



St. Paul and Epicurus (Minnesota Archive Editions)

Norman Wentworth DeWitt

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Everyone who is interesting in the meaning of the Bible will find this a revealing study, for it opens up a new window on the New Testament, a window that was walled up centuries ago by prejudice. Professor DeWitt throws new light on the writings of the Apostle Paul by showing how they were influenced by the teachings of the Greek philosopher Epicurus.

The Epicureanism could have a place in Christian religion may come as a surprise to those familiar with the conventional concept of the philosophy of Epicurus. As demonstrated in the meaning of the English word *epicure*, derived from the name of the ancient philosopher, the modern world has long associated Epicurus with the indulgence of sensual pleasure in food and drink.

But, as Professor DeWitt makes clear both in this volume and in its predecessor, *Epicurus and His Philosophy*, the pleasures which the ancient Greek espoused as constituting the chief good of life were not the pleasures of the flesh. The merit and the lure, however, of the Epicurean ethic, which allied happiness with pleasure, were so appealing and so widely acknowledged that Paul had no choice but to adopt it and bless it for his followers with the sanction of religion. He could not, though, admit indebtedness to a philosopher who had long been accused of sensualism and atheism, and there was no choice, therefore, but to consign Epicurus to anonymity.

Through his scholarly investigation into the Epicurean source of certain portions of the Epistles, Professor DeWitt provides new explanations or translations for seventy-six biblical verses. The close scrutiny of biblical passages is carried out, not in a spirit of vandalism, but in a quest for accuracy, and the result is a challenging, readable, and absorbing book.

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