

Editorial:

On Scholarship and Interconnectivity

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As the articles for the current issue of *Old Testament Essays* were being laid out and edited, news of the death of Prof. Gunther Wittenberg of UKZN was received. *OTE* and the OTSSA wish to convey their condolences to Prof Wittenberg's family and colleagues. A former colleague and student of Gunther Wittenberg, Elewani Farisani, pays tribute to him.

In the last article of this issue, Lubunga W'Ehusha refers to the last two articles Wittenberg wrote for *OTE*.¹ Those articles were conceived as a response to an eco-theological challenge raised by Peet van Dyk.² Wittenberg wanted to find the right metaphor instead of searching for an ecotheology. That metaphor he found in Jesus Christ's role in creation and redemption. W'Ehusha looks in the Old Testament for a response to the challenge, namely redemption of the priestly role of theology. One of the priestly duties was that of acquiring and distributing the scientific knowledge of the time. W'Ehusha argues that a reconfiguration of that role in current society will entail a theological enterprise that is knowledgeable about nature and its sacredness, instructing the world about harmony with nature, God and human beings. W'Ehusha's response to a challenge advanced by an essay in *OTE*, bearing in mind Wittenberg's own response to it and his socio-political engagement during his life-time, raises the question of the nature of an academic, and more specifically, an Old Testament scholar in South Africa.

Madipoane Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele) addresses scholarship on the African continent, and more specifically, gender-sensitive South African biblical scholarship. To be even more specific, she looks at the insider/outsider dynamics within a scholarly context which she regards as mimicking Eurocentric frameworks that are regarded as normative, if not natural. In gender-sensitive South African scholarship she still find traces of Eurocentric normativity, and she laments with the late Ferdinand Deist the inclination to follow the latest trend of the Global North in biblical scholarship, implying a failure within South African biblical scholarship to remain contextual, namely questioning the relevancy of what is "imported" to the country's own peculiar questions.

Masenya's questions are very pertinent to the guild of Old Testament scholarship in South Africa, and especially its publishing flagship, *Old Testament*

¹ Gunther Wittenberg, "Part One: Metaphor and Dominion," *OTE* 23/2 (2010): 427–453; Gunther Wittenberg, "In Search of the Right Metaphor: A Response to Peet van Dyk's 'Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology': Part Two: Searching for an Alternative," *OTE* 23/3 (2010): 889–912.

² Peet J. van Dyk, "Eco-Theology and Losing the Sacred," *OTE* 23/3 (2010): 822–833, and "Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology," *OTE* 22/1 (2009): 186–204.

Essays. The latter professes, *inter alia*, to publish South African scholarship within the field of the Old Testament. And the questions are, firstly, whether this scholarship reflects an agenda of social consciousness in any way, and secondly, whether there is an internal dialogue within South African Old Testament scholarship. As this issue shows, there is definitely an interconnectivity between the various essays. This interconnectivity may point to the possibilities of dialogue, even when the points of departure are considerably different.

Ndikho Mtshiselwa's article realises Masenya's wish via Ferdinand Deist for contextual South African scholarship. His article sets out to delineate the possibilities for socio-economic redress in South Africa when the story of Naboth's vineyard is read in terms of the socio-economic reality of the day. But to him the story is less about Naboth and more about the revolution Jehu brought about. Nonetheless, he is quite critical of the story's failure of reconstruction and redistribution in that Jehu seems to keep the vineyard in his possession (for example, in terms of power relations where Jehu remains part of the ruling elite), although there is evidence that in other instances dispossessed land did return to their original rightful owners. However, Mtshiselwa's approach of contextualisation brings forward the question of the politicisation of scholarship and the biblical justification for political processes which can be linked to party political affiliation.

Whereas the previous three essays play on the socio-political relevance of Old Testament scholarship, Louis Jonker's article looks into scholarship politics between two fields of study. Jonker argues that Pentateuchal scholarship and Chronicles studies have come within hearing distance from one another, since both show an interest in the negotiation of identity in the Persian period, but with the following difference: in Pentateuchal scholarship the attention is on the formation of the Pentateuch and in Chronicles studies the focus is on the reception of these traditions. He remains wishful that these two groups will eventually hear each other.

Nissim Amzallag's article raises the issue of dialogicity, or antiphony as he phrases it. Antiphony is the presence of two voices in a single text. Amzallag applies the concept to the musical mode of the writing of the Psalms and its significance. He observes within the psalms an anomaly: despite symmetry within the text, the flow of the text is not very smooth. His explanation of this phenomenon relates to the musical fashion in which the psalms were once written. The way in which the music was written created a dialogue, or two distinct scores that are sung by two different voices, creating a dialogue as they sing the score. He defines this as a complex antiphony where small fragments of texts from the two scores find their way into a composite text. Amzallag's utilisation of the notion of antiphony is quite relevant in an African context where antiphony is regarded as a fundamental mode of music writing and performing. Antiphony may be regarded

as a principal formal feature of African music whose impact ranges far beyond music as a mode of cultural expression.³

Whereas Jonker concentrates on the Persian Period of the Early Second Temple Period, Howes's article concentrates on the later time of that period. He enquires about an aspect of divine judgment, a concept that developed into a full-fledged theological belief in Second Temple Palestinian Judaism: psychostasia. Psychostasia is the weighing of the soul in the final eschatological judgment. It is a process of measuring and weighing a person's moral worth. Within Judaism the wisdom and apocalyptic literature provide ample evidence for psychostasia as judgment by God. Howes provides a description of the belief's historical development up to the Second Temple Period in Palestine via the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. His essay plays on Messianism, theocracy, Day of Yahweh and fear, which are all aspects of the idea of God's judgment of people and themes raised by a few more authors in this issue.

Gianni Barbiero's essay on messianism and theocracy in the Psalms links up with Amzallag's argument of antiphony in a single text. Barbiero also defends the view of a unified composition over-against the traditional view of redaction criticism that sees in these two psalms evidence of different editors. Implied in the arguments by Amzallag and Barbiero is the notion of a single composition with deliberate different voices. If antiphony can be defined in terms of call and response as two voices in a single composition, Barbiero's argument boils down to two voices, namely messianism and theocracy. Whereas an antiphony implies, nonetheless, opposing or at least contrasting voices, this is not suggested by Barbiero who rather argues that messianism and theocracy are reasonably linked in the Psalms. However, the difference between Amzallag and Barbiero is that the latter does not bring into play the music as a constituting element of the literary production. For Barbiero, the evidence for messianism and theocracy is literary in nature.

The theme of messianism and theocracy is picked up by Boloje and Groenewald with their discussion on eschatology and the Day of Yahweh in Malachi. According to them, Malachi's projection of the Day of Yahweh constitutes an eschatological day of judgement as well as a future day of renewal and restoration of the fortunes of those who fear the Lord. Within the context of a post-exilic province of Yehud, the people expected that the Day of Yahweh will be a day of divine deliverance from their enemies. However, to the prophet they are themselves Yahweh's enemy. On that day they too will be judged, with a second day in future that will be a day of renewal and restoration for those who fear the Lord. Boloje and Groenewald conclude that it is this eschatological dimension of the Day of Yahweh that intensifies the ethical uniqueness of the book of Malachi.

³ Paul Gilroy, "'It Ain't Where You're From, It's Where You're At...'. The Dialectics of Diasporic Identification," *Third Text* 5/13 (1991): 3-16. Online: DOI:10.1080/09528829108576284.

Whereas the issue "fear of the Lord" functions in the background in Boloje and Groenewald's essay, it is the topic of discussion *par excellence* in Ellis's article. In fact, his study of the often quoted apophthegm "the fear of God is the principle of wisdom" may provide necessary background for the understanding of the fear of God in Malachi. Walter Zimmerli called it the queen of all rules⁴ and Gerhard von Rad saw it as the theory of Israel's knowledge in a nutshell.⁵ Ellis provides a literature review of the notion "fear of God" and focuses specifically on the work of Rudolph Otto, who is claimed to have influenced the understanding (of, *inter alia*, Walther Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad) of the notion of the fear of God with his concept of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Of considerable importance is Clines's take on the notion. Although Ellis differs from Clines's understanding, it is perhaps necessary to bear in mind the distinction Clines makes, namely the emotion of fear and the subsequent ethical action, the latter being referred to by Boloje and Groenewald in their essay.

The notion of the Day of God forms the background to Kruger's minute detailing of one aspect of judgment that may befall men and women in Israel if they do not keep YHWH's commandments. His discussion of rape as a war brutality in the Minor Prophets is a chilling reminder of the possibility of terror within the biblical text. It is important to take note of the reminder in his conclusion, namely that the violence he detected within the prophecies takes the reader to an outer limit. To cross that boundary results into questions about God. It is for this reason that one only finds references to this kind of violence in prophecies of doom and not in the rest of the HB and in the literature of the ANE.

Leonard Maré's essay on Psalm 88 links up with Amzallag's inquiry into the musical mode of writing the Psalms and with Kruger's reference to the outer limit where God is questioned. Maré regards Psalm 88 as one of the dark corners of the Psalter because of its darkness, despair, fear, and hopelessness, in crying out to a God that is silent and absent. Its musical indication is that of singing in a depressed or muffled voice, a mode that suits the darkness within the psalm. To Maré, this darkness and divine silence is part of the reality of faith where the faithful periodically experience abandonment and despair.

The underlying theme of a messianic day of judgment is picked up by O'Kennedy in his comparison of Zechariah 3 and 13. For example, both chapters refer to "on that day." It is a technical term that signifies in both chapters a period of peace and prosperity with the following difference: in ch. 3 the period will lead to peace, prosperity, and good relationships, but in ch. 13 there is an added feature, namely purification and the removal of idols and false prophets.

⁴ Walter Zimmerli, "The Place and Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17/2 (1964): 146-158.

⁵ Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, (trans. J. D. Martin; SCM Press, London, 1972), 67-68. [p.47 par 7.2.4 – net voorletters van die vertaler]

Adding to the discussion of the prophets and judgment is Ndoga's reading of Ezekiel 22:23-30 within a context of national leadership and collective responsibility. He argues that the absence of responsibility can directly be linked to a lack of accountability. It begins at the highest level of leadership and filters down to the subordinates, thus pervading the whole society. In addition, such moral degeneration follows spiritual decay resulting in a situation where leaders retain their functional titles but lack the necessary integrity.

In Jordan Scheetz's detailed textual study—a mind-set as well as a methodology he shares with several authors in this issue—he draws the attention anew to the Masoretic text of Genesis 22, providing the reader with an example of what he labels “canon-conscious interpretation” in comparing the Masoretic text (MT) of Gen 22:1-19 and its appearance in the Targum Onkelos (TO). Canon-conscious interpretation is present in a translation when a translator notices a connection between authoritative texts in Hebrew and then makes this connection explicit within the translation of these texts. Scheetz shows how this process impacts on a later reader's interpretation of the text.

In another detailed textual study Josh Spoelstra inquires into the reason why Esther postponed her revelation of the identity of the people Haman wanted to annihilate and invited the king to a second banquet. His study of the words *משתה יין* and *משתה* and their semantic ranges as well as his comparison of King Ahasuerus' drinking-bout and Queen Esther's second invitation suggests that she postponed her request and revelation because the king was not sufficiently intoxicated.

Proofreading these articles, I became fascinated by the inter-referentiality of these essays. They all can be seen as picking up a theme or an argument raised by another author in this volume. However, it is an interconnectivity that is not always recognised in our own scholarship. In terms of Jonker's wish of two groups hearing each other, or Amzallag's antiphony in a text, or Masenya's plea for socio-political involvement, Old Testament Studies in South Africa have a way to go.

Henry A. Giroux, in an interview on the publication of his book, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*,⁶ refers to “gated intellectuals” who have succumbed to the seductive trimmings of neoliberal power; to scholars whose work is “anti-political, and often indifferent to the growing plight of human suffering,” “utterly privatized and unconnected to important social issues and always haughty” and to those scholars who are “wakeful and mindful of their responsibilities to bear testimony to human suffering and the pedagogical possibilities at work in educating students to be autonomous, self-reflective, and socially respon-

⁶ Henry A. Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*, (Haymarket Books: Chicago, 2014); Victoria Harper, “Interview: Henry A. Giroux: Neoliberalism, Democracy and the University as a Public Sphere,” *Truthout*, n.p. [cited 23 April 2014]. Online: <http://truth-out.org/opinion/item/23156-henry-a-giroux-neoliberalism-democracy-and-the-university-as-a-public-sphere>.

sible."⁷ In order to function as, what Giroux calls, "moral witnesses, [raise] political awareness, and [make] connections to those elements of power and politics often hidden from public view," it is necessary to explicate the text on which these actions will be based. Not every reading can be political, but neither should Old Testament scholarship eventually be reduced to political instrumentality.⁸ The challenge is to maintain Old Testament scholarship amidst the corporatisation of the university with its concomitant expansion of a managerial class draining funds and minimising academic offerings (i.e. for Semitic languages because of low student numbers) to those that are financially affordable in an authoritarian way. The challenge is also to transcend the language of professionalisation and specialisation—a process that will enable scholarship to connect to public concerns, disputes and national socio-political problems.

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⁷ Harper, "Interview," n.p. [cited 23 April 2014]. Online: <http://truth-out.org/opinion/item/23156-henry-a-giroux-neoliberalism-democracy-and-the-university-as-a-public-sphere>.

⁸ Harper, "Interview," n.p. [cited 23 April 2014]. Online: <http://truth-out.org/opinion/item/23156-henry-a-giroux-neoliberalism-democracy-and-the-university-as-a-public-sphere>.