

The Reception of Paul and Early Christian Initiation

This book breaks new ground in New Testament reception history by bringing together early Pauline interpretation and the study of early Christian institutions. Benjamin A. Edsall traces the close association between Paul and the catechumenate through important texts and readers from the late second century to the fourth century to show how the early Church arrived at a widespread image of Paul as the apostle of Christian initiation. While exploring what this image of Paul means for understanding early Christian interpretation, Edsall also examines the significance of this aspect of Pauline reception in relation to interpretive possibilities of Paul's letters. Building on the analysis of early interpretations and rhetorical images of the Apostle, Edsall brings these together with contemporary scholarly discourse. The juxtaposition highlights longstanding continuity and conflict in exegetical discussions and dominant Pauline images. Edsall concludes with broader hermeneutical reflections on the value of historical reception for New Testament Studies.

Benjamin A. Edsall is Research Fellow at the Australian Catholic University. He is the author of *Paul's Witness to Formative Early Christian Instruction* (2014) and of numerous articles in journals such as *New Testament Studies*, *Vigiliae Christianae*, and the *Journal of Theological Studies*.

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History and Hermeneutics

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*For my parents,
who taught me to read*

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Preface

I believe that Fredrick Buechner was on to something when he wrote, “at its heart, most theology...is essentially autobiography.”¹ Though this book is not a work of theology, strictly speaking, its shape and argument certainly reflect developments in my own thinking about theology, philosophy, and history that have taken place slowly over the last decade or so. (I also think that Beuchner’s view describes the works of the interpreters examined here, though a defense of that will have to wait until later.) Those who know me will have little difficulty, I think, in spotting this. What started as the pursuit of a simple historical account of a particular aspect of Pauline reception has slowly become something more ambitious: an attempt to situate these early readers within contemporary scholarly discussions in order to reframe the relationship between New Testament Studies (as it is often practiced) and “reception history.” We shall see if I was successful.

All projects of this size require the support of institutions and colleagues to come to completion, and that is no less the case here. Many have offered valuable feedback at various times, though only a few can be mentioned here. My colleagues in the Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry (IRCI) at Australian Catholic University (ACU) have been exceptionally generous with their time and helpful in their feedback. Matthew Crawford and Michael Champion never failed to provide guidance in the world of late antique Christianity and ancient philosophy. Matt was also my go-to resource for all questions pertaining to Syriac or Armenian. Edward Jeremiah endured the task of proofreading all my Greek and

¹ Frederick Buechner, *The Alphabet of Grace* (New York: Harper One, 2007), 3.

Latin translations and, in addition to saving me from awkward phrasing (some of which no doubt I neglected to change sufficiently) and typos, he offered incisive and substantive suggestions on how to clarify and improve difficult passages. Chris Jacobs-Vandeger and Alda Balthrop-Lewis graciously read and commented on the final chapter. The award for scholar most put-upon by this project, however, goes to Stephen Carlson, who was there at its start and consistently provided incisive criticisms on every chapter. Many thanks are also due to Frank Moloney for welcoming me to ACU and providing support and guidance up to and well beyond his retirement. The research leadership at the IRCI – Wayne McKenna (DVCR), James McLaren, and David Runia – have supported this project from the start, by enabling me to attend conferences to road-test the material and by allowing me to spend seven months in Berlin to finish the initial draft of the manuscript.

My time in Germany was generously funded by the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung, which enabled not only me but my whole family to flourish while we were there. Jens Schröter, at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, was a gracious host and provided very helpful feedback on my work, especially Chapters 7–8. I am grateful for his hospitality, support, feedback, and enthusiasm for this project, as well as for the welcome from other colleagues there, in particular Konrad Schwarz and Christine Jacobi.

As one trained in New Testament Studies, it is hard to avoid the feeling that I am trespassing on others' domains while covering such a wide range of interpreters and issues. For that reason I am indebted to experts in these areas who have taken the time to read and comment on drafts of my chapters: Michael Champion (again) on Clement; Peter Martens on Origen; Wendy Mayer on John Chrysostom; and A. K. M. Adam on hermeneutics. David Lincicum offered helpful comments on my discussion of F. C. Baur (along with broader comments on the manuscript), as did Simeon Zahl on my discussion of Luther and Erasmus. Matyáš Havrda read an earlier related version of the material about Clement and offered extremely useful feedback; Judith Kovacs kindly corresponded with me about her work on Pauline reception; and Christoph Marksches supplied some helpful bibliographical suggestions in relation to Origen. Early on in the project, a valuable conversation with Markus Bockmuehl pushed me to begin thinking harder about the hermeneutical significance of reception.

The initial research for this project, focusing in particular on the *Acts of Paul*, was presented at SBL in Atlanta (2015, chaired by Christopher

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M. Hays). The material on Clement was first road-tested at the Rome Seminar hosted by ACU and convened by Lewis Ayres (2016), and a summary of the whole project was presented in Berlin in October 2017, convened by Jens Schröter together with Tobias Nicklas and Joseph Verheyden. I am thankful to the organizers and conveners of these seminars for the opportunity to try out a few of the arguments present in this volume.

Finally, I owe a huge debt of thanks to my family. They have traveled around the world with me over the last four years, from Oxford to Melbourne to Berlin and back to Melbourne again, and they have done so with incredible spirits. I simply could not have done this without their support. The book is dedicated to my parents, who did not put in much work on the project, but did put in the much harder work of raising me.

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