Introduction

The year 1977 marked a distinct turn in the world of NT studies. It was this year in which E.P. Sanders published his watershed book, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism.* Ever since the debate between Luther and the Papacy, it has been commonly held in Protestantism that Paul's doctrine of justification by faith was a direct attack against Jewish legalism. However, Sanders performed extensive research in order to demonstrate that first century Judaism was not a religion of legalism, and that scholars since Luther have read a sixteenth-century debate into the NT. The significance of Sanders' thesis (now called the 'New Perspective') could hardly be underestimated. It has shaken the world of NT studies to the point that it has been recognised as having the greatest influence on Pauline studies since the Reformation.

Before the reader laments – 'Oh no, not another article on the New Perspective!' – let me briefly explain why I have chosen to write on such a well-trodden topic. First of all, although most NT scholars and students who have been around the field for a while will be well versed in the current discussion, many budding theologians are still discovering it for the first time. Those who can remember their first encounter with the so-called 'New Perspective' (whether it was in 1977 or 1997!) know that it has not produced the most reader-friendly literature. I therefore primarily wish to help those who are in the midst of an exegetical wrestling match with Paul and the law, trying to understand the flow of influence leading up to what has now been called the New Perspective.

Secondly, I hope to be a bit more novel by focusing on those scholars who wrote either before 1977 or not much later. This essay is not designed to be a critique, or a verification, of the New Perspective. Rather, I simply wish to review the work of some influential 'New Perspective-like' scholars who either wrote previous to, or relatively independent of, E.P. Sanders. To tie things together, I will conclude by looking at the monumental work of the man himself.

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2 This term has been coined by James D.G. Dunn in his article, 'The New Perspective on Paul', *BJRL* 65 (1983), 95–122.
3 'Since the Reformation, I think no school of thought, not even the Bulmannian School, has exerted a greater influence upon Pauline scholarship than the school of the New Perspective;' Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), xiv.
The Old Perspective on the New Perspective

Uneartthing the Seedbed: Moore, Stendahl, Howard, Tyson, Dahl and Wright

George Foot Moore

It was George Moore who was one of the greatest influences on the subsequent work of Sanders in the late 1970s. Moore exposed the highly fallacious studies of previous NT scholars, criticising both their method and use of the original sources. Focusing on three prominent NT scholars (Ferdinand Weber, Emil Schürer, and Wilhem Boussed), Moore revealed their failure to perform a true historical study, which resulted in a distorted portrayal of first-century Judaism.

Moore begins by showing that writers since the early Christian Fathers have misrepresented first-century Judaism. Their primary goal was the edification of the Gentiles, not the conversion of the Jews. This began to change through the ages as the conversion of Jews became the main desire. As Jewish/Christian dialogue began to heighten, Christian apologists quickly learned that the only way to achieve conversion was to argue from the Jewish literature (Targum, Talmud, and Midrash) and to demonstrate first-hand that early Jewish interpretation of the OT possesses much discontinuity with medieval exegesis. In order to win Jews to Christ, Christian apologists had to look to the Jewish interpretations of the OT to demonstrate the folly of Judaism's own beliefs. However, at the turn of the nineteenth-century, a new direction arose regarding Jewish studies. Moore writes:

These later authors would have described their aim as historical – to exhibit the beliefs and teachings of Judaism in the New Testament times or in the early centuries of the Christian era. For this purpose they employed chiefly the material that came down to them from their predecessors, without giving sufficient consideration to the fact that it had been gathered for every conceivable motive except to serve as material for the historian.

This formed a gross misuse of these second-hand sources, which in their original context were never intended to give an accurate picture (or any picture really) of the nature of Judaism in the first-century. Unfortunately, it is the work of Ferdinand Weber which Christian authors cite most. Moore characterises the work of Weber as a German systematisation of the inherently unsystematic theology of early Judaism. Weber's systematic portrayal of early Judaism is that it is a legalistic system of works. Holiness is God's primary attribute at the expense of his love, and man can only please a virtually inaccessible God through strict adherence to a system of religion. Though seeking to be apologetic in nature, Moore contends that Weber's work attempted to show that Lutheran Christianity is better than Judaism.

Moore's main critique of Weber lies in his misuse of sources. Though at a first glance it may seem that he demonstrated a thorough acquaintance with the original Jewish documents, it is clear that he viewed them through the quotations of his predecessors. The original context is neglected, misinterpretations are frequent, and his desire to 'systematise' the thought of the Rabbis proved precarious. Furthermore, Weber restricted his comparison to a Palestinian Judaism which existed three to four hundred years after Christ.

Equally devastating was Emil Schürer's work on Judaism which also sought to demonstrate that Judaism was a legalistic system far inferior to Christianity. This led Moore to conclude that Schürer (like Weber) was not widely read in the Jewish literature. Boussed too, like his young contemporaries, sought to demonstrate that Judaism was a legalistic religion by looking at the Pseudepigrapha and apocryphal writings contemporary to Jesus and Paul. His neglect, however, of the Rabbinic writings (because they were late), was roundly criticised by Moore since these are the most authoritative writings in early Judaism.

Moore concludes that it was not a fresh and thorough study of first-century Judaism that unearthed 'legalism' as the dominant pattern of religion. Rather, it was 'a new apologetic motive' sought by 'NT theologians' to prove that the 'essence of Christianity' was far superior in comparison to Judaism. Moore's plea, then, was for an unbiased and thorough examination of the original Jewish sources in order to gain an accurate picture of what first-century Judaism was all about.

Krister Stendahl and Paul's 'Robust Conscience'

While Moore demolished traditional thinking concerning Judaism, he made little connection with the theology of Paul. This road, however, was travelled later by Krister Stendahl who shook the world of Pauline studies with his groundbreaking article, 'Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West', which was published in 1963. His main thesis was that Paul had been drastically misrepresented by scholars who have read his

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4 It should be noted that even before the work of Moore, G. F. Monetofeiro recognised that the negative statements that Paul made against Judaism did not match up with what early Judaism says about its own religion. Thus, Monetofeiro concluded, that Paul's attack was not against mainstream Judaism, but against a lesser form of Judaism not represented by the original sources; see his Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays (London: Max Goshen, 1914).

5 George Foot Moore, 'Christian Writers on Judaism', HTR 14 (1921), 197-254.

6 Moore, 'Christian Writers', 198.


8 Moore, 'Christian Writers', 203-204.

9 Moore, 'Christian Writers', 221 (emphasis added).


12 Moore, 'Christian Writers', 229.


14 Moore, 'Christian Writers', 231-35.


17 Moore complains that not only are all three New Testament scholars (as opposed to historians), 'the oldest of them (is) scarcely past thirty years old,' Moore, 'Christian Writers', 241.


letters in light of Luther and Augustine. Unlike Luther, whose conscience was burdened with personal sin, Paul possessed a ‘robust conscience.’ Paul, as a Jew, lived in a covenant relationship with YHWH, whereby forgiveness of sins was possible by means of repentance and sacrifice. In this sense Paul was faithful, for he was ‘blameless’ in regard to the Sinaitic legislation (cf. Phil. 3:6). After Paul was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles in Acts 9, he saw the Torah in a different light. The law, being a Jewish document, was an obstruction to his Gentile mission. Therefore, Paul did not view the law as a set of ‘legalistic principles’. Such an outlook is a product of late medieval piety. For Paul, the law was primarily a barrier between Jews and Gentiles. The overall framework for the apostle, then, is that of ‘Jews and Gentiles’, (not ‘works’ versus ‘faith’) and ‘the possibility for Gentiles to be included in the messianic community’. In light of this, the argument of Paul in Romans 2–3 is drastically affected. Paul is not primarily concerned with ‘how to find grace and forgiveness before a holy God’, but rather to point out that the transgressions of the Jews prove that they are not better than the Gentiles. The law is no help for the Jew, for he too stands in judgement before God, even more than the Gentiles. Paul’s purpose in the early chapters of Romans is to proclaim the ‘new avenue of salvation’ which is equally available to both Jews and Gentiles.

Stendahl believes that the ‘lost centrality of “Jews and Gentiles”’ is most clearly to be seen in the present middle. In Stendahl’s provocative thesis can be summarised in the following statement:

2. Stendahl, Jews and Gentiles, 80.
5. Stendahl, Jews and Gentiles, 81.
7. Stendahl, Jews and Gentiles, 3.
10. Stendahl, Jews and Gentiles, 79.
15. Stendahl, Jews and Gentiles, 81.
17. Stendahl, Jews and Gentiles, 81.
22. Stendahl, Jews and Gentiles, 81.
27. Stendahl, Jews and Gentiles, 81.
29. Stendahl, Jews and Gentiles, 81.
30. Stendahl, Jews and Gentiles, 81.
31. Stendahl, Jews and Gentiles, 81.
32. Stendahl, Jews and Gentiles, 81.
33. Stendahl, Jews and Gentiles, 81.
34. Stendahl, Jews and Gentiles, 81.
35. Stendahl, Jews and Gentiles, 81.
between Romans 3:27–30 is irresolvable in light of the common understanding of justification by faith. The text reads:

27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

In light of Paul's argument for the inclusion of the Gentiles, the rhetorical question made in verse 29, that God is also the God of the Gentiles, makes sense. The modern understanding of justification by faith cannot explain the connection between verse 28 and the question raised in verse 29.44

Probably one of the greatest statements concerning the inclusion of the Gentiles, according to Howard, is the problematic passage of Romans 10:4ff. 45 This is another passage which is often misunderstood as teaching that the Jew insisted that they rely on their own works to merit salvation instead of recognising that Christ has brought an end to the system of works inherent in the law. However, as G.F. Moore has sufficiently demonstrated, the Judaism of Paul's day 'believed very much in salvation by grace', 46 in fact, 'this concept permeated the whole of Judaism in all of its divisions'. 47 So then, when Paul confronts the Jews for 'seeking to establish their own righteousness', (Rom. 10:3) he is not referring to individual legalistic merit, but rather 'collective righteousness, to the exclusion of the gentiles'. 48 The key to the passage, then, is the phrase 'to everyone who believes' (10:4b; cf. 10:11ff). The intended goal (telos) of the law was to point to 'the ultimate unification of all nations under the God of Abraham ... In this sense Christ is the telos of the law; he was its goal to everyone who believes'. 49

Another exegetical study that had an incredible effect on subsequent scholarship was a short article by Joseph B. Tyson in 1973. 50 Tyson focussed his study on Paul's use of the phrase, 'works of law', in his letter to the Galatians. The traditional perspective thought that Paul's pejorative use of the term was against 'works-righteousness'. Tyson attempted to show, however, that Paul 'uses the phrase, erga nomou [works of law], not to express the deeds of men accomplished in response to law but to describe the conditions out of which deeds may be accomplished'. 51 'Works of law' for Paul is not 'human moral achievements' but 'nomistic service' or 'life under law'. 52 When Paul

46 Howard, 'Christ, the End of the Law', 331.
47 Howard, 'Christ, the End of the Law', 331.
48 Howard, 'Christ, the End of the Law', 333.
49 Howard, 'Christ, the End of the Law', 336.
50 Howard, 'Christ, the End of the Law', 336 (emphasis original).
51 'Works of the Law' in Galatians', JBL 92 (1973), 423–31. Another study by Tyson that was influential in a similar way was his, 'Paul's opponents in Galatia', NovT 10 (1968), 241–56. For the sake of space, I will only review his former article.
52 Tyson, 'Works of law', 425.
53 Tyson, 'Works of law', 425. Tyson here is drawing on, and improving, an earlier study by Ernst Lohmeyer.
Paul, had a significant effect regarding his doctrine of justification, and provides a valid seedbed for future critics of the Lutheran Paul.

N.T. Wright

One may wonder why I have included N.T. Wright in a 'Pre-Sanders' discussion on the New Perspective. I have done so simply because it was only one year after the publication of Sanders' *magnum opus* that Wright expressed some of the most 'New Perspective-like' thoughts on Pauline theology. Even more remarkable is that he did this almost completely independent of Sanders' work (his citation of Sanders is fairly infrequent). It was in 1978 when Wright nudged his way into the dialogue regarding the relation of the Apostle Paul to first-century Judaism in the publication of his Tyndale lecture. Attempting to interact with the opposing views of Ernst Käsemann and Krista Stendahl regarding Paul and justification, Wright promoted a mediating position in order to present a 'new view of Paul'.

Two primary points emerged from Wright's seminal study: 1) Judaism was not a Weberian religion of works righteousness; and 2) justification was a polemical doctrine that has been abused by Lutheran thought. Regarding the former, Wright agrees wholeheartedly with Moore and Sanders that according to the original sources, Judaism was not a legalistic religion and so weber was way off in his depiction. The Apostle was not confronting a wrong view of works-righteousness, but rather Jewish 'national righteousness', namely, the belief that fleshly Jewish descent guarantees membership of God's true covenant people. Possession of the law was, for the Jew, a 'badge of national privilege'. According to Wright, this was Paul's point in Romans 10:3 where he faults Israel for being ignorant of God's righteousness and 'seeking to establish their own righteousness' (i.e. 'national righteousness').

Secondly, the doctrine of justification by faith needs to be revised. Rather than occupying the core of Paul's theological thought, justification by faith was a polemical doctrine 'because it declares that the way is open for all, Jew and Gentile alike'. Contra Luther, justification is aimed at Jewish national pride, not moralistic self-reliance. In light of this, justifying faith is not 'easier than law' since 'both are impossible without grace'. Rather, faith, unlike law, 'is available world-wide'.

Summary

As the reader will see, E. P. Sanders was not thoroughly novel in his thesis. Although he is often credited with providing the foundation for subsequent New Perspective thinking, and rightly so, there were many before him who were embarking on the same path. Moore seemingly destroyed the traditional understanding of early Judaism by

65 Wright, 'The Paul of History', 61.
66 He recognises colourfully, that 'Moore said this fifty years ago, and nobody listened'; Wright, 'The Paul of History', 79; cf. 65.
67 Wright criticises Sanders for failing properly to apply the relevance of his thesis regarding first-century Judaism to Paul. Wright, 'The Paul of History', 81.
68 Wright, 'The Paul of History', 65.
69 Wright, 'The Paul of History', 83.
70 Wright, 'The Paul of History', 65.
71 Wright, 'The Paul of History', 61.
72 Wright, 'The Paul of History', 72.
73 Sanders, *Palestinian*, 12.
75 Sanders, *Palestinian*, 16.
76 Sanders defines 'covenantal nomism' as 'the view that one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression,' Sanders, *Palestinian*, 75.
77 Sanders, *Palestinian*, 427 (emphasis original).
In light of the nomistic pattern of religion, Sanders gives a seven-fold structure of Judaism that may be outlined as such:  

1. God has chosen Israel.  
2. God has given the law.  
3. The law implies both God's promise to maintain the election and the requirement to obey.  
4. God rewards obedience and punishes transgression.  
5. The law provides for means of atonement.  
6. Atonement results in maintenance or re-establishment of the covenantal relationship.  
7. Therefore, all of those who are maintained in the covenant by obedience, atonement, and God's mercy belong to the group which will be saved.

Sanders concludes that this structure reveals that 'election and ultimately salvation are considered to be by God's mercy rather than human achievement'. The Judaism that was attacked by Jesus and Paul, though it may be a correct picture of some individual Jews, is not a correct picture of the type, or pattern, of religion as revealed by the surviving Jewish literature. 'Covenantal Nomism', rather, 'must have been the general type of religion prevalent in Palestine before the destruction of the Temple'.

Sanders on Paul

Sanders' analysis on Paul is generally believed to be less helpful than his research in first-century Judaism, even among his own supporters. Nevertheless, his work on the Apostle's thought shook the grounds of contemporary scholarship leaving various after-shocks that continue to be felt today. Perhaps the most significant contribution to Pauline scholarship made by Sanders was his reversed approach to Paul's theological thought. He believed that for Paul, the solution to man's problem preceded the problem itself. In other words, for Paul, 'the conclusion that all the world - both Jew and Greek - equally stands in need of a saviour springs from the prior conviction that God had provided such a saviour'. This stands diametrically opposed to the traditional thought that views Paul's struggle with trying to keep the law as the 'plight' that preceded his 'solution' found in Christ. It is clear from his epistles, argues Sanders, that Paul 'did not start from man's need, but from God's deed'.

The order of thought in the book of Romans, then, does not in fact reflect Paul's actual missionary tactics. Instead, he preached the gospel, namely, God's action in Christ.

Sanders lists an eight-fold structure, but I have combined his points 3 and 4 into the present number 3; see Sanders, Palestinian, 422. Sanders, Palestinian, 422. Sanders, Palestinian, 426. Sanders, Palestinian, 428.


84 Sanders, Palestinian, 444.

85 Sanders, Palestinian, 444.

88 Sanders, Palestinian, 481.

87 Sanders, Palestinian, 482 (emphasis original).

88 Sanders, Palestinian, 550.

89 Sanders, Palestinian, 548.

90 Sanders, Paul, 47.

91 Paul, the Law and Jewish People (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1983). Furthermore, by the time Sanders published this second work, the novelty of his thesis began to fade as more scholars were beginning to make contributions to the New Perspective.