

## Foreword

ANY NEW THINKING ON Pauline theology captures the attention of New Testament scholars, and indeed a wider readership, with the hope that here is another insight that will help us to grasp even better the complexities of this critical area of New Testament Studies.

Against a background of the discussion of the intricate link between religion and imperialism in the Caribbean and beyond, this book seeks to demonstrate that it is this link that is at work in the Epistle to the Romans. It is to this combination that St. Paul responds, showing that another set of combinations—those linking God and Jesus, and Jesus and the church—provide a basis for hope in withstanding the imperialism of Rome.

This book by Ian Rock is a significant contribution to the further unfolding of the complexities of Pauline theology. It leads us to focus on the tension between Paul's theology and worldview, on the one hand, and those of Roman imperialism, on the other. This tension, he argues, is at the very heart of the Epistle to the Romans. Set in the context of the exercise of Roman power that manifested itself in the imposition of Roman imperialism and control, Dr. Rock treats the Epistle as an attempt by the small Christian group at Rome to generate hope. The Epistle can also be read as counter-imperial and most likely resistance ideology. This, according to Dr. Rock, leads to the placing of the manifestation of the eternal power of God through the resurrection of Jesus over against the imperial power of Rome which will decline and die. Positing this tension (Jesus/church/Christian vs. Roman imperialism) as the exegetical key to unlock the Letter, the Epistle comes alive as an heroic Christian attempt to maintain the integrity of the faith in the face of tensions that can lead to the compromising of Christian integrity.

The book is a timely reminder that, given the intricate link between context and content in theological discourse, there can hardly be an ideologically free theology. Even when theology tries desperately to disentangle itself from the dominant ideology of its context, its response can be shaped and influenced by the very ideology it is countering. Dr. Rock is correct in drawing our attention to the fact that Paul's theology emerges from, and is inextricably bound to, the politics of his day. God through Jesus thus emerges in Romans as an all-conquering power against which Rome is no match. In the God vs. Caesar contest there is only one possible winner—God.

This book enables us to listen to Paul again as he speaks in Romans. Just when we thought we had heard all that St. Paul had to say, Dr. Rock invites us to listen again.

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When we do so, we hear some new things that, like the old ones, can lead us to a deeper understanding of Paul, and, even more so, a better understanding of the integrity of the faith in the context of a powerful and domineering imperialistic ideology.

The book is excellent reading for Pauline scholars in particular and biblical scholars in general.

The Most Rev'd Dr. and Hon. John W. D. Holder

*Bishop of Barbados*

*Feast of St. Ambrose*

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