

BOOK REVIEWS

Achtemeier, Elizabeth. *Preaching Hard Texts of the Old Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998.

Elizabeth Achtemeier shares with us, yet again, the fruits of a life of solid biblical scholarship. In *Preaching Hard Texts of the Old Testament*, she brings a freshness and a creativity to the text that is consistently rooted in a posture that honors the normative character of the text. While conversant with recent trends and "fads" in biblical studies, she discerns and delineates their inadequacies and determines to wrestle with the text with integrity. For example, her discussion of Gen. 3:14-19 (pp. 11-16) and the relationship between the sexes will not pass muster as being "politically correct," but it is both faithful to the text and to the greater biblical message: "The battle between the sexes will undoubtedly continue in our society...but in the church we know that the battle has been stilled and the love of Christ has joined women and men together" (p. 15).

Dr. Achtemeier begins on a lofty note: "I have always thought, and in fact taught, that if we have some problem with a passage in the Old Testament, it is not the Bible's problem. It is ours." Does she carry it off? Strictly speaking, no. But when one realizes that she operates as a biblical theologian, then the answer is, "Yes, she does." Again and again, Achtemeier urges the Old Testament text to a fuller exposition in light of the New Testament, never distorting or negating the meaning of the Old Testament text. While for some odd reason unknown to me, academics have hailed the death of biblical theology, it is a joy to see its influence yielding such fruitful results in this scholar's work. See her discussion of the sacrifice of Isaac. At some level, this biblical word is "incomplete" without the fuller explication of the sacrificial work of Jesus. Similarly she (rightly) subjects Ezra's teaching on divorce to the fuller light of Paul's teaching (pp. 80-85); and the message of Psalm 137, "Dashing the children on the rocks..." is superseded by Jesus' word of forgiveness in Luke 23:24 (pp. 105-110).

Achtemeier will not "trade in" biblical metaphors easily in the name of current sensitivities. Rather, she plumbs their depths for relevant meaning as she does on p. 28 with her discussion of God as Warrior and military language. Her wisdom on Sophia (pp. 111-15) is much needed today. Her discussion of Theophanies on p. 31 and Uzziah and the Ark (p. 73) are a needed corrective to the current, folksy religion that shares more in common with the self-help psychology section of a major bookstore than it does with vital biblical faith. Her treatment of the tragedy of Saul reflects her approach as one of vigorous honesty which allows the text to engage us in the real struggles of our world, never resorting to simplistic

answers, such as "obey and everything will be all right."

Once again, Dr. Achtemeier has provided a great resource to the church.

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Longman, Tremper, III. *Making Sense of the Old Testament: Three Crucial Questions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998.

The volumes of the "Three Crucial Questions" series are derived from seminars by the same name, sponsored by Bridge Ministries of Detroit, Michigan. The editors assert that the books (and presumably the seminars) are based on the realization that "imperfect Christians seem to have no final answers" to certain critical issues related to our faith (p. 9). These volumes offer tentative answers to such crucial questions in the hopes of advancing the Christian faith in our times. Previous volumes have offered answers to three questions about Jesus (Murray J. Harris), the Bible (Grant R. Osborne), the Holy Spirit (Craig S. Keener), spiritual warfare (Clinton E. Arnold), and the last days (Daniel J. Lewis). The editors promise forthcoming volumes on topics of interest to all believers: three questions about women, black theology, the Trinity, salvation, moral reasoning, and racial reconciliation.

The topics chosen for the seminar and book series are indeed "crucial" to our faith, and as the history of interpretation demonstrates, none is more crucial to biblical hermeneutics than the way Christians relate to the Old Testament. Since Christians frequently raise tough questions about the Old Testament, this new volume is a welcome contribution. The book has a simple structure. There are three chapters, one devoted to each of the following questions. First, what are the keys to understanding the Old Testament? Second, is the God of the Old Testament also the God of the New Testament? Third, how is the Christian to apply the Old Testament to life?

The first chapter surveys the attractions and obstacles of Old Testament study and presents nine principles for successful interpretation, which the reader is to assume provide the "keys" to understanding the Old Testament. This portion of the volume is a lay-level introduction to biblical hermeneutics, and is a convenient summary of the author's earlier publications on this topic. The first principle is a defense of the traditional interest in authorial intent. Longman carefully navigates between newer approaches, many of which often abandon entirely the pursuit of authorial intent, and those who equate the human author's intent with God's intent (notably Walter Kaiser). Longman's conclusion is that the human authors sometimes "wrote better than they knew," meaning that "God's intention may surpass the conscious intention of the human author" (pp. 28 and 29). Other principles for reading the Old Testament include context, genre identification, attention to history and grammar, and so forth. At times Longman adopts a Christocentric (rather than Theocentric!) approach to the Old Testament, as in his discussion of principle 8: "Discover How the Scripture Passage Presents Jesus Christ" (pp. 52-53).

In the second chapter, Longman addresses the perceived contradictions between the

Testaments. In other words, Christians often have difficulty with the Old Testament because they perceive Yahweh as a vindictive, anger-filled despot, who seems to delight in punishing helpless victims. The chapter exposes the erroneous nature of such approaches to the Old Testament, by surveying three metaphors for God in the Bible: God as covenant king, God as warrior, and God as Immanuel. By stressing the continuity between the Testaments concerning these metaphors, Longman is able to conclude that the God of the New Testament is clearly the same God of the Old Testament, and that he revealed himself progressively through time (p. 101).

The third and final chapter addresses the issue of how the modern Christian is to apply the Old Testament to life. Longman begins the chapter with a brief survey of opposite extremes regarding Old Testament law: dispensationalism versus theonomy. In essence, the former overemphasizes discontinuity between the Testaments while the latter sees only continuity. The truth, Longman argues, lies somewhere between these extremes. The heart of the chapter then explores the most difficult part of the Old Testament to apply to modern Christians, namely, the laws of the Pentateuch. Relying on the well-worn distinctions between the moral law (the Ten Commandments), the ceremonial law (sacrificial and ritualistic regulations) and civil laws (societal legislation), Longman argues that the specific ceremonial and civil laws flow from the general moral laws of the Decalogue. Since the ceremonial and civil laws are defined culturally and presented in a specific redemptive-historical setting, they are no longer applicable to modern believers. Nevertheless such specific casuistic and ritualistic laws illustrate ethical principles that are still relevant.

Longman has a casual and easy-to-read style, which will make this a useful volume among lay-people and students interested in the Old Testament. But I was left wondering if he has asked the right questions, or to put it another way, if he has asked them specifically enough. Are these three general questions the questions plaguing modern Christians with regard to the Old Testament? There is no doubt that the most troubling question those of us in ministry hear today about the Old Testament is the problem of violence, particularly concerning the conquest narratives. The author's second chapter certainly addresses this question by affirming that Yahweh of the Old Testament is the same God as in the New. Particularly pertinent is his discussion of the metaphor of the Divine Warrior as a continuity between the Testaments. But there is much more that needs to be said on this point, especially concerning the centrality of the justice of God in both Testaments, and the modern misconception and overemphasis on the love (or better, the perceived sentimental drive) of Jesus in the New.

Likewise, another important question concerning the Old Testament is its applicability to modern life. Longman's third chapter is instructive at this point, but leaves us with further questions. For example, while the time-honored distinction between moral, ceremonial, and civil laws of the Pentateuch may be a useful starting point for discussion, it is inadequate to finally settle the question. What of sabbath-keeping? Observation of the sabbath is certainly part of the Decalogue, and by this definition is part of the moral law of God. But why then do so many Christians (in fact, all but the Seventh-Day Adventists) routinely alter this particular law? Some laws are both moral and civil, such as laws against adultery, stealing, and bearing false witness. Others are both moral and ceremonial, such as laws against idolatry and sabbath-breaking. The lines between the categories are not always easy to

determine. The moral-civil-ceremonial categories are a helpful start, but such distinctions are extra-biblical and are a bit arbitrary. It is better to accept some laws of the Pentateuch as broad and generally intended for all societies, while others are specific applications to Israelite culture and society. Rather than rely on an arbitrary distinction to determine when a law is applicable, is it not better to evaluate each law on a case-by-case basis?

Part of our difficulty in the West is our own context, specifically our industrial-urban setting. Much of the two-thirds world today (the majority of the world's population!) is closer to ancient Israel than we may think (and than we are). The specific applications of civil law are not so far removed from the culture and society of much of the world today. It may not be as satisfying initially, but I believe it is better to assert that the Old Testament law is God's word for us, though not his command to us in every situation. It is better to accept ancient Israel as the model and example of how God's revealed law is applied in that particular time and place. As we compare our own situation to theirs, we accept Pentateuchal law as confirmed by Christ (Matt. 5:17), and with the help of his Holy Spirit, the specifics of how we ought to love God and neighbor should become clear (for more on this approach, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990], pp. 260-65).

Longman has put us in his debt for addressing the most difficult topics involved in making sense of the Old Testament. This little volume will not settle those questions once and for all. But that would be too much to ask from any single volume, even one written by a scholar as gifted as Tremper Longman.

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Currid, John D. *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997.

The historical reliability of the Old Testament has been a matter of sharp debate for generations. Scholars continue to be divided and scattered between two extreme poles: one being the minimalist view that most, if not all, of the historical material in the Old Testament is quite late (dated to the Persian period and later) and heavily dependent on other ANE cultures; the other claiming that the biblical presentation is altogether sound and historically accurate. Currid's work leans heavily toward this latter position and is an attempt to refute those denying the Old Testament's historical veracity. He does this, in particular, by presenting the Egyptian backgrounds to those portions of the Old Testament which deal in some respect with Egypt. Since certain scholars believe that much of the biblical material is a late creation, it naturally follows that those Hebrew writers would have known virtually nothing of the era about which they were writing (i.e., Joseph or Moses in their respective Egyptian settings). Currid wants to correct this notion by showing that the Egyptian backgrounds to these particular Old Testament passages, many of which, he argues, are polemical in nature, do indeed validate the authenticity of the biblical history.

Currid arranges the book in five parts. Part One is the introduction, wherein the author

asserts that, contrary to the opinion of many modern scholars, the ancient Hebrews were very well informed about Egyptian life and culture. He rejects the common idea that the Hebrew cosmology accounts are heavily dependent on their Mesopotamian counterparts, and stresses rather the dissimilarities between the two. Part Two, *Egyptian Elements in the Pentateuch*, is the bulk of Currid's work, not only in length but also in his efforts to prove the historicity of those particular passages in the Pentateuch involving Egypt. Part Three, *Contacts between Israel and Egypt in the Historical Books*, deals mainly with Solomon's reign (his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, administration, etc.) and Shishak. Part Four, *Egyptian Wisdom Literature and the Poetical Books*, is basically a discussion involving the parallels between the "Instruction of Amenemope" and Proverbs. Part Five, *Egyptian and Israelite Prophecy*, describes Egyptian divination and examines certain Hebrew prophecies against Egypt.

It is unfortunate that Currid's Introduction and opening chapter of Part Two (i.e., the first three chapters of the book) are the weakest parts of his work. These sections deal with ancient cosmologies: those of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Israel. There are three basic faults. First, in an attempt to rescue the Old Testament from the claims, now quite dated, that the Hebrew account is completely dependent upon much earlier Babylonian lore,¹ Currid endeavors to de-emphasize the similarities between the two cosmologies and place greater emphasis upon their differences. The problems in doing so are multiple. To begin with, since such a powerful display of similarities does, in fact, exist between the Hebrew and Mesopotamian cosmologies (particularly the creation accounts), to emphasize their dissimilarities in an effort to prove their relative independence only weakens the *polemical* aspect which the Hebrew cosmology is leveling against the other. In other words, the similarities to the Babylonian material (though restricted for theological/polemical purposes) are the entire point of the Hebrew cosmology. Currid seems to impair this particular polemic, while he later depends on polemical arguments that are based on the *similarities* between Israel and *Egypt*. Interestingly, today there seems to be a growing understanding within scholarship which maintains that similar cosmological/mythological forms found in different cultures are not dependent upon direct borrowing. To note similarities between Mesopotamian and Levantine motifs says nothing about Israelite dependence on a Mesopotamian culture.² Furthermore, once Currid de-emphasizes the similarities between the Hebrew and Mesopotamian cosmologies, he then, in an effort to further distance the two stresses all the similarities between Hebrew and *Egyptian* cosmologies. These similarities seem more general and less impressive than he imagines. Ironically, he emphasizes an Egyptian milieu to the point that one could see a Hebrew dependence on Egypt!

A second basic fault in Part I is Currid's treatment of the Hebrew cosmology itself. For example, *bēre'šit* is given the standard definition of "in the beginning" without any mention of other possible readings.³ The creation is understood to be *ex nihilo*, which is based more on theological presuppositions than Hebrew syntax. Such an understanding of these concepts allows Currid to make a strong comparison to Egyptian cosmology, which portrays Ptah as speaking everything into existence.

One final fault, which tends to run throughout the book, is Currid's tone. He is quite inflammatory towards the "liberals" and the "revisionists." His work tends to be 'preaching to the choir' more than dialoguing with the scholarly community. Ultimately, he damages his own endeavors, as well as those of other conservatives, by fueling the 'fundamentalist' stigma.

Apart from these cosmological/cosmogonic issues, the rest of Currid's work is lucid and insightful (Part 2: Egyptian Elements in the Pentateuch; Part 3: Contacts between Israel and Egypt in the Historical books; Part 4: Egyptian Wisdom Literature and the Poetical Books; Part 5: Egyptian and Israelite Prophecy). He is much more comfortable dealing with those biblical passages with direct Egyptian contact, and his understanding of Egyptian cultural backgrounds is thorough. In these chapters, Currid reviews the history of Egyptological scholarship, often supplying his own opinion on the matter. A few examples would be chapter 4, Potiphar's position in society; chapter 10, Shishak and the Bubastite Portal (a partially legible inscription which records the Palestinian cities he conquered or subjugated); and chapter 12, Egyptian divination. His strongest work tends to be in Part Two, Egyptian Elements in the Pentateuch, and in particular his treatments dealing with serpents. In chapter 5, for instance, Currid discusses the first confrontation of Moses with the magicians (Exod. 7:8ff.), and in chapter 8 he deals with the episode involving the fiery snakes and the Bronze Serpent (Num. 21:4ff.). In both cases Currid delivers powerful and original arguments for a polemical understanding of these incidents. Having provided the Egyptian background regarding serpentine lore, he demonstrates how both instances could be interpreted as Yahweh mocking the Egyptian culture, religion, pharaoh, and ultimately the Egyptian gods. Yahweh displays his authority *over* (Exodus 7) and *through* (Numbers 21) serpents,⁴ which, in Egyptian culture, were endowed with various powers.

Overall, Currid's work is perceptive and vigorous. Although it is somewhat defensive in tone, it nevertheless provides valuable insights into the Egyptian backgrounds of the Hebrew Bible, as well as fresh approaches in interpreting various biblical passages with direct Egyptian connections. This volume is an excellent source for background material and would also be a fine resource for college and seminary students.

NOTES

1. Currid is especially sensitive to Friedrich Delitzsch's castigation of the Old Testament writers for their outright plagiarism of Babylonian material. See note 16, p. 28. Also see Delitzsch, *Babel and Bible* (New York: Putnam, 1903), pp. 149, 175, 176.

2. See Dorothy Irvin, *Mytharion: The Comparison of Tales from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East* (AOAT 32; Kevelaer/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Butzon and Bercker/Neukirchener, 1978), esp. p. 112; Susan Niditch, *Folklore and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993); W. G. Doty, *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1986).

3. Gen. 1:1 is understood by many as a circumstantial clause, dependent on verse 3, while verse 2 is parenthetical: "When God began to create...(now the earth was formless and void...) God said..." Others see verse 1 as a title or caption of the whole creative process. Currid fails to acknowledge the complexity of these verses. For a thorough discussion see G. Wehnart, *Genesis 1-15* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco, TX: Word, 1987), pp. 11-17.

4. Healing, a common characteristic of Egyptian serpent gods, was only possible here through Yahweh's command.

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Hill, Andrew E. *Malachi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible 25D; New York, NY: Doubleday, 1998.

The editor and publishers of the Anchor Bible series have a tradition of producing large commentaries on small biblical books (e.g., 979 pages on Amos and 701 pages on Hosea), but Andrew Hill's contribution on Malachi takes us to a new level: 436 densely-printed pages on 55 verses.

In the introduction, the author includes sections on textual, canonical, literary, and historical considerations, as well as brief discussions of the date of Malachi's oracles and the use of Malachi in subsequent Jewish and Christian literature. This introduction is followed by an extensive bibliography that includes many works not directly related to Malachi, and 260 pages of meticulous commentary relying upon the author's new translation. The book concludes with appendices on a variety of topics related to interpreting the prophet, as well as extensive indices.

Most sections in the introduction survey the history of interpretation on a given topic and conclude with the author's position. On the question of the nature of "Malachi" as either a contrived appellation for the anonymous person responsible for compiling the book or a proper name of the author of the oracles, Hill sides with those scholars who take it as a proper name, probably meaning "my messenger." He further speculates that it may be an abbreviated theophoric name in the same vein as "Zechariah," that is, without a connecting "y" vowel. Hence, the original form might have been something like *mafākyaḥ(ū)*, or s'Malachiah," meaning "messenger of Yahweh" (pp. 15-18). In terms of the specific type of prophetic oracles found in Malachi, the author agrees with Claus Westermann and classifies it as prophetic disputation speech formula, part of the standard Old Testament prophetic judgement speech against the nations. The speeches contain the prophetic declaration, followed by the hypothetical audience rebuttal, and conclude with the prophetic refutation.

As a scholar who posits "the person and presence of God" as the theological center and organizing tenet for the Old Testament, Hill sees Malachi "as primarily a theology of Yahweh" (pp. 46-47). As much as we may appreciate this emphasis in the prophecies of Malachi, the perils of postulating such a center for the Old Testament generally are well known. One wonders how helpful it is to postulate a superintending *Mitte* (center) as vague as "divine presence."

After surveying scholarship on the date of Malachi's composition, Hill turns to a purely linguistic analysis, which has the advantage of being more objective (pp. 80-84). Relying on previous studies that establish a continuum between Classical Biblical Hebrew (the Deuteronomistic History) and Late Biblical Hebrew (secondary extensions to the priestly corpus), Hill proposes a round figure of 500 B.C. as the most reasonable date of composition for Malachi. This proposal stretches the consensus opinion, which places Malachi in the first half of the fifth century, and it precludes those positions that place Malachi after Nehemiah. The author also provides a healthy overview of the Persian period's history and its implications for interpreting Malachi, including four maps and four charts (pp. 51-76). There is an eight-page glossy insert with photographs and line art to shed light on the Persian period (found at p. 212).

At times the reader gets much more than expected from a commentary. For example, in

the introduction's section on "unity" (pp. 18-23), the author begins by describing three approaches to the Bible: the historical, the theological, and the literary. After discussing each, he explains how the theological approach to the Bible continues in the work of modern canonical criticism, especially as defined by James Sanders and Brevard Childs (even though Childs disavows the terminology). After a brief explanation of the differences between Sanders and Childs, the author uses two more pages to describe what all this means for interpreting Malachi. Most of these discussions are quite useful as surveys of various trends and emphases in the discipline, and few commentaries can afford the luxury of so much background and survey material. The author includes other such summaries in the text-critical presentation (pp. 3-12), his discussion of canonical considerations (pp. 12-15), the problem of genre classification in Old Testament studies (pp. 23-25), a survey of scholarly work on prophetic disputation speeches (pp. 35-37), and to a lesser degree, a survey of recent developments in Old Testament theology (pp. 46-47). One wonders, however, if all of these items—as informative as they are—are necessary for a commentary on Malachi, especially one intended for a scholarly readership.

This volume will no doubt be of enormous benefit to beginners in the field as well as professionals, though scholars may actually find it tedious to work through. All in all, however, we must be grateful for at least a few academic publishers and editors who allow such extensive treatment and space devoted to such a small biblical book. In this sense, the commentary is a rarity. Like most commentaries being produced today, this one will be most widely read for its introduction and turned to subsequently as a reference tool on the text of Malachi. Hill's commentary itself is painstakingly exhaustive, perhaps the most comprehensive biblical commentary I have ever seen. He is to be commended for an impressive amount of work. The result is a volume that will become one of the stock reference tools on Malachi, more because of its extensiveness than its innovations.

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Dunn, James D.G. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Grand Rapids/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1998.

In this major new treatment of Paul's theology, James Dunn of Durham University makes an impressive contribution to Pauline studies and New Testament theology. This is certainly a text to be included in all New Testament collections, and it will be of interest to all students of Paul's writings. Especially significant is the book's rare combination of clarity, incisiveness, and scope. Dunn writes clearly enough for a mature college student to grasp, and yet he engages the giants in the field productively, contributing effectively on their level. In twenty-five sections Dunn covers seven major themes (including chapters on God and Humankind, Humankind under Indictment, The Gospel of Jesus Christ, The Beginning of Salvation, The Process of Salvation, The Church, and How Should Believers Live?) introduced and followed by a helpful prologue and epilogue. Exhaustive bibliogra-

phies introduce each chapter, and the work is marked by fitting thematic progressions and appropriate topical excursions along the way.

Having discussed thoughtfully the question of whether a theology of Paul can be written, Dunn's approach begins with Romans, arguably the greatest theological work of the greatest Christian theologian. From thence, Dunn develops a model of theology as a dialogue or sets of dialogues—not simply an abstract set of ideas—wherein Paul's theological views and frameworks were forged. After all, what we have to work with is the letters of Paul, and these were produced as epistolary responses to specific issues within particular contextual settings. Nevertheless, Romans offers the most fitting template from which to construct one's presentation of Paul's theological work, as it is here that Paul's explorations are most comprehensive and far reaching.

This move leads Dunn to a fit ordering of his own explorations, beginning with Paul's treatment of God. Highlighting the provenance of Jewish monotheism, combined with Paul's personally transformative experience, Dunn moves from Paul's lively theism to a thoughtful discussion of the dialectics of human experience. Here the realities of human fallenness lead to discussions of "sin and death" and their effects. The law, of course, serves to define sin and convict humanity of it, but sin turns law into *gramma*, changing it from a gift of God to an instrument of death. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, however, proclaims the new era of the "eschatological 'now'" in which transformation is indeed possible. Normed by the ministry of Jesus, effected by his death and resurrection, worshipped as the preexistent one, and anticipated as the eternal Lord, christology is the pivotal center of Paul's theological platform.

In chapters 5 and 6, Dunn poses what may be one of his most creative treatments of Paul's thought: "The Beginning of Salvation" followed by "The Process of Salvation." This juxtaposition allows Dunn to develop meaningful discussions of such topics as justification by faith, participation in Christ, the gift of the Spirit, baptism, and other topics in chapter 5, while such topics as eschatological tension and Israel are reserved for chapter 6. This sort of division allows the full treatment of the "already" accompanied with the "not-yet" character of Paul's theology. It also brings works and transformation into the discussion meaningfully without compromising the importance of salvation by faith. Dunn then goes on to discuss matters related to the church and ministry, and then ethics, in chapters 7 and 8.

The great strength of Dunn's outline and approach is that it allows him comprehensive treatments of major issues in Pauline theology, and in doing so, he is able to sketch helpful connections between the relevant themes. While particular scholars will take issue with Dunn on one matter or another, this book is well worth considering on the whole, and on specific matters as well. In his postlegomena, Dunn comments on the importance of taking into account at least three levels of dialogue within Paul's theology—the reflective dialogue within himself, his dialogue with his Jewish tradition and convictions, and his many sets of dialogues with members of his communities of faith. Keeping these levels of engagement in mind helps later interpreters appreciate more fully the dynamic character of Paul's epistolary theologizing—a worthy interest indeed—as is this book!

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Pfizner, Victor C. *Hebrews*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1997.

Worship lies at the center of the Christian life, and according to Victor C. Pfizner, a call to true Christian worship is the central message of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Pfizner, professor of New Testament and principal of Luther Seminary, North Adelaide, South Australia, has contributed a rhetorically, literarily, and theologically sensitive volume to the Abingdon New Testament Commentaries Series. The aim of this series is to address the needs and interests of pastors, theological students, and other church leaders, taking into account the technical scholarly literature but communicating in a way that can be understood by non-specialists. Pfizner fulfills this aim admirably. The volume has three basic divisions: an introduction, the commentary proper, and a select bibliography.

The introduction treats the standard questions of author, date, historical situation, and structure, all quite vexing issues with this epistle. The discussion of authorship is necessarily inconclusive. However, Pfizner is bolder regarding the date, departing from the (rough) consensus dating of the mid-90s and arguing convincingly for the late 50s or early 60s, based in part on Hebrews' silence about the destruction of the temple (AD 70). In addition to these standard questions, the introduction contains excellent summaries of Hebrews' literary and rhetorical qualities and its "World of Thought."

The structure of the commentary proper is threefold: literary analysis, exegetical analysis, and theological/ethical analysis. Generally, Pfizner does well in all three areas, but, as one might expect with this particular epistle, his literary and rhetorical analysis is especially detailed and nuanced. Hebrews is the most self-consciously rhetorical writing in the New Testament. Inclusions, alliteration, hookwords, and a dozen other tropes abound. But even with Hebrews, commentators have occasionally "found" more than is there. This is especially true with the rhetorical structure known as chiasm (A, B, C, C', B', A'). While Hebrews no doubt uses this technique, Pfizner on occasion seems to create them by seeing dubious relationships between clauses (pp. 48, 195). But in general his judgments are sound and his observations insightful. Inclusions, used pervasively by Hebrews (see esp. 4:1-16 and 10:19-23), are regularly noted by Pfizner. Transitions, preparations, and special occurrences and concentrations of words are effectively mined for their exegetical yield.

Pfizner offers a thorough exegesis of the principle argument in Hebrews: a series of amplified comparisons demonstrating the superiority of God's Son over angels, Moses, the Levitical priesthood, etc., and the lesser to greater argument for faithful endurance ensuing from those comparisons. At one point, however, he includes the enigmatic Melchizedek in the list of comparisons (p. 21) and later suggests that Hebrews' use of this figure constitutes an implicit lesser to greater argument, i.e., that Jesus is greater than Melchizedek (p. 104). But as Pfizner's own exegesis makes clear, Melchizedek is a type of Christ. The author's argument is not that Jesus is superior to Melchizedek (although presumably he would have thought this), but that Jesus' superiority to Abraham and to the Levitical priests is prefigured in Melchizedek.

Pfizner's novel contribution to the study of Hebrews lies in the prominence he gives to the theme of worship. Neglect of worship leading to apostasy is seen as the "real issue" behind the letter (p. 27). Indeed, the whole letter can be seen in the light of its conclusion (12:18-13:25) as "a call to worship" (p. 182). It is certainly the case that the recipients'

reinvigorated faith ought to express itself, among other ways, in worship. It is also true that at certain climactic points in Hebrews (4:16; 10:19-25; 12:22-24; 13:15-16) exhortations are framed in liturgical language of "approaching the throne of grace," "entering the sanctuary," etc. This being granted, there are occasions when Pfitzner's definition of "worship" is too expansive, and almost any doxological, eschatological, or ethical affirmation becomes an aspect of it (pp. 52, 83, 191). If the entirety of Christian existence can be subsumed under the category of "worship," then it would be surprising if Hebrews did *not* make it a central concern. Nevertheless, worship in a distinctively Christian mode is critical to this epistle, and Pfitzner rightly calls attention to it.

The commentary is uncluttered by footnotes, using instead parenthetical references to works in the bibliography. The concluding bibliography then gives full information about both significant monographs and articles (all English or English translations) and commentaries (mostly in English, but also the most noteworthy German and French works). The latter group includes brief annotations that will guide those wishing to do further study.

Among those "mid-range" commentaries that make no claim to be full reference volumes but aim at well-informed, accessible exegesis, Pfitzner's is among the best. Pastors, students, and conscientious lay persons will find Pfitzner's *Hebrews* to be an intelligible, learned, and reliable guide.

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