

essence, he does not go into more detail than in his dogmatics manual on the doctrine of sin and redemption.¹⁹ This brevity makes it more difficult to understand his thesis.²⁰

That said, I recommend reading Blocher's work with particular attention to the wise and very relevant dogmatic consequences he draws in chapter 4 from the doctrine of original sin to explain human experience (83–103). His knowledge of Scripture and way of treating it with the respect it deserves can be set as a standard to be imitated, even when we disagree on a particular theological point.

PIERRE-SOVANN CHAUNY

Professeur de théologie systématique
Faculté Jean Calvin, Aix-en-Provence

Gregory A. Boyd. *Cross Vision: How the Crucifixion of Jesus Makes Sense of Old Testament Violence*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017.

Gregory Boyd is a theologian and senior pastor in the Twin Cities. This book follows up on his epic two-volume *Crucifixion and the Warrior God*. While more accessible than the major work, its more concise presentation of the subject will be enough to satisfy most readers. As one might expect, the subject arises out of theological and hermeneutical engagement with the Old Testament narrative and pastoral concerns.

The scandal of the victims of human behavior has become a preoccupation of postmodernism. The question of religious violence is at the forefront because of the friction between different religious groups in a shrinking world. It is therefore hardly surprising that this work is another drop in an ocean of publications, both Christian and other, on the problem of violence. Add to this the rivers of literature on the question of hospitality and the gift from the stable of Marcel Mauss and Georges Bataille and the ocean is overflowing.

The book is divided into four main sections. The issue is the old question of liberal theology as to how the violent tribal God of the Old Testament can be reconciled with the loving God of Jesus and the cross. In spite of the efforts of many Christian writers to address the problem, this is still the

¹⁹ Blocher, *Péché et rédemption*, 88–94.

²⁰ Cf. Daniel J. Treier, "Original Sin (NSBT)—Henri Blocher (Apollos, 1997): Review by Dr. Daniel J. Treier," *Trinity Journal* NS 21.2 (Fall 2000), reproduced at <http://beginningwith-moses.org/books/102/original-sin-nsbt/review>: "Competent theological associates and this reviewer took hours of verbal and written discussion to ferret out Blocher's claims and their exact significance compared to the tradition."

commonly held view in the subconscious of many Christians and a major reason why unbelievers reject the biblical message as a whole. Boyd wishes to tackle this issue and provides a solution that will be attractive to many, as it fits in with the basic postmodern narrative about violence.

In the first section, the problem and solution are presented with the cross as a lens for looking at the Old Testament stories that are the big issue. Boyd does not want to duck the problem of divine violence by reneging on the inspiration of the texts and wishes to make Christ and the cross central in interpreting them (22–24). Jesus has “a weightier authority than the OT” and “only when we grasp why the cross is the centerpiece to everything Jesus was about will we be able to see what else is going on in the OT’s violent portraits of God and discern how this something else points us to the cross” (31). If we believe that Jesus reveals what God is like, when God appears to be acting violently in the Old Testament problem texts, we must be challenged to imagine that something else is going on. “Something else must be going on” could well be seen as the refrain of the book. This fits in nicely with postmodern propensities for suspicion and finding solutions in a narrative under the narrative. One might say that the facts are there and are undeniable, but do we attach to them the value that is apparent?

The second section looks at the way God comes into the world in the pagan ancient Near Eastern setting. The Old Testament at once conforms to the surrounding background by depicting Yahweh as a violent warrior God, and at the same time, in contrast with the native culture, it depicts God in Christlike ways. The difference can be seen through the lens of the cross. God enters history as a “heavenly missionary.” The author’s “conservative hermeneutical principle” will not let him deny either the reality of the violence or the cross-centered lens. The cross was itself a divine judgment, and Boyd wishes to see how God “justly judges sin while denying that God ever acts violently in the process” (132). This is a tall order.

The third section, comprising three chapters, is the core of Boyd’s thesis; he seeks to demonstrate, in three ways, the true nature of divine judgment.

Firstly, he has a new explanation—“divine aikido”—a way of saying that God steps back in judgment and abandons evil in line with the model of the fourth word from the cross. God allows evil (Satan, demons, rebel powers, and the kingdom of darkness) to self-destruct and so uses evil itself to destroy evil. It is surprising that Boyd does not use Karl Barth’s excluded “nihil” or Jürgen Moltmann’s ideas about the Jewish mystical “tsimtsum” here. Equally surprising is the absence of references to the ground-breaking and popular theses about religious violence proposed by René Girard. Although Boyd maintains substitutionary atonement, his position involves a negation

of penal substitution (138) for specious reasons that have been debunked many times in the Reformed tradition.

Secondly, he asserts that sin is self-punishing, since violence is carried out by those who were already bent on it (160). Thirdly, he makes the distinction between doing and allowing. Here again, the cross allows us to see that God is not doing but allowing sin to punish sin and evil to vanquish evil. This distinction runs into all the problems John Frame has pointed out with regard to the classic use of the notion of divine permission (John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002], 177–79).

The fourth and final section is about the “what else that was going on,” as seen through the lens of the cross. When violence is attributed to God in Scripture, it must really be human agents—or, when not, spiritual agents—acting in a cosmic war against God. To his way of thinking, the Genesis flood story shows how God withdrew and the forces of chaos were released; the drowning of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea is a conflict-with-chaos narrative: it was the sea monster, not God, who devoured Pharaoh’s army, and “dragon eats dragon.” Other Old Testament texts that reference God directly, such as Elijah calling down fire, Elisha calling down a bear curse on forty-two youths, and Samson’s acts of violence, are cases of misuse of divine power. Finally, Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac shows that a paradigm shift was necessary for the patriarch to see that God provides a nonviolent way out for human beings.

Boyd’s argument throughout is based on the presupposition that God is totally nonviolent, that Jesus taught and practiced nonviolence, and the cross is God’s lens for making us see that the biblical narratives of divine violence do not mean what they say. These texts are “literary crucifixes” in miniature, inviting readers to go beyond the surface meaning. God allowed himself to be seen as a warrior god, but in the final revelation of Christ the loving God appears.

In conclusion, Boyd’s proposal is based exclusively on the presupposition that God must be nonviolent. Scriptures that depict divine violence must be reinterpreted. Readers have to go beyond the surface meaning. God allowed himself to be viewed as a pagan deity or warrior god, but the cross-revelation of Christ shatters that violent perception of God. The author keeps his Anabaptist cards pretty close to his chest, but he finally comes clean in the “Acknowledgments” section (an exception being a passing reference on page 77). So, what I suspected all along is the case, in spite of the surprising lack of references to major players in this game like John Yoder and J. Denny Weaver. Transparency from the start would have been gentlemanly, but maybe I just missed the references. That apart, Boyd is

pleasant to read and convincingly makes his case. He will push many who are evangelical in the way they want to fall. His thesis rubs us up in the right way because we want to think that God is not violent and judgmental, or that all that is over and done with through the lens of the cross. It is a boon, as Brian McLaren says on the dust jacket, for those who want to “detoxify their understanding of God and rediscover God as most fully and beautifully imaged in a nonviolent man who loved all, hated none, and brought healing rather than harm wherever he went”(!)

Three final comments. Firstly, Boyd doth protest too much, methinks. The texts that he reinterprets are so numerous, so categorical, and so obvious that to try and explain them as referring to a “nonviolent” God demands flights of imagination that are just too much. Secondly, the idea of God allowing himself to be seen as a “warrior god” flies in the face of divine kingship and lordly control. It leaves us with the nasty taste that before Christ appeared to set the record straight, God was involved in some duplicity about his real nature. This approach does not do much for the trustworthiness or the faithfulness of God to himself. Finally, Boyd claims his hermeneutic to be a conservative evangelical one, even if it more specifically Anabaptist. This raises the question as to whether “the lens of the cross” is appropriate for reading the Old Testament. If Christ is the center of Scripture and the history of salvation in an Oscar Cullmann sense flows to Christ and from Christ, is this in and of itself a hermeneutical key? Is it not the New Testament that interprets the Old and Scripture that interprets Scripture, and not a “cross lens” abstracted from Scripture itself?

PAUL WELLS

Professeur émérite
Faculté Jean Calvin
Aix-en-Provence

Brent A. Strawn. *The Old Testament Is Dying: A Diagnosis and Recommended Treatment*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017.

Any book that seeks to keep the Old Testament from dying and to revive its use among God's people is to be encouraged simply because it raises the issue. People tend to view the Old Testament as distant in time and culture and therefore irrelevant to modern-day life. In fact, taking the Old Testament seriously could lead to problems because of its many difficult texts. This book seeks to solve some of the difficulties related to the Old Testament by treating it like a dead language that needs to be recovered. It gives a diagnosis of the problem, evidence of the signs of the Old Testament's demise, and