

## Foreword

THE FRESH CONTRIBUTION OF this study to an understanding of Paul's letter to the Romans is rooted in the seriousness with which it takes Old Testament and Second Temple Jewish traditions of the Fatherhood of God. It has been all too easy for Christians, in understanding the Fatherhood of God christologically, to shortchange the Jewish heritage and invest everything in the newness of the Abba-Father relationship opened up by Jesus. Khobnya has redressed the balance in the case of Romans. True, the Jewish heritage has been reinterpreted in the light of Christ, but the point is that there was something solid to reinterpret and expand.

Intertextuality is an important dimension of the approach adopted. The "illegitimate totality transfer" identified in earlier study of biblical words led scholarship into a period of austerity where meaning was stripped down to a bare minimum. The credibility of this minimalism was undergirded by a rather narrow conceptual focus in the understanding of meaning; the discovery of the reader and rediscovery of rhetoric, among other things, have moved us on from that. An exploration of the way in which texts echo earlier texts and create meaning, in part by exploiting levels of precision and imprecision in the textual links, has been one way in which the scholarly pendulum has been swinging back to a more fulsome approach. When one is talking of resonance with multiple texts rather than reference to a single text, issues of meaning become more complicated, but also much richer.

And if a text like Romans resonates with a large body of OT texts and Jewish traditions, various elements in the text of Romans can also have relationships of resonance with one another (intratextuality). Khobnya takes full advantage of this possibility in Romans. The richness is undeniable, but the challenge is to demonstrate that wild imagination has not taken the place of chilly minimizing. Khobnya keeps back from

extremes and makes her own attempt at offering a reasoned case for a considerable degree of flexible and plural readings.

Romans is not as such a narrative text, but the point has been made often enough that it implies a narrative, a salvation-historical narrative that draws heavily on OT patterns and motifs and finds its completion in Christ. It is an implied-narrative approach that adds another kind of richness to this study of the role of the Father-Son relationship of God and Jesus in Romans. Intertextuality and implied-narrative work hand in glove.

The importance of the Jewish background for Romans is understood by Khobnya in worldview or symbolic world terms. Since the symbolic world represents the very air breathed by those who share it, it is rarely explained, but it is often the all but invisible vital clue to understanding. Vital aspects of the meaning potential of a text cannot be accessed without appreciation of the appropriate symbolic world. An appreciation of the symbolic world clears up obscurities and non-sequiturs in texts, but it also expands the range and depth of meaning.

Unfortunately many of the surviving Jewish traditions can only be definitely traced to a period beyond the writing of Romans. Perhaps many of them existed earlier, but Khobnya takes another approach: what is done with texts later demonstrates a potentiality of the text; and a potentiality recognized later could also have been recognized earlier. This strand of thinking becomes of particular importance for her appeal to the Jewish Aqedah traditions.

With Jewish traditions of God as Father as vital background, Khobnya explores how in Romans God the Father is revealed in Christ. Paul is shown to be involved in some redefining. God as Father in Romans corresponds primarily to Christ as Son. God fulfills his promises in this Son: messianic promises, including making the nations the king's heritage. God is also father of his people, now redefined in terms of Jews and Gentiles, able to address God as Abba through the Spirit. They are sons now through conformity to the obedient son, Jesus. Where now to look for the faithfulness of the Father? Redefinition again. Without loss of the Jewish history, God's faithfulness = his righteousness must now embrace a place in the covenant for Gentiles, and it must take account of the widespread Jewish failure to embrace Jesus. Old Testament resources are available to assist in the necessary rethinking. For Paul Christ is the means of demonstrating God's covenant faithfulness to Israel, for the sake of Israel, but also for the benefit of the Gentiles.

Working from Rom 1:5; 1:16–17 (with a major focus on the quotation from Hab 2:4); and 3:21–26, Khobnya argues that Christ’s faithfulness is intended to be seen as fulfilment of the Father’s faithfulness. The role of πίστις is called upon to carry the main burden in the case being made. It is helpful for Khobnya’s case that πίστις is used of God’s faithfulness in 3:3, but surprising that it is not used elsewhere in the NT or in the OT in this way (except as echoed in one place name); and elsewhere in Romans δικαιοσύνη is preferred for God’s faithfulness.

In the author’s hands intertextuality (and intratextuality) tends here toward maximizing readings, with what have previously been seen as competing readings tending to be asserted simultaneously. So, for example, “the obedience of faith” of 1:5 seems to be both the obedience that is faith, but also faithful obedience in the pattern of Jesus, and as well acting in light of the eschatological situation with its new covenant realities. For Hab 2:4 there seems to be a similar adding up of the various options. Perhaps there is an important corrective here to overanalyzed conceptual meanings. In relation to the discussion of Hab 2:4 there is a question of whether expansiveness of meaning should be allowed to include syntactical indeterminacy. Khobnya aligns herself firmly with those who read “faithfulness of Christ” in Rom 3:22 and not “faith in Christ.” This is the key to her understanding of Rom 3:21–26: Christ undertakes the redemption God intends; God is demonstrating his faithfulness in as much as Christ is faithfully fulfilling God’s redeeming intention.

In the study of Rom 4:1–25 Khobnya sets Abraham’s example into the Pauline context, and in particular Paul’s concern for Gentile inclusion. She looks at Abraham in Gen 15 and 17 and in Jewish tradition. For Paul God acts in power and grace; and faith is faith in God’s faithfulness thus expressed. Abraham’s faith anticipates the shape of Christian faith. Of special interest, however, is that alongside this main thrust Khobnya identifies a thread that wants to make Abraham’s faith, acted upon in obedience, anticipatory for that of Jesus. Some will see this as an unsatisfactory maximizing reading, but it gains at least some thematic traction from what follows (only thematic traction, because in what follows the correspondence is between Isaac and Jesus, not Abraham and Jesus). In an extended treatment of Christ’s redemptive death and the Aqedah motif, Khobnya argues that Paul offers a radical rereading of the Aqedah as God’s story of redemption that comes about in Christ’s obedience to the Father.

Christ’s obedience versus Adam’s disobedience is explored with a focus on Rom 5:12–21, but reaching wider and beginning with Adam’s

disobedience in Scripture and tradition. Christ's obedience is equated with his faithfulness. And Christ's obedience here is seen as the obedience of the son. Are we therefore to see Adam's disobedience in terms of Adam as son of God? Traditions of Adam as son of God might have been explored here, but have not; they might have strengthened the case being made.

The use of the Fatherhood of God as a lens through which to explore Romans is as far as I am aware unparalleled. Khobnya has made it fruitful, producing new insights into this much studied letter. Both in terms of method and substance this is a book that deserves our attention.

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