

Marcin Kowalski

"Between Gospel and Election", Florian Wilk, J. Ross Wagner, Tübingen 2010 : [recenzja]

The Biblical Annals 5/2, 479-486

2015

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Florian Wilk – J. Ross Wagner (ed.), *Between Gospel and Election*. Explorations in the Interpretation of Romans 9-11 (WUNT 1/257; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2010). Pp. 554 + XXVII. € 134.00. ISBN 978-3-16-150533-1.

MARCIN KOWALSKI

Institute of Biblical Studies, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
address: Aleje Racławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin, Poland; e-mail: xmkowal@gmail.com

The book *Between Gospel and Election* originates in an international and interdisciplinary symposium *Römer 9-11 im Spannungsfeld zwischen "New Perspective on Paul" und christlich-jüdischem Gespräch* held May 1 – 4, 2008, at Göttingen. It consists of 26 essays (15 in German and 11 in English) written by specialists in Biblical and Judaic Studies, in Systematic and Practical Theology. The authors from Germany, the UK and the USA bring together the English- and German-language scholarship focused on the *New Perspective on Paul*, Rom 9-11 and its significance for the Christian-Jewish dialog. The impressive volume *Between Gospel and Election* has an excellent "Introduction" with the concise and substantial summary of every essay, and it is provided with Index of Ancient Sources and Index of Modern Authors.

The essays are divided into five segments, the first of which is entitled *Horizons* as it tries to give a general frame for the investigations on Rom 9-11 contained in the book. The opening essay by Berndt Schaller, "Die Rolle des Paulus im Verhältnis zwischen Christen und Juden" depicts the double potential of Paul whose texts stimulated anti-Jewish attitudes (cf. 1 Thess 2,14-16, Ga 4,21-31, Phil 3,1-8), but also, especially after 1945, patronized the renewal of Christian-Jewish dialog (Rom 9-11). Rom 9-11 is qualified by the author as the central text for the new theology of Israel, because of its stress on the faithfulness of God and eschatological salvation of all Israel. Paul envisages it not as their incorporation into the Church, or as their pursuit of the distinct Torah-righteousness (Israel's *Sonderweg*), but as the final saving act of Christ recognized as the Messiah.

In the second essay, "Romans 9-11 and the *New Perspective*", Nicholas Thomas Wright reads Rom 9-11 through the lenses of the so-called "New Perspective on Paul" envisaged by him as a differentiated family of currents

and interpretations. Paul charges his fellow-men not of rejecting the justification coming from faith, but rather of being ignorant as to the way the righteousness of God operates in Christ, and of pursuing their own “national righteousness”, the one that excludes Gentiles. At this occasion Wright also corrects the thesis by Sanders who claimed that Paul proceeded from the solution (revelation of Christ) to the plight (the Law is defective). According to Wright, Paul’s plight is: “how and when would Israel’s God be faithful to his promises” (p. 44). Through Christ’s death and resurrection God fulfilled, not abrogated, the Law (Rom 10,6-11), establishing one people based on “new covenantal, eschatological, Spirit-driven, fulfilling-Torah fideism” (p. 48).

The third essay by Klaus Haacker, “Das Thema von Römer 9-11 als Problem der Auslegungsgeschichte”, points at the theme of Israel as the main focus of Rom 9-11, and presents various approaches to it: theodicy, history of salvation, textual, pragmatic, and situational analysis. Instead of reading it through the concepts of “hardening”, “rejection” or “downfall”, the author proposes to see here the prophetic critique of the Church which should not lose the sight of the foundations of Israel located in the covenantal faithfulness of God. Finally, Mark Reasoner in “Romans 9-11 Moves from Margin to Center, from Rejection to Salvation: Four Grids for Recent English-Language Exegesis” analyzes the four trends in the present interpretation of Rom 9-11: 1) it is considered an integral or even central part, a controlling locus of the whole letter, 2) major theme is still Israel’s unbelief drawing the eschatological judgment upon God’s people, 3) the proponents of the consistency of Paul’s argument in Rom 9-11 get the upper hand pointing at the crucial role of Rom 11, 4) in Rom 11,25-27 Paul envisages the salvation of the “ethnic Israel”.

The second section entitled *Contexts* places Rom 9-11 in the context of the Second Temple Period Jewish writings and Pauline letters. In the first essay “Unnerving Grace: Approaching Romans 9-11 from The Wisdom of Solomon”, John M. G. Barclay puts in dialog Paul and the author of the Wisdom of Solomon. The juxtaposition of these two texts shows some similarities (the themes of God’s people, Gentiles, mercy and justice, use of Scriptures) but also the crucial difference: while for Wisdom the mercy of God operates within a comprehensible, natural and rational world order, with no arbitrariness and injustice, for Paul it is enacted in Christ-gift and transcends any coherent moral norms.

In the next essay “Die Texte aus Qumran als Horizont für Römer 9-11. Israel-Theologie, Geschichtsbetrachtung, Schriftauslegung”, Annette Steudel investigates on the term “Israel” which in Qumran texts generally takes the meaning of the community of faithful. The sect, like Paul, uses the actualizing

method of reading the Scriptures, stresses God's sovereign power and uses the terms like "grace", "election", "rest", and "covenant". Yet, unlike Paul, Qumran denies salvation to those outside their ranks. Next, Dieter Sanger in "Er wird die Gottlosigkeit von Jakob entfernen (Rom 11,26). Kontinuitat und Wandel in den Israelaussagen des Apostels Paulus" tries to explain the sharp contrast between 1 Thess 2,14-16 and Rom 9-11. Since the explanations based on the self-correction or presumable development of Paul's thought between 1 Thessalonians and Romans result problematic, the author proposes to read the respective texts in their own context: 1 Thess 2 is concerned with the salvation of pagans to which Israel posits an obstacle, thereby deserving the judgment of God; Rom 9-11, on the other hand, widens the soteriological perspective from *ethnē* to God's people. The salvation of Israel depends on Paul's mission to the Gentiles and that is an important conceptual link between 1 Thess 2,14-16 and Rom 9-11.

Further, Susan Eastman in her essay "Israel and Divine Mercy in Galatians and Romans" argues that Paul speaking of the "Israel of God" in Ga 6,16 means his fellow Jews living under the law. The apostle prays so that they may find God's mercy and be saved. Thus, the invocation stands in congruence with the vision of Israel's final redemption explicated in Rom 9-11. In the fifth essay, "The Addressees of Paul's Letter to the Romans: Assemblies of God in House Churches and Synagogues?", William S. Campbell sketches the profile of the addressees of Paul's letter sent to Rome. The apostle addresses the community "severely divided in their attitudes toward Jews and Judaism and who label each other with reference to perceived preferences for and against association with Jewish groups" (p.187). Paul seeks peace and harmony in the situation of great diversity, negotiating between the weak (close to the synagogue) and the strong (dissociating from Jews). He demonstrates the intertwined destiny of Christ-followers and Jews and calls to recognition of Christian indebtedness to the faith of Israel. The last essay in this segment by Christoph Stenschke, "Romer 9-11 als Teil des Romerbriefs", links Rom 9-11 with the preceding and following chapters by lexical, thematic, and scriptural parallels. Rom 9-11 arises necessarily from the issues discussed in Rom 1-8 and prepares the *paraenetic* section of Rom 12-14.

The third segment (*Readings*) presents itself as a systematic investigation on Rom 9-11. Florian Wilk in "Rahmen und Aufbau von Romer 9-11" shows the thematic unity and argumentative structure of the chapters in question. Using the rhetorical tools, the author differentiates the outer frame of the Pauline discourse with the *exordium/narratio* (9,1-5) and *peroratio* (11,25-36), and the core consisting of the argumentative part 9,6-10,21 plus the *paraenetic* unit in 11,1-24. The central problem of Rom 9-11 is the apparent

contradiction between God's promises given to Israel and the Gospel of salvation. The purpose of the discourse is to build up a new community with distinct roles ascribed both to Gentile and Jewish Christians.

In the next essay, "On the Calling-Into-Being of Israel: Romans 9:6-29", Beverly Roberts Gaventa presents Israel as depending entirely on God's saving power. By undertaking the exegetical analysis of Rom 9,6-29, the author shows that God's election of Israel is actually an act of creation. Israel is defined not by biology, but by divine promises. Consequently, God's sovereign, creative will controls their destiny setting the stage for the scenario that Paul envisages in Rom 11,32. In the third essay, "Das Gesetz der Gerechtigkeit. Zur Auslegung von Römer 9,30-33", Frank Schleritt equalizes the Law of Moses with the Law leading to the righteousness of God, but actually only in the case of those who believe in Christ. The paradoxical character of the Law results from the fact, that the righteousness it proposes cannot be attained by Law observance itself, as Israel tried to do it, but only by the approach marked by the faith in Christ.

In the next essay by Friedrich Avemarie, "Israels rätselhafter Ungehorsam. Römer 10 als Anatomie eines von Gott provozierten Unglaubens", the readers are invited to ponder on the riddle of Israel's disobedience. The author first argues for the understanding of *telos nomou* in Rom 10,4 as the "goal" not the "end" of the Law, and claims that Israel's rejection of the Gospel cannot be explained in a logical manner. The fact that Paul does not speak of their punishment or sin points at God's saving plan working behind the scenes, being the main focus of the apostle. Subsequently, Enno Edzard Popkes in "Und David spricht ... Zur Rezeption von Ps LXX 68,23 f. im Kontext von Röm 11,1-10" reflects on Paul's use of Ps 68 in Rom 11. The reason Paul recurs to this particular citation is twofold: first, David prays so that the final salvation might embrace Zion and Judah; second, it is a part of the so-called Second Davidic Psalter which culminates in the universal worship of God. As such the scriptural reference prepares the rationale of Rom 11 where the salvation of Israel will be expressed with the use of the same ideas.

In the last essay of this section, "Broken Branches": A Pauline Metaphor Gone Awry? (Romans 11:11-24)" Mark D. Nanos takes on the metaphor of the olive tree (Rom 11,17-24). According to the author, the apostle contradicts himself claiming beforehand that Israel merely stumbled (11,11), but now they fell; their branches were broken (11,19-21), yet now they are cut off (11,22-24). The apparent contradictions can be explained with the development of Paul's argumentation which focuses first on the temporariness of Israel's disbelief and then warns Gentiles not be "cut off" from the "holy stump". The author refers to Theophrastus and to the ancient oleicultural techniques to enlighten

the meaning of the metaphor. By turning upside down the natural order, Paul stresses the miraculous action of God grafting the wild branches of Gentiles into the cultivated tree, which is not Israel (they are also but small branches), but the “people of God, the righteous ones, the descendants of Abraham” (p. 360). The image demonstrates God faithful to his covenantal promises and dissuades the Gentile Christians from priding in their good fortune over Israel. Israel’s state and vicarious suffering is temporary and serves others; the same can happen to the Gentile Christians, so they should rather help to return those who stumbled. The author ultimately argues that the metaphor “has proven unable to communicate this nuanced perspective effectively – it is itself broken” (p.369).

In the fourth section (*Themes*) the major theological themes of Rom 9-11 are analyzed. Reinhard Feldmeier in the essay “Vater und Töpfer? Zur Identität Gottes im Römerbrief” asks how to reconcile the tension between fatherly love of God and his seemingly unbridled capriciousness portrayed in Rom 9. Rom 1-8 finishes with marvelous image of God the Father who defines his fatherhood with relation to Jesus and in Him binds himself to mankind. Even though he maintains the characteristics of the powerful Lord from the OT, his distinctive trait in NT is relationality. The metaphor of potter expresses not his capriciousness, but creativeness and resolution to save all his children.

In the next essay, “Paul’s Theological Preoccupation in Romans 9-11”, A. Katherine Grieb portrays Paul intoxicated with “unfathomable depths of God’s mercy towards humanity” (p.394). The author reads Rom 9-11 as a “journal of Paul’s prayer life around the issue of God’s righteousness with respect to Israel” (p. 396). The apostle starts from anguished lament and goes through the train of dramatic questions, to finish with the jubilant doxology at the end of chapter 11. Subsequently, Wolfgang Reinbold in his essay, “Zur Bedeutung des Begriffes ‘Israel’ in Römer 9-11”, deciphers the meaning of the expression “Israel” in Rom 9-11. According to the author, it denotes the forefather Jacob (9,6b.27b), the biblical Israel (9,27a; 11,2), the people of God (9,6b; 10,11a), the Jewish people (9,27a.31; 11,7.25.26), Christ non-believing Jews (10,21), and Christ believers coming both from Jews (11,7) and from Gentiles (10,21). In none of these passages Paul credits the Christians to be the “true Israel”, or promotes a “substitution theory”.

In another essay, “Not from the Jews Only, But Also from the Gentiles: Mercy to the Nations in Romans 9-11”, J. Ross Wagner pays attention to the construction “Jews” and “Gentiles” reemerging in Rom 9-11 pointing at different characters and roles assigned in the drama of salvation. Paul “carefully constructs for his Gentile hearers a negative identity as outsiders

(...) to establish their identity anew on the sole basis of God's mercy" (p.420). That should help Gentiles to welcome Jews within the community, as Christ has welcomed them. Finally, Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr in "Nicht alle aus Israel sind Israel" (Röm 9,6b). Römer 9-11 als Zeugnis paulinischer Anthropologie" reflects on Paul's anthropology in Rom 9-11. In the passage in question, Paul integrates Jews and Gentiles to introduce a distinction between believer and non-believer in the perspective of individual human standing before the revelation of God in Christ. As the author indicates, Paul's anthropology draws on different strands of prophetic, wisdom and deuteronomistic traditions.

The last section (*Perspectives*) reflects on the significance of Rom 9-11 for Christian-Jewish relations. Notger Slenczka in "Römer 9-11 und die Frage nach der Identität Israels" reads Rom 9-11 as Paul's statement on the identity of Israel, from now on based on the promise and faith in Christ. In the same time Paul confirms the faithfulness of God to his people and a still-standing covenant with them. Although Israel interprets his history with a different hermeneutical key, both Christian and Jews come from the same Abrahamic lineage and their destinies are inseparable. In the next essay, "The Doctrine of Election in Romans 9-11", Katherine Sonderegger explores the tension between God's sovereign will and the contingency of the historical events in which it is expressed. The solution is sought in the incarnational strategy of God, according to which the Creator enters the created world operating from within it. The election of Israel and the Christian failed mission are to be understood as the incarnational unfolding of God's saving plan in the contingent human history.

In the third essay by Martin Rothgangel, "Christliche Identität ohne antijüdische Kontrastfolie. Zur Bildungsrelevanz von Römer 9-11", the author employs the socio-religious and pedagogical analysis to show that discrimination against the other always diminishes one's own identity. Consequently, instead of defining our Christian self in antithetical relation to Israel, we should rather highlight the overarching commonalities, as Paul does in the olive-tree parable (Rom 11,17-24). In the next essay, "They are Israelites: The Priority of the Present Tense for Jewish-Christian Relations", R. Kendall Soulen analyzes Rom 9-11 to draw from it the four points of "enduring relevance for Christian-Jewish dialog": 1) the present tense in which Paul speaks of the election of Israel denotes its existing and enduring character, 2) Israel's "no" to the Gospel means that the Church should evangelize them "indirectly", with the example of Christian life in the Spirit; the salvation of Israel ultimately depends on "God-in-Christ direct intervention on behalf of Israel", 3) the key feature of covenant history is God's faithfulness to his people (Israel), not the mission of the Church towards the world, 4) the

new meaning of the divine name Jahwe comprises both the lordship of Jesus and God's fidelity toward Israel. Finally, in the last essay by Wolfgang Kraus, "Die Bedeutung von Römer 9-11 im christlich-jüdischen Gespräch", the author shows Rom 9-11 as a principle text reorienting the understanding of Christian-Jewish relations in German protestant theology after 1950. Although the announcements of Paul have been of seminal importance for the ongoing inter-religious dialog, they have their limitations still waiting to be addressed in ecclesiological reflection: Paul's expectation of *Parousia* was not fulfilled, his pronouncements fueled anti-Jewish approaches, and we are still waiting for a solid rethinking of the "theology of repentance".

The volume *Between Gospel and Election* is definitely a comprehensive and valuable overview of the biblical research on Rom 9-11 in the perspective of Christian-Jewish dialog. Methodology chosen by the authors to cope with these difficult texts of Paul is differentiated and comprises historical-critical method, as well as pragmatic, contextual, and rhetorical reading. It's impossible to discuss the content of each and every essay, let us then pay attention to some arbitrarily chosen papers and ideas appearing in the volume.

As usual, one should carefully read simple and devoid of scholarly apparatus, but synthetic and well written article by N.T. Wright who makes us realize that the *New Perspective on Paul* is not a monolithic entity, but rather a vortex of different currents. Wright, a critical proponent of the *New Perspective*, aptly shows its difference but also proximity to the *Old Perspective* and enters into an interesting polemic with E.P. Sanders. His interpretation of "national righteousness" in Rom 9-11 is debatable, especially in the context of Rom 1-3 and 7, but no opposing voice is heard. The scholars presenting point of view challenging the *New Perspective* simply have not been invited to contribute to this volume, which may be regarded one of its weaknesses.

Proceeding, the authors of the essays persistently stress that Rom 9-11 is no more an appendix to the Letter to Romans, but an integral or even central part of it. The links with the rest of the letter are well recognized on the semantic and theological level. What the reader may find missing is a thorough rhetorical analysis of the whole letter and of the three chapters in question (the one made by Wilk is too general). The same rhetorical analysis could also be profitable to substantiate the verdict of Nanons claiming that Pauline olive-tree allegory is gone awry (Rom 11,17-24). The article itself is very interesting, but its finale is pretty unexpected and probably based on the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the text. Did Paul really fail to convince the Roman Christians to take more brotherly attitude to Jews? Notwithstanding the provocative and exegetical value of Nano's essay, on what textual basis can we ground the claim that the allegory itself is broken?

Another aspect that the authors of the articles stress almost unanimously is the central topic of God's faithfulness in Rom 9-11. The future salvation of Israel does not depend on human efforts, but on the saving power of God and on the ultimate revelation of Christ. That does not mean the passiveness of the Church. As it is rightly stressed by Soulen, the Church's mission consists in *indirect* evangelization of Israel, provoking the people of God to jealousy with the example of Christian life in Spirit.

Further, the reader should also find very inspirational the comparison between Rom 9-11 and the Book of Wisdom drawn by Barclay. It may seem a bit exaggerated in stressing too much God's going beyond any logic and morality and demonstrating his uncompromised freedom. In fact, the limitation or rather a natural frame for God's freedom in Rom 9-11 is his mercy, as it was marvelously shown by Katherine Grieb. Her interpretation of Rom 9-11 as a spiritual journal and prayer of Paul "intoxicated" with God is both touching and inspiring. The same novelty accompanied additionally by scholarly rigor can be found in the text by Eastman who makes a good case for interpreting Ga 6,16 as a prayer for Israel "under the Law", or in Campbell's persuasive reconstruction of the addressees of Romans.

Concluding, the last article by Kraus finishes with two remarks that are hard to agree with. The first one is Paul's unfulfilled expectation of Parousia which can hardly be traced in Romans and which, according to the author, should have some bearing on Christian-Jewish dialog. The second one is the "theology of repentance" which, according to Kraus emerges in the Church only in a rudimentary form. Kraus did not pay attention to the efforts and initiatives undertaken on this field by the Roman Catholic Church which brings us to one more weakness of the present volume. It represents almost exclusively the protestant and evangelical theology with no serious place given to the Catholic or Jewish perspective. Their inclusion would be not only welcome, but also much profitable in the future discussions dedicated to Paul and Christian-Jewish dialog. The topic is in no way exhausted. Notwithstanding its shortcomings, the volume *Between Gospel and Election* is a major stone in building our understanding of Christian and Jewish identity. It is highly recommendable to both biblical scholars and theologians working on that issue.