

and Jews also go back to the beginning of Islam, when Mohammad accused the Jews living in Medina of informing his enemies of his military strategies, resulting in the brutal slaughter of a whole clan of Jews. The authors also trace the development of *Sunni*, *Shiite*, and *Sufi* sects of Islam, as well as their basic teachings and traditions.

Part 2 deals with the clash of empires, suggesting reasons that have contributed to present-day relationships between Islam and the non-Muslim West. The Crusades, the spread of Muslim empires, European colonialism, the Christian missionary movement, and the recent conflicts in the Middle East are described in broad strokes. Part 3 looks at the recent past and the present, offering tentative suggestions for appropriate responses by governments and Christians.

The strengths of *Islam in Context* lie in the authors' abilities to go beyond common stereotypes to present a balanced view of the Islamic world and its many faces. The book is well documented and relies heavily on primary sources, yet it is readable at both the academic and casual levels. The book addresses many of the hard questions asked about Islam and the points of tension it has with the West.

If Islam is to move in a more moderate direction, it must deal with several crucial issues. Muslims must develop a hermeneutic for interpreting the Qur'an. Will the principles of the Qur'an be used to shape a moderate Islam? Or will literal interpretations continue to hold Muslims to the practices and methods of the past? Will the common people be allowed to read and interpret the Qur'an for themselves? Or will interpretation and understanding of the text remain the exclusive domain of the Muslim clergy?

This book has a wide range of uses because of its readability and its use of primary sources. The excellent historical background given to current issues is a helpful resource for readers who want to understand the background for present-day tensions. The book would also be useful as a college or graduate text for an introductory course to Islam.

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Schenck, K. *Understanding the Book of Hebrews: The Story Behind the Sermon*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003. 144 pp. Paper, \$19.95.

Kenneth Schenck is currently Associate Professor of Religion at Indiana Wesleyan University. *Understanding the Book of Hebrews: The Story Behind the Sermon* follows several earlier publications by the author, in which he also deals with the book of Hebrews: "Keeping His Appointment: Creation and Enthronement in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *JSNT* 66 (1997): 91-117; "A Celebration of the Enthroned Son: The Catena of Hebrews 2," *JBL* 120 (2001): 469-485; and "Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews: Ronald Williamson's Study after Thirty Years," *SPhilo* 14 (2002): 112-135.

Schenck deals thematically in six chapters with the complex argument of the epistle. His basic premise is that Hebrews is the "story-as-discoursed" in rhetoric (3). Chapter 1 presents an overview of Hebrews in terms of events, characters, and settings. Chapter 2 investigates the problem of humanity—namely, sin—and the solution offered in Christ's blameless sacrifice that atoned for the "sons of Abraham" (39). Chapter 3 focuses on the rhetoric of Heb 1. Here the author emphasizes the relevance of the catena and states that the early Christians saw the enthronement "as the point at which Jesus received the titles of 'Lord,' 'Christ,' and 'Son of God,' all of which are royal in nature" (55). Chapter 4 discusses the various characters of the plot, some of whom are worthy of emulation. Above all, the audience is to look to Jesus as the example *par excellence* and imitate his faithfulness. In chapter 5, Schenck sets forth the superiority of

Christ when compared to the Levitical order and to the OT sacrifices. The last chapter analyzes the situation of the audience. The book concludes with a glossary, bibliography, and three indices ("Scripture and Ancient Sources," "Subjects," and "Scholar Index"). The advantage of dealing thematically with Hebrews is that it gives the author some flexibility in developing his argument. The disadvantage is that several ideas reoccur frequently in the book, e.g., the categorization of Hebrews as a sermon, the mediation of the law through angels, and the inability of the blood of bulls to take away sin. Further, some parts of Hebrews receive in-depth treatment (Heb 1–2), while others (e.g., Heb 3:7–4:13) are dealt with only peripherally.

Overall, the book is persuasive and proves the points the author wants to establish. However, some of the points are rather weak. For example, Schenck attempts to demonstrate that the passage from Ps 102:25–27, quoted in Heb 1:10–12, "is not on Christ's role as creator, but on the fact that he remains enthroned forever, unlike God's angel servants whose role is passing away" (53). Here, Schenck aligns himself more closely with the position of G. B. Caird than with the text in his presupposition that Heb 1–2 is not concerned with a preexisting figure who becomes human, but rather with a human being who is raised to an exalted status. Because Schenck embraces adoptionism, he gives more weight to the cryptic meaning of the text, which focuses on the *eternal* aspect of Christ in contrast to the *transitory* role of angels (52). These aspects alone are enough for Schenck to "vindicate Caird's interpretation" (53). What Schenck seems to overlook in Heb 1:10–12 is, first, that κατ' ἀρχάς ("in the beginning") is an echo of Gen 1:1, much like John 1:1. Second, θεμελίω ("to found") is, here, a poetic equivalent of ποιέω ("to make, to do") in Gen 1:1. Third, the position of κύριε suggests that the author of Hebrews understands it to be synonymous with, or complementary to, ὁ θεός (Heb 1:8).

Another weakness of Schenck's book is his statement that "Esau *wanted* to find a place of repentance, but could not find one" (63, emphasis original). He understands this position in the context of apostasy from faith and the chance of "a second repentance." None of the explanations that Schenck offers really soften the import of this passage. Hebrews 12:17 reads: "When he [Esau] wanted to inherit the blessing [τὴν εὐλογίαν], he was rejected, for he found no opportunity for repentance, even though he sought it [αὐτήν] with tears." The problem can be solved by pointing to the fact that the expression in Heb 12:17, μετανοίας τόπον εὑρεν, is an idiom meaning "to find a possibility (or opportunity) for repentance." The antecedent for the feminine pronoun αὐτήν ("it") is not then μετανοίας ("repentance"), which is, according to Schenck, the dependence of αὐτήν upon the anarthrous masculine noun τόπος (place, opportunity), but rather the independent articular noun τὴν εὐλογίαν ("the blessing"). This analysis is in agreement with the narrative of Gen 27:34, 38. What Esau sought with tears was the blessing, not the opportunity for repentance (cf. W. L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, WBC, 47B [Dallas: Word, 1991], 440).

The strengths of this book are the informative sidebars in which Schenck not only provides definitions of technical terms for his targeted audience of college and seminary students, but in which he also presents summaries of the comparisons between Hebrews and Philo of Alexandria (30), Hebrews and the Book of Wisdom (31), and Hebrews and the Pauline writings (90). What is rather user-unfriendly, in my opinion, is the small font size used in the book and the use of endnotes rather than footnotes.