

BOOK REVIEWS

BOOK REVIEWS

James BUCHANAN WALLACE, *Snatched into Paradise (2 Cor 12: 1–10). Paul's Heavenly Journey in the Context of Early Christian Experience*, BZNW 179, De Gruyter: Berlin/New York 2011, p. 391, ISBN 978-311-024784-8

This book is the work of a young Orthodox New Testament scholar from the USA. It represents a revised version of his doctoral dissertation, completed under the mentorship of the well-known New Testament scholar Luke Timothy Johnson. Wallace's book also represents a very serious attempt to engage the Patristic exegetical tradition in contemporary debates on biblical texts, such as 2 Cor 12:1-10 (the account of Apostle Paul's religious experience of being snatched into the [third] heaven). He considers contemporary interpretations of this textual complex as unsuccessful in terms of approaching its adequate meaning. Modern exegetes see Paul's experience as ironical speech that the Apostle used in order to cope with the opponents within the community, or as a description of an experience that might be important only for the Apostle himself. Unlike contemporary exegetes, the Patristic interpreters saw Paul's religious experience as very significant for Christian identity, in their own way. In this respect, the author formulates his own thesis: The apostle Paul finds his ascension to the heaven as a very important religious experience, not only for himself, but also for the Christian community for which he mediates it in 2 Cor 12:1-10. In his book the author is trying to explain this and to prove it, by verifying it, first of all, by a historical-critical exegesis of 2 Cor 12:1-10 in the context of the whole thought of the Apostle Paul, and then by interpretations of selected Church Fathers that are, according to Wallace, in line with the Apostle's original intention.

The book consists of six chapters. In the first chapter the author offers a basic introduction to the theme. The central part of this chapter is a systematic review of contemporary interpretations of 2 Cor 12:1-10. Almost all of them consider Paul's religious experience of being snatched into the heaven as an episode which he did not take as constitutive for his Apostolic mission: it is an account of a personal experience which he is "forced" to tell in the context of conflict with opponents in Corinth. One important contemporary interpretation is that Apostle was describing his ascension to heaven with skillful and ironic rhetoric. The author criticizes this kind of approach to the text and explains his own intentions of research.

The second and third chapters deal with investigations of the motive of the heavenly ascension seen as religious experiences in the Greco-Roman world and in Judaism. By studying literary testimonies of heavenly ascension-experience, the author considers this types of experiences as common in the religious practices in the antiquity. His intention is to explore the cultural and religious background of