

PROPHECY IN BOOKS: A REJOINDER

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Several of the issues raised by Overholt concerning the proper integration of textual study and sociological and anthropological research are also addressed in a recent paper by Deist with which I much more easily sympathize. I am puzzled that Overholt should write that the major assumption in his rebuttal of my argument is 'that the kind of religious intermediation which we designate "prophetic" was a social reality in ancient Israel and Judah, presumably from ancient times'. I have in fact no quarrel with such a statement; and indeed believe that cross-cultural studies like those of Overholt may fairly be used to clarify aspects of intermediation in ancient near eastern states.

What does give me pause is that distinctions readily maintained in contemporary social anthropology between the self-understanding of those observed and theoretical constructs of observers become blurred as we move to the biblical sources. Overholt concedes that the prophetic books are highly edited. He would agree that we find in them a blend of fragments of the original (oral) performances of intermediaries and possibly the responses of contemporaries on the one hand, and the theorizing of (often very much later) followers and historians on the other. It was my contention through the series of studies which he reviews that we have some grounds for distinguishing between these elements. Insofar as this is true, we have more immediate access to the views of the observers than of the original intermediaries, and that means to the

later terminology than to the earlier.

I am quite as interested as Overholt in historical reconstruction. Granted the absence from the biblical texts of manifest examples of 'prophetic' self-reference, for which he rightly notes there was little opportunity, it is important to recognize just how little good evidence there is even of the technical terms in which contemporary observation would have been stated. For the usage of expressions like 'prophet', 'seer', 'man of God', 'messenger of Yahweh', and the like is remarkably sparing outside redactional and late narrative contexts.

Overholt invites us to begin a history of terminology with Amos 7.10-17. But this is a bad place to start, not so much because of the long-standing dispute over how to translate vv. 14f., but rather because the whole story is a late insert into the account of Amos's visions; and its sources are to be found in 1 Kings 13 and 2 Chronicles 25. My discussion of the historical implications (1986: 27-30) is unfortunately ignored by Overholt.

A second issue which I have not much previously discussed, but which I think Overholt needs to address, is the literary quality, as distinct from the literary history, of much of the material in the prophetic books. We are all familiar with shorter units edited more or less artistically into larger ones as a model of the development of the prophetic literature. However, some of the more recent critics have sought to persuade us of larger and more seamless literary creations within these books. Such are less likely to embody records of oral performances by prophetic intermediaries. If they do have a relation to these, it is much less immediate and much more filtered and imaginative and 'literary'.

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