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# Annual New Testament Literature Survey (1999)

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Alistair I Wilson

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## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to survey recent literature on the New Testament. I make no claims that this survey is exhaustive. I have not restricted my selection to evangelical authors, but have also included reference to several constructive non-evangelical works, which nonetheless contain comments or conclusions that I would not accept. The focus of this article will be on works published in the last 24 months, but since there has been no similar survey in recent editions of *Foundations*, I will perhaps be excused if occasionally I refer to important literature published as far back as 1993.<sup>1</sup>

## NT Theology

There are three categories of books on NT Theology to consider here. First there are volumes that seek to present the theological voice of the entire NT canon. The posthumous *New Testament Theology* by **George B Caird**, (and completed by his student **LD Hurst**) was published in 1994. Though not holding to a sufficiently robust doctrine of Scripture, Caird is nonetheless an able guide through the NT. His comments are generally sensitive to the message of the biblical text, and often penetrating. Stretching to two large volumes is the recently translated and published NT Theology of **Adolf Schlatter**.<sup>2</sup> Schlatter should be required reading for those who ask, "can any good thing come out of Germany?" This reformed Swiss scholar, who taught in the University of Tübingen for many years, offers a challenging (and demanding) presentation of the message of the NT, demonstrating equal concern for history and theology.

Worth watching is the McMaster New Testament Studies series. Edited by **RN Longenecker**, these volumes aim to draw together essays by specialist biblical interpreters written in accessible style on topics of significance for the life of the church. To date, three volumes have appeared in the series: *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*,<sup>3</sup> *The Road from Damascus: The Impact of Paul's Conversion on His Life Thought and Ministry*,<sup>4</sup> and *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament*.<sup>5</sup> Generally these volumes achieve what was intended for them. They certainly dispense with much of the clutter of academic papers, and there is a clear effort on the part of the authors to express themselves clearly, although some papers do not make the connection with the life of the church particularly obvious.

Also dealing with a specific issue is the two volume set, *The Grace of God and the Bondage of the Will*, edited by **Thomas R Schreiner** and **Bruce A Ware**.<sup>6</sup> Written as a direct response to the Arminian theology of *The Grace of God, The Will of Man*,<sup>7</sup> and echoing the title of Luther's famous work, this collection of essays examines the theology of the sovereignty of God's grace in salvation. Although the volumes include a broad range of essays from theological, historical and practical perspectives, there is also a group of fine exegetical papers from authors such as Grudem, Piper and Schreiner.

In a similar vein is the important volume, *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*,<sup>8</sup> edited by **A Köstenberger, TR Schreiner & HS Baldwin**. This is a valuable attempt to earth ecclesiastical practice in careful exegetical theology, written from a "complementarian" perspective.

Secondly, some volumes present the theology of a particular canonical document. Notable in this regard is the series entitled (rather prosaically) "New Testament Theology" edited by Professor James DG Dunn, and published by Cambridge University Press. Most of the proposed volumes have now been published, and many are useful. Particularly excellent is the volume on Revelation by **Richard J Bauckham**.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, we must mention works that focus on the thought of one individual NT author. Not surprisingly, Paul has been the focus of several important works published in the last few years. Pride of place must go to the outstanding achievement of **James DG Dunn** in producing his *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. This is a superb volume, profound yet readable. There is no doubt that some of Dunn's conclusions can be and should be contested, but that is the task of a careful and respectful review. In a few words, all that can be conveyed is the clarity, rigor and usefulness of this landmark volume.

On a similar scale, and equally indispensable, is **Gordon Fee's** book on the Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul, which has been reviewed elsewhere in *Foundations*.<sup>10</sup> Fee's skill as an interpreter of Paul is immense, and the wise preacher will listen to his opinion, even if he finally rejects it.

The impact of EP Sanders' writings is felt in numerous ways in Pauline studies, and in particular it has prompted a vibrant debate on Paul's view of the Mosaic law. Three useful volumes that critically interact with Sanders and his followers from an evangelical perspective are **Thomas R Schreiner's** *The Law and Its Fulfillment*,<sup>11</sup> **Frank Thielman's** *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach*,<sup>12</sup> and **Colin Kruse's** *Paul, the Law and Justification*.<sup>13</sup> These volumes also provide useful sparring partners for readers who wish to wrestle with James Dunn's recent volume. With regard to the theme of justification, **Philip Eveson's** valuable study may be consulted for discussion of some important contemporary literature.<sup>14</sup>

Encompassing all three of these categories, mention should be made of the various titles in the series "New Testament Biblical Theology" published by Apollos. Some volumes in the series are on OT Theology, but several devoted in full or in part to NT themes, such as recent volumes by **Craig Blomberg** and **Murray Harris**. This series includes several excellent volumes, and the preacher will find in them rich material based on solid exegesis, which will still provoke fresh thinking on issues of contemporary application.

## **NT Ethics**

The issue of NT ethics has not been particularly well served in terms of serious theological literature. A substantial step to rectify this situation has been taken with the publication of **Richard B Hays' volume, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament***.<sup>15</sup> Although one wishes that Hays' doctrine of scripture was more robust, yet he takes a commendable stand on the contemporary relevance of NT teaching to issues such as homosexuality and warfare. This is a stimulating book, which repays careful and thoughtful reading.

## Commentaries

Turning our attention to commentaries on individual books, we have only space to mention a few significant volumes.

Beginning with the Gospels, the recent commentary by **Craig Keener**<sup>16</sup> is a detailed exegetical work, which nonetheless is presented accessibly, with the preacher and teacher in mind. A mammoth work, it deserves more detailed evaluation at a later date, but it shows great promise and deserves a brief mention here. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT) series has served preachers faithfully for over forty years. Several fresh volumes are worthy of note here. The NICNT replacement on Luke is written by **Joel B Green**,<sup>17</sup> who draws on literary studies of the Gospels for his interpretation. However, the preacher may find more help in **D Bock's** massive two-volume commentary on Luke in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series (BECNT).<sup>18</sup> Though Bock teaches in the dispensational Dallas Theological Seminary, he is a so-called "progressive dispensationalist" which indicates, in part, that he is more sensitive to the importance of the OT for understanding the NT than we might expect.

On Acts, we must note the major commentary by **Ben Witherington**, who continues his pattern of producing "socio-rhetorical" commentaries. Although the phrase sounds daunting, it basically indicates sensitivity to the world of the first century and to the structure of the text that leads to helpful exegesis.<sup>19</sup> For a more specifically theological perspective, **DG Peterson and IH Marshall** have edited *Witness to the Gospel* on the theology of Acts.<sup>20</sup> Bridging the gap between scholarship and application is the innovative volume by **Dennis Johnson**, entitled *The Message of Acts*.<sup>21</sup> Pastors will find that Johnson provides a useful model for exposition.

**Douglas J Moo's** commentary on Romans in the NICNT series has already earned an assured place on the shelves of ministers.<sup>22</sup> Vying for attention, however, is the new commentary on Romans by **Thomas R Schreiner**,<sup>23</sup> which is a model of clear expression and keeps the needs of the preacher in view, yet does not evade important issues. The recent commentary by **Paul W Barnett** on **2 Corinthians** is a further welcome addition to the NICNT series. On Galatians, **Ben Witherington's** commentary, entitled *Grace in Galatia* may be found to be helpful.<sup>24</sup> It is typically thorough and well written, with an eye to application. Witherington's concern for rhetorical structure, though it will not convince at every point, leads to a sense of the coherence of the argument of the letter.

Philippians is well served by good commentaries. Noteworthy are **Peter O'Brien's** NIGTC volume and **Moisés Silva's** volume in the BECNT series. More recently, **Gordon Fee's** contribution to the NICNT series<sup>25</sup> has demonstrated that Fee is able to maintain the exceptionally high standards of textual, historical, literary and theological comment set by his commentary on 1 Corinthians for the same series.

Recent additions to the admirable Crossway Classic Commentaries series are **John Calvin** on *1&2 Timothy/Titus* and **John Owen** on *Hebrews*. These volumes are condensed and modernised versions of classics from various ages. Calvin is always contemporary, and the astonishingly brief edition of Owen's *magnum opus* may provide a helpful entry point to his voluminous writings.

Two recent volumes in the Welwyn commentary series<sup>26</sup> deal with short letters.

**Peter Barnes** provides an exposition of the Johannine letters, and **John Benton** writes on Jude. It is particularly good to see the latter document given a separate treatment, which may open it up to readers who have so far neglected it.

Recent years have seen several major commentary series add a commentary on Revelation. While Aune (WBC) and the revised Mounce (NICNT) will be important resources for the serious exegete, perhaps the most important volume has come from the pen of **Greg K Beale**.<sup>27</sup> For those who have reasonable competence in Greek, this volume provides virtually an exhaustive discussion of the text from a thoroughly evangelical standpoint. Beale is particularly helpful on the Old Testament background to Revelation.

## Conclusion

The volumes identified above are only a small proportion of the aids to exegesis and exposition available to the pastor. It is our responsibility to use them widely and wisely so as to make more effective our proclamation of the Gospel of God.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The most useful survey of literature published up to 1993 is DA Carson, *New Testament Commentary Survey* (Leicester, IVP, 1993).
- <sup>2</sup> Vol 1: *The History of the Christ* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1997); Vol 2: *The Theology of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1999),
- <sup>3</sup> Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1996.
- <sup>4</sup> Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1997.
- <sup>5</sup> Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998.
- <sup>6</sup> Grand Rapids, Baker, 1995.
- <sup>7</sup> Clark Pinnock (ed). Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1989.
- <sup>8</sup> Grand Rapids, Baker, 1995.
- <sup>9</sup> Cambridge, CUP, 1993.
- <sup>10</sup> *Foundations* 38 (1997) 46-48.
- <sup>11</sup> Grand Rapids, Baker, 1993.
- <sup>12</sup> Downers Grove, IVP, 1994.
- <sup>13</sup> Leicester, Apollos, 1995.
- <sup>14</sup> See the review by C. Bennett in *Foundations* 38 (1997) 45-46.
- <sup>15</sup> Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1996.
- <sup>16</sup> Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1999.
- <sup>17</sup> Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1996.
- <sup>18</sup> Grand Rapids, Baker, 1994, 1996.
- <sup>19</sup> See the review by P. Brown in *Foundations* 42 (1999) 45-46.
- <sup>20</sup> Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998.
- <sup>21</sup> Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998.
- <sup>22</sup> See the review by J Woods in *Foundations* 40 (1998) 45-46.
- <sup>23</sup> BECNT, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1998.
- <sup>24</sup> Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1998.
- <sup>25</sup> Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995.
- <sup>26</sup> Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995.
- <sup>27</sup> NIGTC, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998.

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*Rev. Alistair I Wilson teaches New Testament at the Highland Theological College, Dingwall*

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