
Appropriately bearing Gerhard von Rad’s “semi-canonical” thesis that the reception and culmination of Old Testament prophecy is made manifest in the New Testament, Christopher Seitz branches out by offering his own path-breaking reading of prophetic literature—bridging the recent activities on the studies of the Book of Isaiah with the Book of the Twelve being “under the providence of God, through an act of dispersed inspiration and superintendence” (p. 24). With that said, the work is a wonderful balance of academic rigor and faith.

Rehearsing past scholarship, while injecting and making keen observations from his re-reading of select classical scholarship on the prophetic tradition, Seitz tackles the questions of prophetic genre and the nature of “introductions” to prophetic literature. He incorporates problems of historical, literary and social impetuses. In the end, he breaks free and offers a new gateway for fresh theological interpretation. He calls his approach the “canonical-historical” (pp. 189-219).

After briefly laying out the problem and history of nineteenth century scholarship on the prophets, addressing the relationships between the former and latter, prophecy and law, the life and time of the prophet who in many respects offers the most comprehensive view of religiosity through the historical context, Seitz leaves his mark by emphasizing the “figurative” reading. Right away, one can see Seitz’s modus operandi: “where and with whom do we place the prophets” (p. 56), thereby extending and expanding on Han Frei’s Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative as “the Eclipse of Biblical Prophecy” (Chapter 3).

For Seitz, inspiration and revelation go hand in hand—it is grounded in history, with multiple directionality in terms of order—as played out in the Three (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) and the Twelve. So as I read him, the first half of this book can be summarized essentially as God’s revelation through the Law—the written word with the prophetic archetype Moses bearing the title lawgiver, continuously being made manifest in history as God’s revelation through the Prophets—the spoken word, which finally culminates in the revelation of Jesus Christ—the word incarnate. This undertaking is done with such sophistication and subtly, one appreciates the background as much as the foreground—fully veiled behind the shadows in the works of Hävernick, de Wette, Gustave Oehler (1873), George Day (1883), and others. In my judgment, this is the mark of a brilliant ensuing generation Childseans, now standing on that same sacred ground.

Although historical progression is operative in the book of the Twelve, with or without a superscription, from early to late, what biblical scholars do with this information, “in a proportional way and in accordance with the formal character of the witness” (p.92) is at stake. So, to speak of the correct sequence of Hosea—Amos, but interestingly, in contemporary scholarship, Amos emerges at the front with development of “the Day of YHWH” in Joel, concluding with Jonah as a critique on the whole of prophecy, is pushed beyond the general consensus. Seitz says “My point of departure has been prophecy as an affiliated canonical reality within the Old Testament and the way that reality contributes to our understanding of God’s accomplishing word across the two Testaments of Christian
Scripture” (p. 97). I am afraid that Seitz has run into the same problem that von Rad ran into. But this time, it is not how does the Wisdom Tradition fit into “salvation history,” but even more broadly, how do the Writings fit into his proposal of moving from proph­ecy to apostolic witness? Of course the medium in which all this was taking place was none other than being “under the providence of God.” All this is addressed very subtly, within a generic framework, by simply referencing and unpacking the work of E.B. Pusey. Seitz says, “I have used Pusey in this book, then, chiefly because his is an example of an approach that takes the canonical form seriously” (p. 114).

The second half of the book, titled, “Time in Association—Reading the Twelve,” starts with “Prophecy and Tradition-History: The Achievement of Gerhard von Rad.” The chapter can be summarized as “…there is vetus testamentum in novo receptum, and von Rad never loses sight of this even as he labors to highlight the Old Testament’s literal-historical sense” (p. 162). Points on pp. 173-5 are extremely insightful. There, Seitz opens up another subtle yet brilliant thought from von Rad that has been previously overlooked.

I found the material presented in “Prophecy and History: The Book of the Twelve as History” redundant.

The chapter entitled “Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Canonical Reading and Hermeneu­tical Reflections” attempts to reverse the tendency of placing emphasis on the “man,” or the prophet, rather than on the text. The “experiential-expressive” (G.A. Smith, George Lindbeck, Walter Brueggemann) traced back to Schleiermacher, Herder, and Lowth, receive renewed attention. Seitz says “My hope in so doing is to show that the turn from man to text, from recovered individual personality to the collective witness of the final­form presentation of the Twelve as a whole, need not rob the exposition of its rhetorical power nor its existential engagement with new generation of readers” (p. 230).

As a final word, the ensuing words capture the essence of this work: “A word is uttered. It is the prophet’s human word. Yet it is released, publicly, with a claim to be God’s word, and to be that word it will have to move through time—even times of silence and dark­ness—and finally come to pass” (p. 252).

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