

REVIEW ARTICLE

‘All things to all people’: a Chameleon Paul?

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A Jew to the Jews, by David J. Rudolph (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 304), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2011, xii + 290 pp., £69.00 (sewn paper), ISBN 978-3-16-149293-8

The chameleon is the quintessential image for a constantly changing individual. Proteus was an early sea god who would change his shape in order to avoid capture. These images resonate with aspects of the scholarly consensus with regard to Paul’s claim that he became ‘all things to all people’. He remained Torah-observant among Jews but not among the non-Jews. Since the New Testament does not explicitly describe Paul engaging in such diverse practices, scholars fill in the gaps in the textual record with claims that Paul was just such a protean figure, one whose behaviours would change depending on his context. This raises an important interpretive question: is this a valid understanding of Paul and his mission practice among non-Jews? Was Paul a chameleon?

In *A Jew to the Jews*, David J. Rudolph sets out to problematize the consensus view with regard to Paul’s lack of continued Torah-observance in his gentile mission. He sets out two parallel research paths for himself: (1) to show that 1 Cor 9.19–23 may not be irrefutable evidence for Paul’s lack of continued Torah-observance; and (2) to provide a constructive reading of this passage that results in understanding Paul as one who continued to be Torah-observant in his mission. This monograph is a revision of Rudolph’s 2007 Cambridge University PhD thesis, which was supervised by Markus Bockmuehl. Revised theses often only account for subsequent scholarship at a minimal level; however, Rudolph’s revisions, when compared to the 2007 thesis version, are substantial and result in a thoroughly up-to-date work that engages scholarship as late as 2010, making this work that much more significant, and a good model for recent PhD graduates who might be tempted not to make important revisions to their work before publication.

Chapter 1 introduces Rudolph’s argument by providing an overview of the case for the traditional reading of 1 Cor 9.19–23. He surveys contemporary scholarship with regard to the intertextual, contextual, and textual arguments that are marshalled in defence of the consensus interpretation. He then points out four areas in which the traditional view reflects interpretive inadequacies with regard to Paul’s context: (1) the practical impossibility of being ‘all things to all people’; (2) the presentation of Jews as ‘simpletons’; (3) the lack of evidence that Paul employed this strategy; and (4) the dismissal of both the Pauline and Lukan texts that present Paul as one

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who continues to be Torah observant (12–13). This final factor is central to Rudolph's argument. Next, he briefly notes three other scholars who have read Paul in ways similar to himself: Peter Tomson, Mark Nanos, and Mark Kinzer. Rudolph establishes differences between his approach and theirs and suggests there is sufficient warrant for a reassessment of the scholarly framework with regard to whether 1 Cor 9.19–23 'precludes a Torah-observant Paul' (17). This last phrase is an important qualifier in that Rudolph is not trying to prove that Paul remained Torah-observant; rather, his goal is to point out that scholars overstate their claim when they read 1 Cor 9.19–23 as indisputable evidence that Paul ceased to be Torah observant. The rest of the monograph addresses the intertextual, contextual, and textual arguments alluded to earlier in the introduction, and then it concludes with a proposed interpretation of 1 Cor 9.19–23 that fulfils Rudolph's secondary goal of providing a reading of this passage that could allow for it to be understood 'as the discourse of a Torah-observant Jew' (18).

Chapter 2 surveys the key scriptural texts that are alluded to in the broader debate over the salience of Paul's Jewish identity. The first part of the chapter addresses whether Paul's Jewishness is inconsequential now that he is in Christ. Rudolph argues that Timothy's circumcision, referenced in Acts 16.3, and the controverted phrase *dia tous Ioudaious* addresses timing issues and not circumcision itself. Next he addresses the putative erasure discourse in Paul's writings and provides a series of convincing non-erasure readings for the following: (1) 'circumcision is nothing' (1 Cor 7.19; Gal 5.6; 6.15); (2) 'no longer Jew or Greek' (Gal 3.28); (3) third entity language (1 Cor 10.32); (4) 'weak in faith' discourse (Rom 14); (5) 'former way of life' and 'rubbish' language (Gal 1.13; Phil 3.8); and (6) 'live like a gentile and not like a Jew' discourse (Gal 2.14). Rudolph concludes that these verses do not indicate that Paul no longer considered himself a Jew; rather, he understood his Jewish identity as an ongoing calling in Christ. The second half of this chapter provides a constructive reading of Acts 21.17–26; Gal 5.3; Rom 2.25, 4.11–12, 16, 11.29, and 1 Cor 7.17–24 to suggest that Paul remained a Torah-observant Jew (89). Based on chapter 2, though the dominant segment of New Testament scholars would suggest otherwise, the label 'Paul the Chameleon' would be entirely inappropriate for the apostle, and Rudolph's arguments are quite persuasive in this regard, especially his reading of Romans 14, 1 Cor 7.17–24. Those who seek to continue to view Paul as one whose Jewishness ceases to be significant will have to engage Rudolph's arguments for those two passages.

Chapter 3 focuses more properly on the text of 1 Corinthians. Rudolph provides a contextual analysis of 1 Cor 8.1–11.1 that establishes Paul's instruction concerning food offered to idols and the way these chapters may be understood as *not* being the teaching of one who has broken the boundaries of pluriform Second Temple Judaism. Rudolph addresses four issues that New Testament scholars have focused on with regard to this section: (1) the compositional unity of the passage; (2) the presence of the strong and the weak in the passage; (3) the situational permission with regard to eating idol food; and (4) the relationship of Paul's teaching here with the apostolic decree in Acts 15. The most important findings are that, although Christ-followers were not permitted to eat idol food in cultic contexts, indeterminate food *was* permitted outside those contexts. However, idol food was still not permitted once it was known to be such, even outside the cultic context. So, Paul's localized, contextualized teaching here is quite in line with the

non-situational apostolic decree (101). This teaching, argues Rudolph, was quite Jewish in its orientation. He provides several reasons for his claim, the most substantial being the use of *skandalizō* two times in 1 Cor 8.13, a term that connects Paul's teaching with Lev 19.14, thus placing Paul's discourse within proper 'Jewish ethical categories of thought and legal traditions surrounding Leviticus 19' (104). So, rather than seeing Paul in 1 Cor 8.1–11.1 as one arguing in a non-Jewish fashion, he may be seen as one applying the principles of Jewish teaching and learning discourse in a flexible manner for gentiles in Christ. Rudolph concludes his contextual discussion by briefly noting the function of 1 Cor 9 within the literary unit of 1 Cor 8.1–11.1. He rightly sets aside the idea that Paul was defending his apostleship here; rather, 'the central point of 1 Cor 9 is Paul's renunciation of all rights (even those rights provided by Mosaic law and the Lord Jesus' command) for the sake of the gospel' (107–8).

Chapter 4 focuses in on the textual issues in 1 Cor 9.19–23. Rudolph begins by addressing possible contextual frameworks for Paul's accommodation discourse. He concludes that there are no explicit references to Greco-Roman philosophical traditions nor any allusions convincing enough to accept the claim that Paul is working within an accepted accommodation *topoi*. Rudolph then surveys Second Temple texts to see if they provide insight into the adaptation language evident in Paul's teaching. He concludes that there is evidence for similarities with regard 'to the mindset of a first-century Jewish guest who seeks to please his host in everything' (147). Next Rudolph considers whether the gospel traditions provide a proper framework for understanding Paul's adaptation principle. He affirms Kim's (2003) overall approach to the presence of an *imitatio Christi* discourse in 1 Cor 9.19–23, though he rightly sets aside Kim's rather explicit supersessionist understanding of Mark 7.19b. This will be an important part of Rudolph positive reading in chapter 5, a reading that places Rudolph firmly in the post-supersessionist approach to New Testament interpretation. Finally, he concludes chapter 4 with detailed discussions of the semantic variations of the language in 1 Cor 9.19–23. Rudolph's conclusions here form the basis of his reading that Paul may be understood in these verses to be a Torah-observant Jew. As Part I of *A Jew to the Jews* comes to a close, it is now clear that Rudolph does not think that Paul was a chameleon in any sense of the word. He was one who, it could be argued, maintained Torah observance *not* as missional adaptation, rather as a valid expression of covenant fidelity to the God of Israel.

Chapter 5 provides Rudolph's understanding of Paul as a Jew who continued to faithfully observe Torah throughout his mission among the nations by 'imitating Christ's accommodation and open table-fellowship' (173). He views the flexibility evident in 1 Cor 9.19–23 as an expression of Paul's belief that his Jewishness is a calling that continues in Christ, and that this passage can be understood 'as the discourse of a Jew who remained within the bounds of pluriform Second Temple Judaism' (173). He reads 1 Cor 9.19–23 as an expression of Paul's imitation of Jesus' interchange and accommodation-oriented table-fellowship with all. Rudolph argues that Paul was aware of Jesus' rule of adaptation evident in the words 'eat what is set before you' (Luke 10.7–8). This rule originally focused primarily on 'clean food of doubtful or defiled status', but Paul expands it to apply to the questions relating to idol-food in Corinth (190).

Rudolph frames Paul's statement 'all things to all people', not as a claim that Paul ceased to be Torah-observant, rather as an example of the way he applied

Jesus' adaptability rule, Jesus who likewise remained Torah-observant (Mark 5.17–20). Rudolph summarizes his view: 'As Jesus became all things to all people through eating with ordinary Jews, Pharisees and sinners, Paul became "all things to all people" through eating with ordinary Jews, strict Jews (those "under the law") and Gentile sinners' (190). Paul's halakhah with regard to commensality was flexible, and he adjusted it, as a bi-cultural mediator, based on his context (1 Cor 10.25–30).

Concerning the continued relevance of Paul's Jewish identity, Rudolph understands Paul to be one who argued for the continuation of Jewish identity within the Christ-movement. He builds his case on 1 Cor 7.17–24, which teaches that Jews 'in Christ' should continue Torah observance as a vital expression of their calling from God. With regard to the claim that Jewish identity and Torah observance were inconsequential to Paul since the coming of Christ, Rudolph thinks that Paul kept his 'rule in all the churches' as one who 'was "not without the law of God" (1 Cor 9.21)' (212). Rudolph's study is masterful, an argumentative *tour de force* that requires serious engagement by those contending that Jewish identity is no longer relevant for Jews 'in Christ'. It will most likely be looked at as a seminal work among New Testament scholars engaged in post-supersessionist interpretation.

While it is clear that Paul should not be labelled a chameleon, and in this Rudolph's study remains quite convincing, it is still hard to determine if it is possible to avoid the charges of hypocrisy that would be levelled against Paul for even these adaptable practices. Rudolph's study rightly focuses on the behaviours evident in the text, but Paul may also be continuing his discussion of the way previous identities are transformed 'in Christ'. Thus, I would suggest that 1 Cor 9.20–21 may evidence Paul's principle of social identity adaptation. This is only a slight adjustment to Rudolph, taking into consideration the claims of duplicity mentioned by Nanos (2009) but still follows Rudolph (*A Jew to the Jews*) and Tomson (1990) in seeing 1 Cor 9.20–21 as evidence of a relaxed halakhah with regard to the idolatrous intentions of the gentiles. Thus, this passage connects with Paul's mission among the gentiles and his teaching concerning mission as social identification for those in Corinth (see Tucker 2011).

If we extend the metaphor we began with, Paul is not a chameleon who changes his colour, i.e., one who picks up and sets down his Jewish identity (even if that would have been possible) in order to take the gospel to the nations. However, we might describe him as the 'Chameleon Paul' if by that we mean one who was comfortable in diverse cultural environments, able to socially identify (but not integrate) with non-Jews as an expression of his theologizing. His focus on the negotiation of the practicalities of life within the Christ-movement would have been familiar to the Jews but new to gentiles in Christ (Ehrensperger 2011, 18). This metaphor is especially *apropos* since chameleons really cannot change their colour in the first place; rather, they react to changing environmental situations and thus only appear to change. Maybe it is time to revisit scholarly misconceptions with regard to Paul's so-called lifestyle adaptability. Rudolph's monograph, *A Jew to the Jews*, provides a helpful starting point for addressing a number of these long-held and deeply-engrained views on Paul, his identity, and his mission.

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