INTRODUCTION

THE SCHOLARLY STUDY OF JUDAISM
AND ITS SOURCES

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In 1927, George Foot Moore, in his now classic work, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, epitomized the Jewish religion of the ancient Mediterranean with the following words:

Of all the religions which at the beginning of the Christian era flourished in the Roman and Parthian Empires Judaism alone has survived, and it survived because it succeeded in achieving a unity of belief and observance among Jews in all their wide dispersion then and since. The danger of a widening gulf between Aramaic-speaking Jews and Greek-speaking Jews, which at the beginning of our era was not inconsiderable, was completely overcome....

The ground of this remarkable unity is to be found, not so much in a general agreement in fundamental ideas as in community of observance throughout the whole Jewish world. Wherever a Jew went he found the same system of domestic observance in effect. This was of especial importance in the sphere of what are now called dietary laws, because it assured him against an unwitting violation of their manifold regulations. If he entered a synagogue he found everywhere substantially the same form of the service with minor variations....The ‘Synagogue of Israel’ (*Keneset Israel*)—we should say the Jewish church—might with good right have taken to itself the title catholic (universal) Judaism in an inclusive sense, not, like catholic Christianity, with the implied exclusion of a multitude of sects and heresies.

This unity and universality, as has been said, was not based upon orthodoxy in theology but upon uniformity of observance.¹

In 1992, E.P. Sanders, in his massive *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-66CE*, summarized his view of ancient Judaism this way:

We have seen enough to justify speaking of orthopraxy in worldwide Judaism. The five areas of law just enumerated [regular worship of God, Sabbath observance, circumcision, purity observance—primarily dietary restrictions, support of the Temple] establish it, even while no one of them shows absolute uniformity. All over the world Jewish practice was based on the Bible, which constituted common ground. Fur-

ther, representative Jews from a vast area met one another in Jerusalem, and this too helped to promote certain forms of agreement. A Jew could travel from the westernmost part of the Empire to Mesopotamia, go to the synagogue, recognize at least aspects of the service, and perhaps even find a common language. If invited to a meal, he might find the combination of foods and the spices to be entirely new, but there would be no pork and the meat would not be bloody. On the sabbath a few customs might be strange, but the constantly burning lamps, the absence of toil, and the service of prayer and study would be, at least in general terms, the same as the customs which he left so many miles to the west.

Jewish solidarity became a great socioreligious fact, one that endured after the temple was destroyed.  

In contrast to these citations, E.R. Goodenough, in 1957 at the outset of his monumental *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, raised a series of questions about the sort of description of ancient Judaism proffered by Moore and again by Sanders.

First, he observed that the varied religious writings by Jews in antiquity do not indicate, or even suggest, one another.

Our evidence of post-Christian Judaism comes almost entirely through rabbinic channels. If we had only the traditions of the Jews themselves as they have survived through the ages, we should hardly have suspected the existence of a whole body of apocryphal and pseud-epigraphical literature....Some passage in rabbinic literature may refer to Josephus, but I have never seen an allusion to such a reference....no one would have suspected Philo's existence merely from rabbinic sources. If without the text of Philo and the references to him and his predecessors in Christian writings anyone had a priori said such a Judaism as Philo's had ever existed, he would have been laughed out of scholarly company.

Second, Goodenough raised the possibility that different Jewish literary sources represented different ways of being religious. He advocated, for example, an analysis of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha that would

bring out several distinct types of Judaism, for the Jews who wrote the apocalypses of Enoch and Adam had a quite different conception of the aim of religion from that of halachic Jews. When we add to these the gnomic Judaism of Sirach, the Zionistic Judaism of the first three books of Maccabees, and the magical or demonic Judaism of Tobit, it is clear that here are a wide variety of what I have to call types of religiosity, many of which may appear in a single individual, but none of which can be eliminated for the sake of simplicity from a total picture of the Judaism of the age.

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