

Book Review

Mark HARDING and Alanna NOBBS, eds.,
All Things to All Cultures: Paul among Jews, Greeks, and Romans
(Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2013) pp. xx + 406, Pb. \$ 50.00.

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All Things to All Cultures contains 14 important articles and 2 helpful appendices on Paul by 15 scholars. In the Foreword, Alanna Nobbs says: “All contributors have links in varying degrees with the Australian College of Theology and/or the Department of Ancient History at Macquarie University (often with both institutions)” (p. ix). Some of these studies take a close look at the great Apostle of the Gentiles in his complex first-century context – in his impactful interactions with the Jewish and the Greco-Roman worlds – as he sought to communicate to them the Good News about the Lord Jesus Christ. Others scrutinize the character and the message of the letters written by this great Christian theologian and pastor.

What does Paul hold out to twenty-first-century readers? Murray J. Smith (in his “Paul in the Twenty-first Century”) takes us on an itinerary to highlight the importance of what writers like R. Bultmann, A. Schweitzer, W. D. Davies, K. Stendahl, E. Käsemann, E. P. Sanders, J. D. G. Dunn, and N. T. Wright have taught us about Paul. He explains the New Perspective on Paul and considers significant scholarly responses to it. This is an informative section for students not well acquainted with Pauline scholarship. Smith says: “The lively discussions of the last decades have loosened the stranglehold of traditional interpretations of all varieties, and breathed new life into the study of this most controversial Apostle. If the result is that we return to the letters of Paul with fresh eyes, ready to learn again from the man from Tarsus, that can only bode well for the future of both the academy and the church. The way forward must surely be to go back, time and again, to Paul’s own letters, to pay close attention to his use of language in its first-century context, to read each section as part of the narrative whole and to listen to this very Jewish apostle to the Gentiles proclaiming God’s victory in Christ, with ears attuned to hear the echoes of the Scriptures of Israel and eyes open to see his polemical engagement with the Greco-Roman world” (p. 32).

David L. Eastman’s “Paul: An Outline of His Life” is, among other things, an attempt at constructing a Pauline chronology. Eastman’s chronology is not fault-free, but it offers us a slightly different perspective worthy of serious consideration (see the comparative chart on p. 52). Regarding the time of Paul’s death, Eastman says, “There is certainly no specific

evidence against the idea that Paul died in Rome under Nero, yet the fact that a tradition is repeated numerous times does not make it historically reliable” (p. 55).

Cavan W. Concannon (in his “The Archaeology of the Pauline Mission”) shows us that an archaeology of Paul’s mission should not be confined to a mere scholarly tour in the footsteps of Paul. Many scholars have taken part in a larger history of pilgrim journeys and touristic trips in search of Paul. Some have shown us a different way of engaging Paul and the communities for which he wrote, a different way of befriending him, in the company of scholars from other disciplines. Doing this allows us “to see early Christian communities as part of, and not distinct from the dynamic and diverse landscapes of civic life in the early Roman Empire” (p. 82). This article is an important contribution!

Brent Nongbri writes on “Pauline Letter Manuscripts” and opens a small window on the world of Textual Criticism. He gives us a brief, but good panorama of the nearly 800 manuscripts (some fragmentary) of Pauline letters we are familiar with today. In the process, he highlights the complexities involved in the assessment of these manuscripts. The section on textual problems in the Pauline letters is particularly instructive. Nongbri has an enlightening section on the earliest recoverable text of the letters, and ends his presentation with a consideration of the different theories about the collection of Paul’s letters. He wisely takes note of the fact that the earliest surviving manuscripts of Paul’s letters that we possess are “likely no earlier than the third century” (p. 99). We ought not to forget the variations found in the various manuscripts, which attest to a complex transmission history. “Becoming familiar with the manuscripts leads to a much richer understanding of the letters attributed to the apostle Paul and their legacy among early Christian readers” (pp. 101-102).

Paul McKechnie (“Paul among the Jews”) pursues the recent renewed interest in seeing Pauline believers and Jews of the Dispersion in a comparative perspective. His concern is mainly twofold: (1) a consideration of Paul on the road to Damascus (where Paul came from and where he went after the Damascus incident); (2) a new look at how Paul interacted with Jews from the time Barnabas brought him to Antioch till the time he finds himself in Rome awaiting his trial. His exploration follows the biblical *narrative*. It concerns what Paul *did* and what *happened to him*, occasionally seeking the reasons for these. Of great importance is McKechnie’s discussion on where Paul might fit in the broad spectrum of Jewish factions. The way the author evaluates the opinions of such scholars as N. T. Wright, M. R. Fairchild, R. A. Horsley, M. D. Nanos, and others is important.

Christopher Forbes offers an enlightening article (“Paul among the Greeks”) in which he first explores what really defined someone as ‘Greek’. He rightly notes that it is not easy to give a simple answer to the question, ‘Who was a Greek?’ when we speak with reference to the post-Alexander the Great period of pan-Hellenization and further with reference to the Roman period. The section on ‘Paul’s level of engagement with Greek culture’ and the discussion on ‘Paul as an apostle to the nations and his understanding of his role in the purposes of Israel’s God’ are enlightening.

Forbes’s article and the previous one by McKechnie have much historical value. Both the contributions could have been slightly more helpful if they had ended with conclusions, wherein the authors briefly restated their main positions.

James R. Harrison introduces us to “Paul among the Romans”. He first gives us a brief overview of the triumph of Augustus and the emergence of the Julio-Claudian conception of governance. To ascertain how much ideological conflict might have existed between Paul’s gospel and the Julio-Claudian perspective on history, Harrison goes on to answer some important questions: What do New Testament scholars say about Paul’s critique of the Empire and its questionable values? How can we discern Paul’s subtle critique of the Empire in his letters? What are some of the scholarly opinions on this issue that are suspect? What are some of the classical scholars’ interpretations of the imperial cult? Harrison takes us on an interesting tour through the maze of modern scholarship on Paul and imperial politics. In the process, he helps us *to locate Paul in his imperial context* from a methodologically responsible perspective. His survey of imperial allusions in Paul’s letters is informative. More importantly, he reviews “seven profitable intersections of the Julio-Claudian propaganda with Paul’s gospel” (p. 156; see pp. 156-174). In contrast to the official imperial propaganda that the Roman gods had given the privilege of eternal rule to the Julian household, “Paul’s counter-imperial benefaction communities, established through the soteriological obedience of a dishonored and vindicated benefactor, embraced a radically different narrative of power and grace that would empower and transform the weak and marginalized of all nations. Paul depicts Christ as simultaneously the fulfillment of universal world history and Jewish covenantal history in a rhetorical strategy designed to dismantle the ideology of rule articulated through the Roman ‘founder’ narratives. ... The risen and reigning Christ ... had summoned the Romans and their provincial clients to abandon the idolatry of the imperial cult and the protection of the Roman gods, with a view to escaping God’s wrath in the present

and at the eschaton ... By becoming a 'Roman to the Romans,' Paul ensured the ultimate triumph of his gospel in the Greek East and in the Latin West" (pp. 174-175).

Michael F. Bird's article is on "The Letter to the Romans", which is "arguably his [Paul's] most theologically erudite and pastorally applicable set of teachings about faith in Jesus Christ and its implications" (p. 177). Readers will find here a helpful introduction to this monumental Pauline letter. The author dwells on Christianity's arrival in Rome, text-critical issues in the letter, the possible purpose of the letter, its literary structure, its argument (which Bird outlines very attentively), and its basic themes. Bird shows that "the main themes of Romans can be summarized around the two nodes of proclamation and praxis" (p. 201). According to him, "Romans is the precipice of Pauline theology and the summit of early Christian thought. The challenge for contemporary readers of Romans is to get inside the story of the letter, to become conversant with its various background contexts, and to imagine the situation behind the text that called for its composition" (p. 204). The 'Recommended Reading' surprisingly does not mention some important authors (e.g., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Brendan Byrne, F. F. Bruce, J. D. G. Dunn, Colin G. Kruse, and N. T. Wright).

L. L. Welborn's article deals with "The Corinthian Correspondence". It gives us an overview of the letter, a glimpse of Paul's visits to Corinth, and a detailed look at the composition of 1 and 2 Corinthians. According to the author, "[t]aken as a whole, the Corinthian correspondence is a chronicle of reconciliation" (p. 206). He prefers an early chronology, according to which Paul's first visit to Corinth would be dated to AD 41. Welborn is disinclined to accept the two letters as unified compositions! For him they are *letter collections*. He follows the hypothesis that 1 Corinthians is a three-letter blend and that 2 Corinthians is a five-letter composition, with 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 as a probable non-Pauline interpolation. This view makes his article somewhat problematic and rather unconvincing to me. Here too, among the recommended authors, some important scholars are surprisingly absent (e.g., R. F. Collins, J. A. Fitzmyer, J. Lambrecht, R. P. Martin, J. Paul Sampley, R. E. Ciampa and B. S. Rosner)! Welborn does not seem much interested in their perspectives!

Greg W. Forbes writes on "The Letter to the Galatians". His preference is for the South Galatian hypothesis. This would make Galatians Paul's first letter, written around AD 48 shortly before the Jerusalem Council (p. 246). Some will certainly beg to differ. Forbes rightly notes that the argument of this letter "has ramifications beyond its particular historical situation" (p. 267). In some ways, this article can serve as an introduction for students. The

'Recommended Reading' should have included the names of Frank J. Matera and Richard B. Hays too.

"The Thessalonian Correspondence" is introduced by Murray J. Smith. The author takes care to give an account of the apostolic gospel mission in Thessalonica and an analysis of the two letters. According to Smith, 2 Thessalonians was more likely written first, "even if the evidence does not allow certainty" (p. 281). There may not be many takers for this proposal. As two examples of the oldest Christian writings we possess, these letters "preserve the heart of the Christian gospel in its earliest form" (p. 300). After his brief analysis of the letters, Smith concludes that "all of the major threads of Paul's theology, and of the orthodox Christian faith that later wove them together, are already laid out here" in these two letters (p. 300). The following authors could have been included in the recommended reading list: Abraham Smith and Earl J. Richard.

Ian K. Smith explores "The Later Pauline Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon". He starts from the assumption that all these letters are from Paul himself. He also rightly assumes that Colossians is prior to Ephesians. Rather than deal with these four letters separately, he prefers to discuss them "as a literary subset of the Pauline corpus of Scripture" (p. 303). He feels that these letters have a Roman provenance. According to Smith, Ephesians seems to consist of general instructions sent to several churches, prompted by some specific issue that arose in Colossae (p. 309). "If we accept the theory that Ephesians is a more general letter written for the benefit of several congregations in Asia Minor, it may explain the similarities between it and the Letter to the Colossians. It may be that Paul has become aware of a specific situation in Colossae, which is being experienced more generally throughout the region. Thus having addressed the specific situation, Paul then writes a similar and more general 'circular' letter. Both letters are then entrusted to Tychicus for delivery" (pp. 315-316). Those who feel that Ephesians is post-Pauline will find this view difficult to accept. The list of recommended authors could have included some of the following too: Marianne M. Thompson, G. W. Hawthorne, G. Walter Hansen, Eduard Lohse, Morna D. Hooker, R. P. Martin, M. Y. MacDonald, Stephen E. Fowl, Pheme Perkins, Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, B. B. Thurston and J. M. Ryan.

Mark Harding tackles "The Pastoral Letters". His discussions on the character of the Pastorals, their genre, their non-Pauline authorship, and their theology are sufficiently balanced. The article is simple and informative. Among the authors for further reading, the

following too could have been included: Benjamin Fiore, G. W. Knight III, W. D. Mounce, Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker.

The difficult topic of “Pauline Theology” is taken up by Timothy J. Harris. As he himself is aware, he has undertaken a hazardous exercise in synthesis. Concerning the problematic issue of methodology, he says: “There is no single or ‘correct’ method of approach to delineating Pauline theology: differing modes of presentation often function in complementary fashion to highlight different aspects in the discernment of Paul’s theological considerations” (p. 355). The best part of Harris’s treatment is perhaps ‘A Topography of Pauline Theology’ (pp. 372-388). This section is enriched with 4 simple, but helpful diagrammatic presentations too (pp. 374-376). At least the following books should have been included in the ‘Recommended Reading’: J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Eerdmans, 1998); Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Eerdmans, 2001); Frank J. Matera, *God’s Saving Grace: A Pauline Theology* (Eerdmans, 2012). Besides, D. E. H. Whiteley, J. A. Fitzmyer and Thomas Schreiner too might have enriched the reading list.

Finally, there are two very brief appendices by Paul W. Barnett: (1) “Paul in the Book of Acts”; and (2) “A Tabular Analysis of Paul’s Asian Epistles”. There are three useful indexes: (1) of ancient people; (b) of places; and (c) of scholars. All the articles in this book have their ‘Recommended Reading’. Together, they add up to something like 8 pages. This is a great bibliographical aid to readers interested in further research. As I have pointed out, some important authors have been neglected in some of these reading lists. I was surprised to notice that a significant author like J. A. Fitzmyer gets just one mention in the whole book (and that too in an Appendix by Barnett)!

Paul the missionary par excellence and seminal thinker, God’s chosen vessel and Christ’s Apostle to the Gentiles continues to fascinate and challenge readers even today. And he will continue to do so because he is one of the brightest minds that Christianity has produced. More will have to be said about him as we discover the depths of his insights into the mystery of Christ. The present book is a small, yet important contribution in this direction. Students in particular will find here much that will clarify the rich theological and spiritual legacy of Paul.

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