



---

*A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership*  
Volume 10 • Number 1 • Winter 2001

---

## BOOK REVIEWS

---

***MICAH: A NEW TRANSLATION WITH INTRODUCTION  
AND COMMENTARY***

The Anchor Bible, Volume 24E

Francis I. Anderson and David Noel Freedman

New York: Doubleday (2000)

637 pages, cloth, \$42.50

***PROVERBS 1-9: A NEW TRANSLATION WITH INTRO-  
DUCTION AND COMMENTARY***

The Anchor Bible, Volume 18A

Michael V. Fox

New York: Doubleday (2000)

474 pages, cloth, \$42.50

**T**hese are the two most recent volumes in the massive series known as *The Anchor Bible*. The series is, like all such efforts, uneven. Some of the volumes are wonderfully useful while others are of limited value to most pastors and serious biblical students. Francis Andersen, a solid and reliable Old Testament scholar and teacher, is now professor of classics and archaeology at the University of Melbourne (Australia), while David Noel Freedman is the esteemed professor of Hebrew Bible at the University of California, San Diego. Freedman has served as the general editor of *The Anchor Bible* series from its inception. Michael V. Fox is a professor of Hebrew and Semitic studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Micah, a prophet of judgment, also held out the hope

of redemption. "Micah combined poetic complexity and literary sophistication to compel his audience to respond. And now, through an exacting linguistic and literary analysis of the biblical text" (from dust jacket) Andersen and Freedman show us what the text meant to the original audience. The authors approach the text with correct presuppositions. The work that results is descriptive, not speculative. It is philological rather than theological, at least in the narrow sense.

One of the striking conclusions reached by Andersen and Freedman is that Micah employs a special kind of Hebrew and discourse that differs significantly from the language of classical Hebrew prose.

As in a number of other volumes in this series the bibliography is extensive and useful. The indexes are also valuable. The translation is fresh and sheds new light on the meaning of Micah. This is clearly one of the very best Old Testament volumes in this series. It should stand as a landmark for future scholarship for some time to come. Pastors will most definitely profit from this work if they intend to preach an expository series through the seven chapters of Micah.

Thirty-five years ago *The Anchor Bible* first produced a volume on Proverbs-Ecclesiastes. This present new work is intended to update and replace that earlier work. Roland Murphy, the Roman Catholic biblical scholar, notes that "This stunning commentary . . . towers over all other studies in Proverbs 1-9, and bodes well for the next volume." He adds, "This commentary combines erudition with clarity, originality with the necessary dialogue with previous scholarship" (from the dust jacket).

Fox provides stunning essays that define wisdom and challenge a great deal of older scholarship. Other thematic essays include work on the formation of Proverbs 1-9 and the origin of wisdom personified. This work alone makes

the volume important for serious Old Testament work.

Included with this fresh translation is an examination of the place of Proverbs in the intellectual history of ancient Israel. The text surveys Near Eastern wisdom literature and applied insights there from the biblical text. The format of the commentary makes it accessible to the general reader while also providing material of special interest for Old Testament scholars.

JOHN H. ARMSTRONG  
Editor

### A SHORT SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Paul F. M. Zahl

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2000)

109 pages, paper, \$12.00

Most works of theology are predictable, large, philosophical, and structured in ways that follow a predictable path. This is a wonderful alternative that is truly refreshing. It follows the affirmation-denial model of confessional Christianity by stating twenty-five theses that are meant to draw the reader into both the content and methodology of the theological discipline. It wastes no words, provokes response and drives the reader to sound conclusions.

As a proponent of serious evangelical ecumenism I am always on the lookout for works that can help the church at large establish clearly what "core orthodoxy" is for our time. The theses Zahl affirms are surely the core of apostolic orthodoxy for all time.

Zahl begins at the right place, insisting that the proper subject of Christian theology must be clear: "This means that Christology is the beginning and the end, better, the starting point and summary of all Christian thought" (5).

But why not begin a theology with God as creator, or God as "the ground of our being" or simply God as the Other? "Theology is unable to start in those places because the picture of God that emerges from such beginnings is speculative" (5). So, Zahl's first thesis is: "Theology is Christology" (7). "Christian theology is rightly described as being 'from the bottom up' rather than 'from the top down'" (7). This means we build our picture of God, "layer by layer" as Zahl puts it, by looking at the human person and experience of Jesus Christ. He properly and wisely devotes almost one fourth of his book to this first thesis. I seek to make this point almost daily in my own ministry. I find the most conservative confessional traditions often the most unreceptive to this emphasis. This is a tragedy; no, I should say it is a *great* tragedy! It has to be corrected if we are to experience modern reformation. In Paul Zahl I have found a wonderful ally for making this point.

The theses that follow flow systematically and biblically from the first. For example we read "Thesis 2: The historical Jesus was the first Christian. His teachings demonstrate it, his associations embody it, and his exorcisms confirm it" (22). And, "Thesis 3: The connection between the historical Jesus and the present-day Christ is Easter Day of the year 29" (24). But how is the Christ who is alive become present for us today? In what sense is the historical Jesus made present in our moment in history? Zahl argues that he is "present in the sacraments" (25) and "present in the words of the Bible" (27). This is what he calls "objectification" in religion. "It is the human attempt to locate a tangible object in the tangible world that carries the intangible universality of the divine, invisible God" (26). This thinking leads to "magic" in various religions. Zahl insists, properly I believe, that "For Christianity, only the body of Christ during his time in history can be considered the objective manifestation of God" (26).

Evangelicals who are uncomfortable with this type of thought should consider the argument Zahl makes. It is not "magic" or "hocus pocus" but serious biblical exegesis that motivates his conclusions. To give the reader a sample of how Zahl develops the theology of objectification consider the following quotation:

Some will separate or distinguish the words of God (the text) from the Word of God (the Christ to whom the text points or the Christ whom the text bears). This tactic, which is a tactic of differentiation, takes varying forms, as do all other theories concerning the objective communicability of the risen Christ. It all depends on the degree to which the theologian of divine presence wishes to be objective and thus to speak in objective terms about the mediating thing. If the characteristic theology of object in Roman Catholicism relates to the elements of the eucharist, the characteristic theology of object in Protestantism relates to the Word of God written. *Both historic streams of objectification, the Roman Catholic and the Protestant, are attempts to receive the resurrection.* They are deeply felt and yearned for attempts to pin down that which cannot be pinned down.

Even the one concrete and universal Christian symbol of the appearance of the grace of God, the cross of Jesus, represents the hiddenness and, from our end, the inaccessibility of God in any objective form. In the cross of Jesus, God operates *sub contrario*, under the opposite of his reasoned attributes such as strength and authority and life. In the cross, which is an objective symbol of Christ's objective life on earth, the symbol belies the reality to which it points. God takes his stand on earth within the human experience of kinked, crooked desperateness (28).

Later we encounter a discussion of icons, something few evangelicals would ever bother to consider at all. Zahl argues that iconography is:

"a concept that is hopelessly over-freighted" (32). This is true because the Spirit "blows where it wills" (John 3:8), and no human being exists who can summon it by impulse or wish. The same is true of the power of any visual image of any type. Its communication is too subjective. One person's Picasso is another person's Bougereau. The power of the image is not stable (32).

Zahl concludes his argument about the presence of the resurrected Christ by saying that we must necessarily grapple with "The Presence of His Absence" (35). He draws on the theology of both Bonhoeffer and Luther to speak of the *deus absconditus*, the hidden or concealed God. "The illusory or at best fading tangibilities of sacrament, written Word, visual image, and even future hope as guarantor in the meantime—these hoped-for tangibilities are all at root ways to possess God on human terms" (35). Christians must, finally, live in the "presence of his absence" (35). This leads to his fifth thesis: "The risen Christ is present in his absence" (36). The sixth logically and biblically follows: "The presence of Christ's absence is found within the works of love" (37). The seventh reads: "The absent Christ is present in human love where and when such human love resembles his love when he was here" (38).

By the time Zahl reaches thesis number 10 he draws an astounding conclusion, but one which is correct given his approach. "Thesis 10: Satan is the second subject of theology" (43). Theology must seek to understand Christ's ancient and final victory over Satan in this world. "Even as he is defeated by the greater Subject, the risen Christ, Satan lives on, in death throes as it were, like *the rigor mortis* of the dying stegosaurus in *King Kong* (1933)" (46). When the subject of the Holy Spirit first occurs, in thesis 11, he becomes "God's unseen presence operating through the works of compassionate love and in closest relation to Providence" (46).

From these eleven theses follow fourteen more. The *content* of theology is "power in the blood" (51). By this Zahl anchors the Christ of history in the atonement and his sacrifice for sin. He takes up the language of substitution with considerable care. Not one word is wasted.

In Thesis 18 Zahl finally comes to the doctrine of the Trinity. He refers to this mysterious reality as "the last development in the logic of systematic theology" (73). I can't pass on allowing Zahl to explain himself on this vital point. His words profoundly move me to worship the living and true God of the Scripture.

For God to have birthed the incarnation strategy, for God to have created the atonement strategy, for God to be predicated as Three-in-One, God must be a Being capable of movement and transition.

God as predicated by the shedding of the blood of Christ must have affect. God must have feeling. God must have sorrow. God must be capable of having compassion that responds to human distress (i.e., Exodus 3:7). He must be capable even of dividedness—or better, a variety of emotions. He responds to our bondage by means of the death and life of Christ. "God is love" (1 John 4:8). The whole characterization of God allowed us by virtue of the New Testament's portrait of Jesus requires us to say, in the formal language of theology, that God is *passible*" (74).

Paul Zahl believes, with a widely quoted modern theologian, that "the position of the theologian . . . [is] nothing over and above what is laid upon the whole Christian community and upon each of its members" (79; from Ernst Käsemann "Theologians and Laity," in *New Testament Questions of Today*, London: SCM Press, 1969). With this in view Thesis 20 is vital to the overall argument of this superb book.

The theological method is the same as the method that has been given to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1) in the life of every Christian. *This method is the gospel, which starts with self-criticism (i.e., repentance) and turns the human being by means of grace to the works of love. The gospel of the forgiveness of sin is the first principle of all theological thinking* (emphasis mine, 81).

This method of theology produces "freedom" (82), which in turn leads to "integration" and "fruitfulness" (83). This means that the "inductive method is the method of Christian theology" (84) and thus theology "is not a received truth" (84). Theology is a continual search for truth. But will this not result in the freedom that produced liberal theology over a century ago? Zahl argues that this will not be the case so long as Christ and blood atonement are kept central and foundational (85-86). So, we must adopt a "critical method in theology and daily life, [which] exorcizes the world of false gods and false assumptions" (88). The conclusion of the matter is to be seen in Thesis 25: "The world exists in the time between the blood of Christ and our death. The Spirit acts in the present through freedom enacted within the works of love" (89).

The conclusion drawn is well stated:

The Christian thinker often reels from the freedom that flows from the Christian insight concerning Christ. Thus a duality is present in theology that results in constant confrontations between the ancient Story and its Promethean implications. "Theology necessarily entails temptation, contestation and controversy."

I offer no solutions to this problem. It is the startling union of a radical experience of God that is described in its original form in ancient transmitted texts; of a spiritual, unseen religion linked to unpredictable results. . . . The only factor that

is able to make this perpetual tension tolerable is the assurance of Christ, who promised to be present with us "always until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20) and who has been hailed as forever contemporary in the words "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). The compassionate Christ is the only One who ties all epochs and all the exercises of human freedom together into one consistent labor of love (94).

The Reformed theologian Beza's *Summa totius Christianismi* is included as one appendix (95-97) and the Lutheran Lucas Cranach's "The Old and the New Testament" is a second appendix (99-100). Both are added, for good reason, to support the approach taken by Zahl.

Paul Zahl is dean of the Cathedral Church of the Advent (Episcopal) in Birmingham, Alabama. He previously authored *The Protestant Face of Anglicanism*. This new little book, *A Short Systematic Theology*, may well be the finest small introduction to the discipline and place of Christian theology in some time. I recommend it to pastors and lay leaders for serious reading and theological discussion. It marks a path that could happily lead the church to a new reformation.

JOHN H. ARMSTRONG  
Editor

### *EERDMANS DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE*

David Noel Freedman, Editor

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2000)

1,459 pages (134 illustrations and 16 color maps), cloth,  
\$45.00

*H*ailed as "the most comprehensive and up-to-date one-volume Bible dictionary available" this work is

clearly an important new reference tool for reading and studying the Bible. It contains over 5,000 alphabetically arranged articles which offer explanation of all the books, persons, places and significant terms found in the Bible. It discusses cultural, natural, geographical and literary matters touching upon the content and message of the Bible. The design is for easy reference and the illustrations are marvelous. The maps are superb and a valuable part of the book.

Originally Eerdmans intended for this to be only an update of its 1987 edition of *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* but editor-in-chief David Noel Freedman prevailed in causing the production of a wholly new reference work that would include the important contributions of biblical scholarship from the last decade. Over 600 scholars contributed to the work. The writers cover a broad range of critical and theological perspectives, but the intent seems to be objectivity and balance.

The scope of this work is broad. The usual entries are to be found here for sure. But the inclusion of topics not normally included in such a work make this revised edition particularly useful for serious Bible research. As an example of this point, "archaeology" provides useful insight into the settlement patterns of ancient peoples. To ignore this insight is to miss a major contribution of modern research. Such insight is, more importantly, helpful for better understanding the text of Scripture itself.

David Noel Freedman describes this work as "a rapid-response reference work." By this he means the dictionary covers the same ground as larger multi-volume works but with shorter discussions and descriptions. Even though this is the case, the editorial process does not cheat the reader in any significant sense.

One extremely helpful feature of this volume is the choice the editors made regarding biblical names. Instead

of giving us artificial anglicized pronunciations of the names of persons and places, the editors give the common English names along with the transliterations of the Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek forms of the same names. This allows the average reader to get as close to correct original pronunciation, without benefit of the original languages, as possible.

The editors also include articles that develop important themes in biblical theology, text, and transmission. Extra-biblical writings and relevant traditional church interpretations are also part of the work.

This will be a valuable resource for some years to come. It is user friendly and factually impressive. Clear, concise information appears on almost every page. I heartily encourage serious students of the Bible to use this resource.

JOHN H. ARMSTRONG  
Editor