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Robert Jewett. *Saint Paul Returns to the Movies: Triumph Over Shame*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. Pp. x + 221. \$14.00 (Paper).

[1] In this sequel to his *Saint Paul at the Movies: The Apostle's Dialogue With American Culture* (1993), New Testament scholar Robert Jewett (Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary) returns to "the experiment of bringing films and biblical texts into dialogue" (4). The volume consists of ten essays; prologue; epilogue; endnotes; and indices of ancient texts and of names and authors. The essays are organized under three headings. Part I, "Love and the Secrets of the Heart," includes "The Exposure of Shameful Secrets in *The Prince of Tides*," "*Babette's Feast* and Shaming the Poor in Corinth," and "Shame, Love, and the Saga of *Forrest Gump*." Part II, "Transforming the Proud and the Shamed," consists of "*Mr. Holland's Opus* and Letters Written on the Heart," "The Deadly Deception of the Flesh in *Groundhog Day*," and "*Babe* Takes the Lead in Honoring the Lowly." Part III, "The Shameful Gospel and the Problem of Redemption," includes "The Blood of Christ at the *Edge of the City*," "The Gospel Free of Charge: Bondage and *The Firm*," "Shame and the Other in *Unforgiven*," and "A Problematic Hope for the Shamed in *The Shawshank Redemption*."

[2] Jewett aims to explore a "seemingly preposterous proposition," namely, that "certain movies afford a deeper access to the hidden heart of Paul's theology than mainstream theologians . . . have been able to penetrate"; and conversely, that Pauline theology can help us understand the deeper dimensions of the ten films discussed here (20). That ancient religious texts and a set of modern films, which, by Jewett's own admission, are "either neutral or overtly hostile to traditional religion" (182), could have anything to say to each other seems preposterous indeed. But Jewett exposes in his dialogue partners a shared concern for honor and shame, hence, the title of the prologue ("Uncovering Shame and Grace in Paul and the Cinema"), and more specifically, a message of triumph over shame, thus, the volume's sub-title.

[3] Fundamental to the project is Jewett's recognition of the theological significance of honor and shame in Pauline thought, for which he is expressly indebted to recent studies of Mediterranean culture. At the core of a shameful gospel is the cross, "the supreme emblem of shame," which overturned current definitions of honor. His definition of shame as "the

embarrassment we feel in getting caught" doing wrong (39) hardly captures the deeper reality which he describes thus, "Shame is felt when others demean us on prejudicial grounds, not because of what we have done but because of our own identity, whether it be our race, our culture, our gender, our ability, or our religion. The most damaging form of shame is to accept and internalize such evaluations, leading us to believe that we are worthless, that our lives are without significance" (39). It is precisely this shamed condition and self-estimation that Jewett sees both Paul, with his gospel of grace, and contemporary films as addressing.

[4] Summaries of the films are provided in each chapter, but readers will need to have viewed them in order to follow the dialogue. To aid those less familiar with biblical texts, the Pauline text central to the discussion is quoted in full at the beginning of each chapter, after which Jewett interweaves analyses of the text and film, "allowing each to shed light on the other" (4). His method throughout is that of biblical hermeneutics, "aiming at the 'fusion of horizons' between the ancient text and the contemporary situation."

[5] "*Babette's Feast* and Shaming the Poor in Corinth" is illustrative of the method. Analyses of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 and the film lead Jewett to observe, "Gaining a sense of worth at its most basic level comes most naturally when we eat together, moving beyond the normal boundaries of friends and families. When this occurs, communities and individuals . . . are enabled to escape for a time from the distortion of a competitive world, in which honor and shame are dispensed ruthlessly to the damnation of all" (51). He then suggests that Christians would do well occasionally to celebrate the Lord's Supper in the spirit of *Babette's* feast, i.e. as an actual meal in which sensual pleasure and fellowship are combined. Similarly, with an eye to "the new beastliness" on the contemporary horizon, in "*Babe* Takes the Lead in Honoring the Lowly" Jewett asks, "Can this film and Romans 12 provide guidance in this difficult era . . . when civility and good manners are increasingly held in contempt by Americans?" (107). Paul and *Babe*, he suggests, agree "that the kind of civility that can conquer meanness and prejudice does not rest on a new law but on the mercy of the master" (120), i.e. "on the prior gift of God's loving action to each person" (109). Hence, his recommendation for the current beastliness: "a new ethic of civility, based not on patronizing manners but on the kind of solidarity found in *Babe* and Romans" (120).

[6] One need not be a scholar or film critic to appreciate the dialogue that Jewett has orchestrated here. Biblical scholars may find the volume a useful way to engage undergraduate students in study of Paul; but its primary appeal will be to a much broader non-specialist audience. It can be recommended to those interested in exploring the relevance of biblical texts for today's world, including preachers, seminary instructors, religious educators, and campus ministers. Readers will not agree with every reading of a particular film or Pauline text; but the thought-provoking treatments of both are sure to stimulate lively conversations.

[7] Although Jewett is no Siskel and Ebert (nor does he claim to be), his treatment of the films is far from uninformed. Frequent citation of the reviews of film critics indicates that Jewett has not ventured beyond the boundaries of his discipline without doing his homework. Moreover, his considerable expertise as a biblical scholar surely compensates for his limitations as a film critic. The insights he affords into Pauline thought and the social realities of early Christian communities are surely the strength of the book. Especially

worthwhile are his treatment of Paul's critique of boasting and use of shame language (10-15), his reconstruction of the shaming behavior that distorts the Corinthian love feasts (40-46), and the social circumstances that condition Paul's insistence on preaching the gospel free of charge (137-40). Most importantly, Jewett's "new assessment of the triumph of grace over shameful status as the organizing center for Paul's thought" (19) is an especially significant contribution to which one hopes a sequel will be forthcoming.

[8] I suspect that, as a result of the insights this respected Pauline scholar brings to his discussions of the pertinent biblical texts, some readers, lured to the book primarily by their love of cinema, will be brought to a deepened appreciation of Paul and of the social implications of the gospel of grace for early Christian communities. For such a welcome achievement, this reviewer and fellow New Testament scholar gladly assigns Jewett's project a "thumbs up" rating.

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