

KATHY EHRENSPERGER, *Searching Paul: Conversations with the Jewish Apostle to the Nations*. (Wunt 429; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019). Pp. xi + 458. Cloth. €149.00.

Searching Paul consists of 19 essays (15 previously published) drawn from Kathy Ehrensperger's research over the past decade, plus an introduction (section I), an extensive bibliography, acknowledgements, and comprehensive indexes of Ancient Sources and Modern Authors. Ehrensperger explains that these essays are "trajectories of an exploratory journey with and through the literary traces Paul the Jewish apostle to the nation has left in the letters available to us." As such they represent "snapshots" of Ehrensperger's "conversations with Paul and his interpreters over a number of years and as such they do not represent a system of interpretation but are rather nods in the multidirectional network of trajectories" (3). These "nods" are diverse and highlight the diversity of research Ehrensperger has undertaken. Ehrensperger openly acknowledges that these conversations are shaped by her own presuppositions, interests, concerns, and values. These include: correct Biblical interpretation (discussed throughout the book); gender and Paul—including feminist readings of his letters (section II, chaps. 2–6); Paul's location within Judaism and Greco-Roman culture (section III, chaps. 7–10); the distinction between Paul's language of belonging and modern concepts of race and belonging (section IV, chaps. 11–13); various aspects of reading Romans (section V, chaps. 14–18); and early receptions of Paul in 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians (section VI, chaps. 19–20).

Embodiment, gender, and everyday life describe a further interest for Ehrensperger. She argues that Paul's letters reflect an aspect of his communication and interaction that take place between particular people with particular needs and questions (14–15). Paul acts not only as a teacher, but also as an example of how his addressees can embody the message that he writes. Ehrensperger's attempts to explore contextual readings of Paul, supports her "feminist" perception of Paul. Her engagement with "Gender-critical approaches" challenges what she terms "male-

stream theologies and interpretations,” but she does this to necessitate “critical reflection on the hermeneutical presuppositions at work in any interpreter’s approach to biblical texts and theologies” (70).

While Ehrensperger espouses the Paul within Judaism school of thought, she nevertheless argues that even though Paul is a Jew and utilises Jewish interpretive practices, “the peculiarity of Paul’s activities in writings lies in the fact that he transmits this content to non-Jews, that is to people who are not socialised and do not live within the context of Jewish traditions.” As such he is involved in “a cultural translation process” (11). Consequently, Paul can translate key themes across linguistic and cultural boundaries (the topics of section III, chaps. 7–10), and is able to draw on Greco-Roman thought and language and utilise this in speaking to his various church communities.

Spanning two sections, chapters 8–12, specifically explore terminology and concepts important to Paul’s own context and thinking. The chapter titles reflect this well: “Polis, Oikos and Ekklesia in 1 Cor 12:1-11” (chap. 8); “Embodying the Ways of Christ: Paul’s Teaching of the Nations” (chap. 9); “The Absence of ἐνσέβεια in Paul: Peculiarities of Cultural Translation” (chap. 10); “Paul, His People and Racial Terminology” (chap. 11); and “Narratives of Belonging: The Role of Paul’s Genealogical Reasoning” (chap. 12). Each essay reiterates Ehrensperger’s argument for Paul as a cross-cultural translator.

For Ehrensperger, biblical interpretation is “a collective endeavour, a conversation of scholars, past and present, that will hopefully inspire scholars in the future” (6). This involves challenging anachronistic readings and interpretations that seek to understand the world of antiquity using contemporary concepts (concepts such as power—including language of power—race, ethnicity and cultural diversity, and religious concepts and rituals). She is especially concerned with the way in which Christian self-understanding over the centuries has developed in opposition to Jewish traditions and Jewish people, leading more recently to anti-Semitism and racism. This is addressed in section IV, chaps. 11–13. Each chapter deals with key terminology and

concepts that relate to usual labelling of people-groups and subgroups. Ehrensperger highlights the difference between how the modern concept of “race” operates differently than the way some of these category designators in Paul were used during his time. While she accepts that Paul employs certain terms to delineate different distinct groups (such as γένος and ἔθνος) they appear to have broader and, at times, more ambiguous boundaries of meaning than the likes of “Gentile” and “race” have today. Ehrensperger is keen to distance Paul’s use of such terms from modern ideas. She argues that “no discourse of ‘race’ existed in antiquity as no ideas expressed in negative stereotyping literature expressed anything which resembles the ‘racial’ categories of modernity” (215). Thus, it is something alien to the ancient world within which Paul wrote. Instead, it is most likely Paul uses such terms to distinguish between the Jewish people and others in a broader, non-racial sense akin to kinship distinctions (226).

Section V (chaps. 14–18) and VI (chaps. 19–20), directly explore various biblical texts. These chapters present different perspectives for interpreting passages and ideas in Romans, and aspects of Paul’s thought in 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians, respectively. Ehrensperger’s erudite interpretation and critique explores alternative interpretations, with consideration to cultural, sociolinguistic, and contemporary approaches to interpreting Paul.

The diversity of themes in *Searching Paul* represents both a strength of this volume and a challenge for any reviewer and reader. It is challenging, because Ehrensperger’s mature critique of many of the ideas consistent with mainstream scholarship that one usually draws on when interpreting Paul, requires us to challenge our own filters and frameworks with which we interpret his thought. It is also inspiring, because this work highlights the value that passion and confidence a scholar such as Ehrensperger brings to the exercise of biblical interpretation. It is rewarding, because *Searching Paul* both confirms and has shifted some of my own interpretation of Paul. *Searching Paul* is not for everyone. Those who prefer a single theme in a book will find it

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frustrating. Others will find aspects repetitive; something indicative of such a compilation. Furthermore, at times, some of her own approach to interpreting Paul is as anachronistic as the very thing she wants to challenge. As a resource of Ehrensperger's thought, however, it will be invaluable to students and academics alike, who seek a balanced, feminist, sociolinguistic, and sociological reading of Paul.

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