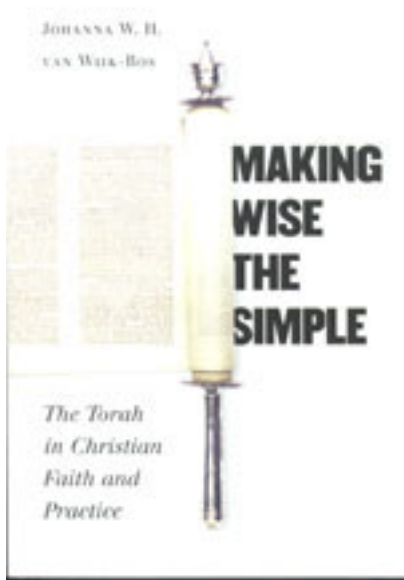


RBL 06/2006



Wijk-Bos, Johanna W. H. van

Making Wise the Simple: The Torah in Christian Faith and Practice

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. Pp. xxiv + 329. Paper. \$20.00. ISBN 0802809901.

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This book addresses “above all the Christian need to engage the entire Bible for its own sake, as a rich source for Christian faith and practice, as well as for the sake of ‘the other,’ for the sake of restoring just relations with those we have considered to be estranged from their own inheritance—the Jews, for whom the Christian Old Testament counts as the Bible” (xix). Professor Johanna W. H. van Wijk-Bos, furthermore, takes the standpoint of feminist biblical interpretation within a confessional arena (xix). The book is subdivided into five parts, each with an introduction, separately numbered chapters, and a conclusion.

Part 1, “The Torah in Bible and Tradition” (1–34), introduces concrete examples of ignorance and supersessionist prejudice against the Torah in Christian exegetical tradition, such as Christian attitudes to the Torah in Judaism in terms of “legalism” (ch. 1 [3–14]) and anti-Jewish readings of 1 Pet 2:9–10 (ch. 2 [15–24]). Van Wijk-Bos counters this bias and “lack of intimacy,” stressing that the Torah is for instruction, with reference to Deut 31:11–13 (11–12), instruction in the context of a covenant relationship with God. Letting 1 Pet 2:9–10 enter into a conversation with Exod 19:3–6 (22–24), she aptly notes that “God’s choice involves a charge rather than a special status” (24). In chapter 3 (25–32) van Wijk-Bos takes the argument a step further. Exodus 23:1–9 serves as evidence that a covenant community cannot be based on an exclusivist worldview, since a

perspective of justice with concern for the stranger is “at the heart of the Torah and of all torah” (32).

Part 2, “The World of the Torah” (35–78) provides information about the conceptual, historical and literary settings of the Torah, while it rightly stresses that “a conversation between the Testaments” should serve the purpose of mutual illumination (69–70). Van Wijk-Bos here also formulates boundaries of legitimate biblical interpretation, which she subdivides as four factors: information about historical context; linguistic and literary-critical information; thematic consistency; and current concerns, problems, and questions (66–69). Part of historical-critical interpretation of the Torah are source-critical concerns, including those of the Documentary Hypothesis, which supposes four sources (J, E, D, P), and the two-source theory (D, P), which stresses postexilic editorship (58–62). When noting challenges to the Documentary Hypothesis, however, van Wijk-Bos makes the problematic suggestion that “the day may not be far off that a single authorship, albeit a postexilic one, will be more generally assumed” (78). This perspective ignores other scholarly studies that continue to uphold the Documentary Hypothesis (e.g., A. F. Campbell and M. A. O’Brien, *Sources of the Pentateuch* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993]; cf. e.g. the recent ATD 7/2 [2004] commentary on Num 10:11–36:13 by L. Schmidt).

Part 3, “The Story of the Torah: The Making of a World (Genesis 1:1–11:32)” (79–127), focuses on Gen 1–11 as a broader cosmic setting “for the creation of God’s covenant people” (79), paying attention to “motifs of this theme” in chapter 1 (81–108). Chapter 2, “A Tale of a Garden (2:4b–3:24)” (109–25), goes specifically into the subject of the second creation story, that of Gen 2–3, which follows Gen 1. Van Wijk-Bos assigns the “final shape and context of the story” to the postexilic period (118). Yet do concerns such as a “need for identity,” “a desire for order,” and “a perspective on the world as filled with violence” (118) dictate a postexilic context as exclusively as van Wijk-Bos appears to assume? Van Wijk-Bos appears to be in two minds about it, for she also observes that “historical contexts, on multiple levels, may be the best we can assign for stories of the world’s beginnings in ancient Israel” (118). She further discusses the Christian readings of the “tale of the garden” in Rom 5:18–19, in the interest of the inclusion of Gentiles (123), and in 1 Tim 2:11–15, whose “theo-mythical foundation for the subordination of women” is “judged wanting by the biblical word itself” (125). Van Wijk-Bos observes that Paul “was probably very little concerned with what the story was trying to convey in its own time” (121). However, Paul’s focus on Adam and mortality does have points of connection with Gen 3: it is Adam whom God addresses in a speech that first mentions mortality as a human fate (Gen 3:17–19 at v. 19), and it is *ha’adam* who is singled out in Gen 3:22–24 as the one who is expelled from the garden.

Part 4 focuses on “The Story of the Torah: The Making of a People (Genesis 12:1–Deuteronomy 34:12)” (129–230). Chapter 1, on Gen 12:1–50:26 (133–48), highlights interesting examples of a “family of strangers,” mainly Gen 16 and 38. The story of Jacob’s descendants in Gen 37; 39–50, however, hardly receives attention. It is also not immediately clear how the sections on Joseph would fit into the theme of “the making of a people,” since van Wijk-Bos stresses that “it is not Joseph who will rise to tribal prominence in ancient Israel” (135). Her discussion of a postexilic date for Gen 15 and 17 in certain strands of scholarship (135–36 and n. 8) does not mention recent defenses of “traditional” views on Gen 15 as a mixture of J and E (see Campbell and O’Brien, 100–101, 166–67, with reference to M. Noth and C. Westermann). Chapter 2 on Exod 1:1–24:18 (149–68) rightly argues against a one-sided debate about the postexilic period as the historical context par excellence for the covenant texts Exod 19:3–6; 20:1–17; and 24:3–8 (Wellhausen’s claim), observing that they are “not essentially Deuteronomic” (168). Chapter 3 (169–78) discusses two passages about the instruction of God’s people in the wilderness, Num 11:1–15 and Deut 34:5–6. Chapter 4, “Instructions for the Covenant Life” (179–202), treats cross-sections from Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, with an eye to the requirements in regard to the stranger (Exod 22:21–27; 23:1–9; Lev 19:9–10, 33–34; Num 15:14–16; Deut 24:17–19) as part of the regulations for the covenant community. Chapter 5 pays specific attention to “Instructions for Life with God” (203–29), while admitting that the differentiation from “the common life of the community” in the preceding chapter is “a somewhat artificial one” (203). Current concerns appear to govern this differentiation, since the author aims to explore “the possible relevance” of what seems “exceedingly foreign” among these regulations (203). Van Wijk-Bos goes into the materials on the worship cult (Exod 25–40) with matters pertaining to it, such as sacrifice (Lev 1–7; with much attention to the analysis by Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* [Oxford University Press, 1999]), purity and impurity (Lev 11–22), and the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). The dominant rule with regard to sexual relations that Van Wijk-Bos appropriately applies to her reading of Lev 18–20 is “the prohibition to ‘oppress’ and the mandate to ‘love’ (as) the outer markers” (227).

In part 5, “Living with the Torah” (231–305), chapter 1 discusses images of “God in the Torah” (233–62), concluding that “the God of the Torah is also the God of Christianity” (262). Chapter 2, “Christ and Torah” (263–95), lets the New Testament, mainly the Synoptic Gospels and Paul’s letters, enter into a more elaborate conversation with the Torah, stressing points of continuity against “a false dichotomy” (294). Chapter 3, “How Then Shall We Live?” (296–99) and the conclusion, “How Do We Read?” (300–305), trace the lines together, pleading for a new theological foundation of the Torah in Christian life and exegesis of Scripture.

By way of evaluation, let me say that linguistic, literary-critical, and current questions and concerns are well elaborated by the author. In addition, historical settings are brought into the discussion by van Wijk-Bos, but the attention to the final shape of a text as the determinative historical context combined with the tendency of a postexilic dating, at least of Genesis, seems to motivate the author's idea that the source-critical approach of the Documentary Hypothesis can and should be set aside (see, e.g., 61–62, 78, 118, 146–47). The notion that the Torah in its final shape conveys a postexilic perspective (61–62) also has a problematic side: apart from occasional exceptions (e.g., 153 n. 11, 160 n. 25), the author leaves possible preexilic ancient Near Eastern contexts to the Torah relatively unexplored. Yet her thematic discussion of sections in the Torah is generally illuminating and provides a reading of “the Torah as a vibrant, God-revealing word for the Christian household, a word that we can hear if we are willing to ‘listen and learn’” (304) that is well established against previous Christian biases about the Torah as of peripheral or inferior concern.