

to it on the cover is a piece of opportunistic marketing on the part of the publisher. (Those looking for a readable yet scholarly discussion of Gibson's film may wish to read a recently published collection of essays edited by R. L. Webb and K. E. Corley, *Jesus and Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ* [London: Continuum, 2004] which is devoted entirely to consideration of the film.)

If, on the other hand, the reader simply takes this book on its own terms then it provides a generally helpful introduction to the events leading up to and including the crucifixion, as viewed through the historical-critical method. Bovon helpfully examines the various canonical and non-canonical sources. He rightly comments that the gospel accounts are not 'disinterested reports of objective witnesses' (24), but he appears to accept that the faith of the authors necessarily affects their ability to provide a sober account of what has taken place – a highly contestable position. For example, he claims that the gospel accounts of Jesus' predictions of his passion derive from church tradition rather than from Jesus himself (18). I was also surprised at his claim that the resurrection account of the Gospel of Peter, with its sky-high figures and moving, speaking cross, is 'neither more miraculous nor more legendary than the canonical accounts' (28). He explains 'There is, here as there, cohabitation of memories and interpretation.' Fair enough, to a point. Human beings have no access to such a thing as an uninterpreted fact. Yet there must surely be some recognition of the difference in character between the restrained canonical accounts and the startling features of Gospel of Peter.

Bovon's brief sketch of the events of the last week of Jesus' life prior to the crucifixion is typical of discussions of the 'historical Jesus'. It deals with standard historical questions relating to the passion narrative (e.g., whether the Sanhedrin had the authority to pronounce a capital sentence) and, in general, is characterised by even-handed treatment of the evidence. Even in the very brief compass of the discussion, one has the sense that Bovon is carefully evaluating the sources. Yet, once again, I was left frustrated when Bovon concluded his comments on the sayings from the cross (which were sensitive to the significance of these sayings in the gospel narratives) by claiming that these sayings are not historical (63).

In his conclusion, Bovon addresses the issue of the resurrection. It is commendable that he does so, but it is unfortunate that he excludes this event, to some extent, from the realm of history. Contrast this with, for example, the very different argument of N. T. Wright in *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003).

The bibliography largely reflects literature prior to 1974, but around two-dozen more recent works are added.

The brevity of this book might suggest that it is a popular paperback for a general readership. In fact, although Bovon writes clearly, the level of the discussion would probably be demanding for those without some theological training. Those who are ready to weigh carefully the arguments in this slight book will doubtless

learn much, even in disagreement.

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**Contours of Pauline Theology**  
**A Radical Survey of the Influences on Paul's**  
**Biblical Writings**  
**Tom Holland**

Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus  
Publications, 2004, 384 pp., £14.99, hb, ISBN 1-  
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**SUMMARY**

The thesis of this book is that two important axioms have been missing from the interpretation of Paul's writings. The first is that the story of the Passover and the exodus are the interpretive keys to Paul's thought and, in particular, to his interpretation of Jesus' death. The second lens is that the Pauline writings should be read as being implicitly corporate and covenantal in their approach. Holland excludes the literature of Second Temple Judaism and the pseudographical writings from the interpretation of Paul's writings. The strengths of the book are its robust challenge to many scholarly presuppositions and an impetus to new research on Paul's debt to the Old Testament.

**RÉSUMÉ**

L'auteur défend la thèse selon laquelle deux axiomes importants ont fait défaut à l'interprétation des écrits pauliniens. Premièrement, l'histoire de la pâque et de l'exode constitue à ses yeux la clé de la pensée de l'apôtre Paul et, en particulier, de sa compréhension de la mort de Jésus. Deuxièmement, il pense que les textes devraient être lus en tenant compte du fait que Paul pense implicitement en termes de communauté et d'alliance. Holland exclut que la littérature du judaïsme du second Temple et les pseudépi-graphes soient pertinents pour l'interprétation des écrits pauliniens. La critique sévère de bien des présupposés des spécialistes et la stimulation à explorer la dette de Paul à l'égard de l'Ancien Testament sont les points forts de ce livre.

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

Die These dieses Buches lautet, dass zwei wichtige Axiome bei der Interpretation der paulinischen Schriften bisher gefehlt haben. Das erste besteht darin, dass die Geschichte vom Passah und vom Exodus der interpretative Schlüssel zur paulinischen Gedankenwelt und insbesondere zu seiner Interpretation des Todes Jesu ist. Die zweite Linse lautet, dass die paulinischen Schriften als solche gelesen werden sollen, die in ihrem Ansatz implizit gemeinschafts- und bundesorientiert sind. Holland schließt die Literatur des Judentums der Periode des zweiten Tempels und die pseudographischen Schriften bei der Interpretation der paulinischen Schriften aus. Die Stärken des Buches liegen in seiner robusten Herausforderung vieler wissenschaftlicher Voraussetzungen und in einem Anstoß zu neuer Forschung



über das, was Paulus dem Alten Testament verdankt.

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The thesis of this book is clear and well-expressed throughout. Stated simply it is that two important axioms or reference points (which the author calls 'lenses') have been missing from the interpretation of Paul's writings. The first such lens is that the story of the Passover and the exodus are the interpretive keys to Paul's thought and, in particular, to his interpretation of Jesus' death. Allied to this – but not one of the 'lenses' – is that, in the author's view, Paul's thought can only be properly understood when we see him to be an exegete and theologian of the Old Testament. According to Holland, it is wrong to interpret Paul's thought as containing the alloy of Hellenistic thinking. He did not, he says, 'Hellenise' the Christian message but he remained faithful both to the thought patterns and expectations of the Old Testament and also to what Jesus had proclaimed. The second lens is that the Pauline writings should be read as being implicitly corporate and covenantal in their approach. The 'rediscovery' of these two axioms, claims the author, 'bring [*sic*] a far more coherent understanding of the teaching of the apostle Paul in the areas of Christology, salvation and anthropology' (p. 291).

This is a difficult book to review because it is good in part – indeed, sometimes very good – but in other places, I am not so sure.

The strengths of the book are its robust challenge to many scholarly presuppositions and an impetus to new research on Paul's debt to the Old Testament. In addition, Holland offers an impressive restatement of much in the Pauline corpus to demonstrate that Paul's thought is paschal, new-Exodus, corporate and covenantal. For these reasons alone, this is a book that should be read by all who are interested in reading and understanding Paul. That said, I have questions about aspects of Holland's method, style and presuppositions.

Holland doubts the value of two sources for interpreting Paul: the literature of Second Temple Judaism and the pseudepigraphal writings. Rather, according to Holland, Paul stayed 'within the framework of Old Testament theology' (p. 43) – but this begs an important question: Which is Paul's Old Testament interpretive framework of that theology? Is it ancient Israel's, Paul's own (however derived) or twenty-first century? At least Second Temple literature and the pseudepigraphal writings provide some clues as to how the Old Testament were being interpreted in Paul's era within the many 'Judaisms' that Holland, acknowledging Neusner, agrees existed. Paul clearly is an exegete and theologian of the Old Testament – but, we should note, of the Septuagintal version of it. To exclude from Paul's thinking *all* other cultural influences – including the pervasive influence of Hellenistic thought – is an overstatement of a case. In my view, there is too much accumulated evidence to say otherwise, and Holland does not go much beyond asserting this point, although I acknowledge it would

take more than one book to prove his case.

I also wonder whether some of Holland's conclusions may be overstated: for example, with Holland I would say that, of course, Paul interprets Jesus' death as the fulfilment of the Passover – but, I would add, not *only* as the fulfilment of the Passover. What of II Corinthians 8:9, for example?

The author sometimes knocks down what I see to be 'straw men'. For example, he demolishes the view that in his pre-Christian days, Paul persecuted fellow Jewish Christians because they proclaimed a law-free gospel to Gentiles. Some, including me, would argue that Paul persecuted Jewish Christians because the teaching they proclaimed to *other Jews* was heterodox in the view of the Jewish party Paul represented. Holland's targets are (to mix a metaphor) more nuanced than he sometimes admits and, as a result, sometimes does not address other viewpoints.

Another example is on p. 11, the first page of Chapter One. Holland says that scholars claimed for generations that Paul changed Jesus' message to such an extent that Jesus would not have recognised what Paul taught. But a mainstream scholar such as Hooker has recently written most unexceptionally: 'Although Paul's contribution to Christianity was enormous, his understanding of the gospel was not a distortion of Jesus' own message and mission' (M D Hooker, *Paul. A Short Introduction* [2003], p. 148).

There are some wider issues that Holland does not deal with. On the narrative substructure to Paul's thought, much important work is being carried out and Holland does not engage with it. On the corporate nature of Paul's thought – and of all thought in 'the Mediterranean world' – see, for example, chapter Two of B J Malina's *The New Testament World* (2001).

There is much that is very good and stimulating in this book. My reservations aside, the book is an important contribution to the way we read Paul. Scholars will need to engage with it.

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### Revelation

#### Ben Witherington III

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 307 pp. £15.99, pb., ISBN 0 521 00068 8

#### SUMMARY

This commentary, the first in the *New Cambridge* series, applies socio-rhetorical criticism to Revelation. There is a 50-page introduction and notes on the (mostly English) secondary literature organised by category. The commentary proper is more helpful on verses and on sections of text than in supplying book-wide insights, somewhat regrettably for a rhetorical approach and inadequately given Revelation's organic unity. A polemic in the Graeco-Roman context is overstated and Revelation's Jewish matrix cor-