

Bruce, F. F. *The Pauline Circle*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985. 106 pp. Paperback, \$4.95.

A major subject of recent debate in NT scholarship is the possibility that John the beloved disciple gathered around himself a "school" or "circle" of disciples who passed on the traditions about Jesus that they had received from him. Such a thesis has been particularly attractive to scholars who wish to acknowledge the inroads of critical scholarship on NT introduction, while nevertheless maintaining that the insight and authority of the beloved disciple controlled the content of what has traditionally been known as the "Johannine Writings" (the Fourth Gospel and the three epistles and Revelation of John). The main problem with this approach is that evidence for such a "school" or "circle" is virtually nonexistent. It is, in fact, only by imaginative reconstruction that such a hypothesis can presently be maintained.

In stark contrast to this situation concerning the Johannine corpus, Bruce rightly points out that there is abundant evidence within the NT documents themselves for a considerable "circle" of associates and disciples who worked together with Paul and, in many cases, carried on his work after his death. Yet, this topic has never been thoroughly studied along the lines of the "Johannine-School" hypothesis; and thus, Bruce's *The Pauline Circle*, though a shorter and more shallow work than one has come to expect from him, makes a major contribution by pointing out the possibilities in such a study.

Bruce devotes a chapter each to ten major figures or groupings in the "Pauline Circle"—Ananias (along with the disciples at Damascus), Barnabas, Silas/Silvanus, Timothy, Luke, Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos, Titus, Onesimus, and Mark. In chap. 11, he devotes about a paragraph each to some of the lesser-known associates of Paul, such as Aristarchus, Epaphras, Philemon, Epaphroditus, Demas, Tychicus, Tertius, and Onesiphorus. The final chapter focuses on the hosts and hostesses who sheltered Paul in the course of his journeys—Judas of Damascus, Lydia, the Philippian jailer, Jason of Thessalonica, Gaius of Corinth, and Mnason. It is evident from the giving of these lists that Bruce considers the Acts of the Apostles to be a reliable source of information about the career of Paul and his associates.

Some readers will perhaps be disappointed that Bruce does not engage in much "reading between the lines." His approach is, rather, a straightforward one to the evidence presented in the biblical account. A small exception can be found on p. 93, in his speculation that while Paul was working with Barnabas in Antioch, Paul stayed with the parents of Rufus, that Rufus' mother was the wife of Simeon Niger (Acts 13:1), and the Niger is to be identified with Simon of Cyrene, who was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21).

Bruce makes no attempt to analyze the personalities of Paul's close associates, even though hints in the NT almost beg that such an attempt be made. For instance, Bruce makes no effort to contrast the personalities of Timothy and Titus. Timothy appears timid and retiring (1 Cor 16:10, 11), especially so if the Pastoral letters reflect Paul's estimate of his character. On the other hand, Titus comes across in the NT as a powerful, self-assured personality—a person willing to be paraded before the apostles as a "model Gentile Christian" (Gal 2), succeeding in Corinth, where Timothy failed (2 Corinthians, esp. 7:15), and appearing to be in little need of Paul's direction while working in Crete.

Certain other questions are also bypassed—such as, what the kind of people who gathered around Paul tells us about the personality of the apostle, and what first-century history, geography, and sociology suggest concerning the activities, occupations, and interests of Paul's associates. Bruce's book would undoubtedly have made a greater contribution to Pauline scholarship if the author had interacted more with historical and sociological studies of the first century and if he had explored the possibilities implicit in the time and place of the NT record.

Negative reactions aside, it must be stated that this book is nonetheless indeed a helpful pointer to a neglected area of NT scholarship. *The Pauline Circle* provides a good starting point for the study of Paul's "friends and co-workers, hosts and hostesses, [who] had no other motive in being so helpful than love of Paul and love of the Master whom he served" (p. 99).

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Brueggemann, Walter. *The Message of the Psalms*. Augsburg Old Testament Studies. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984. vi + 200 pp. Paperback, \$10.95.

This is a rather slender volume, but its usefulness extends considerably beyond its physical size. Its title-page describes it as a "theological commentary," and that it is. The aim of the author is to give the reader the heart of the theology of each of the psalms discussed. This calls for a format different from the typical exegetical commentary's verse-by-verse discussion. While the psalms are examined by sections in broad outline, no attempt is made to break the psalms down into smaller units than these. Because the treatment of the psalms is thematic and theological, their order of presentation follows the nature of their contents rather than their order of appearance in the Psalter. About a third of the total psalms in the Psalter are discussed in this work.