

"Search the Scriptures"

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"Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."—St. John 5: 39.

II.

Ezekiel

His ministry can be divided into three main parts. The first part extended to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., during which time he addressed himself to his own people, denouncing the sin that had led to their present plight (Chapters 1-24). The second part deals with his account of God's judgment on Israel's enemies (Chapters 25-32). The third part deals with the period of reconstruction (Chapters 33-48).

With tremendous passion, he paints lurid colours the shamelessness of the sins of Israel and Judah. They had defiled themselves by their adoption of heathen practices right throughout their history. The very land had become polluted by their iniquity. Even the temple itself with its sacrificial worship which should supremely set forth the holiness of God had been prostituted to pagan rites. Consequently God himself had been forced from his holy place. They had been guilty, too, of gross social sins, contempt for the sanctity of the family, oppression of the weak, injustices in business dealings, greed and violence. To Ezekiel, with his high sense of the holiness of God, degraded worship and social sins were equally repugnant.

So retribution had come upon Israel, and a like ruin would overtake Judah. The exiles thought that with the first invasion the worst was over, and they were encouraged by false prophets who cried, "Peace, peace, when there was no peace." No, said Ezekiel, God's holy name could be vindicated only as this whole sorry mess is swept away. Judah, indeed, was even worse than Sodom (Ezekiel 16: 48). The certainty of destruction, the inevitability of God's judgment, had been in the forefront of Ezekiel's thought for a long time (4: 1ff, 5: 5ff, 12: 1ff). His language about the dominations of his people is stinging and vitriolic. Their disobedience and treachery, still going on in Jerusalem after the first deportation, were like a great unspeakable horror to him. In a remarkable vision (Chapters 8-10) he sees the city put to the sword, the chariot of the Lord leaving the city to its doom. The sin which was to him the most heinous was that of idolatry, which, indeed, is a very subtle sin corrupting the very spirit of worship and seeking to drag the deity down to the level of human desires. Idolatry dethrones God.

Ezekiel felt himself to be bound up with the life of his people. He was a most sensitive individual, feeling keenly the ruin under which his people had fallen. His wife whom he loved very dearly dies just at the time when the news of the fall of Jerusalem reaches him, but he is forbidden to express his grief (24: 15ff). The fall of Jerusalem is like the death of his wife, but the death sentence on the city is God's, and the prophet must acquiesce though his heart is torn and bleeding. It is not to be wondered at that such a man hears the call of God to be a pastor of his people as well as their prophet. He is to be their Watchman responsible to God for their care (Chapter 33).

"To watch and pray, and never faint; By day and night strict guard to keep; To warn the sinner, cheer the saint, Nourish Thy lambs, and feed Thy sheep."

Ezekiel has been spoken of as a man of great contrasts, in whose thought contrasting conceptions meet and move towards a reconciliation. So even in his sternest denunciations, on the storm-clouds of his thought there falls the light of a forgiving mercy, dim maybe at first, but growing brighter with the years. Ezekiel was no mere prophet of doom. While he was thoroughly convinced that sin could not go unpunished, he also knew that the divine purpose went deeper than this. He knew that the arm that was strong to smite was also strong to save. He who had cast down would also build up. At the close of Chapter 16, with its condemnation that cuts like a two-edged sword, Ezekiel introduces his great passage about the new covenant and uses the word forgiveness. So in Chapter 33 we have the memorable words: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" He reflects that his people had been like sheep without a shepherd (Chapter 34). Their kings and rulers had failed and betrayed them and they had trusted in broken reeds. But God himself will seek them out (34: 11ff), and feed them upon the mountains of Israel. Here we have one of the noblest passages of the Old Testament, though Ezekiel never

rose in this regard to the great heights attained by the writer of the last part of Isaiah.

Ezekiel knew how the punishment they were suffering had eaten into the very pith of their spirits, raising challenging thoughts as to the justice of God. Why should they suffer for the sins of the past? They had a saying: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." It is in this connection that Ezekiel enunciates his famous doctrine of individualism. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" (18: 20). He goes on to state that repentance always opens the way to the favour of God whatever the individual's past may have been (Chapter 33). Ezekiel, however, does not reconcile this great principle with the older view of corporate sin and corporate responsibility which he also shared, but places it alongside of the older view for the future to grapple with. In Chapter 36 he gives us his famous passage on the clean heart, with new thoughts, new hopes, and new feelings; and in Chapter 37 he declares that a new Israel will arise from the dry bones of this calamity, animated by the breath of God. God's love and mercy alone can restore us to newness of life.

Following the fall of Jerusalem, the prophet turns his attention to the neighbouring peoples. Palestine held a strategic position in that ancient world, encircled by the smaller peoples, like Ammon, Edom, Moab and Syria, whose

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European Leaders Oppose Rearmament

By J. ZEMAN, Toronto, Ont.

The names of Professor Joseph L. Hromadka of Czechoslovakia, Pastor Martin Niemöller of Germany, and Professor Karl Barth of Switzerland have become well known among the Protestants on this continent. In recent months, all three of them—symbolically representing the three parts of the present-day divided Europe, the "iron-curtained one," the free western one, and the traditionally "neutral" Swiss one—have independently and yet unanimously raised their voices against the proposed and much-debated rearmament of West Germany.

1. Hromadka's sharp criticisms of the western policies in Germany, as well as in the Far East, could, of course, be easily explained away by the political pressure to which he and his Church are presently exposed in Czechoslovakia, although such an easy explanation appears to be unacceptable in the light of Hromadka's life-long "leftist" inclinations. There is—to my mind—no reason for questioning the genuine and sincere origin of Hromadka's utterances printed occasionally in the Czech Protestant papers and reprinted in translation elsewhere. Nor can his opposition to German rearmament be simply traced back to a Czech patriotic fear of another German aggression.

2. For next to him, we can hear the voice of Martin Niemöller, "a German of the Germans," whose unpleasant experiences in Hitler's concentration camps should perhaps make him extremely vigilant with respect to another similar threat of violence arising in the East and therefore make him welcome the plan for a strong West Germany. Instead, last October, he wrote an open letter to Dr. Adenauer, Chancellor of West Germany, questioning his willingness to drag West Germany into a rearmament programme.

"My main point," says Niemöller, reviewing this problem in a short article in *The Christian Century* of March 21, 1951, "always has been to make clear that rearmament in Germany, during the present state of division, cannot but amount to suicide. . . . Therefore I always have been in favour of negotiations and of my old proposal that the United Nations might take over the occupation authority from the four powers in the middle of Europe and create a united administration. Later on it could launch a united government for the whole of the German people in order to prevent the tension from developing into an open war in this area of the globe."

Observing how "the very urgent social reform work in West Germany is stopped more or less in favour of rearmament," Niemöller is persuaded that "the economic advantage, which is one of the trumps of the western world on the Continent, is shrinking and may very soon be of no significance. That would mean that the East would win even this match. I think definitely that social politics are the key position for the West German situation and might help to make the population immune against any infiltration and propaganda from the East. An immunized population would mean the best barrier against the progress of Bolshevism. You cannot rely on the newspapers to give you an accurate impression of what is going on in the German people's minds. The Bonn parliament may have a small majority favouring rearmament. But the people are against it, at least three-quarters of them."

3. Niemöller's outspoken opposition to West German rearmament provoked a heated debate throughout Germany. Politicians as well as Church leaders and Church Councils roused a loud

alarm-cry. Among other arguments, the editors of *Christ und Welt* took from their files and reprinted a letter of Karl Barth, addressed to Dr. Hromadka in Czechoslovakia during the crisis of Munich in September 1938, in which then, Barth encouraged the Czechoslovak people and the "Czech soldier" to take a firm and fearless military stand against Hitler's aggression.

The editor of *Christ und Welt* used this letter of Barth's authority, respected greatly in European Protestantism, as a weapon against Niemöller, drawing a presumed parallel between the conditions in the fall of 1938 and those of 1950, and quoting Barth's historical words in support of the necessity of present German rearmament as a means of a firm stand against the Russian threat. However, Barth himself resented against drawing such a parallel in a Stalin's sake we might not be allowed to a German minister in Berlin, Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann, and reprinted in the *Schweizerische evangelische Pressedienst* as well as in the French Protestant monthly, *Foi et Vie*, of February 1951.

Contemporary Events Against 1938

Since the majority of people on our continent are so often tempted to draw the parallel between the events of 1938 on Hitler's side and those of 1950 on Russia's part, and since they so readily hasten "to avoid the mistake of 1938" by taking strong military preparations nowadays, it may not be without vital interest to go through some of Barth's arguments against seeing the contemporary events in the light of fall 1938.

1. Says Barth: "On September 30, 1938, I put down the following note in my calendar: The catastrophe of the European freedom in Munich. At that time, I found myself surprisingly alone in making such an analysis. Thanksgiving services for the preservation of peace were held in all Churches. . . . Half a year later, Hitler broke the shameful treaty, one year later we saw him in Poland, and the rest followed after. Had not the Czech soldier been betrayed by the West in 1938, the Russians would not be standing on the Elbe today. Then, the East-West problem was laid bare. And then, Europe and the Christians were sleeping. Then was the time to raise a cry. . . ."

"Today, nobody is asleep with regard to the threat of Stalin's communism. On the contrary, there is an overstressed vigilance turning into a condition of excited anxiety and panic with so many people in the West. There is no necessity for the Christians to intensify this alarm-cry. The Christian word for today is, therefore: Be not afraid. This word, however, is not to be proclaimed with a loud voice. The best way to proclaim it is to try to live it: to sow the grain, to raise the cattle, to build the houses, to preach and trust the Word of God, and not to lose energy on thoughts and worries whether for Stalin's sake we might not be allowed to go on like that one year later."

"2. In the fall of 1938, I raised my voice in favour of an immediate military action against the armed threat of Hitler for that was the only way how to meet the situation then. The peace at any price, which the world and also the Church were so anxious to have in those days, was a deeply inhuman and even deeply unchristian thing. Had the western powers taken a determined stand, many, perhaps all of the inhuman and unchristian things that followed would have been prevented."

Now, Russia of today is certainly no peace power, howbeit much she may claim to be such. Nor can I see why she should feel threatened by the western nations. The unrest in the world and

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