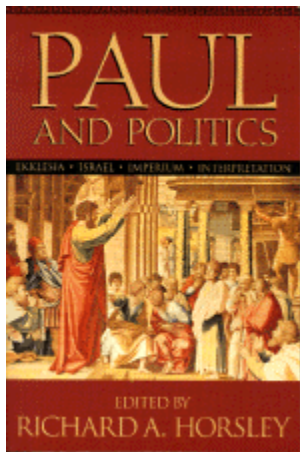


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Horsley, Richard A., ed.

Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation. Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl

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Arguably, few scholars have done more to shape current Pauline scholarship than Krister Stendahl. In a pivotal work, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Consciousness of the West” (first published in *Harvard Theological Review*), Stendahl called for a rethinking of Paul’s major themes and focus. Rather than continue to fixate on individual piety, guilt, sanctification, and salvation, Stendahl challenged scholarship to read Paul’s letters in light of community creation and development and to consider Paul’s self-identification as both Jew and Christian missionary. Stendahl’s challenge is fundamental to the “new perspective” on Paul, influencing (among others) E. P. Sanders, J. D. G. Dunn, Stephen Westerholm, and Daniel Boyarin. *Paul and Politics* is offered not only as a Festschrift for a major scholar but as a genuine attempt to address the issues and concerns he voiced—particularly in ways subsequent scholarship has not yet broached.

In general, the essays assume (or engage those who assume): “Both texts and interpretations are sites of struggle. Paul is arguing with or against or even attempting to silence other voices in his letters, and some of those voices are evident in or underneath the text. The oppressive as well as liberative possibilities in Paul’s texts can be critically assessed from diverse perspectives and interpretive positions.... Both the production and interpretation of texts involve power relations, and interests, values, and visions.... Both texts and interpreters occupy particular social locations and contexts. Analysis of contexts (both of text and interpreter) is therefore as important as the analysis of texts.... Interpreters’ identity and social location are hybrid and complex. With race, class, and gender now seen as more complex structures of relations, we can recognize that, far from

possessing an essential identity, we move through several positions and attitudes vis-à-vis the dominant social and hegemonic culture” (13-14).

Each essay of *Paul and Politics* is an expansion (most with enhanced bibliography) of essays presented over the last four years at the annual meeting of the Paul and Politics group of the Society of Biblical Literature: “The aims and agenda of the Paul and Politics group are, broadly, to problematize, interrogate, and re-vision Pauline texts and interpretations, to identify oppressive formulations as well as potentially liberative visions and values in order to recover their unfulfilled historical possibilities, all in critical mutual engagement among diverse participants. A diversity of participants as well as diversity in theory and approach, including ‘readings from below,’ may further the demystification of problematic practices in contemporary biblical interpretation. Interpretation as well as texts are sites of struggle. All interpretation has an agenda. Critical awareness means making a choice to exercise criticism on the side of the marginalized and oppressed and with demystification and liberation in mind. Diversity in interests, insights and approach will generate a certain level of conflict among interrelated liberationist readings, which is to be valued rather than avoided” (15).

After an introductory chapter by Horsley on the importance of Stendahl’s work and the purpose of *Paul and Politics* as a whole, the book’s remaining fourteen chapters fall into four groups. The first, taken from the inaugural session of the Paul and Politics group, concentrates on methodological issues and assumptions. Neil Elliott writes on “Paul and the Politics of Empire: Problems and Prospects,” an essay envisioning a political hermeneutic of Paul and offering invigorating potential readings of both Galatians and Romans. He is accompanied by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Paul and the Politics of Interpretation.” Schüssler Fiorenza calls for a reading of Paul where the voices of the “marginalized” (particularly, those Paul considers opponents) are brought to the fore. They are responded to by Robert Jewett.

The second group focuses on 1 Corinthians. Horsley offers “Rhetoric and Empire—and 1 Corinthians,” where he examines Paul’s rhetoric and its use in the construction of the Corinthian community as an alternative *polis*. Cynthia Briggs Kittredge writes “Corinthian Women Prophets and Paul’s Argumentation in 1 Corinthians,” where she uses the work of Antoinette Clark Wire to examine Paul’s views on social hierarchy (and to place Paul’s resistance to women’s prophecy within that matrix). Sheila Briggs writes “Paul on Bondage and Freedom in Imperial Roman Society,” treating 1 Cor 7. They are responded to by Wire, who addresses issues of gender, slavery, and social hierarchy in Corinth.

The third group focuses on Galatians. Pamela Eisenbaum writes “Paul As the New Abraham,” suggesting that Paul sees himself as Abraham, expanding God’s kingdom to the Gentiles and being the “father” of generations of spiritual progeny. Mark D. Nanos

writes on “the Inter- and Intra-Jewish Political Context of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians,” taking very seriously Stendahl’s critique that Paul must be read as a Jewish writer who always understood himself within God’s covenant people. N. T. Wright, in “Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire,” cautions that Paul’s anti-imperialist sensibilities are political language arising from theological conviction and not the other way around. They are responded to by Alan F. Segal, who also uses the opportunity to continue to place his work on Paul as an intra-Jewish convert within a Stendahl-ian frame.

The final essays are the work of newer Pauline scholars. Sze-kar Wan writes “The Collection for the Saints As Anticolonial Act: Implication of Paul’s Ethnic Reconstruction,” perhaps the most original and dynamic essay of the collection. Wan contrasts Paul’s “collection for the Jerusalem Saints” (drawing mostly from 1 Corinthians, Rom 15, and Galatians) with the Jewish temple tax and explores how Paul uses the offering simultaneously to integrate the Gentiles into the covenant people, fulfill Jewish messianic expectations that the wealth of the Gentiles would flow into Jerusalem, and resist patron-client social hierarchical relationships. Allen Dwight Callahan writes “Paul, *Ekklesiā*, and Emancipation in Corinth: A Coda on Liberation Theology.” Callahan offers, in passing, the intriguing notion that the Corinthian community might, as a group, have combined resources to manumit members and that such would inform Paul’s familial, adoptionist, forensic language in Corinthians. Wan and Callahan are responded to by Wire and Calvin J. Roetzel.

The essays represent a broad continuum of scholarship, many interested in liberationist or inclusive readings of Paul, some very conventional. Nearly all seem frustratingly short (in part, the mark of a good essay), opening far more discussion and exegetical possibility than they resolve. Readers looking for postcolonial or poststructuralist approaches to Paul will find an exceptional amount of stimulating material and data but will ultimately need to expand and supplement what they find. Only Sze-kar Wan makes deliberate use of established postcolonial literature (citing Bhabha, using “anticolonial” and “postcolonial”). Schüssler Fiorenza, Callahan, and Wright have no interest in moving beyond historical-critical readings of Paul.

Collections of essays are notorious for uneven quality and importance; Festschriften are frequently more sentiment than scholarship. Neither complaint can be made of *Paul and Politics*. Each essay is engaging, intricate, and important; any one of these works could easily stand as a centerpiece of another set of collected essays. I have not read a more generally invigorating, stimulating, and engaging collection of essays on Paul since *The Romans Debate*. Indeed, I suspect comparison between the two will be frequently and justifiably made. I further suspect that *Paul and Politics* will prove as influential in applied, exemplified exegesis.

Richard A. Horsley is Distinguished Professor of Liberal Arts and the Study of Religion at the University of Massachusetts, Boston; in addition to being the author of *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, he recently served as co-editor (along with Allen Dwight Callahan and Abraham Smith) of *Slavery in Text and Interpretation* (*Semeia* 83/84). *Paul and Politics* will be of most interest to scholars of Paul (particularly those interested in the “new perspective” on Paul, Paul’s rhetoric, Galatians, and the Corinthian correspondence), scholars interested in liberation or postcolonial readings of the Bible, and scholars of the Greco-Roman social backgrounds of the New Testament and earliest Christianity. The collection is appropriate for graduate and seminary students (it would, in fact, be an excellent choice for courses on Paul or New Testament interpretation), clergy, and scholars.