MELITA THEOLOGICA

THE BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP OF P.P. SAYDON

THE present issue of *Melita Theologica* purports to be no more than a modest attempt at commemorating the first Maltese translation (1929-59) of the entire Bible from the Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek originals. It is, therefore, a *Festschrift* in honour of the translator and his work; but, if full justice is ever to be done to Monsignor Saydon, there remains yet to be published a commemorative volume of greater consequence — one that would embrace his own scholarly publications on matters biblical and oriental, for they all lie scattered in foreign works that are inaccessible, and therefore unknown, to the average Maltese reader.

To be sure, Professor Saydon's many distinguished friends here or abroad will welcome this humble but lasting tribute to his name. One article directly concerns itself with the Saydon Version of the Bible: it is the appreciation penned by Father Sant. In the following pages I have sought to delineate the trends of biblical and Semitic scholarship in Dr. Saydon's investigations, throwing into sharp relief the originality of his contributions. A full list of Professor Saydon's publications is appended.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Professor the Very Rev. Mgr. Peter Paul Saydon was born at Żurrieq, Malta, on July 24, 1895. His secondary school studies at the Archbishop's Seminary were crowned with 'Second in Order of Merit' in the Malta Matriculation (June 1910). Ordained to the Priesthood on the 20th September, 1919, after graduating B.Litt., J.C.B., and D.D. at the University of Malta, he left for Rome in order to reap, as he admirably did, the benefits of the Government travelling scholarship awarded to him for placing First in all Faculty examinations. The Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome conferred upon him the degree of Licentiate in Holy Scripture (L.S.S.), whereupon in 1931 he was appointed professor of Holy Scripture, Hebrew and Biblical Greek at the Royal University of Malta, where he remains to this day — a great asset to the institution — and, in addition, he holds the appointment of University Librarian. He may be said to have won for himself friends as well as laurels at such

international congresses of biblical and oriental studies as were held in Rome (1932), Brussels (1938), Paris (1948), Rome (1952), Norfolk (1952), Copenhagen (1953), Cambridge (1954), Louvain (1954), Birmingham (1955), Strasbourg (1956), Munich (1957), Brussels (1958), Louvain (1959), Oxford (1959), Dublin (1961). In 1946 he was created Privy Chamberlain to His Holiness the Pope. At the age of 66, at the close of thirty years' professorship, the Malta University has on the 12th November, 1960, conferred on this great Maltese translator of the Bible an honorary D.Litt. in public recognition of the rare scholarship that is his.

LITERARY CRITICISM

No problem of origin and authorship, of structure and analysis, in the case of any book of the Bible eludes Professor Saydon's observation or even his inquiry. The book chronicles and book reviews, which have regularly appeared over his signature in this periodical ever since its first issue in March 1947, have done excellent service to succeeding generations of students as well as to the wider circle of reading public in Malta, acquainting one and all with the results achieved by present-day literary critics in both hemispheres. Such, too, was the purpose of the paper on *Recent Developments in O.T. Literary Criticism* (1950). His 1944 lecture on *Literary Criticism of the Pentateuch* evinces, no doubt, a rare sense of judgement: even more than in its being a full though terse review of the chequered history of a vexed problem, its value lies in its recommending 'a sounder interpretation of biblical texts, a deeper linguistic knowledge, a more intelligent application of the rules of textual criticism, a higher appreciation of the literary and psychological personality of the biblical writers' (page 74), and, above all, a fair estimate of all the constituent elements of a problem which is inevitably quite complex, as well as a fair estimate of all the literary features of the Pentateuch, which, as a book, is to be seen in its true historical perspective and in the light of its religious implications.

For scholars like P.P. Saydon, the prophetical writings — by far not the least difficult section of Holy Writ — seem to have the properties of magnets. The two *Melita Theologica* contributions (1951 and 1952) on *Cult and Prophecy in Israel*, a sound historico-theological inquiry based on a sound exegesis, couple themselves with such other exegetical matter relating to the prophetical literature as are his commentaries on Baruch, Daniel and Hosea in *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (London and Edinburgh, 1953). Problems of literary criticism are more than lightly touched upon in the introduction to each of those three commentaries. *The Literary Structure of Isaias 40-55 and the Servant Songs*

(1953) is an independent investigation suggesting a division of these chapters into nine poems. As Father Robert North had done in a subsequent issue of *CBQ*, I am quoting Professor Saydon's conclusions word for word:

1. The several poems forming the two cycles Is. 40-48 and 49-55 are composed after a fixed pattern consisting of three different elements, namely, announcement of deliverance, assurance of deliverance, confirmation of promise in the first cycle, and the Servant's mission and its failure, promise of success and assurance of success in the other cycle.

2. The Servant songs are a constituent element and therefore an integral part of the contexts in which they stand.

3. The transposition of Is. 42, 1-43, 13 and its insertion at the beginning of the second group of poems would give us two perfectly symmetrical groups developing two aspects of the same fundamental theme, namely, the deliverance of Israel from the Babylonian captivity and the restoration of Sion as two successive stages in God's plan of eternal salvation.[1]

One other contribution — *Il libro di Geremia: struttura e composizione* (1957) — is equally revealing in that, on the strength of internal evidence, it tentatively presents a literary analysis of the whole book, which of itself betrays traces of its having been a collection of scrolls written on various occasions before it took its present shape of one composite work. Further reference to this article will be made further down.

Unpretentious as are his two contributions to N.T. criticism — *Dislocations in the Fourth Gospel with reference to a recent Theory* (1948) and *The Order of the Gospels* (1950) — they yet reveal him to be the good critic he is even when handling literary problems of the New Testament and (why leave it unsaid?) even when appraising theories proposed by others. It is characteristic of him to avoid all undue controversy in favour of setting forth the positive biblical data as well as all the external evidence available. 'The best and simplest solution of the difficulties inherent in the traditional order of the Fourth Gospel is that connected with the circumstances of the composition of the Gospel itself. It is generally agreed that St. John wrote the Gospel in his old age some fifty or sixty years after the events narrated. Though the recollection of Christ's discourses was, through prolonged meditation and preaching, still fresh in the Apostle's mind, we have not in the Fourth Gospel a verbatim report of Christ's discourses. The doctrine is Our Lord's, but the wording is, at least in many cases, St. John's. Besides condensing

[1] *Melita Theologica*, Vol. VI, No. 1, 1953, p. 15.

Our Lord's speeches St. John has also, sometimes, added words and
sentences which Christ had said on a different occasion. It is also
possible that St. John has, occasionally, expanded in his own way
Christ's words, without however changing Christ's doctrine. It is also
probable that St. John, after completing his Gospel, has added some
chapters inserting them in their chronological, though not in their logi-
cal, context.'[2] In connexion with the problem of the order of the Gospels
Saydon proves that the traditional order is upheld by internal no less
than by external evidence and that it is a chronological order rather than
a merely literary one. His investigation of the internal evidence ingen-
iously resolves itself into a comparison between all three Synoptic Gos-
pels taken in pairs so as to establish the dependence between any two
Gospels as well as the order of priority between them. His conclusions
are: '... the order Matthew, Mark, Luke is supported by external evi-
dence reaching into the second half of the second century. Internal cri-
teria show that Luke is later than Mark and that Matt. Gr. is very prob-
ably later than Mark. The priority of Matt. cannot be proved with absol-
ute certainty, but the priority of a Judaic Gospel over the other Gentile
Gospels is more in conformity with the 'Jews first' principle followed
by the Apostles and solemnly proclaimed by Paul. The decree of the
Pontifical Biblical Commission, dated 19th June 1911, declaring the
priority of Matthew's Gospel, is based on solid traditional grounds.'[3]

SCROLL THEORY

For years now, such expedients as Source Criticism and Form Criti-
cism have been popular enough with scholars, but certain textual and
literary problems can best be solved by appeal to the palaeographic
argument. There are dislocations or transpositions in some of the O.T.
books as surely as there are, say, in the Fourth Gospel; and, in some
cases, there are divergences between the Hebrew M.T. and the Greek
LXX as far as the length of the text is concerned. Professor Saydon in-
geniously puts forward a theory calculated to reconcile the traditional
views with the established data of literary criticism. At least the longer
books of the O.T. were originally each written on a number of separate
scrolls, more or less uniform in size, which were kept together in one
jar; only many years later, towards the 2nd cent. B.C., was such a loose
collection of small scrolls united into one larger scroll, after a number
of additions, alterations, and adaptations had crept into the text. 'So
long as books were in a state of loose collections of scrolls they were
more liable to editorial changes, additions and adaptations to the chang-

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[2] *Melita Theologica*, Vol. I, No. 3, 1948, p. 23f.
[3] *Scripture*, Vol. IV, No. 7, July 1950, p. 196.

ed conditions of the people. Still more important for literary criticism is the fact that the sacred authors writing on separate rolls and in different times and sometimes on different subjects could employ a different style and a different vocabulary. Hence literary difference between the component parts of a book are not necessarily marks of different authorship.[4] Saydon's 'Scroll Theory' provides a solution to the literary problem of Ezra-Nehemiah, Job, and Proverbs, as well as of Isaiah and Deutero-Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Daniel, Zechariah.[5]

THEORY OF 'AUTHOR' AND 'WRITER'

Professor Saydon instances Prov. 25, 1 (also 22, 17-21) to prove that the Hebrews actually distinguished between author and writer or editor. Mgr. E.J. Kissane had held, back in 1943, that Isaiah 40-66 were comparable with the Epistle to the Hebrews: just as this Epistle could be regarded as Paul's work because it contained his own ideas though perhaps written by a different hand, Isaiah 40-66 were to be attributed to the 8th-cent. prophet of that name because they contained his teaching even though this material may have been collected from oral tradition by some exilic compiler or editor (E.J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah*, II, Dublin, 1943, pp. 56-61). Mgr. Saydon had then accepted the comparison but not without this one important reserve: 'Paul must be considered as the author of *Hebrews* because the letter, if not actually written by him, was certainly conceived by him, written under his direction and finally approved by him. The case is different with Is. xl-lxvi. According to Kissane's theory these chapters contain Isaiah's teaching but were neither written under his direction nor with his approval. Isaiah, therefore, can hardly be considered to be the author of chapters xl-lxvi.'[6] What Saydon understands to have been the concepts of author

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[4] 'Literary Criticism of the Old Testament. Old Problems and New Ways of Solution', in *Sacra Pagina* (Miscellanea Biblica Congressus Internationalis Catholici de Re Biblica, edd. J. Coppens, A. Descamps, E. Massaux), I, Paris and Gembloux, 1959, p. 322.

[5] See: 'Paleography of the O.T. and its bearing upon Textual and Literary Criticism of the O.T.,' in *Melita Theologica* 3 (1950) 5-22; 'Are we to take Daniel V, 30-1 as historical and, if so, to what does it refer?', in *Scripture* 4 (1951) 363; 'The Authorship of the Book of Isaiah', in *Scripture* 5 (1952) 58f.; 'Il libro di Geremia: struttura e composizione', in *Rivista Biblica Italiana* 5 (1957) 142-4; 'Literary Criticism of the O.T.: Old Problems and New Ways of Solution', in *Sacra Pagina*, I, Paris & Gembloux, 1959, pp. 319-24; art. 'Libros Hebreos, Forma original de los', in *Enciclopedia de la Biblia*, Barcelona (in preparation).

[6] 'The Authorship of the Book of Isaiah', in *Scripture* 5 (1952) 56. Prof. Saydon points out that the Isaian authorship of the whole book must not necessarily be extended to every single sentence or even to every single chapter. With the help of his 'Scroll Theory' Saydon explains such editorial alterations and ad-

and writer according to Hebrew mentality is found in the paper he read out before the scholars of the Brussels congress in 1958: 'author is the person from whom the contents of a book or at least their substance derive; writer or editor is the person who puts into writing the author's thoughts either in his own words or in the author's own words.'[7] Admittedly, the writer was not necessarily one who wrote under dictation, and he may have gleaned his material from oral tradition, moulding it as he thought best to suit the historical conditions of his own time. It is easy to understand why the editor's or compiler's name, excepting that of Baruch, should be completely forgotten, when obviously the right of authorship rested with the author, not with the compiler.

EXEGESIS

Of the exegetical contributions *Sin-Offering and Trespass-Offering* (1946) is, perhaps, the most rewarding. Little wonder that it ranks foremost among the opinions reviewed by Father L. Moraldi in his doctoral thesis on *Espiazione sacrificale e riti espiatori nell' ambiente biblico e nell' Antico Testamento* (Roma, P.I.B., 1956, p. 163). Dr. Saydon distinguishes for the verb אָשֵׁם a legal sense, namely 'to incur the obligation of making good the damage caused to a person', and a liturgical meaning (which is, in fact, the fundamental meaning of אָשֵׁם), namely 'to be responsible in spite of ignorance'. According to Professor Saydon, Hebrew theology made no distinction between material and formal sin: both were imputable. For an understanding of the O.T. theology of the Redemption from the Hebrew viewpoint, we are to bear in mind, as we read Is. 53, 10ff. (an אָשֵׁם passage), that the responsibility of the Servant of Yahweh does involve an involuntary, though not a personal, transgression of the law. It is in this sense that the Messiah actually atoned for man's sin, namely, in so far as our sins were laid upon him. We are indebted to Saydon's original investigation for these conclusions: 'Therefore, Hebrew theology distinguishes three classes of sins with regard to their expiation:

1. Sins committed with a high hand, consciously and wilfully; sins involving disregard and contempt of the Law. These could not be atoned for by any sacrifice (Num. 15, 30).

2. Ordinary sins committed with a greater or lesser degree of consciousness and wilfulness, but which are due to human frailty rather than to

ditions as had found their way into the text in course of time. 'If these changes and additions do not affect the substance of the book, Isaiah will still be regarded as the author of the latest, revised and enlarged, edition of his work as much as of the original one' — loc. cit., p. 58.
[7] *Sacra Pagina*, I, p. 318.

any disregard of the Law. These are atoned for by a sin-offering (*sacri-ficium pro peccato* חַטָּאת).

3. Sins of ignorance or unintentional sins. These are atoned for by an אָשָׁם -offering (*sacrificium pro delicto* — אָשָׁם).' (page. 398).

SEMITIC PHILOLOGY

It was Father Alberto Vaccari, S.J., who once described Mgr. Saydon, his student of former days, as a 'profondo conoscitore' (one imbued with a thorough knowledge) of both Hebrew and Maltese.[8] Articles like *The Pre-Arabic Latin Element in Maltese Toponymy* (1956) and *The Vocalization of the Verb in Maltese* (1958) will by now have undoubtedly been acclaimed by a Vaccari, a Rychmans, an Arbez, or a Seele. I am limiting myself to a review of those of Saydon's contributions that must have appealed to the wider circle of Hebraists.

The assonant expression עָצוּר וְעָזוּב presents difficulty. Saydon[9] rejects the antithetical meanings generally adopted by modern interpreters, 'bond and free' or 'under age and over age', in favour of the synonymic meaning 'a helpless and worthless person'. There are texts, e.g., Deut. 32, 36 and 2 Kings 14, 26, where the sense clearly supports this interpretation. The assonance expresses with greater emphasis the meaning already conveyed and forcibly enough by the synonymous phrase. Saydon, therefore, takes עָצוּר וְעָזוּב בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל to have been a proverbial saying which originally denoted a universality from which not even the most miserable of the people are excluded, but it then came to denote an unlimited universality, very often (as in 1 Kings 14, 10) 'all males, no one excepted'.

The aesthetical and psychological relation of assonance to style had been brought out by Eduard König in his *Stilistik, Rhetorik, Poetik...* (Leipzig, 1900, pp. 290ff.). Saydon has contributed on the subject thirty-three pages of *Biblica*,[10] limiting himself to investigating those cases where assonance is intended to express emphasis, not those others where assonance is intended to produce a purely aesthetic effect. Mgr. Saydon distinguishes three groups of assonant expressions: emphatic assonance may be produced by (a) the combination of two identical words, the second one being the feminine of the other; (b) the combination of two

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[8] *Biblica,* Vol. XX, 1939, p. 435: 'la traduzione di quel profondo conoscitore delle due lingue, che è l'esimio Professore di Malta, può interessare anche il filologo.'

[9] *The Meaning of the Expression 'asur we'azubh,* in *Vetus Testamentum,* Vol. II, 1953, pp. 371-4; 'Assonance in Hebrew as a means of expressing Emphasis', in *Biblica,* Vol. XXXVI, 1955, 299-303.

[10] 'Assonance in Hebrew as a means of expressing Emphasis', in *Biblica,* Vol. XXXVI, 1955, pp. 36-50, 287-304.

words derived from the same stem; (c) the combination of two words of a different stem but with a similar meaning. Well over eighty assonant phrases come for separate treatment in this investigation.

The Hebrew tenses express temporal relations – Present, Past, Future – as well as 'kinds of action' – instantaneous, durative, iterative. In *Biblica*[11] Saydon draws our attention to a fourth 'kind of action' or action-form, namely inceptive action, which we must take into consideration on account of its syntactical implications. Whereas S. R. Driver had held that the simple *yiqtol* is sometimes used with an inceptive meaning, P. P. Saydon has submitted a number of examples which show that there are *wayyiqtol*, not *yiqtol*, forms which are best explained in an inceptive sense. The second half of his article inquires into the relation between the verb הֵחֵל ('to begin') and the inceptive *wayyiqtol*.

There is yet another *Biblica* article, of recent publication, which concerns itself with the Hebrew verbal system and its syntactical connotations.[12] Saydon, in the wake of G. R. Driver, has there set himself the task of improving upon the investigations of Ludwig Köhler (*Deuterojesaja stilkritisch untersucht*, BZAW, 1923), who had stopped at remarking that *qatal* and *yiqtol* could equally be translated 'he kills, he killed, he will kill'. In Deutero-Isaiah Saydon finds traces of an older pre-Massoretic pronunciation pointing to two *qatál* and two *yiqtol* forms: *qátal* denoted a present-future tense and *qatál* denoted a past action; while *yiqtol* was originally both *yaqtúl* with a present-future meaning and *yáqtul* with the meaning of a past. Instances of an originally past *qatál* survive in the *weqatáltí* forms of Is. 43, 12 and 44, 8. The *yiqtol* form in 40, 3, for example, is a remnant of the old preterite *yáqtul*.

These are the main trends of the biblical scholarship of P. P. Saydon. Students of the Bible await his further contributions.

                                                              J. SCHEMBRI

[11] 'The Inceptive Imperfect in Hebrew and the Verb hehel "to begin"', in *Biblica*, Vol. XXXV, 1954, pp. 43-50.
[12] 'The Use of Tenses in Deutero-Isaiah', in *Biblica*, Vol. XL, 1959, pp. 290-301; also in *Analecta Biblica* 10, Roma, 1959, pp. 156-67.