

1-1-1994

Book Review: Margaret M. Mitchell, Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians

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Recommended Citation

Wimbush, Vincent L. Book Review: Margaret M. Mitchell, Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians (Louisville KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991). In *Journal of Religion* 74 (October 1994): 558–560.

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The Journal of Religion

issues, "The Heritage of Abraham," followed by chapter 5, "How Should the Heirs of Abraham Live?" Chapter 6 adds "Lesser Issues," mainly Paul's use of the Old Testament, ecclesiastical concerns, and baptism. The seventh chapter surveys "The Influence of Galatians in Christian Thought."

What is the theology of Paul in Galatians? As Dunn points out (p. xiii), this theology is at once "Christian theology in the making" and "a statement of theology sufficiently complete in itself" (p. 34). Dunn's position concerning this difficult problem is easy to understand but problematic as an adequate answer to the plethora of questions raised by present scholarship. He sees the theology of Galatians to be a contextual crystallization, behind which lies Paul's larger theology, comparable to a basin of water drawn from a larger cistern. "And of course, behind Paul there is a larger theology again—that of the first Christians, in all its diversity. And behind them again the theologies of the wider Judaisms of the time, to go no further" (p. 34). Dunn can distinguish between "the developed theology of Galatians itself" and "the submerged or hidden theology on whose resources Paul drew to build up his appeal to the Galatians." The question remains, however, Where is Paul's theology to be found, in the developed appeal of Galatians or in the hidden "basis of that appeal" (p. 35)? If there is controversy, is that controversy "the result of different interpretations of . . . shared convictions" (ibid.), or are these interpretations the consequences of convictions not shared? The first alternative, favored by Dunn, assumes a steady stream of given traditions, with controversy being the result of involuntary or voluntary misinterpretation; the second presupposes controversy to have its roots in competing claims on diverse traditions. Consequently, "theology in the making" occurs either in the successive applications and contextualizations of given layers of tradition or in arguable choices to be made between alternative interpretations of diverse traditions. Theology would then be the process of reflection and argumentation necessitated by the potentially deceptive or illusionary nature of "shared convictions" and "shared experiences." The volume would no doubt have gained by presenting readers with the full range of conceptional options in a more sharply defined manner, as they are not only currently discussed by New Testament scholars but also encountered by laypersons in the churches.

It should be acknowledged, however, that raising these issues would probably take readers beyond what is envisaged by the Black's New Testament Commentaries. As is required of Black's New Testament Commentaries also, this summary is intended primarily for general lay readers in churches and schools.

Commendably, though written in a fresh and uncomplicated way, Dunn avoids sounding pedagogical. Instead, engaging himself as well as the readers, he leads them into the thicket of Paul's theological argumentation. Thus, while not breaking new ground, the volume is helpful also as a good introduction for undergraduate and seminary students. This aim and purpose is underscored by useful and up-to-date bibliographical annotations.

HANS DIETER BETZ, *University of Chicago*.

MITCHELL, MARGARET M. *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. 380 pp. \$24.00 (cloth).

This book is a revision of a dissertation written under the supervision of Hans Dieter Betz at the University of Chicago. An exercise in what Margaret Mitchell

terms “historical rhetorical analysis,” it is an analysis of Paul’s “arts of persuasion” as author of 1 Corinthians. This in turn involved, for the sake of comparison, analysis of the rhetorics of some of Paul’s contemporaries and near-contemporaries. Mitchell is critical of modern-day assumptions about rhetorical persuasion, especially the tendency to focus only on ancient rhetorical handbooks that prescribe certain rhetorical practices. She argues quite logically that not only the handbooks but the actual rhetorical practices of the ancients as well should be compared to the rhetorical practices of 1 Corinthians. This different starting point is what Mitchell claims distinguishes her effort from the efforts of other scholars who have applied rhetorical criticism to the study of early Christian literature and is, by extension, what justifies yet another study of 1 Corinthians.

The comprehensive reading of comparative materials leads Mitchell to the thesis that 1 Corinthians is a unitary document that urges the Corinthians to become unified. She argues that the major characteristics of deliberative rhetoric are in evidence in 1 Corinthians: (1) focus on future as subject of deliberation, (2) employment of a determined set of appeals or ends (e.g., *to sympheron*), (3) proof by example (*paradeigma*), and (4) focus on certain subjects (e.g., factionalism and concord). Evidence for the first three characteristics is provided throughout the book in a detailed outline and in compositional analysis; the last characteristic, having to do with subject matter, takes up the largest part of the book. 1 Corinthians is established as deliberative argumentation that appeals to the Corinthians to become unified. It is also established that in drawing on certain Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions and assumptions, Paul adopted Greco-Roman political ideologies and orientations. 1 Corinthians is then interpreted both as rhetoric and as a type of “practical ecclesiology,” including a particular politics of group formation.

The argument for 1 Corinthians as deliberative rhetoric is quite defensible. The comprehensive and sophisticated reading of comparative materials and the identification of similar rhetorical conventions in 1 Corinthians are persuasive. But the wedding of rhetorical and compositional analysis and historical reconstruction, in spite of Mitchell’s efforts and claims, is made, not less, but more problematic. Mitchell is certainly not the first to argue that it is to factionalism that Paul responds in 1 Corinthians. This position, more than any other, certainly represents consensus in interpretation of 1 Corinthians. And by her own admission (p. 301), Mitchell does not contribute anything new to the arguments or theses about what actually motivated the factionalism addressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians. She wants only to offer a reading of “Paul’s rhetoric of response to factionalism,” even as she gainsays ahistorical interpretation.

But why does rhetorical criticism, as Mitchell understands and engages it—namely as an essentially *historical* investigation—contribute so little to historical reconstruction? What does it mean that 1 Corinthians should be read “at some face value [as Paul’s] own description of the problem” (p. 303) and “on [his] own terms” (p. 302)? What does it mean for historical investigation? How should rhetorical analysis, including the determination of cultural borrowings, delimit the range of possibilities of meanings? In arguing that Paul’s use of certain Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions marked him as an ideological fellow traveler with Greco-Roman conservative elites, did Mitchell too readily accept the flawed but widely held notion that formal similarities—linguistic, rhetorical, compositional—suggest similarity of meaning or worldview? But might not differences in physical and social location establish a different context of reference and meaning or suggest difference in function?

The Journal of Religion

The most important implications of Mitchell's book, then, may arise from the methodological approach it exemplifies. The lack of attention to the problem that rhetorical analysis and historical interpretation present to each other in a book that consciously weds the two is surprising. But this may be so only because first-rate scholarship—of which Mitchell's book is a clear example—is always, among other things, bold in conceptualization, thorough and wide-ranging in coverage, and always raises more questions than it provides answers. This problem-raising, question-provoking book is a must read for those who think the questions for a new generation of interpreters of 1 Corinthians have only begun to be considered and formulated.

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BAUCKHAM, RICHARD. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. xvi+169 pp. \$39.95 (cloth); \$14.95 (paper).

Critical scholars have often responded to fundamentalism's and pop eschatology's sometimes dangerous infatuation with the last book of the Bible by viewing Revelation with either condescension or consternation. It is thus passing strange—and encouraging—to find a first-rate exegete and New Testament theologian declaring that the Apocalypse is “not only one of the finest literary works in the New Testament, but also one of the greatest theological achievements in early Christianity” (p. 22). An opening chapter addresses the question of genre, concluding that Revelation is a combination of apocalypse, prophecy, and letter. Richard Bauckham then combines the major loci of dogmatics with the structure and themes of Revelation to produce readable and solid chapters on Revelation's doctrine of God, the person and work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and eschatology. The concluding chapter argues that the Revelation continues to speak to later readers, not because John had them in view, but because the “eschatological hyperbole” of the symbolic world he presents to his own historical situation provides a surplus of meaning that will not be exhausted prior to the Parousia.

Bauckham creatively derives theological insight from standard historical conclusions. While everyone recognizes that Revelation is directed against the Roman empire, Bauckham takes account of what is now a solid conclusion of research, that there was no general imperial persecution of Christians in John's day. While there were sporadic arrests and occasional executions of Christians, it was not a general persecution (whether real, threatened, or imagined) that provoked John's counterblast, but the general idolization of Roman power and success that was so alluring to Christians. The hermeneutical bridge opened up to modern readers is thus broader and straighter than if the book is seen primarily as a response to overt persecution. A second example: it is practically a cliché among critical interpreters that biblical “prophecy” is not to be identified with “prediction.” Bauckham shows that, well and good, nonetheless the predictive element cannot be dismissed either by showing that John's chronology and imminent expectation were wrong, as they in fact were. Revelation's prophecy of the final victory of God and of the church's role in the meantime, even when understood as predictions, are hermeneutically important.

Bauckham is especially clear and persuasive in his advocacy of the ultimately universalistic perspective of Revelation. His exegesis shows that 11:1–13 (which he regards as a key passage) and 15:1–4 can be added to the texts in Revelation that portray the final conversion of all nations to worship and serve the God of