

## Empire, Economics, and the New Testament

**Peter Oakes**

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020 (237 pages)

Peter Oakes has distinguished himself as one of the premier New Testament scholars in the field today. Oakes, Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester, is known for his careful attention to the material culture of the ancient Mediterranean world and its bearing on the interpretation of New Testament texts. Among Oakes's many important works, one highlight is *Reading Romans in Pompeii: Paul's Letter at Ground Level* (London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), a fascinating study of Paul's letter to the Romans that draws richly on demographic and archaeological data from the city of Pompeii to explore the dynamics of the Christ-following community in Rome and the ways in which Paul's letter might have been heard by its intended recipients.

The present volume, *Empire, Economics, and the New Testament*, brings together ten essays by Oakes that demonstrate the strengths of his interpretive program. One essay, the first chapter, appears for the first time in this volume, and the other nine chapters have been previously published, spanning a period from 1998–2016. The book is divided into three parts. Part 1, "House Churches," offers two essays that investigate the spaces in which early Christians met and the socioeconomic implications of the house-church setting for many of these meetings: (1) "A House-Church Account of Economics and Empire" (3–30) and (2) "Nine Types of Church in Nine Types of Space in the Insula of the Menander" (31–62). The first chapter most clearly draws upon Oakes's earlier work on Pompeii, using archaeological data from Pompeii to imagine a model craftworker house church of forty people. Oakes's model allows for a number of different types of members of an urban house church: (1) the household of the host craftworker; (2) other householders and the members of their households, including spouses, children, and slaves; (3) members of the house church who belonged to households with non-Christian heads, including slaves and freedpersons who belonged or had belonged to non-Christians (Oakes actually divides this category into three separate subgroups); and (4) homeless house church members. The interesting move that Oakes makes in this particular essay is to map the diverse perspectives on economic and imperial issues found in the New Testament onto the situations of the different sorts of members of Christian house churches. As Oakes writes, "Circumstances in the house churches make sense of both the more radical and less radical rhetoric on economics and empire" (4).

Part 2 "Economics," concentrates on economic issues and their bearing on the interpretation of New Testament texts: (3) "Methodological Issues in Using Economic Evidence in Interpretation of Early Christian Texts" (65–90); (4) "Economic Approaches: Scarcity Resources and Interpretive Opportunities" (91–108); (5) "Urban Structure, Patronage, and the Corinthian Followers of Christ" (109–22); and (6) "Jason and Penelope Hear Philippians 1:1–11" (123–32). The four essays in this part are nicely balanced in that the first two primarily reflect on methodological issues related to the use of economics in the

study of early Christian texts, whereas the second two essays deliver insightful test cases applied to specific contexts and texts (i.e., Corinth and Philippi).

Part 3, “Empire,” provides four chapters that consider the relationship of New Testament texts to the Roman empire: (7) “Remapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians” (135–55); (8) “Christian Attitudes to Rome at the Time of Paul’s Letter” (156–63); (9) “A State of Tension: Rome in the New Testament” (164–80); (10) “God’s Sovereignty over Roman Authorities: A Theme in Philippians” (181–93). In these four essays, Oakes presents a nuanced picture of the interaction between early Christianity and Roman imperial ideology. Especially helpful is chapter 7 that develops a fourfold typology for understanding parallels between Christian discourse or practice and “some element of the discourse or practice involved in the maintenance of the power relations of Roman society” (136). That is, according to Oakes, a parallel between Christian discourse and practice, on one hand, and Roman discourse and practice, on the other, can be ascribed to: (1) “a coincidence arising from Roman and Christian use of the same prior model”; (2) Christians “borrowing some aspect of Roman discourse or practice (without that involving conflict between Christianity and Rome)”; (3) “Christian discourse [that] uses Roman language as part of a reaction against trouble caused by Rome”; or (4) Christians writing “in Roman terms in order to oppose some aspect of Roman discourse or practice” (140–41).

Students of the New Testament interested in learning more about the material, economic, and political contexts of early Christianity will find this collection of essays to be an excellent resource.

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## The Business of Conquest: Empire, Love, and Law in the Atlantic World

**Nicole D. Legnani**

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This book opens with two significant images from *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno* (1615/16) and *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* (ca. 1615) by Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, which portray on the same boat the protagonists of the Spanish conquest of the Americas: Christopher Columbus, Juan Díaz de Sólís, Diego de Almagro, Francisco Pizarro, Vasco Núñez de Bilbao, and Martín Fernández de Enciso. The second drawing, which was about the “Pontifical Fleet,” omits Martín Fernández de Enciso. Fernández de Enciso was necessary for the conquest, but he did not deserve a place in the church’s boat. Why? Legnani speculates that the absence of Fernández de Enciso served to stress “this conquistador’s role in providing an apologetics for empire, as a tailwind to the corporate enterprise of conquest” (5). In other words, by deleting Fernández de Enciso, Guamán Poma, a contemporary of these explorers, wanted to damage the partnership between the crown and the church, which was instrumental to the Spanish conquest.