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Paul and His Interpreters since F. C. Baur¹

The history of Paul's significant interpreters stretches from his contemporaries (cf. 2 Pet 3:15–16!) to the present and includes such notable figures as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley. Our focus here is on the way in which Pauline scholarship since the mid-nineteenth century has taken its cues from F. C. Baur and the "Tübingen school" that grew up around him. For despite the exponentially burgeoning volume of studies in the last 150 years, the basic perspectives of the Tübingen school have continued to provide both the structure and presuppositions for the modern study of Paul's writings. As a result of the agenda set by Baur's work, Pauline research in the twentieth century has focused predominantly on the interrelated questions of the center of Paul's thinking, Paul's view of the law, and the nature of Paul's opponents. Moreover, the questions raised by Baur concerning the place of Paul's theology in the history of the early church still remain unresolved.

F. C. BAUR AND THE TÜBINGEN SCHOOL

Ferdinand Christian Baur was professor of NT at the University of Tübingen from 1826 until his death in 1860. At the heart of Baur's work was his conviction that modernity could no longer accept the traditional Christian view of a transcendent, personal God. The concept of revelation as the disclosure of God's will, and of miracles as the act of a personal God in history,

1. From Scott J. Hafemann, "Paul and His Interpreters since F. C. Baur." In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by Ralph P. Martin et al., 666–79. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993.

must therefore also be rejected. By midcareer Baur became convinced that the traditional Christian view must be replaced by the new speculative philosophy of Hegel, which to Baur's mind offered the most coherent and comprehensive explanation of history and of the nature of reality. But in the final fifteen years of his life Baur came to reject Hegel's abstract view of God as infinite Spirit or eternal Idea, which in the evolving process of history was emerging from its own previous finite manifestations. In its place Baur returned to a simpler rationalism that emphasized universal ethical principles as the meaning of life. The value of Christianity lay in the fact that it taught such principles. Nevertheless, it was the Hegelian orientation of Baur's earlier and formative understanding of Paul and early Christianity that became determinative for subsequent scholarship.

Baur's Paradigm

In 1831 Baur published his seminal essay, "Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des petrinischen und paulinischen Christenthums in der ältesten Kirche, der Apostel Petrus in Rom."² In it he laid out the foundation for his understanding of Paul and the history of the early church by applying the dialectical, evolutionary approach of Hegel's philosophy to 1 Cor 1:11–12. Based on this text Baur posited a *fundamental opposition* between Gentile Christianity, represented by Paul and the party of Apollos, with its universal, law-free, Hellenistically determined gospel, and Jewish Christianity, represented by Cephas and the "Christ-party," with its particular, law-orientated, Jewish-bound interpretation of the significance of Jesus. According to Baur, the "Christ-Party" was a Jewish-Christian faction that followed Peter and emphasized its own direct relationship to the historical Jesus through the original apostles whom Christ had appointed.

First Corinthians 1:11–12 thus provided a basic framework for understanding the conflict within early Christianity that provided the inner dynamic of Paul's writings. Paul's law/gospel contrast was seen to reflect the opposition within early Christianity between Paul and Gentile Christianity on the one side, and the Jewish Christianity supported by Peter, James, and the rest of the Jerusalem apostles on the other. It was to fend off the continual attacks by his Jewish-Christian opponents that Paul consequently developed his doctrine of justification by faith as the center of his theology. Moreover, according to Baur, this bitter conflict between Peter and Paul not

2. "The Christ-party in the Corinthian Church, the Conflict between Petrine and Pauline Christianity in the Early Church, the Apostle Peter in Rome." *TZT* 4 (1831) 61–206.

only dominated the rest of the writings of the NT, it also drove the historical development of the early church until the end of the second century, when it was eventually resolved by the emerging unity of the hierarchical Catholic church.

The height of the Tübingen school was reached in 1845 with the publication of Baur's *Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi: Sein Leben und Wirken, seine Briefe und seine Lehre* (published in English in 1875 in two volumes as *Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, His Life and Work, His Epistles and His Doctrine*). As the capstone of his work on Paul, Baur now argued that the authentic Paul could only be found where the conflict between Jewish (Petrine) and Gentile (Pauline) Christianity was evident *and* where Paul's doctrine of a law-free justification by faith was explicitly presented in response. Those writings attributed to Paul that evince an attempt to mediate this conflict by finding a middle ground were regarded as a second stage in the development of the early church. Furthermore, any documents that reflected an authoritarian or ecclesiological attempt to resolve this conflict were considered part of the eventual Catholic resolution of the Jewish-Gentile Christian conflict around A.D. 200, which came about only in response to the common threat of Gnosticism.

Armed with this paradigm, Baur concluded that only Romans, Galatians, and the Corinthian letters could be considered authentic. On the other extreme, the Pastorals were clearly inauthentic, late second-century documents written against gnostics and Marcionites. The Prison Epistles and Philemon, although sometimes disputed in terms of authorship and theology, were also in reality aimed at gnostic opponents, being written between A.D. 120 and 140 as late examples of the Pauline school. First and Second Thessalonians were written in the generation after Paul (A.D. 70–75), but were of no particular significance, since they were of inferior quality theologically. They had no trace of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith, nor of the conflict between Peter and Paul, and their eschatology conflicted with 1 Cor 15. Following his lead, Baur's students and followers then applied this basic scheme to the rest of the NT writings by categorizing them according to their theological "tendency" (*Tendenz*) as either Pauline (e.g., Hebrews; 1 Peter), Petrine-judaizing (e.g., James; Matthew; Revelation), mediating and conciliatory (e.g., Luke-Acts; Mark), or catholicizing (2 Peter; Jude; John).

Baur's Impact

As time went on scholars rejected the Tübingen school's evaluation of the late date and character of the majority of the Pauline letters. Its analysis of the rest of the NT and of the second century as a continuation of a conflict between Gentile and Jewish Christianity has also proved unconvincing, since it was based on the groundless identification of Simon the Magician in *Pseudo-Clementines* with Paul! Many, if not most, NT scholars have also rejected Baur's historical skepticism and philosophical rationalism, which as a matter of principle excluded the supernatural from history. Nor has the Tübingen school's complete skepticism concerning the historical Jesus gained wide acceptance, beginning as it did with D. F. Strauss's *Life of Jesus* in 1835 and positing as a result a decisive break between the life and teaching of Jesus and the Jerusalem apostles on the one hand, and that of Paul on the other.

But in spite of the weakness of his historical and theological judgments, Baur's consistent attempt to provide a comprehensive and coherent understanding of the history of the early church on the basis of historical reasoning alone, without recourse to supernatural interventions or to explanations based on the miraculous, did propel biblical scholarship into the modern world. Moreover, Baur's work also set the stage for the debate in the twentieth century over the relationship between the life and teaching of the historical Jesus and the theology of Paul. Most importantly, Baur's treatment of Paul raised the three interrelated, interpretative questions with which all subsequent students of Paul have had to wrestle in attempting to work out a comprehensive picture of Paul's life and theology: (1) the identity and perspective of Paul's opposition as a key to his own life and thought, (2) Paul's view of the law and its relationship to his own understanding of the gospel, and (3) the search for the generating center of Paul's theology (if indeed it is possible to talk about one such generative principle within Paul's varied writings).

It is these three questions, above all, which have determined the interpretation of Paul and his place within the history of the early church for the last 150 years. How one answers any one of them will greatly influence, and be greatly influenced by, one's understanding of the others. But for the sake of clarity, the three issues will be treated separately, inasmuch as the interpreters of Paul since Baur have usually entered the debate by one of these three avenues.

THE IDENTITY AND THEOLOGY OF PAUL'S OPPONENTS

No aspect of Pauline studies has received more attention in the twentieth century than the identity and arguments of Paul's opponents. And nowhere has the disagreement been more far reaching. Beginning with the work of Baur there have been at least eight major theories proposed for Galatians, and in the more difficult cases such as 2 Corinthians and Philippians, scholars have proposed no less than thirteen and eighteen different proposals respectively.³ Despite the multitude of proposals, the debate concerning the identity of Paul's opponents in his various letters still centers on the validity of Baur's understanding of the conflict between Jewish and Gentile Christianity during Paul's day and on its *extent* within the Pauline corpus, since Baur was the first modern scholar to make Paul's opponents the key to interpreting the whole of Paul's writings.

The Polarization of Views in the Nineteenth Century

Of course, Baur's view was not new, nor was it uncontested. Ever since the Reformation most Protestant exegetes have held that Paul's opponents were "Judaizers" who advocated the necessity for Gentile Christians to be circumcised and to keep the Mosaic law. But already in the seventeenth century some scholars argued, in contrast, that Paul's opponents were gnostics, while others maintained that Paul's opponents were not comprised simply of Judaizers or gnostics, but included those whose teaching mixed legalistic, gnostic and/or enthusiastic elements. Indeed, just prior to Baur's work, Edward Burton offered in 1829 the most thoroughgoing presentation to date of the thesis that Paul's opponents were gnostics. The debate in the first half of the twentieth century thus had its immediate roots in the polarization that took place during the previous century between those who presented Paul's opponents as gnostics and those who, following Baur, saw them as Judaizers. Moreover, the debate centered primarily on the identity of Paul's opponents in Corinth because of the difference in subject matter between 1 and 2 Corinthians and the other Pauline letters. If Baur's thesis was to stand, it must be able to account for Paul's theology and opposition in 1 and 2 Corinthians, where the issue of the law does not appear to be central, even though, especially in 2 Corinthians, the focus of Paul's apologetic is still on his own legitimacy as an apostle.

3. See Gunther, *Opponents*, 1–5.

Lightfoot, Lütgert, and the History of Religions School

In nineteenth-century Germany the overwhelming majority of scholars thought that Baur was right, even in regard to the issues at stake in the Corinthian correspondence. But outside of Germany the reaction to Baur was significantly different. This was especially true in England, where J. B. Lightfoot led the way with his critique of Baur, entitled “St. Paul and the Three” (in his *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 5th ed., 1884, 292–374), in which he maintained that Paul did not stand in opposition to the chief “apostles of the circumcision,” James, Peter, and John, and that the opponents of Paul were not rival Christians associated with the “Pillar” apostles (Gal 2:9). Rather, the opponents behind Colossians, Romans, 1 Corinthians, and the Pastorals were part of a “Christian Essene” movement that was more gnostic in orientation than the traditional Pharisaic Judaizers whom Paul opposed in Galatians, 2 Corinthians, and Philippians. In contrast to the situation in Germany, Lightfoot's influence in the English-speaking world consequently mitigated Baur's impact by keeping scholars from interpreting Paul's letters as reflecting only one type of judaizing heresy.

Within Germany the first significant break with Baur did not come until the beginning of the twentieth century with the publication in 1908 of W. Lütgert's work, *Freiheitspredigt und Schwärmgeister in Korinth*. In Lütgert's view, Paul's opponents in his various writings could all be subsumed under the overarching rubric of “gnostics,” or “pneumatics,” whose background was a liberal, Alexandrian Judaism that taught a gnosis in the form of a haggadic exposition and expansion of Scripture. Only in Galatians could Paul's opponents clearly be identified as Christian, Pharisaic Judaizers. But even in Galatia a pneumatic opposition still existed, so that in his letter to the Galatians Paul was fighting against two fronts at once.

It was the rise of the *religionsgeschichtliche* (“history of religions”) school, however, with its emphasis on a gnostic, mystery religion backdrop to early Christianity, that appeared to deal the deathblow to the reign of Baur's position. The history of religions school crystallized around the scholarship of W. Bousset, especially his 1913 work, *Kyrios Christos: Geschichte des Christusglaubens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenaeus* (ET *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, 1970), and R. Reitzenstein's study of the ancient mystery religions, *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen* (1927, 3rd ed.; ET *Hellenistic Mystery-Religions: Their Basic Ideas and Significance*, 1977). As a result of these works, the attention of NT scholars was now forcefully directed to the conceptual world of Hellenism. In addition, the history of religions school offered for the first time a reconstruction of the development of early

Christianity that was just as comprehensive and extensive as that of Baur's. Prior to this time, the concept of "Gnosticism" had been used merely as a general description for certain theological tendencies. With the rise of the history-of-religions approach, this formerly vague term was now given the concrete and well-defined content needed to compete with the Tübingen school's ability to define the precise nature of Jewish-Christian legalism.

Yet, ironically, it was precisely the well-defined nature of Gnosticism offered by the history of religions school that brought about its own demise. In fact, the last serious attempt to argue that Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians were gnostics was R. Bultmann's 1947 essay, *Exegetische Probleme des Zweiten Korintherbriefes zu 2 Kor 5:1-5; 5:11-6:10; 10-13; 12:21*, written in response to E. Käsemann's influential article, "Die Legitimität des Apostels: Eine Untersuchung zu II Korinther 10-13" (*ZNW* 41 [1942] 33-71). Käsemann had concluded that Paul's opponents in Corinth were simply pneumatics who, as part of an association of Palestinians in the Diaspora, emphasized in their preaching their own spiritual exploits and accomplishments. In Käsemann's view, to say more than this, especially to understand them as gnostics, was to go beyond the evidence of the text. In response, Bultmann argued that Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians were in fact the same Christian gnostics whom Paul had opposed in 1 Cor 15. But what is most evident in Bultmann's response is his determination to maintain at all costs the existence of a pre-Christian Gnosticism. Bultmann's desperate attempt eventually failed, taking with it the entire program of interpreting early Christianity against the backdrop of the gnostic mystery religions, which had been a central tenant of the history of religions school. There was simply no evidence to justify their extension of the incipient gnostic tendencies apparent in some parts of the NT into a reconstruction of a full-blown pre-Christian Gnosticism like that first attested only in the second and third centuries.

The Bornkamm-Georgi Hypothesis

The collapse of the Bousset-Reitzenstein-Bultmann hypothesis thus freed scholarship from the burden of its past bias toward Gnosticism as the key to Paul's thought, while at the same time allowing it to retain the history of religions school's sound insight that early Christianity must be interpreted in the light of its surrounding religious context. Ultimately this continuing interest in Paul's religious environment and his opponents in Corinth culminated in the massive work of Dieter Georgi, *Die Gegner des Paulus im 2. Korintherbrief* (1964; ET *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians*,

1986). Georgi's work was an extension and substantiation of the position of his mentor, Günther Bornkamm, whose overall understanding of Paul's life and thought was summarized in his now classic study, *Paul* (original German ed., 1969; ET 1971).

Georgi concluded that Baur's earlier adversaries had not been able to offer an adequate alternative because they had not taken seriously enough the Jewish origins and aspects of Paul's opposition. Georgi's extensive study of the missionary activities of Hellenistic Jews therefore sought to provide the history-of-religions foundation Lütgert and Bultmann had failed to produce in order to combat Baur's extensive depiction of Palestinian Judaism and Judaizers. Against this backdrop, Georgi's own study of the terminology in 2 Cor 10–13 led him to the conclusion that Paul's opponents were Jewish-Christian missionaries of Palestinian origin who utilized the propaganda methods of Hellenistic Jewish apologists. The result of Georgi's surveys of the Hellenistic-Jewish sources is a picture of Paul's opponents as Hellenistic-Jewish pneumatic missionaries whose self-understanding was based on the "divine man" (θεῖος ἄνθρωπος) tradition within Hellenistic Judaism.

The publication of Georgi's work finally confronted Baur's thesis with an equally systematic and comprehensive antithesis. If Lütgert had ended the *dominance* of Baur's position, Georgi appeared to have called into question its very *legitimacy*! Baur's traditional picture now seemed to be a thing of the past. The only task remaining, apparently, was to refine Georgi's position, which many scholars since then have attempted to do.

Oostendorp, Barrett, and the Revival of F. C. Baur

This new surge of optimism was premature. Not only was Georgi's work severely criticized for his methodology and use of sources, but the position of Baur itself still remained very much alive, despite the rise of the history of religions school. In a reversal of roles, however, it was now two scholars from outside Germany, D. W. Oostendorp and C. K. Barrett, who rose up to defend Baur's classic thesis, albeit with certain significant modifications.

Oostendorp modified Baur's Judaistic hypothesis by incorporating within it the central significance of the Spirit, which Baur had excluded and which had repeatedly become the basis upon which he was attacked. According to Oostendorp (*Another Jesus: A Gospel of Jewish Christian Superiority in II Corinthians*, 1967), the Judaizers in Corinth, as in Galatia, had connected the work of the Spirit with the observance of the law (cf. Gal 5:13–26), so that Paul's purpose was to contrast the law and the Spirit in such a way as to contradict their teaching (cf. Gal 3:1–5; 2 Cor 3:6). Oostendorp

was able to integrate the reception and role of the Spirit with the issue of obedience to the law, both in the theology of Paul's opponents and in Paul's own understanding. Oostendorp thus brought together what, in the more traditional approach to Paul's opponents, had always been kept apart: the Spirit and the law.

Of even greater significance for the history of the debate is the fact that Baur's position has been strongly represented by one of the most influential of the recent interpreters of Paul in the English-speaking world, C. K. Barrett. In 1953 Barrett laid the foundation for his future work in his article, "Paul and the 'Pillar' Apostles" (in *Studia Paulina* [ed. J. N. Sevenster and W. C. Van Unnik; 1953], 1–19). Ten years later Barrett built upon this foundational study with a reexamination of the references and possible allusions to Peter in 1 and 2 Corinthians entitled "Cephas and Corinth" (in *Abraham unser Vater: Juden und Christen im Gespräch über die Bibel*; [ed. Otto Betz et al., 1963], 1–12). In this study Barrett concluded not only that it was probable that Cephas had visited Corinth, but also that the "man" who was building on Paul's foundation in 1 Cor 3:10–17 was either Peter himself or someone acting in Peter's name. Like Baur before him, Barrett thus posited the existence in Corinth of a Jewish-Christian "Cephas Party" in opposition to Paul.

If that were true, why then was Peter not mentioned in 2 Corinthians? Because, according to Barrett, and contrary to Baur's view, Paul still retained some respect for the original Jerusalem apostles. For this reason, rather than attack Peter directly, Paul released all of his "vigorous antipathy" on the "other agents" at work in Corinth under the guise of the authority of Peter—that is, the "false apostles" of 2 Cor 11:13–15. Thus for Barrett, as for Käsemann before him, a distinction must be made between the "false apostles" and the eminent Jerusalem apostles of 2 Cor 11:5 and Gal 2:9. Furthermore, the key to the situation in 2 Corinthians is the same as that in Gal 2:12: Peter's heart was in the right place, but he was easily frightened and used by others! At Corinth Peter had once again become an easily manipulated figurehead whose name and authority were being used by impostors. As in Gal 2, Paul was therefore once again in the uncomfortable position of not being able to repudiate Peter, while at the same time having to deal with those who wanted to destroy his work in Peter's name. From this point on, Barrett's subsequent work was aimed at strengthening this basic position.

The Deadlock in Recent Scholarship

After more than 150 years of scholarship the result of Barrett's extensive work was to destroy any notion that a general consensus had been reached concerning the identity and theology of Paul's opponents. By the mid-1970s the camps were equally divided. The very fact that Barrett could argue for Baur's position so persuasively in the face of its most serious challenge made it clear that scholarship was at a stalemate. The two basic positions were now both firmly entrenched and well fortified with a strong supply of documented arguments and counterarguments.

Equally devastating to the modern debate has been the serious doubt raised concerning the historical reality that is said to undergird both of these positions. Georgi's evidence for the existence of a "divine man" persona in Judaism as the key to Paul's opponents' self-understanding has been seriously called into question. Others have criticized Georgi's attempt to interpret "servants of Christ" in 2 Cor 11:23 in the sense of "envoys," while still others have rejected his entire enterprise by maintaining that Jewish parallels to the missionary motives and methods of Paul do not exist. On the other hand, those who want to maintain that Paul's opponents were in some sense "Judaizers" must now contend with the various challenges raised by the "new perspective on Paul" (see below). Indeed, some from this perspective doubt if Paul's polemics had anything to do with the real position of his opponents at all! Hence, like the gnostic hypothesis of a previous generation, both of the basic, remaining hypotheses now stand under the shadow of serious questions concerning their historical reliability.

Central to these questions is the realization that the current stalemate is a direct and natural result of the methodology employed in attempting to determine the nature of Paul's opposition. The inconclusive and internally contradictory history of Pauline studies since Baur has demonstrated that scholars must resist the temptation to reconstruct a grand hypothesis based on isolated fragments and "catchwords" from Paul's letters, which are then filled out by recourse to distant parallels. The simple fact is that there is no direct evidence from any of Paul's opponents themselves, unless James is read as an anti-Pauline polemic, which is itself certainly questionable.

Sumney's proposal of a "minimalist approach" to identifying Paul's opponents is therefore to be welcomed for its emphasis on the priority of exegesis in a "text-focused method," for its insistence upon a sound evaluation and use of proper sources, together with a "stringently" limited application of the "mirror technique" (i.e., reading the position of Paul's opponents directly out of Paul's own assertions as their opposite), and for its rejection of the attempt to approach the text with a previously determined, externally

based reconstruction. It is also significant in view of the history of research that when Sumney himself applies his method to 2 Corinthians he offers no new insights into the identity of Paul's opponents. As Sumney's work thus illustrates, if progress is to be made in breaking the current deadlock, it will come about only when such a text-oriented approach to the problem is combined with a renewed analysis of Paul's own view of the law and the center of his thinking as they impinge upon the opposition that he faced, not only in Corinth, but also in Galatia, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Essential to such a renewed study is the recognition that in countering his opponents Paul drove a wedge between the "pillar apostles" and those who worked in their name by underscoring his essential unity with the Jerusalem apostles while at the same time opposing those who claimed to represent them (cf. Gal 2:1-10; 1 Cor 15:1-11; 2 Cor 11:5-6).

PAUL'S VIEW OF THE LAW

Baur's understanding of the conflict in the early church between a law-free, Pauline, Gentile Christianity and its judaizing, Petrine, Jewish-Christian counterpart was wedded to his acceptance of the Reformation understanding of Paul's law/gospel contrast. But as Douglas Moo observed in 1987, following the insight of Robert Jewett, "scholarship on Paul and the law in the last ten years has witnessed a 'paradigm shift.'"⁴ All of the traditional "assured results" concerning Paul's law/gospel contrast are now being so seriously called into question that, after a long period of dormancy characterized by only minor refinements of the reigning paradigm, Paul's understanding of the law is currently the most debated topic among Pauline scholars.

Antecedents to the Paradigm Shift in Recent Scholarship

The recent destruction of the modern consensus concerning Paul's law/gospel contrast corresponds to the largely unheeded dissatisfaction earlier in the twentieth century with the traditional Reformation understanding of the centrality of justification by faith in Paul's theology (see below). It also picks up Johannes Munck's explicit and sustained critique of the continuing influence of Baur on modern scholarship.⁵ To argue as Munck did, however, that the only substantive difference between Paul and the Jerusalem apostles was over mission strategy, based on Paul's conviction that the Gentiles must

4. Moo, "Paul and the Law," 287.

5. See his *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, 1959 (German, 1954).

be won to Christ *first* as a prelude to the salvation of Israel, did not seem to account for Paul's critique of the law itself. Moreover, Munck's contention that Paul was convinced that the arrival of the messianic age depended upon his own ministry, so that Paul himself becomes the central figure in salvation history, was viewed both as an overstatement of the case and as an untenable denial of the centrality of Christ in Paul's eschatology. Munck's supporting thesis that Paul's opponents were *Gentile* Judaizers has also garnered little support. Nevertheless, Munck's strong rejection of Baur's conflict theory concerning the relationship between Paul and the rest of the primitive church, based upon a supposed difference in their fundamental perspectives concerning Jesus and the law, is a lasting contribution of his work. For Munck, there was no essential theological conflict between Paul and Jewish Christianity.

On the other hand, H. J. Schoeps, *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (1961; German, 1959), and W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (1948; see now the revised 4th ed., 1980), sought in different ways to challenge the traditionally negative view of Judaism and the supposed antagonism between Paul and the Jewish-Christian apostles against which Paul had been interpreted since Baur. Schoeps did not deny the basic Reformation understanding of Paul's view of the law. He merely sought to show its irrelevance to the "mainstream" Judaism of Paul's day, since, in Schoeps's view, Paul was in essence attacking only a distortion of Judaism represented by the Hellenistic Jews of the Diaspora. Conversely, Davies discounted Paul's critique of the law as mere polemic, and therefore as not essential to Paul's otherwise normal "rabbinic" views. As a result, Schoeps's "Paul" was not Jewish enough to win the day, and Davies's "Paul" was too Jewish to be accepted.

The modern consensus was significantly attacked again in 1964 in C. E. B. Cranfield's now programmatic article, "St. Paul and the Law" (*SJT* 17 [1964] 43–68). Cranfield did not deny the centrality of justification by faith for Paul's theology or the Reformation understanding of Paul's opponents. Rather, he redefined the focus of Paul's criticism of the "law" not to be on the Torah itself, but on its *perversion* into legalism as represented by the unique Pauline phrase, "works of the law" (cf. Rom 3:20, 28; Gal 3:2, 19, etc.). According to Cranfield, Paul coined this new terminology because there was no designation available in Greek to represent "legalism." Hence, when Paul speaks negatively of the "works of the law," or simply the "law," he is not opposing the law itself, but its perversion into works-righteousness. In 2 Cor 3:6 it is thus the "legalistic misunderstanding and perversion of the law," not the law itself, which kills. Conversely, Paul's positive statements concerning the law refer to the law freed from this legalistic misuse.

In arguing this, Cranfield's overall intention was to counter the axiom of the modern consensus that, for Paul, Christ had abolished the law. In stark contrast, though he abolished all forms of "legalism," Christ was the "goal" (τέλος) of the law itself (Rom 10:4).

Cranfield's view has won many followers and has been refined in many directions (see now his two-volume commentary on Romans, and the studies of C. F. D. Moule [1976], Ragnar Bring [1971], and, most importantly, D. P. Fuller [1980; 1992].) But this position has also been severely criticized for its reliance on what appears to many to be a self-confirming hypothesis in which Paul's negative statements concerning the law are simply taken to be about legalism, even when the full phrase "works of the law" is not used (see, e.g., Gal 3:10–12, 17–19). Others have pointed to its apparent failure to incorporate adequately some of Paul's statements concerning the abolition of the law itself (e.g., Gal 3:12, 15–20; Rom 6:14; 7:4). And now, after the advent of E. P. Sanders's work, NT scholars increasingly regard the historical basis for Cranfield's view to be a phantom.⁶

Finally, from a very different perspective on Paul's theology as a whole, a revitalized interest in biblical theology has led Hartmut Gese and Peter Stuhlmacher to reject the traditional Reformation understanding of the law/gospel contrast as a theological distinction between two competing ways of salvation (see P. Stuhlmacher, "Paul's View of the Law in the Letter to the Romans," *SEÅ* 50 [1985] 87–104; his *Reconciliation, Law, and Righteousness* [1986]; and his commentary on Romans [1989]). Instead, the law and the gospel are seen to represent an eschatological contrast between two periods in God's salvation history. Though still retaining the Reformation emphasis on the centrality of justification by faith in Paul's theology and on his corresponding critique of the law apart from faith, this approach views the law itself as also in need of "redemption" from its flesh-dominated role within the old covenant as the "Sinai Torah." Through the atonement of Christ and by the power of the Spirit, God has therefore redeemed not only humanity from the power of sin, but also the law. As the freed, eschatological "Zion Torah," God gives back to the law its original function of giving life which it had in paradise.

To date, although its contours are clear, this approach has not yet been fully developed. In addition, the refinement it offers with its emphasis on an eschatologically redeemed law either goes too far for the traditional view, or not far enough for those seeking to replace the old perspective with a new one. For in maintaining the centrality of justification by faith in Paul's thinking its criticism of the more traditional view does not strike at its essence.

6. But see his self-defense: Cranfield, "Works of the Law."

The “New Perspective” on Paul

Though substantial critiques of the reigning paradigm could certainly be found prior to 1977, these attacks were primarily aimed at the Reformation understanding of Paul's theology, rather than launching an assault on its perception of Paul's judaizing opponents. But as long as the traditional view of Paul's opponents remained substantially in place, the attempt to rethink Paul's own view could be dismissed not only as theologically or exegetically unsound, but also as historically misguided. Moo is therefore right in dating the destruction of the modern consensus to the advent of Sanders's contribution to the debate, beginning with his *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* in 1977. Sanders's view of Paul is, of course, in and of itself worthy of note. But this is not what turned the tide in Pauline studies.

Sanders changed the course of scholarship on Paul because he succeeded in forcing scholars to rethink *fundamentally* the nature of the opposition Paul faced in his churches, and consequently the character and content of the criticism he raised against it. He accomplished this feat by presenting his own portrayal of Paul against the backdrop of a comprehensive and polemically forceful understanding of Palestinian Judaism as a religion of nonlegalistic “covenantal nomism.” According to Sanders, rather than demanding a perfect “works-righteousness” as the prerequisite for entering into the covenant, the “covenantal nomism” pervasively found throughout Palestinian Judaism “is 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, while providing means of atonement for transgression.”⁷ Thus, for Palestinian Judaism at the time of Paul, “the intention and effort to be obedient constitute the *condition for remaining in the covenant*, but they do not *earn it*.”⁸ Sanders's conclusions concerning Palestinian Judaism, though certainly not new (cf., e.g., the work of G. F. Moore before him), and not without their critics, could therefore not be ignored, combined as they were with a corresponding reinterpretation of Paul's polemic against the law.

For the majority of scholars, Paul's world had suddenly changed, and with this change came the need to rethink Paul's view of the “problem” or “plight” of the law itself, which for Sanders came about for Paul not in response to Judaism *per se*, but only in view of the “solution” now offered in Christ. For if Sanders and his followers are right about the nature of Palestinian Judaism in Paul's day and the impetus for Paul's critique of the “law,”

7. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 75.

8. *Ibid.*, 180 (emphasis his).

then the traditional Reformation view of “Paul’s polemic is left hanging in midair, and it is necessary either to accuse Paul of misunderstanding (or misrepresenting) his opponents, or to find new opponents for him to be criticizing.”⁹ The effects of the paradigm shift regarding Judaism precipitated by Sanders, now widely accepted, have thus been both far-reaching and decisive for the way in which Paul has been read in the decades after Sanders’s work.

As is always the case, it is easier to tear down than to build up. Since the early 1980s the study of Paul’s view of the law has been marked by a flood of studies seeking to work out the implications of Sanders’s paradigm for “the new perspective on Paul,” to quote the title of the 1983 article written by J. D. G. Dunn, one of the leading voices of this radical reorientation. In addition to Dunn’s many studies (see, e.g., his collection of essays, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians*, 1990; his two-volume commentary, *Romans*, 1988; and now his volume, *The New Perspective on Paul: Collected Essays*, 2005) and Sanders’s own subsequent works on Paul and Judaism (see especially his *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 1983; *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE*, 1992; and *Paul*, 1991), most important among these new voices have been the works of Heikki Räisänen in Scandinavia, especially his *Paul and the Law* (1983), and, in Germany, the study of Reinhold Liebers, *Das Gesetz als Evangelium: Untersuchungen zur Gesetzeskritik des Paulus* (1989). Pride of place in terms of widespread influence goes of course to the voluminous body of work created by the British scholar, N. T. Wright, earlier marked out by his *Climax of the Covenant* (1991) and *What Saint Paul Really Said* (1997), and now culminating in his two-volume magnum opus, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (2013). Often at odds with one another on individual points of history and exegesis small and large, these studies are unified by their common conviction concerning the nonlegalistic nature of first-century Judaism and their corresponding rejection of the traditional Reformation understanding of the law/gospel antithesis as the key to Paul’s view of the law and the theology of his opponents.

The Current Diversity of Proposals

Dating from Sanders’s initial work in 1977 a forceful and, in part, successful attack has thus been mounted on the traditional understanding of Paul’s view of the law. The plethora of new proposals spawned by this paradigm shift, however, suffers as much from internal dissent as from external

9. Moo, “Paul and the Law,” 293.

critique, since no new consensus has yet emerged among them concerning the reason(s) why Paul actually rejected the “works of the law,” nor concerning the actual referent of “works of the law” in Paul’s writings. Moreover, the earlier positions represented by Cranfield and Stuhlmacher continue to win adherents, while the early studies of Charles H. Cosgrove, *The Cross and the Spirit: A Study in the Argument and Theology of Galatians* (1988); Roman Heiligenthal, *Werke als Zeichen, Untersuchungen zur Bedeutung der menschlichen Taten im Frühjudentum, Neuen Testament und Frühchristentum* (1983); Frank Thielman, *From Plight to Solution: A Jewish Framework for Understanding Paul’s View of the Law in Galatians and Romans* (1989); and Peter J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* (1990), have signaled a new way forward due to their recognition of the positive role that obedience to the law plays in the soteriological structures of both Judaism and Paul. At the same time, although the pendulum of opinion is now swinging toward the new perspective, proponents of the more traditional view, such as Seyoon Kim, Gerd Lüdemann (who has once again picked up and argued extensively and explicitly for the validity of the Tübingen school’s perspective), Otfried Hofius, Martin Hengel, Robert H. Gundry, Thomas R. Schreiner, Brice L. Martin, Stephen Westerholm, together with a growing number of more recent, often nuanced studies (e.g., Roland Deines, John Barclay, Francis Watson, Michael Bird, Preston Sprinkle, Simon Gathercole), continue to argue that the “paradigm shift” in Pauline studies has been misguided and that “there is more of Paul in Luther than many twentieth-century scholars are inclined to allow.”¹⁰

As with the question of the identity and nature of Paul’s opponents, the positive result of this great diversity among contemporary scholars is that it drives interpreters back to the text itself. Students of Paul are now approaching his writings with a healthy skepticism concerning *all* paradigms as they search for fresh insight into passages that suddenly look new again. To that end, Paul’s emphasis on his essential unity with the Jerusalem apostles as the conduits of the teaching of Jesus and on the positive role that the law played “in Christ” and under the power of the Spirit must once again play a decisive part in the forging of a new consensus (cf. 1 Cor 11:23–26; 15:1–7; Rom 1:1–4; Gal 5:1–6:16; Rom 8:1–8; and the use of the law in Pauline ethics). Furthermore, the centrality of Paul’s eschatological conviction that Christ has initiated the beginning of the new creation and the establishment of the new covenant in fulfillment of Jer 31:31–34 and Ezek 36:26–27 needs to be taken seriously as a key to Paul’s understanding of the law. As Peter Stuhlmacher has stressed, it is against this eschatological backdrop that the

10. Westerholm, *Israel’s Law*, 173.

question must be raised regarding the exact locus of the “problem” with the law as it functioned under the old covenant, as well as its role in the new. To raise the question of the impact of Paul’s eschatology on his view of the law is also to call attention to the larger question of the center of Paul’s theology as such, which is the last and most important question raised by Baur’s work.

THE CENTER OF PAUL’S THEOLOGY

Until the mid-1970s most German scholarship maintained an inextricable link between its traditional Reformation understanding of Paul’s law/gospel contrast and the overriding conviction that the center of Paul’s thinking was the concept of the righteousness of God as encountered in the doctrine of justification. This view was bolstered by the corresponding understanding of Paul’s opponents as predominantly Judaistic legalists who insisted that, in addition to faith in Christ, adherence to the law was necessary for gaining and/or maintaining a righteous standing before God.

As with the other pillars of Baur’s perspective, this too was not without its challengers within Germany (see below), while Anglo-Saxon scholarship was never dominated by this position or directed in the same way by the search for the center of Paul’s theology. Instead, some of the leading scholars outside of Germany sought to understand Paul’s doctrine of justification as merely one aspect within a larger panorama of theological themes. The various themes of Paul’s theology were therefore not organized as derivatives of this one, generating center of Paul’s thought. Rather, Paul’s theology was analyzed either according to the traditional structure of systematic theology (e.g., creation, anthropology, sin, redemption, christology, eschatology, etc; for prime examples of this approach, see D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul*, 1964; and Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 1975 [original Dutch ed., 1966]), or within the structure of some other organizational principle (see, e.g., Richard N. Longenecker, *Paul: Apostle of Liberty*, 1964, who took the broader issue of “legality-liberty” as the organizational framework for displaying Paul’s thought; and F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, 1977, who presented Paul’s theology within the historical outline of Paul’s missionary travels). And yet, due to the influence of the Reformation’s questions on the study of Paul and as a result of the leading role that German scholarship played for the first seventy years of the twentieth century, the dominant question within Pauline studies has remained whether justification by faith is the conceptual center of Paul’s thought.

Challenges to the Traditional View

Already in 1904 William Wrede had argued in his book, *Paulus*, that the doctrine of justification was not the generating principle of Paul's thinking but merely a polemical doctrine (*Kampfeslehre*) aimed at the Judaism of his day. The generating principle of Paul's theology, Wrede maintained, was his eschatological conviction that Christ had ushered in the proleptic beginning of the kingdom of God. But it was left to Albert Schweitzer to take Wrede's emphasis on eschatology and employ it as the *framework* of Paul's thought in his influential book, *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus* (1930; ET *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 1931), which was to date the most convincing and thoroughgoing alternative to the traditional view. Schweitzer combined Wrede's emphasis on eschatology with Adolf Deissmann's earlier development of Paul's "Christ-mysticism," which Deissmann had argued was "the characteristic expression of [Paul's] Christianity," as evidenced by the 164 times that the formula "in Christ" appears in Paul's writings.¹¹ Hence, for Schweitzer, being "in Christ" was not merely a cultic reality as Deissmann had emphasized, but an eschatological reality that was experienced physically and sacramentally, having been brought about by the inaugurated kingdom of God now present with the turn of the ages. Viewed in this way, "mysticism" was the key to Paul's thinking. The title of Schweitzer's book is thus misleading, since for Schweitzer this mysticism was not the result of some immediate and timeless "oneness" with Christ. Nevertheless, Schweitzer relegated the doctrine of justification by faith to a mere "subsidiary crater" (*Nebenkrater*) of Paul's thought, since it was found only in certain letters (predominantly in Galatians and Romans) and then only in reference to the specific problem of the law as raised by Paul's controversy with the Judaizers.

Despite their programmatic nature, the work of Wrede, Deissmann, and Schweitzer did not win the day in the German-speaking world. Nor did W. D. Davies's rejection of the centrality of the law/gospel contrast and the doctrine of justification in Paul's thought, argued in his *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (1950), gain a hearing outside of England and America. It was not until the seminal writings of Krister Stendahl and E. P. Sanders that these earlier protests found a foothold in scholarship. For ever since the work of Stendahl and Sanders the traditional understanding of the center of Paul's thought has been increasingly called into question.

Stendahl's essays, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West" (1960) and "Paul among Jews and Gentiles" (1963), were

11. See his *Paulus*, 1911 and 1926; ET *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, 1912, p. 140, for the quote and evidence.

originally written in Swedish and were published in English in his *Paul among Jews and Gentiles and other Essays* (1976). Stendahl's reinterpretation of Paul's theology grew out of his conviction that, due to Reformation theology and the grid of Luther's own conversion experience, Paul's teaching concerning justification by faith had been removed from its original setting regarding the relationship between Jews and Gentiles and transposed into the very center of his teaching about salvation. Rather than addressing the status of Gentiles within God's plan for the world, as it does in Paul's writings, the doctrine of justification by faith was now seen to be the abstract, doctrinal response to the despair of humanity brought about by the failed attempt to live up to the moral demands of the law or by the pride caused by humanity's attempt to justify itself by the law. When the original focus of justification is lost, the Pauline problem of the relationship between Jews and Gentiles becomes captive to the Western problem of the introspective conscience. As a corollary to this misunderstanding of the role of justification in Paul's thought, Paul's Damascus Road experience has been wrongly universalized as an experience of conversion, rather than rightly understood as Paul's specific call to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

Hence, for Stendahl, "Paul's argument about justification by faith neither grows out of his 'dissatisfaction' with Judaism, nor is intended as a frontal attack on 'legalism,'" but instead was "hammered out by Paul for the very specific and limited purpose of defending the rights of Gentile converts to be full and genuine heirs to the promises of God to Israel. Their rights were based solely on faith in Jesus Christ."¹² For Stendahl, therefore, Paul's view of justification by faith served merely as an apologetic doctrine that "'justified' the status of Gentile Christians as honorary Jews."¹³ As such, the doctrine of justification by faith can lay no claim to being the pervasive or organizing principle of Paul's thought.

In much the same way, E. P. Sanders's reexamination of the religious pattern of Judaism in light of the central issue in Paul's thinking of the relationship between Jews and Gentiles led him as well to reevaluate the driving force of Paul's theology. Just as Paul's opponents can no longer be understood as legalistic Jews who held to a form of works-righteousness, so too justification by faith must be given up as the clue to Paul's thought.¹⁴ Instead, following Schweitzer, the dominant conception of salvation in Paul's letters is the transfer from one sphere of lordship (sin, death, the law) to another (righteousness, life, the gospel), so that being saved both entails

12. Stendahl, *Paul*, 127, 2.

13. *Ibid.*, 5, cf. 130.

14. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 438.

and is brought about by becoming “one” with Christ. If the religious pattern of Judaism in Paul’s day can be called “covenantal nomism,” the pattern of Paul’s religion can thus be described as “participationist eschatology.”¹⁵

There have also been those who, like H. Räisänen, have stressed that due to the occasional nature of Paul’s theology it is asking too much to seek the center to Paul’s thinking in the first place. Indeed, the fact that Paul was not a systematic theologian in his approach to doctrine, or in his mode of presentation, is widely acknowledged today. But for Räisänen, not only is Paul not systematic in his framework, his thinking itself is characterized by internal contradictions concerning the relationship between the law and his gospel, from hostility and mutual exclusion in Galatians, to compatibility and inclusion in Romans. Räisänen’s understanding of Paul as fundamentally inconsistent has not carried the day, nor should it. It is one thing to recognize the occasional nature of Paul’s letters, but quite another to conclude that Paul’s thinking lacks an internal coherence or conceptual focus.

The Debate within and against the Traditional View

The traditional interpretation of justification by faith as the center of Paul’s theology has undergone a significant development of its own in the last fifty years. The internal debate has focused on the meaning of the “righteousness of God” in Paul’s thought (cf. Rom 1:17; 3:21–22, 26; 10:3; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9) and on the relationship of Paul’s doctrine of justification to his other central affirmations. Above all, scholars have sought to understand more precisely the interplay between justification by faith and the new creation, the role of the Spirit, the expectation of moral transformation in Christ, the coming judgment by works, and Paul’s hope for the future consummation and vindication at Christ’s return (cf., e.g., Rom 2:13; 3:24; 4:25; 5:9; 10:4; 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Titus 3:7).

The starting point for the modern debate is the work of Rudolf Bultmann, no doubt the most influential NT scholar of the twentieth century. As an extension of Luther’s basic position, Bultmann argued in §§28–30 of his *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols.; 1948, 1953; ET 1951, 1955) that for Paul the righteousness of God, which is granted to the *individual* upon his or her justification by *faith*, was a forensic concept. As such, it does not refer to an ethical change brought about in a person as a result of one’s obedience to the law, but to an eschatological reality, which, although originally related to the end times, is now experienced by the believer as a pure gift of God’s grace.

15. *Ibid.*, 552.

Bultmann's view was based on his reinterpretation of Paul's theological categories in existential terms in which God was viewed not as an external subject in himself, but only from the perspective of his relationship to humanity, while humanity was equally viewed only in relationship to God. For Bultmann, history thus becomes the arena in which God encounters humanity directly and individually in order to call for a decision in response to the preaching of the gospel, rather than being the working out of God's redemptive plan on the way toward an ultimate consummation at the return of Christ.

The legitimacy for this reinterpretation of Paul's view of history and eschatology was found in Paul himself, who had continued the process of demythologizing the Jewish, apocalyptic gospel of Jesus as the messianic Son of Man originally preached by the early church into a kerygma concerning Jesus as the divine Son of God which could be preached and understood in a Hellenistic context. For Bultmann, this explains why Paul's letters show hardly a trace of the historical Jesus or of the Jewish and Palestinian tradition of the early Christians, since Paul received the Christian tradition after it had already been passed through the filter of the Hellenistic church. In line with this reconstruction, Bultmann saw Paul's opposition to be a Judaistic legalism based on the law's own teaching, which not only could not be kept perfectly, but also *itself* brought about sinful boasting as a result of the very demand for obedience. So Paul opposed the law and those Jewish Christians who held to it for both quantitative reasons (no one can keep the law perfectly) and qualitative reasons (the very attempt *itself* to keep the law is already sin). Luther's law/gospel contrast therefore reaches its apex in Bultmann's reading of Paul.

In stark contrast, Ernst Käsemann argued in his paradigmatic 1961 article, "Gottesgerechtigkeit bei Paulus" (ZTK 58 [1961] 367-78; ET "The Righteousness of God in Paul," in *New Testament Questions of Today*, 1969, 168-82), that for Paul the righteousness of God was not primarily a *gift* for the *individual* as a consequence of encountering God, but a cosmic and creative *power* under which the *corporate* people of God are brought to live as a result of having been freed in baptism from the power of sin and death. Rather than referring to a righteousness that *comes* from God as a gift, as Bultmann argued, for Käsemann the righteousness of God is God's *own* righteous behavior, expressed in his saving activity as an outworking of his covenantal faithfulness to his creation and to his people. Hence, for Käsemann, Paul's thought must not be interpreted primarily in existential terms, but in apocalyptic categories. The content of the righteousness of God is the rule of Christ over the world and his people in anticipation of God's final cosmic triumph. Salvation is not fundamentally the experience of receiving

God's righteousness, but of being brought back into obedience to the righteousness of God manifest in Christ.

The most important contribution to this ongoing debate has been the further development of Käsemann's basic perspective in the work of Peter Stuhlmacher, beginning with the 1966 revised form of his dissertation, *Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus (The Righteousness of God in Paul)*. Against the backdrop of the OT and Jewish, apocalyptic understandings of the righteousness of God, Stuhlmacher has argued that decisive for Paul's thought was his conviction that the new age of the righteousness of God has already broken in with Christ, so that God's people are now living in the overlapping of the ages. The present experience of the righteousness of God does not refer, therefore, primarily to a forensic transaction in heaven that transcends time. Instead, Paul spoke of the present reality of the righteousness of God precisely because God's power to save and to vindicate, in accordance with his faithfulness to his covenant, was already being poured out in the world through Christ. The righteousness of God is thus first and foremost the power of God that brings one into the new world of the kingdom of God. In turn, the believer's experience of God's righteousness is made possible by the "forensic situation" brought about by the cross of Christ and realized in the world through participation in the body of Christ.

Stuhlmacher then addresses the tension between the theological categories of imputed and effective or real righteousness by emphasizing that the Spirit is the ontological bridge that makes possible the Pauline assertions concerning one's real participation in the righteousness of God. In contrast to the view of Schweitzer and those who follow him, by virtue of the presence of the Spirit mystic union with Christ and justification are bound together in one reality for Paul, rather than being in conflict or distinct from one another. For according to Stuhlmacher, being justified includes, in Paul's perspective, being put into the realm and experiencing the reality of the Spirit as a proleptic realization of the future new creation (cf. Rom 8:2-17; 1 Cor 12:13).

In the English-speaking context Käsemann's fundamental paradigm, based on the conviction that apocalyptic thinking is the "mother" of all Christian theology, was further developed and applied consistently to all of Paul's thought in J. Christiaan Beker's, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (1980). Beker too recognized with the majority of modern scholars that Paul's thought is not systematically developed or presented. Beker's distinct contribution was to argue, however, that for Paul the apocalyptic triumph of God that has now been brought about proleptically in the Christ-event, but will only reach its final victory in the imminent future triumph of God, is nevertheless the coherent and *symbolic*

(not doctrinal!) center of Paul's gospel. The center of Paul's thought is thus neither an abstract doctrine nor a life-changing experience. According to Beker, it is "a mistake to define Paul's coherent center *either* in terms of a too-narrow conceptual definition—that is, in a petrified conceptuality ('justification by faith,' 'sacramental participation,' etc.)—*or* in terms of a too-general characterization ('being in Christ,' 'the Lordship of Christ')."¹⁶ Instead, "Paul's coherent center must be viewed as a symbolic structure in which a primordial experience (Paul's call) is brought into language in a particular way. . . . That language is, for Paul, the apocalyptic language of Judaism, in which he lived and thought."¹⁷

In Beker's view, the genius of Paul is his corresponding ability to correlate and apply this overarching and consistent apocalyptic theme to various, distinct situations without dissolving the coherence of the gospel. Beker argues that for Paul "in nearly all cases the contingent interpretation of the gospel points—whether implicitly or explicitly—to the imminent cosmic triumph of God."¹⁸ Hence, Beker too rejects Bultmann's attempt to remove the apocalyptic elements from Paul's gospel by demythologizing them into an existential self-understanding as an attempt to remove the very content of the gospel itself. But unlike Käsemann and Stuhlmacher, Beker rejects the conclusion that the theme of the righteousness of God is the central theme of Paul's writings. For Beker, it too is merely one of the many expressions of the underlying symbolic theme of the coming triumph of God. "Thus, righteousness must be viewed as *one* symbol *among* others and not as *the* center of Paul's thought."¹⁹

As the history of scholarship from Wrede to Beker demonstrates, the challenge from the end of the twentieth century is to rethink Paul's theology in such a way that the implicit centrality of eschatology is brought together with Paul's actual assertions on a doctrinal and personal level concerning what *God through the Christ* has accomplished in history and for the believer. At the same time, to pursue the question of the center of Paul's theology is also to ask what it means for the *believer* to be living in the kingdom of God, which, although *already* inaugurated, has *not yet* been established in all its fullness. Within this context, and in anticipation of the coming triumph and judgment of God, the need to delineate the meaning of the righteousness of

16. Beker, *Paul the Apostle* (preface to the 1984 ed.), xvii. See too the review of Beker's work by R. P. Martin, *JBL* 101 (1982) 463–66.

17. *Ibid.*, 15–16.

18. *Ibid.*, 19.

19. *Ibid.*, 17.

God and the means of the justification of God's people, both now and in the future, still remains the crux for interpreting Paul's letters.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

The history of Pauline research since F. C. Baur has highlighted the crucial importance of determining the historical context within which Paul's thought was developed and expressed. As a consequence, recent studies of Paul have increasingly focused on the study and classification of Paul's rhetoric (programmatically in this regard, H. D. Betz's *Galatians*, 1979; and his earlier work, *Der Apostel Paulus und die sokratische Tradition: Eine exegetische Untersuchung zu einer 'Apologie' 2 Korinther 10–13*, 1972) and on the sociology of Paul's communities (programmatically, Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 1983; and the many works of Gerd Theissen, especially *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 1982). Nevertheless, such studies remain subsidiary "craters" in service of the main task of interpreting the *content* of Paul's *own* thought as it was expressed in response to the needs of his communities and the opposition that he faced.

The history of Pauline research since Baur has also made it clear that one's picture of Paul will be determined, above all, by whether one interprets his letters primarily and predominantly against the Greco-Roman philosophical and religious world of Paul's day, as Bultmann argued (to which we must now add "political"!), or in light of the Hellenistic-Jewish subculture of the first century and its Scriptures, as Adolf Schlatter proposed. This is the great watershed among students of Paul. It remains true despite the fact that modern scholarship has shown the great degree to which the Judaism of Paul's day had already become Hellenized, so that it is both a historical and categorical mistake to view Paul as *either* Jewish *or* Hellenistic in his thought. Paul was clearly a Hellenistic Jew. Nevertheless, the fundamental issue in Pauline studies remains the determination of the *primary* religious and theological context within which Paul's thought is to be understood.

How one decides this issue will determine how one reads Paul. And how one reads Paul will determine how one evaluates the relationship between Jesus and Paul on the one hand, and the place of Paul in the development of the early church on the other. Baur saw Paul as the great "Hellenizer of Christianity," so that Paul's opponents became the other apostles themselves. Those who likewise look first to the religions and philosophies (and now politics) of the Greco-Roman world to explain Paul's thought must also posit a gap, if not hostility, between Paul and the early church in Jerusalem.

Against the backdrop of this decision, it is worth remembering the words of Ritschl. Already in 1856 he recognized that the enduring value of Baur and the Tübingen school would be in the counter-reactions that it would evoke: “The Tübingen school has fallen to pieces and its initiative will only deserve recognition in the measure that it leads to opposition against the system of early Church history as presented by Baur and Schwegler, and as it furthers the cultivation of biblical theology more than has been the case up to now.”²⁰

After one hundred fifty years of Pauline studies the need still exists for a developmental, rather than conflict model of Paul’s apostolic life within the history of the early church, and for the corresponding cultivation of a biblical theology that incorporates Paul’s theology not only within that history, but also within the Old Testament and Jewish *Traditionsgeschichte* that created it. This need has been underscored in the twentieth century by the study of Paul from an explicitly Jewish perspective (in addition to the work by Schoeps, see Samuel Sandmel, *The Genius of Paul: A Study in History*, 1958; Schalom Ben-Chorin, *Paulus: Der Völkerapostel in jüdischer Sicht*, 1970; and now Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee*, 1990). Even adherents to the “new perspective” on Paul, who have worked hard to renew our understanding of Paul within the Judaism of his day, have often not taken the Jewish matrix of Paul’s own thinking seriously enough as the decisive conceptual source for Paul’s thinking. Moreover, the debate concerning the law and the role of justification in Paul’s thought hinges on the question of Paul’s understanding of redemptive history (cf. Gal 3–4; 2 Cor 3:7–18; Rom 3:21–26; 9–11), which itself can only be answered by a renewed study of Paul’s “use” of the OT. This, in turn, raises the still larger question of the relationship of Paul as the “apostle to the Gentiles” to Israel as the old covenant people of God. Such studies have all received decisive beginnings at the end of the twentieth century (see, e.g., the works of Dietrich-Alex Koch, *Die Schrift als Zeuge des Evangeliums: Untersuchungen zur Verwendung und zum Verständnis der Schrift bei Paulus*, 1986; Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 1989; N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*, 1991; and the various motif studies and treatments of particular key passages in which Paul quotes, alludes to, or relies upon the OT implicitly for his self-understanding and theology, such as Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul’s Gospel*, 1981; James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God*, 1992; and Karl Olav Sandnes, *Paul—One of the Prophets?* 1991). The future of Pauline studies at this juncture in its history is dependent upon just these

20. Quoted by Harris, *Tübingen School*, 108–9.

kinds of studies if we are to move forward in our understanding of Paul as he understood himself: the Jewish apostle to the Gentiles, whose message came from the history of his people, their Scriptures, and the history of Israel's Messiah.²¹

21. For further reference, see Becker, *Paulus*; Bring, "Paul and the Old Testament"; Colpe, *Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule*; Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*; Cranfield, "Works of the Law"; Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*; Dunn, "New Perspective on Paul"; Ellis, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*; Ellis, "Paul and His Opponents: Trends in Research"; Epp and MacRae, eds., *New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*; Fuller, *Gospel and Law*; Fuller, *Unity of the Bible*; Gunther, *St. Paul's Opponents and Their Background*; Harris, *Tübingen School*; Hübner, "Paulusforschung seit 1945"; Kümmel, *New Testament*; Moo, "Paul and the Law"; Moule, "Obligation in the Ethic of Paul"; S. Neill and N. T. Wright, *Interpretation of the New Testament 1861–1986*; Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*; Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*; Schweitzer, *Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*; Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*; Sumney, *Identifying Paul's Opponents*; Gundry Volf, *Paul and Perseverance*; Way, *Lordship of Christ*; Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith*; Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*; Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*; Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*.