ISA 29,15-24: PERVERSION REVERTED

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The pericope which we will examine in this study is rarely considered a literary unity. This is especially so if one does not accept v. 15 as a new opening but places vv. 15-16 with the previous passage. By doing so one puts an obstacle in the way of understanding the particular purpose of 29,15-24. There is, however, every reason to consider the five woe-cries of 28,1; 29,1.15; 30,1; 31,1 as form elements which mark the major redaction-historical composition of Isaiah 28-32. J. CHERYL EXUM, furthermore, in an in-depth study, has shown the internal unity of 29,1-14. It seems reasonable, therefore, to assume that 29,15-24, the third passage in this complex which begins with a woe-cry, is a unity at least on a redactional level.

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1. THE TEXT FORM OF THE PASSAGE

Literary genre

The literary genre of our passage does not make it easy to accept that a unity is being aimed at. The woe-cry itself follows the most common construction in as far as the participle which follows "contains an accusation (vv. 15-16). Even the announcement of the contrastive destinies of the poor and their oppressors has parallels (vv. 17-21; cf. 25,1-5). The appeal to available foreknowledge from the addressees concerning an event which will soon take place is, however, unusual (v. 17a). What is most at variance is the construction of vv. 22-24, which are introduced by the traditional prophetic messenger formula, due to the fact that the element of God’s intervention (often "with a participle) is missing. The last verse is reminiscent of the ‘knowledge of God’, which is often given by the prophets as the reason for YHWH’s intervention (Isa 4,7; 37,20; 43,10; 45,3.6; 49,23; Jer 16,21; 24,27; 44,29; Ezek 5,13; 14,23; 20,20; Zech 2,13). Here, however, specific knowledge of God is not the question. Furthermore, the concepts ‘understanding / instruction’ seem to point more to a chokmatic form element than to a prophetic one.

Colometry

A second aspect of the passage which raises questions is the verse construction. The colometric divisions in BHS are insufficient in a number of places. We have to avoid the tendency to systematize in two respects. Firstly there is no getting round the postulation of three monocola: v. 15a, v. 16a and v. 17a’ (or prose lines ?). Secondly we have certainly to consider two other lines, v. 22a and v. 23a, as prose because

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5 Cf. the survey given in TWAT, II, 383-386 (H.-J. Zobel).