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Paul in Acts

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we have “earned” the kingdom/salvation? If so, we may find “in the age to come” that we were very much mistaken. The sermon that plumbs the spiritual depths of this passage goes well beyond the matter of “wealth and possessions” (114-15).

There are two other major difficulties with this work. Although Thurston notes frequently that the Markan Jesus clearly came to die, she never investigates why nor looks at Mark’s atonement images with any depth. Nor does she closely examine Mark’s negative portrayal of the scribes and Pharisees; she notes in one section that Mark has likely created “polemical figures, composite characters who represent opposition to Jesus” (153, see also 169), yet the actual character of Jewish religion at the time is unexplored, neither in general nor within specific stories (e.g., she does not address why the Pharisees might be threatened, 3:1-6, nor why she “hold[s] the historicity” of other critical views like 7:1-23 and 8:1-21, nor what actually happened at the trial by the Sanhedrin, 15:1-20). If one follows Thurston’s lead, one ends up avoiding the head-on collision with the foolishness of the cross, and one’s sermons may also reflect a kind of creeping anti-Semitism, as slowly a misleading portrait of Jesus’ fellow Jews emerges.

This would not be the first volume I would turn to as a Markan commentary, but still, Thurston’s interpretation will likely inspire you to similar careful reading, and its useful detail would help any of us when we are floundering for something to say!

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Paul in Acts

Stanley Porter

Tubingen: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999

233 pages, \$28.69 Softcover

The focus of this book is the depiction of Paul as a literary figure in Acts – especially his character, his speeches, and his theology—using

literary-critical, rhetorical and theological methodologies. Using the “we” source (a group of 82 verses composed of travel narrative, written in the first-person plural, which is found in parts of chapters 16, 20-21, and 27- 28) as a basis for comparison, Porter, Principal and Dean of McMaster Divinity College, argues for the similarity of the Acts depiction of Paul to the portrayal found in the letters.

This view challenges the commonly held view of many scholars that the Paul of Acts and the Paul of the letters are very dissimilar. In fact, Porter argues that the differences between the portrayals of Paul within Acts itself are as significant as are the differences between the Paul described in Acts and the Paul of the letters. Even though the perspective on Paul and his companions in these passages differs significantly at points from that of the author of Acts, Porter argues that something about this portrayal appealed to the author of Luke-Acts and perhaps fit into his overall goal of describing the progress of the spread of the gospel.

Recent scholarship has also tended to downplay the historical validity of Acts, believing it to be more fictional than historical and comparing it to other fiction of the time. In contrast to this view, Porter argues that although the “we” material is similar in some ways to other fictional literature of the period, it is also different in many ways. He argues that this material may reflect a first-hand account, perhaps a diary, of one of Paul’s travelling companions, and that this source was incorporated by the author of Luke-Acts as part of his overall plan to describe the spread of the Christian message to the Gentile world.

According to Porter, there are several reasons to understand the “we” material in this way. First, he notes the fact that the “we” sections begin and end abruptly in the midst of other narrative material. Second, the material has been competently interwoven into the text, yet occurs only in small portions and only in the second half of the book of Acts, rather than throughout the book. Third, the similarities in characteristics such as the form (four-part travel narratives), theology (understated depiction of divine guidance and miracles), and vocabulary (for example, there are 111 words in the “we” section which do not occur elsewhere in Luke-Acts and 162 which do not occur in the rest of Acts) of the “we” passages.

This book is appropriate for theological research and offers an insightful discussion of the use of sources and the portrayal of Paul

and his companions by the author of Luke-Acts, as well as the controversial issue of the historical authenticity of the book of Acts itself. Because of the large number of footnotes, as well as the frequent mention of the views of many different scholars, many of them German, it may prove somewhat technical for use as a resource for ministry. However, it could be useful as a tool for a Seminary course on Acts or Paul.

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Visionary Women: Three Medieval Mystics

Rosemary Radford Ruether
Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002
83 pages, \$9.30 Softcover

Rosemary Radford Ruether is a leading feminist theologian who teaches at Garrett-Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. She has written hundreds of articles and reviews, and is the author or editor of thirty-two books, including a classic in the field of theology: *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Beacon Press, 1983; reissue edition, 1993). *Visionary Women: Three Medieval Mystics* was written for a popular audience, and it is an adaptation of her previous publication *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (Fortress Press, 1998). It offers a concise introduction to the life and thought of three medieval mystics: Hildegard of Bingen, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Julian of Norwich.

Ruether posits that these medieval mystics are vital to the spiritual life of modern Christians. The rich and creative thought of these women can provide contemporary Christians with new perceptions into faith and the medieval world. Female images inform their understanding of God (e.g., Julian's view of God as both father and mother, 54-56), the redemption and creation of the universe, the fecundity of nature, and the relation of the self to God. She argues