

Michael F. Bird and Joel Willitts eds., *Paul and the Gospels. Christologies, Conflicts and Convergences* (Library of New Testament Studies 411; London: T & T Clark International, 2011). Pp. 288. \$ 120,00. ISBN 978-0-567-61742-2

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Paul and the Gospels is a book project edited by two experienced lecturers and NT scholars, Michael Bird, NT and Greek lecturer at Highland Theological College in Scotland, UK, and Joel Willitts, Associate Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at North Park University, Chicago, USA. The editors contributed their own essays and invited other experts to address the issue of how the Pauline letters and the Gospel tradition relate to each other, and to what extent Paul could have influenced the canonical and non-canonical Gospels.

The book is comprised of Introduction and ten essays written by established scholars from Australia, England and USA. They focus on four canonical Gospels and the *Gospel of Thomas*, discussing their relation to Paul's theology and thought. In Introduction, Michael F. Bird draws briefly the main issue (the influence of Paul upon the Gospel texts and traditions) and puts forward two questions underlying the project: 1) what is the relationship between Paul and the earliest Christian Gospels in terms of their origins, setting, and theology, and 2) what sort of reaction to Paul, appropriation, development, or polemic, can we detect in the earliest Gospels. The remainder of Introduction contains a concise presentation of every essay preceded by a short *status quaestionis* regarding Paul and the respective Gospel writings compared to him. The essays are followed by the helpful indexes of ancient sources and modern authors.

The two opening contributions are dedicated to Paul and the Gospel of Mark. In the first one, entitled *Mark, Paul, and the Question of Influences*, James G. Crossley builds upon the Werner's thesis claiming that the thematic links between Mark and Paul are due in part to the general cultural context of the earliest Christianity. Then, by taking up the case texts such as Mark 4:1-20 (the parable of the sower), Mark 14:22-25 (the Eucharistic tradition),

and Mark 7:19 (the purity law), the author arrives at the conclusion that their wording and the universality of their message does not prove any direct dependence between Paul and Mark. The similarities between the two writings arise from the fact of facing the same theological issues of Jesus's death and suffering, inclusion of Gentiles, the issue of Torah and different Christologies. The lack of characteristic theological language of Paul in Mark and a different conceptual framework exclude any mutual influence, though in the last words the author admits such a possibility on the grounds of the wide-range missionary activity of Paul.

The second study, *Mark: Interpreter of Peter and Disciple of Paul* by Michael F. Bird, advances the thesis on the Gospel of Mark as an early synthesis of Petrine testimony and Paul's theological perspective. Bird first points to the elements bespeaking the presence of the Petrine tradition in Mark: the references to Peter bracketing the entire Gospel (Mark 1:16; 6:17), Peter as the dominant narrative character, the Petrine location of the Gospel episodes, and the affinity between Mark and Peter's speech in Acts 10:34-41. Then, the author focuses on the theology of the cross, salvation, and the attitude to the Law, as the evidences of Pauline influence in Mark 7:19; 8:31; 10:45 and 13:10. All in all, Mark writes his Gospel not as a slavish imitator of Peter and Paul, but as a creative theologian trying to put together the two towering personalities of the first century church.

The next two essays deal with Paul and the Gospel of Matthew. In *Paul and Matthew: A Descriptive Approach from a Post-New Perspective Interpretative Framework*, Joel Willits offers a critique of recent comparative methodology that leads to antagonistic views of Matthew and Paul. Subsequently, the author sets forth an alternative, descriptive framework in which the analysis of the two corpora should be carried, and which takes into account the social location of Paul and Matthew's missionary activity, that is, the Diaspora synagogues with their audiences and rhetorical concerns. The two case studies proposed then by Willits are the ideas of Davidic messianism and eschatological recompense according to the deeds, both of them basic to Matthew and Paul. Ultimately, in the post-New Perspective framework adopted by the author, Matthew can be called either un-Pauline, directly disinterested in Paul, or pro-Pauline, sharing with Paul the same ideas.

In the next essay, *Paul and Matthew: Two Strands of the Early Jesus Movement with Little Sign of Connection*, Paul Foster right at the beginning rules out the possibility of establishing any sure relationship between Matthew and Paul. The purpose of his study is to compare topics occurring both in the Pauline and Matthean material, such as the use of the Hebrew Scriptures, attitudes toward the roles of Torah, Christological perspectives,

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participation in Gentile mission, and community structures. Regarding the Torah, contrary to the oversimplified scholarly views, Paul does not abrogate it totally, and Matthew does not defend its ongoing observance, portraying Jesus as the New Moses. Paul and Matthew share the same way of reading the Scriptures, but they differ in their Christological perspectives. Other issues like community structures or law-free mission to the Gentiles remain a matter of conjecture and cannot be easily deduced from the Gospel of Matthew. All in all, the points of convergence between Matthew and Paul are probably due to the wider early Jesus movement, while the scarcity of data does not allow us to establish any case of dependence between the two analyzed bodies of literature.

Getting to the Lukan and Pauline corpora, David Morlan in his article *Luke and Paul on Repentance*, compares Luke and Paul's notion of repentance within the wider context of conversion and issues of divine and human agency. The comparison is based upon the analysis of Luke 15 and Romans 2, the texts representative for the authors' respective views at repentance. Luke, in congruence with the prophetic thought of Jeremiah, perceives the changeability of human heart as both an opportunity and hindrance to the lasting conversion which is eventually impossible without God's intervention. Paul shares with Luke the same conclusion, although his original premise is the view of man's heart as unrepentant and utterly corroded by sin. In the next essay, *Luke: Companion or Disciple of Paul?*, Stanley E. Porter, after having examined the issue of authorship of Luke's Gospel, discusses a number of convergences between Luke and Paul. They regard the use of Scripture (creative reading undergirding proclamation), Christology (Jesus as Lord), Jesus's death and resurrection (covenantal and expiatory dimension), and the image of *parousia* ("already-and-not-yet perspective", "in-between stage of the Church"). The results of the comparison allow to appreciate both the relationship between Luke and Paul's thought, as well as their individual and distinctive voices in the early Church.

In the next part dedicated to John and Paul, Mark Harding, *Kyrios Christos: Johannine and Pauline Perspectives on the Christ Event*, ponders on the possible Pauline influence in the Fourth Gospel. It regards the fields of Law, Jews, Christology and eschatology. The first point of contact between the two traditions is established by their location in Ephesus and by the person of Apollos (former follower of John the Baptist, co-opted into the Pauline circle and active in Ephesus). Discussing the theses put forward by Wrede, Goodspeed and Barnett, Harding rather denies a direct literary influence between Paul and John. Instead, referring to Bousset and Hengel, he claims that the two apostolic corpora draw on the same Christian Hellenistic

background which embraces also the elements of the Palestinian community theology. Consequently, Harding considers several themes which evidence both juncture and disjuncture between Paul and John. These are the Law, the Jews, Christology and eschatology. On the one hand, John's outlook on the Law and Jewish question is much more negative than the one we find in Paul, probably due to the ongoing conflict with the synagogue. On the other hand, the realized eschatology, the language of resurrection and Wisdom Christology attest that the Fourth Gospel, Colossians and Ephesians share some similar theological views. It is explained by the fact that Ephesians and Colossians were produced by Ephesian Paulinists at the time when the Fourth Gospel was reaching its final form in Ephesus.

Another contribution by Collin G. Kruse, *Paul and John: Two Witnesses, One Gospel*, explores several themes occurring both in Paul and John: God the Father, Christ the Son, Holy Spirit, Scriptures, Mosaic Law, humanity condition, the work of Christ, union with Christ, the church, mission and Jews. Every theme is divided into the part dedicated to Paul, John, and the conclusions resulting from the comparison between them. At the end, the author states that there is little evidence to the fact that Paul and John are dependent on each other. They simply draw from the same wellspring of primitive Christian tradition.

Finally, the last two essays are dedicated to the relationship between Paul and the *Gospel of Thomas*. Christopher W. Skinner in *The "Gospel of Thomas's Rejection of Paul's Theological Ideas*, examines several Paul-Thomas parallels concerning the kingdom of heaven (*Gos.Thom.3/Rom 10:508* and *Gos.Thom.17/1 Cor 2:9*), the law (*Gos.Thom.53/Rom 2:25-29*), and a spirit / flesh dichotomy. The author advocates the view that the *Gospel of Thomas* is dependent on Paul whose ideas it deliberately modifies and rejects to promote its own vision of Christianity. The last essay by Joshua W. Jipp, *Death and the Human Predicament, Salvation as Transformation, and Bodily Practices in 1 Corinthians and The 'Gospel of Thomas'*, investigates on the similarities between Paul and the *Gospel of Thomas* which regard the image of God and the reading of Gen 1–3. The author focuses on death and the human predicament, salvation as transformation, and bodily practices as envisaged in *Thomas* and in 1 Corinthians. The common imagery and biblical motifs occurring in both sets of writings does not bespeak any convergence of thought between them. The *Gospel of Thomas* perceives salvation as a reunification with the state of existence before the tragic division into gendered individuals (the first Adam), it regards transformation as gaining knowledge of one's true origins, and denigrates worldly and physical existence. For Paul, the pattern of eschatological change is Jesus

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(the second Adam), and the transformation occurs by incorporation in his death and resurrection, in which an important part is assigned to man's bodily practices. Thomas rejects the Jewish Scriptures and the notion of resurrection. The author concludes that, even if Thomas knew Paul, he was disinterested in a direct conversation with him and should rather be viewed as one of the voices going upstream formative Christianity.

Paul and the Gospels is a valuable effort of capturing an extremely interesting question of contact between Paul and the Gospel tradition. The task is not easy taking into account the plethora of literature produced on the issue. The authors of the essays succeed well in avoiding ideological pitfalls and highly questionable historical hypothesis proliferated by the scholars of the XIX and XX century. Joel Willitts rightly calls for a new methodology which will help us to avoid the polarization between Paul and other writers. One of the premises of such a methodology would be leaving apart historical reconstructions and focusing more on the rhetoric of the texts, narrative strategies of their authors and implied audience reaction. On that level, it is possible to talk about a dialog or even polemic between NT writers.

The above presented essays draw definitely too little on the rhetorical features of the analyzed texts. The primary goal of their authors was a thematic comparison between Paul's letters and the Gospels. Such a comparison sometimes embraces even several topics presenting a sort of theological summary of Paul and the respective gospel writers. However, from the reader's perspective, much more profitable would be a comparison involving only one or two theological or literary motifs analyzed more in depth (cf. the essay by David Morlan). The broader comparison the author draws, the more general and repetitive analyses the reader finds.

All in all, *Paul and the Gospels* is in many ways a valuable publication. The conclusions provided by the authors may seem lacking at least a bit of polemical stanza, but they are really sound and well founded. The book also deals with the relation between Paul and *Thomas*, which, using the expression of Michael F. Bird, "hasn't occupied many minds" so far. *Paul and the Gospels* should stimulate further study and dialog in this field of research and it should definitely be read by scholars, students, and everybody interested in the formative period of early Christianity.