

Antoinette Clark Wire. *2 Corinthians*. Wisdom Commentary. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2019. 239 pages. \$39.95.

Students in seminary classes in biblical interpretation often seek to identify what a biblical author wanted to happen in the congregation(s) to whom the author wrote a particular book. In most cases, the answer is “We do not know what happened.” Professor Antoinette Clark Wire, who taught at San Francisco Theological Seminary and the Graduate Theological Union, argues that 2 Corinthians opens just such a window with respect to what happened after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. Because Wire’s reconstruction of the situation is quite distinctive, the preacher cannot simply pop 2 Corinthians off the shelf and turn to the comments on the passage at the center of the sermon. One must be familiar with her larger interpretive point of view.

In her earlier work, *The Corinthian Women Prophets* (Fortress, 1991), Professor Wire contends that Paul writes 1 Corinthians in response to women prophets in the congregation who were acting in ways that the apostle perceived as disrupting the community. In Wire’s view, the apostle aims to restrict the behavior of the Corinthian women prophets.

Paul writes 2 Corinthians because the women have *not* heeded Paul’s proscriptions in 1 Corinthians. In the second volume, however, Paul does not speak as an authority prescribing behavior, but writes in a way that seeks to maintain relationship. Paul defends his work among the Corinthians and seeks reconciliation by accepting the differences between his perspectives and those of the Corinthian community.

The preacher, thus, should read 2 Corinthians not as a source of proof texts for doctrine nor as a simple continuation of 1 Corinthians, but from the perspective of its own distinct rhetorical purpose. Wire’s viewpoint imposes upon the preacher the responsibility to alert the congregation to the particular dynamics of the changed rhetorical situation.

Within the detailed comments, Professor Wire reads each text from the standpoint of three different (but related) fields of concern. The first is a broad focus on what the text assumes about “all bodies or beings in what we now call an ecosystem on this earth within a functioning universe” (xlvi). These are overarching matters of world view. The second focus is the social, political, and economic world, with attention to such things as the significance of the Roman empire for interpretation. The third focus is a close-up look at the letter, specifically at how Paul seeks to accomplish something specific in the text in regard to the Corinthian situation. The volume cites texts from other ancient documents that play into the commentary. An example: the Roman proclamation that the birth of Augustus is gospel (good news).

Professor Wire’s interpretive perspective is a case study not only for preaching, but for a possible way forward in many circumstances in which pastoral dynamics change: face conflict, accept difference, claim continuing relationship. Of course, interpreters may sometimes come to situations in which they think it is not possible to get beyond conflict, to accept difference, or to continue relationship.

Along the way, Professor Wire names the parts of 2 Corinthians according to their function in the categories of ancient rhetoric. In a contemporary situation similar to the church in ancient Corinth, the preacher could ponder the degree to which the ancient rhetorical function might suggest a contemporary function for the sermon. In a contemporary situation dissimilar to that of ancient Corinth, the preacher might ponder how Paul’s way of drawing on core values might help the preacher draw on core values in making sense of a new and different kind of situation.

This volume, like others in the Wisdom series, contains short pieces by other scholars. Some of these pieces deal with exegetical matters. Still others, of particular interest to preachers, are meditative and even homiletical. While the author did not write this volume as a commentary for preachers, the preaching community will be interested in it. The range of voices between the two covers of the book testifies to the integrity of the series which aims to honor the diversity of the interpreting community, including diversity within feminist interpreters.

In *The Corinthian Women Prophets* and *2 Corinthians*, we have something that should be standard in scholarship: studies of two related biblical books by the same scholar that allow a single line to guide the interpretation of both books.

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