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VOLUME 19



ETHNICITY AND THE BIBLE

EDITED BY

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LEIDEN · NEW YORK · KÖLN

NEITHER JEW NOR GREEK: MULTICULTURALISM AND THE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PAUL

John M.G. Barclay

What is at issue in Paul's critique of his contemporary Judaism? In Galatians, where it first comes to expression, Paul contrasts "faith" with "works of the law" (2:16), he plays off "spirit" against "flesh" (3:3) and he declares that, in Christ, "there is neither Jew nor Greek" (3:28). Such a multiplicity of motifs makes it possible to construe his critique in many different ways. Is there a principle by which "faith" is superior to "works (of the law)"? Is Judaism in some sense inherently "fleshly"? Is the issue the equalizing of Jew and Gentile in Christ? What is it about his "former life in Judaism" (1:13-14) that Paul now finds inadequate?

In their answers to such questions, interpreters of Paul reveal more than simply their attentiveness to the text. The framework within which they conduct their analysis of Paul indicates much about their own intellectual and social context. To assess how Paul's varied arguments hold together, and to do more than simply repeat the terms in which he expresses them, interpreters have to place Paul's theology within a conceptual framework which makes sense in their own day. The history of the interpretation of Paul shows the different modes in which Paul's theology has been construed, modes which naturally (and properly) reflect the social and cultural questions dominant in the interpreter's environment.

When F.C. Baur took Paul to articulate "the principle of Christian universalism as a thing essentially opposed to Jewish particularism," his reading of Paul was clearly influenced by nineteenth century notions of cultural and historical progress: according to these canons, Judaism was "a religion based on law" and had only "a subordinate and secondary place in the history of the religious development of mankind," while Christianity constituted "the absolute religion, the religion of the spirit and of freedom."¹ "Jewish particularism . . . is but a stage,

¹ F.C. Baur, *The Church History of the First Three Centuries* Vol. I (E.T. by A. Menzies from 3rd edition, London/Edinburgh: Williams & Norgate, 1878), pp. 47, 57; *Paul*,

a stepping-stone to the universalism of Christianity, in which all nations should be embraced."² History determined that "it was necessary that the particularism of Judaism which opposed to the heathen world so repellent a demeanour and such offensive claims, should be uprooted, and that the baselessness of its prejudices and pretensions, of the privilege and the superiority it asserted, [be] fully exposed to the world's eye. This was the service which the apostle did to mankind by his magnificent dialectic."³ From such soil grew the confident plant of "Culture Protestantism" and in it the seed of anti-Semitism could find fateful nourishment.

The new readings of Paul which developed out of the "theology of crisis" in the middle decades of this century were no less indebted to their social and intellectual milieu. From Bultmann's synthesis of Lutheran theology and existentialist philosophy Paul emerged as exposing a fundamental human perversion, our desire to justify ourselves. In Paul, to live "according to the flesh" designates "to trust in one's own self as being able to procure life by the use of the earthly and through one's own strength and accomplishment"—an illusory goal to which we are lured by the law.⁴ Thus where Paul attacks Judaism under the rubric of "flesh" and "works of the law," it is this false hope of self-righteousness, and the false pride which it generates, which is his real target: "A specifically human striving has merely taken on its culturally, and in point of time, individually distinct form in Judaism."⁵ Such a reading of Paul clearly represents a powerful combination of Lutheranism and Western, specifically existentialist, individualism.

At the present time a new reading of Paul has gained currency—in some circles the status of consensus—which radically opposes the "Lutheran" Paul and claims a greater historical sensitivity to the dynamics of Paul's controversies. Of course this interpretation, like all its predecessors, is influenced by current social and ideological

² Paul, p. 309.

³ *Church History*, p. 73.

⁴ R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* Vol. I (E.T. by K. Grobel; London: SCM Press, 1952), p. 239.

⁵ "Christ the End of the Law," in *Essays Philosophical and Theological* (E.T. by J.C.G. Greig; London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 43. Cf. E. Käsemann, "Paul and Israel," in *New Testament Questions of Today* (E.T. by W.J. Montague, London: SCM Press, 1969), pp. 183–87. For further analysis see F. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 2–10 and J.K. Riches, *A Century of*

currents, although such influences have rarely been noted and few of its practitioners seem conscious of the fact. In this essay I wish to outline, first, the main elements of this "new perspective" on Paul (I) and then attempt to identify the social and cultural factors which influence it and account for its popularity (II). I shall then describe a new and important discussion of Paul by Daniel Boyarin, who has built on the new perspective to address, from a Jewish standpoint, modern questions of multiculturalism (III). Finally, in dialogue with Boyarin, I shall outline my own reading of Paul as a potential resource for our multicultural society (IV).

I. *The New Perspective on Paul*

The new era in interpretation of Paul is generally recognized to have its starting point in an essay by Krister Stendahl on "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West."⁶ Here, claiming to "renew our acquaintance with Paul after nineteen hundred years" (p. 78, note), Stendahl challenged not just the Lutheran-Bultmannian consensus but the whole Western tradition of Pauline interpretation which had read Paul from the standpoint of the individual's troubled conscience and taken his doctrine of justification by faith to constitute the solution to the sinner's quest for a gracious God. For Stendahl, Paul's theology was primarily concerned not with any such general human predicament (first invented, he argued, by Augustine) but with the immediate social issue of the integration of Gentiles into the Messianic community. The law was a matter of controversy for Paul not because of its temptation to "legalism" but because some attempted to impose it on Gentile converts, while he asserted that salvation was "open to both Jews and Gentiles in Christ" (p. 80). Thus in Stendahl's view the doctrine of justification by faith "was hammered out by Paul for the very specific and limited purpose of defending the rights of Gentile converts to be full and genuine heirs to the promises of God to Israel."⁷

It is important to note the words "specific" and "limited" in this statement. In asserting that Paul struggled to make salvation "open

⁶ First published in English in 1963 and subsequently available in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (London: SCM Press, 1977), pp. 78–96.

to both Jews and Gentiles," Stendahl's reading of Paul bears some comparison with Baur's emphasis on Pauline "universalism" and might appear to renew Baur's view of Judaism as "particularist" and "secondary." But Stendahl insists that Paul's doctrine is *only* apologetic: it does not at the same time constitute a *polemic* against Judaism. Paul was merely concerned to defend "the right of Gentiles to be full members of the people of God;" he is only against "Gentiles submitting to circumcision and food laws."⁸ Thus, although Stendahl is conscious that his reading of Paul "opens up a new perspective for systematic theology and practical theology," he is especially concerned that it should not be employed for any form of Christian anti-Semitism.⁹

As is well-known, the figure who ensured the full impact of the new perspective was E.P. Sanders, whose *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* changed the course of Pauline studies in English-speaking scholarship.¹⁰ The most immediately significant aspect of this book was its demonstration, from detailed analysis of a huge range of literature, that Palestinian Judaism of the first century did not correspond to the Christian caricature of a legalistic religion, but was based on confidence in covenant grace, *within which* law-observance took place (constituting what Sanders called "covenantal nomism"). Yet, unlike Stendahl, Sanders saw Paul's theology as in some sense fundamentally *opposed* to Judaism, and if this was not for the reasons advanced by the Bultmannian consensus, what explanation could be offered? Sanders' analysis of Pauline theology marginalized the theme of justification by faith (following Schweitzer) and found the centre of Paul's thought to lie in the notion of the believer's new location "in Christ," awaiting his imminent return ("participationist eschatology"). Thus, the deficiency of non-believing Jews lay not in some inherent fault in their religion, but simply in their not being in Christ: "this is what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity" (p. 552).

Sanders himself was aware that this was not an entirely satisfac-

⁸ *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, p. 130.

⁹ *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, pp. 95, 126-33. Note that the phrase "new perspective" was coined by Stendahl, and in a hermeneutical context: "a new perspective for systematic and practical theology" (p. 95, my italics). While combating what he understood to be anachronistic readings of Paul, Stendahl did not regard his work as being of merely historical interest.

¹⁰ London: SCM Press, 1977. Although it has been translated into German, its

tory analysis, and he augmented it somewhat in his subsequent book, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*.¹¹ Here he grappled at greater length with Paul's polemic against the law, noting the many different ways in which its deficiencies are described. He concluded that Paul did not critique Jews for boasting in the achievement of good works, but still had two principal reasons for excluding "justification by works of the law." One was Paul's Christological exclusivism (if justification was made available through Christ, it cannot be by means of the law, Gal. 2:21). The other was his commitment to the Gentile mission, which necessarily questioned the authority of the law and implicitly bracketed out those aspects of the law which Paul did not wish to have imposed on his Gentile converts (circumcision, Sabbath observance and food laws).

Thus both Stendahl and Sanders highlighted the social dimensions of Paul's theology, specifically his commitment to integrate Jews and Gentiles in the church. Sanders encapsulated the novelty of this reading of Paul when he wrote:

The subject of Galatians is not whether or not humans, abstractly conceived, can by good deeds earn enough merit to be declared righteous at the judgment; it is the condition on which Gentiles enter the people of God... The supposed conflict between "doing" as such and "faith" as such is simply not present in Galatians. What was at stake was not a way of life summarized by the word "trust" versus a mode of life summarized by "requirements," but whether or not the requirement for membership in to the Israel of God would result in there being "neither Jew nor Greek."¹²

This new perspective on Paul has been widely adopted over the last ten years both in Britain and in North America.¹³ A particularly prominent exponent has been James D.G. Dunn, who in numerous essays and in major commentaries on Romans and Galatians has

¹¹ Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.

¹² *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, pp. 18, 159.

¹³ Among British scholars one may note, besides J.D.G. Dunn (see below), F. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, J. Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (TPI New Testament Commentaries; London: SCM, Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989); N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991); W.S. Campbell, *Paul's Gospel in an Intercultural Context* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992). I made my own contribution in *Obedying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991). In North America, besides J.G. Gager and L. Gaston (see below, n. 23) see, e.g., N. Elliott, *The Rhetoric of Romans: Argumentative Restraint and Strategy and Paul's Dialogue with Judaism* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990) and S.K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*

employed the new perspective in exegesis of the key Pauline texts.¹⁴ Particularly noticeable in Dunn's reading of Paul is his exploration of the social aspects of Paul's critical engagement with Judaism. Highlighting the "social function" of the law in distinguishing Jews from Gentiles, Dunn identifies the "works of the law" against which Paul polemicalizes as particularly those "boundary markers" which identified Jews in Graeco-Roman society: circumcision, food laws and Sabbath observance. Thus, like Stendahl and Sanders, Dunn considers that "the leading edge of Paul's theological thinking was the conviction that God's purpose embraced Gentile as well as Jew, not the question of how a guilty man might find a gracious God."¹⁵ But he develops this further than his predecessors in specifying that Paul's polemic was directed against:

those who, in his judgement, were putting too much weight on the distinctiveness of Jews from Gentiles, and on the special laws which formed the boundary markers between them, those who rested their confidence in Israel's "favoured nation" status, those who invested their identity too far in the presumption that Israel was set apart from "the nations."¹⁶

In such statements it is possible to hear echoes of Baur's representation of Judaism as a "particularist" religion with special "prejudices" and "pretensions." But it is important to note that Dunn's analysis is shorn of Baur's claim for Christianity as the "absolute religion." Dunn is also at pains to insist that Paul was not rejecting Judaism as such, only a particular interpretation and application of the Jewish tradition. In Dunn's analysis, the objects of Paul's critique were "nationalistic presumption" and "ethnic restrictiveness," neither of which were, in Paul's view, a proper interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures.¹⁷ And although these features may have been typical of the Judaism of his day, Dunn is careful to keep his discourse strictly historical and not to suggest that such features typify Judaism *as such*.¹⁸

II. *The Social and Ideological Milieu of the New Perspective*

It is, of course, much harder to assess factors influencing contemporary interpretation than it is to discern, with hindsight, the influences on our predecessors. Nonetheless, there seem to be at least three aspects of our present social and ideological environment which undergird the new perspective and encourage its reception.¹⁹

1. *Theological Respect for Judaism*

This is the most obvious influence on the current readings of Paul, and is evident from the beginning in Stendahl's challenge to the consensus. When he clarifies the framework in which he reads Paul, Stendahl highlights his awareness of how, in relation to the Jewish people, "the Christian use of Scripture, and not least of the Pauline epistles, had caused developments of satanic dimensions." Thus he explicitly reads Paul "in an attempt to get at the roots of Christian anti-Semitism,"²⁰ and refuses to interpret Paul in any way that leads to "making Judaism a code word for all wrong attitudes toward God."²¹ This is surely why, as we have seen, Stendahl is reluctant to accept that Paul was engaged in any sort of *critique* of Judaism: he is only defending Gentile converts, not attacking Jews. Indeed Stendahl suggested that Paul never expected Jews in general to believe in Christ. He took Romans 9–11 as the climax of that letter and was impressed by the fact that the name of Jesus Christ does not appear once in all of 10:17–11:36. Thus he suggested that "Paul's reference to God's mysterious plan [for the salvation of all Israel] is an affirmation of a God-willed co-existence between Judaism and Christianity in which the missionary urge to convert Israel is held in check."²² This reading of Paul, which denies the presence of any serious critique of Judaism and suggests the prospect of a *Sonderweg* for Israel, has been

¹⁴ The chief essays are collected in *Jesus, Paul and the Law* (London: SPCK, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990). Dunn's commentaries are *Romans 1–8* and *Romans 9–16* (Word Biblical Commentary 38a and 38b, Dallas: Word, 1988); *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Black's New Testament Commentaries; London: A & C Black, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993).

¹⁵ *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, p. 232.

¹⁶ *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 172.

¹⁷ *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, p. 248.

¹⁸ E.g., *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, p. 249: "Paul objects to covenantal nomism under-

¹⁹ In identifying these influences on the new perspective, I am not, of course, attempting to disqualify the historical study which has been its hallmark. But historians should not need reminding that historiography is not a value-free enterprise: it inevitably and properly operates within the framework of the social and cultural questions of the day. As those questions change, new perspectives on history are opened up, but careful historical research is not thereby to be dismissed, in a facile way, as a purely subjective enterprise.

²⁰ *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, p. 126.

²¹ *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, p. 132.

²² *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, p. 132.

adopted by some other scholars as well, all acutely conscious of how Paul could be, and has been, read to nourish Christian anti-Semitism.²³

Most exponents of the new perspective hold that Paul *does* mount some critique of his contemporary Judaism, but all are sensitized to the horrendous potential of anti-Semitism in Pauline interpretation. Sanders' massive rebuttal of caricatures of Jewish "legalism" is evidently a product of the new spirit of understanding between Jews and Christians which characterizes our post-Holocaust, pluralist world. Present unwillingness to portray first-century Judaism as a religion of "works-righteousness" undoubtedly reflects our embarrassment that Christians have for so long espoused such derogatory attitudes towards Jews. Neither Baur's nor Bultmann's construction of the relationship between Paul and Judaism could flourish again in the present climate, even if some aspects of Baur's interpretation have been revived by Dunn and even if certain aspects of the Lutheran reading remain influential and fruitful.²⁴

2. *Community as the Goal of Christian Faith*

The shift in the new perspective from an individualistic to a communal reading of Pauline theology is surely related to significant changes in the social context of theology in the last thirty years. Bultmann's existentialist reading of Paul is now both philosophically and theologically passé and even at a popular level one is now less likely to hear sermons warning believers against trying to earn their salvation by good works. In an age of ecumenism, Protestants are less inclined to define their identity by contrast with the supposed "works-righteousness" of Catholicism, and the churches are in general more exercised about their social identity and social roles than about ensuring their members are individually put right with God on the correct terms. The current concern with ecclesiology—with the church as constituting and creating community—thus dovetails neatly with a reading of Paul's doctrine of justification which emphasizes its social origins and effects.²⁵

²³ See e.g., J.G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (Oxford: OUP, 1983); L. Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987); S.G. Hall III, *Christian Anti-Semitism and Paul's Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*.

²⁴ S. Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) represents a modified Lutheran reading of Paul, opposing some exaggerated features of the new perspective.

In the same post-60s climate social studies of early Christianity have gained a new lease of life and the research of G. Theissen and W.A. Meeks has focused attention on the social realities of the early church.²⁶ The use of sociology and anthropology in analysing those realities has discouraged a purely "theological" assessment of Paul's controversies; instead it encourages attention to social groups (synagogues and churches) and how they constructed and maintained their identities. By reading Paul within this framework, the new perspective thus mirrors a general change in both ecclesial and academic environments.

3. *Multicultural Concerns*

If the new perspective emphasizes the creation of communities in which "there is neither Jew nor Greek," this may also be seen to match contemporary concerns in multicultural politics. As we have seen, Dunn repeatedly refers to Paul's target as "nationalistic presuppositions" or "ethnic restrictions"—language redolent of social and political issues in the contemporary world. One cannot miss echoes of the contemporary rejection of colonialism and the current concern with "the politics of difference," in a statement such as:

It was the attempt to enforce a uniform *Jewish* understanding of the gospel in *Gentile* Galatia which roused Paul to furious indignation. Integral to the freedom of the gospel is freedom to express it differently, with different emphases in different contexts.²⁷

Within the Christian community, the bad conscience of Western churches in assessing their mission history, the development of non-Western theologies and the sanctioning of "inculturation" have introduced a new awareness of the value of "difference." In the secular realm, the cultural crisis in the West and the questioning of its

Social Function and Implications," in *Studies in Paul* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), pp. 95–120. Cf. my "Justification by Faith: The Root of Christian Tolerance," in R.P. Carroll and A.G. Hunter (eds.), *Words at Work* (Glasgow: Trinity St. Mungo Press, 1994), pp. 1–13.

²⁶ G. Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (E.T. by J.H. Schütz, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982); W.A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

²⁷ J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 28. I was conscious of using such a conceptual framework in referring to Paul as combating a Jewish "cul-

Enlightenment legacy have undermined the presumption of Western cultural hegemony. Thus the possibilities and problems of an interdependent and multicultural world have begun to loom large on the agenda of serious thinkers. In this context it is understandable that the Pauline motif of "neither Jew nor Greek" should come to the fore.

Of these three features of the current milieu, the third has been perhaps the least noticed by Pauline interpreters and the least exploited for the current theological and social task. Interpreting Paul as a cultural critic and exploring his vision of community in which there is "neither Jew nor Gentile" is an agenda still largely undressed by Pauline scholars. It has, however, been opened up in a significant fashion by Daniel Boyarin, and we may best pursue this Pauline potential in dialogue with him.

III. *The Contribution of Daniel Boyarin*

Daniel Boyarin's *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*²⁸ is a rich and deeply engaging reading of Paul by a "talmudist and postmodern Jewish cultural critic" (p. 1). As a practising and non-Christian Jew, Boyarin inevitably resists some aspects of Paul's theology, but he reads Paul sympathetically enough to discern that he issues an important challenge to Judaism, especially in its present multicultural environment. Boyarin's refusal either to "blunt the force of [Paul's] critique of Judaism" or to "render him a slanderer of Judaism" (p. 6) enables him to resist some common temptations, and his interpretation of Paul draws heavily on the main insights of the new perspective. Ultimately he rejects Paul's universalism as naïve and even dangerous, but he recognizes that equal dangers lurk in the rabbinic insistence on Jewish "difference," especially if it is linked, as in present-day Israel, with the possession of power and territory.

Foundational to Boyarin's interpretation of Paul is his conviction that Paul was "motivated by a Hellenistic desire for the One, which among other things produced an ideal of a universal human essence, beyond difference and hierarchy" (p. 7). It is this "Greek longing for universals" (combined with "Hebrew monotheism," p. 228) which induced Paul to interpret Christ as enabling not just equality but *sameness* (pp. 9, 156). For Boyarin, Gal. 3:28 indicates that Paul took

Christ to fulfil "the moral and religious necessity of humankind, namely to erase all distinction between ethnos and ethnos, sex and sex and become one in Christ's spiritual body" (p. 85).²⁹

Such a universalizing strategy is displayed, for Boyarin, in two interrelated features of Paul's theology: his dualism and his allegorical hermeneutics. Paul's dualism is, Boyarin insists, at least partially parallel to that of Philo: the two share a common background in eclectic middle-Platonism which influenced many Hellenistic Jews and encouraged them to operate "in a dualistic system in which spirit precedes and is primary over body" (p. 14). Boyarin finds his strongest evidence in Paul's "spirit"/"flesh" dualism which he takes to represent not complete rejection of the body, but a hierarchical schema in which physical and bodily phenomena are always subordinated to their spiritual counterparts (pp. 57–85). And this schema undergirds Paul's allegorization of Judaism. Whether in relation to circumcision (Rom. 2:25–29), Abrahamic lineage (Gal. 4:21–31), "Israel according to the flesh" (1 Cor. 10:18) or the Jewish interpretation of Scripture (2 Corinthians 3), Paul continually spiritualizes Jewish particulars and thus transforms the rites and the very existence of "a particular tribe" into "an ahistorical, abstract, and universal human 'truth'" (p. 96).

Boyarin understands this strategy as Paul's response to the tensions inherent in Judaism in which the God of all the world seems to have a disproportionate concern for one ethnic group.³⁰ By allegorizing circumcision and "the Israel according to the flesh," Paul's Christian perspective makes it possible for Judaism to become a world religion (pp. 230–31), but at the cost of eradicating Jewish difference and disqualifying its vital genealogical identity. Paul's treatment of circumcision is particularly crucial, and revealing, for Boyarin: it is the very physical character of this Jewish mark of identity which is fundamental to Jewish ethnicity, since it embodies the significance of parentage, family and historical memory. By spiritualizing and universalizing circumcision, Paul in effect deprives genealogy and ethnicity

²⁸ "Erasure" language is frequent: cf. pp. 24, 216, 231 etc. Elsewhere he talks of Pauline universalism as "dissolving all others into a single essence" (p. 9; cf. pp. 95, 257), "suppressing cultural difference" (p. 26) and "eradicating" cultural specificities (p. 8).

³⁰ Boyarin finds Paul's Christology symbolic here, and biographically foundational for his whole theology: understanding the Christ "according to the Spirit" to supersede Christ "according to the flesh," Paul finds the "hermeneutic key to the resolution of that enormous tension that he experienced between the universalism of the Torah's covenant and the particularist character of its laws" (p. 90).

of value. To be sure, Paul does not outlaw circumcision (for Jews); he regards it as an *adiaphoron* which counts for nothing compared with "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6; 6:15; 1 Cor. 7:19). But, Boyarin insists, even this apparent "tolerance" of difference is ultimately *intolerant* of the Jewish conviction that circumcision cannot be a matter of indifference:

What will appear from the Christian perspective as tolerance, namely Paul's willingness—indeed insistence—that within the Christian community all cultural practice is equally to be tolerated, from the rabbinic Jewish perspective is simply an eradication of the entire value system which insists that our cultural practice is our task and calling in the world and must not be abandoned or reduced to a matter of taste. (p. 32; cf. pp. 9–10, 290 n. 10)

Thus Boyarin ultimately rejects Paul's multicultural transformation of the Jewish tradition despite its attractive embrace of all humanity; indeed, he regards the eradication of difference as a dangerous version of "coercive sameness" (p. 236) which suppresses cultural differences by absorbing them into a dominant cultural system. Such a strategy leads too easily into European cultural imperialism where one specific culture masquerades as nonspecific. As a Jewish response to the dilemmas of multiculturalism, Boyarin propounds what he calls "diasporized identity," in which Jewish ethnic loyalties are combined with cultural participation in their local environments and shorn of territorial claims. This, he suggests, is the only viable synthesis which can correct "in the 'Christian' system its tendencies toward a coercive universalism and in the 'Jewish' system its tendencies toward contemptuous neglect for human solidarity" (p. 235; cf. p. 257).

The above summary cannot convey the full richness of Boyarin's intense and often captivating dialogue with Paul.³¹ In some respects it represents a Jewish riposte to Baur's Christian reading of Paul, which now at the close of the twentieth century appears painfully triumphalist and loaded with danger. In the light of European history it is remarkable that Boyarin can read Paul with such sympathetic attention, and it is his concern to give Paul (and his many interpreters) a fair hearing which constitutes one of the strengths of this book. Nonetheless, I consider that Boyarin's often acute reading of Paul sometimes misconstrues the apostle, and ultimately underval-

ues the contribution he could make to our contemporary tasks. I shall therefore conclude with an alternative reading of Paul which, in dialogue with Boyarin, offers a different employment of the new perspective for our multicultural age.

IV. *Paul and Multiculturalism*

Paul's theology was forged in dispute with his contemporary Judaism and needs to be understood in its social context. All Jews in the Graeco-Roman world were affected to some degree by the dominant Hellenistic culture, which they encountered not only in the Diaspora but also in Palestine. Hellenization, however, had many different facets, and it is worth distinguishing (in an approximate manner) between "acculturation" (the adoption of Hellenistic speech, literary forms, values and philosophies) and "assimilation" (social integration into Hellenistic society). Highly acculturated Jews, who spoke and wrote sophisticated Greek and were conversant with the Greek intellectual tradition, were not necessarily highly assimilated: many indeed employed their Hellenistic training precisely to demarcate their social life from that of non-Jews. The bond which held Jews together was primarily social: their common life in observance of "ancestral customs." Of these customs the most significant for social relations were aniconic monotheism (the refusal to participate in non-Jewish religion), the male mark of circumcision (which, among other things, limited marriage relations), the dietary laws (which restricted social intercourse) and the observance of the Sabbath (which affected employment relations). Such customs defined Jewish difference: they created social boundaries between Jew and Greek, even where the two might otherwise speak the same language and employ the same thought-forms. Greeks who wished to become Jews (as some did), needed to adopt precisely these social practices to achieve full integration into the Jewish community.³²

Paul's highly controversial claim was that Gentiles could become "children of Abraham" and heirs of the covenant promises simply by faith in Christ and receipt of the Spirit, thanks to the grace of

³¹ I have perforce omitted Boyarin's discussions of gender, which he regards as

³² On the distinction between acculturation and assimilation, and the social definition of Jewish identity in the Diaspora, see further my *Jews in the Mediterranean*

God. That led him to establish and maintain communities of believers whose common life could not be bounded or defined in the same way as were Jewish communities. One of the defining "ancestral customs" he did in fact transfer to his churches: he continued the ban on participation in Gentile religion, since his converts had, as he put it, "turned from idols to the true and living God" (1 Thess. 1:9). But he did not allow the other three "social markers" to characterize the common life of believers: Gentiles should not be required to "Judaize" in such matters as food (Gal. 2:11–14), circumcision (Gal. 6:11–16) or the observance of "days" (Rom. 14:5–6). In this sense Paul preached to Gentiles a partially "deJudaized Judaism"³³ and attempted to create church communities which were multiethnic and multicultural: in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek" (Gal. 3:28).

It is misleading, I believe, to interpret Paul as here engaged in a "spiritualizing" or "allegorical" hermeneutic (*pace* Boyarin). Paul was not reaching behind Jewish particulars to some abstract "essence" or disembodied "ideal": he was placing alongside the Jewish community another which was equally physical and embodied in social reality. To be sure, he can relativize circumcision by claiming that what counts is "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6), but that faith and love are designed to take extremely practical shape in the life of a community (Gal. 5:13–6:10). Similarly, he will not allow the Roman churches to define themselves by distinctions in food or drink, but the "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" which he puts in their place (Rom. 14:17) are meant to have immediate impact on their common life, not least in their common meals (Rom. 14:1–15:6). Hence Paul's apparent allegorization of Jewish particulars is performed not in a quest for "the universal human essence," but to enable an alternative form of community which could bridge ethnic and cultural divisions by creating new patterns of common life.³⁴

³³ G. Theissen speaks of a "Judaism for non-Jews," *Social Reality and the Early Christians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), p. 205.

³⁴ In this respect there is far greater *distance* between Paul and Philo than Boyarin allows. At first glance some of Paul's discussions of circumcision seem comparable to Philo's allegorizations, and his practice as dangerous to Judaism as the allegorists who advocated abandoning the practice of circumcision (Philo, *De Migratione Abrahami* 89–93). But Paul was not involved, like them, in an intellectual quest for the "human meaning" of Jewish customs: he was relativizing certain Jewish particulars in the interests of establishing multiethnic communities. Paul was more assimilated than Philo, but far less acculturated; hence the conceptual parallels between Paul and

For the same reason, Paul does not, I believe, "erase" or "eradicate" cultural specificities, but *relativize* them. Paul never loses his respect for Judaism, even for circumcision, which he regards as a sign of the advantage of the Jews (Rom. 3:1–2, even after 2:25–29). He can still list Israel's privileges in Rom. 9:4–5 (sonship, glory, the covenants etc.) with genuine awe. It is important for him that Christ was a Jew and thus a "servant of the circumcised, to fulfil the promises to the patriarchs" (Rom. 15:8). But it is also important that Christ is now the Lord of both Jews and Gentiles, who call on him in faith on the same terms, whatever their cultural identity. Thus Jews and Gentiles are simultaneously *affirmed* as Jews and Gentiles and *humbled* in their cultural pretensions. In much of what he presents as the direction of the Spirit, Paul is indebted to his Jewish tradition, both in his response to "idolatry" and in his sexual ethics. He can also draw some resources from the Hellenistic cultural tradition, urging openness to "whatever is true, whatever is just, whatever is holy . . ." (Phil. 4:8).³⁵ No one's culture is despised or demonized, but by the same token none is absolutized or allowed to gain hegemony.

But from what vantage point does Paul relativize cultural specificities? Clearly, as he would say, from the vantage point of "the truth of the gospel" (Gal. 2:14). But Paul does not present the gospel as if it carries a whole new cultural package, designed to eradicate and replace all others. It is rather a cluster of values, focused in love, which enables the creation of a new community in which variant cultural traditions can be practised. When he describes himself, famously, as being all things to all people (1 Cor. 9:19–23) he indicates his ability to adapt his behaviour—at one time living under the law, at another without the law—because his ultimate commitment is not to the law (or to lawlessness) but to Christ (he is *enim* *Christus*, 1 Cor. 9:21). That does not install Christ as the founder of a new culture, but indicates how commitment to Christ can simultaneously *encompass* various cultural particularities. Thus Paul, although he de-thrones the law, never forbids its practice by Jews or Jewish Christians, and in Romans 14 goes to some lengths to defend their rights to observe food and Sabbath customs. But as that chapter and others display (cf. 1 Corinthians 8–10), all such cultural commitments are of only penultimate significance: the overriding commitment is to

³⁵ See now T. Engberg-Pedersen (ed.), *Paul in his Hellenistic Context* (Edinburgh:

love and the building of responsible and supportive communities. The gospel is not, for Paul, a philosophical principle which reveals universal human truths. His investments lie not in the abstractions of "knowledge" but in the practical and often complex demands of love (1 Cor. 8:1-3).

Thus far I have suggested that Paul's stance towards cultural difference was neither as brutal nor as naïve as Boyarin has suggested. At two points, however, I believe Boyarin is right to call attention to major difficulties in the Pauline prescription. In the first place, he rightly suggests that the very "tolerance" of cultural difference turns out to be subtly intolerant of those for whom the maintenance of their cultural traditions cannot be a matter of taste, but is the very core of their identity (see the citation above, p. 208). This is, as he says, one of the essential dilemmas of multiculturalism,³⁶ since in this respect tolerance itself appears flawed (pp. 9-10). As Romans 14-15 indicates, Paul's protection of the rights of law-observant Christians to keep Sabbath and food laws in fact subtly undermines their social and cultural integrity, since they are forced to acknowledge the equal validity of *non-observance* even while being allowed (with some concession) to observe.³⁶ Thus even if Paul does not "eradicate" cultural differences, his relativization of their significance somehow threatens the very seriousness with which they are taken by their practitioners. I can only agree with Boyarin that a dialectic between common values and cultural difference must be maintained and that "somewhere in this dialectic a synthesis must be found, one that will allow for stubborn hanging on to ethnic, cultural specificity but in a context of deeply felt and enacted human solidarity" (p. 257). I can only add that I believe Paul's ethic and his creation of cross-cultural communities is already pointing towards such "deeply felt and enacted human solidarity."

But isn't it true—and here we encounter Boyarin's second objection—that Paul's multicultural vision presupposes common *communitas* to *Christ* and in this Christological exclusivism refuses to recognize the "right" of Jews and others "to remain unconvinced by the gospel" (p. 10)? Does Paul's subtly "particularist claim to universalism"

(pp. 205, 208) ultimately delegitimize Jews and all other non-Christians who cannot accept that they are simply "on the way to destruction" (1 Cor. 1:18)? Does Paul have anything at all to offer a world that is not only multicultural but also multireligious?

I think myself that Paul partially deconstructs his own Christological exclusivism by his pervasive appeal to the grace of God.³⁷ The foundation of Paul's gospel, and the basis of his relativization of all cultures, is his radical appreciation of the grace of God which humbles human pride and subverts the theological and cultural edifices which "flesh" constructs. The justification of the ungodly and the gift of the Spirit are, for Paul, acts of grace which undermine absolute commitment to the law (Rom. 4:4-5; Gal. 3:1-5); he himself had experienced God's grace as calling into question all his previous cultural assurances (Gal. 1:13-16; 1 Cor. 15:8-10). Paul discerns the gracious initiative of God through Israel's history, and its paradoxical triumph precisely through her unbelief (Romans 9-11), since the God who has consigned all to disobedience will ultimately have mercy on all (Rom. 11:32). This radical notion of divine grace, which Paul uses to destabilize the church at least as much as those outside it (cf. 1 Corinthians *passim*), could serve both to affirm and to relativize the Christian tradition itself. The church exists not for its own sake but to bear witness to the grace of God. Paul himself is ultimately speechless before the mercy of God and cannot find even Christian language in which to express its significance (Rom. 11:33-36). To this extent, even Pauline theology could be mobilized to serve a multiculturalism whose religious basis is the affirming and relativizing grace of God.

Thus the new perspective suggests that Paul could serve as a valuable resource in our struggles to fashion a harmonious but multicultural society. It reads Paul as the fashioner of multiethnic and multicultural communities, which function not to erase but to moderate between differing cultural specificities. It could be claimed that any community which relativizes difference sets itself up as, in effect, a new hegemonic culture. But I have suggested that Paul never intended to found a "Christendom," and his prescription, at its most basic, could

³⁶ I have explored this irony in "Do we Undermine the Law? A Study of Romans 14:1-15:6," in J.D.G. Dunn (ed.), *Paul and the Jewish Law* (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), forthcoming), a paper written before I encountered Boyarin's book but

³⁷ This is a motif underappreciated by Boyarin who, influenced by Watson, takes Paul's contrast of "grace" and "works" as the *sociological* markers of different communities (p. 206) and fails to allow for their theological significance. Cf. his dialogue

be taken as elevating only what accords with love and enhances community. Any social framework in which differing cultures are enabled to share a common life necessitates the establishment of some "common ground," and I am not convinced that Boyarin's stimulating advocacy of Jewish "diasporized identity" can circumvent this requirement.³⁸ On one side we are faced by the injustices of cultural suppression, but on the other lie the equally enormous dangers of cultural incompatibility. And it is better that we create possibilities for community on some common ground than that we tear the fabric of societies whose cultural threads are already too interwoven to be simply unravelled. A cautious use of our Pauline heritage could equip us to undertake that long and difficult search for a polity which both respects ineradicable difference and enables meaningful community.

³⁸ Precisely in the Diaspora, without the power to impose territorial or cultural claims, Jews need to establish on what basis they can accept the conditions of their social environment and perhaps contribute to its cultural life. If a diasporized identity entails being both Jewish and American (p. 244), on what basis can an individual (or community) justify the adoption of this double identity? In rejecting the abstract notion of "a universal human essence" (p. 257), Boyarin leaves unclear the basis of his own commitment to "human solidarity" (*ibid.*) and "social justice" (p. 259). Josephus, writing on behalf of Jews in the Diaspora, articulated the need for some common ground in their relations with non-Jews: "It is most advantageous for all men, Greeks and barbarians alike, to practise justice; our laws are specially concerned with this matter and they make us (if we keep to them sincerely) kind and friendly to all. Thus we properly expect the same attitude from them, for foreignness should not be defined as a matter of difference of customs but in relation to one's proper attitude to civilized behaviour (*καλοκoreðia*); for this is common to all and it alone enables society to survive" (*Antiquities* 16.177-78). Josephus' *καλοκoreðia* is, of course, a cultural product, manufactured no doubt by a privileged élite. But on what other basis could (or can) minority groups hope to receive respect for their difference?

GROUP BOUNDARIES AND INTERGROUP CONFLICT IN GALATIANS: A NEW READING OF GALATIANS 5:13-6:10¹

Philip F. Esler

Introduction: The Galatian Context and Gal. 5:13-6:10

The principal issue in Galatia to which Paul responds in his letter to the congregations, the *εὐκτατοῖα*, which he had founded there, was the pressure being exerted upon Gentile members to accept circumcision and the other requirements of the Jewish law. It is clear from Gal. 6:12-13 that it was Jewish members of the congregations who were actively running this campaign, although, as I have argued elsewhere (Esler 1994: 52-69), they themselves were conforming to wider Jewish opinion. That this campaign was making some headway in Galatia is clear from 4:10-11, even if circumcision had not yet been widely accepted by the Gentile membership.

One of the great conundra of Galatians research, however, is that in Gal. 5:13-6:10, Paul seems to shift away from the question of circumcision and the primacy of justification by faith—and the forces in the external environment impelling him to such a discussion—and to turn instead to a problem internal to the communities of Galatia, namely, the way their members should behave toward one another. Further below I will outline various solutions which commentators have proposed to explain the alleged difficulty in relating the material in Gal. 5:13-6:10, traditionally described as "ethical," to the issue of circumcision.

In this essay I wish to outline a new approach to the problem. For present purposes my interest is the historical one of investigating what meaning or meanings this text conveyed to its original audience (listeners rather than readers). My starting point, however, is that since the context in which Paul was seeking to make an impact was a social one, we should augment traditional tools of historical

¹ This is a revised form of a paper delivered at the SBL Conference in Chicago on 21 November 1994.