

## Book Reviews

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Allaby, Martin. *Inequality, Corruption, and the Church: Challenges and Opportunities in the Global Church*. Regnum Studies in Global Christianity. Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013. x + 228 pages. ISBN 978-1-908355-16-4. £16.19.

Martin Allaby's book devotes itself to answering two questions: "Why is economic inequality greatest in Christian, and especially Protestant, countries? And can the church reduce those economic inequalities" (1). For most people, the term "corruption" is difficult to define. Its scope has such a wide range that it proves unhelpful without a framework to understand it. For example, out-of-power groups may try to sabotage their in-power opponents by accusing them of corruption—with or without specificity and with or without evidence—merely to replace them in the structure of power. To redress this ambiguity, Allaby limited his scope of inquiry to economic inequality as a result of corruption, which lies at the heart of many instances of corruption. He made reference to the Gini coefficient, which he suggests "is widely used, easy to grasp, and as valid as any of the alternatives" (7). The reviewer feels his last phrase smacks of gratuitousness, though this does not seem to harm the overall validity of the usage.

To establish the Gini coefficient, researchers first collect data on the income levels of a representative sample of households. Second, they determine how what percentage of households earns what percentage of income, plotting the former on the x-axis of a graph and the latter on the y-axis. In a country with perfectly even distribution of income, the graph will come out at a 45-degree angle. The Gini coefficient (G) measures the deviation of a given country from that 45-degree angle by dividing the area between the diagonal line and the actual measurement (A) by the total area underneath the diagonal line (B). In simple terms, the formula is  $G = A / B$ . Allaby further notes that the Gini coefficient can be determined by measuring either income levels (in real terms) or consumption levels (converted into monetary values). He discusses the implications of this difference for making comparisons across countries in his second chapter (7, n 13).

The remainder of the Introduction is devoted to refining Allaby's method as employed in the study. First, he "labelled a country as having a prevailing religion if at least 50 per cent of the population describe themselves as following that religion, and no more than 20 per cent describe themselves as following any other religion" (8). Significantly, he does not delve into whether leaders of the particular religions would judge the practices these self-designated adherents

follow as orthodox or heterodox. This is an important limitation, since not making it would probably have hopelessly entangled the results in a thicket of theological and practical distinctions that would necessarily affect the results. In other words, if the adherents of a particular religion (Christianity, say) were judged as to whether their Christianity was “pure” or “orthodox” or what-have-you, and then found lacking, then one might conclude that higher economic equality and/or corruption would be ameliorated by “being better Christians,” defined as closer conformity to the standards of the leaders. In contrast to all of this, Allaby found, much to his surprise and dismay, that “some surprising evidence was emerging that Christianity is associated with extreme economic inequality, particularly in those countries where democracy is weak” (2). The weakness of democracy seemed to Allaby to be a greater factor than whether the majority population identified itself as Christian, and as a result he “tightened up [his] second question from the rather general ‘Can the church reduce economic inequalities?’ to focus on the church and corruption” (6). In defining corruption, he first used a somewhat well-known definition of corruption as “the abuse of public office for private gain” (9). However, Allaby still did not yet have all the pieces on the board for the full explication of his thesis. He needed to make sure that he and his interview respondents meant the same thing when they used the term corruption. Therefore, he further refined this definition to the following: “Corruption determines the extent to which public resources result in material benefit for elites rather than the majority” (11).

The remainder of the study is divided into two theoretical chapters, a chapter describing the methodology of the case studies, then the case studies themselves, comparative comments among the four nations examined, then a concluding chapter. Three appendices detail the country data used in the first theoretical chapter, sources of statistical data, and some identifying information for key informants interviewed. The first theoretical chapter, chapter two (13-47), tries to answer the biggest question of all: why Protestant Christianity and corruption are so closely intertwined. Allaby first dispensed, on logical grounds, with the idea that Christianity causes corruption (for corruption is found in many countries, both Christian-dominant and otherwise). Alternative, he proposed that a government’s revenue (as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product or GDP, a common economic measurement) multiplied by the World Bank’s index of control and corruption for that country yielded an effective measurement of how corrupt that country was likely to be (15). Both of these factors are essential: if either a government controls revenue equal to a lower percentage of the GDP, or that government is more equitable in the disbursement of public funds, corruption will be lower. The equitable distribution of resources is, furthermore, directly tied to the level of accountability government has to its citizens, or, put another way, to democracy. Although, as Allaby pointed out, Christianity does not appear to be a cause of corruption, nevertheless they often appear in conjunction with each other. As an aside, Allaby could have strengthened his argument by suggesting here that inferring from the co-existence of Christianity and corruption that Christianity caused corruption, is an example of the logical fallacy of *cum hoc ergo propter hoc*, “or with it, therefore because of it.” A further factor discussed had to do with the nature of the

ntry's economy. Put simply, fewer exports from mining or large plantations usually meant greater equality in distribution of wealth (21).

Allaby went on in chapter two to discuss something of apparent tremendous import for Christian missionary theory and practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He wrote: "Only sparsely populated societies have become majority Christian since AD 1500, and only sparsely populated societies have developed economies that are dominated by mining or large plantations or farms (with climate being an additional factor in the case of plantations and farms)" (25). Aside from Allaby's investigation of corruption and Christian responses to it, this historical note seems to indicate that the notion of changing a densely populated society from one religion to another may be more utopian than previously realized. If true, this statement should perhaps raise an alarm, especially within the more missionary-minded Christian communities (which, at least in the last 100-150 years, have been mainly Protestant).

Chapter three is the second of these two theoretical chapters (49-62), dealing with general thoughts about corruption. Allaby dealt with several factors in this chapter. First, he defined why fighting corruption is important. Corruption being defined as the enrichment of elites at the expense of the masses, the elimination of corruption should necessarily result in greater equality in the distribution of wealth, taking into account factors already discussed. In addition, Allaby noted that while corruption and its elimination are only topics of recent concern, it is to be celebrated that they are topics of concern at all. In other words, better late than never! He also discussed some of the causes of corruption and some of the things that have helped countries reduce corruption. These latter include well-paid public officials (especially police), an independent court system, laws designed to reduce corruption, good audit systems, and a free press (51-52). Evangelical churches in particular, according to Allaby, may engage in specific practices aimed at identifying and reducing public corruption: they may promote honest behavior through preaching, elect fellow Evangelicals to office, promote public oversight of government, or any combination of these three things (61). Colonial history is also a significant factor, with the interesting connection—demonstrated also by anecdotal evidence gathered by the reviewer—that a history of *British* colonialism often contributed to a lower level of corruption in post-colonial times (52)! Allaby hinted, but did not overtly state, the converse, that countries with other colonial histories, in particular Spanish and Portuguese, often have greater levels of corruption. Further study should be required to see why that was the case.

In chapter four, the shortest of the book (63-67), Allaby laid out his program for the case studies. He recalled that as he was beginning his exploration into the relationship between Christianity and corruption, he was surprised by an African evangelical leader who told him "that in his [the African's] country the churches were high on the government's list of institutions that should be investigated for corruption" (63). This experience highlighted for Allaby that one should not assume that the reputation of churches, and Evangelical churches in particular, within a given society is the same in all other societies. In other words, how the church behaves within a given culture determines how the church (or the churches) is perceived

in that society. Allaby devised a set of three questions to ask regarding the perception of churches within particular societies experiencing various levels of government corruption. These questions dealt with 1) the general reputation of Evangelicals for honest behavior; 2) the practices, ideas, thoughts, etc., which Evangelical leaders believe lie behind corruption where it is found in the church; and 3) the perception of Evangelical leaders as to the effectiveness of Evangelicals in reducing corruption in society using the three strategies noted in chapter three (63-64). With these principles in mind, Allaby organized his case studies so that the countries studied should have a low Gini coefficient (meaning they exhibit much inequity in income and/or consumption) and that a mixture of African and non-African countries should be selected. This second factor resulted directly from his earlier African informant's perception that Evangelicals were largely perceived as part of the problem rather than part of the solution for corruption in Africa. He used five categories of informants, trying as much as possible to secure a balanced representation of each: leaders of Evangelical churches, both local and denominational; Evangelicals with leadership in professional organizations, business, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) specializing in social-justice issues; representatives of non-religious NGOs (included here was each country's representative from Transparency International); senior governmental officials charged with identifying and reducing or eliminating corruption; and representatives of non-Evangelical Christian leaders, in particular Roman Catholics (64-65).

Chapters five (65-94), six (95-124), seven (129-154), and eight (155- 184), include the case studies themselves. The four countries studied are, in order, the Philippines, Kenya, Zambia, and Peru. (As an aside, the institution where the reviewer serves is located in the Philippines, and has one student each from Kenya and Peru. In addition, two students come from Zimbabwe, which Allaby said he considered but ultimately rejected [64]). Between chapters six and seven, pages 125-128 include pictures of several of the Allaby's key informants. Each of these four chapters begins with an introduction that highlights relevant facts of the particular country's history, with special emphasis on the colonial history and the introduction of Christianity into the countries studied. Allaby reported that he sent draft chapters of the Philippines, Kenya, and Zambia chapters to the informants from those countries. The feedback he received being universally positive, he believed he had faithfully represented the conditions in the three countries. This was a crucial step in the credibility of his study, since he as a British citizen came as an outsider to all four societies (67).

Chapters nine (185-194) and ten (195-202) summarize the findings through comparative comments about the four countries—taking their differences into account—and looking ahead for further study. Allaby wrote that he was initially stumped by the variegated results he received from each of the four countries. The confusion was finally lifted by his exposure to “the church-sect theory, with Evangelicals reflecting the church type in Kenya and Zambia and the sect type in the Philippines and Peru” (185). German Protestant theologian Ernst Troeltsch initially developed Church-sect theory. The basic distinction between them concerns the role of subjective holiness among the members, this being generally higher in sect-type religious groups

than church-type religious groups (185). Churches are better able to make use of “objective treasures of grace and redemption,” while sects “in varying degrees within their own circle set up the Christian order” (185). “Church” and “Sect” may thus be envisioned as opposite ends of a spectrum. Allaby found that the reputation of Evangelicals for honest behavior varies widely in the four countries studied (186). Further, while countries with more Protestants generally have lower levels of corruption, countries where Protestants are in the majority see some corruption even within Protestant ranks (187). Third, the perceived causes of corruption among Protestants have to do primarily with co-optation by the government, particularly when Protestants are in the majority, though other factors such as the prosperity gospel and lack of accountability for religious leaders also play a role. Interestingly, the effect of lack of accountability in generating corruption within the church is not far off from the effect it has in generating corruption within the government. Surely a lesson is to be learned for the learning.

In the reviewer’s judgment, this book was well-researched and cogently argued. Though at times the argument was difficult to follow, the reviewer suspects this has to do with his own unfamiliarity with the topic rather than deficiencies on the part of the author. The topic of corruption and the Evangelical churches’ role in reducing or eliminating it, though of relatively recent vintage, should be embraced by thoughtful Evangelicals, particularly those with leadership positions in countries which exhibit high levels of economic disparity and/or high levels of public mistrust in or perception of corruption within government. The Lord has called all Christians—Evangelicals, Catholics, and otherwise—to make a difference in the societies in which they have been placed. Allaby’s book may just be a way of speaking power to truth, or giving Christians, the witnesses to the Truth, the confidence they need to speak a prophetic word in the midst of corrupted and corrupting influences.

Hauser, Alan J., ed. *Recent Research on the Major Prophets*. Recent Research in Biblical Studies 1. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008. xiv + 388 pages. ISBN 978-1-906055-13-4. \$95.00. (PDF available for free in certain countries from [www.sbl-site.org/publications/onlinebooks](http://www.sbl-site.org/publications/onlinebooks))

It is a truism that a volume attempting to present recent research on anything quickly lags behind the bewildering pace of biblical scholarship. Such is undoubtedly the case with the Alan Hauser-edited volume *Recent Research on the Major Prophets*. Nevertheless, Hauser has turned in a noteworthy performance. The Herculean task set before the editor of such a volume should not be understated: someone in Hauser’s position must develop a representative sample of recent scholarship. This involves not only selecting the “best” articles (and this is certainly a matter of perspective), but also must make proper justification for leaving out this or that article which, though interesting and representing quality scholarship, simply did not make the cut. Though one may quarrel with this or that decision, the editor deserves praise simply for having completed the project. By Hauser’s own admission, “this volume provides a comprehensive, though not

exhaustive, presentation and analysis of scholarship on these three prophets” (vii). To accomplish this goal, he selects ten articles. He divides these, appropriately, into sections for Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel scholarship. The Isaiah section contains four articles, while the Jeremiah and Ezekiel sections have three each. In each section, two articles (for a total of six) had previously appeared in the journal *Currents in Biblical Research*, for which Hauser serves as Senior Editor and Editor for Old Testament (vii).

The volume opens with an “Introduction and Overview” article by Hauser himself (1-77). At 77 pages, this article exceeds by more than twenty pages the length of the second-longest contribution, by Roy Melugin in the Isaiah section. The reviewer had positive and negative reactions to this lengthy article. On the positive side, it is probably the most quickly useful part of the book, for it presents in summary form the findings of the other articles. The articles themselves, of course, present summaries of recent scholarship on the Major Prophets. In a sense, then, Hauser’s article is a summary of the summaries, and thus a great place to look to find a way through the ever-thickening maze of scholarly work on Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Negatively, however, the reviewer wishes he had saved Hauser’s summary article until the end. Having not done so, the reviewer has the impression of having a “Hauserian” slant forced upon his reading of the rest of the articles. This is not to say that Hauser’s article is defective; actually, it is excellent. It may have been better to have placed it behind all of the articles, or else to have separated “Introduction” from “Overview,” and renaming the latter “Summary.” The introduction would then find its home before the articles, and the summary after them.

As noted, the Isaiah section contains four articles. Two come from Marvin A. Sweeney (78-92; 93-117), accompanied by one each from Hyun Chul Paul Kim (118-141) and Roy F. Melugin (142-194). Both of Sweeney’s articles come from *Currents*, while Kim’s and Melugin’s do not. Inclusion of articles from other sources was done, according to Hauser’s foreword, to “bring the discussions up to scholarship at the present time” (vii). Sweeney’s first article, “The book of Isaiah in Recent Research,” dates from 1993. He indicates that the primary concern of scholarship has moved away from the separation between the three Isaiahs identified so long ago by Duhm and toward “identifying the literary work and theological perspectives of the anonymous tradents and redactors who shaped [the Isaiah] tradition” (78). In other words, scholarship in the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (and, to update Sweeney, into the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup>), has taken more interest in the final form of the book of Isaiah, which some would perceive as a welcome change. Even if, as the historical-critical consensus maintained, the three divisions of the book did in fact come from different time periods, more recent scholarship has realized that they cannot in any wise be studied without reference to one another.

Sweeney’s continues this theme in his second article. It focuses more directly on First Isaiah, though not without making reference to the other two parts. At the beginning, he succinctly comments: “The debate has progressed to the point that scholars may legitimately ask whether it is possible to write a commentary on Isaiah 1-39 that does not account for its place in the book of Isaiah as a whole or even to consider Isaiah 1-39 as a distinct literary entity” (93).

Sweeney goes on to indicate that the “commentaries of Kaiser [1983-1974] and Wildberger [1972-1982] mark a watershed in Isaiah studies in that they are the last major commentaries to view Isaiah 1-35 (36-39) as an autonomous book, separate from Isaiah 40-66” (101). This emphasis, along with an interest in the redaction history and ideological backgrounds of the Isaiah tradition, have charted the course of Isaiah studies in recent years, even though “important contributions continue to be made to the study of the First Isaiah tradition” (116).

Hyun Chul Paul Kim’s article “Recent Scholarship on Isaiah 1-39” from 2008 extends the discussion up to the date of the collected volume. He divides his article into four sections: compositional issues, intertextuality, readers and readings, and biblical theology and contemporary hermeneutics. Thus Kim takes the postmodern turn into account for its impact on the interpretation of Isaiah. To take the example of intertextuality, Kim notes that Second Isaiah in particular leaves traces in many other biblical books. However, as Hauser notes in the introduction, “intertextuality has been operative since the beginning of interpretation” (16). Thus an exploration of intertextuality could nicely lead into a discussion of readers, to which Kim devotes the final part of his article.

In the Jeremiah section, one finds two articles by Robert Carroll (195-216; 217-231) and one by A. R. Pete Diamond (232-248). Carroll’s two articles come from *Currents*. The first article, “Surplus Meaning and the Conflict of Interpretation: A Decade of Jeremiah Studies (1984-1995)” is dated from 1996. He picks up on a theme articulated by Walter Brueggemann in 1989, indicating that the late 1980s began a significant resurgence in Jeremiah studies. Carroll expands Brueggemann’s notion of the “great turn” of 1986, including in his assessment several other commentaries both major and minor. Clearly, Jeremiah scholarship has experienced a resurgence. One could certainly add to this the addition to the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting of the Writing/Reading Jeremiah Group in 2007. This resurgence has been characterized by “a turmoil of competing reading strategies for understanding the book associated with Jeremiah the prophet” (195). Among the three great 1986 commentaries, including Carroll’s own offering in the Old Testament Library series, one of the items up for debate was the extent to which the book of Jeremiah offered biographical details of Jeremiah, ranging from the quite positivistic leanings of William Holladay to the quite pessimistic ones of Carroll. Carroll devotes his article to discussions of composition, the role of Baruch, the role of the Deuteronomists, and the ever-present problem of the relation between the MT and the LXX. These issues and more have dominated the scene in Jeremiah studies, and Carroll, before his untimely death in 2000, was at the forefront of many exciting developments.

Carroll’s second article, “Century’s End: Jeremiah Studies at the Beginning of the Third Millennium,” was published posthumously. This article was intended as “a follow-up to [Carroll’s] 1996 survey of recent writings in Jeremiah studies” published in *Currents* and in the present volume. Carroll suggests, somewhat pessimistically, that the “twenty-first century will...continue to see a thriving field of activity in Jeremiah studies, even though I think that the great age of *innovation* in Jeremiah studies...probably has now come to an end” (217).

Interestingly, he defers from including himself among the “great commentaries” published in 1986. He suggests, however, that the poles between which third-millennium scholarship are likely to move were established by Holladay and McKane.

The final paper in the Jeremiah section comes from A. R. Pete Diamond, entitled “The Jeremiah Guild in the Twenty-First Century: Variety Reigns Supreme,” and published in 2008. Diamond lists Carroll among Holladay and McKane as “that harvest of Jeremiah commentary represented in the[se] watershed publications” (232). Diamond introduces what he calls the “Peter Rabbit principle” over against “Historicist-biographically oriented readers [who] continue to spin Jeremiah ben Hilkiyah’s romance oblivious of” it (232). The adventures of Peter Rabbit, invention of Beatrix Potter in 1902, contain “such symbolic energy, production, and development” that it had to have been based on historical events (236). According to Diamond, this logical fallacy bewitches many Jeremiah scholars as well. He gives an example of a hypothetical scholar many millennia in the future coming across *Moby Dick* or *Tom Sawyer* written in “the long dead English language” and beset with the task of separating out historical reality from artistic license (237). In summary, “I argue that the creativity of cultural memory, the complexity of causes for symbolic processes, and the inventiveness of vested ideological engagement renders verisimilitude a poor bridge from the textual world to the ‘mirror-world’ to which we hope it refers” (237).

Finally, three articles also appear in the Ezekiel section, the first by Katheryn Pfisterer Darr (249-259) and the other two by Risa Levitt Kohn (260-272; 273-277). Pfisterer Darr’s article and Levitt Kohn’s first article come from *Currents*. Pfisterer Darr’s article “Ezekiel Among the Critics,” indicates that “challenges to majority views [of a coherent Ezekiel] were already appearing in the late 1800s and early 1900s, though such outposts were far from secure” (249). Some of the critical proposals made during the twentieth century were to limit the authentic Ezekiel material to the ecstatic utterances, and to move back and forth on the question of whether Ezekiel was really a part of the exilic community, over against the book’s explicit claims. On the contemporary landscape, Zimmerli’s two-volume commentary (1979, 1983) “lay between the extreme positions of Smend and Driver on the one hand, and Hölischer and Hertrich on the other,” with the result that no further commentary on the third major prophet may overlook Zimmerli’s effort (252). Another note from current Ezekiel scholarship is the question of the relationship between MT and LXX which, while perhaps not as significant as in Jeremiah, still presents many critical problems which cannot be ignored. The other big stick in Ezekiel scholarship, however, belongs to Greenberg’s 1983 commentary. It is a delightful irony that the same year saw the publication in English of Zimmerli’s second volume as well as Greenberg’s, a situation echoed in the triple-threat year of 1986 for Jeremiah commentaries.

The other two articles in the Ezekiel section come from, as noted Risa Levitt Kohn. As with Carroll’s articles in the Jeremiah section, Levitt Kohn’s second piece was intended to supplement the first. Levitt Kohn devotes her first article to a study of some contemporary commentaries (mainly from the 1990s), literary relations of Ezekiel to the rest of the Hebrew

Bible, the psychology of Ezekiel, Ezekiel's sign-acts, Ezekiel and gender, corporate and individual responsibility, and the vision of Ezekiel 40-48. Her ultimate conclusion is that while "much of the recent critical work on the text continues to find itself wedged somewhere between the two pillars of Zimmerli and Greenberg, several new postmodern modes of investigation have opened new venues of research" (272). Her second article, the shortest in the collection at only five pages, picks up this same thread, discussing some of the new avenues of research engaged in since the watershed year of 1983.

Overall, the collection *Recent Research on the Major Prophets* represents a phenomenal effort. As indicated above, Hauser's introductory article is itself worth the price of the volume, though it perhaps should be saved for last if the volume is read through. While of course many other studies could be included, this would have made necessary the exclusion of something else, at which point criticism could be endlessly directed. I believe that Hauser met his task well. I enthusiastically recommend this volume for all those interested in scholarly investigation of the Major Prophets. It is a convenient collection which is sure to serve its intended purpose well.