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978-0-521-36721-9 - The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters

Andrew T. Lincoln and A. J. M. Wedderburn

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This volume investigates the respective theologies of the Letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians, and in so doing provides an accessible introduction to the themes and significance of these New Testament books. A. J. M. Wedderburn examines the background to Colossians, and considers both its readers' situation and that of its author. In this the question of the interpretation of the letter, made more acute by the author's use of traditional material which may have differed in its outlook from his own, and of the theological relevance of the letter, particularly for Christology, are investigated. Andrew T. Lincoln examines in turn the authorship of Ephesians, and tries to explain the letter's strategy of persuasion and the key elements of its teaching about the new identity of the Christian believer. The similarities and differences between the thought of Ephesians and that of Paul are thereby set out clearly. Both sections of the book reflect on the relevance of these letters for today.

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NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

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This series provides a programmatic survey of the individual writings of the New Testament. It aims to remedy the deficiency of available published material, which has tended to concentrate on historical, textual, grammatical, and literary issues at the expense of the theology, or to lose distinctive emphases of individual writings in systematised studies of 'The Theology of Paul' and the like. New Testament specialists here write at greater length than is usually possible in the introductions to commentaries or as part of other New Testament theologies, and explore the theological themes and issues of their chosen books without being tied to a commentary format, or to a thematic structure drawn from elsewhere. When complete, the series will cover all the New Testament writings, and will thus provide an attractive, and timely, range of texts around which courses can be developed.

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# THE THEOLOGY OF THE LATER PAULINE LETTERS

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Contents*

<i>Editor's preface</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Note on citations</i>	xi

## THE THEOLOGY OF COLOSSIANS

1 The background of Colossians	3
2 The theology of Colossians	23
3 Colossians, the Pauline Corpus and the theology of the New Testament	58
4 The continuing influence of Colossians	64

## THE THEOLOGY OF EPHESIANS

5 Introduction	75
6 The background of the theology of Ephesians	78
7 The theology of Ephesians	91
8 The theology of Ephesians within the Pauline Corpus and the New Testament	127
9 Critical appropriation of the theology of Ephesians	142

<i>Guide to further reading – Colossians</i>	167
<i>Guide to further reading – Ephesians</i>	170
<i>Index – Colossians</i>	173
<i>Index – Ephesians</i>	179

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## *Editor's preface*

Although the New Testament is usually taught within Departments or Schools or Faculties of Theology/Divinity/Religion, theological study of the individual New Testament writings is often minimal or at best patchy. The reasons for this are not hard to discern.

For one thing, the traditional style of studying a New Testament document is by means of straight exegesis, often verse by verse. Theological concerns jostle with interesting historical, textual, grammatical and literary issues, often at the cost of the theological. Such exegesis is usually very time-consuming, so that only one or two key writings can be treated in any depth within a crowded three-year syllabus.

For another, there is a marked lack of suitable textbooks round which courses could be developed. Commentaries are likely to lose theological comment within a mass of other detail in the same way as exegetical lectures. The section on the theology of a document in the Introduction to a commentary is often very brief and may do little more than pick out elements within the writing under a sequence of headings drawn from systematic theology. Excursuses usually deal with only one or two selected topics. Likewise larger works on New Testament Theology usually treat Paul's letters as a whole and, having devoted the great bulk of their space to Jesus, Paul and John, can spare only a few pages for others.

In consequence, there is little incentive on the part of teacher or student to engage with a particular New Testament document, and students have to be content with a general overview, at best complemented by in-depth study of (parts of)

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[More information](#)

x

## EDITOR'S PREFACE

two or three New Testament writings. A serious corollary to this is the degree to which students are thereby incapacitated in the task of integrating their New Testament study with the rest of their Theology or Religion courses, since often they are capable only of drawing on the general overview or on a sequence of particular verses treated atomistically. The growing importance of a literary-critical approach to individual documents simply highlights the present deficiencies even more. Having been given little experience in handling individual New Testament writings as such at a theological level, most students are very ill-prepared to develop a properly integrated literary and theological response to particular texts. Ordinands too need more help than they currently receive from textbooks, so that their preaching from particular passages may be better informed theologically.

There is need therefore for a series to bridge the gap between too brief an introduction and too full a commentary where theological discussion is lost among too many other concerns. It is our aim to provide such a series. That is, a series where New Testament specialists are able to write at a greater length on the theology of individual writings than is usually possible in the introductions to commentaries or as part of New Testament Theologies, and to explore the theological themes and issues of these writings without being tied to a commentary format or to a thematic structure provided from elsewhere. The volumes seek both to describe each document's theology, and to engage theologically with it, noting also its canonical context and any specific influence it may have had on the history of Christian faith and life. They are directed at those who already have one or two years of full-time New Testament and theological study behind them.

James D. G. Dunn  
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## *Note on citations*

The conventions of the *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (1988) 579–96 are used. Second or subsequent citations of works listed in the guides to further reading are simply cited by an abbreviated title.