

energetic willingness to re-imagine church (148–149). It is not, then, religion itself that is necessarily in decline, or even the sustaining doctrines of various traditions (as the success of conservative churches seems to indicate). Rather, it is the forms and practices of belief that appear to be deteriorating and, in fact, are being replaced. To put it in Gospel terms, the wine remains while old wineskins are exchanged for new.

One of the values of Warner’s brilliant sociological assessment is that it paves the way for some important theological questions to be asked. What forms and practices of belief will allow for religious individuals and communities to maintain their traditional identities in a changed and rapidly changing world? Must more conservative religious communities liberalize their doctrines in order to maintain relevance and respect today, or are they free to remain “illiberal” within their community while participating as full members of the broader society? And, fixing his gaze on the more particular subject of evangelicalism, how will the question of homosexuality define the more conservative strains of this movement moving forward?

It is with this latter question, upon which Warner only briefly touches (see pp. 139–140), that some areas of concern with his approach come to light. First of all, he appears to frame moral questions (at least this one) in more sociological than theological terms. To do so, however, seems to move from the task of gathering empirical data on religion to imposing a moral trajectory upon it. Second, even though evangelicalism figures prominently in his analysis, Warner provides a rather flat portrayal of this movement. Essential to understanding evangelicalism is to recognize: 1) its distinct nature as a movement rather than simply as a denomination; 2) the significant connection between theology and morality inherent to it; and 3) that as a movement there are more internal distinctions to be made than simply between moderate evangelicalism and Pentecostalism.

In all, I found *Secularization and Its Discontents* to be an extremely insightful project and a valuable resource as I consider the impact of secularization theses on my own research into religion and ethics in liberal society.

The Origins of Jewish Mysticism

Peter Schäfer. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009.

ISBN 978-0691142159. Pp. 398.

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When confronted with a work on Jewish mysticism by one of the foremost experts in the field, expectations are justifiably very high. In this densely packed work, Peter

Schäfer (PS) tackles some of the important issues in Jewish mysticism that have plagued and divided scholarship ever since Gershom Scholem elevated it to a bona fide discipline. One concerns the trajectory of its development. When did it arise? What were its precursors? A short introduction deals with the question of *what* mysticism, and specifically Jewish mysticism, is thought to be. While presenting a number of opinions with which he disagrees, gradually throughout PS's detailed treatment of the selected texts it becomes clear that the very narrow characterization of mysticism that he advocates, as a "union with God" or *unio mystica*, is never attained in any of the texts (24), with the possible exception of Philo. Instead, PS proposes that the texts show an *unioliturgica* (32).

In eight chapters, PS traces the developments of and possible connections between perceived mystical texts, beginning with Ezekiel's chariot vision; followed by the various ascent apocalypses with the Enoch corpus as its most prolific representative; examples from Qumran showing human-angelic communion; Philo's conception of spiritual life and unique distinction between body and soul; Rabbinic approaches to God and take on Ezekiel's chariot; and finally the early medieval Merkavah mystics.

Rather than "imposing a preconceived definition on the texts" (24) PS sets out to deconstruct the terms "origins" and "mysticism" which, he believes, are not applicable when properly describing the phenomena in developing Judaism even though they are often used to do exactly that.

Among the main questions geared towards establishing the mystical quality of the texts are:

1) *Does the seer/mystic actually get to see God?*

While this is often the stated objective, the results are either not described or the quest was unsuccessful. The postbiblical works show an increasing emphasis upon the individuality of the seers, and their focus on attaining a (still elusive) vision of God (30). The Qumran texts form an exception as they deal with a communal quest (153). There is also a growing interest in participating in the angelic heavenly praise of God, which PS aptly calls *unio liturgica* (liturgical or cultic communion).

2) *Does the journey involve a bodily transformation?*

In most cases the seer undergoes a temporary transformation in order to 'fit in to the heavenly milieu', however, this stops short at the level of angelification, never to reach 'deification', or the desired unification with God.

3) *Is the journey accomplished in body and soul or only in the soul/mind?*

PS maintains that the journeys in most texts involve a bodily translation to the heavenly realm, with Philo as the first Jewish thinker to follow the Greek model of a separation between body and soul, forming the exception. This results in the notion that only the soul rises up while the body stays behind—both after death but even during the seer's life time.

4) *Do the texts represent accounts of actual journeys or do they form a literary genre?*

This is part of an ongoing debate that started already with Scholem. PS belongs firmly to the school that favors the literary character of the texts over the experiential aspects that they might contain. Therefore, even if some experience of an author may be at the core of a text, that particular level of the text is no longer recoverable. The ascent has in fact become a literary motif.

5) *What is the goal of the journeys in the ascent apocalypses and the Hekhalot texts?*

In the earlier ascent apocalypses the seer seeks information from heaven concerning the well-being of the Jewish people and the fate of the Temple. PS stresses that even the Hekhalot mystic expects to be reassured that God is still present and cares for the Jewish people. Thus, a message is sought and not a *unio mystica*. Furthermore, rather than manuals for praxis, the actual texts become objects of contemplation.

6) *Can any evolutionary relationship be established between our texts?*

Despite many recent proposals to the contrary, PS is reluctant to find any evidence of a chronological linear development from Ezekiel to the Hekhalot mystics.

Notwithstanding the fact that this book contains much of merit, not the least of which are the meticulous analyses of the texts themselves, there are certain points that leave the informed reader somewhat baffled. One of these is PS's insistence that all seers in the ascent apocalypses make their journey in the body (83) as well as that this is the only way to travel. An exception is the Apocalypse of Isaiah where he notes that "the visionary is in a trancelike mental state that allows his spirit to undertake the journey while his body remains on earth," in full view of his companions (111, 334). This is a very problematic statement since it negates every single mention of a seer either falling asleep in his bed and then commencing a dream vision or falling into a trance which is followed by a vision experience. In this light it is unfortunate that Daniel does not receive more attention and the important apocalypses 2Baruch and 4Ezra are only mentioned in passing. No doubt, PS is guided by the notion that the seer recounts undergoing a bodily transformation. However, he disregards the most important means of transport: that of dream and trance. The seer's body is clearly described as remaining firmly on earth whereas he travels in the mind and in a 'virtual' body. In this respect it is also problematic that PS glosses over studies, such as those by, D. Merkur, F. Flannery and the late A.F Segal that delve into dreams and trance as ways to obtain the experience of a heavenly journey.

PS sways towards reading Ezekiel and the ascent apocalypses as literary fictions rather than reflecting the actual experiences of author or protagonist. The role of pseudonymity is especially invoked to argue for the fictional nature of the ascent apocalypses and therefore for the absence of genuine experience (338). However, what is not taken sufficiently into consideration is the notion that the

authors use categories that do belong to the stock taxonomy of heavenly journeys and may be a literary reflection and borrowing of the true experiences of genuine (or at least self-proclaimed) seers.

It is quite clear that PS sets as his goal to ‘demystify’ a number of texts that have almost automatically come to be seen as (proto-)mystical. However, his project of deconstruction is turned on its head when he states in his conclusion: “...the craving for the living and loving God and the experience that he still exists obviously applies to so many more texts that we have not included in our survey that we run the risk of voiding the category of ‘mysticism’ and ultimately rendering it meaningless by confusing mysticism with religion.” (354). With this in mind the title should probably have been followed by a question mark.

Re-Reading the Prophets through Corporate Globalization: A Cultural-Evolutionary Approach to Economic Injustice in the Hebrew Bible

Matthew J. M. Coomber. Piscataway: Gorgias, 2010.

ISBN 978-1607249788 . Pp. 283.

Reviewed by Sara Parks Ricker, McGill University

Book-length publications in biblical studies generally fall into one of two formats; such books can be “rigorous” *or* they can be “relevant.” Rarely can an author cater to both the specialist *and* the layperson in a single work. Perhaps this is due to the deeply specialised nature of modern biblical studies, as opposed to the largely non-specialist demographic that retains an interest in “applying” the biblical text.

For this reason, I was curious to review this revision of Matthew Coomber’s Sheffield dissertation, “Corporate Globalization as a Model for Interpreting Prophetic Complaints against Landownership Abuse.” Given its leap from the Hebrew prophets to present-day “corporate globalization,” I would have expected such relevance to arrive at rigour’s expense. In order to be rigorous, Coomber would have had to take into account the problematic scarcity of data for the prophetic context, and wrestle with serious methodological issues when jumping from ancient literature to ancient socio-historical reality. He would have needed to be proficient not only in the usual areas of textual criticism, ancient languages, and historical method, but also in sociology and economics. With true interdisciplinarity being so uncommon, it is only because I was familiar with Coomber’s fine work from the conference circuit that I dared to expect it. To say that I was pleasantly surprised is an understatement.

Economic injustice is a key theme in the prophetic corpus, one from which many theologians have extrapolated modern lessons. Coomber, however, combines