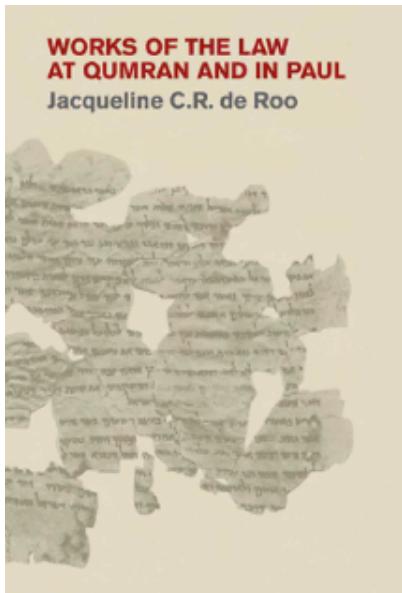


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Works of the Law at Qumran and in Paul

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The issue of the “works of the law” has been one of the most controversial themes in the debate on Paul. Whereas the Pauline phrase is unparalleled in the Hebrew Bible and the LXX, we have at least one exact parallel and some other, less exact parallels in Hebrew from the Qumran library. In general, the Qumran parallels demonstrate that the Pauline usage is not totally unique but draws on debates on doing the law in contemporary Palestinian Judaism. Qumran parallels, however, cannot decide the issue of the precise meaning of the phrase in Paul. In Pauline scholarship, Qumran parallels are used and “exploited” in support of very different views. For most Pauline scholars, the complicated debate on the fragmentary texts from Qumran, on different readings, and on the interpretation of various Qumran documents is still a remote field of specialists, whereas, on the other hand, Qumran scholars often lack expertise in the issues of Pauline theology and interpretation. Although there are a number of articles and even books on the relevance of the Qumran parallels for Pauline interpretation, the topic of the “works of the law” in Qumran and Paul has not been discussed in monograph length yet. Thus, the present volume may fill a lacuna in scholarship.

The study is the revised version of a doctoral thesis written under the direction of Stanley Porter and John Jarick and accepted already in 2002 at the University of Surrey in

Roehampton, but published five years later in a new monograph series edited by Stanley Porter himself. Some titles from the years after 2002 are referred to, but a number of important contributions are missing, not only from non-English scholarship but, for example, also the important introduction in James D. G. Dunn's collected essays on the New Perspective on Paul from 2005, where Dunn, who originally coined the term New Perspective on Paul, critically reflects his former contributions and partly rephrases his views.

The volume is structured in eight chapters, with only the first two on Qumran matters, whereas the remainder of the book is about Paul. Two appendices add material on particular Pauline issues (*δικαίωσις* and *πίστις Χριστοῦ*). The first chapter (previously published in *Dead Sea Discoveries*) discusses the question of the "works of the law" in different Qumran texts (especially drawing on the passage CD V.5–6). This chapter forms the basis of the argument of the whole monograph, and the notion of "works of the law" developed here is later used to understand the Pauline phrase. Thus, a critical interaction with the author's views has to focus on the first chapter.

It may be helpful to sketch some aspects from the Qumran debate: While the phrase *מעשי התורה* is used eight times in Paul, the number of Qumran parallels is a matter of dispute. The only passage in which the reading *מעשי התורה* ("works of the law") is clear is from the fragmentary halakic text 4QMMT (C 27). In 4Q174 (formerly called Florilegium, now Midrash on Eschatology or Midrash on the Last Days), col. 3, line 7, there is an ongoing debate whether *תורה* is to be read or *תודה* should be preferred (resulting in an expression "works of thanksgiving"). Although the two letters *dalet* and *resh* can easily be confused, the majority of specialists now cautiously read not "works of the law," so that the passage cannot be counted as a parallel to *ἔργα νόμου*. In 1QS there are two passages (5.21; 6.18) where the reading is *מעשי בתורה* ("works in the law"), which may also be viewed as a parallel, although the Pauline phrase is not matched exactly. Contrary to this state of the debate, de Roo introduces what she thinks to be an additional parallel. CD 5.5–6 reads in her translation, "And the works of David rose up except for the blood of Uriah, and God left them to him" (*ויעלו מעשי דויד מלבד דם*) (*אוריה ויעזבם לו אל*). The reading of *יעלו* as a Qal is plausible here, and the author's translation seems preferable against others. More problematic are the consequences drawn by de Roo: CD 5.5–6 now serves as a semantic link with 4Q174, where de Roo prefers the reading *מעשי תורה* ("works of the law") instead of *מעשי תודה* ("works of thanksgiving"). This reading is preferred, however, only from reasons of context, while de Roo downplays the arguments from palaeography (12). CD 5.5–6 is, then, interpreted in the light of 4Q174 and 4QMMT. From the context in 4Q174, David's works in CD 5.5–6 are thought of as sacrifices that "rise up," that is, are offered up in smoke, with the result that others are blessed for the sake of David's works of the law. From the context of 4QMMT,

de Roo also conjectures that the “works” are synonymous with **חסדים**, with vicarious “godly deeds.” The resulting idea, called “the Jewish notion of the works of the law” (25 n. 87), is that the works of the law of one person lead to the blessing of others. This idea is later used to understand the Pauline phrase and the controversy between Paul and his opponents.

Methodologically, the author’s approach raises a number of questions. First, the uncertainties in the reading of 4Q174 are disregarded, and the reading **תורה** is taken for granted without sufficient reasons. If contextual arguments overrule paleographic observations, the field is open for speculation. This is, in my view, a methodological fallacy. Then, the doubtful reading of 4Q174 serves to interpret the difficult phrase in CD 5.5–6, especially to determine the meaning of **ויעלו**. Furthermore, from the idea that CD, 4Q174, and 4QMMT are all sectarian texts and that David is also mentioned in 4Q174 and 4QMMT, de Roo thinks it is possible to take the notion of the term in one text as a clue for understanding the term in the other. The possibility that the meaning of the words and the imagery used may differ from one text to another is disregarded. From a perspective of modern semantics, this is also questionable. Therefore, the conclusions drawn in this chapter are far from certain, and calling the resulting idea “the Jewish notion of the works of the law” might be an additional simplification. Actually, there is not a single “Jewish notion” of the law and its accurate observance or its salvatory function, but there are very different approaches in Second Temple Judaism, and even within the Qumran texts there is no uniformity. Thus presupposing a single Jewish notion of the “works of the law” is as problematic as the precise description of that notion.

In chapter 2, de Roo draws on the well-known fact that in Qumran sectarian texts (especially in the Thanksgiving Hymns) there is a strong awareness of the sinfulness of all humanity, including the pious. As a contrast, it is noted that the readers are exhorted to live blamelessly and that the Qumran community regarded it as its duty to live perfectly according to the law. One might doubt, however, whether they also thought “they could acquire God’s favor by performing works of the law” (40). This might be a typical “Protestant” misunderstanding of Second Temple Judaism. According to many Qumran sectarian passages, it is rather God’s grace that opened the ear of the author of the members and revealed the true meaning of the law so that the Qumranites could be righteous in spite of their sins. Be that as it may, de Roo primarily aims at another point: the need for atoning sacrifices. From her (uncertain!) reading of 4Q174 col. 3 line 7 that the Qumranites offered “works of the law” as sacrifices to God, de Roo concludes that the Qumranites’ performing works of the law is a kind of vicarious sacrifice for other people’s sins. In de Roo’s view, performing “works of the law” as a vicarious and atoning sacrificial act seems to be the “Jewish notion” of works of the law.

This interpretation of the Qumran texts is related with the Pauline problems in chapters 3–8. Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the interpretation of the “works of the law” in different views of Paul. Here de Roo gives an overview on the Bultmannian position, the modified position of Wilckens, Cranfield, and Schreiner, the “ambiguous” Lutheran position, the position of L. Gaston, and, finally, the view of the New Perspective authors Sanders, Dunn, and Watson. After pinpointing the weaknesses of all the positions mentioned, de Roo notes that none of these scholars adequately recognizes the great significance of the figure of Abraham in Paul’s argument. According to her view, one should realize “that Abraham, in the eyes of at least some of Paul’s contemporaries, was ... a redeemer figure on whose good deeds Jews relied for salvation” (71). This is the main idea of the present book, which is further developed in chapters 5–8.

Before that, chapter 4 assesses the significance of the Qumran texts for establishing the meaning of “works of the law” in Paul. First, de Roo excludes the passages from 1QS 5.21 and 6.18: מעשי בתורה is not synonymous with מעשי תורה or מעשי התורה. Then de Roo points out that the expression from 4QMMT terminologically parallels the Pauline texts in two aspects: the text mentions that performing the works of the law will be reckoned to the addressee as righteousness, and it says that doing good deeds is not only for one’s own benefit but for the benefit of Israel. (75). This double parallel is explained, then, by the idea that the author refers not only to Ps 106:31 (as well as to Gen 15:6). From Ps 106:31 she explains the notion that others were blessed for the sake of the righteousness Phinehas, and she concludes, somewhat generalizing, that “in Jewish texts the expression ‘to be reckoned as righteousness’ is especially used when an individual’s obedience is a source of blessing for others” (81). This is then applied to the figure of Abraham, who “was viewed as such a salutary person” (81).

In an intermediate step of the argument, de Roo discusses the view of Michael Bachmann that “works of the law” in Qumran and Paul merely denotes “works prescribed” (i.e., halakah, precepts), not works performed. *Contra* Bachmann, she states, in my view correctly, that the expression also implies works performed, that is, obedience to the whole law of God, including both cultic and ethical deeds (94). From this observation she can also rule out L. Gaston’s view of “works of the law” as a subjective genitive, works done by the law.

In chapter 5 de Roo moves on to Paul and his portrayal of Abraham in the context of other early Jewish views of Abraham where the focus is much more on the patriarch’s obedience in his binding of Isaac. She points out that, for many of Paul’s contemporaries, Abraham’s obedience was also effective for the benefit of others, so that the Abrahamic covenant, based on the patriarch’s obedience, was a source of blessing and of the divine grace for its members. According to de Roo, this construction can help one to find a way

between the views of the so-called New Perspective about “covenantal nomism” with the grace rooted in the covenant and a more “Lutheran-minded” view where grace is thought to be rooted in one’s own obedience. Therefore, chapter 6 discusses the meaning of “justification apart from works of the law” in Paul. Here de Roo tries to harmonize the different passages on how a person is justified: The “enigma” in Paul that he says that “works of the law” do not justify whereas in other contexts (e.g., Rom 2) he can also say that good deeds lead to salvation is solved by the idea that Paul “is not necessarily criticizing a reliance on one’s own works for justification” (221) but rather a reliance on other’s works, such as the works of Abraham. There remain some doubts, however, whether this is a real solution to the apparent contradictions in Paul.

Chapter 7 then browses through Paul’s argument concerning “justification apart from works of the law” in Romans, before chapter 8 focuses on the same argument in Galatians, which is, notably, dated early, in 48 C.E., before the apostles’ council, on the basis of the south Galatian hypothesis and an identification of the events of Gal 2:1–10 with Acts 11:27–30, not Acts 15. There is no need to discuss these introductory matters here. I would like to mention only one striking point: if Galatians is dated so early, it is even more difficult to reconstruct the background of Paul’s argument and the views of his opponents from Romans and not from Galatians. Actually, de Roo just conjectures that in Galatians Paul reacts against the same theological error as he does in Romans (150).

But even for Romans, de Roo’s argument is not really compelling. As is well known, the reconstruction of the situation of Romans and also of the respective opponents and their views is one of the most difficult issues, and actually there is no textual reason to assume that Paul’s opponents (in Rome, Jerusalem, or elsewhere) actually relied on Abraham’s works as the source of blessing. Nor is the argument compelling that “the” Jewish notion of “works of the law” is the idea of a vicarious or atoning obedience effective for the benefit of others. If Paul’s opponents in Romans or elsewhere had actually relied on Abraham as a redeemer figure instead of Christ, one might expect a more polemic treatment of Abraham. In Rom 4, however, Abraham is described as a very positive figure, and there is no devaluation of Abraham because of his sinfulness. Paul’s scriptural argument in Rom 4, thus, seems to be misconceived by de Roo. Further, if de Roo conjectures that the same theological error was already rejected in Galatians, about seven to ten years before the composition of Romans, this is even more daring. Methodologically the other way is mandatory: the issue between Paul and the “Judaizers” is best reconstructed from Galatians, with consideration of Paul’s own intellectual biography and spiritual experience, and from there we can cautiously draw some consequences for the argument phrased later in Romans.

De Roo aptly states that “works of the law” cannot be understood as merely precepts or cultic deeds (boundary markers), but her attempt to establish an alternative view beyond the dichotomy of the Lutheran and the New Perspectives does not lead to a convincing solution. In spite of numerous fine interpretative observations, this first monograph on the “works of the law” in Qumran and Paul remains unsatisfactory, due to the methodological problems in selecting, reading, and interpreting the Qumran parallels, to an overgeneralizing idea of “the” Jewish notion of “works of the law” and to the application of this alleged Jewish notion to Romans without sufficient textual evidence.