



EXCERPT

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The Last Things

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In this final *Contours of Christian Theology* volume, David Höhne offers a trinitarian theological description of eschatology that is at once systematic, generated from the theological interpretation of Scripture, and sensitive to essential elements for Christian practice. His reading of the Bible is shaped by the gospel, informed by the history of Christian thought, and dedicated to serving the church.

Systematic and Sensitive Eschatology

In many ways and at various times since the resurrection of Jesus, the church has agonized over the Father's plans to restore his kingdom to the earth. If Jesus has ascended to the right hand on high and the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all flesh, then surely the *Last Things* have come to pass – or very nearly. Of course, after nearly 2,000 years of anticipation Christians in the West struggle to maintain a hope for the future exclusively on the promises of the gospel and to resist the false optimism of the Enlightenment. Ironically, even modernity's secular critics have come to see that its determination to displace God as the foundation of truth, meaning and purpose has failed miserably. While promising 'a culture of unintimidated, curious, rational, self-reliant individuals', it has instead delivered 'a herd society, a race of anxious, timid, conformist "sheep," and a culture of utter banality'. In the twentieth century alone the paradoxes of our modern culture, especially the Romantic infatuation with change or revolution, have given ample evidence of both our desire to preserve, at all costs, an individual's right to choose and, simultaneously, the potential to unleash technological forces capable of destroying human life entirely.

Throughout this modern period with its messianic aspirations and apocalyptic visions, Christian accounts of eschatology have expanded to include more than the traditional list or sequence of end-times events. During the twentieth century what has been called the 'now but not-yet' tension of the gospel message has become more prominent. Some movements in Christian theology have favoured the 'now' or realized elements of God's promises, while others have argued for emphasis on the 'not-yet' of God's rule over history. In this book I shall aim to keep these two poles in equilibrium by developing a biblically anticipatory and theologically experiential account of eschatology. That is, the Scriptures will determine what we can expect of God's will for creation in the future, and in the meantime our life will be guided and governed by reflecting on the promises that the God of the Bible makes to his people. As such, eschatology in what follows will mean 'the goal of history toward which the Bible moves' and 'the biblical factors and events bearing on that goal'. One of the chief aims of this book is to construct an explicitly Trinitarian description of eschatology that is at once systematic, generated from the theological interpretation of Scripture and yet sensitive to essential elements of Christian practice.

While there is no shortage of books on 'the end times', too few combine systematic theology with a theological interpretation of Scripture and Christian living. Regrettably, many books on the subject arise out of incoherent or superficial readings of the Bible that detract from, or even ignore, the 'once and for all' achievements of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The cost to the church is an eschatology that is insufficiently Christian despite its claim to be 'biblical'. Alternatively, many books on this subject fail to consider how God reveals himself through the Lord Jesus and by the power of his Spirit and are therefore not genuinely Christian, despite the claim to be 'theological'. Sadly, too many books on this subject fail to distinguish between the hope provided by the gospel and the superficial aspirations of a culture that is shaped by the tenets of free-market capitalism and Western political liberalism.

—Taken from the introduction



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