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*The New Testament: Its Background and Message.* By Thomas D. Lea and David A. Black. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003. ISBN 0-8054-2632-9. Pp. 653.

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Originally published in 1996 by Thomas D. Lea (late Dean of New Testament at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary), this new edition is an updated and moderately revised version from the pen of David A. Black. The present edition continues to serve as an introductory-level textbook for New Testament books and integrated issues. That is, it provides students with the essential information regarding issues of authorship, date, general theological precepts and purpose for each NT book. The book is divided into five principal sections. Part 1 focuses on background studies, i.e. intertestamental socio-political backgrounds, religious settings, canon and text criticism. This serves as foundational information to familiarize readers with basic information and fundamental tools for interpreting the NT books within their appropriate historical context.

Part 2 deals primarily with Jesus as found in the Gospels, presenting an overview of his ministry and teachings. There is a harmony of the four Gospels in chapter 5, although chapters 8 to 11 offer an outline of A. T. Robertson's *Harmony of the Gospels* (which does not always correlate with that of chapter 5). Robertson's harmony is accompanied by a brief commentary for each main pericope (synoptic and Johannine differences are explained, and possible explanations for conflicting passages are offered).

Chapter 12 brings us to part 3, devoted to the book of Acts. The authors' judgement regarding the historicity of Acts comes out favouring Luke as a historian, and Acts is deduced as presenting an accurate and historical (though selective) recounting of earliest Christianity. Interrelated with Acts is the ministry of Paul, who is introduced in part 4. After exploring the background and socio-religious context of Paul, chapters 15 to 18 provide a brief description and explanation of Paul's epistles (all so-called Deutero-Pauline letters are considered authentic; Pauline authorship for Hebrews is preferred).

The final section (part 5) discusses the remaining NT books (Hebrews, Catholic Epistles and Revelation). Distinctive and well-known problems with each book are discussed (i.e., exegesis of Hebrews 6, identity of James). The book concludes with a brief subject and name index.

The book purports to enable students to perceive and appreciate the historical, theological and literary characteristics of each New Testament book. As an introductory primer, it succeeds fairly well in elucidating these essential matters. Major theological themes are introduced and defined, and key theological and exegetical problems are discussed. The relevant topical bibliography at the

close of each section is useful. If there is one nagging critique that remains, it is that the book suffers from brevity. Many of the issues dealt with could be revised into a more substantial discussion of relevant details. Significant questions are occasionally (but not always) lightly touched upon, technical discussion is kept to a minimum, and contrary opinion is often relegated to a brief mention in the endnotes. Students (and teachers) will be forced to continuously supplement the discussion with additional reading elsewhere. The revised and updated bibliography by Black demonstrates he is well aware of current issues, but it is unfortunate that he did not seize the opportunity to revise Lea even further. The same critique of brevity could be made to Lea's first edition, and it is unfortunate that not much has changed, since one appreciable quality of a classroom textbook is its thoroughness and ability to advance the arguments presented. Contrast this with the monumental *Introduction* by Raymond Brown (likewise intended for beginning students!) and the gulf between the two is immediately apparent.

Although the book appears well written, there is the occasional lapse of one kind or another. Thus a table covering Jesus' ministry of Galilee is provided for Matthew, but not for the remaining Gospels. Bibliographical entries have their own special problems, with publishers' names and locations added or omitted inconsistently. All references to D. Guthrie's *Introduction* should be revised to reflect his last, significantly revised single-volume *fourth* edition, rather than alternating between past multi-volume second and third editions (with the occasional error of date, particular volume unidentified, etc.). Notwithstanding these criticisms, the user-friendly style and clear approach make this book readily accessible and suitable for students in undergraduate studies. The "Guiding Questions" and "Further Discussion" at the beginning and end of each chapter provide ample opportunity for teachers to raise important, critical points regarding contemporary issues in NT studies. It is ultimately a book written *by* evangelicals *for* evangelicals; whether non-evangelicals will be convinced by its presuppositions remains to be seen.

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