

BOOK REVIEWS

Achtemeier, Paul J. *1 Peter*. Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. 423 pp. \$50.00.

For the study of both the OT and NT the Hermeneia series of commentaries has made its impact. Written by established scholars, Hermeneia is regarded by many as the premier biblical commentary series in English.

Paul J. Achtemeier, the Herbert Worth and Annie H. Jackson Professor of Biblical Interpretation at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, has contributed to NT scholarship some thirteen books and numerous scholarly articles. He is also the general editor of *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, new edition (1985), and a consulting editor for *Harper's Bible Commentary* (1985-88).

For this commentary, Achtemeier provides his own translation, reflecting his exegetical decisions. Each section begins with grammatical notes on the text. Quotations from Latin and Greek authors follow the texts of the Loeb Classical Library or other standard editions; the translations, except where noted, are the author's. Footnotes to both primary and secondary literature evaluate previous scholarship and add nuances to the older views in light of recent information.

A major issue in the introduction to 1 Peter is the issue of authorship, which for many recent scholars constitutes one of the biggest challenges. Achtemeier points out that "the nature of the letter, its destination, and its content" complicate any attempt to resolve the problem of authorship. For instance, the quality of the Greek "reveals a certain facility in rhetoric, an anomaly for one who in another context is identified as 'unlettered' (Acts 4:13)" (1-2).

After a consideration of many different kinds of evidence, Achtemeier contends that 1 Peter reflects a date after the Neronian persecution but that the date does not exclude Petrine authorship. The long introduction concludes with a survey of the theology of 1 Peter, and a discussion of the text.

The commentary is very useful in comparing and contrasting the ideas of Peter with the writings of Paul, John, and the author of Hebrews. Another strength of this commentary is its historical-critical comparisons of themes in early Christianity, especially in the author's tracing of the origins of Petrine views on the teachings of Jesus. Achtemeier offers insightful exegesis and often stimulating exposition.

The commentary proper is followed by a select bibliography in two parts. The first consists of a brief list of editions and short titles of commentaries, studies and articles often cited (xxiii-xxxv). The second part, a longer list, contains commentaries and studies on 1 Peter that will be particularly helpful to readers of the commentary (359-381). The great majority are in English. Four indexes are included, of passages (383-408), Greek words (409-412), subjects (413-416), and modern authors (417-421).

The technical but readable approach will be appreciated by both beginning and advanced students, and Achtemeier's critical and theological insights illuminate the text for every reader. This is a substantial work with a clear and logical methodology which leads to new insights into the study of 1 Peter. It will

be used for a long time and, because it is complete, balanced, and judicious, it will be beneficial to those of diverse theological views.

9104 Linson St.
Silver Spring, MD 20901

OTIS COUTSOUMPOS

Arnold, Clinton E. *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996. xii + 378 pp. \$19.99.

The Colossian Syncretism can perhaps best be situated against the backdrop of the ongoing controversy surrounding Colossians—not merely in relation to such general introductory issues as authorship, authenticity, original addressees, or audience, but more in terms of the specific factors and forces that lie behind the syncretistic “philosophy” (2:8-19) against which the author of Colossians (for Arnold it is Paul) is inveighing. The work under review should also be placed alongside Arnold’s earlier Aberdeen dissertation, *Ephesians: Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of Its Historical Setting*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series (Cambridge University Press, 1989). We find “intertextual echoes” of the latter volume in the former precisely because “the seeds of the present study [*The Colossian Syncretism*] were planted and took root” during Arnold’s earlier investigation of Ephesians (v).

In an Introduction, a General Conclusion, and three Parts (comprised of nine chapters), Arnold provides us with a highly informative piece of scholarship. The work is well organized, moving us from general background information that is grounded in the magico-cum-religio-cultural traditions of a relatively obscure city like Colossae and its environs, traditions that tended to foster angelolatrous belief and behavior, to a more focused study of Colossians itself—in particular, two passages: (1) the Christological poem/hymn of 1:15-20 with its timely stress on the supremacy of an all-sufficient Christ, and (2) the pericope which deals specifically with the false or syncretistic philosophy itself (2:8-19).

Arnold’s basic thesis is that, contrary to the Gnostic and other hypotheses that have been tried, “the beliefs and practices of the opponents at Colossae best cohere around the category of what might loosely be called folk religion” (5) with its stress on trinkets, amulets, a mumbo-jumbo-like use of language, and other apotropaic magic-related practices and paraphernalia. To buttress a well-argued thesis, he quarries from relatively little known angel inscriptions, magical texts and archeological data relevant to Asia Minor as a whole. His primary sources cover the papyri, amulets, and lead curse tablets and include both the non-Jewish and the Jewish. Examples include: inscriptions from Claros and Notion; the cults of Apollo, Men, Theos Hypsistos, Cybele, Attis and Isis; the Book of Tobit, the Testament of Solomon, the Sephar Ha-Razim and the Hekhalot literature. Interestingly (but not as surprising for the reviewer as, seemingly, it appears for Arnold), what emerges from a scanning of these and other relevant sources is that basically, “Jewish magic appears quite similar to pagan [I prefer to say: non-Jewish] magic” (59). And under the rubric of the “pagan” are to be found some Egyptian magical belief and behavior-systems with distinct tinge of the Jewish—systems in