

Die urchristliche Mission. By Eckhard J. Schnabel. Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 2002, xxxii + 1806 pp., 59 Euro.*

The publication of the present volume constitutes a major event in the missiological exploration of early Christianity. A full century after Adolf von Harnack's *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, Schnabel's work fills a major gap in the missiological literature by providing a treatment of the early Christian mission that considers not only the mission theology of the biblical material (as does P. T. O'Brien's and my *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*), but sets the early Christian mission in a full-orbed historical and geographical context. Overall, Schnabel's work is characterized by a magisterial command of the secondary literature. It truly represents an amazing achievement, especially in a day of specialization when it has become exceedingly difficult for anyone person to master the vast amount of material that continues to be generated. The fact that the present work is in German will limit its influence, at least until the publication of the author's own English translation, a work that is currently being prepared. The purpose of the present review is therefore primarily to alert interested readers to the existence of Schnabel's work in German and to provide a summary of its contents and some of its major conclusions; a more thorough review may reasonably await the publication of the English translation.

In the opening chapters Schnabel surveys the relevant teaching of the OT and the Second Temple period. The author's conclusions are that (1) there was in OT Israel no overt mission program with the aim of converting foreign nations or even individual polytheists (p. 93); (2) in the centuries prior and subsequent to Christ's birth there was no direct Jewish mission that pursued the aim of converting non-Jews to faith in Yahweh (p. 174). The work then moves on to a consideration of the mission of Jesus (a presentation of the mission theology of each of the canonical Gospels is provided toward the end of the volume). The chapter draws on information from all four Gospels and excels particularly in providing extensive geographical information on the various locales in which Jesus ministered. A chapter on the mission of the twelve is followed by a treatment of Jesus' mission and non-Jews. Here Schnabel maintains that Jesus neither explicitly sought nor avoided contact with non-Jews (p. 377). He healed non-Jews and responded to their pleas for him to heal their relatives or friends. At the same time Jesus' contact with non-Jews was not a major part of his mission. While he focused his overt activity on Jews (p. 324) and while he did not engage in an active mission to Gentiles (p. 329), Jesus' ministry did attract non-Jews, thus anticipating the post-Pentecost Gentile mission of the early church.

The next section discusses the mission of the early church. Schnabel draws attention to the surprising nature of Jesus' mission command in light of the OT expectation of the nations' eschatological pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This command to engage in active missionizing, according to Schnabel, is grounded in the removal of the exclusive importance of the temple and of the Torah: non-Jews need no longer become Jews but can be integrated into the messianic people of God as representatives of the nations (p. 881). The mission of the apostle Paul, the next subject of discussion, follows a recurring pattern: (1) Paul's arrival in a given city with several associates; (2) contact with Jews in the local synagogues, who can provide him with work and/or accommodations; (3) initial preaching and discussions in the synagogue in recognition of the Jews' salvation-historical pre-eminence; (4) and (5) after initial success and the making of converts, opposition mounts, which usually (though not always) leads to Paul's moving to different venues; and (6) the gathering of converts in house churches, which meet regularly for worship, biblical instruction, and mutual edification (pp. 1318–19). Schnabel notes that Paul did not call his churches to "world mission"; this was primarily the role of the apostles and of other church-sent gospel messengers. Nevertheless, churches are to contribute actively to making the gospel attractive to both Jews and Gentiles.

After a brief treatment on the centers of early Christian mission activity (Jerusalem, Antioch,

Rome) Schnabel summarizes the mission theology of Matthew, Mark, Luke (including Acts), John (including the Johannine epistles and Revelation), and Peter (a discussion of the Pauline writings was already included in the section on Paul). This is followed by a concluding summary of the self-understanding, practice, and message of the early Christian mission, as well as a discussion of the early Christian mission and mission in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Here Schnabel is properly critical of using the term "incarnational" as conveying a missionary paradigm (contra John Stott and much of contemporary mission literature), favoring instead terms such as "contextualization" or "inculturation." The volume is rounded out by forty-two illustrations and a virtually exhaustive bibliography, plus indices pertaining to biblical and extrabiblical literature, geographical locations, as well as a subject (though not an author) index.

In his major contentions, Schnabel represents a coalescing consensus in recent thought and literature on the subject (including my own): the role of OT Israel regarding mission (largely passive); the missionary nature of Second Temple Judaism (largely non-existent); the question of whether or not Jesus engaged in an active Gentile mission (he did not, though he attracted numerous individual Gentiles); and the question of whether or not the NT warrants speaking of an "incarnational paradigm" for mission (it does not). Schnabel's personal engagement in mission (a native German, he is a former missionary to the Philippines, who now teaches in a North-American context) is both apparent and appealing; clearly, for him mission is more than merely an academic field of study. Schnabel's knowledge is encyclopedic, his discussions are consistently thorough, and his judgments are judicious and well-informed by all the available data and literature. If you have an interest in this subject and read German, get this volume now. Otherwise, wait for the publication of the English translation, then digest thoroughly the immense learning reflected in these 1800 pages and let the insights reflected in them inform and refine your mission thinking and involvement.

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