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# Review of Grindheim's "The Crux of Election: Paul's Critique of the Jewish Confidence in the Election of Israel"

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*The Crux of Election: Paul's Critique of the Jewish Confidence in the Election of Israel.* By Sigurd Grindheim. WUNT 2/202. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005. xi + 282 pp., \$69.00 paper.

*The Crux of Election* represents the revised and expanded version of Sigurd Grindheim's Ph.D. dissertation (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2002; advisor D. A. Carson). The book is a helpful contribution to the ongoing interaction of NT scholars with E. P. Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) and with the new perspective on Paul (NP) and joins a chorus of evangelical critics of the same. According to the author, when one compares Paul's view of Jewish election with Jewish views, the discontinuity must loom larger than Sanders's "similar patterns of religion" would suggest.

Although interaction with the NP appears to form the impetus for the study and results in a brief concluding chapter on implications, the bulk of the book carefully examines selected aspects of Jewish and Pauline understanding of election rather than conducting a polemical argument with the NP. For Paul, election is expressed as conformity to the cross of Christ. God's elect are now characterized by weakness and by a reversal of values in which they do not appear outwardly to possess the visible markers of divine favor. Jewish confidence in election, on the other hand, is "directed towards a visible religious status, rather than toward Christ and his cross" (p. 200). Paul's view amplifies the view of election already present in the OT, while the Jewish view represents a departure witnessed in writings of the Second Temple period.

The study makes no claims to methodological advance but utilizes standard exegetical and historical tools with limited reference to socio-rhetorical approaches. The bulk of the book's argument is laid out simply and is almost entirely free of editorial errors. Interaction with recent scholarship is found largely in the footnotes and is generally thorough. As with most contributions to the WUNT series, the book will be of interest mainly to scholars and serious students of the NT.

Chapter 1 reviews briefly "Election in the Scriptures of Israel." Attention is drawn to a unified (canonical) concept of election. The elements chosen for focus are of obvious value as precursors to Paul's own thought—reversal of values (Deuteronomy 7), remnant, etc.—and lead nicely into the suggestion that Paul's view is a faithful continuation of the OT perspective. No attempt is made to trace diachronic development or diversity. Numerous other central elements of the OT election tradition, which would fit less easily into Grindheim's thesis, are not analyzed (e.g. circumcision and adherence to Torah). A study, for instance, of the OT's language of "worthy" behavior by the elect might suggest that Paul (cf. 1 Thess 2:12; Phil 1:27; Eph 4:1 ["worthy of the calling"]; Col 1:10; 2 Thess 1:5, 11) and Judaism were not quite so different as Grindheim theorizes.

Chapter 2 treats "Election in Second Temple Judaism" by examining selected writings of the OT apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, Qumran literature, and Philo. Unlike the OT, a diversity of views is expected in this body of literature (against Sanders's supposed common pattern of religion). Election is increasingly associated with wisdom/Torah, with the result that "the elect can be characterized by their obedience to the law" and "righteousness is understood as the logical cause of election" rather than grace alone (p. 75). While the gracious election of Israel as a whole is generally unquestioned, a tension develops where the elect are marked by adherence to the sect's particular Torah obedience or by acceptance of divine discipline upon sinful Israel. Thus, election is increasingly "related to one's visible religious status" and represents a departure from Israel's Scripture and a contrast to Paul's view. It will be this Second Temple view of election that Paul critiques. Grindheim's views in this chapter echo those of his doctoral advisor (cf. D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1981]). He applauds Sanders for overturning a caricature of legalistic Judaism,

but his consistent resurrection of self-righteous Judaism will be viewed by most as a return to the same. Even in Rabbinic Judaism “the great majority of the Rabbis . . . attribute the election to a mere act of grace (or love) on the part of God” (S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* [2d ed.; New York: Schocken, 1961] 61).

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 constitute the heart of the book, focusing on passages in the undisputed Paulines. Relevant critical issues are treated as necessary (e.g. theories as to literary integrity and opponents) but do not interfere with the main focus on detailed exegesis of the passages themselves. Rather than novel interpretations, these chapters provide convincing evidence for the centrality of cruciformity in Paul’s soteriology (see also M. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001]). In 2 Cor 11:16–12:10 (chap. 3) Paul opposes Jewish-Christian false apostles who put confidence in their election via visible markers of blessing and power. Their “boasting in the flesh” equates to “confidence in an election-based privilege rather than the ultimate expression of a reliance on grace” (p. 106). Paul’s status as God’s elect servant, on the other hand, is demonstrated in his weakness.

In Phil 3:1–11 (chap. 4) the apostle critiques his own former reliance on Jewish heritage in order to warn against possible encroachment of such views. This confidence in such visible markers as circumcision, Jewishness, etc. is now rejected as confidence in the flesh. Instead, the true mark of election is sharing in Christ’s suffering (v. 11). On a minor note, Grindheim speaks approvingly of Paul’s “robust conscience” (K. Stendahl) and does not see actual opponents at work in Philippi.

In Romans 9–11 (chap. 5), rather than Paul’s critique of a Jewish view of election, Grindheim finds Paul’s *own* view of (Israel’s) election. Although there is also a more positive appraisal of Israel’s election in this passage, that does not contradict the critique in other places. Israel’s traditional election privileges are deconstructed in Romans 9–10. However, rather than rejecting Israel’s privileges, Paul then reconstructs them in Romans 11 particularly along the lines of weakness (remnant) and reversal (judgment). Paul does not differ from other Jews by rejecting Israel’s election but by reconfiguring divine election to refer to a remnant, to include Gentiles (which provokes unbelieving Israel to a jealous emulation), and to envision a further eschatological reversal when unbelieving Israel (= “all Israel”) will come to faith in Christ. Grindheim’s brief discussion of provocation would profit from awareness of serious questions on this issue; see M. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) and now Murray Baker, “Paul and the Salvation of Israel: Paul’s Ministry, the Motif of Jealousy, and Israel’s Yes,” *CBQ* 67 (2005) 469–84.

Following these central exegetical treatments, chapter 6 provides a superficial survey of both the undisputed and disputed Paulines showing that “the identity of the elect is bound up with the principle of reversal of values, manifested by the cruciform existence of the Christ believers” (p. 169). The book closes with a brief summary of its conclusions (chap. 7) and equally brief suggestions as to implications for the NP (chap. 8). An extensive bibliography and indices of references, modern authors, and subjects wrap up the volume.

Two weaknesses of the book are worth pointing out. Grindheim’s methodology in selecting relevant Pauline passages is unclear. While parameters of terminology and metaphor are laid out for the OT, the reader is left wondering why 2 Corinthians 11–12 and Philippians 3 are chosen, but not, for instance, Galatians. Grindheim is undoubtedly correct that in the former two passages Paul critiques claims to privilege for the Jewish people, but is that not even more the case in Galatians? The value of “Jewishness” (Jewish identity) in Paul’s writings seems to be the real subject of the book (p. 7, where “reference to Jewishness” is apparently synonymous with “reference to God’s election”). Election is, at best, implicit in the passages chosen, hinted at by epithets such as “Israel,” “Abraham’s descendants,” etc. (pp. 2, 84–88).

Second, the force of Grindheim's argument against Sanders and the NP was (for me, at least) difficult to follow. He concludes, "In Paul's assessment, the Jewish confidence in the election of Israel must be reproved because it was incompatible with the cross of Christ . . . directed towards a visible religious status, rather than toward Christ and his cross" (p. 200). Paul's critique of Jewish confidence via cruciformity or christocentricity is purportedly radically different from what the NP holds regarding Paul's critique. However, would not many NP proponents find the heart of Paul's critique precisely in such a perceived Jewish reliance on visible markers of religious status (ἔργα νόμου) rather than on the cruciform πίστις χριστοῦ?

There is much to commend in this book, especially its argument that Paul's view of divine election revolves around the cross of Christ and is expressed in weakness and reversal of values rather than visible blessing and power. Grindheim's pointer to prophetic precursors of this view is also well taken, following the lead of K. Sandnes in *Paul, One of the Prophets?* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991). Thus, divine election is radically Christocentric (echoes of Karl Barth?); Christ must be seen as the key point of discontinuity between Paul's pre- and post-conversion views. Whether this point of discontinuity is downplayed by the NP, as Grindheim claims, will probably depend on which NP proponent one queries.

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