

Hyun Ho Park. *Intergroup Conflict, Recategorization, and Identity Construction in Acts: Breaking the Cycle of Slander, Labeling and Violence*. London: T&T Clark, 2024. PP. XVIII + 201. \$39.95. ISBN-10: 0567713318; ISBN-13: 978-0567713315

Interest in the social realities of the world that the earliest Jesus-followers inhabited has long fascinated historians of Christian origins. Recent scholarship has recognized not only the external realities that Jesus-followers had to negotiate, but also the internal creative agency that they exhibited in the writings they left behind. The language of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) have provided recent scholars with the vocabulary and theoretical background with which to study this phenomenon.

Hyun Ho Park's study of Paul's arrest and early trials in Acts steps boldly into this field. Throughout this book, Park highlights instances of ambivalence, social creativity, and recategorization, arguing that Acts provides readers with material to construct a distinctive Christian identity through the conflicts in the narrative. Coming to Paul's arrest and trials in Acts 21:17–23:35, he demonstrates the fluid nature of Paul's identity in relation to Jesus, Romans, and Pharisees, as well as his creativity in negotiating the boundaries of these respective identities. Thus, the charges brought against Paul, in addition to being mostly false, are ambiguous in ways that Paul exploits. Paul demonstrates social creativity later in this story when he presents himself as both a Torah-observant Jew and a Roman citizen (Acts 22:22–29). These identities are situation-specific, and he adeptly utilizes each to his advantage. Such creativity is closely connected to another strategy Park identifies, namely recategorization. When Paul recognizes that his claim to be law-abiding is not persuasive to his Jewish audience, he alters the categories for the conflict so that an argument breaks out between Pharisees and Sadducees (Acts 22:30–23:11).

Throughout the study, Park illustrates how Paul's overlapping identities shed light on Luke's strategy for constructing a distinctive Christian identity. He illustrates that the Lukan narrative itself falls into the cycle of slander, labeling, and violence at the discourse level, shows that the history of interpretation has led to the misuse of scripture justifying violence against Jews, and suggests an alternative cycle of approval, investigation, and peace.

Park's reading of Acts asks readers to wrestle with two issues.

First, Paul's overlapping subgroup identities and their relation to an overarching superordinate identity implicitly beckons readers to consider their own way of identifying themselves. Park even turns the tools of SIT on himself, considering the implications of his study from his own South Korean and American sociocultural milieus.

Second, Park's study considers the degree to which Luke's attempt to break the cycle of slander and conflict is ultimately successful. While undoing the labels and violence perpetrated by Jewish characters in Acts, does the narrative ultimately re-inscribe these practices through the actions of Paul and his supporters? If so, how might this cycle ultimately be broken?

Park's study explores a key section of the story in Acts and provides a detailed study of the ways in which identities relate and overlap. It offers a valuable addition to both scholarship on Luke-Acts and social identity theory in the New Testament. Graduate students, researchers, and the libraries that support them will want to have access to this work.

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