

PAUL AND HIS JEWISHNESS

RECENT BOOKS ON PAUL, JUDAISM AND THE TORAH

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I. Introduction

Blameshifting is a familiar psychological phenomenon. When people blameshift, they place a responsibility on someone else in order to avoid facing an unpleasant fact or in order to avoid taking responsibility for something they have done. Blameshifting also a theological phenomenon, and missionaries to the Jewish people encounter it quite often.

Jews traditionally avoided considering the Messiahship of Jesus by impugning his person. Jesus was pictured as a false prophet and a seducer of the people. Recently the image of Jesus among Jews has been changing. He is now typically seen as a rabbi, or a teacher, or a miracle worker, or as the first "Reform Jew" or as any number of other things, except as Messiah. This "Jewish reclamation of Jesus," to use Donald Hagner's phrase, has many causes. Hagner's book can be consulted for a discussion of that issue.¹

In spite of this "reclamation," most Jews do not believe in him as Messiah and Savior. But this leads to a question. If Jesus is Jewish and a good teacher, why don't we believe what he taught? How can we continue to justify our non-belief in him? One way is by shifting the blame for our non-belief: we do believe what Jesus taught. The problem is that Jesus never taught what Christians believe about him. Christianity, as opposed to the teaching of Jesus, was invented by Paul from a mixture of pagan and Greek sources. Paul is to blame for the existence of Christianity. If Jesus only knew what Paul wrote, the argument goes, he would be horrified at what had been made of his life and teachings.

In Jewish missions, we therefore hear all kinds of things about Paul: that he invented a new religion, that he abrogated the Law, that he was gnostic and a Hellenist and an advocate of mystery religions and an antinomian and a self-seeking megalomaniac and an epileptic. Several Jewish writers have been willing to admit some measure of Jewishness, not to mention sanity, for Paul. But if Judaism were a baseball game, Paul would still be confined to the bleachers. He is still not considered by Jews to be a part of "real" Judaism. He is still the "inventor"

of a new religion. Though some have admired him for his religious genius, the consensus is that he separated himself from his own people.²

II. Crucial Questions, Jewish Answers

There are two questions about Paul that should concern us in Jewish missions. **The first question** is that of the origin of Paul's doctrine and thought. Did Paul really "invent" Christianity from an amalgam of pagan elements, the typical Jewish view? Did everything suddenly come to him on the Damascus Road as a theology so new that it was divorced from Jewish precedents, so new that only the revelation on the road could have led Paul to formulate it? This view is adopted by many evangelicals. Or did Paul learn anything from the teaching of Jesus, the earlier apostles, and the Jewish background of his age?

Jewish scholarship on Paul has gone through three chronological stages in answering these questions.³ It is important to recognize that the Jewish scholars on Paul, as on the New Testament in general, have tended to follow the higher critical conclusions of the non-Jewish scholars. Let us see how this came about.

1. In the first chronological stage Paul's religion was thought to be completely Hellenistic, not Jewish. His relationship to Jesus and to the earlier apostles was considered non-existent. This viewpoint began with the 19th-century German scholar F. C. Baur who developed a theory of the early church which has shaped higher criticism down to the present day. According to Baur, Petrine (i.e. Peter's) Christianity was that of the so-called "Jerusalem Church" which was composed of law-observing, Jesus-following Jewish Christians. Pauline Christianity was a newer invention, tailor-made for reaching gentiles, not based on the teaching of Jesus nor on the teaching of the earlier apostles, and reflecting Paul's theology of law abrogation. The Book of Acts is the grand synthesis of both, papering over the differences between Peter and Paul.

Baur's exegesis was colored by the philosophy of Hegelian dialectic, the same philosophy that lay at the roots of Marxism. In Hegel's system, there is a thesis, which is opposed by an antithesis, both resolved in a synthesis. For Baur, Petrine Christianity was the thesis, Pauline Christianity was the antithesis, and Acts was the

synthesis. With Baur's theory as the foundation, a superstructure was constructed in which it was claimed that Paul borrowed his concepts from Gnosticism and the Greek mystery religions. Among Jewish scholars, the idea that Paul's theology had a pagan origin was held by Heinrich Graetz, Kaufmann Kohler, and in large part by Martin Buber.

2. In the second chronological stage, Paul's religion was Jewish, but represented Hellenistic Judaism in contrast with Rabbinic Judaism. Or, it was something of a mixture of paganism and Judaism. So whatever could be said for its Jewishness, it wasn't "mainstream" Judaism. This was held by Claude Montefiore, Joseph Klausner, Samuel Sandmel, and Leo Baeck.

3. Finally, in the third stage Paul's religion was considered to be a mix of Hellenistic Judaism and Palestinian or Rabbinic, Judaism. Hans Joachim Schoeps and Schalom Ben-Chorin took this point of view.

So much for the first question of the origin of Paul's thought. **There is a second question** of interest to Jewish missionaries. This is the question of what has been called "Paul's main concern" or what some would call the "center of Pauline theology." Again, we can discern a chronological progression.⁴

The early Church Fathers thought Paul's main concern was the abrogation of the Law. Commentators still debate whether that was Paul's intention, though few would say that it is his central concern. The Reformers said that the center of Pauline theology was justification by faith, which has been the standard evangelical view. More recently, some writers have argued that Paul is concerned mainly with the relationship between Jews and gentiles in the Church. These writers say that while Paul teaches justification by faith, that is subsidiary to his concern over Jews and gentiles.

What about Jewish writers on the subject? Since Paul's theology as a whole is rejected by Jewish authors, they are not particularly concerned to highlight his theological center. It is fair to say that most Jewish scholars find such a mix of pagan, Hellenistic, and perhaps Jewish elements in his thought that they conclude that his theology has no center. Most would undoubtedly concur that Paul abrogated the Law, though they would not see fit to label that as a theological center of Paul's thought.⁵

The books reviewed in the following section will be useful for determining the answers to these two questions from a Jewish point of view: the origin of Paul's thought and the center of his theology.

III. Four New Books

The assignment was to review new books by Jewish writers. But it turned out there is also a recent book by a gentile author which is of equal importance. Since in New Testament studies the Jewish scholars frequently take their lead from the non-Jews, I will also discuss this third book and make mention of a fourth book as well.

The four books are:

The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity by Hyam Maccoby (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986).

Paul the Convert: the Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee by Alan F. Segal (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990). Alan F. Segal is professor of religion at Barnard College.

Paul and the Jewish law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles by Peter J. Tomson (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum and Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990). In the series *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum* (section 3, Jewish Traditions in Early Christian Literature, v. 1). Tomson studied theology and rabbinics in Amsterdam and Jerusalem, has ministered in the Dutch Reformed Church, and was the executive editor of two volumes in the *Compendia*.

Paul and the Torah by Lloyd Gaston (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987). Lloyd Gaston is professor of New Testament at the Vancouver School of Theology.

In order to easily remember the thrust of each writer, I have designated the first three respectively as "Maccoby the Mythmaker," "Segal the Sociologist," and "Tomson the Torah-Man."

Each book tackles Paul from different vantage points and does not always consider the same passages in Paul. Although they all treat of Paul's Jewishness, to compare them side-by-side would be like comparing apples or oranges, or maybe more like comparing torah scrolls and blintzes. But there is one area in which they can be easily compared: the subject of Paul and the law. I will return to this at the end.

1. Maccoby the Mythmaker
The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity
Hyam Maccoby

Maccoby has a reputation for being a tabloid scholar of Paul.⁶ Nor is he much better on Jesus. In Maccoby's world, nothing is ever quite what it appears to be. The New Testament is assumed to be full of historical inaccuracies and deliberate misrepresentations which Maccoby has now uncovered by finding clues hidden within the New Testament narratives themselves.

First, a summary. His book is divided into two main sections, labeled, "Saul" and "Paul." The first chapter gives the "conventional" view of Paul. In the second chapter he summarizes six propositions which he will defend in the rest of the book:

1. Paul was never a Pharisee rabbi, but was an adventurer of undistinguished background. He was attached to the Sadducees, as a police officer under the authority of the High Priest, before his conversion to belief in Jesus. His mastery of the kind of learning associated with the Pharisees was not great. He deliberately misrepresented his own biography in order to increase the effectiveness of his missionary activities.
2. Jesus and his immediate followers were Pharisees...
3. The first followers of Jesus, under James and Peter, founded the Jerusalem Church after Jesus's death...[Here he gives his version of Baur's theory of Petrine and Pauline Christianity.]
4. Paul, not Jesus, was the founder of Christianity as a new religion which developed away from both normal Judaism and the Nazarene variety of Judaism...Paul derived this religion from hellenistic sources, chiefly by a fusion of concepts taken from Gnosticism and concepts taken from the mystery religions...
5. A source of information about Paul that has never been taken seriously enough is a group called the Ebionites....
6. The Ebionites were stigmatized by the Church as heretics who failed to understand that Jesus was a divine person and asserted instead that he was a human being...The Ebionites were not heretics, as the Church asserted, nor "re-Judaizers," as modern scholars call them, but the authentic successors of the immediate disciples and followers of Jesus,

whose views and doctrines they faithfully transmitted, believing correctly that they were derived from Jesus himself. They were the same group that had earlier been called the Nazarenes, who were led by James and Peter...⁷

So much for his six propositions.

To continue the summary, in chapter 3, Maccoby outlines the nature of the Pharisees (they were the opposition party to the Sadducees); in chapter 4 he proposes that Jesus and the Pharisees had no conflicts (but in Mk. 3:6, "Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus," "Pharisees" is a late substitution for "Sadducees"!); the thesis of chapter 5 is that Jesus was crucified not over religious conflict with the Pharisees but over political conflicts with the establishment, represented by the Sadducees. Chapter 6 purports to show that Paul was not a Pharisee and chapter 7, that his hermeneutics are unrabbinic. Chapter 8 claims that the story of Stephen was concocted to link teaching of Paul to that of Jesus. Here Maccoby reflects Baur's theory that the book of Acts "synthesized" Petrine and Pauline Christianity so as to harmoniously link Paul with the earlier apostles.

In Part Two, the successive chapters treat Paul's conversion and outline a rather avant-garde biography of Paul: he was a gentile who converted to Pharisaism but didn't quite succeed at it, so he joined the High Priest's police force and in a state of great mental anguish, had a vision which reconciled all his conflicts. His ensuing teaching was a combination of his pagan background and what he had learned of Judaism. To further his conversionist aims, Paul resorted to deceit and trickery. In this regard, 1 Cor. 9:20-22 ("to the Jew I became as a Jew...") is quoted in the usual anti-missionary manner to show Paul's deceitfulness. The remainder of the book builds on Baur's distinction between the Jerusalem Church and Paul's churches.

This cannot be responded to in detail here, so let us look at one facet of Maccoby's thinking. How does he arrive at this contemptuous reconstruction, especially where he imagines Paul as a gentile convert to Judaism? He does it by purporting to find "clues" that show us the truth. For example, he writes about Gamaliel's statement in Acts 5:34-39, in which the famous rabbi urges caution in taking measures to stop the apostles. Maccoby says:

If Jesus, as the Gospels represent, had actually been a rebel against the Jewish religion, declaring the Torah abrogated and himself able to cancel its provisions at will, why did Gamaliel the Pharisee, leader of a religious party whose loyalty to the Torah was renowned, have nothing to say about this when giving his opinion about what should be done to Jesus' immediate followers?⁸

It doesn't occur to Maccoby that perhaps the reason Gamaliel had nothing to say about Jesus' rebellion against the Torah is that he never rebelled against it! But Paul fares even worse than Jesus here. Since Gamaliel and Paul were both allegedly Pharisees, how is it, Maccoby wonders, that Gamaliel was so positive towards the Christian movement while Paul was a violent persecutor? It is because "Gamaliel is an authentic, historical character, whose attitudes can be understood perfectly in the light of knowledge of the period: but Saul is a mere caricature, a bogeyman-Pharisee whose motivations cannot be understood at all."⁹ That is one "clue" to Paul's alleged non-Pharisaic background: the difference between Gamaliel and Saul. A second clue is the fact that Saul was sent by the High Priest on a mission to Damascus. Pharisees don't work for high priests; therefore Paul was not a Pharisee. Never mind that earlier, Maccoby had written that "the Pharisees were able to co-operate with the High Priesthood..."¹⁰

Once Maccoby has determined from such "clues" that Paul was no Pharisee, he piles speculation on speculation:

A person of foreign, non-Jewish extraction is just the kind of person that could be expected to enter the service of the High Priest and engage in police activities which a native-born Jew, resentful of Roman hegemony and of the Sadducean quisling regime, would regard with hostility and scorn. [Therefore there could be no Jewish tax collectors, no Jewish priests, and no Jewish Sadducees for that matter!] It would be natural for Paul, writing to communities for whom he was an inspired figure, to attribute to himself a more glamorous origin than was in fact the case and to explain his phase of serving in the High Priest's police force as actuated by religious zeal rather than by humdrum motives of earning a living by whatever unsavoury means were open to an immigrant.¹¹

So, then, Paul is some kind of gentile scoundrel. Additional alleged evidence for this assertion is found in the writings of the Ebionites, a late, unorthodox group whom few would turn to for authentic information about Paul. According to

Maccoby the Ebionites depicted Paul as a convert to Judaism. Although Paul or Saul wanted to be the best Pharisee he could, he ended up as a failure:

We may surmise that he made an abortive attempt to rise in the Pharisee movement; that he enrolled with some Pharisee teacher for a while (though not with Rabban Gamaliel, who accepted only advanced students), but proved a failure. His Epistles show him to be eloquent and imaginative, but lacking in logical ability; and this would have been an unsurmountable obstacle in a Pharisee academy. Moreover, his educational base was too feeble; he had too much to learn to be able to shine and, being a person of soaring ambition (as his subsequent career shows), he would not be able to endure mediocrity. He broke off his studies and in desperation took whatever job he could obtain. Instead of his dream of respected status as a rabbi, the reality was ignominy as a member of the High Priest's band of armed thugs.¹²

Finally, on the Damascus Road, at a point of "near breakdown," Saul had an experience which "solved all his conflicts and raised him from the abyss of self-hatred and failure."¹³

What should be said about Maccoby's book? It is an anti-missionary tract rather than responsible scholarship. Maccoby uses an outdated 19th-century view as ammunition to discredit the life and thought of the apostle, further basing himself on speculation and unsubstantiated charges of historical inaccuracy. He rewrites history from the assumption that the New Testament can be properly understood only if one reads between the deceitful and deceiving lines. He further assumes without argument that Paul taught abrogation of the law of Moses. Maccoby hardly addresses the primary sources, whether in English or in the original language. The value of this book is in preparing a Jewish believer for the kinds of anti-missionary arguments he or she may encounter when it comes to Paul. Should an anti-missionary cite Maccoby, it may prove helpful to respond: "Maccoby follows the teaching of a gentile scholar who has been dead for a hundred years. Don't you have an up-to-date Jewish response?"

2. Segal the Sociologist

Paul the Convert: the Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee

Alan F. Segal

Paul the Convert is altogether a much better and more objective book. It contains a great deal of valuable material on the Jewish backgrounds to Paul, but it too suffers from questionable assumptions, as we shall see. Alan Segal is a professor of Religion at Barnard College and approaches Paul sociologically. Paul's conversion is not primarily theological, but sociological. Segal defines it as "a decision to change commitments from one religious community to another,"¹⁴ a matter of switching one's group. What Paul switched from was participation in a Pharisaic Jewish community to participation in a largely gentile Christian community.

This book is in part a collection of separate articles and still retains that character. It is divided into three sections: "Paul the Jew," "Paul the Convert," and "Paul the Apostle."

Chapter 1, "Paul and Luke" takes the typical higher critical position that Acts is not historically trustworthy. We saw above that this position began with F. C. Baur. Furthermore, Luke created the image of a unified church. Luke is therefore an early media handler!

Chapter 2, "Paul's Ecstasy," is an attempt to place Paul within a mystical and apocalyptic Jewish tradition. Paul is described as a visionary. One of the most interesting arguments in this chapter is that the Christian idea of the divinity of Christ was part of a larger Jewish tradition in which angels and even men are transformed into virtually divine status. For example, Segal writes:

Philo often speaks of Moses as being made into a divinity ('*eis theon* [e.g. *Sacrifices* 1-10; *Moses* 1.155-158]). In exegeting Moses' receiving the Ten Commandments, Philo envisions an ascent, not merely up the mountain but to the heavens. This possibly describes a mystical identification between God and Moses, suggesting that Moses attained a divine nature through contact with the *logos*. In *Questions and Answers*

on *Exodus* 1:29,40, Philo writes that Moses was changed into a divinity on Mount Sinai.

While a man attaining divine status clearly falls short of the Christian understanding of the Incarnation, it marks an important step in Jewish scholarship in showing that Paul's doctrines do not have to be divorced from a Jewish frame of reference.

Ch. 3 then discusses the nature of conversion in ancient Judaism and in sociological studies and goes on to describe the nature of Paul's own conversion. Here, Segal clearly shows an unbiblical understanding of conversion. Since he understands conversion only in terms of communities and not a personal turning to God, he is able to write: "Therefore there are no second generation conversions but the children are 'socialized into Christianity.'" ¹⁵ Despite this significant shortcoming, Segal's reconstruction of Paul's biography is more Jewish and more accurate than is Maccoby's. Paul was raised as a Pharisee according to Segal. At some point in his life, he had a mystical visionary experience, similar to the experiences of the Jewish "merkabah mystics" of early rabbinic times.

In this book, Segal makes two main points about conversion:

First, for Paul conversion must mean a change of communities. Segal says, "For Paul as [not] for James...to be a Jew who has accepted Christ is not enough. For Paul, the Jew as well as the gentile must be converted," ¹⁶ that is, join the new community. In a sense, he is right. In Christ we do identify with a new community. But he is wrong because this new identification is not in place of our identification with the people of Israel.

Second, Paul arrived at the interpretation of his experiences through his new community:

We know that converts learn the meanings of their experience in their new community....The Christian interpretation by Paul of his visions does mark his long association with the Christian community.¹⁷

What Segal maintains is that Paul spent the fourteen years after his conversion in a gentile Christian community learning his doctrine. To this community he now showed allegiance and interpreted his ecstatic experience accordingly. What Segal is

trying to do is to find a historical basis in Paul's life to confirm his sociological understanding of his conversion. Conversion is a switch of communities, *ipso facto* Paul must have found a new community. Also, since Segal like Maccoby assumes that Paul abrogated the law, he must find a context in which Paul could have learned about this abrogation.

But Segal is a better sociologist than historian. His thesis of Paul's early experience in a gentile Christian community will certainly come as a surprise to many. For nowhere does he explain how a gentile community came into existence before Paul began his apostolic ministry; and nowhere does he explain why in the world a Pharisee like Saul would have been motivated to spend fourteen years in a gentile community or allowed gentiles to become his teachers.

Continuing with the next chapters of Segal: ch. 4 and following chapters elaborates on the results of Paul's conversion. Segal identifies Paul's chief problem as the integration of Jews and gentiles into one faith community, or as Segal phrases it, "the management of diversity, so that it does not become divisive."¹⁸ He tells us that Paul abolished the ceremonial but not the moral law.¹⁹

Then chapters 6-8 elaborate on Paul's practical measures to ensure this community integration, largely by a policy of continuing to keep the Law where that would be helpful in accommodating the Jewish believers. Chapter 7 is particularly interesting since it gives Segal's own idea of Paul - as a man whose concept of law observance changed over the years. Let us look more closely at Segal's biographical picture of Paul.

The nature of Paul's change as Segal portrays it is fascinating though unconvincing. In his earlier letters like Galatians and 1 Corinthians, Paul says that he gave up the law altogether. But Romans 7, in one of Paul's last letters, shows a difference. In this autobiographical chapter, Paul says that he kept the Torah for some time after becoming a Christian. But he received his teaching not from the earlier apostles but from living in a gentile Christian community for fourteen years. This exposure marked first, his "conversion" -- for before switching communities he had not converted to anything but was still part of Judaism -- and second, the occasion for him to become convinced that there was no value to observing the ceremonial law.

However, he maintained a policy of returning to the Law as a courtesy (Rom. 7:9; 1 Cor. 9:20-22). Gal. 2:11-12 shows us that Paul could diplomatically accommodate himself to his converts in the name of church unity. According to Segal, Peter was himself undecided on the value of the Torah; he kept the basic Jewish food laws regarding table fellowship between Jews and gentiles. For Paul, the chief motivating issue was not what the law required -- for he believed that the law had been abrogated -- but church unity: no distinctions in practice should be allowed among Jews and gentiles. Here Segal's sociological perspective is evident: as Paul's conversion was a change of communities, so Paul's primary concern in his ministry was to maintain unity between Jews and gentiles, that is, the two groups within the new community of the church.

So even though Paul himself abrogated the Law, in order to maintain unity in a Jewish and gentile church, he did not insist that everyone follow him. This was not hypocrisy, as Maccoby thinks, but reflected Paul's view that one was free to keep or not keep the law. This policy however would naturally cause problems, namely, public doubt would be cast on his abrogation policy.

As Romans 7 continues to show, when Paul went back to keeping the ceremonial law, then he would be attacked by the sin of pride. Because observance of the ceremonial law is fleshly and not spiritual, his own salvation was in fact imperiled by this policy. Rom. 7:16 and 17 therefore represents the confession of a failed compromiser, whereas for Maccoby they showed the confession of a failed convert to Pharisaism. The final answer for Paul was to openly advocate abrogation of the law, which marks a change from Paul's either-or position of Galatians. In Romans, Paul's final position emerges: do not keep the ceremonial law. Rom. 13:14, "put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh" means not to observe Jewish practices, i.e., the ceremonial law.²⁰

This reconstruction and creative exegesis of Romans 7 has problems: it rests on an alleged Pauline distinction between the physical and the spiritual that cannot be maintained; and it equates keeping the ceremonial law with being "fleshly," radically misunderstanding Paul's remark about "knowing Jesus after the flesh."

There is much in Segal's book that is helpful in giving insight into Paul's Jewish background, such as the discussions of Jewish mysticism and early Jewish conversion practices. But Segal must be criticized in the following areas:

1. Segal does not and cannot adequately explain why Paul gravitated to a gentile Christian community to interpret his experiences; the scriptural record shows that it was his conversion and subsequent understanding that sent him to the gentiles, not the gentiles who provided him with understanding.

2. Segal is in danger of sociological reductionism when he makes conversion to be nothing other than a switch of social groups. He writes that for Paul "the vocabulary of repentance was inapplicable to his [conversion] experience, though probably not to the experience of the gentile community."²¹ The idea that a practicing Jew needs no repentance²² not only sounds like it comes from the modern Jewish-Christian dialogue movement, but seems to forget that Yom Kippur exists on the Jewish calendar!

3. Segal's sociology of conversion does not always ring true. He says, "The theory of cognitive dissonance predicates that a highly cohesive group would better confirm and preserve an individual decision of such magnitude by erecting high boundaries between themselves and the disbelieving world. Thus, conversion communities tend to be both more cohesive than and hostile to the outside world." But what of Christians and Christian groups who take an active involvement in "the outside world"? In varying degrees Christians involve themselves in the affairs on this world and the lives of non-Christians. This suggests that Segal is describing only one type of conversion experience among many.

4. Segal's exegesis can be questionable: Romans 7 is creative but overinterpreted to fit into Segal's idea of Paul; while Romans 2 is idiosyncratic and weird (Paul is not dealing with the Mosaic Law but with human law courts; Segal's conclusion is Jewish courts are more corrupt than gentile ones since they should know better!)

5. Although Segal breaks ground for a Jewish author in detailing some of Paul's Jewish background, the gentile scholar Schweitzer proves to be the theological

father of Segal. Segal follows Schweitzer in seeing Paul as an apocalyptic-mystic; in seeing a pluriformity rather than a uniformity in law observance in the early church; in understanding that justification by faith is not central to Paul; and as understanding that the “flesh” is the arena of life in which the law applies.

So far, we have looked at two Jewish authors. They are quite different from each other. Both see Paul as abrogating the Law. It is therefore of great interest that we now turn to two gentile authors advocate the opposite: that Paul kept the Law.

3. Tomson the Torah-Man

Paul and the Jewish law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles Peter J. Tomson

Of the three books reviewed here, Tomson's book is the one most oriented to biblical exegesis and theology. It represents a very high level of scholarship. The aim of the book is to provide "a historical analysis of the halakha reflected in Paul's letters as a contribution to a more adequate interpretation."²³ Tomson represents past scholarship on Paul in this way:

Scholarship on Paul has been based on three traditional assumptions: (1) the centre of his thought is a polemic against the Law; (2) the Law for him no longer had a practical meaning; and (3) ancient Jewish literature is no source for explaining his letters.²⁴

A historical review of Pauline studies follows, then Tomson's own three-fold starting point:

...his [Paul's] historical background was in Judaism as represented in the ancient Jewish sources;...the Law polemic was not his constant concern; and...the Law retained a practical function.²⁵

This last point means that Paul employed halakha, defined as "the tradition of formulated rules of conduct regulating life in Judaism."²⁶ There follows a review of the academic study of halakha and a review of Paul's historical background (which was in Jewish, particularly Pharisaic, Hellenism).

Chapter 2 deals with the nature of Paul's letters; they are responses to practical and theological questions in largely gentile churches,²⁷ except for Romans where a substantial part of the church was also Jewish. Notice how this causes Tomson to differ from Segal. For Segal Paul's chief task was to figure out how to integrate Jews and gentiles into one social group. For Tomson Paul's chief task was to regulate the life of the gentile churches. These do not need to be mutually exclusive, though each author emphasizes only one or the other.

According to Tomson Paul's theology of justification by faith does not entail the abrogation of the law as its corollary but exists side by side with elements of

Jewish traditional law. We see this in other Jewish sources that also have a theology of justification by faith:

Thus neither in Rabbinic tradition nor in Qumran 'salvation' or 'justification by faith' excluded obeying commandments. The same appears to hold true for Paul.²⁸

Tomson's point is important: The doctrine of "justification by faith apart from works of the law" is complementary to not in opposition to Paul's use of halakha and his affirmation of the law.

In ch. 3 Tomson analyzes First Corinthians and discusses the halakha of that epistle in the areas of illicit sexuality; celibacy, marriage and divorce; the apostles' right; and worship and liturgy. In the area of sexuality, Tomson talks about the rabbinic halakhot of *arayot* or "forbidden degrees of relations." The rabbis held that even gentiles were bound to conform to certain of these halakhot in accordance with the Noahide Laws, so that for instance relations with one's stepmother were forbidden even to gentiles. In 1 Cor. 5, Paul discusses this precise situation.

Under the topic of celibacy, marriage, and divorce, Tomson describes the differences between rabbinic and Hellenistic law; for example, in Judaism only the husband could initiate the divorce, but in Hellenistic law the wife could initiate. Mark 10:12 reflects the latter situation and shows that Mark is addressed to gentiles. Unfortunately, Tomson's view of Scripture is not always conservative. This is shown in the way he deals with the "exception clause" of Matthew in which the matter of whether divorce is permitted for adultery is raised. Tomson says that Mark and Luke reflect a stricter Qumran-like view on divorce, while Matthew is closer to rabbinic views. Therefore two different traditions are reflected in the New Testament teaching on divorce, both attributed to Jesus by the various New Testament writers.

In the category of worship, Tomson describes 1 Corinthians 14:16 as halakhic. This verse says: "If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say 'Amen' to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying?" The meaning is that one must hear and understand the blessing recited by the *shaliach tsibbur* in order to respond "Amen," a halakha found also in the Tosefta.

Where do all these halakhot of Paul derive from? Halakha is a “tradition of rules” and “tradition” implies a handing down from earlier sources. We therefore must ascertain from where Paul received his tradition. Tomson enumerates several sources: scripture; the teaching of Jesus and early apostolic tradition (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:14 on sustenance of the apostles; or 1 Cor. 11:2-16 on the headcovering of women, ascribed to “the custom of the churches of God”); and generally circulating Jewish halakha (Gal. 5:3, he who is circumcised must keep the whole law). Tomson’s definition can also imply newly formulated halakhot which then become part of a later tradition. So we find halakhot in Paul’s own apostolic teaching (1 Cor. 10:25-27, regarding the allowability of gentiles eating “undesigned food” in a pagan environment).

Chapter 4 through 6 contain discussions of the following: the halakha of idolatry in early Judaism and Christianity; 1 Cor. 8-10 concerning offerings made to idols; and Jewish-gentile table fellowship. A concluding chapter integrates the treatment of Paul given in the book.

Tomson’s treatment of Jewish-gentile table fellowship begins with an examination of Gal. 2:11-14 which describes the conflict between Peter and Paul in Antioch.

(11) When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. (12) Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. (13) The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. (14) When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

Tomson asks several questions about this passage.

First, what was the conflict about in general terms? Gal. 2:1-10 refers to the Jerusalem meeting of Acts 15 and shows that Paul was in fundamental agreement with James and Peter.

Paul implies here that his ‘Law-free gospel’ for Galatian gentiles was founded on his respect for Law-observance by Jewish Christians. All

would be well as long as two separate domains remained. Problems might arise where they overlapped, or in other words where Jews and gentiles were living and eating together, as at Antioch. Thus the question was: can Jews and gentile eat together without endangering either the Law-observance of the former or the freedom from the Law of the latter? James' representatives apparently thought they could not, but Paul and Barnabas, as well as the other Antioch Jews and Peter, thought they could.²⁹

So the Jerusalem Council had laid down principles for gentiles, but had not considered a mixed group such as there was at Antioch, with Jews and gentiles together. This new situation explains the potential for conflict between Peter and Paul.

The second question concerns the specific nature of the problem that James' representatives had. Tomson cites the church father Chrysostom who believed that Peter and Paul had both abrogated the dietary laws. Chrysostom understood that Paul was therefore admonishing Peter to live consistently as though the dietary laws were abolished, and that he should not revert to keeping the food laws just in order to appease the James contingent. But Tomson thinks this would have violated the results of the Jerusalem Conference of Acts 15 and is therefore historically impossible. Moreover, Chrysostom's interpretation

also portrays Paul as the Apostle who indeed severed Christianity from Judaism and hence excommunicated Jewish followers of Jesus. Chrysostom was conscious of this. As he wrote elsewhere, abrogating the food laws amounts to an abrogation of Judaism itself.³⁰

What then was the problem, if not abrogation of dietary laws? Could it be the laws of ritual purity at the table? No, because those laws could not be kept in the Diaspora, where Antioch was located. To answer the question, Tomson devotes a long section to the Tannaitic halakha on Jews eating together with gentiles. From several examples he shows that table fellowship between Jews and gentiles was a normal part of Jewish life. But there were lenient views and stricter views. The Mishnah records this example of a more lenient halakha:

If [an Israelite] was eating with [a gentile] at a table, and leaving in his presence a flagon [of wine] on the table and another flagon on the side-

table, left him and went out -- what is on the table is forbidden, but what is on the side-table is permitted.³¹

The Tosefta gives us an example of a stricter halakha:

R. Shimon ben Elazar says: Israelites outside the land worship idols in purity. How? If a non-Jew prepared a wedding feast for his son and sent out to invite all Jews in his town -- even if they have food and drink of their own and have their own servant waiting at them, they worship idols. Thus it is said: "[...Lest you make a covenant...when they sacrifice to their gods and] when one invites you, you eat of his sacrifice" (Exod. 34:15).³²

The stricter position arises from what Tomson labels an "excessive fear of idolatry,"³³ and "hyper-halakhic anxieties."³⁴ Apparently the men from James took the stricter position. The problem was not concerned with abrogation of kashrut nor even purity laws (which could not be kept in the Diaspora) but with the possibility that idolatry might be in evidence.³⁵

What then is the meaning of Paul's response to Peter in Gal. 2:11-14? Tomson paraphrases the thrust of Paul's remarks to be "Before, you agreed to live and eat as a Jew together with the gentiles, and although some call that 'living like a gentile,' why do you now separate and wish to eat with them only if they become Jews?" Paul is not advising Peter to be consistent by eating in violation of Jewish law; he is telling Peter to abide by the Jerusalem agreement of Acts 15, that he himself should live as a Jew but not require it of the gentiles.

There are problems with Tomson's view of Gal. 2:11-14. It entails that the phrase in v. 14, "and not like a Jew" be a later insertion in the text. (Tomson does not rely on speculation but on textual criticism.) Can "live like a gentile" really mean "what some people call 'living like a gentile'"? Why would Peter and the men from James fail to abide by the Jerusalem agreement, even if they disagreed over the strictness of the halakha? But Tomson has certainly given full weight to the Jewish backgrounds of Paul's teaching.

In the final chapter of the book. two key passages are discussed:

First Corinthians 7:17-24, esp. verse 19: "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts." This means

that Jews and gentiles should both keep God's commandments. For Jews, this is the Torah; for gentiles, it is the Noahide Laws. These are kept not for salvation but as a lifestyle. Many might dispute this exegesis but not Tomson's summarizing remark: "An important practical consequence is that Paul's 'egalitarianism' did not mean an eradication of all distinctions." That is certainly true.

The second key passage is First Corinthians 9:19-23:

(19) Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. (20) To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. (21) To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. (22) To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. (23) I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

This is not unprincipled, hypocritical behavior. In an extended analysis, Tomson concludes that the phrase "though I myself am not under the law" is a later interpolation. He bases this conclusion both on a comparison of textual variants and on the overall conclusions of his study. He gives the meaning of the entire passage when he translates in the English of a non-native speaker (Tomson is apparently Dutch), "I was born the Jews a Jew...I was born the delicate a delicate."³⁶ "Delicate" is the translation he prefers over "weak." He means that Paul was born Jewish and with a thorn in his flesh.

Just as the assumption that Paul abrogated the Law was the starting-point for other writers, so the assumption that he kept the Law is Tomson's starting-point. He justifies this assumption in two ways: one, by the fact that there is much material in Paul's instructions to his churches that shows parallels, similarities, and points of contact with the rabbinic halakha of the day; two, that exegeting Paul's letters on the basis of this assumption makes for the most coherent understanding of what he has to say. There is much to commend and much to argue about in Tomson's volume. He has provided an abundance of material for understanding Paul's Jewishness.

4. *Paul and the Torah* Lloyd Gaston

This book has not been reviewed, but it must be referred to for a very important reason. Along with Krister Stendahl and John Gager, Gaston advocates a two-covenant Paul. He maintains that the apostle taught two ways of salvation: Torah for Jews, and faith in Christ for gentiles. Gaston clearly states this himself:

[Paul] can be understood, at least implicitly, as affirming something like the two-covenant concept of F. Rosenzweig. That is, Paul affirms the new expression of the righteousness of God in Christ for the Gentiles and for himself as Apostle to the Gentiles without in any sense denying the righteousness of God expressed in Torah for Israel.³⁷

And:

For Paul, Jesus is neither a new Moses nor the Messiah, he is not the climax of the history of God's dealing with Israel, but he is the fulfilment of God's promises concerning the Gentiles, and this is what he accused the Jews of not recognizing.³⁸

Here is where the four writers should be placed side-by-side to see what they say about Paul and the law. They represent four different ideas of Paul's relationship to the Law of Moses:

<u>Maccoby</u>	<u>Segal</u>	<u>Tomson</u>	<u>Gaston</u>
Law abrogated for everyone and no one should observe it	Law abrogated for everyone but OK for Jewish believers to observe	Law not abrogated for Jews and is required as a lifestyle; gentiles not required to observe the Law	Law not abrogated for Jews and is a way of life; law observance not required for gentiles and faith in Jesus is way of salvation; uncertain whether Paul observed the Law

Notice that the Jewish writers say Paul abrogated the law; the gentile writers say he did not.

Notice also that the two Jewish authors reject the notion that Paul taught a two-covenant way of salvation. Maccoby objects by saying that Pharisaic theology already allowed for gentiles to be saved either through conversion or through keeping the Noahide laws.

As to Alan Segal, he is no friend to evangelism and interprets Rom. 11:29 to suggest that no mission to Jews is needed; yet he also cannot find a two-covenant theory in Paul. First, his statement on evangelism:

Rather than merely abandon the unbelieving members of the Jewish community, Paul asserts that God's promises to them are still intact: 'For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable' (11:29). Of course, he hopes that the remaining Jews will come to Christ as he did, freely and without coercion. Though the mission to the Jews has been a failure, God will eventually reveal the reason. Therefore, there need not be a continuing Christian mission to the Jews.³⁹

Yet he nevertheless makes this admission:

As a believing Jew and a twentieth-century humanist, I could have hoped for a different outcome of Paul's interpretation of these passages. The theology outlined by Stendahl, Gaston, and Gager [that Paul teaches two ways of salvation] makes more sense for today than does Paul's actual conclusion. It would have been easier for today's Xy had Paul embraced cultural pluralism more fully.⁴⁰

IV. Practical Value

1. Apologetics. From three of these authors, there is an abundance of material from Jewish sources that can help us present the Jewish background of Paul. Alan Segal is so certain that the New Testament represents first-century Jewish thinking that he advocates using the New Testament to comment on the Mishnah rather than the other way around.

Consider the doctrine of the Incarnation. In Segal we saw how different Jewish authors such as Philo spoke of men who became divine. These writings are not the source of Paul's doctrines but they provide illustrative material to show that "divine men" are not found only in paganism but can be found in Judaism. From there we can argue more scripturally for the divine nature of the Messiah. Some might think that this kind of *ad hominem* argument undercuts our case for the God who became a man because it seems to prove the opposite, that a man became God. But in Jewish evangelism we often need to establish plausibility before we establish certainty; to show that the Incarnation could be Jewish because somewhat similar ideas are also Jewish.

Again, consider the charge that Paul "invented" Christianity as something radically at variance with the teaching of Jesus. Tomson affirms that Paul drew on the teaching of Jesus and the early apostles.

2. The second area of practical application is in missions. It is instructive that neither Jewish scholar reviewed here is willing to accept a two-covenant Paul, while three gentile scholars do. This shows that the two-covenant theory is a theory designed for export rather than for internal consumption. Furthermore, Jewish dialogue leaders have had a strategy of shaming Christians into abandoning support of Jewish evangelism. Observe the words of Lloyd Gaston:

I believe that it is possible to interpret Paul in this manner. That it is necessary to do so is the implication of the agonized concern of many in the post-Auschwitz situation, including Rosemary Ruether in her powerful *Faith and Fratricide*.⁴¹

In other words, the exegesis of the Scriptures is now shaped by shame rather than by the truth. The practical application is that a survey of these books teaches us how the dialogue movement has influenced exegesis and Bible study.

Another practical application for missions might be Segal's work which is based on modern sociological theories of conversion and commitment. His theories are inadequate for explaining the nature of conversion to God, but they have utility in understanding how groups of converts cohere. For that reason they might find application in evangelistic follow-up and in the life of congregations.

3. The third area relates to discipleship and teaching the Bible. One of the questions raised at the beginning concerned what is the center of Paul's theology. A strong case can be made out for seeing Paul's relationship with Jews and gentiles in one body as his chief concern. Rather than just teaching doctrine from Paul's letters, we can also use them to teach new Jewish believers how to understand and relate to the gentile Christians in the church.

4. Finally, the fourth practical area is the most controversial. How should Jewish believers live in light of the Law of Moses? Segal argued that though Paul abrogated the Law, it was acceptable to observe it if one so wished, and this is the position of many Jewish believers today. It is interesting that this was also Augustine's view: works of the law could be observed *sine ulla salutatis necessitate*, "without any necessity in view of salvation."⁴² Tomson argues that Paul by implication expected Jewish believers to continue keeping the Law; he intended its non-applicability only for gentiles. Some might see Tomson's view of the Law as a challenge to be met, but it is also an opportunity to exegete Paul in a way that fully recognizes his Jewishness.

An important problem in all these books is that no one of these authors examines all the relevant verses in Paul, nor the relevant verses in the remainder of the New Testament. Tomson does not consider Romans 7, which receives extensive treatment by Segal. Nor does he handle Gal. 3:24 ("the law was a tutor to lead us to Christ").

It could be that Segal and Tomson have begun a trend which will be a "Jewish reclamation of Paul." When such a "reclamation" becomes more widespread and Paul's Jewishness is recovered at the expense of a true understanding of what he taught,

many in the Jewish community will continue to justify non-belief in Jesus. At that point we can look forward to seeing the blame shifted yet again to the Church Fathers. Then they will be the ones who took the Judaism of Jesus and Paul and invented a new religion.

¹ Hagner, D. A., *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

² Modern Jewish views of Paul are also conveniently summarized by Hagner in "Paul in Modern Jewish Thought," in D.A. Hagner and M.J. Harris, eds., Pauline Studies. Essays Presented to Professor F.F. Bruce on His 70th Birthday (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 143-65.

³ For this breakdown in regard to Jewish scholars, see Hagner, *passim*.

⁴ Cf. Tomson, pp. 1-3.

⁵ Over the years other scholars, usually non-Jews, have written about Paul and Judaism. From almost half a century ago comes the work of W. D. Davies who in *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* gave the apostle a larger place in Palestinian Judaism. Recently, E. P. Sanders who has done the same. In the last ten years several books have been written on Paul and the Law.

⁶ In his own book Segal dismisses Maccoby's work in a footnote (p. 307, n. 5).

⁷ Maccoby, pp. 15-17 *passim*.

⁸ Ibid., p. 53.

⁹ Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁰ Maccoby p. 27.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 60-61.

¹² Ibid., p. 99.

¹³ Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁴ Segal, p. 117.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 72.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 174.

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- ¹⁹ See Ibid., pp. 122 and 153.
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 252.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 134.
- ²² Ibid., p. 20: “[Paul] obviously thought himself to be guilty of no infraction of Torah before he became a Christian, as Galatians 1 and Philippians 3 tell us...” [!]
- ²³ Tomson, p. 24.
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 1.
- ²⁵ Ibid., pp. 18-19.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 19.
- ²⁷ In First Corinthians: “In a way the letter reminds one of the responsa...”, ibid., p. 86.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 67.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 227.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 228.
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 231, citing Mishnah Avodah Zarah 5:5.
- ³² Ibid., p. 233, citing Tosefta Avodah Zarah 4:6.
- ³³ Ibid., p. 236.
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 244.
- ³⁵ Tomson continues his discussion by dealing with Romans 14:1-15:13, concluding that in this case the gentiles at Rome need to make allowance for basic kashrut laws as well as the “hyper-halakhic anxieties” seen in Gal. 2:11-14.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 277.
- ³⁷ Gaston, p. 79.
- ³⁸ Ibid., p. 33.
- ³⁹ Segal, p. 280.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 281.
- ⁴¹ Gaston, p. 34.
- ⁴² Cited in Tomson, p. 224.