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Deuteronomy is an ideal book for preaching, composed as it is of sermonic address upon sacred history and law. This new contribution to Interpretation, written by an editor, attempts to facilitate its use in the pulpit. The simple, emotive prose of Deuteronomy has called forth a theologically reflective and useful guide for the church.

The commentary breaks some conventions of the genre. Not only does Miller eschew verse by verse comment in favor of expounding larger textual units, not all passages are discussed. Most narratives and homilies are covered, fewer of Deuteronomy’s legal chapters. Scattered through the text are a number of valuable topical essays. It is advisable to read the introductions and essays before consulting textual exposition.

Miller organizes his exposition of a text under headings, concepts and general propositions, frequently printed in italics. One might call this style “reader friendly.” Unfortunately, it might become the lazy reader’s substitute for the hard work of interpretation. On the other hand, if my pastor is going to misuse a commentary, this one is far superior to those most commonly misused. Miller locates the subject matter of passages well, and usually identifies their most important theological concepts and practical import. He is also to be commended for his honesty on passages that offend moral or theological sensibilities.

Miller aspires to a “system of doctrine” taught in Deuteronomy. At the center of this system are the first and second commandments, and their positive rendition in the love commandment. Deuteronomy is urgent to inculcate wholehearted loyalty to the Lord, and to warn of the dire consequences of apostasy and idolatry. By attending to formulae and other structural clues, Miller relates the leading concerns of the book to its parts through outlines.
Miller locates his interpretation in the final form of the text. While he notes that scholars have various theories about the sources and editing of the book, he seldom reviews them; the reader should not be distracted from appreciating the canonical text.

The commentary gave me some fresh insight into passages I have been mulling over for years. For example, I had never quite recognized the relationship of fear to sin in the response of the people to the report of the spies (1:19-46) until reading Miller’s exposition. His discussion of election resonates with Reformation theology. He is especially illuminating on 9:1-29, showing how it avoids any thought that Israel must be righteous because the Lord destroyed the native population and gave the land to them.

Miller attends nicely to the dialectic of divine sovereignty and human responsibility in Deuteronomic theology. The Lord initiates, yet Israel must act in faith and obedience to receive God’s promised good. Human responsibility is especially prominent when Israel is called to decide between blessing and curse (cc. 11, 28); nevertheless, when Israel has been driven into exile, the Lord still claims them and promises to “circumcise your hearts” (30:6) so that they can obey the divine will. Prevenient grace is the final word within the synergistic movement of sacred history.

The strengths of Miller’s Deuteronomy have their flip side. There is an inclination toward theological abstraction. The commentary is strongest when the Deuteronomic Moses eloquently expounds the meaning of sacred history and fundamental commandments, weakest on legal and quasi-legal material. Miller tends to read the law in the same way he reads homilies, not as practical and utopian thinking on the nitty-gritty of everyday life. He has, for example, little interest in the actual implementation of the sole sanctuary provision or the concepts and principles governing slavery. Perhaps we could also gain theological insight from Deuteronomy’s pragmatic idealism.

Miller’s procedure of tracing out the New Testament use of Deuteronomic texts is both commendable and problematic. It is important for the Christian church to recognize her roots in the Old Testament. However, it is equally important for Christians to learn that the Jewish synagogue has a lively, independent relationship to this