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Book Review: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology

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the common tendency to reduce OT ethics to questions about the Law. Wright also deals extensively with topics of vital importance that sometimes are not handled adequately by evangelicals, such as ecology and the poor.

A work of this size and scope always contains details with which one will disagree, lacunae that seem overlooked, and interpretations that surprise. I list the following as examples. For instance, even though the survey of recent scholarship is quite current (chapter 13), the review of historical approaches (chapter 12) is a bit out of date; theonomy is not nearly as prominent now as it was in the 1980s, and dispensationalism has developed in innovative ways since that time. Second, Oliver O'Donovan's work, *The Desire of the Nations* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), is cited with approval in several places, but Wright appears to miss that in that book O'Donovan champions a more Constantinian perspective on the relationship between Church and state—a position that does not square well with Wright's own views. One wonders, too, how a premillennial view of the OT promises might fit into Wright's scheme, which is essentially amillennial. I do not see this as necessarily problematic, but Wright nowhere entertains the option—though perhaps this is not unexpected in light of his British background. His argument in favor of a kingship mandate instead of a stewardship view of the created order should be a healthy (and welcome) challenge to many, while his functional view of the Fall might catch others unawares (pp. 121–31). OT research now is not so confident of the existence of a Canaanite fertility cult, but Wright mentions it on occasion to contrast it with Israelite religion. Finally, I would also have liked to see a more in-depth engagement with views that question the ideology of the biblical text. Wright is aware of these and does cite such authors (dealing mostly with Rodd's work), but he does not respond substantively to feminist approaches that are extremely relevant to discussions on the authority of the OT. He does close the appendix on the Conquest narratives with the promise for a future book on such matters. This is good news, and one looks forward to that constructive publication from such a seasoned hand in the field.

I highly recommend *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, and I, for one, will use it as a textbook for my seminary class on OT social ethics. The book is not difficult to read, is quite full in scope, and irenic in tone. We are in debt to Wright for a job well done.

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Reconstructing Old Testament Theology: After the Collapse of History. By Leo G. Perdue. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005, xvi + 399 pp., \$20.00 paper.

In this work, Perdue intends to build on a conversation he started in his earlier volume, *The Collapse of History* (1994), as his subtitle suggests. Perdue's methodology is to review and glean from several different contemporary approaches to OT (or biblical) theology. At first glance, Perdue's chosen approaches seem eclectic or perhaps even marginal. However, Perdue attempts to show how each of the diverse methods contributes in its own right and how together these perspectives provide a formidable alternative to older historical approaches to biblical studies.

Perdue surveys the developing relationship between *Religionsgeschichte* and biblical theology with special attention to developments from the last third of the twentieth century. In what may be his most constructive section, Perdue wades through various models for the place of the history of religion in biblical theology. He concludes that the

history of religion will not be illuminating to contemporary faith unless the biblical theologian takes the data gleaned from the past and couples it with current contexts for a dialogue that may produce “a Word that is decisive for faith and life” (p. 74).

Perdue surveys various liberation theologians who delve into biblical theology and highlights the work of Fernando Segovia. Segovia’s intercultural criticism and the treatment of the biblical text as “other” are paradigmatic for biblical theology in liberation (especially Hispanic) contexts. The result is a reader-response hermeneutic with a dialogue focused on the “otherness” of the original audience of the biblical texts with its contemporary oppressed readers.

Perdue demonstrates that feminist theology’s interest in history can result in a hermeneutics of suspicion, which attempts to identify patriarchal attempts to suppress women’s voices in a text. Moreover, Perdue shows that there is some divergence among feminist, womanist, and *mujerista* theologies. Some feminists have moved away from historical approaches to a literary approach that has special interest in the use of metaphor. Many womanist scholars agree with Renita Weems’s reader-response approach. *Mujerista* theologians take up the issues of their male liberation theologian counterparts. They address further concerns such as social location and solidarity among Hispanic women.

Perdue comments on the growth of Jewish biblical theology and how current scholarship fills the dearth once noted by Jon Levenson. Perdue notes that scholars such as Benjamin Sommer and Michael Fishbane grapple with the perennial questions of the status and relationship of the written and oral Torah that face any endeavor in Jewish biblical theology. Perdue proposes that Fishbane’s methodology might be the best model for furthering Jewish biblical theology. Of special interest to Perdue is Fishbane’s tracing of tradition and the imaginative mythmaking found in inter-biblical exegesis.

Postmodern biblical theologies are evaluated in chapter 7, with Walter Brueggemann serving as one of the main exemplars. Interestingly, Perdue notes that Brueggemann is not fully postmodern, but does affirm meaning as multi-faceted and contextual. For Brueggemann, meaning is assessed through the use of imagination and the acceptance of the open-ended dialectic of OT texts.

The last theologies Perdue surveys are a conglomerate of “contextual” theologies in postcolonial societies such as Senegal and India. In many ways similar to the liberation theology of Segovia, these theologies address the unique contexts of societies reemerging after the waning of capitalist colonialism. These surroundings affect the reading and interpretation of the texts, as theologians strive to overcome elitism and sense the need to forge a culturally relevant theology that pursues equity.

Perdue demonstrates openness to the value of many contemporary approaches to biblical theology, with the notable exception of the “canonical method.” One might fault Perdue for his dismissive view of Brevard Childs and other purveyors of the canonical method. Perdue claims scholars such as Childs who follow Barth’s repudiation of the history of religion for theology have “few devotees in the present world of biblical theology” (p. 60). As a result, Perdue devotes his attention to other approaches that evince some incorporation of history of religion, albeit highly contextualized.

A useful feature of Perdue’s work is his use of Jeremiah as a case study for the various approaches he surveys. His application of diverse methods to the sample text allows the reader a tangible application of the methodology. Choosing Jeremiah as the standard example makes it possible to make further comparisons of how the various approaches would handle a text.

The immense diversity among the biblical theologies Perdue reviews perhaps overshadows a central thesis, though Perdue’s proposal persists. He intends a biblical theology that first gleans from historical work and eventually moves to dialogue between “the ever-changing meaning of texts” and the cultural context of the interpreter/reader.

At a more basic level, Perdue's work serves an in-depth introduction to biblical theologies outside the typical evangelical reading patterns, thereby extending the horizons of biblical theology discussions.

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Rewriting Moses: The Narrative Eclipse of the Text. By Brian Britt. New York: T & T Clark, 2004, 208 pp., \$49.95 paper, \$130.00 hardcover.

Using a method developed by Walter Benjamin and the Freudian premise that traditions preserve what they repress, Brian Britt attempts to show how post-biblical accounts of Moses in a variety of mediums have subverted or rewritten the biblical portrait of Moses. Benjamin spoke of the "aura" of a text, that is, the text reflects the viewer's gaze, becomes more distant the closer one looks, and gathers involuntary memories around it. With this grid, Britt investigates post-biblical usage of Moses to see how the biblical tradition of Moses is engaged in perennial questions about myth, sacred texts, and the nature of tradition.

In Part I, Britt devotes a chapter each to a discussion of Moses in modern novels, films, biblical scholarship, and art. Thirty-four novels were written about Moses between 1859 and 1998 (chap. 1, "Subverting the Great Man: Violence and Magic in Moses Fiction"). These novels mostly make a heroic figure of Moses and ignore the text. Films have to simplify the complex biblical picture by "doubling" Moses (chap. 2, "Double-Moses: Gender and the Sacred in Moses Films"). Doubling is defined as splitting the ambiguities of Moses' biblical character in two and projecting one part onto another character in the film. For example, the biblical text is ambiguous about whether Moses is Hebrew or Egyptian. In "The Ten Commandments" (1956 version), Moses is a quite masculine Egyptian in the first half but an asexual Hebrew in the second. In "The Prince of Egypt," Rameses and Moses are doubles of each other. Rameses is the bully brother, seeking the father's approval, while Moses is the softer, gentle figure, loving Rameses to the end. Chapter 3 suggests modern scholarship mainly searches for the legend behind the biblical person. Chapter 4 compares the veiling of Moses in Exodus 34 and depictions in art. Veiling suggests concealment, silence, and absence in revelation. Most of the art that deals with this episode shows Moses unveiled or only half-veiled. Britt concludes that the tradition could not handle the idea of concealed prophecy and revelation.

Part II of the book is devoted to a study of biblical texts on Moses. Chapter 5 offers a new interpretation of Moses' "heavy mouth" in Exod 4:10–17. His professed inability to speak enhances his writing role and elevates him above the status of ordinary prophet. Chapter 6 investigates the link between Torah and song in Deuteronomy 31–32 and its implications for the writing of Torah. Chapter 7 is an exegesis of Deuteronomy 32 and 33 to show how they connect written tradition and the death of Moses. The final chapter offers a reflection on the birth and death accounts of Moses and what they suggest to us about writing and memory.

Britt concludes Moses is both a writer and a person written about. Ultimately the lines blur, so that Moses as writer and Moses as a text written become the same. For Britt, Moses resides in the writing. Extra-biblical interpretations of Moses miss this vital point and have focused on Moses either as a hero or as a subject through which to promote ideology and attack culture.