

nettle, but having summarised some arresting criticisms of contemporary practice he immediately backs off, relegating cries of pain, frustration and disillusionment to the comforting status of 'grumbles' (pp 28–29, a category which of course leaves the basic structure in place. Later we are told that 'Ignatius gave those he trained to give the Exercises no theory of prayer or spirituality'. (p 252). I cannot help wondering whether for some at least of the contributors to this book allegiance to the Exercises is at the price of a comparable wisdom. There is something a bit claustrophobic about most of it.

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JEWISH LAW FROM JESUS TO THE MISHNAH; Five Studies by E.P.Sanders, SCM. London/Philadelphia, Trinity Press International, 1990, £17.50.

The Twentieth Century has seen a growing number of Christian scholars taking a serious interest in rabbinic literature, either for its own sake or as a means for better understanding the intellectual milieu of the time of Jesus, in order to gain a more accurate insight into the New Testament and the origins of Christianity. On the Christian side studies have often been hampered by the presupposition that the Pharisees were the powerful villains that the gospel traditions make them out to be. Opinions shift again and again, but certain-basic questions remain. To what extent can the rabbinic literature (now aided by the Qumran and related texts) be used to reconstruct a Judaism which existed two hundred years or more prior to the rabbinic texts? To what extent does the New Testament reflect first century Palestinian Judaism? To what extent did Palestinian Judaism (and the Pharisees in particular) influence the Greek-speaking Diaspora? What were the real concerns of the Pharisees and how much influence did they really have? How did the different parties within first century Judaism regard one another? Professor Sanders touches on all these questions in a series of five independent but related studies, which are characterised by meticulous scholarship, carefully thought out arguments, and a healthy dose of common sense. The work as a whole turns on questions of methodology. It is no surprise to find that the secondary theme running throughout this work is Sanders' ongoing debate with Jacob Neusner, which by now has taken on the quality of Sanders' David going up against Neusner's Goliath. Dealing with this secondary issue first it is good to note that

Sanders gives credit to Neusner where it is due, but rightly points out that it is impossible to define a position held by Neusner on any subject. The large volume of the man's output has created a corpus full of internally conflicting and contradictory positions. The last essay in the volume is a savage but well-reasoned attack on Neusner's 'Philosophy of the Mishnah', demonstrating that Neusner never takes the basic question of the *genre* of the Mishnah into account, ignores evidence which would undermine his theory of timelessness, and makes of the Mishnah a coded work for which Neusner is the first decoder. Regardless of how one wants to evaluate the importance of Professor Neusner's contributions, Sanders' observations should be carefully read by any non-expert, lest one be misled into thinking that Neusner's portrayal of first century Judaism is the final word. The complexity of Sanders' arguments point to the complexity of evaluating the evidence.

Methodology, then, is Sanders' principal concern. He offers not so much new ideas as a new way of looking at the evidence; he appeals to tighter argumentation and a careful evaluation of the evidence based on common sense. In the study on 'The Synoptic Jesus and the Law' Sanders concludes that classical form criticism is correct in presenting an idealised Jesus in an idealised situation, but that is not his main concern. He assumes for the sake of argument that the Synoptic Jesus is an accurate historical representation and that the disputes of halakah and interpreting the Torah are accurately represented. He then asks whether there is any basis for assuming that Jesus was at odds with first century Jewish teaching; he concludes that there is not. But he brings to bear a wealth of evidence regarding traditions. Of course he must in the end point out that the rabbinic evidence does not necessarily reflect Jewish or pharisaic thought of the first century, but nothing in the teaching of Jesus is incompatible with it. The second essay is a fascinating inquiry into whether the Pharisees had Oral Law which they regarded as having the force of revealed Scripture. He concludes that they knew the difference between Torah and their own traditions and said as much. Here he expands on suggestions made by Neusner and others in the last 20 years. This study together with the two following is a helpful corrective to the often supposed position that the Pharisees wielded an inordinate influence in the last century of the Second Temple period. Neither internal nor external evidence would appear to support such a claim. The longest of the studies, on 'Purity', as well as the fourth study on 'Purity, Food and Offerings in the Greek-Speaking Diaspora'

challenge the idea that the Pharisees were a “pure food club”, trying to live like priests, and that they forced or tried to force non-Pharisees at home and abroad to live like them. Purity was a universal concern in the Mediterranean world; although the Pharisees tried to live as purely as possible, there was nothing exceptional about their concern. Some of the methodological difficulties that Sanders points out are the problems of ascribing the term *haverim* (‘associates’) from later literature to a group that existed at least 200 years earlier; the problem of defining what is meant by *perushim* in later rabbinic literature (the negative assessment of these people has been used to demonstrate a negative evaluation of the Pharisees, but the issue is not all that clear); and most importantly he returns repeatedly to the point that most researchers do not distinguish between laws which apply to all of Israel and for which the Pharisees provided commentary (e.g., *Lev. 11*) and those which applied only to the priests. If one does not make this important distinction, then any argument purporting to show that the Pharisees were trying to legislate priest-like behaviour must founder.

The strength of Sanders’ work is a common-sense approach: what are legal texts really like? how realistic is it to say that women in a state of impurity (menstrual or child-birth) were secluded in separate rooms or houses, given what we know of first century living conditions, the absence of references to ‘purdah’, and the fact that the Houses presumed there would be contact with such women? Often Sanders’ common sense forces us to think of real people in real situations rather than abstractions. ‘Only people in our field, which is cursed by a perverse literalism, can write such things as that menstruants could not live at home. They read ancient idealisations and believe them, they do not actually imagine what it means’ (p. 159). ‘Physical separation from impurity was probably talked about more than it was practised, and modern scholars think about what they read more than about the size of first-century houses. . .’ (p. 161). The strength of Sanders’ work is also its weakness. He makes many qualifying remarks, such as ‘I am inclined to think’ or ‘it would seem likely’. These sometimes create the impression of a felt necessity being presented as a reasoned conclusion. It is here that the work is likely to be attacked in the years to come. Still, it is an important and positive, if not exhaustive, contribution to the ongoing attempt to define first-century Judaism.

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