

Zur Geschichte der alttestamentlichen Religion in ihrer universalen Bedeutung

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The common title under which the author has joined these two rectoral orations describes more accurately the purport of the second than that of the first. In the first entitled "Old Testament Science and the History of Religion" the problem of universality emerges only towards the end. The larger space is given to a retrospect of the development of Old Testament science in the direction of a history of the Old Testament religion and to a review of the more modern discussions concerning the influence of other religions upon that of Israel. In regard to the former point the author calls attention to the precedence of theology in this field. Classical science made the transition from the study of mythology to a scientific treatment of religion as a historical growth later than and perhaps in partial dependence on the pursuit of this new method by biblical scholars with reference to the Old Testament. To be sure in its older form this method was vitiated by the rationalistic misconception that the historical development to be traced was a matter of doctrine, a misconception to which the name Biblical Theology still bears witness. Even under the wrong name, however, much was done to clear the way and lay the foundations for the work which now under a better nomenclature the History of the Old Testament religion may take in hand. In his discussion of the comparative problem Baudissin evidently means to make a generous allowance for the elements that the religion of Israel had in common with the religions of the surrounding nations and for the influence exercised from various quarters upon the Old Testament religion. On the latter point his statements are not so much along the line of positive opinion as of a mere objective review of possibilities. Even on so fundamental a question as to whether the primitive Semitic religion of Israel was like that of the Arabs, or partook of the astrological character of the Babylonian religious system, he remains non-committal. And, what is most important, he refuses to admit that the key for our historical understanding of the biblical religion can be found in anything that was borrowed from outside. The specific character of Israel's religion must be due to something indigenous. Baudissin finds the source of this first of all in the intense Semitic consciousness of the greatness of the deity and in the unique position and prestige enjoyed by the deity in consequence of the intertwining of religion and tribal organization. This reminds of the view developed some decades ago from a more positive standpoint by Grau in his book "Gottes Volk und sein Gesetz." Next to monotheism, and far outweighing it in religious importance, stand the ethical conception of God and the unique estimate put upon personal spiritual communion with Him as the highest possession of man. These two features the writer derives from the inner religious experience of the heroes of Israel's religion, the prophets. It will be noticed that thus the monotheism and the ethico-religious spiritualization are made to appear as two coordinate strands in the development, whereas the representatives of the Graf-Wellhausen school generally represent the monotheism as the result of the ethicizing of the prophetic conception of God.

In the second oration entitled "Nationalism and Universalism" these two aspects are not merely considered in their contrast but also as to the dependence of the latter upon the former. Baudissin subscribes to the paradox of Kuenen, that Israel has given to the world the most universalistic religion, because its religion was most intensely national in character. This is affirmed on the principle that in the most national and specific traits, the universal and generic is apt to find its strongest expression. It is not made clear, however, how in the concrete case of Israel, the element which chiefly made

for universalism, the ethico-religious conception of religion, is connected with the national consciousness. For this element according to Baudissin himself was born in the inexorable depths of the prophetic consciousness. It is true the prophet did not lack the national spirit. Only, by taking recourse to the region of psychological mystery, as a sort of modern substitute for the old factor of revelation, the writer at the outset surrenders the possibility of historically explaining the unique prophetic consciousness either from national factors or otherwise.