

## Consensus

---

Volume 29

Issue 2 *Leavening the Lump*

Article 12

---

11-11-2004

# Decolonizing Biblical Studies: a View From the Margins

Mona Tokarek LaFosse

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

---

### Recommended Citation

LaFosse, Mona Tokarek (2004) "Decolonizing Biblical Studies: a View From the Margins," *Consensus*: Vol. 29 : Iss. 2 , Article 12.  
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol29/iss2/12>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact [scholarscommons@wlu.ca](mailto:scholarscommons@wlu.ca).

uniqueness of Israel, its faith and its politics. Instead he emphasizes what the various ancient near eastern societies had in common. The only uniqueness he underscores is the long-term survival in the Jewish and Christian traditions of the values and writings that emerged from this marginal and constantly conquered people. Ironically he suggests that this survival of a non-statist, more village-oriented faith needed the state apparatus it despised to insure a literate intelligentsia to preserve those very values which challenged the hegemony of a centralized state apparatus.

I could go on and list other positive features of this book, but I leave that to those readers and scholars who wish such a concise and comprehensive study of this vitally important topic. By placing ancient Israel within its own historical context and that of the empires, which shaped its life for good and ill, Gottwald provides this very thing.

Oscar Cole-Arnal  
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary  
Waterloo, Ontario

### **Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins**

Fernando F. Segovia  
Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2000  
177 pages, \$27.27 Softcover

The methodological assumptions that undergird biblical criticism are profoundly shifting. Fernando F. Segovia's rich collection of essays provides both a thoughtful description of this shift, and an articulate, passionate call to embrace it in its multiplicity of forms.

Segovia organizes the history of biblical criticism into four broadly conceived methodological paradigms: traditional historical criticism (beginning in the 19th century), literary criticism and cultural criticism (both developed in the 1970s), and ideological criticism, or cultural studies (a recent, largely post-modern development, which is Segovia's focus). He presents the first three paradigms as expressions of Western hegemony, claiming to have the

right tools to uncover the “correct” meaning of the text, while in reality focussing on a Western, male (often clerical) perspective under the guise of scientific inquiry. Though Segovia characterizes the four paradigms as “competing,” he still advocates a familiarity with all of these methodologies for the purpose of “critical dialogue.”

Recognizing the prevalence of the Western so-called “objective” insights all along, his project seeks multiple voices from various viewpoints to interact about (1) the methods we use to study the biblical texts, (2) the text itself, and (3) the readers themselves who engage in biblical studies. Though the biblically educated — especially the so-called “experts” — bear a great responsibility (and privilege) in the dialogue, Segovia desires to invite others who read the Bible as well. He recognizes that such multiplicity of voices must be held in tension, but advocates engaging the complexity for the sake of depth of understanding, not only of the text, but also of ourselves. As a Cuban immigrant to the U.S. himself, he describes “from the margins” a move away from Western generated and sustained forms of reading the text, and reading ourselves (our own experiences, perspectives and motivations). The goal is not to rid ourselves of unnecessary biases to become “objective” (a wholly impossible task), but rather to bring the richness of ourselves into dialogue with the texts and with others of various expertise and background.

Segovia is greatly concerned with pedagogy. Because the foundations of biblical criticism are primarily formed and perpetuated in the post-secondary classroom, he strongly urges teachers of biblical studies to move toward meta-theoretical, meta-canonical, and multi-vocal ways of presenting the discipline.

A New Testament scholar, Segovia certainly makes his work of interest to students of both testaments because of its methodological concerns. This book is an attentive exposition about the present state of biblical studies. It is a reflection of current trends, as well as a description and prescription for the future, recognizing the ability of non-Western folk to make valuable contributions to biblical studies, apart from traditionally Western points of view. That is, he hopes for future biblical studies to be global and de-centered. Though not all students of the biblical texts will agree with the details of Segovia’s view of methodology and its assumptions, his invitation to respect for, and critical dialogue with, others is compelling, well-articulated



and well worth exploring. Because of the great diversity in classrooms and churches in Canada today, educators, scholars and other students of the Bible would certainly benefit from carefully considering this relevant treatise on methodology.

Mona Tokarek LaFosse  
University of Toronto  
Toronto, Ontario

### **Paul, Thessalonica, and Early Christianity**

Karl Paul Donfried

Grand Rapids, Michigan:

William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002

347 pages, \$29.39 Softcover

Karl Paul Donfried's *Paul, Thessalonica and Early Christianity* gathers together this scholar's work on the Thessalonian correspondence for the last twenty-eight years, a work which demonstrates a high level of precision scholarship on these texts. Within these numerous articles one finds examination of such varied topics as the literary and rhetorical character of the epistles, the religious and cultic infrastructure which the newly emerging Jesus Movement encountered in Greco-Roman Thessalonica, the nature of the Christian communities found there, studies of theological concepts vis-à-vis the Pauline writings, Paul's ties with Judaism and possible connections between the Thessalonian correspondence and Qumran.

In my opinion, Donfried's greatest strength lies in his textual analysis and facility with meaning nuances in the original languages. He takes great pains in dealing with religious concepts that emerge from these texts. Indeed, the tool of word studies undergirds his strongest arguments for the Qumran/1 Thessalonian connection he espouses. Overall Donfried comes across as a conservative scholar within a mainline tradition that accepts the tools of Biblical criticism. By way of example, in 1993, in a piece entitled "2 Thessalonians and the Church of Thessalonica" (Chapter 3 of the book) Donfried