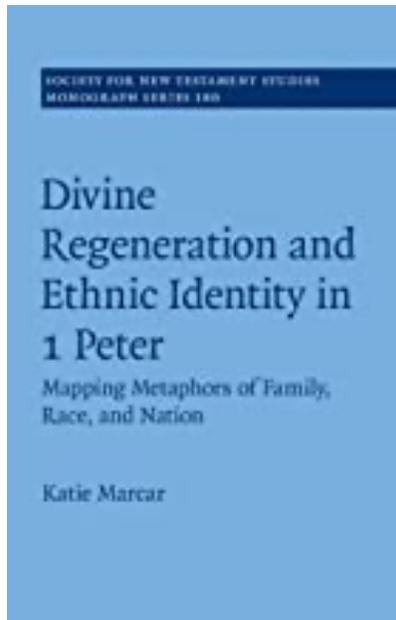


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Katie Marcar

***Divine Regeneration and Ethnic Identity in 1 Peter:
Mapping Metaphors of Family, Race, and Nation***

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In *Divine Regeneration and Ethnic Identity in 1 Peter*, Katie Marcar observes that 1 Peter is the only New Testament writing that describes Christians as members of a new race (*genos*). God is the parent who creates the new race through rebirth and nurtures the new entity with spiritual milk. Marcar examines the concept of metaphor, the literature of Second Temple Judaism, and early Christian writings to discuss race, ethnicity, rebirth, kinship, temple, and priesthood as they relate to 1 Peter's presentation of Christian identity.

The brief introduction explains that the book offers a new study of spiritual regeneration in 1 Peter, a key topic in 1:3—2:10, and pays particular attention to 2:9–10, “where Christians are described as a γένος, ἔθνος, and λαός” (2). Previous treatments of the metaphor of divine regeneration have been of limited value for Petrine studies, according to Marcar, for four reasons: (1) those studies have given only brief attention to 1 Peter; (2) scholars tend to read Pauline, gospel, and baptismal notions into 1 Peter; (3) previous studies superimposed the possible origins of the language of rebirth in the New Testament onto 1 Peter; and (4) earlier studies “do not fully appreciate the gendered aspects of the Petrine imagery” (4). Marcar's strategy is to focus on the literature of Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity and to offer insights from recent investigations of metaphor.

Marcar's first chapter discusses ethnicity and race in the modern and ancient worlds. Relying largely on Anthony D. Smith's *The Ethnic Origin of Nations*, which names six parts that together constitute ethnic identity, Marcar makes an initial case for how the author of 1 Peter presents Christian identity as an ethnicity. Marcar explores what is meant by Jewish and Greek identities. In the case of Jewish identity, Marcar concludes that 1 Peter has only a few things in common with the concept of Jewishness in the Second Temple period. Greek identity, however, could be fluid, often relying on cultural markers rather than birth, and Marcar asserts that the author of 1 Peter pays attention to birth, or common ancestry, and the fluidity or "malleability" (23) of ethnicity.

The second chapter focuses on the concept of metaphor, exploring its use in 1 Peter and other places in the Bible. Marcar's detailed look into metaphor climaxes with an explanation of the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), a concept from the field of linguistics that is applied at various points within the book. The MIP is meant to be a tool to assist in removing subjectivity in identifying what constitutes a metaphor. Metaphor need not be taken as the opposite of what is real and can be helpful in explaining theological ideas, since truth can be expressed figuratively. Marcar's insights explain how 1 Peter's metaphorical language of regeneration assists in developing a new identity for the Christian community.

The third chapter gives an overview of the structure of 1 Peter, a document that Marcar describes as "an early Christian diaspora letter" modeled after Jewish diaspora letters (52). The focus, however, is on 1:3–2:10, a section outlined in detail under the heading "The People of God" (61). The main metaphors for divine regeneration are contained within 1:3–2:10, yet Marcar asserts that the "people of God" concept "permeates the letter from prescript to postscript" (62). Having established the significance of metaphor and 1 Peter's use of divine regeneration as a framing concept for the letter, Marcar moves on to explain rebirth in detail.

Marcar's fourth chapter is an in-depth exploration of the language of rebirth in 1 Peter. The vocabulary of divine regeneration in 1 Peter has similarities with Johannine literature, and both follow Jewish tradition in viewing God as "divine begetter" (116). Even though Judaism does not describe God as giving birth anew, God is often described as "a begetter or birthmother" (115). In 1 Peter, however, divine rebirth is through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and believers become God's heirs (1 Pet 1:4). The new status as heirs is meant to engender hope among a beleaguered people.

Marcar's fifth chapter delves into the seed metaphors of 1 Pet 1:23–25. As with the previous chapter, Marcar searches the literature of Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity, concluding that 1 Peter emphasizes divine parentage and the *concomitant* distinction between believers and unbelievers. Divine regeneration and seed metaphors leads to a discussion of spiritual milk.

The sixth chapter treats 1 Pet 2:1–3, where Christians are referred to as newborns who crave their mother’s milk. Marcar focuses on breastfeeding in Second Temple Jewish literature and notes how mother’s milk was not only for physical nourishment but also to transmit ethnic identity. Feminine imagery (even if not feminine vocabulary) is used of God, and 1 Pet 2:1–3 “was part of several colorful, polyvalent traditions that involved ethnicity, wet-nursing, and cross-gender imagery, particularly as it is applied to God” (196). The intimate picture of a nursing newborn and its mother coincides with Jewish and early Christian tradition to indicate spiritual development.

Marcar’s seventh chapter is an exegesis of 1 Pet 2:4–10, a passage that employs several passages in the Old Testament and coincides with themes found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, such as the notion of a community embodying God’s temple. Marcar is careful to point out that the author of 1 Peter does not view the letter’s recipients as a replacement for the Jerusalem temple, even if members of the Qumran community saw themselves in such a way. Temple and priesthood language is metaphorical, part of several descriptors that signify the formation of God’s people through divine regeneration.

The eighth chapter consists largely of tables. The first lists forty-six words from 1 Peter and assigns each to a broad category (source domain) and to a more specific category (subdomain). For example, *διασποράς* in 1:1 is assigned to “Ethnicity: Diaspora/Sojourning” (256). The second table collects all the terms with an “ethnicity” source domain, and the third table shows terms with a “family” source domain. Through mapping the metaphors, Marcar reaches three conclusions about how 1 Peter shapes Christian identity in the context of opposition (263): (1) Christian membership is belonging to a sojourning nation; (2) Christian membership is being begotten anew and growing up in God’s family; (3) God’s family is an ethnic group.

Marcar’s ninth chapter concludes the book by providing a summary of each of the preceding chapters and offering three ways that *Divine Regeneration and Ethnic Identity in 1 Peter* might influence future New Testament studies (274): (1) the use of metaphor in Jewish and early Christian texts; (2) ethnic identity, especially in Pauline studies; (3) the use of “gendered aspects of imagery and language” (vis-à-vis Marcar’s exploration of paternal and maternal imagery related to God in 1 Peter). Following the conclusion is an appendix, “The Language of Rebirth in Rabbinic Judaism,” in which Marcar reveals the extent to which 1 Peter relies upon Jewish traditions in the letter’s mention of new birth.

Seeing the word *race* in Marcar’s subtitle could trigger questions about how 1 Peter might offer insights, if any, into contemporary discussions of race among Bible readers. In recent years, some studies in 1 Peter that explore the notions of kinship or ethnicity offer practical implications for readers—especially those who have been minoritized. For example, Shively T. J. Smith’s *Strangers to the Family: Diaspora and 1 Peter’s Invention of God’s Household* deliberately addresses the marginalization of African Americans, and Janette Ok’s *Constructing Ethnic Identity in 1 Peter:*

Who You Are No Longer confronts the perpetual foreigner label that Asian Americans face and raises questions regarding ways that Asian American Christians might find exhortation as well as consolation from 1 Peter. If society alienated all of 1 Peter's recipients, then surely the women and enslaved people had it the roughest. Some modern Bible readers might wonder how being part of a new ethnic group through divine regeneration benefited enslaved people (1 Pet 2:18–21) and women (3:1–6). Perhaps Marcar's engaging analysis can help us consider anew the solidarity meant to exist among people who are members of a new ethnic group—a new family created through divine regeneration.