Reviews


This volume consists of the papers and responses presented and debated in the seminar “Romans through History and Culture” of the Society of Biblical Literature that lasted from 2000 to 2002. The first essay (previously published in *Harvard Theological Review*) by Kathy L. Gaca argues that in Romans 1:18-32 Paul is innovative in supposing that the Gentiles had originally known the Biblical God, and in assessing their polytheism in terms of religious apostasy, for according to contemporaneous Jewish authors Gentiles had never known this God and thus could not be blamed for their idolatry. Professor Gaca demonstrates that Paul’s standpoint was not accepted until Tatian, who identified these Gentiles as the Greeks, or even as the Greek philosophers, and that Paul’s view was elaborated by Athanasius and John Chrysostom. However, Clement of Alexandria and Origen evaluate the Greeks’ knowledge of God both negatively and positively. These findings are affirmed and elaborated upon in Halvor Moxnes’s response. Next, Michael Joseph Brown investigates the position of Jews in Alexandria and Clement’s view on the salvation of the Jews in his *Stromateis* II. He concludes that according to Clement at least a portion of them will be saved, and that Christianity has not displaced Judaism. However, in her response Kathy Gaca rightly criticizes this conclusion, for if—as Clement assumes—only those Jews will be saved who believe in Christ, this implies that in his view Christians have displaced Jews as God’s people. L.L. Welborn gives an interesting analysis of the structure of Clement’s *Stromateis* II, and demonstrates that Paul’s epistle to the Romans was the organizational basis of this book. In her response Kathy Gaca shows that she is convinced by this conclusion, although she does not agree with Professor Welborn’s contention that *Stromateis* II is a protreptic book. The book then turns from Clement of Alexandria to Irenaeus of Lyons. Susan L. Graham corroborates the hypothesis that Paul’s line of thought in
Romans 9-11 structured Irenaeus’ interpretation of Noah’s three sons, Ham, Shem, and Japhet, in his *Epideixis*. Although Irenaeus does not explicitly refer to Paul’s image of the olive tree in Romans 11:17-21, Professor Graham argues that it must have been in his mind. D. Jeffrey Bingham describes how Irenaeus read Romans 8 with regard to the resurrection of the human body, and how this chapter provided him with the key to his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:50, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”, a text that was a favourite among the “heretics”. These two papers on Irenaeus are answered by Jouette M. Bassler and Christoph Markschies, who both agree with, and expand on, the main lines of the arguments. The following contributions are devoted to Origen. Ruth Clements investigates Origen’s *Peri Archon* IV and shows how his distinction between “literal” and “spiritual” exegesis was inspired by Pauline texts. Therefore, she also pays attention to Origen’s relationship with Jews and his view of their interpretation of Scripture. Her paper is positively commented on by Peter Gorday. Sze-kar Wan deals with the theme of Jews and Gentiles in Origen’s *Commentary on Romans*, and particularly examines his interpretation of Romans 2:9b-10 (To the Jew first, then to the Greek), 2:17-24 (Who is a true Jew?), 2:29 (What is true circumcision? [3:29 is a printing error]), and 11:25 (The mystery of salvation of the Jews). Charles H. Cosgrove appreciatively responds to Professors Clements and Wan in a lucid and even humorous essay on the differences between premodern and modern hermeneutics and their mutual correspondences. He keenly highlights how difficult it is for modern interpreters to know the “real Paul”. The final contribution to this volume is authored by Dieter Georgi. He pretends to evaluate the seminar as a whole, but in fact he only deals with Irenaeus and Origen (“The two persons that are in the center of this seminar’s discussion”), as if Clement was not discussed at all. Moreover, he hardly evaluates the preceding contributions on Irenaeus and Origen. Taking up Professor Bassler’s references to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Georgi posits the similarity of the adulation of martyrdom in the early church and in the Muslim world. He supposes that the purpose of the anti-heretical literature of the early church was in part to inform the Romans authorities, allowing them to more easily persecute the heretics. He puts that martyrrologies refer to torture, but do not say anything about the authorities’ questions regarding names, locations, practices, and rites. Surprisingly, Professor Georgi deduces from this that (“catholic”) Christians did not mind betraying the names of their fellow-believers (he prob-