

Father Power's book raises a number of interesting questions, many of them philosophical. He makes an honest attempt to come to terms with post-modernism, but in attempting to engage in a fruitful dialogue he is in danger of being imprisoned by that same cultural and social insularity which he implicitly condemns.

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THE POEMS AND PSALMS OF THE HEBREW BIBLE, by S E Gillingham. Oxford University Press, 1994

This book is part of the Oxford Bible Series, and is intended for those with some knowledge of the Old Testament, but it is hoped that it will be of use also to beginners in Old Testament studies. As the title suggests, it is concerned with the poetry of the Old Testament, to be found principally in the Psalter, but also elsewhere. Given its intended audience, much of the material has an introductory quality, and it deals with standard topics in a fairly standard way. It is divided into three parts. Part Two deals with poetry outside the Psalter, and Part Three with the Psalter itself. The various categories of poem, such as lament and hymn, are clearly explained and many examples are given. Most of what Ms Gillingham says here is reasonable and useful, and should serve its purpose well as an introduction to biblical poetry for students.

There are though, some slips of reasoning in this part of the book. For example, she makes the point that it is likely that liturgical formulae have been incorporated into the biblical text, and takes as an instance the Aaronic blessing of Num. 6:24–6. She claims that it was originally used in the liturgy; its actual liturgical setting, however, is unclear (p. 137). Yet barely a sentence later she claims that the priestly author of Numbers "has transformed the liturgical setting for the blessing so that it now serves a different purpose: that of emphasizing the rewards due for... ritual propriety" (p. 138). But, of course, if we do not know the normal liturgical setting of the blessing, we cannot know that the priestly writer has transformed that setting.

It is Part One of the book that contains potentially the most interesting material. This is entitled "Identifying Hebrew Poetry", and is devoted largely to a discussion of the characteristics of Hebrew poetry, though other important matters are also discussed. Here Gillingham raises a number of questions, such as the nature of the inspiration of biblical poetry and the relation between poetry and music. It is one of the merits of this book that Gillingham is prepared to try to deal with such wider matters which are often neglected in scholarly works on the Old Testament. She signals her broader interest right at the outset,

beginning chapter one with a quotation from a lecture of T S Eliot on "The Music of Poetry".

If her determination to think about these matters is to be applauded, some of her conclusions are, it seems to me, less than happy. A section of chapter one is devoted to a discussion of the inspiration of biblical poetry, particularly the psalms. Beginning with Lowth's conception of the psalms as prophecy inspired by God, she remarks quite correctly that modern scholarship has gone in a different direction. (p. 7) This is quite right, because most modern scholars do not see the question of the divine inspiration of the psalms as falling within their purview; that is seen as a religious, not a critical question. Modern Anglican service books may well, as she says, have marginalised certain psalm verses (such as Ps. 137:9) as 'unsuitable for use in public worship' (she could equally have cited examples from Roman Catholic liturgical books); but to be deemed unsuitable for such public use in the 20th century is not the same as being uninspired. Presumably a verse such as Ps. 137:9 ("Happy shall be he who takes your little ones and dashes them against the stones") is excised because it seems to us to express an outrageous sentiment. There is, however, nothing in Lowth's conception of inspiration to prevent an outrageous text being inspired. One need only treat such a text as, for example, allegorical, and this is how it was traditionally treated. It may be that the temper of our times is against allegory, but that is a comment on our times rather than a proof that some biblical poetry is not inspired.

The waters are further muddied here by a confusion between different ideas of inspiration. She continues:

Not only is it possible to question the inspiration of particular verses of biblical poems, but it is also possible to encounter an inspired quality in other poetry which is not in the Bible. Just as Scripture is now seen to contain less-than-inspired poetry (whether in divine or human terms), so too in other literary works, both ancient and modern, there is ample evidence of verse which is equally inspired (*ibid.*).

There is an unjustified shift here from a question ("it is possible to question the inspiration of particular verses") to an affirmation ("Scripture is now seen to contain less-than-inspired poetry"). This is partly facilitated by a shift between inspiration understood as a poetic text's inspiration by God and inspiration understood as a text's quality as great poetry (perhaps partly because it expresses great sentiments). But the two are utterly distinct. Nobody who claims that the psalms are

inspired by God has to claim that they are the most wonderful poetry (though they might also make this claim). Conversely, to say that a poem by Virgil is wonderfully wrought and full of the most noble sentiments is not to claim that it is inspired by God. God is not a Muse. Even if there is ample evidence that much non-biblical poetry is great, that is no indication at all of its being divinely inspired, any more than a psalm's being rather mediocre as poetry is an indication that it is not divinely inspired.

Similarly, it is to Gillingham's credit that she raises the question of the relationship between music and Hebrew verse, but it seems to me there is some confusion here also. She asserts:

the balanced formation which is evident in Hebrew verse, in the binary presentation of the ideas, is one of the characteristic features in plainsong: the first half of the verse is the 'ascent' (the first recit and cadence), leading to the pause between the two halves (the mediant), and the second half of the verse is the 'descent' (the second recit and cadence). (p. 49)

But the musical structure of which she speaks is not characteristic of plainsong as such; there are many plainsong pieces that do not have this structure. Gillingham seems to be thinking specifically of the plainsong recitation of psalms in the traditional office of the church. But then the music has this structure precisely because it is conformed to a text that has the same structure. It takes its structure from the text; it is not true that it is antecedently particularly well fitted to set texts of this type. Other styles of musical setting are not intrinsically less well fitted. Biblical poetry has been set successfully by Bach and Brahms in most unplainsonglike fashion. Is there perhaps an assumption underlying Gillingham's thesis here that Hebrew poetry somehow demands a syllabic setting, or that this was how it was originally set? We have no reason to think so.

In chapter four Gillingham also introduces her own contribution to the theory of parallelism. Agreeing that Lowth's schema of synonymous, antithetic and synthetic parallelism is oversimple, she is dissatisfied also with the general nature of Kugel's formula "A, and what's more, B". She proposes, like Lowth, a threefold classification, but one based on the dynamic of the verse (pp. 78ff.). There are verses where the second half of the verse virtually echoes the first half, or where it contradicts it (A = B); there are verses in which the most important idea is expressed in the first half, the second simply adding a qualification (A > B); and there are verses where the second half is an expansion of the first and bears

the main weight (A < B)

I found this section difficult to follow. The main trouble is the distinction between types in actual practice. An example given of A > B is

If Cain is avenged sevenfold (A)

Truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold. (B)

But it is surely not the case here that B is simply a qualification of A "completing more fully the thought expressed in the first line" (p. 80). To me it appears that the emphasis is rather on B; what the verse is about is Lamech's vengeance, which far outpasses that of Cain. Again, an example given of A < B is

In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, (A)

make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (B)

Here B is said "not only to complement but also to complete A" (p. 81). This is an obscure explanation. It certainly does not seem that the most important idea is expressed in B. I would have said that this verse is of the type A = B, B more or less repeating A. I wonder whether a classification of types of parallelism based on assessment of where the main idea lies and what counts as a development of it does not rely too much on subjective judgment to be very useful. At least, I am not convinced of this system by the exposition of it that Gillingham gives here.

There are, then, very arguable points made in this book. This is in a way one of its merits; the reader is made to think, and to think about important matters such as scriptural inspiration, rather than simply having to wade through seas of information. But there is also information here in plenty, and it should prove useful, as well as provoking, to the audience at which it is aimed.

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A FEAST OF MEANINGS. EUCHARISTIC THEOLOGIES FROM JESUS THROUGH JOHANNINE CIRCLES, Supplements to *Novum Testamentum LXXII*, by Bruce Chilton. Brill, Leiden, NY, Köln, 1994.

Chilton's study understands the different eucharistic texts of the NT and the Didache as developments of the conscious practice of distinct and separate circles of usage. It tries to discern a history of practice from what it calls 'declarations of purity within Judaism' to 'declarations