CRISIS AND EVOLUTION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT[1]

"IF, from the threshold of the New Testament, we look back over the history of the Hebrew race with which their religion was inseparably interwoven, we are at once conscious of a gradual but quite definite progress onward and upward, in spite of repeated setbacks." That quotation—which happens to be from Miss B. K. Rattey's *Short History of the Hebrews* (p. 177) —might in fact have been from almost any of the standard textbooks on Hebrew religion of the past generation. The only difference which might be expected would be the omission of the final phrase, which draws attention to a point largely glossed over by many writers about the Old Testament. It is true that a closer study of the Old Testament reveals the setbacks, but the over-all impression—as it is normally given—is of a gradual upward movement, an evolutionary trend in religion with as much inevitability as that which the conventional understanding of evolution expects to find in the biological sphere. (This is the conventional understanding of evolution, not the scientific.)

Taken to its logical extreme, this common view of evolutionary theory issues in a theology which is frequently to-day ridiculed for its lack of reality. "Translate the evolutionary theories into religious faith, and you have the doctrine of the Kingdom of God" (quoted by G. E. Wright, *The Challenge of Israel's Faith*, p. 103, from H. Shelton Smith, *Faith and Nurture*, pp. 33 f.). That quotation epitomizes a rightly criticized attitude which is less common on this side of the Atlantic than on the other, and which used to be common in certain parts of the Continent. For, except where an occasional extremist view is expressed which justifies such criticism, the attacks made upon what are termed the outworn evolutionary creeds of those who believe in evitable progress appear to have little reality in our part of the world at all.

I

The purpose of these general remarks is to introduce the real question raised by the subject. We have grown accustomed to the use of the term "evolution" as descriptive of the processes of religious development in the Old Testament. Many of us

[1] Based on a paper originally read to the Leeds Theological Circle in May 1951 and subsequently revised.

have been trained entirely under such ideas. The standard text-book of Old Testament religion, still used by most students, is inevitably Oesterley and Robinson's *Hebrew Religion.* A large place is devoted in this work to the earliest stages of religious belief and its survivals in the Old Testament—ancestor worship, totem and taboo, tree and water spirits, and the rest. We are then led through the religion of Moses and the religion of Canaan to the problems of the Israelite settlement, the prophets (themselves the result of an evolutionary process) and so to the later religious ideas of Judaism.

This approach, which discusses the religious material of the Old Testament from a historical point of view, is obviously of considerable value. It may well need to be revised frequently. For example, the opening sections on primitive religion find many critics among those who have carried on investigation into the fields of early Semitic religious thought,[1] and the discovery of many traces of primitive beliefs in the Old Testament narrative may well need to be differently evaluated. These ought perhaps to be described rather as survivals, which have lost their meaning, than as still possessing any real hold over the people. They might be compared with the continued existence in our own day of superstitions like that which discourages walking under a ladder, though the known persistence of primitive side by side with more advanced ideas needs to be taken into account.[2]

The principles, however, of such a history of religion inevitably remain, even when assessments vary of the periods to which individual factors belong. We are dealing with a certain period of history during which many changes took place in religious custom and belief. We must expect to describe these changes in historical terms, giving an account of the developments which took place. Such an approach gives also much opportunity for reference to the environment of Israel. Israel was never so isolated a community as not to undergo considerable influences from the people among whom she lived. How much or how

[1] Cf. G. E. Wright, *The Old Testament against its Environment*, p. 12, note 6. Recent study of " high gods " suggests a new evaluation of patriarchal religion, though a reliable definition of the nature of high gods is much to be desired.

[2] Cf. A. Vincent, " L'Ancien Testament et l'Histoire des Religions," in *Oudtestamentische Studiën*, VIII (1950), pp. 282 ff. W. F. Albright (*From the Stone Age to Christianity*, p. 80) justly criticizes the Wellhausen school for telescoping evolution into an impossibly short period in its tracing of the development of Israel's religion.

little of her religious belief and ritual she derived from other peoples remains a matter of debate. We can only not deny such assimilation of material from other communities and cultures.

Recent criticism of this historical approach attacks it on three main grounds. In the first place it is pointed out that there is confusion between the terms " description " and " explanation ". A history of Old Testament religion *describes* the evolution of the religion through the centuries. For example, it points out the forms of primitive prophetic life and thought, as indicated by the frenzied prophets of Baal and the " sons of the prophets " of the time of Samuel or Elisha. It then shows the connections between the great prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries both with these forerunners and with prophetic groups in other communities. The assumption is then often made—tacitly, if not explicitly—that such a description *explains* the origin of the great prophetic movement in the eighth century.

In the second place, there is the similar danger to which Wright points: " The application of the metaphor of growth to the study of the Bible . . . has also generated a habit of mind which easily misinterprets the subject matter because it must always evaluate in terms of an ascending scale of values."[1] This " ascending scale " is itself of doubtful validity. Robert Graves has defined the humanitarian concept of progress, rather cynically perhaps, as " a bumpy journey to nowhere in particular considered as somehow better than the putative point of origin only because it had not yet been reached."[2] The historical approach meets repeatedly the difficulty of explaining why at certain points there was lack of development. Why does it appear that sometimes civilization moves backwards? Many studies of the Old Testament leave out of account the periods of setback, or gloss them over. Yet it would be possible to write a history of Hebrew religion emphasizing the periods in which there was no development, no progress from a lower to a higher standard or outlook. We might concentrate for example on the failure of Elijah and Elisha, who touched so ineffectually the evils of their community that less than a century later Amos and Hosea pilloried the same or similar evils; the failure of these latter two prophets to effect any change in the outlook of

[1] *The Old Testament against its Environment*, p. 11; cf. also W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, p. 50.

[2] *Seven Days in New Crete*, pp. 222 f.

the population, as witnessed by the similar prophecies of Isaiah; the refusal of Ahaz to follow Isaiah's advice and its dire repercussions on the religion of Judah in the reign of Manasseh; the failure of Josiah's reform; the religious decline after the return from Exile and the re-dedication of the Temple in 516; the failure of Nehemiah; the decline from Maccabean heroism to Hasmonean treachery. These are all perfectly real factors in the history of the Old Testament, and they cannot be explained on the simple assumption that there is a gradual progress from the lower to the higher. Of course they are not the only factors, nor are they adequately described merely in terms of failure, but any account of the Old Testament which leaves them out is unsatisfactory.

In the third place, the historical approach is criticized for failure to give the answer to the question "Why?" Wellhausen's statement is quoted by Wright: "Why Chemosh of Moab never became the God of righteousness and the Creator of heaven and earth, is a question to which one can give no satisfactory answer."[1] No matter how accurate the description of Old Testament developments may be, a purely historical approach inevitably leaves untouched this central problem. In effect it ignores the theological bias of all Old Testament literature, which is concerned very little with description and almost entirely with explanation. The books of Kings are not intended as a merely descriptive account of the period from Solomon's accession to the time of fall of Jerusalem and the release of Jehoiachin from prison; they are intended as an explanation of *why* certain things happened. The narratives concerning the Exodus are not simple descriptions; they make certain assertions about the causes of the events they describe. It is being increasingly realized that, however interesting the descriptive material may be, and however fascinating the elusive study of Old Testament problems, the real problem with which the Old Testament confronts us is its assertion that the "why" and the "how" of Israelite fortunes are to be found in the activity of God.

II

The attempt is made by G. E. Wright, in the book already mentioned and elsewhere, to find a more adequate answer to the problem of Israel's unique development. In this attempt he

[1] *The Old Testament against its Environment*, p. 15.

has much in common with other scholars, Continental and British as well as American.[1] The idea of a progressive evolution of Israelite religious life and thought out of its background and environment is an insufficient explanation of its distinctive characteristics. The answer to the problem is found in the use of the term " crisis ".

This is not the place for a full discussion of this kind of approach; and a brief account inevitably does less than justice to some very important contributions to the study of the Old Testament. But the general impression left by such views is that the essential moment of Israel's history and experience was the Exodus. This is the " crisis " out of which emerge the distinctive elements of the faith—belief in God, the idea of a community, the understanding of divine purpose. Parallel with this Old Testament crisis one may place the crisis of the New Testament, which in the same way issues in a new apprehension of the divine nature and purpose, and of the community of the church.

It is certainly clear from a reading of the prophetic writings and the Psalms that the experience of the Exodus bulked large in Israel's understanding of her peculiar place in history. One may go further. The legal material of Israel's heritage was linked inevitably with the great personality of the Exodus—Moses. This was surely not the result of a mere accidental attribution of law to the one who had first given law to Israel. It was the result of the realization that the Exodus was the normative event in the formulation of Israel's law. Its refrains speak of the slave-condition of Israel in Egypt and the deliverance given by Yahweh " with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm." Especially in Deuteronomy is this appeal made, but it is not absent from the other legal codes. Apart indeed from Psalmody and the ordering of Temple music and procedure, which were attributed generally to David, though themselves witnessing to the prior event of the Exodus, and Wisdom, attributed to Solomon, the whole of the literature turns about the recollection of God's deliverance and the hope and conviction of its repetition. Even the primitive creation imagery is in a sense subordinated to this, for the Psalms which speak of the

[1] Cf. also G. E. Wright, *God who acts* (1952), and the writings of W. F. Albright. The critical attitude of many Scandinavian scholars to the evolutionary approach may also be compared, though their particular attitude is not here discussed.

creative activity of God are eloquent equally—with that abrupt turn which Phythian-Adams has stressed—of the smiting of the first-born of Egypt and the cleaving of the Red Sea (cf. Ps. cxxxvi). The imagery of creation and Exodus has become inextricably interwoven in Ps. lxxiv and elsewhere.

The argument which is worked out on this basis shows how the distinctive elements of Israel's faith arise out of the particular experience of God's intervention in the life of Israel. Clearly the emphasis must be on the differences between Israel and the surrounding nations rather than on the points of similarity and contact. The title of G. E. Wright's book *The Old Testament against its Environment* ought really to have the word *against* printed in distinctive type, since the emphasis is on the differences rather than on the environment. This emphasis needs to be made. Especially does it need to be brought out afresh in this period when we are being continually subjected to theories of the close relationship between the Old Testament and other cultures. Different relationships have been found at different times—tracing everything to Babylon, or to Egypt, or, as frequently now, to the Canaanite civilization whose nature is disclosed in the Ras Shamra tablets. The points of relationship are of great importance, but clearly the fact remains to be accounted for that Israel has left its mark on the life of the world in a way that most other ancient cultures have not.

The argument can, however, be pressed too far. The fact that ultimately Israel's contribution was so distinctive does not necessarily involve the conclusion that her faith and her religious life were not at earlier periods very similar to those of her neighbours. That there were many lapses to the level of contemporary culture is conceded on all sides. The contemporaries of Elijah or of Hosea certainly lapsed into the worship of the Baalim. Throughout the Old Testament period we can trace an undercurrent of popular belief, of hankering after magic, of superstition, which were continually the target of prophetic diatribes. But the issue is not quite so clear-cut as this. Perhaps it is not doing full justice to the " crisis " type of approach to the Old Testament to say that it sees a starting point of true faith at the Exodus and explains subsequent lower levels as lapses from the higher standard. Yet that is how it appears, and indeed such a claim is sometimes, though not invariably, made by the prophets (cf. Hosea xi. 1, Jer. ii. 1–3,

vii. 21–26; but see on the other hand Ezek. xxiii, xx. 5–8, Hos. xii).

One or two examples may be cited from Wright which may serve to show that such a view is not the only possible interpretation of the data. It is pointed out that there is no word in the Old Testament for "goddess". From this it is deduced that, whatever the practices of different periods, there was never any real question of a female counterpart for Yahweh. Two pieces of evidence may be quoted as pointing to an opposite conclusion as at least possible. Gideon's clan seems to have worshipped both male and female until Gideon was moved to reject the latter. The male deity was not some other god than Yahweh, but Yahweh himself described as Baal (cf. Judges vi. 25 ff.).[1] Can we be so sure that this was not the generally accepted practice in the period of the settlement? From a much later date we may quote the evidence of the Elephantine papyri as showing the existence of a female counterpart to Yahweh in a religious community which was apparently in touch with the official centres of Hebrew religion in both Jerusalem and Samaria. There is no hint that when the authorities wrote to Elephantine authorizing the offering of certain forms of worship they felt it necessary to forbid the associating of female deities with Yahweh. What is the explanation of this? Is it satisfactory to describe both these as merely aberrations from an originally pure worship; or may not the opposite trend be equally intelligible? The evidence is insufficient for any dogmatic judgment.[2]

It is also argued that there was no image-worship in Israel, except in error and as a debasement of the true stream of Israelite tradition which renounced images. No male images

[1] Judges vi. 32 probably refers to a new meaning given to Gideon's name Jerubbaal as a result of his iconoclasm: probably he had originally received the name in honour of Yahweh syncretistically worshipped as Baal.—Ed.

[2] Cf. L. E. Browne, *Early Judaism*, pp. 170 ff., where the Elephantine religion is described as a relic of Judaean polytheism. Cf. also Hart, *Foreword to the Old Testament*, p. 52. On the other hand it is argued by Albright (cf. *Stone Age to Christianity*, p. 286, for references) that the divine names are to be regarded as hypostatized aspects of Yahweh, a sort of paganizing prototype of the hypostatic speculations of Philo. G. R. Driver in *J. T. S.* xxv (1923–4), pp. 293 ff., in a review of Cowley's *Aramaic Papyri*, gives an alternative interpretation of the names which also removes the polytheistic meaning.

have been discovered by archaeology.[1] This is a dangerous argument from silence, and seems to leave out of account the existence, *officially accepted* (cf. Hos. iii. 4), of teraphim and of the ephod, which in origin at least may have been images (cf. 1 Sam. xxi. 9).[2]

It is claimed, and this is much more important, that the relationship between Israel and Yahweh was unique and that the commonly-used description of the work of Moses as producing the relationship " Yahweh God of Israel and Israel people of Yahweh " (cf. Hos. ii. 23, Jer. vii. 23) is a " cliché without real content which *mutatis mutandis* could also be used for other folk-religions."[3] Certainly one can imagine the use of the phrase " Chemosh god of Moab and Moab people of Chemosh". But is it true to say that Israel *was* the only people which believed that its God had intervened in its history?[4] That Israel claimed this is plain. The Exodus represents a historical foundation for the religion of Israel, and the relationship which was then established between Israel and Yahweh was distinctive, so far as we know, in that he " adopted " Israel in Egypt, so that the bond between them was artificial, " by adoption " rather than natural, " by physical descent." " Or has any god essayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of a nation . . . according to all that Yahweh your God did for you in Egypt? " (Deut. iv. 34—my translation).

But did Israel alone among the nations claim a historical contact with its God? Mesha of Moab says: " Chemosh was angry with his people . . . Chemosh restored it [the land of Mehedeba] in my days. . . . And Chemosh said to me, God, take Nebo against Israel. . . . But Chemosh drove him out from before me. . . ." Is not this a claim that Chemosh acted in the historical sphere? It has frequently been noticed how closely the style of the Moabite Stone resembles the narrative sections

[1] Cf. G. E. Wright, *Old Testament against its Environment*, p. 24. Cf. also Albright, *Stone Age*, p. 202; *Archaeology and Religion of Israel*, p. 43. A similar absence of images is noted in Hittite areas, and may be attributed to the loss of the metal exterior and the decay of the wooden core. (Cf. O. R. Gurney, *The Hittites*, 1952, p. 148.)

[2] Cf. however Albright, *Archaeology and Religion of Israel*, p. 114; but against this my note in *Expository Times*, September, 1951.

[3] Cf. Wright, *Old Testament against its Environment*, p. 15.

[4] This point is discussed again by Wright, *God who Acts*, pp. 38 ff.

of the Old Testament. It also shares with them something of their conception of the deity and of his activities.[1]

It is not my intention to deny the significance of the Exodus and its interpretation in Hebrew thought, or to deny the tremendous importance of that historical rooting of Israel's faith, which does ultimately, I believe, make for the difference —both in the Old and the New Testaments—between it and the more purely mythological faiths whose gods are intimately connected with nature but not in the same way with history. My point is that it is no adequate answer to the problem of the distinctiveness of the Old Testament to attribute the unique development of Israel to the Exodus alone.[2] There is much more to be said than this.

III

In both the approaches so far discussed—that from the idea of evolution and that from the idea of a crisis, a high-water mark from which there has been decline—there is the same danger. In spite of the criticisms of the first by the adherents of the second, there is much similarity between them. The first takes the term " evolution " as it is popularly understood and regards the descriptive technique which is derived from the idea of a gradually evolving progress in human faith as an explanation of the faith itself, and specifically of the distinctive faith of Israel. The second in effect takes up another scientific term, the term " mutation ", and asks with Wright, " What is the Israelite mutation, which made the particular evolution of Biblical faith a possibility? " and finds the answer to this question in the Exodus experience. " It has been assumed that a considerable proportion of Israel's allegedly unique contributions to religion were not of her own discovery. She borrowed

[1] Cf. comments by Hart, *Foreword to the Old Testament*, pp. 47 ff. On the whole question, cf. also A. Alt, *Der Gott der Väter*; on the deliberate choice of deity by the patriarchs, cf. Albright, *Stone Age to Christianity*, pp. 175 ff. For the text of the Moabite Stone, cf. S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel*, pp. lxxxvi f.

[2] Cf. also Albright, *Stone Age to Christianity*, pp. 85 f., where he speaks of the prophets as reformers seeking to restore primitive Mosaism. The parallel with the Reformation is instructive, but suggests that while the intention may well have been to revive the simplicity of the past, the prophets, like the Reformers, represent a new departure. In so far as the Old Testament reflects this new departure of the prophets, it becomes difficult to determine what in Israel's religion is primitive and what in it belongs to later stages.

from many sources, and her uniqueness consisted in the alterations and improvements which she imposed upon what was borrowed. But what led to these 'alterations' and 'improvements'? Why is this question not examined? I find it necessary to agree with W. Eichrodt when he says that the source of the difficulty lies in the inability of the developmental hypothesis to take seriously the story of God's revelation and covenant at Mt. Sinai."[1]

The danger of taking over scientific terms and using them for the explanation of religious experiences is a serious one.[2] Quite apart from the fact that such terms are rarely used as the scientist uses them, it is clear that scientific terminology is by its nature not concerned with questions of judgment of value.[3] We habitually use a variety of schemes of terminology for describing religious experience, but we need to be cautious of allowing such descriptions to be understood as explanation. The one fact of religious experience may be described in the emotional terms of mysticism or revivalism, or in the familiar jargon of psychology. But quite plainly these descriptions are not explanations. Any attempt at scientific—that is to say, objective—examination of religious experience automatically empties it of its most distinctive element, and becomes mere description. A description of religious experience from the outside—whether by a completely detached observer, or by someone who detaches himself from his own experience—is not the same thing as the account given, necessarily in similar terms because we have no other terms to use, by the man who like Paul can say, " By the grace of God I am what I am."

A more serious criticism is that both these ways of approach to the Old Testament tend to deny any real activity to God except on isolated occasions. The evolutionary view may well degenerate into pure deism, in which God gives the initial impetus to the whole scheme of development, and then has no need to intervene further. The alternative view suggests a certain divine casualness in the intervention of God at given points in the historical sphere, or falls into the error of using the deity to fill in the gaps in our knowledge—God becomes merely the

[1] *Old Testament against its Environment*, p. 15.

[2] Cf. the discussion of biological principles of significance to the historian in Albright, *Stone Age to Christianity*, pp. 80 f.

[3] Cf. L. E. Browne, *Where Science and Religion meet*, p. 46.

cause of the mutation, or of the jump in the evolutionary scheme. This invites the criticism from the scientific side that a later generation than our own may well discover that what we see as a mutation or a jump has a quite other explanation. Between these interventions the same evolutionary processes are as necessary to the crisis theory as to the more purely developmental.

IV

The problem thus becomes the more familiar one of the point of contact between divine nature and human experience. Evolutionary theories of religion tend to make for deism, or perhaps for pantheism—a God who either initiates the process and leaves it at that, or a God who is ever present within the process itself and has no real existence apart from it. The crisis theory has much affinity with that school of theology which describes God as the " wholly other ", coming into contact with men every now and then as from a great distance—a conception which rightly emphasizes one necessity of true religion, but at the same time is in danger of undermining its validity. For while it must be agreed that no doctrine of God is adequate which attempts a complete summary of His nature in purely human terms and leaves no room for that awe and sense of mystery in His presence which is proper to created beings, there is no place for religion as a relationship between God and man, if the object of worship is so remote from human experience as to be completely other. The doctrine of the Incarnation must always, for Christians at least, exclude so radical a view of divine nature.

The Old Testament—and the New Testament as well—presents us, I believe, with another view of the relationship. God to the Biblical writers is neither outside the scheme of created life and history, giving it an initial push or intervening from time to time in its affairs in a somewhat capricious manner; nor within history in the sense of being bound up in it and limited by its scope and laws. He is the ever-present Lord and Judge. That is to say, He both rules over history and challenges it. Crisis there certainly is in this sense. Not in the sense that there are odd moments of crisis, but that the whole created order is under crisis (judgment). Each moment of man's experience is present to God and under God's judgment; the whole of history is present to God and under God's judgment.

The words used in the New Testament apply at any point in history and at every point: " Now is the judgment of this world " (John xii. 31). At every point God confronts man and presents a challenge to him, and it is through the facing or avoiding of that challenge that man derives his further knowledge of God's nature and his own—or fails to gain it.

We can hardly stop at this point. For the nature of the contact between God and man is not thereby made clear. If we look at the New Testament, we can make the claim for the Incarnation, as expressing that entry of God into the human sphere, bringing crisis with Him in His own person. The Old Testament presents the same essential view of the contact. The very conception of human nature as " animated body " which the Hebrew holds, is itself a witness to the idea that it is possible for a man's life to be possessed by Divine Spirit. The experience of religious power, of creative life—whether it be by prophet, priest, or chieftain—is described in similar terms. It is the entrance of the *ruach Yahweh*, the Spirit of the Lord, into a man, and this is a frequent and observed experience.

Translated into more modern terms, we should perhaps say that just as we are bound in describing God to use the highest categories which we know within human experience—namely the personal categories—so we should expect to find that the point of contact between the divine and the human is in the personal sphere. The nature of Hebrew religion, of the Old Testament understanding of God and of history, depends ultimately upon the appropriation of divine revelation by persons. That appropriation is expressed in both Old Testament and New Testament in the terms of covenant relationships, which are both personal and corporate, and which are the indication of the freely given and freely accepted power of the Spirit of Yahweh. The clue to the developments and the clue equally to the setbacks in Old Testament religion (and also in Christian experience) may be found here. Continuous crisis there is; and the story of the development is incomplete without the recollection that at certain periods the preservation of the faith was in the hands of unimportant people, the " quiet in the land ". The moments, however, which stand out as decisive are those in which there was present a great creative personality who was able to interpret the crisis and so to make it meaningful to the community, within which there was at any given time a

nucleus, a " remnant " which though not so prominent was nevertheless able to apprehend the interpretation offered and so to carry it further.

If a newspaper reporter of modern times had been present at the events of the Exodus to give us his account, it is doubtful whether we should gain anything much from what he described. There is a hint of the sort of thing we should get in the account of Exod. xiv. 21 that a great wind blew back the waters. The formerly much-debated question of the historicity of Moses is equally an irrelevant issue. If Moses did not exist, then—as Voltaire said in another connection—" il faudrait l'inventer." We should have to invent someone else of the same name and character to account for what happened. Whatever conclusions we may reach about the detailed accuracy of the Exodus narratives, at least we may be sure of the presence in them of an outstanding personality. From the point of view of the secular historian his function was to weld together a group of slave-tribes into a nation. From the point of view of the Old Testament it was to reveal the hand of Yahweh in the events experienced.[1]

But the Exodus is not the only moment of crisis, albeit the one which in the development of the Old Testament tradition has come to be regarded as normative. It is this " normalization " which is responsible for the large place given to the Exodus, in contrast to the smaller place given to other events. The crisis of the Exile led to great changes in Israel's faith and life, but this was seen in Exodus-terms.[2] Similarly the New Testament crisis is presented and its distinctiveness to some extent subordinated to normal redemptive categories. The moments of Gideon, of Elijah, of Isaiah, of Jeremiah—to mention only a few outstanding names—were also decisive. The moment of the Reform of Josiah and of the return from Exile were—so far as we can judge on the evidence—moments when the decisive creative personality was lacking, with the result that the Reform was soon lost (though it had its effects probably elsewhere in historical and legal writings) and the

[1] Wright (*God who acts*, p. 55) speaks of the " objectivity of God's historical acts ". Yet can an objective act be meaningful without being interpreted and appropriated? Wright offers an amplification and to some extent a correction of the point on pp. 60 f.

[2] Cf. especially Is. xl–lv.

unique message of Isaiah xl–lv remained for centuries almost without echo.[1]

Fleming James has written a useful book on the *Personalities of the Old Testament*, and I recall that when I first gave a course of lectures on introduction to the literature of the Old Testament, I was advised by Dr. Bertram Lee Woolf that it was better to " hang " the material on personalities, than merely to divide it into periods. Perhaps we could avoid the pitfalls of the two extremes if we took this line of approach. A developmental account of Old Testament religion must perforce spend much of its time dealing with the genetics of religious ideas and their connections with the background out of which they emerge. Biblical theology, on the other hand, may be in danger of becoming an abstract system remote from human experience and human needs.[2] It is a great merit of some of the more recent approaches to Old Testament study that they recognize that you cannot fully understand a faith which you do not in some measure share.[3] A study of Old Testament religion through the personalities of its great exponents, entering into their experience and sharing in their faith, may perhaps preserve us from the barrenness of antiquarianism or of abstract theology, and lead us to a deeper understanding of our own faith as we enter into theirs.

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[1] It has been pointed out to me by my former colleague, Professor Matthew Black, that the work of the Holy Spirit as it is described in the Fourth Gospel is similarly the producing of creative personality and the opening up as a result of a new vista of religious experience and vitality.

[2] Cf. the preface to J. A. Findlay, *Jesus and His Parables*, and the warning of G. E. Wright, *God who acts*, pp. 65 f.

[3] Cf. for example the valuable essay " Semantics and Old Testament Theology " by N. W. Porteous in *Oudtestamentische Studiën*, VIII (1950), pp. 1 ff.