



Claus Westermann at Eighty

Claus Westermann, professor emeritus of Old Testament at the University of Heidelberg, celebrates his eightieth birthday on October 7, 1989. We are pleased on this occasion to publish his essay, "The Human in the Old Testament." Although presented in 1962, the essay has never been translated; nor has it been easily accessible in German, since it was only privately published even there. Because of this minimal exposure, Westermann writes that he is "very happy" to see the essay printed now in English.

Word & World is happy for this opportunity, because Westermann's work over the decades has so well exemplified what we are after: Theology for Christian Ministry. The present essay is no exception. Like so much of Westermann's work, it listens carefully to the biblical texts, recognizing their original context, but then presenting their message in a surprisingly contemporary fashion. Westermann assumes there is a word for the church and the world in these ancient documents. He works carefully and creatively to learn what it is.

In many ways, Westermann has always been somewhat ahead of his time. When Brevard Childs was worried about the crisis in biblical theology and James Smart was decrying the strange silence of the Bible in the church, Westermann was busy writing and preaching in ways which made the results of his rigorous research available to people in the pews (and the marketplace) as well as to students in the classroom and colleagues in the academy.

When, according to some present oversimplifications, Old Testament form criticism was interested only in seeking smaller and smaller units and interpreting them independent of their context, Westermann was busy trying to see larger literary and sociological connections—especially in the narratives of Genesis, the prayers and songs of the Psalter, and the prophecy of Second Isaiah.

When neo-orthodoxy was stressing the mighty acts of God and the events of the *Heilsgeschichte*, Westermann was busy pointing out the importance also of God's work in creation and blessing and of the role of the human in a dialogical understanding of biblical theology.

But it would be a mistake to say that Prof. Westermann was not a person of his time. On the contrary, his work was honed on the *Kirchenkampf*, a fact which undoubtedly has given the profoundly pastoral and urgent edge to his teaching and writing. Those who know him, know that this pastoral concern is a part of the man himself, applying also in his personal relationships with students and colleagues.

In these latter years, Westermann has disposed of most of his personal library, especially the secondary literature; but that does not mean he has gone out of business. He continues to work on that which has always mattered to him most—the biblical texts themselves. *Word & World* joins academy and church in continuing to welcome the results.

F.J.G.