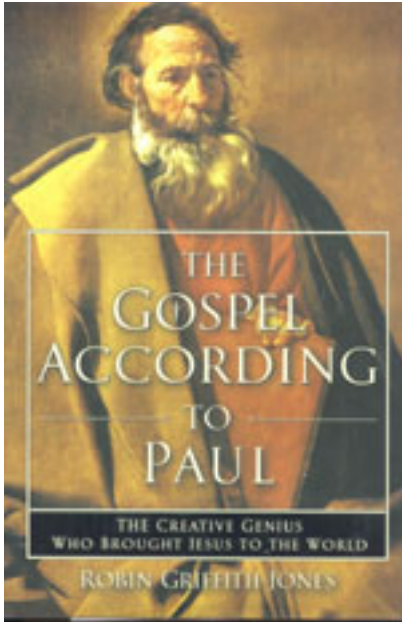


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Griffith-Jones, Robin

The Gospel according to Paul: The Creative Genius Who Brought Jesus to the World

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J. Brian Tucker
Michigan Theological Seminary
Plymouth, MI 48170

Robin Griffith-Jones, Master of Temple Church in London, has written a follow-up book to *The Four Witnesses* in which he seeks to understand Paul, primarily through his extant letters. *The Gospel according to Paul: The Creative Genius Who Brought Jesus to the World* argues that Paul's gospel message is inextricably interrelated to Paul himself. The essence of Paul's message is Jesus' death, resurrection, and glorification with its constituent transformational aspects upon its first-century C.E. recipients. To make this message clear, Griffith-Jones seeks to answer two questions: What inspired Paul? What influence should he have today?

Griffith-Jones begins with a brief travelogue based on Acts of the Apostles, which he refers to as "The Mission," in which Paul's missionary endeavors are reconstructed following closely the chronology of Jerome Murphy-O'Connor in *Paul: A Critical Life*. He provides the reader with two organizing principles with which his work will proceed: the first section engages in a comparative analysis of works written before and after Paul that offer a similar visionary outlook, which is vital to his understanding of Paul as a seer; the second section provides an overview of Paul's argument in the undisputed letters and seeks to establish their function within the communities to whom Paul was writing. The book concludes with a contextualization of his findings with regard to current intra-

religious dialogue, thus fulfilling one of the goals of his scholarship: that it seeks to serve the current culture in which it finds itself.

It is interesting to note that this book has not been reviewed by many within the scholarly community; part of the reason may be that it is written for a general audience, and its lack of engagement with the secondary literature may make it less than appealing for those engaged in Pauline studies (bibliography is very limited, footnotes are nonexistent, and the reader must visit <http://thegospelaccordingtopaul.com> to locate the indices for the book). It would be wrong, however, to conclude that this work is not beneficial for those studying Paul. It provides a good introduction to Paul's undisputed letters and his interpretation of Paul's argument, though laden with various redefined terms (e.g., "breath" for "spirit"), and sometimes idiosyncratic (i.e., finding visionary terminology as an integral interpretive motif), offers moments of brilliance and neglected insights specifically from Greco-Roman sources (i.e., Apuleius and Seneca on transformation).

Griffith-Jones's argument begins with identifying the network of Paul's most important ideas. He argues that Paul was trained as a seer and that his Damascus road experience (Acts 26:12–13) provided the impetus for his mission. The visionary throne experiences of Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Rabbi Akiba, for example, provide the language and symbols from which to understand Paul's visionary experience in 2 Cor 12:1–4. This experience transformed Paul into a seer who would re-present the gospel of Jesus in a fashion similar to the writers of the four canonical Gospels. Writing would be his primary means for affecting this transformation; his rhetoric was structured for identity formation whether through conviction (i.e., Romans) or forced compliance (i.e., 2 Cor 1–9).

Paul's anthropology is taken up next by Griffith-Jones. He sees in the writings of Genesis (Gen 1:26–27), the sectarians at Qumran (1QS 4.22–23), the Jewish philosopher Philo (*On the Confusion of Tongues* 41, 145–146), and Sirach (Sir 24:19–23) antecedents for Paul's visionary understanding of Adam, the image of God, wisdom, and the law. Paul's teaching in 1 Cor 15 and Rom 9, argues Griffith-Jones, is difficult to understand without critical reflection on the role that Paul's contemporaries played in the establishment of the visionary interpretive matrix and the ensuing prophetic shaping by seers similar to Paul.

Griffith-Jones shifts from a reflection on the visionary motif to Paul's interaction with the prophets. The connections between Paul and the visionary tradition that Griffith-Jones sought to establish in the first section are made more concrete in this section. Isaiah's vision in Isa 6 is very similar to Paul's Damascus road experience that Griffith-Jones argues was both Paul's call and his conversion (77). This visionary experience of the glorified Jesus serves as the motivating factor for Paul's mission. Griffith-Jones sees in the

visionary experience of Isaiah the development of Paul's understanding of how the death and resurrection of Jesus brought salvation to people (see 4 Macc 6:27–29). Further development in Paul's Christology, argues Griffith-Jones, is to be found in the vision of Ezekiel (cf. Ezek 1:27–28 with 2 Cor 4:3–6), which provided the symbolic understanding for Paul of who Jesus was and who Luke understands Jesus to be (Acts 9:4-5), while *1 Enoch*, *Ascension of Isaiah*, and the Qumran sectarians informed Paul's understanding of the identity of faithful believers as God's sanctuary and the worship that this awareness should produce (see 1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19).

The implications of Paul's Damascus road experience are extensively discussed in that this vision is the focal point for many of Griffith-Jones's arguments for Paul as a seer and the transforming nature of his message. He critiques the view that the visions of Paul were simply literary devices and suggests that Paul's experience was just as Paul describes it. He then reminds the reader that many of Philo's writings are fine parallels to Paul's understanding and notes the importance of Plato on seers in Paul's day. He next engages in a deconstruction of Luke's description of Paul's experience and argues that his person is inseparable from the gospel he preaches. Griffith-Jones also engages in a therapeutic understanding of Paul concerning sexual issues (Rom 7; 1 Cor 7); however, this section suffers from too much psychological analysis of texts and produces uneven results. Griffith-Jones argues next that Paul's central missionary concept was the proper understanding of power and weakness (2 Cor 12:9). He follows this chapter with a discussion of Jesus and Paul as seers, which reworks information from *The Four Witnesses*. He does, however, address the issue of Paul's apocalyptic self-understanding, which is that Paul was revealing truths that had been hidden (151). Here Griffith-Jones differs from other social-scientific scholars of Paul, who understand him to have been a political subversive or possibly one arguing for a theocracy but not presenting a thoroughly apocalyptic message. Griffith-Jones concludes this section with a fine discussion of Stephen's allegorizing tendencies and the prophetic role of Damascus (Zech 9:1; CD 6.5, 19) and the reason why Luke has Paul going to Damascus.

The final chapter in the first section deals with Paul's mission in Antioch. Griffith-Jones describes the nature and the work of Barnabas and Paul, arguing they "were not seeking converts from Judaism to Christianity." (175) He contends that the development of Paul's preaching emerged while he was at Antioch, with its starting point being "the imminent return of the Anointed" (183). Paul's understanding of the timing of the return of Jesus impacted his rhetoric throughout his letters. One of the strengths of this book is introducing its readers to Greco-Roman sources; Griffith-Jones does this with a description of Dio Chrysostom's *Discourse*, in which he addresses the Alexandrians for their treatment of him when he was among them as an invited speaker (32.11). His description reminds the reader of what Paul must have dealt with as he attempted to

present his message to hostile audiences. The discussion on the use of money by speakers, such as Paul or Dio, provides interesting background for the Corinthian's suspicion of Paul concerning the collection for Jerusalem, in which, Griffith-Jones argues, the Corinthian believers ultimately did not participate. (447)

The second half of the book traces Paul's argument in each of the undisputed letters. Concerning 1 Thessalonians, Griffith-Jones understands Paul's role as the person responsible for their spiritual development and sees Paul using his rhetoric in hopes of producing transformation in their lives. He argues that Paul's use of kinship language positioned him to be able to address these nascent believers who were experiencing external troubles. It appears the Thessalonians misunderstood Paul's original preaching concerning the nearness of the return of Jesus, so Paul wrote to instruct them on how they should live. This section is rather unsubstantial except for a brief discussion of the possibility that 2 Thessalonians was written as a replacement for 1 Thessalonians by some of the leaders in the Thessalonian assembly (207).

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, Griffith-Jones argues, Paul's vision of a law-free life was too subversive for Jewish believers, which led to the problems discussed in the letter; the influence of F. C. Baur is evident in this chapter. Griffith-Jones rightly discusses social identity in the chapter on Romans; however, it is glaringly missing from the discussion of Galatians, even though both Mark Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm have written on this key aspect of Paul's argument in Galatians. Also, Griffith-Jones's discussion of Gal 3:28 could be a bit more nuanced: Paul does not do away with ethnic distinctions; Judith Lieu and Denise Buell have argued that he relativizes them. Griffith-Jones does, however, argue for this in the context of 1 Cor 7 (271).

Griffith-Jones's section on the Corinthian correspondence is quite effective. He argues for a literary unity of 1 Corinthians and separates 2 Corinthians into two documents: 2 Cor 1–9 was written in the spring of 55, 2 Cor 10–13 in the fall of 55 (xiii, 375). Griffith-Jones most clearly connects Paul's message with Paul's person when he writes “[i]n 2 Cor 1–9 Paul presents his converts with himself and his mission as the key to their own self-understanding” (377). Paul's earlier visionary experiences had become the central interpretative motif for his mission, and they served him well in his correspondence with the Corinthians, who could boast of visions of their own.

The Letter to the Romans is seen as one written for transformation. Paul presented himself differently because of his lack of prior relationship with the community; however, Griffith-Jones argues that Paul was addressing specific situations and aiming for their transformation while in the act of hearing the letter read. Identity formation is central to Paul's argument, and Griffith-Jones follows the work of Philip Esler and William S.

Campbell and the role that identity formation plays in the successful transformation of the individuals at Rome. In his discussion of the libertines and the legalists from Rom 6–7, Griffith-Jones argues that in Rom 7 the “I” of Paul is only hypothetical and should not be understood as either a preconversion or postconversion Paul (419). He concludes this section with an insightful summary of the various rituals in the city of Rome.

The religious rituals of Rome lead Griffith-Jones into reflections on Philippi. He discusses the imperial context of pagan and civic duties and provides the reader with insights into the military and sacred background of the city. He also takes a late date for Philippians, approximately 63, while Paul was imprisoned in Rome, and rejects the multiple-letter theory. Griffith-Jones provides a cursory discussion of the Christ hymn and attempts to contextualize the emerging Christology of Paul in the letter to the Philippians. He concludes his book with two chapters of contemporary implications based on his understanding of Paul’s gospel; they feel a little disjointed from what proceeds, although Griffith-Jones is to be applauded for a commitment to bringing scholarship into the service of the church and society in general.

In the end, this book is engaging and offers the reader insights into the world of Pauline studies. It describes Paul’s message and mission as one and argues that Paul’s message was not designed primarily for doctrinal development but for individual and corporate transformation. This book serves as a nice introduction to Paul’s letters and is recommended in spite of the weaknesses mentioned above; however, one still may be better served by Calvin Roetzel’s *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context* for an introductory text on Paul’s letters.