

**Plevnik, J 1997 – Paul and the parousia: An exegetical and theological investigation**

Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers. 353 Pages. Price: Unknown.

**Reviewer: Dr G J Malan**

In this study Plevnik grapples with the frequently neglected subject of the parousia, in search of the Pauline understanding of the theme. His approach is a reaction to Rudolf Bultmann's program of demythologizing, as he tries to reclaim the "spiritual riches and the theological significance of the parousia" which Plevnik sees as lost in Bultmann's approach.

The book has two parts. The first part (chs 1-7) deals with the fundamental concepts and imagery in Paul's presentations of the parousia and with the exegesis of the key texts on the subject. The second part (chs 8-13) deals with the theological issues connected with the parousia. The notions discovered in the first part are here assembled and located within the wider context of Paul's thought. Theological issues are

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raised under such topics as hope, judgment, the antagonistic aspect of the parousia, living with Christ, the church and the parousia, and Paul's apocalyptic theology.

The study is not restricted to the term "parousia" as such, but includes relevant terms used in Paul's imagery about the parousia. A welcome and relevant inclusion is the discussion of the "day of the Lord" in the Pauline texts. Plevnik demonstrates that the concept of the parousia and its terminology derive [from the Jewish apocalyptic tradition rather than that of the Hellenistic "comings" of the kings.]

Plevnik sees the following as the key Pauline texts dealing with the parousia: 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18, 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 15:23-28, 50-55; Philippians 3:20-21. To these texts he applies the somewhat dated historical critical exegetical method, as this book is a 1991-1992 reworking of his doctoral thesis from 1971. Therefore the text abounds with historical aspects as well as textual cross-references. It is evident from the list of more than three hundred short titles that he refers mostly to somewhat dated works. There are fewer than twenty references to works from this decade, while about fifty works mentioned are from the eighties. From a historical point of view it is nevertheless a thorough explication of the theme and could as such be useful to pastors and students.

In the concluding chapter, which is about Paul's apocalyptic theology, Plevnik gives his critical views on Bultmann's programme of demythologizing. In fact, there seems to be little if any common ground between Plevnik and Bultmann. Plevnik is critical about Bultmann's use of Heidegger's existential philosophy for hermeneutical purposes, Bultmann's departure from "objective knowledge" about salvation to a subjective stance, his definition of myth, and the demythologizing programme, itself. As far as hermeneutics is concerned, Plevnik is at home with Karl Rahner, whose principles he proposes. Regarding the parousia in Pauline literature, Plevnik sees Bultmann's method as a reduction of eschatology, and stresses with Beker the role of the apocalyptic in Paul's theology. For him, hope has a specific object, and apocalyptic supplies the framework for this object. In the last five and a half pages Plevnik gives his own "rephrasing" of Paul's apocalyptic imagery for modern people. Actually, he never lets go of the apocalyptic and mythological world-view, but simply states its "meaning", which is not very helpful to people who do not accept the apocalyptic world-view. In view of his immense criticism of Bultmann, one would have expected much more. It is in the hermeneutical field that Plevnik fails the modern and more critical reader.

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