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R. W. L. Moberly, *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013) pp. xiv+333. \$34.99.

My initial impression on picking up this book was that the title had been poorly chosen; Moberly's study does not fit the recognisable form of an 'Old Testament theology.' Rather than a lengthy treatment governed by a few central concepts and purporting to be comprehensive, he offers eight 'representative' essays, deliberately modest in scope; each focuses on just one or two discrete passages or a single theological issue (e.g. does God change?). Moreover, the approach taken throughout is close reading, and thus lengthy citations of the biblical text occupy a much larger portion of this volume than is common in Old Testament theologies. Despite these differences from the standard form, my initial impression was wrong. Moberly's use of that title is bold rather than mistaken; he is making a fresh proposal about what Old Testament theology might look like.

A hallmark of this study is consistent recognition that the central matters addressed by biblical texts are deeply personal, if also widely shared. Accordingly, the texts should be treated 'with full imaginative seriousness' (p. 285) and not narrow intellectualisation. Moberly's two opening chapters, on allegiance to God as expressed in the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4–9) and on God's election of Israel, are both explorations of the logic and mystery of love. In other essays, he shows how the biblical writers illumine existential difficulties they do not try to resolve: for instance, the disparity between affirmations of faith and bitter life experiences of the faithful, as exposed by Psalms 44 and 89. Here Moberly's careful literary treatment demonstrates the psalms' complex unity (in contrast to reductionistic applications of form criticism that invent a simpler 'original' text); their genre is simultaneously both lament and wisdom. Thus these paradoxical psalms offer correction to our own culture's simplifying tendencies: either to ignore the painful realities that contradict the expectations of faith, or to dwell on those realities to the exclusion of faith. Following a brief but cogent discussion of suffering as it is treated in the New Testament and in Jewish theology after the Holocaust, Moberly suggests that these psalms must be contextualised in prayer and worship, where over the long term their language may be experienced as both expressive and transformative, and those currently in pain and perplexity may be supported. This is Old Testament theology embedded in the life of faith communities.

Moberly's close exegetical and philological work requires and repays close attention; this is a model of how exegetical evidence and interpretive options may be weighed and judgement rendered. A particular strength

is his sensitive awareness of intertextual resonance, with difference, across the two Testaments of the Christian canon. Nonetheless, the whole study is remarkably readable, due in part to Moberly's lucid style and even more to the practical interest that informs the whole: 'Performance is the ultimate goal of this study' (p. 288). In some contrast to the dominant trend in scholarship to focus primarily on the ancient contexts of biblical texts, Moberly looks 'forward from Israel's scriptures toward those enduring faiths, both Jewish and Christian, that appropriate this material as Scripture and understand themselves in relation to it' (p. 283). Throughout he practices the full integration of exegesis and the history of interpretation, making selective and well informed use of Christian commentary, theology and hymnody, beginning with the New Testament and the ancient church, and continuing through the Middle Ages and Reformation into the modern period. Moberly deftly shows how the rich tradition of Jewish interpretation and spirituality, including classic rabbinic texts and modern writers, yields insight on matters literary, hermeneutical and ethical. The fact that any of the eight mutually informative essays could also stand alone makes the volume especially useful for teaching.

Moberly consistently demonstrates how essential the disciplined use of a broadly educated imagination is for the work of interesting (i.e. good) biblical interpretation. He draws analogies from contemporary film, from music, Tolkien and expressions of football club allegiance, as he seeks to make the biblical text 'resonant' (p. 287), so that it is both comprehensible and available for fresh performances. A scene recounted from *Saving Private Ryan* sheds light on Jonah's problem of misunderstanding mercy. The conventions of an action war movie are adduced to show why the book of Job holds the focus on him alone, rather than lingering on the tragic fate of his household and family. The Pussy Riot case and the women's appeal to Christian priorities as they challenged abuses of power and privilege in the church – cited in the study of Isaiah, Jesus, and the rejection of self-aggrandisement – is a useful reminder that there is nothing arcane about imaginative engagement with issues raised by the Bible.

The relatively brief compass of Moberly's *Old Testament Theology* may itself suggest something about the nature of the genre as he practises it. It is a modest enterprise and an inviting one. These carefully explicated readings mark out a clear trail for other interpreters, more and less experienced, and at the same time they leave both room and need for more such work.

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