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Recent Work on the Old Testament Prophets

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THE LAST authoritative survey in English of movements in Old Testament studies was *The Old Testament and Modern Study*, produced in 1951 by members of the Society for Old Testament Study under the editorship of H. H. Rowley. It was in effect a survey of the main developments in the previous thirty years.

The chapter on *The Prophetic Literature* was contributed by Prof. Otto Eissfeldt, the third edition of whose *The Old Testament: An Introduction* appeared in English translation in 1965. In the above-mentioned chapter he began by pointing out that both the main works on prophecy and the main commentaries on the prophetic books that had appeared since 1880 still had great value. This was equivalent to saying that the foundations laid between 1880 and 1940 had been able to withstand attacks on them. He went on to stress, 'The new approach to the study of the prophets is limited to certain specified traits in them and in the books that bear their names'.

The specific points he dealt with, apart from comments on outstanding works on individual books, were three: cultic prophets, the origin and transmission of the prophetic books, and the supranormal experiences of the prophets. The two former largely belong together, for mainly as the result of the work of G. Holscher (*Die Propheten*), Mowinckel and Halдар (*Associations of Cult Prophets among the Ancient Semites*) there had grown up the tendency to see all the prophets as linked with sanctuaries—that such prophets existed is indubitable, and we cannot *a priori* deny that some of the canonical prophets were linked with the temple in Jerusalem—and so the prophetic books were regarded as the products of groups of sanctuary prophets rather than of individuals, even if the one whose name is given to the book was a leading figure among them. By the time Eissfeldt wrote, this theory was already losing its popularity, though it may still be met. The same is true to a lesser extent of the theory popularised above all by T. H. Robinson that the prophetic consciousness was to be understood

mainly in terms of ecstasy. Here the decline in popularity was partly due to the theory's failure to explain all the facts, partly because ecstasy defied all efforts at clear definition. It may be fair to say then, that by 1950 Wellhausen's conception of the prophets as the rational and ethical element of religion triumphing over the ritual, priestly and irrational had largely lost its grip, but there can hardly be said to have been any general consensus of opinion which had taken its place.

Since 1950 the number of full-scale works and monographs devoted to the prophets has shown little sign of decreasing, but it is clear that for the time being, at any rate, the main interest in constructive Old Testament work has shifted to other areas. There is, perhaps, the feeling that there is little original left to be said on the prophets, at least in the fields of exposition and interpretation.

Translation and Text

THOUGH it may be questioned whether RSV (Old Testament 1952) was quite as great an advance over the RV as is often suggested, for the ordinary reader it had the tremendous advantage in the prophets that it showed their poetic structure, though it should not be forgotten that this had already been done by others, e.g. J. Moffatt (Old Testament 1926). Now it has been joined by *The Jerusalem Bible* (1966) and the *New English Bible* (Old Testament 1970). It is likely that these, especially NEB, will be found more valuable. Since they owed no loyalty to an already existing translation, as RSV did to AV, they have been freer to bring out the inner meaning of the Hebrew idiom. It must be a matter of regret that J. B. Phillips in his *Four Prophets* (1963) was not really able to do for Old Testament translation what he did for that of the New.

However carefully the text of the Hebrew Bible may have been copied from AD 70 on, it suffered not a few scribal errors at an earlier date. There seems to have been an official revision of the text about 150 BC, but the method used seems to have been a mechanical one, and especially in some of the prophetic books it is generally recognised that there are serious textual errors. Unfortunately the Old Testament text still awaits its Westcott and Hort. The passing years have shown that the textual apparatus of Kittel, *Biblia Hebraica* (3rd edit., 1937; later editions have merely taken in the main variants from some of the Qumran MSS) is often more misleading than helpful. The treatment of the text in RSV tended to be unsystematic. Until the promised volume on the text underlying the Old Testament in NEB appears, judgment must be reserved on it, though it is clear that it will stir up much controversy.

General Introductions

INTRODUCTIONS, whether to the Old Testament as a whole or to the prophetic books in particular, seldom seek to be original. They are intended to introduce the readers to positions which have normally been argued out in more detailed works. As a result we may expect to find, except in the case of Ezekiel, approximately the standpoint of S. R. Driver, *Literature of the Old Testament* (9th edit. 1913), unless the volume represents a thoroughly conservative approach, which in many points, where the prophets are concerned, is not likely to vary much from the liberal one.

There are three major works from the beginning of the period we are considering. R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (2nd edit. 1948) is probably the last large-scale reproduction of the 'orthodox' Wellhausen position that will appear. That is not to say that the author could not go his own way, as may be seen especially in his treatment of Ezekiel and Hosea, and in his comments on Amos' alleged rejection of sacrifice. His treatment of the texts is standard, viz. later accretions are to be separated out from the main body of oracles coming from the prophet named. Though he mentions ecstasy from time to time, it is clear that the psychology of prophecy is of no great importance to him. The outstanding value of the book is its very full bibliography. A. Bentzen, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (2nd edit. 1952) is a much less detailed work, but it is the only readily available work of its scope which gives us an insight into the Scandinavian stress on oral tradition in shaping the prophetic books. In the light of this his treatment of Isa. 40-66 is specially interesting. A very large part of the work is given to the study of literary forms. On the conservative side there is E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (2nd edit. 1960). It is a pity that vast erudition and a fair presentation of the modern critical position should in measure be nullified by rigidity in exposition and a complete lack of sympathetic understanding for the positions he rejects. Here too the student will find a shorter but very well chosen bibliography.

One of the more useful of the more recent publications is G. W. Anderson, *A Critical Introduction to the Old Testament* (1959). In very small compass it presents most of the modern concepts on the prophetic books. The opposite extreme is given by Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (translated from 3rd German edit. 1965). The student will find the bibliography almost exhaustive—even I have a mention in it—and few of the matters that interest him are passed over in silence. Anyone seeking something between these extremes of length will find it in A. Weiser, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (translated from 4th German edit. 1961). His sobriety of judgment and balance in the prophets is specially commendable.

In 1969 (America) and 1970 (Britain) appeared a work that should

have a deep influence on Old Testament studies. It is R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Its 1230 pages (British edit.), written from a conservative, but not obscurantist, position, and showing by the literature mentioned an almost encyclopaedic acquaintance with the subject, come as a challenge to all interested in the Old Testament to think again, for it is very far from being a repetition of traditional shibboleths. The section on the prophetic books alone would make a respectable volume by itself. The opening chapter of this section deals briefly but adequately with most of the modern theories of the prophetic office and consciousness. Its greatest value is that it is less concerned with advocating the author's own views, and more with presenting most that have been advocated, showing their strength and weakness.

It is impossible to mention more than a very few of the works on the prophets that by their nature could have formed part of a larger introduction to the Old Testament. That T. H. Robinson could have brought out a 2nd edition of his *Prophecy and the Prophets* in 1953, thirty years after the first, with little alteration except in the chapter on Ezekiel, is a tribute to its balance, but is also evidence how little views have changed. Of T. Henshaw, *The Latter Prophets* (1959) a kindly reviewer said, 'A popular, stereotyped but scholarly introduction to the prophets along critical orthodox lines.' On a more popular level there are S. F. Winward, *A Guide to the Prophets* (1968) and H. L. Ellison, *Men Spoke from God* (3rd edit. 1966). The former disturbs the balance of his book by too much attention to the critics, the latter quite probably does not pay sufficient attention to them.

Prophetic Consciousness

THE justification for mentioning Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel* (1960) is that though this translational abridgement is of work published between 1937 and 1948 in Palestine, it was almost unknown to scholars in the West. The author held a unique combination of personal, often very conservative, and normal critical views. For him the ecstatic in prophecy is marginal, present at the reception of the message but not at its repetition to others. He regards 'the apostle-prophet' as 'a peculiarly Israelite conception'; not the spirit of God, but the word of God is the prime factor in prophecy. He is opposed to the idea that 'disciples and later editors had a hand in the composition of the prophecies themselves'. With the exception of Hosea his actual attitude towards the various books is that of critical orthodoxy.

For advocates of the ecstatic theory J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (1962) is of the utmost importance, though the work has a value far beyond it. The first chapter deals with 'prophecy' outside Israel and the second with primitive prophecy in Israel. Then, in

contrast to Kaufmann, he stresses that 'the later prophets belong to the same general type as the primitive prophets, which, of course, is quite consistent with the fact that the preaching of the great classical prophets is on a higher level than the oracles of the primitive prophets'. This must, however, be interpreted. Speaking of Amos, he says, 'A real vision is always based upon ecstasy of one form or another'. This is, in contrast to T. H. Robinson, so to widen the concept of ecstasy that it ceases to explain anything. In fact, while ecstasy may or may not explain the how of prophecy, it has been signally incapable of dealing with its why. Entirely consistently with his views on ecstasy Lindblom considers that the 'prophetic books of the Old Testament must in the first place be understood as collections of prophetic revelations', where the collectors were not the prophets themselves. Of these collections he maintains, 'These collections have undergone changes and transformations of different kinds. There are countless examples of additions, enlargements and comments, which show that the text was not regarded as in any way sacrosanct, but was subjected to alterations in accordance with the taste and the needs of later times.'

It is a great pity that E. J. Young, *My Servants the Prophets* (1952) did not receive a British edition, and is hence almost unknown over here—in fact its non-mention in Lindblom's far-stretching bibliography is one of the minor blemishes on that work, for Young is worthy of being shown wrong, if he is. Most of the popular critical views on prophets and prophecy are here controverted to the author's satisfaction. He makes a perhaps too complete separation between true and false prophecy and maintains that there was an unbroken chain of true prophets, as mouthpieces of God, from Moses on.

An even greater loss has been that A. J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (1962) has not had a British publisher. The author's main thesis appeared in a little known work in German in 1936, but here it has been greatly expanded and deepened. It may be that the comparative neglect of this outstanding work has been due to the essentially Jewish approach in which neither revelation nor ethics receives the primary stress. Prof. Heschel considers that it is not primarily God's essence but his pathos that is revealed. His use of pathos goes back to Greek, and we must beware of understanding it in the popular modern sense. This pathos is not a fundamental attribute of God, but something that arises empirically in God's relationship to man. It is God's involvement in and concern for human history. The prophet so identifies himself with this pathos that on the one hand he can become man's representative before God, and on the other he is the means through which this pathos is revealed to man. 'The characteristic of the prophets is not foreknowledge of the future, but insight into the present pathos of God.' It need hardly be added that he rejects ecstatic and mystic interpretations of prophecy completely, and personally I consider his arguments sound. There is an element of onesidedness in the book, but it seems

to do justice to much in prophecy which neither traditional conservative or liberal views seem to do.

Commentaries and Expository Works

IN the earlier part of this century the Anglo-Saxon world was exceptionally well placed for commentaries. I need mention only in descending order the International Critical Commentaries, the Westminster Commentaries, the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, the Century Bible, to say nothing of other outstanding works which are still in regular use, though they may in many cases be available only secondhand. Then, shortly after the first World War, there came a strange hiatus. Though some outstanding volumes have been added to it, the ICC remains incomplete; above all the second and third volumes on Isaiah and that on Jeremiah are not there.

New series are now appearing, but so far the prophets have fared very badly in them. In the American Anchor Bible J. Bright, *Jeremiah* (1965) is the only one of the prophets to have appeared as yet. Since no British edition has as yet been negotiated, it remains virtually unknown over here. In the new Century Bible only J. W. Wevers, *Ezekiel* has as yet been announced. We are more fortunate with the Old Testament Library, but most of the main volumes on the prophets are yet to appear. There is a great deal of excellent work in the Torch Bible Commentaries, but in hardly any case did the writer have adequate space at his disposal, hence this series will not be mentioned further. The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries do not yet include more than one volume on the prophetic books. For convenience it will be best to follow the canonical order.

Isaiah. E. J. Young was able to complete two volumes of *The Book of Isaiah* before his death; the third is promised us from his uncompleted MS. The work is of high quality and strictly conventionally conservative. Unfortunately there is no British edition. C. R. North gave us in *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah* (1948) what must remain for many a year a standard work on the Servant Songs. He followed this up with a work of wider appeal, *The Second Isaiah* (1964), in which a great deal of scholarly detail should not hinder the ordinary reader's enjoyment. Strangely enough the first longer prophetic commentary to appear in the Old Testament Library is C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* (1969), translated as are a number of other commentaries in this series from *Das Alte Testament Deutsch*. This German series could best be styled middle-brow. Though this, like most volumes in it, is excellent, it is inclined to give information of no great interest to the typical English reader.

Jeremiah. Though there are two outstanding commentaries in German, W. Rudolph, *Jeremia* (3rd edit. 1968, HAT) and A. Weiser,

Das Buch des Propheten Jeremia (5th edit. 1966, ATD), nothing of note has appeared in English. H. L. Ellison had a long series of expositions, *Studies in Jeremiah*, in the *Evangelical Quarterly*, but they have not yet appeared in book form.

Ezekiel. It is to be hoped that J. W. Wevers, *Ezekiel*, in the Century Bible will fill the void at present with us—once again there are good volumes in German—until then D. M. G. Stalker, *Ezekiel* (1968, Torch Bible Commentaries), the Tyndale commentary and H. L. Ellison, *Ezekiel: The Man and His Message* (1956), must fill the gap. The latter is mainly expositional.

Daniel. E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (1949)—again there is no British edition—gives us an excellent treatment of the book from a conservative Calvinist, i.e. pre-dispensationalist, standpoint. He tends to ignore that there are certain other, entirely respectable, conservative interpretations of the prophecies, and he does not try to solve certain problems like the identity of Darius the Mede. Very useful is the work of the Jesuit C. Lattey, *The Book of Daniel* (1948), in The Westminster Version of the Sacred Scriptures. It is a scholarly and conservative work, in which the reality of the prophetic element is strongly maintained. It is, however, scarcely surprising that there is no identification of the fourth kingdom as Rome. N. Porteous, *Daniel* (1965, Old Testament Library), interestingly enough first appeared three years earlier in German in ATD. It is typical of the series for which it was originally written that it is virtually taken for granted that Daniel was written in the second century B.C., and that there is neither history nor foretelling in it. The monograph, *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel* (1965) by D. J. Wiseman, T. C. Mitchell, R. Joyce, W. J. Martin, K. A. Kitchen, whether it carries conviction or not, should act as a warning that the problems of the date and authorship of the book are far from settled yet.

Amos and Hosea. Pride of place must be given to two of the most recent volumes in The Old Testament Library both by J. L. Mays: *Amos*, pp. viii+168, and *Hosea*, pp. x+190, both 40s. each (SCM Press, 1969). In spite of much that is excellent and valuable in them, there can be no doubt that they will come as a disappointment to the average student of the prophets. One of the studies by Old Testament scholars this century has been that of literary forms (*Gattungen*). A strict application of these principles, along with the supposition that each of the prophetic books went through the hands of a series of compilers, etc., enables whole oracles, as well as individual phrases, to be identified as later additions with apparently far more objectivity than was the case with earlier avowedly subjective surgery on the prophet. Such an approach ignores G. A. Smith's protest against the treating of the prophetic oracles as though they were essays in formal poetry. Then too, if Prof. Mays can say, 'This saying is another example of the versatility with which Amos employs a variety of traditional forms of

expression to clothe his message', why are we to deny him a variety in form within a set of oracles? The objection, however, is not so much to the method, but to its distracting the commentator from the prophetic message as such.

No one familiar with the prophets will doubt that there is a quality about Amos which separates him from the other eighth and sixth century prophets, apart from Ezekiel. This is the inner unity of his message. While it is easy enough to separate his message into single oracles, yet they have a far greater cohesion than in the others. Over a period of years J. Morgenstern produced a series of *Amos Studies*, the first three being published in book form in 1941. In them he maintained that we have, subject to a major textual re-arrangement, a single 'sermon' held by Amos in Bethel at the New Year festival. If this is in anyway true, it means that we have to regard this book in a different way altogether. Though Morgenstern's work is referred to in the bibliography, he is not honoured with any mention in the text, much less a refutation.

This attitude is seen also in the willingness to give various views with regard to certain controverted points without coming down in favour of any one of them. When he says, 'By "Sheepbreeder" he probably means an owner in charge of other shepherds, a substantial and respected man of his community', there is no attempt to estimate what a substantial member of the Tekoah community would be likely to be objectively worth. It could be interpreted as though he were a minor capitalist, while in fact he was obviously a practising shepherd, sufficiently poor to have to double up as a dresser of sycamore trees. It is in matters like these that the average reader needs guidance.

These criticisms are less valid against the treatment of Hosea, but here too one misses adequate stress on key points. One example must suffice. In 1:2 he translates, as does RSV in the important point, 'The beginning of Yahweh's speaking through Hosea'. He assumes, as is far from certain, that this is the necessarily correct rendering, and that it must mean that the marriage that followed 'was from the first an enterprise of declaring the revelation of Yahweh'. On the basis of these assumptions he can then assume that Gomer was probably a known ritual prostitute. This is not an adequate way of brushing away the difficulties associated with this view.

It is surely too easy an answer to Hosea's judgment on Jehu's blood-bath at Jezreel (1:4) to suggest, 'Hosea stands in a tradition which has a different view of kingship and another evaluation of Jehu's "reform".' The multiplication of entities without adequate evidence should always be suspect. It is really disappointing to find no understanding for the difficulty of 11:9. It is not that the interpretation given is impossible, but that it is virtually impossible to believe that its original hearers would have so understood it. If it were correct, it is just here that we should expect to see the hand of the alleged compilers and editors.

On the other hand there is very much of value in these volumes. I specially appreciated the careful treatment of the text. Emendations are fairly sparingly made and are carefully based. It will be an interesting exercise to compare the rendering with the NEB. It is particularly good to see that refuge is not taken in ambiguities in the difficult text of Hosea. The price will see to it that these two volumes are mostly used as library reference works.

For those who know German there are two outstanding commentaries on Hosea, viz. by H. W. Wolff (2nd edit. 1965, BK) and W. Rudolph (1966, KAT). H. L. Ellison, *The Prophets of Israel* (1969) is essentially a commentary on Amos and Hosea, in which he takes a modified version of Morgenstern's view on Amos. He is not concerned so much with details of the text as with the understanding of the prophets' message. Hence they are placed in the setting of the prophetic activity in the northern kingdom generally, including Elijah, Elisha and Jonah. Though one has the impression that it was in parts written with his tongue in his cheek, N. H. Snaith, *Mercy and Sacrifice: A Study of the Book of Hosea* (1953), throws interesting light on various aspects of both Hosea and Amos.

Haggai and Zechariah. P. R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration* (1968, Old Testament Library) gives a detailed study of the effect of the Exile on sixth century writers. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah among the prophets all figure, but there is a specially close study of Haggai and Zechariah. Many will disagree with the interpretation of exilic literary activity, and most will find the proliferation of material difficult to handle, but the section on these two prophets is most valuable. It suggests that there may well be a shift of interest to a period which has all too often been neglected as a mere period of transition.

Other Writings

EXIGENCIES of space and the frailty of human endurance forces me to make a small selection from a great ocean of works. Since we are apt to lose the prophets under a weight of technicalities and erudition, let E. F. F. Bishop, *Prophets of Palestine* (1962) have pride of place. Its modest purpose, which is admirably fulfilled, is to show how the continuing life of Palestine can still throw much light on the prophets, their acts and their words.

Next should be mentioned a number of works linked with the name of H. H. Rowley; he was the editor of the *Festschrift* in honour of T. H. Robinson, *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy* (1950), which contains a number of essays of great value. Then there are the collections of his own essays, which are rendered doubly valuable by the extensive bibliographical notes. *The Servant of the Lord* (1952) contains three long considerations on the Servant Songs as well as one

on prophecy in general. *From Moses to Qumran* (1963) contains two valuable prophetic studies, that on Jeremiah being his contribution to the Robinson *Festschrift* mentioned above. His *Men of God* (1963) has four such studies, one being his standard consideration of Hosea's marriage.

Somewhat older is the posthumous book extracted from A. C. Welch's MSS, *Kings and Prophets of Israel* (1952), with very wise studies on Amos, Hosea and Isaiah. A very different type of work is *Israel's Prophetic Heritage* (1962); it is edited by B. W. Anderson and W. Harrelson, and is a *Festschrift* in honour of James Muilenburg. It tends to be concerned rather with the by-ways of the subject. G. von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (1968) is a most valuable extract from his two-volume *Old Testament Theology*.

Messianic prophecy has produced few major works in recent years. Though the publication date of the English translation of J. Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel* (1956) brings it within the period being covered, it is in fact a voice from the past. The first part appeared in 1909, the second in 1921, and the third, post-Biblical, appeared in its first form as early as 1904, though its final version dates from 1953. It is well that we should hear a traditional Jewish voice on Messianic prophecy in the midst of conflicting modern views. However much one may disagree with many of his arguments, the consideration of Messianic prophecy will never be quite the same since the appearing of S. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, in 1954. We are introduced to certain interesting aspects of Scandinavian thought in A. Bentzen, *King and Messiah* (1955) and H. Ringgren, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (1956).

The two series of monographs, *Studies in Biblical Theology*, do not have many titles that bear directly on the Old Testament prophets, but apart from the work by Ringgren already mentioned, we may mention W. Zimmerli and J. Jeremias, *The Servant of God*, which is a translation of the article *Pais Theou* in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary*; R. E. Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant* (1965), which deals with a subject much neglected in the earlier critical studies on the prophets; B. S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* (1967), which gives a close study of section of Isaiah's oracles.

While archaeology and linguistic analysis will continue to enable us to understand the obscurer allusions and vocabulary of the prophets better, it is unlikely that the next quarter of a century will bring us much that is new. Qumran was too far removed from the prophets to throw much light on them. It rather reassured us that the text was in fact better preserved than many had dared to hope, but not so well as some had claimed. Certainly it had nothing to say about questions of authorship beyond ruling out a few extreme views which few took seriously in any case.

The probability is that the extremer views on ecstasy and literary

forms will wither away, and that, whether we understand them or not, we shall see the prophets ever more clearly as God's servants, God's spokesmen.