

Author provides insights into Paul

Study offers fine fare for the serious reader

Galatians, (Vol. 9: Sacra Pagina Series), by Frank J. Matera; Michael Glazier Books (Collegeville, Minn., 1992); xiv, 252 pages; \$24.95.

By Father Sebastian A. Falcone
Guest contributor

The preface to this advanced-level commentary poses two questions.

- Has the time spent in writing this book been fruitless?
- Will this work prove helpful to the faith community?

This reviewer found himself questioning the author's doubts or disclaimer halfway through the 36-page Introduction.

Here is a remarkable achievement, from at least three perspectives.

Galatians moves beyond Frank J. Matera's three earlier books on: Jesus' kingship (in Mark 15); the specific theology in each Gospel account of the Passion; and contemporary studies in the Gospel of Mark.

This work ranks among the better full-length commentaries written in English (though based on the original language) in the last 25 years.

Galatians sustains the high-caliber contribution of the other three commentaries appearing to date in this series (namely, *Matthew*, *Luke*, and *Acts*).

The Sacra Pagina Series of New Testament commentaries adopts a five-part layout: an Introduction (with bibliography); a fresh translation; a breakdown of individual text-sections, each with its own explanatory Notes; and a corresponding Interpretation.

(Readers familiar with the Anchor Bible commentaries will note the inversion of the last two features.)

Matera begins his analysis with a careful study of the text tradition, since over the centuries the New Testament copyists have given us different readings.

The Notes explore the "flow" of the apostle's thought, while the Interpretation summarizes the apostle's overall theology up to that point.

Throughout the book, Matera focuses on "the rhetorical dimension" of *Galatians*. Hence the reader is consistently given insights into Paul's intent regarding the issue at hand.

The commentary follows three basic premises.

Matera challenges "mirror reading" — the tendency of many interpreters to read Paul's statement as direct rebuttal to charges supposedly circulating in the communities.

Matera steers clear of a naive fundamentalism and a radical criticism. Sometimes this works to a disadvantage. For instance, in the debate about the exact nature of Paul's experience on the Damascus Road, Matera adopts the non-committal phrase, conversion/call (an awkward expression, by his own admission, and one which points to indecision).

Matera accepts seven genuine letters: Galatians, First Thessalonians, First and Second Corinthians, Romans, Philemon, and Philippians.

The translation is good and consistently clear. An explanation for the translation is given whenever the author feels it's necessary.

Several negative remarks seem

called for here, however.

One reads on page 2 that "there will probably never be a consensus about the identity of the agitators" in Galatia. Three pages later, however, one reads: "To summarize, there is a general consensus that the agitators were Jewish Christians from Judea."

The commentator argues, rightly, on page 120 that "to hang on a tree" (Deut. 21:23) was understood to mean crucifixion by the new Testament period, and the author, again rightly, appeals to Acts 5:30. The argument can be considerably strengthened by a further appeal to Luke 23:39, more especially to Acts 10:39, and in fact to the Qumran materials.

This reader on several occasions found a particular point being made two and even three times. Readers will have to decide whether such repetitions are helpful or not.

Most readers, however, will appreciate Matera's strategy (the sign of a good teacher) to present summaries of the apostle's turn of thought at this point or that. In other words, Matera never loses sight of the reader.

This commentary deserves high praise. It has clarity and balance, keeps to its stated premises, and makes Paul's communication process the primary focus.

Intended for the serious reader, this book belongs on the shelf of anyone who has a serious commitment to understanding the difference between Saul, the law-observing Pharisee, and Paul, "a man in Christ."

Father Falcone is professor of New Testament Studies at St. Bernard's Institute.

Fundraiser planned for AIDS Rochester

ROCHESTER — The second annual AIDS Walk-Rochester fundraiser is scheduled for Sunday, June 6.

This 10-kilometer walk will begin and end at Cobbs Hill Park and cover parts of Culver and Winton roads as well as University, East Park and Monroe avenues. Registration is at 9 a.m., with the walk starting at 10 a.m.

Last year's inaugural event drew more than 500 walkers and raised in excess of \$64,000 for AIDS Rochester, an organization which provides AIDS-related services, education and outreach.

To participate in the AIDS Walk as either a walker, sponsor or volunteer, call 716/442-2220.

Faith Haven announces open house tour May 8

NAPLES — Faith Haven, West Hollow Road, will hold an open house from 2 to 4 p.m. on Saturday, May 8.

A home for unwed women in crisis pregnancies, Faith Haven was founded in 1986. It provides up to 25 women a year with health care, counseling, education and the support necessary to make important decisions about themselves and their unborn babies.

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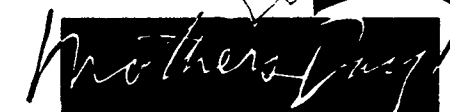
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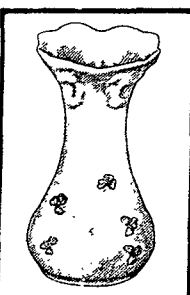
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