

## Exegetical Symposium Conclusion

I would like to extend congratulations to the department of biblical studies and especially to its chairperson, Mr. Charles Gieschen, for a splendid symposium and for tackling the sensitive topic of *The Law in Holy Scripture* and making a complex topic even more so. You are to be commended for having Dale Allison and Paul Raabe as your guests. Allison's 3-volume *ICC Matthew Commentary* and *The New Moses* deserve a place in every pastor's library. Raabe has likewise distinguished himself as a biblical scholar as a contributor to the *Anchor Bible* without surrendering his confessional integrity. Comments on your other speakers would put me in a compromising position. Secondly your theme **The Law in Holy Scripture** only confirms what many have thought all along, that this seminary a hotbed of legalism. What other seminary president has **JoyInTorah** as his Email address. Lastly I want to commend the department for its selection on its most recent addition. Perhaps Darwin was right. Human life does improve even drastically from one generation to another..

Traditional Lutheran exegesis often suffers from assuming that the dogmatic, historically conditioned of any word, in this case **law**, is also the biblical understanding. Your **The Law in Holy Scripture** allows for superimposing a dogmatical definition on the biblical data. Rarely will Lutherans resist playing the Pauline trump card that the **law** is man's enemy and then move the discussion to the law and gospel, as if this were a homiletics course. Just seems to have indicated that Luther may have done just that. Raabe points to the problem in footnote 20 where he says that *Elert is patently wrong* in holding that *the law* throughout the Scriptures is always the law of retribution. Peter Scaer showed that law in Luke is synonymous with custom and hence does not carry the negative weight Paul some times attaches to the word.

Just brought up the matter of the law of Christ in Galatians 6:2, a reference to the law, which does not fit the characteristic Pauline-Lutheran negative definition of this word. The law of Christ is the love of the neighbor and this afternoon I hope to show how this command is the clue to the true understanding of God.

By referencing a variety of passages Allison could find no definite principle which motivated Jesus' ethical behavior. Jesus comes across as both liberal and conservative in keeping some laws and breaking others, but his deportment is not unique since Talmud allows for ethical inconsistency in cases where one law contradicts another. Sabbath keeping is the clearest example. A crisis allows different ethical responses. It is tempting to see that crisis as an ethical principle resembles situation ethics offered in the 1960s. Since in the end we can say more of Jesus than that he was an imaginative interpreter of the Torah (25), it is no wonder than his followers got mixed signals and headed towards further ethical disarray.

Though Raabe does not use the dogmatical terminology of the Third Use of the Law, he moves in that direction by concluding that both Testaments devote a great deal of space to describing the life and conduct of God's people (20), a topic directly addressed by Gard, who uses the language of the Formula of Concord (VI) to say that the Christian does good works with a merry and willing spirit. (FC VI) To help others is what the Third Use of the Law is all about (so Gard). Just is commended for recently finding a book published more than forty years ago. Hugo Odeberg's research into the ethics of Pharisees, if taken to heart, may reveal that many understandings of the Third Use of Law might bear an uncomfortable resemblance to those of Jesus' opponents. Righteousness becomes only another word for upright behavior and thoughts. This is neither biblical nor confessional.

By adjusting the title of your symposium from **AThe Law in Holy Scripture** to **AThe Holy Scripture as Law** a different outcome would have been produced, as may be indicated by Raabe pointing to how the Psalms praise **Torah** (4). Here the definition of **law** as in law-gospel hardly fits. Law, that is **Torah**, refers to the written record of God's saving deeds (Heilsgeschichte) in Israel's behalf. **Torah**, manuscript or written law, provides Israel with the certainty that the God who brought them out of Egypt will again act for their salvation. As Just points out, since Paul includes Isaiah as **law (nomos)**, the term embraces all of God's saving and redemptive activity, including perhaps the return from Babylonian captivity. Scaer notes that Luke's pious nativity characters faithfully follow Jewish customs. To take this one step further, they do not suffer from any Pauline-Lutheran anxiety of punishments attached to failing to keep the legal minutiae, as if all hell would break out if somehow they made a mistake here or there. Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary all know what means for Jesus to be the Son of God even before he is born and Simeon and Ana waiting for the redemption of Israel. At least in the case of Simeon and Ana, their faith had been informed by **Torah** and certainly it is appropriate to call **Torah (law) gospel** in the fullest sense of the word, a view which I think Raabe approaches. We are prone to speak of both **law** and righteousness in negative terms. Since as Gieschen showed that in Christ God absorbed his own wrath into himself, God's righteousness is salvation and not morality, threat and punishment. This was Luther's discovery. Similarly **Torah, law**, written manuscript is not to be chiefly defined as a collection of rules and regulations, but as the narrative of salvation. Where this is not recognized, the Old Testament is called **law** not because it is the narrative of salvation (gospel), but because it told the Israelites what to do (law).

Conversely the New Testament is called gospel, because the Old Testament regulations are missing. This means distancing ourselves from any view which suggests that New Testament is superior because it has less regulations than the Old Testament. In any event, such regulations did not determine the characters of **Torah**, since **Torah** itself allowed for the Gentiles to be exempt from them. Peter and James were not acting irresponsibly in finding these legal minutiae annoying (Acts 15:10, 19), a topic which Scaer broaches.

Neither is the superiority of the New Testament derived from a more serious offer of forgiveness lacking in the allegedly law laden Old Testament. In **Torah** God came in ink and scrolls, but in Jesus he came in the flesh. As Allison said, Jesus is incarnate **Torah**. In fact this may be the meaning of *in the beginning was the word . . . and the word was made flesh.*<sup>@</sup> Lutherans have typically used John 1:17, *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ,*<sup>@</sup> to support their law-gospel theology. In other words Moses is **lex incarnata** and Jesus is the gospel. This also supports the view that the Old Testament is mostly law and the New Testament mostly gospel, which seems to me to be a mild case of Dispensationalism. I am not sure whether anyone has actually tabulated the verses to come to this conclusion. Should one determine this question by time, the Old Testament wins the honor of being the gospel with a score of 1500 years to three for the gospels. The contrast in *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ,*<sup>@</sup> is not between law and gospel, but between scroll and incarnation. God's intentions in Moses (**Torah**) and Jesus are the same, but Jesus is the qualitatively superior vehicle (Hebrews), because in him the God who could be found on the ink of parchments is completely assumed into the flesh of Jesus. In any event, the frequent Lutheran caricature of Moses as a stern figure of final, non-negotiable

judgment does not fit the Old Testament evidences where Moses is Israel's intercessor . Even Paul, who provides the substance for the Lutheran understanding of the accusatory nature of the law, sees Moses as Israel's redemptive figure into whom they were baptized and saved (1 Cor 10:2). **Torah** with its account of divine redemption from Egypt is salvific in content and purpose.

Allison uses Matthew 5:17-18 to introduce his thesis that Jesus was law observant.

**"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished."** This understanding has to be challenged. This passage might even be used by others to place each testament on equal footing in doing theology or minimally that the Old Testament had an autonomous authority independent of what would evolve into the New Testament. Hence old laws, especially Sabbath laws, stay in place. However, I propose Jesus is not referring to the abiding authority of the Old Testament, but rather his determination to fulfill the entire Old Testament, as Allison showed in the question period. The Aiotas@ and Adots (slashes)@of **Torah** are not threats against those who do not fulfill the regulations, but Jesus is asserting his intention to fulfill every word and letter in Old Testament and not just this or that prediction. **In Jesus=crucifixion heaven and earth quite literally pass away.** (Matt 27:45, 50-54). AAll is accomplished @and a new era is put into place, so Just said in his discussion of the Christian living in the old and new eras. This passage addresses the matter of biblical authority only in a subsidiary way, but chiefly it describes Jesus= self-understanding as Messiah (Christ) and it is programmatic for coming to terms with what the entire gospel of Matthew is about. Jesus embraces and takes Moses (**Torah**) and all the prophets

into himself and transfigures and transsubstantiates the Old Testament into the New. Jesus is incarnate **Torah**. (Allison). Old Testament Scriptures become alive and are permanently preserved in Jesus. Apart from him the veil of Moses stays in place. In Jesus the longings of patriarchs, kings, and prophets are completely satisfied. The one greater than the temple, Solomon and Jonah has come.

A place for the Old Testament (law) as an autonomous authority might be supported by what immediately follows: **Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven** (5:19). Jesus is here speaking of his own words and not the Old Testament. The Greek noun and verb for commandments and command are usually used to define what Jesus says as absolute word of God (Matt 17:9; 28:20). His words are divine command. The prophets and apostles are inspired. Jesus is not. The word **commandments** has nothing to do with contrasting law with gospel. Jesus= death is the moment in which the Old Testament (*torah*) will be readjusted: **Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away** (Matt 24:34-35).

The transfiguration is also an instructive hermeneutic in how the Old Testament is to be understood in the church. Peter wants to place Jesus in a hermeneutical trinity in which Moses and Elijah share an equal or at least near equal voice with him. In later historical terms, he was an moderate Ebionite, in the style of the Neo-Evangelicals. That is, Moses still has something to say to the church. Matters for Peter are settled by God's command to listen to Jesus. Moses and Elijah are no longer there (Mark 9:5-7). The disciples and the church must listen only to Jesus.

However, we want avoid to Marcionism, as if the Old Testament has nothing to say. Moses and Elijah do not discuss laws with Jesus but lay out for him the divine plan of suffering and salvation (Luke 9:31). Jesus is the living, eternal, incarnate **Torah**.

Again, best wishes and congratulations on your symposium.

David P. Scaer

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