

BOOK REVIEWS

THE LETTERS OF PAUL AS RITUALS OF WORSHIP. By John Paul Heil. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011. Pp. viii +208. \$24.

In this interesting and readable book, Heil sets as his main purpose to emphasize the relationship of Pauline letters to early Christian worship. Also, noting that they were originally sent to, and intended to be read in, the worship gatherings of the churches to which they were addressed, and that the letters are replete with references to acts of worship (e.g., Pauline thanksgivings, prayers, doxologies and praise statements, grace-and-peace salutations, and grace-benedictions), H. rightly observes that these texts have a strong liturgical tone. In effect, they “breathe” worship, and it is much to H.’s credit for highlighting this. Functioning as substitutes for Paul’s own personal presence in the churches to which the letters were sent, H. argues, they are a vehicle by which Paul can function as part of, even as presider over, the worship gatherings of these churches.

Paul’s letters have been studied incessantly for many centuries as Scripture for theology and Christian ethics, as reflections of Paul’s own theological convictions and ethical teachings. In more recent decades, scholars have probed Paul’s use of rhetorical devices, his appropriation and citation of OT texts, and what the letters reflect of the social character of Pauline churches. The distinctive contribution of H.’s study is to point out quite specifically the numerous features that reflect the fundamentally religious/devotional character of these texts. Whatever else they are and do, Paul’s letters presume and promote religious beliefs and practices, and prominently among which are attitudes and practices of worship.

After a brief and concise introduction, H. works through the 13 letters of the traditional Pauline corpus, chapter by chapter. Interestingly, he treats all 13 as authentically Paul’s (although he urges that specific authorial practices varied, such as including use of coworkers involved in Pauline “authorship”). This acceptance of the entire traditional corpus represents a minority stance in today’s NT guild, but H.’s observations about the liturgical elements in the letters stand on their own merits, whatever view one takes of the authorship of the disputed epistles.

In each chapter, H. comments on the consecutive contents of a given epistle, highlighting liturgical features and expressions in its introduction, body, and closing. Then, each chapter closes with a summary of these observations. In a brief conclusion, he reiterates his reasons for taking Paul’s letters as “epistolary worship”: (1) All 13 begin and end with a “prayer-greeting” for divine grace. (2) Each letter includes “ritualistic, liturgical language, such as prayers, petitions, thanksgivings, benedictions and

doxologies,” with Paul functioning as a worship leader “by performing various acts of epistolary worship within the letters” (180). (3) Each of the letters addresses “the ethical or moral worship” that Paul seeks to promote in those to whom he writes.

It is particularly intriguing to consider H.’s proposal that at various points in his letters Paul intended to lead and stimulate corporate liturgical actions in the churches he addressed. So, e.g., H. urges that Paul in Romans 6:17 “leads his audience” in worship and in celebrating liberation from the power of sin (80). H. also (rightly in my view) proposes that Paul intended his references to his own prayers and thanksgivings to be instructive and inspirational for his readers. This means that, in addition to articulating Christian beliefs and advocating Christian behavior, Paul’s letters also had a profoundly worship-oriented focus and intention.

In footnotes, H. engages and draws upon the work of other scholars, citing commentaries with particular frequency (almost entirely English-language publications). The book seems mainly directed to students, pastors, and others engaged in serious study of NT texts. But NT scholars also will find the work a salutary stimulus to notice and take seriously the liturgical features of Pauline letters.

On the one hand, the systematic and methodical analysis of each of the 13 letters makes it abundantly clear that H. has a valid point. On the other hand, it does make for a workman-like and occasionally repetitious discussion. But given H.’s comparative lack of references to scholarly studies of Paul, perhaps this text-by-text approach is necessary. Moreover, for teachers and students this scheme facilitates use of the book alongside direct study of Paul’s epistles.

A ten-page bibliography and indexes of Scripture and authors completes this useful volume.

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THE WORD OF GOD AND THEOLOGY. By Karl Barth. Translated from the German by Amy Marga. New York: T. & T. Clark, 2011. Pp. xiii + 242. \$44.95.

This is a splendid new translation of Karl Barth’s early addresses, well known in their 1957 English translation as *The Word of God and the Word of Man*. Here is a key window into B.’s early theology from the period when his commentary on Romans burst like “a bombshell on the playground of the theologians” (Karl Adam in *Das Hochland* [June 1926] 276–77).

This title more closely reflects the original 1924 edition, *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie*. Its eight essays were presented from 1916 to 1923, some of which are mentioned below.