

PAUL by E.P. Sanders. *Oxford University Press*, 1991, 138 pp. £4.99.

Previous scholarly works of Ed Sanders have been largely responsible for removing the misconception that Paul rebelled against the Jewish tradition in general and particularly against a Jewish view that justification could be earned by the works of the Law. This he has replaced with his explanation of 'covenantal nomism', that obedience to the Law is a loving response to God's own loving gift of the Law and the promises. Now he offers a masterly synthesis of his interpretation of Paul in the excellent popular series, 'Past Masters'.

The book is a feast of strongly-expressed views which throw a flood of light on Paul's thought. Sanders is an admirer but not a hagiographer. On some subjects he grants that Paul shows 'none of his customary virtuosity and ingenuity' (p. 119). He points out Paul's fickleness with regard to observance of the Law: if his opponents insist on it, Paul rants and raves against them (as in Galatians 1–2), but in calmer times he himself permits it. He explains Paul's self-contradiction with regard to Sin: in order to balance Christ's saving work, Paul rhetorically exaggerates the universality of the grip of Sin (regarded as an enemy power), though he elsewhere grants that there is such a thing as righteousness by the law or even without the Law. This is because Paul's theology works backwards: God sent Christ to save the world, so the universe must have been enslaved to Sin, and even in some sense God must have intended sinfulness.

On the great controversy over 'righteousness' which has so dominated Protestant views of Paul since it played so basic a role in Luther's theology Sanders is unequivocally opposed to any idea of fictional or even merely legal acquittal in Paul. With liberating insight he shows that Paul's 'righteousness'-terms, used only in Galatians and Romans, do not reflect his own favoured language; when he is not dealing with scriptural proof-texts he moves away from it to turn to his own language of 'dying with Christ', being 'in Christ', and having the indwelling Spirit. Paul is not a philosophical or systematic theologian, and the dominance of images in his thought (such as the judgement-seat, a race to be run, God as creator-king) enables him to leave many discords resonating.

On this point it is a pity that Sanders seems so uncomfortable with Christology that he provides only a minute chapter (pp. 77–83), suggesting that Paul offers several irreconcilable Christologies, partly inherited and expressed in inherited terms. The work is not intended to be the book of a believer, but it is surely a limitation that such a stimulating and exciting book should not penetrate more deeply into the central inspiration of Paul's vision.

HENRY WANSBROUGH