

Seitz, Christopher R. *Isaiah 1-39*. Interpretation Commentary Series. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993. xvi + 271 pp. \$22.00.

Interpretation is a commentary series dedicated to integrating technical scholarship with the practical needs of the pastor and teacher. In theory the series aims at providing commentaries which speak to the issues of contemporary literary theory. Thus the commentaries tend to deal with the final form of the text and reader response, rather than more traditional categories such as textual history or applied hermeneutics. However, contemporary literary theory is not a unified discipline, and thus a great deal of diversity in approach may be expected in this commentary series.

Seitz's commentary on Isaiah 1-39 is interested in the text of Isaiah in its final form, the received text. This does not mean that the commentary treats Isaiah as a simple unity or ignores the theories of a Deutero-Isaiah and a Trito-Isaiah. In fact, the commentary presupposes these later authors as writers of most of the text of chapters 40-66. However, Seitz explains, later redactors assembled the unified text as we have it. These redactors recognized unifying themes between the texts and enhanced these unifiers when they pulled this text together. As a result, the present book of Isaiah is far more unified than traditional scholarship has allowed for. For over a century conservative scholars have attacked the division of Isaiah with vigor and demonstrated that there are real unifying themes which bind the book together. Just as vigorously, liberal scholars ignored these unifiers. Now, as conservative scholarship moves in the direction of accepting the division of Isaiah, liberal scholarship has been discovering the unifying factors which underlie the book as we have it.

Scholarship plays an important role in this commentary. The redactional layers of Isaiah are constantly presented to the reader as vital to understanding and using the text. However, whatever might be theorized concerning the redaction of Isaiah, the text as we have it is what this commentary regards as most important. Seitz wishes the reader to understand the present text, and redactional study is merely a means to this end.

For Seitz one important factor in understanding Isaiah is the minimal role biography plays in the prophet's message (21-22). Other prophets such as Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, begin with autobiographical call narratives; and much of the text interacts with the personal life of the prophet. However, in Isaiah the call narrative is delayed (if Isaiah 6 is indeed a call narrative), and overall the book retains only peripheral interest in the prophet's life.

For the most part, Seitz's commentary is unremarkable when consulted for a treatment of a small passage. The value of this commentary lies chiefly in its treatment of larger blocks of text. Even when Seitz's comments are unremarkable compared with those of other commentaries, the value lies in his ability to outline the larger context in which the text resides.