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***Mixing Metaphors: God as Mother and Father in Deutero-Isaiah***

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Since the 1960s there has been a lively discussion about new literary and semantic theories of metaphor and their importance for the study of the metaphors for God in the Bible. In this book, a revision of a dissertation written under the guidance of Martin Buss, Emory University, Sarah Dille takes up the category of “metaphorical coherence,” introduced by Lakoff and Johnson, and demonstrates how their ideas on the interaction of different metaphors can be helpful for the interpretation of “mixed metaphors.” As an example, Dille has chosen the “father” and “mother” metaphors in Deutero-Isaiah.

Dille’s book is divided into seven chapters. In an introductory chapter she gives a short theoretical overview of how to understand a metaphor, discussing the well-known theories of I. A. Richards, Max Black, and Lakoff and Johnson. Of course, this chapter could be very brief because in earlier studies on biblical metaphors these theories were discussed already at great length, though Dille does not mention them (e.g., M. C. A. Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds: Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine* [Münster, 1990]; G. Eidevall, *Grapes in the Desert: Metaphors, Models, and Themes in Hosea 4–14* [Stockholm, 1996]; B. Seiffert, *Metaphorisches Reden von Gott im Hoseabuch* [Göttingen, 1996]; M. P. Zehnder, *Wegmetaphorik im Alten Testament* [Berlin, 1999]; P. van Hecke, *Koppig als een koe is Israël, en JHWH zou het moeten weiden als een schaap in het open veld? (Hos 4, 16): Een cognitief-linguïstische analyse van de religieuze pastorale metaforiek in de Hebreeuwse bijbel* [Leuven, 2000], and his later publications in English; D. H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics, and Divine Imagery* [Leiden, 2001]). Oddly, Dille seems to be unaware of the existence of the international

Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible group of Van Hecke, meeting since 2002 at SBL and EABS congresses (see <http://www.shef.ac.uk/bibs/eabs1/mhb.htm>).

In chapter 2 the theme of kinship and birth in Deutero-Isaiah and ancient Israel is discussed in general. Dille states that there is a difference between the conceptual metaphor of God as creator and that of God as father. Creation terms quite clearly can be connected to God as creator, but in the case of the father metaphor it is impossible to speak about a simple concept of God as a father or parent because in Deutero-Isaiah this metaphor expresses “a *variety* of concepts rather than one central concept” (22). Dille gives an overview of several categories of the family/kinship language plus a short description of each: offspring, child-bearing and child-rearing, begetting, marriage, and the redeemer. These six categories appear to be selected from the discussed passages in Deutero-Isaiah. The question is whether this variety is not applicable to all metaphors for God. As Lakoff and Johnson stated, metaphors are structured in “families” (semantic spheres of related concepts). A conceptual metaphor (or root metaphor) generates a range of semantically related metaphors. This justifies the question whether Dille is right in her statement that the metaphor of God as a creator in Deutero-Isaiah has a central concept in contrast to that of God as the parent that breaks down in several categories of commonplaces. The largest part of this chapter is dedicated to the description of these associated commonplaces and a short survey on father and mother as metaphors, taken from the entire Old Testament as well as from some other ancient Near Eastern texts. It is laudable that Dille also brings the importance of ancient Near East characteristics of the mentioned categories to the fore. She often mentions Babylonian and Canaanite texts, be it on the basis of sometimes secondary and/or dated sources (e.g., Cross, *Canaanite Myth* [1973]). On the other hand, she refers to a book on *Birth, Death, and Motherhood in Classical Greece* (1994) as applicable to a study of the associated commonplaces of childbirth in Israel and the ancient Near East, whereas she could have referred to the fine study by Marten Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and in the Bible* (Groningen, 2000).

In chapters 3–7 Dille studies five metaphorical passages in Deutero-Isaiah, where the father and mother metaphor (sometimes only mentioned implicitly) interacts with other metaphors for God, namely, Isa 42:8–17 (ch. 3); 43:1–7 (ch. 4); 45:9–13 (ch. 5); 49:13–23 (ch. 6); and 50:1–3 (ch. 7). In these chapters a model is presented for understanding metaphors in their interaction with various other metaphors. The author starts with a full translation (with philological notes) of each passage followed by a section “unit: form and structure.” However, neither an argument for the unit delimitation nor for the structure is given. Of Isa 42:8–17 Dille simply remarks, “Verses 8–17 form a coherent unit.” In a footnote she admits that only George Adam Smith also treats 8–17 as a unit while other scholars take 10–17 as a unit. However, this unit of 10–17 is confirmed by the *setumot* and *petuhot* in both 1QIsa and the Hebrew Bible (and LXX and Peshitta),

dividing Isa 42:1–17 into three parts: 1–4, 5–9, and 10–17 (cf. Korpel and de Moor, *The Structure of Classical Hebrew Poetry: Isaiah 40–55* [Leiden, 1998], 119ff.). Apparently the author feels free to ignore such data.

After form and structure the author presents an overview of the text in themes. In the third section she discusses the interacting metaphors. This part of her treatment is the most interesting. Making use of Lakoff and Johnson's category of metaphoric coherence, Dille presents a new approach to the metaphors for God in Deutero-Isaiah. For Isa 42:8–17 Dille concludes that here God is both destructive and creative, both masculine and feminine. At the same time there is an interaction, the warrior is not only destructive but also saves, just as birth is not only creative but also life-threatening. This she relates to the concrete situation of the exiles in Babylonia. In this way, she reveals the richness of the metaphors and demonstrates that a single description of just the mother metaphor is "overly reductionistic" (72).

At the end of chapter 5 an appendix devotes some philological discussion to Isa 45:9–13. In verse 9 Dille reads "earthenware with the artisans," emending the text. She states (124) that this emendation is *widely accepted* and that "artisan" provides a suitable parallel term for "shaper." However, of eleven (ten English and one German) commentaries published between 1972 and 2001 (and not cited by Dille), only one supports this emendation (Brueggemann, 1998)! All others follow MT. The problem with this emendation is, especially in this study, that God as the shaper then would be paralleled by the plural "artisans of the earth," which makes no sense. Who are they? Deities? The question of Deutero-Isaiah is whether a creature (man) may ask God, his creator, about the work of God's hands. In verse 11 Dille emends the word *banai* "my sons/children" into *bani* "son." She argues that what follows is all about Cyrus. Also in this case there is little support for this emendation. Of twelve commentaries only one shares it (Grimm and Dittert, 1990). Baltzer (1999) defended the Masoretic reading with a reference to LXX, which reads *`al banay `al benot*, and pointed to a possible word play with the Canaanite title of El, *bny bnwt*. LXX confirms an early reading of "my sons/children." Dille has overlooked the fact that in Isa 45 the prophet obviously reacts to people complaining that the God who created them is not watching them and leaves them unattended in Babylonia. In verse 12 God answers in a positive way: God has *not* forgotten his children; he has awakened Cyrus to restore the city and send the exiles home.

Although the central thesis of this book, the interaction of metaphors, is interesting and the conclusions of the chapters sometimes offer new insights, the book suffers from a lack of adequate bibliographic research. For some reason numerous important publications have been ignored. Although the book is a revised version of an earlier dissertation, it seems that only literature up to 1999 has been consulted, except for

Blenkinsopp (2000) and Smith-Christopher (2002). Fully missing are, for example, the commentaries of Koole (1997, 1998), Brueggemann (1998), Oswalt (1998), Baltzer (1999), and Childs (2001). And with regard to the metaphors Dille should certainly have consulted S. L. Stassen, "Marriage (and Related) Metaphors in Isaiah 54:1-17," *Journal for Semitics* 61 (1994): 57-73 (similar conclusions!); M. Brettler, "Incompatible Metaphors for YHWH in Isaiah 40-66," *JSOT* 78 (1998): 97-120; R. Abma, *Bonds of Love: Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery (Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10, Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3)* (Assen, 1999), as well as G. Baumann, *Die Ehe als Metapher für das Verhältnis JHWH-Israel in den Prophetenbüchern* (Stuttgart, 2000). In a revised edition the book could gain clarity by the use of a better section and paragraph system.

The greatest merit of this book is the author's awareness of the enormous potential the mixing of metaphors has as a deliberate ploy to simultaneously hint at and hide what cannot really be described (see also my remarks in *A Rift in the Clouds*, 632-34). Her emphasis on the relevance of what she calls "associated commonplaces" for the understanding of metaphors (esp. 177-78) is a welcome reminder of the fact that an ahistorical approach of the Bible is bound to create misunderstanding.