

PREFACE

Given the fact that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of commentaries on the letters and pseudo-letters of Paul, one might ask, Why another commentary? Most commentaries are theologically or religiously oriented, underscoring features of biblical letters that might be of use in articulating contemporary denominational Christianity. Others are linguistically or philologically oriented, based on the belief that written documents can be best understood by literary, aesthetic criteria. The distinctive feature of this social-science commentary is that it draws insights from an array of social sciences such as anthropology, social psychology, sociolinguistics, and the like in order to determine the most culturally plausible interpretation of Paul's letters. The concerns considered here derive from first-century Eastern Mediterranean social systems, with the various social structures, cultural values, and understandings of what it meant to be a person that existed at that time and place. Our concern is to discover what the Pauline tradition was up to within the social setting of its society by examining the typical Eastern Mediterranean social behaviors witnessed to in his letters. What social interactions do the letters evidence? What sorts of outcomes in this society are expected?

The New Testament text that is authoritative in the churches is, of course, the critical edition of the Greek. There is no perfect version of the Bible, not even the King James Version, as the Revised Standard Version indicates. The New Testament translation printed in this book is the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). We shall at times have occasion to question the accuracy of some renderings, for reasons that will be specified.

This book provides two types of interpretative material. First, by way of clarification, we offer short Textual Notes commenting on each letter. These notes draw the reader's attention to dimensions of the social system expressed in the language of each letter and provide a small-scale social-science commentary

that supplements the traditional, more theologically oriented studies available on the Deutero-Pauline documents.

Second, later in the book we provide a collection of Reading Scenarios drawn from anthropological studies of the Mediterranean social system. This is the social system that has been encoded in the language of the letters in ways that are not always obvious to modern readers. Since most of the reading scenarios apply throughout the Deutero-Pauline letters, however, we have duly referenced them in the commentary for the convenience of the reader. Together with the Textual Notes, the Reading Scenarios offer clues for filling in the unspoken or implicit elements of the writings as a Mediterranean reader would certainly have done. The Textual Notes and Reading Scenarios help the modern reader develop a considerate posture toward the ancient author and prevent imposing on that author's work interpretations that would be culturally incompatible.

The scenarios expressed in the Deutero-Pauline letters come from a time and place that for all of us remains foreign territory. It is unlike anything we are likely to imagine from our experience in the modern West. It is a world we invite you to enter as a thoughtful and considerate reader.

Bruce J. Malina, Creighton University

John J. Pilch, Johns Hopkins University