

In the Study

EVEN in these days of clerical self-questioning, the privilege and burden of the prophetic function of the Ministry remains. We are ordained that we may proclaim with power and authority the living Word of God. Preaching remains central. Sermon preparation continues to bulk large. Any and every aid is to be welcomed.

Freechurchmen, tending to regard this field as their own peculiar preserve, may learn anew that "the wind bloweth where it listeth" through the recognition that the two most powerful recent voices come from the Anglican tradition.¹ Both have much to teach us. The basic distinction between them lies in the fact that while the one is addressed to the Anglican tradition, the other stems from it.

The biggest service that any work on preaching can perform is to prompt the fundamental questions. Our deepest need is not improved technique but profounder theology and a more adequate understanding of our task. The sermon is and must be rooted in Scripture; and our apprehension of Scripture is changing. To preach from the basis of a storehouse of revealed truths and ideas is one thing. To preach from the foundation of the prophetic and apostolic witness to the saving acts of God, christologically determined, is—or should be—quite another. But how far has theory been allowed to govern practice? As with the message, so with the agency of its proclamation and the situation to which it is addressed. In what sense is the word of the preacher the Word of God, and what will this mean for his self-understanding? What is the nature of modern man, and what the vital characteristics of the twentieth-century scene? These are the important questions. It is here that our hesitations lie. It is those who are aware of the problems and have begun to grapple with them that should command our attention.

Ronald Ward, it is true, writes within the framework of the Anglican tradition. But if his work is a summons to the vicar and the parson to exercise fully and effectively the prophetic ministry committed to them at their episcopal ordination, it is yet fully relevant to the Free Church minister. Indeed, the earlier Baptist background of the author makes it more likely that he will strike his

¹ *Royal Sacrament*, by R. A. Ward. (Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 12s. 6d.), 1958. *The Ministry of the Word*, by R. E. C. Browne. (S.C.M. Press, 8s. 6d.), 1958.

most powerful spark from his erstwhile brethren. He writes pun-
gently and engagingly. But his presuppositions need to be subjected
to careful and reasoned scrutiny. In several ways this is not a good
book. Of recent years we have suffered increasingly from the
American system of grouping footnotes together at the end of each
chapter. Now we are asked to cope with the equally distracting
practice of references bracketed within the body of the text.
In many cases this might merit only mild protest. But it becomes
unbearable in a work in which the early chapters in particular are
grossly overladen with references and quotations. It is not at all
clear what is the real purpose of this excessive documentation.
Statements that are merely peripheral to the argument bring no
satisfaction to Mr. Ward unless he can point at once to scholarly
works which approve them. The reader having access to this
mound of reference books will know where to go already. His less
fortunate brethren will probably be prepared to make do with the
concluding two-hundred book bibliography!

But it would be a pity if irritation and annoyance were to blind
the reader to the real merits and the profounder inadequacies of
this challenging and impressive *cri de coeur*. No preacher can
study the chapter on the use of the Greek Testament without be-
coming aware of a fabulous mine of unsuspected treasure. No priest
can read the pages relative to the Preacher and the Fellowship
without gaining new understanding of the crucial place of the
sermon within liturgical worship. No pastor can pass by the sec-
tion on the Preacher and his Daily Life without gaining a new
sense of the contemporaneous application and illustration of the
living Word of God.

Yet the caveats remain. We are offered treatments of Synoptic
Parallels and of the Sermon on the Mount. They illumine. They
abound in provocative material. But they do not wholly satisfy. We
never quite leave behind the moral truism, the religious principle,
and the brooding aura of the three-point sermon with all of the
static view of Scripture that it enshrines. The curiously eclectic use
of Gospel material—via Huck's synopsis—would command more
wholehearted consent if it were more obviously controlled by clear
and evident hermeneutic principles. Even the conservative is driven
to sigh for a salutary injection of the canons of form criticism.

I suspect that what is really wanting is a chapter entitled: The
Great Lacuna. Mr. Ward largely ignores the Old Testament. Per-
haps it is a fatal omission. For to confront the Old Testament in
preaching is to be forced to measure up to most of the great under-
lying problems. It forces us to relentless application and explication
of our new understanding of Scripture. It compels us to take
seriously the dynamic unity of the biblical record. Mr. Ward takes
us half the way. His chapter on Preaching Epistles from Gospels is
far and away his most important contribution. Thus to think the

Epistles into the Gospels, the Gospels into the Epistles, is to advance triumphantly. It is the wider range that is needed—the thinking of the Old Testament into the New, the New into the Old.

R. E. C. Browne does not directly help us at that point. But he does speak to our condition. He probes the fundamental questions of which I earlier spoke, and goes far towards providing the adequate and satisfying answers. We might fairly say that he offers an *Essay in Communication*—so long as this is not taken to imply a superficial discussion of techniques. It is the nature of the Gospel preached and the nature of the World addressed that between them determine modes and methods. So it is that his conclusions always stem directly from foundations firmly laid. The working minister may find Mr. Browne baffling and elusive, may turn with relief to Mr. Ward and his reservoir of sermon material. But I suspect that *The Ministry of the Word* will prove to be one of the great books on preaching of our generation.

Of one thing at least all competent works on preaching leave us in no doubt, that the tools of our trade are legion. From biblical studies, church history, theology, philosophy, psychology, and many other disciplines, we derive our equipment. It is a matter for profound thanksgiving that the best work in these fields, whether British, American, or Continental, is increasingly becoming available—though at a price!

Certainly, no one who understands the Faith in terms of historical revelation can be indifferent to advances in our knowledge and understanding of Old Testament history. Martin Noth's *Geschichte Israels* has, in this area, long ranked as a classic, and is now available to us in competent translation.² Easily and skilfully we are conducted through the tangled story of Israel, from the Palestinian settlement to the Bar Cochba revolt. The result is a clear, connected and convincing narrative.

Nevertheless, the careful reader will be alert to some large assumptions in the earlier pages. Sacred Anglo-Saxon landmarks have vanished almost without trace! There has been at work a deep-rooted scepticism about Mosaic traditions and the confirmatory evidence of archaeological discovery; history begins with the Settlement; the amphictyonic confederation emerges only on Palestinian soil. This is the work of an exponent of Tradition-History, relying heavily on form-critical tools. His precursors are Alt on the one hand and Gunkel on the other. So it is that while the story of political development can be confidently told, the assertion of the informing Faith that made the dry bones live is lacking. Here is an influential challenge to the widespread British reliance on early biblical traditions. It may be refuted, but it must be met.

Whatever our estimate of the historicity of the biblical narrative,

² *The History of Israel*, by M. Noth. (A. & C. Black, Ltd., 42s.), 1958.

we are at one in our increasing recognition of the importance of Old Testament theology. For long enough we have suffered from the lack of any standard and reliable work in this country; and we still look in vain for N. W. Porteous' half-promised contribution. The reader of German had no problem. He could always refer to one or other of the sacred trio, Eichrodt, Koehler, and Procksch. But comparatively few are fortunate enough to surmount the language barrier; and even the appearance in 1955 of Jacob's *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament* obviously failed to meet this problem completely. Now, however, the industry of the translator is harvesting a rich yield. The work of Eichrodt is under translation. The studies of Koehler, Vriezen, and Jacob have already appeared.³

It must be admitted that Koehler's work is neither a good book nor a reliable guide. Of all the standard Old Testament theologies, this is the one that least deserved translation. It has a wooden, static quality that recalls the lecture hall at its worst. Despite its claim to recent revision, it clearly remains a product of the 1930s, in presentation and methodology looking to the past rather than to the future. Koehler finds the sovereignty of God to be the inclusive theme of Old Testament theology, and follows Sellin in grouping his material under the three titles of God, Man, Judgment and Salvation. Here, in handy reference, is a mass of scholarly information. But today we are very conscious of the disastrous effects of the importation of presuppositions alien to Scripture itself; and at this point the author is open to damaging criticism.

Vriezen, for his part, is fully aware of the problems involved in the writing of any Theology of the Old Testament. He prefaces the main body of his work with a lengthy and valuable discussion of all the relevant issues that must be faced; and if his examination of Torah, Nebiim and Kethubim is disappointingly jejune, the section on exegesis is magnificently successful. He seeks to clarify and maintain the distinction between Old Testament theology and the religious ideas of Israel, to allow the place of the Old Testament as part of the larger Christian Scripture to govern constantly the presentation and selection of material. The criterion of relevance is revelational, that is to say, in general Yahwistic; and the central concern is with the prophetic testimony, precisely because the Old Testament finally emerges and survives under the impact of the prophetic criticisms evoked by the great events of Israel's history. The heart of Scripture is the eschatological perspective; the *leitmotif* of the Old Testament is the prospect of the Kingdom of God; the underlying idea of biblical testimony is the fact of communion between the Holy God and created, sinful man.

³ *Old Testament Theology*, by L. Koehler. (Lutterworth Press, 35s.), 1957. *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, by T. C. Vriezen. (Basil Blackwell, 42s.), 1958. *Theology of the Old Testament*, by E. Jacob. (Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 30s.), 1958.

All this is illuminating, profound, and methodologically impressive. Perhaps it is because the reach is so vast that the grasp fails, because the promise is so great that the fulfilment disappoints. The theology is worked out with suitable classification: God, man, the relationship between God and man, the intercourse between man and man, God, man and the world in the present and the future. But the treatment is discursive, and we tend to lose our way. Is it too readily assumed that we know what is revelation and what is primitive survival? If the Gospel fulfilment must in some sense govern our understanding and explication of the Old Testament promise, can we too easily forget the necessity for a two-way traffic? The questions remain. Nevertheless, those who can endure to the end will find here much of abiding worth.

Edmond Jacob attempts less than Vriezen, but always remains within his competence. He would probably not claim to have provided the definitive answer to the baffling problem of how the Theology of the Old Testament should rightly be written. He has, however, laid himself fully open to the impact of contemporary discussion, and he is acutely aware that the history of Israel itself is "a part of the theology, that is to say a word and a revelation of God." In the light of a careful initial consideration of methodology, he delimits his theme, and finds that his ruling concern must be with the presence and the action of God. He treats first of the characteristic Aspects of God, continues with an examination of the Action of God (including creation, anthropology, and the cult), and concludes with a somewhat brief discussion of sin, death, redemption and eschatology. Invaluable bibliographies are grouped in a more satisfying form than in the French edition. The whole is an attractive volume, which is a joy to handle and read. We may hope that a British scholar will match it. Meanwhile, it remains an outstanding Theology of the Old Testament, and the most handy and reliable work available to us in this field.

It is increasingly being realized that Old Testament theology cannot be adequately expounded without attention to New Testament fulfilment. A competent study of New Testament theology is thus doubly welcome at this juncture; and Alan Richardson has provided us with a work of singular sanity.⁴ He has his own problems of methodology to face, and those familiar with his earlier work on Christian Apologetics will not be surprised at his conclusions. He is no foe of the scientific method. From the standpoint of apostolic faith he frames his hypothesis, tests it out against the variety of evidence, and claims for it validity, coherence, and the measure of proof available in such a field. The writing of New Testament theology must begin with presuppositions, with principles

⁴ *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, by A. Richardson. (S.C.M. Press, Ltd., 30s.), 1958.

of interpretation. Better to have them in the open than to leave them concealed, unrecognized, and therefore undefended. For his part, Richardson takes his stand with Augustine. *Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis!*

The treatment offered is thematic—even, to some extent, credal. The person, life, and work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Church, Ministry and Sacraments, are among the subjects carefully examined. Again and again, the creative factor is found to be the mind of the Lord working upon Old Testament Scripture and its rabbinic interpretations. The debt to the Jew is crucial: the debt to the Greek is practically non-existent. The perspective of inaugurated eschatology runs through the whole like a silver thread, and is applied with a delicacy of understanding that is rare and beyond praise.

And yet, at the end, we are left with certain hesitations. Perhaps the weakness of this book is that it has so few loose ends. In its way it is a work of art. But the symmetry is obtained at the expense of the awkward configurations which also demand their place. Does the content of the New Testament theology really conform so exactly to pattern? May affirmations really be made in the unqualified manner and the black and white fashion that Richardson favours? Certainly he is entitled to his conclusions; and the New Testament scholar will supply the question marks for himself. But will the average ministerial reader? We miss the adequacy of footnote reference and explanation which would initiate us into the travail of mind through which the author must surely have passed before this study came to birth. We look in vain for a bibliography to match the admirable indexes. This is an "Introduction" of outstanding merit. The general reader should pay it the best compliment of all, and study it critically.

To turn from biblical to theological studies is sometimes to enter a new world; but the very reverse is the case when the study in question is the English translation of Karl Barth's monumental *Church Dogmatics*, a new part-volume of which has now appeared.⁵ Here is not only dogmatic theology but also biblical exegesis on the grand scale. And if the exegesis is sometimes questionable, it is always provocative and generally illuminating. Add to such riches the frequent excursus in the field of historical theology, and the result is a treasury of original thinking, stimulating comment, and factual information, unparalleled in our time.

The general British antipathy to Barth is a curious phenomenon, in which sheer ignorance and misunderstanding surely play a large part. It is a hard saying—but a true one—that there is probably no effective antidote other than a careful reading of Barth himself. Little books about him will not do. In his foreword to the English

⁵ *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, Part 2, by Karl Barth (translated by G. W. Bromiley), (T. & T. Clark, 55s.), 1958.

edition of Weber's *Introductory Report on the Church Dogmatics*, Barth has commented brutally but on the whole justly: "Am I deceived when I have the impression that there I exist in the phantasy of far too many—even of the best men—mainly, only in the form of certain, for the most part, hoary summations; of certain pictures hastily dashed off by some person at some time, and for the sake of convenience, just as hastily accepted, and then copied endlessly, and which, of course, can easily be dismissed? However, I could hardly recognize in them anything else than my own ghost! God as 'the wholly Other'! Kierkegaard's 'infinite qualitative distinction'! For me creation is non-existent! By me culture and civilization are damned! With me ethics is impossible! According to me the Church is Noah's ark on Mount Ararat! Her task consists in preaching an otherworldly Biblicism and an inactive quietism! All in all: 'neo-orthodoxy' with a faint flavour of nihilism! What else? Should I weep or laugh? Is this the only way in which I am known in the English-speaking theological world in spite of all the translations that have appeared so far? How does one read, how does one really study there. . . .?"

Certainly, the intending reader of the latest part-volume should turn first to its predecessor (Vol. 4, Part I), for what we now have is the second instalment of a magisterial examination of the doctrine of reconciliation. The earlier study worked from the standpoint of the divinity of Christ and expounded the Atonement in terms of the high-priestly work of the God who became a servant. Here the procedure is reversed, and on the basis of the *verus homo* the Atonement is treated in terms of the royal Man in whom we are exalted to fellowship with God. We accept without surprise the acute discussions of Reformation doctrine. We applaud the dynamic re-interpretation of the Chalcedonian symbols in the light of the life and deeds of the historical Jesus. Perhaps we hesitate at the difficult conception of the pre-existent humanity in the decree and purpose of God. Nevertheless, when this book has been assimilated, it can be preached.

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