

On Biblical Poetry concludes with a delightful chapter in which Dobbs-Allsopp applies his poetic theory to Psalm 133. In this short poem, he provides a rich model for how biblical poetry is to be read.

The only criticisms I have do not reflect on the substance of this book at all. They are: (1) the book uses endnotes that force the reader to flip back and forth to get the fullness of what was being said; (2) the graphic images used to confirm points about how early poetry was written were often too small and ill placed (p. 233); and (3) the text used transliteration rather than Hebrew letters; my preference is to see the Hebrew characters.

In sum, this is a rewarding, scholarly book that invites the reader into the delightful depths of biblical poetry. I cannot recommend it highly enough as it furthers the discussions begun by giants such as Lowth, O'Connor, and others who have made significant contributions (e.g. Berlin, Kugel, Cooper, and Alter). It is heavy plowing but definitely worth the effort. F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp's *On Biblical Poetry* is perhaps the best book written on biblical poetry in a generation.

Ted Hildebrandt
Gordon College, Wenham, MA

The Cultural Life Setting of the Proverbs. By John J. Pilch. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016, xiv + 234 pp., \$29.00 paper.

John J. Pilch has provided a very practical volume aimed at offering insights upon Scripture from the social sciences, in the vein of his co-authored six-volume *Social Science Commentary on the NT* (1992–2013). In this volume on the book of Proverbs, Pilch's approach incorporates the findings of disciplines like anthropology, social psychology, sociolinguistics, and so forth, to approximate the "most culturally plausible interpretation" of Proverbs (p. vii). The concern is thus to "discover what the proverbs were expressing within the social setting of their society by examining the typical circum-Mediterranean [sic] social behaviors witnessed to in these aphorisms" (p. viii).

Pilch has formatted the volume into two mutually-informing sections. These consist first of the "Outline of the Book of Proverbs" with what Pilch calls "Textual Notes," and, second, the "Reading Scenarios for the Book of Proverbs" section that is more for reference. The bulk of the volume consists of the commentary-style "Outline" section. Here, Pilch presents the English text (NRSV with minor modifications) of the entire book of Proverbs, organized by chapter and interspersed with his Textual Notes. The outline is as follows:

- | | | |
|------|----------------------|--------------|
| I. | Proverbs 1–9 | (pp. 1–30) |
| II. | Proverbs 10:1–22:16 | (pp. 31–115) |
| III. | Proverbs 22:17–24:22 | (pp. 115–28) |
| IV. | Proverbs 24:23–34 | (pp. 128–30) |
| V. | Proverbs 25–29 | (pp. 131–60) |
| VI. | Proverbs 30:1–31:9 | (pp. 161–68) |
| VII. | Proverbs 31:10–31 | (pp. 168–71) |

Because he is focused upon those proverbs that stand to benefit from socio-cultural background information, the Textual Notes of Pilch's commentary are selective, and do not treat every verse. Furthermore, throughout the commentary, the ► symbol appears, paired with boldfaced terms or phrases that key to the second part of the volume, where they are alphabetically organized as headwords. Thus, the Reading Scenario headings ► **Hospitality**, ► **Patronage**, and ► **Evil Eye**, for example, appear throughout the first section and are expanded upon in the second section. In this way, the Textual Notes and the Reading Scenario headwords are meant to function in tandem to "help the modern reader develop a considerate posture towards the ancient author" from a sociocultural point of view (p. ix).

The Reading Scenario headwords found in the second section of the volume are drawn from the *Social Science Commentary on the NT*. Each heading receives fairly brief discussion, between one and five pages in length, with some references to Scripture (including the NT) and secondary literature. Pilch employs a total of twenty-two Reading Scenario headwords, which are indexed on pages 225–26. The most common include Lying (22×), Agonism (21×), Rich and Poor (18×), and Honor and Shame (17×). By far the most frequent, however, is what Pilch terms "Three-Zone Personality" (66×). Pilch explains Three-Zone Personality as an emic psychological feature that disallows intimate self-knowledge. Rather, the human person is understood externally through three symbolic "zones." These zones include the three concepts (and their related terminology): (1) *Heart and Eyes*, the zone of purposeful observation and thinking; (2) *Mouth and Ears*, the zone of self-expressive speech; and (3) *Hands and Feet*, the zone of purposeful activity. Because it appears so frequently, this concept supplies a significant framework for the volume.

Certain features of this book deserve some critique. While it is not meant to be a thoroughgoing academic volume, Pilch's citation and discussion of relevant literature is unfortunately sparse. Those unfamiliar with the social sciences – presumably most readers – will find virtually no introductory material to help understand the discipline, nor Pilch's angle within it. The social sciences are extremely methodologically diverse. So far as I can tell, the only way to discover precisely how the conclusions that Pilch so deftly summarizes were reached is to read the secondary literature for oneself. Even if one were to do so, questionable aspects of applying a social-scientific approach to ancient literature would remain. Since the social sciences are grounded upon observations made and methodology developed within the modern context, one wonders whether their application to Scripture occasionally amounts to a more academically rigorous exercise in eisegesis.

The most problematic feature of this volume is the Three-Zone Personality concept, which treads into the hazardous terrain of applying abstract social psychology to the ancient authors of Scripture, who Pilch occasionally calls "the Semites" (p. 222). This psychological model appears to depend entirely upon the work of the mid-20th-century Belgian scholar Bernard de Gérardon, who promoted the notion of a "Semitic view" of the human person. According to both Pilch and de Gérardon, "people in the biblical world focused *concretely on the body*. They were *not*

at all introspective” (p. 218, emphasis added). Somewhat astonishingly, it is this psychology that Pilch finds in “practically all” of the very proverbs that have nonetheless generated millennia of personal introspection and theological reflection (p. xiii).

These drawbacks are navigable with the right awareness. Overall, Pilch is to be commended for his desire and effort to help modern readers avoid imposing culturally incompatible interpretations upon the proverbs. While many interpreters are busy undertaking, for example, postcolonial or transgender “readings” of Scripture, it is refreshing to see concern for the ancient historical context directed towards accurate textual understanding. All the more so it is good when it appears at an accessible level that will benefit pastors and the concerned layperson, aware of the danger of unwitting eisegesis born simply of unfamiliarity with the very cultural and social factors Pilch discusses. Accordingly, there is much to be gleaned from this volume that will at least flag issues for further critical reflection and historical research. To that extent, Pilch has produced a useful resource that will assist those reading and expounding the pithy yet profound wisdom in the book of Proverbs.

William A. Ross

University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom

Time in the Book of Ecclesiastes. By Mette Bundvad. Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 211 pp., \$110.

Time in the Book of Ecclesiastes explores time in terms of the past, present, and future. Mette Bundvad argues that Qoheleth has a thesis about time—a thesis that, when all is said and done, is decidedly unenthusiastic about the human project of making sense out of our location in time. Qoheleth investigates time, the basic dimension of human existence, and discovers a dimension inaccessible to the human mind. Bundvad sets out to follow Qoheleth’s wrestling with time in Ecclesiastes.

After investigating the framing poems (Eccl 1:4–11; 12:1–7) in chapter 3, Bundvad claims that time is *the* basic condition for human life (p. 72). Furthermore, the framing poems expose a clash for humans in their experience of time: there is a tension between what is repetitive in the cosmological order of things and the finite, linear motion of humans through time. The upshot is that in the first poem, we learn not to expect a meaningful sense of human continuity in life; while in the second, owing to the inevitable threat of death, Qoheleth’s quest for some permanent gain in life is futile (p. 73). Not only are there no temporal points of orientation available in life, humans are, in the final analysis, unable to understand the character of the time that fences us in. Bundvad affirms that this last point emerges repeatedly in Qoheleth’s thinking: “How will the author engage with the temporal conditions of humanity after having singled them out both as all important to his quest for meaning in human life *and* as fundamentally inaccessible to the human mind?” (p. 74).

The author reads Ecclesiastes as affirming that present time is intensely problematic for humans. There are reasons behind this, which she explores in chapter 4.