

Preface

IT IS IMPORTANT TO share something of my own social, cultural, and religious location from the outset. Reared, educated, and residing in U.S. culture, and a woman—though living, learning, and moving about regularly in other cultures still shaped by indigenous traditions—means I am shaped by what this entails. As a student of the Hebrew Bible, I have learned most from Jewish scholars and from Christian scholars who have immersed themselves as much as possible in the ancient Hebraic culture(s) and language. Both of these traditions have greatly influenced me as a Christian. Yet, I have a profound respect and appreciation for those who constructively practice the world's indigenous spiritual traditions and world religions, and I also stand with them. I believe we all, including those adhering ultimately to philosophical principles, have something important to contribute to understanding what it means to be fully human, responsible, just, and compassionate in relation to one another, to our kindred spirits in nature, and to the transcendent realm beyond us, that the spiritually inclined call God or Creator or many other names in traditional languages. On the other hand, every culture with its religious or spiritual tradition has its faults and failings which must be critically engaged and criticized.

Besides using oral-poetic, indigenous/postcolonial feminist approaches, this study surely benefits from all the methods and scholarship that has come before, and insights from poststructuralist, new-historical, and postmodern approaches. However, neither the intent nor procedure here, I trust, is to create a methodological 'system' in order to explain everything in or about the biblical texts. This study proposes a 'new' way to rediscover something important about 'the old ways' of Hebraic oral poetic traditional composing, but does not claim to be comprehensive. Moreover, not only do the texts precede theory in this study (if not all presuppositions!),

neither is the text all there is in this approach. Biblical lyrics from Hebraic culture and contexts came indeed from real indigenous people with real voices and perspectives, put into writing at some stage. This return to the local and the contextual, as well as a respect for the sophistication of the artistry of indigenous women and men from ancient oral-traditional cultures is central here. And of course the 'hearer' (expanding 'the reader' of texts) is important—as are, one hopes, the oral performers for new contexts. My aim as an investigator is not to stand apart from these traditions but to immerse myself as utterly as possible in them, even though I am still an outsider historically and culturally. Apart from some of the dangerous ideologies occasionally appearing in ancient Hebraic culture (e.g., holy war, misogyny, exclusivism, which have been also practiced by other cultures), it is my firm conviction that retrieving a fuller understanding of the whole Hebraic oral tradition, especially the lyrical, will illuminate much that is desperately needed in our world today.

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