

New Perspectives on Paul: A Reflection on Luther's Contribution to the Doctrine of Christian Grace on the Occasion of the Fifth Centenary of the Reformation

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THIS STUDY WILL DEAL WITH different ways (or “perspectives”) in which Paul’s central teaching on justification, faith, grace, and works have been interpreted in the context of the Reformation, and especially in the teaching of Martin Luther. It is made up of three parts. The first briefly considers Luther’s own interpretation of Paul and its applicability or otherwise to the situation of the Church in society five centuries ago. The second part presents an interpretation of Paul commonly called the “new perspective,” which has consolidated over the last fifty years or so, a perspective that recontextualizes Luther’s view, situating it within challenges of an ethical and ecclesiological kind typical of the late-twentieth-century Christian world. The principal authors involved include E. P. Sanders (especially his work *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*), N. T. Wright, and James D. G. Dunn.¹ In the third place, we shall consider how the “new perspective” has been contested in different ways of late, and not only by classical Lutheran authors who insist on the perennial value of Luther’s intuition. We shall pay special attention to the recent work of the Anglican exegete John Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*.²

¹ For a historical introduction to the interpretation of Paul, see S. J. Haefmann, “Paul and His Interpreters,” in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, ed. G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, and D. R. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 666–79.

² John M. G. Barclay, *Paul & the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015).

Luther's Perspective on Paul's Doctrine of Justification by Faith

Luther consistently envisaged his understanding of the Gospel as centered on the doctrine of justification by faith alone,³ without works, as a rediscovery of St. Paul's fundamental and determinative intuition as regards the justice of God. For Luther, *iustitia Dei*, the "righteousness of God," is not the justice by which God judges our actions and rewards (or punishes) them accordingly, but rather the justice by which God accepts the believer as being truly just. That is to say, justification is by faith, not by works: humans cannot win justification by their good deeds; they can only accept it gratefully in faith. Although the Christian is meant to carry out an abundance of good works, the latter are of no use in winning or maintaining divine favor. This, of course, decisively influences Luther's understanding of salvation, of the Church, and of ethical life.

The context in which Luther's revolution took place, as he saw it, constituted an almost exact replica of the situation Paul found himself in when faced with the Judaizing movement within nascent Christianity. He applied the Pauline tension between "faith" and "works" (especially present in Galatians and Romans)⁴ to the tension that existed between his personal situation as a conscience-smitten monk seeking a merciful God and the late medieval Church enslaved (as he saw it) to a religion of works far-removed from the original Gospel message of simplicity and freedom. The comparison Luther made between the two historical situations, in spite of obvious religious and cultural differences that not even he denied, is highly significant. If Luther's contention was right, his would be an epoch-making rediscovery of authentic Christianity, and by insisting on "justification by faith alone," he would be paying signal service to the Church's evangelizing mission. His doctrine, as expressing anew Paul's authentic teaching, would necessarily constitute a living statement of the permanent and perennial core of Christian life and doctrine, in his own time as well as five hundred years after the Reformation began.

³ See Paul O'Callaghan, *Fides Christi: The Justification Debate* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 19–69.

⁴ On the tension between the negative vision of the law in Galatians and the more positive one in Romans, see J. W. Drane, *Paul, Libertine or Legalist? A Study in the Theology of the Major Pauline Epistles* (London: SPCK, 1975), 5–6, 132–36; J. Gnalka, "La dottrina paolina della giustificazione: legge, giustificazione, fede," *Annales Theologici* 10 (1996): 93–108, especially 94.

And on the same account, the medieval Church Luther encountered could well be accused of having severely prejudiced, at least in practical terms, the core belief of Christians that God, in his mercy, had sent his only Son to save his people from their sins.

However, in attempting to re-present authentic Christian teaching in terms of the doctrine of justification by faith, Luther made two assumptions, both of which need to be carefully appraised.⁵

Paul's Conversion and Luther's

Firstly, Luther took it for granted that Paul underwent the *same experience* he (Luther) had undergone before discovering the true meaning of *iustitia Dei*, the “righteousness of God,” the justice by which God makes the believer truly just. Before encountering Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul had, in Luther’s mind, suffered long with a distressed conscience. “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:24), he cried out. This anguished confession contained in Romans 7 has been commonly applied by Lutherans to Paul’s situation *before* his conversion. Yet contemporary biblical exegesis is quite contented to apply this passage from Romans to the situation of the converted Christian⁶ and does not exclude the possibility that, for Paul, it may not have been entirely autobiographical.⁷

The fact is that Paul elsewhere does explicitly describe his personal situation and mindset before conversion took place. In the letter to the Philippians, he boasts that he was “as to righteousness under the law blameless” (Phil 3:6), and to the Galatians, he exclaimed that he “advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I” (Gal 1:14). There is no reason to think that Paul was riddled with anxiety and scruples before encountering the risen Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus. In fact, he seems to have

⁵ I have studied the theology of Luther in *Fides Christi*, 19–69, and in *God and Mediation: A Retrospective Appraisal of Luther the Reformer* (Minneapolis: Fortress 2017).

⁶ For a complete overview of the different positions, see James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary 38A (Dallas, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 374–413, especially 404–13.

⁷ For a comprehensive overview of the bibliography on the matter, see E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1977), 443, 479 (in notes): “The fact that Paul can express the pathos of life under the law as seen through Christian eyes does not mean that he had himself experienced frustration with the law before his own conversion” (443n4).

been very sure of what he was doing in persecuting Christians. It has therefore been suggested that: "The Protestant reading of Paul was a reading back of Luther's own experience into Paul. It was a retrojection back into Paul's first-century self-testimony of what Krister Stendahl has called 'the introspective conscience of the West.'"⁸ In spite of Stendahl's thesis⁹ being vigorously rejected by authors such as Ernst Käsemann and considered as a serious threat to Protestantism,¹⁰ it has come to be widely accepted over recent decades.¹¹ In the words of Heiki Räisänen: "We can safely subscribe to the now common opinion that Paul's critique of the law was not born out of any personal moral difficulties. Paul was no Luther before Luther."¹²

⁸ James D. G. Dunn and Alan M. Suggate, *The Justice of God: A Fresh Look at the Old Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1993), 14. This work provides a useful summary of the question.

⁹ See Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963): 199–215. This essay is reprinted in Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987), 78–96.

¹⁰ See Ernst Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1971), 60–78. Stendahl's later, more extensive treatment of the question is to be found in his *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, 1–77, as well as his reply to Käsemann in 129–33 of the same volume. Käsemann in fact holds to a clearly Lutheran view of justification by faith alone: "The true adversary of Paul is the pious Jew . . . as the realization of the religious man" ("Paul and Israel," in *New Testament Questions of Today*, trans. W. J. Montague [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1969], 183–87, at 184). However, on the basis of the biblical texts, Käsemann holds two positions not typical of Lutheran authors: that the basis for justification and faith is creation and that justification does not involve a mere imputation of God's justice, but a transformation of the believer who is filled with divine power (*dunamis*).

¹¹ The roots of Stendahl's position are to be found in, among others, the works of the liberal Protestant scholar F. C. Baur, *Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi: Sein Leben und Wirken, seine Briefe und seine Lehre: Ein Beitrag zu einer kritischen Geschichte des Urchristentums* (Stuttgart: Becher & Müller, 1845); English translation in *Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Works, His Epistles and Teachings* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007).

¹² H. Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1986), 231: "Luther's doctrine of justification is not the Pauline one." W. Heitmüller, *Luthers Stellung in der Religionsgeschichte des Christentums* (Marlburg: Elwert, 1917), 19: "It is obvious that the difficulty of Luther is not that of Paul" (my translation). O. Kuss, *Der Römerbrief* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1957), 134: "In no case can we any longer take as obvious that Luther can be made equal with Paul, nor rest on such a presupposition, nor much less can we explain Paul with Luther and Luther with Paul" (my translation). See also H. Pohlmann, *Hat Luther Paulus entdeckt? Eine Frage zur theologischen Besinnung* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1959), 147–48.

Judaism in the Time of Nascent Christianity

The second reason that Luther's self-identification with Paul may have been misplaced lies in the fact that the former took it for granted that the situation of the medieval Church was akin to that of Judaism in the time of Paul, that the two were steeped in the same legalistic religious mentality based on an exacting performance of works and obtaining merits.¹³ Whether Luther's appraisal of medieval Christianity was accurate on a global scale need not be looked into at the present moment.¹⁴ But he was convinced, at least on the basis Paul's own testimony, that Judaism of the first decades of the Christian era was the epitome of narrow legalistic religious institutionalism.¹⁵ Of course, Jesus's far-from-commendatory depiction of the hypocritical legalism of many priests and leaders of the people as found in the Gospels only serves to confirm Luther's impression.

Yet recent studies on the fundamental spiritual traits of Judaism at the time of nascent Christianity—E. P. Sanders's groundbreaking *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* comes especially to mind—have shown quite clearly that Judaism in the time of Paul was not in the main a religion

¹³ This negative evaluation of first-century Judaism, substantially rejected by Sanders (*Paul*, 1–12, 33–59) and others, can be traced back to highly influential works of authors such as F. W. Weber, *System der altsynagogalen palästinischen Theologie aus Targum, Midrasch und Talmud* (1880), revised as *Jüdische Theologie auf Grund des Talmud und verwandter Schriften* (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1897), and those who followed on from him, for example: J. Wellhausen, E. Schürer, R. H. Charles, and W. Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1966 [originally 1925]). Through Bousset, Rudolph Bultmann and his school undoubtedly take up many of Weber's findings; see, for example, Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in a Contemporary Setting* (New York: Living Age Books 1957). For a classical influential defense of the antithesis between Judaism and Paul's doctrine in the English-speaking world, see H. St. John Thackeray, *The Relation of St Paul to Contemporary Jewish Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1900).

¹⁴ On the theological situation of the fifteenth century that prepared the way for Luther, especially via Gabriel Biel, see H. A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963); Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: a History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

¹⁵ On Luther's anti-Semitism, see H. A. Oberman, *Wurzeln des Antisemitismus: Christenangst und Judenplage im Zeitalter von Humanismus und Reformation* (Berlin: Severin and Siedler, 1981), 123–83. See specifically the following works of Luther: *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* (1543); *Von den letzten Worten Davids* (1543). See also B. Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2011), 336–45.

of “works” in the Lutheran sense, but rather one of mercy and faith in God as savior.¹⁶ Not only Old Testament spirituality expressed in wisdom literature (particularly the psalms) but also intertestamentary spirituality present and expressed in rabbinic-Tannaitic literature,¹⁷ Qumran documents drawn from the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha from the period between 200 BC and AD 200¹⁸ may be characterized in terms of what Sanders called “covenantal nomism”:

The “pattern” or “structure” of covenantal nomism is this: (1) God has chosen Israel and (2) given the law. The law implies both (3) God’s promise to maintain the election and (4) the requirement to obey. (5) God rewards obedience and punishes transgression. (6) The law provides for means of atonement, and atonement results in (7) maintenance or re-establishment of the covenantal relationship. (8) All those who are maintained in the covenant by obedience, atonement and God’s mercy belong to the group which will be saved. An important interpretation of the first and last points is that election and ultimately salvation are considered to be by God’s mercy rather than human achievement. . . . By consistently maintaining the basic framework of *covenantal nomism*, the gift and demand of God were kept in a healthy relationship with each other, the *minutiae* of the law were observed on the basis of the large

¹⁶ In support of Sanders’s position, see also G. F. Moore’s then-neglected 1921 “Christian Writers on Judaism,” *Harvard Theological Review* 14 (1921): 197–254, and its voluminous follow-up, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of Tannaim*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950). The same position, though less developed, is to be found in the 1969 study of G. E. Howard, “Christ and the End of the Law: the Meaning of Romans 10 4ff,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 3 (1969): 331–37.

¹⁷ The Tannaites were teachers, Pharisaic in inspiration, active from the foundation of the Grand Council of Jamnia (ca. AD 75) until the third century AD.

¹⁸ The possible exception is *4 Ezra*, according to Sanders, *Paul*, 409–18: “On the whole, . . . the author of IV Ezra without doubt gives us a correct presentation of the repercussion of the belief in the future judgment on the religious expressions of individual Jewish piety. All the many expressions of belief in God’s grace and mercy appear to be denied.” See also J. Köberle, *Sünde und Gnade im religiösen Leben des Volkes Israel bis auf Christentum: ein Geschichte des vorchristlichen Heilbewußtseins* (Munich: C. Beck, 1905), 657. Sanders pays little attention to Sadducean and Pharisaic literature, in all probability because little of it is available (*Paul*, 426–28).

principles of religion and because of the commitment to God, and humility before the God who chose and would ultimately redeem Israel was encouraged.¹⁹

According to Sanders, God's merciful call to Israel, the subsequent covenant, and the ultimate salvation of God's people are *all by grace*, and obedience to works of the law simply "maintains one's position in the covenant, but does not earn God's grace as such."²⁰ In other words, grace comes before law. Nomism, observance of the law, is covenantal: it is a posterior expression of fidelity to an anterior covenant. And the Jews were fully aware of this, Sanders argues. It cannot be held, therefore, on the basis of available documentation of the intertestamentary period "that Judaism necessarily tends towards petty legalism, self-serving and self-deceiving casuistry, and a mixture of arrogance and lack of confidence in God . . . according to which one had to earn the mercy of God by minute observance of irrelevant ordinances."²¹

God did not expect or require, under pain of punishment, a sinless perfection from his people. The whole sacrificial system, deeply rooted in the social and liturgical life of Israel, should be seen, according to Sanders, as a God-given means of conveying forgiveness to sinners. In that sense, little or no fundamental contrast may be perceived between Paul's doctrine of justification and the Old Testament message of God's graceful and merciful generosity. God's fidelity is directed principally toward the "commitments" he acquired, as it were, in establishing a covenant with Israel, rather than toward punishing infractions of the law for its own sake.²²

A New Perspective on Paul: Sanders, Dunn, and Wright

Sanders's position has given rise to what has come to be known as the "new perspective" on Paul. It has been noticeably popular over recent

¹⁹ Sanders, *Paul*, 422, 427.

²⁰ Sanders, *Paul*, 420.

²¹ Sanders, *Paul*, 427, 419. Sanders substantially retains and develops this position in his recent ample work, *Paul: the Apostle's Life, Letters, and Thought* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015).

²² Alister E. McGrath asserts that Luther does not hold to a "covenantal" view of reality, seeing in it an obscuring of grace (*The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1987], 77–85). The covenantal view in fact was characteristic of the *via moderna*.

decades, particularly in the works of Dunn,²³ Räisänen,²⁴ R. Liebers,²⁵ Wright,²⁶ R. Penna,²⁷ and many others.²⁸ But, of course, an important question needs to be considered. If Judaism and Christianity shared a more or less common theology of justification, sin, grace, and faith, then where do the differences lie?²⁹ Why did Jesus berate the scribes

²³ For a good summary of the debate about the “new perspective,” see Dunn and Suggate, *The Justice of God*, 7–48. Of Dunn’s own works, see especially: James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (London: SPCK, 1990), esp. 183–206 (“The New Perspective on Paul”) and 215–36 (“Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law”); Dunn, “The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 43 (1992): 1–22; Dunn, “Paul and Justification by Faith,” in *The Road from Damascus: the Impact of Paul’s Conversion on His Life, Thought, and Ministry*, ed. R. N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 85–101; Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 334–89; Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul: Collected Essays* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

²⁴ See Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*.

²⁵ See R. Liebers, *Das Gesetz als Evangelium: Untersuchungen zur Gesetzeskritik des Paulus* (Zurich, CH: Theologischer Verlag, 1989).

²⁶ See N. T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005). See also: Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), in which he takes J. Piper’s critique of the “new perspective” to task (see note 83 below for Piper); Wright, *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978–2013* (London: SPCK, 2013); Wright, *The Paul Debate: Critical Questions for Understanding the Apostle* (London: SPCK, 2016). See the critique of S. Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered: Rethinking a Pauline Theme* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 52–58, and that of Barclay in *Paul and the Gift*, 162–64.

²⁷ See R. Penna, “Le ‘opere della legge’ in s. Paolo e 4QMMT,” *Ricerche Storico-Bibliche* 9 (1997): 155–76; Penna, “Il tema della giustificazione in Paolo: Uno status quaestionis,” in *La giustificazione (Associazione Teologica Italiana)*, ed. G. Ancona (Padua, IT: Messaggero, 1997), 19–64; Penna, “Presente e futuro della giustificazione nella Lettera di Paolo ai Romani,” *Protestantesimo* 71 (2016): 213–26.

²⁸ Others include: N. A. Dahl, “The Doctrine of Justification: Its Social Function and Implications,” in *Studies in Paul* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1977), 95–120; W. D. Davies, “Paul and the People of the New Testament,” *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977–1978): 4–39; L. Gaston, “Paul and the Torah,” in *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, ed. A. T. Davies (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 48–71. See also the extensive work *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, ed. D. A. Carson, M. A. Seifrid, and P. T. O’Brien, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001–2004), the first volume of which is titled *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*.

²⁹ Critiques of Sanders’s theory generally take him to task on this point; see, e.g., M. D. Hooker, “Paul and ‘Covenantal Nomism,’” in *Paul and Paulinism: Essays in Honour of C. K. Barrett*, ed. M. D. Hooker and S. G. Wilson (London: SPCK, 1982), 47–56.

and Pharisees for their legalism and hypocrisy? And more specifically, why did Paul convert? Why was his conversion such a radical one? What did he convert from? What did he convert to? Defenders of the new perspective explain these issues in a variety of different ways, but substantially as follows.

Covenant and Jews, Gentiles and Sinners

Indeed, the Jews did not doubt God's merciful generosity toward them, nor the grace of the covenant, nor their obligation in gratitude to fulfill the law as a necessary sign of their recognition of God's goodness. The theology of election, followed by observation of the law, the *Torah*, was and is at the very heart of Jewish spirituality and life.³⁰ Thus, the "sacred" and not just "practical" significance of male circumcision, of avoiding "unclean" foods, of protecting the holiness of the Temple, and so on.

An important corollary, however, tended at times to result from this outlook and spirituality: Israel came to consider itself as a people set apart, as God's own people, his favorites. Of course, this was true in an important sense. By inference, however, the other peoples of the ancient world would be considered not only as different or distinct, but by the very fact that they were *not* under God's special protection and care, as *Gentiles*, as "sinners," non-fulfillers of the *Torah*. The existence of the covenant would have bound Israel to observance of the law as a kind of defensive barricade surrounding and protecting it from defilement,³¹ but in practice, it also induced the Israelites to take it for granted that the Gentiles were situated in some way *outside* the reach of God's favor and consideration.³²

It is understandable that certain questions would spontaneously arise in the hearts of the Israelites. "Why did God choose my people

³⁰ See the interesting reflection in L. Klenicki, "Exile and Return: Moments in the Jewish Pilgrimage to God (Responding to the Shoah)," *Annales Theologici* 10 (1996): 485–503.

³¹ W. A. Meeks takes up Philo thus: "Israel cannot be harmed by its opponents so long as it is a 'people dwelling alone' (Num 23:9), 'because in virtue of the distinction of their peculiar customs they do not mix with others to depart from the way of their fathers' (Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:278)" (*The First Urban Christians* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983], 97). For an incisive anthropological reflection on "the social function of the Law," see Dunn, "Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law," 216–19. See also J. Neusner, *Judaism: The Evidence of the Mishnah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 72–75.

³² Several New Testament texts show this tendency to confuse "Gentile" and "sinner": Eph 2:11–12; Luke 6:33; Matt 5:47.

to enter into a covenant with them and not others, more powerful, more numerous, perhaps even more faithful and virtuous?" "Why were we invited and others excluded?" "Could it be that God has now abandoned us as a result of our not being faithful to the covenant?" At heart: "What was the purpose of the covenant?" Perhaps some light can be shed on these questions by reflecting on the real motives of Paul's conversion.

Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, and the "Works of the Law"

Paul was quite clear on the matter: he was converted from being a *persecutor of Christians*, the followers of Jesus, and not *as such* from being a faithful Jew, an "observer of the law." "Then they cast him [Stephen] out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. . . . And Saul was consenting to his death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem" (Acts 7:58, 8:1).³³ Clearly, Saul persecuted Christians but fulfilled the law.

Memories of his earlier life in Judaism brought to Paul's mind *in the first place* his violent persecution of those who were later his brothers and sisters in the faith (see Gal 1:13; 1 Cor 15:8–9; Acts 9:4, 22:7, 26:14), not a negative attitude toward Judaism (see Rom 9–11). Some things had not changed. He persecuted out of "zeal" (*zēlos*: Phil 3:6; see also Acts 22:3), but now he preached the good news with unabated vigor (see 2 Cor 8:7; Phil 1:14). Yet the object of his zeal had certainly shifted. Perceiving that Israel's covenant status and distinctiveness were under serious threat (see the discourse of Stephen in Acts 7), Saul, the ardent Pharisee, took it that he was under strict obligation to defend the covenant and the law, and thus safeguard the God-willed privileges, prerogatives, and distinctive quality of Israel.³⁴ He saw that, though Christians considered themselves as being in continuity with the people of Israel, they admitted Gentiles into their assemblies without requiring them to become Jews or to observe the

³³ On the nature and significance of Paul's conversion, see the works of Dunn, and in particular "The Justice of God" (see note 23 above) and "Paul's Conversion: A Light to Twentieth Century Disputes," in *Evangelium, Schriftauslegung, Kirche*, ed. O. Hofius (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996).

³⁴ On the delicate socio-political situation confronting Judaism in the years of early Christianity that induced the Jews, understandably, to believe that their distinctive religious and national prerogatives were under serious threat, see Dunn, "The Incident at Antioch (Gal. 2.11–18)," in *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 129–74, especially 133–36.

prescriptions of the law. And Saul thought that this was unacceptable.

In fact, Paul does not speak of his “conversion” as a turning away from personal sin, an obtaining of personal mercy and forgiveness, as Luther taught. His new life did not look inward, but outward; his fault was not personal, but “ecclesial.” His was not so much, at least apparently, a personal change-about, but rather a change in *mission*.³⁵ The effect of Christ’s appearance on the road to Damascus was one of constituting him as an apostle or missionary to all peoples (see Gal 1:15–16; 1 Cor 9:1–2, 15:8–10). The sin he turned from, which made of him “the least of the apostles,” was *to have persecuted the Church of God* (see 1 Cor 15:9), to have attempted frustrating God’s universal saving will.

This provided Paul with a new way of looking at Scripture. God had not chosen Israel for its virtues or moral superiority to other peoples or for any such reasons. The benefit of the Gentiles was ever in view.³⁶ The original promise to Abraham was ultimately directed toward the Gentiles: “by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves” (Gen 12:3). Deutero-Isaiah had already expressed the notion in proclaiming who Israel was and what Israel was for: it would be “a light to the nations [*goyim*], *that* my [God’s] salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isa 49:6; cf. Isa 6; Jer 1:4–5, 31:31–34).³⁷

³⁵ That Paul’s conversion was essentially a kind of “commissioning,” an apostolic vocation rather than a moral conversion, was clearly established by Eduard Pfaff: “Paul never spoke of his conversion but almost always of his vocation, connecting that event with his mission as an Apostle” (*Die Bekehrung des hl. Paulus in der Exegese des 20. Jahrhundert* [Rome: Officium Libri Catholici, 1942], 169). See also: J. Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (London: Black, 1954); J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (London: SCM, 1959), 11–35; M. Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul* (London: SCM, 1983), 53; Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 7–12; J. Blank, *Paulus: von Jesus zum Christentum* (Munich: Kösel München 1982); S. Kim, *The Origins of Paul’s Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 56; Dunn, “‘A Light to the Gentiles,’ or ‘The End of the Law’? The Significance of the Damascus Road Christophany for Paul,” in *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 89–104; G. Pini, “Vocazione di Paolo o conversione,” in *Atti del I Simposio di Tarso su San Paolo Apostolo*, ed. L. Padovese (Rome: Istituto francescano di spiritualità, 1993), 47–63; and many other authors. “Again and again we find that there is hardly a thought of Paul’s which is not tied up with his mission. . . . The ‘I’ of his writings is not ‘the Christian’ but ‘the Apostle to the Gentiles’” (Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, 12).

³⁶ See Rom 1:1–2; 3:29–31; 9; Eph 4:6; 1 Tim 2:4.

³⁷ Emphasis added. See P. R. Williamson, “Covenant,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 426–29.

In other words, Paul's insistence on justification "by faith alone," without "works of the law," was an expression of the fact that God was ready to accept Gentiles as his children with the same privileges and promises as Jews, yet without requiring them first to "become" Jews, to adopt a new culture, to observe the *Torah* down to the last detail, to subscribe to ritual laws of purification, male circumcision, and so on. In the words of Dunn: "The Christian doctrine of justification by faith begins as Paul's protest not as an individual sinner against a Jewish legalism, but as Paul's protest on behalf of Gentiles against Jewish exclusivism."³⁸

When Paul criticizes the Jews for "boasting," he is not referring only to personal complacency in respect of the "works" they performed. Rather, he rejected Jewish insistence on an undeserved, open-ended *special status* before God in respect to other peoples (see Rom 2:17, 23). The boasting of the Jews in "seeking to establish their own [righteousness]" (Rom 10:3) might seem to mean that God is Lord of Jews only (see Rom 3:27–30).³⁹ Käsemann and Rudolf Bultmann, following the classical Lutheran stance, understood this "boasting" principally in an individualistic and personally self-confiding sense, as an expression of an attitude of self-relying achievement before God.⁴⁰ But this does not respond exactly to the mind of Paul or to the circumstances faced by nascent Christianity.

When Paul hits out against "justification by works," there is no evidence that he is attempting to run down good deeds, faithful obedience, or sincere and persevering striving in fulfilling the law understood as "covenantal nomism" (Sanders), "service of the law" (Ernst Lohmeyer),⁴¹ or "nomistic service" (Joseph Tyson).⁴² Accord-

³⁸ Dunn-Suggate, *The Justice of God*, 25.

³⁹ See Dunn, "Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law," 221–22.

⁴⁰ See Rudolph Bultmann, "καυχάομαι, καύχημα, καύχησις," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 648–54. See also: Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Groble, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1951–1955), 1:242–43; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 102. Bultmann's position is also held by H. Hübner, *Das Gesetz bei Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1980), 102. See also "καύχησις," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. M. Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 2:651–54.

⁴¹ See Ernst Lohmeyer, *Probleme paulinischer Theologie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1955), 67.

⁴² See J. B. Tyson, "'Works of the Law' in Galatians," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1973): 423–31.

ing to the defenders of the “new perspective,” the “works of the law” that Paul rejects refer to an important degree to ceremonial laws of different kinds, especially to male circumcision and food laws, and not to moral prescription or observance as such: “The phrase [‘works of the law’] refers not to an individual’s striving for moral improvement, but to a religious mode of existence . . . which demonstrate[s] the individual’s ‘belongingness’ to the people of the law.”⁴³

When Paul speaks of living “in the flesh” (see Rom 2:28), he is not referring to a merely exterior, sinful, and materialistic lifestyle and attitude over against one that is interior, holy, and spiritual, “in the spirit.” Rather, he refers to the people of Israel taken in terms of their physical identity and racial kinship.⁴⁴ Thus, not being “in the flesh” is equivalent to “not of works” (see Rom 9:8, 11) in the sense that “works of the law” demonstrate national identity, constituting not so much individual righteousness, but “collective righteousness, to the exclusion of the Gentiles.”⁴⁵

It should be noted that the precise technical term “works of the law” may also be found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, which portray the lifestyle and religious practice of the Qumran communities.⁴⁶ As we

⁴³ Dunn, “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law,” 220. Here Dunn treats especially Gal 2:16, but 221–22 treats the same issue in Romans. This whole section of Dunn, entitled “Works of the Law” (219–25), is of particular interest, as is 225–30. See also: K. Kertelge, “Zur Deutung des Rechtfertigungsbegriffs im Galaterbrief,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 12 (1968): 211–22; Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 259. See also Dunn’s “A New Perspective on Paul,” in *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 183–206, and especially the symposium published as *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Tübingen: Mohr, 1996), particularly the papers of H. Lichtenberger and M. Hengel.

⁴⁴ See Dunn, “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law,” 222–23, and James D. G. Dunn, “Jesus—Flesh and Spirit: an Exposition of Romans 1.3–4,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 24 (1973): 44–49.

⁴⁵ Howard, “Christ and the End of the Law,” 336.

⁴⁶ See, for example, 1 QS 5:21, 23; 6:18; 11:2–4; 4 QFlor 1:1–7; 4 Q; and the analysis of Lohmeyer, *Probleme paulinischer Theologie*, 33–74. This position is held by: S. Schultz, “Zur Rechtfertigung aus Gnade in Qumran und bei Paulus,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 56 (1959): 155–85; Dunn, *Romans*, 154; J. Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1965), 49–51; B. Estrada, “La fede e le opere a confronto con il giudaismo,” in *La giustificazione in Cristo*, ed. J. M. Galván (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 67–76. Several texts from the 4QMMT Qumran manuscript indicate quite clearly that common usage of the Pauline syntagma *ergōn nomou* (“works of the law”) refers not so much to fulfillment of ethical actions as such, but rather to particular prescriptions of the law that require obedience and serve as “identity markers” (see E. Quimron and J. Strugnell, *Qumran Cave 4-V*

saw above, these communities can be said to have practiced what Sanders calls "covenantal nomism." They did certainly not think that they could *earn* God's favor or mercy by their works.⁴⁷ Rather, for them, "doing the law is *the condition for remaining elect*, . . . of remaining in the covenant."⁴⁸ However, the concrete existence of the members of the Qumran communities was marked by an attempt to separate themselves consciously from other peoples, even from Israel itself, with a view to avoiding being tainted by the power of sin and the defilement that surrounded them.⁴⁹ Thus, by persevering in the practice of the "works of the law," they were distinguished to some extent from other Jews as a specially chosen part of Israel,⁵⁰ and certainly from the Gentiles, their "enemies" and God's,⁵¹ who were destined to destruction at the end of time.⁵² Remaining within the covenant by persevering in good deeds, in other words, was their way of maintaining and affirming a privileged status, of defining themselves as members of the covenant people.⁵³ It would seem that their fulfillment of the "works of the law" gave them special access to God's favor and grace, and by implication, conditioned his merciful will to save *all* humanity.

And this is precisely what Paul's conversion or newly found mission consisted of: to announce to the whole world that the time had come for God's promises of universal salvation to be fulfilled. Dunn summarizes his apostolic mission and understanding of "works of the law" in the following terms:

[Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994], especially 27–30; F. García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* [Leiden: Brill, 1994], 113–17). Of course, a perfect distinction between ceremonial and moral laws cannot be made; see E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* (London: SCM, 1992). On the significance of the Qumran texts in this regard, see James D. G. Dunn, "4QMMT and Galatians," *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997): 147–53, and Penna, "Le 'opere della legge.'"

⁴⁷ See especially Sanders, *Paul*, 305–12.

⁴⁸ Sanders, *Paul*, 312, 320.

⁴⁹ Sanders, *Paul*, 312–16.

⁵⁰ Sanders, *Paul*, 247.

⁵¹ See Sanders, *Paul*, 248–57. On the notion of the hatred of wicked outsiders as a form of *imitatio Dei*, see A. Jaubert, *La notion d'alliance dans le judaïsme aux abords de l'ère chrétienne* (Paris: Du Seuil, 1963), 186–89.

⁵² See Sanders, *Paul*, 257.

⁵³ The documents of the Qumran community MMT "preserve a vocabulary and manner of theologizing which left its mark on a wider spectrum of Jewish thought and practice, and it was just this sort of theologizing and practice which confronted Paul in Antioch and which he wrote Galatians to counter" (Dunn, "4QMMT and Galatians," 153).

The law serves both to identify Israel as the people of the covenant and to mark them off as distinct from (other) nations. . . . “Works of the law” refer not exclusively but particularly to those requirements which bring to sharp focus the distinctiveness of Israel’s identity. It is because they have such a crucial role in defining “Jewishness,” membership of the covenant people, that circumcision and food laws feature so prominently in discussion of works of the law and righteousness. What lies behind so much of the debate is the identity crisis which Paul’s work among the Gentiles precipitated among his fellow Jewish Christians.⁵⁴

The Significance of Jesus’s Condemnation of Hypocrisy and Legalism

The following fact is also worth noting. Jesus’s forceful recrimination of the Jews, in particular of the “scribes and Pharisees,” seems to respond to his perception of a hypocritical exterior legalism, a disregard for weightier matters of the law, an attitude that would, in fact, eventually be instrumental in his execution.⁵⁵ Paul’s outright rejection of “works of the law” for the sake of true “faith in Christ Jesus” would seem to confirm this message, condemning all human self-righteousness in God’s sight.

However, a closer look at the Gospel texts shows that Jesus’s resolute

⁵⁴ Dunn, “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law,” 223.

⁵⁵ Recent investigations in the area of comparative studies of Judaism and Christianity commonly tend to redress the predominantly negative image that the Gospels seem to offer of “the Jews,” and especially of the Pharisee party, whose life and spirituality, it is said, have been consistently misrepresented in Christian theology; see W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 256–315; J. König, *Jews and Christians in Dialogue: New Testament Foundations* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1979), chs. 4 and 6; F. Mussner, *Traktat über die Juden* (Munich: Kösel, 1979). Some authors, often Jews attempting to “reclaim” Jesus, would go so far as to say that the Pharisees took no part in the death of Jesus. See, for example: H. Maccoby, *The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986), 45–49; E. Rivkin, *What Crucified Jesus? Messianism, Pharisaism, and the Development of Christianity* (New York: UAHC Press, 1984). Others suggested that Jesus himself was a Pharisee, for example: John T. Pawlinkowski, *Christ in the Light of Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (New York: Paulist, 1982); H. Maccoby, *Jesus the Pharisee* (London: SCM, 2003); E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985). Despite the real coincidence between Jesus’s teaching and that of the Pharisees on many fronts, Christians generally do not see the latter position as tenable; see S. Westerholm, *Jesus and Scribal Authority* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1978), esp. 128; Dunn, “Pharisees, Sinners and Jesus,” in *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 61–86.

condemnation of the hypocritical exteriority of the scribes and Pharisees did not respond only to the possibility that they might be seeking after *divine* approval of their good works, but rather also to the fact that they sought approval “from men” (Matt 6:2–5). His insistence on the preponderance of interior rectitude (see Matt 5–7) did not imply that his disciples should not fulfill the law (Matt 5:17–20), but rather that their actions and thoughts should be turned in all sincerity and simplicity toward their “Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16). Such sincere interiority was by no means lacking in Old Testament spirituality (see, for example, Deut 6:5), nor is it absent in the spirituality found in intertestamentary literature, as we have seen. Jesus’s indignant remonstrances toward “the scribes and Pharisees” was motivated, so it would seem, by the way in which they relied on a scrupulous exterior fulfillment of the law, even to the point of neglecting the “weightier matters,” while excluding from God’s favor those who did not fulfill the law with such exactitude. It was the legalistic “exteriority” of their behavior that showed that they were excessively interested in impressing on others that *they* were God’s favorites, the true Israel, and the rest were not. They attempted to “stay in” by acting the part of the true Israelite. Jesus gives the reason for his remonstrances: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! *because* you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in” (Matt 23:13).⁵⁶ John the Baptist had already said something of the kind to the Jews: “*do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’; . . . Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*” (Matt 3:9–10).⁵⁷

Though contemporary studies have certainly made a most welcome contribution toward taking the sharp edges off the negative understanding many Christians have had of the frame of mind and spirituality of the Pharisees,⁵⁸ the *same message* comes across in both

⁵⁶ Emphasis added.

⁵⁷ Emphasis added.

⁵⁸ For a good overview, see Dunn, “Pharisees, Sinners and Jesus,” who comes to the following conclusions: “The purity of the meal table was an important concern among many of the Pharisees of Jesus’ time” (65); “In the middle decades of the first century, Pharisees were characterized by zeal for the law and concern to practice that pattern of life which maintained the righteousness of the covenant and Israel’s status as people of God” (69); “That there were at the time of Jesus a number of Pharisees, and probably a significant body of Pharisees, who felt passionately concerned to preserve, maintain, and defend Israel’s status as the people of the covenant and the righteousness of the law

the teaching of Jesus and that of Paul:⁵⁹ the saving power of God is not limited to a restricted group of individuals who establish a boundary between themselves and the rest by insisting on the strict observance of a series of burdensome statutes and ceremonial regulations. Israel was chosen as God's people so that his grace and salvation would reach to the ends of earth (see Acts 1:8). As we shall see now, there is a clear continuity between the message of Jesus and that of Paul and that this continuity is not unrelated to that which exists between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.

Paul, Apostle of Jesus Christ

Paul's calling or "commissioning" brought him to realize that he could no longer consider himself "in" by attempting to keep others "out."⁶⁰ He could not truly remain a Christian believer were he not to strive to bring others, everybody else, "in" with him: "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16).

However, in the context of the debate about the "new perspective," it is at times suggested that Paul's vocation did not consist primarily of a commission to evangelize the whole world. Such a conviction would have arisen afterward, somewhat contingently.⁶¹ The nucleus

... must be regarded as virtually certain" (71); "The more that members of the Jewish community departed from the standards which the Pharisees as a rule saw to be necessary to maintain covenant righteousness, the more likely these Pharisees would be to dub them 'sinners'" (77); "It is very likely that the portrayal of Pharisees, sinners, and Jesus in passages like Mark 2 and 7 accords very closely with the historical realities of Jesus' ministry and may not be discounted as a retrojection of later controversies into the period of Jesus' ministry" (80); and finally: "Far from being left with an uncomfortable wedge between Jesus and Gentile Christianity, the overall perspective we have gained ... enables us to recognize an important line of continuity between Jesus and his successors [Paul for example]. For behind the particular objections and charges leveled against Jesus was the central fact that Jesus was ignoring and abolishing boundaries which more sectarian attitudes had erected *within* Israel. ... [This] helps us see how a Christianity which broke through the boundaries of Israel's own distinctiveness sprang from a Jesus who posed such a challenge to the boundary between Pharisee and sinner" (80). Dunn concludes: "In other words, the recognition of the Jewishness of Jesus need not separate Jesus from the Christianity he founded, just as the recognition of the Christian significance of Jesus need not separate him from the faith of his own people" (80–81).

⁵⁹ See Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament*, 51–52.

⁶⁰ The terminology is from E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1983).

⁶¹ See, e.g.: J. Dupont, "The Conversion of Paul, and Its Influence on His Understanding of Salvation by Faith," in *Apostolic History and the Gospel: Biblical and*

of his vocation that resulted from the Damascus Christophany should be considered, rather, in terms of a special union with and knowledge of the crucified and risen Lord, who is the expected Messiah.⁶² His new faith and calling lay in the identification of the Messiah with the one who had been crucified.⁶³

Of course, the claim is substantially valid. The occasion and *res* of Paul's conversion was undoubtedly his singular encounter and subsequent union with the crucified one who had risen from the dead by God's power, and on account of whom he knew "nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). Paul's whole life became a "being with Christ," and as a result, an acting in conformity with this "new being,"⁶⁴ a mystical vision of all things "in Christ." But it should also be said that Paul's "commissioning" to evangelize *was* a consequence, and a very direct one, of his personally turning toward Jesus Christ and coming to belong to his "body."

The true, personal object of his calling was indeed the risen Lord Jesus Christ, whom he encountered on the road to Damascus and whom he had previously persecuted in his members (see Acts 9:4–5). Yet turning away from persecuting the Christians and turning toward evangelizing the Gentiles did not result, for Paul, simply from a new *understanding* of the full meaning of the Scriptures and of the law, the culmination perhaps of an extended reflection on the extent of God's universal saving will, at best occasioned or consolidated by his encounter with Christ. Rather, his calling to universal evangelization was the *direct and necessary consequence* of his encounter with the risen Lord. "He who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, *in order that* [*hina*] I might preach him among the Gentiles" (Gal

Historical Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce on His 60th Birthday, ed. W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1970), 176–94, at 193; M. S. Enslin, *Reapproaching Paul* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1972), 64–65.

⁶² See, e.g.: H. G. Wood, "The Conversion of Paul: Its Nature, Antecedents and Consequences," *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954–1955): 276–82; P. H. Menoud, "Revelation and Tradition: The Influence of Paul's Conversion on his Theology," *Interpretation* 7 (1953): 131–41.

⁶³ It has sometimes been noted that Sanders's theory of associating Jewish and Pauline "covenantal nomism" does not take the centrality of Christ sufficiently into account; see R. H. Gundry, "Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul," *Biblica* 66 (1985): 1–38.

⁶⁴ See Paul O'Callaghan, "The Mysticism of Paul of Tarsus," in *In Dialogue with God: Mystics in World Religions*, ed. K. Acharya, U. Vaidya, L. Namjoshi, and M. Iturbe (Mumbai and New Delhi, India: Somaiya, 2009), 161–82.

1:15–16).⁶⁵ These two elements that defined Paul's new life—being with and belonging to Christ and preaching the good news everywhere—belong inseparably to one another, explain one another, and require one another.⁶⁶ However, the intimate link between the content (“being with Christ”) and consequences (universal evangelization) of Paul's conversion may be understood in two possible ways.

Some authors⁶⁷ suggest that, since Christians before Paul had already posed “salvation through faith in Christ” and “salvation through works of the law” as distinct alternatives to one another, his encounter with Christ and subsequent faith in him meant simply that observance of the law was no longer a viable way to salvation and had to be resisted with the same energy (*zēlos*) with which Christians had previously been persecuted. In this sense, the coming of Christ would mark in time “the end of the law [*telos gar nomou*], that everyone who has faith may be justified” (Rom 10:4): the law would have no more effect. Thus, Paul's encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus would come to mean “the bankruptcy of the law and the all-sufficiency of Christ,”⁶⁸ the rejection of the law and its substitution by Christ. Likewise, it is argued that, according to Paul, since Christ had been crucified—“cursed *by the law*” (see Gal 3:13)—but had been vindicated by God, the law had lost all power of being God's instrument of salvation.⁶⁹ This is, of course, a restatement of the classical Lutheran position: justification by faith simply excludes seeking salvation through fulfillment of the works of the law.

⁶⁵ Emphasis added.

⁶⁶ The fruitful tension between them may be perceived in Paul's words to the Philippians: “To live is Christ, and to die is gain. If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and *be with Christ*, for that is far better. But *to remain in the flesh* is more necessary on your account” (Phil 1:21–24); emphasis added.

⁶⁷ For example: Ulrich Wilkens, “Die Bekehrung des Paulus als religionsgeschichtliches Problem,” in *Rechtfertigung als Freiheit: Paulusstudien* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag 1974), 11–32; P. Stuhlmacher, “‘Das Ende des Gesetzes’: Über Ursprung und Ansatz der paulinischen Theologie,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 67 (1970): 14–39; H. Weder, *Das Kreuz Jesu bei Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1981), 187–93.

⁶⁸ Dunn, “‘A Light to the Gentiles’, or ‘The End of the Law?’” 92.

⁶⁹ Dunn, “‘A Light to the Gentiles’, or ‘The End of the Law?’” 92–93, and in greater detail: Dunn, “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law”; Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 25–26; Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 249–51; Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, 268–311.

Other authors argue that this position, though plausible from an exegetical standpoint, does not hold up when it is observed that, in all probability, most Christians in Paul's time "did not see any antithesis between faith in Christ and a life regulated by the *Torah*."⁷⁰ Besides, for Saul the Jew, before his conversion, the crucifixion of Jesus confirmed purely and simply that God had rejected and disavowed him, excluding him from the covenant, in keeping Deuteronomy's injunction: "Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree" (Gal 3:13; cf. Deut 21:23). On this account, he took it that Christianity itself had been repudiated by God and its members thenceforth excluded from the divine promises. However, Paul's encounter with the risen Lord, "the Damascus road Christophany, must obviously have turned such a line of reasoning completely on its head, for it indicated clearly that God *had* accepted and vindicated this one precisely as the crucified."⁷¹ "The curse which was removed by Christ's death . . . was the curse which had previously prevented [the covenant] blessing from reaching the Gentiles, the curse of a wrong understanding of the law. . . . It was *that* curse which Jesus had brought deliverance from by his death."⁷² That the Gentiles came to be accepted by God is not, therefore, a historical accident occasioned by excessive Jewish attachment to the letter of the law and subsequent falling from divine favor. Rather, it fit into God's eternal design that came to fulfillment in Christ, whose fidelity to "the law," to doing the will of his Father, brought about his execution on the perceived charge of blasphemy, and thus his exaltation (see Phil 2:6–11). Belief in the crucified one as the Christ, or God's Anointed One, therefore, did not require the repudiation of the law as such, Christ's own "pedagogue" (Gal 3:24), but rather meant that man could not be saved by a mere external observance of the law, conditioned furthermore by a desire to demarcate God's favor and restrict his saving will.⁷³

⁷⁰ Dunn, "A Light to the Gentiles', or 'The End of the Law'?" 99.

⁷¹ Dunn, "A Light to the Gentiles', or 'The End of the Law'?" 100. See also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Crucifixion in Ancient Palestine, Qumran Literature and the New Testament," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978): 493–513.

⁷² Dunn, "Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law," 229.

⁷³ The following text of Dunn's is worth citing: "Christ in his death had put himself under the curse and outside the covenant blessing, . . . that is, put himself in the place of the Gentile! Yet God vindicated him! There, God is for the Gentiles; and consequently the law could no longer serve as a boundary dividing Jew from Gentile. In short, Christ in his death had effectively abolished this disqualification, by himself being disqualified. It is the out-working

Living “in Christ” and living “off Christ,” Paul saw clearly that the purpose of God’s special election of Israel (see Isa 6, 49:1–6; Jer 1:4–5) was the salvation of all peoples and, inseparably, that this universal saving will culminate in the coming of the long-awaited Messiah “according to the *revelation of the mystery* which was kept secret for long ages but *is now disclosed* and through the prophetic writings *is made known to all nations*” (Rom 16:25–26).⁷⁴ The coming of the Messiah coincides directly with the fulfillment of God’s will and promise, the salvation of all peoples, and thus Christ is the “end,” or “fulfillment” and culmination (*telos*; Rom 10:4), of the law.⁷⁵ And so, Paul’s two primary convictions (that Jesus Christ is the crucified-risen Lord in whom God has provided for the salvation of all mankind, and that he [Paul] was called to be Apostle to the Gentiles) go hand in hand, explain one another, and even require one another.⁷⁶

The faith of Paul is no longer directed, as a zealous Pharisee, to the words of prophets already defunct or toward the impersonal *Torah*, which must be studied, understood, correctly interpreted, and defended at all costs, but rather toward the living Christ, risen Lord and universal Savior, Image and Wisdom of God made visible.⁷⁷ It is of its very essence a *fides Christi*, a faith directed toward and determined by Christ, a faith *in* him. And it was none other than this newly found, personally lived faith that spurred Paul on to evangelize all peoples without exception (see 2 Cor 5:14). Made a son of God in

of this train of thought which we see unfolding in the incidents described in Galatians 2, and climaxing in 2.21: ‘If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.’ Christ’s death was effective, in Paul’s view, precisely because it broke through the restrictiveness of the typical Jewish understanding of God’s righteousness, and demonstrated that the grace of God was not to be experienced apart from the law” (“Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law,” 230).

⁷⁴ Emphasis added.

⁷⁵ This is the common Patristic, Scholastic, and Reformed reading of Rom 10:4 up to, though excluding, liberal Protestant authors such as A. von Harnack. The notion of *telos* as the temporal end (cessation, abrogation of the law) is found, for example, in Conzelmann, Käsemann, and others; see M. A. Tabet, “Rm 10,4 nel dialogo ebraico-cristiano,” in Galván, *La giustificazione in Cristo*, 89–106.

⁷⁶ See Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, 41, 66–70; Sanders, *Paul*, 439–42. Paul’s determining, driving faith in Christ is linked besides, to an important degree, to his conviction of the nearness of the end of the age.

⁷⁷ See especially Kim, *The Origins of Paul’s Gospel*.

Christ,⁷⁸ incorporated into him and becoming a member of his body, Paul perceived directly and almost intuitively that “*in Christ Jesus* you are all sons of God, through faith. . . . [Therefore, ‘in Christ’] there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26, 28).⁷⁹ And Paul saw that “the Gospel which [Christians] took as their common starting-point . . . [would be] distorted in its fundamentals if . . . the outworkings of the gospel and Christology were not followed through,”⁸⁰ if Judaizing Christians were to have their way in reinstating strict observation of the law in order to ensure salvation.

One final observation to tie up the question is in order. The “end of the law” in Christ does not mean its abrogation for Christians. Linguistically, the term *telos*, as referred to the Law (Rom 10:4), may mean either “termination” or “fulfillment,” conclusion or goal.⁸¹ George Howard writes: “Whatever explanation scholars give, the general consensus is that the law, so far as man is concerned, has come to an end. Either it has been terminated completely or man finds its fulfillment in Christ. Whichever the case, the result is the same. The system of law, as known before, has been ended by Christ, and the new eon of grace and faith now prevails.”⁸² But neither did the coming of Christ involve a mere quantitative improvement on the Jewish way of fulfilling the law.⁸³ If such were the case, then the

⁷⁸ A. Pitta maintains that the theological center of Galatians is that of our divine sonship in Christ (*Disposizione e messaggio della Lettera ai Galati* [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1982]). See also: B. Byrne, *Sons of God, Seed of Abraham: a Study of the Idea of the Sonship of God of all Christians in Paul against the Jewish Background* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1979); Paul O'Callaghan, *Children of God in the World: An Introduction to Theological Anthropology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 247–77.

⁷⁹ Emphasis added.

⁸⁰ James D. G. Dunn, “The Theology of Galatians,” in *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 242–64, at 248.

⁸¹ On Rom 10:4, see Howard, “Christ and the End of the Law”; R. Badenas, *Christ the End of the Law: Romans 10.4 in Pauline Perspective* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1985), 7–37; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, Word Biblical Commentary 38B (Dallas, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 596–98; Tabet, “Rm 10,4 nel dialogo ebraico-cristiano,” 91–95. The discussion on Romans 10:4 has been centered, understandably, on the two possible meanings of the term *telos*, “termination” and “fulfillment.”

⁸² Howard, “Christ and the End of the Law,” 332.

⁸³ This is the position held in: C. E. B. Cranfield, “St. Paul and the Law,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17 (1964): 43–68; Cranfield, “Has the Old Testament Law a Place in Christian Life? A Response to Professor Westerholm,” *Irish Biblical*

action of Christ's Spirit would be at the service of the law, which would retain its primacy. Fulfillment of the law for Christians finds its roots in their belonging to Christ in such a way that the law is carried out primarily by God through Christ's Spirit *in* the Christian, not so much *by* the Christian.⁸⁴ Howard concludes: "The very aim and goal of the law was the ultimate unification of all nations under the God of Abraham according to the promise. In this sense Christ is the *telos* of the law; he was its goal to everyone who believes. . . . Rom 10:4 is one of the greatest of Paul's statements concerning his doctrine of the inclusion of the gentiles."⁸⁵

*The "New Perspective": A Summing Up and a Rapprochement*⁸⁶

According to Sanders, Dunn, Wright, and others, Paul's teaching on "justification by faith and not by works of the law" means that we

Studies 15, no. 2 (1993): 50–64; T. R. Schreiner, *The Law and its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of the Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), esp. 149–78.

⁸⁴ See L. E. Keck, "The Law and 'the Law of Sin and Death' (Rom. 8:1–4): Reflections on the Spirit and Ethics in Paul," in *The Divine Helmsman: Studies on God's Control of Human Events*, ed. J. L. Crenshaw and S. Sandmel (New York: Ktav, 1980), 41–57.

⁸⁵ Howard, "Christ and the End of the Law," 336–37.

⁸⁶ Reviews on the debate we have considered abound: R. H. Gundry, "Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul," *Biblica* 66 (1985): 1–38; B. Riecke, "Paulus über das Gesetz," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 41 (1985): 237–57; John M. G. Barclay, "Paul and the Law: Observations on Some Recent Debates," *Themelios* 12, no. 1 (1986): 5–15; Barclay, *Obedying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988); J. Lambrecht, "Gesetzesverständnis bei Paulus," in *Das Gesetz im Neuen Testament*, ed. K. Kertelge (Freiburg: Herder, 1986), 86–127; D. J. Moo, "Paul and the Law in the Last Ten Years," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40 (1987): 287–307; F. F. Bruce, "Paul and the Law in Recent Research," in *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity*, ed. B. Lindars (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 1988), 115–25; G. Klein, "Ein Sturmfeld der Paulusforschung," *Verkündigung und Forschung* 33 (1988): 40–56; S. Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988); T. R. Schreiner, "The Abolition and Fulfillment of the Law in Paul," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 35 (1989): 47–74; B. L. Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul* (Leiden: Brill 1989); R. Penna, "Il problema della legge nelle lettere di San Paolo," in *L'apostolo Paolo: studi di esegesi e teologia* (Cinisello Balsamo, IT: Edizioni paoline, 1991), 496–518; Penna, "Il tema della giustificazione in Paolo. Uno status quaestionis," in Associazione Teologica Italiana, *La giustificazione*, ed. Giovanni Ancona (Padua, IT: Messaggero, 1997), 19–64; M. A. Seifrid, *Justification by Faith: the Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); as well as the works of the principal authors, Dunn and Wright.

are justified or saved by *faith in Jesus Christ*, God's Son and our Savior, being incorporated into his "body," the Church, and *not by good works*, not by *remaining within a privileged community* through the observation of certain exterior precepts that in some way could localize and ensure God's favor and grace toward humanity. Hence, justification is not only a personal question for a Christian with implications of a predominantly individual and interior kind, but an essentially ecclesiological, indeed apostolic, one.⁸⁷ Certain "works," or more exactly, certain forms of behavior incompatible with faith in Jesus Christ, should be avoided. But the works to be avoided are not, as such, those in which the individual strives to express gratitude to God and obedience to his will, but rather "works" that, in their intentionality and performance, attempt in one way or another to reinforce one's belonging to the community of the saved *to the exclusion of others* from such a community, works of a ceremonial and social, perhaps "ecclesiastical," kind that condition the apostolic mission of Christians.

As was noted earlier on, many contemporary authors maintain a more classical (Lutheran) approach to this vast and complex exegetical question, holding that the Pauline "works of the law," insofar as they are opposed to "faith in Christ," refer to the law *in general*,⁸⁸ and not only to mere ceremonial laws as boundary conditions that reinforce covenant identity.

Perhaps in real terms, the positions are not as far removed from one another as it might seem at first sight.⁸⁹ The classical Lutheran

⁸⁷ On the question of the ecclesiological aspects of justification among biblical exegetes, see especially: W. Klaiber, *Rechtfertigung und Gemeinde: Ein Untersuchung zum paulinischen Kirchenverständnis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1982); A. von Dobbeler, *Glaube als Teilhabe: Historische und semantische Grundlagen der paulinischen Theologie und Ekklesiologie des Glaubens* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1987), 97–100; J. Roloff, *Die Kirche im Neuen Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1993). See also O'Callaghan, *Children of God*, 340–74.

⁸⁸ See especially: Hübner, *Das Gesetz bei Paulus*; J. Reumann, "Righteousness" in the New Testament (New York: Paulist, 1982); J. Piper, *The Future of Justification: a Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007); J.-C. Maschmeier, *Rechtfertigung bei Paulus: eine Kritik alter und neuer Paulusperspektiven* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010). Westerholm says that "there is more of Paul in Luther than many twentieth-century scholars are inclined to allow" (*Israel's Law and the Church's Faith*, 173).

⁸⁹ Westerholm in particular has maintained that behind the "social function of the law" (Dunn) is to be found the more fundamental issue of the relationship between personal salvation and human activity (see *Israel's Law and the Church's*

position rightly hits out at those who complacently seek to live lives pleasing to God on the basis of their own self-given justice, as if their “good behavior” was capable of winning divine favor. However, does it really matter whether this attitude comes across as, on the one hand, an individualistic striving to cross the divine favor barrier by the abundance or self-centered rectitude of good works or, on the other, as an endeavor before society to show that one is worthier than the rest of humanity to receive and retain God’s gifts? Putting the same thing in positive terms: the sense of personal unworthiness and mistrust in one’s own person and works resulting from the faith-perceived awareness of the abundant and merciful goodness of God necessarily expresses itself in the joy of communicating that goodness to the *whole* of sinful mankind, not retaining it jealously for oneself. “You have without pay, give without pay” (Matt 10:8). Conversely, should God’s gifts be monopolized or consciously withheld from others, this can only mean that one considers *oneself* naturally worthy *coram Deo* of having received such gifts in the first place, while others are not considered to retain such a standing. As Dunn comments:

It is important to appreciate that both emphases are rooted in a fundamental assertion of the sufficiency of faith; both protest against any attempt to add or require something more than faith on the human side when computing what makes a person acceptable to God. The difference which becomes apparent in earlier chapters [of Galatians] is that the added factor against which Paul himself was protesting was not individual human effort, but the assumption that ethnic origin and identity is a factor in determining the grace of God and its expression. Ethnic origin and identity is a different way of assessing human worth, but one more fundamental than the question of ability to perform good works. What Paul protested against was even more insidious—the assumption that the way people are constituted by birth rules them in or rules them out from receiving God’s grace. Paul’s protest was not against a high regard for righteousness, against dedicated devotion to God’s law. It was rather against the corollary to such devotion: that failure to share in that devotion meant exclusion from the life of the

Faith; “Paul and the Law in Romans 9–11,” in Dunn, *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, 215–37).

world to come, and that the majority of peoples of the world were in principle so excluded.⁹⁰

It is not mistaken for a Christian to strive to fulfill God's commandments with all the God-given energies he or she has received. Besides, it is impossible for a Christian not to belong to the saved community, the Church, Christ's own "body." However, to be faithful to the inner truth of this "incorporation," every Christian must strive to communicate the Gospel of Christ to the whole of humanity, to be an apostle.

A Recent Perspective on Paul: John Barclay's *Paul and the Gift*

Forty years have gone by since Sanders penned his influential *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. Although his analysis has left a clear mark on Pauline studies as a whole, several authors, principally of the Lutheran tradition, have opposed it.⁹¹ On the whole, they have insisted on a classical Lutheran reading of Paul, according to which "good works" were not to be considered as mere ceremonial boundary conditions for belonging to God's people, but as attempts sinful creatures make to win God's favor on their own terms. It is fair to say that this was the fundamental intuition Luther found in Paul's letters.

However a recent, major book by the Anglican biblical scholar John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*,⁹² has changed the framework of the debate in more ways than one,⁹³ mainly by taking Sanders's position to task and challenging the "new perspective." Interestingly, the structure of the work is not unlike that of Sanders. After an extensive introduction to the anthropological notion of gift and grace in Greek thought, Roman jurisprudence, Jewish religion, and modern sociology/anthropology, Barclay considers how grace has been understood by important Christian authors (mainly Protestants): Marcion in the

⁹⁰ James D. G. Dunn, "The Influence of Galatians in Christian Thought," in *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 133–45, at 143–44.

⁹¹ See note 83.

⁹² See Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*. This work will be subsequently cited parenthetically by page number in the text.

⁹³ Among many reviews, see C. K. Rowe, "Grace's Perfections," *First Things*, April 2016, 49–52; T. R. Schreiner, "Paul and the Gift: A Review Article," *Themelios* 41, no. 1 (2016): 52–58; P. O'Callaghan, in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 18, no. 4 (2016): 474–77; C. T. Holmes in *Review and Expositor* 115, no. 1 (2018): 132–4.

context of Gnosticism, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Barth, Bultmann, Käsemann, J. Louis Martyn, Alain Dadiou (a professed atheist who is a student of Paul), and especially Sanders. The notion of divine gift is then considered extensively in the context of Second Temple Judaism: the Wisdom of Solomon, Philo of Alexandria, the Qumran *Hodayot*, Pseudo-Philo's work *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*, and 4 Ezra (many of these works were studied likewise by Sanders, who refers to this period with the term "Palestinian Judaism"). Barclay's own contribution to the debate may be found in the two extensive and detailed exegetical chapters that attempt to explain Paul's view of gift and grace in Galatians (ch. 3) and Romans (ch. 4) mainly in terms of what he calls the perfection of "incongruity," quite in line with Luther.

The Complexity and Perfections of "Grace"

Barclay accepts Sanders's major thesis to the effect that Second Temple Judaism, contemporaneous with nascent Christianity, did not deny the priority of divine grace among the Jews and that it thus was not in direct opposition to Paul's view of justification by faith as found in Romans and Galatians. This does not mean, however, that one and all had the *same idea* of what *divine grace itself* meant in the first place. "Grace is everywhere in Second Temple Judaism but is not everywhere the same. Instead of uniformity, a careful examination of the texts indicates diversity in their representations of divine beneficence" (6).⁹⁴ He observes that Sanders "unwittingly created a spurious uniformity within Judaism" (564).

In fact, Barclay shows that Christian "grace" is a more complex issue than either Luther or Sanders would allow. According to the former, God's grace is "incongruous" or underserved for fallen human beings and reflects simply the total unworthiness of the receiver, who is a sinner. According to Sanders's interpretation of Paul and Second

⁹⁴ See the comment of Schreiner: "Barclay rightly notes, however, a crucial mistake in Sanders's work, for Sanders understands the priority of grace as if it also entails the incongruity of grace. But, says Barclay, it is clear that the Rabbis believed grace was given to those who were worthy (in accord with the view of gift in antiquity). Sanders operates as if the Augustinian view of grace is shared by the Rabbis. Since he fails to define carefully what grace means, he lumps together priority with incongruity. . . . One major conclusion Barclay draws . . . is that interpreters often disagree because they do not realize that they are operating with different conceptions of grace" ("Paul and the Gift: A Review Article," 54).

Temple Judaism, grace, besides being “incongruous,” is also “prior,” in the sense that it is offered to humans before being demanded: grace comes before law and works. Luther and “new perspective” interpreters may disagree on the outworkings of Paul’s teaching on grace, but according to Barclay, neither have taken fully into account the real meaning of grace in all its richness and complexity, reducing it rather to certain basic aspects of God’s loving self-giving to humans, approaching Paul with a “master concept” of grace, as it were.

On the basis of several philosophical and sociological studies of gift that emphasize the notion of reciprocity between giver and receiver (especially Marcel Mauss’s influential work *Essai sur le don*, written in the 1920s), Barclay insists on the complexity and polyvalence of the terms “gift” and “grace” in Scripture and Christian theology. He describes six “perfections” (or “conceptual extensions”) of gift, all of which are to be found at different moments of the theology of grace and Christian spirituality (69–75): (1) “superabundance,” or lavishness, which refers to the scale or permanence of the gift with respect to the receiver (one might think of the disproportionate quality of the gift of “eternal life” for those who believe [John 6:47; see also 2 Cor 9:8]); (2) “priority,” the time frame within which the gift is given, in the sense that gift-giving is initiated without a previous gift having been obtained from the recipient and is undeserved, an aspect that may be seen, for example, in the association Paul establishes in Romans (8:29) between predestination and justification; (3) “singularity,” which reflects the motivation behind the gift, the goodness or benevolence that motivates the giver, such as in John’s affirmation of “God as love” (1 John 4:8, 16); (4) “incongruity,” which indicates that the gift is simply undeserved on account of the unworthiness of the receiver, a central tenet of Paul’s teaching, especially in Galatians; (5) “efficacy,” insofar as the giving of grace achieves a transformation of the receiver, as found in Paul’s doctrines of “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; etc.) and “regeneration” (1 Cor 6:11; Titus 3:5); and lastly (6) the perfection of “non-circularity,” which refers to the absence of response to the gift offered, suggested, for example, in 1 Corinthians 4:7 (“What have you that you did not receive?”).

Barclay observes that “the perfections are not exclusive to particular authors”: “They can coexist and overlap with one another. To perfect one facet of gift-giving does not imply the perfection of any or all of the others” (75). In this way, he strives to maintain the semantic latitude of the term “grace.” Barclay goes on to explain that “different scholars assume different perfections of grace” (175),

and in describing the unfolding of grace's conceptual history, we discover that it is a highly complex reality. Philo of Alexandria, for example, insisted upon its superabundance and singularity. The gnostic Marcion emphasized the singularity of grace and sought to distance the good God from any form of judgment. So did the Stoic Seneca, who insisted also on the perfection of efficacy. Augustine found three of these perfections in grace, which he combined richly with one another: priority, incongruity, and efficacy. In Calvin, "singularity" is absent in that he allows for the possibility of predestination to condemnation, but differing from Luther, he includes "efficacy" as a perfection of grace. Barclay holds that Luther gave particular attention to two perfections of grace: *incongruity*, the fact that it is completely undeserved by humans, and *non-circularity*, in that believers are never in a position to give anything back to God (except gratitude and praise). Although many other issues in *Paul and the Gift* could be profitably considered, Barclay's dialogue with Luther's understanding of grace is of particular interest.

The "Incongruity" of Grace in Luther

On the one hand, Barclay finds Luther's notion of *incongruity* deeply present in the letter to the Galatians: here the Gospel "stands or falls" (370), to use the classical Lutheran expression. The reformer's preaching, he says, "constituted a brilliant re-contextualization of Pauline theology in the conditions of the sixteenth-century church" (572). "The achievement of Luther was to translate Paul's missionary theology of grace into an urgent and perpetual *inward mission*, directed to the church, but especially to the heart of each believer. . . . Paul's theology is re-preached to effect the *perpetual conversion* of believers, who need to learn over and again to receive the gift of God and banish the false opinion that their works will merit salvation. The gospel consists of a mission to the self and a daily return to baptism" (571). Barclay specifies the perfection of grace "as a *permanent incongruity* that makes the Lutheran theology of grace stand out from its context" (102). For Protestants, "the object of Paul's critique is not the content of the works, but the 'doing' of them, not the criteria by which worth is measured, but the purported achievement of worth" (572). This coincides with the position of Sanders, who emphasized that the covenant is unmerited and observance of the law follows on from it, which is what he means by "covenantal nomism."

Paul insists that "the Christ-gift, as the definitive act of divine beneficence, is given without regard to worth" (350). In Antioch,

Paul opposed Peter neither because observance of the law could earn salvation (the old perspective) nor because the Torah involved ethnic or covenantal exclusivity (the new perspective). Rather, the Christian Gospel is based on a gift that has inverted one and the other, both circumcision and uncircumcision. Hence, those who observe the Torah are not necessarily the ones marked out for salvation, but rather those who are “marked by faith in Christ” (377). For this reason, Barclay holds that the much-discussed Pauline expression *pistis Christou* does not refer to any personal “faith” or trust of Christ in the Father, but rather to our faith *in* him (the objective genitive reading), a position that coincides with classical Lutheranism. He concludes that “faith is not an alternative human achievement nor a refined human spirituality, but a declaration of bankruptcy, a radical and shattering recognition that the only capital in God’s economy is the gift of Christ crucified and risen” (383–84). In contrast to Wright’s covenantal reading of justification by faith, Barclay states: “What arrives at ‘the fullness of time’. . . is not a ‘shock’ at the end of a ‘many-staged’ plan, but God’s counter-statement to the previous conditions of the possible, a new creation in the midst of the present evil age” (412). He observes further that “Paul’s theology of grace is coherent with emphasis on the necessity of human obedience not so much via the *efficacy* of grace (with God as the acting agent in believers’ action) as via its *incongruity* (with human righteousness as the product of a divinely created life that is wholly at odds with the normal human condition)” (503). That is to say, Paul’s insistence on priority and efficacy does not mean believers should act in a purely passive way. In any case, with Galatians’ emphasis on “incongruity,” the Reformation reading of Paul is vindicated to an important degree. But that is not the whole story.

The “Non-Circularity” of Grace in Luther

On the other hand, Luther radicalizes the incongruity of grace by insisting on its *non-circularity*. Once received, it remains forever undeserved and provides no means of giving anything “back” to God. Thus, “human praise and obedience are never *instrumental* in Protestant theology, never part of a *repeatable* pattern of gift and return” (56). Barclay observes that “Luther attempted to sever completely the pattern of interested circularity by which human works, offered to God, were understood and intended to elicit future benefit or reward” (106). He notes that “one of the fundamental principles of Greek social relations,

both among humans and in the relationship between humans and gods, was the expectation of reciprocity in gifts, favors and ‘good turns’” (24). Yet he observes that the popular notion of “grace” understood as a pure, non-reciprocated gift has been successfully deconstructed by the philosopher Jacques Derrida (61–63): “Derrida’s construction of the impossibility of the gift is based on the premise that the gift *by definition* should be free of reciprocity or return” (63). Derrida concludes that Mauss’s “‘monumental work’ speaks of everything but the gift in this sense, for it deals with economy, exchange, contract, it speaks of raising the stakes, sacrifice, gift *and* countergift” (62).

Barclay’s observation is an important one: the notion of non-reciprocated gift is a modern construction, not a Pauline one.⁹⁵ A completely “free” gift would, in fact, eliminate all human solidarity, reinforce individualism, and make giving and taking simply irrelevant (63). Barclay situates the modern roots of this idea precisely in Luther, who “offered a new theological definition of gift whose ramifications continue to be felt today” (116). From Luther, it passes on to Kant: the notion of “one-way gift . . . may have its roots in Lutheran theology, but was universalized in Kantian ethics with its resistance to externally imposed obligation” (185). Yet “that particularly modern presumption [of non-reciprocity] does *not* correspond to the assumptions of antiquity and should not be allowed to determine what Paul or his fellow Jews might have understood by the grace or gifts of God” (185). “Kant provides a powerful ideological (and easily secularized) sanction for the one-way, non-obliging, and preferably anonymous gift” (58). As a result, “gift-exchange—in which persons and things, interest and disinterest are merged—has been fractured, leaving gifts *opposed* to exchange, persons *opposed* to things, and interest to disinterest” (59, citing J. Parry).⁹⁶ Luther’s combination of

⁹⁵ Barclay also notes that first century Jews did accept the idea of reciprocity (39–45). Giving to the poor was seen as a form of “giving” back to God: “Since giving to the poor was closely connected to religious piety, both giver and recipient could figure benefaction as receiving its most important return not from the human recipient but from *God*” (43); “Return of the gift is both human *and* divine. . . . Doing good to the poor will result in blessings *from God*” (44); “Jewish giving to the poor is fully enmeshed in the expectation of reciprocity, and its distinctive elements are justified not by an ‘anti-reciprocal’ ethos but by the modulation of the reciprocity-ethos into the expectation of reciprocity from God” (44).

⁹⁶ See J. Parry, “The Gift, the Indian Gift and the ‘Indian Gift,’” *Man*, n.s. 21, no. 3 (1986): 453–73, at 458. Barclay pays particular attention to this article.

the incongruity and non-circularity of grace establishes a net distinction between relationships humans establish with God, on the one hand, and with other humans and society, on the other. This idea is well developed in Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms.⁹⁷ And Barclay observes: "If Luther 'horizontalises' good works (making them no longer part of an ongoing transaction with God), he also renders them all, in principle, of equal worth" (115). In other words, "good works" are useful and necessary in our relationship with other humans (*coram mundo*), but before God (*coram Deo*) they are useless, for only faith obtains.

Indeed a unilateral understanding of grace in terms of strict non-circularity would imply that Christian grace does away with the subtleties (or perfections, or complexities) of gift dynamics in human life, relationships, and work. If gift, in its supreme (divine) manifestation, is nothing other than disinterested self-giving that involves no possible meaningful response, then the reality of Christian grace has little or no anthropological weight, since divine self-giving would no longer be in a position to shed light on or interact with created self-giving (and taking). Grace thus becomes irrelevant to human life and may even be an interference, as Hans Blumenberg suggested in his attempt to legitimize modernity.⁹⁸ Human giving and taking become a purely secular (or better, secularized) reality, of little religious significance. Doubtless, divine self-giving *is* supreme and unsurpassable and is deeply mysterious, but it should be in a position to reveal the ultimate meaning of all created gift-dynamics, the fruit of divine creation, what might be called "first grace."⁹⁹ For that very reason, grace should not exclude, but rather confirm, indeed purify and elevate, the value and meaning of human gift dynamics. But Luther's position seems to exclude this.

Situating the "Old" and the "New" Perspective

All in all, Barclay's *Paul and the Gift* has placed the "new perspective" in a situation of crisis. His critique of Sanders and others is incisive and solidly biblical, but he is convinced of the fundamental validity of the

⁹⁷ See C. E. Braaten, *Justification: the Article by which the Church Stands or Falls* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1990), 64–65; Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 314–24.

⁹⁸ See Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985 [originally 1966]), 73, 137.

⁹⁹ See F. R. Hittinger, *The First Grace: Rediscovering the Natural Law in a Post-Christian World* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003).

principle enunciated by Sanders, Dunn, Wright, and others that “the context for Paul’s theology of justification is the Gentile mission and the construction of communities that crossed ethnic (as well as social) boundaries” (572). Thus, “the reading of Paul offered in this book may be interpreted *either* as a re-contextualization of the Augustinian-Lutheran tradition, returning the dynamic of the incongruity of grace to its original mission environment where it accompanied the formation of new communities, *or* as a reconfiguration of the ‘new perspective,’ placing its best historical and exegetical insights within the frame of Paul’s theology of grace” (573). Barclay insists that the doctrine of grace is directed not only inward, toward personal conversion, but also outward, to the establishment of new Christian communities. The living context of Paul is different from that of Luther, as is Luther’s from our own. As a result, “Paul’s theology does not remain encased within its first-century context” (573). But, for Barclay, the need for proper contextualization does not mean pure adaptation and ultimate irrelevance—thus the importance of Luther’s fundamental insight. “It is Paul’s theology of the Christ-gift that shapes his appeals to the Abrahamic promises, to the experience of the Spirit, and to the oneness of God. . . . It is the incongruous grace that Paul traces in the Christ-event and experiences in the Gentile mission that is the explosive force that demolishes old criteria of worth and clears space for innovative communities that inaugurate new patterns of social existence. It is because grace belongs to no one that it goes to everyone” (571). Barclay goes on to explain:

The language of grace that had once served to detach new communities from their previous cultural allegiances was now applied to believers with little or no consciousness of a break with their past and to communities whose external boundaries were either non-existent (in a solidly Christian culture) or already obvious. Their criteria of worth . . . were already strongly “Christianised.” Paul’s theology of grace became a tool for the inner reform of the Christian tradition, its critical edge turned against believers, undermining not their pre-Christian criteria of worth but their pride or purpose in achieving Christian worth. (570)

Thus, Paul’s vision is still highly relevant in the present age. In fact, “one might be struck by the *similarities* between Paul’s missional context and the social context of many churches today” (573). But

it is relevant not only in terms of personal salvation, “but also in its *original* dynamic accompanying the creation of innovative, counter-cultural communities of faith” (573).

Barclay promises another book that will address the rest of Paul's letters, especially 1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians, and Philemon (574). In *Paul and the Gift*, he did not develop a clear theory or thesis about what divine grace actually is and how it interacts with human giving and taking (the question of efficacy, deeply present in Paul), but rather attempted to *amplify* our discussion of divine grace at a wider level by considering a series of perfections that describe its complex yet divine dynamics. All this augurs well for the future volume.

Two final observations are in order in respect of Barclay's contribution to a more systematic reflection on grace, the first regarding method, the second content.

Theological Method: An Ecumenical Biblical Theology

It is instructive to see how Scripture is used in *Paul and the Gift*. Of course, the work is almost entirely biblical in character. Nearly 250 pages go into Barclay's analysis of Galatians and Romans. But he avoids the biblicist idea that it is possible to return to the biblical sources, the original and pure biblical text, as if nothing had happened in the meantime, and in this way, he recognizes that the principle of *sola Scriptura*, strictly applied, can easily become a source of impoverishment for theology.¹⁰⁰ “A historical perspective is, therefore, necessary for contextualizing every discourse on gift/grace” (64). “No contemporary interpreter of Paul can afford to remain ignorant of the history of interpretation, which influences us at levels deeper than we tend to recognize” (80). Luther is not a replica of Paul; if he were, his contribution would, literally, be inexistent, meaningless. Luther *reads* Paul and applies his inspired vision to the world in which he lives, which is very different from Paul's. What makes Luther's reflection on Paul enriching, contextualized, *and* limited is the fact that it takes place in a different setting: in the late Middle Ages, within a particularly challenging social

¹⁰⁰ On the notion of *sola Scriptura* in a Lutheran context, see Paul O'Callaghan, “*Sola Scriptura* o *tota Scriptura*? Una riflessione sul principio formale della teologia protestante,” in *La Sacra Scrittura, anima della teologia*, ed. M. Tabet (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999), 147–68. Westerholm states, however: “To lift Paul out of his first-century context is to distort him” (*Justification Reconsidered*, 1–2).

and religious context. After all, Christians had been attempting to live out their life in the light of the Gospel for 1500 years already. Not everything was decadence and sin.

This is why Barclay, I believe, pays special attention to such a wide variety of Paul's commentators from the earliest times: Marcion, Augustine, Calvin, Barth, Bultmann, Käsemann, Martyn, as well, of course, as Luther and Sanders. One and all made their contributions in clarifying and applying Paul's inspired (and therefore perennial) teaching to the epoch they lived in. Above all, they widened and explained in different circumstances the potential richness of the notion of grace, its multiple perfections. Barclay mentions six, and he's aware that seven is the perfect number (5), but who knows if others may eventually be suggested. For all Christian believers, of course, only Paul's writings are inspired and only his teaching may be considered to contain the fullness of the Christian understanding of grace.¹⁰¹ The same thing may not be said of Augustine, of Luther, or of any other author. However, theological reflection throughout the centuries has done the inestimable service of bringing Paul's often inscrutable writings into close and meaningful contact with the life of the Christians. They do not share in the divine inspiration that made Paul's vision insuperable and definitive, but their understanding, though limited, brought the light of the Gospel into the minds and hearts of believers of the epoch they lived in.

Of particular interest is Barclay's analysis of the second-century gnostic Marcion (80–85). For the gnostics, of course, the God of Scripture (the Old Testament) has been displaced by that of the New Testament, the God of justice replaced by that of grace and mercy. But Irenaeus and others who opposed Marcion and the gnostics understood that Scripture was always the point of departure for theological reflection and that no part of it may be superseded, adjusted to taste, or simply set aside. Just as doctrinal development does not require the elimination or complete reinterpretation of the word of God, neither does fidelity to the word of God involve a literalist understanding of

¹⁰¹ In reviewing Barclay's book, Schreiner writes: "For those who think that Paul's writings are the inspired word of God, the Pauline conception of grace is superior to construals of grace that depart from his understanding. Obviously, there is not space to defend here what I am suggesting. Still, it is questionable to think that a strictly historical framework is to be preferred over a theological stance that accepts Paul's theology as the word of God. Most recognize that there is not any neutral place to stand in doing history or exegesis" ("Paul and the Gift: A Review Article," 56).

Scripture, as if the hagiographers were already completely aware of all the possible theological difficulties and implications that would arise throughout the centuries. Barclay's approach therefore provides a living, ecumenical theological reflection that does not attempt to monopolize the word of God, but rather render it relevant and present in each period of history. Perhaps the future volume promised may consider other positions such as those of John Chrysostom, Thomas Aquinas, and the decree of the Council of Trent on justification.

The Meaningfulness of a Dialogue between Grace and Gift

Barclay's work makes a significant contribution to theology by taking the philosophical and sociological underpinnings of human gift dynamics fully into account, not only from the standpoint of method, but also from that of content. Second Temple literature is no longer presented as the exclusive lens by which we understand Paul: the vital, secular context of first-century gift dynamics is also given considerable weight. This is what made it possible for Barclay to reflect on the variety of "perfections" of grace. Paul and Second Temple Judaism may suggest these perfections, but philosophers and sociologists are the ones who made them explicit. As a result, seen in the light of God's grace received in faith, human gift dynamics (as expressed in economics, commerce, work, and human relationships) takes on a whole new color. Polar opposites that have traditionally been placed side to side in theological structures of a dialectic kind—for example "freedom and debt, choice and obligation, interest and disinterest" (64)—can now dialogue with one another. The reality of everyday life, of family, of society, specifically the founding of "new communities," becomes fully a part of the dynamics of Christian grace. This issue needs systematic development:¹⁰² "Anthropology offers no model of 'the gift' and provides no single definition, but it alerts us to the dynamics of reciprocity, power, and obligation that have been common in gift-relations, but are easily missed or misconstrued. Studies in gift-giving in pre-modern societies are of particular heuristic value in raising questions worth testing against ancient sources" (183–84.)

However, an objection may be raised to this way of focusing things. It is fully to the point to allow God's "prior" and "incongruous" gift to illuminate, inform, and purify human giving and receiving, the warp and woof of human life. But could it not be

¹⁰² I attempt to develop these ideas in my work *Children of God*, 340–568.

that, in doing so, we may be projecting our ideas and experiences of gift taking and giving onto God? In general terms, we are happy to say that God is the ultimate source of all gift, but at the moment of appreciating the dynamics of divine grace, it may happen that we portray God's gift-giving as simply an enlarged version of our own. A complete separation between the two, as we already saw, may give rise to a secularized Christianity. An excessive assimilation of divine and human giving and taking may find expression as idolatry. After all, early Christians resolutely condemned the veneration of idols precisely insofar as they were seen as representatives and agents of giving and taking between humans and the gods, since this was unthinkable for Jews and Christians, who believed in God as the unique creator of the universe.

Conclusion

The Israelite and Christian Apostle Paul, on the basis of his direct encounter with God in Jesus Christ and his call to evangelize the whole world, has provided Christians of all ages with an unparalleled vision of the doctrine of divine grace and justification. Theologians and reformers from every period in history have drawn deeply on his writings, guided by the same Spirit who inspired them in the first place and attentive for that very reason to challenges of the period and society they lived in. Irenaeus reflected on the position of Marcion and other second-century gnostics. Augustine faced down Pelagians and Donatists with the help of Paul. Luther identified consciously with the Apostle to the Gentiles in his attempt to reform the medieval Church and (what he perceived) as a semi-Pelagian spirituality and ecclesiology. More recent authors have attempted to rectify the individualistic and intimistic leanings present in a lot of modern Christian anthropology, insisting on the ecclesial and apostolic outworkings of divine grace and justification by faith—hence, the so-called “new perspective” promoted by Sanders, Wright, Dunn and others. Barclay's *Paul and the Gift* goes even further than his predecessors in what might be called an “anthropological amplification of the category of divine grace.” No aspect of human life, no human activity (except sin, of course, which is diametrically opposed to grace), may be situated outside the dynamics of divine grace by which, in Christ, God is “reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5:19). Barclay makes it clear, however, as Luther tirelessly taught, that only God is God, and that no human being is capable of conditioning his gentle power.