

Book Reviews

Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice

Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett

Grand Rapids: Zondervan

2012, 193 pp. paper, \$17.99

ISBN: 978-0310-49223-8

Reviewed by Ruth Anne Reese

In the last 60 years the field of biblical theology has gone through an extensive transformation. At one point it seemed that the main proponents of biblical theology had been relegated to the sidelines, and that scholars would move on to other areas of interest. But in recent decades this area of study has grown with each passing year. Scholars such as Barr, Carson, Childs, Hays, Seitz, VanHoozer, Wright and Watson have all contributed significant works in the field. Sometimes these contributions have been in multiple monographs or volumes. And yet, if one were to pose the question “what is biblical theology?” to ten different biblical scholars, one can expect any variety of different answers. And, since the conversation is ongoing and new works are appearing every year, it becomes more and more difficult to get an overview of this area of exploration. Klink and Lockett have entered into this topography with a helpful map. This short volume is quite intentionally an overview rather than an extensive exploration of any particular position. Their book could be likened to a snapshot from 10,000 feet of the “lay of the land” in the year 2012. Changes will happen in the years ahead, but this book gives a solid picture of the general terrain.

In their brief introduction, the authors provide a helpful orientation to the book. The field that they map out is guided by two orientations—biblical theologians who are more oriented by history and biblical theologians who are more oriented by theology. What follows are five types of biblical theology. Each type has an introductory chapter that lays out the presuppositions, proposals, and character of that type of biblical theology. This is followed by a second chapter that focuses on a representative scholar from that position. At the end of the second chapter is a critical assessment of the scholar’s approach. Each of the five approaches receives an equally critical assessment,

and none of the positions that they present are without their challenges. Throughout the book the authors recognize that many of the five types of biblical theology overlap with one or more of the other types of biblical theology. And yet, the guide that they provide helps readers understand the nuances between different perspectives on biblical theology.

The five types of biblical theology that they explore range from the most historical, which sees the task as one of solely historical description, to middle positions such as redemption-history and narrative approaches, to more theological positions such as the canonical approach and a more purely theological approach. While most of these give some attention to other aspects of the continuum, providing the continuum gives a way for both students and scholars to think about the different types of biblical theology that are being proposed by a wide variety of scholars. Finally, in each of the chapters, the authors give attention to the audience to which each of the approaches is speaking—whether the academy or the church or both.

The authors provide a welcome guide to the different approaches to biblical theology and its current array of practices and practitioners; however, I would have liked to see a little more discussion of the way in which particular cultural realities (modernism, post-modernism, globalization, and other changes in culture) are related to the different types of biblical theology. One way of addressing this would be to think about whether different forms of biblical theology are developed in response to particular cultural realities. In addition, some discussion of the location of biblical theology in relationship to particular ecclesial realities would also be helpful. At one point the authors do talk about the connection of particular forms of biblical theology with certain schools, and that is a very helpful observation. But helping us to understand if particular forms of biblical theology are connected with particular ecclesial traditions would be a solid addition to the book. Finally, if the authors are invited to produce a second edition, it is my hope that they will add an annotated introductory reading guide at the end of each chapter. Such a guide would provide students of biblical theology with helpful hints about where to start in an area of study that has become daunting even for some seasoned scholars.

This book is a helpful guide for students, and I would highly recommend it for a variety of introductory classes (theology, biblical theology, hermeneutics, and exegesis). Pastors who are interested in biblical theology may also find this a helpful guide. And it can also provide a tool for scholars that may helpfully guide conversation since the area of biblical theology continues to be a topic of interest for a wide variety of scholars.

Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament

Murray J. Harris

Grand Rapids: Zondervan

2012, 304 pp. cloth, \$42.99

ISBN: 978-0310-49392-1

Reviewed by Dale F. Walker

Harris is professor emeritus of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. The present book is an outgrowth of a 45-page article with the same title, tucked away as an appendix to *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Colin Brown, editor, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978, Volume 3, pp. 1171-1215). Here the article is expanded to a 293-page book.

The cover adds a subtitle, “An Essential Reference Resource for Exegesis.” The word “reference” is important to note; this is not a book to simply read through. All of the 17 “proper” prepositions in the New Testament are dealt with, a separate chapter for each one. For each of the prepositions, basic meanings are illustrated, usually with some discussion of usages in classical writings and in the Septuagint, along with notes on post-New Testament usages. Usages in significant phrases in the New Testament are illustrated; some of these lead to substantial discussions of particular New Testament verses with theological implications. Some usages of prepositions in compound verbs are mentioned, but it is disappointing that more is not done in these sections. More is also needed on usage of prepositions with particular verbs, like the two chapters on prepositions with *baptizo* and with *pisteuo*. More attention could also be given to 42 “improper” prepositions found in the New Testament.

Throughout the book, reference is made to the major Greek grammars; the secondary literature on specific words and phrases is minimal, less than in the previously published article. The indexes, important for a reference book like this, are very good. The index of biblical references neatly displays where a verse is just referred to, where it is quoted as an illustration, and where it is used in extended discussion. This would be very valuable in reference work.

The book would be of most help to intermediate Greek students. But look for a deep discount from the \$42.99 list price.

The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction

Donald Alfred Hagner

Grand Rapids: Baker Academic

2012, 896 pp. cloth, \$49.99

ISBN: 978-0-8010-3931-7

Reviewed by Randall Hardman

Donald Hagner is well known for his work in the arena of New Testament (NT) studies and his most recent work, *The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction* is everything one might expect from his pen. Given the plethora of NT introductions that exist in the market one might wonder whether another introduction is truly necessary. Hagner attempts to separate his work in two distinct ways: First, the book is about as exhaustive a treatment on the NT as one could want. Numerous topics are treated which one does not always find within an introductory text, ultimately making up eight topical sections and forty-three chapters. To extend the book further would ultimately require two separate volumes. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Hagner attempts not just to describe the issues surrounding the New Testament and the individual contents therein, but tries to place the entire sweep of his work within “the history of salvation” (xi). Thus, Hagner’s introduction is composed of various topics and how they relate to the grand metanarrative of scripture (for example, Hagner devotes a chapter to seeing the Old Testament within the lens of the New Testament) and, then, a focus on the New Testament books themselves and their relation to salvation-history. In other words, Hagner attempts to reflect the continuity of Scripture under the guise of divine inspiration.

Hagner’s book is up to date in scholarship but often times points back towards the strengths of older scholarship assumed to be put to rest. This approach sometimes means that the author leaves alternative ideas and theories on a given topic for the reader to consider and judge, though he often hints towards his own preference on an issue. The work is also to be commended for its interaction with a broad array of scholarship. Hagner both understands and represents various views on scholarship well and interacts heavily with those outside of the evangelical tradition. Thus, while the book is primarily devoted towards the seminary student, church leader, and interested Christian, it does have the benefit of not *merely* being a theological introduction. Historical-critical topics treated range from the nature and existence of Q to a history of the Jesus Quest to textual criticism and beyond. This approach then moves forward into his treatments of individual books. Also helpful are the numerous suggestions for further reading located at the end of each chapter, though all resources are in English.

Of course, all introductory texts suffer from the consequences of brevity and Hagner’s is not without exception. Given both the nature of the text and the subjective preferences of readers, offering my own thoughts on what should have been included are of little use here. Suffice it to say, however, that Hagner’s text accomplishes what many introductory texts wish for. The student—and even the scholar—who commits to the book will no doubt walk away having learned much.

Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models

A. Scott Moreau

Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications

2012, 429 pp. paper, \$28.99

ISBN: 978-0-8254-3389-4

Reviewed by Robert A. Danielson

Scott Moreau, who is well known in missiological circles, has launched into an ambitious program to map Evangelical views of contextualization in an attempt to compare the models used by Evangelicals and develop a framework for Evangelical contextualization similar to the classic Roman Catholic models by Bevans and Schreiter. In this book, Moreau begins by laying out the theoretical background of contextualization. Then in the second half of the book he presents six Evangelical approaches to contextualization with descriptions, examples, and evaluations of each approach. He further breaks down each type of approach by the “flow of approach” or the various ways missionaries might use to apply the various types, these include a linear approach, a dialogue approach, a cyclical approach, an organic approach, and a “not clear” category. This provides a total of thirty different possible permutations of Evangelical models of contextualization.

What really makes Moreau’s work stand out is the methodology of his research. He categorized 249 actual Evangelical cases of contextualization and clustered them according to various emphases in order to arrive at his final “map” of Evangelical contextualization. All of these cases, along with maps of other Evangelical missiologists and an impressive bibliography complete this study. The book itself is designed as a textbook with each chapter complete with an overview, outline, keywords (more of a small glossary for each chapter than classic keywords), questions for reflection, and resources for further reading.

The first section of Moreau’s book is an exceptional overview of the major scholars, themes, and critical issues of missiology in general and contextualization in particular. It is well suited for an introductory college text. The second half of the work is an admirable study and approach to understanding how Evangelicals have dealt with the issue of contextualization both theoretically and practically. However, it is much more of a functional categorizing of contextualization that does not really correlate with either Bevans’ or Schreiter’s more theoretical models. While admirable to attempt to define unique Evangelical models, Moreau’s approaches can still be categorized under Bevans and Schreiter. This is probably a good thing, as thirty models could be a bit too unwieldy in a classroom setting.

It is vital to add however, that Moreau is clearly on the right track in attempting to understand how the models of contextualization are worked

out at the grassroots level, and his statistical analysis is quite enlightening. Academic scholars are likely to be more attracted to the second half of his work than the first. *Contextualization in World Missions* clearly leaves the reader with a bifurcated feeling. It is half introductory textbook and half academic research, and it might have made more sense to develop it as two separate books. There are also enough basic grammatical errors to call for an additional reading by another editor.

Clearly the time is right for a solid Evangelical view of contextualization, and with more work, Moreau may have found an approach that will help develop this view more fully. If his clustering approach of work on the ground can be more fully interwoven with academic theoretical models, and if the view can still maintain the vital distinction between the types of approach and the flow of approach without creating confusion, this book may indeed be groundbreaking.

The Right Church: Live Like the First Christians

Charles E. Gutenson

Nashville: Abingdon Press

2012, 194 pp. paper, \$14.99

ISBN: 978-1-4267-4911-7

Reviewed by Brian Yeich

In the book, *The Right Church*, Charles E. Gutenson states that his “foremost goal” is to illustrate how the understandings of faithful Christianity differ between early followers of Jesus and today’s Christians. To that end, Gutenson seems to succeed in offering a glimpse of the perceptions of early Christians as well as some examples of that contrast. To accomplish this, Gutenson divides the book into three parts: Church Life, Social Life, and Civil Life. In each of these sections he explores the writings of representative early church leaders such as Irenaeus, Clement of Rome, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Basil, the Desert Fathers and Mothers, Thomas Aquinas, and highlights areas of contrast.

Using the examples of Athanasius, Origen and others, the section on Church Life begins with exploring how the early church viewed scripture. In this first chapter, Gutenson emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in both the development of the canon and the interpretation of scripture. While Gutenson affirms the early church’s belief that the scriptures were inspired by God, he also points out that early church thinking allowed for other inspired writings. The next chapter continues with a discussion of unity and schism among early Christians. Gutenson is quick to point out that any utopian view of the early church without controversy or conflict is not accurate. However, he does point out that in spite of the controversies, including some challenging

heresies, the church was essentially united for approximately one thousand years. Gutenson contrasts this unified status with the “fractured” body of Christ that exists today. After exploring the writings of Irenaeus, Clement of Rome, Cyprian and others to illustrate some of the challenges faced and overcome by the early church, Gutenson then turns to offer some suggestions for healing current divisions in the body of Christ. In the last chapter of the first section, Gutenson addresses discipleship in the early church. He contrasts what he observes of the contemporary church’s approach to discipleship, which he describes as “laissez faire, with the more intense discipleship of the early church characterized by a robust catechesis.” Giving examples from Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and Cyril of Jerusalem, Gutenson suggests that the current church return to catechetical teachings for new Christians of all ages which would include central beliefs and practices of the faith.

Gutenson turns next to the section on Social Life by describing the early church’s views on human freedom. Rather than the freedom to do as we please which characterizes modern Christians, he observes, using Augustine and Aquinas as examples, that the early church’s view of freedom was the freedom from sin. In the next chapter, Gutenson engages in a discussion regarding the early church fathers’ view of wealth and poverty. Citing examples from Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom, Gutenson observes that from the perspective of the early church, the issue with wealth was whether it was utilized for a person’s own enjoyment or for building up others – especially the poor. Finally, in the chapter on the stewardship of creation, Gutenson observes that while there were no identified ecological crises during the time of the early church, early church leaders did speak to the respect of God’s creation and to the avoidance of gluttony and greed.

In part three, Gutenson turns to the subject of Civil Life where he begins by exploring the early church’s view on society and government. He analyzes the “Lockean liberalism,” in which today’s church sees a separation between the private and public spheres of life and contrasts that train of thought with the early church and its prophetic voice against the establishment. The early church’s view on war is the next subject for Gutenson. He points out that while in the first two hundred years, the majority of the church was pacifist, there have been differing views of war throughout the history of the church from the “just war” theory of Augustine and Aquinas to the strand of the church that sees war as never justified. Finally, in the last chapter Gutenson turns to the desert fathers and mothers of the church. His primary point in this chapter echoes the overall theme of the book, namely, that there have been Christians throughout the ages who have perceived faithful Christianity very differently than most Christians in the present day.

Gutenson seems to do good job at pointing out the contrasts between the early church and contemporary Christianity without forcing the perspectives

on the reader. Rather, he invites the reader to reflect on the differences we may have with those in the past. Gutenson also introduces the reader to a wide variety of classic Christian writings, which beg to be explored in greater depth.

While overall, Gutenson seems to be successful in illustrating the contrast between early and contemporary expressions of Christianity, there are times when he seems to step beyond and become somewhat prescriptive. Gutenson also presents the contrasts between early and contemporary Christianity from largely a Western view. It would be interesting to see how these contrasts play out with the Global South as well as the West.

Overall, *The Right Church* is a thought provoking look at the early Christians and provides today's Christians with much food for thought in reflecting on their own discipleship and call to live faithfully in their current reality.

Interfaith Dialogue in Practice

Daniel S. Brown, Jr., ed.

Kansas City: Rockhurst University Press

2012, 160 pp. paper, \$30.00

ISBN: 978-1-886761-32-2

Reviewed by Robert A. Danielson

This volume of nine papers is the result of several conferences by the Religious Communication Association, and attempts to approach the issue of interfaith dialogue through the academic field of communication studies, instead of through the usual lenses of theology, sociology, or politics. The papers also attempt to focus on dialog between the Abrahamic religions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The nine essays in this collection range from practical case studies to more theoretical discussions of the topic. As editor Daniel Brown notes in his opening essay, "Interfaith dialogue is communication" (1).

Gerald Driskill and John Gribas present a very solid beginning essay basing dialogue between the Abrahamic religions on common shared commitments to grace and truth, as well as a strong view of hospitality in each faith. They also integrate this within a communication tool called The Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) as a way to preserve open dialogue and yet allow participants to remain true to their faith commitments.

Jacob Stutzman argues for the increased need for general religious literacy in the United States as a key foundational element of interfaith dialogue, in order to avoid "Epcot-type" superficial experiences of other faiths. Key to this is having people knowledgeable of their own religious traditions, especially when they are in the cultural majority. People in the majority seldom feel the need to defend their own faith traditions, but as a result they also minimize and see minority faiths only through very shallow experiences.

Paul Fortunato and Diana Bowen examine the structure and impact of a public interreligious dialogue project at the University of Houston, which developed a series of public speakers with open question times over the course of a year, primarily to encourage Muslim-Christian dialogue in the public sphere. In a similar way, Jeffrey Kurtz and Mark Orten examine three case studies of interfaith dialogue at Denison University in Ohio, of which the most interesting is *The Open House*, a physical building designed to be shared and used by multiple faith groups to encourage dialogue.

Both the article by Joel Ward and David Stern, which examines interfaith dialogue through the influence of Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin on communication, and the essay by Kenneth Chase, examine the importance of having people involved in interfaith dialogue who are committed to the truth claims of their own faith. It is through dealing with differences openly, and not looking for the lowest common denominator or artificial commonalities, that real dialogue can occur. Through such dialog, vital peacemaking efforts can result, as person-to-person relationships are developed across religious boundaries.

While this book is an interesting attempt to include communication studies into interfaith dialogue, a scholar looking for really new insights is bound to be discouraged. Many of these essays only reinforce what is already known in the literature of interfaith dialogue, and the theme of communication studies and its unique contributions to the field does not really come out very strongly. Added to this is the realization that in a book about interfaith dialogue between Christians, Muslims, and Jews, there are no Muslim contributors to add their voices to the work. Interfaith dialogue is indeed fundamentally about communication, and I am convinced that communication studies, especially intercultural communication studies, could be very helpful in this endeavor. Unfortunately, this book only scratches the surface of what is a very promising avenue of study.