

CONCORDIA
THEOLOGICAL
QUARTERLY

CTQ

Volume 48, Number 4

OCTOBER 1984

Announcement	261
Authority in English Theology from the Oxford Movement to the Present	John Stephenson 265
Jonathan Edwards: A Case of Medium-Message Conflict	Klemet Preus 279
Theological Observer	299
Homiletical Studies	303



Theological Observer

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR THE STUDY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Ninth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament took place in the ancient university town of Salamanca (28 August – 2 September 1983) under the patronage of His Majesty, Juan Carlos, King of Spain. The convocation was preceded by briefer reunions of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, the International Organization for Masoretic Studies, and the Society of Biblical Literature (in the case of the latter, the first European session of an essentially American organization). It was the first occasion on which the IOSOT had convened in Spain, and the serene site of the oldest Iberian university (founded around 1215, junior only to Bologna and Paris) provided a picturesque and supposedly appropriate setting. In some respects, however, the stage seemed somewhat inappropriate to this scholarly spectacle.

The majestic monuments to medieval and renaissance architecture which comprise the academic quarter of Salamanca heard very few echoes of any theology antedating the “Enlightenment” and the rise of rationalism. A partial exception to this general rule was the inaugural lecture delivered by the president of the IOSOT, Luis Alonso Schoekel, amid the regal splendor of the ceremonial hall constructed by the “Catholic Monarchs,” Ferdinand and Isabella. Noting the grandeur, not only of the buildings of Salamanca, but also of her past professors, Professor Schoekel observed, “We can easily be satisfied with the result of our historical-critical method and can sweep the scholars and writers of the past under the carpet on which we have been walking.” Choosing Fray Luis Ponce de Leon (d. 1591) as a representative example of pre-critical scholars worthy of contemporary consideration, Professor Schoekel proceeded to make an enjoyable excursion into the life and work of this Augustinian monk, poet, and professor of Old Testament exegesis in sixteenth century Salamanca.

On other occasions, too, there was the moderating influence of British and Spanish scholarship attempting to apply the brakes to the wilder wheels of the more radical German and American critics, especially in the case of theories suspected of Marxian provenience. Such an atmosphere was evident, for example, in the evaluation of the so-called Mendenhall-Gottwald hypothesis of ancient Israelite origins. George E. Mendenhall of the University of Michigan described it as “reasonably certain that ancient Israelite society and ideology were a *response* to the destruction of civilization at the end of the Late Bronze Age, not the cause”—a position, in other words, directly contrary to the picture painted by the Book of Joshua. “The entire historical context of the early Israelite Federation is the Early Iron Age, and therefore the formation of the Twelve Tribes is to be placed not much before 1150 B.C.” In the most eloquent address of the congress, J. W. Rogerson of the University of Sheffield provided a trenchant critique of the use of sociology in Old Testament studies.

Advocating a "deliberately British" approach, Professor Rogerson warned sociological exegetes against confusing reportage of data with attempted explanations of the data and against forgetting the "quasi-experimental nature" of such sociological explanations. "It is not enough to show that a given model *may* explain the data," argued Professor Rogerson. "The preferred model must be justified against other possible models." Nevertheless, the essential validity of higher criticism was the common assumption of almost all the participants in the congress. There were, of course, some papers of a neutral character by virtue of their subject matter (textual criticism, history of exegesis, etc.). And William S. LaSor, to be sure, delivered a lecture on the interpretation of apocalyptic literature in which he affirmed the divine nature of the Old Testament and denied the presence therein of *vaticinia ex eventu* ("prophecies from the event" — referring, of course, to the critical concept of "prophecies" which are not really predictions of future events, but are actually descriptions of past events — descriptions which were ascribed by the unknown men who wrote them to supposed prophets of an earlier age in order to convince their contemporaries of the divine authority of their fraudulent productions).¹ These propositions, however, served only to disqualify his presentation from serious consideration by his audience (the fallibility of Scripture being, after all, the very cornerstone and *sine qua non* of higher criticism).

Clearly, moreover, there was considerable anxiety about the interrelationship between the various categories of higher criticism, fostered by the practitioners of one "criticism" clashing with those of another, or, at least, ignoring the work of comrades-in-arms. Already in his inaugural call for perennial dialogue on "methods and models," the president of the IOSOT saw the continual appearance of new methods as producing a sense of insecurity in those accustomed to the use of older critical approaches. Thus, a number of papers emphasized the mutual interdependence of all the "criticisms" and proposed the integration in one way or another of historical criticism, literary criticism, rhetorical criticism, structural criticism, canon criticism, etc. And, in reality, as stated previously, the validity of higher criticism was the least common denominator in the positions of almost all the participants in the IOSOT congress, regardless of which particular "criticism" may have been the specialty of each. In a study, for example, of Joseph's final exchange with his brethren (Gen. 50:15-21), Walter Brueggeman sought to do justice to both "the 'internal dynamics' of a literary kind" emphasized by Gerhard von Rad and "the 'external function' of the text in the Pentateuch" stressed by Martin Noth. Describing many statements in Genesis 50 as deliberately ambiguous, Professor Brueggeman saw the account as a picture of "family relations in a conflict situation" in an exilic context—in other words, some twelve or more centuries later than the setting specified by the text of Genesis 50 itself. More importantly, this reconstruction, like critical exegesis generally, resists seeing the point of the Joseph story as God's preservation of the people from whom, according to prior promise, the Savior of all men was to come.

An intriguing example of the way in which theory is built upon theory in the critical house of cards was provided by Wilson Chang of Hanshin University in Seoul. His paper, "John Milton and the Yahwist," compared the personal

circumstances of a historical figure whose biographical data is profuse and "the Yahwist," of whom Professor Chang acknowledged that we know little. Not to put too fine a point on it, indeed, the very existence of "the Yahwist" is a hypothesis—and one deduced only from supposed implicit evidence in the Pentateuch which runs counter to the explicit testimony of the document itself in its present form (as the critics are quite prepared to admit) as well as all external sources of ancient times, including statements made by our Lord and His apostles (e.g., John 5:45-47).⁴ Nevertheless, Professor Chang could describe the Yahwist as a man living in the Davidic-Solomonic period who "may have wanted to compose the national epic of Israel emanating from the call of Abraham," but whose involvement with the court politics of his day broadened his perspective and caused him to project his scheme all the way back to the origin of the cosmos.

The theological nihilism of higher criticism was pressed to its logical extreme by Imre Mihalik of Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans. His lecture, "Elohim and Monotheism," argued that in their original forms the supposed J and E sources of the Pentateuch (Yahwist and Elohist) were not using different names for the one God of Israel, but rather were extolling two different gods. One was Yahweh, a particular Hebrew tribal god, and the other was El, the father of the gods in the Canaanite pantheon as he is described in the Ras Shamra tablets. While the Pentateuch, however, was passing through various editions over the course of the centuries, so too was Israelite monotheism gradually developing from the polytheism inherited from the ancestors of Israel. Thus, "D" decided to merge the two gods Yahweh and El into one, and "P" sought to defuse any tension between the gods of "J" and "E" by introducing Yahweh in Exodus as a new manifestation of El and by using the name "El" before that point and "Yahweh" afterwards. Professor Mihalik suspected the final grand redactor of the Pentateuch of attempting (as a result of his thoroughgoing monotheistic bias) to eliminate the name of the ancient Canaanite deity El from his sources by mechanically replacing it with "Elohim." In its pre-final form, however, the Pentateuch was "a covenant document for two worshipping communities," emphasizing the unity of their originally distinct gods. Professor Mihalik was, indeed, merely drawing the logical conclusion from the historical-critical method of exegesis when he observed, "A kind of 'ecumenical' attitude toward extinct religions seems to be a prerequisite for this task."

Notes

1. Editorial Escudo de Oro, *Toda Salamanca y su Provincia* (Barcelona: Editorial Escudo de Oro, 1983), p.3.
2. Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, tr. Peter Ackroyd (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), p. 520, summarizes the general critical position on the Book of Daniel in this way: "But when the book came to be dated between 167 and 163, this carried with it at the same time the

recognition that only the proclamation of the imminent coming of the end-time was genuine [although supposedly erroneous] prophecy. Otherwise the book provides *vaticinium ex eventu* and the description of the distress preceding the end does not extend beyond the Seleucid period...." Eissfeldt argues, in typical fashion, that in chapter 9:29-39 the second campaign of Antiochus IV against Egypt (167) "is so exactly 'prophesied' that we here clearly have *vaticinium ex eventu*...."

3. Robert Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper, 1941), for example, makes this assertion, pp.133-134: "There is no reason to doubt that the Pentateuch was considered the divine revelation to Moses when it was canonized about 400 B.C. ...The Deuteronomic Code, found in the Temple in 621, was officially accepted at once as the transcript of a divine revelation to Moses. The author of this code would not have incorporated in his prophetic oracle of Moses current civil and ritual laws unless he had reason to believe that their Mosaic origin would not be questioned. The Pentateuch is only an enlarged edition of the Deuteronomic Code."
4. Thus, Eissfeldt states without any note of concern, p. 158: "The name used in the New Testament clearly with reference to the whole Pentateuch— *the Book of Moses* —is certainly to be understood as meaning that Moses was the compiler of the Pentateuch."

Douglas MacCallum Lindsay Judisch