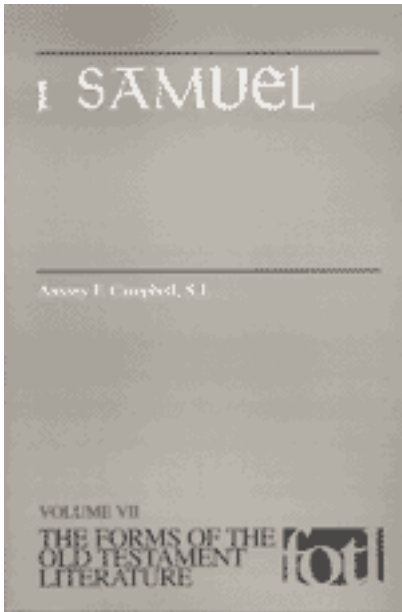


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Campbell, Anthony F.

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Forms of the Old Testament Literature 7

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In the preface to this first of two form-critical commentaries on the books of Samuel, Campbell wrestles with what he calls process and product readings of books such as Samuel, methods otherwise called diachronic and synchronic. He notes that today we do not necessarily seek the right interpretation but one that is adequate and responsible. In the commentary itself the author promises to deal with larger units of sense or story and to interpret substantially the text as it now exists.

The final chapter summarizes what the author (sometimes assisted by Mark O'Brien) has published elsewhere about diachronic issues dealing with 1 and 2 Samuel: the Ark Narrative, the so-called Prophetic Record, the editions of the Deuteronomistic History, and the like. The only surprises for me here are his denial of the existence of a precanonical composition called the History of David's Rise and his sense that the concern of the Ark Narrative is foreign to Christian theology, since Christianity allegedly is free from any concern about God abandoning his people. Christians, in my judgment, might not be quite so free from many a dark night of the soul, and the cry of dereliction from the cross indicates that Jesus assumed divine abandonment was more than a theoretical possibility!

After many years of research, Campbell has concluded that the primary task of the prophet Samuel was to anoint David as king. Here he takes issue with Edelman's understanding of 1 Samuel as a narrative about Saul. Instead, he sees in 1 Sam 1:1–16:13 the prophetic moves to establish David as king, followed in 1 Sam 16:14–2 Sam 8:18 with the political moves to establish David as king.

As to issues of form criticism itself, Campbell notes that the value of the term “setting” in narrative literature such as this lies in the literary setting rather than the institutional setting. He publishes at the end of the book a ten-page glossary where he defines the genres encountered in the books of Samuel. Instead of “intention” (a common category in the FOTL series) he seeks the genres’ “meaning” to emphasize that it is the intention of the text rather than of the author that he is defining.

Campbell puts great stock by his structural analyses and suggests a five-step approach to reading the book: (1) read the text; (2) contemplate the structural analysis; (3) read the text again with the proposed structure in mind; (4) read the commentary with its discussion of genre, setting, and meaning; and (5) interpret the text for the reader's time and life.

We can examine Campbell's method in his discussion of 1 Sam 7–12. After introductory remarks, he provides a structural outline but then goes on to assign 9:1–10:6 and 11:1–11, 15 to a Josianic Deuteronomistic History, although he believes these two passages were combined already in the Prophetic Record of the ninth century. He attributes 7:2–8:22 and 10:17–25 to a revision of the Deuteronomistic History after the death of Josiah, and he detects royal and national foci in that revision. These passages contain older tradition and are scarcely Deuteronomistic compositions, in his judgment (appealing to Dennis McCarthy for support). Chapter 12, also part of the revision of Dtr, brings balance to these divergent traditions: the emergence of monarchy was sin, but it is possible for king and people to remain faithful to Yahweh. Shorter passages such as 10:26–27 and 11:12–13 were introduced at an indeterminate time.

While I by no means agree with all of his conclusions—I am skeptical both about the existence of the Prophetic Record and of a preexilic Deuteronomistic History—there is much wisdom and careful observation of the text in Campbell's comments. But my central problem with this volume is that the passion and insight seem concentrated in tradition-historical and redactional-critical issues, two areas in which the author has made major proposals and major contributions in the past. The extra that comes from form criticism seems thin to me: 1 Sam 7 is called a “reported story”; the traditions in 1 Sam 8 are identified as “accounts” and the whole as “reported story”; God's commission to Samuel in 9:1–10:16 is conveyed in a “story”; the genre of 1 Sam 12 is “close to

indefinable.” These types of classifications offer little to the task of understanding or interpretation.

Is form criticism what is needed if one wants to move to a method beyond tradition history or redaction criticism? Would not narrative criticism offer a better understanding of the text’s form? Narrative criticism pays attention to the characters, events, and settings within stories, identifies implied authors and implied readers, and focuses on the narrative’s discourse or rhetoric. It helps us see what the text means as text. While Campbell promises attention to product as well as process, his best and most substantive comments are surely in the world *behind* the text.