

perspective in the religious history of mankind. But, of late, the conviction has been growing that historical understanding divorced from a commitment to belief is unproductive of true insight when religious conceptions are concerned. Basically, the crisis is one of attitude. Historical interpretation was allied with the optimistic belief in mankind's progress toward a better social order and a firm faith in the ability of human reason to discover and apply general principles for successful living. The new orthodoxy, taking its point of departure from the appalling fact of unreason in human behavior which the political and social turmoil of a quarter century has revealed, emphasizes the necessity of going back to the eternal verities for the solution of mankind's problems. The revival of traditional dogmas is part of the reaction to conservative ways of thinking in an age which has found easy optimism and unrealistic idealism wanting in many respects.

In these circumstances, the main question is whether the new orthodoxy represents the path forward out of the difficulties it professes to find in the exegesis of the past century; or whether it is a reaction that, by concentrating entirely upon theological exegesis, may obscure the real gains of the historical approach to the interpretation of the Bible. If the former, it is a summons to scholarship to re-examine the bases of biblical research, to admit the error or the incompleteness of its previous conclusions, and to compensate for any inadequacy in its approach. If the latter, it is a challenge to modern exegesis to justify its techniques of investigation and to maintain the line of its advance toward fuller understanding by building on the foundations already laid.

I

The Critical Approach to the Old Testament

The Rise of the Critical Spirit in Biblical Exegesis

Until the latter part of the nineteenth century, biblical studies had usually taken the form of theological exegesis. The prevailing view was that the Bible contained a timeless, universal, and final teaching which was fundamentally the same in all the various books. "Biblical Theology" was therefore mostly a matter of presenting the teachings of the Bible in systematic form. But, since the theologian tended to equate the dogmas of orthodoxy with the teachings of the Bible, his interpretation of Scripture was a highly subjective one. He usually found in the sacred writings what he sought there, and what he sought was determined by his theological prepossessions. The results frequently obscured the real meaning of the passages he expounded. Even the doctrine of divine inspiration did not always persuade the theologian to listen to what the "word of God" might actually be saying. He heard in it the echo of other voices to which his ear had long been trained.

It required an entirely different approach to the Bible to expound it according to its original intention and meaning—a different conception of the nature of the Bible which would permit more objective principles of exposition. Such a new conception became possible when the tendency generated by humanistic studies to regard all ancient literature as the product of human culture had removed the old distinction between sacred and profane writings. All were expressions, in varying degrees of profundity, of mankind's most characteristic thoughts and aspirations.

The Bible, therefore, among liberal scholars, came to be regarded as a body of religious literature amenable to study and appraisal by the same principles of scholarly research as were applied to any other ancient book. These principles, known as the "higher criticism," which came to dominate biblical studies in the second half of the nineteenth century, did not themselves produce an exposition of the meaning of the biblical literature; they were a necessary preliminary to the successful accomplishment of that end. The prerequisite was an analysis of the Bible by objective literary and historical methods for the purpose of determining the internal structure of the individual books, the actual authorship of the various parts, and the historical circumstances under which they were produced. The goal of such an analysis was to reconstruct the historical development of the biblical literature. Its ultimate objective, however, was to gain an understanding of the spiritual history recorded in the documents. For through the latter, and only through the latter, did the critics believe they could recover the real meaning of the literature.

This objective required the avoidance of any preconceived notion regarding the nature of "sacred history," for the documents must be allowed to tell their own story. Sometimes, it is true, interpretation of the data was still affected by one or another theological viewpoint, such as the doctrine that the Old Testament was but the preparation for the New. But, at its best, the higher criticism refused to be fettered by traditional views. It tried to make a place in biblical studies for that sort of free inquiry which had proved fruitful in other historical disciplines. Freedom of inquiry was, after all, the essence of the Protestant tradition, however much it had been hedged about by theological controversy in the centuries after Luther. Given its opportunity in the nineteenth century by the rise of the scientific spirit, it came to fruition in the liberal Protestant approach to the biblical literature.

The critics soon found that the facts did not permit that con-

ception of the Old Testament which had been usual up to that time. Instead of a unified body of literature which presented a single history unfolding according to the divine plan, they found a rich and manifold literature which expressed a number of different religious viewpoints, each reflecting the conceptions of a particular age. There were varying depths of religious insight and an apparent history of growth in understanding of the basic conceptions of Old Testament religion. The critics, therefore, regarded their task as an investigation into the actual historical development implied in the documents. They did not deny that the Old Testament generally taught a specific doctrine of divine control over human history. But they insisted that, if the true significance of the Old Testament as an expression of human religious aspiration was to be comprehended, they must go behind the official theology and search out the actual facts of religious development as objectively as possible.

No historian of the nineteenth century, trained in the methods of scientific research, undertook to expound a historical development without first examining the available written sources critically. The initial task of the higher critics, accordingly, was a purely technical one: the careful analysis of the composition of the books of the Old Testament. Even in the eighteenth century, J. G. Eichhorn, "the father of Old Testament criticism," had seen clearly that, before criticism could proceed with its task of investigating the historical circumstances under which the writings had been produced, the problem of defining the textual limits and the special characteristics of the underlying sources must be solved.¹ It had long been suspected, but could not be proved before the rise of scientific methods of literary analysis, that the Pentateuch was really a composite work, in spite of the tradition of its unity, and that it contained various sources of diverse age and origin. A

¹ On Eichhorn, see Thomas Kelly Cheyne, *Founders of Old Testament Criticism* (London, 1893), pp. 21-26.

clue to the identification of such sources had been discovered as early as 1753 by Jean Astruc, who used the fact that two different names for God (Elohim and Yahweh) occurred in the book of Genesis as a means of distinguishing two interwoven narratives running through the book.² Then Eichhorn discovered additional criteria for defining and describing these narrative documents in repetitions and duplicate stories, diversities of style, and characteristic words and phrases peculiar to one or the other of the documents. It was the task of his successors in the nineteenth century to follow these parallel lines of narrative beyond the book of Genesis by applying the same criteria of identification to the rest of the Pentateuch.

At first, it seemed to the critics that the "Elohistic narrative" was the most comprehensive document in the Pentateuch, for it included the bulk of the legal material in the middle books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Since its narrative portions seemed to provide a chronological framework for the whole, the early critics called it the Foundation Document; and, because of the numerous archaisms in its vocabulary, they considered it the oldest of the sources of the Pentateuch.³ The "Yahwistic narrative" was, in their view, a later supplementary addition; and the Book of Deuteronomy—or its original legal nucleus (chaps. 12-26), which had already been identified by W. M. L. De Wette⁴ with the "Book of the Law" found in the Temple during the reign of Josiah—was a still later addition. But Hermann Hupfeld in 1853 showed that the Foundation Document was really the work of two writers who had used the name Elohim for the deity. He accordingly divided

it into a separate Elohistic narrative and an extensive "Priestly Document."⁵ A dozen years later, K. H. Graf demonstrated that the Foundation or Priestly Document was not the most ancient but the latest of the sources of the Pentateuch.⁶

Thus, as the result of a century of critical study, four major documents had been identified in the Pentateuch and their relative sequence had been determined. Each document had an individual character, both in contents and in general point of view; and, although they had been skilfully interwoven, their special characteristics made it possible, for the most part, to trace the extent of each through the books of the Pentateuch. The earliest was the Yahwistic Document (to which the symbol J was assigned, being the first letter of the divine name which was its characteristic feature). It was followed soon after by the Elohistic Document (E). Both were narrative histories with some legal material embedded in them. They had a charming literary style and displayed great skill in the portrayal of human nature. These two documents were thought to have been composed in the early monarchical period, probably in the ninth and eighth centuries respectively. The book of Deuteronomy (D), which gave a narrative framework to the "Book of the Law" promulgated by Josiah in the seventh century, was primarily a law code based on prophetic principles. The Priestly Document (P), a universal history and extensive legal code, was chiefly concerned with matters of cultus and was dominated by the priestly interest in prescribing the correct ritual for each ceremonial occasion. In contrast to the first two documents, it had a precise and formal style, was given to stereotyped expressions, and lacked human interest. K. H. Graf assigned it to the postexilic age and connected it with the promulgation of "the Law" by Ezra in the fifth century.

² See Adolphe Lods, "Astruc et la critique de son temps," *RHPR*, IV (1924) 109-39, 201-37.

³ The theory, first suggested by J. J. Stähelin in his *Kritische Untersuchungen über die Genesis* (Basel, 1830), was fully elaborated in his *Kritische Untersuchungen über den Pentateuch* (Berlin, 1843). The name Foundation Document was proposed by J. C. F. Tuch in his *Kommentar über die Genesis* (Halle, 1838).

⁴ In his doctoral dissertation (1805), reprinted in his *Opuscula* (Berlin, 1833).

⁵ *Die Quellen der Genesis und die Art ihrer Zusammensetzung* (Berlin, 1853).

⁶ *Die geschichtlichen Bücher des Alten Testaments: Zwei historisch-kritische Untersuchungen* (Leipzig, 1865).

The process whereby these four documents were combined to form the Pentateuch was described in terms of successive "redactors" (editors) of the original documents. A "prophetic redactor" first combined the two old narrative histories, even before the appearance of Deuteronomy, and did it so successfully that critical analysis was not always able to distinguish the parts. Many scholars therefore spoke of the combined work as a single source document (JE). It reflected the "prophetic" point of view regarding the nation's history; that is, it taught there was a causal relationship between the prosperity or misfortunes of the people and their righteousness or sinfulness. This greater history underwent revision when the book of Deuteronomy was appended to it, to make it conform to the teachings of the latter. Traces of the "Deuteronomist redactor" could be found throughout the whole, in characteristic turns of phrasing or the addition of "Deuteronomic" ideas. Finally, the Pentateuch itself was created by the combination of this composite work with the great Priestly Document, the latter supplying a framework for the whole. A final revision was made in harmony with its spirit and its leading conceptions by the "priestly redactor."

The attempt to date the various documents of the Pentateuch had taken the critics beyond literary criticism into the field of historical criticism, their second task as scientific historians. In this type of research, which required the comparison of the data of the documents with the facts of history (as revealed by the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament), the critics achieved equally illuminating results. The relative sequence in which the documents had been composed had already been established by comparing the legal material of each document with that of the others. There were perceptible differences in their cultic regulations which could be arranged in a logical sequence showing the progressive development of cultic practice. Now the further comparison of these implied stages of ritual development with the

facts of actual cultic practice in Israel's history made it possible to determine the period of religious development to which each corresponded. W. M. L. De Wette, whose researches frequently anticipated the final conclusions of the higher critics, had demonstrated, by such a comparison with reference to the ritual regulations of the Levitical legislation,⁷ that these laws could neither have been promulgated in the age of Moses nor have been the product of the early monarchical period. For the historical books showed that the most important regulations were either unknown or ignored in the early days of Israel's history. Wilhelm Vatke next argued that the elaborate ritual system of the Levitical legislation must have been the product of a long process of development.⁸ Basing his investigation on Hegelian theories regarding the growth of religious institutions, he concluded that Israel's religion had progressed through three stages of development, to which there had apparently been three corresponding stages of ritual legislation. There was, first of all, the age of primitive worship portrayed in the books of Samuel and Kings and reflected in the Yahwistic and Elohist documents; then the age of ethical consciousness initiated by the prophets, to which the Deuteronomic Code corresponded; and finally the age of the more external, ceremonial religion represented by the Levitical legislation.

The final proof that the Levitical legislation of the Priestly Code was actually the latest stage of cultic regulation was provided by K. H. Graf, as already indicated. His conclusion, drawn from the apparent history of ritual development, was supported a few years later by Bernhard Duhm's argument for a parallel development of religious ideas.⁹ Duhm demonstrated that the teachings

⁷ *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (2 vols., Halle, 1806-07).

⁸ *Die biblische Theologie wissenschaftlich dargestellt: Die Religion des Alten Testaments nach den kanonischen Büchern entwickelt* (Berlin, 1835). On Vatke, see Otto Pfleiderer, *The Development of Theology in Germany since Kant* (London, 1890), pp. 252-56.

⁹ *Die Theologie der Propheten als Grundlage für die innere Entwicklungsgeschichte der israelitischen Religion* (Bonn, 1875).

of the prophets did not presuppose the ceremonial conceptions of the Priestly Code, but were themselves presupposed by both the Deuteronomic and the priestly legislation. Moreover, while the Deuteronomic law drew most of its fundamental conceptions from the prophets, it drew none from the priestly legislation. The conclusion was evident that the prophets preceded Deuteronomy, while the Priestly Code followed both.

The "Grafian hypothesis" that the Levitical law was the product of the postexilic age became the most significant conclusion of historical criticism. For it affected a great deal more than the date of the Priestly Code; it necessitated a radical revision of the traditional view of Israel's religious history. The transfer of the "Mosaic law" from the beginning to the end of the history did away with all theories based on the supposition that the religious institutions of the Levitical legislation were characteristic of the age of Moses. With these elaborate institutions shifted to the end, the history of Israel's religion no longer appeared as a continual struggle to maintain an ideal system established at the beginning; instead, it took on the character of gradual growth from the simple to the complex, with the Levitical institutions as the climax of the whole development. This new interpretation made the history more rational and comprehensible than the confusing sequence of events resulting from the traditional dating. The latter had separated the promulgation of the "Mosaic law" from the time of its effective influence on the institutions of the people by a long period in which its prescriptions were apparently unknown and the existing religious institutions were primitive by comparison. The evolutionary conception proved of great value in ordering and explaining various phenomena of this sort which had puzzled earlier scholars. Now the characteristic ideas and institutions of each age could be understood as parts of the continuous process of development through which Israel's religion had gone.

The first attempt to describe the successive stages of Israel's

religious development in line with the new chronological arrangement of the sources was Abraham Kuenen's history of the religion of Israel.¹⁰ Like Vatke, he distinguished three successive forms of the religion: the primitive religion of popular worship, the spiritual religion of the prophets, and the ritualistic religion of the Law. But, unlike Vatke, who had used Hegelian philosophy and intuitive insight to trace the evolution of the religion, Kuenen made his reconstruction of the historical process strictly on the basis of a careful analysis and criticism of the sources. He blunted the point of some of the opposition to the "Grafian hypothesis" from conservative scholars, by demonstrating that the postexilic origin of the Priestly Code did not imply the same late date for all of its contents. There were among its laws some regulations covering much older practices, built into a ritual system which was itself late.¹¹ With this clarification, the chronological order of documents established by historical criticism became the framework for a persuasive reconstruction of the religious history of Israel.

The conception of historical development was the chief contribution of the liberal critics to the exegesis of the Old Testament. It is true, of course, that this conception did not grow merely from an objective reading of the sources. In a larger sense, it was a reflection of the intellectual temper of the times. The genetic conception of Old Testament history fitted in with the evolutionary principle of interpretation prevailing in contemporary science and philosophy. In the natural sciences, the influence of Darwin had made the theory of evolution the predominant hypothesis affecting research. In the historical sciences and in the areas of religious and philosophical thought, the evolutionary concept had begun to exercise a powerful influence after Hegel had substituted the notion of "becoming" for the idea of "being." He had arrived at the notion

¹⁰ *De Godsdienst van Israël* (2 vols., Haarlem, 1869-70); English translation: *The Religion of Israel to the Fall of the Jewish State* (3 vols., London, 1874-75).

¹¹ See, *ibid.* (English trans.), II, 252-58.

by *a priori* reasoning without testing it by scientific application to observable fact, but Hegel was none the less the intellectual progenitor of the modern point of view. In every department of historical investigation the conception of development was being used to explain the history of man's thought, his institutions, and even his religious faiths. It was not strange that the same principle should be applied to the explanation of Old Testament history. In every age exegesis has conformed to the thought forms of the time, and in the latter half of the nineteenth century thought was dominated by the scientific method and an evolutionary view of history.

This is not to say that the work of a liberal critic was no more objective than that of a conservative theologian. There is a great difference between a dogma assumed to be true from the start and a hypothesis to be tested in the light of the facts. The liberal critics would have been the first to agree that the evolutionary view of Old Testament history could be maintained only as the result, not the presupposition, of a critical examination of the relevant evidence. But the conception of historical development seemed to them an inevitable deduction from the evidence of successive changes in the religious institutions of Israel. The only historical reconstruction possible on the basis of the sources was one which showed an evolutionary growth.

As a result, then, of the liberal Protestant approach, the task of Old Testament scholarship was to apply the current rules of scientific criticism to the Old Testament records and to uncover the line of evolution in the religious history of Israel. By the beginning of the twentieth century, theological exegesis as the paramount concern of biblical scholarship had been supplanted by the scientific-historical conception of the scholar's task.

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More limited in scope but also useful are: Stanley A. Cook, "Notes on Old Testament History, VII: Literary and Historical Criticism," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, O.S. XIX (1906-07), 342-62; idem, "The Present Stage in Old Testament Research," in H. B. Swete (ed.), *Essays on Some Biblical Questions of the Day* (London, 1909), pp. 53-89; Leroy Waterman, "A Half-Century of Biblical and Semitic Investigation," *AJSL*, XXXII (1915-16), 219-29; D. C. Simpson, *Pentateuchal Criticism* (London, 1914; rev. ed., 1924).

A systematic and detailed justification of the conclusions arrived at by literary and historical criticism was presented by Abraham Kuenen in the second edition of his *Historisch-kritisch Onderzoek . . . van den Boeken des ouden Verbonds* (3 vols., Leiden, 1885-93); German translation: *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in die Bücher des Alten Testaments* (3 vols., Leipzig, 1887-94); English translation (of Part I only) by Philip H. Wicksteed: *An Historico-critical Inquiry into the Origin and Composition of the Hexateuch* (London, 1886). See also Alexandre Westphal, *Les sources du Pentateuque* (2 vols., Paris, 1888-92); Charles A. Briggs, *The Higher Criticism of the Hexateuch* (rev. ed., New York, 1897); J. Estlin Carpenter and G. Harford-Battersby, *The Hexateuch* (2 vols., London, 1900).

The Position of Julius Wellhausen in the History of Criticism

The most cogent presentation of the critical theory of the origin and composition of the Pentateuchal documents and the best exposition of those conclusions which seemed to grow logically out of the critical approach to Old Testament religious history were to be found in the work of Julius Wellhausen. His position in Old Testament criticism is somewhat analogous to that of Darwin in the intellectual history of modern times. The central idea which he made common property had already been broached by others before him, but he gave the theory its classic formulation and applied

it with assurance to a wide range of data, assembled in a comprehensive synthesis and unified by a dominant theme. What was new and original in Wellhausen's presentation was the way in which he combined the various lines of argument developed by his predecessors and drew the conclusions toward which the literary and historical criticism of a century had been tending.

In a volume which came to be recognized as the most important contribution to Old Testament criticism of the nineteenth century,¹² Wellhausen gave a convincing demonstration that the Mosaic legislation of the Pentateuch was not the starting point of Israel's religious institutions but the fundamental law of the Jewish community after the Exile. By combining Graf's method of arranging the ritual laws in logical sequence with Vatke's program for studying the religious institutions of successive historical periods, he was able to show not only that there was an intimate connection between the succession of the law codes and the evolution of religious practices, but also that these parallel developments were intelligible only in the sequence which placed the Priestly Code and the priestly institutions at the end. Thus Wellhausen both confirmed the "Grafian hypothesis" and erected thereon a detailed history of the cultus, which worked the multifarious data into a coherent and rational scheme. It disclosed the progressive development which had taken place from simple observances of a spontaneous and natural character, through the reforms in practice initiated by the prophets, to the predominance of ceremonial and priestly elements.

In a subsequent account of the history of Israel,¹³ Wellhausen described more fully how the results of criticism affected the interpretation of Old Testament religious history. His exposition was a prime example of the liberal approach to the exegesis of the Old

¹² *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (Berlin, 1883); English translation: *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburgh, 1885).

¹³ *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* (Berlin, 1894; 3d ed., 1897).

Testament. Wellhausen omitted the theological interpretation entirely and emphasized the factor of historical causation instead. He consciously based his exposition on the evolutionary view of history. The fact that he also displayed an extensive knowledge of the sources and critical acumen in their interpretation lent persuasiveness to his conclusions. Among his followers, Wellhausen's reconstruction of the religious history of Israel became the standard interpretation. It inspired and served as the model for a number of critical histories of Old Testament religion during the next generation.¹⁴

As Wellhausen reconstructed it, the history of Israel's religion began with the Exodus, not with the patriarchs. From the evolutionary point of view, which assumed that development invariably took place from lower to higher forms, it was inconceivable that the nomadic ancestors of the Israelites could have held the lofty, monotheistic conceptions ascribed to Abraham in the patriarchal narratives; and, from the critical view, these narratives were untrustworthy sources for religious history before the Exodus, since they reflected the conceptions of the later age in which they were written. "We can begin the history of the religion," said Wellhausen, "only with the history of the people, that is, with Moses at the earliest."¹⁵ It was Moses who had created the people from a group of loosely related tribes by giving them a community of interests for the first time and a common religion centered around the figure of a national deity. The religion which they took with them into the promised land was not monotheism, for the existence of the gods of other nations was not denied. Nor had it yet outgrown some of the primitive religious conceptions which the Hebrews had inherited from their nomadic background. But it was a genuine type of religion, toward which Wellhausen felt

¹⁴ See the Bibliographical Note at the end of this section.

¹⁵ "Israelitisch-jüdische Religion," in Paul Hinneberg (ed.), *Die Kultur der Gegenwart*, Div. I, Vol. IV, Part I (Berlin, 1906), p. 7. Cf. Wellhausen's *Prolegomena* (Berlin, 1883), pp. 363-65.

quite sympathetic. He portrayed its ritual acts as a natural expression of religious feeling and tried to show how worship grew out of life, being conducted at the local shrines in intimate connection with the activities of the people.¹⁶ This interpretation reflected the humanistic appreciation of religion first expressed by Herder in the eighteenth century.

Following the evolutionary mode of interpretation, Wellhausen proceeded to show how the religion developed into a more complex form, as the Israelites adopted various cultic practices from the Canaanites among whom they had settled. But the significant development of the second period of their religious history was the transformation of the simple, monolatrous religion of the early Israelites into strict monotheism. This was the work of the prophets. In the course of their polemic against the way in which ritual worship developed, they "created" the transcendent, divine figure of God and transformed his relationship to man from a national into an ethical one. The truly formative power in the religion of Israel was not the Mosaic law, as traditionally assumed, but the teaching of the prophets. In Wellhausen's view, it represented the real climax of the whole development.¹⁷

Paradoxically, it was the prophets, according to Wellhausen, who introduced into Israel's religion the concept of law which later transformed their spiritual point of view into a legalistic preoccupation with the ritual forms of worship. So emphatically were they impressed by the universal significance of God's justice as the supreme law of the whole world that they brought the principle of conformity to it into the very center of their thinking and made it the fundamental basis of religion. They made righteousness (justice) the basic requirement of religious ethics, hoping thereby to transform the social order of the day. But, while the principle was embodied in the Decalogue and Deuteronomy and inspired the

¹⁶ See *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* (3d ed., 1897), chap. II.

¹⁷ See, *ibid.*, chaps. VII and IX.

reformation under Josiah, the permanent influence of the prophets was not so much in social reform as in the region of the cultus. The prophetic conception of monotheism led to the centralization of the cultus at a single shrine, the temple in Jerusalem; and this was the beginning of a process of ritual development that reached its climax in the elaborate cultus of the Priestly Code.¹⁸

Wellhausen felt that this ritual development resulted in a type of worship which contrasted greatly with the spontaneous and natural worship of the early period. "With the appearance of the Law the old freedom came to an end, not only in the region of the cultus . . . but also in the realm of the religious spirit."¹⁹ For, when the cultus became the subject of detailed legislation, worship was deprived of its spontaneity, by being reduced to a set of prescribed religious exercises. Moreover, since the centralization of the cultus gave a strong impetus to the creation of a hierocracy, the reform of the social order contemplated by the prophets ended instead in the transformation of the nation into an ecclesiastical state. "There arose that artificial product, the holy constitution of Judaism."²⁰ However, the formalized institutions of Judaism formed a protective shell for the kernel of ethical monotheism that preserved it in a world not yet ready to accept it.²¹

Thus, in contrast to old-fashioned summaries of Old Testament history, Wellhausen offered a reconstruction. Its characteristic feature was that less attention was paid to the pre-Mosaic period and a greater emphasis was placed on the importance of the prophets. This shift in emphasis was accompanied by a re-interpretation of the restoration of Judaism after the exile. The most striking feature of Wellhausen's interpretation was the sharp contrast that he drew between the formalized wor-

¹⁸ See, *ibid.*, pp. 111-12, 131-32.

¹⁹ *Prolegomena* (Berlin, 1883), p. 427.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 447.

²¹ In general, see *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* (3d ed., 1897), chap. XIII.

ship of postexilic Judaism and the vital, natural religion of the early Israelites. He portrayed two different spiritual climates in the respective periods and set them in opposition to each other. "In Hebrew antiquity worship was natural; it was the expression of life."²² In the later period, the cultus "became an end in itself, set apart in its own sphere," with the result that "the old practices were denatured and rendered lifeless."²³ The force with which Wellhausen felt the contrast was the result of his lively appreciation of the wide difference between the "natural" world which he found in the historical and prophetic books and the "holy" community described in the Priestly Document. The superiority of the former was the dominant theme of his exposition.²⁴ He preferred the "primitive" society of the Israelites because he found it to be a genuinely integrated world in which religion was the very essence of life. The world of postexilic Judaism, on the other hand, was divorced from reality because it separated the ceremonial expression of religion from secular life. Its dominant tendency was "legalism." Wellhausen regarded the increasing complexity of the ritual law as exemplifying a certain decay in the original vitality of Israel's religion. In place of religious individualism, which once had flourished free of institutional restrictions, the principle of conformity had become the basis of the socioreligious system.

In Wellhausen the higher criticism had arrived at the point of expounding the meaning of Old Testament history. All the preceding work of criticism, with the exception of Vatke's, had been no more than the preparation of the technical groundwork. Wellhausen built upon it an imposing structure of interpretation. How much his interpretation differed from the theological exegesis of the past is obvious. It combined a careful scrutiny of the religious

²² *Prolegomena* (Berlin, 1883), p. 80.

²³ *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* (3d ed., 1897), p. 182; *Prolegomena* (Berlin, 1883), p. 185.

²⁴ See, especially, *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* (3d ed., 1897), pp. 16-30; *Prolegomena* (Berlin, 1883), pp. 436-37.

data with a genuine feeling for their significance in human history. Taken as a whole, his critical and historical work answered the needs of the times so completely that his conclusions were widely accepted. He had evolved a view of Old Testament history, covering literature, religion, and law, which accounted for most of the facts and answered most of the problems brought forth by the higher criticism. His relatively simple scheme of three major periods in Old Testament history provided the framework into which all else fitted easily. No other system of interpretation has been suggested since his time as comprehensive in its scope or as satisfactory in its solutions, even though his judgment of postexilic Judaism has rendered his historical reconstruction somewhat less than satisfactory to those of a later generation who do not share his ruling conceptions.

If a distinction is made between the results of Wellhausen's critical study of the Old Testament and his characteristic interpretation of the religious history, much of value remains from his work. His dominant theme had no necessary connection with the analysis of the Pentateuch into its major sources or the consequent division of Old Testament history into its major periods. These have been the common property of scholarship ever since, for they were achieved by scientific methods of literary and historical criticism. The real importance of Wellhausen in the history of criticism lies not in his exegetical conclusions but in the critical methods by which he worked. He stands as "the symbol of nineteenth century criticism" chiefly because, in elaborating the theory of the documents and the succession of periods in Old Testament history, he assembled the relevant facts in that objective way which is characteristic of the critical spirit at its best. Wellhausen did not speak the last word on Old Testament exegesis, but he had perfected the method of research initiated by Eichhorn.

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The Successors of Wellhausen in Old Testament Criticism

Wellhausen believed that he had succeeded so well in establishing the value of the critical method in Old Testament studies that he devoted no more attention to the history of Israel's religion but turned to the books of the New Testament instead, in order to apply the same critical method to the problem of the Synoptic

Gospels—a problem as complex and challenging as that of the Pentateuch had been.

But the critical spirit did not rest content with past achievements. Wellhausen's followers continued to dig for facts in the Old Testament field, using his methods and working within the framework of his critical conclusions. His influence on younger scholars was profound and far-reaching. For a full generation he dominated Old Testament scholarship not only in his own country but in France, England, and America.²⁵ All the more important histories of Israel, of Hebrew literature, and of Old Testament religion, as well as a host of commentaries and introductions, were based more or less directly on the Wellhausen system of Old Testament criticism. The commentaries, especially, in the series edited by Wilhelm Nowack and Karl Marti,²⁶ and in the *International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, represented the liberal Protestant type of exegesis at its best; neither theological nor homiletical in their emphasis, they were strictly critical and historical.

Although Wellhausen's influence was international, Germany remained the chief center of biblical studies, especially with reference to the Old Testament; and the problem of the Pentateuch which had dominated all research in that field continued to be the chief subject of investigation. The methods of critical research had been firmly established, but the results of the documentary analysis were not universally agreed upon. Even the most convinced advocates of the theory of documents sought to pursue the literary analysis still further, feeling that it had not been carried out in sufficient detail, particularly with reference to the assignment of

²⁵ See Antonin Causse, "Notes sur le développement des études d'Ancien Testament en France . . . depuis un demi-siècle," *RHPR*, XX (1940), 47-76; H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Contribution of Great Britain to Old Testament Study," *Expository Times*, XLI (1929-30), 246-50; J. M. Powis Smith, "The Contribution of the United States to Old Testament Scholarship," *ibid.*, pp. 169-71.

²⁶ *Handkommentar zum Alten Testament*, edited by Wilhelm Nowack (15 vols., Göttingen, 1892-1903); *Kurzer Handkommentar zum Alten Testament*, edited by Karl Marti (20 vols., Freiburg, 1897-1904).

verses to the J and E documents. Confining themselves more strictly to the technical problems than Wellhausen had done, the younger members of the Wellhausen school made new analyses of the scope and structure of the major documents, reconsidered the number of source documents, and advanced new hypotheses concerning the literary history of the Pentateuch.

The most important change made in the critical theory after Wellhausen had left the field resulted from the reconsideration of the scope and structure of the chief sources. It had usually been assumed that each of the major documents was a unified literary work, produced in answer to the needs of a particular time. Now, after recalling certain hints and suggestions of earlier critics, Wellhausen's successors re-examined the possibility that each of the documents had acquired its final form by a process of accretion. On the basis of internal evidence, it had been clear even to Wellhausen that neither J nor E could be regarded as the work of a single author. Each contained a number of obviously older elements, originally independent, which had been taken up into the body of the document; each had apparently been supplemented from time to time with later historical material; and each had undergone a certain amount of editorial revision in an effort to co-ordinate and harmonize the various elements in the style of the original. The additional materials were so extensive that it was better to regard the documents as products of literary or religious schools than as the work of individual authors. Much attention was now given to the sources behind the documents and the editorial processes by which they had been combined to make the present texts.²⁷

The consequent tendency of criticism was to cut the materials of the Pentateuch ever finer. Deuteronomy, when subjected to new analysis, was found to contain some fragments of older legis-

²⁷ The chief works of the Wellhausen school along this line included Heinrich Holzinger's *Einleitung in den Hexateuch* (Freiburg, 1893), Rudolf Smend's *Die Erzählung des Hexateuch auf ihre Quellen untersucht* (Berlin, 1912), and Wilhelm Eichrodt's *Die Quellen der Genesis von neuem untersucht* (Giessen, 1916).

lation and to show traces of several stages of redaction.²⁸ The Priestly Code, which had impressed even the early critics as consisting of a huge mass of disparate legal materials, was also found to contain within its bulk some originally separate groups of laws, some of which were probably pre-exilic.²⁹ The late date given to the document by Graf applied only to the final redaction; it did not cover the separate groups of laws or, as Kuenen had pointed out, all the practices regulated by them. Intensive critical investigation of the documents along these lines greatly enriched the stock of knowledge concerning their internal structure, although the results made the analysis of the Pentateuch seem extremely intricate. However, the broad outlines of the document theory—the identification of four major sources and the establishment of their relative historical sequence—were not basically affected by the conclusion that the documents had been expanded through the insertion of additional materials.

Early in the history of criticism it had become evident that the J and E documents not only could be traced through the Pentateuch but extended into the book of Joshua as well. Scholars therefore spoke of the documents of the "Hexateuch" and even attempted to trace them farther into the historical books.³⁰ So basic were their conclusions for the reconstruction of religious as well as literary history that the prophetic and poetical books also received a searching examination, for the purpose of determining what effect the new conclusions had upon the interpretation of

²⁸ See, e.g., Willy Staerk, *Das Deuteronomium: sein Inhalt und seine literarische Form* (Leipzig, 1894); A. F. Puukko, *Das Deuteronomium: eine literarkritische Untersuchung* (Leipzig, 1909); Johannes Hempel, *Die Schichten des Deuteronomiums* (Leipzig, 1914).

²⁹ Cf. Carl Steuernagel, *Lehrbuch der Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, pp. 227, 252.

³⁰ See, e.g., Rudolf Smend, "JE in den geschichtlichen Büchern des Alten Testaments," *ZAW*, XXXIX (1921), 181–217; I. Benzinger, *Jahvist und Elohist in den Königsbüchern* (Berlin, 1921); Otto Eissfeldt, *Die Quellen des Richterbuches* (Leipzig, 1925), and *Die Komposition der Samuelisbücher* (Leipzig, 1931).

these other classes of literature in the Old Testament.³¹

However, with the passage of time critical research tended to concentrate almost exclusively upon the analysis of "documents," as though that were an end in itself. The critics, of course, never lost sight entirely of the historical goal which was the only justification for literary criticism. But more and more time was spent in isolating subdocuments and assigning disputed passages, or in the still more minute work of dividing paragraphs and even single sentences into two or more original elements. The result was a somewhat artificial criticism that defeated its ultimate purpose by grinding away forever at the same mill. The literary criticism which at first had seemed significant and productive now became increasingly sterile. Small wonder, then, that a kind of reaction, akin to a feeling of surfeit, set in against the methods of critical analysis, combined with an attempt to return to older views regarding the composition and history of the Pentateuch.

Conservatives, in particular, seized upon the exclusive splitting up of the Pentateuchal documents as a *reductio ad absurdum*. They rejected the critical approach to the Old Testament as not only illegitimate in principle but without constructive value in its results. Anxious to preserve as much of the traditional viewpoint regarding the Pentateuch as possible, they attacked the very foundations of the documentary analysis, including the criterion of the divine names.³² But the conservative opponents of criticism could not

³¹ Wellhausen had made the first critical study of the Minor Prophets in *Die kleinen Propheten* ("Skizzen und Vorarbeiten," No. 5; Berlin, 1892). The important work on the major prophets was done by Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Göttingen, 1892; 4th ed., 1923), *Das Buch Jeremia* (Tübingen, 1901), and *Israels Propheten* (Tübingen, 1916). Duhm also did the pioneer work on the Psalms, in *Die Psalmen* (Tübingen, 1899; 2d ed., 1922).

³² See, e.g., Johannes Dahse, "Textkritische Bedenken gegen den Ausgangspunkt der Pentateuchkritik," *ARW*, VI (1903), 305-19; or his fuller treatment in *Textkritische Materialien zur Hexateuchfrage* (Giessen, 1912). This attack on the "divine names" criterion was successfully refuted by John Skinner, *The Divine Names in Genesis* (London, 1914). See the convenient summary of his arguments in S. R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (9th ed., 1913), pp. xxvi-xxxiii.

discredit analysis as such. Pointing out the excesses of literary criticism as practiced by the less cautious members of Wellhausen's school was not equivalent to invalidating the method itself when sanely and soberly applied. Refuting minor points in the details of critical theory regarding the scope of the documents did not negate the necessity for criticism where the phenomena of the Pentateuch were concerned. The conservatives did not succeed either in explaining away the internal difficulties of the Old Testament or in elaborating an acceptable alternative to the Graf-Wellhausen theory. In its major outlines, the latter still offered the best explanation for the critical problem of the Pentateuch. Such modifications as were required in the light of various points raised by the conservatives affected peripheral elements, not the main conclusions of critical analysis.

More vulnerable, however, than the critical school's methods of literary analysis were some of the conclusions growing out of its historical criticism. Opposition to the critical reconstruction of Old Testament history from those who were motivated by an essentially theological interest³³ can be disregarded at this point. Theirs was the normal reaction to every advance achieved by a scientific method which aims to be objective. Their sincerity cannot be questioned, but their failure to understand the purposes of historical research made their criticisms irrelevant. A more significant type of opposition came from one who tried to meet the critical school's arguments on its own ground. B. D. Eerdmans submitted its reconstruction of Old Testament history to a searching examination and attempted some corrections of critical theory without sacrificing scientific objectivity.

Eerdmans argued, first of all, that the critical school had erred in refusing to credit the traditional picture of the Hebrew patriarchs simply because the patriarchal narratives were contained in

³³ As, for example, James Orr, *The Problem of the Old Testament* (London, 1906).

supposedly late documents.³⁴ He rejected the critical view that the early Hebrews must have been simple nomads and called for greater confidence in the historicity of the narratives which showed them pursuing a settled way of life, not only raising flocks but also tilling the soil whenever circumstances were favorable.³⁵ In Eduard Meyer's phrase, their mode of life was "semi-nomadic."³⁶ The point of Eerdmans' argument was that the distinction between a nomadic and an agricultural stage in Old Testament history, which neatly fitted the evolutionary interpretation, had never actually existed. The Hebrews had been agriculturists from the beginning and their way of life much farther advanced than Wellhausen had supposed. This view of the matter gave a new importance to the patriarchal period as a time of cultural origins. "We are not justified," Eerdmans declared, "in considering the moral feeling and the ethical content of early Semitic religion so primitive as it was formerly considered."³⁷

Eerdmans tried in similar fashion to restore the importance of the Mosaic period, showing more confidence in the reliability of Israel's traditions about the origins of its ritual institutions than was accorded to them by the critics. He argued that the rituals embodied in the Levitical legislation were older than the laws themselves, because they seemed to reflect ideas belonging to a very early age.³⁸ From the literary point of view, he agreed, the law codes were all late; but, from the point of view of substance, he maintained, they contained much ancient material. The priests who compiled the Priestly Code had brought long forgotten prescriptions into the foreground. Eerdmans described these prescriptions as authentic reproductions of the ancient practices of Mosaic times,

³⁴ *Alttestamentliche Studien, II: Die Vorgeschichte Israels* (Giessen, 1908), pp. 28-34.

³⁵ See, *ibid.*, chap. II (esp. pp. 38-43).

³⁶ *Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstämme* (Halle, 1906), p. 303.

³⁷ *Alttestamentliche Studien, III: Das Buch Exodus* (Giessen, 1910), p. 126.

³⁸ *Alttestamentliche Studien, IV: Das Buch Leviticus* (Giessen, 1912); see esp. pp. 143-44.

thus carrying the origin of the ritual institutions much farther back than Kuenen had suggested. He did not go so far as to revive the precritical, traditional view that all of Israel's religious institutions had existed from the beginning; but he felt that the critical theory had gone to the other extreme by placing the chief ceremonial institutions last in the history of ritual development. The critics had been led to declare many things that must have been ancient the inventions of a later age because of their evolutionary preconceptions, which prevented them from accepting the existence of highly developed rituals in an early period of history. Wellhausen, it is true, had not made the mistake of assuming that the ritual system of the Levitical legislation had been wholly manufactured by the priests during and after the Exile; he agreed with Kuenen that the compilers of the Priestly Code had "systematized and reduced to writing what they had formerly observed in practice."³⁹ But he had strongly emphasized that the basic rituals had gone through a progressive evolution, as indicated by the three successive strata of legislation concerned with ritual. Accordingly, he had described the ritual practices of Mosaic times as primitive and the elaborate ceremonials of the priestly legislation as the climax of the whole development. But Eerdmans, who rejected the evolutionary dogma that every historical process must have simple beginnings, saw no reason to deny that the Mosaic era was the time when the Levitical ritual system took substantial form.

Eerdmans' conclusions, however, did not convince those who regarded the history of Old Testament religion in the tradition of Wellhausen. He had bolstered his views regarding the high stage of cultural and ritual development among the early Hebrews by appealing to the evidence which archaeological discoveries had begun to supply concerning the existence of a well-developed state of culture throughout the ancient East. But his deductions from the oriental data with regard to the early Hebrews struck his

³⁹ *Prolegomena* (Berlin, 1883), p. 429.

contemporaries as no more than assumptions based on analogies. Because of the large measure of uncertainty involved, his arguments failed to win acceptance, at that time, either for his thesis regarding the cultural maturity of the patriarchs or for his view of the advanced state of ritual in the Mosaic era. Nevertheless, he had helped to reveal how complex were the historical questions involved. Although some theory of development was obviously demanded by the facts of Old Testament history, the unilinear development of Israel's religion expounded by the Wellhausen school apparently needed modification. Just where modification was to be made, however, and how far it was to be carried were still open questions.⁴⁰

The basic difficulty was that, up to this point, criticism had been working entirely with the Old Testament materials themselves and interpreting them exclusively from within. The critics lacked a comprehensive knowledge of that ancient oriental world which constituted the larger milieu of Old Testament history. Consequently, they had been unable to set the Old Testament records against a wider historical background or to interpret them through comparisons with developments in contemporary cultures. Being unfamiliar with the wealth of data supplied by the archaeological exploration of the Near East, it did not occur to them to investigate the possible influence of external factors upon the origin and development of Old Testament religion. But new methods of investigation, based on the comparative principle, were beginning to make their appearance and promised fresh insight into the historical problems of the Old Testament. Historical anthropology, the general history of religions, comparative literature, and sociology, each approaching the historical picture from a different

⁴⁰ Almost twenty years later Eerdmans himself attempted such a modified interpretation of Old Testament religious history in his *Godsdienst van Israël* (2 vols., Huis ter Heide, 1930). For a summary and critical evaluation, see Otto Eissfeldt, "Zwei Leidener Darstellungen der israelitischen Religionsgeschichte (Kuenen und Eerdmans)," *ZDMG*, LXXXV (1931), 172-95. A revised edition of Eerdmans' history later appeared in English: *The Religion of Israel* (Leiden, 1947).

direction, altered the perspectives from which it could be viewed. Whatever might help toward an understanding of the soil out of which religious phenomena grew and whatever might contribute to an appreciation of the conditions that determined the processes of development was being brought under scrutiny. The field of investigation was consequently greatly enlarged and new sciences auxiliary to literary and historical criticism demanded the attention of Old Testament scholars.

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Old Testament Criticism during the Last Generation

Among the generation of critics who came to maturity after World War I the insights provided by the new approaches to the Old Testament made the higher criticism of the preceding generation seem less than adequate. The feeling was general that this type of Old Testament research had done its work: it had accomplished much in separating the existing sources into historical strata and arranging them in chronological order so that a history might be deduced from them. But it was now clear that literary analysis and historical criticism had their limitations and that further progress toward elaborating the history was to be made along other lines.⁴¹ In a programmatic survey of the problems of research in the new era that had begun, Hugo Gressmann declared that "in

⁴¹ Cf. Rudolf Kittel, "Die Zukunft der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft," *ZAW*, XXXIX (1921), 84-99.

our field we need not more but less literary-critical research. The higher criticism has generally exhausted the problems which it could and had to solve."⁴²

Nevertheless, the critical approach was never wholly abandoned and has survived to the present day. Other problems might preempt the foreground of Old Testament study, but the analysis of the Hexateuch continued to receive some attention. For fresh points of view reopened some of the old problems or put them in a new light. Otto Eissfeldt divided the Yahwistic document into two parallel strands of narrative, the older of which he characterized as an early collection of popular tales embodying the traditions and reflecting the viewpoints of the people in nomadic times.⁴³ Julian Morgenstern identified a few surviving fragments of a still older document which had contained a narrative of Moses and his relations with the Kenites.⁴⁴ Robert H. Pfeiffer thought he detected the existence of another old document which had originated somewhere to the south of Palestine, probably in Edom.⁴⁵ These identifications of hitherto unobserved documents independent of the major sources increased the complexity of literary criticism. But, in broad outline, the theory of four basic documents in the Hexateuch was still maintained.

However, in the critical work of the generation after World War I, it was not the continued analysis of the textual scope of the documents that drew the most attention, but their age and provenance. This historical criticism was more radical in its conclusions and, for a time, threatened to force a major change in the accepted theory regarding the history of the documents. After the critical studies of the previous generation had uncovered old materials in supposedly late documents, it was inevitable that the tendency of

the Wellhausen school to date the sources of the Hexateuch as possible should be challenged. Ernst Sellin, for example, questioned the theory that the J and E documents were no earlier than the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. respectively. The J document, he thought, had been composed in the time of King Solomon to provide a proof of the divine authorization of Israel's claims to Palestine. The E document, likewise, contained narrative materials which had been completed by the end of Solomon's reign, although the final composition of the document must be dated somewhat later.⁴⁶

Similarly, Adam C. Welch argued from the presence of archaic material in Deuteronomy that the original law book was considerably older than the classic date in the reign of Josiah.⁴⁷ He broke the historical connection with the king's reform by denying that the chief purpose of the Deuteronomistic Code was the centralization of the cultus in the temple at Jerusalem. As Theodor Oestreich had already suggested,⁴⁸ the purpose of the original law book was not the centralization of the cultus at one shrine but its purification at all shrines. Welch's theory was that Deuteronomy contained old laws from the northern kingdom of Israel, inspired by prophetic teaching against the contamination of the cultus by Canaanite influences. That the genesis of these legal principles lay even farther back in history Welch considered a strong possibility, for he regarded the Deuteronomistic Code as the outcome of that religious and national movement which had its beginnings in the work of Samuel. An attempt to fix the origin of the Deuteronomistic legal principles definitely in the time of Samuel was subsequently made by Edward Robertson,⁴⁹ who credited Samuel himself with

⁴² "Die Aufgaben der alttestamentlichen Forschung," *ZAW*, XLII (1924), 8.

⁴³ *Hexateuch-Synopsis* (Leipzig, 1922).

⁴⁴ "The Oldest Document in the Hexateuch," *HUCA*, IV (1927), 1-138.

⁴⁵ "A Non-Israelitic Source of the Book of Genesis," *ZAW*, XLVIII (1930), 66-73; *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York, 1941), Part II, chap. III.

⁴⁶ *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (5th ed., Leipzig, 1929), pp. 34, 41.

⁴⁷ *The Code of Deuteronomy: A New Theory of Its Origin* (London, 1924).

⁴⁸ *Das deuteronomische Grundgesetz* (Gütersloh, 1923).

⁴⁹ In a series of articles originally published in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 1936-1949, and gathered together in his *The Old Testament Problem* (Manchester, 1950).

the compilation of the Deuteronomic Code from the various traditions and laws of the local sanctuaries of the premonarchical period.⁵⁰

With regard to the Priestly Document, neither Sellin nor Welch denied the postexilic date of its final redaction. But they gave further support to the thesis that late sources could and did contain old elements. Sellin maintained that the narrative portions of the Priestly Document were as old as the narratives of J and E,⁵¹ while Welch argued in favor of a pre-exilic date for the bulk of the legislation.⁵² Pointing out the presence of rituals of a really primitive character, such as the rituals of the scapegoat and the red heifer, he strengthened Eerdmans' thesis that the Priestly Code was not a new creation of a late epoch but, in large measure, a compilation and codification of old laws and customs. The code, as a code, had a long history behind it, and a history of some complexity.

This tendency to regard much of the narrative and law in the Pentateuch as of more or less antiquity brought into question what had once been accepted as "the assured results of criticism." It was not, however, the effect of a conservative reaction against scientific criticism; it was a sincere attempt on the part of the critics to discover the actual outlines of a true historical picture. How much of this represented a permanent advance in critical theory and how much was mere groping in blind alleys is open to question. Sellin's shifting backward of the dates of J and E merely illustrates the fact that historical criticism had never been able to date these documents except within very broad limits. Without the use of other criteria than the internal literary phenomena of the documents, his theory was neither more nor less convincing than previous theories had been. A clearer understanding of the actual provenance of

⁵⁰ Robertson's theory is questionable, however, because it does not accord with what is known of the activity of "prophets" in the premonarchical period.

⁵¹ *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (5th ed., Leipzig, 1929), p. 55.

⁵² "On the Present Position of Old Testament Criticism," *Expositor*, XXV (1923), 364-65.

these early narratives was possible, however, on the basis of the "form criticism" initiated by Hermann Gunkel, to which consideration must be given later.⁵³

The attempt of Welch and Oestreicher to shift the date of Deuteronomy, thus dislodging the keystone of Wellhausen's scheme of history, was a more serious attack on the classic theory of the documents. If sustained, it would have involved a radical readjustment in the whole critical position, for the validity of the critical view of Old Testament literary and religious history depended on the essential correctness of the identification of the Deuteronomic Code with the Book of the Law found in the temple in 621 B.C. This dating of Deuteronomy had been the central point from which the critics had worked forward and backward to determine the age and the relative sequence of the other law codes and documents; and the description of Deuteronomy as the immediate inspiration for the reform and centralization of the cultus had been the starting point for Wellhausen's reconstruction of the religious history of Israel. With the date of Deuteronomy the whole critical edifice stood or fell. However, Welch's earlier dating did not win many critics away from the classic theory. His argument not only involved a denial of the identity between Deuteronomy and Josiah's Book of the Law but a rejection of the account in II Kings 22-23 of how the Book of the Law had been found in the temple—radical positions which most critics were not willing to accept.⁵⁴ The arguments first adduced by De Wette for connecting Deuteronomy with the reform of Josiah had an inherent persuasiveness which

⁵³ See below, chap. IV.

⁵⁴ See Hugo Gressmann, "Josia und das Deuteronomium," *ZAW*, XLII (1924), 313-37; Karl Budde, "Das Deuteronomium und die Reform König Josias," *ZAW*, XLIV (1926), 177-224. The problem was discussed in its more general aspects by William C. Graham, "The Modern Controversy about Deuteronomy," *Journal of Religion*, VII (1927), 396-418; Julius A. Bewer, "The Case for [*sc.* against] the Early Date of Deuteronomy," *JBL*, XLVII (1928), 305-21. Cf. the review article by Walther Baumgartner, "Der Kampf um das Deuteronomium," *Theologische Rundschau*, I (1929), 7-25.

made the standard view of the book's date and purpose still generally acceptable.⁵⁵ After all, it was not impossible to combine the view that many of the individual laws had an early origin with the accepted theory that the body of the book was the product of the seventh century B.C.⁵⁶

Something of the sort had been the end result of Welch's discussion of the Priestly Code. His view was strengthened a decade later by certain conclusions of Otto Eissfeldt regarding the nature and history of the Pentateuchal law.⁵⁷ Having identified within the code various small *corpora* of laws, each of which was a distinct unit dealing with a single subject and formulated in a single style, Eissfeldt argued that they must be the literary deposit of earlier stages of legislation. For although the cultic regulations in their present form reflected the practice of the temple in the late monarchical period, the rituals they had reference to were almost all old, drawn from the cultus of earlier generations at the local shrines. Since the latter must also have been controlled by rule and regulation, Eissfeldt assumed that the small groups of laws went back "not only in content but in formulation" to earlier types of cultic regulations, perhaps even to a stage when they were transmitted in the form of oral tradition.⁵⁸

This theory, of course, represented a great change from the old view of how the Priestly Code had come into existence. Wellhausen had recognized the antiquity of many of the practices embodied in its ritual laws, but he had denied the antiquity of the laws

⁵⁵ See George Dahl, "The Case for the Currently Accepted Date of Deuteronomy," *JBL*, XLVII (1928), 358-79.

⁵⁶ Such a position was taken by A. R. Siebens in *L'origine du code deuteronomique* (Paris, 1929).

⁵⁷ *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Tübingen, 1934), pp. 26-32.

⁵⁸ Compare this view with the thesis of Edward Roberston, mentioned above. See also R. Brinker, *The Influence of Sanctuaries in Early Israel* (Manchester, 1946). The theory that separate groups of cultic regulations originated at the local shrines raises the possibility that the duplications and inconsistencies in the Pentateuchal law may have been due to independent, parallel developments rather than successive stages in the history of the law (cf. the theory of Ezekiel Kaufmann, below).

themselves. Now it was clear that much of the legal content of the code was pre-exilic, in form as well as substance. This insight, derived from the theories of Eerdmans and Welch and expressed most clearly by Eissfeldt, was a permanent gain in critical theory. It counteracted the critical school's preoccupation with the latest stage of legal development—a preoccupation which had been the result of Wellhausen's overemphasis upon the dominant interest of the postexilic priesthood in codifying the ritual system. By showing that an interest in ritual legislation was not a new phenomenon in the postexilic period but characteristic of every period in Israel's history, the new theory shifted some of the weight of interpretation forward to the earlier stages of legal development and restored the feeling for gradual growth in the history of the law. The "formalism" of the cultic regulations in the Priestly Code, which Wellhausen had contrasted unfavorably with the "natural" treatment of the cultus by the Yahwist and the Elohist, could no longer be regarded as the result of a "legalistic" orientation in the postexilic period alone.

As a matter of fact, it could now be argued that the priestly tradition in cultic legislation was entirely pre-exilic. Ezekiel Kaufmann regarded it as the oldest and most characteristic tradition in Israel's religious history and even argued that the priestly literature in the Old Testament was the oldest stratum of the writings preserved there.⁵⁹ His theories did not spring from a traditionalist bias but grew out of the same sort of literary and historical criticism as the Wellhausen school had practiced. Kaufmann believed that, once the data of the respective law codes were compared with each other apart from any evolutionary preconceptions, it could be shown that the legislation of P, rather than enlarging and elaborating upon the legislation of D, antedated it in every important

⁵⁹ See his series of articles under the general title of "Probleme der israelitisch-jüdischen Religionsgeschichte," *ZAW*, XLVIII (1930), 23-32, 32-43; LI (1933), 35-47.

particular, being much closer to the formulations of JE.⁶⁰ More important, however, in establishing the priority of P, was the fact that the ideological content of the priestly literature was quite independent of prophetic teaching and reflected an age in which conditions were more nearly like those of the premonarchical and monarchical periods than those of the prophetic or the postexilic age.⁶¹ The "congregation" of Israel, far from being an ecclesiastical community chiefly interested in religious exercises, was conceived as a camp of the hosts of Israel; the "high priest" of this congregation stood beside, not in place of, the leader of the people and aided him with advice obtained through oracles; the "tent of meeting," being first and foremost the place of revelation of such oracles, corresponded more closely to the character of an early shrine, as implied in JE, than to the function of the second temple. The priestly literature, therefore, Kaufmann believed, was not the successor of previous religious writings but a parallel and independent tradition developing from beginnings which actually antedated the other traditions.⁶²

Thus Old Testament criticism in the decades between World War I and II had considerably altered the Wellhausen system of hypotheses and conclusions. The problems to be investigated were stated differently and the solutions proposed led to modifications and adjustments in the imposing scheme of literary history which Wellhausen had constructed. As a matter of fact, the attack upon its fixed points was made from two sides at once. While the origin

of much of the law was being moved back in time, the alternative possibility that the final dates of the law codes should be moved down was also considered. Gustav Hölscher abandoned the pre-exilic date of Deuteronomy altogether and questioned the identification of the Priestly Document with Ezra's law book.⁶³ Dating each of them considerably later than the Wellhausen school had done, he cut these sources loose from their anchors in history (the reforms of Josiah and Ezra), thus weakening the close connection which Wellhausen had established between the literary and the religious history of Israel. Hölscher ignored the proof of Wellhausen and his school that Deuteronomy was essentially prophetic in point of view and, making it essentially priestly in character, classed it with the other legal literature of the postexilic period. But his theory crowded the entire legal development from Deuteronomy to the Priestly Code into a brief period of about fifty years—a period which seems too short for the development of so many differences as separated the two codes.

Modifications that were proposed on the margins of the Wellhausen system did not yet represent a sufficiently consistent point of view to form the basis of a new theory of Old Testament literary history. On the other hand, the younger generation of critics had been attacking the Wellhausen system at one point or another for so long that the consensus of acceptance which had once prevailed no longer existed. But, with all the fluctuations of critical theory, it is significant that there was no return to precritical arguments to find a basis for qualifying the theories propounded by Wellhausen. Although such scholars as Welch and Hölscher thought of themselves as outside the main stream of the Wellhausen tradition, their work was in no sense anticritical. In their attempt to improve upon critical theory, they appealed to evidence and induc-

⁶⁰ See, especially, *ibid.*, XLVIII (1930), 32-36.

⁶¹ See, *ibid.*, pp. 27-32.

⁶² These theories Kaufmann has since been developing, with many an original observation that merits serious consideration, in his multi-volumed history of Israel's religion in Hebrew: *Toledoth ha-emunah ha-yisraelit* (Tel-Aviv, 1937-?), Vol. I, 3 parts; Vol. II, 2 parts; Vol. III, 2 parts—to date. Cf. the summary of Vol. I by Efraim Urbach, "Neue Wege der Bibelwissenschaft," *MGWJ*, LXXXII (1938), 2-14.

See Moshe Greenberg, "A New Approach to the History of the Israelite Priesthood," *JAO*, LXX (1950), 41-47; H. L. Ginsberg, "New Trends in Biblical Criticism," *Commentary*, X (1950), 282-84.

⁶³ "Komposition und Ursprung des Deuteronomiums," *ZAW*, XL (1922), 161-255; "Die Bücher Esra und Nehemia," in Emil Kautzsch (ed.), *Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments* (4th ed., Tübingen, 1923), II, 491-502; *Geschichte der israelitischen und jüdischen Religion* (Giessen, 1922), pp. 132, 142.

tion like other critics, differing from them only in the adequacy and soundness with which they used critical methods.

The same phenomenon appeared even in the ranks of the conservatives who were interested on *a priori* grounds in annihilating the exegetical position represented by the name of Wellhausen. The decade of the thirties witnessed a decided reaction in the direction of reviving the traditional theory that the Pentateuch was the work of a single great author. A small group of conservatives labored hard to restore a semblance of the ancient view. But, in contrast to the conservatives of an earlier generation, they did not attempt to refute the results of criticism by discrediting the methods of literary analysis. They made use of the methods of criticism to establish new positions which challenged the previous results of criticism. Thus a situation arose in which those who rejected Wellhausen's rationalistic approach and his evolutionary philosophy of history nevertheless paid him the tribute of adopting his technique of analysis. Their work was based upon an apparatus of criticism ostensibly as scientific as that of the objective critics, though they arrived at totally different conclusions.

Umberto Cassuto, for example, maintained that the linguistic and stylistic criteria for identifying the documents did not represent distinct and separate sources but purposeful variations in the style of a single author.⁶⁴ Benno Jacob had already argued that many of the stylistic peculiarities on which the dissection of sources had been based were simply the effects of oriental modes of thought and expression.⁶⁵ He now defended the unity of the book of Genesis with the thesis that the compiler was the real author, since he had created an integrated work by imposing a single viewpoint upon the various types of sources.⁶⁶ Similarly, F. Dornseiff, on the

basis of detailed comparisons of the literary phenomena of the Pentateuch with the works of classical writers,⁶⁷ argued that the Pentateuch was a consciously composed literary unit, the work of a Levite (c. 900 B.C.) whose aim had been to present the cultic, ethical, and civil laws of the Israelites in a colorful historical framework.⁶⁸ But none of these theories can be said to have offered a satisfactory alternative to the critical theory. Cassuto's technique of taking each of the literary criteria separately and showing how it failed to support the accepted theory of documents ignored the chief contention of criticism that the strongest argument for the theory was the consistent occurrence of several types of criteria in conjunction with each other. The arguments of Benno Jacob regarding oriental modes of expression were drawn from the narrative art of a much later age than that which produced the Pentateuch. Dornseiff's argument from analogy with the literary criticism of classical literature failed to give sufficient weight to the results of biblical criticism, for it made the priestly legal codifications and the old popular tales the products of the same hand. Only Jacob's thesis that the compiler of the ancient traditions had tried to unify them under a single religious viewpoint was a valuable contribution to the understanding of biblical literature. It reappeared in the work of others, who did not, however, avoid the task of also seeking to understand the significance of the original traditions so unified.⁶⁹

Symptomatic of the conservative reaction which accompanied the halting progress of critical scholarship was the further fact that some of those who were themselves heirs of the critical tradition joined in the attempt to reassert the basic unity of the Pentateuch. Max Löhr rejected the Priestly Document as a literary entity and

⁶⁴ *La Questione della Genesi* (Florence, 1934). For a similar use of the argument from style against the documentary theory, see A. Bea, "Der heutige Stand der Pentateuchfrage," *Biblica*, XVI (1935), 192-98.

⁶⁵ *Quellenscheidung und Exegese im Pentateuch* (Leipzig, 1916).

⁶⁶ *Das erste Buch der Tora* (Berlin, 1934).

⁶⁷ "Antikes zum Alten Testament," *ZAW*, LII (1934), 57-75; LIII (1935), 153-71; LV (1937), 127-36.

⁶⁸ "Die Abfassungszeit des Pentateuchs und die Deuteronomiumsfrage," *ZAW*, LVI (1938), 64-85.

⁶⁹ See below, chap. IV, pp. 150-56.

put forward the view that Ezra and his school had created the Pentateuch, not from continuous documentary sources, but from smaller groups of laws and narratives upon which they stamped a relative unity in the interests of the priestly point of view.⁷⁰ Paul Volz and Wilhelm Rudolph attempted to explain away the Elohistic document by an analogous theory.⁷¹ They recognized the presence in Genesis of only one narrator, the Yahwist, whom they exalted to a primary position such as he had not enjoyed under the four-document theory. They described him as an author of great skill and deep religious purpose, who in the time of Solomon had gathered the ancient traditions of Israel and grouped them into a consecutive narrative. The portions of Genesis usually assigned to the Elohist or the priestly narrators they said were either original parts of the great Yahwistic narrative or merely the work of later editors interested in emphasizing certain theological or cultic principles.

But these attempts to cancel the long established results of literary and historical criticism by means of criticism itself failed to convince the majority of critics. The tendency apparent in the work of some to build theories affecting the whole Pentateuch from a consideration of the phenomena in Genesis alone⁷² was a glaring weakness of method; and the wide variation in dating, as well as the failure to work out a circumstantial history of the composition of the Pentateuch, left these theories as inconclusive as those of Welch and Hölscher had been.

Finally, there has been the rather striking phenomenon of criticism being applied to books in the Old Testament which had

⁷⁰ *Untersuchungen zum Hexateuchproblem, I: Der Priesterkodex in der Genesis* (Giessen, 1924); see the convenient summary of his argument in "Zum Hexateuchproblem," *OLZ*, XXIX (1926), 3-13.

⁷¹ *Der Elohist als Erzähler ein Irrweg der Pentateuchkritik?* (Giessen, 1933).

⁷² Wilhelm Rudolph later extended the theory he and Volz had worked out for Genesis to the rest of the Hexateuch in *Der "Elohist" von Exodus bis Josua* (Giessen, 1938). His analysis, however, was confined to the narrative portions of the Hexateuch, leaving out of consideration the large body of legal material.

hitherto escaped the scalpel of the literary dissectors. When William A. Irwin was invited to issue a revised edition of J. M. P. Smith's handbook on the prophets,⁷³ he found it necessary to rewrite completely the chapter on Ezekiel, because of the great change that had taken place in the critical view of the book of Ezekiel since Smith wrote. Ezekiel had been the one book in the Old Testament regarding which the critics had thought it possible to accept the traditional view of authorship and date with complete confidence. But even that tradition has now been corroded by the acids of criticism. An entirely new view of both the prophet and his book was presented by Gustav Hölscher in 1924,⁷⁴ and the clue he offered to the understanding of the book was quickly followed up by others until the accepted view of Ezekiel was no longer recognizable. Hölscher had made a distinction between the man Ezekiel and the book which bore his name. The man, he tried to show, had been a true prophet with the stylistic gifts of a poet, not the legalist obsessed by ritual which tradition made of him. The book, he argued, in its present form was a complete transformation of the prophet's original oracles, made by priestly writers who had added all the legalistic and ritual matter. In other words, a simple prophet of the people had been turned into a teacher of the law. The traditional Ezekiel had never existed; he was a fiction created by the priestly editors of his writings.

The startling aspect of this change in the long accepted view of Ezekiel was that it threatened to destroy the theory of the Wellhausen school regarding the history of Judaism. Wellhausen and his followers had made Ezekiel a key figure in the development of exilic and postexilic religion, a priest-prophet who drew up a program for the restoration of Judaism after the Exile. His book, according to their view, played a major role in preparing the final

⁷³ J. M. P. Smith, *The Prophets and Their Times* (Chicago, 1925). Second edition, revised by William A. Irwin (Chicago, 1941).

⁷⁴ *Ezekiel: der Dichter und das Buch* (Giessen, 1924).

triumph of the priestly over the prophetic point of view. Hence he could be called "the father of Judaism" and the critics always regarded him as such. Now Hölscher's new view of the prophet made that impossible. But the priestly book of Ezekiel could still play the role once assigned to the man, for Hölscher did not date the priestly compilation much later than the critics had done. Other scholars, however, moved the period in which the priests had worked on the book so far down that the book now followed the Priestly Code instead of preparing the way for it.⁷⁵ Torrey, for example, considered Ezekiel a pseudopigraphic writing composed entirely in Palestine in the third century B.C.⁷⁶ Such a radical revision of the book's dating would have destroyed the historical sequence established by the Wellhausen school. But since Torrey's view was related to his thesis that the Babylonian Exile itself was a myth created by the Palestinian priests,⁷⁷ it did not find general acceptance.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, subsequent scholarship recognized that at least some part of the book originated in Palestine, but it attempted to preserve the tradition of the book's origin in Babylonia by supposing that the original prophecies of the pre-exilic prophet had been edited and given a Babylonian framework by a second "author" during the Exile.⁷⁹ William A. Irwin, however, in his own work on Ezekiel,⁸⁰ supported the conclusion that the book must be regarded as the offspring, not the progenitor of Judaism. The prophet Ezekiel, as he appeared after his genuine prophecies had

⁷⁵ Millar Burrows, *The Literary Relations of Ezekiel* (Philadelphia, 1925); C. C. Torrey, *Pseudo-Ezekiel and the Original Prophecy* (New Haven, 1930).

⁷⁶ James Smith, in *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: A New Interpretation* (London, 1931), also considered the book wholly Palestinian in origin but ascribed it to a pre-exilic prophet Ezekiel.

⁷⁷ First presented in his *Ezra Studies* (Chicago, 1910) and restated in subsequent works.

⁷⁸ Cf. the refutation by Shalom Spiegel, "Ezekiel or Pseudo-Ezekiel," *HTH* XXIV (1931), 245-321.

⁷⁹ See Volkmar Herntrich, *Ezechielprobleme* (Giessen, 1932); J. B. Harford, *Studies in the Book of Ezekiel* (Cambridge, 1935); I. G. Matthews, *Ezekiel* (Philadelphia, 1939).

⁸⁰ *The Problem of Ezekiel* (Chicago, 1943).

been disentangled from the rest, stood out from Irwin's analysis as a truly prophetic personality. But the book appeared as largely a commentary on the original words of the prophet, made by many editors over a long period of time. There the problem of Ezekiel rested, for the time being, three different periods of history having been suggested for the origin of the book.⁸¹

This review of activity in the field of Old Testament criticism during the last quarter century⁸² has revealed a chaos of conflicting trends, ending in contradictory results, which create an impression of ineffectiveness in this type of research. The conclusion seems to be unavoidable that the higher criticism has long since passed the age of constructive achievement. This does not mean that it has failed to vindicate the purposes which generated it in the beginning or that it has lost the fruits of its early victories. The principle of objective research according to scientific methods is still the basic preliminary to Old Testament interpretation, and there is a large body of common knowledge concerning the history of Old Testament literature and religion which is the permanent legacy of scientific criticism. But the fact remains that criticism seems to have lost its way in a dense tangle of minor problems of analysis.⁸³ Having reached the point of steadily diminishing returns, it no longer occupies its former position as the paramount method of research.

⁸¹ For a review of the problem of Ezekiel, which arrived at a conclusion similar to Irwin's, see George Dahl, "Crisis in Ezekiel Research," in Robert P. Casey (ed.), *Quantulacumque: Studies Presented to Kirsopp Lake* (London, 1937), pp. 265-84.

⁸² For a more detailed survey of the same see C. R. North, "Pentateuchal Criticism," in H. H. Rowley (ed.), *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (Oxford, 1951), pp. 48-82; and N. H. Snaith, "The Historical Books," *ibid.*, pp. 84-114. See also Otto Eissfeldt, "Die neueste Phase in der Entwicklung der Pentateuchkritik," *Theologische Rundschau*, XVIII (1949), 91-122, 179-215, 267-87.

⁸³ See the most recent attempt to carry literary analysis to the utmost limits of detailed verse-division: Cuthbert A. Simpson, *The Early Traditions of Israel: A Critical Analysis of the Pre-Deuteronomiac Narrative of the Hexateuch* (Oxford, 1948), esp. pp. 280-322. Cf. Otto Eissfeldt's severe criticism of this book in *Die ältesten Traditionen Israels* (Giessen, 1950).

Perhaps the basic reason for the decline in popularity of criticism is the fact that, even with all the work it had done, it had failed to fulfill the promise of the liberal, humanistic approach to religious literature. It had failed to explain the Old Testament as a significant expression of religious aspiration, the most important product in all human history of the mind and heart of man. To be sure, criticism had accomplished its purpose of describing the spiritual history recorded in the documents. But, in doing so, it had avoided the Old Testament's own view of the meaning of that history and so had missed the real key to the significance of the Old Testament as the supreme example of man's striving toward an understanding of his place in the world and in history. Criticism had also accomplished much toward showing that Old Testament literature was the product of the religious culture of its times. But it might better have attempted to explain how the Old Testament's view of history grew out of the spiritual experience of its authors. That would have fulfilled the objectives of the humanistic approach to Old Testament literature more adequately.

However, the idea that a religious culture, rather than divine inspiration, was the source of the literature had been so new when criticism began that the necessity of making plain the nature and history of that culture appeared to be the primary task of scholarship. In the attempt to accomplish the task as objectively as possible, criticism did not see the problem of explaining that culture's attitude toward history as the real problem. It set aside the Old Testament's "philosophy of history" as a tendentious interpretation of historical events by the redactors of the various documents. Instead, it sought to extract the kernels of historical fact from the interpretations overlaid upon them. To portray the history of Israel's literature and religion in the same objective manner as would be used in portraying the history of any other cultural development was a useful and necessary work. But the more the critic adhered to the spirit of scientific objectivity, the less he attempted to inter-

pret the inner significance of the religious literature with which he dealt. Criticism contributed greatly to the increase of knowledge; it did not deepen understanding.

But, even in terms of its own objectives, criticism did not fully accomplish the task it set itself. Its reconstructions of Old Testament literary and religious history suffered the limitations of a specialized method of research which did not look beyond the particular materials of its own field. To broaden the significance of its results, Old Testament research needed a deeper insight into the nature of religious belief and practice and a wider perspective on the historical manifestations of religion in the ages when Old Testament religion was developing. It needed to approach the history of the Old Testament writings from a broader literary point of view than was afforded by the strict analysis of internal structure. And it needed a better understanding of how religious development was affected by social and economic trends in the life of a people. These broader approaches to the study of the Old Testament had been made available by the auxiliary sciences of anthropology, comparative religion and literature, and sociology. Too often, however, literary and historical criticism was carried on in isolation from these other disciplines, although they had much to offer by way of supplementing the results of criticism. It is time to turn to a consideration of their contributions to the interpretation of the Old Testament.