

## Shorter Notices

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*This Strange and Sacred Scripture: Wrestling with the Old Testament and Its Oddities.* By Matthew Richard Schlimm. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015. Pp. xvi + 254. \$22.99.

For Christians, the Old Testament is a complicated friend that disrupts spiritual complacency. This is the metaphor Schlimm proposes for the difficult narratives of the OT. Just as a friend from a different culture challenges one's assumptions and widens one's perspectives, so the OT expands the horizons of anyone with the patience to learn its idiom. S. applies this metaphor especially to OT narratives of divine and human violence, sexual immorality, divine wrath, and patriarchy. In his accessible and thoughtful discussion of the moral power of narrative, S. argues that a reader who engages these vivid and troubling stories will encounter a broad array of perspectives from which to test moral outcomes (51–56). In other words, the strange narratives of the OT provide a safe stage on which alternate storylines can play themselves out. One should not take stories of divine wrath, for instance, as high theology, but rather as narrative explorations of what might happen if God's mercy were ever to run out (189). For the modern Christian, S. argues, the troubling narratives of the OT have enduring value more as parables than as histories or ethical models.

This approach to difficult OT narratives is at least as old as Origen (*Princ.* 2.4.4). S.'s book provides an accessible and updated treatment that would be useful for undergraduates or advanced secondary students. S.'s discussion of inerrancy especially might be helpful to students who are moving past a literal approach to the bible (198–208). S.'s pastoral approach occasionally subverts his own intent, however, when it ignores historical context. His treatment of *herem*, for instance (79–81), lacks any indication that it was also a non-Israelite practice (*Mesha Stela* 16–17). Getting to know a friend from another culture requires an appreciation of that person's past, and the OT is no different. Such criticism aside, this is a useful text for the classroom and personal reference.

Michael R. Simone, SJ  
Boston College School of Theology and Ministry