

○ COSMOPOLITANISM AND BIBLICAL STUDIES (WITH A WELCOME TO SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE READERS)

Cosmopolitanism and biblical studies are not terms one often mentions in the same breath. I won't bother listing the associations 'biblical studies' has (I will let you play that game), but I would be surprised if cosmopolitan turned up anywhere on the list. Yet, that is what we have with this issue of *The Bible and Critical Theory*. To begin with, from France comes an essay on Paul Ricœur by one of the world's leading philosophers, Alain Badiou. Then from Switzerland there is Claire Clivaz (Lausanne) and Peter Ben-Smit (Bern, although Peter found his way there from his native Netherlands). Following the path of the mythical Chinese fleet of 1421–23 when it circumnavigated the globe, touching on North America on the way, let us move westward: from Earth's country music centre, Nashville, we have Jennifer Bird's paper on ideological readings. And then, from New Zealand (yes, the Chinese are supposed to have been there) comes Philip Culbertson's piece on Cain.

One thing that perpetually confronted me as I worked through these papers was Walter Benjamin's adage from his 'Translation' essay, namely that a translation should hug the original as a coastline hugs the shore: the contours, bumps and inlets of the original should show up in the translation itself. I am no great fan of the dominant ideology of Bible translation – touted by Eugene Nida, the Summer Institute of Linguistics and the Bible Societies – that goes by the name of 'dynamic equivalence'. This is the idea that a message and its language is like water and a bucket: you can change the container, but the message remains the same. How such a position ever persuaded any translator is beyond me, since it flies in the face of common sense. Of course the syntax and grammar of a language have a profound effect on the meaning and its translation.

It is with great pleasure, then, that three of the papers that appear in this issue are by people whose first language is not English – in these cases French and Dutch. One was translated by others, the Badiou article by Natalie Doyle and Alberto Toscano, but the other two, by Claire Clivaz and Peter-Ben Smit were written in English. Perhaps the best thing about these articles is that the different turn of phrase from what a native English speaker might use (although does that not vary from place to place?) makes the reader stop and think. And that, to my mind, is always a good thing.

The other papers are of course just as enjoyable for other reasons. Yet, before I introduce them, let me give a warm welcome to all those people from the Society of Biblical Literature who have signed up to access book reviews printed in the journal. I would give you a big, warm hug if I could, except that I am not really a touchy-feely person; so a firm handshake and a smile will have to do. Welcome indeed! Sarah Cannon from Monash University ePress and Bob Buller from the Society of Biblical Literature have set up a wonderful deal where SBL members can access the book reviews in addition to the SBL's *Review of Biblical Literature*. If you are reading this and you are not signed up, please contact Sarah at Sarah.Cannon@lib.monash.edu.au. In this issue, just to welcome our new readers, we have a bumper seventeen reviews, and the way the reviews are coming in we should have about a dozen per issue in the future. Of course, I also encourage you to subscribe to the journal, and Sarah can help you with that too.

To whet your appetite, let me say a few words about each article. Alain Badiou's piece, 'The Subject Supposed to Be a Christian: On Paul Ricœur's *Memory, History, Forgetting*' is, as the title suggests, an engagement with Paul Ricœur's massive book by that name. In it Badiou argues that for all Ricœur's efforts to develop his philosophy apart from his religious commitment, his system cannot be thought without such a commitment. Badiou tells me Ricœur was not happy with the piece when it appeared in French. It is typical Badiou, direct, polemical, tightly argued and fun. Ricœur of course was no stranger to the Bible, having reflected at some length on the Bible in the 1970s (*Interpretation Theory* in 1976 and *Conflict of Interpretations* in 1974) only to return in his old age, especially with *Thinking Biblically* which he wrote with André LaCocque (2003).

Philip Culbertson's 'De-demonising Cain' engages psychology and the founding story of Cain and Abel to suggest that Cain's response is perhaps the most dignified one of the story. Rather than giving into 'narcissistic rage and shame, and, complementing the emotions in Eden, the role of loss and desire in creation', Cain turns his back on death and desire to get on with life. As Culbertson points out, 'The story of Cain marks the introduction into creation of the human inner landscape, a condition possible only after human existence is no longer idyllic'.

Claire Clivaz's 'Asleep by Grief' (Lk 22, 45): Reading from the Body at the Crossroads of Narratology and New Historicism' is an astute piece of critical theory *and* biblical exegesis. Clivaz begins by noting that what goes by the name of 'narrative criticism' is the way the various streams of critical theory and literary criticism have had their greatest impact to date on biblical studies. Yet the casualty has been the separation of the hoary historical and more sprightly literary sciences, or what she calls History and Poetics. Here she proposes the category of 'corporeal narratology' as a very different way to bring the two into conversation with each other. And the social lubricant for such a discussion is the brief phrase 'asleep by grief' in Luke 22: 45 – the moment when the disciples fall asleep on the Mount of Olives in Luke's passion narrative.

Jennifer Bird's essay, 'Reading the Readers Ideologically: Prolegomena to a Study of 1 Peter' is a good dose of vintage ideological criticism of the best (Marxist) sort. Here she takes on some of the key players in the interpretation of the epistle of 1 Peter – Charles Talbot, John H. Elliott and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Challenging the tendency for so many biblical scholars to keep their own personal location (which must include questions of religious commitment and of what kind it might be) a continent or two away from their scholarship, Bird raises some pertinent points concerning the ideological impact that such location has for these scholars. The essay is, if you like, an exercise in metacommentary, a commentary on the commentators that really must be a prolegomenon for any serious study of a biblical text.

Finally, Peter-Ben Smit, in 'Jesus and the Ladies: Constructing and Deconstructing Johannine Macho-Christology' provides us with a careful reading of the masculinity of Jesus in the gospel of John. Focusing on Jesus' address to his mother in John 2:4 (the wedding feast in Cana, a place that has been very much in the news lately) – 'woman, what have I to do with you?' – Smit traces the way John constructs a distinct 'macho-christology'. In the best Germanic tradition (albeit with a distinct twist) and on the basis of a wealth of Hellenistic background, especially the material on family and the hierarchy of penetration, Smit shows how Jesus must distance himself from his mother in order to be the active male. However, just when such a macho-christology has been constructed, it begins to show its limits in John's passion narrative, where the masculine Jesus is profoundly 'sissified'.

Well worth a read, as well as the books reviews that deal with a range of works, from the edited collection of fictional ‘yours faithfully’ letters edited by Philip Davies, to works on feminism by Jane Schaberg, Amy-Jill Levine, J. Cheryl Exum, Kathleen Wicker, Althea Miller and Musa Dube, and Gale Yee, to postcolonialism by R. S. Sugirtharajah, Stephen Moore and Fernando Segovia, to a range of others, such David Jasper, George Aichele and Richard Walsh, Michael Gilmour, Yvonne Sherwood, Jonathan Draper, Derek Krueger, Cynthia Chapman, Wesley Bergen, Sharon Ringe and Hyun Kim.

Roland Boer, Editor, August 2006