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*Pneuma und das neue Sein
der Glaubenden*

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***Pneuma und das neue Sein der Glaubenden: Studien
zur Semantik und Pragmatik der Rede von Pneuma in
Röm 8***

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Christoph's monograph on the experience of the Spirit and the new existence of believers according to Rom 8 is the result of doctoral research undertaken at the University of Munich under the supervision of Prof. A. J. M. Wedderburn. In her book, Christoph asks how Paul's Spirit-language in Rom 8 relates to the communicative scenario between Paul and the Roman church. Taking a reception-theoretical approach, she argues that Paul describes the experiences of the Spirit in this passage in semantically ambiguous, "open" language that evokes identification on the side of Paul's conversation partners through association. As the Romans feel that Paul writes about spiritual experiences they can relate to, they become receptive to Paul's message and more ready to put aside differences of opinion (83–85, 194, 331). This is Christoph's main thesis; however, the majority of the book is not a thematic study but an in-depth chronological exegesis of Rom 8.

The monograph begins with a brief history of research of Pauline pneumatology, with a special focus on Rom 8 and reception theory (*Rezeptionsästhetik*). This leads Christoph to look in the next two chapters at two problems she perceives yet unsolved in previous scholarship. The first chapter provides a thorough analysis of the communicative situation (*Rezeptionssituation*) of the Epistle to the Romans. Christoph agrees with recent scholarship that the reason for Romans was not monocausal. Nevertheless, she singles out two aspects that appear to have motivated Paul to write the letter, namely, to strengthen

the church (1:11–12) and to present his gospel, of which no one needs to be ashamed (1:16). Moreover, Christoph states that to effect the desired response in his readers, Paul deliberately uses language that resonates with the experience and conceptive world of the Romans (56–62, 321).

This last-mentioned insight is more fully developed in the second chapter, in which Christoph turns to a methodological discussion of “Die Bedeutung von Erfahrung und Weltwissen für das Verständnis der Rede von Pneuma” (thus the title of the chapter). She starts off by elucidating the semantic flexibility of the term πνεῦμα, specifying that this flexibility provides the reason for its “openness” to a reader response (64–71). Turning to the experiential side of the Spirit, Christoph differentiates her own approach from the two most prominent ones within German scholarship. On one side, she does not want to provide a phenomenology of the Spirit, as Gunkel did; on the other, she is critical of Horn’s overemphasis on theory to the exclusion of pneumatic experiences in the Pauline churches. Christoph believes, instead, in the reality of the pneumatic experiences described in Paul’s writings, and with the support of cognitive psychology she argues that appealing to the experiential world of his communication partners is a useful strategy for Paul to achieve rapport with the church in Rome (78–87).

The remainder of the book comprises three exegetical chapters on Rom 8 and one concluding chapter. The first chapter (3) deals with 8:1–8, focusing on the freedom from the law and the flesh. Christoph explains that Paul’s talk of the “law of the Spirit of life” is a phrase highly “open” for potential associations (“setzt ein hohes Assoziationspotential frei” [149]). In this way, as well as by means of the notion of the just requirements of the law being fulfilled by those who walk according to the Spirit (8:4), Paul is able to soothe the worries of both legalists and libertines in the Roman church. The former are put at ease because the requirements of the law are being fulfilled if they accept Paul’s teaching about the work of the Spirit. The libertine party is helped too, because they see that Paul sticks to his law-free gospel, while at the same time they are kept from drifting away from the church community because Paul shows that being in the Spirit has ethical consequences (8:12–13). This is further clarified by Paul’s teaching on freedom from the flesh. Christoph argues that the transition from being in the flesh to being in the Spirit does not refer to an “external” change of sphere or eon but to the “internal” move from being unsaved to the state of being saved (142). Again, it is important for Paul to take up the personal experiences of his audience in this respect: “Wenn also Paulus Erfolg hat mit der Rede von der Kraft Pneuma, die zum Wesentlichen führt, nämlich zur Aufhebung eines existenziellen Zwiespalts, dann werden sich die Kritiker auf das einlassen, was hinter κατὰ πνεῦμα bzw. ἐν πνεύματι steht, nämlich das Hineingenommensein in die Heilswirkung von Tod und Auferstehung Christi” (147).

In her exegesis of verses 9–11 in chapter 4, Christoph draws attention to the different functions of the statements of indwelling. Theologically, these verses convey how, through the Spirit, Christ's soteriological work becomes "a tangible reality within human categories" (205; cf. 146: "Pneumatology is the bridge from Christology to ethics"). Rhetorically, however, the pluriform language of indwelling functions as a "chain of immanences"—the Spirit proceeds from God to Christ and then to the believers—which makes it easy for the Roman believers to relate to Paul's teaching. They accept what Paul has to say about the indwelling of the Spirit because of their own, congruent religious experiences. This, however, also increases their trust in Paul's overall purpose, the communication of his gospel (205).

The final (and longest: 113 pages) chapter of the monograph engages with the remaining 28 verses of Rom 8. Christoph intends to provide a reading of this section that is focused on experience ("erfahrungsbezogene Lesart"). Accordingly, each section heading begins with the words "The Experience of ...", starting with "The Experience of Responsibility" (8:12–13). Christoph explains that Paul's emphasis on ethical conduct fits well into the associative world ("Assoziationskulisse") of the recipients of the epistle. However, Paul transcends Greco-Roman and Hellenistic-Jewish ethics by arguing that it is not by one's own power that one can live an ethical life but only "by the Spirit" (8:13c). In the next section, Christoph looks at the experience of being a child of God (8:14–17). She shows how Paul, by drawing on the associative power of the concepts of sonship and adoption, furthers the self-confidence of the Romans as he explains to them that the Christian experience of the *Abba*-cry means that they are children of God. Moreover, Paul is able to integrate the experience of suffering into his concept of sonship, so that he can avert the potential danger of insecurity the Roman believers may feel when faced with opposition. Finally, Christoph concludes that "in the community everyone can feel as though they are in good hands with their personal experiences. 'Experiences of being a child of God' and 'experiences of the Spirit' are closely knit together. The acceptance of Paul's gospel is thus nothing of which to be ashamed" (266).

Verses 18–25 are discussed under the heading "The Experience of Being a Bearer of ἀπαρχή τοῦ πνεύματος." In contrast to Horn, who comprehends ἡ ἀπαρχή τοῦ πνεύματος as the culmination of Pauline pneumatology, Christoph explains that the eschatological tension expressed in this phrase is characterized by the experience of a realistic hope and an ethical responsibility. It is a guarantee of one's assurance of being saved (*Heilsgewissheit*) and a stabilizing factor in the formation of the Christian community. This is also true for "The Experience of Help through the Pneuma" (8:26–30), for the Spirit comes alongside believers and inspires prayer. According to Christoph, this inspiration is best understood as cooperation rather than an overpowering by the Spirit (an "Ergänzungskonzept" rather than an "Übernahmekonzept" of inspiration) (301). She

therefore thinks that Paul does not have glossolalia in mind, although this might have been part of the associative framework of the Romans. In line with this argumentation, Christoph interprets the φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος as referring to both the human and the divine S/spirit. There is no contradiction between the external power of Pneuma and its anthropological effects. “Es handelt sich um ein inneres Geschehen, das nicht vom Selbst des Menschen abgekoppelt werden darf” (311).

The book concludes with a two-page exposition of verses 31–39 (in which Christoph perceives an echo of what Paul has said about the Spirit in the previous verses) and a final chapter summarizing the results of the investigation.

Christoph has provided a thorough study of the experience of the Spirit in Rom 8 in its context of the communicative situation of the epistle. In her skillful exegesis she does not limit her interaction to German scholarship (which is frequently the case with German studies of this nature) but equally engages with Anglo-American scholars. In the course of the book, Christoph deals with a plenitude of different topics, often in excursuses, as, for example, one on the significance of rhetorical analyses for interpreting Pauline texts (87–89). Unfortunately, the excursuses are not listed in the table of contents. What is more, the monograph has no indexes. This is a major weakness in a book that has an exegetical rather than a thematic structure, since it prevents the majority of readers (who cannot afford to read the whole book) from accessing the wealth of material that is discussed.

However, this book is more than just a good commentary on Rom 8. While some may criticize Christoph’s emphasis on the *experience* of the Spirit as individualistic (as potentially, e.g., M. M. Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000], 126–27), Christoph should be applauded for treating this theme not only from the perspective of cognitive psychology and sociology but also from the angle of reception theory. She thus brings new questions to the text. However, a number of the arguments regarding her focal theory are difficult to verify. This is partly due to the method and matter of inquiry. Nonetheless, it would have been better if she had derived her psychological interpretations more clearly from the foregoing exegesis (see particularly the conclusion on 266 cited above; see also 222, 263). Hence, several of her deductions appear speculative and psychologistic (see, e.g., 292, 312).

Nevertheless, Christoph should be complimented for presenting a monograph that integrates the purpose of Romans and its communicative situation so closely with the exegesis of chapter 8. This book is worth consulting for everyone interested in the

experience of the Spirit in Paul, especially in Rom 8, and more generally in a study of the Epistle to the Romans from the perspective of *Rezeptionsästhetik*.