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# “SAITH THE LORD”

by E. EARLE ELLIS

**D**R. EARLE ELLIS is a new contributor to our pages. But he is not completely unknown on this side of the Atlantic; many of us got to know him in recent years while he was prosecuting his post-graduate studies in Edinburgh University. The substance of his doctoral thesis is shortly to be published by Messrs. Oliver & Boyd in a book entitled “Paul’s Use of the Old Testament”. The use of the Old Testament in the New is a subject which has been receiving fresh examination of late, and the following article surveys one small corner of this wider field—those quotations which are marked by the words “saith the Lord” (or “saith God”). Dr. Ellis is now Professor of Bible and Philosophy in Aurora College, Aurora, Illinois.

**T**HERE are nine N.T. quotations—four of them in Pauline letters—within which the phrase, “saith the Lord” (λέγει κύριος) occurs;<sup>1</sup> the equivalent phrase, λέγει ὁ θεός, occurs once.<sup>2</sup> Rom. 12: 19 is a typical example:

For it is written: Vengeance is mine,  
I will repay, saith the Lord.

The phenomenon ordinarily would be only of passing interest since any number of O.T. texts include this seal of authority. However, two facts are present which warrant a second look: (1) All of the citations vary, to one extent or another, both from the LXX and from the MT. Furthermore, the variations are not only in the addition or omission of words but in the rendering of the text as well. (2) On at least six occasions the phrase, λέγει κύριος (as well as λέγει ὁ θεός in Acts 2: 17), is a N.T. addition to the text;<sup>3</sup> the other five occurrences—all non-Pauline—have the phrase or its equivalent in the O.T. passage.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Acts 7: 49; 15: 16 f.; Rom. 12: 19; 14: 11; 1 Cor. 14: 21; 2 Cor. 6: 16 ff.; Heb. 8: 8-12; 10: 16 f.; 10: 30. The phrase occurs twice in 2 Cor. 6: 16 ff. and three times in Heb. 8: 8-12. Its presence in Heb. 10: 30 (= Rom. 12: 19) is textually uncertain; Codex A and the Antiochian texts have it, B and C omit it.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 2: 17.

<sup>3</sup> If Heb. 10: 30 be admitted, the total is seven. In Acts 7: 49 the phrase may have been borrowed from the opening clause of the LXX or MT.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 15: 16 f.; Heb. 8: 8, 9, 10; 10: 16 f. The passages quoted in Hebrews all have φησὶ κύριος in the LXX.

In the question of subject matter there is some affinity with earliest Church *testimonia*<sup>5</sup> although only one λέγει κύριος passage is used more than once (Rom. 12: 19; Heb. 10: 30). The greater portion of the citations is related to the 'temple typology' in which the Christian community is viewed as God's new temple. This is the probable import of Stephen's words (Acts 7: 49), and it is the explicit purpose for the adduction of the *catena* in 2 Cor. 6: 16 ff. Amos 9: 11 f. (Acts 15: 16 f.) is cited by James to show that the purpose of God includes the Gentiles; the introductory portion of the quotation concerns rebuilding "the tabernacle of David". As several writers have shown,<sup>6</sup> these themes are a part of a pattern current in the earliest period, and their presence here suggests, at least, that this context of Scripture was understood as a part of the 'new temple' *testimonia*.

The New Covenant prophecy (Jer. 31: 31 ff.) cited in Hebrews (8: 8-12; 10: 16) also has more than a surface connection with the other λέγει κύριος quotations. The author of Hebrews sums up his argument by noting that Christ is the minister "of the true tabernacle (τῆς σκηνῆς τῆς ἀληθινῆς), which the Lord pitched, not man,"<sup>7</sup> and the mediator of a better covenant;<sup>8</sup> then follows Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the New Covenant. It may be going too far to see in "the house of Israel" (i.e., the Christian 'remnant') an allusion to the "true tabernacle"<sup>8</sup> or to make a contrast between the law in the heart and the tablets (or scrolls) of the law in the temple. But the words, "I shall be to them a God and they shall be to me a people", are a distinct echo of a verse in a Pauline 'new temple' quotation (2 Cor. 6: 16 ff.); and the reference to the old covenant "ready to vanish away" (vs. 13) is probably an allusion to the old temple services.<sup>9</sup>

The other λέγει κύριος quotations concern (1) the principle of

<sup>5</sup> Cf. C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London, 1952).

<sup>6</sup> See especially C. K. Barrett, "Paul and the 'Pillar' Apostles", *Studia Paulina, Festschrift* for J. de Zwaan (Haarlem, 1953), pp. 1-19; A. Cole, *The New Temple* (London, 1950); C. F. D. Moule, "Sanctuary and Sacrifice in the Church of the New Testament", *Journal of Theological Studies*, Second Series, I (1950), 29-41.

<sup>7</sup> Heb. 8: 2. It is an interpretive paraphrase of Num. 24: 6 (LXX).

<sup>8</sup> Taken in terms of the Jewish concept of solidarity, there is a closer relation than is apparent at first. Cf. Eph. 2: 19 ff.; Kittel's *Theologische Wörterbuch*, V, 128 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London, 1920), p. 226; Rev. 21: 3.

vengeance or judgment as the prerogative of God alone (Rom. 12: 19; 14: 11; Heb. 10: 30) and (2) the judicial significance of ‘tongues’ (1 Cor. 14: 21). The latter may be considered within the framework of the anti-Jewish polemic to which Harris assigned the ‘Testimony Book’.<sup>10</sup> The citation (Acts 2: 17 ff.), λέγει ὁ θεός, is from a section of the O.T. listed by Dodd as a primary testimony source, and from which Paul also draws a quotation (Rom. 10: 13).

Taken as a whole, the λέγει κύριος quotations represent only a fraction of N.T. citations, and some of these merely repeat the phrase from the O.T. text; furthermore, most of the passages inserting the phrase *ad hoc* are Pauline. Yet the usage appears to be more than an idiosyncrasy of any individual N.T. writer. The ‘testimony’ pattern into which most of the passages fall, the ever-present textual variations, and the significance of the phrase in the O.T. suggest that λέγει κύριος may have been characteristic in the proclamation of elements of the *kerygma*. Even if Heb. 10: 30 be excepted, the words of Stephen and the essentially identical λέγει ὁ θεός of Peter remain independent witnesses to the practice. Its employment in Paul is too sporadic to construe the verses in Acts as Lukan interpolation of Pauline phraseology. Nor is the explanation satisfying that the N.T. writers are merely stressing the fact that God is speaking. The introductory formula performs this function; and the λέγει κύριος is always an integral part of the citation, apparently already present in the text when it is introduced by the writer.

Λέγει κύριος is the badge of prophetic pronouncement in the O.T. Its presence in the N.T. probably has an equivalent significance and may give a clue for understanding the role which the N.T. exegete—or better, the N.T. prophet—considered himself to fill. The gift of prophecy was highly regarded in the apostolic age;<sup>11</sup> it was a specific gift or appointment of the Holy Spirit;<sup>12</sup> and it

<sup>10</sup> The passage is difficult. Robertson and Plummer (*First Corinthians*, [Edinburgh, 1911], pp. 316 f.) give perhaps the best explanation: As the Jews who scorned Isaiah’s clear and simple message were judged in God’s speaking to them by means of a foreign-tongued Assyrian horde, so now those Jews rejecting the simple message of the Gospel are, in effect, judged by the incomprehensible words of the Holy Spirit. On Harris’s hypothesis cf. J. R. Harris, *Testimonies*, two volumes (Cambridge, 1916 and 1920).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Acts 2: 17 ff.; 1 Cor. 14: 1-5. Stress on the prophetic aspect is seen in the added phrase, καὶ προφητεύουσιν in Acts 2: 18.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 12: 4, 10, 28.

was not conferred upon all.<sup>13</sup> Early Christians without doubt used the word in full light of its O.T. significance, and, indeed, some of the functions most peculiar to O.T. prophets, such as predictive utterance, appear in their N.T. counterpart.<sup>14</sup>

It is not unreasonable to expect that the N.T. 'prophet' would, at times, employ the prophetic epigraph, "thus saith the Lord". The equivalent phrase, "thus saith the Holy Spirit" (τάδε λέγει τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον) introduces the prophecy of Agabus in Acts 21: 11.<sup>15</sup> The occurrences in the Apocalypse are even more noteworthy. In Rev. 14: 13 the phrase, "saith the Spirit", appears in much the same fashion as λέγει κύριος in the passages mentioned above :

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; for their deeds follow them.

In the beginning of John's prophecy<sup>16</sup> the Lord Christ is quoted as follows:

I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God (λέγει κύριος ὁ θεός), the One who is, and was, and is to come, the Almighty (ὁ παντοκράτωρ).<sup>17</sup>

This citation has no introductory formula and λέγει κύριος may only be the writer's way of introduction. If so, it evidences a type of introductory formula of which there are very few in the N.T. ; even the other λέγει κύριος quotations have a formula of the ordinary type.

At first blush one is inclined to dismiss the whole matter as the idiom of the N.T. writers as they quoted, and it may well be that some instances are only the writer's formula of quotation. Such a case could be made, for example, of the two citations in the

<sup>13</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 12: 28. According to Swete "only a relatively small number of believers were 'established to be prophets', forming a charismatic order to which a recognized position was given in the Church. Such persons were said ἔχειν προφητεῖαν (1 Cor. 13: 2) and known as οἱ προφῆται (Eph. 2: 20; 3: 5; Rev. 18: 20; 22: 6), being thus distinguished from those who occasionally 'prophesied' (Acts 19: 6; 1 Cor. 11: 4 f.; 14: 31)." H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (London, 1909), p. 377.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., Acts 21: 11. <sup>15</sup> Cf. Heb. 3: 7.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Rev. 1: 3.

<sup>17</sup> Rev. 1: 8. The phraseology differs from the more usual introductory formula, e.g., "these things saith he that . . ." Cf. Rev. 2: 1; 3: 1. It is perhaps worth noting that ὁ παντοκράτωρ occurs only twice in the N.T. outside Revelation; it is in the λέγει κύριος citation in 2 Cor. 6: 16 ff.

Apocalypse. This, however, does not explain why the pattern is not found more often; it certainly does not explain why Paul, whose introductory formulas are so consistently different, should have λέγει κύριος embedded in a few of his quotations which already contained an ordinary formula of introduction, and that he should do this without any warrant from the O.T. text. It is more probable that this form of the quotation was most familiar to him. He may, certainly, have originated the particular text-form himself; but it is extremely unlikely that he did so as he wrote his epistle. That he introduced a double formula of introduction into his quotations sporadically and apparently without any reason is one of the least likely explanations of the matter.

The foregoing argument may be summed up as follows:

1. Λέγει κύριος is a characteristic phrase of prophetic pronouncement in the O.T.
2. The early Christian community also includes those with the office or appointment of 'prophet', and these 'prophets' sometimes use the same phrase, or its equivalent, in citing their own revelation.
3. The phrase also is inserted within some quotations in the N.T. in such a manner as to preclude its being considered an introductory formula or a part of the cited O.T. text.
4. These λέγει κύριος quotations are consistently divergent from extant O.T. texts and their O.T. source is often within a 'testimony' pattern evident elsewhere.

It is not an unreasonable conclusion that at least some of the Pauline λέγει κύριος texts were quoted by the apostle in a form already known and used in the early Church. The most natural origination for such paraphrases of the O.T. would be early Christian prophets—including not only leaders such as Paul but also minor figures.

The use of testimonies may well have arisen, as Dodd suggests, from the selection of whole sections of the O.T. and their oral application to the facts of the Gospel. But this does not mean that no written and specific 'proof texts' were in use in the pre-canonical testimony tradition.<sup>18</sup> Whether there was an actual 'school of the prophets' one can only conjecture. But Stendahl has shown at least that many O.T. quotations in the N.T. evidence a careful working out of interpretive principles, and the in-

<sup>18</sup> Dodd (p. 126) argues against the hypothesis of a pre-canonical "Testimony Book," but he recognizes the possibility of occasional testimonies in written form. The presence of O.T. *florilegia* is reported among the recent Qumran discoveries; however, the writer has seen nothing published on them.

corporation of these principles into the text of the quotations themselves.<sup>19</sup>

There is an activity of the Holy Spirit in the early Church which may well explain the source of some of these interpretations. It is the exercise of prophecy, and it occurs both in ecstatic utterance (cf. 1 Cor. 12-14) and the disclosure of the import of revelations from the Holy Spirit (e.g., Acts 21: 11). There is no reason why it could not have included the elaboration, interpretations, and application of O.T. Scriptures.<sup>20</sup> The fact that the prophetic λέγει κύριος was already present in some O.T. texts being used as *testimonia* may well have facilitated an *ad hoc* employment elsewhere. This extension appears at least in some degree to be related to *testimonia* of the same order or perhaps arising from the same group or 'school'.<sup>21</sup> There would be no hesitation in using these O.T. paraphrases—or any other matter spoken 'in the Spirit'; for they, as much as the O.T. itself, were the Words of God. This hypothesis is not without its problems, but it does seem satisfactorily to explain some of the phenomena found in N.T. quotation and to shed further light on the genesis and development of O.T. exegesis in the early Church.

*Aurora College,  
Aurora, Illinois.*

<sup>19</sup> K. Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew* (Uppsala, 1954). Stendahl's conclusions are concerned mainly with Matthew, but he finds similar evidence in the Fourth Gospel: "Thus the Johannine method is not what is usually meant by loose citations, or those more or less freely quoted from memory. It is rather the opposite since the form of John's quotations is certainly the fruit of scholarly treatment of written O.T. texts" (p. 163).

<sup>20</sup> There is something similar to this in the reflection of O.T. prophets upon earlier Scriptures; cf. Pss. 2; 105; Isa. 48: 21. The origin of some early Christian hymns—a few of which are incorporated into the N.T. (cf. E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of Peter* [London, 1952], p. 267)—may also have been included within the exercise of the prophetic gift. Cf. 1 Cor. 14: 15.

<sup>21</sup> E.g., the presence of λέγει κύριος (φησὶ κύριος) in Amos 9: 11 f. (Acts 15: 16 f.) and Jer. 31: 31 ff. (Heb. 8: 8 ff.) may have occasioned the *ad hoc* usage in other "new temple" *testimonia* such as the *catena* in 2 Cor. 6: 16 ff.