

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND ETHICS IN PAUL
TRANSFORMATION AND EMPOWERING FOR RELIGIOUS-
ETHICAL LIFE¹

Volker Rabens

This dissertation answers the question how, according to the apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit enables religious-ethical life. How does the Spirit transform and empower believers so that they are able to live according to the values set forth by Paul's gospel? In order to answer this question, we look in the first part of the dissertation at an established approach to the ethical work of the Spirit in Paul. We have named this the 'infusion-transformation approach' because it assumes that the Spirit transforms believers substance-ontologically due to its nature as a physical substance. Moral life should be the natural outflow of the transformed nature of the believers which results from this infusion.

We examine every passage from the Hebrew Bible, early Judaism (esp. from the DSS, *JosAs* and Philo), Hellenism and Paul (esp. 1 Cor. 10:3-4; 12:13; 15:44) that is put forward by the proponents of the infusion-transformation approach. We conclude that the Jewish and Pauline texts which are understood to contain a physical concept of the Spirit have been misinterpreted, partly owing to a misconception of metaphorical and symbolic language. However, while a material concept of the Spirit is discovered in some strands of Hellenism, none of the Jewish, Graeco-Roman or Pauline sources give evidence of a substance-ontological transformation of believers caused by the alleged infusion with a physical Spirit. For this reason we are able to dismiss the 'infusion-transformation' approach in chs. 2-3 of the thesis (these chapters further provide an extensive treatment on how to interpret metaphors and an excursus on the alleged Pauline concept of the Spirit as an immaterial substance).

¹ Volker Rabens, 'The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul' (PhD Dissertation, London School of Theology/Brunel University, 2008); supervisor: Prof. Max Turner. Published in WUNT II (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

In our programmatic ch. 4 we unfold a new approach to Paul's theology, understanding the ethical work of the Spirit in particular, as *relational*. This concept of relational transformation and empowering overcomes the perceived opposition of 'substantive' and 'relational' change. It is argued that the experience of intimate relationships transforms people both in their being as well as empowering them for moral conduct. Accordingly, we propose that for Paul it is primarily through deeper knowledge of, and an intimate relationship with, God, Jesus Christ and with the community of faith that people are transformed and empowered by the Spirit for religious-ethical life.

Ch. 5 shows that our proposed model of the ethical work of the Spirit is echoed in the writings of Paul's contemporaries. Particularly Philo (with an emphasis on mystical encounters with God), the Dead Sea Scrolls (with an emphasis on the cognitive side of knowing God), and a number of Jewish traditions based on Ezekiel 36:25-28 give evidence of the concept that the Spirit enables religious-ethical life through providing deeper knowledge of and an intimate relationship with God. A closer relationship with the faith-community also plays a role in this model of Spirit-empowering.

Ch. 6 demonstrates from the Pauline epistles that Paul's view of the Spirit's empowerment for religious-ethical life is well comprehended by our relational model. A detailed investigation of 2 Corinthians 3:18 shows how the notion of Spirit-worked contemplation of the divine is put forward by Paul as a means of (religious-ethical) transformation. Romans 8:12-17; Galatians 4:1-7; Romans 5:5; and Ephesians 3:16-19 lend further support to this relational approach. A close examination of Romans 8:12-17 demonstrates how the intimate relationship of sonship of God that is worked by the Spirit of adoption is presented by Paul as grounds why believers can 'kill the deeds of the body'. Finally, it is argued that also the communal work of the Spirit (through gifts given by and participation in the Spirit; 1 Cor. 12:7; Phil. 2:1-3; etc.) strengthens and enables believers in their religious-ethical life.

Ch. 7 summarizes the results of the thesis and draws attention to their significance for other aspects of early Jewish and Pauline theology (e.g. for the 'indicative' and 'imperative' in Paul's concept of sanctification). The dissertation is completed by an extensive appendix on '140 Years of Research on Spirit and Ethics in Paul'.