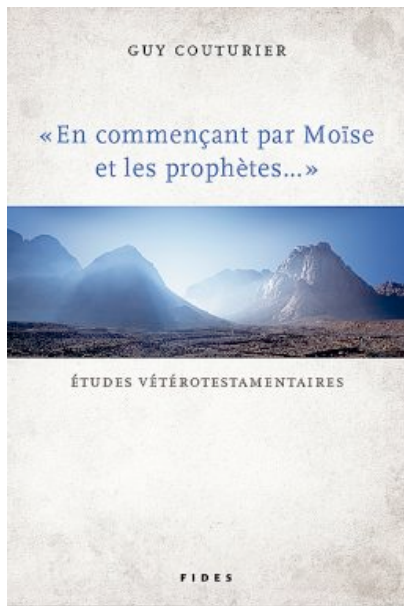


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**Couturier, Guy**

**«En commençant par Moïse et les prophètes...»:  
Études Vétérotestamentaires**

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The volume is a collection of the most significant essays of Professor Guy Couturier, a student of William Albright and Roland de Vaux who taught at Notre Dame, Indiana, Jerusalem and for nearly three decades at the Faculty of Theology of the Université de Montréal.

After a preface by Jean Duhaine, Dean of the Faculté de théologie et de sciences des religions de l'Université de Montréal, the introduction contains two articles where Couturier first traces the career of Roland de Vaux at the École Biblique de Jérusalem (ch. 1; first published in 2001) and then presents different trends relative to the integration of archaeology into the history of Israel (ch. 2: "L'archéologie de la Palestine: Ses progrès et ses rapports à l'exégèse biblique," 1995). Couturier lauds de Vaux, *Institutions de l'Ancien Testament* (1957, 1960), Helga Weippert, *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit* (1988), and Gösta Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine* (1993), as the best tools to move away from biblical archaeology toward the new archaeology to integrate archaeological data into the study of the Bible. Couturier was confident that the 'Izbet Sartah abecedary proved that Phoenician writing was used during the first centuries of the settlement of Israel in Palestine (twelfth century B.C.E.). Couturier also considers that Israel was the only ancient people to use a historical genre close to the modern understanding of history: not the transmission of bare facts but a search for their deep significance for the destiny of a

people (78). If the four sources of the Documentary Hypothesis were really dated between the *twentieth* and the sixth centuries B.C.E., as misprinted at page 20, Père de Vaux's objections were indeed well-founded.

Chapter 3, "Le prêtre et l'enseignement en Israël" (1970), opens part 1 by dealing with the Pentateuch and the historical books, where the Christian notion of salvation history is prominent. The Lord is the master of history rather than simply a natural force. Hosea is presented as a paradigm for Catholic priests, stressing the importance of scientific theology over against magical rituals.

Chapter 4, "La mort en Mésopotamie et en Israël: Phénomène naturel ou salaire du péché?" (1985), compares the reason and means for the creation of humanity and the cause of death in Gen 1–4 in the light of Sumerian and Babylonian myths. As the Yahwist tradition is still dated to the reigns of David and Solomon, the originality of J is the setting of hard labor as the consequence of disobedience rather than for feeding the gods, while P's specific contribution to Israelite anthropology is the introduction of Sabbath rest for God and humans.

At this point, the twenty-first-century reader ponders the impact of the reversal of the order of precedence that considers Gen 2–4 as a reaction to Gen 1, as is done today. The stress moves away from J's purported insistence upon a Lord of history who needs no feeding toward P's identification of violence (bloodshed, slavery) as the *only* sin, and J's reaction as a remythologization that uses Mesopotamian mythological themes to justify the feeding of the priesthood.

The struggles of Catholic theologians with the Roman guardians of the faith over the historicity of the patriarchs is the theme of chapter 5 ("Le problème de l'historicité des Patriarches de M.-J. Lagrange à R. de Vaux," 1998). Whereas the founder of the École Biblique was not allowed to publish on the subject, the arrival of Pius XII enabled de Vaux to publish on the subject during a thirty-year period, an enduring contribution that Couturier evaluates in light of the younger J and the diminishing value attributed to oral tradition.

Chapter 6 ("Le Dieu présent: Yahweh," 1978) reviews various possible etymologies for the name Yhwh and insists that from the foundational event of the exodus, Yhwh was the God who is ever present and active in history. Chapter 7, "Prière de Moïse: Le chant de la mer (Ex 15,1–21)" (1983), is a study of Exod 15, again from the perspective of the "God of history."

Chapter 8, “Sagesse babylonienne et sagesse israélite” (1962) is a review of W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford, 1960), that puts these texts in relation with biblical wisdom texts and concludes with a discussion of the concept of wisdom as experience and broadens its *Sitz im Leben* with the education of sons in the home. The same idea is taken up in chapter 9, “La vie familiale comme source de la sagesse et de la loi” (1980), where the Catholic sanctification of the family and the interest in canon law orient the discussion.

Chapter 10, “Le sacrifice d’«action de grâces»” (1982), focuses on the so-called thanks-offering (*tôdâh*), a song and a sacrifice that should be understood more as praise and admiration than as thanks. The study of the notion of *tôdâh* continues in chapter 11, “Sens de Tôdâh en Jos 7,19 et en Esd 10,11” (1987), in the problem of Achan’s execution and of Ezra’s forced repudiation of the foreign wives where it refers to the confession of sins.

Chapter 12, “Débora: Une autorité politico-religieuse aux origines d’Israël” (1989) discusses the major role played by Deborah at the origins of the history of Israel (the period of the judges considered as historical). Although Couturier mentions the Arabian *kâhina*, in its male form, the *kâhin* (written *hâkin* at 330) as an obvious parallel for Deborah, Couturier strangely concludes that such a recognition of a woman’s value must have been rare in antiquity.

In chapter 13, “Quelques observations sur le *bytdwd* de la stèle araméenne de Tel Dan” (2001), Couturier defends the reading “house of David” at line 9 of the Dan Stela as a reference to the kingdom of Judah.

Part 2 deals with prophetic texts. First, “Les prophètes à l’heure des charismes’ (ch. 14; 1982) is a study of the role of the divine spirit in the context of the rise of modern charismatic movements. Apart from Ezekiel and the Elohist, Couturier notes how rarely the *ruah* is mentioned in relation to biblical prophets. It is the king who is the primary beneficiary of divine anointing, and after him Jesus and church leaders, that is, bishops and priests. This essay reveals how much our understanding of prophetic texts has changed in the last decades. The way Couturier uses the literary figures of the prophets as description of actual people and situations makes this essay an excellent pedagogical support to teach how *not* to read prophetic texts today.

The next study, “L’esprit de Yahweh et la fonction prophétique en Israël” (ch. 15), deals with the same subject but from a more exegetical point of view. A detailed discussion of Hos 9:7–9; Mic 2:6–11; 3:5–8; Jer 5:10–17 and of prophetic groups, sons of prophets, false prophets, and “called” prophets concludes that it is impossible to give a comprehensive

definition of prophetism. The divine spirit was not tied to any one group, and individual prophets did not claim the spirit for themselves.

“Le prophète: Conscience révoltée de son peuple” (1977) is a standard piece on the ethical dimension of prophetic denunciations of the rich, the powerful, and the priests. Today a greater critical distance supports the suspicion that such critiques were motivated by the interests of rival patrons rather than by a disinterested concern for the poor. Biblical prophets, the paper ones as much as the flesh-and-blood figures they imagined, were no trade unionists. Reading them as expressions of “social justice” is a disastrous anachronism.

Chapter 17, “Isaïe 7,14: Etude philologique du terme ‘almâh’” (2005), reveals the primacy of the notion of young age over against that of virginity for the word עלמה. Couturier starts from the masculine counterpart, *‘elem*, attested only twice as a noun (1 Sam 17:56; 20:22), and the abstract notion עלומים. Couturier then reviews the evidence from Semitic epigraphy and the attestations of the feminine form in the titles of the Psalms and in Isa 7:14. The discussion of the *betulah* should be completed with Elena Cassin, “Virginité et stratégie du sex,” in *Le semblable et le différent* (Paris, 1987), 338–57.

Chapter 18, “Alliance nouvelle et homme nouveau en Jérémie 31,31–34” (1994), is an exegetical study of the new covenant promised by Jeremiah. Couturier shows that this new covenant implies no new party nor any changes in the stipulations of the treaty. The newness of the covenant is anthropological. Jeremiah’s insight is found in his recognition of Israel’s fundamental inability to obey the divine commands and that only Yhwh can correct this original defect by giving a new heart.

“Rapports culturels et religieux entre Israël et Canaan d’après Osée 2,4–25” (ch. 19; 1986) is another classical attempt to ground the originality of Yahwism in history, although Hos 2 shows clearly that Yhwh is a fertility-god like Baal. “Yahweh et les déesses cananéennes en Osée 14,9” (1995) focuses on the relation of Yhwh with Asherah attested by epigraphy and Hosea.

Chapter 21, “La vision du conseil divin: Étude d’une forme commune au prophétisme et à l’apocalyptique” (1984), offers a most informative overview of how scholarship viewed the relation between prophetic and apocalyptic genres, a chapter read with the greatest interest by the present reviewer. The notion of divine council is placed in its ancient Near Eastern context and presented as the centerpiece upon which prophetism and apocalyptic articulate their specific views. The discussion includes Enoch, Testament of Levi, various apocalyptic texts, the New Testament, and the Dead Sea scrolls in its broad sweep and focuses on the prophetic *sod* and the apocalyptic *raz*. Couturier is still under the influence

of the standard diachronic scheme that sets the “exile” as the turning point when prophetism (supposedly born as a reaction to a rural crisis of the eighth century B.C.E.) gave rise to apocalypticism as a reaction to the crisis caused by the empires. However, this essay could help break this simplistic “crisis” mode of thinking and lead to understanding prophecy and apocalyptic revelations as concomitant expressions.

The choice of placing “Qui est Yahweh dans l’Ancien Testament” (1974) and “Je crois en Dieu...” (1989) as a conclusion to the volume is rather unfortunate, since these chapters are terribly outdated.

«*En commençant par Moïse et les prophètes*» is a tribute to the enduring clash between scientific exegesis and magisterial authorities of all times, Protestant as much as Catholic. The volume will be of interest for the history of twentieth-century Old Testament exegesis in the microcosm of Francophone Catholicism, revealing how Catholic colleagues dealt with the constraints of the hierarchy, blending some conservative Protestant notions with Catholic themes to enhance the legitimacy of scientific exegesis. For this reason, it would have been easier to order the chapters according to their date of publication rather than according to the sequence of the Catholic scriptural canon. Authors like to see a selection of their articles gathered in a single volume, in this case with a beautiful cover, but the lack of indices is a serious drawback. When the ever-growing costs of publication lead university presses to enforce electronic publication of theses, the allocation of resources to reprint essays published decades earlier without any corrections and update is hard to justify. Old Testament scholars are scientists rather than artists, or they should accept that the exigencies of research places them willy-nilly close to the freedom, the corrosive, and, above all, the ephemeral aspect of Dadaism. It is a tribute to the vibrancy of our field that our best contributions fade into irrelevancy within a few years. Publishing a Festschrift with contributions by one’s students is surely a better way to honor a professor.