

Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003, xvi + 314 pp. n.p.

This work by Markus Bockmuehl was published by T. & T. Clark in 2000 and has now been issued by Baker Academic. Most of the chapters in the book were published earlier in journals or books containing a collection of essays. Issuing these articles here along with two new chapters is useful since the essays receive thereby a wider distribution and all of the essays examine the issue of law and ethics at some level.

The book is divided into three sections. The first part examines Christianity in the land of Israel with chapters on the halakah and ethics in the Jesus tradition, Matthew's divorce texts, the Jesus logion, "let the dead bury their dead," and James, Israel, and Antioch. The first chapter sets the stage, reviewing Jesus' moral teaching relative to Jewish halakah. Bockmuehl maintains that Jesus' view of Torah was remarkably Jewish. Like the rabbis he erected a "fence" around Torah, even if it was emphatically scriptural. At the end of the day, according to Bockmuehl, Jesus affirms the authority of the Torah.

Bockmuehl overstates his case, though he rightly observes that others have exaggerated the discontinuity between Jesus and Torah. The salvation historical context of the gospels is ignored, so that we have an isolated treatment instead of setting Jesus' teachings on the law into the flow of the biblical narrative. Bockmuehl also minimizes Jesus' messianic authority over Torah in texts like Mark 2:23-28. Jesus' deliberate healing on the sabbath points towards a new stance on the law. The religious leaders did not view the controversies between Jesus and themselves merely as interpretive debates over halakah. They discerned that Jesus was introducing something new relative to Torah. This is evident in Jesus' assertion that the temple tax no longer applies to him or his followers (Matt 17:24-27)—a text not even mentioned by Bockmuehl. Nor is it apposite to say that Jesus erected a "fence" around Torah, for the term is quite misleading as a designation of Jesus' approach to scripture since it could be argued that he tears down any such fence. Jesus does not explicitly abolish Torah, but his behavior on the sabbath, his comments on cleanliness, and his ignoring of purity rules (touching the dead and lepers) all point in this direction. Bockmuehl mistakenly limits Jesus' touching of the dead and lepers to the level of halakah, noting that purity laws were suspended when the impure are transformed by Jesus' touch. Such actions, however, also suggest a new relationship to the law, in which Jesus as Messiah has the authority to interpret the law since it is fulfilled in him (Matt 5:17-48).

Such a lengthy discussion of the first chapter is warranted since it sets the stage for the remainder of the book. Bockmuehl's study of Matthew's divorce texts investigates such against the background of Jewish law. He canvasses pre-rabbinic tradition that *required* divorce for sexual infidelity. He suggests that the exception clauses in Matthew fit with this tradition, thus prohibiting conjugal union after the marriage has been defiled by *porneia*. Bockmuehl helpfully situates Jesus' words on divorce within Jewish exegetical tradition, but he appears to go too far in suggesting that Jesus ratifies rabbinic interpretation. The Matthean exception *permits* but does not mandate (or even necessarily encourage) divorce for sexual infidelity. Hence, Jesus' view, though similar in some respects to his Jewish contemporaries, differs at a significant point.

In the third chapter Bockmuehl considers the logion on the dead burying their own dead. He argues against the consensus represented by Hengel and Sanders, for the latter have maintained that this saying represents a radical contravention of what the Torah enjoins. Bockmuehl in this instance has raised serious questions about the plausibility of the received interpretation. Hengel relies on evidence from the third century A.D. and later to support his conclusion. Moreover, even the Tannaitic evidence marshaled by Hengel does not clearly point to an abrogation of the law. Hence, Matt 8:22/Luke 9:62 do not clearly support the nullification of the law. Bockmuehl's own solution, that the saying may reflect Nazirite motifs, is intriguing but cannot be established from the existing evidence.

Chapter four surveys Syrian Antioch and considers the Jewish community in the city. Bockmuehl suggests that a spectrum of belief and practice existed on table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles. He also maintains that Antioch was judged to be part of the Holy Land by many Jews. Bockmuehl then tackles the question of James's embassy to Antioch (Gal 2:12). The "men from James" genuinely represented him. They were not Judaizers who required circumcision, nor were they opposed to the Gentile mission. Bockmuehl proceeds to argue that the Jewish Christians in Antioch did not withdraw from fellowship with the Gentiles because of Gentile food or concerns about idolatry. The men from James did not impose the apostolic decree when they arrived. Bockmuehl surmises that James's concerns were probably political. Given the tense political situation in Judea and its environs, James desired solidarity among Jewish believers to further the Jewish mission in Judea and Jerusalem. Since Antioch was considered to be part of the Holy Land, the Jewish and Gentile mission should be kept separate in Antioch. Paul, therefore, did not disagree with James soteriologically, nor is it even clear that Paul disagreed with James in any respect. What Paul objected to was the behavior of Peter. James interfered here but not elsewhere in the Pauline mission because Antioch was considered to be part of the land promised to the twelve tribes. Bockmuehl's resolution of this age old problem text is quite ingenious, but the evidence he compiles supporting Antioch as part of the Holy Land is quite uncertain and speculative. Nor is there any evidence that James or any Jewish Christians considered Antioch to be part of the Holy Land. Hence, the conclusions drawn here remain unpersuasive.

Part two of the book considers natural law in Second Temple Judaism, the New Testament, and concludes with a study of the relationship of the Noachide commandments to New Testament ethics. Bockmuehl argues that in Second Temple Judaism there is no natural law apart from God himself, so that no law operated outside of or above God. What we find in natural law accords with God's commands in Torah, so that the two are in harmony. The notion of natural law in Judaism precedes Philo and is rooted in both the OT and Second Temple traditions previous to Philo. Natural law is not explicitly acknowledged in the NT, but there is enough evidence to conclude that natural law played a role, though it was not a decisive or ultimate criterion for ethics. Both Jesus and Paul appealed to the created order for moral instruction, but such morality is finally interpreted in light of the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus Christ, so that natural law is not an ultimate norm but is modified and even relativized in some instances.

What laws were binding on Gentile Christians? Bockmuehl suggests that the Noachide commandments played an important role in establishing what was normative for Gentile Christians. He objects to the law-gospel antithesis formulated by many Lutheran interpreters. Though Bockmuehl sees a shift from Torah to Christ, such does not mean that the content of the law has changed dramatically. The Noachide commandments were observed in early Christianity since those laws were viewed as normative for Gentiles in Jewish circles. Bockmuehl traces the tradition of the Noachide commandments, seeing them as formulated explicitly in the second century A.D., though their substance has many antecedents in Jewish tradition.

Bockmuehl argues that the apostolic council considers what Gentiles must do in order to be saved, so that the issue is not merely regulating social relations between Jews and Gentiles. What the council required of Gentiles is remarkably similar to the Noachide commandments. Bockmuehl understands the decrees of the council to contain both moral injunctions (related to idolatry and sexuality) and ritual matters (prohibiting meat with blood and meat from an animal slaughtered improperly). He sides with minority opinion in saying that Paul forbade the eating of all idol food and speculates that Paul would not have tolerated consuming blood. Hence, Paul would not have had any reservations about the apostolic decree. Paul expected the Jews to live by the entire Torah and Gentiles by what are essentially the Noachide commandments. Space is lacking to interact with Bockmuehl's interpretation of the apostolic council and Paul. Against Bockmuehl 1 Corinthians 8-10 reads more naturally as a permission to eat idol food in certain contexts, even when the eater *knows* it is idol food. It likely, then, that the apostolic decree was a temporary expedient to facilitate fellowship between Jews and Gentiles and not required for salvation. Much more should be said, obviously, to defend the latter conclusion.

Bockmuehl closes the work in part three with stimulating chapters on the role of public ethics, investigating especially the contribution of Aristides of Athens and the *Epistle of Diognetus*. He argues that the Jewish halakah was foundational for the content of Christian ethics, noting that Jews and Christians overlapped significantly on the content of public ethics. Bockmuehl is almost certainly correct about the shared heritage in many respects of Jewish and Christian ethics. Even though his arguments fail to convince at a number of points, Bockmuehl has reminded us that the early Christian movement had ethical norms and that some of these norms were shaped by the OT and Jewish tradition.

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