

Book Reviews

The Epistle to the Romans. New International Greek Text Commentary.
By Richard N. Longenecker. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016, 1208
pp., \$50.00 hardback.

“No other letter in the NT is as important [for the church] as Romans,” says professor Emeritus of Wycliffe College, Richard N. Longenecker (xv). He further contends, that whenever this letter is seriously studied, “there has occurred in the church some type of renewal, reformation, or revolution” (xiii). It is this legacy of Romans that has motivated Longenecker to offer his interpretation of the letter in the latest volume of the *New International Greek Testament Commentary* series. As one of the leading NT scholars of our day, Longenecker exudes competent exegesis to provide a fresh analysis of Romans, while at the same time building upon the work of past commentators. In this way, Longenecker aims to impact the contemporary Christian community’s thoughts and actions through Paul’s gospel presented in Romans (1).

Longenecker begins his commentary with a brief introduction, highlighting the challenges interpreters will face working through the letter. From the outset, Longenecker directs readers to his previous work, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul’s Most Famous Letter*, for a more thorough treatment on matters related to authorship, dating, and setting (4). Though one must refer to another publication for an extensive introduction to Romans, Longenecker nevertheless, states that he will delve into these topics as needed throughout the exegetical portions of the commentary.

While readers may desire more from the introduction, they will likely appreciate the way Longenecker organizes the material into three main sections: (1) matters largely uncontested, (2) matters recently resolved, and (3) matters extensively debated today. Concerning the matters largely uncontested (i.e., authorship, occasion, and date), Longenecker affirms Pauline authorship, stating that Paul likely wrote Romans from Corinth during the winter of A.D. 57–58 (5–6). Next, Longenecker moves on to matters recently resolved by first addressing the presence of glosses and interpolations

in the manuscripts. He optimistically concludes, “it is always possible, of course, that minor glosses or extraneous interpolations have somehow become incorporated into a particular biblical text ... Suffice it to say that NT textual criticism has come a long way during the past few decades, with the result that a great many of the textual issues ... have been resolved” (7). In a similar vein, Longenecker agrees with Hurtado and Marshall concerning the authenticity of the ending of Romans 16 (7–8).

Longenecker gives the greatest attention to the matters most debated today. The first issue concerns the identity of the recipients. Longenecker concludes the Christian community consisted primarily of Gentiles, but also included some Jews, who were heavily influenced by the “Jerusalem church.” However, this community is not to be characterized among the Judaizers (9). Second, he explores the purpose of the letter, seeing the primary purpose to be two-fold: first, to impart a “spiritual gift,” namely his contextualized gospel for the Gentiles; and second, to seek missionary assistance to take the gospel to Spain. He, furthermore, detects a few sub-purposes: (1) to defend against criticism of his person and message; (2) to give counsel regarding relations between the weak and the strong; and (3) to provide guidance for submitting to the Roman authorities (10–11). A third issue debated is the genre of Romans. Longenecker categorizes the work as a “letter essay,” namely instructional material written in the form of an epistle (14). Fourth, he provides a discussion on the rhetorical genre of Romans, noting that scholars disagree whether Romans is forensic, deliberative, or epideictic. In the end, Longenecker proposes that the letter is “protreptic,” namely a word of exhortation, mixed with the “then-current Jewish ‘remnant theology’ rhetoric” (15). Finally, he discusses the central focus of Paul’s presentation in Romans. Longenecker contends that Romans 5:1–8:39 is the central focus of the letter, where Paul desires to present “the message of the Christian gospel as he had contextualized it in his preaching to those who were ethnically Gentiles and without any preparatory religious knowledge gained from either Judaism or Jewish Christianity” (17).

The rest of the introduction identifies prominent thematic features to be found within the exegetical portions of the commentary. These include: (1) the structure of passages, (2) the use of OT quotations and allusions, (3) the use of pre-Pauline confessions, and (4) narrative substructures (20–27). These subjects are expounded upon at the beginning of each major section in

the commentary. Finally, Longenecker concludes by identifying the GNT4 and NA27 as his base text, and that for each passage, he will discuss every variant cited in the GNT4 along with notable other textual issues acknowledged in NA27 and major commentators (27).

As readers continue into the main body of the commentary, they will notice that it is organized under six primary headings: (1) Translation, (2) Textual Notes, (3) Form/Structure/Setting, (4) Exegetical Comments, (5) Biblical Theology, and (6) Contextualization for Today. Readers will appreciate this layout and division of the material, which makes for a pleasant reading experience.

After providing his own translation of the passage, along with a brief discussion of the textual matters, Longenecker examines the form, structure, and setting of that passage. The purpose of this section is to assist the reader in placing the particular section of Scripture within the rhetorical argument and context of the letter. In doing so, he recognizes significant areas of debate regarding the structure, theological content, and exegesis. For example, in his treatment of Romans 5:12–21, Longenecker expounds upon how the church has wrestled with Paul's understanding of Adam's sin, its universal effect upon the world, and the relationship between human sin with Adam's (577). Furthermore, he identifies key rhetorical features of the passage, important exegetical issues to be resolved, the relationship of this passage to all of 5:1–8:39, an argument for the main thesis of the passage, and finally concludes with a structural outline (577–85). This unique way of introducing each passage – at least for the NIGTC series – highlights a genuine strength of Longenecker's work. Readers will find these sections helpful in approaching each passage, keeping important matters at the forefront.

Moving into the "Exegetical Comments," Longenecker provides commentary on each verse by dividing them into consecutive phrases. The bulk of Longenecker's attention is given to the rhetorical features of the passage, seeking to understand the emphases of each text. Though an exegetical commentary, readers will notice that he does not delve greatly into grammar and syntax. Furthermore, he keeps his interaction with other commentators to a minimum resulting in few footnotes on the page. Nevertheless, when he does interact with commentators he regularly invites early church and Reformation theologians into the discussion. This is a refreshing addition

to the 21st century commentary, which typically limits interaction to contemporary interpreters.

Each exegetical treatment of a passage concludes with a section called “Biblical Theology” and another entitled “Contextualization for Today.” However, readers may be disappointed with both of these sections, for they aren’t exactly as one may expect. For instance, the “Biblical Theology” portions are more like overviews of the doctrinal content of the passage, rather than an exploration of redemptive historical themes. For instance, in the section covering Romans 2:17–29, Longenecker does not address the theological significance of the spirit/letter antithesis. Neither does he address the relationship this passage has with the new covenant (318–23). This notable absence illustrates how the “Biblical Theology” sections of the commentary fall short of exploring Pauline theology, and how Romans fits within God’s redemptive plan. In a similar way, the “Contextualization for Today” sections do not attempt to apply the text, at least not on a pastoral level. Rather, it seeks to “contextualize” the truths of the passage for a general Christian audience. Regrettably, this section rarely adds anything beyond what was already said under the heading of “Biblical Theology.”

It is worth noting that throughout crucial points of the commentary, Longenecker provides various excurses to further explore important topics in Romans. These include treatments on: “The Righteousness of God” (168–76), “Works of the Law” (362–70), “Exegetical and Thematic Matters in Rom 3:25a” (425–32), “Paul’s Message of Reconciliation” (566–70), “Paul’s use of ‘in Christ Jesus’” (686–94), and “Terms for ‘Remnant’ in the OT” (803–10). Readers will find these excurses to be a welcome addition to the main body of the commentary, often addressing important matters debated within Pauline studies. Unfortunately, the excurses are not listed in the table of contents, and are therefore hard to find without tediously flipping through the pages of the commentary.

Besides some minor quibbles with the sections on “Biblical Theology” and “Contextualization” this is a fine commentary that both scholars and pastors will want to consult in their study of Romans. Longenecker has brought a lifetime of research to bear on this commentary, and his contribution is certainly appreciated. As to whether Longenecker has achieved his goal to set the course for the future of the church in promoting “a better understanding of this most famous of Paul’s letters and a more relevant contextualization

of its message,” only time will tell (xv). Notwithstanding, those who read this work will find their understanding of Romans enriched.

P. Chase Sears
 Ph.D. Candidate
 The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Introducing Christian Doctrine, 3rd edition. By Millard J. Erickson and Edited by L. Arnold Hustad. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015, xiii + 498 pp., \$36.99.

Millard Erickson (b. 1932) is retired and previously taught at several schools, including Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Western Seminary, and Baylor University. Although still a hefty 498-pages, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* is an abridged version of Erickson’s 1200-page work, *Christian Theology* (Baker, 2013) and aims to be an undergraduate level introductory textbook in systematic theology. For classroom use, conservative evangelicals can choose among Erickson’s work and two other systematic theologies by Wayne Grudem and John Frame, both of whom also have larger and abridged versions of their textbooks: Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994) and abridged *Bible Doctrine* (Zondervan, 1999) and John Frame’s *Systematic Theology* (P&R, 2013) and abridged *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (P&R, 2006).

Rather than summarize Erickson’s work, I will touch upon his doctrinal positions on major topics of discussion and controversy. On the doctrine of Scripture, Erickson holds to verbal-plenary inspiration (50-57) and affirms full inerrancy, that is, “while the Bible does not primarily aim to give scientific and historical data, such scientific and historical assertions as it does make are fully true” (60). Erickson has helpful nuances in defining inerrancy and dealing with alleged errors in the Bible (63-66).

Erickson is ambiguous about whether he holds to the classical Trinitarianism of the early church creeds. He seems to deny the classical Trinitarianism for two reasons: (1) he does not distinguish the persons within the Trinity according to the properties of being unbegotten, begotten, and spirated; and (2) he argues for equivalent authority within the Trinity as opposed to

gradational authority (115-16). Theologians have called into question such discussions about authority within the Trinity and warned against relating the Trinity to gender roles of male headship and female submission in the home and church (e.g., the numerous blog posts of Fred Sanders, Michael Bird, and Stephen Holmes). Also problematic is Erickson citing Augustine and Calvin as supporting his view of equivalent authority (116). Augustine and Calvin neither speculated on issues of gender and Trinity nor is it likely that they would support Erickson's position.

Erickson holds to classical Christology as affirmed at the Council of Chalcedon (264-67) and provides a very helpful diagram comparing the orthodox view of Christ against the six basic heresies of Ebionism, Arianism, Docetism, Nestorianism, Apollinarianism, and Eutychianism (266). The diagram could be displayed in class lectures to give students the big picture regarding Christology and Christological heresies.

Erickson holds to creation *ex nihilo*, although he believes that "God created in a series of acts that involved long periods, and that took place an indefinite time ago" (40), which implies that he holds to the day-age interpretation of "day" in Genesis 1, and that he believes in an old earth. Furthermore, he affirms what he calls "progressive creationism" (141), which seems very similar to theistic evolution.

Erickson is Reformed in a Calvinistic sense (as opposed to a Lutheran or Anglican sense). However, Erickson advocates a "moderate Calvinism" (127): he affirms compatibilistic free will and denies libertarian free will (126-30). He affirms humanity's total depravity and total inability (342-43). He affirms unconditional election (127-28; 346-48) but does not comment on double predestination; even in his larger work (*Christian Theology*, 841-59), Erickson does not take a position concerning double predestination, although he seems to support sublapsarianism (851). Erickson does not comment on the extent of the atonement in this work, but in his larger work, he affirms a "limited-unlimited" atonement (*Christian Theology*, 753-63). Erickson seems to affirm irresistible grace, although he does not use the term (128-30; 348). Erickson affirms the perseverance of the saints and the hypothetical view of apostasy (381-84). Somewhat problematic is the fact that Erickson does not make clear to the uninformed reader what exactly "moderate" Calvinism is. An undergraduate student will surely be confused. Only the theologically informed reader will recognize that Erickson's "moderate" Calvinism surfaces

through his affirmation of middle knowledge (130, n. 12), which is rejected by most Calvinists, through his support of “limited-unlimited” atonement, and through his ambiguous view of double predestination—and the latter two issues are not even mentioned in this work, but only in his larger work.

Erickson advocates the Reformed view of forensic justification by faith alone and briefly responds to the New Perspective on Paul and Roman Catholicism (363-69). Erickson also advocates the Reformed view of progressive sanctification and briefly argues against Wesleyan notions of perfectionism (374-78).

With regards to charismatic gifts (tongues and prophecy), Erickson seems to affirm an “open but cautious” view with regards to tongues, although he never explicitly states this position (309-314). Regarding prophecy, Erickson argues quite forcefully against modern-day prophecy (318-21).

With regards to ecclesiology, Erickson advocates an elder-led congregational form of church governance (408-409). He argues for believers’ baptism, argues against baptismal regeneration (412-18), and seems to fuse the Reformed and Zwinglian view of the Lord’s Supper: Christ is spiritually present during the Lord’s Supper; yet the ordinance is primarily symbolic and commemorative (421-22).

With regard to eschatology, Erickson seems to affirm historic premillennialism (460-61) in light of his rejection of dispensationalism (466), although he is not entirely clear what sort of premillennialism he supports. Erickson affirms posttribulationism (466-67). Erickson also argues against universalism (475-77) and against annihilationism (477-78), thus representing Christian orthodoxy on the doctrine of hell.

Erickson’s work will be useful for undergraduate courses because of its brevity and clear writing style. Erickson supplies review questions at the end of each chapter, which could be assigned as homework or become the basis of quizzes/exams. Perhaps the biggest weakness of Erickson’s work is the lack of bibliographic help. Even undergraduates are often assigned research papers and Erickson’s work would be greatly improved if he pointed readers to the best resources for further study. Erickson’s citation of sources in footnotes is sometimes plentiful and at other times sparse; a summary of helpful resources at the end of each chapter would greatly help students, especially students who are new to systematic theology.

An evangelical conservative’s final choice in selecting a textbook for undergraduate studies will likely come down to Erickson, Grudem, and Frame (as

mentioned above). All three are excellent choices—although Frame is the weakest with regards to bibliographic helps. Perhaps the choice will come down to doctrinal and denominational preferences: Grudem’s support for charismatic gifts, modern-day prophecy, and complementarian gender roles contrasts sharply with Erickson’s rejection of modern-day prophecy and advocacy of egalitarian gender roles. Frame’s Presbyterianism and support of infant baptism contrasts sharply with Grudem and Erickson’s congregationalism and support of believers’ baptism. While all three have written excellent works, these doctrinal differences may help instructors decide which text to use.

Nelson S. Hsieh
Ph.D Candidate
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics. By David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011, xvi + 446 pp., \$33.00 paper.

Inductive Bible Study is an update to Robert Traina’s *Methodical Bible Study* which was published in 1952. The authors felt that a new book could more adequately address the hermeneutical developments since that time than a revision. Robert Traina was professor of English Bible at The Biblical Seminary in New York and Asbury Theological Seminary. David Bauer is the Professor of Inductive Biblical Studies and Dean of the School of Biblical Interpretation and Proclamation at Asbury Theological Seminary.

Inductive Bible Study gives a comprehensive introduction to practical hermeneutics. Bauer and Traina advocate for an inductive approach in which the meaning of a text is deduced from evidence “in and around the text” of Scripture. *Inductive Bible Study* is oriented towards a practical introduction rather than a theoretical introduction. It is mainly for readers who are looking for a “how-to” guide to biblical interpretation. The authors do, however, include a short initial section dealing with recent theoretical discussions. *Inductive Bible Study* is divided into five parts: 1) Theoretical Foundations, 2) Observing and Asking, 3) Answering or Interpreting, 4)

Evaluating and Appropriating, and 5) Correlation. Most chapters conclude with a discussion of 2 Timothy 3:15–17 which illustrates the principles discussed in that chapter.

The initial three parts of *Inductive Bible Study* are the strength of the book. The first part (Theoretical Foundations) summarizes much complex material in relatively short space. Though some of their conclusions warrant further thought (see below), students who want a quick orientation to theoretical matters such as critical-realism (Ben Meyer, N. T. Wright), canonical interpretation (Brevard Childs, Robert Wall), and implied-author will benefit from Bauer and Traina's concise discussions.

The second (Observing and Asking) and third (Answering or Interpreting) parts form the core of the book and give a process of inductive Bible study. Bauer and Traina recognize the biblical books as the most basic literary unit of the Bible as opposed to shorter units, such as paragraphs or sentences. Only once a general grasp of an entire book is obtained do they recommend proceeding to smaller units within the book where most preaching and bible teaching is done. Unfortunately, when discussing appropriation (application) in part four, Bauer and Traina only discuss the appropriation of smaller sections of Scripture instead of how one may attempt to appropriate the message of whole books.

When discussing observation and inquiry of the text, Bauer and Traina give a detailed list of observations, such as contrast, comparison, climax, etc., upon which interpreters may focus. Focusing on these specific elements reinforces their emphasis on inductive study because these observations will reveal elements of the text which may indicate the author's meaning. Though focusing on these types of observations may seem restrictive at first, narrowing the range of an interpreter's focus should help them avoid making observations of the text which would be more deductive in nature.

Despite the helpfulness of the first three sections, *Inductive Bible Study* does contain some elements which diminish its usefulness. The most perplexing issue within the book is the decision to discuss correlation, which is the term Bauer and Traina use for the formulation of biblical and systematic theology, in the last section and to suggest that evaluating and appropriating (how the text should be applied) should influence correlation (337). Later, however, they say that "the goal of biblical study is the development of a biblical theology that may form the basis for Christian faith and life" (341). Here, it seems as

though they believe correlation should form the basis of appropriation, which would seem more fitting for an inductive methodology. Thus, the section on correlation should precede the section on evaluation and appropriation.

Bauer and Traina discuss theoretical matters in a short, initial section and then rarely refer back to these matters. The one matter they continually keep before the reader's attention is the notion of the implied author. This is unfortunate because most of the reasons for which they advocate appealing to the implied author instead of the historical author can be overcome by principles they discuss in their chapter on critical-realism. It is possible to speak of the meaning of a historical author as long as we recognize an acceptable measure of provisionality in our conclusions. Since this is the case, the concept of an implied author loses much of the significance that Bauer and Traina place upon it.

For professors/teachers seeking a textbook in practical hermeneutics with a minimal amount of material spent discussing theoretical matters, *Inductive Bible Study* is worth consideration. With the first section, it attempts to bridge the gap between practical and theoretical textbooks on hermeneutics, but it only introduces these theoretical issues. If a professor/teacher wants to focus exclusively on practical elements or wants a more in depth discussion of theoretical issues, it would be best to look elsewhere.

Casey Croy
Ph.D. Candidate
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Toward a Canon-Conscious Reading of the Bible: Exploring the History and Hermeneutics of the Canon.* New Testament Monographs 34. By Ched Spellman. Sheffield, UK: Phoenix Press, 2014, xiv + 278 pp., \$110.00 hardback.**

Ched Spellman is Assistant Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Cedarville University. One of his primary academic interests is the role of canon within biblical and theological studies, which is the focus of *Toward a Canon-Conscious Reading of the Bible*. Spellman's goal in this book is to demonstrate that the Christian canon is a legitimate hermeneutical control for biblical interpretation.

Spellman's book may be divided into two parts. The first part, consisting of chapters one and two, discuss the fact and formulation of the canon. Chapter

one focuses upon defining the term “canon” and how (or if) it differs from the term “Scripture.” Those who are familiar with literature pertaining to canon will recognize that this is the central concern in what has become known as “the canon debate.” Some scholars argue that “canon” should be defined as an *authoritative list of books* whereas others argue that canon should be defined as a *list of authoritative books*. While noting that both definitions have some merit, Spellman deems that those who deny that there was a growing collection of authoritative books even during the New Testament times are overly strict in their application of the term canon. In chapter two, Spellman develops the concept which is the name-sake of his book: the concept of canon-consciousness. This chapter discusses internal and external evidence which suggests that the biblical authors and communities were conscious of a growing body of canonical literature among them. Though the physical unity of this body of literature was impossible due to the absence of the codex, these authors and communities were able to maintain the unity of this material through what he calls “canon as a mental construct.”

In the second part of *Toward a Canon-Conscious Reading of the Bible*, Spellman shifts his attention to the effect which the biblical canon may have on its readers. Chapter three discusses contextuality, which is the effect created when biblical books and/or groups of books are placed with each other within the canon. Spellman distinguishes between “mere contextuality” which is the unintentional yet unavoidable outcome of including books within the canon and “meant contextuality” which is the intentional shaping of a book to appear in conjunction with another canonical book or within a canonical grouping of books. Chapter four discusses intertextuality. Spellman notes that the concept of canon-consciousness provides obvious avenues for intertextual exploration. The role of the canon within intertextual studies is to set the limits for the intertextual connections an interpreter may see. In the final chapter, Spellman discusses the identity of the implied reader of the biblical canon. The implied reader of the Bible embraces the contextual world which the canon has developed and is able to recognize the thoughts and concepts developed within the canon. Essentially, the modern reader of the canon becomes the implied reader of the canon by becoming a more canon-conscious reader through continual engagement with the contents of the canon.

Spellman has provided an excellent discussion of how the Christian canon may function within the field of biblical interpretation. The structure of his book was very well thought-out. Each chapter rests on the foundations

established by the previous chapter while forging ahead with new implications. His discussion of the “canon debate” summarizes an extensive amount of literature, and he comes to a reasonable conclusion, though I do wonder if some of those who represent a “narrow view” of the canon would find his argumentation somewhat dismissive. Distinguishing “mere contextuality” from “meant contextuality” will be an important step forward for those who are interested in the possibility of biblical contextuality.

Although I am very appreciative of Spellman’s work, the one troublesome aspect of his book is that it leaves many questions concerning the hermeneutical influence of the Christian canon unanswered. Undoubtedly, this is because Spellman is seeking to build a case for the hermeneutical function of the canon without being waylaid by some of the more difficult and speculative issues surrounding this topic. Eventually, however, these issues will surface.

For instance, one question arising from Spellman’s discussion of canon-consciousness is “what should be made of instances where it appears that a biblical author’s canonical intentions were not followed during the development of the canon?” The Christian canon contains numerous such instances. The book of Ruth begins by setting itself within the time frame of the book of Judges and concludes with a strong Davidic focus, who is the main character within the book of Samuel. The author seems to be doing everything possible to situate this book into the middle of what became the Latter Prophets, but his wishes were not followed within the Hebrew traditions, which consistently place Ruth within the Writings. Or what about the Pentateuch, which is frequently referred to as one book but has traditionally been treated as a composite of five books? There are obvious authorial affinities between Luke and Acts, so much so that a large strand of biblical scholarship approach these works as a two-part series, but if this was Luke’s intention, it was never followed within the reception history of these two texts. In Colossians 4:16, Paul indicates that he believed his letter to the Laodician church would be beneficial for the church of Colossae, perhaps even indicating that he believed this letter to have an equal status with Colossians. Paul’s letter to the Laodicians, however, has never been included, to our knowledge, within the collection of Paul’s letters. If Paul believed his letter to the Laodicians should have been canonical and it was not, what does this mean for the canon-consciousness of the biblical authors? Could their intentions be overridden by those who canonized their works?

Another question arises from Spellman's discussion of intertextuality: "what is the role of antecedent and contemporaneous literature for biblical interpretation?" Spellman believes the canon sets the limits for intertextual connections drawn from the biblical text. Yet, many of the connections made between the Bible and other ancient literature are essentially intertextual. For instance, many interpreters read Genesis 1 against the background of other ANE creation accounts, often resulting in a polemical aspect to their interpretation of the creation story. These are essentially intertextual correlations, but if one of the features of the canon is to limit the scope of intertextual possibilities, as Spellman claims, are these ANE creation stories rendered extra-textual and thus invalid for interpreting the Christian canon? Such background studies make up a large portion of modern biblical scholarship. The prospects of Spellman's approach, however, appear to necessitate rethinking how much of this ancient material can be used within biblical interpretation.

In conclusion, Spellman's work will challenge all readers to give a more thorough consideration to the hermeneutical implications of the canon. Those who have already considered many of the canon's hermeneutical implications will be exposed to new ways in which to consider many avenues of thought. Though Spellman's hesitance to address some of the more difficult issues of his approach will leave the reader to wade through these matters on their own, his reluctance to address these issues allows him to clearly express his opinion that the canon should be understood as a legitimate hermeneutical control.

Casey Croy
 Ph.D. Candidate
 The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Christian Theology and Its Institutions in the Early Empire: Prolegomena to a History of Early Christian Theology. By Christoph Marksches. Baylor-Mohr Siebeck Studies in Early Christianity. Translated by Wayne Coppins. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015, xxv + 494 pp., \$79.95 hardback.

Early Christianity is marked by the formation of Christian identity, the rise of heresy, and the clarification of orthodoxy. Walter Bauer's thesis sought to overturn this binary narrative that pits orthodoxy and heresy against one

another in the development of early Christianity. In *Christian Theology and Its Institutions in the Early Empire*, early Christian scholars are afforded an opportunity to hear from European scholarship and from one who attempts to offer a paradigmatic shift in how scholars think of earliest Christianity—distinct from and sympathetic with Bauer.

Christoph Marksches's primary aim is to revise a program of "understanding the history of Christian theology on the basis of the respective institutional contexts" (xiii). His thesis, moreover, considers the different institutional contexts of Christian theology so as to provide common and variegated differences in 2nd and 3rd century ancient Christianity (xx). Thus, it is an attempt to find some commonality with the Walter Bauer thesis and with those in opposition to him. This attempt is sensitive to the historical critical norms of antiquity, while offering a different historical paradigm that is typically given precedence. His thesis begins to move away from a binary narrative of scholarship—the Bauer thesis and his opponents. Methodological considerations reflect upon the distinguishing elements of historical analysis and theological interpretation—"a *'mixo-philologia-theologia'* that excessively mixes historical analysis and theological interpretation may correspond to the tradition of the discipline" (xiii). That is, a balance is found between a pure social scientific study and the history of dogma. He merges the two features.

The development of Marksches's thesis progresses through four saturated chapters. In chapter one, "Theology and Institution," he recognizes the difficulty of standardized language in the study of antiquity. Definitions and terms change, and so, his starting point is a clarification of "theology" and "institution" (1). Concepts of "theology" were developed and connected with other terms like φιλοσοφία and κανών or *regula* in early Christianity (5). In the third century, the term relates to "Trinitarian theology" by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and the latter Cappadocian theologians. "Institutions," then, refers to a hierarchically structured majority that allows for stability and duration (26). These two elements permit, for Marksches, the subsequent discussions on the development of Christian theology within particular institutions in 2nd and 3rd century Christianity.

Chapter two, "Three Institutional Contexts," tightly builds upon the lexical clarification of "Theology and Institution." Marksches explores three different institutional features of early Christianity and their connection to "theology." First, he investigates the concepts of free teachers and Christian schools. If

scholars desire to investigate Christian theology as articulated by Justin (“free teachers”) or Origen (organized education), then, as Markschies argues, “one must first deal in somewhat greater detail with the ancient system of education” (31). Next, he notes how “Montanism” is a paradigm for explicit theology and not toward philosophical instruction. Last, Markschies navigates the history of Eucharistic worship services and prayers as an example of implicit theology. The Eucharist and Christian worship helped stabilize Christian doctrine, thus serving as an “institution” for Christian doctrine.

In chapter three, “Institution and Norm,” Markschies moves from a strict “institutional” discussion to an element that stabilizes an institution. In this way, he addresses the “connection between institution and norm” and “between institutionalization and norm-setting” (192). In a variety of institutions, Markschies asks if the “norming process” is the same among the variety of institutions, or if the norming process varies with each entity. For Christian theology, it is the canon—largely, the New Testament—as the “norming process” that Markschies seeks to inquire.

In the final chapter, “The Identity and Plurality of Ancient Christianity,” the ideological and historical concerns of Markschies merge together. I would suggest this to be, by far, the most important chapter as it brings all the previous findings to a close. In what ways do the “institutions,” “norming” features, as well as the “theologies” permeate the theology of ancient Christianity? He assesses and comments on the critical reception of Walter Bauer’s *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (1971; English trans.). In the end, Markschies concludes with a “complementary model” that features unity, identity formation, and plurality in earliest Christianity (335). “Christianity in antiquity,” as Markschies notes, “can be described as a very complex process in which identity and plurality differentiate themselves in relation to each other in certain institutions, limits of a legitimate pluralism are probed, and the identity-forming center is interpreted in certain institutions of theological reflection and disseminated in this way” (344). Therefore, as he concludes, the plural identity can concentrate around an “identity-forming center” of singleness and unity (344–45).

In general, the Baylor-Mohr Siebeck *Studies in Early Christianity* is good for English speaking scholarship. The previous volumes in this series devote themselves to the study of New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew, and Canon. This new volume by Markschies now affords English-speaking scholars to

garner quick access to a leading German figure within early Christian scholarship. With the language barriers between the two continents, Anglophone scholars may quickly hear the voice of modern German critical scholarship.

Another advantage in considering this book is noting the potential paradigmatic shift in critical early Christian scholarship. Markschie's offers a way forward in terms of methodology. He attempts to be sensitive to the Bauer thesis of *Orthodoxy and Heresy* as well as to modify his thesis with those in opposition to Bauer (xx). I wouldn't call this, necessarily, a *via-media* position. It is helpful to note the shift—if Markschie's is correct—in binary methodological options. Markschie's has surely left us with something further to consider.

I do, however, have a few criticisms, only mentioning one shall suffice. I wonder if the history of dogma and social institutions is a complete way of viewing the formation of early Christianity. If Markschie's position of unified plurality is correct, why did he give no consideration to early Christian hermeneutics or Trinitarianism? These two features emerge as staple markers of Christian identity. For example, part of Origen's hermeneutical paradigm is also set against Jewish readings of texts (see Peter Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* [OUP, 2012]). Furthermore, some Trinitarian constructs are central features Justin Martyr's apologetic, and Tertullian's and Origen's anti-monarchian distinction.

It is without reservation that early Christian scholars should consult and read *Christian Theology and Its Institutions*. Markschie's "complementary model" is a critical feature to grasp for critical readings of early Christianity. Early Christian scholars can hear first hand from European scholarship that is shaping the critical guild. The target audience of this text is designed for graduate students and early Christian scholars. It is an advanced text that requires some knowledge of the early Christian historical paradigms and general awareness of methodological diversities.

Shawn J. Wilhite
California Baptist University
Riverside, CA