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BOOK REVIEW

Catherine L. McDowell. *The “Image of God” in the Garden of Eden: The Creation of Humankind in Genesis 2:5—3:24 in Light of *mīs pī pīt pī* and *wpt-r* Rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt*. Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures 15. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015. ix + 246. Hbk. ISBN 978-1-57506-348-5. \$47.50.

Catherine McDowell’s recently published dissertation offers a fresh perspective for the meaning of *šelem* in Genesis. Her interpretation provides a foundation from which to explain the use of kinship language in expressing a relationship between God and Israel/humanity throughout the Christian canon. McDowell’s interpretation is based on her extensive research in ancient Near Eastern cultic ritual and descriptors used for royalty. Most significant is her appeal to the Assyrian Tukulti-Ninurta Epic where a king is compared to a divine statue and is also described as a son of a god. She sees in this example a double entendre of the cognate of *šelem* in Genesis; the king is an *offspring* of the god, and therefore, the god’s *fleshly divine statue*.

McDowell’s study provides a significant advancement in scholarship in Genesis through her detailed analysis of Egyptian and Mesopotamian *mīs pī pīt pī* and *wpt-r* cultic rituals. The Egyptian opening and washing of the mouth ritual “was performed on animate and inanimate things . . . to purify it, making it fit for cultic use” (16–17). The significance of these rituals for McDowell is that they provide a *Sitz im Leben* for what she calls the creation and installation of humanity in the garden (Gen 2:5—3:24). The parallels she attempts to make in this pericope are detailedly and carefully laid out. But one problem with her reliance on the comparison is how the Egyptian

and Mesopotamian cultic ritual parallels cohere in all of the contexts where *šelem* appears in Genesis (e.g., 5:3; 9:6). Nonetheless, her main interest is to show semantic or thematic cohesion between Gen 1:1—2:3 and 2:5—3:24. She does convincingly show cohesion between Gen 1:1—2:3 and 2:5—3:24, but in her interpretation of Gen 5:3 and 9:6, the parallel with the cultic ritual does not appear, thus making her argument for a double entendre in those passages, especially Gen 5:3, unpersuasive.

As stated above, McDowell's understanding of *šelem* as a double entendre likely comes from the Assyrian Tukulti-Ninurta Epic. Its description of the birth of the king illustrates for McDowell a connection between the king's kinship relationship with the gods and the description of his body that is likened to a divine statue. This section of McDowell's book provides the most illumination, or at least, the best starting point, for assessing her work. Its importance warrants a full quotation from McDowell.

The divine-royal relationship in Assyria was expressed anew in terms of statue manufacture and divine birth. In the hymn from the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic, the king's body is likened to "the flesh of the gods," a phrase known from Erra Myth, which refers to the precious *mesu*-wood from which divine statues were made. He has "successfully engendered through/cast into the channel of the womb of the gods" and, as a result, "He alone is the eternal image of Enlil," whom "Enlil raised . . . like a natural father, after his first-born son . . . [Therefore,] *šalmu* may have been intended as a *double entendre*, referring not only to the king as a "living image" of the god but also, on some level, as Enlil's royal son (134–35).

The melding of the concepts of sonship and idols is reinforced, McDowell argues, in a ninth-century BCE statue of an Assyrian provincial official found in Tell Fakhariyeh. On this statue is a bilingual inscription in Aramaic and Akkadian, which refers to the statue using cognates of *šelem* and *dāmūt*. Drawing mainly from parallels like these and from her literary exegesis of *šelem* in Genesis, McDowell is persuaded that three different references are key to uncover the meaning of *šelem* in Genesis: Offspring, Idols/Statues, and Royalty. McDowell summarizes

her analysis with the following semantically loaded definition,

Şelem and *dāmūt* in Gen 1:26–27 define human relationship in terms of kin, king, and cult. To be created [in the image of God] suggests that humankind is, on some level, in a filial relationship with God, that humans are his appointed rulers over creation, and, in contrast to an inert divine statue . . . they are living “images” of Elohim (175).

These three functions of being created in the *image of God* are also illustrated, McDowell argues, in the so-called second creation story of Gen 2:5—3:24. In this pericope, McDowell draws out the kinship theme through the depiction of Adam entering into familial relationship with Eve (e.g., bone and flesh). The royal or ruling theme is picked up in the depiction of Adam as a royal gardener or farmer-cultivator, an established function of Mesopotamian royalty. The cultic function is illustrated in the description of Adam being *installed* in the garden, which parallels descriptions of idols or divine statues being similarly installed in sacred garden locations. These and many other examples are detailed to illustrate that the explicit mentioning of Adam and Eve being created in the *image of God* in Gen 1:1—2:3 is thematically developed in the following pericope of Gen 2:5—3:24.

There is one issue with the order of McDowell’s argument, however. It would have been clearer if she had first appealed to the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic as the hermeneutical lens to interpret the creation of humanity in the *image of God* in Genesis. In the epic, the king is called the royal son of the god, Enlil. In the same co-text, the flesh of the king is likened to a special *mesu*-wood, which is the material used in the creation of divine statues. The comparison of the king’s flesh to the *mesu*-wood provides McDowell with her double-entendre: the king is metaphorically both the son and the divine statue of the god Enlil.

But instead of beginning with this hermeneutical lens, McDowell begins by making the semantic connection of *şelem* to kinship through the biblical theological work of Meredith G. Kline. Since Kline’s utilizes a canonical hermeneutics, part of his argument asserts that, as Christ was called the “Son of God”

and the Father's perfect "image," *šelem* must refer to a kinship relationship between God and humanity. He also alludes to the genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3:38, where Adam is listed as the son of God, as further support that Adam, made in God's *šelem*, is also his son. While there is nothing logically incoherent with Kline's argument (he says much more than what I have pointed out), using Kline to start does cause some confusion in McDowell's argument. It may have been better to lead with the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic parallel, and from there illustrate its cohesion with Kline's biblical theological argument.

Kline's work is not the only biblical theological study that highlights the emphasis in Genesis on progeny. Mark J. Boda draws out the prominence of this theme beginning with the repeated *tôlādôt* structure:

This superscription . . . functions as a regular reminder of one if not *the major theme in the book*. Genesis is about God's fulfillment of the first command given to humanity in Gen 1:28 (be fruitful and multiply; see also 9:7) . . . This emphasizes the enduring fulfillment of the promise of people, because the focus is on the *offspring* (*A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament* [Eisenbrauns, 2009], 17).

Kline's and Boda's connection of Gen 1:26, 27 with Gen 9:6, 7 reinforces McDowell's argument that Yahweh functions as a kinsman-redeemer in Gen 9 where he requires the blood of any creature who takes the life of one of his progeny. The use of Kline or Boda can be useful to her argument, but Kline's work should have come after drawing out a kinship meaning of *šelem* through her comparative approach.

As contextually illuminative as McDowell's work is in highlighting the ancient Near Eastern milieu related to divine statue creation and animation, probably the most problematic issue with McDowell's methodology is her use of a comparative hermeneutic for what is essentially a word study. She argues early on in the book that the Bible cannot be fully understood without trying to uncover the context from which the biblical text was produced. The dominant use of a comparative approach in studies of Gen 1–11 illustrate her point. Although comparative

approaches are useful, it is not apparent how they can provide the best starting point for a lexical study. What would seem to be a good starting point would be to use a linguistic framework to draw out the meaning of the word in its co-text. A survey of theories on lexical semantics would prove useful for the scholar in differentiating meaning at the word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, and discourse levels. It would also be helpful in differentiating between the limited meaning that a word has and what the word is referring to in its co-text. Instead, what is common in comparative approaches is an assumption that the word *šelem* has referential meaning by itself. McDowell has followed this false assumption of lexical meaning when she states that *šelem* has a broad semantic range. By assuming that the word itself contains a broad semantic range, McDowell falls victim to an exegetical fallacy D. A. Carson labels as an “unwarranted adoption of an expanded semantic field,” which states,

The fallacy in this instance lies in the supposition that the meaning of a word in a specific context is much broader than the context itself allows and may bring with it the word’s entire semantic range (*Exegetical Fallacies* [2nd ed; Baker Academic, 1996], 60).

That McDowell’s final interpretation is shaped by three references illustrates the point. Interestingly, her literary analysis alone of *šelem* in Gen 1:26–27, 5:3, and 9:6 lead her to conclude that the word primarily refers to “offspring” or “progeny.” Coincidentally, using a linguistic framework in my own dissertation actually supports this view (Brian D. Lima, “צֶלֶם and דְמוּת: Their Kinship Meaning in Genesis,” (PhD diss., McMaster Divinity College, 2015). However, McDowell’s approach overloads the co-text of Genesis, when she insists that idols/divine statues and ancient Near Eastern kings must semantically contribute to the use of *šelem* in Genesis. Comparisons are still important, but they are better made once a reference of *šelem* in Genesis is secured through linguistic analysis. That is to say that McDowell may have shown that comparisons between offspring, royalty, and idols/divine statues are fruitful, but the claim that the word *šelem* in Genesis must

somehow refer to all three references is less convincing.

McDowell does provide a number of helpful insights in Genesis outside of her analysis of *šelem*. Among the many issues related to the book, she convincingly argues that the *tôlâḏôṭ* at Gen 2:4 functions both as a summary of the previous pericope (i.e., Gen 1:1—2:3) and as a heading for the second (Gen 2:5—3:24). She does this in part to illustrate cohesion between the two pericopes, which provides some foundation for her argument that, even though *šelem* does not appear in the second pericope, functional themes related to the *šelem* do. She also argues for a three-part problem-solution-problem thematic progression in Gen 2:5—3:24. This and a *tôlâḏôṭ* step pattern illustrate for McDowell a progression in Genesis from one offspring to the next.

In all, McDowell's book makes a significant contribution to studies in Genesis. Her connection of *šelem* to kinship uncovers the foundation from which all future relationship between God and his people is built. Her literary observations stemming from Kline's biblical-theological work provides an area of research that deserves new and extended engagement. Still, McDowell's comparative contributions need further clarification through the use of a more rigorous linguistic analysis of *šelem* within the book of Genesis.

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