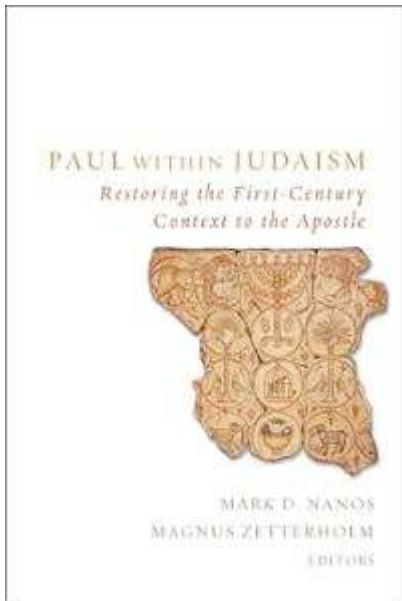


RBL 09/2015



Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm, eds.

Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle

Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015. Pp. x + 350. Cloth.
\$23.40. ISBN 9781451470031.

Mark M. Mattison
Grand Rapids, Michigan

James D. G. Dunn's 1982 Manson Memorial lecture, "The New Perspective on Paul," was originally intended to describe a paradigm shift in Pauline studies triggered by E. P. Sanders's 1979 book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. In his lecture, Dunn embraced Sanders's recognition that the traditional Christian caricature of Judaism as a religion of legalism is a gross distortion (a recognition now shared broadly by Pauline scholars, with the exception of some committed to preserving older Christian interpretations). The title of Dunn's lecture quickly became the catchphrase for a generation of biblical scholars' attempts to reconstruct a more historically plausible Paul whose doctrine of justification by faith must have been something other than a polemic against a presumably legalistic Judaism.

More recent developments in Pauline studies have included increased consideration of Paul's rhetoric in the light of Roman imperialism (often described more simply as Paul and empire) and the increasingly better defined interpretative approach to Paul completely within the context of Second Temple Judaism. Once considered more broadly under the rubric of "the new perspective," these scholars have struggled to delineate their unique perspective in a variety of ways. Pamela Eisenbaum, for example, early on suggested "a radical new perspective," which tried to convey the idea of moving even further toward interpreting Paul in continuity with Judaism but which nevertheless was

not much more descriptive than “the new perspective.”¹ In 2010 these scholars presented at a Society of Biblical Literature session entitled “Paul and Judaism,” and shortly thereafter they began to describe their perspective more helpfully as that of “Paul within Judaism.” Most of these essays have now been published by Fortress under the title *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, edited by Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm, and this new book is well-positioned to convey their unique approach to those who are less familiar with it.

In the introduction, Mark Nanos provides some context and an overview that is helpful overall (including some of the details above) but that could perhaps have benefited even more from a perfunctory description of the new perspective at the outset. However, the first essay, “Paul within Judaism: The State of the Questions,” by Magnus Zetterholm, quickly remedies this in a superlative historical overview of the evolution of anti-Jewishness in Christianity. What began as a political move by early gentile Jesus-followers to legitimize their movement by claiming the heritage of Judaism while simultaneously denigrating Jews, Zetterholm points out, soon became a theological problem (37–38) which deepened throughout the history of the church (38–42) prior to the paradigm shift signaled by the work of E. P. Sanders (42–44). Zetterholm’s cursory description of the new perspective is good overall, although it repeats some popular overgeneralizations. For example, Zetterholm’s one-sentence summary of Sanders’s view—“In short: *the problem with Judaism is that it is not Christianity*” (44)—is an (unannotated) reference to probably the most famous sentence in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, “In short, *this is what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: It is not Christianity*” (552)—one of those statements that takes on a life of its own and compels its author to provide more nuanced qualification.² Similarly, Zetterholm’s description of Dunn’s definition of “the works of the law” as “Jewish identity markers” (45) may not fully preserve the nuance that Dunn has repeatedly tried to make since 1982.³ But given the brevity of his outline, Zetterholm’s lack of nuance is perhaps understandable; in its broad brush strokes, the description seems close enough.

As one final aside with respect to “the new perspective on Paul,” in his response essay in the current volume, Terence L. Donaldson draws attention to statements by both Dunn and Wright suggesting that “the new perspective” moniker predated Dunn’s Manson Memorial Lecture (278 n. 2); one hopes it is not too pedantic to note that the previous

1. See *Paul Was Not a Christian: The Original Message of a Misunderstood Apostle* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 250, 251.

2. See E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1983), 154ff., 165 n. 38.

3. See, among many other instances, James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 23ff.

references in both Wright (1978) and Stendahl (1963) were simply to “a new perspective,” not “the new perspective on Paul” per se.

More to the point on the topic of terminology, the essay following Zetterholm’s fine introduction is Anders Runesson’s helpful “The Question of Terminology: The Architecture of Contemporary Discussions on Paul.” Runesson’s exercise in questioning the terms “Christian/Christianity” and “church” in Pauline scholarship (since, after all, “Christianity” as such did not yet exist in Paul’s day) is particularly effective in clearing the way for consideration of the new paradigm. His observation that even the NRSV, contrary to its usual translation of *synagōgē*, nevertheless renders it as “assembly” instead of “synagogue” in Jas 2:2 is instructive. Runesson also introduces a suggested term that he and Nanos are proposing to describe the early Jesus movement in Paul’s day: “Apostolic Judaism” (67; see also 121 n. 27).

An entirely different but no less useful exercise is taken up by Karin Hedner Zetterholm in “The Question of Assumptions: Torah Observance in the First Century,” which considers Paul’s halakic instructions for Jesus-oriented gentiles in 1 Cor 8–10 after describing by way of analogy the depth and diversity of contemporary Jewish understandings of Torah observance.

The next essay, Mark D. Nanos’s lengthy but nevertheless engaging “The Question of Conceptualization: Qualifying Paul’s Position on Circumcision in Dialogue with Josephus’s Advisors to King Izates,” thoroughly explores Josephus’s highly relevant narrative about God’s preservation of Izates who accepted circumcision as “the fruit of piety” toward God by *monō pepisteukosin*, “faith alone” (123), though Nanos consistently uses the phrase “faith(fulness)” instead of “faith” throughout to emphasize that “faith” for Paul entailed more than simply “belief in contrast to action or deeds or works or effort” (118 n. 23). “The work” or “the rite” (*ton ergon*) of circumcision for Izates was a matter of debate between Ananias, a Jewish merchant who advised against circumcision in the particular case of this foreign ruler (whereby he would “definitively” become “a Jew,” 110) and the Galilean Eleazar, who urged circumcision precisely as an act of faith(fulness). Nanos’s essay effectively highlights the degree to which conflicting positions on circumcision for non-Jews has nothing whatever to do with the bifurcation of faith and deeds (125ff.). His essay goes on to provide helpful critiques of both the new perspective (including E. P. Sanders) and traditionalists in their essential conceptualization of Jewish texts in universalizing terms reflective of Christian theology (144–52). “In short,” Nanos writes, “it is a category error of significance to universalize Paul’s position against the circumcision of Christ-following non-Jews without distinguishing that special topic from the issue of the circumcision of sons born to Jews, Christ-followers or not, and then to