

The New Testament and the Torah

Doctoral Dissertation

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*Abstract*

The past fifty years have witnessed profound changes in the paradigmatic viewpoints of historical scholarship on the New Testament. Partly as a consequence of these changes, a real revolution got underway in Christian theology as well, particularly in the field of Jewish-Christian relations. These changes were given grounds, to some degree, by powerful historical events, just to mention here the most decisive three of them: the Shoah, a unique event in the history of mankind that shook the foundations of European civilisation, in all its aspects; the rebirth of the State of Israel after 2000 years, with the subsequent reunification of Jerusalem; and the discovery and scholarly treatment of the Dead Sea scrolls. Together with, of course, the many consequences of all the above in the self-definition of both Judaism and Christianity, and in their relationship to one another.

These social breaks have also inspired and motivated a religious and theological ferment that encouraged representative figures of both Judaism and Christianity to start questioning fundamental tenets of their respective traditions, virtually undisputed for 2000 years, and to start proposing rather original answers for the theological problems that had been burdening for centuries the relations of the two “peoples” that invoke the same God. The various Christian churches, but first and foremost certain theologians, also launched resolute initiatives to eliminate traditional Christian anti-Semitism and theological anti-Judaism; whereas Jewish scholars, like Martin Buber, Joseph Klausner, Géza Vermes, David Flusser and others made efforts to rehabilitate the highly upsetting figure of Jesus in the eyes of the Jews.

Above all, the present paper argues that the relationship between the New Testament and the Law— simultaneously to the disappearance of Jewish Christianity and to the formation of Christian anti-Judaism—was misunderstood by Gentile Christianity since the second and third century in a number of ways, just as it was by (the than institutionalising) Rabbinical Judaism after the destruction of the Temple; with the difference, though, that the two misunderstandings aimed at the opposite directions, as each other’s inverses, and remained in

force for two millennia. This paper aspires to uncover an accurate structure, “matrix”, of the New Testament’s full teaching on Torah, a structure in which all New Testament statements on the subject can be accommodated maintaining their harmony with the text as a whole and its message.

The adherents of present-day scholarly theories, at the same time to the beginning rehabilitation of Jesus, contend that Paul was an “antinomist”, who denied the validity of the Mosaic Law, and thus he essentially represented a teaching that could be regarded as heretical, and conflicting, even compared to Jesus’ own. These scholars thus affirm that Paul, in ways that were contrarily to Jesus’ intentions, became the founder of Christianity, a heresy from the standpoint of Judaism.

The present paper does not represent a step “backwards” to the traditionally anti-Judaist stance of “historical Christianity”, by stating that Jesus was not a fully observant Jew, but a step “forward”, by claiming that so were the Twelve and Paul as well, even with respect to the Law. The author offers a detailed analysis of the relationship of Jesus, the Jewish Christians and Paul, to the Torah, and demonstrates that they were all characterised by an unconditional adherence to the written Torah and the Tanach; while maintaining a selective and creative stance to the oral Torah, as the pluralistic Judaism of their times—unlike the normative Judaism that took shape after the Churban—granted them the possibility to do so.