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Review: Paul, monotheism and the people of God: the significance of Abraham traditions for early Judaism and Christianity

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Scalometry and the Pauline Epistles. By George K. Barr. JSNT Sup. 261. London GB: T & T Clark International, 2004. Pp. 178. $130.00.

The Polemic of the Pastorals: A Sociological Examination of the Development of Pauline Christianity. By Lloyd K. Pietersen. JSNT Sup. 264. London GB: T & T Clark International, 2004. Pp. 182. $120.00.

Paul, Monotheism, and the People of God: The Significance of Abraham Traditions for Early Judaism and Christianity. By Nancy Calvert-Koyzis. JSNT Sup. 273. London GB: T & T Clark International, 2004. Pp. 173. $120.00.

A philosophy professor once noted the importance of perspective by noting that if the students in his class all witnessed a car accident outside the classroom window, each student would remember different aspects of the wreck and may well remember the incident in a completely different framework. One student may focus on the colors of the vehicles, another may focus on the responsibility for the wreck, and yet another may want to set the wreck in the context of prior experiences of similar accidents. In a sense the reading of these three books is a lot like that classroom rendition of the history of a car accident. These authors offer some interesting insights into the study of Paul and his epistles. Each work offers a different perspective, however, and each author focuses on a different approach to understanding the message of the Pauline materials.

The first work under consideration, George Barr's *Scalometry and the Pauline Epistles*, is by far the most original approach of the three works under consideration here. As in the example above, Barr could be understood as noticing the colors of the vehicles, except that in his case he is noticing the colors of the undercarriage, the engine, etc. Barr attempts apply the concept of scale to Pauline texts in an effort to introduce the use of scale into New Testament scholarship as a textual measure. Barr contends that the Pauline materials (as well as other texts) evidence a surprising range of scale that could be important for determining not only the importance of certain elements in a text, but also for the possibility of determining authorship of various disputed works.

Barr is rather meticulous in his description of scale, and the first chapter was fascinating primarily because it introduced this idea in a manner that made its application to New Testament texts rather obvious. What was not so obvious, however, is the question of how to measure scale in texts. Barr responds to this difficulty by offering the reader an overview of the use of graphs and graphical methodology. This material is by far the most difficult for the graphically challenged, but the precision with which Barr works is fascinating. He elects to employ sentence sequence information presented in a cumulative sum graph (CS graph). Barr applies this method to the Pauline epistles (both undisputed and disputed) and offers in appendix B a mathematical model of six

levels showing the prime patterns of the Pauline epistles. He is diligent to show how the levels are present in some form in the undisputed letters of Paul, after which he proceeds to deduce the graphs of the disputed Pauline materials.

His conclusions may seem conservative to many, but Barr's graphs lead him to conclude that the disputed epistles (including the Pastorals) are actually authored by the same person who wrote the undisputed letters. Barr seems particularly interested in the Pastoral Epistles and spends an entire chapter proposing a multivariate statistical study including an analysis of the scale of these works. From here he moves to a consideration of the relationship of Hebrews and the Petrine epistles to the Pauline texts, and even includes a chapter that discusses the possibility of Silvanus as an author of Hebrews and the Petrine writings. He bases this conclusion primarily on the relationship of Silvanus to Paul as a missionary and on the graphical similarity of the scales of Hebrews/1 & 2 Peter to the Pauline prime levels. He concludes his work with a call for a change in the consensus of New Testament scholarship.

If Barr's introduction of scale into the study of the New Testament text is accepted, then the current mainstream perspective concerning Pauline authorship is no longer adequate to explain all the data discovered by this study of scale. Whether or not the reader agrees with Barr's conclusions, he certainly raises some important questions and possibilities that must be considered in the study of Pauline materials. If Barr's graphical analysis of scale is accepted as a new tool, then New Testament scholarship must begin to learn and use it. At the very least, his method and results merit more attention and investigation.

The second work under consideration, Lloyd Pietersen's *The Polemics of the Pastorals,* at least shares some common texts with Barr's analysis, but instead of colors, Pietersen focuses on the underlying reasons for the writing of the Pastorals. Employing the investigative methods of sociology, Pietersen contends that the polemic of the Pastorals is directed at former elders in the churches of Ephesus and Crete who had attracted a following (primarily among the women) by means of a charismatic Christian experience that these former elders attributed directly to the apostle Paul. The Pastoral Epistles, then, act as the means by which these former leaders are publicly denounced.

Pietersen employs sociological models in his discussion of the Pastorals, but relies primarily on the areas of "labeling theory" and its use within the "status degradation ceremony" (defined by Harold Garfinkel as "any communicative work between persons whereby the public identity of an actor is transformed into something looked on as lower in the local scheme of social types" [p. 31]). Pietersen understands the Pastorals to be a passionate argument against the activities and theology of the former leaders who form the opposition in Ephesus and Crete. These leaders have an understanding of Paul as a miracle worker, and that understanding drives their particular theology and activities relating to the church. Charges are leveled against the opponents, while the positive attributes of good leaders are exampled in the lives of Timothy and Titus. In other words, Pietersen contends that the author of the Pastoral Epistles is offering a negative stereotype (e.g., the opponents) and a positive one (e.g., Timothy and Titus) in order to differentiate between unacceptable and acceptable forms of leadership in the tradition of Paul. Of course, for this argument to

work, Timothy and Titus must still be alive and active in the leadership of the churches in Ephesus and Crete, meaning that the letters were written shortly after the death of Paul. This view is hardly a consensus position in New Testament studies.

Pietersen is also interested in arguing that the Pastorals do not indicate an institutionalization of Christianity as it becomes further removed from its original charismatic foundations. Using a wide variety of sociological materials, Pietersen suggests that new thaumaturgical movements may well rise even in a group that is in the process of institutionalization. He reasons that these types of demands may appear as a result of the unstable or marginalized culture sometimes produced by a move toward institutionalization. Pietersen includes a case study of Bristol Christian Fellowship as a modern example of such an occurrence. Pietersen also discusses the possibility that a similar set of circumstances may have been experienced in the second century church. With the Ignatian letters as a background, Pietersen asserts that the second century church was not fully institutionalized and may well have faced opposition from some "proto-Montanist" leaders who mirror the characteristics of the opponents in the Pastorals. Turning finally to an exposition of the Pastoral Epistles, Pietersen applies his findings to these texts and concludes that the opponents in Ephesus and Crete held a view of a type of realized eschatology (2 Timothy 2:18), practiced asceticism (1 Timothy 4:1-3), and engaged in ecstatic prophecy (1 Timothy 1:6; 6:20; 2 Timothy 2:16). These opponents apparently enjoyed success among the women in the household churches of Ephesus and Crete by presenting Paul as primarily a wonder-working thaumaturge. The author of the Pastoral Epistles paints this viewpoint as deviant and as a misrepresentation of the leadership and teaching of Paul.

The last book to be considered, Nancy Colvert-Koyzis's *Paul, Monotheism, and the People of God,* attempts to understand the symbolic usage of Abraham in Galatians and Romans through the lens of Jewish portrayals of Abraham in such works as *Jubilees,* the writings of Philo, Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities,* Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews,* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham.* Colvert-Koyzis sets out to show that the Jewish traditions regarding Abraham in these works form the background of Paul's arguments concerning Abraham in Galatians and Romans. Colvert-Koyzis claims that the background materials present Abraham as the ideal convert to Judaism because of his rejection of idolatry and embrace of Torah observance before the Law was given to Moses. Abraham therefore becomes the ideal Jew who refuses to give up his faith in a monotheistic religion for idolatry or social gain. With this in mind, Colvert-Koyzis attempts an interpretation of portions of Galatians and Romans as Paul's response to opponents who held these views of Abraham.

Like his opponents, Paul appeals to Abraham as a means to identify the people of God, but Paul defines the role of Abraham in a decidedly different manner. According to Colvert-Koyzis, Paul attempts to undermine the Jewish claims that Abraham represents faithfulness to the one God by means of Torah-observance. This subversion is accomplished by arguing that any return to or addition of Torah-observance is essentially a denial of God's oneness and a return to idolatry. According to Colvert-Koyzis, Paul radically revises what it

addition of Torah-observance is essentially a denial of God's oneness and a return to idolatry. According to Colvert-Koyzis, Paul radically revises what it meant to be a descendant of Abraham. In Paul's revision, obedience to the Law becomes a type of idolatry that adds the Law to faith in Christ. In this argument, the Law is categorized with the "elements of the world" of Galatians 4:3, which Colvert-Koyzis understands as similar to the astrological practices left behind by Abraham when he became a monotheist.

Colvert-Koyzis applies a similar argument to Paul's use of Abraham in Romans, with special focus on an application of this material to the designation of "strong" and "weak" believers in Romans 14. Citing the presence of possible conflicts between Jewish and Gentile Christian elements in the Roman church, Colvert-Koyzis asserts that Paul understands the Gentile side of the argument to be predominantly "law-free" and the stronger of the two. Even though the "weak" believers try to avoid idolatry by means of abstaining from meat sacrificed to idols, their inclusion of Torah observance to faith actually advocates a type of idolatry. The addition of the Law implies that there is more than one way to be a member of the people of God in and produces a charge of idolatry.

These explanations offered by Colvert-Koyzis, while interesting, overlook some of Paul's apparently positive language about the Torah (Romans 7:14; Galatians 5:6, 13-14). Paul's use of Abraham in Romans and Galatians does not appear to be overly influenced by the traditions described by Colvert-Koyzis. In Galatians, Paul seems to argue that Abraham is more of an ideal believer in that the faith of Abraham actually comes prior to the establishment of the Mosaic Law. Nowhere does Paul develop the idea that Abraham was once a Torah-observant Jew, an item that Paul would no doubt have mentioned if his opponents were using the traditions defined by Colvert-Koyzis. In Romans, Paul's presentation of Abraham and the Law in chapters 3 and 4 seem only tangentially related to his discussion of the weak and the strong in chapter 14. The connection to the traditions about Abraham seems a little forced in this regard.

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The People's New Testament Commentary. By M. Eugene Boring and Fred B. Craddock. Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004. Pp. 827 + x. $39.95.

A Companion to the New Testament. Second edition. By A. E. Harvey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp. 858 + x. $39.99 paperback; $80.00 hardback.

Writing a one-volume commentary on the New Testament presents a major challenge for any author. The task is to provide adequate discussion of the entire New Testament in a limited space. Obviously, hard decisions have to be made about what to include and what to exclude. Since one-volume commentaries are aimed more at the general reader rather than at specialists, the author needs to avoid technical, detailed arguments, yet not gloss over exegetical or textual

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