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In the Name of God.
The Bible in the Colonial Discourse of Empire
Biblical Interpretation Series 126. Leiden: Brill, 2014.
viii and 192 pages, € 98, ISBN 978-900-425-8334.

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This edited volume originates from a 2011 meeting of the SBL Bible and Empire programme unit and comprises six of the papers presented there. It is designed to give an overview over the debate on the use of the Bible as a means both of justification of imperial power and of resistance against this same power. The six articles tackle the question from very different angles and use different approaches. They span the sixteenth through twenty-first centuries. While some focus on the Bible as a means of resistance, others put the justification of power at the centre of their examination and still others try to look at both sides of this coin simultaneously. Regrettably, the introduction of one and a half pages is limited to a short presentation of the general theme and an overview over the chapters. Neither an introduction, nor a conclusion hold the volume together. In this review, I will therefore discuss the individual chapters one by one.

The first contribution is also the longest. In her 57-pages-chapter, “Comparing the ‘Telegraph Bible’ of the Late British Empire to the Chaotic Bible of the Sixteenth Century Spanish Empire: Beyond the Canaan Mandate into Anxious Parables of the Land”, Yvonne Sherwood discusses relationships between colonialism and empire in the Bible and the use of the Bible in the sixteenth-century Spanish Empire. This is certainly one of

the most original contributions to the volume. It is also the most difficult chapter, particularly because the parallels are drawn on the background of late nineteenth-century British Imperialism that is construed as rather monolithic.

Sherwood narrates several stories and weaves them together. There is the story of imperialism, dreams of imperialism, and anti-imperialism in the Bible itself, exemplified by competing political and social ideals, the different accounts of Israel's land conquest, or the account of JHWH being the only God. The Bible itself undermines these ideals by telling other stories, and the biblical authors often are inconsistent. A second line of narration in Sherwood's article is that of (European) Bible interpretation and exegesis. By use of several examples she illustrates that — in the sixteenth century — the Bible was not yet regarded as an entity with a specific message that could be reduced to a few sentences or statements to be 'telegraphed'. In contrast to this, she calls the Bible in the late British Empire "Telegraph Bible". In this context, she emphasises the unity of the Bible - and here, the analysis over-simplifies a bit. Sherwood's focus, however, is on the sixteenth century. She compares this early "chaotic" Bible to the "chaotic" Early Modern Spanish Empire (p. 15), and the story of this Empire forms a third line of narration. Here, too, she stresses the multilinearity of the story, the different angles, approaches and contestations among the Spanish colonists and missionaries and between the Spanish and native South Americans. Furthermore, she gives examples of very different uses of the Bible as supporting or contesting imperialist claims. With regard to the later British Empire, the fourth line of narration, she highlights one aspect of Bible and Empire in particular: that the Bible was not, like in the early modern Spanish Empire, used in order to organise society as a whole, but only to regulate the religious sphere. This article presents a truly entangled narration. It does not tell a linear story but rather illustrates

interwovenness of different phenomena. It shows different facets of the Bible and of an Empire and thus demonstrates their multipolarity. However, this is sometimes to the detriment of historical accuracy on the one hand and readability on the other. On a meta-level, this might be what we can learn from this article: That writing history in an entangled way (as opposed to a more or less linear story), as postcolonial theorists postulate, can make it rather difficult for readers to follow and for authors to make their point.

Maria Ana T. Valdez's article "The *Esperança de Israel*: A Mission to Cromwell" is situated in seventeenth-century Holland and England and between Jewish expectations of acceptance, English millenarianism and emerging imperial dreams. Among both Jews and Christians, a belief in the imminent coming of the Messiah/the second coming of Christ was widely spread at the time. In 1650, Menasseh ben Israel published his *Esperança de Israel / Spec Israelis* in Spanish and Latin, followed very soon by an English translation of the Latin version. Presumably, the books targeted two audiences: the Sephardic community and the Christian, particularly the English community. Contents and structures differ considerably, as do, of course, the dedications of both books. The former is dedicated to the Jewish leaders in Amsterdam and the latter to the English leaders. By dedicating the Latin version to the English authorities, ben Israel engaged in an ongoing debate in England. Oliver Cromwell was one of the English leaders who expected both an imminent return of Christ and the Jews to convert to Christianity before the end of times. He therefore advocated readmission of Jews in England so that they be near when the time of their conversion came. Imperial dreams, according to Valdez, were eschatological at the time. Ben Israel, who had been in correspondence with Cromwell for some years, probably hoped to use this expectation and believed that there would be toleration and free practice of Judaism, soon.

Mark Somos in “*Mare Clausum, Leviathan, and Oceana: Bible Criticism, Secularisation and Imperialism in Seventeenth-Century English Political and Legal Thought*” aims to demonstrate that secularisation already began, albeit unnoticed, in British early seventeenth-century political treatises. He shows how it was introduced by several authors’ use of the Bible and biblical quotations that were presumably deliberately misleading or even openly wrong. In this process, natural law became more important than divine law. Somos presents John Selden, Thomas Hobbes and James Harrington as case studies. Regrettably, he does not contextualise his study in other ongoing research on law and religion in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century political and legal theory. Selden, like his Dutch counterpart Hugo Grotius, aimed to weaken the biblical justification of chosen nation theories. Furthermore, both scholars also tried to make their theories less amenable to religious adaptations. Hobbes’ *Leviathan* is analysed by the example of the *unum necessarium* thesis, that only belief in Jesus Christ was needed for salvation. Somos demonstrates how, in almost all his arguments, Hobbes used biblical references that either were not to the point or that were misconstrued and misread in a very obvious way. The example of Harrington illustrates that, according to Somos, secularisation could not be introduced boldly and openly. Rather, Harrington used irony, quoted inappropriate biblical passages, omitted words or phrases in quotations or even changed phrasings. Summing up, Somos elaborates on the consequences of this development not only for secularisation theories but also for imperialism. He argues that this process of secularisation was necessary for the development of a “soft imperialism” (p. 130) – a claim that was also made by Protestant colonialists up to the nineteenth century and is therefore well-known in the history of colonialism.

Andrew Mein presents an interpretation of Ezekiel 38-39 by nineteenth-century British Christians in his article “The Armies of Gog, the Merchants

of Tarshish, and the British Empire". These two chapters of Ezekiel comprise a prophecy against Gog of Magog, and the merchants of Tarshish are one of the groups that are presented as challenging Gog. Some British Protestants of the nineteenth century interpreted biblical prophecies as referring to the present, and they used this prophecy among others to explain Britain's role in the world. From early on, Gog had been identified with Russia, mainly on the basis of the Septuagint translation where the Hebrew "rosh" (head/ chief) was rendered into the proper name "Rhos", and this was linked to "Rus" or Russia (p. 137). As Britain and Russia were opponents in the nineteenth century, this interpretation made sense to the British readers, it could be linked to their perception of the Russian Empire and it guided their speculations about the future. They found their own role in the prophecy about the merchants of Tarshish, believing that they would be those who challenged Russia as the merchants had challenged Gog. But they still had to solve the problem of agency: the prophecy of Ezekiel did not envisage human agency. When the nineteenth-century British interpreters strengthened Britain's active role in the battle against Russia, they brought the British Empire close to God, British politics became closely linked to God's own politics and the Empire was thus mystically aggrandised.

"The *'Jerusalem-gangers'* as an Illustration of Resistance against the British Empire and Nineteenth Century Biblical Interpretation in Southern Africa" by Hendrik Bosman brings forward an example of opposition against the British Empire from the perspective of white Afrikaners. The *'Jerusalem-gangers'* were a group of former *'Voortrekkers'* in Southern Africa who set out to leave their country and travel to Jerusalem, relying on a map that was printed on the back of the *'Statenvertaling'*, the Dutch Bible. Bosman's goal is to illuminate their motifs and to show that they did not only base their decision on a sense of being a chosen people as most researchers believe. According to Bosman, it was rather a decision to resist

the expansion of the British Empire into their realm. The leader of the group was Johan Adam Enslin, and he is at the centre of Bosman's essay. He and other 'Voortrekkers' migrated towards the Northeast in order to escape the expansion of the British Empire. Tellingly, he called his farm in Marico/Madikwe "Vergenoeg" ("Far enough", p. 156). Soon, he became a member of parliament. But it turned out that they had not travelled far enough, and in February 1852, they set out again in the hopes of proceeding to Jerusalem. Two months later, Enslin and more than half of the group died of Malaria and the 'Jerusalemgangers' dispersed. The religious opinions of the 'Jerusalemgangers' are hard to establish. It seems that they interpreted the Bible literally and that this encouraged them to leave their country again and again.

In "The Battle of the Books: The Bible versus the Vedas" Hugh Pypers takes his departure from the observation that nowadays North Indian Christians face problems when they try to use the Bible in arguments against the allegations by Hindu nationalists who claim that Christians do not belong to India. Pypers demonstrates how biblical topics in the shape of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German and British conceptions have entered Hinduist self-constructions so that nowadays Hindus can argue against Christians by means of concepts derived from the Bible. Pypers shows how Sanskrit traditions and Scriptures were used by Voltaire in order to question the status of the Bible as revelation. William Jones, judge at the Supreme Court of Bengal, searched for a basis of local jurisdiction in Hindu religious texts. He developed the theory of families of language, seeing Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, Germanic and Gothic languages on one side and Hebrew and Arabic on the other. This theory is modelled on the biblical story about the sons of Noah ("Japhetic" and "Semitic", p. 175). This was picked up by German nationalists as a basis for a new German theory of 'Volk' that derived from an assumed Indo-German tradition

which was presumed to be older than the Bible and – above all – not connected to a certain region. Theories of Indian history were developed that explained why and how India had, in spite of its religious texts which functioned as fundamentals for self-understanding in ‘Christian’ Europe, become polytheistic and dark-skinned: by invasion from Dravidians and Tamils. Thus, British imperialists could construe themselves as liberators who brought back enlightenment to the Aryans. Furthermore, by building their understanding of ‘Hinduism’ on Brahmin and Sanskrit texts, they provided Indian leading classes with a model to devise national identity despite the plurality prevalent in India. Hindu nationalists then used the biblical concept of the ‘holy land’ against Muslims and Christians, accusing them of belonging to a country outside of India. This chapter, like the first one, tells a very entangled story. Unlike the first contribution, it divides the lines of narration into chapters that make it easy to follow and which allow the author to strengthen the argument. Furthermore, this is the only chapter in the collection that illuminates the agency of non-white people.

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