Volker Rabens

The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul
Transformation and Empowering for Religious-Ethical Life

[Der Heilige Geist und Ethik bei Paulus. Transformation und Befähigung zu religiös-ethischem Leben. 2., korrigierte Auflage mit einem neuen Vorwort]

Published in English.
Volker Rabens answers the question of how, according to the apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit enables religious-ethical life. In the first part of the book, the author discusses the established view that the Spirit is a material substance which transforms people ontologically by virtue of its physical nature. In order to assess this «Stoic» reading of Paul, the author examines all the passages from the Hebrew Bible, early Judaism, Hellenism and Paul that have been put forward in support of this concept of ethical enabling. He concludes that there is no textual evidence in early Judaism or Paul that the Spirit was conceived as a material substance. Furthermore, none of these or any of the Graeco-Roman writings show that ethical living derives from the transformation of the «substance» of the person that is imbued with a physical Spirit. The second part of the study offers a fresh approach to the ethical work of the Spirit which is based on a relational concept of Paul's theology. Rabens argues that it is primarily through initiating and sustaining an intimate relationship with God the Father, Jesus Christ, and with the community of faith that the Spirit transforms and empowers people for ethical living. The author demonstrates that Paul lived in a context in which this dynamic of ethical empowering was part of the religious framework of various Jewish groups.

Reviews of the first edition:

«Rabens's book is a model of thorough research, lucid argument, and careful exegesis.»
Peter Orr in Themelios 35 (2010), pp. 452–455

«Overall Rabens has provided us with a fascinating and convincing account of how the process of ‘walking in the Spirit’ takes place.»

«To conclude, I recommend this monograph for three reasons. One, it is truly a ‘model’ thesis in that it accomplishes its aims with clarity and simplicity. Secondly, it provides an excellent survey of Pauline pneumatology and ethics. Lastly, another benefit of this monograph is the intentional bridging of continental and English NT scholarship.»
Carsten Lotz in LST – InSight Spring 2011, p. 17

«This is a beautifully written book, detailed, stimulating and fresh. Its central thesis is strongly argued and makes an important contribution to understanding Paul’s ethics, theology and pneumatology.»

«R.’s study is remarkably comprehensive and well-informed.»

«Rabens’s relational approach is carefully argued and will be of particular use to specialists in Pauline pneumatology and ethics, although the implications […] will cause this study to be of interest to other specializations within Pauline studies in particular and biblical studies in general (e.g., cosmology, anthropology, soteriology).»
Matthew P. O’Reilly in Religious Studies Review 38 (2012), pp. 20–21

«And here is the strength Rabens’ work offers us. Not only is The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul the work of a competent Neutestamentler who is able to realistically place Paul in both his traditional and contemporary context, but it is also a model of what effective biblical theology can offer the Church in a wider conversation.»

«Overall, R. provides a fascinating and convincing account of the work of the Spirit in the ethical transformation of the individual.»


«In der Paulus-Forschung wird die Beziehungs-Dimension in jüngerer Zeit zu Recht stärker wahrgenommen. In diesem Rahmen bietet Rabens’ Arbeit eine wichtige und meines Erachtens notwendige Auseinandersetzung mit einem Paradigma der Paulus-Forschung, die zu Korrekturen nötigt.»
Stefan Schreiber in Biblische Notizen 152 (2012), S. 141

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