

# Book Reviews

*The Paradoxes of Paul*. Vol. 2 of *Justification and Variegated Nomism*. Edited by D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid. Tübingen/Grand Rapids: Mohr Siebeck/Baker, 2004. x + 545 pp., \$49.99.

The new perspective has lost its newness and perhaps it has lost its attractiveness as well. Book after book has emerged challenging the central contentions of the new perspective. The view of Judaism first propounded by Sanders was demonstrated to be wanting in the first volume of *Variegated Nomism*, for it was shown that covenantal nomism does not fit all the literature in second temple Judaism, and that there is significant evidence that contradicts the so-called pattern. And the first volume of this two volume set does not stand alone in its critique of Sanders's interpretation of second temple Judaism, for serious challenges have also been issued in volumes by Mark Elliott, Friedrich Avemarie, Andrew Das, and Simon Gathercole. Thus far the empire has not struck back, and one wonders if the textual evidence advanced in these recent works can be refuted. The new perspective on Paul may be well on the way to becoming the old and outmoded perspective.

If such is the case, volume 2 of *Variegated Nomism* may constitute a summary of the arguments that have dethroned the new paradigm with regard to Paul. If the view of second temple Judaism advanced by the new perspective seems to

be in serious trouble, the same can be said regarding its theology of Paul advanced most significantly by James Dunn and N. T. Wright. The sheer number of books questioning the work of Dunn and Wright (and of course Sanders) makes it impossible to list them all, but we think of the contributions of Moo, Thielman, Westerholm, Laato, Das, Gathercole, Aletti, Seifrid, Das, Stuhlmacher and Hagner, etc. Naturally some scholars continue to advance the new perspective, but it seems that the current is now running in the other direction. The newness has worn off, and the exegesis of the Reformers, though not embraced in every particular, seems to be weathering the recent challenge. Perhaps the proverb applies in this case, "The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him" (Prov 18:17 ESV).

A book with essays by a number of different contributors, like this one, does not build to a climax. Instead the various authors examine different aspects of the new perspective, and the careful reader will perceive that they do not agree in every respect. Nevertheless, the book reflects a broad consensus on the inadequacy of the new perspective. Space is lacking to interact with the essays in any detail, and it will suffice to note some of the essays and the contributions therein. Stephen Westerholm introduces the book with a nice summary of works on the new perspective, both pro and con,

over the last twenty-five years. With his characteristic lucidity he sets the stage for the remainder of the book. Mark Seifrid contributes two essays, one on righteousness language and the other consists of an analysis of Rom 1:18-3:20. In the former he surveys righteousness both biblically and in Hellenistic literature, and interacts with the new perspective and the new Tübingen school. Both Simon Gathercole and Douglas Moo demonstrate that in their exegesis of Romans 3:21-4:25 and 5:1-11:36 that central planks of the new perspective cannot be verified textually.

Moisés Silva with his usual verve and dexterity as an exegete unpacks the antithesis between works of law and faith in Jesus in Galatians, showing in the process that the objective genitive ("faith in Jesus Christ") is clearly superior to the subjective genitive ("faithfulness of Jesus Christ"). Two of the most helpful essays in the volume are written by Peter O'Brien, who is invariably careful and sensible in his scholarship. The first essay asks whether Paul is a covenantal nomist. O'Brien lays out several lines of evidence to demonstrate that Paul does not fit the pattern of covenantal nomism established by Sanders. O'Brien's discussion on judgment according to works is quite helpful, but it would have been helpful if the editors had included an entire essay on that topic since it plays a central role in the debate. O'Brien summarizes the problems with Dunn's view of "works of the law,"

and then responds to Wright's view of justification. I found the latter to be particularly helpful, for careful responses to the latter on justification are not plentiful. O'Brien's essay on whether Paul was converted is also a model of scholarship and a convincing response to those who claim Paul was only called but not converted.

Robert Yarbrough demonstrates the importance of salvation history in Paul's theology and notes how it has fallen out of favor in recent scholarship, and surveys the contributions of those of a previous era who rightly saw the importance of this theme. Timo Laato examines Pauline anthropology in a brief essay, and Don Carson provides an illuminating discussion on mystery and fulfillment in Pauline theology, showing that these themes stand in tension and must be held together. Timothy George demonstrates that Luther was a faithful interpreter of Paul, and Henri Blocher sums up the volume with an excellent essay which considers the theological implications of the whole debate.

All in all, I would judge this volume to be a success and a convincing rebuttal to the exegesis of Paul propounded by the new perspective. Perhaps the debate on the new perspective will slow down, or perhaps volumes like these and others mentioned in this review will represent a new consensus where a more nuanced view of both Judaism and Paul has been gained.

Thomas R. Schreiner

*Paul: In Fresh Perspective.* By N. T. Wright. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005, 195 pp., \$25.00.

In many ways, there is not much that is "fresh" about N. T. Wright's *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*. The book consists largely of a rehashing of material that he has already written about elsewhere. Wright acknowledges this fact in the preface where he states that the current work develops themes from three of his previous writings on Paul: *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Eerdmans, 1997), *The Climax of the Covenant* (T. & T. Clark, 1992), and his commentary on Romans in the *New Interpreters Bible* (Abingdon, 2003). Wright is not so much attempting to break new ground in this work, but rather he intends for it to stand as a pointer to a fuller treatment of Paul that will form volume IV of his series *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (xi).

The book divides into two parts that broadly define the direction of Wright's thinking on Paul. In part one, "Themes," Wright's introductory chapter locates Paul in his own historical setting. According to Wright, Paul was a man shaped by "three worlds" plus one: Second-Temple Judaism, Hellenistic Culture, the Roman Empire, and the church. In this chapter, Wright also reaffirms his commitment to the so-called "new perspective" on Paul. The remainder of part one is taken up with three dyads that according to Wright form the matrices from which Pauline theology develops: Creation and Covenant (chapter 2), Messiah and Apocalyptic (chapter 3), and Gospel

and Empire (chapter 4).

In the first three chapters of part two, "Structures," Wright offers a sketch of the shape of Paul's theology (83). Because Wright finds the familiar topics of Reformation soteriology an inadequate framework in which to understand Paul (83), he suggests that Paul is best interpreted within the framework of what the Jews of Paul's day believed. The structure of second-temple Jewish faith had three tiers: monotheism, election, and eschatology. For Wright, "Paul's thought can best be understood, not as an abandonment of this framework, but as his redefinition of it around the Messiah and the Spirit" (84). For this reason, Wright's argument proceeds by explaining Paul's rethinking of God in chapter 5, his reworking of God's people in chapter 6, and his reimagining of God's future in chapter 7. The concluding chapter of the book takes up the difficult question of how Paul's gospel relates to that proclaimed by the Jesus of the canonical Gospels, how Paul conceived of his apostolic task, and how Paul informs our understanding of the task of the church in the present day.

In this book, Wright has made his case once again that Paul cannot be properly interpreted apart from his historical context. Wright does not argue that Paul merely mirrors the philosophical and theological premises of his Jewish and Greco-Roman background. Rather, he shows that Paul both agrees and disagrees at significant points with both. This fact enables Paul to be both thoroughly Jewish and Roman, while at the

same time confronting both with his gospel. This reviewer looks forward to seeing how the details of this approach will work out in his forthcoming volume on Paul in *Christian Origins and the Question of God*.

Yet even for all of his learned explanation of Pauline theology, Wright's exegesis in this book leaves much to be desired. Rather, I should say, that the exegesis is nearly non-existent. Rather than getting bogged down in the details of careful exegetical work, Wright is constantly referring the reader to his former works on Paul. These notices come up so often, that one wonders why Wright has chosen to write this volume at all.

Nevertheless, one theme that Wright returns to time and again appears to be at least one "fresh" emphasis on his part. In chapter 4 in particular, Wright argues that Paul's gospel contained "echoes" of the rhetoric of imperial Rome. The upshot of this observation is that Paul thought that his message offered a direct political challenge to the dominant world power of his day—the Roman Empire. This so-called "fresh perspective" on Paul argues that the unveiling of the Messiah as Israel's king and the world's true Lord challenges the grand claims of pagan empire (40). This means that, for Paul, to confess Jesus as Messiah is to confess that "Jesus is Lord and Caesar is not" (69; cf. 58).

This much of Wright's proposal is not controversial. Even the most traditional readings of Paul recognize that his gospel makes Jesus out to be the King of kings, and Lord of lords. Most interpreters would probably

agree that there are no political or spiritual rivals to the kingship and lordship of Jesus in Paul's theology.

What is truly "fresh" about this perspective is the implication that Wright derives from this reading of Paul. It means first of all that Paul's gospel calls Christians to oppose political entities that make claims to empire and world domination. Wright even hints (via Richard Horsley) that this message of Paul offers a special critique of "today's monolithic American empire" and that this emphasis should not be dismissed "as a mere leftie fad" (16). Given Wright's open and frequent critique of American foreign policy elsewhere, this particular application of Paul's gospel will likely prove to be very controversial.

This book is to be recommended to anyone who wishes to get an overview of Wright's thinking on Paul. It summarizes the work that Wright has done on Paul up to this point and gives a little bit of a hint as to where he will be going in the future. For anyone who has already been reading Wright's work, there is not much more here that is not already covered in Wright's other books. Nevertheless, the book does pique one's interest in what trails Wright might be blazing in his forthcoming volume on Paul.

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*Making Sense of the New Testament: Three Crucial Questions.* By Craig L. Blomberg. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004, 189 pp., \$ 15.00.

This latest addition to the Baker's "Three Crucial Questions" series is the New Testament counterpart to Tremper Longman's volume on *Making Sense of the Old Testament: Three Crucial Questions* (1998), in which Longman discusses the keys to understanding the Old Testament, compares the God of the Old Testament with the God of the New Testament, and provides guidance for Christians on how to apply the Old Testament today. Blomberg's three crucial questions regarding the New Testament are questions about Jesus, Paul, and also of application (similar to Longman's volume).

The first crucial question ("Is the New Testament Historically Reliable?") concerns the historical reliability of the sources regarding Jesus and the early church ("whether or not the New Testament's portraits of Jesus of Nazareth can be trusted"; "Or, to phrase the question more precisely, do the apparently historical portions of the New Testament in fact communicate trustworthy history"). Blomberg sets out with a fine survey of the current state of discussion before he approaches these narratives as a historian would do: "But even if we limit ourselves to the approaches taken by the classical historians who study other people, events, and institutions from the ancient Jewish, Greek, and Roman worlds, a cumulative case emerges which suggests that the Gospels and Acts are very historically reliable" (21). Blomberg's discussion includes textual criticism, questions of authorship and date, and the genres of the Gospels and of Acts. Then Blomberg assesses the success

of the evangelists' enterprise by asking whether they had an historical interest, whether they were able to write history and what accuracy is evident in the final product, including discussion of supposed contradictions. Further sections treat hard sayings and missing topics ("Various early-church controversies described in Acts and the epistles never appear on the pages of the four Gospels," 45), the evidence of non-Christian writers, archaeological evidence, other early Christian evidence, and the miracles. According to Blomberg, by historical criteria alone, an impressive case can be argued for the general trustworthiness of the NT narrative books: "People who choose to believe more of the accounts than historical reasoning by itself can support do so by a 'leap of faith', to be sure. But it is a leap in the same direction that the vast majority of the historical evidence is already pointing. . . . Because the Gospels and Acts prove reliable in so many places where they can be tested, they should be given the benefit of doubt in those places where they cannot" (70). Blomberg presents a well argued persuasive case and raises arguments that cannot be ignored by those disagreeing. The section will be good reading for introductory courses on Jesus and the Gospels (compare Blomberg's previous contributions on this subject: *Jesus and the Gospels*; *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* and *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues and Commentary*)

The second part tackles the question of the relationship between Paul and Jesus. Was Paul the actual founder

of Christianity? Can the teaching of Jesus and Paul be reconciled? "Or did Paul so distort Jesus' message that we must choose one over the other? Was Paul, in fact, the second founder or even the true founder of Christianity as it developed down through the centuries?" (15). After a brief survey of the discussion Blomberg sets out with Paul's knowledge of Jesus' teaching and of other elements of the Gospel tradition (references to the life of Jesus) before providing seven reasons for the remaining silence ("there are numerous reasons why we do not see it [the Jesus tradition] appearing more frequently and more explicitly in his epistles"). Blomberg then makes a number of broader theological comparisons (justification by faith and the kingdom of God, the role of the law, the Gentile mission and the church, the role of women, Christology (comparing the implicit Christology of the Synoptics with Paul's more explicit christological statements), and eschatology. Blomberg concludes that Paul "knew a considerable amount about the life and teachings of the historical Jesus, and his central proclamation depended on the veracity of the death and resurrection of Christ, precisely as described in the Gospels and predicted by Jesus himself. Theological distinctives between the two men remain, and the differing purposes of the Gospels and the Epistles must be taken into account when assessing the reasons why certain issues do or do not appear in each. But in numerous central topics the two find themselves in profound agreement" (106). This section will make good

reading for introductory courses on Paul and on New Testament theology. A similar case is argued in more detail by D. Wenham, *Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity? A New Look at the Question of Paul and Jesus* and *Paul and Jesus: The True Story*.

Finally Blomberg raises the question: "How do we apply the New Testament today? . . . More precisely, what varying principles emerge for applying the New Testament's diverse literary forms?" Blomberg begins with the plea that valid application cannot be separated from legitimate interpretation. He emphasizes the different approaches to application required by the different literary genres in the NT and the smaller forms that appear within its books. Blomberg discusses general and specific principles for the Gospels, Acts, the epistles of Paul ("Normative or situation-specific?"), and the remaining NT. This section would make good reading for introductory courses to NT exegesis. (compare also W. W. Klein, C. L. Blomberg, R. L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*; and I. H. Marshall, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology*). A summary of the three chapters, notes, and indices round off the small volume.

Blomberg has provided a succinct, easy to read but not simplistic introduction to three crucial issues in NT studies from an evangelical perspective. While aimed at and suitable for a wider readership or undergraduate students, the volume also has its challenges for advanced students. Similar treatment of other issues (such as the relationship of the Paul of the Pauline



corpus and the Paul of Acts, the origin and significance of the NT canon or the diversity and unity in the NT) would be welcome.

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*Spirit Ethics: Scripture and the Moral Life.* By Paul Jersild. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000, 204 pp., \$18.00 paper.

*Spirit Ethics* is concerned with the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church, particularly where Scripture, ethics, and contemporary culture meet. The first part of this book deals with methodological and theoretical issues, including postmodernism, pluralism, and biblical interpretation and authority. In the second part, methodological proposals are applied to three issues: euthanasia, homosexuality, and genetic research.

This book is commendable in many respects. For instance, Jersild provides a brief introduction to postmodernism that will be very useful for those unfamiliar with the ideas. In addition, there is much to be gained from his treatment of euthanasia and genetic research, and how the church may contribute and, indeed, guide the contemporary debates on these issues.

However, an assessment of Jersild's treatment of the interpretation and authority of Scripture is mixed. He rightly affirms the need for the work of the Spirit in the task of bibli-

cal interpretation and application. Yet he compromises the transcendent authority of the Bible, presumably in order to avoid a wooden or legalistic application. For Jersild, biblical authority rests with the spirit-led community as it engages with the text and with contemporary culture, and embodies biblical themes such as grace, forgiveness, and faith in response to Jesus Christ. The result for ethics is to resist appeals to a transcendent source of moral norms: "our moral convictions are not based on a transcendent moral order but emerge from the story of the believing community" (35). When it comes to specific moral decisions, the message of Scripture is "neither sufficiently clear or consistent to give it a blanket hermeneutical primacy" (80).

Turning to Jersild's chapters on contemporary issues, it is interesting that on the issues that are not addressed explicitly in Scripture (euthanasia and genetics), he concludes that the "facts of the case" do not justify a turn from the tradition. Concerning homosexuality, which is addressed explicitly, he parts with tradition. Here the facts of the case—the experience of homosexuals and the (very debatable) results of scientific research—persuade him that the church ought to affirm monogamous homosexual partnerships, and dissenting biblical texts must be reinterpreted to avoid inflicting harm on those who understand themselves to be homosexual.

This treatment reveals an inadequate hermeneutic, which fails to place particular texts within the biblical message of creation, fall,

and redemption. His conclusions may be well intended, but when he affirms what Scripture condemns (and attributes to our fallen condition), he denies not only particular texts but also the general themes of Scripture: to be truly human, and to experience God's grace and forgiveness, is to turn from ourselves and to God in repentance and humility, recognizing that even our most "natural" desires are alien and in need of reform. The Spirit-led community must communicate these biblical truths with compassion, and not simply follow our contemporary culture, or even the (disputed) "facts of the case" if they are derived from experience and from ideological perspectives opposed to the message of the Bible.

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*To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview.* By Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004, 396 pp., \$29.00.

With a seemingly endless variety of pluralisms abounding today (religious, epistemological, etc.), and with naturalism still strongly rearing its ugly head (despite what postmodern pundits might say), it is no surprise that evangelical presses continue to produce a sundry array of apologetic books, academic, popular, and otherwise. Many of these books are quite excellent. But, as a rule, a new Christian apologetic release is usually not something to get too excited over. *To*

*Everyone an Answer*, though, is quite an exception.

This new book is a collection of essays assembled in honor of, and appropriately for, Norman Geisler, a pioneering and prolific influence for the apologetic endeavors of many well-known contemporary evangelical scholars today. Some prime examples of Geisler's influence are the editors of this volume: Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland, who are symbolically carrying forth the torch that Geisler once primarily held. Like Geisler, all three are philosophers; and also like Geisler all three have individually published works apologetic in subject or nature. The various contributors within *To Everyone an Answer* are also all well-qualified evangelical authors in their respective fields—including such names as William A. Dembski, Douglas Groothuis, Gary Habermas, Ronald H. Nash, Ben Witherington III, and Ravi Zacharias. This book also includes some lesser-known names but with equally well-written essays.

The overall purpose of this book, according to its primary editor, is to present Christianity as a viable and coherent worldview (13-14). This concept is not new, but the editors believe there is a need to offer a complete volume dealing with different respective facets of Christianity's testimony. Though meant for the "ordinary Christian" (17), the editors have assumed a certain amount of education on the part of their readers, particularly, the "informed churchgoer" (17).

*To Everyone an Answer* is divided

into five main parts, each with a brief introduction given by one of the three editors. Part one addresses the mammoth subject of the relation of faith to reason and apologetics' place within that scope. In the greater context of the book's mission, this section is quite admirable for its applicability and simplicity. Greg Koukl's essay is particularly germane for witnessing Christians. Part two deals with the classic issue of arguing for God's existence. Doug Geivett gives as concise and lucid a presentation of the *Kalam* cosmological argument to the non-initiated as one can. I especially liked Dembski's Bill Gates illustration in the essay on the design argument. Such illustrations are tools that I believe will stick with people long after they (unfortunately) forget Dembski's name and work. Part three argues from a more traditional standpoint: Christology, the resurrection, and the related subject of the existence of miracles. Gary Habermas and Ben Witherington III are two familiar contributors to this section. Part four, probably the hardest section of the book, addresses the different philosophical and cultural challenges to Christian faith. In this part Douglas Groothuis and Francis Beckwith both have poignant essays. Part five cites the major religious challenges to Christianity such as Islam, New Age thought, and religious pluralism. Lesser-known scholars, Carl Mosser and Paul Owen, present a very applicable and insightful essay on witnessing to Mormon believers. J. P. Moreland sums up the book in a surprising, but appropriate, evangelistic invitation for possible non-

Christian readers.

One of the unfortunate consequences of reviewing a book of essays is that time and space will not allow one to comment on all of the works within. And often in a collection there is one or two dismal chapters that hide within. But *To Everyone an Answer* is exceptional in regards to this trend. Though some of the pieces are more readable, some more scholarly, some more interesting, some more technical, all the essays within it are highly informative and give pertinent advice for dealing with different apologetic aspects for the Christian worldview. It is an excellent volume for any pastor or Bible study teacher to use for a class or study. Likewise, it would be an extraordinary textbook for many different kinds of Christian university or seminary classes. I highly recommend it as a good introductory text for any disciplined follower of Christ.

Since it would be unfair to pick out any particular essay for critical examination, I want to draw attention to a couple of overall shortcomings in the book, though they are few and forgivable, based upon the editorial leadership.

First, I believe the primary editor's stated purpose (Beckwith's) in pursuing this project is a bit derogatory to other similar texts. He writes, "Although there are numerous technical works that respond to these challenges, there are few *if any* that are offered to the ordinary Christian and the wider public as an accessible volume" [*Italics mine*] (17). I could not disagree more. There are numerous apologetic books avail-

able that are exactly what Beckwith describes. Many of these volumes are even written by the authors within this reviewed text. Josh McDowell's famous *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* and also his *More Than a Carpenter* are quite accessible for the average layperson. Paul Copan's *That's True for You But Not for Me* and *That's Just Your Interpretation* are also very applicable and useful for lay people. Almost all of Ravi Zacharias's books are sermonic in style such as *Can Man Live Without God?* And space will not allow us to name many of the other good books by names such as Knechtle, Kreeft, Moreland, and others.

No doubt, Beckwith is partly justified in that there are many technical or philosophic apologetic books. Groothius' *Truth Decay* demands a greater span of attention, as do any of the works of William Dembski. Ronald Nash's various books such as *Worldviews in Conflict* must be read carefully and attentively as well; though, they are also all quite applicable. And of course there are the more advanced apologetic texts by William Lane Craig and Norman Geisler himself. Yet, even *To Everyone an Answer* has its harder chapters. Ben Witherington's essay demands greater acuity than the editors' "ordinary Christian" or "informed churchgoer" probably possesses. Doug Geivett's essay on the *Kalam* argument is somewhat hard to follow even though it is the simplest presentation of this argument that I have seen to date.

Dealing with the questions and polemics of non-Christians takes

work. So reading apologetics takes work as well. Any apologetics text, including *To Everyone an Answer*, is going to have its technical aspects no matter how introductory it might be. So Beckwith's assessment is at the very least incongruent with the array of volumes available today for the ordinary Christian.

The second weakness that some Christians may find in this text is the overall perspective presented. Though evangelically mainstream, it represents only one type of evangelical apologetic thought.

Because the editors of this volume believe that general revelation is a legitimate means by which human beings may acquire knowledge of theological truths, we have asked the contributors of this volume to provide arguments that may be understood and appreciated by those who do not share our Christian faith. Consequently, we do not share the conviction of some Christians that theological knowledge is impossible apart from special revelation (16).

This particular apologetic perspective is best known as the classical or evidentialist approach. This reviewer considers such a perspective legitimate and worthwhile. Evidentialism has historical precedence and has proven highly effective for evangelism. The editorial bias is representative of the evangelical majority, and thus it is quite proper to have a text that exclusively pursues this direction. And in fairness, one of the contributors included, Ronald Nash, does not even consider himself an evidentialist scholar. I do not see this in any way as a problem for

the book; but some Christians may feel marginalized or caricatured, especially by the last sentence in the above quote.

*To Everyone an Answer* is quite balanced though. Beckwith, Craig, and Moreland have done an estimable job in trying to assemble a group of essays that cover the whole gamut of apologetic issues related to the various aspects of the Christian worldview for the ordinary Christian. The book is also an advance in furthering the discussion and, I believe, the sway of evangelical apologetics. I suspect that *To Everyone an Answer* will be around long after Norman Geisler is not. And in the end, what could be a more fitting tribute for a Christian apologist than a book that honors his apologetic contributions and outlasts him?

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