

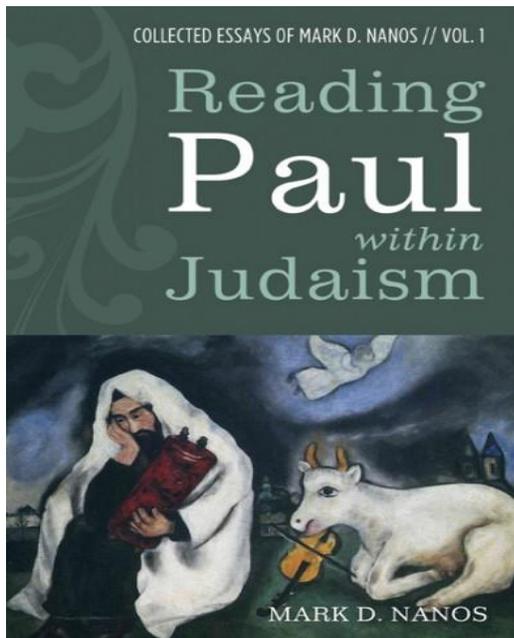


*Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2019.05.06*

**Mark D. Nanos, *Reading Paul Within Judaism: Collected Essays of Mark D. Nanos, Vol. 1.* Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017. ISBN: 9781532617553. Pp. 214. \$23.00 USD. Paperback.**

**Rebecca I. Denova  
University of Pittsburgh**

“The Continuing Problem of Rescuing Paul the Jew”



Mark D. Nanos is a Lecturer at the University of Kansas who has produced several articles and books on the problem of modern interpretations of Paul (*The Mystery of Romans*, 1996; *The Irony of Galatians*, 2002). *Reading Paul Within Judaism* is a collection of several chapters, papers, and conference presentations (through 2015) of his arguments that include criticism of both traditional readings of Paul’s letters as well as the new perspective on Paul.

Nanos lauds the paradigm shift that took place in the latter half of the last century with the work of Stendahl, Sanders, Gager, Fredriksen, and many others. Rather than the founder of what became (later) Christian theology, Paul is now understood as a Second Temple Diaspora Jew. This new (and correct) understanding of Paul also includes the application of the social sciences in the study of context in two ways: (1) the culture and religious experiences of Jewish and pagan neighbors in the urban centers of the Roman Empire and (2) Paul’s involvement in the higher elements of philosophical education (*paideia*) of this culture, which included training in rhetoric.

As Nanos points out, sometimes this new analysis produces more new perspectives on *Judaism* in the first century than new perspectives on Paul himself (13, italics his). Our increased

knowledge of the diverse groups of Jews throughout the Roman Empire has produced a more nuanced understanding of the difference between Jewish identity markers (as a defined ethnic group) and Jewish behavior (Jews and non-Jews who followed select elements of Torah). In Paul's letters, Nanos emphasizes that it is vitally important to distinguish identity markers from behavior (as Paul does).

Now that we have "Paul the Jew," what kind of a Jew was he? First and foremost, Paul was a Pharisee. Our ideas of what it meant to be a Pharisee in the first century rely upon three main sources: Philo of Alexandria, Josephus, and Paul. (Rabbinic traditions that connect to Pharisaic concepts date mostly from the second century.) Portraits of the Pharisees in the canonical gospels are negative for the most part as they serve as the oppositional foil for the teachings of Jesus. In Paul's pre-revelation career, these negative views still influence the analysis of Paul's earlier persecution against the community. Hence Paul's transition was viewed as one of complete rejection of his conservative, legalistic former self which included traditional Torah practice (the persistent view of the Pharisees as villains in the public perception). Paul continues to be polarized at the extremes of his pre- and post-revelation self.

Passages such as 1 Corinthians 9:20–21 ("To the Jews I became like a Jew . . . To those without the law I became like one without the law . . .") traditionally served as proof that Paul no longer adhered to Torah. But what was "traditional Torah" practice in the first century? The assumption has been that Judaism was universally directed from the Temple in Jerusalem in coordination with a literal understanding of Jewish Scripture. Paul is then measured against these concepts and practices. In his detailed analysis of Pauline passages, Nanos emphasizes the existence of the diversity of Jewish groups throughout the Mediterranean. We have very few writings from Diaspora Jews (Philo and Josephus loom large), but from inscriptions we know that Jews often accommodated themselves to the dominant culture. Nanos discusses descriptors of "Jew" and "Jewish," in the first century, citing the story of Izates from Josephus, where advice is given by two different Jews on the way in which to include Izates (pp. 130–131; 133–139).

The diversity of Jewish subgroups in synagogues where you also had the presence of pagans (the "god-fearers" of Luke), and now ex-pagan believers in Christ, provide the direction which Nanos then argues is the key to the interpretation of problematic passages in Paul. Addressing such diverse groups required specific *rhetorical* arguments (not literal) for Paul to persuade each respective audience of his "good news."

The problem of describing Paul's Jewishness is also limited by the constraints of language and anachronism. Modern scholars do lip-service to the fact that a defined system of Christianity did not exist in Paul's day; Paul did not "convert." Nevertheless, descriptors that include "Christian" elements consistently make their way into analysis for lack of a better way in which to describe Paul's new understanding.

We know what happened even though Paul did not; Christians were distinct from Jews by the second century. In seeking the roots of this process, the new perspective continues to argue that while Paul was a Jew, his arguments nevertheless stand in opposition to Judaism (for both Jews and ex-pagans). Softening the traditional negativity of Paul's views against his own traditions, modern analysis nevertheless highlights his innovations. These become oppositional

by their very nature in the sense that Paul was offering something that Judaism did or could not do.

For some scholars of the new perspective, what makes Paul different from other Jews (and Judaism) continues to be focused on his preaching of “faith vs. works” and his ideas of salvation and grace. Nanos is particularly critical of Dunn, Wright, and others on these topics (11–12; 47). As he argues convincingly, salvation and grace were fundamental features of Paul’s Torah-based Judaism (chapter 4).

Another traditional interpretation of Paul is the concept of his alleged “universalism,” the inclusion of Jew and Gentile on an equal footing before god that Paul preaches throughout his letters. This is particularly relevant in his descriptions of the coming “kingdom,” where all will be judged, Jews and pagans alike. But at the same time, the letters consistently present a two-tiered community—Jewish believers and ex-pagan believers who now coexist in prophetic fulfillment. Paul’s Jewish believers remain Jews and the Gentile believers remain non-Jews (without Jewish identity markers, but following many of the precepts of the Law of Moses). Paul argues throughout the letters (“in a very Jewish way”) that the god of Israel is also the god of the nations and thus each subgroup is to respect and love the other (“Why Non-Jews Remain Non-Jews Yet Fellow Members of the People of God,” pp. 162–163).

Spiritual and theological interpretations aside, the conundrum of trying to reconstruct how Paul’s communities actually worked on the ground with two distinct groups remains somewhat elusive. And many passages allude to the tension created with his “stay as you are” and “now/not yet” advice to the communities. We see much of this in 1 Corinthians, where apparently the Corinthians had misinterpreted Paul in so many ways.

Following Nanos’ argument, that this is an *intra-Jewish family feud*, how then to describe Paul’s Judaism?

With Paul’s end-time convictions, an apt descriptor for his arguments could be “Apocalyptic Judaism.” As we learn more about Hellenized Judaism in the Greco-Roman Empire, “Apocalyptic Judaism” has become a discipline in its own right. And it is apparent that various groups of Jews disagreed over some fundamental precepts. Compared to other literature of the period (Enoch), there is a significant absence in Paul for the “son of man” traditions, although the canonical gospels emphasize this as a major title and function of the identity of Jesus. Paul does anticipate the later proclamation at Chalcedon (451 CE) but without the theological arguments or detail. Paul has both a divine pre-existent figure (present at creation) and someone “descended from David according to the flesh . . . and declared to be son of god with power . . . by resurrection from the dead” (Rom 1:3–4). This other side of Christ mirrors the convictions in the Maccabean literature and the vindication of the righteous.

According to Nanos’ description (and hence the title of the collection):

In Christ-following based 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. Incorporating non-Jews into the people of God in the present as proselytes according to the traditions of the fathers is no longer halakhically warranted. That is not because Paul or the non-Jewish addresses are no longer a part of Judaism, but because they are members of a particular Judaism, or alternatively, of a Jewish coalition that understands itself playing 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, regardless of how triumphalistic it may be, these Christ-following Jews—and non-Jews!—are to live *on behalf of Judaism* and every Jewish person, not against them (Rom 9–11; esp. 11:11–36) (italics, his, p. 37).

I am not quite sure if Nanos' phrase, "Christ-following based Judaism," will be enough to undo the Gordian knot (it remains somewhat awkward), although it is superior to the older "Jewish-Christians" vs. "Gentile-Christians." Such labelling has traditionally polarized systematic points of view that are reconstructed on the very limited evidence of James and the others in Jerusalem. In relation to such polarization, Nanos revisits the Galatian passages for the "Antioch incident" (pp. 87-92).

I fully agree with Nanos' description of Paul as a Torah-observant Jew. There is no evidence in the letters that he advocated Jewish believers to eliminate Jewish practices (circumcision, dietary concerns, Sabbath). In fact, Paul upholds Torah for Jews "born under the Law." Nanos's exegesis of the various passages that have been traditionally argued for Paul's elimination of Torah-based Judaism are crucial for future studies of Paul.

However, I was surprised at the absence of some elements in this collection that are necessary in arguing that Paul was an educated Jew of the Diaspora. How did Paul relate his Judaism to the philosophical schools, particularly on shared concepts of creation of the cosmos, transcendence, flesh and spirit, body and soul? This is relevant to the ways in which Paul presents Jewish issues to his ex-pagan audiences. Does Paul conform to Hellenized Judaism in this sense or does he now add something to the mix?

An even more important element of Paul and the first communities is that of the concept of Christ sharing divinity with god which leads to the worship of Jesus (summarized in the "Christ hymn" in Phil. 2:1–11). This absence is particularly startling in light of the recent books on Paul's "high Christology" (the work of Hurtado, Ehrman, Bauckham and others). How does Paul's Torah-observant Judaism account for Jesus as "Lord" who shares worship with God?

"Jewish monotheism," of course, did not exist in the ancient world. As we use the term today, this "belief in one god," was not coined until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Like their pagan neighbors, Jews recognized the existence of various powers in the universe, crowded with archangels, angels, cherubim, seraphim, "wisdom" (*Sophia*) and a power known as *ha-Satan* (the later Devil). The books of the Prophets and the Psalms have god recognizing the "gods of the nations," denoting their existence. Paul upholds this idea, referring to the gods of the nations who interfere with his mission.

What distinguished Jews from their neighbors was their refusal to offer sacrifices to these other powers; sacrifices were reserved to the god of Israel alone. Sacrifices were also only to be

offered at one place (according to the traditional Scriptures)—at the Temple in Jerusalem. It remains difficult to understand how Diaspora Jews worked this out, but apparently they did.

Paul's polemic against sacrifices is reserved solely for the ex-pagan believers (1 Cor. 10), applying the Jewish ban against idolatry. There is no indication that Jewish believers were to alter the concept of sacrifices. His castigation against "Judaizers" is always in reference to what is being preached to ex-pagan believers by Paul's opponents and involves Jewish identity markers.

As Nanos consistently points out, Paul has positive things to say about the Jews, the covenant, and the Temple (Rom 9:3–5; 15:8–16). The "justification" for the inclusion of Gentiles is based in Scripture, in the covenant with Abraham and his descendants, which did not disappear because "Christ had come." To the contrary, everything about Christ validates the stories of Israel. In 1 Cor 3:16, he can use the Temple as an analogy for the bodies (and thus behavior) of the Corinthians.

What did worship of Jesus consist of in the early communities? As far as we know, hymns to Jesus, baptizing in his name, healing and exorcisms in his name, and "eucharistic meals." But when Paul proclaimed that everyone should "bend the knee" to Jesus as "Lord" (indicating worship, Phil. 2), how was this received by Jews in the synagogues as well as the now believing Jews in the assemblies? Much analysis has been spent on Paul's former persecution of Jesus' followers as well as his own persecution after his revelation (what did this involve and why?). Discussions continue to be rooted in the details of ex-pagan inclusion but couldn't reactions to such deification also lead to resistance among Jews and Jewish communities? How much did Paul's experience (his revelations of Christ now in heaven) contribute to his Christology (Galatians 1:11–12; 2 Cor. 2–5)?

I am assuming that Nanos covers most of the above absences in his other publications (such as *The Irony of Galatians*). This series is the first of several volumes (*Reading Romans Within Judaism*, 2018; *Reading Corinthians and Philippians Within Judaism*, 2017). For this collection however, if it is to be understood as an introduction to "Paul's Judaism," more of Paul's philosophical Judaism and his worship of Christ are important for his overall arguments.

Aside from the absence of this discussion of early Christology, Nanos has presented a cogent and enlightening analysis of many of the issues in the study of Paul *within* Judaism. The larger goal of this collection is to acquit Paul of his role in causing the rift in Jewish-Christian relations in antiquity that still resonates in the modern world:

Those promoting the prevailing portrait of Paul's Torah-free gospel and the life-style do not depend exclusively on these texts and topics, but they usually appeal to them first as the ostensibly most self-evident sources that contradict the proposition of a Torah-observant Paul. . . . These implications extend to include how each characterizes the other, which is so instrumental in the perpetuation of stereotypes (p. 102).

I live and work in the ancient world, studying and teaching the emergence of Christianity as a sect of Second Temple Judaism in the first century. I also live and work in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Any effort to eradicate ultimate theological differences between the communities that have led to bigotry and violence is to be applauded and encouraged.