



## Paul within or without Judaism: that is the question

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## REVIEW ARTICLES

### **Paul within or without Judaism: that is the question**

**Paul within Judaism: restoring the first-century context of the Apostle**, edited by Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm, Minneapolis, Fortress, 2015, x + 350 pp., £25.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-14-51470-031

What happens if interpreters do not assume that Paul left Judaism for Christianity? In the wake of the last 30 years of New Testament (NT) scholarship that focused on a more historically accurate understanding of Jewish patterns of life in the first century, Pauline scholars specifically have made steps forward in recovering a more contextually appropriate apostle Paul. However, many scholars do not think that these new insights have been taken far enough, and several of these are included in this crucial collection on Paul's context. Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm have brought together several leading voices challenging interpreters to move beyond the well-worn terrain of both the 'Old' and 'New' Perspective on Paul. There is no one clear label for the views represented here. Sometimes called the Radical Perspective on Paul, Beyond the New Perspective on Paul, or the Renewed Perspective on Paul, scholars read Paul within second Temple Judaism in such diverse ways that some have simply given up on a label that could encompass them all. Nanos suggests 'Paul within Judaism perspective' as a workable title for this group (2).

The collection of essays, each structured around a different crucial research question, opens with an introduction written by Mark D. Nanos. In it, he describes the goal of these essays, many of which originated in the 'Paul and Judaism' section of the Society of Biblical Literature: 'to interpret Paul within his most probable first-century context' (2). He highlights the way this interpretative paradigm differs from existing perspectives and then provides a detailed summary of each of the chapters in the book.

Chapter 1, written by Magnus Zetterholm, provides an apt survey of the state of the question with regard to Paul within Judaism. He first highlights the all-too-close relationship between NT studies and theological normativity. This connection reinforces the binary relationship between Judaism and Christianity, the traditional Paul-against-Judaism framework. Zetterholm's purpose in this chapter is to explain why this binary relationship is mistaken and what has caused NT scholars to be influenced by it. He traces an incipient anti-Judaism from the original intra-Jewish polemic in 1 Thessalonians 2:14–15, to Ignatius and Justin, then to Augustine and Luther, and through to the Tübingen school whose discourse mixed with contemporaneous geo-political discourses that resulted in a Western orientation of opposition to Jews and Judaism. E.P. Sanders brought about a change in the traditional reception of Paul by going back to the Jewish sources. This was followed up by James D.G. Dunn and extended by several other contemporary scholars, one of the most important being William S. Campbell (2013). Zetterholm concludes the chapter with a discussion of Christianity as a third race. This view is one of the foundational elements of the traditional understanding of Paul as against Judaism, and

Zetterholm offers several ideas in this section as ways forward for rediscovering a more historically-situated Paul, one who thought ‘he represented the perfection of Judaism’ such that ‘Jewish identity’ was not problematic for the movement (51, original emphasis).

Anders Runesson, in Chapter 2, contends that existing scholarship has not attended closely enough to the terminology used to describe the earliest Christ-movement. His concerns relate primarily to the terms ‘Christians’, ‘Christianity’, and ‘church’. He sees these as anachronistic and too ideologically laden to be of much heuristic value. Furthermore, they reinforce a binary relationship with ‘Jews’, ‘Judaism’, and the ‘synagogue’ (54–55). This is not merely an esoteric, methodological discussion but one that, according to Runesson, influences the scholar’s ability to conceive of different categories or schemas: ‘the words we use tend to control the way we think’ (57). Runesson, along with Nanos, suggests ‘Apostolic Judaism’ as a more proper term to describe this alternative vision of Judaism followed by those for whom Jesus is ‘a central figure in their symbolic universe’ and ‘a key for the interpretation of what it meant for them to adhere to Judaism’ (67–68). In a similar fashion, ‘church’ is deemed problematic. Runesson, rightly I think, points out that *ekklēsia* could refer to various ‘synagogue institutions’, and to translate it as ‘church’ implicitly argues for an early parting of the ways between Christianity and Judaism. *Ekklēsia* was, rather, Jewish sacred (and institutional) space (69 n. 32). Runesson, in many ways, sees problems similar to those brought to the fore in Zetterholm’s chapter, those related to the contemporary context. The terms he critiques reinforce separate identities and non-overlapping institutional settings; however, these same terms did not have such implications in the first century. If interpreters follow Runesson’s suggestion they open the possibility ‘to understand Paul as practicing and proclaiming a minority form of Judaism that existed in the first century’ (77).

Chapter 3, written by Karin Hedner Zetterholm, addresses the all-too-often misunderstood category of Torah observance in the first century. Hedner Zetterholm rightly notes that the idea that Paul continued to be Torah observant is a hallmark of the Paul-within-Judaism paradigm and rejected by the traditional perspective on Paul. However, she points out that what is needed on both sides of this debate is ‘a more nuanced’ understanding of ‘what it meant to be a Torah observant Jew in the first century’ (80). Halakic debates were an integral part of first century Jewish life since the general nature of biblical commandments required situationally specific interpretations and applications (cf. debates concerning work on the Sabbath, Exod. 20:8–11; *m. Shabb. 7:2*). Hedner Zetterholm further points out that we actually know very little about the nature of ‘halakic observance in the first century’ (91). Thus, it is rather difficult to determine what was considered a violation and what was acceptable. She highlights Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 8–10 and brings it into dialogue with *Avodah Zarah* in order to determine if this is a good example of ‘Jewish Diaspora halakah for Jesus-oriented gentiles’ rather than a violation of Jewish law (92). By highlighting attitude and intention, Hedner Zetterholm places Paul well within the ongoing debates among Jews dealing with how to balance living among the nations whilst seeking to follow Jewish law in the context of ‘theological and ethical general principles’ (103).

Mark D. Nanos wrestles with the difficult question of Paul and circumcision. He provides interpretive insights through his understanding of Josephus’s portrayal of King Izates and his advisors’ direction concerning his situationally-specific

non-circumcision (see *Jos. Ant.* 20). Nanos contends that Paul's rhetoric concerning circumcision, faith, and works should likewise be treated as situationally-specific and not extrapolated out for Jewish Christ-followers or even other non-Jewish Christ-followers in different circumstances. Nanos, further, addresses the longstanding debate concerning the 'works of the law'. He offers a new way forward suggesting the phrase refers to the works associated with proselyte conversion. In many ways, he narrows the focus to circumcision. Also, this chapter provides further terminological nuances crucial for those seeking to understand Paul within Judaism, especially as related to these very Jewish-acting non-Jews (135). Nanos's voice has been influential in much of these debates, and that is evident throughout this collection of essays. His nuanced arguments warrant extensive engagement by traditional Pauline scholars.

Chapter 5, written by Caroline Johnson Hodge, discusses the crucial issue of the transformation of gentile identity within the Pauline communities and the way these 'gentiles-in-Christ' relate to Israel without becoming Jews (153). She begins by discussing the liminal existence of these in-Christ non-Jews and makes some connections with previous Jewish authors who describe a group of non-Jewish sympathisers, those who lived among Jews but did not convert. Whether these are best described as righteous gentiles or god-fearers, Johnson Hodge has already alerted us to the way a group could be described and uniquely identified within the broader Jewish community. However, the traditional way of understanding *ethnē* is problematic for Johnson Hodge. These atypical gentiles are in-between in terms of their identity, a sort of hybrid that Paul seems to negotiate through his writings, including them as the seed of Abraham. The imposition of hybridity has been rightly challenged by Kathy Ehrensperger (2013), but Johnson Hodge has alerted interpreters to the problems associated with Paul's formation of gentiles-in-Christ, though her argument crucially keeps his identity work well within the bounds of Judaism as part of Israel's continuing story (167).

Chapter 6, written by Paula Fredriksen, takes on the critical question of worship and the conceptions of ritual life that differed between Jews and non-Jews. Paul calls gentiles to cease engaging in the cultic expressions of provincial civic life. Since this was not a requirement for gentile sympathisers to Judaism prior to this time, why the change? For Fredriksen, it was because of Paul's eschatology and the role the nations played in the redemption of Israel (187). Thus, Jewish restoration theology was constitutive in the formation of *ethnē* identity in Christ. They enter the kingdom as *ethnē* and not as Jews; thus the culturally accepted connection between 'ethnicity and cult' was 'severed' (188, original emphasis). For the social crisis thus created, Paul offers a very Jewish understanding of *dikaïosynē ek pisteōs* (RSV: justification by faith) that Fredriksen, building on the Law's Second Table, describes as 'right behaviour according to the Law on account of steadfast attachment to the gospel' (194). This provides these *ethnē* who have believed the gospel with a way to express their newfound *pistis/fides* (steadfastness, conviction, or loyalty; 193). She concludes the chapter with a reading of 'all Israel' in Romans 11:25–26 and contends that existing identities continue to be salient in what Fredriksen describes as 'God's universalism' which 'is a very Jewish universalism'. The details of her reading aside, she has provided a strong set of arguments for the eschatological continuation of existing identities in God's 'particular universalism' (198).

Neil Elliott, in Chapter 7, addresses the question of politics and situates Paul as a Diaspora Jew under the Roman empire. For Elliott, the traditional readings of Paul are labelled ‘Christianising’ interpretations in which Judaism may serve as a background for Paul but his revelation of Jesus serves as his foreground (204). These are evident in the work of Malina and Pilch, Frey, and Barclay who all receive significant critique (his engagement with Barclay is particularly noteworthy). One of the keen insights from Elliott is that ultimately Christianising interpreters resist political readings of Paul because they align him too closely with his Jewish identity (242). At a more fundamental level, Elliott thinks that a prior commitment to essentialism has led interpreters astray when it comes to understanding Paul within Judaism. When this misguided framework is set aside and a more complex, embodied Diaspora Jewish identity under the Roman Empire is allowed to emerge, Paul is no longer seen as an anomalous Jew but as one among other Jews negotiating local expressions of Roman culture and ideology through his writings to his anxious in-Christ non-Jews (236).

Kathy Ehrensperger addresses the question of gender and relocates Paul in relation to Judaism in Chapter 8. She argues that Paul’s instructions concerning women in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 presuppose an institutional setting similar to the mixed gender synagogues. Further, Paul’s teaching coheres closely with what some think may be discerned concerning Pharisaic halakah in *t. Demai* 2:16–17. In this way, Ehrensperger and Hedner Zetterholm’s reading of 1 Corinthians reveals a halakically oriented teacher of non-Jews. With regard to a gender-sensitive reading of Paul, Ehrensperger contends that feminist scholars have not paid enough attention to the implications of seeing Paul within Judaism. Rather, these scholars tend to uncritically follow male-stream interpreters relying on problematic notions such as Hellenistic Judaism and universalism. She brings out the idea that if Paul thought existing ethnic identities were erased in Christ, then the same logic would apply to gender identities. This conclusion would be untenable for feminist scholars, and thus Ehrensperger contends that those approaching the text within this hermeneutical frame could benefit from relocating Paul as one who envisions the continuation of difference in the midst of the unity of Israel and the nations.

Chapter 9 provides a substantial response by Terence Donaldson who has identified quite closely with the New Perspective on Paul. He offers two primary critiques of the authors. First, Donaldson thinks there is an over-reliance on Jewish restoration theology with regard to the inclusion of non-Jews within Judaism. Second, he is not convinced by the various proposals that have been put forth concerning the liminal or anomalous nature of non-Jewish identity, the ‘*ethnē*-in-Christ’, especially as it relates to the social implications of describing them as ‘the seed of Abraham’, since, Donaldson notes, Paul in other places actually blurs the distinction between Jews and the *ethnē* in his argument (298; cf. Rom. 3:21; 10:12; Gal. 3:28; but see Campbell 2013, 74, 99). Donaldson’s concerns, though somewhat over generalised, are well taken. The real question here, as noted by Campbell, is why does Paul feel the need to make in-Christ gentiles the seed of Abraham? Donaldson’s thoughtful response provides several areas for further research for those engaged in this area of study and several cautions for those reading Paul within Judaism.

Nanos and Zetterholm are to be commended for bringing together such a collection. This highly recommended work represents an important step forward in repositioning Paul within Judaism. It is not the last word, especially as it relates to

the role of Jewish restoration theology and the implications of the seed of Abraham, but it raises questions that will require engagement from traditional interpreters of Paul. A number of these essays came into the collection as conference papers, a format that does not allow for the extended exegetical engagement needed to dislodge some of the existing perspectives, so further clarification is still needed. For identity and ethnicity issues, the *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* (2014) provides more resources. Several of the Pauline letter entries there are written from a non-supersessionist point of view and thus align quite nicely with the volume under review. Further discussion on these important issues will go forward from here, but these debates remind us that foundational difficulties often arise because our questions and Paul's questions are not the same.

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**Reflections on the transmission of traditions in interaction with Anders Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2010, xviii + 675 pp., £54.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-9-00-418621-7**

When Adolf Hitler began his strategic rise to power, he was able gradually to begin to marginalise and then to murder European Jews partly because within the history of biblical scholarship there had prevailed an ongoing central stream that was deeply anti-Semitic. This study begins 200 years prior to the Hitler era by examining leading biblical exegetes in the Protestant theological tradition. Its strength is that it follows this scholarship from 1750 to 1950, ending with an examination of the publications of the famous Rudolf Bultmann.

Firstly, it must be emphasised that German Protestant exegesis, even though the most extreme in this respect was not alone in this anti-Jewish interpretation, but often its scholars were so brilliant and so central to European intellectual thought that they influenced, to a great extent, interpretation beyond the boundaries of their own country.

Secondly, German scholars at this period were not universally or uniformly anti-Semitic but differed widely both in their views on Jews and Judaism and on whether they were politically involved or scholarly detached. One of the best sections of Gerdmar's book is the section on Johannes Weiss (died 1914) who con-