

Dr Allen presents each of his allotted four among those too often dismissed as 'minor prophets' through an introduction, translation, and notes. The 'New International Commentary', of which this volume is a part, is intended to provide the christian reader with a scholarly account of the Old Testament texts and the contexts within which they were written, together with a more apologetic account of the reference of the texts to our present condition. This book is meant, Dr Allen says, for scholars, pastors, and the 'traditional Christian, who knows and values his New Testament, but is very hazy about the Minor Prophets and secretly doubtful as to their worth'. The pastor may be readily satisfied. He has only to make a short version of the historical information and a more elaborate version of the exhortation to belief and morality that comes with the critical consideration of the text, and there's his sermon. At his preaching the pastor may be content to imitate as well as he can Dr Allen's mediation between his two other classes of reader. And it is evident from the publisher's happy quotation that the exegete may well be content with this book also. Professor Bruce is prepared to say that he 'cannot remember such a satisfying treatment of *Jonah* as Dr Allen gives', though he is perhaps moving a little from his scholar's ground when he suggests that the commentary is 'characterised by sure religious insight'. But what of the common christian reader whom Dr Allen imagined sitting 'on the other side of my desk'?

Such a reader may be a little puzzled by the shape of the book. It is only after shorter treatments of *Joel*, *Obadiah*, and *Jonah*, that theological and social themes and literary forms common to all four of these books are examined at length in the commentary on *Micah*. This results in small irritations, such as having to wait until *Micah* 4:3 is reached for a consideration of *Joel* 3:10 and its parody of *Isaiah* 2:4. And the reader may be a little disappointed at the quality of the application when, arriving at the place in *Micah* he finds the simple remark 'The Sand-

hursts and West Points of this world would be relegated to quaint museums'. At this a reader may question whether the text has not become a pretext, and his questioning may get louder when he is told that 'in the light of such New Testament passages as *John* 4:21-24, the Christian will set little value on the geography of the piece and regard it as a cultural adornment to a deeper and universal truth'. The scholar may mutter at this, and the common reader may wonder if such talk of 'cultural adornment' does not render suspect the publisher's claim that, together with insights drawn from the historical and the theological disciplines, Dr Allen has conducted his commentary in an awareness of the ways of literary criticism.

If the publisher's claim is put forward in a confidence that Dr Allen has paid attention to the literary form of the prophetic material and its first use. I would hesitate to be his second. Dr Allen certainly does not give himself adequate room to discuss the formal relation of the parts of *Joel* to a liturgical structure. There are not, of course, cultic signs and phrases enough to justify assigning *Joel* to an author among the temple establishment, but more needs to be said than is here remarked. Perhaps *Joel* was composed by a temple prophet who had a great number of liturgical notions at the front of his head but who did not intend his work to be put to liturgical use. I incline to the view that we have a set of liturgical songs which have been adapted by an editor from the requirements of worshippers to those of readers. Certainly the great collection of pieces from 2:19 to the end of the book retains many a tell-tale sign of ritual origins. Dr Allen's scattered references to the temple and its priests do not make any of this matter sufficiently prominent for the reader.

With his commentary on *Jonah* Dr Allen enters upon a more delicate literary matter. Since he is prepared to accept a description of this book as having the literary genre of a parable with 'certain allegorical features', and to supplement this with the suggestion that 'its literary tone is

that of parody or satire', Dr Allen is brought to confront a set of most important questions. If we allow *Jonah* to be a literary invention which reveals the divine, do we not have to set ourselves carefully considering the relation of literature generally to the revelation of God for us? This would require some delicacy of critical sensitivity. More so than is revealed by the passage indexed under 'Shakespeare, W.' which turns out to be a quotation from the first scene of *The Tempest* already employed by Perowne. Or by the remark that there are in *Micah* passages of 'majestic whimsicality' which 'writers such as C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien have recaptured for our own age'. And precisely in this small piece of vulgar whimsy there is revealed the need for general literary sense if the scriptural text is to be understood. It occurs in the discussion of *Micah* 1:2-3 where greater service would have been done the reader if the picture of Yahweh coming down to 'the high place' had been clearly related to the arrival of the Ziggurat god who, when he visited his people, landed at the temple on the top of the monument, and then walked down to the temple. This reference might have opened up the nice discussion of how far

the prophet himself was psychologically unable to avoid the pagan language even at the moment when he was denouncing the pagan practices of his culture. This would have allowed Dr Allen to consider lots of other things, for example whether the image of the horned Jerusalem of *Micah* 4:13 might be a literary revision of the figure of the horned goddess of procreation seen on the ivory panel of the royal bed of Ugarit. This lovely lady may, as she suckled her young son, have brought to the editor's mind that Bethlehem saying which he put here. The ancient workings of the literary imagination might, in this place at any rate, have much interested the Christian reader. And other readers might have enjoyed some dependent discussion of how exact the clergyman was in describing Miss Jayne Mansfield as 'the goddess of lust', and how right she was to be delighted by the description. The possibilities are endless. And Dr Allen cannot be expected to entertain each proposal. But he may well be held accountable for his general indifference to such literary openings upon those theological matters which are of enduring interest to the readers of these prophetic books.

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KARL BARTH PREACHING THROUGH THE CHRISTIAN YEAR, edited by John McTavish and Harold Wells. *T. & T. Clark Ltd.* Edinburgh 1978. pp. viii + 279. £3.80.

People respond to Barth in different ways. Usually they either hate or revere him; sometimes they are frustrated by wanting to do both. It is possibly those who favour Barth who will derive most from this book. But those who merely want a convenient Barthian sampler may also find it useful.

The work is a selection of exegetical passages taken from the familiar English version of the *Church Dogmatics* and particularly designed to help in the preparation of sermons. The flavour of the *Dogmatics* is fairly represented by the ex-

tracts chosen, and there is the added advantage that readings have been arranged with an eye on the ecclesiastical seasons.

It is well known that all Barth's theological efforts were directed to preaching the word. One imagines that he would have approved of the present volume. What he might not have approved of is the unexplained manner in which some items are printed. One (p. 70) begins "What are we to make of the divine plural in v. 26?" What indeed.

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