

Orr, Peter. *Christ Absent and Present: A Study in Pauline Christology*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament. Second series 354. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014. Pp. x + 259. Paper. € 79.00.

*Christ Absent and Present: A Study in Pauline Christology* is a revised version of Peter Orr's (New Testament Lecturer at Moore Theological College in Newtown NSW, Australia) doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of Francis Watson at the University of Durham. In this study Orr seeks to demonstrate that "the striking simultaneity of [Christ's] presence and absence is not a minor incoherence in an unimportant aspect of Paul's Christology but actually illuminates some important aspects of Paul's understanding of the exalted Christ that too often are overlooked" (1).

So often overlooked, in fact, that Chris Tilling seems to be the lone scholar who has noted and examined the theme in any depth in recent history. As such Orr is unable to present a *status quaestionis* on the subject and opts rather to examine Albert Schweitzer and Ernst Käsemann's respective conceptions of the exalted Christ as an "entry point" to his own thesis (chapter 2). For Schweitzer Christ is exclusively located in heaven while believers are joined to him in a mystical union. Käsemann on the other hand understands Christ to be present in believers and the world through the medium of the Spirit. Orr notes that their different understandings result from complexity in Paul himself, but neither attends to all that Paul says, especially with respect to Christ's absence.

Chapters 3-5 examine the absence of Christ, the nature of his exalted body, and his bodily absence respectively. Orr effectively shows that Paul, while speaking of believers as being "in Christ," believes Christ to be absent in some sense. He does so by examining Paul's statement concerning his desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better than remaining in the flesh (Phil 1:21-26) and his comments on the Lord's *parousia* (1 Thes 4:15-17).

Orr shows that Paul believed Christ to possess a discrete human body after his exaltation and that the nature of this body differs from that of other humans. He *locates* Christ at the right hand of God in heaven. Orr ties together the topics of chapters 3-4 and concludes that the sense in which Christ is absent according to Paul is bodily through his examination of 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, which speaks to Christ's bodily absence, and Philippians 3:20-21, which speaks to his bodily return.

Chapters 6-8 turn to Christ's presence. In chapter 6 Orr highlights what he has termed the "epiphanic presence" of Christ. Here he looks at texts in 2 Corinthians that present Christ "more as an *object* to which the senses respond" (117). So, for example, Paul can refer to himself as the "aroma" of Christ that goes up before God (2 Cor 2:14-17), or the Corinthians as the "letter" of Christ (2 Cor 3:1-3), or Christ's presence being mediated

through the Spirit (2 Cor 3:4-17). The "exalted Christ is made manifest in his glory" (143) in 2 Cor 3:18 while God's glory is revealed when Christ's "face" is seen through the proclamation of the gospel (2 Cor 4:1-6) or his life manifested in the body of believers (2 Cor 4:10).

Chapter 7 looks at Christ's "dynamic presence," which has him as the subject of activity even though the activity is mediated through some other means. So, for example, Paul can say that it is *Christ* who has accomplished the work that he's done *through* him in Romans 15:18-19 or respond to the Corinthians demand for proof that *Christ* is speaking *through* him in 2 Corinthians 13:1-4. But Christ can also work through impersonal means such as sickness and death as is the case when he judges the Corinthians for their improper practices concerning the Lord's Supper.

Chapter 8 is concerned with Christ's "bodily presence," which Orr understands as a presence mediated through (not as, contra Dunn et al.) the Spirit to the individual and corporate bodies of Christ. He argues that Paul does not believe Christ to be embodied in either the individual believer, the ecclesial body, or the Eucharistic bread (either physically or spiritually), which would erode the absence of Christ. Chapter 9 recaps the arguments of the previous chapters.

In all Orr's study is a welcome addition to the ever growing field of Pauline studies. He should be congratulated for his careful study of this neglected topic but one must ask why it has been so neglected in the first place. Orr's conclusion that "there is a fundamental continuity between the 'historical' Jesus and the exalted Christ" (222) is hardly earth shattering and could have been maintained aside from a focus on this particular theme. When Tilling examined the absence and presence of Christ it stood as one piece of a much larger pattern that told us something of Paul's Christology, but left as a single piece it's difficult to see its significance.

I'm also a bit dubious on Orr's appeal to Christ's "epiphanic presence." He takes language that seems almost certainly metaphorical and turns it into a readymade category for discerning Christ as being somehow passively present. I also think that his denial of some sort of Real Presence in the Eucharistic bread is based on a somewhat circular argument in which it has to first be assumed that for Paul Christ is *only* localized in heaven. With this understanding in place we must then look for ways to explain away indications of bodily presence elsewhere in Paul.

When Orr argues against some sort of bodily or spiritual presence in the Eucharistic bread he focuses on the κοινῶν language that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 10 but I think he neglects the impact of Paul's comments in 11:27 (his focus in chapter 11 is on the judgment that Christ performs) that to eat and drink in an unworthy manner makes the

partaker guilty of sinning against the *body* and *blood* of Christ. For Paul the bread and cup seem to be indistinguishable from the body and blood. Nevertheless, I can commend Orr for his study and respect it even though his conclusions on certain issues differ from my own.