

Marvin A. SWEENEY. *TaNak: A Theological and Critical Introduction to the Jewish Bible*. Minneapolis, MN, Fortress, 2012. (16x23,5), xv-544 p. ISBN 978-0-8006-3743-9. \$59.00.

Although there is no shortage of recent introductory textbooks to the Old Testament, an explicitly Jewish introduction to the Hebrew Bible in English is quite remarkable, particularly when it is written by a renowned biblical scholar like Marvin Sweeney. As stated in the title, Sweeney's goal is to offer both a theological and a critical study of the Hebrew Bible as Judaism's foundational collection of sacred scriptures, much in the same vein as the "biblical theology" movement to which he repeatedly refers. As this field of study has mostly been dominated by Christians, this introduction offers a brief survey of Christian Old Testament theology, after which Sweeney provides a more extensive overview of Jewish contributions to the discipline, including his own work. This leads him to a more profound reflection on the dimensions of a specifically Jewish "biblical theology" as a holistic reading of the Hebrew Bible which fully takes into account both the diachronic and synchronic dimensions of the individual texts as well as their intertextual relationships. Thus having defined the contours of his work, Sweeney embarks on a book-by-book presentation of the Jewish Bible, neatly

divided into four parts corresponding to the TaNaK's major divisions: the Torah, the Former and Latter Prophets, and the Writings. Each of these sections begins with a brief overview of the contexts of these books and influential scholarly views on their literary growth, after which Sweeney proceeds with a detailed treatment of chapters and pericopes, which nonetheless never loses sight of the wider context. The brief concluding thoughts emphasise the diversity of thought that has been enshrined in the Jewish canon, and thus implicitly respond to the approach taken by a number of influential Christian introductions to biblical theology that have been criticised in the introduction.

Notwithstanding Sweeney's considerable emphasis on the Jewish character of his work, only some occasional references to rabbinic interpretations or to the reading of specific books in the Jewish liturgy point to its specifically Jewish background. For the most, this is simply an example of good exegesis interested in a theological reading of the texts, which constantly enters into dialogue with various strands of modern scholarship and takes itself a critical stance. Compared to European exegesis, some of Sweeney's views may be considered somewhat conservative, for example his slightly modified version of the Newer Documentary Hypothesis that redefines "J" as a late eighth or seventh century BCE Jerusalemite redactional stratum depending on the earlier "E"; his attribution of the majority of the book of Ezekiel to the prophet himself; or his reconstruction of an "original" book of Isaiah consisting of Isaiah 1–3; 5–6; 8–10; 14–23 and 28–31. This book's main shortcoming is probably its failure to take into account the insights generated by the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible: it hardly pays attention to the diversity of textual forms attested for the majority of the biblical books. To Sweeney's credit, however, it must be noted that, in the introduction, he explicitly acknowledges his almost exclusive interest in the Masoretic Text as the sacred text of Judaism. Nonetheless, this work, presenting the fruit of a lifetime of study, may definitely be counted among the more interesting "introductions" to the Hebrew Bible: Sweeney offers a learned summary of research into each book from the Jewish canon, taking into account both diachronic and synchronic aspects, and reflecting upon their theological relevance. Much is to be learned from his work, both by students and by more advanced scholars of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, whatever their religious background.