

James Constantine Hanges, *Paul, Founder of Churches. A Study in Light of the Evidence for the Role of "Founder-Figures" in the Hellenistic-Roman Period* (WUNT 1/292; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2012). Pp. 550 + XXIII. € 129.00. ISBN 978-3-16-150716-8.

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The book *Paul, Founder of Churches* portrays the apostle Paul as a founder of cultic communities according to a traditional Greek model. James Constantine Hanges (JCH) is an associate professor in Miami University's Department of Comparative Religion, the author of *Christ, the Image of the Church: The Construction of a New Cosmology and the Rise of Christianity* (Aurora, CO 2006) and *Comparing Religions: Possibilities and Perils?* (Leiden 2006). His scholarly interests revolve around Early Christianity, Saint Paul and Greco-Roman Antiquity. In *Paul, Founder of Churches* JCH argues that Paul's understanding of his role and activities reflect the widely recognized Greek pattern of cult foundation. The book consists of Prologue and seven chapters followed by the impressive multilingual Bibliography, and the three useful indexes: Ancient Authors Index, Modern Authors Index, and Subject Index.

In Prologue, the author describes the origins, purpose, and general structure of his work. He also introduces the readers to his methodology based on comparative study, historical-critical analysis of primary sources, literary criticism, ethnography, contemporary culture studies and postcolonial criticism. All the aforementioned approaches will be employed to explore the phenomenon of Pauline *ekklēsiai* which, according to JCH, are cultural and religious constructs that arose from the exchange between the dominant (Greco-Roman) and the dominated (Jewish-Christian) group to create something that is unique, but definitely not *sui generis*. In his study, the author will argue that Paul in shaping his self-presentation employs simultaneously multiple sources, among which one finds not only Jewish prophetic traditions but also, or rather mostly, Greek concepts and behaviors.

In Chapter 1, "Introduction", JCH, making reference to the history of religions, gives the defining characteristics of the ancient Greek founder-figure. In contrast to the definitions found in modern studies, the image

of the founder for ancient Greeks depended predominantly on revelation and charisma. Here the author makes an important, from his point of view, methodological clarification on the “postcolonial optic” he is going to use in his comparative study. For JCH, the term doesn’t mean “the condition after colonialism”, but rather “the enduring situation of contestation, resistance, assimilation, reciprocal mirroring, and mimicry that frames life” in the society of Paul (p. 11).

After this methodological remark and after explaining the argumentative strategy in the chapters to follow, the author turns to the problem of comparing Paul with Hellenistic founder-figures. JCH takes a polemical stance against the two scholars, Hans von Campenhausen and Rudolf Sohm, who represent for him the traditional consensus about Paul’s apostolic role. The above mentioned scholars agree on the point decisively challenged by JCH, namely, that the uniqueness of Paul’s apostleship doesn’t allow for even a remote resemblance to any Hellenistic or Jewish institutions – he is a *sui generis* phenomenon. The author presents their positions, uncovers the ideological (anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish) agendas standing behind their reasoning, and points at the enduring elements of their legacy (the conviction on the uniqueness of Paul’s assignment to preach the Gospel).

In Chapter 2, “The Founder as Paradigm”, JCH argues for the presence of a well-known foundational paradigm in Greek culture, reaching as deep as Homer and strengthened by Delphic oracle in the period of Greek colonization (VIII BCE). The paradigm was so pervasive that every Greek city sponsored a civic cult in honor of its legendary founder. The paradigm underwent some changes in the course of history, yet always preserving its cultic character and certain key aspects, among which the author enumerates founder’s personal selection by deity, his task of establishing the cult, and his effort of securing connection between newly established institutions and venerable past.

Subsequently, the author proposes a narrative genre definition of the Greek foundation-legend pointing at its *Sitz im Leben* in the context of polemic and apology, the contestation of community’s identity which the story is to defend. Next, JCH gives the two examples of the foundation-legend: the legend of Battos, founder of Cyrene, and the Roman legend on the transferal of the cult of Asklepios. Having compared the story of Battos to the story of Moses (in Exodus and Philo), and to the characters found in Josephus, in the Books of Maccabees and in the Qumran Writings, the author concludes that foundational legend has no substantial parallel in Jewish tradition.

Chapter 3, “The Role of the Founder According to Selected Texts: the Transferals of the Cult of Serapis to Delos and Opous”, is a survey of

specific epigraphical examples that demonstrate the enduring influence of the foundational paradigm from the early Hellenistic period to the times of Paul. The author examines the case of transferring the private cult to public sphere on the example of the so-called Delian Aretalogy of Serapis. The text narrating the event in which Apollonios II, the third generation immigrant from Egypt, receives a commission from Serapis to construct for him a public shrine, is first translated and analyzed from the point of view of its form and structure. According to JCH, it serves apologetic and propagandistic purposes and establishes the pedigree of the founder. In the commentary on the text, JCH pays attention to the effort of rooting the new facility and cultic practices within a chain of tradition. Here the “excursus” on the origins and complex character of the cult of Serapis appears. After that, the author comes back to the presence of tradition in the foundational paradigm and discusses the theme of validation: the founder must ground the newly-established institutions in a respectably ancient tradition, accommodating them simultaneously to the needs of his community.

Another element belonging to the core of paradigm found in the discussed text is the personal selection of the founder (Apollonios II) by the deity (Apollonius II is summoned to his task personally by Serapis in a dream). It's a necessary component of the story, because the newly introduced cults arouse opposition, mentioned also in the Delian aretalogy (Apollonius II faces a trial, corporal punishment and fines). Such an opposition can be a serious threat to the enterprise of the founder, which the author further shows on the example of the cult of Dionysius as described in Euripides' *Bakchai* and in other ancient sources. The god triumphing over founder's opponents (Apollonius II wins with the help of god that during the trial paralyzes his enemies) legitimizes his mission and the newly founded cultic institutions. The same elements are discovered in another text analyzed briefly by the author, namely, the Opountian foundation-legend. JCH, as in the former case, translates the text and analyzes its form and structure. The transfer of the cult of Serapis performed by Eurynomos shows here the same concern with the personal selection of the founder, god's initiative in establishing the new cultic place, and the continuity of tradition.

In the next Chapter 4, “The Role of the Founder-Figure as Cult Authority and Organizer”, the author offers a look at the founder's role in undertaking the specific responsibility of cult organizer, as well as in determining the particular group-defining characteristics and the criteria of participation in the newly established institutions. The two epigraphic evidences analyzed in this chapter are the foundation-legend of the revised household cult of Dionysius of Philadelphia and the document on the attic cult of Mēn founded

by Xantos, the Lykian Slave. In both cases the author proceeds in the same way starting with the translation of text and then going to its structure and exposition. In the two analyzed fragments the personal selection of the founder by deity is stressed: Dionysius receives his commission in a dream from Zeus, while Xantos is instructed by Mēn Tyrranos. It means the accreditation of the whole cult. In both cases also the founders take effort to provide the laws organizing the participation in the cult. In the household code of Dionysius<sup>7</sup>, the regulations regard those who conspire against others and harm them, the violators of marriage and family moral norms. The individuals transgressing the *leges sacrae* are to be excluded from the cult and publically exposed. The laws, to which the new participants agree voluntarily, are to guard the unity among the members of cultic community and prevent the behavior that could destroy it. Xantos is more concerned with ritual impurity, related to sexuality and sickness, and with retaining control over the cult. The founder reserves for himself the right to perform sacrifices or to designate his cultic successors. Along numerous points of contact between these practices and Paul, the author notices one difference: “in the case of non-Christian founders there is no comparable, formerly unknown body of doctrine to be learned” (p.316).

In Chapter 5, “The Mysteries of Andania and the Enduring Legacy of the Founder”, JCH shows how the model described by him serves to retain special position and privileges of the founder. The case to be studied are the mysteries of Andania with its central figure, reformer and founder, Mnasistratos. The author first introduces the readers into the history of the cult of Demeter at Andania and only subsequently gives the translation, structural analysis, and commentary on the more important bylaws regulating the performance of the mysteries. *Leges sacrae* deal with proper clothing and accommodation of cult participants, with disorderly persons and appointment of disciplinary officers, with managing the cult’s money and preparation of sacrificial animals, with punishments for the violators of sacred regulations, with the rules concerning the sacred meal, with the management of the facilities of the mysteries, and with other administrative matters. In his commentary, JCH stresses the importance of the analyzed bylaws in continuing the sanctity of tradition. Mnasistratos operates a fundamental revision of the cult as he transfers it from a private sphere to the state. Such a reformation of the cult, with the introduction of new processional rites and assignments, means, according to the author, “the Messenian identity contestation”, the establishment of new social order (p.366-367). In the same time, however, it reinforces the relative social positions of women, free-persons and slaves bringing to view the coercive power of the state that

guards them. Mnasistratos, the founder-figure, understood by the tradition as the *hierophantēs*, the highest official and guide of the mysteries, is honored by the state and provided with financial remuneration.

In the last Chapter 6, “The Founder of Churches: A Comparison with Hellenistic-Roman Cult Practices”, JCH, drawing conclusions from the analyzed material, argues that Paul’s imagining of his call can be well understood as appropriation of the Hellenic paradigm of the founder. The elements of the paradigm are easily discernible in Paul’s own letters. The apostle presents himself as personally commissioned by God to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. That means a “transfer of rites” to an unknown region. Consequently, he manages his churches and exercises his authority in the communities introducing himself as a model to be imitated. The presentation of his apostolic credentials serves an apologetic purpose and it is, according to the author, “the crucial element in Paul’s exercise of authority over his congregations” (p.392). Paul also plays the role of the cult transferer by transmitting to the newly founded communities the pre-existing rites of baptism and Lord’s Supper. By referring to Scriptures and to the figure of Abraham, the apostle establishes his mission in the venerable stream of Jewish tradition. Paul with his self-understanding as “foundation-layer” orders the internal life of his communities with regard to moral life (1 Cor 5 – 6), proper cult participation (1 Cor 11), and the charismata management (1 Cor 12 – 14).

Further, the apostle shows the typical for *leges sacrae* concern for the cohesion of believers. In his task of founder, Paul resorts to the medium of personal letters, a novelty for foundational paradigm, through which he gives instructions and exercises his authority. JCH argues that Paul might have even issued a foundational document for his congregation in Corinth, the traces of which can be found in 1 Cor 4,6. All in all, his instructions reflect Hellenistic cultic strategy and are modeled on the common *leges sacrae*.

The second part of the last chapter is dedicated to the exploration of Paul’s legacy as a founder of churches. In the deutero-Pauline material (2 Thess, Col, Eph) Paul emerges as the founder of the believing communities or as the principal authority figure. The same image can be found in the Pastoral letters which stress Paul’s special call from God and the authority transferred to his successors.

At the end, returning to the problem of comparing Paul with Hellenistic founder-figures, the author warns that his project was not to isolate the “genetic lines of development” of Pauline churches (p. 451). It rather served to sketch a general image of the cultural encounter between the apostle and the ancient world. Once again coming back to the theses advanced by von

Campenhausen and Sohm, JCH denies the unparalleled character of the apostolic churches. He also reiterates that Jewish model could not supply *modus operandi* the apostle required. The fact that Paul's self-understanding of his office provokes so much hostility, is, according to the author, the proof of his departure from traditional Jewish patterns. It also turns on the question of the visionary experience of Paul, chosen by the apostle to legitimize his mission (cf. also pp. 25, 138-139, 382-391, 454). The chapter finishes with the reinstatement of the main thesis of the author: Pauline churches, without denying them some novel theological ideas or social patterns (Paul is not simply borrowing an artifact of Greek culture), may be called unique, but not *sui generis*.

In Chapter 7, "Epilogue", the author summarizes concisely the content and findings comprised in the chapters 1-6 and adds two more things. The first one is the analysis of the expression *kainē ktisis* which, according to JCH, has a sociological meaning and, rather than to cosmological recreation, given by the author refers to the "new community Paul has founded made up, without precedent, of Jews and Gentiles" (p. 470). The second issue is the answer to the question posed at the very beginning of the book "whether or not we can speak of the historical Jesus or Paul as the founder of Christianity" (p. 472-473). The short answer given by the author is no. First, Paul enters the cult whose object is already the risen Lord – the foundation and the founder of the new community, the initiator of *ekklēsiai*. Second, Paul didn't see himself as the founder of new religion but rather a transferer and ambassador of its cult. At the end, JCH, nuancing a bit his approach, states that "the Christian communities were in many ways something new, an innovation" (p. 474). The author's task was not to explore the details of this novelty, but rather its cultural connection with the Hellenistic world. In light of the presented analysis and according to the postcolonial methodology used by JCH, one can speak of continuity and discontinuity, but not of cultural or ethno-religious purity of the Pauline churches.

*Paul, Founder of Churches* by James Constantine Hanges is an excellent, well-documented scholarly work. It's based on a thorough analysis of ancient sources and it shows impressive knowledge of the bibliography on the issue. The translation and commentary on the epigraphical evidence provided by the author surely help us understand better not only the Greek pattern of founder-figure, but also the mission of Paul. Pauline churches, as the author rightly argues, cannot be properly understood as detached from socio-religious patterns of their times. The following observation brings an especially interesting contribution to the old but still present debate on the opposition between "spiritual" and "institutional" church: „An early

Christian like Paul appears to have seen no fundamental antithesis between the putative ‘spiritual’ nature of the *ekklēsia* and many of the supposedly ‘profane’ structures of organization used by his non-Christian contemporaries. Rather, in Paul’s view, a structure of organization is so fundamentally necessary to the existence of the community that the means of proper order are described as in themselves reflecting the nature of the divine, i.e., the structures are god-given (...)” (p.377).

Notwithstanding all the merits of this truly impressive volume, at times the analysis provided by the author are so detailed that the reader cannot see the forest for the tree. One of the examples is the author’s presentation of the origins and complex character of the cult of Serapis (pp. 166-186), that could be more concise. It indisputably shows the erudition of the author and his knowledge of the discussed matters, but from the point of view of reader those not so “brief excursuses” can distract and make us lose sight of the main thread.

The author also seems to dismiss too decisively the interesting points of contact between Paul and the foundational story of Exodus. Moses, against the claim of the author, doesn’t burn all the bridges with the past establishing the connection between the God of fathers and Jahwe, and thus rooting the new experience in the venerable tradition of patriarchs (Exod 3). It’s also not quite clear why JCH denies the repetitiveness of the pattern of Exodus in the story of Israel, as we find it in Deutero-Isaiah and other post-exilic prophets. All in all, the Greek and Jewish foundational stories have some points in common which could suggest the universality of the pattern and Paul’s use of both sources.

Equally arguable may seem the JCH’s conclusion that “the prophetic call plays only a minor role in Paul’s self-description” (p. 386 n. 31). The prophetic pattern is well documented in Paul, especially in the Corinthian correspondence (cf. e.g. Jeffrey W. Aernie, *Is Paul also among the Prophets? An Examination of the Relationship between Paul and the Old Testament Prophetic Tradition in 2 Corinthians* [T&T Clark 2012]). The explanation saying that Paul modifies the pattern all too significantly going outside to the Gentiles misses the point, because the same opening toward the nations is already present in Isaiah 19,23-25, in Deutero-Isaiah’s Songs of the Servant, or in Jonah. The author doesn’t deny altogether the influence of the prophetic tradition on Paul, but he clearly underestimates it.

More critical approach could be also welcome in the case of the main thesis advanced by JCH, that is, that Paul models his call after Greek foundational legend. To be sure, one can find this thesis both interesting and well-argued, but it should be pursued in a more nuanced manner. Isn’t it

intriguing that we can spot so many structural similarities between Paul and the Greek founder's paradigm, and in the same time the apostle in 1 Cor 9 renounces honors and privileges belonging to founder? Further, in 2 Cor 10 – 13 he presents himself as a suffering apostle imitating the Crucified Lord, in opposition to the preachers following the patterns of pagan honor and power. By the way, it's also here where Paul departs from the "visions and revelations" regarded as a hallmark of true apostleship. He wants to be judged only on the basis of what he did or said in Corinth (cf. 2 Cor 12,1-6). How is it to be reconciled with JCH's claim that it's the visionary experience that Paul chose to legitimize his apostleship and to distinguish himself from Jewish pattern? (cf. pp.25,138-139,382-391,454).

All in all, one cannot be not sure if Greek founder's paradigm does fit the deeply *Christological* model of Paul's apostleship and if it could be purposefully appropriated by the apostle. As I understand it, the "postcolonial optic", employed by JCH in original and well-balanced way, to some extent helps to solve this tension: Paul uses the dominant cultural model not only to express his self-identity, but also to contest the dominant culture standing behind it. At the end, one can see that *Paul, Founder of Churches* is truly an inspirational book. It will surely give new stimulus and points for discussion to the scholars and students interested in Early Christianity, the phenomenon both unique and deeply rotted in Greco-Roman culture.