Justification and Variegated Nomism

Volume II
The Paradoxes of Paul

Edited by
D.A. CARSON, PETER T. O'BRIEN,
and MARK A. SEIFRID

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Preface

This is the second and final volume of *Justification and Variegated Nomism*. The first volume, under the subtitle *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, was published in 2001. Together the two volumes attempt a competent evaluation of the multifaceted movement now commonly known as "the new perspective on Paul."

Because much of the new perspective depends to a greater or lesser extent on the reading of the literature of Second Temple Judaism ably articulated by E. P. Sanders in his 1977 book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, our first volume brought together distinguished specialists to look at that literature afresh, asking fundamental questions about the pattern of relationships between God and human beings, about righteousness, salvation, eschatology, grace and works, faith and law – indeed, about the "pattern of religion" (to use the expression Sanders prefers) found in each literary heritage. Owing to the competence of its contributors, that volume has generally been well received. A few reviewers have complained that, granted we did find, among other things, patterns of religion, in some of the literature, that could usefully be labelled "covenantal nomism," the book could have ended with a more positive evaluation of the movement. That assessment, however, ignores the sweeping nature of Sanders's claim. He argued that covenantal nomism is endemic to *all* the relevant literature of Second Temple Judaism, and therefore that Paul (to go no further) *must* be read against that background. To show that the patterns of religion in Second Temple Judaism cannot legitimately be limited to the embrace of one rubric, to show that the approach to "nomism" in early Judaism is far more variegated than Sanders allows, to discover that even covenantal nomism itself is best understood to have varying shapes, proves to be of interest not only to the specialist in Second Temple Judaism, but also to the interpreter of Paul: the latter is freed up from the restraints imposed by a too narrowly defined and controlling "background."

Of course, this does not mean that the various "new perspective" readings of Paul are wrong. It merely means that, with the increased perception of the variegated approaches to nomism represented in the literature of Second Temple Judaism, the lines adopted by new perspective interpreters enjoy less presumption of being right. They still need to be evaluated, even after a less doctrinaire reconstruction of early Judaism is in place. That is why we undertook this second volume. In the light of the broader frames of reference

and the revised evaluations (e.g. word studies) unpacked in the first volume, we here try to look at the exegetical and theological arguments advanced by the new perspective in its treatment of Paul, undertaking fresh exegesis of most of the relevant texts while interacting with the dominant voices.

Some of the following essays are tightly tied to essays in the first volume. For instance, Mark Seifrid's treatment of Paul's use of righteousness language against its Hellenistic background obviously follows up on his study of righteousness language in the Hebrew Scriptures and in early Judaism. Martin Hengel's essay on the stance of the apostle Paul during the veiled years between Damascus and Antioch builds, in part, on the work of Roland Deines on the Pharisees between "Judaisms" and "common Judaism." Several of the exegetical and topical essays presuppose the diversity in Second Temple Judaism underscored by the first volume, and these essays, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, establish the relevant connections. Nevertheless, three of the essays in this volume expand the horizons yet further. Stephen Westerholm's opening piece masterfully surveys the diversity of contemporary scholarly positions on Paul's attitude toward the law, reminding us that sloganeering and easy generalizations will not prevail in a discussion that has many finely-shaded positions. Moreover, since some defenders of the new perspective cast their work as a self-conscious refutation of Luther, who, it is often claimed, read his own introspective conscience (to recall the famous expression of Krister Stendahl) back into Paul and thus corrupted the next half-millennium of study of the apostle, we have included an essay by a Luther specialist who has been following the debate and who is far from convinced that Luther is *now* being fairly portrayed, or that Luther was, in his time, quite as mistaken as some have made him out to be. And finally, because for the editors of this volume, and doubtless for many of its readers, Scripture remains *norma normans sed non norma normata*, and therefore discussion of these important matters touches the confessional life of the church, we asked a distinguished systematician, Henri Blocher, to weigh in with a closing essay.

Alert readers will soon discover that the contributors are not all in perfect agreement. But then again, neither are those who defend the new perspective! By and large, however, these essays articulate appreciative approval of some elements of the new perspective, while arguing that some of its central stances are not defensible, or, more moderately, that the new perspective sometimes elevates to a place of central importance themes which in Paul's *Hauptbriefe* are better judged to occupy, at most, the background. In that case, of course, it is the foreground that is being lost, and must be recovered.

As with the first volume, the initial draft of each essay was circulated around all the contributors to this volume (and occasionally to a few others). Suggestions and criticisms were received by one of the editors and passed

back to the author. Essays were then revised (sometimes lightly, sometimes extensively), edited, and typeset at Trinity. About half the contributors (but especially the editors) offered suggestions. Markus Bockmuehl, who contributed to the first volume, kindly agreed to continue reading and frequently commenting on the essays of the second volume (as close to a work of supererogation as our theology allows).

With great pleasure we record our thanks to all who have contributed to this project. First of all, we are grateful to the contributors. Their scholarship, patience in the face of our questions, suggestions, and deadlines, not to mention their goodwill and (frequently) their sense of humor has made this a far less onerous task than it otherwise would have been. One of the editors (Carson) has been extraordinarily fortunate to have two able helpers: Alan Thompson, a most competent graduate assistant, compiled the indexes with great care and attention to detail; and Charles Anderson, his administrative assistant, carefully prepared the camera-ready copy and kept control of the flow of information, revisions, corrections, and correspondence. Judging by his consistent good cheer, he either enjoyed the challenge, or most admirably hid his displeasure from his boss. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School provided the funds to support these men and to offset various other expenses. The editors are no less grateful to Prof. Martin Hengel, who first accepted these volumes for the WUNT series, and to Prof. Jörg Frey, who has continued the support. Thanks, too, to Georg Siebeck of Mohr Siebeck, and to Jim Kinney of Baker Book House, for seeing both volumes through the press. To all of them we are enormously indebted, and extend our heartfelt thanks.

Soli Deo gloria.

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Abbreviations

With only rare exceptions, these essays have followed the abbreviations set out in Patrick H. Alexander et al., ed., *The SBL Handbook of Style* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999). In addition, the following abbreviations, not found in the *Handbook*, have been used:

AUSDDS	Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Supplements
BR	Luther's *Letters* (i.e. *Weimar Aufgabe: Briefwechsel*)
BSELK	*Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*
CD	*Church Dogmatics* (1956–75)
CNTC	Calvin's New Testament Commentaries
CR	*Corpus Reformatorum*
JbTh	*Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie*
KD	*Die kirchliche Dogmatik* (1932–70)
LW	Luther's Works
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
SRB	Supplementi alla Rivista biblica
TR	Table Talk (i.e. *Weimar Aufgabe: Tischreden*)
WA	*Weimar Aufgabe*
WdF	Wege der Forschung

1. The "New Perspective" at Twenty-Five

by

STEPHEN WESTERHOLM

"Even a child," the Good Book tells us, "is known by his doings." The "new perspective on Paul" is hardly still in its childhood: a quarter century has passed since it came to birth through the labors of E. P. Sanders, and nearly as long since it was christened by James D. G. Dunn. Yet to this day scholars cannot agree whether its appearance was a Good Thing. For the moment, at least, a survey of scholarly responses can only document diversity.

Any survey must make some attempt at categorizing the material under review while acknowledging that classifications based on other criteria would result in the inclusion of different studies and in different alignments of those considered. In what follows I will, after a brief review of Sanders's work, begin with those who agree with him both that the "Judaism" of Paul's day was not "legalistic" and that Paul did not think it so, though they may disagree on whether, or in what way, Paul found fault with his ancestral faith. From these generally positive responses I will move on to those who insist that Paul did criticize (at least some) contemporary Jews, or see the shortcomings of "Judaism," in terms of a misplaced dependence on human endeavors. Such is the broad sweep of the survey. But though I have necessarily begun by placing scholars in (very rough) categories, my primary concern has been to convey their views fairly (if concisely)[1] rather than to justify a particular taxonomy of the debate.

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[1] In a reworked and updated version of my *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), viz. *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), I have discussed a few of the more significant contributions to the debate in greater detail. Here brief treatment is given to a wider range of scholars, though no one who knows the field will mistake my efforts for an exhaustive survey. To impose some boundaries on the task, I have decided to treat only scholars who have published monographs on Paul that show significant dependence on, or that interact in significant ways with, Sanders's understanding of Judaism *and* Paul.

Worth noting is that the current preoccupation with the "new perspective on Paul" seems mostly confined to scholarship in English-speaking lands (cf. Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, "Die paulinischen Rechtfertigungslehre in der gegenwärtigen exegetischen Diskussion," in *Worum geht es in der Rechtfertigungslehre? Das biblische Fundament der "Gemeinsamen*

1. Paul as Sanders Sees Him

1. The conviction most central to the "new perspective on Paul" pertains in the first place to Judaism, not Paul. In *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*,[2] E. P. Sanders set out "to destroy the view of Rabbinic Judaism which [at the time of his writing, he could claim] is still prevalent in much, perhaps most, New Testament scholarship" (xii): a view that saw Judaism as a religion "of legalistic works-righteousness" (33) in which "one must *earn* salvation by compiling more good works ('merits'), whether on his own or from the excess of someone else, than he has transgressions" (38). Such an understanding was thought to lead people either to a despairing uncertainty about their salvation or to a self-righteous boasting in its achievement (45). In Sanders's view, only a massive misconstrual of the nature and intent of rabbinic sources could yield such a description of Jewish soteriology.

In his own treatment of the literature of Palestinian Judaism and the letters of Paul, Sanders's interest was in the "pattern of religion" they evidence rather than in individual motifs. (The "pattern" of a religion, for Sanders, is the way in which the religion admits and retains its members, or *"how getting in and staying in are understood"* [17].) It is among Sanders's most important conclusions that a fundamental unity (a single "pattern of religion") underlies nearly every witness we possess to the Judaism of the period "from around 200 b.c.e. to around 200 c.e." (422–3). Sanders describes the unifying concept as "covenantal nomism": the notion that a Jew's standing before God is secured by God's election of Israel as his covenant people (this, then, is how "getting in" was understood in Judaism), and that obedience to the law is the appropriate *response* to God's initial act of grace (75). While a Jew's intention to obey the law is thought necessary if the relationship with God is to be *maintained* (this, then, is how "staying in" was understood), it does not follow that salvation is "earned" or regarded as a reward for human achievements. To put the matter provocatively (and in this art Sanders has

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Erklärung" von katholischer Kirche und Lutherischem Weltbund [ed. Thomas Söding; Freiburg: Herder, 1999], 106–30, here 107; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments. I. Grundlegung. Von Jesus zu Paulus* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992], 241). (Finland, however, should be added to the list, owing to Heikki Räisänen's early entry into the discussion and the domestic debate it has provoked.) Scholars elsewhere have not uniformly ignored the discussion; they tend to mention it, however, without invoking comparisons with Copernicus, and, while interacting with Sanders on points of detail, have not seen a need either to rethink or defend everything they have learned about Paul in response to his work. Hence a survey such as this is inevitably dominated by English-language scholarship.

[2] Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977. Page references to Sanders's work in the body of the text are taken from this book. Sanders's position is now also accessible in his introductory *Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1991).

demonstrated unique gifts), the relationship between grace and works is the *same* in Palestinian Judaism as in the letters of Paul: *"salvation is by grace . . . ; works are the condition of remaining 'in', but they do not earn salvation"* (543).

Why, then, did Paul reject Judaism? Sanders insists that, though Paul provided a variety of *arguments* for doing so, his real *reason* was rooted in his exclusivist soteriology: God had provided salvation in Christ, so "no one may follow any other way whatsoever" (519); or, to quote Sanders's best known epigram, *"This is what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity"* (552). A further factor, still rooted in one of Paul's "primary convictions," is allowed as well: "the salvation of the Gentiles is essential to Paul's preaching; and with it falls the law; for, as Paul says simply, Gentiles cannot live by the law (Gal. 2.14)" (496).

Believing Christ to be God's solution, (Sanders's) Paul set out to define a plight. The very diversity that characterizes Paul's portrayals of the human dilemma proves that his thinking began, *not* with a perceived plight needing a solution, but with a solution that required a plight (474). To be underlined here is perhaps only Sanders's emphatic denial that Paul rejected the Jewish law because its observance led to self-righteousness and boasting.[3] The only Jewish "boasting" to which Paul objects is that which exults over the divine privileges granted to Israel and fails to acknowledge that God, in Christ, has now opened the door of salvation to Gentiles.[4]

A major thrust of Sanders's work, then, is that Paul's rejection of Judaism was not triggered by, nor did it trigger, a substantial critique of his former faith.[5] In the wake of his work, some scholars have gone further, concluding that Paul had *no* critique of Judaism. Others agree with Sanders that Paul's critique was not a matter of substance. Still others make more of the "further factor" that Sanders did allow and see in Paul a critique of Judaism for its alleged ethnocentricity.

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[3] E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 156.

[4] Sanders, *Law*, 33.

[5] This seems an obvious implication of Sanders's claim that Judaism's fault, in Paul's eyes, lay in not being Christianity – and many have so construed it, as Sanders himself recognizes ("others have taken me to mean that Paul had no substantial critique of his native faith"). Without addressing the issue of the "substantiality" of the critique, Sanders notes that Paul *did* criticize Judaism on the two points alluded to above: "the lack of faith in Christ and the lack of equality for the Gentiles" (*Law*, 154–5).

2. Paul Finds No Flaw in Judaism

2. For Neil Elliott,[6] Sanders has definitively refuted the illusion that Judaism was "devoted to fulfilling the 'works of the Law' as a means of attaining God's favor"; but the illusion was not one under which Paul himself suffered (146; cf. 212). That Romans attacks Jewish "works-righteousness" is a misunderstanding fostered under the "Lutheran captivity" of the epistle (292). Paul's aim in the opening chapters of the letter was not to refute Judaism, but to underline the (very Jewish) understanding that no human being is exempt from God's righteous requirements, but that all are accountable to God (133–4, 198). Thus, when Paul highlights Jewish sins in 2:17–29, it is not because the latter are peculiarly the target of his indictment; rather, inasmuch as Jews might be *thought* to be exempt from God's judgment, Paul cites their liability as paradigmatic of the truth (3:9) that judgment falls equally on all sinners (135, 141; cf. 145). Moreover, Paul declares that justification is "apart from law" only because, in principle, the demands of God's law might be misconstrued as providing a basis for humans to claim the merit of fulfilling them: "the point of [Rom] 3.20 is that *not even* in the Law (where one might mistakenly expect to find it) is there any ground for boasting against God, *therefore nowhere*" (215; cf. 149). But, Elliott notes, though such a misunderstanding is "possible," it is not one that Paul "explicitly ascribed to the Jews, or to anyone else for that matter" (155; cf. 149 n. 2). Indeed, since Paul is writing to the Roman Christians, he must intend that *they* take seriously his message and guard against presuming on God's grace (126; cf. 185). The danger to which Paul responds in Romans lies in the Hellenistic-Christian doctrine of justification by faith, where "freedom from the Law" was not sufficiently tied to the requirement of obedience (294). The theology of Romans thus opposes, not Judaism, but the Hellenistic-Christian kerygma (295).

3. Lloyd Gaston's studies of Paul[7] assume that E. P. Sanders has accurately depicted Judaism *and* that "Paul knew at least as much about 'covenantal nomism' and Jewish 'soteriology' as does E. P. Sanders" (65). With Judaism itself, (Gaston's) Paul has no quarrel (14). Certainly he does not believe that Jews need Jesus to be saved: Jesus is not, for Paul, the Messiah, but "the new act of the righteousness of God," bringing the salvation already enjoyed by Jews to the Gentiles as well (7). Jews and Gentiles alike are sinners, but, through its covenant, "Israel has always had cultic means of expiation." Now "God has presented Christ Jesus as such a means for the Gentiles, apart from or alongside his covenant with Israel" (122). The only Jewish failure that Paul

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[6] *The Rhetoric of Romans: Argumentative Constraint and Strategy and Paul's Dialogue with Judaism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990).

[7] *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1987).

laments is the refusal to recognize this divine provision for the Gentiles (33, 142).

Paul saw himself as an apostle to the Gentiles. In fulfillment of his commission he had himself become an apostate, abandoning Israel's covenant in order that he, like the Gentiles to whom he brought the gospel, might be justified by Christ (78–79). His letters were sent to Gentiles and addressed Gentile problems (23). All the world is subject to God's law. (Paul here assumes the identification of "law" with "wisdom" found in Jewish texts [26–28].) But whereas Jews encounter that law administered directly by God within the context of the covenant, for Gentiles it is administered by the "angels of the nations" (cf. Gal 3:19) and apart from the covenant (43): Gentiles were thus obligated to obey the law's commands, but lacked the covenant's mediation of divine mercy (39). When Paul speaks of the "works of the law" that cannot justify, he is not thinking of Jewish observances of the law, but of what the law itself "works" on its Gentile subjects: it brings them under a curse, makes them guilty before God, and serves as the instrument of God's wrath (104–5, referring to Gal 3:10; Rom 3:19; 4:15). "The law actively works in the Gentile world to create a situation from which people need redemption" (106). That redemption, for Gentiles, is now available in Christ.

Thus, as Philippians 3 suggests, "it is possible to have a status of righteousness from either of two sources." For Jews, righteousness comes by "the law (in the sense of covenant)"; for Gentiles, "from the faithfulness of Christ." Paul had himself shifted from the former path to the latter, but he does *not* indicate that other Jews were to do the same (136).

4. Stanley K. Stowers[8] reads Romans as directed to a Gentile audience, spelling out for it the path not simply to acceptance by God but also to the "moral self-mastery" that was so highly esteemed in Greco-Roman culture (36). Competing with Paul for his readers' allegiance were Jewish teachers (represented by the "presumptuous teacher" introduced in Rom 2:17) who advocated the observance of "works of the law" as the means to the same ends (189). The latter "works" were the moral demands of the Decalogue (278): these, however, Gentiles could not perform, since God had punished their idolatry by "allowing their passions and desires to become dominant, a loss of self-mastery" (92, referring to Rom 1:18–32). Moreover, whereas Israel "always had means of atonement" so that her sins were forgiven, God "stored up" the sins of Gentiles for the coming day of judgment (106, 176). But "Paul came to believe it unjust for God to allow gentiles to persist in this unequal relation resulting from their original rejection of God. Therefore . . . God had provided the faithfulness of Jesus as a means by which the long

[8] *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University, 1994).

accumulation of gentile sins could be forgiven" (205). Once they are "in Christ," Gentiles too experience freedom from desires and passions through the Spirit (252). But for Stowers's (as for Gaston's) Paul, Christ provides for Gentiles what Israel already enjoyed through her covenant (129, 190).

3. A Paul Whose Critique Is Not of Substance

Or perhaps we should say that Paul *does* develop a critique of Judaism, but merely as a reflex required by his christological convictions or missionary strategies.

5. Citing as his predecessors F. C. Baur, Krister Stendahl, W. D. Davies, and (above all) E. P. Sanders, Francis Watson sees his *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach*[9] as a further contribution to the scholarly task of "delutheranizing Paul" (18). Paul did *not* believe in salvation *sola gratia,* nor did he criticize Jews for attempting to "earn" their salvation. In fact, Watson suggests, the Jews whom Paul *attacks* in Romans 2 held a doctrine of *sola gratia* which led them to "live by the maxim, *pecca fortiter*" (112); moreover, in Romans 6, "it is precisely the notion of *sola gratia* that Paul excludes" (148).

For Watson, the attempt to define a theological basis for Paul's attacks on Judaism and Jewish Christianity is itself misguided: a sociological explanation is needed. Paul initially conducted a mission to non-Christian Jews, but met with little success. Concluding that God had hardened Jewish hearts, Paul redirected his energies toward a Gentile mission. To prevent a repeat of the earlier debacle, however, Paul made the strategic decision to eliminate from his Christian message the requirement to conform to the laws of Torah that offended Gentile sensibilities. The move had the effect of cutting off Paul and the Pauline communities from further fellowship with the Jewish synagogue, thus transforming Christianity from a reform movement *within* Judaism to a sect now severed from its Jewish roots (36–38). It also, inevitably, sparked criticism. Paul's theological reasoning on the subject thus represents a secondary attempt to legitimate a procedure adopted on other grounds. What is essentially at issue in Galatians and Philippians is *not* whether one must "do good works in order to be accepted by God," but whether the church should "be a reform-movement within the Jewish community or a sect outside it" (80). As for the Roman Christians, they were divided into two communities, one of Jewish Christians who maintained their ties with the synagogue (thus remaining a "reform-movement" within Judaism), the other of "sectarian" Christians (97). Paul's letter to the Romans

[9] Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1986.

is best seen as an attempt to persuade "the Jewish congregation to separate themselves finally from the non-Christian Jewish community, and recognize the legitimacy of the Pauline congregation, which based itself on the premises of freedom from the law and separation from the synagogue" (123).

6. Reinhold Liebers[10] concludes from the first part of his study that only exegesis bearing the stamp of the Reformation could find in Paul a critique of righteousness based on works and human merit (238): where Paul rejects "works of law," the accent is in fact on "law," not on "works" (41–54, 92). In the second part Liebers claims that what Paul in effect attacks is a Jewish understanding of Torah (identified with Wisdom) as mediator, not only of creation, but also of salvation: Jews saw Torah as the expression of God's grace, transforming the heart as well as guiding the steps of God's people (240–41). It follows that the understanding of Torah rejected by Paul – because he made the same claims for Christ – was one in which the law served *as* gospel (244).

7. Mikael Winninge[11] expresses broad approval of the "new perspective on Paul" (213) and, in particular, of Sanders's insistence that Paul's depiction of the human plight developed out of his belief in "the indispensability of salvation in Christ" (309). Universal sinfulness is acknowledged throughout early Jewish materials (Winninge's study focuses primarily on the *Psalms of Solomon*). Nonetheless, the "righteous" (or, more aptly, the "sinfully righteous") are consistently distinguished from stubbornly disobedient "sinners." "Paul simply claims that there are no righteous persons whatsoever, because all Jews and Gentiles are sinners from the outset. This is something entirely new within Judaism. . . . Paul's classification of all Jews as sinners along with the Gentiles was incomprehensible from a Jewish perspective, because forgiveness was considered as a covenantal privilege, unless the border was crossed in outright apostasy" (264). The explanation, Winninge believes, is to be found in "Paul's conviction that Jesus Christ was the saviour of all. . . . Since universal sinfulness was not enough to explain the need of salvation, Paul was forced to 'make' sin more dangerous. . . . It is Paul's experience of Christ that is the source for his reflection on the dangerousness of sin" (305).

8. A student of Heikki Räisänen, Kari Kuula has published a monograph[12] that leaves no doubt about its academic paternity.[13] Like Räisänen, Kuula

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[10] *Das Gesetz als Evangelium: Untersuchungen zur Gesetzeskritik des Paulus* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1989).

[11] *Sinners and the Righteous: A Comparative Study of the Psalms of Solomon and Paul's Letters* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995).

[12] *The Law, the Covenant and God's Plan: Paul's Polemical Treatment of the Law in Galatians* (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999). A second volume on Romans is promised.

[13] Räisänen's work is treated briefly below.

finds in Sanders's portrayal of Judaism a reason to reexamine Paul's polemic against the Jewish law and its practitioners; and, again like Räisänen, he finds Paul's positions strained and untenable. It is clear for Kuula (as, of course, for Sanders) that Paul rejected the law and the Jewish covenant because he believed that salvation is only to be found in Christ (206–7). From the perspective of Paul's apocalyptic dualism, what was outside Christ was necessarily under the power of sin; Judaism thus became "one of the false religions of his time" (207). Difficulties arose for Paul because he nonetheless wanted to retain a measure of continuity with his Jewish past, a venture that led to dubious argumentative strategies, forced interpretations of Scripture, and artificial suggestions about the law's place in God's salvific plan (208). Not that Paul was a "poor thinker"; the dilemma at the root of his problems lay in the very "foundations of his theology" (209).

9. This is perhaps the least inappropriate place to introduce the important work of Terence L. Donaldson,[14] though Paul's "critique" of Judaism is not its focus. Donaldson accepts Sanders's portrayal of first-century Judaism as characterized by "covenantal nomism"; and methodologically, Donaldson adopts and refines Sanders's distinction between Paul's "arguments" in favor of a particular position and his real "reasons" for holding it. In regard to Paul's Gentile mission, however, Donaldson finds unconvincing Sanders's suggestions for its roots (i.e., that Paul thought that the time for the "eschatological pilgrimage" of Gentiles had come, and that it was the task of his mission to promote it [12–13, 187–97]).

We cannot here consider the numerous alternative proposals that Donaldson considers only to reject them – other than to note that he, like other proponents of the "new perspective," dismisses any suggestion that Paul's mission was rooted either in a newly won conviction that salvation is by faith, not works, or that Christianity provided, as Judaism did not, an answer to the universality of human sin. How, then, does Donaldson account for Paul's mission to the Gentiles? Prior to his Damascus experience, Paul was among those Jews who believed that Gentiles could share in God's salvation only if they became proselytes, submitting to Torah and becoming incorporated in the people of Israel. Paul himself encouraged Gentiles to do so (he "preached circumcision," Gal 5:11). At the same time, he perceived that faith in Jesus as Messiah and adherence to Torah were rival ways of defining the people of God. Then, as a result of his Damascus experience, Paul became convinced that Jesus was God's Messiah, that Christ was God's way to salvation, and hence (since he continued to see Torah as an exclusive alternative) that faith in Christ, *not* adherence to Torah, defined the boundaries of the people of God. As a Christian, Paul continued to fulfill his

[14] *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997).

pre-Damascus vocation to bring Gentiles into the community of God. He continued to understand God's community as Israel, the family of Abraham. But faith in Christ, rather than adherence to Torah, now defined membership in the community.

4. Paul Finds Judaism Ethnocentric

10. Only a year after the publication of Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism,* N. T. Wright agreed that "the real Judaism" was "based on a clear understanding of grace," and that "good works" were meant to express "gratitude, and demonstrate that one is faithful to the covenant."[15] Pauline scholarship, Wright declared, must find other categories for interpreting Paul than "the thin, tired and anachronistic ones of Lutheran polemic."[16] Rightly understood, Paul "mount[ed] a detailed and sensitive criticism of Judaism *as its advocates present it.*"[17] Judaism, in Wright's reading of Paul, had come to distort its distinctive vocation.

When God entered a covenant with Israel, he intended to undo the sin of Adam and its effects.[18] An obedient Israel would have proved to be the "true Adam, the truly human people of the creator god," and a "light" conveying God's blessing to the Gentiles.[19] Through Abraham's "seed" the nations of the world would come to be united in a "single worldwide family."[20]

But Israel, no less than other nations, shared in the effects of Adam's sin.[21] Adam, confronted by a divine command, disobeyed; Israel, given the commands of Torah, "recapitulated" Adam's sin (197, based on Rom 7:7–12), and thus was in no position to bring "light" to the Gentiles. Moreover, the "Adam" in Israel made Israel's singular vocation the basis for Israel's characteristic sin, the "meta-sin" (240) of boasting of her special place in God's plan and treating the symbols of her distinctiveness (Sabbath, circumcision, the dietary laws) as "badges of superiority" (243).

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[15] "The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith," *TynBul* 29 (1978): 61–88, here 79–80.

[16] Wright, "Paul of History," 87.

[17] Wright, "Paul of History," 82.

[18] N. T. Wright, "Romans and the Theology of Paul," in *Pauline Theology*, Volume 3: *Romans* (ed. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 30–67, here 33.

[19] N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 265, 267.

[20] N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 150. Page references to Wright's work in the body of the text are taken from this book.

[21] N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 130.

Israel's sin brought on the nation the curse of the covenant spelled out in Deuteronomy 27–28, thus leading to its exile. That judgment – that *exile* – was believed to continue in the first century: "Roman occupation and overlordship" represented "the mode that Israel's continuing exile had now taken" (141). Sanders's claim that the post-Damascus Paul contrived a plight to match the solution he perceived in Christ is not, for Wright, the whole story. Paul *revised* his earlier notion of Israel's plight, but in pre-Damascus days he, like other Jews, would have yearned for Israel's redemption (260–61).

Just as Israel was representative of all humankind, so Jesus, as Messiah, was Israel's representative. The curse of the covenant that led to Israel's exile and subjection to foreign overlordship reached its climax in the death of Israel's Messiah at the hands of Roman soldiers; and so, in Messiah's representative death, the curse of his people was exhausted (141). Moreover, his representative resurrection meant Israel's deliverance from the "ultimate enemies" of sin and death.[22] Once the curse of the covenant had been exhausted, the extension of its blessing to the Gentile nations became a reality. The gift of God's Spirit to Gentiles was the sign that the covenant had been renewed, and that its blessings were available to all (154).

The divine plan to unite people from all nations in a single family was evident already in the promise given to Abraham. Habakkuk 2:4 underlines that the single family of God's people would one day be demarcated by faith, not by the boundary markers spelled out in Torah for Israel (148–51). Hence, the fulfillment of God's covenant involves the redefinition of "Israel" as God's people along lines determined by grace, not race; by faith, not by the "works" (or boundary markers) of Torah. "Israel is transformed from being an ethnic people into a worldwide family" (240). Not all Jews, to be sure, are prepared to accept the transformation. Those who cling to the path of "national righteousness" and reject the gospel have both misunderstood God's intentions and perpetuated the "meta-sin" of ethnic Israel. The Israel that, according to Romans 11:26, is destined for salvation is the single family drawn from all nations and marked by its faith (249–50).

11. No one has proven more energetic in the promotion and defense of the "new perspective on Paul" than James D. G. Dunn – who, indeed, gave it the designation by which it has become known.[23] *Traditional* readings of Paul (we are assured) often erred by imposing sixteenth-century categories on Paul's response to Judaism, resulting in a portrayal of Judaism that, like the medieval Catholic church, was "legalistic, dependent on human effort, and

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[22] Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said,* 51.

[23] See James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 183–206 for Dunn's early article "The New Perspective on Paul."

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