

documents, as an excuse to reject all biblical criticism. There is nothing in this book to comfort those who are afraid to think. On the contrary: it is an encouragement to grapple anew with the Jesus of the Gospels, who refuses to be held fast in any consensus, but always "goes ahead" and summons us to follow him. *The Point of it All* deserves a wide readership.

BRIAN MacNEIL CRV

PAUL AND POLITICS: EKKLESIA, ISRAEL, IMPERIUM, INTERPRETATION edited by Richard A. Horsley, *Trinity Press International*, Harrisburg PA, 2000. Pp 248, £19.95 pbk.

The Swedish biblical scholar Krister Stendahl is less well known than he deserves to be in the English-speaking world despite his years teaching at Harvard. It is not possible to be sure whether this is a contributory cause or a symptom of the fact that much Pauline scholarship, especially in this country, continues to focus on Paul's language about justification by faith, even though this represents only a very small part of his theological vision. For many in the academy, and even more so among the well-read non-experts in the Protestant traditions, Paul is at the heart of the New Testament, Romans at the heart of the Pauline corpus, and the doctrine of justification by faith at the heart of Romans. If we owe it to E.P. Sanders that this part of Pauline theology is no longer typically read outside the context of first century Judaism, we can credit Stendahl with the attempt to ensure that it is no longer read outside the context of Paul's much broader portrait of the impact of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Especially, as this collection of essays celebrates, he brought to our attention the impact faith in Christ necessarily had and still has upon our approach to the political world.

One of the most important aspects of Stendahl's programme is the constant emphasis on the particularity of each of Paul's letters; it is true that this can sometimes fall into the trap of using the letters purely to reconstruct the history of Pauline Christian communities, rather than allowing history to help us read the biblical texts as Scripture, but when exercised with caution this focus on historical particularity allows us to rescue Paul from a narrowly individualistic reading. Richard Horsley, the editor of this collection, provides in his contribution a fine example of this approach. Writing on 'Rhetoric and Empire' in 1 Corinthians, he makes careful use of our increasing understanding of the rhetoric of political discourse in the first century to show how Paul presented to the Greek Christians of the Roman Empire a powerfully political gospel. He is to be especially congratulated for taking proper account of two often-overlooked factors: first, that Paul's message, though profoundly social and political in implication, cannot be reduced to these aspects, and so it is impossible to force his letters into the strait-jacket of the forms of deliberative rhetoric. Thus 'we should attend less to the formal types of rhetoric than to the rhetorical situation.' Secondly, Horsley rightly places Paul's rhetorical presentation of a spiritually-transcendent

opposition to the structures of the Empire within the framework of Jewish apocalyptic traditions. The apocalyptic aspects of Pauline theology have until recently been largely ignored, and yet are central to any understanding of Paul's vision; Horsley's combination of them with the rhetorical-critical approach provides a fascinating new reading of 1 Corinthians.

Inevitably in a collection of fifteen essays not all are as valuable or as enjoyable as Horsley's. The essay by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza requires perhaps more hard work than it repays, though some readers no doubt have more patience than I with phrases such as 'politics of otherness' and 'rhetorics of othering', which seem to me to mystify rather than clarify concepts that are really fairly straightforward. The same readers may also not be irritated by the appearance of 'G*d' in this essay. Of rather more use is Robert Jewett's attempt, broadly successful, to find specific exegetical evidence of the position Schüssler Fiorenza wishes to take. Short essays by three American academic whose names were new to me – Sheila Briggs, Cynthia Briggs Ketteridge and Antionette Clark Wire – provide valuable correctives to the traditional picture of Paul's addressees, who have too often been made in the image of the highly educated, affluent and (of course) male scholars who reconstruct them. To see them instead as a ragbag of slaves, the dispossessed and the unacceptably eccentric, with a high proportion of women, inevitably draws our attention to the socially explosive implications of Paul's claim that these are the elect of God.

It is, finally, pleasing to read contributions from N.T. Wright, always an entertaining and provocative, if sometimes over-confident, writer, and from Mark Nanos, who offers a clear and persuasive summary of the thesis of his just-published book, *The Irony of Galatians*, which concludes that the argument in this most fascinating letter is to be read as an intra-Jewish debate rather than one between Christians. For the Pauline scholar there is bound to be something in this collection to stimulate both delight and passionate objections, and for the rest of us, though occasionally a little opaque, the collection offers an intriguing introduction to the new approach to Paul and his letters.

RICHARD OUNSWORTH OP

MORE ABOUT MARK by John Fenton, *SPCK*, London, 2001 Pp. vii+119, £9.99 pbk.

Canon John Fenton, tutor to generations of Oxford undergraduates (b.1920), is best known for his Penguin commentary on *Matthew*. While respected for its careful attention to literary patterns, this commentary does not have a reputation for breaking new ground. But now Canon Fenton is in a valedictory mood. He reminisces about the tutorials he received from R.H.Lightfoot, one of the two pioneers of form criticism in England (the other was Vincent Taylor). He reveals that his favourite gospel is Mark, whom he interprets here in a boldly ironic, postmodern way that I am inclined to call nihilistic. Canon Fenton would prefer no doubt to call it apophatic, existentialist or mystical. For one of the surprises and original contributions of this book is its exploration of the links between Mark's

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