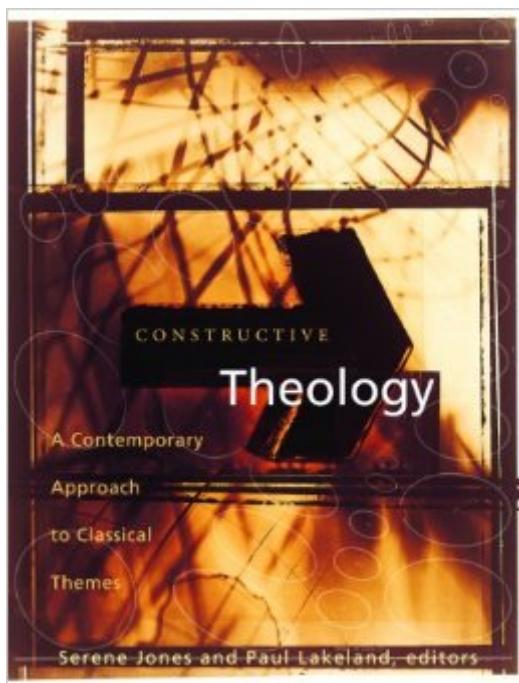


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Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach To Classic Themes: A Project Of The Workgroup On Constructive Christian Theology



Synopsis

Coordinated by Serene Jones of Yale Divinity School and Paul Lakeland of Fairfield University, fifty of North America's top teaching theologians (members of the Workgroup on Constructive Christian Theology) have devised a text that allows students to experience the deeper point of theological questions, to delve into the fractures and disagreements that figured in the development of traditional Christian doctrines, and to sample the diverse and conflicting theological voices that vie for allegiance today.

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Customer Reviews

When I was in seminary, I took a course entitled 'systematic theology'. While this was indeed the subject, the task of the course was more in line with what this text deals with - at the end of that course, we had to construct (as best we could) a consistent theology that dealt with the primary areas of theological concern. The editors Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland have divided this text into six major sections, dealing with the key areas of theological concern: God; Human Being; Sin and Evil; Jesus Christ; Church; and Spirit. The editors have made efforts to make a text useful to a diverse and somewhat paradoxical community situation - how does one honour the traditions while recognising innovation and individuality in the current theological scene? How does one do theology for long-established communities, newly formed community, and those who seek a more personal theological development? In each section, the editors begin some quotes or stories, vignettes that show everyday applications of the issues - how people think about a particular idea, or what they do to bring their beliefs into practice. They continue then with a 'State of the Question', which is a brief

statement of introduction to the topic, highlighting salient points and areas of controversy. Following this, the 'map' of the chapters proceed in two broad ways - a historical theological treatment and a contemporary theological treatment. It is this latter part that is the longest section of each chapter, dealing with modern ideas from current theologians dealing with the issues in context of modern/post-modern culture, scientific knowledge, political realities, and more. Throughout the text, there are bracketed sections (set off in different indentation and typeface) that are drawn from primary sources or set aside special questions that show a difference with the main progress of the chapter. This is very much a collaborative piece. In addition to Jones and Lakeland as the overall editors, each primary chapter has its own editor, and each chapter is a synthesis of the writing and views of half a dozen or more theologians. They are not presented in dialog form or in the form of separate essays, but rather in a more integrated way, which has both strengths and weaknesses. This is true of the overall organisation of the book as well. Jones and Lakeland address their reasoning for the way in which they have selected the categories: 'The answer is pragmatic. Since our students know so little about the history of Christian theology and have limited training in the tradition, this pattern seemed best suited to teaching "the basics." ' This is a book specifically designed to be used as and useful as a textbook for introductory theology. In an era where an increasing number of seminary students are second- or third-career students who have had little or no history and philosophy training (much less theology training), this kind of approach is very welcome. The tradition behind this book includes the books 'Christian Theology' and 'Readings in Christian Theology', each by Peter Hodgson and others. (both of which I read in my seminary days) as well as 'Reconstructing Christian Theology' by Rebecca Chopp et al. (which I read on my own). The first two books were done in the early 1980s, while Chopp's book was done in the 1990s, recognising shifts in the 'typical' students who enrolled in seminary. Jones and Lakeland are again responding to a shift in the past ten years, one that has seen shifts not only in social location but educational purpose. One of the features of this text is the inclusion of a CD-ROM that has a lot of extra material, and links to a broader system through the Logos Library System. At the time of this review, only PC format is supported, but an insert in the back of the book promises Macintosh capability soon. (I PC at work, but Mac at home, and so look forward to the Mac application). For those familiar with Windows environments, the software is easy to install and easy to navigate. One of the real helps of this is a section entitled 'A Short Guide to Writing Research Papers in Theology', which is something I wish I'd had when I was teaching theology - so many students have trouble putting together papers in a clear and coherent manner, that this should prove an invaluable resource for students and a great blessing for teachers who must then read all the papers. The list of

contributors to this book reads like a Who's Who of modern theology, primarily but not exclusively from the Western culture. Jones as a Protestant and Lakeland as a Roman Catholic have worked together to make this a volume useful for readers from both traditions. The next time I teach theology, I will definitely use this text.

Each chapter of "Constructive Theology" begins by looking over historical approaches to historical and contemporary themes in theology. These historical approaches include some foundational thinkers of the Christian faith. The remainder of the book speaks more to the authors' social and political agendas than theology. Christianity does concern itself with the lives of the poor and oppressed, as well as considers the implications of and problems with the contemporary economic system, environment, and religious pluralism, but there are other ways to do theology without leaving many traditional aspects of Christianity behind, as this book often does. This book is heavily influenced by postmodernism/post-structuralism, as evidenced by its looking to Derrida, Levinas, and Irigaray for guidance. The authors premise the book on identity politics but do not divulge this to their readers. It does not teach its readers how to think critically or theologically as much as it tells its readers what to think. If one desires an introduction to what is going on in the North American academy right now (which certainly has its benefits), then this book may be for you. However, If one wants to study theology without being inundated with contemporary trends and biases, I suggest they look elsewhere.

I came across this text toward the end of my seminary education, and after reading the first couple of chapters was quite impressed. It seemed to offer a diversity of viewpoints, was helpfully organized, and covered a lot of basic material I wished I had access to before taking other courses. By the time I made it through the rest of the book, though, it became clear that the book should be subtitled: "An Introduction to Theologians who Hate Capitalism." Virtually the entire chapter on sin and evil is devoted to equating sin and capitalism, and almost every essay following includes some mention of how terrible capitalism is. The phrase "late capitalism" pops up frequently, as though the economic system is on the verge of collapse and a new socialist utopia just around the corner. Unfortunately, what started out seeming like a healthy diversity of views ends up being an exercise in ideology and rhetoric. These authors fall victim to the temptation of over-simplification, presenting a complex issue in stark black and white, good and evil terms. Not all theologians view the world along these lines, and a broader spectrum of opinions would be helpful to students. What I learned from reading this book is that is far easier to be critical of something than

to articulate a meaningful alternative.

The binding is fair quality and survived a semester of use, probably earning 4 or 5 stars on its own. This book is a collaborative work among many theological scholars. Many of the authors are widely recognized as experts in their respective theological interests. Their other works should be read with great seriousness. The reason this work is rated 2 stars is my basic disagreement both on theological method used by the authors and the theological conclusions drawn by the authors. This work is anthropocentric at its core. The text is more about humanity and the human condition than it is about the divine. If this book were classified as a book of religious anthropology, I may rate it 4 stars. I simply cannot call it (the whole book) theology in the classical sense. I would not recommend this text to anyone, even those whose theologies tend to agree with the authors. There is more hubris than theology in this text.

Considering I did not have to use this book as much as originally thought, it was worth the money. The price was exceptional, the condition was new and everything intact, what more could I ask for? Thank you .com for supplying me with exceptional materials for class.

Arrived quickly and was as described. Thanks!

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