DEUTERO-ISAIAH AND FORM CRITICISM 1)

BY

ROY F. MELUGIN

Sherman, Texas

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In a recent Presidential Address to the Society of Biblical Literature James Muilenburg presented his views on the present state and the future of form critical methodology. 2) He praised the method for its contributions to Old Testament scholarship but indicated certain limitations, among which is its tendency to stress the typical rather than the unique features of a pericope. For example, Jeremiah ii 1—iv 4 is a sequence of literary units representing the genre of the ṛīḥ, but the structure of each unit is different. The variety in structure is an indication that the prophet consciously imitated the literary genres (Gattungen) used in legal proceedings but that he was free to modify those genres in accordance with his own artistic aims. This example illustrates the need to pay attention both to typical and individual features of OT texts. Thus there is ample reason, argued Muilenburg, to supplement form critical methodology by giving attention to approaches which concern themselves with the unique features of the text.

One of Muilenburg’s concerns is to determine the outer limits of the particular literary unit with which one is concerned. Climactic or ballast lines at the close as well as opening words repeated or paraphrased at the close may serve as criteria for defining the limits of the literary unit 3). A second task is to recognize the internal structure of the composition—the nature and relationship of its various parts and the literary devices employed to indicate the movement and shifts in the thought of the writer. One sign of internal structure may be the repetition or parallelism of words and images in successive stichoi, as illustrated in Judges v 19-21 by chiasmus, the fourfold repetition of nilhāmû, the threefold repetition of nahal, and the “con-

1) This article is based in part upon the author’s unpublished dissertation entitled, The Structure of Deutero-Isaiah, presented in 1968 to the faculty of Yale University.
3) Ibid., p. 9.
cluding climactic shout.” ¹)
Another means of recognizing structure is the examination of strophes (or stanzas), which are often characterized by refrains, similar phrases at the beginning of each strophe, and the use of particles as indicators of transition points ²).

We can only applaud MUILENBURG’s effort to scrutinize each text more closely. Without doubt we can profit from the observation of repetition and parallelism in successive stichoi. But MUILENBURG’s criteria for determining the extent of units and for detecting strophes are not always unambiguous, particularly in the case of prophetic texts. It is true that strophes can sometimes be clearly identified, as in Amos i 3ff. But in this passage from Amos regularity in word patterns, stress patterns and in the number of lines provides rather certain criteria for detecting the strophic divisions. In most cases Hebrew poetry has no such regularity, and in prophetic texts it is often difficult to determine whether the repetition of words or phrases is indicative of strophes in a unified poem or catchword connections employed by a collector to bring together originally separate literary pieces. Does hoy in Isaiah v, for example, indicate that we have one poem composed of several strophes, or are these verses a loose collection of separate units strung together by means of a catchword?

The problem of the nature and extent of literary units has been particularly vexing in recent literary studies on Deutero-Isaiah. In the German-speaking world the work of Joachim BEGRICH and H. E. VON WALDOW has produced a rather widespread view that the Deutero-Isaianic corpus is a collection of originally separate units each of which conforms to a literary genre ³). In the English-speaking world, however, form critical methodology has not been so widely acclaimed as a satisfactory approach to Deutero-Isaiah. Sidney SMITH saw the differences of opinion among Deutero-Isaianic form critics as an indication of the lack of success of that method for that exilic prophet ⁴). MUILENBURG, too, believes that the atomization of the form critics is unjustified. The prophet at times imitates tra-

¹) Ibid., pp. 10-11.
²) Ibid., pp. 11 ff.