

*Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The Old Testament and Apocrypha.* Edited by Gale A. Yee, Hugh R. Page, Jr., and Matthew J. M. Coomber. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2014. xxiii + 1118 pp. \$70.00 (cloth).

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*Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The New Testament.* Edited by Margaret Aymer, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and David A. Sánchez. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2014. xxiii + 771 pp. \$50.00 (cloth).

*The Fortress Commentary on the Bible* is a two-volume set covering the whole of the Bible, including the Apocrypha. The first volume deals with the Old Testament and the Apocrypha; the inclusion of the Apocrypha is noteworthy, as many students of the Bible often do not consider this valuable body of literature at length. The second volume explores the texts of the New Testament.

Each volume begins with topical articles by a variety of authors treating introductory matters concerning the Old Testament and New Testament. Unfortunately, there are no topical articles for the Apocrypha. The articles in the first volume focus on important issues that arise in reading the Old Testament in both ancient and contemporary contexts, including questions raised by ethnological, feminist, and postcolonial studies. The topical articles in the second volume consider contemporary questions of New Testament interpretation, as well as the Jewish heritage of early Christians, the experience of Christians in contexts of diaspora, and the New Testament's apocalyptic

is, God). What, at multiple points, is gestured to in the phenomenon of our language is something, quite literally, at “the edge of words.”

Williams is careful not to offer this argument as a watertight theistic proof. Nor is it a “bad” natural theology that offers up God as another datum for dissection. Rather, he pursues the intuition that language truthfully and neverendingly represents reality, but “cannot describe or contain the conditions of its own possibility” (p. 172). It suffers from an allusive and tense incompleteness, a sort of “difficulty” (a common word in Williams’s writings) that would be the case if language’s possibility and premise was a communicative intelligence that cannot be denominated as just another item within the world.

This intuition of the allusive, if always incomplete, nature of our speaking and the way this leads us toward “difficulty” is encoded into the very way Williams’s case is made. Those looking for a clinically logical progression in the argument will be disappointed. What they will find, instead, is a series of intertwined conversations and essays. There are forays into multiple fields, including neuroscience, philosophy, poetics, and literature—the last two registers being where Williams seems the most comfortable. The list of interlocutors is impressive, if sometimes dizzying. The sense one ultimately gets is of a polyphony of voices and discourses, untidy but never falling into absolute dissonance, which together gesture toward something that none of them can individually isolate or name, an unsaid which frames them all, but which can only be obliquely referenced by the numerous trajectories on offer. And that, it seems, is part of Williams’s point.

This mode of writing, demanded almost by the case to be made, does make this a difficult book in quite an intriguing sense. Concepts and words are pushed to their “edge,” in a performative difficulty that enacts the book’s contention within the reader, bringing them to the point of linguistic and conceptual failure and tension in reference to a tantalizing something that is no pronounceable *thing*. But, more prosaically, it is also just a difficult book. While not demanding a specialist theological background, it is aimed at those used to working at high conceptual levels.

Beyond these difficulties, performative and prosaic, there are some criticisms that can be made. There is an implicit theological (and Christological) underlay to this work that perhaps remains too submerged for its own good. In part this is a function of genre; Williams accepts the strictures imposed by the Giffords, of working primarily in the realm of “natural theology,” even while trying to qualify what that means. But behind this project, one senses, is the prologue to John’s Gospel. There is a “Word” spoken in human flesh that pushes all words to refer to more than can be said. This Christological facet does break cover by the end of the book, but I then find myself longing for a sequel in which Williams reprises his discussions with this Christology to the fore. On a more persnickety note, the Hegelian underlay of Williams’s

legacy. All of these articles introduce readers to important historical and hermeneutical issues.

After the Topical Articles, each volume is broken into predictable sections: the Old Testament is divided into the Torah, the Historical Writings, the Prophets, and the Apocrypha, while the second volume covers the Gospels, Acts, Pauline literature, and Hebrews, the general epistles, and Revelation. Each of these sections is introduced by a helpful essay situating the text in its context and highlighting particular themes of importance to that text. For example, Sarah Shectman surveys the themes of "Creation, Kinship, and Covenant" in the Torah, and Carol Dempsey considers perspectives of "Truth, Tragedy, Trauma" in the Prophets; the Pauline literature is introduced by Neil Elliott in his essay "Situating the Apostle Paul in His Day and Engaging His Legacy in Our Own." Each book of the Bible likewise gets its own brief introduction, and then each smaller unit within any given book is treated thematically. This commentary proceeds in a section-by-section rather than verse-by-verse fashion. Each section is considered under three different headings: "The Text in its Ancient Context," "The Text in the Interpretive Tradition," and "The Text in Contemporary Discussion." These three different treatments are among the nicer features of this commentary, particularly the latter two. It is a great benefit to be exposed to brief overviews of how texts have influenced and been understood within Christian traditions. "The Text in Contemporary Discussion" exposes the reader to a wide range of contemporary questions being asked of the texts, including postcolonial, feminist, racial, ecclesial, social, and political issues.

The editors of every commentary have to decide the degree of depth and detail of its analysis. To determine this, they have to decide who the audience will be. A commentary targeting an academic audience will be more detail-oriented, while a commentary targeting pastors, preachers, or informed laity will have a broader scope. The *Fortress Commentary on the Bible* is of the latter ilk, and hence is an excellent resource for those needing a brief yet well-informed overview of current scholarship concerning any particular passage in the Bible. An academic hoping for more detailed treatment may be disappointed, but a pastor or priest interested in a resource for homiletics or parish Bible study will be well served by this set, as will anyone seeking simply to understand the Bible better.

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