

BOOK REVIEWS

Barclay, John M. G. *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. xvi + 454 pp. Softcover. USD 48.00.

In this volume, one of the leading scholars in New Testament studies and early Judaism, John M. G. Barclay, collects nineteen essays composed throughout two decades of research focusing on both early Christianity and Diaspora Judaism. *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* was originally published in the Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (WUNT) series (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) and included three previously unpublished essays: an introductory chapter, and the final two chapters. The current version maintains the same content, but is more accessible to scholars who wish to add this book to their private collection.

Barclay's research stems from the observation that "in the urban Roman world of the first century the early churches and the Diaspora synagogues were closely parallel and sometimes overlapping social phenomena" (xii), which allows for comparison and analysis of their unique characteristics and identities. The introductory chapter, "Pauline Churches, Jewish Communities and the Roman Empire: Introducing the Issues," provides an overview of the contemporary socio-historical research on early Christianity before introducing the three main sections of the book. Barclay provides the reader with a rationale for the comparisons found in the subsequent essays and he discusses methodologies and the usefulness of applying social theories to the study of Paul's communities.

The first main section of the book consists of seven essays that compare different aspects of "Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews." Paul's approach to the law and circumcision are found to be radically different from his contemporary Jewish counterparts, such as Philo, which, according to Barclay, rightfully threatens the "social and cultural identity of the Jewish community" (59) and the "historical continuity of the Jewish tradition" (79). Barclay also considers how Paul's strategy for community formation compares to Josephus's ideal of government, and how issues such as money and communal gatherings were conducive to the development of such early Christian communities. Apostasy in Judaism and early Christianity is compared and analyzed using deviance theory, and different paradigms of pagan hostility against Judaism are compared to the emerging hostility against the early church.

The next section contains five essays that focus on issues regarding the development of Christian identity in Paul's churches. Barclay insightfully compares, for example, Thessalonica and Corinth, and questions the cause of the numerous differences between the two churches, considering that both were founded by Paul within a short period of time. He ultimately concludes that the differences were partly due to contrasting levels of conflict with the broader community. Death in Thessalonians, the household codes in Colossians, and ideologies of age are also considered in order to analyze the uniquely Christian identity promoted by Paul.

The final part of the book includes six essays under the title “Josephus, Paul and Rome.” Barclay uses postcolonial theory to study Josephus’s rhetoric in *Against Apion*, arguing that “the openness to complexity (even ambiguity) in this approach, and the awareness of power-relations and constraints, is precisely what is needed in analysis of Josephus” (305). In contrast to Josephus, Paul, according to Barclay, is not directly concerned with Rome. Instead, the author concludes that “Paul does not oppose Rome *as Rome*, but opposes anti-God powers wherever and however they manifest themselves on the human stage” (387). This analysis goes directly against recent tendencies in Pauline studies to see hidden references to the imperial cult throughout Paul’s epistles.

The first and last essays in the book are perhaps the most valuable in terms of depth, insight, and relevance. In the introductory chapter, Barclay emphasizes the contemporary focus of theological studies on “social and economic realia, with emphasis on the particular (not the general) and the communal (not the individual),” in which the scholar is encouraged to ask fresh questions from new perspectives (4). Much of Barclay’s discussion flows from the premise that social interactions between early Christians, Diaspora Jews, and their broader communities have direct implications for the development of faith and Christian identity in the first century, thus aptly demonstrating the benefits of this “social turn” in Pauline studies. The extensive interaction with secondary literature provides evidence that the author’s approach is well thought out, up-to-date, and reflects years of research. The introductory debate on the subsequent sections of the book provides a valuable and thorough overview of the main observations and conclusions reached in the ensuing essays. If the reader is looking to save time and would rather not go through the entire book, Barclay’s opening essay is all one needs to read.

The final essay, “Why the Roman Empire Was Insignificant to Paul,” is written mainly in response to N. T. Wright’s argument that Paul’s theology was directly opposed to the imperial cult, a view that has become quite popular in recent scholarship. This essay is timely and deeply significant, not only for its content, but especially because it addresses the dangers of reading ancient texts through the lens of modern trends and concerns. This tendency of reading Paul’s theology as radically antagonistic to the Roman Empire is attractive, according to Barclay, for it first allows for a fresh framework for Pauline interpretation “free of any possible hint of ‘supersessionism’”; second, it challenges modern distinctions between religion and politics; and third, it provides the basis for “contemporary critique of empires” and global powers (367). However, Barclay cautions his readers that the appeal of allowing such political and social concerns to regulate the interpretation of the text leads to the danger of distorting Paul’s theology. The refinement of this essay is marked by the author’s ability to raise broader questions of hermeneutics, reflect a balanced and mature approach to the task of exegesis, and demonstrate legitimate applications of comparative social theories in Pauline studies.

Although many of the other essays in the book were interesting to read, they were mainly examples of Barclay’s core arguments in the introductory

chapter, which demonstrate how social theories can be applied to Pauline studies. In some cases, it is possible to see the value of such comparative studies between the Diaspora Jews and Pauline communities. In others, Barclay raises more questions than he provides answers, leaving the reader wondering whether social comparisons are actually valuable in cases where so much data is lacking. After all, Paul's epistles are mainly concerned with addressing theological issues, and not with providing us with a description of the ins-and-outs of early Christian communities. Another pitfall of such associations is the danger of over-generalization, as Barclay himself admits (120). Perhaps it would be important to remind the reader that comparative studies should not replace the task of sound exegesis. If the apostle is not, first and foremost, studied and interpreted on his own terms, whatever analogies are subsequently drawn will invariably be skewed.

All in all, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* will stimulate both seasoned scholars and young students of Paul to look at his epistles with fresh eyes, while at the same time providing them with innovative tools with which to explore the world of early Christianity. As the author repeatedly emphasizes, there is still much to uncover, if one is willing to ask the right questions.

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Brewer, Brian C. *Martin Luther and the Seven Sacraments: A Contemporary Protestant Reappraisal*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. xviii + 253 pp. Softcover. USD 26.99.

In *Martin Luther and the Seven Sacraments*, Brian C. Brewer—associate professor of Christian theology at George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University—“intends to outline each of Lombard’s seven sacraments, which became traditional to Roman Catholicism, to examine how Luther understood each practice, evaluate why it was or was not a sacrament, and explore how the rite might be properly understood and positively used in the Protestant tradition still today” (35).

At the heart of Brewer’s argument lie the following key thoughts: First, while Luther and the other reformers reduced the number of the sacraments, they did not abandon the practices related to them. In other words, Luther spoke against the sacramentalization of certain practices, but not against the practices themselves. Secondly, many Christians from Protestant traditions today—in contrast with Luther and other Reformers—have either ignored or do not fully engage in important church disciplines that are considered sacraments by the Roman Catholic Church because of their misunderstanding of Luther’s intentions.

To be clear, the book is not an appeal for Protestantism to return to seven sacraments, but to re-assess the two Protestant sacraments (Lord’s Supper and Baptism) as well as the other ecclesial practices that can strengthen the Christian’s life and the life of the church (xii), in light of Luther’s theology and practice. In other words, the fact that the nomenclature “sacrament” was deemed inappropriate by Luther and other Reformers in reference to five