

Review by Kees Slijkerman of Edjan Westerman, *Learning Messiah* [Dutch edition 2015, English edition 2018 (Wipf and Stock Publishers)]

‘The divine Scriptures’ are ‘the "excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:8)’, so, ‘ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.’ That is the harsh verdict of the Second Vatican Council (DV25). It is also a quote of St. Jerome. When reading *Learning Messiah* I have discovered fully new depths in Holy Scripture, utterly central aspects from the Bible brought to light by Edjan Westerman. It raises a question: how well do we know Christ? Because of the simplicity of children’s Bibles we tend to read the so-called Old Testament predominantly as a history: the stories about Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, and then in the end Jesus. The New Testament we read intensively, but we do not understand half of it when we do not know of what exactly Jesus is the fulfillment.

The Dutch Roman-Catholic Bishop Dr. Ron van den Hout, also Old Testament scholar, emphasizes that *Learning Messiah* is above all pure Biblical Theology, in which God’s faithfulness toward His people Israel has the central place.* *Learning Messiah* shows that fundamental to Israel’s calling is the calling to be a royal priesthood, a kingdom of priests, that will be a blessing for all nations.

Slowly Christians begin to realize that Israel still has its God-given calling and the mission implied by it, and that the Church has not replaced Israel. In Christ people from other nations can share in the calling and mission of Israel. In the Messiah they are fellow citizens, grafted unto the cultivated olive tree. The implications and consequences of this insight – confirmed by the Second Vatican Council and the Catechism of the Catholic Church – have far from fully been thought through. The book *Learning Messiah* is an important aid in this process of further consideration. Of course it does not provide the answers to all questions that could be asked relating to Israel. But before one can really address those questions, first all Biblical material that Westerman presents should be taken in.

What then follows are questions like: what is the meaning of the word *eternal*, par exemple in relation to the eternal promise of the land. What does it imply, a concrete territory *eternally* allotted to the people Israel, while at the same time a new heaven and earth, yet to come, are promised. When that new earth is of the same ‘substance’ as the resurrection body of Jesus, what does that imply then in relation to the borders of the land on this present, “old” earth?

Edjan Westerman succeeds in presenting the relevant Bible verses, without getting tangled in political stances. I am glad to know him personally, and to cooperate with him in a theological committee in which we share developments relating to the interface between churches and the Jewish people. Edjan is a deeply religious theologian, who has personal contacts with ‘all players in the field’: a broad specter of Jewish contacts – Orthodox and Liberal Jews, and many Jews who believe in Jesus as the Messiah – besides his eminent contacts within the churches from the Reformation – in which he himself serves as a minister – , and with representatives of other Christian traditions: Evangelical, Pentecostal, Roman-Catholic, Eastern Orthodox etc.

Learning Messiah does not quote the Pontifical Bible Commission, but in my opinion it generally is in alignment with *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, that this commission published in 2001 (www.vatican.va), and that forms an important starting point for further research. *Learning Messiah* is above all Biblical Theology.

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*www.kcv-net.nl/bouwen-aan-de-nieuwe-aarde/schrijvers/andere-schrijvers/israel-en-de-volken