Penchansky, David and Paul L. Redditt, eds.

*Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Right?: Studies on the Nature of God in Tribute to James L. Crenshaw*


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This *Festschrift* is a most fitting tribute to James L. Crenshaw, Professor of Old Testament at Duke Divinity School, whose exegetical and theological research has long grappled with biblical texts that depict alarming divine characteristics: jealousy, anger, unpredictability, and the like. Crenshaw’s interests are clearly reflected in these essays, which by turns agree and disagree with Crenshaw. The book, edited by two of Crenshaw’s former students, opens with an appreciative introduction to Crenshaw’s scholarly work and a bibliography of his publications from 1967 to the present. The editors have organized the following essays according to the canonical divisions in which their subject matter falls.

The opening essay by the late R. N. Whybray (“‘Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What is Just’: God’s Oppression of the Innocent in the Old Testament”, 1-19) indicates the spirit of many of the essays in the volume. Whybray leads the reader on a whirlwind tour of selected Old Testament texts depicting God’s apparently unwarranted violence toward innocent parties, and subsequently surveys unsatisfactory ways of assimilating these texts into broad theological programs. W. Brueggemann considers similar texts and theological strategies in his essay concerning Yahweh’s periodic abandonment of Israel (“Texts that Linger, Not Yet Overcome”, 21-41). He proposes a dramatic and rhetorical style of interpretation that preserves the memory of Yahweh’s past actions and allows such memories to influence the theological systems of modern communities of faith. Magne Sæbø (“Yahweh as *Deus absconditus*: Some Remarks on a
Dictum by Gerhard von Rad”, 43-55) studies Gerhard von Rad’s occasionally contradictory comments on the possibility of finding a ‘centre’ in Old Testament theology. From Lennart Boström’s essay (“Patriarchal Models for Piety”, 57-72) emerge two models for piety: acquiescence and dispute. Both Job and Abraham behave in each way at different times. Boström concludes that these two models are in tension with each other, but are not mutually exclusive. In “Deus absconditus and Deus revelatus: Three Difficult Narratives in the Pentateuch” (73-88), Otto Kaiser considers the depiction of God in the Akedah, Jacob’s wrestling match at the Jabbock, and the nocturnal attack on Moses en route from Midian to Egypt. Drawing upon rabbinic interpretation of Exodus 33, Lou H. Silberman (“‘You Cannot See My Face’: Seeking to Understand Divine Justice”, 89-95) interprets Moses’ request to look upon God’s face as an effort to understand the principles governing God’s dealings with humanity. Douglas A. Knight applies a hermeneutics of suspicion to Deuteronomic legal texts in his essay, entitled “Whose Agony? Whose Ecstasy? The Politics of Deuteronomic Law” (97-112); he concludes that Israel was a typically oligarchic, agrarian society, the legislation of which reflected a mixture of populist and elitist interests. R. E. Clements (“Achan’s Sin: Warfare and Holiness”, 113-126) offers a thoughtful analysis of the story of Achan’s sin and subsequent execution by Yahweh. He argues that Achan’s offence is to be understood in terms of holiness regulations and suggests an exilic date for the composition of the text. In “The Problematic God of Samuel” (127-161), Marti J. Steussy undertakes a detailed character sketch of God in 1-2 Samuel, analysing divine thought, speech, and action, as well as human characters’ statements about God. She notes the frequency of apparently undeserved divine anger against Israelite kings and prophets, and complements her otherwise exclusively final-form study with a nod in source critical directions by acknowledging that the Samuel narratives may “darken an existing legend” (158). A deft rhetorical analysis of Isaiah 63:7-64:12 is undertaken by Walter Harrelson with a view to tracking the movement of the lament and the spirit of the authors (“‘Why, O Lord, Do You Harden Our Heart?’: A Plea for Help from a Hiding God”, 163-174). Harrelson and Brueggemann would likely find much on which to disagree. Paul L. Redditt considers aspects of divine love, hatred, and election in Mal. 1:2-3 (“The God who Loves and Hates”, 175-190); he adopts Brueggemann’s suggestion that biblical critics and theologians abandon speaking of divine immutability in favour of divine fidelity, and then reflects upon the implications of such a stance for the theological study of the Hebrew Bible. In Roland E. Murphy’s essay (“Wisdom and Yahwism Revisited”, 191-200), points of contact between sapiential and Yahwistic traditions are examined. After cautioning against reading biblical wisdom texts while under the exclusive influence of Egyptian sapiential models, Murphy proposes that the scholarly separation of wisdom and Yahwism may be a consequence of a false modern dichotomy between theologies natural and revealed. Leo G. Perdue presents an engaging survey of various scholars’ means of correlating concepts of revelation and *deus absconditus* (“Revelation and the Problem of the Hidden God in Second Temple Wisdom Judaism”, 201-228). After considering the efforts of Rylaarsdam, von Rad, Murphy, and Crenshaw, Perdue notes that proposed syntheses of reason, inspired insight, and experience do not remove
the “veneer of divine enigma” (222). David Penchansky undertakes a feminist analysis of Job’s wife in his essay, entitled “Job’s Wife: The Satan’s Handmaid” (223-228). He presents Job’s wife as favourably as possible, characterizing her as a bold questioner who sought to beckon Job toward greater theological understanding. Given the paucity of the biblical depiction of Job’s wife, one wonders that anyone dares to propose such a detailed portrait of her inner life and motives. In “The Verb ḫāyāḥ in Qoheleth” (229-238), Antoon Schoors notes the relatively high frequency in Qoheleth of both the term itself and its meaning ‘to happen’, which is otherwise relatively unusual in biblical Hebrew. He regards both characteristics as being in keeping with Qoheleth’s variety of practical philosophy. In the final essay, written by Bernhard Lang (“The ‘Our Father’ as John the Baptist’s Political Prayer: A Ritual Response to the Absence of God’s Kingdom”, 239-253), the book turns from the Hebrew Bible to the New Testament. Lang attributes the Paternoster to John the Baptist and seeks evidence for this proposal in the Lukan and Matthean versions of the prayer, drawing also upon relevant antecedents in the Hebrew Bible and intertestamental literature.

The book was skillfully produced: it is attractively set and very few typographical errors escaped the editors’ eyes. There are indices of names and biblical references, but unfortunately no index of subjects; the titles of the essays, however, are usually sufficiently descriptive to allow the reader to gauge their content reasonably accurately. The lion’s share of the essays are thoughtful, engaging, and well researched. It is pleasant to see a collection of essays whose authors are unafraid to deal with exegetical and theological subjects alike, although many of them are rather stronger at the former than the latter. Nevertheless, the choice of subjects is both stimulating and reflective of Professor Crenshaw’s interests. The book is therefore a most suitable tribute to his own scholarly endeavours during the past several decades. Academic readers seeking food for thought on the troubling aspects of God and Israel’s experience of God will find sustaining fare here.