

In The Study

ANOTHER Theology of the Old Testament!¹ Or at least the first instalment of it; for we still await the translation into English of the second volume of this work, with its discussion of prophecy and the great prophetic witnesses. Meanwhile, there is more than enough here to permit of provisional assessment and to preoccupy the student for many a long day to come.

The sub-title of this volume is significant. It is *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, and that is a fair and accurate pointer to its content. Attention is centred on the Hexateuch and its theology. There is introductory consideration of the historical development of Jahwism and its sacral institutions. There is subsequent examination of the Davidic and messianic promise, and of Israel's response to the revelatory and redemptive activity of her God. But the heart of Von Rad's concern remains the process of credal and confessional statement and restatement that echoes the dealings of God with his people and that makes the Old Testament what it essentially and uniquely is.

So it inevitably follows that judgment and criticism may be recorded from twin perspectives. We must ask first about adequacy and legitimacy of method. Is this the way to write Old Testament theology? It is certainly an unusual way. Because the Old Testament proceeds from first to last with constant and recurring reference to the history of salvation, the task of the scholar is nothing less and nothing other than the rehearsal of that history. He is not to concern himself with world views, even if the world he takes is the world of Israel's distinctive faith. So the argument runs. And it is a cogent argument. But it seems to me that the compelling force which Von Rad's treatment undoubtedly exerts stems not a little from the fact that he is in the event less than rigid in the working out of his thesis. Enunciated in abstraction, that thesis seems both diametrically opposed to the approach of most of his peers in this field and open to most of the criticisms they will wish to level against him: But applied in the style which Von Rad in fact uses, it becomes less exclusive and thus less unsatisfactory. The author has not, I judge, been wholly consistent. He surely found it impossible so to be. The result is a type of treatment which, while not quite

¹ *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. I, by Gerhard Von Rad. Oliver & Boyd. 45s. 1962.

meriting all that is claimed for it, is magnificently complementary to more familiar ways of presentation.

But the second question that can and must be asked relates to content rather than method, to the actual material presented, illuminated, and discussed. Here I think commendation can be whole-hearted, if one proviso be noted. Von Rad is a leading exponent of a certain critical approach and a certain complex of critical positions. These are assumed rather than argued, asserted rather than discussed; and the student will wish constantly to remind himself that many scholars will dissent at crucial points. Granted an overall sympathy with and assent to the positions of the Alt-Noth school however, it is almost impossible not to award this volume highest praise. One of the great merits of Von Rad's general position and approach is that it enables him to do justice to sections of the Old Testament that in many an Old Testament theology scarcely seem to belong. His treatment of the Wisdom literature and of many of the Psalms constitutes in itself a valuable contribution to Old Testament understanding.

Von Rad is not the man to underestimate the cultic background of so much of the Old Testament material. Indeed there is an increasingly realisation of the necessity of this emphasis for a true understanding of the genesis of Scripture as a whole. Accordingly it is not surprising that a good deal has been written of late on the subject of New Testament worship. Everyone knows the difficulty and the temptation. The difficulty arises from the paucity of relevant evidence. The temptation is to generalise from all too few particulars, to impose structure and form according to pre-supposition. To live with the difficulty while conquering the temptation is no mean achievement. This is the attainment of the Professor of New Testament at Halle. It is also the justification for the translation of his important investigation.²

Professor Delling is not unmindful of sacramental observances; but in the main his concern is with the form and content of early worship in its non-sacramental expressions. The way of influence and deduction cannot be avoided, but a thorough knowledge of non-Christian background, a keen attention to detail, and a sensitive awareness of the nuances of the sacred text, protect the study from all the wilder flights of fantasy. Concern is not too rigidly and narrowly directed. Worship is helpfully explored against the wider backcloth of the church and its ministries; and the "what" is allowed to point backwards to the "why."

Certain details provoke, some to applause, some to disagreement. One of our continuing problems is whether the Service of Word and Sacrament was originally one unified whole. Delling answers

² *Worship in the New Testament*, by D. Gerhard Delling. Darton, Longman & Todd. 35s. 1962.

by drawing a distinction between Sunday and other days, and by suggesting the unity of the Lord's Day Service. Intriguing also is his conclusion about the restricted use of the congregational Amen —its special attachment to doxologies and blessings. On the other hand he fails to be convincing in his argument from the Pauline epistles that the Old Testament was not read in Gentile Christian worship. We can hardly get this from 2 Cor. 3 : 14 and Romans 10 : 4, unless *telos* be drastically misunderstood. Finally there may be noted as characteristic of the quality of this book the terse and devastating note on Cullmann's familiar argument on the relationship of *koluein* to baptism. This curiosity of scholarship is rigorously cut down to size. We must hope it will not be reinflated. Though I fear it will continue to haunt the theologians in Scottish universities for many a long day.

All such theories and hypotheses must be ever and anew brought back to the bar of sober scriptural exegesis. If our doctrines wander far from this base we are always in danger. So it is that every careful exegetical labour must command its measure of gratitude. A close investigation³ of 1 Corinthians 15 is a recent venture of this kind, and it finds its appropriate place in the familiar series of *Studies in Biblical Theology*. Mr. Dahl sets over against each other the two main lines of interpretation established over the years, and is concerned to sketch a fresh possibility. It is commonly argued that the Pauline teaching is that the redeemed will be enabled to enjoy eternal life in its fullness through the provision of another body in the eternal world. This is "the accepted exegesis." It was arrived at in contradistinction to the belief that the apostle's teaching was that our present physical bodies are to be wholly restored at the Last Day, and that this would be the lot of the righteous and unbelievers. This is "the traditional view." In neither case does so brief a summary do justice to the complexities of presentation. But Mr. Dahl provides the comprehensive statements we require and buttresses them by ample reference and quotation. He also underlines the difficulties and justifies a plea for restatement.

A resurrection body "somatically identical" with the one we now possess — such is the conclusion to which we are led. But the section by section exegesis must be followed and the whole argument carefully weighed if the reader is to understand and reach his own verdict. Suffice it to say that this careful study is biblical exposition at its best, and that the journey has its own value and fascination irrespective of the validity of the terminus and goal.

One caution only. The main title could be misleading. This is advance on a narrow front in respect of a carefully delimited problem. The result is not the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body. For that we should require at the least a similar ex-

³ *The Resurrection of the Body*, by M. E. Dahl. S.C.M. 12s. 6d. 1962.

amination of 2. Cor. 5 and a far deeper appreciation of the corporate nature of resurrection fullness.

Studies in Biblical Theology set the fashion for the launching of series. Among the most recent is Nelson's *Library of Theology*. It is an ambitious project. It is to range over the fields of Scripture, church history, doctrine, systematic theology, comparative religion, philosophy of religion. It aims at the production of substantial works that will remain standard for a generation; and we can but hope that it will not take a generation to produce. The first volume⁴ is already available to us. Ironically enough it is a republication of a treatise that appeared as long ago as 1918.

This is not an easy book to read right through. Probably many will be content to use it for reference purposes. Yet there is enormous loss if the picture is not seen as a whole. Dr. Franks uses a broad canvas. His main sections treat of Patristic Theology, of Mediæval Theology, of Older Protestant Theology, of Modern Protestant Theology. It will be apparent that his major preoccupation is Protestant doctrine, that the climax towards which he moves is the thought of Schleiermacher and Ritschl, that his story ends at the opening of the twentieth century. His learning is encyclopædic, his judgment perceptive, his labour less dated than we have any right to expect.

The method he adopts is to let his sources speak liberally and freely. This is right and necessary; but it does make for the danger of inundating the reader with a series of disconnected historical notes. So Dr. Franks seeks to guard against this peril by the careful use of contextual statement, summary recapitulation and reference backwards and forwards. He is least successful in the study of the early period where the undeveloped nature of the theology lends itself ill to his systematisation. Once the lines are more clearly and solidly drawn he proceeds magnificently.

At the end of the seven hundred pages I was left with two general reflections. How ancient so many of our characteristically modern problems and questions turn out in fact to be. And how much more careful and precise they were in past ages in drawing distinctions and in defining terms than is many a modern theologian. This difference may partly be due to our concern with biblical ways of thinking and our healthy impatience with artificial subtleties. But in part it is surely due to a tendency towards laziness of thought and application. Either way, we owe an unbounded debt to tradition; and this monumental study can still help us to learn of it.

Dr. Franks leaves us with no word of the great theologians of our own century; and that is unfortunate, for it has not lacked figures of note. We have heard a great deal of P. T. Forsyth in the

⁴ *The Work of Christ*, by R. S. Franks. Thomas Nelson. 30s. 1962.

last fifteen years. It was high time that our generation was reminded of his great contemporary, James Denney. Now a lively study of his theology⁵ is provided in *The Preacher's Library*—a series which declares its task to be to assist the proclamation of the Gospel “under modern conditions.” Perhaps it is this quivering determination to be relevant that prompts us to constant self justification for the commendation of any pre-war writer. Forsyth must always be presented as the man who anticipated Barth; and the cover of this new volume trumpets of Denney that “in a sense, he was a Barthian before Barth.” It is all rather misleading and non-sensical—and quite unnecessary. Denney spoke with enormous power in his own time. In so far as he had greatness, he speaks still.

For him the centre of Christianity was the Atonement. On most other doctrines his writing was occasional. It may be that this accounts for the slightly disappointing impression this study leaves. Mr. Taylor has had to make too many bricks with too little straw. He does it conscientiously, bravely. But it does not quite come off. To fill his pages he must present in summary form the results of his hero's close attention to New Testament material and at this point he cannot win. Critically, Denney is dated, and the result is to remove him from us. Exegetically, his key positions belong to the accepted assumptions of our time, and so the interest flags.

If all this sounds disparaging, it is not intended to be. From this book we gain some real appreciation of the tremendous contribution Denney made in and to his time. But the man and his thought are inseparable. To paraphrase and docket him is to extinguish his flame. Only when Denney himself is quoted is the fire rekindled. He speaks so pungently, so powerfully, so clearly, that lesser voices become but echoes. Our highest debt to Mr. Taylor is that again and again he lets Denney speak. Our most worthy response will be to turn from this study to its sources, to read or re-read great theology which can be preached today.

The roll which includes Forsyth and Denney would not be complete unless it also bore the name of John Baillie. His recent death deprived the British theological firmament of one of its brightest stars. But his Gifford Lectures had already been fully prepared, and in their published form⁶ he speaks to us still. Against the modern philosophical background of logical empiricism and existentialism and in particular opposition to all forms of reductive naturalism, he grapples with the problems attaching to our knowledge of God. We see him wrestling with the epistemological status of faith, exploring the nature and office of theological statements, striving to define and understand the nature of certitude and the test of reality, bravely exposing his Christian commitment to the challenge

⁵ *God Loves Like That!* by J. R. Taylor. S.C.M. 27s. 6d. 1962.

⁶ *The Sense of the Presence of God*, by John Baillie. Oxford. 30s. 1962.

of comparative religion, seeking without evasion to justify "the scandal of particularity." A keen and sensitive mind has given us the fruit of a life time's reflection on those ultimate questions which present themselves inescapably to a faith that is determined to be rational.

How is this testament to be assessed? There is undeniably much on the credit side; for here a mature wisdom has striven successfully to see things steadily and see them whole. Typical but intriguing is the explanation offered as to why God has ordained that in one Name only all men shall find salvation. It is that thus the Father has ensured that as a man finds Him he of necessity finds his brother also. This is truly and convincingly said. And it is of similar importance to be reminded of the way in which Christian affirmations should contribute to "the frame of reference which serves for the guidance of Christian living," and that therefore "no affirmation has right of place within a system of Christian theology if it has no such usefulness." Such significant examples could be multiplied.

Nevertheless, there are hesitations. I must confess that I find the attempt to illumine providence by reference to chance and indeterminacy exceeding odd. But this perhaps should carry no more weight than that of a merely personal reaction. Much more serious is the failure at some crucial points really to come to grips with the contemporary logical empiricist assault. Certainly Baillie recognises that the crucial question concerns not verification but falsification; but at this point he seems to sidestep and evade. Let us take a problem that he himself enunciates: What would constitute a disproof of the love of God? Now Baillie's answer, as I understand him, is to say (1) that there are criteria by which points of doctrine and belief may be tested, and in the particular cases we must agree that upon the production of certain evidence the belief in question must be surrendered; and (2) that we must distinguish between such particular beliefs and that which underlies them as ultimate, that which is given in an act of primary awareness, that which is none other than the primary apprehension by faith of God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ. This is self-authenticating. It cannot be tested by reference to something outside itself. Here only the failure of the primary apprehension can destroy.

Now these two assertions are, I would suppose, exactly true. The trouble arises when we set them alongside the problem already enunciated. If the critic produces evidence against the love of God, he is generally informed that we mean something different by "love" to what he supposed, and that therefore his evidence falls. Indeed it soon transpires that any objection he may advance will be rebutted by some quick juggling with the word "love" and that in fact nothing will be accepted as disproof at this point. Evidently

we have removed this belief from (1) to (2), have merged it with the "primary apprehension." This may be fair enough. But is this Dr. Baillie's position? The answer is far from clear. And if it is his defence, then in what way does he delimit the content of the basic primary awareness? Again I cannot see that he has clearly faced the issue.

Perhaps I have said enough to indicate the general nature of my reservations. This is a book which is at once sober and stimulating. But there remains just the feeling that for Gifford Lectures it is a shade lightweight, and that its Scottish author never quite felt the full blast of the disturbing modern gales.

It is encouraging to find an essay on preaching⁷ included in another familiar series: *Ecumenical Studies in Worship*. It will give the lie to the many who still like to claim that the exponents of liturgical revival are totally uninterested in the proclamation of the Word of God. But even apart from such considerations, the placing of this study reveals a shrewd and accurate judgment at work. For it could, I think, be reasonably argued that the most significant part of it is the final section, the brief concluding chapter that bears the title *Preaching as the Reformed Church's Contribution to the Ecumenical Movement*. No one will wish to treat the preaching of the Word merely as a key to the ecumenical impasse. But if it is much more besides it might turn out to be this as well. The proclamation that builds up the Body of Christ inevitably tramples under foot the false idols that divide.

This emphasis is crucial. But in the hands of the Professor of Practical Theology in Neuchatel University it gives a decisive twist to other material that has its own considerable and independent value. Here preaching is treated theologically—and thus practically—as it always ought to be. The important questions of nature, authorisation, context, and preparation are all brought under discussion, with many an apt phrase and penetrating dictum. Some of the verdicts of detail we may wish to question. At several points I for one would query or dissent. What matters is that such verdicts are the result of the application of theological criteria clearly enunciated; and Von Allmen will abide dissatisfaction if it be grounded either in criticism of a theological criterion or in questioning of its valid application.

As a demonstration of method and quality let one quotation suffice. We should "use words smacking of the soil rather than the academy. God is not a weakling or a purist. He ordained for the sacrament simple, solid, wholesome things—water, bread and wine; and we should therefore use in our sermons words which can bear comparison with the means of the sacraments. Too often we

⁷ *Preaching and Congregation*, by J. J. Von Allmen. Lutterworth Press, 7s. 6d. 1962.

preach as though we baptized with syrup and communicated with pastry. That is perhaps one of the reasons why there are fewer men than women at our services." Oh dear, oh dear! Enough there to set a Church Meeting twittering or a Fraternal foaming.

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