

**PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE**

**Implications of Paul's Hopes for the  
End of Days for Jews and Christians Today:  
A Critical Re-evaluation of the Evidence**

Philip A. Cunningham, Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia  
Mark D. Nanos, University of Kansas, Lawrence

**1. Recent Catholic Interest in Paul's Eschatology**

It is well known that the groundbreaking 1965 Second Vatican Council declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, relied heavily upon Paul's Letter to the Romans to state that the Jewish people remain "most dear" to God (Rom 11:28), and, to them belong "the glory and the covenants and the law" (Rom 9:4). As a recent study of the post-World War II revolution in Catholic theology about Jews and Judaism explains: "Without Romans and its confirmation of God's promises to the Jews as well as the eschatological hope for unity in an unspecified future, the church would not have had language to talk about the Jews after the Holocaust."<sup>1</sup> In addition to the major changes that followed from this new focus on past promises and their relationship to the ultimate future, the eschaton, *Nostra Aetate* also recommended that research and discourse be undertaken in a new spirit: "this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues."<sup>2</sup> It thus seems very fitting to us that, as its fiftieth anniversary approaches, this consideration of that

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<sup>1</sup> John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933-1965* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 256. This important volume provides a vivid narrative of how Christians who sought to combat the appeal that Nazi antisemitism had for Christians, turned to Romans and over the 1940s-1960s gradually came to read it with new eyes.

<sup>2</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, §4.

declaration's roots in Paul's eschatological expectations—which flowed from God's irrevocable covenantal promises—is the combined work of a Jewish exegete (Mark Nanos) and a Catholic biblical theologian (Philip Cunningham). Both authors will speak to the issues raised, but in general Nanos will focus on insights into the translation and interpretation of Paul's language approached from within the late Second Temple Jewish thought-world in which it was written with some attention to the reception history of Paul's language, while Cunningham will focus on how Paul's language can—and just as importantly, cannot, apart from significant qualifications—be usefully employed to address Christian theological concerns today.

Our effort is not without precedent. For many decades now, both Catholic and Protestant ecclesial statements have appealed to Romans to foster a positive relationship between Christians and Jews. Jews have likewise appealed to Romans in efforts to improve dialogue and relations going forward. On the one hand, this development represents the historical-exegetical rediscovery of long-overlooked positive sentiments toward those of his kinspeople who did not share Paul's newfound conviction that Jesus was raised. For Paul and likeminded associates (see Acts 3:20-21), this marked Jesus as the awaited messianic figure, and led them to conclude that the end of the ages had thus been initiated. On the other hand, the modern recourse to Romans arguably arose from the ethical need that Christians felt, and some Jews welcomed, to find a new way to read Paul's representations of Jews and Judaism following the horrendous sufferings of Jews in cultures that were partially shaped by long-lived, anti-Jewish readings of Paul, including Romans 11.

In a pivotal passage in that chapter wherein Paul describes the restoration of Israel as well as the reconciliation of the rest of Creation, he reveals his conviction that this process was going to reach its next stage through the completion of his ministry to the nations. He confidently describes the inevitable destiny of the Jewish people in positive terms (albeit somewhat

less obviously in the currently prevailing construals, a topic that will be discussed more fully below). The NRSV translates Paul's insight thus: "I want you to understand this mystery, a hardening has come upon part of Israel, *until the full number of the Gentiles has come in*. And so *all Israel will be saved; as it is written ...*" (Rom 11:25-26; italics added; see too vv. 11-15).<sup>3</sup>

In the past decade or so, these words have been the subject of a lively conversation within the Catholic community. The interpretation of Paul's ideas about the eschaton framed the discussion of why the Catholic Church today does not organize campaigns to convert Jews to Christianity, as some other Christian groups do. This topic had also been a pivotal one during the deliberations at the Second Vatican Council in 1964 over the draft of what would become *Nostra Aetate*. Language that suggested an interest in promoting a contemporary Christian "mission to Jews" was replaced by an eschatological phrase: "the Church awaits the day, known to God alone, when all people will call upon the Lord with one voice and 'serve him shoulder to shoulder' (Zeph. 3:9)."<sup>4</sup>

These topics again came to the forefront in February of 2008 when Pope Benedict XVI composed a new prayer for Jews in the Good Friday services of the small number of Catholics who utilize the pre-Second Vatican Council Tridentine liturgical rite. The revised intercession asked God to "illuminate their [Jews'] hearts so that they may recognize Jesus Christ as savior of all men."<sup>5</sup> Since this revised prayer was issued without explanation and published as *pro conversione*

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<sup>3</sup> NRSV translation. A different, more promising translation of this verse will be discussed below.

<sup>4</sup> For full details on this internal Catholic exchange, see Philip A. Cunningham, "God Holds the Jews Most Dear": Learning to Respect Jewish Self-Understanding," in Gilbert Rosenthal, ed., *A Jubilee for All Time: The Copernican Revolution in Jewish-Christian Relations* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 44-58.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ccrj.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-benedict-xvi/425-b1608feb5>

*Iudeaorum*, many observers concluded that the prayer was meant to encourage the proselytization of Jews by Catholics.

To counter this understandable impression, Cardinal Walter Kasper, the president of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, composed an important essay that was printed in the Vatican newspaper at the pope's request. He argued that the prayer was not promoting the missionizing of Jews, but rather drew upon the eschatological perspective of Romans 11:

The salvation of the Jews is, for St. Paul, a profound mystery of election through divine grace ([Rom] 9:14-29). God's gifts are irrevocable and God's promises to his people have not been revoked by him in spite of their disobedience (9:6; 11:1, 29). The hardening of Israel becomes a boon for the salvation of the Gentiles. ... When *the full number of the Gentiles has entered into salvation*, the whole of Israel will be saved (11:25ff.). ... So one can say: God will bring about the salvation of Israel in the end, not on the basis of a mission to the Jews but on the basis of the mission to the Gentiles, when *the fullness of the Gentiles* has entered. ... In this prayer the Church does not take it upon herself to orchestrate the realization of the unfathomable mystery. She cannot do so. Instead, she lays the *when* and the *how* entirely in God's hands. God alone can bring about the Kingdom of God in which the whole of Israel is saved and eschatological peace is bestowed on the world.<sup>6</sup>

Pope Benedict himself followed this logic in a book published a few years later:

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<sup>6</sup> "Striving for Mutual Respect in Modes of Prayer," *L'Osservatore Romano* (April 16, 2008): 8-9. Available at: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/kasper/651-kasper08apr16>. Italics added to the "full number" phrase, others are original.

Here I should like to recall the advice given by Bernard of Clairvaux to his pupil Pope Eugene III on this matter. He reminds the Pope that his duty of care extends not only to Christians, but: “You also have obligations toward unbelievers, whether Jew, Greek, or Gentile” (*De Consideratione* III/i, 2). Then he immediately corrects himself and observes more accurately: “Granted, with regard to the Jews, time excuses you; for them a determined point in time has been fixed, which cannot be anticipated. The *full number of the Gentiles must come in first*. ... (*De Consideratione* III/i, 3).”

Hildegard Brem comments on this passage as follows:

In the light of Romans 11:25, the Church must not concern herself with the conversion of the Jews, since she must wait for the time fixed for this by God, ‘until *the full number of the Gentiles come in*’ (Rom 11:25)... In the meantime, Israel retains its own mission. Israel is in the hands of God, who will save it “as a whole” at the proper time, when *the number of the Gentiles is complete*.<sup>7</sup>

Pope Benedict and those he cites, Bernard of Clairvaux and Hildegard Brem, all adduce Paul’s phrase about the “full number of the Gentiles coming in” to argue that the salvation of Jews is divinely guaranteed and will be God’s doing. Benedict made the same point elsewhere when he said that the new prayer: “shifts the focus from a direct petition for the conversion of the Jews in a missionary sense to a plea that the Lord might bring about the hour of history when we may all be united.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, since it is not a responsibility of Christians to “convert” Jews, the Catholic Church does not support any missionary campaigns toward Jews.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 44-45, 47. Italics added.

<sup>8</sup> Benedict XVI, *Light of the World. The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times. A Conversation with Peter Seewald* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2010), 107.

But one could ask, did Paul mean the same things by “full number of the Gentiles coming in” (as typically translated) as do these current applications or actualizations of his words? From the point of view of Catholic theology, do these current applications mean to say that once the quota of Gentiles has been reached at the End of Days Jews will simply fulfill their divine destiny by becoming Christians? Or that the entire post-New Testament Jewish people, including those who have practiced the rabbinic tradition for as long as Christianity has been practiced, will simply collapse—in a zero-sum fashion—in the face of a divinely inspired recognition that Christian expectations about Christ’s “second coming” or return (*parousia*) have proven correct after all?

Furthermore, do such formulations pay any heed to Jewish self-understanding, as required by the Vatican’s 1974 Guidelines to Implement *Nostra Aetate*?<sup>9</sup> The texts mentioned above apparently proceed from the assumption that Jews need salvation in the way Christians have traditionally conceptualized the Jewish need for it—by coming to have faith in Jesus Christ. Jews cannot be expected to recognize themselves in descriptions that do not acknowledge that their own beliefs and convictions are the product of covenantal fidelity to God. Rather, they must remain faithful to what are clearly believed to be the calling and gifts of God. This problem is perhaps especially apparent in a paragraph of the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which also appealed to Romans 11:

The glorious Messiah’s coming is suspended at every moment of history until his recognition by “all Israel,” for “a hardening has come upon part of Israel” in their “unbelief” toward Jesus [Rom 11:20-26; cf. Mt 23:39]. St. Peter says to the Jews of Jerusalem after Pentecost:

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<sup>9</sup> Commission of the Holy See for Religious Relations with the Jews, “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, No. 4,” Preamble: “[Christians] must strive to learn by what essential traits Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience.”

“Repent, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old” [Acts 3:19-21]. St. Paul echoes him, “For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead” [Rom 11:15]? The “full inclusion” of the Jews in the Messiah’s salvation, in the wake of “the full number of the Gentiles” [Rom 11:12, 25; cf. Lk 21:24], will enable the People of God to achieve “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” in which “God may be all in all” [Eph 4:13; 1 Cor 15:28].<sup>10</sup>

While alleviating Jewish concerns about active Christian proselytizing in historic time, does not the “eschatological postponement” approach conveyed by the above quotations nevertheless perpetuate the judgment, albeit more benignly phrased, that the Church is the community that has “gotten it right,” which Jews will eventually come to recognize too? Does it not imply that Jews who have not believed in Christ have compromised their covenantal standing, that they lack “faith” and or have acted unfaithfully (hard-heartedly) in response to the Gospel’s claims, as if these claims were known to be true

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<sup>10</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1994), §674. Scriptural citations presented as footnotes in the *Catechism* are included in square brackets above. The concatenation of Pauline, deutero-Pauline, Matthean, and Lucan perspectives in this paragraph raises the question as to whether all these New Testament texts really share the common viewpoint expressed here. More specifically to Romans, the *Catechism* quote fails to convey all of Paul’s thought here. His reasoning is that God has caused those Jews who have thus far not responded positively to the Gospel to be in some way connected to its spread among the Gentiles. If it desired to cite Paul literally, the *Catechism* should have more accurately reflected Pauline thought here by saying, “The glorious Messiah’s coming is suspended at every moment of history until the ‘full number’ of the Gentiles have heard the gospel.” See further below.

but rejected? Does not an “eschatological postponement” model work from the notion that these Jews remain in an incomplete relationship with God from which they need to be “saved”? Although different from traditional “replacement theology” or “supersessionism,” recognition of these kinds of implications have led some scholars to identify this approach as retaining aspects of traditional triumphalism, a kind of “eschatological supersessionism.”<sup>11</sup> Jesper Svartvik has insightfully framed this matter as follows:

To put it bluntly, Jews are [thus] tolerated because of a Messianic theology which proclaims that in days to come Jews will become Christians. ... But a Christian theology of Judaism cannot be based on such a narrow understanding of eschatology. This line of thought does not allow the others to define themselves, something which must be the starting-point in interreligious dialogue. Simply put, it does not allow Jews to be Jews as the vast majority of Jews define themselves.<sup>12</sup>

In this essay we hope to address this concern directly, by exploring both exegetical as well as theological aspects. We ask: Do the Apostle Paul’s letters—upon which this eschatological scenario relies—require, or even support as most appropriate today, a Christian expectation that envisions that the fate of Judaism will be fulfilled when the distinctive identity of Jews as Jews dissolves in the face of the glorious return of Christ Jesus in messianic splendor? Can Christians theologize about this as if certain that this is what Paul meant, let alone that he accurately glimpsed the eschatological future? Could

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<sup>11</sup> Eugene Korn, “The Man of Faith and Religious Dialogue: Revisiting ‘Confrontation’ After Forty Years.” Paper delivered at the conference, *Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik on Interreligious Dialogue: Forty Years Later*, Boston College, Nov 23, 2003. Accessible at: [http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research\\_sites/cjl/texts/center/conferences/soloveitchik/Korn\\_23Nov03.htm](http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/center/conferences/soloveitchik/Korn_23Nov03.htm)

<sup>12</sup> Jesper Svartvik, “*Geschwisterlichkeit*: Realizing that we are Siblings, ” in Folker Siegert, ed., *Kirche und Synagoge: Ein lutherisches Votum* (Göttingen: Vandernhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 320.

Paul have possibly been thinking in such binary terms about “Judaism” and “Christianity,” when the only church he knew was a subgroup within Judaism, when faith in Jesus as Messiah was an option conceptualized within Judaism, not by conversion from it to a different religious affiliation?

## 2. Paul: Jewish Apostle or Jewish Apostate?

To address these questions, it must be realized that in the almost fifty years since the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*, there have been sweeping developments in Pauline studies that could rightly be called paradigm shifts. We argue that these shifts provide a credible, even compelling, way of actualizing Pauline eschatology in a post-*Nostra Aetate* church that does not lead inevitably to the scenario of Christianity triumphing over a mistaken Judaism at the End of Days. To show this, it is necessary to survey the development of new perspectives in Pauline scholarship.<sup>13</sup>

The dominant reading of Paul for centuries, heavily influenced by Reformation-era debates, saw him as the wedge that split apart the new grace-filled Christian church from Judaism and its “Law.”<sup>14</sup> According to this ubiquitous Christian view, which naturally also shaped Jewish perceptions of Paul’s attitudes toward Jews and their religious sensibilities, Paul declared the end of the “Law” as a futile effort by the Jewish people to earn God’s favor. He is imagined to have proclaimed the “Law-free Gospel” because he discovered that one

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<sup>13</sup> It is not our purpose in this essay to exegete every Pauline passage that bears on new understandings of Paul. Readers are advised to consult the works cited in the notes for treatments of Pauline rhetoric in such passages as 1 Cor 9:19-23; Gal 3:23; Phil 3:7; or 1 Th 2:14-16, for example.

<sup>14</sup> We put “Law” in quotation marks to denote that the word *nomos* in Greek (Paul’s native language) has different cadences from the Hebrew word *Torah*. The latter is better rendered in English as “Teaching” or “Guidance,” thus signifying “God’s Guidance for Israel,” a positive connotation as well as a contextually specific one that is obscured if not altered beyond recognition when translated “law” and especially when put in contrast to “grace” or “love,” as it has been so often in Christian theological representations.

could not become “righteous” by doing good works since no one was without sin. We want to stress that Judaism never upheld this straw man of perfectionism. The Temple and its sacrificial system by definition gave witness to a relationship based upon God’s grace toward those who acknowledged themselves to be sinners. Nevertheless, the subsequent prevailing Christian view proceeded from the conviction that a new universal community that realized its total dependence on God’s merciful grace, which Jews ostensibly had not realized, or, alternatively, arrogantly rejected, had now come into being because of Jesus Christ and the birth of Christianity.

Assuming that Paul had forsaken Judaism after experiencing Christ, the Reformers likened the Jewish way of life to Roman Catholicism as both being, in their outlook, religions based on the futile effort to earn God’s favor. Reformed Christianity, on the other hand, was thought to be similar to Paul in perceiving the need to depend only on God’s mercy. Paul became the champion of “justification by faith” against all the rituals and practices of Roman Catholicism. In this perspective, what Paul wrote was interpreted to be in opposition to Judaism, by way of which the Reformers projected what they found objectionable within Roman Catholicism onto Judaism: e.g., that it was “works” based, legalistic, loveless, filled with empty ritual, arrogant, and corrupt. The “Paul” that Christians thereby constructed was not only the founder of Christianity, but his calling to do so was intimately tied to negative portrayals and valuations of Jewish identity, beliefs, and behavior from which he supposedly found freedom. This is why he was thought to have desired the “conversion” of Jews as well as non-Jews. In response to this caricature that Christians presented as admirable and desirable in sharp contrast to that which Judaism ostensibly offered, Jews naturally approached Paul with the widespread presupposition that he was a renegade, and worse than that, that he was anti-Jewish in a way that

directly contributed to the harm the Jewish people have experienced over the centuries at the hands of Christians.<sup>15</sup>

This way of constructing Paul as well as the negative Christian foil, Judaism, although representing what became the dominant view (and arguably still is, especially at the level of popular culture), has suffered a significant challenge in recent years. Many present-day New Testament and Pauline scholars (which includes some Jews) have become much more aware of the danger of anachronistically reading Paul's writings through the lenses of later Christian polemics and have also moved away from the previously presumed, fundamental dichotomy between Judaism and Christianity. They have begun to reconsider Paul as standing *within* the Jewish world of the late Second Temple Period—not apart from it.<sup>16</sup> A particularly significant turning point occurred with the widespread realization among Christian scholars that the preponderance of late Second Temple Jewish texts understood the Torah as God's gracious gift to Israel.<sup>17</sup> It was a Christian distortion to imagine Judaism as a legalistic religion of “works righteousness” that

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<sup>15</sup> Daniel R. Langton, *The Apostle Paul in the Jewish Imagination: A Study in Modern Jewish-Christian Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. chs. 1-4; Mark D. Nanos, “A Jewish View,” In *Four Views on the Apostle Paul*, ed. Michael F. Bird, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 159-65 (159-93).

<sup>16</sup> The history of this paradigm shift has been superbly charted in Magnus Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul: A Student's Guide to Recent Scholarship* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009), and it is the focus of Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm, eds., *Paul Within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, forthcoming 2015).

<sup>17</sup> This development is traceable to the influential papers and essays by Krister Stendahl, including “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963): 199-215, later published in his *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) and E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977). This trajectory is now called “the New Perspective on Paul” (NPP), which brings a more accurate understanding of late Second Temple Judaism to the task of interpreting Paul. However, the NPP did not locate Paul himself and his own theologizing within the Judaism it now constructed in terms of “covenantal nomism.” See note 23 below.

sought to earn God's approval through the ritual performance of commands. Rather, late Second Temple Jewish texts understood Torah-observance as an act of gratitude for having *already* been divinely favored by God's decision to initiate a covenant with Israel. With this understanding of Judaism, important aspects of the conventional contrast between Paul and "law-bound" Judaism could not be easily sustained.

As Magnus Zetterholm neatly summarizes:

[M]any of the established truths about Paul have thus been challenged, for instance, the idea that Paul ceased observing the Torah<sup>18</sup> or that he created a new religion based on universalism instead of Jewish particularism. If the old caricature of Judaism can be proven false and it can be assumed that first-century Judaism was not characterized by legalism and works-righteousness, it seems quite unlikely that Paul found reason to leave Judaism for Christianity. If the Torah was given by grace and contains a sacrificial system that makes it possible for the individual to atone for his or her own sins, it seems, on the contrary, likely that Paul continued to express his relation to the God of Israel through the Torah, God's most precious gift to the Jewish people. From this point of departure, other factors must have led to the distressing conflicts within the early

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<sup>18</sup> 1 Cor 9:19-23 is a key text on the question of whether Paul relaxed his personal Torah practices when pastorally appropriate. Mark D. Nanos argues that in this passage Paul explains his strategy of "rhetorical adaptability" rather than the adjusting of his behavior, as traditionally imagined. Paul was actually "Torah-observant as a matter of covenant fidelity, and known to be halakhically faithful by the audience to which he addressed this text"; hence, they understood that he was not writing of adjusting, for example, his dietary behavior, but how he adapted his arguments for the Gospel to the argumentative premises of his various audiences ["Paul's Relationship to Torah in Light of His Strategy 'To Become Everything to Everyone' (1 Corinthians 9.19-23)" in Reimund Bieringer and Didier Pollefeyt, eds., *Paul and Judaism: Crosscurrents in Pauline Exegesis and the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations* (London: T & T Clark, 2012), 139].

Jesus movement. This insight has led scholars to emphasize ... the relationship between Jews and non-Jews within the Jesus movement ...<sup>19</sup>

Another way to get to the heart of the paradigm shifts in recent Pauline scholarship is to ask the question: “Was Paul Jewish or Christian?” The question is not as straightforward as it might appear. Upon reflection it becomes clear that it cannot be answered without considering the operative definitions of both “Jewish” and “Christian.” This in turn leads to a greater awareness of the risks of anachronism.

It is crucial to recall that Paul proclaimed his good news to the nations while the Temple in Jerusalem still stood. At least seven of the letters attributed to him in the New Testament may well be the only New Testament books written prior to the Temple’s destruction by Roman legions in 70 C.E. The Temple served as a central locus of a wide variety of Jewish subgroups, including Greek-speaking Jews in the diaspora. With its annihilation, a centuries-long process of reorienting Jewish life began, eventually resulting in normative rabbinic Judaism.

Notably, the Greek word for “Christian” does not appear in any of Paul’s letters. Its absence is instructive. Certainly, Paul became convinced that Christ Jesus had been “established as Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead” (Rom 1: 4 NRSV). He could thus be well described as messianically or eschatologically enthusiastic about Jesus and the imminence of a new creation. But “Christian” has come to convey a discrete religious group identifiably separate from Jewish communities. This distinction simply did not yet exist during Paul’s lifetime.<sup>20</sup> It is more accurate to think of believers in the

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<sup>19</sup> Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul*, 229-30.

<sup>20</sup> A similar dynamic holds true for another New Testament book, the Letter to the Hebrews. If readers come to that text assuming that a distinct “Christianity” existed when the letter was written, they will likely read passages such as 8:13 as ascribing obsolescence to “Judaism.” Jesper Svartvik

Crucified-and-Raised-One as a particular Jewish subgroup. Pamela Eisenbaum puts it this way:

Paul believed that the recognition of the one God by Gentiles was necessary so that they might have a share in the world to come. Thus, Paul was not a *Christian*—a word that was in any case completely unknown to him because it had not yet been invented. He was a Jew who understood himself to be on a divine mission. As a Jew, Paul believed himself to be entrusted with the special knowledge God had given only to Jews. However, Paul also believed the resurrection of Jesus signaled that the world to come was already in the process of arriving and that it was time to reconcile non-Jews to Jews, not because they were necessarily hostile to each other but because, if all people were potentially children of God, Jews and Gentiles must now be considered part of the same family; this entailed a new level of interaction and intimacy.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, Paul's self-descriptions as a "member of the people of Israel, ... a Pharisee" and as an "apostle to the Gentiles" (Rom 11:13), challenge the persistent notion that Paul changed "religions." Yet that way of conceptualizing Paul and his "mission" of founding "churches" (usually "Gentile Christian churches") remains an underlying premise even when interpreters point out that there was not yet such a thing as "Christian" or "Christianity" into which to "convert." Many read Galatians 1:13, for instance, to mean that he formerly lived in a Jewish way (practiced Judaism) but no longer does so (presuming he is now a Christian, thus converting to and

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has convincingly shown how anachronistic and self-serving such a reading is. See his "Reading the Epistle to the Hebrews without Presupposing Supersessionism" in Philip A. Cunningham, Joseph Sievers, Mary C. Boys, Hans Hermann Henrix, and Jesper Svartvik, eds., *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 77-91.

<sup>21</sup> Pamela Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian: The Original Message of a Misunderstood Apostle* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 3-4.

practicing Christianity). However, without the presupposition that Paul must have “switched religions,” his language more likely means that he no longer practices Judaism in quite the same way that he did before (“my former way of living in Judaism as compared to the way that I live in Judaism now”), that is, he was now practicing Judaism shaped by the conviction that the messianic age has dawned, which he did not believe to be the case before.<sup>22</sup>

Since many people still think of Paul as no longer having upheld, practiced, or promoted Torah, or as not beholden to the God-given Mosaic covenantal stipulations to which Jews held themselves in response to God’s gifts and calling (this in spite of Paul’s own comments, e.g., Rom 9:4-5 and 11:28-29), it is hard to avoid the conceptual implications as well as the discursive practices associated with the long-lived anti-Jewish reading of Paul. When readers imagine that Paul sees Judaism as the “other,” it is probably inevitable that they will negatively contrast Judaism with “Christianity” as they understand it. “Christian” virtues of faith, faithfulness, grace, forgiveness, love, freedom, universalism, inclusivism, or non-discrimination tend to be denied to the “othered” tradition of Judaism.

This traditional way of proceeding is generally coupled with the widely held Christian notion that Jews are thus out of the covenant with God if they do not become Christians, that “Jews need to be saved just as do Gentiles,” and, ironically, drawing on Romans 11, that they “have been cut off” yet “can be grafted back in” “by faith.” If one presents Paul as discovering God’s grace appropriately only by faith, that naturally suggests—when compared to the Judaism he supposedly left

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<sup>22</sup> Just as a Catholic might discuss the way that he or she formerly practiced versus how they now practice, without suggesting that they are no longer a Catholic. On this passage and this topic of Paul’s self-understanding within instead of from outside of Judaism, see Mark D. Nanos, “Paul and Judaism: Why Not Paul’s Judaism?” in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle*, ed. Mark Douglas Given (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 117-60.

behind—that Judaism is not based on grace or faith; thus, some other (negative) explanation of the way that Jews think and live must be supplied.

This kind of reasoning is manifest in many readings and translations of Romans 11. That is not to say that Paul's positions cannot be contrasted with his former way of perceiving and practicing the same things, but that the terms for drawing the contrast should not continue to be essentialized and retrojected into a supposed contrast between (first-century) Judaism and (Pauline) Christianity. Rather, the contrast has to be historically contextualized, which involves recognizing that what changed for Paul was his perception of *the meaning of Jesus—within Judaism*.

This very brief sketch of a vast and complex body of contemporary research is intended to lead to this observation about current Pauline studies: Paul is more properly envisioned not as having forsaken Judaism to champion a new universal religion (a Jewish apostate), but as one feeling called within Judaism to proclaim to the nations a Jewish message about the God of Israel's acts through Christ (a Jewish apostle). Although intermediate positions are possible between these basic models, we suggest that there are good historical and exegetical reasons for today's readers to favor the latter approach to Paul's letters.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> While tangential to this essay, we want to observe that the “New Perspective on Paul” (see note 17 above) did not deal with several elements of the traditional negative Christian perception of Judaism. Thus Judaism could continue to serve as a foil for articulating what made Pauline Christianity unique and attractive versus Judaism, which Paul still is understood to have left behind as his “former” religion. There linger also key contrasts, including attributing to Judaism the essentialized traits of arrogance, self-righteousness (including reliance upon badges of identity), judgmentalism, particularism (also referred to as nationalism, ethnocentrism), exclusivism, selfishness, and even works-righteousness. Such alleged features of late Second Temple Judaism are contrasted unfavorably with Pauline “Christianity” (which we would suggest might with greater historical accuracy be called “Pauline Judaism” or “Apostolic Judaism”).

In addition, the zero-sum eschatological scenarios that see Christianity “winning” and Rabbinic Judaism “losing” at the End of Days are based upon translations of Romans 11 that were themselves shaped by the binary understanding that Paul had forsaken “Judaism” and converted to “Christianity.” By its very nature, the act of translation often requires translators to shape the language of reception so that it makes sense of words and ideas and even metaphorical or ironic elements that the language of origin presupposes. Those translational word choices are significantly governed by whether the translators conceive of Paul as a Jewish Apostle or Apostate. *We hope to demonstrate below that very different actualizations of Romans 11 ensue when theologians work from translations based upon the paradigm of Paul within Judaism.*

Furthermore, besides recognizing the very different nature of the Christ-assemblies of Paul’s day, today’s readers also must reckon with his very different vision for the ultimate destiny of all things, his eschatology. Twenty-first century readers of his letters almost certainly engage Paul’s letters with the presupposition that the “End of Days” is sometime in the far-off, indefinite future. But that most likely was not Paul’s perspective. For him the expected future was beginning now, albeit awaiting significant future developments, some of which were intimately tied to his own ministry among the nations.<sup>24</sup> The raising of the Crucified One to the life of the Age to Come had triggered the birth pangs of the New Creation. The time had come for the rest of the nations to know the God of Israel.

### **3. Reading Paul and His Eschatological Hope from “Within Judaism”**

Reading Paul as within Second Temple Judaism requires careful attention to the historical context of Paul’s language. This exegetically-grounded effort offers new and

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<sup>24</sup> Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 239-88; see discussion below.

significant hermeneutical advantages, not least with respect to Christian-Jewish relations today. Many of the most relevant passages relating to the matter of Paul's relationship to Judaism are being exegetically argued, and there is a growing list of participants in this venture.<sup>25</sup>

The basic insight proceeds from some simple perspectives noted above, although generally their implications have not been fully integrated into the way that Paul and his communities are conceptualized or discussed. If we take fuller consideration of insights such as Krister Stendahl's, that Paul was called rather than converted, that his concern with justification by faith was primarily focused on legitimating the inclusion of non-Jews within God's family rather than on individual salvation, and that fighting works-righteousness was not his life's work,<sup>26</sup> and combine them with the now widely recognized historical insight that there was not yet any such thing as or named Christianity into which to be converted or into which to seek to convert others,<sup>27</sup> it logically follows that Paul would have continued to practice and promote Judaism, albeit in an eschatologically enthusiastic form, centered on Christ. If one assumes that his audiences knew this about him (or in the case of Rome, had heard this about him), then they would have read him very differently than those Christians who since the time of the Church Fathers have generally assumed that they knew him to have abandoned Judaism for a supposedly "Law-free" Christianity.

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<sup>25</sup> Leading voices have been participating in the Paul and Judaism Consultation of the Society of Biblical Literature Consultation for several years. See the forthcoming Fortress Press (2015) edited volume by Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm, *Paul Within Judaism*.

<sup>26</sup> Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*.

<sup>27</sup> It has become common to see this stated in introductions to Pauline studies, followed by beginning to write about Paul's Christian views, Christian mission, Christian churches, and so on, as if the insight had not been stated. Paradigms do not change easily, and terminological traditions can be an important deterrent to that process, in this case, perhaps, disclosing that Pauline scholars among others, are not quite ready to embrace the logical implication that Paul was thus still practicing and promoting Judaism, even if that of representing a (small) subgroup of Jews.

Eschatological elements are woven throughout the central features of this re-reading. When Paul became convinced that Jesus was raised from the grave, this signaled for him the beginning of the awaited age to come within the midst of the present age. This was the message that he was called to announce to the nations, including those children of Israel scattered among them. This is eschatological reasoning by definition.<sup>28</sup> Obviously, for himself and other Jews similarly convinced of these propositional truth claims, the most appropriate interpretation of the Torah had then required re-evaluation in the light of the change of eons in which they now believed.

Paul's perspective was thus "chronometrical": it was "time-conditioned" by his sense that the awaited eschatological time was now breaking into the midst of present historical time as God's plans for a New Creation approached their imminent culmination. His driving concern was the question of what was appropriate "now" in the light of the beginning of the Age to Come among those who followed the Jesus who had been raised from the dead. The full "Day of the Lord" had not yet arrived, and thus the time-claims of Paul and his group could be readily disputed at the empirical level. But for those who "experienced" the revelation of this "New Creation," there was a need to reinterpret how to live Torah now, in the "time-in-between-times," we might say.

The most prominent theme in Paul's writing about the Torah concerns the needs of non-Jews. For the emerging "Paul within Judaism" interpreters, it is a focal point for how

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<sup>28</sup> Although sometimes noted by New Perspective interpreters, it should be stressed that Paul's impulse to take the message to the nations was already an Israelite/Jewish ideal present in, e.g., Isaiah's prophecies of the future role of Israel. This shows another value in reading Paul from within Judaism. In Romans 3:1-2, Paul boldly claims that the role of the Jews and circumcision is important because they were "entrusted with God's words/oracles," and throughout he imagines himself as a servant of Israel bringing the good news to the nations. He sees some of his Jewish kin stumbling and falling behind himself (in their role as Israel) to be faithful to joining him as heralds of this news, at least presently (cf. 9-11).

to best contextualize the nature of his rhetorical comments, and thereby to avoid globalizing what Paul writes about non-Jews and the Torah onto all Jews by supposing he is addressing “everyman” in every argument. This contextualization includes attending to whether any given statement is descriptive or prescriptive.

The non-Jews “in Christ” were not to become Jews in order to demonstrate the truth that the end of the ages had arrived. The time had come for the nations to join alongside of Israel in worshiping the One Creator God of all humankind. By its nature, this truth claim demands that Gentiles remain non-Jews, members of the rest of the nations.<sup>29</sup> Paul had come to recognize that the prophets could be read to announce this otherwise unexpected turning of those of the nations from idols to the One God as a signal of the arrival of the time when the wolf (nations) will lie down and dine alongside the lamb (Israel), as Isaiah related the metaphor (Isa 11:6; 65:25). Thus Israel and the nations together must practice an egalitarian way of life in their gatherings (*ekklesia*). To live this way, different yet equal, will, Paul argues, require the enabling of God’s Spirit (which can be understood to represent the end-of-the-ages or eschatological way of living) to guide and empower their lives. What is important to note but so often overlooked is that this is nothing other than a *Jewish* aspiration, one grounded in Jewish Scriptures and teachings, especially Isaiah, whom Paul quotes and echoes throughout his letters, Romans in particular.

The difference between this Jewish group and others is the chronometrical claim that this is the appropriate way to live faithfully to Torah *now*, that something has changed among humankind and thus that Israelites/Jews must develop a new relationship with those from the nations who turn to her

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<sup>29</sup> For fuller discussion, see Mark D. Nanos, “Paul and the Jewish Tradition: The Ideology of the *Shema*,” in *Celebrating Paul. Festschrift in Honor of Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, O.P., and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J.*, ed. Peter Spitaler (Washington D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2012), 62-80.

God through faithfulness to Jesus Christ. The difference is thus not between Judaism and Christianity. It is not even between the essential ideas, motivations, and impulses among different Jewish groups' beliefs and practices; it is the result of different conclusions about *what time it is* and thus about which interpretation of God's "Teaching" for Israel (=Torah) is now the most appropriate or faithful to Israel's covenantal responsibilities.

In addition, just as those Jews who have received the Spirit of God—the Spirit of the Age to Come, the Spirit that raised Jesus from death (Rom 1:4)—have to live out the Torah differently in the emerging new epoch, these Jews also have to develop ways to teach those from the nations how to live righteously as non-Jews. But non-Jews, who have received the same Spirit, are not taking on Torah observance formally, precisely because Torah was given to guide Israel, not the rest of the nations, except in the general sense of guidance in living rightly toward God and neighbor. That is why we can call Paul's propositional claims for the gospel "chronometrical": the dynamic from which Paul's (and his fellow Jesus-followers) reasoning is distinguishable from that of other Jews and Jewish groups is based on a different understanding of what the current time represents. This conditions their ideas about the most appropriate way to think and behave, including, of course, how to interpret and apply Torah (but not in any way to dismiss Torah). Other Jews might well agree that such a position will be appropriate "on that Day," but, because they don't share Paul's conviction that the Crucified One has been raised, for them that Day has not yet dawned.

From Paul's perspective, non-Jews needed to learn how to consult Tanakh and Torah and other teachings and customs without being technically bound to all of them in the same way as Jews. But these former pagans in Paul's assemblies were obligated to turn from being slaves to sin and worshipers of other gods to being servants of righteousness and the One True God. Moreover, they were initially doing so

by joining Jewish subgroups of followers of Jesus; hence, Torah behavior was normative for communal life.<sup>30</sup>

This raises a question we seek to explore: What might Paul's first-century eschatological expectations in the Letter to the Romans mean for Christians regarding how to best conceptualize theologically and morally their discussions about and relations to Jews and Judaism today?

#### 4. Romans 11: Leave All Judgments to God

Unlike, say, Thessalonica and Corinth, the assembly (or assemblies) of Christ-followers in Rome were not founded by Paul, but by other apostles who may have traveled directly from Judea. Although it seems likely that there were Christ-following Jews among the assemblies, Paul's argument targets non-Jews among them who have turned to Christ. Sometimes these non-Jews are specifically singled out [e.g., "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles" (11:5-6, 13; 11:13-32; 15:15-16)], but in many other cases Paul's focus on the non-Jews is evident in various ways, for example, by his choice of pronouns (e.g., "they" in 3:1-3; cf. 9:1-5; 10:1-2; 11:1, 11-32; 15:25-32).<sup>31</sup> One

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<sup>30</sup> By way of analogy, when a non-Catholic attends a Mass, he or she will be expected to behave according to basic cultural norms. This does not require that they become Catholics, that is, formally bound to behave outside of these communal gatherings in the same way as are Catholics. Such behavior when among Catholics also does not make them Catholics, but their behavior is Catholic-like when attending Mass, even though guests. The context for the non-Jews turning to God through Christ was more complicated, because they were becoming full members of the people of God without also becoming members of Israel, which was now recognized within these groups as one of the people of God with people from other nations being reconciled to the One God of all humankind. Thus, while Torah-derived behavior was customary in these groups because they were founded by Jews, they did not regard the non-Jews as merely guests, making for the kind of complications that Paul's letters were written to seek to resolve.

<sup>31</sup> Many exegetes representing different views of the implications recognize the make-up of the target audience is non-Jews who believe in Jesus; cf. Stanley Kent Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); A. Andrew Das, *Solving the*

of the important implications of attending to this focus on instructing the non-Jews is the logical challenge it poses to the traditional assumption that Paul is in some way trying to make Jews realize that they too are sinners or hypocrites and related suppositions. Instead, the later reader can now recognize that Paul writes from positive understandings of Jewish traditions, including the principle that one must “practice what one preaches” or be guilty of hypocrisy (ch. 2). He writes to the Romans in order to help non-Jews learn to think and live similarly.<sup>32</sup>

### A. Unity Among Jews and Gentiles in Christ

As with his earlier letters, Paul seeks to promote oneness between the Jews and Gentiles in Christ. He challenges any nascent indifference or resentment that might be arising. Such reactions must not guide the behavior of the non-Jews who now believe in Jesus as Christ toward Jews who do not share this conviction (Rom 3:1-2; 9-11). This concern is later presented in cryptic terms directed to the “strong” (or: “able” to believe Jesus is Christ) to censure their behavior so that it does not cause the “weak” or “stumbling” over the Gospel’s chronometrical assertions about Jesus and the standing of

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*Romans Debate* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007). In addition, Nanos argues that the assemblies in Rome were likely still subgroups of the larger Jewish communities, creating the confusing situation for these non-Jews that Paul’s message targets: *Mystery of Romans*; “The Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience Addressed in Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” *CBQ* 61 (1999): 283-304; “To the Churches within the Synagogues of Rome,” in *Reading Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, ed. Jerry L. Sumney (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 11-28. Agreement with that proposed scenario is not necessary to our argument, but it helps to make sense of the widely recognized implication that Paul is targeting non-Jews in this letter about their attitudes toward and confusion about Jews as well as righteous standing and behavior. Paul is addressing non-Jews confused by their recent entry into a new Jewish social world centered on the Raised One.

<sup>32</sup> See Mark D. Nanos, “Romans,” in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York, et al: Oxford University Press, 2011), 253-86; idem, “Paul’s Non-Jews Do Not Become ‘Jews,’ But Do They Become ‘Jewish’?” *Journal of the Jesus Movement in its Jewish Setting* 1.1 (2014 forthcoming).

these non-Jews to trip over these claims; Rom. 14:1-15:13).<sup>33</sup> Boasting of one's status with God without complete dedication to living according to such a relationship with God, which includes living in ways that show compassion toward others, especially others (i.e., the "stumbling") who may not be treating one well perhaps because of disagreements about these truth claims, functions as a sign of failure to realize one's dependence on God's mercy (see also, e.g., 3:9, 27; 5-6). It also shows a lack of concern that the "Body of Christ" must be united in order to serve the well-being of all of humankind (12:1-21).<sup>34</sup> Boasting in what one has received as a gift from God instead of focusing on how accordingly to give to others signifies, for Paul, an inadequate or immature understanding of faithfulness.

Paul objects to news he has evidently received about the non-Jews being tempted to contrast their newly realized righteous standing with God through Christ Jesus with that of Jews who do not share this perception (11:11-32). In order to prevent these non-Jews from acting out of resentment, Paul explains the status of Jews who do not share their convictions about Jesus in very positive covenantal terms that appeal to God's faithfulness never to fail to uphold promises that God has made. As mentioned earlier, Paul's eschatologically framed instructions to remain faithful in the present rely both upon God's faithfulness to keep the covenantal promises made in the past as well as the hoped for future of which the

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<sup>33</sup> *Mystery of Romans*, pp. 144-65.

<sup>34</sup> Although not highlighted in the commentary tradition, the "therefore" at 12:1 following the argument for living graciously instead of judgmentally or indifferently toward those Jews who do not share these non-Jews convictions opens Paul's instructions through the rest of the letter, suggesting not just the internal concerns among Christ-followers, but also the way that these Christ-followers think about and live among those who do not share their faith in Jesus. This perspectives helps to explain the presence of instructions about seeking respect and avoiding vengeance in 12:9-21, the otherwise enigmatic appearance of the call to subordination and paying of taxes in 13:1-7, the instructions about how to live respectfully toward the "weak"/"stumbling" in chapters 14 and 15, as well as the concern with the success of Paul's collection upon arrival in Judea.

prophets often spoke—even when things do not appear to be following along according to the prevailing interpretations of that script.

Paul emphatically insists that these other Jews have not lost their covenantal standing, but are in a temporary state of being “unconvinced” (11:30-32),<sup>35</sup> in order for God to begin the stage of bringing those from the nations—who themselves had been characterized by being “unconvinced” of the One God (as seen in their polytheism) until now—into favored standing alongside of Israel. Paul wants both Jews and Gentiles “in Christ” to recognize that they have equally been beneficiaries of God’s grace and so seek to live with each other in equality and unity (15:7-13).

#### B. A Temporary Development that Paul’s Ministry Will Address

It is in this context that we turn to examine more closely the language Paul uses to disclose the mystery of how God is presently working among Israelites and non-Israelites in vv. 25-26. The NRSV translates the passage as follows:

So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved....

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<sup>35</sup> In view of the argument Paul is making about the present state of many of his fellow Jews, appealing to the guarantee of God’s faithfulness to restore all Israel in vv. 25-32, and that God is using this present anomalous situation as a way to include non-Jews among the people of God, the more common meaning of *peithō* as persuade or be persuaded/convinced (see *LSJ* 1353-54) in vv. 30-32, around which Paul’s point works, seems warranted, rather than the prevailing translations that introduce the notion of “disobedience.” See Nanos, “Romans”, in *JANT*, notes to vv. 30-32 on p. 278.

As usually translated and interpreted, Paul is understood to be envisioning a time when Jesus will return, the *parousia* or second coming of Jesus. The full number of the Gentiles is understood to indicate the time when all those from among the nations destined to turn to God through Christ have done so. This is next to be followed by the arrival of Jesus in glory, and then that the rest of the Jews will realize that he is the Christ and so believe in him, in effect becoming Christians. This way of understanding Paul's message in these verses is a central element in the current Catholic eschatological reasoning we mentioned at the outset.

We propose that it is unlikely that Paul is trying to sketch out for a countless succession of Christian generations a time that remains still in the indefinite future for us today. Rather, he describes an era he believed would take place *during his lifetime and ministry*, even though he saw that this process was not turning out precisely as he imagined it would. His confession that God's plans are a mystery he cannot even begin to grasp (11:33-36) provides the warrant for later readers to seek not only to understand Paul's language in its original context, but also to begin to rethink what Paul might say to us today, after a history he couldn't imagine and when things did not turn out as he had hoped—yet. Would he not still be convinced that God's promises were certain but that it was his own understanding that needed adjustment? Wouldn't he then begin to rethink how to understand not only the present but also the future?

If Paul is explaining in vv. 25-26 the role that he sees his own ministry playing in the mystery of God's work among Jews and non-Jews, then the element of time is accentuated in a different way than has usually been highlighted. This can be demonstrated from the prevailing translations, and even more when we show an alternative translation to make better sense of his positive treatment of Israel's present, temporary state, one that is clearly central to the message he seeks to deliver to the non-Jews in Rome.

In his explanation, Paul employs two metaphors: that of messengers proceeding along an assigned route, some of whom stumble on the way and thus open gaps for others to enter into the event as well (vv. 11-15); and that of an olive tree with bent branches, opening spaces into which foreign branches can be grafted (vv. 17-24). The runners symbolize the God-given mission of Jews to be “lights to the nations,” a task which Paul believes must now be vigorously pursued since the End of Days has commenced with the raising of Jesus (ch. 10). Those running to announce this news to the nations most enthusiastically and faithfully are, for Paul, Jewish followers of Christ such as himself, while those who are stumbling (but not falling) are unconvinced Jews who do not realize what is happening.

The pattern that Paul has experienced in his ministry, but which the Christ-following Gentiles in Rome will not experience until Paul's planned arrival, involves him, as a representative and messenger of the unfolding restoration of Israel, delivering the Gospel message first to the synagogues of Rome.<sup>36</sup> He cites Isaiah 59:20-21 to this effect in v. 26: “The Deliverer will come from Zion.” Paul combines this language with that of Isaiah 27:9. These passages have to do with God coming to the rescue of Israel, gathering Israelites from among the nations, where her fruit has filled the whole world. Some

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<sup>36</sup> In *Mystery of Romans*, pp. 239-288, Nanos explains in detail how the concerns Paul expresses in Romans, indeed, the exigency that provokes him to write this letter, arise from fear that the growing resentment among these non-Jews will lead to events that close off willingness to welcome him to share his views in the synagogues of Rome upon his planned arrival. Paul's ministry follows a two-step pattern of preaching first to Israelites scattered among the nations, which provokes a divided response. This event signals the time to turn fully to the nations, which in turn provokes his fellow Jews to reconsider whether the end of the ages expectations for Israel to enlighten the nations has indeed begun, as Paul claims, when they witness members from the nations turning from their gods to the One God through faith in Jesus. This interpretation of Paul's strategy is compatible with the pattern traced in Acts (see, e.g., 13:13-14:7), in sharp contrast to the traditional readings of Paul, which find the (very Jewish and synagogue oriented) Paul of Acts to be very different than the Paul traditionally constructed from his letters.

of his fellow Jews will be convinced when he preaches in Rome; some will not; then he will turn fully to the non-Israelites there, and their positive response will provoke his fellow Jews to reconsider whether the Age to Come has indeed arrived, and thus, whether it is time to proclaim the gospel to the nations alongside of Paul.<sup>37</sup>

This scenario is what Paul tried to communicate throughout chapter 11, especially in vv. 11-32. He developed a series of metaphors and explanations, albeit cryptic, to this end. One metaphor, drawing upon Paul's insistence that Israel's special trust is God's words/oracles (3:2), functions by picturing some of his fellow Israelites stumbling instead of continuing, with him and other Christ-following Jews, to bring the news to the nations (vv. 11-16). He insists that the gap that has opened among these Israelites, because some have stumbled instead of carrying out this task, has benefited the non-Israelites. *This is a temporary development*; in time those who have stumbled will catch back up. This will result in a situation far superior to the present anomalous condition, which Paul likens to the superiority of the resurrected life of the New Creation to normal, mortal history.

In another metaphor, that of the olive tree, Paul pictures some branches as being broken (as in bent, to be discussed below), while others remain in good health, such as he sees himself representing (vv. 17-24). In the argument following these metaphors, Paul seeks to explain these developments as a mystery involving the intertwined fates of Israelites and members from the nations in codependence

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<sup>37</sup> Paul calls this provoking his kinsmen to "jealousy of his ministry" in vv. 13-14. Paul uses *jealous* here in the positive sense of "emulation" to make the point that he expects his fellow Jews to see in the success of his ministry among the non-Israelites the fulfillment of their own expectation, as Israelites, to share in the privilege of bringing the message of God's reconciliation to the nations, which will provoke them to reconsider whether the chronometric claims of the gospel are being confirmed. See Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, pp. 283-285; idem, "Jewish Context," 300-304.

upon the mercy of God, leading in time to the reconciliation of those from the nations and the restoration of “all Israel.”<sup>38</sup>

In vv. 25-26, Paul provides a kind of timeline. The NRSV translates the passage thus: “So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written....” In spite of translation choices that we believe can be greatly improved, the idea that Paul is engaged in disclosing a series of events comes through, and that he sees the end result for Israel in positive terms. This passage is also central to the prevailing Christian position that Paul foresees a time when the Jewish people will believe in Jesus Christ. We too see a timeline, but differently, and we suggest a translation that retains both the metaphorical elements that follow from the olive tree allegory just completed in the previous verses, as well as one that better captures the positive valence of Paul’s comments about the present condition of his fellow Jews.

We propose that Paul is explaining how his ministry is unfolding among Jews and non-Jews, following a pattern that will also take place when he is able to reach Rome. It is not likely a scenario in the distant future involving the parousia, after Paul’s lifetime, but his expectations about what will happen as a direct result of his ministry when he arrives in Rome in the near future. The situation in Rome had not developed according to (Paul’s) plan, because, well, Paul has not yet been able to get there to carry out this strategic program for reaching Israel and the nations in what he considers to be the proper order. The anomalous situation of tensions between Jews and non-Jews in the assembly or assemblies in Rome is a

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<sup>38</sup> The brief discussion of passages from Romans 11 draws upon a series of published works noted below at certain points, and in a more summary fashion, in Mark D. Nanos, “Romans 11 and Christian and Jewish Relations: Exegetical Options for Revisiting the Translation and Interpretation of this Central Text,” *Criswell Theological Review* N.S. 9.2 (2012): 3-21; idem, “Romans,” *JANT*, 275-78.

direct result, but one he hopes to rectify soon. As we will discuss, things did not turn out quite as he imagined that they would, and he allowed for that too, in vv. 33-36, wherein he describes God working in human history beyond the ways that we can imagine, even if the ends are guaranteed by promise.

Paul refers to the state of Israel, or some Israelites, as *porōsis*, which has traditionally been translated as “hardened” or “blinded,” and often compared to the hardened heart of Pharaoh. Yet Paul does not use *sklēros* here, which is the term used to describe Pharaoh’s heart. The word he uses, *porōsis*, is a medical term referring to the formation of a “callus” to protect a wounded limb. It is a positive development, a temporary way for the body (or plant) to preserve the health of the limb and thus “all” of the body.<sup>39</sup> It makes little sense to characterize his fellow Jews as “hardened,” in the usual negative sense that is likened to that of Pharaoh’s heart, in an argument in which he seeks to provoke these non-Jews to be charitable, whereas to characterize them as in a state of repair, while still a value judgment, is at least generous. Moreover, the adverbial phrase *apo merous*, usually translated as if adjectival, “part of Israel” or “Israel *partially*,” can be translated as “for a while” or “temporarily,”<sup>40</sup> preserving its function to modify the verb “has happened.” We thus have the translation: “that a callus has temporarily happened for Israel,” signifying that God is protecting these Israelites in spite of present appearances of their state from the viewpoint of the non-Jews addressed. We suggest that Paul is referring to the initial divided state of Israel that results from his proclamation of the Gospel in the synagogues, with some Israelites accepting the chronometric claims and joining Paul, and others rejecting—“unconvinced” by these claims. The next phrase is likewise of interest.

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<sup>39</sup> Mark D. Nanos, “‘Callused,’ Not ‘Hardened’: Paul’s Revelation of Temporary Protection Until All Israel Can Be Healed,” in *Reading Paul in Context: Explorations in Identity Formation*, ed. Kathy Ehrensperger and J. Brian Tucker (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 52-73.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Rom 15:24, where Paul writes of his plan, before heading off to Spain, to stay in Rome “for a while” or “temporarily” (*apo merous*)!

The temporary protection will function “until” a certain point in time. That point seems to draw, as does the callus imagery, from the tree allegory, by referring to “fullness” (*plērōma*). This might be when the graft takes, or when it bears fruit. If metaphorical, it is unlikely to refer here to “the full number,” as often translated. This callus will protect Israel “until the fullness of the nations *begins/commences (eiselthe)*,” in other words, when the fullness of the nations is addressed by the fullness of *Israel*, i.e., by the stumbling messengers who get with the program and the bent or injured branches after their wounds are healed under the protection of a callus. With both the messengers on the road and the olive tree metaphor, Paul is referring to the positive response to his preaching when he and all Israel turn “fully” to those of the nations following his initial preaching aimed at his fellow Israelites. In terms of the metaphor of some stumbling, this represents those from the nations who step into the temporary gap that has opened up between those who are still walking in full step and those temporarily falling a bit behind because of tripping over whether the end of the ages has really begun with Jesus, who thus doubt whether it is appropriate at this time to bring this message to the nations (vv. 11-15). Paul argues that the message of the Gospel will be fully effective only when the gap among the messengers has been closed back up, and not by the falling aside of those (Jews) who have tripped. Non-Jews in the Jesus assemblies must not think in zero-sum terms and boast over those Jews who are unconvinced that the Day of the Lord is imminent, as Paul makes clear in the words that follow.

Paul completes his sentence by asserting the prophetic promise: “and then (or, and thus), all Israel will be restored (or, saved/rescued),” followed by the cobbling together of passages from Isaiah discussed above that affirm God’s benevolent intention toward Israel in the end, following the disciplining of some who are presently unfaithful. This affirmation of God’s promises for Israel’s restoration continues in the balance of the chapter, including the exclamation that

Israel is “beloved for the sake of the fathers,” and that “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (vv. 28-29).

The time element is central throughout the disclosure of this mystery, but is it not built around events Paul anticipated to take place in his own lifetime as a direct result of his ministry among Israelites of the diaspora and those from the other nations whom he sought to reach, “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek,” as he puts it several times in Romans? We will return to this matter, but first a few more elements in Romans 11 deserve further consideration.

### C. A Slip into but Then a Recoiling from Binary Thinking

Let us turn for a moment back to Paul’s allegory of the olive tree. There Paul added a further twist to his argument of some stumbling temporarily by drawing on imagery from an olive tree, to which the prophets also appealed in their arguments about the future in contrast to the present state of things (e.g., Isa 27-29). The message is similar, supporting the basic lines of argument against drawing mistaken conclusions from the present appearance that many of Paul’s fellow Jews are not joining him to announce the gospel to the nations (“yet,” as Paul sees things). But Paul develops the point in several new directions, some of which on the surface, especially as commonly translated, can be understood to undermine rather than enhance the logic of his argument thus far. This seems to arise from his move into a diatribal conversation with the wild shoot from a wild olive tree that has been grafted in among the natural branches of a cultivated olive tree.

As Paul develops the allegory, God is seen as poised to engage the wild shoot’s mistaken notion of divine favor at the ultimate expense of some natural branches now described as broken (vv. 20-24). Paul labors to clarify that this is only a temporary state, as he did in the previous metaphor. But perhaps because he addresses a wild shoot that has been *cut off* from a wild tree, he changes his language from what he introduced when depicting some of the natural branches as

“broken” as in “bent” by way of verbal forms of *ekklaō* (in vv. 17-21), to terms revolving around “cut off” as in “pruned” by way of verbal forms of *ekkoptō* in verses 22-24.<sup>41</sup> This has led interpreters to choose to translate Paul’s allegory throughout the whole olive tree passage as if the natural branches had been cut off of the tree rather than remaining on the tree, albeit bent, and thus protected by the formation of a callus until eventually restored to good health. But the point to which Paul directs attention is any nascent tendency for the wild shoot to proudly celebrate its new place at the expense of some natural branches that have suffered temporary impairment. His metaphorical language, easily missed in the translation, takes aim at any temptation for the shoot to suppose it is now superior to the natural branches that are suffering from being bent: “Do not think of yourself as above (the other branches), but be afraid.”

Paul’s switch from *ekklaō* to *ekkoptō* raises a zero-sum implication (they lose, you win) that Paul then tries to overcome by claiming that God can graft back in natural branches that have been cut off more easily than God can graft in a shoot cut off of a wild tree, which is, from a strictly horticultural perspective, not reasonable. But it should be noted that when he described the state of some of these natural branches at the beginning of the allegory, before having God address the wild shoot’s presumptuousness directly in a diatribe, he had described them simply as broken/bent (*ekklaō*), not cut off (*ekkoptō*).

In the olive tree imagery, the wild shoot that is grafted among the branches is used to represent the precarious place of the non-Jews among the Jews even though some (many) of the Jews do not (yet) share their faithfulness to Christ and the declaration of the Gospel to the nations (notice, there is but

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<sup>41</sup> For a fuller explanation of the translation decisions to which we are appealing, see Nanos, “‘Broken Branches’: A Pauline Metaphor Gone Awry? (Romans 11:11-36),” in *Between Gospel and Election: Explorations in the Interpretation of Romans 9-11*, ed. Florian Wilk and J. Ross Wagner (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 339-76.

one single branch placed “among” the branches natural to the tree). In both of these metaphors, as in the somewhat more direct comments in vv. 25-26 and the citations in 26-27 (conflating parts of Isa 27:9 and 59:20-21) as well as the conclusions drawn in vv. 28-31, the *temporariness* of the present situation is emphasized. There are some Jews who are convinced of this unfolding process, such as Paul, and there are some who are not. Paul explains that this divided state is actually a part of God’s plan to spark the proclamation of the Gospel to those of the nations, such as the addressees of Paul’s instructions here. But that is not the end goal. Rather, Paul understands God to be using the commencement of this activity among the nations to provoke his fellow Jews to question—when they see these non-Jews turning from idols to the worship of the One God, turning from slavery to sin to slavery to righteousness (cf. ch. 6)—whether indeed the end of the ages has commenced, that time when Israel will be restored and the nations reconciled. He seeks to provoke his fellow Jews to jealousy of his “ministry,” that is, to want to become fellow-participants in what Paul is experiencing, the fulfillment of Israel’s entrustment with God’s words/oracles (vv. 13-14; cf. 3:2).

The unexpected turning to the nations after the divided response to the Gospel among Jews will, Paul believes, provoke the reconsideration of this message by the rest of the Jews. He argues that when his kinspeople see those from the other nations turning to the One God through Paul as messenger (= apostle) of Israel, that they will recognize he is fulfilling their own aspirations to be the light to the nations when the awaited Age arrives. They will thus conclude that the Age to Come must have begun and reconsider the message about Jesus. They will conclude with Paul that it is their calling to now proclaim this message to their fellow Jews among the nations as well as to the rest of humankind. In time, not only will all Israel be rescued from the suffering of the present age, but the reconciliation of the world will finally arrive (vv. 12, 15). In terms of Paul’s metaphors, the stumbling messengers will resume their commanded course and the callus-protected

branches will be fully healed on the tree, but now with those of the nations walking alongside or grafted among them.

Paul uses this argument to address directly any nascent ideas stemming from zero-sum thinking among the non-Jews in Rome that their gain has come at the expense of Israelites—as if having replaced them, as if there is room for only so many. It would be natural enough to conclude that if somehow the present level of being unconvinced of the Gospel claims among many Jews had opened a gate for the admission of non-Jews among the people of God, then all the more benefit would it be for these non-Jews if those Jews remained unconvinced: would these non-Jews not have replaced those Jews as the people of God? Wouldn't it be better for more non-Jews to “get in” if fewer Jews remained unconvinced? Paul rejects this potential reasoning and confronts it head on: some Israelites, to be sure, have stumbled over his taking the message to the nations that the birth pangs of the New Age had begun with the raising of the Crucified One. But they have not fallen, only temporarily tripped so as to open a gap into which some non-Jews can step alongside them. That analogy nevertheless suggests a zero-sum or limited good reality, that someone had to suffer some kind of loss for another to enjoy some kind of gain.

The idea that there are only so many good resources and thus that for one to gain more requires another to lose something is still common today, arguably a part of the theological reasoning we seek to dispute, and it was all the more common for Greco-Romans of Paul's time, where the idea of envy and thus the evil eye was an accepted explanation of the leveling affects one should fear with the gaining of additional goods or fortune.<sup>42</sup> Paul tries to correct this impression, but

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. A. W. Gouldner, *Enter Plato: Classical Greece and the Origins of Social Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 1965); P. Walcot, *Envy and the Greeks: A Study of Human Behaviour* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1978). Nanos has applied this element to the interpretation of Galatians; see *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 184-91, 279-80.

analogies are always problematic in some way. So he argues in *a fortiori* style that as great as this development of a gap among Israelites has been for inviting the non-Jews who turn to God through Christ into sharing the space with them as God's people, the fullness of the opportunity it provides will only be realized when those Israelites who are temporarily falling a bit behind regain their step when they recognize the in-breaking of God's Reign. More Jews will bring light to the nations: it will be like "life from the dead!" (11:11-15).

This provides an interesting case where we can see Paul arguing against the zero-sum logic that his own arguments and analogies otherwise implicitly encourage, and doing so by appeal to an eschatological reality that can be more readily recognized by avoiding the impulse to suppose there are a limited number of people who can gain "at that time." God is therein recognized to be powerful enough to work independently of the limited resources that restrict human perceptions shaped by limited realities, including human frailties, failings, and the self-focused and fatalistic suppositions that characterize the thinking and life of the present age.

The point of Paul's allegories, censuring any suggestion that a non-Jew will ultimately gain the most by the loss of the Jew who does not share his new-found faithfulness to Christ, much less to have replaced the Jew, has unfortunately been undermined both by translations and interpretive discussions. The most obvious case is the decision to translate *ekklaō* as "broken off" or "cut off," but perhaps the most egregious case is to translate *en autois* as "in their place" (v. 17), explicitly expressing that Christ-following non-Jews have replaced Jews who have not become Christ-followers, when it instead means engrafted "among them."<sup>43</sup> When translated "among them,"

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<sup>43</sup> Another inexplicable NRSV translation decision is writing "they are enemies of God for your sake" in 11:28, when there is no manuscript evidence for "of God." Furthermore, the word translated enemies is an adjective (*exthroi*), better rendered something like "estranged for your sake," paralleling the adjectival "*beloved [agapētho]* for the sake of the fathers" with which it is balanced, and referring to the state of impairment that Paul

the reader remains aware that it is among the branches referred to as broken that the shoot has been grafted, which retains the salience that the branch must still be on the tree, although bent, rather than, as commonly conceptualized, as totally severed from the tree. The allegory can advance the temporary condition central to the previous metaphor of stumbling but not fallen, but it works directly against that if the natural branches representing Jews who do not believe Jesus is the Christ and thus do not join Paul to declare this among the nations, have been cut off. They would have actually fallen, despite Paul's emphatic rejection of this in v. 11.

Again, we see Paul appeal to eschatological reasoning to undermine perceptions based upon appearances in the present time and age. His arguments proceed from the conviction that the end of the ages has dawned, but that this is not yet apparent to everyone, not least to many of his fellow Jews, and that is cause for great concern and grieving on his part, and, he argues, it should be also for the non-Jews who have turned to God through Christ.

For Paul, the present non-persuaded state of many Israelites about the Gospel is inextricably tied to the non-persuaded state of many of those from the nations until that time. God is using this temporary stage, which is a part of Paul's own strategy for how to declare the Gospel among Jews and non-Jews, to reach all of humankind in order to bring about the next stage, the awaited inexorable Reign of God. In the meantime, the message is that these non-Jews must remain faithful to what they have received and leave the judgment of others to God—a message that remains pertinent today.

Paul is certain that “all Israel will be saved” or “rescued” from the present, temporary stage of God's mysterious

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has just appealed to in various metaphorical ways as stumbling and bent, temporarily, and for your benefit. See Norman Beck, “Translations of the New Testament for Our Time,” in *Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity's Sacred Obligation*, ed. Mary C. Boys (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 2005), 200-210, here 204-206.

way of reconciling all of humankind, of bringing about the day when the wolves will lie down with the lambs and not devour them. The gifts and the calling of God are certain and irrevocable, which means that God is beholden to all Israelites in covenantal terms stretching back to promises made to Abraham, just as parents are beholden to their children. There are many stages in a relationship, but the bond is not broken. What Paul insists upon is not judging the final outcome by present appearances. He even tries to explain current events in terms that might help one understand the anomalies that present circumstances present to one who is convinced that the outcome will be other than it may seem today.

If Paul believed that his own ministry among the nations, turning to them fully with the gospel, would provoke his fellow Jews to reconsider the message that with Jesus the New Creation was dawning and that they therefore had a responsibility to announce to this to the nations, this did not play out as he envisaged it in the Letter to Romans—certainly not yet. We propose that an awareness of the ad hoc nature of Paul's arguments in Romans 11 invites Christians to consider how best to actualize Paul's eschatological reasoning today.

Central to his argument is the ideal of taking account of one's own responsibility to be faithful in view of the gifts received, and to leave to God the judging of whether another is being responsible to their covenanting with God. God has promised the restoration of Israel; how that is to take place, what events it will involve, is not ours to decide or even to know.

Although Paul would almost certainly still believe that it will involve his fellow Jews recognizing Jesus to be the appointed Messiah whose work remained uncompleted, it must be remembered that for him that was still an option *within* Judaism. It was not a decision to turn *from* Judaism and to convert to a new religion. It is consonant with Paul's own reasoning to stress that God is bigger than any boxes—even the ones he could draw, not to mention those that have emerged

over history—and to focus on living graciously toward each other in the temporariness of our own time, according to what each believes to represent faithfulness. We argue that it does violence to basic Pauline convictions for readers today to simply echo his first-century imminent eschatological speculations as if not reshaped by their own, later interpretive concerns and perspectives. A messianically-enthusiastic Pharisee within late Second Temple Judaism almost certainly imagined the eschaton from within a very different thought-world than have most Christians in later Gentile churches. These differences—and the implications of the intervening millennia—must be respected.

### **5. Conclusion: Paul's Eschatological Speculations and Zerosum Eschatologies**

In this essay, we have envisioned Paul as working from within Judaism, shaped by his eschatological convictions about the meaning of Jesus for Israel and the nations. Convinced that he was living in the throes of the birth of the New Creation, this messianically-oriented Pharisee adapted and applied existing Jewish apocalyptic imagery to address the pastoral needs and questions of the nascent assemblies of the Crucified, Raised, and Coming One. Most specifically, he addressed what he saw as an unhealthy attitude arising among some non-Jews in the Roman Christ-assemblies.

Christians who actualize Paul's reflections in today's ecclesial context are, in a sense, imitating Paul, the other apostles, the evangelists, the authors of the later books of the Tanakh/Old Testament, and the rabbis in bringing earlier traditions to bear on their own particular circumstances. For the Catholic Church today, this includes actualizing Pauline writings in the context of a community that doesn't share his perspective on what the evangelizing of the nations signified within Judaism, or the immediacy of a mission driven by the imminence of the eschatological events he expected but that did not occur in his lifetime. Since—unlike Paul and his communities—the Church has come to represent a non-Jewish

entity, and is thus compelled to consider how its relationship to Israel as the “other,” its commitment to “genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant”<sup>44</sup>—rather than to their replacement or conversion to Christianity—must shape how it actualizes Paul’s words today because it does not share his first-century vantage point on how this “chronometrical” timetable would play out within Judaism.

Two additional points should be made about drawing upon Paul’s eschatological writings today. The first results from a tendency to reify what Paul himself admits are faltering human efforts to grasp divine Providence in its ultimacy. It is simply not possible to actualize these texts as if they provide consistent and detailed eschatological timetables and sequences, or at least, to do so without the exegetical imperative to read these texts across the cultural and temporal divide between Paul’s time and our own.<sup>45</sup> Paul speculated on the basis of foundational convictions, adapting contemporary concepts in an ad hoc fashion—sometimes persuading his audience (as well as later readers), sometimes failing to do so—in response to pastoral issues in the earliest assemblies.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, we

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<sup>44</sup> John Paul II, “Prayer at the Western Wall” (March 26, 2000); Benedict XVI, “Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome” (January 17, 2010); Idem, “Address to Delegates of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations” (February 12, 2009).

<sup>45</sup> For Catholics, this dialogue across the centuries is required. See the Pontifical Biblical Commission, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” (1993), III.

<sup>46</sup> Without adding another major section to this paper, we note that Paul elsewhere also speculated eschatologically in order to address pastoral needs. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul had to respond to unexpected deaths in the assembly: were the dead unworthy of seeing the imminent Day of the Lord? He answered with a reassuring eschatological vision founded on the conviction that just as Jesus was raised, so, too, those who have died “in Christ” will also be raised (4:13-18). In 1 Corinthians Paul disagreed with those who, apparently finding corporeality distasteful rejected the idea that the physical body of Jesus was raised after his death. Paul argued that eschatologically the flesh of sinful humanity will be replaced by the spiritual flesh of the new humanity (15:12-58). He depicts Christ’s eschatological deeds in very physical terms: he will hand over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.

might note that hesitancy about end-times details is expressed elsewhere in the New Testament.<sup>47</sup>

A second concern we've stressed is the deep-seated habit of thinking about eschatology in tendentious, zero-sum ways. Paul himself resisted such approaches, and even he could slip into that way of thinking in his ad hoc way of arguing, focused on whatever pastoral matter he sought to address rather than the writing of theological treatises per se. Today, there are many Jews and Christians who imagine that at the dawning of the messianic age one tradition will finally learn that it was wrong and that the other was right. Some Christians envision that Jews will finally recognize their error in failing to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Son of God. On the other hand, some Jews "believe that the worship of Jesus as God is a serious religious error displeasing to God even if the worshipper is a non-Jew, and that at the end of days Christians will come to recognize this."<sup>48</sup>

Such binary thinking, which basically casts Jews and Christians in the role of either winners or losers, seems so self-serving as to be unworthy of association today with the covenanting God of Israel or the Church. Surely, Christian theologians who are committed to overcoming supersession-

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Then "when all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all" (15:28). Once more, Paul has responded to a pastoral situation in one of the assemblies he had founded by drawing upon existing tropes to produce an eschatological scenario that affirms teachings he believes to be defining, in this case that Christ physically died and was physically as the "first fruits" of what will happen eschatologically.

<sup>47</sup> This is true elsewhere in Paul (Rom 11:33-36; 1 Cor 15:50), and also in the later synoptic tradition, most pointedly in Mk 13:32 || Mt 24:36. If not even the Son knows "the day and the hour," then presumably his followers cannot presume to know how or when the eschaton will unfold. Indeed, such presumption would disrespect divine freedom to act in surprising ways that elude human prognostication.

<sup>48</sup> David Berger, "On *Dominus Iesus* and the Jews," paper delivered at the 17th meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, New York, May 1, 2001. Available at: <http://www.cjlr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/analysis/498-berger01may1>.

ism toward the Jewish people and tradition can be more creative than uncritically reiterating polemics from the Church's anti-Jewish past. Fortunately, the Pontifical Biblical Commission has offered an intriguing perspective on this issue:

What has already been accomplished in Christ must yet be accomplished in us and in the world. The definitive fulfillment will be at the end with the resurrection of the dead, a new heaven and a new earth. Jewish messianic expectation is not in vain. It can become for us Christians a powerful stimulus to keep alive the eschatological dimension of our faith. Like them, we too live in expectation. The difference is that for us the One who is to come will have the traits of the Jesus who has already come and is already present and active among us.<sup>49</sup>

The use of such expressions as “we, too, live in expectation” and “the eschatological dimension of our faith,” remind readers that both Judaism *and* the Church will, in a sense, be superseded in the Reign of God. In particular the formulation that the eschatological messiah will possess “the *traits* of Jesus,” which will be recognized as such by Christians, is very notable. A similar expression was used by Cardinal Walter Kasper, past president of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with Jews, when he said, “But whilst Jews expect the coming of the Messiah, who is still unknown, Christians believe that he has already *shown his face* in Jesus of Nazareth whom we as Christians therefore confess as the Christ, he who at the end of time will be revealed as the Messiah for Jews and for all nations.”<sup>50</sup> Although the PBC was referring to the traits of an eschatological messiah being

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<sup>49</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (2001), §21.

<sup>50</sup> Walter Cardinal Kasper, “The Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews: A Crucial Endeavour of the Catholic Church.” Boston College, Nov. 6, 2002, III, emphasis added. Available at: <http://www.ccrj.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/kasper/642-kasper02nov6-2>

recognizable by Christians as belonging to Jesus, Cardinal Kasper was speaking of Jesus of Nazareth as having proleptically<sup>51</sup> manifested and as continuing to manifest the eschatological messiah to the church.<sup>52</sup>

While one quotation looks forward to the future eschaton and the other looks to the past as manifesting the eschaton, they both use metaphoric speech to address the as-yet-unrealized expectations of many Christians and Jews. In each case, the practices of both traditions will be altered in the Age to Come, e.g., Catholic sacramental life will be rendered obsolete by life in God's direct presence and will Jews continue to study Torah in the divine presence?

Furthermore, Jewish recognition of the eschatological "One who is to come," since their "messianic expectation is not in vain," according to this phrasing, logically depends upon Jews perceiving some identifiable messianic "traits" communicated by the Jewish tradition. One way of conceiving of these messianic matters, although there are diverse ideas both among and between Jews and Christians, is that the eschatological messiah will therefore be recognizable by both Jews and Christians on the basis of different legitimate but converging "traits." This is the "both/and" option.

It follows that each community, by seeing the other's recognition, would fully understand for the first time the "rightness" of not only its own point of view, but of the other's as well. What had been opaque about the other in historic time would become transparent in eschatological "time."

This all suggests that eschatological scenarios have greater complexity than simple zero-sum phrases like "a

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<sup>51</sup> A prolepsis is a premature or anticipatory eruption of eschatological realities into historic time.

<sup>52</sup> A relevant quote from an earlier PBC document also speaks of the resurrection as a proleptic witness: "The resurrection of Christ . . . by its very nature cannot be proved in an empirical way. For by it Jesus was introduced into 'the world to come'" [PBC, 1984, 1.2.6].

Jewish turn to Christ” or “Christians will see their error.” If, as Christians would certainly posit, the birth of the church was part of the divine plan, then Christians must also contemplate the possibility that the development of the post-Temple rabbinic heritage was also part of the divine plan. Likewise, Jews must grapple with whether or not the birth of the Church reflected God’s will for Israel as light to the nations.<sup>53</sup>

We suggest that this was, in fact, what Paul was up to in Romans 11: seeing the advent of Christ in terms of Israel’s universal mission as presented in the Tanakh. Today’s readers should recognize that his effort to combat nascent ideas of zero-sum replacement involved different pairings (non-Jews as well as Jews as still salient categories) in Christ vs. those not yet persuaded of Jesus as Christ, rather than Christians vs. Jews in today’s categories.<sup>54</sup> Ironically, the ways in which Paul’s words were later translated and interpreted fostered the very kind of binary thinking he was seeking to counter (which was, as discussed, incongruously also present in the images with which he sought to counter it).

If, then, as an exercise of divine freedom, God now works on behalf of our two related covenanting communities so that we learn to walk through historical time together, it may be that the eschaton will indeed bring about our absolute reconciliation, not in the sense of one ceding itself to the other, but rather in the sense of both joining in yielding themselves to the ultimate Reality.

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<sup>53</sup> For more on this point, see Philip A. Cunningham, “Reflections from a Roman Catholic on a Reform Theology of Christianity,” *CCAR Journal* (Spring 2005): 61-73.

<sup>54</sup> We would observe, too, that the fact that we have presented a hopefully defensible reconstruction of Paul’s logic in Romans 11 (based on understanding him as a Jewish apostle within Judaism) is itself sufficient reason to doubt facile binary readings (based on the highly questionable view of Paul as Jewish apostate outside Judaism). To the degree that current Christian “eschatological postponement” approaches are themselves predicated on Paul as standing outside Second Temple Judaism, then they are also questionable.

Perhaps in the PBC study's eschatological allusions we can discern a resonance with the humble doxology penned two millennia ago by the Apostle as he pondered the relationship resulting from Israel's initially divided response to the non-Israelites who were turning to Israel's God through faith in Jesus. Following his assertion that everyone has at times misunderstood the Holy One, Paul appeals to the criterion of humility that everyone should thereafter embrace, both for themselves, and in their refraining from judging others:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable God's judgments and how enigmatic God's ways! O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen. I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned (11:33-12:3; NRSV).

Humility is a virtue that is perhaps insufficiently valued in academia. There is much more that we don't "know" than what we suppose we do. Perhaps it is time to theologize accordingly, especially when it impacts our views of the other who claims to seek to do God's will also, according to what is "believed" by them, like ourselves, to be most appropriate for "now."