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Jon M. Isaak, *New Testament Theology: Extending the Table*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011.

Jon Isaak has written an engaging, comprehensive theology of the New Testament. He understands “biblical theology” to have two dimensions: “descriptive” and “constructive” (17). More than half of his volume is given to the “descriptive” task, treating matters of authorship, context, and distinctive content and perspective, much like an Introduction. He begins with the Pauline corpus, then treats each of the Gospels, including Luke/Acts as one work, and Revelation, and concludes with the Catholic Epistles. Isaak is excellent at helping the reader appreciate the distinctive character, voice, and theological perspective of each author. He is fully conversant with, and judicious in, his use of critical methods of biblical scholarship, not shying away from stating his own critical judgments, even where those might run up against cherished traditions. His treatments of the contents of the NT will give the reader a solid introduction to where contemporary scholarship finds itself.

In the second part (after the “intermission”) Isaak takes up the theologically “constructive” task of addressing topics such as christology, revelation, theology, anthropology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. He wishes to respect the multi-valence of the biblical witness. Even so, some of the distinctiveness of the various voices gives way, perhaps inevitably, to the harmony of the choir (xviii, 229). While scholarship often keeps them separate, Isaak wisely insists on keeping them together, believing that the theology of the church must be deeply rooted in an informed reading of, and listening to, the NT. He effectively employs G. B. Caird’s metaphor of a conference table (xviii, 19, *passim*) to which are invited not only the various NT writers but also interpreters, past and present, including readers of Isaak’s own effort to moderate the discussion and elicit clarification from the participants. Sitting close to Isaak at the conference table are Luke Timothy Johnson, G. B. Caird, Norman Kraus, and his former teachers and colleagues at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, most prominently John E. Toews.

Since the table is extended to include readers of Isaak’s book, let me “grab the mic” and offer my own comments. I appreciate the author’s

respectful attentiveness to NT participants in the conference. Each of them is invited to state central concerns clearly and succinctly. He is respectful too of the diversity of interpreters. I find myself largely in agreement with his take on Paul (he seems largely to embrace the “New Perspective”), even if it remains a challenge to let Paul speak as a Jew at the conference table, rather than as a “Christian.”

It may be the special vulnerability of any biblical theology restricting itself to the NT, but I would like to see another session on revelation at this conference in which the role of the Scriptures that the NT writers themselves knew is given greater attention. The role of Wisdom, especially of personified Wisdom in relation to christology, receives scant attention, even though it appears to have played a determinative role in the development of how Jesus was understood (e.g., Matt. 11, John 1, 1 Cor. 1, Phil. 2, Col. 1). I would love to listen in on the exchange between Paul, Matthew, John, and James.

The influence on Isaak of René Girard is felt whenever the themes of judgment and atonement appear, with the result that juridical views of atonement, for example, are less explored than sidelined. In my opinion “discernment” and cause and effect do not do justice to divine agency in judgment as understood by NT writers. Lastly, a distinct focus on soteriology would have allowed the author to explicate more fully his provocative notion of salvation as “God’s creative and transformative activity to complete creation – God’s *shalom* project” (317, à la Bernhard Ott, 21), and the missional role of the church as joining in that creation “project,” and to place it in conversation with other takes on soteriology in the NT.

Isaak writes with great clarity and energy. Each chapter concludes with creative and instructive exercises, making this an excellent classroom textbook or a resource for an adult education setting in which participants are eager for an intellectual and spiritual challenge. His metaphor of the table is wonderfully hospitable, and will ensure that readers will see themselves “at the table” as fully engaged participants. Isaak has moderated an excellent session at this conference-without-end.

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