

"Have Paul and His Communities Left Judaism for Christianity?":

A Review of the Paul-Related Chapters in

Jewish Believers in Jesus and Jewish Christianity Revisited

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First of all, congratulations to the editors, contributors, and publishers for two beautiful books. And thank you for the invitation to participate on this review panel.

My assignment is to discuss the material that pertains to Paul in these two volumes. In each case, I will begin with a few comments about the introductory essays.

Let us begin with the relevant essays in Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik, eds., *Jewish Believers in Jesus* (The Early Centuries; Hendrickson Publishers, 2007):

Oskar Skarsaune and Carleton Paget:

The two introductory essays deal with problems of terminology and phenomenology. Skarsaune makes many helpful observations in his sophisticated essay. The decision to include in the term "Jewish believers in Jesus" "those Jewish believers who did not keep a Jewish lifestyle," who are also understood to fit the label "Christian Jews," is differentiated from those referred to as "Jewish Christians," who "continued to observe Torah" (9). I would have thought the reverse, and especially that *Christian Jews* best fits those who clearly remained within Judaism, i.e., who observed Torah, variously interpreted, as a matter of conviction. The descriptive phrase "Jewish believers in Jesus" avoids but does not solve the problem of how to best define and label

the institutional entity that results when Jews believe in Jesus: Were they members of a new religion, Christianity, and thus Jewish Christians, or members of Judaism who remained members of Judaism because they believed that Jesus fulfilled some of their expectations within that religion? Christianity as the noun just strikes me to be mistaken for some of those covered in this volume, such as Paul, and those within the communities he founded. Christian is also problematic.

In tracing the origins and definitions of the term "Jewish Christianity," Paget makes the helpful observation that he "shall seek to make the obvious point that in part it is definition of the term that has determined other factors in the study of the subject." The point is crucial; the work of most scholars on the topic makes it questionable only whether he is correct that it is "obvious." I learned much from his sketch of the historical development of the terminology and concepts with which the terms were invested.

Richard Bauckham:

Between these introductory essays and the ones on Paul is a very useful essay on James and the Jerusalem Community by Richard Bauckham, with which I found much to agree, including where the figure of Paul came into the discussion. I would like to cite one quotation, following Bauckham's discussion of the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15, that I wish everyone would read: "A view that has been very influential in modern scholarship, according to which the Jerusalem church represented a 'conservative' insistence on Gentile Christian obedience to the Torah and opposition to Paul's Gentile mission in principle, is mistaken. Of course, the decision of the Jerusalem council made no difference to Jewish Christian obedience to the Torah, which was taken entirely for granted. What damaged Paul's subsequent reputation in Jerusalem, at least to some

degree, was not his policy towards Gentile converts, but the rumors that he was encouraging Jews to abandon observance of the whole Torah (Acts 21:21)" (75).

Now let us turn to the essays specifically focused on Paul.

Donald Hagner:

I will spend most of my time discussing Donald Hagner's essay ("Paul as a Jewish Believer—According to His Letters", pp. 97-120), a substantial study focused on Paul as a Jewish believer according to his letters, that is, not based on Acts. Rather than explain his views and then need to repeat them to offer my comments, I will introduce his topics in the order developed in the essay and interject my comments along the way.

The way that the issues to be solved are introduced frames the limitations of the research to be undertaken. Hagner's aim is to explain "the relationship between Paul's *pre-Christian Judaism* and *his Christianity*, and also the relationship between Paul's *Christianity* and the *Judaism* of those who did not accept the gospel that he preached. Another way of putting the matter is in terms of continuity and discontinuity. How much continuity is there between *Saul's Judaism* and *Paul's Christianity*? How much discontinuity" (96-97; emphasis added). Having merely turned the page from the nuanced discussions in the introductory chapters on terminology and phenomena, I feel instead like I have opened the cover of a different book, if not something even more different than that. The separation between the religious system of Paul's past, named Judaism, and the religious system in which his language is to be read and interpreted, Christianity, is striking, although at points this chasm is categorically denied. This is a case where the issue is not simply one of terminology; embedded in these terms are the very answers that Hagner will seek to demonstrate, in keeping with most traditional

interpretations of Paul. Note that the continuities and discontinuities to be explored are not sought out between Judaisms, such as one would do to investigate the way that the Qumran sectarians viewed the Temple or read Scripture versus those who were in control of the Temple or the Texts, or any other such intra- or inter-Jewish lines of difference, but across a fixed and definable religious divide between two different religions and groups of people, Judaism and Christianity, which can be traced in one man's life, that of Hagner's Saul turned into Hagner's Paul.

I already expect that the Paul I will meet in this essay is quite familiar, a Jew because of his past, but a Christian in his present life, albeit one who occasionally plays at being a Jew in order to lure Jews who might fail to perceive that he does so only in order to have access to them so that he can convert them from their religious system into another one, unaware that this is the course upon which following him ineluctably leads.

The issues could have been set out so differently, at least in terms of framing the possible ways to evaluate Paul as a *Jewish* believer in Jesus. The continuities and discontinuities could be explored on a map of mid-first-century Judaism or Judaisms, which at least has historical probability on its side, as has been claimed in the opening essays, in others that follow, and in many works to which Hagner refers, although not from which to draw his own opinions. I submit that the frame for viewing Paul is already constrained to viewing him only from the perspective, concerns, and answers of a later time, and that the essay has been written to confirm the views of those who already share Hagner's point of view on Paul. That is, this essay is not so much an historical as an ideological exercise, the implied reader is assumed to have internalized as unquestionable the same supposed truths and logic by which the author of the essay operates. By ideology, I mean here the idea that an explanation is either not offered, or

when offered, does not actually explain anything to anyone who does not already hold the same point of view; it is not designed to argue as if an argument were required. It is clear, obvious, certain for the author and their implied reader; how could things be otherwise?

That suspicion is only strengthened by noticing several items that appear in the essay. For example, the author's implied reader is greeted constantly with clear(ly), obvious(ly), and other similar words and phrases and assumptions throughout. Also the footnotes to those who disagree or offer alternative reading of Paul are few. For example, some Jewish authors on Paul are noted early in the essay, but none of these works surface in later discussions or footnotes. The reader is made aware that they exist, but not of what they suggest, nor is there any indication that Hagner counts their ideas to be of any importance for the development of his own. No argument against them is mounted; one wonders if one was ever esteemed to be required, if they ever had a chance to convince.

Hagner traces some of the views of Paul that acquired currency in the 19th and 20th centuries, such as the Hellenistic Diaspora Paul of the pagan world versus the world of the rabbis, the challenges mounted to that construction by Davies and Hengel, the recognition that Judaism was not monolithic and could even be helpfully discussed as Judaisms, and that some now emphasize Paul's Jewishness including continued observation of Torah, just as has become more common for studies of Jesus. This last trend is quickly greeted with an important "**But**": "But the subject is often pursued in such a manner as to ignore or downplay the discontinuities caused by the dramatic newness of Christianity itself.... The tensions and discontinuities between Judaism and Christianity should not be swept under the carpet even for the good motive of wanting to avoid anti-Semitism, as important as that is" (100-1). No case of this nefarious

strategy is referenced, and I am unaware of any work fitting the description, either ignoring or downplaying discontinuities between Paul's view pre and post Christ-faith. Most of the works of which I am aware struggle with just those texts that seem uncongenial to the proposition of a Paul to be understood within Judaism, and they self-consciously recognize the difference between the historical task and the hermeneutical concerns that arise today in view of the historical treatment of the Jewish people, which has at least in part been based on previous interpretations of Paul's voice that were unconcerned with the harm they fostered.

What we meet here then is simply a straw-man which indicates Hagner's disapproval of recent developments. He wants to emphasize the discontinuities between Paul and Judaism. But should one not begin to research the *new* things being claimed by these Jewish believers in Jesus in dynamic tension with the claims of other Jewish groups, including their claims for things new? Are not other Jewish group's new claims argued by them to be continuous with what has been awaited from of old, even if discontinuous with the claims being simultaneous made by other Jewish groups, whether also claiming new things, like the Dead Sea Scrollers, or to be upholding the old untarnished by these new things, like Sadducees, or the old understood in new ways, like Pharisees? Should not the discontinuities in Paul's letters be measured against those which characterize other Jewish groups within and between each other, from Sadducees to Pharisees to Essenes to Qumraners to Zealots to Therapeutae to Herodeans to those like Philo or Josephus, to common people and the majority throughout the Diaspora, including some recognition of the fact that we know so little about the Jewish practices of most Jews of Paul's time—instead of against all Jewish groups, as if there really were two oppositional monoliths, Christianity and Judaism? In doing so, will not the continuities become far more evident than Hagner's way of

limiting the options supposes from the start? Do some of them not claim that the spirit is acting among them in new ways, that the awaited age has dawned or is on the horizon, that the proper way to interpret Scripture has changed, and so on? Do we not know of other figures making messianic claims during this period—and yet measure them to fall within Judaism to interpret their meaning—rather than imagining them to thus be from outside of Judaism, as if new claims requires positing that they represent new religions in order to make sense of them?

Under studies in continuity and discontinuity, Hagner's introductory comments on call versus conversion include this statement: "It is surely true that Paul does not believe that he has left one religion for another" (101). That is amazing to me based on what I have read to this point in the essay, and will read. It is not "surely true" for Hagner's interpretation of Paul, even if plainly stated here. Within a few sentences it is surely qualified: "Christianity is for him [Paul] rather the fulfillment of his Jewish faith" (102). Note, it is not stated that Christ-believing Judaism is the fulfillment of his Jewish faith, but a new religion, Christianity, as Hagner's arguments continue to make clear. For in the next breadth we learn from simply reading Gal 1:13-14 and Phil 3:7-9, with no need to qualify or argue what these texts do or do not mean, or how they should be translated, that "Paul speaks of his life in Judaism as something in the past, something now left behind" (102). What would leaving one religion for another be if not leaving one behind for another? Never mind that Gal 1:13-14 can be read to indicate that he has left one *way of living Judaism* for *another way of living Judaism*, from a kind of Pharisaic Judaism for a kind of Christ-faith based Judaism, which otherwise appears to me to be the point Paul seeks to make throughout the letter. Would Hagner insist that when a Christian speaks of the way they used to live as a Christian, let us say before becoming a Charismatic, that this change of being requires understanding them to have changed

religions? When Paul renounces the relative value of "everything to be loss for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" in Phil 3:8, Hagner does not note that *everything* would logically have to include, alongside of his privileges as a natural born and practicing Jew, negation of Paul's role as *apostle*, the very role that defined his identity, and authority ("Paul, an apostle...") in Gal 1! So when he writes Philippians 3, has Paul left behind "Christianity" too? Is not his point in this text that every measure of honor in terms of human comparative ranking is qualified by his faith in Judaism's Messiah, and moreover, contextually qualified by Paul's perception of a situation for which this relativizing rhetoric is shaped? So why then does this highly philosophically limited assertion lead to the observation that Paul has left Judaism behind, but not that he has left Christianity behind too?

Hagner's next topic is the law and salvation. The conclusion to which Hagner points will turn around this: "If for Paul Christ has brought the law to an end, then by the usual standard of judgment Paul has broken with Judaism. If, as the new perspective maintains, Paul continues to uphold the law, then he remains fully within Judaism" (104). This is interesting; note that the first approach undermines the statement that Paul has not left one religion for another. The second approach offered misunderstands the new perspective, setting up another easily attacked straw-man, because almost none of its proponents, certainly not Sanders, Dunn, Wright, or Hays, e.g., uphold that Paul observes Torah as a matter of principle, but quite the opposite—they actually agree with Hagner that Paul does not. (My own view, which is what is described in the second approach as stated, could be described to be within the new perspective in some ways, since it agrees that Judaism was not works-righteousness based as supposed by traditionalist perspectives, but when it comes to Paul, I actually do argue that Paul was Torah-observant as a matter of faith, thus making my view

otherwise at best anomalous if measured in terms of almost all other new perspective proponents, at least certainly not representative of those to be assumed to be under consideration by an unmarked reference to them.) It is relevant to note that Hagner has himself written an essay, to which he refers, that he qualifies in his footnotes this way: "for a more detailed argument *against* the new perspective..." (104 n. 10; emphasis added). Hagner discusses what he views to be Paul's negative statements about the Law, offering an extensive list (104-7), then he reviews the positive ones, providing only three, from Rom (3:21, 31; 7:12) and one from 1 Cor (7:19), which are immediately qualified to mean something other than what they appear to state (107-8), quite unlike the treatment offered on the ones supposed to clinch the case for a negative valuation of Torah. There is not time to discuss the examples, or to offer others that further problematize his interpretation, but Hagner's solution to this supposed dilemma—which has already been heavily weighted to the negative statements, and understood in abstract terms to represent Paul's overall sentiments about the topic—is to recognize that in the negative statements Paul refers to the *commandments* of Torah, but in the positive to "*the righteousness that is the goal of the law*" (108; emphasis his; color mine). I wonder what would happen if Hagner were to reverse these supposed meanings, since they are not marked except by the ideological predisposition of the interpreter. Would not an historical approach try it both ways?

The section on Paul and the law continues with a discussion of Paul and salvation. The summary announces the "clear" conclusion that for Paul "the law had a temporary role to play, and that role was *not* to bring the kind of *righteousness* that would enable one to stand before God justified, but rather to heighten sin and the awareness of sin," among other things (110; emphasis his; color mine, to emphasize the disconnect with statement made above). Besides singing to his choir, I cannot follow the

logic of this propositional statement in view of the solution offered in the previous subsection, wherein he has argued that there is for Paul a kind of positive role for Torah, namely, "the righteousness that is the goal of the law." We are reminded that anything we read in Paul that ostensibly runs in a different direction from the conclusion Hagner has reached should not be "seized upon," which I take to function as a polemical valuation of the efforts of those who read Paul otherwise; they should "not be taken as canceling out the main emphases in Paul" (110). Then a possible text that could be wrongly taken to suggest otherwise is noted. "What Paul says here [i.e., Rom 2] appears to be the standard Jewish viewpoint commonly held in Paul's day" (110). It should not be, we learn. Rather, the important point is that "Paul can envisage *righteousness quite apart from the commandments of the law*," and the key to understanding Paul here is that "Christians will exhibit that righteousness without being under the law" (111; emphasis his).

The topic of the ongoing importance of righteousness for Paul occupies the next subsection. It is necessary to explain why freedom from the law does not mean that the practice of righteousness no longer applies, even if that seems to be a contradiction. Here is one of those discussions that makes me wish NT scholars would make an effort to read the rabbis with the same open and charitable mind with which Paul is read, because the rabbis too call for righteous behavior for the same reasons that are so generously attributed to Paul—because the people in covenant with God belong to God; why would or how could they choose to live otherwise? And I wish they would explain to me why it is that Jeremiah 31 is claimed to apply to Christians, as does Hagner in this essay, which states that there will no longer be need to teach one another these things because they are written on the heart in some way that Jews do not experience apart from Christ, yet Paul's letters are full of just the kind of instruction that is supposed to

no longer be required in the new age. But perhaps most revealing here is this statement, buried in a footnote: "For me there are two Pauline non-negotiables: that Christians are no longer under law and that nevertheless righteousness remains an indispensable priority" (111 n. 50). That is right, "non-negotiables," not open to alternative interpretations of Paul's voice on these two points. Is it not fair to wonder how much one can learn on the subject of Paul's Jewishness from the hand of one who enters the subject with this stated ideological point of view?

The next section is of special interest to me: Paul's own practice. It is here that we can understand what an interpreter really means when stating, "of course Paul was and remained a Jew." This topic has naturally been in view all along when discussing his teachings, but now Hagner will turn to the topic of whether Paul observed the Torah in his own life. Following the previous footnote to this discussion, what are we to expect the answer to be? And the text? You guessed it, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, wherein Paul is understood to make clear several things: "Paul regards himself as no longer under the law" being the main one, since he "obeys it now and then. Paul thus feels free to identify with the Gentiles and not to remain an observant Jew. Incidentally, how remarkable it is that the Jew Paul can speak of himself as an outsider: "To the Jews I became as a Jew!" (113; **Note Hagner's exclamation mark!**). This implies a "break with Judaism," and "it is clear, furthermore, that observing or not observing the law is an unimportant issue before God. The position taken by Paul is one of complete expedience...." (113). If time permitted, I would offer a counter-reading [Note: I am working on this text now and plan to submit something for publication consideration in 2008; look also for the forthcoming work of David Rudolf on this topic], but it does not; moreover, it is clear, based on that which has been plainly stated as "non-negotiable," that it would not make any difference to do so. I do wonder how attributing this morally compromising

behavior to Paul squares with the second non-negotiable, namely, that righteousness remains an indispensable priority, when this way of interpreting Paul's language concludes that he lives instead according to "complete expedience." I also wonder why this reading does not conclude, consistent with the way Paul's rhetoric is being interpreted, that Paul is no longer a Jew, as well as no longer within Judaism. Don't these kind of logically problematic outcomes give pause to taking Paul's language in this direction, invite deeper reflection on the rhetorical nature of the language, and the construction of alternatives to consider before drawing these conclusions as if clear or uncontested? Hagner concludes that while Paul may have continued to behave in some ways like a Jew "by habit, if for no other reason," that "this conduct no longer had any soteriological significance" (114). This too brings up a topic worth discussion, although there is no time for it here: What conduct has any soteriological significance for Judaism or Christianity, and at the same time, what conduct does not? On the one hand, both are faith-based for entrance, but yet both call for "working out your salvation with fear and trembling." Both understand that entering the covenant relationship is the beginning of a relationship, and thus that appropriate (righteous) covenant-guided conduct is imperative thereafter. And so on...

The next subsection deals with Paul's understanding of Tanakh, here labeled "the Old Testament." I will not comment on this brief discussion except to point out that Paul is understood to be discontinuous with Judaism because the conviction "that Jesus is the Messiah now controls his reading of Scriptures" (114). Does it not control that of James and the other Jews who remained Torah-observant and within Judaism? Does not a similar change of orientation, *mutatis mutandis*, apply to every other Jewish group's hermeneutical center for reading these texts? What it shows is how Paul's reading is different from that of other Jewish groups, even perhaps that of some other Christ-

believing Jews, but not discontinuity with Judaism. What does having a belief in anyone as Messiah mean outside of Judaism in the 30's or 40's of the first century c.e.?

When Hagner turns next to discuss Paul and the Temple, we learn both that "the temple and ritual purity of the temple play no role in Paul's perspective" (115), and also that "the land, finds no place in Paul's thinking" (116). The reason is "transparently clear": "the sacrifice of Christ is the fulfillment of the temple sacrifices... his death makes the ongoing sacrificial ritual of the temple a redundancy" (115). For anyone unclear until here whether Christ fulfilling the law meant the end of the law and Judaism, there should no longer be any doubt. Hagner quotes 1 Cor 5:7: "For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed." He does not mention that Paul tells the same Corinthians that his travel plans revolve around Jewish holidays (1 Cor 16:8), which poses questions for land and Temple and sacrifice, as does also the centrality of the collection for Jerusalem. Do we know that the Temple, etc., find no place in Paul's thinking from the few letters we have addressing pastoral problems among non-Jewish Christ-believers in cities of the Roman empire, not Jerusalem, or Judea, or even Syria? In other words, how much should we conclude from silence? And how are we to understand James and the Jerusalem church's apparent continued participation in Temple life? A Christ-believer named Luke, well aware of Paul's claims for Jesus, could nevertheless still conceive of Paul to observe Passover, and to be important to arrive in Jerusalem in time to celebrate the proclamation of Torah to Israel through Moses at Shavuot too! (Acts 20:6; cf. 20:16; 27:9; and Hvalvik discussion in next essay, 143-45). He presents Paul not only going to the Temple, but undertaking a Nazarite vow, which involves a burnt offering. While Paul may not discuss the Jerusalem Temple, he did not condemn it, but the Qumran community did: Does that make transparently clear the end of Judaism and Temple for them? Oh no, for them it would instead be argued (I assume) that they only condemned

the way it was currently being administered; but such mitigation is not expressed (or considered?) for Paul's perspective: Why is that?

The next subsection is Paul's hope for Israel. Here the metaphorical language of the olive tree is made central, with no hesitation about how to read it ("the tree no doubt is Israel"; 117) or what can be taken from a metaphor, a mixed metaphor at that, although the dominant metaphor of walking but not falling, which the idea of pruning off does not mix with very well, is not mentioned. The thrust of the metaphorical language to check the arrogance of the non-Jewish recipients toward non-Christ-believing Jews is not mentioned, but the reader is to understand that in no way does Paul suggest here that apart from faith in Christ is there salvation for anyone: "Paul knows of only one way of salvation" (117). Was that what Paul set out to communicate here, or does that tell us on what side of certain contemporary debates (such as the two covenant thesis or more pluralist sympathies toward rendering judgment for non-Christ-confessors) about which Hagner wants the reader to be clear where he stands?

The final section emphasizes the discontinuity that has been the central focus of the entire essay: the difference between the old, Judaism, and the new, Christianity. What makes all the difference is that "Paul was a Jew who believed that the Messiah had come" (118). I would have thought that only made sense within Judaism, but for Hagner it points instead to the rupture; Paul remains a Jew ethnically, but not religiously. "With this shift of aeons and all of its related aspects in mind, it can hardly be adequate to characterize Paul's theology as a form of Christian Judaism. It is instead necessarily a new entity: a Christianity that is intimately and inseparably related to Judaism as its fulfillment and consummation..." (119). "Although it grew out of Judaism, and despite undeniably Jewish aspects, Pauline Christianity cannot adequately be described as a sect of Judaism" (119). A sentence on the final page clarifies how

semantics has been allowed to get in the way of Hagner's otherwise clear view that Paul is a Christian engaged in a new religion that stands against his former religion, when he denies "nullification" to explain Paul's "former" religion, and thus that there really is no significance that should be attributed to being a Jewish believer in Jesus, for after stating that "from the beginning, Paul knew that his faith in Christ meant a separation from his previous Jewish existence," nevertheless, Hagner observes that "his Christian faith was not the *nullification* of his *former* Judaism as much as it was its *fulfillment*" (120; emphasis added). One wonders how these statements can in any way be reconciled with his introductory claim that "It is surely true that Paul does not believe that he has left one religion for another" (101), or what purpose making it could serve. Does not that kind of language obscure the proper description of that which Hagner's construction of Paul and programmatic interpretation of every passage engaged otherwise expresses, and here makes plain? Why not just state from the start that for Hagner, Paul changed religions?

This essay exemplifies why I do not permit my students to use the terms Christian or Christianity when discussing Paul and his communities: much more than terminology is at issue; rather, it is the way that terminology reveals and limits our conceptualization of reality. Regardless of any new information that will be introduced to them, the way that they have learned from childhood to perceive and thus describe the world into which to fit this new information will inhibit them from thinking about these new things in new ways, including ways that just might challenge and alter what they think they know to be absolute, un-interpreted, non-negotiable truth, instead of being merely one among the many interpretations available for conceptualizing the meaning of this information. In my view, we should seek to limit neither the answers, nor the questions to be posed. As important as terminology is, it is less important than

how it either limits or advances the ability to conceptualize and describe the maps upon which we plot the information at issue.

While Paul got by without using the term Christian, Hagner does not do so. He probably should not. Based on what Hagner communicates about Paul, it would not be useful to avoid such terminology, or deny that his Paul has moved from one religion to another. Paul's Jewishness is only understood to be his identity at his birth and of his life until he became a believer in Christ—thereafter it provides only the context for understanding from where he has come and to where is going, the religion he has left for another, that is, a "the *Christianity* of a *Christian* believer in Jesus from a Jewish background."

Reidar Hvalvik:

The first of Reidar Hvalvik's essays on Paul ("Paul as a Jewish Believer—According to the Book of Acts," pp. 121-53) compares and contrasts Acts' portrayal of Paul with that which he perceives to arise from Paul's own letters. As one of the editors of the volume, I would expect a different approach than Hagner to the phenomena under discussion, as well as to the terminology to employ. To some degree I find that to be the case. In stark contrast to Hagner, Hvalvik plainly states that Paul did not change religions: "He was not converted from 'Judaism' to Christianity," and that this is more than semantics, because after Damascus Paul "talks and lives as a Jew, and is loyal to his people, and his Jewish heritage" (122). In tracing Paul's relationship to the synagogues in Acts and Paul's letters similarities are emphasized, but not without noting dissimilarities. For Hvalvik, "Paul's letters clearly support the picture found in Acts: Paul, even as apostle to the Gentiles, had a continuing relationship with the synagogue" (132). However, although inscrutable to me based on these comments, after reviewing

statements in Paul's letters, Hvalvik upholds that "Paul's concern for the gospel and for the unity of the church thus seems to have been at the expense of the possibility of Jewish believers to live fully according to their ancient customs. The food laws became subordinated to the 'purity' of the gospel. In the mixed Pauline communities complete law observance among the Jewish believers consequently became practically impossible" (135). This observation rests largely on discussions of 1 Cor 8 and Gal 2, although without taking stock of alternative interpretations of those accounts that would have instead allowed a consistency in his conclusions. This becomes all the more obvious when we move to Hvalvik's next essay on the Roman church.

Why do I say all the more obvious?

Because Reidar Hvalvik's next essay focused on Rome ("Jewish Believers and Jewish Influence in the Roman Church until the Early Second Century," 179-216), does not interact at any length, and does not mine in any positive way, the only monograph on Romans that specifically seeks to develop a Jewish (i.e., synagogue) context for reading Paul's letter to Rome, including reflection on Paul as a practicing Jewish believer in Jesus when doing so—namely, my own *Mystery of Romans*. In this essay one finds only two dismissive comments in footnotes, and it was not noted or any awareness of its arguments made known in the essay comparing the Paul of Acts with the Paul of his letters, although I did reflect on this matter in *Mystery*. Since I engaged the consensus views, which are repeated here as if unchallenged, is it wrong to expect a volume with this title to undertake an argument against my views, if not convinced by them, rather than to ignore or brush them off? If judged to be unconvincing, is it not fair to expect the reader to learn why that is so? Enough about my own disappointment.

The real issue is: What do we learn about Paul as a Jewish believer in Jesus in this essay?

Following from Hvalvik's decision to understand the edict of Claudius according to the prevailing view, and thus that Christians were not welcome in the synagogues, we learn that the Christ-believers are not a part of Judaism or Jewish communities: "it is hard to imagine that Jewish believers were still welcomed in the synagogues. The existence of several house-churches independent of the synagogues (cf. Rom 16) points in the same direction. This means that the Christian community developed as an entity distinct from the Jews, and it became more and more Gentile over time.... the believers in Jesus gradually developed a new identification and self-definition with fewer ties to their Jewish roots.... Theologically speaking, this new identity may have been close to Paul's idea of 'the church of God' as something that could be distinguished both from Jews and Gentiles" (198). What we learn about, however labeled, is Paul and the community in Rome to which he wrote as Christian believers in Jesus who are no longer part of Jewish communities or Judaism, although some were formerly from Jewish backgrounds.

Those who champion traditional perspectives of Paul and his relationship with and expression of Judaism as his "former" religion, as well as fellow-Jews to be his "former" brothers and sisters only if qualified to be so "in the flesh," will find much to support their long-held views in the Pauline chapters of this book. At the same time, interpreters who have very different ideas about what it means to declare that Paul was a Jewish believer in Jesus, but understand that their views are nevertheless profoundly shaped by and thus indebted to the way that the consensus frames and argues the issues, will also find much to appreciate here.

Jackson-McCabe, Matt, ed., *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts* (Fortress Press, 2007):

I have less time to say anything about the other volume, *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered*. That is in part because there is only one essay dealing with Paul, more importantly, I have already responded to the original paper version, which was essentially the same as the published essay, in a session of this consultation, and my response, entitled "How The Label 'Jewish Christianity' Limits Investigation of the Category We Seek to Understand, is posted on my web site <<http://www.marknanos.com/SBL-05-Jewish-Chrstnty.pdf>>. In addition to a detailed response to Sumney's essay, one will find that I responded to two other papers presented in the same session that are not included in this volume, one by Anders Runesson, and the other by Magnus Zetterholm, both of which I praised for advancing the discussion in important ways. Also, per the title of that paper, one will find there reflections on the issues of category and description for this enterprise, which is the topic of the introductory essays in both of the volumes under review here.

Matt Jackson-McCabe's introductory essay, "What's in a Name?" helpfully traces the history of modern scholarship on the category Jewish Christianity, and offers a useful discussion of both the phenomena of the category and the possible ways to describe and label them and it. His critique of a practice-based approach to identifying as Jewish Christianity the belief in Jesus Christ combined with Torah observance is excellent. It is time to measure and classify those expressing faith in Christ within the

context of the other groups and texts that are recognized to be Jewish, which encompasses a wide variety of traits, and includes the process of change over time, before concluding that they represent a new religion.

Jerry L. Sumney:

The title of Jerry L. Sumney's essay ("Paul and Christ-believing Jews Whom He Opposes," pp. 57-80) reflects the [a] nuanced perspective of one who has spent many years considering the context of Paul and his relationship with so-called Jewish Christianity. Where Paul has often been portrayed to be opposed, and thus merely responding in kind, Sumney recognizes that just because Paul opposes someone or something does not mean that the targets of his polemic necessarily opposed Paul. Those whom Paul opposes in 2 Corinthians and Galatians are the major topics discussed, with a brief foray into those opposed in Philippians 3. Since I have worked on Galatians (*The Irony of Galatians*, Fortress, 2002), I will primarily comment on this material. As for Philippians 3, I disagree that the context involves anything to do with circumcision for non-Jews, and my current research project on this material will explain why that is so, and offer a "pagan" context for understanding Paul's polemic. I do not agree that Philippians 3 shows that Paul has moved "into a new religious community" (71), meaning, not a Jewish one, or some of the other similar implications that Sumney deduces from this text.

The contest in Galatia is portrayed to be not over Paul's apostolic authority, but because "these teachers urge observance of the Torah for Gentile Christ-believers in a way that is different from Paul" (65). This observation surprises me (although it is commonly encountered in the prevailing interpretations of Galatians). In a positive direction that I wish to affirm, this implies that Paul teaches observance of Torah for

Gentiles in some way. In a negative direction, because it fails to recognize that Paul threatens his addressees by observing that if they would become circumcised then they would be obliged to keep the entire Torah (5:3). Paul's argument suggests that he hopes to undermine the addressees' apparent trust that the intention of the influencers is to be helpful instead of harmful, by revealing that Torah-observance is inherent in the alternative on offer, although the representatives of circumcision have purposely not made that plain. Paul's polemic against the observance of certain days in 4:8-10 does not mitigate my resistance to Sumney's thesis, because it arises in contrast to the idolatrous ways of their former life. Since the calendrical features do not mention Sabbath observance (note, not "*days, weeks, etc...*") but rather those associated with the Roman celebrations of gods and emperors ("*days, months, seasons, and years*"), the alternative does not appear to be Torah-observance of any kind.

The main point that Sumney seeks to make is that for Paul "fundamental is a shared understanding of the work of Christ as that which makes one right with God. This shared understanding entails the creation of a community that grounds its most foundational identity in the act of God in Christ.... This identity takes into itself those who are Jews and those who are Gentiles. As Paul will argue, it must not mean that Gentiles simply join the Jewish community" (67). I do not understand how the last point follows, or that at issue is how to be right with God. It seems likely that Paul's rhetoric seeks to shape his addressees' understanding of how they are a community based on God's act in Christ for both Jew and non-Jew alike. Why does their concern not mean that these non-Jews have joined the Jewish community, albeit a subgroup that is not well-received by every Jewish community member, and opposed by some? And is not their problem more about how to be known to be right before God by those who question this standing, than simply being right before God? Is this letter not just what

non-Jews in need of assurance of their rights to communal identity within Judaism but without becoming Jews might need to hear? Thus they are reassured that they are children of Abraham, children of promise, just like natural born Jews, without the need to become proselytes, which is the model for the inclusion of slaves, but not the members of the nations who turn to Israel's God as the One God of all the nations when the end of the ages dawns.

Moving to Sumney's synthesizing conclusions, I don't think Paul would agree with Sumney that he had "redefined the boundaries of the primary covenant community so that being Jewish is a subcategory within the sphere defined by Christ-believing" (75). I suggest he saw what he was doing *within* the Jewish community as a new *development*, nevertheless one expected to take part in and through the Jewish community on behalf of all communities of the world, so that they will be united under the rule of the One God. In this sense, most if not all Jewish groups understand their group identity to be subordinated to the larger concern of God for all of his creation to be restored to his rule; Genesis precedes Exodus. This Christ-believing subgroup would express a coalition identity, a kind of temporary reform movement until his fellow-Jews came around to seeing that they were right. In the meantime, it was imperative that both the Jews and the non-Jews who were participating in this subgroup of Christ-believers clearly realized that they were representatives of Israel *as well as* of the rest of the nations, and thus had to live appropriately. They signify the first fruits of that which was promised, will come, and has in part arrived in the midst of the present age. Thus these non-Jews must think and behave like righteous ones from the nations and not like "pagans," but also they must not become Jews. This concern provides the comparative context for reading Paul's discussion of Jewish identity and behavior, and reading without continuous attention to it provides the basis for understanding Paul to be far

from a representative of the Judaism of his time in a way that would be respected by anyone practicing Judaism in any age.

I am not comfortable with the idea that Paul's "primary religious identity in-Christ" renders all others secondary, whereas his opposition retains Mosaic covenant identity to be primary, and subordinates in-Christ identity to that, a concept that Sumney promotes throughout the essay. I think that way of conceptualizing the tension is not only mistaken, it functions from an unrealistic bifurcation. I am a son, brother, husband, father, and grandfather, as well as a cousin, uncle, Jew and American, and so forth: is it useful to seek to prioritize these identities as if absolutely competing categories in order to conclude my primary identity, as if it can only be one or the other of them at all times and in all places? I do not think so, although at any given moment, and certainly in some rhetorical situations, prioritization does take place. Paul's prioritizing is situational, arising from the complexities of his and his Christ-believing audiences, often targeting the non-Jewish members, with a host of different interpretations of what those identities mean and do not mean to themselves, to each other, and to the "other." In Galatians, Paul's identity as apostle is paramount for making his case; in Philippians, his identity as nothing but one who only knows Christ is what drives home his point, and so on. Furthermore, Paul's polemical representation of those whose influence he opposes is surely suspect for concluding how they would themselves represent either their identity or how it should be interpreted or prioritized. I cannot imagine that any Jews of Paul's time who believed in Christ would accept that they were subordinating that belief to some other, so that they should not be called, with Paul, Christ-believing Jews, or that Paul relativized the Mosaic covenant so that he could not be called a Jewish Christ-believer either. But on one thing about these labels we both agree; they are far more useful than Jewish Christian, and its cognates.

I appreciate that Sumney avoids the use of Christian and Christianity throughout the essay, and also his summary comment: "If the primary identity of members of the covenant community [I would write: "of the subgroup community"] is that of believing in Christ, then non-Jews remain non-Jews and Jews remain Jews with these identities relativized but not eradicated. They are not eradicated because whether one is Jewish or Gentile continues to define in important ways how one embodies the gospel in the conduct of one's life" (76-77). If we but substitute "of the subgroup community" for "of the covenant community," it is not difficult to understand how their new identity as Christ-believers can take place within the Jewish covenant community, within Judaism, in tension with other groups and interpretations, to be sure, but nevertheless from within and among them. Perhaps then we can begin to conceptualize Paul and his contemporaries in Jewish terms that just might meaningfully challenge the traditional portrayals of Paul, the Christian and founder of supposed Law-free, Gentile—*not*-Jewish—Christianity, regardless of the names by which he, and it, are called.