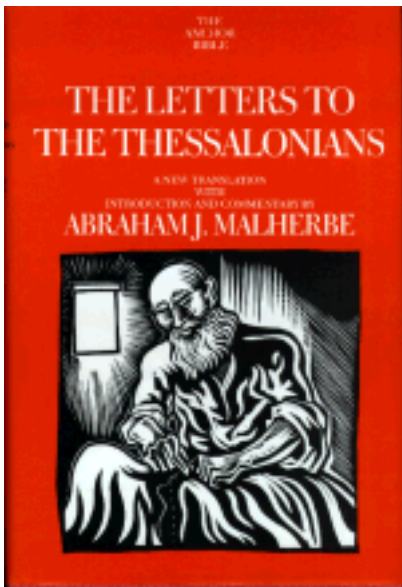


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Malherbe, Abraham J.

The Letters to the Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary

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INTRODUCTION

The publication of Abraham J. Malherbe's *magnum opus* on 1 and 2 Thessalonians crowns some three decades of research on these letters. His seminal article on 1 Thess 2 (" 'Gentile as a Nurse': The Cynic Background to 1 Thess. 2," *NovT* 12 [1970]: 203–17), in which he compares the similar antithetical manner in which Paul and Dio Chrysostom described themselves, was published in 1970. It challenged the widespread view that 1 Thess 2:1–12 was apologetic and laid one of the important foundations for theses that he would present thirty years later in his magisterial commentary (2000). In the latter, as well as in numerous previous publications in the intervening years, he argues that 1 Thessalonians as a whole, including 2:1–12, is paraenetic (see, for example, "Exhortation in First Thessalonians," *NovT* 25 [1983]: 238–56; and *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987]). Whether one agrees with Malherbe or dissents from him, his positions—and the massive evidence that he invokes to buttress them—will command the attention of New Testament scholars for decades to come.

There are many aspects of Malherbe's commentary that merit attention, and it is impossible to do justice to them in even a lengthy review. I shall mention four features

that are not the focus of the reviews that follow this introduction. First, Malherbe gives considerable attention to Paul's language and style. His introduction to 1 Thessalonians provides a discussion of the apostle's "Style and Language" (81–92), and his "Index of Major Subjects" (497–508)—a veritable gold mine for information on almost all key topics discussed in the commentary—contains a listing for "language and style" (503). The former deals with pastoral paraenesis, the use of "we" and "I" in the letters, epistolography, and various other literary features, and the latter refers readers to places where Paul's use of alliteration, asyndeton, diatribe, hyperbole, hendiadys, *inclusio*, irony, litotes, and parallelism is treated. Cross-references direct the reader to related topics, such as antithesis, emphasis, emotive language, and literary images.

Second, Malherbe occasionally makes explicit use of Latin terms to help elucidate Paul's words when Greek evidence for a particular meaning is sparse. So, for example, although he cites two Greek texts in support of his argument, he uses the Latin term *quasso* and cognates to argue in favor of "to be agitated" as the meaning of *sainesthai* in 1 Thess 3:3 (192–93). He does not, however, appeal to Latin terms in all such cases, such as *homeiromenoi* ("having tender affection") in 1 Thess 2:8 (147).

Third, related to Malherbe's concern with language and style is the attention that he gives to grammatical, syntactical, and linguistic issues. For example, he repeatedly attempts to identify the various genitive constructions in the two letters. So, in regard to 1 Thess 1:3, he argues, "The first genitive, *hymōn*, is possessive and qualifies *ergou*, *kopou*, and *hypomonēs*, which are genitives dependent on *mnēmoneuontes*. *Pisteōs*, *agapēs*, and *elpidos* are subjective, and *tou Kyriou Iēsou Christos* is objective, describing the object of hope" (108). Similar attention is given to the force of participles, with *mnēmoneuontes* in 1 Thess 1:3 (107) and *stegontes* in 1 Thess 3:1 (189), for example, understood causally. The same holds true for various Greek constructions (183), the tenses and connotations of verbs (194, 452), and the varied use of such words as *kai* (170, 452), and *hoti* (194, 450). These features will make the commentary particularly helpful for students and pastors.

Fourth, in contrast to many commentators, Malherbe devotes considerable attention to textual variants (for a list, see 507). Naturally, he gives particular attention to 1 Thess 2:7, where he defends *ēpioi* ("gentle") over against the better attested and more difficult reading *nēpioi* ("infants"). All four of the features identified here point to Malherbe's consistent attention to the biblical text *qua text* and his attempt to understand it. The numerous citations of, and references to, other ancient texts (see the lengthy "Index of Biblical and Other Ancient References" [471–96]) have one goal: to help in the elucidation of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. This concern is the mark of every great commentary, and the best commentators drive readers back to the text with new insights, questions, and hermeneutical possibilities. Whatever its faults and deficiencies,

Malherbe's commentary is a smashing success in this regard and will serve as a rich resource for years to come.

In the following reviews, five scholars discuss Malherbe's commentary, giving attention to what they regard as its strengths and weaknesses. The first review (previously published in *Bib* 83 [2002]: 135–38 and reprinted here by permission) is by Jan Lambrecht, S.J., who comments on the volume as a whole and thus lays a solid foundation for the four more specialized treatments that follow. The second is by Edgar Krentz, who focuses on Malherbe's interpretation of 1 Thessalonians. The third review is devoted to Malherbe's discussion of 2 Thessalonians, which, unlike 1 Thessalonians, had not been the focus of any of Malherbe's previous publications. This review is by Charles A. Wanamaker, who, like Malherbe, defends the Pauline authorship of this disputed document but who differs from him in affirming the primacy of 2 Thessalonians. The final two reviews focus on distinctive features of the commentary, namely, Malherbe's extensive use of Greco-Roman materials to interpret the Thessalonian correspondence and his frequent citation of, and appeal to, church fathers, especially John Chrysostom, Oecumenius, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret, and Theophylact. The fourth review, by Johan C. Thom, examines Malherbe's use of Greco-Roman texts, and the fifth, by Margaret M. Mitchell, provides an extensive assessment of Malherbe's use of patristic materials.