

Newsletter on

**African
Old
Testament
Scholarship**

7 • 1999

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Paper edition: ISSN 0808-2413

Online edition: ISSN 1500-7383

Website: http://www.misjons.hs.no/publikasjoner/ot_afr/

Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship aims at being a meeting place where African Old Testament scholars and non-Africans interested in African Old Testament scholarship can exchange ideas and information. The newsletter brings notices on research projects and teaching programmes as well as books and conferences related to African Old Testament scholarship. In brief articles it also comments upon pedagogical, methodological and research political questions. The readers of the newsletter are encouraged to use it as a means of communicating.

Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship is published biannually; in May and November. The paper edition is sent free of charge to African Old Testament scholars and African theological libraries (i.e. libraries in university departments of theology and religion, and degree granting seminaries and colleges). The annual rate for other subscribers is US \$ 8.00.

The newsletter is indexed in:

Religion Index One: Periodicals, the *Index to Book Reviews in Religion*, *Religion Indexes: Ten Year Subset on CD-ROM*, and the *ATLA Religion Database on CD-ROM*, published by the American Theological Library Association, 820 Church Street, Evanston, IL 60201-5613, USA; e-mail: atla@atla.com, web: <http://www.atla.com/>

Old Testament Abstracts, published by The Catholic Biblical Association, 294 Leahy Hall, The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC 20064, USA.

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The question of methodology

is important to all scholarship; also to Old Testament scholarship in Africa. The importance of the traditional methodological questions of *what*, *why* and *how*, should certainly not be neglected, but there is also a growing understanding of the importance of the questions of *where* and *with whom*: what are the implications of the (geographical, institutional, sociological, cultural, ideological) location of our scholarship, and who are our interlocutors or dialogue partners?

These questions are reflected throughout the present issue of the newsletter, in the book reviews as well as in the invitations to and reports from scholarly meetings. But they are especially addressed in Justin Ukpong's important discussion of the value of the historical critical approach to the Old Testament in an African context. Acknowledging its western epistemological context, Ukpong still argues that this approach is necessary for African Old Testament scholarship.

Knut Holter

Can African Old Testament scholarship escape the historical critical approach?

Justin S. Ukpong

The historical critical method, which came into use in biblical studies about the 17th century, constituted the only methodological paradigm for academic biblical studies up to the middle of the 20th century. However, about the 1940s, another approach, the literary approach, which was then called "new criticism", also came into use. While historical criticism focuses on the history behind the biblical text and uses historical tools of research, literary criticism focuses on the biblical text itself and uses the tools of literary criticism of classical literature. The two main paradigms today make up the grapevine of western academic biblical studies.

Most African biblical scholars today have been and continue to be trained in this tradition, including even those trained in Africa itself. Modern biblical scholarship in Africa is therefore a child of this western tradition of biblical scholarship. As a result, both the currents and the counter-currents of western biblical scholarship have found expression also in Africa, and many African biblical scholars are competent in the use of the western tools of biblical interpretation.

On the other hand, however, it is remarkable that Black African biblical scholars have also been able to forge a biblical interpretation strategy that is significantly different from that of western interpretation. In particular, this strategy consists in relating biblical research to specific issues and interests of the African context. Thus, unlike their western counterparts, these scholars focus their research not only on the context of the text (historical critical method) or on the text itself (literary criticism), though these are also important components of their methodology, but on the context of the recipients of the text, that is, the African context.

What one finds in Africa today is two strands of biblical scholarship. One is of western orientation and uses western critical tools without openly and directly relating the biblical text to the African context. The other is African in orientation; in it western biblical tools are used, but the text is interpreted in relation to the African context. Both strands exist side by side, and the same African authors are often found publishing in both. The interest of this essay is the latter strand.

Within the strand that relates the text to the African context there are many methods, and most of them either directly or indirectly use the historical critical method as an important component. I classify these methods that relate the biblical text to the African context in the following categories: Comparative studies, Evaluative studies, Africa in the Bible studies, Inculturation hermeneutics, Liberation hermeneutics, Black theology, and Feminist hermeneutics.

Those referred to as Comparative studies are interested in comparing the OT and African religion and culture. This type of study was very common up to the 1980s. Their analyses of the biblical text are based on insights from the historical critical method.¹ The same is true of the approach referred to as Evaluative studies. This is the most popular approach in use today in studies that relate the biblical text to the African context. It involves the study of the local situation in the light of biblical witness, and the historical critical method is used in analysing the biblical text.² The approach referred to as Africa in the Bible studies seeks to identify references to Africa in the Bible.³ It is an approach that seeks to show the importance of Africa in the world of the Bible. Inculturation hermeneutics referred to here is of recent development. It is an attempt to evolve a holistic approach to inculturation that would, among other things, be interested not only in the religious aspect of culture, but also in its secular aspects. As applied to biblical interpretation it is heavily dependent on the historical critical method for the analysis of the context of the biblical text.⁴ Liberation hermeneutics also uses the historical

¹ See, for example, K.A. Dickson, "Continuity and discontinuity between the Old Testament and African life and thought", K. Appia-Kubi & S. Torres (eds.), *African theology en route*. New York (1979) 95-108; J.S. Ukpong, *Sacrifice: African and Biblical. A comparative study of Ibibo and Levitical sacrifices*. Rome 1987; S.O. Fadeji, "Biblical and African names of God: A comparison", *Ogbomosho Journal of Theology* 5 (1990) 29-36.

² See, for example, G.O. Abe, "Berith: Its impact on Israel and its relevance to the Nigerian society", *Africa Journal of Biblical Studies* 1 (1986) 66-73; C.S. Mngadi, "The significance of blood in the Old Testament sacrifices and its relevance for the church in Africa", *Theologia Evangelica* 15 (1982) 66; K.J.N. Owan, "Championing the cause of the less-privileged: Human promotion in Nigeria in the light of the prophet Amos", *Revue Africaine de Theologie* 19 (1993) 37-57.

³ See, for example, D.T. Adamo, "The African wife of Moses: An examination of Numbers 12:1-9", *Africa Theological Journal* 18 (1989) 230-237; E. Mveng, "La bible et l'afrique noire", E. Mveng & R.J.Z. Werblowsky (eds.), *The Jerusalem congress on Black Africa and the Bible*. Jerusalem (1972) 23-39.

⁴ See J.S. Ukpong, "Rereading the Bible with African eyes: Inculturation and

critical method, so does Black theology.⁵ Feminist hermeneutics uses the historical critical method when necessary, but does not always depend on it directly, for often the literary approaches serve its purpose better. It would be difficult then to find any approach to biblical studies in Africa today that does not utilise the insights of the historical critical method or use the method itself directly.

In recent times, however, the historical critical method has come under heavy fire. It has been criticised for muting the text by focusing on its historical context, and it is for this reason, among others, that biblical critics turned to literary criticism. In the African context, it has also been argued that since biblical studies in Africa are interested in the message of the text, historical criticism, which is interested more in the history of the text than in its message, should be abandoned.

In view of the above, the question arises whether African biblical scholarship needs this method. In my view the answer is a qualified "yes". It is "yes" for three reasons. The first reason is that in the contemporary post-Enlightenment age, it is no longer possible to return to an uncritical use of the Bible in the academy. Therefore, African academic reading of the Bible must be critical. The second reason is that the lack of historical critical use of the Bible has, in the past, led to many abuses of the Bible in Africa, as for example in the apartheid system in South Africa in which ideological meanings were read into the biblical text. Historical critical reading of the Bible is therefore required to avoid such abuses. The third reason is that African biblical scholarship, unlike its western counterpart, is contextual in nature, that is, it links the biblical text to the African context. So that such a link may not be an imposition on the text, and for it to be credible, it is necessary to analyse the original context of the text to ensure that the two contexts are comparable and not completely divergent. The facility for doing this is not provided by the literary approaches but is the mainstay of the historical critical method. For this reason the historical critical method is more appropriate for African academic reading of the Bible, and has been more popular among African biblical scholars than the literary approaches. However, having said this, I

hermeneutics", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 91 (1995) 3-14; and idem, "The parable of the shrewd manager (Luke 16:1-139): An essay in inculturation biblical hermeneutics", *Semeia* 73 (1996) 189-210.

⁵ See, for example, I.J. Mosala, "Biblical hermeneutics of liberation: The case of Micah", R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Voices from the margin*. New York (1991) 104-116.

must add that it is necessary for this method to be used in such a way as to serve the needs of the African situation. The real question then is how this method is to be put to use in African OT scholarship. This is where I qualify my affirmative answer.

In this regard I want to make a distinction between using this method as an end in itself, and using it as a tool, which it is supposed to be. The problem with the historical critical method – bracketing out the issues that surrounded its origin – is that it has been seen as an end in itself rather than as a tool. At the turn of the century, such great confidence, characteristic of the Enlightenment era, was placed on it that it was hoped to enable the "voice of the Bible" to be heard without dampening "voice of the church". However, its failure in this regard has caused its reassessment by its ardent practitioners and advocates.

As it has been used in the West, this method has followed the history of ideas approach in its historical investigation. It is only in recent times that an existential approach has been introduced through the use of sociological and anthropological methods of investigation. For the historical critical method to attain optimal usefulness in the African context, the history of ideas approach must be replaced with an approach that focuses on the social and cultural history of the text's context. This means that the type of questions posed in the western approach will have to be replaced with those generated by insights obtained from the African context. Models of questions determined by the historical, sociological and anthropological contexts of Africa must be made to frame the historical enquiry in African biblical scholarship. What is important to note here is that the historical background of a text is multifaceted. What determines which facet is to be focused on in the process of exegesis is the scholarly community – based on the experience of their contexts (though this is hardly acknowledged). In addition to this, a positivistic view of history must be avoided. History must be seen as comprising both those things that can be identified with the senses and those that cannot be so identified. Above all, the presence of the supernatural in the biblical text must be granted.

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Report: Workshop in Stellenbosch, May 1999

Joseph Muutuki

May 14-15, 1999, the Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, invited a group of biblical scholars to an international workshop on "Old and New Testament studies in Africa: Learning from the past and planning for the future". The occasion for the workshop was the launching of the Stellenbosch database on the Bible in Africa (see p. 11 in this newsletter), and the participants came from Southern, Western and Eastern Africa, as well as Europe and the United States.

The first session focused on biblical studies and Bible translation in Africa. On the basis of the database, Peter Ngugi (University of Stellenbosch) surveyed Bible translations in Africa, and Eric Hermanson (Bible Society of South Africa) gave an overview of Bible translation in South Africa. Bernard Combrink (University of Stellenbosch) highlighted the need for an Afrikaans Bible for the deaf; the work is already in progress. Bobby Loubser (Univ. of Zululand, South Africa) surveyed the Bible in the Coptic tradition; presenting it as "pre-critical, naïve, metaphysical realism, akin to that of the church fathers". Modupe Oduyoye (Ibadan, Nigeria) read a paper on the place of Genesis in the Bible.

The second session focused on biblical studies and the economical and political contexts in Africa. On the basis of the database, Hendrik Bosman (University of Stellenbosch) showed how politics and economic matters have affected the interpretation of the Bible in Africa. Gerald O. West (University of Natal, South Africa) emphasised that the biblical hermeneutics of South African Black Theology is incomplete if it does not include the readings of ordinary African readers. Stephen Reid (Austin Seminary, USA) surveyed the interpretation of the Bible in Black Theology in the USA. Chris Manus (Awoluwo University, Nigeria) made a case study from Luke, arguing that the social injustice of for example Nigeria could be overcome in the years ahead.

The third session focused on biblical studies and the cultural contexts in Africa. On the basis of the database, Joshua Muyo (Cameroon/University of Stellenbosch) argued that there is a need for appreciating African culture and its religious thought form, and he showed through examples that religion and culture cannot be separated easily when interpreting the Bible. John S. Mbiti (Switzerland) asked whether the

Bible can be said to be in African religion and African religions in the Bible, and he pointed out the geographical and historical neighbourliness between Israel and African peoples, the religious similarities between the Bible and African religion, as well as the outstanding differences. Accordingly, Mbiti argued that there is a need for further research to explain the africanisms of the Bible. Danie van Zyl (University of Stellenbosch) presented a paper on traditional religion in South Africa and the interpretation of the Bible, arguing that the Bible should not be read negatively against the traditional religions as it had been in the past. Victor Zinkurature (Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya) pointed out that a major emphasis on the question of relevance in African biblical interpretation. Edwin Zulu (Justo Mwale Theological College, Lusaka, Zambia) discussed the question of ancestor veneration in relation to the interpretation of the Bible. Justin Ukpong (Cath. Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt, Nigeria) focused on the relationship between inculturation and liberation hermeneutical interpretations of the Bible, pointing out that the two are complementary and exist in a dialectical relationship.

The fourth and last session aimed at looking ahead and planning for the future. Liena Hoffman (University of Stellenbosch) outlined the role of women in biblical studies in Africa, comparing it to that of an Acacia tree: they found everywhere in Africa to the extent that we no longer notice them. So is also the role of women in biblical studies in the continent, as they have been participating in reading and studying the bible in Africa.

Herrie van Rooy (Potchefstroom University, South Africa) discussed the question of commentaries and academic material for Africa, pointing out the urgency in writing commentaries from African perspectives. Knut Holter (School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger, Norway) discussed the relationship between two contexts for biblical interpretation in Africa, the popular context – ordinary people's interpretation, and the academic context – the interpretation of universities and theological seminaries.

Professor Hendrik Bosman was the organiser of the workshop, and some of the papers will be published in the South African journal *Scriptura* next year (2000).

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Report: Symposium in Nairobi, October 1999

Knut Holter

An international symposium on "Africa and the Old Testament" was held in Karen, outside Nairobi, Kenya, October 13th-16th 1999. The symposium was organised by Kenyatta University, Catholic University of Eastern Africa (both in Nairobi), and the School of Mission and Theology, (Stavanger, Norway), and it was sponsored by the Norwegian Research Council. The aim of the symposium was to analyse African interpretation of the OT from two perspectives, now at the turn of the century; (i) *theory*: the African perspectives in today's methodological and hermeneutical situation; (ii) *material*: what has been focused, and where is there a need for more research?

The symposium had six sessions. The theme of the first session was "OT studies in Africa: the present situation". Jesse Mugambi (University of Nairobi) discussed the relationship between Africa and the OT from the perspective of love at first sight. Knut Holter (School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger, Norway), made a research historical analysis, outlining the status of OT scholarship in Africa at the turn of the century.

The theme of the second session was "Finding Africa in the OT". Marta Høyland Lavik (School of Mission and Theology) made a broad outline of the "African" texts and their African interpretations. A paper written by David Tuesday Adamo (Delta State University, Nigeria) on the OT images of the African nation of Cush was presented, and Tewoldemedhin Habtu (Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology) discussed the OT images of Egypt.

The theme of the third session was "Using Africa to interpret the OT". Louis Jonker (University of Stellenbosch, South Africa) advocated the need for a "communal" approach for reading the Bible in Africa, and Hendrik Bosman (University of Stellenbosch) discussed OT and African concepts of history. Joseph Muutuki (Daystar University, Nairobi) used the Kamba culture to interpret OT concepts of covenant, and Constance Shisanya (Kenyatta University, Nairobi) interpreted the OT narrative of Hagar through the eyes of an African woman. Jonathan Gichara (Kenyatta University) analysed the significance of names or name giving in the OT and in traditional Africa, and Sammy Githuku (St. Paul's United Theological College, Limuru, Kenya) analysed the narrative of David counting his men on the background of African taboos against counting.

The theme of the fourth session was "Using the OT to interpret Africa". Mary Getui (Kenyatta University) surveyed the role of the OT in African theology, and Serapio Kisirinya (Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda) surveyed the role of the OT in African church life. Madipoane Masenya (University of South Africa, Pretoria) exemplified the relationship between African and OT proverbs, and Margaret Aringo (Tangaza College, Nairobi) looked at work in the OT and in African tradition. Pauline Otieno (Kenyatta University) analysed the use of the OT in the Coptic Church of Kenya, and Philomena Mwaura (Kenyatta University) surveyed the use of the OT in the theology of African Instituted Churches. Bungishabaku Katho (Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology) analysed Jeremiah 22 with special regard to the exercise of political power in Africa, and Anne Nasimiyu Wasike analysed the creation of man and woman in Genesis 1-2 from an African perspective.

The theme of the fifth session was "Translating the OT in Africa". Peter Renju (United Bible Societies, Nairobi) outlined the UBS strategies for OT translation in Africa, and Leonidas Kalugila (UBS, Nairobi) surveyed some central issues of OT translation in Africa. Victor Zinkuratire (Catholic University of Eastern Africa) analysed examples of morphological and syntactical correspondence between Hebrew and Bantu languages.

The theme of the sixth session was "OT studies in Africa: the future". No papers were read here, but different work groups analysed the current situation with regard to textbooks and programs that reflect the African context, and they also discussed different research priorities.

The symposium had 30-35 participants from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa and Norway, and the organisers were Mary Getui (Kenyatta University), Victor Zinkuratire (Catholic University of Eastern Africa), and Knut Holter (School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger). The papers that were read will be published in a symposium volume, and the three organisers will serve as editors. One important spin-off effect of the symposium was the decision to establish an East African organisation for biblical studies. A committee headed by Victor Zinkuratire will prepare the formal launching of the organisation.

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Conferences

- ♦ Ibadan, Nigeria: The 2000 annual conference of the Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies (NABIS) is scheduled to be held from 11th to 14th July. The topic of the conference is "Current Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa". The venue is still to be decided. For further information, please contact the secretary of NABIS, Revd. Caleb O. Ogunkunle, Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.
- ♦ Cape Town, South Africa: 2000 World Congress on Religion, Cape Town, July 24-28, 2000. The congress is cosponsored by the Society of Biblical Literature, the American Academy of Religion, the South African Academy of Religion, the Old Testament Society of South Africa and the New Testament Society of South Africa. An open invitation is extended to scholars in any area of biblical and religious studies. All proposals are due by 15 December 1999. Membership in one of the sponsoring organisations is not required for participation or attendance. Preregistration is now possible. Discounts are available for African scholars and students. Mailing address: 2000 World Congress on Religion, Society of Biblical Literature, 825 Houston Mill Road, Suite 350, Atlanta, GA 30329, USA, fax: 1-404-727-3101. E-mail: mcolli@emory.edu. Web: <http://www.sbl-site.org/Congresses/IM/2000/2000-IM-Call.html>

News

- ♦ Ibadan, Nigeria: *Africa Journal of Biblical Studies* is again operative. The journal, which is published biannually by the Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies (NABIS), was launched in 1986 as a forum for biblical scholarship in an African context; for a presentation, see Gabriel O. Abe, "Africa Journal of Biblical Studies", *Newsletter of African Old Testament Scholarship* 3 (1997) 12-13. Due to economic difficulties, the journal was forced to take a pause in 1994, but now it is here again. Volume 13, nos. 1 & 2 (April and October 1998 in one issue), came recently from the press,

and it includes the papers read at the 11th Annual Conference of NABIS, convening at Ondo State University, Ado-Ekiti, in July 1998. Business correspondence: The business manager, African Journal of Biblical Studies, c/o Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. Editorial correspondence: The editor of *African Journal of Biblical Studies*, Dr J.O. Akao, Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

- ♦ Stellenbosch, South Africa: A database on the Bible in Africa has now been made accessible on the web. Over the past four years, 1700 books and articles regarding Old and New Testament research in Africa have been catalogued. The database uses *Religion Index's* search terms/thesaurus. To access the database:

1. Go to <http://www.sun.ac.za/local/library/catalogue.htm>
2. Choose <Telnet> and log in with the word opac
3. Follow the instructions on screen and type 1 <Enter> to activate the library's database.
4. Choose 8 <Change database>
5. Choose 3 <Theology Database> and search for specific Authors, Titles etc.

For a presentation of the project, see W.R. Kawale, "New data base: Bible in Africa research project", *Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship* 3 (1997) 3-4. The director of the project is Professor Hendrik Bosman, Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch, Private Bag X1, Matieland 7602, South Africa; e-mail: h1b1@akad.sun.ac.za

- ♦ Stavanger, Norway: A preliminary version of a web gateway on "Old Testament Studies in Africa: Recourse Pages", has recently been compiled and made accessible by Dr Knut Holter. The present version offers six sets of links to electronic resources on Africa and the Old Testament: (i) bibliographies, (ii) texts and lexical aids, (iii) journals and book reviews, (iv) organisations, (v) conferences, (vi) further references. Address: http://www.misjonshs.no/res/ot_africa/

Book notes

- ♦ Martin Nkafu Nkemnkia, *African vitality: A step forward in African thinking*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa [P.O. Box 49026, Nairobi, Kenya], 1999 (239 pp., \$ 8.00).

Analogous to but distinct from the western concept of *philosophy*, Nkemnkia, a Roman Catholic priest from Cameroon, has coined the neologism *vitality*: an African philosophical approach to human thinking, a conceptual vision of the whole of reality. Nkemnkia's program is developed through the three parts of the book: Part I surveys the questions and solutions of African thinking – from Tempels and Négritude and onwards; part II discusses African thinking from three perspectives: anthropology, cosmology and theology; and part III develops a synthesis of these perspectives: Nkemnkia's vitality. This is an important contribution to African philosophy and theology. But it is also important for biblical studies, as it describes and analyses some major aspects of the hermeneutical framework of biblical scholarship in Africa, a framework that seldom gets the attention it deserves from biblical scholars.

(Knut Holter)

- ♦ Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999 (Interventions; 2) (182 pp., £10.95).

What roles do biblical studies and biblical scholars play – and what roles should they play – in those contexts where the Bible is a significant text within poor and marginalised communities? This is the major question in a new book by Gerald O. West, Associate Professor at the School of Theology, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. West focuses on what he calls "socially engaged biblical scholars", and he analyses their roles in academic (vis-à-vis the scholarly readings of the Bible) as well as popular contexts (vis-à-vis the ordinary readings of the Bible). The book reflects West's personal commitment in these matters. However, the book is more than a personal testimony from a socially engaged biblical scholar. It is also more than a (most useful) introduction and sharp analysis of current hermeneutical positions. It is, actually, an invitation to join West and his vision of letting biblical scholarship serve marginalised groups and communities. In

the South African experience of struggle, according to West, "biblical interpretations do matter; they do shape our world" (p. 35). So is also the case elsewhere, and West's book provides tools for a better understanding of this.

(Knut Holter)

- ♦ Modupe Oduyoye, *The longest psalm: The prayers of a student of moral instruction*. Ibadan: Sefer Books, 1994 [118 pp.]; idem, *The alphabetical psalms: Systematic instruction for a life of faith and trust*. Ibadan: Sefer Books, 1995 [59 pp.]; idem, *Le-mah sabach-tha-niy?: Lament and entreaty in the Psalms*. Ibadan: Sefer Books, 1995 [99 pp.]; idem, *The psalms of Satan*. Ibadan: Sefer Books, 1997 [65 pp.]. [Sefer Books Ltd., 2, Alayande Street, Bodija Estate, Ibadan, Nigeria.]

The Nigerian author and publisher Modupe Oduyoye gained international attention with his *Sons of Gods, Daughters of Men: An Afro-Asiatic Commentary on Genesis 1-11* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books & Ibadan: Daystar Press 1984; repr.: Ibadan: Sefer Books, 1998). Throughout the 1990s he has followed this up with a series of commentaries on the Psalms. Over the years, Oduyoye has developed his own peculiar approach. As most commentators he tries to find a balance between historical and textual insight and pastoral awareness, but this is then combined with a strong focus on linguistic questions. Being trained as a linguist, Oduyoye is able to draw on his impressive knowledge of West African, Indo-European, and Semitic languages. And he uses this knowledge to draw lines from the Hebrew text of the Psalms and to various translations of the Old Testament and even to various other oral and literary traditions. However, this exciting approach is also Oduyoye's major problem. One is not always sure on what premises he draws such lines. When he goes from the Hebrew to the Arabic (and Quranic), it is of course possible to find historical links. And the same is probably also the case when similar links are drawn between certain words in Hebrew and in Hausa (via Arabic). But not all of Oduyoye's examples are that clear. Some of them rather seems to be a play with consonants or words. In spite of these methodological problems, Oduyoye's commentaries represent a fresh approach to the Psalms. Their focus on the relationship between biblical Hebrew and certain West African languages (and cultures) makes them a valuable tool for

further reflection on what it means to interpret the Psalms within an African context.

(Knut Holter)

- ♦ B.S.J. Isserlin, *The Israelites*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1998 (304 pp., £28.00)

Dr Isserlin, until his retirement Reader in Semitic Studies at the University of Leeds, draws upon his wide experience of university lecturing and field archaeology in this introductory survey. In three parts the book covers a wide range of perspectives on the world of the ancient Israelites: Part 1: The stage and its players – covers geography, origin, history and social structure. Part 2: The material culture – covers the architecture of towns and villages, agriculture, industry, trade and warfare. And part 3: The world of the spirit – covers language, religion and arts. The general approach of this book and the pedagogical skill with which the different topics are treated makes it a good textbook. However, it is an introductory textbook for biblical archaeology courses rather than Old Testament courses, as the book clearly reflects the author's scholarly background: there is a stronger focus and, generally speaking, a more updated discussion of archaeological topics compared to exegetical and theological topics.

(Knut Holter)

- ♦ Christo H.J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999 (Biblical Languages: Hebrew; 3) (404 pp., pb £18.95).

The authors teach Biblical Hebrew in South African universities; van der Merwe is also Director of the Centre for Bible Translation in Africa. On this background they have written a grammar which aims at serving as a reference work at an intermediate level for exegetes and translators of the Hebrew Bible. In a clear way and with relevant examples (and a relevant number of examples), the book provides its users with up-to-date information on the morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics of Hebrew verbs, nouns and other word classes. The authors claim that they do intend to be linguistically innovative; still, their sections on for example construct relationships and word order go beyond what one can find in corresponding grammars. It is certainly understandable that English (and to some

extent Afrikaans) grammar is the primary reference. However, from pedagogical as well as translation technical points of view, there is an increasing need for Hebrew grammars that also refer to grammatical phenomena in African language families; cf. V. Zinkurati's article in this newsletter 4 (1998) 14-19. That could perhaps be a new project for the Centre for Bible Translation in Africa?

(Knut Holter)

- ♦ W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1997 (xxi + 777 pp., \$ 48.00, £ 30.00).

Walter Brueggemann is Professor of OT at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, USA. He has published widely in OT studies, and he has now come up with a very interesting OT theology.

The book is organised into five main parts, each with several subchapters. As the subtitle of the work shows, Brueggemann presents Old Testament theology using the courtroom as a metaphor. Consequently, some of the parts are described with juridical terms: Israel's core testimony, Israel's counter testimony, Israel's unsolicited testimony.

Introductory, Brueggemann delivers a historical survey (pp. 1-114) of OT studies from the Reformation until the present time, emphasising that no scholar works in a vacuum: the contemporary political and sociological scene influences the scholar's theology. The first part, Israel's core testimony, has five sub-chapters, where Brueggemann from different perspectives presents examples of what is positively said about YHWH in the Old Testament. The utterances from Israel about YHWH are studied as they appear in verbal sentences, adjectives and nouns. Part two, Israel's counter testimony, has five sub-chapters, which all focus on texts that Brueggemann perceives as negative utterances about YHWH. Brueggemann shows that the counter testimony of Israel, YHWH's hiddenness, ambiguity and negativity, lives in profound tension with Israel's core testimony. One can here question Brueggemann's criteria, as some texts in this category just as well could have been placed in the first part. The third part, Israel's unsolicited testimony has six subchapters, and presents texts which, in Brueggemann's view, show the drama of partnership with YHWH. Israel, human persons, the nations, and

creation are all seen as showing the following drama of brokenness and restoration (which is the primary ingredient of life with YHWH): creation for glad obedience, a failed relationship, and rehabilitation for a new beginning. This idea of a drama of partnership with YHWH has the purpose of learning more about Israel's articulation of YHWH. Part four, Israel's embodied testimony, has seven sub-chapters, and steps away from the governing metaphor of testimony. In this part, several modes of mediation are seen as instituted by YHWH as gifts to Israel, for instance the Torah, Kingship, Prophets etc. Brueggemann considers Israel's testimony about these modes a way of describing YHWH. The connection with YHWH is from YHWH's side, the modes prove that YHWH wants to be related to Israel. Part five, Prospects for theological interpretation, has four sub-chapters. This part serves as a conclusion of the preceding parts, and reflects upon the postmodern reader's role in encountering the OT texts that articulate YHWH.

P.D. Miller (Princeton) has designated Brueggemann's book as the most comprehensive and important Old Testament theology to arise out of the American scene in this century. Whether Miller is right about the importance of Brueggemann's work is too early to evaluate. However, he is certainly right when it comes to the fact that this book reflects the American context. According to Brueggemann, every Biblical theology reflects the context of the writer, and so, of course, is also the case with his own writings. Two main objections to his book may exemplify weaknesses at this point. One is the absence of African and female voices. Their absence is to be regretted also as far as Brueggemann's metaphorical language from the courtroom by nature should wish to hear all the "testimonies"; however, the voices of Africans and women are described to be in the margin – by one who presumably places himself in the centre. A second objection to Brueggemann's book is his spelling out of the name of God. By frequently writing 'Yahweh', Brueggemann probably provokes Jewish readers, and this practice of his does not correlate with his wish to encounter with Jewish scholarship (p.735).

The book reflects Brueggemann's context as a white and male American coming from the reformed tradition. However, for readers who on these premises are interested in its concepts of OT theology, it is a valuable work from a profiled and productive OT scholar.

(Marta Høyland Lavik)

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As the very idea of this newsletter is to be a forum for exchange of ideas and information, the editor constantly needs response from the readers. Other scholars working with the Old Testament within the context of Africa are interested in your ideas and meanings, your research and book projects, your meetings and conferences.

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