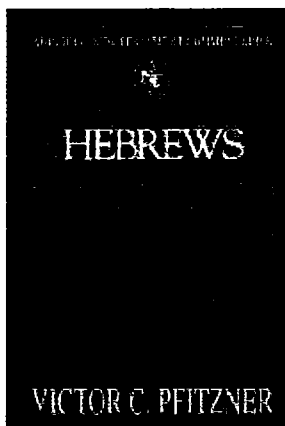


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Pfitzner, Victor C.

Hebrews

Abingdon New Testament Commentaries

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“The Abingdon New Testament Commentaries series provides,” according to the general editor V. P. Furnish, “compact, critical commentaries on the writings of the New Testament” (p. 11). The present work certainly is in keeping with the objective of the series. Pfitzner masterfully compacts an introduction (pp. 19-45) and critical discussion of Hebrews (pp. 47-208) into 190 pages.

On pp. 19-45 Pfitzner, in three broad strokes, succinctly covers the introductory questions. Addressing literary issues first, Pfitzner concludes that the genre of Hebrews is a sermonic letter presented in an epideictic rhetorical fashion and structured with a parenetic thrust on Christ’s priesthood (Heb 4:17-10:18) which is framed by two exhortations (Heb 4:14-16; 10:19-25): “to hold fast to the confession and to claim priestly access into God’s presence” (pp. 20-24). Moving onto historical issues, Pfitzner reveals the shaky foundations for Pauline authorship and argues for Apollos as author. The recipients of Apollos’s sermonic letter, a letter written sometime before 64 CE, were Roman readers who were “possibly tempted to seek security under the cover of Judaism” (pp. 24-32). The final section of the introduction focuses on theological issues. After summarizing the historical milieu of the author’s world (i.e., intertextual issues) and early Christian traditions, Pfitzner identifies Hebrews’ distinctive christological and eschatological emphases (pp. 32-45). Of particular interest is Pfitzner’s argument that Hebrews employs a theology of worship. He traces the theme throughout the book. The summons to worship begins with angels worshipping the Son (Heb 1:4, 6-7), continues with Apollos’s call for believers to be faithful (i.e., to hear and obey the word, Heb 2:1-2;

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3:7-11; 4:12; 12:25-29), and ends in the believer's heavenly worship of the Son with angels (Heb 12:22-24). The presence of worship, according to Pfitzner, occurs at "every climactic point in the Letter" (Heb 4:16; 10:19-25; 12:22-24; 13:15-16).

Although the introduction is thorough, it is at times ambiguous. For instance, Pfitzner's definition and use of the term "homiletical midrash" or "midrash" is less than clear. First, Pfitzner defines "homiletical *midrashim*" as "running commentaries" of the rabbis. Does this mean they are a literary genre, a process, or a combination of both? Second, he exemplifies "midrash" by pointing out Apollos's use of an exegetical rule, *gezerah shawah*, generally attributed to Hillel (Ps 95:11 and Gen 2:2 are linked in Heb 4:3-11 by the word "rest"; Pss 110:1 and 8:6 are linked in Heb 1:13 and 2:8 by the conceptual link of subjection). Does the use of a single exegetical linking technique make a document or a process midrashic? Although he clearly defines rhetoric (pp. 21-22), I wish the same attention were given to "midrash," especially since Pfitzner makes use of the term throughout his commentary (pp. 32, 60, 75-79, 104, 109, 121, 137, 188).

The organization of the commentary is extremely well done. It is organized around six discourses: God's final revelation in the Son (1:1-2:18); the Son, as faithful high priest, calls to faith (3:1-4:13); the Son as merciful high priest (4:14-7:28); the perfect sacrifice of the heavenly high priest (8:1-10:31); a call to persevering faith (10:32-12:17); and the call to heavenly worship (12:18-13:25). Every discourse section provides an overview of the literary and exegetical insights for each discourse. Subsections consistently provide a literary discussion, a concise yet critical exposition of selected verses or key issues, and a synthesis for the subsection.

The commentary's brevity, however, short changes the advanced readers for whom the series is written. For example, Greek is conspicuously absent from the commentary. I was disappointed to read in the foreword that "the authors (i.e., of the series) do not presuppose any knowledge of the biblical languages on the part of the reader" (p. 11). However, if the commentary series is written for theological students, upper-level college or university students, and pastors (p. 11), why not include key Greek terms? Advanced readers are also short changed by overly simplified handling of some issues (i.e., Heb 6:1-6). Distinguishing the critical exposition sections from the synthesis for a particular subsection was *sometimes* difficult.

Although I have mentioned what, in my evaluation, are several shortcomings, I recommend Pfitzner's commentary for theological students and for those upper-level college or university students acquainted with intertestamental history and literature. However, to prevent the concise yet critical exposition of selected verses from appearing cryptic, it will behoove readers to follow the encouragement in the author's preface: "The format of this series rightfully encourages students to examine blocks of material before analyzing verses and dissecting words" (p. 13). Pfitzner is to be commended for his

ability to pinpoint key issues throughout his commentary— as any good expositional commentary will do. In addition, the inclusion of and interaction with extrabiblical material is also praiseworthy. His intertextual work is a significant strength of the commentary. Finally, the annotated bibliography of commentaries at the conclusion of the work will be of significant value for students (pp. 212-14).