

Carla Swafford Works, *The Least of These: Paul and the Marginalized*

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Carla Works' *The Least of These: Paul and the Marginalized* is a book for our times. Stemming from Works' experience teaching the Pauline epistles at Wesley Theological Seminary, the book is particularly aimed at Christians inclined either to avoid or loathe the apostle. Without shying away from the 'enslavement, silencing, marginalization, and ostracism that has been done in the name of Paul's letters' (p. 8), and while still acknowledging Paul's fallibility, Works intends to rehabilitate Paul's reputation by casting him as 'an Apostle for the "least of these"' (p. 10), a figure whose mission and message stand in continuity with Jesus' proclamation of good news to the poor.

Following the introduction, chapter 1, 'Paul and Poverty', sets the stage by locating Paul's mission in its socio-economic context, arguing that most members of the Pauline congregations experienced material want and that Paul's message and actions were aimed at 'remembering the poor' (Gal 2:10) through practices of mutual care and love. Chapter 2 takes up the complex issue of 'Paul and Slavery'. Rooting her analysis in a nuanced treatment of slavery in the Roman world, Works contends that, while Paul does not directly advocate for the abolition of slavery, Paul's gospel 'demands embracing slaves not as property, but as humans and, even more than that, as brothers and sisters' (p. 48).

Chapter 3, 'Women and the Pauline Mission', opens with a poignant reflection on the role that Paul's letters have played in the lives of seminary students for whom those letters have been employed as a barrier to Christian leadership. Works then carefully examines a number of Pauline texts that have featured prominently in debates about 'biblical womanhood', namely, 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, 14:34–5; 1 Timothy 2:11–12; 1 Corinthians 7; and Ephesians 5. In each instance, readers are provided with discerning exegesis that emphasises the leadership roles that women performed among the churches of Paul's mission and that contextualises these texts historically and in light of Paul's eschatological convictions. Works observes, 'What we see in these letters are the struggles of real believers who are trying to navigate life in the tension of their conventional roles and in the freedom of their service to Christ' (p. 84). It is worth noting one missed opportunity in this chapter, however. Works' discussion of 1 Timothy 2 concentrates on the silencing of women in vv. 11–12, contending that, instead of silencing all Christian women at all times, 'in its first century context ... the instructions here offer sound advice to women who are using their status to interrupt and possibly try to "correct" sound teaching'" (p. 76). While this is helpful, Works never discusses 1 Timothy 2:13–15. In my experience teaching the Pastoral Epistles, 1 Timothy 2:9–15 functions as a 'text of terror' for many women not merely because of instructions regarding female silence in vv. 11–12, but also because of the apparent

creational, perhaps even ontological, warrant provided for that silence in vv. 13–15. Readers would have benefited from Works' perspective on these difficult verses.

Notable contributions are found in chapter 4, 'The Galatian Heirs', and chapter 5, 'The Church as the Least of These?' In the former, Works expands the concept of 'the least of these' beyond poverty, slavery and gender to include those subjugated by Rome's power. With a focus on Galatians, Works contends that to Galatian readers whose land had been taken by Roman occupation Paul's evocation of God's promises to Abraham is linked with the hope of new life in the Spirit, inheritance of God's kingdom and the arrival of new creation. Thus, 'the Galatians are indeed heirs and children of the promise, and what they are inheriting is life – the kind of abundant life that rectifies and reclaims human and nonhuman creation alike' (p. 106). In chapter 5, Works advances a fresh and compelling claim that Paul's metaphor of the Corinthians as 'infants' (1 Cor 3:1) stresses not only the Corinthians' immaturity but also their vulnerability, that is, their status as the 'least of these'.

The penultimate chapter, 'Paul as the Least of These?', aptly illustrates the vulnerability and humility of the 'least' of the apostles, who was willing to become 'least' in service of God's calling. The book concludes with a thoughtful chapter, 'Good News for the Least of These', that expounds the cosmic nature of Paul's 'gospel' and the gospel's ability to obliterate 'any distinctions used in our culture to foster hierarchy, privilege, and power' (p. 172). Works has written an excellent book that will be useful in many teaching settings, especially seminary or advanced undergraduate courses on Paul's letters.

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Jennifer A. Herdt, *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition*

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In this book, Jennifer Herdt, Professor of Christian Ethics at Yale Divinity School, sets as her task to retrieve 'the German *Bildung* tradition' and make it acceptable to Christian thought and moral reasoning, albeit in manner that allows for the participation of non-Christians as well (p. 245). In this effort, she is assisted by Karl Barth, who functions in the book like a wise, chatty Vergil, appearing episodically to help the author take stock theologically of her Dantesque journey through the past. Herdt calls these appearances 'listening sessions' (p. 243) with Barth.

Herdt's achieves her purpose, but it is a Pyrrhic victory. On the one hand, she admirably trudges over immense ground in German intellectual history and literature, from medieval mystics such as Meister Eckhart; to early-modern Pietist thinkers such as Johann Arndt and Jakob Boehme; to canonical thinkers of the German Enlightenment and Romantic period, such as Goethe, Kant, Humboldt, Schilling, Herder, and Hegel, with excursions along the way to ponder the 'ethical formation