

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Legrand, Lucien. 2023. *Paul and Mission***

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Reviewed by John D. Doss

Lucien Legrand's study of *Paul and Mission* was initially published in French in 2021 as *Paul et la Mission: Apôtre des temps nouveaux*. The English translation of his research on the man, the mission, the message and the method of Paul the apostle is valuable for studying the New Testament, early Christianity, and the Christian mission today. *Paul and Mission* is very readable, consisting of twelve concise chapters. The New Testament scholar has a gift for expressing the complexity of Paul's thought in simple, understandable terms. Moreover, as a member of the Paris Foreign Mission Society and professor emeritus at St Peter's Institute of Theology in Bangalore, India, Legrand is uniquely equipped to speak both to the ancient context and the contemporary implications of Paul's mission.

Legrand opens the preface by asking, "Was Paul a missionary?" The method he rigorously applies to answer this question is studying the seven undisputed or authentic Pauline Epistles (Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon). The Pastoral Epistles (1–2 Timothy, Titus) and especially the book of Acts are also essential for reconstructing Paul's life and ministry even though they were written one or two generations afterward. Chapter 1 is the prelude. Legrand briefly sketches the life and times of the apostle, including his hometown of Tarsus, Roman citizenship, and especially his upbringing as a member of the Jewish Diaspora and training under Rabbi Gamaliel in Jerusalem.

Chapters 2–5 are the first of three parts of *Paul and Mission*. Legrand begins with his conversion on the Damascus Road, where he saw the risen Lord and became an apostle. He focuses on Paul's own references to his conversion in Galatians, 1–2 Corinthians, and Philippians. The Damascus Road encounter is reported several times in the book of Acts. Legrand acknowledges the differences between the portrayal of Paul in his letters and Acts. Nevertheless, he identifies essential points of agreement, concluding that Acts is useful for reconstructing the historical Paul.

In chapters 3–4, Legrand explores two of Paul's most frequent self-identifications: apostle and servant of Jesus Christ. The former is the basis of Paul's authority to

teach, preach and establish churches among the nations of the ancient world. Paul defines an apostle as one who has seen Jesus (1 Cor. 9.1). Hence, his Damascus Road conversion was not a dream or vision but a physical encounter with the risen Lord himself. Moreover, the frequent designations of himself as a servant (*diakonos*) and slave (*doulos*) of Jesus emphasize his conformity to Christ and personal communion with him. Legrand notes the application for God's servants today as those who must empty themselves to be united with Christ and experience his fullness in their ministry. Chapter 5 concerns Paul's message, especially his "gospel". Paul's frequent use of the term demonstrates its centrality to his message. The gospel is the good news of God concerning his son, Jesus Christ. It is the message of love's victory over human weakness accomplished by Jesus's resurrection, which is the divine power of salvation for the world.

Part 2 (chapters 6–10) is the longest and most critical section of *Paul and Mission*. Chapters 6–7 concern Paul's missionary project. Legrand begins by surveying parallels to the Pauline mission in Second Temple Judaism and Roman Hellenism. Paul's ministry remains distinct, though he is firmly situated in Judaism. His purpose was not merely to preach the good news but to establish small communities of converts in major cities across the Roman Empire. Hence, the church (*ekklesia*) was central to Paul's missionary project, the subject of chapter 7. The new covenant community is comprised of those who are baptized in the name of Jesus and continually commemorate his death in the Lord's Supper. Furthermore, the church is a community united with Christ through practicing Christian virtue, especially the triad of faith, hope and love.

Legrand discusses Paul's mission field in chapter 8, defining his self-title as "apostle to the nations" (Rom. 11.13). He argues that this was not an ethnic but a geographical designation since Paul evangelized Jews along with Gentiles. Moreover, Paul's assignment was to go west, where Judaism was culturally absent. In contrast, the apostles and others focused on the southern and eastern parts of the Roman Empire that had large, established Jewish communities. Legrand moves on to Paul's methods in chapter 9. The apostle travelled with his missionary team around the empire by land and sea, working to support himself and receiving monetary support for his church-planting mission. Paul wrote letters to continue communicating his message to the churches in his absence.

Chapter 10 explores Paul's "inculturation" of the gospel, i.e., the contextualization of a Palestinian Jewish sect for a Greco-Roman audience. He begins with an intriguing comparison between Paul and Jesus, who mainly taught rural peasants in Galilee as opposed to the major metropolitan centers of the Roman Empire. He discusses the influence of Stoicism on Paul as well as Hellenistic virtues like wisdom, freedom and glory. Paul's genius lay in expressing the core of Jesus's message in terms familiar

to his Mediterranean audience, calling them to join the countercultural Jesus movement.

The third and final part of *Paul and Mission* reflects on the source of the apostle's power and his ministry of prayer. Paul credits the Holy Spirit as the source of his seemingly inexhaustible energy. The gift of the Spirit is also a primary motif in the book of Acts, but Legrand highlights Paul's distinct emphasis on the Spirit's resurrection power. In chapter 12, he asserts that Paul's prayers are a distinctive feature of his epistles among other ancient letters and indicate the centrality of prayer in his ministry. This has powerful implications for today as prayer is inseparably intertwined with mission. Legrand concludes by answering his original question that Luke presents Paul as the model and hero of Christian mission, while his letters provide an earlier and more personal portrait of the apostle. The resurrection was central to Paul's message of a new covenant community forged by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and transformed by the Spirit into his image.

*Paul and Mission* is a bath in the Scriptures, especially the Pauline Epistles, and a helpful resource for understanding his missiology. Legrand's extensive focus on Paul's mission in the seven undisputed epistles and the book of Acts is an important contribution to biblical studies. He is to be commended for situating Paul within Second Temple Judaism, not as a founder of a new world religion. The missiological principles he distills are applicable to all Christians today, especially those serving in cross-cultural contexts.

Nevertheless, *Paul and Mission* has several shortcomings. First, while Legrand's style of successively citing multiple passages immerses readers in the Pauline Epistles, further comment on their interpretation is desired. Libraries of books have been written on Paul the Apostle, resulting in numerous fiercely debated readings of his epistles. A contemporary study of Paul's mission cannot simply cite his letters, often lengthy block quotations, and assume readers know the proper meaning. I particularly enjoyed chapters 8–10 as Legrand makes intriguing claims concerning the interpretation of Paul and then supports his argument. These are more substantive and thought-provoking than other sections of *Paul and Mission*, which contain lengthy chain quotations with little exegetical comment.

A second critique concerns Legrand's methodology. His dependence on the book of Acts as a reliable source of historical information on the historical Paul conflicts with his view that it is a later tradition along with the Pastoral Epistles. Legrand often discusses the discrepancies between the portraits of Paul in Acts and his letters. Yet his reconstruction of the Pauline mission is sometimes primarily dependent on Acts. Further clarification of his methodology in this regard is needed. Moreover, some of the distinctions Legrand claims to have identified between the two corpora are suspect. For example, he asserts in chapter 3 that Acts does not refer to Paul as an apostle but reserves this title for the Twelve. However, Acts 14.4, 14 identify Paul and

Barnabas as apostles. Legrand explains that the term *apostolos* should be understood here as “missionaries”. Nevertheless, the data clearly challenge Legrand’s interpretation of Acts.

Finally, Legrand’s portrait of Paul is instructive but incomplete. It is striking that Paul’s eschatology and doctrine of justification are almost entirely absent in *Paul and Mission*. Instead, Legrand focuses on the reconciliation at the cross and the present victory believers enjoy through the resurrection. His treatment of these themes and their bearing on Paul’s mission are insightful. However, one cannot understand the apostle or his mission without engaging his eschatology. Moreover, justification by faith in Christ was central to Paul’s message, as both the undisputed Paulines and the book of Acts (see 13.38-39) attests.

In conclusion, despite its inadequacies, *Paul and Mission* is a valuable contribution to the ongoing study of history’s most celebrated missionary and its implications for the contemporary Christian mission.

## About the Reviewer

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