

RESPONSA TO THE FIFTY-NINE THESES OF DAVID FLUSSER

by JOHN T. TOWNSEND

1. To assume that Jesus did not want to become a reformer assumes that we know more about the historical Jesus than many biblical scholars would claim to know. Also, what is meant here by "reformer"?
2. I am in essential agreement. It is true that the Pharisees were often hostile to each other. At one time there was a clash with swords and spears (yShab, 1:7, 3c). Such an incident is not surprising. We tend to argue most violently with those relatively close to our own positions.
3. Generally this thesis is true including all of the first part. Of course, Jesus did allow his disciples to be lax about washing of hands according to Mark 7:1-8; but the best evidence seems to date this practice from the age of Hillel and Shammai although some traditions assert that the practice stemmed from Solomon. Of course, outside Pharisaic circles laxness in this area was common; but for the Pharisees Jesus' laxness on the matter might have loomed large, especially if Neusner is correct in regarding table manners and the like as the main concern of the Pharisees in the time of Jesus.
4. True.
5. Generally correct; but, although the synoptic Gospels do not mention the Pharisees directly with the trial, according to Mt. 27:62 they are involved with Pilate on post-trial matters. Cf. also Jn. 18:3 according to which the Pharisees were involved with Jesus' arrest.
6. Flusser is partly correct, but there were other reasons for opposition between Christian and Jew. See the introduction to my Passion story. See also P. Winter, On the Trial of Jesus, who has a chapter on the development of anti-Judaism in the trial under threat of Roman persecution.
7. The question of whom to call Jewish Christians is not decided. They may be Ebionites; but these have non-Jewish beliefs, such as that Scripture lies (re Adam sinning) and that the Jewish Temple worship was evil per se. Archaeological evidence from Pella has found what appears to be a crucifix with a hawk faced goddess on it, and Pella was a center of Jewish Christianity according to Christian sources. It would seem that the Jewish Christians were under suspicion by the Jews ever since they refused to help the Jews in the first revolt against Rome. The last Jewish Christians were forced from the synagogues in the last decade of the first century through a curse against Christians inserted into the weekday liturgy. Of course I am not denying that a minor reason for Jewish and Christian estrangement was the Jewish failure to convert.
8. Note that in Gal. 2:1-10 Paul claims to be in essential agreement with the Jerusalem Church leaders.

9. No comment.
10. Is he serious?
11. Jews would not have held any special place if Paul had had his way. Note that the last sentence should read, "But all Jewry did not become Christian." To omit the word "all" is to imply that few, if any, Jews became Christian; and many seem to have done so.
12. Possibly partly true, but certainly only one factor among many. Cf. the introduction to my Passion story.
13. So Acts, contrary to Paul. Acts has Paul preaching first in the synagogues and converting the God-fearers. Paul (Gal. 2:7-9) denies that he does so.
14. There was a certain attraction that many eastern religions had in the Graeco-Roman world. Among these religions were Christianity and Judaism. In the case of Judaism circumcision had a certain revulsion as well as attraction. Cf. the case of the conversion of the royal family of Adiabene. At first the king tried conversion without circumcision and was assured that such a conversion was valid. Later a Pharisee insisted that he become circumcised. When he submitted to such a "barbaric" custom, there was an unsuccessful revolt.
15. According to the school of Shammai (probably), full proselytes were of inferior status before full Jews. There are many sayings insisting that proselytes are as good as born Jews, but the protest is so strong that one suspects that many disagreed.
16. Again Professor Flusser assumes that the Gospels accurately represent Jesus' attitude. The evidence seems to indicate that Jesus was far from pro-gentile, but the evidence is scanty.
17. No comment.
18. Acts 15 and the Noachic precepts are two different things. The Noachic precepts are essentially ethical, and the precepts in Acts 15 are ritual. They may represent demands that Jewish Christians placed upon gentile Christians with whom they had fellowship. This interpretation seems to fit their use in the Ebionite literature (= Pseudo-Clementines).
19. For a Pauline (?) attitude, see Col. 2:16, where the decision to keep some Jewish precepts is purely a personal matter.
20. Probably correct. In what sense did Paul believe Christians were free from what law? I believe that he still regarded Noachic and Mosaic laws as good ethical guides for gentile and Jew respectively. Neither were a means for salvation.
21. Perhaps generally true, but there may be a few exceptions.
22. I am not sure of what Professor Flusser means here.
23. I am by no means sure that Paul was against keeping Jewish precepts in general.

- He did not want gentiles circumcised. To do so would have made them Jews and subject to the Mosaic law. Also he did not want a Jewish Christian to avoid table fellowship with gentile Christians; however, there is here a certain precedent in the fact that Jesus commonly ate with publicans and sinners. Note that as an eastern religion Judaism had a certain attraction in the Graeco-Roman world.
24. How does he know that Luke was a God-fearer?
 25. The Christians did not have to promote abhorrence for Jewish Law. Although there was a certain attraction in many circles, in other places there was revulsion. Various pagan historians regard Antiochus Epiphanes IV as a hero for trying to hellenize the barbaric Jews. Incidentally there is some evidence that as late as the time of Origen, many eastern Christians had liturgies of Saturday as well as Sunday.
 26. Partly true, but see the introduction to my Passion story.
 27. Cf. above under # 7.
 28. Like other eastern religions, Christianity had a certain revulsion and attraction for the Graeco-Roman world.
 29. No comment.
 30. Perhaps true, as far as we can know that much about Jesus.
 31. There is plenty of Hellenism in early Christianity although much of this Hellenism may have come through Judaism. Cf. the two books of Saul Lieberman, Hellenism in Jewish Palestine and Greek in Jewish Palestine.
 32. The use of Paul's anthropological terms is hotly debated. I think that Paul often uses sarx as the equivalent of the Hebrew Yetser haRac. Cf. also Stendahl's article on conscience in HTR 56(1963), pp. 199-215; R. Jewett, Paul's Anthropological Terms (Leiden: Brill, 1971).
 34. No comment.
 35. Son of God may be a royal title, and it is doubtful whether Jesus applied Son of Man to himself as an eschatological title. Re Jesus equalling God, while the Philippian hymn has Jesus share God's name, I Cor. 15 :27f.) clearly states that Jesus is less than the Godhead.
 33. In rabbinic hermeneutic, most exegetical arguments are only valid in confirming tradition, not in refuting tradition. (This view holds for legal matters. The rabbis are far freer in dealing with non-legal matters.) The early Christians, such as Paul, seemed to use their traditions about Jesus in much the same way even for non-legal traditions, i. e. for them Jesus became the key for interpreting scripture.
 36. Jesus life and death, at least for Paul, is more than mere atonement. It makes the Christian a whole new person (Rom. 6).

37. Since Messiah was a Jewish royal title, it was dangerous for Christians to use this word as a description of Jesus. The title is too tied up with the person of Jesus for the early Church to drop it. (Jesus was the only messianic figure of his age to have this title.) Therefore, Paul makes it a personal name. Note that in many of Paul's sources the title Messiah is, not a personal name, but still a title.
38. Many such motifs fit equally well a non-Jewish background, especially in the Fourth Gospel. Cf also above, # 31.
39. In the first century and later, Judaism has much that could be regarded as non-monotheistic as some forms of Gnosticism. Also there is a certain influence of Persian dualism (devil-God dualism) both in the New Testament and in Jewish sources.
40. Note that many mystery religions did pretty well by stressing ^asalvation not unlike Christian soteriology. Note also that, while some apologists talked of a Jewish type monotheism, others did have a Christological emphasis.
41. There are many Jew-haters, e. g. Epistle of Barnabas and the Paschal Homily of Melito of Sardis.
42. I agree generally although many scholars would argue that Paul, for example, was quite Hellenistic. Also one should not forget the many Christians that we lump under the heading of "gnostic." They certainly were generally Hellenistic long before the end of the second century. They also generally tried to make use of Greek philosophy.
- 43-47. Not my period.
48. Perhaps in dialogue with some Christians, but not with me.
- 49-56. Others here can discuss these better than I.
57. I agree with the last sentence. Cf. my ^Passion story.
58. Others should lead the discussion here.
59. Again Professor Flusser is overly optimistic about discovering Jesus' message.