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Book Reviews

ISAIAH 1-39. INTERPRETATION: A BIBLE COMMENTARY FOR TEACHING AND PREACHING. By Christopher R. Seitz. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1993.

The recent commentary by Christopher R. Seitz on the first thirty-nine chapters of the Book of Isaiah illustrates both the promise and the ultimate disappointment of the most current trend in critical scholarship. From the outset Seitz promises the reader "an interpretation geared to the present form of the text or the final shape of a biblical book" (xi). This approach, commonly known as canonical criticism, appears to offer the hope that critical scholars and conservative scholars may at last share some common ground. Conservative scholarship certainly welcomes the commitment to interpret the text as it stands rather than the all-too-lamentable—not to mention dubious—practice of basing one's interpretation of the work of a biblical writer on an hypothetical reconstruction of the text, a practice which has characterized critical scholarship for more than a century now.

One does not have to read far, however, before encountering the limitations of this approach. Seitz himself anticipates the first problem: Why is a commentary which claims to deal with the final form of the text only treating the first thirty-nine chapters? Seitz offers the answer that the prophets in general, and Isaiah in particular, resist a focus on the final form of the text because of their "seemingly random movement from this oracle to that" (xi). If this response is true, does it not undercut the author's intention of presenting the reader with an interpretation which focuses on the coherence of the larger structure?

Seitz attempts to resolve the tension between the oracular nature of the text and the concern for greater coherence by positing a process in which the prophetic oracles were re-applied and re-interpreted by subsequent generations. This process creates a bridge between the historical context of the original presentation of the word of God (the oracles themselves) and their re-presentation as word of God to subsequent generations (the canonical presentation of the oracles). This approach yields a *process* of inspiration that encompasses the afterlife of the texts as much as their origin. This process is "based on the conviction that the prophetic word had a vitality and relevance that outlived its own originating circumstances" (20). Real theological understanding of the text, for Seitz, requires understanding this process.

In the extensive treatment of the oracle on Immanuel in Isaiah 7 and the discussion of the identity of Immanuel, we can see how Seitz understands the movement from the historical to the theological in the canonical process. After examining the various possibilities for the identity of Immanuel (which for him do not include the possibility of a rectilinear

prophecy applying directly and solely to Jesus Christ), Seitz concludes that, despite the chronological problems, Hezekiah was the person originally called Immanuel. He draws this conclusion primarily from the characteristics attributed to Immanuel and the contrast between Ahaz and Hezekiah in chapters 7-8 and 36-39. He buttresses it with the fact that it was said of Hezekiah that "God was with him" (2 Kings 18:7). The movement from an oracle intended to address the specific situation of Ahaz to a broader statement of royal theology with eschatological (and for Christians messianic and christological) implications is an outgrowth of the canonical arrangement of the material, particularly the juxtaposition of the oracle on Immanuel with the references to Immanuel in chapter 8 (8, 10) and the royal oracles of 9:2-7 and 11:1-9, which also reflect elements of the royal theology of Psalm 2.

In the end Seitz' commentary reveals the large gap that still remains between critical scholarship and conservative scholarship. Even when canonical criticism promises to focus on the final form of the text, it is clear that it begins with presuppositions about the pre-history of the text and that the real focus is not on the text itself, but upon the process by which the final form of the text emerges and the impact that process has on the text itself. We can salute Seitz and other canonical critics for taking a step forward, but we must recognize that it is a small step.

With the foregoing reservations understood, Seitz' commentary on Isaiah 1-39 still makes a worthwhile contribution to the literature on Isaiah. While it is not likely to be useful to the average parish pastor, it will find a welcome place on the bookshelf of those who have a particular interest in Isaiah or who wish to examine closely the workings of this current trend in critical scholarship.

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BRUISED AND BROKEN: UNDERSTANDING AND HEALING PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS. By Frank Minirth, Paul Meier, and Donald Ratcliff. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992.

Frank Minirth and Paul Meier, well-known Christian psychiatrists, have teamed with a professor of psychology, Donald Ratcliff, to write what seems like a somewhat simplistic textbook of psychopathology. In the preface Ratcliff states that the book is primarily written for the layman with questions about issues of mental health and Christian counseling. He expresses at the same time, hope that the volume will be useful to pastors.

The book does contain much information within its twelve chapters. The "bruised" persons discussed suffer from depression, anxiety, and other personality disorders. The term "broken" refers to persons suffering with psychotic disorders or some organic brain syndromes. The "bruised" can usually be helped significantly. The "broken" can be helped less predictably.

The volume certainly does cover many mental health disorders and describes the treatments that Christian pastoral counselors or psychiatrists and psychologists employ. For this reason the book could find a place as a work of reference in the congregational library. In this reviewer's estimation, however, the volume is too general to serve well in a counseling course in a seminary or college. Better texts for such purposes and works of reference for the pastor have already been written. Indeed, several such books have been written by the authors of the book being reviewed.

Theologically speaking, Lutheran readers will find themselves at odds with the book when it states that Christian faith is an act of the free will. This reviewer was disappointed by the lack of more in-depth explanations of the neuro-chemical causes of some mental illness. He was even more surprised that several newer medications for the treatment of anxiety, in common use long before the book's publication, are not even mentioned. Parish pastors could possibly, then, find some space for this book in their congregational libraries, but they should save the space in the pastoral counseling section of their personal libraries for texts of greater scope and depth.

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