

PERCEPTIONS OF COMPATIBILITY BETWEEN
CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM IN PAULINE
INTERPRETATION

WILLIAM S. CAMPBELL

University of Wales, Lampeter

Introduction



In the discussion of Pauline interpretation after the New Perspective it is clear that some interpreters regard a portrait of Paul as a first century Jew who may even have kept Torah to be incompatible with the image of Paul that was dominant until recently.¹ The significance of their concern is increased by the fact that the great figures of the Reformation do not seem to be in accord with the insights of the New Perspective. Paul's gospel continues to be almost universally viewed as opposing Judaism. "Even honest and sophisticated New Testament exegetes and historians continue(d) to depict Judaism in contrast to prophetic religion on the one hand and New Testament Christianity on the other."² Thus, whatever aspects of Paul's theology are under discussion this perception persists as the general background within which all debates take place. This in turn leads to the question whether the perception of incompatibility between Paul and Judaism is itself contextually variable.³ Behind this question is a nagging doubt that Paul is interpreted more in relation to the interpreters' context than in relation to the context of his letters. In the history of interpre-

¹ Cf. the literature cited by P. Eisenbaum in "Paul, Polemics, and the Problem of Essentialism," p. 225 in this volume; also, M. B. Thompson, *The New Perspective on Paul* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2002), pp.18-22, 24-26.

² G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins: Diversity, Continuity and Transformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 196.

³ Since I am dependent in this article on my paper "How Contemporary Perspectives on Paul Assist in Illuminating Ancient Jewish/Christian Relations" (Early Jewish Christian Relations Section, SBL Annual Meeting, Denver, 2001), in my discussion I will continue to use the word "incompatibility" despite the fact that there is an obvious link with Pamela Eisenbaum's very helpful term "essentialism." Cf. also N. Elliott, "An American 'Myth of Innocence' and Contemporary Pauline Studies" pp. 243, 245, in this volume.

tation it is easy to identify moments when Paul's interests are presumed to be identical with those of the interpreter.⁴ Hence it is important to distinguish Paul's concerns from our own.

Distinguishing Paul's Concerns from Ours

In what ways might contemporary scholarly concerns with Judaism differ from those of Paul? In both instances, ours as well as Paul's, the presupposition is that the Scriptures of Israel and its living traditions are the point of departure for any discussion of the norms and self-understanding of the Christ-communities. But in presupposing this it is not claimed that the motivation in contemporary interpretation is the same as Paul's. In most of his letters Paul is in fact not arguing that the Christ-believers are the true Judaism. He is rather more praxis oriented, seeking to guide his mainly gentile communities in the modes of life and behaviour in keeping with the gospel of Christ. This appears to be his dominant concern. Thus, although the origin of the faith of Christ-believers from Jewish roots is presupposed, this theme is not actually the primary topic of Paul's letters.

It can confidently be affirmed that Paul thought that what was taking place in the coming of the gospel to the gentiles was in keeping with God's purposes for his people. Paul's mission and gospel derived from the coming of Christ and the influence of the Holy Spirit. Thus for Paul his citation of Scripture, his appeal to the promises, etc., was simply affirming that all of this activity within the Christ movement was consistent with the faith of the fathers and the prophets. Paul's engagement with Judaism is not to claim superiority or to argue for its displacement by a new people of God, but rather to show that the Christ event and thus the roots of the new movement was in accordance with the Scriptures and the traditions of Israel. He sought to show it was *consistent with* Judaism but not to argue that it had displaced it.

In this respect Paul's concerns in the engagement with the Judaism of his day was to argue that the expected messiah had come

⁴ Ernst Käsemann, my esteemed teacher, did interpret Paul directly in relation to contemporary German theological debates, as was particularly evident in his reaction to K. Stendahl in "Justification and Salvation History in the Epistle to the Romans," in *Perspectives on Paul* (London: SCM Press, 1971), pp. 60-78.

and that the gentiles could now be welcomed as gentiles to the kingdom of God. Though his claim that Jesus was the Christ was not everywhere accepted in Judaism, the debates over this issue were not debates about the superiority of “Christianity” over Judaism but rather inner house debates as to the coming of the messiah and its implications for gentiles.⁵ This debate concerned only one crucial motif within Judaism. The Christ movement was still relatively small in number and was still operating within the overall umbrella of Judaism. There was no conception as yet of a new religion springing up in opposition to Judaism. As Sanders notes, the term “Christian” had not yet been coined, and Paul might have rejected it if it had.⁶

Where contemporary interests differ from those of Paul is that in any modern discussion of Judaism, Christian interpreters are not simply maintaining that Jesus was the Messiah. Nor are they with Paul merely arguing that Christ-faith is true in that it is consistent with the faith of the fathers. They are also frequently engaged in debating the issue whether Christianity is true in the sense that it alone is *the* true Judaism and that it should legitimately displace all other “untrue” forms of Judaism. Some, perhaps even most, Christian interpreters are in fact engaged, whether consciously or unconsciously, in a comparative activity comparing one religion with another competing religion.⁷ Thus the ensuing interpretation of those texts in Paul’s letters where he engages with his ancestral faith is not simply based upon the issues which concerned Paul and his communities but includes in addition an ongoing agenda of whether Christianity is the true Judaism and whether Christians are the true Jews.⁸ This interpretation of Paul’s

⁵ Cf. Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins*, pp. 115-17.

⁶ *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 175. Cf. Eisenbaum, “Paul, Polemics, and the Problem of Essentialism,” pp. 236-237 in this volume.

⁷ The comparison of religions is a valid intellectual exercise but only when undertaken in an impartial scholarly manner, rather than implicitly. Cf. the critique of J. L. Martyn’s commentary on Galatians M. D. Nanos, “How Inter-Christian Approaches to Paul’s Rhetoric Can Perpetuate Negative Valuations of Jewishness—Although Proposing to Avoid that Outcome,” pp. 255-67 in this volume. Cf. E.P. Sanders, “Patterns of Religion in Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: A Holistic Method of Comparison,” *Harvard Theological Review* 66 (1973), pp. 455-78, stressing the need to compare religions as a whole with one another, and not merely their individual elements or motifs (similar to the “Introduction” in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* [London: SCM Press, 1977]).

⁸ Evident in the views of Tom Wright, e.g. in “Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s

letters involves a concern for Christian self-understanding and identity⁹ that must necessarily differentiate the modern agenda from that of Paul, since these, in fact, are Enlightenment categories, and thus must inevitably be foreign to Paul. This differentiation is not always clearly maintained, even when the dual effects of the influence of synagogue and state upon the Pauline communities, and the historical tensions arising from these in the development of the communities' self-understanding, are taken into account. At times there is a tendency to move beyond the evidence to posit what most likely would be the outcome of Paul's advice; e.g., in the tendency to view Paul's stress upon internal coherence and solidarity as a preparation for the later separation between these communities and the synagogue. To build up a community stressing belongingness may have effects on its boundaries with those outside, but to suggest that Paul was consciously encouraging separatist tendencies leading to a distinction between Jewish and Christian identity is not warranted.¹⁰

Moreover, in such discussions of Paul and Judaism there is a tendency to use "true" in the sense of "true or false" rather than "true or inconsistent," thus tending to oppositional terminology in which one can only be right or wrong, which Nickelsburg aptly describes as "a mindset that identifies right and wrong *doctrine* as the touchstone of true religion."¹¹ This demonstrates a zeal for an exclusive claim by Christianity to the heritage of Israel, and a

Empire," in R. Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honour of Krister Stendahl* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000), pp. 160-83. For a contrary opinion see D. Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), pp. 151-208.

⁹ In Eisenbaum's words: "the ongoing attempt by Christians to define their religious identity vis-à-vis Judaism" ("Paul, Polemics," p. 224 in this volume).

¹⁰ Contra M. Tellbe, *Paul between Synagogue and State: Christians, Jews and Civic Authorities in 1Thessalonians, Romans and Philippians* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2003). On p. 188, Tellbe concludes that Paul's failure to mention the Temple tax in Rom 13 implies "... that Paul in practice implicitly affirms the autonomous religious identity of the Roman Christians vis-à-vis the Roman Jews" (cf. also pp. 135, 208).

¹¹ *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins*, pp. 30-31. Nickelsburg traces the development of this mindset back to the first disputes with Jews concerning the divine nature of Christ and then via the Marcionite and Gnostic controversies to other inner-Christian debates about orthodoxy "ironically spawning the kind of debate and conflict that its theologians would later attribute to the rabbis and the kind of self-righteousness that they would claim was a hallmark of the Pharisees" (p. 30).

persistent emphasis on antithesis rather than commonality between the two. On the other hand, it can well be argued that *Judaism and Islam may also be consistent with their Abrahamic roots and thus not necessarily right or wrong—but true and consistent*. Of course, where there are two or more existing monotheistic religions as in the modern era, there is a need for exclusive commitment to the faith of one's convictions and it is clearly contradictory to claim allegiance to two differing religions. But this was not the situation Paul faced, when Christ-faith was only a minority movement still adhering to its Jewish roots, and where his hope was that this new movement would eventually permeate the whole of Judaism.

Whilst it is inevitable our modern interests should diverge from those of Paul, we must recognize all the more the difference between Paul's time and ours, including the difference in our perspectives. It is the assumption of shared perspectives between ourselves and Paul, although living in vastly differing periods of history and in spite of changing developments in the church, that leads to lack of clarity and to great misunderstanding. To avoid such confusion it is essential to distinguish clearly between Paul's interests in writing to his communities about contemporary first century issues and our modern concerns of self-understanding and identity. Such an approach respects the integrity of Paul's own theologizing and also facilitates the relating of his theological thought to our very different concerns. It is too much to claim that "Paul's theology in Romans must have escalated the process of self-definition that was already underway and precipitated the final separation between the synagogue communities and the house-churches."¹² Whilst scholars cannot entirely escape their own subjectivity in the interpretive process, differentiating between Paul and ourselves is essential for clarity. There may be scepticism concerning the potential to fully achieve such differentiation, but failure to do so will result in innumerable diverse subjectivities without any historical based critique; thus, modern agendas become the criterion for interpreting Paul's letters.

We conclude therefore that we need to distinguish between:

¹² Tellbe also claims that Paul, "by creating a self-definition whose fiscal application allowed Christians to be distinguished from Jews" contributed to the final separation between the groups, despite this not being his primary aim (*Paul between Synagogue and State*, pp. 208-09).

1. Paul's theologizing in relation to his first century communities;
2. Paul as interpreted in the history of the church, particularly in ecclesial dogmatics; and
3. Paul as interpreted in relation to contemporary contexts.

Distinguishing between Paulinism and the Historical Paul

In contemporary interpretation of Paul, our understanding is illuminated by all three of these differing contexts. Since no interpreter is devoid of a hermeneutical framework and since all hermeneutical frameworks are constructions, we need to be aware of our own involvement and choices in the creation and/or selection of these. In this process we can no more escape the influence of past hermeneutical constructions than we can our own subjectivity.¹³ We need to recognize them and to give them appropriate attention without allowing any one of them exclusively to determine our own position or to override the significance of the others.

Sanders has clearly demonstrated how a later inner-Christian debate about grace and works was retrojected by Luther into nascent Christianity, thereby causing the understanding of Christian origins in relation to Judaism to become somewhat skewed. Dunn's summary of this tendency—"To a remarkable and indeed alarming degree, throughout this century the standard depiction of the Judaism which Paul rejected has been the reflex of the Lutheran hermeneutic"¹⁴—can still be confidently affirmed. It should be

¹³ Nanos's article in this volume explores some of the difficulties interpreters face in both of these respects.

¹⁴ J. D. G. Dunn, 'The New Perspective on Paul', *Bulletin of the John Ryland's Library* 65 (1982-83), pp. 95-122, (98-99), reprinted in *Jesus, Paul and the Law* (London: SPCK, 1990), pp.129-82. A classic discussion of reading one's contemporary perspectives into Paul is Sanders' brilliant critique of Käsemann's view of Paul. Sanders claimed that for Käsemann, "The prime point of accepting Christ becomes the renunciation of achievement ... Thus the correct exegetical perception that Paul opposed Judaism and that he *argued christologically* becomes—without argument or exegetical demonstration, but on the ground of basic theological assumptions—an assertion that he opposed *the self-righteousness which is typical of Judaism* ... But the supposed objection to Jewish self-righteousness is as absent from Paul's letters as self-righteousness itself is from Jewish literature" (*Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, p. 156). Similarly, he analyses Käsemann's critique of Judaism, "This not only individualizes and generalizes the discussion of the failure of the Jews in Romans 9–11, it makes a historicizing leap: indi-

noted, however, that Luther's primary interest was in the debate about grace *within Christianity*. For Luther, Augustine was his preferred authority,¹⁵ his main ally against what the Reformer believed to be the Pelagian tendencies of scholasticism. Luther saw the Jews as representing a type of Pelagianism in much the same way as the still unreformed church.¹⁶ A useful reminder in this context is that Luther himself, though at first not being particularly unfavourably disposed towards the Jews,¹⁷ for a variety of reasons eventually turned on them as the enemies of Christ. But although Luther's attitude to Jews and Judaism was indelibly coloured by an inner-Christian debate on grace and works originating from Augustine and his anti-Pelagian debates,¹⁸ there were real differences between these scholars, particularly in their view of the law.¹⁹ Not only this, but even more significantly, social and political factors also played a part, so that although Luther initially had hoped that the Jews might respond positively to his Reformed gospel, when this did not happen, he then depicted them not merely as those enemies who had murdered the Christ, but added to this the perception of the Jew as *the* paradigm of works righteousness.²⁰ Luther's differences from other reformers who not only learned

vidual Jews rejected grace as such and were thus in fact guilty of zeal for self-righteousness" (pp. 155-58.).

¹⁵ Cf. P. Gorday's discussion of the Reformation interpretation of Paul (*Principles of Patristic Exegesis* [New York, Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983], p. 20).

¹⁶ Cf. my essay, "Martin Luther and Paul's Epistle to the Romans," in O. O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Bible as Book: The Reformation* (London: The British Library and Oak Knoll Press, 2000), pp. 103-14 (abbreviated version available in *Luther Digest* 11 [2003], pp. 7-9). Also W. Pauck, *Luther: Lectures on Romans* (Library of Christian Classics; London: SCM Press, 1961), Vol. XV, p. 216.

¹⁷ Cf. Pauck, *Luther*, pp. 60-61, 260-65.

¹⁸ On Luther and anti-semitism see H. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (trans. E. Walliser-Schwartzbart; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), and *The Two Reformations: The Journey from the Last Days to the New World* (ed. D. Weinstein; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 81-85.

¹⁹ See P. Fredriksen, "Augustine and Israel: *Interpretatio ad Litteram*, Jews and Judaism in Augustine's Theology of History," in D. Patte and E. Te Selle (eds.), *Engaging Augustine on Romans: Self, Context and Theology in Interpretation* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002), pp. 91-110 (97-105).

²⁰ It was, however, the influence of Ferdinand Weber's invention of the theory of legalism which was most influential in the creation of a Pauline hermeneutic in antithesis to Judaism. Cf. Joseph B. Tyson, *Luke, Judaism and the Scholars: Critical Approaches to Luke-Acts* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 4-6. Particularly in the Bultmann/Käsemann strand of interpretation this paradigm resulted in the "allegorizing of 'the Jew' in Paul's thought as a cipher for sinful or boastful humanity" (cf. N. Elliott, "American 'Myth of Innocence,'" p. 245 in this volume).

Hebrew from Jews but who, unlike him, also positively valued their exegesis of the Hebrew scriptures, indicates that individual and contextual factors also played a particular role in his formulation of justification by faith.²¹ The challenge for Christian scholarship today is to clearly differentiate inner-Christian debates and agendas from impartial discussion of Judaism, both in the period of Christian origins and in contemporary life.

Here emerges the dilemma facing interpreters familiar with, indeed even moulded by, great Christian theologians of the past. These giants of interpretation assist in providing a framework of understanding, a hermeneutical stance to help us understand Paul. Thus it must be recognized that in the contemporary interpreting of Paul we are still immersed in the historical deposits of Pauline interpretation crystallized in historic ecclesial dogmas. Within the church and even beyond it, it remains difficult to fully engage and possibly challenge such interpretations because they carry both ecclesial and Pauline authority. Yet at the same time they also obscure the historical Paul, and our task as scholars is to take account of their insights but to go beyond them to look at Paul afresh with the aid of contemporary scholarship.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in the great legacy of F. C. Baur to the history of Pauline interpretation. Baur's contribution was significant in that he dared to challenge the dogmatic interpretation of Paul in the church, including the significance of the doctrine of justification by faith.²² We are still in his debt for his emphasis upon history rather than theology for a full understanding of Paul.²³ But his interpretation also carried within it "Hegelian" influences that viewed historical developments as the outcome of contrary and competing forces.²⁴ Paul's achievement,

²¹ Unlike Erasmus, Luther considered converted Jews and gentiles to be equal within the church, but Johannes Eck, following Erasmus's view, challenged Luther continually on his alleged loyalty to the 'Christkillers' until Luther explicitly and in no uncertain terms declared that all Jews were enemies of Christ and the Church (cf. Oberman, *Two Reformations*, pp. 82-85).

²² Cf. *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Works, His Epistles and Teachings* (Peabody, Ma.: Hendrickson, 2003), vol.1, pp. 325-27. Elliot, p. 244 in this volume.

²³ As N. Elliott notes, "Baur, Wrede, and Schweitzer understood their readings as dramatic *alternatives* to the dominant theological interpretation of Paul" ("American 'Myth of Innocence,'" p. 244 in this volume).

²⁴ Joseph B. Tyson does not maintain that Baur was familiar with Hegel's writings prior to his earlier published work on Paul. According to Tyson, "... it is no longer permissible to dismiss Baur's work as nothing more than the imposi-

according to Baur, was to bring Christianity to its true self-understanding, to universalism. Paul was viewed as formulating Christian truth in *antithesis* to the narrow particularity of Judaism. This antithesis Baur regarded as a necessary stage in the historical process, being interpreted as the dialectical unfolding of the Spirit. According to Baur, despite acknowledging Christian origins in Judaism and its scriptures, the Old Testament concept of God has such a genuinely nationalist imprint that the whole stands in its particularism in the most distinct opposition to Christianity.²⁵ The church had to liberate the concept of God from this narrow nationalism and particularism in order that the concept of God in its universal meaning could become the pure concept of real religion. As Kathy Ehrensperger argues, "It is no accident that Baur, like Luther, used the same categories in his characterization of Catholicism and Protestantism as he used in his characterization of Judaism and Christianity."²⁶ The primary focus of Baur was not contemporary Judaism as such, but contemporary *inner-Christian* debates amongst the churches in Germany. The legacy of Baur's image of Judaism as a movement essentially and in principle opposed to Christianity, accentuated by Weber's theory of Jewish religion as legalism, was that Judaism was thus deprived of any positive identity in subsequent history and Paul continued to be depicted as the one who freed Christianity from the limits of the law.

Behind and sometimes also even in front of much modern interpretation of Paul lie these antithetical contrasts of Baur. Paul had to "rise above" ethnic and other particularities. Baur's influence is explicit in the earlier study of Daniel Boyarin in which he argues that Paul is motivated by a Hellenistic desire for the One, which among other things produced an ideal of a universal human essence beyond difference and hierarchy, so that all ethnic distinctions are erased in Christ.²⁷ Increasingly, however, it is be-

tion of Hegelian philosophy on the history of early Christianity", but he is nevertheless critical of Baur's speculative historical reconstructions, *Luke, Judaism and the Scholars*, p. 27, cf. also pp. 14-15. But cf. also S. Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), pp. 111-15.

²⁵ Cf. S. Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, pp. 77, 113. Cf. also S. Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology, and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (London: Routledge 2002), pp. 64-88.

²⁶ *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged: Feminism and the New Perspective in Pauline Studies* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), p. 29.

²⁷ *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Contraversions 1; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 7.

ing recognized that what Paul asserted was the relativisation in Christ of all aspects of a person's life, not the *elimination or obliteration* of one's particularity.²⁸ There is nothing inherently wrong with particularity whether in ethnicity or gender and there is no essential contradiction between the particular and the universal.

Thus a number of scholars now stress Paul's words to the Corinthians, "Let everyone abide in the calling in which they were called" (1 Cor. 7:20), and increasingly the ethnic dimension of Paul's thought is being recognized and investigated.²⁹ This development represents a very different image of Paul much more in tune with, and capable of being related to, the diversity of the modern world. Caroline Johnson Hodge's essay builds on these developments and seeks to further define what she terms Paul's Judean identity,³⁰ whilst regarding it as not fixed but fluid. In her view Paul is adaptable, willing to rearrange the components of his multiple identities for the sake of his mission to gentiles. Though I prefer to think in terms of Paul possessing a basic Jewish identity with other sub-identities such as "of the tribe of Benjamin" added to it, I am impressed both by Johnson Hodge's arguments for Paul's adaptability for the sake of the Gospel, and by her argument that, for gentiles, being in Christ involves a change from "gentile ethno-religious 'others' to gentiles affiliated with Israel."³¹

²⁸ Lloyd Gaston and John Gager are now rightly recognized as pioneers in the reaction against a monolithic Paulinism.

²⁹ Cf. my essay, "Religious Identity and Ethnic Origin in the Earliest Christian Communities," 1985, now available in my *Paul's Gospel in a Multicultural Context: Jew and Gentile in the Letter to the Romans* (New York: P. Lang, 1992), pp. 98-121. For recent studies see M. D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996); Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First Century Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002); N. Elliott, "Paul and The Politics of Empire: Problems and Prospects," in Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Politics*, pp. 72-102; P. Eisenbaum, "Is Paul the Father of Misogyny and Anti-Semitism?" *Crosscurrents* 50.4 (2000-01), pp. 506-24; J. M. Gundry-Wolf, "Beyond Difference? Paul's Vision of a New Humanity in Galatians 3:28," in D. A. Campbell (ed.), *Gospel and Gender: A Trinitarian Engagement with being Male and Female in Christ* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2003), pp. 8-36; P. F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); M. Zetterholm, *The Formation of Christianity at Antioch: A Social Scientific Approach to the Separation Between Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 2003); T. Martin, "The Covenant of Circumcision (Genesis 17:9-14) and the Situational Antithesis in Galatians 3:28," *JBL* 122/1 (2003), pp. 111-25; K. Ehrensperger, *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged*.

³⁰ Esler takes the same option (*Conflict and Identity*, pp. 66-74.).

³¹ Johnson Hodge, "Apostle to the Gentiles: Constructions of Paul's Identity," p. 287 in this volume.

I am not clear how the “added” component of their identity, in-Christness, which gentiles share with Jews in Christ, relates to one’s prior identity in terms of hierarchy.

Increasingly also it is being recognized, especially since the advent of the “New Perspective,” that Paul must be viewed in his concrete affiliation to his Jewish roots and not in contrast to them. Yet old patterns of thought and theological systems die hard (as Mark Nanos demonstrates so thoroughly in his article in this volume) and assumptions must continually be re-examined. Thus whilst giving due recognition to Luther’s theology and its historical indebtedness to Augustine and others we should not allow it by itself to determine our interpretation of Paul. We have taken note also of its outcome in the legacy in a later context in the interpretation of F. C. Baur. Thus the fact that the New Perspective may be seen to be critical of Luther’s interpretation of Paul is not necessarily by itself an argument against the worth of this Perspective as an interpretation of Paul.³² We should be quite clear that in the interpretation of Paul in an ecclesial context (which remains dominant) the primary interest is not in hearing just another voice on an issue but is rather a deliberate attempt to claim Pauline authority for contemporary life. The concern is not just to know what Paul thought about something purely out of academic interest but a desire to claim his authority both for past ecclesial traditions and for contemporary Christian theology. In fact, if scholars’ perspectives are viewed in relation to their acknowledged church affiliation, it is clear that past ecclesial interpretation of Paul still plays a significant role in current interpretation. This is indeed what we would expect.

On the other hand, if the Church absolutizes past Pauline interpretations—something that several centuries ago might legitimately claim his authority, but by now is crystallized into a fixed doctrine and applied without modification to a new context—this by virtue of its transfer may no longer actually qualify for the claimed authority of Paul, because it has lost the relevance to context demanded of all genuine Pauline theologizing. One such issue may well be the doctrine of predestination as developed by Calvin and which constituted such a source of strength and comfort for persecuted French Protestants, but which is distorted when

³² As Oberman, has demonstrated, there are legitimate grounds for criticizing Luther (*Two Reformations*, p. 83).

used to claim absolute security in salvation by members of a triumphalist modern church.

We may sum up the argument thus far in relation to several issues. In the first main section it was argued that the important issue is primarily to discover what Paul was thinking in his context, and only then to consider how what Paul was thinking impinges on our context. A second issue is how previous interpretations of Paul in their respective historical contexts influence contemporary interpretation. A third issue is how we perceive Paul's life and activity as apostle to the gentiles. It is to this we must now turn.

Avoiding a Sectarian Reading of Paul

I have argued elsewhere that it is misleading to regard Paul as having advocated separation from the synagogue as a sectarian might do.³³ Clearly, the glaring example of the Qumran sectarians demonstrates the possibility, however remote, of sectarian mentality in the variegated groups that constituted the Judaism of the first century.³⁴ But to interpret Paul primarily in the light of the Qumran community would be to greatly exaggerate its influence and also any apparent parallels with Paul.³⁵ If a sectarian perspective is defined as the perspective of those whose religious worldview portrays their group as the sole legitimate and exclusive arena of salvation and which thus sees all outside of that com-

³³ "Did Paul Advocate Separation from the Synagogue?," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 42 (1990), pp. 457-67; reprinted in my *Paul's Gospel in an Intercultural Context*, pp. 122-31. My view of sectarian mentality is based on B. Wilson, *Religious Sects: A Sociological Study* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970), and on the widely accepted distinction between "reformist" groups which seek to change a world that they see in need of changing and "introversionist" groups which give up on the world and turn in on themselves.

³⁴ Esler differentiates between reformist and introversionist attitudes within the Qumran literature; he is hesitant to describe those for whom CD was written as sectarian, and questions whether the Qumran community was sectarian vis-à-vis Judaism, but is nevertheless clear that introverted sectarianism was typical of the group (*The First Christians in their Social Worlds: Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation* [New York: Routledge, 1994], pp. 79-84).

³⁵ Cf. Nickelsburg's comment: "Exclusivism and sectarianism in both Judaism and Christianity had ugly consequences in both communities and between them, consequences that were inconsonant with the heart of both religions" (*Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins*, p. 200).

munity as cut off from God's favour,³⁶ this is typical neither of first century Judaism nor of Paul.³⁷ Nickelsburg attributes this mentality only to the Qumran community and to the authors of many of the Enochic texts and Jubilees.³⁸ But Paul does not take the title Israel and claim it with its inheritance for those in Christ. His attitude is reformist rather than sectarian. In prophetic fashion, he seeks the renewal of his own people in the new era dawning with Christ, and his letters should be read in that light.³⁹ My contention is that a sectarian reading of Paul operates, whether consciously or unconsciously, with assumptions and analogies deriving from contemporary experience of or theories about sectarianism.

1. A common presupposition is that Paul somehow operated and produced communities in complete isolation from all other groups in Judaism.⁴⁰ Wayne Meeks and others have maintained that it is clear that the Pauline communities were socially distinct from Judaism.⁴¹ But to be socially distinct does not deny some contact, and could in fact even presuppose some positive links between diverse groups, as in the case of modern political parties.⁴²

³⁶ Cf. F. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 40, 69. Cf. also Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins*, pp. 181-84.

³⁷ Cf. S. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 BC to 640 CE* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) pp. 59-69, and 91-99. Cf. also Eisenbaum, "Paul, Polemics," pp. 233-235 in this volume.

³⁸ *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins*, p. 182. The Christian movement differed from the Qumran community in that while they claimed exclusive uniqueness for their status as God's people, they nevertheless had an open door and pursued a mission among gentiles (p. 175).

³⁹ As Nanos notes, the issues Paul faces are both halakhic and eschatological ("The Inter-and Intra-Jewish Political Context of Paul's Letter to the Galatians," in M. D. Nanos [ed.], *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* [Peabody, Ma: Hendrickson, 2002], pp. 396-407 [401]).

⁴⁰ Cf. also the critique of this by Nanos, "How Inter-Christian Approaches," pp. 262-66 in this volume.

⁴¹ *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 186. Similarly E. P. Sanders states, "But it is equally clear that meetings of the church were not meetings of the synagogue ... Gentiles who entered the people of God did not simply join Israel. There was a separate entrance requirement (faith), a separate rite (baptism), and a separate social reality (the church)" (*Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, pp. 176-78).

⁴² As Nanos has shown, Galatians can be better understood when intra- and inter-Jewish group boundary issues resulting from the formation of Pauline sub-

2. But even if a degree of separation between the Pauline groups and Judaism is allowed, there can be no denial of the fact that Paul himself sought, despite desperate conflicts, to maintain the link between his gentile communities and Judaism. The collection, taking up a large amount of his time and energy over a period of several years, is itself an abiding witness to Paul's concerns to link his nascent movement with Jerusalem and Jewish Christ-believers. The collection project witnesses against a sectarian mentality in Paul because in it he manifests hope rather than the despair typical of sects who withdraw from the larger group.
3. The fact that he himself maintained his links with synagogue worship, and, if Luke can be trusted, even with the Temple is further proof that Paul was no sectarian and should not be interpreted as such. As has been convincingly argued by Sanders and others, "punishment implies inclusion," and "Paul was not consciously aiding in the foundation of a new religion."⁴³ That Paul suffered under Jewish discipline is one of the best attested aspects of his life and letters, indicating the apostle's rugged determination to cling to his ancestral faith. A sectarian apostle would have no such struggle.
4. It is clear that in his use of scripture, Paul does not claim the scriptures for Christ-believers alone. He argues as a Jew of his own era, with the patterns and models of scriptural interpretation which he shares with those who do not share his view of the Christ. He has common ground with them and in his use of scripture he is wholly in line with contemporary Jewish practice. The apostle is obviously still engaged in dialogue with those who differ from him. But if Paul is not a sectarian, this comes as no surprise. To acknowledge his relation to contemporary Jewish thinking is merely to put Paul in his social context, "to recognize the sociality of his reading and reasoning."⁴⁴ Contrary

groups are taken into account ("What Was at Stake in Peter's 'Eating with Gentiles' at Antioch?," in Nanos [ed.], *The Galatians Debate*, pp. 282-318 [289-91]).

⁴³ *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, p. 192. Sanders rightly asserts that "both Paul and the Jews who punished him regarded the Christian movement as falling within Judaism," but he is in my view wrong to hold that Paul somewhat naively created, in his practice—against his own conscious intention—a church which was in important ways neither Jewish nor Greek: a third entity (pp. 178-79).

⁴⁴ Cf. Ehrensperger, *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged*, pp. 142-46, and her

to such evidence, we do find Paul interpreted from a sectarian stance which somehow claims Paul's authority for its own separatist tendencies.

5. Even in the writings of James Dunn, a representative of main-line Christian faith, we can see how a foundation for a sectarian Paul can be located. According to Dunn, it was at Antioch, after Peter and Paul, despite agreeing that justification by faith is the basis of the new Christ-movement, somehow violently disagreed over table-fellowship with gentiles in Christ. Despite their earlier harmony and friendship, the dispute at Antioch is perceived as the basis for Paul coming to a fundamental new insight that was to significantly change relations not only with Peter but with the Jerusalem leaders as a group. According to Dunn, "so far as the Jewish Christian was concerned, belief in Jesus as Messiah did not require him to abandon his Jewishness ... but Paul followed a different logic ... Paul pushed what began as a qualification on covenantal nomism into an outright antithesis." Thus "from being one identity marker for the Jewish Christian alongside other identity markers, circumcision, food laws, sabbath, faith in Christ becomes the primary identity marker which renders the others superfluous."⁴⁵ So faith in Christ became the inalienable essence of the new movement, and Paul was willing to separate from Peter and from Jerusalem and go his own way as an independent missionary. It would appear that Paul required only *initial* recognition by the other apostles for his gentile mission, but once it had been recognized, he felt free to renounce the earlier consensus. This version of events depicts Paul as the archetypal sectarian, and a model for all future sectarian Christianity. The outcome of this scenario is that Jewish identity and the markers associated with it were rendered obsolete,⁴⁶ or at least became superfluous for Paul, and this incident sets him on a course that was to lead to the devaluation and eventual relinquishing of distinctly Jewish identity markers among all (Jewish) Christ-believers, though this latter outcome only arose much later.

"Scriptural Reasoning—the Dynamic that Informed Paul's Theologizing," *Irish Biblical Studies* 26.1 (2004), pp. 32-52.

⁴⁵ "The New Perspective on Paul," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 65 (1982-83), pp. 95-122 (112-13).

⁴⁶ Contra A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: NITC Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 551-52.

Whatever the details of the scholarly consensus on the dispute at Antioch, it is not hard to see how Paul can be perceived as the champion of gentile believers who as such was forced by the power of his Christ-given convictions into separation and independence.⁴⁷ If Paul, the great advocate of gentile Christianity, was himself a separatist for the sake of the truth of the Gospel, then there is nothing to hinder anyone from following his example.

But this is, in my opinion, both an over-simplification and a somewhat anachronistic depiction of the Antioch incident. The historical evidence challenges this perception. Paul still continued with the collection for Jerusalem, and was under Jewish discipline, despite this face to face with Peter.⁴⁸ Moreover, there is little other convincing evidence that, already in the early to mid-fifties, it had become clear that Jewish identity markers were in any way incompatible with Christ-faith.⁴⁹ It seems that a theological perception has become historicized into real history, and that later theological formulations indebted to Luther's insights have been retrojected into this early period.

Because scholars know the outcome of the conflicts in early Christianity, there is a dominant (anachronistic) tendency to read the Pauline texts in the light of theological doctrines and events that developed much later.⁵⁰ But it is essential to ask, What could

⁴⁷ For a survey of the prevailing alternatives, see the essays in Nanos (ed.), *The Galatians Debate*, by J. D. G. Dunn ("The Incident at Antioch [Gal 2:11-18]," pp. 199-234), Esler ("Making and Breaking an Agreement Mediterranean Style: A New Reading of Galatians 2:1-14," pp. 261-81), and Nanos ("What was at Stake in Peter's 'Eating with Gentiles' at Antioch?," pp. 282-318). For a critique of the ideological implications of the interpretation of the Antioch incident for Paulinism, see Nanos, "What was at Stake?," pp. 292-300.

⁴⁸ As Nanos argues, "I consider it crucial to isolate the data bearing directly on the identity of the influencers in the Galatian situation from the narrative discourses relating prior situations in Jerusalem and Antioch," allowing him to exegete the Antioch narrative on its own terms and conclude that "he [Paul] is *not* concerned to oppose his apostleship, mission, or message to that of the Jerusalem apostles" ("Inter- and Intra-Jewish Political Context," in Nanos [ed.], *Galatians Debate*, p. 402).

⁴⁹ Cf. N. Elliott's corrective emphasis that Jewish boundary markers "also defined modes of *inclusion* and *welcome* into the Jewish community" ("American 'Myth of Innocence,'" p. 245 in this volume).

⁵⁰ Cf. Zetterholm, "Paul was not involved in a process of creating a new religion where the Torah was no longer valid for Jews. His mission was rather to emphasize that the Torah was not for Jesus-believing gentiles. To state ... that Paul thought it not possible to live at the same time 'in Christ' and 'in accordance with the law' is to invert the set of problems" (*The Formation of Christianity at Antioch*, pp. 158-59).

a separatist Paul (as frequently depicted since the Reformation), possibly have in mind in taking a collection from gentile believers to Jerusalem? Paul's life and actions are fortunately somewhat of a contrast to the history of interpretation of his thought. It would appear that in this portrait of Paul a distinctive theology has displaced history with its ambivalences and compromises to the detriment of our understanding of Paul both in his own day, and as a model for later Pauline Christians.

A later more doctrinally developed Christianity has in fact been read back into Paul to establish his authority for what was to succeed him. Antioch thus becomes the "watershed" in which Paul is represented as having, once for all, denied the relevance in Christ of Jewish identity as such—irrespective of the on-going disputes concerning particular identity markers. He is depicted as thereby having clearly demonstrated the absolute incompatibility between Christianity and Judaism. Our contention is that this incident, whatever its significance, cannot possibly carry the weight attributed to it, and even most newer approaches still retain remarkable similarities with the emphases of F. C. Baur and historic Paulinism (e.g., Dunn and Boyarin, although in many details reading the incident quite differently). Moreover, if it is allowed to continue to carry this significance, it perpetuates the making of Paul into the sectarian founder of a sectarian Christianity in strong discontinuity not only with Judaism, but even more seriously, with Christ. The New Perspective, despite some of its opponents' exaggerated concerns, does not go far enough in its retreat from older antitheses and assumptions. As Gaston insists, "Pauline scholarship, even in its guise as a new perspective, is not sufficient to advance Jewish-Christian relations."⁵¹ We need to move "Beyond the New Perspective."⁵²

⁵¹ Gaston, "The Impact of New Perspectives on Judaism and Improved Jewish-Christian Relations on the Study of Paul," p. 250 in this volume. Cf. also N. Elliott, "American 'Myth of Innocence'", pp. 245-47 in this volume.

⁵² Cf. N. Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 69-71. Also my unpublished paper "Beyond the New Perspective," presented at the British New Testament Conference, Manchester, 2001.

Conclusion

Because of historical development, the meaning of a doctrine can never be repeated, even when exactly the same form of words may be used. In any case, justification in Luther's terms varied from the Lutheran expression of Baur and Weber in the 19th century, and differs again in the formulations of Bultmann or Käsemann. Since theologians have selectively varied its expression while at the same time claiming continuity with tradition, we can therefore do the same, especially where depictions of Judaism have been historically falsified. New perspectives are continuously being added to interpretation but often go unnoticed except when they radically challenge common assumptions.

Modern conceptions of identity have made us aware that Paul's identity, even after his vision of Christ, is basically Jewish, and precedes the notion of Christian identity proper, as Pam Eisenbaum demonstrates. Christians cannot justifiably continue to use Judaism in a sectarian manner as a negative foil for Christian self-understanding.⁵³ Christian faith, including the doctrine of justification, demands neither the denigration of Judaism nor the subversion of Pauline theology into a subjective search for identity.

ABSTRACT

Contemporary interpretation of Paul is heir to a tradition of Paulinism in which Paul's gospel is almost universally viewed as being in opposition to Judaism. Even the advent of the New Perspective on Paul has not yet succeeded in convincing the majority of scholars that there is no basic incompatibility between Paul and Judaism. One reason for a negative response to the New Perspective is that the acceptance of this viewpoint seems (necessarily) to imply that the great Reformers were somewhat deficient in their understanding of Paul. Their own basic principle of 'reformed and always being reformed' demands, however, a critique of all traditions, including this one. Moreover, inasmuch as modern Pauline scholarship is dependent upon the 19th century invention of the theory of legalism as a pejorative description of Jewish religion, there is a resultant failure to view the Judaism that nurtured Paul, and in which he was continuously in dialogue, other than apologetically or polemically. This is because Christian Pauline interpretation tends to involve a concern for self-understanding and identity that necessarily differentiates the modern agenda from that of Paul, since

⁵³ Cf. most recently Daniel Boyarin, *Borderlines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 19-21.



this concern springs from Enlightenment categories and is therefore foreign to the Apostle. It is the contention of this essay that Paul's letters demonstrate that he was no sectarian, vilifying Judaism for the promotion of a new religion. Since Paul's identity, even after his vision of Christ, remained distinctly Jewish, scholars cannot justifiably use Judaism as a negative foil for Christian self-understanding. Christian faith as such demands neither the denigration of Judaism nor the subversion of Pauline theology into a subjective search for identity.

