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Paul, Purity, and the *Ekklēsia* of the Gentiles

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To understand Paul we must respect the double context of his life and work. First, he was a mid-first-century CE Pharisaic Jew; and, second, his mission field, also mid-first century, was pagan. Taking the first seriously requires that we likewise take seriously the importance and centrality of the Temple for Paul: we know that it would be destroyed within twenty years of his writing the extant epistles, but he could not. Consequently, when we note that his letters are shot through with the language of cleansing, purifying, sanctifying, and cult,¹ we should refer this, as he would have, to the traditions of Torah and to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Taking the second context seriously entails two important points, one general and one specific. The general point is that as ancient peoples, Paul's Gentile audience would have naturally and intuitively understood his language of purity and sacrifice since their traditional religions, like Judaism, were structured around such ritual etiquette.² The specific point, which brings us back to our first observation, is that Paul's views of his Gentile community were shaped by the jumble of perceptions, prejudices, optative biblical traditions, and legal instincts of his native religion. In other words, when Paul speaks to his communities about the Law — the larger

1 See my discussion of Rom. 9:4 and 15:16 below.

2 William Horbury notes that Paul's Jewish ideas on the sanctity of the Temple and the Land "would all have been comprehensible to Gentiles. . . [who also] celebrated land and sanctuary," see W. Horbury, "Land, Sanctuary and Worship," J. Barclay and J. Sweet (eds.), *Early Christian Thought in Its Jewish Context*, Cambridge 1996, p. 216. I extend his observation to purity laws as well — not in their detail peculiar to Torah, but to their function and probity in principle. For more on the pagan side, see R.L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, Harmondsworth 1986, p. 347.

category that encompasses his ideas of sanctity, purity, right worship, and proximity to God — he speaks of its relevance to them *as Gentiles*, not of its relevance in general, namely, to Jews as well.³

Keeping these things in mind, how are we to understand what Paul says when he speaks to and of his Gentiles in the language of sanctification and purity?

GENTILE IMPURITY IN SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

That Jews considered Gentiles defiling and intrinsically impure has functioned as an *idée fixe* in New Testament scholarship.⁴ The idea does double duty, both burnishing Jesus' image as a social radical, or at least a liberal,⁵ to the degree that he dissents from such a supposed rule; and also

3 An obvious point, and one noted in principle but usually overlooked in practice, especially by those New Testament scholars who insist that somehow, in Christ, Paul saw Torah as superseded by the Gospel. For an excellent overview of the problem as it affects particularly the interpretation of Romans, see W.S. Campbell, *Paul's Gospel in an Intercultural Context*, Frankfurt am Main 1991; for a current manifestation of the problem, see the essays in J.D.G. Dunn (ed.), *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, Tübingen 1996.

4 I note with gratitude the generosity of two junior colleagues who shared their then-unpublished work with me on this issue: Christine Hayes, "The Impurity of Gentiles in Biblical Law and Late Antique Judaism" (unpub. MS); now published: *Gentile Impurities and the Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud*, Oxford 2002; and J. Klawans, "Notions of Gentile Impurity in Ancient Judaism," *AJS Review*, 20 (1995), pp. 285–312. My understanding of this issue is also indebted to the work of E.P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah*, London 1990, and *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE–66 CE*, Philadelphia 1992, as well as his essay "Jewish Association with Gentiles and Galatians 2:11–14," R.T. Fortna and B.R. Gaventa (eds.), *Studies in Paul and John*, Nashville 1990, pp. 170–188.

5 Recently, some scholars (Borg, Crossan, Wright) have argued that Jesus taught against all purity rules *tout court*, and so, all the more, against the anti-Gentile prejudices of Judaism as well. I review this scholarship and the historical problems attendant on this interpretation in "What You See is What You Get: Context and Content in Current Research on the Historical Jesus," *Theology Today*, 52 (1995), pp. 75–97.

accounting for later difficulties between Jerusalem and Antioch once the movement treveled out of home territory and began to address significant numbers of Gentiles. True, Jews in general did not think highly of Gentiles, as a look at Paul's letters reveals: even when addressing Gentiles and in some sense acting as their advocate, he speaks of them, quite unself-consciously, as "sinners" (Gal. 2:15). Gentile culture, and the sort of people it produced, were not objects of Jewish enthusiasm (Rom. 1:18–34).

But were Gentiles "impure" in general? To answer, we have various evidence, some social, some textual. Socially, we have the fact that Gentiles were permitted into the Temple area. They could not go beyond their designated space in the outer courtyard, on pain of death; but they could get closer to the sanctuary than could a Jewish menstruant or leper, who was forbidden from the entire area.⁶ Gentiles might also be present in Diaspora synagogues. And, of course, in secular space, especially in the Diaspora, Jews and Gentiles would be in contact routinely.

Turning to biblical evidence, we note that proximity to holiness — in biblical narrative, the approach to the tent of meeting — is governed by two binary distinctions: *pure* (Heb. טהור, Gk. καθαρός *katharos*)/ *impure* (Heb. טמא, Gk. akatharos ακαθαρός), and *holy* (Heb. קדוש, Gk. *hagios ἅγιος*)/ *common* (Heb. חול, Gk. κοινός *koinos*).⁷ The pure/impure distinction refers first to "Levitical" or "ritual" impurity, a highly contagious state or condition resulting from certain natural bodily processes (ejaculation, menstruation, childbirth or miscarriage, genital flux), or contact with or even

6 E.g., Josephus, *BJ* 5.193; *Ant.* 12.145, 15.417; Philo, *ad Gaium* 212; cf. Acts 21:28–29. From the Gentiles' presence in the outer court we could immediately infer their immunity to Levitical impurity, which is contagious: had they been considered subject to it, they could never have ringed the sanctuary, particularly at the holidays, when Jews, who were themselves necessarily purified, would have to walk through them in order to get to their own designated areas.

7 For a review of the biblical evidence, see J. Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism*, Leiden 1973; on Leviticus specifically, J. Milgrom's *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York 1991. M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, London 1966, and her more recent *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers*, London 1993, offers a cultural-anthropological analysis of the ancient Israelite purity system.

proximity to certain defiling substances or objects (human corpses especially; also scale disease; the bodies of certain animals).⁸ Such a condition is virtually unavoidable, and implies no moral status: a menstruant is not thereby a sinner, nor is someone who has just buried a corpse. It is also universal: while priests, given their obligation to serve in the sanctuary, had more purity requirements particular to themselves, the purity rules apply to all Israel, not just to priests. It is, finally, temporary: while some defilements might require certain offerings or ritual detergents (the ashes of the red heifer, for instance: Num. 19), most could be removed by a system of “wash-and-wait.”⁹ *The remedy for this sort of impurity is purification.*

Another type of impurity results from certain sexual or cultic sins.¹⁰ To distinguish this from the first type, scholars designate these defilements as “moral” (Neusner and Chilton; Klawans), “figurative” (Baruch Levine), “metaphorical” (Milgrom) or “spiritual and religious” (Büchler).¹¹ Such defilement is not contagious, it is avoidable, and it is restricted (since an individual incurs it by committing forbidden acts). The sinner defiles not only himself or herself, but also the sanctuary and the land (Lev. 18:25, 20:3). *The remedy for this sort of impurity is cessation of the sinful activity, atonement, and a special day of purgation with its own specific sacrifices, Yom Kippur (Lev. 16).*¹²

The second biblical category, קדוש/חול—holy/common or sacred/profane—also governed access to the zone of holiness around the altar (Lev. 10:10). Holy things can be rendered unfit or profane.¹³ Priests, given their special

office, must be קדוש as well as טהור if they serve at the altar (Lev. 21:6). No priest with a physical impairment may serve, because his defect renders him profane. But he may eat consecrated food, “the bread of his God,” because, though profane, he can be pure (21:17–23). That which is common or has been rendered common may not be brought near the sanctuary.

How do these considerations help us to understand Jewish views of Gentiles in the Roman period? “Ritual” purity seems an irrelevant category: Israel, not the nations, is the focus of such purity legislation, and a later rabbinic opinion states specifically that Gentiles are not subject to menstrual or corpse impurity.¹⁴ “Moral” impurity presents a more complex problem. While, again, the biblical legislation is directed specifically to Israel, the narrative warns, “Do not defile yourselves by any of these things [incest, adultery, ritual infanticide, male homosexual intercourse], for *by all these things the nations* I am casting out before you *defiled themselves, and the land became defiled*, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited them out” (Lev. 18:24). The Gentile natives of Canaan, God says in this story, had unambiguously transgressed these purity laws, and were held accountable for having done so. In the first century, Jewish vice lists routinely associated Gentiles with similarly morally defiling behavior, most specifically *porneia* (fornication) and homosexual intercourse. These behaviors express their more fundamental spiritual error: Gentiles worship idols.¹⁵ It is this association with idols, and the behavior thought inexorably

14 On the whole legal tangle, particularly regarding tractate Niddah, see especially G. Alon, “The Levitical Uncleaness of Gentiles,” idem, *Jews, Judaism and the Classical World: Studies in Jewish History in the Times of the Second Temple and the Talmud*, Jerusalem 1977, pp. 146–189, at p. 154 on the status of Gentile blood; Sanders, on the same issue and tractate, *Jewish Law* (n. 4 above), p. 156; Klawans, “Notions,” pp. 302–309, reviews Tannaitic literature on the topic.

15 Paul might serve as our parade example of this sort of characterization of Gentiles: Rom. 1:18–31, specifically of Gentile culture; cf. Gal. 5:19–21, there as “works of the flesh”; 1 Cor. 6:9–11 (personal, not abstract nouns: “idolators, adulterers, sexual perverts...and such were some of you,” i.e., his Corinthian Gentiles); cf. 1 Thess. 4:4–6. For a discussion of such vice lists in Hellenistic Jewish literature, see E. Käseman, *Commentary on Romans*, Grand Rapids 1980, pp. 49f.; in Paul’s letters in particular, E.P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, Philadelphia 1983, under “porneia.”

8 Biblical legislation clusters at Lev. 11–15 and Num. 19. See the useful table of biblical impurities, presented with a list of their means of purification and the zone of activity affected in Sanders, *Jewish Law*, (n. 4 above), p. 151.

9 Sanders, *Jewish Law*, pp. 134–151.

10 Sexual, e.g., Lev. 18:1–30; 20:10–21; cultic (idolatry, ritual infanticide, magic), Lev. 20:1–5; Deut. 7:25 (idolatry), 12:29–31 (again).

11 See Klawans, “Notions” (n. 4 above), p. 289 and nn. 20–25.

12 The mandated activities purge moral defilement both from the sinner *and* from the sanctuary.

13 By carving the stone meant for the altar, Exod. 20:22; eating the peace-offering after the second day (Lev. 19:7). My discussion here draws on Klawans, “Notions,” pp. 292–293.

to accompany it, that defiles: Gentiles themselves are not intrinsically impure, though idolatry is always and everywhere *the* abomination par excellence. (I will make a stronger case for this on the evidence of Paul's letters, below.) However, "though not inherently impure, Gentiles are inherently profane"¹⁶ — common, that is, when contrasted with Israel, the "holy" nation set apart or "sanctified" by God himself. Hence their limited access to the Temple, restricted to the outermost courtyard: not because they were impure, but because, like the impaired priest, they were *hol* — profane.¹⁷

With these distinctions in mind, let us turn to Paul's letters.

CHRIST AS SACRIFICE IN PAUL

Through Christ, or through baptism into his death, Paul proclaims, Gentiles have been swept up into the redemptive drama of Israel. One of the ways he envisages Christ is as a sacrifice: 1 Cor. 5:7, Christ as paschal lamb; 2 Cor. 5:21, God made Christ sin — the Greek *ἁμαρτία* *harmartia* might stand in for the Hebrew *חַטָּאת* *hattat*, the sin offering (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3, Christ died "for our sins"); Rom. 3:25 Christ as *ἱλαστήριον* *hilasterion* (Lat. *propitiatio*), a sort of atonement sacrifice.

If, as I have suggested above, Paul's sacrifice language should be understood within the context of Torah and Temple, it must be noted that his usages here seem impressionist and certainly not systematic. The reference to *pascha* in 1 Cor. 5:7, for example, upon examination turns out to be less a Christological image than a very Jewish way of keeping time. As he exhorts his Gentiles in Corinth to seemly behavior, Paul constructs a sustained metaphor around morality and Passover preparations:

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal

lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Cor. 5:6–8)

"Leaven" as a metaphor for pride is unexceptional. What is interesting here is the image for Christ — the paschal lamb — and the use Paul makes of it. The point made by invoking Christ's death is that it is late — much too late for the Corinthians to persist in *porneia*. In the language of the metaphor, it is already 14 Nisan and there is still leaven in the house.¹⁸ Compared to the analogies between Christ and the paschal lamb drawn in the passion narrative at John 19:36, Paul hardly exploits his Christological possibilities here at all.

Similarly, comparison with other New Testament scriptures — the operative metaphors in Hebrews or Revelations with Christ as a blood sacrifice, for example; or John's offensive teasing in chapter 6 about eating Christ's flesh, or in chapter 2 with Christ's body specifically spoken of as Temple — points out how foggy, by comparison, Paul's use of blood sacrifice language for Christ really is. The two seemingly clear instances, in Rom. 3 and 2 Cor. 5, upon examination, fog over. Most recently, Stanley Stowers has challenged the understanding of *hilasterion* as an atonement sacrifice, arguing that the word should be construed entirely non-sacrificially to mean an "act of conciliation."¹⁹ He also observes that ancient Mediterranean sacrificing cultures (Jewish and Greek) attached no special significance to the death of the animal itself. "The sacrifice was the ritualized use — disorganization and reorganization of the animal's body — that took place after the killing. Sacrifice is not about death or ritual killing."²⁰

So too with *hattat/harmartia* at 2 Cor. 5:21. Such sacrifices cleanse not the one offering the sacrifice of the impurity he carried, but the sancta. The blood of the sacrificed offering purges the Temple: it cleanses not the sinner

18 Paul's Pharisaic deep structure might be surfacing here: I doubt that the Corinthians would be as panicked as he would be by this image.

19 For the entire argument, see S. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, New Haven 1994, pp. 206–213.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 207.

16 Klawans, "Notions," p. 292.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 298.

but the consequences of the sinner's sin.²¹ The closest analogy to a sacrifice in Paul's time that bears away sin would be the scapegoat, one of the offerings of Yom Kippur. But Paul nowhere avails himself of this image, and besides — a nod to his eucharistic instruction — you do not eat scapegoats.

GENTILES AND HOLINESS

Unpacking Paul's language of sanctuary and sacrifice in terms of his Christology does not get us very far: an image of Christ as a particular sort of sacrifice never emerges. More useful is Paul's address to Gentiles. The Thessalonians, for example, having once worshipped idols, now turn and serve "the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). The result is their *ἀγιασμός* *hagiasmos* (4:3), rendered in the RSV, via the Latin, as "sanctification." Accordingly they should abstain from morally polluting acts such as *porneia*; each should use either his wife or his own body (*σκεῦος* *skeuos*) "in *hagiasmo* and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God." For these Gentiles, who *do* know God, have been called "not for impurity (*ἀκαθαρσία* *akatharsia*, the moral consequence of fornication and idolatry) but in holiness" (*hagiasmos*; 4:4, 7). Elsewhere, Paul addresses such Gentiles simply as "holy": *hagioi* (Rom. 1:7, RSV "saints"; 1 Cor. 1:2). They have been made holy in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2).

Elsewhere, Paul urges his Gentiles to non-Gentile behavior by telling them that they themselves are God's Temple. "Don't you know that you are God's Temple, and God's spirit dwells in you?... For God's Temple is *hagios*, and you are" (1 Cor. 3:16). "Your body is a temple of the holy spirit" (6:19); "We are the Temple of the living God" (2 Cor. 6:16). They are also the sacrifices to that God, "holy and acceptable" (Rom. 12:1). Christian Gentiles who lapse back into their native ways, fornicating and worshipping idols, are consequently to be shunned: "Do not even eat with someone like that!" (1 Cor. 5:9–11). The Spirit, through baptism, has incorporated them (literally, somehow) into Christ's eschatological body, so that false gods, hostile cosmic forces, and sin itself no longer have power over them (1 Cor.

12:12–13, 27; Gal. 3:28, 4:3–9; cf. Rom. 6:11). They have been set apart: this is the biblical sense of "made holy."

I want to suggest, then, that we understand Paul's language of separation and sanctification in terms of the biblically based binary terms governing proximity to holiness. For the Gentiles' proximity to holiness is what Christ, through his death and resurrection, had accomplished. Since they are now "in Christ," these Gentiles have ceased their morally polluting actions, in respect of which they are now "clean." But the operative term, *the one that evinces their eschatological change of status*, is *hagiasmos*, holiness: they now — through and by the Spirit, miraculously — are set apart for and by God. Hearing this (as we do through the Latinized English of our translations) as "sanctification" has us going off in a future, ecclesiastical, sacramental direction. Understood biblically, however, the term means simply that, through Christ, in the Spirit, *these Gentiles are no longer common* (חול) *but holy* (שׁוֹרֵק), *and thus suitable to be brought close to holiness*.

This idea in turn supports and explicates Paul's own conception of his apostolate, especially as he prepares to go to Jerusalem: εἰς τὸ εἶναι με λειτουργὸν Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ εἰς τὰ ἔθνη, ἱερουργοῦντα τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἵνα γένηται ἡ προσφορά τῶν ἐθνῶν εὐπρόσδεκτος, ἡγιασμένη ἐν Πνεύματι ἁγίῳ. [to be a [Temple] servant of Christ Jesus to the nations, sacrificing the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, made holy by the holy spirit] (Rom. 15:16).

A word, first, about translation. Just as the RSV obscures Paul's Temple language at Rom. 9:4, where δόξα *doxa* becomes "glory" (Lat. *gloria*) and λατρεία *latreia* becomes "worship" (Lat. *obsequium*), so here with λειτουργὸς *leitourgos* as "minister" and ἱερουργέω *hierourgeo* as "priestly service".²² Behind Paul's *doxa* stands the Hebrew כבוד, God's glorious presence which dwells on earth in the Temple in Jerusalem (cf. Matt. 23:21), the destination Paul names in his closing chapter. The Latin *gloria* would presume the Greek κλέος *kleos*; its synonyms include *laus*, *laudatio*,

22 Lexicographical data from Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, and Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT*.

21 Ibid., p. 208, with specific reference to the work of Jacob Milgrom.

gloriatio, elogium. But, had Paul been trilingual and translating into Latin in the fourth century, I think that he would have used *praesentio* or *manifestatio*, just as those later Christians did when speaking of the manifest presence of the saints at the holy sites of their tombs: כבוד for Paul evokes the *Shekinah*. Similarly, *latreia* in Paul's native context recalls עבודה — the cult revealed by God to Moses on Sinai and preserved before God's presence in Jerusalem. "Worship" is too bloodless a translation.

If Temple and Torah stand behind Rom. 9, then, all the more, so too Rom. 15. "Minister" seems fair for the Latin *minister*, but given the inevitable interposition of the Reformation between Paul's day and ours, its ancient meaning specifically of "a priest's attendant" (Lewis and Short), and thus its specific association with service at the Jerusalem altar, disappears.²³ And while "priestly service" fits *hierourgounta*, the Latin *sanctificans* inevitably conjures sacrament. Paul's "priestly service" means cult; when Paul says *hieros* here he means כהן.

These images, which Paul draws from the wellsprings of his religious faith — Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy — spill, merge, and mix messily with each other. The Gentiles are the offering and they send their offering too. They have been made both pure and holy. They are God's temple and so they may come near it. Christ is some sort of sacrifice, but no single biblical paradigm controls the metaphor. His death empowers baptized Gentiles to become free of moral impurity; the spirit sets them apart, in holiness, for God. The images swirl in the glorious confusion of Paul's improvised eschatology. Scripture provides the sheet music; but the urgency of the times, between the resurrection and the *Parousia*, compels Paul's stunning variations. Nonetheless, listening attentively, we can still hear the great Jewish themes.

CONCLUSIONS

Let us say, for the sake of argument, that I am right, and that Paul's central concept of Gentile redemption is fundamentally, intrinsically Levitical. What do we gain?

Another weapon, I think, in the unending war against anachronism, which prevents us from hearing what our ancient people actually said and meant. Good history requires a willed naïveté: to reconstruct the lived experience of our subjects in their integrity, we have to forget or pretend that we do not know the ending of their stories, because they did not. More simply, it means reading the evidence in their context, not ours. Our context for understanding Paul's letters is the origins of Christianity. We know that the Temple would shortly be destroyed; that his movement would eventually become essentially Gentile and, equally essentially, anti-Jewish; that the form of the world, circa mid-first-century, indeed was *not* passing away. It is this knowledge that leads us to perennially anachronistic readings of Paul: to insist that, at least implicitly, his gospel undermined the Law;²⁴ to say that he looked at the Law as "too ethnic" (read: "too Jewish"), and that he objected specifically to that;²⁵ to see his Gentiles-in-Christ as already and necessarily completely outside the ambit of the Diaspora synagogue.²⁶

24 Again, most of the essays in Dunn, *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, (n. 3 above) begin and end on this point. An example chosen at random: John Barclay writes, "He himself [i.e., Paul] regards key aspects of the law as wholly dispensable for Christian believers" ("Do We Undermine the Law?" p. 308). Paul does regard key aspects of the law as wholly dispensable, but for *Gentile* Christian believers: other aspects, such as love of God and neighbor, avoidance of idolatry and fornication, giving charity, and so on he insists are essential. In this he is little different from his non-Christian Jewish contemporaries. Barclay does not seem to notice the irony of his argument. Drawing his title from Rom. 3:31, he answers "Yes" exactly where Paul urges emphatically "By no means!"

25 A point frequently urged by Dunn, most recently in his essay "In Search of Common Ground," idem (ed.), *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, pp. 309–334; see especially the middle paragraph of p. 313. He argues that Paul battled the nationalism of Jewish law which required "Israel's set-apartness from the Gentiles" (p. 314).

26 Francis Watson's point, attributed to Paul as the defining aspect of his message, in *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, Cambridge 1986; cf. Campbell's review, "Did Paul

23 Cf. the LXX's use of *leitourgia* at Num. 8:25 for performance of service in the Tabernacle.

These interpretations are spawned and supported by our retrospective knowledge — we *know* that this indeed is how things worked out. But though history is done backwards, from the vantage point of the present into the past, life is lived forwards, from the present into the radical contingency of the future. Spared our knowledge, Paul was free to preach his gospel with confidence and conviction as a statement of the impending universal redemption of Jew and Gentile both, together (one holy, the other recently made holy) but distinct (only Israel is Israel; and Gentiles, Paul insists adamantly, should not become Jews). This dual redemption was the ultimate triumph, through his Son, of the God of Israel.

Hence Paul concludes Romans with the catena of prophetic quotations praising the gracious inclusion of the Gentiles in *Israel's* worship. The Gentiles' moral and spiritual transformation articulated the miraculous change in their status vis-à-vis the Temple from common to holy.²⁷ It confirmed Paul's convictions *as a Jew* that in the death and resurrection of Jesus, God had begun the final transformation of the world, as he had promised Israel so long ago: "For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy" (15:8–9).

To return to where I began: Paul was a mid-first-century Jew; his audience mid-first-century Gentiles. This means that whatever Paul says in his letters about the Law, he means it first of all *with reference to his Gentile audience*, not to "Christians" in general — and thus not to Jewish Christians,

Advocate a Separation from the Synagogue?" in his *Paul's* (n. 3 above), pp. 122–131. Paul so frequently and unselfconsciously appeals to biblical stories and Jewish tradition to instruct his congregations that we must suppose that they had some prior acquaintance with the LXX. The only place to get that was the synagogue; and nothing in Paul's gospel would require them to stop attending. The "separation" argument, in other words, strikes me not only as anachronistic and therefore wrong, but also counter-intuitive and nonsensical.

27 This is one reason, as I have suggested elsewhere, that we might take seriously that accusation passed along, but disowned by Luke, that Paul brought Gentiles into the Temple past their boundary point: "Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope," *JTS*, 42, (1991), pp. 532–564, at p. 564.

and certainly not to non-Christian Jews. Hence, too, his uncharacteristic circumspection in Romans: furious when other Christian missionaries try to "build" on the foundation that *he* laid, Paul delicately tells the Roman community that he will simply be passing through, heading West, for a visit: "I no longer have any room for work in these regions" (15:22–23). Other apostles to Gentiles, evidently without the condition of conversion to Judaism, had already brought them in. Paul makes no claim to setting the conditions of their inclusion.

Taking Paul's context seriously means, further, recognizing the degree to which Paul lived in a world of *two* religious options: his tradition, and that of the nations. Christianity as a third way, distinct from Judaism, was not yet born, nor was a Judaism distinct from the Temple. In seeking to interpret how Paul understands his evangelical commitments, then, we might infer from this detail of how the Spirit, or Christ, moves the believing Gentile from חול to קדוש, from profane — that is, literally, *pro fanes*, outside the altar — to holy, newly suitable to be brought close to the one God, "the God of the Jews and of the Gentiles also" (Rom. 3:29). The Gospel profoundly cohered with Torah,²⁸ as Paul argues in Romans, because God is One. Precisely in and through its peculiar and ineradicable Jewishness, it brought the good news of universal redemption.

28 For a similar point with respect to the historical Jesus and the Gospel traditions, see M. Bockmuehl, "Halakhah and Ethics in the Jesus Tradition," *Early Christian Thought* (n. 2 above), pp. 264–278.