

Reviews

A HISTORY OF ISRAEL IN OLD TESTAMENT TIMES, by Siegfried Herrmann, translated by John Bowden. *SCM Press*, London, 1975. 364 pp. £6.
TWO OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGIES, by D. G. Spriggs, *SCM Press*, London, 1974. 127 pp. £3.
A THEOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, by John L. McKenzie. *Geoffrey Chapman*, London, 1974. 336 pp. £4.50.

Herrmann's *History of Israel* is a very carefully written book, cautious not to tread on the toes of orthodoxy and at the same time anxious to take account of new discoveries and certain inconsistencies in the Biblical narrative. The work holds the middle ground, therefore, between the conservatism of Bright and the radicalism of Noth and Alt.

It begins with a description of time and scene which would have been of greater value had we also been provided with some decent maps of the area. The six black-and-white maps in the back of the book are inadequate, and it seems better to ignore them and seek the help of a proper Bible Atlas.

In this introductory description the author lays the foundation for Alt's thesis that the Settlement was not a sudden invasion of an already homogeneous group of people but rather a gradual penetration of nomadic tribes entering the Promised Land from different directions. This divided beginning did not fail to leave its mark upon Israel's subsequent history, and throughout that history we find that the north (Israel) and the south (Judah) remain distinct entities.

However, Herrmann treats this as a complication in the basic view of the unity of the nation, and it is from this point of view that Israel's history is told. So on p. 148 he says that Israel formed a single entity from earliest time, contradicting this by the statement that the name Israel was first attached to the tribes of Central Palestine and strictly speaking continued to refer to them. On p. 190 the author admits that even after the Settlement Judah and the tribes of Palestine remained separate entities with different parts and independent developments, so that the term 'the division of the kingdom' may give a wrong impression. Nevertheless this term is made the title of the relevant chapter and the unitary view remains

the guideline of the study. This procedure of give-and-take, applied throughout the book, has the unfortunate result that the vision is often modified to such an extent that it loses its force, and in the end it seems that nothing at all has been said.

The reason for this approach appears to be that Herrmann does not wish to diverge too much from a kind of Biblical history which starts from an idea of unity and is only prepared to concede that occasionally this view has imposed itself on the facts and has distorted the reality which the modern scholar then tries to restore. But is Biblical history itself as unitary as we usually assume it to be? Does Scripture not recognise the inner divisions within the nation: does it not, in a sense, start from them, without however accepting them as final? The point of narrating the ancient traditions of the north is not to subject them to the unity of Yahwism, but rather to show how this unity was embedded and generated in those old stories. The traditions of Israel imply that the north cannot remain on its own and that the promises given to Joseph can only be realised under the leadership of Judah and through the faith in Yahweh. Judah, on the other hand, can only be the first among the brothers if he regards his position in the light of the ancient traditions. On these grounds I would argue that the Biblical narrative is fundamentally truthful to past traditions and has no intention of distorting them by imposition of a superior theological view. Care is consistently shown for the accurate transmission of older traditions in order to demonstrate that they indeed pointed to fulfilment in the Davidic kingship.

If, however, we follow Herrmann's approach and assume that ideals of later times have been imposed upon these earlier traditions, we are bound to accept a radical distinction between

theology and fact, the world of faith that is given before the knowledge of events.

Now, recently this distinction has been hotly debated among Bible scholars, especially since Eichrodt's and Von Rad's became the two leading and contrasting Theologies of the Old Testament. It is an ideal topic for a thesis, which D. G. Spriggs now presents to the public. To indulge in speculation while writing a thesis is asking for trouble, and Spriggs therefore wisely stays with the actual citations from the two Theologies and the comments made by others.

For Eichrodt the seed of Israel's religion was planted when Yahweh revealed himself to Moses on Mount Sinai. From there it grew, although during this process it was expressed in various ways, depending on historical situations and Israel's temptation to syncretism, the lures of Canaanite religion. Israel's faith stems from the Mosaic Covenant, sealed in the remoteness of the desert, and this is the one and only source from which Eichrodt evaluates and unifies the various expressions of Yahwism. Spriggs points out that the concept 'covenant' itself is not so important, in spite of the prominence given to it by Eichrodt, for it functions merely as a 'cipher' signifying Israel's unique relationship with God. Thus Eichrodt's approach cannot be criticised on the grounds that he has a wrong or limited understanding of Covenant, and it is not impossible to integrate the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants in his version of the Mosaic one. In this way Spriggs seems to underline that the basis of Israel's faith can be detached from its history.

Von Rad, on the other hand, wants to break with this kind of theology that would have its source in a direct divine communication from above. The OT is in the first place an interpretation and proclamation of Israel's history as redemption. Spriggs acknowledges the freshness of this approach, but is nevertheless not very impressed by it as he feels Von Rad fails to bring clarity into what exactly is meant by Salvation History. Not only is the idea of *Heils-*

geschichte a confused one (or more kindly put, 'Von Rad is a poet'); it also cannot be applied to many parts of the OT, for which an Eichrodt-like approach is needed. Now, this seems to me a rather inconsistent criticism, for if the vision is not clear how can we decide whether or not it is complete? Comparing detailed topics in the two works Spriggs reaches the conclusion that they have more in common than Von Rad cares to admit, but this is probably because he finds Eichrodt easier to understand.

After these two volumes we may relax with a more lightweight Theology of the Old Testament, presented by McKenzie, who says more or less openly that he wrote the book only because many years ago, in an unguarded moment, he had signed a contract to this effect with the publishers. This rather prosaic motivation has something to recommend itself, for although the principles behind OT Theology are important, they should perhaps emerge from the work in progress and be discussed as it proceeds, instead of forming some metaphysical basis on which the whole edifice is constructed. McKenzie is particularly anxious not to be bound by any epistemological doctrines before the work has begun. Of course he is a Christian who inevitably will ask the questions from within the perspective of his faith, but that does not mean that this perspective has to be the determining factor in OT Theology. On the contrary, the theologian tries to decide what answers are given by Israelites to the questions he is asking. Although the NT sees itself as the fulfilment of the OT this does not mean that, looking from within the OT, the Christian faith lies necessarily within that perspective.

However, McKenzie is perhaps a little too willing to accept the gap between himself and the Israelite consciousness, and instead of imaginatively re-creating the beliefs and institutions of the OT he writes about them as a journalist reporting on some far-away community, virtually inaccessible to present-day understanding.

ROB VAN DER HART OP

THEOLOGY IN AN INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY, by Margaret Kane. *SCM Press*, London, 1975. 151 pp. Paperback. £1.95.

We have grown accustomed to theology as a discipline in which academics, mostly clerical, reflect on their own experience. This has removed

theology far from the normal experience of industrial society—far, that is, from reflecting on the experience of the majority of people in our society. At