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Author(s): Robert H. Pfeiffer

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FACTS AND FAITH IN BIBLICAL HISTORY*

ROBERT H. PFEIFFER

HARVARD UNIVERSITY AND BOSTON UNIVERSITY

IN THE ancient Mediterranean world, where human culture originated, three cities are chiefly responsible for our contemporary civilization: Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome. We owe our faith, our science, and our law to the Israelites, the Greeks, and the Romans, respectively. But Jerusalem has been surrounded with an aura of holiness wholly lacking in pagan Athens and Rome, and far less prominent in Christian Rome. Do not the three great monotheistic religions of salvation (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) revere in Jerusalem some of their most sacred shrines?

The holiness of Jerusalem begins in 621 B. C., when through the reforms of Josiah the Temple of Solomon became the only legitimate place of sacrificial worship for the Jews; at the same time the Book of the Law found in the Temple was recognized as divinely inspired and eventually became the nucleus of the Hebrew Bible. Thus the ancient literature of Israel surviving in the Old Testament became Holy Writ in the eyes of Jews and Christians, the history of Israel became Sacred History, Palestine became the Holy Land, and Israel became the Chosen People, while the other nations were classed as mere Gentiles.

The portentous selection of Israel among all nations to be "a peculiar treasure" unto God "above all people," "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19 5 f.) has been variously explained, but we may distinguish explanations based on facts from those based on faith.

The Bible itself offers two religious explanations. In ancient Israel, from Moses to Amos, it was taken for granted that Jehovah was the god of Israel and Israel the people of Jehovah (Judg 5). Like other ancient nations, Israel had its national god, and did not conceive its relation with Jehovah as substantially different from that of Moab with Chemosh (Judg 11 23 f.; compare II Kings 3 with the inscription of King Mesha). Some Israelites traced the election of Israel to the call of Abraham, while others to the revelation to Moses out of the burning bush (or at the time of the exodus from Egypt).¹

* The Presidential Address delivered at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis on December 27, 1950, at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

¹ K. Galling (*Die Erwählungstraditionen Israels*. Beiheft 48 of the *ZAW*, Giessen, 1928) has best studied the problem of this twofold dating of the election of Israel — in the time of Abraham and in the time of Moses.

But Amos rejected this naïve notion which identified patriotism and religion, limiting Jehovah's concern to Israel (a notion sarcastically mentioned in Am 3 2 and rejected in 9 7), and Hosea introduced into it a moral element — loyalty. Then the Book of the Law found in the Temple in 621 (which, as generally assumed, is the bulk of Deut 5–26 and 28) taught that the relation between Jehovah and Israel was not a natural one, but was based on divine election (Deut 7 6–8) and was ratified by a covenant in the days of Moses (5 2 f.).² After 621, this new doctrine³ that the God of all nations had chosen Israel as his own people, through one or more covenants, prevailed in the Old Testament.⁴ The same doctrine was adopted without question in the New Testament, although it supported the claims of the Jewish antagonists of early Christianity.⁵ In the LXX and the New Testament the word for “covenant” is *διαθήκη* (testament),⁶ notwithstanding Paul's assertion (reiterated in the Epistle to the Hebrews) that, through Jesus Christ, God had now established the *new covenant* promised in Jer 31 31–34 (II Cor 3 3–14; Hebr 8 6–13; cf. Matt 26 28; Mark 14 24; Luke 22 20). Thus the Christian Church claimed to be the heir of Israel, who through a divine covenant had become God's Chosen People. Many learned Jewish and Christian members of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis will agree with our fellow-member H. H. Rowley (*The Biblical Doctrine of Election*, p. 139) that “Israel's claim to be the Chosen People rests on solid grounds, and that objective evidence in its favour can be produced.”

² H. H. Rowley (*The Biblical Doctrine of Election*. London, Lutterworth Press, 1950) has given us an admirable survey, with abundant bibliographical references, of the Biblical and modern views on Jehovah's choice of Israel as his own people.

³ I have been unable to discover any reference to the divine covenant with Israel in passages which are earlier than 621: Hos 6 7; 8 1 can hardly be dated in the 8th century, and in any case the word “covenant” there refers to the divine law, not to the divine election of Israel. The doctrine of the divine covenant with Israel is one of the most original and most influential contributions of the Deuteronomic Code of 621.

⁴ Gen 17 1–8, 19, 21; Exod 2 24; 6 4 f.; 24 3–8; Lev 26 42, 45; Deut 4 37–40; 29 10–13 [Heb 29 9–12]; Isa 41 8 f.; Jer 11 2–10; 31 31–34; 34 13; Ezek 16 8, 60–62; 20 5; Ps 105 5–10; Neh 9 7 f.

⁵ Acts 3 25; 7 8; Rom 9 4; Gal 4 24; Hebr 8 6–12; 10 16 f.

⁶ Paul, following the LXX, used the word *διαθήκη* (testament) instead of *συνθήκη* (covenant); from I Cor 11 25 the expression “new testament” (Jer 31 31) passed to Matt 26 28; Mark 14 24; Luke 22 20 (“testament” occurs also in Hebr 7 22; Rev 11 19). Hebr 9 15–20 explains the use of “testament” for “covenant” by the fact that death and blood were required to establish both the covenant through Moses and that through Christ. The real reason, however, is that in a covenant both parties are on an equal footing, while in a testament (as in a divine covenant) one of the parties is human while the other belongs to the invisible world: thus anthropomorphism is avoided by the use of “testament.” The word *συνθήκη* (covenant) occurs neither in the LXX (as a rendering of *בְּרִית*), nor in the New Testament; it is found only in the versions of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion; as well as in Wisdom of Solomon 1 16; 12 21; I Macc 10 26; II Macc 13 25; 14 26.

Other scholars, however, distinguish sharply between true facts and true doctrines. The facts in this particular case are the following: in 621 B. C. a scroll, called the Book of the Law, was found in the Temple in Jerusalem and, after it was read publicly, was accepted as a divine revelation to Moses. "And the king . . . made a covenant before the Lord . . . to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant" (II Kings 23 3). The Judeans henceforth believed that, according to that book (called the Book of the Covenant in II Kings 23 2, 21), Jehovah had chosen Israel through a covenant to be his own people; but the truth of this doctrine transcends historical research, and must be established through theological or metaphysical arguments, rather than through the kind of "objective evidence" which the science of history uses to establish actual facts.

Historians have attempted to explain Israel's belief that it was the chosen people of Jehovah without recourse to supernatural assumptions. Indeed, some scholars refuse to even consider the doctrine of election as a problem to be investigated by historians. Thus, for instance, K. Marti (*Geschichte der Israelitischen Religion*, p. 150) has asserted that the question for Old Testament students is not, 'How did the universal God become the God of Israel?' but rather, 'How did Yahweh the God of Israel become the sole God of heaven and earth?' K. Budde also eliminates the election of Israel from the study of Old Testament religion by simply stating that the bond between Jehovah and Israel was not created by Jehovah's choice of Israel, but by Israel's choice of Jehovah as its God: "Israel's religion became ethical because it was a religion of choice and not of nature, because it rested on a voluntary decision which established an ethical relation between the people and its God for all time" (*The Religion of Israel to the Exile*, p. 38. New York, 1899).

On the other hand, a historian may attempt to explain how Israel's faith in its divine election ever arose — for Israel's faith is a historic fact. J. M. P. Smith⁷ discovers the root of this faith in national and racial pride, and in the worship of Jehovah unknown to other nations; moreover many kings in the ancient Near East regarded themselves as divinely chosen. In reality one might wonder whether there is a basic difference between the assertion of the Cyrus Cylinder from Babylon that Marduk the god of Babylon "sought a righteous prince after his own heart, whom he took by the hand. Cyrus, king of Anshan, he called by name, to lordship over the whole world he appointed him" (R. W. Rogers, *Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament*, p. 381. New York, 1912); and the words of the Second Isaiah, "Thus saith Jehovah

⁷ "The Chosen People" (*American Journal of Semitic Languages* XLV [Jan. 1929], 73-82).

to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held, to subdue nations before him: . . . 'I will go before thee, and make the crooked paths straight; I will break in pieces the gates of brass, . . . ; and I will give thee the treasures of darkness, . . . , that thou mayest know that I, Jehovah, who call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel'" (Isa 45 1-3; all of 44 28-45 4 and II Chron 36 22 f. = Ezra 1 1-3a).

While I believe that there are some valuable suggestions in the article of J. M. P. Smith, I would explain, from a purely secular point of view, the origin of the doctrine of Israel's election through the covenant as a brilliant intuition of the author of the Book found in the Temple in 621. Aware of the sharp contrast between the ardent religious nationalism of the J Document, in which Jehovah supports Israel whether right or wrong, and the threats of Amos, who unequivocally declared that Jehovah would destroy Israel for its sins, and being unwilling to relinquish either patriotism or divine punitive justice, he was forced to combine them. Israel's election through the covenant was his admirable synthesis of apparently irreconcilable notions: for on the one hand the choice of Israel among all nations satisfied the utmost national pride, and on the other, according to the terms of the covenant this election was conditional upon the fulfilment of the divine commands: "Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that Jehovah thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the loyalty which he swore unto thy fathers" (Deut 7 12; cf. 8 18-20). As J. Bonsirven (*Le judaïsme palestinien au temps de Jésus Christ*, Paris, 1935, I, 39) aptly sums it up, "God chooses Israel for his people, and he undertakes to preserve its national existence, to develop it and shower his blessings upon it; on its side, the people promise to keep the law of God." Thus, without sacrificing morality, was patriotism stimulated.

Two contrasting points of view have been defended in regard to the divine election of Israel: it is regarded either as a historical fact, or as an article of faith. If the first assumption is adopted, the history of Israel is sacred history. For if the sole universal God actually selected Israel as his own people, "a method which studies and writes history without putting him at the center is not simply faulty from a theological point of view. It is equally unsatisfactory as a historical method, for it is not telling the story as it really was brought about, as it really happened" (F. W. Filson, *JBL*, LXIX [1950], 13; cf. "How I interpret the Bible" in *Interpretation*, IV [1950], 178-88). But if the second assumption is correct, the history of Israel is purely secular and is to be told without regarding divine interventions in Israel's behalf as actual facts, but merely as expressions of faith. That the points of view of science and faith should be kept distinct is admitted by a historian who is a Roman Catholic priest, G. Ricciotti, when he recognizes that

exegetically "the sun stood still and the moon stayed" at Gibeon (Josh 10 12 *t.*) in a literal sense, but that *scientifically* "there was no real astronomical perturbation" (*Histoire d'Israël*, Paris, 1939, I, 288). Thus we must distinguish two types of biblical history, both found in the Old Testament itself, and a third type (also appearing first in the Old Testament) which, with more or less success, attempts to combine the other two.

It is frequently said that the Old Testament is "the Hebrew Record of the Action of God in History" (H. F. D. Sparks, *The Old Testament in the Christian Church*, London, 1944, p. 44) and that it "has no interest in what we call 'pure history'" (Filson, in *JBL*, LXIX [1950], 4), so that "the historian of the objective scientific school and the Bible disagree sharply in their account of what happened" (Filson, *Interpretation*, IV [1950], 183). Like most generalizations, these inclusive statements miss the mark. The Old Testament contains about every type of history, from the most secular to the most theological. The biography of David contained in the early source of the books of Samuel (parts of I Sam 4—I Kings 2), notably II Sam 9–20, written by a contemporary (possibly Ahimaaz son of Zadok) before 950 B. C., is entirely impartial and objective, without any trace of a philosophy of history, reporting no divine interventions aside from oracular responses: it is unsurpassed in its accuracy in describing facts and their consequences. It is the first, and one of the greatest, examples of candid, lucid, honest, vivid, unbiased, accurate historical writing, surpassing most of the ancient and modern histories in psychological understanding, historicity, sense of drama and pathos, and superb literary style. The faithful picture of reality in this objective history may be appreciated by contrasting the figure of David in it — a brilliant, likable, self-made adventurer, half noble and half unscrupulous — with the Chronicler's sanctimonious organizer of Temple music and mighty king, whose army numbered a million and a half men and whose wealth allowed him to set aside the equivalent of three billion gold dollars for the building of the Temple.

No less secular and objective are the three lost histories from which the author of I–II Kings drew most of his information, and to which he repeatedly referred for matters in which he was not particularly interested: The Book of the Acts of Solomon, the Book of the History of the Kings of Judah, and the Book of the History of the Kings of Israel. All three drew factual information from the royal annals, which likewise never presented God as the chief actor in historical events. Like the Assyrian royal annals, those of Judah and Israel dealt chiefly with wars and building operations. The stories relating the coronation of Jeroboam I (I Kings 11–12, in part), Ahab's victory over Ben-hadad

(I Kings 20, in part) and his death (I Kings 22), the rebellion of Jehu (II Kings 9–10), and the victory of Joash over Amaziah (14 8–14; cf. 14 15) seem to be the best preserved remnants of the History of the Kings of Israel: they are classic examples of superb historical writing and make no mention of divine interventions in human affairs, except through oracular responses.

For the history of Judah, besides the History of the Kings of Judah (of which the chief remnant is the account of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem in II Kings 18–19, in part), the author of the Books of Kings utilized a chronicle of the Temple in Jerusalem, written by priests with unemotional objectivity and accuracy, without any notion that Jehovah determined the vicissitudes of the Temple. This chronicle described the Temple when it was built by Solomon, and reported the Temple's restorations, refurnishing, plundering, and spoliation for payment of tribute; its best story is that of Athaliah (II Kings 11, in part).

Finally the early stories of the Book of Judges (omitting the fictitious tales about Samson) are excellent examples of early Israelite historiography in which the deity is not particularly prominent: the story of Abimelech in Judges 9 (in part) is notably objective and secular.

Since Israel became the Chosen Nation through a divine covenant in 621 B. C., when the Deuteronomic Code found in the Temple was accepted as divine revelation to Moses, it is not amazing that all historical writing before 621 is strictly secular. But it will be immediately objected that the J and E documents, written long before 621, show that Jehovah watched over the Patriarchs and the tribes of Israel descended from them, and in every crisis intervened triumphantly in behalf of his people, making possible its growth and progress. Moreover, the stories of Elijah and Elisha (except II Kings 9), likewise considerably earlier than 621, are replete with miracles and saturated with divine interventions in human affairs. All this is indisputable: the only question is whether we may class J, E, and the stories of Elijah and Elisha as *history*. The legendary character of the Elijah and Elisha stories is recognized by modern critical students: these stories are not genuine historical accounts based on written sources contemporary with Elijah and Elisha, but are folk tales rewritten by literary men. A real historian in II Kings 9 1–3 recognized the prophetic gifts of Elisha but ignored his miraculous powers.

The situation is somewhat similar in the case of the J and E documents. In these, as in the Elijah and Elisha stories, Jehovah is still the God of Israel, not yet the international God of justice of Amos: consequently his exclusive and absorbing concern about Israel and its leaders is taken for granted. Like the authors of the Elijah and Elisha stories, the J author could not utilize any written sources at all, whether reliable or legendary, in composing his epic of Israel from Abraham

(or Adam, less probably) to the invasion of Canaan. For the period before Moses, the tales about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, transmitted orally for generations, varied from place to place (as can be seen in comparing J and E) and were fiction pure and simple — even if the Patriarchs be regarded as actual historical characters. Beginning with Moses, J was dealing with actual historical events, but his only sources were popular traditions told during the course of three centuries and thus enriched with legendary details. Thus the author of J could not write accurate history for the period from Moses to the invasion of Canaan even if he had wanted to. But that was not his purpose: he wrote an epic in which Jehovah the God of Israel is the central character and gradually fulfils his three promises to Abraham (Gen 12 1-4, 7): “I will make of thee a great nation, . . . and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed, . . . unto thy seed will I give this land.” In attributing to the unfailling guidance and help of Jehovah the glorious ascent of Israel from slavery in Egypt to the conquest of Canaan, the J author was echoing such epic poems as the Song of Miriam (Exod 15 21) and the Song of Deborah (Judg 5), in which the crossing of the Red Sea and the storm which made possible the victory over Sisera, respectively, were ascribed to Jehovah’s intervention in behalf of his people. Divine interventions in human events are characteristic of all ancient epics, and in this respect the J and E documents do not differ substantially from the Iliad, the Odyssey, the Ugaritic Poem of Aqhat son of Daniel, the Niebelungenlied, the Mahabharata, and others. Similarly some Greek, Roman, and later tragedies (including Goethe’s Faust) place gods, or lesser divine beings, on the stage with men. But no thinking man, ancient or modern, took seriously the historicity of such intercourse between gods and men, such as we have in J and the rest of this literature. It is no accident that the stories of J and E, as also those of the Iliad and the Odyssey, appeared so fantastic to later generations in their literal sense that they were interpreted allegorically beginning with Philo and Paul, on the one hand, and with the Theagenes of Rhegium and the Stoics, on the other.

It is not primarily in the J and E accounts of Jehovah’s intervention in Israel’s behalf that the new conception of history as “a divine dispensation”⁸ (cf. Judg 2 6—3 6) had its origin, but in the Deuteronomic Code found in 621, and ultimately in the eighth century prophets. Amos is the first, in our existing records to declare that Jehovah will punish *all* nations for their sins (Amos 1-2, in part), and that he was concerned with the Ethiopians as much as with the Israelites, actually giving countries to Israel’s worst enemies as well as to Israel (9 7). Then

⁸ J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* III-IV, 657 (London and Copenhagen, 1940).

Isaiah, confronted with the irresistible advance of the Assyrian armies (beginning in 745, after Amos had pronounced his oracles) dared assert with incredible boldness that the god of his little people was responsible for the Assyrian conquests. For in Jehovah's hand, Assyria was only the rod of his anger (Isa 10 5), eventually to be punished because it failed to realize that it was merely Jehovah's ax and boasted itself against him that hewed therewith (10 15a).

The first — and greatest — work in which God is said to control the course of events for the fulfilment of his purposes and men are regarded merely as pawns in his hand, is that history of God's Kingdom on earth dating from about 450 B. C. which we call the Priestly Code. At a time when the Jews, under Persian rule, no longer expected to become again an independent kingdom except through a miraculous intervention of God and were in danger of losing their national identity like the Northern Israelites, the authors of the Priestly Code created for the Jews the Holy Congregation for which the Deuteronomic Code of 621 had merely laid the foundations: it organized the Jews not merely as the people chosen by God through his covenant, but as his own Kingdom on earth, a theocracy within an empire, a holy congregation apart from the Gentiles, governed by God through the High Priest and living in accordance of the law revealed to Moses. Such a theocratic commonwealth, similar in character to a church, caused no uneasiness to the Persian authorities, who were extremely liberal in religious and cultural matters. To establish such a holy community the Priestly Code combines history and legislation. It shows how the sole God in existence created heaven and earth in six days and by resting on the seventh gave to the Sabbath a cosmic significance and ultimate validity; then God through a succession of eliminations in every generation separated Israel from the Gentiles; finally on Sinai the laws regulating the life of the holy congregation and specifying its duties toward its divine sovereign were revealed to Moses, and a country was provided for the twelve tribes. In this dogmatic history God is active throughout, from the moment when God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light, to when the High Priest Eleazar and Joshua distributed the land of Canaan among the nine and a half tribes "by lot as the Lord had commanded by the hand of Moses" (Josh 14 1 f.). The human characters are either passive pawns in God's hand, or, as God's enemies, are inexorably punished, if not instantly eliminated. In this account of an imaginary Utopia, planned and organized in detail by God at Sinai and in Canaan, the question of historicity is irrelevant: the whole had to be accepted by faith, and having thus been accepted it became the charter of Judaism — and one of the most influential writings in the world.

Two centuries later the Chronicler provided a sequel to the doctrinal history in the Priestly Code. After a bare summary of the period from

Adam to Saul, the Chronicler penned an ecclesiastical and dogmatic history of the vicissitudes of the holy congregation of Judaism beginning with David and ending with the restoration of the Jewish community through Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Here, as in the Priestly Code, the human agency in history is insignificant; for the almighty Creator and sovereign of the Jews is almost solely responsible for the course of events: thus although we know that Saul committed suicide after his defeat at Gilboa, we read that the Lord "slew" him because he consulted the witch at Endor (I Chron 10 13 f.). Even foreign emperors, like Nebuchadnezzar (II Chron 36 17) and Cyrus (36 22) are but tools in the hand of God and fulfil his purposes.

This sort of sacred history, setting forth God's activity in human affairs, is utterly impertinent — for man cannot know God's mind and work — unless it rests on a divine revelation, as the Priestly Code manifestly (and the Chronicler tacitly) imply. But the alleged cessation of divine inspiration did not put an end to this history of God's activity: later dogmatic historians down to the present day merely rewrote the inspired pages of the Bible, beginning with Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, and, among the Christians, the works of Eusebius of Caesarea, Sulpicius Severus, Augustine of Hippo, down to catechisms and Sunday School lessons to-day. As a matter of fact it is only during the nineteenth century that secular histories of Israel have been written: the earliest is contained in the first four volumes of H. Ewald's *Geschichte des Volkes Israel* in seven volumes (the first one of which appeared in 1843). In spite of considerable progress towards an objective treatment of the history of Israel, due primarily to the influence of J. Wellhausen (1844–1918) and W. Robertson Smith (1846–1894), dogmatic history still flourishes. Wellhausen was so determined to cling to actual facts that he separated himself from both theologians and philologists, and said, "What would have happened if Alexander the Great had not died is known only to the theologians and the philologists." The prejudice against the secular treatment of biblical history is far from ended. The objections raised against Joseph J. Scaliger (1540–1609) when he dared to deal with biblical history within the framework of the contemporary history of ancient nations are still occasionally raised. Scaliger said⁹ that the theologians ("prophets") of his day detested alien history so intensely that they regarded it as an extreme pollution of sacred history to utilize the chronology of what they called profane history to fix the biblical chronology.¹⁰

⁹ "Hodiernis prophetis tanto in odio est historia exotica, ut quum chronologia sacra instruenda sit, eam maxime inquinare putent, si ad tempora historiae, ut ipsi loquuntur, profanae referatur" (Joseph Justus Scaliger, *De emendatione temporum*, 1583).

¹⁰ A good detailed conspectus of the attacks on Wellhausen's critical and historical

It might seem that secular biblical history, the masterpiece of which is the early biography of David, and theological history, the masterpiece of which is the Priestly Code, are so utterly discrepant and contrasting in their methods and results that no combination of them could be accomplished. And yet, as early as about 600 B. C. the author of the Books of Kings attempted it: he utilized excellent secular histories to inculcate the religious teaching of the Deuteronomic Code of 621. He thus produced a theological treatise which stressed the centralization of the worship in Jerusalem (Deut 12) and the doctrine of earthly retribution of human deeds (Deut 28), but to prove the validity of these Deuteronomic doctrines he was forced, like so many other dogmatic historians, to sacrifice facts on the altar of theory, adopting the two standard devices which inevitably mar objective history: *suppressio veri* and *assertio falsi*.¹¹ For instance he omitted to mention the successful reign of wicked kings like Omri and Manasseh, and asserted that the pious but unfortunate Hezekiah, whose kingdom was devastated by Sennacherib, "prospered whithersoever he went forth" because the Lord was with him (II Kings 18 7). This author's example was followed by the Deuteronomistic Editor who, about 550 B. C. brought out an edition of the history from Abraham to the death of Jehoiachin in the spirit of Deuteronomy, and took the trouble to state his philosophy of history, according to which God was directly responsible for the vicissitudes of Israel, in Judg 2 6—3 6 (in part). Neither author fully succeeded in combining fact and faith, for their work presents true accounts of historical events side by side with imaginary stories and homiletic developments composed *ad hoc*.

Modern biblical scholars thus face the choice of one of three possible methods in writing the history of Israel: an impartial and objective record of all the known facts; religious or theological teaching disguised as historiography; and a combination of the two, in which facts are marshalled as proofs of a theory and historical events are presented as acts of God in the accomplishment of his great plans. Although all three have their champions and their practitioners at the present time, I should like to plead for the abolition of the third, as a snare and a delusion. But let us examine these methods separately.

Although there is no agreement as to whether historical research is scientific or not — it is not if by science we mean exact science, — there can be no serious question about the characteristics of genuine history. In an encyclical published in 1883, Pope Leo XIII said, "It is the first law of history that it dare say nothing which is false nor fear to utter

methods will be found in J. Coppens, *Histoire critique des livres de l'Ancien Testament* (3rd edition; Bruges: Desclée, De Brouwer, 1942), pp. 69–95.

¹¹ "Suppression of truth and assertion of falsehood."

anything that is true, in order that there may be no suspicion either of partiality or of hostility in the writer." In an excellent manual entitled *A Guide to Historical Method* (edited posthumously by Jean Delanglez, S. J. Fordham University Press, 1946), the late Father Gilbert J. Garraghan, S. J., lists the following characteristics of the competent historian: zeal for the truth, critical sense, objectivity, industry, concentration (*op. cit.*, pp. 42-54); and the following hallmarks of critical history: candor, accuracy, thoroughness, verifiability (*op. cit.*, pp. 54-59). I have confined my quotations on genuine history to Roman Catholic writers first of all because their reverence for the Bible is beyond question, and secondly because their logical thought and lucid expression is not always found in the Jewish and Protestant notions about history, and especially biblical history.¹²

The second type of history deals not with actual facts, but with articles of faith, taught as if they were historical events. It is obviously more effective to teach religious truths as facts rather than as doctrines and, beginning with the Priestly Code, this method has borne abundant fruits in the organization and propagation of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. To show how past events manifest the unfolding of a divine plan for mankind or for individual nations; to make, like the Bible, "the astounding claim that in this [biblical] history God is at work to give his decisive revelation and to call men to faith and obedience" (F. V. Filson, in *JBL*, LXIX [1950], 4) is to be encouraged for the up-building of Church and Synagogue. But such theological and homiletical writing should not be confused with genuine history. Thus, for example, it is legitimate for the pious believer to say that God slew King Saul as a punishment (I Chron 10 14); but a genuine historian will say that Saul committed suicide by falling upon his sword (I Sam 31 5). By faith we may assert that the Lord broke Jehoshaphat's ships at Ezion-geber (II Chron 20 37), but by knowledge we can only say that the ships were destroyed by some natural cause (I Kings 22 48 [Hebrew 22 49]). Can divine revelation and divine interventions, such as are reported as facts in the Priestly Code and in Chronicles, be regarded as verifiable events by a historian, even if he accepts by faith the Bible as the inspired word of God? And if not, is he an infidel? "The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" belong to the realm of faith, and not to the realm of actual knowledge. No true historian should even confuse what he believes by faith and what reliable evidence proves to be a fact.

Although common sense requires a distinction in the Bible between actual events in human history and faith in a God controlling the course

¹² "In fundamental theology (the evidences of religion), the problem of the Gospels as historical documents must be dealt with in the spirit and according to the methods of critical historical research" (G. J. Garraghan, *op. cit.*, p. 36).

of history, and although the identification of philosophy and history in Benedetto Croce's neo-Hegelianism (cf. Garraghan, *A Guide to Historical Methods*, p. 31) has been generally recognized as nonsensical verbiage, the third historical method, which combines critical research and religious faith, seems to be increasing in popularity among American biblical scholars: it has received the accolade of Professor Floyd V. Filson in his Presidential Address before the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis in 1949, and has been defended by several of its members. This trend backwards to Deuteronomistic historiography seems to me fatal to objective research, and goes hand in hand with the alarming decadence of serious philological studies in the field of Semitic and Indo-European languages on the part of young American biblical students, particularly Christian. How many theological students, among whom the teachers of the Bible will be recruited, still study Hebrew and Greek at all, or for more than a year? Seneca, the Stoic philosopher, complained that what was once philosophy had become philology (*Epistle* 108, 23). Some of us regret that in biblical studies what was once philology has become philosophy.

Only a few of the advocates of the mixture of theology and history, chosen at random, may be quoted here. R. M. Grant (*The Bible in the Church*, New York, Macmillan, 1948, p. 175) writes, "Science without theology is aimless, and theology without science is moribund. Historical criticism bound together in a free union with theological interpretation, can give guidance to the Christian church in an age of transition." W. F. Albright (*From the Stone Age to Christianity*, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1940, pp. 47-79) criticises rationalistic, evolutionary, and positivistic historical writing, and advocates "an organismic philosophy of history." His own attitude is "generally in accord with the neo-scholastic point of view" (*op. cit.*, p. 318, n. 21), and assumes that "there is an Intelligence and a Will, expressed both in History and Nature — for History and Nature are one" (*op. cit.*, p. 87).

This combination of doctrinal or philosophical speculation with the strictly historical research has found its most obvious expression in a revival of biblical theologies³³ which attempt to be at the same time "descriptive of a particular culture and normative for a religious faith that transcends all culture" (O. J. Baab, in *The Study of the Bible Today and Tomorrow*, ed. H. R. Willoughby, University of Chicago Press, 1947, p. 418). "As a matter of fact, one of the trends of which we are all aware . . . shows the Old Testament scholar adding to his functions

³³ "But in the measure that Israel's spiritual development produced a great change in some religious notions we must do justice to this by allowing the historical principle to join and supplement the systematic one . . ." (W. Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*. Leipzig, 1933, I, 5). Similarly Millar Burrows (*An Outline of Biblical Theology*, Philadelphia, 1946, p. 4) stresses both a historical determination of the nature of the religion of Israel and a religious determination of "what was God's judgment on that religion, and what significance it has for us."

as a scientist the interests of the theologian, seeking to present the religious thought of the Old Testament as a unified system of belief and to demonstrate the vitality of this belief for our day" (F. C. Prussner, in Willoughby, *op. cit.*, p. 184).¹⁴

The pure historical research, called "historicism" in a deprecatory sense, is regarded as bankrupt by Clarence T. Craig (*JBL*, LXII [1943], 294): "It tended to forget that after all it was an enterprise carried on for human values." Similarly Frederick C. Grant (*An Introduction to New Testament Thought*, Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950, p. 49) says, "Expert modern historians can write as if history had no 'meaning' or 'pattern,' never 'repeats,' and has no 'lessons' to teach us, a view totally contrary to the one assumed in the Bible and throughout Christian theology." And yet both these New Testament scholars realize that there are "limitations" in the "systematic view" of biblical theology (Grant, *op. cit.*, p. 51) and that "the present revolt is in grave danger of becoming a retreat to dogma rather than an advance to a truer insight into the permanent significance of the events recorded in the Old and New Testaments" (Craig, *ibid.*).

Half measures, however, will not place biblical research on a solid basis, on a par with research in other fields of the humanities, enjoying the full respect of competent scholars. The unhappy marriage of history and theology, owing to the prevalence of one over the other or else to mutual incompatibility, was never a true union and only divorce will result in the fruitful development of each of the two disciplines.¹⁵ Long ago it was recognized that historical writing and speculation in the fields of theology and philosophy were utterly different in methods and results. Aristotle contrasts history and poetry as follows, "The true difference is that one relates to what happened, the other to what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history; for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular" (*Poetics* IX, 1). From a different point of view the Apostle Paul regards the wisdom of God and the wisdom of this world (or divine revelation and human knowledge) as unrelated if not as opposed (I Cor 1 18—2 16); "for your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (2 5).

Some modern scholars have recognized that "existential and value

¹⁴ The fullest and most accurate account of the development of the theology of the Old Testament has been prepared by the present Editor of this Journal: Robert C. Dentan, *Preface to Old Testament Theology* (Yale Studies in Religion, No. XIV). New Haven, Yale University Press, 1950; cf. his article in the *Journal of Bible and Religion* XIV (1946), 16–21.

¹⁵ John H. Otwell ("Neo-Orthodoxy and Biblical Research," in *Harvard Theological Review* XLIII [Apr. 1950], 145–157) recognizes that "the historian and the theologian need one another." Nevertheless, "Each of these areas requires such specialization that competence in one or the other is a sufficient achievement for one individual." This wise observation is unfortunately almost a dead letter.

judgments" (William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, ch. I) as also the descriptive method of the history of religion on the one hand, and the normative method of theology are mutually exclusive (Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion*, University of Chicago Press, 1944, p. 1). H. Wheeler Robinson said, in *Record and Revelation* (edited by him; Clarendon Press, 1938, p. 305), "History implies dynamic movement of some kind . . . ; revelation implies static and permanent truth. . . . How can human transiency express divine eternity? How can free human activity be made to serve fixed divine purpose?" And Martin Dibelius (*Jesus*. Translated by C. B. Hedrick and F. C. Grant, Westminster Press, 1949, pp. 10 f.) states rightly that "the viewpoints of faith and history cannot be simply combined. What is asserted by faith cannot be proved historically. . . . History can never solve . . . questions by pointing to God. Faith, on the contrary, can be content with no other answer"

Not only scholars, but even the humble untutored believers of all faiths intuitively know that facts and faith do not mix. There is much truth in the following words of George Foote Moore (*Judaism*, Harvard University Press, 1927, I, 250), "In fact the application of modern and critical methods to the Scriptures, and above all the introduction of the idea of development, involves, consciously or unconsciously, a complete change in the idea of revelation, a change which orthodoxy, whether Jewish or Christian, has resisted with the instinct of self-preservation."

In closing this overly long appeal for keeping facts and faith, history and revelation, historical research and theological speculation, separate and distinct for their mutual benefit, I wish to quote the words of an almost forgotten rabbi and biblical scholar, Marcus Moritz Kalisch (1828–85) — words which after almost a century still sound true. "The Biblical narrative, with regard to the *facts*, is to be estimated like other analogous traditions of the ancient writers; though the *religious truths* which it contains belong to the most important parts of the Biblical canon" (*A Historical and Critical Commentary on the Genesis*, London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1858, p. 212). Let us accordingly study the Bible historically as "the record of man's groping after God" and let us by faith discover in it "the record of God's progressive revelation of Himself to man" (cf. H. H. Rowley, *The Rediscovery of the Old Testament*, London, James Clark, 1945. Reprinted by the Westminster Press, 1946, p. 15). If our historical research endeavors only to discover truth as defined by William James, "Truth independent; truth that we find merely; truth no longer malleable to human need" — it may well be that our scholarly work may prove, in its by-products, religiously significant, and that its result will be "not to destroy but to clarify the spiritual value and moral authority of the Scriptures."¹⁶

¹⁶ R. B. Y. Scott, *The Relevance of the Prophets* (New York: Macmillan, 1944). p. vii.