

Book review

Brad Schantz

Reclaiming the Old Testament: Essays in Honour of Waldemar Janzen, ed. Gordon Zerbe. Winnipeg: CMBC Pubns., 2001.

The title of this collection articulates well the primary passion of its honoree. This brief review will attempt to address whether the contents achieve Waldemar Janzen's desire: Just how useful are these essays in helping readers reclaim the Old Testament?

Overall, the Festschrift's contributions will be appreciated by a range of readers. The first section, "Freeing the Old Testament to speak," loosely addresses issues of how the Old Testament has been used by selected Anabaptists, as well as suggesting why and in what ways it should be reclaimed as authoritative canon. The second, "The Old Testament speaks," attempts to flesh out "reclaiming the Old Testament as conversation partner."

In the first section of the book, Waldemar Janzen's excellent introductory article summarizes his concern with a brief but comprehensive review of Anabaptist history and praxis in regard to Old Testament usage. Elmer Marten's piece on canonical theology offers a helpful discussion of the need for a pan-biblical theology (as well as a concise history of such theologies). John Neufeld's article contends effectively for an expanded use of the Old Testament in preaching. Wesley Bergen's attempt to exemplify a narrative style of reading Scripture is less useful in meeting the goal of the first section. The other articles in this section are simply statistical summaries and analyses of Old Testament references in selected Anabaptist writings, past and present.

It is interesting to note that at least two articles in the first section seem to evidence a trace of the very attitude that troubles Janzen. Helmut Harder's review of *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* notes that "the Confession does take a significant step forward in reinstating the appropriation of the Old

Testament,” while acknowledging that it “may not have gone far enough.” Yet Harder’s own terminology and approach throughout appear to view the former testament more as a tool to be used than as an authoritative canon on par with the New Testament (see p. 46, point 5). Less explicitly, Neufeld demonstrates a

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similar attitude. While advocating Janzen’s position, Neufeld comments that his “own position is that we ought to interpret the Old Testament in light of the New” (p. 61, n. 32).

Most articles in the book’s second section are excellent. Ben Ollenburger’s contribution on Jubilee (a thorough and panoramic piece) deserves special notice, as does Gordon Zerbe’s article on forgiveness. Both elucidate broad theological themes birthed and given substance in the Old Testament and finding continued maturation in the New. Dorothy

Jean Weaver’s piece on political advocacy begs for application. Similarly, the pieces by Lydia Harder (on using the whole of Psalm 139 in our worship), Gary Daught (on the state of farming and land in the Bible), and Daniel Epp-Tiessen (on criteria for discerning true and false prophecy in the Old Testament) invite interaction, as they reflect on what the Old Testament might say to us today. Using literary theory (as do Janzen and Jo-Ann Brant), Mary Loewen Reimer addresses the imaginative power of the Old Testament. Her challenge to the way we “protect” Scripture is sure to provoke needed discussion.

In the end, the collection admirably calls us to reexamine the role we give Old Testament Scriptures in our life and work. This Festschrift is itself somewhat reminiscent of the Bible, its diverse voices suggesting multiple interpretations of the issue at hand. Still, it is just that chorus that makes this book worth reading. As Mennonites, we believe we discern the voice of God in community and in listening to one another speak: these are the voices of our community.

About the reviewer

Brad Schantz is a May 2000 graduate of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, now working there in instructional technology support and as a language assistant. He plans to begin doctoral studies in Hebrew Bible this fall.