

This is an electronic reprint of the original article. This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Jewish Believers in Jesus and the Mosaic Law

Laato, Antti

Published in:
The Challenge of the Mosaic Torah in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

DOI:
[10.1163/9789004441996_007](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004441996_007)

Published: 08/10/2020

Document Version
(Peer reviewed version when applicable)

Document License
Publisher rights policy

[Link to publication](#)

Please cite the original version:
Laato, A. (2020). Jewish Believers in Jesus and the Mosaic Law: The Opinion of Justin Martyr. In A. Laato (Ed.), *The Challenge of the Mosaic Torah in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (pp. 115–142). (Studies on the Children of Abraham; Vol. 7). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004441996_007

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Jewish Believers in Jesus and the Mosaic Law: The Opinion of Justin Martyr

Antti Laato, ÅAU

Problem

The Mosaic Torah or Law¹ constituted an important challenge to early Christian theology. The problem was discussed in two important confrontations. *First*, the Jews continued to practise the Mosaic instructions and Christians – among them many non-Jews – had to determine their attitude toward such a practice. Already in the New Testament there are clear references to detailed Mosaic rules not being followed among non-Jewish Christians – although the situation was different among Jewish Christians. *Second*, a major problem was personified in Marcion (among others) who demanded that the Mosaic Law and other Old Testament writings should be abandoned altogether.² Many Gnostic circles followed and had their own peculiar interpretations on the Mosaic Law, especially on creation, and many of them went so far as to regard God who gave the Law to Moses as being the evil creator god.

Justin confronted these two problems, even though our knowledge about his polemics against Marcion is limited. Justin's work *Syntagma* – directed against Marcion (and Gnosticism) – has not been preserved.³

1 Because I treat mainly Christian sources in this article, I have decided to use the imprecise term "Mosaic Law" instead of much better term "Mosaic Torah". Christians used the Greek term *nomos* (used in the Septuagint) when they speak about the Mosaic Torah.

2 Concerning Marcion's anti-Judaism see S.G. Wilson, "Marcion and the Jews," in S.G. Wilson, ed., *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity Volume 2: Separation and Polemic* (Studies in Christianity and Judaism 2, Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986), 45-58. Cf., also H. Räisänen, "Marcion and the Origins of Christian Anti-Judaism: A Reappraisal," *Temenos* 33 (1997): 121-135.

3 Concerning Justin's works and life, see L. W. Barnard, *Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); E. R. Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr: An Investigation into Conceptions of Early Christian Literature and its Hellenistic and Judaic Influences* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1968; first edition 1928); E. F. Osborn, *Justin Martyr* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1973); H. Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement,*

This has given rise to much speculation on how Justin's apology for Old Testament writings presented in *Syntagma* and his attitudes against Jewish practice of the Mosaic Law as expressed in *Dialogue* (= *Dial*) are interrelated. For example, Mach has argued that Justin's tendency to regard the Old Testament as a Christian book obliged him to establish a new strong anti-Jewish bias in his exegesis, and this subsequently became a common trend in the Christian Church.⁴ Furthermore, *Dial* has little relevance to actual dialogues with Jews; rather it is a document of an intra-Christian process. Justin's anti-Marcion tendency played a major role in this intra-Christian process. Marcion forced Justin to argue that the Old Testament was a Christian work. The price of Justin's exegesis was high: "the polemics against the Jews" (p. 46) as Mach puts it. However, Justin was not the first Christian theologian to confront the problem of the Jewish practice of following the Mosaic Law without speaking about the demand that all Christians would live according to Mosaic instructions. Therefore, in this article I am looking at Justin's theology on the Mosaic Law from larger historical and reception-historical perspective.

In the international network of SRB (Studies in the Reception History of the Bible) I have learned that the interpretive tendencies in the New Testament and early Christian texts followed many similar exegetical modes which were also applied in the Second Temple Jewish writings.⁵ Christians used many of Jewish exegetical ideas when they sought proofs from Old Testament scriptures for their own eschatological ideas which they believed to have come to fulfilment in Jesus' life, teachings and resurrection. It seems to me that such a reception historical treatment of the Old Testament scriptures which aims to argue the promise—fulfilment theology gives us the right perspective to understand Justin's

and Origen (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984); S. Parvis and P. Foster, eds., *Justin Martyr and His Worlds* (Minneapolis: Fortress 2007).

⁴See M. Mach, "Justin Martyr's *Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo* and the Development of Christian Anti-Judaism," in O. Limor and G.G. Stroumsa, eds., *Contra Iudaeos. Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Christians and Jews* (Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Judaism 10. Tübingen: Mohr & Siebeck, 1996), 27-47.

⁵ The New Testament interpretive tendencies in conjunction of the Jewish exegetical traditions are well presented, for example, in J. L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge MA.: Harvard University Press 1998).

theology on the Mosaic Law in *Dialogue*.⁶ There are texts, especially in the Old Testament prophetic literature, which indicate that a new covenant will be established, and which also have consequences on how the document of the older Sinai covenant should be understood in a new eschatological era. Christians were not alone in their attempts to give interpretive correctives to the applications of the Mosaic Law. For example, the Qumran community (or some members of that community) with their Temple Scroll argued that this new law is valid for the right understanding of the Mosaic instructions in the Temple. The Temple Scroll was not aimed at being an eschatological document, rather it was written as a corrective to the current way of understanding and applying the Mosaic Law in the Temple worship.⁷ Another important factor, which is not possible to deal with in this article, is Jewish apocalyptic writings and their attitude toward the Mosaic Torah. It seems that in this literature the attitude toward the Mosaic Torah was not very intensive.⁸ This

6 Concerning the important role of scriptural reasoning in the interpretation of Justin's theology see especially O. Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy. A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-Text tradition: Text-Type, Provenance, Theological profile* (NTSup 56, Leiden: Brill 1987). See recently also Susan Wendel, *Scriptural Interpretation and Community Self-Definition in Luke-Acts and the Writings of Justin* (SupNT 139; Leiden: Brill 2011).

7 For this, see L.H. Schiffmann, *Courtyards of the House of the Lord* (STDJ 75; Leiden: Brill 2008). In p. 39 Schiffmann writes: "This 'new Torah' nevertheless does not purport to be messianic. The author tells us explicitly that the scroll describes the Temple in which Israel worship before the end of days (11QT 29:2–10). It is an ideal Temple, built upon the principles of Scriptural exegesis and the beliefs of the author or authors. This Temple, it was expected, would be replaced in the end of days with a divinely created sanctuary. Until then, the author/redactor saw his scroll as representing the correct way in which the Temple was to be built and operated."

8 See, for example, the Book of Enoch where references to the Mosaic Torah are practically seen lacking. For this see especially the discussion in H. Hoffmann, *Das Gesetz in der frühjüdischen Apokalypik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1999); Helge S. Kvanvig, "Enochic Judaism – a Judaism without the Torah and the Temple?" in Gabrielle Boccaccini and Giovanni Ibba, eds., *Enoch and the Mosaic Torah: The Evidence of Jubilees* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 163-177. This does not mean that the author(s) would not have known the stories in the Pentateuch. Cf., my approach to the Animal Apocalypse: A. Laato, "Rewriting Israel's History in the Apocalyptic Context: Animal Apocalypse in First Enoch," *SEÅ* 82 (2017): 28-51.

indicates that the beginning of “Christianity” as an early Jesus-movement could have taken inspiration from Jewish apocalyptic writings where the Mosaic Torah was not such a central element.

In order to actualize the problem of interpreting the Mosaic Law in the early Church I shall first deal with Ptolemy’s Letter to Flora. I am not claiming that this letter gives us the right perspective to understand Justin’s theology. Rather I use it to show how the problem of the Mosaic Law is already rooted fundamentally in the scriptures of the New Testament. There are New Testament passages which made the attitude toward the Mosaic Law controversial in Christianity from the beginning. Ptolemy represents some sort of Gnostic thinking and, therefore, some preliminary remarks are needed to characterize exegetical modes used in Gnostic texts. Gnostic interpretations on the Old Testament were essentially different from Jewish and Christian ones. They were based on the fundamental idea that in some way the creator god represents evil powers and, therefore, the Old Testament writings can be understood only when the Gnostic metanarrative is accepted that the true god is distinguished from the God of Israel.⁹ Not so with the Jewish and Christian interpretations where the God of Israel as the only true God was respected. Therefore, in my interpretation of Justin’s view on the Mosaic Law I shall lay focus on the exegetical modes of Justin. He continued the scriptural reasoning where the teachings of Jesus (as delivered in the synoptic gospels and John) and those of the Apostles (mainly Paul) were regarded as keys to understand the Old Testament writings, particularly the Mosaic Law. This similar tendency continued in mainstream Christianity, and Irenaeus became the main proponent of the

9 Scholars have different opinions concerning the evaluation of the Gnostic exegesis. One important conclusion is that we cannot speak of any homogenous Gnostic exegesis. For sympathetic evaluation of Gnostic exegesis (in its relation to mainstream Christian exegesis), see M.A. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 54-79. See, e.g., pp. 76-77: ‘The hermeneutical approaches represented in the assortment of ancient sources normally categorized as “gnostic” are not appropriately characterized by labels such as “inverse exegesis” or “protest exegesis” or “value reversal.” There is no systematic or consistent program of inversion among these sources. Instead, the amount of any value reversal varies significantly, from zero to several elements. And the selection of biblical elements involved is also diverse, with a given narrative item “reversed” in this or that source, but not in others.’

anti-Gnostic evaluation in the Church.¹⁰ This led to the refutation of the Gnostic metanarrative and for good reason. Seen from this perspective, all Gnostic ideas could be labelled as heretical. The adjective “heretical” here is understood in the original meaning of the Greek word *hairesis* which means “choice”, and then came to mean a party or school of “man’s choice”. Before proceeding with Justin, however, let us first examine Ptolemy’s Letter to Flora. This letter shows what complicated questions Christians met when discussing the role of Mosaic Law in the Christian belief system.

Ptolemy’s Letter to Flora

The problem of Mosaic Law in Christian theology is well illustrated in Ptolemy’s Letter to Flora, preserved in Epiphanius’ *Panarion* § 33.¹¹ The writer of the letter presents an intermediate position between two extreme opinions (33.3.2): “For some say it was given by our God and Father but others, taking the direction opposite to theirs, insist that it was given by our adversary the devil.” Who are Ptolemy’s opponents here? It seems that they are Judaism and mainstream Christianity on one hand and Marcion on other, even though the latter did not equate the devil with Creator God.¹²

Ptolemy’s “evident” starting-point is that “the Law has not been made

10 See, for example, E. Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge, GB: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 150-153; D. Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction* (London, GB: T & T Clark International, 2010), esp. 15-29; J.R. Payton, *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith: A Condensation of Against Heresies* (Cambridge, GB: James Clarke & Co, 2012), esp. 27-39.

11 I use the critical edition in G. Quispel, *Ptolémée, Lettre à Flora: Analyse, texte critique, traduction, commentaire et index grec* (SC 24, Paris 1966); see also K. Holl, *Epiphanius: Ancoratus und Panarion*, Bd. 1 (Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte 25; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1915). I use the English translation in F. Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Book I (Sects 1-46)* (NHMS 63, Leiden: Brill, 2009). See especially the translation on pp. 216-221. For the present discussion concerning Ptolemy’s letter, see I. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 77-94.

12 For this see Chr. Marksches, “New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus,” *ZAC* 4 (2000): 225-254, esp. 233-235. See also Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 87-90.

by the perfect God and Father, since it is imperfect and in need of fulfilment by another person, and contains ordinances inappropriate to the nature and intention of such a God” (33.3.4). Ptolemy argues that the Law can be divided into three kinds of texts (33.4.2): “It is divided into (the words of) God himself and his legislation, but <it> is also <divided> into (the words of) Moses—not as God legislates through him, but as Moses too made certain provisions of his own notion. And it is divided into (the words of) the elders of the people, for it is plain that <they> too have inserted certain commandments of their own.” This division is apparently the most important detail in Ptolemy’s letter because such three-partite division is reminiscent of the Christian arguments, especially in Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue*.

Ptolemy argues for his division of the Mosaic Law using arguments which the Christian church, following the teachings of Jesus, took seriously from the beginning. The most obvious argument is that presented by Jesus himself concerning divorce (33.4.3-5):

You may now learn how the truth of this can be proved from the words of the Savior. In the Savior’s discussion with those who were disputing with him about the bill of divorce—the bill which had been sanctioned by the Law—the Savior told them, “Moses for the hardness of your hearts permitted a man to divorce his wife. For from the beginning it was not so. For God,” he said, “hath joined this pair together, and what the Lord hath joined,” he said, “let not man put asunder.” Here he proves that <the> Law of God, which forbids the separation of a wife from her husband, is one law; but the law of Moses, which permits this couple’s separation because of the hardness of their hearts, is another.

An additional example which Ptolemy discusses is Jesus’ teaching in Mt 15:4-9 where Jesus opposes the elders’ teaching.

The second division which Ptolemy makes concerns “the Law of God himself” (not the Mosaic Law) which is also divided into three parts (33.5.1-2): (1) “Pure law with no admixture of evil” as the Decalogue. (2) “Law mixed with inferior matter and injustice” for which Ptolemy gives an example “the knocking out of an eye for an eye.” Ptolemy refers to Jesus’ words in Mt 5:38-39. (3) “The typical and allegorical legislation in the image of things that are spiritual and excellent.” Ptolemy includes “laws of sacrifices, circumcision, the Sabbath, fasting, the Passover, the feast of unleavened bread and the like” (33.5.8) into this category, and argues that (33.5.9) “for all these, being images and allegories, were transformed when the truth appeared.” In this context Ptolemy refers to the Apostle Paul’s theology.

Ptolemy concludes his letter by arguing that there must be an Intermediate between God and devil who is responsible for the Mosaic Law (33.7.3-5):

If, as we have explained, the Law was not given by the perfect God himself, and certainly not by the devil—it is not proper even to say this—then this lawgiver is someone other than these. But this is the demiurge and maker of this entire world and everything in it. As he differs from the essences of the other two <and> stands in between them, he may properly be titled “The Intermediate.” And if, by his own nature, the perfect God is good—as indeed he is, for our Savior has declared that his Father, whom he made manifest, is the one and only good God—and if a god of the adversary’s nature is evil and is marked as wicked by his injustice—then a God who stands between them, and is neither good nor, certainly, evil or unjust, may properly be called “just,” being the arbiter of his sort of justice.

This reasoning in Ptolemy’s letter makes it clear that he did not represent mainstream Christianity. However, Ptolemy’s way of arguing that the Mosaic Law cannot be taken as representing the true will of God is done by references to the New Testament statements. It is interesting to see the ways in which Epiphanius meets Ptolemy’s argumentation. I shall deal with these counter-arguments in order to compare them with the opinions of Justin Martyr.

Epiphanius argues that the traditions of (Jewish) elders are not included in the Mosaic Law. He knows four kinds of repetitions – δευτερώσεις in Greek corresponding to the word Mishnah in Hebrew (33.9.4): “The traditions of the elders are called ‘repetitions’ by the Jews, and there are four of them. One is circulated in the name of Moses, a second in that of the person named Rabbi Aqiba, a third of Adda or Judah, and a fourth of the sons of Hasmonaeus.”¹³ Epiphanius’ statement

13 In the parallel passage Panarion 15.2.1-2 Epiphanius writes: “Scribes had four ‘repetitions’. One <was in circulation> in the name of the prophet Moses, a second in that of their teacher called Aqiba or Bar Aqiba, another in the name Addan or Annan, also called Judas, and another in the name of the sons of Hasmonaeus. Whatever customs they derive from these four traditions under the impression that they are wisdom—they are unwisdom mostly—are boasted of and praised, and celebrated and acclaimed as the teaching to be given first place.”

is “imprecise or corrupt” but nevertheless contains ideas which receive support from Rabbinical sources.¹⁴

Second, Epiphanius’ counter-argument is that Moses wrote only what he received from God, and in this way the Law has its meaning (33.9.7-8):

And neither were the laws given by Moses given independently of God. They came from God through Moses, as is shown by the Savior’s own verification (of the fact). The very texts you have brought forward, you have assembled against yourself. In the Gospel the Lord says, “Moses wrote for the hardness of your hearts.” But what Moses wrote, he did not write independently of God’s will; his legislation was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, Epiphanius adopted the argumentation attested in the New Testament that God has been a good pedagogue who used the Law for his purposes (33.11.1-2):

A father who wishes to discipline his children progresses with the discipline by suiting it to each age. He surely does not discipline a little baby like a boy, a boy like a youth, or a youth like a grown man. An infant is disciplined with a finger, an older child with the slap of a hand, a boy with a strap, and a youth with a cane. But by law a man is punished with the sword for the more serious offenses. Thus the Lord too, in consequence, made the laws that were suitable for each generation.

Finally, Epiphanius gives some credit to Ptolemy that the latter has managed to touch “on little bits of the truth” when he speaks about “things in the Law” which “are written allegorically” (33.11.11). The real problem for Epiphanius was Ptolemy’s ideas about the Intermediate (33.11.13): “If only you would tell the truth about everything, and not inflict your nonexistent third, intermediate God on us any more—or rather, not inflict him on yourself any more, and on your dupes!”

Ptolemy’s Letter to Flora actualizes important questions concerning the Mosaic Law which formed a theological problem for Christians. The problem can be crystallized in Ptolemy’s references to the New Testament passages where it becomes clear that not everything written in the Mosaic Law was followed in the Christian congregation. In the next chapter I shall deal with Justin’s opinion on the Mosaic Law by comparing it to

14 For this, see G. Stemmerger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1996) 124-126.

Ptolemy's views.

Justin's Opinion on the Mosaic Law

T. Stylianopoulos has dealt with Justin's opinion on the Mosaic Law in his dissertation.¹⁵ He emphasizes that like Ptolemy even Justin has a tripartite division of the Mosaic Law even though Justin has not presented it explicitly. In Stylianopoulos' opinion, Justin's tripartite division is echoed in many parts of *Dialogue*¹⁶ and I shall analyse these texts more closely. The best example of the tripartite division is made in *Dial* 44:1-2:

And you deceive yourselves while you fancy that, because you are the seed of Abraham after the flesh, therefore you shall fully inherit the good things announced to be bestowed by God through Christ. For no one, not even of them, has anything to look for, but only those who in mind are assimilated to the faith of Abraham, and who have recognized all the mysteries: for I say, that some injunctions were laid on you in reference to the worship of God and practice of righteousness; but some injunctions and acts were likewise mentioned in reference to the mystery of Christ, or [alternatively] on account of the hardness of your people's hearts.

Skarsaune disagrees with Stylianopoulos' analysis. He emphasizes that in many points Justin could be stating that Mosaic injunctions can express both typological interpretation as well as accommodations to Israel's hardness. That is also why Skarsaune wants to understand the end of *Dial* 44.2 "or alternatively".¹⁷ It is worth noting that Ptolemy does not actually present a tripartite division of the Mosaic Law, rather the division 1.1., 1.2., 1.3., 2 and 3 as becomes clear from the following table where I have also compared Justin's way of speaking about the content of the Law:

15 T. Stylianopoulos, *Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law* (SBL DS 20; Missoula: Scholars Press 1975).

16 Stylianopoulos, *Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law*, 51-68.

17 O. Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*, 323-324.

Ptolemy	Justin
1 Word of God	Word of God
1.1. Pure legislation	“Worship of God” and “practice of righteousness” injunctions
1.2. Law mixed with inferior matters: “an eye for eye” texts	
1.3. Typical and allegorical legislation	Mystery of Christ
2 Moses’ own words: the injunctions of the hardness of the people’s heart	The hardness of the people’s heart
3 Words of the elders	

The table indicates that for Justin the Mosaic Law was given by God himself and through Moses. There is no room for Moses’ own words which are not given by God without speaking in favour of some injunctions in the Mosaic Law being the words of the Intermediate. It is also interesting that Ptolemy related “words of the elders” to the Mosaic Law indicating that the term of the Mosaic Law in early Christianity (and Gnosticism) could include much more than the written books of the Pentateuch. This makes the concept, the Mosaic Law, very ambiguous and scholars must be aware of its possible different meanings in early patristic literature.¹⁸ While Ptolemy regards the injunctions of the hardness of the people’s heart as belonging to the category “Moses’ own words” and not to the category “Word of God”, Justin regards this as the word of God. As Skarsaune has noted, one and the same Mosaic injunction could speak about the mystery of Christ and express accommodations to Israel’s hardness. This makes it difficult to maintain that Justin, in principle, followed the system of Ptolemy. However, it is important to see that the roots of both Justin’s and Ptolemy’s way of speaking about the Mosaic Law are laid in the New Testament where Jesus defines certain Mosaic injunctions anew and where Paul argues that the Mosaic Law of circumcision cannot mediate salvation.

¹⁸ After the conference in Karkku 2017, I have discussed with Erkki Koskenniemi this particular problem to define the concept of the Mosaic Law in early Christian writings. See more closely Koskenniemi’s article in this volume.

Justin's aim (as apparently was also Ptolemy's) was to follow Jesus and Paul in their views on the Mosaic Law, and his theology is some sort of synthesis of their opinions. In *Dialogue* he presents proof texts from the Old Testament that could explain why the Christian attitude toward the Mosaic Law changed. Before I proceed to Justin's proof texts and their relation to the teachings of Jesus and Paul, I shall deal with some important texts of Justin which expresses his way of dividing the Mosaic Law. In many excerpts from *Dialogue* Justin writes that some injunctions of the Mosaic Law were given to the Jewish people because of the hardness of the people's hearts (*Dial* 18.2):

Wash therefore, and be now clean, and put away iniquity from your souls, as God bids you be washed in this laver, and be circumcised with the true circumcision. For we too would observe the fleshly circumcision, and the Sabbaths, and in short all the feasts, if we did not know for what reason they were enjoined you—namely, on account of your transgressions and the hardness of your hearts.

In this passage Justin lists fleshly circumcision, the Sabbaths and all the feasts as belonging to the Mosaic injunctions which were enjoined to the Jewish people on account of the transgression and hardness of their hearts (a similar statement is made also in *Dial* 43.1). However, same Mosaic injunctions of fleshly circumcision and of Sabbaths can also be typological references to the true circumcision (i.e. baptism; *Dial* 41.4) and new Christian life (i.e. continuous Sabbath; *Dial* 12.3). This indicates clearly that Justin must have regarded these Mosaic injunctions as being the word of God. The essential question is how Justin explains this dichotomy that one and the same law can mean two different and diametrically opposite things. Skarsaune notes that "Justin strictly speaking never establishes his point by any kind of argument ... he simply takes this for granted."¹⁹ In Skarsaune's view Justin adopted this view from early Jewish-Christian circles (*Recognitions* I:35:1-36:1)²⁰ where the Mosaic laws enjoined on account of the hardness of the heart concerned (only) the sacrificial cult. Justin developed this idea to concern other parts of ceremonial law and

¹⁹ Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*, 318.

²⁰ See the text in F.S. Jones, *An Ancient Jewish Christian Source on the History of Christianity: Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions 1.27-71* (Society of Biblical Literature 1995), 63-66.

feasts too.²¹

For Justin an important aspect in the Mosaic Law are its typological declarations about Jesus Christ and his followers. Such a typological interpretation is attested in the New Testament (Joh 3:14-15; 19:36; 1 Cor 5:6-7; 10:1-13). Such an interpretive tendency is clearly formulated in *Dial* 42.4:

And in short, sirs, by enumerating all the other appointments of Moses I can demonstrate that they were types, and symbols, and declarations (*tupos kai sumbola kai kataggelias*) of those things which would happen to Christ, of those who it was foreknown were to believe in Him, and of those things which would also be done by Christ Himself.

It is interesting that Justin's typological interpretations on the Mosaic Law may have been related to the important hermeneutic problems in Jewish (or rabbinical) academies.²²

So how to explain this remarkable theology where one and the same Mosaic injunction can be regarded as given for the hardness of the Jewish people's hearts and then also express the wonderful typological mystery about the divine salvation fulfilled in Jesus Christ? In order to make this problem apparent I shall briefly discuss the ways in which Justin speaks about the hardness of the Jewish people.

Justin refers several times to the golden calf episode in Exodus 32 and argues that this event was one reason why God commanded Jews to make sacrifice, not because that he needed such a cult, but in order that the people would avoid idolatry because of the hardness of their heart (*Dial* 19.5-6; 20.4; 22.1; 27.2). Justin distinguishes good laws and the laws given by reason of the hardness of the people's heart (*Dial* 45.3):

When I quoted, sir, the words spoken by Ezekiel, that "even if Noah and Daniel and Jacob were to beg sons and daughters, the request would not be granted them" [Ezek 14:14, 20], but that each one, that is to say, shall be saved by his own righteousness, I said also, that those who regulated their lives by the law of Moses would in like manner be saved. For what in the Law of Moses is naturally good, and pious, and

21 Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*, 313-323.

22 See, e.g., M. Hirshman, "Polemic Literary Units in the Classical Midrashim and Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 83 (1993) 369-384.

righteous, and has been prescribed to be done by those who obey it; and what was appointed to be performed by reason of *the hardness of the people's hearts*; was similarly recorded, and done also by those who were under the law.

While Justin distinguishes between two different instructions in the Law of Moses: those which are “good, and pious, and righteous,” and those which were appointed by reason of the hardness of the people’s hearts, there is no reference to their having been prescribed by two different agents or that one of them would have lacked divine justification. This becomes even clearer in *Dial* 67.10 (see below).

Dial 46.5: You perceive that God by Moses laid all such ordinances upon you on account of the hardness of your people’s hearts, in order that, by the large number of them, you might keep God continually, and in every action, before your eyes, and never begin to act unjustly or impiously. For He enjoined you to place around you [a fringe] of purple dye [Num 15:38], in order that you might not forget God; and He commanded you to wear a phylactery [Deut 6:6], certain characters, which indeed we consider holy, being engraved on very thin parchment; and by these means stirring you up to retain a constant remembrance of God: at the same time, however, convincing you, that in your hearts you have not even a faint remembrance of God’s worship.

The passage argues Moses laid ordinances upon the Jewish people on account of the hardness of their hearts in order that the people would keep God in their mind and live according to his commandments, and not worship idols (*Dial* 46.6).

Dial 67.4: You are not, however, acting fairly or truthfully in attempting to undo those things in which there has been constantly agreement between us; namely, that certain commands were instituted by Moses on account of the hardness of your people’s hearts. For you said that, by reason of His living conformably to law, He was elected and became Christ, if indeed He were proved to be so.

Justin gives this answer as a rebuttal to Tryphon’s statement, where he challenged Justin’s belief that Jesus really was Christ (*Dial* 67.2): “And if

you prove from the Scriptures that He is the Christ, and that on account of having led a life conformed to the law, and perfect, He deserved the honour of being elected to be Christ, [it is well]; but do not venture to tell monstrous phenomena, lest you be convicted of talking foolishly like the Greeks.” Tryphon relates the appearance of the Messiah to a life conformed to the law, while Justin insists that Jesus has established a new covenant where instructions given to the hardness of the Jewish people’s hearts are no longer valid (*Dial* 67.10):

God promised that there would be another covenant, not like that old one, and said that it would be laid on them without fear, and trembling, and lightnings, and that it would be such as to show what kind of commands and deeds God knows to be eternal and suited to every nation, and what commandments He has given, suiting them to *the hardness of your people’s hearts*, as He exclaims also by the prophets.

Dial 67.10 indicates clearly that the instructions of the hardness of the Jewish people’s heart are distinguished from the content of the Mosaic Law which is good, and pious and righteous (*Dial* 45.3) by the promise of God which concerns the new covenant. This new covenant is predicted in Jer 31:31-34 as the expressions “another covenant, not like that old one” clearly show (quoted in *Dial* 11). Another expression “commands and deeds God knows to be eternal and suited to every nation” is again a reference to Isa 51:4-5 (quoted also in *Dial* 11). This being the case, *Dial* 11 at the beginning of the Justin’s passage is, therefore, an essential introduction to the *Dialogue* where the main point has been presented:

There will be no other God, O Trypho, nor was there from eternity any other existing, but He who made and disposed all this universe. Nor do we think that there is one God for us, another for you, but that He alone is God who led your fathers out from Egypt with a strong hand and a high arm. Nor have we trusted in any other (for there is no other), but in Him in whom you also have trusted, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. But we do not trust through Moses or through the law; for then we would do the same as yourselves. But now —for I have read that there shall be a final law, and a covenant, the chiefest of all, which it is now incumbent on all men to observe, as many as are seeking after the inheritance of God. *For the law promulgated on Horeb is now old, and belongs to yourselves alone*; but this is for all universally. Now, law placed against law has abrogated that which is before it, and a covenant which comes

after in like manner has put an end to the previous one; and an eternal and final law—namely, Christ—has been given to us, and the covenant is trustworthy, after which there shall be no law, no commandment, no ordinance. Have you not read this which Isaiah says: “Hearken unto Me, hearken unto Me, my people; and, you kings, give ear unto Me: for a law shall go forth from Me, and My judgment shall be for a light to the nations. My righteousness approaches swiftly, and My salvation shall go forth, and nations shall trust in My arm?” [Isa 51:4-5]. And by Jeremiah, concerning this same new covenant, He thus speaks: “Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt” [Jer 31:31-32]. If, therefore, God proclaimed a new covenant which was to be instituted, and this for a light of the nations, we see and are persuaded that men approach God, leaving their idols and other unrighteousness, through the name of Him who was crucified, Jesus Christ, and abide by their confession even unto death, and maintain piety. Moreover, by the works and by the attendant miracles, it is possible for all to understand that He is the new law, and the new covenant, and the expectation of those who out of every people wait for the good things of God. For the true spiritual Israel, and descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham (who in uncircumcision was approved of and blessed by God on account of his faith, and called the father of many nations), are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ, as shall be demonstrated while we proceed.

Justin delivers his arguments concerning the two different covenants from the prophetic texts Isa 51:4-5 and Jer 31:31-32, and argues that Jews should have a new orientation to the old covenant because its whole content can no longer be valid for the nations. For this reason Jer 31:31-34 became an important key-text for Christians because it indicated that the old Sinaitic covenant is no longer be valid when the new one is established in the era of salvation.²³ The text of Jer 31:31-34 has been

23 Quotation of Jer 31:31-32 in *Dial* 11 mainly follows the LXX. Skarsaune (*Proof from Prophecy*, 72-73) discusses the wording of Jer 31:31-32 attested in *Dial* 67:9 and concludes that it deviates from the LXX version and is

quoted already in the Letter of Hebrews (Heb 8:8-12; 10:16-17) indicating its centrality in early Christianity²⁴. In Heb 10:16-17 the verses Jer 31:33-34 have been interpreted so that Jesus' sacrifice is enough for that the promise of forgiveness is valid. Even though these two verses in Jer 31:33-34 are not quoted by Justin in *Dial* 11 he agrees with the interpretation of the Letter of Hebrews according to which the sacrifice of Jesus has made the yearly sacrifices of the Mosaic Law unnecessary.

Another New Testament text where Jer 31:31-34 is referred to is Rom 11:25-27. Paul indicates that this prophetic text on the new covenant will be fulfilled when the "carnal" Israel turns to God and confesses Jesus as the Messiah. This way of referring to Jer 31:31-34 seems to imply that Jeremiah's prophecy was one of the key texts for Paul to understand the Sinaitic covenant in the new Christian era. According to Paul, Jesus has established a new covenant (cf., 1 Cor 11:25), and therefore the old Sinaitic regulations cannot be applied in the Christian congregation. My aim is not to deal with Paul's view more closely in this article but it seems to me that the above characterization indicates his main way of understanding the Mosaic Law.

In *Dial* 11 Justin presents an important remark concerning the Mosaic Law. It is now old and belongs only to the Jewish people. The statement implies two sorts of ideas. First, the covenant made at Horeb (i.e. Sinai) clearly originates from God through Moses. Second, the idea of oldness implies that something better has come instead of it. This something better gives a new orientation to the old. In order to understand this dichotomy between the old and the new it is necessary to attempt to understand how the early Christians understood the relationship between the old covenant and the new one. Meliton's sermon about Passover (ca. 166/67 CE) originates about the same time than Justin's *Dialogue*.²⁵ It

parallel to the rendering in the *Kerygma Petrou* fragment 5. This indicates that Justin bases his ideas on older (Jewish-) Christian sources.

24 Justin apparently knew the Letter to Hebrews. See O. Skarsaune, "Justin and His Bible," in S. Parvis and P. Foster, eds., *Justin Martyr and His Worlds* (Minneapolis: Fortress 2007) 53-76, 179-187, esp. 74-75 and 187 n. 96 with references to his *Proof from Prophecy*, 72-73, 107-108, 126-127, 168, 179-180, 296.

25 It is worth noting that, according to Eusebius (*History* 4.26.13-14), Meliton made Testimonia (including six books) where he collected important key texts from the Old Testament which demonstrated the Christian way to read and understand these scriptures. It is clear that Meliton

gives good perspective to this problem. Meliton compares the old covenant to a model to understand what is coming. When the fulfilment has taken place, however, the model is no longer important. The model was essential in its own time but, according to Meliton, in the period of the fulfilment it is no longer needed (§ 35-38):

35. Beloved, no speech or event takes place without a pattern or design; every event and speech involves a pattern—that which is spoken, a pattern, and that which happens, a prefiguration—in order that as the event is disclosed through the prefiguration, so also the speech may be brought to expression through its outline.

36. Without the model, no work of art arises. Is not that which is to come into existence seen through the model which typifies it? For this reason a pattern of that which is to be is made either out of wax, or out of clay, or out of wood, in order that by the smallness of the model, destined to be destroyed, might be seen that thing which is to arise from it—higher than it in size, and mightier than it in power, and more beautiful than it in appearance, and more elaborate than it in ornamentation.

37. So whenever the thing arises for which the model was made, then that which carried the image of that future thing is destroyed as no longer of use, since it has transmitted its resemblance to that which is by nature true. Therefore, that which once was valuable, is now without value because that which is truly valuable has appeared.

38. For each thing has its own time: there is a distinct time for the type, there is a distinct time for the material, and there is a distinct time for the truth. You construct the model. You want this, because you see in it the image of the future work. You procure the material for the model. You want this, on account of that which is going to arise because of it. You complete the work and cherish it alone, for only in it do you see both type and the truth.

Meliton applies this figurative example to the relationship between the old and the new covenant (§ 40-45):

40. The people, therefore, became the model for the church, and the law a parabolic sketch. But the gospel became the explanation of the law and its fulfilment, while the church became the storehouse of truth.

41. Therefore, the type had value prior to its realization, and the

has mediated lot of important details of early Christian exegesis and, therefore, his sermon on Passover is relevant in our discussion.

parable was wonderful prior to its interpretation. This is to say that the people had value before the church came on the scene, and the law was wonderful before the gospel was brought to light.

42. But when the church came on the scene, and the gospel was set forth, the type lost its value by surrendering its significance to the truth, and the law was fulfilled by surrendering its significance to the gospel. Just as the type lost its significance by surrendering its image to that which is true by nature, and as the parable lost its significance by being illumined through the interpretation,

43. so indeed also the law was fulfilled when the gospel was brought to light, and the people lost their significance when the church came on the scene, and the type was destroyed when the Lord appeared. Therefore, those things which once had value are today without value, because the things which have true value have appeared.

44. For at one time the sacrifice to the sheep was valuable, but now it is without value because of the life of the Lord. The death of the sheep once was valuable, but now it is without value because of the salvation of the Lord. The blood of the sheep once was valuable, but now it is without value because of the Spirit of the Lord. The silent lamb once was valuable, but now it has no value because of the blameless Son. The temple here below once was valuable, but now it is without value because of the Christ from above.

45. The Jerusalem here below once had value, but now it is without value because of the Jerusalem from above. The meager inheritance once had value; now it is without value because of the abundant grace. For not in one place alone, nor yet in narrow confines, has the glory of God been established, but his grace has been poured out upon the uttermost parts of the inhabited world, and there the almighty God has taken up his dwelling place through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever. Amen.

Meliton's sermon helps us understand in which ways typological exegesis could relate the Mosaic injunctions to the fulfilment in Christ, and at the same time emphasize that the injunctions themselves no longer be valid. Seen from this perspective the Mosaic injunctions consist of useful and good regulation for the Israelites in history and at the same time serve as a typological model for the coming Christological events. When the fulfilment was realized then the old regulation became meaningless.

Another important background is the tradition of *σκληροκαρδία*. Berger has argued that *σκληροκαρδία* topic was developed in the Jewish

parenetic context and he refers especially to Ps 95:8.²⁶ That this particular psalm was used in Hebrews 3-4 makes this Jewish background highly relevant for Justin's exegesis because he dealt with similar topic in *Dial* 113-114.²⁷ Another important background for Justin's many quotations "because of the hardness of the heart" is apparently Jesus' teaching on divorce.²⁸ By referring to God's will in creation Jesus refutes the possibility to divorce. He explains the certificate of divorce (Deut 24:1-4) as Moses' way of allowing a human behaviour because of their hardness of heart (Mk 10:5): "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law." Jesus' new attitude toward divorce was understood as part of the new covenant where the Christians could live according to the will of God. This implies that the old covenant with different injunctions was regarded as old and worthless when the fulfilment of the new covenant became a reality.

I propose the following development to understand Justin's theology on the Mosaic Law according to which a Mosaic injunction can be a typological reference to the Christological era and simultaneously also an example of the commandment accommodated because of the hardness of the people's heart. Justin's theology, which he did not develop but accepted from earlier Christian tradition, was developed from two different themes originally separated from each other:

Theme 1: Old Testament references the hardness of the people's heart against listening to the word of God. This theme was developed in the Second Temple period to concern the Jewish people's unwillingness to listen the word of God, as Berger has demonstrated in his article (referred to already).

Theme 2: Christians developed Old Testament and Jewish theology where salvation historical themes were used to describe typologically or anti-typologically the coming eschatological events. Jer 31:31-34 is one good example where the Sinaitic covenant was seen as anti-typos for the coming new covenant.

From Theme 2 the Christians developed the idea that the Mosaic Law was a model for the coming new covenant. Meliton's sermon on Passover

26 K. Berger, "Hartherzigkeit und Gottes Gesetz: Die Vorgeschichte des antijüdischen Vorwurfs in Mc 10:5," *ZNW* 61 (1970) 1-47, esp. 10.

27 For this see Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*, 334-338.

28 For this see Stylianopoulos, *Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law*, 143; Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*, 314.

illustrates this well. Such a theology implied that the Jews would also realize this new decisive turning-point in the salvation history of God. The praxis showed soon that such a theology was not welcomed among the majority of the Jewish people. This led to confrontations, polemics and vilifications. Christians adopted Theme 1 to explain the hardness of the Jewish people causing them to remain in the old covenant even though the new one had been established. The consequence of this was a theology developed already before Justin's time where two strikingly different components were related to one and the same Mosaic injunction. Justin's theology becomes understandable when we realize that he adopted a theological model where two originally different theological themes have been used to illustrate the validity of the Mosaic regulation.

The Greek word *σκληροκαρδία* appears already in the Old Testament in the context of Jews (Israelites/Judaeans) being exhorted to circumcise their hearts and not be stubborn (Deut 10:16-17; Jer 4:4; see also Sir 16:10). Justin refers to Deut 10:16-17 in *Dial* 16 and the passage reveals Justin's thinking when he accused Jews who have erred by persecuting Christians:²⁹

And God himself proclaimed by Moses, speaking thus: "And circumcise the hardness of your hearts (*sklērokardian humōn*), and no longer stiffen the neck. For the Lord your God is both Lord of lords, and a great, mighty, and terrible God, who regards not persons, and takes not rewards" [Deut 10:16-17]. And in Leviticus: "Because they have transgressed against Me, and despised Me, and because they have walked contrary to Me, I also walked contrary to them, and I shall cut them off in the land of their enemies. Then shall their uncircumcised heart be turned" [Lev 26:40-41]. For the circumcision according to the flesh, which is from Abraham, was given for a sign; that you may be separated from other nations, and from us; and that you alone may

29 The problem of the persecutions of Christians and the Jews' role in them is a difficult historical problem. Patristic evidence often makes statements about these persecutions which are one-sided so that all Jews everywhere persecuted Christians and blasphemed them (or Jesus) in synagogues. For this, see especially M. Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire AD 135-425* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization 1996). Earlier I have dealt with these problems in my article "Justin Martyr Encounters Judaism," in A. Laato and P. Lindqvist, eds., *Encounters of the Children of Abraham from Ancient to Modern Times* (SCA 1; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 97-123.

suffer that which you now justly suffer; and that your land may be desolate, and your cities burned with fire; and that strangers may eat your fruit in your presence, and not one of you may go up to Jerusalem. For you are not recognized among the rest of men by any other mark than your fleshly circumcision. For none of you, I suppose, will venture to say that God neither did nor does foresee the events, which are future, nor foreordained his deserts for each one. Accordingly, these things have happened to you in fairness and justice, for you have slain the Just One, and His prophets before Him; and now you reject those who hope in Him, and in Him who sent Him—God the Almighty and Maker of all things—cursing in your synagogues those that believe in Christ. For you have not the power to lay hands upon us, on account of those who now have the mastery. But as often as you could, you did so. Wherefore God, by Isaiah, calls to you, saying, “Behold how the righteous man perished, and no one regards it. For the righteous man is taken away from before iniquity. His grave shall be in peace, he is taken away from the midst. Draw near hither, you lawless children, seed of the adulterers, and children of the whore. Against whom have you sported yourselves, and against whom have you opened the mouth, and against whom have you loosened the tongue?” [Isa 57:1-4].

Justin’s answer to Tryphon is related to the Jewish statement (also presented by Tryphon) that Christians should be circumcised and follow the Mosaic instructions in order to be saved. This discussion opened the dialogue between Justin and Tryphon when the latter exhorted Justin to be circumcised and follow the Mosaic covenant or alternatively follow the philosophy of Plato but to refrain from repeating groundless stories of Jesus and the apostles (*Dial* 7):

I approve of your other remarks, and admire the eagerness with which you study divine things; but it were better for you still to abide in the philosophy of Plato, or of some other man, cultivating endurance, self-control, and moderation, rather than be deceived by false words, and follow the opinions of men of no reputation. For if you remain in that mode of philosophy, and live blamelessly, a hope of a better destiny were left to you; but when you have forsaken God, and reposed confidence in man, what safety still awaits you? If, then, you are willing to listen to me (for I have already considered you a friend), first be

circumcised, then observe what ordinances have been enacted with respect to the Sabbath, and the feasts, and the new moons of God; and, in a word, do all things which have been written in the law: and then perhaps you shall obtain mercy from God. But Christ—if He has indeed been born, and exists anywhere—is unknown, and does not even know Himself, and has no power until Elias come to anoint Him, and make Him manifest to all. And you, having accepted a groundless report, invent a Christ for yourselves, and for his sake are inconsiderately perishing.

Justin answers Tryphon's statement that the Christians should follow the Mosaic Law by referring to Jer 31:31-32 where the new covenant was prophesied. This new covenant puts the Mosaic Law in a new light and, according to Justin, demands a radical new orientation to the Sinaitic covenant (*Dial* 11, already quoted).

This survey indicates that even though – in a certain sense – Justin's arguments parallel those of Ptolemy, according to which certain Mosaic instructions are given to Jews because of the hardness of their hearts, Justin regards these instructions as being the words of God and related to Deut 10:16-17 in particular. In addition, Justin argues that the Christian era corresponds to the era of the new covenant predicted in Jer 31:31-34. This implies that the instructions of the Sinaitic covenant i.e. the Mosaic Law are not necessary to maintain a relationship to God. Apparently Justin, like Paul, thinks that the Mosaic Law was never aimed at defining the right relationship between God and humans because Abraham's belief shows this right relationship (Rom 3-4; Gal 3-4).³⁰ This being the case Justin does not agree with Ptolemy who distinguishes between the word of God and the word of Moses.

After having given an overall picture of Justin's way of understanding the Mosaic Law I am now ready to discuss how he treated Jewish believers in Jesus.

Jewish Believers in Jesus and the Mosaic Law

In *Dial* 46.1 Justin allowed Tryphon to introduce the question as to

³⁰ Justin's dependence on Paul's theology is especially visible in the texts where he discusses circumcision and refers to Abraham who believed in God without having been circumcised. Concerning *Dial* texts, see Stylianopoulos, *Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law*, 133-141.

whether it was possible for a Jew to believe in Jesus and at the same time follow the Mosaic instructions (*Dial* 46.1):

‘But if some, even now, wish to live in the observance of the institutions given by Moses, and yet believe in this Jesus who was crucified, recognizing him to be the Christ of God, and that it is given to him to be absolute judge of all, and that his is the everlasting kingdom, can they also be saved?’ he inquired of me.

A similar question by Tryphon opens *Dial* 47 where Justin also gives him a detailed answer. This passage is the key text to understand the opinion of Justin with regards to how it is possible for Jews to continue to live according to the Mosaic instructions when they believe in Jesus. Such a question was apparently still important for Jewish Christian circles at that time (*Dial* 47):

And Trypho inquired again, ‘But if someone knowing that this is so, after he recognizes that this man is Christ and has believed in and obeys him, wishes, however, to observe these institutions, will he be saved?’ I said, ‘In my opinion, Trypho, such a one will be saved, if he does not strive in every way to persuade other men – I mean those gentiles who have been circumcised from error by Christ (*dia tou Khristou apo tēs planēs peritimēthentas*), to observe the same things as himself, telling them that they will not be saved unless they do. This you did yourself at the commencement of the discourse, when you declared that I would not be saved unless I observe these institutions.’

Then he replied, ‘Why then have you said, “In my opinion, such an one will be saved,” unless there are some who affirm that such will not be saved?’

‘There are such people, Trypho,’ I answered; ‘and these do not venture to have any intercourse with or to extend hospitality to such persons; but I do not agree with them. But if some, through weakness of opinions (*dia to asthenes tēs gnōmēs*), wish to observe such institutions as were given by Moses, from which they expect some virtue, but which we believe were appointed by reason of the hardness of the people’s hearts, along with their hope in this Christ, and [wish to perform] the eternal and natural acts of righteousness and piety, yet choose to live with the Christians and the faithful, as I said before, not inducing them either to be circumcised like themselves, or to keep the

Sabbath, or to observe any other such ceremonies, then I hold that we ought to join ourselves to such, and associate with them in all things as kinsmen and brethren. But if, Trypho,' I continued, 'some of your race, who say they believe in this Christ, compel those Gentiles who believe in this Christ to live in all respects according to the law given by Moses, or choose not to associate so intimately with them, I in like manner do not approve of them. But I believe that even those, who have been persuaded by them to observe the legal dispensation along with their confession of God in Christ, shall probably be saved. And I hold, further, that such as have confessed and known this man to be Christ, yet who have gone back from some cause to the legal dispensation, and have denied that this man is Christ, and have repented not before death, shall by no means be saved. Further, I hold that those of the seed of Abraham who live according to the law, and do not believe in this Christ before death, shall likewise not be saved, and especially those who have anathematized and do anathematize this very Christ in the synagogues, and everything by which they might obtain salvation and escape the vengeance of fire. 5For the goodness and the loving-kindness of God, and His boundless riches, hold righteous and sinless the man who, as Ezekiel tells, repents of sins; and reckons sinful, unrighteous, and impious the man who falls away from piety and righteousness to unrighteousness and ungodliness. Wherefore also our Lord Jesus Christ said, "In whatsoever things I shall take you, in these I shall judge you".'

Dial 46-47 deals with two different Jewish-Christian groups. Both groups consist of the Jewish believers in Jesus and they follow Mosaic stipulations. Justin indicates that there were Jews who believed in Jesus but who regarded him as a merely man and there were also Jews who believed in Jesus and his divinity. The early patristic evidence gives reason to call the first group "Ebionites" and the latter group "Nazoraean" on the basis of Acts 24:5. The latter group accepted Paul and apparently also followed his high Christology.³¹ *Dial* 46-47 indicates that Justin wanted to

³¹ It is obvious that Justin Martyr knew Jewish-Christian groups which revered Jesus as the Son of God. See O. Skarsaune, "Jewish Christian Sources Used by Justin Martyr and Some Other Greek and Latin Fathers," Skarsaune & Hvalvik (eds), *Jewish Believers in Jesus* 379-416. See further O. Skarsaune, *The Proof from prophecy. A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-Text tradition: Text-Type, Provenance, Theological profile* (NTSup 56, Leiden: Brill 1987); A. Laato, "The Christology of the Jewish-Christian

present an apology for the “Nazoraeans”. Justin admits that there are Christians who do not tolerate at all Jewish-Christian way of following the injunctions of the Mosaic Law but he also states that he does not agree with them. He then exhorts all Christians (i.e. the potential readers of his text): “...we ought to join ourselves to such, and associate with them in all things as kinsmen and brethren.”

There are other early patristic texts where it is possible to distinguish between two different Jewish-Christian groups who have different Christological attitudes.³² In addition to Justin Martyr even Origen shows that there were Jewish Christians who believed in the virgin birth and regarded Jesus as divine. In *Contra Celsum* II 1 Origen shows that Celsus does not have accurate information about Jewish Christians:

One must pay attention to what Celsus is also saying to those among the Jews who believe. He says: they left the ancestral Law, since they have been persuaded by Jesus, they have been most ridiculously deceived and have deserted to another name and another life. But he did not notice that those of the Jews who believe in Jesus have not left the ancestral Law. For they live according to that Law called after poverty because of their hanging on to the poverty of the Law.

Later in V 61 Origen recounts that there are two different groups among Jewish Christians and he calls them both Ebionites indicating that the terminology in the early church did not yet distinguish between the Ebionites and the Nazoraeans: “Some stood up who accepted Jesus so that they in addition to this boasted of being Christians and yet wished to live according to the Law of the Jews like the mass of the Jews. These are the two kinds of Ebionites, some confessing that Jesus was born of a virgin as we do and others who deny this but say that he was born like the

Group: the Nazoraeans,” in M. Ahlqvist, A. M. Laato and M. Lindfelt, eds., *Flumen Saxosum Sonans: Studis in Honorem Gunnar af Hällström* (Turku: Åbo Akademi förlag 2010), 85-107.

³² See this evidence in A.F.J. Klijn & G.J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (SupNT 36; Leiden: Brill, 1973); O. Skarsaune and R. Hvalvik, eds., *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007). It is worth noting that scholars are still quite handicapped in dealing with the Syriac patristic evidence on Christianity and its possible relation to early Jewish-Christian traditions.

other people.”³³

Justin’s positive attitude to the “Nazoraean” must be based on historical circumstances i.e. on the Christian tradition that Jewish believers in Jesus had the possibility to continue their Jewish way of life.³⁴ In the *Dialogue* Justin allows Jews to live according to the Mosaic Law so long as they abide by Christological (Jesus is the Son of God) and soteriological (trusting in the vicarious death of Jesus and not forcing non-Jews to follow the Mosaic Law) criteria. For me, such a statement sounds very Pauline.³⁵ Another argument for that Justin believed that he followed

33 W. Kinzig (“The Nazoreans,” Skarsaune & Hvalvik (eds), *Jewish Believers* 463-487) notes that only Epiphanius and Jerome speak about Nazoraean and that “they drew their knowledge of the Nazoraean from the same source” i.e. the works of Apollinaris of Laodicea. Even though this is true as far as the use of the term “Nazoraean” is concerned, the fact is that we have the possibility to argue that Origen knew the same Hebrew Gospel as Jerome and according to the latter this Gospel was used among Nazoraean. In addition, different references are made to Jewish Christian groups which disagreed with the Ebionites’ Christological views. Note, in particular, R.A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity. From the End of the New Testament Period until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Jerusalem-Leiden: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Brill 1988). See further J.C. Paget, “The Definition of the Terms *Jewish Christian* and *Jewish Christianity* in the History of Research,” Skarsaune & Hvalvik, *Jewish Believers in Jesus* 22-52.

34 Concerning this question note further Anette Rudolph, “Die Judenchristen in Justins Dialog mit Tryphon,” *Studia Patristica* 36 (2001) 300-306; G.N. Stanton, “Justin Martyr’s ‘Dialogue with Trypho’. Group boundaries, ‘proselytes’ and ‘God-fearers’,” in: G.N. Stanton; G.G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998) 263-278 and, in particular, O. Skarsaune’s studies: *Proof from Prophecy* and *In the Shadow of the Temple. Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press 2002) and *We have found the Messiah! Jewish Believers in Jesus in Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Caspari Center 2005) and “Evidence for Jewish Believers in Greek and Latin Patristic Literature,” in: Skarsaune and Hvalvik, *Jewish Believers in Jesus*, 505-567, esp. 510-514.

35 In the light of these “positive” statements on the Torah we must also ask whether it is right to say that Justin attempted to present the Torah “as evidence of the perversity of the Israelites, which necessitated the imposition of restrictive rules and decrees” (so Rokéah, *Justin Martyr and the Jews* 47). The point is rather that without Jesus Christ the Torah is worthless because even the Torah contains proofs of prophecy concerning Him.

a Christian tradition, apparently from the time of the Apostles, which allows “Nazoraeans” to follow their Jewish way of life, is the fact that Justin opposes the Christian viewpoint where Jewish-Christians were forced to abjure the Mosaic Law if they wanted to become Christians and confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

There are two Greek expressions in *Dial* 47 which need closer examination. The first one is *diá tou Khristou apo tēs planēs peritimēthentas*. What does “circumcision from error by Christ” mean? It seems for me that the expression can best be explained as “circumcision by Christ” refers to baptism and the expression “from error” refers to all kinds of religious and ideological belief systems from which Christians have been saved.³⁶ Justin’s expression refers back to the beginning of *Dialogue* where Trypho attempted to get Justin to follow the stipulations of the Mosaic Law after having heard that Justin had turned from false philosophical doctrines to the Christian belief. Justin answered Trypho by referring to the baptismal ritual.

The second expression is *diá to asthenes tēs gnōmēs*. This is difficult to translate. The word *gnōmē* can mean “purpose, intention, mind, opinion, previous knowledge” and as noted in *TDNT* “it is hard to differentiate the various nuances with any precision.” It seems to me that another key word in the expression *asthenes* leads us to examine Paul’s opinions concerning those brothers who cannot regard themselves as free from the instructions of the Mosaic Law. There are two passages in Paul’s letters where this topic becomes especially visible:

Rom 14:1-2: Accept the one whose faith is weak (τὸν δὲ ἀσθενοῦντα τῆ πίστει), without quarrelling over disputable matters. 2 One person’s faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak (ὁ δὲ ἀσθενῶν), eats only vegetables.

1 Cor 8:9-13: Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak (τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν). 10 For if someone with a weak conscience (ἀσθενοῦς ὄντος) sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol’s temple, won’t that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? 11 So this weak brother (ὁ ἀσθενῶν), for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. 12 When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience (τὴν συνείδησιν ἀσθενοῦσαν), you sin against Christ. 13

³⁶ For this use of “error”, see especially *TDNT* 6:238-239.

Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

These Pauline passages apparently deal with the food regulations in the Mosaic Law. Paul argues that those who are not yet free from the regulation of the Mosaic Law are “weak” and other Christians must tolerate them by taking their weak consciences into account. Assuming that these passages are behind Justin’s expression *diā to asthenes tēs gnōmēs* then it could be translated something like “weakness of opinions” or similar. The idea is that some Christians have not yet realized the true meaning of Jer 31:31-34 and Isa 51:4-5 which imply the new covenantal order, whereas the greater part of the Mosaic regulations were aimed at controlling the human hardness of the heart.

Justin connects the expression *diā to asthenes tēs gnōmēs* with the hardness of the heart. I find this extremely interesting. He thinks that some regulations in the Mosaic Law can, on one hand, be regarded as being regulated because of the hardness of heart, but the following of this same regulation, on the other hand, can be an expression of weakness of conscience. Hardness and weakness are interrelated here in an interesting way. In order to understand such a connection it is important to discuss whether “hardness of the heart” in its deepest meaning is a polemic concept against Jews or rather *anthropological statement* that humans (including Jews) cannot fulfil the will of God. Therefore, the essence of the will of God is expressed in different ways to Abraham (who believes before Moses) and who is the model for the true religion. In this understanding (partly inspired from Paul’s theology) a great part of the regulation of the Mosaic Law was formulated in order to get Jews away from idolatry and sinful life.

Skarsaune has argued that Justin received inspiration from Recognitions 1:35:1-36:1 where the sacrificial cult was instituted in the Mosaic Law in order that the Jews would avoid idolatry. That this attitude cannot be regarded as anti-Jewish tradition *per se* becomes evident from LevR 22:8 where the passage of Lev 17:7 is interpreted: “They must no longer offer any of their sacrifices to the goat idols to whom they prostitute themselves. This is to be a lasting ordinance for them and for the generations to come.”³⁷

Conclusions

37 Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*, 316-320.

Justin's attitude toward the Mosaic Law is based on three fundamental factors all of which were based on earlier Christian tradition.

The first important factor was the prophetic prediction that the old Sinaitic covenant would be substituted by the new one. Jer 31:31-34 was an important key-text already used in the New Testament. Additionally, it emphasized two important topics which played a central role in the Christian theology. The new covenant was based on forgiveness, illustrating well the salvation-historical event accounted in the Gospels: the death of Jesus on the cross. Another topic was a new life. According to the prophecy, the law of God would be written in the hearts of the people. Jer 31:31-34 also explains why elements of old Sinaitic covenant can be regarded as typologically corresponding to the elements of the new covenant. The Sinaitic covenant was good but after the establishment of the new covenant its meaning was mainly typological. It is also important to see that Jer 31:31-34 explains well the anthropological statement that humans are incapable of fulfilling the divine commands without help from God, i.e. that God himself puts his law on the hearts of humans.

The second factor includes many Old Testament references to the hardness of the people's heart against listening to the word of God. This theme was developed in the Second Temple period to address the Jewish people's unwillingness to listen to the word of God. In Christian theology this topic was developed as a reaction to the Jews' unwillingness to accept the Christian message. Jews persisted in staying in the old Sinaitic covenant which Christians regarded as an example of hardness of their hearts. This explains why in an early Christian theology the word of Jesus that divorce was allowed by Moses because of the hardness of heart was applied to the ceremonial law. Jews do not understand that the new covenant has been established and, therefore, they want to follow old Sinaitic stipulations because of their hardness of heart.

The third topic was an apostolic tradition that Jewish believers in Jesus ("Nazoraeans") have the right to continue to practise the Mosaic Law.

Justin received all three of these topics from older Christian traditions and made a synthesis of them. This explains why there seems to be a certain tension in Justin's theology. This becomes evident particularly in the cases when some ceremonial aspects in the Mosaic Law are seen as *typoi* for the coming salvation but at the same time also as expressions of the stipulations made for the hardness of the hearts of Jews. This tension was explained so that Exodus 32-34 became a hermeneutical key to

understanding the stubbornness of the Jewish people. Israel received two laws: first it received Ten Commandments, and after the episode of the Golden Calf the ceremonial law because of their stubbornness.

What makes Justin's attitude toward the Mosaic Law highly important is that he was a theologian who recognized intensive criticism toward the Jewish-Christian groups in the Church more and more, and regarded this as problematic. He was still willing to oppose those sentiments which forbade Jewish-Christian groups to practice the Mosaic Law.³⁸ In this respect Justin is an important theologian who recognized that it is important for Christian theology to preserve a positive attitude toward those Jews who wanted to practice the Mosaic Law and confess that Jesus from Nazareth was the Messiah and the Son of God.

38 For this, see especially W. Horbury, "Jewish-Christian Relations in Barnabas and Justin Martyr," in idem, *Jews and Christians* (London: T & T Clark International 2006), 127-161.