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Kessler, John. "Review of Haggai, by T.J. Meadowcroft. Readings, A New Biblical Commentary." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (April 2009): 383-384

TIM MEADOWCROFT, *Haggai* (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006). Pp. xii + 259. Paper \$25.

Meadowcroft's volume includes an introduction to the Book of Haggai (dealing both with its primary historical setting and redactional and reception history), an exegesis of the text, detailed reflections on a variety of questions regarding the reading of Haggai as Scripture, and comments on its contemporary significance. Three appendixes provide a form-and discourse-critical analysis of the book, and a survey of connections to the Judean calendar. A helpful bibliography is provided. The actual commentary on the text constitutes just a little over half of this volume. The commentary proceeds without footnotes (in contrast to the other sections)—a choice imposed by the series (p. ix)—which somewhat limits the volume's usefulness as a tool for students and scholars, since the research behind M.'s carefully reasoned conclusions cannot be easily accessed. This a significant loss, since so much of M.'s discussion involves detailed analysis of historical matters and secondary literature, rather than purely literary observations that are self-evident. In this regard, M.'s approach is more historical and critical than some other volumes in the Readings series. M. views the dates in Haggai as authentic (pp. 93–94), and he situates the redaction of the book (which he views as essentially a narrative [pp. 89, 107]) shortly thereafter (p. 45).

Noting the difficulties of attempts to distinguish the perspective of the oracles from that of the narrative frame, M. employs discourse analysis and reads the book as a unified whole (pp. 90–91). When the introductions to the oracles are read alongside the oracles themselves, “a clear picture emerges of a narrative structured around the reception of the word of the Lord by Haggai” (p. 91). Indeed, M. adopts a structuration of the book by means of the prophetic oracle markers rather than the dates (pp. 108–9). This leads him to posit a somewhat innovative division of the text, especially the first three units: 1:1–2, 3–12, 13–15a. For M., the dates are nevertheless highly important, and their constant repetition serves a variety of literary, dramatic, and ideological/theological functions (pp. 91–95).

Meadowcroft approaches Haggai as both as individual textual unit with its own distinctive emphases and a text integrated into the larger context of Zechariah 1–8, the Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi corpus, and the Book of the Twelve. For example, regarding the prominence of Zerubbabel in Haggai versus that of Joshua in Zechariah 1–8, M. concludes, “Readers do well to allow the two emphases to exist side by side in the text as it has been received, and to read synoptically” (p. 59). M. surveys the reception-history of the book, including the LXX, Philo, Ben Sira, the Targum, Josephus, and rabbinic and Christian interpretations (pp. 60–77, 228–30; these sections are very insightful).

Space does not permit a detailed interaction with the content of the commentary. In short, M.'s exegesis is sober and careful; it successfully integrates matters of history, philology, structure, narratology, and ideology. I found myself largely in agreement with his historical and exegetical positions, although unconvinced by some (e.g., his downplaying of Haggai's particular stress on Zerubbabel as an individual, in an attempt to deflect the designation of 2:23 as “unfulfilled prophecy” [p. 207]). As noted, M. devotes a significant portion of his work to questions regarding the various dynamics involved in reading and appropriating Haggai as Scripture. M. roots his approach in the concept of a “hermeneutical circle,” involving the text and its authors as well as the reader in a dialogical relation-

ship (pp. 4-15). From there he moves to the concepts of “speech-act theory” (Anthony Thistelton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992]; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* [Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995]) and “relevance theory” (Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* [2nd ed.; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995]) as “tools that enable me to hold together in my work a respect for the author and the intention to communicate along with my commitment to bring the interests of the reader into conversation with the text” (p. 15). M. provides a careful and detailed analysis of these theoretical approaches and their usefulness for reading Haggai (pp. 15-40). The fruit of such analysis appears in M.’s concluding chapter. There he draws out the implications of Haggai for contemporary readers on a variety of levels: societal, political, ecclesiological, and theological. One wonders whether M.’s theoretical foundations ought not to have been published as a separate article (they merit wider reading, although I find M.’s exposition of Wolterstorff’s views on the role of the human author in divine discourse to be deficient [pp. 33-34]), leaving more room for analysis of the text. In sum, this is an excellent volume, providing an introduction to the plethora of issues relating to the reading and appropriation of Haggai.

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