

stood it' and not 'a symbolic story of Incarnation' (p. 55).

In short the book constitutes a useful statement of a central theme of Christian faith which the critical theologian

ignores at his peril. It does not rule out the propriety of that critical theologian's work, but I do not find that it offers him much help along the road he is trying to pursue.

MAURICE WILES

MYTHS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT by Benedikt Otzen, Hans Gottlieb and Knud Jeppesen (trans) SCM Press, London 1980. pp xiv + 143, £4.95.

This translation from the second edition (1976) of *Myter i Det gamle Testamente*, first published in 1973, gives English readers the welcome opportunity to sample the work of three Danish scholars of the so-called Scandinavian school. First, Otzen examines the concept of myth which he defines as 'an event which occurs outside historical space and time' but which is 'bound to the cult'. Myth was the vehicle by which primitive man, who thought in religious terms, gave 'form to his understanding of the most elemental and profound problems of life'. The question which the Danish scholars then consider is whether in Israel men also resorted to myth in order to express themselves religiously.

Otzen agrees that the narratives in Gen. 1-11 do not have the character of real myths – though such myths do underlie them as traces of them are found elsewhere in the Old Testament. Further such myths must have held a central position in the Israelite New Year Festival for 'it was the task of the cult to reinforce the cosmos and combat the destructive forces which assail it'. But not only has the mythological heritage been entirely reworked; it has been accompanied by what Otzen calls the 'mythologizing of history', that is the introduction into the cult of the high points of Israel's history interpreted mythologically so that salvation becomes identical with creation.

Gottlieb examines the psalms which he holds reflect the Jerusalem New Year Festival in which the myth of creation was repeated in the triumph of Yahweh over all threatening powers and his subsequent enthronement, a festival in which the king played an important part. But while the psalms possess a cultic setting, none the less they served too as encouragement in the particular situation facing Israel at any given time which itself could be interpreted

in mythological terms – 'the mythologizing of reality'.

Finally Jeppesen considers the prophetic material and notes how the prophets use the available religious language of their day including mythological concepts. For them creation was not to be understood merely as a past event, but also a present reality. Consequently 'they frequently employ the creation myths in the context of a concrete historical situation'.

This is a stimulating study which has close affinities with the English myth and ritual school. It rests on the assumption that through the cult with its New Year Festival myth continued to play a dominant role into which Israel's experience of salvation-history has to be integrated – mythologized. But recent Old Testament study has cautioned against the too ready interpretation of Israel's religion from Mesopotamian and Canaanite forms for even if some dependence is shown, these forms may be very different when subjected to Israel's theological presuppositions. While a mythological heritage was certainly received by Israel, later to be much supplemented by sojourn in Babylon, the Biblical emphasis falls, as the Genesis narratives indicate, not on creation (whether or not a Jerusalem New Year Festival existed) but on Israel's election. It is this that the cult celebrates and the prophets threaten. Indeed it is not too much to say that Israel never had a doctrine of creation *per se*, but from earliest times saw creation as the first step in her election and salvation-history. Historical activities in which God revealed himself rather than myth governed her theology. As a result the mythological heritage was demythologized in the service of such theology.

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