

Gal. 2, 16 as a key to Messianic ecclesiology

Antoine Lévy

Presentation given at the conference organised jointly by
Antti Laato (Åbo Akademi) and Antoine Lévy (Studium Catholicum)
at HEO (Helsingin Evankelinen Opisto):

“A Jewish Church- lost opportunity or mythical shadow?”, March 2009

As a movement, Messianic Judaism is founded on a basic historical assumption inherently charged with ecclesiological consequences. The community of believers in Christ, dominated by Gentiles for reasons that will be briefly mentioned later, is said to have thwarted, until only recently, a specifically Jewish approach to the legacy of Yeshua. Messianics claim that this phenomenon is tantamount to a persistent *coup de force*. In theory, nothing in the legacy of Yeshua forbids the attempt to create a Jewish entity within the wider community of Christian believers. Indeed, it cannot be denied that Yeshua is a Jew whose mission was first and foremost orientated towards Jews as heirs to the divine covenants sealed with Abraham and Moses. What the community of Christian believers, beyond all the divisions that occurred in the course of history, holds as the most fully authorized expression of the legacy of Yeshua, Sacred Scriptures, is integrally Jewish. Why then should the people originally chosen by God remain without institutional representation in a community which owes, at least in part, its very existence to them? If there is an African or an Asian Christianity, why should there not be a Jewish Christianity? The consensus, however, tends to disintegrate as soon as one attempts to spell out the elements that should characterise this institutional representation. It is clear from what we have just said that Jewishness cannot be defined according to purely ethnic or even cultural criteria: it simply cannot be isolated from a definite religious identity. A Christian theologian would argue that it is “made” -or more accurately, created- in view of Christ’s message of universal Salvation. True, this identity appeared before Yeshua and has perpetuated itself independently from the

Christian Revelation until the present times. One could describe this identity as a creative faithfulness to the Torah given to Moses, something that materialised through the synergy between practice and study. If Jews have to give up their specific relationship to the Torah in order to become members of the body of Christ, how could a Jewish entity ever take shape? In order to become a Christian, a Jew should cease to be a Jew and become a Gentile. The triumph of the Church would sign the death warrant of Jewishness.

A crucial illustration of the issue at stake can be drawn from the "incident of Antioch", an event which induced Paul to write one of his earliest letters, the Epistle to the Galatians, dating probably from the mid-sixties of the first century. The context is well-known: yielding to the pressure of mysterious "false brothers", Peter, one of the "pillars" of the Church, has withdrawn from the meals taken with the Gentiles of the Galatian community. Paul bitinglly accuses Peter of behaving in a Jewish manner (*Ἰουδαϊκῶς*) among Gentiles, although he has been living as a Gentile (*ἔθνηκῶς*) among Jews (Gal. 2,14). Apparently, the intention of Paul is to convince Gentiles that they do not have to adopt Jewish religious customs in order to be considered full members of the Body of the Church. However, the acceptance of Gentiles *qua* Gentiles in the community for the purpose of building the body of Christ on the basis of equal respect and true communion, seems to require that Jews abandon some of their customs. Or does it?

Paul does not tell whether the reasons that prompted Peter to withdraw from the community meal had to do with the type of food served, the purification rituals or the absence of such rituals, the hierarchical placement of the partakers or the order in the distribution of the dishes¹. We

¹ An article of M. D. Nanos presents a wide range of conflicting opinions regarding this issue among contemporary exegetes, "What was at stake in Peter's eating with Gentiles?" in *The Galatian debate*, Hendrickson publ., Massachussets, 2002, pp.282-318. We agree with Nanos that the problem was the equality of Jews and Gentiles implied by such meals. However, this equality does not need to be related, as Nanos argues, to some concrete modality of the meal, like the order in the distribution of dishes. As we see it, the essential issue lies rather in the very principle of shared meals.

do not know to what extent eating together with Gentiles could have legitimately been perceived as damaging to the core of Jewish identity. What Paul does, instead, is to formulate a general principle that could serve as a criterion of unity in a body composed of both Jewish and Gentile disciples of Yeshua. There is hardly a more famous theological principle in the New Testament than this one: "οὐ δικαιοῦται ἀνθρώπος ἐκ ἐργῶν νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, a human being is not justified by the works of the Law but by faith in Jesus Christ" (2, 16). Traditional Christian exegesis has almost unanimously understood this statement as depriving Jewish observances, indiscriminately identified with the "works of the Law", of any legitimate ground within the Body of Christ. A mode of existence which is Church-true, that is, is based on justification by faith, is something essentially different from the Jewish mode of existence, based on justification through the works of the Law. This interpretation erects an insuperable wall between the members of the Church and those who cling to Jewish observances. By condemning the gesture of Peter, Paul was claiming that the wall of observances that protected Jews from Gentile defilement no longer had any place within the Body of Christ. Ironically, the Gentile interpretation of Paul's saying tends to build a reverse wall, a wall that protects the Body of Christ from Jewish impurity. Actually, the Council of Elvira, convened at the beginning of the 4th century, echoes the discriminating attitude of Peter, but in reverse: "If any cleric or believer takes a meal with Jews, be it advised to ban him from communion in order that he may mend his life". Clearly, the Jewish component that was present at the beginning of the Church, having been denied the possibility to express and keep its identity within the Body of Yeshua, faded out in the course of the first centuries².

—

² By placing the Epistle to the Galatians at the head of his own canon of scriptures, a canon from which he deliberately emptied the texts of the Old Testament, Marcion (died not long after 207) wanted to signify that the new ecclesial body stemming from the blood of Christ no longer had anything to do with the heritage of Israel nor with the Jewish people. This idea is an evident distortion of Paul's concept of the Church, and was treated as such by the Church authorities when it was voiced by Marcion and his followers. Be that as it may, an empirical fact, namely the rapid disintegration of the Jewish component of the Church during the first centuries, produced the very results that the Marcionite ideology had failed to achieve. The remnant of Israel came to melt

There must be something wrong with the traditional exegesis of Gal. 2, 16. By condemning Peter, Paul was aiming to bolster the communion between those from Yeshua followers for whom Jewish observances were vital and those for whom these observances contained nothing necessary *per se*. However, if the principle proclaimed by Paul in Gal. 2, 16 excludes Jewish observances from the Body of Yeshua, what is left of such a communion? What kind of parity can there be between two distinct partners if this communion denies one of these partners a specific form of existence?

Obviously, if the position of Paul appears inconsistent, it is because traditional exegesis finds it difficult to see how the perpetuation of Jewish observance in the body of Yeshua could be distinguished from the discriminating attitude of Peter. The question is whether Paul finds it as difficult as Gentile exegetes. In other terms, does Paul view the discriminating gesture of Peter as authentically Jewish? Is it, according to Paul, a faithful expression of what it is to be a Torah-observant follower of Yeshua? Claiming that, in Gal. 2, 16, Paul makes an implicit distinction between Peter's bad way of being a Jewish Yeshua believer and some good way of being so, presents a major obstacle. It implies that, for Paul, being genuinely faithful to the Torah is something different from doing the works of the Law, since Peter falls under Paul's accusation for doing so when he withdraws from community meals. However, what does it mean to be faithful to the Torah, if it is not precisely to do the works of the Torah? Is there any reason to claim that, for Paul, genuine Torah-faithfulness is something different from what he calls "seeking to be justified through the works of the Law"?

From the perspective that we have just sketched, the answer to this question is crucial. The only hope a Jewish entity can have to take shape within the Body of Yeshua is that there exists a positive Torah-faithfulness in the Spirit of Yeshua. Accordingly, there is nothing more urgent for the Messianic movement than to define what constitutes a Torah-faithfulness that would be

into the mass of the Gentiles, so that the sense of a living and positive connection to the people of the first Covenant got lost. The only Jews left were the "denigrators" of Christ's messianity.

distinct from “the works of the Law” rejected by Paul. This is simply what Messianic ecclesiology is about.

By way of prelude, I shall argue that extant Messianic commentaries fail to deliver an explanation of the passage that would legitimate this specifically “Jewish way” within the Body of Yeshua. In order to do so, one has to determine with some historical precision what Paul means when he invokes the “works of the Law”. This will lead me to examine the problem associated with the incident of Antioch in the light of two major movements of the Second Temple era Judaism; that is, the Pharisees and the Essenians respectively. I shall finally argue that a renewed understanding of Paul’s expression opens up a path to the foundation of a fully legitimate Messianic ecclesiology.

Prelude: The ambiguities of rabbinic hypocrisy

Until the most recent times, Gentile exegesis has understood Paul’s dismissal of justification through the deeds of the Law as conveying an implicit condemnation of post-biblical Judaism. Drawing on the Torah to motivate one’s behaviour has long been the only way for Jews to show commitment to the true God, but it ceased to be so with the advent of Christ. Peter does not understand this fundamental truth when he withdraws from the meals with Gentiles. Nor does any Jew that, after the time of Christ, bases his or her conduct on the Torah of Moses. Luther, for whom Gal. 2,16 provided the key to a genuine understanding of the Gospel, is a perfect example of such an attitude. The openly genocidal rage that Luther displays against Jews in the treatise called *The Jews and their lies*, not to mention the obscene considerations contained in his *Table talk*, are at least partly due to the fact that he sees the Jews of his time as striving to earn their salvation through mere Torah observance. As he writes in his commentary to the Epistle to the Galatians, the Jews behave in relationship to the Torah exactly as the “Romanists” do in relationship to the pseudo-prescriptions of the New

Covenant: "The Jews exhibited a working Abraham. The Pope exhibits a working Christ" ³.

That Jewish faithfulness to the Torah cannot be reduced to a mechanism of Salvation that would exclude the recognition of Christ as Yeshua, the only one who saves, is a conviction on which Messianic Judaism is grounded. As Yeshua himself proclaims, there can be no more adequate interpretation of Torah-faithfulness than the one which is to be found in his words and deeds (Matt.5, 17-18). Accordingly, Messianic theology sets itself the task of disclosing the implicit harmony between the teaching of the New Testament and Torah-faithfulness as conveyed by Jewish tradition. So we come to the specific problem that the "incident of Antioch" raises, or should raise, from a Messianic point of view. Undoubtedly, Peter's withdrawal from the meal is accomplished in the name of Jewish Torah-faithfulness, and yet this action is considered a contradiction to the teaching of Yeshua by Paul. To what extent can Messianic theology, here, succeed in salvaging the alleged harmony between Jewish Torah-faithfulness and New Testament teaching?

I have consulted two commentaries on the passage, David Stern's *Jewish Commentary on the New Testament* and Joseph Shulam's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*⁴. The principle of the solution is identical in both writings. At the same time, the content supporting the principle is different, if not mutually exclusive. The overarching idea is that Paul does not condemn Torah-obedience as understood from a Jewish perspective, but the perversion of the authentic spirit of Jewish religious tradition due to human hypocrisy. According to Stern, the hypocrisy comes from legalism, or an overemphasis on doing: I obey the Law only outwardly, without embracing it inwardly. Meanwhile, Shulam emphasises the neglect of real practice, the absence of real deeds or, as he writes, "the lack of

³ 3, 9. How little love is lost upon [the Jews](...)" (3.24).

⁴ H. Le Cornu-J. Shulam: *A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Galatians*, Netivyah Bible Instruction Ministry, Jerusalem, 2005; Stern, David H.: *Jewish New Testament : A Translation of the New Testament That Expresses Its Jewishness*. 1st ed. Jerusalem, Israel; Clarksville, Md., USA : Jewish New Testament Publications, CD-rom ed. 1989.

concord between saying and doing »⁵. For Stern, hypocrisy is about feelings lagging behind deeds; for Shulam, it is about deeds lagging behind words. But whatever the content they assign to Peter's hypocrisy, both definitions lead to an identical interpretation of the whole passage. By counterbalancing faith in Yeshua (the *JF* system for sake of brevity) and deeds of the Torah (the *JD* system), Paul is supposedly willing to state that only justification through faith can save true Torah-obedience from the venom of hypocrisy. One remains therefore within the framework of an intra-Jewish discussion: what is the best way of applying the Torah, "in" Yeshua or without him? The answer of Messianic exegesis is obvious. Let it be also stated that, according to these authors, this discussion about the correct interpretation of the Torah does not preclude a strictly Gentile interpretation of Paul's *JF* axiom. Torah-obedience cannot properly function but in connection with *JF*, but the converse is not true: *JF* does not necessarily need Torah-obedience in order to function properly. The fact that Jews are able to carry out a Jewish practice in the spirit of Yeshua leaves open a space where Gentiles will be justified by faith without having to carry the burden of the Jewish *mitsvot*. It seems therefore that the Jewish disciples of Yeshua will be entitled to form a community of their own based on a specific synthesis between the Jewish tradition and Yeshua's message of universal communion.

In my view, this interpretation, rather than solving the issue, brings up more questions. Following the logic of Shulam's and Stern's commentaries, true Torah observance should induce Peter to eat together with Gentiles, that is, to share with them one and the same code of behaviour. But the whole problem comes from the fact that Paul does not blame Peter for *not behaving* according to the Torah. He does not contend that Peter is distorting the Torah by being overlegalistic, as in the explanation of Stern, or by not complying with some species of genuine Torah that would dwell in the heart, as in the explanation of Schulam. Paul blames Peter *for behaving according* to the Torah or, according to his own wording, for seeking

⁵ *Commentary on the Jewish Roots...*, *op.cit.*, p.137.

justification in the works of the Law. Claiming that faith in Yeshua delivers the correct interpretation of Torah-obedience seems therefore to lead to an unsustainable paradox: correct Torah-obedience is against Torah-obedience, since Torah-obedience is opposed to faith in Yeshua⁶. At any rate, Peter's personal hypocrisy is not the problem; it is the consequence of a larger problem connected with a correct understanding of the relationship between Torah and Faith. Besides, if true Torah should induce Jewish and Gentile believers to take their meals together, one wonders what is left of the "specific way" to which Jews are supposed to be entitled as members of the body of Yeshua. What remains of this specifically Jewish Torah observance in the spirit of Yeshua, if nothing distinguishes it from the Gentile way of life in the same spirit? Neither Shulam nor Stern takes the trouble to grapple with this difficulty.

In my view, these hermeneutical ambiguities reflect the structural dilemmas of current Messianic ecclesiology. If one takes seriously the communion with Gentiles that Paul advocates in the name of Yeshua, how can one conceive of patterns of behaviour specifically designated to Jewish communities of Yeshua disciples? On the other hand, if one emphasises the possibility of patterns of behaviour specifically designated to Jewish Yeshua disciples, how could observing these patterns avoid recreating the division in the Body initiated by Peter in Antioch? Although Messianic communities often claim to be *sui generis* entities in the body of Christ due to their special bonds with the Jewish tradition, their structural reality is most of the time just the opposite. Folkloric elements apart, their codes of behaviour are most

⁶ Stern's exegesis implies that Paul, without taking the trouble to warn his readers, uses in the same texts the same word, Law or Torah, in two mutually exclusive meanings. Together with its opposite pole, "law" in the sense of a legalistic perversion of the law, "law" in the positive sense would be tacitly implied in a sentence like Gal.2. 19. There, Paul explains why, at this stage, he finds irrelevant the regulations of his previous life as a pharisee. The Greek is: *Egô gar dia nomou nomô apethanon*, literally, "For I through *nomos* to *nomos* died". Stern translates: For it was through letting the Torah speak for itself [N.B. "letting...itself" corresponds to Stern's positive understanding of the word *nomos*] that I died to its traditional legalistic misinterpretation [N.B. "traditional...misinterpretation" is a paraphrase of the same and only word: *nomos*]. We have to take at face value Stern's claim that this is an "exception" to the "good old rule of interpretation", according to which a word that is used twice in the same sentence is supposed to keep one and the same meaning. But even if that were the case, how can the refusal of applying a Pharisaic regulation, namely abstaining from sharing meals with Gentiles, be understood as "letting the Torah speak for itself"? Is not the Pharisaic regulation a consequent application of the laws on food purity formulated in Leviticus? Or to put it conversely: how can obeying the Law betray a legalistic attitude?

often indistinguishable from non-Messianic free Churches, while they have little in common with those pertaining to the Jewish tradition. Meanwhile, these communities do not have any other means of emphasising their ties with the Jewish tradition than to dissociate themselves from the rest of Christian communities, thus recreating the division condemned by Paul without for all that being acknowledged by main-stream Judaism. Moreover, since all these communities have to promote their own idiosyncratic understanding of Torah-obedience in the light of Yeshua, they can hardly avoid looking at the customs of main stream Judaism as something inferior, lacking true Torah-faithfulness. Non-Messianic Judaism tends to be identified with what Paul condemns as a system of Salvation through the deeds of the Torah, as opposed to Salvation in Christ. Eventually, Messianic Judaism is led to espouse the negative views of the Gentile tradition on post-biblical Judaism. This is not only a complete reversal of the original inspiration of Messianic Judaism – it is also an unbearable self-contradiction: how can a spiritual movement draw its *raison d'être* from a tradition it simultaneously professes to despise?

Speaking of hypocrisy in the case of Peter is an easy way out of the problem, but, as we see, it will not do. We have to reflect on the core of the difficulty: the alleged identity with Torah-faithfulness and the *JD* system of Gal.2, 16. Is there any ground to claim that, for Paul, genuine Jewish Torah-faithfulness does not necessarily induce a type of behaviour which, as the one adopted by Peter in Antioch, is incompatible with due faith in Yeshua? Can we infer from the study of the passage a distinction between genuine Torah-faithfulness and the system of salvation which, according to Paul, is incompatible with the teaching of Yeshua? If there is none, Messianic ecclesiology is a non-sense. If there is one, there is no other basis on which an authentic Messianic ecclesiology could take shape.

1. Pharisaism: separating what is holy

If Paul does not deem it necessary to give an account of the precise motives for Peter's withdrawal, it is probably because what matters, in his view, is the action of withdrawal itself. Indeed, for a former Pharisee as Paul (Gal.1, 13-15; Phil. 3, 5-6), the theological implications of such an action are self-evident. One withdraws in order that the sanctity of the Torah might be preserved. To put it in kabbalistic terms, if God's *tsim-tsum* or original *withdrawal* is that which creates a world worthy to be inhabited by human beings, the withdrawal of human beings in the name of the Torah is, according to the Pharisaic understanding, that which creates a space worthy of being inhabited by God in this world. The very name *Perush*, derived from the verb *Parash* according to its most likely etymology, connotes the idea of having deliberately separated oneself. The will to conform the integrality of Jewish existence to the teachings of the Torah led Pharisees to separate themselves from the *amei-ha-aarets*, namely from the Jews who had not kept their religious lifestyle free from Pagan influences⁷.
Actually, Paul provides an additional indication of a Pharisaic influence when he mentions that Peter's sudden change of behaviour, motivated out of fear of "those of the circumcision", took place after the visit of emissaries sent by James, the "brother of the Lord" (Gal. 2,12). Indeed, the ties between James and the Pharisees are quite well-documented⁸.

Moreover, nothing is more understandable than the refusal of Pharisee sympathisers to share meals with Gentiles. Pharisees paid a great deal of attention to the purity of meals, since Pagans were used to eating foods that were either forbidden by the Torah or/and vowed to their gods⁹. The

⁷ See S. Stern: "Rabbis are depicted in the *Mishna* as refraining from commercial exchanges and social contacts with the *amei haAret* as well as from attending their synagogues. In this respect, *amei haAretz* are treated in a manner similar to non-Jews. In the Babylonian Talmud, we find that rabbis do not dine with them or even sit with them and enjoy their company", *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings*, Brill, 1994, p.116 .

⁸ As a matter of fact, the apostle James seems to have been close to Pharisee circles until his tragic death. According to a text of Hegesipus reproduced by Eusebios of Cesarea (*Historia Ecclesiastica*, 2. 1.5, 23, 4-19) the Pharisees came to see James, thinking that this "righteous man" would help them to calm down the messianic enthusiasm of many Jews that had come to believe in Yeshua's resurrection. Angered by Jame's refusal and fiery messianic speech, they would have stoned him to death.

⁹J. Neusner writes: „Der hervorstechendste Zug des Pharisaismus vor 70, wie er in den späteren rabbinischen Traditionen über die Pharisäer und in den Evangelien beschrieben wird, besteht im Interesse für rituelle Dinge.

avoidance of meals taken in common with Pagans is derived from the most ancient prescriptions of Jewish *halakha*¹⁰. In later Talmudic literature, common meals with Pagans and marriages between Jews and non-Jews, with their putative fatal consequences regarding the survival of Israel, are often treated on the same level¹¹.

It is true, however, that the most ancient sources bear witness to disagreements between the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel as to the way "God fearers" should be treated. As is well-known, these "God fearers" were uncircumcised Gentiles converted to the faith of Israel who

Insonderheit betonen die Pharisäer, dass Essen im Status ritueller Reinheit, so als wäre man Tempelpriester, zu erfolgen habe (...). Alle Mahlzeiten erforderten rituelle Reinheit, dies jedoch unter Nachbarn, die nicht Gruppenmitglieder waren. Gerade daher erhielten diese Reinheitsregeln und Speisegesetze auch solches Gewicht, denn sie allein separierten den Pharisäer von seiner Umgebung. Nicht in der Wüste oder an Festtagen bzw. Sabbaten allein, sondern wochentags in den Ortschaften, ohne erzählen des Element oder Lesungen (Gespräche über Tora bei Tisch sind erst für später bezeugt), hing die pharisäische Mahlgemeinschaft einzig von der normalen Beobachtung der Tora ab. „, *Das Pharisäische und Talmudische Judentum*, JCB Mohr, Tübingen, 1984, p.24, 51.

¹⁰ G. Alon has shown that the notion of Gentile uncleanness predates the Hasmonean period. It does not appear during the Second Temple era, as had been thought previously. In actual fact, the evolving line of Talmudic interpretation shows rather that this notion has been decreasingly understood, so that the logic of a series of ancient precepts has been lost from sight, see *Jews, Judaism and the Classical World*, Jerusalem, 1977. Pagan idolatry made it highly perilous to share meals with non-Jews. Works written during the Second Temple era such as *The Book of Jubilees* and *Joseph and Aseneth* reflect this attitude. As P. J. Thompson writes, "The point is that idolatry, here [*Jubilees*, 22,16] called 'sacrifices to the dead' caused gentiles to be impure in 'all their ways' and hence forbidden to eat with for a Jew observing the law of purity", *Paul and the Jewish Law*, Van Gorcum, Maastricht, 1990, 153. In this book, when Joseph, the son of Jacob, visits the house of the Egyptian father of Aseneth, the woman who was, according to God's providence, due to become his wife, the Jewish favourite of Pharaoh "sat down on a seat; and he washed his feet, and he placed a table in front of him separately, because he would not eat with the Egyptians, for this was an abomination to him" (c.7, 1.). And when Aseneth comes to greet him, he declares: "It is not right for a man who worships God, who with his mouth blesses the living God, and eats the blessed bread of life, and drinks the blessed cup of immortality, and is anointed with the blessed unction of incorruption, to kiss a strange woman, who with her mouth blesses dead and dumb idols, and eats of their table the bread of anguish, and drinks of their libations the cup of treachery, and is anointed with the unction of destruction" (c.8,5). Moreover, the tale confirms the intimate connection between the prohibition of eating Gentile food and the threat of intermarriage (see Alon, *op.cit.*, p.181).

¹¹ S. Stern emphasises the continuity of this parallel between the Mishna and the Talmud: "We are told in the Babylonian Talmud the story of a matronita who tried to seduce R. Tzadok. As he warded her off with the excuse that he was very hungry, she offered him some forbidden food; whereupon he remarked: 'this indicates that whoever does this (i.e. intercourse with a non-Jewish Woman) eats this (i.e. forbidden food)'. The relationship between non-Jewish sex and non-Jewish food - both equally repulsive - may be explained in terms of the analogy between food and sex which is generally found in early rabbinic writings. In this context, however, it is effectively employed for the purpose of enhancing the bodily repulsiveness of intercourse with non-Jews. Interestingly, in a Halakhic context, we also find that the prohibition of non-Jewish food is explicitly related to that of intermarriage: non Jewish bread and alcoholic drinks are forbidden by rabbinic decree, according to the Babylonian Talmud, "on account of intermarriage", *Jewish Identity, op.cit.*, p.165-166.

often took part in the life of synagogal communities. There was certainly much more willingness to count these Gentiles as accepted members of the Jewish community, though with some restrictions, by Hillel than by Shammai, the school to which Paul had belonged¹². If anything, the status of uncircumcised Gentiles in the primeval communities of Yeshua disciples carried an obvious similarity to that of the "God-fearers" of the ancient synagogues. From this point of view, the withdrawal of Peter sounds like a specific statement to be deciphered in the terms of the school of Shammai. Gentile Yeshua-believers are still impure, and therefore not yet full members of the community comprised of those whom God has chosen and justified in Yeshua. Accordingly sharing meals with them would compromise the sanctity of the Torah, now fully revealed in Yeshua. There is therefore a Jewish question about whether faithfulness to the Torah necessarily demands taking such a step. Things might not have been that clear from the point of view of a disciple of Hillel, for whom the sanctity of the Torah was not necessarily defiled by a certain degree of mixing with the "God fearers".

Of course, one can ask whether this intra-Jewish debate is relevant for Paul in the context of Galatians. By opposing faith in Yeshua to the deeds of the Torah, Paul might be simply willing to say that one has to forget about faithfulness to the Torah when it comes to building a community on the foundation of Christian faith. This is indeed the way traditional Gentile

¹² J. Shulam quotes the passage of the Talmud where the difference of opinions between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel regarding the ways to treat "God fearers" comes into focus. Here, the issue is about the importance of circumcision as a necessary step to be integrated as "proselytes" into Israel's covenant: "Our Rabbis taught: If a proselyte was circumcised but had not performed the prescribed ritual ablution, R. Eliezer said, 'Behold he is a proper proselyte; for so we find that our forefathers were circumcised and had not performed ritual ablution'. If he performed the prescribed ablution but had not been circumcised, R. Joshua said, 'Behold he is a proper proselyte ... ' (Yev.46a). Shulam comments: "When interpreted in the context of Beit Shammai's zealot tendencies, this dispute may be read as emphasising the fact that the Gentile is unclean per se. He is forbidden to study Torah until he has been circumcised, since circumcision is not merely a commandment but symbolises entry into the covenant people. Only full conversion - embodied in the blood drawn through circumcision - fits a person to study what God gave to Israel alone", *A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of the Galatians, op.cit.*, pp.93-94. Shulam also quotes a passage of Joseph's *Antiquities* where the historian contrasts the attitudes of two Jews towards the conversion of the king of Adiabenes: whereas the merchant Ananias believes that the adhesion of the king to the faith and tradition of Israel is sufficient permission to partake of Israel's covenant, Eleazar "who came from Galilee and had the reputation of being extremely strict" claims that performing the rite of circumcision is a condition *sine qua non* (Ant.20.34-48, cf. *Comment.*, pp.94-95).

exegesis has understood the passage: by withdrawing from the common meals, Peter is simply putting the Torah into practice. But is he really? This is precisely the question we ask here: does Paul identify the search for salvation through the works of the Torah with Torah-faithfulness? From this point of view, it is worth remembering here the entire sentence that conveys the famous statement of Paul. The beginning in Gal. 2, 15, is indeed seldom quoted:

” -Hmeij fusei Vloudaibi kai. ouk ek ergwn amartwloi, eidotej Ideð oti our dikaioutai anqrwpoj ek ergwn nomou...

We who are by nature Jews and not sinners from among the Gentiles, knowing that man is not justified by the works of the law...”

It seems that Jews, that is, those to whom the Torah has been given, in contrast with Pagans, are the ones who are supposed to know that they are not justified through the works of the Torah. How come, if, as traditional Gentile exegesis claims, Paul associates the Jewish religious identity with the *JD* system? ¹³ In actual fact, modern, non-Messianic exegesis has widely questioned the historical validity of such an identification. It appears that traditional exegesis, when developing these views on Judaism, was largely unconscious of reflecting a typically Christian way of thinking. In one manner or another a Christian is someone who has to adjust himself or herself to the justifying action of salvation which God has achieved for the sake of mankind. Actually, the protracted discussion between Catholics and Lutherans is only about the correct way to do so. At any rate, “Salvation-for-me-too” or personal admittance into the reality of God’s salvation, through

¹³ James Dunn, the promoter of the “new perspective” on Paul, shows his acquaintance with the extant literature on the subject in the following terms: “Not untypical of my early reading was the commentary on Rom. 4.6 by Franz Leenhardt, who notes 'that the juridical mentality of the rabbis (and in this they resembled all men of all times) thought of the believer's relations with God as an account showing debit and credit. The important point was that on the credit side should be listed more good works than there were bad works on the debit side'. In a footnote he quotes J. Bonsirven's observation (Jud. Palest. II 58-9) that it was such an attitude which 'earned for the Pharisees their nickname as calculators'. Also, W. Bousset: 'Life thus became a game of reckoning, a constant inspection of the account which the pious man has in the divine bank' (*Rei. Jud.* 3rd ed. 1926, 393). Influential was Emil Schärer's characterization of Judaism at the time of Jesus in terms of 'external formalism ... very far removed from true piety'. To similar effect was Matthew Black's description of Pharisaism as 'the immediate ancestor of 'the largely arid religion of the Jews after the fall of Jerusalem', 'a sterile religion of codified tradition, regulating every part of life by a halachah .. '. My reaction was understandable: no wonder Paul found his conversion liberating from such a religion (Rom. 8.2; Gal. 5.1)!”, *The New Perspective on Paul*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2005, p.2.

justification, is the issue that stands continuously in the forefront of a Christian consciousness. This attitude seems to be very far from what we know about the non- or pre-Christian Jewish mentality of the Second Temple period. The Pharisees, in particular, seem to have devoted very little attention to these notions of justification and salvation. As Neusner observes regarding the Mishnaic corpus: "the word 'salvation' is rare, 'sanctification' common place"¹⁴. Salvation was something God had done for his people a number of times, could do once more and would certainly do at the end of times. But it belonged to the very concept of salvation that it was in the hands of God alone. For those in Israel who were expecting God to save his people in one way or another, religion could not be about entering into a salvific reality which either lay in a remote past or had not yet occurred. The very idea of *acquiring or earning salvation* must have indeed sounded very strange. In his seminal work on the Judaism of the Second Temple era, Sanders coined the term "covenantal nomism" to characterise an attitude that fundamentally relates to Torah as to the gift of God, God's graceful response to the faith of Abraham, and not as to a system of individual or collective salvation. Sanctification, not salvation: this was about an existence led according to the Torah as a possibility of placing one's whole life under the blessing of God's friendship. The faith of the Pharisees proclaimed that the daily accomplishment of *mitsvot* mattered much more in the eyes of God than eschatological views regarding the salvation of Israel. Pharisaic *halakha* witnessed a divine friendship which was not to be passively awaited, but was already at hand.

It seems therefore that the majority of Jews, at the time of Paul, would not - at least not immediately - understand faithfulness to the Torah in terms of salvation through the works of the Torah. For lack of a better solution, some exegetes have suggested that Paul, in this passage in Galatians, deliberately constructed a "straw man". *JD* would merely be a rhetorical argument destined to render Paul's message about justification in Christ more

¹⁴ *Foundations of Judaism*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1993, p.41.

compelling. The rub is that it is precarious to make a point in a discussion by relying on a caricature of one's opponents. If Paul's characterisation has been perceived only as an artificial construct, how could he have reasonably hoped to convince his readers that equality of treatment between Jews and Gentiles worked better than segregation from the perspective of Salvation? In actual fact, recent textual research has shown that the expression of Paul had a solid historical background, albeit in a context totally different from the one of Pharisaic circles. Salvation through the works of the Torah appears indeed as a kind of coded formula, emanating from a marginal current of the Second Temple era, namely the Essenes. I believe that this Essenian background of the *JD* principle sheds a new light on what Paul intended to say about genuine Torah-faithfulness in Galatians.

2. Qumran: sanctifying separation

Biblical scholars have long been intrigued by the expression: *ergon nomou*, deed of the Law which was likely to be translated *maase-ha-torah* in Hebrew. The fact is that this expression is completely absent from the Mishnah and the Talmud. For one thing, it recalls the terminology associated with the liturgical and ritual service of the Levites in the Tent of the Meeting, *ʔerga thj skhnhj* and in the Temple *ʔerga oikou kuriou* (Num.3,7,8; 4.3; 2 Chr. 23,18, I Esdr.5, 56, Ezr.3,9, etc.) in Hebrew *tdbq* or *hkbalm*, which is sometimes simply designated as the works of God, *ʔerga kuriou hwhy > tdbq* (Num.8,11). This observation would not take us very far, had not a team of Qumran scientists uncovered a very remarkable document in the 80s. Here one finds the Hebrew expression that was supposed to lie behind Paul's *erga nomou*, that is, *ma'ase-ha-torah*. In both the title and other places, *Miqtsat Maa'sei ha-Torah*, which has been translated as *Some observances of the Law* or *Some important observances of the Law*¹⁵. The editors called this fragmentary document, familiarly designated as *MMT* and dating from about one century

¹⁵ See M. Abegg, "Paul, 'Works of the Law' and MMT", *Biblical Archeology Review* 20 (1994).

before the Letter to the Galatians, a *halakhic* letter. The main theme of the document is the prohibition of mingling the pure with the impure, the community with the external world: "You know that we have separated from the mass of people (*parashnu me rob ha'ham*) and refused to become enmeshed in these things" (C 7). The author links this dread of mingling with the impure to the rules of purity associated with the service of the Temple. Thus, he evinces great concern for the various ways in which the sacred can be defiled. The first of these instructions bears upon the origin of the offerings made in the Temple: "the [Gentiles] touch the offering of wheat...and defile it. One should not accept anything [from the wheat of the Gentiles] and [none of it] is to enter the Sanctuary"¹⁶. Sexual intercourse with people who are dedicated to idolatry and depravity, also mentioned here under the code names of "Amonites" and "Moabites", is severely prohibited. Holy people should even avoid wearing clothes made out of mixed material.

The fact that the text deals so extensively with the rituals of the Temple, which is unique in the Essenian literature, has led scholars to suspect that it had originally been produced outside the community. However, the notion of *ma'ase* does not refer only to the service of the Temple. In this particular text as in other Qumranic texts, the author concentrates on the high deeds of Israel or of God, *ma'asei-El*, in the course of history. The link between Temple-like ritual purity and heroic deeds becomes clearer at the end of the text. We read there a short *Pesher midrash* that is, a hermeneutical attempt to shed light on events of the past or the present by reference to sayings taken from apparently unrelated biblical contexts. As Paul does in the Galatians, the author of *MMT* develops his *Pesher Midrash* in the light of the blessings and the curses that follow, in the book of Deut.(c.30), the granting of the Law to Moses (4Q398 14-17, i-11-13). But whereas the *Pesher midrash* of Paul is focussed on the role of faith in the history of Israel, the author of *MMT* focusses on the high deeds of the heroes and kings of Israel. Towards the end of the document (4Q398 11-13, 24) we read: "Remember the kings of Israel and

¹⁶ 4Q395, Translation from "The Complete Dead-Sea scrolls in English", G. Vermes ed., Penguin books 2004.

understand their works, *ma'aseimakh*, that each of them who feared the Torah was saved from troubles, and to those who were seekers of the Law, their iniquities were pardoned" ¹⁷. It is clear that the author links the observance of the rules of purity associated with the "works of the Temple" and the heroic deeds which, in the past, earned divine forgiveness for their authors. This is consonant with the general lines of the Essenian *Weltanschauung*: the striving after ritual separation from profane elements is identified with a "doing" or a "working" of the Torah, that, in the eschatological context of the great war between the sons of righteousness and the sons of Belial, will contribute to the final and cosmic justification of God. Among these *ma'asei*, instructions regarding the purity of the food (4Q394, 3-7, 4Q396, 1-2, etc.) play a significant role. One has to bear in mind the somewhat extraordinary meaning attached to the common meal at Qumran, which was also called Purity, since it was supposed to be shared only by the members of the sect who had managed to remain totally undefiled¹⁸.

The issue at stake in *MTT* appears strikingly close to what Gal. 2,16 is supposed to be about. However, this similarity could still be considered coincidental, had not a second remarkable expression been found. Indeed,

awl wí ÁÁ dymdt l ⁵

hñdyX[mb lnbthw íl BarXy yklm ta rikáí Á ÁÁ BÜhw ⁶
-hm ymX

-hw tw@cmí dl wcm hyh hríwth ÁÁ ta Bary ayhX ⁷
Á hrwt yXlqBbans

¹⁸ See the account of M. Newton: "The meals were to be taken in common (IQS 6.2), that is, food was not to be shared with outsiders or with members under the ban (IQS 5.16) (...) Only full members of the community who were in good standing (cf. IQS 6.23ff.) could participate. What this meant was that those who had passed through the different levels of purity within the community and had reached the stage where they could 'touch the drink of the Many' (1 QS 6.20f.), could join with the others and eat the meal. Should such a full member become unclean he would be excluded from the 'purity' and thus from the meal (IQS 6.25; 7.16,19,23). The demand for purity of those attending the eschatological meal which is described in 1 QSa is emphasised by the fact that those who would have been unfit for ministering at the Temple are barred from joining in the meal (1 QSa 2.3ff.)", *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985, p.34-35. The mention of the eschatological dimension of these meals (cf. Is.25,6 sq.) sheds an additional light on the incident of Antioch. At Qumran, meals taken in common were signs of the imminent coming of the end of times, which gave them an importance unknown to main-stream Judaism. In the early Christian communities, they could hardly symbolise something other than the fact that the end of times had come. Hence the overwhelming significance of the inclusion of Gentiles *qua* Gentiles among the banquet guests.

the last sentence of the document (4Q398 17ii) reads: “And it will be reckoned for you as righteousness when you perform what is right and what is good before Him, for your own good and for that of Israel”¹⁹. The Hebrew $\text{hqdcl } \$l \text{ hbXxnw}$, with its *passivus divinus* literally coincides with the Greek of Gal. 2,16: “know that a man is not justified, $\text{ouv dikaioutai anqrwpoj}$ ”. On the basis of these elements, one could claim to find in *MMT* a statement on justification through the works of the Law, *ma’ase-torah*, which corresponds, even in the wording, to the system Paul dismisses in Gal. 2,16. This doctrine identifies a *ma’ase-ha-Torah*, a work of the Torah as an action dictated by the pious desire to withdraw from any sort of mingling or communion with foreign, non-exclusively Judaic, elements. This applies first and foremost to meals and sexual intercourse.

From this point of view, the hidden reference to Psalm.106, v.30-31, that Abegg has discovered sounds compelling²⁰. The fact is that the expression “reckoned as righteousness” found in Gal. 2,16, is contemporaneously referred to the episode in which God reacts to the faith of Abraham, Gen.15.31. This accounts for *JF*, but not for *JD*. However, in Psalm 106, one finds the same expression used to qualify a heroic deed pleasing to God, a *ma’ase-ha-Torah* in the Essenian sense. Not surprisingly, this holy deed involves a radical separation between the Jewish element and the Pagan one. The passage of the Psalm refers to an event that occurred when Israel was on its way to the Holy Land, at a time when a plague had just struck the nation (cf. Numbers 25, 1-8). The priest Pinehas is said to have discovered a Jew and a Moabite engaged in sexual intercourse and to have pierced them through their bellies with a single spear right away²¹. According to the passage in Numbers, the plague that was devastating Israel receded in the immediate aftermath of this *ma’ase*. The passage of the Psalm reads:

“Then Pinehas stood up and interposed

¹⁹ $\$l \text{ bwj l wnp l bwj hw rXyh } \$twX[b \text{ hqdcl } \$l \text{ hbXxnw}$ ⁷
 Å ce Ü l arXyl w

²⁰ “Paul, Works of the Law..”, *op.cit.*

²¹ See the above mentioned treatment of “Moabites” in *MTT*.

And so the plague was stayed

And this was reckoned to him as righteousness (kai. elogisqh autw| eij dikaiosunhn eij genean, hqcc.l i Al abvxTn)

From generation to generation”.

The figure of Pinehas is not a coincidental one. He was of special importance to the Essenes, as the forefather of the Zadoquite line of priests, out of which the “teacher of righteousness”, one of the founders of the community and one of the possible authors of *MTT*, is thought to have come.

Seen from this perspective, the doctrine that Paul dismisses in Gal. 2,16 appears in a light, very different from traditional Gentile exegesis. What is pointed out is not the attitude of the Pharisees, with their striving after the sanctification of daily life, as if this effort to apply the Torah could mechanically bring about the justification of God. Rather, what is immediately intended is the Essenian concept which sees in the separation from the world, in the refusal of any sort of mingling with foreign, especially Gentile, elements, a *ma’ase-ha-torah* which is said to call down the healing grace of God upon the whole nation of Israel. What we see here is the embryo of a transcendent dynamics linking human action to a divine reward. True, this has little in common with the Pharisaic system of mechanically-obtained justification, which is but an artificial, Gentile construct²². The Essenes held to the way of Pinehas, the way of heroic deeds. In the Epistle to

²² A passage from the *Community Rule of Qumran* (1QS 11.11-15) shows clearly how far the correspondence between the deeds of human beings and the event of God’s justifying salvation lies in the mechanics of merits and rewards: “As for me, if I stumble, the mercies of God shall be my eternal salvation. If I stagger because of the sin of flesh, my justification (*mshpti*) shall be by the righteousness of God which endures for ever. He will draw me near by his grace, and by his mercy will he bring my justification (*mshpti*). He will judge me in the righteousness of his truth and in the greatness of his goodness he will pardon (*ykpr*) all my sins. Through his righteousness he will cleanse me of the uncleanness of man and of the sins of the children of men”, quoted by J. Dunn, *The New Perspective, op.cit.*, p.3-4. That sinners can hasten the advent of God’s justification through the accomplishment of holy deeds does not imply that these deeds necessitate this advent as a work deserves its reward. The distance between the human merit of these deeds and the dispensation of God’s justification is incommensurable. Otherwise, God’s justification would not be a matter of grace. In actual fact, the accomplishment of *maa’sai ha-torah* is already an effect of God’s grace, as appears clearly elsewhere in the Qumran corpus: “I know that man has no righteousness nor does the son of man walk in the perfect way. All the works of righteousness belong to God most High” (1QH 12, 30-31).

the Galatians, Paul explains why he holds to the way of Abraham, the way of faith²³.

That echoes of Qumran literature and worldviews are found in a passage of the letters of Paul is nothing extraordinary *per se*, especially if they are fraught with unfavourable overtones²⁴. The question is rather, as stated before: why here? Why does Paul use a religious system of reference challenging that of the Pharisees (separation from the world vs. sanctification of daily life) at the very moment when he is trying to solve a matter that touches upon the relevancy of a Pharisees-inspired *halakha*- the withdrawal of Peter from meals with fellow Gentiles? As we give our answer to this question, we will be led to re-examine the ecclesiological claims of the Messianic movement.

3. Between Hillel and Shammai: Jewish Yeshua-believers at the crossroads

When we get involved in discussions with people who do not share our views, a frequently used rhetorical manoeuvre consists in imputing opinions to them which they cannot legitimately hold, so as to convince them to reconsider their stand on the issue. In some way, it is like offering them the opportunity to contemplate themselves in a slightly distorting mirror, with the expectation that this limited therapeutical shock will drive them away from their previous ideas. For instance, disagreeing with a member of some respectable conservative party, I will argue that if he advocates such or such opinion, he is a "Fascist", because it is common to hear this particular opinion from the mouth of Right-wing extremists. The reference to the *JD* system, in

²³ In the First Book of Maccabees, the fury of Judas Mattathias against hellenizing Jews is referred to Pinehas, who, "*in return for his burning zeal [against Zimri, son of Salu] received the covenant of everlasting priesthood, ἐν τῷ ζηλωσῶσαι ζῆλον ἔλαβε διαθήκην ἱερωσύνης αἰωνίας*" (1 Mac. 2,54, see also 2,26). The dynamics between Pinehas' heroic "deeds of separation" and the divine reward is blatant. Meanwhile, Abraham is praised for his faith in the very same passage: "Was not Abraham tested and found faithful, was that not considered as justifying him, Ἀβραάμ οὐχὶ ἐν πειρασμῶ ἐυρέθη πιστός, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην?" (2,52).

²⁴ M.G. Abegg holds it as "not unreasonable" that Paul "consciously reflected the term 'works of the Law' which was used by the author of 4QMMT", "4QMMT C 27, 31 and 'works of righteousness'", *Dead Sea Discoveries* 6 (2), 1999, p.141. Echos of Qumran literature and theology in the Pauline corpus are as indubitable as they are diffuse, see J. Murphy O'Connors, *Paul and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Christian Origins library, 1990. Meanwhile, Paul's and the Essenes' understandings of the "true Temple" are radically different, as has been often emphasised. See for ex. M. Newton, *The Concept of Purity...*, *op.cit.*

Gal. 2,16, called to the minds of the readers a very specific view on Judaism: one that saw separation between the members of the community, as the true Israel, from the surrounding Gentile world, as a holy deed that could bring about salvation. But this is a position which a true Jew, that is a Jew by birth, *ἡσεί Ἰουδαίῳ* as Paul writes, immediately identifies as wrong. The grace of being included in the Covenant of Israel came upon all the descendants of Isaac and Jacob through the faith of their father Abraham, and not through strivings, no matter how heroic, to separate from the Gentiles, *ἐκ ἐθνῶν ἀμαρτωλοῖ*. Separation is not a good *per se*; it is good only insofar as God has revealed himself to only one nation, and not to others. Therefore, separation no longer has a *raison d'être* now, that Gentiles have, through faith in Christ, come to the knowledge of the true God. If the house of Hillel appeared more open than the house of Shammai when it came to modes of sharing community life between Jews by birth and Gentile proselytes, it should be true *a fortiori*, *καὶ ὑπομὲν* now that Jews and Gentiles are united by a common faith in Yeshua. The followers of Yeshua are justified equally through faith, and this also includes Jews who practice Torah in their own way. Accordingly, the signs that marked the difference of status between Jews and Gentile proselytes in mixed synagogal communities, like meals taken separately, should be abolished²⁵.

Obviously, the issue at stake is not, as Stern and Shulam claim, about true Torah obedience vs. human hypocrisy or weakness. It is about two different ways of interpreting the Torah. A wise Hillelite rabbi would have had

²⁵ Our views come close to the "new perspective on Paul" as it has been expounded by Dunn in numerous works and articles. In order to show that the formula "works of the Law" is intended to dismiss Jewish exclusivism, Dunn also relies on MMT and the Essenian religious ideology; see for instance "Noch einmal: 'Works of the Law' in *The New Perspective on Paul*, Mohr Siebeck, München, 2005, pp.407-22. I do not believe, however, that this exclusivism had a protective character, but rather an offensive one. Peter did not withdraw in order to preserve some "badge of Jewishness" within the wider community, but to indicate that the wider community had to be integrated into the Jewish people in order to become fully partaker of the new covenant proclaimed by the the Messiah of Israel. The artificial isolation of Peter is a deliberate strategy aimed at instilling a bad conscience among Gentile believers. It was not sufficient that they would have come to believe in the Messiah of Israel; they had additionally to become full members of the people of Israel through circumcision and the adoption of a Judaic mode of existence. By referring to the Essenes' *ma'ase-ha-torah*-ideology, Paul points out that the theological reasons brought forward by these adepts of a "Pharisaic Messiah", as they practice their isolation strategy, are utterly mistaken.

no difficulty in conceiving ways in which his disciples could have shared meals with Gentile proselytes without breaking the rulings of the Torah that apply to Jews or forcefully imposing them on Gentiles²⁶. There is no reason why Peter could not have proved half as imaginative. Meanwhile, sticking as he did to the tough line of Shammai in the context of a Yeshua-community is tantamount to transforming Judaism into a sort of Essenism. On a practical level, it induces the seclusion of the community of Jewish believers from the community of Gentile believers, as if the former were “purer” or more perfect than the latter.

Now, as we try to draw some ecclesiological conclusions from this interpretation of Gal. 2,16, we see that there is no attempt, on the part of Paul, to abolish a distinction which he does not question elsewhere, namely: the distinction between Jewish and Gentile followers of Yeshua. This distinction is materialised by the difference in customs that, according to the Torah and the writings of the apostles, apply respectively to Jewish and Gentile followers of the true God. One can legitimately conceive of Messianic communities which, like the one led by James in Jerusalem, was characterised as Jewish observant. What Paul wants to emphasise here, however, is the necessity of maintaining and fostering observant Messianic communities everywhere as the means of communion between Gentile and Jewish believers. It is in this communion that the mystery of Yeshua’s justification discloses its reality, its universal and life-giving power. Accordingly, as Jewish-observant communities should try to grant their due place to Gentile members by respecting their customs, the same should hold true for Gentile-observant communities. There are many ways in which communion can be maintained without damaging the respective customs of Gentile- and Jewish-observant followers of Yeshua.

Meals in common, as discussed in Gal. 2, have an important role to play in this respect. However, as we have seen in this presentation, the issue

²⁶ See for instance E. P. Sanders, “Jewish Association with Gentiles and Galatians 2: 11-14” in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, R.T. Fortna and B.R. Gaventa ed., Nashville: Abingdon 1990, pp.170-88.

about meals in common stands very close to the delicate - albeit pivotal from a Jewish point of view - issue about intermarriage. Ethnically speaking, it was through intermarriage that the Jewish element, having being denied an idiosyncratic ecclesial mode of existence, disappeared from the Body of Yeshua during the first centuries of the Christian era, thus paving the way to a "purely" Gentile Church. Accordingly, is it impossible to conceive intermarriage as an example of the type of communion that Paul advocates in Gal. 2,16? The Jewish element will not be compromised if the communion between the Jewish- and the Gentile-observant partners is sufficiently deep to nourish a mutual respect for the religious "way" of each of the partners. On the level of community life, these intermarriages should not be a source of difficulty as long as these communities themselves, whether Gentile- or Jewish-observant, practice the Paul-inspired principle of communion that we have just described. Jewish-observant communities will be welcoming to Gentile members - without giving up their basic observances - and conversely.

In this manner, the Jewish-observant part of the Body of Yeshua will really be able to fulfill the vocation that Messianic theologians often put forward: form a contemporary bridge between main-stream Judaism and Gentile traditional Churches, striving to overcome a past of hatred, persecutions and mutual prejudices. Jewish Messianic communities will not be tempted to elaborate on their virtual disagreements with Gentile communities to get closer to main-stream Judaism. One will be given the possibility to assume and develop the distinctiveness of the Jewish identity, whether on the level of daily practice or of theological research, while being in full spiritual communion with the rest of the Body of Yeshua. Nor will these communities be tempted to undermine, on the basis of their faith in Yeshua, the worth of the tradition that carries main-stream Judaism, as a kind of counter-reaction to the natural feelings of suspicion and hostility that they raise on the part of the latter. Whether they succeed in getting some recognition from their fellow Jews or not, these communities will feed on an

identical tradition as they assume their identity within the Body of Yeshua. For sure, they will have to find their own creative way of being faithful to this tradition. But is that not the lot of every movement inside contemporary Judaism, from the most conservative to the most liberal one? Is Jewish tradition not, according to its very essence, engaged in a movement of perpetual and often conflictual self-recreation?

One cannot overestimate the significance of the rebirth of the Jewish component when it comes to the whole “spiritual economy” of the Body of Yeshua. What is at stake is the communion between Israel, in its particularity, and the Nations, in their generality, that is, ultimately, nothing else than the mysterious essence of Salvation itself. As old Simeon, seeing the wondrous new-born child in the Temple, exclaimed:

Now, *ADONAI*, according to your word,
your servant is at peace as you let him go;
for I have seen with my own eyes your *yeshu'ah*,
which you prepared in the presence of all peoples —
a light that will bring revelation to the *Goyim*
and glory to your people Isra'el.”(Luke 2, 29-32, transl.Stern)

The inclusion of the Nations in God’s plan of salvation is the glory of Israel. Salvation in Christ entails a communication of the heritage of Israel that renews the Nations and a reception of this heritage by the Nations that renews Israel. Granting a new life to the Jewish component of the Body of Yeshua is the exact obverse of a division that would weaken it. It is about the restoration of a spiritual dynamics of communion, the historical disappearance of which has considerably weakened and impoverished the Body of Christ.

Of course, the concrete ecclesiological form that this restoration could take is another issue. One has to take into account a context where Church traditions and religious trends, not least the Jewish Messianic movement itself, are almost endlessly split among themselves due to their different dogmatic and organisational options. The future probably rests on a modest group of people determined to experience afresh this most primeval form of ecclesial communion, and see how it works. Indeed, this is how the Body of Christ

initially took shape: with a small number of people from heterogeneous ethnic and cultural backgrounds gathering in a bustling metropolis of present day Turkey and deciding that, from then on, they would take their meals together.