

In the following year (A.D. 21) Quirinius died. The emperor himself asked for the honour of a state funeral for him and spoke warmly of his services and their friendship. Had he died ten years sooner, he would no doubt have been valued as he deserved for the great qualities which he certainly possessed, his energy, humanity and moral courage. As it was, men were more prone to remember his "mean and tyrannical old age." Velleius, who probably knew him well, and who moreover was anxious to pay compliments to Tiberius's friends, had several opportunities of mentioning Quirinius but never did so. His silence is a most eloquent testimony to the bad name that Quirinius left behind him.

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NEW LIGHT ON OLD TESTAMENT PROBLEMS

RECENT WORK IN FRANCE.

THE Encyclical Letter, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, has indicated the direction that Biblical exegesis should take, especially for the Old Testament: "to remain sensitively faithful to the belief of our fathers in the Written Word of God, but at the same time to apply to it the most tried methods of textual and form criticism in order to understand and utilize it better."¹

The faithful should not be disquieted at the results of such methods when applied to the early chapters of Genesis. In a deeply interesting article, His Eminence Cardinal Liénart² has shown that there can be no contradiction between the Biblical cosmogony and the conclusions of science: science and faith, established on two different planes converge towards the one Truth: the revealed truth of Genesis and the results of human research harmonize, provided that we modify our interpretation and broaden its scope according to the established facts.

Besides, revelation and faith alone can enlighten us on the origin of life, of thought, of evil, of evolution and the direction it will take, of man constituted as such by the direct creation of the spiritual soul. Moreover, God intended to accomplish a work, even more marvellous in the order of grace.

This last fact enables us to grasp the meaning of the Old Testament. A. Gelin³ describes the leading ideas to be found there, as they develop, are purified and are deepened in the course of centuries and through the pressure of events, finally reaching their goal in Christ: the discovery

¹ A Robert, *Interprétation contemporaine de l'A.T.* in *Dict. de la Bible, Supplément*; (abbrev. D.B.S.). 1947 col. 636.

² *Le Chrétien devant les progrès de la science*, in *Etudes*, Dec. 1947, pp. 289-300.

³ *Les idées maîtresses de l'A.T.* (coll. *Lectio Divina*, no. 2, Paris, 1948, pp. 88.

of God as unique, spiritual, transcendent, near to His own, the expectation of the Messias and Messianic rewards gradually becoming a hope more and more spiritualized; the slow birth of individualism, which however, never goes beyond the racial limits.

Yet rewards and punishments envisaged at first as collective and temporal, appear finally as individual and belonging to the next life: at the same time the sense of sin grows more keen and the value of intercession comes to be appreciated. More than once, we may note finally, the sacred text records authentic mystical experiences of these less favoured ones of the Old Testament who sought intimacy with their God.

Two texts in particular, show early stages in the development of the idea of God (Gen. 11, 1-9, Ps. xxiv, 7-10). According to J. Chaine¹ the first is an account which has some dependence on Canaanite tradition and is still very anthropomorphic: but Yahweh appears there as the only God and all-powerful and He alone lives for ever. No man can infringe his prerogatives without incurring punishment. Later on, God is considered as Lord of Hosts, leader of the armies of Israel, whose presence is bound to the Ark: this ancient idea is clear in Ps. xxiv, 7-10. Moreover, Podechard² sees in this passage a poem composed for the triumphal entry of the Ark into Jerusalem at the time of David.

The gradual "de-localization" and spiritualization of the idea of God as well as the development of the Messianic expectation and individualism may be followed in the writings of the prophets. A. Feuillet has written a well-considered and informed yet bold article on *Isaias*³ in which he deals with the grave problems set by this book. He brings out the great diversity of literary forms and at the same time the richness and variety of the doctrine: for example, the universalism centred on Mount Sion (ch. i-xxxix), then detached from the Temple and the House of David (xl-xlv) and finally again centralized but even more nationalist (lxi-lxvi).

No less was the prestige of *Jeremias*: rightly does A. Gelin refuse to separate his life from his teaching⁴: the prophet deepens the sense of sin; he lives in intimate communion with God. So it is that he was able to announce the New Covenant which is both interior and individual. Hence the great influence which he was able to exert after his death above all on *Ezechiel* and perhaps also on some passages of the prophet *Isaias*.

On the book of *Jonas*, this influence was direct: A. Feuillet⁵ shows that in it we have the developed doctrine of divine pardon, in strict relation to change of heart on the part of man: at the same time we find

¹ *La Tour de Babel*, in *Mélanges Podechard*, Lyons, 1945, pp. 63-9.

² *Psaume xxiv, 7-10*, in *Mémorial Lagrange*, Paris, 1940, pp. 143-6.

³ *Le Livre d'Isaïe*, in D.B.S., 1947, col. 647-729.

⁴ *Le Livre de Jérémie*, in D.B.S., 1948, col. 857-89.

⁵ *Sources et sens du livre de Jonas*, in *Revue Biblique* 1947, pp. 161-86 and pp. 340-61.

in the book a broad universalism which is much in the same line of thought as the books of Ruth and Job. We should therefore date the work in the middle of the fifth century B.C.—a period when the conflict between universalism and particularism was at its height.

In speaking of the mystical experiences of the Old Testament one's thoughts turn instinctively towards the Canticle of Canticles—but how varied are the opinions and how strange are many of them on this subject ! A. Robert¹ reminds us that a Catholic may not abandon the inspired spiritual sense of this book which has been included in the Canon of Scripture and recognized as profoundly mystical by the whole of Catholic Tradition. To understand it, we must take into account the methods of composition which were in vogue after the exile—this was the era of the scribe, of profound study of the Scriptures and of attempts to work out in ancient terminology the new problems of social and religious life. Hence as a result, there are many subtleties which are quite conformable to the Oriental mind. We have then to find the literary background to the work. In applying this method, the author recognizes certain Deuteronomic texts as being at the base of the description of the Bridegroom (v, 11–15), namely, Deut. xii, 5 etc. And this allows us to identify him with the Temple. In the same way, the description of the Bride based on Osee ii, 5 ; xiv, 6–8, identifies her with the Holy land—a moving aspect of the general theme of the book which is the union of Yahweh with Israel.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Is it possible to take the Hebrew word translated as "serpent" in Genesis ch. iii, as coming from a root meaning "to shine," and translate it as "shining one" ? In this case Satan would have appeared as an "angel of light" (cf. II Cor. xi, 14) and the difficulty about talking snakes would disappear.

The Hebrew word in question is *nahash*. There is a root *nahash* which may possibly mean to shine, but which Brown, Driver, Briggs give as of unknown meaning. The word in dispute here however is always taken as coming from the root *nahash* to hiss, and meaning serpent. The impossibility of the suggested translation "shining one" may be further seen by simply substituting it in the text, and seeing what havoc is wrought in the sense, e.g. verses 1 and 14.

The symbolism of the serpent is full of meaning and it is to be found in many ancient religions of the East, sometimes in close association with gods, sometimes as itself a god. In Egyptian legends "it usually appears as a rebel, in eternal conflict with gods and men in the nether

¹ *La description de l'Epoux et de l'Epouse dans le Cantique, in Melanges Podechard, Lyons, 1945, pp. 211–23.*