

INTRODUCTION

It seems best to leave untouched, as having a certain historical interest, the following paragraph. Like a good many others in this book, it was written in an Air-Warden's Post in the early days of the war of 1939.

"God knows whether this book will ever be printed. But in the midst of the stresses, multitudinous and agonizing, of an outbreak of war, the subject on which research was begun in quietness two years ago seems more, not less, relevant than before, and the results of the inquiry should be written up for someone to use. What Bible is going to nourish the younger churches now adolescent in the East and Africa, which are fresher than we are, making their choices now with adult life stretching before them into future centuries? If civilization goes down in this struggle they must take over our tasks. Their question is ours, too, for we never needed more than now a Bible of which we can use the whole without reservations and with comfort and satisfaction. And if this poor suffering world of men, which has fallen into chaos through wandering away from God, is ever to find its way back to Him, it must have clearer guidance than it has lately drawn from its confused notions about the Bible, especially about the Old Testament."

This study which began with the younger churches in mind has interest for us all. It started from the fact that many missionaries and many national leaders are perplexed about the place they ought to give to the Old Testament; some of them consequently use it very little, and some are conscious of using it wrongly. What is the real function of this larger part of the Bible in the 20th century as the religion of Christ spreads through Africa and the East?

Someone from Africa rightly said at the very beginning that it is of no use to answer such a question easily, as we could do by bringing forward a few obvious considerations on the strength of which most of us would say, "Of course we must study the Old Testament." Deep and devout inquiry is needed about many things, and its scope has proved to be immense; only a portion of it is reflected here. What part is already played by the Old Testament in India, China, Africa, and the other lands of the adolescent churches? Our first task was to secure answers to that question from experienced people,

THE PRESENT USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

alike "nationals" and missionaries; this involved extensive correspondence and consultation (Part One). Next, in the light of what we had ascertained we tried to look at the Old Testament with fresh eyes for that in it which has special relevance to what we had discovered (Part Two). Then it was necessary, having looked around the world to-day, to look back through the Church's history to its beginning. How did the Church in New Testament times and in later periods use its Old Testament, and with what effects upon its life? (Part Three). Only after the discipline of this inquiry could we hope to reach well-founded conclusions, and offer constructive advice regarding the use of the Old Testament in specific areas to-day (Part Four).

As will be apparent to the reader, much of the inquiry has been corporate, made by groups which, owing to missionary furloughs, have constantly changed, and so many people have taken part that it is impossible to print the list here, though they will know we are grateful to them all.¹

This book aims at laying foundations rather than erecting a building. Detailed plans for the right use of the Old Testament must be made in each country by those who best know their own people as well as the Bible. Those who prepare lectionaries of lessons to be read in worship, those who prepare the courses of Sunday School and Day School Scripture teaching, those who train teachers and the future ministers of the Church, will have the great and joyous task of practically applying the principles here laid down if these are generally approved. There seems to be work here for National Christian Councils and other bodies representing all branches of the Church. It is a satisfaction to know that our inquiry, though begun before the Tambaram Conference of the International Missionary Council, in some small measure answers its demand for "a fresh search into the treasures to be found in the Old Testament."

This introduction to our inquiry may well end with a few paragraphs also written in the early days of the present war.

We hear on every hand of difficulties felt at present. A voice from China says that *Shang-ti* represents as noble a thought of God as we find in most of the Old Testament, and that "Heaven" in the Chinese classics does much the same things as the deity of the Old Testament. In revealing Christ

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to ordinary simple Chinese, why lead them through the labyrinthine ways of religion before Him? Speak of Him as the revelation of God, and they will know what you mean, without being worried by that which puzzles us—the Pentateuch with its composite authorship, the doubt where history ends and preaching begins, the occasional stories of doings on a low moral level. If you *must* have the Old Testament—and no doubt the pastors must know it for the sake of the instruction of the Church—content yourself with an anthology of the finest passages and a summary of the rest.

An educational missionary in India is handing over charge of his college to an Indian colleague, as happily occurs not infrequently nowadays, and they talk of the Scripture syllabus. "Of course," says the Indian, "I shall drop the Old Testament part of the present syllabus. This college is Indian, and its right introduction to the sublime truth which only Christ reveals is through the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita."

From Africa comes the cry, almost petulant, "Are not our people sufficiently predisposed to polygamy without your teaching them the Old Testament stories of its polygamous heroes? Certainly Africans like the book, and take to it like ducks to water, but like ducks that stay in the water they prefer to remain at Old Testament levels of morality and religion. To their simple minds any part of their Bible is equally binding, and they naturally obey the older and longer part because they find it easier to understand."

This is naturally not the whole story—we shall proceed to supplement it—but these voices from three continents represent a considerable chorus in many parts of the world. It is noteworthy that its volume has grown in recent years at the very same time that the older churches are in some sense re-discovering the Old Testament which they had in some measure neglected under the influence of the shocks of the "higher" criticism. That fact in itself gives us hope. In the course of our studies we certainly must try to find out why the older are turning back to that particular part of the Bible. Thereby we might possibly save the younger from making a mistake from which they would always afterwards suffer.

Our first task must be to ascertain what is the present position in a few great areas, such as Africa, China, India. There are many other important areas, which we have not overlooked, but their problems sufficiently resemble those of these three vast lands for us to be content with occasional references to them.