

Scottish Journal of Theology

<http://journals.cambridge.org/SJT>

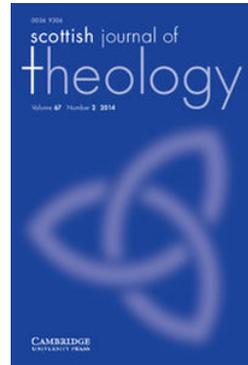
Additional services for **Scottish Journal of Theology**:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



Justin K. Hardin, *Galatians and the Imperial Cult: A Critical Analysis of the First-Century Social Context of Paul's Letter*, WUNT 237 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), pp. xiv + 190. \ \$79.00.

John Anthony Dunne

Scottish Journal of Theology / Volume 67 / Issue 02 / May 2014, pp 245 - 246
DOI: 10.1017/S0036930612000506, Published online: 03 April 2014

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0036930612000506

How to cite this article:

John Anthony Dunne (2014). Scottish Journal of Theology, 67, pp 245-246
doi:10.1017/S0036930612000506

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

a very similar agenda and set of commitments with Miller-McLemore, do not yet seem significantly to have influenced her thought and development. Australian Terry Veling's seminal work on practical theology is also apparently ignored. But one person cannot encompass the whole world of knowledge, and hopefully this will not be Miller-McLemore's last word on her discipline. While I share the author's hopes for the nature and future of practical theology, I remain a little uncertain as to whether the vision advanced here will really affect the wider practice of the theological academy to the extent that she would like.

The book is terrific value for money and should be on the shelves of any advanced pastoral or practical theologian, wherever they live. May all its aspirations and dreams for pastoral and practical theology be abundantly realised.

Stephen Pattison

University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK
s.pattison.1@bham.ac.uk

doi:10.1017/S0036930612000506

Justin K. Hardin, *Galatians and the Imperial Cult: A Critical Analysis of the First-Century Social Context of Paul's Letter*, WUNT 237 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), pp. xiv + 190. \$79.00.

Justin Hardin's monograph on *Galatians and the Imperial Cult* addresses the social and religious background of the letter's recipients. The key question that Hardin seeks to answer is: 'What were the Galatians actually doing at the time of Paul's letter?' (p. 15). Essentially, Hardin concludes that the Galatians were contemplating circumcision in order to give themselves a proper socio-political status among the Jewish community (p. 112). In the mean time, however, some of the Galatians were participating in the imperial cult as an attempt to ease their awkward social standing (pp. 141–7).

Hardin begins his study with an overview of the imperial cult in the Julio-Claudian era broadly, before specifically addressing the extent that the cult of Rome had affected both the northern and the southern cities of Galatia. Hardin's historical research leaves little doubt about the expanse of imperial ideology throughout the eastern portions of the Roman Empire, and there is good reason to assume that the Galatians would have been affected by the pervasive emperor cult to some degree. However, this is not the same as suggesting that the imperial cult had directly affected the crisis in Galatia that Paul was addressing. Yet Hardin attempts to provide evidence for this in his treatment of Gal 6:12–13 and 4:8–10.

In Gal 6:12–13 Paul states that the agitators were seeking to persuade the Galatians to accept circumcision so that they might avoid persecution. Based upon references to suffering and persecution in the letter as a whole, Hardin understands the agitators' avoidance of persecution here to be an accurate description of their motives, rather than a polemical overstatement. Certainly, Paul does emphasise that following the cross leads to external conflict (Gal 5:11; 6:14). Yet, it is not clear from Gal 6:12–13 whether the threat against the agitators was from local Jews or civic authorities or even both (as Hardin suggests). Paul seems to be suggesting in 6:12–13 that if the agitators abandoned their message and instead followed the gospel that he preached (Gal 1:6–9), they too would experience persecution and suffering. Thus, the avoidance of persecution in Gal 6:12–13 need not be understood as a reference to a specific threat, although it is possible that external pressure provided part of the impetus for compelling the Galatians to receive circumcision. Perhaps this pressure is what led the agitators to 'persecute' the Galatians, if this is what Paul means in Gal 4:29 (as I think likely).

The other important argument for Hardin's thesis is that the calendrical system of Gal 4:10 is not Jewish, but pagan. If the Galatians were observing a pagan calendar, then there is probably more to the crisis than the issue of circumcision. It is from this text primarily that Hardin suggests that the Galatians had begun to embrace the imperial cult to allay their social dislocation. Granted, the calendar of Gal 4:10 is intriguing, however, it can also be read as a polemical reference to the Jewish calendar. Regardless, even if the calendrical system reflects pagan observances, this would not necessitate the Galatians participating in the imperial cult. Therefore, the evidence of Gal 4:10 appears to be inconclusive for Hardin's thesis.

Overall, Hardin's thesis is worth serious consideration. The merits of the first half of Hardin's study go beyond the background of the New Testament and have value for historical studies generally. In regard to Galatians specifically, however, the thesis leaves more to be desired. One suspects that there should be additional evidence of the imperial cult's influence in Galatians if it held such a central role behind the crisis. To be fair, Hardin does not overstate his case. At the end of each of the two chapters dealing with Galatians he notes that his suggestions are 'tentative' (pp. 114, 146). Although different readers will evaluate Hardin's treatment variously, any serious interpreter of Galatians should consult this monograph as it is an important contribution to identifying the nature of the Galatian crisis.

John Anthony Dunne

St Mary's College, University of St Andrews, St Andrews, KY16 9AJ, UK

jad22@st-andrews.ac.uk