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## Book Reviews

***Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament.* Edited by G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007. xxviii + 1239 pages. Hardcover, \$59.99.**

This is a great resource for every pastor and all other serious students of the New Testament. Beale and Carson have gathered a team of eminent scholars, who contribute to this commentary on the quotations, allusions, and echoes of the Old Testament in each of the New Testament books. While providing answers to the overall question of how the New Testament writers understood and used the Scriptures, the focus here is on the quotations and allusions themselves. In which context do they appear and from which context are they taken? How is the Old Testament text used in the New Testament passage? What is the theological significance of its usage? Does the author cite the Hebrew or the Greek Old Testament? In addition to this, there is often also a discussion of how the text is used in contemporary Jewish sources. For pastors who usually preach on the Gospel reading, this volume will be of great help in their efforts to include Old Testament material in their sermons and so enrich the interpretation of the text, preaching "the whole counsel of God." Especially helpful in this regard is that each of the four Gospels is given a thorough discussion; together these discussions make up almost half of the volume. Of course, sometimes the reader may wonder why this or that allusion does not get more attention. I am, for example, surprised by the sparse comment on Jesus' allusion to Isaiah 35:5-6 in Matthew 11:5. Nevertheless, this is an invaluable tool for the preparation of sermons and Bible studies.

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***Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy—A Righteous Gentile vs. the Third Reich.* By Eric Metaxas. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010. 591 pages. Hardcover, \$29.99. Paperback, \$19.99.**

Biographies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer abound, ranging from the massive and authoritative work of over a thousand pages, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Fortress, 2000), by Bonhoeffer's friend Eberhard Bethge, to dozens of shorter, popular accounts. Those interested in a helpful guide to the literature might consult Jonathan D. Sorum, "Review Essay: Another Look at Bonhoeffer," *Lutheran Quarterly* 18 (2004): 469-482, since the body of work on Bonhoeffer is immense. Drawing largely on secondary sources, especially Bethge and *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, edited by Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald Smith (Harper and Row, 1966), Eric Metaxas has woven together a narrative focusing more on Bonhoeffer's personal life and his struggle against National Socialism

than on his theological contributions. While this biography contains nothing that cannot be found in other accounts, Metaxas provides a readable, albeit selective, telling of Bonhoeffer's life. Readers intimidated by the size and detail of Bethge's magisterial work will find *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy – A Righteous Gentile vs. the Third Reich* much less daunting.

Eberhard Jüngel once remarked that one must remove "the halo of theological unassailability" that "has surrounded the works of Bonhoeffer, much to their own detriment. One should destroy that halo for Bonhoeffer's sake" (cited by Frederik De Lange, *Waiting for the Word: Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Speaking About God*, 13). Metaxas never really gets beyond the halo. In fact, the Bonhoeffer who appears in his book often speaks with the theological accents of American Evangelical spirituality. While one can resonate with Metaxas's attempt to retrieve Bonhoeffer from the "Death of God Theologians" and various revisionists who sought to use unfinished fragments from Bonhoeffer's letters to construct a secularized Christianity, he cannot be so easily refashioned in the mold of Evangelicalism either. The accuracy of the book also suffers from the common mistake of confusing Hermann Sasse with the pro-Nazi bishop Martin Sasse of Thuringia (see 307 and index, 588).

John T. Pless

*Christian Ethics in a Technological Age.* By Brian Brock. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010. 408 pages. Paperback, \$34.00.

Asserting that the gospel is critical but not destructive of technological developments, Brian Brock seeks to demonstrate how Christian doctrine both frames and engages ethical questions pressed on us by these developments: "The annunciation of the gospel does not destroy the modern technological world altogether, but is a divine invitation to a form of life at once critical, enlivening, and connective" (6). Using the biblical narrative of Paul's encounter with Demetrius, the silversmith in Ephesus (Acts 19:24–26), Brock probes whether or not the presence of Christ is invasive to those who construct the icons of our technologically constituted culture. The first part of the book works through the philosophical claims of Martin Heidegger, George Grant, and Michel Foucault, pressing issues of economics, sociality, and political community within the matrix of a metaphysics of technology. The second half of the book is an effort in constructive theology, as Brock endeavors to work out a concrete ethic grounded in Christ and addressed to issues of political power, work, ecology, marriage, and fertility.

The Swiss theologian Karl Barth is the theological north star guiding the general orientation of Brock's project, although Brock does not hesitate to offer criticisms of Barth along the way. Brock also draws on Oswald Bayer, Bernd Wannewetsch, Christoph Schwöbel, Michael Banner, and Hans Ulrich to

argue for an ethic entrenched within the contours of creation. Those who have read and reacted to *Together with All Creatures*, recently released by the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations, might find Brock's criticism of approaches to environmental ethics provocative. For instance, he appreciates some aspects of Wendell Berry's work, especially his accent on the gift-nature of creation. Brock believes, however, that Berry's approach is marked by several serious theological flaws, including a romantic notion of the holiness of creation and a disparagement of biblical eschatology (304).

Several other aspects of Brock's work merit careful reflection. He critiques the notion of freedom inherent in modern conceptions of technology. Technology promises autonomy, or freedom of choice. This is a durable claim reinforced in myriad ways culturally and politically within the technological ethos. Accordingly, Brock worries that "abortion and contraception are understood not as acts of gratitude for human fertility and its biological roots, but as bringing freedom by offering escape from the tyranny of biology" (363). Brock diagnoses both Manichean and Pelagian cancers gnawing away at the Christian vision of ethics. The Manichean impulse is identified in the attempt "to expunge the work of the evil creator god by erasing his handiwork from the genome" (370). Brock argues that contemporary Pelagians seek perfection through "responsible procreation," that is, genetic engineering.

*Christian Ethics in a Technological Age* is not an easy read, but it is a book that will help pastors and laity alike think more clearly about the way technology shapes our vision of human life and the alternative vision given in the confession of the triune God. Brock accurately notes that "the gods of any age do not go quietly" (374). In this well-researched and at times challenging book, Brock provides Christians with a theologically informed tool for discerning the spirits which haunt our culture, as well as some significant assistance in formulating a coherent response.

John T. Pless

***Epaphras: Paul's Educator at Colossae.* By Michael Trainor. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008. 123 + xi pages. Paperback, \$12.95.**

Michael Trainor's *Epaphras*, part of the series *Paul's Social Network: Brothers and Sisters in Faith*, combines close attention to New Testament texts and modern network analysis to produce a 123-page book on a person whose name appears only three times in Scripture (Phlm 23; Col 1:7; 4:12-13). Trainor's book is comprised of seven chapters: One: Introducing Epaphras; Two: Epaphras' Social Network; Three: The Domestic Network in the Letter to Philemon; Four: Epaphras' Distinctiveness in Philemon; Five: Epaphras in the Letter to the Colossians; Six: Epaphras' Colleagues at Colossae; Seven: Summarizing Epaphras of Colossae. At the end of the book appear Notes (97-

108), Bibliography (109–115), Index of Persons and Subjects (116–120), and Index of Biblical Sources (121–123).

Complexities associated with authorship have great bearing upon one's understanding of Epaphras. Since Trainor believes that Paul wrote Philemon but not Colossians, he places great emphasis upon Philemon 23–24, where Epaphras's name appears first in a list of persons who append their greetings at the end of the letter: "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers" (Phlm 23–24 RSV). Epaphras's prominence in this list and the specific language Paul uses of him ("sends greetings") suggest his importance within Paul's social network. His significance in Philemon becomes, according to Trainor, the catalyst the writer of the letter to the Colossians allegedly drew upon and elaborated in Colossians 1:7 and 4:12–13. The latter passages establish Epaphras as the "instructor and interpreter of Paul's Gospel of God" (10) and prove that he was "foremost in Paul's retinue" (41) and Paul's "legitimate spokesman and interpreter" (69), and through Epaphras Paul continues to "speak from the grave" (70). Trainor's insights depend in large measure upon the presumed pseudonymity of Colossians, a position which I do not share. Textual support for the Pauline authorship of Colossians is actually quite strong (Col 1:1, 23–25, 29; 2:1, 4–5; 4:3–4, 7–8, 11, 13, 18), so I cannot abide the argument that Epaphras, or anyone else, was the real author of Colossians. If Paul was not the author of Colossians, would the many Christians there and elsewhere have carried on as though Paul really were the author—knowing full well that he was not? This is the stuff of popular conspiracy theories (e.g., *The Da Vinci Code*; *Angels and Demons*), not fact. So Pauline authorship still has much to commend it—even though, to be sure, problems remain with traditional explanations (cf. Trainor, 2–5). Another irritant is Trainor's use of the terminology "Jesus movement groups," "Jesus households," and "Jesus followers" for what more traditional interpreters would term "churches," "congregations," and "Christians." This nomenclature suggests that the book is intended more for social scientists, New Testament scholars, and graduate students than for pastors, church professionals, and Christians.

Nevertheless, I completely agree that the series' social-historical approach opens up "new ways of envisioning [Paul's] world" (45). Just one funerary monument can cast a bright light upon the type of world it was that Epaphras originally inhabited (16–19), and Trainor's understanding of ancient slavery (8, 44–46, 65, 68, 99, 103) is more nuanced than one ordinarily finds in scholarship of this type. This is a book—and an approach—that should be utilized by Lutheran pastors and laity, given our heightened emphases on cross-cultural ministry and missions.

*Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek.* By Constantine R. Campbell. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008. 159 pages. Paperback, \$16.99.

Although I read every word of this book carefully and tried with great concentration to understand Campbell's arguments completely, I had trouble coming to terms with this book—both on account of my own limitations and (as I suspect) from Campbell's tendency to presume a lot from his reader. Perhaps the best way to appreciate the contribution of this book is to consider the following two statements, which essentially describe the same events from two quite different perspectives: I walked down the street. A man talked to me (external); I was walking down the street when a man began talking to me (internal). Campbell uses this example (20) to point out that a Greek verb's tense does not provide the whole story of what happens in a sentence. Indeed, close attention to the Greek text quickly reveals that New Testament authors used present tenses to refer to the past, past tenses (aorists and imperfects) to refer to the present, perfect tenses that have a present orientation, etc. (21). Verbal aspect is key to understanding such conundrums.

Another illustration Campbell keeps coming back to involves an imaginary investigative reporter sent to cover a street parade. The reporter who observes from a helicopter and can therefore give a general account of the parade has "perfective aspect," or an external viewpoint, while the reporter who observes from the street and sees the parade from within has "imperfective aspect," or an internal viewpoint (20).

There is much more to aspect, however, than this apparently simple illustration lets on. After two introductory chapters, *What is Verbal Aspect?* and *The History of Verbal Aspect*, Campbell unpacks his theory of the two viewpoints in the remaining chapters: Three: Perfective Aspect; Four: Imperfective Aspect; Five: The Problem of the Perfect; Six: Verbal Lexeme Basics; Seven: Present and Imperfect Tense-Forms; Eight: Aorist and Future Tense-Forms; Nine: Perfect and Pluperfect Tense-Forms; Ten: More Participles. Each chapter adheres to the following order of presentation: introduction, Greek texts (plus English translations), explication, and conclusion. In chapters 7–10, Campbell provides exercises on various nuances of verbal aspect: semantics, lexeme, and context, with the goal being to determine a given verb's Aktionsart, "a category of pragmatics that describes actional characteristics, such as iterative, punctiliar, ingressive, etc." (Verbal Glossary, 134). Thankfully, answers to these exercises are provided at the end (138–154). Try as I might, I just could not catch on to Campbell's system of ferreting out the subtle shades of meaning afforded by aspect. Sometimes his analyses seemed too abstract for me to grasp; other times he would explicate only one future, aorist, perfect, or what-have-you, but not comment on other verbs of the same tense which happened to fall in a given passage (this happens in pages 97, 99, 100, 108, 110, 113). Why does Campbell account for *some* of the verbs' aspects

in a given passage, but not *all* of them? This frustrating problem kept me from mastering the deeper knowledge of aspect Campbell attempts to convey in this book.

The book's cover says that Campbell wrote this book because he believes the concept of verbal aspect "can be made accessible to all students of New Testament Greek" (back cover). I rather suspect, however, that Campbell is a specialist writing for other specialists. Again, however, Campbell provides a Scripture Index at the end (155-156), making it possible to check one's own (perhaps limited) understandings of aspect against Campbell's more professional assessments. I agree with Campbell that an appreciation of aspect can cast a bright light on what might otherwise seem quite nondescript verbs (see the examples provided in 11-16); my experience has taught me, however, that one may read a book with due diligence yet still come up short. If nothing else, the book taught me that mastering Greek at deeper levels inspires humility, not arrogance.

John G. Nordling