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LAATO, A., J.C. de MOOR (eds.) – Theodicy in the world of the Bible. Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden, 2003. (24,4 cm, LIV, 830). ISBN 90-04-13275-9. € 119,-; \$ 142,-.

The best of this impressive collection of high standard essays on this interesting subject can be found at the beginning and at the end: the very good introduction of almost fifty pages and the extensive indices of about the same length. In the first chapter the editors did not restrict themselves to a short introduction to the problem of the theodicy with a short summary of the way it is dealt with in the subsequent contributions. They offer instead an elaborate discussion of the problems one encounters in the study of the history of religions when trying to get a coherent view on this issue. In this way they are able to give a convincing answer to questions the reader could have at the outset about using the modern word 'theodicy' in describing ancient views and about the relation between the different religions and cultures which have been put here together. They even extend their discussion to the Islam with its own well known ideas (although some variants can be discerned here as well) about the direct relation between god and human suffering. For their arguments the editors can refer to the following expositions, but the different authors of these expositions do not always follow the same lead. They do not always use the same definition of theodicy (especially when it comes to the role of god or the gods) and they are not all descriptive in their approach, as is admitted in the introduction which refers to some articles with an ideological and with an existential approach. To this can be added that the different essays are not built up in the same way. Some give lengthy general information about the sources used, with many references to secondary literature, in others the reader is confronted directly with a presentation of the many literary details. Within this framework it can be remarked that many readers would have been helped when they had received more information about the authors and their expertise, because in a number of cases this would have explained the peculiar approach of the topic by the author at hand. From all this one can infer that the editors were not very strict in imposing a clear cut format on the authors. This led to a number of superfluous repetitions (for instance, about Leibniz and his coining of the word theodicy). It can also be regarded as a wise decision of the editors leaving room for different approaches to the divergent material. This multiplicity also strikingly

underscores the fact that the issue of theodicy in the different cultures cannot be easily grasped.

The general section contains next to the introduction a contribution by M. Sarot (1-26) in which he elucidates the philosophical background of the word theodicy and the development of the concepts related to it. His thorough treatment of the subject makes all remarks in the others essays about the definition of the word look superficial.

The section on the Ancient Near East starts with A. Loprieno (27-56) giving a clear survey, both thematic and chronological, of the different approaches of the problem in the text of ancient Egypt. K. van der Toorn (57-89) establishes that in only few Akkadian texts theodicy is an issue. This leaves room for an elaborate discussion of the relevant texts: the Babylonian Theodicy, *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, and the Dialogue of Pessimism. With regard to the Hittite texts H.A. Hoffner (90-107) has to work with even less material which is also restricted to royal texts. There appears to be only indirect evidence for people having problems with the role of the gods in situations of human suffering. J.C. de Moor (108-150) offers a insightful general introduction to the study of the literature of ancient Ugarit, but the discussion of theodicy is restricted to a description of the growing scepticism of one man, the author of a number of religious texts. Whereas in most contributions of this volume only give translations of the texts discussed, De Moor also gives a transcription of the original texts.

In the section on the Hebrew Bible most space is reserved for the poetic texts and especially the wisdom texts. Following the canonical order of the Bible the section opens with an essay on the Pentateuch. C. Houtman (151-182) rightly warns for the danger of mixing modern moral values with ancient conceptions of divine influence on the things happening in life. We have to accept that we may feel uncomfortable with some actions ascribed to the god of Israel. He pays special attention to the story of YHWH making Pharaoh obstinate and to the different versions of the Ten Commandments. A. Laato (183-235) repeats not only much of the introduction but also of his own monograph on the important place of Josiah within the Deuteronomistic History and its formation, which is admittedly very relevant in this connection, because the untimely death of this pious king clearly calls forth the problem of the theodicy. After a general introduction to prophecy in ancient Israel J. Crenshaw (236-255) describes the differences and sometimes even contradictions in the way the prophets explain the actions of YHWH. Just as in his dissertation F. Lindström (256-303) comes with a detailed formhistorical analysis of the Psalms, on the basis of which he tries to

demonstrate that according to these texts suffering is not to be explained as punishment following sin. In his discussion of the book of Job (304-333) K.-J. Illman (who deceased before the publication of the book) pays much attention to the relation of the prose and poetic part of the book. He concludes that the book in its final form is deliberately ambivalent with regard to the theodicy. In her first contribution to this volume (334-350) M.C.A. Korpel tries to demonstrate that the book of Ruth is one coherent unity and should be read against the background of the Judaeans returning from exile and was meant as a protest against measures taking against strangers. More than simply as a vindication of YHWH it should be explained as an exhortation to the post-exilic community. In her second contribution (351-374) she offers an interesting theory about the Hebrew story (with different accents in the Greek version) of Ruth as an ingenious theodicy without YHWH being mentioned. The message would be that it is not a viable option to abandon faith because you do not believe in a just god anymore. According to the editors this comes close to modern secular thinking about theodicy (XLI). However, they appear to be not completely convinced by Korpel. As could be expected from his previous thorough philological studies on the book of Qohelet, A. Schoors (375-409) analyses in the first place the way the writer of this book speaks of his god. He concludes that Qohelet gives no explanation of God's actions. God's work remains mysterious. According to J. Renkema (410-428) also the book of Lamentations does not contain any form of theodicy. It should be remarked, however, that this primarily seems to be a matter of definition with Renkema taking it in the strict sense as the attempt to justify YHWH in the situation of undeserved suffering. S. Japhet (429-469) gets the opportunity to show her great expertise in the interpretation of the books of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. She demonstrates that whereas the Chronicler emphasizes the justice of YHWH, the central theme in Ezra and Nehemiah is his compassion.

The section on early Jewish writings opens with an introduction by J. Charlesworth (470-508) with an illuminating survey of the many different approaches to the theme of theodicy. He emphasizes the importance of the historical background for the right understanding of the many writings on this subject. His general remarks are not always in line with the more specific contributions following his essay. His remark that there was 'no preoccupation with theodicy in the sect of Early Judaism known as the Palestine Jesus Movement' (504) is not supported by the contribution on the New Testament by Holmén. P.C. Beentjes (509-524) pays much attention to the textual

history of the Wisdom of Ben Sira. With regard to the theodicy there are remarkable differences between the Hebrew and Greek text. Also in later manuscripts there are traces of changing views. D. Winston (525-545) notes an ‘obsession’ with theodicy in the Wisdom of Solomon. As already indicated by Charlesworth, this can be attributed to the extreme difficult historical situation. K. Atkinson (546-575) demonstrates the struggle with this subject in the Psalms of Solomon. The views on the covenant with god had to be reinterpreted to account for the problems the people of his time were facing. D.T. Runia (576-604) offers a detailed introduction to the writings of Philo of Alexandria with special emphasis to the relation with Greek philosophy.

The section on the New Testament consists of two contributions. T. Holmén (605-651) discusses ‘theodicean motifs’, using the more general definition of theodicy as the attempt to explain suffering in life. More than most other contributions to this volume he pays much attention to reading the biblical writings from today’s perspective. The essay by A. Simojoki (652-684) is primarily a survey of the history of interpretation of the book of Revelation with a very interesting list of the many references to the Old Testament in explaining the role of god when it comes to the suffering of mankind. Like Holmén he also tries to make a link to modern forms of theodicy. It is not clear why this contribution is the only one in the book without a direct reference to theodicy in the title.

The final section is on Rabbinic Judaism. It consist of two stylistically totally different contributions. In the first J. Neusner (685-727) shows that theodicy is core business in Judaism. He presents it – with many references to the primary sources and none to secondary sources – as a consistent logical theory. B. Chilton (728-752) discusses the Targumim, which results in a more differentiated picture of many different approaches next to each other.

The indices of authors, texts, and subjects will help to make this in more than one respect great volume to remain for a long period a rich source book for anyone trying to find her/his way on this theologically tricky field, be it in attempting to reconstruct ancient views or to formulate her/his own ideas. In many cases this volume can also function as a first general introduction to the literature presented here.