

READING PAUL WITH THE REFORMERS: RECONCILING OLD AND NEW PERSPECTIVES. BY STEPHEN J. CHESTER. GRAND RAPIDS, MI: EERDMANS, 2017, XXI + 478 pp.; ISBN: 978-0802848369 (Hbk.); 60 USD.*

DOI: 10.29357/ISSN.2521-179X.2018.20.23

When a highly-qualified Pauline scholar such as Stephen Chester immerses himself in a historical exegetical research in order to foster a dialog between the different eras of New Testament (hereafter NT) studies, the outcome cannot be but interesting. *Reading Paul* is an interdisciplinary study that examines the hermeneutics and exegetical theology of the great Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century and their relation to crucial contemporary discussions in the field of Pauline studies. Thus, it is both a research into the reception history—the reception of Paul in the Reformation and of the Reformation Pauline interpretation in the contemporary scholarship—and an exercise in NT exegesis informed by historical theological data. The book has been written by a NT scholar and primarily for NT scholars. It will be extremely beneficial for this intended audience, yet readers whose interest belongs to others theological disciplines might find here a great source of information and insights, as well.

The basic argument of the author is stated clearly: “[T]he Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century have insights into the interpretation of the Pauline letters that can assist us as we attempt to interpret the same texts in and for contemporary contexts” (1). But the rationale of the book is more specific and driven by two hermeneutical reasons.

The first one is historical and methodological and has to do with the influence of the Reformers’ exegesis upon the subsequent generations of NT readers. Although their significant impact has always been recognized, it is, Chester claims, “still too little understood” (56). The Reformation tradition of reading Paul used to be uncritically accepted by Protestant exegetes in the 17th-19th centuries but is frequently criticized and altogether rejected in contemporary scholarship, especially after the advent of the New Perspective on Paul (hereafter NPP) whose proponents have convincingly shown that the earlier pictures of the Second Temple Judaism and religious context of the first century were extremely distorted and, they concluded, hence the Reformation exegesis of Paul’s writings must have been invalid. However, Chester finds this NPP’s stance problematic and rightly argues that whereas the rejection of the Reformers’ interpretations of the first-century Judaism as a work-righteousness religion is justified, the outright dismissal of their Pauline exegesis is not, because this pretentious claim usually lacks substantial engagement with relevant primary sources.

The article received on 07.02.2018; approved for publication on 13.03.2018.

The second reason that forms Chester's rationale is exegetical in nature: the Reformation exegesis has some relevance for contemporary discussions in Biblical Studies because these discussions are both shaped by the Reformers' findings and can be further enriched by the critical engagement with their thinking. After all, Luther and his companions "occupy such a central place in the history of Pauline interpretation that if we fail to understand what they say about Paul, then we fail properly to understand our own place in that history" (56).

With these motifs in mind, Chester sets out to, firstly, provide a maximally accurate and historically credible depiction of the Reformation Pauline exegesis and, secondly, call into question current hermeneutical perspectives (4-7, 56-59). Both tasks are executed in a good and convincing manner, which is all the more important because a research project of this kind has been long since needed. The recent works by S. Westerholm, M. Bird, G. Macaskill, and J.A. Harill all went in that direction, but it is Stephen Chester who has undertaken the task of bringing the Reformation exegetical findings to the participants of current theological debates.

After some methodological musings in Part I, "Hermeneutics: The Sixteenth Century and the Twenty-First Century," Chester dedicates the bulk of his research, parts II and III—"Shared Convictions: The Reformers' New Pauline Exegetical Grammar" and "Individual Perspectives: Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin on Righteousness in Christ," respectively—to a detailed exploration of the Reformation's Paul. He takes the notions of reception history as developed by H.-G. Gadamer and H.R. Jauss, the theory of paradigm shifts of T. Kuhn, and M. Luther's own idea of a "new and theological grammar," and then employs them in his conceptual analysis of the select primary sources. These include the works of just-mentioned Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin, because for Chester the term "Reformers" refers to early Lutheran and Reformed theologians only, and, additionally, these three figures are most important for the subsequent development of Pauline interpretation. Such a choice of personalities is not surprising but, still, not fully representative. The author's definition of the Reformers includes many other sixteenth-century exegetes, some of which (Bucer, Bullinger, Vermigli) cursorily appear on pages of the book but without a doubt, they deserve more space and attention.

The early leaders of the Evangelical Reform appear to stand in radical exegetical—not cultural or theological—discontinuity with the medieval context, in significant continuity with many contemporary biblical scholars, and in fundamental unity with each other. As Chester puts it, the Reformers "all speak the same language of Pauline theology" (65). He consistently uses the metaphors of grammar and, rarely, paradigm to illustrate the shared framework of convictions, which characterized the sixteenth-century Protestant exegesis and opposed it to the Catholic theology of the time. Luther, Calvin, and their colleagues had a rather unified set of exegetical theses about what Paul meant by such concepts as "the law," "the works of the law," "sin," "grace," "faith," and "justification." In short, the Reformers understood Paul's anthropology and soteriology in a similar way.

At the same time, Chester does not deny the dissimilarities in the theologies of the different Reformers. He notes that Christological and practical aspects of their interpretations were rather distinctive. Luther, for instance, highlights the idea of intimate union with Christ (*unio cum Christo*), who is present in faith, up to the point that the believer lives

an “alien life” and receives the “alien righteousness” of the Savior, whereas Melancthon avoids speaking of such a union but prefers to analyze the Pauline texts rhetorically and think of a forensic but very real justification “on account of Christ” or “because of Christ” (*propter Christi*). Calvin, in his turn, supports the notion of *unio* but adds to it yet another distinction: in the gracious union, the Savior bestowes upon the believer the double saving benefit – justification and sanctification (or regeneration), which are always inseparable but nevertheless distinct “operations” of the divine grace.

These and other theological insights of the Reformers are strongly based on their readings of Romans, Galatians, and other Pauline epistles. As such, these insights might be easily “inserted” into contemporary debates around the NPP. To Chester’s mind, they can even serve to correct or amplify these ongoing discussions. Thus, in Part IV, entitled “Contemporary Implications: The Reformers and the New Perspective on Paul” he compares and critically assesses the Reformers’ and NPP’s exegetical decisions – especially made on the basis of Romans. According to Chester, it is the Reformers’ interpretation of the Pauline anthropology that stands behind the “apocalyptic” trend (J. Martyn, D. Campbell), although this dependence is not acknowledged; it is the soteriological priority of the divine initiative, so cherished by the Reformers, that is extremely intensified, radicalized (N.T. Wright, R. Hays) and unnecessarily opposed to any human involvement (D. Campbell) in contemporary accounts of Paul’s theology; and there are some potentially fruitful teachings of the Reformers, such as the notions of the union with Christ and the active human faith, that have been simply forgotten or misunderstood by the NPP. Hence the conclusion: more active engagement with the Reformation exegetical heritage is needed, and more diligent approach to its insights has to be searched for.

Such an invitation is timely and well-grounded. The book by Chester makes a very significant contribution to the field of Pauline studies in this respect because it connects the past of the discipline with its present and does so in a nuanced and substantiated way. The Reformers’ exegetical views are presented on the basis of careful investigation of the primary sources and in light of the most recent historical scholarship, their fundamental agreements (the joint “exegetical grammar”), as well as minor disagreements, receive adequate amount of attention, and the—factual or possible—connections between the Reformation tradition and the NPP are clearly traced. Yet neither the former nor the latter is idealized or, on the contrary, denigrated – both are acknowledged to have its strength and weaknesses and be able to contribute to a never-ending hermeneutical process.

Hence, the high praise for *Reading Paul* would be a very logical gesture. Its significance for the Pauline studies is undeniable, although further research is needed to further elaborate some points, which remained underrepresented or under-researched. For example, the chapter on medieval context is extremely densed and misses engagement with the fundamental primary (e.g. the *Glossa ordinaria* and Scriptural commentaries) and secondary literature (e.g. by H. de Lubac and F. Stegmüller); the “discontinuity thesis” about the radical difference between the medieval and the Reformation theological paradigms has to be more scrutinized and discussed on a larger scale; some other early Reformers could have been treated in greater detail (especially Bullinger, Hyperius, Ochino, Olevian, Vermigli and others who authored commentaries on Paul’s epistles); and, finally, the scope of examined theological concepts taken from the Pauline texts could have been broadened to include, for

instance, ecclesiological and eschatological themes. Yet, these criticisms and suggestions cannot take away the fact that Chester's work is of great quality and its potential is huge. It resets the agenda for the global exegetical enterprise by successively showing that one cannot read Paul just with Dunn, Wright, or Hays in hand—she has to *consciously and carefully* read him with the Reformers and, I would add, medieval and early modern Christian exegetes. In the realm of Pauline studies, this diligent analysis of the preceding interpretative tradition starts with Chester's book.

Rostislav Tkachenko,
Evangelical Theological Faculty
Leuven, Belgium, ORCID: 0000-0002-5355-2090

ЭПОХА ПУСТОТЫ. КАК ЛЮДИ НАЧАЛИ ЖИТЬ БЕЗ БОГА, ЧЕМ ЗАМЕНИЛИ РЕЛИГИЮ И ЧТО ИЗ ВСЕГО ЭТОГО ВЫШЛО [THE AGE OF NOTHING: HOW WE HAVE SOUGHT TO LIVE SINCE THE DEATH OF GOD]. УОТСОН ПИТЕР. ПЕР. С АНГЛ. М. ЗАВАЛОВА, Н. ХОЛМОГОРОВОЙ (СЕРИЯ: РЕЛИГИЯ. ИСТОРИЯ БОГА). М.: ЭКСМО, 2017. – 784 с.; ISBN 978-5-699-97046-9; 738 RUB.*

DOI: 10.29357/ISSN.2521-179X.2018.20.25

Известный британский журналист и историк идей Питер Уотсон написал книгу о том, как возможно жить после провозглашенной Ф. Ницше в 1882 г. и неоднократно пережитой западной цивилизацией “смерти Бога”. Если Бога нет, а вселенная абсолютно случайна и лишена конечного смысла, то может ли человек обрести горизонт ценностей, помимо того, который он создаст сам? Поиск оснований для жизни, нравственного решения и понимания мира, потерявшего представление о сверхъестественном и трансцендентном, стал определяющим мотивом развития философии, искусства, науки и психологии в XIX – XX веках. Для многих творческих личностей осознание обреченности человека на одиночество перед лицом бесконечно превосходящей его бесчувственной вселенной стало источником опыта ужаса и растерянности, воплощенного в их произведениях. Например, поэзия Т. Элиота, романы Ф. Достоевского и драмы С. Беккета. Книга Уотсона имеет иную направленность. Автор стремится представить тех “героев”, для которых потеря трансцендентной точки отсчета не источник тревоги и трепета, а радостная весть освобождения, призыв к жизни наполненной воодушевлением и изобретательностью. Исходя из этой перспективы, он предлагает нашему вниманию тщательно подобранную хронику поиска смысла жизни после

* Статья поступила в редакцию 09.02.2018; утверждена в печать 13.03.2018