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Thate, Vanhoozer, and Campbell's "'In Christ' in Paul: Explorations in Paul's Theology of Union and Participation" (Book Review)

Greg Rosauer
Bethlehem College & Seminary

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**“In Christ” in Paul: Explorations in Paul’s Theology of Union
and Participation,**

edited by Michael J. Thate, Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Constantine R. Campbell.
Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe, 384.
Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014. 577 pp. \$150.00. ISBN 9783161523878

Reviewed by Greg Rosauer, Librarian, Bethlehem College & Seminary, Minneapolis, MN

WUNT is a technical series for New Testament studies. The titles in the series are often published versions of doctoral dissertations or collected essays on a theme. *“In Christ” in Paul* belongs to that latter category. A hefty volume at nearly 600 pages, the essays therein extend what has been a topic of growing interest in modern Pauline studies since at least E. P. Sanders in the 1970s (not to mention Adolf Deissmann’s and Albert Schweitzer’s earlier work). As the title indicates, Paul’s phrase “in Christ” is euphemistic for his broader theology of union with or participation in Christ. Moreover, it is a peculiarly Pauline phrase in the New Testament, and is a flashpoint for theological discussions on mysticism, *theosis*, deification, or divinization. The essays here are divided into three parts preceded by Kevin Vanhoozer’s creative introduction to the topic, where he lays out the “state of union” in exegetical and theological conversations.

The essays in part one, “Pauline Theology and Exegesis,” examine various aspects of Paul’s union/participation motif as it is expressed in or relates to aspects of his thought – e.g., the Spirit, faith, body, ethics, baptism, politics, etc. Others deal with specific texts and offer perspectives on constructing Paul’s theology – e.g., royal messianism in Ephesians, *theosis*/missional/cruciform in 2 Corinthians, Pauline metaphors, etc. Michael Thate’s essays in particular stand out, having the feel of thought experiments, and are rich with interdisciplinary implications.

The essays in part two, “Reception History,” highlight the reception of Paul’s union/participation motif in a few prominent theologians – namely, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Owen, and Barth. How these theologians engaged and extended Paul’s theology on this point is assessed in the context of their own emphases and theological constructions, making for balanced interpretations of figures whose thought is often caricatured. Of particular note is Johnson’s essay on Barth, which clearly articulates the theological issues at stake when negotiating between union with Christ on the one hand and creator-creature distinction on the other.

The essays in part three, “Theological Reflection,” offer just that. The first of three essays treats how being united to Christ moves to participation in his virtues. The latter two essays reflect on the unity of the body of Christ, the Church, from a Eucharistic and biopolitical perspective respectively.

Most of the essays are clearly written and push beyond the current state of the topic with fresh insights. The contributors are, with a few exceptions, budding scholars that represent a range of approaches (some more fruitful than others in my opinion). Union with or participation in Christ is not generally how Christians in the West frame salvation. This volume will not change that, but it does expose a strong undercurrent in Pauline and theological scholarship (particularly in the evangelical world) that is beginning to surface in more popular theological writings. Highly recommended for libraries that support research level degrees in New Testament or theology.

**In Defense of the Bible: A Comprehensive Apologetic
for the Authority of Scripture,**

by Steven B. Cowan and Terry L. Wilder. Nashville: B & H Publishing Group,
2013. 490 pp. \$34.99. ISBN 9781433676789

*Reviewed by Paul A. Roberts, Director of Library Services,
Southeastern Bible College, Birmingham, AL*

As we draw closer and closer to the time when Christ will return to take His bride to be with Him, the attacks on the authority of His Word come almost daily. To aid believers in their stand for the truth, Cowan and Wilder asked experts in a variety of Bible related fields to write in layman terms how to defend God’s truth to those who scoff at the text. This is not a book one can read in one sitting. The reader must be prepared to engage with the topic being discussed and think through how to answer questions that might arise in future conversations. Personally, I found myself reflecting on conversations I have had in recent weeks with non-believers and how I could have used some of the material given in this book had I read it sooner.

The book is divided into three sections: 1) philosophical and methodological challenges, 2) textual and historical challenges, and 3) ethical, scientific and theological challenges. The writers argue that the Bible is the Word of God and trustworthy in every part. Every challenge can be answered although it must be realized that what the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2: 14 is true – “the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (ESV). Highly recommend for all libraries.