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BOOK REVIEWS

Ecclesiastes, by Craig G. Bartholomew. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009. 448 pp. $39.99.

Throughout its history of interpretation, Ecclesiastes has been one of the most difficult books to interpret. One issue that has made Ecclesiastes a challenge is determining its message. Does the book have a negative or positive overall message? Is Ecclesiastes about the vanity of life, or about celebrating it? While a number of leading commentators have taken the message of Ecclesiastes negatively as a foil to the other books in the canon, Craig G. Bartholomew's commentary provides a modest contrast to a pessimistic interpretation of this book.

Bartholomew is the H. Evan Runner Professor of Philosophy and professor of religion and theology at Redeemer University College in Ontario, Canada. His qualifications for writing this commentary are unmistakably displayed in his 1999 work, *Reading Ecclesiastes: Old Testament Exegesis and Hermeneutical Theory*, a revised edition of his 1996 dissertation completed at the University of Bristol. The most helpful contribution of *Reading Ecclesiastes* is Bartholomew's discussion of the history of interpreting Ecclesiastes. Between *Reading Ecclesiastes,* other books, and articles, he is particularly competent to write a commentary on Ecclesiastes.

Bartholomew provides a helpful and detailed discussion of germane introductory issues (pp. 17–99), such as the history of interpretation (pp. 21–43) and genre and literary style (pp. 61–82). The remainder of the volume is divided into the actual commentary (pp. 101–373), followed by a postscript (pp. 375–89), bibliography (pp. 391–420), and indexes referencing subjects, authors, Scripture, and other ancient writings (pp. 421–48). The commentary itself is divided into three sections: the frame narrative: prologue, 1:1–11 (pp. 101–17), Qohelet's exploration of the meaning of life, 1:12–12:7 (pp. 119–357), and the frame narrative: epilogue, 12:8–14 (pp. 359–73). The body of the commentary (pp. 119–357) focuses on Qohelet's exploration of the meaning of life. This is divided into twenty-one units. With each of these sections, as well as the prologue and epilogue, Bartholomew provides his own translation, followed by his interpretation of the text and its theological implications.

Bartholomew cautiously proposes that Qohelet lived in a third-century Israelite community that had been exposed to a pervasive Greek philosophy with its stress on an autonomous epistemology. The programmatic question in 1:3 ("What does man profit from all his work at which he toils under the sun?") initiates his exploration into finding the meaning of life by using an empiricist epistemology throughout the

majority of Ecclesiastes. In this book Qohelet walks, as it were, in the sandals of his audience who believed that the LORD's promises had failed and that there was no empirical evidence supporting his purposes and promises (p. 94). Qohelet's trip "is carried forward by the *hebel* conclusions and their contradictory juxtapositions with *carpe diem* passages, the developing tension between the juxtapositions, as well as the growing sense of irony of the autonomous epistemology driving his journey" (p. 83). His journey ends when these "*deliberately* juxtaposed" (p. 81) gaps are resolved in 11:8–10 and 12:1–7. Through almost eleven chapters of Ecclesiastes, Qohelet places the *hebel* ("breath," "vanity," etc.) motif in juxtaposition with the *carpe diem* ("enjoyment-of-life") motif immediately following. However, this order is reversed in 11:8–10 and 12:1–7 where the *carpe diem* passage comes first (p. 354). In contrast to those who respond to life with an autonomous epistemology, Qohelet's reversal of the two motifs purportedly provides the solution to life in an enigmatic world. With this reversal the emphasis of the *carpe diem* passage on rejoicing and remembering one's Creator provides the solution to the *hebel* passages and their concentration on the lack of meaning in life (pp. 354–58).

I will make three observations about this commentary. First, because of Bartholomew's impeccable credentials and research, he has made a noteworthy exegetical contribution into the expanding field of Qohelet studies. In the midst of concisely covering the key areas one expects in a commentary, he also develops an argument that is something of a hybrid between a positive and negative interpretation of Ecclesiastes. What keeps Bartholomew from a pessimistic interpretation is 11:8–10 and 12:1–7. In these two passages Qohelet's theology of creation explicitly surfaces (12:1, "Remember your Creator") to solve the meaninglessness of life. In the final analysis of Ecclesiastes, Bartholomew concludes with an interpretation of Ecclesiastes that is not pessimistic (pp. 355–58).

Second, his translation of the key term, *hebel,* as "enigmatic," is a welcome contribution to Ecclesiastes, although he occasionally allows this word to have other nuances (p. 106). Following the lead of Ogden ("'Vanity' It Certainly Is Not," *The Bible Translator* 38 [July 1987]: 301–7), I made a similar argument in 1996 that the core nuance for the majority of uses of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes was essentially the same ("The Message of Ecclesiastes," *DBSJ* 1 [Spring 1996]: 88–94). Qohelet begins his book with "all is *hebel*" (1:2) and concludes it with the same (12:8). When Qohelet presents the specifics of the "all" and he appraises these as "hebel," these uses should have the same nuance as *hebel* does in 1:2 and 12:8.

Third, though there are some areas where I have concerns, such as his, at times, sparse commentary on the text, reading too much into the "*deliberately* juxtaposed" gaps (p. 81), and how his use of irony twists the obvious meaning of key texts (for example, note how Bartholomew distorts the use of *wisdom* in Eccl 2:3 [p. 131]), my primary concern is with Bartholomew's conclusions regarding Qohelet's autonomous epistemology. Rather than having Qohelet's epistemology based on Greek

philosophy with a return to Israelite wisdom only in the end, I understand that Qohelet's epistemology throughout the book is based on the wisdom tradition of Israel. This explains why Ecclesiastes is permeated with connections to the early chapters of Genesis. As such, Qohelet, as a godly sage, recognized that he lived in a world that had been supernaturally cursed by the Fall, but that God was still working to preserve his creation. By using polarized motifs, Qohelet designed his masterpiece to explore how to live wisely as God's people in a fallen world.

I found Bartholomew's *Ecclesiastes* to be a beneficial resource when I taught Hebrew Exegesis of Ecclesiastes and I can positively recommend it with only a few reservations.

Robert V. McCabe

The Shepherd Leader, by Timothy Z. Witmer. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2010. xi + 268 pp. $17.99.

The Shepherd Leader is a welcome addition to the field of pastoral theology. Witmer is Professor of Pastoral Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary (PA). He also serves as the Preaching Minister at Crossroads Community Church (PCA) in Upper Darby, PA. He brings a teacher's organization and a pastor's heart to the subject of the pastor being a shepherd-leader in the local church.

This work is divided into three main parts, each comprised of several chapters. The first part lays the biblical and historical foundation for the role of the shepherd, surveying the Old Testament and New Testament pictures of the shepherd with a brief historical survey and discussion of a shepherd's authority. The second part outlines the duties of the shepherd: to know, feed, lead, and protect the sheep. And the final part proposes a ministry model and ideas for implementing an effective shepherding ministry.

The book has several weaknesses. The author tends to overemphasize "shepherding" to the exclusion of other images of pastoral ministry in the New Testament such as elder, overseer, and pastor-teacher. He brings in OT pictures of the Shepherds of Israel and applies them directly to the obligation to shepherd the NT church. Though there is a hermeneutical issue here, I still find the discussion very helpful overall, as his discussion and description of the "shepherd" theme is tied in to the coming Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and pastors today as undershepherds of Christ serving the church (1 Pet 5:1-4; Eph 4:11; Acts 20:21).

Another critique is Witmer's assumptive arguments about the plurality and parity of eldership. For instance, he quotes John Murray saying "Paul called to Miletus the elders of the church and charged them, as a plurality, to shepherd the flock of God" (p. 40). While not necessarily opposed to either plurality or parity, the Scriptures are general enough