

BOOK REVIEW

Brevard S. Childs, *The Church's Guide for Reading Paul: The Canonical Shaping of the Pauline Corpus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). 288 pp. Pbk. US\$28.00.

Brevard Childs calls on Biblical Theology to heed the Pauline corpus as a canonical sub-unit in *The Church's Guide for Reading Paul: The Canonical Shaping of the Pauline Corpus*. Childs first recognizes the textual tradition as justification for understanding the Pauline letters as a single corpus. He then illustrates the difficulty this creates for the prominent historical-critical perspective. The advantage of the canonical approach is shown to be its sensitivity to the reader and its application to contemporary Christian discourse. Childs argues that this theological method extends to the Pauline corpus as a unit and as such opens this corpus up to the rest of the canon.

Childs also evaluates the work of Ulrich Luz, Richard Hays, Francis Young, Wayne Meeks and Luke Johnson in their endeavors to derive theology from the text. The primary criticism of all of these interpreters is that they have not adequately appreciated the canon as the key to Biblical Theology. He argues that Luz does not adequately divide the text in the canon from the tradition proceeding from it. Both Hays and Young are criticized for emphasizing the freedom of the contemporary reader over the task of interpretation. Childs sees especially in Johnson and Young a tendency to see the canon as an ecclesial or dogmatic imposition upon ancient texts. Thus, Childs sees the canonical approach as adequately recognizing the reader without overemphasis, moving away from historical criticism without abandoning it altogether, and making the Biblical text available to the contemporary theologian.

In order to demonstrate the results of a canonical analysis, Childs addresses several key theological themes of the Pauline corpus from this perspective. Childs denies a developmental approach to apostleship in the Pauline corpus. Instead, he sees the prescript of Romans as programmatic for any further discussion in Galatians and Corinthians and

argues that these roles are present in the Pastorals, if not explicitly stated. As for justification, Childs's emphasis on Romans over Galatians softens Paul's criticism of the law. The discussion of pneumatology focuses on Romans 8 and 2 Corinthians 3 rather than 1 Corinthians 1 and 14 in order to show the relation of the Law to the Spirit. Childs maintains the importance of church office as described in the Pastoral Epistles despite his assertion that the writings are pseudepigraphal. The discussion of the weak and strong in Romans is preferable to the discussions in 1 Corinthians because it represents a singular voice after the conflict instead of responding to multiple perspectives as in the Corinthian community. Childs argues that apocalyptic elements are ancillary to almost all members of the biblical canon and that this partial influence is true also of Paul's corpus. Childs denies eschatological development in the Pauline corpus, understanding 1 Corinthians 15 to reflect the general sentiment of the Thessalonian epistles. These key themes highlight the implications of the corpus-based reading of Paul.

While arguing that the historical-critical method is unhelpful to Christian theology, Childs uncritically accepts many of the conclusions resulting from this work. Despite Childs's emphasis on the canon, he maintains the traditional *Hauptbriefe* classification, and in some instances is dependent on its existence to make his point. Childs finds the arguments for authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles unconvincing and sides instead with Catholic scholars who see these writings as a valuable part of ecclesial tradition. Furthermore, he assumes the non-authenticity of Colossians and Ephesians, emphasizing them as collections of apostolic witness. The result is a somewhat muddled concoction of traditional historical criticism and canonical concerns. Unfortunately, Childs does not go in depth into the collection of the Pauline corpus, arguing that canon and corpus are inherent to the apostolic witness instead of being foreign dogmas placed upon the documents.

Approaching the Pauline corpus from a canonical perspective requires the interpreter to emphasize the canonical beginning and end of the corpus. Childs addresses the implications of the boundaries of the Pauline corpus as characteristic of the theological implications an interpreter should take from the epistles. While he briefly notes Karl Donfried's work on the *Sitz im Leben* of Romans, he ultimately sidesteps the debate to suggest theological implications of the epistle's

canonical placement regardless of the apostle's intent. From this perspective, Romans is placed in this location in the canon because of its character as representative of Paul's teachings, not the importance of the issue at hand. Likewise, the Pastoral Epistles represent the Pauline traditions in the early Church and illustrate the appropriation of the apostolic witness. For Childs, this not only argues for a different understanding of the Pauline letters, but also justifies identifying the Pauline corpus as a canonical sub-unit. The Pastoral Epistles evidence an early collection of Paul's teaching and thus historically validate a canonical approach to the corpus. The corpus boundaries as set up by Childs both affirm a canonical approach and provide insight into the theologizing of Paul's letters.

Unfortunately, Childs marginalizes certain elements of the Pauline corpus when addressing theological issues. This marginalization illustrates that Childs is not advocating an equality of corpus members, but rather that the canonical order should establish the theological value of the members of the Pauline corpus. The Thessalonian epistles and Philippians get scant attention from this canonical reading. In this sense, Childs is suspicious of the historical-critical enterprise. While 1 Thessalonians and Galatians are clearly the earliest writings from a historical perspective, these writings are subject to Romans and the Pastorals for interpretation. As an awkward turn, Ephesians and Colossians, while not authentic according to Childs, receive more attention than 1 Thessalonians and Philippians. It is clear that the canonical reading of the Pauline corpus does not refer to the consideration of each letter as a single unit, but instead the reading of the middle elements in the canonical order in terms of the canonical boundaries of the corpus.

The canonical reading of the Pauline corpus devalues the Greco-Roman background of the Pauline corpus. Romans is taken as a representative epistle as opposed to a response to a specific situation. Furthermore, the rest of the corpus is interpreted in light of Romans as a representative letter. As such, much of the Greco-Roman context that may be applied to the Pauline texts is ignored or marginalized. Ephesians, Colossians and the Pastorals as pseudepigraphal writings are seen as early corpus formations, yet the contextual factors leading to such a collection are subsumed to theological reasoning. These collections reflect a pure theological concern for apostolic witness according to Childs.

This book calls attention to the implications of a pre-New-Testament-canon Pauline corpus and shows how this fits within the larger canonical critical enterprise. Childs finds a corpus that is much more open to the rest of the biblical canon when he understands the writings in terms of their canonical order. When Romans sets the stage instead of Galatians, Paul seems less critical of the Old Testament. This interpretation unfortunately hides the widely attested brilliance of Paul's post-resurrection understanding of the Hebrew Bible. It is also problematic that Childs's methodology is much less sensitive to context and as a result less verifiable as apostolic witness. This verifiability is traded for a textual reading appropriate to the Christian theological enterprise. Herein lies the value of the work, however. The corpus reading provides a text-sensitive theological tool that aids the contemporary task.

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