

Reversals of Old Testament Criticism

N.H. Ridderbos

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For many centuries Bible criticism played no important role, at least not among those who wished to be known as Christians. But gradually this situation began to change. In the course of the nineteenth century, Bible criticism came to exert more and more influence. About the turn of the century, we might say, criticism of the Old Testament reached a high point.

I. CRITICISM AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

About that time the Wellhausian school had attained great influence. It is true, of course, that orthodox scholars opposed the conclusions of that school on fundamental grounds, and even among those who accepted Bible criticism in principle some scholars held themselves more or less aloof from Wellhausen's theories. But a conspicuously large measure of agreement prevailed nonetheless among influential Old Testament scholars of that period.

According to Wellhausianism, Israel's worship of God, like that of every other religion, had a very primitive beginning. Israel's ancestors were fetish worshippers and polydemonistic. Under Moses' leadership the tribes were united into one people accepting Yahweh (Jehovah) as their common God. Scholars differed over whether this Mosaic religion required the exclusive worship of Yahweh, and whether its moral character was higher than that of the religions of surrounding peoples, but general agreement prevailed that the religion that emerged in Mosaic times was not really monotheistic.

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After Israel's entrance into Canaan the worship of Yahweh was influenced measurably by the prevailing Baal worship of the country. Assertedly, this had not only disadvantages, but many advantages as well. "The Yahweh of the nomads was a power hostile toward culture, a god of thunder, of war, of the holy ban, in the first place a destroyer and, for the rest, a god of the monotonous, empty steppes. Such a religion could never have become that of a cultured people, let alone of all mankind. Baal worship brought this religion what it lacked; now for the first time Yahweh attained to the beneficent Godhead who, in Hosea's words, also supplies corn, oil and wine (Hosea 2:8). So it has also been a providential circumstance that Israel first for a long time had to worship the Baals" (cf. J. Ridderbos, *Israel en de Baals*; afval of ontwikkeling, second ed., 1928, pp. to ff.).

A later phase in Israel's religion is assertedly reached in the appearance of the great prophets. With increasing clarity they preached the doctrines of ethical monotheism. As follows from what has been said, that was "something new"; hence there is more reason to designate them as revolutionaries than as reformers.

Slowly thereafter the Law acquired greater significance until, after the Exile, the Law completely ruled the religious life of the Jews. Their worship (cultus) was regulated in detail. Strong emphasis was laid on the necessity of observing the Law's dictates even to the smallest minutiae.

This representation of the evolution of Israel's religion, it is apparent, went hand in hand with a particular view of the writings of the Old Testament.

The Pentateuch had long been regarded as a unity, and, for the most part, was ascribed to Moses. But after the middle of the eighteenth century, scholars in increasing measure began to dispute this view. As the result of the work of the Graf-Kuenen-Wellhausen school an entirely different conception came to great influence.

The Pentateuch was now regarded as assembled from four different documents. The earliest was the Yahwistic document (J), characterized by its use of the name Yahweh for God; this document was regarded as dating back to the early monarchical period, about the middle of the ninth century B.C. The second document was the Elohist document (E), characteristic of which were the references to God as Elohim; the date of this document was placed at about the middle of the eighth century B.C. Deuteronomy (D) was the book of the law, assertedly discovered during the time of King Josiah, 622 B.C. (cf. II Kings 22:8). The last document was the Priestly code (P), dating to the period of the Exile and directly afterward.

Of central significance was the determination of the date of D (Deuteronomy). What was new in this theory was not the identification of the book of the law of Josiah with Deuteronomy, but the assertion that D had originated in Josiah's time. The reasoning was as follows: D calls for the centralization of worship (cultus) in one place; but the older books of the Old Testament, the legal portions as well as the historical portions, imply

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that before Josiah's time the multiplicity of holy places was legitimate; therefore D must have originated at the time of Josiah.

P (the Priestly code) is repeatedly identified with the book of the law that Ezra had with him when he came from Babylon to Canaan about the middle of the fifth century B.C. (cf. Ezra 7:14). During the Exile the priests had no occasion to exercise the worship rites and therefore applied themselves to theory. The largest part of P is to be found in the second portion of Exodus (the description of the tabernacle), in Leviticus and in Numbers.

Not only the Pentateuch but also the other books of the Old Testament were now dated according to a new pattern. Roughly stated, the traditional sequence was: Law (the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch)—the Psalms—the Prophets. In place of this, the following chronological order was substituted: Prophets—Law—the Psalms.

As is apparent from what has been said, this school had an evolutionistic view of the development of Israel's religion. There is again and again a development from the lower to the higher, from the simple to the complex. Wellhausen was under the influence of Hegel via Vatke. It is worth noting that the well-known conception of Hegel—thesis-antithesis-synthesis—also appears repeatedly in Wellhausen's system. In this manner he speaks of the

successive development of nomad religion, rural religion, and prophetic religion. And of conclusive significance for his system is the sequence of nature religion, prophetic religion, and priestly religion. There is a time wherein a plurality of altars is legitimate; a time in which an attempt is made to attain to the unity of sanctuary; and a time in which the unity of sanctuary is an accomplished fact; and so on.

II. METHOD OF APPROACH

In the above we have attempted to give some impressions of the pattern of views that prevailed about the turn of the century (1900 A.D.). Since that time there have been important changes in Old Testament scholarship. If we wish to delineate these reversals, we shall encounter no small difficulties. Our picture of Old Testament criticism as it obtained about 1900 is not entirely adequate, since certain severe simplifications have had to be employed. But it is even more difficult to give a picture of the present status of Old Testament criticism. To depict the status of knowledge or scholarship in any field a half century in the past is generally easier than to portray the contemporary scene, for we find ourselves in the middle of the prevailing currents. Only time will show which currents are deep and lasting and which are temporary. And an additional observation must be made. At the turn of the century much more unanimity of opinion prevailed among Old Testament scholars than is to be observed today. This very phenomenon is, in fact, one of the typical changes that have come about in Old Testament scholarship.

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Therefore, we shall not directly pose the question: what is the current status of Old Testament criticism? But we shall consider two other questions, namely, what are the causes, and what is the significance, of the changes of view? In answering these we hope also to shed some light on the current position of Old Testament criticism.

III. CAUSES OF REVERSALS IN OLD TESTAMENT CRITICISM

How are the important reversals in Old Testament scholarship to be explained? There are many reasons. But two complexes of causes are of special importance.

The Changes in Spiritual Climate

In the first place, it must be pointed out that the dominant spiritual currents in our times are totally different than at the beginning of this century. Belief in direct-line evolution today grips people's minds less than it did 50 years ago. At the start of the century many persons could still make a plea for the pursuit of objective scholarship; at the present time a consciousness has impressed itself that objective scholarship is an illusion, a contradiction in terms. Nowadays many are convinced also that simply to analyze the Old Testament and to trace the development of Israel's religion is insufficient, and that the most important question is: What is the message of the Old Testament? This is likely connected with the fact that the realization of the need to get at this Biblical message is stronger with our generation than with a generation that still expected so much from human knowledge and human ability.

We need not speak further here about these changes in spiritual currents, since their consideration falls more appropriately into other chapters of this volume. But it goes almost

without saying that these changes have influenced Old Testament scholarship. One conspicuous instance of this is the remarkable fact that the evolutionistic interpretation of the history of Israel's religion, as expressed by Wellhausen, has now to a large extent been abandoned.

At this point two restrictive remarks are in order: First, no one likely would wish to deny that Wellhausen erected his conception constructively, that he stood under the influence of Hegel, that he held evolutionistic views. Nevertheless, these lines do not depict Wellhausen in totality; with good reason a reminder has appeared recently not to underestimate the influence of Herder upon Wellhausen (cf. H. J. Kraus, *Geschichte der historischkritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments*, 1956, p. 248). Wellhausen draws this line: natural religion—prophetic religion—priestly religion. He conceives this as a development in which the spirit more and more releases itself from nature. Notwithstanding, Wellhausen regards the third phase as

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a phase of rigidity, and he writes about natural religion with obvious sympathy.

Second, we must note that students of the Old Testament today continue to see apparent lines of development in the Old Testament. It is difficult to deny that, in a certain sense, we can and must speak of development in the Old Testament. From of old, orthodoxy has spoken of the history of revelation, of God revealing himself with increasing clearness.

New Data and New Methods

As a second set of causes of reversals in Old Testament positions, we must mention the uncovering of new data and the projection of new methods. The discovery of new data we owe to the excavations of the archaeologists. We shall not treat this aspect in detail because it is handled in other parts of this book. The result of these excavations will find occasion for passing mention, however, at several relevant points later in this chapter. There is no occasion to deal here with textual criticism, so I do not treat the scrolls found at Chirbet Qumran.

Something must be said in detail, however, about the new methods that have been brought into use. In his instructive book, *The Old Testament in Modern Research* (1956), Herbert F. Hahn deals with such themes as "The Testament anthropological approach to the Old Testament," "The sociological approach to the Old Testament," and so forth. Here we shall consider especially the new methods for Old Testament study that can be grouped together under the term "form-criticism."

One of the fathers of form-criticism was Hermann Gunkel. This scholar accepted the source-analysis advanced by Wellhausianism, but attempted to penetrate to what lay behind the documents J, E, D, and P. He asked that special attention be given to the smaller units. By examining the form in which the transmitted material has come down to us, he attempted to establish the various types and genres of tradition. He asserted that each type and genre was closely associated with a specific situation in the life of the people.

Form-criticism found many followers. Today it still exercises a strong influence. As has been said, form-criticism can be combined with the analysis of documents advanced by the Wellhausian school. But with this the followers of form-criticism attach great importance to oral transmission. Through constant repetition the oral traditions had already acquired a

certain form. From this the conclusion was drawn that although the definitive version of a document may have come late in history, the document might nonetheless contain very ancient material.

Many authors are of the opinion that for a great deal of the orally transmitted materials the cult was the primary situation in life. Originally the Psalms were sung as part of the rituals performed at the shrines. But this was not all. At the shrines priests recounted the sacred stories; according to

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some scholars, portions of the transmitted materials were presented in the form of a cultic drama. On the occasion of cultic ceremonies the priests presented the laws to the people; these laws grew in the course of the centuries and were again and again adapted to the modified circumstances. There is a school of thought also which regards some of the prophets as members of the cult personnel; their prophecies were assertedly preserved through associations of cult prophets, to which they had belonged; these associations transmitted the prophecies to the people, adapting them to the altered circumstances.

A specially strong emphasis on oral transmission exists in various Scandinavian scholars, among them I. Engnell. Despite strong criticism of the Wellhausian school, Engnell in large measure accepts that school's analysis of the Pentateuch. In a certain sense he speaks also of J, E, D, and P, but when he refers to these he means something different than Wellhausen. For Engnell, J, E, D, and P stand for circles of traditionists, by which the principal materials were transmitted orally. In Engnell's judgment, all the sources of the Pentateuch are old as well as recent, recent in the sense that they obtained their literary fixity, anyhow their definitive literary fixity, only after the Exile; old, in the sense that all the sources contain ancient material. According to Engnell, such a phenomenon as the centralization of worship (cultus) may not be used for dating the sources. Rather, we must assume that various circles of traditionists existed side by side, each circle with different spheres of interest. In the one circle, interest might exist in the centralization of the cultus, but not in others. Deuteronomy speaks of this centralization, while J and E do not; yet this does not necessarily indicate that J and E are more ancient than D.

IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE REVERSALS

In this section we shall attempt especially to answer the question: Have orthodox scholars reason to rejoice over the recent reversals in Old Testament criticism? Here I make the statement that in my view it is not possible to answer this question with a simple yes or no. In considering this question I will discuss subjects of various natures. With all this we shall need to go into further detail regarding the question, how far are we entitled to speak of reversals in Old Testament criticism?

Investigation of the Psalms

We may begin with a few remarks concerning a more limited aspect of our subject, namely, the study of the Psalms, for in this manner we can more easily arrive at a proper impression of the changes in Old Testament scholarship.

Bernh. Duhm regarded it as likely that Psalm 137 is the oldest poem in the Psalter (*Die Psalmen*, second ed., 1922 [first edition, 1899!], pp. XX, 454); but according to Engnell, it is the most recent of the Psalms (*Studies*

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in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East, 1943, pp. 175 f.). One who reads this might infer that a large change assuredly has taken place in Old Testament criticism, and that orthodoxy has indeed ground to rejoice over this altered situation. For the orthodox scholar finds himself again and again in opposition to the late dating of a large portion of the Old Testament, because it conflicts with some aspect of the Old Testament account, in this instance with the Old Testament record that David is author of many of the Psalms, and also because the late dating of historical sections, as a rule, is combined with doubt regarding their historical trustworthiness.

To mention only the views of Duhm and Engnell, however, would give a very one-sided impression. There was never such a time when Duhm's conceptions were universally accepted. And there is missing even more of a general acceptance in our time of Engnell's views. A new plea is even made in our day for the post-exilic origin of many of the Psalms. This attempt comes not from the side of extremely critical scholars, but from some Roman Catholic authors such as A. Robert and A. Deissler ("The Anthological School").

Are we not justified then in speaking of reversals in the study of the Psalms? Indeed, we must certainly take account of reversals, provided we keep in view the complexity of the contemporary situation. About the turn of the century (1900) a strong movement called for the recent dating of the Psalms; many of the Psalms were dated in the Maccabean period. This was not only a question of dating, but influenced the very conception of the Psalms as well; and it went hand in hand with viewpoints held by scholars concerning the evolution of the religion of Israel. Since that time, new factors already mentioned have become operative, especially new data and methods. It has been discovered that the people surrounding Israel—Babel, Egypt, Ugarit—had a very old poetic literature that in greater or lesser measure displayed relationship with the Old Testament Psalms. Under the influence of the discoveries of recent excavations, and of other factors, the Psalms, too, have been placed in close connection with religious worship (*cultus*). In many of the Psalms several authors now see religious formulas which were used in Temple worship in Jerusalem before the time of the Exile. So now some critics are ready to accept the fact of Davidic and even of pre-Davidic Psalms in our Psalter (Cf. J. J. Stamm, *Ein Vierteljahrhundert Psalmenforschung*, *Theologische Rundschau*, XXIII, 1955, pp. 1-68).

Speaking generally, therefore, one is justified in noting a current tendency to acknowledge for the Psalms a date earlier than scholars were inclined to concede at the beginning of this century. However, this more ancient dating in many instances is correlated with an exegesis that gives reasons for many serious objections. G. Widengren, who belongs with Engnell to the leaders of the Uppsala school, contends that several of the Psalms originally were part of a cultic drama, in which the king played the role of a dying and resurrecting Godhead!

In the present-day investigation of the Psalms, diverse tendencies are

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therefore to be noted. Among these tendencies, some can certainly bring us to better understanding of the Psalms. Especially will it be fruitful, in the writer's personal opinion, to lay emphasis upon the connection between the Psalms and the cultus, and also on the connection between the Psalms and the king.

Continuity and Reversals

1. After these remarks on a rather limited aspect of our subject, it is proper now to turn to more general observations. First, we would call attention to the fact that, despite the aforementioned reversals, certain viewpoints are still regarded by most Old Testament scholars as lasting results of the critical investigation of the nineteenth century. For instance: that Isaiah, chapters 40 and following, is not attributable to the prophet of that name who lived about 700 B.C.; that the prophecies of Daniel, at least in part, came out of the Maccabean period; that the story of the book of Jonah is not history, but a parable or allegory—these conclusions seem to be accepted by virtually every critical scholar. This is not to say that investigation of the above-named books has stood still since 1900, nor that universal agreement has now been reached on these subjects. Radically differing viewpoints are still adduced concerning these books. And sometimes these viewpoints contain gratifying elements. So a greater realization has arisen that, despite all the differences, important points of similarity exist between Isaiah 1-39 and 40-66; this is then explained by the theory that chapters 40 to 66 arose in prophetic circles that considered themselves in a peculiar pupil-relationship to Isaiah. (Cf. O. Eissfeldt, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, second ed., 1956, p. 419. For further literature on Isaiah, cf. E. J. Young, *Studies in Isaiah*, 1955, pp. 9–101.) But this does not alter the fact that critical scholars have cast aside the traditional viewpoints concerning these books.

Amidst all the reversals an undeniable continuity—and sometimes a remarkably far-reaching continuity—persists in critical scholarship. No one opposed Wellhausen more vehemently than did Engnell—A. Bentzen, when in a discussion with Engnell he quoted Wellhausen, wrote a mocking "Forgive me, that I quote this old condemned dragon" (*Messias, Moses redivivus, Menschensohn*, 1948, p. 24)—but nonetheless when it comes to the source-splitting of the Pentateuch that became fashionable during the nineteenth century and was carried through to certain set conclusions by Wellhausen, even Engnell goes along in considerable measure. We have already pointed out, however, that Engnell regards J, E, D, and P in a rather different way than did Wellhausen and his followers. But the majority of the present-day critical investigators stand closer to Wellhausen than to Engnell. As we saw above, Engnell insists that we cannot invoke the centralization of the cultus for dating the sources, but a great many contemporary authors do that nevertheless. That is not to say that in this respect nothing is altered. Around the turn of the century it was commonly said that the discovery of the book

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of the law under Josiah was "a pious fraud"; the book of the law had allegedly been prepared just for this occasion; the "discovery" of the law-book was thus merely a fiction. Today the critics no longer speak so easily about a "pious fraud"; it is now deemed more likely that the book of the law was written earlier, e.g., under Manasseh, and that it contained much of still older material (cf. H. H. Rowley, *The Growth of the Old Testament*, 1953, pp. 29 ff.). But the

notion is still widely held that the laws of Deuteronomy were proclaimed for the first time under the reign of Josiah and that they acquired their authority at that time.

Perhaps it is useful to note in this connection that a certain measure of fluctuation is evident in the representation given of J, E, D, and P. The older Wellhausians regarded them largely as authors who wrote with a definite purpose in mind. Under the influence of form-criticism, the emphasis arose that the documents transmit older materials; hence J and E came to be viewed as the work of mere compilers who had gathered and arranged the multifarious legacy of oral tradition essentially in the form in which they found it. Today, certainly, emphasis falls upon the more ancient material that these supposedly later documents contain, but it is noteworthy that they are now regarded once more as authors, or groups of authors, whose works evidence a purposeful character. H. F. Hahn has written: "This recognition of the unifying religious motivation of Hebrew historiography was the most important development in Old Testament Criticism of the last two decades" (*op. cit.*, p. 260).

2. There is occasion, therefore, to speak of continuity as well as reversals in Old Testament criticism. We may note this more fully in respect to the Priestly document (P). As we have seen, this document was viewed at the beginning of this century either as exilic or post-exilic; it was thus the most recent of the sources in the Pentateuch. But recent archaeological excavations have brought to light the remarkable similarity of the terminology of this document with that of the worship sacrifice that prevailed in Ugarit about 1400 B.C. From the side of the critics this is now admitted, although differences of feeling occur as to how far this similarity extends.

We must caution the reader again, however, not to overvalue the significance of the reversals in Old Testament criticism in the last half century. First of all, it is noteworthy that a large area of critical agreement still exists on the question of which segments should be ascribed to P. And likewise, if acknowledging that P contains ancient material, even very ancient material, the majority of critical scholars still accept a post-exilic date for the definitive literary fixity of P, and still contend that P is the youngest of the sources. It must be added that Kuenen and Wellhausen themselves held that P contained some older material.

Nonetheless a reversal of considerable significance has eventuated in this area. G. von Rad contends that critical investigation has now established the position that P in its present form is not to be understood historically with-

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out the preceding pre-exilic history of the cultus (G. von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, I, 1957, p. 248). And Hahn writes: "Wellhausen had maintained that the priestly spirit of minute regulation that animated the system was an entirely post-exilic phenomenon without any roots in the Hebrew past. Now it appeared that this very spirit had been a dominant force throughout the evolution of the system" (*op. cit.*, p. 112).

Here again it should be emphasized that this shift does not bear simply on the question of dating. The change involves these results also, that scholars now do more justice to the value of the so-called "P-portions"; that they see more clearly the large place of the cultus in the entire period of Israel's history; that they have a larger regard for the unity of the Old Testament. We shall return later to the significance of this latter development.

Historical Trustworthiness of the Old Testament

The following question is next in order: Has the historical trustworthiness of the Old Testament, or more sharply formulated, has the historical exactness of the Old Testament through these reversals in contemporary criticism been vindicated? While this question is handled more comprehensively in another chapter, we cannot forego discussion of it at this juncture.

Here again discussion will profit from an example. Wellhausen expressed the well-known viewpoint: The accounts of the patriarchs are historically of importance to us only in so far as they reveal to us the times in which they were written. Nowadays, however, to find anyone who would take responsibility for such an expression would be difficult. Through the excavations at Mari, Nuzu, Ugarit, and elsewhere, it has become clear, for instance, that the social-economic circumstances that are described in the stories of the patriarchs are very old (we employ this general term because many difficulties still cling to chronology); and still other considerations could be mentioned in this connection. But this does not mean that the majority of present-day critics think the stories of the patriarchs therefore are in all respects historically trustworthy. Many critics still share the opinion that the patriarchs were not historical persons, but only personifications of tribes. And although Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, for example, be accepted by some critical scholars as actual historical persons, these scholars are mostly of the opinion that, viewed historically, we can make only some general statements about them. The genealogical connection which these four patriarchs have toward one another, according to the Old Testament, is presumed to be unreal, because the tradition regarding this genealogical connection is seen as a result of the collection of originally independent folk tales. Many Old Testament stories regarding the patriarchs are viewed as legends which originally belonged to the Canaanite places of worship and only later were connected with the figures of the patriarchs (cf. M. Noth, *Geschichte Israels*, 1950, pp. 105 ff.).

An observation of more general import will not be amiss at this point.

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Through excavations we now possess rather conclusive evidence that the ancestors of the Israelites emigrated to Canaan out of northwest Mesopotamia. But that this occurred on orders from God, and with a world-embracing promise from God, naturally disregards all historical arguments and all historical dispute. Nonetheless it is exactly this fact of divine direction that finally gives value to these narratives.

Let us put what we have said in a somewhat wider perspective, referring once again to form-criticism. G. von Rad says: "The path from the presentations of the source documents to the historical events has for us become longer, because the simple picture of the source documents, which for the originators of the literary division of the sources was the starting-point for their investigations, must now be viewed as the end-station in which a long history of the interpretation of Israel's early history has finally come to rest" (*op. cit.*, p. 14). Naturally, this position has its consequences. The Wellhausian school held fast in the main to the historical sequence of the events recounted in the Old Testament: the period of slavery in Egypt, Sinai, the journey through the wilderness, entrance into Canaan, and so on. But scholars like Noth, von Rad, and others, regard this as unjustified. As they see it, various

masses or blocks of traditions became connected with one another only in a secondary stage. The traditions regarding the events at Sinai, for instance, are regarded as having originally no connection with the traditions regarding the exodus from Egypt and the entrance to Canaan. What happened at Sinai—there can certainly be little told about what happened there—was not experienced by the tribes that came out of Egypt. And it follows that for the scholars named above, the figure of Moses is much more nebulous, much less historically real, than he was for the old Wellhausians.

Writers like Noth and von Rad are not extreme critics whose views we can ignore; they are well qualified Old Testament scholars wielding great influence especially in Germany but also outside. On the other hand, their views do not reign unchallenged. When one reads the writings, for example, of W. F. Albright, an entirely different impression is gained concerning these matters. With what we may perhaps call "a winning American optimism," Albright proclaims insistently that the latest discoveries strikingly confirm the Israelite traditions. He certainly ascribes much more to the trustworthiness of the Old Testament materials than do Noth and von Rad. But this does not mean that Albright warns simply against the dangers of hypercriticism; he warns also against an over-reliance on tradition (cf. W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, second ed., 1946/48, p. 193). Albright himself describes his point of view as "rational conservatism" (*Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands*, 1955, p. 133). As a matter of fact, Albright accepts fundamentally the methods of Alt and his followers (writers such as Noth and von Rad), but he means only to say that they go much too far (cf. *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, p. 210). For the relationship of the views of Albright and Noth see Albright's review of Noth's *Geschichte Israels* in

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Erasmus, IV, 1951, pp. 490-493. Albright writes there: "Though we are often very uncertain as to exactly how things happened, we may rest assured that the historical facts were generally closer to the Israelite tradition than our modern reconstructions" (p. 492). Nevertheless, the instances in which, according to Albright, the Old Testament is historically untrustworthy are not few.

The complicated questions that are posed for us by Israel's exodus from Egypt and entrance into Canaan are dealt with, for example, in the book *From Joseph to Joshua*, by H. H. Rowley, which appeared in 1950. This volume demonstrates that even a moderate critic such as Rowley regards considerable Old Testament data as untrustworthy. Reading this book will also confirm the impression of the difficulty of harmonizing all the data of the Old Testament and the results of recent excavations.

The Religio-Historical Approach

Archaeological findings have exercised influence on Old Testament scholarship and not in the last place in this way, that they have brought to light again the religions of ancient peoples who lived round about Israel. We must delve into this more closely.

1. When the religions of the surrounding peoples were once more brought to light, scholars were at first struck by remarkable similarities between these religions and that of Israel. For a time, therefore, the tendency prevailed to view everything of value in the Old Testament as having been borrowed from other peoples; in this connection the first thought was of Babel (cf. the "Panbabylonism" of such writers as Hugo Winkler, Friedrich Delitzsch, and others).

These extreme viewpoints did not hold favor very long. But the danger of too much emphasis on Israel's dependence upon its neighbors in religious matters is certainly not obviated once and for all. One need only mention the "myth and ritual school" (S. H. Hooke, I. Engnell) which advances the view that a certain pattern of myths and rituals was widespread in all of the ancient Near East, and that this pattern was also to be seen in Israel. Proceeding from this line of thought, this school advanced to the reconstruction of all sorts of myths and rituals that are supposed to have been common in the life of Israel.

Many scholars, however, entertain sounder ideas. They emphasize that to obtain a good picture of the religion of Israel it is more important to observe in what respects this religion *differed* from other religions, than to be preoccupied with the *similarities* between the religion of Israel and other religions. Also it must be noted that whenever Israel borrowed a notion or a practice from other peoples it acquired a different content than it had originally, because it now functioned in an entirely different totality.

Precisely through the rediscovery of the neighboring religions it has now become more possible to focus attention upon what was unique in Israel's religion. This must be regarded as a distinct gain. Perhaps the warning here

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is not presumptuous, however, that evangelical scholarship should not make too much of an apologetic use of this possibility; that we should not try to prove that the Old Testament brings us the special revelation of the only true God by pointing out the differences between the religion of Israel and the religions of the neighboring nations. That the Old Testament brings us the special revelation of the only true God is something that lies in an entirely different area; it is not something to be proved but can only be seen with the eye of faith. We need mention only this: uniqueness is not alone applicable to the religion of Israel; the religion of Babel, of Egypt, in fact, the religion of every people, is in some respects also unique (cf. on this point my *Israels profetie en "profetie" buiten Israel*, 1955, p. 45 ff.).

2. Archaeological discoveries have prompted many scholars to reject the evolutionistic viewpoints that Wellhausenism had advanced regarding the origin and development of Israel's religion. Even before Israel was established as a nation, it now appears, the surrounding nations had forms of religion which can be characterized as highly developed. Naturally, however, this does not in itself prove that the ancestors of Israel already had a highly developed worship of God. But, to put it mildly, there is certainly no warrant here for the representation that the forerunners of Israel were polydemonistic, fetish worshippers, and so forth.

In these matters also we must be careful not to overestimate the significance of the reversals since the turn of the century. We must not lose sight of the fact that Wellhausen literary analysis of the sources and their dating still carries a great influence. Still widely accepted is the view that the Canaanization of the belief in Yahweh was a necessary stage that indicated a step forward. Many today remain of the opinion that the demand for the centralization of worship (*cultus*) received its authority at the time of Josiah. The most important turnabout in this respect probably lies in this, that the greater attention is now focused on the fact that the essential character of the belief in Yahweh remained the same throughout the centuries. Various authors have thus accepted the idea that the germs of "ethical monotheism" already

were present in the Mosaic religion (cf. H. H. Rowley, *Mose and der Monotheismus*, *Zeitschrift für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, L I X, 1957, pp. 1-2. Albright has gone the farthest in this direction, in that he is willing to designate Moses as a monotheist (*op. cit.*, pp. 196-207). For the rest, the presentation of Albright also has its drawback. Referring to Albright's expression, "The period between 1350 and 1250 B.C. was ideally suited to give birth to monotheism," H. H. Rowley remarks, rightly, "This is to present biblical monotheism not as something attained by divine revelation to Moses and his successors, but as something that belonged to the *Zeitgeist* of the age of Moses" (*Journal of Semitic Studies*, II, 1957, p. 428; in a review of W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process*, second ed., with a new Introduction, 1957).

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The "Theological" Approach to the Old Testament

Of the various changes or reversals in Old Testament scholarship, the most important of all is perhaps this, that at the present time much more attention is again being paid to what is generally designated as "the theology of the Old Testament." A half century ago many scholars regarded the study of the Old Testament as only a narrower department of the more general study of the religions; the purpose was to uncover the development of Israel's religion. Today many see that alongside this or in its place—and this is a very important difference!—the purpose of such study is to answer these questions: What is the message of the Old Testament? How are we to understand the relationship between the Old and New Testaments? What is the meaning of the Old Testament for modern man?

Earlier we intimated, as a possible cause of these changes in viewpoint, the strengthening of the consciousness that man has need of a message from God. One factor that has brought about these changes is certainly this, that the exposition of a "theology of the Old Testament" is now regarded as a more fruitful prospect because a greater fundamental unity has been discovered in the Old Testament. In other words, a greater realization now obtains that the distinguishing characteristics of Israel's religion have remained the same throughout the Centuries. This is not the place to treat this increased attention to the "theological" approach to the Old Testament more fully, since we are here concerned, not with changes in Old Testament scholarship in general, but with the reversals in Old Testament criticism. But it is important to take cognizance of this new approach, with its growing awareness that, while Old Testament criticism has a definite value, it cannot, however, be allowed the last word in Old Testament study.

One thing is regrettable in this respect. Many quarters are inquiring into the message of the Old Testament. The answer to this question, admittedly, cannot be given by way of an "objective unprejudiced science." But when literary or historical questions are involved, scholars seem to think they can go to work with an objective, scientific method; in other words, in these respects it seems that the Old Testament must be handled as any other book. It is difficult to deny that here there lies an inconsistency. C. A. Keller recently has posed the demand that in order to come to a proper historical understanding of the events of Moses' time, we must take reckoning of the personal intervention of Yahweh, of which the sources bear witness, and that we must work out a scholarly historical method that takes account of this intervention (cf. C. A. Keller, "Von Stand and Aufgabe der Moseforschung," *Theologische Zeitschrift*, XIII, 1957, pp. 430-441; esp. 438-441). It is sincerely to be hoped that such a challenge will be accepted.

In this connection a reference in greater detail to the previously mentioned work of G. von Rad (*Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Vol. I) is relevant. Von Rad writes as follows: "The object with which theology occupies itself

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is not the spiritual-religious world of Israel and its psychological situation, also not its realm of faith... but only that what Israel itself directly has professed concerning Yahweh" (pp. 111 ff.). And he follows with the statement that the witnesses of the Old Testament "limit themselves to presenting the relationship of Yahweh to Israel and to the world really only in one way, namely, as a *continued divine working in history* (italics mine).

From this approach von Rad writes a "Theology of the Old Testament" that differs fundamentally from what usually appears under this title. This is a very significant attempt which we cannot now discuss further. But through this viewpoint von Rad necessarily directly confronts the question of the historicity of the Old Testament narratives. He speaks of this repeatedly (cf. pp. 116 f., 300 ff., 329 f.). The clearest answer he gives to this question is in his commentary on Genesis (*Das erste Buch Mose*, I, third ed. [A T D], 1953, pp. 22 ff.). There he denies that the narratives of Genesis are no more than wordings of religious truths of universal significance, that the representation of the godliness of the patriarchs constitutes their main purpose, and he argues that these narratives have the character of what happened only once-for-all in the history of salvation. But they are not historical in the strict sense; the experiences of the community in the course of centuries are condensed or synthesized in these narratives. The final conclusion that von Rad gives to the question is unsatisfactory, but that the question of historicity is raised anew can perhaps be taken as an encouraging sign.

V. CURRENT POSITION OF ORTHODOX SCHOLARSHIP

What, in view of all these reversals in Old Testament criticism, is the contemporary position of orthodox Old Testament scholarship? By "orthodox Christians" I mean in this connection those who desire to bow before the divine authority of the Bible and who realize that their views with regard to questions of literary-historical criticism must be dominated and characterized by their acceptance of the divine authority of the Bible. Is the position of orthodox Old Testament scholarship easier than it was a half century ago? This question cannot be met by a direct answer. In some respects its position has become more encouraging. The tone of the critical scholars is repeatedly less self-assured than it was at the turn of the century. Orthodox scholars too will again and again be able to gain an advantage from new data and new methods. Interchange is certainly possible, especially in the realm of Old Testament theology. An orthodox Christian can often learn a great deal from and through the books of critical scholars in the field of Old Testament theology, even though he cannot agree with the literary-historical criticism that underlies such books, and although his disagreement is often strongly felt.

Yet the orthodox Old Testament scholar still finds himself in as much of an isolated position as at the end of the nineteenth century. In all likelihood

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we must say that he finds himself more isolated than ever before. One thinks here about the position of the Roman Catholics; at the beginning of the century the critics were being officially opposed, but today many Roman Catholic authors are indulging in Biblical criticism and this meets with more or less official approval. (While it is impossible to give further details here regarding the position of the Roman Catholics, the reader is referred to an informative work, *Introduction à la Bible*, I, edited by A. Robert and A. Feuillet, 1957. So also we shall not survey the newly unfolding Jewish Old Testament scholarship. Orthodox Christian Old Testament students will do well to follow attentively the development of Jewish Old Testament studies; often the Jewish scholars surpass critical Christian scholars in their regard for the traditions contained in the Old Testament.)

Perhaps the situation can be stated in this manner: At the beginning of this century it was clearer than now that criticism of the Old Testament contained a danger for the faith of the Church of all ages, especially because of the critics' evolutionary starting-point. Due to the strong constructionist character that the critical position then carried, it was also easier—at least so it appears to us now!—to oppose it; today the methods of the critics are much more refined and they work with a far greater amount of factual material.

At any rate, orthodox Old Testament scholarship, as in the past, will have to go forward along its own path, without allowing its way to be prescribed by Old Testament criticism, neither by the recent reversals in this field. That many difficult questions face it need not be concealed. Two dangers especially are present. The first is that it may fall short in its regard for the authority of God's Word. But another danger is that orthodox Old Testament scholarship exists in too great a degree on the reaction against Old Testament criticism. Even though the critic often presents analysis of the books of the Bible in an unacceptable manner, this does not necessarily mean that every analysis thereof must be rejected. There is also the possibility that one is too hesitant in acknowledging the parallelisms that exist between the Old Testament and the religions of the peoples that surrounded Israel.

We may ask whether the new data and the new methods already discovered, and those still to come, will affect Critical Old Testament scholarship in such a way as to carry it still farther from the critical positions of 1900. This possibility exists, but no one can predict whether this will make the position of the orthodox Old Testament student easier.

May God give us, in the present and in the days to come, men who will take up the study of the Old Testament both in believing subjection to God's Word and in keeping with the new challenges which each changing period of history imposes on this enterprise of scholarship.

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