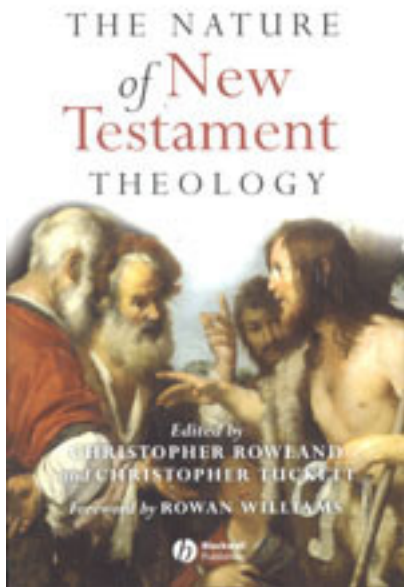


RBL 04/2007



**Rowland, Christopher, and Christopher Tuckett, eds.**

***The Nature of New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of Robert Morgan***

Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2006. Pp. xix + 314. Paper.  
\$34.95. ISBN 1405111747.

Craig L. Blomberg  
Denver Seminary  
Littleton, Colorado

This particularly rich collection of essays forms a very appropriate Festschrift for Robert Morgan on the occasion of his early retirement from Oxford University. Questions addressed range from the definition, purposes, and scope of New Testament theology to the contributions of individual authors or corpora to issues of the role of the historical Jesus, Christian faith, and relevance for the life of the church in the enterprise.

After an introduction by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, John Ashton authors the first of the seventeen chapters. In it he follows closely in the footsteps of Gabler's pioneering work in biblical theology in the late 1700s and William Wrede's at the turn of the twentieth century to argue for a sharp delineation between the work of the historian, who determines what the text meant, and the theologian who determines what it means for the church today. John Barton then complements Ashton by arguing for the same distinction but stressing that, for the most part, at least Old Testament scholars have until quite recently usually engaged even in historical work out of a desire to serve the church. Barton recognizes this is not the only possible motive for exegesis but applauds it as perhaps the best and most important one.

Adela Yarbro Collins turns to apocalypticism and New Testament theology. Again beginning with Gabler, she traces major approaches to her topic over time and then crafts a spectrum of contemporary perspectives with Hal Lindsey's fundamentalism at one extreme and Tina Pippin's harsh attacks at the other. In between are various approaches, including conservative and liberal principlizing and Walter Wink's and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's use of Revelation for social protest. Yarbro Collins concludes that what the text meant and what it means should *not* be as strongly separated as Ashton and Barton insisted, not least lest application be viewed as an optional second step in exegesis.

Philip Esler, as has become his custom, next discusses the social-scientific side of the topic at hand, in this case, "New Testament Interpretation as Interpersonal Communion." Appealing to such "old-fashioned" ideas as authorial intent and the communion of the saints, Esler maintains that we must read texts for their theological meaning in dialogue with the past. Morna Hooker follows this by demonstrating, with Christology as a test case, the unity as well as diversity of theological reflection on core Christian issues across the canon.

Luke Johnson explores the question of unity in diversity as well with his mandate to address the question, "Does a Theology of the Canonical Gospels Make Sense?" Recalling the standard fears of how an affirmative answer could blur all the proper distinctives and emphases of the four individual texts, he nevertheless observes ten points of commonality across all four, *none* of which apply to the apocryphal and gnostic Gospels, thus making canonical choices less arbitrary than some would claim. These commonalities involve (1) realistic narratives, (2) with specific historical roots in first-century Palestine, (3) connecting the story of Jesus to that of Israel using texts and symbols of Torah, (4) emphasizing the ways humans respond to Jesus, (5) highlighting his passion, (6) sharing an understanding of his resurrection that was continuous with his human experience, (7) agreeing that he was a representative agent and spokesperson sent on behalf of God for the sake of other humans even as he radically obeyed God, (8) driving no wedge between the God of Jesus and the God of creation, (9) with God's triumph still in the future, and (10) with discipleship as following in his footsteps in the path of selfless service to others. All ten points likewise demonstrate far more continuity with the later orthodox creeds than with the heterodox literature some would trumpet as better reflecting the earliest stages of belief in Jesus.

Leander Keck follows Johnson by tackling the logic of the major categories of Pauline theology. He plausibly opts for a sequence that reasoned from Paul's experience of the resurrection of Jesus to inaugurated eschatology and revised Christology, to a changed basis for soteriology and definition of ecclesiology, and finally (from solution to plight) to a revised anthropology.

Thus far one could almost imagine that there was a thematic rationale for the sequence of chapters—from more general methodological essays to those that treated a more delimited New Testament corpus or doctrine. Looking ahead to the remaining chapters quashes this idea, and one suddenly recognizes that the entire volume is arranged solely by the alphabetical sequence of the contributors' surnames! Thus Ulrich Luz next treats a topic we might have expected at the end of the book: the contribution of reception history to New Testament theology. In post-Christian Western Europe, reception history holds promise not only for awakening interest among nonpractitioners of the faith but also to bring together diverse Christian traditions, to avoid the arrogance of thinking what is most recent is necessarily best, to bring the scholarly and untutored in communication with each other, and to learn from prayers, liturgy, and hymnody, not just theological treatises, and indeed from other art forms, including painting, dance, and poetry, and other uses of Scripture altogether—in ethical decision making, politics, war, persecution, and even martyrdom.

Margaret Macdonald proceeds to isolate four central challenges for New Testament theologians that emerge from scholarship on early Christian women and then illustrates them from Eph 5:22–33: the contributions of Jewish feminists; the call to engage with modern issues rather than feigning value neutrality; recovering marginalized female voices from the past; and considering how the representation of women and gender issues is influenced by authors' distinctive styles, genres, and other literary conventions. John Muddiman returns to the issues raised in his Black's Ephesians commentary, defending on the one hand the pseudonymity of Ephesians and the Pastorals but denying, on the other, their *Frühkatholisismus*. Heikki Räisänen pursues his antitheological agenda by sketching what a chapter (on individual eschatology) could look like from a book that merely describes ancient Christian beliefs on various central doctrines, comparing and contrasting them with other significant religious antecedents and heirs.

Quite differently, Christopher Rowland and Zoë Bennett argue that New Testament theology must issue in practical theology, with an illustration from the Center for Faith in the Workplace, based in San Antonio, Texas. Gerd Theissen returns to many of the issues raised by Räisänen, plotting four major approaches to the less prescriptive and more descriptive role of religious studies (as over against theology), only one of which even presupposes a Christian framework. The one he finds holding out the most promise subsumes its task under the broader project of charting the history of human cultures. Christopher Tuckett considers all the classic reasons why Jesus, who wrote nothing of which we know, and those reconstructions of his life carried out under the rubric of historical Jesus research, should not be the object of New Testament theology per se and eventually rejects them all.

Frances Watson creatively explores two quite different approaches to John's Gospel, one based on each of the two "endings" in 20:31 and 21:24–25. The former remains more enigmatic, labeling the entire Gospel as filled with "signs," thus referring not just to the overt miracle narratives. The latter eventually supersedes the former, viewing the narrative as compelling testimony. Given that both approaches find ample supporting evidence in numerous parts of the Fourth Gospel, one can understand why Käsemann labeled it naively docetic while many others have found it profoundly antidocetic. Michael Wolter posits the cross as the center of New Testament theology from which all *Sachkritik* may and must be performed legitimately. Finally, Frances Young briefly explores patristic Trinitarian theologizing, arguing that it faithfully reflects, albeit in appropriately contextualized forms, the New Testament's consistent teaching that the activity of Christ and the Spirit form the work of the one true God of Israel.

The largely "all-star cast" of authors of this book's essays alone ensures a sumptuous and diverse fare for hungry readers. Because of the mutually contradictory positions championed in a number of the chapters, no reader can expect to relish fully more than one main course in the methodological meal offered. But each course offers tantalizing tastes, some quite new and others not enjoyed much in recent days. If *Festschriften* could regularly achieve the consistent quality of contributions that the editors of this one have amassed, publishers might stop being so fearful that the genre would only produce money-losers!