

# Book Reviews

## **L. Daniel Hawk. *The Violence of the Biblical God: Canonical Narrative and Christian Faith.***

**Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019.**

Divine violence in the Christian Bible is the challenging topic Hawk's book sets out to address. Biblical scholars have wrestled with this problem for decades in modern times. For a disciple of Jesus, violent accounts connected with God can hardly be reconciled with the image of God in Jesus Christ as the revelation of the divine self. "I have written this book, therefore, writes Hawk, not so much to present definitive answers on the topic as to contribute to the conversation through a focused study that explores the way the Bible addresses the issue of violence by the way it tells God's story" (p. xiv).

To develop his project, Hawk takes the following steps: he begins with an exposition of the "problem of the violent God" (pp. 1-22). In this chapter, he first clarifies his approach, stating that instead of "approaching the Bible as a book from the past and about the past, [he] will approach the Bible as a revelatory text that speaks the truth about God, humanity, and the world in the here and now" (pp. 16-17). Secondly, the author portrays God as a personal and relational deity who neither controls the human partner, nor shields himself from events in the world. The question that drives the whole exploration of the biblical narrative, limited to Genesis through 2 Kings in the OT, and Luke and Acts in the NT, becomes how the Bible narrates God's experience of engagement in a violent world.

Starting from Genesis, Hawk remarks that the world God created and entrusted to human beings was faultless. However, in Gen 3 we hear about the disruption of the God-human partnership. Through humanity's decision to make the world in its own image, the God-Human-Creation relationship was corrupted. The flood that ensued was meant to cleanse the world and repair it (pp. 23-44). In the following chapter entitled "Yahweh's new approach" (pp. 45-65), Hawk

shows how God's new strategy to fix the world ruined by humanity follows a pattern in which God repeatedly descends into worldly realities, partnering with human friends. From that moment on, divine violence erupted whenever the divine partner was in danger, or after consultation with the human partner like Abraham (Sodom and Gomorrah). In return, God expected "respect, obedience, and dependence" (p. 64). In Genesis, therefore, God operates within a framework of friendship, and divine violence is never the result of anger.

In the "grand entrance" chapter (pp. 66-108), Hawk sees God entering the realm of power politics by identifying with a people. "Stepping into the world in solidarity with Israel means that Yahweh will enter and participate in the contests of power that define the world," writes Hawk (p. 71). The divine use of violence in Egypt is always meant to make a point: the recognition of Yahweh's sovereignty, the recreation of the world, etc. Yet, at no point did divine anger prompt divine violence against this foreign nation. When later Israel entered the world power system by wanting to be like the nations, God had to accommodate Israel's new system. There, we witness God's anger directed toward Israel. Hawk believes that God's decision to rescue the world in partnership with faithful friends failed ("God and kings", pp. 109-139).

Being "the most troublesome episode of divine violence in the Bible" (p. 140), Hawk dedicates a chapter to the Book of Joshua ("Land promised and taken" pp. 140-168). We learn that Yahweh makes no direct pronouncement against the nations. The exodus and the conquest share the same pattern as Israel's origin story. Divine violence happens there because Yahweh has decided to renew creation by forming a new people. Having failed to fix the problem of the world's corruption wrought by human actions, "God moves to the outside" (pp. 169-193). God moves from the center, i.e. the power system, to the periphery. This mainly happens in the NT, particularly in the Lukan account of the life of Jesus and the first Christian community. Indeed, "Yahweh's grand plan, to heal the world by identifying with a people, ends in disaster. [...] Yahweh's attempts to adapt and work within the system, culminating in the

endorsement of a monarchy that renders Israel after the fashion of the nations, have done little more than draw Yahweh into the system and the violent practices by which it is sustained.” (169) To conclude his exploration, Hawk ends by “interpreting divine violence” (pp. 194-208) as “a consequence of God’s decision to enter a violence-saturated world and to work with human partners within it” (p. 195). One point stressed again and again by Hawk is that God’s violence against a nation other than Israel was never prompted by anger (pp. 204-205). Instead, Israel as the covenant partner has often been the target of God’s violence out of divine wrath.

Divine violence is therefore associated with God’s restorative project on the world, aiming at renewing the world. The framework, Hawk suggests, looks at God working “from multiple locations within Israelite society, but primarily from the center” (p. 199), in the OT, whereas, in the NT, “God operates from the margins, in the person of an indigenous peasant whose people are suffering under imperial oppression. [...] God stands in radical opposition to the human powers in the world.” (p. 199). This framework cannot apply to ethical situations in an ‘either-or’ manner, i.e. either the center, or the margin. God himself had to adapt to a broken world with its violent power system in order to try and repair it. Convinced that “there are multiple faithful ways of thinking about how the story of God’s violence can or should inform Christian thought and practice,” (p. 201) Hawk calls for an open conversation that ensues from a community modeled by a reading of the Bible that respects its complexity and diversity. Without indulging in a permissive interpretation of the biblical text, the author calls for “an ongoing corporate exercise in discernment” (p. 203) in the complex process of ethical decision-making. “The biblical text, however, provides the notations that direct the interpretive conversation.” (p. 203)

“In Christ,” notes Hawk, “God no longer identifies with a nation or accommodates nationalist or monarchical objectives.” (p. 206) Therefore, retaliatory violence cannot be justified using the biblical accounts. The use of the Bible to endorse decisions about war and violence demonstrated in the church’s history should be considered inappropriate.

This book offers a refreshing perspective on the topic of divine violence for Christians, and is grounded in solid scholarship. Within the canonical perspective, Hawk's contribution is meritorious.

**Paul Béré, S.I.**

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**Lisa M. Bowens. *African American Readings of Paul: Reception, Resistance and Transformation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019.**

In *African American Readings of Paul* Lisa Bowens offers a revelatory and harrowing insight into the interpretation of Pauline texts from African American perspectives. Disembarking from Howard Thurman's account of a conversation with his grandmother, in which the slaveholders' co-opting of Paul's words made them the subject of oppression, Bowens engages with a plethora of African American hermeneuts from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. She is careful to clarify that this study does not seek to offer 'one correct reading of Paul' but that her aim is to 'shed light' on the numerous African American interpreters, allowing 'their voices and ideas to come to the forefront.' Bowens is successful in doing this by powerfully presenting extracts from primary literature, exposing the reader to literature about slavery and racism which rarely appear on a student's mandatory reading list. In doing so, Bowens' readers are invited into a better informed and well-rounded history of Pauline interpretation.

Bowens proceeds from her introduction to engage with key interpreters from the early eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century. She begins by connecting the racial focus of slavery to the story of Ham (Gen. 9:18-27) in which slavery proponents located the origin of the black race in the Noahic curse. From here, Bowens engages with Jupiter Hammon who uses Paul to propose a slave's agency as well as to engage in discussions of anthropology and repentance. However, whilst Bowens acknowledges alternate readings of Hammon, these are not explored. Bowens continues to present Lemuel Haynes' use of Paul to discredit the claims of the Ham myth, followed by

engaging with the role of the supernatural in relation to John Jea. Accordingly, she then focuses on the experiential conversions of Jarena Lee and Zilpha Elaw, drawing on their own comparisons with Paul's conversion and attending to the foci on the Spirit, miracles, spiritual warfare and their own sense of call to preach the gospel. Unlike Thurman's grandmother, these women turned to Paul's writings as a resource of liberation. Finally, and seemingly ahead of its time, Bowens outlines David Walker's interpretation of Paul in which he draws together the systemic nature of Sin as a power and its manifestation in racism and slavery.

Moving into the mid-nineteenth century and the late nineteenth century Bowens situates Pauline interpretations against the political backdrop of 'The Fugitive Slave Act' and its use of Philemon. Continuing on from hermeneuts such as Lee, Elaw and Walker, Maria Stewart emphasises an apocalyptic reading of Paul, identifying herself as one involved in a cosmic battle against the systemic and societal power of Sin, and standing with the oppressed against anti-God powers. James Pennington uses Romans 7:21 to argue for the forceable nature of evil. In a move that Bowens terms as 'reformulation,' Pennington refuses to define evil in relation to his body, origin or skin colour, and defines slavery itself as evil; the gospel is anti-slavery because it is anti-sin. Daniel Payne uses Paul to call on his peers to use prayer as a weapon of resistance to bring about justice and freedom. Julia Foote, in light of her conversion and angelic visitations, speaks of 'Christian perfection' as a gift from God and argues that Sin's loss of dominion (Rom. 6:14) should be a present, lived reality. Harriet Jacobs exposes Bowens' readers to the realities of a black woman in a society where African American women were 'barely considered to be human.' Jacobs uses Acts 17:26 to identify the irony of white slaveowners who produced children of 'one blood' with African American women.

In the final 'chronological chapter,' the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, Bowens offers an historical overview of factors which upheld racism. Reverdy Ransom warns America not to 'un-Christ itself,' speaking of a 'social salvation' which concerns the reconstruction of a society where racism no longer exists. William J. Seymour, the pastor of Azusa Street,

speaks about gender and racial equality in the Azusa Street revival as well as focusing on the work and power of the Spirit in concert with his 'steps' of salvation. Charles Harrison Mason employs Paul to encourage racial unity and to oppose involvement in war. Similarly, Ida B. Robinson speaks out against war but also uses Paul to denounce violence against African American persons, developing a body hermeneutic and a focus on humanity's unity. As a shift in the interpretive narrative, Bowens then presents two hermeneuts who reject Paul: Howard Thurman and Albert Cleage Jr. Thurman deems that too much weight has been given to Paul and that unlike Jesus, who like African Americans was a minority, Paul was a Roman citizen which afforded him privilege. Similarly, Cleage holds that the historic Jesus, who preached to a black nation, is totally lost because of Paul's insistence to preach to the gentiles (white people). Finally, Bowens offers an extended treatment of Martin Luther King Jr. King makes use of Paul in many of his speeches, writing as 'Paul' and using Pauline language, likening himself to a prophet and a Paul-like apostle. King also draws comparisons between Paul's sufferings and those of the civil rights activists, highlighting the connectedness of humanity in terms of race and history.

Bowens' final two chapters mark a shift in style to thematic and synchronic treatments. First, Bowens focuses on the theme of conversion, sharing powerful accounts of enslaved African Americans who encountered Christ and she subsequently highlights specific themes. A question that arises here concerns the treatment of subjective experiences and the development from experience to interpretation. It may have been fruitful for Bowens to have offered a more critical reading of these accounts and to have assessed how *Pauline* these experiences were. Second, then, Bowens offers a synchronic assessment of the study and focuses on Paul's various uses from his liberative figuration to the formulation of a body hermeneutic. She asserts the importance of the Pauline texts and the process of interpretation, challenging the reader to reassess the subversive and oppressive uses of Paul.

In *African American Readings of Paul* Bowens offers an important and powerful contribution to Pauline studies, one which should be taken seriously and

considered as key reading for any Pauline curriculum. Bowens' survey of African American hermeneuts is unsettling, inspiring and purposeful. The reader is exposed to accounts of spiritual experiences and conversion stories that prompt one's engagement with Paul's own apocalyptic texts. Critically, whilst Bowens' presentation of the primary material is powerful, her engagement with it is often too descriptive and lacks critical evaluation. Further, an assessment of the extent and means by which African Americans engaged with Scripture in light of its specifically *Pauline* content would be helpful. Finally, though, as Beverly Gaventa summarises, this study prompts many further questions and paths to be followed (p. 309) but the journey that Bowens leads her readers on is certainly poignant.

**Benjamin M. Leighton**

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**Esau McCaulley. *Reading While Black: African American biblical interpretation as an exercise in hope.***

**Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2020.**

*Reading While Black: African American biblical interpretation as an exercise in hope* presents a robust yet accessible entry point for the everyday African American Christian to wrestle with the articulation of their grassroot hermeneutic. This text aims, not to present a new and original theological perspective but, to frame the hermeneutic of the Black American church that is found at the pulpit, in the marches, the social programmes and mid-week Bible studies – it is a hermeneutic of hope for liberation through a faithful reading of the word of God.

Although written to the Black church, the book is inviting to others who want to sit in McCaulley's mother's living room and engage with Black church hermeneutical reason. To achieve this, McCaulley presents his own experiences alongside a contextualised exegesis that demonstrates how the ancient biblical text, even when processed according to "traditional exegetical standards", speaks to the lived experiences of, in this case, Black people in the twenty first century. Unapologetically socially located, each chapter theologically resonates

with the issues of today: *Chapter 2 - Policing, Chapter 3 - Political Witness, Chapter 4 - Justice, Chapter 5 – Ethnicity, Chapter 6 – Black Rage and Chapter 7- Slavery.*

To explore the main thrust of this text, McCaulley discusses the conundrum of the Black ecclesial position. By and large traditional African American Churches have struggled to be considered equal conversation partners with White evangelicals and Black/White progressive theological spaces – both he contends to be rooted and dominated by European thinking and undergirded by self-serving interests. What is most poignant in this exploration is articulating the deficit of Black Progressive theologies, birthed in the academy, that reimagine the gospel and at times challenge the authority of the word of God by prioritising European theory or the Black experience. McCaulley's Black ecclesial theological framework acknowledges that although many African American Christians bring their concerns to the text, they seek for the biblical text to answer their concerns and shape their response to their experiences, rather than root their truths in the experiences themselves. In this case then Black biblical interpretation is canonical, theological, socially located, listens to, and trusts the biblical texts and is willing to dialogue with others. McCaulley supports the ongoing challenge of “disinterested interpretation” by asserting that all biblical interpretation demonstrates interest – the challenge he presents to the reader is a question: ‘who do we allow to answer/respond to our interests and concerns?’

One of the successes of this book is the way in which it sheds light on a Black church hermeneutic that challenges the common crude caricatures of the Black church as theologically unsophisticated, over-emotional and only ever on the extremes of political engagement be it passive or driven. Although liberation and postcolonial theologians have spoken into this area so far as to demonstrate the nature of resistance, agency, and astute experiential intelligence within Black hermeneutics; their overt distrust of the biblical text has affected their ability to gain significant traction with the majority Black church, despite their successes within the academy. McCaulley has overcome this issue by striking the balance - a more honest reflection of the Black ecclesial position as it has been and is today.



Another detail that matters for this conversation lies with the efforts of the first generation of Black theologians who sought to correct the Eurocentric account of the Bible by demonstrating the African presence in the Bible. Rightly perceived, McCaulley considers this effort incomplete and calls for more attention to the presence of Africans within God's redemption plan and according to the scriptural accounts as necessary for right reading. He explores this in chapter five but as with each chapter it is not exhaustive, but an example of how Black ecclesial interpretation works and leaves room for further conversation and, in my opinion, a much needed in-depth contextual/exegetical bible commentary.

It is hard to locate fault in this text because it is a great read, inspiring, thought provoking and achieves what it sets out to do. It is making no claims to groundbreaking ideas but to serve as a resource to help African Americans better articulate theologically and exegetically what they already know socially and religiously. However, other conversation partners that are often overlooked in black theology are those on the margins of Black bible-reading America – Afroasiatic (Black) religions such as Rastafari, Nation of Islam and the (Black) Hebrew Israelites. McCaulley talks of the need for the *double apologetic* in which one refers to the text to discern true Christianity and its distortion in the face of progressivism and ethnic exclusion – an intention that is embedded into the fabric of these alternative Black bible-reading religions. Although many in mainstream Christianity consider these religions to be cults and theologically problematic – they have the capacity to be equal conversation partners based on shared history, shared religious text, shared lived experience, and shared conversion pool – Black America. Although on the margins, they are a persistent presence and challenge to mainstream Christianity (considered Babylon) on the very bases for which this book was written and it feels that a brief consideration of their distinctive contribution alongside progressivism and evangelicalism is missing – especially as they pick up and major on where the first-generation black theologians left off – the African/Black presence in the Bible.

Each chapter of this book is constructed in a way that speaks to nuances of the Black lived experience – who one is, how one is perceived and what one hopes to be. As a result, when Black Christian America read this book, they are engaging with the Bible on their terms – they are not reading as an outsider but as an agent and rightful participant in God’s unfolding plan for redemption. McCaulley says, ‘When the Black Christian enters the community of faith, she is not entering a strange land. She is finding her way home.’ (p. 117) and this resource solidifies this truth through an engaging and honest exegetical journey.

**Eleasah Phoenix Louis**

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**Andrew Naselli. *The Serpent and the Serpent Slayer*.  
Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020.**

This volume is a recent addition to the Short Studies in Biblical Theology series, which is oriented towards making academic biblical theology available to ‘everyday believers.’ As such, each volume is written in a way that does not require any previous theological training of the reader.

In the introduction, Naselli outlines the overall biblical narrative as a drama, in which a serpent seeks to deceive and attack the people of God, but Jesus intervenes to crush the serpent in the act of being devoured himself. When the serpent then attempts to devour the Church he is slain by Jesus, and the bride of Christ is saved. This is summarised in the slogan ‘kill the dragon, get the girl.’ This is the ‘greatest story’ and underlies why other fictional dragon-slaying stories in (English language) literature remain popular. Examples are given, ranging from Saint George and the Dragon to *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Harry Potter*; allusions to Eden, to texts in Revelation and Ephesians, and the self-sacrifice of Christ show how these all echo the greatest story, and why people love reading them. In comparison to these stories, the ancient Near East context of serpent mythology is given only scattered references in the next two chapters.

Chapter one describes the snake portrayed in Genesis 3. In discussing Eve's temptation, Naselli draws parallels between Genesis 3:6, Luke 4:1-13 and 1 John 2:16. The snake's deceit led to Adam's failure to 'rule and subdue:' he 'should have killed the dragon and rescued the girl' (p 39). God curses the snake's offspring, of which Cain is the first; the woman's offspring follow a line from Seth through Abraham and David to Jesus, who will eventually crush the serpent. Naselli perpetuates the idea that God punished the woman with pain in childbearing, and believes 'God punished mankind with mortality' (p 43); his view of how Adam failed to exercise headship over Eve, and that 'Satan somehow used the physical body of a snake in Eden' (p 47), informs his exegetical framework. The story of the talking snake is 'real history.'

Chapter two acknowledges that some serpent images in the bible are viewed as wise or shrewd, yet the majority are negative: unclean, dangerous, to be feared, evil. Serpents symbolise God's enemies, and Satan is the ultimate serpent. However, the story of Job tells us that even Behemoth and Leviathan were created by God and remain under his power. Isaiah 27:1 affirms that God will destroy the most powerful evil monster, and Isaiah 11 and 65 point forward to a time when serpents will no longer be deadly.

Next, Naselli describes offspring of the serpent depicted through the bible. First, Egypt or its Pharaoh are described variously as a snake, Leviathan, sea monster or dragon, who murders babies but who is ultimately powerless; God swallows up Egypt just as Aaron's staff swallowed the serpents of Pharaoh's magicians. Next, examples of wicked leaders in Canaan and Moab are given: Jael drives a tent peg through Sisera's skull, a woman crushes Abimelech's skull with a millstone, Saul crushes Nahash ('snake') the Ammonite, and David kills the scaly-armoured Goliath and cuts off his head. Each time, the seed of the woman crushes the seed of the serpent. Then Babylon and its king Nebuchadnezzar are described as a monster and as serpents; next King Herod acts as a murderous dragon after the birth of Jesus in Matthew 2, fulfilling the typology of Exodus. The Pharisees and Sadducees are then described as a brood of vipers, who like all serpents deceive or tempt, and devour or kill, and

end up murdering Jesus. Finally, false teachers are connected with serpents in 2 Corinthians 11 and Romans 16.

Chapter four is given over to the devouring dragon in Revelation 12 and 20. The dragon is the ancient serpent, a powerful murderer, who plans but fails to devour the Messiah. The dragon is thrown down to the earth and conquered, on the basis of the blood of the Lamb and the saints' testimony. Yet the dragon continues to persecute God's people, in the 'already but not yet' era of the church; however, the people cannot be destroyed. In the end, Jesus will come back to slay the dragon and save his bride.

In the concluding chapter, Naselli draws together suggestions for how Christians can live differently, in the light of this storyline. We should not imitate the serpent, for example by killing the unborn, or embracing the prosperity gospel, by slandering or deceiving others, or through pride. We should beware the deceiving snake and the devouring dragon: Satan is scheming to deceive and destroy us. Naselli encourages Christians not just to wear the defensive armour of Ephesians 6 but to fight back by speaking the truth and contending for the faith. We should exult and trust in Jesus, the serpent slayer: we know how the story ends.

The book concludes with an appendix, listing the various biblical words for serpents and where they are used. Unlike other volumes in this series, there is no bibliography, but there are ample footnotes throughout, and frequent – sometimes extended – scriptural quotations illustrating the arguments being made. This short book is easy to read, and fulfils its aim as an introduction to the serpent theme in the Bible, written from a certain standpoint. A fuller treatment in, for example, the NSBT series would be welcome.

**Mark Mallet**  
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**Johanna Stiebert. *Rape Myths, the Bible, and #MeToo*.  
Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020.**

As the inaugural contribution to the Routledge series on rape culture, religion, and the Bible, Stiebert's book naturally possesses a responsibility to convincingly demonstrate that the theoretical ideas surrounding sexual violence and rape hold relevance for the fields of religious and biblical studies. With anachronism being a common critique of this type of work, Stiebert proves that these themes are not just applicable to the study of the Bible but are even outrageously necessary. Engaging in this work begins to recognise the trauma and accountability of rape in both modern and biblical rape cultures.

The principal aim of this book is to engage modern discussions of sexual violence and the myths that emerge around them with the interpretation of biblical texts depicting rape. Structured in two parts, the first section of the book reflects the author's 'bifocal' approach, with one half looking at modern issues and the other focussing on biblical instances of rape and sexual violence. The second section of the book then successfully harmonises these two seemingly distant cultural studies, assessing how rape culture and its falsehoods similarly operate in both modern discourse and biblical examples. It is interesting, and indeed clever, that Stiebert treats #MeToo tweets and testimonies of rape survivors on an equal footing with biblical texts. As such, the voices of both biblical and contemporary women are heard and affirmed with parallel importance. Stiebert concludes that, despite the differences, both cultures' pervasiveness of sexual violence means similarities can be drawn. Not only this, but she says that the Bible has had a hand in the perpetuation and preservation of toxic rape cultures and the myths that accompany them.

The selection of biblical examples is not limited to the usual 'canon' of scriptural instances of sexual violence, originating largely with Tribble's *Texts of Terror*. Stiebert is right to break free from these traditional examples by, for example, noticing moments of male-male sexual abuse. Still, Stiebert's tour of these passages does not necessarily offer anything remarkably new, outlining the historical and literary gender issues in the texts. Though, her intent here is

to establish the overwhelming presence of these narratives within the Bible in preparation for the following section. It is there where Stiebert's distinctive and expert comparative analysis between modern and biblical rape cultures emerges.

After defining the key concepts of rape culture, as a setting in which 'sexual violence occurs and is upheld and sustained by a wider context that enables and normalizes this violence through lower-level microaggressions' (p. 60), and rape myths, as 'prejudicial or stereotyped and false beliefs about sexual assault, rapists, and victims of rape' (p. 61), Stiebert shows where and how rape myths of contemporary culture are also evidenced in the Bible. Questions of victim-blaming, the categorisation of 'real' rape, false allegations, the identity of perpetrators, and the stereotyping and 'othering' of perpetrators and victims are thoroughly discussed.

Importantly, Stiebert's final conclusion takes a stance of social action, whereby in order to confront and dismantle rape cultures in modern society, we must take another look at the Bible and its part in their creation and resilience. By doing so, we might begin to dismantle the structures ingrained in our culture that give rise to rape myths. Stiebert's book is a useful aid in doing so.

Stiebert accurately notes the pervasive authority that the Bible holds, not only for religious followers, but socially and politically. Unfortunately, in turn, toxic biblical attitudes have also lingered in society and still retain influence in contemporary discourse. It is significant here that Stiebert mentions the growing interdisciplinary nature of biblical studies that has allowed for topical discussions on themes such as these to emerge in academia. In responding to some potential critics of her work, naming them as victim-blamers and rape culture deniers, Stiebert reaffirms her argument of the contemporariness of these topics. If such discussions are still not accepted, nor these testimonies believed, in mainstream academic discourse then the rape cultures and myths outlined by Stiebert are evidently still at play in the field of biblical studies today. It is worth considering how much this is the case in this particular discipline purely because of the importance placed on the Bible by many devotional scholars and the resultant danger because of it.

Although there is a shortage of discussion specifically regarding the impact of rape culture and its myths on minorities, Stiebert admits that these people on the margins of rape case studies ‘demand a platform’, but that this particular work is not the place for it. However, Stiebert also rightly highlights that #MeToo as a movement has an element of privilege, presenting heteronormative presumptions of sexual violence and a largely exclusive focus the victimhood of women, and so her analysis of it naturally must follow suit in this restricted scope to some extent. It is appropriate and indeed commendable then that successive contributions to the Routledge series explore these ideas further, including Chris Greenough’s discussion of men (including those who are LGBTQ+) as sexual violence victims, as well as Nancy Nam Hoon Tan’s work on Hong Kong sex workers.

This book lays solid foundations for the themes of rape culture, religion, and the Bible, leaving the subsequent book contributions in the series (those published and those still to come) to explore related issues in much more depth. Not only is this book an integral resource for any scholar who finds themselves interested in the study of the Bible within contemporary discourse, with particular reference to gender and violence, but it is also a critical aid in confronting the damage that rape culture and myths have caused, the Bible’s culpability in that, and how to begin the necessary and overdue reparations.

**Will Moore**

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**Valerie Hobbs. *An Introduction to Religious Language: Exploring Theolinguistics in Contemporary Contexts.***  
London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.

Why study religious language? Because ‘it is a significant part of the way we make something sacred or acknowledge it is sacred and perpetuate its sacred status’ (p. 174). Such language articulates our deepest beliefs, our connections with and distance from others, a sense of our human limitations, of mystery and wonder, but also grief, pain and confusion. Religion and religious language

function ‘axiomatically, social cohesively and emotively’ (p. 175). I begin at the end as this encapsulates the motivation for writing the book and what it aims to achieve. I need to make clear at the outset that I am not a specialist in the field of linguistics, so some of the technical sections of the book are unfamiliar territory and beyond my competence for critical comment. Since the book is designed as an introduction, however, this is no bad thing. With each chapter containing a useful summary, suggestions for further reading, questions for discussion, and then at the end 4 appendices of theological terms and on-line resources, this is a book to be used for continued reference. As an ‘outsider’ I can see this becoming a standard work in this field.

The opening three chapters survey the subjects of religious language itself; the definitions of religion, and then a discussion of how religious language functions. Hobbs acknowledges that the topic is gargantuan, and that this is simply an introduction, shaped largely by her work with students. An obvious question is that of what constitutes religious language, and mentioning such sources as Luckmann, and also Bailey’s work on *Implicit Religion*, Hobbs draws heavily on Durkheim’s concept of the sacred as that which is set apart from the ordinary and treated either with awe and respect or else fear and disgust. ‘The process of sacred-making is a universal phenomenon, not simply a feature of people who think of themselves as religious’ (p. 15). In which case, the scope for study is indeed massive, hence the inclusion at the end of the book of consideration of spheres such as sport, advertising and health care (Chapter 9). I wonder whether the concept of sacred-making might benefit from a philosophical as well as linguistic approach thinking of Derrida’s work on both religion and language? (Derrida and Vattimo, ‘Religion’, Polity Press 1998). Without going into the contested understandings of deconstruction, one might want to suggest that all of the terms coming under discussion contain alternative and even multiple interpretations whereas a linguistic interpretation appears to alight on only the most obvious ones? Hobbs’ objective though is to operate with open definitions of what counts as religious in order to encompass a wide range of potential functions, hence again the reference to Durkheim’s categories of the sacred as axiomatic, socially cohesive and emotive (p. 32).



Following chapters examine different types of religious language, beginning in Chapter 4 with the obvious area of explicitly religious contexts such as worship, rites of transition, religious education and private devotion, but recognising that one also encounters such usage in moments of conflict and crisis (p. ). Considerations of context, using genre analysis lead to discussions of where and when religious language represents dichotomous worldviews (p. 55); a push-pull strategy (p. 56), and the use of a sacred legitimizing authority. (p. 57) Chapter 5 continues the rather technical approach, addressing the issues of vocabulary, archaism and parallelism, making it clear that the specialized area of corpus construction and analysis is central to these tasks, although some corpora are more useful than others given their differing scope and range. What does emerge and is of more general theological and pastoral importance is that many references are actually of men talking about men. 'Much religious discourse relies on male images and metaphors, whether this is an overtly religious context or not' (p. 75). Hence this technical analysis reveals issues of much wider significance and that is an important reason for engaging in this type of study. Chapter 6 looks at intertextuality and metaphor, the latter having two components, the target domain and the vehicle domain (p. 89). Hobbs once again refers to Bailey's work on Implicit Religion arguing that while not everything is religious, anything can be religious (p. 91). The discussions of intertextuality are highly technical and I will leave to the linguistic experts.

Chapter 7 looks in detail at the examples of the Lord's Prayer and what is called the Atheist's Prayer and deploys the techniques already mentioned in order to analyse and contrast the two. This is where I become slightly sceptical and might question both Bailey and Hobbs on the claim that anything can be religious. While one can readily recognise the deliberate parallels between these two prayers, one is left wondering in what respects the atheist's version can be called a prayer rather than just a clever parody of the Christian version? Is there a danger of reading too much into such constructions simply because they are a clever imitation of the original?

Chapter 8 enters the safer territory of how religious language functions at times of death and a revealing analysis of the phrase 'a life well lived' which is

frequently used in this context. As with the discussion about male images, what appears to be the case is that there is a clear bias towards those who have been successful or famous and against those (often female), who have not led high profile or public lives (p. 149). If this is the case then it suggests that those responsible for constructing eulogies need to take more care of the language they use. The penultimate chapter dips briefly into other areas for further development such as health care, sport and conversion. Again, there is much work to be done here, but one notes that the philosopher Sloterdijk has argued that sport requiring both discipline and sacrifice has replaced religion as a sphere of personal betterment so perhaps it is not quite so clear that it is another form of religious language as such. This is not to detract however, from a book which is a major contribution to this field of study and destined to become a significant text for future reference.

**John Reader**

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**Chris Greenough. *The Bible and Sexual Violence Against Men.***

**Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020.**

*The Bible and Sexual Violence Against Men* is, to the author's knowledge and my own, the 'first book dedicated exclusively to an exploration of sexual violence against men and the Bible' (p. 3). A slim volume, whose three chapters nevertheless pack plenty of punch, this innovative book makes for rich, interdisciplinary reading.

From the outset, Greenough makes us immediately aware of a criticism levied at works such as this: that reading sexual violence against men into biblical texts amounts to unwarranted anachronism. Greenough, however, surmounts this critique convincingly, arguing that the misogyny, patriarchy, and heteronormativity endorsed by biblical texts have the 'potential to validate and endorse these same ideologies, values, and assumptions within the communities in which they are read' (p. 4). Greenough argues that these ideologies negatively affect women *and* men in contemporary contexts,

resulting in the upholding of dangerous myths surrounding sexual violence against men.

In the first chapter, Greenough places his research in the context of the #MeToo, #Me(n)Too, and #ChurchToo movements, critiquing religion as a driving factor in perpetuating shame and stigma about male rape, and exposing its role in ‘obfuscating sexual violence against men’ (p. 20). Bringing this chapter to a conclusion, Greenough argues compellingly that through a combination of misogyny and ‘fear of the queer’ (p. 24), religion perpetuates the primacy of hegemonic and heteronormative masculinity, intensifying the continuing stigma and silence surrounding sexual violence against men.

Greenough turns to the Hebrew Bible in the second chapter, noting throughout how contemporary attitudes of shame and stigma towards sexual violence against men are rooted in systems of patriarchy inherent in biblical texts. Through short exegetical explorations of biblical narratives — Lot and his daughters (Gen 19:30-38); Joseph and Potiphar’s wife (Gen 39); attempted gang rape of men (Gen 19:1-29; Judg 19); Noah, Ham and the curse of Caanan (Gen 9:20-27); Ehud and Elgon (Judg 3:12-30); Jael and Sisera (Judg 4); Samson and Delilah (Judg 16) — Greenough argues that explicit instances of sexual violence against men exist in the Hebrew Bible, yet are often ‘erased in the interpretative traditions surrounding these texts’ (p. 56). Of particular merit here, is Greenough’s treatment of the story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife; it is refreshing to see a focus on this sexual violence as being a coercive assault on Joseph, and Greenough’s exposition of this narrative highlights the critical, yet often overlooked reality that violence need not always be physical. Greenough analyses the perception of Joseph as demonstrating ‘the virtues of self-restraint and abstinent sexuality’ (p. 42) as a way in which the text obscures the sexual violence done by a woman to a male victim by focussing instead on Joseph’s virtuous purity rather than the perpetrator’s crime. This is a well argued and significant point, though could have been more deeply articulated by the inclusion of a comment on the ‘Purity Culture’ espoused in this passage and promoted in some church communities. Arguably, ‘Purity Culture’ is a form of

coercive control which promotes sexual violence, sexual shame and stigma, and contributes to a rape-culture-positive discourse in itself.

The third chapter turns to address a controversial subject area: Jesus as victim of sexual assault. Through rigorous analysis, Greenough probes ‘the silence surrounding Jesus’s enforced nudity in the gospel accounts of the crucifixion’ (p. 62), emphasising society’s continual inability to recognise sexual violence against men. Of particular distinction here is Greenough’s attention to Jesus’s silence, asserting convincingly that rather than ‘heroic stoicism’ (p. 65), Jesus’s silence is a vulnerable expression of fear, and typical of the silence male victims feel they must keep in the face of shame. ‘Jesus is further silenced’, argues Greenough at the apex of his argument, ‘by those who refuse to see him as a victim of sexual abuse’ (p. 65). The chapter moves on to appropriately problematise Jesus’s perceived sexual purity (Jesus’s divine conception and virginal birth; his lack of spouse or offspring; the non-sexuality of God; the divine penis). Again though, the otherwise excellent analysis is (only marginally) curbed by the omission of addressing, even in passing, the ‘Purity Culture’ inherently entwined with this understanding of Jesus, which so detrimentally and coercively perpetuates a culture of silence and shame around sexual violence.

The book concludes with an afterword, where Greenough briefly addresses student engagement with this topic in higher educational settings. He quite rightly draws attention to the ethical imperative of not compounding the trauma of any students who have experienced sexual violence, noting that ‘the research and teaching of such topics do not exist in a university vacuum separated from the reality of sexual violence’ (p. 88) on campuses and elsewhere. Too often volumes of this nature theorise as if abstracted from reality, so Greenough’s sensitive attention to his audience and environments in which this book may be discussed is to be greatly applauded.

Though rooted in the biblical texts, this volume would make interested readers of theologians and social scientists alike, making appropriate and nuanced

reference throughout to diverse legal cases, legislation, and psychological and sociological studies. Despite the complexity of the issue at hand, and the harrowing violence it encounters, Greenough handles a sensitive subject matter with intellectual rigour, thorough research, and a clear, coherent style. A refreshing new perspective, building on the emerging body of scholarship on gender-based violence, this volume argues compellingly that through various hegemonic ‘cultural scripts’ (p. 25) of masculinity, including that espoused by the Bible, sexual violence against men has been obscured, and victims silenced for too long.

**Charlotte Thomas**

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**Brad E. Kelle. *The Bible and Moral Injury: Reading Scripture Alongside War’s Unseen Wounds.***

Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2020.

Moral injury is likely to be a major part of our future. With the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate emergency and the onward march of technological complexity, our moral world is likely to become exponentially fraught. This is perhaps the truest for military personnel, whose future warfighting is set to be faster, more complex and more uncertain than ever before. *The Bible and Moral Injury* perfectly steps into this context, with an exploration of Moral Injury and the Bible that is accessible, interesting and sometimes challenging. It excellently showcases the benefits – practically and academically – of interdisciplinary conversations between theology and moral injury, and of theological insights for understanding war and security.

*The Bible and Moral Injury* aims to address the lack of discussion between moral injury and Old Testament scholarship regarding their shared ideas and resources surrounding warfare. In this book, Kelle both asks and exemplifies what a more thorough discussion between the Bible and Moral Injury might look like. Concluding that engagement between the Bible and Moral injury can generate a “*two-way conversation*”, placing moral injury as a lens to bring new meanings out of biblical texts, and for the Bible to contribute important

resources and ideas to moral injury scholarship and repair practices. As such, this book excellently explores a number of ways in which the bible and moral injury scholarship can learn from each other.

Each chapter of this book covers a lot of ground, and at each turn simulates this discussion between the bible and moral injury to highlight their shared ideas, insights and contributions. The book begins by discussing how Moral Injury can be defined, and the two major trajectories for how the Bible can contribute to the definitions, debates and repair of moral injury. The first is to engage creative re-readings of biblical stories as portrayals of morally injured warriors. This is covered in the book's second chapter where Kelle re-reads the story of Saul through a moral injury lens. This chapter is hugely useful for a whole host of reasons, not least because it provides a concrete example of how moral injury can be useful for understanding, interpreting and preaching biblical texts. Likewise, moral injury provides readers with a new perspective on the character of Saul, showing him in a more sympathetic light than might otherwise be the case. For ministers, this chapter can help to provide a stepping stone from which to introduce congregations and colleagues to moral injury as an issue and as an interpretive tool, as the story of Saul can be used to introduce congregations to the causes, experiences and implications of moral injury on a warfighter and those who surround her. In terms of moral injury, Kelle's re-reading of Saul can help to provide examples of betrayal-based moral injury, as well as its implications on soldiers, leaders and those around them. Likewise, Kelle provides a detailed and multi-layered account of how moral injury and biblical scholarship can contribute to one another, on an academic and practical level, making this chapter – and of course, the book as a whole – essential reading for anyone embarking on bringing together these disciplines to provide creative re-readings of the bible and moral injury theory.

The second trajectory for Kelle's *two-way conversation* is the identification, reflection and implementation of biblical post-war rituals and symbolic practices as attempts to deal with aspects of moral injury and repair. To address this, Kelle offers a survey of the Old Testament texts that present post-war

rituals and practices, and considers these texts against the cultural and social backdrops of similar practices. This chapter considers the biblical accounts less as resources for understanding moral injury – like the re-reading of Saul does – but as resources for repairing moral injury in returning soldiers and their communities. Most importantly, this chapter highlights the value of the bible as a resource in of itself for moral injury repair, as well as a site of help and support for military personnel. In terms of biblical scholarship, conversations about post-war rituals and moral injury can help biblical scholars to better understand why these rituals took place, and what value they might have had. For moral injury scholarship, Kelle's discussion positions the community in a vital place when thinking about and responding to moral injury. This helps to re-focus moral injury, detaching it from only relating to an individual experient; providing a definition of moral injury which includes both the community's role in moral injury's cause and repair, and moral injury as a communal experience.

Before concluding this investigation, Kelle takes some time to explore a different trajectory than the two previously identified. Here, Kelle shifts his focus away from the texts of the Old Testament to the experience of reading these texts, especially those which include descriptions of humans committing violence at God's command or God committing violence themselves. This chapter is hugely important, and challenging. As it places God and the bible, not so much as a resource or source of knowledge, but as a source and site of moral injury in of itself. It is a chapter which makes Kelle's text a must read for chaplains, ministers and moral injury scholars beyond its interdisciplinary value. It also begins to explore the relationship between moral injury, objects and structures – here religious scripture – and helps to expand our understanding of how moral injury can be caused, beyond simple accounts of action and betrayal by individuals.

However, because of the scope of Kelle's book, he does not spend much time exploring how the Bible – and God – could directly cause violence to its readers, such as passages which directly and explicitly harm LGBTIAQ+

people, women and people of colour. This omission is troubling, as it ignores a major way in which the Bible can morally injure its readers. Though, it is also an understandable omission, given the book's focus on war and conflict. As such, a more in-depth investigation in to moral injury as a result of reading the bible would be of a lot of value, and Kelle's chapter – by beginning to explore the ways in which the bible morally injures - provides a key foundation point for this further research.

Altogether, Kelle's *The Bible and Moral Injury* provides a huge range of resources and insights into the Old Testament, Moral Injury and their shared ideas and challenges. It provides new avenues of investigation for moral injury and biblical scholarship, and stimulates a rich discussion within and between these fields, stimulating a reading of moral injury which re-orientates it towards the humanities, and provides resources for a thicker description of the experience and healing of moral injury in and through biblical texts. Beyond the content of *The Bible and Moral Injury*, Kelle provides a text which is accessible and flexible, making it broader in its appeal and its uses than other similar moral injury and theology texts. Kelle writes in such a way as to allow the chapters and sections to be read slowly and independently, making it perfect for study and group reading. Likewise, it is not written in a way which limits its usefulness to one sector or field. Though Kelle focuses his exploration on the military, and biblical accounts of warfare, his text does not limit the readership – or its applicability – to the military alone. Rather, the insights which Kelle collects in this book can be useful for scholars and ministers working in a range of contexts, and for informing people about moral injury and its relationship to faith in a post-covid, climatically unstable and technologically advanced future.

However, this breadth – of scope and of discussion – may be this book's downfall. As with any interdisciplinary study, Kelle sets out to answer a lot of questions and explore a lot of interesting areas. However, this has meant that this book perhaps tries to do too much; ask too many questions; explore too many problems. This has meant that some of the power of Kelle's claims is lost in further exploration, and he risks losing the original argument of the book.



That being said, what this book loses in conciseness, it gains in usefulness and breadth. This makes it a great guidebook for the huge range of issues, problems and perspectives that one might come across when exploring the Old Testament and moral injury. It allows for readers to explore a huge range of questions, and offers an important insight into what conversations between moral injury and the Bible can look like, providing the very conversations which Kelle wants to encourage. As such, *The Bible and Moral Injury* acts as a starting point for more in-depth discussions between moral injury scholarship and theology, as well as informing thinking about moral injury repair practices and how moral injury might be introduced to congregations and training ministers.

To conclude, *The Bible and Moral Injury* is a fantastic book, with a vast breadth, accessible structure and incredible usefulness for so many in the universe of faith and moral injury. It provides a vital resource for ministers, chaplains and students to begin to explore the relationship between moral injury and the bible, and provides several challenging and important insights which help to refocus preaching, practice and moral injury definitions. In this book, Kelle offers an entry point into moral injury and theology debates, providing a glimpse into what the rich conversations between these fields can look like, and laying foundation stones for much future research. It is, of course, not without its faults, least of all its tendency to say too much. But nonetheless, this book is a must read for anyone wanting to begin exploring moral injury alongside the bible, and might prove to be an essential read for military chaplains, training ministers and moral repair professionals.

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