Consensus

Volume 19
Issue 2 *Liberation Theology*

Article 12

11-1-1993

Amos: a commentary

John W. Miller

Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos
Shalom M. Paul
Hermeneia
Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991
409 pages $44.95

When launching the Hermeneia series, its editors boldly promised that published volumes would be revised and eventually, new commentaries would "replace older works in order to preserve the currency of the series". With this commentary on Amos by Shalom Paul a step toward realizing that promise has been taken, for this is the second commentary on Amos to be published in this series. However, the editors warn that it should not be thought of as a replacement for Hans Walter Wolff's earlier commentary, since the two works are different enough that both will continue to be useful to the serious student. I would hope their recommendation is heeded, for Wolff's older commentary (published in 1977) contains useful insights into the locale of Amos and the compositional history of his book which are ignored or neglected by Shalom Paul.

As might be expected, Paul's commentary makes rich use of the wealth of research on Amos that has appeared since Wolff's commentary was published. Paul is also persuasive in his defense of the essential theological unity of the book in all its parts, including its opening and closing words (1:3; 9:10- -15), which are frequently attributed to later editors. Moreover, his work is marked by extended and extremely helpful comments on the general geopolitical history of the times, as well as on the book's diverse literary genres, especially as these are illuminated by a wealth of extra-biblical literature.

Where Paul's commentary is *not* so successful is at the point of situating Amos and his book within a specific Israelite social or theological milieu, or in tracing the book's compositional history within the institutional developments leading up to canonization. Paul seems to be working with a rather undifferentiated picture of Israelite theological and institutional development. As a consequence, Amos is portrayed as a lonely figure who broke with Israel's monolithic past and was the first to introduce the "novel ideal of the supremacy of morality" into the stream of Israelite religion. Indeed, Paul states that Amos's concept that morality was the determining factor in the destiny of his nation is "a radical shift from the basic outlook expressed in the Torah literature and in the Former Prophets, where the sin of idolatry was considered the primary transgression".

Were Amos in reality such a pivotal figure in the evolution of Israelite religion, all the more important would it seem to be to pay some attention to the question of what community it was that first embraced this radically new message, and how it came about that the book of Amos was compiled and preserved and eventually joined to others in the Book of the Twelve, and then added to "the Law and the Prophets". That Paul neglects to

address these issues leaves us with many questions and the rather unsatisfactory assumption that Amos and his book were a bolt from the blue. Nevertheless, taken as a whole this volume is a substantive contribution which pastors and scholars alike will consult with great profit for many years to come.

John W. Miller
Professor Emeritus, Conrad Grebel College
Waterloo, Ontario

From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God. The Origins and Development of New Testament Christology

Maurice Casey
Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991
197 pp.

Maurice Casey, lecturer in New Testament and Christian Origins at the University of Nottingham, has written a delightfully provocative book, the thesis of which aims not only for an accurate historical reconstruction of New Testament christology, but ultimately a revision of Christianity itself. The book is in the liberal British Anglican tradition, similar in aim and methodology to the book of essays edited by John Hick in *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM, 1977), whose contributors, liberal Anglican theologians, sought to present a contemporary, rationally defensible account of the Christian faith. As such, Casey's book represents both the best and worst of the liberal Anglican tradition: a rigorous, brutally honest, historically grounded appropriation of the Christian faith, but one that ultimately fails to satisfy existentially and begs important questions about the multiple meanings and interpretation of Christian texts. The book would be of interest to anyone who is interested in seeing how more radical New Testament theology is done in the United Kingdom.

Casey's thesis is that the christology of John's Gospel, in his estimation fully incarnational and latest in the New Testament canon, bears no resemblance to the historical self-understanding of Jesus and that one may discern a development in the Christian canon from affirmation of Jesus as a prophet (as testified especially in Q sayings and the historically authentic self-designations of Jesus) to the incarnate, pre-existent Word of God of John. The book is an attempt to account for that development. To do this Casey describes three stages of New Testament christological reflection. The earliest stage occurred when the Jesus movement was still exclusively Jewish. Christological affirmations from Jesus' own mouth and those of his immediate followers, such as Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, prophet and teacher, when compared with analogous intertestamental titles for agents or emissaries of God, show that neither Jesus nor his first followers believed that he was God *simpliciter*, but rather a prophet who in teaching