

ED SANDERS

Ed Parish Sanders

18 April 1937 – 21 November 2022

elected Fellow of the British Academy 1985

by

WILLIAM HORBURY

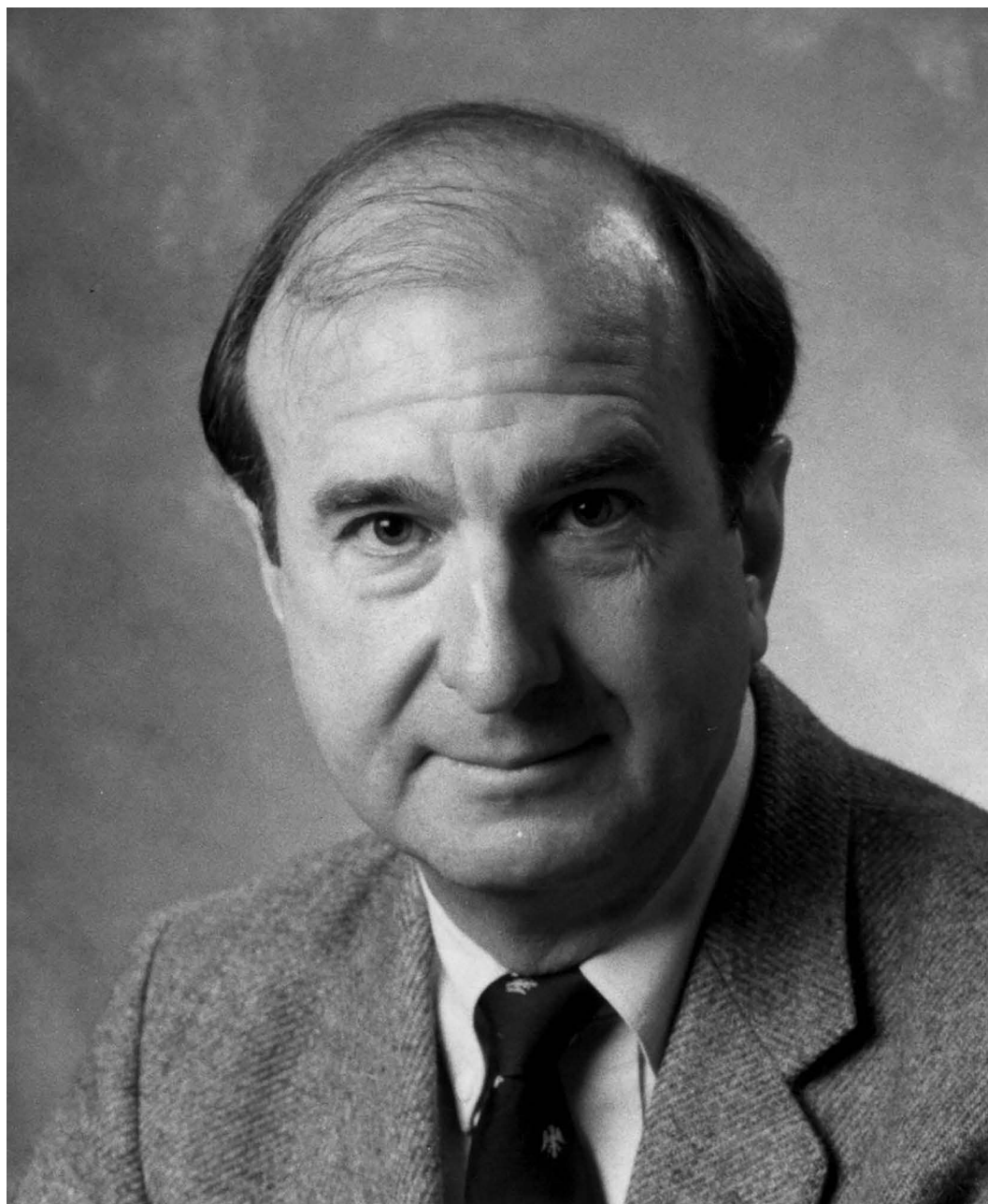
Fellow of the Academy

Summary. E.P. Sanders conveyed a sense of dignity and purpose, but his disarming smile and occasional frown hinted at underlying depths of feeling. Outstanding among students of the New Testament and ancient Judaism in his time, he changed the face of Pauline study, enlarged historical approaches to the figure of Jesus, and brought back to general view the common features of the Judaism in which Jesus and Paul were rooted.

Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy, 23, 393–431

<https://doi.org/10.5871/mem/023.393>

Posted 20 August 2026. © British Academy 2026.



E. P. Sandem

I

Born on 18 April 1937 to Mildred Sanders (née Parish) and Eula Thomas Sanders, their second son Ed Parish Sanders grew up in Grand Prairie, Texas. To quote his short ‘academic autobiography’, ‘although Grand Prairie is close to both Dallas and Fort Worth, families such as mine, which was at the lower end of the economic spectrum, lived almost entirely in our small town, seldom traveling to the nearby cities’ (AA 2).¹ His father ran a dry-cleaning shop, his mother worked as a seamstress from home, and later as a schoolteacher.² Ed Sanders’ elder brother Jack Thomas Sanders (1935-2016) also became a well-known New Testament scholar, teaching at the University of Oregon (1969-2002), but the ‘academic autobiography’ does not touch on their relationship. E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (1993) was dedicated, however, ‘For Jack and Susan’ – J.T. Sanders and his wife Susan Elizabeth Plass. At the time of this dedication, Ed Sanders had recently recalled in print the self-contained atmosphere of Grand Prairie at the time when the brothers grew up. He was illustrating the difficulty for historians of knowing, despite their awareness of the names of prominent persons, who actually decided what was to be done in a given place. ‘In the 1940s and 1950s Harry Turner ran Grand Prairie, Texas. He was not always mayor, and he was probably not the largest landowner. But Harry Turner ran the town’.³

A glimpse of Ed Sanders’ boyhood, and of his independent mind, emerged when he later noted the centrality of memorising in ancient education, by contrast with his own schooling. ‘In my childhood in the vast and sandy plains of north-central Texas, besides attending school, I had only three activities: reading my mother’s college books, especially English literature; playing informal games of baseball; and playing informal games of American football’ (he was in fact a star footballer). ‘I had from 3.30 p.m. to 10.00

¹ *Abbreviations*. AA=E.P. Sanders, ‘Comparing Judaism and Christianity: An Academic Autobiography’, in Fabian E. Udoh with Mark Chancey, Susanna Heschel and Gregory Tatum (eds), *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities: Essays in Honor of Ed Parish Sanders* (Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity, 16; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 11–41, repr. in E.P. Sanders, *Comparing Judaism and Christianity: Common Judaism, Paul, and the Inner and the Outer in Ancient Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 1-27; PPJ=E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1977); PLJP=E.P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); JJ=E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985); LJJM=E.P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies* (London: SCM Press, 1990); JPB=E.P. Sanders, *Judaism, Practice and Belief, 63 BCE – 66 CE* (London: SCM Press, 1992); Foreword=E.P. Sanders, ‘Foreword to the Fiftieth Anniversary Edition’, in W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (5th edn, Mifflintown, PA: Sigler Press, 1998), vii-xvii; PLLT=Paul: the Apostle’s Letters, Life and Thought (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015).

² Information from Dr Rebecca Gray.

³ E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE – 66 CE* (London: SCM Press, and Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 458.

p.m., plus weekends and summers, to indulge my three pastimes. So I read and reread a lot of English literature. From about the age of seven to age fifteen I memorized my favorite bits – those that appealed to a boy who liked strong rhyme and rhythm, fast pace, action, blood and gore, and romantic sentimentality ... My life as memorizer was opposed to the educational philosophy of my time and place, which was that learning by rote was damaging because it (supposedly) ruined creativity ... I personally resented this doctrine ...⁴ He was also already interested in history. ‘Thanks to my mother’s college textbooks, I read extensively in English literature and world history’ (AA 2). Moreover, as he recalled elsewhere, he was ‘brought up in the Methodist Church’.⁵ On tolerance, he wrote ‘When I was a little boy, one of my playmates confessed to me that he knew that I was going to go to hell, since he attended the Church of Christ, whose teachings made it clear to him that all Methodists would go to hell. I quaked a bit but simply asked him if we could still be friends. Sure, he said. All was well. Thank God for John Locke and Thomas Jefferson!’⁶

Looking back on his beginnings in scholarship, he perceived especially a struggle to find the opportunity of learning languages, and indeed to recognise the need of them for literary and historical study. The course of his education appeared to him almost as a Renaissance journey *ad fontes*, begun later and under more difficulties than he would have wanted. ‘I learned many things from going to church, but not that reading the Bible required Hebrew and Greek, nor that understanding it required German and French’. Early experience sharpened his keen sense of the need for professionalism in biblical scholarship. (He once said to me, on a new publication, ‘In this country [Britain] people think they can just sit down and straight away write a book on a New Testament subject’.) In his own education some Spanish was taught at school, and after sixteen he had two years of Latin at high school. Yet (AA 3) ‘I did not meet a foreigner, or even someone who spoke a foreign language, until I went to college’ — Texas Wesleyan College in Fort Worth, which provided him with a scholarship. Here he took the BA degree, *summa cum laude*, in English and French Literature (1959).

‘I knew from the time I was in college’ (1955–9) ‘that I wanted to study ancient history and specialize in religion’ (AA 3). He began to fulfil this desire in work (1959–62) for the Bachelor of Divinity degree in the Perkins School of Theology at Southern

⁴E.P. Sanders, ‘Paul’s Jewishness’, in Thomas G. Casey & Justin Taylor (eds), *Paul’s Jewish Matrix* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011), 51–73, repr. in E.P. Sanders, *Comparing Judaism and Christianity*, 267–85 at 269.

⁵E.P. Sanders, ‘God Gave the Law to Condemn: Providence in Paul and Josephus’, in Calvin J. Roetzel & Robert L. Foster (eds), *The Impartial God: Essays in Biblical Studies in Honor of Jouette M. Bassler* (New Testament Monographs, 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 78–97, repr. in E.P. Sanders, *Comparing Judaism and Christianity*, 175–95 at 195, n. 36.

⁶E.P. Sanders, ‘Christianity, Judaism, and Humanism’, in E.P. Sanders, *Comparing Judaism and Christianity*, 429–45 at 443.

Methodist University in Dallas. Related to the biblical and theological curriculum were language-learning opportunities he had so far missed: he now studied Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac, and took summer courses in German. His fellow-students will often have gone on to serve in the ministry of the church, but this was their chance of a thorough preliminary academic training. Sanders does not say how he came, by the end of his time at Perkins, to specialise in New Testament studies in particular. Perhaps he thought it obvious that a primary concern for him had been to gain academic knowledge of documents which were fundamental both for Christian life and for study of Christian origins. At any rate, the historical as well as theological importance of the New Testament books would have stood out in work for the BD degree at Perkins. Sanders was encouraged and influenced by the senior New Testament scholar there, W.R. Farmer, whose writings ranged from the historical question of the origins of the Zealot movement in ancient Judaea to the problem of the literary relationships between the gospels; Farmer was now beginning work on his book challenging the widely-accepted view that Matthew and Luke depended on Mark and the conjectured sayings-source Q (the ‘two-document hypothesis’).⁷ To be noted also is an aspect of the young Sanders which is suggested but not emphasised in his ‘academic autobiography’: his attachment, critical but strong, to the biblical and especially New Testament Methodist ethos, represented in his home and also in Texas Wesleyan College and Southern Methodist University. During his years of study he assisted in various congregations, often in youth ministry. He was ordained as a Methodist minister, but his aim was academic work rather than a career in ministry.⁸ The ardour of his early commitment is suggested, however, by the preamble of an explanation of the overturning of the tables in the temple which he later gave jointly with W.D. Davies: this action of Jesus ‘cannot be simply a one-time “prophetic” protest against a bit too much commercialism, as a devout and angry Christian might disrupt trade in a large store at Christmas time’.⁹ Here there seems to be an allusion to Sanders’ own experience; he related that as a young man he had once been seized with anger at the display of luxury goods in a branch of the Texan department store Neiman Marcus.¹⁰

After Perkins his ideas for his own future scholarly work developed during a year’s study abroad (1962–3). He then quickly qualified for a doctorate at Union Theological Seminary, New York (1963–66; Theol D). From his upbringing and education he retained

⁷W.R. Farmer, *Maccabees, Zealots, and Josephus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956); id., *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Review of the Problem of the Literary Relationships between Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (New York: Macmillan, 1964); id., *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

⁸Information from Dr Rebecca Gray.

⁹W.D. Davies & E.P. Sanders, ‘Jesus: from the Jewish Point of View’, in W. Horbury, W.D. Davies & J. Sturdy (eds), *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, iii, *The Early Roman Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 618–77 at 667.

¹⁰Information from Professor J. Carleton Paget, to whom in conversation Sanders related this story.

a sense of standing in a religious and scholarly tradition. His freedom and independence of mind made all the more impressive his later statement in *Jesus and Judaism* (1985), when he had criticised historical reconstructions which seemed to have been dictated by the authors' religious standpoints, and felt the need to declare his own position: 'I am a liberal, modern, secularized Protestant, brought up in a church' – the Methodist Church in the USA of the 1940s and 1950s – 'dominated by low Christology and the social gospel. I am proud of the things that that religious tradition stands for. I am not bold enough, however, to suppose that Jesus came to establish it, or that he died for the sake of its principles' (JJ 334).

All parts of this declaration have to be given weight. He was not simply 'secularized', but 'a liberal, modern, secularized Protestant'. He held that the early church was in some continuity with Jesus' hopes for the restoration of Israel, but that Jesus was not intending to establish a separate church – and there is a touch of scorn for any who claim him as the founder of their own particular tradition. Yet the liberal and modern religious tradition of his own upbringing and education stood for things of which he was proud. His colleague D. Moody Smith later noted the way in which a background in Methodism, a movement arising from devotional renewal within the Anglican tradition rather than confessional conflict, might have helped to form his sense of a continuity between Judaism and nascent Christianity, and his 'primal instinct to understand Judaism fairly, from the inside'.¹¹

In 1966, at the end of his time at Union, he accepted an invitation from Canada immediately to become Assistant Professor in the newly-founded Department of Religious Studies at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario – with the proviso that after two years he could take a year's leave for further study in Jerusalem. At McMaster he served for twenty-two years, ultimately as Professor (1974–88; part-time from 1984). Here he warmly appreciated the university's facilitation of research, the help and friendship of administrators and fellow-teachers, and the stimulating intellectual atmosphere of the new Department.¹² In 1984 he succeeded G.B. Caird as Dean Ireland's Professor of the Exegesis of Holy Scripture at Oxford, and Fellow of The Queen's College, in 1989 was elected a Fellow of the British Academy, and in 1990 took the Oxford DLitt degree. Finally he returned to the USA to become Arts and Sciences Professor of Religion at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (1990–2005). He became a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2003.

In 1963 he had married Becky Jill Hall (later Hollingsworth). Thanking her for her share in typing and proofreading for publication his doctoral dissertation, he added: 'her

¹¹ D. Moody Smith, 'Professor Sanders at Duke', in Udoh with Chancey, Heschel and Tatum (eds), *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities* (n.1, above), 3–10, at 8–9.

¹² PPJ xiv–xv; JJ xi–xii, a glowing tribute written when he was moving to Oxford; AA 6; 8, n.16; 17–18, with n. 41; 26, n. 74 (1).

support and help have been indispensable throughout the course of the work'.¹³ Their marriage was dissolved, however, in 1978. In *Jesus and Judaism* (1985) he wrote: 'The years' (1975 onwards) 'during which the work was in progress or on the shelf have been challenging and trying ones, both professionally and personally'. In this period, he added, their daughter Laura's 'cheerful acceptance, steady affection and buoyant good spirits have always been an inspiration' (she 'grew from five to fourteen years during this time', he noted later). The book is dedicated to her.¹⁴ *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977) had borne the dedication 'In memory of Susan Phillips | July 2 1947 – September 26 1975', and the Preface ends with the statement that when she died, 'we had been looking forward to a long and happy life together; this book is offered as a memorial to her and that hope' (PPJ v; xvi). In 1996 he married Dr Rebecca Gray, for whose Oxford DPhil work he had been supervisor in the late 1980s.¹⁵ The comprehensive *Paul: the Apostle's Letters, Life and Thought* (2015) is dedicated to her 'with love and thanks', and the preface, noting her academic and personal contribution, states that 'my main advisor and assistant was my much-beloved wife ... who, in addition to holding down a full-time job, read the typescript twice and made copious notes'; she is again warmly thanked in *Comparing Judaism and Christianity* (2016).¹⁶

II

Sanders indicated the continuity between his desire, felt by the end of his college years (1955–9), to study history and religion in antiquity, and his writings on Paul and Judaism, on Jesus and Judaism, and on the overall description of ancient Judaism. His formation as a student of the New Testament in particular, and the shaping of his own scholarly outlook and aims, took place especially in the decade from 1959, when he entered the Perkins School of Theology aged 22, to 1969, when as Assistant Professor at McMaster he had returned from the year's leave mentioned already, devoted to further rabbinic study in Jerusalem. In these years he encountered, through reading and sometimes in person, scholars whose influence on him elicited creative assent and dissent.

At Perkins, and later (JJ xii), his thoughts on New Testament study and the possible direction of his future work interacted with those of W.R. Farmer. Sanders' abiding scholarly interest in the tradition underlying the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and

¹³ E.P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, 9; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), xii.

¹⁴ JJ v, xii; AA 18.

¹⁵ The dissertation, submitted in 1990, was published as Rebecca Gray, *Prophetic Figures in Late Second Temple Jewish Palestine: The Evidence from Josephus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹⁶ PLLT v, xvii; E.P. Sanders, *Comparing Judaism and Christianity* (n.1, above), xii.

Luke), and in their literary relationship, was, he notes, planted in him by Farmer (AA 6; n. 7, above). From early study with C.H. Dodd in Cambridge Farmer retained links with members of the Cambridge New Testament seminar.¹⁷ Among them was C.F.D. Moule, who would later have friendly relations with Sanders as well as Farmer.¹⁸ Visiting lecturers at Perkins included two major scholars in the field of New Testament and ancient Judaism who were to help and influence Sanders: **David Daube** and Morton Smith (AA 4). Daube, born at Freiburg im Breisgau in 1909, was a jurist who from his early studies onwards had written on biblical and Talmudic as well as Roman law. When Hitler came to power, Daube had just completed a doctorate on biblical law with the Old Testament scholar Johannes Hempel at Göttingen. He moved to Cambridge, where he was soon making a series of far-reaching rabbinic contributions to the New Testament seminar, then chaired by C.H. Dodd. By the time that Sanders first heard him, Daube was Regius Professor of Civil Law at Oxford. Morton Smith, whom Sanders called ‘one of the great heroes of my life’, was born in Philadelphia in 1915, and began rabbinic study at Harvard Divinity School.¹⁹ His teacher, the Philonic scholar H.A. Wolfson, recommended him for a Sheldon Fellowship to work at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Here for his doctorate he wrote in Hebrew on early rabbinic literature and the gospels. He served as a priest of the Episcopal Church of the USA, but became a critic of religion in all forms. This did not affect his sense of the centrality of religion, including Jewish and Christian religion, for understanding the ancient world. He became Professor of Ancient History at Columbia University, New York, in succession to Elias Bickerman, who had likewise written on Jewish together with Greek and Roman history.

Daube and Smith both integrated New Testament interpretation with rabbinic study, and Smith in particular represented the history of religion, with primary attention to cult rather than doctrine, and to topics which would be central for Sanders: the shared customs and convictions of Jewish populations in antiquity (despite Smith’s concurrent emphasis on the conflict between parties in ancient Judaism), and the comparison of the religion of Jesus and early Christians with Jewish and Hellenic religion, including mag-

¹⁷F.W. Dillistone, *C.H. Dodd: Interpreter of the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977), 5; 234.

¹⁸Moule was chair of the Cambridge New Testament seminar, 1953–77. He was among those with whom Sanders had ‘especially rewarding and detailed conversations’ on the manuscript of PPJ (PPJ xiv–xv). In the *Festschrift* for Farmer edited by Sanders, Moule, dedicating his essay to Farmer, added that ‘it owes much to the searching challenge contained in the works of another friend and scholar, namely the editor’; see C.F.D. Moule, ‘The Gravamen against Jesus’, in E.P. Sanders (ed.), *Jesus, the Gospels, and the Church: Essays in Honor of William R. Farmer* (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 177–95, repr. in C.F.D. Moule, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation, and other New Testament Themes* (London: S.P.C.K., 1998), 95–115 at 95.

¹⁹The quotation is from ‘The Origin of the Phrase “Common Judaism”’, in Sanders, *Comparing Judaism and Christianity* (n. 1, above), 31–49 at 39.

ical practice.²⁰ The independence of both these scholars probably also appealed to Sanders.

The year abroad (1962–3) which followed Sanders' graduation at Perkins initiated perhaps the most important development in his life as a scholar, a prolonged first-hand encounter with rabbinic Hebrew literature.²¹ Farmer viewed the year as necessary and raised funding for it together with Sanders' friend Samuel Crossley, of University Park Methodist Church in Fort Worth. The substantial sum given (\$10,000, in 1962) included a large contribution from a member of First Methodist Church in Fort Worth and a very large donation from a member of Temple Emanuel in Dallas. Appropriately, the fund raised was a joint Jewish and Christian vote of confidence in the gifted 'local boy'.

He began with further study of German, in Göttingen, from June to October 1962. Then, for the new academic year of 1962–3, Daube was ready to help him in Oxford, and Farmer and Morton Smith had both commended him to Yigael Yadin in Jerusalem. As a result, in Oxford Sanders, in the context of discussion with Daube, began to study the Hebrew text of the earliest major document of rabbinic literature, the Mishnah (probably compiled by the early 3rd century CE). In the then still new Oriental Institute building, the home of the Faculty of Oriental Studies (now Asian and Middle Eastern Studies), he attended Dr David Patterson's classes on the Mishnah tractate Sanhedrin for two terms.²² Finally, in Jerusalem, through an introduction from Yadin, he studied both rabbinic and modern Hebrew under the tuition of Dr Mordechai Kamrat (died 1970).²³ This beginning was continued five years later in 1968–9, when during the promised year's leave from McMaster Sanders returned to Jerusalem. He now read with Kamrat most of the 'tannaitic' or 'halakhic' midrashim – so termed because they include many traditions attributed to *tanna'im*, teachers named in the Mishnah, and concentrate on *halakhah*, 'walking', how to keep the commandments rightly. These midrashim seem likely to have received a first redaction not long after the Mishnah, during the 3rd century.²⁴ In reading

²⁰ D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone Press, 1956); M. Smith, *Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1951); id., *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971; 2nd edn London: SCM Press, 1987); id., *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Harper and Row & London: Gollancz, 1978; repr. Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1985); id., *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh*, ed. S.J.D. Cohen (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World, 130; 2 vols., Leiden: Brill, 1996).

²¹ On this year abroad, and Sanders' second period of study in Jerusalem (1968–9), see PPJ xi, xv; AA 3–4, 9–12.

²² The Mishnah, arranged in six Orders, comprises sixty-three tractates, including Sanhedrin. The Mishnah text is incorporated in both the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, but was also transmitted separately. The Tosefta, perhaps compiled later in the 3rd century, resembles the Mishnah and often overlaps with it.

²³ PPJ xv, 'Dr Kamrat, who is best known as the "father" of the Ulpan system in Israel, was a peerless teacher of Hebrew. Although his academic field was not Talmudics, he had an encyclopedic knowledge of Rabbinic literature (as well as of much else)'; further biographical detail at AA 9–10.

²⁴ G. Stemmerger, 'Halakhic Midrashim as Historical Sources', in M. Goodman & P. Alexander (eds)

the early rabbis 'I fell in love', says Sanders, noting their humanity, tolerance and good humour as well as their 'academic love of precision' (AA 10). The counterpart of this affection was the force of his later rebuttal of unfair presentations of rabbinic thought which lingered, despite the established currency of better description, in some influential biblical scholarship.

By September 1963, when he entered Union Theological Seminary and started preparation for doctoral work, Sanders knew that at the heart of his own interests were religion – including practice, not simply doctrine and theology, aspects which he found to be over-emphasised in New Testament interpretation – and comparison between religions (AA 4). Looking back, Sanders saw these orientations in study as his own, not consciously drawn from a particular scholar. For the link between study of New Testament religion and the study of Judaism in particular he noted, however, that he had accepted Farmer's view that New Testament scholars ought to study Judaism – although it seems likely that Sanders had been coming to this conviction, too, under his own steam.²⁵ Yet of course, as appears with hindsight, he was not alone in choosing approaches governed by the history of religion. They were 'in the air' in the early 1960s, but it was not fully obvious that their time was coming.

Sanders would become a follower of two American giants of the history of religion, G.F. Moore (1851–1931) and E.R. Goodenough (1893–1965). Moore had interpreted early rabbinic literature as the best guide to 'Judaism in the first centuries of the Christian era', to quote the subtitle of his *Judaism* (1927–30); showing how much rabbinic Judaism had in common with the Judaism discernible through writings of the Second Temple period (ending, as regards literature, in the 2nd century CE), and especially with what is known of Pharisaic opinion, he urged that early rabbinic teaching represented 'normative Judaism'. Sanders accepted that the rabbis were intellectual heirs of the Pharisees, but, following Morton Smith, emphasised the importance of the priesthood (as opposed to lay scribes or members of any particular school of thought) in communal teaching and guidance in Judaea at the time of Paul. Moore's discernment of a long-term continuity in ancient Judaism, through the upheavals of Jewish revolt in the late 1st and early 2nd centuries, became vital for Sanders from 1969 onwards, in preparation for *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977); but a first encounter with Moore seems likely to have taken place about or before 1963. One of Sanders' two favourite books at that time (AA 5) was Goodenough's *By Light, Light* (1935), presenting, especially but not only from Philo, a mystical and symbolic Judaism which, Goodenough argued, would have been concurrent, but not fully reconcilable, with Moore's 'normative Judaism'. In 1963 Goodenough

Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine (Proceedings of the British Academy, 165; Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2010), 129–42.

²⁵The typically wry statement in AA 4 runs: 'Bill Farmer had told me [that New Testament scholars ought to study Judaism], and I simply believed him'.

was writing and issuing his vast work *Jewish Symbols in the Graeco-Roman Period* (13 volumes, 1953–68), on the religious symbolism suggested by documents from Jewish epigraphy and art, which impressed Sanders almost as much as *By Light, Light*. Later Sanders would write ‘I have never lost my confidence that Goodenough really discovered something – a deeply Hellenized Judaism’ (AA 25). A fellow-enthusiast for Goodenough, Jacob Neusner (1932–2016), who became Sanders’ faithful critic, would soon be reconsidering rabbinic texts as documents of the history of Jewish religion. The other favourite book was C.H. Dodd’s *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (1953), illuminating John from Philonic and Hermetic mysticism.²⁶ In the event, however, Sanders’ work would not embrace sustained Johannine study. Yet, while at Union, ‘I liked the mysticism that was so obviously important in the study of Philo and John, and at the time I identified it as part of “nontheological religion” ... And I found Goodenough’s portrayal of mystic Judaism enticing’ (AA 5).

Sanders was correspondingly attracted (AA 27) to the earlier *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* of biblical scholars (flourishing c. 1880–1930), whose members often detected outside influence on Jewish and Christian religion.²⁷ Among them was Wilhelm Bousset (1865–1920), author of much-discussed books on Jesus, Judaism, and the cult of Christ with the associated early Christian beliefs; he depicted Judaism during the Greek and early Roman periods of Jewish history as affected by Hellenism, and as a religion in tension between joy and anxiety, the latter becoming prevalent (nn. 66–7, below).²⁸ A debt to this depiction seems perceptible in Goodenough’s conception of a mystical Hellenised Judaism alongside Moore’s ‘normative’ Judaism. Sanders, following Moore, would write much (in PPJ and JJ) to correct negative views of rabbinic religion transmitted by Bousset, but he balanced these corrections with sympathetic evaluation of Bousset’s broader aims and achievements (JJ 360, n. 12).

Beyond the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* itself, religion rather than theology was also central for Adolf Deissmann (1866–1937), admired by the young Sanders; ‘for a long time I thought that Deissmann had written the best book on Paul’ (but later for a

26 On Goodenough, see AA 5–8 and n. 15; 11; 16, n. 39; 23–5, with n. 62; on Dodd, AA 5.

27 AA 27 ‘I was very attracted to the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* and, in fact, to pre-World War One German scholarship in general – before the turn toward Luther, which has narrowed that scholarship, to its detriment’ (referring back to AA 5; 7–8, on his reading when he made a start at Union).

28 For Albert Schweitzer, used to depictions of post-exilic and later ancient Jewish piety as dry and formal, it was an insight of Bousset that he showed the continuation of a pure and fresh ‘spontaneous piety’, exemplified also in Jesus, in the Judaism of this period (even though it was outweighed, in Bousset’s view, by an anxious piety of works); see A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (English translation of the enlarged and revised second edition of A. Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1913], by W. Montgomery, J.R. Coates, Susan Cupitt and John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 2000), 203–4.

while he followed Bultmann's Pauline interpretation).²⁹ Deissmann, however, had viewed Paul in the context not primarily of non-biblical religion, but of ancient and modern biblical piety, that of the rural congregations in which Deissmann first ministered as well as that of Jews in the eastern Roman provinces.³⁰ He urged that the key to understanding the apostle was Paul's Christ-mysticism in its Jewish setting, especially in spirituality shaped by the Greek Septuagint versions of the Hebrew biblical books. Although he envisaged influence on the Septuagint from Hellenic religion, his description of Paul as a 'Septuagint Jew' (*Septuagintajude*), formed by the scriptures in Greek, differed from Bousset's presentation of Paul as moulded by the Hellenised Christ-cult of the gentile church in Antioch and elsewhere. When Sanders urges that, for Paul, Christ-mysticism was a profound reality which is probably now indescribable (PPJ 522–3, PLLT 723–5), or, later, that Paul would have known the Jewish scriptures in Greek by heart, Deissmann seems not far away.³¹ Albert Schweitzer's seminal books on Paul as mystic and on the historical Jesus (important in PPJ and JJ, respectively) will probably also have been familiar to Sanders by the beginning of his time at Union.³² He would become a notable transmitter of Schweitzer's influence in New Testament study.³³ He mentions too that he had read Gershom Scholem on Talmudic and later Jewish mysticism, but he did not pursue this line in view of doubts on the importance of mysticism in early rabbinic Judaism; he would later highlight, rather, what Max Kadushin called 'nor-

29AA 27, adding to his statements on his reading when he was making a start at Union; see A. Deissmann, *Paulus. Eine Kultur- und religionsgeschichtliche Skizze* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1911; 2nd, revised and supplemented, edn, 1925); English translation by L.R.M. Strachan, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912; 2nd, revised and enlarged, edn, transl. William E. Wilson, 1926). PPJ cites a New York, 1957 reprint of the 2nd edition, transl. Wilson, perhaps the widely available Harper Torchbook paperback (Harper & Row).

30A. Deissmann, 'Adolf Deissmann', in E. Stange (ed.), *Die Religionswissenschaft der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen*, i (Leipzig: F. Meiner, 1925), 42–78 at 60, quoted by K. Dienst, 'Adolf Deissmann und die Nassauer Lande', in C. Breytenbach & C. Marksches (eds), *Adolf Deissmann: Ein (zu Unrecht) fast vergessener Theologe und Philologe* (Supplements to *Novum Testamentum*, 174; Leiden: Brill, 2019), 189–215 (at 207; Deissmann writes that the 'lay piety' of those working on the land formed a living exemplar of Paul's Christ-centred piety, and changed his own text-book-derived view that Paulinism was a theological system).

31 Sanders, 'Paul's Jewishness' (2011; cited in n.4, above), in Sanders, *Comparing Judaism and Christianity*, 270–76.

32A prospective pupil of W.D. Davies would have noted the importance of Schweitzer, on Paul's mysticism as central, in *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*. When Sanders began lecturing at McMaster (1966) and soon found that he could not continue to present a Bultmannian Paul, he went through Paul's epistles, as noted already, and then 'returned to Albert Schweitzer', afterwards reading some of the pre-Schweitzer German scholars (AA 13).

33J. Carleton Paget, 'A Stranger and an Enigma': *The Contexts and Contested Legacy of Albert Schweitzer* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 539; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2025), 243–7, 483 n. 38, 486–7.

mal mysticism', rabbinic cultivation of consciousness of the divine presence, not least during study of Torah.³⁴

In the early 1960s, however, Goodenough could write (in accord with the young Sanders' experience at the same time) that 'study of the history of religion ... has now generally declined', by contrast with its importance before the First World War.³⁵ Goodenough put this down partly to the post-1914 resurgence of concern with divine revelation and its unfolding in theology, in the setting of experience of war and upheaval. However causes may be traced, one manifestation of this concern was revival of a theological interpretation of scripture. In the 1920s Karl Barth (1886–1968) saw theological commentary on biblical books not as entirely rejecting historical and critical study, but as building on it – and, in Barth's eyes, now getting to the heart of the matter; for the whole task of the interpreter could not be fulfilled, he urged, without theological interpretation.³⁶ The term 'religion' itself, as opposed to 'faith', now held negative associations for many engaged in biblical study; the equivocal character of religious devotion in scripture, brought out in the narrative of the golden calf (Exodus 32, Deut. 9:8–19, Ps. 106:19–23), was underlined through Barth on religion as human effort bound up with sin, so that 'religion must die. In God we are rid of it', and then through Dietrich Bonhoeffer's related concepts of 'non-religious interpretation' and 'religionless Christianity', also influential in the 1950s and later.³⁷

Sanders himself highlighted Barth's contemporary, Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), as bearing 'a lot of the responsibility' (AA 4) for the shift towards theological interpretation. The heritage of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* appeared in Bultmann's historical reconstructions (thus he set Paul as Christian within the frame of a Hellenistic

34 'The Covenant as a Soteriological Category and the Nature of Salvation in Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism', in R. Hamerton-Kelly & R. Scroggs (eds), *Jews, Greeks and Christians: Religious Cultures in Late Antiquity. Essays in Honor of William David Davies* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 11–44, repr. in E.P. Sanders, *Comparing Judaism and Christianity*, 141–73 at 172, n. 94; PPJ 220–222, citing (n. 50) M. Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* (2nd edn, New York: Blaisdell Publishing Company, 1965), 194–272; AA 7–8, with n.15.

35 E.R. Goodenough, "Religionswissenschaft", in E.P. Booth (ed.), *Religion Ponders Science* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), 63–84, repr. in E.S. Frerichs & J. Neusner (eds), *Goodenough on the History of Religion and on Judaism* (Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 1986), 3–17 at 4.

36 K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, transl. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 6–12 (from Barth's 1921 preface to the second edition of the German original); K. Barth, *Die Auferstehung der Toten. Eine akademische Vorlesung über 1 Cor. 15* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1924), v–vi.

37 Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, transl. Hoskyns, 238, on Rom. 7:6 'having died to that wherein we were held prisoners' — the law, viewed here by Barth as an expression of religion; D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison (Widerstand und Ergebung: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen aus der Haft)*, ed. E. Bethge [Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1951; English translation, London: Collins, 1953]), discussed on 'religionless' interpretation, with reference also to similar thought in Paul Tillich, by E. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1967; English translation, London: Collins, 1970; repr. 1977), 773–84.

Christianity), but in his *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (2 volumes, 1948–51, English translation 1952–5) he incorporated this history of religion into a philosophico-theological New Testament interpretation with a debt to Martin Heidegger, focused on existential response to the preached word.³⁸ Bultmann agreed with Barth and like-minded thinkers that Christian faith should be regarded by theology not as ‘a phenomenon of the history of religion’, with the older ‘liberal’ Christian thought, but as ‘the answer to the word of the transcendent God’ which encounters us; unlike Barth, however, he also pursued the historical-critical research which was typical of ‘liberal’ theology.³⁹ On Paul, Bultmann began with an implicit rejection of Deissmann’s religion-centred interpretation: we should not suppose that to understand Paul’s individuality ‘he must be regarded ... as a hero of piety’; what Paul thinks and says grows, rather, out of a basic theological position in which the knowledge inherent in faith has attained the clarity of conscious knowing. Faith and the theology emerging from it, not piety and religious feeling, are central in Paul.⁴⁰ These declarations were contrary to Sanders’ perception of religion and mysticism as central, and his admiration for Deissmann; but they introduced a penetrating interpretation of Paul’s theology as an analysis, from the standpoint of faith, of the human predicament (humanity ‘prior to the revelation of faith’), and of the discovery of life and freedom through faith (humanity now ‘under faith’). Bultmann brought justification by faith, without works of the law, back to the central height in Paul’s thought which it had attained for Luther.⁴¹ Sanders adopted Bultmann’s general position in his early lectures on Paul at McMaster, to reject it eventually in a return to a ‘mystical’ Paul, confirmed by re-reading the text of the epistles and Albert Schweitzer (AA 13). Every serious New Testament student in the 1960s had to come to terms with Bultmann, but Sanders did so with eminent creativity, in work on the gospels and Jesus as well as Paul.

Sanders’ early perception, c. 1962 onwards, of a lopsided emphasis in biblical study on theology, as opposed to religion and history, was thus among other things a reaction to a New Testament scholarship which was often consciously theologically-oriented, although at the same time historically critical. In the 1920s Barth and Bultmann had in

³⁸ Bultmann’s existential reinterpretation of Paul’s participationist language is judged illuminating yet in the end inadequate in PPJ 520–3; PLLT 723–5.

³⁹ R. Bultmann, ‘Autobiographical Reflections’ [1956], English translation in R. Bultmann, *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings*, selected, translated and introduced by Schubert M. Ogden (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1961; repr. London: Collins Fontana Library, 1964), 335–41, at 340–41.

⁴⁰ R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (English translation, London: SCM Press, 2 vols., 1952–5), i, 190. This passage, without naming Deissmann or Schweitzer, also suggests rejection of the further advocacy of Christ-mysticism as central in Paul by Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (1930; English translation London: A. & C. Black, 1931), esp. 219–26, although Bultmann agreed with Schweitzer’s concomitant recognition of Paul as a thinker.

⁴¹ See especially Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, i, 259–69, on law (ending the section on humanity prior to faith); 270–87, on God’s righteousness (opening the sketch of humanity ‘under faith’).

different ways represented the revelation-focused ‘theology of crisis’, as it was called: a venturesome reaction, amid political and economic turbulence, against what seemed the hollowness of both traditional and liberal interpretation of the bible. By the 1960s, however, both scholars headed powerful international schools of thought.

Sanders’ share in widespread movement in the 1960s and 1970s back towards the study of Christianity as one religion among others in the ancient world heralds his later self-presentation as a New Testament scholar. He wrote as an historian of religion rather than a theological interpreter of biblical texts, or, more broadly, as an historian rather than a theologian. By the early 1980s Sanders would see in the continuing theological concern of much New Testament scholarship not a fulfilment of the interpretative task, but a constriction upon it: ‘I have been engaged for some years in the effort to free history and exegesis from the control of theology; that is, from being obligated to come to certain conclusions which are predetermined by theological commitment’ (JJ 333–4). The first great instance of this effort was his opposition to the ‘Lutheran’ Paul of Bultmann, and to associated misconceptions of ancient Jewish religion, in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977).

Sanders went to New York in 1963 for his doctorate, as noted already, in order to work with ‘the leading New Testament scholar who wrote about the rabbis’, W.D. Davies, the Edward Robinson Professor of Biblical Theology at Union Theological Seminary. Also, ‘just across the way’ from Union was the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, where Sanders would attend some courses, and later would serve as part-time Visiting Professor (1979–80). In the closest connection with his New Testament specialism, he could now undertake, both at Union and across the way, a concentrated study of Judaism (AA 4–5).

Davies became Sanders’ main doctoral supervisor; the other was J. Louis Martyn, then soon to write on John and Judaism, whose Pauline teaching and later personal support Sanders gratefully noted (JJ xii). Sanders will first have felt Davies’ influence through the book *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (1948), the fruit of researches undertaken by Davies in Cambridge in the 1940s, under the supervision of C.H. Dodd and David Daube.⁴² Discussing freshly-investigated rabbinic Hebrew texts, Davies urged, at a time when Paul’s Greek-speaking milieu and the Hellenistic elements in his thought formed the focus of scholarly attention, that Paul’s central convictions were rooted, rather, in rabbinic Judaism, taken to represent in its main outlines the Pharisaism to which he had adhered (Phil. 3:5). Paul was a Pharisee who believed that the messiah had come.

⁴² W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (London: SPCK, 1948; 2nd edn, with additional notes, 1955; 3rd edn, with new introduction and additional appendix, 1970; 4th edn with new preface (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1981); 5th edn (Fiftieth Anniversary Edition), with foreword by E.P. Sanders and biographical overview by Dale C. Allison Jr (Mifflintown PA: Sigler Press, 1998).

This book will have helped to alert Sanders to a problem which concerned him throughout life, as seen already: that of the relationship between Judaeen Judaism, including rabbinic piety, and diaspora Jewish religion. Davies had begun *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* by questioning C.G. Montefiore's view that Paul, affected by the 'colder and more sombre' religion of Jews in the diaspora, was not in the main stream of 1st-century Judaism, which would have evinced the more joyous religion later documented in rabbinic texts. In reply, Davies argued on general grounds for 'the mutual interpenetration of diaspora and Judaeen thought', such that rabbinic writings could well give indications of the Jewish religion inherited by Paul, but added that only 'an exhaustive study of Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism in the first century' could fully answer Montefiore.⁴³ Sanders would always keep this broad study as his aim, and was aware that he had in fact been constrained to concentrate chiefly on Judaism in Judaea (PPJ 1-2, 552-5; Foreword, xvii, n.1; AA 24-5). His work towards *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* was, however, complemented by an essay in honour of Davies in which he argued that 'mutual interpenetration' was not complete; there were Hellenised Jewish concepts of salvation which did not appear in Palestinian sources.⁴⁴ His instinct remained, with Goodenough, to envisage difference as well as agreement between diaspora and Judaeen religion.

When Sanders arrived at Union in 1963 he began to know Davies fully, not only as the author of *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, but as a compelling personality, attached to his own Welsh language and tradition and also to Hebrew literature, biblical and rabbinic, who showed poetic insight into the New Testament and ancient Jewish writings, and had a feeling for the underdog which Sanders shared (Foreword, viii). At the same time he got to know Davies as the scholar who had just finished a second book, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964; preface dated 3 February 1963), a study of the relation between gospel and law which complemented *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*. The new book shared with *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* a characteristic to which Sanders' heart warmed: a love of rabbinic literature, evident in generous quotation of passages in Hebrew and Aramaic as well as translation, often in the main text, so that some justice was done to their integrity as well as their importance for New Testament exegesis. *The Setting* is an historical study, focused on the Sermon on the Mount, of the Matthaean presentation of the teaching of Jesus as law. Davies interprets Matthew in the setting of ongoing developments in Judaism as reflected in Hebrew prayer and early rabbinic texts, and in comparison with the treatment of the teaching of Jesus in other New Testament sources, beginning with the appearance of this

⁴³ C.G. Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays* (London: Max Goschen, 1914), 48-51, 93-104 (quotation from 94); Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 5th edn, 1-16.

⁴⁴ 'The Covenant as a Soteriological Category' (n.34, above).

teaching as something like a new law in Paul. It is argued that the Sermon on the Mount emerges from historical comparison as a law which is present within the ‘new’ covenant of grace; the problem of the relationship between grace and law has often divided Christians, but the Sermon on the Mount ‘spans the arch of Grace and Law’. Davies notes his own debt to preaching by his Union colleague Reinhold Niebuhr on law as the expression of grace as well as the instrument of justice, and to similar remarks by A.J. Heschel on the Torah in Judaism.⁴⁵ It was the Davies who had recently concluded *The Setting* with this interior wrestling of whom Sanders later wrote: ‘Professor Davies helped liberate me from the dichotomies between grace and law and faith and works, false dichotomies that have marred the interpretation of Paul ...’ (Foreword, xvii).

III

The sequence of Sanders’ academic career after Union, from 1966 onwards, was varied but unbroken – eighteen full-time years at McMaster, six in Oxford, and fifteen at Duke until retirement in 2005. For the outside world its events were the books which he issued, from 1969 onwards (his many articles had begun to appear in 1966). *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition* (1969) and *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977) were followed in the years 1983–93 by seven books in quick succession, including *Jesus and Judaism* (1985) and *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE – 66 CE* (1992). In the 1980s Sanders also edited the three volumes of the collective work *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition* (1980, 1981, 1982; in association with other editors for volumes 2 and 3), and a *Festschrift*, with an essay by him, for W.R. Farmer (1987; n.18, above). Martin Hengel (1926–2009), Sanders’ German opposite number as a New Testament scholar deeply engaged with ancient history and Jewish religion, opened a critical appraisal by asking, with reference to 1983–93, ‘What other New Testament scholar could create such an imposing *oeuvre* within a decade?’⁴⁶

The books were of course events also in Sanders’ personal life, as he indicated in the prefaces cited above. His outpouring of creative energy, especially in the 1980s and the early 1990s, took its toll. It is tempting to transfer to Sanders himself on Jesus, Paul and

⁴⁵ Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, x, citing Niebuhr’s sermons and A.J. Heschel, *Torah min ha-Shamayim* (in Hebrew: London: Soncino, 1962); Davies, *The Setting*, 439–40 (the ‘arch’); 387, 449–50 (Niebuhr and the significance of the Torah). Sanders would later note his own debt to Heschel’s book (AA 12, n. 31), and Heschel’s daughter Susannah would be one of the editors of the 2008 *Festschrift* for Sanders (n.1, above).

⁴⁶ M. Hengel & R. Deines, ‘E.P. Sanders’ “Common Judaism”, Jesus, and the Pharisees: a Review Article’, *Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 46:1 (1995), 1–70 at 1; enlarged German version, ‘E.P. Sanders’ “Common Judaism”, Jesus und die Pharisäer’, in M. Hengel, *Judaica et Hellenistica: Kleine Schriften*, i (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 392–479.

Judaism what he wrote at the end of a treatment of Paul on election and law: 'I have presented this topic in a somewhat dispassionate way, and I have concealed the deep emotions that the reader sees in Galatians, Romans 7 and Romans 9–11.'⁴⁷ Deep authorial emotion is sometimes evident, as noted already, beneath Sanders' own seemingly dispassionate reasoning and exposition. His friends noticed that he was drinking considerably. He described his experience at the end of the decade of intense creativity as follows: 'When I finished *Judaism: Practice and Belief* in 1991 (published 1992) I had published a book a year for four years. I managed to complete *The Historical Figure of Jesus* in 1993 ... But I was thoroughly used up.' He wrote only 'little bits' of the further book on Paul which he had planned. Despite all difficulties, his stream of articles did continue, with publications (often more than one) each year, until a gap occurred between 2002 and 2007; after 2011 there was only one more, in 2018. He hoped to complete the book on Paul after retirement, but 'in 2005 I went into a post-retirement slump, lacking ambition and vitality ... A series of health issues arose in 2008. Finally, in 2013, I regained enough of my energy to make my brain work and to sit at the keyboard for several hours a day.'⁴⁸ His inner compulsion to finish a book on Paul which would embody all that he sought to teach undergraduates was at last victorious. The comprehensive *Paul: The Apostle's Life, Letters, and Thought* appeared in 2015, followed next year by the collection of papers and lectures entitled *Comparing Judaism and Christianity* (n. 1, above). The series of often interrelated books can now be recalled, with some notice of their situations in Sanders' life.

The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition (1969) was his doctoral dissertation. At Union Sanders already wanted to compare aspects of Judaism with one another and with early Christian religion, but he saw that this project would exceed the limits of doctoral work (AA 5). He therefore chose a literary and historical New Testament subject which he was ready to treat. The title represented his interest, implanted by Farmer, in the history of the tradition embodied in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Farmer's book helping to reopen the question of their literary relationship (n. 16, above) appeared in 1964, not long after Sanders arrived at Union. Davies, interpreter of the Matthaean and other New Testament presentations of the teaching of Jesus in *The Setting*, remained the supervisor, and the dissertation was finished promptly by June 1966.

The book is a compact treasury of classified instances of apparent tendency in various directions, aiming at completeness in each category. It is also a sometimes devastating discussion of efforts to reconstruct tradition-history. Bultmann, in the fullest study of the synoptic tradition (1921, revised 2nd edition 1931, English translation 1963), had been

⁴⁷ E.P. Sanders, 'Did Paul Break with Judaism?', in *Comparing Judaism & Christianity*, 231–40 at 238–9; this paper was given in 2008.

⁴⁸ PLLT, xiii.

representative in arguing, cautiously and with allowance for exceptions, for a certain regularity or ‘accordance with law’ (*Gesetzmässigkeit*) in development, especially towards expansion.⁴⁹ Yet, Sanders noted, Bultmann and others relied on selected examples, not a complete collection of instances; moreover, they accepted a ‘two document’ solution to the synoptic problem, affirming the priority of Mark and the conjectured sayings-source Q to the longer Matthew and Luke. Matthew and Luke would then constitute evidence for the later development of the material of Mark and Q, whereas, in the light of Farmer’s work (n.7, above) and his own observations, Sanders held that the two-document hypothesis was open to question. He therefore examined first those sources, mainly later than the synoptic gospels, which Bultmann had taken to confirm his approach – early textual variants in the manuscript tradition of Matthew, Mark and Luke, early patristic gospel citations, and apocryphal gospels – and then, instances in the synoptic gospels themselves, without assuming the priority of Mark and Q. Classifying developments, Sanders aimed at completeness in each class. The results showed, he concluded, that there were no observable *general* tendencies on which criteria for distinguishing later forms of tradition could be based; tradition could become shorter as well as longer, less as well as more detailed.

The book was at once recognised as important.⁵⁰ Later C.F.D. Moule roundly stated that ‘E.P. Sanders has demonstrated that most of the criteria commonly employed to determine the sequence of different forms of a tradition are inconclusive. Yet’ (Moule went on) ‘there are no others; and one has to rely on cumulative evidence, convergence, coherence, and so forth’.⁵¹ *The Tendencies* has formed a standing reminder for historians of how much any reconstruction of the development of gospel tradition depends on case-by-case judgments of likelihood. Sanders himself combined this point with the view that the synoptic material, handled with due care, did permit some historical inferences concerning the life of Jesus. The book heralded his *Jesus and Judaism* (1985), *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (1989, with Margaret Davies), and *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (1993).

The Tendencies was followed, eight years later, by *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977; n.1, above). This would be Sanders’ most influential and controversial book, and the foundation of his later work on both Judaism and Paul. It formed the major literary

⁴⁹ R. Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (1921; 2nd edn, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931, repr. 1964), 7, 68–9, 88. He wrote more confidently of ‘laws governing transmission of tradition’ (but still with a note of caution) in the summary article ‘The New Approach to the Synoptic Problem’, *The Journal of Religion* 6 (1926), 337–62, repr. in Bultmann, *Existence and Faith* (n.39, above), 39–62, at 46–7.

⁵⁰ H.F.D. Sparks, review of E.P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition*, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 21:2 (1970), 469–73.

⁵¹ C.F.D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament* (3rd edn, revised and rewritten, London: A. & C. Black, 1981), 108.

task of his thirties, and he followed it in his forties by the supplementary *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (1983; n.1, above). The immediate origins of PPJ lie, as Sanders showed (AA 6–14), in the time after his return from Jerusalem to McMaster in autumn 1969, when he was thirty-two. Before departure in 1968, he had considered a Goodenough-related project involving comparison both within Judaism (Philonic and rabbinic mysticism, rejected in favour of rabbinic and Hellenistic Jewish pious practices) and between Judaism and Christianity (AA 6). After return, he decided to focus on Palestinian Judaism, comparing the tannaitic literature which he had just been studying with earlier writings, including the Dead Sea Scrolls. He now wanted to consider not just practice, but the thought implied and presupposed by practice. He eventually based the comparison on ‘patterns’ of religion. In rabbinic texts, and then also in Jewish writings from the 2nd century BCE onwards, he discerned the pattern of religion which he termed covenantal nomism – the keeping of a mercifully-given divine law, under the presupposition of the covenanted mercy shown in the election of Israel, which allows for repentance and restoration in the case of failure.

This formulation possibly owes something to Goodenough, for whom the view found in Philo that ‘the law was mercifully given, and God kindly desires to pardon those who fail when genuinely seeking to keep it’ was ‘an epitome of traditional Judaism’, or of ‘normative Judaism’.⁵² In any case, Sanders thinks of a pattern of basic, often implicit, connected assumptions or principles, rather than an epitome, and stresses above all the framework of covenant. Later he noted that the phrase ‘covenantal nomism’ had met his need for a theological construct which (placing law-observance in the context of covenant) would banish and replace the Christian description of Judaism as legalism – one principal aim of his book (PPJ xii).⁵³ He compared this pattern of religion with his markedly different reconstruction of the pattern of Pauline religion, in a project, as he had hoped at Union, ‘more like the work of W.D. Davies’ (in *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*), than the dissertation (AA 6).

By 1973, four years after his return from Jerusalem, the scheme and main arguments of *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* had been presented in two essays.⁵⁴ By 1974–5 (the

⁵² Goodenough, *By Light, Light*, 253, paraphrasing Philo (*Fug.* 95; 98–9) on the divine powers of mercy and positive and negative commandment which form refuges for those incapable of direct flight to the highest divine powers; Philo would here have recognised ‘normative Judaism’ as true, yet below the highest form of religion.

⁵³ E.P. Sanders, ‘Covenantal Nomism Revisited’ *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 16 (2009), 22–55, repr. in E.P. Sanders, *Comparing Judaism and Christianity* (n.1, above), 51–83, at 53.

⁵⁴ E.P. Sanders, ‘Patterns of Religion in Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: a Holistic Method of Comparison’, *Harvard Theological Review*, 66 (1973), 455–78; id., ‘On the Question of Fulfilling the Law in Paul and Rabbinic Judaism’, in E. Bammel, C.K. Barrett & W.D. Davies (eds), *Donum Gentilicium: New Testament Studies in Honour of David Daube* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 103–26 (already cited in 1973, as forthcoming in this *Festschrift*, in ‘Patterns of Religion in Paul and Rabbinic Judaism’, 461, n. 15).

long section on rabbinic Judaism was completed in early 1974) the new book was in a state to be discussed with scholars who differed from its views.⁵⁵ They included Sanders' McMaster colleagues B.F. Meyer and A.I. Baumgarten, and from elsewhere W.D. Davies and C.F.D. Moule; also Samuel Sandmel, representing American Jewish New Testament interpretation and urging, by contrast with Davies, that Paul was indeed primarily influenced by Hellenistic Judaism – a view which Sanders the disciple of Goodenough never ceased to consider.⁵⁶ Finally, a typescript of some 1100 pages was submitted to SCM Press in October 1975 (PPJ xi-xii, xv-xvi; AA 6–8, 15–16 and n. 38). Delayed by 'very negative reader's reports in both England and the United States' (AA 16), it was issued in 1977 by the decision of John Bowden, the editorial director of the Press, who had read the typescript himself.

Part One of the new book opens with tannaitic literature (200 pages). Sanders was aided in detecting a unity in basic principles by Max Kadushin's perception of coherence without total consistency in rabbinic thought, and by E.E. Urbach's *The Sages*, a large-scale historical synthesis of rabbinic teachings (with recognition also of variety) which appeared in Hebrew just as Sanders was beginning work towards his own book.⁵⁷ The particular pattern of covenantal nomism which he discerned 'has to do with how one moves from the logical starting point of a religion to the logical end' (PPJ 75, cf. 17); one 'gets in' through the covenant – covenanted mercy in the election of Israel – and 'stays in' through nomism – obedience to law, the Torah given in the covenant, with allowance for repentance after transgression and restoration by divine forgiveness under the presupposition, as in Christianity, of covenantal mercy and grace.⁵⁸ This is a pattern of often unexpressed assumptions, but it includes the elements of a doctrine of salvation, a soteriology in the sense of how to 'stay in'; this covenantal soteriology is truer to Judaism

⁵⁵ E.P. Sanders, 'Puzzling Out Rabbinism', in W. Scott Green (ed.), *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, ii (Brown Judaic Studies, 9; Chico CA: Scholars Press, 1980), 65–79 at 78, n. 16.

56 AA 15 and n. 38; PPJ 552–6, on Sandmel and Davies; 549–50, arguing, by contrast with scholars such as Moule, 'Obligation in the Ethic of Paul', in W.R. Farmer, C.F.D. Moule & R.R. Niebuhr (eds), *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies presented to John Knox* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), 389–406, cited at PPJ 501, that Paul largely ignored the concept of repentance, and did not criticise law for permitting legalistic works-righteousness. PPJ xiv-xv noted rewarding meetings with others too, including Knox and J.A. Ziesler.

⁵⁷ PPJ 71–5, and elsewhere (n. 34, above), on Kadushin; PPJ 55 and elsewhere, on E.E. Urbach, *Haza"l. Pirke 'Emunot ve-De'ot* ['Our Sages. Chapters in Beliefs and Concepts'] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1969); English translation *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, 2 vols (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975).

⁵⁸ 'Patterns of Religion in Paul and Rabbinic Judaism', 471–2; PPJ 178–9. In both places Sanders quotes the sequence beginning 'We have offended against thy holy laws' and ending 'Restore thou them that are penitent', from the (Christian) General Confession found in the Book of Common Prayer and related liturgies, to stress that in rabbinic understanding, as in Christianity, those who sin and repent are restored to their original relationship with God, established by grace.

than the notion of a Jewish soteriology of works-righteousness accepted in some Christian scholarship (PPJ 38–59; n. 53, above, and n. 64, below).

Sanders then discerns covenantal nomism also in the Dead Sea Scrolls found at and near Khirbet Qumran, as available in the 1970s; he mainly draws on rule-literature, hymns and biblical interpretations, all arising from sectarian life. Election is clearly attested, now with emphasis on individuals rather than Israel as a whole, but repentance (apart from the great ‘turning’ constituted by entry into the sect) has to be regarded as implicit. Finally, apocrypha and pseudepigrapha are considered, from Ecclesiasticus in the early 2nd century BCE to the apocalypse of Ezra towards the end of the 1st century CE. This writing, preserved in II Esdras (IV Ezra), chapters 3–14, had been viewed in the past as close to Paul’s outlook, notably for the painful conviction expressed at one point that only very few in Israel, however devoted, can fully keep the commandments and so find life hereafter (II Esdr. 7:45–74; 8:46–62). Sanders judged that, for the same reason, this was the only Palestinian Jewish source studied by him which did not reflect covenantal nomism, for the covenant here fails to maintain its efficacy in assuring the salvation promised to Israel in election (PPJ 409). Despite the length of Part One, it was surprising that, with the 1st-century Paul in mind, Sanders did not review the writings on Judaism and Jewish history of the Jerusalem-born priest Josephus (c. 37 – c. 100 CE).⁵⁹

This elucidation of a common pattern of religion stands out in retrospect, however, as a first step in Sanders’ outlining of a ‘common Judaism’ in antiquity. Thereby he would counteract the emphasis laid on diversity in Judaism by many in his time, not least Jacob Neusner, for whom Urbach and Sanders were alike misguided.⁶⁰ Sanders had stated that ‘to the frequent assertion that there were numerous *Judaisms* [his italics] in the Palestine of the period studied, one can reply yes or no, depending on just what is meant. There were obviously different groups and different theologies on numerous points. But there appears to have been more in common than just the name “Jew”’ (PPJ 423).

The shorter Part Two (125 pages) asked if Paul’s religion showed the same pattern of covenantal nomism. Christianity itself, Sanders recognised, would take on this pattern (PPJ 178–9, 513, 552), and Paul is indeed close to it; but covenantal categories are inadequate for interpreting him, since – Sanders now follows Deissmann, Schweitzer and

⁵⁹ PPJ 425–6 briefly consider Josephus on Jewish schools of thought. Sanders later explained the absence of fuller review by noting (AA 20) that he had read Josephus’ *Jewish War* at Perkins on Farmer’s advice, and had associated it with Farmer’s view (rejected by Sanders) that the Pharisees fostered zeal for law-observance.

⁶⁰ Insistence on diversity of outlook in Judaism, especially as regards the different outlooks governing various rabbinic compilations, marked the opening of what became an ongoing debate with Sanders, in the review-article on PPJ by J. Neusner, ‘Comparing Judaisms’, *History of Religions*, 18 (1978), 177–91, enlarged and revised as ‘The Use of the Later Rabbinic Evidence for the Study of Paul’, in W.S. Green (ed.), *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, ii (Brown Judaic Studies 9, Chico CA: Scholars Press, 1980), 43–63.

W.D. Davies, but goes further – the heart of his religion is participation in Christ, informed by eschatological hope (PPJ 513–14).⁶¹ Paul's pattern of religion can be called 'participationist eschatology'. Thus faith in Christ, rather than the election of Israel, has first place; and repentance is sometimes mentioned by Paul, but is not in his participationist pattern (PPJ 548, 551–2; contrast Sanders' treatment of the Scrolls, where repentance was regarded as implicit). Paul thus differs from covenantal nomism both on 'getting in' and on 'staying in'. In confirmation of this contrast Sanders added, in *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, discussion of Rom. 11:25–36. Here the gifts and calling of God to Israel are 'irrevocable', and in the end 'all Israel' shall be saved. For Sanders, however, this is a situation-bound interpretation, a 'desperate expedient' to reconcile salvation by faith with the irrevocable promise to Israel; it did not modify Paul's conviction that only faith in Christ counts (PLJP 192–8). In PPJ it is almost doubtful whether 'pattern' remains the right word for Paul. For Sanders, Paul envisages the position of the non-Christian as the opposite of belonging to Christ, and evinces 'a series of polarities rather than the smooth sequence of covenantal nomism: in Christ/in the flesh; under grace/under law; and the like' (PPJ 549).

What appears to be Pauline criticism of justification by conformity to law is in Sanders' view retrospective argument against any supposition that salvation is offered otherwise than through faith in Christ. Justification by faith, viewed as central by Bultmann (n. 41, above) and in Lutheran tradition, is another, more restricted way of stating, in juristic terms, what is expressed more fully by the language of participation (PPJ 502–8). Works-righteousness is not the heart of the matter. The Pauline pictures of a vain struggle to attain righteousness by works of the law, and an increase of transgression paradoxically caused by a law given to condemn us, are not descriptions of Paul's or other Jewish experience, or, as argued by Bultmann, insights into the human predicament (PPJ 495–7). Neither did Sanders endorse the understanding of Pauline religion, including these statements on law, by Schweitzer and Davies, as an expression of Judaism as it might be changed in respect of law-observance in the days of the messiah – a view shared also within Jewish scholarship by Leo Baeck and, with comparison of the 17th-century Sabbatian movement, by Gershom Scholem, H.-J. Schoeps (in his 1959 book on Paul often cited in PPJ), and Jacob Taubes.⁶² Sanders would indeed later

⁶¹ Sanders was close, as he notes (PPJ 440, 466), to the use of the phrase 'salvation by participation' in D.E.H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964), 130–54.

⁶² PPJ 496–7; L. Baeck, 'The Faith of Paul', *Journal of Jewish Studies* 3 (1952), 93–110, repr. in L. Baeck, *Judaism and Christianity*, essays translated with an introduction by Walter Kaufmann (1958; repr. New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 139–68, at 161–4; G. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), 57–9, 63–4 (from 'The Crisis of Tradition in Jewish Messianism' [German original, 1970]); id., *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (English translation, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 795–9, 803, 814; Schoeps, *Paul*, 173–5, 192–3, citing earlier writings by Scholem; W.D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come*

emphasise that Pauline accounts of the negative functioning of law also expressed a Jewish faith in divine providence.⁶³ His chief suggestion remained, however, that Paul's 'solution' – participation in Christ – dictates his accounts of the 'problem', for Paul's old religion now seems to Paul to lack precisely the liberation given in his new faith.

This denial of any primary Pauline intention to criticise law-observance as a quest for works-righteousness removes an old stumbling-block from the path of positive presentation of Judaism, and so takes up the apologetic thread in the discussion of tannaitic literature in Part One. Here Sanders had aimed not only to show the pattern of covenantal nomism, but also 'to destroy the view of Rabbinic Judaism' as legalistic works-righteousness 'which is still prevalent in much, perhaps most, New Testament scholarship', and 'to establish a different view of Rabbinic Judaism'.⁶⁴ Now, after consideration of Paul as well as Jewish literature, Sanders can say not only that early rabbinic and other Palestinian Jewish texts fail to attest a religion of works-righteousness, but also that the charge of works-righteousness 'is not the heart of Paul's critique ... The fundamental critique of the law is that following the law does not result in being found in Christ'; it 'is wrong only because it is not faith' (PPJ 550). Yet, as he had put it in a preliminary study, 'Paul's opposing faith to works as the gateway to salvation has misled Christians ever since' – into understanding Paul as a critic of works-righteousness.⁶⁵ This Christian view of Paul had coalesced with time-honoured Christian emphasis on such gospel passages suggesting works-righteousness as the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:9–14) and the woes against Pharisees in Matt. 23:1–36 and parallels. Sanders would consider this gospel material in *Jesus and Judaism*.

Sanders had resolved on polemic against contemporary portrayal of Judaism as works-righteousness by New Testament scholars when he found this view in Bultmann also (AA 11–12, 14). Bultmann had used Bousset's handbook on Judaism in New

(Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, 1952); Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, 109–90, 362–6, 446–50; id., *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 5th edn, xlix-1 (from his Preface to the 4th edn, 1981), citing Scholem; J. Taubes, 'The Issue between Judaism and Christianity: Facing up to the Unresolvable Difference', *Commentary* xvi.6 (New York, 1953), 525–33, German transl. in J. Taubes, *Der Preis des Messianismus*, ed. Elettra Stimuli (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), 11–23; id., *The Political Theology of Paul*, transl. Dana Hollander, edited by Aleida Assmann & Jan Assmann, with H. Folkers, W.-D. Hartwich & C. Schulte (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 7–11, discussed by D.R. Langton, *The Apostle Paul in the Jewish Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 255–6.

⁶³ E.P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 39–43; id., 'God Gave the Law to Condemn: Providence in Paul and Josephus' (n. 5, above), noting (189–90) Benjamin Franklin's acceptance of the doctrine.

⁶⁴ PPJ xii (quoted), xiii, 33–59, 233–7, against Christian interpretations of rabbinic religion as works-righteousness (for 'destroy' see also 59, 234); 549–52, on Paul's critique of the law as wrongly taken to attack works-righteousness.

⁶⁵ 'On the Question of Fulfilling the Law in Paul and Rabbinic Judaism' (n. 36, above), 124.

Testament times. Now (in 1966) it had been reissued.⁶⁶ Bousset (n. 28, above) held that in Jewish piety joy was present but outweighed by anxiety.⁶⁷ In response, Sanders highlighted and developed (PPJ 33–59, 212–17, 233–8) the critique of modern authors, including Bousset, in G.F. Moore's 1921 article on Christian writers on Judaism, soon translated into German.⁶⁸ Moore here argued that Ferdinand Weber's much-used but mission-oriented treatise on Talmudic teachings (1880, 2nd edition 1896) took rabbinic passages out of their larger context to support a view of Judaism as the effort to please God by works of the law – a view which could seem to have the support of the gospels and Paul; Bousset and others rediffused Weber's view.⁶⁹ Sanders showed that Moore's critique applied also to (parts of) widely-used works completed since 1921, and to books by respected living authors. In correcting these errors of 'the older generation of scholars', Sanders deliberately declined to discuss the writers' attitudes towards Jews (PPJ xiii). His warmth in defending Hebrew writings which he loved from misinterpretation converged, nevertheless, with the wish of students of theology, the classics and ancient history in the 1970s, especially but not only in Germany, to take account of anti-Jewish tendencies in the scholarship they inherited.⁷⁰

Sanders' discernment of covenantal nomism as a pattern was thus bound up with an apologia for ancient Judaism against Christian misunderstanding. The term 'covenantal nomism' and the 'soteriology' which the pattern represented were both, under one aspect, rebuttals of the charge of legalism. This apologia fell on open ears; but Sanders' critique of Christian interpreters was focused on the writing of history rather than the exposure of prejudice, and, rightly, he was not treated simply as an apologist. His own 'pattern' of

⁶⁶ *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (1903; 2nd edn 1906); 3rd edn, revised by H. Gressmann, *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1926), repr., with foreword by E. Lohse (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1966). Gressmann's altered title reflects his distinction, in continuation and development of Bousset's view, between a 'late Hellenistic' period of Judaism, ending around 100 CE and marked by interaction with Hellenism, and a more inward-looking following period, marked by suffering through repression of revolt against Rome; rabbinic literature, composed from the late 2nd century CE onwards, 'lies outside the period to be considered [in this book], and in general cannot count as a source for [this period]' (Bousset & Gressmann, *Die Religion des Judentums*, 3rd edn, 40–41).

⁶⁷ Bousset & Gressmann, *Die Religion des Judentums*, 3rd edn, 382–94 (followed, 394–9, by a further balancing appendix on the unmediated, mystical access of the pious to God, and their experience of the divine spirit).

⁶⁸ G.F. Moore, 'Christian Writers on Judaism', *Harvard Theological Review*, 14 (1921), 197–254; German translation by Rosalie Perles in *Ost und West. Illustrierte Monatsschrift für das gesamte Judentum*, 22 (1922), 151–74, 203–20; 23 (1923), 19–26.

⁶⁹ Moore, 'Christian Writers on Judaism', 228–37 (Weber), 241–8 (Bousset), 251–3 (Weber, Bousset, and the charge of legalism).

⁷⁰ See for example Charlotte Klein, *Theologie und Anti-Judaismus: eine Studie zur deutschen theologischen Literatur der Gegenwart* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1975), English translation *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology*, transl. E. Quinn (London: S.P.C.K., 1978).

Judaism was criticised accordingly. There was a widespread wish, shared by Sanders, to get away from defining Judaism, or any religion, by a briefly-described ‘essence’; but he was thought to have fallen back into this trap, and into discussion of theology rather than both practices and tenets.⁷¹ For some critics, his ‘pattern’ was really another ‘epitome’ – descriptive within its limits, but too limited to be useful.

Sanders’ argument for a Palestinian Judaism with common features was not, however, without effect. Moreover, the framework of comparison was welcomed. It placed Judaism and Paulinism side by side as phenomena, and avoided setting them both within the sequence of the Old Testament and the New; that familiar approach gave historical benefits, but could also imperceptibly suggest that Paulinism was something better. Sanders’ comparison led, rather, to a sharp, stimulating contrast. ‘Paul derived most of his mental material from Judaism, but ... his faith in Christ resulted in a basic difference’ (Foreword, xvi).

Yet by the same token the contrast had a measure of detachment from history. Sanders viewed his literary evidence for the pattern of covenantal nomism, stretching back from rabbinic texts to the 2nd century BCE, as representative enough to support an inference to the Palestinian Judaism of St Paul’s time (PPJ 426–8). The prevalence of the pattern indeed accorded with long-standing perception of lines of continuity between Second-Temple and rabbinic Judaism, as the value of rabbinic texts for interpreting Second-Temple writings, including those in the New Testament, had repeatedly suggested. Nevertheless, the pattern had its limits. The rabbinic sources from which Sanders began date from the late 2nd century CE onwards, after the harsh experience of repeated repression of Jewish revolt against Rome, and attest changes in thought. How far can their Judaism be considered as continuous with the Judaism of the 1st century CE and earlier?

Bousset’s handbook (1903, 2nd edition 1906) had made this question prominent again (n. 66, above). It could be raised, as in England by F.C. Burkitt (1906), to support the view that New Testament depictions of Judaism have some validity; but it still posed a genuine historical query to assumptions of continuity in religion.⁷² Moore’s article

⁷¹ See essays by Jonathan Z. Smith, W.A. Meeks, J. Neusner (a revised version of his review; see n. 60, above), and Sanders himself in Green, *Approaches*, ii, 1–79 (n.55, above); Beverley Roberts Gaventa, ‘Comparing Paul and Judaism: Rethinking Our Methods’, *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 10 (1980), 37–44; Sanders, ‘The Origin of the Phrase “Common Judaism”’, 32–9 (n. 19, above).

⁷² F.C. Burkitt, *The Gospel History and its Transmission* (1906; 2nd edn, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1907), 169–74 (perhaps religion changed for the better after the revolts); in reply, C.G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels* (2nd edn, 2 vols., London: Macmillan, 1927), ii, 197–201 (the gospels and rabbinic texts might exaggerate shortcomings and excellences, respectively; both before and after the revolts, ‘Judaism, like Christianity, had its good qualities and its defects’; cf. the summary in similar terms of Montefiore’s earlier *Judaism and St Paul*, 87–91, at PPJ 5).

(1921) rekindled the debate.⁷³ Gressmann, following Bousset, sharply distinguished between periods (1926; n. 66, above). G. Kittel (1926), however, like Sanders fifty years later, expressly endorsed Moore's critique of Weber and Bousset; but with debate on continuity in view he also expressly argued that rabbinic material could illuminate writings of the Second-Temple period (this book was eclipsed by his 1933 commendation of Nazi anti-Jewish separatist measures).⁷⁴ In England Wilfred Knox regarded it as a weakness of Moore that he did not allow for the possibility that the Judaism of the 1st century CE may have differed considerably from that of the Talmud.⁷⁵ In Sanders' time Schoeps (1959, English translation 1962), writing as a Jewish historian of religion, comparably saw it as an important insight of Bousset (and earlier scholars) 'that the Judaism of the New Testament period was not identical with that of the rabbinic schools' at the time of the Mishnah.⁷⁶ Sanders' study, however, was 'not ... designed to answer the question of what Judaism was like in Palestine before 70 c.e.' (PPJ 426).

His own answer to that question, now with intensive interpretation of Josephus, would come later (in JJ, JLM and JPB). Meanwhile, however, especially through Neusner and his pupils, emphasis on diversity within Judaism (n. 60, above) and doubts on the utility of Sanders' pattern were joined by the question concerning continuity between Second-Temple and rabbinic religious outlooks, posed now from the side of Jewish scholarship. This question was the first to be raised in Neusner's revised version (1980) of his review 'Comparing Judaisms', now significantly re-named 'The Use of the Later Rabbinic Evidence for the Study of Paul' (n. 60, above). The same question was being posed in a different way by further study of Second-Temple and rabbinic scriptural interpretation, where continuities are often striking but changes are also important. Sanders' later work on the 'common Judaism' of the 1st centuries BCE and CE did not in fact end the question of its degree of continuity with rabbinic religion.⁷⁷

In New Testament study *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* was seen, however, as a major force towards the opening of a 'new perspective' on Paul, a phrase used soon after publication but made popular by J.D.G. Dunn (1983; n. 78, below). This umbrella term covered scholars of varying outlooks, but Sanders' work in particular was judged to

⁷³ R. Deines, *Die Pharisäer: Ihr Verständnis im Spiegel der christlichen und jüdischen Forschung seit Wellhausen und Graetz* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 376–7, 436–8, 450–2, 457–9.

⁷⁴ G. Kittel, *Die Probleme des palästinischen Spätjudentums und das Urchristentum* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1926), 5–21, 25–30; id., *Die Judenfrage* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933).

⁷⁵ W.L. Knox, *Some Hellenistic Elements in Primitive Christianity* (Schweich Lectures, 1942; London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1944), 43, n.1 (envisaging 'reaction against speculations which might be taken to support Christianity').

⁷⁶ Schoeps, *Paul*, 22, on Bousset.

⁷⁷ The abiding importance of this question was highlighted together with a Sanders-like plea for recognition of common features by G. Stemmer, 'Was There a "Mainstream Judaism" in the Late Second Temple Period?', *Review of Rabbinic Judaism*, 4 (2001), 189–208.

mark the change. Particularly ‘new’, at least in combination, seemed his perception of ancient Judaism as a religion of grace, his affirmation of participation in Christ rather than justification as central for Paul, his interpretation of Paul on the law as retrospective assertion of salvation through Christ, and his understanding of Paul as coherent but not totally consistent – although perhaps none of these positions individually was without precedent. In 1985 a German translation was published. By 1990 two differing long-term critical incorporations of PPJ and PLJP into historical and theological work on Paul, by Dunn and N.T. Wright, were in progress.⁷⁸ A quarter of a century later, treating PPJ in a chronicle of Pauline debate, Wright (2015) wrote that ‘the lava is still flowing as we speak’.⁷⁹ International discussion went on throughout Sanders’ life. Here the rolling debate can be evoked by mention of three aspects of criticism which bring out major features of the book.

In 1981, still not long after publication, W.D. Davies asked whether Sanders, despite his positive treatment of Judaism, was not also ‘somewhat reminiscent of Marcion’.⁸⁰ *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* tended, for Davies, to detach Paul from the Jewish scriptures and their development in kindred Second-Temple period writings. The significance of a biblically-rooted messianism for Paul was minimised; Paul himself appeared as a gifted ‘prooftexter’, but not as personally involved in the biblical narrative of the people of Israel, in the way suggested by I Corinthians 10 and Romans 9–11. In later responses to views of this kind (most fully in PLJP) Sanders considered Paul’s relationship with his Jewish contemporaries, including the implications of being ‘as a Jew to Jews, and as without law to those without law’ (I Cor. 9:20-22); but he still argued that Paul’s writings implied a separation of Christianity from Judaism.⁸¹ PPJ can certainly leave the impression felt by Davies, in the sense that Paul, pictured in this book as under the pressure of his new convictions, has been shifted away from Jewish scripture and life, without full allowance for the agility of his movement to and fro between things new and old.

By the mid-1990s other books by Sanders had amplified his account of Judaism and Paul, but the fundamental *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* was still a major concern, not least in Germany. Martin Hengel and his pupil Roland Deines (1995) argued that covenantal nomism falls short as a pattern because its focus is simply on ‘getting in’ and

⁷⁸ J.D.G. Dunn, ‘The New Perspective on Paul’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 65 (1983), 95–122; id., *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (London, SPCK, 1990), and further publications; N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), and further publications; id., *Paul and his Recent Interpreters* (London: SPCK, 2015), 65, n. 1 (on Dunn’s observation that the phrase ‘new perspective’ in his 1983 title had already been used by Wright in a 1978 lecture on Paul, attended by Dunn).

⁷⁹ N.T. Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters* 63–4.

⁸⁰ Davies, ‘Preface to the Fourth Edition’ (1981), in id., *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 5th edn, lii.

⁸¹ See PLJP (1983), 207-210; *Paul* (1991), 117-28; ‘Paul’s Jewishness’ (2008; n. 4, above); ‘Did Paul Break with Judaism?’ (2008; n. 47, above).

‘staying in’, without any notice of the intention or goal in view (Sanders excludes ‘speculative’ questions, including after-life, from the pattern, PPJ 17); moreover, Sanders envisages a toleration of different opinions which does not do justice, they urged, to the force of inner-Jewish conflict between religious standpoints. In related criticism, over the next few years Sanders’ view of the overriding importance of covenantal grace in Palestinian Jewish writings was reconsidered. An argument that emphasis on grace was matched by emphasis on obedience to commandments was made both for early rabbinic sources (F. Avemarie) and for the literature of the Second Temple period (S. Gathercole). Similarly, but with concentration in Neusner-like fashion on particular rabbinic texts in their entirety, the Mishnah (works) was contrasted with the halakhic midrash Sifre on Deuteronomy (grace) by P.S. Alexander, to confirm that both emphases are found in early rabbinic Judaism; reviewing JJ, he had also urged that righteousness by works should in any case be viewed as a respectable religious standpoint, not something to be disowned or apologised for.⁸² Sanders rejected some of these arguments as basically rearrangements of well-worn ‘proof-texts’, but also responded further to some criticisms, in his lecture ‘Covenantal Nomism Revisited’ (2004, published 2009; n. 53, above).

Lastly, forty years after publication, PPJ was reissued in an anniversary edition (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017). The *Journal of the Jesus Movement in its Jewish Setting* 5 (2018) began with articles on PPJ and its reception, and then gathered discussions of scholarship concerned with ‘Paul within Judaism’, a Sanders-related motto carrying an implicit distinction from study of Paul within the context of the Christian tradition — of which, as was likewise indicated by Sanders on Paul’s ‘break with Judaism’, Paul can also be historically viewed as an early expression. At and after this anniversary PPJ still stimulated diverse rethinking of Paul within the setting of Judaism, with awareness of Paul’s place within an early Christianity which was also a Jewish phenomenon.

Thus Paula Fredriksen’s *Paul, the Pagans’ Apostle* (2017) acknowledged a debt to Sanders’ ‘great book’, which ‘began the serious academic retrieval of Second Temple Judaism as the defining context, in positive ways, of Paul’s life and work’. She was akin

⁸² Hengel & Deines, ‘E.P. Sanders’ “Common Judaism”, Jesus, and the Pharisees: a Review Article’ (n. 46, above); F. Avemarie, *Tora und Leben: Untersuchungen zur Heilsbedeutung der Tora in der frühen rabbinischen Literatur* (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 55, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996); id., ‘The Tension between God’s Command and Israel’s Obedience as Reflected in the Early Rabbinic Literature’, in J.M.G. Barclay & S.G. Gathercole (eds), *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and his Cultural Environment* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2008), 50–70; S. Gathercole, *Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul’s Response in Romans 1–5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); P.S. Alexander, ‘Torah and Salvation in Rabbinic Literature’, in D. Carson, P.T. O’Brien & M. Seifrid (eds), *Justification and Variegated Nomisms*, i, *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.140; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 261–301; id., review of JJ, *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 37:1 (1986), 103–6.

to Sanders in giving a picture of Paul focused on his calling as a teacher of gentiles, but this picture, unlike Sanders', resembled the Paul of Acts. Fredriksen's Paul was an often synagogue-based teacher who appealed to the non-Jewish sympathisers or 'godfearers' in the synagogue congregations, himself continued to follow Jewish practice, and assumed that other Jews with faith in Christ would do likewise. The Pauline 'polarities' highlighted by Sanders, such as that between law and gospel, are the contrasts of Paul's rhetoric as 'a late Second Temple visionary'; it was only after some time, Fredriksen argues, that they were taken, in the emerging gentile churches, as a doctrinal pattern of polarised opposites.⁸³ By contrast, Paul's development of a theological theme which unites ancient Judaism with later Christianity had been studied with particular depth in a reconsideration of grace in Paul and Judaism by J.M.G. Barclay (2015) — a book which for Fredriksen had questionably envisaged a 'Christian' Paul. For Barclay, Paul should indeed be viewed, with Sanders, among many contemporary Jewish affirmations of grace, but these are variously nuanced in ways not brought out in PPJ. Paul's connection of grace not only with faith but also with his own practice in the gentile mission makes him question his former allegiance to the Torah; the gift of incongruous, unmerited grace to Jews and gentiles alike means that the authority of Torah is demolished, the ethnic distinction between Jew and gentile is dissolved, and Paul rethinks the identity of Israel in the context of new communities which live at odds with both Jewish and non-Jewish traditions of value.⁸⁴ The reconstruction recalls Sanders' stress (in PLJP) on the influence of this new social context, a third group beside Jews and gentiles, but by comparison with Sanders makes Paul more of a reformer, and lays less emphasis on Paul's reverence for the law and sense of his own Jewishness, and on the eschatological setting of the new ecclesiastical group (lasting until the redeemer comes from Zion).⁸⁵ Lastly, M.V. Novenson, having reaffirmed (by contrast with Sanders) the importance of messianism for Paul (2012), now (2024) reviewed the implications of the whole eschatological setting. Paul writes as a Jew, not as a teacher of Christianity; his Jewishness included a respect for law which could be called legalism (contrast Sanders' rejection of the term) and a share in disdain for gentiles, for Paul was not a supporter of 'Enlightenment cosmopolitanism'. (Sanders, likewise stressing Paul's Jewishness, noted his acceptance that gentiles are prone to sin and uncleanness, but highlighted, not without sympathy for Enlightenment values, Paul's teaching that both Jews and gentiles receive God's grace.) Paul's messianic eschatology suggests fresh review of law in the age to come (n. 62, above), with emphasis on the expected change in mortals rather than a change in law;

⁸³ Paula Fredriksen, *Paul, the Pagans' Apostle* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), 173–5, 178.

⁸⁴ John M.G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 151–8, 350, 385, 520, 562–9.

⁸⁵ PPJ 291–7, 420–22, 516–18, and elsewhere; PLJP 171–206; 'Did Paul Break with Judaism?', 238–40; 'Paul's Jewishness'.

change through resurrection into a spiritual state (as at Rom. 8:11) means fulfilment of the law and release from a large part of its prescriptions, and is comparable with Jewish views of the future angelic life of the righteous dead. Novenson rejects all attempts to compare Paul with Judaism, ‘a single person with an entire ethno-religion’; yet Sanders’ was ‘the one comparison of Paul and Judaism that towers over all others’.⁸⁶ Novenson noted as a reason the quality of the exegesis. One might expand this by noting the strength with which aims are pursued, the inspiring breadth of scope, the number of questions in the study of Jewish sources and of Paul which are brought clearly to a point – and the author’s insight, ingenuity and clarity.

Sanders began to work on *Jesus and Judaism* (1985) in 1975, aged thirty-seven, when the typescript of *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* was submitted. The early draft of JJ was entirely rewritten in 1982 (JJ xi). During this year Sanders was a Visiting Fellow Commoner at Trinity College, Cambridge. His sponsor there was the Dean of Chapel, the New Testament scholar and theologian Dr John A. T. Robinson (1919–1983), formerly Bishop of Woolwich, a close friend of C.F.D. Moule. Sanders much enjoyed regular discussion with Robinson; ‘my life and work were greatly enhanced by him’ (JJ xi). Robinson was then working on his book *The Priority of John*. It would appear, edited by his pupil Chip Coakley, only after Robinson died from cancer in December of the following year.⁸⁷ Sanders took the possible presence of historically valuable tradition in St John’s Gospel seriously, in accord with Robinson, but was not convinced by Robinson’s early dating of John and also the synoptic gospels (JJ 359, n. 55). Robinson’s infectious fascination with Josephus on 1st-century Judaea, developed especially while he was working on John, may also have been shared with the Sanders who had once recoiled from Josephus after a reading of the *Jewish War* (n. 59, above); it was while writing *Jesus and Judaism* that Sanders too became ‘fascinated with the riches of Josephus’ (AA 20). This further period abroad afforded a change of scene and a chance to return to *Jesus and Judaism*, at a difficult time in Sanders’ life (JJ xii). He took part in Cambridge teaching and met a range of British scholars and undergraduates and graduate students, and the experience perhaps helped to encourage him to accept a chair in Britain. Over twenty years later his memory of the concise minutes of the Cambridge New Testament seminar, lacking any introduction to the subject of a paper (‘we all knew why the day’s topic was an issue, and it was unnecessary for the secretary to tell us’), would serve him as illustration of his view that rabbinic discussion may presuppose a principle like the covenant without mentioning it.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ M.V. Novenson, *Christ among the Messiahs. Christ Language in Paul and Messiah Language in Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); id., *Paul and Judaism at the End of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 13–16, 132–4, 159, 209–43.

⁸⁷ J.A.T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, edited by J.F. Coakley (London: SCM Press, 1985).

⁸⁸ ‘Covenantal Nomism Revisited’ (n. 53, above), 61.

The new book eventually appeared (1985) in the year after his move to Oxford. It formed one in a late 20th-century succession of works on the historical Jesus. Near the beginning of this series were C.H. Dodd's *The Founder of Christianity* (1970) and Geza Vermes' *Jesus the Jew* (1973). Sanders held the potentially conflicting emphases of these two titles together, but he did so still within the context of Jewish history. His book is not a first chapter in the history of the church, although it has elements of such a chapter. In constant dialogue with other contemporary interpretations, he concentrates on the problems of the intention of Jesus and his relation to his Jewish contemporaries. The treatment of this second point against the background of his broader study of Judaism is a distinctive feature of the book. In *The Aims of Jesus* (1977) Sanders' McMaster friend and colleague B.F. Meyer, writing in sympathy with the philosophy of Bernard Lonergan, had put consideration of the intention on a fresh historical and theological basis, giving (in Sanders' words) 'the richest and best nuanced [description] that I know' (JJ 47). Sanders, like Meyer but more sparingly, argued for a measure of continuity between the intention of Jesus and the rise of the church (unlike Meyer, he viewed the gospel indications that Jesus expected suffering and death as a church creation rather than a clue to the historical Jesus). 'There is substantial coherence between what Jesus had in mind, how he saw his relationship to his nation and his people's religion, the reason for his death, and the beginning of the Christian movement' (JJ 22). Coherence between intention and outcome was found in the belief-setting of Jewish restoration eschatology. For Sanders, hope for the restoration of Israel according to God's design was shared by Jesus – without conflict over law (JJ 272–4) – with other Jews of his time, and with his followers, including Paul. This view set Sanders in an established scholarly tradition, but distinguished him from those contemporaries, like J.D. Crossan, who were reconstructing a 'non-eschatological' Jesus, a sage rather than a prophetic figure.⁸⁹ For both Meyer and Sanders coherence was confirmed by the importance of restoration eschatology in early Christianity; but for Sanders the significant point (also important in his study of Paul) was not simply the rise of Christianity, but the separation of Jesus' followers from the majority Jewish community. With Joseph Klausner, he held that any account of the intention of Jesus and his relation with other Jews must also shed light on how it was that the Jewish Jesus originated a movement that became separated from Judaism (JJ 3, 19, citing J. Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, translated from the original Hebrew by Herbert Danby [London: Allen and Unwin, 1925], 369).

The backbone of reconstruction is formed, therefore, by significant 'facts about Jesus' career *and its aftermath*' (Sanders' emphasis). These are selected from facts which are historically 'almost indisputable' (JJ 11). In the mid-1980s this focus on 'facts' was startling as well as absorbing. Jesus' teaching is important for the book, notably as

⁸⁹ Davies & Sanders, 'Jesus from the Jewish Point of View' (n. 9, above), 624–5, n. 13.

regards sayings and parables on the kingdom of God, but not central; contrast Bultmann's *Jesus* (1926, English translation 1958), which concentrated on the teaching rather than the career — an emphasis which was allied with the widespread view (criticised in England notably by C.H. Dodd) that, because the synoptic gospels depend on fragmentary traditions which have been only secondarily connected, a sequential 'life of Jesus' cannot be written. Yet, as Sanders emphasised, some facts about him can be recognised with reasonable confidence. In retrospect, Sanders judged that 'the most important academic decision I made' (in writing JJ) 'was to shift the discussion away from Jesus' sayings' (AA 18).

The appointment of the Twelve, representing the tribes of Israel, is for Sanders one of the significant facts, and suggests that Jesus viewed himself as divine viceroy (not 'messiah'), with an implied self-claim which would have aroused hostility (JJ 280). At this point a line connected his historical Jesus with the heavenly lord envisaged by his Paul. Aspects of the sayings-tradition which might reflect such a claim include its surprisingly slight reflection of teaching by Jesus on repentance (again, compare Sanders' Paul); possibly Jesus understood entry into the group of his followers as sufficient repentance and signification of it (JJ 109–113, 203–8). Suggestions that hostility arose on account of violation of the law or attacks on legalism have no basis in the gospels or Paul, rightly interpreted (JJ 270–81, developing PPJ). Another significant fact is Jesus' demonstration in (and, in Sanders' view, against) the temple — the key to his execution. Jesus was a casualty of his Jewish prophetic conviction. Finally, in the 'aftermath', the persecution of the Christian movement by some Jews suggests that both Jesus and his followers were regarded as threatening values and commitments common in Judaism (and not restricted to any particular school of thought).

Sanders' whole vividly-presented argument has gripped readers, and continues to do so. Obviously interpretation of 'facts' may be disputable. Yet Sanders' construal of the life of Jesus and its aftermath as connected episodes within Jewish history remains memorable and impressive. Within Sanders' own biography the book marks a moment when, in his mid-forties and 'a liberal, modern, secularised Protestant' (JJ 334, quoted already), he could look back to a time when he was less 'secularized'. 'I am interested in the debate' (among the followers of Bultmann, especially) 'about the significance of the historical Jesus for theology in the way one is interested in something he once found fascinating' (JJ 2).

After moving to Oxford in 1984 Sanders enjoyed renewing his old link with Jewish studies and the Oriental Institute. Interchange in Oxford between scholars concerned with Jewish and with Greek and Roman religion had recently been strengthened through collaboration between Geza Vermes and Fergus Millar on the updating of Emil Schürer's *History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*. Sanders now joined in setting up a new MPhil in Judaism and Christianity in the Graeco-Roman World with Vermes, and

a new cross-faculty graduate seminar on Religion in the Roman World with Martin Goodman and Simon Price. In AA, having named these scholars, together with Millar and Robin Lane Fox, Sanders added 'I wanted to be like them. Well, I could never be that clever or learned, but I could go back to nontheological religion and, specifically, to religious practice, [subjects] which I had dropped after 1968–69' (AA 20).

In 1985 he began work accordingly on his book *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE*, helped further by teaching a summer graduate seminar at McMaster with his colleague A.I. Baumgarten (JPB x; on Sanders' debt to him, AA 26, n. 74). He settled in at his Oxford college, Queen's, where he appreciated 'conversation in an atmosphere at once relaxed and challenging' (JPB xi). A regular exercise was running, and he was proud that he took his runs even in heavy rain. Within the sphere of his chair of New Testament interpretation his self-presentation in *Jesus and Judaism* (1985) as historian rather than theologian underlined the difference between him and his predecessor George Caird, a brilliant exemplar of the integration of philological, historical and theological interpretation of the bible.⁹⁰ Sanders' outlook seemed far from that of colleagues who also sought to hold history and theology together in biblical study.⁹¹ His conviction of the significance of his own work went together with a certain ruthlessness in attacking those with whom he disagreed. Somewhat comparably, he was strict in maintaining a minimum standard of competence for graduate students. Some potential pupils may have hesitated to approach him. Yet his statement of his position allowed those studying early Christianity who were from other religions or without religious commitment to feel at home with his writing and teaching; and in any case, *Jesus and Judaism* enthused many readers of Christian faith.

A reflection of Sanders as a teacher who could interest and encourage his Oxford hearers is his handbook *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (1989). Margaret Davies contributed the chapters on redaction criticism and literary approaches to the gospels. This book takes the reader from critical foundations, beginning with the synoptic problem, right into the quest of the historical Jesus and the formation of historical hypotheses. It supplements *Jesus and Judaism* in a striking aspect of both books, the use of synoptic and Pauline texts to illuminate one another with regard to the future hopes of Jesus and

⁹⁰ J. Barr, 'George Bradford Caird, 1917–1984', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 71 (1985), 493–521.

⁹¹ For discussion from this viewpoint see R. Morgan, 'From Reimarus to Sanders: the Kingdom of God, Jesus, and the Judaisms of His Day', in R.S. Barbour (ed.), *The Kingdom of God and Human Society* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 80–139. Considering JJ in the setting of the whole modern quest for the historical Jesus, Morgan notes the need for hypothetical historical construction, the potential helpfulness yet also the inevitable openness to question of Sanders' presentation, and, above all, the need for historical construction to be complemented by theological construction. 'But for clear statement of the problems, trenchant argument, knowledge of the context, boldness in risking a hypothesis coupled with careful assessments of the weight of the evidence at every point, Sanders' book is unsurpassed' (112).

Paul.⁹² In the same year the British scholar Francis Watson issued his first book, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: a Sociological Approach* (Society for New Testament Study Monograph Series, 56; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; rewritten for the second edition [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], with the new subtitle *Beyond the New Perspective*). Here PPJ and PLJP were followed in rejection of ‘Lutheran’ interpretation of Paul in terms of theology, and emulated in the suggestion that Paul’s treatment of law was indeed rhetorical, as Sanders argued, but aimed at defending the existence of Pauline congregations — which had the social characteristics of sectarian groups — in separation from the Jewish community; Watson also warned, however, against division between contemporary New Testament study and theology. The stimulus of Sanders is clear, together with the tension between historical and theological interpretation.

The first-fruits of Sanders’ Oxford return to the study of Jewish religion, now with emphasis on practice, appeared early in the following year in *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies* (London: SCM Press, and Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990). Josephus on Jewish custom and observance and schools of thought, as well as Judaeon politics, now has a central place, together with New Testament, Philonic and rabbinic texts, and archaeological evidence: ‘in April 1989, I examined the remains of several synagogues and many more immersion pools in Israel’ (JLJM viii). The five studies were originally written as part of the still forthcoming *Judaism, Practice and Belief*. The first three, in debate with a range of scholars, discern tolerance and a sense of proportion in Jewish practice, including that of the Pharisees. First, the disputes over law described in the synoptic gospels, even if authentic, would not have formed serious causes of offence. Then, Pharisees venerated their traditions, but distinguished them from the written law; similarly, early rabbis did not equate their own rules with the law given by God. Third, a detailed investigation of the Pharisees’ concern for purity stresses that their desire to be pure was shared with the populace in general, and argues that they did not, as sometimes stated, separate themselves by eating ordinary food in priestly purity. Then, inquiry into a less-studied question finds that Jews in the Greek-speaking diaspora had their own practices, not dependent on Judaeon rules, with regard to food, purity, and donations to the temple; compare Sanders’ earlier perception of distinct diaspora concepts of salvation (n. 34, above). The book closes with an assessment of Neusner’s writings on the Mishnah, gratefully noting his analytical work, but rejecting his view that the Mishnah represents a ‘philosophy’ which excludes from concern all that its text does not mention.

Later in 1990 Sanders, now fifty-three, would take up his position at Duke. He was welcome especially as representing the range of scholarly interests associated with

⁹² E.P. Sanders & Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM Press and Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 337–8, revising JJ 230 on Paul’s expectation.

W.D. Davies, who had twice taught there (1950–55, 1966–82). He showed humanity and effectiveness in teaching and administration.⁹³ In 1991 Sanders issued his short paperback *Paul* (n. 63, above), in an Oxford University Press series of introductions to the thought of abidingly influential intellectual figures of the past. Paul's personal as well as intellectual traits are sketched with sympathy and admiration.

Next year came *Judaism, Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM Press, and Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992; viii + 580 pp.). This is the book he always wanted to write, and the crown of all his books. Discussion of scholarly views moves mainly into the background (especially thanks to the earlier publication of JLJM). A flowing exposition stays close to unobtrusively interpreted primary texts. The subject is Judaism as a functioning religion at a given time, and historical sketches, ending with the chapter 'Who ran what?', show this Judaism intertwined with a multifaceted society. The book aims to set out the observances of 'common Judaism', the religion of ordinary people occupied in daily agricultural and urban life, above all in Judaea. The temple and the festivals come first, but the domestic and synagogue settings of observing the law of God are always in view. The spiritual and practical importance of the temple service, and of the priesthood and the Levites with their tithes and dues, stands out from the beginning. The covenantal nomism described in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* is reaffirmed (JPB ix) and spelt out further, but placed in the context of practice. Telling detail brings out, with the author's gift for imagining a scene concretely, just how rites are likely to have been performed, prayers offered, and law and custom followed. Then groups and parties within this common Judaism – mainly Sadducees, Essenes and Pharisees – are described with emphasis on what they share, as well as where they differ. These points are worked out with special care (taking up JLJM) in the case of the Pharisees. Here debate with secondary literature comes to the fore. Their devotion to God is clear, but their pietism and influence are not to be exaggerated. Yet Judaism is not just a sense of proportion. Most Jews thought that God, the law and their way of life were worth dying for (JPB 409), and among Pharisees and 'other pietists' not identifiable with any party there were those who were ready to give their lives. Sanders relates this aspect of religion to the prevalence of insurgency in Judaea; war and resistance is the first topic considered under the heading of 'Hopes for the Future'. Overall, a debt to Morton Smith's picture of ancient Judaism is acknowledged, but the book is its author's creation. Sanders' sense of fellowship with the people concerned in the functioning religion is constantly illuminating. It does not impede his exercise of judgment, as seen in the graded declarations which conclude the book: 'I rather like the chief priests ... I even find things about Herod to like ... I rather like the Pharisees ...' and 'Mostly, I like the ordinary people' (JPB 493–4).

⁹³ Moody Smith, 'Professor Sanders at Duke' (n. 11, above).

After this book Sanders began to experience the writing fatigue described already. He completed one masterpiece of writing for a wider public, the Penguin book *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (1994). Then for the time being his scholarly energies were given mainly to teaching and articles, with generous response to requests to lecture and assess. Thus, important for his own thinking was a graduate seminar which he offered in the early 1990s on the question of development in Paul's thought, with, in the same period, his pupil Gregory Tatum's dissertation on the subject. Sanders' suspicion that one could detect growth and development was confirmed; he envisaged both but laid greater emphasis on 'growth', as shown in a 1996 public lecture. He did not publish it, however, until 2016.⁹⁴

In March 2000 he was back in England to give the Edward Cadbury Lectures at the University of Birmingham, later published under the heading 'Inner and Outer in the Study of Religion' (*Comparing Judaism and Christianity*, 311–427). In them (pp. 376–7) he noted, in line with his earlier experience of fatigue, a contrast with his old self. 'I was once obsessed with scholarship ... Now I find that I must force myself to sit at my desk and work', although then 'I begin to enjoy it'.

His achievements as a teacher of his pupils, the scholarly world and the general public were recognised at an international conference in his honour at Notre Dame, Indiana (2003), organised by Susannah Heschel (n. 45, above) and three former doctoral pupils at Duke, Mark Chancey, Gregory Tatum and Fabian Udoh. The occasion evoked the 'academic autobiography' often quoted here. Most of the lectures were published as a *Festschrift* edited principally by Udoh, *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities* (2008; n. 1, above).

After retirement in 2005 he after some years felt the impetus to finish *Paul: the Apostle's Letters, Life and Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015; xxxv + 862 pp.). It is meant for 'the elusive "ordinary reader"' and for undergraduates, but aims at completeness (hence its length); 'this book includes everything I know (or think I know) about [Paul's] life, his mission, his letters, and his thought' (PLLT xiii–xv). New elements (by comparison with PPJ, PLJP, and the short *Paul*) include the chapters on Paul's life, the analysis of each letter to clarify its topics and their treatment by Paul, and attention (on lines noted already) to growth and development in Paul's thought (xxxi, 171–2, 710–23, and elsewhere). The old problem of locating the churches addressed in Galatians – in the north, for Sanders, rather than the south – is confronted with his typical freshness and zest in an appendix.

⁹⁴ Gregory Tatum, *New Chapters in the Life of Paul: the Relative Chronology of his Career* (Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2006); E.P. Sanders, 'Did Paul's Theology Develop?', in E.P. Sanders, *Comparing Judaism and Christianity*, 241–65 at 249, 256, 266; PLLT 720.

The collection of essays and unpublished lectures *Comparing Judaism and Christianity*, often cited already, appeared in 2016 to form his last book. It can serve as a companion to the book on Paul, but stands on its own, clarifying the movement of Sanders' thinking and the aims which he consistently pursues. One aim of his life as well as his literary work was publicly acknowledged this year. He received from the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations the Shevet Achim award, taking its name from Ps. 133:1 'to dwell as brethren in unity', for his contribution to Jewish-Christian understanding.

The last essay in *Comparing Judaism and Christianity*, 'Christianity, Judaism, and Humanism' (n. 5, above), is an admiring discussion of Locke, Jefferson and ideas of toleration. Based on lectures given to American audiences as Sanders was approaching his seventies, in October 2003 and March 2007, it was completed when he was nearly eighty. It shows him with a share in the early 21st century 'rediscovery of the Enlightenment', but this element in his outlook seems likely to go back a long way, to upbringing and education in contact with the American ideal as envisaged in the 1940s and 1950s. He had an inner kinship with the age of reason, but his hold on the imagination of readers perhaps owes something also to other rooted interests which were partly put aside in the course of his early life. He moved (Part II, above) from a fascination with mystical and symbolic religion, as seen in his enthusiasm for Goodenough, and for Dodd on Philo and the Hermetic writings, to a Bultmannian sense of Paul as a thinker, and then, perhaps together with his own measure of secularisation, to an outlook which again admitted the importance of mysticism for Paul, but embraced the rabbinic primacy of practical halakhic concern with the commandments, and sidelined such 'speculative' topics as after-life — although he deeply valued the Pauline hints at future mercy upon all (Rom. 5:18, 11:32; PLJP 195–9; *Paul* [n. 63, above], 126–8). He did not lose his sympathy for those who approached these topics, as seen in his admiration for Jewish teachings on providence (nn. 5 & 63, above) — admittedly a tenet with Enlightenment links; Sanders notes that Benjamin Franklin found it congenial. For himself he added wryly 'Having been brought up in the Methodist Church, I am grateful to divine providence for leading John Wesley to accept the [universalist] teaching of Arminius!' (n.5, above).

The essay on toleration likewise represents something more of what lies below the 1985 self-description 'liberal, modern, secularized Protestant'. It recalls also Sanders' later, half-jesting reference to himself in England in 2000: 'I am a Protestant and an American'.⁹⁵ Locke and Jefferson, he argues, stood, without being fully aware of it, for a compromise between the biblical view of authority proceeding 'downwards' from God

⁹⁵ *Comparing Judaism and Christianity*, 376 (from his Edward Cadbury lectures); the sentence continued 'and thus I belong to two groups that have enormous confidence in spontaneity'.

and the view that it proceeds ‘upwards’ from the people. This compromise is better than the alternatives of pure rationalism or unfettered fundamentalism. Its key is the affirmation that religion is private and not a state concern. These points were of course topical in the USA and beyond, but they also show the setting of Sanders’ statement ‘I do not know what other people *ought* to believe – except that they should love all other humans and protect the universe from destruction’ (PLLT xxxiv-xxxv). In his view, his own further religious outlook was a private matter; he retained the precious compromise, as a Protestant and an American.

Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to Dr Rebecca Gray and to Professor Martin Goodman for information and comment.

Note on the author: Professor William Horbury is Emeritus Professor of Jewish and Early Christian Studies at the University of Cambridge, and a Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1997.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy (ISSN 2753–6777) are published by The British Academy, 10–11 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5AH
www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk