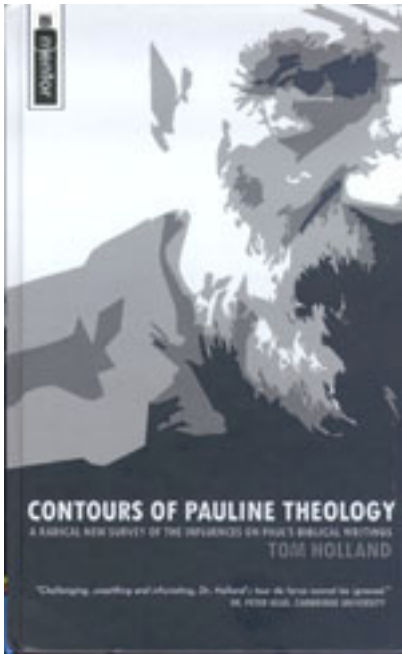


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Holland, Tom

Contours of Pauline Theology: A Radical New Survey of the Influences on Paul's Biblical Writings

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Holland's primary thesis is to demonstrate that the theology of Paul is strongly indebted to the Hebrew Bible. In chapter 1 Holland rejects the view that Paul Hellenized the Christian message or that he consciously departed from Jesus' teaching (11). He argues rather that Paul's theology has its roots and model in the Passover and exodus (12).

Chapter 2 asserts that Paul picked up the new exodus paradigm through his citations of Isaiah, particularly evident in Romans. Holland writes, "Paul received his theological model from his Jewish upbringing, in which he was taught that Yahweh would bring about the promises New Exodus. He had come to realise that this had been inaugurated by the death of the only Son in his Paschal death" (43).

Holland then discusses faulty presuppositions in Pauline theology in chapter 3. He attacks the purported view that Hellenism and Gnosticism are the appropriate backgrounds for New Testament study. Holland writes of a "growing realisation that the New Testament is not a collection of Hellenistic writings, as argued by the liberal forefathers, for it is being increasingly recognised to be a collection of essentially, if not entirely, Jewish writings." This conclusion supposedly undermines the fundamental "presuppositions of

theological liberalism” (53–54). Several things can be said by way of response. First, notwithstanding the problem of what Holland means by “theological liberalism,” his remarks are needlessly polemical and hardly develop his argument. Second, Holland’s contention against the Hellenistic/gnostic approach to Paul and the New Testament is not only attacking a straw man but is arguing against a particular view of Christian origins that very few scholars in the New Testament academy would espouse today. As a case in point, the gnostic redeemer myth has been widely disregarded in New Testament circles. Moreover, there seems to be widespread recognition that Paul had a foot in both the Jewish and Hellenistic worlds. One cannot construe Paul’s Jewishness over and against Hellenism simply because Paul wrote in Greek, utilized Greek literary forms and rhetorical methods, and was competent sufficiently to engage readers steeped in the language, culture, and philosophy of the Hellenistic world. Third, Holland seems to imply that a Jewish Paul is a sufficient safeguard against liberal ideologies. However, Jewish readings of Paul can paint a picture of Paul no less “liberal” than constructions of his theology indebted to Hellenistic concepts (e.g., E. P. Sanders and Alan F. Segal).

In the same chapter Holland cautions against making too much out of use of the pseudepigrapha for Pauline study. He raises several good points, such as the fact that the pseudepigrapha has been transmitted mainly by Christians, the problem in assigning any document to a particular group, and the breadth of diversity in these documents themselves. This is a stern warning against what Samuel Sandmel called “parallelomania.” Even so, Holland states, “[T]he New Testament letters [were] written to communities outside of Palestine and presumably outside of access to most pseudepigraphal writings” (67). Yet this is patently false, as not all of the pseudepigraphal writings were composed in Palestine (*Aristeas* and *Joseph and Aseneth* were probably written in Alexandria) and the Epistle of Jude for one quotes *I Enoch* and *Assumption of Moses*. Holland wants to argue that Paul’s theology had the Hebrew Bible as its substructure but needlessly asserts in the process that Paul would not borrow or echo thoughts from a “dubious Palestinian perspective” (i.e., referring to pseudepigrapha) in the process (67).

Chapter 4 concerns the role of the Isaianic Servant in Paul’s letters. Holland makes the case that the servant language of the New Testament (*doulos*, *douleuō*) corresponds more readily to the Semitic view of a servant with privileges and dignity than to a Hellenistic slave. Furthermore, Holland believes that the christological use of the Suffering Servant passage does not imply a theology of vicarious atonement. Holland suggests that the reason why this imagery, so easily exported from Isaiah and enlisted in support of a theology of vicarious atonement, was not utilized was due to the logic of what it implied: “If the Servant’s sufferings were vicarious, then so were the church’s, for she also was a servant” (82).

In chapter 5 Holland analyzes Paul's images of corporate identity in Rom 5–8. In particular, he argues that “body of sin” in Rom 6:6 refers to “the state of unredeemed humanity in its relationship to Satan (Sin)” (108). Similarly, in chapter 6 he interprets the “prostitute” and “body” of 1 Cor 6:15–16 as a contrast of corporate metaphors for “godless human society” (132) and “the church” (124). Holland discusses the collective meaning of baptism in chapter 7, starting with Rom 6:1–4. In contrast to individualistic understandings of baptism, Holland states: “What I am arguing for is that the baptism passages which we have considered are speaking neither about water baptism nor even of Christ's baptism into his sufferings . . . but a baptism modeled on the baptism of Israel into Moses when Israel came into a covenant relationship with Yahweh through the representative he had appointed” (151–52).

Holland focuses again on the application of the Passover and exodus themes in relation to Paul's imagery of sacrifice in chapter 8. He argues that *hilastērion* in Rom 3:25 means propitiatory sacrifice and has its background in Ezek 45 (161–65). The problem is that it remains far from certain that Ezekiel was talking about an “eschatological Passover” that “will propitiate for the sins of the people” (161), and the links between Romans and Ezekiel are tenuous or oblique at best. Holland also rejects any attempt to view Paul's conception of Jesus' death via a martyr theology (179–81).

Chapter 9 presents an assessment of the “New Perspective on Paul.” Holland advocates a fairly balanced view of justification as both forensic and covenantal (183). It appears, however, that Holland misunderstands Dunn's reference to Paul's preconversion zeal to signify that Paul was a political revolutionary (188–92), whereas Dunn says nothing of the kind. According to Dunn, Paul's “zeal” was his willingness to use violence against fellow Jews to protect Israel's distinctiveness.

The paschal theme is explored further in relation to justification (ch. 10), its role in shaping early Christian soteriology (ch. 11), and christologically in the Christ hymn of Colossians (ch. 12). Finally, Holland includes four appendices that follow up issues he raises in the book, such as the new exodus/paschal motif, the Passover/Akedah motif, justification in the Reformers, and firstborn and wisdom.

There were several typographical errors in the book, such as the incorrect spelling of “psuedepigraphal” (180) and the wrong middle initial of “R. R. Gundry” in the bibliography (357).

The strength of Holland's book is that it presents a forthright case for viewing Paul's soteriology in corporate terms and seeing Paul as a very Jewish thinker. What detracted from the work is, first, that Holland overemphasizes the corporate dimension in Paul's

thought and allows little role for the individual. Second, Holland possesses a deep suspicion and an acute disdain for the pseudepigrapha, mainly because he finds it detrimental to his own evangelical viewpoint (see esp. 180). Third, Holland's book is also parochially evangelical and might not interest readers beyond the evangelical constituency.

I would hardly label the book a "tour de force" (see the blurb on the front cover from Peter Head) but rather a moderately interesting examination of the new exodus and paschal motifs in Pauline soteriology as undertaken from a distinctly evangelical perspective.