
This book, which is prefaced and recommended by Joseph T. Lienhard S.J., is a welcome contribution to the history of Origen's influence on the interpretation of the New Testament. Scheck focuses on a Pauline theme that has been hotly debated since the sixteenth century Reformation, viz., justification by faith. Although Origen hardly mentions this topic in his preserved works, he had to deal with it in his voluminous *Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans*. Except for fragments of the Greek original preserved in the Tura papyri, the catenae, and in two chapters of the *Philo-calia*, this work has survived in Rufinus's abridged Latin translation. Some years ago, Scheck published a fine translation of this work in the series *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 103-104 (see my review in *VC* 57, 94-95). The present book is a revision of his doctoral thesis defended at the University of Iowa in 2004. Since Scheck wants to investigate the legacy of Origen's *Commentary on Romans* and the original Greek version had little direct influence, he uses Rufinus's influential translation as his starting point, correctly assuming that it gives a relatively good idea of the original text.

The first chapter contains an elaborate exposition of Origen’s own interpretations and their context. In Origen’s view, when Paul writes that one is justified by faith (Romans 3:28), he means that “faith” embraces the other virtues. This implies that Origen understands “faith” as a *pars pro toto*, including the “works” that are to follow the initial faith of the convert. Although he admits the possibility of justification by faith alone, he considers it an exception, examples being the adulterous woman of Luke 7:37-50 and the “good” thief crucified with Jesus (Luke 23:42). Origen’s view that in general the faith by which one is justified includes the other virtues and is to be followed by “works”, opposes those who thought that the mere fact that they believe is sufficient for salvation. Scheck explains that for Marcionites “faith alone” was the criterion of salvation by the Supreme God, whereas judgment would be carried out by the Demiurge, and that Origen ascribed similar ideas to the schools of Valentinus and Basilides. Origen’s emphasis on the free will of human beings counters the alleged “Gnostic” view of predestination; for him, predestination is based on God’s foreknowledge of the future choices and merits of each human being.
Scheck investigates several themes related to justification, such as Paul being an arbiter between Jews and Gentiles, the meaning of *iustitia dei*, the necessity of redemption by Christ, and the “works of the law” that, according to Paul, do not lead to justification (Romans 3:28); these “works of the law” are understood by Origen as Jewish ceremonial works like circumcision, Sabbath keeping, and food laws. Scheck notes that this interpretation coincides with the “New Perspective” on Paul propagated by E.P. Sanders and other exegetes of the last decades. This chapter is concluded by an excursus on modern assessments of Origen’s doctrine of God’s grace.

The second chapter deals with Pelagius’s reception of Origen’s *Commentary on Romans*. Pelagius wrote his own, far more concise *Commentary on Romans* after Rufinus’s translation of Origen’s commentary had appeared and before the Pelagian controversy arose. As Origen opposed Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides, Pelagius’s commentary is noteworthy for its anti-Manichaean emphasis. According to Scheck’s analysis, the two theologians show a profound affinity on the questions of free will, predestination, faith, grace, redemption, and the “works of the law”. Pelagius wrote about salvation on the basis of faith alone, and opined that God had foreseen this faith and the life in conformity with it. But whereas Origen considered several interpretations of the relationship between Adam’s fall and human sins, Pelagius only explained that human beings sin by following Adam’s example: he bypassed the view that they all “fell” with or in Adam. Another difference is that Pelagius repudiated Origen’s theory of the pre-existence of human souls.

The third chapter is devoted to Augustine, whose initial interpretation of *Romans* is not unlike Origen’s. Only in his later years, during the Pelagian controversy, he changed his mind on themes like original sin and the interpretation of the “works of the law” as being the ceremonial works of Judaism supposed to be useless for justification; for the older Augustine, all “works of the law” are excluded as a basis for divine justification. Yet Augustine agrees with Origen and Pelagius that justifying faith includes the good works that are to come after baptism, and he rejects the view that faith alone is sufficient for salvation. According to Scheck, Augustine does not understand justification in the sense that God accounts the believer righteous apart from subsequent moral renewal (which is the traditional Protestant view), but for Augustine justification is a process of becoming righteous through the indwelling of Christ and the Trinity, a process that begins at baptism or conversion.