

BOOK REVIEW

Campbell, Douglas, *Framing Paul: An Epistolary Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014). xxii + 468 pp. Pbk. USD39.00.

Douglas Campbell's *Framing Paul* seeks to solidly situate Paul within his historical context. Unlike many other attempted Pauline portraits, however, Campbell's rejects the received methodological wisdom that some sort of prior Acts–Epistles synthesis is required for the task. In Campbell's view, all such syntheses have yielded only a *Paulus absconditus* and thoroughly confused the reconstruction effort itself. As an alternative strategy, Campbell borrows a page from the playbook of John Knox (the twentieth-century Union Seminary Professor, not the sixteenth-century reformer) by utilizing only the Epistles as his primary source material. Accordingly, Campbell begins his work non-controversially enough by selecting 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans as his primary epistolary backbone (or frame). Next, Campbell adjudicates authenticity and chronology using more or less standard theological and historical methods (i.e. by culling locational, chronological, and exegetical information from the textual data and their various Greco-Roman settings). Finally, this cycle repeats until all the epistolary data is accounted for. At face value such an approach would seem capable of yielding only yet another pedestrian recension of the apostle. In Campbell's hands, however, it is St Bartholomew's day in Paris and the Seine runs red with both cherished theological assumptions and previously secure notions of the apostle. Only a smattering of Campbell's results is necessary to make the scope of the theological carnage clear. He concludes that (1) there were at least six missionary journeys, depending on how one counts them; (2) the Macedonian/Achaean mission preceded the Galatian mission; (3) the Letter of Tears (2 Cor. 2.4) is actually 1 Corinthians; (4) the opponents in Philippians were the same as those in Galatians and Romans, but not the same as those in 2 Corinthians; (5) the Philippian imprisonment was in Corinth, and the Colossian imprisonment in Apamea; (6) due to *Nebenadressat*

(the claimed Pauline praxis of intending multiple addressees for his epistles) the Corinthians were likely the first hearers of the letter to the Philippians as well as the letter to the Galatians; (7) the parallels between 1 Corinthians and 1 Thessalonians and those between Colossians and Ephesians were due to the practice of copying Paul's letters; (8) Grotius was right in identifying the Thessalonian Man of Lawlessness with Gaius; and (9) fully ten epistles are deemed Pauline.

Of course, had Campbell started with these punchlines readers might have immediately dismissed his work. But dismissal would be a serious mistake for three reasons. First, Campbell arrives at his conclusions only after carefully weighing them in terms of the given epistolary skeleton and historical chronology in place. In this way, the known becomes the arbiter of the unknown, and the skeleton grows organically. Secondly, one receives the refreshing impression that Campbell's method has Campbell himself in tow, and not the other way around. Thirdly, the specter of Ockham broods over all of Campbell's deliberations. The author repeatedly selects the option that explains the maximal amount of the data attendant with the least number of problems.

Because of the startling nature of Campbell's conclusions, it is worthwhile to further unpack Campbell's method, beginning with its presuppositions, then critically examine its content and conclude with a discussion of the overall adequacy of his method.

In terms of his presuppositions, Campbell adopts two: one from J.C. Beker and one from John Knox. From Beker (1978) Campbell adopts the notions of *contingency* and *coherence*. Importantly, Systemic Functional Linguists will note that Beker's notion of contingency (occasionality) maps closely to effects that emerge in language from the larger *context of culture* and, more locally, the *context of situation* that motivates the writing of any text. Along similar linguistic lines, *register* is defined as linguistic variation 'according to use' (Halliday). That is, speakers and writers vary their linguistic choices based on the demands of the contexts within which they find themselves. Accordingly, Beker's *contingency*, as Campbell leverages it, can be largely subsumed under the linguistic notion of register. *Coherence*, by contrast, is the notion that an underlying 'deep structure' exists in the texts of any coherent author, including Paul. In Campbell's use of the term, this 'deep structure' reflects the essential, unchangeable Paul that *is* Paul. Contingency and coherence, therefore, operate in concert to

yield the texts we have, but are themselves quite distinct. Here is duality of cause but unity of effect, and this synergism does not escape Campbell's critical eye. Most importantly, this duality expressed in unity raises the pregnant possibility that such an intertwining can, in Campbell's term, be 'reversed'—that is, contingency and coherence can both be reconstituted (or disentangled) from their currently comingled state. The implication of Campbell's claim must not be missed. If such a reversal can actually be achieved, then a number of long-standing issues of occasion and introduction in the New Testament, most notably the authorship of its sources and texts, can be substantially reconstituted—stripped free of the residue that has obscured it for so long. With such a claim in play, the operative question for the exegete, historian and theologian becomes, by what *method* can such a reversal or disentangling be achieved? It is here that Campbell adopts from Knox the construct of *framing*, the uncovering of the historical Paul via a five-step process. In Campbell's slightly modified reworking of Knox's process, Campbell first identifies the letters the apostle wrote; secondly, he explores their integrity; thirdly, he uses internal evidence to yield their sequence; fourthly, he challenges his own results by exploring gaps, intervals and contrary notions; and fifthly, he anchors all of the above to external data, including the book of Acts. This five-fold exercise occupies Campbell in the central chapters (2 to 6) of his monograph.

In evaluating his effort, we can say that if we were not before convinced, this monograph reveals the Duke professor to be a careful, assiduous scholar and exegete. He weaves together theological erudition, critical scholarship, and knowledge of the Greco-Roman world to its full effect. Even if his conclusions are, for some, iconoclastic, they merit attention because he lays out his case properly, adheres to his methodology, and is fully current in his scholarship. Secondly, while not all would grant this as a positive, Campbell constantly critiques 'methodological atomism' derivative of 'unmitigated Cartesian skepticism' as a scourge on the critical landscape. In particular, Campbell rightly disparages the practice of the theological 'treasure hunter...[who decides] in advance...that the treasure is hidden in a particular room' (p. 15). Thirdly, though it is not his primary object, Campbell seems to be persistently arguing for a revitalized brand of criticism: 'Criticism correctly conceived is the application of appropriate feedback...to any hypothesis' (p. 17). At first blush, this may

sound like little more than the normative peer review process. But it is not. Campbell is here arguing that one must be ‘attentive to different levels of confidence’ (pp. 15-16). In so doing, Campbell recognizes that if a method is incapable of being falsified (hence Campbell’s reference to confidence levels), it ceases to be fulsomely critical since it privileges itself above such mundanities. Lastly, lest it be missed, a repeated critical process using levels of certainty (probabilities) capable of being affirmed or denied maps quite closely to C.S. Peirce’s process of abduction, a form of methodological pragmatism better known as inference to the best explanation (IBE). Moreover, Campbell seems to recognize what literary critics (notably Bakhtin) and the functional linguistic schools (notably the London school) have asserted for decades—that writers and speakers ‘adapt their lexicon’ (as well as other syntagmatic and paradigmatic choices) ‘to local circumstances’ (p. 15). Given these procedural and critical proclivities, it is not a surprise that Campbell is also unusually cosmopolitan in his methodological reach. In responding to Ehrman’s dismissal of the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians on stylistic grounds, for instance, Campbell notes that a renaissance has occurred in what has come to be known (following Juola) as ‘nontraditional authorship attribution’ (p. 211). Laudably, Campbell is not merely unusually conversant with the historical trajectory of that field but even leverages it to some modest effect in demonstrating that, when non-“cherry-picked” markers are employed (*pace* D. Schmidt and B. Ehrman), the two Thessalonian Epistles are actually cut from the same cloth.

Despite these positives, some significant reservations must be raised regarding Campbell’s study. Most of these relate to whether his method is actually adequate for achieving the lofty goals Campbell sets for it. Three points can be made in this regard. First, Campbell comments that ‘All scholars concede that contingency and coherence are in play... [and that a]...reversal of the process should be able to recover the coherence’ (pp. 3-6). But is Campbell’s chosen method truly capable of doing so? The clarity of Campbell’s separation or ‘reversal’ has yet to be demonstrated. Secondly, Campbell comments, ‘Unless we know the circumstances...we cannot make any progress’ (p. 11). But is this really so? Form criticism, since its inception, has never thought it requisite, and indeed sometimes deemed it impossible, to recover from history the specific *Sitz im Leben* that called forth a given text. In such cases, the specific form (e.g. a woe or weal oracle or the like) is still a

useful entity, especially when aggregated with similar forms. Accordingly, we may not really need to know the specifics of a situation to make progress. All we may really need to know is that the occasion (whatever it may have been) demanded a social semiotic, a culturally understood form, which motivated the writer to select the appropriate genre or register to address that occasion. Taken this way, Campbell's timing may indeed be considered exquisite. Register analysis has just emerged as a burgeoning field in linguistic analysis. Recent works by J.R. Martin and D. Rose as well as M. Ghadessy's text on register analysis should be consulted in this regard. Thirdly, while Campbell's use of nontraditional authorship attribution data is laudable, he relies on twenty-year-old data, and offers no original work of his own. His argument for the centrality of such criteria would prove more convincing if he engaged more thoroughly in these exercises himself.

Given the positives and negatives just listed, it seems clear that Campbell has achieved two things: (1) he has modified the existing method of Knox and integrated it with the notions of Beker; and (2) his work has yielded a startlingly different kind of Paul. What is not yet clear, however, is whether this different Paul is, indeed, a better Paul. The issue, as so often seems to be the case, boils down to method. Has Campbell indeed disentangled Bekerian contingency (variation due to context and sociolect) from Bekerian coherency (variation due to authorship)? If so, how would we ever really know?

A crossdisciplinary insight may assist us here. Quantitative disciplines have methods and suites of verification that are collectively termed 'validation suites' or a 'validation model'. These are, in essence, systems and structures put in place to see if the researcher has actually done what he claims to have done. While I am not saying that one should expect to compare reproducible mathematical models to events in history, which cannot be reproduced, I would make three assertions. First, is it truly possible to separate Beker's contingency (sociolect) from coherence (idiolect) in the Greek New Testament? The answer to that, in my opinion, is a qualified 'yes'. I say qualified because, on the one hand, such disentangling has been achieved using computational stylistics in dozens of corpora over the last thirty years. This gives us the reasonable confidence that it can one day—soon—be achieved in the Greek New Testament. The operative question here is whether Campbell has done so. The need for a far more thoroughgoing

stylostatistical approach would be necessary to confirm or disconfirm Campbell's findings. Secondly, whatever else he has done, Campbell has performed a noteworthy ground-clearing exercise. He has argued for a renewed critical process, one that affirms high probability with different 'levels of confidence' as a main criterion. Thirdly, and most penetratingly, I wonder at the correctness of the core presuppositions Campbell and Knox assume. Specifically, is Luke–Acts really so irrelevant in the reconstitution of the Paul of history? Clearly, scholars such as I.H. Marshall and A. Thiselton would argue to the contrary. There is no doubt that Campbell's distinctives in this work combine to yield a coherent picture of Paul. Yet this is an epistolary coherence only. By limiting the data to the Epistles, and without some external 'verification model', the question is reduced to whether Campbell's portrait of Paul is more coherent than the standard Acts–Epistles-based portrait. Two assessments, then, seem open to us. Either Campbell's work is rigorous, ground-breaking theological brilliance, or it is monocular historical vision. In this reviewer's considered opinion, Campbell's Paul is intriguing indeed. But his recension of the apostle seems still to require far more reconstitution as well as far more validation if it is to overtake the various Pauls delivered to us using more conventional methodological assumptions.

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