

Bruce W. Winter. *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 96. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 289 pp. No price.

This work represents a revision of Dr. Winter's 1988 dissertation completed under E. A. Judge. The author indicates that the revisions are substantial. He excised material on Gnosticism and included recent work on rhetoric. Winter contends that the theory that the Second Sophistic movement bloomed only late in the first century A.D. is mistaken, for evidence from both Alexandria and Corinth indicate that the sophists flourished throughout the first century A.D. The presence of sophists in Alexandria is attested by *P. Oxy.* 2190 (a first-century papyrus), Dio of Prusa's oration in the city of Alexandria, and Philo's own writings. Evidence for sophists in Corinth is gleaned from Epictetus, Dio of Prusa, Plutarch, and Paul's writings. I am hardly an expert on the sophistic movement in the ancient world, but Winter's evidence for the presence of the sophists throughout the first century appears convincing, for he documents in some detail from the sources listed above the presence of sophists in both Alexandria and Corinth.

What is even more interesting to readers of this journal is Winter's assessment of the interaction between sophists and both Philo and Paul. He maintains that the sophists were an identifiable and discrete group in Philo's Alexandria, and that they should be distinguished from philosophers, dialecticians, grammarians, musicians, and geometricians. Sophists are identified as extraordinary orators who had a significant public following. Philo, influenced by his hero Plato, did not reject rhetoric entirely. Rhetoric could sharpen one's thinking and promote clarity of expression. What Philo

rejected was the excesses of the sophists and their lack of virtue. What particularly appalled him was their greed, indicating that their public declamations did not stem from a love of truth. He saw the magicians whom Moses opposed in Egypt as precursors of the sophists which inhabited Alexandria. Philo still believed, however, that rhetoric was useful, arguing that only those who were trained in rhetoric were prepared to encounter and triumph over sophists in debate. Nonetheless, Philo could never really embrace the sophistic movement, for it contradicted the virtue which he believed was mandated in the scriptures.

Winter also contends that Paul's opponents in Corinth were sophists, and that Paul counters the sophistic movement in both 1 and 2 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 Paul presents his initial arrival and preaching in Corinth as a rejection of the *modus operandi* of sophists. He did present himself forcefully but reminded the readers of his weakness, inability, and timidity. The terms *πειθώ*, *ἀπόδειξις*, and *δύναμις* have rhetorical associations, and when used together would suggest to the readers the virtuosity of the rhetors. Paul renounces root and branch any dependence upon rhetorical techniques, insisting that they undermine the centrality of the cross. Even though rendering the word *πίστις* in this passage as "proof" would fly against the usual Pauline meaning of the term, Winter suggests that such a reading is at least possible in this context. In any case, Paul rejected the rhetorical methods of the sophists so that he would not be aligned with them.

Winter spies another contrast between Paul and the sophists. Sophists promised to lavish public benefactions upon a city, but Paul instead endures the indignity of working with his own hands to support himself. Winter follows many in seeing 1

Corinthians 9 as an apologetic for Paul's ministry, but he stakes out his own path in detecting a contrast to the sophists. The sophists, after all, charged fees for their services, while Paul offered the gospel freely and engaged in manual labor so as not to burden the gospel. Winter believes that the polemic against sophists continues in 1 Cor. 9:23-27, for sophists lived luxuriously and softly. Paul, on the other hand, lived a disciplined and spare life, the kind of life the sophists detested and mocked. Winter suggests, then, that an anti-sophistic instead of an anti-Cynic stance informs 1 Corinthians 9. He also sees the charge of envy and strife (1 Cor. 1:10-12; 3:3-4) as evidence of sophist opponents since their debates were marked by quarrelling and a love for supremacy. That the debate was between Apollos and Paul also signals a sophistic dimension to the problem. Indeed, Winter maintains that the majority in the church invited Apollos (1 Cor. 3:18; 16:12) to return to the city. This invitation demonstrated that Paul was unwelcome and demonstrated the presence of divisions in Corinth. Even in the introduction to the letter, the use of the words λόγος and γνῶσις together alludes to the Corinthian feeling that they are inadequate rhetorically. The attachment and devotion to teachers in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10-17) reflects the kind of devotion to teachers characteristic of sophists. Paul identifies this spirit as idolatrous. Following Duane Litfin (*St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation: An Investigation of 1 Corinthians 1-4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994]), Winter argues that preaching οὐκ σοφίᾳ λόγου (1 Cor. 1:17) focuses on the rhetorical skill of the speaker. In 1 Corinthians 1-4 Paul does not dispute with the Corinthians theologically, nor is there any evidence of a theological breach between him and Apollos. Paul protests against rhetorical artistry that obscures the message of the crucified Christ. The terms σοφοί,

δυνατοί, and εὐγενεῖς in 1 Cor. 1:26-31 refer to those instructed by sophists, and the sophists themselves would have hailed from the ruling class.

Winter also detects a polemic against sophists in 2 Corinthians 10-13, arguing that the opponents here are the same as those indicted in 1 Corinthians 1-4. In this instance the sophists tried to blunt Paul's apostolic authority by criticizing Paul's ability as a public speaker. Paul's public presence and delivery as a speaker (2 Cor. 10:10) were deficient according to rhetorical standards, and the Corinthian opponents were quick to advertise his deficiencies. When Paul says that he was ἰδιώτης τῷ λόγῳ (2 Cor. 11:6), this does not mean that he was unacquainted with rhetoric. His defense before Felix (Acts 24) displays a knowledge of forensic rhetoric, and his letters also contain rhetorical features. Winter says that Paul refused to use rhetoric in spoken presentations because such rhetoric was too often accompanied by deceit, whereas he did use rhetoric in his epistles. The use of spoken rhetoric would undercut the message of the cross and the truth that divine power is displayed in and through human weakness.

The work of Winter and Litfin (see above) supports Johannes Munck's claim that theological divisions were not at the root of the controversy in 1 Corinthians 1-4. Paul and Apollos were assessed in terms of their rhetorical ability. Winter also makes a good case for identifying these opponents as sophists. Even if they were not sophists per se, they were probably significantly influenced by sophist traditions. I believe that Winter (and Litfin) are correct in saying that Paul renounces the use of rhetoric in preaching because the use of such rhetoric would obscure the message of the cross. Such a conclusion is directly relevant to readers of this journal, for there is a kind of preaching which displays the rhetorical artistry and the dazzling personality of the speaker. Paul

renounces such preaching because it blots out the message of the cross, which proclaims that God saves through a crucified man. If God saves through weakness, the messenger who proclaims the gospel cannot advertise his strength by stunning his hearers with rhetorical artifices.

Despite agreeing with much of Winter's thesis, not everything is equally convincing. It is doubtful that πίστις in 1 Cor. 2:5 refers to "proof" rather than faith, for Paul abstains from rhetoric so that the Corinthians' faith will depend upon God rather than human beings. Nor is it at all evident that some of the Corinthians were imploring for the return of Apollos because they preferred him to Paul. Paul informs the Corinthians that he (i.e. Paul!) desired Apollos to return to Corinth (1 Cor. 16:12), but no evidence is adduced that the Corinthians sought Apollos' return. Envy and strife in the community, although consistent with sophist opponents, could arise in a community for many reasons. Sophists were not alone in desiring to be praised. I am also unpersuaded that 1 Corinthians 9 provides evidence for sophist opponents. Wandering teachers of many stripes defrauded their hearers, speaking in order to get funds. Moreover, despite the majority opinion, it is doubtful that Paul engages in self-defense or a polemic against opponents in 1 Corinthians 9. The issue of finances comes to center stage in 2 Corinthians (2:17; 11:7-21; 12:13-18), but one should not impose this upon the first letter. I would suggest that in 1 Corinthians 9 that Paul inserts the example of his foregoing his right to receive pay precisely because it is non-controversial. It illustrates the principle that he desires to convey on food offered to idols (chs. 8-10). The latter is the subject of controversy not the former. Paul does not try to adjudicate the debated question of food offered to idols by introducing another unsettled issue.

Winter's thesis raises the whole issue of mirror reading which has been extensively discussed in NT studies. Winter makes a good case for the opponents being sophists in 2 Corinthians 10-13 and 1 Corinthians, and there is little doubt in either instance that Paul's adversaries were entranced with Greek rhetoric. Infatuation with Greek rhetoric, however, does not demonstrate that the opponents were sophists. Perhaps they were. I am less confident than Winter regarding the specific identification offered. Nonetheless, the book is full of insights with regard to both 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Winter's knowledge of the Greco-Roman world helps us see more sharply how Paul renounced rhetoric in speaking so that the gospel of Christ would not be compromised.

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