

rape of Zion is outrageous, unbearable, and unspeakable is surely the point of the imagery. To be invaded by another country, to be victims of attack, occupation, and dislocation is outrageous, unbearable, and unspeakable” (55). Jeremiah’s image of a violent God is not *the* answer, but another provisional explanation of the disaster.

The weeping poems portray well the state of shock characteristic of undergoing trauma and disaster. Spirits are numbed, emotions turned off. A first stage of recovery involves telling one’s experience, finding language to name the disaster. These poems serve “to rouse up grief like mourning women whose wailing and weeping makes space for tears, awakens sorrows, and releases buried feelings from benumbed spirits” (68).

The confessions may “serve as ready-made prayers for victims of trauma and disaster” (82). Jeremiah’s lamentation “gathers in the afflicted, draws them back from social isolation, articulates doubt, and shows how it is possible to cling relentlessly to God in the wreckage of their world” (88).

Jeremiah’s sermons offer three separate rationales for the nation’s fall, each explaining the disaster with confidence and simplicity. From the perspective of trauma and disaster studies, this is appropriate and helpful because “when experienced events cannot be understood, the human mind returns again and again to the event to try to make sense of it in a repetitive and compulsive way” (94).

The “little book of consolation” is commonly ascribed to a later author. The perspective of trauma and disaster studies supports that conclusion. “The vision of hope contained in these hopeful chapters would be meaningless for victims immediately upon the heels of disaster” (107).

Reading O’Connor’s book was not only fascinating from an intellectual point of view, but also an emotional and cathartic experience of reengaging my own experiences of pain and struggle with God. Her exposition of texts is in-

sightful, and her approach offers wisdom for ministering to those in the midst of trauma or disaster.

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**THE VIOLENCE OF SCRIPTURE:
OVERCOMING THE OLD TESTA-
MENT’S TROUBLING LEGACY**, by
Eric A. Seibert. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012.
Pp. 220. \$23.00 (paper).

Some years ago, I deemed it time to open the Bible at Genesis and read it straight through. I didn’t finish (though I *did* make it through Leviticus, to 1 Samuel). But what struck me most was the body count. The story of God and God’s people, as told throughout the stories and histories of the Old Testament, contains beautiful stories of God’s faithfulness and redemption, but they are woven in and around a “troubling legacy” that justifies—and is still used to justify—war, colonialism, slavery, violence against women, child abuse, and condemnation of LGBTQs, all of which lead to problematic conceptions of the character of God. In *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament’s Troubling Legacy*, Eric A. Seibert acknowledges and confronts the Old Testament’s legacy of violence, and offers ways to constructively read and engage Scripture’s darker stories.

Seibert’s objectives are twofold. First, “reading the Old Testament *nonviolently* in an effort to overcome the Old Testament’s troubling legacy,” and second, “to offer guidelines for dealing with violent Old Testament texts that sanction, and sometimes even celebrate certain acts of violence... by critiquing the violence in them while still considering how these texts can be used constructively” (3–4).

The Violence of Scripture is organized into three parts. Part one, “Exploring the Old Testa-

ment's Troubling Legacy," identifies examples of violent texts and the dangers of either avoiding them or failing to read them critically. "Virtuous" violence and the danger of religious justification of violent behavior make necessary reading Scripture as a "conversant" rather than "compliant" (54–56). Part two, "Proposing a Way of Reading the Old Testament Nonviolently," lays out a series of reading techniques, benchmarks for an ethical critique, and then five steps to reading nonviolently. His steps include naming, analyzing, and critiquing violence, then discerning productive ways to engage the texts. Part three is "Applying Nonviolent Reading Strategies to Violent Texts," where Seibert puts his reading method into practice, looking specifically at Canaanite genocide in Joshua 6–11, texts that justify war, and those that condone violence against women.

At its core, *The Violence of Scripture* is intended as a guide on how to critically yet constructively read and confront violent texts. It is not intended as a deep theological discussion of problematic relationships between God, suffering, and evil. Seibert cites his exploration of Old Testament portrayals of God in another work, *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009). While theological questions of the nature of God's character do arise, the primary objective in *The Violence of Scripture* is a guide on *how* the text is read, not a theological character analysis of the God of the Old Testament. These conversations occur particularly in Part three, when Seibert uses the historicity of the Canaanite conquest (Joshua 6–11), cultural theological assumptions of ancient Israel, and God's supposed condoning of war as case studies for his method.

The Violence of Scripture is intended for a broad audience. The writing style is accessible and even conversational at times, and often enters first-person narrative. In this work that scrutinizes Scripture, Seibert points out early

and often that critiquing biblical texts may be difficult for readers who uphold Scripture as infallibly authoritative or historically accurate. He calls such attempts to tie biblical authority to historical accuracy as "ultimately, untenable" (160) in the Appendix, "A Brief Word about Biblical Authority." But Seibert assures his audience that he approaches the text with deep respect, and that this same respect demands critical engagement. Readers unused to or uncertain about critiquing biblical texts may be reassured by Seibert's assurances that *The Violence of Scripture* is a faithful study, while those trained to read Scripture with a critical lens may think them unnecessary.

At the same time, he has clearly done significant academic research into supporting and opposing views. Endnote citations and suggestions for further reading are plentiful, and a lengthy bibliography supports his discussions. In fact, if any portions of *Violence* are difficult to read, it's because the frequency of citations is often distracting.

The value of *The Violence of Scripture* is twofold. First, it honestly and earnestly calls out the "troubling legacy" of the Old Testament's violence that is often "Sunday-schooled" into acceptable ideas, ignored, or—at worst—used to justify violence. Second, Seibert gives the reader new perspectives with which to read and discuss texts. Even if critical questioning isn't new to readers, reading with the perspectives of the "invisible" victims, children, and those marginalized in and by these stories are helpful ideas. This book does not solve the "problem" of God and violence. But it does give the reader useful tools with which to critically read and discuss problematic texts. Seibert's final chapter is a plea to leaders to actively preach and teach these texts in "an ethically responsible manner," rather than "shying away," since real-world consequences of irresponsible reading are at stake (155). I'm hoping to use Seibert's method in a *Violence and Scripture* series at my congregation this Lent. I expect it to yield fruitful con-

versation, which is the least I think these texts demand. The texts that comprise the “troubling legacy” of the Old Testament are here to stay. We might as well confront them head-on.

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PRACTICING THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION: ENGAGING BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR FAITH AND FORMATION, by Joel B. Green. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011. Pp. 160. \$21.99 (paper).

Recent biblical scholarship has primarily been based on historical criticism. In academic circles, other interpretive methods often get little serious attention, while in practical theology or ministry settings, historical criticism may not get the airtime it deserves. A division has emerged between serious scholarly readings of Scripture and unscholarly faith-based readings. In *Practicing Theological Interpretation*, Joel B. Green seeks to bridge this gap. His thesis is twofold. First, a serious theological reading of the Bible need not employ the historical-critical method—it is possible to think about Scripture critically while still considering it theologically. Second, in faith communities, theological interpretation is necessary in order to faithfully and appropriately use the writings in the Bible. Green believes that it is time to reassess the typical training of biblical scholars that has lately become “at best agnostic and at worst antithetical to theological interpretation” (8).

Green describes theological interpretation as “identified especially by its self-consciously ecclesial location” (2). He considers, in each of the four chapters respectively, the relationship between theological biblical study and growth in the Christian faith, the influence of the historical-critical method in the development of theology, the mutual influence of biblical

study and the Rule of Faith, and the example of John Wesley as a serious scholar who read the Bible critically and theologically.

This book is based on a series of three lectures that Green delivered at Nazarene Theological Seminary in 2010. The fourth chapter was added for the published collection. Green’s writing style is fluid, as would be expected of a speech, and flows easily from one idea into the next. The topics in each chapter complement each other, but could stand independent of one another, which makes this book a good option for classroom reading with discussion after each chapter.

Chapter 1 identifies the division between serious historical-critical study of the Scriptures and serious theological interpretation. In academia, the words of the Bible are considered “historical artifacts; they evidence what once was spoken” (15). For Christian communities, the words of the Bible are still relevant today and can be used to discern God’s will for us. Green uses the extended example of the book of James to describe a model reader of the Scriptures, in distinction from the actual historical reader or the implied reader of the text. He spends more than twenty pages in detailed study of James, which need not be recounted here. The conclusion of chapter 1 is that every text is read within a context, but the context of Scripture need not be its historical context. Reading the Bible implies a shared theological context with readers of other times and places, and the present-day reader must make himself a model, one who takes the words seriously, albeit from a different historical and cultural context than the original audience.

Chapter 2 defines three historical-critical methods that are either opposed to or necessary for theological interpretation. Green concludes: “the Historical-Critical Paradigm cannot be correlated with theological concerns apart from the historical attempt to describe early Christian religion” (47). Green rejects historical criticism when it reconstructs past events in order to retell a past story, or dissects