

Book Reviews

Jacob Onyembe Wenyi, *Piles of Slain, Heaps of Corpses: Reading Prophetic Poetry and Violence in African Context*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2021. ISBN: 978-1-7252-6831-9. Paperback. Includes Table of Contents, Scripture Index, and Subject Index. 191p.

Jacob Wenyi's book is a hermeneutical and exegetical confrontation with violence. Its purpose is to "confront violence" in the biblical text of Nahum and in the author's context of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), towards the goal of establishing a hermeneutic of reconciliation for post-conflict communities. The book embarks on a four-tiered analysis: (1) literary – analyses of the poetry of Nahum; (2) historical – analyses of ancient (8th century) Assyrian reliefs and iconographic materials; (3), ethnographic – engagement with post-conflict DRC; and (4), theological – the portrait of the divine and human communities in the midst of chaos and violence. Classifying Nahum as lyric poetry that resonates with ancient Israel's Oracles against the Nations and ancient Near Eastern city laments, Wenyi argues that the book of Nahum is not a historical account of the fall of Nineveh but a work of collective memory associated with Judean survivors of Assyrian conquests. Thus, in spite of its violent rhetoric and in fact through its violent rhetoric, the book can be a resource for examining collective memory about a traumatic event, and embarking on a journey towards reconciliation. Wenyi argues that what matters most for Nahum's audience is "not that YHWH is destroying another nation, but that he is *present* amid the conditions that vividly bring back their memories of war and affliction and that he is capable of restoring them.... The artist uses verbal art to imagine a well-ordered world, even as he depicts war" (109, *emphases original*).

This theoretical framing is evident in the structure of *Piles of Slain*. The book moves from hermeneutics (chapters 1-2); to exegesis (chapters 3-4) addressing genre in, and historical context of, Nahum; interpreting Nahum's portraits of the divine and human communities in the midst of violence (chapters 5-6); and then back to hermeneutics (chapter 7).

Chapter 1 draws upon a tri-polar approach to African biblical hermeneutics, developed by Gerald West and Jonathan Draper. Wenyi makes his contribution by arguing that in a post-conflict context, a hermeneutic of *reconciliation* needs to be "at the center of biblical interpretation" (4, *emphasis original*). This hermeneutic of reconciliation is theorized and embodied around ethnographic work in and with a traumatized community. Chapter 2 engages theory of collective memory