

cause', whereas Shammaites allowed divorce only for adultery. He says that Jesus sided with the Shammaites, though they demanded divorce for adultery while he only allowed it. Matthew added the Hillelite phrases 'for any cause' and the Shammaite response 'except for *porneia*' because he wrote after Mark, at a time when this dispute was not so well known. Mark's readers would have mentally added these phrases, just as we mentally add to the question "Do you believe in the Second Coming", the phrase which makes this question meaningful: "of Jesus Christ".

Heth goes beyond the traditional Protestant position by allowing remarriage after a valid divorce. Jesus said that remarriage was adulterous in order to emphasise that the divorce was invalid – ie the person getting remarriage was still married. But if Jesus allowed people to get a valid divorce when their partner was unfaithful, then surely Jesus allowed those people to get remarried. He recognizes that some texts record Jesus teaching that all who remarry commit adultery, and he says that the exception must be read from one text into the others. Both he and Keener point out that Jesus often used hyperbole to emphasise his point. When Jesus says that "whoever says 'You fool!' is liable to hell fire" (Mt.5.22) we have to add "unless he has good cause" because Jesus himself used this insult (Mt.23.17). When Jesus says "whoever looks at a woman lustfully has committed adultery" (Mt.5.28) we have to add "unless she is his wife". In the same way, when Jesus says "Whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" we have to add "unless she has a valid divorce".

Keener has the most difficult task when he presents reasons why remarriage might be allowed after divorces other than those specifically allowed in the New Testament. He starts from the standpoint of Heth, and argues that the two New Testament exceptions are instances from which we have to infer principles. Jesus mentioned unfaithfulness because this was the Shammaite position in the debate he was asked about, and Paul mentioned desertion because this is what was happening in Corinth. Neither of them addressed the issue of violence done to a partner or to their children, or the issue of drug addiction leading to impoverishment and illegal means of raising money. The fact that these and other situations did not arise or were not envisioned does not mean that Jesus or Paul would have been silent about them if they did. Unless we look for ethical principles in the Bible, we have no way of responding to problems like drug abuse, abortion or eugenics.

He also argues for the right of the guilty party to remarry, so long as their partner does not want them back, but he adds a serious caution to this. Remarriages are statistically less secure than first marriages, probably because the same mistakes are repeated, so he says that there should be sufficient time for the divorcee to go through counseling before remarriage. He says that these ethical discussions are outside his normal area of competence as a biblical scholar, but his sensitive approach

shows him to have a wise and pastoral heart.

This volume is invaluable as a brief and well argued defense of all three positions. Ultimately, however, the book has an unfinished feel. This is partly due to the inevitable lack of any conclusion – which is due to the nature of the book – and partly because each author is constantly referring to a work which came out after the structure of the book was conceived, and which is therefore missing. The missing work (*Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, Eerdmans 2002) presents many manuscripts and first century texts which had not been brought into the discussion previously, and came to new conclusions which both Heth and Keener have subsequently substantially agreed with. The fact that I, the reviewer, am also the author of that missing work means that it is difficult for me to assess this gap accurately, but the fact that it is referred to in one fifth of the footnotes is probably significant. I understand that some of the contributors wished to have this view represented fully, but the publishers felt it was too late to change the structure.

This deficiency is not as great as it might have been thanks to Heth who devotes a large portion of his space in order to represent some aspects of this work. Heth is a remarkable scholar for one outstanding reason – he is capable of changing his mind when he finds new evidence. He describes at the start of his chapter how he originally authored a book with Wenham (*Jesus and Divorce*) which argued the no-remarriage position, but pastoral experiences caused him to doubt this, and the new data in *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible* showed him that his previous conclusions were based on incomplete information. To publicly revise an opinion through which a scholar has established his own reputation is a praiseworthy example of scholarship and Christian discipleship.

For the reader who wants a quick overview of the breadth of protestant biblical interpretations on remarriage, this single small volume covers all the main issues up to the twentieth century.

David Instone-Brewer, Cambridge

### *Colossians and Philemon: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*

R. McL. Wilson

ICC ; London: T&T Clark/Continuum, 2005. xxxvi + 380pp. £50.00, hb  
ISBN 0-567-04471-8

#### SUMMARY

This commentary by Robert McL. Wilson is a technical but readable analysis of Colossians and Philemon with due attention given to the text, background, and arguments of these letters. The author gives good overviews of scholarship and excavates the text with learned precision. Wilson regards Colossians as pseudonymous, but not a forgery, and



believes Philemon to be authentically Pauline. According to Wilson the heresy that precipitated Colossians stands in a trajectory somewhere between Judaism and Gnosticism.

# ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Kommentar von Robert McL. Wilson ist eine fachlich versierte, aber lesbare Analyse des Kolosser- und Philemonbriefs, die dem Text, dem Hintergrund und den Argumentationsgängen dieser Briefe die gebührende Aufmerksamkeit schenkt. Der Autor bringt gute Überblicke über die wissenschaftliche Exegese und hebt die Schätze des Textes mit gelehrter Präzision. Wilson hält den Kolosserbrief für pseudonym, aber nicht für eine Fälschung, und er glaubt, dass der Philemonbrief ein authentischer Paulusbrief ist. Nach Wilson steht die Häresie, die den Kolosserbrief hervorrief, irgendwo zwischen Judentum und Gnosis.

# RÉSUMÉ

Ce commentaire sur les épîtres aux Colossiens et à Philémon est une analyse technique mais accessible qui prête toute l'attention voulue au texte, à son arrière-plan et aux arguments de ces lettres. L'auteur fait de bonnes présentations de l'état de la recherche et explique le texte avec une précision érudite. Wilson considère que l'épître aux Colossiens est pseudonymique sans toutefois être une contrefaçon, et pense que l'épître à Philémon est authentique. Il considère que l'hérésie à laquelle répond l'épître aux Colossiens se situe quelque part sur un chemin qui va du judaïsme au gnosticisme.

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Robert McL. Wilson is well qualified to writing a commentary on Colossians given his forty years of expertise on writing about Gnosticism and the obvious echoes of Gnostic terminology in Colossians. The introduction includes discussion about the city of Colossae and the close link between Philemon and Colossians. On authorship, Wilson acknowledges the split among English-speaking scholars as to whether or not Colossians is authentically Pauline. In his view the 'letter was written not so very long after Paul's death, by some disciple who sought to apply his master's teaching to meet a new and dangerous situation which he saw developing' (p. 59). Determinative for this view is the apparent differences in style, language and content in comparison to the accepted Pauline letters. At the same time Wilson is adamant that Colossians is not a fraud or forgery since writing under a false name was not thought reprehensible by ancient writing standards. He thinks the author was honestly and sincerely trying to develop and carry further the teachings of Paul to a new situation (pp. 11-12). Although one thing we can say in response is that falsely attributing literature to an apostle was unanimously censured in the early church (e.g. Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 17). Wilson also thinks Ephesians as being post-Pauline and dependent on Colossians. With regards to the Colossian heresy, Wilson contends that it has both Jewish and Gnostic elements (possibly other sources as well such as magic or mysticism) but it is impossible

to be any more specific than that. Here we would have appreciated Wilson at least having an educated guess at the root cause of the heresy even if it was speculative. This would comport with Wilson's own adage that a commentary should be about telling people what one actually thinks (p. x). Rather than summarize the entire commentary I intend in what follows to highlight Wilson's analysis of a few well known passages. Wilson takes Col. 1.15-20 as an early Christian hymn taken up by the author, though the author might himself be responsible for its composition. The hymn and the teaching that it tries to confute is not gnostic, rather, it seeks to correct a deficient view of Christ and so proclaim the pre-eminence and superiority of the Son. The background of the hymn lies in a mixture of Wisdom-Logos and Adam/Christ elements. In regards to Col. 2.11-12, Wilson understands circumcision in the OT to point to circumcision of the heart, but thinks that Paul's view is that true circumcision is experienced in baptism. He understands the 'word of Christ' in Col. 3.16 to denote the gospel about Christ and the word which he spoke. The *Haus-tafel* of Col. 3.18-4.1 shows the author urging a view of Christian households that are part and parcel of family life in the ancient world the differentiation from Graeco-Roman household codes is that the Christian expression are orientated around the 'Lord'. Wilson accepts the authenticity of Philemon and prefers the theory of Paul writing from Ephesus. Regarding slavery, Wilson notes that the Christian failure to condemn the practice was because slavery was simply part of the social and economic tiers of the Mediterranean world. He mentions OT rules about slavery and points out how the NT set our principles which were eventually to lead to the abolition of slavery. The impetus to abolish slavery in both the Roman empire and in the Americas found roots in the teaching of Paul (e.g. Gal. 3.28; Col. 3.11). In sum, Wilson has produced a technical but eminently readable commentary on Colossians and Philemon and he is sympathetic to the worldview and arguments of the author whom he regards as writing Scripture.

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## *The Nature of New Testament Theology:*

**Christopher Rowland and  
Christopher Tuckett**

Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, xii + 314 pp.,  
£19.99, pb, ISBN 1-4051-1174-7

## SUMMARY

This volume is a collection of essays on New Testament Theology in honour of Robert Morgan. It pays particular attention to the challenges of doing New Testament Theology, it raises hermeneutical questions about New Testament Theology, and articulates the relationship between exegesis, systematic theology, pastoral theology, and New