

## Preface

This is the first of a two-volume set. The subtitle of the second will be *The Paradoxes of Paul*. The idea was conceived when Peter O'Brien spent a sabbatical year at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He and I enjoyed many hours talking over recent publications variously connected with the "new perspective" on Paul. In due course Mark Seifrid joined the discussions. Despite the fact that we were approaching the subject from various angles, we soon reached agreement that what was needed was a fresh exploration of the literature of Second Temple Judaism, followed by a fresh treatment of Paul that took into account the findings of the first exploration. In our view, the theses of E. P. Sanders regarding covenantal nomism, articulated in his seminal work on *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977) and in subsequent publications, though they obviously provided valuable correctives, needed further examination. It was not as if nothing had been done. Hundreds of reviews and articles, and not a few monographs, have been published on the views of Sanders and on the constellation of fairly diverse reconstructions that make up the "new perspective," but nothing had been published of which we were aware that looked afresh at virtually all the literature of Second Temple Judaism, aiming simultaneously for comprehensiveness and depth, before turning again to Paul.

These goals meant that we soon abandoned the hope of achieving our purpose in one fat volume. Hence this two-volume set. At one point we briefly toyed with the idea of attempting a straight-line chronological study; indeed, one or two distinguished scholars urged us to take this route. But eventually we settled on the outline reflected here. A straight-line chronological study is very difficult in any case, owing to protracted debates about the dates of many of the sources. More importantly, however, we were concerned not to lose the interpretive gains that depended on being sensitive to distinguishable literary genres. One of the criticisms raised against the category "covenantal nomism" is that it is suspect precisely because it paints with such a broad brush, or (to change the metaphor) because it is such a powerful vortex that it sucks in diverse literary genres without much historical and literary sensitivity.

The result was that we divided up the literature of Second Temple Judaism and invited distinguished specialists to look at it afresh, asking fundamental questions about the pattern of the relationships between God and human beings, about righteousness and salvation and eschatology and grace and

works and faith and law. We tried to make the categories broad enough that each scholar could “tweak” the approach – the questions asked and the categories for the results – according to the literature. Several of the contributors decided to follow a roughly chronological schema within the corpus of literature being studied.

Inevitably, this approach led to a bit of overlap: both Philip R. Davies and Donald E. Gowan, for instance, treat 4 Maccabees; despite some specific assignment of sources, there is a little overlap between the treatment of apocalyptic (Richard Bauckham) and of the Dead Sea Scrolls (Markus Bockmuehl). In our view, however, this has proved beneficial: we did not attempt to impose an artificial uniformity on the findings, and the small degree of diversity that resulted has probably enhanced the project’s credibility. On two fronts, we decided to commission essays of a topical nature (which of course ensured a bit more overlap with the other essays): Mark A. Seifrid wrote an essay on the “righteousness” words of the Hebrew Bible and of Second Temple Judaism, while Roland Deines embarked on a major study of Pharisaism. The most serious lacuna in the present volume is the absence of a separate treatment of the LXX. We intend to include something on that subject in the second volume, in an essay dealing with Greek “righteousness” words.

As the first draft of each essay was received, it was circulated to the other contributors to the first volume, who were invited to offer their suggestions and criticisms. About half of them did so. Essays were then revised and edited. I must make special mention of the written responses of Markus Bockmuehl, who (apart from the editors, of course) offered the most detailed and penetrating comments. Though they are now unseen by those who read these pages, his critical suggestions have probably made almost as great a contribution to this volume as his own essay.

Within the limits of reasonable uniformity of presentation, I have tried in final editing to allow some diversity of stylistic preferences. For instance, individual authors could choose for themselves between B.C.E./C.E. and B.C./A.D.

I want to record my thanks to those who have contributed to this project, some of them very substantially. First of all, I am grateful to the writers, whose erudition has been matched by consistent courtesy and efficiency as suggestions have been followed up, proofs read, questions answered. Prof. Martin Hengel and Georg Siebeck have been unflagging in their support of this project, even when there were some painful delays occasioned by the ordinary but always unexpected vicissitudes of life. Several scholars contributed to the translation of the essay by Roland Deines: their names are in the first footnote of that piece. The co-editors have been wonderfully rapid and insightful in their suggestions. My graduate assistant, Sigurd Grindheim,

prepared the indexes with his customary attention to detail; my indefatigable secretary, Judy Tetour, prepared the camera-ready copy. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School has an enviable track record of encouraging scholarship, and in this instance provided funds to offset various expenses. To all of them I owe a great deal, and extend my heartfelt thanks.

*Soli Deo gloria.*

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, April 2001

D. A. Carson

# 1. Introduction

by

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The “new perspective” on Paul is in some respects not new, and in any case cannot be reduced to a single perspective. Rather, it is a bundle of interpretive approaches to Paul, some of which are mere differences in emphasis, and others of which compete rather antagonistically. Taken together, however, they belong to the “new perspective” in that they share certain things in common, not least a more-or-less common reading of the documents of Second Temple Judaism, and a conviction that earlier readings of Paul, not least from the Protestant camp, and especially from the German Lutheran camp, with lines going back to the Reformation, are at least partly mistaken, and perhaps profoundly mistaken. The sometimes mutually reinforcing, sometimes mutually competing, interpretive grids share enough in common that together they have generated a reigning paradigm that to some extent controls contemporary discussion on Paul, the genesis of early Christianity, justification, grace, the identity and boundaries of the people of God, Torah, and a host of related themes. This new perspective (for so we shall continue to call it) is now so strong, especially in the world of English-language biblical scholarship, that only the rare major work on Paul does not interact with it, whether primarily by agreement, qualification, or disagreement.

Perhaps it is true that the origins of this new perspective, at least insofar as this new perspective became a reigning paradigm, lie with the 1977 volume by E. P. Sanders.<sup>1</sup> Arguably, however, some of the elements in the debate stretch back centuries. Within the twentieth century, some of Sanders’s views on Second Temple Judaism were anticipated by C. Montefiore,<sup>2</sup> G. F. Moore,<sup>3</sup> and K. Stendahl,<sup>4</sup> among others.<sup>5</sup> In 1963, the last-named scholar wrote a

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<sup>1</sup> *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> *Judaism and St. Paul* (London: Goschen, 1914).

<sup>3</sup> “Christian Writers on Judaism,” *HTR* 14 (1921): 197–254; *ibid.*, *Judaism*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard, 1927–30).

<sup>4</sup> *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

<sup>5</sup> For a useful overview of Jewish thought regarding Paul, see D. A. Hagner, “Paul in Modern Jewish Thought,” in *Pauline Studies* (ed. D. A. Hagner and M. J. Harris; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 143–65.

seminal essay of extraordinary influence,<sup>6</sup> in which he argued that Luther's position on justification reflected rather more his own internal struggles than the teaching of the Pauline letters. In Stendahl's view, Luther's influence was continuing to make difficult an historically accurate reading of Paul. Several years before his 1977 volume, E. P. Sanders anticipated his own book in one of his articles.<sup>7</sup> The title of the article and the subtitle of the book are significant: Sanders was looking for "patterns of religion," essentially an approach that borrows from the sociology of religion rather more than from theology. Over against a focus on "reduced essences" (e.g. faith vs. works, liberty vs. law, and the like) or of "individual motifs" (e.g. one starts with Pauline motifs and looks for their origin in Judaism), Sanders deploys a "holistic comparison of patterns of religion," in which the function and context of individual motifs are traced within the "whole," within a "more or less homogeneous entity."<sup>8</sup> "A pattern of religion, defined positively, is the description of how a religion is perceived by its adherents to *function* – how getting in and staying in are understood."<sup>9</sup>

Despite the title of his book, Sanders's focus was on some of the literature of Second Temple Judaism, not on Paul. Almost four hundred pages were devoted to the former, a mere ninety-two to the latter. That scarcely mattered, for it was his treatment of Palestinian Judaism that proved broadly convincing to many. In the forms of Judaism that he treated, Sanders found a common pattern that he labelled "covenantal nomism." This pattern Sanders summarized as follows:

The "pattern" or "structure" of covenantal nomism is this (1) God has chosen Israel and (2) given the law. The law implies both (3) God's promise to maintain the election and (4) the requirement to obey. (5) God rewards obedience and punishes transgression. (6) The law provides for means of atonement, and atonement results in (7) maintenance or re-establishment of the covenantal relationship. (8) All those who are maintained in the covenant by obedience, atonement and God's mercy belong to the group which will be saved. An important interpretation of the first and last points is that election and ultimately salvation are considered to be by God's mercy rather than human achievement.<sup>10</sup>

More simply put, the "pattern of religion" in Second Temple Judaism, according to Sanders, is that "getting" in is by God's mercy, while "staying in" is a function of obedience. Despite the many branches or emphases in first-century Judaism, this "covenantal nomism" is the common pattern. Sanders

<sup>6</sup> Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *HTR* 56 (1963): 199–215.

<sup>7</sup> E. P. Sanders, "Patterns of Religion in Paul and Rabbinic Judaism," *HTR* 66 (1973): 455–78.

<sup>8</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Sanders, *ibid.*, 17 (emphasis his).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 422.

acknowledges, of course, that some documents are notably "defective" (Sanders thinks in particular of 1 Enoch),<sup>11</sup> but the pattern, he insists, is pervasive.

To determine just how pervasive this pattern is, is one of the purposes of this volume. Whatever the results, the implications of this reading of Second Temple Judaism are certainly pervasive. For a start, it means that the theory that apocalypticism and legalism constitute substantially different religious streams within Second Temple Judaism of the period is profoundly misguided. More importantly for our purposes, the Protestant (and especially Lutheran) reading of Paul, which pits Paul's theology of grace against an ostensible Judaism of legalism, cannot (on this view) withstand close scrutiny of the primary texts. The Protestant reading of Paul is grounded not only on a terribly anachronistic reading of late texts – after all, apart from other evidence a fifth-century talmudic source is as relevant to Paul as mid-twentieth-century existentialism is for the evaluation of Shakespeare – but also on a chronic failure to discern the *pattern* of religion that Sanders believes he has uncovered. Paul's primary problem with the Judaism of his day, according to Sanders, has little to do with merit theology. His primary complaint is that it is not Christianity. Otherwise put, the most significant dividing line between Paul and his Jewish opponents was not merit theology but Christ. Of course, once Paul had come to accept that Jesus was the Messiah, he had to work out the theology of that position, and sometimes that drove him to theological constructions that emphasized differences between himself and unconverted Jews – sometimes even caricaturizing his opponents, rather than dealing with them fairly. Moreover, one must distinguish (Sanders says) between the way that Paul arrived at his conclusion, and the theological construction he later developed to support it. Thus, the relationship between Romans 1:18–3:20 and Romans 3:21–6 may be that of plight and solution, but that is surely after the fact: as Paul actually experienced things, he came to accept Jesus as the Messiah, and then worked out the theology: he moved from solution to plight.

Even now, almost two and a half decades later, reading the initial reviews of Sanders's work is a profitable exercise,<sup>12</sup> not only for their intrinsic value

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 423.

<sup>12</sup> These include: C. Scobie, *SR* 4 (1978): 461–3; J. Murphy-O'Connor, *RB* 85 (1978): 122–6; G. B. Caird, *JTS* 29 (1978): 538–43; J. Neusner, *HR* 18 (1978): 177–91; Bruce J. Malina, *BTB* 8 (1978): 190–91; C. Bernas, *TS* 39 (1978): 340–41; J. C. Beker, *ThTo* 35 (1978): 108–111; J. Drury, *Theology* 81 (1978): 235–6; J. T. Pawlikowski, *ChrCent* 95 (May 10, 1978): 511–12; D. E. Aune, *ChrToday* 22 (Apr. 21, 1978): 34; S. S. Smalley, *Chm* 92 (1978): 71–2; R. Smith, *CurTM* 6 (1979): 33–4; M. McNamara, *JSNT* 5 (1979): 67–73; G. Brooke, *JJS* 30 (1979): 247–50; A. J. Saldarini, *JBL* 98 (1979): 299–303; W. Baird, *PSTJ* 32 (1979): 39–40; G. Nickelsburg, *CBQ* 41 (1979): 171–5; D. J. Lull, *QR* 1 (1980): 81–7; N. King, *Bib* 61 (1980): 141–4; B. R. Gaventa, *BTB* 10 (1980): 37–44; E. Best, *SJT* 33 (1980): 191–2; J. F. Collange,

but also to discover how prescient (or otherwise!) they were. At the risk of generalization, most of them thought that Sanders's views on Paul needed a good deal more work, while his portrait of post-biblical Judaism received generally favorable notice. A. J. Saldarini (in *JBL*) was one of several exceptions: he protested that the pattern of "covenantal nomism" could not be sustained in pre-70 Judaism. Although many reviewers predicted that the book would prove important, few signalled that they thought it would bear the influence it has in fact enjoyed.

What has happened is that, for a sizable proportion of the New Testament guild, "covenantal nomism" has become the shibboleth for understanding Second Temple Judaism, and the necessary background for understanding Paul. So influential has this proportion become that few serious students of Paul say much about his writings without interacting with the "new perspective," whether as supporters or as detractors (or some mix of both).<sup>13</sup>

To track these developments here would be inappropriate, not least because the lead essay in the second volume of this two-volume set attempts just such an exercise. But it would surely not be inappropriate to mention the work of two scholars in particular. In 1983, James D. G. Dunn gave a highly positive assessment of the work of Sanders,<sup>14</sup> and this was eventually followed up by major commentaries on Romans<sup>15</sup> and Galatians<sup>16</sup>, not to mention a bevy of articles and books aimed at re-constructing parts of first-century Christianity, especially in Pauline circles. Dunn and his students have repeatedly insisted that the "works of the law" that draw the focus of interest in our literature have little to do with merit theology, and much influence as "boundary markers": Sabbath observance, the importance of kosher food, and circumcision have to do with preserving Jewish identity. Paul's insistence on breaking down these barriers has less to do with his opposition to some sort of ostensible legalism, than with his opposition to cultural elitism. Meanwhile, the growing corpus of N. T. Wright argues, among other things, that for Paul justification does not so much mark the entrance point into the Christian way, as that justification is God's righteous declaration that someone actually belongs to the covenant. Inevitably, Sanders, Dunn, and Wright all disagree with one another in various ways, even though they are among the leading lights of the new perspective. What all sides would agree upon, I think, is that Sanders's "covenantal nomism" has been a shaping feature of the new

perspective on Paul, even though there are other elements of Second Temple Judaism that some parties within this trajectory judge to be no less significant (e.g. Wright's insistence that for most first-century Jews the exile was viewed as still not over).

This means that the place to begin is with the literature of Second Temple Judaism, and the questions to be asked have to do with whether or not "covenantal nomism" serves us well as a label for an overarching pattern of religion. The scholars who have contributed the chapters of this book are not in perfect agreement on this point. The disagreement may spring in part from legitimate scholarly independence, but it springs even more (as the following chapters show) from the variations within the literature: the literature of Second Temple Judaism reflects patterns of belief and religion too diverse to subsume under one label. The results are messy. But if they are allowed to stand, they may in turn prepare us for a more flexible approach to Paul. It is not that the new perspective has not taught us anything helpful or enduring. Rather, the straitjacket imposed on the apostle Paul by appealing to a highly unified vision of what the first-century "pattern of religion" was really like will begin to find itself unbuckled.

The bearing of these matters on Paul must await the second volume. For the moment, it is enough to attempt a fresh evaluation of the literature of Second Temple Judaism.

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*RHPR* 61 (1981): 196–7; N. Hyldahl, *DTT* 46 (1983): 223–4.

<sup>13</sup> The exceptions stand out: e.g. Joseph A. Fitmyer's commentary on *Romans* (AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993), for the most part, simply ignores the new perspective on Paul, which tends to make his commentary on *Romans* simultaneously refreshing and obsolete.

<sup>14</sup> "The New Perspective on Paul," *BJRL* 65 (1983): 95–122.

<sup>15</sup> *Romans* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1986).

<sup>16</sup> *Galatians* (BNTC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993).