

BOOK REVIEW

Nancy Calvert-Koyzis, *Paul, Monotheism and the People of God: The Significance of Abraham for the Traditions for Early Judaism and Christianity* (JSNTSup, 273; London/New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2005); xiv + 173 pp. Hbk. US\$120.00.

Written under the supervision of Philip Davis and Andrew Lincoln at the University of Sheffield, Calvert-Koyzis's monograph represents an important contribution to the continually growing corpus of work that explains Paul's theology in light of Second Temple Judaism and its interpretation by scholars like E.P. Sanders. Although rather short for a doctoral dissertation, the work is to the point and well written. The book could probably have been broken up into two sections, with Chapters 2–6 addressing portraits of Abraham in various Jewish traditions and the last two chapters focusing on Paul's picture of Abraham in Galatians and Romans. The central thesis toward which these chapters point is 'that the tradition of Abraham's rejection of idolatry and embracing of monotheistic faith is significant for an understanding of Paul's argument in his letters to the Galatians and the Romans and the debates in the communities to which he writes' (p. 3). Calvert-Koyzis sees these virtues exemplified by Abraham as the most prominent identity markers of the new people of God. It is monotheistic faith, not circumcision or obedience to the law, that unites Jewish and Gentile believers into one faith community.

Chapters 2–6 assemble five sources for her analysis of Abraham in Jewish tradition: (1) the *Book of Jubilees*, (2) Philo, (3) Pseudo-Philo, (4) Josephus and (5) the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. The selection has a slightly diasporic Jewish orientation and may not stretch widely enough to be truly representative, although her exposition of these texts is detailed. Consultation of relevant Second Temple and rabbinic literature is conspicuously absent. Perhaps the Old Testament narrative and intertexts should have weighed in more heavily as well. But that Abraham was understood from different perspectives in Calvert-

Koyzis's inventory of texts as an anti-idolater and the first true monotheist comes out clearly and it is not disputed that this understanding pervaded early Jewish and Christian traditions.

Calvert-Koyzis begins her analysis of each source with a socio-historical introduction, followed by an exposition of the relevant passage(s) discussing Abraham. The account of Abraham in the *Book of Jubilees* is an adaptation of the Genesis tradition and includes a series of speeches, possibly according to the techniques recorded by Thucydides. Abraham is perceived as the one who 'rejects idolatry for faith in the one God and practices covenant stipulations', which 'legitimizes the people of God and provides the necessary boundaries for their continued existence' (p. 13). Monotheism, therefore, provides a communal identity-marker and Abraham functions as a prototype for heeding the warnings of *Jubilees* against idolatry.

A similar picture is painted by Philo, but from a more Hellenistic philosophical perspective. Philo not only emphasizes that Abraham was the first to believe in the one true God, but also portrays him as the ultimate example of a 'Gentile proselyte who leaves behind his idols of wood and stone for the worship of the one, true God' (p. 28). On the other hand, he is cast as a Hellenistic philosopher and apologist for a monotheistic faith who attained to the state of the *logos*, but 'had not yet reached the essence of God' (p. 31). These adaptations reflect Philo's concern to convert Gentiles. He believed that both Jews and Gentiles could see God. This leads Calvert-Koyzis to conclude that Philo's literary works were directed mainly toward Gentiles who had a deep interest in Jewish traditions. But he seems to expect that his work will be read by Jews as well. 'In his Alexandrian context, Philo is telling his Jewish readers not to put too much faith in the accoutrements of status acquired in the Hellenistic world. The true Jew is to put his or her faith in the one God who alone is worthy of that faith' (p. 39). Similarly, Gentile readers 'should see that although Abraham eschewed some aspects of contemporary philosophy that gave the creation divine attributes which belonged to the Creator alone, Abraham's discernment of God was according to the respected philosophical practices of the day' (p. 39). Again, the boundary marker that divides the people of God from pagans is monotheism and Abraham is put forward as the prototypical monotheist.

For Pseudo-Philo, idolatry is the root of all evil. The story that Abraham's father was an idolater is rejected. Jews who assimilate into

the Gentile culture of idolatry are subject to the wrath of God. In Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*, Abraham is given an opportunity at the tower of Babel to place a stone on the tower with his name on it and he and eleven others refuse to participate. This event is interpreted as a rejection of idolatry on the basis of the antithesis set up by the author between the Jewish and Gentile nations. It is Abraham's rejection of idolatry that causes God to elect him to receive the land, eternal covenants and descendants. Abraham emerges in Pseudo-Philo as the premiere example of a righteous, monotheistic leader.

Josephus, writing to Hellenized Jews and Gentiles interested in Judean history and culture, represents Abraham as a Hellenistic philosopher; 'he has no problem portraying Abraham in the garb of an intelligent Hellenistic rhetorician who uses philosophical proofs of the time to make his own deductions' (p. 59). There are many reasons for this picture, according to Calvert-Koyzis. Most fundamentally, it provides an apologetic to non-Jewish readers and answers the common accusation of atheism that came from pagan religions by showing Abraham to be the wise, moral, cultured, intelligent forefather of the Jewish nation. The most distinctive element of Josephus's Abraham, however, is his monotheism, which marked the true identity of the people of God and characterized their most significant ancestor.

The final source consulted by Calvert-Koyzis is the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, which emphasizes Abraham's rejection of idolatry. Both idolaters and those who make idols are condemned. God's judgment on Israel for going after false gods in the form of idolatry is meted out by the destruction of the temple. Abraham, and in particular his monotheistic faith, 'functions to identify who are the true people of God. As the author portrayed him, Abraham is the point of division between Gentiles and his descendants and also the point where God divides Gentiles into those who were before Abraham and those who came later' (pp. 83-84).

Having surveyed the Abraham tradition in various Jewish sources, Calvert-Koyzis turns to the function of the patriarch in Galatians and Romans. These chapters involve a detailed review of previous exegetical work on the relevant passages, especially New Perspective readings. Calvert-Koyzis's understanding of obedience to the law as a form of idolatry in Galatians is illuminating. She bases this thesis on the statement in 3.18-20 that the law was given by more than one and, therefore, to persist in keeping it would be to deny the oneness of God

(4.1-11). ‘All those who were true children of Abraham should shun the law, just as Abraham was known to have shunned idolatry, particularly in the form of astrology, which was believed to control the lives and actions of human beings’ (p. 113). Therefore, Paul radically subverts the Jewish Abraham tradition and enlists it for his own ends, much like Josephus and Philo. Acceptance of Paul’s portrayal of Abraham, then, constitutes an identity marker for the new people of God: rejection of law-keeping as a necessary prerequisite for membership in God’s people.

A similar picture is painted in Romans. Calvert-Koyzis parallels Romans 3 and 4 with ch. 14 and concludes that ‘the weak monotheists’ (playing off of the weak and strong in conscience) are represented by those who have an understanding of Abraham and the people of God along traditional Jewish lines, where obedience to the law functioned as a primary identity marker. ‘The strong monotheists’, those who are a part of the new people of God, are justified by faith apart from the nationalist symbols associated with obedience to the Torah. What separates the new people of God from community outsiders is precisely the symbol that previously identified Israel as the true people of God: obedience to the law. Yet monotheism provides continuity between the shift in communal identity markers. According to Calvert-Koyzis, ‘The foundational boundary marker for the people of God in Christ is monotheistic faith and the true monotheists are those who reject the law as necessary for membership in God’s people just as Abraham rejected idolatry’ (p. 114).

Although not as extensive or representative in its selection and application of Second Temple literature as some studies have been, *Paul, Monotheism and the People of God* is a welcome addition to New Perspective Pauline studies. Calvert-Koyzis offers genuine insights and fresh readings for some of the most central passages to understanding Paul’s theology. I remain unconvinced that monotheism is *the* central element in Paul’s understanding of the identity of the people of God. Though this is clearly fundamental, Paul’s emphasis seems to be more christocentric than the picture she paints, an emphasis that often gets lost in her persistence in highlighting his advocacy of monotheistic faith.

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