

Musvosvi, Joel Nobel. *Vengeance in the Apocalypse*. Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 17. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993. ix + 305 pp. \$19.99.

Joel Musvosvi has chosen to deal with a topic that is not well understood and provokes diverse responses, but he deals with it very sensitively and biblically. The subject of God's vengeance in Scripture is often approached with certain presuppositions regarding how God should or should not conduct himself, given his character and nature. There is a tendency to define vengeance in anthropomorphic terms which preclude viewing it as an act of God. Yet Musvosvi looks carefully at the biblical evidence without beginning with such presuppositions, and he finds that vengeance plays an important role in the covenant relationship which God has with his people, in which God is the protector of his people, exercising judgment against their enemies. Thus God's vengeance has a positive role, rather than the negative role which some have ascribed to it.

Musvosvi begins by looking at the biblical and Near Eastern backgrounds to the concept of vengeance. He finds that in the Ancient Near East vengeance was an important part of suzerainty treaties. The suzerain had a responsibility not only to protect his subjects, but also to punish those who violated the treaty (46). A similar function is ascribed to Yahweh in the OT covenant with Israel. Yahweh acts with vengeance against those outsiders who oppress his covenant community, and he acts with wrath against those within the community who violate the covenant (99). Vengeance refers primarily to his acts of judgment in which at the same time he delivers and vindicates his people and punishes their oppressors (109 "Vengeance is, therefore, a balanced revelation of both mercy and justice" (75)

In the imprecatory psalms, some of the most difficult texts to deal with theologically, Musvosvi concludes that "imprecations and vengeance are not anthropocentric but theocentric" (96), revealing the divine perspective to human cries for justice and judgment. Further, in the prophets, when Israel rejoices at the punishment of their enemies, such rejoicing is based not on the intensity of the suffering of the enemy but on the mighty acts of their covenant Lord, who has prevailed and upheld his covenant promises (111). The chief concern is the upholding of Yahweh's honor as righteous judge and covenant-keeping sovereign (115, 120). "To attack the covenant community is to attack that community's Lord" (121). Noting the reversals between the saints and the earthly powers in Daniel, Musvosvi points out God's role: "God as Judge passes a verdict which reverses the judgment of earthly courts and in the process vindicates his loyal subjects. This is at the core of the Biblical concept of vengeance" (125).

In addition to the OT evidence, Musvosvi also considers the extrabiblical and NT evidence outside of Revelation. He finds no departure from the OT concept that vengeance is a divine prerogative based on the obligations God incurs under the covenant as protector and vindicator of his covenant community (130, 134-35, 143, 147). "Jesus did not do away with biblical vengeance" (137) in the Gospels. "Jesus and the Apostles emphasized the need for moral/spiritual preparation for the end-time vengeance" (146).

Persecution and suffering provide the context for the call for vengeance and vindication, Musvosvi demonstrates in his third chapter. Specifically, in the book of Revelation, persecution is the experience to be expected by the church, following the experience of their Lord, the martyr *par excellence* (175). God is portrayed in Revelation as the Sovereign Lord who hears from his sanctuary the cries of his covenant people and promises to bring vindication for them and judgment against their persecutors. The sanctuary is the place of sacrifice, and it is also the place from which vindication and judgment proceed (186-88). It is, indeed, the locus of the covenant relationship. It is not surprising, then, that the appeal for vengeance in Rev 6:10 "is to be understood in the light of the covenant motif, addressed to God as *despotēs*, the absolute ruler who can bring redress and justice for his abused and mistreated vassal servants (216). The accusation of justice will be taken as a lawsuit to court, where the just Judge will render a verdict in favor of those who have been treated unjustly and against those who have abused them (225-232, 248).

To simply render a verdict, however, would not ensure that justice was done (237). Therefore, the vindication is accompanied by restoration, and the condemnation, by punishment (255).

The dissertation is well written, despite a lot of mechanical errors. It is incisive and easy to read. It follows a logical progression of thought and covers most of the questions that would be raised in the discussion. The exegetical portion in chapter 4 is very well done, bringing from the text many insightful ideas that clarify the issues. I would highly recommend this volume to any reader who has an interest in the question of theodicy, especially pastors who have to deal with the practical questions raised by the experiences of their parishioners in regard to suffering, injustice, and God's responsibility.

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Nilson, Jon. *Nothing Beyond the Necessary: Roman Catholicism and the Ecumenical Future*. New York: Paulist Press, 1995. 105 pp. \$7.95.

Jon Nilson, professor of theology at Loyola University of Chicago, has written this book on ecumenism to stimulate creativity and courage in Roman Catholic leaders. He challenges them to put into action their commitment to church unity. The author believes the ecumenical impact of the Second Vatican Council has slowed down and current ecumenical dialogues are stalled, producing an "ecumenical winter." To young theologians and church leaders, ecumenism seems to be "very old and unexciting news" (v). Although the ecumenical movement is irreversible, it needs new vigor. To rejuvenate it, Nilson offers to church leaders a simple solution drawn from Acts 15:28, "impose no burden beyond what is necessary."

In his first chapter, Nilson asserts that Christianity is ready for coalescing. Even though ecumenism is low on the churches' agendas, Christians are growing together and coming into one body. But the problem with modern ecumenism is