

Review

Strangers to Family: Diaspora and 1 Peter's Invention of God's Household. By Shively T. J. Smith. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016. xxi + 207 pp. Hardcover \$39.95. ISBN 9781481305488.

This study analyzes the concept of diaspora as it is reflected and employed in 1 Peter and three writings of the Israelite diaspora. Smith, who completed her PhD in New Testament Studies at Emory University, is Assistant Professor of New Testament at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC.

The work consists of two halves only loosely connected. The first half (17-83, chs. 1-3) examines 1 Peter as a Christian letter of the late first century, in which the concept of Christian community living in diaspora is a central focus. Diaspora, here, is conceived “not just as a historical phenomenon but also a literary trope that signifies cultural ideals, conjures specific social relationships and positionalities, and represents constructive dialogues on difference, deviance, and assimilation” (12). Three aspects of diaspora existence are examined: cult, citizenship, and household relations. The volume's second half (85-162, chs. 3-6) considers three Israelite writings addressed to audiences in the Israelite diaspora: chapters 1-6 of Daniel in Babylon; the *Letter of Aristeas* in Egypt; and the writings of Philo in Alexandria. These writings are interrogated in regard to their respective conceptualizations of “diaspora.” Similarities with, and differences from, the significance of the concept of diaspora in 1 Peter are noted. Ultimately, this comparison and contrast sheds little new light on the situation and message of 1 Peter.

The title seems to promise a study in which the concept of Christian community as a “family or household of God” plays a key role (as proposed by Elliott, *Home for the Homeless*, 1981, some thirty years ago, but unacknowledged by Smith). This, however, is not the case. No discussion is presented concerning 1 Peter's purported “invention” and employment of “household of God” as ecclesial metaphor (in contrast to the extensive analysis of Elliott, *Home*). Nor is the related concept of “strangers to family” adequately examined.

Smith contends that 1 Peter is a “writing of the underclass for the underclass,” and that it “constructs a double social reality of persons” who are in the world but not of the world. This double reality calls forth a double consciousness that allows the creation and preservation of a strange new fellowship that transgresses social and cultural boundaries, while neither conforming fully to dominant norms nor openly rebelling against them. In this view, “diaspora” (1 Peter 1:1), Smith contends, introduces a root metaphor redefined to characterize a community contending with this double social reality in a double stance of both assimilation and resistance. 1 Peter, Smith asserts, represents the earliest Christian construction of diaspora as an ongoing way of life.

This study is a welcome contribution of a self-professed “thirty-something-year-old southern African American woman” (163) to a positive appreciation of a New Testament writing that often has been deplored for its purported underwriting of female subordination and inferior status. The comparison of 1 Peter to three other diaspora writings, however, sheds little new light on the message of 1 Peter, and the material on 1 Peter adds little that is new to the scholarly discussion of the letter. The notion of diaspora as *the* organizing metaphor of 1 Peter has yet to be persuasively demonstrated.

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