

REVIEWS

Robert B. Coote

Early Israel: A New Horizon

Fortress Press: Minneapolis

1990, pp. 197 + ix.

Robert Coote, author and co-author of numerous works of late concerning the early history of Israel, has written a book which is an expansion of an earlier work (*The Bible's First History*, 1989, with D. Ord). His purpose is to summarize the latest developments concerning the study of early Israel. The text, which has few detailed notes, is intended for beginning students of the history of Israel. Israel, according to Coote, was not unique, but had cultural and political similarities with other groups in Palestine. He wrongly tends to deemphasize Israel's religious nature, overcompensating for what has lacked in earlier works.

The origins of Israel are not shrouded in mystery, according to Coote, but are part of a process involving political relations that existed in ancient Palestine (p. 2). Early Israel was a fluid political organization, with sheikhs, clients, and laboring constituents. He does not accept the biblical account of the conquest of the highlands, nor does he agree with recent theories concerning a movement of disparate nomads into the hills, merging gradually into a tribal league, nor with the idea of a peasant revolution. What actually occurred, according to Coote, is not another alternative, but a shift in research designs. Recent scholarship is concerned with viewing Israelite origins in the context of Palestinian (used as a geographic term in this review) politics of the late first millennium B.C. While many may not agree with his ideas, they must admire the significance of this shift; historians are now grappling with understanding ancient Israel, not simply theologians or linguistic experts, who have been short-sighted in their views. Since Coote believes that the Scriptures say nothing about Israel's origins, he thus does not include a discussion of the periods of the Patriarchs, the Exodus, or the Conquest. For Coote, they never happened. To add them to a history of Israel would be a grave disservice. He begins with Egyptian rule, Philistine domination of the lowlands, and the rise of the Israelite monarchy in this context (c. 1200-1000 B.C.)

Coote has thus come up with eight premises which comprise the chapters of the book: 1. The Israelites, who were indigenous to Palestine, were a tribal organization which was used by the Egyptian state in order to extract taxes. When this system was abused, the tribes would oppose state interference. 2. Since the time of Thutmose III (c. 1490-1435), the Egyptians had established a network of garrison cities with mercenaries. Within a century, migrants and displaced persons who were in the area became a formidable force with which the Egyptians had to reckon. 3. However, this disrupted the social fabric and

intensified the retreat of the population into the highlands, which became the agricultural heartland of the area. 4. When first attested, Israel was neither a religious group, family, nation, race, nor an ethnic group, but a strong highland political confederation developed by Egypt and by Palestinian chieftains in the wake of these social changes. 5. Philistine and Anatolian invaders overcame lowland Palestine in the last century of Egyptian rule, replacing Egypt as the ruling class. Israel was in part a tribal alliance fostered by Egypt as a buffer territory between Egypt and the newcomers (p. 98). 6. The collapse of the recent kingdoms triggered the expansion of settlements and population. As Egypt and Hatti declined, the Palestinian lords fell into Israel's camp in order to escape from the European invaders. Material evidence is lacking concerning the Israelite conquest, but does show signs of this expansion into the highlands. Coote correctly does not view Israel as archaeologically distinctive, since it was a political, not a cultural, entity (p. 131). 7. The first tribal confederation culminated in the crowning of Saul, who was usurped by David, a Philistine client who used foreign mercenaries. 8. This complex tribal affiliation of pastoralists and farmers under the leadership of tribal sheikhs, was created wholly within the framework of the political dynamics of Palestine, not from the outside, as the Scriptures imply. But Coote fails to see that these two apparently opposing viewpoints are not mutually exclusive. Because of its heterogeneity, Israel could have had both outside origins and indigenous elements.

Although many of Coote's conclusions are speculative and probably will not stand the test of time, he correctly views Biblical history as a function of the greater Palestinian area history, a history almost completely ignored until now.

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Robert Gnuse

Heilsgeschichte as a Model for Biblical Theology: The Debate Concerning the Uniqueness and Significance of Israel's Worldview

College Theological Society Studies in Religion 4

Lanham, MD: University Press of America

1989; viii + 179 pp.; \$12.75, paper.

The uniqueness of Israel's faith is one of the hallmarks of the Biblical Theology movement. Though not without their critics, teachers of both Old and New Testament, as well as a number of teachers of ancient Near Eastern studies, supported the conclusion that when compared with its contemporaries Israel stood in stark contrast. In his book Gnuse opens with an examination of one proposed area of contrast, viz., Israel's religion as a historical (as op-

posed to a mythical) religion. In Israelite religion Yahweh was “the God who acts,” to use the title of Wright’s monograph.

Gnuse summarizes this proposal and the debate which has ensued. While Biblical Theology concluded that a number of characteristics of Israel’s religion — historiography, monotheism, social and personal morality — were utterly distinct in quality from other religions of the day, critics attempted to demonstrate that there was a great degree of continuity between them. So, for example, the idea of divine activity in history was seen to be evident in Hittite and Assyrian literature, as was a developed historiography. Egypt and Mesopotamia evinced social concerns. Even in its monotheistic emphasis Israel was not considered unique. (On these see especially pp. 27ff.)

Gnuse considers these criticisms and finds them significant. He suggests, however, that the option lies not in the total abandonment of the Salvation History model but in a rethinking and refining of it. “What remains,” he writes, “is to apprehend this model in a more nuanced fashion so as to accurately describe Israel’s perceptions in relationship to the rest of the ancient world. Having accomplished this the new model may be of service to biblical theology” (p. 97). Such a procedure seeks to avoid “previously sweeping generalizations [that] were made that simply were not true in regard to the evaluation of biblical and ancient Near Eastern values” (p. 102).

That Israel was clearly part of the larger ancient Near east in a variety of ways is undeniable. That Israel was in essential ways unique is equally undeniable. (Does not each culture have distinctive characteristics?) At issue is the nature and extent of that uniqueness. It is significant that even Gottwald in his massive study *The Tribes of Yahweh* found it necessary to ask this question, though he couched it in terms of Israel’s unique “sociology” (see *Tribes*, p. 19). Gnuse concludes, “Israel took a qualitative step forward in terms of religious and intellectual evolution. When one compares the basic practices most commonly found in the ancient Near East with those values endorsed by at least the prophetic minority in Israel, one is impressed by the divergence, even if it is not as complete as we had been wont to say in the past. How to articulate this by clearly and sensitively describing that transformation remains the difficult challenge” (p. 136).

We must applaud Gnuse for his efforts. His treatments and summaries of various opinions are judicious and helpful. His suggestions for advancing this debate need to be digested and worked through by everyone concerned with the nature of Israel’s faith. Clergy, who have been quick to take up and disseminate the conclusions of the Biblical Theology Movement, largely uncritically, need to hear these criticisms and new proposals.

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Temper Longman III

How to Read the Psalms

Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity

166 pp., 1988, \$9.95.

In this volume, Temper Longman attempts to make the psalms accessible to collegians, seminarians, and lay people (9). Though at times it applies to the latter two groups, this work best serves college students, because it focuses on basic background issues, essential content details, and simple exegesis. Structured in three parts, the book utilizes a coherent format for discussion.

Part one first introduces the many types of psalm that appear in the Old Testament (19-36). Common forms such as the hymn, lament, and thanksgiving psalm are discussed adequately (19-30). Longman then mentions psalms of remembrance and confidence, which are properly treated as sub-genres of hymn and lament by many scholars (30-32). Next, Longman offers a strong, concise chapter on the historical background of psalms (37-50). Finally, three chapters are dedicated to the relevancy of the psalms for today. Though they contain many valid theological observations, these chapters are the weakest part of the book. Longman demonstrates the relevance of psalms much more effectively in part three, where he analyzes individual psalms.

Part two describes Old Testament poetry (88-94), parallelism (95-110), and imagery (111-122). One could hardly expect Longman to pack more vital information into so few pages. He explains the essentials of Hebrew poetry clearly and thoroughly, yet succinctly. This section will be of great help to beginning students.

Part three applies the principle gained in parts one and two to psalms 98, 69, and 30. These studies demonstrate the power and relevance of a hymn, lament, and thanksgiving songs. Readers are able to see how knowing background issues helps interpret texts.

I recommend this volume for basic courses in psalms. Besides its good content, the book also includes study questions and a solid bibliography. Students will find it readable and helpful.

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E.M. Yamauchi

Persia and the Bible

Grand Rapids: Baker

1990, pp. 578, \$34.95.

Edwin Yamauchi, author of numerous books, has written a full-scale history

of ancient Iran, with special reference to biblically related material. With the interruption of archaeological research in Iran, this is a welcome addition to our knowledge of the area. There have been no major works covering ancient Iran and the Bible for over a generation (since R. North, *Guide to Biblical Iran*, Rome, 1956). Few are more qualified than Yamauchi for this task.

After providing a brief introduction and historical outline, Yamauchi begins with a discussion of Median history, ignoring the ancient Elamite civilization (only briefly discussed in a later chapter), but recognizing the import of the new field of 'Median' archaeology. He avoids coming to any conclusions concerning the identity of the mysterious 'Darius the Mede,' realizing that new information is needed before any positive identification can be made (pp. 56-59).

The next five chapters (2-6), which are concerned with Persia, are labeled with the names of the first five major rulers, ending with Artaxerxes I (424 B.C.), which is neither a convenient ending date for Iranian nor biblical studies. A survey of some of the more arguable issues will suffice. Yamauchi mentions the references to Cyrus in Isaiah (44:28, 45:1ff.) without surveying the problem of authorship of Isaiah, and adds that, ". . . the predictions of Cyrus [are] an extraordinary example of fulfilled prophecy" (pp. 72-4). He should have added more dialogue for this claim. He is often uncritical of primary sources. For example, he employs Aeschylus' *Persai* to understand the nature of the Persian army; a Greek playwright is hardly a reputable source for Persian customs. His conclusion on linguistic grounds that Queen Vashti, of the book of Esther, is identical to the Herodotean Amestris is unfounded (p. 231). Yamauchi determines that Esther was Xerxes' queen based on an argument from silence rather than from reference to extra-Biblical sources. Mordecai's existence appears to be more certain because of the numerous sources about a certain Marduka (see A. Ungnad, *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 58 [1940/1]: 240-4, and 59 [1942/3]: 219). Yamauchi shows that the author of Esther had an understanding of Persian culture and customs, but it does not follow that this proves the historicity of the book. He also accepts the historical value of the biblical accounts of Nehemiah and Ezra, but his reasoning is not always clear. He accepts that Nehemiah was Artaxerxes' cupbearer because of an inscription mentioning Nehemiah's contemporary, Sanballat (p. 242). But this does not prove that Nehemiah was part of the Persian court, as there is no extra-biblical evidence that Nehemiah was governor of Judea, a surprising fact since many others are known. He also does not address the issues of Ezra's historicity, which have been argued by some scholars (see G. Garbini, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel*, pp. 151-69).

Yamauchi shifts without comment to an archaeological focus in the next four chapters (7-10), and discusses four of the most important urban centers in Persia; Susa, Ecbatana, Pasargadae, and Persepolis. The goal of chapter 11 is to discuss the Greek words used in the book of Daniel, normally used to determine a late date for the book. He gives cogent arguments for Greek contact in the Near East before Alexander (pp. 379ff.). Many scholars, however, do

not argue with this, but instead find fault with internal problems with the book, which Yamauchi does not discuss. The final three chapters address aspects of Persian religion, including Zoroastrianism and Mithraism. Much of the chapter on Zoroastrianism seems to have been written as an independent manuscript, with sections about the Medes and Persians repeated. But Yamauchi is convincing in arguing that the relationship between Zoroastrianism and Judaism is at the most superficial (pp. 458-66). He views Mithraism as a Roman mystery religion rather than having an incipient Iranian religious heritage. Thus, its impact upon early Christianity has been overrated, because of their contemporaneity.

Yamauchi provides detailed notes and a bibliography, showing an ability to control the sources in all areas of Iranian studies. But the lay person will benefit little from most of the references, while the expert will be frustrated by his occasional use of secondary authors instead of referring to primary sources. However, Yamauchi has written a book which will be the standard for Iranian and biblical studies for years to come.

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David L. Petersen

Haggai and Zechariah 1-8

Old Testament Library

Philadelphia: Westminster

320 pp., 1984, \$24.95.

Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers

Haggai, Zechariah 1-8

The Anchor Bible

Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday

xcv + 478 pp., 1987, \$20.00.

Sometimes it is helpful to allow two commentaries on the same Old Testament books to act as dialogic partners. By comparing and contrasting the authors' viewpoints, readers can synthesize a variety of scholarly conclusions. Since Petersen and Meyers and Meyers have written critical commentaries (including translations) of *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, and since these volumes appear in the prestigious *Old Testament Library (OTL)* and *Anchor Bible (AB)* series, these two books make appropriate benchmarks for one another. The fact that the authors' overlapping publication deadlines make it impossible for them to discuss the other's opinions makes the comparison even more compelling.

Both books offer acceptable translations. Meyers and Meyers attempt to pro-

duce "a rhythm of language that characterizes the Hebrew original" (xxv). They admit that this procedure sometimes leads to awkward English readings (xxv). Petersen's renderings often read more smoothly than the Meyers and Meyers version, though he shares their concern about the problems of distinguishing poetry from prose (*OTL*, 31-32; *AB*, xxvi).

Each volume interacts with numerous other publications, yet neither finds it necessary (possible) to react to **every** known work on Haggai and Zechariah (*OTL*, 7; *AB*, lxxii). This decision allows the authors to voice their own, albeit informed, opinions. More commentators should follow their example.

Each commentary includes a solid description of Israel's historical situation during the Persian era. Petersen explains Cyrus' impact on Israel, Darius' career, and the political organization of Palestine (20-27). He also notes the economic pressures Israel faced, then concludes that the nation's social structure consisted of farming collectives centered around the temple (28-30).

Meyers and Meyers use their data on Persian political policy to describe why the prophets favored Persia, and to discuss Persia's role in Jerusalem's restoration (xxix-xliv). Petersen emphasizes many of the same points, yet does not make as smooth a transition from historical detail to theological significance. Meyers and Meyers also examine the influence of the prophetic tradition on the sixth-century prophets (xli-xliv), which allows them to tie Haggai and Zechariah to prophecy as a whole.

These authors differ over the books' final date and purpose. Petersen states that though Ezra 5-6 indicates the two prophets pushed for temple reconstruction about the same time, "this assessment . . . was not altogether accurate" (19). Indeed, he says "nothing in the book implies that Zechariah experienced, at least in his role as prophet, the completion of the temple in 515 B.C.E." (110). Haggai may have been compiled some time after the temple's rebuilding (37-39). Thus, Petersen argues that the prophecies were not necessarily completed shortly before or after 515.

In stark contrast, Meyers and Meyers think "Haggai and the first eight chapters of . . . Zechariah belong together as a composite work" (xliv). Further, they claim the two books' intermixture of vision and oracle "is a sign of artistry rather than of differentiation of authorship or setting" (xlv). Finally, they state that the prophecies' first-person references indicate the prophets themselves may have helped shape their books (xlvii). Meyers and Meyers even posit that this composite work may have been finished to commemorate the temple's rededication (xlv).

The authors' comments on the text reflect their convictions on authorship and setting. Petersen focuses on the individual theologies of Haggai and Zechariah. His best material is his discussion of Zechariah's program for a restored Jerusalem (cf. 113-130; 160). Similarly, Meyers and Meyers emphasize the connections between the books. Given more pages than Petersen by their editors, they are able to discuss their views at length. Both commentaries offer clear and insightful exegesis.

Teachers and seminarians will benefit greatly from these volumes. Pastors

and collegians will find these works dense and not easily accessible. Both volumes reflect careful, effective scholarship. They will remain standard works for some time. Just as important, they participate in the growing body of quality work on the minor prophets, a too-often neglected section of scripture.

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The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556-539 B.C.

Yale Near Eastern Researches 10
New Haven: Yale University Press
1989; xiv + 270 pp.; \$40.00

This well-documented volume, originally a Yale dissertation prepared under William H. Hallo, is essentially an update, in the light of fresh cuneiform evidence, of the earlier study by R.P. Dougherty, *Nabonidus and Belshazzar: A Study of the Closing Events of the Neo-Babylonian Empire* (1929), which Beaulieu calls "epoch-making" (p. xiii), and which was for many years the standard work on the last king of Babylon. Both studies were done at Yale, and had the advantage of access to the vast holdings of the Yale Babylonian Collection.

Beaulieu's study consists of three chapters, the first dealing with the surviving inscriptions of Nabonidus, the second with his early reign (556-539), and the third with the final years of his reign, including especially the 10 mysterious years which he spent far from Babylon in the Arabian city of Teima, and his return to Babylon shortly before its fall (553-539). The last chapter also includes an extensive discussion of the crown prince Belshazzar, who was appointed co-regent, and left in virtually complete control of the empire, when his father left for Teima.

For students of the Bible, Nabonidus is of interest chiefly because of his association with the fall of Babylon to Cyrus in 539 B.C., which marked a significant turning point in the history of Israel. Although Nabonidus himself is not mentioned in the Bible, his son and co-regent Belshazzar figures prominently in the dramatic story of the handwriting on the wall in Daniel 5.

Unlike Dougherty, who had concluded that Daniel 5 is the most reliable of ancient accounts of the last days of Babylon, Beaulieu pays very little attention to the book of Daniel, which he presumably regards as a late and unreliable source. Ironically, however, he does bring forward evidence which supports the historical reliability of Daniel. For example, it is often said that Belshazzar is mistakenly identified as "king" in Daniel 5, but Beaulieu speaks repeatedly of the "double kingship" that was in effect during Nabonidus' self-imposed

exile (pp. 154, 158, 159). A similar point can be made about Belshazzar's feast, described in Daniel 5. Beaulieu argues that there may indeed have been a feast at the time of Babylon's fall: "As Babylon was captured on the eve of the 17th, the festivities mentioned by Herodotus and the Book of Daniel may have been those of the Harran *akitu* festival, as celebrated in the capital by the supporters of Nabonidus" (p. 226). If Beaulieu had paid more attention to Daniel scholarship, he would have noticed that his hypothesis of an *akitu* festival finds support in the preamble to Daniel 5 preserved in the Old Greek, which identifies the occasion as "the day of the consecration festival of his palace." In a recent Harvard dissertation it is argued that this was "most likely the day of the New Year (*akitu*) Festival" (see Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990] 123).

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Building Your New Testament Greek Vocabulary

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans

1990, pp. xii + 110. \$7.95.

As every student of languages knows, there is no substitute for knowledge of vocabulary. In the Greek New Testament there are 1,630 words that occur five or more times. The task of memorizing even these is no mean feat. Common practice, as illustrated by Bruce Metzger's *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek* (Princeton, 1969), is to provide the student with lists of words arranged according to frequency. While this has its strengths (one wants to know words one will frequently encounter), the person who attempts the actual reading of the Greek New Testament will find continuous reference to a lexicon necessary for even the basic meaning of many words.

Attempting to overcome this methodological weakness Van Voorst offers the present work. It consists of six parts. The first is a guide to the use of the book, including helpful suggestions for learning vocabulary. In Part Two he outlines the basic principles by which Greek words are built, viz., derivation (the addition of nominal, adjectival, adverbial, or verbal suffixes to a stem) and composition (prepositional or adverbial prefixes joined [predominantly] to verbs; and compound nouns and adjectives).

It is Parts Three and Four that constitute the bulk of this work (pp. 15-78 and 79-91, respectively). Here Van Voorst provides word lists based on frequency. However, in Part Three words which belong to a cognate family and

of which one cognate occurs more than five times are listed according to the frequency of the simplest form. The frequency of each word in the family is also supplied. While the "Guide" tells us that the most frequent form/word within the cognate family will determine the location of that family among the various lists in Part Three, this is not always the case. So, for example, the cognate family built on *krino* is found under "III.C. Families with One or More Words Occurring 100-154 Times," while the form *apokrinomai* occurs 232 times.

Part Four consists of vocabulary which have no cognates in the New Testament that occur more than five times. For the purposes of this book, that of building vocabulary, the omission of less frequent cognates is understandable. However, students should be aware that such a list would be lengthy. (See J. Harold Greenlee's *A New Testament Greek Morpheme Lexicon* (Zondervan, 1983], especially pp. 149ff). The question arises, "By what criteria are cognate lists to be constructed?" If, for example, according to Van Voorst's criteria, the word *theos* has no cognates found more than five times, it is rightly placed in Part Four. However, according to Greenlee the verb *theoreo*, which is found 58 times, is a cognate of *theos*. Does that imply that any benefit would be derived from asking the student using Van Voorst's book to associate these terms? If *theoreo* is by derivation related to *theos*, has not the former acquired a meaning independent of that (original [?]) relationship? But these are questions that go beyond the stated purpose of the present work. (Students should, however, be aware of the dangers of word studies based on analysis of cognates. Van Voorst issues a warning to this effect on pages 9-10. It is hoped that users of this work will become familiar with the studies of J. Barr, J.F.A. Sawyer, M. Silva, et al., which treat this issue in significant detail.)

Part Five is a one-page list of principal parts of 32 selected verbs, regular and irregular, all of which occur 50 or more times. Part Six presents numbers related to Parts Three and Four. The work concludes with a complete index of words found in Parts Three and Four.

Any who use this book will find it of immense value. Those of us who have utilized George Landes' *Student Vocabulary of Biblical Hebrew Listed According to Frequency and Cognate* (Scribners, 1961) in the learning of Hebrew recognize the strengths of this approach. While the largest circulation will no doubt be among introductory level Greek classes, it should not be overlooked by those wishing to review or improve their knowledge of vocabulary and thereby increase their enjoyment of the Greek New Testament.

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Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought

Grand Rapids: Baker

1990: reprint

This is a reprint of the successful 1979 volume, which has been updated with minor alterations. Bebbington's purpose is to analyze historical ideas from ancient times to the present, emphasizing the West. He critiques five historical traditions: cyclical, linear, idea of progress, historicism, and Marxism, attempting to resolve the contradictions between them. Though helpful, these labels do not adequately depict the sum total of ideas, as most historians have mixed the best from each tradition. The first chapter focuses on problems that historians encounter, including the entry of bias into the reconstruction of history. Bebbington holds that the historian is molded by the cultural, political, and religious values he/she may hold. But the modern historian has set up academic standards of autonomy that cannot be infringed upon, and so bias has a detrimental effect on one's version of history. Professional sanctions do not eliminate bias, but add fresh ones. Bias need not compromise one's integrity; it can enhance one's history writing. Bebbington holds that if an historian tries to deemphasize his personal views on history, the effect is to increase other influences on what one writes. The Christian can be subtle and prune his ideas for secular readers.

The first major tradition discussed is the cyclical view; history is a revolving wheel, a view which he mistakenly considers to have been diffused in the ancient world, and thus lumps together divergent views. Only India had a cosmic view of the universe which was perpetually recurring. The Greek philosophers had a view which could better be described as a catastrophic, or spiral view of history, and had little interest in whether history was eternally recurring. Bebbington assumes that the Greek historians, like Thucydides and Herodotus had views similar to the philosophers, but neither had a sense of grand patterns in history. Zoroastrianism had a spiral view of history leading to a final judgment and was partly linear in nature, but not cyclical.

He rightly claims that Israel was unique in its historical views, but this is simplistic, since Israel had recurring patterns in history (in Judges; cf. J. Curtis, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 34 (1963): 115-23, and B. Albrektson, *History and the Gods*, 1967). Augustine's seven stages of history were spiral in nature, combined with a final goal to history, like modern day dispensationalism. Bebbington should have given more attention on the Muslim historiographers, who are from this tradition. He correctly sees the idea of progress (related to positivism) as the secularization of the linear Christian view, but ignores Augustine's legacy in this matter (cf. T. Mommsen, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951): 346ff). They study humanity empirically, using the methods of the natural sciences. Historicism (related to idealism) was a reaction to this idea. The historicist uses critical research and intuition to understand culture groups. History is unique, unlike other disciplines; human life cannot be subject to generalization.

These two last named ideas have greatly influenced modern the modern study of history. Marxism, stemming from Hegelian thought, is an attempt at a reconciliation between the two schools. Bebbington has made an attempt to transcend the opposing two schools with the Christian view. But it is naive to believe that the moderns would be willing to return to a view which has been cast aside. He is 'Lockean' in this respect, as the Christian view is to him as the most 'reasonable of all views.' The modern historian has legitimate concerns about a Christian view. How does a Christian recognize God's providence in history? No modern historian can accept an answer from Scripture, because of his aversion to any outside authority. Although proof of the work of providence is beyond the power of the historical evidence, Bebbington holds that often the evidence suggests that the expected course of events was diverted in a way that agrees with the character of God (p. 174). However the Christian historian can fall in to the trap of describing the work of providence, while ignoring details that do not fit into his scheme. He cannot write history like the writer of II Kings because he lacks inspiration. Instead, he needs humility.

Although there are some problems with this work, because of its clarity and simplicity it is an excellent summary of historical thought for a Christian audience. But it will take more than this research to convince the modern historian of the value of returning to a Christian model of history.

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Thomas C. Oden

After Modernity . . . What?: Agenda for Theology

Grand Rapids: Zondervan

224 pp., 1990, \$14.95.

After Modernity . . . What? is a major revision of *Agenda for Theology: Recovering Christian Roots*, first published in 1979. Chapters five through eight are entirely new (not including the interlude at the end of chapter five). The book is divided into three parts, with each part containing five chapters. Part one discusses "The Courtship of Modernity" in modern theology. In part two, "The Critique of Criticism," Oden critiques modern higher criticism. Part three, "The Liberation of Orthodoxy," puts forth an account of orthodoxy free from modern constraints and assumptions. Oden intends for this revised and updated edition to speak to a wider audience of evangelicals and neo-evangelicals. He does not, however, abandon his former audience.

The premise of the book is stated clearly on page 197: "[I]t is possible for the core of classical Christian belief to stand in critical dialogue with modern personal and social hopes." Oden confesses in his book that his theology has shifted from the liberal tradition in which he was trained, to classical orthodoxy

(a change he credits, in large part, to his students). Classical orthodoxy is not a synonym for fundamentalism, as Oden rightly recognizes. Fundamentalism is just as much a product of modernity as liberalism. "[M]odern fundamentalism is more akin to liberalism that either one of them would be willing to admit" (p. 67). Oden defines classical Christianity as "the consensus of the first millenium" (p. 37).

In defense of the classical Christian perspective, Oden proceeds in the book to present a powerful and accurate critique of modern liberalism, from its philosophical presuppositions to its construal of doctrine; from its critical methodologies to its interpretation of the Scriptures.

Liberal theology is characterized by its desire to be innovative, resulting in a faddist approach to theology. The ultimate quest of modern liberalism is not truth, but what is "in." If one stands in the classical orthodox perspective, however, such thinking is irresponsible. "For the last thing the faith needs is another absolutely serious new program of theology Theology needs reforming but not in a new way, only in an old familiar way" (p. 21). The task of the theologian is not innovation, but conservation. The theologian is not an inventor, but a guardian.

Oden testifies to this in his own experience. The theologians he once disparaged because they were conservative, he now reads because of their depth and wisdom. At the end of the book Oden includes an appendix entitled, "Perennial Resources for Ministry," in which he lists works by classical theologians from the Apostolic Fathers to Post-Reformational classical writers. Certainly conservatives can learn a lesson from Oden since most systematic courses in theology, even from a conservative perspective, neglect the classical voices of the faith. A conservative theologian from the 20th century is preferred reading in systematics, while Aquinas, Augustine, and Irenaeus are "relegated" to the history curriculum.

The philosophical center of modernity, according to Oden, "is a narcissistic hedonism that assumes that moral value is reducible to new feelings and sensory experience" (p. 31). It is because of this that the faddism of modern theology is not accidental, it is a necessary conclusion (p. 32). This, in turn, has created " . . . a rapidly deteriorating modern ethos that has lost its moral power" (p. 35).

How should classical orthodox Christians respond to this? Oden writes, "It is time to quit our grovelling apologies for traditional Christianity. It is time to listen intently to the Scriptural texts and early Christian witness. It is time to ask how classical Christianity itself might teach us to understand the providence of God in the midst of our broken and confused modern situation" (p. 36). This does not mean that the classical Christian cannot participate in scientific inquiry. Oden himself happily confesses to being a modern man (p. 39). We are all products of modernity. In spite of this, however, we must not unquestionably embrace the assumptions of modernity that have contributed greatly to the modern theological and moral confusion. For Oden it is modernity's inability to understand marriage that reveals most clearly "the failure of the modern consciousness" (p. 195).

Should the church in its concern for orthodoxy, therefore, reinstitute the inquisitions and put people on trial for heresy? Oden answers this negatively. Such an endeavor would be an abuse of the classical orthodox position. The church needs to allow for diversity within unity.

Just what is the unified center of the Christian tradition? It is life in Christ; specifically the crucified and resurrected Christ. "The resurrection is God's yes to Christ's obedience 'even unto death,' and the atoning cross is the only context for grasping the significance of the Easter narratives" (p. 182).

After Modernity . . . What? is a great book. It is a book that should be read and passed around. It would make a wonderful birthday gift for the liberal in your life. In this book Oden states in a wonderful way what professors and students of theology are discovering more and more each day: The classical formulations of the Christian faith are true. They contain wisdom. They make sense.

Oden concludes the book with the statement, ". . . the season of late modernity is a winter season and . . . it is time for conserving the essentials" (p. 199). To this I heartily respond, "Amen!"

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Wendy Farley

Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy

Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990, 150 pp., \$13.95.

Theodicies forever struggle between saying too little or too much. Saying too little may leave the suffering pilgrim with the feeling that no guidance is forthcoming, that no sense is made of the moral chaos that threatens to undue us. But saying too much tends to "justify" the evil by its very success in explaining it, and as a consequence to lead to a tendency to accept evil as inevitable rather than as a force we should vigorously oppose.

Farley's concern is with the latter mistake, a mistake, she feels, that characterizes virtually all traditional, orthodox theodicies. The problem cuts two ways. First, the radical suffering in the world (defined so well by Farley, 51-59), that dysteleological or gratuitous suffering that dehumanizes its victims and is as prevalent as it is incomprehensible, destroys the power of traditional theodicies (12, 21, 29, et al.). Some evil is simply beyond redemption, either in this life or the next: it cannot be atoned for ("even by the Messiah", 63, 65) but only defied. Second, traditional theodicies have the opposite of their intended effect, because they actually justify evil. To correct this mistake, Farley moves away from traditional theodicies (she gives a threefold rationale for this, 12-13) that are oriented toward cosmic guilt and punishment/atonement and takes up instead the paradigm of tragic suffering and compassionate defiance. "A tragic vision is concerned with resistance to evil rather than

justification of evil" (97). Her method is phenomenological and experiential, with "scattered illustrations — from history, literature, and the Bible — throughout the text" (13).

Several features of Farley's vision are commendable. First, she helps us to orient our thinking on the real or genuine problem of evil, which is not just any suffering, some of which is understandable or even deserved, but truly gratuitous suffering that, by normal canons of faith and reason, appears to betray explanation. Truly our world *is* tragic. Second, surely any worthy theodicy should incorporate an element of righteous indignation, defiance and active protest, especially as an antidote to the temptation of "highminded moralism" that could wrongly justify and candycoat evil. Third, I appreciated her focus on divine compassion (literally, "suffering with") in a tragic world, even though I would not concede that we can realize God's love only at the expense of His omnipotence.

My own differences with Farley exist at several levels. First, she merely states what she needs to prove, that is, just how and why radical evil disqualifies classical theodicies, or that classical theodicians do not take evil seriously enough and in fact justify evil by explaining it. Three points can be made here. I do not see why classical theodicy cannot incorporate the well-justified concerns Farley has. Further, some might say Farley herself justifies evil when she labels it an inexplicable necessity (117). Third, on a pastoral level, is it not a cold comfort indeed to tell a person that evil is irredeemable? Farley struggles between admitting that her position comes close to embracing meaninglessness and even nihilism (27–28) on the one hand, and embracing the ultimate goodness of creation (29, 32, 59–60, 116).

Likewise, why does active protest need to be the sole preserve of non-classical theodicies? In fact, some of the most active protests and successful ameliorations of evil have been accomplished by Christians in evangelical traditions. In a similar vein, I see no reason why the category of the tragic cannot be incorporated into the classical framework, or why eschatological themes necessarily mean we must neglect or reject redemptive activity in the here and now. Marx's criticism of religion as an opiate applies to perversions of orthodoxy and not genuine orthodoxy.

Finally, on a methodological level, I would begin with a theologically informed faith and from there move to interpreting experience, and not vice versa. The Biblical tradition of Habakkuk (3:16–19) and Job (13:15), and the historical tradition of Anselm offer that we believe in order to understand, not that we understand in order to believe. But neither does that mean we should neglect or reject the needed warnings by Farley about the dangers of halfbaked versions of evangelical traditions. In short, having accepted her warnings about saying too much, I sense a greater risk in saying too little.

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Henri J.M. Nouwen

Beyond the Mirror: Reflections on Death and Life

New York: Crossroad

74 pp., 1990, \$9.95, hardcover

In this beautifully written little book, Nouwen offers his personal story of a near-lethal accident and the resultant journey to the portal of death. With honesty, Nouwen recounts the events and his state of mind leading up to the accident. He recalls the emotions he felt when finding himself at the gateway of death after the accident at the hospital.

At the portal of death, Nouwen encounters the presence of the risen Christ who enfolds him in love and calls him home (p. 37). After the author recovers from his subsequent surgery, he reflects upon his spiritual experience of Christ's presence. Nouwen writes, "Now I felt his presence in a most tangible way, as if my whole life had come together and I was being enfolded in love" (p. 37).

Nouwen realizes this experience of Christ's love transforms his understanding of his own ministry and vocation in this life now. For Nouwen, the spiritual task is to trust God and to belong to Him so that we may give and receive signs of God's presence in this world (pp. 58-59). For Nouwen, we are to be beacons of Christ's eternal love in this broken and needy world.

Nouwen's purpose for writing about his experience is to offer his insight into a deeper encounter with God. This is aptly done. The book is well worth reading for people who seek a deeper and richer glimpse into the mystery of the divine presence of God. Nouwen states, "My accident brought me to the portal of death and led me to a new experience of God" (p. 9). Faithful to his theological task, Nouwen declares, "Not writing about it would have been unfaithful to my vocation and to proclaim the presence of God at all times and in all places" (p. 9).

JoAnn Ford Watson

James L. Crenshaw

Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction

Atlanta: John Knox Press

1981

D. Kidner

The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes

Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Press

1985

R.E. Murphy

The Tree of Life. An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature

N.Y.: Doubleday

1990

G. Von Rad

Wisdom in Israel

Philadelphia: Trinity Press International

1990 rpr.

Twenty years ago some of the most neglected material in the Bible was the material generally called wisdom literature, but this is hardly the case anymore. There is now such a vast array of commentaries, monographs, articles, and introductions on Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes that one needs some sort of road map or guide to be able to wade through the veritable forest of material. The four general introductions listed above seek to provide such guidance.

The oldest of these introductory books and, in many ways, still the most profound, is the offering by Von Rad which originally appeared in English in 1972. This study was one of the last written by Von Rad before his death, and he brings the wealth of a lifetime of study and teaching of the OT to this work. This study can, in some ways, be credited with stimulating the scholarly world to renewed interest in wisdom literature. Von Rad wishes to reveal not only the nature of the content of wisdom literature and the character of OT wisdom in general, but he also seeks to shed light on the sort of world view and mind set that would produce such literature.

Many scholars have seen wisdom literature as a foreign body in the OT in view of the fact that it says little or nothing about covenants, the temple cultus, salvation history, God's chosen people, or the special relationship they have with Yahweh. The few comments about the 'fear of the Lord' in these books is often seen as something tacked on after the fact to a literature that is much more secular and international in character. Von Rad sets out to refute such a view of wisdom literature, a view which is still prevalent today, and to some degree is represented by the work of James Crenshaw.

In some ways Von Rad's study is the most difficult to get into as he does not work his way systematically through the wisdom literature, introducing each book separately, but rather pursues a topical or thematic approach. The strength, however, of this approach is that he is able to show the common threads, ideas, and content which sets this literature apart from most of the rest of the OT, with the exception of some of the wisdom psalms perhaps. Particularly helpful is his chapter entitled 'Trust and Attack.'

Von Rad helps us to see that the mind set that produced this sort of literature presupposed that in nature as well as in human behavior, which together make up what is called creation, there were orderly patterns which, if adhered to normally, led to blessing and prosperity. In short, the authors of at least Proverbs and Job, if not also Ecclesiastes, believed there was a moral structure to the universe which blessed virtue and cursed vice, or at least there was a

God who rewarded the former and punished the latter *in this lifetime*. Wisdom amounted to discerning what this pattern was and following it as well as one could. These biblical writers were concerned then about a life well lived, lived in a way that is pleasing to God and beneficial to all, including oneself.

Now it will be seen that these writers were not dealing with what may be called salvation history — God's saving intervention in history, but rather the joys and sorrows, the trials and triumphs of *ordinary* human experience. They felt that there were guidelines for how to live under all such circumstances, and they sought to supplement the guidance given elsewhere in the sacred traditions which usually dealt with crisis or boundary experiences (theophanies, acts of salvation, murders and other extreme events). I must agree with Von Rad and against Crenshaw that wisdom literature is, for the most part, not offering a world view that competes with that found in the historical and prophetic books of the OT, but supplements them.

The problem with OT religion, which we may call Yahwism, is that for some Israelites it led to a 'God of the gaps' approach to life. If God was one who periodically intervened in human history, what does one do in the meantime? Some turned to the pagan fertility religions which were based on, among other things, the cycles of the seasons and crops. The sages sought to provide some practical and pragmatic advice to deal with life as it was ordinarily experienced, without resorting to such pagan religions and their patterns of life. This may suggest that some of this wisdom material was written with one eye on the competition — hence the repeated warnings about sexual aberrations and the stranger.

These sages knew, however, that ordinary, non-salvific, daily experience could be either good or bad, could involve either pleasure or pain. Thus they should not be seen, even in the case of the author(s) of Proverbs, as naive optimists. Their teachings, however, do often involve generalizations that have been shown to be true in a large number, though not in all cases (such as 'train up a child in the way that it should go . . .'). Proverbs basically does not deal with the exceptional cases, while Job seeks to make good this lack.

We may be thankful that we have in the canon three different sorts of wisdom literature. Proverbs must be read in tandem with both Job and Ecclesiastes for the latter two books offer powerful correctives to someone who might make the mistake of trying to live solely by the advice one finds in Proverbs.

We have one book which deals basically with the normal, daily experience, whether good or bad, of those living in a non-crisis environment (Proverbs), but we also have a book that deals with what may be called the abnormal though nonetheless recurrent human experience of extreme suffering (Job). It will be noted that Job's story is meant to deal with the problem of innocent or undeserved suffering that happens quite apart from any crises or salvific events or wars God's people might be involved in. Job's suffering is individual, not part of some systemic or general crisis. Thus again it focuses on individual, non-salvific or martyrological suffering that happens in everyday experience. Finally there is Ecclesiastes which presents one individual's pessimistic view

of human possibilities. This pessimism is generated by the belief that death is the great equalizer casting a shadow of futility over all human endeavors. There may be several reasons which explain Qoheleth's (the name given to the author in Ecclesiastes) jaundiced view of life: 1) his book may be seen as an example of wisdom as seen from below, that is the wisdom of the poor and oppressed, which stands in contrast to the more middle- and upper-class perspectives that we find in both Proverbs (some of which comes from the king's court, the halls of the wealthy and powerful) and Job. Put in another way, it may reflect clan wisdom as opposed to courtly wisdom; 2) it appears from the language used in Ecclesiastes (late Hebrew and Aramaic, with possibly some Hellenistic influence in style and content) that this book is the latest piece of canonical wisdom literature, if not the very latest book of the whole OT. As such, it reflects a post-exilic worldview that in part entailed a real strand of pessimism as a result of the failure to re-establish things like they had been in the heyday of David and Solomon; 3) Qoheleth, perhaps to some extent unlike Job (or the author of Proverbs?), assumes death is the end of the story. That is, like many OT figures, he did not assume there would be any sort of positive afterlife beyond death. Rather, only Sheol, the land of the dead, whether good or bad awaited, unless one was an exceptional saint like Enoch or Elijah. Now on such a worldview this means that if justice is not done *in this life*, it is not done at all, and therefore one comes up with a worldview like we find in Ecclesiastes which, when it is not busy saying all is futile, urges a sort of hedonism — enjoy things while one can for the night comes for all, good or bad (*carpe diem*).

Ecclesiastes then becomes a profound meditation on what it is like to live in a fallen world in the ever-present shadow of death without recourse to some sort of eternal hope or belief in divine intervention. It gives us insight into what a pessimistic or, some would say realistic, worldview looks like of a person who still believes in God but expresses no real hope of God correcting or somehow reversing life's injustices, not unlike certain modern existentialist writers who still see themselves as theists. Von Rad must be credited with forcing us to wrestle once again with all this literature which, especially in the case of Job and Ecclesiastes, can be profoundly disturbing, especially for Christians. This literature, if studied closely, makes clear what a sea change there has been between a Qoheleth and a Paul, for instance.

Besides Von Rad's masterful piece the reader has three other guides to turn to for studying the wisdom literature, each of which has its merits. All three of the other guides study each book of wisdom literature in turn, making the material more accessible to those who wish to do a book study of a particular wisdom book. All three books also trace the wisdom trajectory beyond the Protestant canon to include two fascinating pieces of late wisdom literature — Ecclesiasticus, otherwise known as the Wisdom of Ben Sira, and also the Wisdom of Solomon.

Crenshaw's study is, in many ways, the easiest to read and most complete, but it also furthers the erroneous suggestion that the wisdom writers were of-

fering a counter-worldview to that of Yahwism (a view which is only really plausible for Ecclesiastes and even there it has its problems). Crenshaw also suggests that the non-supernaturalistic and more humanistic perspective of the wisdom writers is preferable to that of the views of other portions of the Scripture. The conservative reader is likely to find such a view at the very least disconcerting. Nevertheless, this book has the great merit of condensing and explaining in simple language a great quantity of data, introducing the reader to a whole host of resources and ideas for further reflection. It may be commended with the aforementioned reservations.

The most recent treatment of the subject is Roland Murphy's helpful book *The Tree of Life*. Murphy's book follows basically the same pattern as that of Crenshaw, including a concluding section on extra-biblical Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom literature, which has numerous parallels with biblical wisdom material. Father Murphy approaches wisdom literature more along the lines of Von Rad than Crenshaw and, like Crenshaw, he has devoted his whole career to this subject to good effect. If there is only one book one can read on the subject this one is perhaps most to be recommended (although as yet it is available only in the somewhat expensive — \$27.50 — hardback form). Murphy writes with a clear style and pares the scholarly notes to a minimum. He also provides a most useful annotated bibliography, whereas Crenshaw's is now dated and unannotated. It is curious that neither Crenshaw nor Murphy takes any note of the work of Derek Kidner on the wisdom literature, and it is to this latter author's work that we must now turn.

The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, which was published earlier under a slightly different title, is the standard, Evangelical guide to wisdom literature. One interesting feature of Kidner's book is that he makes his guide more user-friendly for lay people by discussing scholarly and technical matters in separate chapters that parallel the content chapters on Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. Kidner also takes a more traditional view on Solomon's possible involvement in the production of at least some of the material in Proverbs. This traditional view is simply dismissed by too many scholars, especially if it is true that the impetus to produce wisdom literature arose first during the monarchical period when the influence of international sages and their material was felt to good effect (by Solomon and his successors). Kidner's book is not strong in some cases in the way it handles some of the critical problems in these books, and his argument that Qoheleth is arguing in a 'Yes . . . but' format is not always compelling. Nevertheless, as a guide for lay people and undergraduate students, this book is perhaps to be preferred, whereas Murphy's book will best serve the clergy and seminary classes.

With these four books the reader has more than ample material to provide them with a guide into the wisdom literature. The question that remains is whether the Church will see fit to show the kind of interest in these oft-neglected books that scholars have been showing for the past two decades. T.S. Eliot once bemoaned how wisdom has been lost in the search for knowledge and knowledge lost in the search for mere information. One can only hope that