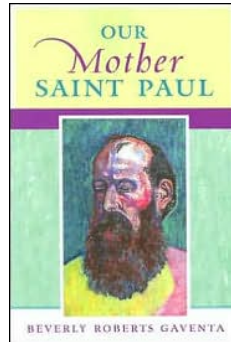


○ REVIEW OF BEVERLY ROBERTS GAVENTA, *OUR MOTHER SAINT PAUL*

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In this book Beverly Gaventa explores the Apostle Paul's use of maternal metaphors of birthing, nursing, and nurture in his epistles. She explains that 'this book has undergone a long period of gestation' (11), since it is the product of her long-term interest in these virtually neglected maternal images. Many of the eleven chapters, which are divided into two parts, have been previously published and were written for a scholarly or pastoral audience. To give the book coherence, she has revised and updated the previously published essays and has included new essays. In addition, at the beginning of the two parts of the book, she provides helpful introductions that provide the rationale and objective of the two sections. The first part examines the texts in which Paul employs maternal imagery (1 Thessalonians 2:7; Galatians 4:19; 1 Corinthians 3:1–2; Romans 8:22) and the second part explores the apocalyptic and cosmic dimensions of Paul's theology, which, according to Gaventa, provide the context for understanding his maternal imagery.

In Part 1, 'Maternal Imagery in the Letters of Paul', Gaventa sets out to reclaim the maternal metaphors, which have typically been neglected or brushed aside by modern Pauline scholars. In order to 'retrieve these texts from their place in the footnotes of Pauline studies' (12), Gaventa importantly lays the necessary foundation for the rest of the book. She explains that modern interpreters have typically subsumed the maternal imagery into the more easily understood paternal imagery, or have regarded the former as interchangeable with the latter. Interestingly, according to Gaventa, only recent generations of interpreters have neglected the significance of Paul's maternal metaphors, whereas earlier generations of readers drew upon their significance. She provides four reasons for why the maternal imagery is an important 'topic' in the Pauline corpus. First, the maternal imagery involves a complex metaphorical movement, which she calls 'metaphor squared'. Secondly, she observes a distinction between the maternal and paternal imageries. Gaventa explains that the maternal imagery refers to the ongoing nature of the relationship between Paul and his communities, while the paternal imagery, in contrast, normally refers to a single event occurring in the past (i.e. their conversion under Paul's ministry). Thirdly, the occur-

rences of the maternal metaphor are associated with Paul's apostolic task. Fourthly, Paul's use of maternal metaphors is often located in an apocalyptic context. Gaventa also explains that she essentially employs three approaches to grasp Paul's use of maternal imagery: history of traditions, socio-cultural context, and gender construction. Furthermore, she explains that the implications of looking at the maternal metaphors are to understand more about Paul's theology and his ongoing activity of 'theologizing', the social functions of Paul's language, and his attitudes toward leadership and women. Concerning the last implication, Gaventa states, 'Taking seriously the presence of maternal imagery in fact subverts the reductionistic dichotomy between hierarchical and egalitarian texts' (14).

The first four chapters of Part 1 are each devoted to one of the instances of maternal imagery in Paul's letters. The first three instances considered (1 Thessalonians 2:7; Galatians 4:19; 1 Corinthians 3:1–2) are Paul's self-reference in the maternal image, while the last instance (Romans 8:22) conveys 'all of creation' in the maternal image. Chapter 5, which concludes Part 1, is a digression which examines the significance and implications of Pauline theology for the lives of women. In this chapter she challenges the feminist scholars' tendency to be chiefly focused on women issues in Paul's letters and his patriarchal context, rather than considering the strong implications of Paul's gospel for women; she additionally challenges the typical practice of considering Paul's theology based on the traditional loci of systematic theology (e.g. revelation, Christology, and soteriology).

In Part 2, 'Maternal Imagery in Its Cosmic and Apocalyptic Context', Gaventa considers how these metaphors are substantively connected to the apocalyptic and cosmic natures of Paul's theology. In the previous chapters there were points where these apocalyptic dimensions were discussed – for example in her treatments on Galatians 4:19 and Romans 8:22. In her introduction to this second part, Gaventa defines the term 'apocalyptic' and justifies her use of this debatable term. According to Gaventa, apocalyptic theology undergirds Paul's writings. In order to demonstrate the connection between the maternal imageries and the apocalyptic framework of Paul's theology, she focuses on Galatians and Romans. In Chapter 6 she probes Galatians 1 and 2 and Paul's retrospective account of the revelation or 'apocalypse' that has penetrated his own life. Chapter 7 looks at Galatians and the 'singularity of the gospel'. For her discussion on Paul's theology in Romans (chs. 8–11), Gaventa refutes more recent scholarly trends in studies of Romans and emphasises the cosmic character of the letter. In Chapters 8 and 9 she discusses the topic of sin in Romans. In Chapter 10 she examines the theological identity of the Christian community and its participation in God's apocalyptic rectification in Jesus Christ. Finally, in Chapter 11 Gaventa explores Paul's understanding of God in Romans, which she describes as God is 'on the loose'.

Gaventa's book clearly draws the necessary attention to the neglected maternal metaphors used by Paul. Her writing is clear and lucid, and her arguments are informed by her breadth of research and knowledge (e.g. metaphor theories and Pauline theology). She compellingly shows how these metaphors are not mere variations of paternal metaphors, but are rather significant features of Paul's understanding of his apostolic identity and activities. However, given the title of her book, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, readers will probably be disappointed to find that Paul's maternal imageries are only the main subject of the first four chapters. In Part 2, she attempts to show how the maternal images are located in an apocalyptic framework, but there is hardly any discussion of maternal imageries beyond these first four chapters – despite the title of and

introduction to Part 2. A stronger coherence of the two parts of this study (Paul's maternal metaphors and Pauline theology) could have been enhanced with an inclusion of a concluding chapter and some more revisions of Chapters 5–11. Thus, the book seems to be about two subjects, and at times their connection is not so apparent. Despite these quibbles, her valuable insights into Paul's maternal images and her accentuation of the apocalyptic feature of Paul's theology and 'theologizing' will no doubt generate further discussion and research on these topics. In sum, Gaventa's book is a welcome contribution to Pauline studies, and is recommended for anyone interested in Paul's use of maternal metaphors and Pauline theology.