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Zetterholm, Magnus

Approaches to Paul: A Student's Guide to Recent Scholarship

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In this guide to recent scholarship on Paul, Magnus Zetterholm aims “to attempt to explain how Paul’s relation to Judaism can be understood in two very different ways and to explore which approach is likely to produce the most historically plausible picture of Paul and the development of the early Jesus movement” (10). The particular focus of the book is therefore on Paul’s relation to Judaism and on the question of whether he should be seen as a figure within Judaism or as somehow having made a decisive break with it and as representing something distinct: Christianity.

The opening chapter offers a way into the study of Paul, initially via Romans and Galatians, which highlight Paul’s apparent “break” with Judaism and the Torah. After briefly setting out the aims of the volume, Zetterholm then sketches Paul’s biography and letters (13–32). With the second-century emergence of what we know as Christianity, what Zetterholm calls the “one-sided reading of Paul” came to triumph. This view is somewhat hyperbolically described as one in which Paul “repudiated his original religious identity... [and] brought the salvation of the God of Israel, not to the Jews, but to the non-Jews, and at the same time banished everything Jewish to the rubbish heap” (32).

The next chapter jumps forward to the nineteenth century and the formation of the modern paradigm for understanding Paul and Judaism in the work of Ferdinand Christian Baur and the Tübingen School. Baur in particular, Zetterholm argues, conferred “scientific” legitimacy on the superiority of Christianity to Judaism (40). There follows something of a long digression tracing the history of anti-Semitism from pre-Christian times, including a lengthy section summarizing Zetterholm’s view of the processes by which Christian groups came to separate from Judaism; this early church struggle formed the historical context for the origins of Christian anti-Semitism (57). The historical narrative continues with the opposition between law and grace as established in the theology of Augustine and then in Luther and the Protestant tradition. This brings us back to the nineteenth century, where in Germany various strands combine to construct a view of the inferiority of Judaism. Further work by Ferdinand Weber, Emil Schürer, and Wilhelm Boussett then contributed to a Christian theological construction of Judaism as a religion of legalism “unable to create a relationship between God and the individual” (67).

Zetterholm then (ch. 3) surveys the work of Rudolf Bultmann and two of his most influential students, Ernst Käsemann and Günther Bornkamm, in whose work what is termed “the standard view of Paul” is consolidated. Despite their differences, Zetterholm sees all three scholars as sharing a theologically grounded, negative view of Judaism, with an absolute contrast between Paul and Judaism (83). This “standard view,” Zetterholm suggests, was “practically unchallenged” until the 1970s, despite the early protests, which he notes, from Jewish scholars such as Claude Montefiore, Salomon Schechter, and George Foot Moore.

The following chapter (ch. 4) examines the emergence of the “new perspective” on Paul through the work of Krister Stendahl and especially E. P. Sanders. As well as the work of these two scholars, Zetterholm also outlines the interpretations of Paul offered by key figures influenced by Sanders and the post-Sanders debates: Heikki Räisänen, James Dunn, and N. T. Wright. Zetterholm’s main analytical point is that these writers all remain within a framework where Paul largely represents something separate or distinct from Judaism. In short, “[t]he new perspective on Paul should at least partly be regarded as a Christian theological attempt to come to terms with the new view of Judaism while still establishing a well-defined distinction between Judaism and Christianity” (126).

By contrast, Zetterholm next (ch. 5) examines the work of a number of scholars whom he sees as in some ways moving “beyond the new perspective” whose work does not retain the basic assumption of a dichotomy between Judaism and Christianity but who interpret Paul as a figure *within* first-century Judaism. Representatives of such a perspective are Lloyd Gaston, Peter Tomson, Stanley Stowers, Mark Nanos, and Caroline Johnson Hodge. The following chapter (ch. 6) then surveys the reactions to Sanders and the new

perspective that in various ways defend a more traditional “Protestant” understanding of Paul. Representatives of such a stance are Frank Thielman, Andrew Das, Simon Gathercole, and Stephen Westerholm. Such scholars take Sanders’s work seriously but are influenced in their own depictions of Paul by a confessional and theological agenda.

The next chapter (ch. 7) offers a survey of some very recent works offering new or radical directions in Pauline studies. These are seen as connected with, and further extending, the radical readings in chapter 5 that are concerned to go “beyond” the new perspective (see 195, 223). First, Zetterholm notes the recent interest in Paul among secular philosophers. Then, under the heading of postcolonial approaches, he considers Neil Elliott’s recent monograph, *The Arrogance of Nations* (2008). Under the heading “Paul and the Feminists,” Zetterholm examines Kathy Ehrensperger’s *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged* (2004) and, finally, under the heading “multi-disciplinary approaches,” Davina Lopez’s *Apostle to the Conquered* (2008).

The final chapter (ch. 8) offers a summary of the whole book and some overall reflections and conclusions. For Zetterholm, there are broadly “three different schools” in contemporary Pauline scholarship: a “traditional, Reformation perspective”; “the new perspective”; and the “radical new perspective” (231). The “new perspective” thus occupies something of a “middle position” (125). In the first two “schools,” “normative theology” continues to play a significant role, something Zetterholm sees as problematic from a “scientific” perspective, while the third approach has most fully rejected theological influence and for Zetterholm offers the most promising route into “[t]he truth about Paul” (239).

There is much valuable and perceptive material in this survey, particularly in tracing the nineteenth-century influences on the “traditional” view of Paul and Judaism, in highlighting the range of “radical” readings that attempt to go beyond the new perspective, and in attempting to make explicit some of the hermeneutical and theological influences on scholarship. However, there are also, to my mind, certain weaknesses.

My first critical observation relates primarily to the title and back-cover blurb, which describe the book as offering a guide to recent scholarship on Paul, including topics such as the Roman Empire, feminist and postcolonial interpretation, and so on. At times the author himself depicts his work as a survey of “major currents within the discipline” (11; cf. 231), but generally he is clear that this is a book about scholarly views on Paul’s relation to Judaism (1, 11, etc.). What this means is that many “major currents” and contemporary debates within the discipline receive little or no mention. For example, there is no mention of Gerd Theissen and Wayne Meeks nor of any of the social-scientific studies of Paul and the Pauline churches that have developed since the ground-

breaking work in the 1970s. There is nothing directly on debates about the heart of Paul's theology (participation, justification, etc.), on Paul's use of scripture, on the meaning of *pistis Christou*, on the relationship between Jesus and Paul, or on the study of Paul's ethics from Rudolf Bultmann through Victor Paul Furnish to the present day. Scholarship that has focused on Paul in relation to Greco-Roman philosophy also passes mostly without notice, with the exception of Stowers's study of Romans; neither Troels Engberg-Pedersen nor Abraham Malherbe features in the bibliography, for example. Potential readers, not least teachers and students, need to be clear that this is a book on Paul's relation to Judaism and not an inclusive survey of contemporary Pauline scholarship.

The tendency in most of the major chapters to focus on selected monographs, described one by one, also has certain weaknesses, especially when combined with Zetterholm's decision not to offer bibliographical leads for further reading (keeping references to a minimum, on the grounds that "[t]he relevant literature can easily be found through the bibliographies in the works under discussion" [11], is rather unhelpful for students: Where on earth should one start in the lengthy and often specialized bibliographies included in most of the scholarly monographs under discussion?). This means that only certain voices are presented. With the focus on monographs, students are not alerted to the two-volume response to Sanders edited by Don Carson, Peter O'Brien, and Mark Seifrid (*Justification and Varied Nomism*), nor to Richard Hays's lengthy reply to Stowers, to mention just two examples. Indeed, this lack of bibliographical guidance combines with something of a lack of critical assessment of the works surveyed. On the whole, Zetterholm sticks to description rather than raising critical issues students could valuably consider (the Protestant theological assumptions that continue to underpin Sanders's analysis, for example, could well have been highlighted; see 100–108). The central issue that dominates Zetterholm's analysis is the question as to whether Paul is depicted as someone "outside" of or still "within" Judaism—and some will question whether "new perspective" scholars such as Dunn and Wright are rightly characterized as taking the former position. Zetterholm is somewhat critical of Westerholm—for his very limited engagement with the "radical" scholars such as Stowers and Nanos and his presentation of a "highly contentious objection to the Sanders-Dunn-Wright new perspective" (191)—but he has no critical questions to raise about the "important" and "excellent" work by Elliott and Lopez. It is not that I object to an author finding some works more compelling and cogent than others, but, especially in a guide for students, there ought to be *some* issues for critical discussion one might valuably raise about all proposals and perspectives.

It is also unfortunate that the monographs surveyed as representatives of recent scholarship on Paul are all in English. Given the inclusion of works in German in the earlier, more historical, chapters, this gives the impression that all the significant and important recent work on Paul is published in English, while Germany's role is mostly

consigned to an unfortunate history. I appreciate that works in languages other than English may be deemed inaccessible to English-speaking students, and thus irrelevant to include (sometimes a publisher's decision rather than an author's), but it is important to convey the reality that scholarship on Paul remains an international endeavor, with relevant and innovative publications in a number of languages.

Finally, I found chapter 7, on "breaking boundaries," somewhat loosely connected and less satisfactory than those that preceded. It seems a chapter intended to take the book beyond the specific confines of scholarship on Paul and Judaism, but, given the focus throughout on the history of this particular discussion, the history and developments that lead to some of the more diverse recent work remains out of sight. Zetterholm's attempt to connect these new studies with the "radical new perspective" is at best only partially successful. For example, Neil Elliott's recent study should be connected with the development of interest in Paul and empire, a development that needs to be set in the context of a history that goes back to Adolf Deissmann and is much influenced by recent work in the field of ancient history, notably by Simon Price, and for which Richard Horsley's 1997 edited volume *Paul and Empire*, along with Elliott's 1994 book *Liberating Paul*, are important landmarks. Yet given the focus on Paul and Judaism, there is no space for such a history of scholarship. The same applies to the treatment of Paul and feminism, for which Ehrensperger's 2004 book serves as the exemplar. This needs to be set in the context of "traditional" interpretations of Paul's view of women and the modern challenge to them and the landmark work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, again absent from the bibliography. One can only cover so much, of course, but given the decision to focus specifically on Paul's relation to Judaism, the attempt to engage with other approaches and recent developments is somewhat unsatisfactory.

Nonetheless, despite these weaknesses, this book offers a valuable and well-informed survey of the competing contemporary constructions of Paul in relation to Judaism. Setting these perspectives in the context of scholarly developments since the nineteenth century is especially valuable. Since Zetterholm gives more attention to the "radical" post-new perspective developments, and clearly favors this approach to understanding Paul, his work might profitably be used alongside Stephen Westerholm's *Perspectives Old and New On Paul*, which gives less space to such perspectives but is in other respects more thorough and comprehensive. It is important to be clear, though, that Zetterholm's book offers a guide to recent scholarship on Paul's relation to Judaism, not to the discipline of Pauline studies as a whole.