

Approval

of admitting Elena Sidorova to the public defence of her thesis

Rhetoric and Hermeneutics of Blessing and Curse in the Pentateuch

This PhD thesis is a good piece of scholarly work. The theme is relevant, the study of the texts is in general well done, and the thesis is well written. I congratulate her and her supervisors on the work done. In my opinion, she can certainly be admitted to the public defence of her thesis.

Explanation

The author shows that she knows her way in Old Testament exegesis and theology. The exegesis is well informed and often gives concise insights in important issues. She knows how to explain the problem and the possible solutions of a complicated text in a few pages without simplifying matters: a beautiful example is the way she handles Num 5, the ritual of the woman accused of adultery. I could give more examples of good work, but I'll focus on the objections I have against certain aspects of her thesis.

Objections

- The handling of Genesis and the Torah in general is very good. Concerning the prophets, a little more depth would be possible. As for Jeremiah, the connection between *רענה* and curse is too easily made, and there is also the problem of a non-historical approach, which is not quite adequate for a complicated multi-layered book like Jeremiah. There are more issues that could have been addressed somewhat differently.
- I would have preferred an analysis or at least a presentation of the relevant verbs right in the beginning: *קלל* / *ראר* (Gen 12:3, not the same, no attention for that!), *בכר* etc.
- Her standpoint on the text of the Old Testament as literature and/or history is not clear. While that is not the theme of this thesis, the reader regularly stumbles across remarks that could be understood as very historicizing, e.g. where creation and fall are concerned: 'homo sapiens' (p. 12), P. 154f speaks about etiology and stories but at the same time gives the impression that in the beginning there was a harmony that was historically disturbed: 'when the curse entered the world...' Clarification comes in an indirect way on p. ..where she indeed seems to understand the text quite historically.
- The author is convinced that in the Old Testament it is always God who is the source of blessing and curse, and who is in fact acting, so to say behind the curtains, when a curse or a blessing becomes effective. In general this can be true, but for me, I would allow for more diversity in the Old Testament texts. Now and again the word 'magic' appears, but as far as I can see there is no definition. And would have appreciated a discussion about 'magic', and do not hesitate to find magic in some of the OT texts.
- The selection of the extra biblical texts could do with some more explanation. Also, their strictly synchronic approach is in some tension with the conclusion on page 125, that during 15 centuries of blessing and cursing there is virtually no development.
- While in the end I agree with the main conclusion of the thesis regarding the difference between biblical and extra biblical blessings and curses, I feel the issue at hand is a little bit more nuanced than the author supposes. I think there are traces of the 'pagan' line of thought in the Bible, and I feel it would be fair to admit that. I would not shatter her conclusions, but only make clear that the OT texts are part of their environment.
- In the last chapter, the author develops her own theological thoughts from a Christian 'inside perspective'. While this is completely acceptable in a theological thesis, it might be advisable to announce that at the beginning of the chapter. That would make clear that we are now going from exegesis and analysis of the 'data' to theology proper. It would also make clear that the scheme offered on p. 158, in which the central point of man's existence is acting

according to 'creational harmony' (so 'Heilsgeschichte' from a particular point of view) is just one of more possible theological options.

Errors

I found a small number of typos or simple problems in the text. I list them here for the benefit of the author:

- p. 15, quotation at the top, the word 'a' (cold) must be an error.
- p. 15, almost at the bottom: *Adam* is only partly in italics, is that intentional?
- p. 16, § 1.1.1.5, 4th line: gets drunk *at once*
- p. 32, § 1.1.2.4, 7th line: *his* son sounds a little odd, it is also her son! 'Their son' or 'the son'.
- p. 103, note 170: *a wife*: according to ANET she was the main wife, which makes the condition even more logical.
- p. 136, ca. 10 lines from bottom: γλωσσασ requires an end-σ.
- p. 137, middle of the page, 'proximis' – ?
- p. 139, line 10: after 'thief' a superfluous '
- p. 147, line 9: 'spit ghee' → 'spilt', I presume.
- p. 152: line 1: rich theologically: I would say: theologically rich.
- p. 154, last line, 155, 1st line: entered ... becomes: verbs are in different tenses.
- p. 162, in the middle: 'Problematic of curses in some texts...' English not understandable.
- p. 170: However true the last statement may be, I would never conclude a thesis in capitals. In modern communication, text in capitals is regarded as screaming. If we believe in the power of words (and with this thesis in mind there is every reason to do so) we should let the words do their job just as they are.

I hope to be present at the exam, and expect to receive a final version of the thesis,

Between Prague and Amsterdam, April 12th, 2015,

prof. dr. Joep Dubbink,
Dirk Monshouwer Chair for Biblical Theology,
VU University Amsterdam
j.dubbink@vu.nl

