

agree that this passage should be dated before 2 Corinthians 1–9. Although several scholars agree with this theory, several others such as Bruce, Barrett, Furnish, and Martin, who follow the lead of Windisch, consider 2 Corinthians 10–13 to be an independent epistle, written later than 2 Corinthians 1–9. More recently, F. Watson asserts that 2 Corinthians 10–13 is equal to the “Severe Letter.” The main objection to identifying 2 Corinthians 10–13 with the “Severe Letter” is that the two do not deal with the same problem. 2 Corinthians 10–13 was occasioned by an attack on Paul’s apostolic authority by Judaizing intruders, a subject which is never suggested *apropos* the “Severe Letter.” Hence, 2 Cor 2:12–7:4 is the continuation of the subject matter of the earlier “Severe Letter.” The difference of opinion that eventually occasioned the “Letter of Tears” concerned Paul’s gospel, not his personal authority as an apostle.

This collection of essays will be welcomed by those who are interested in the study of Paul and 2 Corinthians. It is not necessary to agree with Murphy-O’Connor on every point to appreciate the valuable service he has performed in offering these comprehensive essays. The essays in *Keys to Second Corinthians* do not necessarily break new ground, but provide a valuable reexamination of some of the major issues in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians. This is an excellent book that students, professors, and scholars of Paul and 2 Corinthians should find immensely helpful.

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OTIS COUTSOUMPOS

O’Brien, Peter T. *The Letter to the Hebrews*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010. xxxiii + 596 pp. Hardcover, \$50.00.

Peter O’Brien, a senior research professor in New Testament at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia, comes from the Anglican tradition. *The Letter to the Hebrews* is his second contribution to the Pillar New Testament Commentary series, following his commentary on Ephesians (1999). He also authored the NIGTC commentary on Philippians (1991).

O’Brien reaps the results of the scholarship of those who precede him in the study of the epistle to the Hebrews (xiii; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990]); Harold Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989]; W. L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8 and Hebrews 9–13*, WBC [Dallas: Word, 1991]; Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993]; Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, AB [New York: Doubleday, 2001]; and Luke T. Johnson, *Hebrews*, NTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006]). As for European literature in this area, O’Brien is not in discussion with scholars such as Otto Michel or Hans-Friedrich Weiss, although he acknowledges the works of scholars such as Frey, Grässer, and Hofius.

The Introduction to *Hebrews* addresses issues such as authorship, audience, destination, date, genre, and milieu of influence. O'Brien attributes the *authorship* of Hebrews to someone other than Paul (8), due to Heb 2:3, which states: "After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard" (NAS), although the criteria mentioned, such as being of Jewish ancestry, well educated, trained in rhetoric, and familiar with both Jewish and Greek philosophy, could undoubtedly apply to the apostle Paul. The *audience* is identified as Jewish Christians who are in danger of relapsing or reverting back into Judaism (11). The internal evidence of Hebrews, however, does not support such an assertion. That the readers were most likely not in danger of relapsing into Judaism seems evident, first, from the way in which the author refers to Jesus as Christ. While he argues a variety of things about Jesus, he never disputes his messiahship or that he is the Son of God. Rather, he takes it for granted that Jesus is the Messiah (cf. 5:5: "Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee," a messianic Psalm addressed to "the Christ," a designation used as an alternative to "Jesus"; cf. 4:14; 6:1). In Heb 1:6, Jesus is introduced as "the firstborn," another well-recognized title for the Messiah (Rom 8:29; Col 1:15, 18; Rev 1:5). That such a name can be introduced without any attempt to justify its use supports the view that the readers were not questioning Jesus' messiahship or consequently relapsing into Judaism. Second, the warning in 6:6 ("since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God") does not make sense if the audience is in danger of relapsing into Judaism. The suggestion that the audience of Hebrews is under external pressure from persecution and has a faltering commitment to the confessed faith (cf. Heb 10:35-36; 12:12), a notion advanced earlier by both Attridge and DeSilva, seems more probable than relapsing into Judaism.

O'Brien sees Rome as the most likely *destination* for the epistle, based upon Heb 13:24, which states, "Those from Italy send you greetings." He interprets this greeting to mean "that some Italians who were living outside of Italy were sending greetings back" (14). The *date* attributed to the composition of the epistle to the Hebrews is "between A.D. 60 and 90, but much of the evidence supports a time before 70" (20). The pre-70 date for Hebrews has its grounds in 10:2, although O'Brien admits that this argument is not decisive (19). The *genre* of Hebrews is understood by O'Brien as both an oral ("word of exhortation," 13:22) and a written composition ("for I have written you briefly," 13:22). Pursuing the *milieu of influence*, O'Brien correctly concludes that the author of Hebrews and Philo of Alexandria belonged to two entirely different schools of OT exegesis. While Philo chose to develop certain themes from a Platonic perspective, the author of Hebrews develops them eschatologically (37). Possible links between Hebrews and the Gnostics are denied legitimately by O'Brien because Hebrews does not envisage human souls returning to the heavenly world (20). While there are points of contact between Hebrews and the Qumran literature, there are, at the same time,

striking linguistic and conceptual differences between them (40). In reality, Hebrews has affinities with a number of Christian writings, including Paul's letters, Stephen's speech in Acts, and 1 Peter (43).

Due to space considerations, I will comment only on some of O'Brien's interpretation of Hebrews 4 and 10. Regarding the structure of these passages, he (based on Guthrie) states correctly that Heb 4:14-16 and 10:19-25 form the major inclusion of Hebrews and are connected by verbal parallels (360). What he misses is that the two passages are connected by three hortatory subjunctives in both chapters. O'Brien mentions only two in Hebrews 4. Westfall provides a concise diagram:

**Heb 4:11-16**

- Let's make every effort to enter
- Let's hold on to the confession
- Let's draw near to the throne

**Heb 10:19-25**

- Let's draw near
- Let's hold on to the confession
- Let's consider how to stimulate

The next problem with O'Brien's interpretation of these two chapters seems to be his repeated assertion that "Psalm 95 looked beyond the rest in Canaan to a future, permanent place of rest" (167, 169, 157, and 145). This is an assumption taken by many Hebrews scholars. However, it is baseless. If one reads Psalm 95 in both the MT and the LXX (Ps 94), there is no such claim made by the writer. The writer of Psalm 95 recounts the forty years in the wilderness, during which the people of Israel provoked God and rebelled so that God finally swore in his wrath that this generation would not enter his rest (Ps 95:11). This swearing is not, as O'Brien and other Hebrews scholars assume, a reference "to something beyond the material inheritance of the land of Canaan" (145). Rather, this is a clear reference to Num 14:23, "Surely they shall not see the land, which I swore to their fathers," which is a clear denial of the promise of entering the land of Canaan for those who were currently alive at that time, and not to something beyond the land itself.

Furthermore, O'Brien bases his definition of "rest" in Hebrews 4 on secondary literature from sources such as Laansma, Lane, Hofius, and others, rather than on his original exegesis. In Heb 4:3, he has already reached his conclusion as to what the "rest" signifies before he has finished exegeting the whole pericope (4:1-16). In this, he falls prey to a mistake others have made before him. For example, he states: "The deliberate choice of *sabbatismos*, which finds its earliest occurrence in extant Greek literature here, must have been dictated by the fact that it conveyed a nuance not found in *katapausis*" (170; based on Lane, 1:101). If O'Brien would have checked these occurrences of *sabbatismos* in extant Greek literature for himself, he would have been astonished to find out that the term means "Sabbath observance" in all cases, with the exception of Origen, who figuratively uses the term twice. Even better, it corresponds with the term *katapausis* ("Sabbath observance") in

Exod 35:2. For O'Brien, the "rest" is a future soteriological rest, based on Hofius's interpretation of Second Temple literature (*4 Ezra* 8:52).

Several things speak against this conclusion. First, Attridge accuses Hofius of relying too heavily on the reconstruction of an "apocalyptic" understanding of rest without paying attention to *4 Ezra* 7:75, 91, 95, all of which portray "rest" as a state of mortality (*Hebrews*, 128, n. 71). Second, O'Brien's connection of Hebrews 4 with Heb 12:22 is structurally and linguistically unwarranted. Wray states: "Whether or not the author of Heb made the connection between REST and a spiritual land, the 'heavenly city' that equation cannot be documented in the text" (*Rest as a Theological Metaphor*, 91). Third, soteriological language (σῶζω/σωτήρια) is completely absent from Hebrews 3 and 4. Fourth, the context of Hebrews 4 speaks of a present entering (4:3), a past experience (4:10), and a future effort on the part of the audience to enter (4:11), but not of eschatological salvation. Otherwise, how could the community seem to have fallen short now (4:1), if the "rest" refers to an eschatological salvation? If the concept is an eschatological salvation, Guthrie concludes that all of the members are short of achieving it at present (*Hebrews*, 152). Fifth, O'Brien interprets God's seventh-day rest with Philonic exegesis when he states: "The notion that the divine sabbath began when the work of creation came to an end and continues to the present time finds its parallel in Philo" (167). Earlier in his introduction, O'Brien placed Philo and the author of Hebrews in two different exegetical schools (37). Here, however, he betrays his own principles.

The suggestion of the reviewer is to interpret the "rest" with the help of the structural connections mentioned by O'Brien. The fact that in Heb 10:25 the audience is neglecting the gatherings and that Heb 4:10 assumes that the one entering his rest rested as God did from his works on the seventh day (4:4), makes it clear that the audience seems to have given up their religious gatherings (most likely Sabbath gatherings when one looks at Numbers 15 and its mention of willful sin in Heb 10:26). The one who enters God's rest does as God did on the seventh-day Sabbath (4:10) when he rested from all his works (Gen 2:2). God's works of creation are called "very good" (Gen 1:31). To speak of the works of the audience as "self-justifying" or "dead works," as O'Brien does (166), is to blatantly interject a "faith versus works" dichotomy into Hebrews. The clear implication would be that God's own works, the object of comparison, were carnal and faithless, fleshly strivings. No one would assume that.

Overall, O'Brien has succeeded in pulling together the most recent literature in a nontechnical manner. He must be commended for that. The only thing that seems to be missing is his original, independent exegesis of the biblical text. An attentive reader, however, will be exposed to an enriching commentary on the epistle to the Hebrews.