

Book Reviews – Recensions – Buchbesprechungen

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Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians

Ancient Christian Texts

Ambrosiaster, translated and edited

by Gerald L. Bray

Downers Grove: IVP, 2009, xxiii + 270pp., \$60.00, hb, ISBN 978-0-8308-2903-3

SUMMARY

In his translation of Ambrosiaster's *Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians*, Gerald Bray has provided an invaluable resource for interacting with an early interpretation of Paul's letters. Bray opens up the oldest extant Latin commentaries on Paul's letters to English readers for the first time and thus enables them to engage Ambrosiaster's insights by means of his excellent translation.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Mit seiner Übersetzung von Ambrosiasters *Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians* [Kommentare zum Römerbrief und zum 1. und 2. Korintherbrief] hat Gerald Bray eine unschätzbare Quelle zur Verfügung gestellt, welche die Auseinandersetzung mit einer frühen Interpretation der Paulusbriefe ermöglicht. Bray öffnet den englischen Lesern zum ersten Mal den Zugang zu den ältesten, bestehenden lateinischen Kommentaren zu den Paulusbriefen. Durch seine ausgezeichnete Übersetzung ermöglicht er es ihnen, sich mit Ambrosiasters Erkenntnissen auseinanderzusetzen.

RÉSUMÉ

Avec son excellente traduction des commentaires de l'Ambrosiaste (sur les épîtres aux Romains et aux Corinthiens), Gerald Bray nous fournit une source inestimable permettant de prendre en considération une interprétation ancienne des lettres de Paul. Il fait ainsi découvrir à ses lecteurs anglophones le plus ancien des commentaires latins des lettres de Paul en notre possession avec toute sa richesse.

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In his translation of Ambrosiaster's *Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians*, Gerald Bray has provided an invaluable resource for interacting with early interpretations of Paul's letters. This serves as the first English translation of the oldest extant Latin commentaries on Paul's letters. They were probably written in the 370s (AD 366–384) by an anonymous author later nicknamed Ambrosiaster. These commentaries importantly coincide with the flowering of pro-Nicene theology in the West and also give witness to a pre-Vulgate Latin tradition.

This is the first of a two-volume set, the second of which covers Galatians through Philemon. These volumes are the initial offerings of a new series by IVP, Ancient Christian Texts (ACT), and this new series

stands as a companion of their popular Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (ACCS). Whereas ACCS provides comments in a catena format which whets our appetite, ACT focuses upon commentaries and sermons that cover large portions of text. Thus, this series and Bray's volume in particular are a welcome addition since we can better grasp the emphases of individual interpreters. ACT's publication is timely because interest in patristic interpretation of scripture is growing. Within patristic studies there has been a resurgence in the appreciation of the role interpretation of scripture played in theological practice and debate. At the same time, biblical scholars are beginning to interact with non-modern interpreters in order to re-appropriate insights from previously neglected voices. Along with academic researchers, the church is looking back to the fountains of tradition embodied in patristic study of the Bible. Accordingly, these new avenues of interaction with these texts are most welcome.

As the first volume in the new series, Bray's model is excellent. He first gives an eight-page introduction to the three commentaries, in which he discusses the identity of the author, the text and its translation, the social and theological context, Ambrosiaster's legacy and recommendations for further reading. This introduction addresses most of the key issues which will interest readers. Since this is a commentary, I expected a little more discussion of Ambrosiaster's exegetical practices. Also, when I turned to the commentaries themselves, I was disappointed that Bray did not include any further introduction for each letter. Something short, on the order of 2–3 pages, sketching how Ambrosiaster treats key themes in the letters would have been helpful to the reader, particularly since this series is targeted at a non-specialist audience. We must note, however, that a little of this discussion appears in Bray's treatment of the social and theological context in the introduction.

These points are minor because the heart of the work is the translation itself. As with all good translations, I easily found myself engaged in the subject matter of the text because of Bray's clear and flowing language. The verses are bolded and numbered so readers can easily access different passages. Most footnotes are for scriptural references made by Ambrosiaster and, where necessary, Bray adds additional footnotes to clarify issues with the textual tradition or the translation of a particular word or phrase.

It is perhaps an overstatement that 'Ambrosiaster must be regarded as one of the greatest of the ancient biblical commentators' (xix), but this work should not be underestimated. These commentaries are filled with insightful perspectives on Paul's letters and they will repay dividends to all who explore them. Opening up

this text to English readers for the first time, Bray has enabled us to engage Ambrosiaster's insights by means of his excellent translation.

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***The Deliverance of God:
An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul***
Douglas A. Campbell

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009, xxx + 1218 pp.,
£40.99, hb, ISBN 978-0-8028-3126-2

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Douglas Campbell's *The Deliverance of God* [Die Befreiung Gottes] ist ein ehrgeiziger Versuch, die paulinische Interpretation von dem offensichtlichen Würgegriff zu befreien, in dem klassische (zumeist protestantische) Auslegungen die Lehre des Apostels über Rechtfertigung gefangen gehalten haben. Nachdem Campbell die hauptsächlichsten philosophischen, theologischen und kulturellen Faktoren behandelt, die scheinbar für die klassische Lesart verantwortlich sind, legt er sein eigenes Argument dar, indem er vor allem zwei antithetische Linien im Römerbrief identifiziert: 1. eine „Rechtfertigungstheorie“, der sich Paulus widersetzt (Hauptteil von Rö. 1,18 – 3,20) und die ein rechtlich-vertragsmäßiges, vergeltendes und individualistisches Verständnis von Erlösung beinhaltet sowie 2. des Paulus eigenes Evangelium, das auf Beziehung, Teilhabe und Befreiung angelegt ist (besonders in Rö. 5 – 8).

SUMMARY

Douglas Campbell's *The Deliverance of God* is an ambitious attempt to break Pauline interpretation out of the perceived stranglehold that classic (mostly Protestant) interpretations have placed on the apostle's teaching on justification. After setting out the main strands of philosophical, theological and cultural factors that are supposedly responsible for the classic reading, Campbell puts his own argument forward primarily by isolating two antithetical strands in Romans: a 'justification theory' that Paul opposes (the bulk of Rom. 1:18-3:20) which consists of a legal-contractual, retributive and individualistic understanding of salvation, and Paul's own relational, participationist and liberative gospel (found especially in Rom. 5-8).

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet ouvrage ambitieux, *The Deliverance of God*, Douglas Campbell se donne pour but de libérer l'interprétation des épîtres pauliniennes de la forteresse érigée par les interprétations classiques (essentiellement protestantes) de l'enseignement de l'apôtre sur la justification. Après avoir décrit les principaux courants philosophiques, théologiques et culturels qui sont censés être responsables de la lecture classique, Campbell avance sa propre argumentation en isolant principalement deux courants antithétiques dans l'Épître aux Romains : le premier « une théorie de la

justification » que Paul critique (la plus grande partie de Rom 1.18-3.20), et qui propose une compréhension juridique, rétributive et individuelle du salut ; le second, la conception paulinienne qui souligne les aspects relationnel, participatif et libérateur de l'Évangile (particulièrement évident dans Rom 5-8).

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The Deliverance of God is a bold book. Convinced that standard discussions of justification in the church and academy (pre-critical, critical and conservative) are wrong, Campbell's alternative proposal is a blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regime of 'Lutheran' and 'modern, Western Christian' (especially Protestant) readings of Paul. While biblical scholars have chipped away at elements of traditional Protestant teaching on justification for over a century, even these revisionist readings (e.g. Wrede, Schweitzer, Stendahl, Sanders, Dunn) have failed to do more than simply identify problems and hint at solutions to conundrums faced by classic interpretations. Campbell's book is far more ambitious: he isolates what he sees as at least fifty major problems, inconsistencies and contradictions in 'traditional' interpretations, as well as providing a comprehensive solution that is free from any such errors (935).

In order to show how one should proceed to make sense of justification in Paul, Campbell believes it is necessary to provide an extensive discussion of how justification has been dealt with previously, both among 'traditional' interpreters and 'revisionists'. This comprises parts one through three. In part one (chapters 1-6) Campbell lays out what he takes to be the traditional reading, including extensive analysis of what he sees as its major difficulties. The over-arching problem with traditional accounts can be reduced to their 'individualist' understanding of justification (3). From this flawed starting point, a flood of additional problems emerge. The first of these is the notion that salvation involves a conditional and contractual arrangement between sinful individuals and a just and wrathful God. Implied within such a schematisation is the additionally problematic focus on 'rational decision', where salvation depends on the individual becoming aware of his or her spiritual conundrum (through mental self-examination) and thus seeking out a solution to the problem of personal violations of God's law. This initial mental clarity, however, does not lead (as expected) to salvation, but instead to a 'loop of despair', as the individual becomes stuck in a cycle of self-righteousness, or a 'loop of foolishness', as the individual lives hypocritically in judgment of others. Inevitably, then, a concomitant, timeless, de-historicised emphasis on personal conversion develops alongside the individualist, contractual interpretation of justification.

Campbell finds a huge number of 'intrinsic and systematic' difficulties in the conventional reading. Some of the most important include attributing to Paul an overly optimistic ability to understand the human predicament outside of union with Christ, its reading of faith