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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (Mar., 1959), pp. 1-12

Published by: [The Society of Biblical Literature](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3264396>

Accessed: 09/04/2012 10:13

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A STILL SMALL VOICE . . . SAID, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?*

WILLIAM A. IRWIN

PERKINS SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

THE unmerited honor which the Society in its grace has bestowed upon me has come at a time when it is possible to review almost the total of a somewhat long life; and while few of us would endorse unqualified the assertion that "with the aged is wisdom" (Job 12 15), yet at the least lengthening years do confer a sense of perspective that can be attained otherwise, if at all, only with difficulty. Applied to our corporate task, it may provide something of relevance on the course we have come, the forces and directions of the present, and on our methods and attainments, which are close to, if not identical with, the certainty and validity of our entire enterprise.¹

It is not, I hope, boastful on my part to claim some immediate participation, first through my teachers and then by my own slight activity, in the ferment of biblical study since the self-vindication of the critical movement, as it seemed at that time, through its triumph in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The period has witnessed far-reaching changes. Yet it is wholesome to ponder the demonstrable conclusion that we have accomplished nothing comparable with the achievements conveniently symbolized by, though by no means limited to, the names of Jean Champollion, Sir Henry Rawlinson, and Julius Wellhausen. Along such lines the nineteenth century witnessed nothing less than a revolution, a completely new start in biblical study, such that all the remarkable accomplishments of our own time, which periodically astonish us, are but superstructure on the foundations firmly laid a hundred years ago.

The time with which my personal survey begins was one of great confidence and such eager expectation as notable attainment always

* The Presidential Address delivered at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis on December 30, 1958, at the Union Theological Seminary, New York City.

¹ I acknowledge gratefully the constructive criticism provided during the preparation of this paper by Professor Fred D. Gealy, of Southern Methodist University, and Professor Edward C. Hobbs, of Church Divinity School of the Pacific. Obviously neither is to be held responsible, however, for views that still others will wish to repudiate.

engenders. It is sobering to reflect now on what has happened to the alleged "assured results" in which scholars then felt stirrings of pride. One thing at least is certain: the future will deal no more kindly with our self-assurance. And are we then driven to conclude that all scholarly certitude is no more than a mute submission to the *Zeitgeist*, created through forces of which we need not stop to attempt an analysis but certainly are beyond determination by any of us?

In any case, we have even yet learned but imperfectly that scholarly conclusions are only opinion — disciplined and informed opinion, it is to be hoped, but still opinion. *Per se*, it is negligible. Nor does it take on cogency through a series of illustrious names that may be attached to it. Truth is not determined by counting noses, however aristocratic those noses may be, but by careful toil in service of sound methods. At the risk of triteness, it is relevant to mention that such methods, presented in most bald simplicity, consist of just two elements, a mastery of relevant facts and a delicately balanced and rigorous judgment to decide the meaning and significance of those facts. Yet how far these fall short of an objective rule of thumb which will inerrantly produce truth becomes apparent from a rhetorical question and a comment. How does one secure an endowment of such good judgment, if not so blessed by nature? High worth attaches to certain standard guides and restraints; also experience brings some development. But ultimately the thing cannot be created. Then, in biblical research the facts are not all available — and they never will be! Each archeological discovery which through recent years has periodically astonished us carries its reverse implication, how deficient was our prior knowledge, and how deficient that of the present for lack of what the incalculable discoveries of the future will yet reveal!

At this point we join hands with our colleagues in every area where the border of light with darkness is being steadily pushed back. It is routine to comment that the overpowering mass of knowledge attained in, say, the past hundred and fifty years has functioned to demonstrate our immense human ignorance. We know only a few things in a vast universe that becomes steadily more mysterious with each new, far glimpse into its profundity; we ourselves and our farthest-ranging intellectual search are but broken lights of an infinite Reality. Scholarship leaves no ground for personal pride. (Can there be anything more pathetically ludicrous than an arrogant scholar? Alas, the spectacle is not unknown!) On the contrary the scholar's predicament compels him to a profound humility, even a tempered agnosticism. No phrase better befits his tongue than the honest confession, "I do not know." Of necessity all his conclusions are tentative and contingent. It is as though he underwrote his every decision with the reservation, "Such evidence as I now possess — and it is incomplete — leads me to this

view, but I stand ready and eager to change it as soon as new evidence makes this desirable."

A pessimistic result, it may appear; but the scholar will retort, "Not pessimistic; only realistic." For the fact is that in spite of such obstacles and the inadequacies of the human mind, we can and do find truth — doubtless a relative, and certainly a very limited truth, but such as is adequate for daily life and converse.

In more cheerful mood, it is relevant to point out that the scholarship of fifty years ago has by no means been superseded. In reality its results, modified and restrained, are basic to our entire activity of today. But even if it were not so, even if every conclusion so confidently put forward were swept away, it would yet remain that the period was one of the great epochs of biblical study and made permanent contribution to the advance of our work. First, in a brilliant demonstration of sound scholarly procedure, along the lines just now indicated, and the indelible impress that whatever else may arise this is a *sine qua non*. Second, and closely related, was the entire implication of emphasis upon the literal method in interpretation of the Scriptures; that is, the first responsibility of the exegete, wherever else he may go in the sequel, is to determine as exactly as possible just what the biblical writer actually meant; it is not mere *parti pris* that leads one to regard the great advances of these intervening years in literary, historical, and archeological research as merely subservient to this use and purpose. Then, comparable in importance was the demonstrated result that the Bible itself is our first and altogether best source for study of the Bible; not the necessities of modern theology, not the dictum of tradition, nor any clever idea which the current vogue may devise, but the Bible itself with whatever we can make of it by all best known procedures is alone to tell us what the Bible is and what it means.

It is tempting to turn aside for a sketch of the kaleidoscopic vogues and moods of the passing years. But we must press on, yielding to allurements only to the extent of commenting that in their fads, foibles, and follies, scholars are just as human as the members of any small town gossip association! It would be no great task to illustrate this from the lingo and novelties that pass current among us at this day.

The changes which two generations have witnessed do not all consist of an accumulation of knowledge, which indeed has been impressive; changes in temper have been even more significant. Probably first among them, but still on this critical side of our work, has been the realization that the Bible, while certainly one of the great historic documents to come out of the ancient world, yet is historic in a quite different sense from what we then supposed. It gives us not the objective

² This was well presented in the symposium of the 1957 meeting of the Society, *JBL*, LXXVII (1958), 18-38.

event — indeed we have come to see that all history writing is filtered through the prejudices and purposes of the historian — but a certain understanding of particular events on the part of Israel and the church. This is not to invalidate historic research but only to introduce another element into it along with a necessary caution. For to illustrate through a single one of the contentious issues involved: unless a clear relationship between the historic Jesus and the Christ of faith can be established by objective evidence such that, while doubtless less than strict historical method might demand, yet possesses demonstrable validity, then nineteen centuries of the church's discussion of the Incarnation becomes so much mistaken babble.

However, it is outside our critical research that the most apparent change in our mood and interest has been manifest — in the phenomenal and diverse activity that goes on under the name of biblical theology. To set it in proper perspective, we must recognize that we are still in the critical age, in the sense that the great bulk of our activity is engrossed in interests that were in the foreground fifty years ago. This is readily apparent from examination of our *Journal*, and the programmes of our meetings and those of other great biblical societies. Even so, change has occurred, amounting almost to a revolution; and like all revolutions it elicits pronounced emotional response. There can be no doubt that it is an expression, and in some degree a source of the rightward mood of the present which manifests itself variously all the way from a mild conservatism to blatant reaction. Its cause, while frequently (and very dubiously) explained has never been satisfactorily analyzed. For it is all too glib to claim that its essence means personal confrontation with the biblical oracles or the effort to disclose the biblical relevance, religious or ethical, for the life of today³ — all this is very familiar; if one may use a pejorative of matters so serious, it is trite. Precisely this was the concern of the critical age, from which the theological movement would dissociate its genius. The scholars of that time were stirred by a vision of the vitalizing power of the Bible stripped of the accretions of the centuries and presented in its pristine freshness.⁴ That they were right is evident, for those who know the period, in the profound and far-reaching impact of the teaching of men who, some today may charge, were engrossed in facts. The point too easily overlooked is that those facts related to a very great creative episode in the long human story.

Every novel movement is prone to excess; and this revived biblical theology is no exception.⁵ Frequently it arrives only at superficiality

³ The interrelation of biblical and systematic theology at this point was well presented by Otto Piper, *JBR*, XXV (1957), 111.

⁴ Cf. H. E. Fosdick, *The Living of these Days* (1956), pp. 62–67.

⁵ I said more about this in my article, "The Study of Israel's Religion," *VT*, VII (1957), 115–26.

when attempting edification, and in the interest of relevance exhumes old errors we had supposed long-since deep buried. One of its astonishing expressions has been a reversal to typology, which employed probably in its most extreme form by Wilhelm Vischer⁶ and variously noted by others, has recently found approval, after considered examination, by one of our colleagues⁷ (I suppose I might say), an honorary member of our Society, Walther Eichrodt, an association in which I presume every one of us feels personally honored.

Whatever one's initial surprise, it will soon become apparent that Eichrodt is far from advocating a return to crass medievalism. He dissociates his typology from allegory; further it is not a revival of the methods of NT writers, for our understanding of history is remote from theirs. Typology relates only to the correspondence of the central historic realities of OT revelation to that of the NT. It is eschatological, concerned with the designs of God foreshadowed in the OT but steadily converging in lines that find their culmination in Jesus Christ and the church. In a term which he employs much, it is *heilsgeschichtliche* exegesis; and in its restricted and proper function is a highly useful tool of the exegete. Indeed he actually describes it as indispensable (*unentbehrlich*) and quotes a phrase from Baumgärtel to enforce the view that otherwise we stand "without a key before the Word of God."

This hurried summary does much less than justice to the earnestness and force of Eichrodt's presentation, yet it will suffice for a few comments. That the thing is wrong in genesis and being there can be not the least doubt. It is not exegesis at all, which surely consists in "leading out" into understanding the thought of the author. OT writers did not think in these terms at all; the most that Eichrodt himself will claim is that they manifest at times something similar and one passage comes close to the actuality. The NT is a different matter; but there sound exegesis takes us only as far as the authors went, not into similar excursions of our own. The objection is not unknown to Eichrodt; his eminently sound rejoinder, that interpretation demands setting literature in its entire historic context, we shall approach from a different direction in a moment. Here it is relevant to remark that we are surely in sad plight if the unity of the Bible in its great themes of a transcendent God, his self-disclosure, and his designs for sinful and needy man cannot be demonstrated by sound literary and historical methods but must depend on clever devices of ingenuity. Deplorable, also, is our situation if with all sound methods of interpretation we yet "stand without a key before the Word of God."

⁶ *The Witness of the Old Testament to Christ* (1949).

⁷ "Ist die typologische Exegese sachgemässe Exegese?" *VT Supplement*, IV (1957), 161-80.

Neither is typology a proper exercise in biblical theology but, as Eichrodt elsewhere expresses his interest, a way of subordinating this to the service of Christian dogma.⁸ In reality it is a homiletic, not a hermeneutic, study of the Bible. Old preacher that I am, it is highly improbable I seek to disparage this concern; but he who follows it must realize clearly what he is doing and refrain from the confused mingling of diverse disciplines that has found too rich expression in the theological movement.

A further confusion in Eichrodt's presentation relates to his favored word *Heilsgeschichte*, which indeed has served with many other scholars precisely this function of distorting biblical scholarship. Certainly there is a historic reality corresponding to the term; there is a history of God's self-revelation in his dealings with men, and if one wishes to call it *Heilsgeschichte*, there can be no great objection. But we must quibble very seriously over the narrow scope which its proponents uniformly give it. The only true *Heilsgeschichte* is *Weltgeschichte*, the entire process of the numberless ages through which "the redemptive forces of the universe" have slowly, and as yet very imperfectly, won man away from his beastly impulses toward the path that leads upward to the perfect day. In this universal working of God for man's redemption, the brief interval of the history of Israel and the early church is to be appraised, not quantitatively, but as the moment when a revolutionary realization of this "salvation" came to classic expression.

However, we must concede that Eichrodt has succeeded in an unsought, though necessary result. He has brought to focus the need for a clarification of the function and proper limits of biblical scholarship and, in particular, the relationships between the two Testaments and of both together to theological research. Here is the issue that has confused not a little of this movement since its revival. Instead of clarifying, Eichrodt has merely succumbed to the confusion.

It would bring a breath of freshness to this activity if all engaged in it would keep in mind that the biblical scholar stands by inherent right in the place of first authority. The prime question is not what the theologian may wish or say, or what the immensity of modern thought may induce; the essential matter is what do we find, by all the best procedures we can employ, to be the teaching of the Bible. What is not biblical, in this sense, is not Christian, however ingenious it may be — and I suppose one might equally deny that it is Jewish. When the Bible speaks the theologian must attend, and he must revise his conclusions, if so dictated. Is this a platitude? Yet much writing and thinking seems to proceed on the opposite principle. We witness, ad nauseam, the spectacle of the biblical scholar standing, hat in hand, at the door of the

⁸ *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1933–39), pp. 1–5.

theologian imploring that a few crumbs, perhaps of verbiage, may fall into his beggar's bowl!

Then too, if I may dismiss summarily a very complex and contentious question, we are not theologians, in the specialized sense of that word;⁹ primarily we are historians. To blur this basic distinction results only in frustration, and robs the total of scholarship, general as well as religious, of the contribution which no one but we can provide. Our function, for which we have been trained, on which our entire activity converges, is to tell as accurately and fully as possible just what happened, and what was understood about that happening and its meaning for man's life, in those centuries of the ancient world which were so determinative for the course of the human career. But this is not to reinstate the finality of facts, which is erroneously attributed to the critical age. It is no narrow scope of history that engages us, but history in all its ramifications: certainly objective occurrence, but even more what was said and thought and — here is the important matter — felt; in other words, the total of the faith and practice of Israel and of the early church. Our task is to tell that, let the results be what they may. It will bring us inevitably close to the theological thinking of our time; and the nature of the Bible is such that every biblical scholar becomes in some measure an amateur theologian, and many have let us to become professionals of high standing. Yet since the seamless garment of human intellectual activity must be torn asunder, a line is necessarily drawn setting biblical scholarship apart, however fuzzy that line must remain. Our position is analogous to that of the historian of ancient Greece, whose subject matter quickens his interest in the course of philosophy right into the present, yet he must remember that he is a historian of a classic fragment of ancient time.

However, it is freely admitted that none of this comes to effective grips with the essence of Eichrodt's position. I suppose it was inevitable that soon or late he would arrive at enunciation of the scholar's presuppositions and the results that flow from them: that hoary platitude which for a generation has been serving overtime to produce, as the bard of Avon might have said, a "deal" of pallid, sanctimonious nothingnesses! Certainly every scholar has presuppositions, or a bias, if one prefers the word; it is so axiomatic that we grow weary of this laboring of the obvious. But there is no reason to elevate it into a cosmic finality, or to excuse the nonsense he may utter on the basis that it is in line with his presuppositions. Our prejudices are a dead weight of our past against which every honest scholar must struggle with might and main while he tries desperately to see truth as it is. The objective of scholarship is truth, not the glorification of our individual inadequacies, however sanctified they may be. The worth and significance of a Society such as

⁹ So too Krister Stendahl, *JBL*, LXXVII (1958), 33.

this one to which we are proud to belong, is that coming together to tell of our investigations we unconsciously declare our biases and throw them open to the equally deep-based ones of our colleagues, until one cancels out the other, and collectively we take a step toward ultimate truth.

Eichrodt writes as a devout Christian who finds no need of apology for seeing the culmination of OT revelation in Jesus Christ. Indeed he says this is the difference between Christian and Jewish exegesis. Is it? Or is it the difference between Christian and Jewish dogma and dogmatic approach to the Scriptures? In all seriousness I ask a question which apparently is already answered in the deliberations of this Society through many years: Is there, or should there be *any* difference between Jewish and Christian exegesis? Is not the Jewish scholar every whit as competent to apprehend truth as his Christian colleague? And vice versa?¹⁰

Somewhere about this point we come to the core of the confusion that has dogged biblical theology since its newer inception — for just that is my charge and the point I am seeking to make in this hurried survey: it has in a confused way thrown together matters which are quite diverse and has failed to discriminate when this was vital — and all in service of a tolerant pietistic mood such as Job charged against his friends (Job 13 4–12). Eichrodt does not advance the equally hoary platitude that faith is a means to knowledge, but his thought is close to it. Is faith a means to knowledge of the New York Underground system? Is it a means to knowledge of your friend? To both questions the answer is, Yes; but in neither does faith function as a mystic apprehension. Instead, its value is in taking one to the point where normal cognitive processes can set in and attain demonstrable knowledge. It is not otherwise in matters such as we are discussing. Differences of faith are important, but their appraisal relative to scholarly work demands much more penetrating thinking than the sort of thing with which we have been generously burdened through many years. The essential matter is not the confessional faith of the exegete but his competence as a scholar and his ability to arrive at sound results.¹¹ I am by no means indifferent to the

¹⁰ If I interpret correctly Father John L. McKenzie ("Problems of Hermeneutics in Roman Catholic Exegesis," *JBL*, LXXVII, 197–204) typology is in very dubious standing now even with Roman Catholic biblical scholars.

¹¹ Professor Hobbs has drawn my attention to Bultmann's discussion of "The Problem of Hermeneutics" (*Essays Philosophical and Theological* [1955], pp. 234–61), and to this passage in his *Kerugma und Mythos*, III (1954), 53–55:

Now certainly such methodical understanding is not possible if the possibility of primary understanding is not present in the investigator — i. e., if he does not have a basic, understanding, existential relationship with the matter of the text he is going to interpret. Therefore, if he wants to show what the text considers good and evil, true and false, etc., he can do this only if being good and bad, true and false, etc., are existential possibilities for him. But this in no way hinders him from suspending his own valuations in his interpretation, that is, keeping them under question.

values which Eichrodt seems ultimately to mean; that whole large area is of supreme importance. The question rather is how biblical scholarship properly serves them, and in what disciplines the total dedication of one's activities properly falls. If Eichrodt wishes to introduce typology as a department of Christian dogmatics, well and good; that is an issue for the dogmatists; he, or anyone else so disposed, has yet to show that it belongs in biblical research.

I make no claim to extra-sensory perception, yet for some moments past I have almost *felt* some of you saying in your heart (to use a good OT phrase), "Historicism! Why he hasn't learned a thing in thirty years." Good; such critical response is a proper function of a scholarly society! I do ask, however, that I shall not be charged with views I have never held, or have fathered on me things I am not now saying. In an effort to make clear just what I mean, may I have recourse to a specific body of literature? The Servant Songs would, I believe, fall within Eichrodt's definitions and restrictions; I presume he would see here a "type" of Christ. And possibly you ask, Why not? What else do I propose?

Happily I go a considerable distance with him, granted I correctly understand him. The OT scholar must set these poems in their historic environment and by all best resources available determine so far as possible just what their author (or authors) had in mind in composing them, whether that leads him to any one of the individual interpretations, the more recent messianic views, or some sort of collective solution — it does not matter, but only that the answer espoused shall have been reached by strictly sound methods. In that period, then, and relevant to such conditions the Songs said thus and so, and their contribution to Israel's faith and practice was this and that. Arrived here, the task of the exegete, in the most strict sense of the word, is complete; the meaning of the Songs has been "led out," in the diverse meanings of that word "meaning." Yet the scholar must take seriously the alleged story of the man who in a tumbril on his way to the guillotine during the French Revolution complained, "It is too bad to cut off my head; I want to see how this comes out." The scholar must not cut off his own head! Exegesis may here be complete, but certainly full interpretation is not. I am happy to take another step with Eichrodt; one does not fully understand the Servant Songs until he follows them down the centuries inquiring what has been their interpretation in terms of impact upon succeeding ages. And no one, whatever his religious presuppositions, can do this without taking account of Jesus of Nazareth and the early church. As a Christian believer he may, if so disposed, assert that Christ is the real meaning, that in him revelation reaches its culmination. But most emphatically as an OT scholar, he must not. Nor is he justified in doing so if his specialty lies in NT; his task then is rather to examine with all possible evidence whether the historic Jesus was a figure of the sort

presented in the Songs. His next step is easier, for certainly such was the faith of the church. He carries responsibility to demonstrate his conclusions relative to these matters. But when he moves into personal appraisal, he goes beyond his special competence. This is not to say that the historian may not pass judgment; on the contrary he must, if his history is to be more than a dull chronicle. But in doing so he invokes more than his training and experience as a historian; he speaks as an intelligent and well-informed man of his times. Out of the total of the forces that have made him, he presumes to say that this or that is good or bad. The biblical scholar may confess, if he so wishes, that the faith of the nascent church is also his faith. But if he takes the short further step of asserting that it is true, he speaks no longer in his role of biblical scholar. To claim that Jesus Christ is the culmination of the whole great process of divine revelation entails a disciplined understanding of what revelation is, besides a familiarity with the immense field of history of religions, and considerable experience in handling philosophic and theological problems. Doubtless each of us has found an answer for himself; that is well and good, provided we see clearly that our biblical scholarship plays only a minor role in the appraisal and has little worth in authenticating it.

Eichrodt's argument requires us to go just a little farther. How would the result just now sketched differ for the Jewish scholar? Since I am not a member of the Jewish community, I do not feel competent to answer; but there is a considerable bulk of relevant literature by Jewish writers; it will suffice to refer only to the thoughtful studies of our colleagues Sheldon Blank,¹² Harry Orlinsky,¹³ and Samuel Sandmel.¹⁴ They deal competently with the facts. No basic difference of method or result is discernible here that may be tabbed characteristically Jewish or on the other hand Christian. However, the varying bulk and cogency of evidence available to the biblical scholar entails that our conclusions range all across the area from somewhat well-attested views to perhaps plausible, informed guesses. In this latter direction it is inevitable that the scholar's preferences will express themselves; they may produce a Jewish or Christian complexion. But this marginal region is incidental and of minor significance for the serious scholar who steadily holds his work up to self-criticism. In its central part, where he deals with evidence sufficient for an argued conclusion, there will and can be no distinction between Jewish and Christian exegesis of the meaning of the Servant Songs. But to follow down the centuries, as we have noted, is a valid part of interpretation: it is obvious that the career of Jesus and the

¹² *Prophetic Faith in Isaiah* (1958).

¹³ *Ancient Israel* (1945).

¹⁴ *A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament* (1956).

rise of the church lack for the Jew the emotional stirring they possess for the Christian. But it is no more the function of the Jewish biblical scholar, qua biblical scholar, to deal with the ultimate truth entailed than it is of his Christian colleague. On the other hand he is in position to cite incidents from the long course of Jewish history which seem to be the working out of the revelation granted in the Servant Songs. There, I believe, is the difference of treatment of these passages by Jewish and Christian scholars: certainly not, so far as they are true to their scholarly responsibility, in their search for the original meaning, but only in the sequel. It is totally diverse from that invoked by Eichrodt, and can perhaps be adequately summarized as difference of emotional reaction and of subsequent illustration.

I cannot believe that any of you is objecting that this, as an example of what I have called the historical function of the biblical scholar, still falls short of the admittedly important results that are emphasized as the objectives of the theological movement. For to do so would be to confess a preference for pietistic phrases rather than the realities of divine relation. How does that wonderful thing come about? Certainly there is no method to assure that the words of the Bible will strike through the coldness of our hearts and work their age-old miracle. The "theologian," just as the biblical historian, can do no more than present the realities of the ancient revelation; from there onward it is all a question of what happens in the individual consciousness — neither theologian nor historian can do more. If the vision in the Servant Songs fails to stir us, then we may well confess our full share of human depravity. True, the stirring may be assisted by various devices of emotional exposition. But this is precisely the point I am making; exactly there the activity becomes homiletic, not hermeneutic. Numbers of great biblical scholars have been preachers, and we wish devoutly that all preachers were biblical scholars. Yet the two roles are distinct.

It is hoped that my criticisms of excesses, as I believe them to be, in the biblical theology of the past score of years will not be equated with total disparagement. I would be last to wish a return to the aridity I knew in the 20's and 30's. It is sometimes said that the critical age erred in that it stopped just where it was ready to begin. When all the historical orientation was done and the literary questions dealt with (which too often meant analysis into absurd snippets), there still remained the Bible in all its greatness and transforming power. Such a charge may be fitting, if leveled against second — or was it third? — generation critics, mere camp followers like myself, who came on the field of battle to strip the slain but were often troubled only remotely by the agony of soul exacted from the protagonists. But when directed toward the great figures of the movement, the charges merely declare an ignorance of the history of our common activity. Those men were deeply

aware of the significance of what they were doing and worked under a concern for the riches of biblical meaning unlocked by their discoveries. This is so fully apparent from their publications as to call here for no documentation. Happily we are again awake to the supreme matters that undergird our work.

The theological movement has been not so much the cause as the expression of this awakening. It has contributed no new method to our investigations; the tried and proven procedures of the critical age are still basic and indispensable. It has enriched us with a considerable bulk of first rate studies, among which one may mention, merely as illustration, Bultmann's¹⁵ and van Imschoot's¹⁶ "theologies"; it has provided some valid insights, though far less than apparently supposed by some engrossed in it while too slightly familiar with the mood and thought of the great critical age. For all such, whatever their bulk, we must be grateful. In addition it has created much novel verbiage that deceives its proponents into supposing a new term, for what had always been known, to be a new discovery. Doubtless some of this also must rank as gain; doubtless time makes ancient words, also, uncouth. Still truth is supreme, and it is best served by clear distinction between words and essence.

Beyond these the great worth of the theological movement has been in reminding us constantly of the immense area of meaning and significance that lies beyond the accumulation of facts. The biblical scholar may never forget that he works, not just in an ancient literature, but in Bible. His results become sterile when he ignores the sobering reality that he deals with ancient people who believed they recognized the activity of God in human life, individual and corporate, and that this belief was a creative power which induced a profound turning point in the long millennia of man's career. In a deep and sobering sense we have come very humbly, let us hope, to a realization that to us as biblical scholars, not exclusively but in a special way and for a special purpose, there have been "committed the oracles of God."

¹⁵ *Theology of the New Testament* (Eng. trans., 1951-55).

¹⁶ *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament* (1954).