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# Pauline Theology: Ministry and Society

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Whatever one's theological judgement on Melancthon, the historical value of the 1536 *Loci communes* is incontestable—and hopefully, Dr. Preus will someday see fit to publish his entire translation.

Richard A. Muller  
Calvin Theological Seminary

## **Pauline Theology: Ministry and Society**

E. Earle Ellis

Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989

This book is part of a renewed conversation around the question of Christian ministry. Why this conversation now? First, probably because the search for vital church life and mission inevitably leads to the issue of ministry and the church. Second, with renewed consideration of ministry comes increasing awareness that this is an ecumenical issue because of the variety at this point among the churches. And third, in particular this study takes up the question of whether ministry is church centred or directed to the world. Specifically, the aim in this book is to deal with five aspects of ministry in the Pauline churches: (a) definition of ministry within Paul's theology, (b) ministry and gifts from the ascended Christ, (c) ministry and the role of women, (d) ministry and church order or office, (e) ministry and the church in the Greco-Roman world.

The first part of the book offers solid insight on ministry as an expression of the realm of God. It would have been helpful to develop more fully the connection between ministry represented by Jesus (as the servant) and by Paul. This could have helped to clarify a further point briefly addressed in the book, to what extent is the concern with office (rather than function) in Christian ministry. In the section under "the Spirit and the gifts" the author discusses the "four functions" of the Spirit: incorporate the believer in Christ, produce the fruit of Christian character, provide the gifts to enable ministries, and being the source of power for resurrection. Under ministry and the gifts of the Spirit there is a helpful discussion of diversity (various forms of ministry) and unity. There is a lack of clarity on whether difference in the order of ministry means difference in status (46). There is emphasis on the order of ministries in Paul: the ministry of apostle is prior to that of teacher. Is there an intended correlation between order and status? Ellis is illuminating in showing how the gifts of the Spirit (in ministry) are related to the fruit of the Spirit (50–52). Similarly in his discussion of women and ministry, he deals directly with the question of equality and subordination (taking up some of the key texts). We may agree that both have a place in Pauline theology, but his argument for an element of hierarchy and the definition of "headship" as "authority" is not

completely convincing (e.g., head seems clearly at times to mean "source" or "origin", 1 Corinthians 11:3, 8-12; Colossians 1:15-18; 2:19 etc). Ellis stresses that the primary purpose of ministry according to Paul is not to serve or change society but to call and then build people up in their new identity in Christ. This seems well grounded as far as it goes but questions arise when he goes on to fire barbs of criticism at liberation theology. This is too sweeping. If there is misconception of the gospel in versions of liberation theology, surely it is also true that salvation concretely involves liberation (cf. Exodus 15; Romans 8).

The book deals with questions directly; one may disagree at key points and still find the work illuminating. This is at once an important and strongly argued contribution addressing many of the critical questions and casting light at many points on ministry as presented in Pauline theology.

Ben Wiebe  
Hamilton, Ontario

## **The Word of Life. Systematic Theology: Volume Two**

Thomas C. Oden

San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989

xxi + 583 pp. U.S. \$32.95

This second volume of Oden's projected three-volume *Systematic Theology* carries forward the method and approach of its predecessor, *The Living God. Systematic Theology: Volume One*. Oden approaches Christian doctrine from a biblical-traditional perspective that enables his readers to encounter the riches of the church's teaching and to grasp the significance of traditionary formulations. He demonstrates a sound grasp of the tradition and an ability to state its message clearly for his readers. Readers can only admire his exploration and exposition of patristic, medieval, and classic Protestant theologies—and readers ought also to appreciate the broadly ecumenical character of Oden's doctrinal statements. In his own words, Oden offers here a "systematic statement of the meaning of Jesus' authority, life and work that ... attends to classic Christian exegesis (especially of the first five centuries) without getting embroiled in ever-extending modern historical interpretations and debates" (xi). On this fundamental level, the work continues to be one of the best contemporary efforts at presenting the traditional message of Christianity to a more or less conservative audience.

This is not, however, to say that there are no problems resident in Oden's approach—and, indeed, Christology is precisely the place where the problems become evident. A few substantive encounters with "modern historical interpretations and debates" would be salutary. For although he reflects some of the results of modern New Testament exegesis and theology,