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### Review of Pauline theology: ministry and society

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the Christian story; it must release the complex stories of memory and hope in the Bible from a chronological scheme of salvation history so that the experience of the holy can be rekindled in contemporary society.

Ricoeur discusses issues other than religious language. An article on Kant's philosophy of religion, one on evil, and another on hope are in particular interesting and informative. His analysis of the topics is always thorough, utilizing ideas and categories from other philosophers and theologians. When reading Ricoeur one engages the intellectual dialogue of many authors relevant to the issue. However, his emphasis on analysis and description prevents him from offering definite and constructive solutions to many of the issues he raises. For instance, in the article "Toward a Narrative Theology: Its Necessity, Its Resources, Its Difficulties," he makes a good case for a narrative theology but does not spell it out and, in fact, highlights its inherent weaknesses more than he gives reasons for developing one. Also, in the article "Philosophy and Religious Language," Ricoeur observes that to understand the uniqueness of religious language, one must apply both linguistic analysis and a philosophical hermeneutics. He concludes that religious faith is a "self-understanding in the face of the text" (46); yet there is nothing specifically theological about such a notion of faith. There is no mention of God or revelation or spiritual regeneration—all of which would seem to be indispensable in understanding religious language.

Ricoeur often says he is first and foremost a philosopher who clarifies and describes. His readers are indeed instructed in these analytic and descriptive ways. Perhaps a philosopher should not give many constructive answers in religious matters; yet such philosophers as Aquinas, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Alisdair MacIntyre, and many others have found ways to risk the scandal of religious particularity and still be philosophically analytical. As brilliant and thorough as this book is, it shares a common failing with Farley's and Perloff's works: they all lack definite solutions to many of the important issues they raise, thus leaving the reader with a bit of frustration.

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*Spiritual Exercises Based on Paul's Epistle to the Romans.* By Joseph A. Fitzmyer. New York: Paulist, 1995. Pp. 235. \$14.95.

*Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary.* By Luke Timothy Johnson. New York: Crossroad, 1997. Pp. 224. \$24.95.

*Pauline Theology: Ministry and Society.* By E. Earle Ellis. Lanham MD: University Press, 1997. Pp. 182. N. p.

In *Spiritual Exercises Based on Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, Joseph A. Fitzmyer uses certain sections of Paul's letter to the Romans as a springboard for spiritual exercises following a sixteenth century work by Ignatius of Loyola. Fitzmyer's work is largely a reaction against what he views to be a neglect of

the Pauline writings by the Catholic church in treatments of spirituality. For Fitzmyer, the lack of the concepts of faith, grace, and the Holy Spirit in Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* reflects the problems that the Catholic church of Ignatius' day had with the teachings of Luther and Calvin. Fitzmyer's work highlights these Pauline concepts and emphasizes them as a "truly Christian and Catholic spirituality." His desire is to read the epistle to the Romans with both a critical and a meditative insight, emphasizing the epistle's contribution to understanding our human condition and the Christian's relationship to God.

Fitzmyer, professor emeritus of biblical studies at the Catholic University of America, writes this work as a meditative supplement to his commentary on Romans from the *Anchor Bible* series (1993). He organizes the study of Romans into twenty-three meditations preceded by a section on the purpose of "spiritual exercises." Each meditation consists of approximately 6-12 pages, which the reader should be able to work through in roughly 20 minutes. At the conclusion of each meditation, Fitzmyer provides questions based upon the sentiment of the Pauline passage, as well as a "colloquy" such as a Psalm or NT hymn to assist the reader in contemplation. Finally, Fitzmyer alludes to specific pages in his commentary on Romans to provide an opportunity for further study on the discussed topic.

Fitzmyer writes his meditations with the general reader in mind, often dialoguing with his intended reader whom he assumes to be on a retreat in search of spiritual revitalization: "As Paul was aware that his apostolic commission was a 'grace,' so he invites his readers to realize the 'grace' involved in the call that each of them has received from God. Such a realization is crucial at the beginning of a retreat or a course of spiritual exercises. It calls for an awareness of the special 'grace' that each one may be receiving, a call to a level of greater faith and commitment to the service of God and his Son." Fitzmyer often alludes to the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius, mentioning how his own work is based upon Romans as Ignatius' is largely based on the Gospels. However, an understanding of Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* is not a prerequisite to understanding and appreciating Fitzmyer's work.

When necessary, Fitzmyer lists and explains the various interpretations of the Greek text (e.g., the *dikaiosyné theou* found in Rom 1:17 alludes to the character or attribute of God, while the same phrase found in 2 Cor 5:21 refers to the gift of God that he bestows upon humanity in Christ Jesus; cf. 24-26). He does a good job of clarifying complicated issues so that both the scholar and the lay person will gain valuable insight. The book's main weakness is the lack of attention given to Romans 9-16. This disparity is exemplified by the fact that 154 pages of the work are devoted to the first half of Romans, while only 64 pages are devoted to the second half. While this is consistent with Fitzmyer's contention that the exercises based on Romans 9-16 are of "less importance" than those based on Romans 1-8, the reader should not lose sight of the value and insight that Romans 9-16 has to offer. Although this work is devotional in nature, it will still prove helpful for both the scholar and the general reader.

*Reading Romans*, by Luke Timothy Johnson, who teaches at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University, is the newest edition to the *Reading the New Testament* series. The goal of this series is to bring cutting-

edge research into an easy-to-read format that is valuable both for the scholar and the lay reader. Johnson, a Roman Catholic, applies his tradition to the classic text used by Reformation theologians to bring special insight to his interpretation of the text. Johnson maintains that the letter is an authentic whole and was most likely written by Paul from the city of Corinth ca. 57-58.

Acknowledging the "Romans Debate," which concerns the degree to which the text should be read as a response to problems found in the Roman community or as generated by a major turning point in Paul's mission and career, Johnson argues for the latter. He emphasizes Paul's planned mission to Spain and his hope that the Roman church will financially support the endeavor as the impetus for the epistle. In addition, Johnson argues that this analysis better explains the addendum of Romans 16 to the seemingly unified text since it serves Paul's purposes by commending Phoebe to the Roman church as his "business agent," who will organize and prepare the financial support for Paul's future expedition to Spain. Likewise, the list of names in 16:3-6 serves Paul's purposes by providing a network of witnesses who can testify that he is worthy of support.

As to the body of the letter, which does not seem to appeal for financial support, Johnson argues that Paul, who had never visited the church at Rome, is seeking support for his mission to the west by (1) trying to persuade them of the trustworthiness of his "gospel" (since to support an apostle means to support the message that the apostle proclaims) and (2) recommending himself to the Roman church by recommending his "gospel." Hence Johnson's thesis that "Romans completely transcends its immediate purpose as a fund-raising letter by providing Paul's most complete and ordered exposition of what he understood his ministry to be about."

Johnson believes that Paul's arguments most closely resembles the characteristics found in Greco-Roman scholastic diatribe (compare Philo's *That Every Good Man is Free*). For this reason, Johnson organizes his commentary to be read "in sequence" as a developing argument, emphasizing diatribal characteristics: Paul states his thesis (1:16-17), followed by the antithesis (1:18-3:20); the thesis is demonstrated by means of example (4:1-25), by the evidence of experience (5:1-11) and by the rhetorical device of comparison (5:12-21); a series of objections to the thesis are anticipated (6:1-11:36, cf. also 3:1-8); and the *deliberative* aspects of the argument ("I appeal to you therefore, brethren") are spelled out as Paul applies his argument about God's righteousness to the life of the community (12:1-15:13).

Johnson argues against the more traditional interpretation on two controversial issues: (1) He translates *pistis Christou* (see esp. Rom 3:21-26) as a subjective genitive meaning the "faith(fulness) of Christ," rather than as an objective genitive meaning "faith in Christ." He argues that the theological implication of this translation is that Jesus' human faith is the means of the revelation of God's righteousness. This "places the faith of Jesus at the heart of God's gift to humans. His sacrificial and redemptive death is not simply an offering made of him, but an offering he makes of himself, 'faithfully.' It is Jesus' faith that reveals God's way of making humans righteous with God." (2) Johnson acknowledges that salvation is the central theme of Romans, but seeks

to replace the Reformation reading of salvation in individualist terms emphasizing “grace versus legalism,” to that of social terms emphasizing “universality versus particularity.” Likewise, Johnson contends that Paul envisions salvation as occurring in this life. It means something akin to “belonging to God’s people” by responding to God in obedient faith. These two points are pivotal for Johnson since he believes that to interpret saving faith as faith *in Christ* “would be inconsistent with Paul’s whole argument,” since it would “claim that one had to be Christian in order to have access to God. Then the particularity of the Christian religion would simply replace the particularity of Judaism, providing an expanded but in principle equally restricted range of accessibility to God.” Although Johnson writes with the general reader in mind, the scholar will also find this clear and well-written commentary beneficial since Johnson treats all the critical issues of Romans with fresh insight.

E. Earle Ellis’ book entitled *Pauline Theology* is a revision and expansion of lectures that the author delivered in the USA as well as abroad. It is a re-publication of an earlier edition that was originally published in 1989 by Eerdmans. In the work, Ellis treats five aspects of ministry in the Pauline church: (1) ministry as a concept in Paul’s theology, (2) the source of ministry found in gifts from the ascended Christ, (3) the bearing of ministry on the role of women, (4) the bearing of ministry on official or ordered status in the congregation, and (5) the place of ministry in the social order of the Greco-Roman world. Although Ellis seeks to confront issues that are both relevant to an historical analysis of Pauline thought as well as to note implications for the modern church, the title *Pauline Theology* is somewhat deceptive since the work cannot be said to present a rendering of Pauline theology. The book seems disjointed at times, as Ellis does not offer a cohesive argument throughout.

Accepting all thirteen canonical Pauline epistles as genuine, Ellis attempts to presents a synthetic analysis of Pauline ministry that posits a spiritual equality through order and subordination. He argues that Paul addresses the principle of unity in diversity in at least four areas: ethnic, socioeconomic, ministerial, and sexual. He states that “for Paul unity and equality do not exclude difference, diversity, or rank but incorporate them and express them as a many-splendored mosaic. Whenever unity or equality is interpreted as sameness, we are, in Paul’s eyes, on the road of illusion and frustration. This applies particularly to a current mythology that the only difference between male and female is genital.” Ellis thus argues that Paul is not concerned with transforming the rules of the larger society, nor does he contest the element of inequality within it. In fact, for Ellis, “Paul affirms both inequality and subordination as proper and complementary roles” within the church.

In the end, Ellis raises a variety of issues, but he does not treat any of them in detail. However, the attention he gives to the implications of Paul’s thought for the church today is insightful. Hence, the minister and general reader will find the book thought provoking, but the New Testament scholar will likely find it lacking. The other two studies of Romans offer something positive, by contrast, for specialist and generalist alike.

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