

Comment

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This year marks the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses, inaugurating commemorations around the world, from joint Lutheran-Catholic statements to a Luther Playmobile figurine. Marking the anniversary with many, this issue of the *Quarterly* features articles on the Reformers' reading of Scripture by two specialists in the history of interpretation.

G. Sujin Pak, assistant professor of the history of Christianity at Duke Divinity School, reflects on the Reformers' affirmation of Scripture's perspicuity, establishing how it relates to their core commitments to Scripture's prime authority and justification by grace through faith, and its implications for the church's role in scriptural interpretation. Throughout her account, she distinguishes the Reformers' commitment to Scripture's clarity from contemporary misunderstandings in which perspicuity ascribes authoritative interpretation to every individual interpreter on every point of Scripture—and removes interpretive authority from the church. Against these she renders the Reformers' insistence on God as the sole authoritative interpreter, their limitation of Scripture's perspicuity to its soteriological content, and their affirming the continued interpretive role of the church, in submission to Scripture itself.

Stephen J. Chester, professor of New Testament at North Park Theological Seminary, asks what use contemporary interpreters of Paul may make of the Reformers' Pauline interpretation. Against wholesale acceptance or rejection, Chester advocates for—and offers—a more critical engagement that differentiates between aspects of Reformation readings of Paul that contemporary interpreters understand and rightly reject, those they simply misunderstand, and those that are over-emphasized to the neglect of equally important themes, resulting in a false portrait.

He concludes by suggesting avenues for fresh interpretation opened by the Reformers, including a retrieval of the believer's union with Christ, correcting a perceived imbalance on merely extrinsic justification.

The sixteenth-century Reformers called the church *ad fontes*—back to Scripture and its patristic interpreters as the pure fountainhead of Christianity, over and against what they saw as later corruptions. Pak and Chester do the same with respect to the Reformers themselves. Their articles return to the sources, separating the Reformers' thought from subsequent construals of it—whether the New Perspective's portrayal of their Pauline interpretation or contemporary misunderstanding of their affirmation of Scripture's perspicuity.

I suspect commemorating Luther's gospel with a toy in his likeness would scandalize the man Pak quotes as saying, "Would to God that my exposition and that of all doctors might perish. . . . [L]et my exposition and that of all doctors be no more than a scaffold, an aid for the construction of the true building, so that we may ourselves grasp and taste the pure and simple Word of God and abide by it" (LW 52:286). Research such as that of Pak and Chester, that enables us to better see Scripture and its gospel as the Reformers did, provides a fitting commemoration.