

OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY (Volume Two): The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions by Gerhard Von Rad. Translated by D. M. G. Stalker. *Oliver and Boyd* 1965, pp 470, 45s.

'I have some hesitation in allowing these volumes to appear in a foreign dress. Theological writings are like others – their roots are often more exclusively bound up than we are with the country and language in which they were written, for a specific country and language always imply as well a specific mode of thought. These volumes have their origin in a theological situation, a phase in theological discussion – I should prefer to call it a certain impasse – which has been felt with particular force in Germany. Perhaps, then, if they had been intended to meet the needs of scholars in other countries, they should not have been written in the way they are.

I wish particularly to thank Mr Stalker, the translator, for the time he has given to this work and the excellence of his rendering. He has done everything he could to bridge the difficult gulf between the two languages. If obscurities still remain, the reader should lay them at the author's and not at the translator's door.

The fourth edition of VOL. II, which is expected to be published in Germany before the end of this year, will contain some alterations to which the lively discussion, both appreciative and critical, which greeted the book's first appearance, gave rise. Unfortunately it has not been possible to include all of them in this translation.'

I have begun this review by quoting the entire preface of Professor Von Rad for three reasons: (i) To show the author's awareness of the fact that a language carries with it the particular way of thinking of its people. (ii) To congratulate the translator who, as a result of this 'labour of love', has succeeded in making Von Rad available to us in an English which is intelligible. (iii) To thank the publishers for this second volume with an additional postscript, and to show the present 'state of things' regarding the German editions.

Anybody who wishes to lay a claim to reading about the Old Testament, must take up the work of the renowned Professor of Heidelberg. Each reader will be struck by a certain number of the penetrating comments which abound in this book. Perhaps, after several re-readings, one might absorb them all, with a consequent dynamic effect on one's own synthesis. A mere reviewer shrinks before the task of attempting any kind of summary. I find myself choosing one particular sentence in a chapter to suggest the depth of thought therein contained, and find myself seized with an urge to append the sentences which follow it as well. There is one urge which has to be restrained. You open the Table of Contents, and find that Part One is given over to General Considerations on Prophecy, Part Two to Classical Prophecy, and Part Three to the most important question of the Old Testament and the New. Please, do not begin reading there, at p. 319. The author himself asks, in the preface to the German edition, that the last four sections should not be taken in isolation. 'They should stand or fall according as what preceded them is valid, in particular what is said about the history of tradition and its continuous re-interpretation.'

Something must now be said about the actual contents.

*Part One. A. Introduction.* Prophecy was discovered to be *sui generis* only in the nineteenth century. It is now studied independently of 'law'. The prophets adhered to common concepts, and the task of criticism is to redefine what is specifically prophetic.

*B. Prophecy before the Classical Period.* The idea of a straight-line development of prophecy from the ecstatic bands through Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, is an over simplification. The origins of prophecy still pose a difficult problem. In his considerations of Elijah and Elisha, Von Rad points out that the idea of

remnant is not new; the notion that Jahweh might destroy Israel, and leave only a remnant, is the original element in prophecy. The latter prophet is one of the *bny hnby'ym*, the 'sons of the prophets' who seem to have formed separate communities and lived by rule, with members drawn from a very low economic and social stratum.

C. *The Oral Tradition of Prophecy*. One should note here that a prophet like Isaiah writes his words as a testament, i.e. they are for future reference as well as for his contemporaries. Later ages felt at liberty to adapt the prophet's words. 'Present-day exegesis is concerned above all else to discover the content of each specific oracle as it was understood by the prophet himself. But, while not abandoning this effort, ought it not perhaps to be more aware that this is only one way among many of understanding an oracle? By referring the prophet's oracles to subsequent generations and the situations confronting them, fresh ways of understanding them were opened up, and this process continued right down to the time when in the New Testament, the prophets' preaching was for the last time reinterpreted in the light of present events.' It is encouraging to find Von Rad emphasizing what seems to me to be the main function of New Testament prophecy: the interpretation, under the spirit, of the ancient prophets (1 Pt 1, 10–12) in the light of the 'new' situation, and thus 'unveiling' God's plan of salvation (Rom. 16, 25) Was it, however, the last re-interpretation? Is there not a place for some prophetic 'adaptation' today, at least in an analogous sense?

D. *The Prophets' Call and Reception of Revelation*. The special call of the 'writing' prophets, which causes the breaking of all former ties, and leaves them in a position of complete dependence on God, is described with the expected usage of Amos 7.

E. *The Prophet's and Freedom*. There is no reason to suppose that Isaiah and Jeremiah were the only prophets to experience 'freedom' about their call.

F. *The Prophets' Conception of the Word of God*. Of its 243 usages in the Old Testament writings, all but twenty occur in a prophetic oracle. It is above all the Deuteronomist 'who gave the Word of God in its form as the dynamic of history its broadest theological basis, for he saw the word of Jahweh, whether in salvation or in judgment, as the real motive force and creator of Israel's history', p. 95.

G. *Israel's Ideas about Time and History, and the Prophetic Eschatology*. Here, I think that we could

especially stress the fact that the historical acts by which Jahweh founded the community of Israel were absolute, and *actual* for each subsequent generation. Thus, the ritual of the Passover was not just a 'remembering the Exodus'. It was an entry into the saving event of the Exodus itself, and a participation in it in a quite 'actual' way, cf. p. 104. (I would consider that such liturgical renewal was at least the 'occasion' of Grace in Old Testament times.)

*Part Two*. This second part takes in order the work of Amos and Hosea until we reach Daniel and Apocalyptic. I liked the way in which Amos is depicted as attacking a general attitude of mind of the wealthy class (p. 137), and the fact that the stories of Hosea's marriage are considered to represent an actual marriage (p. 140). Isaiah is seen as the theological high-water mark of Old Testament prophecy. Since I see no difficulty in Divine assistance of word-choice, I can suggest the possibility of greater significance in a passage such as Is. 11, all within the Eternal Now of God. Might I suggest that the sign of Is. 7 is similar to that of Is. 37, 30 – one which is contemporaneous. Then, the persuasive force of the promise would lie in the concrete placing.

It is good to have available in English such an excellent account of the post-exilic prophets. Not all would agree with our author that Apocalyptic literature is not the 'child of prophecy' (p. 303) because the view of history differs in both. Nor would there be general agreement about the suggestion that the legends of Daniel 1–6 were originally addressed to the Jews of the Persian diaspora.

*Part Three*. This part provides some of the most exciting and stimulating material. Any attempt at synopsis would be quite disastrous. Let the section headings speak for themselves. A. *The Actualisation of the Old Testament in the New*. B. *The Old Testament's Understanding of the World and Man, and Christianity*. C. *The Old Testament Saving Event in the Light of the New Testament Fulfilment*. I cannot pass this section by without two brief extracts. 'The early Church's re-interpretation of Old Testament material to make the latter apply to itself is therefore, even from the standpoint of the pre-Christian history of the tradition, a perfectly legitimate procedure', p. 384. Again, in a consideration of the question, 'Why should we retain the Old Testament?' we find 'Christianity also needs the universalism of the Old Testament doctrine of creation, to prevent Christians from being a 'group of esoterics to whom the world is foreign'. I am reminded of a basic

proposition which the Archbishop of Canterbury enunciates in his lecture on 'Christianity and Humanism': Scientific humanism can criticize any presentation of Christianity which fails itself to be sufficiently humanistic. D. *The Law*. 'In Jesus Christ there at last entered into the history of the chosen people one who was "perfect" with God; and in this One, God drew near to his people in the most personal way possible, more personally and directly than could be through any of the institutions or offices in the Old Israel', p. 408.

In the Postscript, Von Rad gives a further explanation of his historical approach to Old Testament theology. He discusses also the problem of the 'One and Many' in biblical theology.

I would consider Eichrodt's starting point of 'Covenant' a more unifying concept than would Von Rad. The latter holds that arduous work was needed on the traditions to bring the covenant and royal theology together. Would it really have been so difficult for the People of God to consider that God's presence to them in covenant-promise had been made concrete in their king? (cf. the tradition behind 2 Sam. 7, 1 Chron. 17).

This is the type of scholarly work which remains on the shelf for further consultation, when the popular presentations have been taken down to make room for the more recent efforts.

JOHN J. GREEHY

#### CALVIN'S COMMENTARIES

*The Acts of the Apostles 1-13*. Translators John W. Fraser and W. J. G. McDonald. Editors David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance. Edinburgh and London: *Oliver and Boyd*, 1965, pp. vi — 410, 30s.

*The Epistles of Paul The Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*. Translator T. H. L. PARKER. Editors David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance. Edinburgh and London: *Oliver and Boyd*, 1965, pp. vi — 369, 30s.

'I will not stand to rip up those commodities which thou by reading these Commentaries mayest reap, but I leave them to thine own experience.' So in 1584 wrote Christopher Featherstone, the first English translator of Calvin's commentary on *Acts*, by way of apology for not providing the reader with an Introduction. His twentieth-century successors are guilty of the same sin of omission — and they provide no word of apology or explanation.

Any one picking up either of these volumes will want to know if it is the first in a new series of translations, and surely for commercial reasons alone the publishers might well have provided this information on the jacket. But it is only by consulting, e.g., Blackwell's catalogue that one can find out that they are apparently the seventh and eighth volumes in a series which began in 1959. The prospective buyer will also want to know what the aim of the new series is, what principles it follows, what readers it intends to cater for, what needs it proposes to serve. Disappointed not to find the answer here, he may go to the trouble of seeking out the first volume to appear — only to find no answer there either.

The reader of these books will again want to know something in general about Calvin as a scriptural commentator. This information seems vital to an intelligent reading of the books but it is provided neither here nor in any of the

previous volumes and no indication is given as to where it might be found. The required information is in fact supplied by Professor Haratounian in his excellent 'General Introduction' to the selection from Calvin's biblical commentaries which he has translated and edited in volume 23 of the Library of Christian Classics series (SCM 1958). Calvin's merits as a biblical commentator are such that Professor Haratounian has no need to exaggerate, much less to make the extravagant claim of the publisher's blurb on the jackets of both volumes under review: 'These are the classic Commentaries of the Reformation which laid the basis for all later scholarly exegesis of the Bible.'

The reader would also be interested to know how the second edition 'enriched with a large addition' of Calvin's commentary on *Acts* differs from the first: what the changes are and what their significance is. But these changes and similar ones in the Pauline commentaries under review are not even indicated here. He would also appreciate some help in judging how these commentaries fit into the general development of Calvin's thought and how in particular the differences between succeeding revisions are related to the differences between the various editions of the *Institutes*. No such help is provided. The reader is not even told why the first edition of the commentary on *Acts* was dedicated to Christian III, King of Denmark, and