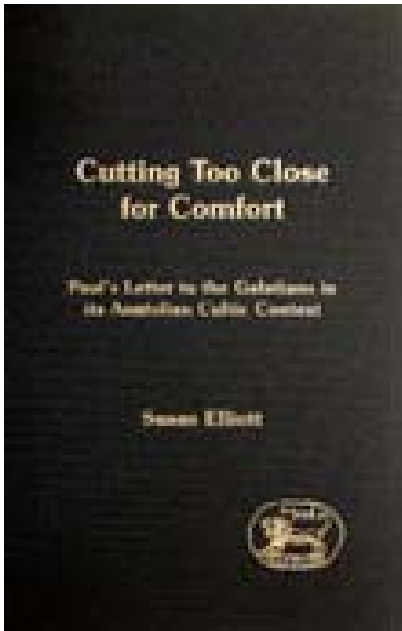


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Elliott, Susan

Cutting Too Close for Comfort: Paul's Letter to the Galatians in Its Anatolian Cultic Context

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In this fascinating and timely monograph Susan Elliott seeks to understand Paul's letter to the Galatians, and in particular certain problematic metaphors and issues in the local context of Galatia. The sad fact is that, despite the amount of recent work devoted to this letter of Paul, such considerations of its specifically Gentile context have been lacking. Elliott's monograph should be seen as, one hopes, the first of several works trying to redress this imbalance. Her work is thorough, displaying an in-depth knowledge and familiarity not only with recent Pauline scholarship but also with classical scholarship and solid biblical exegesis of previous generations, spanning back well into the first few centuries after the one in which Paul wrote.

The monograph is split into three sections: part 1, a consideration and identification of the major problems in Galatians, as Elliott sees them; part 2, where she makes a very insightful study of the specifically Anatolian religious context of Galatians and of the society at large; and part 3, where Elliott turns toward a more in-depth consideration of the problems that she identifies, considered against the background of the Anatolian cult. Possibly one of the greatest struggles that this book will face is that of winning over a skeptical scholarly community that seems so set on thinking of Paul in his Jewish context that even moderate works suggesting anything else in passing are ignored on the whole.

Elliott's work deserves to be read, considered, and discussed at length, and one hopes it will lead to similar works considering the specific Gentile context of Corinth, Rome, and other places in the ancient world.

Having already stated that Elliott's main interest is in the Gentile context of Galatians, I think it worth mentioning that she does not ignore recent scholarship that emphasizes the Jewish context of Paul. In fact, it is due to such scholarship on Paul and the law that she feels the need to address the difficult issue of Paul's association of the law with the στοιχεια in Gal 3:19–4:11, as she does in chapter 2. Although previous generations of scholarship have considered this somewhat problematic, it is only really those committed to a Jewish Paul, such as Dunn and Matera, among others to whom she draws attention, who have made it into such a major issue. Her writing is very clear, and the questions that she raises are helpfully laid out at the end of part 1 for readers to refresh their memory before moving on to part 2.

Whereas Part 1 of the work is well related to Galatians and Pauline scholarship, part 2 moves into a rather different realm: the Anatolian religious context. Her work in chapters 3–6 is extremely thorough and mostly very interesting. Each chapter has a useful summary at the end that picks out the central points made in the rest of the chapter. However, there are so few references to Paul or his letter to the Galatians in this section to make it heavy going for nonclassicists. Speaking personally, I would have liked to have seen more cross-referencing and application to Paul in this section. Elliott herself describes this part as “a lengthy detour” (349), and perhaps it is a little too lengthy.

Part 3 is much more successful. In particular, chapters 7 and 10 are very impressively argued. Chapter 8 is persuasive and well focused on the difficult issue of identifying Hagar as a mountain mother-goddess. Although I am not persuaded by all of Elliott's arguments that tie Galatians into a rather complex cult setting, certain aspects of it have nonetheless struck me as very plausible, even likely. Chapter 9 on the “two ways” dualistic theme found in Galatians and in much Greek and Hellenistic Jewish literature is, I feel, a little less successful. Elliott refers, in a footnote, to criticism she has received from others, in particular Bruce Longenecker (337–38), going on to dismiss it fairly briefly. More detailed discussion of the reasonable objections that Longenecker raises in the main body of the text would have helped her case.

The epilogue is very interesting and worthwhile. Elliott begins by summarizing the main points of her new reading of Galatians before moving on to issues for future study that she has hinted at from time to time in the present work. Not only does this give one a good indication of where Elliott's interests lie, but it also provides ideas for others to follow in reaction to, and building upon, Elliott's work in *Cutting Too Close*. This is the

kind of brief chapter that many monographs would benefit from but all too often do not include. Elliott leads the way with this helpful chapter.

Overall there are only a few negative comments that I feel need to be made about this work. First of all, there are a number of niggling little mistakes such as obvious typos and missed words, which for a monograph such as this is rather disappointing. Elliott also tends to get rather bogged down in inscriptions and iconography, which is rarely linked to Galatians in part 2. Although Elliott's intentions are clearly laid out as being to investigate the Anatolian cultic context of Paul's letter, and hence the cult itself, the lack of linking the evidence to the letter leaves the nonclassicist Pauline scholar wondering where she is going with all this. One other annoying characteristic of this work is Elliott's footnotes that state something along the lines of "this is beyond our scope here" or "we shall not consider this issue." I appreciate that not everything can be considered, but the comparatively large number of these references does little other than irritate a reader. However, having said that, I recognize that her epilogue goes some way to pointing out what she is hoping to do with these issues that are beyond the scope of *Cutting Too Close*.

Despite these criticisms, I would nonetheless still thoroughly recommend this work. First of all, the rather unique starting point of reading Galatians from the point of view of the audience and their cultic context is a refreshing breath of air. Her willingness to delve back into good quality scholarship of yesteryear that has rather gone out of fashion is another endearing quality about this present work. The success of this monograph can be indicated by the fact that she has persuaded me to read Paul's letter to the Galatians as being at least somewhat influenced by this Anatolian context. I was initially rather skeptical about Elliott's starting point, but her arguments have intrigued me and persuaded me, at least to some extent, as to their viability.