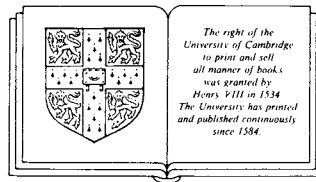

Preaching the tradition

*Homily and
hermeneutics
after the exile*

*Based on the 'addresses'
in Chronicles, the
'speeches' in the Books
of Ezra and Nehemiah
and the post-exilic
prophetic books*

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Introduction

In 1934, Gerhard von Rad wrote an article entitled ‘The Levitical Sermon in I & II Chronicles’.¹ In it, he noted that the Chronicler gives a number of speeches to some of his characters which do not appear in parallel passages in Samuel–II Kings, the so-called ‘Deuteronomistic History’. These speeches seldom fit the historical context in which they are placed, and all tend to use similar vocabulary to express similar truths. They share the characteristics of citation of, or at least allusion to, earlier legal and prophetic sayings, a general parenetic nature, and have many features of style in common. Von Rad claims that they ‘evinced a distinct form–category of later origin, that of the “Levitical Sermon”’.² This way of understanding the ‘speeches’ in Chronicles has commanded a great deal of support, which is still evident in many of the recent commentaries on Chronicles.³ Nevertheless, it has also received some strong criticism.⁴ On the other hand, some writers have claimed to find material similar to the ‘Levitical Sermons’ elsewhere in the post-exilic literature, especially in the prophetic books.⁵ In order to take the discussion further, it seems appropriate to base it on a fresh examination of the main speeches in Chronicles.⁶ In Part I, therefore, after a brief mention of some of the critical issues affecting the approach to the Chronicler’s work which occupy contemporary scholarly debate, we shall in Chapter 2 consider each of the speeches in turn. This examination will not be limited to those passages used by von Rad in his study (see n. 2 above). We shall look at all the significant addresses given to his characters by the Chronicler which are not found in Samuel/Kings. This will be followed by a special note on II Chr. 36:15f. In Chapter 3, we shall attempt to draw some conclusions from that examination respecting contents, style and form of the speeches, asking whether von Rad’s claim that they represent a *Gattung* or ‘genre’ of ‘Sermon’ can be upheld in general, and how far they might be held to be ‘Levitical Sermons’ in particular. In Part II some other post-exilic literature will be considered to see how far we may find material similar to, or in any way related to, the ‘speeches’ in Chronicles and what conclusions can be drawn from such similarity as may be found. Chapter 4 will deal with the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, since here, whatever the relationship of their authorship to that of the Books of Chronicles, we might

expect to find some continuation of the 'Chronicler tradition'. In following chapters attention will be given to the post-exilic 'prophetic tradition', represented by the Books of Haggai, Zechariah 1–8 and Malachi. Clearly, there is much more post-exilic literature which might be examined. However, it is hoped enough is represented in this study to show what 'trends' may be observable in some post-exilic traditions. I hope to test and develop conclusions reached in this book with reference to other post-exilic traditions and literature in a later work.

The general conclusion reached here is that, while it is difficult, if not impossible, to make a case for a *Gattung* or precisely identifiable form-structure of 'sermon', and certainly not possible to say that such was the exclusive prerogative of Levites, the material does reflect and encapsulate something of the 'preaching' that must have gone on in the second temple. Of course, the term 'preaching' must not necessarily or exclusively conjure up pictures of present-day sermons. A recent scholar has referred to the post-exilic tradents as 'rhetors'.⁷ By 'preachers' we must think of those who preserved, developed and taught the traditions which must have been becoming increasingly enshrined in Israel's 'Scriptures'. The activity of such tradents must have been both literary and rhetorical and have taken place in the study and the classroom as well as in more formally 'liturgical' settings. We lack the precise and detailed information to be more exact. But the written material itself may be found to indicate by its very nature an origin in the activity of those who were consciously interpreting and teaching the 'traditions'. As it became more fixed in form it must itself have acted both as a guide for the development of that tradition and as a basis for continuing interpretative and exegetical practices.

Viewed in this light the literature may be seen to afford an illuminating window into the life, beliefs, doubts, fears and hopes of the post-exilic community of faith, and especially into the cares and concerns of their spiritual mentors. This community, from which the literature sprang, and among whom it was preserved, expounded, reinterpreted and applied to ever-changing situations, have thus left in their 'Scriptures' a vivid and living witness to their brave attempts to interpret the ways of God in difficult circumstances.

It is difficult to find the right term for the passages in Chronicles to be examined. To call them 'sermons' begs the question of their form. 'Speeches' is hardly an appropriate term, for some of them are too short to be that, and

some are directed to one person only. Perhaps 'addresses' is the most suitable description since this can be used of any spoken communication, and yet, in English, carries overtones of a religious context in which the faithful are encouraged, instructed, warned or exhorted.