

the reader a broad and sweeping argument for understanding the papacy and its interaction with Western history and culture in a new, refreshing way.

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Dunn, James D. G. *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996. 388 pp. Hardcover, \$32.00.

In their foreword regarding the series the editors refer to the paucity of recent NT commentaries that cater to the needs of students of the Greek text. It is to meet this need that the *New International Greek Testament Commentary* series was developed. At the same time, the editors do not consider the series a "full-scale critical commentary" (x), though they make liberal use of the many articles and monographs of NT studies that continue to be produced. Their goal is to provide a theological understanding of the text, based on historical-critical-linguistic exegesis. Of course, the words "historical" and "critical," when put side-by-side, might suggest to some readers liberal presuppositions that would, in their view, irreparably flaw the work. In general, the series does not take a liberal, critical approach, and in the present volume James D. G. Dunn does not reflect such presuppositions. Dunn, who is Lightfoot Professor of Divinity at the University of Durham, England, has written numerous NT works, including two other commentaries: one on Galatians and a two-volume work on Romans for the *Word Commentary* series. His commentaries reflect his careful attention to detail, his unusual ability to identify ancient parallels, and a keen insight into modern-day applications. In keeping with the title of the series, the editors have attempted to be "international" in character by drawing on the specialized qualifications of worldwide authors. The aim of the series is "to serve those who are engaged in the ministry of the Word of God and thus glorify God's name" (xi).

Dunn's style of writing is clear and understandable for persons from a broad spectrum of intellectual acuity. However, as the series title suggests, the work will be best appreciated by those who received above-average marks in Greek and have dusted off their Greek Testaments at least once or twice in the last six months. After an extensive bibliography of commentaries and "other literature," Dunn examines both Colossians and Philemon, giving considerable emphasis to the Jewish and Hellenistic cultures in the first century. He also pays particular attention to how these books portray the Pauline mission to the particular communities that received them.

Dunn applies his careful scholarship to the expected introduction issues such as time, place, and occasion of the writing of the letters. For Colossians, in addition to the historical/cultural/geographical background, Dunn devotes considerable attention to the elusive heresy/philosophy that called forth Paul's vigorous reproofs. It is a helpful, even necessary prelude to the commentary. After the introduction, Dunn carefully works his way through the text, Greek-phrase-by-Greek-phrase without a running English translation of those phrases. Although a translation is given at the beginning of each pericope of verses, the design favors those who don't have to keep paging back to check the translation in order to follow the exegesis.

The Pauline authorship of Philemon poses no problem, but Colossians is another story. While Dunn doesn't take a strong stand against Pauline authorship,

he feels that some other hand must be involved, since the vocabulary and mechanical style differ from the undisputed Paulines and because the unconscious speech mannerisms and "authorial fingerprint" are different. Also, he feels the theological and paranetic content is quite different from that of the Paulines. A few examples would have strengthened his argument. Still, Dunn feels that the similarity of names and styles between Philemon and Colossians suggests that if Paul was not the writer of Colossians, someone very close to Paul (like Timothy) must have been. At length he decides to leave the issue of authorship "fairly fluid," but interprets the letter with the assumption that it was the work of both Paul and Timothy, with Paul being the dominant influence. Given the many similarities of the letter to Ephesians, Dunn suggests that Colossians is among the "late(r)" Pauline letters (19).

In spite of a long tradition of interpreting the Colossians false teaching as a heresy that included elements of incipient Gnosticism as well as Jewish legalism, Dunn views it differently. He feels that it cannot be called a heresy, since there was not yet a well-defined Christian orthodoxy, whereupon he refers to it as "the syncretistic soup of religious philosophical ideas that cohered into the later Gnostic systems" (27). But, for Dunn, the primary ingredient in the Colossians belief system was simply Judaism, and he consistently refers to it as the Colossians philosophy.

A brief example of Dunn's exegesis is his interpretation of the wiping out of the *cheirographon tois dogmasin* ("handwriting of ordinances" KJV) in Col 2:14, not as bearing on the ceremonial law (a common Adventist view), but as the erasing of the record of sins, since it is a parallel to the previous phrase, "having forgiven us all our trespasses." But while interpreting *cheirographon* as referring to the moral law, he repeatedly asserts (correctly, I think) that "it is not the law which is thought of as thus destroyed, but rather its particular condemnation of transgressions" (166).

Since Dunn holds that the primary element in the Colossians philosophy was a narrow, covenant-marking Judaism that had no welcoming attitude toward Gentile converts, his warning about Sabbath insistence in 2:16 by persons diminishing Christ (v. 19), is understandable. The Sabbath in question is not simply ceremonial, but the Sabbath as a Jewish institution in all its "covenant distinctiveness" (175). It was somewhat disappointing to look in vain in Dunn's comments for some deductions about how Paul's instruction impinges upon Sabbath-keeping today.

Overall, it is a commentary characterized by careful exegesis of the Greek text, yet it is presented in language that is not beyond the grasp of the average minister. Even the footnotes are concise and not highly technical. In spite of the number and variety of NT commentaries now available, this recent series, and this volume in particular, make a valuable contribution.

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Elwell, Walter A., and Robert W. Yarbrough. *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*. Encountering Biblical Studies. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998. 416 pp., plus CD-ROM developed by Chris Miller and Phil Bassett. \$44.99.

Encountering the New Testament is the first volume published in Baker's new series of college-level textbooks called Encountering Biblical Studies. A