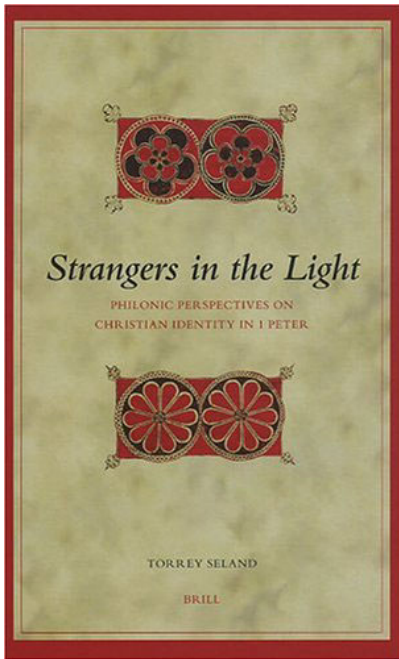


RBL 02/2006



Seland, Torrey

Strangers in the Light: Philonic Perspectives on Christian Identity in 1 Peter

Biblical Interpretation Series 76

Leiden: Brill, 2005. Pp. x + 216. Hardcover. €69.00.
ISBN 9004144919.

Fika J. van Rensburg
North-West University
Potchefstroom, N.W., South Africa 2520

The subtitle of this book is an apt label to the content of the book: the author, Torrey Seland, constructs an “expert reader called a ‘Philonic reader,’ ” well versed in the works of Philo of Alexandria, and ventures into an interpretation of 1 Peter from this stance. The motivation for the title of the book, *Strangers in the Light* (1 and 191), is, however, an artificial combination statements from 1 Peter (1:1 and 2:9).

In the first chapter (9–37), entitled “The Making of 1 Peter,” Seland presents a traditional reading of the making of 1 Peter in the light of ancient Greco-Roman ways of writing, propagating, and transmitting letters. He makes four rather persuasive conclusions: (1) the mention of Mark and the community in 1 Pet 5:13 is to be explained by the practice of having a letter read to a close group of friends and associates; (2) the description of Silvanus in 5:12 denotes him as the writer/secretary, not the carrier; (3) the vast areas of destination given in 1:1 (Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia) for this circular letter makes it very unlikely that Silvanus was the carrier; and (4) the transmission of the letter involved several copying processes, several couriers, and an extended period of time for the letter to reach all the areas (36–37).

In the following three chapters Seland asks more explicitly what can be deduced about the ideology of Christian life from a comparative reading of other Diaspora Jewish literature, especially the works of Philo. As far as 1 Peter goes, the focus is on 2:1–11.

Chapter 2 (39-78: “*Paroikos kai parepidemos*: Proselyte Characterizations in 1 Peter”) deals with the role of the central descriptions of the readers as *paroikoi* and *parepidemoi*. Seland argues that the terms should be understood as proselyte terms, providing social descriptions in 1 Peter in the light of Diaspora Jewish conceptions of proselytes as particularly found in the works of Philo. Seland’s criticism of Elliott’s view that the addressees were *paroikoi* and *parepidemoi* even before they became Christians is not substantiated; he dismisses it with a mere “is not the most likely view” (62). Here and elsewhere Seland tends to make statements without proper substantiation. For example, on 62–63 he interprets *hoos* in 2:11 as a particle used “to introduce a metaphorical expression” without considering the possibility that it is a relational particle marking “reason,” the very interpretation of most English versions (“since you are strangers and resident aliens”), and on 64 he states that “Van Unnik overstates his case when reading this expression as indicating that the recipients were proselytes,” without giving any reason for this view. On the whole, too little acknowledgement is given to Van Unnik (see 44) for his groundbreaking work in this connection.

Chapter 3 is entitled “The ‘Common Priesthood’ of Philo and 1 Peter: A Philonic Reading of 1 Peter 2:5 and 9.” In it Seland constructs how a Philonic reader could have read the issues of priesthood contained in 1 Pet 2:5, 9 in the light of the Philonic symbolic universe. His conclusions (114–15) are persuasive and offer a solid contribution to the interpretation of 1 Pet 2:4–10.

Chapter 4 (117–45: “The Moderate Life of the Christian *paroikoi*: A Philonic Reading of 1 Peter 2:11”) deals with a possible Philonic understanding of the psychological and ethical issues contained in 1 Pet 2:11 (“Beloved, I urge you as strangers and resident aliens to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul”). Seland interprets 2:11 “as an admonition to control the *epithumiai* of the flesh by means of Reason” (141); however, this is not argued at all, nor is it motivated or substantiated from the rest of the letter.

In the fifth and final chapter (147–89), entitled “‘Conduct Yourselves Honorably among the Gentiles’ (1 Peter 2:12): Acculturation and assimilation in 1 Peter,” Seland constructs the author’s view of the social conditions of the intended readers of 1 Peter in the light of models on assimilation and acculturation. He first surveys the recent social-science research concerning assimilation and acculturation, then applies the model of Milton M.

Gordon in a reading of these issues as represented in 1 Peter. Seland's contribution is the very fact that he uses this model.

The book ends with a list of the works cited (193–203), an index of authors (205–8), and an exhaustive index of Scriptural references (209–16), including references to the books of the Old Testament (including the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, as well as *Joseph and Aseneth*) and New Testament as well as to the works of Philo, Josephus, rabbinic literature, Christian authors, Pliny the Younger, and Tacitus.

Although the language is clear and idiomatic, some glaring mistakes witness to the need for a more thorough proofreading before a second edition of the manuscript:

- ▶ concord: 8 line 2 should read “apply,” not “applies”; 50 line 12 should read “organizes” and “functions”
- ▶ 15 line 2: “such” should be inserted between “works” and “as”
- ▶ 20 line 13: “on” should be inserted between “primarily” and “two”
- ▶ 22 line 5: “been” and “to” are to be deleted to make the sentence understandable
- ▶ several inaccuracies in Greek words: 21 line 5 from bottom: the *spiritus lenis* on the alpha of *kuriai* should be deleted; 48 line 4 from bottom: both Greek words should be in the plural; 129 line 11: *agapetoi* is misspelled; 171 lines 1 and 4: the dative plural *paroikois* and *parepidemois* should be the accusative *paroikous* and *parepidemous*; 171 n. 60: the dative plural *paroikois* and *parepidemois* should be the accusative *paroikous* and *parepidemous*; 174 paragraph 2: the dative is again used where the nominative would be more natural; 178 line 16: the author refers to the *agathopoiioi* of 2:12, but 2:12 refers only to *kaloos ergoos* (derivatives of *agathopoiioi* are used only in 2:15 and 4:19)
- ▶ 51 line 5 from bottom: it is unclear why the words *paroikos* and *parepidemos* are transliterated, since just a few lines earlier the Greek form was given; further, the words must be in the plural to make sense: *paroikoi* and *parepidemoi*
- ▶ 61 line 15: either “In this section” or “here” should be deleted
- ▶ 92 line 8: “priesthod” should be “priesthood”
- ▶ 93 line 15: the “the” before “1 Peter” should be deleted
- ▶ 118 n. 4: punctuation is needed between “Alexandria” and “A Critical”

- ▶ 126, last line: this sentence is obviously intended to be the last sentence of the second paragraph on 128, since this is where the “reading of 1 Peter 2:11” is about to commence
- ▶ 128 line 10: one “below” should be deleted
- ▶ hyphens should be deleted at 137 line 16 (“never-theless”); 180 line 10 from bottom (“Consider-ing”)
- ▶ 137 line 16: the phrase “The 2:11” should read something like “The use in 2:11”
- ▶ 149 line 7: replace “possible” with “possibly”
- ▶ 178 line 8 from bottom: the surname “Winther” should read “Winter,” as in the footnote and elsewhere on this page
- ▶ 189 line 3 from bottom: the semicolon should be replaced with a colon.

Although the author acknowledges in the introduction (1–8) that he uses earlier research that was separately published as articles, it would have made much easier reading had he done more to ensure that the present manuscript had its own unity with its own integrity as a monograph. Not only is there much repetition in the later chapters of matters already argued in the earlier chapters, but at least twice he refers to “this article” instead of “this chapter” (79 line 1, 80 paragraph 3). In addition, on 171, he writes “I have dealt with them in another study” instead of referring back to chapter 2 of the present manuscript.

One of the more glaring examples of unnecessary repetition is the section on the terms *paroikos* and *parepidemos* in the works of Philo (119–20); a mere reference to and summary of the information given in chapter 2 would have been sufficient. The same goes for the third and fourth paragraphs on page 130, on the views of Van Unnik and Elliott; it is covered earlier in the manuscript.

Seland seems to view the pre-Christian state of the readers as too monolithic, with them as “of Gentile background” (170). This view does not take account of the fact that, as strangers and resident aliens, the readers were, before they became Christians, mere individuals. Having become Christians, they are now forged into a new identity, the “people of God.” The author himself hints at this “more diverse cultural background” in note 65 on page 172.

In spite of these criticisms, *Strangers in the Light* is a must read for all Petrine scholars. The book makes for good reading and convinces that the interpretation of 1 Peter is

elucidated and enhanced by using insights drawn from Diaspora Jewish literature and the social concerns voiced in this literature.