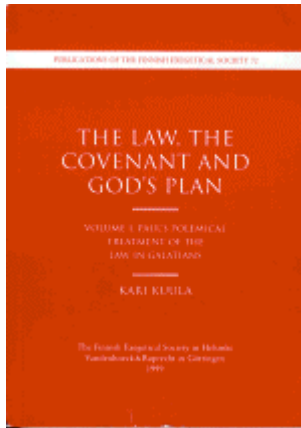


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Kuula, Kari

*The Law, the Covenant and God's Plan: Volume 1: Paul's Polemical Treatment of the Law in Galatians*

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Sheila McGinn

John Carroll University, Cleveland, Ohio 44118

Kari Kuula focuses this monograph on the problem of salvation-historical continuity, that is, the paradox that: “God shows his righteousness and fidelity to his promises by sending the Messiah as savior not only to his elected people but also to all the nations of the earth. *However, God’s good news to the nations is at the same time bad news to his own people for it implies that Jews as such are no longer God’s people.*” (1; original emphasis) The three foci for Kuula’s investigation, then, are (a) the “Jewishness” of Paul (the question of continuity, here defined on the basis of his continued acceptance or rejection of covenantal nomism); (b) the dynamics of Paul’s thought concerning the Mosaic Law, i.e., why he criticized it; and (c) the coherence or inconsistency of Paul’s thinking concerning the Law (p. 2-3). This first volume deals with these issues in relation to the letter to the Galatians, while the second volume will address them in relation to Romans.

The discussion begins with methodological considerations (ch. 1) and an exposition of the background of the letter, both in time and in Paul’s theological framework (ch. 2). The ensuing argument is divided into four stages, with the following questions taken up in turn in the four succeeding chapters:

- How did Paul treat the figure of Abraham, and why?
- To what extent does Paul separate the Law and God?

- How is the Law connected with sin?
- What is the positive function of the Law in God's plan?

The final chapter draws preliminary conclusions on the basis of this letter to the Galatians.

Kuula sets the stage for his analysis of Galatians by introducing E. P. Sanders' thesis that the Palestinian Judaism of Paul's time was characterized by covenantal nomism: "God has chosen Israel (covenant) and given it his law for guidance and for providing means of atonement (nomism)" (p. 10). Hence, it is divine grace that allows one to "get in" to the covenant, and human effort that is required to "stay in." Whether Paul maintains this paradigm, or whether his axiom "*extra Christum nulla salus*" indicates a radical break with it, must be assessed by careful contextual analysis of his statements concerning the Law in Galatians (and later, in Romans), especially through social-historical and rhetorical analysis.

The language of participation in Christ and the Spirit is the cognitive domain for understanding Paul's soteriology, including the question of the role of the Law (p. 40). Apocalyptic thinking was the world-view which provided the frame of reference for Paul's interpretation (p. 41). In Galatians, his initial use of "law" refers to the Mosaic Law *per se*, but then comes to denote a more universal force which imprisons not only Jews but Gentiles as well. Paul's "stretching of the meaning of the term law betrays his abandonment of the salvation-historical interpretation of the law in favor of apocalyptic dualism, where the law is left to the forces opposite to the divine will" (p. 56).

Paul distances himself from covenantal nomism by the dual assertion that (a) not only Gentiles but also Jews must have faith in Christ in order to be saved, and (b) "the works of the Law" cannot justify anyone (p. 59). The only explicit reason Paul gives for the latter is essentially a restatement of the former: it is faith in Christ that justifies (p. 60). In short, "living for God is incompatible with living within the law" (p. 62).

Kuula argues that, in his discussion of Abraham, Paul insists that the true children of Abraham are all those who have faith (in Christ) like Abraham himself did. "In fact, the only children that Abraham has are the Christians, since belonging to his progeny can be realized only when faith in Christ has become a possibility. *This means that Paul did not interpret the Christ-event as God's way of bringing Gentiles into the children of Abraham, since before the "Christian faith there could be no people of faith and promise into which the Gentiles could be included"* (p. 65; original emphasis).

This is not to be construed in contrast to meritorious works, however, since faith includes living out the moral and social obligations associated with it. The contrast is between persons: "those of faith" and "those of the works of the Law." The former are blessed while the latter are under a curse because of their transgressions (p. 66f.). Kuula insists, *contra* Hansen, Cranford and others, that Paul sees this curse applying to the people of the law as a

whole (i.e., Jews) rather than one specific group among the “circumcised” (6:12f). In this argument, Kuula contends, Paul misrepresents the Jewish view of the law because he omits the significant notion of forgiveness taught in the law (p. 69). Paul’s dogma that righteousness comes from faith means that, for him, it cannot come from anything else, the law included (p. 71). So, it is not faith or works that makes the crucial difference between covenantal nomism and Christian faith, it is the set of norms to which one complies: those of Moses or those of Christ (p. 73).

In fact, the law itself is associated with transgressions (3:19b), for “the scripture confined everything under sin” (p. 170). In Romans, the law provides the scriptural witness to salvation in Christ. It is the law as scripture—not as the covenantal law of Moses—that enables God’s plan to come to light (p. 173). The notion of the law as custodian should then be read as a negative evaluation of the law, which “prevents not sinning but *escaping from the power of sin*” (p. 175; original emphasis). The image of the law as pedagogue reinforces this idea of being confined and kept in custody for a time. Even those under the law need to be liberated from it in order to receive divine adoption. Kuula concludes that, the purpose-clauses of 3:22 and 24b “are some kind of afterthoughts or artificial attempts to find at least something positive in the divine law” (p. 181). “It is as if the ultimate purpose of the law is to contribute to our justification simply by being terminated” (p. 181).

In the paranetic section of Galatians, Kuula argues, Paul reduces the law to the love command (5:14). This must have entailed an intentional break with the covenantal nomistic understanding of the law (p. 183), given its apposition to “doing the whole law” (5:3). Paul substitutes “the law of Christ”—i.e., Christian lifestyle—for the Mosaic law (p. 188). The Christian should be ruled by the experience of Christ/Spirit as power and norm (p. 189). Indeed, the law that is fulfilled in love is not the Mosaic law at all but “the law of Christ” (p. 189). The Mosaic law is not needed at all because “the Spirit is a sufficient norm and a power that keeps Christians within the lifestyle which finally inherits the kingdom of God” (p. 191).

In short, in Paul’s discussion in Galatians there finally is no positive role for the law of Moses and the Sinaitic covenant in God’s plan of salvation (p. 193). The prerogative of the covenant with God is taken away from Jewish tradition and reserved for “the Israel of God,” i.e., Christians who nullify the law (p. 199). By this polemic, Paul has ensured that Judaism and Christianity are fundamentally and irreconcilably separated. “Therefore, it is in place to speak of Paul’s conversion to a new religion rather than a call to a different mission within Judaism . . .” (p. 200).

The three foundational principles of Paul’s theology—that salvation is in Christ alone, the present evil age has been invaded by the power of Christ and the Spirit, the covenant faithfulness of the God of the scriptures—“simply do not make a harmonious combination” because only Christ saves, the covenant that God made with his people is not the way of life and salvation. The apostle did not express considerable hesitation in this conviction, even though the notion of God who cancels his salvific promises amounts to the greatest

paradox one can imagine” (p. 209).

Kuula’s book offers a coherent explanation of Paul’s understanding of the law in Galatians which will provide a stiff challenge to the growing “new perspective” on Paul, especially for those who wish to see Paul as a faithful Jew all his life. While many will take issue with the argument presented in this book, it certainly deserves close scrutiny. Kuula provides a clear alternative among current trends in Pauline research, and those who disagree with the conclusions presented here will do well to seriously engage Kuula’s analysis and demonstrate why their alternative is more persuasive. Whether as challenge or confirmation, this volume is a worthwhile contribution to current research on Galatians.