

The “New Perspective on Paul” and the New Testament Evidence

by
Chrys C. Caragounis
(Professor Emeritus in New Testament
Exegesis at Lund University)

1. Introductory Remarks

Academic research has always been driven by the desire and ambition to explore some new, previously unexplored, area and thus make a contribution to the advancement of knowledge. That is commendable in every respect. However, the emphasis upon what is fresh and new has not infrequently been so exaggerated as to blur if not entirely eclipse what is right – in the sense of factually correct. This can be illustrated by a dissertation that appeared some years ago that claimed that Jesus was not crucified but merely suspended.¹

Above the entrance of the aula of my *alma mater*, the University of Uppsala, is the inscription: “Att tänka fritt är stort, men att tänka rätt är större”. This wise *dictum* seems often to have been forgotten by both supervisors and doctorands, as a result of which we get a plethora of dissertations and other books which would have made a positive contribution, if they had never been written at all.

The so-called “New Perspective on Paul” is formally attributed to the work of E.P. Sanders, which appeared in the same year as I published my doctoral dissertation, 1977.² However, Sanders had his precursors,

1 In my web site (www.chrys-caragounis.com) there is a detailed review of this work.

2 E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, London 1977, though the expression was created by J.D.G. Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul”, The Manson Memorial Lecture delivered in Manchester University, 4 Nov. 1982, included in J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 1990, pp. 183–206 (and 206–214). I read both Sanders’

from whom he received his inspiration. Sanders' academic supervisor, W.D. Davies, finished his own work of similar tendencies as Sanders', in 1947,³ that is, the book was finished just after the Hitler holocaust.

Now, the Old Testament has at all times been drawn upon in the interpretation of the New Testament. The Church has always believed that the two Testaments in some sense belong together both by means of prophetic pronouncements that are fulfilled in the New Testament and by themes and motifs that are being worked over or developed in the New Testament. But in more recent times interest has focused on Jewish materials as well, which had previously been neglected. We see such interest, for example, in the works of John Lightfoot,⁴ Alfred Edersheim,⁵ F. W. Farrar,⁶ and especially P. Billerbeck⁷.

This was more or less a departure from previous exegesis since the Church Fathers, the Middle Ages and the Reformation and its aftermath, which derived certain ideas in Paul's and the other apostles' thought from the Hellenic and Hellenistic backgrounds.⁸ This was probably owing to the common language that the New Testament shares with classical Hellenic literature, the advance of classical studies in e.g. grammar, lexicography and history of ideas as well as the influence of the Hellenic Fathers of the Church – who were adhered to by the Reformers – and whose exegesis of the New Testament was set forth in Hellenic fashion. They were giving an *Interpretatio Graeca*, whereas the new tendency was to give an *Interpretatio Judaica*. Now, speaking quite generally, these two could not be Hermetically distinguished from one another, since, as M. Hengel has demonstrated in his erudite work,⁹ all Judaism in Palestine already before our era was

and Dunn's works when they appeared, though I had to re-examine both books for the writing of this article.

3 W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, London 1948.

4 J. Lightfoot, *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae*, originally 1658–1674; Oxford 1859; (= *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, 4 Vols., Peabody, MA 1979.

5 A. Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2 Vols., 1883

6 F.W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ*, 2 Vols., London-Paris-New York 1874 and *The Life and Work of St Paul*, 2 Vols., London- Paris-New York 1879

7 H. Strack – P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 5 Vols., newer ed. München 1989.

8 As an example here, I may mention the concept of *Logos* in the prologue of John's Gospel.

9 M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 2 Vols. 1974. German original: *Judaismus und*

deeply influenced by Hellenic ideas. It is thus impossible to speak of a purely Jewish Judaism.¹⁰

However, in the particular case under consideration, what is meant by the Jewish background is rabbinic Judaism, that is, the accumulated teaching of hundreds of years of rabbinic exegesis and speculation over Old Testament themes – in which, however, the rabbis constantly contradict each other.

Thus, Davies' work and especially Sanders' work were attempts to set Paul within the Jewish framework, that is, not so much to read him against the Jewish background, as to place him within the Jewish matrix. The new way of looking at Judaism and Paul came at a time when, as Krister Stendahl¹¹ expressed it, the West was plagued by a guilty conscience, owing to the way they had treated the Jews, which, as we know, culminated in Hitler's lamentable holocaust. Stendahl's views gave rise to the idea that there are two ways of salvation, one for Gentiles through Christ and one other for the Jews. The rationale for this for the present author was articulated several decades ago by a Lutheran priest somewhere in Småland during a visit of his to that place: "After what we have done to the Jews, we have no right to preach the Gospel to them. God will save them in some other way". Once again, the Holocaust was peeping its head!

Many, indeed, are the factors that have led to the new way of looking at Judaism and to relativizing and even reducing Christianity to a particular expression of the Jewish Faith that we often meet today. The sufferings of the Jews, who for centuries have been tossed about in Europe, to confine myself to our *Gebiet* – although acts of kindness to the Jews have not been wanting,¹² – in particular the Holocaust, the formation of the State of Israel, the discovery of the Qumran scrolls, and generally our increased knowledge of Israelite history through archeological discoveries, and a better acquaintance with the Jewish *Apocrypha*

Hellenismus, 2 Vols., (WUNT 10), Tübingen Rev. ed. 1973²

10 The rabbinic writings, for example, have been shown to have borrowed over 1600 Hellenic terms and concepts.

11 K. Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West", *HTR* 56 (1963), 199–215.

12 Here, I am not thinking so much of Schindler's List as of such examples as the many Dutch and Hellenic people who paid with their lives in Auschwitz and Dachau for having given protection to the Jews.

and *Pseudepigrapha* as well as Jewish rabbinic literature: the *Mishnah*, the *Tosefta*, the *Talmuds*, the *Mekhilta*, the *Midrashim*, etc. etc. – all have contributed in giving flesh and bones to the Jewish entity and identity. And, of course, we know that before Paul became a Christian, he was a Pharisee. Moreover, in our scholarly New Testament societies a rapprochement has been going on for decades between NT scholars and Jewish scholars.

It would then appear that reading the New Testament, and in particular Paul, within the Jewish sphere of thinking and interpreting him within his Judaic faith, would be the most natural thing. Consequently, this presumption appears to many to be thoroughly justified.

What is disturbing about this presumption, however, are certain intransigent facts of the New Testament. There is an amplitude of Old Testament texts that are being quoted in the New Testament to illustrate or prove various statements or claims, by showing that what happens or is said in the New Testament was predicted long ago and is in total harmony with the Old Testament Scriptures. But the New Testament never makes any reference to the teaching of Jewish rabbis by name.¹³ The Gospel of Matthew, for example, demands of the disciples that they should never play the role of rabbi (Mt 23:8) and directs seven (or eight) ‘woes’ against the scribes and the Pharisees (Mt 23:13–33). The Gospel of John has Nikodemos come to Jesus, but so far from setting forth Nikodemos’ teaching, the Jewish teacher actually sits at Jesus’ feet. The New Testament never quotes any views of even unnamed rabbis, except in order to denounce them (see e.g. Mk 7:1–13). Even Paul, who had had the privilege of studying at the feet of one of the greatest of rabbis, one of four who bore the title Rabban,¹⁴ namely, Gamaliel I, the grandson of the great Hillel, never quotes his master or refers to his teaching. The Qumran literature which, ever since its discovery, has made such a stir among New Testament scholars, is never hinted at in the New Testament and their community by the Dead Sea is never mentioned. Yet there are many scholars today who try to derive the one New Testament idea after the other from the Essene writings.¹⁵ If Paul, after his

13 Gamaliel I is mentioned twice in Acts, once cautioning the Jews for eventually fighting against God and once as Paul’s teacher, but his teaching is never set forth.

14 See E. Schürer, *History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, Vol. II (1979), p. 326.

15 Because of the general lack of classical education among NT scholars, NT terms, ideas

Damascus experience, had remained a Jew in faith, would we not have expected him to quote his teachers or his colleagues? On the contrary, every time Paul speaks about Judaism and the Judaists, as we see e.g. in Galatians, his statements are deeply critical of them and even disdainful (cf. Phil 3:2). Would it have been so, if Paul was such a faithful Jew in religion, as is being claimed by the adherents of the “New Perspective”?

The Jewish material is for various reasons often interesting – though, to express it mildly, not exactly captivating reading – but above all it is important in helping us to form a fuller diachronic picture of Judaism. We can further understand better some things in the teaching of Jesus and the apostles, if we become acquainted with the way the Jews thought and acted diachronically. Moreover, some of the older material, i.e. the apocrypha and the pseudepigrapha, have had some impingement on the New Testament, particularly their apocalyptic ideas. An example of this might be the further development of the Danielic “One like a Son of Man” by the so-called ‘Parables’ of 1 Enoch and IV Ezra.¹⁶ The inclusion of such ideas into the New Testament was facilitated especially by the fact that during the apostolic age the Hebrew canon had not been definitely settled,¹⁷ being completed in Yavneh (Jamnia)

and linguistic constructions are often interpreted as Hebraisms. There is, of course an initial plausibility for this on account of the continuation of the two Testaments. The present author, too, pleads guilty on occasion on this score. For example, in my latest book, *Huvudpunkter i Johannes undervisning*, XP-Media 2019, p. 57, I have explained Jesus’ words to Mary (Jn 2: 4): “Woman, what to me and to you” as a Hebraism. Expressions to that effect actually occurs in the OT, and it is not impossible that John had them in mind. Only last night, however, I read in the Latin author Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, I.iii.11, the very same expression that John uses, occurring on the lips of Herodes Atticus (A.D. 101- 177), the celebrated Athenian magnate-benefactor, Roman Consul and sophist (of the Second Sophistic), which Gellius quotes in Hellenic, as Herodes had uttered it. The possibility of Herodes Atticus having borrowed the expression from the OT or the Gospel of John can be safely excluded. The expression was simply Hellenic, and John might be using a Hellenic rather than a Hebrew expression, since he was writing in Hellenic. I have found another Hellenic example in Epiktetos (I-II century A.D.), *Dissertationes*, II.2.4. The meaning of this phrase was probably developed from Homeros, *Ilias* XVI. 55–6 and Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazousai* 498. The similarity with the Hebrew expression is probably a coincidence.

16 On the Son of Man question in Daniel, the Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament, the interested reader is referred to Chrys C. Caragounis, *The Son of Man. Vision and Interpretation* (WUNT 38), Mohr: Tübingen 1986.

17 See the discussion in the new edition of E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, Vol. II (1979), p. 316–21.

around A.D. 100, while the Hellenistic collection of OT books went beyond the Hebrew canon, including the apocrypha. Thus, reference to such works – often composed in Hellenic – later called apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, was in principle possible (as we see in e.g. Jude 14f., who quotes the pseudepigraphic 1 Enoch). But that the New Testament authors totally disregard rabbinic sources and the Qumran material is at variance with the claims of the “New Perspective”.

2. E.P. Sanders’s Work

Sanders wrote an impressive work, in which he attempted to show that the picture of Judaism for the days of Jesus and Paul that the New Testament paints is basically incorrect. The impression gained from the New Testament is that Judaism is a religion of works of law, in which the Jew seeks to achieve salvation by doing the works that the law prescribes. Sanders argues that Judaism was something very different. What lay at the heart of Judaism, argues Sanders, was the covenant that God had made with Israel. The people of Israel were saved by God’s election, which had placed them within the covenant. Accordingly, the keeping of the various commandments is not to be understood as earning the Jews salvation. The observance of the law is rather proof that the Jews have the right relationship with God. They have already *got in the covenant* and for them it is a question of *staying in the covenant* by keeping the law. The objective here is to dismiss the impression that Judaism’s works of righteousness were intended as a means to achieving salvation.

To prove his thesis, Sanders arranges his book in the following way. After an introductory chapter, in which he presents how New Testament scholars up to his time had (mis)interpreted Paul and Judaism, that is, they had interpreted Paul along the lines that Martin Luther had staked out, Sanders devotes pp. 33–238 to a discussion of the Tannaitic literature. It is here that he develops his central thesis. He says: “The material employed is that which is traditionally considered Tannaitic, that is, coming from the period between the fall of Jerusalem (70 c.e.) and the compilation of the *Mishnah* by R. Judah ha-Nasi (ca. 200 c.e.).”¹⁸ This material includes in the first place the *Mishnah*, the *Tosefta*

18 Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, p. 59.

and the Tannaitic or *halakic midrashim*. He assumes that this material “provides an accurate presentation” of rabbinic discussion between A.D. 70 and 200, especially between 130 and 200. At this point he *disclaims* that this material provides “an accurate picture of Judaism or even of Pharisaism in the time of Jesus and Paul”!¹⁹

The second chapter, pp. 239–328, is devoted to the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Qumran community, which Sanders regards as a sect, and which, as is well-known, was at odds with the rest of Judaism. For example, the Qumranites regarded the Jerusalem priesthood and its followers as the sons of Belial, whom God would annihilate at the end time. Although he admits that the Qumran definition of covenant was different from the rabbinic (p. 423), he still includes the Qumran scrolls for whatever support they may have to offer.

The third chapter, pp. 329–420, is concerned with the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha, which cover material from the II century B.C. to early II century A.D. Here, Sanders is selective – as he is also with regard to the rabbinic sources – but even of those books that he takes up for treatment, some, like the important IV Ezra and Sirach, he admits, do not support his thesis.²⁰

The book closes with chapter four, “Paul”, pp. 431–542, in which Sanders tries to explain Paul’s thought in the light of his findings in the Jewish material.

It is impossible to give an adequate presentation and critique of the many and nuanced points of interpretation and source quotations in such a wide ranging book. Here, I can only touch briefly upon Sanders’ main thesis.

As mentioned above, Sanders’ main thesis is that at the heart of the Jewish religion is the covenant that God made with Israel. The Jew sees himself as chosen by God and placed within this covenant relationship. The fact that God placed the Jew within the covenant, means that God acknowledges the Jew, and this acknowledgement of God implies the salvation of the Jew. Thus, the inclusion of the Jew within the covenant implies that the Jew is justified. Moreover, the placing of the Jew within the covenant implies certain privileges and obligations like

19 Sanders, *op. cit.* p. 60.

20 Cf. Sanders, *op. cit.*, 427–8: “IV Ezra is not a ... good representative of Judaism” and “IV Ezra can hardly represent Pharisaism”.

circumcision, sacrifices and offerings, etc. etc., which the Jew performs gladly. But these works are not to be understood as earning salvation for the Jew, since the Jew is already 'saved' by having been included in the covenant. These "works of the law" are rather to be understood, argues, Sanders, as a confirmation that the Jew is in the covenant and they assure his staying in it. Thus, Sanders coins his two terms regarding the covenant: "getting in" the covenant, which is by election, and "staying in" the covenant,²¹ which is by the works that the law prescribes. In the light of this scenario, when Paul presents the Jew as seeking to obtain salvation by the "works of the law", he has misunderstood the nature of the "works of the law" and why the Jew undertakes to perform them. Sanders does not appear to face the problem that his position raises, namely, how could Paul with rabbinic training and personal experience as a Jew, have failed to understand correctly why he, as a Jew, performed these "works of law"?!

In his discussion of rabbinic literature, Sanders, knowing that the rabbis never present a full-fledged theology, either individually or all of them being taken together, but instead utter brief sayings about anything between heaven and earth and mostly in contradiction of one other, settles for a minimum of common ground among them.²² This common ground he calls a "pattern of religion",²³ in other words, a settled picture of Judaism as to the core of its faith.

This "pattern of religion", he thinks, can be found in normative rabbinism in the Tannaitic literature (and is even adumbrated in the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and Dead Sea Scrolls). This "pattern of religion" is none other than the religious consciousness of the Jew that he is placed in the covenant that God made with Israel. This covenant, based on God's election of Israel, implied that Israel was saved by virtue of God's love and mercy, not by their own works. The works commanded by the law were not the means of obtaining salvation but in order to show Israel's gratitude to God for his election of them. The Hellenic word for "law" is *nomos*, so Sanders speaks of the Jewish obligation to do

21 Sanders, *op. cit.*, 425.

22 He admits that it is difficult to identify a distinctive theology or 'pattern of religion', as he calls it, for any individual rabbi, in a similar way as we find in e.g. Paul (*op. cit.*, 70). In spite of this statement, he claims again and again that taken together the rabbis offer this 'pattern of religion'.

23 Sanders, *op. cit.*, 24 f.

the works of the law, as a *nomism* that is imbedded in the covenant: this gives the important term *covenantal nomism*. The covenant served in order to bring the Jews into a right relationship with God (“getting in”), while their *covenantal nomism* was to help them “stay in” (the covenant). Thus, the “works of the law” were not intended to lead the Jews into salvation; the Jews were already saved by means of the covenant. The works of the law were merely to exhibit the Jews’ faithfulness to the covenant.

Now, how does Sanders go about to prove this thesis? Sanders explains that he makes two large assumptions: he follows Epstein in thinking that most of the anonymous material stems from ca. A.D. 130 to 200, and also follows Neusner in according reliability to quotations of named rabbis of the same period.²⁴

It is a fact that Sanders’ favorite terms “pattern of religion”, “getting in”, “staying in” and “covenantal nomism” are his own constructions, and since they never occur in rabbinic literature, he imposes them upon the rabbis. For example, the euphoric manner in which Sanders speaks of the covenant and covenantal nomism as being the real religion of the Jews even from B.C. times,²⁵ would seem to imply that these terms were in profuse use among the rabbis. The truth is the opposite, and in the end he is obliged to admit “the relative scarcity of appearances of the term ‘covenant’” (p. 421).²⁶

According to Sanders, the rabbis were not concerned with the question of salvation, as this is understood in the Christian Faith. Their concern was rather to be ‘in’ and not ‘out’ of the covenant. He defines his favorite term “covenantal nomism” as “the view that one’s place in God’s plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments” (p. 75). A little surprisingly and self-contradictorily he

24 Sanders, *op. cit.*, 63, 68, 69. It ought to be pointed out here that the rabbinic material is supposed to represent oral traditions (oral law) originally taught by Moses. As such it was of equal authority with the Old Testament, while in later times such material in form of the *Talmud*, seems to have supplanted the Old Testament in the life and worship of the Jews.

25 Sanders, *op. cit.*, 426, 428.

26 For example, in the indices of their editions of *Mishnah*, neither H. Danby (*The Mishnah. Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Notes*, Oxford 1938, np. 1977) nor Ph. Blackman (*Mishnayoth*, 7 Vols., Judaica Press, NY 1990) give any references to “covenant”, although I have found one to “the covenant of Abraham” in *Avoth* 3:11 (in Danby: 3:12).

says that in the progress of time civil law was applied more and more leniently, while ritual law increased in strictness!²⁷ Sanders quotes Num 5:1–3 about the removal of unclean persons from the camp, because God dwells in it. The rabbis, however, quoted also Lev 16:16, to support the idea that God dwelt in the midst of unclean people. This provides the ground for Sanders’ thesis that the covenant had precedence over the unworthiness of the people; so it did not matter how the people behaved. They could not lose their standing within the covenant.²⁸ On p. 84, Sanders raises the question of whether or not the covenant is earned by fulfilling the law. In answer to this, he quotes *Mishnah Berakoth* 2:2, according to which, rabbi Joshua ben Karha asks: “Why does the section ‘Hear O Israel’ (Dt 6:4–9) precede ‘And it shall come to pass if ye shall hearken [deligently] to my commandments?’” The rabbi answers: “so that a man may first take upon him the yoke of the kingdom of heaven and afterwards take upon him the yoke of the commandments”. Irrespective of the problematic hermeneutics of rabbi J. b. Karha, “The yoke of the kingdom of heaven” is understood by Sanders as being nothing other than being in the covenant! This is a good example in showing how Sanders works out his thesis of “covenant” and “covenantal nomism”, which terms do not occur in the literature he cites.

Similarly, in *Mekhilta Bahodesh* 5 (219) and 6 (222) God claims to have delivered Israel out of Egypt. So, God is Israel’s king and thus they have to obey His commandments. For Sanders, God’s kingship implies once again the covenant. God first chooses Israel and then demands obedience (p. 86 f.). However, according to *Mekhilta Pisha* 5 (to 12:6, which Sanders also quotes, God assigned Israel two duties: paschal sacrifice and circumcision, in order for them to be worthy of redemption (p. 89)! Now I ask: If this is not earning redemption through performed duties, what is it? Sanders also cites *Sifre Deut* 170 (to 18:9), which present a similar point of view: “When you come to the land” – fulfill the commandment which is mentioned so that as a reward for it you may enter the land” (p. 89). Here, I may also quote Johanan ben Zakkai’s answer to rabbi Josua, who felt dismayed because there was no temple in which to atone for the sins of Israel: “Do not grieve, my son.

27 Sanders, *op. cit.*, 79.

28 Sanders, *op. cit.*, 81–2.

We have an atonement *kapparah* similar to it.” R. Josua asks: “What is it?” Johanan ben Zakkai answers: “It is almsgiving, for it is said ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’ (Hos 6:6)”²⁹ Sanders recognizes that these quotations “are in conflict with the [attitude] which we described earlier”,³⁰ but, – since he has no answer, he leaves the matter unanswered and proceeds to another question!

Moreover, he tries to explain away the problem of texts such as the ones just quoted by saying that ‘merit’ does not mean ‘merit’! But the rabbis, in fact, do present exodus as merited by the Israelites’ meritorious deeds.³¹ For example, *Pisha* 16 claims that “Because of their observing the rite of circumcision did God bring the Israelites out of Egypt” (p. 90). Views to the same effect are expressed even in other works, e.g. *Mekhilta Beshallah* 3 (98f.): “Simon of Teman says: ‘Because of the merit of observing the commandment of circumcision, I will divide the sea for them’” (p. 91). In p. 92 Sanders has to admit that merit is involved in some way, even in the choice of Judah for kingship.

Sifre on Lev 11:45, “*For this purpose* I brought you up from the land of Egypt: *on the condition that* you take upon yourselves the yoke of the commandments” the statements “for this purpose” and “on the condition that” are explained away by Sanders as meaning “perhaps ... ‘with a view to’!

In spite of the above texts, Sanders claims that the rabbis considered that God’s covenant with Israel was not conditional, no matter what the Israelites did. It is difficult to imagine that, if one turns to Gen 17:14: “Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” or to Ex 19:5: “Now, therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples”. Here, conditions are certainly stipulated! The question is: What happens if the conditions are not fulfilled? Is Israel still the people of God? Was John the Baptist wrong, when he once said that God could raise up children to Abraham from stones! (Mt 3:9) or Paul, who spoke of a remnant of Israel (Rm 9–11)? Is this not the import in the Old Testament teaching?

29 Cited by F. Büchsel, art. *Hileōs, hilaskomai* etc., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. R. Kittel, eng. ed., Grand Rapids, Vol. II, p. 313.

30 Sanders, *op. cit.*, 90.

31 Cf. Sanders, *op. cit.*, 90, where R. Simeon ben Yohai “attributes exodus to Israel’s strict fulfillment of a commandment”.

The ambivalence of the rabbinic views concerning Israel's merit or lack of merit leads some rabbis to affirm Israel's merit while others to deny it. This is problematic for Sanders' thesis, but he cuts the Gordian knot by saying: "The rabbis did not have the Pauline/Lutheran problem of 'works of righteousness', and so felt no embarrassment at saying that the exodus was earned".³² What an admission! But an admission such as this is tantamount to the collapse of his theory. Indeed, the intractable evidence from *inter alia* his rabbinic quotes, which show clearly that there never was any unanimity in rabbinic teaching, is responsible for the self-contradictions that we find in Sanders' work.

Settling for such a vague idea as a "pattern of religion" is thoroughly unsatisfactory. In contrast to rabbinic literature,³³ the Old Testament does use the term covenant no fewer than 284 times, according to Lisowski.³⁴ That Jewish authors should mention 'covenant' in their writings ought to have been quite natural. The surprise here is that they use the term so seldom. Thus, Sanders' playing down the divergent views among Jews (p. 423), abstracting the concept of covenant from all kinds of irrelevant rabbinic texts, which lack the term, and bringing the very diverse, or more correctly, contradictory views of the rabbis under the flag of the covenant as a common ground among them (424), is hardly persuasive.

According to Mt 23:1–4, Jesus speaks of the scribes and the Pharisees in no flattering terms, warning especially that his disciples should not follow their example: "for they say but do not do [i.e. what they command others]" and not to let themselves be called 'rabbi'. In the same chapter, Jesus directs no fewer than seven (eight with vs. 14) woes against them. Verse 16, which criticizes their placing the gold above the temple, is quite typical of how the rabbis quibbled about inessential things "while they neglected the weightier matters of the law" (23:23). The criticism here is quite pertinent. But how does Sanders react? While he readily accepts as reliable the sayings of the rabbis, he minimizes the trustworthiness of Jesus' (or if you like, Matthew's) words:

The possibility *cannot be completely excluded* (my emphasis) that there were Jews accurately hit by the polemic of Matthew 23, who attended

32 Sanders, *op.cit.*, 100.

33 The *Mishnah* alone is about 75–80 per cent the length of the Old Testament.

34 G. Lisowski, *Konkordanz zum Hebräischen Alten Testament*, Stuttgart, 1958.

only to trivia and neglected the weightier matters. ... One must say, however, that the surviving Jewish literature does not reveal them” (p. 426).

It is astounding how he can say so in the face of so much evidence to the contrary. In my popular- scientific book *Do You Understand What You Are Reading*, pp. 31–37 I have given a number of examples about trivial matters that occupied rabbinic interests and interpretation. They, in fact, went so far as to prescribe how often men of different occupations or professions should lie with their wives.³⁵

With regard to the relevance of Sanders’ finding for the New Testament, he disclaims that the picture of Judaism he has painted reflected the situation current during the time of Jesus and Paul – “I do not suppose that it provides an accurate picture of Judaism in the time of Jesus and Paul” (pp. 60, 62, 426). In spite of this, in the very next paragraph (p. 426) he seems to know exactly the kind of Judaism that was current in New Testament times: “Covenantal nomism was pervasive in Palestine before 70”! (also p. 428).

That Sanders downplays the differences among the rabbis (p. 423), which often were diametrically opposite, has been noted, above.³⁶ He does occasionally note some differences, but then falls back on the minimal general common ground (‘pattern of religion’), which he considers enough for his thesis (424).

Here, we need to investigate also the impingement of Christianity on Judaism. We know, for example, that the rabbis had borrowed thousands of words from Hellenic³⁷ – and words are not empty receptacles, but always filled with a certain content, and it has also been suggested

35 See further, J. Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, 4 Vols., 1997. See Lightfoot’s remarks in Vol. 4, p. 206.

36 For example, in the question of resurrection, New Testament scholars have conventionally argued for “the Jewish view” of man (anthropologically) and of resurrection over against the Hellenic view of man (anthropologically) and of the immortality of the soul. In a recent study, I have found *five* (with one bifurcation, i.e. *six*) *views on resurrection among the Jews – among which one was the immortality of the soul!* See Chrys C. Caragounis, “Immortality of the Soul (Platon) and Bodily Resurrection (Paul) – Any Rapprochement?” *Fortunatae*, 27 (2016), pp. 23–51.

37 Cf. Chrys C. Caragounis, “The *Weltanschauung* of the New Testament Authors”, *Festschrift for James W. Voelz, The Press of the Text*, Eugene, Oregon 2017, pp. 51 f. For the *Gemara* alone, Ph. Blackman, *Mishnayoth*, Vol. 7, p. 105 mentions some 4000 Greek and Latin words (mostly Hellenic).

by some that they most probably had borrowed their proselyte baptism from Christian baptism.³⁸ So, we may rightly wonder, what other elements might have entered Judaism in the centuries under discussion, when Judaism took another appearance – if, indeed, it did – than the one we find in the gospels?

If the picture of Judaism as a more inwardly-oriented religion rather than one engaged in external trivialities that Sanders tries to paint had any basis in history, so that the Judaism of the second and succeeding centuries was different to that of the New Testament times, then there is readily an explanation for this: the upheaval of the year 70: the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple. It is an indisputable fact that “The destruction of Jerusalem resulted in a violent upheaval in the inner life of the Jewish people”, says Schürer.³⁹ Schürer continues: “without a political home and unified only by the ideal of the Torah, the Jews from then on held all the more tenaciously to this common treasure and cherished it”. Following the Fall of Jerusalem the Jews lost their country; they lost their capital city, which was their pride; they lost their Temple, where they worshipped their God; they lost their Sanhedrin, their spiritual and political leadership; and their High Priest, their priests who performed their sacrifices for them; they lost their identity; they became fugitives in their own country! Is it possible that all these tragic events had no effect on their religious feelings and views? It is possible that they continued just as before and that the historical upheavals had had no impingement on their religious consciousness? Would it not have been natural that with the only thing left to them – their historical knowledge of God’s election of them established through his covenant with them – they now occupied themselves with the only thing that the enemy could not deprive them of? Could all these things have brought about some transformation among them, or was this opportunity for reflection and contemplation wasted and they continued as before?⁴⁰

38 See Chrys C. Caragounis, *Huvudpunkter i Paulus undervisning*, p. 96.

39 E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People*, Vol. I, p. 521.

40 “Zeal for the Torah during this later time, among the great majority of the devout anyway, found its mainspring in a belief in the nation’s glorious future. This was so already before the great disaster; and it continued to be so, to an even greater degree, after it. If people strove more keenly than ever towards a meticulous observance of God’s commandments, their impulse was to become worthy of future glory in which they believed so confidently. The Apocalypse of Baruch and IV Ezra, which originated at this time, provide a vivid and authentic explanation of the religious mood prevailing

Here, then we have an adequate explanation for any eventual differences that might have existed between the Judaism of New Testament times and the Judaism that Sanders thinks he finds in later centuries. But this in no way undermines the picture of Judaism in the first century A.D. Sanders' arguments for a 'pattern of religion' and 'covenantal nomism' as obtaining in New Testament times as well as that works of law were not performed for the purpose of earning God's favor has not been shown to rest on any solid evidence.

With regard to Paul, Sanders admits that "covenantal nomism" is not an adequate category to describe Paul's theology (514, 543). Paul shared with rabbinism the view that salvation depended on God's gracious election. Good works were the condition of "remaining in" but they did not earn salvation ("getting in") (517). In this respect, Sanders thinks, Paul is in perfect agreement with what is found in Jewish literature (p. 518). Just as the Jews are saved by being in the covenant, *participating* in the people of God, so, too, Christians are saved by being incorporated (*participating*) into Christ: Christ died for the believer and the believer dies with Christ (519 f.). One other difference between Paul and Judaism is that righteousness in Judaism implies "the maintenance of status", whereas in Paul it is a "transfer term" (p. 544). By this he means the transference of righteousness from Christ to the believing Christian. Being righteous in Judaism implies repentance, but this is totally absent in Paul:⁴¹ man is saved not by repentance but by faith in Christ, says Sanders. He continues:

Thus in all these essential points – the meaning of 'righteousness', the role of repentance, the nature of sin, the nature of the saved 'group' and, most important, the necessity of transferring from the damned to the saved – Paul's thought can be sharply distinguished from anything to be found in Palestinian Judaism (p. 548).

Sanders concludes: "We thus in a way agree with one of the conclusions of previous comparisons of Paul and Judaism, that there are peripheral agreements and a basic disagreement" (p. 548)

The previous understanding of Paul was that he considered Judaism as a "religion of legalistic works-righteousness". Sanders feels, however,

in the first decades after the destruction of the Holy City" (E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People*, I, p. 527).

41 This is a little unfair. The term occurs in Rm 2:4 and 2 Co 7:10.

that his research into the rabbinic and other Jewish literature did not support this conclusion (p. 550). He maintains that Paul's fundamental critique of the law is that following the law does not result in being found in Christ ... Doing the law, in short, is wrong only because it is not faith (p. 550).

This exposition of Sanders is hardly a fair representation of Paul's attitude to the law. Paul makes clear that if one is to be justified by the works that the law prescribes, then one must fulfill the whole law (Gal 5:3), which, as is pointed out by Peter in Acts 15:10: "neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (i.e. the yoke of the law). Nor is it true to say that Christ "provides a different righteousness from that provided by Torah obedience" (p. 550) as if there were two types of righteousness that could be compared or contrasted. Paul's position in Galatians and Romans rather is that there is only one kind of righteousness available that can justify the sinner – Jew or Gentile – and that is the one provided by Christ by imputation on the believing sinner.

Thus, although Paul is often misrepresented in the nuancing, Sanders concludes rightly that for Paul "the entire system represented by the law is worthless for salvation" (p. 550). This is exactly right! Sanders may not agree with it, but his conclusion that "Paul in fact explicitly denies that the Jewish covenant can be effective for salvation, thus consciously denying the basis of Judaism" (p. 551) lies at the heart of Paul's teaching.

Finally, in comparing the Jewish "covenantal nomism" with Paul's "participation eschatology", Sanders claims that "there is no reason for thinking that one is superior to another. Paul's view could not be maintained ... Christianity rapidly became a new covenantal nomism" (p. 552). It is not clear what Sanders has in mind with this cryptic statement. But having said this, he brings his book to a close in the spirit of political correctness: he refuses to pronounce over the superiority or inferiority of the one over the other. He thinks that the net result of his book is that unlike what has been thought by New Testament scholars, the religion of Judaism was "covenantal nomism", while Paul represented a basically different type, "participationist eschatology" (p. 552).

3. J.D.G. Dunn's work

The reactions to Sanders' work were many and varied. One of those who took up Sanders' work in order to develop his thesis further was professor James D.G. Dunn of Durham.⁴² Professor Dunn is both an eloquent speaker and a very prolific writer on New Testament subjects, exuding great energy and a richness of ideas, some of which are not only interesting but also fruitful, though his writings some times give the impression of haste without due attention to what exactly his sources say.

Dunn accepted enthusiastically Sanders' thesis that "the picture of Judaism drawn from Paul's writings is historically false ... fundamentally mistaken".⁴³ New Testament scholars, in particular Lutheran scholars, imbued with the spirit of the Reformation, during which the agonizing Martin Luther sought and found relief from the Catholic dogma of merited salvation, when suddenly the truth shone upon him that "the just shall live by faith", have seen a deep dichotomy between Paul's justifying faith and the dead works of Jewish religiosity. How serious this is, says Dunn, is seen by the fact that the two most influential scholars of the past two generations, R. Bultmann and E. Käsemann "both read Paul through Lutheran eyes" (p. 185).

Dunn refers here to Sanders' reconstruction that first century Judaism had the covenant at the center and that law-keeping was only a way of "staying in" the covenant relationship with God. Thus, first century Judaism was a "covenantal nomism". According to Dunn, in the light of Sanders' findings, the New Testament exegete's duty now is "to shift our perspective back from the sixteenth century to the first century ... to see Paul properly within his own context, to hear Paul in terms of his own time, to let Paul be himself" (186). This implies that the "New Perspective", when applied to Sanders, is limited to the new interpretation of Judaism, whereas the "New Perspective on Paul" is Dunn's own reading of Paul in the light of Sanders' reconstruction of Judaism.

Accordingly, at this point Dunn faults Sanders for not taking the opportunity supplied by his own findings to explore how far Paul's theology could be explained in relation to Judaism's "covenantal nomism".

42 Other well-known scholars who have taken part in this debate include H. Hübner, H. Räisänen, and N.T. Wright.

43 "The New Perspective on Paul", printed in *Jesus, Paul and the Law. Studies in Mark and Galatians*, Louisville, KY 1990, p. 184.

This is what Dunn proposes to do in this study. He will take Sanders' thesis further than Sanders considered feasible himself, since he thinks that Sanders' settling for a mere difference between Judaism and Paul's religion was "only a little better than the one rejected" (p. 187).

Dunn refers to the new study by Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, in which the latter broadens the perspective on Paul from merely "getting in and staying" in the covenant. Paul, according to this study, attacks covenantal nomism. For Paul it was never God's intention that one should accept the law in order to become an elect. "What is wrong with the law" says Sanders, "and thus with Judaism, is that it does not provide for God's ultimate purpose, that of saving the entire world through faith in Christ" (Dunn p. 188, citing Sanders new book, p. 47). The new reconstruction of Sanders with regard to Paul in the context of Judaism leaves Dunn unconvinced ("little more convincing (and much less attractive) than the Lutheran Paul" (p. 188)), wherefore he proposes to put forward a new interpretation of Paul in the light of Sanders' new perspective.

In the rest of his study (pp. 188–203), Dunn concentrates on an exegesis of Gal 2:15–16, which he translates as follows (p. 189):

We who are Jews by nature and not Gentile sinners, know that a man is not justified by works of law except through faith in Christ Jesus. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of law, because by works of law shall no flesh be justified.

On the basis of this translation, Dunn proceeds to delineate his "New Perspective on Paul". Accordingly, "we who are Jews ... know" "is something Jewish, something which belongs to Jews 'by nature'" (p. 190), and this is nothing other than "covenant language". Thus, "almost certainly ... his concept of righteousness ... is thoroughly Jewish too, with the same strong covenant overtones" (p.190). Moreover, in speaking of "being justified" Paul is not thinking of an initiatory act. Rather, God's justification is ... God's acknowledgement that someone is in the covenant! – a formulation that recalls Sanders' words. Dunn also sees futuristic sense in "in order that we might be justified" and "no flesh shall be justified" (Gal 2:16).⁴⁴ Thus, Paul is "wholly at one with his fellow Jews

⁴⁴ Incidentally, it may be said that the first is a subjunctival clause of purpose, while the second is expressed in a Hebrew formulation "he shalt not ...", where the futurity is

... Justification by faith, it would appear, is not a distinctively Christian teaching” (190 f.). This means that Paul’s appeal is not “to Christians who happen also to be Jews, but to Jews whose Christian faith is but an extension of their Jewish faith” (p. 191). Therefore, to exegete this text in the light of Reformation teaching is to set the whole exegetical endeavour on the wrong track, says Dunn.

Dunn asks, What is Paul attacking when he dismisses being justified by works of law, something he does three times? Dunn thinks that the answer is that Paul has in mind “covenant works”, works done in obedience to the covenant. By covenant works, Dunn thinks of circumcision and food laws (Acts 15:29). He seeks support for this interpretation in the fact that circumcision and food laws were widely recognized in the Roman empire as distinctively Jewish. So, these functioned as “identity markers”. Dunn does not spare words (more than two pages) in order to enhance the importance of these for Paul – an emphasis that is entirely missing from Paul’s writing. Dunn concludes that what Paul attacked when he claimed that no one could be justified by works of law, was the idea that “God’s acknowledgement of covenant status is ... dependent upon observance of these particular regulations” (p. 194).

Dunn continues: neither Paul nor his Jewish interlocutors understood “works of law” as works which earn God’s favor; they were merely regarded as “badges” for Jewish identity, demonstrating “covenant status” (p. 194). In all this Paul thinks of what Sanders calls “covenantal nomism”. He repeats again that “works of law” in Gal 2:16 refer precisely to identity markers.

Paul speaks of righteousness through works of law and righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. What is involved in this contrast? asks Dunn. He answers that according to Gal 2:16a “a man is not justified by works of law *except*⁴⁵ through faith in Jesus Christ”. Dunn continues: “According to the most obvious grammatical sense, in this clause faith in Jesus is described as a *qualification* to justification by works of law, not (yet) as an antithetical alternative” (p. 195). From this translation he draws the conclusion that “Seen from the perspective of Jewish Christianity at that time, the most obvious meaning is that *the only restriction on justification by works of law is faith in Jesus as Messiah*. The

not eschatological but only from the point of view of the utterance.

45 The word ‘except’ translates the Hellenic original ἐὰν μὴ . On this see below.

only restriction, that is, to covenant nomism is faith in Christ” (p. 195). Thus, Paul does not deny covenantal nomism; he only restricts it. This, in turn, implies that the only change that the new movement calls for is that the traditional Jewish faith be now directed to Jesus Messiah (p. 196).

At this point Dunn performs a somersault. On the one hand, he writes that belief in Jesus the Messiah did not require a Jew to abandon his traditional faith and the practices that came along with it (sc. the works of law of his covenantal nomism). And on the other, he continues: “But Paul followed a different logic”. If God’s justification is by faith then it cannot be by works. So, at this point all of a sudden “Paul alters it significantly: what were initially juxtaposed as complementary, are now posed as straight alternatives. ... In other words, in verse 16 Paul pushes what began as a qualification of covenant nomism into an outright antithesis” (p. 196). “From being one identity marker for the Jewish Christian alongside the other identity markers (circumcision, food laws, sabbath) faith in Jesus as Christ becomes the primary identity marker which renders the others superfluous” (p. 196).

Thus, while to the question: “What difference does the coming of Jesus the Messiah make to our traditional understanding of the covenant?” many Jerusalem Jewish believers would say, None!, or “Christ’s coming has made some difference, but in the day-to-day event not much” (p. 197). But “Paul’s new answer” was that the time of fulfillment had come with Christ; God had intended his covenant not to be understood in nationalistic fashion or racial terms but to be broadened out to include the Gentiles as well.

In Gal 2:16, Dunn thinks, we are witnessing a very crucial development for the history of Christianity. “*We are seeing the transition from a basically Jewish self-understanding of Christ’s significance to a distinctively different understanding, ... from Jewish Messianism to a faith which sooner or later must break away from Judaism*” (my emphasis) (p. 198).

The rest of the study (pp. 200–203) is reiterative, trying to persuade the reader that Paul objects not to works of law as such but to the narrow understanding of Judaism that covenantal nomism was used as a nationalistic badge. This, according to Dunn, is what Paul takes exception to.

The above exegesis is simply *falsch*, having been based on an equally faulty translation. Dunns’ translation has been veered to support the

ensuing exegesis. The original must be translated in the following way:

We who are Jews by nature and not Gentile sinners, [*but* δέ] having come to know [i.e. *having come to the insight* εἰδότες] that a man is not justified by works of law *but* [εἰ μὴ] by faith in Jesus Christ, *we, too* [καὶ ἡμεῖς], [have] believed in Christ Jesus in order that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of law, since by works of law no one [i.e. no flesh] shall be justified.

1. The first problem with Dunn's translation is that he rendered ἡμεῖς φύσει [ὄντες οὐ ὑπάρχοντες] Ἰουδαῖοι ... εἰδότες [δὲ] ὅτι ... καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν ἐπιστεύσαμεν ... with "We who are Jews by nature ... know that ... And we have believed in Christ Jesus", that is, as two coordinate clauses: "we (Jews) *know* and we *have believed*". In the original, however, the first clause is participial, giving the reason for the behavior in the second clause (believing in Christ), which was not the normal behavior of the Jews.

2. The word 'but' in my translation, above, represents the original δέ. This word normally implies a contrast or an antithesis⁴⁶ (in which case it is usually translated with 'but'; cf. NASB: 'nevertheless'; NAB: 'yet'; NRSV: 'yet') but sometimes it may imply narrative or argument continuation and occasionally it is left untranslated. In this verse the 'but' is significant in showing that what follows is an additional insight that "we who are Jews" have received, an insight that we did not have from the start. In other words, "We are Jews but *we have come to see/know* that a man is not justified by works of law ..." The reading δέ is absent from certain manuscripts, most notably P⁴⁶ and Codex Alexandrinus. So, Dunn conveniently sets it aside. The majority of the oldest uncial manuscripts (Ⲡ B C D*), however, include it and we ought to retain it as original, because it suits the exigencies of the construction.⁴⁷ But even if Paul had not written this word, the meaning of the participle 'having come to see/know' would have been enough to make his meaning clear. With 'but', however, the point is even more enhanced.

3. By removing 'but'⁴⁸ and translating the participle εἰδότες (pron.:

46 Which is not as strong as in πλήν.

47 The latest critical editions of the NT text include it but within brackets, to indicate there is some uncertainty.

48 In a footnote, Dunn refers to Rm 6:9 and 2 Cor 4:14, which lack δέ and contrasts them with Rm 8:28, which includes it. Evidently, Dunn has missed the point, that the participle has no place in the first two contexts, while it is necessary in the third context.

idhótes) as if it were a finite verb form, i.e. ‘know’, Dunn tries to establish that this is covenant language and that the Jews, because they are within the covenant *already know* (i.e. have already this knowledge because they are informed by their covenant) that man is not justified by works of law. This far-fetched thought is the very opposite of what Paul is saying. In addition to removing δέ, which draws a contrast to the previous clause (“We who are Jews”), Dunn mistranslates also the participle. The form εἰδότες is active participle of the verb οἶδα. This verb is the perfect tense of an unusable present verbform (εἶδω), whose stem is Feíd-, and from which comes, for example, the aorist form (εἶδον) of the irregular verb ὁράω [ὀρῶ] = ‘I see’. Thus, οἶδα means ‘I know’ but inherent in the meaning of this verb is the thought of an insight or information received beforehand, in other words, an insight that brought about the result of ‘I know’. Οἶδα, therefore, properly means ‘I know as a result of having seen/having received an insight/having being informed’.⁴⁹ Stated more succinctly, our verb means ‘I have come to know’. As such the verb is contrasted to ἐπίσταμαι ‘I know’, from which derive ἐπιστήμη, ‘knowledge’, ‘science’, etc. This shows clearly that the insight that man is not justified by works of law but by faith is something that the Jews did not possess originally as Jews in their so-called covenantal relationship but that it was an insight they attained later (i.e. when confronted with Christ, cf. e.g. Paul’s own testimony in Phil 3:7–8).

4. Moreover, Paul is not speaking here of Jews in general, as Dunn unfortunately supposes, but of the Christian Jews of Antioch and *especially of Peter and himself!* Remember, he is addressing Peter! In this particular context Peter and Paul are the Jews who have received the insight that no one can be justified by works of law! In other words, Paul says “We [i.e. you and I] who are Jews ... but having received the insight that man is not justified by works of law ... we, too, [like the Gentiles] have put our faith in Christ ...” The force of the “εἰδότες δέ “but having received the insight ...” is precisely to underscore the difference between themselves and all the other Jews, who had not come to see/understand that they could only be justified by faith in Christ. The clause “we

49 Cf. Δ. Δημητράκου, *Μέγα Λεξικὸν ὅλης τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Γλώσσης*, 9 Vols., Vol. 6 (1964), p. 5042: οἶδα = ἔχω ἴδει, ἔχω παρατηρήσει, ὅθεν γινώσκω “οἶδα [means] ‘I have seen, I have observed, hence I know’”. Similarly, F. Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, Leiden 2015, p. 598: “οἶδα ‘to be informed about, know, understand’.”

who are Jews” left alone tells us nothing in particular. The important clause here is “But knowing/having come to know/having received the insight ...” This clause sets Peter and Paul apart from the unbelieving Jews. Thus, it must be underlined that this insight or knowledge is not a knowledge that resides in the covenant relationship.

5. Another mistranslation concerns the word *καί*. This word normally bears the sense of ‘and’ but it is also the Hellenic word for ‘also’, ‘too’. By translating this word here as ‘and’ (“We who are Jews ... *know* that a man is not justified by works of law ... *and* we have believed in Christ”) Dunn produces a sentence that bears no relation to what Paul writes. In Dunn’s translation, being a Jew, one knows inherently that justification is by faith and so he believes in Christ in order to be justified by faith. If this was such a simple and natural procedure for Jews, as Dunn seems to imply, one must ask, How come there were so few Jews who came to faith in Christ – if their staying within the covenant had taught them that justification is by faith? If justification by faith was what they had been brought up with in their covenant context, why, then, did they go about trying to establish their own righteousness based on works of law? And how could Paul say of them that they were “ignorant of God’s righteousness”? (Rm 10:3) And where was, then, the scandal of the cross?

The translation we are offered in Dunn’s article is certainly not in harmony with the Hellenic text. The real consciousness of what it means to be justified by faith, in spite of occasional references to covenant in the Psalms and prophets (covenant occurs most often in the Pentateuch), was something that was not inherent in popular Jewish religiosity but confronted them first through the proclamation of the Gospel.

The first occurrence of *καί* in Gal 2:16 clearly bears the sense of ‘too’. *Having come to know/to the insight* that no man can be justified by works of law, we (who are Jews), too, have believed in Christ Jesus. The word ‘too’ here is in allusion to another group who have believed in Christ in order to be justified. This is the Gentile Christians. Thus, Paul is saying that, we who are Jews, having become aware/come to know/ to understand that no one can be justified by works of law, we, too, like the Gentiles, have set out faith in Christ that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of law, since by works of law no person (flesh) will ever be justified. Paul’s meaning is quite clear in the original.

I have left till the end Dunn's translation of 'except'. Behind 'except' stands the expression ἔάν μή literally 'if not'. A similar phrase with a similar meaning is εἰ μή = 'if not'. Originally, the hypothetical particle εἰ was more objective and was used with the indicative, especially in conditional sentences that presented the matter as objectively true (even if it was false). The conditional particle ἔάν (compounded of εἰ and the modal particle ἄν) was more subjective, was constructed with the subjunctive and was used in conditions that averred eventuality, though in the New Testament it is sometimes used with the indicative (e.g. Acts 8:31). Eventually, however, the two particles came to coincide in meaning, which happens already in the New Testament,⁵⁰ and with the passage of time the more phonodynamic ἔάν came to eject εἰ in later Hellenic (Byzantine and especially Neohellenic).⁵¹

The crucial words in Gal 2:16 are "a man is not justified by works of law ἔάν μή through faith in Jesus Christ". How is this Hellenic expression to be translated? Dunn translates it as 'except' and thinks that it qualifies the phrase "by works of law", that is, except when the works of law include also faith in Christ. This means that in stating that no man is justified by works of law, Paul is making an exception: unless there is also faith in Christ, that is, unless those who do the works of the law also have faith in Christ. In this way, Dunn thinks that he establishes his view that in their covenantal nomism the Jews were well aware of

50 The phrase ἔάν μή occurs 44 times in the New Testament while the phrase εἰ μή occurs no less than 72 times. I have examined all of the above instances, but it would be out of place here to quote and comment on each one of the 116 texts. Almost all of the occurrences of εἰ μή can be translated by 'but' (e.g. Rm 11:15 "For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will be their acceptance *but* [εἰ μή] life from the dead"), most of them also by 'except' (e.g. Lk 5:21 "Who can forgive sins *but/except* [εἰ μή] God alone?") and some of them more literally by 'if not' (e.g. Mt 24:22 "If those days had *not* [εἰ μή] been shortened, no person [flesh] would be saved"). Ἐάν μή may be rendered with 'if not' (e.g. Jn 8:24 "For if you do *not* [ἔάν μή] believe that I am He, you will die in your sins"; 1 Cor 8:8 "We are no worse if we do *not* [ἔάν μή] eat nor better if we eat"). In most occurrences, however, the phrase can be translated also by 'unless' (e.g. Mt 18:3 "If you do *not* convert/*unless* [ἔάν μή] you convert and become like little children ..."; Acts 8:31 "How could I if *not/unless* [ἔάν μή] someone guided me"). In Lk 7:23, however, along with the relative pronoun ὅς the meaning is '[who]ever not': "blessed is *whoever is not* [ὅς ἔάν μή] offended because of me".

51 See Chrys C. Caragounis, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission*, Tübingen (WUNT 210), 2004, pp. 188–192.

justification by faith and that Paul affirms that, when works of law are accompanied by faith in Christ, they lead to justification. It is impossible, however, to derive such a meaning from the Hellenic construction. Feeling for the language must protest at such violence to Hellenic syntax. It is simply impossible for the present text to express Dunn's meaning. To do so, the wording must be changed drastically.

The rule is that the verb of the sentence [here 'justified'] is omitted with the construction of ἐὰν μή (also εἰ μή), because this construction refers back to the verb and presupposes it in the clause that it forms: "if not [understood: *justified*] by faith ...".⁵² To paraphrase the sense of the passage, we might write: "a man is not justified by works of law (and so he remains unjustified) unless he is justified by faith in Christ". Or, to make it shorter: "a man is not justified by works of law, [he is justified] only by faith in Christ". The phrase "but/except by faith in Christ" is not a qualification on the phrase "works of law", as Dunn thinks, but on the main idea in "a man is not justified". Thus, "a man is not justified ... *except/if not* by faith in Christ". In other words, Paul says "there is only one way to attain justification, and that is by faith in Christ". The ἐὰν μή-clause refers to the whole of the preceding sentence – "a man is not justified by works of law", not merely to the phrase "by works of law". This is what the Hellenic text says.⁵³ It is perhaps not irrelevant that this is also how it is understood by the Neohellenic translations, which are not influenced by Reformation doctrines!⁵⁴

If Paul had wanted to express the meaning that Dunn wants to find here, he would have used the adverb ἐκτός. Had Paul written "No man is justified by works of law ἐκτός εἰ μή [unless]⁵⁵ they include also faith

52 So, too, Δ. Δημητράκου, *Μέγα Λεξικὸν ὅλης τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Γλώσσης* (= *Great Lexicon of the Entire Hellenic Language*), 9 Vols., p. 2254.

53 To the same effect Blaß-Debrunner-Rehkopf, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, § 376, 2 "ἐὰν μή wie auch att[isch] ... (nur ohne Verbum) ... Gal 2:16: ἐὰν μή in der Bed[eutung] 'wenn nicht'".

54 The Katharevousa tr. by N. Vamvas, *Τὰ Ἐρᾶ Γράμματα* (mid XIX century) is similar to the original: δὲν δικαιούται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου εἰμὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ; the *Ἡ Καινὴ Διαθήκη* (1967) simpler Hellenic: ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲν δικαιώνεται ἀπὸ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ νόμου ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς πίστεως εἰς τὸν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν ("... but by faith in Jesus Christ"); the Demotic tr. of 1999 (a little paraphrastic): ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ σωθεῖ μὲ τὴν τήρηση τῶν διατάξεων τοῦ νόμου. Αὐτὸ γίνεται μόνο μὲ τὴν πίστιν στὸν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν (a man cannot be justified by keeping the law. This happens only by faith in Jesus Christ).

55 It should not be forgotten that εἰ μή and ἐὰν μή are often in late Hellenic used inter-

in Christ”, then he would have said what Dunn wants him to say. But in this case, the wording would have to be changed, since it is impossible to get this meaning out of the present wording. It is instructive to compare 1 Cor 14:5: “For greater is he who prophecies than he who speaks in tongues, ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ [unless] he interprets”. Here, the ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ—*unless* changes the situation: from being inferior to the prophet, the tongue speaker, following the exception clause – the *unless*-clause – becomes equal to (or even greater than) the prophet. Similarly, 1 Cor 15:2 “With what word(s) I evangelized you, ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ [*unless*] you have believed in vain”. In both of the above texts, however, the ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ, *unless*-clause has its own verb, whereas in Gal 2:16 the ἐὰν μὴ-clause omits the verb, since it presupposes the verb of the main clause. In the following example, we have a text that corresponds exactly to our text. 1 Tim 5:19: “Do not accept an accusation against an elder ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ [*unless*] [it comes] from the mouth of two or three witnesses”. Here, the ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ-clause has no verb of its own but refers back to the main verb of the sentence, as in Gal 2:16. It is the adverb ἐκτὸς that produces the exceptive sense, the adverb that changes the force of the principal clause. This adverb would be indispensable in Gal 2:16, if this text were to be understood in the way Dunn proposes. But since it is absent, the force of ἐὰν μὴ is antithetical and contrastive: “no man is justified by works of law; only by faith in Christ” or “a man is justified not by works of law but [εἰ μὴ] by faith in Jesus Christ”.

Having been criticized by *inter alios* F.F. Bruce, for a “defective exegesis” of ‘except’ in Gal 2:16, in his “Additional Note” (pp. 206–214), Dunn modifies and softens his interpretation of the phrase. He adduces in his defence E. de Witt Burton’s information on the various uses of the expression, but withholds Burton’s opinion that our phrase here means “*but only* [by faith in Christ].”⁵⁶

4. The New Perspective in Sweden

In the above discussion the expression ‘justification by faith’ has figured repeatedly. In Sanders’ research, particularly the opposite to this

changeably.

56 E. de Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, Edinburgh, latest impr. 1977, p.121.

doctrine, namely, ‘justification by works of law’, has been described as a New Testament distortion of true Judaism. In the research of Dunn the doctrine of ‘justification by faith’ and its correlative ‘justification by works of law’ have been seen as particularly Lutheran teachings that are responsible for the supposedly *distorted* view of Judaism that the New Testament presents. In further writing, beyond Sanders and Dunn, things have taken on an even uglier turn, when some younger authors, without paying close attention to texts but zealously building on Sanders and Dunn, among others, have advanced theories to the effect that Jesus provides salvation only for non-Jews, whereas the Jews are already saved by their covenant. They have forgotten that Peter and Paul and John and the whole early Church were all of them Jews, who had experienced the grace of God, had given up trying to be justified by their works of law and put all their trust in Christ’s atoning work on the cross. If the New Perspective and its more extravagant forms had appeared in ancient times, they would no doubt have been dubbed as heretical.

In our Swedish context, a book was published last year (2019) by Mikael Tellbe, in which he tries to propagate the teachings of Sanders and Dunn for a Swedish audience.⁵⁷ Tellbe, to be sure, is critical of the extravagant views which the New Perspective has led to – e.g. the two ways of salvation – exemplified, for example, by Magnus Zetterholm and his associates (pp. 74–5), and he offers some criticism which is both justified and correct against their vagaries (pp. 81–4). The bulk of his chapter, however, is weighed down by serious problems.

Quite uncritically, Tellbe has accepted Sanders’ thesis without investigating the nature of Sanders’ proofs for his theory, i.e. his rabbinic sources. Following his mentors, Tellbe explains away Paul’s teaching on ‘justification by faith’ by making it a modern reading of Paul initiated by M. Luther’s painful experience. This is a perverse explanation, which has been taken over from Sanders and Dunn. Martin Luther did not invent ‘justification by faith’; he merely (re)discovered it, and he (re)discovered it, because it had been there all the time.

Another one of Tellbe’s vagaries is that Paul is not primarily interested in man’s salvation but in the relations of non-Jews to Jews (taken

57 M. Tellbe, *Paulus mot väggen*, Libris, Stockholm 2019. In the present critique my comments on Tellbe are limited entirely to Chapter 4: “Vad var det för fel med judendomen?” (pp. 68–86).

from Dunn) (p. 72). This transformation of Paul from theologian and pastor to a sociologist is discredited by the entire Pauline corpus. Quite contrary to the clear statements in Galatians, Tellbe claims that Paul's criticism of Judaism was not because of its legalism, but because of its claims to exclusivity. This is also Dunn's point. This means, according to Tellbe, that Gal 2 is not concerned with how salvation is to be attained but with how non-Jews and Jews can live together, constituting one covenant family (p. 73).

Thus, Tellbe welcomes the New Perspective (Stendahl, Sanders, Wright) that Paul's interest was not centered on the individual's salvation but on how the non-Jews might be incorporated within the Jewish family! Hence, Romans and Galatians are not primarily concerned with man's salvation but with the status and identity of those who believe in Jesus (p. 77). Remarks such as these leave one flabbergasted: it is obvious here that the rules of sober exegesis have been thrown overboard!

On p. 78 Tellbe quotes Gal 2.11–16 in the translation of *Bibel 2000*, which differs markedly from the translation made by Dunn. Here was a golden opportunity for Tellbe to scrutinize Dunn's translation and exegesis of the passage. But nothing of the kind. Tellbe seems not to be aware of the linguistic problems involved in Dunn's translation. Without perceiving the violence that Dunn has done to the text of Gal 2:16, he happily accepts Dunn's interpretation (reflected throughout his chapter) and makes it his task to propagate this teaching. It is perplexing how Tellbe can quote *Bibel 2000* and without any explanation, go on and give the text the exposition of Dunn, which was based on his own peculiar translation!

Tellbe's chapter illustrates the danger of following established scholars without critically examining their work. It is in this respect that he has failed his audience. Thus, without perceiving it – for otherwise the charge would be much more serious – he has transmitted a teaching that is undeniably contrary to the New Testament teaching, a teaching that is thoroughly at odds with Paul's whole argumentation in Gal 2:16 as well as the rest of Galatians and Romans as well!

There are many more details in Tellbe's interpretation of Paul, that are misled and misleading – hence also the confused remarks he makes on pp. 80–1, in which his exegesis of the nature of “God's righteousness” cannot stand closer scrutiny.

Justification by Faith

The problem in Gal 2:15–6 was not a sociological problem but a theological and more especially a soteriological problem. It arose as a result of table fellowship between Jews and non-Jews, but the incident provoked by the table fellowship was caused by and at the same time revealed an underlying soteriological difference. Peter came to Antioch and was happy to have fellowship, including meals, with the non-Jewish believers. But when some Jews arrived from James, the leader of the Jerusalem Church, Peter suddenly became afraid, perhaps of the report these might bring to James, and withdrew from fellowship with the non-Jews.

Paul accused Peter (and a few others including Barnabas) of hypocrisy. Peter had failed to stand firm in his convictions that the Gentile Christians had been justified by their faith in Christ and were, therefore, full believers, formed part of the people of God, and needed nothing more. Being a Jew, he had lived together with the Gentile Christians, as if he were a Gentile Christian himself, but when his fellow-Jews came he changed color and by his example he was giving the Gentile believers the message that their faith in Christ was not enough but that they needed to live like the Jews (Gal 2:14). Directly thereupon Paul raises his protest that justification before God takes place only by faith, not by works of law and that the same conditions apply to both Jews and non-Jews:

We who are Jews by nature and not Gentile sinners, [*but δέ*] *having come to know* [i.e. *having come to the insight εἰδότες*] that a man is not justified by works of law but [*εἰ μὴ*] by faith in Jesus Christ, *we, too* [*καὶ ἡμεῖς*], (like the Gentiles) [have] believed in Christ Jesus in order that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of law, since by works of law no one (i.e. no flesh) shall be justified (Gal 2:15–6).

I have already indicated the meaning of this text above in detail, while commenting on Dunn's book. Thereafter Paul goes on:

But if while we are seeking to be justified in Christ we (Jews), too, are found out as/to be sinners [like the non-Jews], is then Christ the minister/agent of sin? (Gal 2:17).

There is some ambiguity as to the exact sense of verse 17.⁵⁸ The sentence

⁵⁸ See e.g. the discussions in J.B. Lightfoot, *St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 116–7; F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 140–2; and especially E. de Witt Burton, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, (ICC), pp.124–32, who presents the various options.

consists of three parts: (a) But if while we are seeking to be justified in Christ, (b) we, too, are found out as/to be sinners [like the Gentiles] and (c) is then Christ the minister/agent of sin? The sense of the first clause is clear. The second clause, according to the above rendering, means that we Jews, too, have have been placed in the same category as the [Gentile] sinners. The third clause is the hypothetical opponent's objection which is expressed by Paul as a rhetorical question: "Does this mean that Christ is a minister or agent of sin?", i.e. by making us Jews sinners like the Gentiles? An alternative way is to take the second clause "we, too, are found out as/to be sinners" by seeking justification in Christ, which implies that we have put ourselves outside the law and so broken it. The third clause would then mean "Does Christ make people sinners by breaking God's law?" Either of these alternatives works in the context.

The next verse (18) denies in the strongest possible fashion the truth of the third clause of verse 17, namely, that Christ is a minister/agent of sin, and supplies Paul's answer:

Absolutely not! For if I build up again those things that I destroyed, I show/prove myself to be a transgressor (Gal 2:17–18).

The answer given here is quite clear, no matter how verse 17 is construed. Paul is speaking of Peter, but out of delicacy, he puts it in the first person ("If I ..." instead of "If you, Peter ..."). The words refer, of course, to Peter's behavior at Antioch. When Peter mixed freely with the Gentile Christians, he had pulled down the middle wall of partition that had separated him from the Gentiles (*sc.* the ordinances of the law), but when, following the coming of the Judaists from James, Peter withdrew and separated himself from the Gentile Christians, he was rebuilding what he had destroyed, i.e. his having given up the works of law as a means to justification, which he had found only by faith in Christ. Here was the inconsequence in Peter's behavior and the hypocrisy Paul charged him with in Gal 2:14.

This, finally, leads to the *denouement*:

For through [the] law I died unto (the) law, in order that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ ... (Gal 2:19–20).

The expression "I died to law" is quite clear: By being in Christ, I have been freed from the power and dominion of law. Law has no longer any hold on me. The expression "through law" is, however, somewhat

ambiguous.⁵⁹ The meaning seems to be that the Mosaic law, by its commands and regulations – which I as a Jew could not keep – condemned me to death and I died! (Rm 7:4, 8–10: “when the commandment came I died”). In other words, in the final analysis, it was the law (through the allurements of sin) that killed me. And since it was through the law that I died, my death, at the same time meant that I ceased to be answerable to the law. In other words, I was dead as far as the law was concerned. Having now died unto the law, i.e. having been set free from it, I live unto God. I am crucified with Christ I have now a new relationship – to Christ (the new ‘husband’ to use the picture of Rm 7:1–4) – having broken my old relationship with (my old ‘husband’) the law.

This is an extremely abbreviated exegesis of this text, but it will do for the present purpose.⁶⁰ Nowhere in the entire argumentation does Paul say anything about ‘covenant’, ‘covenantal nomism’, ‘getting in’ and ‘staying in’ or bringing the non-Jews into the covenant of the Jews, so that they will live together as one family. All these concepts are figments of imagination. That Paul believed and worked for the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers is, of course, only too true (cf. Eph 2:11–22) and he proved it by the great collection he organized in Hellas toward the end of his third missionary journey.

Instead, in this entire context of Gal 2, Paul is arguing about setting aside the law and its demands for justification before God, while presenting justification through Christ as the only viable way to salvation for both Jews and non-Jews.

In my popular-scientific book *Highlights in the teaching of Paul*, pp. 67–90, I have given a rather detailed and nuanced account of Paul’s teaching on justification by faith. In the present study I can only give a very brief summary of what Paul means by justification by faith, referring the interested reader to the above mentioned book.

The doctrine of ‘justification by faith’ lies at the heart of the Gospel as Paul understood and preached it. Paul did not take over the concept of justification from the Hellenic context but from the Old Testament. It is possible that this way of thinking and expounding the Biblical message was suggested by his debates with the Judaizers, but the terminology had certainly the Old Testament as its source of inspiration. The

59 See the commentaries cited in the previous note, *ad loc.*

60 For more extended explanations, see the commentaries cited above.

first and most critical occurrence is in Gen 15:6: “Abraham believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness”.

It is important to note here that God reckoned to Abraham his faith as righteousness – in other words, Abraham was justified – not only before Abraham was circumcised (Gen 17:24) but also before God proceeded to make a covenant with him (Gen 15:18)! For Paul this order is extremely important. God reckoned to Abraham his faith as righteousness before Abraham was circumcised! And before there was a covenant. Justification then, according to Paul, both *predates* and at the same time is *independent* of circumcision – the most important regulation imposed on the Jews by the law of Moses – and it *predates* and is *independent* also of the covenant! Abraham was justified at a time when he could not show any works of righteousness in order to deserve the grace of God and *before he had been placed in any covenant!* He had absolutely no merits to rely upon in order to be in a position to claim justification; only his faith! Abraham believed in God and God reckoned his faith unto righteousness, which in the context means that God looked upon Abraham as just(ified). God’s grace was given freely, as a result of which Abraham stood righteous before God.

Now, this question of chronological order in God’s dealing with Abraham and the continued history of Israel is of paramount importance for Paul, because according to the Biblical principle of the first being the best, it implied that the law, which came 430 years after God’s covenant could not invalidate God’s dealing with Abraham (Gal 3:17: “a testament that has been previously ratified by God cannot be abrogated by a law that comes 430 years later”)⁶¹. God gave to Abraham the promise about the Seed in the singular, which for Paul it meant Christ (Gal 3:16 “[The Scripture] does not say ‘to your seeds’, as if it meant many, but speaking of one, [it says] ‘to your seed’, which is Christ”). Paul sees the law as a parenthesis (Gal 3:19; Rm 5:20: “the law was brought in as an addition or parenthetically”⁶²) and its functions

61 The terminology can be a little confusing. The Old Testament uses *berith* = ‘covenant’, German ‘Bund’, while the New Testament concept is very different: ‘testament’, ‘will’. On the meaning and distinctions of these terms see Chrys C. Caragounis, *Do You Understand What You Are Reading?*, pp. 43–6.

62 The verb used here (παρεισερχομαι) properly means ‘to enter besides’, ‘to enter secretly or with guile’, ‘to steal into’ so e.g. Ploutarchos, *Publicola* 17; Galenos, VIII.749 and Gal 2:4 “who had slipped in to spy our liberty in Christ”.

as temporary in order to (a) make people conscious of sin (Rm 5:13: “sin is not reckoned when there is no law”), (b) curb sin (Rm 5:20: “the law was added in order to make sin appear in all its ugliness”), and (c) lead sinners to Christ (Gal 3:24: “the law became our *paidagogos* to Christ”⁶³).

When Christ comes, he puts an end to the validity of the law (Rm 10:4: “Christ is the end of the law”) In other words, according to Paul, it was never God’s intention that the Mosaic law could be kept and that it could lead to life everlasting. The law was a pointer to Christ. But when Christ came, the law had played out its role fully: “for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness (obtained by imputation) for every one who believes” (Rm 10:4), and that means both Jew and Gentile!

Paul is quite clear that there is only one way of salvation. This is also shown by the fact that the first believers were all Jews!

Finally, I wish to touch upon another matter. In addition to the false message that the “New Perspective on Judaism and Paul” gives to the Christian Church, it has also repercussions in another area: it encourages the so-called Messianic Judaism. Now, it ought to cause great joy to every true believer that people of Jewish descent come to Christ. We ought to encourage, pray and do what we can to see this happen. However, their turning to Christ must be whole-hearted; like the blind Bartimaios they must leave behind them their rags (of law righteousness) and follow Christ. The entrance ticket cannot be discounted in the case of the Jews. It is the same for all, Jews and Gentiles: repentance and faith in the salvific work of Christ on the cross and no appeal to birth privileges or personal merit: no works of law. I say this from personal debate with a Jewish messianic professor rabbi: it ought to worry every Christian that at present, at least, messianic Judaism appears to have one foot in Christ and one foot in the Mosaic law. They continue to practice circumcision, food laws, sabbath etc. at the same time as they also are said to believe in Jesus Christ as their Messiah. We seem to have over again the situation that existed in Jerusalem in the days of Paul: “You see, Brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who believe, and all of them are zealous of their law”, said James to Paul (Act 21:20). “How many myriads of Jews”! But how did it go for them? Ancient historians inform us that as Titus’ armed advanced

63 On the meaning of *paidagogos* see *Huvudpunkter in the Teaching of Paul*, p.78–9.

toward Jerusalem (in the war of A.D. 66–70), these Jewish Christians fled East of the River Jordan. Later they spread to Galilee, Mesopotamia and other places, but by the close of the third century A.D. having gradually become a negligible sect, they disappeared from history altogether. Why? Because they had no clear message of salvation. They had compromised the Gospel. They had made a jumble of elements from their Jewish past and Christianity. The message they preached had been attenuated of the power of the cross and had no prospects of surviving. The Christianity that has continued to our days was the Christianity that put Christ at the center as the only way to the Father, the only way to receive eternal life.

Had Paul the chance to address this new phenomenon today, he would have spoken to the same effect as he spoke to his contemporary Judaists: “Tell me, you who want to be under the law, Do you not hear what the law says?” (Gal 4:21); “Once again, I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law” (Gal 5:3) – “which [the yoke of the law] neither our fathers nor we were able to bear”, says Peter (Acts 15:); “Pay attention! I Paul am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will not avail you at all” (Gal 5:2); and finally: “You who are trying to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ” (Gal 5:4).

Many Christians congratulate the Jews who along with their practices also believe in Jesus Christ, being oblivious of the fact that they are doing them a ‘disservice’! I have no doubt of their good intentions. But the truth can never be sacrificed to good intentions. Our Jewish friends must be invited to come to Christ just as they are, without one plea, and cast themselves completely at the mercy of the Crucified and Risen Lord.

I conclude: Sanders has not given a reliable picture of the many-faceted Judaism, which had a diachronic development. He has been selective, given a slanted portrayal of Judaism centuries after Christ and misrepresented the New Testament. Dunn has mistranslated and misinterpreted the Hellenic text of Gal 2:16 – his basic text – and utterly failed to establish that Paul’s chief concern was to bring the Gentiles into the Jewish fold. In his presentation of the ‘New Perspective on Paul’ Tellbe has not examined critically the statements of Sanders and Dunn, but has accepted them at face value, with a few peripheral disagreements.

A brief look at Paul's statements shows that the heart of Paul's Gospel was his insight that God justifies both Jews and Gentiles only by faith in His Son Jesus Christ, who gave himself for them on the cross.