

differences of coverage. The Neo-Babylonian empire is treated in but one page, while the kingdom of Urartu, which played a much less important role than Babylonia, gets five pages of treatment. The author also rides some hobby horses, for which he really had no space. For example, he devotes five pages of illustrations (pp. 178-182) and one page of text (pp. 51-52) to a description of the belief of the ancient Pharaohs that they had had a divine origin; and he describes the Arabic *hily*-system, a covenant-union entered by various tribes, to explain the bond existing between the tribes of ancient Israel (pp. 84-85).

Enough has been said to point out that this book tries to accomplish the impossible. A condensation of the ancient history of a dozen or so nations spanning about three thousand years into 127 pages is an almost meaningless endeavor. The reader who knows ancient history cannot learn anything from a book such as this one, and the uninitiated reader becomes confused and bewildered since there are too many facts thrown at him without being explained.

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Lohse, Eduard. *A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*. Trans. W. R. Poehlmann and R. J. Karris; ed. Helmut Koester. *Hermeneia*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971. xviii + 231 pp. \$12.00.

The appearance in English of Lohse's commentary marked a happy event for English-speaking students of the Bible. They have now available to them the best commentary on Colossians and Philemon, a translation of the 14th edition of the German Meyer series. It launches also the new commentary series, *Hermeneia*, which will include original works as well as translations of the best commentaries available.

Lohse has achieved an admirable balance between the scholarly tapping of all possible sources of meaning for words and phrases, and clarity as to the meaning of the whole paragraph. Nothing is said just to display erudition. With a sure hand he moves in a search for meaning, and the results honor the title of the English series. He brings forth a lucid interpretation. Unlike most commentaries which are intended primarily as reference works, this one is meant to be read, and it reads well. In reading it, one does not find himself in the middle of a long, disjointed series of comments on words.

For each passage, Lohse always considers the possible backgrounds: Qumran, Hellenistic Judaism, Gnosticism, Apocalypticism, or an early Christian adaptation of apocalypticism with a soteriological rather than a cosmological thrust. In this connection this reviewer is only surprised that Lohse has not made references to the apocalyptic use of the *cheirophonon* in Col 2:14.

Lohse identifies the "philosophy" being taught at Colossae as a form of syncretism having roots in Judaism. Therefore many of the terms used by the propagandists of the "philosophy" are best understood by reference to Hebrew terms. But a radical shift away from both Judaism and Christianity has occurred since the "philosophy" has established specific cultic practices of the mystery-cult type. Here his interpretation clearly affects his translation. Thus, the short phrase *ha heoraken embateuōn* is translated, "as he has

had visions of them during the mystery rites." In combatting this philosophy the author lays his theological foundation by quoting a Christian hymn (1:15-20). Lohse denies a pre-Christian origin to the hymn.

I would certainly agree with Lohse when he states that "in the context of Col, however, the command to keep festival, new moon, and sabbath is not based on the Torah according to which Israel received the Sabbath as a sign of her election from among the nations. Rather the sacred days must be kept for the sake of 'the elements of the universe,' who direct the course of the stars and thus also prescribe minutely the order of the calendar" (p. 115). As Lohse succinctly states it, "the 'philosophy' made use of terms which stemmed from Jewish tradition, but which had been transformed in the crucible of syncretism to be subject to the service of 'the elements of the universe'" (p. 116). Thus the "philosophy," which included a set cultus, and which propagandists were introducing at Colossae, may best be described as "pre-Gnostic" (p. 129).

Lohse does not think that Paul wrote the Epistle. As he sees it, Colossians is the best argument for the existence of a "Pauline school tradition" which, most probably, was centered at Ephesus. The recipient of this letter most likely lived in Colossae. But the letter is really addressed to Christians in Asia Minor (Colossae had been destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 60-61) in order to help them cope with the "menace of syncretism" (p. 181). The appeal of syncretism was based on the fear that the forgiveness of sins attained by Christians at baptism did not quite free them from the power of fate.

Only 22 pages are devoted to Philemon. Here the interpretation is rather straightforward and traditional. However, Lohse feels that Paul wrote the letter in the mid-fifties while he was a prisoner at Ephesus where he met the runaway slave, Onesimus. In writing to Philemon, Paul is not arguing that Philemon should free Onesimus so that he might come back to serve Paul. A classical parallel is provided by Pliny the Younger's letter to his friend Sabinianus on behalf of one of the latter's slaves who had run away. But whereas Pliny appealed to his friend's respect for the Stoic virtue of clemency, Paul's appeal is based on their common existence in Christ, and Philemon's knowledge of Christian love.

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McClendon, James Wm., Jr. *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology*. Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1974. 224 pp. \$13.95; paperback, \$4.95.

The author proposes in this book to do theology based on biographies rather than the study of God. People's lives are based on the convictions they hold in common with the community of which they are a part. The study of Christian beliefs can be more directly and authentically studied by concerning ourselves with lived lives. In studying lives, one needs to observe what are the dominant or controlling images found in these lives. These