbath observance when the need for more structured worship made itself felt (36).

The second chapter traces the Sabbath in the Old Testament and intertestamental Judaism and then in the Roman world. In the latter part Sturcke also refers to attitudes toward Judaism occasioned by Sabbath observance, as well as to proselytes and Godfearers in the synagogue. Interestingly, Sturcke does not explicitly differentiate between Palestinian and Diaspora Judaism, probably rightly so, since there is little indication that Sabbath observance differed greatly between them.

The third chapter is at the same time the first chapter dealing explicitly with a New Testament text, namely, Gal 4:8–11. While Paul competes with missionar-

ies who try to convince the Galatians to be more observant with regard to Torah and mentions circumcision as a point of contention, Sturcke argues that Sabbath observance was also at stake, since 4:10 mentions the observance of certain times. This implies not only a Pauline mission that did not include a Sabbath observance but also that Paul was not interested in religiously significant times at all but lived in the "last days, when the coming of Christ had changed the very quality of time" (136).

In the next chapter Sturcke examines the attitude of Jesus toward the Sabbath by way of the three Synoptic accounts of the gleaning of grain on a Sabbath. Sturcke's rationale for selecting this pericope is the absence of a healing miracle, which accompanies other Sabbath controversies. The story allows for a much clearer assessment of the issues at stake with regard to the Sabbath. Sturcke first examines Mark's version of the story and then compares the attitude found here to some of the other references in the Gospel. Unsurprisingly, Sturcke concludes that, while Mark describes a Jesus who comes into conflict with some of the expectations about Sabbath observance, there is no clear indication that the community behind the Gospel did or did not observe the Sabbath. What is clear, however, is its subordination to the authority of Jesus. Sturcke's treatment of the Lukan and Matthean versions comes to similar results. However, Sturcke also observes that in Matthew the authority of Jesus alone did not suffice to resolve the problem. Yet on the question whether Matthew's group was observant, Sturcke waxes, to my mind unnecessarily so. Finally, in this chapter the traditions behind the Markan story are studied, with the aim of suggesting some probabilities concerning Jesus' own attitude toward the Sabbath. Here Sturcke observes that Jesus probably subordinated the Sabbath to the dawning of the kingdom of God.

The fifth chapter turns toward the Gospel of John in the examination of the two healing miracles in John 5 and 9. Again Sturcke finds no definite indication either way as to the actual observance of the Sabbath in the Johannine community. He takes the *heos arti* in 5:17 as ambivalent. However, he also points out that the separation between Judaism and Christianity in the Gospel seems so far ahead that a dialogue with the synagogue had ceased.

In a sixth chapter Sturcke turns to further writings, among them extracanonical Christian literature. He looks at Heb 4:9, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and the *Gospel of Thomas*. He observes how the link between weekly Sabbath observance and entry into the divine Sabbath is broken in Hebrews and the confession of Christ takes the place of weekly Sabbath observance. The *Epistle of Barnabas* takes over the entirety of the scriptures and the covenant as exclusive property of the Christians (301). This means that the Sabbath is to be observed, with the caveat that this is only truly possible for those consecrated and justified by God. Sturcke's very sensible and careful examination of logion 27 of the *Gospel of Thomas* leads him to state that the most we can say is that it subordinates Sabbath observance to specific soteriological concerns.

The seventh chapter provides a conclusion that in a first step summarizes the results of the study so far, then attempts an all-too-brief historical reconstruc-

tion of the Sabbath question in early Christianity, and finally moves on to some hermeneutical observations that prepare for the application of the question of Sabbath observance to contemporary worship practice. The volume concludes with a bibliography and an index of ancient literature.

Sturcke's book is well written. It provides excellent summaries of his findings at the end of each section, is carefully edited, and does not contain too many tedious repetitions. The amount of secondary literature Sturcke has worked through is quite admirable, and he is conversant not just with the English but also with the German and French literature on the subject. His analyses are always careful. He achieves a good representation of the diverse attitudes toward the Sabbath and succeeds in showing that this diversity in ancient Christianity does not allow for the general statement that most early Christians observed the Sabbath. He is also careful in his assessment of the details still recoverable with regard to community practice, even if the historical reconstruction at the end goes a little beyond the evidence of his individual analyses. This book is balanced and makes good sense. Therefore, it can be recommended to all interested in early Christian worship and history.

