

history. And so, conversely, as long as the *meaning* is clear, the reader will dismiss as wholly unimportant and irrelevant any critical considerations of the details of the narrative in which that meaning is embodied. The pious Jew, with the simple profundity that sees (as a child sees) much that is hidden from more sophisticated folk, *knows* that the story is true, and would consider this as far more important than trying to answer the question, "But did it actually happen in such a month of such a year, and in such a fashion?" I think that if the teacher has really absorbed this point of view, and will gradually communicate it to the children, he will do much to answer their questions and to establish them with all firmness on the impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture.

Finally, remember that in the teaching of Scripture, and indeed of any subject, you are moulding a plastic material which presently will set so hard that only God Himself can change it, and perhaps even He only by breaking it. Your impress will be permanent; see that it bears, in every point, the sign of the Cross. And do not forget that every time you take a lesson in school, you are fulfilling the parting command of our Master, "Go ye therefore and teach . . .". Happy is that class, and that school, in which this command is so perfectly fulfilled that in every lesson, and indeed in all the contacts of life, the teacher may continually be saying, less indeed by word than by action and example and prayer, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord".

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## Old Testament Study

BY THE REV. CANON J. E. FISON, M.A., B.D.

I WANT to draw attention to three or four recent books on the Old Testament which have impressed me very much. First of all no Christian should neglect the two works of the great Jewish mystic and thinker, Professor Martin Buber: *The Prophetic Faith* (Macmillan, 1949), and *Moses* (East and West Library, 1946). Secondly, no one who wants to keep abreast of Old Testament scholarship should miss *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (edited by H. H. Rowley, Oxford University Press, 1951). Thirdly, for detailed study, combining real scholarship and spiritual discernment, it would be hard to beat C. R. North's *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah* (Oxford, 1948).

### I

There can be no doubt at all that no one can claim to be up to date in any way with his Old Testament studies who does not realize the immense change which has taken place in the whole 'climate' of Old Testament scholarship between 1920 and 1950. It is as great a change as that between 1870 and 1900. And in a nutshell the result of the best scholarship of the last thirty years has been to reassert the simple and generally conservative attitude to the Old Testament which

has been traditional in both Jewish and Christian piety throughout the ages.

But there is this tremendous difference. Before 1870 this attitude was based upon dogmatic presuppositions, which started from a conception of revelation in the form of biblical propositions and generally ended by an assertion of the infallibility of the letter of scripture. Between 1870 and 1900 this attitude was completely overthrown by critical scholarship and only those who were determined to hold to their old views at all costs, regardless of the apparent contradictions involved in their position, maintained the old conservative position. The time-lag of a generation meant that it took another twenty or thirty years for the thought of the pioneers to seep down and penetrate the masses. By 1925 this change could be registered in such a volume as A. S. Peeke's edited *The People and the Book*. Liberalism stood ranged against Conservatism, and there was no third party.

Since then the situation has entirely changed. The simple faith of believers is being re-established at point after point, but this time upon critical rather than dogmatic foundations. This makes all the difference in the world. It now becomes possible to argue freely with unbelievers with reference simply and solely to the facts and without reference to a dogmatic authority which the unbeliever does not accept. The beginnings of such a change are apparent in the sequel to *The People and the Book*, viz., H. Wheeler Robinson's edited *Record and Revelation*, published in 1938. The circumferential literary and historical work of the critics is here beginning to bear fruit in theological reconstruction. And this movement is carried much further in the third of the series of composite works, published by the Society of Old Testament Study, *The Old Testament and Modern Study*.

This latter book is unquestionably a landmark in its subject. Archaeologically there can surely be no going back behind Professor Albright to either Garstang, Macalister or Sayce. Professor Albright is not infallible. He is quite frank about the way his own views have changed. But he is justified in claiming that there is now an established chronological reckoning of Palestine and Near Eastern history such as just did not exist thirty years ago. The amazing finds of Ugarit (Res Shamra), Mari and now En Feshka (the Dead Sea scrolls) have almost overwhelmed the capacity of competent scholars to deal with the implications of what has been discovered.

No longer is the patriarchal age a blank. Thanks to Mari it looks like being one of the most richly documented periods of Near Eastern history. As for Ugarit, it has thrown Israelite religion into the melting pot of contemporary comparative religion, with results the significance of which we are still only beginning to realize. And then the Dead Sea scrolls have come along to give us (on any view of their dating) Hebrew manuscripts at least 500, probably 1,000, and perhaps 1,250 years older than any to which we previously had access. The effect of all this has been, (i) to indicate the substantial accuracy of the M.T. of the Hebrew Bible; (ii) to support the more conservative as opposed to the most critical conclusions of literary criticism; (iii) to show that the uniqueness of the content of Old Testament

revelation must be evaluated in the context of a general similarity in outward form between all the religions of the Near East.

## II

First of all, the Pentateuch is now seen neither as the work of Moses, nor as consecutive planned editions of the law, published in the 8th century, 621 B.C. and 445 B.C. Instead of this consecutive series of documents we begin to see the contemporary 'uses' of different sanctuaries, so that the 'use' of Shiloh, Bethel or Jerusalem in the 1st or 2nd millennium B.C., may be compared, *mutatis mutandis*, with the use of Sarum, Exeter or Bangor in the 2nd millennium A.D. This does not rule out the general idea behind the symbols J E D P, but it does put them into the living context of a growing oral and written tradition. As in the New Testament, we have moved from source criticism to form criticism; and though the latter may be misinterpreted destructively, it can be invaluable in the hands of the scholar who is genuinely seeking to live himself into the spirit of a past age and genuinely trying to reconstruct its forms of religion and rediscover its sources of inspiration.

When we turn to the historical books, the chief value of recent study has been to relate the sources for these books not to artificial continuations of the Pentateuchal documents, but to the natural tendencies of courts and sanctuaries to gather round them scholars and archivists. More particularly we begin to perceive the greatness of whoever or whatever school lies behind the symbol D. The 'Deuteronomist' not only gave us the fifth book of Moses, but also a great deal of history too. And what fun it is to have the suggestion that Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, is "the father of history", half a millennium before Herodotus came on the scene! And how disconcerting, too, to recent critics to have the Chronicler rehabilitated as a reputable historian in his own right!

As for the prophets, well, here the work of the Scandinavian scholars of Upsala and Copenhagen really begins to make its influence felt. It seems as if Swedish Lutheran Catholicism has been able to point the way forward on the crucial issue of the true relation between prophet and priest in the Jewish Church. (Perhaps they might do too, or the Christian Church, if only we would listen to them!). First of all Hebrew prophecy is seen to be closely related to prophecy throughout the Near East. 'Cultic prophets' are as much a feature of a typical Syrian or Palestinian sanctuary as cultic priests. Certainly there is all the difference in the world between the true prophet and the false, but so is there between the true priest and the false. The criterion of distinction is to be found not in any abnormalities of psychological behaviour, but in the nature and character of what they have to say and of the oracles which they deliver.

## III

Secondly, this linking of prophet and priest means the relation of prophecy to the liturgical year and so to those psalms which can with great plausibility be related both to prophecy and liturgy. Nowhere is this close relation between prophecy, liturgy and life more clearly

seen than in the climax of all Old Testament prophecy, the servant songs of Deutero-Isaiah. The increasing tendency to rediscover in these songs the secret of Jesus' own understanding of His mission and message, which has been characteristic of all recent New Testament scholarship, has been matched in Old Testament studies by the increasing tendency to see in them a true Messianic prophecy, whatever the historical circumstance of their origin and whoever the historical personage they represent. Here is the Messiah—Prophet, Priest and King.

And this re-emphasis of the old faith of the church, based as it now is not on dogmatic, but on critical arguments, has found monumental expression in C. R. North's exhaustive work, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah*. It leads straight on to perhaps the most exciting of all fields of Old Testament literary scholarship, the Psalms. Here indeed Prophet, Priest and King all come together again and again, thanks to the pioneering of Gunkel and Mowinckel, so ably interpreted by Professor A. R. Johnson. Whatever views may be held as to the significance of a New Year Festival in which the king of Israel may have been ceremonially crowned as a cultic symbol of the effective Kingship of Jahweh through him over Israel, there can be no doubt that the Psalms gain immensely by being seen not just as compositions of personal devotion, but also as expressions of liturgical action. For example, we may find in one psalm the enquiry of an individual on a particular problem and the prophetic oracular reply. Israelites needed 'guidance' as much as we do. And the eccentricities of the 'guided' need not blind us to the reality of the Guide and of His desire and ability to guide those who truly seek Him.

Many psalms come to life in some such living setting of Israelite religious life—how different from and how alike to the prophecies of the sanctuaries of Dodona and Delphi and no doubt of Mesopotamia and Syria too! And what exciting vistas all this opens up! Perhaps Psalm lxviii consists of the first verse(s) of about thirty psalms, otherwise lost. And certainly David's role, if not David's person, abundantly justifies his connection with the Psalter. Here is the worship of the King of kings (Isaiah vi), and perhaps more than we used to realize the monarchy focussed and expressed that worship. The distractions of Solomon should not blind us to the ideal of David. As for Solomon, his archives have come back into recognition for the origin of the wisdom literature, just as David's have done in the case of the historical books of the Old Testament.

#### IV

When we try to assess the result of all this thrilling critical work on the literature of the Old Testament for our understanding of its theology, one thing is clear. We are at least within sight (as we have not been for the past fifty years) of the possibility of a reconstruction of Old Testament theology. There is certainly a development of Old Testament religion. That discovery of the first critical period is not denied. But there is now seen to be a theology of the Old Testament as a whole underlying all the religious development of its different parts. And if we want to get to grips with this, which is after all, for

the Christian, the fundamental *raison d'être* of all Old Testament study, I cannot think we shall do better than tackle in all seriousness and humility the works of the great Jewish thinker, Professor Buber.

It is the doctrine of God which is all important. If we disagree about Who God is we are not likely to agree about what (if anything) He is doing or how He is doing it. It is on these latter points that the Christian Church is divided. It is not likely to come to agreement within itself by a study of the New Testament alone, for it all too easily reads its own presuppositions and prejudices back into the New Testament, and then proceeds with quite unconscious hypocrisy to thunder forth its *ex cathedra* pronouncements—as if they had been read out of the gospel instead of (as so often) being read into it.

Only an overwhelming awareness of the greatness of the Old Testament God, Who is after all completely taken for granted on every page of the New Testament, can put us in the humbler frame of mind which befits both the pettiness of our paltry bigotries and the sloppiness of our tolerant sentimentalism. And where can we look for such a revelation to break upon our startled minds? I think we can at least begin with what Martin Buber has to say about Moses and the God Whom Moses met at Sinai.

Who was this God? I AM THAT I AM OR I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE, may be a metaphysical mystery. It is certainly not the effective slogan of a revolution. Yet that is exactly what it originally was. Surely all notions of the propositional God must go down like ninepins before the reality of the personal God. Neither the idol of the priest nor the idea of the philosopher can stand up for one minute in the presence of I AM. But who is I AM? Martin Buber's answer to this vital question is that I AM is just HE with an exclamation mark! HE! When Moses tried to tell the people Whom he had met, he could only exclaim 'HE'. His immediate reaction to a divine experience was the same as any immediate reaction to a painful experience—an exclamation and not an interpretation. (I say 'Ooh!' and everybody gets my meaning. I do not say 'I feel pain', though afterwards that may be the interpretation I give of my original exclamation.)

Explanations and interpretations are necessary, but they follow. The start is an experience. How can it be otherwise if the real God is actually what Christians say He is? No explanation or interpretation of Love can convey the reality of what love is to one who has not experienced it. And no explanation or interpretation of love will ever adequately express the experience which lies behind it. If God is Love, as Christians believe, and if Truth is personal, as Jesus said it was, and not propositional, as all theologians inevitably tend to think He is, then Yahweh is 'HE'! and I AM THAT I AM, means something more like 'I will be there as He Who I there will be'.

'HE' cannot be proved. The very essence of an apostolic ministry is that it bears witness to Him, and does not prove Him. The temptation of ecclesiastics and evangelists to go back on this and deny the very essence of their calling is proof positive of the tremendous need to rediscover the secret of the mystery of the God of the Old Testament. To assert the inexpressible reality of 'Him' is not to deny the need for constant reinterpretation of our understanding of Him.

On the contrary, as the whole of the Old Testament shows, it is the greatest possible stimulus to such interpretation. To assert that "I will be there as HE who I there will be" is the true meaning of the divine assurance to Moses is not to deny the Real Presence. On the contrary it is the only guarantee of that Presence, for it is grounded not in any rite or formula of man but in the declared promise and will of God Himself. In Buber's words, we cannot conjure Him and we do not need to. We can rely on Him and that is the very essence of faith, both in the Old Testament and the New.

## Notes on Recent Biblical Literature

BY THE REV. W. LEATHEM, B.A.

ON putting together these random notes on some recent biblical literature, the writer's aim has been to offer a little guidance to those who are called to teach the Scriptures and preach the Gospel. It comes at a time when most clergymen may reasonably expect to be the recipients of a few book tokens from understanding and generous-hearted parishioners. How rich would be the latter's reward if, through their far-seeing kindness, their vicar's preaching took on a new freshness in the coming year!

Because of the particular aim the choice has been limited to 'middle-weights', and furthermore, to those which should prove immediately helpful; that is, such as would come readily as grist to the preacher's mill. It has also been suggested that the emphasis should lie in the direction of the New Testament. Because of this request the writer's perverseness (a national trait, he hopes, rather than personal fault) leads him to start off with a couple of books inclusive of the Old as well as the New. Leaving aside questions of literary and historical criticism (and occasional theological lapses) let me heartily commend *The Theological Word Book of the Bible* (S.C.M. Press, 25/-), and recommend it, not only because of its achievement but also because of its idealism. Here is a volume which, in design, is that which every hard-working minister of the Gospel with limited means and gifts has been dreaming about. If we suggest that fulfilment has not *quite* reached promise this is no censure but high praise. Truly it is the preacher's *Vade Mecum*, for even when he may disagree with it, it points the direction towards a more excellent way. The defining word in the title is "theological". The work is concerned supremely with the essence, or inner core, of revelation itself, and either not at all, or scarcely, with matters of history, geography, archaeology, etc. A hard-worked vicar, or an inexperienced curate, with this as his possession, and making diligent use of it, may look forward with new confidence to the task of expounding "the whole counsel of God". A word of appeal to those who are of the same school of thought as the writer: don't be put off by the worthy editor's pet pastime, the knocking down