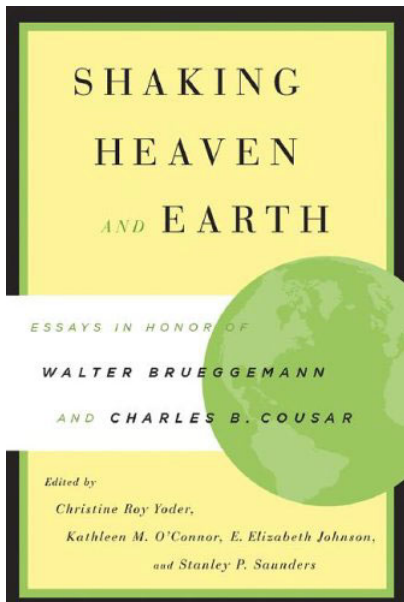


RBL 02/2006



Yoder, Christine Roy, Kathleen M. O'Connor, E. Elizabeth Johnson, and Stanley P. Saunders, eds.

Shaking Heaven and Earth: Essays in Honor of Walter Brueggemann and Charles B. Cousar

Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005. Pp. xi + 170. Paper. \$29.95. ISBN 0664227775.

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Shaking Heaven and Earth: Essays in Honor of Walter Brueggemann and Charles B. Cousar contains the contributions of 13 biblical scholars. Forming an inclusion in the volume are chapters 1 and 13 by Cousar and Brueggemann, respectively. The volume's contributors participated in a colloquium entitled "Shaking Heaven and Earth: Bible, Church, and the Changing Global Order" held in April 2003 (x). The Colloquium's text was "Yet once more, I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven" (Heb 12:26) (7). The essay topics span both Testaments.

What strikes one immediately about this slim volume is the sincere collegiality, deep respect, and genuine love the contributors extend toward Cousar and Brueggemann. Each honoree is a professor emeritus at Columbia Theological Seminary. Brueggemann served as the William Marcellus McPheeter Professor of Old Testament and Cousar as the Samuel A. Cartledge Professor of New Testament.

Writing in the preface, the editors (all current Columbia Seminary professors) set the tone by summing up the theology of the honorees: "Walter Brueggemann and Charlie Cousar have told us repeatedly to watch for the ways God's Word shakes the earth" (xi). Yet although God's Word shakes the earth, "God's realm is unshakeable," they continue, and the proper response to this unshakeable fact is worship, reverence, and thanksgiving (xi).

The editors celebrate the aggregate of eighty-plus years, the total years of the service of Brueggemann and Cousar to the academy, church, community, and classroom (x, xi), with this volume. In addition to the editors and honorees, the contributors include Carol A. Newsom, David L. Petersen, Patrick D. Miler, Louis Stulman, Beverly Roberts Gaventa, J. Louis Martyn, and Leander E. Keck.

Cousar, writing in a conversational style, continues the preface's theme of shaking with a story about a security check in November 2001 at the Atlanta airport. A passenger commented that security measures were necessary "to make our country as secure as we can" (2). Mulling over that phrase, Cousar recalled Matthew's Gospel in which Pilate instructed the soldiers to make Jesus' tomb "as secure as you possibly can" (Matt 27:65). Cousar comments that the women came to the tomb expecting to find their deceased friend Jesus but instead found an empty tomb. "The body of Jesus was gone. So much for homeland security!" Cousar quips (3). The women, leaving the tomb site with "fear and great joy," fulfill their job of telling others that Jesus was going on ahead of them into Galilee (4). Cousar's point is that with everything in their known world shaken, the women obeyed and later met Jesus and worshiped him (5). Like these women, "There comes the moment when we have to leave behind the sanctuary of this world for the security of the risen Christ" (5).

Newsom, in her essay "Genesis 2–3 and 1 Enoch 6–16: Two Myths of Origin and Their Ethical Implications," states that origin myths offer statements of fundamental values and convictions (7). Newsom offers an imagined exchange between Eve and Enoch. She humorously describes this moral imagination as "Eve-s-dropping" and argues that stories "tell about who we are as human beings and what the world is like" (21).

In a humorous jab at the radio program, "Focus on the Family" and its advocacy of "traditional values" (24), Petersen points out how dysfunctional were the families in the Old Testament. In "Shaking the World of Family Values," Petersen looks at the marriage and family relationships of Israel's greats such as Abraham, David, and Moses and concludes that they "present us with patterns of marital behavior that do not conform to the pillars of 'Focus on the Family'" (24–25). Looking at the family of Abraham in particular, Petersen concludes that the family members used various strategies such as distancing, oaths, contracts, legal separations, verbal combat, gifting, and battles of wit to resolve most conflicts without murder and violence (31). Thus, Abraham's extended family offers us today practical avenues of nonviolent conflict resolution (31).

Miller, in "What Do You Do with the God You Have? The First Commandment as Political Axiom," argues that the starting point is that God demands that "you cannot have any other gods before me, behind me, beside me, over against me" (34). Miller sees

the first commandment as requiring that “you take the God you have with ultimate seriousness” (40). He follows this with observations that the second commandment requires “that you not take anything else too seriously” and that the third commandment instructs us “not to take the Lord your God, the only God you have, too lightly” (40).

Stulman, in “Conflicting Paths to Hope in Jeremiah,” argues that Jeremiah is a highly contemporary book (43). Believing that the events of 9/11 have been exploited in obscene ways (43–44), Stulman argues that the book of Jeremiah gives an unblinking view of chaos and devastation coming upon Judah yet offers hope through the wreckage (48). The book of Jeremiah realistically asserts three things: hope is rooted in suffering (49); hope involves letting go of the old world (50); and hope exists on the margins of society among the vulnerable and wounded (51).

O’Connor, also writing about Jeremiah, notes that the prophet sees two futures: one of impending doom and destruction; the other “a-soon-to-come ‘good place’ ” (59). The setting for both—the massive upheaval and the future paradise—is Jerusalem. In “Jeremiah’s ‘Prophetic Imagination’: Pastoral Intervention for a Shattered World,” O’Connor concludes that a utopian future does not evolve from what has gone before but “bursts into history and interrupts the present weariness without causal explanation” (68). She says that the book’s two futures guide Jeremiah’s shattered community through a process of recovery and reconnection; for people living then and today, Jeremiah provides insights that generate healing and hope (69).

Yoder, in “The Objects of Our Affections: Emotions and the Moral Life in Proverbs 1–9,” challenges the conventional wisdom that the book of Proverbs promotes self-restraint. She finds multiple emotions, and strong ones, too, throughout the book and in chapters 1–9 in particular (73). Some of these emotions are fear, greed, love, hate, delight, terror, distress, and anguish (73–74). To be a wise person means to be “captivated by beauty and goodness, disgusted by wickedness, devoted to God, wisdom and others” (84).

Johnson, in “Life Together in the Household of God,” considers New Testament teaching on the family. Going back to Genesis, she writes that the patriarchal narratives portray people who live, work, and worship together in the household of God (89–90). God’s covenant faithfulness to Abraham, Sarah, and their extended family are carried over by the writer to the Ephesians. Johnson maintains that it is only when “such covenant faithfulness and the cruciform life of the church mark our life together as the people of God that the individual households we create within it will be blessed” (100).

Gaventa examines Acts 17:1–9 in “‘Turning the World Upside Down’: A Reflection on the Acts of the Apostles.” The story “puts Rome in its place” and acknowledges “God’s

cosmic intervention on behalf of mankind” (105). In this story of Paul and Silas in Thessalonica, the world is being turned upside down, but it is not Paul and Silas who are doing it (113). Instead, it is the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ that is shaking both heaven and earth (114).

Martyn draws a distinction between Greek theology and Paul’s. The Greeks often identified the world with God, but Paul knew the world to have a beginning and an ending and that it was created and continued to be overseen by God (118). In his essay, “World without End or Twice-Invaded World,” Martyn sees Paul’s language as apocalyptic and full of imagination—but imagination that has its origin in God (119).

Keck writes in “What If Paul Was Right?” that the canonical status of Paul’s letters means that interpreters are perpetually confronted by his thought and must decide, repeatedly, whether he was right about various issues—and what difference that makes (133). Via a series of italicized questions, Keck deftly brings Paul to modern eyes and yet places Paul back in his own time. Taking Romans as a focal point, he notes that Paul cites Old Testament texts in a way that resembles other Jewish interpreters of his time (138). But Paul sees these texts through the starting point of the resurrection of Jesus (138). Paul reads the Old Testament in the light of Christ and therefore can see Abraham’s faith as grace. “The divine grace enacted in the Christ event and in bringing in the new age by resurrection was the same grace by which God chose Jacob over Esau, (138).

Saunders, in “Between Blessing and Curse: Reading, Hearing, and Performing the Apocalypse in a World of Terror,” focuses on things he has learned from his friends Cousar and Brueggemann: the theology of the cross, theological imagination and integrity, and worship (141). Saunders argues that mainstream Christians can no longer afford to ignore John’s Apocalypse or treat it as an embarrassment or an object of scorn (142). Seeing the Apocalypse as meant for performance, he argues that it behooves readers to take its admonitions of blessing and curses seriously (Rev 1:3; 22:18–19) (152). He concludes, “The words of the Apocalypse are alive in the world all around us, suspended—as are we in the church—between violence and peace, hope and despair, between the powers of this world and the reign of the Lamb, between blessing and curse” (152).

Brueggemann, in his concluding reflections, notes that shaking (in Hebrew, *ra’as*), an apocalyptic term, connotes a God-caused upheaval indicative of a new creation being wrought by God (157). Brueggemann believes that interpreters of Scripture have a congruent role in this shaking business. Using synonyms for *shaking*, he writes that it is the work of Scripture “to deconstruct, destabilize, and subvert what is settled” in order to receive God’s newness (157). Brueggemann concludes with warnings to conservatives

and liberals alike. He notes that conservatives tend to focus on what the Bible seems to say about sexuality, while liberals tend to focus on what the Bible seems to say about economics (163). Furthermore, conservatives tend to reduce the Bible's vitality to doctrinal formulation, while liberals tend to reduce the inherent shaking capacity of the Bible to historical criticism (163). Scripture's life-giving element means that while it shakes, it "gives us access to the direction and significance of that shaking" (163).

The volume's essays provide insights on following Christ, our security, into an insecure world that is constantly being shaken. After reading these essays, one can acknowledge with fear God's shaking power but trust in his character to restore, to bless, and to remember his covenant with Abraham.