

Editorial: Honouring a Colleague and Friend

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The editors of the present volume, Professor Hulisani Ramantswana and Professor Jaco Gericke, bestowed on me the privilege to write an editorial for this volume in honour of a well-respected colleague in the guild who is also a dear friend to many of us. The writing of these words takes me back to the time Professor Gerrie Snyman was the editor of *Old Testament Essays* and we shared a close working relationship. During this period of considerable change and challenges faced by editors of accredited scholarly journals, Snyman worked tirelessly behind the scenes to secure the continued publication of *Old Testament Essays* as an independent journal accredited by the Department of Education. He also took the lead in ensuring that the journal is accepted on renowned international indices such as SciELOSA and Scopus. For these accomplishments, of which present and future generations of African Old Testament scholars continue to reap the fruit, we remain in debt to Professor Snyman. The innovative leadership demonstrated by Gerrie while in the editorial seat also includes the publication of articles in not only Afrikaans and English but also in some of the other eleven official languages of South Africa. His inclusive approach to our scholarly journeys is also reflected in creating publication opportunities for scholars of different persuasions, especially from our continent, to enter and contribute to academic debates.

The scholarly contribution of Gerrie Snyman is considered by a colleague from UNISA, Izak (Sakkie) Spangenberg, who witnessed the whole academic career of the laureate. In "Reading the Bible in Post-Apartheid South Africa: The Contribution of Gerrie Snyman," Spangenberg positions the work of Snyman against the backdrop of the history of biblical scholarship in South Africa, a topic that Spangenberg has explored in many scholarly and some popular publications. Spangenberg points out how Snyman's contributions can be counted among the new voices that seriously considered scholarly developments in the international context and the impact these had on understanding the Bible in South Africa. Snyman's continued conversation with his ecclesiastical context stands as testimony to his attempt to apply hermeneutical theory to the practice of reading the Bible.

In the contribution, "Prophets, Kings, and Vulnerability in South Africa Today," a member of the same church circles as Snyman, Herrie van Rooy, who is attached to the NWU and well-known for his study of Syriac psalms, explores

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the relation between the prophets and the kings in ancient Israel. Van Rooy links this contribution to the word 'vulnerable' that Snyman uses in the context of the development of a specific hermeneutic. Although not suggesting such a reading for the Old Testament texts that elucidate the function of prophets during different eras in the history of Israel and Judah, he gives a detailed overview of the role of the prophets especially during monarchic times, as described in the text. Taking his cue from the interactions between the prophets and the kings in the Old Testament, Van Rooy concludes that in the past and unlike the Old Testament prophets, Afrikaans-speaking churches failed to speak truth to power, leading to their important witness regarding current affairs being all but lost.

Phil J. Botha (UP), whom Snyman succeeded as editor of *Old Testament Essays* presents a comprehensive study of the indicated cluster of Psalms in his contribution, "'Ascribe Power to God, Whose Majesty Is over Israel, and Whose Power Is in the Skies' (Ps 68:35): The Theological Intent of Psalms 65–68 and Their Connections with the Prologue to the Psalter (Pss 1–2)." With meticulous attention to detail that characterises his scholarly work, Botha firstly offers the reason for grouping the psalms from Book 2 of the Psalter together. He then highlights the semantic and thematic links between the poems in this cluster to conclude with a discussion of how these characteristics link these psalms to the introductory poems of the Psalter (Pss 1 – 2).

The article by Snyman's Stellenbosch colleague, Louis C. Jonker, picks up on Snyman's study of the story of King Asa as depicted in the book of Chronicles. In "The Cushites in Herodotus and Chronicles: Revisiting the Asa Narrative," Jonker revisits earlier work he presented on the rhetorical use of the name 'Cushites' in this narrative. After examining the role the 'Cushites' play in the work of the Greek 'historian', Herodotus, Jonker draws the compelling conclusion, based on evidence presented, that the Chronicler probably "latched onto the classical Greek historiography of Herodotus." This necessitates the final inference that "Chronicles thus stands in a continuum of historiographic literary works that connect the classical Greek traditions with those from post-exilic Yehud, but also with later Hellenistic and Jewish histories."

Gerald O. West, a retired colleague from UKZN presents the reader with an 'against-the-grain' reading of the biblical text in his "Decolonial Post-Tribal Interpretation: Proto-Tribal Socio-Economic Contestation in 3 Reigns 24:12:24p-t." In line with his continued and much-needed focus on reading the Bible contextually, he probes oppressive political and especially economic systems. While depending heavily on the recent work of Mahmood Mamdani (2021), he proposes a new lens ('heuristic vehicle') for looking at what later became a variant text in the LXX. This new look at what is viewed as an earlier edition of the text opens the eyes to "a glimpse of economic struggle against exploitation at the moment when it begins to take on an ethnic, tribal

countenance." Based on the analysis of Mamdani, this indeed becomes a very topical issue in the present South Africa.

In another contribution by a colleague from Stellenbosch University, HL Bosman puts on the table a current but contentious issue for not only churches in South Africa but also the rest of the continent and further afield. The article, "Discerning So-Called Abomination in Lev 18:22 and 20:13 in Relation to Holiness, Honour, and Shame," unpacks the meaning of 'abomination' in the context of regulating male-male sexual relations. After discussing the structure and content of the texts mentioned in their broader and narrower literary contexts, Bosman explores possible reasons for describing male-male sexuality with the term 'abomination.' Here he solicits arguments from the fields of sociology and the history of interpretation to arrive at the conclusion that "prohibition of male-male sexual intercourse in Lev 18:22 and 20:13 should be read contextually . . . and not just accepting it as unconditional legal instruction."

In the essay, "It Is a Matter of Justice! The Old Testament and the Idea of Retribution," the Belgian scholar, Hans Ausloos from the Université Catholique de Louvain, follows up on the search for 'justice,' which, he observes, runs like a thread through the work of Gerrie Snyman. Ausloos suggests a more nuanced understanding of one aspect of justice in the Old Testament, namely the doctrine of retribution. At first, he notes a few terms in the Old Testament that, depending on the context of their use, communicates the idea of retribution. The author then takes the reader on a journey through the Old Testament, which clearly points out the kaleidoscopic nature of this idea. The article concludes on a cautionary note indicating that in the wisdom books of Qohelet and Job, the very real human experience that sometimes seems contra the idea of retribution is also present in life and thus acknowledged by the biblical authors.

In another essay, "Raised Eyes and Humble Hearts: The Body as/in Space in Pss 123 and 131," Gert Prinsloo, who like Phil Botha was attached to the Faculty of Humanities at University of Pretoria until his recent retirement, picks up on research themes he is renowned for namely the representation of bodily and spatial aspects in the poetry of the Psalter. Prinsloo presents a "detailed intratextual reading" of the two Psalms that are significantly placed within the 'Songs of Ascent' corpus. An overview of the theoretical basis for his reading is followed by a detailed analysis of the different stanzas in the two poems. The result of this reading shows that these "two poems resonate with each other and provide a lens through which YHWH's terrestrial and cosmic presence can be appropriated by his people', both "collectively and individually." The suggestion of a possible real-life context of these poems renders this reading even more valued.

Madipoane Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele), also a long-standing colleague of Snyman at UNISA, reflects on the experiences of many readers on the African continent in "A Woman with Multiple Identities: Reading the Ruth

Character in Post-Apartheid South Africa." She notes that our interaction as Old Testament scholars and colleagues can enhance one another's lives and scholarship, as was the case with her and Gerrie. In her reading of the character of Ruth, Masenya identifies tropes in the story that resonate with modern-day people on our continent. This reading gives her the means on the one hand to explore the avenues of liberty contained in the story and on the other hand also to pause and ask critical questions as to what extent we are staying true to and, if need be, confronting our own identities in an African South African context.

The third colleague from Stellenbosch to contribute to this project is L. Juliana Claassens. Her contribution, "Theological Language in Crisis? Importance of Trauma Hermeneutics for Exploring Gendered Metaphors for God in the Book of Jeremiah," is placed against the background of a public debate on the use of feminine metaphors when referring to God. She shows that the book and character of the prophet Jeremiah are well suited for investigating "how male and female metaphors for God are performed." She argues that the metaphors in the book not only typify "gender reversal" for its intended audience, in some cases, but also, in others, positively express attempts at healing in a context of traumatic violence. Furthermore, Claassens points out how queer criticism can assist the reader in steering away from a binary view of gender and rather discover the gender fluidity these metaphors suggest. This suggests not only the possibility but, in fact, the necessity of imagining God differently in an altogether new context.

The Norwegian scholar, Knut Holter, reflects on "The Theological Significance of Africa and Africans in the Bible." Using the reference to 'Cushite' in Amos 9:7, he notes the influence our "interpretive traditions and contexts" has on our understanding of the biblical texts. This recognition then opens the door for seeking and "expressing a contemporary theological significance of the presence of Africa and Africans in the Bible." Holter starts out by noting that "the most relevant definition" of Africa/Africans to address this topic would be the explicit references to "geographical, cultural, or ethnic entities" in the Bible that refer to what is seen as Africa at present. For Holter, the theological significance of these references culminates in the universalistic meaning they add to the text—indeed, "the God of Israel is the God of all people."

"Sacred Texts Produced under the Shadows of Empires: Double Consciousness and Decolonial Options in Reading the Hebrew Bible" is Hulisani Ramantwsana's (UNISA) tribute to Professor Snyman whom he describes as "a friend, a colleague and a mentor." By way of introduction, mention is made of the postcolonial work of, among others, Fanon to indicate not only the theoretical underpinnings of the argument but also the problem of 'two-ness' experienced by people on the African continent. After noting a similar imperialistic ambivalence in the exodus and conquest narratives as founding myths, the author

takes a closer look at imperialism in the ancient world and what it meant for less significant peoples such as those living in Palestine at the time. The ambivalence encountered in the Hebrew Bible brings Ramantswana to the conclusion that a modern reading of the text "requires decolonisation of the minds of both the previously oppressed and the oppressors, colonised and colonisers." This proposal is then carefully unpacked by means of seven statements that are outlined with reference to our present postcolonial context.

In his characteristically philosophical analysis of the biblical text, Jaco Gericke (NWU), contributes a piece entitled, "Old Testament Scholarship and the Religious-Philosophical Sense of 'Life' in Ordinary Language," as "a celebration of [Prof Snyman's] life and in honour of his life's work." Taking his cue from Cuppitt's view of life rather than any of the more traditional treatments of the concept of life in the Hebrew Bible, Gericke postulates "that the recent history of Old Testament scholars' recourse to ordinary language is likely to reflect an increased quantity and quality of the associated folk-philosophical presuppositions, problems and perspectives on "life" as a religious-philosophical concept, concern and category." After listing the occurrences of the word(s) 'my life' in the MT and two English translations (KJV and NRSV), the inference is drawn that "the conceptual-historical 'turn to life' cannot be ruled out as one sufficient reason" in the choice of the NRSV to translate "my *life*" rather than other alternatives. In a second data set, the occurrences of 'life' in six theologies of the Old Testament dating from the 20th and 21st centuries is reported on and a similar pattern is noted. The conclusion drawn is that "the emergence of 'life' as religious-object . . . has its counterpart as a popular supervening folk-philosophical concept, concern and category also within OT scholarship."

The final study, co-authored by Elizabeth Esterhuizen and Alphonso Groenewald, is entitled "Rereading Isaiah's Vision (Isa 6) through the Lens of *Generational Imprinted Trauma* and Resilience." the authors consider that the names of the children in these chapters of Isaiah "metaphorically showcase the ruptures of possible suffering" in the community. After constructing a historical context for the text, each of the three names is thoroughly analysed. From the rich material uncovered in these analyses, the authors ultimately conclude that these "names as signs as embodied in the children became barometers for the hope and salvation that YHWH will have for Judah if they believe, and by extension, for all humankind."

We hereby offer these scholarly contributions in appreciation of the work and person of Gerrie Snyman. May you and Diek enjoy the riches this new phase in your life bring.

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