

the Eucharist as the source of Church unity. They were merely following St Paul, who insisted, 'Because the bread [we eat] is one, we, though many, are one body' (1 Cor. 10:17). All of us at Mass, joining Christ more effectively in his passage from the world of sin to the divine life of charity and doing this together, cannot escape being drawn closer to one another: the love that increases within us naturally goes out first to those to whom we are closest in him.

But this paper is fast becoming a biblical theology of the Christian life. Enough has been said to show the difference between God's salvific work in the centuries that stretched from Abraham to Christ and those that reach from the apostolic age to our own. From Abraham to Jesus, God was revealing Himself (in a saving, divine self-revelation) gradually more and more fully—gradually irrupting, so to speak, more and more fully into the world of men. In Christ that revelation is complete. From the apostolic generation till the world's final day that full self-revelation of God which is Christ is being accepted not merely intellectually but practically by men, and, by the Church's preaching, being put within the reach of more and more human beings. And our total acceptance of the crucified and risen Christ as the full irruption of divinity into our life consists in our effective agreement to share in his paschal mystery. By this acceptance we agree effectively to pass with him from the world of sin and selfishness to a life—a glorious, divine life of love—where God alone is everything. Our whole life forms part of that passage, but, begun in our baptism, it is accomplished most effectively in the liturgy—above all, in the Mass.

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THE EMMANUEL PROPHECY AND ITS CONTEXT (concluded)¹

Is Emmanuel Ezechias?

As already mentioned, the view that sees in Emmanuel Ezechias, the son of Ahaz, has as yet failed to gain strong support among Catholic exegetes. The theory, however, has certain advantages to commend it. Ezechias was of the Davidic dynasty and a pious king, much lauded by the sacred writers. This view has no difficulty in fitting the oracle into its historical context. Steinmann believes the later prophecies of the book of Emmanuel on the illustrious scion of David (9:1ff.) and

¹ cf. *Scripture* 1962, pp. 118-25

the Shoot from the Stock of Jesse (11:1ff.) likewise envisage Ezechias and not the future Messiah. Steinmann thinks that Ezechias' mother, Abiyya daughter of Zacharias (2 Kg. 18:2), had entered the royal harem as a wife of second rank shortly before the Emmanuel prophecy was given.¹

The greatest difficulty to Ezechias' candidature is chronology. Due to the ambiguity of the biblical data on the point (2 Kg. 16:2; 18:9-10; 18:13; 2 Chron. 29:1) the date of Ezechias' regnal year is uncertain. Some place it at 726, though the majority of moderns seem to favour 715. 2 Kg. 18:2 and 2 Chron. 29:1 are explicit that he was 25 years when he began to reign. In this case he must have been at least 5 years old at the time of the Emmanuel prophecy in 735-734. The dates contained in the books of Kings and Chronicles are, however, not always faithfully preserved and 15 may conceivably have been the original number. This, however, is but a possibility and against its probability stands the reading of the MT, supported by the versions.

The contention that Abiyya had entered the royal harem shortly before the Emmanuel prophecy is of course but a surmise. Even if it were true, she could hardly be called an *'almah* at the time of the prophecy as she was already a spouse.

A further difficulty is that Abiyya's son had as his personal name Ezechias, not Emmanuel. At first sight this may not appear as a difficulty since, in point of fact, no-one in history—not even the historical Messiah!—bore as a personal name Emmanuel. Emmanuel, it is maintained, may well have been a metaphorical name, not a personal one. Thus for instance, of the messianic king foretold by Jeremias 23:5 it is said: 'This is the name by which they shall call him: "The Lord is our justice,"' while in 33:16 it is said that this very same name will be borne by Jerusalem in messianic times. The names are descriptive, not personal.²

While this may be true of future persons seen in prophetic vision, it can hardly be maintained where there is question of contemporary personages. This is all the more true where these figures have a prophetic mission to fulfil. Their very names bespeak their mission and are constant reminders to their contemporaries. Thus Isaias and his two sons, Shear-Yashub ('A Remnant shall return') and Maher-shalal-hash-baz ('The spoil speeds, the prey hastes') were signs and portents in Israel (Is. 8:18). The prophet's name indicated salvation; Shear-Yashub's name was the burden of his father's prophetic teaching; the younger son's was a reminder of the imminence of punishment.

¹ *Le Prophète Isaïe*, p. 90, n. 11

² cf. Sutcliffe, art. cit., p. 762

In such society Emmanuel, too, would have to be accepted as a personal name.

It is hard to believe, too, that the prophecies of 9:1ff. and 11:1ff. were fulfilled in Ezechias. Despite his piety, this king was neither a wonder Counsellor (cf. 9:5) nor filled with the spirit of wisdom etc. (cf. 11:1-3). Then again, Mic. 5:3, an oracle to be dated *c.* 700 at the earliest, seems to refer to the Emmanuel oracle and consider it still unfulfilled.

Is Emmanuel some other son of Ahaz ?

Realising the strength of the arguments against Ezechias' candidature other critics¹ opt for some other son of Ahaz. This only increases the difficulty, as many of the arguments given above will hold against him also. No such son is known to us, and it would be hard to conclude that so great an oracle was fulfilled in some person unknown to history.

Mowinckel² believes the oracle was not fulfilled at all. He holds that the realisation of the promise made by Isaias depended on the faith of Ahaz in the truth of his words. Since this faith was lacking, no new sign or miracle was given. This view does not seem to do justice to the context. Isaias' words on the new sign are absolute. Far from being made dependent on Ahaz' faith, the new sign is proffered precisely *because* of the king's lack of faith in the earlier one.

Is Emmanuel a son of Isaias ?

We have seen that this theory, too, has had its defenders. Of recent years the view tended to be neglected, but has now received the support of no less an authority than Fr Sutcliffe.³

Fr Sutcliffe's opinion is that Emmanuel is the second son of Isaias, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, whose conception and birth are narrated in 8:1ff. His mother, the *'almah* of 7:14, was the prophetess of 8:3, a second wife of the prophet. 8:1-4, he believes, is the natural continuation of 7:14-16. This is broken by 7:17-25. These verses he believes to be 'an errant block' inserted in an alien context: they were probably not spoken by the prophet in the time of Ahaz at all.⁴ Sutcliffe then gives the original passage as follows: 7:14-16: 'Behold a maiden shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel [which means 'God with us']. Cream and honey shall he eat when he shall reject evil and choose good, for before the boy shall reject evil and choose good, the land shall be forsaken of these two kings thou

¹ e.g. Gelin in *Introduction à la Bible*, vol. I, 2nd ed., Tournai 1959, pp. 509-10

² *op. cit.*, p. 119

³ *art. cit.*, *Est. Eccles.*

⁴ His main thesis, however, is not held to depend on the correctness or otherwise of this view (*art. cit.*, p. 760).

standest in dread.' 8:1-4: 'And the Lord said to me, "Take thee a large scroll and write thereon with customary characters 'Maher-shalal-hash-baz.'" Then I took me trustworthy witnesses, Urias the priest and Zacharias the son of Barakias. I went in to the prophetess, who conceived and bore a son. And the Lord said to me: "Call his name 'Maher-shalal-hash-baz,' for before the boy can name 'Father' or 'Mother' the strength of Damascus and the booty of Samaria shall be carried away before the king of Assyria.'"'

A stock objection to this theory used to be Is. 8:8 where Juda is called the land of Emmanuel. This was taken to mean that Emmanuel was possessor or king of Juda. Fr Sutcliffe remarks on this that in the Bible the expression 'thy land' is used of persons other than kings, e.g. Jonas, 1:8; Abraham, Gen. 12:1; Jacob, Gen. 32:10; Hadad, 1 Kg. 11:22.

Be that as it may, other difficulties remain. The main basis for the identification of Emmanuel with Isaias' second son seems to be what Fr Sutcliffe calls 'the identity of the prediction concerning Emmanuel and of that concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz,' each prediction speaking of two invading kings and foretelling disaster within a short space of time. This similarity of prediction, however, does not warrant the identification of the characters predicted. In any view, Maher's conception took place soon after the Emmanuel oracle. The identity of the historical background will explain the similarity of the predictions. The births of the two personages seem to be presented as distinct, and to constitute two distinct signs: Emmanuel is a sign to the House of David while Maher. is one to the people of Jerusalem or Juda. This latter point seems to follow from the command to have his name written on a large tablet¹ in lettering easily read by the people. It is less easy to see how the birth of a son to Isaias could have been a sign to the House of David.

The Emmanuel oracle being a sign to the House of David, it seems better to interpret it in the light of the other messianic oracles of chapters 9 and 11. These certainly cannot refer to a son of Isaias.

Other factors too stand in the way of the identification of Emmanuel with Maher. First of all, the predictions of their births are really quite different. In that of Emmanuel his mother the 'almah is in the foreground: not so with the prophetess, Maher's mother. It is the 'almah who is to name her son Emmanuel: while in 8:3 it is Isaias who is commanded to call his son Maher-shalal-hash-baz.

¹ The Hebrew word *gillayôn*, rendered as 'scroll' by Fr Sutcliffe, is taken by Driver and others to mean 'tablet.' Driver refers to Is. 30:8 and Hab. 2:2 for a similar command to write for the public on tablets. In both texts, however, we have *luah*, the usual word for 'tablet.'

The *‘almah*, then, can hardly be identified with the propheticess. Other indications point in the same direction. Fr Sutcliffe makes clear that Isaias' first wife, the mother of Shear-Yashub, cannot be called an *‘almah*. Maher's mother, then, must be a second wife of the prophet.¹ It is possible Isaias had a second wife, though we are not informed of this in the Bible. At the time of the Emmanuel prophecy she would already have been the spouse of the prophet, however, and could hardly be called an *‘almah*. In this theory, too, it is maintained that Emmanuel was a mere descriptive, symbolic name for the boy who bore but the one personal name, Maher-shalal-hash-baz. We have already considered this unlikely. Further, there seems to be no case where a prophet's son bore one symbolic, personal name and another descriptive, non-personal one. The names of both Osee's (ch. 1) and Isaias' sons were both symbolic and personal. The very *raison d'être* of a symbolic, prophetic name seems to consist in its being a personal one and as such a constant reminder to contemporaries of some prophetic teaching. The very sense of the sign of 7:14 seems lost if the person who constitutes the sign is a contemporary known in daily life by some other name than that given him in the oracle.

Is Emmanuel no-one in particular ?

Duhm believed that the *‘almah* was any young woman who would give birth to a child at the time of Juda's deliverance from the Syro-Ephraimite coalition. In her joy she would spontaneously name her child Emmanuel: 'God is with us.' These children would be a sign to Ahaz of the truth of Isaias' words. The period of tribulation implied by Emmanuel's eating curds and honey (v. 15) creates a slight difficulty to the theory and is excised by Duhm as a gloss. But apart from the difficulty of v. 15, the entire context, indicating some sign outside the ordinary course of events, militates against Duhm's position.

The variety of opinion outlined above is sufficient proof of the complexity of the Emmanuel problem. The weakness of the theories that see in Emmanuel some contemporary of Isaias is that they raise more difficulties than they solve. It is then, perhaps, not to be wondered at that many prefer the traditional view that Emmanuel is none other than the Messiah King seen by Isaias as a person of the future. Their problem is how to reconcile this view with the context of the oracle. Consideration of this can be reserved for a future article.

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¹ After the death of the first wife, presumably. Though bigamy was permitted by law (Deut. 21:15-17), De Vaux (*Les institutions de l'Ancien Testament*, vol. I, Paris 1958, pp. 50-1) notes that monogamy seems to have been the rule in Israelite families.