

1-1-2002

Review of Gordon Zerbe, Reclaiming the Old Testament: Essays in Honour of Waldemar Janzen

Daniel L. Smith-Christopher

Loyola Marymount University, dchristopher@lmu.edu

Repository Citation

Smith-Christopher, Daniel L., "Review of Gordon Zerbe, Reclaiming the Old Testament: Essays in Honour of Waldemar Janzen" (2002). *Theological Studies Faculty Works*. 302.
http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/theo_fac/302

Recommended Citation

Smith-Christopher, Daniel. Review of Reclaiming the Old Testament: Essays in Honour of Waldemar Janzen by Gordon Zerbe, ed. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64 no. 3 (July 2002): 602-603.

The authors emphasize the similarities and differences of prophecy as represented in the Mari letters, Neo-Assyrian literature, the Hebrew Bible, and early Islamic literature. The methodological essays reveal various difficulties of using the comparative method as well as some of the rich possibilities. Some of the difficulties noted include reconstructing historical phenomena from literary sources, selection of what is considered comparable data, and how to define “prophet” and “prophetic literature.” In all of these essays the reader can see the difficulty of defining the terms and of drawing conclusions concerning what is comparable, because, on the one hand, prophecy has significant variety both within a single corpus (for example, the Hebrew Bible) and between different cultural systems, but, on the other hand, it has similarities that demand such cross-cultural comparison.

Although these methodological issues are raised and appear to be taken seriously by the essayists, there is no common definition of terms throughout the volume. For example, Petersen can equate “different kinds of intermediaries” with “different kinds of prophets” (p. 37), whereas Nissinen wants to divide forms of divination (a form of intermediation) into two groups (inductive and noninductive) and wants to limit prophets to a subset of noninductive divination (pp. 107-11). This example helps us see the difficulty of defining these terms, because it appears that both Petersen and Nissinen are correct in that prophets in various cultures may be different types of intermediaries, but in the Neo-Assyrian literature the terms for prophets appear to refer to a well-defined group of intermediaries distinct from other intermediaries.

This diversity should not be seen as a weakness of the volume, but a strength challenging readers to assess carefully the complex issues of the topic. Readers who accept this challenge responsibly will certainly be rewarded with a heightened knowledge of the difficulties of the comparative method in the study of prophecy and some of the significant insights that the method can reveal.

Raymond F. Person, Jr., Ohio Northern University, Ada, OH 45810

GORDON ZERBE (ed.), *Reclaiming the Old Testament: Essays in Honour of Waldemar Janzen* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 2001). Can \$22.00; US \$16.00.

This festschrift honors one of the most important OT scholars in the modern Mennonite tradition, and the essays produced by colleagues and former students reflect Janzen’s influence and productivity as both a scholar and a teacher. The work is a well-deserved honor, and is very nicely produced by a Canadian Mennonite press. The essays reflect Janzen’s central interests, influences, and concerns, and represent a wide range of scholarly production. The contents are as follows:

“A Canonical Rethinking of the Anabaptist-Mennonite New Testament Orientation,” Waldemar Janzen (pp. 3-21); “The Old Testament in Mennonite Preaching,” Adolf Ens (pp. 22-32); “The Use of the Old Testament in the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*,” Helmut Harder (pp. 34-47); “Preaching and the Old Testament,” John H. Neufeld (pp. 48-66); “Can New Methods Free Us to Listen to the Old Testament?” Wesley J. Bergen (pp. 67-82); “Reaching for a Biblical Theology of the Whole Bible,” Elmer A. Martens

(pp. 83-101); "The Poetry of Praise: Some Comments on the Old Testament and the New Music," Victor Doerksen (pp. 105-14); "Hebrew Magic: 'If the Bible is so Patriarchal, how come I love it so much?'" Margaret Loewen Reimer (pp. 115-27); "Reading Psalm 139: Opting for a Realistic Reading," Lydia Harder (pp. 128-37); "The Prophetic Emphasis of the Sinai Tabernacle Pericope—Exodus 25:11-22," Millard Lind (pp. 138-45); "Missionary Vision and Practice in the Old Testament," Titus F. Guenther (pp. 146-64); "The Sword, the Stone and the Holy Grail," Jo-Ann A. Brant (pp. 165-74); "The Lord Has Truly Sent the Prophet," Daniel Epp-Tiessen (pp. 175-85); "Beware of Burning Bushes: A Biblical Theological Foundation for the Ministry of Political Advocacy," Dorothy Jean Weaver (pp. 186-97); "Framing Encounters the Bible: 'What if I don't want to compete against my neighbor down the road?'" Gary F. Draught (pp. 198-207); "Jubilee: 'This land is mine; you are aliens and tenants with me,'" Ben C. Ollenburger (pp. 208-34); "Forgiveness and the Transformation of Conflict: The Continuity of a Biblical Paradigm," Gordon Zerbe (pp. 235-58).

There is also a select bibliography of Janzen's writings, and a tribute written by Gerald Gerbrandt at the beginning of the work.

As a reviewer from outside the Anabaptist tradition of Christianity, I have to point out that a good deal of this discussion is understandably "in house" in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, and pertains to issues of Mennonite faith and practice (reflecting Janzen's own applied interests in biblical studies). But it is also quite true that most of the essays can be read with great profit by those outside the Mennonite tradition. Janzen's own work, for example, is rarely parochial, and Anabaptist theology and perspective have certainly had a demonstrably significant impact on historical, systematic, and biblical studies more generally in the last generation. The last four essays, by Weaver, Draught, Ollenburger, and Zerbe, are arguably the most widely applicable studies of the collection, and in this reviewer's opinion they are among the strongest of the book. Weaver reflects on her (then recent) visit to Israel/Palestine and how this influenced her reading of the Moses traditions. Draught, from a rural farming context, asks provocative questions about how the Bible informs ethical issues facing modern farming (a historically appropriate topic considering the rural nature of much of the North American Anabaptist heritage). Finally, Ollenburger and Zerbe offer quite sophisticated studies dealing with the subjects of jubilee, and conflict resolution, respectively. Their two essays make important contributions to the literature on both topics within biblical studies.

Anabaptist theological perspectives represent a genuinely alternative ecclesiological and theological tradition from which to examine issues of the church—*any* church. Anabaptist influences, notably, are clear in such otherwise "mainline" biblical scholars and theologians as Walter Brueggemann, Jürgen Moltmann, and Stanley Hauerwas, and this collection gives frequent occasion to see why this has been the case, although the present reviewer is not entirely objective on this matter, being also deeply influenced by Anabaptist thought. This collection is a welcome addition to Anabaptist theological reflection in North America.

Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA 90045