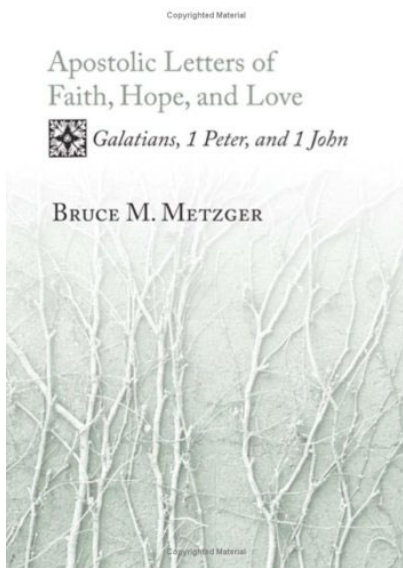


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Metzger, Bruce

Apostolic Letters of Faith, Hope, and Love: Galatians, 1 Peter, and 1 John

Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2006. Pp. xiii + 93. Paper. \$15.00. ISBN 1597525014.

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This book of some ninety pages combines brief surveys of the three New Testament letters named in the subtitle with helpful background information, devotional encouragement, and an occasional word of advice directed to pastors and preachers. Bruce Metzger addresses readers at an introductory level but draws on his extensive knowledge of both the environment out of which these writings grew and the subsequent history of their interpretation to offer fresh insights all along the way.

In an opening chapter Metzger discusses the nature of New Testament letters, showing how they share features of private letters and more formal epistles. He offers useful information on the process of letter writing and the challenges of having letters delivered in the Greco-Roman world.

The three chapters that form the body of the work each cover one letter, first Galatians, then 1 Peter and 1 John. Metzger presents a traditional view of the situation that led Paul to write Galatians, one in which Jewish Christian believers from Jerusalem had begun to press Gentile believers to adopt Old Testament precepts such as circumcision, such that they were in danger of putting their trust “in what they might do to earn their standing in addition to having faith in Christ” (14). He also takes a traditional Protestant view of Paul’s response, seeing his stress to lie on salvation by faith alone (22). As he surveys the

contents of Galatians, Metzger pauses to offer theological and devotional reflections on selected passages. Commenting on Gal 1:3, for example, he notes that “grace” precedes “peace” in Paul’s salutation and observes how this fittingly illustrates the primacy of grace in Christian thought and experience. An example of the kind of background information that enriches Metzger’s exposition is his discussion of the role and reputation of a *paidagōgos*. This “custodian,” he points out, was often viewed as a sour, nagging disciplinarian (25).

The chapters on 1 Peter and 1 John follow a similar pattern. Metzger notes persecution as a key issue addressed in 1 Peter and sees hope as a central theme. The theme of love comes to the fore in his exposition of 1 John, which is seen in part as a response to an early form of Gnosticism. One of Metzger’s pastorally oriented reflections in his chapter on 1 Peter reveals what is perhaps one of the most central qualities of this book. Metzger picks up on the word “apostle” in the letter’s opening verse and (citing Kierkegaard) stresses the more-than-human authority of apostles as representatives of Jesus Christ (41–42). The concept of apostolicity is important for Metzger, as the title of his book indicates. He affirms the apostle Peter as the author of 1 Peter (using Silvanus as his amanuensis) and the apostle John as the author of 1 John (42–43, 59–60). This perhaps explains why Metzger seems not in the least troubled by any sense of a gap between historically oriented scholarship and theological exposition.

I think this little book could serve a useful role as a supplementary text in a New Testament introduction course in a seminary setting. Introduction courses confront students with a great deal of information and oblige them to wrestle with numerous critical questions. In classes where students want to study the New Testament to deepen their spiritual lives and prepare for church ministry, Metzger’s book might offer a welcome taste of the New Testament in a different mode—consistent with historical study, yet going beyond it.