

*Westminster Theological Journal* 71:2 (Fall 2009):510-511.

*Martyrdom from Exegesis in Hippolytus: An Early Church Presbyter's Commentary on Daniel* by W. Brian Shelton. *Studies in Christian History and Thought*. Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008, xiv + 178. £19.99, paper.

Shelton's thesis is that Hippolytus, one of the first Christian authors of a continuous commentary on one book of Scripture, wrote the *Commentary on Daniel* to encourage his readers or auditors to patiently and bravely endure persecution even to the point of martyrdom. Shelton, an assistant professor of theology at Toccoa Falls College in Georgia, systematically develops this in five chapters. The first sets forth the martyrdom motif in Hippolytus' commentary and surveys recent scholarship, including the controversy over double authorship of the Hippolytan corpus.

The second chapter discusses the provenance of the commentary, tentatively setting it near Rome about 204 during the persecution of Septimus Severus. After elucidating the concept of martyrdom in Maccabean literature, Jewish apocalyptic texts, and the Book of Revelation, Shelton discusses the function of the Book of Daniel in early Christianity. Chapter three analyzes the passages in Hippolytus' commentary dealing with martyrdom. These are the accounts of Susanna (today considered apocryphal), Daniel and the three youths, and what Hippolytus saw in Daniel 10-12 as prophecies of persecution that will take place under Antichrist. For Hippolytus, these passages contained models for his Christian readers who were presently suffering persecution. I found interesting Hippolytus' belief that the *parousia* of Christ, with its corresponding exaction of divine justice on persecutors and its dispensation of a special place for

martyrs in the kingdom, would be delayed some 300 years. This sentiment came at a time when one of Hippolytus' contemporaries had calculated from the Book of Daniel that Christ's return was imminent, and another had led a band of followers into the desert to wait for the Lord's return. For Hippolytus, inquiries about the exact timing of the end are useless since the Lord deliberately concealed that knowledge. Rather than hoping for an interruption of the persecution by the Second Coming, Christians should "patiently and bravely face the afflicting duty of martyrdom that confronts them." (109)

Chapter four treats Hippolytus' exegetical method, showing that he in essence started a new genre of Christian literature, what we have come to know as the running commentary on one book of the Bible. In a search for influences upon Hippolytus' exegesis, Shelton finds parallels with rabbinic literature and earlier patristic writings including those of Justin and Irenaeus. This chapter also presents a variety of interconnections between Hippolytus' *Commentary on Daniel* and his other works including *Against Plato*, the *Chronicle*, and *On Christ and the Antichrist*. In this section I would have liked to have seen correlations between Hippolytus' Daniel commentary and the fragments of Hippolytus' Apocalypse commentary preserved in Andrew of Caesarea in Cappadocia and two medieval Apocalypse commentaries, Syriac and Arabic respectively, and published in articles by Prigent and Stehly in the 1970s. Fortunately, Bernard McGinn filled this gap in an even more recent essay published in Robert J. Daly's *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity* (Baker, 2009). Chapter five recapitulates the book's thesis and its development of the argument in a summary of the evidence. *Martyrdom from Exegesis in Hippolytus* also contains indices and a detailed bibliography.

To date, no English translation of Hippolytus' Greek *Commentary on Daniel* has been published. Until one does appear, Shelton's book, which contains many excerpts from that commentary in translation, may be the most comprehensive source in English for ascertaining its contents. Those interested in Hippolytus, the subject of persecution and martyrdom in the early church, early Christian eschatology, the Book of Daniel, and patristic biblical commentaries will find it well-researched and cogently argued, exceptional in its organization and engaging in its subject matter.

Francis X. Gumerlock

Providence Theological Seminary

Colorado Springs, Colorado