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"Le strategie di Dio: Dinamiche comunicative nei discorsi divini del Trito-Isaia", Elżbieta M. Obara, Rzym 2010 : [recenzja]

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Elżbieta M. Obara, *Le strategie di Dio: Dinamiche comunicative nei discorsi divini del Trito-Isaia* (Analecta Biblica 188; Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2010). Pp. 504. € 37. ISBN 978-88-7653-188-0

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In the last twenty years there has been noticeable increase in interest in the third part of the book of Isaiah (chs. 56–66). The most important contributors in this area (among them S. Sekine, K. Koenen, O.H. Steck, W. Lau, P.A. Smith, and L. Ruzskowski) remain within the historical-critical method, especially *Redaktionsgeschichte*. A different approach is proposed by Elżbieta Obara in her doctoral dissertation *Le strategie di Dio: Dinamiche comunicative nei discorsi divini del Trito-Isaia*, written under the guidance of Prof. H. Simian-Yofre SJ, and defended in November 2009 at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. Instead of being concerned with typically diachronic questions like the unity of Isa 56–66, its author, and its process of redaction, Obara prefers a synchronic treatment which respects the literary character of Trito-Isaiah, and focuses her attention on the discourse strategies deployed in it (p. 13). This perspective introduces a modified concept of the author understood as “textual strategy” and in this case identified with Yahweh, who speaks in the first person as the announcer of messages. The recognition of the text of Isa 56–66 as a communicative event requires the application of pragmatic analysis. The methodological premises are revealed in the introduction. The author explains the key elements for her investigation of the communicative strategies employed in the divine discourses in Trito-Isaiah (pp. 19-39). First, the main features of “discourses” – unity, completeness, cohesion and coherence – are explicated. Then, the author presents the communicative dynamism of discourse as an illocutionary and perlocutionary act. The former is dealt with through the presentation of five principal types of perlocution: representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative (p. 33). At the end of the introduction the author explains the specificity of communication through the written text.

Obara's monograph consists of three parts. The first (pp. 41-135) begins with an analysis of Isa 56:1-8 as a communicative *ouverture* of the divine discourses in Trito-Isaiah. After presenting the formal elements of this programmatic discourse, such as unity, cohesion and coherence, the author searches for the chief motifs of the communicative theme of Isa 56:1-8, of which she finds four. The first is the bipolar divine revelation which can take the shape of a salvific event or of a judgement sanctioning human choices. The second corresponds to the identity of the addressees of the divine discourses. This group potentially involves every man and woman. The third motif is located in the criteria of diversification applied to God's judgement, which consists in the answer to the human adherence to, or refusal of, the covenant. The fourth motif indicates the expected results of divine action and the subsequent human response. The next step in the analysis of Isa 56:1-8 brings out the verification of communicative modalities chosen to present the motifs. The aim of divine discourse is not only informative, but also persuasive. God wants to convince everyone to accept his invitation to participate in salvation and benediction. In effect, the principal theme of Isa 56:1-8 expresses God's desire for each human being's acceptance of the invitation, which would reveal the divine will of the universalistic salvation (p. 115). In the second chapter of the first part of the monograph, using formal criteria, Obara identifies other divine discourses in Trito-Isaiah (57:3-13; 57:14-19; 58:1-14; 65:1-25; 66:1-23) and subsequently provisionally investigates their ways of articulation in the four thematic motifs.

The second part of the monograph (pp. 137-279) contains a semantic analysis of all the divine discourses in Trito-Isaiah. The aim of this inquiry is to examine the means of expression of the four motifs, which – in the light of Isa 56:1-8 – the author maintains are the most important in divine communication (*il "che cosa" della comunicazione*). In the case of the first motif – the revelation of Yahweh – Obara confirms the validity of its alternative character as salvation or judgement. Divine revelation is not an abstract reality, for it is always a reciprocal relation between concrete subjects – Yahweh and the people. The analysis of the second motif – the recipients of the revelation – permits a universalistic redefinition of the concept of the people of God. As a consequence, the phrase "people of Yahweh" is not limited to the entire chosen people; nor are "not-people" simply identified with pagan nations. In this context, Israel functions as an example. This status is not based on election, but on selection, which takes place at the moment of the revelation of God. The third motif – the criteria of diversification – is shown from the perspective of the content of the criteria (salvation or condemnation) and the strategy of their exposition. Salvation is realised

in the human choices concerning the relation with God, which also forms people's relationship with their neighbours. Human behaviour in the community should follow God in his act of liberation and his gracious care for the human being. In order to bring the addressees around to this kind of behaviour, in his discourses God describes negative conduct with adequate communicative strategies – that is, irony and sarcasm. The fourth and last thematic motif in Trito-Isaiah – the expected results – is closely connected to the relational revelation of God: benediction and life or condemnation and death depend on the human relationship with God.

The third part of the monograph (pp. 281-457) contains a pragmatic analysis of the divine discourses, which examines the modality of divine communication (*il "come" della comunicazione*). Each of the discourses is examined in the same way. First, the author studies the linguistic acts used in the discourses. In their light Obara proposes a dynamics of the analysed discourses and verifies their communicative intentions. The focus then shifts to reinterpretation of the four main motifs from Isa 56:1-8. The analysis finishes with recognition of the persuasive value of the discourses.

The conclusion of the monograph (pp. 459-466) synthetically demonstrates the presence of broad communicative unity in divine discourses in Trito-Isaiah (56:1-8; 57:3-13; 57:14-19; 58:1-14; 65:1-25; 66:1-24), and then develops these discourses in a coherent thematic continuum, differentiated, however, by varied persuasive strategies. The monograph concludes with abbreviations, bibliography and an index of authors (pp. 466-495).

The significance of Obara's monograph resides in the new, theocentric exposition of Trito-Isaiah's theology. The complete reading of the divine discourses in Isa 56–66 indicates that the act of ascribing to God the role of the speaker (the announcer of messages) is a key communicative strategy. In divine communication mediators are absent. In this way, people are addressed directly by God and thus remain more involved in the questions undertaken in the divine discourses. God's first person utterances underline the most superior performative authority of the divine speaker, which is decisive in the process of persuasion. The main object of divine communication is the redefinition of the people of Yahweh. This concept receives a universal dimension on account of the direct relation of men with their Creator. Therefore, the salvific event laid out by Trito-Isaiah has a relational character. The life of the people depends on their relation with God. This relation is not only determined by the openness on God's part, but is also linked with the human being's free choice of whether to adhere to God or not.

The book's valuable contribution to the studies on Trito-Isaiah comes from its treatment of this text conceived as a discourse strategy. Obara's

monograph is the first study to treat the divine discourses in Isa 56–66 as a communicative continuum through which God expresses His will to achieve communion with every man.

Elżbieta Obara's dissertation is one of the few exegetical works to use pragmatic analysis. Thanks to this approach, it is possible to verify the illocutionary and perlocutionary purposes of the divine discourses. The analysis of the literary genre of the examined texts is also worth mentioning. In some discourses it permits us to grasp the discourses' meaning in a new way (for example Isa 57:3-13 as a legal disputation).

It is also essential to mention the structure of Obara's monograph. Attention should be paid not only to the general structure of the study, but also to the author's ability to facilitate the reading through the clear introductions and recapitulations that accompany each stage of the analysis. The conclusions do not simply summarize the previously conducted study, but provide also creative development in the theological perspective (second part of the monograph) and the pragmatic perspective (third part of the monograph). Moreover, in her exegetical study, the author puts the literary and theological value of the examined texts in the foreground; she thus avoids overwhelming the reader with technical exegetical particularities, which could divert attention from the main aims of the study.

Notwithstanding the quality of the reviewed monograph, it is nevertheless worth indicating some deficiencies. The divine discourses within Isa 56–66 are the object of analysis. These texts are considered as a dynamic whole. However, one can ask about the relation of the divine discourses to the rest of Trito-Isaiah. To what extent is the discourses' position meaningful for the understanding of the Trito-Isaiah's message? Although mentioned during the analysis of discourse 66:1-25 (p. 373), this problem seems to lack subsequent development.

The divine discourses are examined by means of pragmatic analysis. In her study of the communicative strategy Obara passes over the original communicative situation presupposed by the discourses. The opinion about the "exteriorization of the communicative potential of the act of speech" through its textualisation (p. 34) is valid. However, the object of the discourses remains rooted in the specific historical, cultural and religious context. As an example one could give the interpretation of the expression "you who tremble at his word" (Isa 66:5). According to Obara, the trembling persons are pagans, whose hope for participation in the communion with Yahweh is mocked by the Israelites (p. 429). Yet, the deriders' statement cited in Isa 66:5 points to the Deutero-Isaiah prophecy announcing the future glory of Zion couched in words causing controversy. As

a result, those “trembling at his word” should most probably denote the very Israelites.

Some reservations can be expressed with reference to the semantic analysis of terms belonging to the main thematic motifs of Isa 56:1-8. The semantic value of the terms is searched for inside Isa 1–55 (*yəšū‘āh*, pp. 63-67; *šedeq*, pp. 67-73). However, the significance of a word is construed by its semantic relations inside the rhetorical unit, of which it is a part – in this case Isa 56–66. At the same time, a certain inconsistency is noticeable in the analysis of the term *bərīt* in Isa 56:4.6 (pp. 95-97). Obara refers to the covenant with Noah in Genesis, but neglects the presence of this word in the book of Isaiah, and especially in Isa 54:10 and 55:3.

The presentation of the communicative dynamics of the divine discourses in the third part of the dissertation could be more legible with the schematic re-writing of the discourses pointing to the object and communicative modality in each part of the texts. Obara’s delimitation of subunits inside examined texts is not always convincing. This pertains to, for example, Isa 56:1-8, especially the disjunction made inside v. 7 (p. 57).

In conclusion, it is necessary to emphasise the theological significance of Obara’s monograph in the context of other studies dedicated to Trito-Isaiah. Furthermore, it should be stressed that Obara’s pragmatic approach to the divine discourses enables her to demonstrate the ever valid message present in these texts and addressed to subsequent generations of readers of the book of Isaiah.