

ethical conviction is of course not limited to religious people). Also, while Thompson has a fairly clear overall picture of relevant theological issues, some nuances which a theologian could have brought in are perhaps lacking. For example, it might have been helpful to point out that the millenarian concepts and questions described in the book, while of course having relevance to lay believers, are largely abandoned in serious contemporary professional theological discussions. Also, some aspects of biblical studies brought in are representations of single, even if often quite prominent theologians and may not reveal the full breadth of variety of opinions, or debates about the matters drawn in. Finally, as a minor point, aspects of the statistical analysis in chapter six seemed to be based on rather small differences and thus one might be slightly cautious about taking them at face value (e.g. the conclusions on p. 135 seem to be based on rather small differences). But, these criticisms aside, in my view, definitely a good book worth reading.

Pekka Pitkänen, Cheltenham, England

Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil

James L. Crenshaw,

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, x + 275 pp.,
h/b, £22.99, ISBN: 0-19-514002-8

SUMMARY

This study of the age-old problem of theodicy is largely based on the careful study of the Old Testament by a Wisdom scholar of some standing. Crenshaw takes a systematic approach and examines various issues connected with the whole question of human suffering and the character of God.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Diese Arbeit über das uralte Theodizee-Problem basiert größtenteils auf einem sorgfältigen Studium des Alten Testaments durch einen Fachmann für Weisheitsliteratur von gewisser Bedeutung. Crenshaw wählt einen systematischen Ansatz und untersucht verschiedene Fragen, die in Verbindung zu der ganzen Frage des menschlichen Leides und des Charakters Gottes stehen.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude du problème séculaire de la théodicée nous vient d'un spécialiste d'envergure de la littérature sapientiale et se fonde sur une étude minutieuse de l'Ancien Testament. Crenshaw adopte ici une approche systématique pour aborder divers problèmes liés à toute la question de la souffrance humaine et à celle du caractère de Dieu.

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James L. Crenshaw's *Defending God* is a digest of a lifetime of study (p. viii). In it, he tackles the age-old problem of theodicy based on an examination of the Old

Testament (or the Hebrew Bible, with a few occasional references to the New Testament as well). Crenshaw takes a synchronic approach where aspects of the problem are divided into sections within which possible answers are discussed. The first section considers the response of denying God's existence. The second discusses a shift to monotheism and the problem of attributing evil to other gods in this context. The third takes a look at the concept of Satan. The fourth is about putting the blame on human freedom. The fifth discusses the issues of justice and mercy in God's character as a basis for dealing with the world. The sixth looks into suffering as having a disciplinary and nurturing function. The seventh treats the concept of seeing suffering as a punishment of sin. The eighth considers whether suffering could be seen as atonement for someone else. The ninth discusses the central issue in terms of looking forward to having justice in the afterlife. The tenth discusses the proposition of the inscrutability of God's ways from the perspective of humans. Finally, the eleventh section considers the suggestion that God is beyond theodicy, owing nothing to humans. Crenshaw then concludes that one possible way of looking into theodicy could be to see life as a gift from God and humans as debtors, and therefore humans should love God without expecting anything in return.

The book is of very high academic level and is not for the fainthearted if one were to approach it from a faith perspective. In essence, Crenshaw completely disassembles the Hebrew belief system into a set of human projections about God. As a whole, the book is very well argued and raises (or restates!) a number of problems that anyone thinking about the testimony of the Old Testament in particular must face if one wants to tackle any real problems relating to theodicy. The exegetical work and the reflections are very interesting and stimulating. However, this reviewer would not quite share Crenshaw's pessimism. For example, one might read Romans 9:15-21, a passage to which Crenshaw does not refer, based on an existential commitment rather than on logic as such (this might remind one of Crenshaw's Chapter 10, however). It is also worth noting that, interestingly, while Crenshaw speaks against the logicity of the biblical representation, he nevertheless admits that he feels drawn by it (p. 182).

The presentation of the book is somewhat cryptic in places (cf. Crenshaw's own comments in the Preface, p. viii), but only on the sentence level and this does not detract from a clear presentation as a whole. At the same time, the book makes an entertaining read with some delightful and snappy comments especially towards the end of the book, even if some people less accustomed to dealing with problems relating to theodicy might find them slightly offensive on occasions. There were a number of places where I did not necessarily agree with Crenshaw's exegetical readings, the exact basis for which, unfortunately, as the book is in many ways a digest of work and thinking over a long period of time, was often not referenced as much as might have been desired in

order to check their validity. However, again, such differences of view were not sufficient to cast any doubt as to the overall logic of the main argument of the book. The selection of the aspects of theodicy as per the chapters is more of a systematic ordering than one directly suggested by the biblical evidence, even though, equally, the categories can definitely be seen to arise from the biblical material. Finally, I felt that the conclusion had aspects that did not quite tie in with the preceding discussion, but this is a minor criticism.

As a whole, this is an excellent work. Whether or not one agrees with the conclusions of the book, it is a must read for anyone wishing to seriously look into the problem of theodicy.

Pekka Pitkänen, Cheltenham, England

Global Bible Commentary

Daniel Patte, J. Severino Croatto, Nicole Wilkinson Duran et al. (eds.)

Nashville: Abingdon, 2004. 571 pp., \$ 39, paperback.
ISBN 0-687-06403-1

SUMMARY

The present volume gathers interpretations of all biblical books (or at least key passages) and essays on additional topics from a contextual perspective. The international team of contributors sets out with detailed descriptions of their own contexts (or their chosen contexts) which raise and determine the issues addressed by the following contextual commentary. The introduction by D. Patte (reviewed in detail below) raises a number of crucial hermeneutical issues which evangelicals also face. The commentaries help readers to see aspects in biblical text hitherto unnoticed and may help users to appreciate that their own interpretations are also influenced by their contexts. The issue of validity in interpretation is not sufficiently raised.

ZUSAMMENFASUNG

Der vorliegende Band ist eine Sammlung von Interpretationen aller biblischen Bücher (oder zumindest von Schlüsselpassagen) und von Essays über zusätzliche Themen aus einer kontextuellen Perspektive. Das internationale Team von Beitragsautoren startet mit detaillierten Beschreibungen ihrer eigenen Kontexte (oder ihrer gewählten Kontexte), die die Fragen aufwerfen und festlegen, die im folgenden kontextuellen Kommentar bearbeitet werden. Die Einleitung von D. Patte (die unten detailliert rezensiert wird) wirft eine Reihe von entscheidenden hermeneutischen Fragen auf, mit denen Evangelikale ebenfalls konfrontiert sind. Die Kommentare helfen den Lesern, Aspekte in biblischen Texten zu sehen, die bisher unbeachtet waren, und sie können den Benutzern helfen anzuerkennen, dass ihre eigenen Interpretationen ebenfalls durch ihre Kontexte beeinflusst sind. Die Frage der Gültigkeit und Wahrhaftigkeit von Interpretation wird nicht ausreichend behandelt.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet ouvrage rassemble des interprétations de passages clé de tous les livres de la Bible, ainsi que des essais sur des questions supplémentaires, en adoptant une approche contextuelle. Les contributions émanent d'une équipe internationale dont les membres indiquent de façon détaillée dans quel contexte ils se situent eux-mêmes, ou dans quel contexte ils ont choisi de se situer, en partant du principe que c'est ce contexte qui suscite et détermine les questions abordées ensuite dans le commentaire. Dans l'introduction, Daniel Patte pose un bon nombre de questions herméneutiques cruciales, auxquelles les Évangéliques ont aussi à apporter des réponses. Les commentaires aident le lecteur à découvrir dans le texte biblique des aspects jusque-là ignorés et peuvent lui faire prendre conscience que ses propres interprétations sont elles aussi influencées par le contexte dans lequel il se situe lui-même. La question de ce qui fait la validité d'une interprétation reste cependant insuffisamment abordée.

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The present one volume commentary is fully contextual in its orientation. In the introduction the chief editor Daniel Patte outlines the idea and purpose of this international project. The selection of the contributors "seeks to approximate the geographical, denominational, and gender balance of Bible readers around the world today. ... Thus approximately two-thirds of the commentators are scholars from the 'two-thirds world', with a proportional and thus smaller number of contributors from the Western world (including two Jewish scholars) and the Eastern Orthodox world" (xxi). Twenty eight of the contributors are female. The women are not fully represented (i.e. thirty three), "because the number of female biblical scholars is still relatively small, though growing in the two-thirds world" (xxi).

These commentators were given two questions to answer:

"What is the teaching of the given biblical book for believers in your specific social, economic, cultural, and religious context?" In order to give the scholars from the two-thirds world the opportunity to address issues that colonialist attitudes have prevented them from raising, we further specified that each of the commentators should ask: "What does this given book say regarding the relationship of the people of God to the world? (xxi).

According to Patte, such a commentary is an "Invitation to read the Bible as for the first time" (xxiii), because "the commentary points out significant aspects of the biblical text that we have overlooked, possibly simply because we have taken them for granted. What was for us a familiar biblical book, which no longer had anything new for us, becomes once again a surprising, disturbing, challenging, prodding, demanding, or wooing address that we cannot ignore. The muffled, subdued, tamed biblical text with which some of us might have