

Entwicklungsgeschichte des Reiches Gottes  
H.J. Bestmann  
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This book is a bold attempt to construe the development of Old Testament religion as a spiritual movement on the basis of the expression which the successive stages of this movement have found in the literature. The author finds the fatal mistake of modern criticism in its predominantly literary character, and consequently proceeds to substitute for this the exclusive test of the correlation of religious ideas and sentiments. In point of fact, however, the difference between him and the critics is rather negative than positive: it consists entirely in his resolute refusal to make use of any literary data. So far as the positive side of the matter is concerned, we do not see how critics of the school of Kuenen and Wellhausen can be justly charged with neglect of the ideal element pertaining to the history of religion. The fault with the critics is not that they rely too much on literary data and too little on the data of the history of religion, but that from the very beginning, and ever increasingly as time goes on, they allow themselves to be guided in their literary criticism by viewpoints drawn from their historico-philosophical interpretation of the religion of Israel. Even the documents yielded by the literary analysis of the Pentateuch cannot be dated without falling back upon the particular scheme of evolution the critics have espoused.

Bestmann's own criticism is from beginning to end determined by the one canon that the religious movement is in its earliest stage individual, and that its further development consists in the expansion at this personal element to the spheres of social life and the organized community. This is traced successively in the Psalms, the wisdom literature, the prophetic writings, the law codes, the historical books. It will be seen that this differs from the critical hypothesis in that it places the pronounced religious individualism which, e.g., many of the Psalms exhibit, at the beginning instead of at the end. In regard to the Hexateuch, Bestmann agrees with the modern school in distinguishing four strata of (literary) development, but follows Dillmann in placing P before D. Deuteronomy dates from before the early prophets, the holiness law from the time of Jeroboam I, the priestly laws from before the days of the kingdom.

Notwithstanding the many stimulating and interesting observations in which the book abounds, we cannot say that its method of reasoning is very convincing. The trend of thought lacks in clearness and scientific precision. As apart from this, exception may be taken to the fundamental principle underlying the whole discussion. The tendency of religion to expand from individual to social and national forms may be a factor to be reckoned with, but it is only one among many, and to suspend on it alone a comprehensive scheme, not only of the growth of Old Testament religion, but of the origin of the Old Testament books themselves, appears to us a precarious procedure. What right have we *a priori* to assume that the collection of documents gathered into the Old Testament canon is either intended to be, or suited to be, a record of subjective religious development, and that from such a specific view-point? While professing to occupy supernaturalistic ground, the author, we fear, has not sufficiently guarded against the misconception, as if revelation came through the medium of religion, instead of the reverse. It is connected with this that on one point especially we must disagree with his representation. Bestmann thinks that the old view about the Mosaic origin of the entire written law presents an insuperable difficulty, because it renders it impossible to explain the low plane on which, in the later period, we find the popular religion. This is true, of course, if the principle

holds that all revelation is subjectively conditioned in such a sense that it cannot rise above the level of spiritual development actually attained at a given time. From the standpoint of a more objective and consistent theory of revelation, however, such a lapse as the Post-mosaic period presents to our view is not only explainable, but in a certain sense must be held to have been inevitable. Precisely because the legitimate religion of Israel was not the natural product of the people's life, it could for long periods remain unassimilated and in partial abeyance.