

Matthew V. Novenson. *Paul, Then and Now*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022. 248 pages. Hardcover. \$20.49.

The cover of Matthew Novenson's book features a painting entitled "Self-Portrait as the Apostle Paul." Like so many of the great works of Dutch art in this period, the self-portrait is surrounded by darkness, which allows the light to illumine parts of the face of the subject while almost seeming to hide others. As you read Novenson's collection of essays on Paul, it becomes clear that the painting is a powerful metaphor. The self-portrait on the cover is of the artist Rembrandt *as Paul*. Novenson seems to revel in the juxtaposition: our pictures of Paul are never far from being pictures of ourselves.

Of course, it need not be so. With Novenson, we recognize that in the desire to appropriate Paul (say, for proclamation), we too easily flatten Paul's strangeness out of desire to have a living dialogue in the present. The impulse is good, but the result is, too often, rendering Paul as if we ourselves were ventriloquists (2). Novenson does not gainsay the importance that invested readings can and ought to have. But as a historian, he asks interpreters to hold what we claim Paul is saying in tension with the Paul who remains in all of his otherness, shading off into the darkness of Rembrandt's painting. Theologians can and should engage with Paul. Historians, however, should be just as committed to ensuring that critical scholarship refuses to collapse the distance. Novenson thus also aims to "make Paul weird again" (5).

And the collected essays in his volume do just this work. Novenson is aware of the theological *Wirkungsgeschichte* between then and now and treats the work sympathetically, even if he also is constantly reminding his reader, or his other NT interlocutors, of the firm limits of theological claims in the face of irascible historical limits that constantly pose questions back on the theological interpreter. In his many essays in the book, which range from "Our Apostles, Ourselves;" "The Self-Styled Jew of Romans 2 and the Actual Jews of Romans 9-11;" and "Anti-Judaism and Philo-Judaism in Pauline Studies, Then and Now," Novenson is relentless in keeping theological readings of Paul and historical criticism of Paul tethered—not because they are doing the same thing, but because they are *not*. The exercise is a healthy one for a tradition that needs to account for otherness: both the otherness of contemporary communities *and* the otherness of Biblical texts in ancient contexts.

Why should a journal on preaching make note of Novenson's collection of essays enveloped in Rembrandt's uncanny self-portrait as apostle? While Novenson would never say so, I think his work goes to the heart of how many of us in homiletics have aimed to account for otherness in preaching: whether out of a commitment to social location and the need for advocacy, or out of ethical concern for the irreducible face that meets us in the preaching moment, or out of a broader desire to initiate bona fide conversation across difference. Yet the value of this volume takes us one further step in that mystery that we in homiletics have started to chart. Novenson wishes interpreters to take the otherness of Paul and perhaps even all scriptural traditions with the same theological (and homiletical) seriousness. Let's do theology, preachers; but let's also keep Paul weird.

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