

his letters and actions? Is it an examination of how deeply Paul is influenced by classical rhetorical theory? Is it an examination of Patristic exegesis and how extensively it consciously drew on Paul's hermeneutic in 1 and 2 Corinthians, rightly understanding the moves Paul was making because it too was steeped in classical rhetoric? Is it an essay in hermeneutics in general? The answer is all of the above. And it is also an example of how to deliver a very literate scholarly lecture, weaving the various themes together into a literary whole. For greatest appreciation, read it aloud.

The 115 pages of lecture are supported by 45 pages of endnotes and a 10-page bibliography (which Mitchell admits in her "Note on Style" is limited due to the lecture format and the focus of her concerns). The use of endnotes, frustrating as it is, appears a deliberate preservation of the lecture format. Mitchell makes explicit that her transliteration of Greek words and phrases (there are a lot of them) is so that readers who cannot read Greek can see the repeated use of similar roots and terms. While I find that this makes the text more difficult to read, especially because there are a significant number of Latin words and phrases (as one would expect with multiple citations of Cicero, among others) and the lack of difference in script makes shifting languages more difficult, one suspects that for others it serves Mitchell's purpose. That, of course, assumes that the person is willing to think through a work that, in terms of literary style, numerous quotations from Paul and Patristic writers, and careful argument, was very worthy of being lectures delivered in Oxford.

Whether or not one agrees with Mitchell's ideas about the composition of the Corinthian correspondence (e.g., that 2 Cor 8 is a separate letter and that 2 Cor 10–13 is the "letter of tears"), her main argument is cogent, for Paul's rhetoric remains, however one reconstructs what he is responding to. This is a fascinating work that will reward not just a good, slow read but careful study.

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James Buchanan Wallace. *Snatched into Paradise (2 Cor 12:1–10): Paul's Heavenly Journey in the Context of Early Christian Experience*. BZBW 179. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011. Pp. 391. ISBN 978-3-11-024784-8 \$150.00 cloth.

This work is a revised version of a dissertation completed at Emory University. The author acknowledges the spiritual support of the Orthodox community in Atlanta, and this indebtedness can also be seen in the fruits of the research: the scholarly discussion of the theme of the book is extended to works of great theologians of the Eastern Church, whom the author calls "premodern exegetes" (p. 289), whose interpretation of 2 Cor 12:1–4 is recommended by the author as a welcome correction to some 20th century interpretations.

The title and the subtitle properly name the main theme of the book, but this work offers even more: it discusses not only "early Christian experience" as context but also the ascent traditions of the Greco-Roman world (ch. 2) and of ancient Judaism (ch. 3).

Chapter 1 ("Introduction," pp. 1–38) offers a helpful summary of the history of interpretation of 2 Cor 12:1–10. Wallace presents the view of many

scholars who see “Paul’s decision to speak of his heavenly journey . . . as a response to his opponents in Corinth” (p. 9). One of the most influential proponents of this view is Ernst Käsemann, who argued that in 2 Cor 12:1–10 Paul wanted to give an answer to “claims of ecstatic experience” on the side of the Corinthians (p. 12). According to Käsemann, the ascent to heaven is a matter of Paul’s private spiritual life and has “no consequences or implications for his ministry” (*ibid.*). Wallace’s main thesis is that the ascent is a positive example in Paul’s hand, and—rightly understood—it has a spiritual message that can be accepted by the Corinthian Christian community as well.

Wallace establishes his own methodology in order to correct the weaknesses of previous interpretations. He surveys many texts of the Greco-Roman world and ancient Judaism that relate to ascent or some kind of direct experience to encounter God. In these texts, he looks for an answer to the following questions (pp. 36–37): “Where do the travelers go” and what do they see “in the highest realm”? “What are they willing to say, and what is forbidden to be spoken?” “Does the traveler ascend in or out of the body?” “What is the relationship of the ascent to suffering and/or power?” “What is the purpose of the ascent”? “Are there any otherworldly beings that seek to hinder the ascent or harm the ascender?” Wallace offers a useful categorization of the experiences in 2 Cor 12:1–10, and he searches for analogies to these kinds of experience in Greco-Roman and Jewish literature (p. 8): experience “A” is Paul’s initial experience: “visions and revelations of the Lord”; experience “B” is “some kind of experience of bodily suffering” that serves to “prevent one from being exalted in the eyes of others”; “C-type” experience is an experience when “weakness and suffering transform the human being into a dwelling place of divine power.”

The very informative chapters on the Greco-Roman and Jewish world marshal many examples where, for example, ascent, paradise, and visions of God occur. Wallace comes to the conclusion that “Paul shows points of similarity with many of the ascent traditions” found in those texts, “but he replicates none of them” (p. 166). About the texts discussed in chapters 2 and 3, Wallace makes the following summary statement: “Second Corinthians 12:1–10 presents a distinct configuration of motifs found throughout the materials explored” in those chapters (*ibid.*). Among the numerous Jewish texts, Wallace also discusses “The Revelation of John of Patmos” (pp. 147–151) and intertestamental Jewish literature that may arguably contain Christian interpolations as well. Regarding the latter kind of literature, the author might have consulted several writings of John C. O’Neill in which he argues that even texts that are regarded as “Christian interpolations” by other scholars are Jewish.

In chapter 4 (pp. 169–230), Wallace widens the scope of his main interest to include “religious experience” in Paul as a background to his “ascent” experience in 2 Cor 12. Helpful and insightful exegesis of passages from the “non-disputed” Pauline letters is offered (e.g., from 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Galatians, Philippians). Wallace argues that we can see in these texts that religious experiences such as these, in which one is “in contact with the divine, invisible world”, are foundational not only for Paul but for all Christians. By these examples, Wallace prepares the way to his main thesis concerning the “ascent” passage in 2 Cor 12: Paul does not degrade this sort of

religious experience as an “ascent,” but he wants to lead the Corinthians to see that these experiences must lead to humility, to seeing one’s weakness, and when one arrives at this humility, then one can experience Christ’s power in his own weakness.

Chapter 5 (pp. 231–287) offers a fresh and challenging interpretation of the passage on Paul’s ascent. Wallace harvests the fruits of the preceding chapters. He shows how Paul uses motifs found elsewhere, but in a new way in order to achieve his goal. He affirms, “Like other accounts of heavenly ascent, 2 Cor 12:1–10 associates themes of vision, suffering, and power, but there the similarity ends” (p. 286). He convincingly argues, “For Paul, ascent is an experience of power and grace, but the experience of physical suffering prevents excessive elation and ensures that he continues to follow the pattern of the crucified Messiah, thus enabling him to perfect the divine power he has experienced” (ibid.). Paul not only has a high view of this experience for himself, but he wants to share it with others—with the Corinthians—“in *agape*” (p. 287).

In chapter 6 (pp. 289–331), Wallace corroborates his results with a chapter on four examples of “premodern interpretation”: Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Symeon the New Theologian, and Gregory Palamas. He shows that these Orthodox theologians have a high view of Paul’s ascent vision—even the reference to “ineffable words” is understood by them in positive terms: Paul was in the “immediate presence of God.” For them, Paul’s experience “is the high point precisely *because* Paul cannot speak about it, for it is the realm of true theology, where theology is vision and direct experience *of* God, not merely a word *about* God” (pp. 328–29, emphasis original).

Wallace’s study is clearly structured and well argued and brings new insights into the exegesis of a difficult passage. Chapters 2–6 are well summarized at the end of each chapter, and the whole work is summarized in an epilogue (pp. 333–37). The study is a good example of the importance of “effective history” (*Wirkungsgeschichte*); it shows that we can learn from early interpreters, and there may be cases where more-recent interpretations may not understand the biblical texts as fully as earlier generations (even those of the “premodern” times) did. This work enriches our understanding not only of one particular passage in 2 Corinthians but also that of “religious experience” in a wider sense in the NT and its environment. I add two more comments that, however, do not belittle the value of this work. Having discussed the theme of ascent and visionary experiences in such detail, Wallace could have interacted with further recent works on “altered psychological state” (p. 329); one would be interested, for example, to see him respond to the works of Pieter F. Craffert (e.g., his *Life of a Galilean Shaman*, Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008). The index of modern authors is very selective; such a beautifully prepared volume would have deserved a fuller index.

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