

be able to answer these questions; certainly we cannot do so at present; we are left mouthing our 'perhaps' and 'it might be' and 'possibly.' It is unfortunate, to our minds, that the author of Joshua has not been more explicit, more of a chronicler and less of an historian-cum-theologian. But the writer had more important matters to make clear and it is those matters which form the enduring message and value of his book.

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Wonersh

THE UNKNOWN PROPHET OF THE EXILE—I

It is rather annoying though possibly providential that the greatest difficulties both of text and of interpretation in the Old Testament occur in passages of the greatest importance for our faith. Take chapters 40-55 of Isaiah. There is hardly a single conclusion to which scholars have arrived in relation to these chapters which has not been and still is in dispute: the date of the writer, his identity, where his ministry took place, whether these sixteen chapters form a unity or whether they are really made up of 41 (Mowinckel), 49 (Gressmann), 50 (Volz), 70 (Köhler) or more separate pericopes—not to speak of the *crux crucium* of the identity of the Servant of the Lord. At the same time they are patently of vital significance for us in our attempt to grapple with and understand the dynamic line of development of revealed religion. Even on the superficial though useful level of statistics, we can gauge their importance if we note that the *Bible de Jérusalem* gives about 120 cross-references to the New Testament for these few chapters: far more, comparatively, than for any other part of the Old Testament. The reasons are not far to seek. They provide, in the first place, the means by which Jesus and, after him, the early Church, expressed his identity—the Servant of the Lord with a mission for vicarious suffering and redemptive death; secondly, a figure by means of which the mission of the Church itself in relation to the world could be communicated as a prophetic reduplication of the mission of Jesus himself; thirdly, and not least in importance, a universal theological frame of reference within which the divine action and, supremely, the divine Act in Jesus could be understood and expressed. Thus the oracles of this great anonymous figure of the Exile whom we somewhat inelegantly call Deutero-Isaiah, handed down by his disciples, form the watershed of the Old Testament;

in them we find the earlier themes gathered up, recapitulated, re-interpreted and projected into a future full of hope. Their message is at the same time both old and new.

It is this message which we want to try to elucidate here, but before doing so we should make the following brief introductory remarks. First of all, our purpose is to state as simply as possible the theological framework of Isaiah 40-55 as we see it, leaving to one side other possible alternatives. We cannot spend all our lives making catalogues of other peoples' opinions, and, in any case, this has to a great extent already been done in regard to these chapters, as for example by Christopher North in his book on the Suffering Servant.¹ We take chapters 40-55 as thematically and in literary origin separate from chapters 56-66 and read them on the assumption of their thematic and theological unity though they are of course, from the purely literary point of view, divided into different units principally though not entirely in verse. Most important, we restrict ourselves to an examination of the theological content of 40-55, to the exclusion of the so-called Servant Songs (42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12) which are distinct in origin and the examination of which would take us well beyond the modest limits we have set ourselves. Quotations are from the *Revised Standard Version* purely for convenience, since we take the retention of the verse-form to be important for questions of interpretation.

A Crisis of Faith

Basically, these chapters offer a solution to a problem or better, a crisis of faith. Hence their universal significance. We must first make ourselves familiar with the nature of this crisis. The fundamental sustaining conviction of the Israelite was that he was the recipient of a promise of God: the peaceful and perpetual possession of the Land in which he lived (Gen. 13:15 etc.), continued existence as a great people (Gen. 12:2 etc.), a permanent, divinely blessed dynasty (2 Sam.7) and the divine presence in the Temple (1 Kings 8:13 etc.). For him these promises were quite simply of absolute binding force and indefectible, a conviction which remained untouched by the insistence of the eighth-century prophets that they must be seen within the context of the over-all plan of God which could even contemplate the destruction of the nation as a political entity. The Israelite of that time never seemed to have considered seriously the possibility that he might be overtaken by historical events, and it is in this light that we must view what happened after the fall and destruction of Jerusalem in 586

¹ C. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah: An Historical and Critical Study*, 1948

and, with it, the liquidation of Judah as a nation. In the light of traditional religious ideas then current, this would have been interpreted as a definitive triumph of Marduk, national god of Babylon, over Yahweh, national god of Israel; therefore the exiled Israelite in the land of Marduk fell under his kingship. That the average Israelite of the exilic age acted and thought under the influence of this religious idiom rather than under the data of his own, revealed, religion, is certain. According to that idiom, the god stands or falls with the success or failure of his subjects. It is his task to go out to battle at the head of his subjects, as the Assyrian kings went out under the aegis of Ashur, the Babylonians under that of Marduk and the Israelites behind the Ark of Yahweh their king and God. Victory involved both people and god :

Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who among all the gods of the countries have delivered their countries out of my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand? (2 Kings 18:32-5)

Thus Sennacherib through his officer parleying under the walls of besieged Jerusalem in 701, and his words give us an excellent example of the idea of a god as the unconsciously projected and embodied will to existence and power of a political unit. The Chronicler comments on this rhetorical question in the consciousness that Israel's religious experience was unique: 'They spoke of the God of Jerusalem as they spoke of the gods of the peoples of the earth, which are the work of men's hands' (2 Chron. 32:19), but this comment dates from after the time of Deutero-Isaiah and in fact, though that particular boast was not fulfilled, the emblems of victorious Marduk were to be carried into the defeated city not much more than a century later. Therefore this crisis of faith at the Exile was also a question of the kingship of Yahweh—was it a reality after all? Was it universal? Could Yahweh and Marduk be considered as rivals for universal rule?

It is within this context of the question of Yahweh's universal rule that we must think of the related problem of His *moral* rule of the world and of His people. There is plenty of evidence that they considered that they, of that ill-starred generation, were being punished unjustly for the sins of their ancestors, a feeling summed up in the proverb then and later current :

The fathers have eaten sour grapes,
And the children's teeth are set on edge. (Jer. 31:29; Ez. 18:2)

Not only, therefore, was it impossible to think rightly of and worship Yahweh in a land which was so obviously under the rule of his victorious rival Marduk—'How shall we sing the songs of Yahweh in a foreign land?' (Ps. 137:4)—but the whole question of faith in God, *their* God, met with a complete psychological and spiritual impasse.

It was in this impasse that some man whose name we do not possess, full of the Spirit of God, speaking out of a profound meditation on the Covenant and the whole of the past history of his race considered as the arena of the unfolding action of God, and influenced profoundly by his prophetic predecessors, especially Isaiah son of Amos of the eighth century, set himself to re-create his people's faith. His starting-point is not, as we might have expected, the great deeds of God in the past, but a reading of contemporary history in the light of what has already been revealed of God's plan and intentions. This is important for it gives us yet one more example of inspiration as the record of the response to facts, that is, to historical events.¹ The inspired writer imposes a pattern on the apparently disparate and unconnected events which are taking place, he gives them meaning by decoding their hidden significance, he deciphers the hieroglyphics of historical facts by showing the meaning which they have for God. The prophet is always more concerned about the present than about the future, a fact nowhere clearer than in this particular case of an inspired reading of history. From what point, then, in contemporary history did the prophet of the Exile begin?

To answer this question we must first cast a glance at the events of that age. Viewed in its historical perspective, the Exile was not such a world-shaking event—a city, the capital of a vassal state about the size of a couple of English counties, was destroyed in a punitive expedition and some of its people, possibly as few as 20,000 or so, were transported elsewhere in accordance with a policy initiated by the Assyrians. The Old Testament, however, sees this event in an entirely different perspective according to which Israel is the *centre*: 'Not the visible pivot of historical movements but the secret centre of events.'² The Exile also happened to take place in a crucial transitional period of world history. The years between the fall of Nineveh (612) and the fall of Babylon (539) saw the eclipse of those Semitic civilisations which had dominated the Middle East for about three millenia and the ascendancy of the Indo-Arian races and with them a new orientation of religious thought, new languages, new habits of mind. Further afield

¹ See C. A. Simpson, 'Old Testament Historiography and Revelation,' *Hibbert Journal*, 1958, pp. 319ff.

² M. Noth, *History of Israel*, 2nd ed., 1958 p. 256

there were Buddha, Zoroaster and the Ionian philosophers trying to find the key to unlock the universe, the closed universe which the millenarian myths had accepted without question. For the Near East the decisive fact is the shift of emphasis from the idea of the nation to that of the *oikoumene*, conceived either as cosmos or as world empire and this, given the terms in which men, not excepting the Hebrews, tended to think of their god, involved of necessity an enlargement of the idea of God. World empire demanded a theology of world empire and thus brought to the fore the question of the universal kingship of God. This is, taken in the abstract, the theological *point de départ* of Isaiah 40-55.

Cyrus the Persian

The theological debate on world kingship is, however, centred in a particular person—Cyrus the Persian. It is not in any way improbable that his career, right from 546 when he captured Sardis and made Lydia part of his empire, was watched with keen interest and hope by those exiles who still hoped for the return, the prophet of chapters 40-55 among them. In 539 he defeated the last of the Babylonian kings, Nabonidus, and in October of that year his general Gobryas entered Babylon unopposed. The fall of the city which had inflicted so much suffering on the Hebrews and which was for them a byword for vice and oppression produced a crop of allusions, indeed, quite a literature in the Old Testament.¹ What is important to note here is that the defeat of Babylon involved the defeat of Marduk the god of Babylon. Thus in a poem of savage force which we find in the Isaian collection :

Fallen, fallen is Babylon ;
And all the images of her gods
He has shattered to the ground. (21:9)

In another *qinah* or lament for fallen Babylon the defeat of the city involves the eclipse of her astral deities, described in imagery which has played a not inconsiderable part in the formation of the master-images of New Testament eschatology :

For the stars of the heavens and their constellations
Will not give their light ;
The sun will be dark at its rising
And the moon will not shed its light. (13:10)

—a theological position which no doubt has influenced the final edition of the Old Testament presentation of creation, to be discussed at a later

¹ Is. 21:1-10 ; 13 ; 14:3-21(?) ; 14:22-3 ; 47 ; Jer. 50-1 ; Dan. 5:30 ; 2 Chron. 36:22. cf. the Nabonidus Chronicle III, 5-24

stage. The Prophet of the Exile also has a *qinah* which is sung in anticipation of the fall of the hated city (chapter 47) and, in another oracle, draws a dramatic distinction between Yahweh who has carried Israel like a child from its birth and the Babylonians who have to carry their gods out of the city on mule back :

Bel bows down, Nebo stoops,
Their idols are on beasts and cattle ;
These *things* you carry are loaded
As burdens on weary beasts (46:1-2)

The fall of the city is closely connected in the mind of the prophet with the divine mission entrusted to the Persian king. Shortly after the conquest of Babylon, Cyrus promulgated his edict restoring local cults and permitting exiled enclaves to return to their place of origin. This edict is referred to in the Old Testament (2 Chron. 36 and Esd. 1) and on the well-known cylinder on which he inscribed his religious and political manifesto. But from the religious point of view there is a very great difference between the two. The Cyrus Cylinder tells us that Nabonidus had neglected the worship of Marduk, chief god of Babylon. From other sources we know that this monarch, more interested evidently in culture than in liturgy (he is sometimes rather fatuously called the first archaeologist), had absented himself continuously from the great New Year Festival so necessary to the well-being of the community through the whole course of the year. We shall take up this point later since we believe it is a valuable clue to the theological frame of reference of Deutero-Isaiah. Marduk, in these circumstances, *called* Cyrus, and ordered him to take Babylon, and even accompanied his army. From that time Cyrus proclaimed himself 'king of the world, great king, mighty king, king of Babylon . . .' and taking over from Marduk the Babylonian kingship as he himself states, he took over also the particular *theology* of kingship expressed not so much in protocol as in liturgy—the liturgy of the *akitu* or New Year Festival. This is of cardinal importance. Finally, he states that he restored the cult of other gods—the gods of Sumer, Akkad—and, though not explicitly mentioned, presumably Israel—which gods, however, remain under the lordship of Marduk, as is clear from the last coherent phrase of the cylinder : 'May all the gods whom I have placed within their sanctuaries address a daily prayer in my favour before Bel and Nabu that my days be long, and may they say to Marduk my lord. . . .'

This is all rather different from the form of the edict which we read in the biblical texts referred to above. There it is Yahweh who stirs up the spirit of Cyrus and causes him to write his edict resulting in the

return from exile ; it is from Yahweh that he holds universal kingship and receives the command to restore the Jerusalem cult. In order to explain this discrepancy we must remember that the author of Chronicle—Esdra—is writing, however unconsciously and however long after, under the shadow of the Prophet of the Exile. It is therefore to the latter that we must go for the explanation. There are four passages which speak quite plainly of Cyrus : Is. 41:1-5 ; 41:25-9 ; 45:1-6 ; 48:12-16. In the first of these we can hear the undertones of a polemic against the theology of the Cyrus Cylinder ; he who has *stirred up* Cyrus (v. 2), who is responsible for what has been brought about, is not Marduk but he who is 'Yahweh, the First, And with the Last—I am He !' (v. 4).

This is proved by the very fact of the prophet's announcing beforehand to Jerusalem her liberation through the mighty works of Cyrus, since this revelation has been made possible through Yahweh, whereas the inability of the pagan gods to give such an oracle is proof that they are 'a delusion'—an empty wind (41:29). It is in the context of this polemic that we should understand the frequent allusions to idolatry and the bitterly satirical attack on the statues of the gods to which cult was rendered, especially in the long prose interpolation in Is. 44:9-20. The exiled Jews must have been thoroughly familiar with the Babylonian religious calendar with its succession of feasts and processions during which the statues of the gods were borne on their palanquins through the streets of the city. In the third passage we find an oracle of Yahweh to Cyrus his 'anointed' whom he takes by the hand ; in this oracle he promises to go before him into battle and give him success : 'That you may know that it is I, Yahweh, The God of Israel, who *call* you by your name' (45:3). Therefore Cyrus was in error in believing, as he himself states on the cylinder, that Marduk had called him ; indeed, the non-existence of Marduk is categorically stated : 'I am Yahweh, and there is no other, Beside me, there is no god !' (45:5)—a theological formula repeated many times in the course of these chapters. In the last of the four passages the call of Cyrus by Yahweh is again repeated and this conviction is put into the mouth of the king himself, in diametric opposition to his words recorded on the cylinder.

Thus, what the prophet is in effect saying is first, that the universal kingship had always belonged to Yahweh not to Marduk, though political events made this fact difficult to perceive, and secondly, that now that the Persian king had succeeded to the kingship of Babylon and was, in his own words, 'universal king, king of kings (that is, the only real king), king of Babylon,' he must be regarded as the

emissary of Yahweh not Marduk, the king anointed by Him and consequently the focus of all hopes for the future. It should therefore not cause us any surprise to find that, consistent with what we have already seen, the prophet presents what the universal and eternal kingship of Yahweh means for him in the theological idiom already known and familiar to both Babylonian devotee of Marduk and the exiled Israelite who, if not exactly driven out to serve other gods, as David averred of himself in the land of the Philistines, had at least to assist helplessly at the spectacle of the triumph of a god not his own. We must try now to see what this implied.

Royal Ideology and the New Year Festival

The universal theological idiom of antiquity was myth; not myth understood merely as a form of entertainment, a story about gods and goddesses, but as a form of communication vitally important for the life of the whole community. In fact *muthos* is practically always found to be, basically, a holy recital or libretto accompanying a ritual action or *drōmenon*. Myth is a Greek word and there is no specific counterpart in the Semitic languages, but one of the best examples of such a myth can be studied precisely here in the Babylonian story of creation which was recited in the course of the *akitu* or New Year Festival in Babylon to which we have already referred. Its purpose was to bring out the point and purpose of the ritual drama in progress and to draw attention to its theological significance and its saving efficacy. This was especially important in the festival of the New Year in Babylon since this feast was not just one of many but was *the* day and, in a way, the epitome of all religious emotions and aspirations. Since we are going to submit that some of the phases of this ritual were seen by the Prophet of the Exile as specially apt to express a complex theological statement which could be summed up in the phrase: the Kingship of God, and which the appearance of Cyrus as heir of the Babylonian royal ideology and his ambiguous position *vis-à-vis* the Israelite exiles had made of pressing importance, it will be necessary to give first the essential lines of the liturgy of the New Year Festival.¹

Although differing from place to place and from age to age through a period of at least two millenia, the liturgy always presents some invariable and fixed features. The scenario is the seven-storeyed Ziggurat and its three sanctuaries, or the local temples with their sanctuaries and processional ways which derive from the idea of the primordial mountain of creation which the Ziggurat represents in a stylised form. The *dramatis personae* are the Sumerian Dumuzi or his

¹ cf. *Dictionnaire de la bible, supplement* VI, 556-97, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 331-4

Akkadian counterpart Tammuz and the goddess, variously named but usually Ishtar, who is associated with him. The essential action concerns the death and resurrection of the young god; it begins with the lamentations over his catafalque, the ritual humiliation of the king who, as the vicegerent of the god must participate in the tragedy,¹ various purifications and lustrations followed by the restoration and exaltation of the god, represented by the restoration of the king to his dignity through his receiving anew the insignia of office from the risen god. The climax comes in the *hieros gamos* or ritual marriage and the fixing of the destinies of the people and the land for the New Year.

This is the pattern which is found as far back as we can go in the earliest Sumerian dynasties. Our chief source for the feast as practised during the last days of the Babylonian monarchy only gives us a partial picture since it is the *rituale* of one official only, the *urigallu* priest, evidently a kind of glorified master of ceremonies. But the outline at least is reasonably firm. There is a definite sequence of actions to be performed for the first five days of the festival, rites of purification of the temple, sacrifices to be offered daily, two statues to be set up, clothed and fed in the temple until the sixth day when they are decapitated and burnt. On the fourth day, after the singing of psalms which refer to the kingship of Bel (Marduk) and the blessing of the temple, not dissimilar from that carried out by Solomon (2 Kg. 8), the solemn recital of Creation, *Enuma Elish*, takes place. This poem, which, with some minor lacunae, has come down to us in its entirety, describes the triumph of Marduk over Chaos and the ensuing creation of heaven and earth out of the mutilated body of Tiamat, Chaos personified, and her general Kingu, culminating in the declaration of the eternal kingship of the god. The fifth day sees the purification of the temple by the sprinkling of water and the sacrifice of a ram. Later there follows the public humiliation of the reigning king who is divested of his regalia of office which are placed before the god, struck on the cheek, dragged by the ear into the holy of holies and forced to kneel before Marduk and make a kind of negative confession like those found in the Books of the Dead in Egypt. Later he receives back his kingly dignity from the hands of the god and, though the document ends here, presumably the rest follows as outlined above.

Such was the way in which royal ideology at the time of Cyrus was conceived and expressed. What was in its original intent, we may imagine, nothing more than a gesture fixed and made permanent in cult, aiming at assuring and enhancing the resurgent fertility of the crops, of men and of beasts at their due season, had already gathered

¹ The Greek counterpart Dionysos is associated in the *divina tragedia* vicariously, through the ritual death of a condemned criminal, according to Dio Chrysostom.

BOOK REVIEWS

to itself political significance. The liturgical recitation of the creation epic, with its substitution of Marduk the national god of Babylon (or Ashur for Assyria) for the original Enlil, and the close correspondence between the fate of the god of the city and of the king makes this quite clear. The retelling year by year of the great cosmogonic victory, the *gesta dei*, which is *Heilsgeschichte* outside of history, is brought within reach and made available for the reigning king who is the *locum tenens* of the god and must reproduce to scale the deeds of the god. When we recall that Cyrus claims to have restored the cult of Marduk neglected by Nabonidus, and would certainly have remedied that king's neglect of the New Year liturgy by taking the chief place in it himself, we can see the relevance of all this for the royal ideology supposed in the edict and how the oracles of the prophet, necessarily polemical in character, must to some extent have followed the lines of this ideology. We have now to show that this was in fact the case.

(to be concluded)

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BOOK REVIEWS

T. Worden, *The Psalms are Christian Prayer*. Geoffrey Chapman, London 1962. pp. 217, 18s.

This excellent book fulfils the promise of its title. In the Introduction attention is called to the fact that whereas the Psalter has always been the 'official' prayer-book of the Church and has been given a place of honour by Christian writers from earliest times, it is nevertheless true that in the modern popular prayer-book the psalms are not to be found. It is also unfortunately true that many who are obliged to recite the Divine Office find it difficult to make the recitation a real prayer.

Fr Worden correctly diagnoses the trouble. The twentieth-century mentality of the vast majority of Christians is completely alien to that of the Old Testament and since the Psalter is the epitome of Old Testament revelation it is not understood by that vast majority. This book is an attempt to remedy this position and to show that because of the continuity in the divine economy of revelation and redemption, the psalms are prayers suited to the New Israel as well as to the Old. The reviewer has no hesitation in forecasting the success of this book