

Reviews

THE PRE-CHRISTIAN PAUL by Martin Hengel. SCM Press, London, and *Trinity Press International*, Philadelphia, 1992. Pp xiv + 162.

The more one studies Pauline theology, the clearer it becomes that in order to understand the thought of Paul the Christian, it is necessary to comprehend the influences that mould him before his conversion. What sort of a man was the pre-Christian Paul? Was he, as most of us believe, thoroughly Jewish in his training and outlook? Or was he, as some still advocate, influenced by Hellenistic attitudes and rhetoric, and by the beliefs of the mystery religions? In his latest study, Martin Hengel sets out to investigate Paul's origins, education and early career: as usual, his book is competently translated by John Bowden.

Beginning with Paul's origins and citizenship, Professor Hengel points out that the information that Paul came from Tarsus and was a Roman citizen is provided by Acts alone. Strangely, Luke is usually believed here, even when he is supposed to have got everything else wrong! Hengel suggests that Paul fails to mention Tarsus because it was of little importance to him in later life. It is from Acts, also, that we learn that Paul's Jewish name was 'Saul' (or Sha'ul)—an appropriate name for someone 'of the tribe of Benjamin': it is when he moves from a Jewish-Christian environment to a pagan one (Acts 13.9) that it is replaced by 'Paul'. On the question of Paul's upbringing and education, Luke and Paul are in agreement: Paul's important training—as a Pharisee—must, so Hengel argues, have taken place in Jerusalem, since only there could the Torah be studied seriously by those who were strict Jews. As for Paul's training in Judaism, Hengel points to the links between Paul's teaching and later rabbinic literature, which—despite problems of dating—he believes are significant, as are the parallels with apocalyptic and Essene literature. From this, then, there emerges a picture of a thoroughly Jewish scholar.

But Jerusalem was also, in part, a Greek city: inscriptions in the city indicate the extent of Hellenist influence. Paul could have acquired a Jewish-Greek education there, as well as studying the Torah in Hebrew, and so gained a basic knowledge of rhetoric. Professor Hengel suggests that he was able to use his training, both in the Torah and in Jewish-Greek rhetoric, to teach the Diaspora Jews who flocked to the city and who worshipped in the Greek-speaking synagogue(s) there. If so, then he was working in the very milieu in which, according to Acts, the argument with Stephen broke out. Paul's persecuting zeal was directed against the Christian Hellenists, Greek-speaking Jewish-Christians whose beliefs and practices were contrary to 'this holy place and the law' (Acts 6.13). *Pace* Gal. 1.22, the community he attacked was based in Jerusalem, but the Aramaic-speaking Christians escaped persecution; the small group of

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Christian Hellenists was driven from the city, whereupon Paul set off to pursue it to Damascus.

Like all Professor Hengel's books, this one is written on the basis of an immense knowledge of the source material and is backed up by detailed end-notes, though in this particular case the majority of these have been provided by Roland Deines. The argument is punctuated by barbed comments on alternative interpretations of the evidence. Many of these are aimed at those who dismiss Acts as providing us with any reliable information at all; although Professor Hengel agrees that one must start with Paul's own accounts of events and not with Luke's, he makes far more use of Acts than do many scholars working in this field, and finds a surprising degree of agreement between the two writers. This cautious use of Acts is certainly preferable to the unduly sceptical dismissal of everything Luke wrote, provided we concentrate on those areas where he provides supporting evidence for the picture given by Paul himself, and do not build on the evidence of Acts alone.

In other ways, too, Professor Hengel presents a far more traditional understanding of Paul than is common today. In his final paragraph, for example, he insists that no one has understood 'the real essence of Pauline theology' better than Augustine and Martin Luther! Can we really still pursue the notion that we can separate out 'the real essence of Pauline theology'? And can we claim that *Paul's* theology has been grasped by those who failed to understand his context? It is odd, too, to find Hengel, a little earlier, maintaining that what distinguished the proclamation of the Hellenists was the fact that it 'was critical of the ritual parts of the Torah and the cult'. Can we any longer suppose that we ought to try to separate 'ethical' from 'ritual' in this way?

Most useful, perhaps, is Hengel's attempt to 'place' Paul in Jerusalem, as an ardent student of the Law, and yet acquiring a Greek education. This makes sense of Paul's involvement in the persecution which was apparently sparked by a dispute within the Greek-speaking community. Yet precisely why the lax attitudes of the Hellenist Jewish-Christians should have led to persecution of the intensity described by Luke, and how it came about that Paul received, on the Damascus road, a call to be a Christian apostle remain for one reader at least, unanswered questions.

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RELIGION AND THE AMBIGUITIES OF CAPITALISM by Ronald H Preston, *SCM Press*, London, 1991 pp. 182. £12. 50.

This is an informative and readable book, the most recent in a tradition of thought that perhaps originated with Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. It would especially suit the general reader interested in the ongoing debate about how to live with capitalism on one's conscience; its breadth is impressive.

The book begins with an attack on the Social Credit theory of the Thirties and the seemingly endless ability of theologians and church leaders