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**Álvarez Barredo, Miguel**

***La Iniciativa de Dios: Estudio literario y teológico de Jueces 1–8***

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Biblical scholarship published in Spanish does not regularly receive the attention it merits from mainstream (and mostly English- or German-speaking) *academia*, although over the past ten to fifteen years an increased output of relevant material from Spanish-speaking authors (residing both in Spain and in Latin America) can be noted. One only needs to think about the important works of the late L. Alonso-Schökel or the significant contributions of G. del Olmo Lete and J.-L. Cunchillos and others in Ugaritic and ancient Near Eastern studies, not to forget Latin America's contribution in the current hermeneutical discussion of the relationship between text, culture, and interpretation.

Álvarez Barredo, professor of biblical studies at the Pontificio Ateneo Antonianum in Rome and at the Theological Institute of the Franciscan order in Murcia, Spain, adds to this growing body. His is primarily a literary and theological study, utilizing the approach emphasizing syntax, structure, and narrative as pioneered (with obviously distinct results) by W. Richter and A. Niccacci without losing touch with traditional redaction-critical explanations (M. Noth, R. Smend, F. M. Cross, J. A. Soggin, to name a few) to focus upon the Deuteronomist (or the many supposed Deuteronomistic-style redactions discovered by different scholars).

The roughly three hundred pages of the book are divided into seven main chapters, following basically the order of the MT of Judg 1–8. Álvarez Barredo understands Judg 1:1–2:5 as the primary introduction referring back to distinct traditions about the conquest (17–61). Judges 2:6–3:6 (63–85) is described as a “second introduction” to the book in which Joshua reappears (after Judg 1:1), which—according to Álvarez Barredo—clearly indicates an “adjustment of the narrative” (63), most probably in terms of its redaction, although this is not further clarified by the author. Chapter 3 focuses upon the narratives of the first judges found in Judg 3:7–4:24 (87–142). Interestingly, Álvarez Barredo suggests reading Judg 4 holistically (against traditional majority positions, which predominantly posit three main strata [117–19]) and concludes from this

reading that the chapter focuses upon two scenes: the first involving the dialogue between Barak and Deborah and the second involving a change of location into the tent of Jael (119–24, with relevant lexicographical and linguistic connectors). The author interprets the stylistic connectors as evidence of a conscious (redactional-level) reworking of earlier traditions (124) and with that tries to makes everybody happy.

The following chapter 4 studies the song of Deborah in Judg 5 (pp. 143–82) and again suggests a unified reading whereby prose and poetic sections form a sensible whole. Álvarez Barredo also sees terminological connections to other sections of Judges (esp. Judg 4; p. 172) and includes also—rather strangely for a work focusing upon innertextual literary and theological aspects—a section discussing the broader ancient Near Eastern literary context, with reference to comparative material such as the epic of Tukulti-Ninurta (156–57). A great part of the chapter is dedicated to demonstrate lexicographical or structural links between the different sections. The final three chapters study the Gideon narrative and basically follow the chapter division of the MT (Jdg 6 [182–236]; Jdg 7:1–8:4 [237–76]; Jdg 8:5–34 [277–306]). As with the previous chapters, each section is first discussed syntactically (which unfortunately does not always include a technical discussion but quite often involves retelling of the storyline), which is generally followed by the author’s translation of the MT into Spanish. This is followed by comments on the literary structure and the resulting theological repercussions. Álvarez Barredo does not include a conclusion and leaves the reader wondering what the implications and benefits of the study might be. The book also contains an eight-page up-to-date bibliography (307–14), which includes some obvious formatting issues on page 311 (entries of D. F. Murray and A. Niccacci), and also a helpful index of Old Testament textual references (315–24), which is followed (in good Spanish publishing tradition) by a complete table of contents, providing more details than the short version at the beginning of the book.

Generally, the author could have utilized more graphical illustrations, providing visual support for his complex and repetitive descriptions of the textual evidence. The book left one lingering critical thought in my mind that could be expressed with the following New Testament illustration: “Is it possible to put new wine into old wineskins?” In other words, is it, both in terms of method as well as regarding specific results, possible to study a text with the new tools of narrative criticism or structural analysis and always take as a given traditional historical-critical positions? This tendency could be interpreted as a lack of consequence or an unwillingness to challenge the academic status quo. The danger of this approach involves circular reasoning along the following lines: since this section contains a certain vocabulary that is generally understood as Deuteronomistic, the section must be interpreted along the lines of Deuteronomistic theology. Notwithstanding these shortcomings (including also one or two orthographic problems [e.g., “la” instead of the correct “las” on p. 172] in an otherwise well-edited book) I urge the prospective reader first to begin to read theological academic literature in Spanish and second to have

a closer look at Álvarez Barredo's study when working with Judg 1–8. There is many an interesting and novel interpretation contained in a text that could otherwise need some more structuring and visual guidance.