

elevating it to the model for the transformation of society? Inasmuch as this is the central thesis of his study, it is surprising how little time he spends in explicating the Anabaptist tradition. There is nothing here (except in an obscure footnote) about the Schleithem Confession or the *Great Article Book* of the Hutterites, and there is no real discussion of the Anabaptist two-kingdoms motif and the idea of radical separation it engenders, nor of the apocalyptic eschatology of that tradition. One can certainly remain highly appreciative of the Anabaptist tradition and yet raise the question as to whether it fits Niebuhr's concept of the role of the church in the transformation of society, even when contemporary reconstructions of that tradition are utilized.

But Scriven's constructive work can stand on its own feet. In fact, it might be better if it were unencumbered by its Niebuhr-related thesis. The modified Anabaptist model developed in the final chapter, with its emphasis on a radical understanding of the authority of Christ in the Christian community and its three subthemes of political engagement, universal loyalty, and nonviolence, is clear, powerful, and compelling and deserves serious consideration. Scriven's study is certainly to be recommended for college and seminary courses in Christian social ethics.

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RUSSELL STAPLES

Thompson, Alden. *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989. 173 pp. Paperback, \$8.95.

How should the conservative Christian react to the OT picture of God, particularly as it depicts God as a harsh and vindictive deity? Alden Thompson writes to invite conservative Christians, who are likely to ignore the OT and read only the NT, to rethink this question with the aid of modern biblical scholarship. The study provides a way to come to grips with the OT as part of the Christian canon and thus view God in the OT, not as promoting brutality through word and deed, but as condescending to meet people "where they are." God would have been misunderstood or considered unworthy of worship if he had revealed himself as he does in the NT, because people would have been unprepared for it. When conditions were right, God revealed himself in the person of Jesus.

Why did God let the race get into such a bad spiritual condition? Thompson argues that if God's authority were to be recognized, then the full impact of demonic rule must be allowed to develop. Also, humanity must have the opportunity to respond in freedom to the struggle between good and evil. This discussion leads to a consideration of the Adversary, or Satan, from the perspective of the historical development of the idea. The

stimulus for Thompson's book was the difference between 2 Sam 24:1 and the Chronicler's midrash in 1 Chr 21:1. While 2 Sam 24 depicts God as assuming full responsibility for evil, Thompson interprets the Chronicler's passage to mean that God "allowed" evil, not "caused" it. By this manner of interpreting, Thompson can attribute the "cause" to the demonic and human factor, while understanding God in a condescending or pastoral role.

Thompson's axiology emerges from his interpretation of the NT and is expressed in chapter titles such as "The Worst Story in the Old Testament: Judges 19-21" and "The Best Story in the Old Testament: The Messiah." The "worst story" is a story of anarchy, and Thompson's bias toward the OT monarchy is obvious. That bias causes us to forge links between anarchy and lawlessness, on the one hand, and monarchy and the prevention of lawlessness, on the other. The monarchy is also the most proper context for discussing the "best story," which is really not a story but an interpretation of the messianic prophecies that are fulfilled in Christ. Thus, the title is a little misleading, because the story of the Messiah in the OT actually has no ending.

Thompson also speaks kindly about the idea of law. Selections from the various OT codes serve to demonstrate that external laws are evidence of God's condescending pastoral concern, and Thompson argues that no law is any more permanent than the human condition that makes it necessary. However, the Decalogue apparently represents something more basic. I would submit that it is an expression of a metaphysical reality for Thompson. With Christian maturity, external law becomes less and less necessary. Law is internalized in love; thus love never rebels against or negates law. Thompson maintains that the whole of biblical law is still pertinent today because, by recognizing how God dealt with humanity through law in the past, we can see how he deals with us today.

The book's final chapter treats the Psalms and some passages from Job. Here again the objectionable language of the Psalms does not represent God, but is the result of humanity reacting to a twisted world. The point of praying with the Psalmists and Job is that one can be frank with God. Thompson has defused the terror of the OT God through his interpretation of the condescension to evil realities by God, whose essential self is revealed in Christ as a man of peace. In the process Thompson has opened the door to a discussion of Christian ethics. Is capital punishment permissible today? The answer must come by the leading of the Spirit, but it would be difficult to think of Thompson as condoning capital punishment.

Thompson's rational approach has worked well on objectionable OT texts, but he owes us some comments on the frightful NT statements. For example, what is taking place when Jesus mentions hanging a millstone around the neck of one who destroys faith? Is God accommodating sinful humanity in Christ? In addition, because 1 Chr 21:1 is so important to Thompson's interpretation, how does the whole interpretive process in

Chronicles, of which this text is a part, bear on his subject? Finally, doesn't freedom's possibility limit the effectiveness of a rationally expressed view of God and his acts and words?

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Waltke, Bruce K., and O'Connor, M. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990. xiii + 765 pp. \$37.50.

This massive book is a major achievement and advance in the study of classical (biblical) Hebrew. It is not difficult to understand for anyone who has had a good foundation in Hebrew—it is just detailed and comprehensive, an excellent reference work, as well as one worth careful reading as an intermediate or advanced grammar. The authors make good use of Semitic and other languages for the purpose of comparing forms and structures, helping readers to understand Hebrew. Their translations of Hebrew texts are most fruitful and idiomatic. They make excellent analyses, particularly concerning the verbal system; and their explication of grammar (its philosophy and categories) is outstanding. They are conversant with the recent books and articles in many languages in this field, as well as with the standard older works. Where scholars differ, they list them and state with whom they agree (e.g., at the top of p. 585 regarding the infinitive absolute). The format is open, clean, and attractive; the book is clearly organized, well marked to make it easy to use, and well bound to withstand years of usage.

The first three chapters of the introductory section—"Language and Text," "History of the Study of Hebrew Grammar," and "Basic Concepts"—are especially helpful in their compact presentation of useful background material. Most students need the review of grammatical terms found in chap. 4 as well. Chaps. 5-13 treat nouns; chaps. 14-19 cover adjectives, numerals, and pronouns; chaps. 20-28, verbal stems; and chaps. 29-40, verbal conjugations and clauses. A brief glossary and bibliography follow, then indexes of topics, authorities, Hebrew words, and scripture references.

The authors really advance the understanding of the Hebrew verbal system, long considered enigmatic, by their descriptions of what they term the "suffix (perfective) conjugation," the "prefix (non-perfective) conjugation," and the "*waw*-relative" (instead of *waw*-conversive or *waw*-consecutive) as used with each. They recognize and demonstrate the perfective aspect of the original short prefix conjugation with *waw*-relative (equivalent to the suffix conjugation without *waw*-relative or with *waw*-conjunctive) and the non-perfective aspect of the suffix conjugation with *waw*-relative (equivalent to the original long-prefix conjugation in all its usages).