

There are solid accounts of figures who received little or no attention in the former volume, such as Damascius or Hierocles of Alexandria. The use of philosophy by Christian bishops and theologians or, in the editor's words, 'the intertwining of philosophy and the theology of a religion rooted in revelation and in a non-Hellenic tradition' (p. 3), is an admittedly difficult aspect of the work. While the editor notes the polemical and other factors which make this relationship such a complicated one, the chapters themselves are notably disappointing precisely because they tend not to take these factors into account, omitting the apologetic, rhetorical and missionary stance of the theologians, with a few exceptions noted below. Unfortunately the disclaimer given in the introduction is apt.

While some variation of quality is to be expected in a work with this many contributors, the range is regrettably wide in this case. Among the most helpful chapters are those by Harold Tarrant on pre-Plotinian Platonism, John F. Finamore and Sarah Iles Johnston on the Chaldean Oracles, R. J. Hankinson on Galen, David Winston on Philo, Andrew Smith on Porphyry, Hermann Schibli on Hierocles of Alexandria, Dennis Minns on Justin Martyr, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz and Lewis Ayres on Basil of Caesarea, Beatrice Motta on Nemesius of Emesa, Angela Longo on Syrianus, Carlos Steel on Proclus, Gerd van Riel on Damascius, Koenraad Verrycken on John Philoponus, Eric Perl on Pseudo-Dionysius and – a welcome surprise – historical surveys of the major developments pertaining to philosophy in each period, by Elizabeth Depalma Digeser.

Although it is stronger on the non-Christian philosophers than the Christians, this new *History* succeeds in providing a single reference work which covers most of the major figures and movements in late ancient Western philosophy. As the study of late ancient history has come into its own in recent decades, so too late ancient philosophy has become virtually a new field, with growing interest in figures such as Proclus, the Pseudo-Dionysius and Boethius. So it is appropriate that the field receives a proper reference work such as this. It is to be hoped that early Byzantine and Islamic philosophy will receive the same degree of attention in the years ahead.

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Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul, the Corinthians and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. xiv + 178. £50.00; \$85.00 (hbk).

This study of Paul's Corinthian correspondence is an extremely sophisticated exploration of what is involved in the interpretation of texts. It interweaves two different sets of material to challenge not only assumptions about early Christian interpretation but also aspects of postmodern hermeneutical debate, including its consequences for historico-critical approaches to the Bible. The first set of material consists of the Corinthian correspondence itself and Paul's constant rewriting and reinterpretation of himself to which it bears witness. The second set is patristic exploitation of statements, originally generated by Paul in his self-apologetic, to justify their own exegetical procedures, commenting, not simply on the text, but with the text. In both cases the agonistic nature of ancient rhetoric and its expectation that exegesis is meant to be useful are recurring themes, each requiring sometimes an appeal to the literal wording, sometimes a claim to clarify an obscure or deeper meaning, in the interests of persuading the audience to understand or act upon the recommended reading. Yet the sheer instability of meaning, as Paul explains and rewords himself, and later early Christians explain or exploit Paul, is the resultant outcome.

There is then considerable complexity in the argument of this book. Originally delivered as the Speaker's lectures in Oxford, the publication of the material is welcome, allowing as it does greater direct engagement with what is going on as one moves from chapter to chapter. Any attempt to summarise detracts from a discussion full of unexpected insights and interconnections. In subtle ways the book reinforces the challenges offered by this reviewer to the classic accounts of patristic exegesis, but it also goes even further in setting patristic exegesis, as well as Paul's writing, in its proper rhetorical context, as distinct from retrospective readings of its shape and intentions derived from medieval classifications.

The opening chapter, using Gregory Nyssen's Prologue to his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* as its launch-pad, demonstrates the extent to which patristic defence of non-literal readings called in evidence the Corinthian letters. In fact, it argues that 'hermeneutics is born in misunderstanding' (p. 11), and the misunderstandings created between Paul and the Corinthians by his words, his corrections and interpretations of his own meanings explain why these letters became such a significant resource for patristic hermeneutics, which was equally agonistic. Neither Paul nor the Fathers can be understood simply through the binary opposition of 'literal' and 'allegorical' – all alike looked for what was 'beneficial' for the reader in the text, and there is constant tension between clarity and elusiveness, mystery and testimony, such that it demands engagement, insight and action, rather than methodological theory. It is through such insights into the rhetoric of interpretation that Margaret Mitchell crafts her own rhetorically based exploration of the way in which

the Corinthian correspondence provides the *diolkos* through which passed the whole development of early Christian hermeneutics, *diolkos* being the path by which cargo was dragged across the Corinthian isthmus and therefore an apposite metaphor.

The second chapter explains and explores what is meant by agonistic interpretation, drawing attention both to Paul's self-defence as the context of this exercise in self-reinterpretation, and to the adversarial nature of ancient rhetoric, which taught pupils how to use texts to make their case. Not for the last time, Cicero is called in, here to demonstrate the point that texts were known to be ambiguous and that, in support of an argument, appeal could be made either to the plain meaning of the text or to a variety of other possibilities, including potential implications beyond what is actually stated. The discussion is exemplified by careful analysis of 1 Cor 5:9–11, together with an account of patristic debate about its reference, and then by 1 Cor 4:6, 'a marvellous hermeneutical irony: Paul maintains that he has engaged in *figured or disguised speech* (*meteschēmatisa*) in order to protect a *literal interpretation* (in word and in deed) of another utterance' (pp. 33–4).

Chapter 3 shifts the binary of 'literal vs. allegorical' to their common associates, 'bodily vs. incorporeal', 'fleshly vs. spiritual'. The argument of the early chapters of 1 Corinthians is examined in some detail, the profound ambiguities being drawn out and the legacy explored. Paul's logic requires that the Corinthians have it in their power to grow and mature, but it 'left anthropological hermeneutics tantalisingly unresolved' (p. 45), and not surprisingly we soon reach the Valentinians who transmuted Paul's 'exhortatory rhetoric' into 'philosophical anthropology': three races of people – spiritual, psychical and earthly (p. 46). New light is then thrown on Origen's subsequent use of the terms as hermeneutical principles by insisting that, like Paul, he was 'constructing a rhetorical argument' with 'several not entirely consistent goals'. The extent to which Origen's discussion is indebted to Paul is subtly drawn out: he provides 'the key to the keys' (p. 57). Yet Origen is hardly playing in the same ball-game as Paul – he has refashioned Paul's words to suit his own hermeneutical argument.

Chapter 4, 'The Mirror and the Veil', explores what the author calls 'a "veil scale" of careful strategic calibration between the utterly clear and the utterly obscure, depending upon the *skopos* of a given argument' (p. 57). Paul and his patristic readers employ the same techniques, moving across the tensions between the hidden and the revealed. Again, the discussion covers familiar material concerning symbols, enigmas, types and allegories, while actually throwing on all such terms new shafts of light, and oscillating still between the rhetoric of Paul's arguments with Corinthians, and the patristic appeal to Pauline texts, and illuminating both by reference to

ancient rhetorical conventions. By now passages in 2 Corinthians are being deployed, and the remaining two chapters focus on aspects of this document, which the author clearly regards as a composite text, providing evidence once again of how Paul was reinterpreting and representing himself, and indeed his apostleship, in an *agon* with his Corinthian readers. This time the argument focuses on the legal dimensions of appeal to witnesses and the verification of authority, but the technique of precise examination of Pauline texts alongside reference to patristic material follows the same pattern as earlier in the book and will not be described further here.

The final pages draw out the purpose of this ‘backwards and forwards’ reading of Paul and its major conclusions. Not only do we find within the correspondence itself ‘a dynamic process of negotiated meaning . . . through the series of letters interpreting and reinterpreting what is written’, but ‘once published the Corinthian correspondence was to provide patristic exegetes with a treasure house of equipment for their own agonistic tasks involving scriptural interpretation’ (p. 106). This leads to certain reflections about the process of interpretation, both in antiquity, and at present. For example:

- the either/or of letter and spirit is a ‘binary, rhetorically constructed in favour of one’s own reading and against that of another’, and so cannot be treated as an ‘analytical tool’ – most reading is ‘somewhere between the letter of the text and its intent or deeper sense as discovered later’ (p. 109).
- ‘academic biblical scholars are masters of a “veil scale”’. So ‘we routinely clarify the obscure and obscure the clear’, and ‘continue to work away, year by year, somewhere in the middle between the part and the whole, the known and the obscure, plotted on a movable spectrum along the veil scale of clarified and hidden meanings’ (pp. 113–14).

I guess the very attempt to give a flavour of this rich and detailed exploration of not just the Corinthian correspondence, but many other texts from antiquity, has shown something of the range and depth of scholarship implicit in this work, as well as the insights which emerge from the close attention to particular texts, which themselves illuminate the complexity of hermeneutical engagement with texts in general. The book is not conducive to easy précis and demands attention from its readers. But that is just what good interpretation requires, and to give that attention is to be richly rewarded. The discussion of New Testament exegesis, both ancient and modern, should be much enhanced by serious consideration of Margaret Mitchell’s fascinating reappraisal of this material.

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