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## Significant Nuances in Contemporary Pauline Interpretation \*

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The last half century has witnessed great changes in the scholarly image of Paul. His Jewish roots have been rediscovered by scholars such as W D Davies. His Damascus road experience has been stressed as a call to preach the Gospel to gentiles without this being interpreted as involving hostility to his fellow Jews. The apostle's pastoral relation with the gentile churches has been reassessed emphasizing both Paul's concern for his converts and his continuing links with the Jerusalem apostles and the mission to Jews. In interpreting the contents of the letters of Paul, their particularity as letters to individual churches with varying contexts is now increasingly recognized with a corresponding awareness of the dangers of generalizing and universalizing Paul's statements

Although there is a general consensus that great changes have occurred in Pauline interpretation in the last half century, there is less agreement as to what are the most significant of these changes and to what extent they should be affirmed or deplored. This essay is an attempt to outline one scholar's view of these developments and to evaluate their contribution.

Our starting point will be the period immediately after the Second World War when W D Davies challenged the view of Paul as a Hellenizer, someone who would bring the broader more humanistic, universalistic insights of Hellenism to a narrow

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tribalistic Torah-centred Judaism.<sup>1</sup> The basic issue is where to locate Paul intellectually, ideologically and spiritually. Is his native ground the Diaspora Judaism of Tarsus influenced by a pervasive Greek spirit or did he spend even his early youth in Jerusalem, as van Unnik was to argue in a famous study in 1962?<sup>2</sup>

That Paul knew and spoke both Aramaic and Greek cannot be disputed. Whether he acquired both from childhood or one only later is still an important issue even after the Fiftieth Anniversary Edition of W D Davies' book. Even so, it still may be questioned whether Paul thought in Greek or in Aramaic. Perhaps we should inquire whether in his dreams Aramaic or Greek was the language of communication! Martin Hengel in his major work has demonstrated that there was extensive Greek influence on First Century Palestine.<sup>3</sup> Ongoing archaeological studies confirm this. So it seems that in the Mediterranean world at this time, there were no such entities as 'pure Judaism' or 'pure Hellenism', only a confluence of both, and perhaps Paul himself was a "confluence of ideas, motifs and practices of almost any provenance".<sup>4</sup>

However realistic this view of Paul may seem, it is no solution since, in this scenario, the Apostle is decontextualised so that his particular historical identity is fused into the generalities of cross-cultural fertilization. He suffers the same fate as frequently occurs with the statements in his letters, being both decontextualized and

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<sup>1</sup> Davies W.D., *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Elements in Pauline Theology*. Fiftieth Anniversary Edition, Mifflintown,PA: Sigler Press 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Van Unnik W.C., *Tarsus or Jerusalem: The City of Paul's Youth*. London: Epworth Press 1962.

<sup>3</sup> *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in the Early Hellenistic Period* Vols 1-11, ET London:SCM, 1974, esp. ch 111 and IV.4.

<sup>4</sup> Engberg-Pedersen Troels (ed.), *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*. Louisville KY: John Knox Press 2001, pp.16-17.

generalized. Andrie Du Toit insists that the view that Paul “ was thinking in Aramaic while writing in Greek cannot be sustained” (p16)<sup>5</sup> Yet, as Davies and others emphasize, there can be no doubt that Paul was nurtured through, and sustained by, a devout interaction with Torah as illuminated by Jewish exegetical methods and styles of argumentation. If much of this was memorized, can we be sure in which language? Perhaps neither geography nor language will explain the reality of Paul, the Jewish apostle to gentiles! Other insights may prove relevant and important here. Identity is certainly influenced by the language of communication, but dual identity is a reality in modern life as illustrated by German Jews of the Nineteenth Century, or by some second generation Moslems in Britain.<sup>6</sup>

It would appear that we cannot in the last resort ignore Paul’s own self-designations whether as a Hebrew or as an Israelite and that we should at least allow for the possibility that however conversant he was with Greek life and culture, this was not necessarily the ground of his being. To separate Paul from his Jewish roots in any kind of dichotomy is to lose this very particular First Century figure in an intellectual haze that does not assist clarification but rather adds confusion. To this extent, scholarship remains indebted to W D Davies.

We have already noted the issue of how Paul’s statements are to be interpreted. The tendency in the early post-war years was to regard Paul as being primarily a theologian. Johannes Munck rejected this view in favour of Paul the missionary with an eschatological agenda.<sup>7</sup> The tendency, however, was not easily dismissed. The question for some was not whether but only how Paul’s words were

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<sup>5</sup> “A Tale of Two Cities: ‘Tarsus or Jerusalem’ Revisited”, *Journal of New Testament Studies* 2002, vol 48, p.16.

<sup>6</sup> On dual identity see Mendes – Flohr Paul, *German Jews, A Dual Identity*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press 1999.

<sup>7</sup> *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, London: SCM Press, 1959, see esp pp. 43ff.

to be viewed as theology. TW Manson's essay which had inspired Munck's view of Paul, had described Romans as a missionary's reflections upon, and concluding summary of Paul's missionary work in the East.<sup>8</sup> In an essay in the early 1960's Guenther Bornkamm elaborated further on this in a revealing statement, "...in Romans, the ideas and motifs enumerated are not found, as in the earlier letters, in disconnection and as bearing on this or that actual situation. They are reasoned out, substantiated more fully and in detail, and given universal application."<sup>9</sup> Thus, from this era on, the question of the interpretation of Romans and the nature of Paul's letters and how to interpret them were to proceed hand in hand since they had been, and continued to be, perceived as inextricably related.

Johannes Munck had reacted strongly against the Tübingen School and its implicit Hegelianism.<sup>10</sup> As Margaret Mitchell has noted, interpreters tend to paint their portrayal of Paul in reaction to previous popular depictions.<sup>11</sup> In order to undermine the Tübingen School's established framework, Munck challenged both the nature of Paul's letters in general and of Romans in particular. Munck insisted that Paul's letters were to be interpreted as such and this means that statements from Acts and elsewhere may only be used if they do not clearly contradict what is found in the letters, nor should such extraneous material determine the exposition of the letters.

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<sup>8</sup> "St Paul's letters to the Romans - and Others", Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 31, 1948, pp. 224-40, now reprinted in *The Romans Debate* revised and expanded edition, ed K P Donfried, Peabody MA: Hendricksons 1991, pp.3-15.

<sup>9</sup> *Paul*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985, pp.94-95, now included in *The Romans Debate* (see n.7 above) pp.16-28 with a modified form of this statement,(see pp37-38).

<sup>10</sup> See esp . chapter 3 of Munck's book, "The Tübingen School and Paul, pp.69-86.

<sup>11</sup> *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Interpretation*, Tübingen: Mohr, 2000, see esp. pp.422-425.

Paul's individual letters, and the situation that forms the background of each individual letter, must be viewed on their own merits in each case. Indeed the material in the letters and behind these supposed situations may be unified only if such a procedure does not violate the individual nature of a particular letter and the situation that lies behind it.

Any historical situation, such as a situation that is the background of a particular Pauline letter, despite the fact that it may not be the expression of a clearly systematized theological position, is nevertheless historical and its historical character must not be disregarded.

Munck's stress was on the particularity of the situation of each of Paul's letters including Romans. These particular documents should not be abstracted from their particular context to form part of any generalized or universal theological system. Munck's Paul is not a systematician,<sup>12</sup> but his insights have been respected and have opened the way to a better appreciation of Paul's writings as real letters with specific addressees. As a result of this insight into the nature of his letters, Paul's theology can no longer be simply abstracted en bloc from his letters, nor can Romans be viewed merely as its summary. Krister Stendahl elaborated further on Munck's proposals, stressing that Paul's letters were first century texts about first century issues and that they were not to be read as discussions about the general human predicament as seen through Augustinian and Lutheran spectacles. They deal with the specific issues of two peoples, Jews and gentiles rather than the individual and his sins.<sup>13</sup>

In reaction to the specificity of Paul's letters, there was a fear amongst some biblical scholars that these foundational documents

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<sup>12</sup> See esp. Munck's comment, "We misunderstand Paul much more fatally if, as has been usual, we regard him as a theologian", op.cit. p.65.

<sup>13</sup> *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, London: SCM Press, 1976, pp.4f and 78ff. Stendahl here follows Munck who had stressed that Paul thought in terms not of individuals but of nations (Munck p.53f., 277f.)

were now to be regarded as relativised and ad hoc statements of ancient history, resulting in a “sociological captivity” for Paul’s thought. On the other hand, creedal, dogmatic formulations or a dogmatic dialectic of cross and resurrection could result in captivity to an imposed, perceived centre in Paul’s thinking. This matter was clarified by some excellent work by J Christiaan Beker<sup>14</sup> who sought to stress both the occasional, contingent elements in the letters and the abiding coherence that enabled them to point to the theology of the Apostle. By coherence Beker meant “the stable, constant element which expresses the convictional basis of Paul’s proclamation of the gospel...the truth of the gospel” . Apocalyptic *motifs* dominate Paul’s thought – “Paul’s modifications of the Christian tradition are not due to Hellenistic-Jewish or Philonic influences but are modifications of an *apocalyptic* substratum.”<sup>15</sup>

According to Beker, Paul’s statements really are coherent when correctly viewed despite the recognition of their very real contingency and despite the fact that the “centre of Paul’s thought transcends every instance of its expression.” Instead of suggesting that these time-related statements have somehow to be lifted above the level of everyday reality to some suprahistorical abstract plane, in Beker’s view, for Paul it is just such situations that are fertile for theologising since he is best described as a hermeneutical theologian. “ It is Paul’s interpretive achievement that he combines particularity and universality, or diversity and unity, in such a way that the gospel is neither simply *imposed* on historical situations as a ready-made orthodox system, nor *fragmented* into fortuitous and incidental intentions of thought”.<sup>16</sup>By this approach Beker seeks to retain the stress on the particularity of the letters and at the same

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<sup>14</sup> “Recasting Pauline Theology: The Coherence-Contingency Model”, *Pauline Theology* Vol.1, ed. J M Bassler, Minneapolis MI:1991, pp.15-24.

<sup>15</sup> “Recasting Pauline Theology”, p.17.

<sup>16</sup> *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980, p.351

time to respect the desire to cling to some understanding of Paul as a theologian. His view of Paul's hermeneutical activity in transforming both traditions and scriptural interpretation provides a valid model of continuity (and discontinuity) between Paul and his Jewish predecessors in the broadest sense, i.e with both Christ-believing and non-Christ-believing Jews. Regarding Paul as both an interpreter of scripture and of earlier traditions avoids the image of Paul in reaction to his ancestral faith and helps to understand better the unity and diversity of the New Testament and its relation to the Jewish scriptures.

As W D Davies noted, there had been a dominant tendency in Pauline scholarship to contrast rather than to compare Paul with Jewish ways of thinking. Johannes Munck was dedicated to opposing the latent Hegelianism of the Tübingen School stressing particularity over against the latter's concern with universality. For Munck, the posited "opposition between particularism and universalism is the product of a modern cosmopolitan outlook, and has nothing to do with the biblical conception of the mission" (of Paul) <sup>17</sup> But the Nineteenth Century view of Paul was itself also partly the outcome of centuries of Christian self-definition over against Judaism. Judaism had long been used as a negative foil by Christians, "making Judaism a code word for all wrong attitudes toward God".<sup>18</sup> This pattern had in certain ways been strengthened by the Lutheran understanding of justification with its strong opposition to works. It was this aspect of Judaism that EP Sanders chose to address in his major work, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*; Sanders research into the Judaism of Paul's time revealed that contrary to Christian stereotyping, Palestinian Judaism was a religion of grace and faith-what Sanders described as covenantal nomism. Obedience to the Law is still acknowledged as of the essence of Judaism, but for Sanders, "obedience maintains one's position in the covenant, but it

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<sup>17</sup> Cf Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, p.71, (Munck is citing B.Sundkler's article of 1936).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, p.132.



does not earn God's grace as such...Righteousness in Judaism is a term which implies the maintenance of status among the elect"<sup>19</sup>. In Sanders' view, Luther had made the mistake of regarding the First Century Jewish opponents of Paul as similar to his unreformed opponents of the Sixteenth Century. The result was that later attitudes to faith and works were wrongly attributed to First Century Judaism to the detriment of the latter. Sanders' thesis has not been universally welcomed, but it has gained wide acceptance.<sup>20</sup>

There can be no doubt that he has demonstrated convincingly that inner Christian disputes over law and grace have coloured our perspectives on Judaism and prevented impartiality. His attempt to explain Paul's alleged departure from Judaism is particularly interesting. According to Sanders, Paul did not have problems with Judaism prior to his conversion but his post-conversion perspective was that Judaism was deficient simply because it was not Christianity. JDG Dunn criticized this thesis since it gave no real explanation for Paul's alleged departure from Judaism. Though aware of the implicit anti-Judaism in some pre-Sanders New Testament interpretation, Dunn, however asserts.... "this presentation of Paul is only a little better than the one rejected. There remains something very odd in Paul's attitude to his ancestral faith. The Lutheran Paul has been replaced by an idiosyncratic Paul who in arbitrary and irrational manner turns his face against the glory and greatness of Judaism's covenant theology and abandons Judaism simply because it is not Christianity".<sup>21</sup>Dunn did not

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<sup>19</sup> *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*, London: SCM 1977, pp.75, 420 and 544. On Sanders' views of Paul see further in my *Paul's Gospel in an Intercultural Context: Jew and Gentile in the Letter to the Romans*, Frankfurt, New York: Peter Lang, 1992, pp.133ff.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. CH Talbert, "Paul, Judaism and the Revisionists", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 1 2001, pp.1-22.

<sup>21</sup> "The New Perspective on Paul", the Manson Memorial Lecture delivered at the University of Manchester, November 1982, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 65/1983 pp. 96-122 (101) Reprinted in *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians*, London, SPCK, 1990,

hesitate to criticize First Century Judaism, at least in part. The failure was that in the dominant Judaism of that period those aspects which separated Jews from others had been given exaggerated significance so that circumcision, sabbath and food laws became as it were the identity badges of true Judaism.

Dunn's appreciation of Judaism emerged in his claim that justification was a Jewish doctrine, and not specifically Christian, and thus there could be no inherent obstacle to believers being Jewish. However, he went on to argue that at Antioch, after his debate with Peter, Paul realised that faith in Christ alone was essential and that keeping the law was thereby rendered superfluous.<sup>22</sup> In this claim, Dunn not only supports an image of Paul as an independent or sectarian apostle who at a certain point separated from Peter and other Jewish Christians thereby making his own gentile form of Christianity the norm for the whole church, but he fails to allow space for Jewish believers to retain their Jewish identity in Christ. In this respect Dunn is, I believe, open to criticism. It is quite clear from Romans 14-15 that Paul recognizes and supports Jewish believers in their freedom to maintain a lasting Jewish life-style and identity. Paul thereby refuses to universalise gentile Christian identity as the norm for the whole church-what he seeks is unity in diversity, not a monochrome gentile Christianity. Paul did not advise a temporary toleration of Judaism but, on the contrary, allowed for abiding diversity in the church. Surprising or trite as it may seem, to be the apostle to the gentiles did not mean that Paul was biased in favour of gentiles.<sup>23</sup>

What we have just claimed concerning diversity in Paul may seem to be in contradiction of Gal 3:28 where Paul apparently asserts the end of ethnic and other distinctions in Christ. That this ending of such distinctions did not actually take place in New Testament times

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<sup>22</sup> "The New Perspective on Paul", p.113.

<sup>23</sup> See my essay, "Divergent Images of Paul and his Mission", *Reading Israel in Romans* ed. C Grenholm & D Patte in the Series *Romans through History and Culture, Reception and Critical Interpretation*, Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International 1999, pp.259-86.

is significant, and Paul also says, "Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called" (1Cor.7: 20). That Jewish Christianity gradually decreased is a fact of history, but to claim it is superfluous or to unwillingly tolerate its temporary continuance is pro-gentile bias. Paul did disagree with Peter on occasions as others probably did as well, but that does not mean that he opposed Peter's mission to the Jews or that he ceased to recognize Peter and other law-abiding Jewish Christians as equal partners in Christ. To be one in Christ does not mean that all ethnic and other distinctions are abolished, but rather that discrimination on the basis of difference is to be abolished. To be one in Christ actually implies already existing differences. What Paul seeks is oneness rather than sameness among believers. As Pamela Eisenbaum states, "Paul does not relegate Jewishness to a lower order of being; it is his interpreters who do that....I do not think Paul preaches the collapse of all human difference; this interpretation is simply a more benign expression of Christian imperialism."<sup>24</sup>

The abiding difference between Jews and gentiles is illustrated by the fact that Paul reserves the title Israel for Jewish believers despite his parallel emphasis upon equality between Jew and gentile in Christ. The church is not explicitly described as 'new Israel' by Paul or elsewhere in the New Testament-only from 160CE can we find such a conception.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the fact that Paul acknowledges and respects differences between Jew and gentile, means that contrary to some critiques of him, he does not hold to the view that the ideal Christ believer is a law-free male gentile. The supposed abolition of differences has not freed Paul from his image as a male chauvinist. However, if Paul allows and supports real diversity in his communities, then this opens the way for a more significant role for women since they no longer need to be judged by male

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<sup>24</sup> "Is Paul the father of Misogyny and Antisemitism?" *Crosscurrents* Vol 50,no 4,pp.506-524 (524).

<sup>25</sup> See my article on Israel in *The Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, ed. G Hawthorne, RP Martin & D G Reid, Downers Grove,IL, Intervarsity Press, 1995, pp. 441-446.

standards and expectations, being different from men.<sup>26</sup> Indeed when we look at Paul's letters carefully, we can see that he both acknowledges women and gives them significance in his work. Phoebe was not only the bearer of Paul's most important letter, but presumably as such was also authorised to explain its contents to the believers in Rome. The image of the family, so basic in Paul is further evidence of his recognition of difference-believers as male and female are to become part of one family, the family of Abraham. To be part of a family implies recognition of difference within an overarching framework of equality and belonging.

In my view it is quite significant that Daniel Boyarin has criticized Paul for advocating sameness rather than diversity in Christ. This alleged flawed opinion is in fact the view of Paul's interpreters rather than of Paul himself. Paul has suffered greatly from his interpreters and recent perspectives have begun to correct this. When this fresh understanding is reapplied by feminist scholars to Paul's letters, I am sure that Paul will emerge as much closer to feminist goals since he is biased in favour of the weak and powerless and seeks the good of everyone in the community of faith. If we continue to view Paul as advocating the removal of differences, this is very similar to the "Hellenistic desire for the One, which among other things produced an ideal of a universal human essence, beyond difference and hierarchy".<sup>27</sup> On this view Paul is too much a servant of Hellenism rather than its critic.

Part of the reason for a certain naivete regarding Paul's relation to the Empire, springs I am sure because his opposition has, in the past, tended to be seen as Jewish. As Guenther Bornkamm put it, "Paul's opponent is not this or that section in a particular church, but the Jews and their understanding of salvation".<sup>28</sup> But opposition

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<sup>26</sup> See the as yet unpublished thesis by Kathy Ehrensperger, "Feminist Interpretation of Paul and Changing Perspectives in Pauline Studies", presented to the University of Wales, Lampeter 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Cf Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*, Berkeley: University of California 1994, p.7.

<sup>28</sup> *Paul*, p.95.

to Jewish ethnocentrism does not explain Paul adequately. Neil Elliott perceptively notes in commenting on a recent publication by John Barclay that although “Hellenistic and Roman imperialism is in view through the rest of Barclay’s work, it is primarily against Jewish “nationalistic presuppositions” or “ethnic restrictions” that he sees Paul to be struggling. True, Paul’s apocalyptic perspective still regards the non-Jewish world as a “cess-pit of godlessness and vice (Rom.:18-32; Phil. 2:15)...but Barclay has gone so far as to refer to ‘Jewish’ cultural imperialism” as the horizon against which Paul must be read.”<sup>29</sup>

More recent studies regard Paul as very aware of and as certainly not neutral towards the Roman Empire and its practices. Paula Fredriksen claims that under imperial rule, “the open dissemination of a Messianic message... put the entire Jewish community at risk.”. Even Paul’s conversion may be highly political. The *Iudaismos* in which Paul says he had advanced (Gal.1:14) was “not merely a matter of religious observance but a movement of political activism and autonomy by diaspora Jews” Thus Saul’s ‘zeal’ was directed toward “the end of ensuring community solidarity and security in Damascus” against “the specific political threat” posed to the larger Jewish community by the Jesus movement”.<sup>30</sup>

It is quite unlikely that someone previously so politically aware should suddenly become so neutral towards or indifferent to the wider political context. There are numerous texts in Paul whose significance in this regard has only recently begun to be appreciated. The fact that Paul borrows a technical term for news of victory, *euangelion*, to designate his gospel may in fact signify that

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<sup>29</sup> “ Paul and the Politics of Empire”, *Paul and Politics: Ekklēsia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honour of Krister Stendahl*, ed Richard A Horsley, Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press International, 2000, pp. 17-39 (p.21f.).

<sup>30</sup> Paula Fredriksen, “ Judaism, The Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2 “, *Journal of Theological studies* 42:2 (1991) p.556.f.

Paul implicitly parodies the theological claims made on behalf of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, language in other words calculated to be politically provocative. F W Danker has argued that Paul's conception of God had been shaped in contrast to the ubiquitous Greco-Roman symbolization of the Emperor as *Benefactor*.<sup>31</sup> Again, Neil Elliott claims that Paul's "warning of doom when others proclaim" peace and security"(1Thess.5:3) is widely regarded as a not-so-cryptic critique of the Roman world after the establishment of the Principate".<sup>32</sup>

There are of course many scholars who, for diverse reasons, do not stress Paul's political awareness. Even those well versed in the forms of imperial rhetoric and convention and able to discuss with some expertise the rhetoric of Paul's letters do not always demonstrate new insights on Paul and his context. This may be because rhetoric is viewed by some as a purely neutral medium of communication. Thus the rhetorical expertise is somehow dissipated because it is used to give fresh shape to old and out-dated opinions. An interesting example is in Margaret Mitchell's description of Pauline portraits in the present century as being "situated in a museum haunted by a face that doesn't deserve a picture, but nonetheless dominates the scene and the viewing experience totally"<sup>33</sup>. We find here along with the imagery of viewing portraits, a somewhat disengaged, dispassionate scholarship both in relation to Chrysostom and to Hitler as well as to anti-Semitism as "a modern virus". This is a pity since rhetoric offers great potential for uncovering implicit ideologies.<sup>34</sup> With rhetorical as with other approaches to Paul, there are no neutral or value-free portraits, the

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<sup>31</sup> Danker Frederick, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Greco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field*, St. Louis: Clayton 1982.

<sup>32</sup> N. Elliott, "Paul and the Politics of Empire", p.25.

<sup>33</sup> *The Heavenly Trumpet*, p. 424.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Vernon K Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse : rhetoric, society and ideology*, London: Routledge, 1996.

image of the authors reappear in the portraits they supply whether explicit or implicit.

One of the most disputed areas of New Testament scholarship is the issue of precisely how and when ‘the partings of the ways’ began to take place.<sup>35</sup> Mark Nanos has demonstrated that to make sense of Romans we need to posit a situation not only where Jewishness or rather Jewish life-style was a bone of contention, but where, as he himself maintains, Christians were still in contact with the synagogues. This means that for most, if not all of Paul’s ministry, he was operating in many situations where he had to take into account the ongoing links between Jewish Christ-believers and the local synagogue.<sup>36</sup> Judith Lieu has noted the desire on the part of early church leaders for iron boundaries and impenetrable ramparts between Judaism and their Christian communities, but points out that this may in fact denote not as it appears, that a clear separation had already taken place, but on the contrary, that fuzzy boundaries were what actually existed as it were, on the ground.<sup>37</sup> This means that when Ignatius asserts that it is monstrous to confess Christ and practise Judaism that he opposes Christ –believers who in fact were actually doing just this.<sup>38</sup>

Daniel Boyarin goes further and claims that the “boundaries” between the two faiths were, even for as much as several centuries, in many places difficult to discern. The analogy he offers, instead of solid fortifications, is the boundary between major language areas.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

<sup>36</sup> Mark D Nanos, “ The Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience Addressed in Paul’s Letter to the Romans”, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* Vol 61 no 2, April 1999, pp. 283- 304.

<sup>37</sup> “Impregnable Ramparts and walls of Iron’: Boundary and Identity in Early ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity’”, *New Testament Studies*, Vol 48, 3, pp.297-313.

<sup>38</sup> Ignatius, *Magnesians* 10:13

It is almost impossible to denote clear boundaries between local dialects where two or more language areas intersect and just as difficult to draw the boundaries around the two emergent faiths within the one Judeo-Christian reality.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, Boyarin sees the ongoing movement between the two as involving a two-way traffic with the Jewish Christ-believers as the facilitators.

This new scenario can help us to understand better the fact, for so it seems, that Paul himself never ‘separated ‘ or even wanted to separate from his ancestral faith. It also allows scholars such as Peter Tomson, to claim that Paul’s letters contain or reflect Jewish halakha in an incidental or fragmentary way.<sup>40</sup> Tomson identifies three different modes of the possible presence of halakha in early Christian literature: (1) halakha reflected in behaviour or speech of Jews within a narrative; (2) halakha cited in support of a hortatory argument; (3) halakha quoted in a work based on the premise that Law observance is obsolete. Tomson concludes that category (3) is not found in Paul and Galatians confirms this because Paul’s plea against forced observance of the Law is itself actually based on the halakha . Here Paul supports his plea against forced judaizing of gentile believers with an explicit appeal to a halakha which pertains to proselyting procedures; “Every man who is circumcised is bound to keep the whole law and therefore by implication, those not circumcised are not bound to do so”.<sup>41</sup>

Paul’s use of halakha, in however limited a form, and his frequent recourse to explicit as well as implicit scriptural reference should alert us to the fact that his form of reasoning differs from post-Enlightenment patterns of rationality. Paul theologises and makes ethical decisions not in modern forms of rationality, but with what

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<sup>39</sup> *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles*, Minneapolis MI: Fortress Press, 1990, pp.259ff.

<sup>40</sup> *Paul and the Jewish Law*, p.261.

<sup>41</sup> Boyarin is completing a new book on this topic entitled, *Borderlines: ‘Heresy’ and the Emergence of Christianity and Judaism*.



has been described as 'scriptural reasoning'.<sup>42</sup> A similar pattern occurs in Romans 14-15 - gentiles are not obliged to keep Jewish commandments, but the strong are called upon to respect Jewish customs and the delicacies of their fellow-believers, in short, to respect Judeo-Christian identity.<sup>43</sup>

From these examples, we can begin to reconstruct our new image of Paul in his First Century context. He is Hellenized to some extent, but his Jewish pattern of life and halakhic patterns have not been rendered obsolete. He does not always see eye to eye with Peter, but neither does he oppose the mission to the circumcision, nor those Jewish believers in Christ whose conscience still tells them to keep Torah. Paul does not demand sameness in Christ but acknowledges the diversity inherent in two parallel missions within one Christ centred movement to which they both recognized the other as belonging. His opposition is not to be confined to opponents of Jewish extraction, whether believing in Christ or not, but extends to all principalities and powers for Paul certainly included the Emperor and the Imperial system in such. We are left with an image of Paul operating still on the margins of Jewish life, still maintaining links with the synagogues wherever possible; he continues to fight fiercely with the aid of a type of scriptural reasoning for the different lifestyles of Jews and gentiles in Christ, for his particular understanding of Christian identity as including diversity and recognizing difference. Above all, we see him as one who was anti-imperialist, in the sense that he refused to allow any one sub-group of Christ-believers to universalise their own identity as the norm for the entire church.

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<sup>42</sup> See the new series *Radical Traditions, Theology in a Postcritical Key*, eds. SM Hauerwas and Peter Ochs, *esp. Christianity in Jewish Terms* eds. T Frymer-Kensky, D Novak, P Ochs, DF Sandmel and MA Signer, Boulder CO: Westview Press, 2000, p. iv. The Foreword advocates a "return to the text" (of scriptures) and calls for new paradigms of reason, a thinking and rationality that is more responsive than originitive".

<sup>43</sup> Cf. the paper given by Philip Esler at the SBL Meeting in Denver Nov 2001, "Ancient Oleiculture and Ethnic Differentiation: The Meaning of the Olive - Tree Metaphor in Romans 11."

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