

Galatians Re-Imagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished. By Brigitte Kahl. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010, 413 pp., \$29, hardcover.

Brigitte Kahl, professor of New Testament at Union Theological Seminary, analyzes the Roman Imperial context from its art and architecture and pioneers an interpretation of Galatians which takes that historical background seriously. Her approach questions the traditional Jew/Gentile dichotomy, agreeing with some of the tenets of the New Perspective, and yet situating Galatians in the midst of the victor/vanquished dialog of the Empire. Her appreciation for visual communication also shows up in her frequent use of a modified Greimasian semiotic square to elucidate the various binaries that she either references, argues against, or constructs herself.

The busy student or professor will appreciate the organization of this book, which is intentionally offered at various levels of engagement (see p. 25). The introduction sets her main argument in the history of interpretation. She notes the way justification by faith has allowed Christians to construct their own selves with an invisible good that others do not have. This Self/Other opposition, she argues, lines up more with Imperial thought than Paul's, who instead advocates "the practice of Selves who no longer try to vanquish their Others" (p. 22). This 'self-othering' causes one to connect and be transformed by others, producing a concomitant distancing of self from dominant powers.

In chapter 1, she moves the argument about Galatians' *Sitz im Leben* past the Northern and Southern Galatia hypotheses, through the semantically equivalent terms Gaul/Galatian/Celt, to the construction of the barbarian Other necessary for the self-understanding of the Roman as civilized savior. An in-depth analysis of the Great Altar of Pergamon in chapter 2 makes this clearer as Kahl shows its power to construct the identity of the viewer as aligned with the gods and their representatives, the rulers, on the side of civilization and law, and against the forces of chaos, brutality, and barbarianism. In this part of her argument, Kahl (Dr. theol., Dr. sc. theol., Berlin) combines insights from such varied fields as art, architecture, semiotics, philosophy (and, later, ritual studies) and analyses this world order where rule is legitimated in opposition to the Gauls/Galatians as the representatives of the barbarian Other.

The shift, in chapter 3, to the specifically Roman appropriation of this reality seemed, by contrast, slightly weaker. Although the resemblances between the Great Altar at Pergamum and the Roman constructions of "imperial monotheism" (chapter 3), the shield of Aeneas in Virgil, and the public performance of imperial reality in the gladiatorial games are undeniable, they may be not so much redeployments as co-deployments of the same assertions, as Kahl's references to the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* also show. This, however, does not weaken her argument. Similar speeches among various ancient powers only point to their usefulness in legitimation without any necessary interdependence or common provenance. Thus, the (new) position of the emperor in the contact zone between humans and gods, the emperor's construction of temples (both in humble gratitude to but also in benefaction to the gods) and the inscribing of these new realities on the consciousness of the people in the enacting of the Roman salvation from lawlessness and brutality in the arenas resulted in a "united *us* as the one-self of the imperial civic body, compliant with Roman law, order, and religion" but completely at odds with the reality which Paul was communicating (p. 165).

This Roman reality had already essentially effected the transformation of the Galatians from Other/Barbarian to Roman Self/Civilized by the time Paul arrived. Gauls were fighting for Rome, ruling for Rome and enjoying feasts and games that helped to re-inscribe new identities over previous ones. Chapter 4 describes this transformation with descriptions of the history of Rome and Roman colonization through critical engagement with primary sources and instructive sections of background (for example on the *Res Gestae*, p. 193) for those new to the topic. Kahl also makes much, in this chapter, of the practices of euergetism in the Empire, reading Paul's allusion to 'works of the law' alongside these normative customs.

The realities of the Roman Empire had not only civilized the Gauls/Galatians, but also provided a "back stair" for Jews to participate in the Roman ordering of society through an exception for them as the circumcised (chapter 5, see p. 216). Messianic Galatians, by refusing to participate in Imperial worship (like Jews) but also eschewing circumcision (like Gentiles), stood against the prevailing order. Their foreskins thus became as much an attack and affront to Rome as to Jerusalem. On the other hand, their circumcision would paradoxically uphold these systems of power beneficial to both. Only by remaining as they were would the messianic community incorporate the identification with and acceptance of the Other which for Paul marked "the essence of the messianic event" (p. 278).

The conclusion, in chapter 6, is that the gospel which Paul preached called people to leave the structures of Rome with their emphasis on power over others and competitive "works of the law" and begin a process of 'self-othering' in imitation of Christ on the cross, where the presence of the Other, instead of inciting us to a demand for submission, causes us instead to move into that one's space and invite her into ours. In this reading, the God who becomes Other (Galatians 1-2) invites all humanity into the family of Abraham (Galatians 3-4). This "one-an(d)-otherness" must be lived out in "transnational solidarity" (p. 287). The epilogue presents the Empire's last attempts to force Gauls and Jews into its mold, apparently successfully and yet resisted from within by the growing messianic movement.

Kahl's reading challenged me, both academically and personally. Although I didn't always agree with her exegesis (Gal 3:19-20, especially), her background work is impeccable, her vivid descriptions of Paul's world are compelling, and her conclusions – dare I say? – seminal. Although possibly difficult for the student in some sections, much of the writing is very accessible. Some footnotes offer avenues for further research and others the history of the scholarship. This book has profound implications not only for our reading of Galatians but also for our construction of 'church' if we should choose to take it seriously.

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