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Bertone’s monograph on the law and the Spirit in Rom 8:1–16 first saw the light of day as a Ph.D. dissertation at the University of St. Michael’s College (University of Toronto). With his study the author seeks to advance our understanding of both the continuity and the tension between the Mosaic law and the work of the Spirit in Paul’s thought. On the one hand, Bertone sees continuity between these two concepts in Rom 8:2, 4. On the other hand, however, he perceives these verses to stand in tension with the surrounding context, where law and Spirit are set in opposition (7:6; cf. 8:2 [“the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death”]) or where the law is eclipsed by the Spirit (8:5–16; see p. 18). In order to comprehend more fully how Paul handles this potential contradiction of continuity and discontinuity, Bertone applies cognitive dissonance theory, an area of social psychology, to Rom 8:1–16 (mainly at the end of the book).

The book is divided into three parts. Subsequent to the introduction (which contains a brief history of research and methodological considerations regarding the application of cognitive dissonance theory to biblical studies), the first part of the monograph looks at the relation of Spirit and law in the Hebrew Bible and in early Judaism. Part 2 is an exegetical study of Rom 7–8 that sheds light on the discontinuity between law and Spirit. In part 3 Bertone finally looks at Rom 8:1–16 from the perspective of cognitive
dissonance theory. One chapter highlights the continuity of law and Spirit, whereas a closing chapter looks at their dissonance in Paul’s thought and tries to trace how he solves this cognitive problem.

Chapters 1–2 are general overviews of the relationship of law and Spirit in ancient and Second Temple Judaism. Bertone does not appear to argue a particular case as he ploughs through the evidence, although the results of this investigation are important for his later case. Namely, Bertone shows that Judaism looked forward to the outpouring of the Spirit as an enablement for Israel to keep the Torah. His overview is generally helpful, even though some of his interpretations are unconvincing. For example, when God is described as the maker of the universe in *Joseph and Aseneth* 8.9, it seems to be a case of overinterpretation to read the description of the creator as the one “who gave life to all (things) and called them from darkness to the light” as a reference to the knowledge of the Torah and its fulfillment and then conclude that “This indicates that the type of Spirit-renewal the author describes here with respect to Aseneth coincides with the ethical and moral standards and functions associated with the Jewish Torah” (70). Nonetheless, while the findings of this first part of the monograph do not arrive at new conclusions regarding Paul’s antecedents, the author manages to accumulate enough compelling evidence for his conclusion that law and Spirit were seen in congruence in the Jewish S/scriptures.

Part 2 begins with two chapters looking at Rom 7 (both without subheadings or much signposting regarding what will be argued), followed by one chapter on Rom 8. Large parts of these chapters read like a commentary on the respective verses that are being discussed. The main thrust of Bertone’s presentation is a salvation-historical interpretation of law and Spirit in Rom 7–8. This is helpfully illustrated in chapter 3 through focusing on the structure of Rom 7–8 that is foreshadowed in 7:5–6. Bertone shows that the former phase of *Heilsgeschichte* was characterized by the flesh and the law and ultimately by death; in the new phase, people are discharged from the law and serve in the newness of the Spirit. In the context of this reasoning, Bertone criticizes positions that, on the one hand, promote the end of the law and, on the other, contend that Paul’s thoughts comply with the new-covenant teaching of Jeremiah read in conjunction with Ezekiel (thus his summary of Fee). Bertone is eager to point out that, in contrast to Judaism, for Paul law and Spirit stand over against one another, representing two radically different modes of existence. A major argument in this context is one from silence, namely, that nowhere in the context of Rom 2:29; 7:6 and 2 Cor 3 does Paul promulgate that the law would be internalized or obeyed by means of the Spirit (153–55). Unfortunately, he does not discuss the notion of the Spirit writing on “tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor 3:3), which might suggest an internalization of the law by the Spirit (cf. Rom 2:29; 8:4). Nonetheless, toward the end of part 2 Bertone offers a more nuanced judgment when he says that “the
phrase ‘the law of the Spirit of life’ designates the Spirit’s life-giving function in continuity with the Mosaic Law in that the Spirit, like the Law in the previous era, is associated with ethics. But at the same time, there is discontinuity between the new era of the Spirit and the old era of the Law in that the Spirit replaces the Law as the basis of ethics” (178–79).

Chapter 4 concentrates on Rom 7:9ff. and elucidates the way in which the law, although intended for life, resulted in death. At the outset of his interpretation of this controversial passage, Bertone states that it is unnecessary to favor any one of the four major interpretations of the “I” (ἐγώ) that he lists (158). His own reading of the passage coheres with his interpretative model of the law in Rom 7–8; that is, Rom 7:9ff. describes life in the “flesh” as a previous phase of Heilsgeschichte that has passed away (157, 165; cf. 119). This reading is, of course, mutually exclusive with some of the other views that he had outlined. However, he does not discuss alternative concepts of the “flesh,” as for example that of an apocalyptic framework (cf., e.g., J. L. Martyn), nor is the possibility of an “overlap of the ages” given any consideration at this point. Hence, it appears as if people (whether pre- or postconversion) in the new phase of Heilsgeschichte can no longer face the struggle described in Rom 7.

However, Bertone returns to the issue of the “flesh” in the context of his discussion of Rom 8 in chapter 5. Here he repeats his view presented in the previous chapter (184; cf. 199). However, now he continues that “‘to walk according to the flesh’ is to be oriented to the values of this world in rebellion against God. But ‘to walk according to the Spirit’ is to be oriented to the values of the new era of God’s Spirit” (184). This suggests that a certain overlap of the two eras is part of Bertone’s interpretative model, although he does not discuss this explicitly. At a later stage, however, he presupposes this very concept. “In the tension between the new era and the old, the believer’s decisive break from the Law, sin, and death does not free him from the necessity of mortifying sin in the present; there is a possibility of reverting back to the previous manner of living in the old era of the flesh” (190). This notion appears to reflect Paul’s theology more accurately, although Bertone unfortunately fails to integrate it with his overall salvation-historical model of “life in the flesh” versus “life in the Spirit” and, more significantly, of “life under the law” versus “life in the Spirit.”

The main part of chapter 5, however, is an exposition of the replacement of the law as the source of life. This is argued, for one thing, on the basis of the fact that the law is no longer mentioned after Rom 8:7, while the benefits of the law (life, sonship, etc.) continue to be discussed by Paul. Hence, the experience of the Spirit is the new operative basis of the new era (186, 191). While one may criticize this as an argument from silence, Bertone makes clear that this omission is due to the opposition of law and Spirit in 8:2. The “law of the Spirit” in this verse does not refer to the Torah but to the “principle” or “rule” of
the Spirit (although Bertone prefers not to translate νόμος with any figurative terminology; see 175). It is placed in opposition to the Mosaic law. Regrettably, Bertone does not consider the view that the “law” in “the law of sin and of death” in 8:2b could have a figurative meaning too. However, at a later stage he is at least ready to grant that “the law of sin and of death” does not refer to the Mosaic law per se but to the former era of the Mosaic law in toto (179).

Like each of the three parts of the book, part 2 concludes with a helpful diagram illustrating the relationship of law and Spirit that has been uncovered in the previous chapters. The exegesis in part 2 leads to the conclusion that, in contrast to Paul’s antecedents, the apostle does not understand the Spirit to be given in order to secure Torah obedience but in order to inaugurate a new era of salvation history replacing the era of the law.

Part 3 of the book is entitled “Consonance between the New Era of the Spirit and Judaism’s Covenantal Nomism.” In the first of its two chapters, Bertone focuses precisely on this consonance. As in the previous chapter, the author starts by exegeting 8:2. This time he argues that Paul intends both the replacement as well the continuity of the law when he coins the expression “the law of the Spirit.” Paul “carefully chooses his words in 8:2 so he could articulate a sense of continuity between the Law and the Spirit, and more specifically, represent a positive parallelization between them” (293). However, one may wonder whether this grand picture of law and Spirit in Paul can be read out of this single expression. More significantly, at the stage of this second exposition of 8:2 in the book, one is surprised that one is now made to believe a different interpretation of the same verse.

This conveys one of the more general problems of the monograph, namely, its structure. For one thing, the author does not provide a plan for the book at its outset that would enable the reader to fathom the place of the individual chapters within the focal theory of the thesis. Moreover, a lot of the material in part 3 repeats that of part 2, but now without insisting on the harsh dissonance between law and Spirit. One wonders whether it would have been more helpful if the author had provided only one exegetical treatment of Rom 8:1–16 in which he would have been forced to give a coherent interpretation of the passage rather than artificially force continuity and discontinuity of the law into separate parts of the thesis. In contrast to his somewhat atomistic reading, a synchronic analysis of the passage would also have included an exegesis of the “consonant” 8:4, which Bertone submits only at this stage of the book: “The Spirit is the basis of ethics for the believer, not the Law. However, at the same time Paul expresses continuity between the work of the Spirit in believers’ lives, and the Mosaic Law; i.e., Paul understands believers’ acts of love
towards one another as achieving the designed goal of the Mosaic Law or even the summary of the Decalogue (‘love your neighbour”) (236; cf. 210–11, 293–94).

The tension between (1) “the tension between the Law and the Spirit, and more fundamentally [and more sweepingly] the tension between his [Paul’s] Jewish past and his Christian present” (25) set out in part 2 and (2) the continuity between law and Spirit unfolded in the first chapter of part 3 is intended to be solved in the final chapter of the thesis by means of cognitive dissonance theory. Bertone argues that through appealing to their common experience of the Spirit and consequent identity as children of God, Paul seeks corroboration for his cognitions from the community of faith (306). Bertone believes that if Paul receives validation from the Roman believers on his convictions, “there will be an appreciable reduction of dissonance between the two clusters of cognitions represented by covenantal nomism and his post-Damascus beliefs. He would have formed a new consonant cognition that others affirm his understanding of the intersection between Judaism and his post-Damascus beliefs and would have succeeded in producing a dissonant free environment among the community of the Spirit in Rome” (308).

Bertone has provided a helpful study of law and Spirit in Rom 8 that touches on many important issues of Paul’s theology. While neither his results regarding law and Spirit in Paul nor the application of cognitive dissonance theory to the law-Spirit antithesis are new as such (on the latter, see, e.g., G. Theißen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987], ch. 2, which Bertone never references), he has nonetheless provided a fresh perspective on Rom 8:1–16. He has drawn out (and perhaps sometimes also overdrawn) both the antithesis as well as the “synthesis” of law and Spirit in this passage. By approaching Paul’s treatment of law and Spirit with the concept of “cognitive overlap,” Bertone has removed from a Hegelian context what others so far may have comprehended as “synthesis” and has placed it into the framework of cognitive psychology. In this context, “dissonance is reduced when one takes characteristics corresponding to each of the alternatives and places them in a context where they lead to the same end result” (295). Whether Paul indeed needed the validation from the Roman believers on his cognitions (308) in order to arrive at the synthesis that Bertone draws together at the end of his book is open for debate.

It is regrettable that differing scholarly opinions are rarely discussed in the main body of the book (esp. in the first half). For example, Bertone claims with regard to the purpose of Romans that Paul’s “main concern is clear”: introducing himself to the Romans and winning the congregation for his future plans through communicating the gospel (23). However, the purpose of Romans is a matter of great debate among scholars. Bertone would have done well to discuss at least those alternatives that have a direct bearing on
his thesis, as, for example, the argument of Thompson. She contends, in contrast to Bertone, that Rom 8:14–17 is not about the believer’s experience of an intimate, filial relationship with God but much more about the grand plan of reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles, which she (and other scholars) believes to be the main concern of Romans (M. M. Thompson, The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000], 125–31). Likewise, Bertone claims that there is a consistent pattern in Paul’s writings regarding his understanding of the Spirit (315). However, it would have been important for Bertone to interact with the standard work of (German) critical scholarship on the Spirit, F. W. Horn’s Das Angeld des Geistes: Studien zur paulinischen Pneumatologie (FRLANT 154; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992). Horn presents a sophisticated developmental model of Pauline pneumatology that has the law-Spirit antithesis as one of its stages (cf. V. Rabens, “The Development of Pauline Pneumatology: A Response to F. W. Horn,” BZ 43 [1999]: 161–79).

Despite the weakness mentioned above, Bertone’s monograph is a useful resource for students of Paul’s theology, especially those interested in the role that the apostle attributes to the law and the Spirit in the Epistle to the Romans.