

Third, the principles for interpreting the New Testament presented by Cousar (pp. 183–86) are valid for those who are engaged in the task of interpreting the sacred writings, and at the same time they constitute a warning against the claims of both the Enlightenment and postmodernism: (1) We need the guidance of the Spirit; (2) the Bible is always to be read in the light of past and present readings of the text; (3) Scripture interprets Scripture; (4) Jesus Christ is the center of Scripture; (5) the Bible needs to be read in a community with others; (6) the Bible is to be read in the light of the rule of love; (7) the Scriptures are always to be read in the light of the literary form, and the social and historical context in which they were written; and (8) the interpreter must be open to change. It is the recognition of our limitations and the work of the Spirit which can lead in directions we have never gone before. Based on all what has been said above, this book is a good read not only by those who have theological training but also by those who seek a fresh encounter with the text of the New Testament.

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*Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, by Richard M. Davidson. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007. Pp. xxix + 844. ISBN 978-1-56563-847-1. Paper. US\$ 29.95.

Richard Davidson, the J. N. Andrews Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at Andrews University, has set out to write a “wholistic theology of [human] sexuality in the OT” (p. 1). His method is to examine the “final canonical form” (p. 2), using synchronic methodologies drawn from the literary school and biblical theology. He acknowledges a debt to feminist scholarship while rejecting any hermeneutic of resistance (p. 3).

Broadly following the shape of the canon, the work falls into three sections. The first, “Sexuality in Eden” (65 pages), takes Gen 1–2 as “the divine design” or paradigm, and Gen 1–3 as “the interpretive foundation for the rest of Scripture” (p. 15). This section introduces ten themes which will organize the rest of the book: sexuality as creation order, heterosexuality, monogamy, gender equality, sexual wholeness, marital exclusivity, permanence, intimacy, procreation and the wholesome beauty of sex. It then begins to consider the effects of the fall in Gen 3.

The second section, “Sexuality outside the Garden” (459 pages), treats the vast bulk of OT material regulating or reporting on imperfect sex in a fallen world. It is organized according to the ten principles established in section 1, and analyses later sexual behavior as either consistent with the original plan or a distortion of it. It also analyses texts within their culture,

citing historical and legal sources from the ANE. For example, there is historical background on sacralized sex in the fertility cults of Israel's neighbors, and it is in this culture that Davidson argues that women were excluded from the cultic functions of Israel's priesthood mainly to differentiate against ANE cultures with tendencies towards portraying so-called holy women as the wife of the deity or using them as cultic prostitutes. He argues that exclusion for this reason does not denigrate one gender and "in no way implies that women are barred from leadership (teaching/administrative) roles over men in the covenant community" (p. 253). He has previously argued for "Adam and Eve's inauguration as priests in the post-fall world" (p. 58). Homosexual practice is discussed in a chapter alongside transvestitism and bestiality. Texts on polygamy and concubinage are interpreted to show much less approval than is assumed in many readings of the OT: Davidson looks for consistency across the canon. On the elevation versus denigration of women, he canvasses a range of views before arguing for an original equality without hierarchy, and then a temporary male servant-leadership initiated during the curse of the Fall but intended as a potential blessing. After Carol Meyers, he sees Israel's history as much less sexist than is often thought. He grants that "under biblical patriarchy there occurred horrendous incidents of female denigration, oppression and abuse" but sees patriarchy "was not evil in itself but rather one of those God-ordained remedial provisions, instituted after the fall, that God called 'statutes that were not good', i.e., not the ultimate divine ideal (Ezek 20:25, p. 219)." Prostitution, mixed marriages, masturbation, sexual blemishes and impurities are also discussed, as are adultery and premarital sex. Each chapter concludes with an explicit statement of how divine grace applies to the issue.

The third section, "Return to Eden" (87 pages), reads the Song of Songs as wisdom literature, and is organized around the now-familiar ten principles. It argues that even in an imperfect world the Song echoes Edenic ideals, and that a good relationship reveals God's own character of love. It sees subtle renderings of God's name artistically watermarked into the text of the Song, including 8:6c which calls love a "flame of Yah" (weh), suggesting Davidson's title and theological keynote: "human love is explicitly described as originating in God, a spark off the Holy Flame" (p. 630).

An Afterword (25 pages) considers some implications of the study for a NT theology of sexuality, particularly suggesting Pentateuchal background for Jesus' much-debated statements about divorce and for apostolic understanding of *porneia*.

Davidson (who in a brief footnote positively comments on a manuscript of mine, p. 617 n. 36, lest you think that would bias me) could hardly have

chosen more controversial subject areas, involving sex itself, gender equality, marital power relations, homosexuality, divorce, women in ministry—issues on which global denominations are currently fracturing. This mountainous research project will catalyze debate, but readers who argue with some conclusions will, one expects, respect scholarship which listens to such a wide range of views and seeks to heed the biblical text and apply it with theological and pastoral awareness. A conservative evangelical exegete, Davidson finds in the text refreshingly egalitarian—not to say progressive—principles on feminine equality and women in ministry.

The treatment is commendably frank, and no more shocking than Scripture itself: as part of his belief that all Scripture is inspired and profitable, Davidson can discuss tragic rape plots (ch. 12) or lesbians with dildos (p. 163), while maintaining the sensitive, rational tone of one seeking faithfully to exposit “all the counsel of God,” or at least every OT text concerning sex.

The basic approach can of course be criticized from the perspective of other theories of origins, or of the origins of the Pentateuch, but is an internally consistent synchronic canonical method, and fairly standard conservative hermeneutics. Some will also object to Davidson’s wish to find unity across the canon, especially in a tendency to harmonize legal material. Yet Davidson examines law texts skillfully, providing insights into Pentateuchal passages often misunderstood and discounted. His treatment of the “trial of jealousy” in Num 5 is particularly deft and honoring to the status of women (ch. 8). While the book cannot consider the many interlocking themes and nuanced subtexts of narratives, it does offer key insights from narrative theology (see p. 180 n. 12 for a brief methodological statement) and footnotes theologically rich studies from narrative scholars.

A valuable analysis of strong and admirable female characters (ch. 6) could also have fleshed out fascinatingly evil women like Athaliah, Jezebel or Sisera’s mother, showing that the OT is comfortable enough with women’s value to give even-handed portrayals of bad women.

As a theological treatment of the Song of Solomon, section 3 is well-researched and helpful. The search for the historical Shulamite is intriguing, even if built on several speculations, yet the literary and theological study of the Song stands without it.

The NT section left me curious about how the author might trace the canonical story right through: will the eschatological Eden involve a restoration of the wholistic human marriage and sex originally intended by the Creator? How are Jesus’ words on this (Matt 22:30 // Mk 12:25) to be understood? Yet Davidson recognizes that a complete biblical theology of sexuality is yet to be written.

While the prose is scholarly in style, I have that found both graduates and undergraduates without Hebrew language knowledge have appreciated chapters. Even a bright and curious teenager dipping into this book would find many burning questions tackled biblically. Davidson is to be commended for an OT biblical theology of sexuality which is fearless, deep and comprehensive—almost encyclopaedic. With 142 pages of bibliography, it offers a rich mine of scholarly material and, running to a hefty xxix + 844 pages, this profound volume could double as a barbell for the home gym.

In an age when culture-shaping sexual questions are often discussed everywhere except church—when in too many pulpits traditional silences are allowed to gag scripture, or fashionable ideology dictates the agenda, or idealistic denial excludes real people's needs, or knee-jerk moral outrage replaces pastoral care—Davidson's work offers not only valuable biblical information but permission and example to encourage teachers and preachers. Church and society need this kind of grace-based biblical teaching on sexual issues, revealing God as the Source of all that is good and the Redeemer of love and sex, and calling people in a fast-changing culture to the timeless logic of biblical principles.

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*The Tenants in the Vineyard: Ideology, Economics, and Agrarian Conflict in Jewish Palestine*, by John S. Kloppenborg. WUNT 195. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006. Pp. xxix + 651. ISBN 978-3-16-148908-2. Hardcover. €149.00.

John S. Kloppenborg, Professor and Chair of the Department and Centre for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto and well-known for his works on Q and early Christianity, seeks in this book to peel back the layers of interpretative tradition that have adhered to the parable of the Tenants in the Vineyard (Mark 12:1–12 parr). The book consists of a six-page introduction, followed by nine chapters, an epilogue, two appendices, extensive bibliography, and three indexes (modern authors, ancient texts, and subjects/terminology).

Chapter one describes how the parable has been used throughout Christian history to reinforce the dominance of socio-political powers. Kloppenborg begins with its use in the *Book of Common Prayer* by Charles II who established January 30 of 1662 (the anniversary of the death of Charles I) as a national fast and penitential observance for the crime of regicide. Then follows a fairly lucid description of ideological theory drawn principally from Raymond Geuss, but also utilizing insights from Marx and Engels regarding the use of ideology for social domination. Kloppenborg asserts that one