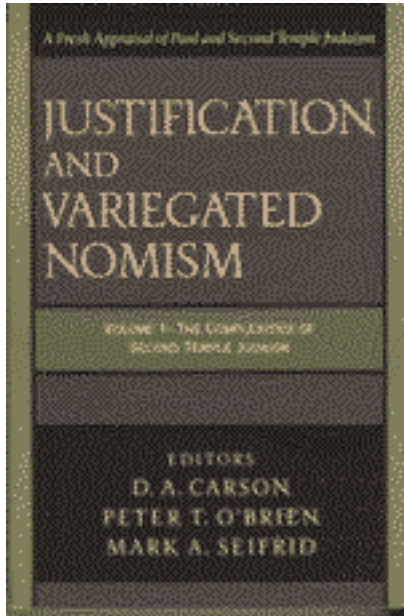


RBL 05/2003



Carson, D. A., Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, eds.

Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism

Volume: 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism

Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001. Pp. xiv + 619. Paper. \$44.99. ISBN 080102272X.

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This is the first of two volumes intended as a reconsideration of the “new perspective” on Paul. As a first step this book examines the contention with which E. P. Sanders set in motion that shift in Pauline studies. Sanders argued that Jewish religion at the turn of the eras was united in its commitment to “covenantal nomism,” the belief that one is included in the covenant by grace, on the basis of God’s free election, and that one must then simply maintain an overall allegiance to Torah in order to “stay in” the covenant people. The fifteen contributors to this project have set out to determine, twenty-five years later, exactly how far “covenantal nomism” is an appropriate description of all the varieties of early Jewish literature.

Most of the chapters look at specific literary genres, and the coverage is quite thorough. Chapters are devoted to “Psalms and Prayers” (Daniel Falk), “Scripture-Based Stories” (Craig A. Evans), “Expansions of Scripture” (Peter Enns), “Didactic Stories” (Philip R. Davies), “Apocalypses” (Richard Bauckham), “Testaments” (Robert A. Kugler), “Wisdom” (Donald E. Gowan), Tannaitic literature (Philip S. Alexander), and the Targumim (Martin McNamara). These are joined by more-focused essays on Qumran sectarian literature (Markus Bockmuehl), Josephus (Paul Spilsbury), and Philo (David M. Hay). No attempt has been made to separate “Palestinian” works from “Diaspora”

writings, despite the fact that Sanders's original thesis was limited to *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. Yet in his *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 B.C.E.–66 C.E.* it becomes clear that Sanders does extend “covenantal nomism” to include communities outside of the Levant (see 262–78), and the label has certainly been taken in Pauline scholarship to apply to Judaism as a whole. So, while one might have wished to see an explicit discussion of the issue, the geographical diversity of the texts covered is one of the book's strengths.

By necessity the chapters on Qumran, Philo, and the Tannaitic corpus are selective in their treatment of these large bodies of work. More lamentable is the fact that, aside from the prayers included in Falk's chapter, the *nonsectarian* literature found at Qumran is neglected entirely. The *Visions of Amram* (4Q543–548), for example, is not discussed in the essays on apocalypses or testaments, nor is the *Genesis Apocryphon* treated along with other retellings of biblical narrative. Still, the scope of this volume is broad enough to yield a truly representative picture of Jewish belief as it is reflected in our literary sources.

The readings of the primary texts are generally close, convincing, and methodologically sophisticated, and the results are well nuanced. The contributors do find “covenantal nomism” a perfectly adequate description for the soteriology of texts such as *Words of the Luminaries* (4Q504–506), Ben Sira, Baruch, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, and the like. At the same time, several of them offer telling criticisms of Sanders's interpretation of other documents. Falk and Bauckham recognize, for example, that writings such as *1 Enoch* and the *Psalms of Solomon* fit technically within the terms of “covenantal nomism.” Yet both authors point out that the narrowness of the covenant communities that these texts envision, along with the subtlety of their boundaries between the “sinners” and the “righteous,” means that the practical value of election diminishes in comparison with the importance of careful obedience. Likewise, some of the texts that stood outside of Sanders's original purview prove difficult to reconcile with his paradigm. Thus Bauckham's inclusion of *2 Enoch*, a text that seems to espouse a frank system of works-righteousness, makes *4 Ezra* seem less anomalous than Sanders suggested. On the other hand, Paul Spilsbury suggests that Josephus has assimilated the covenant to patron-client relationships, transforming it into a “patronal nomism” in which Israel must carry out its responsibility to obey Torah if it expects to gain benefits from its heavenly patron. Carson thus offers a fair summary of the volume as a whole when he writes in his concluding chapter that Sanders is not “wrong everywhere, but he is wrong when he tries to establish that his category is right everywhere” (543).

Most of the studies are marked by an effort to avoid imposing a “Protestant” soteriological agenda on the texts. Yet one would sometimes like to see more discussion

in the individual essays of the relationship between the framework that arises naturally from the texts and Sanders's schema. Davies, for example, quite rightly emphasizes that texts such as Tobit and Judith are focussed on *national* deliverance. The reader is left wondering, however, whether Davies thinks this compatible with covenantal nomism or whether, on the contrary, Sanders's focus on the individual "staying in" the covenant through piety should be seen as out of keeping with the interests of the texts. Similarly, Evans observes the way in which righteous behavior eclipses any idea of election in *Joseph and Aseneth* and in the *Life of Adam and Eve*, but it is left to Carson to draw the conclusion in his final chapter that these texts do not fit the pattern of covenantal nomism. The overall result is that some of the chapters seem frustratingly vague, and Carson's conclusions thus seem abrupt despite the fact that they arise naturally from the conclusions of the individual contributors.

Another recurrent problem is imprecision in use of language about "salvation" or "justification." In particular, several contributors fail to distinguish at key points between individual salvation and national restoration, even though "staying in" was for Sanders clearly an individual matter. Thus when Enns discusses 1 Esdras, the Additions to Daniel, and Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*, he concludes that they all represent covenantal nomism because of their confidence that God will always restore the Israelite people if they repent. Yet he does not ask on what basis individual Israelites are able to participate in this restoration. Can they be excluded if they sin? If so, where does the boundary lie? Enns would likely answer that the texts do not address these questions, but it would be very helpful to make that explicit, for these questions were central to "covenantal nomism" as Sanders envisioned it.

In a few places, however, several of the contributors do explicitly consider the usefulness of Sanders's framework, and the result is often a subtle and searching criticism of "covenantal nomism" as a category. In his discussion of *Jubilees*, Enns confesses that "it is still not entirely clear how 'salvation' can be by grace but 'staying saved' is a matter of strict obedience" (97). He then goes on to ask telling questions about the orientation of Sanders's formula toward the past and present ("getting in" and "staying in") when so many Jews were more concerned about the future and "arriving." On a different plane, Alexander argues that Sanders's concern to protect Judaism from the charge that it is based on works-righteousness accepts a privileging of grace over works that belongs to liberal Protestant sensibilities and not to early Judaism. "Tannaitic Judaism," he argues, "can be seen as fundamentally a religion of works-righteousness, and it is none the worse for that" (300). McNamara, on the other hand, wonders whether the focus on "nomism" does not tie Israel's covenant relationship too closely to the Mosaic law, since Jewish texts often associate it more closely with Abraham.

When Carson takes up these scattered criticisms and presents them together in his concluding chapter, the combined effect is a harsh critique of Sanders's paradigm that may go beyond what the individual contributors would want to say. Yet the overall tenor of the book is critical of the wholesale interpretation of Second Temple Judaism in terms of "covenantal nomism." Falk makes explicit what seems to lie behind most of the chapters, that covenantal nomism is accurate as a "lowest-common-denominator" description of Jewish faith but that as such it "masks very different conceptions of the problem of sin, the balance of focus on nationalism and individualism, and most significantly the boundaries of the covenant" (56). Thus, despite its weaknesses, this volume succeeds in reminding us of the sheer diversity of Second Temple Judaism and warns us that monolithic constructs such as "covenantal nomism" will probably always be distorting, particularly when they are pitted against particular writers such as Paul, who were speaking in the context of a particular Judaism in a particular time and place.

In this sense it already seems that this first volume succeeds in setting the question of Paul's view of the law in a different light than it has often enjoyed in the past quarter-century. We would be remiss not to mention that this volume also includes a study by Mark A. Seifrid of "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," along with Roland Deines's description of "The Pharisees Between 'Judaisms' and 'Common Judaism.'" Yet these two chapters, intriguing (and controversial) as they are, bear such a tangential relationship to the main thrust of this first volume that their full significance is probably not visible until we can read them in the context of the second volume and its discussion of Paul. If this first installment is any indication, that volume too will be unavoidable reading for anyone interested in Pauline theology.