

young and old for millennia. The question is, “Are we relying on the wrong savior (youthfulness) and have we gotten in the way of the Holy Spirit?”

Decline in church attendance overall, along with aging congregations, are very real concerns for churches in America, including the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. The greater concern is that young people, if not absent, are not well represented in local churches, particularly apart from university and metropolitan settings. Though, worldwide, young people between the ages of sixteen to forty in the Seventh-day Adventist Church make up more than half the membership, in the North American Division (NAD) 18.54% are below the age of forty. The median age is fifty-one in the NAD, while worldwide it is thirty-two. The research speaks for itself; implementing any one of these strategies from *Growing Young* in the local church setting will bolster the future of the church in the NAD. While the data was not collected from Seventh-day Adventist congregations, one of the positive points of the study is the diversity of denominations, church affiliates, and regions of the United States of America that were utilized. Therefore, its benefit can be delineated and easily contextualized for an Adventist context, which has started with the *Growing Young Adventists* movement.

The format of the book itself is easy enough for a broad audience, and is geared to pastors and church leaders. I would highly encourage church leaders to, not only read this book, but gather a group to analyze each of these six strategies in light of their own church (utilizing the online assessment tool). *Growing Young* is meant to encourage struggling churches with strategies to go beyond their discouraging reality, learning from positive outcomes from thriving congregations.

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Pressler, Carolyn. *Numbers*. AOTC. Nashville: Abingdon, 2017. xviii + 323 pp. Softcover. USD 39.99.

While *Numbers* is a title that evokes the theological importance of the two censuses which indicate the failure of the first generation of Israel and the divine faithfulness towards the second, it is the Hebrew title that conveys the main thrust of the book: God’s people are on the way to Canaan *in the wilderness* (במדבר). The book of Numbers collects the most important glimpses of this wilderness journey. Carolyn Pressler thoughtfully examines such glimpses in the newest release of the Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries series (AOTC). The work reflects the teaching and research of the author, a professor of biblical interpretation at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities (Minneapolis-Saint Paul) and an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. Pressler’s personal interest in the Hebrew Bible, feminist and liberationist biblical interpretation, and gender and biblical law is evident throughout the pages of this commentary.

The book is divided into two parts. In the first part, the author provides a short introduction (1–8) to Numbers where she discusses authorship, composition and dating, as well as the issue of historicity and context

for the reading. In the second part, the reader can find the commentary itself, which is divided into several literary sections. Each section begins with a short introduction where the author summarizes the main point to be explored followed by a literary analysis of the unit where the author presents her view on structure and composition. She takes into account her understanding of the long historical process involved in the formation of the text. Pressler locates its culmination in the Persian period, when a redactor shaped the final form of the Hebrew text of Numbers, which, according to her, is part the “legend of origins” of Israel as a people (4). Following the literary analysis, the reader finds the exegetical analysis, where Pressler carries out a discussion of the main elements of the passage. Finally, each section contains a theological and ethical analysis of the unit. Here, the author proposes a contemporary application of the text and deals with some of the “unpalatable” practices found in the book, such as holy war (198).

The present commentary follows the editorial intention of the series to provide an “aid in the study of Scripture” and to “provoke a deeper understanding of the Bible in all its many facets” (xi). The work is aimed at reaching not only theological students and pastors, but also “upper-level college and university students, and those responsible for teaching in congregational settings” (xi).

In a certain sense, the book succeeds in reaching a wide range of readers. On the one hand, those who have professional background in biblical studies will benefit from Pressler’s insightful analysis of Numbers. She examines the biblical data from an interdisciplinary perspective (e.g., anthropology and archaeology), taking into account the history of interpretation from the primitive rabbinic exegesis to the recent emerging reinterpretations such as feminist, post-colonial, and liberationist readings. One important point that a more informed reader could miss is the lack of source identification. Phrases like “some commentators,” (208) “other scholars,” (108) or “broadly scholarly agreement” (222) permeate the work without explicit mention of any representative sources. On the other hand, those who do not have expertise in this area of knowledge may also enjoy reading this book. In fact, the readability of the commentary is one of its most evident strengths. While the author’s analysis is based on the original language, the commentary does not require training in Hebrew. The Hebrew words are transliterated and the author sets apart complicated discussion about linguistic and textual issues. The language is accessible and pleasant, revealing the skill of Pressler as a writer. At the same time, the theological applications are sensible to the current social and political circumstances in the United States, making the work quite relevant.

The critical perspective of the commentary is coherent with the editorial line of the series. This is clear from her definition of Israel’s historiography, which, according to her, “refers not to ‘what happened’ but to the way in which a people understands and recounts its past” (112). In her hermeneutic of suspicion, the author seeks to be attentive to the way in which a passage “reflects the conscious or unconscious biases and interests” (164) of that passage, which are almost always “self-serving” (164). As the stories of Numbers are no more

than “wilderness tales,” the author does not have difficulty understanding most of the book’s content as a result of a “priestly agenda” (154), whose guild of professionals sought to establish its legitimacy during the reconstruction of the Persian period, mostly through “cautionary tales,” a term which the author often resorts to in dealing with passages referring to God’s punishment. Thus, it is expected that, in many cases, only a *priestology* (rather than a theology) of the text is offered. In other words, only the perspective of a “self-serving” priesthood is available. In this case, the text needs to be deconstructed so that it may reveal the real “theology” behind it (e.g., 47, 98, 145, 156, 164). Having in mind the disjunction between history and record, the pervasive influence of “male authors and redactors” (43) with a strong “patriarchal bias” (105), and the effect of a priestly guild filled with an ambitious desire for power, it would not be an overstatement to affirm that discerning any theological statement from the text in its canonical form is quite unfeasible.

Another major characteristic of the commentary is the emphasis on source criticism. In fact, one could state that Pressler’s book is a good example of how Wellhausen’s documentary hypothesis stays alive in spite of the advancement in literary studies of biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts that has recently led to an appreciation of the text in its final form. Conjectures on the different layers of traditions (e.g., 141) and sources (e.g., pre-P source) present in the final form of the text are spread throughout her analysis. The assumption that the text is a result of centuries of development and is formed by competitive sources trying to push a particular agenda not only lacks historical evidence but also runs against the literary evidence and the clear claim of the text. Such presupposition directly affects her work in several ways. First, the speculative nature of identifying the distinct levels and sources in the text makes a great deal of her commentary a scholarly historical guess. Second, the author is unable to see the macro literary structure of the book and, consequently, the masterful narrative strategies which impact the message of the book. Finally, in dealing with apparent contradictions in the text (e.g., Num 16–17), the author merely assumes the inability of the ancient editor to eliminate “contradictions in the story that cannot be reconciled” (141) from the final canonical text.

By way of conclusion, the importance of the book in the context of scholarly research should be emphasized. In several points, her commentary illustrates how the interpreter should engage with the text, both in terms of the past being attentive to its original context and in terms of the present being sensible to the contemporary challenges that demand a biblical response. The book is quite provocative and its reading invites those who consider the Mosaic authorship, the unity of the final canonical form, and the accurate historicity of Numbers as more than mere “doctrines of faith,” (3) to cope with the challenges raised by this new release. In this context, the reading of Pressler’s commentary is not only recommend but almost indispensable.

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