

**Daniel Carrol R, M (ed) 2000. Rethinking contexts, rereading texts: Contributions from the social sciences to biblical interpretation. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 299.**

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**Reviewer: Dr Johann Benkes**

The premise of this well-written, well-edited and highly informative book is that an interest in interdisciplinary approaches enables us to better understand the Bible and to make it relevant to our contemporary social world. This venture, to be more specific, reflects an interest in interfacing biblical studies and the social sciences. We know, to speak in general terms, that social-scientific criticism has as its twin goals 1) to explicate the complex socio-cultural realities described or reflected in a number of ways in the (biblical) text and 2) to explore the social dimensions of the interpretive process. Variety has always been a hallmark of this endeavour, as a wide range of theories and models, primarily from the disciplines of sociology, anthropology and in particular social philosophy or social critique, have been utilized with fruitful results in biblical research.

To enter the world of the social sciences and their use in biblical studies has as a necessary consequence an understanding and sensitivity of the context *described* or assumed by the text, the context in which that text is *read* and applied, and the context lying behind its *production*. The true value of this book is to be found in the ways that the contributors succeed in exploring and refining the avenues of research in this regard exactly. What becomes clear in this book, soon enough, is that social sciences approaches necessarily will draw upon and impact on other disciplines. For instance, it is simply impossible to speak of the contexts of the reception of the Bible and not interact with literary theory and philosophical hermeneutics. Making decisions about the *contemporary* viability of the text, be it positive or negative, moves one very quickly into issues of theology and religious and/or ecclesiastical traditions. Or, to put it differently: interdisciplinarity breeds yet greater interdisciplinarity. This book shows that this tendency can be a salutary development as different fields of interest interact with and enrich biblical studies, constituting the "network of knowledge" typical postmodern thinkers such as Lyotard and Foucault, and perhaps less typical postmodern thinkers like Adorno and Habermas, have agitated for over the past four decades.

The book consists of two parts. The first set of essays includes aspects of the journeys of the authors into the realm of the social sciences; each essay suggests, as well, fresh insights into how they might serve biblical research. The second set of essays contains three extensive case studies, or "applications" of the results introduced in the first part. It would serve the hermeneutical perspective of this book well to introduce you to the themes explored:

*Part I:*

John W Rogerson's *The potential of the negative: Approaching the Old Testament through the work of Adorno*

Mark G Brett's *Reading the Bible in the context of methodological pluralism: The undermining of ethnic exclusivism in Genesis*

Gerald O West's *A cautionary tale concerning the contribution of the social sciences to biblical interpretation*

*Part II:*

Jonathan E Dyck's *A map of ideology for Biblical critics and Ezra 2 in ideological critical perspective.*

M Daniel Carroll R's *Re-examining "popular religion": Issues of definition and sources and "For so you love to do." – probing popular religion in the book of Amos.*

Stanley E Porter's *Dialect and register in the Greek of the New Testament: Theory and dialect and register in the Greek of the New Testament: Application with reference to Mark's gospel.*

Each one of these essays is well worth the time and trouble of a close reading. Having been an Adorno scholar for the past nine years myself, I have to acknowledge my inclination towards Rogerson's excellent article on Adorno. Rogerson has an extremely comfortable and engaging style. He lets Adorno speak the notoriously complex "Adorno-tongue" (*skotinos*) without either setting him up or letting him down. I have to admit some sort of scholarly envy here: having not succeeded in it myself (yet!), I personally was not at all convinced that Rogerson would succeed in introducing Adorno to the Old Testament (or is it the other way around?) without giving in to the temptation of making Adorno a victim of his own negativity. But Rogerson honours Adorno's very peculiar idiosyncrasies, his profound sincerity and willingness to "think the unthinkable". And even if that were to be the only solid reason I had for recommending to you this marvellous book, I would do so without hesitation.