



The Psychotheology of Sin and Salvation: An Analysis of the Meaning of the Death of Christ in Light of the Psychoanalytical Reading of Paul

By Paul V. Axtон

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Through the employment of the work of Slavoj Žižek and his engagement with the Apostle Paul, Axtон argues that Paul in Romans 6-8 understands sin as a lie grounding the subject outside of Christ, and salvation is an exposure and displacement of this lie. The theological significance of Žižek (along with Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan) is his demonstration of the pervasive and systemic nature of this lie and its description as he finds it in Romans 7. The specific overlap of the two disciplines of psychology and theology is found in the psychoanalytic understanding that the human Subject or the psyche is structured in three registers: the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. These three registers function like a lie analogous to the Pauline categories of law, ego, and the 'body of death' which constitute Paul's dynamic of sin's deception.

Axtон argues that if sin is understood as a lie grounding the Subject, the exposure of the lie or the dispelling of any notion of mystery connected to sin is integral to salvation and the reconstructing of the Subject in Christ. While the lie of sin is mediated by the law, new life in the Spirit is not through the law but is a principle unto itself, which though it accounts for the law, is beyond the law.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Rarely has the trajectory of Freud, Lacan, and Zizek been set out with such clarity in pursuit of Pauline theology and rarely has Pauline theology been made to converse so thoroughly with psychoanalysis. The result not only recasts the significance of psychoanalysis in accounting for *sine qua* law and subjectivity but as importantly, the ways in which a Pauline theology of salvation can speak directly into contemporary accounts of the subject *qua* law. Axton’s book is not only written with a sensitivity usually reserved for analysis, it also delivers the analyst’s blow: a true intervention.” *?Marcus Pound, University of Durham, UK*

“The mark of deep insight is to be able to present a creative and insightful nexus of ideas in such a way that afterwards the connections and reconfigurations seem so obvious and natural that it is hard to imagine it being seen any other way. Axton displays just such an insight with Paul and Freudian/Lacanian/Zizekian psychoanalysis. As an expansion of Zizek’s expansion upon Lacan’s expansion upon Freud that returns to the negated Christian ground of Freud, *The Psychotheology of Sin and Salvation* brilliantly exposes the resonances between the theological doctrine of sin and the psychoanalytic mystery of the death drive.” *?Christopher Ben Simpson, Lincoln Christian University, USA*

“Axton applies the work of Zizek and psychoanalysis (Freudian, Lacanian, and otherwise) to the twin threads of sin and salvation in the Pauline Gospels. It is an exercise in biblical exegesis that is as rigorous as it is creative.” *?Gordon Marino, St Olaf College, USA*

About the Author

Paul V. Axton is Professor of Theology and Missions at Central Christian College of the Bible, USA. He spent 15 years as the president of American Christian College in Tokyo, Japan, where he was also a preacher and missionary.

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