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still awaits a satisfactory commentary which takes account of the great strides made in recent years. If, that is, the task is now worth attempting. As suggested earlier, Haenchen on Acts gives hope that it can still be done. His work stands unrivalled, though the sobriety of F.F. Bruce on the Greek text (Tyndale Commentaries, second edition 1952) makes him a desirable companion.

The Gospel of John has been attracting commentators on the grand scale: R.E. Brown (Anchor Bible, two volumes, 1966) is comprehensive without being in the least unreadable. R. Schnackenburg (1965) takes two large volumes to reach chapter twelve. On a more practical scale for everyday use, B. Lindars (New Century Bible, 1972) is not only attractive in its own right but gives more of an impression of the many interesting lines of Johannine study at present being pursued than, for example, J.N. Sanders and B.A. Mastin (1968), which nevertheless has the advantages of the mode of presentation of the Black series.

While the Pauline corpus is admirably served by the Black series (especially by C.K. Barrett on the Roman and Corinthian letters and Ernest Best on I and II Thessalonians, 1972), there are other luminaries. C.E.B. Cranfield's two volumes on Romans, heralding a new run for the detailed International Critical Commentary (1975 and 1979), provide an exhaustive treatment of the Greek text. More theological, but not uniformly digestible, because of its presentation in summary form of a vast range of research, is Käsemann on Romans (1973, translation 1980).

It is relentlessly penetrating and rewards persistence. Works on other Pauline writings have been referred to in other contexts. A medium weight book on Galatians is still wanted, and its absence tends to keep a central NT writing out of the syllabus and the programme of the serious study group.

Gaps remain in the commentary repertory, despite the apparent abundance of works available. Apart from H. Montefiore in the Black series (1964), Hebrews is ill served when it comes to full-scale exegetical comment. The Catholic Epistles receive substantial treatment in the Black series at the hands of J.N.D. Kelly (Petrines and Jude, 1969), J.L. Houlden (Johannines, 1973), and Sophie Laws (James, 1980). G.B. Caird (Black, 1966) and J. Sweet (Pelican, 1979) both offer wholly adequate commentaries on the Revelation of John.

Whether the commentator's craft is on the wane and whether it should be are debatable questions. They deserve more discussion than they have received. Teachers and preachers could derive advantage from a more critical attitude to that approach to the Bible which the commentary represents. But no doubt it will survive, continuing to modify itself imperceptibly from one style to another, and fulfilling certain indispensable roles, but not perhaps hogging the centre of the stage quite as much as in the past. In the history of Christian theology, NT commentators, from Origen to Augustine, Luther to Barth, have used their work to make major contributions to the movement of Christian thought. Is the commentary likely to play that part again?

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE BOOK OF ISAIAH: THREE INTERRELATED STUDIES

I THEOLOGY OF A BOOK

Peter R. Ackroyd

There are clear advantages in starting this discussion with something that we can recognize precisely and agree on exactly. This is the fact that there is a book of the Old Testament which is described as Isaiah. If, as commonly and as in

the general title given to these three studies, this is extended to 'The Book of Isaiah', there is both gain and loss: gain, because it thereby becomes clear that we are referring to the book rather than to the individual named Isaiah; loss,

because this common title can readily be understood in a limiting way so as to imply, what tradition has gradually imposed, the belief that there is a simple and direct relationship between the named individual and the book which bears his name. At this point, the original point on which it was clear that we could all agree comes to be clouded over with questions which have yet to be opened up. That these questions must be opened up is apparent to all who engage in the serious study of the biblical writings; but I hope we may open them up in a way which is more generally illuminating than some of the rather pedestrian literary analyses which have all too often attempted to do duty for a proper investigation of what is involved. That process must, however, wait for the ongoing discussion in which I hope to engage.

What we can agree on is the book; and here, essentially, on the book as it stands, as we know it. Of course, that is an over-simplification. The book which we normally handle—usually as part of the larger collection which Christians know as the Old Testament or the still larger collection, the Bible—is likely to be in the language which we generally use, in a translation—one of the many available to us in a period rich in translations of varying quality and differing intention, though many of them of importance in mediating insights into the nature and meaning of the original. We must, however, be continually conscious that it is a translation, and that like all translations, except of the most pedestrian factual matter, likely to contain more or less of paraphrase, of interpretation, of modification dictated by the range of the language into which the translation is made, and by the extent of our knowledge of the language upon which it is based. With an ancient language, and one inevitably only partially known by reason of the limitations of our sources—and the Old Testament really is a relatively small body of writings—the degree to which there are still uncertainties, about words, about shades of meaning, about idiom, about allusion, must be substantial.

Textual Variety

But that caution, which need not cause undue anxiety in this context, is itself a reminder that

the book is essentially what we know: essentially, because this leaves open the recognition that we do have more than one text of the Hebrew. Alongside that which is represented by our modern translations—and even some of these are influenced by alternative traditions—we do now have an ancient text, from the Qumran area beside the Dead Sea, which shows many small yet not unimportant differences from the text later regarded as authoritative. In fact, from Qumran we have two main Isaiah texts: the one—a complete text—has these variants (1QIs^a), the other—incomplete—is virtually the text later established (1QIs^b). This in itself is a sober reminder that a religious community of the ancient world could possess and use, apparently at one and the same time, more than one text of the same writing. The variant text in some points indicates an affinity with the textual tradition known to us from the ancient Greek translations—though the varieties and complexities of their textual traditions would also need to be recalled and would be the potential subject of another and separate study (Cross and Talmon).

This preamble, in which what has been said is well-known, serves to introduce a fact of particular importance about the book of Isaiah in contrast to some at least of the other biblical books. Particularly relevant, because sufficiently similar, is the curious case of the book of Jeremiah, where attention has to be given to the oddity of the textual position. Anyone familiar with the problems which exist by virtue of there being not one text of Jeremiah but two, would wish to know which book of Jeremiah was to be the subject of discussion. The position is not, indeed, quite so extreme as that, for there is very substantial overlap and agreement between the two texts, represented for us by the Hebrew and Greek traditions: but the important differences of order between the two and the substantial differences of length—the Greek text is very much shorter than the Hebrew—would demand some attention to the problem of which book is the book of Jeremiah. And of course the answer would have to be that they are both rightly so described, and that we have here, but in a more extreme form, the oddity of the existence side by side at Qumran of two texts

of Isaiah: here the oddity is that of the survival of two alternative forms of the text of Jeremiah, the Greek text handed down to us within the Christian tradition, and the Hebrew text handed down within the Jewish community but providing the acknowledged basis of modern translations, whether Jewish or Christian (for discussion, see the commentaries on Jeremiah).

At a relatively simple level this is a reminder that the biblical writings—like many other ancient texts—provide us with more evidence than will fit neatly within a single and uniform theory. Textual evidence itself contains the reminder that the fixing of a single and generally acknowledged norm—whether textual or theological—belongs to later stages of the process by which the writings come down to us. The earlier stages are, in a great many cases, marked by variety, by alternative forms of the same story or poem or prophetic saying, by differing kinds of theological interpretation of both tradition and written or spoken word: and these within the same general religious community, a community which in some degree conceals its own richness and variety within a body of writings eventually regarded as having an authoritative quality, and therefore inevitably, but rather regrettably, supposed to speak with a single voice.

The most obvious example lies in the existence of the four gospels; had only one been preserved, or heaven forbid, only a gospel harmony such as was early attempted, our apparent gain in simplicity would be overwhelmingly outweighed by our evident loss in richness. But such alternatives abound, and the existence of two creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2; or the interwoven double or perhaps even triple stories of the origins of Israel's monarchy in 1 Samuel; or the overlapping but divergent occurrence of the same passage of prophecy in two forms in Isa.2 and Micah 4, and the similarly overlapping but divergent presentations of the story of king Hezekiah and the Assyrian ruler Sennacherib and of the prophet Isaiah in 2 Kings 18-20 and Isa.36-39—all these provide a wealth of evidence of a lively tradition of interpretation, of a community often alert to the problems of handling the subject of theological discourse,

that elusive and often most ambiguous being to whom we give the name of God and whose nature must, by any definition worthy of the name, remain out of reach of the simplified statements which we, sometimes with an alarming glibness, venture to make about what he is and what he does.

To say this does not of course mean that such variety of material is unique to the biblical writings; it is a commonplace of the ancient world, both near eastern and classical. It provides in one respect a way into the study of ways of thought, of folklore and tradition, of mythology and custom. But when, as is so clear in the biblical writings—though here again by no means uniquely—such a variety is turned to the service of theological interpretation, to the understanding of life and experience in theological terms, the variety has its own particular value in warning us off the simple and the simplified.

Theological Variety

Such a reflection raises a major problem about the title of this first study—and indeed similar problems about the remaining two. For the use of the singular form 'theology' in relation to 'the book'—as subsequently for 'the tradition' and for 'the prophet'—would seem to presuppose that there is a single identifiable strand, a single theological theme, a consistent and recognizably unified theology, detectable in the material which makes up the 66 chapters of the book.

If, as appears to be the case, even the shortest Old Testament book—the tiny 21-verse book of Obadiah—offers variety within that brief compass, it must not surprise us if the book of Isaiah provides clues to more than one theological strand.

In the past generation or so there has been a substantial increase in the number of 'theologies of the Old Testament' which have appeared. This is hardly surprising, since the nature of the impact which the Old Testament writings have on our understanding of theology and of its manifold disciplines invites the attempt at a coherent account. Yet we may observe that, thought-provoking as many of these attempts

have been, and rich in insight into the problems of interpretation and into the ways in which those problems may be resolved, we still remain uncertain whether there really is such a thing as 'Old Testament theology', or whether it is not in fact the case that the richness and variety of the material is less than satisfactorily handled when the attempt is made at fitting it into a particular mould. It might appear that we could more hopefully encompass the theology of a book—as it were, the theology of Ezekiel or of the book of Ezekiel. But this would encounter the same problem, even though on a lesser scale. The unity and consistency which alone could enable a single theology of such a book to be written, just do not exist. For the book of Isaiah, the matter is even more evidently complex. The range of poetic forms (and of prose too, though this is of limited compass), the varieties of style and of content, the differences of emphasis, would suggest that the writing of a theology of the book of Isaiah, were it to be adequately undertaken, would include many if not most of the themes which normally find a place in a survey and analysis of Old Testament theology as a whole. The biblical index to almost any Old Testament theology of recent years shows a scatter of Isaiah references spread throughout the work, with some drawing upon its resources for a very wide range of the themes handled.

The Impact of the Book

It is here that we come to a further and more difficult consideration. Whatever we may say about the formation of the book of Isaiah—and what I have said has indicated that I do not believe there to be any simple exposition possible of what appears to be a long and complex process—it must be clear that the impact of the book as a whole, virtually as we know it, can only be felt when the book is complete. Only then, at whatever point in time we may believe this to be, could it be possible for someone to assess that impact. Only then could an attempt be made, in whatever way was at that point appropriate, to assess the theology of the whole.

We do not know that point precisely. It must be later than any main component of the book, but decisions on dating are very delicate and in

most instances very tentative. It must be possible by the time of the earliest manuscript known to us—that from Qumran (1QIs^a), for which a date in the last two centuries B.C. appears likely.

Early in the second century B.C., in the work in the Old Testament apocrypha known as Ecclesiasticus, though more correctly as the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira, there is a passage which suggests familiarity with the book as we have it (Ackroyd, 1981). It is true that the reference is selective: it refers to the deliverance of Judah from the Assyrians 'by the hand of Isaiah' (Isa.36-37) to the healing of Hezekiah and the sign of the backward moving shadow (Isa.38), and ends the account with a brief summary of the latter part of the book

'with inspired power he saw the future and comforted the mourners in Zion.

He revealed things to come to the end of time, and the hidden things before they happened.'

(Eccles.48.20f., 23-25)

We could not prove from this that ben Sira knew the whole book, but it would be a perfectly reasonable assumption, especially since similar statements about the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel follow in which central points of that prophetic material are noted. If it were to be demonstrated that this or that short passage was added only later, the main contention would not be invalidated.

Ben Sira gives us, in fact, a sort of clue to a theological interpretation of the book. Two particular points emerge from what he sets down in relation to Isaiah. First, he includes reference to much of the material which brings together Hezekiah and Isaiah, and hence the primary reference is to the chapters which incorporate those narratives, Isa.36-38 (though not Isa.39). The reason for this choice of material is clear: the reference to Isaiah comes in the context of comments on the kings from David to Josiah where we may also see references to Samuel and Nathan for the reign of David, Elijah and Elisha for the earlier period of the monarchy (only Solomon, Rehoboam and Jeroboam are named),

until we reach Hezekiah which provides the occasion for reference to Isaiah. Jeremiah and Ezekiel follow on the last royal references, where only Josiah is named; the twelve other prophets bring up the rear! But second, ben Sira includes the passage quoted which corresponds sufficiently, though not necessarily exclusively, to the chapters which follow the Hezekiah narratives, Isa.40ff. The wording 'he comforted the mourners in Zion' is precise enough to point to 40.1 and 61.2, though numerous other passages could be adduced where the same or similar wording is used. Of a more general nature is the comment on the revealing of what should happen at the end, in the final days; and on the hidden things which were revealed. Here again some precise allusion may be found, as to Isa.42.9, but more generally we may note links with other passages, scattered through the book, which use what is commonly termed eschatological language, language pointing to 'that day'—that is God's day of intervention—and to the future in expressions such as 'the afterwards', 'the future', i.e. rendered in some such way as 'the latter days'. Here we might think of the opening of Isa.2, or of Isa.4, or of numerous passages in Isa.7, as well as others which speak of the promises for the future.

A First Theology of the Book?

Here in Ecclesiasticus we have the first example known to us of an overall theological statement about the book. It was not necessarily the earliest example, and indeed ben Sira can certainly be seen to be in many respects so traditional in his outlook that we should expect him to be expressing teaching with which he was familiar. It is the first attempt that we know at saying what the book taken as a whole is about. Its context imposes certain limitations, and we may remark on some omissions which we should not have expected—there is no explicit allusion to the great visionary experience of Isaiah in the temple described in Isa.6; another phrase does, it is true, describe him as a prophet 'who was great and faithful in his vision' (49.22), but that could have a wider reference and might indeed be pointing to the title 'the vision of Isaiah . . . which he saw' in the very first verse of the book, a title in which the word 'vision' is clearly used

not in its narrower sense but as denoting the total message, the divine word which was mediated through him.

This first 'theology of the book of Isaiah'—for even so brief a summary can be a theology—affirms the story of the power of God mediated through the prophet in relation to the political situation in the time of Hezekiah and thereby affirms concisely an understanding of the nature of God in relation to historical events; and this is extended in regard to the granting of healing and longer life to the same king. It also claims the pronouncement of a message of well-being, of restoration and comfort and hope; and this in the context of the affirmation that through the same prophet the secrets of the final age were disclosed.

A theology does not write itself. It is the product of a subtle relationship between the man who writes it, the particular theological tradition in which he stands, and also of the particular moment in which it is set out. The assessing of such a theology therefore demands a good deal of background study, and to do this would take us beyond the limits of my present purpose, and would indeed demand a degree of detailed study of the book of Ecclesiasticus which it is not my intention to offer, even if it fell within my competence. We may, however, observe that this presentation of the theology of the book of Isaiah stands in the writer's endeavour to show the coherence and the pattern of Israel's experience from the very beginning; he offers a survey, interestingly selective, beginning with the general praise of famous men in the opening of ch.44, going right through to the restoration of Judah and Jerusalem after the exile, with Zerubbabel and Joshua the priest and Nehemiah, with a final exordium concerning Enoch and Joseph and Shem and Seth and Adam—thus coming virtually full circle—and then, making clear his real intention, offering an encomium on the high priest Simon son of Onias, active in about 200 B.C. This climax, virtually the end of the book and followed only by a poem as an appendix, seems to imply that for this writer the final point has in some sense at least been reached. The ominous political and religious pressures which were to follow within two

decades still lie in the future—though hints of them have been supposed elsewhere in the book in distressful psalm passages (see ch.36)—and there is implicit the belief that, in some sense at least, the final age has come. Within this the exposition of the book of Isaiah takes a small but not insignificant place.

But if we attempt an assessment of this first theology of the book of Isaiah, we must confess its limitations. The impressionistic picture it offers is inadequate to the richness of the book with its great variety of material. It not only omits much, it may also be said to distort. On the one hand, it ignores the whole of the darker side of the book's contents, for throughout the book there are shorter and longer sections which speak in harsh and condemnatory tones, and others which proclaim disaster and gloom; on the other hand, its assessment of the more hopeful aspect of the book's content is limited, too generalised and too little concerned to draw out the variety of lines of thought. This is no condemnation of ben Sira whose purpose was not to write a theology of the book, even though incidentally he offered one. But it suggests two guidelines for a more adequate presentation. First, it points to the dangers of so concentrating on a particular theme that this is viewed out of proportion to the whole. Second, it demands that whatever particular themes are drawn out in a theological presentation shall be treated not in isolation but in the whole context of the book's thought.

An Approach to the Wider Theological Compass

It is with these two guidelines in mind that I propose now to make some further comments and assessments. I propose to examine three areas of thought which are considerably represented in the book of Isaiah. They do not cover all that the book contains, nor will it be possible to attempt anything like a full discussion of any one of them. To that extent there clearly will remain wider ranges of exploration to be undertaken; we are simply engaging in a surface survey. We are simply noting, as it were, the outlines of buildings and collecting sample pottery sherds.

1. *The kingship theme.* In some respects this

is a theme which has frequently resulted in an artificial narrowing of the interpretation of the book of Isaiah, because kingship with its consequential development into messiahship has provided one of the most popular lines of thought enabling links to be made between the book of Isaiah and the New Testament. It has been one of the points at which a prophecy-fulfilment style of linkage has seemed to lie ready to hand, a style which has frequently dominated discussions of the nature of the relation between the two Testaments, though by no means all such references are concerned with the king-messiah theme.

A consideration of the book of Isaiah opens up something of the wealth of material associated with kingship ideas in the Old Testament. The deeply theological theme of the kingship of God finds its place in relation to the Isaiah vision of ch.6—'my eyes have seen the king, Yahweh of hosts' (v.5)—and is echoed in a whole group of other passages—'Thus says Yahweh, king of Israel, his ransom, Yahweh of hosts' (44.6). In relation to the kingship of God stands the concern with kingship in Judah. But here more than one pattern is to be traced. It is kingship from the death of Uzziah (6.1) through Ahaz (7.1-17) to Hezekiah—king at the death of Ahaz (14.28) and king in the series of narratives in chs.36-39. It is also kingship in an idealized picture—of the son who is heir to the Davidic throne depicted as 'Wonder of a counsellor' 'Divine warrior' 'Father of eternity' 'Prince of well-being', whose reign is in justice and right for ever (9.5-6—Evv 6-7); of the shoot from the stock of Jesse, the ruler in wisdom and understanding, counsel and power, true religion and reverence of God, true upholder of justice (11.2-4); the king of right and justice, the protector of his people (32.1-3). The relationship between these pictures—of the real and of the ideal—is partly one of contrast; Isa.6 and 7 are in part concerned with the failure of the Davidic dynasty, typified in the figure of Ahaz, the ruler who, in the presentation of 2 Chron.28 has become the type of failure and disobedience and apostasy. Over against him there are adumbrations in the presentation of Hezekiah of that ultimate idealization by which that one of the Davidic rulers will become pictured far beyond

what is claimed for him in later Old Testament material, in 2 Chronicles 29-32, so that he becomes himself a messianic figure in rabbinic writings (Ackroyd, 1974, 351-2; 1982). So in the early period of Jewish-Christian debate, it could be claimed that the messiah had already in some sense come in the person of Hezekiah, a claim which could be set over against Christian claims for Jesus. Along with this there goes another strand which appears to offer an alternative line of thinking about the relationship between king and people. If older tradition—so for example in 2 Samuel—could claim for David and hence for the Davidic line a position of special quality, a light for Israel (21.17), a protective power for Israel (18.3), what we might in such passages claim as an embodiment of Israel's well-being; in the book of Isaiah, as it now stands, these kingship themes may be traced further and differently in the use of the motif of the servant of God (Ackroyd, 1968, 125-8), a term used frequently in reference to the king elsewhere in the Old Testament, and here used with some interplay of ideas for both king and people, related in the depiction of humiliation to the experience of Davidic king and people in the deprivations of the exilic period, and anticipating a renewal of honour beyond humiliation (so especially Isa.53). The Davidic covenant is renewed with the people (55.3) (for critical discussion, see Vincent, 65-107), the reality of the promise to David is thereby reaffirmed but in the context of a changed political situation, with the texts in some measure reflecting disillusionment with the monarchy perhaps in some degree now reflecting post-exilic experience when hopes of a Davidic restoration centred on Zerubbabel of the royal house (see for example Hag.2, 20-23) proved vain and a rethinking of political and religious life excluded the possibility of a Davidic king while seeking to preserve the values of the institution. A similar process may be detected in that range of writings in 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, commonly associated with the less than fully definable figure of 'the Chronicler' (Ackroyd, 1973). Such lines of development were not the only ones which existed, alongside them must be put both the re-interpretation of royal imagery in the

Psalms and the undercurrent of Davidic, messianic hope, which surfaces again clearly in later centuries, not least in some elements in the New Testament.

In this area of thought, the book of Isaiah, as we may now see it, offers a variety of possibilities. It contains both a negative and condemnatory attitude to Davidic kingship, and also more than one type of positive appraisal, looking variously to a future in which an ideal king will reign, the agent of divine rule and empowered by divine spirit, or to one in which the realities of such an understanding are to be expressed through the life of the community itself, epitomised in a servant concept which enshrines the status of the king in relation to God and the incorporation of humiliation and glorification in the appraisal of that kingship, and hence an interpretation of the people's experience.

2. *God and Israel and the nations.* The theme of the supremacy of God appears either directly or indirectly in connection with much of the material of the book. It is at some points explicitly stated, especially in passages which concern the refutation of any claims that may be made on behalf of other deities (40ff.). In the theme of the Assyrian ruler as instrument of the divine will, the affirmation of God's control is set over against claims by the Assyrian of his own power (10.36-37); in controversy with the gods of Babylon and the idols which men worship, the powerlessness of these are set out in terms of biting irony (44, 46). Less directly, the claim is made in all those passages which deal with the theme of judgement on the nations, many of which are collected together in chapters 13-23, others to be found in 34 and 63, and implicit or explicit in the narratives of 36-37 and 39 in relation to Judah and Assyria and Judah and Babylon. The primary emphasis in these passages is on divine judgement, extended to all nations; it is an extension of judgement on Judah and on the northern kingdom of Israel. As in other such passages, particular elements in the life of the nations may be picked out—Babylonian violence against other nations (ch.13), Egyptian folly in the conduct of her affairs (ch.19)—more often the themes are more general, lacking the

specific accusations which are so characteristic of similar oracles in Amos 1-2. In a number of instances too the more narrowly directed accusations against a particular nation are given the wider context of the universal judgement of all nations (see, for example, 24 and 34).

But there are two further aspects to this theme, each of them involving some consideration of the relation between Judah and the nations. (a) Judgement upon Judah is depicted in a variety of ways as being at the hands of outside powers—where these are specified by name they are Assyria or Babylon, and indeed the overlap between the two is one part of the interpretative tradition (Macintosh). At the same time, it is possible to detect another thought here, namely that the attack on Judah, however much it may be justified by the condition of the community, can be understood to be an attack on God himself. Response to that

attack is therefore to be seen as itself exemplifying wrong and right understanding of the relation between people and deity. Isa.7 relates to the theme of the attack on Judah by the northern kingdoms of Israel and Aram, and the judgement upon these northern kingdoms is an essential element in the presentation both in ch.7 and at the beginning of ch.8. The response of king and people to this threat is itself an exemplification of the propriety of divine judgement upon Judah, since it reveals a lack of faith in God which automatically brings king and people under judgement. It also allows the exemplification of the response of faith in the reality of the divine presence, most clearly in the naming of a child as Immanuel 'God is with us' (7.14), and this theme is elaborated in the first part of ch.8 both in the continuation of the picture of judgement, but now at the hands of Assyria, and in the elaboration of the theme of divine deliverance, since the attack,

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like that of the nations in Ps.2, is against God himself, and the assurance of his presence is the guarantee that what the nations plan cannot prevail (8.9f.). Ps. 46 offers a similar presentation, utilising the same Immanuel theme in its refrain.

Relation between the themes of restoration for Judah and judgement on the nations comes to be expressed further in passages which deal with a future in which Judah is glorified, her status increased, and her relation to the nations depicted in often highly nationalistic metaphor in terms of the subservience of the nations. The presentation involves both pictures of a narrower kind (e.g. 45.14; 60; 66) and those in which the nations, as witnesses of the divine restoration of Judah, are themselves brought to the acknowledgement of who God is, a theme also developed in Ezekiel (Ackroyd, 1968, 115-7).

(b) This last, more positive element, leads into the second point, the theme of the coming of the nations to Jerusalem, to God, not in warfare against his people but in acknowledgement of his law. The opening of Isa.2 preserves such a portrayal of the centrality of Jerusalem in the divine ordering of the world; it is the place where God has chosen to reveal himself, and therefore the place where not only Judah but all nations can learn of his ways; the theme is echoed again in ch.19 where, in a passage which is by no means easy to interpret, a picture is drawn of Israel, Egypt and Assyria all as sources of blessing; and yet again in the final chapter of the book (66) in which all nations are to see the glory of God, and some of them are to be envoys to ensure that he is known where he has not yet been heard of, the theme of Judah is incorporated, for the nations will bring the people of God back from every land, offering them as Israel makes its own acceptable offering to God, even, it would appear, some of the nations chosen for priestly function in relation to God (66.18-21). The relation of the people of God to the nations and to God is bound up with questions of the relation of the nations themselves to God. No single pattern appears, but a range of ideas capable of further explanation and development.

3. *Worship and acceptability.* That last point is also one in which the final chapter of the book provides a particular echo of the opening. The theme of judgement upon Judah and Jerusalem with which the book opens is broad in range, beginning from the unnatural behaviour of a people which rebels against the one who has cared for it; but the development takes this into the improprieties of Judah's worship, the unacceptability of ceremonials offered by those who have incurred blood-guilt. Again and again, particularly in the opening chapters of the book, the theme of the unacceptability of the people of God is set out. Their condition makes it impossible for them to be in a right relationship to him. What is set out here in relation to the practices of worship is taken further in repeated references to various types of improper religious practice, and particularly to idolatrous practice. In a biting satire in ch.44 those who make idols are held up to ridicule, and in ch.66 the religious practices of those who are unacceptable are to be regarded as equivalent to the most noxious alien worship.

But equally the unacceptable condition of the people is contrasted with a coming time of purification and acceptability. If the disaster to Jerusalem and its temple is more often implicit than explicit, the themes of restoration themselves indicate the radical nature both of that disaster and of the new situation which God will bring into being. The rebuilding of the city and of the temple, and the rehabilitation of the land as one which is acceptable to God—renamed as Hephzi-bah—'my delight is in her'—and as Beulah—'married to a husband (to God)' (62.4)—make possible the prospect of a true people of God. This theme thus, in its turn, links both to that of the king and people and to that of God, people and nations. It holds together—and it is surely significant that words of warning and caution appear again at the end of the book—the realities of man's condition and the promises of a true and enduring relationship with God.

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In this first stage of the discussion little attention has been devoted to what we may term the chronological aspects of the variety in the book. In endeavouring to see what the book as a whole has to say it has seemed proper to take material from any part of it, without more than occasional reference to the changes politically and socially against which some of the differences are to be set. It is a reminder of the total impact of the book to be seen alongside consideration for different levels.

It is perhaps important, however, to draw attention to one other point which is relevant for such a view of the book. While we saw a unified, though somewhat one-sided, view of the book in the words of ben Sira, and while we might, equally, take up questions of the interpretation of the book in the long tradition of commentaries, both Jewish and Christian, over the following centuries; we must also recognize the degree to which the impact on reader and hearer comes less from knowledge of the book as a whole and more from the immediacy of a particular passage. From later Jewish evidence we know something of the use of prophetic writings in synagogue worship; we have indications of particular passages associated with particular regular occasions and festal days. It is often thought, though the point cannot be fully demonstrated, that the reading from Isa. 61, associated with Jesus' appearance in the synagogue at Nazareth in Luke 4, points to the use of the regular lection for the day. It certainly demonstrates a practice in which a passage from a prophetic book would be both read and expounded. When biblical writings are read piecemeal—as they are in the lectionary practice of both church and synagogue—something is inevitably lost in the lack of the broader context, though sometimes the preacher may supply this. But there can be gain, provided the interpretation of the individual passage is not rigidly subordinated to some systematised theological view.

If we may look back once more at Ecclesiasticus and recall the presentation of the book of Isaiah there, we may recall the limitation imposed by the singling out of the themes of restoration and of an ideal coming age. If such an overall view were allowed to dominate in the reading of each individual passage in the book,

what might be thought to be gained in coherence would be outweighed by what was lost in the confining of view. For when each passage in the book is taken for itself, not subjected to even any one of the three lines of thought which have been examined in some measure in this study, there is opened up the possibility both of an enlarging of our theological outlook and of a critique of the straitjackets which we all too often impose out of our own particular theological tradition. It provides a warning that subjecting the biblical writings to our own particular theological tradition does less than justice to the richness of their thought and hence can prevent the opening up of that theological tradition with its inevitably constricting and limited presuppositions. Put quite simply, this is the recognition that if our reading of the biblical text serves only to confirm us in the rightness of our own opinions and in the immovability of the particular theological stance of those with whom we stand, we have not yet begun to hear what it has to say; we are hearing only what it may say to comfort, not what it must say to disturb.

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The two further studies: 'Theology of a Tradition' and 'Theology of a Prophet', will appear in the next two issues of the Review. The three studies were first given as the Annual Theological Lectures in the Queen's University of Belfast in February 1981.