

KATHY EHRENSPERGER

Searching Paul

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament*



Mohr Siebeck

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Searching Paul

Conversations with the Jewish Apostle to the Nations

Collected Essays

Mohr Siebeck

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Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich

זכרונו לברכה

and to

Ekkehard Stegemann

Reliable Friends and Mentors

Preface

The following essays were composed over a period of 12 years (2007–2018), originating mainly from invited lectures, and invited conference participations. They reflect my search for understanding Paul within the context of first century Jewish traditions. All of these essays have greatly benefitted from critical conversations with colleagues, who helped me to clarify and deepen some of my thoughts and arguments. As always, Bill has been my most critical reader, he put up with me when these essays originated, helped to formulate what I wanted to say in intelligible English, was patient when they were prepared for first publication, and now for publication in this collection. For his companionship I am most thankful. I am thankful for the lively distraction my growing family offered me; I am blessed with the joy of the arrival of grand-children and am deeply thankful for the continued trust with which my children and their partners let me take part in their lives. I am very proud of all of them.

Over the period of the emergence of these essays some significant changes happened in my academic career. I was awarded a British Academy mid-career fellowship (2012–2013) which enabled me to focus entirely on my research on the relevance of cultural translation in Pauline studies. Not long after I was offered the great opportunity to take up a research professorship at the Abraham Geiger College, Universität Potsdam, and work in the impressive context of this higher education institution and the School of Jewish Theology at the Universität Potsdam in Germany. It is a great privilege to work together with Jewish colleagues in this unique context and be part of the re-building of Jewish academic life in Germany and continental Europe. I am deeply grateful to Prof. Dr. Walter Homolka for this opportunity and hope that this volume will contribute one of the many building blocks needed in the overcoming of anti-Judaism in New Testament interpretation and as such will further Jewish-Christian relations.

Four of the essays in this volume have not been previously published. In the introductory essay written specifically for this volume, I have outlined the pre-suppositions and parameters which guide my approach to the New Testament and to the Pauline letters in particular within the context of contemporary scholarship which I hope will indicate and explain some of my interpretive choices and peculiarities. The three other essays are invited conference or project papers which have been revised here for publication: “Paul, Emasculated Apostle or Manly Man? Gendered Aspects of Cultural Translation,” which is a revised version of a paper presented at the 10th Nangeroni Meeting on Gender and Second Temple Judaism held in Rome in 2018; “Called to be ἄγιοι but without εὐσέβεια? Peculiarities of Cultural Translation in Paul” is the revised version of a paper presented at the Research Conference “Paul and Diaspora Judaism,” held at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, 2015; and “The Mystery of Paul’s

"Mysterion in Rom 11:25–36" is the revised version of a contribution commissioned by the Käte Hamburger Kolleg "Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe," Focus Group "Secret," Ruhr Universität, Bochum.

All the other essays are re-published here unaltered. Since they emerged over a period of more than a decade and sometimes deal with related issues, there is occasionally some thematic overlap between parts of them. Slight changes were only made in terms of stylistic adjustments and corrections of obvious typos, a minimal updating of footnotes, and corrections of bibliographical errors. I am grateful for the permissions granted by the original publishers to reprint these essays in this volume (details see p. 441). I would also like to thank the series' editor Prof. Dr. Jörg Frey for accepting the volume for publication in the series WUNT, and Elena Müller, the program director Theology and Jewish Studies of Mohr Siebeck, for the patience with which she thoughtfully accompanied and guided this project through the process of getting to the print stage. Above all my huge gratitude is owed to my research assistant Dr. Juni Hoppe, who patiently and with great efficiency supported the entire process of publication, by standardizing, adjusting, and formatting the essays, putting together the bibliography and indices. Without her support the process of publication would have been far more troublesome.

With living and working now in Berlin and Potsdam it is as if a trajectory of my life reconnects with some beginnings in my home city in Basel, Switzerland. Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich and Ekkehard W. Stegemann were two precious friends and academic colleagues there who contributed significantly to my awareness of the permeation of anti-Judaism in Christianity and New Testament interpretation. This encouraged me to become involved in Jewish-Christian relations and inspired me to embark on an academic career. Beyond that they were reliable friends through turbulent and joyous times. It is to Ekkehard and to the memory of Lutz that I dedicate this volume – in gratitude for their friendship.

Berlin, 15th of September 2019

Kathy Ehrensperger

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I. Introduction

1. Searching Paul

The essays in this volume are trajectories of an exploratory journey with and through the literary traces Paul the Jewish apostle to the nations has left in the letters available to us. In as much as his letters are fragmentary evidence of conversations in the early Christ-movement which spanned over a longer period of time, over geographically distant places, and including people from various contexts and backgrounds, these essays are themselves fragmentary evidence of conversations in the scholarly community, which encompassed more than what has made it into the written form presented here. They are snapshots of my conversations with Paul and his interpreters over a number of years and as such they do not represent a system of interpretation but are rather nodes in a multidirectional network of trajectories I explored. There are many traces that have not (yet) been explored, pathways that I am not even aware of, and others I might wish to come back to so I can deepen my understanding. So this collection is a patchwork of explorations in progress – part of an exploratory journey which continues.

The topics of the essays are diverse but they came to conglomerate under certain main headings. So they are presented here in a topic related rather than in the chronological order in which they were originally published. This indicates that I came upon some trajectories of Paul from different directions, at different periods, namely “Gender and Traditions,” “Among Greeks and Romans,” “The Language of Belonging,” “Romans,” and “The Early Reception – the Emergence of Pauline Traditions.” All of these essays in different ways represent aspects of parameters which guide my approach to New Testament Studies and Paul in particular. Rather than summarizing the essays here, I will sketch the concerns and parameters which guide my reading of Paul with different aspects being in the foreground in different essays.

Hermeneutical Presuppositions – Contemporary Concerns

My conversations with Paul are guided and shaped by my presuppositions, that is by my interests, concerns and values. I hear his letters say certain things because of the place from where I listen into his conversations, I see certain aspects because of the perspective from which I read his conversations. There is no point from nowhere. And although it is vital in academic research to take a step back from personal interests and try to do justice to the research “material” by getting as much historical, political, social, cultural, and linguistic information as possible on events, circumstances, and situations of the past, a stance of pure objectivity is not possible. Hermeneutical presuppositions shape

and color academic understanding and interpretation. I still think Sheyla Benhabib has summarized this in an excellent way:

Understanding always means understanding within a framework that makes sense for us, from where we stand today. In this sense, learning the questions of the past involves posing questions to the past in light of our present preoccupations. [...] Every interpretation is a conversation, with all the joys and dangers that conversations usually involve: misunderstandings as well as ellipses, innuendos as well as surfeits of meaning.¹

I thus consider it vital in the business of interpretation of ancient texts and traditions to reflect on, and as far as possible lay open such presuppositions. They are rooted in, and emerge from contemporary issues rather than those in the past. This distances the approach of the interpreter from the material in question, and similarities and commonalities should not easily be assumed, nor direct conclusions be drawn between past and present. Although I am interested in understanding events and documents of antiquity, namely of Jewish traditions in the Mediterranean of the first century CE, this interest is related to my concern for Christian self-understanding in the pluralistic, interreligious world of today. The texts of the New Testament eventually were recognized as the authoritative texts of Christian traditions and as such their interpretation triggered an enormously influential world-wide reception history. Many aspects of this reception history have been, are, and will be in the focus of scholarly research. My particular concern is the fact that Christian self-understanding has been formulated over centuries in opposition to Jewish traditions and Jewish people and thereby contributed significantly to racist and “völkisch” antisemitism in the 19th and 20th century (this aspect is explicitly addressed in the essays “Paul, his People, and Racial Terminology” and “What’s in a name? Ideologies of Volk, Rasse, and Reich in German New Testament Interpretation: Past and Present”).

An implicit question which guides all my New Testament research thus is whether there are ways to Christian self-understanding that do not use Jewish traditions and Jewish people as negative foils. Of course this concern is influenced by the horrors of the Shoah, and of course it is influenced by the concern for Jewish-Christian relations. It would be rather strange if events as those of the Shoah would not affect also academic research! Moreover, there is no way to engage meaningfully in interreligious conversations if the partners in the conversation are not treated with the highest of respect for the value of their own, different tradition. In addition, there are in my view internal reasons which render it necessary to reconsider Christian self-understanding in relation to Jewish traditions.

¹ S. Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), xxxiv.

The recognition that there is an intrinsic relation between Christian self-understanding and Jewish traditions has not been triggered by recent events but has been part of Christian tradition from the very beginning. The question is not whether, but how this relation has been and is being conceived by Christians. Christian self-understanding has emerged decisively in negative differentiation from Jewish traditions. In the course of the centuries clarification about who one was, and what the essence of one's own perception and relation to the divine was, has been defined via opposition to anything Jewish. To be Christian implied an attitude of contempt and rejection to anything Jewish, and to the people who lived according to Jewish tradition, that is, the Jewish people.² Formulations in the Pauline letters were read as supporting such perceptions. Thus Jewish traditions and Jews were part of Christian self-understanding all along. Christians seemed to be unable to say who they were without denigrating the others who read (almost) the same scriptures, also related to the one God, and continued to do so, although in different ways. The question is: Is this denigration of Jews and Jewish tradition an inherent necessity for Christian self-understanding? Is the differentiation into the two religious traditions of Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity necessarily antagonistic and is antagonism against Jews and anything Jewish as such an essential part of Christianity? It is a crucial question for Jewish-Christian relations today, and Christianity has to find ways to address it for her own sake. If a denigrating negative foil is inherently necessary for Christian identity a meaningful interreligious conversation is basically impossible.

I consider this a vital question in that, to base one's self-understanding on the contempt and denigration of others who are and remain different seriously questions the very core of values claimed as Christian. The Pauline letters have been a main source and provided building blocks for Christian self-understanding at different periods of Church history often at decisive junctions, such as the Reformation or after World War I. They are necessarily part of this search for a Christian self-understanding without anti-Judaism. My journey in conversation with Paul is thus not interest- and value-free but guided by this main concern.

Biblical Interpretation: An Open Conversation – with Limitations

The Pauline letters eventually became authoritative scripture as part of the Christian canon. But like the other New Testament writings, they were not written as such. They emerged as part of the divergence of Jewish traditions,

² Ignatius, *Magn.* 10:1.3.

with the Pauline letters being written even before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE. As such these letters are historical documents of the late Second Temple period, documents of Jewish history and tradition. My journey is guided by the presupposition that they should be read as such, informed of course by most recent research into the socio-historical, cultural, political, and linguistic conditions of the period and through critical evaluation of the letters in relation to these. Paul refers to himself as someone who is and remains part of Jewish tradition, who is educated in this tradition, who understands his task as part of this tradition, who tries to understand the implications of the Christ-event relying entirely on this tradition, and who considers the traditions of the fathers and the scriptures as the authoritative guidance for his own life and that of the Christ-following groups from the non-Jewish nations. I share this perspective on Paul with others,³ and my own research is indebted to many who have been involved in this endeavor for a much longer time than I have.⁴ I have learned from others, I build on the research and insights of others, who were before me and are with me on this journey. Biblical Interpretation is a collective endeavor, a conversation of scholars, past and present, that will hopefully inspire scholars in the future. In as much as it is a conversation, that is, a critical interaction between colleagues, there are always new questions emerging, different perspectives opening up which challenge but also illuminate each other. As such I consider the task of interpretation not as something static, aimed at generating answers which stand the test of time forever, but as a journey in search of meaningful answers within particular contexts. As a continuous journey there is always another perspective from which to perceive and interpret, perspectives of which I had not been aware, or blind spots I could not see from where I was standing.

This is not an argument for “anything goes,” but as mentioned, any interpretation has to be grounded in solid scholarly research, based on information available and relevant in support of understanding texts from the past, and argued with the scrutiny of critical reasoning as required in any academic discipline in conversation with colleagues.⁵ This means that where new information demonstrates that earlier interpretations were based on misinformation and wrong assumptions these of course need to be revised. In the field of New Testament

³ Cf. *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First Century Context to the Apostle* (ed. M.D. Nanos, M. Zetterholm; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015).

⁴ Above and before anybody else I am deeply grateful for all the years I have been privileged to share in the journey with Bill, who had embarked on the challenges of this search long before I did.

⁵ Cf. D. Patte and C. Grenholm, “Overture: Receptions, Critical Interpretations and Scriptural Criticism,” in *Reading Israel in Romans: Legitimacy and Plausibility of Divergent Interpretations* (ed. D. Patte, C. Grenholm; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 1–54.

Studies such an insight was triggered by the publication of E.P. Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* in 1977.⁶ Although already at the end of the 18th century Reimarus had located Jesus within Judaism, this had nothing to do with an accurate perception of Judaism but rather with an internal critical stance over against Christian doctrinal traditions.⁷ In the 19th century attention was drawn to the Jewishness of New Testament writings, mainly by Jewish scholars who demonstrated the closeness of the traditions of the New Testament with Jewish traditions,⁸ but since Jewish academics were not taken seriously as scholars on equal par with Christian academics, their evidence and arguments were widely ignored.⁹ Leo Baeck's book on the gospels as part of Jewish tradition and history (*Das Evangelium als Urkunde der jüdischen Glaubensgeschichte*, Berlin: Schocken) was published in 1938 (sic!) without triggering any response from Christian scholars. From a Christian perspective, already in 1921 George F. Moore had demonstrated that the "Judaism" of New Testament scholarship presented a highly distorted image of Jewish traditions.¹⁰ And Albert Schweitzer had argued that Paul had to be understood from within Jewish apocalyptic traditions.¹¹ Paul's Jewishness was acknowledged by others in the 19th century but for entirely opposite reasons. He was charged with having transformed and falsified Christianity. Paul LaGarde saw in him the reason the church had adhered to the writings of the Old Testament and thus to a Jewish understanding of history under which in his view the true gospel perished.¹² With the publication of W.D. Davies' *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* the trajectory of taking Jewish tradition seriously in New Testament interpretation re-

⁶ E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

⁷ For an overview see W. Stegemann, *Jesus und seine Zeit* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010), 157–80.

⁸ Thus Abraham Geiger wrote about Jesus "He was a Jew, a Pharisean Jew with Galilean coloring – a man who joined in the hopes of his time and who believed that those hopes were fulfilled in him. He did not utter a new thought, nor did he break down the barriers of nationality." *Judaism and its History. In Two Parts*. Transl. by Charles Newburgh (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1911), 131. Published in German in *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte von der Zerstörung des zweiten Tempels bis zum Ende des zwölften Jahrhunderts. Nebst einem Anhang: Renan und Strauß* (Breslau: Schlettersche Buchhandlung, 1865).

⁹ See the important discussion in W. Homolka, *Jewish Jesus Research and its Challenge to Christology Today* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), esp. 49–54.

¹⁰ G.F. Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism," *HTR* 14 (1921), 197–254.

¹¹ A. Schweitzer, *Die Geschichte der paulinischen Forschung von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1911).

¹² P. LaGarde, "Über das Verhältnis des deutschen Staates zu Theologie, Kirche und Religion (1873)" in *Schriften für das Deutsche Volk* (Munich: Lehmann, 1937), 68–70. Cf. also the discussion in H.-J. Schoeps, *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*. Trans. Harold Knight (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), 277.

emerged after World War II.¹³ And Krister Stendahl challenged the dominating strand of Pauline Studies in his lecture on “Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West” in 1963.¹⁴ In the case of Stendahl a major controversy between him and Ernst Käsemann evolved, however, without major changes in the image of Judaism in New Testament scholarship following from this.¹⁵ Such a change only slowly began to emerge with Sanders’ 1977 publication. Building on colleagues’ research before him, Sanders conclusively demonstrated that the image of Jewish traditions used in traditional Christian New Testament interpretation was a caricature rather than an adequate representation of Jewish traditions of the Second Temple period. Even if some aspects of Sanders’ work may in detail be questioned due to new or more precise information, the assessment that the image of Jewish tradition in New Testament scholarship was a misrepresentation cannot be refuted, and there is no going back to such distortions whatever one’s stance on the so-called partings of the ways may be.

The World of Antiquity and Contemporary Concepts

Since we are dealing with traditions of the past, from contexts not our own and not directly accessible to us, the methods and concepts through which access to, and understanding of the past is sought, need to be as critically scrutinized as possible. They are contemporary methods and concepts – not the concepts, possibly not even the terminology of those people of the past we are trying to understand.¹⁶ It means trying to understand writings of the past as far as possible within their own frameworks, and critically reflect on the concepts and frameworks we apply and through which we interpret. Since Christianity as a separate entity did not exist in the first century, it is anachronistic to apply the concept of such an entity to the texts in question. This is why I do not use the term Christian for those who are part of groups of people, Jews and non-Jews, who were convinced that with the Christ-event the age to come was in the process of beginning.

Since a concept of religion as a realm of life which consisted predominantly in a belief system as separated from other dimensions of life, also did not exist

¹³ W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism. Some Elements in Pauline Theology* (London: SPCK, 1948; 50th anniversary edition, Mifflintown: Sigler, 1998).

¹⁴ Now in K. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 78–96.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the debate between Stendahl and Käsemann see W.S. Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 23–26.

¹⁶ Cf C.A. Barton, D. Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion. How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 7–8.

in antiquity, I also try as far as possible to avoid to refer to the traditions which in modern categorizations are referred to as religions, in this terminology.¹⁷ These dimensions were intrinsic parts of everyday life of all people at the time. They were permeating all aspects of “how one did things” among particular people, Thracians, Macedonians, Egyptians or Jews, that is, they were part of what in contemporary terminology is referred to as something similar to “culture.”¹⁸ As Barton and Boyarin clarify this does not mean that “people did not make gods or build temples, praise and pray and sacrifice, that they did not ask metaphysical questions or try to understand the world in which they lived, conceive of invisible beings (gods, spirits, demons, ghosts), organize forms of worship and festivals, invent cosmologies and mythologies, support beliefs, defend morals and ideals, or imagine other worlds.” But they did not organize these “experiences and practices into a separate realm.”¹⁹ The realm of belonging and the way of living were a package which included the relationship of those who belonged to the same group with the divine realm. As Paula Fredriksen pointedly formulated “Divine ethnicity might seem like a strange idea; but in Greco-Roman antiquity, gods often shared the ethnicity of the peoples who worshipped them. In this regard, the Jewish god was no exception.”²⁰ This was so for Jews, including Paul, this was also so for those to whom Paul refers as τὰ ἔθνη.

I thereby do not imply that these different cultures were entirely separate and untouched by other traditions and cultures.²¹ But they were, in their self-perception and in the perception of others, identifiable as Egyptian, Roman, Greek, Phrygian, or Jewish, thus their sense of belonging including the relation to the divine was perceived to be different.

¹⁷ On this see Barton, Boyarin, *Imagine no Religion*, 15–38; also B. Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

¹⁸ Barton, Boyarin, *Imagine no Religion*, 7.

¹⁹ Barton, Boyarin, *Imagine no Religion*, 4.

²⁰ P. Fredriksen, “How Jewish is God? Divine Ethnicity in Paul’s Theology,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137.1 (2018), 193–212 (193).

²¹ It has become widespread to refer to cultural exchange and interaction with the concept of hybridity. I do not consider this concept to be heuristically helpful when trying to analyse identity formation processes in antiquity, as it only states the obvious. Of course there is no such entity as a pure culture untouched by interaction with others. In that sense all cultures are hybrid, hybridity being that which is prevalent in a collective entity as well as individuals. Hence my questioning of the heuristic value of the concept beyond the assertion that this is the normal state of play. Cf. K. Ehrensperger, *Paul at the Crossroads of Cultures. Theologizing in the Space Between* (London: T&T Clark, 2013), 17–38.

Paul, the Jew

To see Paul as firmly rooted in Jewish tradition has a number of implications. It is an assertion which by now is quite widely shared in the scholarly realm. It is a move similar to the acknowledgement that Jesus was and remained a Jew. Although the latter insight had already been formulated in the late 18th and early 19th century, most significantly by Jewish scholars,²² it really only became widely accepted in the wake of the so-called third quest for the historical Jesus.²³ This insight led to the question in what sense Jesus was a Jew, was he a marginal Jew, a middle-ground Jew, etc. The question of what kind of Jew Jesus was and where he should be located within Judaism indicates that precisely this aspect still presents an unprecedented challenge because of its theological implications. The attempts to specify in what sense or to what degree Jesus was a Jew seem to assume that there is a way in which Jewish traditions of antiquity can be evaluated in terms of quality, intensity, center or periphery according to some objective, quantifiable criteria. A similar phenomenon can now be observed concerning Paul. While in earlier interpretations he was considered to be the first Christian theologian, that is the one who broke away from Jewish tradition, and did overcome its perceived particularity as the founder of universalist Christianity,²⁴ it is now widely acknowledged that he was and remained a Jew. But as with regard to Jesus the question often debated is, what kind of Jew Paul was: an apostate, a marginal, a radical or an anomalous Jew; as if there was a normative Jewish tradition over against which Paul's Jewishness could be measured. In variation of a phrase by E.P. Sanders it can certainly be asserted that "There is no evidence that Paul was an anti-Jewish Jew."²⁵

Aside from the acknowledgement that Paul was a Jew, this often does not have any further implications for the interpretation of his letters. However, if Paul was and remained a Jew, he also considered the message he was called to proclaim among the non-Jewish nations to be a Jewish message. The content of the proclamation as well as the implications Paul elaborates in his letters are Jewish. The authoritative reference where interpretive guidance is being sought, are the Jewish scriptures and their interpretation within contemporary

²² Cf. Homolka, *Jewish Jesus Research*, esp. 36–63.

²³ Cf., e.g., Stegemann, *Jesus und seine Zeit*, 113–24.

²⁴ F.C. Baur, "Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des paulinischen und petrinischen Christentums in der ältesten Kirche," *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* 4 (1831), 61–206; for an overview see E. Stegemann, "Der Jude Paulus und seine antijüdische Auslegung," in *Paulus und die Welt. Aufsätze* (ed. C. Tuor, P. Wick; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2005), 17–40.

²⁵ E.P. Sanders, "Jesus, Ancient Judaism, and Modern Christianity: The Quest Continues," in *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust* (ed. P. Fredriksen, A. Reinhartz; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 31–55, 54.

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