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It's a privilege to honor the legacy of Mark Nanos' groundbreaking work on Paul. I feel as if a recitation of the *shechecheyanu* is of order, and I am grateful for this occasion, which offered me the opportunity to revisit and ruminate, with my split hoofs, Nano's seminal book, *The Mystery of Romans*.

The first time I heard the name "Mark Nanos" was around 2005 (of the Common Era). I was but a puny Masters student seeking to deepen my knowledge of biblical and cognate languages as well as Second Temple and classical rabbinic literature. At that time, a graduate student from the Hebrew University would share reflections on the New Testament via email and Yahoo Groups (Remember that?). The name "Nanos" would regularly appear in his emailed reflections on Paul, and from what I could discern from this third party was that Nanos was offering a very different, some were already saying, "radical" new perspective on Paul. I bookmarked Nanos' name for future reference, hoping to read his work firsthand at a later date, preferably *ba'olam hazeh*.

The occasion finally presented itself sometime circa 2008 anno Domini, during my PhD studies at the University of Michigan when my *Doktorvater* Gabriele Boccaccini decided to lead a graduate seminar on Paul and Second Temple Judaism. In those days, everyone was using Skype, *zikhrono livrakhah*. Instructors were raving about incorporating what was then an innovative technology into their classrooms. Always ready to experiment with new methods that could bring people together to discuss their scholarship, Gabriele asked each graduate student to suggest a Pauline scholar they could invite to speak at the seminar via Skype. I think I suggested Mark Nanos, but I am unable to double check since my email account with the University of Michigan

is no longer active. At any rate, Nanos gladly accepted the invitation to converse with us that semester. A rapport began that would develop into collaborations, especially through the Enoch Seminar. Indeed, Nanos' effort to reclaim Paul's Jewishness in a thoroughgoing manner naturally resonated with the aims of the Enoch Seminar, which, since its inception, has gathered the study of earliest Christianity under the wings of Second Temple Judaism.

But what does it mean to reclaim Paul's Jewishness in a thorough way or to resituate "Paul within Judaism," a phrase that was not yet in vogue when Nanos' *The Mystery of Romans* first saw the light of day? If we turn back to *The Mystery of Romans*, I think that the answer to this question is threefold, and that, generally speaking, Nanos would still subscribe to the following three points means, which are reiterated in some of his more recent publications (see, for example, his annotations on the Letter to the Romans in the second edition of the *Jewish Annotated New Testament*).

First, Paul preaches *liberté* for gentiles to join the Jesus movement without having to undergo a full-fledged "conversion" to Judaism, which in the case of gentile males would require a signature below the dotted line for them to partake in the covenantal benefits promised to Israel. At the same time, Paul does not seek to liberate Jews from the supposedly burdensome requirements of the Mosaic Torah, to free them from Jewish legalism or "works righteousness."

Second, Paul proclaims *égalité* between Jews and gentile followers of Jesus. Gentiles "in Christ" and Jews are equals as far as soteriological and covenantal blessings are concerned. Indeed, the word "equal" is one of the most frequently highlighted words in *The Mystery of Romans*. The case for the equality of gentiles and Jews stems from Nanos' first point concerning the freedom for gentiles to remain gentiles and for Jews to retain their *judéité*, for if gentiles had to become Jews, then the god of Israel would be the god of the Jews only, which Paul categorically rejects in

Rom 3:29. Hence Paul's opposition to the full naturalization of gentiles into Jews. Conversely, Nanos reasons that if Jews, according to Paul, must forsake their *judéité* to join the *ekklesia* of "Christ," then the god of Israel would become the god of the gentiles only. The two groups must therefore remain distinct in some way. Jews and (righteous) gentiles may be equal but they are not identical twins.

Third, Paul promotes *fraternité* among gentile and Jewish followers of Jesus as well as Jews in general. In order to promote and sustain Jewish-gentile fellowship, Nanos argues that Paul expects gentiles who confess Jesus as their lord to observe basic codes of living, the so-called Apostolic Decree, which Nanos believes Paul endorsed, and which Nanos closely identifies with the biblical laws for the *gerim* as well as the rabbinic Noahide laws.

Today, many in academia would not deem this snapshot of Paul's worldview to be *révolutionnaire*. But it certainly was avantgarde thirty years ago when *The Mystery of Romans* was first published. In fact, it was still perceived as "radical" one decade ago, when the so-called Radical New Perspective started going mainstream. In 2015, the SBL Paul and Judaism Consultation morphed into the Paul within Judaism Section, and hosted a panel on the book, *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, edited by Mark Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm. The release of this volume coincided with the publication of *Paul the Jew: Rereading the Apostle as a Figure of Second Temple Judaism*, edited by Carlos Segovia and Gabriele Boccaccini, which featured select contributions from an Enoch Seminar conference held in Rome in 2014 that gathered specialists in Second Temple Judaism and Pauline scholars, including Mark Nanos, to discuss anew Paul's Jewish identity. Now, the sogennante Paul within Judaism *Schule*, or maybe I should call it a shul, was not only yielding but also harvesting its fruit,

and some of its adepts were curious about how their experimentation with recovering Paul's Jewishness could extend to other sectors of early Christianity.

Indeed, it was scholars who identified or have been identified with the Paul within Judaism Perspective that first showed special interest in my experiment to read Luke and Acts qua Jewish texts, this before Lukan scholarship really began to take notice of the "New Perspective" on Luke and Acts that I and other colleagues were proposing.

As I revisited *The Mystery of Romans*, I was delightfully reminded of Nanos' extensive use of the book of Acts to reconfigure Paul's message in Romans within a first-century Jewish context. Thirty years later, his treatment of Acts is still apropos for the ongoing discussion about the (ir)relevance of Acts in the quest for the "historical Paul." According to one recent publication, "Acts 8–15 does not provide reliable information independent from the Pauline letters to confirm or supplement details in the letters of Paul."¹ To speak quite frankly, I find this kind of hermeneutic rather simplistic, if not positivistic. It pretends that a modern hyper-critical reader can know Paul better than a member of the Jesus movement who was much closer in time, culture, and space to the apostle of the gentiles, simply because they have access to seven authenticated letters written by Paul (the other letters presumed to be junk or spam mail). Yet as Daniel Marguerat points out in his study on the reception of Paul, "It is anachronistic to think that, since we have [Paul's] his correspondence before our eyes today, his letters constituted the sole means by which he was known in the first century. All that we know of the rarity of writing in Antiquity should lead us to think the contrary: the memory of the apostle was preserved primarily through oral tradition preserved in the communities which he founded. Only literate persons had access to texts. In no way was the social memory of the apostle transmitted through purely literary channels."²

I find myself in (rare) agreement with Marguerat. Acts should not be dogmatically excluded from the historical investigation of Paul, especially when we want to make sense of Paul in an ancient Jewish setting. In all likelihood, the author of Acts knew more about Paul and what was said about him early on in history than what can be inferred from the *sieben kleinen Hauptbriefe*. I presume that the author of Acts also knew a great deal more about ancient Jewry and Jewish tradition than his modern critics who live in a galaxy far, far away from the Judaism of both Paul and Luke's time.

First impressions matter. The first systematic attempt to reclaim Paul within Judaism dates back to at least the beginning of the second century, if not the first, depending on when the Acts of the Apostles was written. Nanos rightly perceived that one of the earliest impressions of Paul's Jewishness to survive history shares notable affinities with Paul's self-understanding as a Jew, and that it has the potential to illuminate Paul's treatment of matters such as Torah observance, Jewish-gentile relations, and the restoration of Israel in the Letter to the Romans. Without taking everything Luke said about Paul *à la lettre*, Nanos effectively employs Acts to interpret the Epistle to the Romans.

In this regard, I was also struck as I reread *The Mystery of Romans* by the importance that Nanos grants to the Apostolic Decree for deciphering Paul's message in Romans and recreating the social setting of the Jewish and "Christ-following" communities established in Rome and elsewhere during Paul's time. Nanos' supposition that Paul endorsed the Apostolic Decree is commendable, even if Paul makes no explicit reference to this legal corpus, let alone reference it as a "decree." The observance of the stipulations associated with the Apostolic Decree was widespread among antique and late antique Christians, as Holger Zellentin has recently shown in his comprehensive study, *Law Beyond Israel*. Nanos is right therefore to suppose that Paul would

have subscribed to its demands. Indeed, Paul explicitly refers to gentile abstention from *eidōlōlatria* and *porneia*, two out of three (or four) requirements of the decree.

Nanos was also right to relate the Apostolic Decree with the rabbinic Noahide Laws. Again, Zellentin has shown more recently how both the Apostolic Decree and the Noahide Laws originate from and contribute to ancient Jewish discourses about purity laws from the Levitical Holiness Code and how these apply to non-Jews, particularly the laws for the *ger* in Leviticus 17–18, read in conjunction with Genesis 9.

Three decades later, there are, of course, points to disagree with in *The Mystery of Romans*. For example, I am not convinced that Rom 13:1–7 focuses on Christian obedience to synagogue authorities. The language of Rom 13:1–7 seems too vague to me to make this precise identification. Likewise, I am not persuaded that the “weak” in Rom 14 represent Jews *tout court*, namely, Jews who do not confess Jesus as their lord and messiah. Here, Nanos may be overly reliant on Acts to reconstruct the social dynamics to which Paul may have been alluding in Romans, given that Acts repeatedly situates Paul in Jewish synagogal settings.³

On the other hand, I agree with Nanos that the “strong” in Rom 14 are probably “Christian gentiles.” Furthermore, Nanos’ break from the longstanding supposition that the “weak” in Rom 14 are “Jewish Christians” has enabled novel and promising interpretations, including the recent proposal by Paul Sloan and Logan Williams that Rom 14 addresses gentiles throughout and deals with food offered to foreign gods and pagan holy days rather than Sabbath and “kashrut.”

To end this reflection with another anecdote, I remember in more than one exchange Nanos reminiscing about how formidable a task it was to advance his ideas about Paul’s Jewishness and views on Judaism, especially in the late 1990s and the beginning of the third millennium. He could not simultaneously lead a similar combat on the Lukan front. Yet Nanos should be credited not

only for his persistent efforts to foreground Paul's Jewishness and for his perceptive insights on how to reconceptualize Paul's views on Jews and Judaism. Nanos also helped pave the way for the much wider project that is still under renovation to relocate the entirety of nascent Christianity "within early Judaism." Time, of course, will be the ultimate judge of the merits behind the current trend, which I think is reaching its peak, to read not only Paul but virtually all of the documents of the New Testament "within Judaism" or as early Jewish texts. What cultural, political, social and historical forces lie behind this impetus? And what does it say about the particular moment that New Testament studies and the study of early Judaism are currently traversing, not to mention Jewish-Christian relations and, more broadly, the *pneuma* of our *Zeit*? Whatever answers meta-criticism will provide to these questions, I would like to think that, despite the limitations and shortcomings that time will reveal, the Paul within Judaism Perspective(s) has provided unique opportunities to appreciate the entire Jewish landscape of early Christianity with novel insights that are based on a solid historical investigation. For this and much more, I celebrate the legacy of Mark's pioneering work.

¹ Christopher Mount, "Acts," in the *T&T Clark Handbook to the Historical Paul*, eds. Ryan S. Schellenberg and Heidi Wendt (London: T&T Clark, 2022), 23–38 (34).

² Daniel Marguerat, "Paul after Paul: A (Hi)story of Reception," in *Paul and the Heritage of Israel: Paul's Claim upon Israel's Legacy in Luke and Acts in the Light of the Pauline Letters*, ed. David P. Moessner et al., LNTS 452 (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 69–89 (75).

³ See, for example, Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans*, 109 fn. 67 and its reference to Acts.