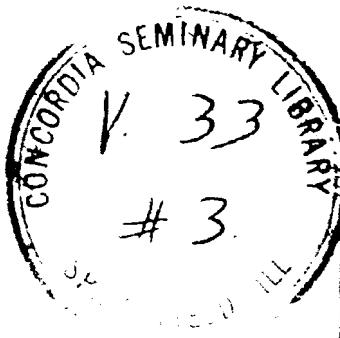


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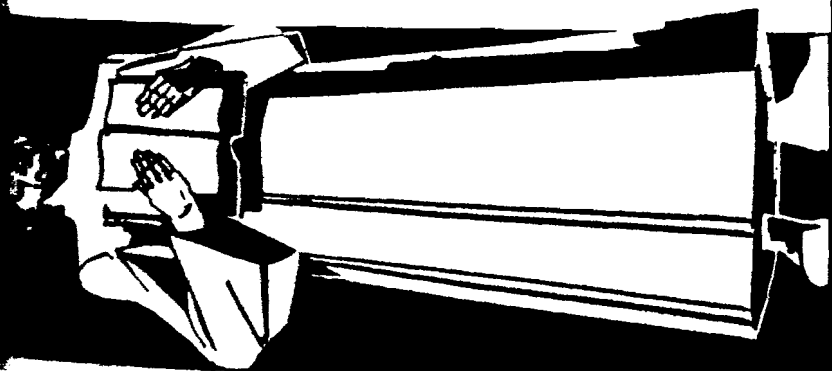
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Theological Refractions

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE STATE OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES TODAY

If it were suggested that the state of Old Testament studies has shifted, the marked impression left on the majority of readers would simply be that it has moved from one extreme to another. But as each of us has often observed, a shift many times only implies a gradual change or altered position. In the area of Old Testament studies, the shift in the last twenty or thirty years has been so gradual that it can only be observed in retrospect.

Prior to the Wars, the Old Testament was the textbook of speculative thought. In an attempt to clarify many of the unanswered questions of perplexing, and sometimes confusing, problems facing the interpreter, a host of monographs, commentaries, and studies flooded the market with (in some cases probable) theories to answer the time worn inquiries. Little concern seemed to be given to the fact that some day theological students would be asked to delineate the various positions, providing the "theoretical evidence" amassed by some creative mind.

The great minds of the past were at an impasse. The world was crying for an answer to its unsolved problems and they were expected to provide one, with or without the evidence. This impasse gave rise to dogmatic formulations, intricate textual criticisms, and a raft of studies dealing with the religious, cultural, social and historical relationships to the theology of the Old Testament. What emerged was a diversified or segmented theology of the Old Testament, without any unifying themes or recognized relationships between the various historical eras of the developing Israelite religion.

Disagreement was primarily evident regarding the date of the sources of the Pentateuch, the exact delimitation of the sources, and the various ages to which the majority of the Psalms were to be ascribed. The development of Israelite religion was traced from its primitive beginnings to its heights in the pre-exilic prophets, and its decline in the post-exilic priestly religion which triumphed over the prophetic. Literary analysis of the various books was paralleled by the sharp antithesis between Yahwism and Baalism, between priest and prophet, between pre-exilic and post-exilic ages.

During the war years, Old Testament studies maintained a status quo. But in the years immediately following and to the present, with the revival of archaeological expeditions, the Old Testament is again in the forefront of theological thought. The marked change that is apparent to all who read any of the latest studies in this area is that the scholars' contributions are no longer based on speculation or theories but on factual evidence.

Archaeological material brought back by the expeditions has greatly enriched our knowledge of the historical, cultural, and religious background of Israel's life and thought. This enrichment is most noticeable in the area of linguistics. Many forms and phrases, which were previously unintelligible to the interpreter, today provide fine nuances which enlighten previously nebulous passages. Scholars are also finding a greater

measure of unity in the Old Testament. The great search for diversity and segmentation in Old Testament thought, which failed to provide the key to its understanding, has been replaced with the recognition that the religious expressions of the ancients are part of a fundamental or unified conception of their faith.

Most prominent in this shift is the noted archaeologist and Old Testament scholar, W. F. Albright. In one of his earlier books *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, he suggests that Israel's conception of monotheism was the result of a developmental change, imposed on Israel through its constant encounter with new and foreign cultures or social environments. However, in his latest book, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, he openly repudiates his former position and maintains that monotheism was always uniquely and distinctly a characteristic feature of Israel's faith.

Any number of recognized scholars in the same field could be cited who apparently have made the same flip-flop because the evidence available today no longer permits the tenability of their previous position. They now recognize that prophets and priests are not to be set over against one another in quite the sharp antithesis that was formerly common, but that prophets were cultic persons alongside priests in the service of the shrine. Likewise, the psalms were interpreted as ritual worship forms or attributed to cultic prophets who composed them for liturgical use, with a preoccupation to determine their date and the historical background out of which they came. Today the tendency in dealing with the psalms is rather to ask for what purpose and to what ritual use they are applied.

In the field of Lower, or Textual, Criticism there is greater respect paid to the Massoretic text than formerly was the case. No doubt, as most of us are aware, this is primarily due to the marked similarity between the *textus receptus* and the Dead Sea Scroll of the book of Isaiah. Also, as M. Dahood has so ably pointed out in his recent commentaries on the *Psalms*, Ugaritic, a member of the Canaanite language family, attests to the acceptability of the Massoretic text.

Applicable to all this is the question: Does all this suggest that the trend in Old Testament studies is toward a more conservative view? It can safely be said that there is a conservative trend, but not conservative in the sense that it is a return to the traditional and frequently uncritical interpretation of the Old Testament, but that the evidence demands an interpretation that is textually based on the Biblical record. This trend suggests that the students of the Old Testament must again return to the Biblical record, for it is a testimony of the faith that is in us.

William F. Meyer

"HE WENT TO THE DEAD"

Perhaps the change in the first printing of *Worship Supplement* to *The Lutheran Hymnal* that will attract the most attention is the substitution of "He went to the dead" for "He descended to hell." Those who have attacked the change with the charge that Commission on Worship of the Missouri Synod has denied the descent of Christ to hell have not

bothered to read all of the *Worship Supplement*. The very first hymn, "Savior of the Nations, Come," number 701, affirms the descent with the words, "Down to death and hell descends, God's high throne reascends." There can be no doubt that the phrase "He descended to hell" was confusing to our laity as many thought that Christ actually suffered in hell. This is Calvin's thought and not Luther's. A creed, especially a brief and concise one like the Apostles Creed, should avoid all misunderstandings and possible double interpretations as much as possible. The removal of "He descended into hell" should not be met with too much consternation. The question which remains is whether or not the substitute clause "He went to the dead" is really an improvement.

The substitute clause does find support in many early church writings which held that between His death and resurrection, Jesus was in the realm of the dead. In some cases it was said that Jesus preached to the Old Testament patriarchs who were still locked up in death. In other cases Jesus was said to liberate the patriarchs. Both of these thoughts gave way to a prominent one that Christ had triumphed over Satan and death. The older views eventually grew into the Roman Catholic doctrine of the *limbo patrum* which maintained that the Old Testament saints only could enter into bliss after the Lord had accomplished His work. It would be the thought that Christ had triumphed over Satan and hell that would later predominate in the medieval church and the Lutheran Church in Article Nine of the Formula of Concord.

Both phrases, "He descended into hell" and "He went to the dead" are open to a variety of opinions. His going to hell leaves open the option of suffering or glorification. "He went to the dead" can mean the following: 1. Jesus died. 2. Jesus went to heaven or hell. 3. Jesus went to the place of the dead and preached, without further clarification. 1 Peter 3:19 defines his audience as the contemporaries of Noah. The early church defined his audience as the Old Testament saints. Recently Professor Wolfhart Pannenberg of Munich interprets this to mean that Jesus preaches to everyone in death, giving them a chance to repent after this life. This is a pleasant wish, but without adequate support either from Scripture or tradition. Does the phrase "He went to the dead," which is supposedly an improvement, really need more explanation than "He descended into hell"?

Also interesting is the downward action of "descent" is replaced by the horizontal action of "went." Of course the Scripture is riddled through with "up's" and "down's" and the removal of ascent and descent seems a little artificial. If the purpose is to rescue us from the three storey universe, the horizontal one hardly seems to be an improvement. The new translation however, is more faithful to 1 Peter 3:19 with "went" than "descended."

The question of the necessity for change must also be considered. Certainly there is no merit in uniformity of expression, simply because sameness does not assure unity of belief. The early church had a uniformity of belief even though there were a variety of creeds in use. As a rule

change came from the local congregation and was not superimposed by church leaders. A life's study can be devoted to the origin of the Apostles Creed. The trend to uniformity, which came rather late, was a natural process in both the East and the West. Taking this principle into consideration, was there any movement in the church for the substitution of "dead" for "hell?" The shock or at least the surprise among our people at the different phraseology will adequately show that the desire for change was hardly the result of a popular movement.

Since the creeds are universally used among our churches, there should be no change in wording without trying to reach a prior consensus. Two versions of one creed can cause all types of embarrassments to those people who have always confessed it by heart. When you have learned a Bible passage in one version, it is hard to switch over to another. A creed, unlike a hymn or a prayer, is a legal document setting forth a church's position on certain things and should be changed with only the greatest reluctance. For example, is it possible for a candidate for the ministry to swear allegiance to the Apostles Creed as it possibly could be understood by the new translation? The question of "dead" for "hell" becomes even more interesting for the Church of the Augsburg Confession since Article IX of the Formula of Concord is absolutely specific in saying that this clause is to refer to the glorious descent of Christ into hell to triumph over Satan. The Lutheran Church has had a definite position on this issue and it might be best to avoid a phrase which opens up possibilities not permitted by its confessions. A possible exception is the Church of Sweden where Christ is described as descending into the kingdom of the dead, *nederstigen till dödsriket*, but this is understandable since the Formula of Concord was never officially recognized there.

Perhaps the best argument against the use of the phrase "He went to the dead" is that it only repeats that Christ died, *mortuus*. In a short creed like the Apostles Creed and its predecessors there was never any duplication of thoughts. The phrase, "He went to the dead," is really only a duplication and does not tell us any more than Christ died. Where the change should have come is the elimination of the phrase, "the communion of saints," *communione sanctorum* in favor of a reference to the Eucharist. More will be said about this clause in a future issue.

The new translation has pointed out confusion in both phrases, "He descended into hell" and "He went to the dead," and the choice of one over the other is merely the weighing of positive and negative evidence. Both phrases should be sacrificed for another suggesting Christ's triumph over Satan, a thought which prevailed in the ancient church and in the Lutheran Confessions. This was thought popularized in more recent times by Gustaf Aulen with his *Christus Victor* theme. We offer this substitute as a translation for the controverted "descensus ad inferna" "He went to hell to triumph over Satan" or "the evil powers." The suggested wording may be awkward, but in some sense this is the idea that should be conveyed.

NEW HEBREW BIBLE

The successor to Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* has begun to make its appearance with section 7, prepared by Winton Thomas. It is the Book of Isaiah, whose textual study has been so greatly enriched by the Qumran discoveries. The new Bible is called *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) in contrast with the former, which now is denominated BHK (kittel). The Leningrad manuscript remains as the basic text with variant readings from the two Qumran Isaiah manuscripts noted in the apparatus. The two Qumran mss. are simply designated as Q^a and Q^b. The Württembergische Bibelanstalt, Stuttgart announces that two to three fascicles may be expected annually.

The old division of the apparatus at the bottom, which divided the notes into actual textual variants and minor notes and conjectures, has been abandoned. There is however a division into two parts, the first bearing footnotes, relating the *masora marginalis* to the *masora magna*, the latter to appear in a special volume as BHS, vol. II, simultaneously published in Rome as *Massorah Gedolah*. The material from Q^a is considerably less than in the special edition of Isaiah published earlier. Even that earlier Isaiah with the Qumran footnotes was by no means complete in listing all variants. It remains profitable therefore to compare the Massoretic text with the Qumran manuscript. Comparatively few variants from Q^b are found because that mss. is not complete, and it is much closer to the Massoretic text. In the instances noted Q^a and ^b were in agreement when they varied from the Massoretic text. It remains true that the Qumran manuscripts provide a marvelous demonstration of the faithfulness of men in preserving the text, even more of the faithfulness of God who promised that not one jot or one tittle should pass away. We have too many "jots and tittles", but the scholars have done excellent work in sorting them. The omission of most of the conjectures shows that many were no longer viable even in scholarly circles. The next generation of Hebrew students will have the advantage of studying the *masora magna* in the Aramaic. Perhaps even those can one day be translated.

Otto F. Stahlke

HENOSIS IN CHURCH ADMINISTRATION

World Vision Magazine (Sept. 1969) features an article on "Mission Mergers: How Successful?", in which a variety of efforts toward merger are evaluated. The writers find that "overseas missions can be slighted when churches of merging denominations form conferences at the state level." "Some loss of interest as a result of mergers was shared by several executives."

"Let's not kid ourselves," it was emphasized. "Church union is a complicated and expensive business." Author Marion W. Kliever, reports that "mission support does drop after merger. One denominational official indicated that financial contributions by one group in the merger dropped after amalgamation. Its offerings have not climbed higher than half of what they were before."

As a concluding opinion Kliever suggests, "It is likely that more missions will merge since some are now negotiating and since amalgamation is a trend of the times. Meanwhile, missions considering union can learn from those which have already merged."

Otto F. Stahlke

BISHOP STOPS INSTALLATION

The bulletin of *Kirchliche Sammlung um Bibel und Bekenntnis* (Dec. 20, 1968) reports that Bishop Heintze did not allow the official installation of Pastor Friedrich Grotjahn as student pastor in Braunschweig because the bishop could not accept a proposed installation form, which altered basic elements provided in the accepted order for churchly installations. The responsibility of his office, said the bishop, did not allow him to consent to the action on the grounds of the contents of the form submitted. *Kirchliche Sammlung* applauded the bishop for halting an ordination which excluded any obligation to Holy Scripture and Confession. Will the innovation become a practice so that any pastor may enter upon the duties of his office without official installation?

Otto F. Stahlke