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und seiner Umwelt

22

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Maurice Hogan

The Law in the Epistle of James

Introduction

The letter of James may be described as a moral and religious exhortation. It is a call to realize professed faith in appropriate action. Because of the generalized nature of the greetings (1:1), it is difficult to reconstruct the historical circumstances of its composition. It was probably written to Jewish-Christians living outside of Palestine by James, the brother of the Lord (d. 62 A.D.), an important figure in the Jerusalem Church, though not one of the Twelve (cf. I Cor. 15: 5, 7).¹ He is so well known as to need no introduction. Since the Palestine of the first century had witnessed the fusion of Greek and Jewish influences, the relatively polished Greek of the epistle could well have originated there. In the epistle there is a reflection of social realities and an outlook appropriate to Christianity around the middle of the first century of the Christian era. If this is correct, the recipients would have been first generation Jewish-Christians living in the Diaspora and familiar with the Old Testament.² It should, however, be kept in mind that the originating circumstances of the letter do not exhaust its meaning nor its significance for today.

Literary Structure and Genre

The letter of James is organized around a central set of convictions concerning the incompatibility of two modes of behavior following from two very different outlooks on reality. Friendship with the world and friendship with God undergirds the inclusion and the shaping of the material. Some sections are easily recognized as units, others present difficulties (e.g., 2:12-13; 4:11-12; 5:12; 5:19-20), while chapter one seems more aphoristic in character. Many of the maxims in 1:2-27 are

¹ For a lengthy discussion of authorship, cf. *L.K. Johnson*, *The Letter of James* (AnchB, 37A), New York 1995, 89-108.

² *Ibid.*, 118-123.

treated at length in the remainder of the letter and so chapter one may be seen as a kind of table of contents, an overture giving coherence to the entire letter.³

James is a moral-religious exhortation with elements of diatribe, paraenesis and protreptic discourse. It advocates behavior compatible with Christian living; its moral teaching is defined in terms of a specific Christian way of life. Although it begins like a letter (1:1), it lacks other formal elements associated with letter writing in antiquity. The situations described are general and typical rather than specific and local, and yet there is exhortation, direct address and dialogical style. The writing may have been a circular communication, experienced as a letter from James when read aloud in the congregations.

The letter of James stands within the great stream of exhortatory literature in the Greek-Roman and Jewish worlds, having to do with the right ordering of practical living. Nevertheless, it is not a treatise on virtue and is more at home in the world shaped by the Old Testament; a reinterpretation of Old Testament law in the light of Jesus, Messiah and Lord (1:1; 2:1), as well as drawing on themes associated with the wisdom tradition.

Law in James

The law (*nomos*)⁴ is a secondary theme in James (cf. 1:25; 2:8-12; 4:11-12). Life should be lived in view of God's judgment administered on the basis of the law of freedom. His language echoes the perception of law in the Old Testament, especially in the wisdom tradition (cf. Ps. 118(119): 55, 105, 109, 142, 153; Sir. 21:11; 33:2; 45:5). But James never connects language about works to language about law, nor does he use "commandments". While he recognizes the theoretical divisibility of law into commandments, he thinks rather in terms of the law as a whole. Breaking any part of the law is like breaking the whole of it, for obedience is directed, not to the commandment, but to the Lawgiver (cf. 2:11; 4:11-12). Neither does he connect the law with ritual observance; there is no mention, for

³ See also *P.B.R. Forbes*, The Structure of the Epistle of James, in: *EvQ* 44 (1972) 147-153; *E. Fry*, The Testing of Faith. A Study of the Structure of the Book of James, in: *The Bible Translator* 29 (1978) 427-435; *H. Songer*, The Literary Character of the Book of James, in: *Review and Expositor* 66 (1969) 379-389.

⁴ Cf. *O.J.F. Seitz*, James and the Law, in: *Studia Evangelica* 2 (1964) 472-486; *M.J. Evans*, The Law in James, in: *Vox Evangelica* 13 (1983) 29-40; *F.E. Vokes*, The Ten Commandments in the New Testament and in First Century Judaism, in: *Studia Evangelica* 5 (1968) 146-154.

example, of circumcision, feasts, dietary or purity regulations. James speaks of "pure religion" as being "unstained from the world" (1:27) which involves moral rather than ritual behavior. His notion of law, therefore, cannot be connected with any recognizable program for Jewish ethnic identity, nor with any "Judaizing" tendency within early Christianity.

Positively, *nomos* includes the Decalogue, two of which he cites according to the Septuagint version in 2:11. It also includes Lev. 19:18c which he quotes and calls the "royal law" (2:8). In the light of the rest of the New Testament, especially the Synoptics, it is appropriate to designate this as the law of the kingdom (cf. *basileia*, 2:5) announced and inaugurated by Jesus. The role of the law in James, however, is not exhausted by these citations. He calls for fulfilling the royal law "according to the scripture" (2:8) and makes use of the original context of Lev. 19:18 (19:12-18) throughout the letter to articulate dimensions of the love of neighbor. The image of the mirror (1:22-25) establishes the "perfect law of freedom" as something one can gaze at (*parakypsas*) and remain in (*parameinas*) by becoming a doer of the deed (*poiotes ergou*) in 1:25. As well, the Old Testament also contains examples the reader can see and imitate; Abraham and Rahab (2:20-25), Job (5:11), Elijah (5:17-18). These examples continue the theme established by the mirror image.

We can say then that *nomos* comprises a set of moral norms established by divine authority rather than ritual ones, and provides the basis for God's judgment on human behavior. It finds its focus in love of neighbor, but that love is explicated by specific attitudes and actions prescribed by the law as well as narrative examples for imitation as models of faith in action. There is the obedient works of faith shown by Abraham and Rahab, the endurance of faith demonstrated by Job, and the prayer of faith exhibited by Elijah.

The Jewish provenance of James has suggested to some commentators that the epistle was originally a Jewish writing "Christianized" by the insertion "Jesus Christ" (1:1; 2:1). While it is true that an explicit messianic character is muted and that James makes no obvious use of explicitly Christian elements, yet he makes use of Christian language that was developing within the Christian milieu. He shows affinity with the sayings of Jesus and in some of the wording resembles Matthew in

particular.⁵ The use of the sayings tradition is James' distinctive way of mediating the Jesus event.

James and Paul

Since the time of the Reformation the understanding and interpretation of James has been colored and distorted by comparison with Paul.⁶ Each author must, however, be appreciated in his own right and the fixation on the narrow issue of faith and works clouds the wide range of language and perception we find in James. As well, historical and theological bias in New Testament scholarship saw Paul as the most important witness of early Christianity. A welcome development in this century⁷ has been the investigation of the letter's literary and social connections to Judaism, making it a form of Jewish-Christian literature of the first Palestinian generation.

In spite of the obvious differences between Paul and James, they share a range of language revolving around justification, salvation, faith, law and works. Within this narrow range, James and Paul seem to be saying contradictory things, yet there is surprising agreement between them. Both employ a diatribal style of moral exhortation, both insist on the need to translate Christian identity into consistent moral behavior, but James never connects *erga* (works) with *nomos*. For him *ergon* is deed, moral effort as an expression of conviction which Paul also uses. Both are moral teachers against the Old Testament background of law, and both affirm law as the revelation of God's will and so as a norm of moral behavior. Paul also agrees that the "whole law" must be kept (cf. Gal. 5:3; Jas. 2:10). Both agree not only on the necessity of knowing, but also of keeping God's law (cf. Rom. 2:13; Jas.1:22-25), and that the requirement of this law is fulfilled in Lev.19:18 (cf. Rom. 13:18; Gal. 5:6; Jas. 2:8).

Both Paul and James give primacy to faith and that being heirs to the kingdom of God is a matter of God's promise (cf. Gal. 3:29; Jas. 2:5) and gift (cf. Rom. 3:24; 5:15; Jas. 1:17; 4:6). Nevertheless, it is precisely on these points that they have been thought to diverge (cf. Gal. 3; Rom. 4 and Jas. 2:18-26). It would seem that

⁵ *P.J. Hartin*, *James and the Sayings of Jesus* (JSNT.S, 47), Sheffield 1991; *M.H. Shepperd*, *The Epistle of James and the Gospel of Matthew*, in: *JBL* 75 (1976) 40-51.

⁶ Cf. *Johnson*, *James*, 140 ff.

⁷ *P.H. Davids*, *The Epistle of James in Modern Discussion*, in: *ANRW* II 25.5 (1988), 3621-3645.

the perceived contradiction between Paul and James on the question of justification has little or no basis. James' understanding of *nomos* in 2:18-26 has nothing to do with the issues Paul is confronting in Galatians and Romans. The climactic statement in Jas. 2:24: "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone," which appears to contradict Gal. 2:16: "...a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ...", does not in fact do so for both have different referents. In Galatians, Paul is opposing those Christians who want to "Judaize" and so his polemical attitude towards "works of the law" is concerned with this specific situation involving circumcision and the keeping of the ritual commandments. He opposes works of the law and faith in Christ as principles of justification before God. James, on the other hand, is making the point that faith, if it is genuine faith, must reveal itself in appropriate behavior. Despite all the resemblance in language, though, Paul and James do not appear to be talking to each other by way of instruction or correction. They are addressing concerns specific to each other.⁸

In 4:4 James offers a thematic center for his ethical and religious dualism. God and the world are opposed as objects of human allegiance and commitment - something his readers are expected to know already - and this allegiance is a matter of human choice. "World" is seen as a system of values, allied with wickedness, impurity and wealth, and opposed to true religion. To this James opposes friendship with God as his frame of reference for his moral exhortation. He does this to target the "double-minded" (*dipsychos*, 1:8; 4:8) who wants to have it both ways. The double-minded person is one who claims to be within the Christian community, but dallies with the values and standards of outsiders and so merits the prophetic condemnation of "adulteress" (4:4). James is critical of those inside the community who fail to live up to its standard and so he challenges them concerning the integrity of their own lives.

⁸ For other views on the relationship between Paul and James: *M. Hengel*, *Der Jakobusbrief als paulinische Polemik*, in: *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament* (G.F. Hawthorne-O. Betz, eds.), Grand Rapids 1987, 248-278; *H.P. Hamann*, *Faith and Works. Paul and James*, in: *Lutheran Theological Journal* 9 (1975) 33-41; *J.C. Lodge*, *James and Paul at Cross-Purposes? James 2,22*, in: *Bibl* 62 (1981) 195-213; *U. Luck*, *Der Jakobusbrief und die Theologie des Paulus*, in: *ThGl* 61 (1971) 161-79; *A.E. Trevis*, *James and Paul. A Comparative Study*, in: *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 12 (1969) 57-69; *R.B. Ward*, *James and Paul. Critical Review*, in: *Restoration Quarterly* 7 (1963) 159-164.

The Biblical Concept of Law

To the Israelite way of thinking, the concept of law (Torah) corresponds to the ordering of life communicated by God, the revelation through grace of the will of Yahweh first given at Sinai in the context of the covenant. The Greek *nomos* used in the Septuagint and in James comprises only a partial aspect of this rich biblical concept which includes prescription, teaching, instruction, ordering of life and the revelation of the will of God, as well as being associated with faith, works, sanctification of daily life and the fulfilling of God's will. We need to be aware of James' Old Testament background to assess properly his meaning and use of *nomos*.⁹

James, together with Jesus and Paul, is aware of the necessary link between faith and works already evident in the Old Testament wisdom tradition and in Deuteronomy. The law is central for the life of faith of both Jews and Jewish-Christians. It is not enough to be hearers, Christians must also be doers of the word of God (*poietai logou*, 1:22). Because of this, the law became a way of life for Israel, the foundation for a full and satisfying life. It was applied to the ever changing political and social circumstances throughout history and gave rise to various prescriptions, precepts, commandments and admonitions, some of which were eventually written down (e.g. Ex. 21-23; Dt. 12-26).

In Mt. 5:17-20 Jesus affirms the organic relationship between his teaching and the law. This relationship is expressed as fulfillment, thereby affirming the law rather than nullifying it. This abiding validity of the law as interpreted by Jesus serves as a reminder of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity as understood in the Matthean community. Matthew views the law's relationship to Jesus in terms of prophetic fulfillment, at times transcending the letter and even nullifying it in the very process of fulfilling it.¹⁰ What will bind Christians are the commands of Jesus, though in actual fact much of the content of Christian morality will remain Mosaic, summed up in the radical gift of self to God and neighbor both in inward thought and outward behavior. Jesus' interpretation of the law is both a deepening and at the same time a radicalization.

⁹ Cf. *W. Gutbrod*, *nomos*, in: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 4 (*G. Kittel*, ed.), Grand Rapids 1967, 1036-1091; *H. Frankemölle*, *La legge nella lettera di Giacomo*, in: *La legge nel Nuovo Testamento* (*K. Kertelge*, ed.), Torino, 191-196 (Translated from the German, *Das Gesetz im Neuen Testament*, Freiburg 1986).

¹⁰ Cf. *J.P. Meier*, *The Vision of Matthew*, New York 1979, 222-264.

For the Jews faith meant obedient behavior based on the law as the expression of God's covenant will to be lived out in daily social life. There was to be no dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, for there is only one faith seen as dedication to God through the observance of the law. Holiness consists in the congruence between belief and action. This Jewish self-understanding was taken over and accepted by Christians. James is aware that Christians are recipients of a gift (1:7) and of the wisdom that manifests itself in works of peace, mercy and good fruits which is also from above (3:17). Christianity for James, as for the rest of the New Testament, has both an indicative and an imperative. Both Matthew and James especially have common roots in Judaism and this has important consequences for the interpretation and understanding of *nomos* in James.¹¹

Exegesis of Relevant Texts

James introduces theological concepts without any explanation because it is presupposed that they are already well known to his hearers. One of these is the concept of law which can be fully appreciated only by analysis of the contexts in which it occurs. The concept *nomos* occurs five times in the unitary complex of 2:1-13 (2:8,9,10,11,12), once in 1:25 and three times in 4:11.¹² The concern of James in these passages is with the function of law as an indicator of practical deeds or as the criterion of divine judgment. In 4:11 it is taken up again to emphasize that man may not put himself above the law as judge, but must behave as one who keeps it. Yet James, unlike Paul, never speaks of the "works of the law," nor does he develop a theory of law. Where *nomos* appears it does not constitute the central theme, but serves only in function of it. Because this is so, James feels no need to justify his reduction of the law to exclude cultural and ceremonial precepts, not even in 2:10 where he speaks of keeping the whole law. The formal and thematic unity of the letter is not determined by the meaning of law, it is utilized only in function of his main theme (cf. 4:4).

¹¹ R. Fabris, La legge della libertà in Giacomo (Supplementi alla Revista Biblica, 8), Brescia 1977.

¹² Cf. Frankemölle, La legge, 191-196.

Verse 1:25 is embedded in 1:2-27¹³ which is an epitome of the opposites that James works with throughout the letter. Two ways of construing reality are contrasted: one that comes from God, the giver of gifts; one that comes from the world opposed to God whose outlook is duplicitous and envious. The contrast is between attitudes and behavior consistent with each outlook; between a sham religiosity of speech or appearance, and true devotion expressed in honest speech and action. There is a connection between right perception, right speech and right action. The letter is written for those who share the community's faith but who do so with a divided mind (*dipsychos*, 1:8), because they seek to live by two contradictory outlooks at one and the same time. James prepares his hearers for a fundamental choice of living out profession in practice. Nevertheless, there is no hint that it has anything to do with the ritual demands of the law, rather it has to do with the word of truth by which God has engendered the community and which was received in faith (cf. 1:18).

In 1:25 the law has now replaced the mirror as that into which a person gazes. The law is perfect (*teleios*, cf. 1:4, 17) since God himself is the source of every perfect gift, the law among them. Obedience to this law renders a person truly free. Using the metaphor of a mirror suggests that James envisages the law as containing as well examples of moral behavior (cf. 2:20-26; 5:10-11, 16-18). It is the person who gazes into, remains and does that is blessed. A person's life must conform to the truth one espouses. The mirror and so the law is a moral exemplar held up for contemplation, remembrance, imitation and emulation.

There is first of all the person who catches sight of his natural face in a mirror, but goes away and forgets what he looks like. This represents a negative moral judgment. He is like a man who has heard but failed to "remember" it in his behavior. There is now a shift in the metaphor; a contrast between glancing (*katanooonti*, 1:23) and gazing intently (*parakypsas*, 1:25) not at one's face, but into the perfect law of freedom which is connected with "the word of truth" (1:18). The word of God received with meekness is not only able to save, but also provides a guide to behavior. This guidance is given by the "implanted word" (1:21) with which God brought to birth the community. This word liberates from all forms of egoism enabling a person to really do the will of God, expressed in the law, taught by Jesus and summed up in love. The law does not enslave, it sets one free when

¹³ Johnson, James, 173-216; Frankemölle, La legge, 196-200.

obeyed. For James, it is not freedom from the law, but freedom in and through the law (*nomon teleion ton tes eleutherias*, 1:23; 2:12).¹⁴ The word of truth (the Gospel, the Christian proclamation) and the perfect law of freedom are here virtually synonymous. There is a connection between faith, word, law. The latter is given perfect expression in the law of the kingdom summed up in the command of love of neighbor both in Leviticus and in the teaching of Jesus.

Three times his readers will recall the image of the mirror as James presents models from the Old Testament for them to imitate: Abraham and Rahab exemplify obedient works of faith (2:20-26); Job, faith's patient endurance (5:10-11); Elijah, the power of the prayer of faith (5:16-18). All make essentially the same point - faith to be perfected must be enacted. The theme, therefore, is the opposition between hearing and doing, between speaking and action. James does not use the word "Gospel," but "word of God" which is identical, and God's activity is underlined in 1:18,21. To this work of God there ought to correspond the proper response of humans. The law as regards content is identical with the word of truth implanted by God. If a person wishes to arrive at true freedom he must receive this gift of God (1:21). This reception is an active one which shows itself in the concrete deeds of mercy that were traditional in Judaism (1:27).

The solemn prohibition and formal invocation of 2:1 clearly marks the beginning of a section just as 2:26 clearly comes to the conclusion that faith without works is dead. Ch. 2 then is a unified and coherent unit with characteristic features of diatribe together with examples, citations and questions as instruments of persuasion to move the hearer from one kind of behavior to another.¹⁵

Within this unit 2:1-7 treats of discrimination against the poor and rich in the assembly, 2:8-13 treats of the royal law, while 2:14-26 is a discussion on faith and works. There is then discrimination, love and works which make for a single argument concerning faith and its deeds. This faith is associated with Jesus, the Messiah (2:1) and given summary expression in the royal law of love of neighbor. Each of the three stages is inextricably connected with the next. The royal law in 2:8 picks up from the promise of the kingdom in 2:5; the mercy that overcomes judgment in 2:13 anticipates the merciless behavior towards the poor in 2:14-26.

¹⁴ F. Mussner, *La lettera di Giacomo*, Brescia 1970, 181-182 (Translation from the German, *Der Jakobusbrief*, Freiburg 1964).

¹⁵ Johnson, James, 217-52; Frankemölle, *La legge*, 200-206.

This behavior shows the futility of faith without works. The sin of partiality which transgresses the law of love in 2:9 corresponds to the prohibition of partiality in 2:1. The negative example in 2:2-3 to illustrate partiality matches the negative example of rejection of the poor by members of the community in 2:15-16. These refusals of hospitality are answered in turn by the positive example of Abraham and Rahab in 2:21-25.

The argument from beginning to end, therefore, concerns the necessity of living out the faith that is from Jesus Christ in appropriate deeds. James holds the community to its professed ideals and they cannot adopt the standards of the world that scorns the poor and treats them with contempt. If they are to claim the law of love associated with the preaching of Jesus and his kingdom, then they must live out that love and not practice discrimination against members of the community which the law itself forbids. This is the context for James' conclusion that faith without deeds is dead (2:26); it is also the context in which *nomos* occurs five times.

The proximity of royal (*basiliskos*, 2:8) to kingdom (*basileias*, 2:5) suggests that James has the law of the kingdom in mind when he speaks of "the royal law," i.e., the law as articulated and ratified by Jesus, the glorious Lord (2:1) whose name has been invoked over them (2:7). This law is expressed and summed up in Lev.19:18c and preached by Jesus, but it includes all the law (cf. 2:10) "according to the scripture" (*kata ten graphen*, 2:8). There is a verbatim quote of LXX Lev.19:18c and this follows naturally from those who love God in 2:5, thus filling out Christ's summary of the law in Mt. 22:37-39 which combines Dt. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18c. This commandment is "royal" because it is identified with Jesus' preaching of the kingdom. It is contrasted with partiality (2:9) which is convicted by Lev.19:15 and this clearly reveals that Lev.19:18c is not being kept.

"For whoever tries to keep the whole law" (2:10), the point made here is not a legalistic one, but whether the royal law is being kept in its entirety. Anyone who fails in "one point" is a transgressor of the law as a whole. The focus of interest then is the genuine and complete fulfillment of the law of love as enunciated in its scriptural context. This is explained in 2:11: "For he who said..." i.e., the Lawgiver, and James quotes two commandments following the order of the Septuagint. Obedience or disobedience to the law and commandments as a whole is unified by the fact that together they express the will of the Lawgiver who issues both commands (2:11). Breaking any one of them makes one a breaker of the law. James has in mind here the necessary connection between love and the refusal to practice partiality in judging (2:8-9). Those who judge others will themselves be

held to account by the very law of God itself. Since no doctrine of law is being presented here, James tacitly separates the ritual from the ethical laws. This is justified because the theme he is concerned with is the right and wrong practice of the faith in the social environment. If he highlights conduct contrary to the law which respect to the poor (2:5), this is because it was an urgent problem in the community. In a socially stratified community, Christians must examine their conduct to bring about a change. The commandment of love forbids behavior based on prestige and external appearance.

In the present context, then, the law is a unit of measure and one can quote its written formulation in the Old Testament. By referring to it as the law of liberty, James excludes every form of nomism and legalism. Thanks to his faith and the law that gives concrete expression to it, the Christian can arrive at true liberty and will be justified eschatologically (cf. 2:5). Love of God and love of neighbor, faithfulness to God's law in its totality, constitute one and the same thing for James as it did for Judaism and for Jesus.

The argument in this section of the letter concerns the consistency in living out professed convictions. The topic is not the law and the terms of its observance, but consistency in the practice of the faith. Those who live within a kingdom defined by the royal law cannot at the same time practice partiality. The law of love as articulated by its scriptural context prohibits favoritism (cf. Lev. 19:15).

In 2:14-26 the contrast between faith and deeds is the same as between hearing and doing mentioned earlier. If profession of faith does not come alive in acts of mercy towards the needy it is dead, and James cites the examples of Abraham and Rehab as examples of a faith demonstrated by action. As in the Old Testament, so here also there is no dichotomy between faith and works. True faith exists only as faith oriented to praxis which results particularly in works of mercy, otherwise it is barren. This type of faith needs the law to articulate concretely what is demanded in particular situations. In Deuteronomy there is a close connection between love of God and fidelity to his commandments. Faith and law for James are then but two sides of the same coin and we find a unity in these two aspects of the fundamental commandment: "those who love God" (*tois agaposin autou*, 2:5; 1:12), and love of neighbor explicitly quoted in 2:8.

Ch. 4:11 may be seen as representing some kind of starting point since 4:10 rounds of the call to conversion.¹⁶ It is in the form of a prohibition and its close connection to law and judgment makes it likely that James is alluding to the commandment of love. As well, it bears a thematic resemblance to Lev. 19:16. For a person to slander a brother means assuming the status of judge. But this slander is a judging of the law, because the law of love forbids it. It also assumes an arrogant superiority towards the law since such a person has appropriated the role which belongs to God alone as Lawgiver and Judge. Slander serves to lower another in order to exalt oneself and James identifies this form of arrogance: "you are not a doer of the law, but a judge."

Throughout James is treating of conduct that does not lead to solidarity in the community, but instead generates tensions between groups, wars and fights (cf. 4:1-10). In 4:13-5:6 he speaks with severity against the conduct of rich Christians to the extent of accusing them of homicide. Since proper conduct among Christians receives its fundamental motivation from the law as the revelation of the will of God, they should observe the law, not judge their neighbor which that same law forbids.

Conclusion

Although the law itself is not the main theme in the letter of James, it is introduced in function of faith, works to be done, freedom, perfection and integrity. There is no mention of specifically Jewish concerns. His purpose in introducing it at all is to help bring about a transformation of attitude and behavior in the recipients of his letter and so it assumes an ethical and social dimension.¹⁷

James counters the practice of partiality by laying down a theocentric foundation for true Christian fraternity and social ethics. He takes law as the revelation of the will of God, and Christians who make it the norm of their behavior will experience it as the perfect law of liberty. This law, though, must be taken in

¹⁶ Cf. *Frankemölle*, *La legge*, 206-09; *Johnson*, *James*, 291-310; *Mussner*, *Giacomo*, 266-69.

¹⁷ Cf. *Mussner*, *Giacomo*, 336-39; *W. Schrage*, *The Ethics of the New Testament*. Edinburgh, 1988, 281-293 (Translated from the German, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments*, Göttingen 1982).

all its complexity and integrity. The roots of his thinking is in Hebrew thought that sees faith and its practice as one. The link between law, faith and works is clear from the antitheses he uses. Only a faith demonstrated by action based on the law of God will be confirmed at the judgment. There is only one true faith, a faith that does, and this concept of faith is genuinely Hebrew. The practical expression of that faith for Christians, as for Jews, is in acts of love.

In the New Testament, however, the law no longer mediates man's relationship to God. This function is now occupied by Christ, the one mediator between God and man. This is not a general repudiation of the law, though, for the will of God is still set forth in it. Jesus recognizes it as such (Mk. 10:19). True obedience to the law is now rendered in discipleship of Jesus who rejected any appeal to the letter of the law which conflicts with the unconditional claim of God and neighbor. While God's will is expressed in the law, one may not appeal to it to evade the will of God as regards one's neighbor. Jesus thereby restored the law to its original meaning and function. The primitive Christian community regarded the observance of the ethical precepts of the law as a guideline and criterion for Christian ethics. For the love of God and neighbor is not by itself a sufficiently articulated ethical norm for guiding the Christian in the many complex circumstances of daily life. The Christian, therefore, will take seriously external law, not only for delineating the lower confines of love's demand, but also for positively highlighting the implications of that demand. While Paul takes issue with the salvific function of the law, he leaves untouched the social concept of the law upheld in Judaism. In this James is at one with Paul and the primitive Christian community. His understanding of law is derived from the Old Testament, radicalized in the teaching of Jesus and appropriated by him to spell out the true meaning of a faith that does as the only adequate Christian response to the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ.

James' grounding of his moral exhortations in theological rather than Christological principles provides a genuine bridge between Christians and Jews who share a belief in the One God, Creator, Lawgiver and Judge. He invites us to examine how faith in Jesus Christ can positively be affirmed as much in continuity with the Old Testament and its law as in discontinuity.