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INTRODUCTION

The task of this book is to describe a teaching which reached its completion in some of the writing prophets from the last decades of the Northern kingdom to the return from the Babylonian exile, and to describe it both as regards its historical process and as regards its antecedents. This is the teaching about the relation between the God of Israel and Israel. It did not begin with the first writing prophets. Generally speaking, it is not a new teaching they advance, but they fashion its form to fit the changing historical situations and their different demands, and they perfect a teaching they have received—but where is the beginning of this teaching?

We cannot begin our investigations with the primitive stages of Israel's faith, that is to say with something up to now doubtful in the eyes of many scholars. In order to find a safe starting point we must begin with the first stage at which we find evidence, the stage which no literary criticism can shake, in other words: we must begin with the question we put to a text, that, according to the common opinion of science, is the direct expression of a special age. We must ask this text, what was the faith of Israel in that age, and we must examine whether or not this faith contains the essential core of the

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prophetic teaching about the relation between God and Israel. If the answer is in the affirmative, we must go back step by step and find out in which earlier periods we can assume the existence of a faith possessing such characteristics as this, though of course in an earlier stage of development, and we must continue groping until we reach that stage which we may regard as the beginning. At every stage we shall discover something not only about the formation of this teaching, but also about its nature. Thus the first part of our task will be accomplished.

We shall be able then to turn to the second, the greater part of our task: we must tread the way of the history of Israel's faith from the beginning, and investigate how on this way that essential core develops until it becomes a complete teaching. Here we shall find that at every landmark the persons connected with it are designated by the term *nabi*. It is true this term came to bear witness to their character as intermediaries, bearing the word of message from heaven to earth and the word of petition from earth to heaven, as these two together are the chief work of the *nabi*. But it is clear too that apart from this there prevails a special purpose of the writing prophets, who were largely responsible for writing or arranging the stories of those men; this purpose was to bring before us the great figures of the past, whose lips from generation to generation handed down the core of the teaching at a certain stage, in their special prophetic character. But this purpose means mainly, as we shall see in our investigation, not a late alteration of the nature of that reality, but the recognition of facts in the domain of the history of the Spirit.

Now begins the historical description of the actual teaching of the prophets in its principal manifestations. This description is historical, because it places each of these manifestations in its proper place, showing how it was determined by the preceding, and how it determined the following. Our concern here is not

with differentiating the single special types, but with marking the historical way of the teaching. In the second part of the book we must relate how along with the development of the powers of economy and state in the land of the settlement, this teaching advances in the midst of “the great tensions,” and enters the straits of problematics within and without, and at the same time broadens and deepens increasingly in this struggle. When we reach this point we must describe the “turning to the future,” that is to say prophecy in its limited sense as concerned now with the future. The rebelliousness of the hour, rebelling against the prophetic teaching, directs the heart of the prophet to the future, which will fulfil his teaching. But the connection of the *nabi* with the future is not that of one who predicts. To be a *nabi* means to set the audience, to whom the words are addressed, before the choice and decision, directly or indirectly. The future is not something already fixed in this present hour, it is dependent upon the real decision, that is to say the decision in which man takes part in this hour. When a *nabi* announces deliverance as something about to come, he presupposes *t’shubbah*, “returning,” that is to say a positive and complete decision of the community, whether in this generation or in one of the generations to come. I emphasize the word “community,” for even where he is mentioning individuals, the main purpose is the realisation in the whole of public life. According to the nature of things a change takes place here as in the second part: there through the formation of the state, and here, in the middle of the third and last part, through the crisis and destruction of this state: out of the depth of the community’s suffering there arises the conception of God as “the God of sufferers.” Just as we ascribe to the merit of the *nabi* and his teaching the change of the leader God of the semi-nomads into the God of the agrarian state, to Whose nature there clung nothing of the nature of the Canaanite gods,

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the local gods, so we are to ascribe to the same agency the fact that now along with His revelation as the God of sufferers nothing of His world power and His authority is lost.

In the second part one chapter leads us beyond the figures of the prophets: in the “struggle for the revelation” we can see traces of the influence of their teaching in its primitive form in the didactic story about the primeval world. And one chapter in the third part too leads us beyond prophecy: this describes how “the question,” that is the question of the suffering community about the meaning of its suffering, absorbs within itself the teaching of the prophets, and how it finds its most personal expression in the didactic song and the psalm.



With regard to the use of Scriptural passages in the first and the second part we must make certain methodological observations.

The matter is made difficult because we do not possess the means of fixing the date of a great part of Scripture. Especially in the narrative books we do not know how far the chronological order of their composition corresponds with the chronological order of the things described. And this means that it is not in our power to make it clear, with accepted principles and rules of linguistic and literary history, whether or not the picture of an early religious stage bears the stamp of a nearby or a later age which has merely projected its own character or its yearning onto the background of the early time.

The attempts of modern scholarship to show each of the narrative books and especially the books of the Pentateuch, as a composite work made up of fragments from different “sources,” the dates of which can to some extent be fixed, have not solved these difficulties. Such scholars have not succeeded in proving the existence of a number of complete documents,

from which parts, chapters, sentences have become attached one to another. As a matter of fact they have only established one matter, namely that we have before us a number of fundamental types of the literary working out of tradition, all according to different editorial tendencies. The most important of these types are: first, a type based mainly on court prophets, a type interested in the antecedents of the kingdom of David and Solomon, appearing as those did to them as a revelation of God's will concerning this kingdom; second, a type based mainly on the free prophets, a type interested in the antecedents of the rule of God's Spirit through men seized by it; and third, a type based mainly on priests, a type interested in the antecedents of the sanctuaries, of the holy institutions and the holy customs. All of these are types and tendencies of the working out of a tradition which had already reached the written stage, types and tendencies, it is true, which, still proportionately early, have a further history. But even if we were allowed to speak of "sources" and if it were even possible to fix their dates (and also the dates of the additions and redactions), we would thereby only be able to establish layers of the *literary*, not the *religious* development, and these two need not in any way parallel one another, as it is very possible that a primitive religious element is only found in a late literary form. In order to learn something about the religious development we must look into the problem of tradition itself.

Is this scientifically possible? And if so, how?

To begin with we must fix the limits of our inquiry. The history of Israel's faith as recorded in Scripture clearly begins with the "fathers." All that preceded them can only serve us as an expression of the religious outlook of Israel, an expression of Israel's conception and picture of the beginning of the world, and its explanation of the earliest events which took place between godhead and manhood. Whereas with the wanderings

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of the family of Terah that part of the story begins, in connection with which we may, in fact we must, ask whether it has not in some measure the direct value of a real account of happenings in the history of faith, that is to say whether from this point on it is not advisable to take a double view of the texts and to make a double use of them. One deals with the accounts according to their character as tendencies in the working out of tradition, and therefore it is bound up with questions of dates, and one deals with them according to their narrative character independently of the question of date, if and in so far as the texts contain a tradition *near to historical events*.

In connection with this question there is no need to be afraid of the argument that “there is nothing here but legend.” Historical song and legend are to a large extent—and often too in the ancient East—the natural forms of the popular oral preservation of “historical” events, that is to say events of vital importance for the tribe. They all represent a vital kind of history memorising as it happens, so long as the force of tribal life is greater than that of state control; only when the latter becomes stronger is the former obscured by the variegated history written to government order. Both kinds, the legend of the heroes (in verse or in semi-rhythmic “prose”), and the chronicles of the kings, are not intended to describe, but to glorify what took place. In the legend the practice of glorification, exaltation, and transformation grew of itself from narrator to narrator, from generation to generation of narrators, until “the fixed form” was crystallized. From now on it is made permanent and subjected to the prohibition “no addition or subtraction” (e.g., the history singers of a Negro tribe—a tribe without a script—are forbidden to make any change, and the slightest change in words or tune is even punishable by death). Is it possible then, out of such a formation, to separate a historical content, lacking as we do parallel, “objective” accounts?

It is, in a special measure, first of all by examining the social-cultural background. Wherever in the narrative a definite stage in the development of economy and civilisation stands out, a stage specific to the time under description, there the historical core is not far away: the same judgement applies to the examination of geographical, political, and other data. But in particular it is possible to separate off a content from the point of view of the history of the Spirit and especially the history of religion. Here we are not concerned with the authenticity of an external event; we merely inquire whether in the period under discussion there exists the religious act or position, the religious relationship under discussion. This question can only be answered by the inner media of the history of religion. What we have to compare with here are the earlier or later stages of religious development; we have to make clear whether it is possible to understand the narrative historically, if we see in it the link in the chain of development at this point of time. But in special occurrences, which generally are of unusual significance, another criterion is to be added, only to be used, however, with great care and precision, standing as it does on the confines of knowledge, and not to be used without intuition, scientific intuition that is to say, and therefore a concern of particular scientific responsibility. I refer to the criterion expressed in all its significance in the category of the *uniqueness of the fact*. There are in the history of religion events, situations, figures, expressions, deeds, the uniqueness of which cannot be regarded as the fruit of thought or song, or as a mere fabrication, but simply and solely as a matter of fact. Only the way of speculative theory leads to a different judgement; the intuitively scientific method, that is the method that seeks after the *concreteness* at the basis of an evidence, approaches the real fact. Naturally we do not by this learn the real course of an historic event, but we do learn that in a definite age in a definite circle

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of tribe or people an actual relationship appeared between the believer and that in which he believes, a unique relationship and according to our perception, at a definite stage too, which also has to be designated unique, a relationship which embodies itself in a concrete event, which continues to operate concretely.

This mode of research, which I can only hint at here, must lead us in the history of Israel's faith wherever the text presents us with a tradition which we may regard legitimately as being near to the historical events. When we are confronted with such, our duty is first of all to penetrate, as far as we can, beneath the layers of different redactions of tradition and their tendencies,¹ that is to say to work from the point of view not of "source criticism" but of tradition criticism. It is true these common matters that arise from our investigation are not yet interchangeable with the unity of the tradition itself, because outside and beyond the various special tendencies, there predominates again and again under the prophetic guidance a composition tendency, a unity tendency of a religious nature, the tendency that pervades all the books in their different parts and sheds abroad one spirit, the "Biblical" spirit. It endeavours to implant one type of idea, one principle, or more correctly to restore according to its intention the first type, the latest redaction only serving as a culmination of this endeavor. It is necessary therefore to distinguish very clearly in each tradition between its fundamental unity, from which different redactions have proceeded according to different tendencies, and the unity of harmonization, fruit of the "Biblical" spirit; but we are not to see in this in any sense a late, and, from the historical point of view, utterly incorrect matter, rather we are to examine

1 Cf. my essay "Samuel and the Development of Authority in Israel" (Hebrew Zion, 4th year 1f), which is part of an as yet unpublished book and some chapters of my book "Moses" (English edition, 1946).

it again and again and to make it as clear as possible, whether and how far in the case of the subject under discussion there is to be found in the work of harmonization the influence of a primitive unity, preserved in the memory of generations in spite of different editorial tendencies, tendencies which in some cases had already been efficacious at the time the tradition itself came into being. And when we have come as near as possible to the tradition, we must ascertain its content from the point of view of faith, and determine its place in the development of religion.

In the account that follows I can only bring forward the results of this method; concerning the work of research itself I have written more elsewhere, and I hope to continue it.