

ANTHONY CHINEDU OSUJI, *Where Is the Truth? Narrative Exegesis and the Question of True and False Prophecy in Jer 26–29 (MT)* (BETL 214; Leuven/Paris/Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2010). Pp. xx + 465. Paper €76.

This volume is Osuji's doctoral thesis at the Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve (2006), supervised by André Wénin, who also wrote the preface. O. is a priest from Nigeria who has chosen an important topic for his research. The discernment of true and false prophets is a key theme in the Bible (e.g., 1 Kings 22), and the selection of Jeremiah 26–29 for its treatment is particularly appropriate, as the book of Jeremiah in general contains the most material, and these chapters are replete with it.

The methodological orientation is laid out in part 1. On the basis of a history of research, O. opts for a shift that he describes more fully as a literary approach, giving emphasis to narrative analysis and theology, based on the final form of the text. To apply this type of analysis to a prophetic book is warranted in the case of Jeremiah by the fact that there are many narrations, that is, prose passages recounting events.

This program is worked out in part 2, a "narrative exegesis" of Jeremiah 26–29. According to O., chap. 26 enunciates the theme of prophetic authenticity; chap. 27 brings in a sign-act with the "yoke of Yhwh"; the next chapter dramatizes the conflict between verity and falsity; and chap. 29 deals with this tension "by correspondence." Finally, O.

treats literary-thematic coherence and characterization, for example, in the usage of words for speaking, hearing, and sending, or the motif of life and death.

In part 3, O. deals with “theology and context,” but the first two chapters also explore other areas, for example, the status of prophetic books and the connection between the Book of Jeremiah and prophetic traditions. In chap. 3, he takes up in more detail the relevant themes of Jeremiah 26–29, discussing the problem of criteria for prophetic authenticity (starting with p. 373, O. mentions six criteria, the last one from the NT) and the theological implications of the texts.

In general, O. displays sound judgment. He is cautious with regard to a Deuteronomistic redaction of Jeremiah; picks up the excellent study of Louis Stulman (*Order amid Chaos: Jeremiah as Symbolic Tapestry* [Biblical Seminar 57; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998]) for his outline of the book of Jeremiah; chooses the reading of the MT several times, against his own inclination for the LXX, for example, in 27:3 “to send them,” or “prophet” in 28:1 MT, as against “false prophet” in 35:1 LXX; and pays attention to intertextual relationships, as in the case of Jer 29:5 with Isa 65:21. He also references a broad range of literature, including hermeneutical studies, engages with these other authors in a fair discussion, and explains clearly his ideas and considerations—though these discussions sometimes becomes repetitive, overly long, or too general.

While the overall impression is of a learned, diligent study, a closer view reveals quite a number of faults and weaknesses. To start with the bibliography: O. concentrates his history of research on the commentaries of the “broadliners” (W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1 and 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986, 1989]; Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* [OTL; London: SCM, 1986]; and W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* [2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1986, 1996]), whose first volumes date from 1986, a quarter of a century ago (the second volumes of the first and last date from 1989 and 1996 respectively), ignoring other relevant and more recent commentaries from Terence E. Fretheim (*Jeremiah* [Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002]), Jack R. Lundbom (*Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [3 vols.; AB 21A, 21B, 21C; New York: Doubleday, 1999–2004]), and Louis Stulman (*Jeremiah* [Abingdon OT Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon, 2005]), to mention only a few of those published in English. Taking these and others into consideration, O.’s approach is not new, and there is no need for a shift in methodology, as they too, at least partially, follow a synchronic approach and share his aims. For chap. 27, O. does not make use of the classical study of Kelvin G. Friebel (*Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts: Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication* [JSOTSup 283; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999]) on sign-acts, although it is cited in the bibliography; for chap. 29, he is apparently unaware of the thorough treatment by R. Willi (*Les pensées de bonheur de Dieu pour son peuple selon Jr 29* [Lugano: Facoltà di Teologia, 2005]).

With regard to the topic of true versus false prophecy in Jeremiah, O. should also have paid more attention to other texts, especially Jer 14:13–18 and 23:23–40, which prepare for chaps. 26–29 thematically and have close connections with them. Then he would not have had to resort to Matt 7:15–20 for his sixth criterion for discerning true prophecy, because Jer 23:22, 27, 32 are in a similar vein, in addition to other passages in Jeremiah that speak of “fruits.”

The key question of how Jeremiah, a prophet of doom for the most part up to chap. 28, changes his message (chaps. 29–33) and becomes a prophet announcing “future and hope” (29:11), is also not really addressed. Why does Jeremiah’s announcement of even greater salvation than Hananiah’s prophecy of the previous chapter not fall under the same verdict of being false prophecy?

A number of details, too, seem to be imprecise. Just to mention three examples: Jer 26:13 is no “call to repentance” (p. 141) but rather a call to improve one’s deeds; Jer 26:16 does not confirm Jeremiah’s “authenticity as a true prophet” (p. 144); the expression of Jer 27:5, alluding to the exodus, is not “used earlier in this sense in Jer 21,5” (p. 178) but with inverted adjectives. All in all, this study shows a serious effort to enter into the field of Jeremiah research and a good hermeneutic position, yet its starting point is outdated and its contribution therefore limited.

*Georg Fischer, S.J., University of Innsbruck, A-6020 Innsbruck, Austria*