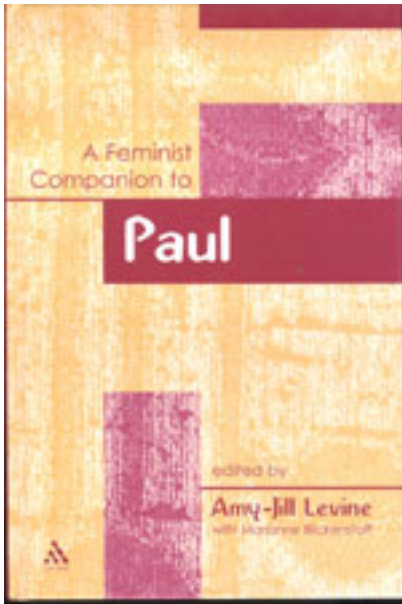


RBL 04/2005



Levine, Amy-Jill, ed.

A Feminist Companion to Paul

Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings 6

London: T&T Clark, 2004. Pp. x + 227. Hardcover.
\$130.00. ISBN 0826463347.

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This sixth volume of *The Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings* focuses on the undisputed letters of Paul. The book begins with a succinct and insightful introduction by Amy-Jill Levine (1–12) that paraphrases the content of the ten individual contributions that follow. The scholars represented in the collection exhibit a variety of critical methods, interests, and hermeneutical investments. Four of the articles have been published previously; two have been translated from German for this publication. I will briefly engage each article, though not at the same depth, then offer some general comments about the volume as a whole.

The collection opens, appropriately, with Daniel Boyarin's article, "Paul and the Genealogy of Gender" (13–41), a reworking of an earlier version published in *Representations* 41 (1993) and more fully developed in Boyarin's *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Cultural Identity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994). Wayne Meeks's classic 1974 article, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," lies at the heart of Boyarin's reconstruction of Paul's understanding of gender, as it does many other contemporary attempts. Boyarin narrows his analysis to Paul's use of the terms "flesh" (*sarx*) and "spirit" (*pneuma*) while largely restricting his analysis to the Galatian and Corinthian correspondence. The letters

to these two communities have been interpreted as indicating Paul's waffling support of egalitarianism (e.g., Gal 3:27–28; 1 Cor 11:1–10). Boyarin, however, argues persuasively that Galatians and Corinthians represent complementary expressions of a dialectic grounded in the Hellenistic tendency to privilege “spirit” over “flesh.” To make his point, Boyarin runs Philo's understanding of the myth of the primal androgyne. Philo reads the two creation stories in Genesis as representing two separate creations. The first creation was of a spiritual being without gender differentiation; the second creation produced a carnal being that subsequently differentiated into male and female. Boyarin's point is not that Paul is dependent upon Philo for his metaphysics of gender but that the two exegetes do reflect, to some extent, similar interpretive traditions regarding the Genesis creation accounts. Paul, in Boyarin's analysis, is less disparaging of the body than his Alexandrian contemporary.

The manner in which Boyarin works these insights out with reference to Pauline texts is both delightful and important. I appreciate, in particular, the various “homologies” that are revealed if one distinguishes the relationship between “flesh” and “spirit” in Paul's thought as Boyarin does. Applications abound beyond the particular issue of gender, including the relationship between Israel (of the flesh) and the Israel of the Spirit, Christ according to the flesh or spirit, and the Scriptures read according to the flesh/letter or spirit. Boyarin notes: “The dual person of Christ in the world is a perfect homology . . . to the dual nature of language and the necessity for allegorical interpretation to fulfill the spiritual meaning of concrete expression. Corporeal difference yields to spiritual universalism” (21). The application of his understanding of the antimony between flesh and spirit to these other fields in Pauline thought only strengthens Boyarin's use of it to understand Paul's “genealogy of gender.”

In “Sexy Stoics and the Rereading of Romans 1:18–26” (42–73), Diana Swancutt identifies a *topos* of “the hypocritical, sexy Stoic” in order to interpret the first two chapters of Romans. The object of Paul's ire in Rom 1 is understood to be Stoic philosophy as revealed by flawed tradents. The “hypocritical judge” lambasted by Paul in 2:1 is the Stoic sage who does not practice what he preaches. In her conclusion, Swancutt acknowledges that her interpretation is “in contrast to all scholarly analysis of Romans” (71). I personally was not persuaded by her application of this *topos* to Romans. I understand Paul in Rom 1:18–32 to be setting a “rhetorical trap” for the good, pious believers in Rome (both Jew and Gentile) who are led to judge others (i.e., pagan sinners) as unrighteous before God. The trap is sprung in 2:1, where Paul identifies such easy judgment with a subtle form of idolatry (the focus of Rom 1). The judgment of who is and who is not righteous is properly an attribute of the Creator, not the creature. In other words, I see the “piety” that is being criticized in 2:1 to lie much closer at home than does Swancutt. The target is not so much hypocrisy as idolatry. For me, the value of

Swancutt's article does not lie in the application of the *topos* to Romans but to the fund of information that it recovers about the Stoics, ancient sexual mores, and the use of cultural stereotypes in rhetorical argumentation. Such insight can be brought to bear upon Paul's discourse in Rom 1, I believe, but in a secondary manner, to illuminate how Paul's argument both reflects and is to be distinguished from other Greco-Roman uses of sexual stereotypes in epistolary or rhetorical constructs.

The essay by Luzia Sutter Rehmann, "To Turn the Groaning into Labor: Romans 8:22–23" (74–84), has been translated from the German for this volume. The article criticizes, as has much feminist theology, the tendency to equate Christian hope with the endurance of suffering. As Rehmann says, "I doubt that patient waiting for better times brings relief in times of distress" (75). A more appropriate alternative to such passivity in the face of suffering is suggested by means of a feminist reading of Paul's use of the childbirth metaphor. This reading, in the first place, is based in common-sense observations of birthing. It simply points out how active and participatory are women who labor. The application of this observation is similarly straightforward, "I do not see Paul and his friends awaiting the final triumph of God; they are working for it" (82). Understanding birthing as a work that arises out of the very stuff of creation leads to more speculative interpretations. For example, Rehmann identifies the "groaning" of labor with the groaning of the oppressed. She can then read the metaphor as an expression of the resistance to dominant ideology (e.g., *imperium romanum*) that is often inscribed, in veiled form, in apocalyptic literature.

Beverly Roberts Gaventa's "Our Mother St. Paul: Toward the Recovery of a Neglected Theme" (85–97) is a lecture that was previously published in *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* (1996). It reviews, in an admittedly programmatic way, Paul's use of maternal imagery in seven texts (1 Thess 2:7; 1 Cor 3:1–2; Gal 4:19; 1 Thess 5:3; Rom 8:22; Gal 1:15; 1 Cor 15:8). Thus the lecture continues to develop the discussion of Paul's use of imagery explicitly tied to women's experience that was initiated by Rehmann's article. One strength of the work lies in the depth to which Gaventa engages "metaphor theory." This pays off in several ways, including the observation that Paul's use of maternal imagery often involves what Gaventa calls "a metaphor squared" (88). For example, in 1 Cor 3:2 Paul says: "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food." For this metaphor to work one must imagine something like a "double switch"; one must first equate the gospel with "milk" and then Paul with a mother who can supply that nourishment. Gaventa's point is, simply, that these passages represent rather complex metaphorical moves. She then asks the question as to what extent one can read such language operations as playing with (i.e., deconstructing) socially constructed gender roles. Gaventa suggests tentative responses to this programmatic question ranging from a maternal metaphor's impact upon affect (i.e., encouragement of intimacy) to those more classically cerebral. One interpretive speculation

that is compelling comes from an analysis of what she calls the “cognitive character” of metaphor. Citing Eva Fedder Kittay, Gaventa notes, “a metaphor rearranges the furniture of the mind” (93). Gaventa’s concluding comments suggest that if we think through Paul’s use of maternal metaphors with some discipline, we might better understand the sort of rearrangements of the social constructs of self, including those of gender, Paul envisioned occurring within those communities that grew up around the risen Christ, communities that were both nourished and challenged by Paul’s use of maternal imagery.

“Women’s Inheritance Rights in Antiquity and Paul’s Metaphor of Adoption” (98–121) by Kathleen E. Corley, investigates the background of Paul’s use of *huiiothesia* (“adoption as a son”) in order to recover authorial intent in its use, for example, in Rom 8:22–23. Translation issues are prominent in the discussion, specifically the choice of the NRSV to gloss *huiiothesia* as “the adoption as *children* of God” (beginning at Rom 8:15), eliminating the gender specificity of the term. Corley reviews, at length, the question of adoption—for both genders—within Judaism, in Greek law, and in Roman law. In this discussion, Corley surmises that while the term *klēronomos* is gender-inclusive, *huiiothesia* is not. Hence, she claims, the evidence suggests that Paul’s use of the *huiiothesia* metaphor is a gender-specific one (121). This observation complicates both the analysis of Paul’s intent in using the term as well as its contemporary appropriation. As she notes, “Even though Paul may not intend to exclude women from the ranks of the sons of God, for a woman to appropriate this metaphor, there is one more step to be taken before she can participate in the ‘adoption’ Paul describes.” To some extent, then, Corley’s analysis leads one to a different understanding of Paul’s use of metaphor than that recovered by Gaventa in the previous article’s investigation of *maternal* imagery.

Sara B. C. Winter in “Philemon and the Patriarchal Paul” (122–36) engages in a complex prosopological analysis of individuals mentioned in Paul’s letter to Philemon, in particular with regard to people similarly named in Colossians, in an attempt to understand better the nature of the request Paul is making regarding the slave Onesimus. Winter also (as did Boyarin in the article that opened the collection) analyzes the opposition flesh/spirit in order to understand the apocalyptic character of the free/slave dichotomy. Such an opposition, Winter claims, is “symptomatic of the present evil age . . . the gap between slave and brother could not be greater” (135). Her conclusion is that Paul is petitioning for the manumission of “a baptized slave of a baptized slaveowner” (136). She also suggests that her work on the slave/free dichotomy in Philemon produces, by analogy, an interpretive benefit for gender studies. Here Winter claims the methodological high ground. She asserts that even though “we possess no genuine Pauline writing arguing for equality between men and women . . . the significant representation of women leaders in Pauline churches uncovered by feminist scholarship

of recent decades puts the burden of proof on those who would argue Paul was indifferent to or opposed to equality of women within the churches” (135).

Richard B. Hays’s contribution to the volume, “Paul on the Relation between Men and Women” (137–47), was originally published in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (1996). In this excerpt he notes a difference of opinion from Boyarin’s position (as expressed in *A Radical Jew*) with regard to the extent to which Paul’s flesh/spirit anthropology “parallels the systematic dualism expressed more clearly in Philo” (142). Still, Hays acknowledges common ground with Boyarin respect to Paul’s “two-tiered” system that privileges celibacy over marriage. Within marriage Hays notes how Paul will proscribe “mutual submission” (140), which, Hays claims, distinguishes itself both from the antique norm of a “one-way hierarchical ordering of the husband’s authority over the wife” as well as the modern notion of the sexual autonomy of each individual. Hays also acknowledges the significant role that women played in Paul’s ministry. Though he thinks 1 Cor 14:34–35 is an interpolation, he recognizes that in (the real) Paul there is a tendency, such as in 1 Cor 11:3–16, to maintain “traditional markers of sexual distinction” (146). Hays concludes that “the transformation of gender roles was not a programmatic emphasis of Paul’s mission; rather, it was an unintended consequence, as the Spirit worked in churches” (146).

In “Virgins, Widows, and Wives: The Women of 1 Corinthians 7” (148–68), Margaret Y. MacDonald pushes the tension, recognized by many scholars to have developed in late first century (i.e., the time of the Pastoral Epistles), between the experiments in gender redefinition in early Christianity and the expectations of the larger world, *backward* into the time of the authentic Pauline epistles. As she notes in her conclusion

Paul’s teaching and implicit attitude to women need to be understood in light of the social tensions created by the combination of efforts to preserve a group’s distinct identity with the goal of evangelization. Such a combination inevitably leads to a considerable dialogue between church and world and considerable maneuvering to preserve reputation. That such social dynamics occurred in a society that linked honor with the public demonstration of the reputation of women only heightened the tensions. (167–68)

Too much deviation from societal norms with regard to the role of women would draw unfavorable attention to the community. Ascetic practices among married women, including celibacy, would be one such deviation that would be problematic. This is precisely the “problem” MacDonald identifies as having evolved in Paul’s Corinthian social formations.

In “Does Paul Make a Difference?” (169–82), Faith Kirkham Hawkins takes as her interpretive task an investigation of “the value to feminist analysis of focusing on passages where gender is not the central issue” (172). The text she chooses is 1 Cor 8 and Paul’s remarks on *eidōlothytos* (‘things sacrificed to idols’). What evolves in the discussion of this chapter is a delineation of what might be called two different epistemologies within the Corinthian community. These clear differences, however, arise out of what Hawkins terms a more basic “group sameness” (181). The end result is that “neither group can or should claim superiority over the other.” Hawkins sees, then, a conspicuous *lack* of hierarchical distinctions being made by Paul in the dispute over the “things sacrificed to idols.” This differentiates Paul’s response to the conflict over *eidōlothytos* from his admonitions to women in 1 Corinthians. Hawkins ends her piece with a set of questions that ask why Paul’s conversation about gender distinguishes itself by its invocation of the hierarchic mode of thought.

Luise Schottroff’s “‘Law-Free Gentile Christianity’—What about the Women? Feminist Analyses and Alternatives” (183-194), was translated from the German for this collection. At the beginning of her argument, Schottroff identifies a set of “stereotypes” that function to support an academic construct of what she calls “law-free” Christianity (182). The stereotypes are: (1) The Christian gospel is law-free; (2) Judaism is legalistic, (3) seeking to achieve salvation on one’s own (through the law) is sin; (4) Paul’s repudiation of circumcision signifies the fundamental abrogation of the law; (5) even Jesus himself tends to represent a law-free position; (6) the Pharisees are opponents of Jesus and represent a calculating, legalistic position. Having identified these interpretive stereotypes concerning the “law-free” nature of Christianity, Schottroff engages them in a feminist critique. This criticism is important, she claims, because “The majority of current scholarly commentaries on the Second Testament, textbooks, and lexica assume this concept” (182).

It is clear that anti-Semitism, not only in its more blatant forms but also in quite subtle ones, remains an issue to be addressed in New Testament scholarship. Still, given the breadth of Schottroff’s claims, one would expect at least a cursory nod to the significant corrections in this regard that goes by—at least in North America—the rubric of the “new perspective on Paul.” This has been a major trajectory within Pauline studies for the last thirty years and is now, perhaps, the dominant one. An adequate description of the state of New Testament scholarship, however, is not what is driving Schottroff in this article. What is at the heart of Schottroff’s disquiet is her clear recognition that Christianity has long formulated its common life and creeds “at the expense of others, in particular, Jews” (194). This is undeniably true. Yet there are a variety of possible responses to this confession. The new perspective on Paul—which has as its heart a deep appreciation for the richness of Second Temple Judaism—I would argue, is one such attempt to redress

the slander of the past. Schottroff's response to anti-Semitism goes in a singularly different direction. It is both more individual and more radical in that she desires to return to some sort of Christianity *informed by the law*: "As a Gentile Christian, I want to live in accordance with God's law, The Torah" (194).

Quite frankly, I do not know quite what to make of this article. It assumes, obviously, a German discussion about such matters of which I am largely ignorant. Still, Schottroff's understandings of early Christianity and church history, as well as her description of contemporary Pauline scholarship, seems somewhat eccentric. Her sensitivity to the fact that stereotypes with regard to Judaism and the Torah continue to be reconstructed in insidious ways in Christian communities of faith is certainly laudable. But to push the more blatant kinds of anti-Semitism into the heart of contemporary Pauline scholarship seems a less secure move. Also, Schrotthoff's claim that Christianity, in all ages *after* its very first expressions, has been constructed as "law-free," seems reductionistic. The appropriate use of Torah/*vomos*—understood either as "Law" or as "Scripture"—seems to me to be at the center of many of the theological reflections in the New Testament, as it is in every subsequent period of church history of which I am aware. In my own theological tradition, that of North American Lutheranism, the Word of God continues to be received in the primary hermeneutical categories of law and gospel in a manner that is increasingly cognizant of issues raised by the new perspective. Although I appreciate the intent of Schrotthoff—to articulate the righteousness of the Christian before God in a way that does not come at the expense of "the other"—her stereotypical representations of "law-free" Christianity, both ancient and modern, are not convincing and easily falsified.

The feminist perspective on Paul has been underrepresented in publications that can be readily accessed as exegetical resources for theological students. This volume responds to that need. I will recommend it to students. It provides a sampling of feminist approaches to New Testament texts. It exemplifies, on the whole, very careful work with primary texts that extend beyond those of the New Testament canon. While it is centered in "close" readings of Paul, it also consistently displays important, sophisticated, and imaginative hermeneutical moves. In addition, the footnotes supply a fund of bibliographic information that documents the history of scholarship in the ever-evolving feminist engagement with Paul. Although all the articles are of importance and worthy of reading, if I were to recommend one to read, it would be the first, that by Boyarin. In my estimation it is the *prima [sic] inter parens*, destined to become a classic of the literature.