



Paul Without Religion: The Creation of a Category and the Search for an Apostle Beyond the New Perspective

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Paul Without Religion explores the tension between recent developments in the study of the category of religion and the dominant approach to reading the letters of the apostle Paul. While some historians, anthropologists, philosophers, and even critics in the field of religious studies have begun to question the validity of the category of religion, scholars of the New Testament have not subjected the idea of religion to much scrutiny. Recent study of Paul's letters has come to focus with increased urgency upon the relationship of Paul with Judaism, and an unhistoricized, essentialized notion of religion has operated unnoticed in these debates. The modern category of religion and the contemporary framework of so-called World Religions have set the agenda for the discussion of Paul's letters and other ancient Jewish texts. I attempt to read Paul outside these structures, and I justify doing so by further historicizing the category of religion. The first portion of the dissertation thus traces out a history of the modern category of religion, highlighting several different episodes of divine-human interaction from antiquity to the English Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. The second part of the dissertation then generates a different framework for interpreting Paul's letters by examining recent works by classicists and scholars of the ancient near east in order to isolate the typical ways ancient Mediterranean peoples interacted with the gods. The final chapters provide a re-reading of Paul's letters grounded in these concerns. Using more traditional philological tools (such as comparisons of Paul's letters and the Dead Sea Scrolls and close attention to the intertextual relationships between Paul's letters and prophetic literature such as the book of Isaiah), I provide a reading of Paul (especially his letter to the Galatians) that focuses the apostle's concern for non-Jews and his positive valuation of purity and the temple in Jerusalem, some of the very issues that scholars have claimed separated Paul from other Jews. Thus, rather than solving the problem of Paul and Judaism, I try to show how and why Paul and Judaism came to be perceived as a problem in the first place.

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