

Regent's Reviews 22 (Autumn, 2003) 13-14

© *Regent's Reviews*, a publication of Regent's Park College, Oxford, OX1 2LB
Reproduced by Permission

Mark D. Nanos (ed.), *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002) ISBN 1-56563-468-3

Reviewed by Sean F. Winter, Northern Baptist College, Manchester

To really understand Galatians, that most passionate and thus most polemical of all Pauline epistles, the scholar, or indeed the preacher, needs to get to grips with a couple of central issues: what was going on in the Galatian church that aroused Paul to such passion? and to what extent can we discern within the letter a careful and fitting response to that situation?

This collection of essays gathers twenty-three important articles relating to these two questions in a volume that will be of enormous value to students of Galatians. The Editor divides the essays into three sections. Part 1 includes essays which explore various rhetorical and epistolary dimensions of the letter (of special interest here is the inclusion of parts of an unpublished essay by Nils Dahl, which has long been famous among New Testament scholars). Part 2 focuses on the first two chapters of the letter, exploring the rhetorical function of Paul's autobiographical and historical story as well as suggesting some of the likely issues at stake in the Antioch Incident of Galatians 2.11-21. Part 3 contains more general essays exploring the situation in Galatia at the time of writing. The essays are carefully introduced by the editor who traces the shifts in scholarly interpretation of Galatians over the last 20 years.

The value of the volume lies in the fact that we are given an insight the sheer variety of interpretations and readings of Galatians, a feel for the different methodological approaches that now characterise Pauline studies, and a flavour of some classic studies and some of the most up to date work on the letter. As a set they reinforce the notion that Paul, despite his passionate outbursts, has constructed in Galatians a carefully structured and powerfully persuasive argument, which, while not always convincing, nonetheless continues to have rhetorical force beyond the boundaries of the original Galatian situation (which is subject to a number of different explanatory hypotheses). While the approaches taken in these essays are rhetorical or historical, it is impossible to avoid the key theological issues that lie at the heart of the letter: of freedom, faith, promise, inclusion, obedience and authority.

Pauline scholars will enjoy having all this in one place. Students will find this a helpful volume in their studies. Ministers and preachers may be a little more reluctant to purchase a book that is so obviously "scholarly" in focus, and which contains essays, which are often highly specialized. This would be a shame. Sometimes it is good to go beyond the commentaries and read what the commentators have read themselves. The fact that readers of Galatians can now do this without rooting around in the journals and *Festschriften* where these essays were originally published, makes this a worthwhile buy, if a challenging read.

Sean F. Winter
Northern Baptist College, Manchester