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Ezra-Nehemiah

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Ezra-Nehemiah. Interpretation: A Commentary for Teaching and Preaching

Mark A. Throntveit

Louisville: John Knox Press, 1992

129 pp. \$22.25

The goal of the *Interpretation* commentary series is to provide a resource for students of the Bible, which is at once faithful to the received text and useful in the church. To this end, the series integrates theological observation and historical-critical research into a tool that is accessible to both the professional (pastors, professors) and the laity.

Throntveit's contribution on the post-exilic books of Ezra and Nehemiah nicely achieves this goal. He divides Ezra-Nehemiah into two major sections. Part I (Ezra 1:1–Nehemiah 7:3), Return and Restoration, recalls three parallel returns, each with a different restoration project: Zerubbabel-temple (Ezra 1–6), Ezra-community (Ezra 7–10) and Nehemiah-walls (Nehemiah 1–7:3). Moreover, each return displays a similar pattern of a) royal authorization prompted by God; b) almost constant opposition, and c) triumph through divine guidance.

Part II (Nehemiah 7:4–12:42), Renewal and Reform, concentrates on the future. Throntveit contends that a primary goal of the final redactor was to demonstrate continuity between the restoration community and the past. Part II strives to extend this continuity into the future.

It is in Part II that Throntveit situates Nehemiah 5, Nehemiah's second memoir, the only example of text relocation in the work. The ties to Nehemiah 12:44–13:14 are numerous and substantial (foreign influence, Nehemiah's rebuke, the formula, "Remember me, O my God", mention of grain, wine and oil, reference to Nehemiah's return to Babylon, and Nehemiah's alleviation of economic distress in the community, p. 123).

Parts I and II are further divided into smaller units, each of which is then expounded. These expositions provide insight into the problems facing the restoration community, ponder the theological concerns of the final redactor, and draw connections between the ancient community and our own—a great launching point for any homiletician.

Throntveit's attempt to find a chiasmus (ABB'A') or a concentric arrangement (ABC[X]C'B'A') in every unit meets with mixed results. At times these arrangements shed new light on a given passage. For example, the concentric arrangement of Ezra 7–8 not only recounts the community's return to Jerusalem, but theologically illustrates the cooperative, delegatory and administrative style Ezra would later use when confronted with the nascent community's problems. On the other hand, Throntveit sometimes labours to conform a particular passage to these patterns. For example, Nehemiah 12:27–43 contains several series of lists (vv. 32–36, 41–42) which break up an otherwise concentric arrangement. He writes, "By omitting

these lists for the present, a coherent structure appears..." (p. 114). To Throntveit's credit, however, he does attempt to explain the intrusive nature of the lists, and does so with useful results!

In keeping with the purpose of the commentary, Throntveit stridently avoids being drawn into historical debates. Questions on the authorship of Ezra-Nehemiah, the chronological order of their missions, and the connection of the books to the Chronicler's works, subjects of many volumes, are mentioned only in passing. Theological not historical questions guide his deliberations.

Despite the fact that Ezra and Nehemiah are rarely used in the church's worship life (once in the three year lectionary, never in the one year lectionary, and only as alternatives in the daily lectionary), they are amazingly current. Throntveit's commentary is an excellent resource for opening the doors to these books.

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Congregational Leadership: An Art in Context

Arnold D. Weigel

Vancouver, BC: The Centre for Study of Church and Ministry,
Vancouver School of Theology, 1993

iv + 44 pp.

Congregational Leadership is a book that is meant for anyone who is willing to give some serious thought to leadership that will be both effective and faithful to a vision for ministry stemming from the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In this book, Weigel challenges readers to examine the assumptions upon which their approach to congregational leadership is based.

The thesis proposed in *Congregational Leadership* is that "effective leadership requires leaders to practise leadership as an art" (p. 4). A major part of effective leadership is the fulfilling of four challenges that await anybody who would become an effective leader. These challenges are 1) to develop vision through attentive listening, 2) to furnish meaning through effective communication, 3) to establish trust through availability and accountability, and 4) to use one's gifts with confidence.

A statement by Max DePree about leadership as an art provides a glimpse of the vision of leadership presented in this book. In this vision, leadership is an art of "liberating people to do what is required of them in the most effective and humane way possible" (p. 4). In order to fulfil this vision, leadership styles may need to change from what most members of the congregation have been used to in the past, for this is a vision of shared ministry, as opposed to "lone-ranger" or "hierarchical" ministry.