

I perceive two advantages to B.'s method: (1) it allows for a methodical comparison of all characters on the same terms, and (2) it evaluates the characters' degree of complexity (none, little, some, much) rather than using limited binary categories such as round/flat. Accordingly, a character is labeled as an agent, a type, a character with personality, or a person. Yet, I usually found simplistic and moralizing the final step of the method, which describes the significance of the character and is meant to achieve a Gadamerian fusion of the historical context with the contemporary world of the reader. For instance, Jesus' mother in Mark would represent "those who, based on certain privileges, assume they are insiders and have access to Jesus (e.g., those who are born in a Christian family) but who are actually outsiders because they misunderstand Jesus and presume they can control him" (122). I am also unsure of the desirability of including a historical element in the narrative approach, because literary approaches help counterbalance historical approaches. Reintroducing historical concerns into narrative criticism jeopardizes the unique perspective it provides when interpreting narrative sections of the NT. Interestingly, when addressing point of view, B. seems to ignore Alain Rabatel's recent work on this topic and relies more on the work of Boris Uspensky, published in the early 1970s. Similarly, when dealing with the portrayal of Peter in Acts, B. relies heavily on Carsten Peter Thiede's 1986 monograph on Simon Peter, mostly written from a historical perspective, and shows no acquaintance with Yvan Mathieu's 2004 massive monograph on Simon Peter in Luke–Acts, written from a narrative perspective. Despite these few shortcomings, B. has provided interpreters with a splendid tool for studying characters in NT narratives.

*Jean-François Racine*  
*Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University*

*Christ Absent and Present: A Study in Pauline Christology.* By Peter Orr.

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Orr's revised dissertation analyzes the tension in Paul's writings between the absence and presence of Christ, an absence and presence that are experienced simultaneously. This tension is expressed, for example, in Romans 8. On the one hand, Paul states that Christ is "in" the believer (8:10); on the other hand, he declares that Christ is at the right hand of God (8:34). O.'s basic assertion is that by appreciating how Paul conceives the "absence" of Christ—an absence that "is explained by his continuing humanity in which he possesses a distinct and distinguishable resurrection body" (3)—we gain greater precision in understanding what the apostle means when he speaks of Christ's "presence." In short, that presence is mediated presence, whether by Paul, the gospel, the church, or, most especially, the Spirit.

After setting forth his thesis (chap. 1), O. offers in chapter 2 a helpful comparison of the works of Albert Schweitzer and Ernst Käsemann. The purpose of the comparison is to raise essential issues and show different ways that commentators understand

the “location” of the exalted Christ (in heaven or on earth) and the manner in which he continues to exercise his agency (impersonal or personal).

Chapter 3 makes the case for Christ’s “absence.” The key texts are Philippians 1:23 (where Paul expresses his desire to depart [i.e., die] in order to be with Christ) and 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 (where Paul describes Christ’s parousia from heaven). Both texts illustrate that Christ is now, in some real sense, absent from believers. Chapter 4 then treats the topic of the nature of the exalted Christ’s body. Appealing to 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 8, O. explains what is meant by Christ’s resurrection body as “heavenly” and “spiritual,” that is, transformed by the Spirit for eschatological existence. Crucial for O. is that the risen Christ “remains a *human* being and retains an individual bodily nature” (101), one that is discrete and therefore “located.” In so doing, O. is positioned to argue in chapter 5 that Paul conceives of Christ’s absence as a “bodily absence.” Illustrative of O.’s exegesis is his interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5:7, namely, that Paul claims, in the present, to live in the sphere of faith rather than in the presence of the visible form of the exalted Christ.

With this foundation in place, O. takes up the question about how to understand the various ways in which Paul teaches that Christ is present. O. provides a useful taxonomy of modes of Christ’s presence: epiphanic (chap. 6), dynamic (chap. 7), and bodily (for example, in individuals, the church, and the Lord’s Supper—chap. 8). O.’s concern throughout these chapters is to provide nuance to what Paul means by Christ’s presence in light of his absence.

A major virtue of O.’s text is its explanation of the Spirit’s role in mediating the presence of Christ. Against interpreters who claim that Paul elides the risen Christ with the Spirit (for example, “Christ is experienced *as* the Spirit”), O. makes a strong case for operating with a more “personal” or “hypostatic” conception of the Spirit. In short, “there is distinction as well as unity between the Spirit and Christ. The presence and activity of the former serve as a substitute for the absence of the latter” (218). In a similar vein, his insistence on the sense of Christ’s absence in connection with the various ways he is “embodied” (e.g., the church as “Christ’s body”) prevents an identification without remainder. But do the various mediations of Christ’s presence render them in any sense less real as O. at times seems to suggest?

In his concluding chapter, O. proposes that the humanity of the exalted Christ is a topic that merits further study. I agree, though as I read his study, I wonder if he offers an overly constrained notion, spatially and temporally, of the “locatedness” of the risen Jesus. When the risen Christ appeared (unmediated?) to Paul, does that mean he was at that moment no longer at “the right hand of God” (as I take O.’s logic to imply)? O. does not treat passages like 1 Corinthians 9:1 and 15:8, where the apostle claims to have “seen” the risen Lord. In his quest for precision, O. seems to shortchange the *mysterious* nature of Jesus’ eschatological existence. The appearance stories in the Gospels suggest that the risen Christ’s embodied existence is not so easily analyzed and grasped.

To be sure, O.’s monograph deserves a careful reading, not only by exegetes but also by systematic theologians. Indeed, it is refreshing to read an exegetical study with a theological focus.

Thomas D. Stegman, S.J.  
Boston College School of Theology and Ministry