

## Recent Pauline Studies

David G. Horrell

Pauline studies is among the most crowded and vigorous areas of New Testament scholarship. There is an ever-growing mountain of literature about the Apostle to the Gentiles and his letters. In this short survey I cannot hope to touch on every significant area of debate nor to mention every major publication. What I aim to do is to discuss a few areas of lively current discussion, with selected references to recent literature, highlighting some of the ways in which the debates have wider theological significance.

### ***New and old perspectives: the battle rages***

If one had to single out one book that had dominated the agenda of Pauline studies since its publication it would surely be E.P. Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, published in 1977.<sup>1</sup> Still a focus for discussion several decades on, this *magnum opus* challenged prevailing depictions of Judaism in Pauline studies as a religion of 'legalistic-works-righteousness' — seen by Sanders as little more than Christian caricature — and substituted the term 'covenantal nomism' as a more adequate description of first-century Judaism's 'pattern of religion'. This rethinking of the Judaism contemporary with Paul led to much related rethinking about how to understand Paul, most prominently in the 'new perspective' proposed by James Dunn and developed in his many writings, including commentaries on Romans and Galatians and his major summary treatment, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*.<sup>2</sup> Taking Sanders's depiction of first-century Judaism as a much needed corrective and new starting point, Dunn argued that Paul's criticism of 'works of the law' was not targetted against 'legalism', or 'doing good deeds to earn salvation', as in the traditional, 'Lutheran' reading of Paul, but rather against the ways in which the Jewish law (and specifically the identity-defining 'works' such as circumcision, food laws and sabbath-observance) was (mis)used to indicate that a

---

<sup>1</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, London: SCM, 1977.

<sup>2</sup> J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Edinburgh: T&TClark, 1998.

particular ethnic, national, group — the Jews — were the people of God. The problem Paul confronted, in a nutshell, was not legalism but ethnocentrism or nationalism.<sup>3</sup>

The new perspective has, in some circles at least, proved highly controversial. Rejection of it is virtually a touchstone of orthodoxy in some places. A flavour of the extent to which fundamental issues are felt to be at stake may be gained from the recent comments of Seyoon Kim: ‘Since the Reformation... no school of thought... has exerted a greater influence upon Pauline scholarship than the school of the New Perspective... [This school] is in many respects overturning the Reformation interpretation of Paul’s gospel. The potential significance of the school for the whole Christian faith can hardly be exaggerated’.<sup>4</sup> Kim’s book is both a vigorous defence of his earlier work and a sharp critique of the new perspective. Indeed, recent years may perhaps be characterised as ones in which the ‘old perspective’ has fought back with considerable energy. One weighty example is the two volume project edited by D.A. Carson, Peter O’Brien and Mark Seifrid which has as its main target Sanders’s characterisation of Judaism’s religion as one of covenantal nomism and the consequent interpretation of Paul against the background of this controlling concept.<sup>5</sup> Another notable example defending an essentially ‘Lutheran’ reading of Paul, notable not least because it provides a thorough, accessible, even witty, way into the current debates and range of opinions, is Stephen Westerholm’s *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, a much revised and expanded version of his earlier work, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith*.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J.D.G. Dunn, ‘The New Perspective on Paul’, in *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, London: SPCK, 1990, pp. 191-200.

<sup>4</sup> S. Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002, p. xiv. It should be noted, however, that the new perspective has dominated Anglo-American discussion of Paul more than German discussion.

<sup>5</sup> D.A. Carson, P.T. O’Brien, M. Seifrid, eds, *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Vol. 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (WUNT 2.140; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck/ Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); *Vol. 2: The Paradoxes of Paul* (WUNT 2.181; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck/ Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> S. Westerholm, *Perspectives New and Old on Paul*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004; *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.

One of Sanders' main concerns, it should be stressed, was to dislodge the scholarly presentation of Judaism as a religion which clearly 'had a problem', to which the Christian gospel then provided an answer. Sanders famously reversed this analysis, claiming that Paul only depicted an inadequacy in Judaism with hindsight, as it were, once he had already become convinced that Christ was now God's chosen way to salvation. In the light of this concern, it is significant to observe how, despite their vigorous opposition, prominent versions of both 'old' and 'new' perspectives on Paul differ from Sanders at this point and argue, though in different ways, that there really was substance to Paul's criticism of Judaism.<sup>7</sup> Thus, as Barry Matlock has astutely observed: 'Substitute for "legalism" in the traditional reading "nationalism" in Dunn's, as the perverted attitude toward the law and its observance that is the real target of Paul's attack, and the old perspective fits Dunn right down to the ground'.<sup>8</sup> 'New' and 'old' perspectives thus share a structurally similar analysis of Paul's theology in relation to Judaism, both insisting that Paul's gospel 'makes sense' as a criticism of the Judaism to which he belonged. One key question at issue in historical analysis is whether it is convincing to argue that the Judaism of Paul's time placed salvific weight on doing good deeds in obedience to the law ('legalism'; the 'old perspective') or placed weight on the identity-defining 'works of the law' as determining the boundary around who was 'in' and who was 'out' ('ethnocentrism'; the 'new perspective'). A question that remains for theological reflection is whether, and how, the Pauline gospel can (or should) be narrated without implying a relation of superiority between Christianity and Judaism.

### ***Paul in his Greco-Roman social and political context***

Another major development in Pauline studies that began in the 1970s was the wave of studies seeking to illuminate Paul and his churches in the light of their Greco-Roman social context, often drawing on theoretical and comparative material from the social sciences to do so. The most influential early studies here are those by Gerd Theissen, followed in the early 1980s by Wayne Meeks's important book, *The First Urban*

---

<sup>7</sup> For a fuller analysis of the range of views on Paul's 'criticism' of Judaism, see S. Westerholm, 'The New Perspective at Twenty-Five', in Carson, et al., *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Vol. 2*, pp. 1-38.

*Christians*.<sup>9</sup> Since that time, many further studies have followed, some making use of social-scientific resources to shape and inform the inquiry,<sup>10</sup> others avoiding such contemporary theoretical approaches and focusing rather on comparative ancient evidence. Examples of the former category include Philip Esler's studies of Galatians and Romans, in which social identity theory provides the basic orientation for a study of the ways in which these Pauline letters construct a positive group-identity for their readers.<sup>11</sup> Examples of the latter category include Bruce Winter's studies, in which ancient Greco-Roman evidence is used to illuminate aspects of Paul's correspondence and the characters and disputes in it.<sup>12</sup> More generally, one may point to the recent handbook edited by Paul Sampley as a valuable resource setting Paul in the context of his Greco-Roman world.<sup>13</sup>

One area of recent debate picks up Theissen's early argument that the Corinthian church was characterised by 'social stratification', an argument applied to the Pauline churches as a whole by Meeks, who helped to establish a broad and 'new' consensus that these churches contained a mix of socio-economic levels, some members being comparatively rich, high-status, others poor, low-status. This so-called 'new consensus' received a major challenge in Justin Meggitt's book *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, in which Meggitt argued that Paul and the members of the Pauline churches shared in the near subsistence-level poverty that was the lot of about 99% of the Roman empire's

---

<sup>8</sup> R.B. Matlock, 'Sins of the Flesh and Suspicious Minds: Dunn's New Theology of Paul', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 84 (1998) p. 86.

<sup>9</sup> Theissen's major (German) essays on Paul and the Corinthian church from the mid-1970s were collected in English translation in *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, Edinburgh: T&TClark, 1982.

W.A.Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, London & New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983; 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> For an introduction to this area, and examples of the work done, see D.G. Horrell (ed.), *Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation*, Edinburgh: T&TClark, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> P.F. Esler, *Galatians*, London & New York: Routledge, 1998; *idem*, *Conflict and Identity in Romans*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> B.W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001; *idem*, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> J.P.Sampley (ed.), *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, Harrisville: Trinity Press International, 2003.

population.<sup>14</sup> Meggitt's arguments have been countered by Theissen and by Dale Martin, but supported and nuanced by Steven Friesen.<sup>15</sup> The debate is rightly focused on the interpretation of ancient evidence, but it clearly has implications for the ways in which we envisage the Pauline communities and thus for the ways in which they can be seen as models for contemporary Christian churches. Are they early exemplars of the ways in which diverse classes, rich and poor, can be integrated together in sacrament and community (so Theissen), or rather communities of the poor, finding a strategy for physical survival in the practice of mutuality (so Meggitt)?

The contemporary implications of our studies of Paul are still more apparent in recent approaches to the subject of 'Paul and Politics', especially in the work of the Society of Biblical Literature group of that title. Paul's political stance is often assumed to be rather conservative and conformist, with Romans 13 and its call to submit to the governing authorities the most influential text. Moreover, for the latter part of the twentieth century, questions about Paul's perspectives on the Roman Empire were rather little asked, the focus being much more — as in the debates between 'new' and 'old' perspectives (see above) — on the relationship of Paul and the early Christians to Judaism. Much earlier in the century, however, scholars like Adolf Deissmann had insisted on the importance of the imperial context of the New Testament. Deissmann, for example, proposed that there existed 'a polemical parallelism between the cult of the emperor and the cult of Christ'.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> J.J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> See G. Theissen, 'The Social Structure of Pauline Communities: Some Critical Remarks on J.J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 84 (2001) 65-84; *idem*, 'Social Conflicts in the Corinthian Community: Further Remarks on J.J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25 (2003) 371-391; D.B. Martin, 'Review Essay: Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 84 (2001) 51-64; J.J. Meggitt, 'Response to Martin and Theissen', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 84 (2001) 85-94; S. Friesen 'Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-Called New Consensus', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (2004) 323-361 (with responses by John Barclay and Peter Oakes). For a recent assessment, see also B. Holmberg, 'The Methods of Historical Reconstruction in the Scholarly "Recovery" of Corinthian Christianity', in E. Adams and D.G. Horrell (eds) *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church*, Westminster John Knox, 2004, pp. 255-71.

<sup>16</sup> A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910, p. 346.

This kind of political perspective on Paul has in recent years been revived and developed anew in the light of new studies of the Roman imperial cult, imperial images, and so on, and of new approaches in biblical studies. The most influential volumes are those edited by Richard Horsley, especially the 1997 collection entitled *Paul and Empire*.<sup>17</sup> Here and in subsequent works Horsley and colleagues have sought to show how we should understand Paul as engaged in a thoroughly political task, one which showed his ‘adamant opposition to Roman imperial society’: he was building exclusive communities ‘of a new society, alternative to the dominant imperial society’.<sup>18</sup> In other places Horsley has made clear how relevant this analysis is to Christians living in (or under) the new (American) empire.<sup>19</sup> For him, the New Testament traditions provide a vision of resistance which can inform radical discipleship today.

Some may suspect that contemporary political convictions too heavily shape the reading of Paul as adamantly anti-imperial. We may need more nuanced analyses of the ways in which the early Christians responded to empire.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, I think it indisputable that Horsley and others have brought an important dimension back to studies of Paul, namely the focus on the most significant ‘given’ in Paul’s social and historical context: the domination of Rome. When Paul’s gospel is read in the light of its imperial context and parallels – Augustus too was hailed as saviour, establisher of peace, as the embodiment of good news for the world – it takes on new resonances which are significant both for historical interpretation and for political theology.<sup>21</sup> These resonances may easily be missed by those unaware of the historical parallels; but when brought to

---

<sup>17</sup> R.A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire*, Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997; *idem*, ed., *Paul and Politics*, Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000; *idem*, ed. *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order*, Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2004.

<sup>18</sup> See Horsley, ‘1 Corinthians: A Case Study of Paul’s Assembly as an Alternative Society’, in *Paul and Empire*, pp. 242-52 (here pp. 242, 244); also reprinted in Adams and Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth*, pp. 227-37.

<sup>19</sup> R.A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002, esp. pp. 137-49.

<sup>20</sup> See further the March 2005 issue of the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, which is devoted to articles on ‘The Imperial Cult and the New Testament’.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. N.T. Wright, ‘Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire’, in Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics*, pp. 160-83.

light they may recast our understanding of Paul's insistence, for example, that Christ (alone) is Lord of all, the one to whom every knee shall bow (Phil 2.9-11). This and many other well-known texts in Paul may have a polemical, political dimension too long neglected.

### ***The Faith of Christ: how much turns on a phrase?***

Those who regard biblical scholars as obsessed with points of detail and disengaged from any issues that really 'matter' may sense their prejudices confirmed with the news that there is a good deal of current debate about the precise meaning of two words in Paul: *pistis Christou* — literally (so the KJV) 'the faith of Christ'. Yet this is a debate which does have implications for the way we understand Paul's gospel; indeed, Barry Matlock notes how the 'faith of Christ' reading (see below) 'has become a pivot for an attempted shift of paradigm' in the interpretation of Paul.<sup>22</sup> Traditionally, and in most Bible translations, this Greek phrase is rendered 'faith *in* Christ', taking the genitive as 'objective' (that is: Christ is the object of faith, the one to whom the faith is directed). In recent decades, however, there has been a growing tide of opinion in favour of the view that the genitive should be understood as 'subjective' (that is: Christ is the subject of the faith – it is *his* faith in view here). Important in generating this new tide is the work of Richard Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, first published in 1983 and now reissued in a second edition (2002).<sup>23</sup> This second edition is also a good place to gain an entrée into the debate, since the volume now includes a counterargument by James Dunn, one of the defenders of the objective genitive reading, as well as a response to recent discussion by Hays.

We can get some sense of the different perspective that would emerge by examining one of the key examples, Gal 2.16 (other key texts are: Rom 3.22, 26; Gal 2.20, 3.22; Phil 3.9). As rendered by the NRSV, the opening phrase in Gal 2.16 reads: 'yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in

---

<sup>22</sup> R.B. Matlock, '“Even the Demons Believe”: Paul and *Pistis Christou*', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64 (2002) 300-318; here p. 300.

<sup>23</sup> R.B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, Chico: Scholars Press, 1983; 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. See also, e.g., I.B. Wallis, *The Faith of Jesus Christ in Early Christian Traditions*, SNTSMS 84; Cambridge: CUP, 1995, pp. 65-127 (on Paul).

Jesus Christ'. The contrast would seem to be between a justification which a person receives, or claims, on the basis of works of law, and a justification that they obtain by (their) faith, that is, solely by putting their faith in God. The subjective genitive rendering, by contrast, would make the verse read that 'a person is justified... through the faith(fulness) of Jesus Christ'.<sup>24</sup> This alternative certainly does not remove from Paul's gospel the idea that people need to have faith, so the resulting overall difference between the two interpretations of Paul is perhaps not so great as sometimes suggested. But equally we can see that this alternative rendering does shift the emphasis of Paul's key statement about justification. Now the stress is not on the believer's response but on the action of Christ, or, more precisely, on what God has done in Christ. God's act of justification has been made possible not through the law but through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. In the shift of emphasis we see not only a focus away from human action and towards the redeeming work of God in Christ<sup>25</sup> but also some response to the Protestant dilemma as to how to prevent human faith becoming itself a 'work' which is thought to save. But whatever the theological attractions of the subjective genitive reading, they do not provide adequate reason to conclude that Paul intended the phrase this way: that conclusion can only be reached on the basis of grammatical, linguistic, and exegetical arguments. Barry Matlock and James Dunn have both warned, in criticising the current trend towards favouring the subjective genitive interpretation, that theological considerations should not be allowed to drive or determine the argument.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> The Greek word *pistis* can mean faithfulness or faith (cf. Rom 3.3, where it must mean something like faithfulness).

<sup>25</sup> Other readers of the *Epworth Review* may, like me, have heard Dick Jones tell the story in which he gave his response to the question, 'When were you saved?' — a question intended to elucidate an answer regarding the date of his 'conversion' — 'Sometime around 30AD.' In a similar way to the subjective genitive reading of *pistis Christou* in Paul, this takes the focus away from the believer's faith as the crucial moment of justification and places it onto the work of Christ.

<sup>26</sup> R.B. Matlock, 'Detheologizing the *PISTIS CHRISTOU* Debate: Cautionary Remarks from a Lexical Semantic Perspective', *Novum Testamentum* 42 (2000) 1-23; J.D.G. Dunn, 'Once More, *PISTIS CHRISTOU*', in E.E. Johnson and D.M. Hay, eds, *Pauline Theology, Vol. 4*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997, pp. 61-81 (now reprinted in Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*). Cf. also Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 379-85.

### ***Narrative and the underlying structure of Paul's theology***

Another key argument of Hays's book, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, was that Paul's theology, while not itself 'narrative' in form, depended and drew upon a narrative, the story of Christ. Thus, Hays argued that Paul's 'reflective discourse' had a 'narrative substructure'; 'the event of the cross has meaning not as an isolated event but as an event within a story'.<sup>27</sup> Hays's study paved the way for further studies of the narrative basis of Paul's theology and ethics;<sup>28</sup> and major studies of Paul have since described his theology as essentially story-based.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Hays's approach to Paul chimed in with a growing interest in narrative, or story, not only to describe the nature of Christian theology but also as a way of denoting other perspectives on the world — political liberalism, Marxism, and so on.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, however, to set the events of cross and resurrection within a story of salvation is not uncontroversial. Other scholars, notably J. Louis Martyn, have stressed the apocalyptic, punctiliar, invasive nature of the Christ-event which is precisely *not*, for Paul, an event set within a story of salvation.<sup>31</sup> The debate echoes an earlier controversy in German theology as to whether the notion of *Heilsgeschichte* ('salvation history') was appropriate to understanding Paul. Oscar Cullmann argued that it was, while Ernst Käsemann vigorously opposed Cullmann, and specifically any idea that salvation could be seen as an 'immanent evolutionary process', not least because just

---

<sup>27</sup> Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, pp. 21-30, p. 210 n.1.

<sup>28</sup> E.g., S.E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul*, JSNTSup 36; Sheffield: SAP, 1990.

<sup>29</sup> B. Witherington, *Paul's Narrative Thought-World*, Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 1994; Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, pp. 17-19. Cf. also N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, London: SPCK, 1992, pp. 47-80. For an overview, see B.W. Longenecker, 'Narrative Interest in the Study of Paul: Retrospective and Prospective', in *idem*, ed., *Narrative Dynamics in Paul*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002, pp. 3-16.

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., S. Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981; J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.

<sup>31</sup> E.g., J.L. Martyn, 'Events in Galatia: Modified Covenantal Nomism versus God's Cosmic Invasion of the Cosmos in the Singular Gospel', in J. Bassler, ed., *Pauline Theology, Vol. 1*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991, pp. 172-73; *idem*, *Galatians*, Anchor Bible 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997, pp. 283, 347-48, 389, etc.

such a conception of salvation history ‘broke in on us in secularized and political form with the Third Reich and its ideology’.<sup>32</sup>

The value of a ‘narrative’ approach to Paul has recently been subject to critical assessment by a team of UK-based Pauline scholars.<sup>33</sup> Most of the contributors find a narrative approach, conceived in diverse ways, helpful and apposite, though various cautions and questions are also raised. Some, however, argue that Paul’s sense of the Christ-event is such that it cannot be narrated as part of a story. John Barclay insists that Paul’s, and Israel’s, stories are ‘fractured’ by the cross of Christ. Paul ‘does not trace linear lines through historical processes or human communities’; what he sees instead is an ‘interruption’.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Francis Watson argues that Paul’s gospel is essentially ‘non-narratable’, given the ‘vertical’ rather than ‘horizontal’ character of the Christ-event as Paul describes it.<sup>35</sup> In a recent review essay, Hays has responded to this book, and insists, against Watson, that Paul’s gospel is, and must be, narratable.<sup>36</sup>

### ***Paul’s use of scripture and its implications***

Another area of interesting recent discussion is the ways in which Paul uses scripture in his letters. There are, of course, many quotations of Old Testament texts, along with echoes and allusions, in Paul’s writings.<sup>37</sup> Another of Richard Hays’s books, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, has been influential in drawing attention to Paul’s use of scripture, specifically in arguing that Paul’s citations and allusions establish an intertextual relationship between his letters and the Old Testament, such that the ‘echoes’ of scripture in the letters call to the readers’ mind the wider context and message of the

---

<sup>32</sup> E. Käsemann, ‘Justification and Salvation History in the Epistle to the Romans’, in *Perspectives on Paul*, London: SCM, 1971, pp. 63-64.

<sup>33</sup> Longenecker, ed., *Narrative Dynamics* (see n. 29 above).

<sup>34</sup> J.M.G Barclay, ‘Paul’s Story: Theology as Testimony’, in Longenecker, *Narrative Dynamics*, pp. 146, 155.

<sup>35</sup> F. Watson, ‘Is There a Story in These Texts?’, in Longenecker, *Narrative Dynamics*, pp. 231-39.

<sup>36</sup> R.B. Hays, ‘Is Paul’s Gospel Narratable?’, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27.2 (2004) (in press).

<sup>37</sup> For a valuable introduction, see S. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the New: An Introduction*, London and New York: Continuum, 2001, pp. 75-97.

texts from which they are drawn.<sup>38</sup> While Hays's approach has inspired a good many similar studies by others,<sup>39</sup> and has been followed by further recent studies of his own,<sup>40</sup> questions have also been raised in recent discussion, for example by Christopher Tuckett and Christopher Stanley.<sup>41</sup> One question is whether, in fact, Paul's citations of scripture do indeed depend on, and point to, the wider scriptural contexts from which they were drawn. Tuckett and Stanley argue that they often do not, but may simply serve as isolated texts to illustrate or support Paul's point. Stanley also addresses a key question: Would Paul's Gentile readers have known the scriptures well enough to have appreciated the allusions and their wider contexts? Because of both the low levels of literacy in the ancient world, and the lack of direct access to the Jewish scriptures, especially on the part of Gentiles, Stanley argues that often the answer to this question would be 'no'. Moreover, Stanley suggests that Paul's arguments in many cases would have worked best if there were only a minimal knowledge of the scriptures on the part of his readers; he stresses the way in which the quotations function as part of Paul's rhetoric, part of his strategy to persuade. Once again, the arguments are of interest not only for historical reasons, but also because they connect with contemporary questions about how scripture can and should be used. Hays, for example, makes the proposal that the 'hermeneutical freedom' with which Paul reads the Old Testament provides a model to be imitated in our own readings of scripture.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> R.B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

<sup>39</sup> E.g. S.C. Keesmaat, *Paul and His Story: (Re)Interpreting the Exodus Tradition*, JSNTSup 181; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999; J.R. Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul "in Concert" in the Letter to the Romans*, NovTSup 101; Leiden: Brill, 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Now collected in R.B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as an Interpreter of Israel's Scripture*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming 2005.

<sup>41</sup> C.M. Tuckett, 'Paul, Scripture and Ethics: Some Reflections' *New Testament Studies* 46 (2000) 403-24; C.D. Stanley, *Arguing With Scripture: The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul*, London: T&TClark International, 2004.

<sup>42</sup> See Hays, *Echoes*, 178-92.

In diverse ways, then, the apostle Paul continues to inspire much study and reflection. As contemporary contexts change and new questions and issues become pressing, so new conversations with Paul develop. Hopefully, this brief and selective survey has given a flavour of recent scholarly discussion and indicated some of the ways in which this discussion might inform theological reflection.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> I am very grateful to Barry Matlock for his comments on a draft of this essay.