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Seek the welfare of the city: Christians as benefactors and citizens

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Rashkow appropriates Freud's seduction theory as a tool for understanding the relations of daughters and fathers in Genesis (pp. 65–84). She also deals with the theme of female sexuality by juxtaposing Freud and biblical texts (pp. 85–109). Her arguments are provocative, but some readers will be shocked and put off by her repeated reading of father-daughter incest, including the first father-daughter seduction in Genesis 1–3.

Since Rashkow reads the Hebrew Bible as a single literary work, her approach will hardly satisfy Lutherans who have a high regard for the historical-critical method. But she does provide a new way of reading the text as it stands independent of historical concerns.

Rashkow's book lacks organization, and constant use of brackets interrupts the flow of her argument. Nevertheless, her analysis adds to the ever-growing body of neo-Freudian feminist scholarship, and provokes new questions of familiar biblical texts.

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Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens

Bruce W. Winter

Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company/Carlisle, UK: The Paternoster Press, 1994

ix + 245 pp.

Seek the Welfare of the City is part of the series "First Century Christians in the Greco-Roman World". In this volume Winter, a member of Cambridge University's Divinity Faculty, asserts that the Old Testament injunction to "seek the welfare of the city" (Jeremiah 29:7) provided a paradigm for teaching civic consciousness among first century Christians. By drawing together Greco-Roman and New Testament evidence Winter seeks to map out the roles played by early Christians in the *politeia*—public life—of their cities.

In Part One: Christians as Benefactors (chapters 1–4) Winter examines passages from 1 Peter, Romans, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and 1 Timothy to show that "Christian teaching endorsed the role of benefactor" (p. 2). Public "good works" were encouraged as a God-given responsibility as well as a means of refuting malicious rumours about Christians. The definition of benefactor was expanded to include all Christians capable of working to support themselves and their families, while actual benefactions were limited to those who were truly needy.

What is missing from Winter's discussion of Christians as benefactors is an examination of the role of women. Although both Greco-Roman

and New Testament evidence indicates that women participated in public life most significantly as benefactors, Winter limits his discussion almost exclusively to the subject of women, specifically widows, as recipients of benefactions. Much more could have been said. The same comment applies to Winter's treatment of the widows in 1 Timothy, in particular the requirement that an enrolled widow should have been the wife of one man (1 Timothy 5:9). Winter seriously downplays the implications of this requirement, ignoring the high cultural value placed on the *univira/monandros* in the Greco-Roman world. Ironically Winter quotes a later Christian tombstone inscription which lauds a widow for being a *univira* as evidence of 1 Timothy's influence without making the obvious connection.

In Part Two: Christians as Citizens (chapters 5–10) Winter explores their civic obligations and privileges as indicated in passages from Philippians, 1 Corinthians and Galatians. A publicly credible Christian life entailed eschewing internal conflicts which might spill out into the public realm. Civil litigation as a dispute settling mechanism was explicitly prohibited, as was "the unholy scramble for secular status" (p. 202). Jewish ethnic identity was sought by some Christians as a way of avoiding their civic obligations toward the imperial cult. Others were urged to forego their right to participate in civic banquets. Winter concludes Part Two with a presentation of Erastus (Romans 16:3) as an exemplary Christian benefactor and citizen.

Winter provides much useful information about public life and social customs in Greco-Roman cities: benefactors, dowries, the value of concord, civil litigation, the imperial cult, strategies for social advancement, etc. His description of the patron-client relationship, however, is less satisfactory. Winter asserts that patrons did not establish client relationships with their social inferiors, preferring those who possessed the same or slight lower status or their former slaves (pp. 45, 203). Further, he argues that the status of some Christians as clients challenges the view that Christians came mostly from the lower echelons of society (p. 203). A quick glance at Malina's *The New Testament World*, which is included in his bibliography but not cited on this topic, would have clarified the issue.

Seek the Welfare of the City is an important contribution to the ongoing work of understanding the social context of first century Christianity. Winter's reading of New Testament texts in light of the Greco-Roman evidence results in interesting and occasionally provocative interpretations which, if used critically, might well form the basis for clergy and lay Bible studies.

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