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Review: There Shall Be No Poor Among You: Poverty in the Bible

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Greece was "essentially utilitarian" and that among other things, its function was to provide recruits for the army of the city-state. In Roman society, the family was understood as a natural outgrowth of humankind's animal instinct to mate. Nevertheless, the ideal was a mutual sharing of lives in a lasting relationship and there appears to be more of an egalitarian status for women. In Second Temple Judaism and particularly in Philo, the purpose of marriage was for procreation. Again, the continuities and discontinuities between cultures on the subject of sexual relations outside of marriage, whether fornication, adultery, homosexuality, concubinage, or pederasty would have been illustrative.

This lack of integration and biblical comparison, however, is no doubt due again to the nature of a multi-authored work. At the same time, it is also a question of how to do such comparative analysis from across such a variety of chronological, geographical, and source disparities. The book also lacks an index of modern authors and scriptural quotations. In spite of these difficulties, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* is a valuable contribution to the subject from experts in the pertaining cultural periods all collected in one place.

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There Shall Be No Poor Among You: Poverty in the Bible. By Leslie J. Hoppe. Nashville: Abingdon, 2004, 197 pp., \$22.00 paper.

This book is a lively, engaging, and, above all, passionate study of poverty and of those who were responsible for causing it throughout the biblical period. The scope of the book includes all the canonical books as well as the Apocrypha, Dead Sea Scrolls and Rabbinic literature. Hoppe does not limit his study to the specific words for the poor (although he does a careful analysis of those words and their semantic domains); rather, he seeks to study the wider context of poverty in various texts that are inferential in their contribution to this subject.

Hoppe's reading of these oblique texts and contexts is often fresh and innovative if not always convincing. For example, it is doubtful that the plight of the poor was intensified because "crops such as olives and grapes replaced the grain that the peasants grew" (p. 60), thus causing the price of grain to skyrocket (p. 61). In fact, Israel's soil and climate are often not conducive to prosperity and that and other factors should be properly considered in finding the origins of poverty and want. Similarly, Hoppe's assertion that "the story of Rahab and the spies reflects the alliance between the urban lower classes and the rural peasants in opposition to the royal establishment" (p. 44) is hardly convincing. Nevertheless, these close readings of text and context have resulted in some of the best contributions of the book.

Early on, Hoppe makes it clear that "readers should have no illusions about the 'objectivity' of this study" (p. 16). This would seem to be reflected in a nearly monolithic emphasis on the poor and those who were responsible for making them such. For example, Hoppe suggests the misuse of the poor by the wealthy was "God's *principal* (emphasis mine) complaint against Judah" (p. 86). Furthermore, wholesale poverty resulted from instituting an alien form of government, namely, the monarchy, which was the chief culprit in fostering and intensifying poverty in biblical times. According to Hoppe, before the monarchy, Israel was a classless society, all Israelites had access to land, and "all controversies were dealt with by the elders of the village, who ensured that equity prevailed" (p. 63). In actuality, the book of Judges clearly paints an opposite

picture, with justice not prevailing. Hoppe understands the many pro-monarchical texts as being produced by segments favorable to the monarchy (the establishment) or from those who borrowed from mythological sources (thus pagan pro-monarchical material; p. 79).

Further evidence of the author's monolithic emphasis is seen in that the abuse of the poor is the primary reason for the exile. Indeed, Hoppe only on occasion references the place of religion as an issue and it is clearly not accorded much importance in Hoppe's singular reading of the text.

Setting differences aside, Hoppe's passionate call for justice is a wonderful challenge to everyone to eradicate poverty and expose those responsible for causing it. The review can be summarized in a single quotation: "The one concern of this book has been to show that the biblical tradition never minimizes or ignores material poverty and the actual poor of society. Whenever the Bible uses the vocabulary of the poor, it is calling for justice and for an end to oppression. The community of faith needs to make itself poor in order to use the language of the poor authentically" (p. 174).

It would be difficult to read this work without experiencing a renewal of responsibility to the biblical mandate, "There shall be no poor among you" (Deut 15:4). We are indebted to Hoppe for this powerful and compelling challenge.

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The God Who Provides: Biblical Images of Divine Nourishment. By L. Juliana M. Claassens. Nashville: Abingdon, 2004, xxiii + 145 pp., \$20.00.

The God Who Provides is the first English publication for South African native L. Juliana M. Claassens, who is currently serving as Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Baptist Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. As is the case with many authors' first books, this title is an expansion of Claassens's doctoral dissertation on the same topic.

In her own words, Claassens's purpose in penning *The God Who Provides* is to "argue that the metaphor of the God who feeds is . . . [a] metaphor that has the power to lure us into the world it images and to shape the way we view God" (p. xvi). By focusing, then, on biblical passages that speak of divine nourishment, Claassens aims to encourage her readers to develop "a new understanding of God" (p. xxi), specifically a feminine perception of the divine Being as Mother. Claassens sees such a reimagining of God as necessary because of several factors, including the historical "assumption that God is strictly a male God" (p. xvii), the seeming "exclusivity of the male metaphors [in Scripture]" (p. xviii), and "the patriarchal nature of the [biblical] text" (p. xviii). Consciously identifying herself with Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's "imaginative identification" hermeneutic, Claassens presents her case for imagining God as Mother in six fairly balanced chapters that move chronologically through the canon.

The God Who Provides is a well-written text that contains an unrivaled catalog of biblical images of divine nourishment. Additionally, this book is very pastoral in nature (Claassens is an ordained Presbyterian minister [PC-USA]), and the author's genuine concern for the reader's perception of God is manifest throughout the text. Nevertheless, a major impediment to Claassens's goal of imaging God as Mother is that while numerous biblical texts speak of God's provision for his people, none explicitly label God as Mother. Claassens's two proof texts—Num 11:11–15 and Deut 32:13–16—can hardly be cited as evidence to the contrary. While Claassens claims the Numbers passage "uses