

Jerome F. D. Creach. *Violence in Scripture [Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church]*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013. 286 pages. \$24.89.

For anyone looking for exegetical help to confront baffling passages like the call for genocide in 1 Samuel 15, Jerome F. D. Creach readily lends his scholarly hand in *Violence in Scripture*. For example, Creach appeals to the rabbinic interpretations of Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888) to assert that a narrative calling for the annihilation of the Amalekites does not recount a literal event. Creach suggests instead that upon closer examination God’s fury against Amalek symbolizes a larger redemptive purpose within Deuteronomic history and indeed the entire canon itself—to portray faithfulness to God and “God’s work to establish order in creation” (92–93). The hyperbolic prose of 1 Samuel 15 justifies neither violence nor transgressive interpretations like the historical one from Cotton Mather, who characterized Native Americans as Amalek to be eradicated. As a story, 1 Samuel 15 sets “word” against “sword” (96). It expresses violence ironically—as figuration that stands within an overarching canonical message against violence. Indeed for Creach, violence presented in the Bible not only within 1 Samuel but also from Genesis such as the tale of the Flood to the Psalter, the Gospels, and the “Lake of Fire” from Revelation bears witness again and again to a God who judges graciously and who promises justice that will bring order out of chaos for all of creation.

Creach offers his monograph as a resource “for those who wish to read the Bible as Scripture and who seek ways to interpret the Bible’s violent passages as integral parts of the Bible’s authoritative word to the church” (3). Reading the Bible as Scripture for him entails empathic reading informed by two convictions. First, at its center, the Bible testifies to Jesus Christ. Creach addresses supersessionist concerns by qualifying that “Jesus presents for Christians an authoritative *interpretation* of the Old Testament, not a repudiation of it” (italics Creach, 4). Second, the Bible communicates at a deeper level a consistent message that violence opposes God and God’s will for the world (4–5).

Readers need not, however, share Creach’s theological commitments in order for his scholarship to help disentangle or embolden preaching, Bible study, classroom learning, and personal investigation that wrestles with making sense of violent scriptural passages. I suspect that an array of audiences will find provocative his claims that the authors of the Old and New Testaments are “colonial” people under the throws of empire and that degradation of women in Judges 19 emblemizes deterioration of Israelite society (8, 146).

Creach also carefully highlights the limits to his commentary – that he does not discuss sacrifice, atonement, and what he calls “the legal material of the Old Testament” (14–15). All three of those categories, however, seem crucial for the Christocentric anchoring of the Bible he espouses. Perhaps *Violence in Scripture* warrants a companion volume that establishes or explores a biblical Christology. Notably, he does point readers with further curiosity to additional resources that locate themselves at the limits of his work.

And as it is, Creach’s commentary is timely. The shocking savagery of the Islamic State, domestic “terrorists,” and the military actions of the United States presents particular challenges to preachers and homileticians daring to interpret violent texts toward hope in a violent world. Returning to the opening example, linking “[a]nd Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal” (1 Samuel 15:32) to Jesus establishing order in global mayhem today will require proclamation engaged with the expertise of Creach and then some.

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