

Edwin Chr. van Driel. *Rethinking Paul: Protestant Theology and Pauline Exegesis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. xv + 399 pp. \$99.99 (hbk).

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It is hard to think of another book, written by a systematic theologian, that offers a better entryway for theologians into the world of contemporary Pauline scholarship than this one. Currently, the vast majority of theological work that provides such an entryway has been written by biblical scholars: for example, Douglas Campbell, John Barclay, Beverly Gaventa, N. T. Wright, Susan Eastman, Richard Hays, Michael Gorman, Chris Tilling, Erin Heim, Stephen Chester, and Jonathan Linebaugh. While it would be easy to add many more biblical scholars to this list, it is harder to think of theologians to add—Lucy Peppiatt, Douglas Harink, and Philip Ziegler are three theologians who come to mind. Given how many books have been written by contemporary theologians on Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Barth, Bonhoeffer, etc., the lack of attention given to Paul by systematic theologians would seem to be a glaring lacuna. I might also add that this lacuna appears especially glaring in the world of analytic theology—with Thomas McCall being a notable exception. While I do not want to play down the incredible theological work on Paul that has been undertaken by biblical scholars, there is something distinctive to be gained by a systematic theologian (who is somewhat outside the world of biblical studies) engaging constructively with both Paul and Pauline biblical scholarship. This is precisely what van Driel offers in this book, which achieves three things in particular.

First, van Driel offers a broad survey of some of the major theological discussions and debates in Pauline scholarship (from biblical scholarship) over the last forty or so years, covering a range of topics including the role of Israel, covenant, faith, baptism, participation, justification, righteousness, law and gospel, ecclesiology, missiology, and eschatology. Given the incredible amount he covers, there are limits to how much attention he can give to each of these topics, so the reader may find themselves wanting to hear more at a few points. While the slight tendency to opt for breadth over depth could be seen as a shortcoming of the book, it can also be seen as a strength. By leaving readers wanting more, the book will hopefully serve to draw more theologians into the conversation to do this further work. Yet, while much of this book is given to providing a survey of Pauline scholarship, it would be a mistake to suggest that this book is merely a theological introduction to Pauline scholarship. As we consider below, it also excels as a constructive book by doing precisely what it says on the tin: rethinking Paul. It does this successfully by using its survey to draw attention to an overarching theological narrative that van Driel sees running through and emerging from a theological reading of Paul.

The *second* achievement of the book is bringing Pauline scholarship into conversation with the history of Protestant theology in fresh ways. In so doing, van Driel achieves a few things. First, he demonstrates that the groundbreaking biblical scholarship that has emerged in the

last few decades is often much closer to early Protestant theology than is sometimes presumed or suggested, based on superficial readings—albeit, while also being clear about the ways in which they diverge. Second, by building bridges, he paves the way for future projects that bring Pauline biblical scholarship into conversation with Protestant theology and presents a case of how such interaction could be mutually beneficial. Third, he shows how the Protestant tradition has been able to (and can continue to) build constructively on Paul's writings in a way that goes beyond Paul but also follows a Pauline trajectory. Fourth, he offers helpful critical reflection on some Protestant readings of Paul and suggests ways in which they could be improved by engagement with contemporary biblical scholarship.

The *third* achievement of this book is the constructive case it makes for an 'implicit narrative substructure' (6) based on the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline writings. To do so, van Driel takes a step back from the closer exegetical engagement with Paul's writings to try to see the grand narrative that can arise from a theological reading of Paul. In so doing, he shows how this larger narrative can bring together a diversity of theological readings of Paul by helping to resolve some of the debates that divide them—e.g., Lutheran and Reformed readings, and the "salvation-historical" and "apocalyptic" ones. The narrative he proposes is grounded in the Christological account of creation we find in Colossians 1:15-20 and Ephesians 1:1-14, according to which God creates all things and gathers them together in, through, and for Jesus Christ. According to this narrative, Jesus Christ should not primarily be viewed as a means to the end of human reconciliation with God (or some other end that is relative to creation), but as the very end for which God created the world. Jesus Christ does not merely have a role to play in the narrative of human reconciliation with God, but also defines the grand narrative of creation within which reconciliation with God is but a sub-narrative.

An example of a topic that van Driel rethinks in light of this larger narrative is faith, with special attention given to the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, is the question of justifying faith and the nature of human faith more generally (as it derives from the faithfulness of Jesus Christ). The construal of human faith that emerges does not primarily concern a particular person being made right before God. Rather, human faith is viewed primarily as the way in which persons express themselves as the creatures they have been created to be, in correspondence to the grand Christocentric narrative (beyond our own anthropocentric narrative(s)). One of the distinguishing features between narratives of human reconciliation and Christological narratives of creation, for van Driel, is that whereas the former is, to some extent, defined by sin, the latter is defined by the sinless future. Our understanding of eschatological deliverance is not to be understood relative to sin; rather, sin is to be understood relative to the grand narrative of creation that is defined by God's eschatological consummation of it in Christ—which overshadows sin to the point of making it an irrelevance. Van Driel writes: 'human beings are not primarily woven into this narrative qua sinners; they are woven into this narrative qua creatures whose eschatological future is solely dependent on the grace'—i.e., on the grace of God that is not to be defined relative to sin.

What is critical to van Driel's view of faith, and to his account of many of the other themes he considers, is that we not reduce Christ to a character in one of our narratives, which is primarily about us, but that we learn to view ourselves as characters in God's narrative of creation, which is fundamentally about Christ. True human identity, therefore, is received derivatively, by way of our identification with Christ. Furthermore, in van Driel's reading of Paul, this true identity is received in community; we identify with Christ in and through the communal body of Christ. And our participation in this community (and the new identities

we receive within it) is not grounded in spiritual experience or a subjective faith but by our being baptized into this community (echoing the role that circumcision played for Israel).

While the eschatological emphases loom large in *Rethinking Paul*, it should also be made clear that van Driel does not think that, for Paul, these emphases call us to become removed from the present world. For van Driel, a Pauline eschatology should draw our attention to ecclesiology and mission. In his words, ‘if the world is made to be gathered to Christ, then the church is the place where the eschatological goal becomes visible and tangible. In that case, the church does not exist for the sake of the world, but the world is created to become the church’ (252). As such, ‘that language Paul uses for the church does not sound functional but rather seems to describe a relationship that has its terminus in itself: The church is a family, a household, a new humanity, a dwelling place for God’ (252).

Given van Driel’s commitment to presenting a larger theological narrative in Paul, there are some limits to this book. By giving less attention to the trees to pay more attention to the forest, there will be a number of details that some readers will think require more treatment. Some readers, for example, might complain that the book’s engagement with Pauline scholarship is narrowly focused on the more theologically-minded readers of Paul, and consequently disregards some significant groups of Pauline biblical scholars who may be more critical of van Driel’s project. Some could worry that van Driel provides insufficient support for some of his claims—especially for those who are sceptical of such claims. And some might want him to give more time to prolegomenal (“throat-clearing”) issues, for example, by taking more time to be transparent about his particular theological hermeneutic. While there are valid reasons to want to hear more from van Driel on these issues, addressing these kinds of concerns would have made it impossible for him to achieve all that he does as successfully as he does. Nonetheless, I am still going to mention two very minor points that I fussed over.

First, van Driel notes that Richard Hays’s account of narrative participation in Christ suggests a logic according to which ‘Christ does not identify with us, but we identify with Christ as he lives faithfully’ (191-92). He then questions how it is possible for persons to ‘participate in a story that has not yet been written’—in a Christological story that ‘is still unfolding now and in the future’ (192). In light of what I took to be van Driel’s argument, I was not entirely persuaded by his concern with Hays’s narrative view. I was left with the question as to why Hays could not think about a person’s participation in Christ as participation in ‘a narrative that originates in God’s very first decision: to be Jesus’ (to quote van Driel on 350), and which unfolds according to God’s narrative plan that has already been written in God’s eternal mind. It could be that van Driel is questioning how a person could identify with a Christological story that they have not been able to grasp for themselves. However, as van Driel himself notes (191), Hays recognizes that our participation in the story of Jesus Christ is mysterious, and presumably therefore beyond what we can know.

Second, I need more convincing that the “salvation-historical” (associated with N.T. Wright) and “apocalyptic” (associated with J. Louis Martyn) readings of Paul are firmly committed to an infralapsarian account according to which ‘Christ’s coming is a divine countermeasure against sin, a “plan B” in a world gone awry’ (283). On such a view, ‘Christ exists for the sake of creation’ (283) which, for van Driel, clashes with the Christocentric narrative of creation that he sees in Colossians and Ephesians. While it is easy to see why van Driel sees infralapsarian tendencies in these readings, I am not sure that they need to be so clearly contrasted with van Driel’s supralapsarian reading. As such, I think van Driel’s argument on this point could be more nuanced, and, in so doing, could do more of the bridge-building he does so well throughout the rest of the book. Indeed, van Driel himself

acknowledges at one point (274 n. 59) that his “salvation-historical” representative, N. T. Wright, thinks that Paul is committed to a supralapsarian Christological narrative. I suspect that the rigorously supralapsarian perspective of van Driel makes any view that highlights Christ’s role within creation (i.e. that draws attention to what Christ does for the sake of creation) look more infralapsarian than it might actually need to be—e.g. if we read such seemingly “infralapsarian” accounts as focusing on Christological sub-narratives rather than grander Christological narratives. While I find myself in strong agreement with van Driel’s perspective, and while I certainly think his view can be described as Pauline (if this includes Deutero-Pauline), I am not convinced this view is consistently prominent throughout Paul’s writings. So, I think the “salvation-historical” and “apocalyptic” readers of Paul can be forgiven for saying things that can come across as infralapsarian.

One way van Driel might have been able to insulate himself better from some of the detail-oriented concerns that could arise in response to his book is, perhaps, by being slightly more measured in his argument, and being slightly clearer at times about the complexities in Paul’s writings that could create challenges for his argument. By trying to think about the larger theological picture that emerges from the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline writings (beyond some of the finer details and complexities), one could make a case that the title *Rethinking Pauline Theology* might have been more accurate for the book than *Rethinking Paul*.

In raising these minor concerns, I am being persnickety. Given all this book accomplishes, they hardly bear mentioning, and should certainly not be seen to overshadow the many ways in which this book succeeds. This book is brilliant; it is beautifully written, creative, clear, erudite, and should be an eye-opener for many analytic theologians. Perhaps most notably, by bringing together such a diverse array of readers of Paul into constructive conversation, it is a bridge-builder that will hopefully excite many more contemporary systematic theologians to engage with Paul and Pauline biblical scholarship. I, for one, am certainly more excited and optimistic about the prospect of such engagement having read this book.