Serge Cazelais
Université Laval
Québec, Canada G1K 7P4

The author of this commentary is Distinguished Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. This volume represents his research and meditation on Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians over the last thirty or so years and brings together in a more complete and substantial form a number of materials that were previously published elsewhere.

The book opens with an impressive bibliography devoted to commentaries on Ephesians, both ancient and modern. Hoehner includes a useful although not exhaustive selection of Patristic literature (for example, the absence of Marius Victorinus’s Commentary on Ephesians stands out).

Convinced of the Pauline authorship of Ephesians, Hoehner emphasizes its internal coherence, overall theological unity, and stylistic similarity with those letters of Paul that are universally recognized as authentic. If I may be allowed to express my own view on this issue, before reading this commentary I would have readily accepted the deutero-Pauline character of Ephesians primarily on the basis of the modern consensus. I must admit that Hoehner’s discussion on the topics proves almost convincing. His book is well documented and presents and discusses fairly the multiple facets of the question. His
views are expressed concisely and clearly. Hoehner succeeds in convincing the reader to reevaluate the pseudonymous character of this New Testament letter.

The book opens with an extensive introduction that occupies 130 pages. The author begins with a number of graphs and charts intended to illustrate that many modern critical scholars accept Pauline authorship of Ephesians. In fact, it seems even when one takes into account the positions of Catholic and Protestant scholars, both liberal and conservative, twentieth-century scholarship has been rather evenly divided on the question.

Following this analysis, Hoehner discusses six important issues surrounding the rejection of Pauline authorship of Ephesians. These include (1) the impersonal nature of the letter; (2) its language and style; (3) its literary relationship with the other authentic Pauline letters; (4) the question of pseudonymity; (5) the theological peculiarities of Ephesians; and (6) varied historical considerations. He notes that Ephesians is among the New Testament books with an early attestation by several and varied witnesses (for example, Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, the Shepherd of Hermas, and even certain Nag Hammadi writings such as Hypostasis of the Archons and Exegesis of the Soul) and that its authenticity was never challenged by patristic authors. Hoehner admits that Ephesians differs from other Pauline letters, but he shows that in some ways all the letters are unique and differ from one another in vocabulary, style, and means of expression. The next part of the introduction discusses the structure and genre of Ephesians.

This is followed by an interesting and useful section on the city of Ephesus. In this context Hoehner discusses the text-critical question of the absence in a number of manuscripts of the phrase “in Ephesus” (normally found in 1:1). Moreover, he devotes an excursus to the several textual problems associated with Ephesians 1:1. He next offers short sections dealing with the geographic location of the city, its history, its social and political structure, and influences during the Roman period. He continues with a brief treatment of the question of religions in Ephesus.

A section on Paul’s journeys in Asia Minor and his visits to Ephesus follows. Hoehner raises the question of Paul’s correspondence in prison and its chronological implications. The concluding sections of the introduction take up the questions of the purpose and theology of Ephesians. Hoehner asserts, following C. H. Dodds and F. F. Bruce, that “the teaching of Ephesians is considered the crown or quintessence of Paulinism because in large measure it summarizes the leading themes of the Pauline letters” (106). The author proceeds to a succinct discussion of the following issues: the Trinity, the fatherhood of God, Christology, pneumatology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and, finally, reconciliation. The discussion of these questions in the introduction is by no means exhaustive but has
the merit of providing a good review of the relevant literature. The introduction closes with a second bibliography of seventeen pages, exclusively devoted to issues of the letter’s authorship.

A word or two on the above-mentioned excursuses, of which Hoehner includes eight in all. Excursus 1, as mentioned earlier, deals with “Textual Problems in Ephesians 1:1”; excursus 2 gives an overview of the “Views and Structure of Eph 1:3–14”; excursus 3 consists in a list of occurrences of the expression “In Christ.” Excursus 4, divided into two parts, takes up the question of “Election.” The first part deals with the use of the word ἐκλέγομαι in classical, LXX, Koine Greek, and New Testament texts. The second part consists of a discussion of the doctrine of election that is in dialogue with Markus Barth’s view; excursus 5 consists of a “Study of πλήρωμα” in the LXX, New Testament, and gnostic literary contexts. Hoehner should perhaps have included certain patristic examples (for example, Marius Victorinus discusses πλήρωμα in his commentary on 3:19). Excursus 6 is dedicated to “Mystery” (i.e., the word μυστήριον); excursus 7 is about the “Household Code”; and, finally, excursus 8 discusses the question of “Slavery in Paul’s Time.”

The main part of the book is the commentary on the Ephesian text. Hoehner always begins by quoting the Greek text before proposing an English translation, which is followed by his commentary. The author works from a critical Greek text that, by his own admission, is of a “reasoned eclectic” character. He bases his apparatus on both UBS3 and UBS4 and Nestle-Aland27 with the information brought by the second edition of Metzger’s A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament. In establishing the critical text, he gives more weight to geographical distribution than to any other factor. One example deals with a verse that has attracted my attention for some time now. Hoehner accepts, “with great hesitation” (769), the longer reading in Eph 5:30: ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς τοῦ καὶ τῶν οστέων τοῦ (rejected in the apparatus by critical editions and in the discussion in Metzger’s Textual Commentary). I agree with Hoehner’s view, that (1) the longer reading is supported by a large number of diverse witnesses and (2) it is, as Hoehner says, the lectio difficilior.

As I said earlier, Hoehner is always concerned about internal and external coherence and gives much importance to the overall unity of Pauline theology. In his commentary itself, Hoehner offers a meticulous discussion of every verse of the letter, going into great detail as he exposes and challenges the varied interpretations of modern scholars. Placing considerable emphasis on textual problems, he spends a great deal of time on issues of vocabulary, style, and composition. Concerning vocabulary, Hoehner makes great use of the notion of intertextuality in the Pauline letters and in the New Testament generally and gives examples from the LXX or where necessary from other Koine sources such as the
papyri or Hellenistic literature. The commentary that he offers is both nuanced and lucid. While the author’s conservative theological and exegetical positions are clearly enunciated, his work exhibits a high level of assurance and maturity and will undoubtedly be a standard tool for those working in the field. Hoehner’s treatment of the scholarly literature on Ephesians makes this work useful not only to students and scholars but even for pastors and catechists. Readers unfamiliar with Greek will, however, have some difficulty in making full use of this commentary.