

# Rethinking the “Paul and Judaism” Paradigm

© Mark D. Nanos

May 10, 2005

[Adapted from “Paul and Judaism” for the Central States SBL, St. Louis, March 28-29, 2004, and updated from Yale Post-Grad Seminar paper presented on March 3, 2005]

The title of this paper retains language developed for a 2004 Central States SBL session on Paul. In each case, Paul was set on one side of the conjunction “and,” and on the other side, a topic by which to measure his position. In the case of this topic, the conjunction is commonly approached as if signifying “or,” “against,” “outside of,” or even just “not”: Paul or Judaism; Paul against Judaism; Paul outside of Judaism; or Paul, not Judaism. Traditionally, within NT studies, a paper with this title would measure *the distance between Paul’s new religion based upon Jesus Christ and his former religion, Judaism*. The distance articulated may differ depending upon the presenter, but the perception that *the message and life of Paul’s communities, Paulinism, and the message and life of Jewish communities, Judaism*, represent two fundamentally different religious systems is generally assumed, if not argued.

Most interpreters today contend that Paul had been a Jew, and some maintain that Paul remained one; however, few have or would argue that Paul continued to practice and propagate Judaism (or a Judaism) after his experience of faith in Jesus Christ, except as judged necessary in the service of evangelizing those who did practice Judaism. When not portrayed as the outright founder of Christianity, he is nevertheless understood to have worked outside of Judaism. He built his communities independent from synagogues (although [perhaps] preaching within them when he could), founding house-churches of believers in Jesus Christ, mostly composed of non-Jews and a few (former) Jews, which were distinguishable from synagogue gatherings, and would become the foundations of Christianity, if not already so-called.<sup>1</sup> Some argue that Paul

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the representative comment of Barclay, *Jews*, 386: “In social reality Paul’s churches were distinct from the synagogues, and their predominantly Gentile members unattached to the Jewish community.” Segal, *Paul*, 6-7, argues that Paul represents “a new apocalyptic, Jewish sect,” yet writes of him living “in a Hellenistic, gentile *Christian community* as a Jew among gentiles” (emphasis mine). Esler, *Conflict and*

was not outright antagonistic toward Torah-identity and practice, but rather, he was simply indifferent (ἀδιάφορον; although Paul's letters do not contain the term), and some admit that he observed Torah practices to various degrees, given the situation, because he was born a Jew.<sup>2</sup> In other words, to the degree that Paul may have observed Torah or practiced Judaism "occasionally," it was not an expression of faith, of faithfulness to continued Mosaic covenantal identity. It either represented cultural conditioning from which he had not yet achieved complete independence,<sup>3</sup> or it

---

*Identity*, 89-97, 120-25, argues that the policy of house-churches was by definition a clear differentiation from synagogue gatherings (Esler engages with and argues specifically against the position developed in Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*; Nanos, "Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience"; however, without evidence of a single public synagogue structure in Rome at the time, a city holding the communal meetings of tens of thousands of Jews, who are understood not to even "also" hold meetings in houses. Yet even today, when most Christian meet in public buildings designated "Churches," there are church meetings held in homes, either because they cannot finance other options, seek a more intimate venue for their assembling, or in general, do so in addition to meeting in public buildings for a variety of smaller-group oriented reasons, and in certain cases, call these locations and gatherings "Church." Was similar diversity not probable for Jewish synagogue gatherings?).

<sup>2</sup> This point is clearly made by Schoeps, *Paul*, 197-200, noting that for Paul (and Philo) "the law was no longer a living possession" (198), albeit because of a misunderstanding of its relationship to covenant, which lead to it becoming a matter of indifference, even though Paul "obviously remained consistently faithful to the Torah" (199) and other Jewish Christians continued to practice it as a matter of status quo maintenance, and "freedom from the law only arises in regard to Gentile Christians who do not need to bind themselves to an ordinance of the old and dying aeon, an ordinance which previously had meant nothing to them" (199). Nevertheless, its practice by these born Jews was "irrelevant": "[h]ence the law in its totality, *qua* law, is considered by him to be antiquated" (199). This removal of Torah-observance as an expression of covenant intention instead of status quo adherence as a matter of indifference "led to the final break with contemporary Judaism" (199), that is, the observance of Torah undertaken after Christ was no longer an expression of intention (196), of faith, of the fear of the God of the covenant with Israel, within which covenant these laws derive their expression of covenant faithfulness (cf. 200-18, 280-93), a position that no only Judean Judaism could not tolerate, but even the Jews of the Diaspora anathematized (199-200). See Barclay, *Jews*, 381-95, for a construction of Paul as "an anomalous Diaspora Jew" whose level of assimilation is understood to leave only himself supposing he is not an apostate, and in addition, one to be understood to be intentionally leading others astray.

<sup>3</sup> Representative of a clear statement in this direction is Dodd, *Romans*, 43; Sanders, *Paul, the Law*, 103, 198-99, discusses Paul's struggle to reconcile revelation with "his native convictions." Segal, *Paul*, in a different direction, although arguing that Paul's conversion dramatically altered his understanding of Judaism, detects in Paul's assertion of the eventual salvation of all Israel—which goes against the

reflected the chameleon-like measures to which he would go. In spite of his personal conviction of independence from Torah, Paul was willing to “compromise” his new-found principles. He subscribed to this policy in order, on the one hand, to respect the sensibilities Jewish believers in Jesus who still “fail to trust God completely and without qualification,” i.e., those not free of Torah-practice as integral to faith for Jewish Christ-believers.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Paul did so to gain a hearing meant to win his fellow Jews to Christ-faith.<sup>5</sup> To the degree that Judaism continued to be lived in a meaningful

---

apocalyptic notions Segal understands Paul to otherwise uphold—evidence of “Paul’s continuing allegiance to major aspects of the rabbinic understanding of Torah, in spite of his conversion” (280).

<sup>4</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 798. This common understanding of Paul’s language, e.g., in Rom 14–15 and 1 Cor 8–10, does incorporate some problematic logic (my disagreement with this interpretive tradition, and more problems of the nature I seek here to merely raise, are discussed in detail in, e.g., Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 85-165, 345-47 [88-95, for discussion of “Luther’s trap,” where comments such as this one by Dunn are discussed]). For example, many interpreters of Rom 14 argue that if “Torah-free” Jewish Christ-believers, such as Paul is supposed to be, were to live according to their convictions (e.g., not to practice Jewish dietary customs) in the presence of Torah-observant Christ-believers, that those Jews in Christ would risk being lead to engage in blasphemous behavior or renounce their faith in Christ. Moreover, if they were to try to live Torah-free lives in order to gain maturity, but not be able to believe it to be right, this would lead them to sin (“whatever is not of faith is sin”; v. 23, as commonly understood), while those who do not believe in Torah-observant lives are nevertheless instructed to act against their faith convictions by adopting Torah-behavior in the company of such Christ-believing Jews, without fear that this would lead to sin for them, on the same terms. In other words, the double standard at the heart of this interpretation of Paul does not grant to the Torah-observant as a matter of faith the nobility of conviction to Christ-faith that it grants to Paul and others who are understood to be Torah-free. The Torah-faithful must be accommodated, but not so Torah-free Jews and Gentiles in Christ, who are stronger as a matter of course (because being Torah-free makes you stronger in faith per se? and being Torah-observant weakens faith in Christ per se?—positive answers seem to be at work in the logic of traditional interpretive approaches). In a different direction, it is strange behavior in which Paul and those who represent mature or stronger faith are understood to engage; if this represents the model, how will the weaker in faith mature and learn the better course to undertake? Why does he treat his non-Jewish addressees so severely for notions that are immature by his measure, but coddle Jews similarly mistaken in their notions of Christ-faithfulness? And why does Paul grant that if such immature Christ-believing Jews continue to observe Torah as a matter of faith, that it is acceptable to God, and thus must be accepted by the Torah-free, who know (in the common interpretation of Rom 14:1-12) that it weakens ones faith to continue on that course?

<sup>5</sup> Albeit disingenuously, for this policy obscured the fact that Jews who valued Torah-observance enough that Paul adopted this behavior in order to gain their company would be thereby, if they accepted his

way by Christ-believers—as an expression of personal and communal faith and lifestyle, of *kavannah* (intention)—this was reserved for so-called Jewish Christianity, represented by James or Peter. That was a way of interpreting the meaning of life after the resurrection of Jesus Christ that Paul opposed, because the Mosaic legislation no longer expressed God’s purpose for humankind, either because with the work of Christ the Mosaic covenant had successfully completed its purpose, or because it had failed to do so, and was rendered thereafter obsolete. In short, when New Testament scholars speak of Paulinism, or Pauline Christianity, with its “*Law-free Gospel*,” they by default if not explicitly speak of a *Judaism-free* way of living—in intent, as a measure of faith, if not always in every detail of practice—because of faith in Jesus Christ.

The so-called New Perspective on Paul has challenged the traditional characterizations of the Judaism of Paul’s time as legalistic and arrogantly self-righteous.<sup>6</sup> Instead, it recognizes that Judaism of Paul’s time was focused upon responsible behavior (Torah-observance) undertaken in a spirit of gratitude appropriate (to the expression of faith) for those called by a gracious God to a covenantal relationship (that is, reflecting the ideals prized by Christians in the positive terms [variously expressed by various Christian groups, of course] that had been usually reserved for Christianity but denied to Judaism!). Taking Judaism on its own terms is the precious advance made by its proponents, largely based on the ability of Krister Stendahl’s and E. P. Sander’s arguments, and those made by others since, to succeed where others making similar observations had been unable to convince Pauline scholars

---

message, commencing on a faith-journey characterized by the renunciation of Torah-faith, yet unbeknownst to them. Of course, it follows that they too would adopt this chameleon-like expedient behavior thereafter on the same terms, i.e., only to dupe other Jews, creating a spiral of obfuscation that also created a culture wherein misunderstanding and continued immature notions of the continued value of Jewish practice among Jewish believers in Christ would be self-perpetuating. For an interesting recognition of this element of the traditional construction of Paul by one nevertheless upholding that viewpoint to be correct, even to the point of comparing Paul’s theology with “a Trojan horse which threatens the integrity of those who sought to live according to the law” (308), see Barclay, “Undermine the Law?,” esp. 303-8.

<sup>6</sup> The position and coining of the phrase by James Dunn is well summarized in “The New Perspective on Paul,” *BJRL* 65 (1983): 95-122 (reprinted with additional notes in Dunn, *Jesus, Paul*, 183-214).

(and Christians in general) previously,<sup>7</sup> a change that is timely and most welcome. Undermining this tradition-worn foundation for interpreting Paul's voice against the ostensibly mistaken notions of Jewish works-righteousness has, however, resulted in much confusion about Paul. This historically more viable and cross-culturally more respectful development, with its new level of sociological and rhetorical sensitivity, has also done little to alter the view that Paul as a Christ-believer did not practice the Judaism or Judaisms of his day. Most new perspective interpreters either still find fault with Judaism, albeit emphasizing different reasons; namely, Jewish particularism, which Paul is considered to have transcended (cf. James Dunn; N. T. Wright). Or they find fault with Paul, in that he seems to have misunderstood his "former" religion (E. P. Sanders, and earlier, e.g., H. J. Schoeps), or to have failed to reconcile it with his new "Christian" religion (Räsänen), leaving an irreconcilable contradiction in his theology.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Schoeps, *Jewish-Christian Argument*, 40-52, 165, published in German in 1961 (see Schoeps, *Israel und Christenheit*, 57-59; the first edition of 1937 contains this same language!: Schoeps, *Jüdisch-Christliches Religionsgespräch*, 49-61, 152). Anticipating the observations of the New Perspective (including the viewpoint that Paul's position misrepresents Judaism), before the war, the Jewish scholar Schoeps writes on 41 (49-50, in 1937 German edition): "What is the actual point of the Pauline view, the Christian evaluation of the law? Seen from a vantage point within Judaism, it is a misconception of monstrous proportions; for all Christian polemic—and especially modern Protestant polemic against the law—misconstrues the law of the Jews as a means of attaining justification in the sight of God (so-called 'justification by works'). Wherever Protestant theologians today seek to use Luther's language, they take over his point of view, which often simplifies far too much. The righteous demands of God's law, which in reality is intended to confirm the covenant, are unintentionally put on the same footing as the actual 'justification by works' of the medieval Catholic Church, at least in its degenerate form. And all this because, after his experience on the road to Damascus, Paul was no longer able to understand what he, as a scholar, had surely known previously: that the law of the Torah was given, not to make the Jews righteous and acceptable before their Father in Heaven, but precisely because it proclaims the holy will of their Father in Heaven.... The rabbinic praises of the law can be understood only in this sense of fulfilling God's will, and never in the sense of some ethics of merit, no matter how fashioned." Similar observations are in Schoeps, *Paul*, 168-218, 280-93. There were naturally others who anticipated these positive developments, and some examples such as G. F. Moore, W. D. Davies, and S. Sandmel, as well as central protagonists of the traditional negative biases, are discussed by Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 33-59; see too Heschel, *Abraham Geiger*; Langton, "Myth of the 'Traditional View of Paul'."

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the observations and criticisms of Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, 66-72, 108. On the problem of a continued logical negative valuation of Judaism in recent inter-mural Christian approaches pitting Paul against

This matter can be shown by considering the often repeated statement by E. P. Sanders that cleverly posed the matter this way: “*this is what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity.*”<sup>9</sup> Sanders defines this problem not as a critique of “the means of being properly religious,” but of “the prior fundamentals of Judaism: the election, the covenant and the law; and it is because these are *wrong* that the means appropriate to ‘righteousness according to the law’ (Torah observance and repentance) are held to be wrong or are not mentioned.”<sup>10</sup>

To my knowledge, what has gone largely unrecognized in Sander’s turn of phrase (and in much of the work by the new perspective interpreters) is the traditional assumption that remains necessary to it—which unsurprisingly remains characteristic of traditional approaches, and of those that presently seek to challenge the new perspective where it subverts traditional notions.<sup>11</sup> For Sander’s statement not only requires the institutional development of Christianity to make sense,<sup>12</sup> however

---

Jewish Christianity, and thus claiming to avoid the traditional Paul against Judaism judgments, see Nanos, “Inter-Christian Approaches to Paul’s Rhetoric.”

<sup>9</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 552 (emphasis his).

<sup>10</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 551-52 (emphasis added).

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*; Gathercole, *Where is Boasting?*; Carson, O’Brien, and Seifrid, eds., *The Paradoxes of Paul*.

<sup>12</sup> Stowers, *Romans*, 24-25, similarly notes this problem. James Dunn represents an interesting case of negotiating this language in a way that seems to obscure the fact that his Paul is not doing Judaism, but something different, Christianity. Dunn regularly notes that Paul was not converted to a new religion and that he precedes what can be properly denoted as Christianity (cf. Dunn, *Partings*, 116-19, 135 [even after the Antioch incident, which Dunn takes to represent a monumental realization of incompatibility, still he writes of the eventual developments to be “as much a parting of the ways *within* the new movement as *between* Christianity and Judaism, or better, as within Judaism” (emphasis his)]). And he challenges the idea that Paul should be defined only in discontinuity with Judaism, as opposite to it (Dunn, “How New Was Paul’s Gospel?,” 385). Yet he writes, “we must be careful about defining Pauline Christianity simply as a kind of Judaism” (Dunn, “How New Was Paul’s Gospel?,” 385, in the same sentence upon which my prior sentence was based). Note that here we see that it is Christianity that Paul is described as doing (although he refers to denoting Jew and Christian is “anachronistic” for Paul’s time on p. 387), and moreover, observes that it is not Judaism. How does one square this with the idea that Paul precedes Christianity and did not convert to a new religion, or abandon Judaism?

historically unlikely this remains,<sup>13</sup> but it requires the construction of a Paul who finds something wrong with Judaism, indeed, with the pillars of Jewish identity and religious values, such as election, covenant, Torah, and repentance—and who does so from outside Judaism rather than from on the inside, since the problem lies *in* the prior fundamentals of Judaism. The problem is not with *some* or *other* Judaisms, not with *some* Jewish people or ideas or institutions or practices, not with *some* or *other* Jewish Christians or groups, or *their ways* of interpreting the meaning of Jesus Christ—but with and in Judaism per se, which Paul “*opposed*.”<sup>14</sup> Granted, this is not because Judaism was

---

<sup>13</sup> I prefer not to use the terms Christian and Christianity except where it is necessary to the discussion, and refer to, e.g., Christ-believers and Christ-believing Jewish coalitions in an effort to avoid perpetuating this problem, and hopefully, to help my reader do so too, although I recognize that the change of terminology can tax the reader as well, creating cumbersome language—and that these choices are still not perfect. Likewise, I try to minimize the use of Gentile(s) to label the non-Jew(s), because it obscures the implied not-ness of the Hebrew and Greek terms for the non-Jewish (and non-Israelite) other, a way of conceptualizing the world still present in Paul’s choice of language, and thus with some relevance to the historical interpretive task. In this same direction, it would be clearer, although even more cumbersome, to refer to “a member of the nations other than Israel” when ἔθνος is translated, and for the plural, “nations,” or “members of the other nations,” i.e., other than *the* nation, Israel.

<sup>14</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law*, 156 (emphasis his). Posing the question in a slightly different way, Daniel Boyarin observes: “What was *wrong* with Jewish culture in Paul’s eyes that necessitated a radical reform? And what in the culture provided the grounds for making that critique? The culture itself was in tension with itself, characterized both by narrow ethnocentrism and universalist monotheism” (Boyarin, *Radical Jew*, 52). Is it clear that Paul found something wrong with Jewish culture that led to his turning to Christ and subsequent work among non-Jews, that is, besides something in the culture of a particular group, namely, Christ-believing Jews? In Paul’s (post-Christ-faith) rhetoric I see no critique of certain Jewish people and group’s cultures, but to those who have a negative reaction to Paul’s new proposition that in Jesus Christ the end of the ages has dawned, bringing a new standing to non-Jews who turn to the Jewish Messiah as the Savior of the world, and to their lack of faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Is that a critique of Jewish culture, or of certain Jewish people? Is it not Jewish culture in the first place, indeed, what is right about Jewish culture from Paul’s viewpoint, that makes possible the ministry of both Jesus and Paul, as well as that of the other apostles and coalitionists? Likewise, that creates the tensions that his addressees face when they, as non-Jews believing themselves to have an identity in Christ that will be honored within Jewish cultures, find that it is not indisputably so? Is it not to Jewish culture’s standards of love developed in Torah to which Paul holds his rivals if they should put self-interest ahead of the best interests of his non-Jewish addressees (from his point of view; cf. Gal 6:13, as I interpret it, Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 226-33)? Moreover, on my reading of Paul, I have argued against the notion that the alternative of proselyte conversion that the conventional proponents uphold represents “narrow ethnocentrism.” It

legalistic or based on achieving righteousness by fulfilling commandments rather than by grace, as the traditional views that Sanders criticizes maintained, because he recognized that these were not how Judaism operated. But for Sanders, Paul does not level his critique from *within* Judaism: he is not engaged in prophetic speech based upon an appeal to the noble values of these fundamental Jewish ideals, accusing competing Jewish groups or Judaisms of compromising them. Rather, Paul devalues or challenges the ideals instead—and moreover, he does so *from outside* Judaism.

Sanders does mention the limitation of referring to “Paul and Judaism” in a way that fails to suggest something other than “Paul and *the rest* of Judaism,” but concludes that “the traditional terminology would seem to be justified by his being engaged in a

---

is ethnocentric and particularistic, but it expresses inclusivism and thus represents a kind of universalism within the constraints of the present age (Boyarin, 54, later qualifies his use of exclusiveness, recognizing that anyone can become Jewish, but emphasizes that it is not universalistic in the Greek sense of the universal, which he believes Paul is motivated by instead; see too the arguments of Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, 70, against regarding the issue to be exclusivism as defined by James Dunn, whom Boyarin follows on this point).

On my reading, Paul simply believes, that the age to come has broken into the present age, and thus that the terms for how to incorporate these non-Jews have changed: they do not become members of Israel, as had been characteristic in the present age until now. In other words, Paul bases his critique of those Jews and non-Jews who oppose his communities’ propositions and policies on Jewish cultural norms, albeit ones that can be disputed as applicable or not in the midst of the present age in the ways he proposes, because it is disputable whether the age to come has already dawned, upon which his warrant for activating these Jewish cultural expectations is based. Boyarin proceeds, like Dunn, in a way that understands Paul to seek to collapse the difference between Jews and non-Jews, between Israel and the rest of the nations, so that the signifiers of Jewishness should be abrogated, and thus his Paul undermines the meaning of Jewish and Israelite ethnicity in his quest for universal oneness of humankind. I think this is mistaken, and that Paul retained the distinction between Jewish/Israelite and non-Jewish/Nations ethnicity, but sought to undermine the discrimination that was associated with valuing Jewishness or non-Jewishness—depending upon whether in Jewish or non-Jewish social space—as a relative advantage or disadvantage. Instead, in my view, for Paul non-Jews (non-Torah people, hence not doing works of Torah or gaining the status advantages that offers) had stepped-up to equal standing with Jews (Torah-people, who do the works of Torah in gratitude to the covenant God’s choice of themselves, but who should not hold the advantages that status provides against the non-Jews in Christ who does not possess the same), without becoming Jews, and should remain on that course in the face of opposition to the basis of that claim by those who did not share faith in it.

mission which *went beyond the bounds of Judaism*.”<sup>15</sup> For Sanders, Paul’s problem remains with or in Judaism as a system that does not offer salvation in Jesus Christ. But does it not do so? Is it not precisely *within* Judaism where Paul as well as all of the other Jewish and Judean believers in Jesus Christ understood themselves to find Jesus Christ? Did not Paul persecute (i.e., seek to discipline) groups within Judaism for the failure to exemplify Jewish values according to his Jewish group’s terms, and then later, was it not instead those persecuted groups’ values that he upheld as the most representative of Judaism—Judaism as it should and will be when the end of the ages has arrived, having now, however, in specifically Jewish communal terms, already dawned? Is it not Judaism’s ideals as represented in Judaism’s Scriptures to which he appeals in order that his addressees will “hear Torah” aright (Gal 4:21), that is, according to Paul’s interpretation? Was he not disciplined as a Jew within Judaism? Even Sanders’ argues as much, including that this observation logically implies Paul’s continued presence in synagogues (when discussing Paul’s thirty-nine lashings five times as evidence that Paul was disciplined within; otherwise, it would not take place).<sup>16</sup>

Rather than seek to discuss the various recent works further, which have, for all of their many interesting and helpful discussions about both Judaism(s) and Paul, nevertheless, not for the most part explicitly approached Paul as engaged in the practice and spread of Judaism, I want to try to identify some proposals that might advance the discussion. Let us look a little closer at what Sanders did. He compared “how *one* gains righteousness” in Paul’s system to that of so-called Palestinian Judaism.<sup>17</sup> The Paul he constructed did not share many of the values of the Jewish religious systems to which he compared him. Besides approaching Paul as outside Judaism, I propose that Sanders makes another decisive move that continues to reverberate not only in the work of those who constitute the so-called new perspective, or at least share some of its views, but for

---

<sup>15</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 1 (emphasis added).

<sup>16</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law*, 192, interestingly enough, in this later work (although without engaging the earlier contrary viewpoint he expressed), writes of Paul as still attending synagogue, that is, as Jewish in socially measurable terms, and argues that Paul and all of the parties, including his non-Jewish addressees as well as those who opposed Paul’s work, understood the “Christian movement” they were involved in to be within “the bounds of Judaism. *Punishment implies inclusion*” (emphasis his).

<sup>17</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 12 (emphasis added).

those who oppose it too. The question to search out is not how *one* gains righteousness, which poses the topic in universal terms for *everyone*, but how *one not born Jewish* gains equal standing among *the righteous* (i.e., Israelites, Jews). In other words, Sanders errs when posing the soteriological concerns of the rabbis in such universal terms as “when a man”;<sup>18</sup> the question, to the degree that male circumcision is central to the discussion, should be either “when a *Jewish* man,” or in this case, since it is to be compared to the “when a non-Jewish man” context of Paul’s rhetoric, should be “how does a *non-Jewish* man gain standing among the righteous ones.”

When Sanders does look specifically at the question of the inclusion of non-Jews as righteous ones both in this age and in the age to come, he readily admits that unlike the literature addressing the members of the covenant from which he develops the notion of covenantal nomism, “the Gentiles are dealt with only sporadically, however, and different Rabbis had different opinions about their destiny.”<sup>19</sup> This fact profoundly alters the interpretive landscape for comparing Paul and Judaism. The problem is accentuated if one attends to Second Temple Jewish literature rather than the rabbis. See for example, Josephus’s account of the two very different opinions about how the non-Jewish King Izates should proceed in the present age to worship God and express pious adherence to a Jewish (Judean) way of life, by becoming circumcised or not, espoused by the two different Jewish informants Ananias and Eliezer, which, interestingly enough, takes place within a Diaspora setting during Paul’s time (*Ant.* 20.34-96). I have not noticed any secondary source refer to the teaching against the circumcision of Izates as representing a religious view other than Judaism, and more than a few stretch their conceptualizations to cover the breadth of Jewish views that just such an incident makes necessary. In other words, it is the interpreter’s definitions of Judaism that are challenged, not whether the participants stand outside of it, finding something wrong with Judaism. Unfortunately, to date the distinction between a proposition discussing righteous standing with God for Jews versus one discussing the topic for non-Jews, about which Paul specifically writes, which thus should be central to the “Paul and” debates, continues to be obscured in the way that the discussion unfolds.

---

<sup>18</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 75.

<sup>19</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 207.

## Some Suggestions

If Paul's rhetoric does not collapse the ethnic boundary defining Jew and non-Jew, then why do interpreters not maintain that difference in the way they approach Paul to make comparisons between him and other Jewish voices on the topics at issue? Thus we do not read of "Paul against Torah-observance *for non-Jews* as if they were under Torah on the same terms as are Jews," but of "Paul against Torah-observance," inferring, "Paul against Torah-observance *for all humankind*." The normal shorthand for calling up this paradigmatic understanding of that for which Paul stood reads, "Paul's Law-free Gospel." That phrase is so common as to seem unremarkable, beyond requiring defense.<sup>20</sup> But if we were to limit the comparisons to those within Paul's rhetorical sphere we would find that other Jewish sources also do not believe that non-Jews are obliged to observe Torah on the same terms as Jews.<sup>21</sup> Where we would find a

---

<sup>20</sup> E.g., in a recent essay, Claudia Setzer charges my critique of J. Louis Martyn's approach to Paul (Nanos, "Inter-Christian Approaches to Paul's Rhetoric") with anachronism: "Because," she writes, "Paul's Law-free mission has survived and won the day...." should not be held against Martyn, as if an interpretation from which he is responsible for showing hermeneutical distance (instead of just applying an historical fact) (Setzer, "Does Paul Need to be Saved?"). My criticism, however, was based on disagreement with Martyn's conclusion that Paul saw the Law and Israel's election as terminated. I believe that Setzer's (like Martyn's) notions of a "*Law-free Paul*" and "*Law-free Gospel/mission*" (from which many Pauline interpreters work) express later interpretive constructions of Paul that are historically doubtful. They should be subject to critical distance from the later "Pauline" trajectories, and not presumed to represent the historical Paul instead of being themselves interpretive constructions. Because this construction of Paul "won" among later interpreters does not mean that it represents Paul's historical voice, rather than that of mistaken later interpreters. Hence, there is culpability when it is recognized by the interpreter that that Paul's voice is harmful, but not hermeneutically qualified when applied to their own theological system. At least, I am trying to raise awareness that this should be a topic of concern, and no longer assumed to be an uncontested fact. I do not assume in my challenge that this was necessarily evident to those with whom I seek now to interact.

<sup>21</sup> Donaldson, *Paul*, 60-74, for discussion of various expectations for non-Jews, including a natural law non-Jew who turns from idolatry but is not identified with circumcision and other special laws for Israelites, e.g., observing dietary customs; righteous gentiles; and eschatological pilgrimage scenarios. Examples include Josephus, *Ant.* 20.41 (34-48); Philo, *QE* 2.2; *Moses* 2.4; *Abraham* 3-6, 60-61; *Virtues* 102, 181-82, 212-19; *Spec. Laws* 1.51; 2.42-48; 4.178; *Joseph and Aseneth*; *t. Sanh.* 13.2. Cf. Fredriksen, "Another Look," 236-47; Wyszogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, 162-63, 190-95. For discussion of similarities between

difference is on the question of the standing of non-Jewish people within the community of the people of God in the present age—not even so much in the age to come, because according to some Jewish voices the righteous non-Jew can gain equal or even higher standing then (Isa 66:18-20; Zeph 3:9; Zech 2:15; Tobit 13:11; 14:5-6; cf. *t. Sanhedrin* 13.2; *b. Megilla* 13a). It is on the question of what is appropriate *now* regarding non-Jews turning to Judaism's God that a comparison of Paul's Judaism with other Judaisms (or his Jewish coalition within Judaism, if you prefer) exhibits a salient difference of opinion, although not universally, because his Judaism claims that the end of the ages has dawned, and thus, that the re-identification of non-Jews already takes place on new age terms. That proposition is unique to the Christ-believing Jews, as far as we know.

We thus encounter a familiar difference between Jewish groups, one that turns around eschatological convictions; not whether the Torah obtains, but how it functions in the present age for Jews and non-Jews alike, with differences of opinion emerging along the line marking viewpoints concerning where humankind is on God's timeline. It was because of dissident answers to these kinds of questions that the Dead Sea Scrolls community of the Righteous Teacher apparently withdrew from the Temple worship of its time. It was because of a deviant answer to the question of what God was doing among the nations that the Christ-believing Jewish groups suffered. Neither group opposed Torah-observance, but they disagreed with the way that other Jewish groups interpreted how Torah was to be observed, given the *present* circumstances.<sup>22</sup>

---

Noahide Commandments and Apostolic Decree and implications for this topic, see Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 50-68, 166-87, and bibliography cited there.

<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note the subtle shifts in language that betray the way that Jewish groups other than Christ-believing ones, such as those exemplified by the Dead Sea Scroll community's conflicts with other Jewish groups, are understood to revolve around different views of how *to properly interpret* Torah on the matter at hand ("the correct and only legitimate enactment of what the Torah laid down at these points"), but when the dispute is within groups of Christ-believing Jews or between them and other Jewish groups, the terms change to "the *extent* and *detail* of Torah obligation" (Dunn, "Echoes," 467). In other words, disputes involving Paul's rhetoric do not proceed as if Torah is the final authority for him, so that it is the proper interpretation that is at issue, but instead the authority of Torah itself is questioned. If Paul was practicing his faith in Christ within Judaism, however, we would expect him to argue that his position exemplifies the ideals of Torah in contrast to other interpretations no less than the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls, or any other Jewish literature of his time.

Here is a simple suggestion. To be more faithful to the contextual usage of Paul's language, the interpreter of Paul's rhetoric should add, "for *non-Jewish* believers in Jesus Christ" to the end of virtually every characterization of Paul's position. "Why did Paul oppose circumcision?" misses the point; one should ask "Why did Paul oppose circumcision of *non-Jewish* believers in Jesus Christ?" There is no reason to believe that Paul opposed circumcision of children born to Jewish parents, and good reason to suppose that he did not. And there is no reason to suppose that he opposed circumcision of non-Jews who were not Christ-believers. At many points the logic of his position suggests that Jewish believers in Christ, including Paul, observed his instruction to remain in the state in which they were called, keeping the commandments of God (1 Cor 7:17-24), which for a Jewish person involved guarding the whole Torah, by Paul's own admission (Gal 2:15; 5:3, 6:13; discussion below). And it makes sense to suppose that Paul, like the Christ-believing Jews described by James in Acts 21, would be zealous in his observation of halakhic behavior—otherwise, he leaves himself open to the easiest dismissal of his proposition that Jesus is the Christ that can be leveled by the very Jews he seeks to convince, an accusation that has been made ever since the construction of Paul and Paulinism as Torah-free was invented. How could he expect to reach Jews much less non-Jews with his message that the awaited restoration of Israel and of the rest of the nations (of creation itself), had begun with the resurrection of Jesus, if he did not himself represent the highest ideals of the Judaism which maintained the hope of just such a day? In any case, pursuing clarification of these matters for Jews is not the same task as investigating that which Paul's rhetoric directly addresses, which concerns *non-Jews*, members of the nations other than Israel.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Boyarin evaluates Paul's critique of Judaism as dissatisfaction with Jewish difference with the understanding that "the quintessentially 'different' people for Paul were Jews and women" (Boyarin, *Radical Jew*, 17). Leaving aside the topic of women, as a "Jew from birth" (Gal 2:14) which Paul claimed to be, the "different" should be expected to be non-Jews, and indeed Paul's rhetoric addresses how non-Jews, who are different from Jews/Israelites, now fit into God's universal plan for humanity (the rest of the nations) by way of Israel's service and Messiah. I think Boyarin's point is correct, however, with regard to the constructed Paul of traditional Paulinism, which has been populated by non-Jewish Christians for whom the Jew is the different other. Paul represents a different case, so I seek to argue anyway.

Let us look at how Paul used the term Judaism and see if my proposition can be sustained in that context. Paul uses the word we translate Judaism only two times, and both cases are in Galatians 1:13-14. He writes of “my former way of living in Judaism” (ἐμὴν ἀναστροφὴν ποτε ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ). The clause appears in the midst of a sentence describing a certain feature of his former way of living Jewishly with which his addressees are familiar. That way of living was specifically as one who persecuted the Jewish subgroup communities of believers in Jesus Christ. In further describing that time, he writes that he advanced in the Judaism of his former way of life beyond many of his contemporaries in his ethnic group (προέκοπτον ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ ὑπὲρ πολλοὺς συνηλικιώτας ἐν τῷ γένει μου), because he possessed more zeal for the “traditions of my fathers.” One wonders, even in the way Paul phrases this “former” identity—when he still writes of his relationship to the traditions in such personal terms as “of *my* fathers,” and not simply “of *the* fathers”—if his identity does not continue to be bound up with a particular interpretive tradition that he still considers himself to represent, albeit in some way that no longer brings the approval that he formerly enjoyed from the members of this group.

Traditionally, interpreters have understood Paul to be describing himself as now no longer living in Judaism. But the language Paul uses here arguably describes *a certain way of living* in Judaism that no longer characterizes the way *he lives* in Judaism *now*, one that included a more zealous approach than that of his fellows to protecting the traditions of the fathers. And it may be, although it is not certain, that the specific area in which his zeal for the traditions of the fathers was demonstrated to be greater than his peers was in his taking action against what was considered to be a threat posed by the Christ-believing Jewish subgroups. Does this imply that he has moved from Pharisaic Judaism (associated with the traditions of the fathers)<sup>24</sup> to a different sect, to Christ-believing Judaism,<sup>25</sup> or does it imply that he has moved within Pharisaism, from a group of Pharisees that approved of his zeal to destroy these groups to a group of Pharisees<sup>26</sup> (or a coalition of groups including Pharisees) that now expressed the

---

<sup>24</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 13.297, 408; 17.41; cf. Baumgarten, “Pharisaic Paradosis.” Paul refers to himself as a Pharisee in the context of referring to his zeal to persecute the Christ-believers (Phil 3:5-6).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Segal, *Paul*.

<sup>26</sup> According to Acts 15:5, there were Christ-believers who belonged to sect of the Pharisees, and Paul is portrayed as affiliated with Pharisaism in his proclamations of Christ (23:6; 26:5), which arguably aligns

aspirations of those groups, or something else? Paul claims to have had a revelation that his peers have not experienced, and I understand this to be the background for his dissociating statements that his good news message is not from human agency or agents, but from God. In other words, his references to “humans” and the “flesh and blood” from whom he does not gain approval (1:1, 10-12, 16) are not to the other apostles who knew Jesus personally—from whom he also expresses relative independence for many years but not ultimately (1:17—2:10)—but to his contemporaries from whom he had won great approval until his change of course following this revelation (1:13-16). Hence, Paul is not indicating that he formerly lived in Judaism but no longer does so, but that he has changed the way he lives in Judaism, his social location relative to his former group and its approval, perhaps even the particular Judaism to which he owes allegiance.<sup>27</sup> Behaving so as to gain the approval of those peers no longer characterizes the way he is living in Judaism now.<sup>28</sup>

Paul does not specify what the Christ-believing Jewish groups were doing that he deemed so threatening, but interpreters must fill in a proposition to make sense of Paul’s earlier life and change of course. Interpreters have generally understood Paul’s opposition to be to a lax attitude toward Torah observance, perhaps even outright renunciation—proto-Paulinism, you might say.<sup>29</sup> The issues of the letter,<sup>30</sup> and the topic

---

with the self-identity he still asserts to express that this identity, although advantageous in Jewish communal comparative terms, does not make him better than those Christ-believers who cannot make the same claims to identity, including the non-Jews who are suffering marginality in Jewish communal terms for not having become proselytes to substantiate their claims to full membership (Phil 3:3-11, esp. v. 5; cf. Gal 6:12-15; Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 226-33).

<sup>27</sup> Paul specifically gained approval from the peers of his former Jewish group for the zeal he demonstrated toward the traditions of the fathers, namely, toward the ideals of a Pharisaic party, (perhaps the will of the majority rule on matters in dispute?).

<sup>28</sup> Goodman, “Note on Josephus,” 17-20, makes an interesting case for recognizing that the Pharisees were not characterized only by distinctive theological ideas such as such as resurrection, but they upheld proper behavior according to ancestral customs that were not necessarily Pharisaic. If so, this would fit well with the issue at hand in Paul’s opposition to the traditional convention for non-Jews to gain membership via proselyte conversion. It is not just Pharisaic tradition that is being challenged, but general Jewish tradition, which the Pharisees uphold more zealously than other interest groups (from Paul’s point of view).

<sup>29</sup> Traditional views and her interesting proposal are described by Fredriksen, “Another Look,” 248-55.

<sup>30</sup> The topic of Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*.

of his calling as described in v. 16, to proclaim God's son to the nations, suggest to me that Paul objected specifically to the policy of regarding non-Jews who believed in Jesus Christ as full equal members without becoming Jews, as children of Abraham apart from the traditional convention of proselyte conversion to gain that standing. That is the policy for which he claims to be persecuted later, namely, for not "still" preaching circumcision of non-Jews (Gal 5:11).<sup>31</sup> If so, what motivated Paul's zealous response was not per se a failure to observe Torah by Jewish members, but a change of policy toward prevailing convention for the identification of non-Jewish co-participants. Unlike the conventions in place in all Jewish groups of the time of which we are aware, these non-Jews were being regarded not merely as non-Jewish guests, however welcome and celebrated, as they were in other Jewish groups, but as members in full standing on the same terms as proselytes, while insisting that they were not proselytes, not members of Israel, but representatives of the nations.<sup>32</sup> It seems likely that the objections of Paul and the group he zealously represented were to the rumors of insurrectionist agendas among Jewish groups proclaiming the seditious message that there was already a ruler anointed to rule Israel and the Nations other than Caesar. Such a stance threatened to undermine the way that the political exigencies of compliance with Roman rule were understood to be best expressed by Paul's groups and other Jewish interest groups to which they answered, such as the Temple authorities, who did the bidding of the Roman regime.<sup>33</sup> Hence, as their representative seeking to sustain the ostensible gains of maintaining the status quo, he sought "to destroy" the Jesus-as-Christ/Lord-confessing groups.

---

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Donaldson, "Preaching Circumcision."

<sup>32</sup> I am suggesting here an alternative that Fredriksen, "Another Look," does not discuss, although a variation of one she dismisses (251), because it was not objectionable for Jewish groups to include Gentiles. The difference is that she is dealing with a proposition that these Gentiles were merely guests, while I am proposing that the Gentiles in these groups were being identified and treated as full members in a way other Jewish groups reserved for proselytes. At the same time, I do not believe that they were being classified by Paul as proselytes (contra Donaldson, *Paul*). Rather, it was important that they remain representatives of the other nations, but in membership standing on a par with proselytes, indeed, with natural-born Jews as well, so that the "new creation" community consisted of members of Israel *and* the rest of the nations in one voice worshipping the One God of all humankind (cf. Rom 3:29-30; 10:12; 15:5-13; Gal 3:28; cf. Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 179-92).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Nanos, "Intruding 'Spies'"; Goodman, *Ruling Class*.

Paul refers to a specific way of living Jewishly, within Judaism, that is, among those Jews who looked to the traditions of the fathers for authority. Based upon his arguments throughout Galatians, and especially the dissociating of his authority as directly from God and not human agencies and agents, I believe that Paul seeks to remind the addressees that what he taught them ran against the prevailing views of Jewish groups that looked to “the traditions of the fathers” on the matter at hand, the place of proselyte conversion for non-Jewish believers in Christ. In the present age, those who protect this view among Jewish groups may have the authority to compel compliance, but the non-Jewish addressees are to resist that authority and suffer any consequences required, awaiting God’s vindication of their righteous standing according to the message he had proclaimed (5:5). Paul argues that he too suffers for this policy, and does not alter his course to seek the relief that could be gained by relaxing it (5:11). Now they are to join him in suffering for challenging the prevailing conventions, looking to the suffering of the one in whom they have believed (3:1; 4:12; 6:14).<sup>34</sup> “Do [they] not hear Torah” rightly (4:21)—that is, with Paul?<sup>35</sup>

Although Paul believes it should be otherwise, he does not yet expect approval for his way of incorporating non-Jews according to the revelation of Christ by Jewish authorities who do not share his faith in him, and he tells this story to serve as an example to his non-Jewish addressees that they should not yet expect approval of their identity claims by them either.<sup>36</sup> Instead, they must resist pressure to comply or conform with prevailing conventions to gain undisputed standing among the righteous ones: they must “out of faithfulness to the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness” (Gal 5:5). This intra-group disapproval extends not only to Paul, however independent his ministry among the non-Jews has been, but to the other apostles of this coalition too,

---

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Mitternacht, “Foolish Galatians?”

<sup>35</sup> Note that Paul does not write “Do not hear Torah,” as if Torah was no longer the authority on the matter at hand, i.e., as if its role for Christ-believers was finished (which undermines the usual interpretations of Paul’s statement earlier, in 3:23-25, when taken to mean that the role of Torah is finished with the coming of Christ). Cf. Nanos, “‘Present Jerusalem’ (Gal 4:25) in Paul’s Allegory.”

<sup>36</sup> Paul’s hostile rhetoric betrays that he believes those influencing his addressees should instead accept the truth claims of his proclamation of the gospel (cf. Gal 1:6-9; 3:1; 4:17-18; 5:7-12; 6:12-13; cf. Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 226-33).

who stand up for the same principle truth of the message Paul delivered to the Galatian addressees, albeit sometimes a bit too tentatively for Paul's taste (cf. 2:1-21).<sup>37</sup>

In Paul's Judaism, non-Jews do not become proselytes after becoming believers in Jesus Christ, for doing so would undermine the propositional truth upon which their faith is based, namely, that with the resurrection of Jesus Christ the end of the ages has dawned (cf. Gal 1:1-5). Incorporating non-Jews into the people of God in the present age as proselytes according to the traditions of the fathers is no longer halakhically warranted. This is not because Paul or the non-Jewish addressees are no longer a part of Judaism, but because they are members of a particular Judaism, or alternatively, of a Jewish coalition which understands itself in the role of the remnant representing the interests and eventual destiny of the whole cloth, of every Jewish group and way of living Jewishly. In other words, it lives on behalf of Judaism, and every Jewish person, not against them (Rom 9—11; esp. 11:13-14). In this service, it does not reject Torah, but develops halakhot that articulate the appropriate way to observe Torah now, in view of the revelation of Christ that the representatives of the nations are not to become Israelites, but to join with Israelites in a new community adumbrating the restoration of all humankind.<sup>38</sup> Otherwise, Paul's question in Romans 3:29, "Or is God of the Jews

---

<sup>37</sup> Nanos, "What Was at Stake?"; Nanos, "Intruding 'Spies'."

<sup>38</sup> When Sanders writes, "He [Paul] seems to have 'held together' his native view that the law is one and given by God and his new conviction that Gentiles and Jews stand on equal footing, which requires the deletion of some of the law, by asserting them both without theoretical explanation" (Sanders, *Paul, the Law*, 103), because of the inscrutability of 1 Cor 7:19 in Sander's system, his view overlooks the option I am trying to articulate here. From the oneness of the particular Lord of Israel and the universal God of all the rest of the nations one can claim equal footing for Israelites and members of the other nations without requiring "the deletion of some of the law," by regarding the law, Torah, as that which is particular to Israel, to Jewish observance, and thus arises the need for halakhic developments to incorporate non-Jews as equals within this subgroup/coalition. Likewise, when Sanders states that circumcision, Sabbath observance, and dietary restrictions, although clear to Paul as prescribed in Scripture, "are not binding on those in Christ" (103), he again does not make the distinction that I uphold, that is, that they are binding on the Jew in Christ, but not on the non-Jew. Moreover, making halakhic decisions for Jews who live in view of faith in Christ that may require some deviation from prevailing conventions is not the same thing as deleting laws. That is how the prevailing halakhot came to formation as well, by changing interpretations of Torah commandments with changing situations, and interpretations of what was appropriate given the circumstances at hand. For example, I believe that all of the parties present in Antioch when Paul confronted Peter were eating according to prevailing Jewish diets, but not arranged at

only, and not also of members of the other nations?" could not be answered to affirm the inclusion of anyone but Jews; however, Paul answered: "Yes, God is the one God of the members of the other nations also." According to Paul's logic, the alternative would have been to answer instead that God is only the God of Israel, and anyone from the other nations wanting to become part of the God's people must become Jewish proselytes, as was the case for the present age before the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ changed what was appropriate to age to come terms.

To put this another way, Paul understands the oneness of God in view of the faith of/in Christ to warrant a change of perspective on the way to incorporate non-Jewish people into the righteous ones, into the family of Abraham without joining the family of Jacob/Israel. That change, Paul argued, is according to the teaching of Torah, according to the declaration of God's Oneness, according to the expectations of the prophets. To maintain otherwise is to experience "stumbling" and "hardening" instead of enjoying Israel's special privilege of bringing light to all of the nations when that day has come—alongside of Paul (Rom 11:13-36).<sup>39</sup> It is Israel that has been entrusted with

---

the table according to prevailing conventions that discriminated seating based upon identity as Jew or non-Jew (cf. Nanos, "What Was at Stake?"). Non-Jews are not under Torah; they are, nevertheless, obliged to observe the appropriate halakhah for this association as equals to take place. This is an idealistic notion within the constraints of the present age, when discrimination ineluctably accompanies difference (cf. Hogg and Abrams, *Social Identifications*). But Paul believed the age to come had dawned, changing the terms, so that discrimination was to be eliminated by way of living according to the Spirit, that is, according to the age to come way of life the Spirit made real within this community, or should make real. Hence, Paul can write of equality of Jew and non-Jew in Christ and of keeping the commandments of God as paramount without negating any of Torah. The difference between Jew and non-Jew that the Torah makes plain remains operative, but not the discrimination associated with that distinction in the present age. For everyone is to live in a way respecting the different other, in love as the perfect expression of the commandments of God, of Torah for Jews and the Law of Christ for Jews and non-Jews too. Figuring out how to make this work is doing halakhah for Paul, I believe, contra Sanders, *Paul, the Law*, 144.

<sup>39</sup> Paul seeks to provoke his fellow Jews to jealousy "of his *ministry*" (v. 13), not because non-Jews are being included per se, but because they are not participating in this awaited task of bringing light to the nations too (Rom 3:2; 10:14-17; cf. Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 247-51; Nanos, "Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience," 300-4). The charge of disobedience and the assessment of those Jews who have not yet joined Paul in his faith in Christ as stumbling but not fallen bespeak the position of one who views himself and his coalition to be upholding the righteous standing of Israel in the sense of the remnant preserving the

the words of God for the nations (3:2; 10:14—11:12). It is interesting to note that Rashi, who writes around halfway between Paul's time and our own, finds in the repetition of God's name in the Shema the anticipation of a day not unlike that which Paul argues has arrived:

The Lord who is our God now, but not (yet) the God of the (other) nations, is destined to be the One Lord, as it is said, "For then will I give to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent" (Zeph 3:9). And (likewise) it is said, "And the Lord shall be King over all the earth; on that day shall the Lord be One and His name One" (Zech 14:9).<sup>40</sup>

To evaluate Paul's rhetoric we must decide or otherwise assume what his audience knows about him, often firsthand. Paul's interpreters have proceeded on the basis that his addressees know him to live a Torah-free life. However, the opposite hypothesis should be tested. For if Paul writes from within Judaism, if, for example, he is Torah-observant—eating according to prevailing halakhic conventions for Diaspora Jews in each location he visits,<sup>41</sup> respecting the ideals of Temple worship in the ways

---

certain destiny of the whole cloth. The issue for Jews, unlike non-Jews, is not getting-in, contra Sanders, but staying in, now by way of response to Christ. Even the culpability for failing to yet make that decision is mitigated by the admission that God is involved in a complicated scheme to include the nations that will eventually include the restoration of all Israel, for which some of Israel is vicariously suffering presently. Cf. Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 239-88.

<sup>40</sup> Translation from Lamm, *The Shema*, 31. See too Sifre on Deuteronomy 6:4 (Piska 31): "'The Lord, our God,' over us (the children of Israel); 'the Lord is one,' over all the creatures of the world. 'The Lord, our God,' in this world; 'the Lord is one,' in the world to come, as it is said, '[T]he Lord shall be king over all the earth. In that day shall the Lord be one and His name one (Zech. 14:9)'" (Hammer, *Sifre*, 58-59).

<sup>41</sup> In my view, certain texts that have been traditionally understood to suggest that Paul opposed a Jewish diet for himself, and by implication, for other Jewish believers in Christ, imply instead that Paul observed Jewish dietary customs, and was understood by his non-Jewish addressees to do so (see my arguments related to Rom 14 in Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, esp. chs 3 and 4; related to the Antioch Incident in Nanos, "What Was at Stake?." I have not yet published a detailed investigation of 1 Cor 8—10 (cf. Nanos, "A Torah-Observant Paul?"). Paul expresses the view that no Christ-believing non-Jew should eat idol food when it is known to be such (see Tomson, *Paul*; Cheung, *Idol Food*). Regarding 1 Cor 9:19-23, I understand Paul to be expressing a rhetorical strategy; not admitting to the compromising of Jewish behavioral practices when among non-Jews, but relating the message of Torah to them in other terms, as he does in

that religiously observant Diaspora Jews do (such as attempting to travel to Jerusalem in time to celebrate Shavuot/Pentecost, which celebrates the receipt of Torah by Moses [1 Cor 16:8]; collecting for those in Jerusalem suffering economic hardship for upholding the policy of Gentile inclusion apart from proselyte conversion [Rom 15:25-31; Gal 2:7-10]; or, according to Luke's account, taking a Nazarite vow in the Temple, which involved a burnt offering [Acts 21])—then his polemical language would carry very different implications for those it addressed.

Consider too Galatians 5:3, where Paul seeks to undermine the addressees' confidence that they have proper motives for considering the social advantages proselyte conversion appears to offer, putting in doubt the motives of those influencing them also. Paul argues that if they are circumcised they will be responsible to "observe the whole Torah." To carry weight this rhetoric bespeaks knowledge of Paul as a Torah-protector, since he is a Jewish person by birth, one who has, in keeping with his teaching, remained in that circumcised state in which he was called (1 Cor 7:17-24; 2 Cor 11:22; Phil 3:4-7). Otherwise, they would be expected to reply that they simply want what Paul has achieved, the advantage of traditionally accepted social identity for those claiming to be full members within these Jewish groups, without the obligation to observe the Torah. Consistent with this observation, Paul instructs his non-Jewish addressees to remain in their non-Jewish state, although, importantly, in a way that represents righteousness according to Jewish norms for defining human behavior (further evidence of his continued perspective from within Judaism). Even the love to which they are called to work out their faith is an articulation of the Torah (Gal 5:6, 13-14). In doing so, they represent the nations turning from idolatry to worship Israel's Lord as the One God of all humankind (cf. Rom 3:29-31; 6:15-23; 13:8-14; 15:15-16; 1 Cor 10; 1 Thes 1:9).

---

this case regarding why they cannot eat idol food. He does so not by way of citation of Torah, as he would proceed for Jews. Moreover, I think it probable that Paul is not describing a policy of behaving like a "sinner" (ἄνομος; 1 Cor 9:21; cf. Stowers, *Romans*, 134-38), i.e., sinfully, to be among non-Jewish "sinners." That would be no more likely than was the case for Jesus, when engaging in a similar policy of fraternizing with Jewish "sinners," according to the Gospel accounts: relating to sinners does not entail behaving sinfully in order to do so, but quite the contrary, it behooves one seeking to influence them to behave righteously.

One then wonders, why does Paul's rhetoric that seemingly qualifies the advantages of being a Jew and having Torah arise? It is not hard to understand this development if Paul's non-Jewish addressees are understood to be suffering status uncertainty and disadvantage because they have accepted the proposition that they have become equal members of Abraham's family without becoming equal members of Israel via proselyte conversion, because now God's is shown in Christ to be the One God of members of the other nations as well as of Israel. They have discovered the bad news consequences in the very real, everyday social life of the present age for believing and acting according to the good news proposition of the arrival of the age to come. Paul and those whose teaching has brought about this painful identity dissonance and social disadvantage need to qualify their own advantage as Israelites, Jews who have the privilege of Torah. It is not that their faith in Jesus Christ has brought them down to the standing of non-Jews, but the proposition that the non-Jews have been brought up to equal standing with Jews that creates the problem. From this follows the need to qualify their relative advantages, and by implication, the relative advantages of those Jews who do not accept this re-identification proposition apart from proselyte conversion. Hence, Paul asks, is God the God of Jews only? Of course not, he answers, because God is One (3:29-30).

That these comments are not to be taken apart from their rhetorical function of arguing for relative equality among Jews and non-Jews in Christ is logically demonstrated in Paul's many negative answers to the questions he poses in the midst of these qualifying arguments: "May it never be" that there is no "advantage" to "being a Jew" and "circumcised," he pronounces in Rom 3:1, because "the Jews are entrusted with the oracles of God" (v. 2), the special privilege of bringing God's word to the rest of the nations. "May it never be" that we "overthrow the Torah by this faith" he thunders at the end of that chapter's argument (3:31); and many others could be cited along this line. Moreover, what many overlook are his many positive statements about the Torah that should make the traditional portrait of Paul nonsensical, but have usually to date either been ignored, downplayed, or reasoned away.<sup>42</sup> For Paul not only writes that what matters is "keeping of the commandments of God" (1 Cor 7:19), but also that "the Torah is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (7:12); he

---

<sup>42</sup> Gaston, *Paul and Gager, Reinventing Paul*, have criticized this tendency.

even argues that “the Torah is spiritual” (v. 14)! How many dissertations, monographs, or even essays have been written on these un-Pauline like declarations; indeed, how many sermons have ever been delivered on them?

Paul’s rhetoric is rhetorical.<sup>43</sup> When it is isolated from its argumentative context for non-Jews within first-century and often Jewish communal and conceptual concerns and made into universal whatever-the-context truths for every-person, for all times, it runs a high risk of missing entirely what the historical Paul and his Judaism represented to them, the good news along with the bad. If we approach Paul with the hypothesis that he was a figure within Judaism, indeed, propagating a particular Jewish community-forming viewpoint to Diaspora Jews and non-Jews throughout the lands north of the Mediterranean, and one whom his addressees know to observe Torah as a matter of faith, many possibilities emerge for reading his letters as expressions of Judaism pre-Christianity, however deviant that form of Judaism was and came to be regarded by the other Jewish groups that survived.

### *Conclusion*

The investigation of Paul *and* Judaism has traditionally proceeded as if what was written was Paul *or* Judaism, with the understanding that these referents represent two different religious systems, but in the sense of Paul *within* or *for* or *representing* Judaism, even a Judaism, little work has been done to date. Interpreters do not often, if ever, write of converts to *Paul’s Jewish communities* or *Paul’s Judaism*, or of the *Judaism of Paul* or the *Judaism of Paul’s communities*, and never do I remember reading of *Judaism’s Paul*. The two terms are different, and something must be wrong with one or the other side of the equation, or else they would not be so essentially antithetical. I believe that this “essentializing” of difference between Paul and Judaism and the concomitant requirement to find fault with one or the other (influenced, of course, by the interpreter’s ideological vantage point) will continue to the degree (even if only at the implicit level of working assumptions) that the ethnic division that Paul’s letters draw along a Jew/Gentile and Israel/other-Nations line within a Christ-believing Judaism

---

<sup>43</sup> See too Thurén, *Derhetorizing Paul*.

continues to be approached by his interpreters as if it is to be historically drawn along a Judaism/Christianity line instead (whether using the term Christianity or not).<sup>44</sup>

Christianity has had much invested in the tradition of Paul against Judaism, providing a counter-narrative against which to measure its own unique fulfillment of God's expectations, whereas the Judaism it has fashioned in this meaning-making is portrayed as having failed them. Interestingly, rabbinic Judaism has become invested in that same narrative, although turning the meaning upside down. This is all the more evident since the reclamation of Jesus as a faithful Jewish figure, when Paul becomes the distorter of Jesus, and antagonist even of the Judaism that he had represented.<sup>45</sup> Since it is so obvious that Paul did not understand his former religion and no longer recognized its value, it was easy to trivialize and blame Paul for the misunderstandings and ill will that Christianity so often expressed toward Jewish people and religion. There was no reason to take him or those who appealed to his authority seriously, and certainly no reason to look for Judaism at work in him, or in Paulinism.<sup>46</sup>

I have argued that successfully challenging the implicit as well as explicit negative valuations of Judaism that persist in most work on this topic, especially among Paulinists who embrace this view as ideologically important, depends upon attending to the particular contexts of Paul's rhetorical concerns for non-Jews, instead of universalizing them to everyone, Jew and non-Jew alike. Of course, I cannot even pretend to attempt such an exercise in this paper; indeed, I have made only a start at it in my work to date. However, sufficient historical-critical work on Paul has been done to recognize that the particular should not be confused with the absolute.<sup>47</sup> In this

---

<sup>44</sup> See Eisenbaum, "Paul, Polemics."

<sup>45</sup> See Heschel, *Abraham Geiger*; Langton, "Myth of the 'Traditional View of Paul'"; Eisenbaum, "Following in the Footnotes."

<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, the traditional portrait of Paul against Torah has also been used in disputes between Jewish groups revolving around the relative merits and demerits of so-called progressive policies toward Torah (see Brumberg-Kraus, "A Jewish Ideological Perspective"; Langton, "Modern Jewish Identity and the Apostle Paul"). The implications of reading Paul as a Torah-observant Jew for modern Jewish/Christian relations are addressed in Nanos, "A Torah-Observant Paul?."

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., Stendahl, *Paul*; Gaston, *Paul*; Tomson, *Paul*; Campbell, *Paul's Gospel*; Elliott, *Liberating Paul*; Stowers, *Romans*; Gager, *Reinventing Paul*; Eisenbaum, "Is Paul the Father of Misogyny and Antisemitism?"; Yoder, *Jewish-Christian Schism*; Ehrensperger, *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged*;

context, I hope I have at least raised awareness that the presumption that Paul finds fault with Judaism per se instead of with rival Jewish groups and ideas is itself problematic.

In my view, this is what Paul would find wrong with Paulinism: it is not a Judaism. Otherwise, Paul found fault with some Jews and even some Judaisms for failure to recognize that the expectations of Judaism were being realized in the work of proclamation in which he and his Jewish coalition were engaged, for failing to agree that the end of the ages had dawned, and for not joining him in announcing this glad tidings to all of the scattered of Israel, and to all of the nations in which they were to be found. That is, Paul's criticism was not for being Judaism, a concept of which I do not believe he could have conceived, but for failure to be all that Judaism was destined to be when the end of the ages had dawned. Whether that is the case, is another matter entirely.

### **Bibliography:**

Barclay, John M. G. "'Do we Undermine the Law?': A Study of Romans 14.1--15.6." Pages 287-308 in *Paul and the Mosaic Law*. Edited by James D. G. Dunn. Grand Rapids and Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2001. Original Mohr-Siebeck, 1996.

———. *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE--117 CE)*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996.

Baumgarten, Albert I. "The Pharisaic Paradosis." *HTR* 80 (1987): 63-77.

Boyarin, Daniel. *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*. Contraversions 1. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Brumberg-Kraus, Jonathan D. "A Jewish Ideological Perspective on the Study of Christian Scripture." *Jewish Social Studies* 4.1 (1997).

---

Kimber Buell and Johnson Hodge, "Politics of Interpretation"; Eisenbaum, "Paul, Polemics"; Johnson Hodge, "Apostle to the Gentiles"; Campbell, "Perceptions of Compatibility."

Campbell, William S. *Paul's Gospel in an Intercultural Context: Jew and Gentile in the Letter to the Romans*. Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang, 1992.

———. "Perceptions of Compatibility Between Christianity and Judaism in Pauline Interpretation." *BI* 13.3 (2005): Forthcoming.

Carson, D. A., Peter Thomas O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, eds. *Justification and Variegated Nomism: Vol. 2: The Paradoxes of Paul*. Tübingen and Grand Rapids, Mich.: Mohr Siebeck and Baker Academic, 2004.

Cheung, Alex T. *Idol Food in Corinth: Jewish Background and Pauline Legacy*. JSNTSS 176. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.

Dodd, C. H. *The Epistle to the Romans*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932.

Donaldson, Terence L. *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.

———. "Preaching Circumcision: Gal 5:11 and the Origin of Paul's Gentile Mission." Paper presented at the Canadian SBL Meeting, 1988.

Dunn, James D. G. "Echoes of Intra-Jewish Polemic in Paul's Letter to the Galatians." *JBL* 112.3 (1993): 459-77.

———. "How New Was Paul's Gospel? The Problem of Continuity and Discontinuity." Pages 367-88 in *Gospel in Paul: Studies on Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans*. Edited by L. Ann Jervis and Peter Richardson. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994.

———. *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990.

———. *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity*. London and Philadelphia: SCM Press and Trinity Press International, 1991.

———. *Romans 9-16*. WBC 38b. Dallas: Word Books, 1988.

- Ehrensperger, Kathy. *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged: Feminism and the New Perspective in Pauline Studies*. New York: T & T Clark International, 2004.
- Eisenbaum, Pamela. "Following in the Footnotes of the Apostle Paul." Pages 77-97 in *Identity and the Politics of Scholarship in the Study of Religion*. Edited by Jose Ignacio Cabezon and Sheila Greeve Davaney. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- . "Paul, Polemics, and the Problem of Essentialism." *BI* 13.3 (2005): Forthcoming.
- Eisenbaum, Pamela M. "Is Paul the Father of Misogyny and Antisemitism?" *Cross Currents* 50 (2000-01): 506-24.
- Elliott, Neil. *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994.
- Esler, Philip F. *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.
- Fredriksen, Paula. "Judaism, The Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2." Pages 235-60 in *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation*. Edited by Mark D. Nanos. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002. Original *JTS* 42.2 (1991): 532-64.
- Gager, John G. *Reinventing Paul*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Gaston, Lloyd. *Paul and the Torah*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987.
- Gathercole, Simon J. *Where is Boasting?: Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1-5*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2002.
- Goodman, Martin. "A Note on Josephus, the Pharisees and Ancestral Tradition." *JJS* 50.1 (1999): 17-20.
- . *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt Against Rome, A.D. 66-70*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

- Hammer, Reuven. *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986.
- Heschel, Susannah. *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*. Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Hogg, Michael A., and Dominic Abrams. *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes*. London and New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Johnson Hodge, Caroline. "Apostle to the Gentiles: Constructions of Paul's Identity." *BI* 13.3 (2005): Forthcoming.
- Kim, Seyoon. *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001.
- Kimber Buell, Denise, and Caroline Johnson Hodge. "The Politics of Interpretation: The Rhetoric of Race and Ethnicity in Paul." *JBL* 123.2 (2004): 235-51.
- Lamm, Norman. *The Shema: Spirituality and Law in Judaism as Exemplified in the Shema, the Most Important Passage in the Torah*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2000.
- Langton, Daniel R. "Modern Jewish Identity and the Apostle Paul: Pauline Studies as an Intra-Jewish Ideological Battleground." *JSNT* (Forthcoming).
- . "The Myth of the 'Traditional View of Paul' and the Role of the Apostle in Modern Jewish-Christian Polemics." *JSNT* (Forthcoming).
- Mitternacht, Dieter. "Foolish Galatians?—A Recipient-Oriented Assessment of Paul's Letter." Pages 408-33 in *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation*. Edited by Mark D. Nanos. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002.
- Nanos, Mark D. "How Inter-Christian Approaches to Paul's Rhetoric Can Perpetuate Negative Valuations of Jewishness – Although Proposing to Avoid that Outcome." *BI* 13.3 (2005): Forthcoming.

- . "Intruding 'Spies' and 'Pseudo-Brethren': The Intra-Jewish Context of 'Those of Repute' in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:1-10)." in *Paul and His Opponents*. Edited by Stanley E. Porter. Brill, Forthcoming 2005/6.
- . *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.
- . "The Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience Addressed in Paul's Letter to the Romans." *CBQ* 61 (1999): 283-304.
- . *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.
- . "A Torah-Observant Paul? What Difference Could it Make for Christian/Jewish Relations Today?" Paper presented at the Christian Scholars Group for Christian/Jewish Relations (Available at <<http://home.comcast.net/~nanosmd/projects.html>>), Boston, June 4-6, 2005.
- . "What Does 'Present Jerusalem' (Gal 4:25) in Paul's Allegory Have to Do with the Jerusalem of Paul's Time, or the Concerns of the Galatians?" (2004): Available at <<http://home.comcast.net/~nanosmd/projects.html>>.
- . "What Was at Stake in Peter's 'Eating with Gentiles' at Antioch?" Pages 282-318 in *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation*. Edited by Mark D. Nanos. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002.
- Sanders, E. P. *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977.
- . *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985. Original 1983.
- Schoeps, Hans Joachim. *Israel und Christenheit: Jüdisch-christliches Religionsgespräch in neunzehn Jahrhunderten*. München and Frankfurt am Main: Ner-Tamid-Verlag, 1961.
- . *The Jewish-Christian Argument: A History of Theologies in Conflict*. Translated by David E. Green. London: Faber and Faber, 1965. Original German, 1961.

- . *Jüdisch-Christliches Religionsgespräch in 19 Jahrhunderten: Geschichte einer theologischen Auseinandersetzung*. Berlin: Vortrupp Verlag, 1937.
- . *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*. Translated by Harold Knight. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961.
- Segal, Alan F. *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Setzer, Claudia. "Does Paul Need to be Saved?" *BI* 13.3 (2005): Forthcoming.
- Stendahl, Krister. *Paul among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976.
- Stowers, Stanley Kent. *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.
- Thurén, Lauri. *Derhetorizing Paul: A Dynamic Perspective on Pauline Theology and the Law*. WUNT 124. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000.
- Tomson, Peter J. *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles*. CRINT. Vol. 1. Section 3: Jewish traditions in early Christian literature. Assen and Minneapolis: Van Gorcum and Fortress Press, 1990.
- Wyschogrod, Michael. *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations*. Radical traditions. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2004.
- Yoder, John Howard. *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*. Radical Traditions. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003.