

## A Review of Udo Schnelle and Francis Watson on Paul

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Abstract: Since E. P. Sanders introduced the “new perspective” on Paul, Lutherans have had to ask again: did Luther understand Paul on the Mosaic law? The two books reviewed here carry forward the discussion Sanders began. Udo Schnelle’s *Apostle Paul* makes two methodological choices with dramatic consequences for understanding Paul’s theology and letters: 1) Paul was in direct dialogue with the Greco-Roman culture of the cities where he preached the gospel and founded churches, and 2) Paul’s Christology, ethics, and eschatology developed and changed in relation to the religious and political crises through which he struggled. Francis Watson’s *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* makes an obvious but novel decision to focus on the five books of Moses as read by Paul in dialogue with other contemporary Jewish interpreters, arguing that Paul’s view of the “law” is his counter-reading of the five books of Torah. Paul’s hermeneutic exploits tensions and anomalies in the text of Torah itself, enabling him to emphasize God’s promise, not the human deeds of scriptural heroes.

Key Terms: Paul, Martin Luther, Udo Schnelle, Francis Watson.

“Of the many twentieth-century attempts to banish the ghost of Luther from Pauline exegesis, Albert Schweitzer remains one of the most illuminating and insightful.”<sup>1</sup> The two books this article reviews relate differently to Schweitzer disinheriting Luther. Further, against the majority opinion in the professional guild both books propose significant changes in understanding Paul. The first book proposes two significant shifts in approaching the apostle, both of which have dramatic consequences for understanding Paul’s theology, and the second successfully modifies the “new perspective” on Paul initiated by E. P. Sanders, the most important thesis currently being debated by scholars. This short summary and occasional critique of rather complex books recommends both of them to professors and pastors.

### **Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul***

Udo Schnelle, an ordained Lutheran pastor and theologian who holds the Chair of New Testament in Halle/Wittenberg, might be considered successor to the Chair held by Martin Luther himself. Schnelle both accepts and modifies Schweitzer’s thesis:

The famous dictum of Albert Schweitzer sees the matter rightly: “The doctrine of righteousness by faith is therefore a subsidiary crater, which was formed within

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004) 35 referring to A. Schweitzer, *Paul and his Interpreters: A Critical History* (London: A&C Black, 1912).

the rim of the main crater—the mystical doctrine of redemption through the being-in-Christ.” Both Wrede and Schweitzer, however, unjustly relate these appropriate observations on the origin of the exclusive Pauline doctrine of justification to evaluations of its importance. Although it did indeed originate in the disputes with Judaism and Jewish Christianity, its theological capacity cannot be restricted to this dispute.<sup>2</sup>

Schnelle’s appropriation and critique of Schweitzer as well as his interpretation of Paul in general is formed by two hypotheses. First, Martin Hengel asserts that “what in early Christianity is supposed to come from ‘pagan influences’ can consistently be traced back through Jewish mediation. Nowhere can a direct lasting influence by pagan cults or non-Jewish thinking be demonstrated.”<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, Schnelle affirms,

References to the extensive Hellenization of Jerusalem by no means suffice to explain the apostle’s use in the metropolitan centers of Asia Minor and Greece of themes such as freedom, suffering, conscience, and financial and intellectual independence. Here one recognizes rather the writings of Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus and Dio Chrysostom. This is the thought world in and to which the Pauline letters speak.<sup>4</sup>

This methodological decision has dramatic consequences for understanding, for example, Paul’s Christology, ethics, and eschatology.

Schnelle explicates Paul’s Christology (chap. 16) by rejecting both the subjective-visions hypothesis as an explanation of his resurrection (D. F. Strauss) and the interpretation that dissolves Christ’s resurrection into the kerygma (R. Bultmann). Schnelle writes of the resurrection rather as a real, transcendent event (W. Pannenberg),

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<sup>2</sup> Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005, from German of 2003) 471, quoting A. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul* (London: A&C Black, 1931) 225.

<sup>3</sup> M. Hengel, “Das früheste Christentum als eine jüdische messianische und universalistische Bewegung,” *Theologische Beiträge* (1997) 198.

<sup>4</sup> Schnelle, *Apostle Paul* 82, n. 127. I spoke with Schnelle about his book, and he emphasized this methodological debate. Rabbinic parallels to the New Testament were collected by H. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1969, originally 1926) 5 vols. Wettstein had collected Greco-Roman parallels, which have recently been thoroughly reworked; the Pauline volumes are *Neuer Wettstein: Texte zum Neuen Testament aus Griechentum und Hellenismus* (New York: de Gruyter, 1996), Band II: *Texte zur Briefliteratur und zur Johannesapokalypse*, ed. G. Strecker and U. Schnelle, II.1.1-973 and II.2.974-1073. Schnelle’s methodology is based on a century of research by scholars in the *Corpus Hellenisticum* project, the result of which is the *Neuer Wettstein*. A related volume is the *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament*, ed. M. Eugene Boring, Klaus Berger, and Carsten Colpe (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995); the Pauline section is pp. 335-508.

criticizing those like G. Lüdemann<sup>5</sup> who follow Strauss. Schnelle (417) argues that the interpretation of Strauss and Lüdemann is not “objective” and historically cogent, but rather presents *their* own history with Jesus.

History is never simply there for all to see but is always constructed only through the retrospective view of the knowing subject. In modern times, this process of construction is oriented to particular methods as markers of scientific rationality, so that the prevailing truism is, “No meaning without method.” ... In the case of the resurrection, this freeing of history from its magic spell goes under the name of “analogy.” Historical events can be properly evaluated only when they have analogies.... This is not the case with the resurrection of Jesus.... For our question, this means that the appearances of the risen Jesus and the resurrection events that lie behind them may not be proved by historical method, but neither can they be excluded.... In addition, there is the fundamental epistemological insight that, in general, events of the past are not directly available to us, so that history, as a secondary interpretation of what happened, cannot claim the same reality content as the events from which it derives.... Claims about the reality content of the resurrection event that go beyond this, in the case of both those who believe them and those who reject them, move equally on the level of life history experiences, epistemological positions, and historical considerations.<sup>6</sup>

“If one does not restrict the concept of experience to the natural sciences, the experiences of the early witnesses of the resurrection are by no means so categorically different from ‘normal’ experiences as is commonly supposed.” (426)

After clarifying his use of the term “resurrection,” Schnelle interprets the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ “for us” (chap. 16.5). The pre-Pauline confession in 1 Cor 15:3b, refers to substitution (“Christ died for our sins”). Christ is named as the subject of the event, but there is no mention of sacrificial categories, so Schnelle insists that we should not speak of atonement (444). Also in Gal 1:4, liberation from the present evil age is an apocalyptic motif that avoids the concept of atonement as found in the Priestly document (Leviticus). Nor does Rom 4:25 include the idea. Paul expresses his own idea already in 1 Thess 5:10, Jesus’ death “for” makes possible the salvation of human beings: Jesus died for the weak (1 Cor 8:11). This is not heroic, but a dying for the godless (445). Here one consequence of Schnelle’s methodological choice become clear:

The idea of cultic atonement by no means forms the tradition-historical background of the Pauline *hyper* (“for”) statements, since it is precisely the

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<sup>5</sup> Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Schnelle, *Apostle Paul* 423; also chap. 1.2 often citing Jörn Rüsen, Paul Ricoeur, and J. Straub, and chap. 1.3, often citing Thomas Luckmann and Peter Lampe on “constructivism”: knowledge is constructed rather than perceived through the senses.

characteristic expression of the Septuagint's Leviticus, *exilaskesthai peri* (to make atonement for...) that Paul does not employ.... Instead, it is much more likely that the Greek idea of the substitutionary death of the righteous, whose death effects the expiation / taking away of sin, is the starting point for the formation of this tradition. It is especially this idea that had already deeply influenced Jewish martyr theology ... in 2 Macc 7:37-38; 4 Macc 6:27-29.... The structure of Pauline theology does not include as a part of its load-bearing framework the concept of atonement as understood in its context of temple and sacrifice. (446-47)

It by no means suggests a sadistic image of a deity who demands a sacrifice as satisfaction for the sins of humanity. On the contrary, atonement is the initiative of God himself.... God alone is the acting subject in the event of atonement, who provides the sacrifice through which humanity is ritually set free from sin and who breaks the ruinous connection between the sinful act and its consequences. (449)

The consequences of Schnelle's methodological choice is equally dramatic for his interpretation of Pauline ethics (chap. 20). For two generations now, following Bultmann, interpreters have understood the basic idea of Paul's ethic on the model of indicative and imperative: God's act for humanity (indicative) calls for human actions in response (imperative). Schnelle inquires about a bridge between indicative and imperative, while denying that the Spirit gives a solution, for the Spirit cannot be both gift and obligation.<sup>7</sup> Schnelle integrates the valid elements of the indicative/imperative paradigm into Schweitzer's emphasis on transformation and participation. "Where Paul speaks of the newness of life, he bases this on a Christological foundation, not an ethical one (cf. 2 Cor 4:16; 5:17; Gal 6:15; Rom 6:4; 7:6)."<sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is both prototype and model (*Urbild und Vorbild*), as the hymn in Phil 2:6-11 makes clear. For Paul, Christ is the content and continuum of ethics. The common assertion that Paul did not introduce the historical life and work of Jesus as the concrete norm of the Christian life is incorrect.<sup>9</sup> "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). "To be a Christian is mimesis of Christ."<sup>10</sup> In practice, this refers to conventional Hellenistic ethics. Paul's criticism of marriage as such (1 Cor 7) does not have its source in the Old Testament, but has parallels with Cynic instructions (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.67-82). When Paul writes of "obeying the commandments of God" (1 Cor 7:19), this cannot refer to Torah, which demands circumcision instead of regarding the act as indifferent. Rather human beings as such have direct access to these commands, as in the Stoic Epictetus: "What directions shall I give you? Has not Zeus given you directions?" (*Diatr.* 1.25) In the dispute over eating food offered to idols, Paul does not cite the Old Testament, but cites a general ethical maximum (1 Cor 10:24), and he even gives instructions that oppose commands of Torah,

<sup>7</sup> Schnelle, *Apostle Paul* 547, quoting Schweitzer, *Mysticism* 295.

<sup>8</sup> Schnelle, *Apostle Paul* 548; and on Phil 2:6-11, see 372-75.

<sup>9</sup> Schnelle, *Apostle Paul* 372; 549, n. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Schnelle, *Apostle Paul* 550; also 549, n. 9 referring to the *exemplum Socratis*.

e.g. “eat whatever is set before you” (1 Cor 10:27, opposed to Deut 14:3 and Exod 34:15).<sup>11</sup>

In Rom 2:14-15 Paul proceeds on the basis of a common moral standard among Jews, pagans, and Christians (cf. also 13:13). He adopts the Hellenistic idea that ethical instruction comes through nature, the reason/logos, apart from external, that is, written laws. So also in 12.1-2, Paul does not derive the will of God from the Torah. These first two verses constitute a kind of title for this major division of the letter devoted to ethics.... The Roman Christians should themselves determine what the will of God is, on the basis of their own investigation and reflection.... Paul labels the will of God with the standard categories of popular philosophy: the good, the acceptable, the perfect.... (554-55)<sup>12</sup>

Because a moral life is synonymous with philosophy and because philosophy teaches how to live, it can be thoroughly compared with the *paraclesis* of the apostle.... The material content of the *paraclesis* of the Pauline letters is not basically different from the ethical standards of the surrounding world. Paul uses the Old Testament as a normative ethical authority only in a very reserved manner; the Torah is concentrated into the love command (cf. Rom 13:8-10) and thus integrated into the contemporary ethos. (556-57)

Schnelle concludes, “Paul does not emphasize that the material content of his ethical instruction is new, but that it has a new basis.... Only participation in the Christ event frees from the power of sin and enables, by the power of the Holy Spirit, a life lived in love that conforms to Christ’s own life....” (558) Further, “The Pauline ethic is not first of all an ethic of command but an ethic of insight.” (558)

Schnelle’s second, major interpretive choice involves arguing that Paul’s theology developed, that the conflicts of the early mission with the governments both in Jerusalem and in Rome as well as with other Jewish Christians stimulated Paul to rethink his theology. This is dramatically different from other contemporary scholars, e.g. from James Dunn, who essentially interprets Paul’s theology by exposition of Paul’s letter to the Romans.<sup>13</sup> Schnelle argues, on the contrary, that Paul’s exclusive doctrine of justification occurs only in the late letters, Galatians,<sup>14</sup> Romans,<sup>15</sup> and Philippians.<sup>16</sup> In

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<sup>11</sup> Schnelle, *Apostle Paul* 553 with n. 28.

<sup>12</sup> Paul is a Jewish reader of Torah, in direct dialogue with Greco-Roman culture, and a Roman citizen (*Apostle Paul* 60-62), in postcolonial terms, a diaspora Jew who is “hybrid.” I emphasize the contrast with earlier studies by scholars who claimed Jesus was Galilean, *not* Jewish. See Susannah Heschel, “Nazifying Christian Theology: Walter Grundmann and the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Christian Life,” *Church History* 63/4 (Dec. 1994) 587-605.

<sup>13</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Paul founded the Galatians churches at the beginning of the third missionary journey (Acts 18:23) c. 52 CE (*Apostle Paul* 269), and Paul wrote the letter after writing 1-2 Corinthians in the late autumn of 55 CE (*Apostle Paul* 271). For a different historical

contrast, *nomos* (law) occurs eight times in four passages in 1 Cor; but when Paul writes of freedom, this is not freedom from the law, but “from all” (9:19). (230) 1 Cor 15:56 points in this direction, but with two weighty differences from Gal/Rom: a) the constitutive antithesis between faith and works of the law/Torah is missing, and b) the characteristic contrast *nomos/pneuma* (law/Spirit) which permeates Gal/Rom is also missing. (231) Baptism is the locus of liberation and also where one is taken into service as an obedient slave (1 Cor 1:30; 6:11); but this has no antinomian point and had been advocated prior to Paul. (233)

Schnelle emphasizes tension between the early mission and political/religious leaders both in Jerusalem and Rome. Disciples in Jerusalem were persecuted already c. 42 CE by Agrippa I, who killed James, son of Zebedee, after which Peter gave up leadership of the church there and left the city (Acts 12:1b-17). (122) The emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome c. 49 CE because, instigated by Chrestus, they were constantly creating disturbances (Suetonius, *Divine Claudius* 25.4).<sup>17</sup>

The edict of Claudius had far-reaching effects on the relations between Christianity and Judaism and on the whole history of the early Christian mission. It prevented an early trip to Rome by Paul (cf. Rom 1:13; 15:22) and changed the constituency of the Roman church. But above all, the success of the early Christian mission among Gentile sympathizers of the synagogue in Rome (and in other areas of the empire) led to a defensive reaction within Judaism.... This produced a dangerous situation for Judaism. If at the heart of the Roman Empire Judaism was being looked upon as a notorious disruptive influence, it would be only a small step for the Romans to institute harsher measures against Jews.... (161)

At the Jerusalem council (Gal 2) all parties had agreed to two missions, Peter to observant Jews, Paul to the Gentiles<sup>18</sup>; but after Claudius' edict, both positions polarized.<sup>19</sup> Some in Jerusalem, perhaps also James, began insisting on the circumcision of Gentile believers, and these orthopraxic believers caused problems for the Pauline mission in Galatia and Philippi. Paul too changed. Whereas his doctrine of justification had been inclusive, oriented to the effective making-righteous of the individual believer in baptism through the power of the Spirit, it now became exclusive:

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reconstruction with differing theological conclusions, see my new GTU colleague, Eung Chun Park, *Either Jew or Gentile: Paul's Unfolding Theology of Inclusivity* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Paul wrote Romans in Corinth in the spring of 56 CE (*Apostle Paul* 305).

<sup>16</sup> Philippi was the first Pauline church in Europe, founded by Paul in 49/50 (*Apostle Paul* 366); the letter was written when Paul was an old man in prison in Rome c. 60 CE (*Apostle Paul* 368-69).

<sup>17</sup> Schnelle, *Apostle Paul* 48, 161, 163, 166, 181, 303, 306.

<sup>18</sup> Schnelle, *Apostle Paul* 126, 128, 132

<sup>19</sup> Schnelle, *Apostle Paul* 123, 136, 165, 275, 301.

Paul 1) excludes the possibility that the nomos can play a synergistic role in the event of justification. 2) He likewise now excludes the possibility that Jews and Jewish Christians have a privileged hermeneutical status based on salvation history. The Judaists' insistence that also Gentile Christians must be circumcised compelled Paul to break with the compromise solution made at the apostolic council and, as a countermove, to call into question the importance of the Torah even for Jewish Christians. (301)

### Transition: Torah

Here I want to make a transition to discuss the second book, one by Francis Watson. But first, I observe that in a footnote Schnelle has a workable definition of "Torah," as used in the quotation above: "the different occurrences can be compared to concentric circles: the radii can be different, but the Sinaitic centre remains the same."<sup>20</sup> Schnelle differentiates very, very carefully between each letter by Paul, e.g. between 1 Corinthians and Galatians, but he does not do the same with the five books of Moses. Using "the Torah" or "Judaism" as if either were a single, undifferentiated whole, causes problems and leads many, including Schnelle, into statements that are unfortunate, for example:

The crucified God of Paul and the God of the Old Testament, however, are not compatible with each other.... Regarding salvation, Jewish particularism and early Christian universalism could not both be true at the same time—the two symbolic universes were incompatible. (400)  
 ... in contrast to Jewish tradition, the rest of the commands and prohibitions of the Torah completely lose their importance for Paul. This also applies to the Decalogue, for in [Rom] 13:9 Paul does not cite *the* Decalogue but only illustratively *from* the Decalogue. Through this line of argument, the apostle leaves his Jewish thinking behind.... (357)  
 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Torah by taking its curse upon himself ([Gal] 3:13). This annuls the Torah itself, so that it no longer has power over us, for we have died with Christ. (542)

If a reader had noticed the footnote on p. 278, it would be possible to equate Torah with Sinai in the above quotations, but Schnelle himself does not differentiate within Torah, in the sense of the five books of Moses, so that the statements sound more general than he perhaps intended. Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, differentiates.

When Paul speaks of "the law", he has in mind the text known as "the Law of Moses", with a particular emphasis on the four later books, which are concerned with the event at Mount Sinai and its aftermath. *Paul's "view of the law" is nothing other than his reading of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.* He speaks of the law not as a propounder of dogmatic assertions but as an interpreter of texts. (275)

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<sup>20</sup> Schnelle, *Apostle Paul* 278, n. 44, quoting Räisänen.

The antithesis between “faith” and “works of law” entails an entire scriptural hermeneutic, according to which the core of the scriptural message is to be found in the prophetic proclamation of the infallible, unconditional certainty of God’s eschatological saving action.... If Habakkuk 2.4 represents one side of this fault line, Leviticus 18.5 represents the other. In the one case, the emphasis falls on the human acknowledgment of God’s eschatological saving action; in the other, it is human action in obedience to the law’s prescriptions that constitutes the scriptural path to life. (162-63)

“Antithesis” is key, which Watson affirms Paul found in scripture itself. Contrast this with Richard Hays, who suggests that Paul does not reproduce the ‘plain sense’ of the text, but sometimes perpetrates a ‘strong misreading,’ drawing conclusions that can only be described as ‘outrageous.’<sup>21</sup>

The construal of scripture that will emerge is less smoothly linear, more fractured, than Hays’ reference to unfailing divine faithfulness might suggest. In reading the Torah, Paul chooses to highlight two major tensions that he finds within it: the tension between the unconditional promise and the Sinai legislation,<sup>22</sup> and the tension between the law’s offer of life and its curse. These are tensions between *books*: Genesis and Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy.... What makes him unusual is the fact that he *exploits* these tensions, building his entire hermeneutic on them instead of finding ways to mitigate and contain them. (23-24)

Watson contrasts his reading with that of E. P. Sanders; the index of the latter’s book on *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* shows that his references to the Pentateuch represent only about three per cent of scriptural and non-scriptural passages cited.<sup>23</sup> Watson is in effect observing that E. P. Sanders interprets early Judaism without a focus on “Torah,” the five books of Moses.

### **Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith***

In relation to A. Schweitzer’s characterization of justification (Rom 1-4) as a “subsidiary crater” but mysticism-participation in Christ (Rom 5-8) as the main crater, Watson

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<sup>21</sup> Watson, *Hermeneutics of Faith* 22, quoting Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University, 1989) 115, 111.

<sup>22</sup> Compare Moshe Weinfeld (of Hebrew University in Jerusalem), “Covenant,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1971) 5.1012-22, at col. 1018: “In contradistinction to the Mosaic covenants, which are of an obligatory type, the Abrahamic-Davidic covenants belong to the promissory type.” Also Weinfeld, “berith,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (1975, 1977) 2.253-79, esp. 266-69, 270-72.

<sup>23</sup> Watson, *Hermeneutics of Faith* 13, n. 25, referring to E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM, 1977) 583. For Watson’s summary of Sanders see *Hermeneutics of Faith* 6-13.

observes that for Paul, prophetic texts cannot explicitly refer to Christ.<sup>24</sup> Paul relies on prophetic texts, Hab 2.4 in Rom 1.17 and Gen 15.6 in Rom 4.3, which for him only indirectly refer to Christ (38). References to scripture are less prominent in Rom 5-8, which contain the majority of direct references to Christ, as Schweitzer observed.

Explicit scriptural material is in inverse proportion to references to Christ.... It is important not to misinterpret this finding.... Scripture for Paul is most fundamentally the divine promise, in which God announces an unconditional saving action, universal in its scope, that lies beyond the horizon the scriptural writers themselves.... The prophetic authors of scripture do not know of a "Christ" whose name is "Jesus," but they do know the God of the promise. When Paul speaks directly of the comprehensive divine act in which the promise is fulfilled, he must speak of "Jesus Christ"; but he does so on the basis of an *a posteriori* knowledge that was not accessible to the scriptural writers. It is this *a posteriori*, retrospective knowledge that predominates in Romans 5-8—in contrast to chapters 1-4, where the assertion of the scriptural *a priori* entails a degree of abstraction from the actuality of divine saving action in Christ. (357)

The purpose of Genesis, the first book of Moses, is to identify the God of promise as the primary agent in the Abraham narrative, rather than Abraham himself (172), who simply believed (Gen 15.6). Watson contrasts the narrative of a heroic Abraham in 1 Macc 2.50-54: Abraham was found faithful when he was tested (Gen 22.1). 1 Macc 2 detaches Abraham's faithfulness from Gen 12 and connects it instead to the sacrifice of Isaac, to Abraham's heroic obedience (Gen 22). (172, 178) In contrast to 1 Macc 2, Paul reads the promise of universal blessing (Gen 12.3) in light of Gen 15.6, "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Paul emphasizes not the heroic action of Gen 22, but rather "by faith," the phrase from Hab 2.4. "At stake here is not simply the question of Gentile membership in the people of God, but the priority and unconditionality of divine action in its universal scope." (186) "There is no statement to the effect that *if* Abraham observes the commandments, *then* he will be blessed—but otherwise not....<sup>25</sup> The reason, as Genesis 12-15 shows particularly clearly, is that in this narrative promise is a more fundamental mode of divine discourse than command." (188) The promise, "in you shall all Gentiles be blessed" (Gen 12.3), has become reality for Paul in the death of Christ under the law's curse. Gal 3.6-9 draws conclusions from Gen 12.3 and 15.6: the curse of the law gives way to the blessing of Abraham. (190)

Abraham and Sarah assume the need for human initiative (Gen 16), which results in the birth of Ishmael. Gen 17 shows that Ishmael is not the promised son, but that the promise will be fulfilled rather by miraculous divine act.

The scriptural problematic of promise and law is thus the story of Abraham and his two sons writ large; conversely, the Genesis narrative encapsulates the inner-scriptural anomaly of the two incommensurable covenants. One covenant

<sup>24</sup> Contrast Matthew and Luke, who cite OT texts as direct prophecies of Jesus.

<sup>25</sup> Compare n. 22 above.

represents the beginning and the end, the promise and its fulfillment, whereas the other occupies the space in between, seeking the promise's fulfillment in a human initiative that ends only in exclusion. The structure of salvation history, as outlined in Galatians 3, is already foreshadowed in Genesis 15-21.<sup>26</sup>

A more specific anomaly: In Rom 4 Paul interprets Gen 15 in light of Gen 17: Abraham will become the "father of many nations." Abraham's descendants "like the dust of earth or stars in the sky" are identified not with the people of Israel but with "many nations," which is so fundamental that Abraham receives a new name (Gen 17:2, 4-8). This breaks the link between promises in earlier chapters of "seed" and "land." Paul noticed this anomaly, that the name "father of many nations" and the covenant sign of circumcision are at odds with each other. Rejecting that circumcision altered Abraham's relationship to God, Paul correlates Gen 15 with 17 and concludes that Abraham is "father of us all," father of those who believe in uncircumcision (Rom 4:11-12, 16-17; Gen 17.5). (209-15)

When Abraham believes the promise that "I will make you father of many Gentiles," he believes in the "God who gives life to the dead" (Rom 4.17-18). There is thus a Christological component to Paul's appeal to Abraham, whose faith is an acknowledgment elicited by the promise of future divine saving action on his behalf. (217) "To highlight the faithfulness, piety and heroism of Abraham himself" is for Paul a misreading of Genesis. (219) Indeed, Paul's "own reading may be characterized as a *counter-reading*, a reading directed against a prior reading in which Abraham is *not* seen primarily as the addressee of the divine promise." (219) Watson expands this by considering the interpretation of Abraham in Jubilees (222-38), Philo (238-52), Josephus (252-59), and Eupolemus (259-67). None of these images of Abraham are more authentically Jewish than the others; they demonstrate rather that Jewish identity is contested. (267)

...from a Pauline perspective, the other interpretations of Genesis are in the last resort surprisingly similar. All of them are concerned to present Abraham as an exemplary figure or role model for human conduct in relation to God.... Corresponding to this different construal of Abraham is a different understanding of the God of the Genesis narrative. Apart from Paul, Jewish interpreters regard the promise motif as secondary to a story whose primary aim is to celebrate Abraham's outstanding piety and virtue.... In contrast, Paul consistently focuses on the promise motif whenever he speaks of Abraham.... Abraham no longer holds the central position in his own story. (268-69)

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<sup>26</sup> Watson, *Hermeneutics of Faith* 208; on anomaly in Torah see also 210-13, 292, 429, 441. Watson's teacher at Oxford, N. T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) 99, n. 18, promises a response to his former student. To make only one critical remark, Wright constantly, vaguely refers to "the covenant," while Watson defines the term and differentiates carefully between "covenants" (plural: see Rom 9.4).

I return briefly to Schnelle's assertion: "The crucified God of Paul and the God of the Old Testament, however, are not compatible with each other...." (400) Watson's reading of Genesis demonstrates that Schnelle's judgment on the theology of the Old Testament is incorrect. Watson does not claim that he has done an "exegesis" of Genesis; rather,

Paul, as we have seen, is a reader of the Pentateuch alongside other readers. He can claim no monopoly on it, for he is himself a member of a reading community characterized by ongoing debate about scriptural meaning and significance. Disagreement does not cut him off from that reading community, even when community can only take the form of mutual antagonism. Disagreement can only take place on the basis of an agreed frame of reference. (522)

Representations of God in the Torah, Writings, and Prophets<sup>27</sup> are more diverse than those in the New Testament, a diversity that may go beyond the comfort level of many contemporary Christians and perhaps of some contemporary Jews; however, many hope that we will remain in dialogue with each other.

Finally, I briefly summarize Watson's presentation of Paul's view of the "law," which is nothing other than his reading of texts, his reading of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Because of space, I leave out Deuteronomy, leaving it for the readers of *Dialog* to pursue.

...the law that brings with it the conditional offer of life is overtaken by the realities of sin and death, so that those who are under law are under its curse.... Other interpreters appear to skirt around the fact that the post-Sinai history of Israel in the wilderness is a history of catastrophe. For Paul, this represents an act of interpretative repression. It is the narratives of the Torah itself that lead him to claim that "the letter kills" (2 Cor 3.6). (277)

Moses descends from Sinai with two inscribed tablets (Exod 34.29), but this divine production is broken in pieces, which initiates both the destruction of the golden calf and of 3,000 people (Exod 32.19-20, 28). (283) Paul is not primarily concerned with the eschatological fate of Israel (2 Cor 3:7, 13), about which he draws positive conclusions elsewhere (Rom 11:25-32). (291)<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For example, Sarah Dille, *Mixing Metaphors: God as Mother and Father in Deutero-Isaiah* (JSOTSS; T&T Clark, 2004); Gerlinde Baumann, *Gottes Gewalt im Wandel. Motive und Theologie von Nahum 1,2-8—eine intertextuelle Studie* (WMANT; Neukirchener, 2005). Leo G. Perdue, *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology After the Collapse of History* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) chap. 6: „From Jewish Tradition to Biblical Theology: The Tanakh as a Source for Jewish Theology and Practice.“ Perdue's chapters on liberation (3) and on feminist, Mujerista and womanist theologies (5) demonstrate that significant contemporary readers have found gospel in the book of Exodus, where Paul saw death.

<sup>28</sup> Compare also Schnelle, *Apostle Paul* 588-92.

In his extant letters Paul cites just two texts from Leviticus.... In its Pauline form ... this reads: “The person who does these things will live by them” (Lev 18.5). The way to ultimate human well-being is the way of the commandments: or so it is written in Leviticus. Remarkably, Paul twice cites this text only to state that what it says is in reality not the case (Gal 3.12; Rom 10.5 [see 7.10]). The Leviticus statement encapsulates the fundamental disjunction Paul sees within the Pentateuch—thereby sharply differentiating himself from other contemporary readers of these texts. (314-15)

Lev 26.3-6 makes the conditional nature of the offer of life in 18.5 explicit. (318) Contemporary debate concerns whether “life” here is a goal of law observance or a synonym for it, whether the laws are a means of earning life or, on the contrary, the life to be lived by the covenant people, the latter of which is the central claim of the new perspective on Paul. Watson examines the interpretation of Lev 18.5 in 1) Deuteronomy (4.1; 8.1), 2) in Ezekiel (20.11, 13, 21, and esp. 18.5-9), 3) by the Septuagint translator, 4) by Philo (*de cong. [Preliminary Studies]* 86-87), which is close to the Septuagint, and 5) by Paul. (320-22) He concludes, “Leviticus 18.5 is most plausibly to be understood as a conditional promise of ‘life’—that is, the totality of the covenant blessings—for those who observe the divine commandments....” (322)

Of the books of the Pentateuch, it is Leviticus that most nearly lacks any kind of narrative framework. In relative abstraction from the history of Israel, the legislation of Leviticus acquires an ideal, timeless quality, so that it here seems entirely plausible that the commandments truly represent the divinely ordained way to life. In the other Sinai-related books of the Pentateuch, that is not the case: for in Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, the narrative framework serves only to problematize the conditional promise of life classically articulated in Leviticus 18.5 (and echoed in Deuteronomy 30.19). As narrated in these books, the history of Israel’s first encounter with the law is characterized by death, rather than by life. If there is a “contradiction”,... the contradiction lies not so much in Paul as in the scriptural texts themselves. (354)

Israel’s journey from Sinai to the land is framed by two censuses. The first census is in the wilderness of Sinai (Num 1.1; see 26.63), the second in the plains of Moab by Jordan at Jericho (Num 26.3, 64).

At the conclusion of the second census, it becomes clear that the entire generation of those numbered at Sinai has perished (Num 26.63-65).... The first census turns out to be an enumeration not for military service but for slaughter. At Sinai, the entire adult congregation ... is marked out for death. In moving from Leviticus to Numbers, then, we find that the law’s conditional promise of life is overtaken by the reality of death—the destruction of the entire generation that stood before YHWH at Sinai. (355)

Paul's most explicit references are in 1 Cor 10:1-13. Warning readers of the perils of idolatry and immorality, Paul appeals to Israel's experiences in the wilderness, citing the golden calf story (Exod 32, cited 1 Cor 10.7), and from Numbers, the glut of quails (Num 11.31-35, cited 1 Cor 10:6), Korah's rebellion (Num 16), the plague of snakes (Num 21.4-9, cited 1 Cor 10.9), and Israel's young men seduced by the daughters of Midian (Num 25.1-9, cited 1 Cor 10.8). Each involves mass death—in fulfillment of the divine judgment addressed to the exodus generation: "As I live," says the Lord,... "your dead bodies shall fall in this very wilderness; and of all your number, included in the census ..., not one of you shall come into the land in which I swore to settle you...." (Num 14.28-30) (356) For Paul the wilderness generation died not simply because it rejected the promise, but because it transgressed the law. (370)

## Conclusion

Schnelle and Watson have written crucial books on Paul that I ask students at my institution, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, to read and that I recommend to the readers of *Dialog*.<sup>29</sup> Schnelle makes two methodological choices with dramatic consequences for understanding Paul's theology and letters: 1) Paul was in direct dialogue with the Greco-Roman culture of the cities where he preached the gospel and founded churches, and 2) Paul's Christology, ethics, and eschatology developed and changed in relation to the religious and political crises through which he struggled. Second, in the context of current debates over the new perspective on Paul introduced by E. P. Sanders, Watson makes an obvious but novel decision to focus on the five books of Moses as read by Paul in dialogue with other contemporary Jewish interpreters, arguing that Paul's view of the "law" is his counter-reading of Torah. Paul's hermeneutic exploits tensions and anomalies in the text of Torah itself, enabling him to emphasize God's promise, not the human deeds of scriptural heroes.

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<sup>29</sup> See also *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 45:1 (Spring 2006): "How Lutherans Read the Bible," and *Word and World* 26.4 (Fall 2006): "Biblical Authority Today." Quite important too is the Lutheran / Roman Catholic dialogue at the University of Notre Dame in light of *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, contributions recently edited by David E. Aune, *Reading Paul Together: Protestant and Catholic Perspectives on Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).