

Preface

This book is a synthesis of my experiences with many far wiser and more knowledgeable people who have studied and developed performance criticism. I have tried to acknowledge my debt to them in the endnotes, so please read those! I am especially indebted to my mentor, David Rhoads, who coined the term “biblical performance criticism,” and James Maxey, my colleague from the beginning of our doctoral studies with Dr. Rhoads. I am grateful for our conversations over the last twelve years. Both of these kind souls read an early draft of chapter 1 of this book and gave significant feedback. I am also grateful to Jeanette Mathews who inspired me to use Habakkuk as an example and gave her feedback on chapter 3. From the endnotes and bibliography, I have surely left out significant people who have contributed to this emerging discipline. Many more references and information can be found at the website www.BiblicalPerformanceCriticism.org. I pray, forgiving reader, that you will discover these unattributed treasures through further reading, study, and conversation.

This book also synthesizes my experiences as a performer and the many audiences that have given me feedback. I am grateful to audiences in Arizona and Illinois that have opened up their classrooms and congregations for me to perform. They are a part of this book, too.

Inevitably, this is my synthesis and no one else's. I cannot claim that it represents a consensus picture of performance criticism. Some scholars doing work related to performance criticism will disagree

with details and methods. I have made performance studies important, especially the work of the late Dwight Conquergood, in a way that only a few other performance critics have done. Second, I use relevance theory as the basic theory of human communication. Others do not explicitly describe their theory of human communication, while others would choose a different theory of how signs work (called “semiotics,” e.g., by the nineteenth-century philosopher Charles S. Peirce; I don’t think the different theories are incompatible). Third, I believe that scholars should perform texts with audiences in order to truly understand them.

This synthesis also inevitably reflects my social situation. I am a Lutheran Christian pastor in the United States writing in English from a relatively privileged position. As I will say in the conclusion, those who practice performance criticism need to be challenged for the ways we may try to universalize insights and lose sight of the particular cultural situation. At its best, I think performance criticism offers a method and practice for becoming more sensitive to the social locations of the performer and audience.

Thanks to Susan Hannah for her proofreading of the manuscript and valuable comments. I find it difficult to adequately express my gratitude for my wife, Dana, and daughters, Ruth and Esther, whose support, patience, and grace is a daily gift from God.

My goal is to persuade the reader that biblical performance criticism offers insights that make it worth your time to try out for yourself. It has changed my life, my scholarship, and my ministry.

Soli Deo gloria!