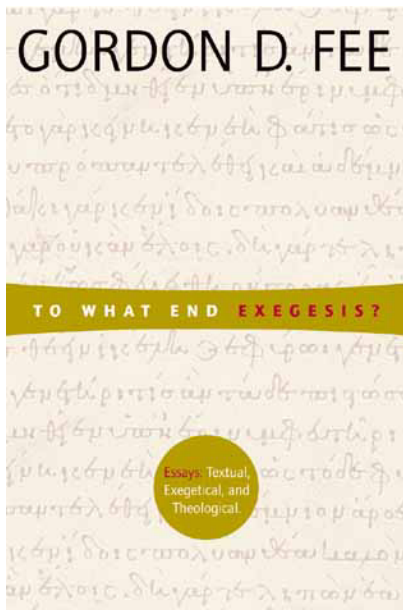


RBL 05/2004



Fee, Gordon D.

To What End Exegesis? Essays Textual, Exegetical, and Theological

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. Pp. x + 378. Paper.
\$26.00. ISBN 0802849253.

Craig D. Bowman
Rochester College
Rochester Hills, MI 48307

This anthology of articles, papers, and essays, many of which were previously published over the last twenty-five years, are here gathered together much like two prior collections of Fee's shorter writings (*Listening to the Spirit in the Text* [2000] and *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* [1991]). In this case, it should be no surprise that the hermeneutical theme is Fee's lifelong insistence that "the ultimate aim of exegesis is the Spiritual one" even when one is engaged in lengthy formal debates over text-critical issues that may seem to have no bearing on a life of "true Spirituality."

Although his preface is extremely brief and there is no freshly written conclusion, Fee very clearly sets his agenda by making several observations about the whole collection at the outset. There has been no attempt to revise older material, only to correct typographical errors. While some readers might find the sequence of the articles somewhat repetitious (loosely overlapping in New Testament canonical order), the ordering of the essays chronicles Fee's own pilgrimage as a New Testament scholar. Having been trained and seasoned as a text critic and a thoroughly committed evangelical Christian, Fee admits he realized a certain schizophrenic impasse existed between his scholarship and personal faith. Therefore, this volume traces, albeit through scholarly articles at a high level, his personal journey from the earliest text-critical articles, which

have only implicit theological conclusions and connections, to focused theological essays bursting forth with individual convictions. Eventually over the course of twenty-plus years what at first was buried becomes explicitly stated in the opening comments. Although this aspect of Fee's disclosure is most pronounced in the text-critical section of this book, it seems also to be at work in the exegetical and theological portions. Indeed, Fee suggests that the interested reader skip to chapter 17 as an extended preface that will make greater sense of the autobiographical schema characteristic of the whole.

Aside from a couple of studies tied to verses in the Gospels of Luke and John, the rest of the book is decidedly a primer for demonstrating textual-exegetical work from the Pauline corpus that predominately deals with spirituality from Paul's perspective. *To What End Exegesis?* would work well as reader for a intermediate to advanced Greek course with highly motivated students seeking to learn the textual, exegetical, and theological arts from a respected master. Although the text-critical section only has five essays, the final two exemplify Fee's conviction "that textual criticism is not an end in itself, but must ultimately be brought to bear on the meaning and message of the New Testament" (43). Thus, chapter 4 deals with the move from textual issues to exegetical observations in 1 Corinthians, while chapter 5 challenges modern commentators to be more purposeful in stepping from text to comment in the exegetical task related to 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The latter article, having originally appeared in the *1992 SBL Seminar Papers*, is an exceptional "how to" piece that correctly enjoins the text-critical process and the writing of commentaries both in the asking of the foundational questions and in the displaying of the results in as helpful and meaningful presentation as possible. In this chapter, one of the most outstanding of the book, Fee allows his experience to educate novice and veteran alike in a way that is exceptionally humble and satisfying.

Several essays in the exegetical studies pave the way for several of the articles in the theological studies. The correspondence is not accidental, as Fee notes in the preface that there were several matters that he wanted to explore in greater depth after having produced a major commentary, but the commentary format was too constrictive. Therefore, four of the exegetical articles culminate in two explorations dealing with the theology of 1 and 2 Corinthians. Probably the most provocative of the exegetical writings is chapter 12, "Philippians 2:5–11: Hymn or Exalted Pauline Prose?" where Fee very tactfully treats two major assumptions in previous positions on this passage in order to offer a refreshed exegetical analysis. In five fairly brief moves he dismisses the long-held conception of this text being a pre-Pauline hymn. Next he discusses its background and authorship, eventually concluding that Paul wrote it. But this leaves open the questions of why Paul wrote it with respect to Philippians as a whole. This gives Fee an opportunity to propose his own reading of Paul's rhetoric displayed in a structural analysis that reveals the so-called hymn to be genuine to Paul and fully functional within the flow of Paul's

argument throughout Philippians. As one might expect, this work on Philippians, published in 1992, sets a foundation for the subsequent headliner four years later, “To What End Exegesis? Reflections on Exegesis and Spirituality in Philippians 4:10–20.”

At times, especially in the final theological section, Fee seems preoccupied with pneumatology and Paul. This ought not be surprising or alarming, given Fee’s Pentecostal affiliation and long list of previous works devoted to this end. As many potential critics have admitted over the years in responding to and reviewing the results of Fee’s research, he works at the highest scholarly level without pretense about what he believes. His textual and exegetical skills are first rate. His commentaries are articulate, meaningful, and thorough. His academic aim has always been sound theology for the life and service of the church. *To What End Exegesis?* extends Fee’s objectives into the scholarly arena, particularly for those whose academic posts, involving teaching and writing activities especially, have the potential to influence what church leaders and laity think and practice. Fee strives in this book to lead by example, to change a generation content to live in the nonbiblical spiritually schizophrenic void where exegetical endeavor only engages the mind, not the heart. He also hopes to mentor the next generation of believing scholars carefully to connect the world of the text and the worlds of contemporary realms via exegesis that can “produce in our lives and the lives of others true Spirituality, in which God’s people live in fellowship with the eternal and living God and thus with God’s own purposes in the world. Thus, it is simply wrong-headed for us ever to think that we have done exegesis at all if we have not cared about the intended Spirituality of the text—whether it be theological, doxological, relational, or behavioral” (282).