

BOOK REVIEW

I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004). 765 pp. Hdbk. US\$40.00.

This product of I. Howard Marshall's mature thought and lifetime of study is a very useful book in many ways. The central questions he tries to answer are whether there is any theological unity among the various books of the New Testament and, if so, whether we can identify a core of common material. Along the way, however, many other questions are answered and many helps given for the student and scholar.

The first chapter begins by defending the idea (contra Heikki Räisänen), that New Testament theology is both legitimate and possible. Marshall states that his approach is to be distinguished from a history of the early Church, literary approaches, and studies of the development of early Christianity as a religion. He will not merely compile and harmonize the theological statements found in the New Testament, as that takes them out of context, and, to slot ideas into preconceived categories from systematic theology can lead to projecting our systems onto the writers and tempt us to fill in the gaps with inappropriate material. Marshall's method, on the other hand, is to discover the theologies in the various New Testament documents, compare them, show the convergences and diversities, and see if there is substantial common ground. Where the theologies diverge, it is important to find out whether they are actually incompatible, or could be complementary. If the material warrants it, in the end he will compile the ideas found to be basic to all the documents, and note divergences.

There are several characteristics of the material that should be recognized at the outset. First, it is unstructured and occasional, written for particular situations. Secondly, it occurs in the context of the mission of the early Church. Marshall believes that if we are not attentive to the

evangelistic side of the early Church and its documents, we may get a skewed reading. Marshall also defends his stances that the New Testament is part of a total canon that includes the Old Testament, that the Gospels give a fairly accurate picture of Jesus, and that biblical theology cannot stop at being descriptive; it leads to prescription and application.

After the introductory chapter, Marshall begins his investigations with the Synoptic Gospels. Chapter 2 deals with the problems of Gospel sources and historical reliability in the Synoptic picture of Jesus and his self-understanding. He concludes that although the Gospels were written after the Epistles, their basic material predates the Epistles, and they do give a reasonably accurate picture of the teaching of Jesus. Then, in chapters 3 to 6, he deals with each of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts. Chapter 7 compares the theology of these books and finds that, despite different emphases, there is a consistent picture and this material can be considered a corpus theologically.

The next section is on Paul. Marshall treats each of the Pauline epistles in their order of writing (including those that may not be directly from his hand but are from his thought world) and concludes with a chapter finding a recognizable Pauline theology. This is followed by a chapter comparing Paul and the Synoptics/Acts material.

The third section is on the Johannine Literature. After individual chapters on the Gospel of John, the letters, and the book of Revelation, Marshall concludes that the Revelation has a different set of interests than the Gospel and letters, and expresses them in a different idiom. This is partly because it has a unique genre. It is not part of Johannine theology per se, but it fills the slot in that corpus that is occupied by the Olivet Discourse in the Synoptic Tradition. At this point there is a chapter comparing the Johannine material with the Synoptics/Acts and Paul.

The last section is on Hebrews and the General Epistles (James, Peter, Jude). This section is more diverse, and not really a corpus. These materials are all compared with each other, and finally compared with the rest of the New Testament material. By this point, Marshall has compared everything with everything else.

The results appear in the final chapter, entitled 'Diversity and Unity in the New Testament'. One of the important points Marshall makes is something that we usually take for granted, and that is world-view. Now that people are becoming more aware that there are many ways of understanding reality and the universe, it is easier to see how important

it is that all the New Testament books share the same frame of reference or world-view, based on that of the Old Testament. They all use motifs, concepts and/or theological vocabulary from the Old Testament. Most of the New Testament books were written to nurture believers, though they also have a message to those yet to believe. Nurture of converts is, of course, part of the evangelistic task. Marshall concludes that 'there is a significant core of agreement and identity within the theologies of the individual constituents of the New Testament' (p. 717), and he is able to compile the basic outline of the agreed-on material. Although this basic content may be expressed diversely, it is there in all the books. This does not mean that all the writers say the same thing. They have their own emphases and methods of expression, even unique material. But the material of each is compatible with that of the others and can be seen to supplement and balance where it does not say the same thing. For example, James is a useful balance to Paul on faith and works, preventing Paul from being misunderstood and taken to false extremes. Later writings also develop further what is in the earlier material. Marshall basically agrees with J.D.G. Dunn's assessment in his *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (1977) that the common core is 'the identity of the man Jesus with the risen Lord' (p. 712), but points out that all the terms in this statement are heavy theologically, and should be unpacked to give an idea of the wide range of agreement among the writers. Werner Kümmel's *The Theology of the New Testament according to Its Major Witnesses* (1974) expresses in wider terms the agreements in the witness of Jesus, Paul and John. Marshall goes beyond both of these good attempts to look at all the witnesses and to unpack the details of their commonalities and unique contributions.

As he treats each book of the New Testament, Marshall follows a pattern of first telling the 'theological story', and then commenting on the 'theological themes'. The 'theological story' is a summary of and commentary on the contents of the book, section by section, dealing with any thorny items of interpretation along the way, interacting with what scholars have said on these points, defending his views and giving his own illuminating comments. Each of his interpretations is thoroughly argued or the reader is referred to a place where this is done. These sections also deal with any matters of New Testament Introduction on questions relevant to discovering the book's theology. The 'theological story' sections are extremely useful for the preacher, teacher and exe-

gete working on the meanings of passages. They also lay the groundwork for the 'theological themes' section, as the reader can see where the theology has come from in the context of the book's argument, and why Marshall has interpreted certain passages the way he has to get the theological ideas he sees. The treatment of each book ends with a statement of its main theological theme and a list of the major points and unique contributions of its theology by way of summary.

Besides the common theological themes like God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation and so on, depending on what each book treats, Marshall often returns to the theme of free will and predestination, universalism and particularism, even though he does not give it a separate heading. This is one of the themes that the New Testament holds in tension, even within books as well as between authors. He insists on maintaining the paradox just as the New Testament does, so that in some way that we cannot now fully understand, both are true.

Marshall is writing with students in mind, though he aims to make the book useful to all who are interested in the subject. Scattered throughout, there are helpful illustrations and analogies that make his meaning clear. For example, the Evangelists 'are all singing from the same hymnbook, although they may be singing different parts' (p. 484), and in Hebrews, the journey motif is not incompatible with the hope of the appearing of Christ just as 'travellers can be people living in hope of a taxi drawing up alongside them to take them the rest of the way' (p. 615). As well, each chapter ends with a select bibliography. Marshall states that he has selected a few of the best commentaries on each New Testament book and the most useful books on the theology of the New Testament, mostly in English, as a guide to the student who wishes to find the books most beneficial for next steps in further study. These lists would be a great help to a student wanting to build his or her library with the most useful books first.

The advantage of Marshall's system, as compared to something like the work of Donald Guthrie, for example, is that the voice of each New Testament writer is given full attention. The drawback is that theological themes that are spread over the work of more than one author are not always treated as a whole. For this, Marshall recommends use of the subject index, which has been compiled to facilitate just such studies. A theme may be given rather complete treatment in only one of the books where it occurs, and the reader can find this no matter where

she or he is working, by consulting the subject index. The result is that themes in general may not get the unified treatment that one might wish, and those working on particular themes will need to look elsewhere for more complete and coordinated treatments.

Although Marshall hopes his book is 'of a length suitable for use by students', it is still a very long book. Nevertheless, it is a general work and much more could have been said. It will be useful as a reference for working on particular books and passages. The first and last chapters are valuable on their own as setting forth the procedure and philosophy of Marshall's method, and his broad conclusions. The comparative chapters draw helpful comparisons between the individual writers. The book also has author and Scripture indexes. It is the kind of volume that every serious biblical scholar, preacher or Bible teacher would find it an advantage to own.

Lois K. Fuller
McMaster Divinity College