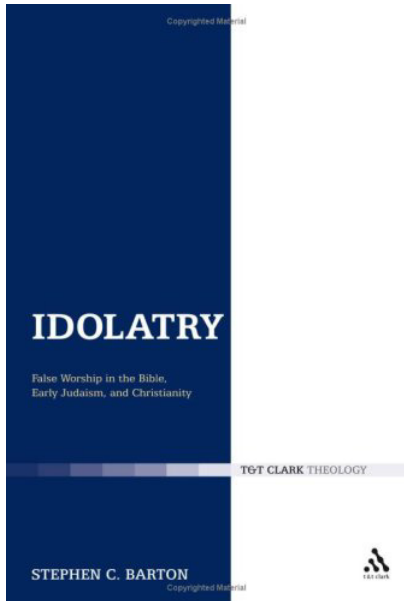


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**Barton, Stephen C., ed.**

***Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism  
and Christianity***

T&T Clark Theology

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Durham University's senior research seminars in Bible and Theology and in New Testament studies have long been central to that institution's prospering research environment in the area of early Christianity. For more than a decade, Stephen C. Barton's patient good offices have made the fruits of that engagement available to a wider public through several edited volumes, of which this latest one is based on presentations given in 2002–2004. Previous topics included studies of holiness (2003), wisdom (1999), and the family (1996).

About half of the nineteen contributors to the present volume are local to Durham. After Barton's brief and largely descriptive introduction, the project is presented in two parts, the first dealing with antiquity and the second with "Idolatry, Christian Tradition and the Modern World." Of these, the first part (ten chapters, 5–176) will be of most interest for the readers of *RBL*.

Stuart Weeks opens the proceedings with "Man-Made Gods? Idolatry in the Old Testament" (7–21), a historical-critical but wide-ranging account illustrating the move from YHWH as the superior deity in the book of Judges to Second Isaiah's insistence on YHWH redefined as the only properly "divine" deity. "The most famous and distinctive

characteristic of the Jewish God,” Weeks concludes with an implausibly Feuerbachian critique of Isaiah, “is no less a human construction itself” (21).

Nathan Macdonald offers “Recasting the Golden Calf: The Imaginative Potential of the Old Testament’s Portrayal of Idolatry” (22–39). Whereas Halbertal and Margalit saw Judaism’s notion of idolatry evolving historically from concepts of adultery via misrepresentation and fetishism to intellectual error, Macdonald argues that the Old Testament’s idea of idolatry is in fact already multidimensional, involving (even in the case of the golden calf) not only adultery but false imagination, folly, political rebellion, and rival cultic alternative.

In chapter 3, Robert Hayward presents “Observations on Idols in Septuagint Pentateuch” (*sic*, 40–57), a characteristically careful and detailed philological study examining the LXX (and Targumic) development of the critique of idolatry in the direction of idols as foreign nondeities, related to bogus divination and image-making, and characteristic of Egypt and the Egyptians.

Next, Crispin H.T. Fletcher-Louis treats “Humanity and the Idols of the God’s in Pseudo-Philo’s *Biblical Antiquities*” (58–72), arguing that *L.A.B.* 25–26 should be added to several other Second Temple period texts in which the righteous share the visual attributes of the God in whose image they were made.

John M. G. Barclay, “Snarling Sweetly: Josephus on Images and Idolatry” (73–87), deconstructs Josephus the “spin-doctor” in *Contra Apionem* to show how he exploits contemporary philosophical critiques of pagan religion in the service of a seemingly unobjectionable attack from the high ground against pagan religious pluralism—advocating instead a Judaism imagined as “purist, radical, coherent, and unitary.”

Chapter 6 (88–106) presents Helen K. Bond on “Standards, Shields and Coins: Jewish Reactions to Aspects of the Roman Cult in the Time of Pilate,” surveying Palestinian Jewish responses to Roman cultic symbolism. She concludes that pragmatism and selective noncultic reinterpretation allowed Jews to be generally tolerant of such imagery, at least when not immediately associated with pagan cult.

Mark Bonnington’s “Fleeing Idolatry: Social Embodiment of Anti-idolatry in the First Century” (107–19) applies social-anthropological analysis of social intimacy, dissonance, engagement, and exclusion to the issues of marriage and food in *Joseph and Asenath*, LXX Additions to Esther, and the book of Judith, identifying competing motivations and disputed boundaries at work.

In a learned and engaging study, David G. Horrell revisits “Idol-Food, Idolatry and Ethics in Paul” (120–40) along lines familiar from earlier work, including his substantial 2005 Pauline ethics volume *Solidarity and Difference*. Neatly dividing idolatrous cult from the products of that cult, he finds Paul arguing in 1 Cor 8–10 that in noncultic settings meat sacrificed to idols need not be avoided except for relational reasons of christologically motivated “other-regard,” undoubtedly a vital subtext in these chapters. Horrell’s Paul balances a “strong rhetoric of difference” with a “concern for accommodation and peaceful coexistence” (139). Whereas food does not for Paul serve as a religio-cultural boundary marker, the body does—as seen in his teaching on baptism, Eucharist, and sexual ethics. Horrell rightly notes, amid the Pauline rhetorical fog, the central importance of the only two clear imperatives: “eat everything sold in the market without making enquiries” and “flee from idolatry” (10:14, 25). The reviewer, chastised at 124 note 23, did find himself wondering if such “relational” dividing-and-conquering may after all leave unresolved the puzzle of why the latter imperative should be embedded in a discussion about the former: Are perhaps idolatrous sacrificing and eating of the idolatrous sacrifice in Paul’s mind distinguished as to moral intention, but in the end pertinently connected (a point the early fathers understood without exception)?

The editor’s own chapter deals with a related question: “Food Rules, Sex Rules and the Prohibition of Idolatry: What’s the Connection?” (141–62). From an opening consideration of the Apocalypse’s letter to Pergamum (Rev 2:14–15, 20), the argument proceeds to a social-anthropological consideration of food, sex, and cult, along with the rules governing them in biblical, Jewish, and early Christian texts. Barton finds in the “connectedness” of the three topics a crucial feature of the biblical witness, of abiding importance for worship.

The concluding contribution to part 1, homiletically rather than analytically construed, is Christopher Rowland’s “Living with Idols: An Exercise in Biblical Theology” (163–76), in which a juxtaposition of m. Sanh. 7:6 and 1 Cor 8–10 (and subsequently, e.g., Justin, *1 Apol.* 14) leads to a discovery of cognately nuanced definitions of idolatry as understood in Jewish and Christian texts. First John and Josephus share a concern with Cain’s defeat by idolatrous material desires of the flesh and the eyes—seen here as iconic for contemporary challenges of international development.

Part 2 contains nine further chapters of mainly contemporary philosophical and theological engagement with the topic, with little reference to the subject matter of part 1. One of two exceptions is the first, Carol Harrison’s “Taking Creation for the Creator: Use and Enjoyment in Augustine’s Theological Aesthetics” (179–97). This chapter, which seems to fit better with part 1, distinguishes in Augustine between an aesthetic of order and harmony in which the beauty of created reality is ontologically constitutive and

revealing of the creator, and another aesthetic in which beauty, justice, and truth are discerned precisely through the perception of their opposite: broken images of deformation, disfigurement and ugliness.

The remaining chapters address more recent concerns: Trevor Hart ranges widely before and after Calvin in “‘Goodly Sights’ and ‘Unseemly Representations’: Transcendence and the Problems of Visual Piety” (198–212); David Clough, “Karl Barth on Religious and Irreligious Idolatry” (213–27); Andrew Goddard, “Jacques Ellul on Idolatry” (228–45); Paul D. Murray, “Theology ‘Under the Lash’: Theology as Idolatry-Critique in the Work of Nicholas Lash” (246–66). One other chapter that touches on matters relevant to part 1 is that of Gerald Loughlin, whose “Idol Bodies” (267–86) warns against reading Rom 1 as an idolatrous “frozen fetish” and recommends instead, in terms evocative of certain passages in Irenaeus, a hermeneutical conversation “in which Paul can learn as much from his interlocutors as they from him,” until we thus “find a Paul who might ... be more at home today in gay rather than non-gay society” (269, 285; see, e.g., *Haer.* 1.8.1).

The concluding contributions in part 2 are Timothy Jenkins’s exposition of Durkheim, “Why Do Things Move People? A Sociological Account of Idolatry” (287–301); Graham Ward’s Baudrillard-enhanced exposition of Marx, “The Commodification of Religion or the Consummation of Capitalism” (302–14); and Bernd Wannewetsch’s “The Desire of Desire: Commandment and Idolatry in Late Capitalist Societies” (315–30), locating the answer to the late capitalist predicament in nothing less than “the reality and the necessity of God’s own passionate desire for his creatures, his restless seeking of them, his emptying of himself into them.”

Concluding with suggestions for further reading and an index of modern authors, the volume’s accessibility would have been enhanced by indices of subjects and ancient sources.

It is encouraging to know that seminar proceedings of this sort can still be published at a time when a number of major theological publishers now resist multi-author works that are not micro-designed, homogenized, and produced as virtually self-marketing textbooks. The present volume can afford to be eclectic, which is certainly welcome. That eclecticism does, to be sure, come at a price in terms of its coverage of the topic: none of the essays deal with the problem of idolatry in the Decalogue or among the early Christian fathers; the “Early Judaism” of the subtitle is also rather patchily served, and no account is taken of the challenge of aniconic or iconoclastic traditions in Judaism and Christianity (but see Hart, 202–6), let alone their respective engagement with Islam.

Nevertheless, the combination of eclectic range and depth is worth having, and we owe Stephen Barton a debt of gratitude for continuing to make available the wealth of topical discussion arising out of the Durham seminars. Conversely, this volume's unfortunate price tag also attests to a hard fact known to every editor: seminar or conference "grab-bags" are now affordable only to well-endowed research libraries. That is a shame, especially given the importance of the subject matter.