

# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

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# Editorial †

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## “THE GHOST OF MARCION”

In Hosea 12:3-4 the prophet interprets Jacob's wrestling bout at Peniel (Gen. 32:24 ff.) as a wrestling with God's *mal'āk*: God's "angel" or "messenger." The history of Christian exegesis contains its own record of a wrestling bout: the wrestling of Christian interpreters with God's Old Testament messengers who recorded the Scriptures of the Old Covenant.

In round one of this wrestling with the literary products of the Old Testament writers, the primitive church learned from its Lord to respect and value them as the Sacred Scriptures which bear their witness to Him as Savior and Lord. But in later rounds a different verdict was occasionally given. Take for example the well-known case of Marcion of Pontus who struggled with the Old Testament writers only to come to the conclusion that they have no relevance or authority at all for Christians. Marcion's verdict: The Old Testament must go; it has been replaced by the New; it has been abrogated by the Gospel.

Marcion, of course, did not carry the day. He is reported to have been excommunicated by his own father, to have been denounced as "the firstborn of Satan" by Polycarp, and to have been expelled from the Christian community at Rome where he sought asylum. Christians through the centuries have generally agreed that the Marcionite rejection of the Old Testament represents an heretical approach to the Bible. Not even an intellectual giant like Adolph Harnack succeeded in gaining any widespread acceptance of Marcion's views, though he tried. It was only 6 years before his death in 1930 that Harnack (in *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott*; 2d ed., 1924) revived Marcion's anti-Old Testament sentiments by maintaining that the church's retention of the Old Testament in its canon is a symptom of "religious and ecclesiastical paralysis." But within the mainstream of 20th-century Christianity Harnack appears to have failed in gaining converts to his incipient revival of Marcionite views toward the Old Testament. Christians today seem to be agreed in the verdict: Marcion must go; the Old Testament remains in the Christian canon.

But in recent years Bernhard Anderson in *The Old Testament and Christian Faith* (1963) has made the disconcerting suggestion that "the ghost of Marcion lingers on" in the Christian church. True enough, Marcionism is not being advocated in open and vigorous theological debate. But, suggests Anderson, the indifference toward the Old Testament on the part of Christians, the ignorance about the Old Testament, and the lack of concern about asking and answering the questions of the relevance of the Old Testament for the Christian faith may well be evidences of the unhappy fact that Marcion's ghost has not yet been laid.

This issue of the CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, devoted largely to Old Testament studies, is intended to be a contribution toward giving the quietus to Marcion's ghost. Carl Graesser's article on "The Message of the Deuteronomic Historian"

will help a Christian preacher see the relevance of the books of Deuteronomy and of the Former Prophets both to the ancient world of Israel and to the world of today. The article explores such questions as: What is the relationship of God to a world of military strife and political turmoil? Who is really in charge of such a world? What is God endeavoring to say to His people in times like these? How are God's people to respond in attitude and action? Does the future hold any hope? If so, what are the sources of such hope?

Ralph W. Klein's essay on "The Day of the Lord" traces the Old Testament use of the concept of the *Yôm Yahweh* through the various eras of the history of God's people of the Old Covenant. After establishing the meaning of this key term for God's ancient people in their varying historical contexts, Mr. Klein concludes his treatment of "the Day of the Lord" with the suggestion that, together with Joel, Christians too may see in the message of "the Day of the Lord" the assurance "that the people of God are surrounded only by sinking opponents, and that deliverance on the day of Yahweh depends exclusively on a relationship to the One who comes." Mr. Klein's discussion of the eschatological and consolatory aspects of the *Yôm Yahweh* will be seen to have relationships to Frederick Danker's study of 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, a text which concludes with a reference to that "Day of the Lord" on which "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

Theodore Ludwig's article on "The Shape of Hope" is a study in Jeremiah 30 and 31, familiarly known as "Jeremiah's Book of Consolation." Mr. Ludwig undertakes to show how Jeremiah's Book of Consolation "displays the shape of a theologically based hope that is given expression in various historical contexts." The article examines at least two of the contemporary approaches to the question of the significance of Jeremiah 31 (the New Covenant chapter) in terms of New Testament faith. Though he takes issue with certain aspects of what he calls "the common interpretation of the new covenant passage," the author nevertheless sees a basic relationship between that passage and "the hope of a new era of salvation for the covenant people."

The study by Dr. Joachim Jeremias, "The Theological Significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls," is a translation of a German article. It appropriately finds its place within the covers of this issue inasmuch as it provides insights into some of the understandings which our Lord's contemporaries held of the relevance of the Old Testament Scriptures to their life and times. Prof. Jeremias points to certain similarities between Qumran and early Christianity, explainable in terms of their common roots in the Old Testament. But he concludes by demonstrating that those similarities are overshadowed by the unbridgeable differences between the faith of Qumran and the faith of the church: the differences, in the last analysis, between the Law and the Gospel.

If you agree with Bernhard Anderson that the ghost of Marcion still gives occasional evidence of spooking around in Christian thought, you will be well-advised to add this issue of the CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY to your arsenal of ghost-hunting weapons.

WALTER WEGNER