

written and oral traditions from the preexilic period and finds it safest to assume no more textual history than absolutely necessary. This methodological presupposition is not explicit and will escape most readers of the commentary.

Like Murphy, Huwiler is most comfortable with a relatively late date for the text of Ecclesiastes. Though Huwiler does not wish to go against the grain of scholarship and claim a pre-Hellenistic provenance for Ecclesiastes, she makes it clear that similar materials had been produced for centuries in Egypt and Mesopotamia. She also shows parallels between Ecclesiastes and Greek literature, indicating some support for a Hellenistic date. However, some of these parallels are already represented in earlier Egyptian and Akkadian writings.

Although the method of the author of Ecclesiastes is described in some detail, Huwiler does not point out the unusual quality of this work, namely, that the writer is an experimenter and critic of tradition. In keeping with the commentary's expected audience, Huwiler does relate the author's message to modern thought and popular culture, including references to pop music and pop philosophy. At no point does she seriously question the appropriateness of Ecclesiastes as Scripture. She assumes the book to be relevant and gleans abundant relevance for the modern worshiper.

On the Song of Songs, Huwiler is cautious and comes to no firm conclusions, either about the ancient provenance of the Song or its modern meaning in the church. She notes several features of the poem that are special within the context of Scripture: It treats sexuality as a self-standing subject and it has the female speaking from her own vantage point. One might conclude that the purpose of this text is to balance the treatment of human sexuality found through most of the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures. But Huwiler does not succeed in explaining the Song of Songs as part of its present religious context, i.e., the Bible. The great unanswered question remains: What is this book doing here in the Bible?

As a whole, this commentary volume is useful but uneven. As a work on wisdom literature it contrasts two books and two commentators. As two commentaries in one volume it contains only the continuity that one would expect to find between separate commentaries in the same series.

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Neyrey, Jerome H. *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998. viii + 287 pp. Paperback, \$26.00.

Neyrey applies the model of honor and shame as pivotal Mediterranean values to two important aspects of the Gospel according to Matthew. After a brief introduction to how honor and dishonor are represented, attained, and ascribed in the ancient Mediterranean region (in which he also defends the use of the term "Mediterranean" as a meaningful cultural category, an obvious response to critics), Neyrey first shows how Matthew presents aspects of Jesus' life that would be readily understood as claims about Jesus' honor rating. A particular strength of this work (one that also emerges in his volume, *Portraits of Paul*, coauthored with B. J. Malina) is Neyrey's reliance on classical rhetoricians as native informants about how a person's honor was perceived and evaluated. This step is a marked

advance over the earlier attempts of biblical students to apply models derived from modern cultural anthropology to NT texts, giving the cultural analysis both methodological teeth and historical grounding. Neyrey convincingly shows how the early reader of Matthew's Gospel would understand the Gospel as an encomiastic work setting forth Jesus' honor by birth, by achieved honor through the demonstration of virtue and through excelling in challenge-riposte interactions with critics, and finally by dying a noble death (Matthew's radical reinterpretation of the execution of Jesus as a criminal and deviant).

The second focus is the Sermon on the Mount (principally 5:3-6:18), treated in three sections. Neyrey reads 5:3-12 as an attempt by Jesus (in the earliest four Beatitudes shared with Luke's Gospel) to bestow honor on those who have suffered the loss of honor (i.e., being cut off by family and neighbors) on account of their commitment to follow him; 5:21-48 as an attempt to distance his followers from the typical avenues of gaining or defending their honor (namely, through physical, sexual, and verbal aggression); and 6:1-18 as an attempt to divorce the followers from concern for their public reputation (here, particularly their reputation for piety) and to turn their focus solely toward God's approval. The result, Neyrey suggests, is that Jesus' followers will lose their honor in the eyes of their neighbors, although they are assured by Jesus that their honor in God's eyes will more than compensate them.

In the majority of cases, I find Neyrey's interpretation to be well-supported and convincing. There are a number of places, however, where I would question Neyrey's rather ubiquitously negative assessments of how the onlookers would have viewed the disciples who act as Jesus commands. For example, there are in fact many points of contact between "meekness" and positive virtue (e.g., acting without arrogance and with the moderation appropriate to mortals, as when a king spares a subjugated people rather than exacting the punishment his power would enable), and many positive assessments of that generosity that imitates the gods' willingness to give to the "right" people and the "wrong" or "risky" people at the same time (e.g., Seneca, *Beneficiis* 7.31-32, which reads like a pagan paraphrase of Matt 5:44-48). This is merely to say that there are available models "out there" in the Greco-Roman world for the non-Christian to understand the disciple's behavior as an honorable alternative to the more predictable practices of responding to insult with anger or seeking to keep one's goods within one's family or network of friends who one knows will repay the favor. Additionally, the fact that Jesus himself is presented as excelling in the game of challenge-riposte makes one wonder if he really can proscribe his followers from playing the game as well, or if he is just making sure that they do so without doing evil (e.g., increasing violence, deceit, and sexually predatory behavior). That is to say, turning the other cheek might be interpreted by the public as the weakness of a person without honor, but it might also be interpreted as a potent riposte to the challenge offered by the one who struck the first cheek. It might say, with the philosophers, that the insults of the foolish person are meaningless—even as his praise would not be pleasing, either.

On the whole, however, this stands out as the finest book produced by a member of the Context Group on the intersection of honor and New Testament interpretation. It is particularly Neyrey's grounding in classical texts (ancient

rhetoricians, Greco-Roman philosophers such as Aristotle and Epictetus, and the like) that gives depth and credibility to this work. He asserts, rightly, that he works abductively from the model derived from modern cultural anthropologists to the classical informants and back again to refine the model—but this is a most welcome dialogue, one that assures that the reading is well grounded in its own native context.

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Nyirongo, Lenard. *The Gods of Africa or the God of the Bible: The Snares of African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, Brochures of the Institute for Reformational Studies, No. 70. South Africa: Potchefstroom University, 1997. ii + 212 pp. Paperback, 55 Rand.

The author boldly sets forth the main motive and aim of his book at the very outset: "What worries me . . . is the denial of the cardinal truths of the Gospel by some well-known African theologians. . . . The denial can be briefly summarized in one proposition: that the African religious beliefs should be regarded as a foundation for faith in Christ" (1). Eighteen informative chapters that deal with various aspects of pre-Christian ancestral and modern religious faith and life in Africa are grouped into four main divisions: "Knowing God and Worshiping Him Aright," "Man's State and Destiny," "Man's Identity in the Community," and "Suffering, Health and Prosperity." Each chapter begins with a helpful outline of the main ideas and issues to be discussed. This is followed by "the [traditional] African's view" of the subject, a perspective that is often uncritically adopted by sympathetic contemporary theologians. Then "the biblical view" is presented and supported by a wide selection of Scripture references.

Many noteworthy features of this book commend its selection as a basic textbook in Christian apologetics for theological schools and seminaries throughout Africa or as an introduction to "Religion in Africa." These features include a clearly developed, contrastive outline approach to the various topics discussed; an easy, nontechnical style of writing; many citations from prominent pan-African theologians to allow them to "speak for themselves"; a number of useful summary outlines and charts (e.g., on different concepts of "time," 90-92; or matrilineality versus patrilineality, 132-134); and a broad, well-balanced ("evangelical") theological position. The author incisively and succinctly calls attention to the insidious danger of syncretism that threatens the vitality and progress of biblically-based Christianity virtually everywhere in Africa. He does not hesitate to criticize certain antibiblical Western influences as well—e.g., Western notions of "progress" (chap. 9). It is hard to believe that the author, a Zambian management consultant, has received no formal theological training when one reads his perceptive treatment of a wide variety of crucial religious issues—e.g., suffering (chap. 15), healing (chap. 16), witchcraft (chap. 17), and the often overlooked subject of African "art" (chap. 18).

Readers may not always agree with Nyirongo's theological position, but they will certainly admire the clarity and Christian conviction with which he has presented it in terms of African traditional religion, key biblical texts, and certain