

lels between lay readers of the Oxyrhynchus and Egerton papyri and other texts like the gnostic *Pistis Sophia*—and their popularization in novels, journals, and devotional literature of the early part of the last century—to the enthusiasm of “seekers” and “New Age” religionists for the Dead Sea Scrolls, Nag Hammadi Library, and media “hype” of the late twentieth century. “Then as now . . . whether they advocated socialism or feminism, eugenics or vegetarianism, it was desirable to argue that this particular theme had been at the core of the early Christian message, before it was betrayed by a corrupt church and clergy” (p. 39). Jenkins contends this strategy is self-consciously deployed: “The marketing of alternative Christianity . . . is . . . tailored to [an audience’s] particular needs and interests . . . told a lay audience what it wanted to hear . . . has been almost too good to be true, in validating postmodern approaches” (p. 16). But unlike a century ago, this latest installment of the “heterodox” Jesus quest is buttressed by graduate programs in prestigious universities; “fringe ideas” of a previous era have now become the “mainstreams” of Ph.D. dissertations, international publications, and media “announcements” (pp. 150–51).

At times in his assessments, Jenkins’s own rhetoric succumbs to the “jingoism” he otherwise so deftly exposes (e.g., pp. 18–19, 168). Moreover, his method of detailed traditiohistorical comparisons of the claims of the canonical vis-à-vis the “hidden gospels” unfortunately does not work in his wholesale critique of “feminist” approaches, where many of the readings depend as much, if not more, on a different construal of the canonical Gospels as on their interpretation of noncanonical “others” (chap. 6). Nevertheless, Jenkins has produced a vade mecum of discoveries, texts, relevant literature, and incisive critique—a “must” for anyone interested in the origins and claims of the Gospels.

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BOCKMUEHL, MARCUS. *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics.* Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000. xvii+314 pp. \$49.95 (cloth).

This book is comprised of nine articles published between 1989 (chap. 2) and 1998. Part 1 focuses on “Christianity in the Land of Israel.” Beginning with teachings attributed to Jesus (chap. 1), concluding with James’s intervention in Antioch (chap. 4), Marcus Bockmuehl analyzes these stories within a stipulated context of first-century *halakhot*. Intra-Jewish disputes reported in the Gospels, Acts, and Paul’s letters are to be understood, he asserts, against this explanatory backdrop of prevenient halakhic positions. In part 2, “Jewish and Christian Ethics for Gentiles” (chaps. 5–7), Bockmuehl argues that problems arising within the new communities of Jews and Gentiles commingled in diaspora *ekklesiai* can also be understood as reflecting various Jewish Christian efforts to accommodate Gentile Christians to those rules—implicit in Torah, explicit in later rabbinic traditions—known as the Noachide commandments. Part 3, “The Development of Public Ethics” (chaps. 8–9), extends the argument into the second century, when Gentile Christian apologists and others continue, argues Bockmuehl, to articulate ethical positions that reveal a continuing awareness of and indebtedness to Jewish legal and textual traditions.

Bockmuehl writes with elegant clarity. His notes (considerately given at the bottom of the page) and his index of ancient sources (pp. 283–301) convey the admirable breadth of his reading. His forthright concentration on his construc-

tion of Jewish Law gives the entire collection of originally independent essays an internal coherence and cumulative force. And the book itself is beautifully produced. For these virtues, both author and publisher are to be thanked.

But what of Bockmuehl's interpretations? Here, historiographic problems mount. Arguments about tradition qua *halakhot* must ricochet wildly across centuries and various Jewish subcultures. Teachings in third- through fifth-century rabbinic texts naming earlier authorities are assumed *eo ipso* to be early, and then, in circular fashion, projected back even earlier on the evidence of the controversies that they are also enlisted to explain. (Eliezar ben Hyrcanus, e.g., makes substantial cameo appearances to account for first-century Christian disputes.) Rabbinic traditions, thus retrojected, are presumed to have wide authority and social purchase. In the end, Second Temple Judaism both at home and abroad, even in its wooly Christian manifestations, seems a doctrinal enterprise. As textual reasoning, this is elegant; as social history, bloodless.

Bockmuehl's deployment of the so-called Noachide commandments most clearly illustrates these several problems. Christianity aside, absent conversion, nonidolatrous Gentiles could only be theoretical Gentiles: rabbinic remarks on this score are speculative ("What would a 'good Gentile' look like, and for what scriptural reasons?"), not prescriptive. Further, Jews "freely associating with uncircumcised Gentiles" was surely not a *novum* of the community at Antioch (p. 75): as the tide of inscriptional and textual evidence attests, diaspora Jewish communities both in this period and for centuries thereafter accommodated, indeed welcomed, the patronage and participation of interested Gentiles, whether pagan or (in Antioch especially, to Chrysostom's chagrin) Christian. Finally, Bockmuehl tellingly misdescribes Jewish views on Gentiles as "damned outright, saved as righteous [i.e., Noachide] Gentiles, or saved as converted Jews" (p. 172) because he so restricts his purview to putatively halakhic traditions. He ignores utterly the apocalyptic trope, well-attested in various narrative, exegetical, and liturgical writings to either side of our period, that holds that (pagan) Gentiles, repudiating their idols literally at the last moment, will have a place in God's kingdom. Thus the Christian position that "Gentiles can be saved *as Gentiles*, without needing to convert to Judaism," while increasingly awkward socially, was not "revolutionary" religiously (p. 145). Rather, it was an improvised social enactment of this belief about Gentiles-at-the-End—for the *ekklesia*, at the "almost-End," between the Resurrection and the Parousia. Eschewing consideration of the ways in which apocalyptic hopes shaped and motivated Christian forms of Second Temple Judaism, Bockmuehl presents these ancient Jews—James, Peter, Barnabas, Paul—not as idiosyncratic messianists but as disputing halakhists. The end result is a documentary *nature morte*.

Bockmuehl is surely right to insist that earliest Christianity was thoroughly Jewish and that the meaningful context for interpreting various Christian texts and movements even in their later phases remains Jewish. But halakha does not define or exhaust ancient Judaism. Finally, in failing to engage Stanley Stowers's seminal study (*Rereading Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* [New Haven, Conn., 1994]), Bockmuehl missed an important opportunity to ground his own discussion of Jewish ethical teachings on Gentiles in the wider world of Mediterranean Jewish culture.

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