

a fresh and accessible format, intended for pastors, church leaders, and Bible teachers. The commentary is filled with sidebars on various related topics and sprinkled throughout with works of art. In a sense, the commentary format is designed as highly eclectic and visually engaging, satisfying the needs and expectations of modern readers. The result is not distracting or overwhelming, but rather attractive to the eye, and will prove helpful and useful for pastors and church leaders. Following commentary on each section of the text of Ephesians, Thomas Slater includes discussions of various topics (“Connections”) that provide applications of the text for the life of contemporary Christian discipleship.

Regarding authorship, Slater argues that Ephesians was written not by Paul, but by a follower of Paul sometime after his death. Unlike Romans and Galatians, which are direct and to the point, demanding that readers make decisions, Ephesians is elaborative and takes its time to develop its points theologically. Slater discusses other options regarding the authorship of the letter, however, and gives each viewpoint a fair hearing.

In Slater’s view, the letter is written to help Christian congregations understand their organic connection to Judaism, and thus help mixed congregations understand how to live together as Jewish and non-Jewish believers. Slater’s introduction also includes robust discussions of various theological topics addressed in the letter. Regarding Paul’s autobiographical comments in Ephesians 3, Slater argues that the author is filling in his readers on Paul’s ministry in ways that will make them heed his message. Not everyone will be satisfied with his explanation, as it is difficult to imagine how such autobiographical comments could come from someone writing in Paul’s name.

Slater’s discussion of the ethical section of Ephesians, especially the household code, will

prove very helpful for teachers. He analyzes the structure helpfully, noting the relationship of Eph 5:21 as a hinge between major sections. His discussion here is an example of how the volume fulfills the aims of the series, bringing scholarly discussions to bear in ways that are helpful for pastors and teachers of the Bible in the church.

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The Practice of Hope: Ideology and Intention in 1 Thessalonians

by Néstor O. Míguez; translated by Aquiles Martínez

Fortress, Minneapolis, 2012. 256 pp. \$49.00.
ISBN 978-0-8006-9824-9.

NÉSTOR MÍGUEZ PRESENTS a social and historical reading of 1 Thessalonians in conversation with political philosophy. Primarily, this is a “counterhegemonic” reading of Paul’s letter, interpreting earliest Christianity as engaged in symbolic confrontation with the Roman Empire. This confrontation took the form of a worldview that denied the empire’s right to absolute power, and created alternate ethics that anticipated the victory of God over dominating human power structures. In this sense, Christianity was not a subculture but rather a counterculture that rejected the social and political system of the empire through distinctive praxis.

Three of Míguez’s claims are particularly noteworthy. First, he disputes the traditional consensus of North American scholars that early Christian groups consisted of a cross-section of Greco-Roman society, claiming that the Thessalonian community was made up of manual laborers and slaves. To those who held

no power in society, Paul provided the symbols for an ethic of resistance lived out in a new, countercultural community. Second, Míguez interprets Christianity as an “inclusive-exclusivism.” On the one hand, a definite boundary stood between those who subscribed to the worldview of the dominant powers and those awaiting the defeat of those powers. On the other hand, people of every social status, nationality, and gender were welcomed into the community. The third noteworthy claim is Míguez’s understanding of hope as resistance. Early Christianity’s confrontation with the empire was a symbolic one, not one based in action or violence. Christians anticipated the return of Christ, when God would defeat all hegemonic powers, including the Roman Empire. Thus, Míguez interprets the *parousia* as revolution. Those without power anticipate it by living in a community grounded in an alternative ethics.

The Practice of Hope is not readily accessible to the non-specialist, given its engagement with political philosophy and its detailed Greek exegesis. However, the book makes several important contributions that should be noted, particularly by scholars who seek to appreciate the insights brought by perspectives from the developing world. Míguez argues that the New Testament was created “in the context of dominated classes” but has since been appropriated by “dominant sectors” to justify their hegemony (p. 18). Books such as this remind interpreters in privileged contexts of the importance of listening to how those in oppressed circumstances hear the message of hope that the NT offers. Míguez’s work calls us not only to view the NT differently, but also to stand with the oppressed everywhere, united in “an ethics of resistance and anticipation” (p. 192).

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The Letters of Paul as Rituals of Worship

by John Paul Heil

Cascade Books, Eugene, OR, 2011. 208 pp.
\$24.00. ISBN 978-0-227-68007-0.

THIS BOOK IS NOT SIMPLY an examination of liturgical fragments within the Pauline letters or a study limited to those sections that explicitly address worship. Rather, John Paul Heil argues that Paul engages in acts of worship throughout the letters (blessing, thanksgiving, prayer, etc.), and that through the reading of the letters, Paul leads the church to join him in that worship. Thus, we need to understand that the letters not only were read within the context of worship, but also that they themselves were acts of worship; through them, Paul became the presider at the church’s liturgy. From the opening blessing to the closing benediction, from the thanksgiving to the exhortations, the worship of God (broadly conceived) is both the topic and the intended outcome of Paul’s letters.

In order to read all of Paul’s letters under the rubric of worship, Heil uses the category of “ethical worship” for much of Paul’s hortatory material. In support of this, Heil points to the liturgical language that Paul uses to describe the life of the church (holy, blameless, sanctified, acceptable, pleasing, etc.). In doing so, Heil makes a helpful proposal for how Paul’s declarations of God’s mercy on the one hand, and his exhortations to faithful living on the other, are united in Paul’s vision of a grace-filled, communal life of worship.

Heil does not combine the letters into a Pauline theology of worship, but devotes a separate chapter to the design and impact of each Pauline letter. Each chapter begins with a clear and concise summary of the letter’s argument. Heil shows how each letter was intended to be a unique experience of worship as it was heard.