

INTRODUCTION

“So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.” (2 Peter 3:15–16)

It is not too much of an exaggeration to suggest that the history of theology is, at its essence, the history of the reception of the writings of St. Paul. Near the end of his life, Raymond Brown could say, “Next to Jesus, Paul has been the most influential figure in the history of Christianity. Although all the New Testament writers are working out the implications of Jesus for particular communities of believers, Paul, in his numerous letters, does this on the widest scale of all. That range, plus the depth of his thought and the passion of his involvement, have meant that since his letters became part of the New Testament, no Christian has been unaffected by what he has written.”¹ Paul’s influence towers over all.

Influence, yes, but not interpretive consensus. The history of interpreting Paul could fairly be described as a history of squabbles producing sometimes progress, sometimes problems. As Adolph Harnack said over one hundred years ago, “One might write a history of dogma as a history of the Pauline reactions in the church, and in so doing would touch on all the turning points of that history.”² Harnack had in mind turning points such as the reactions of Marcion to the Apostolic Fathers; Irenaeus, Clement, and Origen to the Apologists; Augustine to the Fathers of the Greek Church; Luther to the Scholastics; and Jansenism to the Council of Trent. At every turn Paul is there: whether twisted, stretched, tortured, or treated judiciously, Paul is there.

Paul is difficult. If he wasn’t difficult, there would not have been such a lack of interpretive and dogmatic consensus in the history of interpretation. It was enough of a problem in St. Peter’s day that he himself felt the need to point this out in the third chapter of his second letter (see quote above in italics). Paul is difficult because his arguments often take sharp and unexpected turns. He is difficult because sometimes even figuring out the nature of the controversy that he’s addressing is difficult. Paul is especially difficult—indeed, undecipherable—for the “proof-texter.” A text taken out of context in Paul might as well be an encryption.

1 Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 422.

2 Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan, vol. 1 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1901), 136.

Other difficulties arise when an interpreter fails to fully appreciate Paul's Christological interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures. As Jesus himself demonstrated to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, to interpret the Scriptures aright one must maintain their internal unity, a unity where Christ himself is the nexus of all Old Testament pathways. Here, for example, is where then-Cardinal Ratzinger suggested Luther went wrong, when "in the context of his doctrine of justification, Luther invented a new formula relating the two parts of the Christian Bible, one no longer based on the internal harmony of the Old and New Testaments, but on their essential dialectic linkage within an existential history of salvation, the antithesis between Law and Gospel."³ The movement from Old to New is not a dialectic of simple (and jarring) replacement, but one of fulfillment and elegant transcendence.

This issue of *Letter & Spirit* explores the reception history of St. Paul in the Church in ways that demonstrate and illumine Paul's hermeneutic of biblical unity and coherence, a hermeneutic that has led to the Church's understanding that the New Testament fulfills, completes, and transcends the Old.

Scholars have noted the place that the specifically Pauline metaphor of adoption takes within Irenaeus' theology, but in his essay "Partakers of Adoption: Irenaeus and His Use of Paul," **Ben C. Blackwell** moves the discussion a step forward by noting the specific character and shape of that employment. Blackwell shows how Irenaeus makes use of adoption in two distinct but related streams as he explains the salvation-historical progression of the Bible, streams that Blackwell labels "the Adamic arc" and "the Abrahamic arc." Adoption in the Adamic arc, which comes to the fore in Book 3 of *Against Heresies*, helps explain the old creation to new creation movement of the Bible, whereas in the Abrahamic arc, which is the focus of Book 4, adoption helps show the unity and diversity of the progression between the Old Testament covenants and the New Testament. In that way, Irenaeus reflects attention given to similar movements in Paul's own theology.

In his article "Origen, Augustine and 'Works of Law,'" **Benjamin P. Blosser** explores the interpretation of the Pauline phrase "works of law" in the exegesis of Origen and Augustine. The "works of law" which do not justify, according to Paul, are consistently interpreted by Origen to refer to Jewish ceremonial rituals. Augustine initially shares this interpretation but abandons it during the Pelagian controversy. While some commentators infer that this divergence implies an underlying doctrinal disagreement between Origen and Augustine, Blosser's study argues that there is, in fact, no substantial doctrinal disagreement between Origen and Augustine on the question of works in jus-

3 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, Pontifical Biblical Commission (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2003), 15–16.

tification. For Origen, Jewish ceremonial rituals (“works of law”) fail to justify when they are observed “according to the letter,” but do justify when observed “according to the Spirit,” that is, when embraced as eschatological icons of the coming Messiah and the indwelling Spirit.

Cyril of Alexandria is one of the great biblical commentators from the early Church. His biblical exegesis is Trinitarian in structure and both Christological and pneumatological in focus. Across his works, Cyril employs Paul as a kind of special commentator, calling upon him far more frequently than any other biblical source. In his essay, “Cyril of Alexandria’s Reception of the Apostle Paul,” **Daniel Keating** investigates Cyril’s use of Paul on three topics: (1) the Triune God: Father, Son, and Spirit; (2) the place of the law, justification by faith, and the question of supersessionism; and (3) new creation in Christ and the gift of the Spirit. Keating shows that Paul is more than just Cyril’s privileged biblical commentator; Paul provides Cyril with the narrative architecture and the main load-bearing walls of his theology. While falling short in his interpretation of Paul on Israel and the law, Cyril does offer an unparalleled presentation of the divine indwelling in—and transformation of—the human race.

When one thinks of Thomas Aquinas’s reception of Paul, one thinks of two resources in particular: Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae* and his commentaries on the fourteen New Testament epistles that he understands to be from the hand of Paul. In his essay “Aquinas’s Reception of Paul: Reading the Testaments Together,” **Matthew Levering** first briefly sketches the fruits of his 2014 book on *Paul in the Summa theologiae*. In the remainder of his essay, Levering extends our conception of the breadth of Aquinas’s reception of Paul by focusing upon Aquinas’s *Commentary on Jeremiah*, in which modern readers hardly expect to find Paul mentioned or even alluded. By describing the function of each citation of Romans in Aquinas’s *Commentary on Jeremiah*, Levering shows that Aquinas displays deep connections between Romans and Jeremiah in terms of a wide variety of themes, including, among others, God’s frustrated fatherhood, God’s sovereignty, God’s promise to redeem and protect those who suffer innocently, Jeremiah as a figure of Christ, and the need for humility and dependence on God.

In their article “Aquinas’s Reading of Romans: The Multiple Literal Sense and Contemporary Perspectives on Paul,” **Scott W. Hahn** and **John A. Kincaid** explore St. Thomas Aquinas’s interpretive approach that saw validity and usefulness to multiple literal meanings of biblical texts. Hahn and Kincaid argue that a critical re-appropriation of Thomas’s multiple literal sense offers to modern Scripture scholars—and especially to Pauline studies—both benefits and challenges. Hahn and Kincaid argue that Thomas’s

approach not only allows for a richer and more comprehensive reading of biblical texts, but effectively affirms that it belongs to the very dignity of divine Scripture that one text may contain many senses. Particularly with respect to the *pistis Christou* and the *dikaiosynē Theou* debates in modern Pauline studies, Thomas's multiple literal sense offers a hermeneutical path forward, a path beyond "either-or" exegesis and the gulfs that currently exist between those who hold to seemingly opposite positions.

The fourteenth-century Franciscan biblical exegete, Nicholas of Lyra, commented on the Epistles of Saint Paul as part of his comprehensive and influential *Postilla Litteralis*. In his article "The Old and New Law in Nicholas of Lyra's Pauline Commentaries," **Ian Christopher Levy** shows that the abiding theme that Lyra traced throughout his Pauline commentaries was the essential transformation of the human person through the power of grace manifested in love. All the commandments under the New Law are ordered to the action of loving (*ad actum diligendi*) that is directed towards both God and neighbor. It is love, set into motion by grace, which brings human life into its fullness.

In his article "St. Paul in Matthias Scheeben: The Plenary Significance of the Incarnation," **Andrew D. Swafford** unveils the depths of Scheeben's understanding of salvation as divine sonship. Salvation entails our sharing—by grace—in what the Eternal Son has by nature. For Scheeben, the heart of Theology is the communication of the divine nature—within God in the Trinity and outside of God through the sending of the Son and the Spirit. The grace of divine sonship entails our participation in Christ's filial relation to the Father—that is, our participation in Trinitarian life. Scheeben also emphasizes the cosmic significance of Christ, especially as found in Colossians 1:15–20. In God's external works, we find the communication of the divine nature and the glorification of God. Through the Incarnation, God has enabled humanity (and all of creation) to glorify God *infinitely*.

While many are familiar with Pope Benedict XVI's masterful exegesis of the gospels in his *Jesus of Nazareth* trilogy, fewer are aware of the manner and great extent to which the emeritus pontiff has reflected upon the Pauline corpus throughout his career. In his article "The Reception of St. Paul in the Works of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI," **Matthew J. Ramage** explores how Benedict systematically employs his characteristic two-pronged exegetical approach in the case of St. Paul's epistles. Benedict always begins by attending to the literal and historic dimension of the Pauline letters, and then he pauses at key moments to apply their wisdom directly to the life of the Church in the present day. Throughout the article, Ramage draws not only from the emeritus pontiff's Pauline Year homilies and catecheses but also

from a spectrum of other works that, taken cumulatively, give a vivid sense of what Benedict considers vital in St. Paul for the life of the Church today.

When it comes to preaching on Paul in the contemporary Eucharistic liturgy, “silence from the pulpit” seems to be the norm rather than the exception. In his article “The Reception of Paul in the New Lectionary,” **Brant Pitre** explores the reception of the Pauline letters in the contemporary Roman Lectionary. After briefly charting the major changes between the role of Paul’s letters in the Roman Missal of 1570 and the post-Vatican II Missal of Paul VI, Pitre explores key features of the new Lectionary. Particularly important are the three-year cycle of Pauline Readings for Sundays in Ordinary Time and the retrieval of the patristic practice of preaching Paul according to the principle of *lectio semi-continua*. Pitre also analyzes the respective strengths and weaknesses of the reception of Paul in the new Lectionary, with the hope of facilitating a renewal of Catholic preaching on Paul.