

Book Reviews

War in the Old Testament

Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania and Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1980). 214 pages.

Millard Lind, Professor of Old Testament at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, Indiana, offers a fresh assessment of the place of warfare in the early history of Israel that challenges the predominant views of Old Testament scholarship. Basic to his approach is an understanding of Israel's call and mission as "theo-politics", i.e. as the establishment on earth of a form of political existence different from, and a God-ordained challenge to, the prevailing political power structures of this world. In this respect, Lind's book stands in continuity with John Howard Yoder's treatment of the ministry of Jesus (*The Politics of Jesus*).

Lind argues as follows: The central event in the experience of Ancient Israel was the exodus from Egypt. In that event Israel experienced that "Yahweh Is a Warrior" (Exodus 15:3; cf. the book's title), i.e. that the exercise of violent power belongs to God alone; that he exercises it for the salvation of his people; that he accomplishes this salvation by means of miracle, not military power; and that his human agent is the prophet announcing the divine will, not the military leader (king) wielding the sword.

This experience, proclaimed in striking confessional poetry in the ancient Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1-21), impressed itself powerfully on the faith and practice of ancient Israel and determined paradigmatically her theo-political structure and her relationship to power. She accepted God alone as her sovereign, to the exclusion of kingship, the dominant political structure of the Ancient Near East. She relied on God alone for decisive intervention on her behalf in time of crisis, through nature miracles, even though Israelite military co-operation became a fact in the wars of conquest and in the period of the Judges, as evidenced in such old materials as the twelfth-century Song of Deborah (Judges 5:1-31).

With the coming of kingships, however, Israel abandoned her calling to be a people under God's direct rule and yielded to the power politics of the surrounding nations. The warrior displaced the prophet, and military might rather than divine miracle determined the battle. David in particular, though in some ways loyal to ancient tradition,

became the warrior king *par excellence* who, leaning on the worldly counsel of the wise men rather than on the prophetic word and the priestly *torah*, effected the equivalent of a "Constantinian Fall of the Church" (my words, not Lind's) in Israel.

Criticism and opposition to Davidic-Solomonic kingship continued, especially in the Succession Document and the prophets, although the rise of pro-monarchical prophets muddied the waters. While the Deuteronomist (author of Deuteronomy) placed definite strictures on kingship in Israel, the Deuteronomic historian (final compiler of Joshua to II Kings), though critical of kingships, accepted the divine election of the Davidic dynasty (2 Sam. 7) and placed great hopes in Josiah, descendant of David's line. While promises of a new exodus and a new experience of Yahweh's power by his suffering servant are given in Deutero-Isaiah, Lind's picture of the Old Testament story is one of denial of an original calling that once was close to becoming a theo-political reality, only to succumb to compromise with the politics of power.

The thesis presented in summary is developed in detailed argumentation and with great scholarly erudition. Employing the tools and results of literary-critical scholarship and drawing constantly on a vast knowledge of Ancient Near Eastern archaeological and literary data, Lind pursues his interpretation with the tenacity of an apologist, engaging and challenging the dominant proponents of Old Testament scholarship in his struggle to rectify the age-old misunderstanding of the Old Testament as proclaiming a God reveling in warfare and bloodshed. Seldom, if ever, has a Mennonite scholar carried the battle for a truly Biblical understanding of God's call to non-violence so competently and so far into the adversaries' camp. If Lind's book receives the hearing it deserves beyond peace church circles, it should do much to put to rest the age-old appeal to the Old Testament to justify Christian recourse to war and violence.

However, Lind's book also raises serious questions, both scholarly and theological-conceptual. This is not the place to engage in such specialists' debates as the nature of the Succession Document (which I would not consider a critique of Solomon), or the final edition of the Deuteronomic History, (which I would consider exilic rather than late pre-exilic). Suffice is to point out some problematic tendencies that appear repeatedly in Lind's argumentation: 1) Often Lind presses his thesis too hard, drawing doubtful or ambivalent data into its service. Should Jacob's bowing down to Joseph (Gen. 37:9-11) really indicate a call for the subjection of the Davidic king to patriarchal tradition? (p. 42). 2) Lind has a tendency to argue from silence. Can one really draw the conclusion that the absence of kingship election features from the call of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) shows a deliberate refusal of the Yahwist (J) to bring his material in

line with the Davidic-Solomonic era in which he writes? (p. 129). 3) Lind sometimes resorts to argumentation which he disallows for his opponents. Thus he (rightly) criticizes von Rad repeatedly for considering holy war theology to be a later theological interpretation of earlier events. He himself, however, ponders the possibility that Joshua's glorification as war leader may be due to a "read-back from the period of kingship" (p. 81). 4) Lind uses archaeological data competently and helpfully most of the time, but sometimes a bit daringly. Can one really say that Moses, in slaying an Egyptian (Exodus 2), "took the way of the *habiru* freedom fighters" (p. 61)?

My greater problems with Lind's work are of a theological-conceptual nature. What is Lind doing? The sub-title of the book is "The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel". Throughout, he uses modern historical-critical tools to penetrate beyond the confessions of Israel (our Old Testament documents) to an empirical reality, an "historical Israel" (cf. the analogous "historical Jesus" research of the last two centuries). The theology of warfare worked out by Lind is, so it appears, the theology actually held by the Israel contemporary with the events of the exodus, the period of the Judges, etc.

Now, I consider it Lind's greatest achievement to have shown that the oldest documents point to the exodus event, effected by prophetic word and divine miracle, as the paradigm of holy war. However, it is not evident to me why we should take seriously the documents making this point, and not consider them idealizing interpretations, while Lind expects us to accept a picture of David that is at great variance with other Old Testament documents. While the introduction of kingship into Israel was clearly problematic and danger-laden, its acceptance as God's new concession to Israel's need went far beyond an uneasy accommodation to a political reality. Even if one would agree with Lind in seeing the Succession Document (II Sam. 9-I Kings 2) as anti-monarchial — and I do not — there remains the fact that the rise of David (I Sam. 16-II Sam. 5) enthusiastically embraces the ascendant king of God's chosen instrument; that the Deuteronomistic History accepts kingship (and, I believe, much more fully than Lind admits); that many psalms, the messianic prophecies, the theology of I Isaiah and the whole Chronicler's History see in David the paradigm of God's chosen servant and the image of the messiah to come. Unless one selects a narrow "canon within the canon", it is extremely difficult to accommodate Lind's theology of David to that of this wide array of Old Testament documents.

Similar considerations apply to the institutions of kingship and of wisdom. As to the latter, Lind repeatedly presents it as human wisdom contrasted to divine revelation mediated by prophet and torah. He never clarifies the relationship of the wisdom teachers at the royal court to the

wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Does not the Old Testament claim that observation of God's universe, empirical though it be, constitutes *one* legitimate avenue of God's revelation?

As to the office of kingship, the question arises whether any one socio-political structure can be identified as either compatible or incompatible with God's will. Did the tribal form of government, together with the charismatic leadership of the "judges", really constitute a near-ideal "people of God", while the monarchy represented an inherently fallen institution? Does that not evoke echoes of modern attempts to characterize democracy as Christian and any other form of government as anti-godly? I for my part am impressed with the fact that the Old Testament people could be a people of God under various socio-political forms of existence (tribal rule, united kingdom, divided kingdoms, empire-dominated kingdoms, exiled captive community, Persian province). Each socio-political structure was a part of the fallen order, but through God's grace, each could be drawn into his service. Kingship was one of them, with its special, well-recognized temptations, but also with its unique and acknowledged grace from God to be what of itself it could not be in the ancient world. This is a foreshadowing of hope for us. We are not to look back to, or search for, a lost pre-Davidic or pre-Constantinian theological reality (or, for that matter, a Davidic kingdom), but to see the politics of God as breaking through even the most unlikely structures today.

Having stated my far-reaching disagreements with Lind's methodology, and especially with his findings concerning David, kingship and wisdom, I must say once again that his work stands out as an impressive and provocative piece of Mennonite Biblical scholarship. Its forcefully argued theses deserve to be read and discussed widely. They will challenge many glibly assumed views concerning the warlike nature of ancient Israel, even if some of them will need to be revised.

Lind's book invites one further reflection. If God himself fights our battles, i.e. if Yahweh is that ultimate power which makes human warfare both unnecessary and idolatrous, how are we to understand such language? Do we really wish to attach ontological reality to the warrior-characterization of Yahweh, granting him fully the prerogative to the exercise of a violence that for us is sin? Or is the warrior language to be understood metaphorically for a highest form of the exercise of authority, an authority which, in the light of the power of the cross and resurrection, is only partially and inadequately reflected in the warrior metaphor? While Lind himself does not pursue the philosophical — theological consequences of his investigation, it would seem profitable

for our systematic theologians and philosophers to take up these questions.

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Believers Baptism for Children

Marlin Jeschke, *Believers Baptism for Children of the Church*, foreword by J. C. Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983); paperback; 157 pp. \$7.95 US.

This book deals with a subject central to yet often ignored by Mennonites and it deals with the subject in a way whose time has come. More than that, it illustrates a growing convergence between Christians in the paedobaptist tradition and those in the believers' baptism tradition. It resolutely defends believers' baptism yet seeks to take seriously the lessons offered by the infant baptism tradition. It recognizes the basic parallelism between child dedication/infant baptism and adult baptism/confirmation, taking account of the ways in which each has influenced the other. The degree of convergence is symbolized when Jeschke adopts as his own a "felicitous term" coined by an Episcopalian educator, John Westerhoff III, who describes baptism as "the sign of an *owned faith*," or, in Jeschke's words, "a faith [that] people have made their own following a stage of searching, reflection, and self-conscious inquiry" (p. 117).

With references to the Red Sea crossing, to Jewish proselyte baptism, and to the "registration for the coming kingdom" represented by the baptizing activity of John the Baptist, Jeschke reconstructs the biblical setting for Christian baptism as initiation, as entrance upon salvation, as a "crossing over." He also explores the meaning of baptism in the New Testament in the form of an inductive analysis, concluding with a defense of the necessary connection between coming to faith and the sign of baptism.

The heart of the book is found in the third and fourth chapters which examine the place of children in the church. Jeschke asserts that children of the church are in a situation different from that of adult converts in the New Testament setting. It is the contribution of the paedobaptist tradition to have recognized that the second, third and following generations of Christians require a nurture model rather than a conversion model of coming to faith. He rejects, however, the two main arguments for baptizing infants at the outset of the nurture process: the argument that baptism is necessary to cleanse from original sin and the argument that children of Christians are elect of God by virtue of their birth and thus are entitled to baptism.

One of the strengths of Jeschke's book is its theology of children in the church (chapter five), who constitute a third category between the saved and sinners. He outlines a nurture mission for the church that would guide children of the church from innocence into faith without necessarily undergoing a time of estrangement from the church, a time of "sowing wild oats." This nurture mission must, however, avoid over-protective manipulation of preadolescent children into acquiring the faith of their parents without ownership. The do's and don't's of the final chapter summarize this material well.

Chapter six deals with the mode of baptism. Here the author is overly defensive on the affusion/immersion question, concluding with a "half-serious" suggestion that affusion could be used for children of the church while immersion would be more suitable for converts from outside the nurture process. The seventh chapter considers the issue of rebaptism in cases of converts from paedobaptist traditions or in the case of individuals concerned about the potential invalidity of their supposed believers' baptism in childhood. I am not convinced that Jeschke's effort to link consistently baptism and the entrance upon owned faith takes adequate account of what an individual's own baptism as an infant may have come to mean to him or her in the process of coming to owned faith. Jeschke himself notes that the apostles, who were presumably baptized by John the Baptist in expectation of the coming messianic age, were not rebaptized after Pentecost.

Jeschke's basic critique of attempts to induce crisis conversion experiences in children or young people or, the alternative approach used in many Mennonite congregations, of an annual catechism class leading almost pro forma to baptism and church membership deserves wide reading and assimilation. His supporting argument, however, raises even broader questions that merit serious attention.

Believers Baptism for Children of the Church argues that both believers' church and Volkskirche traditions necessarily modify the New Testament, first-generation process of coming to faith. He suggests that children of the church require a second- and third-generation approach to conversion while retaining a first-generation, New Testament approach to baptism: with baptism tied to the initiation into owned faith, not to initiation into Christian nurture. His reasons are partly theological (a lesser degree of departure from the New Testament), and partly pragmatic: tying the rite of baptism to post-adolescent owned faith produces a better church, a more committed, disciplined church. I am not sure that the latter is empirically evident: Mennonites have lapsed into nominal Christendom situations (e.g., in some congregations in Russia during the 19th century, in the Netherlands or Germany or North America during the early and mid-20th century). Conversely, in paedobaptist churches, dur-

ing renewal movements, rites of owned faith (monastic vows, adolescent rites of confirmation, sacramental confession and penance, Eucharistic piety, revival meeting decisions) have led to committed, disciplined churches within churches (monastic orders, charismatic prayer groups, Methodist societies etc.). The relation of baptism, confirmation, church discipline, martyrdom (a second baptism — in blood), and monasticism (a second baptism of spiritual martyrdom) should be explored more fully.

This book also challenges us to come to terms with developments past the second and third generations. If the New Testament pattern of adult conversion is not entirely applicable to the second and third generations, is the adoption of infant baptism in the *Volkskirchen* of the sixth, seventh, and following "generations" necessarily misguided? Perhaps. With Jeschke I am not ready to abandon the New Testament linkage between the rite of baptism and the entrance upon owned faith. Yet, before we decide, even abstractly, against (a) infant baptism and confirmation (b) plus nurture (c) plus a later celebration of owning of faith, in favor of (a) child dedication (b) plus nurture (c) plus adult baptism and confirmation, we must look seriously at the question of the later development of doctrine. I applaud Jeschke's willingness to recognize the first-generation nature of the New Testament. Recognizing the significance of this conclusion, however, begins a longer, potentially painful, process, because those who are ready to leave behind the security of pristine New Testament restitutionism must wrestle with Catholic and Orthodox doctrines of development and tradition.

These questions notwithstanding, this is an important, well-organized book written in lay language that abandons the polemic between the two main fronts and seeks a third, "more excellent" way. It deserves careful consideration from congregations, pastors, parents, church educators, and youth workers.

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