

RECENT TRENDS IN BIBLICAL STUDIES

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This is a broad subject, involving primarily Old and New Testament studies but also background scholarship in Biblical archaeology, philology and theology. The subject is difficult to encompass and control because of the vast flood of publications which are appearing constantly. The amount of material over which one person may gain and maintain mastery is such that one's field of specialization must of necessity be narrower now than in previous years. In this paper attention is concentrated on trends over the past quarter century, especially trends of special importance to evangelical Christian scholars.

The obvious difficulties of the reviewer's task is alleviated considerably by the labors of others in this field. Among these we may note the following:

1. Harold R. Willoughby, edit., *The Study of the Bible Today and Tomorrow*, (Chicago 1947).
2. A. J. B. Higgins, "Some Recent Trends in Biblical Scholarship", *Congregational Quarterly*, 27 (1949), pp. 122-133.
3. C. H. Dodd, "Thirty Years of New Testament Study", *Union Theological Seminary Quarterly*, 5, (1950) pp. 5-12.
4. Archibald M. Hunter, *Interpreting the New Testament, 1900-1950*, (Philadelphia, 1952).
5. W. F. Howard, "A Survey of New Testament Studies During Half a Century", *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, Sixth Series, 21 (1952), pp. 6-15.
6. Wm. R. Baird, Jr. "Current Trends in New Testament Study" *The Journal of Review*, June, 1954, pp. 49ff.
7. H. J. Cadbury, "Current Issues in New Testament Studies", *Harvard Theological Review*, June, 1954, pp 49ff.
8. James Muilenburg, "Old Testament Scholarship, Fifty Years in Retrospect," *Journal of Bible and Religion*, April, 1960, pp. 173ff.
9. G. Ernest Wright, "Old Testament Scholarship in Prospect", *Journal of Bible and Religion*, April, 1960, pp. 182.
10. H. J. Cadbury, "New Testament Scholarship: Fifty Years in Retrospect". *Journal of Bible and Religion*, April, 1960, 194ff.
11. E. C. Colwell, "New Testament Scholarship in Prospect", *Journal of Bible and Religion*, April, 1960, 199ff.
12. Norman K. Gottwald, "Whither Old Testament Studies?" *Andover Newton Quarterly*, September, 1960, p. 17.
13. Russell C. Tuck, "Recent Studies in the Fourth Gospel", *Andover Newton Quarterly*, September, 1960, p. 39.
14. E. J. Young, "Survey of O. T. Literature", *Christianity Today*, February 13, 1960, pp. 5ff.
15. M. E. Marty, ed., *New Directions in Biblical Thought*, N.Y., Association Press, 1960.
16. F. F. Bruce, "New Testament Studies in 1960", *Christianity Today*, February 13, 1961, p. 88ff.
17. R. H. Harrison, "British Old Testament Study", *Christianity Today*, February 13, 1961, p. 12ff.

OLD TESTAMENT

Biblical science is now more than 200 years old if we take the time of Jean Astruc's treatise on two literary sources in Genesis in 1754 as a landmark of its origin. Robert Lowth recognized parallelisms in Hebrew poetry in the same year. In contrast to the relative general orderliness and stability of the 19th century, the 20th century thus far has been one of revolutionary changes in Biblical research. The closing decades of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th saw the increasing influence of evolution in Biblical studies and the emergence of the Social Gospel. The reconstruction of Old Testament historical pattern by the Graf-Wellhausen school of documentary hypothesis had become firmly established. Fundamentalism protested the so-called "assured results" of critical learning with little effect. So overwhelming was the consensus of opinion among those who were considered the best scholars that early in 1940 the Methodist Church under the leadership of Prof. E. A. Leslie (Boston University School of Theology), projected a re-writing of Old Testament history for Sunday School children. In it Amos and the prophets would be presented as the earliest sources of information and the founders of Methodism. A graduate of Colgate Rochester Divinity School doing graduate study at Harvard in the forties, had been taught to revere Julius Wellhausen as perhaps the greatest genius in the history of modern Bible Scholarship. This theory has found expression in the Polychrome Bible irreverently dubbed the "rainbow Bible". The isolation of sources other than The JEDP quartet proceeded, including J (2) by Smend in 1912, an L document by Eissfeldt in 1922, a Kenite source by Morgensterns in 1927 and an Edomite source by Pfeiffer in 1941. Pfeiffer's *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Harper's, 1941) marked the high water mark of Wellhausen's influence. In this volume the author, noting a viewpoint with which he disagreed, dismissed it by the use of "the ultimate weapon," namely, that acceptance of this view would undermine the entire Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis. The result of this trend was an atomistic view of Scripture in which scholars saw divergences, but little unity; they asked *who* said it, *when* he said it, *why* he said it, but little about *what* he said. W. R. Irwin, was in line with this negative result of "higher Criticism" when in 1933, as a self-styled objective and scientific scholar, he was forced to conclude that Amos was not a strong thinker, but one of meager intellectual furnishings and strong prejudices.¹ He had apparently been overconverted by negative criticism.

Meanwhile, over the horizon appeared a cloud the size of a man's hand, which challenged the documentary hypothesis. R. Kittle, ed. of *Biblia Hebraica* was among the first to challenge the documentary hypothesis, in his *Geschichte des Hebraer*, (Gotha, 1888), and in *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, (1909).

One of the most influential of those making a constructive refutation of the documentary hypothesis was Hermann Gunkel. His studies in form criticism found expression in his *Commentary on Genesis* and later in his *Einleitung* to the Psalms (1933). In a reaction from historical criticism he substituted *Formgeschichte*. Instead of dissecting literary sources he went back to assumed oral sources and distinguished diverse literary types. Prominent in this was the quest for the life-situation, *Sitz im Leben*, out of which the literature of the Bible came. This attitude is reflected in Eissfeldt, *Einleitung to Alten Testamentum*. S. Mowinkel was also much influenced by Gunkel as was E. A. Leslie (*The Psalms*) among English speaking writers. The new emphasis here was on the need for correlating what was known about the historical environment of a Biblical book with the message of the book. The result was that most of the Psalms were regarded as pre-exilic rather than post-exilic in order to account for the *Sitz im Leben*.

Von Rad also worked on the *Formgeschichte* problem in *Das Formgeschichtliche Problem des Hexateuch*, (1938), seeking sources of the Jahvist document in creedal

formulations such as Deut. 26 and Josh. 24. Alt and his disciples stressed the importance of cultic as contrasted to historical influences in Israel's history. According to this view the heroic age of Israel is that reflected in the book of Judges when the Twelve-Tribe League with cult centers, "shows existence of a strong national and cultic unity in Israel antedating the monarchy."² This was Israel's charismatic age. In contrast to Alt, Gunkel, Mowinkel, Nyberg and Pedersen, the Bible itself views this period as the "dark ages" in Israelite history and the times of Abraham and Moses as the great creative periods. It is noteworthy that Alt's view is in contrast to liberalism also which assumed a primitive culture slowly evolving to the kingdom period. According to this *Formgeschichte* view the prophets were not hostile to the priests, as is often implied in the Old Testament, but were associated with cult centers as "cultic prophets".³ Law was now restored to a place prior in time to the prophets. This emphasis upon the cultic has lent new importance to the post-exilic period. In short, the emphasis of the older criticism on the priority of the prophetic influence on the kingdom period is now shifted to the periods after the Exodus and after the Exile. This tradition-history, *Formgeschichte* scoffs at historical criticism but is much indebted to it. It is more of a modification than a displacement of Wellhausen.⁴

Many factors have contributed to this shift in emphasis. One of the most influential has been archaeology. While continental scholars have continued to be the dominant influence in lexical and theological studies American scholarship has taken the lead in archaeology. A great impetus to scientific archaeology, as distinct from curio seeking, came with the pioneer work of Flinders Petrie in the dating of pottery and the work of Albright and others on stratification.

Palestinian archaeology received a great impetus since World War I because most of Palestine was under British Mandate and archaeology could be pursued vigorously. It was neither exploited by treasure hunters nor hindered by hostile governments. In this American scholars, from Edward Robinson (1841) to Nelson Glueck (1960) have been the dominant influence. The influence of the discoveries at Ras Shamra of Ugaritic literature has served to provide considerable *Sitz im Leben* for Old Testament literature, particularly that of the Psalms. The overwhelming effect of this mass of data, contemporary with our Biblical records, has been to show that the Hexateuch presents an accurate reflection of the period out of which it purports to come, rather than a world existing only in the imagination of the writers of the Kingdom Period. A case in point is the patriarchal stories which have literary and historical parallels with Hittite remains. George Mendenhall and others have shown from Hittite sources that Canaan about the year 2000 B.C. was essentially the world of Genesis and that Wellhausenism is based more on theory than upon fact. The contribution of archaeology has done much to bolster the conservative position. This is reflected, for instance, in the coldness given by liberals to Albright's demand for a revision of liberalism's position in the dating of Biblical materials. It is seen in the support given by the Qumran Scrolls to our extant O.T. texts and to the Hebrew background of the Fourth Gospel. But archaeology has also made more precarious the doctrine of infallible autographs of the Old Testament, in the judgment of most students of archaeology e.g., Albright, and Young in his *Analytical Concordance*.

However the total impact of archaeology has been to give a new respectability to conservative scholarship.

The influence of archaeology is reflected in two recent books on old Testament history. Martin Noth, *The History of Israel*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959, finds that since there are no written records prior to 1200 A.D. the period of the patriarchs and the Exodus are but memories of events and persons preserved by oral transmission and hence consists of tribal legends later brought into an historical framework which is rather artificial.⁵ Even Moses is a legendary figure. Bright, on the other hand, reflecting the Albright influence, goes back far behind the Judges

period and assumes a valid historical memory behind the Pentateuch. In this matter of diverse data a synthesis is not yet in sight. G. E. Wright finds that this is the central issue in Old Testament study, namely, whether the tribal confederacy is the determining factor in Old Testament history or whether Bright's approach is the valid one. He thinks the teacher must arbitrarily make his choice.⁶ Bright's work has received cordial commendation by evangelical scholars e.g., E. J. Young, "Survey of Old Testament Literature," *Christianity Today*, Feb. 13, 1961, p. 7.

In terms of the contribution of evangelical scholarship to the study of the Old Testament the trend is impressive. More and more well-trained evangelical scholars, especially in the Reformed tradition, are concerning themselves with Old Testament studies. We may mention in addition to those cited such names as E. J. Young, F. F. Bruce and Merrill Unger, and some younger scholars. The Old Testament speaks in no uncertain sound through the writing of Samuel Schultz in his *The Old Testament Speaks*, N.Y.: Harpers, 1959, a volume which combines features of an introduction, a history, and a biblical theology. It is cautious where caution is needed, as in dating Exodus, but sometimes, due to space considerations, deals rather lightly with problems. Merrill P. Unger's volumes indicate a sustained production of a high caliber in Old Testament studies. Many young scholars are beginning to make their influence felt, especially in the Old Testament fields. The interest now being shown by large publishers in the conservative market is symptomatic of the vitality and freshness of the new evangelism or "Neo-Fundamentalism." Eighteen years ago Professor Auer of Harvard said that J. G. Machen was the only fundamentalist for whom he had any respect. His list would undoubtedly be considerably larger today.

IN NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP

Landmarks in N. T. Scholarship during the past quarter century are numerous. The influence of Barth's *Commentary on Romans*, 1918, can scarcely be overestimated. It did the service in exposing the shallowness of humanistic Christianity and the sinfulness of man. It taught us to fit into the biblical frame of reference rather than shaping the Bible to fit our context. In neutral Switzerland, surrounded by the tides of war, Barth was uniquely situated to ponder the sinfulness of man, and the need for divine intervention if man was to be save from self-destruction.

America has been described, however, as suffering a cultural lag in biblical studies. During most of this century it has been the continental scholars who have led the way. North American scholarship has been sharply divided into liberal and conservative camps, while the British, characteristically, have tried to harmonize the extremes. Thus it was not until some fifteen years later that Barth's *Neoorthodoxy* made its influence felt to any extent in this country. As late as the mid-forties New England Seminaries including theological faculties at Harvard and Boston University were vigorously resisting what Van Til calls *The New Modernism*. Aided, not only by the World War, but also by the great depression of the thirties, belief in man's inward goodness and the inevitability of his progress was largely abandoned, much to the relief of those conservatives who had never lost sight of man's sinfulness and his dependence upon divine grace.

As Neo-Orthodoxy was born in World War I so the demand for *demythologizing* originated in World War II. Based upon the philosophy of existentialism of Heidegger, Rudolph Bultmann sought to interpret the New Testament in such a way that the average man of the mid-twentieth century would pay attention.

The most appreciated factor about Bultmann's approach is his alleged motive. He is convinced that the message of the New Testament is largely unconvincing to modern man because the mental furnishings of today's average man differ so widely from those of the first century. Today we live in a space age with man-made satellites becoming commonplace. It is harder for sophisticated moderns to think of a Christo-

centric universe than it was for St. Paul who saw every knee bowing to Christ (Phi. 2:11). Modern man cannot, says Bultmann, think within the dimensions of a three-story universe even if he wishes. The inner spiritual truth of the New Testament must be divested of its symbolism or the "mythology" which pertains to the pre-critical, pre-scientific of the first century. Even such fundamentals as the virgin birth, miracles, and the resurrection, as treated by Bultmann and his disciples, are scaffolding which obscures the true nature of the Gospel message, the *Kerygma*. As Bultmann puts it, "The world view of the Scripture is mythological and is therefore unacceptable to modern man whose thinking has been shaped by science and is therefore no longer mythological."⁷

Serious attempts have been made to understand, translate and present Bultmann in a favorable light to English readers e.g., Ian Henderson, *Myth in the New Testament*; SCM. Press, 1956; John Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing*, N.Y.: Harpers, 1960. A Presbyterian professor at Park College, Missouri recently called for a *Copernican Christology*, and the Episcopal Bishop Pike of San Francisco is ready to demythologize the Apostle's Creed. Many who do accept his conclusions are forced to recognize the seriousness of the problem. *Christianity Today* presently is rendering a service by a series of articles in "Dare We Follow Bultmann?"

If Neo-Orthodoxy is *the New Modernism* what can be said of the *school of demythologizing*? It is exasperating to the typical liberal no less than to the fundamentalist. Bultmann does not tell his disciples what to do about history, at least they do not appear to have heard it if he did. This school of thought does not tell one how he can have a vital faith without some factual basis for it. The negative results of the attempt at demythologizing have already led to a reaction in the direction of a renewed attempt to discover the historical Jesus. There is emerging a new synthesis between the kerygma and the Jesus of history. This trend is reflected in James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 1959.

Recent studies in Acts include two evangelical commentaries; one by F. F. Bruce and the other by Earle and Carter. Significant recent studies in Romans include those by Nygren and Barrett.

Perhaps in no area have trends in New Testament scholarship been more noticeable than in Johannine studies. In 1935 C. H. Dodd stated that, in his judgment, the understanding of the Fourth Gospel was the "crucial test of our success or failure in solving the problem of the New Testament as a Whole."⁸ Landmarks in Johannine studies include the publication of the Ryland Papyrus fragment which completes an abandonment of a mid-second century dating which was in vogue thirty years ago, and locates it about 100 A.D., the traditional dating. Epheesus is once again regarded as the most likely place of origin. Attempts at redistributing the materials in the Gospel, as urged by MacGregor, Bernard and Bultmann, are being treated with increased reserve and skepticism because they raise more problems than they solve e.g., A. Power, "The Original Order of St. John's Gospel, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Oct. 1940. The appearance of the Qumran Scrolls has substantiated the earlier judgments of men like W. F. Howard who had believed that the dominant emphasis on the Gospel was Semitic rather than Hellenistic.⁹ Jeremias and M. Burrows agree that Palestine is the background of this Gospel. English commentators have given this Gospel considerable attention, among them Sir Edwin Hoskyns, (1938), C. K. Barrett, (1955), R. H. Lightfoot (1958), and W. F. Howard and A. J. Gossip in *the Interpreters Bible*, R. V. G. Tasker, (1960) in the *Tyndale Commentary* series and Wm. Barclay, *Daily Study Bible*, a masterpiece of expository lucidity.

During the forties, W. F. Albright brought to bear upon the Fourth Gospel the findings of archaeology and decided that this evidence points to an author acquainted with Palestine prior to the Jewish War, a boost to the defenders of traditional author-

ship. Because of the many verbal similarities, the Qumran schools have intensified interest in the Fourth Gospel. Its historical accuracy has been substantiated to a large extent.

Other recent developments with special reference to Johannine studies include the recent discovery of Gnostic papyri at Chenobekzion in upper Egypt.¹⁰ While not closely related to the Fourth Gospel these Coptic *gospels* reveal the Gnostic influences which had already been anticipated in the Gospel and Epistles of John and in Paul's letter to the Colossians. The Gospel of Thomas has interesting parallels of language with the Fourth Gospel.¹¹

One of the finest ancient manuscripts on the Fourth Gospel is the Bodmer Papyrus II, dating from the third century; hence it is the earliest complete text of the Gospel extant. It will be consulted with profit in the years to come by students of John. It may be noted that the current trend is to recognize no one text of John as the best. Instead scholars like Hoskyns, Barrett, and Dodd have used an eclectic text.

The Evangelical Quarterly edited a series of articles which appeared as "Studies in the Fourth Gospel." It contains an assertion by Karl Barth that the statement, 'The Word Became Flesh,' is the central statement of the New Testament.¹² Cullmann has suggested that the people to whom the Gospel is addressed are not the Jews of the Diaspora, but rather a primitive group of Hellenists which existed simultaneously with the Judaizers from primitive times.¹³ Bultmann's great commentary on John of 1941 marks the end of an era. Merrill C. Tenney has presented a very useful analysis of the Gospel and a judicious presentation of its distinctive messages.¹⁴

Encouraging signs for the Evangelical scholar are numerous. Rolland Wolfe of Western Reserve University said recently that, as a liberal, he had far more respect for scholars like Bernard Ramm and the faculty at Wheaton than he had for the "up-to-date" existentialists. Evangelical scholarship is also apparent in Biblical commentaries, extant and projected, including, the *New International Commentary on the New Testament*, *The Evangelical Bible Commentary*, Hendrickson's solid scholarship, the Torch series, and the Shield series. For the Biblical scholar, this age of new discovery and transition is a good time to be alive. There is a vigor among younger evangelical scholars with a modification of the dogmatism of many of the older conservative scholars. The most promising field for young Christian scholars would seem to be now, as in R. D. Wilson's day, an emphasis on linguistics and philology.

Evangelicals need to guard against a tendency towards *me-too-ism*, a temptation to attempt tasks that are being done better by others, such as translating the Bible and writing Commentaries, not because they contribute to the fund of knowledge but simply because they are done by an evangelical, thus catering to one segment of conservative readers. Less isolation, less motivation of prestige and a greater dedication to the long range task of Christian apologetics via a Biblical approach would seem an appropriate next step for evangelical biblical scholars in this mid-century.

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NOTES

1. W. A. Irwin, "The Thinking of Amos," *American Journal of Semitic Languages Lit.*, Chi. '33.
2. G. E. Wright, "Old Testament Scholarship in Prospect," *J. B. R.* April, 1960, p. 183.
3. N. K. Gottwald, "Whither Old Testament Studies?" *Andover Newton Quarterly*, Sept. 1960, p. 21.
4. (*Ibid.*, p. 22). In this welter of data a synthesis has not yet appeared.
5. G. E. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 184.
6. G. E. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 185.
7. *Jesus Christ and Mythology*. N.Y.: Scribners, 1958, p. 36.
8. R. C. Tuck, "Recent Studies in the Fourth Gospel," *Andover Newton Quarterly*, Sept. 1960, p. 39.
9. *Christianity According to St. John*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946.
10. J. Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics*, Viking Press, 1960.
11. Giffant and Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960.
12. R. C. Tuck, *op. cit.*, Sept. 1960, p. 42.
13. "Fresh Approach to the Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel," *Expository Times*, 1959.
14. M. C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1954.