Book Reviews

John M. G. Barclay. *Paul and the Gift.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. Pp. 673.

It's not often that one gets the privilege of reading a book which you find yourself affirming chapter after chapter. John Barclay's *Paul and the Gift* is such a book. Having completed my own dissertation on the New Perspective on Paul under Dr. Stephen Westerholm about ten years ago,[1] I came to the conclusion that while there were some benefits to the New Perspective on Paul, it was still significantly flawed on several points. On the benefits side, in my judgment, the New Perspective approach pays more attention to the Jew-Gentile controversy as the context in which justification by faith through grace arose and corrects the mistaken assumption that the problem every Jewish person was facing was the matter of attempting to earn enough points to gain salvation. Those certainly are gains. The flaws, however, were the attempt to limit the "works of the law" into boundary markers, to make the whole first-century controversy about Jewish exclusivism and thus to understand justification as a social, ecclesiological issue rather than a soteriological one, thus diminishing the classic doctrine of justification through grace alone. Barclay then moves us further into a "Beyond the New Perspective" era, as he combines in a wonderful way what is best about both the old and the new perspective.

Barclay posits that much of the problem thus far has been one of definition. Too often, people use the word "grace" but mean something quite or entirely different by it. In Barclay's historical section, for instance, he suggests that "Augustine did not believe in grace more than Pelagius; he simply believed

[1] See Gerhard H. Visscher, *Romans 4 and the New Perspective on Paul: Faith Embraces the Promise* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

in it *differently*" (p. 77). Barclay takes us on a wonderful tour as he explores the significance of the concept of grace in Marcion, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Barth and other twentieth-century scholars. A similar tour through much of Second Temple literature follows.

As the title suggests, Barclay sets "grace" in the context of the frequent Pauline word "gift" and examines what he calls the "perfections" of a gift. He comes up with six ways in which one might consider a gift "perfected." Contributing factors then are the degree to which a degree is *superabundant* (lavish), *singular* (in motive), *prior* (with respect to timing), *incongruous* (without regard to worth), *efficacious* (able to accomplish its purpose), and *noncircular* (unconditional). Barclay suggests that the idea of a "pure gift," without any expectation of any kind of return, is an entirely modern one foreign to the ancient Greco-Roman world. In his estimation, Paul views the gift of God in Christ as having these "perfections" of being *superabundant*, *prior*, and *incongruous*; that is, it is given lavishly, before, and without any indications of worth. While it is unconditioned, it is not therefore unconditional, as there is certainly an expectation of response.

So how is it then that Barclay moves into a "Beyond the New Perspective" approach? This becomes particularly clear in Romans. New Perspective authors have promoted an approach which suggests that "works of the law" (Rom 3:20) are limited to those rites that serve as boundary markers distinguishing Jew from non-Jew and that the issue then is exclusivism rather than legalism. Says Barclay, "On this reading, what Paul critiques is not works-righteousness, but the 'national righteousness' that regards the Torah as a 'charter of racial privilege'" (p. 539). Paul is defending a new openness, as the issue is not works or merit, but something more sociological in nature; his opposition then is not to legalism or works-righteousness, but to the exclusivism which ignores the fact that the only "badge" that's valid for the new Christian community is *faith*. Barclay rightly concedes that the issue in Romans is not just the sinfulness of all humanity and the possible pretension that one might have some degree of meritorious works to boast about (Rom 3), but also a possible arrogance based on ethnic difference. The judgment of God will "take no account of the ethnic differences between Jew or Greek (2:6–11). … Sin is counted as sin whether you have the Law or not (2:12–13)" (p. 467). Paul's point then is that the gift of God in Christ is entirely *incongruous* on both fronts; the Giver regards neither ethical nor ethnic privilege when he graciously bestows life in Christ. New life "is experienced by human beings only inasmuch as they share in, and draw from, a life whose source lies outside of themselves, the life of the risen Christ" (p. 501). With Barclay's reading, we get the best of both the old and the new

perspective worlds: no claims can be made on the basis of either works or race. The doctrine of the grace of God remains intact. "Because God acts in incongruous grace, and thus without regard to worth, there is no possible limit on the membership of this people, no ethnic frontier that would keep some nations out" (p. 488).

It is this understanding then of the gift of God in Christ that informs and forms Barclay's delightful reading of the rest of Romans as well as Galatians. It is the gracious, incongruous gift of God in Christ that shapes the people of God, both individually and corporately.

If anywhere I might have a quibble with Barclay, it is when he suggests, much like New Perspective adherents, that Paul does not set himself in any significant way "in principled opposition to Second Temple Judaism" (p. 490). He rightly acknowledges that whereas grace is everywhere in Judaism, grace is not everywhere the same (p. 565); but especially, on the point of *incongruity* —so significant in Barclay's reading of Paul—there is, I maintain, a principled difference. In a previous issue of this journal,[2] I have shown from the intertestamental literature that a belief very common in Judaism was that if anywhere there was a person who merited right standing before God, it was Abraham. Again and again, he is held up as the example *par excellence* of faith, virtue, and obedience. He was believed to have kept the law of Moses wondrously, despite the fact that he predated both the law and the life of Moses! Paul surely intends a contrast and a new sound when he references Abraham, of all people, as "ungodly" (Rom 4:5).

And if anywhere I am not entirely convinced, it is in his Romans 9–11 section, where he becomes optimistic about the future of the actual nation of Israel. Whereas the "first fruits" are evident as the gospel spills into the Gentile world, it will lead, again incongruously, to the "full inclusion" of Israel (Rom 11:12). One certainly hopes that Barclay's reading is right on this point, but I suspect that "Israel" can also be read later in these chapters as a reference to the complete body of those who are in Christ regardless of race. However, I dare not express disagreement too vociferously here, for Barclay is a master exegete, and I have not spent enough time in these chapters.

I also see little need for the contrast that Barclay draws in his concluding chapter between the earlier Paul (Romans, Galatians) and the later books (Ephesians, Pastorals), which Barclay unfortunately regards as "deutero-Pauline" and which supposedly focus more on works as "moral achievements." Perhaps the emphasis shifts, but the "originating context" of the

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[2] Gerhard H. Visscher, "The New Perspective on Abraham?," *Unio cum Christo* 2.1 (2016): 39–66.

Gentile mission is certainly never out of sight (e.g., Eph 2:11, 14; Col 1:27; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 4:17).

Beyond a shadow of a doubt, though, this is a tremendous work that will have a significant impact on the future of Pauline studies. In my view, it settles the controversy generated by those who pushed for a new perspective on Paul. Best of all, as it does so, it places grace where it most certainly belongs—at the heart of the writings of the apostle. Many New Testament scholars will join me in looking forward to the promised second volume.

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John V. Fesko. *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption.* Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 2016. Pp. 414.

Dr. Fesko serves as a professor of systematic theology and historical theology at Westminster Seminary California. His new book is a comprehensive reflection of his careful and sound scholarship as a Reformed pastor and theologian on the subject. In many ways, the covenant of redemption (the *pactum salutis*) and the covenant of works were almost forgotten biblical doctrines even in the Reformed tradition in the twentieth century. Fesko's book is a welcome addition to the scholarship in the Reformed tradition to revive the importance of the biblical doctrines of both the covenant of redemption and the covenant of works. The author's desire is that "the church would rediscover the wonder, beauty, and glory of classic Reformed covenant theology," embracing the covenants of redemption, works, and grace (p. xx). The book has a brief introduction followed by three major parts. The book finishes with a concise conclusion and includes a valuable bibliography and subject index.

Fesko explores the "Historical Origins and Development" of the *pactum salutis* in the first part (pp. 1–48). He locates the origin of the doctrine of the covenant of redemption in ancient church history, including Jerome (347–420) and Augustine (354–430), although the doctrine appears *explicitly* in the middle of the seventeenth century in classical Reformed theology. During the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century in continental Europe, Theodore Beza (1519–1605) and Caspar Olevianus (1536–1587) played an important role in the development of the doctrine of the covenant of redemption. Beza dropped an exegetical and theological pebble "into the