

Israel en de Baäls afval of ontwikkeling  
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In this rectoral address the author subjects the well-known views of the Graf-Wellhausen school concerning the influence of the Canaanitish Baal-cult upon the religion of Israel to a thorough-going critique. The Old Testament does not deny this influence but regards it as apostasy; the evolutionary critics look upon it as a necessary and on the whole beneficial transition stage in the development which led from the pre-Mosaic and the Mosaic religion to the higher faith of the prophets.

The primitive religion of Israel was of the nomadic type, monotonous, austere, the religion of the steppe; it was only through contact with the agricultural religion of the Canaanites, that it could lay aside these unprogressive features and acquire the potentialities of a "Kultur" religion.

Thus not merely accidentals or externals in the line of cult-observance are supposed to have come to Israel from this pagan source, but to a considerable extent the inner propelling force in the marvelous flight of Israel's religious genius was due to the same influence. Of late Baudissin has even attempted to derive the conception of Jehovah as "the living God" and its correlate, the idea of the resurrection, from the religion of the Canaanites.

In criticizing this hypothesis Dr. Ridderbos makes skillful use of the new light which modern discoveries and explorations have shed on the ancient cultural and religious conditions of the Orient. We are often being told that the results of this new research are unfavorable or even fatal to the Wellhausenian views. Unfortunately no adequate effort seems to have been made to point this out in the concrete. The great value of Dr. Ridderbos' work consists in its clear showing of how the historically ascertained facts run athwart the hypothetical construction in such a way that the latter becomes implausible or even impossible not merely in certain details, but in its large fundamental fabric. The ease with which Israel after its settlement in Canaan is assumed to have assimilated itself to the Baal-religion, either by way of syncretism or through modification of the Jahve-religion, and that without any disturbing consciousness of infidelity to its ancestral traditions, is by the critics largely explained from the fact that the Canaanitish religion at the time existed still largely in the stage of polydemonism, its conception of the deity being that of the lower, undefined kind which lacks the pronounced personal element. The Baals were numina associated with various places, the Baal as a single God is a product of later mythological abstraction. Only because such a character attached to the Canaanitish Baalim could the Israelites imagine that their recognition was not inconsistent with the claim of Jahve upon the service of his people, the more so since the Israelites themselves had far from outgrown the polydemonistic beliefs of their own past. Dr. Ridderbos carefully shows how unwarranted this polydemonistic interpretation of the Baal-religion appears in the light of the newly-ascertained facts. Of course there was polydemonistic superstition among the Canaanites as there was among Israel, but it merely coexisted with the other more personal type of religion, and cannot be proven to have been the source out of which the latter was developed, as even Baudissin acknowledges. The stage of culture reached by the Canaanites was far too high to permit of identifying their religion with polydemonism. Baal was not exclusively associated with the soil. The association with heaven was quite ancient, since even in Elijah's time the priests of the Tyrian Baal expect their God to send fire from heaven. And if the location of Baal in heaven is ancient, then

the unified conception also cannot be entirely a later product. The author is inclined to take the opposite view, viz., to consider the plural localized. Baals developed out of the one Baal. With the falling away of this misconception of the character of the religion of Canaan, the favorite view that Israel could have naively, innocently, almost unconsciously drifted into the worship of Baal is much weakened. Still more it is weakened by considering what the actual character of the Baal-religion was. It had few ethical elements, its two outstanding practices were that of human sacrifice and of sexual impurity, both confirmed anew by the modern excavations. It is quite incredible that Israel should without qualms of conscience have abandoned itself to a cult of this character.

If thus the Canaanitish factor in the construction appears with the new knowledge we have of it to be far different from the picture given of it by the critics, the same must be said of the religion which Israel carried into Canaan. The pre-Mosaic religion was not polydemonism. Nor was it purely nomadic. After a critique of the well-known assertions to that effect, the author presents some positive counter-considerations. In this he relies largely upon the testimony of the prophets, who condemn as apostasy what the critics regard as ancient legitimate inheritance. Of course Dr. Ridderbos is well aware that the prophets afford a common debating ground between us and the critics only so long as their testimony is restricted to contemporary conditions. In their interpretation of the past religious history at Israel they are not trusted any more by the modern school than the historical writers of the Old Testament. But some of the critics themselves seem to feel that this wholesale discrediting of the judgment and testimony of men in other respects so highly idealized in their own theory as the prophets are, is far from justified. Some, like Marti, make perceptible endeavors to gloss over or tone down the contradiction between the prophetic and the critical renderings of the past. In regard to the future these same prophets, whose views of former history are cast aside as perverted and misleading, are credited with the highest degree of "genial intuition." There surely is an inconsistency in this. Pertinent also is the consideration, that if the whole prophetic prediction at the judgment was based on a misapprehension of the culpable character of the past and present, then the divine government which has brought on the judgment in harmony with the word of the prophets would seem to be involved in this stupendous misreading of the actual development taken by the history of Israel.

In conclusion the author points out the true causes which will explain Israel's proclivity towards the religion of Canaan. These lie in the ancient paganistic taint of which the people had not fully rid themselves, in the intermingling with the Canaanites through commercium and connubium which, in spite of the divine warning, the Israelites allowed themselves, in the seductive sensual character of the Baal-cult, in the inferiority of the Israelites, as compared with Canaan, in the matter of culture, in the culpable conduct of the priests. But all these factors, even so far as they are not distinctively moral, cannot alter the fact that Israel's yielding to them was a sinful process, which contributed to the development of the true religion of the Old Testament not in any positive way, but merely negatively by creating room for the display of the divine procedure of redemption. That the settlement in the holy land had its positive contribution to make towards the working out of God's plan of revelation is not denied. Only so far as this was the case it was not the Baal-religion, but the Canaanitish environment, as a milieu of common grace which should receive the credit.

If we were to make any criticism on the author's argument it would be in regard to two points. In the first place it should have been brought out with greater precision at the outset, that the critical theory itself, at least in some of its forms, leaves room for a measure of apostasy in Israel's assimilation to

the Baal-religion. Some of the critics treat this as a real decline from the austere, nomadic religion of the earlier period. Only this primitive religion from which the Israelites fell away was by no means identical with the prophetic religion, with falling away from which they were afterwards according to the critics unjustly charged by the prophets. The point at issue, therefore, sharply defined, is not whether there was apostasy, but whether the apostasy was from a revealed norm identical with the prophetic preaching. Our second point is that the distinction between the subjective and the objective aspect of the apostasy involved might have been more clearly drawn. Over against the critical assertion of the wholly naive character of the popular state of mind the former is important; over against the asserted benefit accruing to the Old Testament religion from its marriage to the Baal-cult the latter is of equal weight. A somewhat more formal and pointed distinction between those two sides of the question would perhaps have been helpful to the mind of the average reader.