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# Review of John Rogerson, A Theology of the Old Testament: Cultural Memory, Communication, and Being Human

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between Amos and two types of ancient Near Eastern literature, city laments and divine destruction texts.

In the last chapter, R. explains that the Book of Amos reached its final form in the aftermath of the Babylonian destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, when several additions were made to the core of the literary work. Among them are the oracles against the nations, with the oracle against Judah in 2:4-5 placed before the prophecies against Israel; the expulsion account in 7:10-17, which reflects the rivalry between Bethel and Jerusalem in the exilic and early postexilic period; and the prediction of the rebuilding of the fallen booth of David in 9:11-15, which R. implausibly interprets as a reference to the temple in Jerusalem. Since, in R.'s judgment, there was no tenth-century Davidic state, David's "booth" cannot be a dynastic reference.

The monograph is a synthetic work, blending a variety of literary analyses and comparisons with recent historical research. R. makes a compelling case that the Book of Amos must be dated later than the reign of Jeroboam II and that much of it dates to the reign of Hezekiah in Judah. The related conclusion—that it probably does not go back to a prophetic figure and his disciples in Israel—appears less certain. A large gap is posited between real prophetic activity of short oracular sayings in the ancient Near East and the literary work that is Amos. The example of Hosea, however, would seem to argue against this impenetrable gap. That book bears the marks of a prophetic ministry in Israel along with some editing from Judah after the fall of Samaria. Indeed, a plausible case can be made that the words of a prophet named Hosea made their way to Judah in the aftermath of the fall of Samaria and that a form of the book was published in the reign of Hezekiah (cf. Hos 1:1 and the reference to "David" in Hos 3:5).

Radine makes much of the claim that prophetic books are literary works in contrast to the collections of short prophecies that have survived elsewhere in the ancient Near East. This distinction is important, but the uniqueness of the biblical prophetic books does not mean that their contents are (only?) the composition of scribes and not related to the work of a particular figure such as an Amos or a Hosea. The books of 1–2 Kings are perhaps another parallel to consider. They, too, are unique in literary form and substance when compared to the ancient Near Eastern royal annals and state historiography that have been preserved. Should we interpret the many references in 1–2 Kings to state annals (e.g., 2 Kgs 14:28) as mere literary devices, or should we see at least some of them as references to archival material on which the scribal authors drew in making their presentation of the rise and fall of Israel and Judah?

Radine's work is an informative and interesting read, fairly presenting proposals and data to accompany them.

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JOHN W. ROGERSON, *A Theology of the Old Testament: Cultural Memory, Communication, and Being Human* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010). Pp. x + 214. \$29.

I should state at the outset that, in my opinion, Rogerson has been one of the most important modern voices in British OT scholarship and was an especially important "early

adopter” of the dialogue between social sciences and OT textual analysis. He then moved toward a field where he was nearly alone (especially writing in English)—engaging in reappraisals of the life, context, and impact of earlier OT scholars and their work, particularly German scholars. These are only some of the reasons why a biblical theology from R. is to be anticipated.

It would not be entirely fair to say that R. offers anything like a “distillation of his scholarly endeavors” because of the wide-ranging nature of his previous work; but that wide-ranging work is precisely the reason why this rather brief biblical theology is characterized by a fascinating diversity of dialogue partners across many disciplines, especially Frankfurt School Critical Theory.

In chap. 1, “History and Cultural Memory,” R. sets out his agenda—in contrast to well-known modern skepticism around such an undertaking, he intends to talk about how the OT can inform contemporary theological reflection. This is not a historical analysis of “their religion,” but rather a textually informed and reasoned attempt to ask how “their ideas” can enrich our own. R. is well aware that many attempts to talk about “their religion” can hardly be separated from contemporary contexts of scholarship anyway, and so (in proper postmodern wisdom) he declares his own identity and possible “interests” in approaching his task, including his major dialogue partners (so p. 11, “[Ernst] Bloch, [Walter] Benjamin, [Theodor] Adorno, [Max] Horkheimer, and [Jürgen] Habermas are referred to in the course of the work . . .”). R.’s work attempts to read the narrative as informative of contemporary theological reflection, which is what he means by reading the Bible as “cultural memory.” He is also cognizant of the fact that there are different kinds of “memories” represented in the biblical texts—some are supportive of the status quo, and some raise serious questions from more marginal locations. Along these lines, R. borrows some of the language of “hot” and “cold” societies to articulate some of these differences.

In chap. 2, “Creation Accounts as Critiques of the World of Human Experience and Human Actions,” R. surveys different texts on a similar theme once again—in this case, different kinds of “creation” narratives, and how these different creation accounts can sometimes engender a critical stance toward our perceptions of society and the human condition. Noting the “paradox” between the ideal picture of Genesis 1 and the more “realistic” picture of the fallen human condition in Genesis 6–9, R. insists that this paradox be maintained so that the biblical texts can be heard to model creative tension with existing human structures. To try always to “harmonize” the texts is, it seems, inevitably to silence the dissident voices, and the variety of creation discussions illustrates this creative tension.

In chap. 3, “Aspects of Communication: Interpersonal Relations,” R. moves through a survey of stories in Genesis and Job, in each case asking how these reflect attitudes toward human relationships, through which one can understand something of the divine character: “Standing in sharp contrast to the rationality of self-interest is the rationality of self-sacrifice . . . God is cast in many human images in the Old Testament. The one that comes closest to the truth is that which sees the rationality of self-sacrifice as the clue to God’s nature” (p. 91).

I find chap. 4, “Disrupted Communication: Social Relationships,” the most provocative. Here, R. addresses the prophetic critique of human capacity for systematic and brutal self-interest. Arguing that the prophets did not express a call to “return” to some golden, Mosaic-inspired early Israelite utopia, R. suggests that the prophetic critique rose in direct

response to the historic and economic developments of the late-ninth- and eighth-century social breakdowns led by the rise of an elite, agriculturally based oligarchy. In response to many recent attempts to articulate the precise nature of the economics of the eighth century, R. concentrates on the social consequences themselves and thus suggests that the enduring values must be derived from the prophetic critique that can be applied to any similarly brutal socioeconomic system. I find especially suggestive R.'s proposal about Micah's class-conscious criticism against a Judean state preparing for war.

The previous chapters on human relationships clearly build toward chap. 5, "Disrupted Communication: Divine-Human Relationships." Turning to lament literature, R. suggests a deeply moving intimacy in the human-divine relationship, and he proposes ironically that laments attest less to the break in human-divine relationships than to the very depth of that relationship.

Finally, in chap. 6, "What Does It Mean to Be Human?" R. summarizes his vision of a dialogic reading of the Bible that challenges humans to join God in a critical review of human failure to create a just, loving, and fulfilling context for individuality. The fact that the biblical texts engage in multiple illustrations of human failure, and God's judgment of that failure, is not an indication of a violent or primitive idea about a god whom we can no longer accept, but rather engages us in a dialogue about what we, too, ought not tolerate in the human condition! He notes that many cite Exod 22:21-27 and fall upon the vengeful notion of a punishing god rather than concentrating on what the *punishment is for* in this passage—namely, the oppression of the weak and powerless in our own society. R.'s analysis raises interesting questions, such as: In our wishing for a mild, all-forgiving God who never judges, do we really wish to dispense with the need to think critically about our own failures to forgive, much less our failures to achieve the kind of compassionate society that we blame God for not creating despite us?

Rogerson's work is a fascinating example of what can arise from a reading of the Bible that accepts diverse perspectives in the text, and a reading that takes its ideological cues from the debates already inherent in the various perspectives in that text.

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MARK S. SMITH, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2010). Pp. xxiv + 382. Paper \$18.

In this monograph, originally published in 2008 by Mohr Siebeck, Smith builds on his published research over the last two decades. He takes issue with Jan Assmann's discussion of monotheism (a published theme in Assmann's writings since 1993) in *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1997). Assmann discusses the translatability of divinity (the cross-cultural recognition that the deities of other cultures exist as do their own) among the nations of the ancient Near East. Among other points, Assmann concludes that the Bible's "Mosaic distinction" blocked intercultural translatability between the one true God and all false deities. S. proposes that ancient Israelite religion involved both translatability and its eventual rejection and here researches several issues: (1) the cultural contexts for expressions of trans-