


C.G. Bartholomew – H.A. Thomas, *The Minor Prophets. A Theological Introduction* (A Theological Introduction series; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press 2023). Pp 390. € 52. ISBN: 978-1-5140-0168-4

Mariusz Szmajdziński

Independent Scholar
mar.szmaj@hoga.pl

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5577-8993>

In biblical studies, the books of the Minor Prophets have enjoyed great interest for many years. They are seen as a comprehensive and coherent collection, a testimony to the faith of biblical Israel, and thus as one book consisting of twelve prophecies written over several centuries. This is evident in commentaries as well as theological studies. One of the latest studies of this type is the book by Craig G. Bartholomew and Heath A. Thomas, *The Minor Prophets. A Theological Introduction*. It was published in the series “A Theological Introduction series”. The authors of this book are scholars and interpreters of the Holy Scriptures, especially the prophetic and wisdom books.

The book under review consists of 22 chapters, 17 of which deal directly with individual books of the Twelve Prophets, while the remaining five are general discussions of the entire collection. It is worth taking a closer look at these general studies first. The first chapter is entitled: “Reading the Minor Prophets with the Church” (pp. 7–26). The authors discuss the process of accepting these biblical texts by the Church in both the Hebrew and Greek versions. For linguistic reasons, the latter was more widely accepted. The authors then list commentators and their contributions to the interpretation of the Minor Prophets in the early Church (Church Fathers and early Christian writers, e.g. Origen, St. Jerome, Theodore of Mopsuestia, St. Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret of Cyrus, St. Bede the Venerable, Ishodad of Merv) and medieval writers (e.g. Rupert of Deutz and St. Albert the Great). This chapter ends with a discussion of contemporary research on the collection of the Twelve Prophets treated as a coherent collection or even anthology of OT prophetic texts. Over the last decades, a particular shift has taken place in this aspect. The authors have presented it – in accordance with the research conducted – in its historical, literary and theological dimensions. I know how arduous and difficult this topic is to discuss, because I have been dealing with this issue for many years. The authors have made a synthetic but completely sufficient presentation of research on the process of creating and editing the books of the Minor Prophets and creating them into a coherent collection. This presentation begins with a discussion of the works of H. Ewald, B. Duhm, S. Mowinckel and C. Westermann, the founders

of the historical-critical approach. Although this achievement is currently assessed differently, it is undoubtedly a very valuable and significant study. Next, the literary (including works by M.J. Boda, M.H. Floyd, P.R. House, R.C. van Leeuwen, R. Rendtorff, M.A. Sweeney, K. Budde, J.D. Nogalski, A. Scharf and E. Ben Zvi) and theological (including works by B. Childs, S.J. De Vries) approaches to the collection of the Twelve Prophets as a whole are discussed.

The next chapter (“The Ancient World of Prophecy”, pp. 27–39) is a thorough discussion of the issue and phenomenon of prophecy in antiquity. The historical outline includes a presentation of the prophetic institution in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Transjordan and, of course, Israel. The terms for defining “prophet” and the role that prophets played in the religious, political and social space among individual nations are listed and explained. A valuable contribution is the presentation of the transmission of the prophetic message, which has its source in God (gods) and the relationship between the deity and the prophet. The message was transmitted both through oral teaching and symbolic actions. This is also discussed. The last three chapters of the reviewed book also belong to the holistic view of the Minor Prophets. The chapter “The Theology of Minor Prophets” (pp. 312–332) provides a theological synthesis of the collection of the Twelve Prophets. This part of the book should be considered a special contribution of the authors in the interpretation of the Minor Prophets as a whole, similarly to how the theology of, for example, the Pentateuch, Psalms or the Book of Isaiah is discussed. Such theological syntheses have already been appearing lately, but still very rarely. The authors have designated certain topics for presenting the theological thought of the Twelve Prophets: The God Who Speaks, The Covenant God, Zion – City of the Great King, Creator, Yahweh – and Israel – amid the Empires, God the Judge – the Lord of Hosts, Gracious and Compassionate, Sin and Repentance, Ethics, Spirituality, Eschatology. A particularly innovative approach is the presentation of the spirituality of the Minor Prophets. The authors state that: “In the process they (i.e. the Minor Prophets) also give us important insights into a deep spirituality. [...] If we ask how these prophets were able to exercise such extraordinary ministries, the answer is Jonah: formation” (p. 329), and as examples they give: “Habakkuk is a major resource for living faithfully amid judgment. Jonah is about spiritual formation to become worthy of one’s calling as a prophet. Hosea’s suffering alerts us to what may be involved in becoming like Yahweh and in sharing in the *missio Dei*” (p. 329). Another feature of the spirituality of the Twelve Prophets is the call to silence, to keep quiet and to contemplate God. The next chapter (“The Minor Prophets and Jesus”, pp. 333–354) analyses quotations from the Minor Prophets in the statements of the Lord Jesus. The authors focus on the Gospel of St. Matthew. They carefully analyse the sayings of the Lord Jesus in which He quotes the Minor Prophets (Hos 6:6 → Mt 9:13; 12:7; Mic 7:6 → Mt 10:35–36; Mal 3:1 → Mt 11:10; Jon 2:1 → Mt 12:49; Zech 13:7 → Mt 26:31), as well as those prophecies that were fulfilled with the coming of the Lord Jesus as the Messiah (Mic 5:1 → Mt 2:6; Hos 11:1 → Mt 2:15; Zech 9:9 → Mt 21:5; Zech 11:12–13 → Mt 27:9–10). There is also a very brief

discussion (pp. 348–349) of quotations from the collection of the Twelve Prophets in the Gospel of St. John.

The last chapter is “The Theology of the Minor Prophets for Today” (pp. 355–372). This is a Christological reading of the message of the Minor Prophets, which remains relevant today. Moreover, the authors rightly state:

[...] we ought to retrieve and renew our reading of and listening to the Minor Prophets today because of their importance for understanding Jesus. They are indispensable in grasping the magnitude of the Christ event. Precisely as disciples of Jesus, we are pushed to return to the Minor Prophets and listen to all that they have to say as part of Scripture for today. They bring God’s word to bear on all of life in their particular contexts, and Jesus is Lord of all of life (p. 355).

The main part of the book is a discussion of the individual books of the Minor Prophets (chapters 3–19, pp. 40–311). These chapters are an extensive introduction, developed according to a fixed pattern: historical and literary context, structure, a brief discussion of individual parts, theology and presence in the NT. Additional chapters are devoted to some of the Books (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Jonah, Micah, Habakkuk, Zechariah). In this case, it is an analysis of selected fragments.

The content of the book is enriched with numerous tables that help to better understand the discussed issue. Also helpful are the list of recommended literature on the subject placed after each chapter, the thematic index and the biblical references.

When reading the discussed book, certain comments and reservations arise. First of all, the lack of a comprehensive bibliography is noticeable. The authors quote and refer to numerous publications, which they list in footnotes, and at the end of the chapter – as already mentioned – they provide recommended literature on the subject. However, this is insufficient. Most chapters lack a summary. Yes, each of them begins with an introduction which familiarizes the reader with the discussed issue. An analogous summary would be a presentation of conclusions. In the part discussing the theology of the Minor Prophets, there is no discourse on the priests of the Old Testament. Criticism of the conduct of priests is one of the main themes of the Book of Hosea and the Book of Malachi (and thus the first and last in the collection of the Twelve Prophets), and also appears in other books (cf. *Priests & Cult in the Book of the Twelve*, ed. L.-S. Timmeyer [ANEM SBL 14; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press 2016]). In the part devoted to the role of silence and stillness in the spiritual development proposed by the Minor Prophets, there is not only no discussion, but not even a reference to Amos 5:13: “Therefore he who is prudent will keep silent in such a time; for it is an evil time” (incidentally, there is not a single reference to this text in the entire book). Also intriguing is the lack of an additional chapter (and therefore a discussion of a selected fragment) for the books of Obadiah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Malachi. Of course, these observations do not detract from the value of the book under discussion, which is truly very great and worthy of study for all interested in biblical topics, especially prophetic literature.

Finally, one more quote from the book, testifying to the scholarly and spiritual commitment of its authors:

Our excitement about the Minor Prophets is palpable. We hope it will be infectious. They are extraordinary books and a treasure in the canon of Scripture. They are multifaceted, rich, sobering beyond belief, full of God, and pregnant with his word, which he wishes to speak to us today. Much work remains to be done to retrieve them for today and to create the space for their riveting message to be heard again and again in our day (pp. 371–372).

Indeed, Craig G. Bartholomew and Heath A. Thomas have done a great job, and thanks to their labours the fascinating message of the Minor Prophets can be read a new and better known.