

Editorial

BAPTISTS have always emphasized the authority of Scripture in matters of faith and practice. The argument for believer's baptism is, in large measure, one of New Testament interpretation. But in the world of Biblical scholarship, Baptists in the United Kingdom have produced a larger number of outstanding specialists in Hebrew and Old Testament, than New Testament scholars of equal renown. Some of their names, indeed, have assumed their rightful place among those of international reputation this century.

Why is this? One must recognise, of course, that ecclesiastical concerns and academic interests, while related, can and should exist independently of each other to some degree. Indeed, if the Baptist position could only be maintained by the efforts of abstruse scholarship, it would hardly merit the attention that it in fact receives.

Again, this tradition of Old Testament scholarship stemming from our ranks might be more or less accidental: at most, the result of one or two outstanding figures communicating their personal enthusiasm to students sharing the same religious affiliation. But it still remains an interesting question, as to whether anything in the Baptist ethos particularly encourages a study of the law and the prophets.

It could be argued that a tradition which attaches such great importance to the preaching of the Word of God, and which has customarily stressed the "prophetic" role of ministry, will have more than a slight affinity with the Hebraic world. So too, the dynamic of worship in the Reformed tradition—the dynamic of call-and-response—can be seen to be heir to the Israelite view of the responsibility of God's people before their Sovereign Lord. Admittedly, despite the renewed liturgical interest in our time, the understanding of this dynamic is often all too attenuated today.

Be that as it may, it is good that this issue of the *Quarterly* demonstrates that the tradition of Old Testament interest is still very much alive. Dr. Rex Mason's article on current developments in this field will be a most helpful guide for those who wish to know the present standing of those authors who only yesterday were regarded as having descended from Sinai, and those who in turn are venturing into the cloud today. Further, we have reviews of two recent books by Baptist Old Testament scholars, A. R. Johnson and H. Mowvley. Both deal, in their own way, with prophecy, and they offer important resources for the crucial and perennial task of Christian ministry: to interpret human experience and history in terms of God's purpose, focussed in Christ.

A less scholarly (but evidently effective) use of the Old Testament took place during the English Civil War, when Cromwell's troops marched into battle singing the Psalms of David. Among them were

Baptists. That Baptists were found in significant strength in the Parliamentary cause is well known. But how many actually sat in Parliament in the seventeenth century? Dr. David Bebbington's careful documentation, presented in this issue, together with the findings for the eighteenth century, goes a long way towards clarification here—although, as he is careful to point out, uncertainties remain over a number of individuals. Perhaps the overall effect of this work is a gentle demythologizing of part of our history: not quite so many Baptists as we might have thought at Westminster in the seventeenth century, and not a complete absence of them there in the eighteenth. We should not wish to be either wrong or romantic, and we look forward to publishing Dr. Bebbington's work on nineteenth century Baptist M.P.s in a subsequent issue.

Our last issue contained the report of the 1979 Faith and Order Consultation on Baptism at Louisville, with an introductory article by Dr. Morris West. We now offer a further comment by the Rev. John Nicholson, another British Baptist participant. It is hoped that the three papers will be reprinted together for wider circulation and discussion.

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Reviews: H. Mowvley, M. Tanner, D. B. Murray, the late E. A. Payne, N. S. Moon.