

Block, Daniel I. *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology*, 2d ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000. 176 pp. Paper, \$17.89.

Daniel Block, dean and professor of OT at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, presents an overview of the relationship between Ancient Near Eastern nations and their deities in comparison with the analogous concepts in the OT. The basic concern of the book is to compare and analyze interactions within the triad people, deity, and land.

In the first chapter, Block discusses "the origin of deity-nation relations" under two subheadings: the priority of the deity-territory type, and the priority of the deity-people type. According to his investigation, based on Greek, Sumerian, Ugaritic, and Phoenician traditions, extrabiblical sources tended to view their deities as primarily connected with land, and only secondarily concerned with their people. The Israelites, on the other hand, "understood Yahweh to have established a relationship with them as a nation independent of and prior to their association with the land belonging to Yahweh" (32).

The second chapter investigates "the expression of the deity-nation relationship" in the Bible and ANE literature as it surfaces in genitival constructions (e.g., "our God," "my people"), personal names with a theophoric element (e.g., Joshua, Azariah), divine epithets (e.g. ²*adon* [lord], *melek* [king]), and human epithets (e.g. ^c*bd* ²*dd* [servant of Adad], *ro* ^c*eb* [pastor]). According to Block, by employing these expressions ancient people expressed their view of deity in terms of a feudal divine overlord, protector, defender, and provider of the people (61). The author recognizes that Israel and the nations had much in common in this respect, e.g., both would accept the worship of outsiders. There is, however, as Block points out, a significant distinction: the gods of the nations would tolerate the worship of other deities by their own people; Israel's God required exclusive allegiance (74).

In the third and fourth chapters, the national territory is presented from the perspectives of divine estate and divine grant, respectively. The former has to do with the relationship of the land to the deity, and the latter has to do with the relationship of the land to the people. Genitival expressions (e.g., "god of the land," "gods of Egypt") and feudal vocabulary (*nahala*, "patrimony"; *yeruša*, "possession"; *abuzzā*, "property") indicate that an ANE people viewed their land as the realm of their god. Hence, the land as divine estate implied the involvement of the deity in the national defense of the territory and the deity's provision of human leadership for his land. As a divine grant, the land was a gift of the deity to the people and provided the geographic space where the people would enjoy happiness and prosperity. On the other hand, this implied responsibilities, the neglect of which would entail divine judgments such as famine, disease, and, ultimately, loss of the land (101-109).

The last chapter, dealing with "the end of deity-nation relations," has considerably improved upon the first edition (Evangelical Theological Society Monograph Series, no. 2, 1988). By comparing Sumerian and Akkadian accounts of divine abandonment with Ezek 8-11, Block demonstrates that the relationship between a nation and its patron deity may be broken, resulting in the deity's abandoning the land. The author makes the insightful observation that while the

extrabiblical literature tends to focus on the god's change of heart before returning to his or her shrine, the Israelite account emphasizes that God would change the hearts of the people (142).

Though Block provides readers with a valuable tool for better understanding Israel's religion against its ANE backdrop, a few problems need to be addressed. As he recognizes, he employs a deductive approach. He formulates questions and then searches "for answers from whatever source" (114). In this quest for answers, he does not pay enough attention to the historical contexts of the ANE sources and seems to make generalizations on the basis of scanty evidence. Thus, in order to reconstruct the ANE theology, he gathers data originating from different historical periods, genres, and cultures. The legitimacy of this eclectic approach is doubtful, and the overall picture seems to be an abstraction made possible by a kind of proof-text approach.

Overall, the book gives the impression that it is an apologia emphasizing the superiority of Israel's religion against its Ancient Near Eastern counterparts. This may not sound politically correct in this postmodern age of pluralism and relativism, in which many scholars tend to place every cultural phenomenon on the same ethical and moral level and to avoid any value judgments on cultures or customs. However, once it is understood that the author is an evangelical, who takes for granted the reliability of the biblical records and accepts the value judgments made by the Bible writers themselves regarding their surrounding cultures, his approach becomes understandable.

Despite some methodological deficiencies, this work provides a useful contribution to ANE theology in general. Aspects of detail to be commended include the extensive footnotes and a selected and updated bibliography, which provide additional information about significant details and sources. Indices of Scripture, extrabiblical materials, authors, and subjects also make this work helpful for consultation on specific topics. The publishers are to be commended for the fine quality of printing and exclusion of typographical errors.

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ELIAS BRASIL DE SOUZA

Conn, Harvie M., and Manuel Ortiz. *Urban Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001. 527 pp. \$29.99.

At the time of his death, in 1999, Harvie Conn was emeritus professor of missions at Westminster Theological Seminary. He had edited the journal *Urban Mission* for ten years, and had authored two other books, *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace* and *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds*. Harvie was one of the foremost proponents of and authority on urban mission. Manuel Ortiz, coauthor and professor of ministry and urban mission, authored *The Hispanic Challenge* and *One New People* published by InterVarsity.

Conn was a frequent speaker at professional meetings and a serious proponent of socially responsible mission. This book represents his wealth of experience in doing and teaching. Manuel Ortiz speaks of his willingness to submit himself to Conn's demands of time and style, and, upon the death of Conn, completed the final chapters.

Urban mission has never been highly popular among conservative Christians,