

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

God's Word: Revelation and Preaching

Review Author: J. J. Smith

Philippine Studies vol. 13, no. 4 (1965): 873–876

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

Portugal, had to go through a learning process and know how to cope with the explosive situation of an untamed colony richer than the mother country, and a racial cauldron in which all shades of cultural and ethnic differences had to be fused into one integrated society.

Professor Boxer understood the situation so well, and he has provided the reader with a well written analysis that is a model of judicious historiography.

JOSÉ S. ARCILLA

GOD'S WORD: REVELATION AND PREACHING

REVELATION. By Werner Bulst. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965. 158 pp.

THE PREACHING WORD. By Otto Semmelroth. New York: Herder and Herder, 1965. 256 pp.

Revelation is the english translation of a German book which appeared in 1960. It contains an introductory and useful, though somewhat superficial survey of the results of biblical scholarship concerning the idea of revelation up to the time that it was written. Perhaps today it is dated as a result of more recent work in the field. The discussion would have profited from a more penetrating analysis of the similarities and dissimilarities of revelation by word and work, such as can be found in the work of Semmelroth. The first chapter illustrating the contrast between biblical and dogmatic theologians concerning the concept of revelation is also dated at the present time. Today there is little difference between them, although one could make a case to the contrary by quoting definitions in outmoded textbooks. The author's attempt at a synthesis of the biblical and theological concepts of revelation manifests progress in the realization that the mystery of revelation cannot be adequately squeezed into an abstract definition, but is manifested best by a descriptive paraphrase which manifests the richness of its varied forms in their relation to one another. Despite its shortcomings, this volume is an advance over most treatments of revelation available in English, and will therefore be found helpful by the student of theology.

Semmelroth's book is a valuable contribution to the theology of the Word of God. Not limited to a discussion of the word in preaching as the english title misleadingly suggests, it covers all the dimensions of the Word of God. The first half of the book, which

treats of the reality of the Word of God, explains the Word of God within the Godhead; the Word of God as revelation to man; and the Word of God in the Church. The second half of the book treats of the efficacy of the Word of God. A first section explains the efficacy of the Word within the Trinity, in creation, in the Incarnate Word and in the mouth of the Church. A second section explains the efficacy of the Word in the Church as a content which is preached; as a communication which appeals for faith. The third and final section discusses the preaching of the Church as an event which effects grace.

The author has rendered a fine service by his discriminating analysis of elements of revelation which all too often suffer from superficial treatment. An example of this is his analysis of the similarity and dissimilarity of God's word and God's work. God's word possesses the character of work in as much as its promulgation has an effect on man to whom it is communicated. Conversely, God's work possesses the character of word in as much as it also communicates knowledge. Yet the distinction between these two forms of God's revelation remains valid. For when God addresses Himself to man in work, He does so primarily to accomplish something in and for man; but since the work is produced meaningfully, its significance may be discerned. In the case of the word, the emphasis is reversed. Its first significance is to communicate what is contained in one person's mind to another person; but the effect which has the character of work is always linked indirectly with the word's communicating power. These distinctions find fruitful application to the similarity and dissimilarity between preaching and the sacraments. Finally it is noted that word and work are not merely to be considered as two modes of divine revelation. God's word and work penetrate one another inwardly as two essential elements of God's one revelation.

It is doubtful whether the analysis of the connection and difference between revelation and God's word is as satisfying. Semmelroth differentiates word and revelation as the outward expression is differentiated from the initial experience of the content contained in the word. The word of God is His revelation expressed and made objective, having its roots in the event of revelation, but nonetheless transcending the event by expressing it. This would appear to be a satisfying explanation of the word preached by the prophet. But it does not take account of the biblical practise of calling the revelatory experience of the prophet 'the word of God' as well: "The word of Jahweh came to X". Here word of Jahweh is a technical term for the prophetic experience.

In his discussion of the efficacy of preaching, Semmelroth's most original contribution lies in his explanation of that efficacy as an

efficacy to effect justifying grace. According to Semmelroth, preaching does not merely effect faith, the beginning and root of all justification, as many theologians affirm. Preaching communicates the grace of justification itself. He explains that this does not contradict the teaching of Trent which said that all justification comes through the sacraments, because Trent did not say that all justice comes through the sacraments *alone*. Rather, preaching and the sacraments, as two poles in a structure of dialogue are the unified ecclesial source of all justice and grace. As the basis of this explanation, Semmelroth points to the bi-polar mode in which the redemption was effected. The Father spoke His Word to man in the Incarnation, and Christ responded to the Father in the obedience which terminated on the cross. Thus the redemption was not effected solely by the sacrifice of the cross, nor solely by the Incarnation, but through the Incarnation and the sacrifice of the cross in the bi-polar structure of dialogue as a unified compound cause.

But, continues Semmelroth, the church is the sign and symbol of God's self-communication to man in Christ, making present and active that which it signifies. As such its structure imitates and symbolizes the bi-polar structure of the redemptive event: Word-Answer: Incarnation-Cross. Preaching is the efficacious symbolic re-presentation of the Incarnation of the Word as the word of God to man. The Sacraments, each in its own way, are the efficacious symbolic re-presentation of the sacrifice of the cross. As efficacious symbolic re-presentations of the Christ-event (Incarnation-Cross) that effected redemption, the preaching of the word and the sacraments are a unified total reality, just as the reality they signify is a total-reality composed of two events in the structure of dialogue.

The preaching of the word as the re-presentation of the Incarnation communicates no grace proper to itself alone, just as the sacramental re-presentation of the sacrifice of Christ (in all the sacraments) does not communicate a grace different from that which is given in the preaching of the word. Rather, the ecclesial source from which the grace of justification flows is the preaching of the word and the sacraments as a bi-polar total source.

This explanation of the efficacy of preaching is appealing for its ingenuity and symmetry. However, the base on which it rests is rather narrow. It is true that the statements of the New Testament concerning the "Word of Life", "Word of Grace", "Word of reconciliation", "Word of salvation" do not merely mean that the proclaimed word is a word about life, grace, reconciliation and salvation, but that the word communicates life, reconciliation, grace and salvation. But the question remains whether the word does this directly, or whether it does this indirectly by first causing faith. The latter explanation would seem to be the implication of Rom. 10,17: "Faith

then depends on hearing, and hearing on the word of Christ"; and of Rom. 1, 16: "For the proclaimed good news is God's power for the salvation of everyone who believes".

Further, it would seem that the peculiar efficacy of preaching would be determined by the peculiar nature of the word. But the word of Christ in the Church is a word of witness or testimony; and testimony is a word calling for faith. The peculiar efficacy of the word of Christ in the church will be to cause the obedience of faith. This faith is the root and beginning of the salvation which is communicated fully in the sacraments. Thus the ministry of the word is essentially ordered to the ministry of the sacrament. But their efficacy would appear to be different.

J. J. SMITH, S.J.

GEOPOLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

GEOGRAPHY AND POLITICS IN A WORLD DIVIDED. By Saul B. Cohen. New York: Random House, 1963. 347 pp.

This book is of considerable value for the layman and the beginning student of international relations. It could be used as a textbook in a course on geopolitics to good advantage. It is well organized and well written.

Professor Cohen of Boston University begins his study with a brief history of the study of geopolitics starting with Plato and including recent thinkers in the field such as Mackinder, Haushofer, Mahan, Spykman, de Seversky, and Sir John Slessor. He then discusses modern international politics in the context of "geostrategic regions" or "power cores" which have global significance. These include the United States, Maritime Europe, and the Soviet Union. The author concludes his study with an assessment of the "geopolitical regions" which have significance only in a limited area. These include the Middle East and Southeast Asia, and the Southern Continents (Latin America and Africa) and Offshore Asia (the island nations from Japan to Australia).

The best portions of Professor Cohen's book are those dealing with the *geographical* factors of the subject matter. The data and analysis is excellent on the population, resources, economic development, communications systems, and other pertinent elements in each of the important geographical regions. The only defect here is an occasional oversight such as the use of the term "Viet Minh" for