



Epaphras: Paul's Educator at Colossae (Paul's Social Network: Brothers & Sisters in Faith)

Michael Trainor

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Human beings are embedded in a set of social relations. A social network is one way of conceiving that set of relations in terms of a number of persons connected to one another by varying degrees of relatedness. In the early Jesus group documents featuring Paul and coworkers, it takes little effort to envision the apostle's collection of friends and friends of friends that is the Pauline network. The persons who constituted that network are the focus of this set of brief books. For Christians of the Western tradition, these persons are significant ancestors in faith. While each of them is worth knowing by themselves, it is largely because of their standing within that web of social relations woven about and around Paul that they are of lasting interest. Through this series we hope to come to know those persons in ways befitting their first-century Mediterranean culture.

Epaphras belonged to Paul's network of friends. Because Epaphras is mentioned only three times in the Second Testament, in the letters to Philemon and the Colossians, it is unsurprising that he is passed over by biblical scholars more interested in Paul's better-known companions. Michael Trainor points out, however, that even though Epaphras is mentioned infrequently, Colossians portrays him as an authentic interpreter of Paul and an important teacher. After all, by the time the letter to the Colossians was written, Paul was dead. Epaphras ensures for that community and the next generation of Christians the continuity, as well as the freshness and vitality, of Paul's teaching. Thus Epaphras has great relevance for Christians today who seek ways to engage the contemporary world in light of their discipleship.

Michael Trainor teaches at the Adelaide College of Divinity, in the School of Theology, Flinders University, South Australia. He has published widely in areas of theology, education, and Scripture. His most recent book with Liturgical Press was The Quest for Home: The Household in Mark's Gospel (2001). His interest in Epaphras comes out of his current research with colleagues in Australia and Turkey to interpret archaeologically the site of ancient Colossae in southern Turkey.

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