

### L. L. Welborn

*Paul's Summons to Messianic Life: Political Theology and the Coming Awakening.*  
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Larry L. Welborn, professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Fordham University, has written several books on the letters of Paul and edited others on the urban settings of early Christianity. Welborn brings his expertise to bear on his latest book, *Paul's Summons to Messianic Life: Political Theology and the Coming Awakening*. The slenderness of Welborn's book, which reflects the focus and concision of Welborn's analysis, should in no way detract from the seriousness of his project and the important contributions it makes.

The first chapter, "Neighbor (A)," begins by exploring briefly the central place of neighbor love in Paul's thought. For Paul, love of neighbor fulfills the whole of the Jewish law. Welborn calls attention to the "radical reduction" of the dual commandment to love God and love neighbor (see Mark 12:31) to the single command to love neighbor in Rom 13. Such a reduction prompts Welborn to review several philosophical appropriations of Paul's singular love command, including the work of Jacob Taubes, Kenneth Reinhard, Eric Santner, and Slavoj Žižek. It is here that Welborn provides more clarity into his own project. He hopes to reposition the problems associated with Paul's theology of neighbor love within the context of Paul's eschatological consciousness. Accordingly, Paul's call to neighbor love must be understood under the notion of *kairos*, the eschatological rationale that summons Paul's audience to an awakening.

In the second chapter, "Kairos (B)," Welborn explores more fully the nature of *kairos* in Rom 13:11 and in Paul's thought more generally. Properly understood, it is this *kairos* that enables the love of neighbor. While many understand *kairos* in Rom 13 to denote the future-oriented, in-between time awaiting the return of Christ, Welborn insists that this interpretation cuts against Paul's own thought. By adding the temporal marker, "now," Paul's *kairos* does not anticipate the future but represents how the past invades the present. To fill out this sense of *kairos*, Welborn draws connections between Paul's concept of the "now time" and Jesus's proclamation of the "nearness" of God's Kingdom. Welborn detects one crucial difference between Jesus's Kingdom and Paul's *kairos*, however. For Jesus, the nearing Kingdom was an entirely *present* reality. For Paul, the *kairos* denotes a relationship between the past and the present. The "now time" signifies the moment when the messianic events of the past enter into or intrude upon the present. Welborn refers to this moment as awakening.

Welborn's penchant for concision appears clearly in his third chapter, "Awakening (C)." Here, in just under seven pages of prose appended with several figures, Welborn introduces the reader to the gloomy portraits of social and political life in the literature of the first century CE, with Seneca's *Hercules Furens* as Welborn's point of departure. Welborn fills out Seneca's account with archaeological evidence indicating the violent and dehumanizing forces at work in the Roman Empire, including a mass grave for slaves. Finally, Welborn shows how the consolidation of power around Augustus led to state-sponsored cruelty and violence, expressed and experienced at a structural level. With this bleak picture of life in the early Empire recounted, Welborn returns to Rom 13:13 and the list of behaviors to be avoided found there. Welborn understands these as symptoms of the social and moral ethos evinced earlier in the chapter. Likening Paul's prohibitions to a painted frieze in the little Caupona of Salvius at Pompei, Welborn takes these images to be representative of the widespread moral sleep from which Paul hopes to rouse his audience.

The fourth chapter, "Awakening (C)," discusses more fully the nature or mechanism of the awakening that Paul imagines. Once again Welborn's use of contemporary philosophical and religious writings to illuminate the thought of Paul, though concise, is effective and illuminating. The pseudo-Platonic *Cleitophon*, Epictetus, and the *Poimandres* provide comparative mechanisms of awakening to those of Paul. These writings stress knowledge of the self, self-mastery, or accommodation to the will of Nature to be the mechanisms of awakening. Paul's sense of awakening also has a sense of knowledge, but not of self, nature, or mind, but of an event, the messianic event. "According to Paul, 'awakening' is an experience wherein the past event of the Messiah's death and resurrection comes together with the present moment in the life of believers" (39). Jesus's faithfulness, his complete "saying-yes to the love of God," activates this awakening among believers (43). The result of awakening is the death of the "egotistical part" of the self so that the "messianic seed" may live and work.

If the messianic event is the mechanism of awakening and a partial death to self is the effect, what distinguishes this state of wakefulness? In chapter five, "Kairos (B)," Welborn returns to Rom 13:11-14 and notes five characteristics of wakefulness: (1) wakefulness is characterized by an increased spatial and temporal proximity—what Welborn terms the "actuality"—of the messianic event; (2) a sense of militancy accompanies wakefulness, denoting a readiness to do battle with the forces of darkness; (3) wakefulness is collective in nature; (4) wakefulness is realized in concrete actions; and (5) wakefulness puts previous stages of salvation to the test. Paul's understanding of wakefulness reflects the distinctive eschatology of Romans, which Welborn compares to the eschatology of 1 Thessalonians. While some interpreters may balk at the notion

of development in Paul's eschatological thinking, Welborn offers an insightful account of the changes that occurred in Paul's thinking between writing the two letters. The differences do not denote a lack of intensity in Paul's thought, a sort of resigned concession to the delay of the *parousia*. Rather, the eschatology of Romans represents an *intensification* of Paul's eschatological orientation. He exhorts the Christians to realize the potential of the "now time" and to actualize the messianic event through an awakened consciousness. This awakening results in a higher ethical purpose, an active struggle against hypnotizing forces, and a collective consciousness bound by love.

The final full chapter, "Neighbor (A)," considers what difference an awakened consciousness makes and how it enables mutual love. In the first place, awakening makes the capacity for mutual love possible because all other obligations, especially those tied up with the Roman patronage system, have been renounced and replaced with economic mutualism. Second, Welborn calls attention to the fact that mutual love in Rom 13 is directed toward the *other* (*heteros*), a significant modification of the formula from Lev 19 that would expect "brother" or "neighbor" as the object of love. This love for the *other* means that the community remains "perpetually incomplete" (58). Third, the practices and features of mutual love fulfill the law's original purpose. Welborn concludes the chapter by considering more fully the sort of collective consciousness that enables mutual love and requires the transcendence of class consciousness, returning to Marxist theory and philosophical interpretations of Paul (Baidou in particular). The political consequences of mutual love are economic mutualism and radical hospitality.

In the short concluding chapter, "Coda," Welborn considers the value of Rom 13 for contemporary readers. In so doing, the two horizons of Welborn's project, subtly present elsewhere in the book, become apparent: because Paul's eschatological orientation in Romans 13 is not ultimately directed to the return of Jesus sometime in the future but a summons to messianic life in the present—the "now time"—it applies *also* to contemporary readers. Welborn then sketches suggestively how contemporary society has been lulled to sleep by global capitalism. He discerns the need for contemporary readers to heed Paul's summons to awakening, lest they allow their contemporary global society to return to the structured inequalities that characterized the Roman world when Paul originally wrote. The concluding chapter is followed by the book's endnotes and a brief subject index. The endnotes reveal Welborn's excellent grasp of primary and second sources related to Paul's letters and philosophical appropriations of Paul.

In all, Welborn provides a great service to readers and interpreters of Romans with *Paul's Summons to Messianic Life*. Among many important

contributions of this work, I highlight two. First, *Paul's Summons* can act as a brief introduction to the reception of Paul (and Romans) among contemporary philosophers. Although this reviewer had only minimal exposure to this reception history, I found Welborn's engagement with it to be clear, illuminating, and easy to follow. His analysis could provide the reader with an excellent starting point for attaining a better understanding of this area of Pauline studies. Second, I found Welborn's understanding of Pauline eschatology in Rom 13 to be compelling. His conclusions refocus interpretation on the importance of eschatology for understanding Paul's theology as it appears in Romans. More than a historical observation, however, Welborn's suggestion carries important *theological* implications. His reading makes Paul's eschatological orientation—his focus on the “now time”—relevant to contemporary readers. In this regard, I couldn't help but hear resonances of both Rudolph Bultmann (*Theology of the New Testament*) and Albert Schweitzer (*The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*) in Welborn's proposal. This book would be a welcome addition to a seminary or upper-level undergraduate course on Pauline theology or Romans.

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