THE "FEAR NOT" ORACLES IN SECOND ISAIAH

by

EDGAR W. CONRAD
St Lucia, Queensland

Introduction

Many studies on Second Isaiah have followed J. Begrich’s thesis that Second Isaiah employed the Oracle of Salvation—a Gattung which had its original Sitz im Leben in the lament liturgy as the divine answer delivered by a priest in response to the complaint and petition of an individual.1 Recently, I have argued that Begrich does not convincingly defend his criteria for identifying the Oracle of Salvation in Second Isaiah.2 In this article I now offer an alternative solution concerning five texts usually understood as Oracles of Salvation: Isa. xli 8-13, 14-16, xlii 1-4, 5-7, xlv 1-5.3 The discussion will begin with an assessment of C. Westermann’s analysis of the structure of the so-called Oracle of Salvation in Second Isaiah since his form-critical work has been the most definitive and influential following Begrich’s original thesis. While Westermann understands these five texts as representing one Gattung, I will contend that the two oracles in chapter xli are structurally

3 Since the initial work of Begrich, the so-called Heilsorakel has usually been restricted to these five texts although liv 4-6 is sometimes identified as a Heilsorakel. A significant aspect of C. Westermann’s form critical work on Second Isaiah (see note 6) was that he restricted the number of occurrences of the so-called Oracles of Salvation (Heilsorakel) in Second Isaiah to these five or six texts. Begrich in his Studien zu Deuterogesajja originally published in 1938 and reprinted in ThB 20 (München, 1963) claimed that there were 24 examples of the Heilsorakel in Second Isaiah (pp. 14-26). It was Westermann’s contention that Begrich had confused two Gattungen, both related to lament: the Heilsorakel, a priestly form, and the Heilsankündigung, a prophetic form of speech. While Westermann is correct in his claim that the so-called Heilsorakel in Second Isaiah is not as pervasive as Begrich suggested, his claim that the so-called Heilsankündigung is related to lament needs to be re-examined. See my Patriarchal Traditions in Second Isaiah (Dissertation, Princeton, 1974), pp. 44-50.
distinct from those in chapters xliii and xlv4 and function5 differently. The "fear not" oracles in chapter xli are more like the "fear not" oracles associated with war in Deuteronomy and Joshua while the "fear not" oracles in chapters xliii and xlv are more like the "fear not" oracles associated with the announcement of offspring in Genesis.

Initial reflections concerning structure and setting

Westermann analyses the structure of the Oracle of Salvation in Second Isaiah as follows:6

I. Anrede (Address)
   This is often expanded.

II. Heilszuspruch (Assurance of Salvation)
   This is the call 'al tirā' which represents "den Kern des Heilsorakels".

III. Begründung (Basis)
   This section contains two parts: (a) nominal sentences indicating the intervention of God; and (b) verbal sentences with verbs in the perfect indicating the result of the intervention.

IV. Folge (Result)
   This section announces salvation and contains verbs in the imperfect.

V. Ziel (Goal)
   This part occurs in only a few texts (xliii 7, xlv 5, xli 16b).
   "Eine Angabe des Ziels hat keine feste Form" and therefore "sie gehört nicht notwendig zum Heilsorakel."

4 It will be argued that xliii 1-4 is a mixed genre.
5 I am using "function" here as it has been defined by G. Fohrer. He says, "A genre derived from the cult or from the law does not necessarily possess, in the case of the prophet, a cultic or legal content and significance. Such an assumption is superficial. A distinction must rather be made between the original meaning of a genre and the way in which it is utilized, that is between the form and its function in prophetic proclamation": in "Remarks on Modern Interpretation", JBL 80 (1961), p. 312. He cautions form critics: "Demgemäß ist zwischen der Redeform und ihrer Funktion, zwischen dem ursprünglichen 'Sitz im Leben' und dem 'Sitz in der Rede' wohl zu unterscheiden": Einleitung in das Alte Testament (Heidelberg, 1965), p. 27.