

**Christopher D. Stanley (ed.)**

*The Colonized Apostle: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011.

Pp. xvi + 365; and

**Joseph A. Marchal (ed.)**

*Studying Paul's Letters: Contemporary Perspectives and Methods*. Minneapolis:

Fortress Press, 2012. Pp. xiv + 233.

In her contribution to *The Colonized Apostle* (“Critical Perspectives on Postcolonial Theory”), Susan B. Abraham explores the “pedagogical frame” of postcolonial approaches. In truth, she could have called it the “deconstructive frame,” since, following the work of Gayatri Spivak, she sees postcolonial theory as an example of “the setting to work of deconstruction” (32). For Abraham, “[e]ntering into the experience of otherness cannot be tracked by linear thought. It requires a suspension of the manner in which academic discourses are conducted” (33). Similarly, *Studying Paul's Letters* takes on a pedagogical project characterized by intersections and non-linear connections, but within the context of providing methodological entrées to Paul's letters for students. In his introduction, Joseph Marchal performs the necessary messiness of choosing starting points and aims for engaging Paul within a humanities context as a way of contributing to “the development of one's own critical abilities, considering how to use and also weigh and evaluate what one learns, questioning its utility for a variety of situations” (7). For their respective audiences, each book sets out to help question epistemological foundations in the interests of ethical action, and each succeeds admirably.

Though, as Christopher Stanley explains in his introduction to *The Colonized Apostle*, postcolonial theory can be understood as “seek[ing] to expose the various social and ideological mechanisms that colonial powers use to maintain hegemony over the minds and bodies of colonized peoples” (4), the expositions found within the volume accord to greater and lesser degrees with Abraham's prescription that postcolonial theory take a deconstructive tack. Here again, however, lies one of the volume's strengths: since postcolonial approaches are variegated in their applications both outside and within biblical studies, the diversity represented in the volume allows it to fulfill its aim, in Stanley's words, of providing “a critical introduction to what is quickly becoming a ‘new wave’ in Pauline studies” (5).

The book begins with three pieces addressing the question, “What is Postcolonial Studies?” (Part One). Stephen D. Moore provides an introduction to the history of the approach as an intellectual movement, outlining four myths concerning the “beginnings” of postcolonial studies. Within biblical studies, similar narratives obtain, and Moore traces the appearance in the mid-to-late

nineties of theoretically inspired applications of postcolonial theory, empire-critical work, and postcolonial expansions and critiques of liberationist readings. Moore then addresses critiques from promoters of “contextual readings” from the Global South of interpreters that use theoretical analyses of contemporary oppression for the task of historical reconstruction, often to defuse the power of such theories for addressing present-day injustice.

Susan Abraham, mentioned above, similarly critiques postcolonial approaches for failing to reflect accurately how oppression follows multiple lines of subject formation, almost always including both ethnicity and gender – hence the need for a “feminist frame.” Her “pedagogical frame” also sees the theory as radically questioning, in a deconstructive mode, Western knowledge and how it is created. The need for specificity with regard to context and intersectionality is a pervasive theme in the volume, and one that Neil Elliott takes up in its third piece, “Marxism and the Postcolonial Study of Paul.” Perceptions of the disappearance of Marxism and attention to class in postcolonial scholarship (again, beyond and within biblical studies) has been a pervasive critique for some time. Elliott and others, I think, noticing the Marxist roots of the approach, lament a missed opportunity to advance Marxist criticism of the Bible and its reception. What is revealed in appeals such as Elliott’s is the tension between the Marxist and deconstructive or discourse-critical impulses in postcolonial theory; the former pushes to appreciate the material aspects of imperial oppression, while the latter asserts that the postcolonial ruptures all prior notions of societal knowledge, including class structure.

Part Two, “Paul and Ancient Forms of Colonialism,” engaging Paul and colonial issues within a first-century context, is split into three subsections. “Paul and Roman Colonial Rule” begins with Jeremy Punt’s “Pauline Agency in Postcolonial Perspective: Subverter of or Agent for Empire?” Punt clearly shows the relationship between the concepts of hybridity and ambivalence; torn between resistance and adoption of imperial tropes, subaltern agency is located somewhere in between. In 1 Corinthians, we see Paul side with the “weak” and predict the downfall of existing powers while putting forth an apocalyptic vision evoking imperial, hierarchical values. Thus, it becomes difficult to simply reclaim Paul as resistant to empire. Gordon Zerbe (“The Politics of Paul: His Supposed Social Conservatism and the Impact of Postcolonial Readings”) also addresses Paul’s political perspective toward empire, arguing that his eschatology, reuse of imperial concepts, and status as prisoner and executed victim of Rome help recontextualize readings of Romans 13 and its traditional understanding as upholding the political status quo. Then, Davina Lopez, in “Visualizing Significant Otherness: Reimagining Paul(ine Studies) through Hybrid Lenses,” helpfully pushes the concepts of hybridity and ambivalence beyond a

mere application to Paul's first-century context to understand more fully the hybrid methodological situation of most postcolonial-inclined Pauline interpreters. Torn between traditional methods and the deconstructive aspects of the linguistic turn, scholars fail to produce either a specific, variegated notion of ancient power or an interpretation with contemporary ethical relevance. Appealing for attention to ancient visual communication as producing the multivalent representations expected by theories of hybridity, she examines Trajan's column for clues to the dichotomies that "othered" imperial subjects to show both how Paul might have proposed alternatives to such binaries and how scholars might imagine third spaces beyond ancient constructions and present realities.

The second subsection contains three essays treating postcolonial approaches to ethnic identity in Paul. L. Ann Jervis ("Reading Romans 7 in Conversation with Postcolonial Theory: Paul's Struggle toward a Christian Identity of Hybridity") posits hybridity as an analogy to her exegesis of Romans 7, understood as depicting a Jewish Christian struggling with the commandment to obedience. Sin functions to critique the colonizer, and the law, well-intentioned "postcolonial aid givers" (98). Even after a measure of liberation is achieved (in the passage, in Christ), colonial ideologies (sin) can persist even in the new situation of freedom (the Christian "commandment" of 7:9), just as the postcolonial subject cannot avoid the persistence of dominating structures. While I disagree with Jervis's reading of the passage, the essay helps explain some aspects of hybridity through an analogous scriptural situation. Next, Stanley's contribution ("Paul the Ethnic Hybrid? Postcolonial Perspectives on Paul's Ethnic Categorizations") asks, post-"New Perspective," how Paul understood the ethnic categories he employed and whether Bhabha's notion of hybridity helps us understand this important issue. Stanley is the first in the volume to raise the persistent question of whether a controversial theory developed during the rule of late-capitalism is a relevant analytic for ancient realities. He reads Paul as conceiving ethnic categories in binaries, though these binaries as rhetorically deployed divide the world in different ways. Such binaries are so situational that, according to Stanley, Paul cannot be said to place himself between or beside them in a hybrid position – particularly since, according to Bhabha, hybridity breaks down dichotomous reasoning. However, it seems to me that the effect of deploying multiple types of binaries could in itself have a deconstructive effect; if humanity can be so variously construed, then does not Paul's rhetorical adaptability itself question ethnic divisions? Concluding the section is Tat-siong Benny Liew's "Redressing Bodies at Corinth: Racial/Ethnic Politics and Religious Difference in the Context of Empire." Treating the concept of "bodies" in 1 Corinthians, Liew builds on previous scholarship by focusing on

race and its intersections with gender and sexuality. In order to defend his Judean racial identity (a growing source of embarrassment in Corinth), Paul puts forth the image of Christ's humiliated, crucified, Judean body. In presenting his and Christ's ethnic position as fluid, Paul's racial reasoning provides a logic for his explanation of eschatological transformation in 1 Corinthians 15. Borrowing from analyses of Freud, however, Liew also shows how Paul projects the more shameful aspects of his stereotyped racial position onto depictions of gender and sexuality, particularly in his portrayals of Gentile sexual deviancy. Liew's essay makes a real contribution to understanding in specific terms how the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality might function in a particular piece of Pauline rhetoric.

The final section of Part Two treats issues of gender in postcolonial analysis. Joseph Marchal ("Imperial Intersections and Initial Inquiries: Toward a Feminist, Postcolonial Analysis of Philippians") argues that postcolonial and empire-critical work on Paul has largely ignored concepts of gender, while feminist approaches have neglected empire. He interprets Philippians using the hermeneutical suggestions of Musa Dube and Kwok Pui-lan to show how Paul "reinscribes and mimics" (159) colonial discourses with regard to both political power and gender. The next essay – "Beyond the Heroic Paul: Toward a Feminist and Decolonizing Approach to the Letters of Paul" by Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre and Laura Nasrallah – offers, however, another critique of feminist and postcolonial work on Paul, one that explicitly addresses work by Marchal as well as Lopez. For Johnson-DeBaufre and Nasrallah, even recent work makes the critical misstep of focusing too much on Paul as a "heroic," central actor, effectively duplicating the picture of him perpetuated by Acts and the Pastorals. A more effective feminist and postcolonial approach pays more attention to reception of the letters, even privileging the initial reception by Paul's addressees as a way of reconceiving the early Christ-believing movement as an exercise in communal construction. Jennifer Bird's essay, "To What End? Revisiting the Gendered Space of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 from a Feminist Postcolonial Perspective," makes similar points. In a survey of scholarship on the notoriously difficult passage, Bird shows how scholars vest meaning and authority in Paul's own thoughts on the matter of women in worship rather than looking to Paul's dialogic situation with the community. For Johnson-DeBaufre, Nasrallah, and Bird, Paul's authority is both a symptom and a cause of the subjection of women.

Part Three ("Paul and Modern Western Colonialism") ends the volume by treating contextual receptions of Paul's letters. Robert Paul Seesengood shines light on how the picture of Paul as missionary (particularly in Acts and the Pastorals) supported nineteenth-century American missionary efforts and

discourses on slavery in his “Wrestling with the ‘Macedonian Call’: Paul, Pauline Scholarship, and Nineteenth-Century Colonial Missions.” Guiding his exposition is the notion, taken from Bhabha, that colonization impacts and changes the colonizer as well as the subaltern. In “Galatians and the ‘Orientalism’ of Justification by Faith: Paul among Jews and Muslims,” Brigitte Kahl reads the idea of justification by faith found in Galatians as radically overturning all Self/Other binaries, reimagining constructions of Galatian ethnicity found in ancient depictions (as exemplified in the “Dying Gaul” sculpture type) and in modern scholarship. Jae Won Lee (“Paul, Nation, and Nationalism: A Korean Postcolonial Perspective”) – explicitly foregrounding her own Korean nationalism, borrowing concepts from Aijaz Ahmad and Simon Durning, and critiquing notions of hybridity as found in Bhabha and Liew – reads Paul as a “progressive” Judean nationalist who founds his inter- or trans-national project on his own commitment to Israel. Finally, Gordon Zerbe, in a second contribution, surveys the diverse use of Paul among various Filipino biblical scholars and theologians engaged in the “theology of struggle” (the variant of liberation theology particular to the late-twentieth-century Philippines).

Readers introduced by this volume to postcolonial approaches will engage specific issues in the field far beyond simply questioning the general relevance of theory for biblical interpretation; the exegetical and critical work in these essays amply displays the benefit of postcolonial reading strategies. Pervasive issues include: (1) the nature of hybridity – how do we conceive of its radical disruption of hegemonic regimes, and how do we explore its relevance if it is so deconstructive and, thus, in a sense, lacking in constructive suggestion? (2) the importance of intersectionality, not simply as something to be mentioned but as something to be explored in its contextual specificity; (3) the many values of theory, both as something applied in the work of biblical interpretation and as a stance that makes space for concerns to surface; (4) the need for attention to communal, and not just individual, contexts of oppression and liberation; and (5) the need for depictions of academic situatedness other than the standard “ivory tower” critique, an image which notions of hybridity and intersectionality should radically put into question while simultaneously broadening our attention to voices beyond the academy and the Global North. In outlining these and other issues, *The Colonized Apostle* clearly fulfills its goal of introducing scholars to the history and current state of postcolonial Pauline studies.

Similarly, *Studying Paul's Letters: Contemporary Perspectives and Methods* provides resources for clearing critical space in which students can consider Paul's letters with a wealth of ethical and social concerns. (That the pedagogical concerns of these essays duplicate many found in *The Colonized Apostle* is

no surprise, as five scholars have contributions in both volumes.) As editor Joseph Marchal explains in his introduction (“Asking the Right Questions? Perspective and Approach”), many of the essays have been field tested in the classroom to allow for revision in light of actual use. Every essay is clearly written and engaging; the contributions that ask direct questions of the student reader seem particularly beneficial for teaching. Each essay applies its method or reading strategy to a specific Pauline passage or letter, selected only from the seven undisputed epistles. (It may be too much to ask for more even coverage of the letters, but I did notice that, out of eleven essays, none treated the Corinthian correspondence, with four applications to Galatians.) In keeping with Marchal’s emphasis on intersectionality (which he explains well in the introduction), each essay has cross-references to the other chapters when addressing relevant overlaps. A glossary of thirty-three key terms is appended.

Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre begins the book with a chapter titled “Historical Approaches: Which Past? Whose Past?” – a decidedly postmodern take on historiography. I think the approach will be especially effective in relating to students’ contexts and deconstructing their hidden assumptions. She applies a historical approach to the ethnic and polemical issues involved in 1 Thess. 2:14–16. Todd Penner and Davina Lopez then tackle “Rhetorical Approaches: Introducing the Art of Persuasion in Paul and Pauline Studies,” beginning by examining the rhetoric used by both sides in the American “war on terror,” but also by persuading students of the pervasiveness of rhetoric in daily life. Their approach to the Philippians 2 hymn touches on rhetorics of exhortation, imitation, resistance, and hierarchy.

The following group of essays treats more explicitly materialist approaches. Laura Nasrallah writes on “Spatial Perspectives: Space and Archaeology in Roman Philippi,” drawing on important currents in spatial theory and critical geography to consider the significance for Pauline interpretation of space and place, including notions of physical, conceptual, and lived space. The politics of the urban landscape of colonial Philippi are brought to bear on issues of apostolic presence and absence as well as spatialized construals of hierarchy. Peter Oakes (“Economic Approaches: Scarce Resources and Interpretive Opportunities”) then introduces current debates concerning economic status within Pauline communities, showing how economic concerns can serve as an interpretive framework, an interpretive goal, or can use Paul’s letters for data about the ancient economy. He applies his study of artisanal apartments in Pompeii to the social and economic concerns found in Romans 12. In a chapter titled “Visual Approaches: Imag(in)ing the Big Pauline Picture,” Davina Lopez echoes points made in her contribution to *The Colonized Apostle* by framing attention to visual communication in ancient and contemporary societies as a

way to break with linear epistemologies. Her three-way comparison of Augustus's Prima Porta statue, George W. Bush's "mission accomplished" flight suit, and the images of Sarah and Hagar in Gal. 4:21–5:1 helps broaden interpretive possibilities for the passage's exegesis, read alternately as a positing of Sarah as a free female figure transcending subjection and otherness, or as evoking Roman notions of the goddess Victory and thus reinscribing structures of domination. All three essays, I think, will effectively broaden students' imagination of material contexts, both ancient and contemporary, to affect their interpretations.

A second set of essays treats readings based on specific gendered, ethnic, and sexual concerns. Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, in "Feminist Approaches: Rethinking History and Resisting Ideologies," introduces feminist Pauline readings in two ways: (1) by providing the broad outlines of a history of the international Jesus movement, foregrounding attention to women and communal formation; and (2) by presenting an ideological critique of how gender hierarchies undergird all Pauline passages, taking Romans 8 as a test case. In "Jewish Perspectives: A *Jewish* Apostle to the Gentiles," Pamela Eisenbaum essentially provides an introduction to the New Perspective, though perhaps among the clearest and most succinct I have ever read. She admirably leads the reader through Gal. 3:6–14 – no easy feat, as this notoriously requires retranslating the NRSV for students who likely have no knowledge of Greek. Demetrius Williams then writes on "African American Approaches: Rehumanizing the Reader against Racism and Reading through Experience," arguing for contextual readings in opposition to the standard academic mode of universalism and objectivity. He introduces the history of African American engagement with the Bible and shows how knowledge of the African American experience overturns traditional binaries with regard to the issues of slavery and family relations in Philemon. In "Asian American Approaches: Ambivalence of the Model Minority and Perpetual Foreigner," Sze-kar Wan uses scholarship on stereotypes of Asian Americans as "perpetual foreigners" and "model minorities" to discuss general theories of race, including whiteness theory and its intersections with other aspects of marginality. He reads Paul's conflicts with the Jerusalem apostles in Galatians 1–2 as an example of a minority group reproducing the prejudices of a dominant society in engaging one of their own.

Jeremy Punt then presents an essay on "Postcolonial Approaches: Negotiating Empires, Then and Now," introducing major theories in the approach, including catachresis, hidden transcripts, and mimicry. He then provides a reading of how 1 Thessalonians 4–5 evokes, resists, and reinscribes imperial ideologies with regard to violence, factionalism, embodiment, and the triumph enacted by travel to colonized locales. Finally, Joseph Marchal offers "Queer

Approaches: Improper Relations with Pauline Letters.” As with other contributions, this is the type of introduction for which I as a teacher have been searching, as it traces the contours of a difficult approach with clarity and critical sharpness. Presenting queer theory as a “challenge to regimes of the normal” (210), Marchal categorizes approaches to the traditional biblical passages on same-sex relations as either historical-contextual (showing that ancient notions of sexuality were different from our own) and apologist-affirmative (lifting up examples of same-gendered relationships in the Bible), only to express a clear and helpful preference for a queerly resistant strategy challenging not simply the sexualized content of the Bible but also normative or “appropriate” reading strategies themselves. Applying all three approaches to Galatians 4 suggests that perhaps the Galatians, in their initial concern for Paul’s afflicted body, were already inhabiting a non-normative and just ethical stance before Paul even reached them, since even Paul’s gendered language amounts to condescension, normativity, and an instrumental use of feminine imagery.

Marchal and his fellow authors in *Studying Paul’s Letters* have provided a needed resource for broadening students’ critical imaginations through attention to intersectionality, community, and recovery of subsumed voices. I have adopted *Studying Paul’s Letters* for use in my own seminary-level seminar on Paul, since I feel it, like *The Colonized Apostle*, represents the best work in current Pauline studies: imaginative, dialogical, and deconstructive with an eye toward promoting justice in new and changing contexts.

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