

**Corneliu Constantineanu(†) and Peter Penner, eds. *Central and Eastern European Bible Commentary*. Carlisle, UK: Langham Partnership, 2022.**

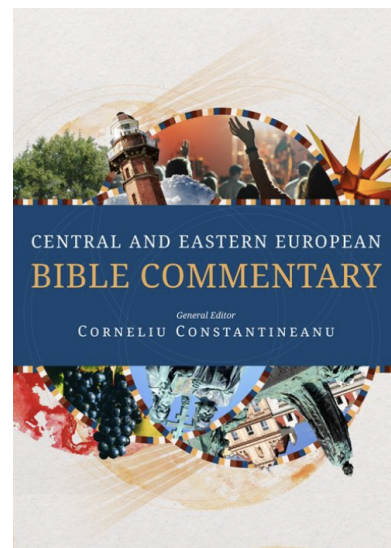
Reviewed by Preston Pearce, PhD, Field Personnel, Europe

## **SUMMARY**

The Langham Partnership has produced several one-volume Bible commentaries in different regions of the world, one of which is the *Central and Eastern European Bible Commentary* (CEEBC). All 104 contributors are from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), nations that “bear the ideological scars of totalitarian regimes” (vii) and are from many denominations. Incidentally, Russia is represented in the *Slavic Bible Commentary* (2016) rather than CEEBC.

The contributors write at a level that is accessible to pastors, teachers, church leaders, and lay people. Because of the many languages in the region, CEEBC is written in English, the most common second language. NRSV is the English translation used. It has section introductions, book introductions, commentary, and articles.

The editors have two major goals for CEEBC. One is to give a voice to Christians in the region, whose theological contributions are under-represented in global Christianity. Another is to be relevant to the CEE context, including both its communist past and its secular, pluralistic present. This relevance should contribute to the transformation of Christianity in the post-



communist nations (vii) and “present the gospel as public truth by reflecting biblically and theologically on issues” (ix-x).

The desire to be relevant to the CEE context is evident in the commentary and in the articles. Each commentator is intentional to relate his/her material clearly to the CEE context. CEEBC also has 125 short articles about a wide variety of topics; most are on current issues of importance in the current CEE context, e.g., abortion, euthanasia, gender, genocide, human trafficking, patriotism and nationalism, refugees, and secularism. CEEBC also includes articles related to the information & technology age, e.g., Artificial Intelligence, Electronic Gaming, and Virtual Reality. Articles about Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Reformation & Counter-Reformation, Ecumenism, and Evangelicalism reflect the complex historical religious scene in CEE.

## **STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

CEEBC represents a valuable contribution to understanding global Christianity, as it seeks to give a voice to Christians from a region that is underrepresented in resources such as this. Resources like CEEBC help believers realize that they sometimes bring assumptions that may be more cultural than exegetical to their own interpretive process.

Another strength of CEEBC is the earnest attempt of each contributor to connect the message of Scripture with the contemporary CEE context. This appears in biblical book introductions, commentary, and articles.

Unsurprisingly, CEEBC also has some good articles on topics like expository preaching; on marriage, divorce, and remarriage; on singleness; on sexuality; on the prosperity gospel; and more.

CEEBC could be strengthened by greater integration of biblical theology into the commentary – that is, more intentionality in placing the books not only in their historical setting and relating them to contemporary CEE culture, but also explaining them in their context in redemptive history.

Awareness of the biblical metanarrative is essential in the process of understanding any text of Scripture and thus is a critical part of the task of biblical interpretation. The lack of integration of biblical theology is evident also in specific areas, e.g., the lack of connection of the prophetic ministry in Israel to the Mosaic covenant and the lack of connection of Matt.20:28/Mark 10:45 with Isaiah 53.

CEEBC has a wealth of information. Yet it would be helpful to have deeper discussion of some core biblical issues, e.g., propitiation, election to salvation, and inspiration of Scripture (especially in light of discussions about authorship of Pentateuch and Isaiah).

The theological diversity on nonessential issues is commendable but in some instances it can cause confusion to the reader. For example, regarding gender roles in the church, one contributor takes the egalitarian position with no mention of other views (7); another describes the views in somewhat polarizing terms (1500); another presents a balanced view (247). The reader needs to be aware of key passages in order to find and weigh the different views. In another example, the commentator's admirable attempt to navigate the difficult issue of apostasy in Hebrews 6 – admittedly difficult – was hindered by jumping to the Calvinist-Arminian debate without giving adequate attention to what the text says.

CEEBC is valuable in that it provides a resource for those in CEE to see Scripture's relevance to their context, and for outsiders to better understand an underrepresented segment of global Christianity. Again, despite any differences or weaknesses mentioned above, Langham should be commended for producing the valuable resource.