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## Review of Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison, *Return to Babel: Global Perspectives on the Bible*

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the motives lying behind the Deuteronomic laws were more economically and socially driven than the text may lead one to believe.

R. E. Clements, "Achan's Sin: Warfare and Holiness" (pp. 113-26), encourages exegetes to treat Josh 7:1-26 carefully so as not to promote such atrocities. It is a story concerned more with God's holiness than with the spoils of warfare. Marti J. Steussy, in "The Problematic God of Samuel" (pp. 127-61), concludes that God is portrayed in the Books of Samuel more often angry than loving, and more often as destroyer than as builder.

Walter Harrelson, "Why, O Lord, Do You Harden Our Heart?: A Plea for Help from a Hiding God" (pp. 163-74), studies Isa 63:7-64:12. Dividing the passage into seven strophes, H. concludes that God does not harden our hearts, but his people will ultimately stray of their own accord, leading to the hardening of their hearts. God is pleased, however, when cries of outrage are made since they will result in divine action. Paul L. Redditt, in "The God Who Loves and Hates" (pp. 175-90), investigates the thorny passage that declares God's "hatred" for Esau, Mal 1:2-3, and challenges the abuse of "perfect-being theology" (p. 184). He suggests that just as modern critics expect scientific and historical error in the text, they should also recognize theological error where that is indicated (pp. 189-90).

Roland Murphy, "Wisdom and Yahwism Revisited" (pp. 191-200), argues for a closer connection between Wisdom and Yahwism over against the opinion of Crenshaw. The central issue revolves around modern presuppositions concerning revelation and natural theology. Leo Perdue, "Revelation and the Problem of the Hidden God in Second Temple Wisdom Literature" (pp. 201-22), blames neo-orthodoxy for minimizing the theological import of Wisdom. As a consequence of this, Wisdom came to be accepted as natural theology, or even as an expression of "pagan religion" (p. 218).

David Penchansky, "Job's Wife: The Satan's Handmaid" (pp. 223-28), considers the reaction of Job's wife, "curse God and die" (Job 2:9), and concludes that her response gave Job the courage to accuse God. Antoon Schoors, "The Verb *hāyā* in Qoheleth" (pp. 229-38), overviews the frequent use of the verb *hyh* and demonstrates that its dynamic meaning ("to happen") implies a philosopher more interested in human life than metaphysics. Bernhard Lang, in "The 'Our Father' as John the Baptist's Political Prayer: A Ritual Response to the Absence of God's Kingdom" (pp. 239-53), avers that John the Baptist viewed himself as a forerunner to God, not Jesus; accordingly, the prayer emerges from John's circle, not from the disciples of Christ.

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PRISCILLA POPE-LEVISON and JOHN R. LEVISON (eds.), *Return to Babel: Global Perspectives on the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1999). Pp. xiv + 234. Paper \$19.

The conception behind this book is very clever: take a series of significant biblical passages (OT and NT), and assign them to a number of readers, students, or scholars of the Bible from a variety of cultural backgrounds (Latin, African, and Asian). Furthermore, have three different responses for each selected biblical passage, so that one has a "Latin, African, and Asian" response for each passage.

Clearly, each writer was invited to think "outside the box" in reading the biblical passages in question. The format was the same in each case—a story is told, or a "context"

described (typically drawn from the cultural setting most familiar to the writer in question); this leads to a reading of the text itself, and then a "reflection" on the text. Each chapter is surprisingly brief; but this has the decided advantage of covering a large amount of material with a number of interesting ideas, even if it is then impossible to play out these suggestions in detail.

The OT texts chosen were Gen 11:1-9 (Tower of Babel) by José Miguez-Bonino, Solomon Avotri, and Choan-Seng Song, pp. 13-36; Exod 20:1-17 (Ten Commandments) by Jorge Pixley, Francois Kabasele Lumbala, and George M. Soares-Prabhu, pp. 37-56; Ps 23:1-6 ("Shepherd's Psalm") by J. Severino Croatto, Hannah W. Kinoti, and Cyris Heesuk Moon, pp. 57-74; Eccl 3:1-8 ("To everything a season . . .") by Elsa Tamez, Francois Kabasele Lumbala, and Choan-Seng Song, pp. 75-94; and Isa 52:13-53:12 (the most well known of the so-called "Servant Songs") by Jorge M. Pixley, Francois Kabasele Lumbala, and Cyris Heesuk Moon, pp. 95-116. The NT passages were: Matt 5:1-12 (the Beatitudes) by J. Severino Croatto, Hannah W. Kinoti, and Helen R. Graham, pp. 117-38; John 1:1-18 (the Logos hymn) by Jose Cardenas Pallares, Hannah W. Kinoti, and George M. Soares-Prabhu, pp. 139-60; Acts 2:1-42 (Pentecost narrative) by José Miguez-Bonino, Patrice M. Siyemeto, and Helen R. Graham, pp. 161-84; 1 Cor 15:1-58 (resurrection theology) by Elsa Tamez, Francois Kabasele Lumbala, and Daniel C. Arichea, pp. 185-200; and Rev 21:1-22:5 ("new heavens and a new earth") by Jorge Pixley, Timothy G. Kiogora, and Choan-Seng Song, pp. 201-20.

It is impossible to comment on all the essays, so I will highlight a few of the OT essays, which are in my area of expertise.

Miguez-Bonino's ("Latin") opening essay on Gen 11:1-9 augurs well for the collection as a whole. His ability to read the story of the tower as "the condemnation and defeat of the imperial arrogance and universal dominance represented by the symbol of Babylon" (p. 15) was both powerful and suggestive. Similarly, Song's ("Asian") reflection on the same passage raises questions not only about human attempts to represent and achieve power, but also about the divisiveness between humans that typically results.

Lumbala's ("African") reflections on the Ten Commandments include an interesting story about how a locally ritualized "covenant" brought important results in the resolving of a local crisis (stolen goods), which allowed Lumbala to reflect on the power of making covenants in societies where such agreements have deeply held meaning. The story illuminated possible elements of ancient Israelitic society that could be the basis of serious historical-critical investigation. Soares-Prabhu ("Asian") also reflected on the significance of equality before the law in the Hebrew tradition, and compared it to the struggle of Dalit Christians in India who struggle to rise above their "low-caste" status in a sharply divided social setting. The Commandments have often been compared to other ancient Near Eastern legal codes, but the stories and the contexts provided here contribute uniquely to the exegetical task and prove to be one of the great joys of this cross-cultural enterprise.

Hannah Kinoti's ("African") reflections on the social significance of shepherding in certain rural African traditions raises interesting questions about the economic and social role of shepherding in ancient Israelitic contexts. Nothing is "proven" by citing the African traditions and stories, but the strong suggestions from African examples create a solid basis for critical investigation, and this is also one of the most important products of cultural exegesis—newly formulated theories for critical testing that arise from culturally specific reflections.

I found a few reflections from cultural contexts to be disturbing. Lumbala's ("African") reflections on a Bantu context for reading the motif of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah raised difficult questions about the ability to be self-critical when reading Scripture within a cultural tradition. Examples that call for some kind of "appreciation" of the suffering imposed on women in certain cultures ought, in my opinion, to be a barrier to one's appreciation of such cultural traditions, no matter how deep-seated they may be. For example, the "rich tradition" of "military culture" in the Euro-American West ought to be condemned rather than extolled. Similarly, the figure of the Suffering Servant displays the triumph of a genuinely nonviolent conception of power, not the acceptance of meaningless suffering—and especially not the "appreciation" of the suffering of the weakest in our various societies, notably their women.

Croatto's comment about Jesus' "interiorization" of the Beatitudes separating them "completely from the so-called pharisaic ethic" (p. 118) struck me as an unnecessary perpetuation of the false pharisaic "foil" against which Jesus has been interpreted, although the essay was otherwise a profoundly interesting reflection. Questions arose in the course of my reading about the fact that many of the "contexts" for reading were local, or ethnically based, while others were decidedly nationalistic perspectives on certain texts. In what ways does nationalism exercise a forced unity in cross-cultural readings? This was an early critique of Liberation Theology when non-Latin populations struggled to incorporate "liberationist" readings of Exodus into their own contexts. But it needs to be said that, in their courage in being willing to open up the mysteries of their own "vested interests," these authors in the present volume hold up a mirror that effectively forces us to ask about our own partisan readings of biblical texts.

The purpose of this collection was clearly to be both impressionistic and suggestive. In this the authors and editors succeeded admirably. What remains is to engage in serious dialogue with these various "readings" in the hope of producing not just a collage of interesting interpretations (what Fernando Segovia has positively called "voices in the marketplace"), but a serious debate about what we have learned together as a result of the differing suggestions. To have started such a critical discussion in a review such as this would have been unfair, given the more modest goals of the book. Yet critical assessment of cross-cultural exegetical projects remains the dangerous ground of cross-cultural biblical study. Until we engage one another in these harder tasks, we have only indulged ourselves in fanciful statements of open-mindedness, or in what R. S. Sugirtharajah has pointedly called "exegetical apartheid." When these critically important arguments begin, I think this volume will prove to have been among the important early steps in the debate.

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RUTH SCORALICK (ed.), *Das Drama der Barmherzigkeit Gottes: Studien zur biblischen Gottesrede und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte in Judentum und Christentum* (SBS 183; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1999). Pp. 240. Paper DM 59.

The present volume is a collection of seven papers (and two extraneous contributions) from a symposium on the occasion of the sixtieth birthday of Dr. Erich Zenger in July, 1999, in Münster; the focus of the colloquium was the tension between the justice and