

BOOK REVIEW

THE INTERNATIONAL BIBLE COMMENTARY. William R. Farmer (ed.)
Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998.

THE INTERNATIONAL BIBLE COMMENTARY [IBC] is the latest of the one volume commentaries to be offered. I have made use of two earlier commentaries, the New Jerome Biblical Commentary [NJBC] (1990 and its predecessor) and The Collegeville Bible Commentary [CBC] (1989) at various times. I have been invited to review the IBC from the viewpoint of its usefulness to a preacher. "Usefulness" may be an important word here. This book is as big as its price tag (about \$100.00). It is as big as an unabridged dictionary. Much will depend on what a reader needs and can afford.

The IBC bills itself as a Catholic and ecumenical commentary. The editors and contributors come from around the world. However, aside from the brief "biographies" of the editors, it is not easy to tell if a contributor is Catholic or Protestant or Jewish unless one notices the telltale initials of a religious order behind a name on the list of the contributors. Occasionally a writer will identify his or her tradition, such as Carolyn Pressler does in her fine article on women and biblical studies. The Catholic aspect seems well represented and the IBC also has a "nihil obstat" and an official "imprimatur" from the bishop of St. Cloud, MN.

The IBC is "up front" about its goals and how it should be used by a prospective reader. Indeed, a section entitled: HOW TO USE THIS BOOK begins at page xxxi. The presumption is that the reader will read a particular book of the Bible twice and follow the commentary in the process. Therefore, each article is divided into two parts: First Reading and Second Reading. The first reading is for the purpose of getting the basic structure, themes and overall meaning of the book. The second reading goes through the book chapter and verse. Thus, the IBC recommends a "book by book" approach in its use. I sampled a couple of the commentaries - Joshua and the Gospel of John - and found them both very accessible in style and content.

There are 52 "roman numeral" pages that comprise an introduction to the IBC and to the Maps at the end of the book. The next 328 Arabic numerals pages contain articles of general interest. There is a set of THE BIBLE AND..... articles. One of them immediately caught my attention: THE BIBLE AND PREACHING, by Virgil Howard. It is an excellent reflection centered around a series of questions: How will this sermon embody the Prophetic Word?; How does this

sermon tell the story?; How does this sermon offer the guiding image?; How will this sermon become a Word of God? At the back of the book is also a "Pastoral Guide for the Use of the Bible in Preaching." More than the NJBC or CBC, the IBC reaches out to preachers as well as other readers.

Among the general articles is a fine one by Carolyn Pressler: TO HEAL AND TRANSFORM: WOMEN'S BIBLICAL STUDIES and one on African biblical studies and usage. The list could go on. My sampling found it all very "useful."

If you have the money, this is a good commentary to have in your library. It is not very portable because of its size (you might want to look at the paperback Harper's Commentary for that purpose.) If you want a commentary that is accessible to a preacher and sensitive to a preacher's needs, this is also a good one. It is less technical and more accessible than the NJBC and much longer and more technical than the CBC.

Commentaries are part of a preacher's important resources. If you plan to use one often, this one is worth the money.

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