

Reviews



ESTHER, by Carol M. Bechtel. Louisville: John Knox, 2002. Pp. 101. \$18.95 (cloth).

This volume has a series preface, acknowledgments, contents, introduction (1–20), a commentary on each of the ten chapters (21–84), an appendix on the six additions in the Septuagint text (85–98), and a three-page bibliography.

The work is in the Old Testament part of *Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* series with the purpose of providing a third kind of resource, written for those who teach, preach, and study the Bible in a community of faith (v). The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is the textual basis for the commentaries and the reader is expected to read the translation and the commentary simultaneously.

Bechtel discusses the Hebrew and Greek versions of Esther before examining the literary structure and style of the book. Bechtel follows Berlin, describing the literary type as “burlesque” (4), as a review of literary perspectives begins. Bechtel then looks at theological themes (proportion, living faith in an unfaithful culture, and power of the written word), concluding with a section for reading, teaching, and preaching (16–20). She ends this introduction by emphasizing that Christians can learn much from the Jewish community by reading the entire book, aloud, interactively, and repeatedly (20).

Bechtel then discusses each part or chapter (9 and 10 are taken together) and the additions from the Greek version. Throughout each discussion Bechtel raises some interesting thoughts and continuously refers the reader to the text of Esther and other biblical texts.

For Bechtel, the key to understanding the work is to comprehend the book’s form (4–5, 22). Apparently this means both the formal structure and the literary type used for the writing, since in the commentary section the literary characters and their roles and interactions are examined in the unfolding drama of Esther. The characters and their interaction with each other (and the audience) make for good reading and a compelling presentation in Bechtel’s weaving of the story to illustrate specific points and provide a basis for understanding the message of the writer(s). Following Bechtel’s advice, reading Esther all the way through in one sitting, especially after reading Bechtel’s introduction, was indeed a profitable means of appreciating the drama, providing a new understanding of the work and raising modern ethical questions.

Bechtel’s presentation is interesting and provocative, raising questions leading to further discussion and contemplation of this little-read work in the Christian community. The Jewish community reads the complete book of Esther during the feast of Purim, which draws its origin from this book. The commentary by Bechtel should be read in its totality—not by picking up the book to look for comments on the few verses mentioned in the lectionary in Year B. To understand the lectionary passage, it makes sense to read the whole book, and in so doing the reader is drawn into a discussion of modern issues such as living in contemporary culture, the importance of the written word, and the current situation of defense/retribution/preemptive strikes that have been discussed in recent days.

The section on date and historicity (2–4)

discusses whether or not the document depicts or originates in the period in which the story occurs. Bechtel correctly concludes that it does not come from the early Persian period. Yet, it could have been helpful to have had a section on the Persian period, especially with information on what we know about manners and customs at the royal court and how the empire functioned. This section should include notes on nonbiblical material from the period to provide a background for the story. To be sure, some of this information is found in the commentary section, but for the pastor to be able to read a short section on Persian Empire practices and policies before embarking on a read of Esther would be helpful. One example is found in the discussion of court rules about not approaching the king without being recognized. Here Bechtel concludes that the story may be murky history, but it is mesmerizing drama (48). Another example is the argument made about the importance and role of the Jews in the Persian Empire, that their destruction represents a valuable loss of property to the king (70). An explanation of this assertion would have been helpful.

A series of interesting questions arises in chapters 8 and 9 (especially 75–76). Bechtel brings out the importance of the replacement of one edict with another—one group planning to kill and take the property of the other, then the reversal of the situation. What was the situation and how ought one to respond in a reversal of fortune situation? What does it mean to reverse the situation? Did the community-at-large convert to Judaism as in 8:17 (76)? Or was this another fantasy or literary device to vindicate the Jewish community in light of their perceived superiority in the Persian Empire?

All told, the commentary by Bechtel is a good and important contribution to understanding the book of Esther. The emphasis on literary material and the type of burlesque literature adds some new insights and raises a number of questions for the reader who engages the text with regard to how it can be helpful to the faith community. Any reader concerned with ethical is-

sues can be challenged to think in new ways by reading Bechtel's introduction, the NRSV text of Esther, and the commentary.

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UNDERSTANDING OLD TESTAMENT

ETHICS, by John Barton. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003. Pp. 212. \$24.95 (paper).

John Barton, in his book *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*, is primarily concerned with interpreting biblical narrative, the most often neglected genre of the Old Testament in the field of ethics. Besides pointing out some shortcomings and dead-ends in the research of OT ethics, he offers a starting point, guidelines, and “red flags” for pursuing this subject. Barton not only turns the attention of professionals to the contribution of Bible stories to OT ethics, but, more importantly, equips an intermediate Bible reader (pastor, teacher, lay minister, etc.) to discern the *moral vision* of the OT in its most familiar parts. For it is undeniable that Bible stories and their interpretations have had a profound impact on the ethical behavior of Jews as well as Christians of each era.

Barton names three basic problems that hinder an ordinary reader from the quest for a moral vision in the OT narrative: first, the stories “are often far from morally edifying”; second, “it is often not easy to decide what is being commended, what deplored”; and third, “there is a general problem about describing what may be called the moral world of biblical narrative” (3). He insists that to eliminate these difficulties we have to employ not just the main exegetical and hermeneutical tools, but also a good portion of sociology and psychology.

Such a quest is also very rewarding for at least two reasons: First, narrative texts “embody and commend a range of virtues and good actions which must have been a part of the culture from which the texts come, even though they find little echo in legal or sapi-

ential teaching” (7), and effectively substitute for the abstract terms missed by Westerners. For example, forgiveness between humans is not mentioned in law or wisdom, but it is certainly a theme of several OT stories. Second, whereas law and wisdom appeal mostly to reason, the narrative genre addresses the whole person. As Barton suggests, some stories (especially in Genesis and the books of Samuel) were “conceived as a vehicle for presenting insights into the moral life of human subjects in such a way that the reader would be challenged and stimulated to thought and action” (10).

To be sure, other cultures have been using stories for delivering ethical insights as well. The reason for this is described in Martha C. Nussbaum’s account of Aristotle: “Principles [understand laws]...fail to capture the fine detail of the concrete particular, which is the subject matter of ethical choice. This must be seized in a confrontation with the situation itself” (as quoted by Barton, 57)—and a story provides the particulars. Thus narrative is not only a legitimate, but a more appropriate and accurate form for communicating ethics than general rules or regulations, because it reflects the complexity of a particular situation and life itself.

Barton rejects the notion of building the moral vision of the OT around a “core” or unifying principle. Using J. Hempel and W. Eichrodt, he illustrates why the systematization of OT ethics appears to him “a rather artificial construct, which purchases coherence and system at the price of historical objectivity and verifiability” (15). He rightly points out that ancient Israel was, just like any other society, far from being homogeneous, and calls for a solid sociological analysis of Israelite society in various stages of its existence. Whether historians can provide sociologists with reliable data is another question, and Barton’s section on Amos’s oracles serves as a great illustration of this difficulty. Nevertheless, he insists that any reconstruction of ethical notions “must be marked with two coordinates—we must indicate to which social group *and* to which period it belongs” (22).

Besides these more general problems of

OT scholarship, Barton challenges the following “rationale” of OT ethics: since law is derived solely from a divine source, obedience to God is the only ground for ethical conduct. He argues for at least two additional presuppositions: existence of conformity to a pattern of natural order (so-called “natural law”) and the notion of imitation of God. Barton focuses mostly on the former, but offers a very helpful description of the rationale behind the imitation of God: “Humans are so created as to be inherently sacrosanct....God is indeed the ‘source’ of this sacrosanctity as of everything else, but it is misleading to see God’s role in this connection as that of a lawgiver. Rather, God is our creator and has made us to have a certain character which must be respected” (34). It seems that if Barton were to choose a unifying theme of OT ethics, it would be the same as E. Otto’s—the idea of imitating God, or, in the words of Lev 19:2, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”

Barton understands “natural law” not as a part or a subdivision of “revealed law” (e.g., K. Barth), but as of an alternative source—“principles seen as inherent in the way things are” (48). This does not mean that the two are opposed as respectively divine and human. “Natural law can perfectly well be theological” and “natural law and positive law, in classical theory, are two ways by which ethics flows from God” (50). Barton convincingly shows the existence of natural law in Amos, Isaiah, and Daniel. In this part of the book, he also illustrates his proposed multitasking method of pursuing a moral vision in the prophetic books of the OT. Yes, it takes a lot of work, but it works!

Understanding Old Testament Ethics is a must-read for everyone who wants to gain proper ethical insights from the OT narratives. And who does not?

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CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY: PROPHETIC REASON, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND CHRISTIAN IMAGINATION, by Gary M. Simpson. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001. Pp. 178. \$14.99 (paper).

A colleague of mine recently handed me a clipping from the *Wall Street Journal* in which an Episcopal layman lambasted Bishop Griswold for what the layman saw as the bishop's repugnant, anti-Iraq-war rhetoric. The bishop was told to keep his politics to himself and certainly to keep them out of religion. For the letter writer religion is a thing between himself and God.

This attitude has been seen repeatedly in the last quarter century when it has become apparent that much of the laity has been more socially conservative than the clergy. The clergy have often taken a prophetic stance while the laity have wanted to stay in a protected religious environment.

Gary Simpson believes that this situation is changing—churches are recovering their prophetic missions. Local congregations are becoming the place where ideology is exposed and truth is recognized and communicated. In this book, he provides a theological understanding of why this should be expected—specifically, how the Christian prophetic tradition and critical theory can be combined to supply the self-understanding and motivation for congregations to reclaim their prophetic mission.

Simpson leads the reader from the celebration of reason in the Enlightenment, to nineteenth- and twentieth-century applications of reason, to social analysis in the sociological tradition and in particular in the Frankfurt School of Social Research. Enlightenment thinkers rejected external authority and instead had a renewed confidence in the ability of human reason to understand social life. From the Enlightenment came a variety of political and economic revolutions, producing changes that both enslaved and freed humanity. Simpson picks up the liberating thread that continues in all modes of social analysis in which external authority is rejected, human reason and divinity are celebrated, and hu-

mans are allowed to act as co-creators of the world.

Simpson observes that North America has moved beyond Christendom. No longer does Christianity have the cultural hegemony that it had in this country in the 1950s. Though a source of lament and death for some congregations, other congregations are flourishing with a new understanding of themselves and their role in a post-Christian society. Simpson applauds this and intends his analysis to provide the justification and motivation for this movement. Simpson believes that this new understanding must welcome pluralism and understand its own faith as an ongoing, unfinished creation.

Simpson uses the critical social theory of the Frankfurt school to recover liberating reason, uses Paul Tillich's understanding of prophetic reason and grace to provide a transcendental basis for the reason, and suggests the congregation as the ultimate source of this transcendence.

For critical theory, Simpson taps Jürgen Habermas, the present-day carrier of the Frankfurt school tradition, who uses modern philosophical understanding of language communication to produce a critical theory that is based on an intersubjective development of reason and action. Habermas stands in a significant tradition in sociology that emphasizes societies and cultures as humanly constructed entities. Such societies and cultures may have calcified into "social facts," but they were created and are maintained through human interaction.

Modern society puts significant obstacles in the way of this rational, communicative construction and reconstruction of our public life. Simpson highlights the significant power of the economy and the state to repress—to turn the "life world," as Habermas calls it, the realm of public life, into a repressive, caricatured version of what our citizens would want if they cared, if they were engaged in life-world work. The fact that many do not care makes it easier for the powerful to take it over for their own purposes. And we suffer, not just from not participating but from not experiencing the

support of the community. It is hard to be human in private, in isolation. The community, the life world, as problematic as it is or may seem to be, is absolutely essential for us. Reclaiming it is one of the missions of the church as well as the mission of all citizens.

Since Habermas's theory of communicative rationality is a social and ethical analysis that exists without ontological support, Simpson turns to Paul Tillich's 1920s understanding of rational criticism as being part of prophetic critique. Prophetic critique implies a transcending of existential being, which is to say faith. Prophetic critique is also the herald of grace in which it finds its depth and its limit. Furthermore, grace, Tillich argues, may find its form in the Protestant congregation.

The church, for Simpson the Protestant congregation, is in a unique position to foster rational criticism because it understands that reason is grounded in ontology. In the process of the congregation's existence, it generates and regenerates ontologies, exposes ideologies, and reformulates ethics. The process is living and is not dependent on the analysis of any religious professional.

The resulting ethics demand that we enable humans to create and maintain life. This mandates some kind of democracy and a repudiation of powers that would try to control public life (colonize the life world, in Habermas's language) and obscure their efforts by explaining that their efforts are really for the public good. To indicate what he has in mind, Simpson describes two moral/ethical traditions that he rejects:

The agonistic tradition—This tradition regards itself as the only truth and wants dominance over all others. It lives on sound bites, clichés, and stereotypes. It has no aspiration for serious social change. This tradition maintains the political and economic power of those on the top of a hierarchic social order (114–122).

The liberal tradition—This tradition squelches the moral elitism of the agonistic tradition by silencing public expression of moral traditions. Moral traditions, and their congregational carriers, may have no

social functions. Without any ethical grounding, civil society withers and the state becomes dominant and unaccountable (137–141).

In contrast to these traditions, Simpson suggests that the theological position that he has developed leads to a communicative mode of civil society. This tradition welcomes common and public discussion of questions of moral truth. It anticipates manipulations and systematic distortions by self-interested parties. It realizes that every moral consensus is fallible, and believes that finding and claiming the moral truth will be an ongoing process. In spite of the fact that this tradition has no eternal truth, its truth is entirely adequate to show the heartlessness of the state and of the economy in the modern world and to call for the restriction of their authority. Simpson's book is unique in providing a useful explication of Habermas's critical social theory and showing its applicability to congregational social critique.

An alternative, but in many ways similar, approach for addressing the issues that Simpson raises is constructive postmodernism as articulated by authors such as David Ray Griffin and John B. Cobb Jr. Constructive postmodernism, like critical theory, embraces reason, and like Tillich, provides a transcendent basis for embracing reason. In the case of constructive postmodernism, the transcendent basis is an ontology found variously in Heraclitus, in the Buddhist tradition, in Hegel, and in Alfred North Whitehead, which asserts that reality is not found in substances but rather in the flow of events. In this ontology, community is the primary experience of the human. The individual could not be, apart from the community. It follows then that critical reason and the transcendence that grounds it are communal products.

In rejecting at least aspects of modernity, constructive postmodernists are achieving goals similar to Simpson's. Modernity emphasizes the centralized power of the state and the economic power of the global marketplace. Constructive postmodernists see politics and economics primarily at the lo-

cal level where such institutions can be a close reflection of the human community that created them and which they serve.

Professor Simpson's book is an important contribution. It provides a way for educated laypersons to understand social theory, to hear the call to use that theory in critique of the ideology and institutions that surround us, and to experience the communal grace that makes this possible. Critical ethical reflection by participants in our common life, as envisioned by Simpson, is desperately needed. His argument for the possibility and for the unique role of continued ethical reflection in churches is very welcome. I trust that this book will encourage readers and congregations to take on this role for the sake of their communities and for our world.

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THE DA VINCI CODE, by Dan Brown.
New York: Doubleday, 2003. Pp. 454.
\$24.95 (cloth).

By now, Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (with more than 6 million hardback copies in print) has been decoded, debunked, deciphered, and deconstructed by so many people in so many ways that further critical assessment is perhaps beating a dead horse. Still, books attempting to separate fact from fabrication continue to appear under predictable headings such as *Breaking The Da Vinci Code*, *Cracking Da Vinci's Code*, *Decoding Da Vinci*, etc. It seems one person's dead horse is another's cash cow. Whatever the case, one more consideration of Brown's best-selling novel, especially in regard to its usefulness for pastors and other Christian educators, can't hurt.

For those Rip van Winkles out there looking for some clues about what all the fuss is about, a brief description of this fictional (clue #1!) whodunit is in order. *The Da Vinci Code* opens with a murder. Rather than solving the murder, however, this "mystery-thriller" is about solving the clues left behind by the murder victim, one Jac-

ques Sauniere (clue #2), curator of Paris's Louvre Museum. Called to the murder scene are forensic cryptologist Sophie Neveu (clue #3), and Robert Langdon, a professor of "symbology" at Harvard. Before you can say "Holy Grail Legends!" (clue #4), the unlikely couple are off on a twists-and-turns-filled chase that involves or implicates the following: a French police chief, an English eccentric, and an albino giant, as well as Constantine the Great, Leonardo Da Vinci, and Walt Disney (*The Little Mermaid*: clue #5), not to mention the usual suspects in literature of this type: the Roman Catholic Church and enigmatic societies like Opus Dei and the Knights Templar (clue #6). In the end, let's just say that Mary Magdalene turns out to be the bearer (clue #7) of much more than just good news. The conclusions drawn may just inspire you to join ranks with the Sauniere Society (yes, there is one) and book your pilgrimage to Rennes-le-Chateau. Or not. Still, you may find yourself wondering if there isn't more to Luther's Rose (Rosy Cross? Rosicrucian?) than originally believed.

Indeed, much of the esoterica required for a good grail hunt is dumbed-down here by Brown. That is, it is clear that Brown is writing for an audience of initiates; his frequent references to the supposed underbelly of ecclesiastical establishment are carefully, even pedantically, explained. In this regard, *The Da Vinci Code* more or less proves the dictum: *a little knowledge is a dangerous thing*. On the other hand, if it's a full survey of the truly obscure and oblique you seek, check out Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* or at least his *The Name of the Rose*. In fact, it is Eco, speaking through a character in *Pendulum*, who perhaps best describes grail questors like those found in and inspired by *The Da Vinci Code*: "If two things don't fit, but you believe both of them, thinking that somewhere, hidden, there must be a third thing that connects them, that's credulity" (Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*, trans. William Weaver [Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989] 43).

Indeed, even readers with a superficial grasp of history will find themselves embarrassed at the level of credulousness exhibited by the book's protagonists, especially the Harvard professor Langdon. As Langdon nods in agreement with increasingly fantastic statements—such as: “The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great” (231) and “establishing Christ's divinity was critical...to the new Vatican power base” (233)—one begins to wonder if the true object of Dan Brown's libel is not Constantine or the Roman Church but Harvard University! Yet Brown's motives, though interesting for speculation, are beside the point. Instead, the point is that people who have read the book—people whom you serve—want to know if such statements are true, providing at last a bit of *raison d'être* for the church historian. That is, part of the fun and function of *The Da Vinci Code* is that it has made folks curious about Christian history, giving countless pastors and others an opportunity to show what they know in adult forums everywhere.

“Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false,” proclaims “The Teacher” in Brown's book (235). It is nearly impossible for Christian teachers to resist such bait; those who take it will want to concentrate their efforts on the material found in chapter 55 of *The Da Vinci Code*. The breathtaking assertions found in this chapter provide the perfect jumping-off point for presentations about (1) the formation of the New Testament canon, (2) the development of the doctrine of Christ's two natures, and (3) the rise, demise, and present-day resurrection of second-century Gnosticism.

Beyond traditional apologetics, *The Da Vinci Code* inspires other considerations as well, not the least of which concerns an accounting of the book's appeal, especially among women. It is not by accident that the name of Brown's heroine is *Sophie*. Although she spends much of the novel being educated by males, Sophie embodies (literally as it turns out) the rediscovery of Dame Wisdom and the attempt to restore gender

equilibrium to a deity perceived to be male-dominated. Still, one wonders if the introduction of *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage) and the alleged coupling of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is the best way to stick it to patriarchy. Whatever the case, presenting a solid Bible study series featuring women and their roles in the New Testament and in the early church will be a step in the right direction for those experiencing the vacancy of female voices within the tradition.

Finally, to aid in the formulation of a response to the novel, two relevant resources are worth mentioning: (1) *Decoding The Da Vinci Code*, an audio CD available from Luther Productions, featuring interviews with four seminary professors taking on the issues mentioned above, and (2) Steve Kellmeyer's *Fact and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code* (Bridegroom Press, 2004), which takes the reader through Brown's book page by page and offers straightforward, concise information regarding dozens of *Da Vinci Code* subjects.

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LOST ICONS: REFLECTIONS ON CULTURAL BEREAVEMENT, by Rowan Williams. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2002. Pp. 190. \$15.95 (paper).

While it is rightly said that one cannot tell a book by its cover, it is nonetheless often true that one can tell *something* by a cover. After all, publishers do hire designers to pique reader interest. In this regard, Morehouse Publishing obviously had something in mind when they used a picture of bearded and mitered Archbishop Rowan Williams for the 2002 reprint of this book. The author's ecclesiastical title, *Archbishop*, would seem perhaps premature, for the book was first published in 2000, some years before his enthronement. Besides, his clerical collar in the cover photograph is still black, not archepiscopal purple. Still, the kindly Williams pastorally gazes beyond the book title, and he soulfully looks at the

reader, inviting him or her to consider *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement*.

At the outset the author briefly describes his understanding of what icons are, regarding them as “structures for seeing and connecting in the light of something other than our decisions, individual or corporate” (4). He goes on to admit that he borrows and extends the term as a means of describing a number of cultural areas whose sense-making capacities are imperiled. In separate chapters Williams proceeds to discuss his practical and iconic concerns: childhood, charity, honor, remorse, lost souls.

By alluding to certain oppressive cultural pressures like the media, consumerism, and market metaphors, he engages in an extensive conversation with regard to the erosions of selfhood in North Atlantic modernity. In spite of his benign, even kindly expression on the cover, Williams lets it be known that “this is a book attempting to articulate *anger*—not anger only, and not necessarily an anger that requires more and more insistent and explicit statement, but anger nonetheless, at a recent history of public corruption and barbarity compounded by apathy and narcissism in our imaginative world” (9).

His anger wells up and spills over the subjects he chooses to discuss: child abuse, feminist issues, violence in sport, even a rakish monarchy. Writing from within the Church of England, he often mentions matters perhaps more familiar to the British reader, like the Scott Report on arms dealing and the 1996 “Values and Education in the Community” for the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority. Beyond these matters he mentions the simultaneous demystifying yet remystifying death of Princess Diana in 1997, which he regards as a lost sacredness. “The ‘lost icon’ was not simply the dead princess; it was a whole mythology of social cohesion around anointed authority and mystery—ambiguous, not very articulate and not easy for either left or right in simple political terms” (66). Williams keeps his eye on the American reader, however, including sprinkled references to

Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, Madonna, and the Muppet Workshop.

The chapter on “Remorse” is typical of Williams’s consideration of lost icons. He notes that public power—even in disgrace—means never having to say you’re sorry (95). From that basic observation he launches into a discussion of the damaging effects of the corporate ethos of political life (it is here that he mentions Ronald Reagan and the Iran-Contra scandal). Williams denounces the presence of professional image-managers, the absence of a sense of “honour,” and the pressures of shame and irony, all of which play a role in our culture’s loss of *healthy* remorse. In talking about our corporate and individual need for penitence, Williams affirms the uncomfortable, yet healing, potential of remorse, for what it offers “is something quite other, and not by any means so attractive: the possibility of *thinking* history, living consciously in time” (109).

As bracing as much of Williams’s observations are, they can at times be abstruse. At one point I began to notice how long his sentences were and how difficult it was to keep track of his thought through the thicket of verbiage. Sentences of 75 and even 85 words in length are not uncommon—and one marathon sentence clocks in at about 109 words (145–146). When the discourse deals with such abstract matters as mutable reality, being at one with oneself, and the frustration of looking for self-presence (the concerns in that long sentence), one is apt to lose the trail. This is not a book to read when drowsy.

Another disconcerting aspect of the book is the author’s inclination to circle around a subject without actually settling down and calling something by name. For instance, Williams discusses the free self as opposed to the self-as-victim, the consuming self/abstract entitlements, and the abiding loss of something like moral property (109–115). One gets the impression that he is talking about something like sin here; yet the word is not used. Later, in a paragraph where he talks about the contingent other, the non-contingent other, the other that is

sufficiently other, the “non-existent Other,” and the absent Other, one senses that Williams is struggling with the existence of God. If so, why not say so?

In spite of the opaque quality of some of the language, Williams does thoughtfully raise a number of issues. His almost melancholy elegy for the drift away from charity is worth keening. He accounts for that loss by pointing to our lust for destructive-competitive activities helped by the intensity of media attention (62). Elsewhere he eloquently pleads for the restoration of civil speaking and listening, for the shared act of conversation (81–87). At yet another point he observes that art possesses the capacity to help in regenerating lost icons. We should “think of how some of the very *processes* of art as well as its content enlarge the imagination of social belonging by insisting upon patterns of relation drastically different from those that prevail in a context where goods are competed for” (88).

The point of *Lost Icons*, Williams argues, is to become aware of how contemporary culture nurtures or fails to nurture trust (176). He tries to raise awareness by describing how certain icons of culture, especially the icon of the lost soul, are endangered, but not irretrievably. Even though much has already been culturally lost, there is the tantalizing possibility of retrieval by a recovered confidence in the therapeutic Other (God?). Whatever the risk, “we have to force ourselves to talk, not of consolation but of hope, of what is not or cannot be lost” (187). One is inclined to infer that Williams is talking about faith in the One toward whom the icon directs our gaze.

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ELVIS IN JERUSALEM: POST-ZIONISM AND THE AMERICANIZATION OF ISRAEL, by Tom Segev, trans. Haim Watzmann. New York: Owl Books, 2003. 180 pages. \$12.00 (paper).

The latest book from Israeli journalist Tom Segev has appeal beyond its catchy title. While many Americans have interest in becoming acquainted with the internal complexities of Israel, the overtly religious content of political discourse concerning the region—from West Bank settlers to Hamas to American congresspersons describing themselves as Christian Zionists—beckons Christian leaders to educate themselves regarding this mythologized region. *Elvis in Jerusalem* provides an accessible path into this dense subject.

Engagingly structured around four statues, Segev’s historical and cultural essay introduces readers to various permutations of the movement for Jewish nationalism—Zionism—from the communitarian concerns of Theodor Herzl to its present, militarized expression. Throughout, Segev traces the cultural effects on Israel of its close relationship to the United States.

The term “post-Zionist” was introduced into the Israeli lexicon by conservatives decrying revisionist approaches to Israel’s early history, investigations that belie most claims of the young state’s righteous beginnings. Segev’s last book—National Jewish Book Award winner *One Palestine, Complete*—is one such example. Readers of *Elvis in Jerusalem* should thus be aware that they are entering a debate in which Segev is a spirited participant.

Segev’s central concern for Israel is that it be both “a Jewish and a democratic state” (150). Both traits are challenged by the state’s unexpectedly multicultural populace: in addition to discussing the problem of Israel’s increasing Palestinian population, Segev convincingly argues that Israel was intended to be an outpost for western European Judaism rather than the worldwide Jewish community (32–33). Israeli multiculturalism necessitated by the European Holocaust gave rise in the 1960s to

American-style movements for racial equality—some members of the Sephardic community, for instance, called themselves Black Panthers (64)—which in turn informed Israel's peace movement after 1967.

The 1967 war brought other changes as well. With the conquest of holy sites such as the Western Wall, popular expressions of Zionism came to embody a religious fervor foreign to the movement's secularist origins. With groups such as Gush Emunim declaring that "the state is holy in any and every case," Segev notes that Zionism itself was transmuted into another thing: "Messianic patriotism identified itself as true Zionism, but it in fact dragged the state into a manifestly post-Zionist reality" (91). It is in this Zionist environment, Segev implies, that American characteristics like individualism and self-interested pragmatism have flourished.

While the descriptive work of *Elvis in Jerusalem* is valuable, Segev is not able to offer hard conclusions. In part, this is because he does not ask hard questions. He does not sufficiently consider perpetual war as the context of post-1967 Zionism and therefore does not ask the critical question of who benefits from this lack of normalized relations.

Still, by discussing Zionism as a matter of debate rather than a static ideology, Segev introduces readers afresh to the complexities of the Jewish and democratic state it helped found. Hope for a moribund Middle East can perhaps be found in such dynamism.

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