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Review: Ezra-Nehemiah

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Ezra-Nehemiah. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. By Mark A. Throntveit. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. 129 pp. \$16.96.

Like many contemporary commentators on Bible books, Throntveit follows a literary approach in discussing the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. This means that he deals with the canonical form of the text and does not enter the diachronic debates concerning, for example, the order of the returns of the exiles recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah. It also means that he uses literary structure (chiasmus, concentricity, and parallel panels) to assist in identifying literary units as well as the central meaning of a unit. Literary devices and structure are now the rage and need to be viewed with a balanced skepticism, but Throntveit has presented several concentric patterns that are not only convincing, but also help explain the structure and purpose of the units. His literary analysis, centering on the theme of the restoration and the temple, is insightful and provides assistance in unraveling some of the difficulties of the book.

The problems in Ezra's genealogy (7:1-5) have been explained in various ways. Why does the passage omit six names in his genealogy that are included in 1 Chronicles 6:7-10? And why is Ezra called the son of Seraiah when 1 Chronicles 6:14 says Jehozadak was Seraiah's son? H. G. M. Williamson (*Ezra-Nehemiah* [Waco, TX: Word, 1985]) argues that the omission of the six names is accidental and the second change was intentional: some names are omitted because Ezra is the important one. Throntveit, however, says that three names, Aaron, Azariah, and Ezra, are keys to the structure. The first and last are obvious, and Azariah is the one who served in the temple of Solomon (1 Chron. 6:10). The result is that seven names are given by the chronicler between Aaron and the temple of Solomon and seven names are listed between that temple and its destruction (or perhaps better, its reconstruction). Thus the selective use of the genealogies is theological and not accidental.

Throntveit explains the problem of the order of the units of the books in terms of the theological *tendenz* of the compiler. Much of what Throntveit says is attractive, but one may question his approach to the mission of Ezra, which he says was "an originally secular mission on behalf of the Persian crown" as understood from the perspective of later readers (p. 42). In this light he says the words "scribe" and "law" take on meanings from a much later period.

The practical aspects of this series can be illustrated by Throntveit's discussion of the imprecations and holy war concepts in Nehemiah 4. His response is balanced and instructive, and he draws implications for Christians from these difficult issues. The same comments could be made on his discussion of Nehemiah's forcing divorces on those who were married to foreign wives (pp. 56-58).

Throntveit deals with many of the technical issues in ways that the uninitiated can understand even where they do not agree with some of them. Furthermore the attempt to deal with the biblical text and to draw practical applications from it will prove helpful to those who use this commentary in their preparation for preaching or teaching.

Homer Heater, Jr.