

## Philosophy in Review



# Teresa Morgan, "The New Testament and the Theology of Trust"

Wm. Curtis Holtzen 

Volume 43, Number 4, November 2023

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1108422ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1108422ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

University of Victoria

### ISSN

1206-5269 (print)

1920-8936 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this review

Holtzen, W. (2023). Review of [Teresa Morgan, "The New Testament and the Theology of Trust"]. *Philosophy in Review*, 43(4), 25–27.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1108422ar>

© Wm. Curtis Holtzen, 2023



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

**érudit**

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

**Morgan Teresa.** *The New Testament and the Theology of Trust.* Oxford University Press 2022. 480pp. \$125.00 USD (Hardcover 9780192859587).

*Pistis* and its cognates have long been the subject of biblical, theological, and philosophical studies. Scholars, especially since the medieval period, have translated and emphasized faith, belief, or knowledge as its primary meaning. Teresa Morgan, building upon her book *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire* (2015), where she demonstrated that in first-century principate *pistis* and *fides* typically denoted trust, argues in this book ‘for the recovery of trust as a central theme in Christian theology’ (1). In *Roman Faith*, Morgan primarily explored how Classical, as well as early Jewish and Christian, writings used *pistis* and *fides*, while *The New Testament & The Theology of Trust* offers a fuller and richer theological argument that draws out the implications of ‘trust’ being the richer meaning for *pistis* (3).

*The New Testament and the Theology of Trust* is primarily a work of New Testament biblical theology, though Morgan also displays a profound breadth of knowledge, making careful use of theology and history as well as the psychology and, of course, philosophy of trust. While I will focus mainly on her philosophical and theological considerations, the reader should know that this is a multidisciplinary work.

Morgan presents the groundwork for her argument in the opening chapter, reviewing her earlier work on *pistis* and *fides*, explaining how confessional theology intersects with historical study, and summarizing how trust has been approached in disciplines such as the social sciences, philosophy, psychology, and theology. She argues that biblically and historically, *pistis* and its relatives have a variety of meanings ranging from trust and trustworthiness to loyalty, credibility, belief, and more. However, she notes that Greek tends to use other words besides *pistis* to denote belief or ‘thinking’ (4). For this reason, ‘trust’ serves as the ‘umbrella term’ because *pistis* ‘means both the trust I put in you and the trustworthiness I attribute to you and which ... you display; it means both my faithfulness to you ... and yours to me’ (7).

After reviewing the work of several modern ‘pistologists,’ Morgan offers her own working definition of ‘relational trust.’ Her lengthy definition can be condensed to, ‘Trust is the action of putting something ... or the attitude of willingness to put something, in someone else’s hands ... on the basis ... that the other will respond positively’ (22). Morgan asks several big questions which frame her study, such as: ‘Why do New Testament writers think anyone should or does trust in God or in Jesus Christ?’, ‘What is it like to live in a relationship of trust with God and/or Christ?’, and most intriguing, ‘What happens when God and/or Christ put their trust in human beings?’ (25-26).

In chapter 2, the ‘*pistis* of God’ is examined through the Pauline corpus. For Paul, the trustworthiness of God is shown primarily, though unexpectedly, in the Christ event. While God is understood as permanently trustworthy, it is not risk-free trust. While trusting God and Christ could lead to exclusion or persecution, Morgan argues that the greatest risk of trust in God was the ‘difficulty of living out its implication until the day of the Lord’ because followers may ‘fail to be as trustworthy as God asks them to be’ (69). This concept introduces a discussion of God’s trust and is further developed in chapter 7.



Morgan strongly suggests that God's trust is a form of 'therapeutic trust.' God does not necessarily believe the trusted or entrusted will be faithful but hopes that trusting will encourage those to become trustworthy (71). Morgan understands that discussions of divine trust raise questions concerning divine omniscience. She recognizes that a theology of divine trust works well with open theism but offers a different approach. She suggests that God's foreknowledge of the future is founded on God's (present?) relational knowledge of humanity instead of propositional knowledge. She uses the analogy of a parent who knows and understands their children all too well. I am left wondering how God genuinely risks or authentically trusts, even therapeutically, when God knows the outcome of the act and whether the trusted will ever really become trustworthy. Morgan's own language of God hoping and knowing 'that their trust is *likely* to be fragile and imperfect' (71) raises questions about how much foreknowledge God might have.

Chapter 3 shifts focus from trusting God to trusting Jesus as the exalted Christ. While covering much ground (including the role of belief in trust), the triad of trust between God, Christ, and the faithful is key. Morgan writes, 'Christ is able to mediate between God and humanity not least because he is faithful both to God and to human beings and so worthy of trust by both.' Furthermore, 'we can assume that wherever in the New Testament writing Christ is envisaged as mediator, or more broadly as acting for both God and human beings, he is also envisaged as faith to both and worthy of trust by both' (125). She concludes that while there is no 'unified story of trust between God, Jesus Christ, and human beings' (137), it is important for practically all 'New Testament writers, and presumably a wide range of early communities, to speak of trust between God, Christ, and the faithful in every part of Christ's existence' (138).

Advancing a trust-based model of atonement is the effort of Chapter 4. Further developing and building on the triad of trust between God, Christ, and human beings, while not necessarily supplanting other atonement models, Morgan argues that restoring a relationship of mutual trust is fundamental to Jesus' death. Assisting those who argue that violence was unnecessary for the atonement, she writes that in a trust-based model, 'nothing is accomplished on the cross per se. In Christ's crucifixion, both God and Christ take the greatest imaginable risk, maintaining their trust in one another and in humanity even when it leads to betrayal, humiliation, and death' (163). Furthermore, Christ's trust and trustworthiness are 'vindicated in the resurrection' (164). Morgan does not eschew images of Jesus' death as an act of sacrifice and redemption but ultimately understands these as a means to an end in which the triad of trust 'is both the catalyst and the expression of the new age and of Paul's eschatological hope' (194).

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the gospels and their depictions of how and why people put their trust in Jesus or failed to trust in him. Chapter 6 explains that the gospels are critical of those who seek signs or proofs to trust Jesus. However, trusting the person of Jesus first is required to understand his teachings and not the other way around. The disciples are to trust Jesus because of Jesus' trust in God, which will result in God entrusting the disciples with power (221). Morgan also asserts that there is no suggestion that those who trusted Jesus in his earthly life understood him as anything other than human. '[I]t seems, everything human beings need for forgiveness, salvation, or eternal life, can be gained through trust in the Jesus in his human person' (234). Chapter 6 builds on this,

arguing that the trust of the disciples and followers of Jesus is imperfect but adequate. ‘Their relationship with Jesus is a tapestry of light and shade: trust, confidence, fear, doubt, and scepticism’ (259). She concludes that while Paul may offer an ideal of *pistis*, the gospels were reassurance that ‘human trust is always likely to be less than ideal’ but ‘there is time ... for trust to develop and strengthen’ (279).

Chapter 7 builds on what was begun in Chapter 2, that God is forging a new partnership of *pistis* by entrusting those who have responded to the Christ event with trust. Morgan, noting that entrustedness is a theme too often missed by commentators, carefully works through biblical passages that, explicitly and implicitly, teach that God entrusts the faithful with mission and ministry. Concerning gifts of power, Morgan argues, ‘[i]t is the trust relationship, with all its implications of obedience and service, trustworthiness, self-entrusting, and hope, which must remain at the front and centre of the attitude and actions of everyone who receives and seeks to do the work of the spirit’ (307). She further argues that the Christian narrative of a triad of trust between God, Christ, and humanity ‘offers a profoundly optimistic vision of humanity and its capacity, despite all its limitations and shortcomings, to enter and live in a relationship of right-standing and abundant life with God’ and furthermore, humanity is to share this optimism and share in the work (323).

The final and most philosophical chapter is Morgan’s venture into propositional trust, which she defines as ‘entrusting oneself, or being willing to entrust oneself, to a proposition about which one is not certain’ (326). Morgan explores the challenges of believing or knowing, not just in religious studies but in all the humanities, to reach her ultimate point that propositional trust ‘can act as a basis for relational trust’ and ‘offers an alternative to claims of objective knowledge or reasonable belief’ (356).

For those willing to put in the time and effort, *The New Testament and the Theology of Trust* is a rewarding book, both academically and personally. Morgan offers a formidable and comprehensive, though never tedious, work that deserves to be read widely, especially by biblical and systematic theologians and philosophers of trust and religion.

**Wm. Curtis Holtzen**, Hope International University