

Review of Lioy, *Facets of Pauline Discourse in Christocentric and Christotelic Perspective*

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Lioy Dan 2016. *Facets of Pauline Discourse in Christocentric and Christotelic Perspective*. New York: Peter Lang.

1. Introduction

Dan Lioy is Senior Research Manager in the Postgraduate School of South African Theological Seminary, and also Professor at the Potchefstroom Campus of North-West University, both in South Africa. As an ordained minister in the North American Lutheran Church and faculty member of the Institute of Lutheran Theology, he writes from a Lutheran perspective to contribute to the Publisher's *Studies in Biblical Literature* Series. This book is the latest of Prof. Lioy's prodigious publications that span studies in both Old and New Testaments and the wider fields of theological and theo-scientific disciplines. In his preface, the Series Editor describes the work as part of a series aimed at making 'available to scholars and institutions, scholarship of high order, and which will make significant contribution to the ongoing biblical

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

discourse' (p. ix). With its enormous breadth and depth of excellent scholarship, the book does not disappoint in fulfilling this objective.

In terms of genre, the monograph belongs to the burgeoning category of high quality studies in Biblical Theology which are at the same time also keenly attuned to contributing to contemporary reflections in Christian pastoral and ecclesiological circles. The monograph makes its contribution to these recent endeavours with its unique focus on the key themes in Paul's theological discourse. Its primary thesis is that Paul regarded Christ as the central and defining goal of his discourse. Yet, this simplicity of thesis belies the profound depth of the theological arguments and the astute exegetical judgements which the author brings to bear on the biblical texts in order to unearth the scriptural, conceptual, cultural and socio-historical basis upon which Paul builds this Christocentricity and Christotelicity. Furthermore, Lioy's intricate investigation into some of the facets of Paul's discourse enables him to draw out a number of implications for contemporary reflections on Pauline theology.

The book has eleven chapters, the first acting as a prologue and the last as its epilogue. Though portions of some of the chapters are revised iterations of articles published previously in peer-reviewed scholarly journals, the overall tone of the monograph is one of erudite freshness combined with its critical engagement of the current intellectual and ecclesial discourse on the nature of Pauline theology. There is also an extensive forty-page bibliography, followed by separate indexes categorised according to subjects and ancient sources.

This extended review aims to provide a précis of the various insights of this important contribution to Pauline studies, and will also at some points engage a number of the key issues it raises for the purpose of exploring their further implications. What follows then is a section

summarising the main contours of its argument, contributions and thoughts. I shall then conclude by highlighting a couple of the key strengths of the book.

2. Summary of the Argument of the Monograph

2.1. Prologue

Lioy's prologue provides the scholarly context for his study followed by a general overview of his thesis. As a way of introducing the unique features of his methodology and distinctive contribution, he first surveys some of the recent scholarly discussions on Christology and its place in Pauline theology. Fee's landmark study (2007, 1) in which he adopts a combination of exegetical and theological analyses to argue that 'Christ is the beginning and goal of everything for Paul, and thus is the single great reality along the way' serves as Lioy's starting point. While some of Fee's conclusions are similar to Lioy's, the latter additionally adopts a 'narrative approach' (p. 3) in his analysis, thus bringing the features of Paul's conceptual line of logic to bear on, and augment insights gained from the apostle's explicit statements. This perceptive move by Lioy more likely yields a richer appreciation of Pauline theology.

In contrast to Fee, Tilling's study (2012) points to the complicated context of polytheistic Greco-Roman pagan religion and monotheistic Jewish Second Temple Judaism as the key milieu for understanding Paul's divine-Christology. While Lioy also takes this complex religious background into account, he regards it as occupying a less primary role in favour of the wider hermeneutical context set by the Old and New Testaments' theological trajectories within which Paul more closely interacted. Lioy concludes the survey by pointing to his thesis that in Paul's view, 'Jesus is the nexus, apex, and consummation of the

redemptive-historical, narrative arc of Scripture’ (p. 5). With this canonical and biblical theological methodological approach of his study laid out, Lioy proceeds to provide an account of how each of the subsequent chapters contributes to his thesis.

2.2. Chapter Two

The second chapter provides a biblical foundation to the study by exegetically examining the creation narrative of Genesis 1–3. Lioy’s premise for this chapter is that ‘To more fully appreciate the Christological, eschatological, and apocalyptic themes found in the Pauline discourse, it is vital first to consider what Genesis 1 through 3 reveals about the old, Adamic creation’ (p. 15). This is because that narrative provides the background for the apostle’s Christocentric and Christotelic theology. While Lioy reflects on some of the implications of scientific advances for interpreting this portion of scripture, his biblical and theological exegesis makes traditional conclusions in line with his conservative hermeneutics. Thus he underlines the *Imago Dei* nature of human beings, the fall of Adam and its immense consequences both for humans and all of God’s creation, God’s remedy for sin and the promise of the Messiah in the proto-evangelium. Lioy concludes the chapter by arguing that at its root, the creation narrative in Genesis is theocentric, and underlines the creative power of God, whereas Pauline creation theology was essentially Christocentric.

In my view, this conclusion could have received a bit more in-depth exploration as to the exact terms in which Paul viewed the Genesis creation account as was available to him and is reflected in passages such as Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. To be fair to Lioy, it is noteworthy that these passages have already received his closer attention elsewhere (Lioy 2011a; Lioy, 2011b, 89–127). His interest in this particular monograph evidently lies in examining the wider conceptual field of

Paul's creation theology, which thus receives more extensive examination in the next chapter.

2.3. Chapter Three

Chapter three examines 2 Corinthians 5:11–6:2 with the aim of exemplifying Lioy's thesis that New Creation Theology serves as the major premise of 'Paul's Christocentric and Christotelic discourse' (p. 54). Lioy begins by summarising some relevant conceptual data on Old Testament Jewish eschatology to furnish a backdrop to Paul's discourse. He surveys passages in the Major Prophets such in Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, passages which highlight God's promise of eschatological redemption and the renewal of his covenant community, ultimately resulting in the reversal of the effects of Adam's fall.

Lioy further examines relevant passages in Literature of Second Temple Judaism such as 2 Baruch 32:6, Tobit 15:5, 1 Enoch 72:1, 4 Ezra 7:75 and the Apocalypse of Abraham 9:9 to demonstrate, along with a number of authors he cites, that Paul's new covenant theological discourse was within a context of lively Jewish eschatological theological reflections of his time. In this regard, Lioy's specific interest is to highlight Paul's distinctive view of this eschatology of which Christ is both its centre and telos. The redemption of the eschatological community no doubt plays a role in Pauline discourse as it did with his contemporaries. Even so, for Paul, Christ sums up the fulfilment of these eschatological expectations.

This uniqueness of Pauline eschatological discourse in his new creation theology is fleshed out in Lioy's subsequent exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:11–6:2. This new creation is effective through the power of God in the Christ event of his death and resurrection. The cross achieved three divine objectives as part of the new creation enactment, namely, the defeat of Satan, the appeasement of God's wrath, and the furnishing of

moral example of divine love to reconcile rebellious sinners. In Lioy's view then, this passage shows that Paul understood himself as not just a propagator of this Good News but also as a pastor imbued by its new realities to shepherd the new covenant community, in contradistinction to his opponents who were seeking to distance the Corinthians from the apostle.

2.4. Chapter Four

Chapter four of the monograph delves deeper into some of the specifics of Paul's new creation theology by focusing in particular on his apocalyptic theology as espoused in Ephesians 1:15–23. The chapter argues that 'Paul's eschatological outlook exercised a controlling influence on the Christocentric and Christotelic facets of his discourse' (p. 79). Lioy introduces the reader to the broad building blocks of first century apocalyptic worldview and asserts that in this regard, Paul's thinking was ingrained in its Jewish variety that was inherited from the prophetic reflections on God's covenant. Paul was, however, also very conversant with the prevailing Greco-Roman cosmologies as well as their pervasive influences in Roman imperialism, and interacts with these in his letters. Lioy thus affirms a particular school of thought in current Pauline scholarship which argues that Pauline discourse contains significant anti-imperial rhetoric.

That said, however, Lioy's specific slant to this line of scholarly discourse is that Paul's apocalyptic worldview imbued by his Christocentric and Christotelic theology made his counter-cultural opposition to Rome's 'pagan pretensions' (p. 85) not just inevitable, but obligatory. His exegesis of Ephesians 1:15–23 serves to underscore how this was so. Lioy's conclusion affirms the traditional conservative view regarding Christ's triumph over the powers through his death and

resurrection, and that this serves as the basis of the present victory of believers who are in union with Christ.

On reflection, Lioy is certainly correct in underlining the anti-imperial implications of Paul's apocalyptic discourse. This view could well be complemented by highlighting the fact that Paul envisaged these evil powers as existing in wider categories such as in demonic spirits, idols and general astrological and cosmological entities as indeed is evident in his language in Ephesians 1. The first Christian readers of Ephesians would certainly have viewed these other spiritual powers in equally sinister terms as they would have regarded the imperial cults. I note, however, that a later chapter of the monograph is devoted to Paul's reflections on the powers in Ephesians 6:10–20.

2.5. Chapter Five

Chapter five of the monograph focuses even further on an element of Paul's apocalyptic theology, namely, his theology of the cross as evidenced by 2 Corinthians 11:16–12:10, asserting that 'an understanding of Paul's theology of the cross helps clarify his apocalyptic view of reality' (p. 101). By 'theology of the cross' Lioy does not only mean the salvific achievements of Jesus on the cross, but also encompasses its pastoral implications for Christian cruciform existence. Thus for Lioy, Paul's theology of the cross is not only restricted to his Christology but also his pastoral reflections on Christian existence – 'On one level, believers *take part* in the cruciform narrative; yet, on another deeper level, the Cross *becomes* their personal defining narrative (p. 105; his emphasis).

It is here in this chapter also that Lioy sets his reflections within his Lutheran ecclesial tradition by interacting with scholarship from that confessional stance. Starting with Luther's 1518 *Heidelberg Disputation*,

Lioy provides a synopsis of the debates within the tradition on the nature of Pauline theology of the cross. Of key relevance are Lutheran theological ideas on Paul's view of Christian suffering in the light of his theology of the cross. This serves as the basis for Lioy's exegetical analysis of his chosen passage. He demonstrates that for Paul, Christocentric cruciform living evident in his attitude to afflictions and weaknesses 'functioned as a heuristic device' (p. 123) that shaped his response to his opponents. In so doing Lioy advances the conversation within the Lutheran tradition regarding some of the pastoral implications of Paul's theology of the cross.

2.6. Chapter Six

Chapter six of the monograph compares the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 with Paul's speech to the Athenians as recorded in Acts 17 as means of highlighting the biblical-theological foundations of Paul's Christocentric and Christotelic discourse. Lioy provides a number of reasons for conducting this exercise, chief among them being the evidence that Paul's speech to the Athenians engages the Mosaic speech at 'literary, conceptual and linguistic' levels (p. 125). Moreover, Lioy sees Acts as playing a somewhat similar literary function in relation to the gospels and the rest of the New Testament in the way Deuteronomy functions in parallel fashion in relation to the Pentateuch and the Old Testament as a whole. This inevitably invites a canonical comparison capable of shedding light on both passages. After demonstrating the intricacies of these parallels, Lioy proceeds to validate how Paul's polemic in Athens against idolatry and his Christocentric proclamation draw on the Mosaic passage.

This chapter is particularly interesting for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it rightly underlines the potential for Acts of the Apostles to make key contributions to the construction of Pauline theology. While this

approach is not in itself new, certainly not in conservative scholarship, it is nevertheless not as commonly adopted within recent Pauline scholarship. The tendency in the academy by contrast has been to distance Acts of the Apostle from the construction of Pauline theology in general, choosing rather to regard Acts as charting a separate Lukan theology. Lioy's astute move then demonstrates that this excessive juxtaposition of the Paul of Acts against the Paul of the Epistles is ultimately counterproductive. More positively put, Lioy demonstrates that a serious consideration of Acts of the Apostles as one of the sources for generating the apostle's theology does yield rich tokens.

Secondly, even though not explicitly articulated by Lioy himself, the chapter lays a foundation for his subsequent argument in chapter nine which asserts that Paul, not Jesus, should be regarded as fulfilling the Jewish expectation of the 'Second Moses'. More will be said on this particular link later, but I raise it here to highlight the possibility that placing this chapter in closer proximity to chapter nine would have enhanced Lioy's argument regarding the parallels between Paul and Moses.

2.7. Chapter Seven

The seventh chapter of the monograph focuses on another aspect of Paul's apocalyptic theology, which is regarding Jesus' triumph over Satan. Lioy is aware that while Paul refers to the evil powers on numerous occasions in his letters, the scholarly literature on this specific subject is disproportionately limited. His aim then is to highlight how Paul's discourse on the evil powers relates to his Christocentricity, but also through this make some contributions to scholarly reflections regarding its role in Pauline theology. Lioy fulfils this objective by first surveying the scriptural account on Satan, and then exegete how Ephesians 6:18—

20 exemplifies Paul's teachings on Christ and the believers' triumph over Satan in union with Christ.

2.8. Chapter Eight

The eighth chapter might at first glance appear to be out of place in a monograph examining Paul's Christocentric and Christotelic discourse. This is because it is devoted to arguing for the continued theological relevance of the Epistle of James and not primarily focused on a Pauline passage as are the other chapters. Yet, Lioy's decision to include an exploration of James in what is after all a study of Pauline theology is incisive and is in the end proved justified. In the first place, he demonstrates that Jamesian theology is completely compatible with Pauline theology. To put this in a different way, the chapter demonstrates that the pillars of Pauline theological discourse were widely shared by his first-century Christian contemporaries: 'a careful and thoughtful reading of James challenges the notion that it goes against Paul's Christocentric discourse about justification by faith' (p. 173).

Lioy nevertheless underscores some of the key theological distinctives of the Letter of James, pointing to the letter's stress on the role of the new covenant as well as the Torah in the lives of the redeemed. James also draws heavily on Jesus' teachings to underline the moral and ethical implications of justification by faith. But essentially, James' Christocentric and Christotelic emphases are shared in common with Paul. In this regard, Lioy's reflections in the chapter achieve two theological objectives with one stroke, namely, he underscores that James has a lot to contribute to our understanding of New Testament theology, and that Paul and James share a common theological agenda even if expressed with different theological idioms and syntax.

2.9. Chapter Nine

As pointed out earlier, chapter nine makes the argument that contrary to the scholarly school of thought which argues that at least some among the New Testament writers regarded Jesus as the ‘second Moses’ who fulfilled the eschatological prophecies, it is Paul rather who fits this accolade. Lioy begins by briefly surveying the contributions of some of the scholars who have dissented from the common notion of Jesus as ‘new Moses’. He proposes to build on this trajectory by arguing that several parallels point rather to Paul as ‘the more likely New Testament counterpart to Moses’ (p. 195). Lioy argues that in addition to Paul being identified by others as a prophet (Acts 13:1–2), the apostle on several occasions explicitly and implicitly also indicated a self-understanding as an eschatological prophet. Lioy further argues that given Jesus’ absolute supremacy indicated by how the New Testament portrays him as transcending Moses, a notion which Lioy exegetically demonstrates with a number of passages; Paul would appear to be a far more suited candidate for this accolade.

This chapter opens up a promising research trajectory within the wider field of the current academic discourse on the bases and implication of what is being termed ‘early divine Christology’ (e.g. Fletcher-Louis 2015). By addressing one of the major flaws in the school of thought which equates the ‘second Moses’ or ‘eschatological prophet’ to Jesus, and proceeding to suggest that Paul, rather than Jesus, fits that accolade, Lioy furnishes further potential evidence weakening objections to ‘early divine Christology’. As he rightly points out, other scholars have also argued against Jesus as the ‘second Moses’ line of thought, but they have often stopped short of proposing a substitute candidate who fulfilled the prophecy of Deuteronomy 34:10. Lioy’s contribution then is to offer this substitute candidate in the form of Paul.

This chapter thus lays down a good foundation for subsequent investigations into the specific question as to whether Paul would have or indeed did articulate cues which indicated that he considered himself as this eschatological prophet. Lioy does not go as far as to make such a claim, even though, given his argument in chapter six of the monograph that Paul drew from the Song of Moses in crafting his speech of Acts 17 in Athens, that could well be the ultimate implication of Lioy's thesis.

2.10. Chapter Ten

Chapter ten of the monograph summarises two contrasting scholarly views on the historical authenticity of the Adam character in the Genesis creation narrative. In particular, the two chosen writers who are contrasted disagree on whether Adam and Eve existed as progenitors of the human race, or whether the narrative reflects an ancient mythological conception on the origins of the world not fixed in real existence. Lioy declares himself to 'favour a predominately classical, evangelical, and orthodox interpretive approach to the Judeo-Christian Scriptures' (p. 258) but nevertheless employs the chapter to demonstrate the sharp differences in scholarly approaches to the passage.

This chapter then is not directly related to Pauline theology as much as demonstrating how two scholars have attempted to reconcile their hermeneutical interpretation of the creation accounts with their understanding of current scientific views. Even so, Lioy from time to time generates a conversation to establish how the two authors have interacted with and framed Paul's theology of creation as mirrored in his letters.

2.11. Epilogue

The epilogue is devoted to summarising the findings of the study and raising a number of its implications. Lioy concludes (p. 259):

[T]he way in which Paul interpreted and applied the Old Testament aligns with the apostle's Christocentric and Christotelic perspective. Specifically, Paul considered Jesus of Nazareth to be the heart of the metanarrative in the Judeo-Christian canon. From that vantage point Paul taught that the Son came to earth to fulfil the salvific promises the Father made to His chosen people through such luminaries as Abraham, Moses, and David...as a result of the cross-resurrection event, the Son bridged the infinite chasm of separation between Creator and those whom He created.

3. The Strengths and Implications of the Monograph

In addition to my evaluative statements in the above summary, a couple of general comments seem to me to be in order as part of rendering my deep appreciation for the excellent scholarship of this monograph. One of the key strengths of Lioy's contribution is his detailed attention to exegesis as the bedrock of developing his theological argument. While most biblical theologians would claim to develop their theological ideas and mapping of concepts from exegesis, the tendency has been the harvesting of insights from scattered texts throughout the Pauline corpus for the purpose. There may be some advantages to this approach, but one of its drawbacks is that it fails to demonstrate the depths to which Paul's theology affected the minutiae of his discourse and praxes. As a result, exactly how Paul employed his theology to address the different socio-pastoral problems which he contextually sought to address with his letters is often left unexplored.

Lioy's thoroughly exegetical approach in contradistinction grounds Paul's theology in his apostolic and pastoral enterprise evident in his letters. In this way, Pauline theology becomes better appreciated within the exact contextual milieu in which it is applied, whether literary,

conceptual or socio-historical. This is a key strength that readers will very much appreciate from Lioy's monograph.

I am also impressed by Lioy's charting of new avenues for further exploration of the contours of Pauline theology within the scholarly guild. I am here thinking of my earlier point regarding the role of the book of Acts in the construction of the Apostle's theology. While Lioy does not work out the details of this avenue of research in this study, his demonstration that within appropriate literary and contextual conventions, Paul's statements and activities that are recorded in Acts of the Apostle do shed light on the apostle's overall theological ideas and so must be considered as one of the sources for the construction of Pauline theology, is thoroughly valid.

A similar judgement may be made of Lioy's argument regarding the inter-relationship between Pauline and Jamesian theologies. As he argues, that these shared a common Christocentric and Christotelic theological outlook is beyond question. Demonstrating the directions in which James, and for that matter, other New Testament inspired authors applied this Christocentricity and Christotelicity is the inevitable implication and challenge to scholarship. That challenge potentially makes this monograph exceptionally pivotal in advancing future directions of New Testament Theology in integrative fashion. For this and other reasons argued above, I have no hesitation whatsoever in wholeheartedly commending this monograph to biblical scholars of all stripes.

Reference List

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