BOOK REVIEWS


Albertz is the first scholar for many decades to write a comprehensive history of Israelite religion. This first volume deals with the pre-state and monarchy eras, and the second with the exilic, post-exilic and Hellenistic periods. Albertz's work is well-researched, detailed and thorough, and follows a mainstream reconstruction of Israelite history. For these reasons it will be warmly welcomed by many scholars and may well become a standard textbook for a generation of students. But others have already rejected the underlying historical reconstruction and will therefore also reject this elaborate superstructure.

A rather brief introduction charts this century's replacement of the history of Israel as a scholarly discipline by Old Testament theology, and the latter's more recent demise. While accepting that the distinction is imprecise, since a religious history involves theological presuppositions and a theology involves historical awareness, Albertz argues for the former as "the more meaningful comprehensive Old Testament discipline" (p. 16) because of its greater appropriateness to the material of study. Here he tends to address the ghost of scholarship past, though at the same time he leads the way in developing a thorough alternative.

Albertz's particular contribution (argued programmatically in 1978) is to focus separately on family piety and official religion, and to deal extensively with the former. Early family piety is reflected in the patriarchal narratives with their interest in divine immediacy, descendants and blessing, and in the individual laments with their personal rather than historical concerns. It displayed a pervasive "internal religious pluralism" (p. 95) largely uninfluenced by the rise of Yahweh religion. This can be seen in theophoric names; e.g., those of Saul's family (in notable contrast to Josiah's family) and in archaeologically attested house cults. This pluralism at family level continued during the monarchy and even intensified under Assyrian influence as poly-Yahwism, with the national god gradually replacing the family god.
Albertz demonstrates a keen appreciation of the different concerns of various social strata and groups in Israelite society. While he does not adopt a specifically social-scientific approach, his work is sensitive to the social dynamics informing Israelite religion and marks a new stage in discussion of it.

At the national level Albertz sees a genuine historical kernel to the exodus and pre-state traditions. The liberation god Yahweh of the small exodus group was attractive to and adopted by the emancipated shepherd and peasant population of Palestine. "It was above all [the] common ideal of freedom, rather than institutions, which united the loose tribal alliance of 'Israel' " (pp. 75f.). The establishment of the state led to its religious legitimation in the Jerusalem cult by appeal to universal creation and chaos myths, and this in turn fostered various opposition and reform groups during the course of the monarchies. Particular attention is paid to Hosea's polemic against Israel's apostasy, the Book of the Covenant as the basis for Hezekiah's reform and the Deuteronomistic reform as the confluence of various interest groups.

Albertz is clearly confident in his historical reconstruction and textual interpretation; e.g., "it can now be said with some certainty that ... the cultural milieu of Palestine presupposed by the patriarchal narratives ... does not go back beyond the conditions of Iron Age I" (p. 28), or "it is quite certain that the religious idea of the covenant in Israel is a Deuteronomic innovation" (p. 229). This confidence will leave critics from various perspectives dissatisfied.

Unfortunately the English edition shows many signs of hasty production. The translation is efficient but unimaginative (cf. the title) with a few obscurities (e.g., "this pernicious Christian history of guilt", p. 13) and mistakes (e.g., walls 21 metres thick, p. 84). Other errors include the omission of the main headings from the two complex diagrams (pp. 21, 106) and the mistaken title ("Exile" instead of "Monarchy") on the front cover.

Perhaps more importantly for students, the book is not user friendly. The system of endnotes, which comprise a third of the volume, requires one to read constantly in two places (or more, when consulting the bibliographies). The original's footnotes are much better. The dense sectional bibliographies do not distinguish authors typographically, unlike the original's upper case, or the bold type in Child's *Introduction* (also published by SCM). These bibliographies omit works previously listed, and the notes