

Review of Butova, Elena, *The Four Prohibitions of Acts 15 and Their Common Background in Genesis 1-3*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018

In this first full-length treatment of the Apostolic decree, Butova offers a “natural law” solution for a passage that poses notorious challenges for theories about the Jew-gentile problem in Luke-Acts. Surveying in ch.1 how the decree’s awkwardly Jewish elements and other uncertainties have dogged both textual history and later scholarship, in ch.2 Butova analyses Acts 15:1-35 and 21:25 using semantic diagrams, noting several midrashic-style allusions to creation. In ch.3, she discerns in Gen 1-3 a creation-fall-recreation scheme undergirding the decree’s curious mix of ethical and ritual concerns before showing in ch.4 how that same duality runs through wider evidence from Luke and Paul. She concludes in ch.5 that a notion of universal “true worship” gives the prohibitions their special character.

Much of the value of this study comes from its comprehensive introduction and efforts to commend an existing position in a new way. Beyond this, queries arise, not least in retaining a temporary or accommodation option and minimising the Jewish dimension. These include pressing the intertexture in primarily theological terms when creation is of intrinsic halakhic interest (as in Acts 10), and working out of a traditional position on the law and a ritual/moral distinction that many are now questioning. Thus, if Genesis’ concerns about blood and idolatry remain essentially Jewish efforts to stake a claim in a gentile world, Moses remains implicated even in pre-Mosaic “natural law” and the problem remains. Nevertheless, Butova helpfully recalls us to a passage that continues to challenge both traditional and contemporary reconstructions alike.

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