

the Prelude. However, the absolute language with which the authors describe most music of the Great Composers speaks far louder than this token qualification and betrays the authors' belief that these examples of art music are indeed 'the best'. This bias is also clear in the narrow-minded and idealistic hope, also expressed in the Prelude, that 'the more people acquaint themselves with what is truly great and beautiful, the more they will dislike and turn away from that which is shallow and ugly'. The category of 'truly great and beautiful' music becomes frustratingly smaller as you read through the book, excluding not only non-western music, but also twentieth-century music which they refer to as 'irritating', 'uninspiring', a 'battery against the listener', and even harboring 'less talent than [the song of the] cuckoo birds'.

More inappropriate even than all of this is the trite way in which a superficial 'Christian perspective' has been tacked on to this history in an attempt to make a critical and relevant analysis for Christian readers. The authors have analyzed the relationship of faith and music by a) divulging what they deem the most important biographical detail of each composer discussed in the book: whether or not he was a Christian, and b) determining 'Christian' elements in a composer's works, defined by them as consonance, cheer, order, and the ability to inspire one to do good works. Ignoring musical-historical contexts, Stuart Smith and Carlson actually suggest that the reason Bach resolved musical dissonances was because he was a Christian and believed in the 'resolution . . . for each individual and for history'. It was this wholesomeness and a 'firm Christian base' in his music that allowed Bach to have such influence on subsequent composers. Similarly, although Haydn was not as devout a believer as Bach, his music is a Christian witness because of its happy and cheerful mood. On the other hand, music which displays disorder and dissonance (Beethoven, Wagner, all twentieth-century music) should be treated with caution, because it proclaims an 'untruthful' hopelessness about the world, and never inspires us to do good.

This critical analysis leaves much to be desired. It not only makes crude, dualistic assessments of what and who are 'Christian', but also ignores a host of other types and levels of belief and the variety of ways that these beliefs could be seen in music. In addition, it assumes that music can be evaluated as an extra-cultural autonomous entity, and that what was true of Bach's music in the eighteenth century

is true of it now. Ironically, this 'Christian perspective', which was meant to enrich their historical account, has in fact worked against the purpose of their book. By evaluating music only as either Christian or non-Christian, the authors have robbed it of much of its rich, complex interest, and by showing a patronizing disappointment in those composers and works which fall short of heavenly stature, many Great Composers have at last been knocked off their pedestals.

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### ***Nahum (Historical Commentary on the Old Testament)***

**K. Spronk**

Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1997, pp. xxi + 153, pb, ISBN 90-242-6355-7

### **RÉSUMÉ**

*K. Spronk considère que le livre de Nahoum est l'œuvre d'un scribe royal, qui a écrit sous un pseudonyme à Jérusalem autour de 660 av. J.-C. Ce commentaire est remarquable pour le travail minutieux sur le texte, que le lecteur suivra mieux en ayant le texte hébreu sous les yeux. Il est utile et instructif pour une étude sérieuse du livre de Nahoum et de ses liens avec d'autres littératures, mais les prédicateurs seront peut-être déçus d'y trouver moins de synthèse et de réflexion théologique qu'on pourrait s'y attendre lorsqu'on considère les objectifs annoncés pour la série dont il fait partie.*

### **ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

*Spronks Kommentar bietet eine detaillierte literarische Analyse des Nahumbuches. Der Verfasser argumentiert, dass das Nahumbuch um 660 v. Chr. von einem königlichen Schreiber unter einem Pseudonym verfasst wurde. Er weist sowohl auf literarische Beziehungen zu biblischen und ausserbiblischen Texten hin als auch auf den sorgfältigen Aufbau des Buches. Der Kommentar leistet damit einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Erforschung des Nahumbuches. Wer vom Nahumbuch predigen will, wird jedoch enttäuscht sein, dass nicht mehr theologische Diskussion angeboten wird.*

This commentary is one of the first in a new series edited by C. Houtman (Kampen), W. S.



Prinsloo (Pretoria), W. G. E. Watson (Newcastle-upon-Tyne), and A. Wolters (Ontario). The editors are committed 'to an approach which takes seriously the historical embeddedness of the message of the Old Testament' and 'to the view that the Old Testament was and is a vehicle of the knowledge of God'. The contributors invited (of whom a list is provided in the book) are Christians from a wide range of denominational affiliation (the author of this commentary is pastor of the Gereformeerde Kerk Culembourg). The challenge given to them is to be up-to-date, but to pay attention to the pre-modern exegetical tradition too, to provide a scholarly exposition with a new translation of the text, but to remain accessible to a wide readership. It is emphasised that 'the authors are expected to pay due attention to the meaning of every historical stage which they discern in the formation of the text, including its final canonical stage. Tradition-historical and redaction-critical analyses should not become ends in themselves, but should be subservient to an understanding of the inner-canonical history of interpretation'. (All quotations are from the editorial preface). In sum, this series is worth watching out for!

Klaas Spronk argues that the book of Nahum is the work of a royal scribe, written under a pseudonym in Jerusalem, ca. 660 BCE. Direct and indirect references to Assyrian treaty texts and royal annals show the influence of Mesopotamian literature on the book of Nahum, but its author was also inspired by Jerusalem cultic texts and the words of Isaiah. Spronk detects three main cantos (1:1–11; 1:12–2:14; 3:1–19) which in turn are subdivided in canticles and strophes. Noteworthy is the break between 1:11 and 1:12 (rather than 1:8 and 1:9) for which Spronk makes a strong case.

The outstanding feature of this commentary is Spronk's painstaking work on the text which readers will best follow with a Hebrew text in front of them. Difficulties of the text are rarely put down to corruptions in the transmission process and are usually credited to the freedom and creativity of the ancient poet. Incidentally, in comparing phrases in Nahum with phrases elsewhere in the Old Testament, Spronk provides a good deal of information for those who want to explore biblical intertextuality. A number of references to an interpretation by, e.g., Tertullian, Jerome, Rashi or Luther fulfill the aim of the editors to provide a commentary that pays explicit attention to the history of interpretation (an index to track down these remarks would have been helpful). Yet more

often than not these remarks look like a collector's item on the shelf. They do not serve as a contribution to the discussion of theological and ethical issues, an area which could have received greater attention from Spronk.

This commentary will be a useful and informative book for those who want to work seriously with the text. Spronk's proposals concerning possible name acrostics (Assur in 1:12; Nineveh in 3:18) and sentence acrostics ('I am Yahweh' in 1:1–3) in Nahum (cf. his article in ZAW 110 (1998): 209–222) are certainly worth further discussion among scholars. Not many ministers, however, would seem to have the stamina and time required to work through the text of Nahum with this very scholarly work which, by the way, could have done with another proof-reading. One wishes that subsequent commentaries in the series combine the same kind of careful analysis with greater synthesis and creative theological thinking. The indications are that a 'historical commentary' has a lot to offer, but a more explicitly Christian approach is required in a commentary that is to be fully adequate for Christian ministers.

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***Transforming Fate into Destiny:  
The Theological Ethics of Stanley  
Hauerwas***  
**Samuel Wells**

Paternoster Press, 1998, 210 pp., pb,  
ISBN 0-85364-906-5

**RÉSUMÉ**

*Dans cet excellent ouvrage, Wells présente les grandes lignes de l'éthique théologique sous la forme d'un récit de Hauerwas. Celle-ci se caractérise comme une éthique du caractère, par opposition à une éthique orientée vers l'action et la décision. La ligne de pensée, qui va du caractère au récit, du récit à la communauté, et de la communauté à l'Église est retracée avec clarté et une grande sensibilité aux nuances. Wells cherche à donner de la pensée de Hauerwas une analyse compréhensive, sans peur de modifier, clarifier et faire progresser le projet de ce penseur. Il nous livre un texte essentiel pour tous ceux qu'intéresse la pensée d'Hauerwas, débutants aussi bien que spécialistes.*