

parts of the world, Friedmann's study reveals intriguing parallels and contrasts regarding several biblical stories.

However, due to the lack of careful linguistic and grammatical research, a somewhat biased selection of Bible stories, a repeated negating of the actual scriptural narratives, interpretations directly contrary to clearly stated pericopes, a rather speculative application of the moral lessons to be learned from biblical chronicles, and an inordinate amount of unsupported assumptions, this book will be found somewhat deficient by the serious biblical scholar who believes in the divine inspiration of these Scriptures.

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Green, Gene L. *The Letters to the Thessalonians*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. xl + 400 pp. Hardcover, \$42.00.

The Pillar commentary series aspires to bring together "rigorous exegesis and exposition, with an eye alert both to biblical theology and the contemporary relevance of the Bible" (xi). Gene L. Green's exegetical and theological analysis of the Thessalonian correspondence admirably succeeds in living up to such an aim. The author is particularly concerned with the Greco-Roman background of the city of Thessalonica, desiring to read 1 and 2 Thessalonians "in light of relevant materials from the city and world of that era in order to help us better understand the impact of the gospel of Christ on its first readers" (xiii). There is, thus, a lengthy introductory section, which gives excellent sketches of the physical and social world of Thessalonica. These "background" sections are followed by the more traditional sections of commentaries: the manner in which the gospel was received by the Thessalonians, the authorship, order, and structure of the letters.

Green begins by noting the importance of the geographic location of the city of Thessalonica. Having the best Aegean port along the great military road "via Egnatia," Thessalonica was a strategically important city. Its great success "was due in grand part to the union of land and sea, road and port, which facilitated commerce between Macedonia and the entire Roman Empire" (6). Paul's decision to evangelize Thessalonica was doubtless influenced by its strategic advantages. A historical outline of Macedonian history—from the Macedonian kingdom of Alexander the Great to the province's incorporation into the Roman Empire in the first century A.D.—gives one a picture of how Macedonia's history left a deep imprint upon the political, economic, and religious life of the Thessalonica of the early church.

Thessalonica was governed by a college of five or six "city authorities" (politarchs), who were "the chief executive and administrative officials of the city, and as such they had the power to convoke the assembly of citizens and to put their seal on decrees and assure that they were executed" (22). As a result of Thessalonica's loyalty to the interests of the Roman people, the city

was declared a "free city," which granted it a significant degree of autonomy and financial freedom from Rome. Entrusted with protecting Roman interests and the privileges of a "free city," the politarchs would have been deeply concerned with the accusation that a group of people were no longer giving allegiance to the imperial and civic cults of the city.

The social world of the Greco-Roman era was characterized by a system of patronage. Given the social and economic inequities of Roman society, clients were forced to establish relationships with wealthy patrons in order to obtain goods and services. At Thessalonica, a wealthy group of resident Roman benefactors mediated access to the goods and services proffered by the emperor. This network of patron-client relationships ensured the economic well-being of the city. Green argues that the convention of patronage at Thessalonica elucidates two features of the church's life. The first is the proclamation that there is "another king named Jesus." This proclamation, which essentially challenged the rule of the emperor, "would have been viewed not only as seditious but also as a grave violation of the delicate and privileged relationship of this client city with her patron the emperor" (28). The second was occasioned by a number of believers, who wanted to maintain their client status with patrons (1 Thess 4:11-12; 2 Thess 3:6-13). Paul unequivocally opposes the institution of patronage and enjoins them to labor: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat" (2 Thess 3:10).

Like any city in the ancient world, the religious environment of Thessalonica was multifaceted; the city was host to numerous deities who were objects of adulation and worship. Deities such as Zeus, Artemis, Apollo, Aphrodite, Dionysus, and the Egyptian gods Serapis, Isis, and Anubis, along with many others, were venerated with the thanksgivings, prayers, and sacrifices of devout people. Particularly important was the imperial cult; an imperial temple was erected in the city so that its citizens could honor and worship the emperor, the supreme Roman benefactor. Significantly, imperial worship was a unifying force for the citizens of Thessalonica, bringing together their religions, political well-being, and economic benefits. Once again, Green makes use of "background" material to interpret several passages. For example, given that the debauched behavior of ancient deities was frequently emulated by its devotees (e.g., Dionysus was the god of wine and drunkenness; Aphrodite, the symbol of sexual license and the patroness of prostitutes), Paul's strong exhortation for believers to live lives of sexual purity (1 Thess 4:3-8) was a necessary admonition for those who had "turned to God from idols" (1 Thess 1:9). Similarly, the persecution experienced by the Christian community (Acts 17:6-9; 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 3:3-4) should be understood in light of Thessalonica's strong and loyal connection with Rome. The church's claims and beliefs threatened this beneficial relationship, which necessitated a forceful response by the residents of Thessalonica. Green also points to the imperial cult as the "hermeneutical key," which solves the perplexing passage of 2 Thess 2. The man of lawlessness, who "opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god

or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God" (2 Thess 2:4, NRSV), is none other than the emperor himself. Not surprisingly, "in such an environment, the Christians who would take no part in this cult, would undoubtedly have suffered for their lack of loyalty and civic commitment" (313).

Incorporating the Acts narrative, as well as the Thessalonian correspondence, Green delineates a clear and evenhanded historical sketch of the congregation's foundation and the subsequent issues it faced. The church was established in the midst of hardship and persecution. In response to the success of the apostolic mission in their synagogue, the Jews incited a civil disturbance in the marketplace, forcing Paul to abruptly leave the city. The church was left in a precarious position, continuing to suffer persecution without leadership. Having sent Timothy to Thessalonica, the apostle anxiously awaited his return with news from the church. On the whole, Timothy's report was encouraging. From Corinth, Paul then wrote 1 Thessalonians in order to thank God for the Thessalonians' steadfast faith, as well as to encourage them to continue to endure sufferings and persecutions. The apostle also addressed a number of other issues: his apostolic integrity (2:1-12), sexual immorality (4:1-8), work (4:11-12; 5:14), and certain eschatological concerns (4:13-5:11). After receiving additional news about the church, Paul penned 2 Thessalonians. In this second letter, the apostle reminded the congregation of the ultimate destiny of persecutors and Christians (1:6-10) responded to the fallacious eschatological teaching that the day of the Lord had "already come," which was destabilizing the church (2:1-12). He concluded this letter by strongly exhorting those who had failed to heed his earlier teaching on work (1 Thess 4:11-12; 5:14), warning them that it was imperative for believers to earn their own food (3:6-15).

Concerning the authorship of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Green sets forth sound reasons for Pauline authorship of both letters. The earlier challenges to the authenticity of 1 Thessalonians in the nineteenth century by Karl Schrader and F. C. Bauer, along with the scholarly responses to this challenge are briefly described. While not an issue in contemporary scholarship, the rejoinders to the objections are informative, for they prefigure a number of important issues that are debated in current Pauline scholarship. A more detailed response is delineated to the objections for the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians, especially those of Wolfgang Trilling and John Bailey. Lucid and cogent arguments, which are based on vocabulary, style, form, and theological perspective, are given to objections. Green's perspective on the presence of the names of Silvanus and Timothy in the salutations of both letters is instructive. He argues that the two letters were written in a collaborative group process—a kind of "authorial community," wherein Silas, Timothy, and Paul all contributed to the process. However, the distinct Pauline style and vocabulary suggests that Paul "gave the group's thoughts their final form" (59). Green believes the traditional order of the Thessalonian letters best explains the historical phenomena found in Acts and the two letters. He marshals strong arguments that fittingly rebut the

scholarly renditions, which seek to demonstrate the priority of 2 Thessalonians.

In regard to the structure of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Green first considers the usefulness of a literary analysis that employs the "canons of rhetoric." He argues that it is inappropriate to analyze NT letters by using the rhetorical genres of classical oratory (e.g., forensic, deliberative, and epideictic). One should not "blend" the different genres of oral discourse with letters nor "mix" the theory of ancient rhetoric with epistolary theory, for "the norms for the elaboration of these two genres were distinct" (72). A more constructive analysis of these two letters can be found in ancient epistolary theory. Of the various types of letters delineated in the epistolary handbooks of ancient authors, Green believes the Thessalonian correspondence is characterized by the "mixed type." Since the letters are distinguished by diverse thematic elements—thanksgiving, commendation, apology, exhortation—the mixed type, which combines a number of letter types, aptly describes Paul's approach.

Green's commentary could have been strengthened in a number of areas. First, given his enthusiasm for interpreting the Thessalonian letters against the background of the Greco-Roman world, it is puzzling to see him unwilling to appropriate the interpretive benefits of classical oratory. As with many scholars who depreciate the usefulness of classical rhetoric, Green draws far too sharp a distinction between ancient rhetorical and epistolary practices. Contrary to his characterization of ancient letters as "letters of conversation" (72), many such letters show marked rhetorical concerns, which suggests a considerable overlap between letters and speeches. The ancient world was a thoroughgoing *oral culture*; all written materials were composed with the understanding that they were going to be "heard" and not "read" (Paul Achtemeier, "Omne Verbum Sonat: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity," *JBL* 109 [1990]: 3-27). Moreover, while Paul's letters contain epistolary elements, particularly in the opening and closing sections, the central section of his letters (i.e., the body) is characterized by vigorous *argumentation* (Margaret Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991]). A rhetorically informed analysis of the letters would have highlighted Paul's masterful use of the rhetorical conventions of his day and disclosed more fully his fundamental rhetorical purposes for the letters. It would also give one pause to "mirror read" passages such as 1 Thess 2:1-12 as Paul's response to his critics. Quite possibly, the autobiographical remarks may be a form of *ethos* refurbishment, wherein the apostle established his character as an "incarnation" of the gospel of Christ (George Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography: Toward a New Understanding* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985]).

Second, Green employs the Acts narrative in his reconstruction of the sociohistorical setting of Thessalonica, as well as in his analysis of the letters themselves, without substantiating such an approach. Since the scholarly guild considers Acts to be a later, secondhand source for the life and theology of Paul, and the "Lukan presentation of Paul" is at certain points strikingly different than that of the "Paul of the letters," a cogent rationale for using Acts

in an exegetical and theological analysis of the apostle's letters is imperative.

The foregoing criticisms do not detract from the overall usefulness and quality of Green's commentary. Conspicuous interpretive benefits are derived for modern readers by his social-scientific readings of the Thessalonian letters. Indeed, when one situates the letters of Paul within the context of the ancient world's social values, economy, political structures, demography, and religion, new horizons and understandings of the letters and early Christian communities are opened up. Green's evangelically oriented commentary is an excellent contribution to Thessalonian scholarship.

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Hagner, Donald A. *Encountering the Book of Hebrews: An Exposition*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002. 213 pp. Paper, \$21.99.

Donald A. Hagner is George Eldon Ladd Professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary. His writings include: *Hebrews*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995); *Matthew*, WBC, 2 vols. (Dallas: Word, 1993); and *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus: An Analysis and Critique of Modern Jewish Study of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1984). He is also the coeditor of the New International Greek Commentary.

*Encountering the Book of Hebrews* is a section-by-section assessment of the arguments and issues of Hebrews. The central and unique theological emphasis in Hebrews, according to Hagner, "is the presentation of Christ as high priest" (180). This high priesthood leads to the "atoning work of Christ" (180), which stands in dramatic contrast to the work of the high priest in the earthly tabernacle because "what Christ offers as priest is his own blood" (182). Christ's atoning work, then, is intentionally connected with the subject of the old and new covenants (182). Another important emphasis for Hagner is the practical treatment of faith in chapter 11 (182).

The commentary consists of four parts: an introduction, which treats issues such as authorship, readers, date, purpose, structure, and genre; thirteen chapters, which parallel the chapters in the book of Hebrews; a conclusion; and a glossary and Scripture and subject indices. At the beginning of each chapter, there is a succinct outline, a statement of objectives, and suggestions for supplemental reading. Each chapter ends with a bibliography of the topics addressed. There are also sidebars and charts that address some of the questions that a modern reader might ask in regard to the text. Charts are included that provide excellent summaries of otherwise long excursions. What impressed me most was Hagner's excursus on the entry of Hebrews into the NT canon (191-195). It is a short, but well researched and documented, piece of work.

Hagner distinguishes himself especially in his attention to the context and background of the letter, the interpretation of the OT in Hebrews, and the letter's distinctive contributions to Christian theology and life. He also remains