through the nonviolent and self-giving hospitality of the crucified Christ. God is first a giver and forgiver who invites us to pattern our lives after his own while living in a graceless and often violent world. That is why Volf's work so strongly rests on an incessant insistence to situate our lives theologically. Concomitantly, he directs our gaze to those practices of the Christian faith that make no sense unless we really believe that God exists. Volf, when all is said and done, is a theologian who simply wants us to live out the radical demands of the gospel. His is a theology of discipleship, and it is in such light that his engagement with memories of wrong suffered needs to be understood. Herein is unquestionably one of the reasons why his theology has a decidedly autobiographical character. While some less charitable critics might see such rhetorical strategy as manifest self-indulgence, this certainly is not the case. As in other successful forms of autobiographical theology, perhaps most prominently embodied in Augustine's *Confessions*, personal elements here truly enliven the discursive plane with a strong existential pathos that contributes to, rather than detracts from, conceptual clarity.

While it is hard to argue with the overall argument of the book, there are specific instances where one would wish to probe the discussion a bit more. For example, Volf engages the question of whether memories can ever be regarded as truthful (47-49). Although his point about the need for truthfulness is well taken—he clearly distances himself here from the postmodern deconstruction of the reality principle—I remained unconvinced about the argument he marshals in support of his position. The fragility of human memory that recent developments in neuroscience so vividly underscore, certainly merits a more robust and detailed response than what is offered here. Also, one might take issue with some stylistic features of his work. Volf most definitely has an uncanny deftness for articulating complex matters in an easily accessible way. He adroitly navigates intricate issues, while at the same time wearing his exemplary erudition lightly. In a strange way, however, his summaries and repetitions of main points often obfuscate the flow of argument. One sometimes loses track of different classifications and hints of matters to be discussed.

In conclusion, Volf's work is, without doubt, an important achievement whose theological depth and practical implication cannot be overemphasized. One can easily imagine multiple contexts and arenas in which his theological proposal could stir significant resonances. Volf succeeds in offering us a book that covers wider swaths of theological reflection—apologetics, public theology, constructive theology, ethics, and practical theology—without sounding overbearing. Not only is his theology imminently preachable—a characteristic he shares with his former mentor and friend Jürgen Moltmann—but also one that challenges us toward transformatory engagement.

Andrews University ANTE JERONCIC

Waltke, Bruce K. *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15–31*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. xxxiii + 589 pp. Hardcover, $50.00.

Rather than a new book, this publication is the second part of a manuscript whose first segment appeared in 2004. That section featured 170 pages of general introduction and bibliography, as well as a commentary on most of the first 15 chapters of the book of Proverbs (Prov 1:1–15:29). Frequent cross references with sections covered in the first publication emphasize the fact that Waltke's *Proverbs 15–31* is part of a united whole that runs through 1,282 pages, plus 68 pages of preliminary material. Omitting no vital feature, the work concludes with four indices, totaling 53 pages, on subjects dealt with,

authors cited, Scripture references, and selected Hebrew words and phrases. The now fully published study, over 25 years in the making, eminently honors NICOT's stated goal of sharing with people of faith "biblical scholarship of the highest quality" (1:xix). The editors could hardly have chosen a better scholar for this work on Proverbs. Waltke is respected for his authority in Hebrew syntax and biblical exegesis, seasoned by long years in OT studies, inclusive of wisdom literature, and particularly convinced of the divine and spiritual character of the OT's preeminent text of wisdom sayings.

It cannot be overlooked that the first verse treated in this second volume is Prov 15:30, a fact immediately illustrative of the innovative care Waltke applies to his commentary. Though he has slighted chapter conventions, the decision, more significantly, argues conspicuously against some interpreters' string-of-beads approach to Prov 10–31, and in favor of the intentional, organized, and syntactically connected character of the sentence literature here treated. For Waltke, the last four verses in Prov 15 (vv. 30-33), replete with close linkages of sound and sense, provide a unique beginning to the prologue (15:30–16:15) of Section B (15:30–22:16) of the first Solomonic collection (10:1–22:16). Waltke entitles this prologue "The Dance Between Humanity, the Lord, and His King."

At times, in the surfeit of linguistic, exegetical, and theological goodness Waltke serves up, philological competence, literary familiarity, strong faith in the book's godliness, and unapologetic imagination may combine to give us excess. Waltke dedicates elaborate attention to connections syllabic and morphemic as marked by assonance and sybillance, and synonyms such as YHWH (Prov 16:1–9) over against *melek* in Prov 16:10–15. He notes conceptual linkages that mark themselves in multiple ways, including such features as metonymy; e.g., Prov 20:27, where he believes *nišmâ* (breath, spirit) stands for "words." At the lowest level, he finds structural connections through *janus versets*: Prov 21:9, on the contentious wife, joins units on how the wicked pursue wealth (21:4–8) and how the righteous triumph over the wicked (vv. 10-18). At more complex levels, there is, for instance, chiasm (e.g., Prov 30:1–6; 466). Typological interpretations explain connections at the intertextual level, across OT books, and in the covenantal (OT/NT) sphere. Illustrative of the last category, the king, for Waltke, represents the LORD (see again on Prov 16:1-15).

The uniqueness of a reading such as Prov 20:27 helps explain why readers may at times feel some reserve about Waltke's confidence. But Waltke's unexpected directions are only a function of great ability. In 1:609, n. 10, on Prov 15:4, he explains *šeer bᵉrûach* as literally "it is a fracturing in the spirit." In Prov 16:18, consonant sensitivity, even across linguistic barriers, leads to rendering *linê šeer* as "before a shattering," suggesting some notion of the common onomatopoeic force of Hebrew *šeer* and English "shattering." Hopefully the intention is not to point to some disruptive import in phoneme "sh," which he emphasizes is twice present in the Hebrew verse (*šeer* ["shattering"] and *kiššalôn* ["stumbling"]). The printer's mischievous devil adds his own disruption by sneaking into comments on Prov 16:18, as readers are encouraged to find further reference to *kiššalôn* in Prov 4:9, *inter alia*. But neither the Hebrew text nor Waltke's comments relate in any way to Prov 4:9.

Waltke may at times be almost political. On Prov 3:34 (1:273), he quotes R. Martin-Achard (*TLOT*), to explain that *ªnêyîm (sic* ["poor"]–K) and *ªn~wîm* ("afflicted"–Q) stand for the poor and oppressed, those "in any circumstance of diminished capacity, power and worth." Given this understanding, he believes that Prov 16:19 "teaches the disciple to embrace conscious solidarity *with the oppressed*" (27). The Ketiv/Qere reflects an inconsequential textual problem (1:599).

But if he is political, he is not constrained by the conventions of political

correctness. He declares his preference for consistent use of the third masculine singular, as illustrated in Prov 17:8 (cited below); witness also his faithfulness to traditional conventions on dates (B.C./A.D.), and the divine name (LORD). One is proportionally less surprised that the ultimate epithet for fool's rebellion is "black ingratitude" (53, on Prov 17:13); or that Prov 17:15 may be seen as correcting "the popular misconception that it is better to free ten guilty persons than to condemn one innocent person" (55). That same political independence combines with an ear for contemporary relevance that some may reluctantly label tendentious. By way of example, Prov 17:8, in combination with references to v. 15 and vv. 1:20-33, is found to apply to "[t]he lobbyist's momentary success" that leads "to eternal doom" (49), and Prov 17:17 "supports eyeball-to-eyeball charity, not impersonal and institutionalized agencies." In Waltke's emphasis, "the king . . . does not administer an impersonal welfare state that has great potential for corruption" (57). That same voice of contemporary relevance is heard again, if not perhaps a shade more harshly, when he criticizes the relativistic epistemology of a "self-deluded generation," "pure in their own eyes, but . . . not cleansed from their excrement" (see comments on Prov 30:12, 485; and 459, the translation of v. 12).

Some passing quibble on potentially confusing editorial features may be in order: In the table of contents, Collection V, Part B is entitled Section C (Prov 25:2–27:27). The subheading's name is only understood if the reader is familiar with volume 1:15, where said Section C begins with Prov 25:1. One might comment that the table of contents is not the place for mystification, or wonder why it was not completely reproduced in volume 2, or how, in a work of such meticulous exegesis, a section begins either at v. 1 or v. 2. It is, of course, but trivial; Prov 25:1 is the superscription to Part B, Section C, a single verse rewarded with almost two pages of notes and commentary on the action of "moving" Solomon's proverbs, an action performed by "godly, wise, and literate" men (301-302).

Returning to the emphasis on exegetical faithfulness, note how, as with the choice for his first verses of the new commentary, Prov 17:7a allows Waltke to illustrate the degree of his commitment to expose every possible nuance. The text informs that "an eloquent lip is not fitting for a godless fool." Because it uses an *a fortiori* argument, Waltke feels constrained to render its second verset with the limited elegance of "how much more unfitting" so that his translation may employ the same *a fortiori* rhetoric.

His faith in the text's ethical consistency helps Waltke see literary gaps, as in Prov 17:8, where the owner's opinion of the magic stone [*'eben ḥēn*] controls his view of the outcome of its use. Waltke contrasts with the modern VSS that consistently describes the stone's possessor as achieving his aims ("he succeeds/prospers"). Instead, he supplies the briber's opinion, to have the text say "he thinks he will succeed."

Waltke's syntagmatic sensitivity is possibly never more on display than when he is answering ostensibly valid criticisms of some proverb's disjointedness. Long ago, Toy emended "his door (*pitô*)" to "his mouth (*pîw*)" to make sense of Prov 17:19 (ICC, 1899), and McKane (OTL, 1970) accepts that hemistich 19a must be unrelated to 19b. Kravitz and Olitzky, *Mishlei* (UAHC, 2002) are unsure what may be meant by the idiom "raises high the door." By contrast, the confidence of Waltke's exposition appears to increase in proportion to the unusual nature of the syntax or imagery he is handling. His preemptive assault on would-be doubters hints at the validity of their different assessment: "Almost as if to anticipate the criticism that its halves are disjointed," he begins, and proceeds to show how multiple and intimate integrations of assonance prove that his two versets belong together. In effect, those very words of his go some way toward acknowledging the validity of the criticism of disjointed parts. At points like

these, the unquestionable profit of Waltke's masterwork might be found even more persuasive to even more readers by some concession on the interpreter's finitude or the limitations of the language of the text. This is because readers are not unaware that sayings of wisdom and wit do occasionally survive despite, rather than because of, their logic. We have a good answer to the question: "How many levels of integration does a saying need to be authentic?" The answer is "not every one all of the time." If everything must always work perfectly, then what should the reader make of the grammatical disagreement that presents itself as part of the commentator's defense of the proverb ("the second words . . . has"–n. 108, 58)? Proverbs may be more or less clear, or more or less counterintuitive, even less or more nonsensical. At times all that hearers need, and all that may need to work, is the sound of "Head over heels!" That said, there is no way to prove that Waltke's ingenious explanations are not, in the end, the best ones. Even his linguistic and exegetical stretches are superlative. And he has left the entire field at full stretch to reach this new standard he and NICOT have set for wisdom and Proverbs study.

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