

REVIEW ESSAY

*The Overstated “New” Perspective?*

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*Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul*. Ed. D. A. Carson, P. T. O’Brien, and M. A. Seifrid. WUNT 2/181. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004.

This book represents volume two of a major evaluation of the so-called new perspective. The first volume attempted a reassessment of Second Temple literature upon which E. P. Sanders had based his view of “covenantal nomism.”<sup>1</sup> That Sanders’s work still holds much sway after 30 years is a tribute to the paradigm-changing nature of his view. Though his position has been repeatedly summarized, it may help some readers to do so again. Sanders claimed to have found an underlying pattern of religion in the writings of Second Temple Judaism, which he summarized as “covenantal nomism.” This pattern was twofold: (1) all Israelites found themselves to be members of a covenant community that had been mercifully elected by God in fulfillment of the patriarchal promises, which had come to pass in the exodus and Israel’s possession of the promised land; (2) all Israelites maintained their status as God’s elect people by being obedient to God’s law, violation of which could be atoned for by the sacrificial system. Sanders summarized this broad twofold pattern of religion as “getting in” and “staying in.” A significant interpretation of this pattern “is that election and ultimately salvation are considered to be by God’s mercy rather than human achievement.”<sup>2</sup> There was no dominant Jewish structure of thought that held that salvation was earned by human effort through keeping works of the law.

This second volume of *Justification and Variegated Nomism* is an effort to re-evaluate the application of Sanders’s view to Paul. Sanders had said that, though Paul represents “a different type of religiousness from any found in Palestinian Judaism,”<sup>3</sup> the twofold pattern of “getting in” and “staying in” that he

1. D. A. Carson et al., *Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 1: *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (WUNT 2/140; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001). E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM, 1977).

2. *Ibid.*, 422.

3. *Ibid.*, 543.

had found in Judaism was also, in essence, to be found in Paul: it was by grace through election that a person was found to be in the covenant and one stayed in the covenant by obedience; while there would be judgment for disobedience, works did not earn salvation but were a condition for maintaining membership in the covenant community. Because the Judaism of Paul's day was not consumed with the notion of meriting salvation by keeping the law, neither was Paul conducting a polemic against a view of this sort.

This second volume is a big book, and it is difficult even to summarize it adequately within the limits of a review article, much less to evaluate its various arguments. But we must first begin with a major critique of the first volume by some reviewers in response to its findings: in partial support of Sanders, a religious pattern of "covenantal nomism" was discovered in some significant parts of the Second Temple material that was surveyed. D. A. Carson then concluded that volume by saying that Sanders's concept of "covenantal nomism" was "too doctrinaire, too unsupported by the sources themselves, too reductionistic, too monopolistic."<sup>4</sup> James Dunn, for example, criticized Carson's comments for being too extreme and not adequately representing the essays in that first volume. Dunn says that "the findings of most of the contributors to this volume are in effect that 'covenantal nomism' serves well as a summary phrase, so long as one recognizes the variations in emphasis, depending on different styles and circumstances."<sup>5</sup> Carson responds to this kind of criticism in the second volume by saying that the assessment fails to recall Sanders's all-encompassing claim that "covenantal nomism is endemic to all the relevant literature of Second Temple Judaism and therefore that Paul . . . must be read against that background" (p. v).<sup>6</sup> This does not mean for Carson that "new perspective" readings of Paul are necessarily wrong but that they must not be presumed to be correct. A close examination of Paul must be conducted to decide whether or not Sanders's model is a fitting lens for understanding the apostle's writings, and this is the motive for writing the second volume of *Justification and Variegated Nomism* (p. v).

This debate over the evidence of the first volume is important and needs unpacking in order to set better the stage for understanding the second volume. Dunn sees different emphases of Sanders's "getting in and staying in" pattern in Judaism, whereas Carson sees not only different emphases but also different theological patterns. When does a different emphasis of an idea become a distinctly different idea? Carson thinks that what Dunn (and perhaps even some contributors to vol. 1) would often term a "different emphasis" of the "covenantal nomism" concept stretches so far as to become a different concept.<sup>7</sup> This debate over whether some sectors in Judaism express a mere dif-

4. D. A. Carson, "Summaries and Conclusion," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 1: *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; WUNT 2/140; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 548.

5. J. D. G. Dunn, "Review of *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*. WUNT 2/140. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001," *TJ* 25 (2004): 113.

6. E.g., see Sanders's very extreme claims about Tannaitic literature: *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 233–34.

7. See Carson's summary of examples of this: "Summaries and Conclusion," 543–47.

ferent emphasis of the "covenantal nomism" notion or a radically different concept is also a constant criticism alluded to by some of the contributors at points throughout vol. 2.<sup>8</sup> This I see to be one of the crucial differences between those who hold to the "new perspective" and those who do not.

This dispute over what is a different emphasis of Sanders's covenantal pattern of religion or a different concept is a difficult issue to evaluate because it demands such a wide grasp of Second Temple Jewish literature, which few possess, but, in my view, Carson and company have the better of the argument. While some likely wish that Carson could have recognized more of what Dunn criticizes him for not acknowledging, it needs to be remembered that, in fact, he does repeatedly recognize throughout his concluding chapter those contributors who saw Sanders's "covenantal nomism" to be fitting in some of the literature they surveyed. Thus, Carson's final conclusion is tempered by these earlier acknowledgments. But many of these contributors also had major qualifications about the way Sanders's view fit. Especially significant is Carson's evaluation that Sanders's thesis is so broad and plastic that it leaves room for not merely different emphases but different ideas.<sup>9</sup> So many adjustments and qualifications need to be made in the model that the model itself needs reformulation.<sup>10</sup> For example, O'Brien acknowledges that, while Sanders has set up covenantal nomism as the antithesis to Jewish merit theology, "his construct is so flexible that it actually includes a great deal of merit theology."<sup>11</sup> I think Sanders might say that this sort of response is, at least, overanalysis, and he would merely respond generally and assert that obedience is necessary for faithful conformity to God's gracious revelation of the law (within the framework of God's election of Israel), and this obedience is linked to God's grace in that it is carried out within the larger context of God's gracious election and the covenant,<sup>12</sup> within which he has also provided for forgiveness of sins through atoning sacrifices.<sup>13</sup>

Some of the significant sources surveyed in vol. 1 reveal, however, that there is an independent human contribution within Sanders's broader framework of grace that issues into final salvation (as pointed out by Carson and O'Brien), which is a synergistic notion comparable to the medieval semi-Pelagianism that Luther confronted (on this parallel, e.g., see George's enlightening essay in vol. 2).<sup>14</sup> This is tantamount to some kind of "merit" theology. Sanders, on the other hand, denies this by saying that the "desire to stay in the

8. E.g., see Peter T. O'Brien, "Was Paul a Covenantal Nomist?" in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 249–96, 253–54, 256, 264–65.

9. D. A. Carson, "Summaries and Conclusion," 544. See D. Falk's similar assessment, "Prayers and Psalms," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 1: *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; WUNT 2/140; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 56.

10. O'Brien, "Was Paul a Covenantal Nomist?" 296.

11. *Ibid.*, 254.

12. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 180–81.

13. E.g., *ibid.*, 235–36.

14. Timothy George, "Modernizing Luther, Domesticating Paul: Another Perspective," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 2:

covenant" and the "intention and effort to be obedient constitute the *condition for remaining in the covenant*," but they do not *earn* it.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, with specific reference to Qumran, he says, "Obedience to the commandments was not thought of as earning salvation, which [the antecedent being "salvation"] came rather by God's grace, but was nevertheless required as a *condition of remaining in the covenant*; and not obeying the commandments would damn."<sup>16</sup> In this respect, "human commitment" or "volunteering" is crucial for maintaining "membership in the covenant for salvation."<sup>17</sup> But Sanders's paradigm is, in reality, broad enough to allow for some Jewish sources to include a notion of special grace enabling one to keep the "condition of staying in," while allowing other sources to include an idea of this "condition" entailing a concept of "earning"/"merit." Thus, it needs to be underscored that Sanders's model easily tolerates the notion that a person's repentance and obedience can be done apart from God's gracious and direct inner working, which in some sources is the key to "staying in" and benefiting salvifically from God's gracious covenantal promises.<sup>18</sup> It would seem that, in cases such as these, Sanders would have to agree that God's grace is only external (God alone has set up a covenantal framework in which one finds oneself<sup>19</sup>), not internal, working to cause faith and obedience (though in Qumran, on the other hand, he sees that initial salvific insight comes from divine intervention within a person). Accordingly, there is room here for an independent human contribution of exercising faith or performing works or both. If this is not "merit" theology (which I think it is), then it comes exceedingly close to it.

The only way that there will be further dialogue between the schools of thought represented by Carson and Sanders/Dunn is to engage in further in-depth exegesis of the specifically debated passages in Judaism. This was certainly the intention of vol. 1 of *Variegated Nomism*, but perhaps more microscopic exegetical work needs to be done on the most debated passages. In addition, more work is needed in tracing the specific exegetical tradition in Judaism of the OT texts quoted by Paul and seeing their similarities and differences. Here I have in mind the kind of work that S. Gathercole has done in Romans, part of which is summarized in vol. 2.<sup>20</sup> I suspect in the end, however, there will be a difference of opinion about how the wider literary and theological contexts shape the meaning of the individual debated passages. And, naturally, diverse decisions about such passages will be influenced by the diverse theological presuppositions of the commentators.

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*The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; WUNT 2/181; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 437–63.

15. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 180, likewise, *ibid.*, 420.

16. *Ibid.*, 320.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Cf. the broad language in *ibid.*, 180–81; likewise, *ibid.*, 362 with respect to 1 *Enoch*; cf. also *ibid.*, 421–22.

19. Cf., e.g., *ibid.*, 320, 543.

20. Simon J. Gathercole, "Justified by Faith, Justified by His Blood: The Evidence of Romans 3:21–4:25," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; WUNT 2/181; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 147–84.

But evaluation of the evidence in Judaism is only part of the difference between new perspective scholars and others. The approach to Paul is quite different, as we saw briefly above. The primary purpose of the second volume is to show how different Paul is from the new perspective's assessment of him. This needs elaboration, which can here only be brief. After a helpful survey by S. Westerholm of the new perspective and its developers, refiners, and opponents,<sup>21</sup> the remaining essays focus on various new perspective views of Paul and set out to refute them. (M. Hengel's essay in chap. 3<sup>22</sup> appears to have less relation to the main issues of the volume than the others.) M. Seifrid (chap. 2) attempts to show, against the background of Hellenistic usage, that Paul's righteousness language goes beyond the idea of covenantal faithfulness or Israel's salvation (the emphasis of the new perspective) but focuses on God's ordering of creation (connected often to ruling and judging) and establishing cosmic justice.<sup>23</sup> This essay is intended as part 2 to Seifrid's earlier essay in vol. 1.<sup>24</sup> It would have been good if he had dealt more thoroughly with Septuagintal usage of the *dik-* word group, where it occurs hundreds of times, though Seifrid acknowledges at the beginning the partial scope of his study ("we are concerned here with the theological significance of Paul's statements concerning righteousness and justification"<sup>25</sup>). Hopefully, Seifrid will do a more thorough study at some future point. In chap. 4, Seifrid analyzes Rom 1:18–3:20 to show that, contrary to the very general definition of grace given by Sanders, Paul understands grace in terms of mercy given to those suffering the plight of condemnation in order that they might avert final judgment.<sup>26</sup> S. Gathercole (chap. 5) argues that "works of the law" in Romans does not refer to ceremonial boundary markers of Israel (so the new perspective) but to all aspects of the law, so that obeying all of the obligations of the law is in Paul's mind.<sup>27</sup> Neither Jew nor Gentile has kept God's commandments, so they all deserve judgment

21. Stephen Westerholm, "The 'New Perspective' at Twenty-Five," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; WUNT 2/181; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 1–38.

22. Martin Hengel, "The Stance of the Apostle Paul toward the Law in the Unknown Years between Damascus and Antioch," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 75–103.

23. Mark A. Seifrid, "Paul's Use of Righteousness Language against Its Hellenistic Background," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 39–74.

24. Idem, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 1: *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 415–42.

25. Idem, "Paul's Use of Righteousness Language," 39–40.

26. Idem, "Unrighteous by Faith: Apostolic Proclamation in Romans 1:18–3:20," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 105–45.

27. Gathercole, "Justified by Faith, Justified by His Blood: The Evidence of Romans 3:21–4:25."

(Rom 3), but they can be declared righteous by faith if they believe that Christ has suffered the penalty of their disobedience (Rom 3–4). D. Moo (chap. 6) analyzes Rom 5–11 to show that the law did not primarily have a social function marking out Jew from Gentile but focuses on Israel's inability to obey the law and thus to establish a righteous relationship with God, a predicament extending to Gentiles.<sup>28</sup> Of course, he acknowledges, it is true that a secondary though very important function of the law was to distinguish Israel from the nations. M. Silva (chap. 7) discusses "works of the law" in Galatians and comes to the same conclusions as Gathercole and Moo.<sup>29</sup> He also has a good discussion of the "faith of Christ" debate in Galatians, though more representation of the arguments in favor of Richard Hays's position would have been helpful. P. T. O'Brien writes a wide-ranging essay (chap. 8, virtually a summary of the entire second volume) on the improbability of Paul being legitimately categorized as a "covenantal nomist."<sup>30</sup> R. Yarbrough (chap. 9) attempts to sketch a perceptive view of "salvation history," which the new perspective does not adequately take into consideration and, in fact, wrongly marginalizes.<sup>31</sup> The highlight of T. Laato's chapter (10) is to argue that Gal 3:10, especially in the light of Gal 5:3 and 6:13, affirms that violation of any part of the law's commands brings judgment on the violators.<sup>32</sup> O'Brien's second essay (chap. 11) contends convincingly that Paul was not only "called" at the Damascus christophany experience but was also converted (the new perspective holding only to the former), so that there was significant discontinuity between Paul's former life in Judaism and his Christian experience.<sup>33</sup> Paul thus was not to be classed as one with merely different emphases from other Jewish theologians (though reference to probably the clearest text about Paul's conversion, 1 Tim 1:11–16, is conspicuously missing). D. A. Carson's essay (chap. 12) is a helpful hermeneutical discussion of the use of the OT in the NT, especially setting out in a balanced way the continuities and discontinuities in Paul's thinking.<sup>34</sup> Especially important is his attempt to locate Paul's salvation-historical emphasis: rather than focusing

28. Douglas J. Moo, "Israel and the Law in Romans 5–11: Interaction with the New Perspective," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; WUNT 2/181; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 185–216.

29. Moisés Silva, "Faith versus Works of Law in Galatians," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; WUNT 2/181; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 217–48.

30. O'Brien, "Was Paul a Covenantal Nomist?"

31. Robert Yarbrough, "Paul and Salvation History," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; WUNT 2/181; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 297–342.

32. Timo Laato, "Paul's Anthropological Considerations: Two Problems," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; WUNT 2/181; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 343–59.

33. Peter T. O'Brien, "Was Paul Converted?" in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; WUNT 2/181; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 361–91.

34. D. A. Carson, "Mystery and Fulfillment: Toward a More Comprehensive Paradigm of Paul's Understanding of the Old and the New," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; WUNT 2/181; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 393–436.

on the importance of the law, as significant as it is, Paul gives greater emphasis to larger redemptive-historical episodes of creation, fall, especially the Abrahamic promises, and a fallen creation needing deliverance from the curses on creation. Consequently, Israel's predicament is part of a human problem larger than that entailed merely in their law: how can humans come into a righteous relationship with God again? T. George's essay (chap. 13) shifts to a historical theologian's view of Luther in comparison to the new perspective's use of Luther as a whipping boy, representing the legalistic introspective conscience of western, postreformational thought.<sup>35</sup> In particular, he contends that the synergism of the late medieval theology against which Luther reacted was very similar to that of significant sectors of Judaism against which Paul likely reacted. In addition, Luther was pessimistic about the ability of humans to achieve a righteous standing before God, especially because of his understanding of Romans and less because of his excessive self-examination of his feelings. H. Blocher's concluding essay (chap. 14) studies righteousness in Paul from a systematician's vantage point, especially arguing that the OT and NT are shot through with a notion of accountability to a legal standard of righteousness of which all humanity falls short, an emphasis lacking among new perspective interpreters.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to the comments earlier on the differing assessments of Judaism, there are a number of discussions that stand out in this volume. I mention only one here that is crucial because it is repeated from different angles throughout the book. The chapters in particular by Gathercole, Moo, Silva, and O'Brien give a viable—I believe—convincing view that Paul's phrase "works of the law" refers to all that is morally entailed in the law and does not refer merely to pride in Jewish "boundary markers" or overweening confidence in the law as "a sign and condition of favored" Jewish status over the Gentiles.<sup>37</sup> For example, Gathercole shows the probability that "works of the law" in some key early Jewish texts and in Rom 3:20 refers comprehensively to the law, and, therefore, the same phrase repeated in Rom 3:28 should be understood likewise. Therefore, the Jewish "boast" (Rom 3:27) is confidence before God in one's own ability to keep the law in order to maintain a righteous standing before God. This conclusion receives further support from his study of Rom 4, where he persuasively shows that "the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works" (against the background of Ps 32) is explained by the "forgiveness" of "lawless deeds," which includes David's own immorality and murder (Rom 4:6–8). This itself is a further explanation of Abraham's justification (Rom 4:1–5). It is obvious that this means that "works" in 4:6 (as a development of "works of the law" in 3:20 and 28) does not primarily refer to the ceremonial aspects of law or to the law mainly as a boundary marker but to its more overt

35. George, "Modernizing Luther, Domesticating Paul: Another Perspective."

36. Henri Blocher, "Justification of the Ungodly (*Sola Fide*): Theological Reflections," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; WUNT 2/181; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 465–500.

37. E.g., see E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 32–36, 46; cf. pp. 102–3.

moral commands. Silva argues the same thing for Gal 3:10 (“for as many as are of works of the law are under a curse”), noting that in Gal 2:15–3:29 “Paul does not once refer to the ceremonial regulations explicitly.”<sup>38</sup> While the ceremonial laws are certainly in mind, the phrase cannot be restricted to them but likely includes all the requirements of the Sinaitic covenant (Silva notes that Dunn has now qualified himself in principle, admitting that the expression does not refer only to ceremonial laws, but this still has not affected his overall interpretation of the letter). Silva’s conclusion is supported by Latto’s above-mentioned conclusion that Gal 3:10 underscores that anyone who does not keep everything in the Mosaic law is under judgment. Galatians 5:3 clarifies this further, despite the protestations to the contrary by Sanders,<sup>39</sup> since there the person who wants to be identified by “circumcision . . . is under obligation to keep the whole law.” This text is key, because it combines a ceremonial law with the “whole law,” which likely cannot be a reference only to other ceremonial laws but to the entire Mosaic law. Rather surprisingly, Sanders’s primary conclusion about Gal 5:3 is that, though the kind of conclusion reached by Laato is clearly wrong, “one can only hazard a guess as to the force of the threat” there.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, in the light of this point, the conclusion is repeatedly drawn by these authors that Paul *was, in fact*, arguing against a Jewish misuse of the law that entailed a legalistic effort to achieve justification by keeping what the law required and that Paul’s solution was that only by faith in Christ’s forgiving death can one be declared righteous and not guilty of breaking the law (interestingly, the notion of Christ’s positive obedience being legally transferred to believers is not touched on much in the entire book). This is argued in different ways in many of the other essays.

The upshot of the volume is that the new perspective places the justification and salvation of the ungodly person on the periphery of Paul’s thinking and replaces it with an ecclesiological problem of the Jew-Gentile relationship.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, in my view, it also does not give due emphasis to the significance of the death of Christ as a penal substitution on behalf of sinful people. It changes the focus from a vertical problem between God and sinful humanity to a horizontal problem whereby the Jews were misusing the law by trusting in it as a sign of national privilege, which ultimately guaranteed Israel’s salvation to the exclusion of Gentiles. Whereas the new perspective would say that the main point of Paul’s justification by faith language was that “faith in Christ” now replaces the “law” as the sign of membership in the new covenant community (thus allowing entry to Gentile as well as Jew), Paul’s idea of justification was essentially “about the transfer of a human being from the status of condemned sinner to the status of one ‘just before God.’”<sup>42</sup>

There is some difference of opinion among the contributors about the notion of whether or not Judaism and Paul believed that Israel’s exile had ended.

38. Silva, “Faith versus Works of Law in Galatians,” 221.

39. Sanders, *Paul, the Law*, 27–29.

40. *Ibid.*, 29.

41. E.g., see O’Brien, “Was Paul a Covenantal Nomist?” 282.

42. Cf. the language of Moo, “Israel and the Law in Romans 5–11: Interaction with the New Perspective,” 187; though Sanders can use the terminology of “transfer” in connection with “righteousness” language; cf. Sanders, *Paul, the Law*, 6–10.

Some new perspective interpreters answer this question positively by affirming that Israel's exile had not ended and use the concept of Israel's ongoing exile as the primary lens through which to contend that Paul is concerned with only national concerns of Israel (in connection with Gentiles) and not individual issues of personal salvation. In response, O'Brien contends that a theology of this sort played an insignificant role in Paul's thinking, though there is a "fresh" or "new" exile of which Paul thinks.<sup>43</sup> This is an interesting response, because it appears to disconnect Paul's understanding of exile from the OT redemptive-historical concept of Israel's exile, though otherwise O'Brien appeals to the broad pattern of redemptive history as an important backdrop to Paul.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, Doug Moo's analysis is, in my view, more balanced:

Without dismissing the helpfulness of the "Israel in exile" concept as *one* useful lens through which we can interpret the New Testament appropriation of the Old Testament and reaction with Judaism, I worry that some are using this one lens to over-interpret the degree to which national categories play a role in the NT . . . as long as we understand how broadly the term is being used, "still in exile" is not necessarily an incorrect way to describe the plight from which Israel still awaits rescue.<sup>45</sup>

The continued belief in an ongoing exile from which further restoration was needed is not inconsistent with an emphasis on individual salvation, because the OT predicts that only a remnant of Israel would ever be restored,<sup>46</sup> and Paul himself picks up on this remnant theme (e.g., Rom 9:6–10:3 and 11:1–14<sup>47</sup>). If Paul uses the OT contextually when he quotes from or alludes to exile-restoration texts to indicate inaugurated fulfillment, then it is likely that he sees that some significant part of Israel's exile is continuing, out of which people are beginning to be restored (e.g., see Rom 9:24–29, 10:12–21; 2 Cor 5:17–6:18).

It should now be obvious that I am not neutral in this debate over the new perspective. I believe this second volume of *Variegated Nomism* is a good response to the new perspective. Not all of the authors agree with one another (the issue of the exile is only one example), but the unanimity on almost all of the major issues is striking. It is important to note that a theme running throughout the volume is that new perspective ideas (e.g., of the law as a ceremonial distinguishing sign or boundary marker, the issue of how Jews relate to Gentiles) are found in Paul but not to the extent often claimed. Likewise, there is acknowledgment that Sanders's "covenantal nomism" is found in significant parts of Judaism but not to the extent that he claims. There is also recognition that Sanders's work has corrected a prior overemphasis that

43. O'Brien, "Was Paul a Covenantal Nomist?" 285–86, 294.

44. On the latter, e.g., see *ibid.*, 258–60, 376–91.

45. Moo, "Israel and the Law in Romans 5–11: Interaction with the New Perspective," 204–5.

46. E.g., see *ibid.*, 200; and Blocher, "Justification of the Ungodly (*Sola Fide*): Theological Reflections," 500.

47. Here I will not enter the debate about Rom 11:25–26, except to say that my conclusion is that it does not contradict the earlier remnant theme of the chapter.

Judaism was dominantly characterized by a “works-salvation” scheme of religion. Some contributors to the volume, such as Moo and Silva, expressed appreciation for what they called secondary-though-significant new perspective ideas (e.g., pride in the law as a boundary marker, the importance of Jew-Gentile relationships), though others were much more reserved in their judgment in this respect.

The new perspective is now 30 years old. There have been so many qualifications of it over the years that it should now be seen to be outdated as the primary default lens through which to understand Judaism or Paul.