

THE CONTRIBUTION OF F. F. BRUCE TO PAULINE STUDIES: A REVIEW ARTICLE

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Fortunately there is no need to dig through the archives in order to assemble the many articles that have come from the pen of F. F. Bruce on the subject of Paul and his contributions to Christian thought. They have been conveniently brought together in a book entitled *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* published in 1977 by the Paternoster Press in England and Eerdmans in the United States. This paper intends to provide an overview of the book and to highlight some of its more significant contributions.

Since the early 1920s Bruce has been a student and teacher of ancient literature. During this half century he has devoted more time and attention to Paul than to any other writer of antiquity. Upon arriving at the University of Manchester in 1959 he taught an already-prescribed course called "The Missionary Career of Paul in Its Historical Setting." In addition Bruce has over the years given a number of public lectures at the John Rylands Library on various aspects of Pauline studies. This material provides the nucleus for the book under consideration. It has been written out of a desire to share with others some of the rich rewards that Bruce has reaped from a lifetime of study of Paul.

The book has thirty-eight chapters. It moves easily and naturally from topics such as "The Rise of Rome" and "The Jews Under Foreign Rule" through discussions of Paul's conversion, the Jerusalem council, and the missionary journeys of Paul to "The Last Days of Paul: History and Tradition." No important phase in the life of Paul, with the exception of the pastoral epistles, is omitted. In treating the last days of Paul and the question of a release from Roman imprisonment Bruce gives less than two pages to the evidence from the pastoral epistles. He cites with apparent agreement J. N. D. Kelly's presentation of the argument for a second Roman imprisonment. He writes: "This is certainly a plausible—perhaps the most plausible—reconstruction of the course of events" (p. 444). It would be natural to infer that Bruce agrees with Kelly that the pastoral epistles were written by the apostle Paul, although nowhere in his book does he so indicate.

In discussing Paul's background Bruce notes that although the apostle was born into a Jewish family that enjoyed citizen rights in a Greek-speaking city the fact that his family strictly observed the Jewish way of life would have given Paul little opportunity for absorbing the culture of Tarsus during his boyhood. Although according to Acts 22:3 Paul was educated in the school of Gamaliel, his pre-Christian attitude toward members of this believing sect was decidedly different from that of his mentor. From *Shabbat* 30b we learn of an unnamed pupil of Gamaliel who manifested "impudence in matters of learning" and tried to refute his master. Bruce does not agree with Klausner that this unnamed pupil was

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Paul, although it is true that Paul would not have agreed with Gamaliel's attitude toward Christians as reflected in Acts 5:38.

On several occasions Paul indicates that his first relationship to the Church was that of persecutor. The case was clear-cut. Jesus had been crucified, and a crucified Messiah is a contradiction in terms. The idea of a crucified Messiah is also sheer blasphemy. Persecution of the early Church had driven many of the disciples, especially the Hellenists, out of Judea. In his crusading zeal Paul resolved that the high priest should exercise his right to bring the fugitives back to Jerusalem for punishment. Thus he heads toward Damascus with extradition papers.

No single event, apart from the Christ event itself, has proved so determinant for the course of Christian history as the conversion and commissioning of Paul. The resurrection appearance granted to him, he insists, was as real as the appearances witnessed by Peter, James and many others on the first Easter and the days immediately following. Paul was compelled by what he saw to acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified one, was alive, vindicated, and exalted by God. To resist such evidence would be to kick against the goad. The evidence was driving him in a direction opposite to that which he had been pursuing. All attempts to explain Paul's conversion solely in psychological terms are less than adequate.

Following his dramatic confrontation with the risen Christ, Paul went into Arabia. By "Arabia" in this context Bruce understands the Nabataean kingdom. It was not a quiet retreat in Arabia that Paul sought but the opportunity to preach. In answer to the question arising from Gal 1:12 in which he says that he did not receive his gospel from man and 1 Cor 15:3 in which we learn that he did receive it, Bruce notes that those aspects in Paul's ministry that were distinctively his belong to the gospel as revelation while the elements that he shared with others belong to the gospel as tradition.

Chapter 11 deals with "Paul and the Historical Jesus." Bruce concludes that while Paul did not know the written gospels as we have them, his tradition ascribed the same ethical qualities to Jesus as are portrayed in the gospels. In a discussion of "Paul and the Exalted Christ" he denies that the statement "the Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:17) asserts an identity between Christ as Lord and the Spirit of God. The statement is Paul's adaptation of Moses' experience to that of the believer under the new covenant. What the Lord was to Moses the Spirit is to the believer.

Although we lack information about the ten years following Paul's arrival back in Tarsus, Bruce is convinced that the apostle spent those years in evangelization. It is possible that it was during that time that he endured some of the hardships that he later lists in 2 Cor 11:22-27. Bruce argues, for example, that when Paul on five occasions "received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one" this must have taken place at an early period when he still submitted to synagogue discipline.

Following Paul's mystical experience (as related in 2 Cor 12:2-10) his self-esteem was given a blow that kept him in constant dependence on the divine enabling. Bruce holds that "this splinter in the flesh" was probably a bodily ailment from which he suffered when he first visited the Galatians. It reminded him not so much of his own inadequacies as of the total adequacy of Christ. Bruce agrees with R. C. Tannehill that if mysticism can be defined as "the doctrine that the individual can come into immediate contact with God through subjective ex-

periences which differ essentially from the experiences of daily life" then Paul may be spoken of as a mystic. It does not follow, however, that he has a mystical theology.

Bruce is of the opinion that the conferences recorded in Gal 2:1-10 coincide with the famine-relief visit of Acts 11:30, although this cannot be positively affirmed.

In a somewhat rhetorical defense of Luke's reliability in recounting Paul's preaching on the first missionary journey Bruce writes, "If Paul, faced with a synagogue congregation in the dispersion, did not speak as Luke makes him speak at the city in Antioch, then let us be told how he did speak" (p. 165). Although Paul went first to the synagogue in the cities he visited, he was always conscious of his call to be the apostle to the Gentiles. He looked on the God-fearers who were in the habit of attending synagogue services as a providentially prepared bridgehead into the wider Gentile world. It was by visiting the synagogue that Paul could most conveniently establish contact with these God-fearers.

As the apostle moved out into Gentile lands, Jewish Christians became increasingly concerned that the Church's ethical standards might be compromised. Some had a simple solution: Gentile converts to Christianity should comply with the same requirements as Gentile converts to Judaism—that is, circumcision and the obligation to keep the law of Moses. This would at one and the same time limit the number of Gentiles coming into the Church and ensure that those who did enter would observe acceptable ethical standards. Bruce holds that Galatians was written shortly after Paul's confrontation with Peter at Antioch. It was sent to the churches recently planted by Barnabas and Paul in the cities of south Galatia. Paul held that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision made any difference in a man's relationship to God. His opposition was to the idea that by submitting to circumcision as a religious obligation a man could acquire merit in God's sight. Bruce argues for an early date for Galatians on the basis that if the council of Jerusalem as reported by Luke had already taken place Paul could hardly have refrained from mentioning its decision on the main issue. The apostolic decree which grew out of the Jerusalem council did not impose circumcision on Gentile believers but did lay down certain requirements for Gentile converts to observe. Gentile practices that were especially offensive to the Jews should be given up in order to facilitate table fellowship.

In discussing the question of the law Bruce rejects the Reformed tradition that while a man in Christ is not under the law as a means of salvation he remains under it as a rule of life. While this distinction may be maintained as a principle of Christian theology and ethics it should not be imagined that it has Pauline authority. Christ is the goal or end of the law in the sense that the law was a temporary provision introduced by God until the coming of Abraham's offspring, in whom the promise made to Abraham would be consummated. The law is "our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal 3:19, 24). The tension expressed in Rom 7:14-25 is necessary for those living "between the times." The question is: How can one who exists temporarily in the present evil age nevertheless enjoy deliverance from it and live here and now the life of the age to come? The answer is: By the indwelling Spirit. The prime function of the indwelling Spirit in the believing community as in the individual believer is the reproduction of Christlikeness in God's people.

The separation of Paul and Barnabas prior to the second missionary journey is

held to have been a good thing for John Mark. Under Barnabas' guidance and with his encouragement Mark developed unsuspected qualities of character and usefulness. The choice of Silas as a companion for the second missionary journey had the diplomatic advantage of his being a Jerusalem Christian. Moreover Silas appears to have been a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37), and this would prevent the embarrassing situation of Paul being able to claim civic privileges which could not be extended to his traveling companion. Among his Gentile friends Timothy (who joined the group at Lystra) was undoubtedly considered a Jew, but he could never have been one in the eyes of the Jews unless he received circumcision.

At Philippi, Lydia is brought to faith in Christ. "Lydia" means "Lydian woman" and may not have been her original name. At Thessalonica Paul and his companions are charged with turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6). The phrase does not allude to a remarkably successful evangelistic effort but implies subversive or seditious activity on the part of Paul and his companions.

In discussing the Thessalonian correspondence Bruce seems to favor the theory that 2 Thessalonians was the earlier of the two letters. If Timothy was given 2 Thessalonians to deliver to the church at Thessalonica then 1 Thessalonians was written in response to the news that he brought back to Paul in Corinth. "The restrainer" who checks the power of the Antichrist is probably the restraint exercised by imperial law and order embodied in the emperor. Since apocalyptic imagery is more widely used in Thessalonians than in the later letters, it is possible that the apostle came to realize that this was not the most adequate vehicle for expressing the Christian hope.

Bruce defends the authenticity of the *Areopagitica*, noting that it is theologians rather than classicists who have almost categorically denied any association between the speech and the letters of Paul. Bruce quotes Eduard Meyer, the classicist who professed his inability to understand "how anyone has found it possible to explain this scene as an invention" (p. 243).

In his discussion of the Corinthian correspondence Bruce holds that it is reasonably clear that Paul was celibate throughout his apostolic career. In answer to the question of his actual marital status he holds that it is probable that Paul's wife left him when he became a Christian. When he "suffered the loss of all things for the sake of Christ" (Phil 3:8) he lost his wife as well. While this cannot be proved it helps to explain Paul's sympathetic understanding of the domestic situation in which the unconverted partner walks out on a spouse who has become a Christian.

Glossolalia is treated as a spiritual gift but held to be of significantly less value than prophecy ("the declaration of the mind of God in the power of the Spirit," p. 272). In his discussion of the four Corinthian letters Bruce maintains that it is improbable that a part of the severe letter survives in 2 Cor 10-13.

In discussing baptism Bruce notes that Paul, who had learned so clearly the religious inadequacy of the old circumcision, was by no means the man to ascribe efficacy to another external rite. Christians could no more be immunized by baptism against divine judgment for their unfaithfulness than the Israelites were protected during the wilderness wanderings by their "baptism" in the cloud and in the sea from the consequences of their idolatry and immorality. Paul received the account of the Lord's supper "from the Lord" (1 Cor 11:23) in the sense that it is in the crucified and exalted Lord that all true Christian tradition has its source.

To eat and drink without discerning the body means to take the bread and cup while treating fellow Christians uncharitably in thought or behavior.

The spiritual crisis that Paul underwent toward the end of his Ephesian ministry as a result of his miraculous escape from what seemed imminent death is described as a sort of second conversion. This crisis is responsible for Paul's subsequent and increasing reflection on the life to come. As a Pharisee Paul would have subscribed to a doctrine of resurrection. At the beginning of the first century A. D., however, there was no uniform view among the Pharisees concerning the details of resurrection. What is important for Paul is that with Jesus' rising from the dead the expected resurrection has already begun to take place. What had previously been only a hope is now a *fait accompli*.

In an interesting discussion on "What Happens at Death?" Bruce deals with 2 Cor 5:1-10, a passage in which Paul makes his most personal contribution to the subject of immortality. Paul says that we do not want to have the old body stripped off but rather to have the new body put on over it. This new body seems to be the spiritual body of 1 Corinthians 15, although at this point Paul no longer thinks of waiting until the parousia to receive it. Nor is it a temporary body that he hopes to receive at death. It is rather the eternal "housing" that God has prepared for him and his fellow believers. Paul implies that for those who do not survive until the parousia the new body will be immediately available at death. He is certain that to be absent from the earthly body means to be at home with the Lord. Since Paul could not contemplate immortality apart from resurrection it appears that the immediate investiture of a new body is valued basically as a means of realizing a fuller communion with the Lord than has been possible during mortal life.

Bruce assigns only fourteen pages to an exposition of the epistle to the Romans. This is a bit disappointing especially since the same amount of space is given to the book of Philemon. It results from the book's having been put together primarily from articles already published.

From here on the episodes in the life of Paul as recorded in Acts are handled in a somewhat cursory fashion. Throughout the entire section, however, there is ample evidence of Bruce's exceptionally broad background in the history, culture and religion of both Judaism and the Greco-Roman world. Paul's appeal for a trial before Caesar was more than an effort to save his own life. A favorable hearing from the emperor in Rome could win recognition for Christianity if not as a true fulfillment of Israel's ancestral religion at least as a permitted association in its own right. The description of Paul's journey to Rome is chatty and filled with a number of interesting observations. At times Bruce breaks out of his scholarly mold with a bit of dry humor. For instance, in discussing the fire on the island of Malta following the shipwreck he writes that unlike many theologians Paul knows that a fire will not continue to burn unless it is fed with fuel, so he joins in gathering sticks to keep it going. Incidentally, he notes that the identity of the Melita of Acts 28:1 with Malta has been challenged most recently by Acworth. In *JTS* 26 (1975) 100 ff., however, Collin Hemer has answered Acworth's argument rather conclusively.

The Christian community at Rome appears to have been decentralized. A half-century later Ignatius notes that the various Christian communities in Rome had not yet been organized under the administrative authority of a single bishop.

At this point Bruce discusses the prison epistles. Colossians and Philemon were plainly written at the same time and place, sent to the same place and carried by the same messengers. In the book of Philemon Paul is asking one of his own converts not only to pardon his slave Onesimus and give him a Christian welcome but to send him back so that he can go on helping him as he has already begun to do. Bruce seems favorably disposed toward the theory that Onesimus did not remain a private Christian but became in due course the bishop of Ephesus, one of the most important figures in the life of the province of Asia. If this is true then it follows that the book of Philemon could have been included in the Pauline letters because Bishop Onesimus would have made sure that *his* Pauline letter found a place in the collection.

Bruce holds to the Pauline authorship of Colossians. He rejects the hypothesis of Holtzmann, Masson, Harrison and others that Paul wrote a shorter epistle to the Colossians that was later expanded by the Paulinist who wrote Ephesians and also inserted a number of interpolations into the genuine Colossians to produce our present enlarged Colossians. A. S. Peake notes that "the complexity of the hypothesis tells fatally against it" (p. 410). The Colossian heresy is primarily Jewish. There exist a number of specific points of contact between the Qumran texts and the Colossian heresy. Bruce rejects the idea that behind Colossians one can discern a gnostic myth of Iranian origin that was current in the Near East about the time of the rise of Christianity. Much of the material on which this myth is based is later than the apostolic age and may well have been influenced by the NT itself.

One gets a feeling that Bruce has saved the best till last. He entitles his discussion on the book of Ephesians "The Quintessence of Paulinism." He offers no fresh contribution to the problem of the authorship of Ephesians. Bruce agrees with Caird that the epistle, "if not by Paul, is a masterly summary of Paul's theology by a disciple who was capable of thinking Paul's thoughts after him" (p. 424). In this excellent chapter Bruce discusses such subjects as the Holy Spirit, the new man, the broken wall and the heavenly ascent.

The last two chapters deal with the final days of Paul and some concluding reflections. Although favoring a release from the first Roman imprisonment followed by a period of missionary activity and a second Roman imprisonment, Bruce suggests that there are alternatives to release on the one hand and execution on the other. It is possible that the house arrest of his first imprisonment could have developed into a much more stringent confinement. Exile is also a possibility. Bruce holds that Paul was executed in connection with Nero's persecution of Roman Christians. The execution should be dated in or shortly after the year A. D. 65. A brief discussion of Paul's perennial influence includes sections on Augustine, Luther, the Wesleys and Karl Barth. The book concludes with a chronological table, a select bibliography (about three pages) and an index of names and subjects. It contains no index of verses.

What then has been F. F. Bruce's major contribution to Pauline studies? It is evident from the foregoing survey that Bruce lays before us no new and innovative perspectives. Concern for historical accuracy coupled with a high view of the Biblical text inevitably restricts the role of the imagination, that prime mover in theological and higher critical "breakthroughs." Bruce's lasting contribution to Pauline studies is his careful and informed treatment of the life and letters of

Paul in their historical, social, religious and cultural setting. The fact that his interpretations are traditional has no bearing on the question of their value for Biblical study. We are indebted to F. F. Bruce for his lifelong commitment to a balanced and Biblical interpretation of the life and thought of the apostle Paul.