

Review

Ethics in Contexts: Essays in Honor of Wendell Lee Willis. Edited by James W. Thompson and Richard A. Wright. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019. xvi + 248 pp. Paper \$32.00. ISBN 9781532660795.

In celebration and appreciation for his more than 30 years of service to the academy and the church, this collection of essays written by fifteen authors honors the scholarship of Wendell Willis, who retired in 2017 as Professor of New Testament at Abilene Christian University. The essays are organized around three areas that represent Willis' academic work and research focus: Paul, Sacraments and Ethics, and Contexts (referring to the historical and literary contexts that are helpful when interpreting Paul, Acts, and Clement).

The first essay in the section focused on Paul is John Boyles' "When the Lord's Supper Isn't the Lord's: 1 Corinthians 11:17-24 in Light of Ancient Mediterranean Associations." Willis completed his doctoral dissertation in 1981 on Paul's argument about eating meat offered to idols in 1 Corinthians chapters 8 and 10. An essay that engages scholarship on 1 Corinthians and the eating of sacramental meals is an appropriate start to the collection. Boyles' essay critiques the influential work of Gerd Theissen. He argued Paul's complaints in 1 Corinthians 11:17-24 are more clearly understood in light of socioeconomic stratification of Greco-Roman culture, and the problem in Corinth was that rich believers were eating the Lord's Supper before the arrival of poorer believers to the assembly. Examining several key expressions in this passage and bringing into conversation the literary data about who in Mediterranean associations were responsible for purchasing, preparing, and distributing the food eaten in association meetings, Boyles nuances Theissen's portrayal. Instead of the rich eating before the poor arrive, Boyles suggests the evidence points to the scenario that the richer believers were eating their food (or the more desirable foods) they brought for the entire group before the poorer believers ate. Paul's concern is that rich believers misunderstand the meal is *theirs*, that they are offering to others rather than understanding the meal as the *Lord's*, which should be distributed equally and without discrimination among all believers.

Ken Cukrowski's essay, "'Even as the Law Says' (1 Cor 14:34b): An Allusion to Miriam in Numbers 12?" aims to provide justification for a brief comment of Carl Holladay in his commentary on 1 Corinthians that it is "remotely possible" that Paul is thinking about Miriam (who is known in Exodus and Numbers as a female prophet) when he instructs women (prophetesses?) who are disrupting and challenging male prophets in the assembly. Cukrowski utilizes Richard Hays' methodology for identifying "echoes" of Scripture in Paul's letters and concludes that the expression "even as the

Law says” (1 Cor 14:34b) satisfies many of Hays’ criteria so that Holladay’s proposal of a “remote possibility” is worth more serious consideration by interpreters.

The Ge'ez text of 1 Corinthians (the earliest known copy of Paul’s letters in Ge'ez) published by Tedros Abraha in 2014 is the focus of Curt Niccum’s article “An Ethiopic Codex in the Egyptian Desert and the Greek Text of 1 Corinthians.” He takes issue with Abraha’s assertion that the Ethiopic translation aligns closely with the text of P⁴⁶ for 1 Corinthians, a view espoused by earlier studies, but which has been criticized for not taking into account other variant readings and Ethiopian translation technique. Niccum demonstrates that this Ethiopic version of 1 Corinthians does not bear a close resemblance to P⁴⁶ and that no “clusters” of textual witnesses show any significant affiliation with it. The essay argues that this Ethiopic version is an important witness of an early Greek text of 1 Corinthians that circulated to this community.

Jerry Sumney’s essay “Whose Parade Is This? What Is That Strange Smell?: The Metaphor(s) of the Triumph in 2 Cor 2:14-17” casts intriguing light on Paul’s use of *θριαμβεύω* in 2 Cor 2:14. Paul’s use of the word is an enigma, not helped by the fact that there is no metaphorical use of it in any Greek text prior to Paul’s use of it here. Fortunately, Seneca provides an illustration of a Latin metaphorical use of being led in triumph, allowing more confidence that Paul is using the term metaphorically as well. But how does this metaphor work in this context of 2 Corinthians, and why does Paul quickly switch to the metaphor of “aroma”? Since a Roman “triumph” included leading captives to their humiliation and frequently their death, was Paul claiming that God is leading him and other apostles (note the third-person plural) to be humiliated and to ultimately die in order to display that God has triumphed through Christ? This reading has challenged interpreters since Chrysostom, and various attempts to reimagine Paul’s use of the metaphor have been offered. Sumney nuances Paul Duff’s proposal made in 1991 that since Paul switches to the metaphor of “aroma,” it is not the military triumphal procession Paul is alluding to but the ancient epiphany procession wherein God is revealed. Engaging the work on metaphors by Lakoff and Johnson, Sumney concludes that Paul’s metaphor of “triumph” was purposefully multivalent. Paul intentionally used the metaphor so that both military and epiphany processions and their “multiple slots” (i.e., multiple aspects) with multiple meanings are invoked to describe how and why Paul and other apostles experience what they do in their service to Christ.

Recognizing Paul’s understanding of God’s judgment upon believers who participate in the Lord’s Supper but are not “discerning the body” is the focus of James Thompson’s essay “Exclusivity, Inclusivity, and Judgment: The Lord’s Supper at Corinth.” Thompson highlights that the larger literary context of Paul’s words about the meal shared by believers in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 (especially 1 Cor 10:1-22) draws parallels between the Corinthian believers and the Israelites in the wilderness, who quite a few Jewish traditions note was a time of Israelite disobedience marked by idolatry and sexual immorality. Paul’s warning about the Corinthians’ observance of the

Lord's Supper is that they are not discerning the body of believers as those who are unified in their participation with Christ in his death. If believers are still eating meat and drinking cups with "demons" (a phrase frequently associated in Jewish literature with the "gods" of pagan worshippers) and engaging in sexual behavior prohibited by God, then they are not recognizing that the Lord's Supper excludes such behavior. If wealthier believers are eating and drinking what they bring to the meal while poorer believers have nothing to eat or drink in their presence, then they are not recognizing that the Lord's Supper includes all believers as one in Christ. These behaviors, like the behaviors of disobedient Israel in the wilderness, will not escape God's judgment. So believers should not presume that either their baptism in Christ or their participation in the Supper excludes them from judgment.

Concluding the first section, Jeff Peterson tackles the question of the degree of diversity in the core theological narrative of the first generation of believers in his essay "Haggadic Concord and Halakhic Conflict in the First Christian Generation." Peterson makes the crucial point that when inquiring about the diversity exhibited by early believers we need to make a distinction between the basic narrative that was espoused by believers (classified by Peterson with the rabbinic term *haggadah* [narrative]) and behavior that was expected and observed by them (classified with the rabbinic term *halakha* [conduct]). Peterson's point is that the undisputed Pauline letters, the disputed letter to the Ephesians, the hypothetical Q, the Gospel of Thomas, and the four canonical Gospels all point unequivocally to a *haggadah* shared by all believers in the first century that Jesus was crucified and raised. In that narrative, there are no differences that emerge, as can be evidenced in the later second and third generations of believers (for example, the docetic beliefs of some alluded to by the Johannine letters). The differences among those in the first generation centered around the ethical implication of that narrative, as can be clearly seen between, for example, the teaching of Paul and those of his opponents (for example, Paul's opponents in Galatia demanded Gentile believers observe "works of law"—Paul did not, but they did not disagree over the core narrative of their faith).

Starting the section on Sacraments and Ethics, Clifford Barbarick's essay "The Parable of the Good Samaritan in Context: Retrieving and Developing Robert Funk's Provocative Reading" offers a novel approach to seeing how the initial hearers of Jesus' parable of the Samaritan and Luke's audience would both be invited to see themselves in the story not as the Samaritan who shows mercy but as the victim who is willing to love one's neighbor as oneself by taking on a posture of vulnerability. Barbarick helpfully reviews Funk's interpretation, noting also how Origen's allegorization of the parable also called believers to identify with the victim as they see Christ in the Samaritan offering them mercy (the kind of allegorization rebuffed by Amy-Jill Levine who nevertheless also sees room for Jesus' original audience to have identified with the victim). Setting his reading of the parable in the Lucan context is tremendously helpful for Barbarick. He reminds readers that the story of the "sinful woman" (Luke 7:36-50), Jesus'

interaction with a “certain ruler” (Luke 18:18-27), and even the curious story of Jesus’ rebuff of Martha and praise of Mary choosing “the better part” (Luke 10:38-42) indicates a Lucan motif of disciples learning to take vulnerable positions of helplessness as opposed to patronistic benefaction towards the helpless in order to identify who one’s neighbor is.

Jeff Childers’ essay “Season Your Meal with Scripture’: Cultivating Biblical Imagination at Table in Late Antique Christian Communities” surveys the content of homilies which were delivered by Jacob of Sarug at Christian meal settings, who became bishop of Batman (near the border of modern-day Syria) in the early sixth century. These *Homilies on Praises at Table* (possibly at “Agape meals” but called “fraternal meals” by Childers) written in Syriac illustrate how one church leader and interpreter of Scripture sought to help diners to reflect on the “spiritual nourishment” they receive from God. Jacob reminds those who feast on food and wine to find deeper meaning in the experience and to see that the meal provides the opportunity for Christians to learn how to live virtuously. Specifically, Jacob allegorizes observations for nature and Scriptural texts to exhort Christians to continually be grateful for what they have to eat and drink and to practice moderation. But no Christian meal is complete unless participants “graze on the rich produce of Scripture and preaching” (118).

Providing the biblical and non-biblical usages of “cup” to understand Paul’s use of *ποτήριον* in 1 Cor 10:21 is the aim of Everett Ferguson’s essay “The Cup of the Lord.” After noting how few biblical encyclopedias and dictionaries have “cup” as an entry, Ferguson surveys both its literal and metaphorical uses in existence by or soon after the time of Paul’s writings. Besides the specific drinking vessels for both humans and animals that were identified as “cups,” the literary evidence shows that the item (or more specifically, through metonym, its content) was used to describe, among other things, an individual or nation’s lot as determined by God, God’s wrath, God’s control of future events, human suffering, and (more relevant for interpreting Paul’s use of the term) God’s blessing.

Mark Hamilton’s essay “Jesus as Interpreter of Scripture: The Case of Grain-Gathering on the Sabbath” introduces readers to the complicated history behind and the interpretative challenges of Matthew’s presentation of Jesus’ opponents questioning him about his disciples’ behavior of plucking the heads of grain and eating them on the Sabbath (Matt 12:1-8). Hamilton correctly observes that the Sabbath in the Hebrew Bible is not only associated (minimally) with legal codes but also (and more importantly) with the notion of it as a sign of YHWH’s merciful presence with his people. In the Dead Sea Scrolls (especially the “Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice” and Mishnah, especially *m. Shabbat*), Sabbath observance is an activity to take note of God’s mercy. Matthew’s text of Jesus’ explanation of the Sabbath had edited Mark’s version (Mark 2:23-28) in important and significant ways, such as removing elements that would be awkward or ambiguous to a Jewish believer. In the end, Hamilton rightly sees

the Matthean rendering of the account not as a call to any supersessionist's view (common in earlier Protestant commentaries), but as an invitation for believers to see Jesus as a "virtuoso interpreter of Scripture" in interpreting Torah's appeal to all of humanity to receive God's presence and mercy.

The last essay in *Sacraments and Ethics* is Amanda Pittman's "Paul as a Model of Eschatological Faithfulness: Reading Acts 27 in Light of Luke 21-22." She stresses more strongly than previous commentaries Acts 27:33-44 (which portrays Paul's exhortation to his shipwrecked fellow travelers that they will not lose a hair from their heads and then eats a meal with them) that the passage "functions metaleptically" to cast Paul as a Christian model of confidence in God's providential care, hopeful perseverance through trials, and an embodied witness to God's salvific activities (both in the present and in the future end of the age). Pittman also interprets the allusions to the Lord's Supper scene in Luke 22:14-23 that other scholars have previously noted, highlighting how Paul's Eucharistic resonance of taking bread, giving thanks, breaking bread, and distributing it to fellow travelers (Acts 27:35) would have been symbolically understood. While not denying that these actions can be seen as merely those associated with eating a typical meal, she argues that Luke intends for Paul's actions to show the "embodied Christian testimony to Christ's passion and parousia before a gentile audience in crisis" (161).

The final collection of essays is grouped under the broad heading *Contexts*. Jim Bury's "Reconsidering 'Calling': Reading κλήσις in Roman Corinth" takes a fresh look at how to interpret Paul's words ἕκαστος ἐν τῇ κλήσει ἣ ἐκλήθη, ἐν ταύτῃ μένετω (1 Cor 7:20). Bury challenges Bauer's suggestion (which had been influential on a number of commentaries on this verse) that in this passage κλήσις should be understood as "position" or "condition." Stressing in particular the use of κλήσις in the writings of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Bury argues that κλήσις was carrying the sense of "summoning" of different "classes" of groups to a civic assembly in first-century CE Roman society. Paul's Roman Corinthian readers would have understood Paul to be referring to their socially defined groups (those who are considered by others as poor, low, and despised) summoned by God into the assembly of Christ. Rather than relativizing social distinctions among believers (as suggested by some commentators), Paul is primarily stressing the diversity of those who have been summoned by God through Christ, regardless of whether or not individual positions or conditions might change.

Christopher Hutson's essay "The Zealous Rage against Paul (Acts 13:45) in the Context of Roman Provincial Administration" makes the important and often overlooked point that interpretations of Jewish opposition to Paul and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra frequently mischaracterize these opponents as primarily "jealous" (ζῆλος), implying that their dispute was centered on the popularity of the apostles' preaching about Jesus. What commentators fail to stress, Hutson argues, is that diaspora Jews living in Asia Minor had an extensive history of negotiating

protection and benefaction from Roman authorities to ensure several rights (i.e., meeting in assemblies, paying the Temple tax to Jerusalem, exemption from military service, etc.). These protections and rights were jeopardized by Paul and Barnabas' preaching since they were diminishing the distinction between Jews and Gentiles by not requiring circumcision and treating dietary laws less stringently. Religiously and politically, if rights were granted by previous Roman officials under a false premise that a distinction existed between Jews and Gentiles that must not be dissolved, Jews could end up losing these rights. These opponents' response is not "jealousy" but "zeal," and Hutson rightly points out that ζήλος is more correctly understood as the expression of a violent passion to defend practices that distinguished Jewish identity.

Clement of Alexandria's distinctive use of ἄγαλμα in his *Stromateis* (specifically *Strom.* VII) to describe how the Christian "gnostic" (with a lowercase "g" so as to distinguish it from those "Gnostics" judged by Christian authors of the same period as heretics) as divine image is the focus of David Kneip's essay "Living Statues of the Lord': Clement of Alexandria on Religious Imagery and Christian Spiritual Formation." Kneip's argument is that Clement has been influenced by the greater Greco-Roman religious culture, particularly as evidenced in second-century CE Alexandria, and seeks to show why the true gnostic is superior to the images of the gods that were so ubiquitously adored. The gnostic shows that they are superior to the plethora of these statues in that they are alive, not by made by human hands, do not interfere with true piety but rather assist humans in honoring and worshiping God, and they do not lead humans to sin. Christians are a living ἄγαλμα of Christ and others can see God through the living image they provide, especially if they teach the true contemplation of God.

The last essay in the collection is Richard Wright's "Reconsidering Assets: Paul and Galen on a Life Worth Living." Wright engages with Paul Holloway's commentary on Philippians, and while agreeing with Holloway's designation of Philippians as a "letter of consolation" and the causes of their distress, he argues that additional components of what is causing them stress can be detected in a closer reading. The essay compares Paul's consolation of the Philippians with the letter written by the late second-century CE physician/philosopher Galen, who, after having lost much of his possessions in a fire, wrote a treatise entitled *De Indolentia* ("On the Avoidance of Distress"), the content of which was recently discovered. Galen argues that in order to avoid distress a person must learn how to assign the proper value to things (a similar idea expressed in Stoic thought). Similarly, in Philippians 3:7-11 (which Holloway did point to as evidence of Paul helping the Philippians to discern what really matters) and 2:6-8 (which Holloway did not cite as evidence) Paul is indicating that he wants to console the Philippians, who he perceives as distressed about their status within a city that emphasized obtaining honor at every level within the social hierarchy. For Paul, what really matters is not the honor of Roman citizenship but knowledge of Christ. As

long as one has that knowledge, the loss of all other status achievements are simply “table scraps.”

Although the organization of the essays seems unclear (e.g., one section is labeled Paul and another Contexts, when essays in other sections also examine Paul’s writings or examine how to read works [whether by Paul or someone else] in their contexts), Thompson and Wright are to be commended for bringing together in a single volume essays that represent the fresh scholarship of those who are former students and/or current colleagues of Wendell Willis. Dr. Willis has made long-lasting, significant contributions not only to New Testament studies but to the workings of local congregations.

After the few occasions I have had to interact with Wendell, I’ve always come away appreciating his intellect, humility, love for Scripture, and love for the church. This *Festschrift* for Wendell’s work and life is a worthwhile source not only for serious New Testament studies but also for those who work daily in local churches and who want to bring the fruit of biblical scholarship to bear on the life of those they lead.

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