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## Rise up, O judge: a study of justice in the biblical world

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Thus, readers taste directly how rabbis wrestled with the text; how Justin Martyr used his Bible (chiefly what Christians later called the “Old Testament”) to “prove” to Gentile Romans that Jesus was the Christ; how varying moods of interpretation were utilized, like typology, allegory, etc.; how medieval theologians debated different modes; how the Reformation and humanism challenged older ways; and finally, how the modern debate emerged and evolved. In all of this, we the readers see first hand that there has never been one historical way that the churches have interpreted their sacred texts.

Appropriately author William Yarchin summarizes his efforts: “In the postmodern world, no single approach to biblical interpretation can claim exclusive validity or relevance.... The world of Biblical interpretation has ever been rich and manifold, and so it continues into the twenty-first century.” (xxix-xxx) I am convinced that this perspective and the wealth of source material he provides can serve all churches by providing a dose of humility to challenge our personal certitudes and thus open the way to fruitful dialogue among the now polarized.

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### **Rise Up, O Judge: A Study of Justice in the Biblical World**

Enrique Nardoni (trans.by Seán Charles Martin)

Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004

343 pages, \$34.29 Hardcover

*Rise Up, O Judge: A Study of Justice in the Biblical World* provides a comprehensive examination around the theme of justice in the Jewish and Christian canonical documents, while at the same time giving attention to the wider social context of the “Biblical World.” Indeed Nardoni’s chapters on the much ignored ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian notions of justice stand out as among the strongest in his book. Also the author deserves much applause for the comprehensive character of the study. Not only does he cover the vast wealth of Biblical writings, but also he provides a solid chronological framework for the reader. Further, he summarizes fairly accurately

the scholarly debates surrounding the faith communities that developed their specific and concrete justice values throughout the history of ancient Israel and the communities emerging from the Jesus Movement.

At the same time I find his book wanting in several respects. Let me add at the outset that I cannot be entirely sure where my own perspective might skew my critique in an unfair direction. Nonetheless, a review constitutes healthy dialogue and serves, in this case, to promote what Nardoni has placed on the table. At the same time, I am convinced that, beyond my own positions, the following points remain worthy of continuing debate around Nardoni's articulations. At times I feel the author caricatures, mildly to be sure, some of his dialogue partners. A case in point is the trail-blazing Norman Gottwald of *Tribes of Yahweh* fame. Yes, Gottwald uses a brand of materialistic social analysis once employed by Karl Marx and his followers, but at the same time, Gottwald nuances this analysis precisely because he is a member of the Christian faith community. It seems that Nardoni resents the fact that Gottwald uses this particular form of analysis as if it does not belong to the study of ancient canonical texts. At the same time, I would criticize Nardoni's frequent fallback to his own personal Christian piety to the point of engaging in updated commentary and pious homily. At one level, this is fine, but as a reader I felt jerked back and forth between these pious utterings and what too often passes as Middle-of-the-road objective scholarship. In this latter category I find that Nardoni is far too trustful of the historicity of New Testament materials. In the pre-Pauline material (especially the ministry of Jesus) he seems to ignore the insights of form criticism and the recent work of the Jesus Seminar. Yes, he mentions them in passing, but I find his dismissals too facile. One other glaring example of ignoring the values of modern scholarship is his linking of the Book of Revelation to the Johannine literature, a connection virtually denied by the vast majority of contemporary scholars. Finally, I find him so bound to his denominational moorings that I suspect his critical skills are blunted. However, he does stretch his tradition toward more "justice" on women's issues.

Having noted my own frustrations with the book I recommend it still – for its comprehensive character, for the author's obvious familiarity with this vast amount of material and for his clear and

profound commitment to linking the texts with the Jewish, Christian and human project of liberation.

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### **Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark**

Whitney Shiner

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2003

214 pages, \$23.00 Softcover

In recent years much has been written about the oral culture in which the New Testament documents were written. Due to very low literacy rates, all first century texts were primarily known through public performance rather than through individual reading. Several scholars have concluded that the Gospel of Mark was either written to be performed, or was written down after a period of development as oral performance. Within the relatively new discipline of performance criticism, Shiner's book adds significantly to the understanding of what performances were like in the first century, and more specifically, what the experience of an audience would have been in hearing a performance of the Gospel of Mark.

Shiner's study of oral performance in the first century leads him to conclude that oral performance was much more highly valued than it is in our culture, that oral performance was done dramatically, that recitation emphasized emotional impact, and that both the performer and the audience were lively and emotionally involved in the performance. He states, "We are not hearing the Gospel through first-century eyes if we do not hear the emotions." (5)

Two general chapters describing oral performance in the ancient world are followed by seven chapters which each discuss a particular aspect of performance: emotion, delivery, memorization, gesture and movement, audience response, audience inclusion, and applause lines. Throughout, he looks for evidence of these within Mark. Yes, applause lines in the Gospel of Mark! Shiner looks at what first-century audiences applauded: the content of a speech, well-crafted verbal style, and impressive vocal delivery. Then he looks at Mark and