

## BOOK REVIEW

*Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism.* By Anatheia E. Portier-Young. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011. 462 pp. \$50.00. ISBN 978-0-8028-6598-4.

Since December 2010, the expression *Arab Spring* has become a leitmotif of journalists, reporters, preachers, and street gossips. *Arab Spring* refers to the movement of resistance brought about by populations of some Arab countries against their political leaders. This movement of resistance is a rejection of the unjust systems through which those regimes oppressed their populations. Thus, it is a happy coincidence that it is during this moment that Professor Anatheia E. Portier-Young publishes her rigorous, careful and extensive work on the theologies of resistance in early Judaism. Professor of Old Testament at the Divinity School of Duke University, North Carolina, Portier-Young has published articles on various topics, but this is her first book, and it is a mature contribution to the study of Second Temple Judaism.

The last decades have seen an increased interest in the study of apocalyptic literature of early Judaism. This book offers a fresh and unique approach by considering apocalyptic imagination in relation to theologies of resistance. Although apocalyptic documents have often been regarded as a “flight from the world” and theologies of resistance as a call to violence, in this book, P.-Y. shows that there is no inherent dualism between belief and practice. Apocalyptic discourse sends a compelling message that invites its audience to resist evil through right knowledge and wisdom, but not through violence (371).

In this book, P.-Y. studies three apocalyptic works: the canonical Book of Daniel and two Enochic non-canonical works, the *Apocalypse of Weeks* and the *Book of Dreams*. She divides her book into three parts. The first part, “Theorizing Resistance,” offers a conceptual framework by explaining what, in the context of early Jewish apocalypticism, needs to be understood by *resistance*. Drawing from authors such as Samuel Eddy, David Flusser, Joseph Ward Swain and James Scott, P.-Y. shows that apocalyptic resistance consists in opposing hegemony, domination, evil and anything that would set human beings in opposition to God and God’s commandments. The purpose of resistance is to restore right relationship between God and human beings. Apocalyptic writings reveal what is yet to come, but show us that the present world is under the care of a provident God (43).

The book’s second part, “Seleucid Domination in Judea,” is a theological reflection on the historiography of the interaction between Judeans and Hellenistic rulers in the third and second centuries B.C. P.-Y. sets the context of

the book of Daniel and the two non-canonical documents she studies (the *Apocalypse of Weeks* and the *Book of Dreams*), and shows that they are a response to a system of state terror instituted by Seleucid rulers, especially Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The persecution of Judeans under Antiochus IV is to be understood more as a strategy of hegemony and domination than the expression of an intrinsic opposition between Hellenism and Judaism. What Antiochus intended in this process of domination was to establish his rule through “de-creation” and “re-creation.” From this perspective, the reader is invited not to see in the apocalypses a way of resisting Hellenistic culture *per se* (91). Rather, the writers of these three apocalypses call their audiences to resist anything (Jewish or Hellenistic) that stands in opposition to God and does not allow the covenant people of God to remain faithful to their covenant with God. The believer is summoned to oppose Hellenism only as far as it becomes a means through which the occupying ruler spreads his claims for ultimacy (226).

The third part of the book, “Apocalyptic Theologies of Resistance,” is a careful analysis of the book of *Daniel*, the *Apocalypse of Weeks* and the *Book of Dreams*. P.-Y. shows that the main idea of these documents is that the faithful have to pay attention to the word of God and proclaim it so as to engender social justice and right worship. Even though the *Book of Dreams* mentions the possibility of making use of armed resistance (as a last resort?), these documents in general call for a non-violent resistance. God himself shapes this resistance through his word, which the audience is invited to heed. What is called for is steadfastness to the covenantal relationship with YHWH (262).

Today, at a critical time of various kinds of sufferings, this book provides us with a clear call to hope in the midst of tribulations. Apocalypses reveal to us that a world better than this “madhouse or *univers concentrationnaire*” (a phrase used by J. Moltmann in *The Crucified God*) in which we live is possible, and God makes it available to anyone who listens to his words and acts upon them. A theology of resistance is essentially a theology of witness in a world that rejects God. It calls upon us to remain steadfast to our faith, even when this requires suffering.

This book renders exceptional service not only to scholars and to students of the Old Testament, but also to pastors and preachers in a time of growing radical secularism. While remaining cautious in suggesting this book to untrained readers, I would strongly recommend it as an indispensable textbook for anyone studying the early Jewish apocalyptic literature.

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