



## Re-reading Paul.

| Council of Christians and Jews, Victoria, Australia

**Further Guidelines for Christian Clergy and Teachers in their use of the New Testament with reference to the New Testament's presentation of Jews and Judaism.**

## Re-Reading Paul

A fresh look at his attitude to Torah and to Judaism

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## Foreword

On 17 August 1995, the Council of Christians and Jews (Victoria) Inc launched its Guidelines, "Rightly Explaining the Word of Truth". The purpose of the Guidelines was to provide specific instructions for clergy and teachers in their presentation of areas of the New Testament relating to Jews and Judaism. There was reason to believe that the intention of the Council was achieved by the publication.

The Guidelines were acknowledged by churches, church leaders and biblical scholars throughout Australia and by some overseas as containing a valuable contribution to those texts to which it is addressed. In addition, the Guidelines were used and continue to be used by teachers in schools, by preachers before the congregants, and by those conducting biblical study courses in universities and theological institutions.

More recently, however, the attention of the Council was drawn by an acclaimed scholar to an omission from the Guidelines of specific reference to Paul and his attitude to Torah and Judaism as found in the New Testament. The Council, recognising the incompleteness of the Guidelines by this omission, requested the Reverend Professor R A Anderson, AM, Father Brendan Byrne SJ and Professor Frank Moloney SDB to address the relevant texts, and to prepare an instructive statement for preachers and teachers, thereby furthering the work undertaken by the authors of the Guidelines.

What follows is the work of distinguished scholars. It is hoped by the Council that this work will receive similar recognition and merit, as was given to the Guidelines, and that it will prove helpful to all engaged in their important instructive purposes.

William Kaye, Executive Committee Chairman 1991-1999

Anne Amos, Executive Committee Chairman 1999-

## Editor's Preface

The Apostle Paul may not have been the founder of Christianity – as is sometimes asserted – but he was, without question, the most persuasive and powerful single influence within the very early period of the Church and that influence has not diminished over the centuries. Throughout the history of the church there have been, and still are, significant streams that reflect what may be claimed to be a recognisably Pauline body of doctrine,

There is also no question that Paul was an exceptionally gifted though difficult and abrasive man, preferring to find friends among those who wholeheartedly agreed with him and, at times, given to treating with near contempt those, even of his missionary colleagues, whose gospel differed in any respect from the one that he so assiduously and effectively proclaimed.

This natural intensity was impelled by two firmly held convictions: first, that he was the divinely called and appointed Apostle to the Gentiles and, second, that he was witnessing the events of the Endtime, the sure sign of which was the response of the nations to the God of Israel.

It is essential that those who interpret Paul should be cognisant of these factors, at least, and that they should also be aware of the prejudice that has been engendered by the previous failures to do so.

One further prerequisite is that there should be some significant measure of scholarly agreement

as to which of the letters traditionally ascribed to him may confidently be accepted as authentically Pauline. While it is true that those of his writings that comfortably fit into this category are fewer than the number ascribed to him, there is sufficient material accepted as unquestionably from Paul himself to give a clear indication of his thinking. This certainly applies to the task before us here. Indeed it is in the Letter to the Romans and the Letter to the Galatians, both Pauline beyond doubt, that we find ample testimony to his attitude towards Torah and Judaism, even though we may look in vain for complete consistency.

When these two letters are scrutinised closely we might readily find that what made Paul so attractive to those who compiled and commissioned the canon of the New Testament, namely his putatively negative attitude towards both Torah and his native religion, is by no means as conspicuous as held to be by the early Church's theologians nor, indeed, by the majority of their successors.

It remains now to express the Council's gratitude and indebtedness to a number of people without whose help this project would not have been brought to fruition. This whole exercise, from its inception, was very much dependent upon Father Brendan Byrne SJ of the Jesuit Theological College and the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne. The central and most important sections for our purpose, "Paul the Jew", "Paul and Torah" and "Paul and the Jewish People", are drawn from a paper Father Byrne delivered to the Council's 1997 Day Seminar on Torah. This was supplemented, with his consent, by a few extracts from a lecture entitled Paul: Apostle or Apostate? which he gave as part of the 1998 series sponsored by this Council and the Council of Adult Education. Both of these scholarly presentations were so enthusiastically received that it seemed wise and proper to press them into this wider service.

Father Byrne generously allowed the submission, as compiled by the editor, to be distributed to a number of persons for comment. These were: Professor Frank Moloney SDB, AM, Sister Shirley Sedawie NDS, The Reverend Anne Amos, The Reverend Dr Colin Kruse and The Reverend Dr Nigel Mitchell. The form in which it now appears in this publication was approved by Father Byrne. Readers are referred to his widely acclaimed commentary, Romans (Collegeville, Minnesota: Glazier, 1996), for a fuller treatment of some of the issues raised in this document.

The Annotated Bibliography is the work of The Reverend Professor Emeritus Nigel Watson and exhibits all the signs of his customary meticulous scholarship.

Finally, recognition must be made of the patient support of the past and present Chairmen and members of the Executive Committee of the Council and it is to be hoped that this will be rewarded by the wide acceptance of what has, at last, appeared in print.

## The Issue: A brief Historical Overview

"The worst tragedy for a poet is to be admired through being misunderstood." If this is true of the poet it is no less so of anyone who puts pen to paper. Numbered among those whose writings have suffered in this way and whose reputation has been at the mercy of interpreters is the Apostle Paul. But an even greater tragedy has been the effect that this misunderstanding of Paul's writings has had upon the way in which Judaism has been perceived generally within the Church. In the long common history of Jews and Christians, particularly where this has been located in the western world, the New Testament letters of Paul have played an important, if not central, role in the way in which Jews and Christians have understood and related to each other.

It is not the intention of this statement to suggest that the differences between Christianity and Judaism should be disregarded or presented in any way that questions the authenticity or integrity of either of these great world religions. What is at issue, however, is the right of the adherents of each of these faiths to be presented in a way that does not conflict with their own self-understanding.

If there is substance in the claim that the writings of Paul have generally been misunderstood, why, when, and how did that misunderstanding occur? For a detailed examination of this question the reader is referred to certain works listed in the Annotated Bibliography provided. Only a cursory investigation is possible here.

It would appear to have been Augustine of Hippo (354-430) who first applied the Pauline depiction of the doctrine of divine righteousness to his own predicament. However it was not until the time of the Protestant Reformation in the early sixteenth century that the thought of Paul was presented in such a way as to set in opposition to each other two possible human responses to God. The one which spoke to Martin Luther's own religious quest is what is spoken of as "the doctrine of justification by faith", that is, that the standing of any person before God is solely dependent upon that person's faith in the grace of God as demonstrated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The other, and the one vehemently rejected by Luther and his fellow Reformers, is, for the sake of convenience, referred to as "works-righteousness". By this is meant the human attempt to be acceptable to God through the performance of good deeds. In Luther's immediate context the latter position was exemplified, so he claimed, in the thinking and practice of his Roman Catholic opponents. In the New Testament context it was taken to be the position adopted by those who were opposed to Paul, specifically those who adhered to Judaism and whose lives centred upon the Torah, the Law. In this way Luther's own experience in his opposition to what he believed to be the tenets of late medieval Catholicism was seen as parallel to that of Paul in his confrontation with Jews who remained within their ancestral faith.

It is this view of Judaism as a religion of "works-righteousness", a human attempt to achieve divine acceptance through deeds, even good deeds, that has dominated Protestant theological thinking down to modern times and which has yet to be entirely eradicated. Though it may have had a different origin, the traditional Roman Catholic understanding and presentation of Judaism has suffered from a similar harmful caricaturing. The efforts, over the centuries, of Jewish scholars to correct this persistently damaging appraisal of Judaism have been ignored by almost all Christian scholars until very recently. There have been notable exceptions among the latter, not least George Foot Moore in the United States early in this century and, a little later, James Parkes of the United Kingdom.

Until the 1960's, however, the field of Pauline studies was dominated by European scholars strongly within the tradition of Martin Luther. The most notable of these was Rudolf Bultmann (1884--1976), perhaps the most eminent New Testament scholar of the twentieth century. Bultmann differed from Luther in that whereas the latter strongly criticised any human attempt to

merit divine acceptance the former asserted that not only was this impossible but the intention to do so was the fundamental sin and that it, itself, leads humanity deeper into its estrangement from God. This human proclivity finds its distinctive form in Judaism. This was a view shared by another influential New Testament scholar, Ernst Käsemann, for whom "the Jew" becomes little more than a cipher for "the religious man" in contradistinction to the Christian who depends upon the grace of God.

Scholars like Bultmann and Käsemann, for all their erudition, had little or no grasp of Rabbinic literature. In the main, for their understanding of the Judaism of the time of Paul, they depended upon the works of scholars, again erudite scholars, such as W Bousset, P Billerbeck and E Schorer. But these too have now been shown not only to have lacked a thorough understanding of the relevant Jewish literature but to have allowed their religious prejudices to dominate their scholarly judgement. For them the Judaism of the first century of this era was "Late Judaism", Judaism in its death throes. What they and their successors failed to realize was that that self-same Judaism, under the Rabbis, was to undergo a reconstruction after the catastrophe of the year 70 CE that was to give it a robust vitality which could withstand all the challenges of time, not least those of this century.

The influence of New Testament scholars such as Bultmann and Käsemann and others like Braun, Conzelmann, Rössler and Fuller has been enormous worldwide, particularly within Protestantism. Generations of theological students have absorbed their teaching through their written works as well as through the words of their own lecturers. It has been difficult for any countervailing influences to be heard but these are now quickly gaining centre stage.

Among the first who questioned the traditional understanding of Paul was the noted British scholar, W. D. Davies, who reminded his readers that, because the Protestant Reformation stood between them and Paul, misunderstanding the latter had become a constant possibility. It was Paul's belief that Jesus was the Messiah and therefore the inaugurator of a new law. This enabled him to speak of the demise of the old which, in fact, had never ceased to be the gift of divine grace. Within the fluidity of the Judaism of his time, that is pre-70, Paul provided a way in which Gentile converts to Christianity could be included within that community without having to submit themselves to the observance of Torah.

In 1963 there appeared an essay with the intriguing title "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West". Its author was the eminent Swedish scholar and Lutheran bishop, Krister Stendahl. As hinted in the title the central question of the essay was whether the issue that so concerned Martin Luther, the constant struggle with his conscience, was really the one that was attended to in the writings of Paul. Stendahl argued that what has continued to occupy the attention of western theologians in their study of Paul, namely, the doctrine of justification by faith, was, for the apostle, peripheral only. What is central is how and upon what basis Gentiles are to be admitted to the fellowship of believers in Christ. In the historical situation in which Paul found himself as Apostle to the Gentiles, with an increasing number of the latter entering the church, this is the matter that exercised him more than any other. In placing the emphasis upon Paul's historical context Stendahl was reflecting the insight of F. C. Baur in a work published more than a century previously. What dominated the contribution of Baur was his insistence upon Paul's opposition of Christian universalism to what Baur referred to as Jewish exclusivism. In a later work, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (1977), Stendahl, among other topics, takes up the question of the centrality of Romans Chapters 9 to 11 where Paul confronts the fact that, while many Gentiles have come to accept Jesus as Redeemer, the bulk of the People Israel has not been convinced of the claim that he is the Messiah. He asserts that these are no mere appendage to Chapters 1 to 8 but are indeed the "real centre of gravity" of Romans.

The most influential voice in the whole debate in its modern form has been that of E. P. Sanders. His magisterial work, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977), had such an impact that it is no longer

possible for any serious student of Paul to disregard it. A more detailed study of some aspect of the question, Paul, the Law and the Jewish People, followed in 1983.

After an exhaustive survey of early post-biblical Jewish literature (such as that of the Tannaim; the Dead Sea Scrolls; the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha) Sanders concluded that the prevailing Christian scholarly consensus that the Judaism of the time was a religion of legalism and works-righteousness was totally wrong. He is particularly severe on those earlier scholars such as F. Weber and W. Bousset who bequeathed to their successors this distorted view of Judaism. Sanders pointed out that what is at the heart of that faith is obedience to Torah not as a means of acquiring status but as the continuing condition of response to the covenant. Judaism, seen in this way, is not less a religion of covenant and grace than is Christianity. Election and redemption are not the rewards of human achievement but are dependent solely upon divine mercy and covenant-loyalty. The Torah expresses not only the demand of God but the means by which failure to meet that demand may be atoned for.

As for Paul, himself, Sanders concluded that he did not attack Judaism because it was legalistic (which it never was) nor, as some earlier scholars had maintained, did he misunderstand or distort it. Paul's exclusion of the Law flowed from the conviction to which he had come as a follower of Christ that salvation was possible only through participation in Jesus Christ as Messiah. His further conviction that Jesus was not only the Messiah of Israel but also Lord of the Gentiles and Saviour of all believers reinforced that view of the Law since, if righteousness came through the Law, that would be tantamount to excluding Gentiles or, at least, relegating them to second-class status. In Paul's schema of salvation there simply was not room for law as well as faith in Jesus as universal Saviour to coexist. In a statement that, somewhat to Sanders' own regret, has become renowned as a summary of his view, what Paul found wrong with Judaism was simply that it was not Christianity. But that, in no way, is meant to contradict Sanders' firm judgement that Judaism is a religion of divine grace. Rather it points to what he sees as the real issue for Paul.

Sanders' understanding of Paul has by no means carried the day. He may have outlawed once and for all the old caricature of a legalistic Judaism that came to dominate Christian teaching and preaching but there are still some difficulties to be resolved. These continue to be addressed by both Christian and Jewish scholars in an atmosphere of increasing mutual acceptance and co-operation which is the hallmark of the new relationship between Jews and Christians that has developed in recent decades. The contributions of some of these scholars are listed in the bibliography.

What must be avoided at all costs is a resolution of the issue of "Paul and Judaism" that merely seeks to gloss over what are very real difficulties. Great gains have been made; much of the misunderstanding and misrepresentation has been removed; the "new perspective" of Stendahl, Sanders and others has redirected the course of study and there is no good reason why this should not be pursued with both sensitivity and the accustomed scholarly rigour. What follows in this statement is offered in that context.

## Paul the Jew

What is clear from a careful reading of his writings is that Paul would never have described what happened to him on the road to Damascus, about the year 34 CE, as a conversion, certainly not in the sense of a conversion from one religion to another, from Judaism to Christianity. To the end of his life he considered himself a Jew, a member of the People Israel. The Damascus road experience and what ensued, led him, however, to a new understanding of himself as a Jew and of Israel as God's people. It was a conversion in the sense that it was a profound and enduring religious experience but it cannot be interpreted as signalling a breach with the faith of his ancestors.

To accept that Jesus of Nazareth, the man crucified under Pontius Pilate, whose followers he, Paul, had vigorously persecuted, was indeed the Messiah of Israel, necessitated for Paul a profound reassessment of the nation to which he belonged. Just as, in the context of God's grace, it led to discovery in his own life of a hitherto unsuspected subtle sinfulness and resistance to God, it led also to a similar judgement on the nation as a whole, one that tended in his view, to collapse the vision of a holy nation, quite separate in this respect from the surrounding nations of the world.

Let us be quite clear: This pessimistic view of Israel in moral terms was a judgement made by a Jew within Israel. It was a judgement made in earlier times by many of the prophets of Israel and by Jewish writers such as the author of the Additions to Daniel (see vv 1-22 of the material inserted at Dan 3:23). It was one being made in Paul's time by other Jews who shared his apocalyptic worldview, such as the members of the community who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls, the author of the Fourth Book of Ezra and, on the evidence of the historian Josephus (Ant. 18:1 16-19) as well as the Christian Gospels, by John the Baptist. It was a prophetic view that in no sense implied a rejection of the Jewish nation but rather a summons to conversion in view of the coming judgement of God.

Central to his personal experience of call and conversion was the conviction on Paul's part that it was his distinctive God-given task to summon the nations of the world to share in this movement of repentance centred upon but not confined to Jews. Israel had always acknowledged righteous Gentiles and, at the time of Paul, as also at other times in history, many people from the nations were attracted to the monotheism and ethical uprightness of Judaism, and sought union either as proselytes or in lesser degrees of attachment ("God-fearers", etc.). Paul, however, fought for and served a more radical vision, one that by no means all his fellow members in the messianic Jesus movement shared. In Paul's view, stemming from the heart of his Damascus road vision, where the barrier between "holy nation" and "unholy rest" had collapsed, the nations of the world who had come to faith in the one true God were to form part of the end-time People of God, not as converts to Judaism but precisely as Gentiles. They were not to take on circumcision and the ritual obligations of the Torah. Nor, through a rigorous imposition of the purity laws, were they to be made to feel second-class citizens when the community gathered to celebrate, worship and eat (see esp. Gal 2:10-21).

This conviction of Paul was not simply a strategic one, designed to make conversion a more attractive and accessible prospect for pagans. It was bound up with a broadened vision of Israel, a vision for which Paul found scriptural validation in his reading of God's dealings with Abraham. Jewish writers before Paul had pictured Abraham as the first proselyte. Paul took this notion much farther. In Abraham's simple faith in God's promise that he would have a son and heir contrary to all the evidence, a faith that put him right with God ("justified" him), Paul saw prefigured a pattern whereby the nations of the world could find acceptance and salvation. In God's promise to Abraham that all peoples would be blessed in his seed (Gen 22:18; 26:4, cf. 12:3, 18:18) un-

found scripture's indication that the final Israel would be made up of a vast constituency of believers from all the nations. In Galatians (chapters 3-4), and less polemically in Romans (chapters 4 and 9), Paul fights for this redefinition of Israel, an Israel based primarily upon faith as a response to God rather than upon observance of Torah. Paul's view of salvation history gives priority to the covenant God made with Abraham over that made with Israel at Mt Sinai through Moses. In this understanding of the divine purpose for humanity the latter becomes something of temporary significance (see especially 2 Cor 3:4-18).

This new understanding did not diminish for Paul his self-understanding as a Jew; nor did it depreciate the role of his people. Rather, it emphasized the place of each in the conversion of the

nations to faith in the God of Israel.

## Paul and Torah

However, it must be noted that Paul's view of Torah involved a relativising of the Mosaic dispensation in favour of that which centred upon Abraham. It is for this reason that many of Paul's statements about the Torah sound very polemical when isolated from their context and their role in the larger argument of a particular letter. They must be read very carefully. In particular it has to be recognised that when Paul speaks of Torah (mostly in Galatians and Romans) he is doing so in the context of defending, against fellow Christians, his conviction that the ritual obligations of the Torah are not to be imposed upon Gentile converts. He is not arguing directly with fellow Jews about the status of Torah as such though, at times, notably in the early chapters of Romans, for rhetorical purposes, he allows his Gentile Christian audience to overhear, so to speak, a fictive discussion he has with a Jewish teacher. It is, in a sense, a play within a play and it is comprehensible within that rhetorical context only.

Paul rejects the imposition of Torah upon Gentiles for two basic reasons. In the first place, as already mentioned, that imposition destroyed Gentile identity in a way contrary to God's will as explained to Abraham. Secondly, and this is a more contentious point, he believed that as an instrument of moral regulation it could not stand up to the ingrained power of sin in human beings. Paul's analysis, chiefly in chapters five to seven of Romans (see 5:20; 6:14-15; 7:5,7-25; also 3:20; 4:15; Gal 3:19-24; 1 Cor 15:56) of the nexus between law and sin, is where he gives greatest offence, seemingly intolerable offence, to Jews and Judaism. What he is trying to do, however, is to dissuade Gentile converts from looking to Torah as a sure means of restraining the impulses and temptations to return to their old pagan pattern of life. Against this, Paul believed that the law would for them be useless, indeed, counterproductive. It would actually provoke rebellion and make matters worse (Rom 7:5,7-13,14--25).

Paul makes it abundantly clear, if due attention is given his words, that the problem lay not in the law itself, which he insists remains "holy and righteous and good" (Rom 7:12; cf. Gal 3:21), but in the indwelling power of sinfulness in unredeemed human nature. This understanding of human nature, with its pessimistic overtones, was typical of apocalyptic thought and it is to be found also in Paul's near contemporary, the author of the Fourth Book of Ezra who, in reflecting upon the fate of his people after the tragedy of 70 CE, is equally pessimistic about the ability of the law to combat



sin.

... the law indeed was in the heart of the people, but (in conjunction) with the evil impulse; so what was good departed and the evil remained (3:21-22; cf. 4:30-32).

So, for instance, when Paul speaks in Rom 8:2 of "the law of sin and death" from which "the law of the Spirit of life has set me free", he is in no way identifying the Law of Moses with sin and death. The "law" of sin and death is the regime of sin in human life, which the Torah, in his view, is powerless to remedy. The reference is not, contrary to some interpretations, to the Law of Moses, which for Paul remained in itself "holy and righteous and good". That judgement about the Law's impotence is made, as noted already, primarily with Gentiles in view. However, it cannot be gainsaid that that was Paul's verdict with respect to Israel as well. But again, it is the view of one imbued with the pessimism characteristic of apocalypticism, of one who has undergone a profound religious experience (cf. Phil 3:4b-11), who identified himself with the classic prophets of Israel (cf. Rom 1:1-2; Gal 1:15) and saw himself called, like them, to summon the nation to repentance in view of a coming offer of salvation. Similar pessimistic verdicts appear in late books of the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g. Isa 59:12-15, 64:5-12; Ezra 9:6-15; Neh 9:16-38; Dan 9:9-14) and in the literature of post-biblical Judaism, especially in apocalyptic circles (e.g. Tob 3:1-6; Jub 23:16-21; 4 Ezra 7:22-24, 46, 62-74, 116-126; 8:35; Qumran: IQH 1:25-27; 4:29-31; 6:18--22; 9:14; 12:30-31; IQS 11:9). Such texts provide a context within which to set Paul's own prophetic accusation against his people.

Paul's understanding of Torah as a temporary dispensation now overtaken by a new divine act is intimately bound up with his conviction that the events which centred upon the Messiah Jesus represented the fulfilment of the pledge given by God concerning the last days, a promise given classic expression in two related utterances, one from Jeremiah and the other from Ezekiel. In Paul's presentation of the matter these two were virtually combined:

But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (Jer 31:33).

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances (Ezek 36:26).

Allusions to these prophecies in Paul's writings (2 Cor 3:3,6; Rom 2:27,29; 7:6) show clearly that he saw the gift of the Spirit as fulfilling the function of the Torah in the new People of God. What the Law/Torah could not do, as he explains in Rom 8:3-4, because of its impotence with respect to sin, God was now achieving through the power of the Spirit released in the resurrection of Jesus.

## Paul and the Jewish People

At a mature stage of his career, when writing Romans, Paul recognised that his view of a broadened Israel around Messiah Jesus had not commended itself to the vast bulk of his fellow Jews. In a lengthy analysis of this phenomenon conducted in chapters 9-11 of the letter he points to persistence in the way of the Torah as the chief factor in this refusal (9:30-10:4). What is striking about this long, convoluted sequence is not so much the reiterated statement of his anguish at this state of affairs (9:1-5; 10:1; 11:1 ) but also, though it is not always recognised, the evidence the entire sequence provides to the effect that Paul cannot conceive of God's people arriving at its final constitution apart from this Israel. He goes a long roundabout route to get there but in the end the principle is clear: "...as regards election they are beloved, because of the fathers; for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (11:28b-29). The community, Jewish and Gentile, made up of those who have come to faith in Jesus as Messiah in no sense simply replaces or compensates for the large bulk of Israel that has not responded in this way. The God who, in fulfilment of the promise to Abraham, has acted inclusively with respect to the nations of the world, will not finally fail to act inclusively with respect to original Israel as well. The present situation of division and exclusion is a temporary one, one foreseen and prefigured in the scriptures, wrapped up in the mysterious patterns of the saving wisdom of God (11:33-36).

Ultimately, and in fact in a very short space, it became clear that Paul's view of a broadened, inclusive Israel was not going to win the day. Judaism and the messianic Jesus movement to which it had given birth went separate ways to become related but distinct religions. That separate destiny was certainly something Paul never personally envisaged or foresaw, even though his writings, interpreted in ways he did not foresee, may, contrary to his intention, have helped the

process along.

## Conclusion

In what has been written above it is the thought of the first-century Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, that has been examined and this has been done within the context of that time. One of Paul's

responses to the Gentile entry into the kingdom of God was his firm conviction that this heralded the Endtime, the divine transformation of the world.

Any examination of the thought of Paul necessarily has to be limited to the texts that scholars have come to accept as authentically Pauline. It would have been clearly unscholarly and some would argue, quite improper, to have attempted to accommodate Paul's thought to an understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism reckoned to be more in keeping with the changed attitudes and circumstances of our own time.

What has been dealt with in the body of this statement are the specific issues that actually confronted Paul as he sought to include gentiles within the divine plan of redemption without calling in question God's covenantal faithfulness to the People Israel. However, it is one of the facts written large in Jewish history that the Christian claims concerning the messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth are unequivocally unacceptable. For the overwhelming majority of Paul's compatriots in the first century this was plainly so. What he had to say about the Torah as no longer a proper response to God but set aside by the advent of Christ is not the way in which Jews understand or have understood the place and purpose of Torah.

Christian teachers and preachers, in particular, are called upon to respect the integrity of Judaism as a religion, an age-old religion, in its own right, not limited in any way by the emergence of another and quite distinct faith.

Just as the caricature of Judaism as a legalistic attempt to gain redemption must be set aside once and for all, so must there be an abandonment of the erstwhile depiction of that faith as blind to the truth of God. The issues faced by Paul may still be very real ones. But their resolution will not be advanced by a continuation of the kind of polemic that has been such a marked feature of our common history. Rather should those issues, and any others, be subjected to the light of a new relationship founded upon mutual acceptance and an earnest desire to learn more of each other. This learning will come only through listening. Moreover, for people of faith the way ahead is not ours alone to determine.

## Annotated Bibliography of Works

Relevant to the 'New Perspective on Paul'

(Authors are listed, for the most part, following the order of publication of their major works)

### The new perspective - antecedents

The "new perspective on Paul" is generally thought to date from the work of Krister Stendahl and E.P. Sanders in the sixties and seventies, respectively. However, some forerunners of this movement can be found among earlier scholars who, in contrast to the prevailing trend in Protestant scholarship, emphasised the Jewishness of Paul. Prominent among them was W. D. Davies with his book, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (4<sup>th</sup> ed; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). The book was originally published in 1948. In opposition to Rudolf Bultmann, in particular, Davies argues that Paul was a rabbi, not a Hellenist, "bone of Ezekiel's bone and flesh of Ezra's flesh". Those elements of Paul's thought which Bultmann sees as evidence of a non-Jewish background are better understood, according to Davies, in the light of the teachings of the rabbis.

Davies accepts Albert Schweitzer's view that the doctrine of justification by faith does not represent the centre of Paul's thought but rather a "subsidiary crater". At the centre of Paul's thought is the notion of dying and rising with Christ which is understood in strictly ethical terms as undergoing a new Exodus and standing at the foot of a new Sinai,

Paul remained an observant Jew throughout his life and, in the most mature development of his thought (reflected in Romans 9-11), believed that all Israel would be saved. An important collection of later essays of Davies is *Jewish and Pauline Studies* (London/Philadelphia: SPCK/Fortress, 1984).

### Krister Stendahl

The "new perspective on Paul" really began with the realisation that Paul is misunderstood if he is read through the eyes of Martin Luther. Until 1963 it had been regularly assumed that Paul's experience in the first century of the Common Era had been fundamentally the same as that of Luther in the sixteenth. Before his call Paul had passed, like Luther, through agonies of conscience about his sinfulness and inability to satisfy God's requirements. This assumption was called in question by Krister Stendahl in an article entitled "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West", published in the *Harvard Theological Review* for 1963 (pp. 199-215) and reprinted in Stendahl's book, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976, pp. 78-96). Stendahl argues that Paul is not to be read through the lens of Luther's soul-searchings. There is no hint that before his experience on the Damascus Road Paul was troubled by a guilty conscience.

### E.P. Sanders

A further assumption that was regularly made by Christian scholars until 1977 was that the Judaism of Paul's day was fundamentally similar to the Catholicism of Luther's day (as Luther

perceived it), in that it taught that men and women could earn God's acceptance through works of piety. It was, in other words, a legalistic religion. This assumption was called in question by E.P. Sanders by the publication of *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977). Far from holding the views of which Luther had accused Rome, Jews of all major parties in the first century, Sanders argued, attempted to keep the Torah not in order to earn their membership in the people of God but to express it. The Torah was understood within the framework of the covenant which was seen as both God's gracious gift and God's call. Sanders coined the term "covenantal nomism" to describe this understanding of the relationship between Torah and the Jewish people. Sanders' book initiated a lively debate which is still in full swing. He himself made a further contribution to it in *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

If the basic thesis of Sanders is accepted, what becomes of Paul's critique of the Torah? Some scholars, such as Heiki Raesaenen, in *Paul and the Law* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), have concluded that Paul misunderstood and misrepresented contemporary Judaism. Sanders himself takes the view that Paul's critique of the Torah was much less sharp than has commonly been supposed within Protestant scholarship.

What is clear is that, in this debate, we are dealing with two new perspectives not one – a new perspective on Paul and a new perspective on the Judaism of Paul's day – or at least new as far as Protestant scholarship is concerned.

### **Scholarship after E.P. Sanders**

All the writers who follow in this survey are responding to the challenge posed by Sanders.

Lloyd Gaston, in *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1987) agrees with Sanders that Christians have consistently misrepresented both first-century Judaism and Paul's relationship to it. Paul's mission was primarily to Gentiles and his letters were written to Gentiles. It is the Law as it related to Gentiles that is the sole target of his negative criticism. Since Gentiles have no part in God's covenant relationship with Israel they experience the Law only as something condemnatory and oppressive. When Paul is critical of Jews it is because of their failure to realise that Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promise concerning the Gentiles.

A weakness of Gaston's work is that he fails to do justice to those passages in Paul which claim that the work of Christ is universal in its scope, from which it follows that Paul's negative statements about the Law apply to Jews as well as to Gentiles.

Stephen Westerholm begins his book, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and his Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) with a lucid review of literature on Paul and the Law. In response to the Sanders challenge he then tries to defend at least some aspects of the Lutheran interpretation. To be sure, Paul was not attacking Judaism for being legalistic but the Reformers were not entirely wrong. Paul does emphasise divine grace over against human achievement. Though there is a considerable overlap between the Torah and Christian morality the Torah no longer functions as the criterion for behaviour for Christians.

A gratifying aspect of the current debate is the way in which it has opened up a fresh and creative dialogue with Jewish students of the Jewish Paul. The next two writers to be discussed are both Jews. Alan Segal, in *Paul the Convert* (Newhaven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1990) offers a sympathetic reading of Paul as a first-century Pharisee who underwent a mystical conversion experience. Paul was an ecstatic visionary and belongs within the Jewish mystical tradition that runs from the throne chariot vision of Ezekiel to mediaeval Merkabah mysticism. In this connection Segal brings to bear on Paul recent research on the sociology of conversion.

This experience of Paul's however, set him dramatically apart from his own people. Segal would

like to agree with scholars like Stendahl and Gaston, who argue that Paul proposed distinct ways to God for Jews and Gentiles, but his reading of Paul will not allow him to do so. While the Torah remains a standard for moral behaviour, the provisions in it which serve to define the community are no longer valid either for Jews or for Gentiles. A practical corollary of this conviction was that saved Jews and Gentiles could and should form a single community and freely interact. This led some Jews to consider Paul an apostate.

Daniel Boyarin, author of *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: Univ, of California Press, 1994), describes himself as a Talmudist and postmodern Jewish culture critic. Stressing more than many recent scholars the debt of Paul to his Hellenistic environment, Boyarin argues that Paul was primarily motivated by the Hellenistic ideal of unity and sought to overcome the limitations of ethnic Israel and thus help to create a universal Israel which would include all humanity. The effect of Paul's project, however, was to annihilate real identities and differences in favour of a more abstract, spiritual identity. While Paul remained a Jew and was not anti-Jewish, his ideal of the unity of mankind led Christianity and western culture generally to deny the validity of Judaism and to persecute Jews.

A persistent thread of this discussion has been the charge that Christians have misunderstood and maligned the Judaism of Paul's day. Mark D. Nanos, in *The Mystery of Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), argues that we have maligned Paul and misunderstood Romans. Paul is not an apostate and neither is he inconsistent. The mystery of Romans is that Paul is arguing against Christian-Gentile exclusivism. The Gentiles in Rome are convinced that Israel has been replaced as God's people by Gentiles who believe in Jesus; hence Paul's response in Romans 9-11. While Paul uses the diatribe device of allowing his readers to overhear a debate with Judaism his real target is Gentile exclusivism. This reviewer is only partly convinced. The debate with Judaism is conducted with such passion and at such length that it is hard to see it as just a diatribe device. For a more balanced discussion of Paul's purposes in Romans see Brendan Byrne, S.J., *Romans* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Glazier, 1996) pp. 8-19.

Finally, three further names. The views of most of the scholars discussed above, together with those of a number of others, are usefully summarised by the Melbourne scholar, Colin G. Kruse, in *Paul, the Law and Justification* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996). Kruse surveys the contributions of eighteen scholars to the problem of Paul and the Law from C.G. Montefiore, G.F. Moore and Albert Schweitzer in the early part of this century to recent scholars like Lloyd Gaston, Stephen Westerholm and Tom Wright.

Also there is an excellent survey of 125 years of New Testament scholarship in Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1961-1986*. The 'new perspective on Paul' is discussed (by Wright) on pp. 371-75 and 424-30.

Last of all, one scholar who has written prolifically on this theme is James D.G. Dunn. Dunn's first foray into the debate was an essay, "The New Perspective on Paul", *BJRL* 65 (1983) pp. 95-122, now included in the collection, *Jesus, Paul and the Law* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990) pp. 183-206. Dunn's main contention is that it is the social function of the Law which attracts Paul's criticisms.

It is the law as identity and boundary marker which is in view....'Works of the law' refer not exclusively but particularly to those requirements which bring to sharp focus the distinctiveness of Israel's identity ("The New Perspective on Paul", p.223).

Dunn has continued to hold this position in several later books, notably in his two-volume commentary on Romans (Dallas: Word Books, 1988) and in a magisterial work, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998).

>Source: The Council of Christians and Jews, Victoria, Australia

See also the Council's Guideline [\*Rightly Explaining the Word of Truth\*](#) and the talks at the launch of the document: [\*Paul is too Jewish for some, too anti-Jewish for others\*](#) and [\*Paul the Jew\*](#)