

Christian Hellenists was driven from the city, whereupon Paul set off to pursue it to Damascus.

Like all Professor Hengel's books, this one is written on the basis of an immense knowledge of the source material and is backed up by detailed end-notes, though in this particular case the majority of these have been provided by Roland Deines. The argument is punctuated by barbed comments on alternative interpretations of the evidence. Many of these are aimed at those who dismiss Acts as providing us with any reliable information at all; although Professor Hengel agrees that one must start with Paul's own accounts of events and not with Luke's, he makes far more use of Acts than do many scholars working in this field, and finds a surprising degree of agreement between the two writers. This cautious use of Acts is certainly preferable to the unduly sceptical dismissal of everything Luke wrote, provided we concentrate on those areas where he provides supporting evidence for the picture given by Paul himself, and do not build on the evidence of Acts alone.

In other ways, too, Professor Hengel presents a far more traditional understanding of Paul than is common today. In his final paragraph, for example, he insists that no one has understood 'the real essence of Pauline theology' better than Augustine and Martin Luther! Can we really still pursue the notion that we can separate out 'the real essence of Pauline theology'? And can we claim that *Paul's* theology has been grasped by those who failed to understand his context? It is odd, too, to find Hengel, a little earlier, maintaining that what distinguished the proclamation of the Hellenists was the fact that it 'was critical of the ritual parts of the Torah and the cult'. Can we any longer suppose that we ought to try to separate 'ethical' from 'ritual' in this way?

Most useful, perhaps, is Hengel's attempt to 'place' Paul in Jerusalem, as an ardent student of the Law, and yet acquiring a Greek education. This makes sense of Paul's involvement in the persecution which was apparently sparked by a dispute within the Greek-speaking community. Yet precisely why the lax attitudes of the Hellenist Jewish-Christians should have led to persecution of the intensity described by Luke, and how it came about that Paul received, on the Damascus road, a call to be a Christian apostle remain for one reader at least, unanswered questions.

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RELIGION AND THE AMBIGUITIES OF CAPITALISM by Ronald H Preston, *SCM Press*, London, 1991 pp. 182. £12. 50.

This is an informative and readable book, the most recent in a tradition of thought that perhaps originated with Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. It would especially suit the general reader interested in the ongoing debate about how to live with capitalism on one's conscience; its breadth is impressive.

The book begins with an attack on the Social Credit theory of the Thirties and the seemingly endless ability of theologians and church leaders

to be caught up in social movements and panaceas that do not do justice to the complexity of the economic and political reality. If Ronald Preston sees his task as educating the non-specialist in the ways of economists, his second chapter 'Understanding Economics and its Limits' is an admirably clear account of some basic principles of the dismal science that really should attract more attention from theologians. Even they have to go shopping occasionally.

Chapter 3 is basically an account of Christian socialism. It also contains a somewhat cursory examination of the rise of political economy. 'The market is the least bad way of finding out over a wide range of economic goods and services what love of neighbour in economic terms requires' (p 44). This judgement is heavily qualified and put in a social context, but the market economy is here to stay on this view. (If you are still interested in Marxism chapter 4 is useful. I skipped it at first but it is historically necessary to understand it).

Professor Preston is extremely clear that, left to itself, the market is merely an ideology; he is no *laissez faire* liberal. He also tries to explain what the market is and how it works, at least in theory. It is one of his criticisms of current Catholic papal social teaching that there is no analysis of the market. He repeats this twice in the main text and once in the footnotes. He is right that there is little technical economics in papal encyclicals, but to my mind they give a perspective that Preston basically agrees with—some kind of reworked social market.

The appendix of the book is a reworked lecture on the ethics of finance, and again Preston shows he is picking up on a significant theme: credit, inflation and debt form the backdrop to most people's lives now. He is unkind to the Middle Ages, but he clearly believes we have now moved on and that Christendom was an exception not a paradigm. I am not so sure.

It is quite clear too that the economic training of the author gives him little natural sympathy with the ecological movement (although he has to borrow some of their insights), nor indeed with those people who he feels are evading their responsibility to face the ambiguities of reality as he tries quite successfully to do. He is self-confessedly no revolutionary. 'Some may indeed be called to live some kind of communal life whether in a religious order or not, but I have not seen any clear account of how such a vision (of apocalypse) bears upon the urgent issues discussed in this book. I think it is an evasion of responsibility' (p 131). Or again, 'Some Christians still expect an imminent parousia. I wonder, do they forego pension and insurance contributions?' (p 170). His dismissal of Moltmann is delicious (p 171) and he has raised some important questions about the nature of liberation theology and natural law morality.

He concludes with some extremely sensible ideas (on debt, trade, aid, and environment), but like the people he criticises he may in the end be encouraging us to do no more than polish the bars of our cage. After reading the book, and despite disclaimers, I felt that it was not only the capitalism that was ambiguous.

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