

THE HEAVENLY COUNSELLOR IN ISAIAH XL, 13-14, by R. N. Whybray. CUP, 1971. 91 pp. £2.20.

This, the first in a series of monographs of the Society for Old Testament Studies, is a model of what a monograph should be. The author first establishes the context of the two verses at issue. Then follows a detailed interpretation of the verses and then an appreciation of their literary characteristics, as form-criticism must play its part. All sound exegesis calls for this much at the outset; only then can there be any real progress in discussion of the doctrinal content or teaching in the given passage. Dr Whybray however proceeds not so much doctrinally as philologically and comparatively. He investigates what obtained among the Israelite kings and their councils—for these may perhaps throw light on the Divine Council, *per humana ad divina*. . . . The contribution from Canaan is debatable and slender; that of Babylon is much more telling.

Further investigation serves to show that the heavenly court was looked upon as a household of Yahweh, whether the notion was purely Israelite or borrowed from elsewhere. Certainly there was no assembly of gods in the Israelite conception. Yet belief in Yahweh's utter supremacy could be reconciled with the notion of a heavenly council on some human analogy.

Some might object that all this debate about God and God's Council, deduced from two small verses, is excessive and out of proportion. Many would urge that the whole Bible speaks of God: can it be right to pin-point two verses of Deutero-Isaiah in this way? The scholarly treatment of context and parallels in this monograph soon dispels the objection. It is a monograph about two verses, but a glance at the index shows that the whole of the Old Testament is at issue. Considerable stress is laid on Isaiah 6, on Job and on the Wisdom tradition. Indeed some of the language of the pericope is that of the Wisdom books. It always remains true that the study of two key verses

connotes much else, and perhaps the whole Bible.

Anyway, the vocabulary and language of Isaiah 40, 13-14 specifically suggest a royal council meeting. This could originate from a purely Israelite tradition. However, this suggestion is left in the air. The historical question needs further consideration. Noth and other historians stress the relative freedom of the Jews in exile. Did they avail themselves of their opportunity to know and understand the lore of Babylon? or did they hold themselves apart, ghetto-wise? Both are possible, but fidelity to the true God might well preclude much attention to or indeed knowledge of Babylonian religious tenets. We might perhaps argue from the analogy of a later period when many Jews read and spoke Greek, even in Jerusalem (cf. Sevenster, *Do you know Greek*, Leiden 1968); yet others, Maccabees-like would not touch anything savouring of Hellenism. So too the Jews of the exile and post-exile times were divided in tastes and loyalties. But the probabilities are that the more loyal to the true God they were the less they would seek contact with Babylonian ways of thought. Loyalty to Yahweh meant an all-embracing struggle: little time or opportunity would be left to glean what was good in Babylon.

The author's own measured conclusion is that Isaiah 40, 13-14, though having in mind an Israelite tradition, was referring to the Babylonian mythology of the post-exile period. It is certain that Deutero-Isaiah strenuously denied the existence of other gods and extolled the transcendence of the Lord of all. But he also handed down the notion of a heavenly court. Its members were not to help God in decision making. They were there simply to carry out his orders, being at most creatures of God or angelic hosts.

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THE SIGN OF JONAH, by Richard A. Edwards. SCM, London, 1971. 122 pp. £2.

This monograph, another in the excellent series *Studies in Biblical Theology*, is particularly pleasing to your reviewer because it proves what he has long suspected to be the case, though he has shied away from its implications, which turn out to be less noxious than he suspected. When the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign from heaven he simply refused any sign (as Mark says). But Matthew and Luke (dependent on Q) add 'apart from the sign of

Jonah'. This addition is seen by the author to be a product of reflection on the resurrection, and to belong to the theology of the early Church. What is convincing about the thesis is the way in which this development is put in its context as part of the theology of Q (though the documentary and introductory parts of the book, dutiful as they are, are excessively dull: the author ploughs his way through all previous interpretations of the