READING EPHESIANS:
EXPLORING SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE TEXT

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how Ephesians engages in social entrepreneurship, that is, the deliberate shaping of emerging Christianness by providing ideological and social paradigms for the community of Christ-followers. The eclectic theoretical framework and deuter-Pauline reading position have two particular purposes which seek to advance Ephesians’ scholarship. The first aim is to offer diversified, theoretically informed social-scientific readings that demonstrate how extensive socio-ideological shaping is for the discourse, and how the writer negotiates different group processes throughout the letter. The second aim is to examine emerging Christianness in the text, testing its ideological and social contours and its reforms upon Jewish traditions, based on interpretations of the Christ-event without the theological presupposition of assuming that something was wrong with the Judaism(s) of the day. Instead, these readings of Ephesians examine how a late first century Christ-follower understood Jesus’ Messiahship, its relation to the Jewish faith and its consequences for the non-Israelite community members in the Christ-movement.

Social entrepreneurship is used as an umbrella for a variety of social processes reflected in the text. These readings of Ephesians examine how the writer, as social entrepreneur, engages in a self-enhancing discourse that reinforces three basic components of communality. These include the construction of a positive in-group identity of Christ-followers, providing the group with ideological and social legitimating, and finally, establishing group norms and encouraging coherence that contributes to group aims, using positive and negative examples of different lifestyles and behaviours. This thesis also discusses textual reflection of communal relations with other groups in Greco-Roman antiquity and related cultural reforms. It examines how Ephesians positions the group in a Jewish symbolic universe, which is forced to make room for Christ and his non-Israelite followers. Finally, this thesis explores Ephesians’ attitude toward non-Israelites and their need for resocialisation.