

Unity and/or/in Diversity? A Survey of Recent New Testament Theologies

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Introduction

Recent years have witnessed an unprecedented explosion in the publication of New Testament theologies (NTT). This is likely due to a number of factors, including the growth of interest in biblical theology that moves beyond the mere historical-grammatical investigation of the text and especially the surge of concern for the theological interpretation of Scripture.¹ Whatever the exact cause, though, students of NTT can be grateful for the multitude of options now available to them. Yet the proliferation of those options can make it difficult for those outside the discipline, and even scholarly insiders, to stay current with research.

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¹Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); R. R. Reno, gen. ed., *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible*, 20 vols. to date (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2005-); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2005); Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2008).

While recent contributions have been diverse in style as well as approach, one common feature is their attention to the issue of the unity and diversity of the NT.² The purpose of this article is to briefly survey some of the more important recent contributions to NTT, highlighting the ways in which they address this topic. I will argue that although the theme of unity and diversity has been treated in nearly every NTT publication, it has yet to be articulated in a way that does justice to the unifying narrative structure of the NT message while simultaneously taking account of the unique contribution of each NT document.

In order to make that argument, I will first examine a few recent NTTs, not attempting full-scale reviews but instead focusing on the treatment of unity and diversity found in each. I will conclude with observations on recent trends in NTT and suggestions for future study.

Unity and Diversity in Recent New Testament Theologies

While the field of NTT continues to grow with the publication of new titles, it has not been without critics. For example, Heikki Räisänen has called on NT scholars to abandon theological issues, focusing instead on historical research into early Christian thought and critical reflection on the influence of the NT in modern society.³ Seeking to resurrect the historical approach championed by William Wrede and others, Räisänen holds that it was a “fatal mistake” for NT scholarship to move away from historical study and turn instead to theological concerns in the years following World War I.⁴ Thus,

²James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, 3rd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2006), first published in 1977, set the agenda for this issue.

³Heikki Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2000), 8.

⁴*Ibid.*, 5.

he argues that the work of the biblical scholar is not theological and normative, but strictly historical and descriptive.

More recently, Thomas Hatina has argued that the discipline of NTT must set aside the quest for normativity and focus on summarizing the diverse theological tenets of the NT's authors. According to Hatina, in order for NTT to find a wider audience or even to survive, especially in the West, its practitioners must "respectfully and intelligently interact with both secularism and religious pluralism," constructing their theologies in conversation with modern culture.⁵ This, as will be seen, is very different from the usual goals and methods of NTT.

In short, for both Räisänen and Hatina, unity and diversity is a non-issue, since a unified NTT is neither desirable nor even possible. Räisänen believes that scholars should avoid all theological construction, instead opting for historical investigation. Hatina encourages theological reflection, but only in dialogue with wider studies of religion and culture for the purpose of contemporary relevance. Nevertheless, the following discussion clearly demonstrates that many scholars disagree with them regarding the alleged demise of NTT.

I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament*

Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel

Marshall's monumental work focuses on exposition of the theology of each book of the NT. Its subtitle gives the reader a clue to Marshall's goal of showing the underlying unity of NTT while at the same time doing justice to the diversity of NT texts. He addresses four primary issues:

- the place of the NT in its canonical context;
- the place of NTT in the early church's missionary context;

⁵Thomas R. Hatina, *New Testament Theology and Its Quest for Relevance: Ancient Texts and Modern Readers* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 4, 44.

- the distinctive theology of each NT book;
- the theological unity of the NT as a whole.⁶

While Marshall's chapters on individual NT books emphasize their theological diversity, these are gathered together into extended sections, each of which concludes with a chapter aiming to demonstrate the theological unity of the entire NT. At the close of Part 3, which deals with the Pauline literature, Marshall includes not one but two summarizing chapters. The first of these provides a synthesis of Paul's theology, highlighting the theological coherence of the Pauline canon.⁷ The second provides a comparative analysis of the theology of Paul's letters and that of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts, arguing that although the individual authors have their unique styles and theological peculiarities, a basic theological unity runs beneath the surface.⁸ The book concludes with an attempt to synthesize the theology of the entire NT.⁹ In short, Marshall argues that all the NT writers shared a common faith and a common purpose—the belief that the Messiah had come for the whole world.

The structure of the book reflects Marshall's approach to NT theology. He begins with diversity and moves toward unity; his basic approach is to summarize the unique theological themes of each NT document and only then to show the basic lines of theological unity that span the canon, pushing beyond the writings themselves to the "underlying history and experience" of the writers.¹⁰ For him, the various strands of NTT are tied together by the concept of mission.¹¹

Any evaluation of Marshall's work should begin by emphasizing its numerous strengths. He has provided students of NTT with a succinct exposition of the theology of each individual book. His text

⁶I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 707.

⁷*Ibid.*, 420-469.

⁸*Ibid.*, 470-488.

⁹*Ibid.*, 707-732, esp. 710ff.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 28.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 718-726.

ably serves as a theological entryway into the study of any portion of the NT. At the same time, he has masterfully demonstrated the theological unity of the NT, placing its common theology in the context of believers' shared mission.

Nevertheless, Marshall could have focused more on the precise location of the NT's theological unity. He makes little mention of its overall plot, particularly as this is related to the larger biblical narrative. The emphasis on mission, though helpful, does not go far enough in demonstrating the gospel story to be the center of the NT's theological narrative. Instead, theological unity is shown through the enumeration of broad theological themes common to all the NT documents.

Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach*

Thielman's primary concern is to allow each book of the NT to speak for itself, thereby highlighting its unique theological contributions. Like Marshall, he is concerned to defend the uniqueness of each of the NT documents while at the same time demonstrating a fundamental unity across the NT canon.¹² Though his approach is book-by-book, his method differs from Marshall's in that he gives more attention to historical background and works through each book section-by-section in order to summarize its theological contents.

The main body of the work is divided into three parts: "The Gospels and Acts," "The Pauline Letters," and "The Non-Pauline Letters and the Revelation of John." Each part begins with an introductory chapter, followed by chapter-length discussions of the theology of each book, and ends with a summary chapter that draws together common theological themes. Having conducted a thorough study of the theology of each individual book of the NT, Thielman

¹²Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005), 42.

concludes the book with a summary of broad themes, emphasizing the theological unity of the entire NT. He identifies these themes as

- the significance of Jesus;
- faith as a response to Jesus;
- the outpouring of God's Spirit;
- the church as the people of God;
- the consummation of all things.¹³

The strength of Thielman's work is his attention to historical issues. More than most other writers of NTT, he emphasizes the historical setting of each NT book and explains how this background influences its interpretation. However, one could take issue with the way in which he pursues this task. The book's subtitle describes his approach as "canonical and synthetic"; it appears that he has narrowly construed a canonical approach as limiting his investigation to the books of the canonical NT alone as opposed to a broader historical study that would take in other early Christian writings as well.¹⁴ While this is arguably legitimate, it does raise methodological issues stemming from the work of Brevard Childs and others who argue that the NT must be read as a part of the Christian Scriptures, including the OT.¹⁵ Thielman does not completely neglect these issues, but they do not seem to be at the forefront of his project as much as the book's subtitle would seem to indicate. In addition, his emphasis on the individual writings in their historical contexts limits his understanding of unity to a few theological themes. Though these are important, they are broad concepts that could easily be traced in nearly any Christian writing.

¹³Ibid., 682.

¹⁴Contra Räisänen and others who argue that historical research into early Christian beliefs demands that one broaden the investigation to include all early sources. See *ibid.*, 28-30.

¹⁵Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1992).

Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity*

Like Marshall and Thielman, Matera seeks to do justice to the diverse contributions of the various NT texts while showing that within this diversity there is a core of theological unity. Also like Marshall and Thielman, he starts with diversity and moves toward unity. One of his distinctives is his relative brevity, with the book coming in at just under 500 pages, compared to Marshall's 765 pages, Thielman's 800 pages, and (see below) Beale's 1072 pages.

The book begins with an introductory chapter in which Matera places his work within the context of previous and current NTT scholarship. Here he also defines the task of NTT. Rejecting a purely historical approach, he argues that NTT "should seek to provide a theological interpretation of the New Testament that integrates and relates the diverse theologies of the New Testament into a unified whole without harmonizing them."¹⁶ The diversity within the NT should not surprise us, since its theologies "are the result of the diverse circumstances and situations that occasioned its writings."¹⁷ Nevertheless, there exists an underlying unity in the NT authors' description of "the experience of salvation that God has wrought in Christ."¹⁸

Following the introduction, Matera works book-by-book through the NT, dividing his work into four main sections: "The Synoptic Tradition," "The Pauline Tradition," "The Johannine Tradition," and "Other Voices." He begins each chapter with a brief introduction to the NT document being considered, emphasizing its structure and theological purpose. Next, he summarizes the theology of the book thematically, highlighting the author's unique emphases. Along the way, he raises issues related to diversity and unity. For example, in his discussion of the theology of Mark's Gospel, he writes, "The Markan understanding of the gospel, then, is broader

¹⁶Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2007), xxvii.

¹⁷Ibid., xxviii.

¹⁸Ibid., xxix.

in scope than the Pauline notion.”¹⁹ This, of course, is debatable, but it is representative of his discussion throughout the book.

Matera waits until the end of the book to draw attention to the unity of the theological message(s) of the NT. The concluding chapter differs from what has gone before in that broad theological themes are shown to be present across the various NT texts. For believers, Matera notes, the unity of the NT is a given. He writes, “[I]nasmuch as the church identified these particular writings as Scriptures that witness to God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, the unity of the New Testament is a presupposition of faith.”²⁰ Nevertheless, believing scholars must move beyond presupposition to proof, confirming this unity through careful study of the NT in “an example of faith seeking to understand what it believes.”²¹

Matera identifies the NT’s key theological themes as

- humanity in need of salvation;
- the bringer of salvation;
- the community of the sanctified;
- the moral life of the sanctified;
- the hope of the sanctified.²²

He traces each of these through the four main sections of the NT mentioned above. He holds that these themes are not independent but to be understood as five elements of “the implied master story to which these writings witness.”²³ That is, the diverse NT writings are held together by a common presupposed narrative.

Matera makes a valuable contribution to the discussion of unity and diversity by moving beyond merely identifying common themes seen throughout the NT to recognizing the common narrative glue

¹⁹Ibid., 8.

²⁰Ibid., 423.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., 428.

²³Ibid., 427.

that actually holds the NT together. This draws the discussion back to the level of biblical theology and somewhat away from dogmatic categories. The problem is that we scarcely hear of this narrative unity until the very end of the book. Up to that point, Matera's emphasis is on the diversity of the NT writings, sometimes to the point of overemphasis, leaving us to wonder whether unity is even possible. In addition, the book's brevity, though not without its benefits, does not allow for serious exegetical engagement with controversial topics. Consequently, Matera tends to make theological pronouncements without providing a sufficient interpretive rationale.

Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*

Unlike the scholars whose works have already been surveyed, Schreiner opts for a thematic approach, arguing that this will aid in understanding both the overall unity of the NT and the individual contributions of its authors. In his preface, he briefly defends this strategy, pointing out that the thematic presentation of NTT can be more strictly called *NT* theology because, unlike a book-by-book approach, which begins with the theology of each individual text, from the outset it aims to explain the theology of the entire NT.²⁴

Schreiner argues that "NT theology is God-focused, Christ-centered, and Spirit-saturated, but the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit must be understood along a salvation-historical timeline; that is, God's promises are already fulfilled but not yet consummated in Christ Jesus."²⁵ This two-part statement aptly describes Schreiner's approach to investigating the theology of the NT. First, though he is careful not to label it the "center" of NTT, he holds that the work of God in Christ is indeed central to the theology of the NT. Second, he takes a redemptive-historical approach to NTT. Throughout the book he underscores the fundamental belief that with the coming

²⁴Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2008), 10.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 23.

of Christ, the eschatological age promised in the OT has been inaugurated but not yet consummated. Thus, he sees unity not only within the NT but also binding together the entire Christian canon.

Whereas many writers of NTT focus primarily on the NT's diversity, Schreiner offers an alternative that more clearly highlights its theological unity. His unique contribution lies in his exposition of the NT's fundamental theological themes and his demonstration that these themes run throughout the canon. Nevertheless, his strategy is not without its drawbacks. He acknowledges that the thematic approach runs the risk of blunting the unique theological emphases of the NT authors.²⁶ In many ways, the risk becomes reality in his book. While he does make clear the NT's unified message, readers do not necessarily gain a greater understanding of the contexts and purposes of the individual NT documents. Admittedly, this goes beyond Schreiner's stated primary purpose of expounding the message of the NT as a whole.²⁷

Perhaps a more serious critique relates to the way in which Schreiner carries out his exposition. In short, he often makes theological proclamations without sufficient exegetical warrant. Indeed, his book often reads more like a systematic theology textbook than one on biblical theology.²⁸ As in many Western systematic theologies, he will often defend a point of theology by making an assertion and then listing prooftexts in support. While prooftexting may have its place, such an approach prohibits an adequate handling of diversity.

²⁶Ibid., 10.

²⁷Ibid., 13.

²⁸This is not to say that Schreiner's work is a systematic theology of the NT. Though his chosen themes overlap with dogmatic categories at certain points, he is clearly writing from a biblical-theological perspective, highlighting the eschatological fulfillment of OT promises in the NT. My critique focuses on his style of presentation, which is similar to that found in traditional systematic theologies.

Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament*

Schnelle's *Theology of the New Testament* stands out among the books included in this survey because of its unique approach. For Schnelle, "[t]he task of a theology of the New Testament is to apprehend [the NT authors'] achievements of meaning-formation and to present them in their theological, literary, and history-of-religion dimensions. The aim is to facilitate authentic reception of the New Testament's meaning-formation in the present."²⁹ By "meaning-formation" he means "establishing or maintaining a valid orientation to the world and to life."³⁰ In other words, the NT documents record the efforts of early believers seeking to make sense of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and their own experience of salvation in him. For this to be meaningful to contemporary believers, they must understand how the NT authors were able to do so. This entails historical research, but the task of NTT is not limited to mere historical matters. Rather, the truth of the NT writings must be appropriated in the modern world, so that their "house of meaning" may once again show itself "capable of grounding, establishing, and structuring human life."³¹

Schnelle's overall structure is unique as well in that it deals with historical, thematic, and theological concerns in the context of a modified book-by-book analysis. He begins with two introductory chapters that briefly explain his approach to the task of NT theology. The exposition that follows opens with an extended examination of the life of Jesus, utilizing material from the Gospels as well as other sources. Schnelle takes this approach because, as he notes, "Jesus of Nazareth is the basis and beginning point of all NT theology."³² Indeed, it was the Christ event that necessitated the meaning-

²⁹Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2009), 40.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 25.

³¹*Ibid.*, 27.

³²*Ibid.*, 61.

formation which resulted in the writing of the NT documents. Thus, unlike the other texts examined in this survey, Schnelle's includes research into the historical Jesus.

Next, Schnelle examines what he believes to be major transitions in the development of NTT. These include the emergence of Christological concerns, the mission to the Gentiles, the writing of the Gospels, and the rooting of the gospel in the Mediterranean world. Along the way, he summarizes the theological content of the Pauline writings, the Johannine writings, and the book of Revelation, using dogmatic categories to frame his study. The Synoptic Gospels and the Deutero-Pauline writings are analyzed individually. Thus, his structure cannot be termed either thematic or book-by-book. Rather, it follows his understanding of the task: to apprehend and appropriate the meaning-formation of the NT writers, which developed over time and in response to specific historical circumstances.

This approach, of course, raises the question of unity and diversity. Schnelle recognizes that this is one of the primary issues which must be addressed by any NTT. He asserts on historical and theological grounds that "*variety clearly has the precedence*, and there can be no such thing as *the* New Testament theology in the singular."³³ Along the same lines, he rejects the possibility of a whole-Bible biblical theology. Nevertheless, he argues that this variety "is not the same as boundless plurality without any contours."³⁴ While each NT author wrote from his own unique perspective and context, "the predominant feature is not antithesis but polymorphy."³⁵ Thus, while there is no unity strictly speaking, the diversity, through real, is within limits.

While Schnelle's work has much to commend it, including his engagement with historical matters and his concern that the teachings of the NT be appropriated in the modern world, the issue of unity and diversity demands more critical attention than

³³Ibid., 52; italics in the original.

³⁴Ibid., 53.

³⁵Ibid.

it receives. The NT writings developed over time and largely in response to specific historical contexts, but this need not necessarily lead to dismissal of the possibility of unity. Even in Schnelle's own exposition of the theologies of Paul, John, and Revelation, there are obvious theological and thematic similarities.³⁶ Indeed, Schnelle's claim that Jesus himself is the basis of NTT means that all the NT authors were working from foundations that were at least similar, if not identical.³⁷ Further, he fails to engage with much recent scholarship that argues for whole-Bible theology on a narrative basis,³⁸ a canonical basis,³⁹ or a theological basis.⁴⁰ The inevitable result of all this is that his argument for rejecting biblical theology is unconvincing.

In sum, Schnelle utilizes a unique approach to NTT which will benefit students of the discipline in that his project offers a stark contrast to most recently published NTTs. Yet this approach involves internal inconsistencies and leads to serious difficulties.

G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*

G. K. Beale has dedicated much of his scholarly effort to the study of the use of the OT in the NT and the theological implications of

³⁶Schnelle uses more-or-less traditional dogmatic categories to expound these three theologies. The use of the same categories would seem to indicate at least some continuity between the diverse writings.

³⁷Schnelle holds that each writer (or community) was writing about *their* Jesus, but he nevertheless denies a rupture between the historical Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ; see *ibid.*, 55.

³⁸For example, Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1991); and Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2004).

³⁹For example, Childs, *Biblical Theology*.

⁴⁰For example, Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997).

such use.⁴¹ *A New Testament Biblical Theology* is no exception. In this work, Beale seeks to offer not merely a NT theology but a NT *biblical* theology. Building on the work of scholars such as Hans Hübner and Peter Stuhlmacher, he presents the theology of the NT in relation to the OT so as to produce a work that, while primarily focusing on the NT, is essentially a whole-Bible biblical theology. He emphasizes that “one of the main goals of this book is to demonstrate further the OT background for the theology of the NT.”⁴²

In order to achieve this goal, Beale employs an approach that sets his work apart from the other NTTs surveyed here, one that focuses primarily on “the main plotline categories of thought through surveying the places in the NT where that thought is expressed.”⁴³ For him, the theological unity of the Bible is to be found in its storyline. Broadly speaking, his approach is to identify the fundamental storylines of the OT and the NT and then to show how that of the NT is founded upon, flows out of, and transforms that of the OT.⁴⁴ He uses the narrative concept to provide a structure around which he details the theological nature of the NT text. Thus, like Schnelle’s, his work utilizes neither a thematic nor a book-by-book structure. Nevertheless, while expounding on the storyline, he moves systematically through the NT, highlighting the distinctive contributions of the various authors.

The great strength of Beale’s project is his unique narrative and intertextual approach. This rightly emphasizes the Bible’s narrative nature, demonstrating the unity of the NT—and, indeed, of the whole Bible—by showing the internal consistency of its

⁴¹G. K. Beale, *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1994); G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2007); G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2012).

⁴²G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2011), 13.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 15-16.

eschatological storyline, while refraining from imposing external dogmatic concerns. Of course, the danger here is the temptation to force all parts of the NT into that storyline, even if their connection with it is not immediately apparent. Thus, Beale shows the unity of Scripture both exegetically and through its storyline, but he largely neglects the particular emphases of individual writings.

Conclusion: The Way Forward

Having surveyed several recent NTTs, I conclude with observations on current trends in the discipline. While the following issues are not the only significant ones addressed in the current literature, they are among the most important and will likely continue to be so.

Approaches to NTT. The way in which one approaches the study of NTT directly influences the results of that study. This is clearly true in relation to the issue of unity and diversity. While there is no one “right” way to do NTT, some approaches are better than others. Those that ignore historical settings and blunt the unique contributions of the individual NT authors do not deal adequately with the NT’s theological diversity. This is a disservice to the church, as it does not help readers to deal with apparent contradictions and discrepancies. Conversely, those that fail to take into account canonical relationships between NT documents, not to mention such relationships with the OT, will fail to understand accurately the overall theology of the NT. One must walk the line, upholding both unity and diversity without overemphasizing one or the other. The approach taken largely determines the success or failure to do so.

Two of the works examined in this survey, those by Marshall and Matera, use their subtitles to highlight the importance of unity and diversity. Some NTTs—for example, Schnelle’s—focus almost entirely on diversity, while others—for example, those by Schreiner and Beale—emphasize unity with little regard to diversity. Still others—for example, those by Marshall, Matera, and Thielman—work from diversity to unity. Yet despite these differences, all of the works examined at least address the issue, and for most of them it plays an important role in their approach and structure.

As NTT research moves forward, a continuing question will be how to understand the unity of the NT in relation to its internal diversity. Approaches like Marshall's seem to be the most successful in hearing the unique voices of the various NT authors while at the same time demonstrating the unity found in the NT's theological coherence. Future NTT research that ignores this issue will produce deficient results.

Exegesis and Theology. In addition to the approach taken, an NTT's strategy is also important, especially the attention it devotes to exegetical work. Some of the NTTs in this survey lack exegetical engagement with the text of the NT, instead moving directly into theological summary and synthesis. The problem is that doing so necessitates the assumption of theological unity without any substantiation. As a result, critical scholars are likely to ignore such NTTs, and lay readers will be left ill-equipped for their own theological exegesis.

Future NTTs would do well to work from an exegetical foundation to theological formulation. While the theological summaries in all the NTTs surveyed here likely draw on exegetical study, this is not always evident in their own pages. In order for a work of NTT to be taken seriously, the exegetical support for its theological conclusions must be demonstrated. Exegetical work can be tedious for both the writer and the reader, but the payoff is worth the effort. This need not mean that NTT becomes nothing more than commentary. Instead, the fruits of exegesis can be expressed in engaging ways.

History and Theology. Another issue that will continue to be important is the relationship between history and theology. In spite of the call of Räisänen and others for the strictly historical study of the NT, it seems that NTT has been successfully defended as a legitimate field of study. Nevertheless, this cannot mean a complete disregard for historical research. The New Perspective on Paul has made that abundantly clear in regard to Pauline studies, but the same is true of NTT as a whole. Furthermore, while canonical approaches seem to be the most fruitful way of understanding the intended meaning of a given text in its biblical context, even a strictly canonical approach cannot ignore the historical context. Seeking to understand the theology of the NT without regard to

this has often resulted in skewed results. Future NTTs must take that into consideration.

Narrative and Theology. One of the emerging areas of NT research is the narrative structure of the NT on both the macro and the micro level. On the macro level, Beale makes a convincing argument for an overarching NT storyline that ties together the theological emphases of the individual writers. This is an area ripe for further study. On the micro level, much Pauline scholarship in recent years has focused on the narrative substructure of Paul's theology.⁴⁵ Future NTTs should build on these insights to locate the basic theological unity of the NT within its narrative structure. This would also pave the way for further work in whole-Bible biblical theology.

This survey has briefly engaged with several recent NTTs, demonstrating that while the discipline is growing, more work remains, especially regarding the issue of unity and diversity. As the discipline continues to develop, future studies should attend to this in a comprehensive way, beginning with exegesis that gives attention to the unique contribution of each NT document. This exegetical work should be historically grounded while taking into account the canonical context of each NT book and giving careful attention to the use of the OT in the NT. A successful NTT would also engage opposing scholars on exegetical rather than theological grounds. Finally, future NTTs need to be able to demonstrate the unity of the NT through accurate exegetical work that does not blunt its diversity, finding its theological cohesiveness in its broad storyline. This would benefit the academy and also the church.

⁴⁵Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002); Bruce W. Longenecker, ed., *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2002); N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2013).