

Paul’s view of the law in Romans and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church’s (EOTC) use of the law as həggā ləbbunā, “həggā Orit” and “həggā wangle”

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Abstract

The EOTC’s view of the law of God as Həggā Ləbbunā (the law of heart), “Həggā Orit” (the law of Moses) and “Həggā Wangel” (the law of gospel) could be related to Paul’s view of the law in Romans as the law of Conscience, Torah and the law of the Spirit of life. The three expressions of the EOTC’s view of the law can be mapped with Paul’s view of the law as unwritten law of God (2:14–16), Torah (2:17–29) and the law of the Spirit of life (8:2–4) in Romans. The EOTC’s view of the law as “Həggā Ləbbunā” could shed light to better understand Paul’s view of the law as unwritten law given to all humanity (Rom. 2:12–14). Besides, “Həggā Orit” helps to better understand the law of Moses given to Israel with its universal implication because the Ethiopic tradition claims that Ethiopians have received the Torah through the Queen of Sheba. Further, “Həggā Wangel” helps to better understand the continuity between the Torah and the Gospel because the Ethiopic tradition understands that the law of Gospel is a continuation of the Mosaic law rather than making an antithesis of law and Gospel. Therefore, the EOTC’s view of the law contributes to better understand Paul’s view of the law as an alternative reading from the tradition of Ethiopic perspective.

Keywords

Paul and the law; the law in Romans; EOTC; Ethiopic Tradition; Həggā Ləbbunā; Həggā Orit; Həggā Wangel

Introduction

Paul's use of the law of God is disputable in the New Testament scholarship and the EOTC's¹ interpretation of the law is also controversial in different ways. In the midst of various perspectives on Paul's use of the law and the EOTC's interpretation of the law, there is no significant research on these two domains in a comparative analysis. Even though EOTC is a historical Church with a significant contribution to the existence and development of Ethiopian Christianity,² its interpretation of the law as a contribution to better understand Paul's view of the law has not been studied.³ The major difference of the EOTC from the Evangelical Churches is the practice of the law of God. The paper explores the extent of the EOTC's interpretation of the law as "Høgga Læbbunā" (the law of heart), "Høgga Orit" (the law of Moses) and "Høgga Wangel" (the law of Gospel) to better understand Paul's view of the law in Romans as an alternative reading in the Ethiopic tradition. The paper is part of ongoing doctoral research in its initial stages.

The article attempts to answer the question to what extent the EOTC's interpretation of the law as "Høgga Læbbunā", "Høgga Orit" and "Høgga Wangel" could lead to a better understanding of Paul's view of the law of Conscience, Torah, and the law of the Spirit in Romans? To this end, the paper will point out the background on Paul's view of the law and the EOTC. In addition, it will demonstrate Paul's view of the law in Romans with a special emphasis on Romans 7–8, focusing on 8:2–4 for two important reasons: The first is that the expression of the law climaxes in this part, connecting the term law with the spirit. The second reason is that Paul's different uses of the law are stated here. Finally, the article will attempt to

- 1 EOTC is the abbreviated form of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church which is an ancient and historical church in Ethiopia that contributed in different ways in the country.
- 2 Ephraim Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahido Church* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 2012). See also John T. Pawlikowski, "The Judaic Spirit of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church: A Case Study in Religious Acculturation." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 4, no. 3 (1971): 178–99.
- 3 The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church has a long-standing belief of the law in three ways as "Læbbuna", "Høgga Orit" and "Høgga Wangel". The words "Læbbuna", "Høgga Orit" and "Høgga Wangel" which are stated above are Ge'ez phrases which could be translated as the law of Conscience/Heart, the law of Moses/Torah, and the law of Gospel.

show EOTC's interpretation of the law as an alternative reading enabling a better understanding of Paul's view of the law in Romans.

Background of Paul's view of the law and the EOTC

Paul's use of the law in Romans, as well as the practice of the law of God in EOTC, is debatable.⁴ Paul's expression of the law seems positive and in other places seems negative. The law is demonstrated as the law of God (Rom 7:22, 25; 8:7) given to Israel (Rom 3:2; 9:4), containing his will (Rom 2:17, 18), and witnessing his righteousness (3:21).⁵ The law is also stated as holy, good and of the spirit (7:12, 14, 16) having the message of love (Rom 13:8–10) with the embodiment of knowledge and truth (Rom 2:20).⁶ It is not abolished, rather it is established through faith (Rom 3:31), that it will be fulfilled through those who live according to the Spirit (Rom 8:4).

On the other hand, Paul's negative expression seems to be contradictory because he presents the law that brings wrath (Rom 4:15), sin (7:7) and death (7:9–11; 5:12–21). It is also stated as the means for the production of transgression (4:15; 5:20), enslaves and condemns to death (2:12; 8:1, 3), and as a result it is identified with sin and death (7:23, 25; 8:7).⁷ The law in Romans is presented alongside its transformation in Christ to function in harmony with the Spirit.⁸ In addition, the expression of the law as it relates to Gentiles, Jews, and Christians in God's redemptive history is stated in different parts of Romans (2:14–16; 2:17–29 and 8:4).

4 Paul's view of the law is the most controversial issue in New Testament studies. See Frank Thielman, *Paul and the law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1994), 165; Peter Stuhlmacher, "Paul's Understanding of the law in the letter to the Romans," *SEA* 50 (1985): 102; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 539 and Chul Woo Lee, "A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Romans 7: With Special Attention to the law." Ph.D. diss., University of Stellenbosch, 2001, 1.

5 Brice L. Martin, *Christ and the law in Paul*, Supplements to *Novum Testamentum*, v. 62 (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1989), 19.

6 Martin, *Christ and the law*, 19.

7 Marin, *Christ and the law*, 19.

8 Eckhard J. Schnabel, *law and Wisdom from Ben Sira to Paul: A Tradition Historical Enquiry into the Relation of law, Wisdom, and Ethics*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 16 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 290.

There are different views on how Paul views the law in Romans. For instance, the law in Romans 8:2–4 is interpreted differently. Leo Morris understands it as the “principle.”⁹ Cranfield observes the first part as the authority working in believers,¹⁰ and the second half as the working principle through the power of sin.¹¹ Fitzmyer understands the law of the spirit of life as the “dynamic principle of new life”¹² and the law of sin and death as “a figurative sense ‘principle.’”¹³ Käsemann understands the law of the spirit of life as the “Spirit himself.”¹⁴ Barrett perceives the first half like Käsemann but considers the second half as Mosaic.¹⁵ Others understand both Laws in Romans 8:2–4 as the Mosaic law with its continued function in the era of Christ.¹⁶

The EOTC’s tradition and its practice of the Old Testament laws has been seen differently by different scholars.¹⁷ According to Paulos Milkias, many Beta Israelites who practice the Old Testament laws accepted Christianity and they introduced the Hebraic practices into the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church.¹⁸ Milkias points out that the introduction of Hebraic practice in the Ethiopian church promulgated the idea that “Ethiopians have become the legitimate successors to the Jews who have failed to accept Jesus as the true Messiah.”¹⁹ However, Stephen Kaplan argues against this

9 Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapid, Mich., Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 300.

10 C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 376.

11 Cranfield, A Critical, 376.

12 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 482–3.

13 Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 483.

14 Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 215.

15 C.K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans: Blake’s New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1991), 146.

16 N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1991), 193–219.

17 Abba Paulos Tzadua, *The Fetha Nagast: The law of the Kings*, ed. Peter L. Strauss (Durham, N.C: Carolina Academic Press, 2009). See also Fetha Negest Amharic and Ge’ez, 384–385. Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450–1950* (Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 1994), 16–17.

18 Paulos Milkias, *Ethiopia* (Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 173.

19 Milkias, *Ethiopia*, 173.

position pointing out that Beta Israelites developed their practices from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church because they emerged from the church by abandoning Orthodox Christianity.²⁰ Amaleletch Teferi disagrees with Kaplan's view in support of Milkias arguing that the Ethiopian church has developed its practice from the Beta Israel.²¹ Teferi comments in this regard, "if following the theory developed in the model that the Beta Israel have developed their religion from Ethiopian Christianity, then one should find the practice of sacrifices in both religions."²² In the presence of diverse views on the Ethiopian church tradition, the view of the law in relation to Paul's view is not properly addressed.

Paul raises the issue of the law in relation to Gentiles (2:14–16), Jews (2:17–29) and the Christian community (8:2–4) in three different ways.²³ In line with this understanding, the EOTC holds a view of the law as "Høgga Løbbunā", "Høgga Orit" and "Høgga Wangel". The practice of the law is different from other Christian denominations because the EOTC claims that the Ethiopians have been worshipping God even before the giving of the Mosaic law.²⁴ According to Ayalew Tamiru, Ethiopians worshipped God in the era of three laws; first by "Høgga Løbbunā" (the law of conscience); next by "Høgga Orit" (the law of Moses) and finally by "Høgga Wangel" (the law of Gospel). In spite of these views about the practice of the EOTC, in relation to its use of the law as different from other uses, it has not been sufficiently addressed. In addition, the EOTC's interpretation of the law as "Høgga Løbbunā", "Høgga Orit" and "Høgga Wangel"²⁵ in relation to Paul's

20 Stephen Kaplan, "The Invention of the Ethiopian Jews: Three Models." *Cahiers des Etudes africaines* 132 (1993): 645–58. See also Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia: From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1992), 8–9.

21 Amaleletch Teferi, "About the Jews Identity of the Beta Israel" (173–192) in Emanuela Trevisan Semi and Tudor Parfit, *The Jews of Ethiopia: The birth of Elite* (Routledge, 2005), 185.

22 Teferi, "About Jews Identity," 185

23 Leander E. Keck, *Romans*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 79.

24 Ayalew Tamiru, *The Religion of Ethiopia in the Three Laws*, 2nd ed. (Addis Ababa, 2011), 15.

25 Tamiru, *The Religion*, 15, 17, 57 and 79. Ayalew Tamiru is the prominent scholar in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church. "Høgga Løbbunā" means the law of the heart (conscious) which considers that the Ethiopian before the law of Moses has the unwritten law. In addition to this, "Høgga Orit" is the law of Moses which is written

view of the law in Romans is not studied and addressed by any scholars. The Ethiopian Orthodox understanding of the law should be studied through different ancient and modern literature that has shaped the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.²⁶

Paul's view of the law in Romans

Paul's view of the law in Romans is stated in different ways in connection with the Gentiles (2:12–13), non-Christ believing Jews (2–3; 9:30–10:4), and the followers of Christ (Christians) (8:2–4 and 13:8–10). Paul points out that Gentiles hold the law of God written on their hearts while non-Christ believing Jews have entrusted the written law of God and Christians' practice the law of faith (the law of Spirit of life).²⁷ The Old Perspective on Paul (OPP) views the law of God in Romans as considering that Paul disagrees with Jews use of the law and proclaims the termination of the Torah. However, the New Perspective on Paul (NPP) understands that Paul favours the continuity of the law of God in the era of the New Testament. Even others interpret Paul in the context of Rabbinic Judaism like Radical New Perspective (RNPP).²⁸

The NPP is the outlook centred on Paul's theology with the special emphasis on the understanding of the law, works of the law, righteousness and other related issues.²⁹ The notion about the view of the law before the

and given to the people of God that they will be led. The EOTC believes that the Ethiopians have this law next to Israel in the time of OT. Further, "Hägga Wangel" is the law of Christ that is given in the time of the New Testament through Jesus Christ as an addition to the former law. These ideas are accepted notions in the Church and clearly stated by the church's recognized Scholars. For instance, Aba Melketsedek in his book of Christian Ethics argued the expression of the law in three chronological ways. Aba Melketsedek, *Christian Ethics* (Addis Ababa, 1983 E.C.).

- 26 Miguel F. Brooks, *Kebra Nagast (The Glory of Kings): A Modern Translation* (Lawrenceville and Asmara: The Red Sea Press, 2000). See also Tzadua, *The Fetha Nagast*.
- 27 Leander E. Keck, *Romans*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 79.
- 28 Mark D Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm, eds., *Paul within Judaism Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015).
- 29 Guy Prentiss Waters, *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul: A Review and Response* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P & R Pub, 2004), 1.

emergence of the NPP was seen in different ways. Among the views, the OPP considers the abolishment of the OT law in the time of the NT and the main text for this argument is Romans 6:14.³⁰ The Lutheran reading of Paul and the law is mostly understood in an antithetical way, with law and grace often contrasted. However, those like Krister Stendahl questioned the existing reading of Paul and started an attempt to read against the reading of the Reformation.³¹ The Reformation makes two important observations on Paul's deliberation. The first one is that Paul's theology centres on individual justification. The second one is that Paul's opponents are legalistic Jews, who Luther and Calvin likened with the Catholicism of the time.³²

Sanders' book titled *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* was a ground-breaking book that introduced a new paradigm deviating from tradition.³³ For example, Sanders new paradigm, known as "covenantal nomism," argued that the covenant is the basis for the place of God's people in God's salvific plan. It also maintains that the covenant requires responsible obedience and further provides for atonement for transgression.³⁴ According to Sanders, covenantal nomism is the belief of the Jews that they are chosen by God who establishes a covenant, with the law as a way of staying in it.³⁵ Sanders claims that the salvation of Israel is based on grace, forgiveness, and the covenant of God. As a result, he views the continuity of the law from the Old Testament to the new era as witness to its significance. However, he attests that the law plays no role as a requirement for salvation.³⁶

30 Walter C Kaiser Jr, "God's Promise Plan and His Gracious law." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33, no. 3 (September 1990): 289–302, 290.

31 Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," in *Paul Among the Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 78–96.

32 F. David Farnell, "The New Perspective on Paul: Its Basic Tenets, History and Presuppositions." *The Master's Seminary Journal* 16, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 189–243, 192.

33 E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

34 Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian*, 75.

35 Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian*, 422.

36 E.P. Sanders, *Paul, the law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 17.

Concerning the different expressions of the law in Rom 7–8, which he raises as states of the law, Sanders argues that “[i]t is a law of sin and death for those under sin, but a law of the Spirit of life for those in the Spirit.”³⁷ The law of the Spirit of life in Rom 8:2 is the Torah because a clear distinction is made between obedience to the law which is possible to Christians in 8:4 but not for non-Christians who, as seen in 7:14–25, are set free according to 8:2b.³⁸ However, Sanders fails to convincingly demonstrate “the law of sin”, “another law” and “the law of sin and death” (7:22–23, 25; 8:2) which he interprets as Torah. This expression of the law as the Torah is not readily substantiated both by the historical or literary context. In this view, beyond the continuation of the law in the era of the NT, interpreting the whole expression of the law in Romans as Torah is not supported by the whole context of Romans and the Pauline corpus.

James Dunn, a prominent scholar in the NPP coined the interpretation of the law in Romans following the new paradigm. Dunn has written many books in the new paradigm diverging from the Lutheran view of Paul concerning Justification, law, works of the law and related issues. Dunn is influenced by Sanders work Paul and Palestinian Judaism and accepted “covenantal nomism” claiming that entrance into the covenant is through God’s election and grace while the relationship is maintained through obedience.³⁹ Dunn also argues that the purpose of the law of Moses is not aimed to show Israel the way to obey, rather it aims to serve as a social function that distinguishes the way they live from other nations.⁴⁰

Dunn supports the view that the different expression of the law in Rom 7–8 is the Torah situated in two different domains namely the domain of Christ and the domain of Adam. He argues, “... the law caught in the nexus of sin and death, where it is met only by σάρξ, is the law as γράμμα, caught in the old epoch, abused and destructive (2:28–29 and 7:6); but the law rightly understood, and responded to ἐν πνεύματι οὐ γράμματι is pleasing to God

37 Sanders, *Paul, the law*, 98.

38 Sanders, *Paul, the law*, 98–99.

39 James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 185 (rev. ed., Grand Rapid, Mich: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008), 6.

40 Dunn, *The New Perspective*, 16.

(2:29).⁴¹ According to Dunn, Rom 8:2–4 has an eschatological sense and “[t]he law of the Spirit is the eschatological law.”⁴² Therefore, the Torah, in the sphere of Christ functions for its original intended purpose, which is helping the people of God to stay in the covenant.

Dunn’s view of the law has received support from some scholars and attempted to settle the seeming contradictions in Paul’s presentation. However, his interpretation of both expressions of the law in Romans 7–8 and elsewhere as the Torah is unpersuasive because “the law of sin and death” in relation to “the law of sin” and “another law” (7:23, 25) could not refer to the Torah. The law in these verses is the law of sin that stands against the law of God that deceives humanity. Besides, Dunn interprets the law of conscience and the law of the Spirit of life as the Torah. However, the literary and the historical context of Romans cannot prove this claim. Therefore, interpreting every expression of the law as Torah in 7–8 and elsewhere in Romans is problematic that demands better research for the better understanding of Paul’s view of the law in Romans.

N.T. Wright is also one of the proponents of the NPP advocating a reading that also differs from the traditional reading of Paul on issues of justification, the law, the works of the law and other related issues. According to Wright, the language of justification could be demonstrated in three grid expressions which are covenant, law-court and eschatology.⁴³ Wright’s Israel-centred exegesis led him to argue strongly for the continuation of the exile of Israel until the coming of the Messiah, with the end of the exile, in his view, being the restoration of Israel through her Messiah.⁴⁴

Wright reads Pauline theology in the view of the NPP with his reinterpretation of early Christianity in light of the background of Judaism showing continuity with Monotheism, Israel, the law and others

41 James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8: Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, 2002), 416.

42 Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 417.

43 N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1997), 117–118.

44 N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 4, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 139–162.

from Judaism to Christianity.⁴⁵ According to Wright, although the law is expressed in both negative and positive ways it is an important element towards understanding Pauline theology.⁴⁶ Wright points to the role of the law in Pauline explanation which establishes the Torah as both the initial seal and the final goal.⁴⁷ Therefore, the law exposes the transgression of Adam directly to Israel so that sin would be seen clearly.⁴⁸ Wright similarly understands the law in Romans in a similar manner as that articulated and argued by Dunn. He argues for the continuity of the law in the era of Christ with its vindication in Christ because Christ is the fulfilment of the covenant. Wright also fails to interpret the meaning of the law in Rom 7–8 both as the Torah because interpreting “the law of sin and death” together with “the law of sin” and “another law” of 7:23, 25 similarly is difficult to maintain historically and textually. The primary shortcoming of this argument is that Wright does not properly interpret the meaning of the law because of his one-sided methodology which is the “story of Israel approach.”⁴⁹

The issue of Gentiles in Romans 2:12–16 is not addressed because some scholars claim that Gentiles referenced here are Gentiles who are saved without faith in Christ, while others view unbelieving Gentiles as having some part of the law, while still a third group views Gentile Christians as fulfilling the law because of their Christianity.⁵⁰ According to Wright, Gentiles here refers to Gentile Christians, and the law here refers to the Christian experience of the law.⁵¹ However, the expression of the law in this context might show unwritten law as it relates to the revelation of God. The

45 N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1991), 13–16.

46 Wright, *The Climax*, 16.

47 N.T. Wright, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” in *Pauline Theology, Volume III: Romans*, ed. David M. Hay and E Johnson Elizabeth (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 52.

48 Wright, “Romans and the theology,” 52.

49 N. T. Wright, “The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *Acts, Introduction to Epistolary Literature, Romans, 1 Corinthians*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 10 of NIB (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 577.

50 Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1996), 148–149.

51 N. T. Wright, *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978–2013* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 150–151.

preceding context, Romans 1:18–32, deals with the revelation of God for all humanity and it refers to the commandment of God for Adam (humanity). In Romans 1:18–32, with the special emphasis of v. 32, there is an echo of the Genesis narrative. The law of Romans 2:15 in relation to non-Christ believing Gentiles might go with this development. The expression does not show Gentile Christians because there is no clue that it could show Christians here. The judgment here needs to be read in relation to Romans 1:18 that parallels the revelation of righteousness and judgement. Peter Stuhlmacher is correct in pointing out that Paul's argument in this context in relation to Gentiles is that God's law is written in their heart because God created humanity and gave the law in the time of creation through their conscience while they critically think they can understand the will of God.⁵²

Paul's expression of the law in relation to Gentiles in the context of Romans 2 needs to be read closely with the texts 2:14, 15, 26 and 27. The text 2:14 says "do the things of the law" ($\tauὰ \tauοῦ \nόμου$) in addition to this in 2:15 says demonstrate the work of the law ($\tauὸ \\xiργον \tauοῦ \nόμου$). Further, in the context Paul critiques the Jews for their disobedience while the uncircumcised keep the decrees of the law ($\tauὰ \deltaικαιώματα \tauοῦ \nόμου$) (2:26). In connection with this verse, Paul also shows that the uncircumcised who are Gentiles are obeying the law ($\piεριτομῆς \piαραβάτην \nόμου$ Rom. 2:27). This whole argument might show that Paul has in mind that Gentiles are also in the scope of God and using his universal law while in the context of Israel given to them in their context.

Against the Jewish centred reading of Wright and others, Engberg-Pedersen demonstrated Paul in the background of the Greco-Roman world. He interprets Paul on first-century stoic philosophical orientation. Engberg-Pedersen has worked out his book extensively on an interpretation of Paul and his message in light of the background of Stoic philosophy in a naturalistic reading.⁵³ He frames his argument pointing that Sanders and Räisänen challenged the traditional theological reading of Paul on specific

52 Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 43.

53 Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Westminster: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 2.

issues, namely Jewish law and Judaism. However, according to Engberg-Pedersen, these scholars did not develop an alternative reading of Paul on Christ, the law, Gentile, and Judaism.⁵⁴

Engberg-Pedersen interprets Romans 7:7–25 pointing out that the section deals about the problem of living under the Mosaic law in cognitive terms.⁵⁵ However, his analysis on the issue of self in Romans 7–8 is not sufficiently addressed, though he can structure it interestingly.⁵⁶ His articulation of using his model I-X-S on the analysis of Romans 7:7–25 and Romans 8:1–13 is rewarding because it is significantly helpful to understand Paul's intended meaning. However, the presence of Jewish intertextuality on Paul's use of the domain of Adam (7:7–25) and the domain of Christ (8:1–13) is not dealt with properly.⁵⁷ Further, Enberg-Pedersen reads Romans 8:2 in the context of the stoic philosophical orientation using his I-X-S model. However, the problematic phrases in the context of Romans 7–8 are not addressed. The meaning of the law of sin and death, the law of the Spirit of life and freedom in Romans 8:2 is not answered.

Engberg-Pedersen's philosophical reading of the law of Romans 7–8 is not sufficient to interpret Paul and his theology because he left out the intertextuality of Jewish scripture in Romans 7–8. On the other hand, Wright's and others' reading of Paul solely in the rabbinic Judaism context is not sufficient to understand Paul and the law. Bruce Chilton correctly argues pointing out that the background of Paul's thinking could not be exclusively identified as Jewish covenantal nomism or stoic philosophical orientation, but Paul's thinking represents both backgrounds.⁵⁸ Chilton argues that "Paul represented a fascinating hybrid of Judaism and stoicism."⁵⁹ If this view is accepted, Paul's presentation of the law could be better studied considering the two backgrounds. The EOTC contains significant Judaic elements as a religious practice and a philosophical

54 Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*, 3.

55 Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 77.

56 Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self*, 168.

57 Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self*, 178–179.

58 Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Paul: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 216.

59 Chilton, *Rabbi Paul*, 216.

understanding of the law. In the Ethiopic tradition, we can find both the Judaic religious influence and the philosophical understanding of someone like Zara Yeaqob, an Ethiopic philosopher.⁶⁰ The Judaic and philosophical orientation in the Ethiopic tradition could be a significant contribution for a better understanding of Paul's view of the law as an Ethiopic reading of Paul, the interpretation of the law of God in light of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church interpretation could be a better alternative as one indication of theology from below because of the parallel expression of the law are well defined and practiced in the Ethiopian church tradition.

The law in Rom 7–8 is complex and Paul develops his argument based on themes found in 7:5 and 6 and demonstrated in 7:7–25 and 8:1–17 respectively. Paul seems to be referring to two kinds of laws which are the law of God and the law of Sin. The law of God in this context seems also to be demonstrated in three different ways in relation to Adam/humanity (7:7–13), non-believing Jews (7:14–25) and Christians (8:2–4). The continual validity of the law of God in the context of 7:7–25 and 8:2–4 is clear.⁶¹ However, different expressions of the law in 7:22–25 need to be closely analyzed to understand the issue(s) at stake. Cranfield insists that since the law in 7:23a is identified as being different from the law of God, this possibly demonstrates as τὸν νόμον in 7:21 and “... the presence of τοῦ θωοῦ after τῷ νόμῳ in v. 22 suggests the probability that νόμος has just been used with a different reference.”⁶² Therefore, he contends “be a law” in 7:21, “another law” in 7:23 and “the law of sin” in 7:25 are construed as a principle. Cranfield is correct in identifying the νόμος τοῦ νοός μου with the νόμος τοῦ θεοῦ of 7:22 and identifying the ἔτερος νόμος with the νόμος τῆς ἀμαρτίας, but interpreting the latter expressions metaphorically as power becomes inconceivable because it is the law that stands against the law of God.⁶³

60 Claude Summner, *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy* (Los Angeles, California: Adey Publication Company, 1994).

61 Neil Elliott, The Rhetoric of Romans: Argumentative Constraint and Strategy and Paul's Dialogue with Judaism. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 45* (Sheffield: JSOT Pr, 1990), 245.

62 Cranfield, *A Critical*, 361.

63 Cranfield, *A Critical*, 364.

On the other hand, Dunn understands the negative expressions as referring to instances where the law was used by sin (7:8, 11, 13) and where the positive expressions are acknowledged as good (7:16, 22).⁶⁴ However, Toews demonstrates the negative expression of the law describes the experience of the defeated self that is enslaved and dependent on “Sin’s creation of an anti-law.”⁶⁵ Toews’s argument is convincing because the law is expressed in this context both as the law of God and Sin’s law. The negative expression of the law could be anti-law created by Sin to deceive humanity just like the serpent in Gen 3 deceived Adam (humanity) bringing another anti-voice that stands against God’s commandment. Satan also tempted Jesus creating another truth-like idea that stands against the truth of God (the law of God) (Matt 4:1–11). As Fitzmyer contends ἀμαρτία is the personified wicked power as a result of Sin (with capital S) which the enemy of God uses to alienate humanity from God.⁶⁶ Paul describes Sin, as acting to attempt much like Satan does (7:20) and performing its activity using its own law to deceive, leading to sin and death. As a result, Sin’s law is presented as “another law”, “the law of sin” and “the law of sin and death” (7:23, 25; 8:2).

The law that is related to Adam is the unwritten law given to Adam and later for humanity (7:7–13). Paul’s argument seems to indicate that prior to the Mosaic law, the law of God is present and is written in every person’s heart because God has given the commandment to humanity (Gen 2:7–25) to live by, but the serpent uses the counterfeit law which enslaves and leads to death (Gen 3:1–22). However, the law that is demonstrated in Rom 7:14–25 is the Torah that is given to Israel while the law of the Spirit of life in Christ is the law of God exercised in the domain of Christ in the new eschatological era (8:2–4).

The “law of the Spirit of life in Christ” refers to the Torah in the domain of Christ whereas the “law of sin and death” refers to the counterfeit law in the domain of Adam. The first expression of the law in Rom 8:2–4 is the law of God – the Torah (8:2a; 8:3; 8:4) as it is affirmed by the literary context of Romans (1–4; 5–8; 9–11). The second law referenced is the counterfeit law

64 Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 395.

65 John E. Toews, *Romans*. Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottdale and Waterloo: Herald Press, 2004), 202.

66 Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 411.

that enslaves humanity (8:2b) as confirmed from the immediate literary context (7:7–25). The two expressions of the law in Rom 8:2 refer to the law of two domains; the first gives freedom and the second enslaves. For those who are in the sphere of Christ, the law is the law of life-giving freedom from the counterfeit law. However, those who are in the sphere of Adam are deceived by Sin's law (the law of sin) leading to sin and death. The expression of the law in 8:3–4 is the law of God as it relates to the person in the domain of Adam (v.3) and as it relates to the person in the domain of Christ (v.4).

The law of God in the context of Rom 7–8 is demonstrated as unwritten law, the Torah and the law of spirit of life which could be mapped with the EOTC's view of the law of God as *Hægga Læbbunā* (the law of heart; 2:14–16; 7:7–13), “*Hægga Orit*” (the law of Moses; 2:17–29; 7:14–25) and “*Hægga Wangel*” (the law of gospel; 8:2–4).

The Ethiopic view of the law to understand Paul as an alternative

The EOTC's interpretation of the law as “*Hægga Læbbunā*” (the law of the heart), “*Hægga Orit*” (the law of Moses) and “*Hægga Wangel*” (the law of Gospel) is articulated in various literature of the EOTC. EOTC is the ancient church in Ethiopia with rich interpretive methods in the process of applying the biblical texts. The common methodology in the church is called the *Andəmta* method. *Andəmta* is a method of interpretation used to produce interpretive commentaries. The *Andəmta* interpretation is attested by different scholars. Keon-Sang An has produced a groundbreaking work in his research engaging on the Biblical interpretation of the EOTC.⁶⁷ The *Andəmta* commentaries are very common in the EOTC context and these commentaries are kinds of exegetical works that show the interpretation of biblical texts word by word.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Keon-Sang An, *An Ethiopian Reading of the Bible: Biblical Interpretation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church*, American Society of Missiology Monograph Series, vol. 25 (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

⁶⁸ Mersha Alehegn, “Features of *Andəmta*: The Ethiopian Hermeneutics in Amharic”, *Journal of Ethiopian Church Studies* No 2 (August 2012): 114–24. 115.

The Andəmta interpretation of Romans 2:14–15 clearly shows that Gentiles have the law of God and this law is written on their heart (Həgga Ləbbunā). Based on the law written on their heart (Həgga Ləbbunā), they developed the rule of the law for their community.⁶⁹ This interpretation assumes that God has given for every person unwritten law before the written Mosaic law was given to Israel and this is a notion developed in various literature. Ayalew Tamiru also significantly argues that Ethiopian worshipped God by “Həgga Ləbbunā”. He strongly argues that from the beginning Ethiopians did not cease to worship God.⁷⁰ According to Tamiru, the worship of God by “Həgga Ləbbunā” is like the Angels worshipping God without any written law referencing Enoch 19:22.⁷¹ On the other hand, in the Ethiopian church tradition, there is also a philosophical reading of the law as unwritten law. A philosophical reading of the law is developed by the Ethiopian philosopher Zara Yaeqob in the Ethiopian church tradition context. Zara Yaeqoba argues that human beings have the law while they were created by God and this is continuously practised by reason.⁷² According to Zara Yaeqob, the law of nature is considered as human reason which God has given with a direct connection to the will of God for humanity.⁷³ Zara Yaequb views the law of God on the human heart as the law of nature and it is foundational for the law of Moses and the law of Gospel because he points both to the Decalogue of the Pentateuch and the six precepts of the Gospel as the will of the Creator.⁷⁴ In the Ethiopic tradition the view of the law as “Həgga Ləbbunā” is multifaceted and a very significant aspect of the law which enables the people to worship God.

In addition to this, the expression of the law as “Həgga Orit” (the law of Moses) is an important aspect of the interpretation of the law in the EOTC. Even though the tradition considers that the law of Moses was given to Israel, the law is not limited to Israel but the church claims that Ethiopians

69 Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, *Saint Paul's Book: Reading with interpretation* (Addis Ababa: Tinsea Publishing, 2015), 44.

70 Tamiru, *The Religion of Ethiopia*, 17.

71 Ibid., 17.

72 Sumner, *Classical*, 240.

73 Ibid., 241.

74 Ibid., 242.

have received the law of Moses as “Høgga Orit” through Queen of Sheba.⁷⁵ Further, in the Ethiopic tradition, it is considered that the Ark of the Covenant is transferred from Zion of Israel to Zion of the Axum in Ethiopia.⁷⁶ The Kebra Nagast was written to authenticate the Ethiopian kings as being divinely ordained in the line of Davidic kinship, and strongly considers that Ethiopia replaces Israel. However, the claim about the reception of the Mosaic law and the worship of God conveys the message that God’s salvific purpose is universal.⁷⁷ In the Ethiopic tradition, the claim is that the God of Israel is the God of Ethiopia and his rule is applicable for Ethiopians too. Against the western interpretation of the Mosaic law that could be limited to Israel of the OT time, EOTC believes that the law of Moses was given to Ethiopians. This view claims that the universal nature of the Mosaic law as an extension to the unwritten law of God given to all humanity. In spite of some of the extreme uses of the Mosaic law in the EOTC, the universalistic nature of the Torah that could be relevant to all humankind is accepted.

The other expression of the law in the EOTC is “Høgga Wangle” (the law of Gospel) which is considered as part of the written law. In the EOTC, the law is generally identified as written and unwritten law. The written law is divided into two parts which are “Høgga Orit” (the law of Moses) and “Høgga Wangel” (the law of Gospel). According to the EOTC, “Høgga Orit” (the law of Moses) contains ten precepts based on Exodus 20 and “Høgga Wangel” (the law of Gospel) contains six percepts based on Matthew 5:21–43. Abel Gashe strongly argues that Ethiopia historically has been practising the law as a story from the queen of Sheba to the Ethiopian Eunuch.⁷⁸ Because of this, in the Ethiopic tradition, the interpretation of Romans 3:27 on the issue of the law of faith is directly connected with the law of Gospel.⁷⁹ The interpretation of the law of faith as the law of the gospel is confirmed by the interpretation of Romans 8:2–4, which shows the law of the Spirit of life. According to the EOTC’s interpretation, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ is the life-giving gospel and which is explained as the law that

75 Miguel F. Brooks, *A Modern Translation of the Kebra Nagast: 1 edition* (Lawrenceville, N.J: Red Sea Press, 1996), 119–121.

76 Brooks, *Kebra Nagast*, 119–121.

77 Tamiru, *The Religion of Ethiopia*, 58.

78 Abel Gashe, *The Wisdom Compass to Eternal Life* (Xlibris Corporation, 2011), 528.

79 Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, *Saint Paul’s Book*, 60.

gives freedom.⁸⁰ The law of Gospel is understood as the continuation of the law of Moses which doesn't contradict with the former two expressions, but rather compliments and fulfils them in the era of Christ. The Ethiopic tradition could be better understood thorough noting how the law of Gospel is explained in the Andemeta Commentary of Mathew in which the law of Gospel is elaborated, explaining the six precepts of the Gospel.

Based on the above assessment, Paul's view of the law and the EOTC's interpretation of the law seem to have a clear conceptual similarity that could shed light for a better understanding of Paul's view of the law. Three aspects of the law could be compared both in Paul and EOTC. The article explored both Paul's view of the law in Romans and the EOTC's interpretation that could be a significant contribution to the New Testament and Ethiopic studies. First, it gives an opportunity to better understand Paul's view of the law in a comparative study with the EOTC's use of the law. This could be an academic contribution because it has not been studied by any scholar. Second, Paul's view of the law, on the other hand, could shed light to better understand EOTC in order to create greater mutual understanding between the Ethiopian Churches–EOTC and Ethiopian Evangelical Churches for an ecumenical dialogue.

A clearer understanding of the EOTC's interpretation of the law employed by different traditions could have significant influence in preventing misunderstandings between different churches in Ethiopia.⁸¹ Beyond the common denominator between the EOTC and the Evangelical churches in Ethiopia, the EOTC's interpretation contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the law of God. In addition, a consideration of the EOTC's tradition could be helpful for opening a mutual dialogue within the Ethiopian churches, and serve as a foundation for mutual dialogue.

80 Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, *Saint Paul's Book*, 89–90.

81 Bruk Ayele Asale, *1 Enoch as Christian Scripture: A Study in the Reception and Appropriation of 1 Enoch in Jude and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Canon* (S.l.: Nielsen Book data, 2020), 2.

Conclusion

The view of the law in Romans is demonstrated that all human beings have the law of God in one way or in another way. Gentiles have the law of God that guides them and Jews have also entrusted the law of God in the written form that they could live in the covenant. A Christian community also expresses the law of God in the domain of Christ. On the other hand, the EOTC interpretation of the law of God is established demonstrating in three different ways claiming that three eras of the law of God as “*Hægga Læbbunā*” (the law of conscience), “*Hægga Orit*” (the law of Moses) and “*Hægga Wangel*” (the law of Gospel). Humanity, as created by God, has given the unwritten law. Besides, the Mosaic law is also given to Israel but EOTC believes that Ethiopians have received this law. The coming of Christ did not abolish the law rather the law is fulfilled by the giving of the law of Gospel. According to the EOTC, the written law encompasses the Ten precepts of Torah and the six precepts of the Gospel. EOTC understands the law of Moses and the law of the gospel as it compliments one another against the Lutheran understanding of the law and gospel antithesis.

The comparative analysis of these two domains could lead to a better understanding of Paul’s view of the law because Paul’s view of the law is demonstrated in three different ways that could be understood in the Ethiopic reception of the law of God. On the other hand, the EOTC’s view of the law and its tradition could be better understood in light of Paul’s view of the law because Paul’s view of the law could shed light to better understand EOTC’s view of the law. On the other hand, the EOTC’s interpretation of the law could be as an alternative reading, understands Paul in the Ethiopic tradition. Ethiopian/African reading of the Pauline Epistles in academic research could be fruitful, and could contribute to the academic studies. The study could also facilitate ecumenical dialogue in the Ethiopian churches for mutual understanding.

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