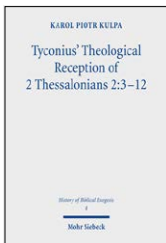




Kulpa, Karol Piotr. *Tyconius' Theological Reception of 2 Thessalonians 2:3–12*. Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2022. ISBN 9783161616341.



Who is the “son of perdition”, the “man doomed to destruction”? When is the “Lawless one”, the wicked one, going to be revealed? When will the rebellion, the time of apostasy come? Besides the above-mentioned questions, some scholars discuss the interpretation of 2 Thess 2:3-12 in an attempt to identify the “enemy” who declares himself to be God. Recent research has paid attention equally to the exegesis and the reception of this difficult and troublesome text. Karol Kulpa has thoroughly studied this passage, focusing on Tyconius’ reception of it.

Karol Kulpa’s monograph is the result of his reworked doctoral dissertation elaborated under the supervision of Tobias Nicklas and prepared at the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the University of Regensburg. Published in a new Mohr-Siebeck’s series (History of Biblical Exegesis), this book is a fine sample of the history of reception in biblical studies.

Karol Kulpa’s monograph is formed by four chapters, in addition to the Introduction and Conclusion. In Chapter 1, the author identifies the epistemological elements of the reception history and examines Tyconius’ interpretative logic of 2 Thess 2:3-12. In Chapter 2, Karol Kulpa delves into Tyconius’ historical context, determining Tyconius’ motif for the reception of 2 Thess 2:3-12. In Chapter 3, he makes a dia-textual examination of Tyconius’ major works: *Liber Regularum* and *Expositio Apocalypseos*, tracing in them allusions and echoes of 2 Thess 2:3-12. In Chapter 4, Karol Kulpa summarizes the theological insights resulting from Tyconius’ reception of this passage, as well as their applicability for the life of the Church. In his conclusion, Karol Kulpa casts several doubts on Tyconius’ label as a heretic and rehabilitates him as an exegete and theologian.

Karol Kulpa’s methodology combines historical critical exegesis and history of reception. He also follows the notions of *Wirkungsgeschichte* developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer and of *Rezeptionsgeschichte* proposed by Hans Robert Jauss. The first supports

the historical and literary levels of which Karol Kulpa understands as reception, while the second supports what Karol Kulpa understands as the theological level. Karol Kulpa's methodology, thus, articulates three categories: transformative assimilation, performative effectiveness, and the productive process of theological insights.

Productive reception is not only a transformative assimilation but a performative process. For Karol Kulpa, Tyconius' exegesis is an example of this transformative and performative process, and his major works—*Liber Regularum* and *Expositio Apocalypseos*—can be understood as the concretization of this process of transformative assimilation. Karol Kulpa compares his research to an iceberg: it focuses on the visible part, namely, Tyconius' reception of 2 Thess 2:3-12, its effects on his interpretation of Scripture and his theology, which in turn reflects the invisible part (i.e., Tyconius' thoughts).

Karol Kulpa's monograph focuses on Tyconius' main work, *Liber Regularum*, whose seven rules guide his interpretation of Scripture and reflect his view of the Church, human being, and his understanding of time. They are: (1) *De Domino et corpore eius* (On the Lord and his body). (2) *De Domini corpore bipertito* (On the bipartite body of the Lord). (3) *De promissis et lege* (On the promises and the law). (4) *De specie et genere* (On the particular and the general). (5) *De temporibus* (On times). (6) *De recapitulatione* (On recapitulation). (7) *De diabolo et eius corpore* (On the Devil and his body).

Among these, the second rule reflects Tyconius' main insight for understanding the conflicts in the fourth-century in the North African Church and for reading 2 Thess 2:3-12. Karol Kulpa insists that the seven rules constitute a conceptual unity. However, throughout his monograph one may notice that the notion of the *corpus bipertitum* determines not only Tyconius' understanding of the church, human beings and history, but also his reading of the motifs he chooses from 2 Thess 2:3.7 to justify his worldview.

Bipartition is a necessary condition (*conditio sine qua non*) for the final unity of the church, the human being and temporality. [...] The bipartite reality [...] is not definitive but serves as a means of awakening a believer's decision to get out of the false reality. (215).

The first level of Tyconius' reception of 2 Thess 2:3-12 is constituted by the historical allusions the reader can trace in his major works *Liber Regularum* and *Expositio Apocalypseos*. These references explain the process of the transformative assimilation of the conflict that took place throughout Tyconius' life. These allusions allow us to reconstruct the context of the fourth-century North African Christianity characterized by the Donatist-Caecilianist controversy, whose description by Karol

Kulpa reveals well the escalation of hatred and violence that occurred. The animosities became physical aggressions: the death of the martyrs of Abitinae, the *circumcellions'* acts of self-defense, the Macarian persecution. In addition to the hostilities, "the fight between the two parties escalated on an intellectual and strategic level" (88). The Donatist's propaganda demonized the Caecilianist group and accused its followers of harming the body of Christ. The separation between these two parties finally shifted from disciplinary to theological matters until the consolidation of the schism.

Karol Kulpa's study of Tyconius' "performative reception" of 2Thess 2:3-12 highlights the following three major categories: *homo peccati*, *mysterium facinoris*, and *discessio*.

1. "The man of sin" translates the expression ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας of 2 Thess 2:3, which Tyconius explains in *Liber Regularum* and *Expositio Apocalypseos* by means of other secondary categories: Antichrist (cfr. 1 John 2:22), "the one destined for destruction" (2 Thess 2:3; cfr. Eph 6:12), and "the one who declares himself to be God" (2 Thess 2:4). "The man of sin," along with the other categories, allows Tyconius to explain the presence of evil in the church: "Evil is 'incarnated' in the false members of the Church who in their pride desire to replace God" (127). They are part of the Church as a result of her bipartite nature.

2. "The mystery of evil" translates the expression τὸ μυστήριον τῆς ἀνομίας of 2 Thess 2:7. For Tyconius, this mystery involves both God and the devil, and reflects the spiritual battle of each believer who may decide to love or to hate. Karol Kulpa's analysis reveals that Tyconius associates this motif to the following notions: what and who is restraining (see τὸ κατέχον in 2 Thess 2:6 and ὁ κατέχων in 2 Thess 2:7) and the working of Satan (2 Thess 2:9). The mystery of evil paradoxically serves God's purposes, because the evil actions of the false brothers become their condemnation; these actions lead to a definitive separation of the true Church from the false one, and of the good from the evil.

3. "The separation" or departure is inspired by the term ἀποστασία of 2 Thess 2:3, which Tyconius interprets as *discessio* and relates to the notions of "in the midst" and "from the midst" (cfr. 2 Thess 2:7). The first is situated in the horizon of the present time and describes the unity of two people, while the latter is located in the horizon of the eschatological time, and asserts the eternal separation in the Church. Tyconius explains this separation by means of two other minor categories: *adventus* and condemnation. The coming of the lawless one is described as an *adventus* (cfr. 2 Thess 2:9) of the Antichrist who is in hidden form in the time of the Church. Both the members of the Church and of the pagan world will be judged (cfr. 2 Thess 2:12) by the coming of the lawless one.

The third level of Tyconius' reception of 2 Thess 2:3-12 is constituted by his productive process of theological insights. The abovementioned categories and other interpretative elements indicate Tyconius' theological trilogy formed by ecclesiology, anthropology, and eschatology. Tyconius' ecclesiology understands the Church as a dynamic reality. He refuses the Donatist idea of a community composed only by pure people and demonstrates, instead, the presence of both the evil and the hidden God in the Church. Tyconius' anthropology interprets the spiritual struggles of Christian believers due to their bipartite nature. As a result, they can choose between the paths of hatred or charity. Tyconius' eschatology affirms the future separation of evil from the midst of the Church to emphasize the present ethical exigencies for the believer in the actual Church. Based on Tyconius' reception of 2 Thess 2:3-12, Karol Kulpa argues that reception history functions as a bridge that may connect the present with earlier biblical interpretations, thus, enlightening the present situation of the Church.

To what extent do Tyconius' main categories (*homo peccati*, *mysterium facinoris*, and *discessio*) depend on his interpretation of 2 Thess 2:3-12 or on his perspective of a divided world? Karol Kulpa claims the originality of Tyconius' hermeneutics and argues that his interpretative system deduces the main categories from his exegesis of 2 Thess 2:3-13, in particular from v. 3 and v. 7. It certainly allows him to understand the conflicts and the obscure prophetic texts in light of faith and a renewed eschatology.

In the same vein, his hermeneutics is a good example of the history of the reception of 2 Thess 2:3-12, but also of a typological exegesis, whose concern for the message goes beyond the text itself. Indeed, the meaning of Tyconius' categories exceeds what Second Thessalonians and the Pauline epistolary can say about sin, mystery, and future judgment. For example, this is evident in the contrast between the conception of the mystery in Ephesians and the mystery of evil in Tyconius. The real content of Tyconius' motifs seems to come rather from his ideological or philosophical assumption of a divided world. Thus, by justifying the dualism with which Tyconius explains the Church, human beings and the history, Karol Kulpa remains faithful to his author and his theological convictions.

Juan Granados, S. J.

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