Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification. The Legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans*, Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press 2008, xii + 298 pp., ISBN-13: 978-0-268-04128-1, $ 60 (hardcover with jacket).

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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 in general Origen hardly mentions this topic in his works – as far as they have been preserved –, he was forced 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 *Philocalia*, 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 *Com–mentary 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 *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 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 he was in conflict with the Church. 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 writes about salvation on the basis of faith alone, and adds 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 explains that human beings sin by following Adam's example, and bypasses the view that they all "fell" with or in Adam. Another difference is that Pelagius repudiates 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 the ceremonial works of Judaism that were 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 as a process of becoming righteous through the indwelling of Christ and the Trinity, a process that begins at baptism or conversion.

In the fourth chapter, Scheck investigates William of St. Thierry's reception of Origen's commentary as an example of a medieval theologian who combines Augustine's and Origen's interpretations of *Romans*. William – a twelfth-century Cistercian – appears to know and to quote Origen's commentary, but usually he inserts Augustinian phrases concerning God's grace and divine determination whenever Origen seems to highlight these aspects insufficiently. Even though he underlines, with Origen, the existence of free will, William stresses that God's grace must anticipate the movement of the human soul. Thus he avoids anything from Origen that might be controversial.

The fifth chapter presents Erasmus's reception of Origen. With regard to justification, Erasmus is particularly close to Origen's commentary, whereas he is most critical of Luther's and Melanchthon's innovating interpretations of justification as something solely dependent on one's faith. Erasmus agrees with the Catholic view that justification is a process that embraces the renewal of the moral life and the reception of God's grace. Furthermore, he maintains that divine election does not destroy free will and human responsibility. This chapter is concluded by an excursus about the first printed editions of Origen's writing in the late fifteenth and the sixteenth century.

The sixth chapter is about Luther and Melanchthon, to whom the preceding chapter referred already. Scheck underlines that their particular view of justification *sola fide* as God's imputation of righteousness to those who believe in Christ deviates from the entire Catholic tradition, as they themselves admitted. Scheck pays ample attention to their criticism of the Church Fathers, Augustine included, and to their explicit rejection of the view that faith as the basis of justification is meant as *pars pro toto*. As for Augustine, they claimed in public that his view corresponded to what they had discovered anew, but in private they were most critical of him.

In the final chapter, Scheck gives an impression of the controversies about Origen's interpretation of *Romans* during and after the Reformation. He briefly refers to John Calvin's and Theodore Beza's repudiation of Origen (and calls the former's antipathy for Origen deep and dilettantish), but he also mentions other Protestant theologians such as Flacius Illyricus, Martin Chemnitz, Thomas Cranmer, Heinrich Bullinger, and Richard Montagu, who were less critical of Origen and approvingly quoted his interpretations of justification *sola fide*. The Roman Catholic bishop Cornelius Jansen, however, accused Origen of being the source of Pelagianism. In his conclusion, Scheck underlines the importance of Origen's interpretation of justification in *Romans* for the formation of the Catholic exegetical tradition. He correctly observes that the "New Perspective" on Paul confirms the interpretations that were first made by Origen.

This book certainly deserves to be studied by historians, Biblical scholars, and systematic theologians. Sometimes it has an apologetic tone in favour of the Catholic interpretation of justification and against the traditional Protestant views. In these passages, Scheck unconsciously suggests that the Reformation was just an academic dispute on the correct view of justification by faith, whereas everybody knows that the Reformers first of all criticized the Roman Catholic Church for its abuse of spiritual authority. The strong focus on his theme seems to make Scheck forget to pay attention to the historical circumstances in which Luther discovered his view of justification – which may indeed be criticized from an historical-exegetical perspective. Nevertheless, it would have been appropriate if Scheck had also observed that the Protestant view of justification as God's imputation of righteousness to the one who believes in Christ simply derives from Romans 4:1-12, where Paul refers to Genesis 15:6, "Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness". Scheck's concentration on his theme brings about that he also passes over other though related aspects of Origen's *Commentary on Romans*. For example, Origen was convinced that Romans 3:20 ("through the law comes the knowledge of sin"), 4:15 ("the law brings wrath"), and 7:9 ("I was once alive apart from the law") refer to the natural law. These interpretations are not generally shared by later Church Fathers, nor by the modern exegetes who adhere to the "New Perspective". Furthermore, Origen sees far more references to "the law of the members" than in the only text in which Paul uses this expression, Romans 7:23. In his comments on Romans 5:20 he explains that the law of the members came in under the pretext of the law of the mind (which Origen identifies with the natural law), in order that trespass might increase. Although for modern exegetes it is always useful to consult the patristic commentaries, someone who investigates Origen's *Commentary on Romans* as a whole will be less often inclined to follow the Alexandrian master than Scheck suggests. However, these remarks do not alter the fact that this book is a valuable contribution to the study of the history of Biblical exegesis and theology.

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