

Research Reporter

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Early Jewish and Christian Memories of Moses' Wives: Exogamist Marriage and Ethnic Identity by Karen Strand Winslow

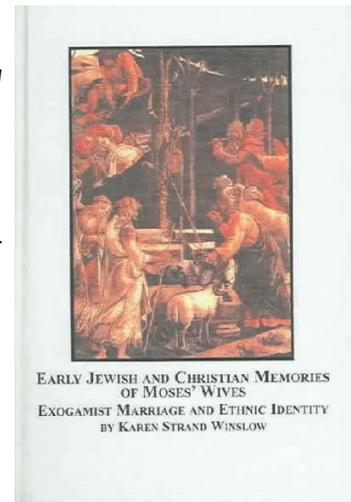
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Karen Strand Winslow, Director, Free Methodist Center and Professor of Graduate Biblical Studies, in *Early Jewish and Christian Memories of Moses' Wives: Exogamist Marriage and Ethnic Identity* (The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), examines not only the various ancient versions of Zipporah's story but also the significance of the additions and subtractions made by many authors writing about this powerful woman. Zipporah, daughter of Jethro and wife of Moses, dares to circumcise with "a flint" their son when the LORD or a "destroying angel" (designations of this aggressive force vary in the accounts) attacks "him" (whom Winslow believes to be Moses, not the infant). Thus Zipporah, along with Abraham and Joshua, becomes one of the only *mohelim* (circumcisers) named in the Bible and the only woman to have performed this act, a tradition often ignored or omitted by Biblical commentators, perhaps because they are uncomfortable with a woman performing this male rite of initiation or with a wife saving her husband's life or with that heroic female rescuer being a Midianite.

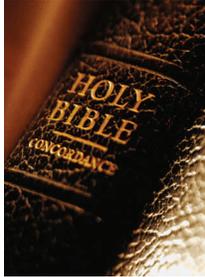


Exodus 4:24-26 is the foundational text of this tale, and Winslow provides her own translation of it plus numerous commentaries about it which include those by Artapanus, Philo, Josephus, Jerome, Tertullian, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine as well as the Jewish sages of the Mishnah, Talmuds, and Targums. Relevant to this foundational text are Exodus 2:16-22 which describes Moses' first meeting with Zipporah's father and Exodus 18:1-7, which portrays Jethro bringing Zipporah and their two sons back to Moses in the desert. Winslow translates these passages as well and then carefully analyzes the narratives that have evolved across the centuries when the texts are melded together.

For example, she clearly summarizes: "Other interpreters also 'forget' the circumcision by Zipporah. The author of *Jubilees* and Aphrahat the Persian Christian sage rewrote the Exodus account of Moses' return to Egypt, including an attack upon Moses, with the circumcision by Zipporah excised. In *Jubilees*, the narrating angel of the presence saved the wifeless Moses from *Prince Mastema*, whereas Aphrahat's Zipporah was the *cause* of the Lord's attack on Moses." Winslow explains these many textual variations as "the development and migration of exegetical motifs that explained puzzles in the primary text and particular objectives of each interpreter on behalf of the social communities he addressed. Both Jews and Christians used a biblical or post biblical 'Zipporah' tradition that they found suitable for their purposes *because it was traditional* and thereby authoritative."

Winslow's volume also demonstrates how a strong emphasis on celibacy emerged from this biblical narrative plus other fascinating ancillary topics. Consistent throughout are her meticulous research into frequently obscure texts and painstaking yet creative comparative analyses, all presented in crystal clear prose.—Carole Lambert

Paul and Theodicy: Intertextual Thoughts on God's Justice and Faithfulness to Israel in Romans 9-11 by B. J. Oropeza



This article, through its rational, well organized analysis of Romans 9, 10, and 11, sheds light on both the mysteries of salvation and of seeming injustice in God's dealings with his creatures—
-Carole Lambert



B. J. Oropeza, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, tackles the challenge of theodicy by closely examining Romans 9, 10, and 11 in “Paul and Theodicy: Intertextual Thoughts on God’s Justice and Faithfulness to Israel in Romans 9-11” (*New Testament Studies* 53 (2007): 57-80). He defines “theodicy” as “an implicit assertion of God’s righteousness” when circumstances may place that “righteousness” in doubt. Oropeza’s strategy is to review the numerous Old Testament passages and allusions found in these three chapters “in an effort to read them the way Paul may have read them.” He notes that “concepts such as sonship/children, ‘seed’, and ‘word’ seem to function in a midrash-styled way as catchwords for the entire unit.”

Oropeza responds to three difficult questions embedded in Romans itself: “Is there not injustice with God?” (Rom. 9.14); “Why then does [God] still find fault? For who has resisted his will?” (Rom. 9.19); and “Has God rejected his people?” (Rom. 11.1). Answers to these questions encompass a discus-

sion of election and predestination which affirms “that God’s word has not failed despite Israel’s failure to receive the same salvation [Paul] has experienced.”

One response to the first question, “Is there not injustice with God?”, is that “God hardens those who harden themselves.” Further, echoes of Job appear in Romans: “What are mere humans that they should question the Almighty?” Finally, Paul reaffirms that God has not rejected Israel: “Israel shares a special love relationship with God.” Oropeza notes that “the doxology in 11.33-36 stresses the mystery of God in his salvific plan related to Israel and Gentiles.” This article, through its rational, well organized analysis of Romans 9, 10, and 11, sheds light on both the mysteries of salvation and of seeming injustice in God’s dealings with his creatures.—Carole Lambert



Naturalism: A Crude Instrument in the Search for a Beloved?

by Teri Merrick

Ever since the end of the European Enlightenment, it seems that there have been regular flurries of opposition to the mechanistic understanding of the universe put forward by such scientific trail-blazers as Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton, whose theories were championed by Descartes' Rationalism and Bacon's Empiricism. Romantics such as Keats, however, lamented the disenchantment of the natural world when such wondrous phenomena as rainbows could be explained away via a modern understanding of optics ("Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings...Unweave a rainbow"). Existential characters such as Dostoevsky's narrator from his *Notes from Underground* also bemoaned the tyrant regency of science and its "laws of nature" which act to steal men's wills and deaden their desire by explaining away all mystery through mathematical principles. Today, according to **Professor of Philosophy Teri Merrick**, in her article *Naturalism: A Crude Instrument in the Search for a Beloved?* (found in *The Many Facets of Love: Philosophical Explorations*. Ed. T.J. Oord, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), the outraged cries against naturalistic approaches to understanding the universe often come from Christian circles, as some Christian academics, including Dallas Willard and Alvin Plantinga, have criticized naturalistic philosophy as too reductive and this-worldly. Merrick, however, attempts to chart a middle ground between the naturalists and the anti-naturalists, using C.S. Lewis and Henri Nouwen to explore whether "naturalism (is) compatible with fostering appreciative love for the created order."

As Merrick explains, naturalism is "the view that whatever can be known about natural phenomena, including human beings, can be known by focusing exclusively on the entities and processes discovered by the empirical sciences." As commonsensical as this approach may appear to most scientists since the 17th century, it's lately run up against some staunch resistance from Christians such as Willard, who feel that science's "totalizing claims about reality" smack of triumphal dogmatism. Indeed, there seem to be a whole host of phenomena, such as human consciousness, that cannot be fully explained by "neuroscience or any other empirical discipline." However, without any clearer or more effective other methodology for settling such mysteries, most scientifically minded philosophers will likely continue to stick with naturalistic approaches to organize and understand the world around them.

Merrick, however, not only recognizes that most current Christian arguments against naturalism fail to provide adequate alternative approaches, but also interrogates the real limitations in modern naturalistic inquiry as well, specifically its insufficiency in examining the universe (and human beings) with an appropriately humble attitude of wonder. Granted, most scientifically credible explanations for natural phenomena responsibly fulfill the standards of "testability and reliability, explanatory scope... (and) consistency with pre-existing knowledge" in their quest for accurate knowledge, but could it be that something critical is lost in the process?

Merrick argues that most of the scientific world since Bacon has sought to understand nature through explanation and theory with the ultimate goal of controlling it. As she puts it, referencing Herbert Butterfield, "An increase in explanatory scope increases one's sphere of dominance. Explanations yielding successful predictions about regular and reproducible natural processes can help us to manipulate those processes." Unfortunately, though, such an emphasis on "predictive and manipulative success" can blind one to moments when the created order surprises us with moments of unexpected beauty and complexity. Merrick affirms that modern naturalistic inquiry could stand to benefit both from Lewis's notion of Appreciative Love (*The Four Loves*), which posits a "disinterested, breathless and silent, appreciative gazer," and Nouwen's contention that (in Merrick's words) "we must...cultivate an atmosphere that is open to surprising revelations about the beloved." Literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin seems to echo Nouwen's belief with his notion of "unfinalizability": human beings should always retain the capacity to surprise and delight us with the mystery of their personhood. Indeed, to attempt to categorize or rigidly define another fully stands as an act of violence and an abuse of power. But when a naturalistic philosopher or scientist possesses enough humility to relinquish control over the expected outcome, the result, according to Merrick, can be surprising, wondrous, and a cause for grateful appreciation. A rainbow may just be re-enchanted.—**Stephen Bell**



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