

Introduction

In this article, I will highlight some recent literature of which serious students of the New Testament, whether college lecturers, students, or preachers, might wish to be aware. As in the case of previous surveys, my criteria for inclusion have been as follows: I have included those titles on the NT, and related subjects, which (a) have been available to me; (b) seem to me to be significant and worthy of note; (c) are primarily exegetical and theological, rather than homiletical; (d) I think could be of benefit to students and/or preachers as well as theological lecturers. Thus, I make no claim to be exhaustive in my survey, but I hope that my comments may still prove useful.

Introductory Issues

Interpreting the New Testament Text,¹ edited by D. L. Bock and B. M. Fanning, serves two functions: firstly, it is a collection of essays gathered to honour Professor Harold Hoehner and secondly it is intended to be a students' guide to 'the art and science of exegesis'. The fact that it manages to accomplish both of these rather different tasks so well is a tribute to the editors and their arrangement of the material. The book is divided into two distinct parts: Part 1 is a helpful analysis of the methods and procedures of exegesis. This has been written by members of the Dallas Theological Seminary NT faculty. Standard topics such as genre, word studies and background studies are covered. Some of the chapters assume a reasonable knowledge of Greek (e.g. on sentence diagramming) but most preachers and students will be able to profit from the chapters with some selective reading. Part two is

intended to show the various methods and procedures in action, and here an international group of scholars, including Howard Marshall, Joel Williams, David Catchpole, Helge Stadelmann and Earle Ellis write fairly short chapters on specific NT texts, illustrating one of the issues dealt with in Part 1. So, for example, Edwin Yamauchi illustrates the use of background material as he shows why the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8 was not from Ethiopia. Such guides can be daunting for busy preachers because they can give the impression that one would need to spend three weeks preparing for one sermon! But the editors of this guide recognize that a great deal depends on the student's developing experience as the 'art' of biblical exegesis is learned and they have presented an extremely valuable guide for all who wish to hone their skills.

Biblical Theology

Allen P. Ross has produced an important study of biblical worship called *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation*.² The bulk of the book deals with the biblical presentation of worship in the various biblical documents, but there are also some concluding reflections on the way worship should be expressed in the church. Ross has clearly drawn on a significant body of scholarship in his research, but scholarship does not obscure the main points and this clearly written book would be of great benefit to any serious Christian reader who wishes to reflect on worship in the life of the church.

In the context of controversy regarding the nature of Jesus' death on the cross, S. Jeffrey, M. Ovey and A. Sach have written, *Pierced for our Transgressions*.³ This

book first addresses the key biblical texts which are relevant to the doctrine of penal substitution and also considers the way in which this doctrine has been presented throughout church history. In the second main part, the authors tackle particular objections to penal substitution, making this a useful tool for developing effective apologetics. This is an important contribution to our understanding of a central doctrine and is worth reading carefully.

Of a rather different nature is the volume of essays edited by C. Rowland and C. Tuckett, entitled *The Nature of New Testament Theology*.⁴ This book is a Festschrift for Robert Morgan. Although the contributors are key figures in modern academic New Testament studies, few hold a high view of the biblical text and this volume, though containing some stimulating studies, can be left to those who have a particular research interest in the area.

Gospel Studies

One of the most remarkable books of the last couple of years is R. Bauckham's major book, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*.⁵ Bauckham argues that the Gospels should be regarded as 'testimony' and that the idea that the canonical gospels are founded on eyewitness accounts should be treated much more seriously than it has been by academics. While many Christians may wonder why this should be startling news when they already accept this view, the fact that this thesis has been taken up in serious debate among scholars is a significant development which is to be welcomed.

Dale C. Allison has published a collection of *Studies in Matthew*.⁶ These were mainly written in the process of writing his major ICC commentary with

W. D. Davies. Subtitled 'Interpretation Past and Present', the most interesting section is the first part which is a collection of exegetical studies which draws heavily on the Church Fathers. This is primarily a book for postgraduate students working on Matthew's Gospel.

Hendrickson has issued (or reissued) four companion volumes on the four Gospels, each with the subtitle *Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*. The authors are W. Carter (Matthew – a reissue of his earlier work and John); Francis J. Maloney (Mark) and Mikeal C. Parsons (Luke).⁷ These volumes pay particular attention to literary and theological issues and are useful in that respect. Parsons' volume is more disparate in its themes than the others.

Simon Gathercole has written a bold exegetical and theological work, *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark and Luke*.⁸ Gathercole takes on a significant academic perspective, not least that of the supervisor of his doctoral thesis, J. D. G. Dunn, that the NT does not teach the pre-existence of the Son. This is a demanding but important study with significant theological implications. Serious readers are encouraged to read it.

Pauline Studies

J. D. G. Dunn's, *The New Perspective on Paul*,⁹ is a collection of Dunn's essays on this controversial topic. Although many of the essays have been published previously, it is very useful for those who wish to understand the New Perspective on Paul to have this handy collection of one of the most significant figures in the debate, including the paper which introduced the terminology of the 'New Perspective' in the first place. The value of the

collection is further increased by a long essay which prefaces the collection which presents Dunn's reflections on the whole discussion.

In a debate which has great implications for the church, there can be a good deal of fiery rhetoric, so we can be grateful that C. Venema has authored *The Gospel of Free Acceptance in Christ*,⁴⁰ in which he attempts to present a critical response to the New Perspective which is nonetheless measured in its tone and fair in its presentation of the views of those with whom he disagrees. He begins by outlining the classic Reformed view of the Gospel, with particular reference to justification. He then moves on to present the views of several key figures in recent Pauline studies: E. P. Sanders, J. D. G. Dunn and N. T. Wright. It is to Venema's credit that he does attempt to take account of different views among these authors and also that he recognises the significant contribution that N. T. Wright has made to conservative scholarship on the Gospels. In the final section, Venema attempts to address the concerns raised by the New Perspective with exegetical evidence and careful engagement with a variety of authors. In a number of places he recognises that there are valid points made by those he criticises and is willing to accept these contributions as well as challenge other points. It is unlikely that this will be the end of the discussion, but the irenic (and readable) nature of this book makes it an important contribution.

A revision of an older study by Francis Watson entitled, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*,⁴¹ Watson's is an interesting voice in the current debate regarding the New Perspective: he is a senior academic who has been quite outspoken in some of his criticisms of

this strand of biblical studies. This is mainly of interest to advanced theological students and lecturers.

Also relevant to this debate is Brian Vickers' doctoral thesis which has been published as *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness*.⁴² Subtitled 'Paul's Theology of Imputation', it is highly relevant in the current discussion of this aspect of Paul's thought. Despite its origins as an academic thesis, the main body of the text is very readable and should not deter any serious reader. The occasional use of Greek and Hebrew terms in their original script can probably be worked round without difficulty. Although it is fundamentally an exegetical study, Vickers has included significant references to various confessional statements and also extensive footnotes which draw on ancient and modern theological reflections as well as recent NT scholarship. The tone is respectful but firm. As an aside, as a Scot, I was amused to read 'Carlisle, Scotland' in the bibliographical information for a book (page 74)!

Following on from his excellent study of the Spirit in Paul, Gordon Fee has now written a major study of *Pauline Christology*.⁴³ The first part treats all the major passages in the NT letter by letter, while the second part is a group of synthetic studies: 'Christ, the Divine Savior', 'Jesus as Second Adam', etc. Throughout, Fee provides numerous exegetical insights and overall argues that Paul has a coherent Christology. Fee also has a delightful manner of expression and a level of credibility in the academy that allows him, at times, to make startling criticisms of the accepted methods and assumptions of academics which few could get away with! (See, for example, page 6 and footnote 16). This book also