

Ucko, Hans (ed) 1997 – The jubilee challenge: Utopia or possibility? *Jewish and Christian insights.*

Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications

Reviewer: Rev G J Volschenk (Pongola)

This volume is a collection of lectures given at the World Council of Churches consultation in Bossey at the 50th anniversary of the Ecumenical Institute. These “articles” are independent of one another and represent a variety of perspectives on the Biblical jubilee. Seen overall, these articles are very superficial. There is a lack of in-depth theological discussion of the historical and theological context and interpretation of the jubilee.

HTS 55/4 (1999)

1163

This review consists of two parts. Part one concerns the interpretation of the Biblical jubilee texts, while part two comments on the practical application of the jubilee regulations.

i) *Interpretation*

According to Gottwald (33) there has emerged virtually no consensus on any of the major points at issue in the interpretation of the jubilee regulations. The many loose applications of the jubilee regulations are the result of a lack of consensus in the interpretation of the texts. With the exception of Smyth's and Jospe's articles, there is little theology of significance.

I would like to comment on two theological issues, in particular one stated by Ucko (4) about God's being:

God has chosen humankind to be co-creators with God. The world is not perfect as created, and God knows it. God has put human beings on earth to refine their environment. ... and God is transformed from an absolute into a "constitutional" monarch, bound as humankind is bound, to the condition of the constitution.

In contrast to the above-mentioned statement within the context of the ecumenical paradigm, Reformation theology states explicitly that God is the Absolute God. He is the "ganz andere Gott." Louis Berkhof (1984:59) says: "The infinity of God is that perfection of God by which He is free from all limitations. In ascribing it to God, we deny that there are or can be any limitations to the divine Being or attributes."

The other theological issue is the definition or concept of justice. "There is an intrinsic connection between peace, justice and the environment. Peace is dependent on justice, justice on the equal distribution of resources ..."

This point overemphasises the horizontal aspect of justice, while forgetting its relational or vertical aspect – to be in the right relationship with God. Achtemeier (1982:99) rightfully states that "... righteousness is fundamentally more concerned with the covenant relationship with God, and more particularly with man's broken and restored relationship to God, than it is with man's moral shortcomings and ethical ideals".

ii) *Application*

As already mentioned, the problem with regard to the application of the jubilee regulations is the result of a lack of consensus in the interpretation of the texts. Human beings have freedom of choice. We have the "responsibility", the ability to choose our response in every situation. Our present life situation is the result of our own thought patterns, attitudes and behaviour. There can be no change without responsibility. Before we can put the jubilee regulations into practice, we must ask a few questions: What is the cause of the present situation? Whose responsibility is our current situation?

Leon Klinicki (51) has given a ringing critique of, as well as advice to, those who want to implement the jubilee regulations:

The international debt, especially of the third-world countries, is the *consequence of banking as well as national irresponsibility*. Military juntas or leaders with little political wisdom accepted loans beyond any realistic possibility of return. These loans generally did not help the masses but rather benefited only individuals, military leadership or the new post-colonial civil administrations, who have learned quickly the *lure of corruption, both economic and political*.

I am concerned about the *use and abuse of biblical laws*, a dimension of theological contempt that might *seduce* religious leadership in *their fight for social justice*. ...The gift of prudence ... should help denounce economic injustice, but also educate people to be responsible in economic dealings (my italics).

The redistribution of wealth without responsibility will not bring equity. We live in an interactive system of relations, where we need one another. We must break the “victim-triangle” or victim metaphor, and take responsibility for the results of our actions.

This is a very readable book that focuses our attention on the jubilee regulations in general, but specifically on the pitfalls in the application of the regulations. The book brings to our attention specific situations in some countries worldwide. It is a very useful reference guide. The title faithfully reflects the contents of the book. The interpretation and application of the jubilee remain a challenge to theologians, sociologists, economists and ecumenicists. The jubilee is a utopia, but unless there is consensus in the interpretation of the texts, the application may be an impossibility.

