

Editorial: Tribute to Sakkie Spangenberg*

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This issue of *Old Testament Essays* is dedicated to Sakkie Spangenberg, our colleague at the University of South Africa and former chairperson of the Old Testament Society of South Africa. Sakkie retired at the end of 2016 after a career spanning 37 years. He started his career with Qohelet and his last article in 2016 was on Qohelet. In between, he looked into hermeneutics, narratives, Daniel, Job, Psalms, Jesus of Nazareth, new religious awakenings, and lately, ecology. The impact of his work was especially felt within the Afrikaans Reformed tradition with his criticism of concepts and traditions that he thought failed to work any longer. He paid a price for that, but he moved on in focusing on the postapartheid context with its various challenges.

Hans Ausloos says the following about Sakkie in this issue: "Notwithstanding the fact of even being considered as 'heretic' by some, he spent decades of his life in analysing numerous biblical passages in order to look for hermeneutical keys to interpret these age-old texts within current times, averse from any dogmatic preconceptions." One such text Ausloos intends to interpret, is Judges 3:12-30, the story of Ehud. The story is a beautifully composed literary creation but highly problematic from a modern theological point of view. Its extraordinary literary character stands in contrast to its gruesome content. Ausloos develops these two lines of thought in his essay dedicated to Sakkie.

Phil Botha, who expresses his high regard for Sakkie, discusses Ps 39 and its role in the development of the doctrine of retribution in the Hebrew Bible. Ps 39 provides a critique of the perspective on retribution expressed in other wisdom psalms (for example 34 and 37). Thus, its criticism is very similar to Ps 73 as well as to notions expressed in the Book of Job. Spangenberg's last article for 2016 as referred to above, is especially pertinent to this article and Botha engages with Spangenberg and his views on wisdom texts and on a number of psalms in particular.

Sakkie is not a stranger to the topic of the LXX. In 2006 he looked at the text of Daniel in the LXX. In his tribute to Sakkie, Johann Cook addresses the question of whether it is appropriate and even possible to formulate "the/a theology of the Septuagint." He argues that the time has arrived for hermeneutical research in Septuagintal studies. What is more, it is possible and even necessary to formulate a theology, or more correctly, theologies of the individual Septuagintal books as one of these hermeneutical issues.

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Helen Efthimiadis-Keith finds Sakkie’s articles on Gen 1-3 particularly intriguing because of her own wrestling with these texts and their implications for the role and dignity of women and men. In her tribute, she provides a Jungian psychoanalytic interpretation of Gen 1:1-2:4a, looking primarily on the memory of original wholeness and the conscious differentiation that are reflected in this text. She concludes that the psyche producing this text would have likely been one that had experienced separation, war, disintegration, and a loss of connection to the Self / its source—a situation that could well be reflected in a post-exilic appraisal of the exile.

Annette Evans explores the rhetorical and ideological orientation that the author of *Pseudo-Ezekiel* employed in his rewriting in order to meet the needs of his new cultural context. She links up with Sakkie’s idea that historical-critical studies of ancient texts should also be concerned with context, culture and worldview. She finds a parallel between *Pseudo-Ezekiel* and Sakkie’s work: “Here in *Pseudo-Ezekiel*, where the author maintains a conservative stance whilst introducing a new idea, so in his work Spangenberg calls on the interpretative community and its authority to open up the possibility of affirming the creative continuity of our various, diverse traditions to discover the shared epistemic resources for problem solving in the future.”

Alluding to Sakkie’s view on context, culture and worldview with regard to the ancient biblical text, Jaco Gericke demonstrates the pros and cons of reading the story of Moses with an anachronistic philosophical-theological meta-language of contemporary analytical philosophy. In contrast to mainstream discussions of Moses’ life in which he is portrayed as a stammering, reluctant leader, in terms of what Gericke calls “contemporary concerns, concepts and categories constructed in theorising about the meaning of life,” another picture of Moses emerges, which Gericke acknowledges as “anachronistic, even if not always necessarily distortive.”

Knut Holter acknowledges Sakkie’s focus on the ethical dimensions of doing biblical and theological studies. In his tribute he reflects on Gen 12:6 and its reference to the Canaanites by adding an *ethical* perspective to the existing traditional *historical* and *literary* perspectives. He enquires into the ethics of interpretation with a view on colonial comprehension of the biblical text which constitutes a rather static understanding of the relationship between the Canaanites, the Israelites, and the land. The multi-voiced discourse of the biblical texts are not recognised, and subsequently, the ethical potential of seeing the Canaanites as “still” being in the land was not recognised either.

Louis Jonker provides a description of the socio-religious development to personalise evil into a satan figure alongside God with the help of 1 Chr 21 and what Christian theology makes of the concepts of evil and satan today. Jonker salutes Sakkie’s courage to put the topic of evil and its personification in figures such as the devil and Satan on the table. With Spangenberg Jonker argues that

belief in the devil cannot be classified as a pure biblical belief. Thus he sees in 1 Chr 21 the only instance in the HB where one may already vaguely observe the personalisation of evil.

Jurie le Roux picks up on Sakkie's idea of the elusiveness of meaning that haunts OT scholars and for which Sakkie paid a costly price in bearing the brunt of one-sidedness and fundamentalism. Le Roux not only highlights the impossibility of fully grasping the meaning of the OT but he also shows how this loss can be approached by utilising the two viewpoints of two African born scholars, Augustine and Jacques Derrida, the one suggesting that studying the text can be a joyful enterprise and the other advising us to be open to future possibilities.

Madipoane Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele) links up with Sakkie's earlier work with regard to the nature of Biblical Studies as a specific discipline and considers the current shaky position of (traditional) Biblical Studies at institutions of higher learning. To her, its future appears to be gloomy, a view she shares with Sakkie. Masenya argues for the inclusion of Multi-, Inter-, and Transdisciplinarity (MIT) in Biblical studies, in order to integrate it into the communities biblical scholars serve.

In his tribute, Ndikho Mtshiselwa utilises the African worldview embedded in the *Inqolobane Yesizwe* (a collection of Zulu wise sayings, proverbs, traditions and histories) to interpret the text of Jeremiah. He alludes to the work done by Sakkie Spangenberg with regard to new paradigms of reading ancient texts as well as his view on Ubuntu. In light of this collection, Mtshiselwa concludes that the themes of forgiveness and restoration in Jer 31:31-34 which refute the prophecy of doom in the book of Deuteronomy and in the Dtr texts in Jeremiah are rather significant.

Gerrie Snyman responds in his essay to a question Sakkie Spangenberg asked him at the 2015 meeting of the OTSSA with regard to the use of the OT in the current South African discourse. It pertained to the use of an OT text in a context that is historically and culturally removed from the story: why is the figure of Cain used to illustrate perpetrator discourse in postapartheid society? Snyman thinks there are good reasons that warrant him to follow the advice fostered in the story of Cain. Just like Cain helps within the German context to account for complicity with the Holocaust, three generations after the fact, Cain helps him with the embarrassment he encounters in coming to terms with the legacy of apartheid. Cain's value to Snyman is the process he went through, from fragility to vulnerability, the latter excellently portrayed in Fernand Cormon's painting, *Cain*.

Sakkie's 1994 article on paradigm changes in the discipline of Biblical Studies had a huge influence on Hans van Deventer. Van Deventer says this was one of the first articles he read in an attempt to gain some insight in what more seasoned scholars in the field of OT studies in South Africa were doing at that moment. Van Deventer's tribute to Sakkie links up with the latter's studies on

Daniel in utilising the concept of liminality investigate the interpretive power as well as the hermeneutical reach of the concept in the book of Daniel.

Willie van Heerden, celebrating 30 years of collegiality and friendship with Sakkie, latches on two topics that are part of Sakkie's career: his views on Jonah and his interest in ecological theology. In reading the Jonah narrative, Van Heerden arrives at the following question: "How do our multi-storied loyalties, as well as the major revolutions that have punctuated the story of humankind, impact on the way we speak about and relate to our environments?"

In his essay, Pieter Venter proposes that the literal as well as metaphorical use of poverty in the book of Proverbs was followed by a more literal use in Ben Sirach and a more metaphorical application in 4QInstructions. He concludes that Proverbs, Sirach and 4QInstruction have a family resemblance internally as well as externally. They show a dynamic continuity as well as a discontinuity in wisdom thinking. Each gave its own nuances to the concept of poverty, a concept and area of study Venter acknowledges Sakkie worked on in the 1990's and which they share.

Eco-theology is an area a colleague, Hennie Viviers, shares with Sakkie. Indeed, Hennie honours Sakkie for the fact that he introduced him to literature exploring eco-theology, an interest he maintained ever since. In his essay, Viviers utilises the Biophilia Hypothesis in his reading of the book of Job, focusing on the worth of wild animals in the divine speeches. Viviers demonstrates how the Biophilia Hypothesis highlights the innate bond between the human being and nature. He concludes that the Joban author acknowledges this bond (physically, emotionally and morally) as he takes Job and the reader on this vast and bio-diverse creational tour.

Gerald West acknowledges Sakkie as a scholar who traverses not only the boundary between the academy and the community, but also the boundary between the testaments. In his reappraisal of the work of South African Black theologian, Itumeleng Mosala, West argues for the need to connect with struggles that were being waged in very ancient communities. However, such recognition is only possible once the reader recognises the Bible as a site of struggle within which readers attempt to access with the help of redactional criticism, ideologically co-opted voices in the midst of their own distinctive sectoral struggles.

It is indeed a privilege and joy to dedicate this issue of *Old Testament Essays* to Prof I. J. J. Spangenberg, our much-appreciated colleague and scholar of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible.

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