

## Foreword

### “A Polite Bribe: An Honest Proposition”

**A** *Polite Bribe* suggests, in the double meaning of the word *bribe*, not only that Paul needed to persuade the original followers of Jesus of the worthiness of the Gentile mission but that his ability to deliver a collection from that Gentile world was a key factor that held together the two factions.

As we say in German, it is the scarlet thread (*der rote Faden*) explored throughout *A Polite Bribe*.

In establishing this plot line, Robert Orlando has rediscovered the importance of Jewish Christianity for the understanding of the early movement and of Paul. Though from 1930 up to now, an outside group called gnostics were regarded as Paul's main opponents, not Jewish Christians, today many a scholar has tacitly withdrawn what he or she wrote about gnostics and Paul.

In addition the author uses a sound, logical series of cause and effect moves in his writing to sequence a new narrative that has yet to be offered to the scholarly or popular imagination. He has found a convincing way to express human-motive, psychosocial, and literary investigations to complement or even challenge some of the traditional Lukan mythical history.

Having a new narrative available will lead readers to answer the question: What really happened? This is an important question that is only natural to ask in matters of religion. If the outcome is new to people, it may cause some uproar. But thus has always been the case after great discoveries. Our job as historians is solely to search for truth, which ultimately sets us free.

New Testament scholarship has had a tendency to spiritualize texts, and as a result human experience is assigned theological terms where saints

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like James and Paul appear as ghosts without flesh and blood. This book will remind readers of the earthen reality—that in spite of spiritual aspirations, the men of the Bible remain just that: men.

*A Polite Bribe*, as human drama, transforms scholarship into a narrative that leads to an unveiling of holy history. It combats the spiritualizing of the texts—the poor were not really poor but only “poor in spirit”—and reminds us that this allegorizing means the end of true religion. Rather it attempts a rediscovery of reality, a more human look at Paul and James through their ethnic conflict and the need for the collection, or “polite bribe,” that defined the early Christian movement.

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