

#### BOOK REVIEW

Clinton E. Arnold. *Ephesians*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010. 538 pp. Hbk. ISBN 0310243734.

Zondervan's Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament provides a welcome addition to the pastor's library with this volume devoted to the exposition of Ephesians. Written by Ephesians scholar Clinton E. Arnold, this work provides a wealth of helpful insight for the preparation of sermons and Christian education materials. This volume also interacts with the latest and most influential literature on Ephesians, which, along with its copious indices, makes this a helpful research tool for the pastor, student, or scholar.

The design of the book is attractive, the layout well organized, and the hardcover binding will ensure it survives heavy use. Documentation takes the form of footnotes and provides dialogue with major commentaries. The two-column arrangement of the footnotes can be problematic. This can occasionally create the impression of a typo for citations of medium length. For example, it may seem as though only half of the bibliographic data has been included for two different sources when, in fact, it is the information for a single source (e.g., p. 403, n. 105).

The headings of the commentary also present some issues. A brief chart indicating the structure of each pericope is included in the introductory portions of the commentary. These are made to take the form of a web browser window, complete with a scroll bar. As one progresses through Ephesians, the scrollbar appears to have advanced, perhaps with the intention of providing the reader with the sense that while reading this book they are working on a computer. This is unnecessary and perhaps distracting.

Arnold's commentary begins with a forty-page introduction to Ephesians' major themes, the controversy surrounding its intended audience, and its broader historical context. The usual subject matter, such as the date and place of writing and the letter's intended purpose, is included. Arnold argues that Ephesians is an authentic Pauline writing and explores the letter's relationship to Colossians, arguing against literary dependence but suggesting that the two letters were composed at roughly the same time. According to Arnold, attributing authorship of Ephesians to someone else creates more problems than it solves in light of autobiographical information, church tradition, and its Pauline theology. Furthermore, Arnold makes note of increasing doubt over the acceptability of pseudoecclesiastical letter writing in this period, suggesting a lack of literary precedent for this practice. Arnold also explores some of Ephesians' literary and stylistic features before beginning the commentary proper. The commentary ends with a "Theology of Ephesians," which provides a synopsis of Paul's thought in this letter. This is followed by a Scripture and Apocrypha Index, an index of other ancient literature, a subject index, and an index of authors.

Arnold differs from most commentators, arguing that the occasion for Ephesians lies not in church disunity, problems with gnosticism, or the need for theological correction, but in the life circumstances of Ephesus. For Arnold, these difficulties can be subsumed under the broader category of a "struggle with the powers of darkness," powers that, according to Arnold's presentation of Paul, would attempt to harm the Ephesian church by promoting disunity and sowing theological problems through human agents such as false teachers.

Each section that examines a passage of Ephesians begins with an examination of the passage's literary context. This is followed by a synopsis of the pericope's main idea, a translation into English, and a grammatical diagram that has been translated into English. The introductory sections for each pericope conclude with an exegetical outline to aid in exegesis. These outlines provide a sense of the passage's logical flow before discussion turns to traditional verse by verse commentary. Each section ends with a "Theology in Application" that provides suggestions

for useful application of the principles discussed in the passage.

This commentary is not a critical research commentary, but in keeping with the goals of the series to which it belongs, acts as an exegetical-theological resource. Yet, the author demonstrates extensive knowledge of critical issues and discusses them when appropriate, providing access to the critical literature by means of footnotes. The most notable feature of Arnold's introduction chapter is his exploration of magic and polytheism in this period and how these influenced the agenda of Paul's letter. The discussion of the goddess Artemis, the beliefs surrounding her, and her influence in the city's culture provide useful insight for reading Ephesians and Acts 19:23–41. Acts 19:18–20 is used to explore pluralistic religiosity among Ephesian Christians as shown in the account of an attempted exorcism by the seven sons of Sceva. Arnold argues that many Ephesian Christians would have "hedged their bets" by pledging allegiance to Christ while holding their previous magical and spiritual folk practices in reserve unless otherwise convinced of Jesus' power over other deities. The prominence of the Artemis cult, magic, and folk belief consistently inform Arnold's commentary, offering unique contextual insights into this letter and its claims for the supremacy of Jesus.

The "In Depth" boxes scattered throughout the commentary provide readers with useful summary discussions of important themes, although these would be difficult to use in research. Included in these segments are household codes and the role of women, the demonic powers, prayer, church leadership, marriage and covenant, and Paul's teaching on slavery. These discussions are useful in framing Ephesians within its historical and cultural context and help to remind the reader of the differences between the present time and that of Paul and his readers. These comments seem intended to function as a stand-alone resource as the "In Depth" boxes tend to suffer from a scarcity of foot-notes and lack bibliographies. This forces the user to search the broader commentary sections for relevant sources.

Arnold's advocacy for a complementarian interpretation of Eph 5:21–33 may, at first glance, raise some eyebrows among more egalitarian interpreters. In Arnold's view, Paul is proposing

a form of christologically-rooted mutual submission on the basis that the household code begins in 5:21, not 5:22. The author goes to great lengths to argue that such an interpretation is counter-cultural not only for the present day but also for the Hellenistic period as well. He argues that the admonition for women to submit to their husbands may be in response to a form of feminism developing in the first century that was deemed by Paul to be incompatible with Christian virtues. He also suggests that the stress of this passage lies not on female submission (which he is very careful to distinguish from “obedience”), but upon the command for men to love their wives, with instructions to wives consisting of 47 words and those to husbands 143 words (almost three times the length). He also firmly argues that women should not be subject to abuse or forced into immorality by their husbands, and as Christians, reserve the right to disobey in such instances.

Arnold is fully cognizant of the reservations modern women may have toward this interpretation, so he provides many examples of how it may take shape in a relationship. Except for references to male leadership, the descriptions of what obedience to Paul’s commands would look like closely resemble those of an egalitarian relationship. In large part this is due to Arnold’s distinction between “submission” and “obedience,” as well as careful notation of what the passage fails to prescribe. It is also largely due to his advocacy for contextualization, where the principle continues to remain valid but its application remains contingent upon cultural circumstances. Despite his views concerning male leadership, Arnold does not envision a return to a patriarchal society. On the whole, pastors and students will find Arnold’s treatment of the issues to be balanced and fair, and the notes provide access to the debate in the scholarly literature.

The most helpful feature of this commentary for pastors and other interpreters is the grounding of Arnold’s exposition of Ephesians in the Greco-Roman world of spirits, gods, and demons. Aside from the discussion of Ephesians 6, much additional space in his commentary is concerned with the implications of spiritual warfare for Christian practice, theology, and pastoral application. Modern biblical social-scientific criticism,

psychology, and philosophy have done much to remove the demonic realm from the worldview of Western Christianity, likely to its detriment. Arnold provides a helpful service by continually underlining the prominence of these themes within Ephesians, and how much of Paul's theology was formed in reaction to these perceived threats to the church. Arnold's discussions of spiritual warfare are well-rooted within biblical scholarship and do not suffer from the anecdotal "insights" or pop-theologies that plague some Christian literature. Arnold's commentary provides useful, intellectually-balanced material for the development of sermons or Christian education programs promoting the importance of sanctification, prayer, and spiritual warfare. The commentary's flaws are superficial and the information it provides will be useful for ministry. The price of the volume (US\$ 36.99) makes it an attractive purchase for the Christian leader.

Jonathan D. Numada  
McMaster Divinity College