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Paul: An Outline of His Theology (Book Review)

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Book Reviews

by John M. Zinkand

Paul: An Outline of His Theology—by Herman Ridderbos, translated by John Richard De Witt. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1975. 587 pages, \$12.95 (cloth). Reviewed by John C. Vander Stelt, Associatè Professor of Theology and Philosophy.

After three decades of teaching at the Theological Seminary in Kampen, the Netherlands, Herman Ridderbos, Europe's most outstanding Reformed New Testament scholar, surprised the theological world in 1966 with his second major publication, Paulus: Ontwerp Van Zijn Theologie. Immediately hailed as a classic in its field, this work was reprinted in 1967, 1969, and 1972, and it was translated into German. Finally, after a whole decade, this significant work has been translated into English.

In his first major publication, The Coming of the Kingdom (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Philadelphia, 1962), Ridderbos concentrated on Christ's eschatological Kingdom proclamation and initiation. With his second major publication, presently reviewed, Ridderbos has provided us with an invaluable sequel to his earlier work.

Although chronologically Jesus preceded Paul's ministry, the writings of Paul antedate the four Gospel accounts. Historically, as the ambassador and extender par excellence of the Kingdom which Christ had come to inaugurate and guarantee, Paul has figured very prominently in Western Christianity. One has only to think of the conflicts between Augustinians and Pelagians; Protestants and Roman Catholics, Reformed and Arminians, Jansenists and Jesuits, Barthians and Bultmannians.

Instead of dealing with only a few isolated ideas and writings of Paul, Ridderbos has zeroed

in on the total scope and content of Paul's unique role after Christ and at the beginning of Christianity. He has focused on the pivotal importance of Paul's understanding of the coming, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus. In an unusually lucid manner, Ridderbos has placed such issues as sin, law, justification, and reconciliation in the immediate context of practical or existential Kingdom concerns—for example, civil authority, the role of women, speaking in tongues, communal responsibility, personal freedom, the people of God, the struggle between "flesh" and "spirit," the life of the new man. Basic to Paul's views is the "redemptive-historical, eschatological character" of his preaching. The governing motif is "the saving activity of God in the advent and work, particularly in the death and resurrection, of Christ" (p. 39).

An outstanding feature of this fascinating study is the concise survey at the very beginning of the book on the history of Pauline interpretation. Helpful also are the excellent indices of "Principal Subjects," "Persons," and "Scriptures," and, for the careful reader, the great number of scholarly footnotes which provide up-to-date information concerning Pauline studies in German, Dutch, French, and English theological circles. Perhaps, Ridderbos should have avoided the ambiguous term "Theology" in the title of his book. Whereas the writings of Paul are inspired and do not change, theologies are not inspired and do change!

In our evangelical world with its often-distorted interpretation of the Kingdom, its individualism and moralism, one only cheats himself by not appropriating the wealth of insights in this unquestionably classic Pauline study. The translator and publisher are to be commended for making available to the international, English-speaking community this most important contribution of Dr. H. Ridderbos.