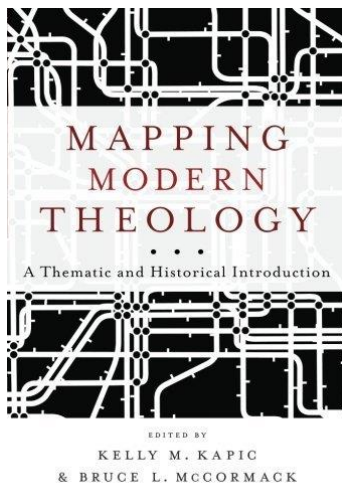


Kelly M. Kopic and Bruce L. McCormack, eds. *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2012). 432 pp.

“Modern theology” is a complex maze. Some paths seem to converge, but never meet; others have surprising, multiple intersections. Some tracks loop back on others, while some prove to be dead ends. The huge variety of signage only adds to the confusion. We can, then, be very thankful to Kopic and McCormack for putting together this impressive and useful volume. It will prove to be a very useful map for students and teachers of theology. In most cases the chapters should be considered required reading for any detailed study of themes in modern theology.



The book consists of an introduction and 15 chapters. Each chapter is a short, readable tour of an area of theological discussion. Most deal with specific doctrines in Systematic Theology, though there are chapters on Ethics and Practical Theology. Each author is well qualified to give an overview of the relevant area. The footnotes and ‘further reading’ point to a host of useful literature, mainly fuller secondary reading rather than key primary texts. Most of the chapters finish with some assessment of possible future directions in theology.

The topic necessarily raises the question of the definition of ‘modern theology’. In the introduction Bruce McCormack makes it clear that the focus is not merely on all the theology of the last two centuries. Rather, ‘modern’ designates a cultural and theological stance which is shaped by the developments in Western thought and culture. According to McCormack, modern theology is not merely defensive, reiterating traditional positions against modernity, nor is it an attempt to accommodate traditional views to modern views. Rather modern theology is “mediating”. It typically takes a theological claim and treats it as a material principle around which it can express doctrine in engagement with modern thought. McCormack highlights three areas in which this has taken place. In the doctrine of creation, modern science provides explanations of origin and the doctrine express absolute dependence of God. In the doctrine of God, theology takes leave of classical theism in order to rethink (or abandon) metaphysics. In the doctrine of revelation, a critical approach to Scripture is accepted, at least in principle, and revelation is viewed primarily as self-revelation. This description of modern theology is stimulating and engaging, though the nature of the case is that such a general thesis can never be tested and proved or disproved. Rather it serves as a useful way to consider what modern theologians are attempting to provide. Schleiermacher and Barth feature most prominently in McCormack’s account of modern theology, with Kant and Hegel as the primary philosophers of modernity.

In the rest of the volume, some contributors seem to largely agree with McCormack’s analysis, often treating Schleiermacher and Barth as key representatives of modern theology. Others take a more inclusive view of ‘modern’ theology and deal with theologies which are isolated from cultural modernity. Some of the chapters deal explicitly with more postmodern approaches and differentiate this from modern theology. For example, Richard Osmer’s chapter on Practical Theology argues that modernity proper put the discipline under question and only postmodernity has allowed it to flourish.

Several of the chapters give satisfying and comprehensive accounts of the area under discussion. The chapter on the atonement is perhaps the best of these, it is remarkably comprehensive while remaining very comprehensible.

In contrast, some of the chapters seem limited in scope, while others cover a wide range of thinkers without relating them to each other with a coherent narrative. The chapter on anthropology falls into the first category, though this probably reflects the immense variety in theological proposals about humanity.

On the other side, the chapter on christology limits the subject to consideration of the “ontological constitution of the Mediator” and tells a story which is entirely focussed around Barth. The chapter could and probably should have included discussion of Bultmann, later quests for the historical Jesus, Rahner, liberation Christology and Pannenberg. Similarly the discussion of theological ethics is heavily dependent on Stanley Hauerwas and focusses around his work. The result is a rather narrow story of America, protestant university ethics, with no discussion of Catholic ethics or social thought; and no discussion of ethical thought in evangelicalism or fundamentalism.

The general intent of the volume is descriptive rather than normative. Despite this many of the chapters offer some assessment of modern developments in theology. Some contributors are largely critical of modernity and assume that theology should continue in, more or less, traditional ways. For instance, Stephen Holmes offers very clear sketch how classical views of the attributes of God and have been challenged. He concludes with a Trinitarian defence of the “unfashionable doctrines of our scholastic forebears” (65). The chapter is a *tour de force* in just over 18 pages. Similarly, John Webster’s discussion of providence notes that since the 17th century the doctrine of providence has been in retreat as God’s influence was marginalised or even excluded and concludes his survey with a plea for “theological reflection on God’s continuing relation to, and action within, the created order, which in his love he maintains and governs, and which he will bring to perfection” (225). Michael Horton’s chapter on Eschatology also concludes that radical revision of traditional views is not required.

Others appear to conclude there are problems inherent in classical approaches which demand reformulations in a modern setting. Daniel Treier presents post-liberalism and theological interpretation of scripture as the best responses to the challenges of modernity. Kevin Vanhoozer’s chapter on the atonement asks for an inclusive unified theory of atonement which is trinitarian and not focussed on the cross alone, but also including Christ’s work of mediation and recapitulation.

Telford Work’s chapter on Pneumatology is the most ambitious and complex of the whole book. He offers a literal map of pneumatology with classical “capital cities”, foreign regions where the Spirit ‘haunts’ rather than ‘indwells’ and frontier settlements, border towns and cosmopolitan cities which lie between the two (229). Work’s map is intriguing but not, finally, convincing. He offers suggestive connections and stimulating observations and invites us to view familiar thinkers and movement in new ways. However many of the claims are unsubstantiated? For instance, I wonder if there is a strong connection between evangelical campus outreach and the thought of John Milbank. How close are the student dorm and refectory to the academic seminar? Similarly, is privatised, civil religion really a close neighbour to Jürgen Moltmann?

Work’s account is confused by having a double agenda. He, like the other authors, is tracing thought about a theological topic. He also treats his descriptions as an exercise in first order pneumatology. Each of his descriptions of a region offers a discussion of how the Spirit is at work there. Can a description of thought about the Spirit be, at the same time, an account of the work of the Spirit? Work offers no basis on which to make the necessary critical assessments. He concludes that “the Spirit is the Spirit everywhere” and the object of pneumatology remains ever the same (255-56) yet the descriptions are so diverse they belie this claim.

The major topic which does not receive a chapter in the work is the doctrine of sin. The area is touched on in discussions of anthropology and salvation. A full chapter could still be justified. It is surprising that the volume did not include a chapter on theological method, and perhaps a chapter on historical theology could have been included.

No book with such scope can hope to be the final word on the topic. It will always be possible to suggest other material or perspectives which could be included. Each chapter is a well-informed and stimulating description of its assigned area. All in all, *Mapping Modern Theology* is an excellent resource which should be a standard resource for all students of theology.

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