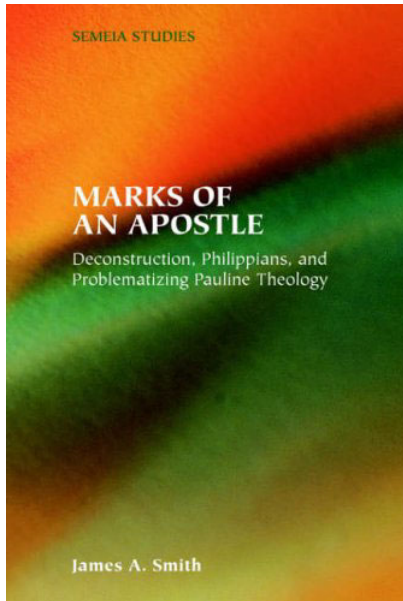


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**Smith, James A.**

*Marks of an Apostle: Deconstruction, Philippians, and Problematizing Pauline Theology*

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In the introduction to his monograph, James A. Smith informs us that the impetus for this study of Phil 1:12–18 is “a question that has nagged me for many years: how can Paul, in Phil 1:18, say that he is able to ‘rejoice’ in proclamation regardless of whether it is done in ‘truth’ or in ‘pretext’?” (1). After a very succinct introduction, the work is structured into five chapters, each of which is, helpfully, provided with an introduction, while the first three also provide summaries. Bibliographical material is divided into two sections: works consulted (159–70) and ancient authors, texts, and translations (170–73). Also included are indices of biblical references (175–77), ancient authors (179–82), and modern authors (183–85).

Smith’s project is to approach Paul as a Greco-Roman psychagogue in order to make clear “the culturally constrained cognitive procedures present to him” (1). The fact that Paul’s thought and (written) speech are determined by the language and structures of his culture implies that his “‘theology’ can only ever be based upon a logocentric pre-text: the immanent features of his social discourse” (1). Thus the first step will be to “describe assumptions associated with the moral philosophers as the cultural pre-text for Philippians” (1). This provides the context for the further activity of examining Phil 1:12–18a, which Smith views as containing a crisis “since Paul attempts to both affirm and

deny the metaphysics of presence within re-citations of the gospel” (1), or, as restated in the introduction of the first chapter, “Paul is willing to affirm or even validate a gospel proclaimed through motives and intentions which are inherently contrary to it: a gospel proclaimed in/by pretext (πρόφασις)” (4). Smith regards the efforts of commentators to avoid the problem by arguing that Phil 1:18 governs 1:15–17 as an exacerbation of the problem that leads to a further crisis. He proposes to demonstrate that the text itself seems to have been “written deliberately to create a point of undecidability in which the text deconstructs itself while leaving the ethical imperative of proclamation unscathed” (2). Thus Paul is utilizing the letter to secure his ideo-theological agenda at Philippi, and this first becomes apparent in the “disclosure formula in Phil 1:12, which is at once an opening and closing of the epistle’s semiotic activity; it thus becomes (dis)closure” (2). This “veiled operation” works its way beneath the surface of the text until Phil 1:18a, “where Paul erases the essential lines of difference between truth (ἀλήθεια) and falsehood (πρόφασις)” (2).

Chapter 1, “The Marks of an Apostle: Writing about Paul,” opens with the charge that most commentators on Paul have developed an ease with the art of glossing in regard to Phil 1:12–18 and have failed to take Paul seriously. A good part of the chapter (6–19) deals with the issue of giving primacy of place to Romans and includes some rather sharp criticism of James Dunn and Francis Watson, utilizing Derrida and Ricouer as well as the masters of suspicion Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud. Kümmel, Furnish, Beker, P. Meyer, and Engberg-Pedersen are commented on positively (19–21). “Writing Performance as Logocentric Citation” is then treated as “Cite-Seeing with Derrida and [J. L.] Austin” (21–33).

Chapter 2 moves to a discussion of “The Historical Context of Paul, the Philippians, and the Letter,” opting for the probable integrity of the letter in the opening section (38–40). After listing four traditionally recognized purposes of the letter, Smith further develops three others (40–49) that he views as more useful for his approach: contextualization of the gift in an overarching theological structure (based on G. W. Peterman), reassurance (Ralph Martin and Loveday Alexander), and Christ-centered *phronēsis* (Meeks, Fowl, Wansik). A comparatively detailed argument for a Roman provenance of the letter ensues (49–55), followed by a brief sketch of its intimate character (55–56), wherein Smith agrees with the general consensus in this regard. The final two sections deal with Paul’s immediate context and the Philippians in the context of conflict.

Chapter 3, “The Socio-Philosophical Context of Paul and His Writing,” discusses the phenomenon of psychagogy, a kind of moral mentoring, in the ancient world and its relationship to ancient schools of philosophy. Though recognizing that the term itself fell into disfavor, Smith contends that the manner in which Paul was writing and acting was

that in which an ideal psychagogue would have written and acted. Though some reference is made to modern authors such as Malherbe, Glad, and Engberg-Pedersen, most of the citations within this chapter are from ancient authors.

Chapter 4, titled “(Dis)Closure,” is a close study of Phil 1:12–18 that leads to a concluding question of why it appears that for Paul an articulation in a “nonserious” mode “has the same value, or can mean the same thing, as one spoken in a ‘serious’ mode.... Asking this question leads us to discover that Paul is bound to a rather unexpected cellmate: Jacques Derrida” (137). Chapter 5, “Failing to Close: (Re)citation, (Re)iteration, Comment,” goes on to read Philippians in view of the discussion between Austin and Derrida in the first chapter, as well as the issues raised by the “masters of suspicion,” concluding that what Paul has done is effectively to dislocate the gospel from the presence of the speakers, thus removing the problem that his imprisonment might have caused for the gospel. The self-deconstruction of the text allows a single intact ethical imperative to arise, that of proclamation. In conclusion, Smith suggests, “It may be necessary to radically subject all of Paul’s statements to the performative logic of proclamation and in the process to uncover a different Paul: Paul the pragmatic proclaimer” (158).

Specialists in Paul would do well to interact with this interesting study that challenges some interpretations of Paul’s writings. One might ask whether the notion of Paul as a pragmatic proclaimer has little or nothing in common with earlier interpretations of Paul. Or one might suggest that another approach to the “problem” of Phil 1:18 would be to study it against Paul’s notion of power in weakness, the power of God precisely in the crucified Christ, condemned to a shameful death. One might wonder what repercussions an approach such as that Smith utilizes would have on the way scholars who are also ministers read Paul or whether different hermeneutical approaches could not be better viewed as complementary rather than oppositional.

One might also take issue with some specific points within the discussion. I will limit myself to two areas: integrity and bibliography. (1) In discussion of the integrity of the letter (38) the citation of my 1993 *JTS* article may give the impression that I hold that the fragment theory of Philippians goes back to a comment by Le Moyne (1685) regarding a comment by Polycarp utilizing the plural in reference to epistles to the Philippians. To clarify, what I have argued in this article is that Le Moyne’s position was that in antiquity parts of a work were sometimes *mistakenly* viewed as two works and that Le Moyne’s conclusion was that the extant letter to the Philippians is one work. I also pointed out that Le Moyne does mention in the same work that one chapter of the letter to the Philippians is interpolated, but Le Moyne is here referring to Polycarp’s *Letter to the Philippians*, not Paul’s. I have consistently argued against the position that the fragment hypothesis originated with Le Moyne. It originated with later authors who misread Le Moyne. I

believe I am more strongly convinced of the integrity of the letter than Smith, who remarks that “the epistle is probably a literary unit. Even if this assumption is incorrect, it does not affect the objectives of this project in any significant way” (40). (2) This second comment has to do with bibliography. One has the impression that, if not a dissertation, this work may be based on Smith’s dissertation, since the bibliography lists no works published after 1999, and the only one from that year, by Calvin Roetzel, appears only in four brief and widely scattered references. A one-sentence citation (7) on the center of Pauline theology in the Catholic tradition from a 1989 work by Plevnik could have been supplemented by citing more recent works by Catholic scholars, and among Protestant evangelical scholars Ralph Martin’s advocacy of reconciliation and Silva’s of eschatology as the center of Pauline theology would provide some balance to Smith’s portrait of Protestant scholars as almost universally, and incorrectly (according to Smith), focused on the issue of justification by faith. Even Dunn, who comes in for serious criticism, has at one point suggested the cross as “the fulcrum point, the central soteriological moment.... If the cross of Jesus stands at the center of Paul’s theology, so also does the resurrection” (J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 233, 235).