

Egypt in relationship to early biblical history for pastors, seminary students, and interested lay readers.

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Beker, J. Christiaan, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980. xi + 452 pp. \$22.95.

With this volume Beker, who has enjoyed a well-deserved reputation as an excellent teacher of biblical theology at Princeton, establishes himself as a major contributor to the ongoing dialogue in NT theology. This contribution to Pauline studies is a major effort to argue for the fact that to understand Paul, his life and thought must be viewed in terms of the "apocalyptic connection" (p. 195)—meaning that at the center of Paul's thought is not Christ but God. Therefore righteousness by faith, Christ-mysticism, the unity of the Church, the mission to the Gentiles, etc., cannot be construed as the Pauline "core."

Beker finds that previous attempts to interpret Paul have failed because of their refusal to take apocalypticism seriously. Most interpreters simply ignore the apocalyptic element, but even those who take apocalypticism into account do not take it seriously. In terms of the basic alternatives for understanding Paul as an interpreter with theological roots, R. Bultmann set up Paul in total discontinuity with the OT, but understood salvation as a kerygmatic event anchored in the past. Oscar Cullmann saw continuity with the OT and pointed toward the final victory in the future, but his salvation-history schema that gives ontological priority to the midpoint in time robs eschatology of God's triumph at the end. E. P. Sanders sets Paul and rabbinic Judaism on parallel courses that never meet and understands Paul in purely christological terms. A. Schweitzer, who saw the importance of apocalyptic, transformed Paul's thought into a Christ-mysticism. J. Moltmann, who gives to apocalyptic an eschatologic-cosmic outlook, sees only in the Cross the divine self-disclosure. And E. Käsemann, who argues for apocalyptic as "the mother of theology," refuses to understand Jesus in that light. Beker insists on the necessity of the apocalyptic connection that links the Christ-event with the future triumph of God.

In his analysis of Paul, Beker is at his best in chap. 9, "The Scandal of the Cross." He argues there that in order for the Cross and the Resurrection to play the role they actually play in Paul's thought, they must be given "their ontological, 'cosmic'-apocalyptic significance." This is possible only when they are linked to the still-future triumph of God that embraces not only human history but the whole creation. Thus, salvation cannot be collapsed into a theology of glory or an individualized theology

of the Cross (pp. 194-195). Here Beker produces a major corrective, i.e., to G. Bornkamm's *Paul*, where in the chapter on "The Saving Event" there is no mention of the Cross. Beker's argument that Paul has interpreted the Cross as central in terms of an apocalyptic center is quite correct.

Besides setting up at the core of Paul's thought "the apocalyptic connection" between Christ and God, Beker also wishes to insist that to understand Paul is to understand his hermeneutic. Paul's particular contribution to theology was his hermeneutical breakthrough, his "contextual way of doing theology." Paul blended "authority and particularity, coherent core and contingent contextualism" (pp. 31-35). It is the interaction of these two elements that must be taken into account for any assessment of Paul's words. The genius of his letters is that they speak from a coherent center to the particularity of contingent situations in Christian congregations. Concretely this means, e.g., that Galatians cannot be used to define Paul's gospel because the Christocentric focus of Galatians is demanded by contingent considerations. Situational contingency is to be adjusted to "the material coherence of the Gospel" (p. 56). On these two basic points I find myself in agreement with Beker and therefore am thankful to him for his argumentation on these issues.

It must be said, however, that in certain respects Beker's book is somewhat of a disappointment. The book contains some contradictions and some examples of careless exegesis, although they do not affect the author's major argumentation. Beker explains that the Cross "abolishes the continuing validity of the law, although it affirms its verdict," and "means the termination of the law . . . because it initiates a new eschatological life" (p. 186). He also agrees with W. G. Kümmel that Rom 7 cannot be understood autobiographically (p. 216), and that all psychological interpretations of Paul should be ruled out. All this is quite fine and good. But then in his analysis of Rom 7 he sees an "apology for the law" (p. 239), and speaks of Paul addressing himself to "the depth of the individual human psyche" (p. 217). He also insists that "the autobiographical element in Rom 7 consists in a perceptual shift that brings to unprecedented clarity a hidden conflict . . . a deletion of all autobiographical inferences from Rom 7 makes the chapter theologically unintelligible" (p. 241).

According to Beker, Paul teaches that the Christian is free from sin. "Because sinful acts testify to the power of sin, both are eradicated in Christ" (p. 220). Beker, of course, cannot deny that Christians are still affected by the power of death. Therefore Beker breaks the Pauline connection between sin and death (p. 221). In other words, as far as the rule of death is concerned, the apocalyptic connection holds: Christians have to wait for the future triumph of God. But as far as the power of sin is concerned, Beker forgets the apocalyptic connection. This inconsistency on Beker's part is caused by his not having paid enough attention to the

Pauline concept of "the body" and the human involvement in a fallen creation, even if in the book's closing paragraph he makes eloquent use of it. In his incredible discussion of the subject, Beker even says that in Phil 1:10 "Paul appeals for the blameless *state of the body* at the Parousia" (p. 290, italics mine). Paul would never have said that unless it referred to the body of Christ (which Beker discusses in a different chapter).

Beker's failure to pay close attention to the concept of the body in Paul also causes him problems in his exegesis of 1 Cor 15. He charges Paul with circularity in his argument. On the basis of the premise that the resurrection of Christ implies a final resurrection, Paul moves about to argue for the resurrection of Christ and therefore a final resurrection. Thus "what needs to be argued is taken for granted" (p. 168). But what Beker has failed to see is that Paul is arguing for the resurrection "of the dead." He is arguing that it was the dead Jesus (whom the Corinthians cursed, 1 Cor 12:3) who was raised. The Corinthians believed in the resurrection of Christ, but not in the resurrection of the dead. They thought themselves to have experienced resurrection in life, as a docetic understanding of Jesus would allow. Paul insists on the resurrection of the dead and therefore he takes pains to differentiate the *psychikos* from the *pneumatikos* body, a distinction which Beker overlooks but which is essential to Paul's anthropology and soteriology.

Any potential reader of the book must, in fairness, be warned about the book's style. Beker writes in a rather convoluted way. Things that could be said in a direct way are forced into high-sounding phrases, and the basic thesis is argued so many times that one wonders how an editor allowed so much repetition. By the time one finishes reading, one is ready to scream the next time he sees the words "coherent" and "contingent" again.

Still, the book's argument stands as a basic statement that needs to be heard, and one which I had already defended in more modest circumstances.

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Edwards, Rex D. *A New Frontier—Every Believer a Minister*. Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1979. 126 pp. Paperback, \$5.95.

The author, a pastor from New Zealand with more than twenty years of ministerial service in Australia, England, and America, as well as experience as a college professor of pastoral ministry, stresses in this volume the importance of active lay involvement in the outreach of the Christian church.