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Review: Biblical Ideas of Nationality: Ancient and Modern

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McConville's scholarship is current, and he presents it in palatable language, although I think he assumes a lot of knowledge the independent student may not have. Yet, he keeps the purpose of the book in mind as he introduces questions in the side bars (e.g. "Think About" and "Digging Deeper") that are intended to stimulate the reader's further thought and study. Some of these encourage his readership to engage in further reflection about the interconnectedness of the prophetic books, which is a very fine feature of this book.

In his "Rhetorical Intention" section, McConville deals with the matter of how each prophetic book was read by various audiences in ancient times, as well as his modern readership (see e.g. pp. 68–69). This feature, of course, grows naturally out of his canonical approach, but it also taps into the method of interpretation that the church has used through the centuries. That is to say, any one prophetic book has spoken differently to the church in different contexts of history. Most non-critically trained readers are aware of this, but not so aware of the ways a single book has been interpreted at the various levels of its development, even though these stages are hypothetical. McConville addresses this matter in his quite helpful introduction (pp. xxv–xxvii), but it would have been helpful if he had drawn together the principles of rhetorical criticism and given some concrete examples there, as he does with the book of Jonah (p. 192).

The author's "Further Reading" suggestions are generally quite helpful, and he has gone to the trouble of placing an asterisk by those works that will be most helpful to the beginner, again keeping his audience in mind.

An editorial problem with the book is that major sections are titled in a smaller font than the subsections. This makes the flow of the text a bit more difficult to follow.

McConville's work is commendable and will serve students in the classroom very well, even though his target audience of independent student may have to do a lot of background reading to come up to the level he assumes in his discussion of the prophetic material.

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Biblical Ideas of Nationality: Ancient and Modern. By Steven Grosby. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002, 269 pp., \$29.50.

The title of this volume may be somewhat misleading to the uninformed reader in that the discussions of nationality, kinship, and borders include the Bible but extend from the eastern Mediterranean to the Far East. It is, in fact, a collection of 10 articles by Grosby that were previously published beginning in 1991 and ending in 2002. The author employed social science theory in articles intended for scholars who are presumably already well aware of the language and issues. The articles are as follows: "Religion and Nationality in Antiquity: The Worship of Yahweh and Ancient Israel" (1991); "Kinship, Territory and the Nation in the Historiography of Ancient Israel" (1993); "Sociological Implications of the Distinction between 'Locality' and 'Extended Territory'" (1993); "The Chosen People of Ancient Israel and the Occident: Why Does Nationality Exist and Survive?" (1999); "Borders, Territory, and Nationality in the Ancient Near East and Armenia" (1997); "*Aram Kulloh* and the Worship of Hadad: A Nation of Aram?" (1995); "The Category of the Primordial in the Study of Early Christianity and Second-Century Judaism" (1996); "Territoriality" (1995); "The Nation of the United States and the Vision of Ancient Israel" (1993); and "Nationality and Religion" (2001).

The author's thesis is explicitly stated: "This is because the primary motivation for these studies was the desire to take up what I perceive to be ongoing problems of the *Geisteswissenschaften*; the limits of historicism, or formulated positively, the merit of philosophical anthropology" (p. 2). He further explains, "The point of departure for these studies was that it was not *a priori* illegitimate to apply the category of *nationality and the bounded territory and extensive kinship structure* (my emphasis) that the category implies to various societies of antiquity" (p. 3). Thus, Grosby's efforts intended to specify as much as possible questions such as "What exactly is a nation?," "When exactly did Israel become a nation?," "Did Israel have precise borders as do modern nations?," and "What precisely comprised Israelite (and other cultures as well) social structure?" His answers to these questions diverge from conventional historiographical methodologies: "Of course, the historicists would and still do claim otherwise, insisting that nationality and relatively extensive, bounded territories are to be found only in the current historical period of what they call 'modernity'" (p. 3). Grosby is at his best in demonstrating that Israel possessed definable borders (although there is debate about historical preciseness of said borders) and a distinct sense of ethnicity (although there is some question about "when" true nationhood began). Some of what C. S. Lewis somewhere called "chronological snobbery" seems to have jaundiced contemporary evaluation of the witness of the Hebrew Bible.

Grosby's philosophical anthropological interests extend beyond the ancient world as he seeks to answer the question, "Is there any meaning to our existence?" (p. 4). How does a sociological study of the ancient world help answer that question for humankind *per se*? The nexus of the book's goals may be seen in the following quotation in which the key issues are italicized: "And if there is meaning to our existence, what is its relation to the *primordial beliefs* about the significance of the objects of that origin and transmission-*descendants and land-conveyed* unambiguously by the so-called *covenant* in Gen. 17:7, 28:15, and especially 2 Samuel 7; or are such beliefs and the existence of the collectivities that bear them-*the family and that bounded territorial collectivity of nativity, the nation-subordinate* to a meaning of *righteousness* [i.e. law] that transcends, hence conditions *vitality* and its transmission as stated in Deuteronomy 30?" (p. 5). His goal is to identify both continuities and discontinuities for ancient and modern humankind.

There is much to commend regarding these articles that are a veritable *tour de force* of Grosby's life's work. His conclusions, often brilliantly executed, must be understood against his methodological presuppositions and practices which are decidedly critical. "These introductory comments are not arguments against the achievements of the historical-critical analysis and higher biblical criticism in favor of a variant of biblical literalism. Indeed, far from it. To think that to read with care the Old Testament out of respect for the text as it is and in its entirety requires abjuring higher biblical criticism is to engage in hypocrisy; for to read the Old Testament with care is to recognize innumerable textual problems and inconsistencies" (p. 93). Thus, "Israel" existed no earlier than the Divided Monarchy (and the text's description of that period may or may not be historically reliable) and the historical reliability of any earlier events is "putative." These issues do not significantly impact the usefulness of Grosby's work which is a helpful contribution toward understanding human thought in OT times.

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