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

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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

in individualistic terms, the conflict between the soteriology of justification through atonement/imputation in Rom. 1-4 and salvation through participation in Christ in Rom. 5-8, its inability to treat ethics as something more than an optional extra of the Christian life, its misreading of first-century Judaism and Paul's response to it, and its failure to set Paul's theology in its apocalyptic context. In sum, 'justification theory' (the traditional reading) 'causes serious problems for the interpretation of Paul if it is included in any broader description of his thinking' (221).

Part two (chapters 7-9) attends particularly to the historical, cultural and hermeneutical influences thought to lie behind 'justification theory'. Part three (chapters 10-12) returns to the conventional reading in order to treat the Pauline texts normally used to defend a traditional view of justification, specifically Rom. 1-4, which Campbell labels the 'textual "citadel"' for justification classically conceived. Campbell sees the traditional reading as advocating a basic move from plight to solution, from human despair, through to faith and thus on to justification. He believes that the texts used by traditional interpreters simply do not say what proponents *need* them to say to defend justification in the classic sense. Campbell helpfully summarises the bulk of the problems with the traditional reading on 397-411.

His own proposal (parts four and five, chapters 13-21) begins with the claim that Rom. 1:18-3:20 is primarily the discourse of Paul's (Jewish-Christian) opponent (with Paul's corrections interspersed throughout), one that puts forward a contractual, individualistic and retributive gospel; see the summary of Campbell's argument on 590-593. Paul's own ironic presentation of his opponent has been so successful that two millennia of Christian readers have missed the joke and thus mistakenly attributed the entire theology of Rom. 1:18-3:20 to Paul himself. In contrast, as developed in the remainder of Romans and other key Pauline passages, the heart of justification is liberation from the dominion of sin, accomplished by Christ's 'martyriological' death on the cross. These two conceptions of God and the gospel are absolutely antithetical. Thus, Paul's gospel must be radically re-conceptualised.

In appreciation, Campbell's book is not the work of an ivory-tower biblical scholar: he clearly believes that his participative, libratory, non-contractual reading of justification is not only true, but vitally so, both for the church and the academy. It is refreshing to see a biblical scholar who actually cares passionately about the subject matter he discusses. Perhaps other scholarly interpretations of justification have been less than persuasive precisely because they have not engaged in the same scrutiny of their real-world implications in the way Campbell has done.

Furthermore, Campbell rightly recognises that any attempt to explicate Paul's teaching on justification must methodically attend to the historical, philosophical, exegetical and theological backgrounds to both Paul's

doctrine and its reception by subsequent interpreters. While Campbell may at points overreach in his pronouncements on various subjects, he is surely correct to highlight the variety of discourses lying behind what is often naively portrayed as a simple question of exegesis.

Nonetheless, there are some quite significant problems with this book. Perhaps the most problematic is Campbell's analysis of the 'traditional' reading of justification. Despite his interaction with various interpreters (ancient and modern), he does not present the reader with the 'traditional reading'. Instead, he offers a quite strange and complex hybrid of portions of the interpretations of such diverse figures as Martin Luther, John Calvin, René Descartes, John Locke, Rudolf Bultmann and Billy Graham (to name just a few). It is hardly surprising that Campbell finds as many as fifty-five problems and contradictions in this 'traditional reading'. One might find that a rather low number considering the vast conglomerate of disparate voices Campbell merges into the 'conventional reading'. Related to this, Campbell shows little awareness of current, mainstream scholarship on many of the representatives of the so-called traditional interpretation. For example, his treatment of Calvin (and the Reformed tradition after Calvin), is completely uninformed by the work of scholars such as Richard Muller and relies heavily on out-dated, widely disputed historical scholarship.

Considering how dependent the success of Campbell's book is on highlighting problems with the 'traditional reading', failures like this are quite significant. If Campbell has constructed a non-existent opponent out of a mishmash of everything he finds wrong in (mostly Protestant) understandings of justification, one begins to wonder how pressing the need is for answers to these problems.

The Deliverance of God has quickly created a stir in the field of Pauline studies and is important reading for scholars grappling with Paul's teaching on justification. Nonetheless, it remains to be seen whether Campbell's idiosyncratic interpretation will convince many.

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*My Brother's Keeper. Essays in Honor of
Ellis R. Brotzman*

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Williams III, eds.

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

My Brother's Keeper [Meines Bruders Hüter] ist eine Sammlung von Aufsätzen, die zu Ehren des Missionars und Hebraisten Ellis R. Brotzman anlässlich seiner Pensionierung entstanden ist und von seinen Kollegen Marinello