

America
The National Catholic Weekly

3/21/2011

The Pauline Year observed in 2008-9 produced many excellent studies of Paul's life, missionary activity, letters and theology (see **America**, 3/9/09, pp. 22-25). A somewhat overlooked topic, however, was the legacy of Paul in early Christian circles. In *The Making of Paul: Constructions of the Apostle in Early Christianity* (Fortress), Richard I. Pervo, the author of the massive and learned commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (2009) for the Hermeneia series, seeks to provide a survey of how Paul was remembered, honored and vilified in the early churches. His goal is to describe how Paul became the pillar and founder of catholic Christianity, that is, the emerging "great church" of the period from A.D. 150 to A.D. 250. His focus is on how Paul's undisputed letters and the figure of Paul the Apostle were used to carry on the Pauline tradition and were adapted to speak to the needs of Christians long after Paul's death.

Pervo first describes how Paul's undisputed letters (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon) were gathered, edited and circulated in the form of a collection around A.D. 100. Then he considers how the pseudepigraphical Pauline letters (Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, Pastorals, etc.) carried on and developed the Pauline tradition in various ways and how the figure of Paul appears in other early Christian letters (such as Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, etc.) and in narratives (Acts of the Apostles, *Acts of Paul*, *Epistula Apostolorum*, etc.). Next he deals with possible examples of opposition to Paul in Matthew's Gospel and with the silences about Paul in other early writings. Finally he discusses how Paul was interpreted and used by Marcion, the Gnostics and Irenaeus.

This volume is immensely learned, full of fresh insights and connections and written in a lively and engaging style. Pervo plays very well the role of the historian as detective, always in search of loose ends, inconsistencies and contradictions, and other clues in the ancient sources. He defines the legacy of Paul as an inspiration to generate fresh understandings of his message for the service of the church and the world. He observes ironically that although Paul gave his life in pursuit of unity, he has often been the apostle of disunity; but that the complexity of his legacy is a fitting tribute to his memory.