Check for updates

first draft', Shearn writes, 'Tillich [rewrote] the sermon and [spoke] for the first time about Christ meeting the doubting sinner in the darkness of despair with a message of double grace: You need do nothing, you need not hold anything to be true' (p. 14). One can imagine the relief such a message brought to the members of Tillich's congregation who earnestly found themselves *trying to believe*, only to realise they could not convince themselves that 'God exists' simply by an act of will. 'I am content to call [the] crisis [Tillich had] an experience of the "breakthrough" of grace to the sinner who is also a doubter', Shearn observes, marking his fundamental contribution to Tillich studies. 'But in this moment of rescue, Christ's presence with the despairing sinner covers not only the sin but the sinner's *modern* inability – the inability to believe the truth' (p. 219).

The connection Shearn postulates between Luther and Tillich should thus be clear: both men not only *sought relief* from the burden placed upon them and their contemporaries thanks to graceless expressions of the Christian faith. They *found it* in the breakthrough they experienced of grace which they subsequently applied to the differing spiritual predicaments of the times in which they lived. By letting go of the desire to make oneself acceptable to God through morality *or* belief, a new encounter with the divine could emerge, the kind that led Luther from hating God to loving God and Tillich from the untenable 'God' of popular theism to 'faith without objectification' (p. 201). Unfortunately, Shearn draws other comparisons in his analysis that bear less fruit. For example, he repeatedly observes how the mature Tillich sometimes misremembers his early intellectual development, even though the discrepancies (at least to the present reviewer) seem trivial.

The result of Shearn's archival work could have led to an additional comparison truly worth making, however. It appears in Tillich's surprising affirmation of the 'suffering God who reigns in weakness' (p. 150) as evident in sermons he preached during the First World War. While Shearn helpfully notes how Tillich anticipates in these sermons the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Jürgen Moltmann, he overlooks the radical discontinuity between what Tillich says here and what he argues in his mature reiteration of classical theism as evident in his doctrine of God as being-itself. Attention to this discrepancy would have helped Shearn more effectively fulfil another goal he identifies at the outset of his analysis, namely, to situate Tillich's early writings within the broader enterprise of twentieth century theology – including Tillich's own.

Criticism aside, *Pastor Tillich: The Justification of the Doubter* fills the gap of Tillich's early theological development for those who cannot access it due to the language barrier. This text would also be an indispensable resource for anyone who finds reading Tillich as a modern descendant of Luther (theologically and pastorally) illuminating. Perhaps the chief importance of Shearn's work would be to contemporary Christians for whom belief in 'God' has paradoxically become an obstacle to their faith in God/experience of God. This will depend, however, on theologically competent pastors who are willing to devote themselves to understanding Shearn's technical analysis and then explaining it, even if that means focusing exclusively on how 'you need not hold anything to be true' can be the very word of grace the modern (or postmodern) doubter so desperately needs to hear.

doi:10.1017/S0036930624000176

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930624000188 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Markus Vinzent, *Resetting the Origins of Christianity: A New Theory of Sources and Beginnings*

(Cambridge: CUP, 2023), pp. xvi + 401. $39.99

Michael Graves

Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL, USA (michael.graves@wheaton.edu)

In *Resetting the Origins of Christianity*, Professor Markus Vinzent presents a history of Christianity in a 'retrospective mode' (p. vii). Instead of narrating Christian history from its presumed beginnings to some later period of maturity, Vinzent works backwards from the ancient narratives that have shaped our historical understanding, paying critical attention at each stage to the writers' ideological agendas and rhetorical strategies. The goal is to analyse how the sources construct their pictures of Christian origins and to get behind the accounts presented in the sources, so that, moving from later sources to earlier ones, we can arrive at a fresh perspective on Christian origins that challenges generally held assumptions.

The first writer treated in detail is Gregory of Tours (c. 538–594), whose *Ten Books of Histories* closely align Roman and church histories with the history of Gaul. Chapter 1 also deals with the historian Orosius (c. 375–420), who likewise identifies Christianity with *Romanitas* and attributes a Christian salvation-historical task to Rome. Vinzent shows how each writer reflects his own time in recounting Christian history (for example, Orosius' claim that early emperors supported the church). Discussion is also offered of the *Letter Exchange between Seneca and Paul*, which presents an ethical reading of Paul in harmony with Roman morality. Each of these texts has points of interest, but it was not made clear how these texts remain influential in shaping today's assumptions about Christian origins.

Chapter 2 is devoted to Eusebius of Caesarea, whose *Church History* served as the master narrative for all later accounts of Christian origins. Vinzent describes how Eusebius relies heavily on citations but uses these to construct a history with clear political and theological aims. It is pointed out that Eusebius depicts whatever he approves as early and close to the apostles, whereas rejected elements are said to have arisen later. It is noted that Eusebius often chose to cite non-New Testament sources, preferring other texts such as Josephus. Based on where in his historical framework Eusebius discusses New Testament texts in the *Chronicle* and *Church History*, Vinzent suggests that Eusebius knew that the Gospels and much of the New Testament were written in the mid-second century. The reader is urged not to trust Eusebius' portrayal of the past, because he manipulates his sources to construct his own story. The question is raised, for example, why scholars who reject the details of what Eusebius reports about the Gospel of Mark still follow Eusebius in their early dating of this Gospel. In general, Vinzent asks, can a plausible historical core be extracted from the narrative constructed by Eusebius, or should we essentially dispense with his account altogether?

Continuing to move backwards in time, chapter 3 treats Julius Africanus, Origen and Tertullian. In general, these figures operate with the canonical Gospels and at least portions of what became the New Testament as starting points for their reflections on Christian history. It is argued from the forward to Origen's *On First Principles* that the communal reading and scriptural status of the Old and New Testaments were

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930624000188 Published online by Cambridge University Press

not commonly practiced/recognised in Origen's day. It is observed that Tertullian understands orthodoxy as coming from the original apostolic churches, whereas he depicts heresies as developing later.

The main subject of chapter 4 is Irenaeus, whose importance in advocating for the four canonical Gospels is emphasised. We are reminded that Irenaeus and Tertullian claimed that Marcion published his Gospel in response to the four canonical Gospels, but also that Tertullian reported Marcion's assertion that his own Gospel was the basis for the others. Vinzent accepts this latter assertion of Tertullian (i.e. that Marcion said his Gospel was earlier) and ultimately agrees that Marcion's Gospel was earlier than the canonical Gospels. Vinzent does not believe Tertullian that Marcion rejected the book of Acts, since he doubts that Acts yet existed in Marcion's day. It is shown that Irenaeus relied heavily on Acts, but he is said to have used it as evidence for truth, not for history. Chapter 4 ends with a brief discussion of the New Testament, which is said to have made clear to its readership that it is primarily a collection of writings about Jesus.

Chapter 5 offers a treatment of the New Testament subcollection called the *Praxapostolos*, consisting of Acts, James, 1–2 Pet, 2 or 3 Epistles of John and Jude. A prominent discussion in this chapter surrounds the order of the *Praxapostolos* in early manuscripts vis-à-vis the Pauline Epistles. In some manuscripts (e.g. *Vaticanus*, *Alexandrinus*) the books of the *Praxapostolos* directly follow the Gospels, making James and the Twelve Apostles primary in Christian origins; but in other manuscripts (e.g. *Sinaiticus*), Paul's Epistles follow the Gospels, presenting a different, Pauline-centred view of the beginnings of Christianity.

The end point of this retrospective history is reached in chapter 6, with a comparative analysis of Pauline traditions and traditions associated with Ignatius of Antioch (early second century). Vinzent adopts the view that only the three letters of Ignatius preserved in a shorter form in Syriac are authentically Ignatian, these three letters were revised and supplemented with pseudepigraphic works to form the seven-letter collection known to Eusebius, and further supplementation created the larger thirteen letter Ignatian corpus known to later centuries. In this reconstruction, not only was the corpus expanded over time to include new letters, but also the older letters were revised and augmented to harmonise them with the new material. According to Vinzent, something similar happened with the letters of Paul. The historical Paul is reflected in the seven letters considered authentic by the consensus of contemporary scholarship, although the original forms of these letters is now lost. Marcion knew a ten-letter collection (adding Ephesians, Colossians and 2 Thessalonians) that still lacked numerous passages appearing in the present, canonical forms of these letters (as is deduced from Tertullian's discussion in *Against Marcion* 5). The final fourteen-letter collection represents another expansion of the corpus and further supplementation (e.g. the addition of Rom 14–16 to harmonise Romans with the book of Acts). Marcion's work is said to give us our earliest window into the development of Paul's letters and the New Testament generally. In an afterword titled 'Outlook: How Were Things Actually', Vinzent explains that we cannot go further back historically than Marcion, who, it is said, wrote the first Gospel, launched the New Testament, and was responsible for the transition from scroll to codex and the introduction of *nomina sacra*.

I found the basic idea of *Resetting the Origins of Christianity*, working backwards from later retellings of history to theories about what might have happened behind the texts, compelling. The book contains numerous intriguing discussions. Especially

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930624000188 Published online by Cambridge University Press

stimulating are Vinzent's willingness to question Eusebius and his creative use of Marcion traditions.

I will note three aspects of the book that left me uncertain or wishing for more. First, a constant question I faced is whether having an agenda necessarily makes a writer's claims false. Another is whether being marginalised by tradition necessarily makes a writer's claims true. Vinzent often seems to be intentionally pushing the boundaries on these questions. Second, given the desire to correct commonly held ideas about Christian origins and debate novel approaches, I was surprised that more diverse sources were not integrated into the discussion. Because Vinzent focuses on revealing the rhetoric of traditional authors, much of the book contains (critical) summaries of major authors such as Eusebius and Irenaeus. Some use is made of Justin Martyr and Theophilus of Antioch, for example, but not much. More importantly, I was expecting more substantial interaction with the so-called New Testament Apocrypha and texts from Nag Hammadi. A more thoroughgoing revision of early Christian history might seek to integrate these works into the narrative. Finally, Vinzent alludes to theological revisions that may follow from historical revisions. *Resetting the Origins of Christianity* does not address contemporary theology, which, in the end, seems appropriate for this work. But I hope Vinzent will do so elsewhere. It is important that early Christian history and Christian theology not operate in total isolation from one another.

doi:10.1017/S0036930624000188

Augustine M. Reisenauer, *Augustine's Theology of the Resurrection*

(Cambridge: CUP, 2023), pp. xvi + 275. £85.00/$110.00

Benjamin T. Quinn

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC, USA (bquinn@sebts.edu)

'While its circumference is almost nowhere in Augustine's works, however, the center of the resurrection is almost everywhere' (p. 1). In his *Augustine's Theology of the Resurrection*, Augustine M. Reisenauer, O.P., offers an historical and thematically theological survey of St. Augustine's view of resurrection. His exploration especially attends to Jesus' resurrection, but it also considers how Augustine viewed the resurrection of all people both spiritually and 'fleshly'. For St. Augustine, Reisenauer argues, resurrection 'means nothing less than the revivification of dead humanity to the eternal life of beatitude in God…. It is our finest moment of resilience, the gracious accomplishment of which belongs to the God of the resurrection' (p. 5).

Reisenauer states his purpose for writing as an investigation into the teaching and preaching of Augustine on the resurrection of dead humanity to life, especially concerning the historical resurrection of Christ, but also concerning the historical and eschatological resurrection 'not only of the saints, but also of the damned, as Augustine describes them' (p. 9). He divides the book into four sections, each with three supporting chapters. The four sections are: 'Early Considerations of the Resurrection', 'The

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930624000188 Published online by Cambridge University Press