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The Colonized Apostle: Paul Through Postcolonial Eyes

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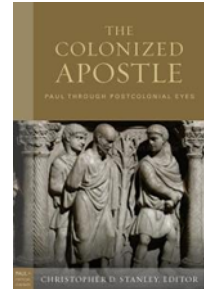
Book Review

The Colonized Apostle: Paul Through Postcolonial Eyes

Christopher D. Stanley, ed.

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011

Initially I was prepared to recommend this book as a required text for a course on Paul. However, after reading it I changed my mind. My chief reason for this involved what I consider to be the weakness of so many books edited by one author with the bulk of the work containing multiple writers. By their very structure such books tend to be repetitive because each author, without consulting what the others have penned, “re-invents the wheel” so to speak. Sad to say, *The Colonized Apostle*, proves to be no exception to this problem. In spite of the fact that the book’s first major section “What Is Postcolonial Studies?” deals in depth with definitional and methodological issues, this does not deter most of the other authors from engaging in rather lengthy methodological discourse for their subsequent analyses.



Although the above critique prevents me from recommending the book as a required text, I would celebrate it as vital reading for understanding Paul within the dual context of Roman imperialism and the global neo-liberal empire under which the “99%” suffer today. Both for seminary and university students *The Colonized Apostle* offers a wealth of analysis and challenge for those students desiring to “walk the talk.” In spite of my judgment about repetition, especially along methodological lines, the very nature and structure of the work offers a standard richness as well. There is the obvious of course: a multi-authored text provides the gift of numerous authors with their own unique insights. This book provides just that “in spades.” Given the book’s title all are postcolonial scholars, yet beyond that the variety is gloriously abundant. To be expected we find western white male academics, but they hardly dominate. Women are there--- globally, white western, Asian, Latina, and a handful of male authors come from two-thirds world cultures. This pluralism provides a sensitivity often lacking in the safety and sameness of western imperial scholarship.

Although I found every chapter (in isolation) valuable, I have my favorites which I cite quickly with a brief reason for these choices. In the methodological section I recommend highly Neil Elliott’s chapter “Marxism and the Postcolonial Study of Paul,” wherein he underscores the need to move beyond traditional western anti-Marxism to re-integrate the importance of class analysis rather than simply falling into the trap of a “liberal” and superficial multiculturalism. The largest section (Part II) deals with Pauline specifics analyzed in a postcolonial venue, but given the limits of space, I expand upon only three of the eight I found most powerful and challenging: 1). Davina Lopez (ch. 6) underscores not only how Paul resists empire but also how he becomes caught up in and also co-opted by imperial rhetoric. In the last analysis Lopez treats Paul kindly by emphasizing that, although he uses imperial rhetoric, his communities include all the outsiders “othered” by imperial discourse, images and practice. Tat-siong Benny Liew’s

“Redressing Bodies at Corinth” (ch. 9) picks up on Paul’s troubles with the Corinthian Jesus assemblies by a powerful analysis of how status and “otherness” have painful and polemical realities connected to embodiment or, in short, how the very visceral physical bodies of Paul, Jesus and Jesus believers remain a vital part of status and also the ethnic, class and gender character of who gets “othered” or pushed to the margins. 3). In his excellent “Imperial Intersections and Initial Inquiries” (ch. 10), Joseph A. Marchal uses the incisive Kwok Pui-lan’s five concerns of postcolonial feminist hermeneutics to examine how well Paul counteracts imperial behavior in his Philippian correspondence. With an impressive array of evidence from Paul’s letter, he reaches this conclusion: “I am suggesting that Paul reinscribes and mimics the imperialism of his time in the letter to the Philippians (p. 159).”

Notwithstanding my critique of the work, I recommend most passionately *The Colonized Apostle* not only for its profound analysis embodied by particular chapters but also for its overall double dynamic: 1). underscoring that Paul and his communities not only resisted Roman imperial colonialism but also became caught up into its values and 2). insisting that Pauline scholarship and Jesus believers today must deal with that same contradictory dialectic in their own lives.

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