

Olomouc Bible (1417),  
St. John writes the Apocalypse  
(Olomouc, SVK, M III 1,  
vol. 2, fol. 282a)



## THE BIBLE IN CULTURAL CONTEXT

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Edited by Helena Pavlincová and Dalibor Papoušek

• Brno 1994

## 2. Die Rolle des Exegeten

Indem der wissenschaftliche Exeget seine Arbeit (als „organischer Intellektueller“) in den Dienst der Gemeinschaft stellt, verliert er auch die Monopolstellung für die „richtige“ Bibellektüre. Diese Enteignung kommt der kritischen Distanz zwischen Text und Leser zugute. Der Text kann wieder als eine uns fremde Instanz zur Geltung kommen und die Schrift als Kerygma vernommen werden.

## 3. Identifikation

Damit stellt sich auch die für Mesters und Ahn Byung-mu so entscheidende Frage der Identifikation: Wer hat das Recht, sich mit der biblischen Tradition zu identifizieren? Die Gefahr der Festlegung des Textes durch eine spezifische Methode und aufgrund von spezifischen Erfahrungen wird dadurch vermieden. Die unterschiedlichen Lebens- und Leidenserfahrungen verlangen eine Differenzierung auch im Prozeß der Exegese: verschiedene Menschen hören Verschiedenes auf verschiedene Art und Weise. Diese Differenzierung der Ausgangsposition und der exegetischen Methoden kommt der Freilegung des Textes zugute, so daß er wieder für sich selbst sprechen kann.

## 4. Narratio

Die Entdeckung der narrativen Traditionen in sogenannten „Dritte-Welt-Theologien“ offenbart ein kultur-geschichtliches Problem der modernen westlichen Theologie: ihre Befangenheit in den Sackgassen und der spezifischen Logik abendländischer Rationalität. Das heißt nicht, daß die eigene kritische Tradition verleugnet oder aufgegeben werden muß.<sup>22</sup> Gerade bei manchen neuen, experimentellen Formen der Exegese, die der narrativen Tradition näher stehen (z.B. beim Bibliodrama), kann und muß die wissenschaftliche Exegese ihre kritische Funktion wahren, um voreilige Identifikationen und Assoziationen zu korrigieren.

„Dritte-Welt-Theologen“ laden die westliche Theologie jedoch zur Befreiung aus den unbewußt hantierten rationalistischen Denkmustern ein. Sie stellen der intellektuellen Erstarrung ein lebendiges „organic thinking“ gegenüber, wie wir es auch bei dem jüdisch-rabbinischen Theologen Max Kadushin kennen lernen können.<sup>23</sup> Es geht darum, Raum für die Mehrdimensionalität innerhalb der Texte selbst zu schaffen, ohne dabei den Entscheidungscharakter aufzugeben, der in dem kerygmatischen Gehalt der biblischen Texte begründet liegt.

Unterschiedliche Erfahrungswelten bewirken eine Vielfalt theologischer und exegetischer Paradigmen. Ökumene ist der Ort, an dem diese unterschiedlichen Diskurse einander in Frage stellen und bereichern können.

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<sup>22</sup> Wir haben gesehen, daß auch Ahn Byung-mu beispielsweise dankbaren Gebrauch von der formgeschichtlichen Exegese macht.

<sup>23</sup> Vgl. Max Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind*, New York 1972.

# The Thora Again

ROCHUS ZUURMOND

## 1. Thora

The Thora<sup>1</sup> is, from a sociological point of view, the document of Jewish identity. It relates the *genesis* of Israel among the peoples of the world: where they came from and what eventually brought them together as a people. It also describes its habits and laws in great detail. The fact that Hebrew תורה was translated in the Septuagint with Greek νόμος (which primarily means: “habit”, “custom”, in particular “national custom”<sup>2</sup>) underlines this particular meaning of the Thora in the Hellenistic period.

It is therefore perfectly understandable that the Thora became an object of great national zeal. The Books of the Maccabees provide many examples. I name only a few. In 1Macc. 2:25f. Mattathias kills a Jew who took part in a ritual of pagan sacrifice. The author comments: “He dealt zealously for the Law of God, like Pinhas did.” In 2Macc. 7:30-38 a young martyr, in a fiercely nationalistic speech, declares that he’d rather die than not obey the ancestral law. This sentiment must have been widespread at that time. One also finds it expressed elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

There can be little doubt that this attitude, which reflects particular opinions of the second half of the first century B.C., was a reaction to a much more “liberal” view of the earlier centuries. The first chapter of 1Macc. in fact describes such a view, with great dismay and no doubt with a severe bias.

I may refer to a number of studies by prof. Martin Hengel for a more detailed account of the inroads of Hellenism in Judaism, from the third century B.C. onward.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Chokhma

Not later than in the first century B.C. hellenized Jews began to identify the Jewish Thora with the Hellenistic concept of WISDOM. חכמה/Σοφία in the Hellenistic world is the knowledge of things unseen and seen, θείων τε καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων ἐπιστήμη according to Aetius (A.D. 100)<sup>5</sup>. It gradually developed towards the knowledge of the unseen, becoming more and more a religious concept.

Certainly, “wisdom” has some credentials in the Old Testament. But there the emphasis is mainly on the practical side.<sup>6</sup> It is perfectly possible that some Jewish thinkers already in the Persian period qualified the laws of the Thora as

<sup>1</sup> I use the word “Thora” rather than “Pentateuch”, to indicate the totality of living stories, laws, etc. which can be found in the Book (Scroll) of the Thora or Pentateuch.

<sup>2</sup> Even more so in plural, following Plato’s *Nomoi*. Josephus uses *nomoi* in this sense continuously.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. 2Macc. 6:28, 7:2, Josephus Ant. 12,267, Philo *De Legatione* 192 and Ass. Mos. 9:6.

<sup>4</sup> In particular: *Judaism and Hellenism*, 2nd ed., London: SCM, 1974 and *The Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*, London: SCM, 1989.

<sup>5</sup> See A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenist Philosophers* I, Cambridge: Cambr. Univ. Press 1987, 163.

<sup>6</sup> Ex. 35:31 and Ez. 28:4-17 are good examples. From the elaborate literature on this subject I mention only a study which relates to the topic of this lecture: J. Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press 1983.

an expression of wisdom,<sup>7</sup> but the Old Testament comes nowhere near to identifying the two on the level of cosmic principles. Even Wisdom as a cosmic principle, with the possible exception of Proverbs 1 and 8, is not an Old Testament concept.<sup>8</sup> What then could have been the reasons for introducing "Wisdom" as a definition of Thora?

I think the main motive was apologetic. Jewish intellectuals, living in a cosmopolitan climate, had to defend their particularity. And how can that be done more effectively than by arguing that one's particularity, at closer inspection, is a general principle sought after by every thoughtful person? I may refer to Cicero's *Laws*, which is an attempt to base the Laws of the Roman Empire on general, cosmic principles. About the laws of the various peoples in the Roman Empire (of which the Jewish nation is one) Cicero speaks in a very descending way. A few quotes:

"The most foolish notion of all is the belief that everything is just which is found in the customs or laws of nations (*in populorum institutis aut legibus*). Justice is One; it binds all human society, and is based on one Law, which is right reason applied to command and prohibition." "It has been the opinion of the wisest men that Law is not a product of human thought, nor is it any enactment of peoples, but something eternal which rules the whole universe by its wisdom in command and prohibition. Thus they have been accustomed to say that Law is the primal and ultimate mind of God."<sup>9</sup>

If this was the opinion among the intellectuals in the Hellenistic period one can understand why Jewish authors like Philo had to tone down the nationalistic zeal concerning the Thora, without however giving up the Thora completely. Philo, in the introduction to *De Opificio Mundi* performs a balancing act by portraying the law-abiding (that is: Thora-abiding) Jew as the true *κοσμοπολίτης*.

Of course authors like Philo would argue that what they were doing was all to the greater glory of the Thora. Identified with Sophia, the Thora was saved from its status as just the document of the Jewish *ἔθνος* or *populus*. Jewish national identity was now firmly rooted in the very essence of the kosmos. True as that may be on a certain intellectual level, it waters down Jewish identity as fundamentally different from the identity of others. It inevitably modifies the concept of "God's chosen people". Judaism is still the best of all religions, but the question *why* it is the best, the "yardstick" so to say, is not formulated in exclusively Jewish terms. Judaism in its cultural context is no longer completely self-sufficient.

### 3. Logos

So much for Wisdom. Very much the same story can be told about the identification of Thora and Logos. "Logos" is a wellknown Stoic concept. According to Diogenes Laertius (7.134) the Stoics distinguish

"two principles of the universe: the passive and the active. The passive is unqualified substance, that is: matter. The active is the Logos in it, that is: god. He, being eternal and pervading all matter, creates (the verb is *δημιουργεῖν*) every single thing."<sup>10</sup>

The Logos is the guarantee of the rationality of being.

It is therefore not much different from Sophia. In particular when Sophia is seen in connection with the divine creation - as Proverbs 8:22ff seems to imply - it may well become just another word for Logos. There is a formal difference though: Sophia is a feminine noun, Logos is masculine. Maybe there is some truth in the contention that the ultimate victory of Logos in Christian theology has something to do with the aversion for feminine principles in the doctrine of God in some of the anti-gnostic theological circles of the second and third centuries.

### 4. Examples

It is worth while to have a closer look at the proof-texts of these identifications. The earliest attempt to identify Thora with Wisdom is said to be Ecclesiasticus 24:23.<sup>11</sup> Wisdom is speaking, much in line with Proverbs 8. As a conclusion vs. 23 states:

Ταῦτα πάντα βιβλος  
διαθήκης θεοῦ ὑψίστου  
νόμον ὃν ἐτείλατο ἡμῖν Μωυσῆς  
κληρονομίαν συναγωγῶν Ἰακώβ.

All these things are the Book  
of the Covenant of God the Most High,  
which Moses commanded as a Law unto us  
an heritage for the congregations of Jacob.

The Problem with this text is that it is textcritically uncertain. Unfortunately there is no Hebrew extant. The Greek nominal sentence is not too clear; it looks like a literal translation of a Semitic original. The Peshitta may well have the original meaning when it renders: "All these things have been written in the Book of the Covenant of the Lord, the Law which Moses commanded, etc."<sup>12</sup> Besides, the last part of the verse is a quote from Deuteronomy 33:4. I hesitate to refer to this text as an early example of the identification of Thora and Sophia.

1Baruch often connects Thora and Wisdom. Chapter 3:9-14 mentions Wisdom<sup>13</sup> in the context of what is clearly the Thora. The text continues in 4:1

"This *αὐτή* is the Book of the commandments of God, and the Law which exists forever. All who cling to it (*αὐτήν*) are (destined) for life, but those who leave it (*αὐτήν*) shall die. Turn, o Jacob, and get hold of it (*αὐτής*), walk in the presence of its light, that you may be enlightened."

Whether *αὐτή* etc. refer to Wisdom or to Book,<sup>14</sup> from the context it is

<sup>10</sup> See A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenist Philosophers* I, Cambridge: Cambr. Univ. Press 1987, 265.

<sup>11</sup> One could argue that Proverbs 2 describes Wisdom and her ways not at all unlike the Thora has been described in other parts of the Old Testament. There is however no formal identification of the two.

<sup>12</sup> *πάντα* could be an allusion to Proverbs 8:8f. See also 1Bar. 4:1, below.

<sup>13</sup> The word is *φρόνησις*, not *σοφία*, but Hebrew *חָכְמָה* is presupposed.

<sup>14</sup> In Greek both is possible, but if we assume a Hebrew original (cf. L. Rost, *Einleitung in die a.t. Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen*, Heidelberg: Quelle und Meyer 1979, 50ff.) Wisdom is

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Ps. 19:8, 37:30f. and Ezr. 7:25.

<sup>8</sup> As such it has been developed in the Apocryphal Books, most notably in the *Wisdom of Solomon* (100 B.C.); cf. 7:22-8:1.

<sup>9</sup> Cicero, *De Legibus* I, xv, 42 and II, iv. Translation by C. W. Keyes for the Loeb edition (Cicero XVI).

clear that the essence of the Book of the Thora is defined in terms of Wisdom. The same applies to the 13th chapter of the Testament of Levi. It is difficult to date these texts, but they would hardly be much earlier than the first century B.C.

Philo uses the terms Logos and Sophia almost without distinction. Both are *εἰκῶν θεοῦ* and instruments of creation. Of course the Law in Philo's writings is mainly, but not exclusively, the *moral* law. I must say that I have not yet found a place where Philo explicitly identifies the Thora with either Logos or Sophia, or describes the Law as an instrument of Creation. However, I would not be surprised to find such a place in the near future, with the help of a recently issued CD-rom.<sup>15</sup>

Philo does almost identify "Moses" and the Logos.<sup>16</sup> There are instances where Philo uses "Moses" in the same way as later Judaism, as a synonym for the Thora.<sup>17</sup> In any case the Thora of Moses, having God for its ultimate author, is nothing but a codification of the Stoic Law of Nature, that is the Logos.

The close correspondence between Wisdom and Thora is well attested in the second century in 2Baruch (48:24, 77:16). Finally one may also refer to early rabbinic writings. Genesis 1:1 is explained as "Through *WISDOM* God created heaven and earth" (Targum Neofiti) but also as "Through the *THORA* God created heaven and earth" (Ber.Rabb 1:1, 4; bNedd 32a; etc.).<sup>18</sup> Of course these are later texts, but they may well contain earlier traditions.

I think we may safely conclude that, although the evidence is not as early and as abundant as we might wish, the identification of Thora and Sophia / Logos was well established in the first century A.D.

## 5. Intermediary

Wisdom and Logos, and later also Thora, function as intermedia between God and the created universe. One of the reasons that in a later stage Judaism did not object to the identification of Wisdom / Logos and Thora may well be that they could not do very well without these concepts any longer. God became more and more transcendent. Not only the pagan and the Christian world, but also Judaism began to feel the need for intermediate powers.<sup>19</sup>

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the most likely, since *חכמה* is feminine but *ספר* is masculine. For the construction see Gen. 5:1, which may have been in the mind of the author.

<sup>15</sup> See D. T. Runia, "How to search Philo", in: *The Studia Philonica Annual* II, D.T. Runia (ed.), Atlanta GA: Scholars Press 1990, 117ff.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Migr.* 23. He could take a lead from Ex. 20:19; see *Migr.* 143 and *Somn.* 143. R. Williamson discusses this question in his *Jews in the Hellenistic World: Philo*, Cambridge: Camb. Univ. Press 1989, 115-118.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. in *De Vita Mosis*, 155-158.

<sup>18</sup> See my contribution in K. A. Deurloo & R. Zuurmond, „In den Beginne etc.“, *ACEBT* 7, 1986, 11-14.

<sup>19</sup> I have become convinced that in the second and third centuries the distinction between Judaism, Christianity and Paganism, although clear for some intellectuals, was by no means evident for many ordinary religious people. The situation may have been different in different places. From Chrysostomus' Easter Sermons in A.D. 386/7 we know that even by the end of the fourth century many Antiochians had no qualms to pick and choose from either religion. Papyri and inscriptions tell the same story. We should realize that we look at the early church mainly through the eyes of Eusebius and a selected number of ancient authors. Many problems about the

There is a remarkable parallel between Philo's interpretation of the giving of the Decalogue and the one we find in the Mekhilta d'R. Yismael. Both have a problem with God audibly speaking. How could the eternal, timeless, non-material God, talk to Moses like you and I talk to each other? "God forbid" says Philo, and he then comes with a theory that God for the occasion had an invisible sound created in the air, which then pronounced the text of the Ten Commandments.<sup>20</sup> Those familiar with rabbinic writings recognize easily the *לול קול* of rabbinic Judaism (cf. Ex. 19:19). The Mekhilta has very much the same solution. At Ex. 20:2 it comments<sup>21</sup>: "All *words* means that He spoke the Ten Words in one utterance, such as is impossible for a mortal man to speak."<sup>22</sup>

An anti-anthropomorphic tendency, strengthened by a more and more transcendent concept of God, may well have contributed substantially to the introduction of the Thora as a Divine Medium between God and the kosmos, the aspect of the Divine Being which is directed towards our world.

## 6. The New Testament: Christ

Early christianity transferred the function of the divine mediator to the person of Jesus Christ. This is well documented in scholarly literature for the Logos and for Sophia.<sup>23</sup> In particular the Prologue of John may be mentioned, but one may also refer to some of the so called "pre-pauline hymns" in the *Corpus Paulinum*: Philippians 2:5-11, Colossians 1:15-18, 1Corinthians 8:6 and some of the hymns in the Apocalypses. In John 1:1 Jesus is the Logos, in Philippians 2 Jesus is in particular paralleled with Wisdom who came down to earth, in Colossians it is either Wisdom / Logos or Thora who being "the firstborn of all creation" gives way to Christ.<sup>24</sup> In 1Corinthians too it is the mediator of creation who is defined as Christ. These are important texts, which in my opinion represent the earliest reflexion on christology in the messianic movement, even pre-pauline.

In addition to this I would like to point out that there are quite a few places in the New Testament where Jesus obviously replaces the *Thora*. I leave aside now those instances where there are references to Wisdom or Logos, but no clear references to the Thora. I must say however that I have become convinced that e.g. the Logos in the Prologue of John actually indicates the Thora, rather than reproducing the Stoic or Philonic Logos. Of course the term is chosen with the Stoic Logos in mind, but the emphasis is on the *Thora* as Logos.

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extent of ancient "Jewish- christianity," or the "Jewish" and the "Christian" component in some of the pseudepigrapha, may be due to anachronistic distinctions adopted by modern scholars from "orthodox" authorities in the fourth century.

<sup>20</sup> *De Decalogo* 32-35.

<sup>21</sup> Jethro 4 (ed. Horovitz p. 218).

<sup>22</sup> The second part of this midrash, where God repeats the Ten Words one by one, is in its present form probably an addition, since God is called by his relatively late title "The Holy One, Blessed be He".

<sup>23</sup> Apart from the commentaries on John 1:1 the *ThWbNT* gives detailed information s.v. *λέγω* (IV,76ff) and *σοφία* (VII,514ff.).

<sup>24</sup> See my article "Hij is het hoofd," in: *Debharim*, N.T. Bakker a.o (eds.), Kampen: Kok 1986, 100-110.

Both Paul and John<sup>25</sup> juxtapose Christ and the Thora. Paul does so e.g. in Romans 5 and 6 where the combination Law-Sin-Death is replaced by Christ-Grace-Life.

A well-known text attributing thora-qualifications to Christ is John 14:4 where Jesus says: "I am the way and the truth and the life." The "I am" not only refers to the name of JHWH, but reminds the reader specifically of Ex. 20:2. And more important: all three qualifications are Thora-metaphors. They may all be found in Psalm 119, the Psalm of the Thora: "way" a.o. in vss. 30-33, "truth" in vs. 142, "life" a.o. in vs. 93.

Another metaphor which is connected with the Thora and has been transferred to Jesus is the verb "walk". Often when John speaks of "walk" (*περιπατεῖν*) one is reminded of הלך (in the ways of the Thora) in the Old Testament. E.g. John 8:12 "I am the light of the world, he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but he will have the light of life." Chokhma/Thora could have said it!<sup>26</sup> It means nothing but "I am the new Thora", "the Lamp before your foot, the light on your path" (Psalm 119:105). The same goes for 12:35f. "Walk in the Light while the Light is with you, and be children of the Light." I refer to Psalm 119:130 (text from the LXX): "The manifestations of your words will enlighten and instruct the simple." The Thora as "Light" also appears in post- Old-Testament Jewish literature.<sup>27</sup> Jesus is the Light, replacing - or rather "fulfilling" - the light of the Thora.

## 7. The Christian Way

That brings me to my final remarks. The Old Testament תורה is a דרך a way of life, a הלכה, not a moral code! Walk in the ways of the Thora is: join the way, the movement, jump on the bandwagon, give yourself to the Spirit of the Thora. In that respect Paul is quite correct in describing the Thora as πνευματικός (Rom. 7:14). Very much the same must be said of the New Testament "way of life". Christians are referred to as belonging to "the way" several times in the Book of Acts.<sup>28</sup> That refers to their הלכה. They have been made into followers of Messiah Jesus. One should not forget that in antiquity you "take" a way as much as the way takes you! One walks *with* (the help of) or *through* (the medium of) the way; Hebrew הלך בדרך, Greek τῆ ὁδῷ πορεύομαι.

Neither Paul nor John preach "ethics" in the traditional sense of this word. What they *do* preach is a new way of life, which began in Jesus Christ and through his Spirit is in principle given to us all. Decisive is the *authority*: are we "under the Law" (which in itself is Spiritual, moving and trying to move us, but failing to do so), or are we under the authority of Christ? In the latter case we are bound to obey the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2), which of course is not a new code of morals to be brought into practice by us, but a messianic movement which is already there and which we may join.

This is the reason why I would prefer not to speak about "The ethics of the New Testament". The New Testament has no "ethics", no ethical "values" in our sense of these words.<sup>29</sup>

It *proclaims* an *ethos*, and it proclaims it with the powerful authority of Christ who rose from the dead. This ethos, this DEREKH, is not an idea, but a living reality. The messianic ethos is the practical side of the presence of the risen Lord.

The New Testament - like the Old Testament - does not argue in terms of abstract ethics, but in terms of power and empowerment. For that reason the expression "New Thora" can be misleading. It suggests that the "Old Thora" has been replaced by the "New Thora" in an undialectical way. If Christ is the "New Thora" that does not mean that He introduces a new set of moral rules, different from the ones of the Old Thora. That is Marcionitism. Christ as the "New Thora" means that the Spirit of the Thora, its power, its impetus, is there again, stronger than ever. What the Old Thora wanted, but could not do, the New Thora finally does. Jews like Paul and John had a messianic understanding of the Thora. The New Thora was not "new" as compared with "old", but "new" in the sense of "again", for the first time in its full and original capacity. I suggest therefore that their "Thora Again," revealed in Jesus Messiah, was closer to the Old Testament Thora than the Thora-concept of those who could solely see it as a document endorsing their own identity.

<sup>25</sup> I would suggest that John in this respect - as in others - is theologically dependent on Paul.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. 1Bar. 3:13f., 4:1, SapSal 6:15f., Sir. 45:17. See also the following note.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. SapSal 18:4, 1Bar. 4:2, Test. Levi 19:1, Pseudo-Philo (*LAB* 11:1) and *Bereshit Rabba* (3:1, with reference to Ps. 119:130).

<sup>28</sup> 9:2, 19:9, 24, 24:22 a.o. See also CD II,6.

<sup>29</sup> The idea that christianity is something special because of its sublime ethics must be rejected, not only because of the obvious practical weakness of its values, but also on historical grounds. There is little if anything particular in the moral ideals of the New Testament if compared with Jewish and pagan contemporaries. See e.g. H. C. Chadwick, *The Originality of Christian Ethics*, James Bryce Memorial Lecture 1988, published by Somerville College, U.K. in 1990.