ONE

Joshua

The book of Joshua is a complex combination of texts reflecting quite different literary and theological interests put together over a long period of time, immediately illustrative of the editorial process in the Former Prophets that we have outlined in the Introduction. There are exciting stories that all biblically literate children will recognize, like the defeat of Jericho, when the ear-splitting noise of trumpets makes its walls fall down, a story immortalized in the Negro Spiritual, "Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho." But then there are geographical survey lists that offer an antidote to insomnia. There are stories of the peaceful assimilation of "Canaanites" within the people of Israel; but then there are stories of Israelite genocide that raise the specter of "ethnic cleansing," revealing a barbaric people and a gruesome God.

Despite the complexity, we can sketch the compositional stages in general terms.[1] Most likely there was an original assembly of conquest stories about entering the land, perhaps limited to the places of Jericho, Ai, and Gibeon (appearing loosely in chap. 2, some of chap. 6, and most of chaps. 8–10, ignoring brief editorial insertions). To the conquest stories someone added a group of texts that portray some of the events in terms of religious ritual. For example, 6:3–20 describes the fall of Jericho as a liturgical stratagem; most of chaps. 3–5 describes crossing the Jordan as ritual, perhaps associated with liturgical reenactments at the place called Gilgal.[2] There are covenant renewal ceremonies in 8:30–35 and chap. 24. Another perspective appears in chap. 11 with its focus on events in the Northern parts of the land.

Yet another stage appears in speeches typical of the Deuteronomist, interpreting the events within the theology of that movement (e.g., most of chap. 1; 2:10–11; 3:7–8, etc.)—indeed, framing the book by preface and epilog (chap. 1 and chaps. 23–24). At some stage the geological survey material was incorporated by the addition of chs. 14–21.

1. The following reflects the analysis of Campbell and O'Brien, *Unfolding*, 101–64 (cf. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomic School*, 50). See also Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, especially 81–90, 133–36.

2. Judg 5:9; 10:6; 14:6; cf. 3:19; 1 Sam 7:16; 10:8; Hos 12:11; Amos 4:4.

Other concerns appear in smaller literary units (e.g., the East Jordan tribes in 1:12–18; 22:9–34).

Some scholars see the figure of Joshua as a model for King Josiah—that is, parts of the book of Joshua were composed or edited to serve as a kind of historical pattern for Josiah's national and religious revival. Since that revival included an attempt to reunite "all Israel" under one king with territory extending to Israel's original boundaries, what better way to promote the king than to associate him with Israel's "founding father" of the "conquest"? It would be something like a history of the United States written in 1933 in such a way that George Washington looked a lot like Franklin D. Roosevelt and Washington's policies a lot like the New Deal. Numerous parallels between the two figures suggest such a relationship: covenant renewal and honoring the "book of the Torah";[3] keeping the Passover festival;[4] opposition to "Canaanite" religion.[5]

The final product juxtaposes sociological and theological tensions without resolving them, offering a mirror to readers who are willing to be as honest about their own society and its history as were the biblical editors. Much of what appears in Joshua is not pretty. For Americans, an analogy would be reading a book like *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn, who hangs out our dirty laundry alongside all the pretty garments of our childhood education (Plymouth Rock, Washington crossing the Delaware, "winning" the West, Southern plantation "gentility").

The theological perspective that dominates Joshua is precisely what we see in a famous speech from American religious history, a speech clearly based on the biblical covenant tradition. Indeed, the speaker, John Winthrop, speaks from a situation identical to that of the character of Joshua—about to enter the Promised Land:

> *Thus stands the cause betweene God and us. Wee are entered into Covenant with him for this worke . . . We have hereupon besought him of favour and blessing: Now if the Lord shall please to heare us, and bring us in peace to the place wee desire, then hath he ratified this Covenant and sealed our Commission [and] will expect a strickt performance of the Articles contained in it, but if wee shall neglect the observacion of these Articles which are the ends wee have propounded, and dissembling with our God, shall fall to embrace this present world and prosecute our carnall intencions seekeing greate things for our selves and our posterity, the Lord will surely breake out in wrathe against us, be revenged of such a perjured people and make us know the price of the breache of such a Covenant . . .*

3. 2 Kgs 22:8–13; 23:2–3 and Josh 1:7; 8:32; 23:6–7; 24:26; cf. Deut 17:14–20.

4. 2 Kgs 23:21–23; Josh 5:10–12.

5. 2 Kings 23; Josh 23:7, 16; 24:14–24. See Nelson, "Josiah"; Sweeney, *King Josiah*, 25–26, 133–35, 173; Smith, *Memoirs*, 23. Coote, *Joshua*, 555–80, argues that the Josianic reforms provide the most substantial context for the book.

> *[Then the blessing shall] be turned into Cursses upon us till wee be consumed out of the good land whither wee are goeing . . . If our heartes shall turne away soe that wee will not obey, but shall be seduced and worship . . . other Gods, our pleasures, and proffitts, and serve them; it is propounded unto us this day, wee shall surely perishe out of the good Land whither wee passe over this vast Sea to possesse it.*
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> *—John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity." Written On Boarde the Arbella, On the Attlantick Ocean, Anno 1630*[6]

"Going by the Book" (Chap. 1)

The book of Joshua begins "after the death of Moses," whose presence dominated the Pentateuchal narrative from Exodus through Deuteronomy. The setting is something like the day before D-Day, as Israel stands on the East Bank of the Jordan River, looking into the land occupied by the enemy generally called "the Canaanites." Before the story of the initial battle, however, the editors have provided a series of pep talks, first by God to Joshua, then by Joshua, then by the tribes whom Joshua has addressed.[7]

Filling Moses' shoes is a daunting task. The concluding paragraph of the book of Deuteronomy says, "Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unequaled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform . . . and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel (34:10–12). Now God addresses a new leader, but the difference between the two appears in their titles: Moses, "the servant of the Lord," and Joshua, "the assistant of Moses." Moses enjoyed an intimacy with God that no successor could match.[8] Another, and more important, indication of the difference is the way in which Moses continues to be the mediator between Joshua (and Israel) and God—not in his person, but in his words. Moses did what God said; Joshua is to do what Moses said God said. It is true that God talks to Joshua also, but part of what God says is that Joshua is to follow the words of Moses, that is, "the law that my servant Moses commanded you" (v. 7). That law, of course, is contained in "this *book* of the law," by which the author means the book of Deuteronomy.[9] Indeed, when God says "*this* book of the law" it is almost as if God is *handing* Joshua a copy.

The opening speech focuses on two "ways," the geographical way that has led to the current setting (vv. 1–6), then the theological "way of Torah" that Joshua must follow (vv. 7–9). Both ways require that Joshua "be strong and very courageous," but two different kinds of

6. Winthrop, "A Model." A printed copy appears in Bellah, *Individualism and Commitment*, 22–27, and in numerous other anthologies.

7. See Weinfeld, *Deuteronomic School*, 45–51, on the literary genre of "the Military Oration."

8. Only at the end of the book , and posthumously, will Joshua assume the title of "servant of the Lord" (24:29)

9. How *much* of the book depends on complex issues involving the dating of the authors of Joshua and of Deuteronomy.

battles are involved—taking the land and remaining faithful. It is as if the editor wants to emphasize the spiritual strength that must accompany Joshua's military strength. The book of the Torah is the manual that Joshua is to meditate on day and night, resembling the assignment that Deuteronomy makes for Israel's later kings (Deut 17:18–19); the Torah provides the blueprint for success. It is encouraging that God promises to "be with" Joshua, as God was with Moses, but that presence alone will not be sufficient for victory. Rather, Joshua (and, again, Israel as a whole) must walk the straight and narrow path, looking neither to the left or the right, that path being the way of Torah.

Excursus 1: The Treaty Model of God

My use of the term "manual" can be misleading in that it might suggest a simple list of rules to follow. In fact, many people have understood the "Torah" in this way, partly because the word often is translated as "law"—the "book of the law" or "the law of Moses."[10] The basic meaning is "guidance" or "instruction," but especially when used to describe a document like Deuteronomy that shapes a people's ethos, the word *torah* would be much closer to our word "constitution" in its political sense. Another translation would be "polity" from the Greek word *politeia* rather than "law" from *nomos*. S. Dean McBride, Jr. in particular has emphasized the important distinction between the two.[11] "Polity" refers to the "social order" spelled out in the document; "law" refers to specific ordinances or rules that the document contains.[12] There is no doubt that Deuteronomy contains laws (concentrated in 12:2—25:16), but the laws are contained in a framework that grounds them in the people's history (the Exodus experience in particular) and in their relationship to God (cf. Deut 5:1–6). Much of the framework of Deuteronomy contains hortatory exhortations to the civic responsibility that the polity requires, as well as procedures that will enact the constitution and insure its transmission to future generations (e.g., 26:16—31:29). The laws are the specific requirements that govern the entire range of the people's life as a community. Obeying the laws is no more important than remembering the history—indeed, it is less so, because forgetting their history easily *leads to* disobedience. The people's *mythos* (its narrative identity) grounds its *ethos* (its way of living in society).

In Israel's polity, the relationship with God is understood as a "covenant."

10. Christians may have a bias against "law" deriving from disputes over its interpretation in various Gospel stories and in the arguments of Paul involving ecclesiastical controversies.

11. McBride, "Polity of the Covenant People," 17. In "Essence of Orthodoxy," 139, he also refers to "the book of the Torah" as "Israel's unique national constitution." In "Deuteronomy," 109, in addition to "polity" he uses the terms "constitutional blueprint" and "comprehensive social charter." See also his introduction and notes to Deuteronomy in the HarperCollins edition of the NRSV Bible. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomic School*, 170–71, says that for the Deuteronomist the Torah "was the ideal legal constitution for a monarchic regieme." Cf. also Miller, *Ten Commandments*, 6–7.

12. McBride, "Polity of the Covenant People," 21.

The Hebrew word (*berit*) can also be translated as "treaty." The language is diplomatic as well as political. Our understanding of Israel's covenant theology is enhanced by a comparison with treaty documents from ancient Near Eastern nations—i.e., treaties between two nations or rulers.[13] Israel adapted the language and formalities of such treaties as a model for construing the people's relationship to the divine. God is the suzerain, or to use the frequent (male) term, Israel's "king" (more inclusively, Israel's "sovereign"). The people are the vassal, i.e., God's "servants." The treaty model is one among numerous possibilities for construing a relationship with God. In this model, the vassal owes its allegiance to the suzerain because of the suzerain's protection of the vassal in the past, including the suzerain's "saving" the vassal from enemies (again, the liberation from Pharaoh of Egypt). The most important stipulation is the demand for absolute fidelity to the suzerain, prohibiting any such treaty agreements with other rulers who would thereby compete for the people's allegiance and alter the social order. Treaties often refer to this allegiance as "loving" the suzerain. Such "love" refers more to covenant loyalty than to an emotion:

> You [the vassal] shall love Assurbanipal [the suzerain] . . . king of Assyria, your lord, as yourself. You shall hearken to whatever he says and do whatever he commands, and you shall not seek any other king or other lord against him. This treaty . . . you shall speak to your sons and grandsons, your seed and you seed's seed which shall be born in the future.[14]

Such covenant love is the heart of Israel's relationship with God (compare the language in Deut 6:4–7). Thus the "love of God" so central to Western religions has it roots here.[15]

The suzerain's continuing protection of the vassal depends on the vassal's loyalty. Obedience to the stipulations (or requirements) of the treaty will assure the suzerain's protection; failure to obey will lead to punishment. The two options often appear in the form of blessings or curses (e.g., Deuteronomy 28), but also are incorporated in the historical exhortations (e.g., Deuteronomy 8). Just as human overlords would punish rebellious vassals who switched allegiance to "other lords," so Yahweh[16] will punish Israel when they switch allegiance to "other gods."[17] Indeed, the model of covenantal reward and punishment is widely assumed not only in the Former Prophets but also in the writing Prophets.[18]

The abiding truth of the covenant model is its insistence on absolute allegiance to God, over against any contenders, whether gods in the theistic sense or those powers which are socio-economic

13. There is a vast literature on this subject. For examples of ancient Near Eastern texts, see *ANET*, 199–206, 531–41.

14. Quoted in Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 75, citing the study of Younger on Assyrian annals. For an informative review of covenants, treaties, and the political meaning of *love*, see Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 243–47, 348–50, 353–55.

15. The groundbreaking study of this is by Moran, "Love of God." Cf. also Weinfeld, *Deuteronomic School*, 81, among other scholars. Cf. Matt 22:36–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–28.

16. See the glossary (below) on the divine name *Yahweh*. Here is a good example of when knowing the personal name helps to understand the contrast with other "gods."

17. On the identity of these "other gods" see Excursus 4. The annals of the Assyrian overlords in the ninth century BCE record their devastating punishment of vassal kings who broke the terms of their treaties and rebelled against them.

18. For the classic formulation in the Former Prophets, see 2 Kgs 17:5–8; in the prophets cf. Jer 34:13–17; Hos 2:2–13; Amos 4:6–12. On this "merit system," see Excursus 2.

or political.[19] This model is potentially subversive of *any* power that would claim ultimate authority (e.g., a human king of Israel or a foreign power like Assyria—not to mention contemporary powers).[20] For contemporary readers, the phrase "other gods" may make little sense in *theistic* terms, but it makes a great deal of sense in terms of what one values above all else and for what one is willing to sacrifice everything.[21] The quotation from John Winthrop at the outset of this chapter shows how the covenant language of ancient Israel could apply to English settlers in America in the 17th century. The "other gods" who threaten to "seduce" the settlers are not gods in the usual sense; they are "our pleasures and our profits"—in short, materialism, greed, and wealth.[22] Hundreds of years later, we can hear an echo of Winthrop's terms in the admission of a man named Brian: "'I was operating as if *a certain value* was of the utmost importance to me. Perhaps it was success. Perhaps it was fear of failure, but I was extremely success-oriented, to the point where everything would be *sacrificed* for the job, the career, the company.'"[23]

We shall return to the implications of Israel's polity again and again for it undergirds much of the editorializing in the Former Prophets, especially that of editors from the Deuteronomic tradition. To anticipate, some of the most important implications will involve political relationships between Israel and other peoples (or between Israel's rulers and other rulers), social relationships with non-Israelites (especially marriage), and worship practices. Above all, an ongoing issue will be the challenge to Yahweh's absolute suzerainty by competitors—i.e., other gods (see Excursus 4).

To return to the opening passage in Josh 1:1–9, it is also a fitting introduction to the entire narrative that stretches to the end of 2 Kings. There is the promise of God's gracious presence, but there is the command to obey the Torah. The combination of promise and command poses a tension that Israel will test again and again: what happens if Israel is *disobedient*? Will God withdraw the promise of presence if Israel does *not* follow the Torah, does not live "by the book"? If obedience produces success, will disobedience produce failure? In fact, will God then annul the covenant? It does not require much meditation on the book of the Torah to know that disobedience will have dire consequences, as the curses of the covenant with God reveal (Deuteronomy 28:15–68). But the same book also gives glimpses of a "merciful God" whose grace continues *despite* disobedience (Deut 4:30–31; 30:1–10). To

19. See my discussion of Deuteronomy 7 in Mann, *Deuteronomy*, 62–69.

20. Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomic History,* 81, suggests that the "Deuteronomic law code of the seventh century" was modeled on an Assyrian treaty, but in acknowledging God as Israel's only sovereign, "may also reveal a subversive or polemical intention" directed at Assyrian power.

21. The theologian Paul Tillich used the term "ultimate concern." That which is one's ultimate concern functionally is one's god. See Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 1–4.

22. See McBride, "Yoke," especially 306, and his discussion of "radical monotheism." On the other hand, Winthrop was among those who often demonized the Native Americans (see below).

23. One of the interviewees in Bellah, *Habits*, 5 (italics added). This book, and its companion book of primary readings, is one of the most perceptive investigations of the role of covenantal language and identity in American experience. Note especially 28–35.

the bitter end of the story, the tension between judgment and mercy will pose great risks for Israel, and also a great dilemma for God.

The introductory speech has already named the prize that awaits: the Promised Land. The next passage raises other questions that will persist throughout the narrative: what are the boundaries of the Promised Land, who constitutes "Israel," and what space is the sacred center? The boundaries are sketched in v. 4—the Negev desert to the South, Lebanon to the North, the Euphrates River to the East, and, of course, the Mediterranean on the West. But some tribes will possess land on the *East* bank of the Jordan ("trans-Jordan"). Is that also the Promised Land, and are they part of "Israel"? The apparent answer to both questions is yes, but the answers will be challenged after the events projected in vv. 12–18 take place (13:8–33; chap. 22). Moreover, the boundaries of v. 4 are idealistic and never materialized, at least with respect to the Euphrates. Eventually, the Promised Land will shrink, and throughout the narrative divisions will occur that belie the apparent unity of the people. Already the point-of-view that sees the East bank land as "*beyond* the Jordan" presupposes the *West* bank as the real land, implying that trans-Jordan is "the other side of the tracks."[24] As we will see in chapter 22, the primary concern will revolve around the question: Can there be more than one shrine that is the unifying sacred space of the community? This question will become a major issue in the narrative, especially after the construction of the Jerusalem temple (1 Kings 8).

24. Feiler, *Walking the Bible*, 353; cf. Hawk, *Joshua*, 16.

Two Boy Scouts and a Lady of the Night (Chap. 2)

The story of Rahab and the spies is one of those stories that parents are likely to skip over when reading the Bible to children. Whores are not the role models we want to present as heroines. The biblical authors, however, were not so squeamish. They did not cover up the apparent folly of two young scouts who were ordered to survey the land but made a beeline for a brothel. In fact, the story is not really so much about them as it is about Rahab, and her occupation is crucial to the significance of her actions.

The scouts are described as "young men" or "youths" (v. 23), probably teenagers, and their behavior betrays their ineptitude at espionage. You can almost see it happening: the two neophytes out on their first great adventure as spies, and, as soon as they enter the city gate—behold, the red light district! They look at each other and grin, and one says to the other, "Jacob, how many shekels did you bring?" Of course, the author does not say explicitly that they sought out Rahab for her services, but he tells us that they "lay down there," highly suggestive language, if also ambiguous. In any event, the young scouts begin to look like bumbling fools when they have to risk their lives—and their mission—to the madam of the house; they seem more like Barney Fife than James Bond. Instead of reconnoitering the city, they must hide under the flax on Rahab's flat roof, escape by the rope she provides,

hide for three days, and then flee back to Joshua. Their "surveillance report" relies totally on what the prostitute has told them.

But this is Rahab's story, not a spy story, which is why we never learn the names of the scouts or even the king. In terms of literary genre, it is both folk tale and etiology. It is a trickster tale of how a lowly but wise woman duped Israelite "intelligence" as well as the king of her city.[25] But in its context the story is also an explanation of how and why the Canaanite family of a prostitute ended up living among the people of God. Originally the story was probably independent of the fall of Jericho sequel in chap. 6, and not completely consistent with it.[26] Its position here—even before the people have crossed over the Jordan—sets a major theme for what follows: already Israel is *not* "going by the book" of the Torah.

When the scouts swear an oath to protect Rahab's family, they are breaking a commandment of God. According to the ideology of warfare, there were to be no such agreements with the Canaanites, indeed, no survivors. They are subject to the "ban." As Deuteronomy puts it, "you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy."[27] However reasonable the spies' agreement with Rahab may seem to us, "it is an illegal covenant according to the rules governing the war of occupation, the law of YHWH."[28] This same commandment will factor largely in the story of the Gibeonites (chap. 9). In fact, Rahab's fear of such treatment is based on what she has heard (v. 10), and anticipates Joshua's command in 6:17 and its execution in 6:21. In the end, all the inhabitants of Jericho are slaughtered, "both men and women, young and old" —even livestock (6:21), a grisly precedent for more to follow (8:25 [twelve thousand slaughtered!]; 10:28–40; 11:11, 14, 20). Although the numbers in such casualty figures are highly exaggerated,[29] such passages present some of the most reprehensible parts of the Bible, ultimately assuming an understanding of God that is clearly unacceptable to virtually all contemporary people of faith (whether Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or other). On the other hand, these stories that seem to describe what we call "ethnic cleansing" hold a mirror to our own history and culture.

Generally, there are two basic types of the "ban" (*ḥerem*). The NRSV often translates the word with "devote to destruction," which may seem like a bizarre understanding of "devotion," but actually points to the religious meaning in one type. Here the ban is a sacrifice by the Israelite military leader, an offering to God in exchange for God's defeat of the enemy. This type presumes that God, in fact, values human sacrifices—indeed, in this version of the ban humans are of ultimate value, far more than material things. So, as Niditch puts it, "Paradoxically, the ban

25. For other examples, see Bird, "The Harlot."

26. Cf. Nelson, *Joshua*, 41, who points out that the survival of Rahab's family in their city-wall house is incompatible with the collapse of the entire wall in 6:20.

27. Deut 7:2; cf. 20:15–18; Exod 34:11–16.

28. Gunn, "Joshua and Judges," 108.

29. McNutt, *Reconstructing*, 110, notes that "the population for the whole of Palestine . . . in 1000 B.C.E. has been estimated at about 150,000."

as sacrifice may be viewed as admitting of more respect for the value of human life than other war ideologies."[30] In the second type, the ban is not a sacrifice but an act of justice.[31] Again, this may seem a bizarre notion of justice, but here it simply means that, according to the religious and moral criteria of those who enact the ban (whether God or humans or both), those subject to the ban *deserve* it—it is punitive. The reason could be worshipping "other gods," i.e., the *wrong* gods in the author's view, or behavior deemed immoral or sinful. In the sacrificial type, the enemy has ultimate value as a holy offering to God; in the punitive type the enemy is sub-human and ultimately offensive to God. The ban is God's insistence on purity, and those banned are seen as "an infectious fungus," a "monster worthy of destruction," "a 'Gook,' an Infidel, an 'Other,' not of human stock."[32] The term "Gook" derives from the way in which Americans referred to North Vietnamese (not just soldiers, but everyone), thus already hinting at why the biblical ban may point uncomfortably to the unsuspecting reader.[33] So we are faced with an act of religious devotion that involves human sacrifice, or a punitive act that demonizes ones opponents. Choose your poison!

Although both types of the ban appear in the Deuteronomic history, the Deuteronomic school emphasized the punitive (or perhaps even better, "purgative"). "The Deuteronomic writers, supporters of the Josianic reform, consider the ban a means of rooting out what they believe to be impure, sinful forces damaging to the solid and pure relationship between Israel and God."[34] The reason that Deuteronomy gives for the ban is not military or even political but religious. If the Canaanites remain they will seduce Israelites into following "other gods," which would invoke God's wrath and lead to Israel's destruction (Deut 7:4). This is the voice of relentless orthodoxy; sometimes, of fanaticism. It will sound again and more fully at the end of Joshua, there as a warning about the peoples who are left. The xenophobia of the "ban" is rooted in insecurity. The "violent language is typical for a minority group which is afraid to lose either its identity or its power."[35] Here is a precedent for what we call a "witch hunt," with 17th century Salem, Massachusetts the prime illustration.[36] (More contemporary ex-

30. Nidtich, *War*, 50. Gottwald, *Politics*, 62, translates the ban with "ritual destruction." Examples of the ban as sacrifice are Num 21:2–3; Judg 11:30; 1 Sam 7:9–10; 13:12. The *herem* was also practiced by other peoples, prominently the Moabites.

31. Niditch, *War*, chap. 2.

32. Ibid., 95; cf. 77 ("a monster, unclean and diseased"). For examples from American history, see below.

33. See Tran, *Vietnam War*, 234: with regard to the Vietnamese, America "rendered the stranger less than human."

34. Niditch, *War*, 56; cf. 75–76.

35. Ibid.,74; cf. Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 63, who suggests that the "ban" really reflects the situation of an editor in the Persian period (sixth century), when the fear of assimilation was prominent (cf. Ezra 9–10; Nehemiah 13). Similarly, Campbell and O'Brien, *Unfolding*, 104, suggest that the "'extermination'" passages are late (although "no less appalling"). Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 131, argues that the very laws on warfare in Deuteronomy 20 stem from the exilic editors, when such laws were totally useless, as "a 'legal' introduction to the conquest stories."

36. Niditch, *War*, 57, uses the term to describe the Deuteronomic reforms. For the literal precedent, see 2 Kgs 23:24 and 1 Sam 28:3 (the "medium" there is often called "the witch of Endor").

amples abound).[37] In fact, some scholars argue that the ban in Deuteronomic texts "could only have been created at the writing-desk and does not reflect any real circumstances."[38] In other words, the stories of ethnic cleansing are at least highly exaggerated, if not simply fictional (see below on Jericho).[39]

Nevertheless, here in the Jericho story we come up against one of the most repugnant aspects of Israelite religion (one could say of all religions). Even if the story of Rahab and Jericho is completely fictional,[40] we would still have a theology of genocide, a divine sanctioning of mass murder. Clearly, the resulting picture of God is unconscionable. Here religion becomes evil. I once had a Sunday school teacher come to me frantically on Sunday morning saying, "The lesson is on Jericho. What should I do? I don't believe in a God who orders human slaughter." "Then tell the children just that," I said. "Tell them that you do not think God is like this. Tell them that here is a place where we have to reject what the Bible says as theologically wrong." Indeed, to make such an interpretive judgment is to engage in that process—that *argument*—of competing voices that is present in the text itself.

But, despite its horrors, we would be wise to read the story (at what age, is another matter), and for three reasons. First, here is a good example of how the Bible "tells all." The Bible generally does not hide the questionable—even damnable—traits of its characters, including God. In fact, the theological problem is compounded in that there is no explicit authorial indication that God's genocidal orders *are* damnable. Still, it is healthy for us to be forced to look at what is ugly and brutal in such stories because *our own history* is full of such brutality. Contemporary examples—often involving religious ideology—are all too abundant (the genocide of Native Americans in our own "New Canaan" [a town name in Connecticut]; the Holocaust of European Jews; machete tribal massacres in Rwanda; "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia;

37. In the United States, one thinks of white supremacist groups, who propose getting rid of all Jews, African Americans, and homosexuals. In Nigeria the tension is between Muslims and Christians. Muslims are generally wealthier than Christians, who are in the minority. According to a recent study, one Christian minister, "like many others of his faith, felt that Muslims were trying to wipe out Christians by converting them through marriage." The minister identifies the problem as "'scriptural,'" perhaps thinking of passages like the intermarriage prohibitions in question. "So he and the other elders decided to punish the women. 'If a woman gets caught with a Muslim man' [he] said, 'she must be forcibly brought back.'" The decree resulted in "vigilante violence" on both sides. See Griswold, "God's Country," 42.

38. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomic School*, 167; cf. Niditch, *War*, 74.

39. Remarkably, two ancient Near Eastern kings declared that they had annihilated Israel: Mernepthah in the thirteenth century and Mesha in the ninth century. Clearly they were both wrong! The latter says "Israel utterly perished forever" and boasts that he "killed the entire population" of one city," men and women, having "devoted" them to his god (i.e., the biblical "ban," *ḥerem*). For the translation see Dearman, *Studies*, 97–98, or *ANET*, 320. For the Merneptah text, see *ANET*, 376–78.

40. At the time of the story, Jericho was at best an insignificant village, and the older city was already in ruins. The annals of ancient Near Eastern kings typically employ exaggerated claims of conquests. For a summary, with parallels to the book of Joshua, see Römer, *So-called Deuteronomistic History*, 83–86.

the "killing fields" of Cambodia; the "disappeared" in Guatemala; sectarian mass murders in Iraq). If these stories prompt us to engage in our own critical self-examination of both our religions and cultures, they will have provided a worthwhile service.[41]

The quotation from John Winthrop at the head of this chapter, often celebrated for its rich contribution to the formation of American religious identity, needs to be balanced with the following, from Winthrop's contemporary colonist, William Bradford, and his History of Plymouth Plantation, regarding the massacre of Pequot Native Americans, who were burned alive: "It was a fearful sight to see them thus frying in the fyer, and the streams of blood quenching the same, and horrible was the stincke and sente there of, but the victory seemed a sweet sacrifice, and they [i.e., the English colonists] gave the prayers thereof to God, who had wrought so wonderfully for them, thus to inclose their enemise in their hands, and gave them so speedy a victory over so proud and insulting an enimie."[42]

The slaughter [at My Lai, Vietnam] was conducted in March 1968, by platoons of American soldiers who shot and abused more than 300 victims—mainly women, children and elderly peasants—in a murderous frenzy.[43]

***Q**: You killed men, women, and children? **A**: Yes. **Q**: You were ordered to do so? **A**: Yes [from a Viet-Nam era court martial]*[44]

I accompanied a South Vietnamese battalion to a village the Vietcong had raided the previous night. Dangling from the trees and poles in the village center were the village chief, his wife, and their twelve children, the males, including a baby, with their genitals cut off and stuffed into their mouths, the females with their breasts cut off.[45]

We must act with vindictive earnestness against the Sioux, even to their extermination, men, women, and children"
—William Tecumseh Sherman[46]

41. "The power of the Bible is largely that it gives an unvarnished picture of human nature and of the dynamics of history, and also of religion and the things that people do in its name" (Collins, "The Bible and Legitimation of Violence," 6).

42. The quotation (widely available) is from Cook, "Thanksgiving"; or Zinn, *A People's History*, 15.

43. *Winston-Salem Journal*, August 31, 2009, A8 (quoting the *New York Times*, August 28, 2009).

44. O'Brien, *In the Lake*, 261–63. For further examples, equally as difficult to read, see also Tran, *Vietnam War*, 35–48. The book is an extended examination of how America has denied much of the reality of the war.

45. Siemon-Netto, *Acquittal of God*, 34, who argues that such an atrocity was "government policy," in contrast to the illegal acts committed at My Lai (35).

46. O'Brien, *In the Lake*, 260.

In the summer of 1885 Geronimo attacked settlements within several miles of Fort Bayard and Silver City. Cowboy, hunter, and guide James H. Cook claimed that the Apaches killed "sixteen in all . . . several of them being women and children. One or two of the children were tortured to death by being hung up on spikes outside their houses." [47]

From the infant in its cradle to the feeble old man, no one was spared; the crusaders slaughtered all the inhabitants without distinction.[48]

Second, the portrayal of a massive blitzkrieg "conquest" from outside the land is, in fact, almost certainly fictional.[49] As Coote states, "Most scholars now think that the people of Israel were indigenous to Palestine, and were not outsiders."[50] More ambiguously, "Israel" quite likely emerged from groups both inside and outside of Canaan, the latter reflected in the Exodus traditions, however much that picture is inflated.[51] Such an emergence would reflect a peaceful process of social developments rather than warfare. Other scholars argue for an historical nugget behind the story of "conquest" in which good does, in fact, conquer evil. In this reading, a small group of "Israelites" who experienced the Exodus infiltrate the land and rally support for a "peasant's revolt" against an oppressive ruling class.[52] The "conquest" was really a type of sociological and political *revolution* that subverted and destroyed a feudal system. Rahab would represent the native underclass who saw in the Israelites a chance for freedom. The overlords would be those Canaanite kings who appear in the story (2:3; 5:1; 8:1; 9:1; ch.12, etc.). Joshua would resemble a contemporary revolutionary hero like Che Guevara (and more successful!). The story would then provide a "theology of liberation," a continuation of the Exodus story with its overthrow of Pharaoh—precisely what Rahab describes (2:10)! Such a reading would make the story far more palatable, although it would not remove the theological problem of a God who commands genocide.[53]

47. Weigle and White, *Lore of New Mexico*, 289.

48. Nigg, *Heretics*, 191, on the Church's thirteenth-century suppression of Albigensians. For more examples from Europe and Australia, see Campbell and O'Brien, *Unfolding*, 102.

49. For an excellent summary of the issue, see Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, chap. 22, especially 374–85; and McNutt, *Reconstructing*, 53–63, on the various "models" of the settlement. Cf. also Niditch, *War*, 52–55; Niditch, *Judges*, 6–8; Newman, "Rahab," 171.

50. Coote, *Book of Joshua*, 557; cf. also 575. According to Coote and other scholars, "Canaanites" in Joshua represent actual or potential opponents to the reforms of Josiah in the seventh century, and the story intends to terrorize them into submission (577 and n. 24 for other scholars).

51. E.g., Smith, *Memoirs*, 22; McNutt, *Reconstructing*, 57–59, reviews this perspective.

52. For a succinct description of this reading see Newman, "Rahab," 170–72.

53. Gottwald, a major proponent of the social revolution theory, suggests that the "ban" was, in fact, a "selective expulsion and annihilation of kings and upper classes . . . with the aim of buttressing the egalitarian mechanisms of Israelite society . . . for the peasant economy" (*Tribes of*