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Nay, Reto

Jahwe im Dialog: Kommunikationsanalytische von Ez 14,1-11 unter Berücksichtigung des dialogischen Rahmens in Ez 8-11 und Ex 20

Analecta Biblica 141

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This 1997 Pontifical Biblical Institute doctoral dissertation, written under the direction of Horacio Simian-Yofre, argues for a new approach to prophetic literature that focuses on the dialogical situation reflected in the text. Nay suggests that most interpreters are too quick to categorise a text as prophetic message without distinguishing between prophetic and divine speech, thus failing to understand the text on its own terms. Taking his cue from pragmatic linguistics, Nay regards speech as a form of social action and argues that texts belong to communicative contexts. The meaning of a text is properly understood only where the other factors of communication are taken into account.

The first chapter outlines this methodological horizon (pp. 3-28), before analysing twenty-seven interpretations of Ezek 14:1-11 and 14:12-23 from Origen to Allen (pp. 29-100), asking how exegetical judgements were justified and how far the dialogical nature of the text has been taken into account. The second chapter (pp. 103-23) delineates sentence units in Ezek 14:1-11, defends the Masoretic text with regard to four textual problems, and discusses grammatical and syntactical issues. Chapter three (pp. 127-81) analyses the communicative situation of the three units of the book of Ezekiel where the prophet is approached by elders. Nay argues that in all three cases, the elders are Judean envoys that have come to Babylonia. Chapter 4 first offers an analysis of the macro-syntax of the text (based mainly on Niccacci's work on Hebrew prose syntax) and then presents the actual dialogical analysis of 14:1-11 (pp. 185-336), before a final chapter offers summaries and conclusions (pp. 339-352). The book closes with two lists of

abbreviations, a bibliography, and a full set of indices. The only item missing is a glossary of technical terms.

In essence, dialogical analysis is defined as the study of a text that focuses on the communicative interaction evident or presupposed in it. It is a form of content analysis and as undertaken in this book does not require serious engagement with communication theory, reflection on the nature of speech as dialogue (Bakhtin makes no appearance in the book), or examination of issues of orality and writing. Nay's main concern is to take the content of the text at face value and to distinguish sharply between prophetic and divine speech. That the elders mentioned in the book of Ezekiel present a Judean delegation to Babylonia is the most fundamental hypothesis he puts forward. At first sight, the exodus/wilderness/exile emphasis of the historical review in chap. 20 (contrasting with the Jerusalem focus of the historical reviews in chaps. 16 and 23!) seems to present a great obstacle to Nay's hypothesis. But Nay argues for a different reading of the chapter in which scattering among the nations is a way of referring to being given over to idolatry and 'the land where they reside as aliens' (20:38) is *Judah* (given over to idol worship). On this reading, vv. 33-37 do not speak about return from exile but about being expelled from Judah and are most appropriate for a Judean delegation. Otherwise, chap. 20 is characterised by its full rejection of Judah in favour of the exilic community. Nay sees this as the final stage of a development that begins in chap. 8.

The dialogical situation in chaps. 8-11 is reconstructed as follows: The delegation from Judah gathers before Ezekiel who falls in a trance. After a time of quiet the prophet cries out loud (9:8), to which the elders respond with the saying in 11:3. Ezekiel then communicates the divine word in 11:5-12 to the delegation and one of the elders, Pelatiah, who is gathered before Ezekiel as well as featuring in the vision, dies. In response the prophet cries out again (11:13). Finally, God gives Ezekiel a message for the exiles (11:17-21), which the Judean delegation does not get to hear. This of course raises the question why a Judean delegation would want to travel hundreds of miles to sit before a Yahweh prophet. Nay suggests that it is the belief that Yahweh has left the land (8:12) and therefore needs to be sought out in his new domicile (which they secretly hope will be his permanent residence).

14:1-11 presents Yahweh's speech to Ezekiel, which includes a speech with which Ezekiel is to address the elders. Nay locates this speech in vv. 6-8. He understands v. 9 as follows: 'and the prophet, when he is put into a frenzy and speaks a divine word – whereby I, Yahweh, have put this prophet into a frenzy – then I stretch out my hand against him...', interpreting the sin of the prophet (=Ezekiel) as speaking the divine word, i.e. *all* of it rather than merely vv. 6-8 which he is meant to convey. In particular, it is the allusion to Israel's future salvation in v. 11, which the elders must not hear. They must hear only the call to repentance which is supported by a legal argument and an implicit warning, the death of Pelatiah in chap. 11, which Nay thinks is alluded to in v. 7

(and, for the prophet, in v. 4). The elders had not taken to heart the warning given to them earlier, still thinking they could hide their idolatry from Yahweh. Yahweh, however, is well able to spot the amulets on their breasts, even though they are hidden under their clothes (this is how Nay reads v. 3; he finds allusions to amulets also in 6:9; 8:10-12 [as well as murals]; 11:19; 21:20; 36:26) and thus refuses to give them a salvific response (*drš* meaning 'to seek a favour' rather than neutrally 'to consult'), although they get an answer, not from the prophet as they had hoped (the ambiguous phrase in v. 7 is rendered by Nay in the sense of 'to ask him [the prophet] about me [Yahweh]'), but from Yahweh himself.

The author covers a lot of ground to build up his case. While this reviewer found the arguments put forward rarely compelling, the ideas suggested merit consideration. This is true for the theoretical as much as for the practical concern of the book. The methodological discussion is not rigorous enough to command full assent and to my mind evades some important issues. Nay argues forcefully that a full analysis of the content of a text needs to precede any discussion of sources, because only a text that has been understood as communication can be questioned regarding its literary integrity. While the case may be somewhat overstated (the traffic is not all one way), the principle is sound that the better one knows a text in its communicative context, the better one is equipped to use it intelligently for other purposes. Nay, however, does not analyse the text as part of a process of communication. Instead, he goes straight to the communication *within* the text. He seems to use pragmatic linguistics to argue that a text (a speech as presented within a book) can only be understood if considered as an act of communication, while at the same time ignoring the communicative parameters of the book itself! Nay does not discuss to what extent the author of the book of Ezekiel presents dialogical situations as opposed to merely alluding to them. He is aware that chap. 14 does not present a dialogue but a divine monologue. Yet he does not stop to ask why we do not have additional narrative introductions to the material in vv. 6-8 and 9-11, which would have helped readers to see the dialogical situation more clearly. Why was it so important to the author of the book that the three speeches are presented as one rhetorical unit to Ezekiel, a fact that Nay recognises but does not attempt to explain? I wonder how he might analyse chap. 34 with its many addresses and call to attention formulae, or chap. 18, which is surely dialogical in some respects but can hardly be analysed in terms of a dialogical situation, except in a very general way. In my view, it would have been essential to integrate a content analysis of chap. 14 with the argument of the book and not just the 'elders' sections. Nay refers to a plethora of writers (and shows an enviable ability to use writings in many different languages), but on occasions this reviewer wanted a more in depth interaction with the most relevant works and had the feeling that the author used secondary literature for some point of detail while ignoring its main thrust (Nay, e.g., unquestioningly assumes that Ezekiel teaches individual responsibility in spite of referring several times to the work of Paul Joyce who forcefully argued against this view). This lack of interaction at critical points makes Nay's thesis all the harder to evaluate. He may well have a point, but as someone who sees these chapters fulfilling a

very different role in the book (*The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel*, Brill, 1999), this reviewer needs more convincing.