

T Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Commentary*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991, (Latest impression 2001) ISBN. 0 567 29556 7, paperback 356pp., £17.50.

Rudolf Schnackenburg's stated aim is to write a commentary on Ephesians 'for our times' and there is no doubt that in this volume his objective is fully met. Few could deny that the Epistle to the Ephesians is an unusual and difficult text. Schnackenburg takes this text and thoroughly, carefully and comprehensively opens up its meaning for the serious scholar and the interested reader alike.

Schnackenburg's Commentary is one of a series arising out of a process of dialogue between Catholic and Protestant scholars working on related writings. In this case, Eduard Schweizer, who was at the time writing a commentary on Colossians, was in discussion with Schnackenburg. Their points of difference are highlighted most clearly in the section on Ephesians 4.7-16, where the 'offices' of the Church are considered. This interaction between the two scholars from different traditions is not a clumsy addition to the thrust of the commentary: rather it offers a rounded view rarely found in less broadly ecumenical works.

The introduction to this Commentary is concise and self-contained while clearly pointing forward to the detailed analysis that is to follow. The major issues that surround any interpretation of Ephesians are covered without being weighed down by excess reference to previous commentators. Schnackenburg's view that the Letter is post-Pauline although built on Paul's ecclesiology is clearly argued. He highlights the current lack of knowledge regarding the social situation of Asia Minor at the end of the First Century CE, while attempting to take seriously the practical situation Ephesians was written to address. This Introduction is a model of its kind, and draws the reader into the tale it has to tell.



The body of the Commentary itself follows a rigid pattern. The Epistle is taken section by section: a brief literature review is offered, followed by a translation, textual analysis, exegesis and summary. Above all, Schnackenburg has attempted to make each section more transparent, and in this he succeeds. The emphasis is firmly placed on textual analysis, although the rigid methodology of linguistic analysis offered in some quarters has not been slavishly emulated. This work is methodologically sensitive without being dense and opaque. Its analysis is valuable for any reader who seeks to understand a word, a sentence or a section of Ephesians.

Also included in the Commentary is an excursus on the Church in the Epistle; an overview of the influence of Ephesians throughout history; and a brief discussion of the place of the Epistle in our time. Each of these sections makes fascinating reading.

At first glance, Schnackenburg's Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians appears forbidding. In fact it is extremely accessible without sacrificing scholarly depth. For Schnackenburg, the *pre-eminent* theological insight of Ephesians for today's divided Church is that the Church's task is to save humanity from want and from the threat of the power of evil. That insight is hugely clarified and amplified by this Commentary.

Alison Jack
Dunblane

