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Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology. By Michael J. Gorman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009, xi + 194 pp., \$24.00.

This volume follows Gorman's previous work on the cruciform character of Paul's theology, especially his 2001 work titled *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Eerdmans). The present, much shorter, book is an extension and development of Gorman's earlier work. While Gorman does not overtly set this offering in the midst of the debates related to "new," "fresh," and "traditional" perspectives on justification in Paul, this proposal may well end up being just what is needed; an irenic work, exegetically based and theologically rich, that shows how unnecessarily polarized the debates have become. This is especially the case in that a clear-eyed vision of justification in Paul will grasp how richly layered Paul's development of this notion actually is.

In an introductory chapter, Gorman notes that theosis is a notion that is foundational to and much more highly developed in the Eastern church than in the West, though it may be unfamiliar to many Protestants. It is not about making humans "little gods," but rather involves God drawing humanity into God's own life. "Theosis is about divine intention and action, human transformation and the *telos* of human existence—union with God" (p. 5). Gorman gives a working definition of theosis: "Theosis is transformative participation in the kenotic, cruciform character of God through Spirit-enabled conformity to the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected/glorified Christ" (p. 7). The use of this concept from the Eastern tradition is long-overdue, since Pauline scholars have noted for several generations the centrality of union with Christ for understanding how so much of Paul's thought is configured.

In chapter 1, Gorman develops Paul's "master story" that demonstrates the kenotic character of Jesus Christ and reveals the very identity of God as kenotic. He focuses on Phil. 2:5-11 and argues, based on a thorough exegetical treatment of the passage, that the pattern "although [x] not [y] but [z]" reveals the narrative trajectory of the kenosis of Jesus. By this, Gorman means "although [status] not [selfishness] but [selflessness]" (p. 16). Jesus Christ had status as God himself but did not exploit this, using it for his own comfort or personal gain. Rather, he pursued several "progressively degrading" positions on a movement of "downward mobility," going eventually to the publicly shameful death on a cross (pp. 16-17). For Gorman, this passage is not properly understood to mean that Christ did this despite the fact that he was in the form of God. Rather, Christ pursued this path *because* he was in the form of God. That is, and this is a crucial point for Gorman, Christ's being in the form of God is most clearly seen in his self-emptying and self-expenditure (p. 25). In this sense, the very character of God is *kenotic* (self-emptying) and *cruciform* (cross-shaped).

In chapter 2, the longest chapter that also functions as the heart of his argument, Gorman claims that setting two alternative conceptions of justification in Paul over against each other misses the mark. Rather than pitting a juridical—or forensic—notion against participationist conceptions, Gorman says that "justification is by crucifixion, specifically co-crucifixion, understood as participation in Christ's act of covenant fulfillment" (p. 43-44). This vision comprehends within it the two other, often (mis-)understood as competing, renderings of justification. Gorman argues mainly from Gal. 2:15-21 and Rom. 6:1-7:7, concluding that, for Paul,

justification means the establishment or restoration of right covenant relations, both "vertical" or theological (toward God) and also, inseparably, "horizontal" or social (toward others)—what Paul most frequently calls "*pistis*" and "*agape*"—with the certain

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hope of ultimate vindication and glory, all understood in light of, and experienced through, Christ and the Spirit (pp. 52-53).

Gorman understands “covenant relations” as the proper human relational behavior of faithfulness toward God and others and love for God and others, both of which are lived out by the true human, Jesus Christ. To enter into justification, then, or to be incorporated into Christ, is to participate in faithfulness and love toward God and toward others. This is not, however, a progressive rendering of justification, contends Gorman. Rather, justification is considered a realm into which believers are transferred by the Spirit of God, a realm in which there is the transformative power of God at work, enabling believers to be transformed in their behavior, from practices of injustice to practices of justice and Christ-shaped cruciform love (p. 99). Much more can be said about this complex and theologically loaded chapter, but it is sufficient to note here that much of what Gorman discusses is immensely helpful in settling disputes between competing visions of justification.

In chapter 3, Gorman relates this vision of justification to Paul’s discussions of holiness, which he regards as theosis; the community of God’s called out people—called into Christ (p. 108)—embodying and growing into the cruciform love of Christ on earth by the Spirit. Gorman claims that this holiness has three features. First, it is radically different from the surrounding culture, though the community of holiness must always participate in the host culture (p. 108). Second, it is Trinitarian in structure (p. 108) in that it is the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit in the community. Third, it is Christlikeness in that it involves being “in Christ,” Christ dwelling with the community, and the community “putting on” behaviors characteristic of Christ. This intense fellowship with Christ, then, is where “inhabiting God” comes from (p. 109). Christ dwells with the people of God by the Spirit, and so God himself also dwells among God’s people. And the very character of God is cruciform, since this is the manner in which Christ reveals God. The task of the church, then, and the character of its holiness, is to inhabit the cruciform God (p. 115).

This will result in a life of non-violence, as Gorman discusses in chapter 4. He notes Paul’s likely conversion from Phinehas-like violence. Paul had been passionate about the holiness of the Jewish nation before his conversion, persecuting the church in his Pharisaic zeal. It is not the case that Paul simply transferred his violent zeal to his Christian call as an apostle of Jesus. His conversion involved a radical change of the mode in which he carried out his ministry, drawing upon and releasing the resurrection power of God through a cruciform ministry of power in weakness (p. 152).

One of the strengths of Gorman’s work is the exegetical care with which he makes his case. He does not get bogged down in methodology, even in chapter 1 in which he mentions but does not extensively develop the linguistic theory that undergirds his theological rendering of Phil. 2:5-11. He makes his case and moves on. It does help that he has carefully developed much of this in far more detail in his previous work, so he can point readers in that direction for further elaboration. This book also is the embodiment of what so many are calling for these days—a significant work that does not respect the artificial lines between biblical studies and theology. Gorman un-self-consciously brings the two into conversation very fruitfully at a number of points.

It is nearly impossible to overstate how powerful and compelling this theme is and how helpful and transformative Gorman’s work on cruciformity has been. Sadly, the debates and discussions among evangelicals over Paul’s understanding of justification have become destructively polarized. The substance of Gorman’s work on justification is a wonderful

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contribution and ought to be received with gratitude. Just as important, however, is the desperate need for participants in the various discussions to receive Gorman's work as an exhortation to practice cruciformity; to adopt cross-shaped postures toward one another, eschewing violence and learning to listen and speak in ways that reflect the self-expending character of Jesus Christ.

Timothy G. Gombis
Cedarville University, Cedarville, Ohio