

READING THE BIBLE BACKWARDS

INTRODUCTION: PROPOSALS AND ARGUMENTS

In the traditional approach, the Bible is treated as revelation, and later as the product of history. But neither the first nor the second can satisfy the modern reader—the first is too naive, the second is too learned. Although the reader no longer believes that the Bible represents the infallible word of God, he nevertheless stands at a loss before an edition which distinguishes its different layers by four different kinds of type. Since he can neither read nor study it, his only alternative is to put it aside.

Compromises of any sort are to no avail. Contemporary theologians still believe that the Bible is the infallible word of God, even though they do concede that it is also the product of history. But as a product of history it cannot be infallible. Although it still evokes emotion, it can no longer be considered the source of truth. Instead of attempting to find a workable compromise between the religious and the scientific interpretations, why not seek a third method which would give a new reading of the Bible?

The author of the present study proposes the adoption of a different frame of reference. Biblical criticism starts with the text, he proposes to start with those who wrote it. At first glance, this would seem a purely technical innovation. But this change in perspective involves a shift from a literary to

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a sociological viewpoint. True, the latter is less precise and more hypothetical in its nature, but any loss in sharpness is made up by breadth of scope. While Biblical criticism concentrated on minutiae, the sociological method gives a view of the whole and enables one to pass from commentary to criticism.

The Bible grew organically: every new layer was derived from and influenced the one before it; each successive editor corrected and was corrected, each was the subject and the object of revision. The conclusion that forces itself upon us is that the later the stratum of the Bible, the fewer revisions it was subjected to and so the best way to understand the Bible is to start reading it from the end. The present study, therefore, proceeds backwards, against the current of time.

It begins up to 621 B.C., when at the institution of Hilkiah, the high priest of the temple of Jerusalem, Josiah, the king of Judah, conducted a religious reform. Its purpose, as the Scriptures state, was to restore monotheism. In consequence, the altars on the high places were destroyed and their priests were slain or deprived of the means of livelihood. The second section describes how Hilkiah revised the old texts with the purpose of proving that his current conflict with the priests of the high places had its roots in an earlier time. In the third section, we shall see how in the 10th century B.C. Nathan, the royal tutor, attempted to establish the right of his pupil Solomon to the throne of David. The fourth gives an account of Nathan's revision of the legend of the patriarchs. Thus Sections I and III describe the political activity of the authors, while Sections II and IV detail how they utilized current political experience in the writing of history. The odd sections, set in the 7th and in the 10th centuries B.C., are the floodlights, the even sections are the beams of light thrown into a distant past.

I. SONS OF ZADOK AND THE PRIESTS OF THE HIGH PLACES (7TH CENTURY B.C.)

Very little is known of the history of the monotheistic dogma, for great effort has been made to obliterate all traces of it.

The one irrefutable fact concerns the history of the cult, that is Solomon's construction of the temple of Jerusalem toward the end of the 10th century B.C. It is not certain whether Yahweh was worshipped there as the One God. It is certain, however, that from the very beginning emphasis was placed on the monopoly of the temple. For when David carried the ark to Jerusalem and when Solomon built the edifice to house it, the priests who had formed one homogeneous body split into two antagonistic groups. The first group continued to make crude offerings in the high places and to anoint the rocks and tree stumps with oil, the second worshipped at the high altar in the temple according to a rigorous set of rules. The first were called the priests of the high places, the second, named after the first high priest Zadok, were later known as Sadducees. It ought to be made clear from the outset that the Sadducees alone are the agents of history. It is they who used writing and who had a permanent sanctuary where they could keep their texts. That is why we know the conflict only from their point of view.

For there was a conflict from the very first moment. There is no doubt that the motives were economical because the meat bought for sacrifice constituted an important item of the priests' budget. There were also political motives behind the conflict—namely the antagonism between the Ten Tribes of the north and the powerful tribe of Judah which dwelled in the south. The split, which had emerged much earlier, broke out with redoubled force after Solomon's death. The kingdom was divided into two: Israel with a capital ultimately established in Samaria, and Judah with a capital in Jerusalem. The latter was ruled by kings descended from David. Their aim was to extend a spiritual protectorate over the whole of the divided nation and it is toward this end that, among other measures, annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem were instituted. The conviction that the holy days can be observed *lege artis* only there was firmly implanted. "Until next year in Jerusalem" the pilgrims used to say in parting.

The kings of the northern state called Israel attempted to oppose the monopolistic tendencies of the south with a cult of their own and so gave their support to the priests of the

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high places: "And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. Where upon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them. It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem, behold thy gods, o Israel, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt" (I Kings 12: 26-28).

Clearly therefore monotheism arose, among others, as a result of the drive of the priests of Jerusalem toward a centralized authority. In connection with this tendency, Yahweh gradually rose to the rank of the supreme and later the One God. On the other hand, to establish their legitimacy the sons of Zadok sought to demonstrate that they were heirs of revelation through an unbroken chain of tradition. They made this the central thesis of the texts which they edited. A claim to power determined by heredity is called legitimism and is expressed by the known formula "We, by the grace of God." The sons of Zadok created a legitimism of their own based on a series of revelations, blessings and anointments that ran from the patriarchs to themselves.

The founder of the tribe was Abraham who spoke with Yahweh and entertained him at his table. In the course of one of the visits, the Lord promised the old man Abraham—who did not have an heir—a legitimate son and the land of Canaan to his descendants. Since that time male descendants of Abraham have worn the visible sign of the covenant's guarantee on their bodies.

Charisma was transmitted in the form of a blessing. On the one hand, it was a kind of last will and testament, the patriarch invested his firstborn, or the son he recognized as such, with all his goods; on the other hand, the bequest was non-material: the son fell heir to the spiritual leadership of the tribe. Abraham blessed Isaac, who blessed Jacob, who in turn chose Judah and Joseph out of his twelve sons. After a break of four hundred years, when the Israelites lived in bondage in the land of Egypt, the Lord renewed the covenant

with Moses, appearing to him in a burning bush. His wife Zipporah circumcised their son once again.

Moses invested Joshua with charisma, he in turn bequeathed it to the military leaders called the Judges. The last of the judges, whom we meet in the first chapter of the First Book of Samuel, is Eli. He performed no military function; his role was to guard the ark. Since Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas proved unworthy of their father's office, his servant Samuel was made the keeper of the ark and with this became the spiritual leader of the people.

Samuel did not transmit the leadership to his sons either (they all proved unworthy of it), but to the Kings he anointed. The first was Saul and, after he had been rejected, David. David was succeeded not by older sons but by Solomon who built a temple in Jerusalem and placed it in the custody of Zadok. From that day on, relations between the secular and the spiritual powers rested on an exchange of services: the high priest "walked before the king," the king was anointed by the high priest. This cooperation was the cornerstone of their legitimism; from that day on the priests of Jerusalem were symbolically known as the "sons of Zadok."

We shall begin the story of their conflict with the priests of the high places, from its final stage, when the sons of Zadok embarked upon the ultimate extermination of their rivals. In 621 B.C. the northern kingdom had been out of existence for a hundred years; the majority of its population had been deported to Assyria; foreign armies roamed freely across Samaria. Judah could exert no more than a spiritual influence on this land. Necessary here was an operation that would unite the nation. This proved to be the collection of funds for the restoration of Solomon's temple which had fallen into sad disrepair in the course of the four centuries since it had been built. The Second Book of Kings 22 and 23 gives us the story:

"And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of the king Josiah, that the king sent Shaphan,... the scribe, to the house of the Lord,

¹ See Martin North, *Geschichte Israels*. Goettingen, 1963, p. 247 and following regarding the attempts of Josiah, king of Judah, to recover after the fall of Assyria at least part of the territory that had once belonged to Israel.

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saying, Go up to Hilkiyah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the Lord, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people; And let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the Lord: and let them give it to the doers of the work which is in the house of the Lord, to repair the breaches of the house... Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully. And Hilkiyah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord... And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again and said, Thy servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the Lord. And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying Hilkiyah the priest had delivered me the book and Shaphan read it before the king...

"And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiyah, and Shaphan the scribe and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying, Go ye, enquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book...

"And the king commanded Hilkiyah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the Lord, all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven... And he brake down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the Lord, where the women wove hangings for the grove. And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense... Nevertheless the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren. And he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech. And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entering in of the house of the Lord, by the chamber of Nathanmelech the chamberlain... and burned the chariots of the sun with fire... And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were

on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth.. did the king defile...

“And as Josiah... sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the word of the Lord, which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words. Then he said, What title is that that I see? And the men of the city told him, It is the sepulchre of the man of God, which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that thou hast done against the altar of Bethel. And he said, Let him alone; And all the houses also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the Lord to anger, Josiah took away, and did to them according to all the acts that he had done in Bethel. And he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men’s bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem. And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the Lord your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant. Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah.”

Let us begin with the author. The flat uninspired style and the linear character of the narrative suggest the idea that these are fragments of annals written by Hilkiyah, the high priest of the temple. The author’s identity is also borne out by the nature of information offered (knowledge of the streets, the inhabitants and the addresses) and by the narrator’s specific bias.

The events described are even more baffling. King Josiah sent Shaphan the scribe to see what progress had been made on the reconstruction of the temple. The king forbade him, however, to make a reckoning of the money that had been collected for, he emphasized, he trusted Hilkiyah implicitly. Someone, so it seems, had strenuously demanded such a reckoning since the author felt it necessary to make the point that the king had given up the idea.

Far more surprising is the high priest’s reaction to the visit. In the answer he gives the king’s scribe, he does not speak of the restoration of the temple but of a book he had discovered. Shaphan takes the book to the king and reads it to him. The king reproaches himself for not having taken

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heed of the word of the book (how could he when he had no knowledge of it?). Under the influence of the book, the king then embarks upon a policy of religious reformation.

The reform, according to the Scriptures, was preceded by a period of more than fifty years during which the people had abandoned their faith. We learn of the extent of the evil ways into which the people had fallen from the description of the abolition of idolatry. It appears that for eighteen years King Josiah ruled over a city where even the cemeteries, institutions that obviously existed much longer than a half a century, were pagan in character,² where children were burned alive as an offering to Moloch, where the high priest ministered in a temple in which the horses of the sun were stabled and where sacral debauchery was practiced.

All this falls into place the moment we accept that Josiah did not restore monotheism, as the Scriptures would have it, but that he established it. It seems that other deities, beside Yahweh, were worshiped in the temple of Solomon, that the priests who served the different gods and played a part in collecting the funds for the restoration might have demanded a reckoning from Hilkiah and requested a part in the administration of the reconstructed temple. They had every right to it. In answer Hilkiah produced the most dangerous weapon: a book which prescribed the abolition of their ritual. Biblical scholars have known for a long time that the book in question is the Book of Deuteronomy, the fifth and most rigorous part of the Pentateuch.³ All evidence points to the fact that its editor was Hilkiah himself.

Josiah's acceptance of the book spelled the end of the semi-pagan ritual of the high places. The priests of northern Samaria were slain, those of southern Judah were forced to move to Jerusalem. They were promised a kind of commissary where "they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren"

² Plundering the old cemeteries, Josiah spared "the sepulchre of the man of God, which came from Judah", and proclaimed these things that he had done. This is a reference to I Kings 13 where a man of God comes to Jeroboam, king of Israel in the 9th century B.C., to prophesy Josiah's reform. The prophesy or "vaticinium ex eventu" is obviously an addition made by Hilkiah who in this fashion wishes to legalize *ex post* his actions.

³ See Otto Eissfeldt, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, Tübingen, 1956, p. 278.

(II Kings 25:9) although they were not entitled to participate in the worship. The sons of Zadok won a decisive victory which was sealed by a passover observed with great pomp and ceremony. "Surely there was not holden such a passover," the author records with triumph, "from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah" (II Kings 23:22).

II. THE POLICY OF THE PRIESTS OF JERUSALEM AND THE FIRST CHAPTER OF THE BOOK OF SAMUEL (7TH-11TH CENTURIES B.C.)

When the opposition had been put down, the priests of Jerusalem were able to exercise an unlimited control over Judah; this domination was to survive not only Judah but also the priests themselves; its final result was to be the Jewish nation. Their spiritual dictatorship was to produce certain enduring forms of existence which enabled the Jewish people to survive the thousand years of the Diaspora and bondage. On the other hand, the monstrous quantity of commandments and injunctions they raised like a wall around the people was to lead in effect to the petrification of culture.

The process of petrification, which might be called Deuteronomization after the work marking its beginning, extended in two directions. In its forward extension it cut a gash through the psyche of the subsequent generations and, in its backward extension, against the current of time, it adapted old tradition to new exigencies. The priests of Jerusalem, as we have seen in the example of Josiah's reform, sought to produce the illusion that they were not innovating but restoring, that every upheaval was a reversion, that Judaism had been from the first what it was now, that it had always been so. That explains their arduous concentration on the revision of the old texts.

We cannot but admire what they accomplished: they had preserved for posterity a treasure of incalculable value. Yet we cannot help but regret that the original texts have not survived. The control they exercised was autocratic, the sifting was conducted with rigid scrupulousness. And so the legends that have come down to us are deformed. It is not a coincidence that the

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masterpiece of the Bible is the "Genesis;" its venerable hoariness protected it from the obtrusive innovations of the Deuteronomists. It is not a coincidence either that the second masterpiece are "The Memoirs" which close the Books of Samuel, a composition of a man who was not constrained by didactic aims, the work of a Biblical Shakespeare who, if he believed in Yahweh at all, it was surely not in the Yahweh of culinary recipes but in the Yahweh who manifested himself in the thunder and falling boulders on the mount of Seir.

The four sections of this study bring out the contrasts between two mentalities: the monotheistic and the pre-monotheistic. The first two sections deal with the first, which found its continuation in Judaism later, the last two describe the second whose expression are "The Memoirs" mentioned above. The representative of monotheism is the instigator of Josiah's reform, Hilkiah; the representative of pre-monotheism is Solomon's teacher Nathan, called a prophet by later generations. As we describe each of them, we shall also discuss the manner in which they adapted history to the current situation.

The beginning of the First Book of Samuel bears clear marks of Deuteronomic revision. The action is set in Shiloh, a city where the ark was housed at the time, that is in the 11th century B.C. The central issue is the antagonism of the two lines of priests—the sinful and the virtuous. The first is represented by Eli and his sons, guardians of the object of national devotion, the second by Samuel who, owing to their wickedness, takes that office from them.

The author of this section was an experienced writer. He took care that what he wrote should conform with the forerunning historiography. The Book of Samuel is preceded by the Book of Judges, a work written in a totally different spirit. In Judges the action is not centered around the ark, which is hardly mentioned at all; Yahweh is not present in the ark but in the mount of Seir; the judges are not priests but military leaders. The Book of Samuel, on the other hand, is a theocratic work. Authority comes from God, the guardian of the ark is the Lord's deputy who transmits authority to the kings.

There is no connection between the Book of Judges and the Book of Samuel; each posits a different outlook. In order

to link the two, it was necessary to resort to a device which testifies to the author's literary skill. The introduction describes Eli and his sons solely as priests: Eli prays to the Lord, and his sons, as befitted His poor servitors, pounce greedily on the scraps of flesh offered in sacrifice. It is from Eli's epitaph that finally we learn that "he had judged Israel forty years" (I Samuel 4: 18); not until the very last moment do his two sons, mean grubbers that they were, take the ark of the covenant and set out for the battlefield as befits true warriors. Thus the two characters are suddenly transformed from priests to judges, an irrelevance that was necessary in order to build a bridge between the two books.

The author of the beginning of the First Book of Samuel was a priest. To him the ark was the center of the world. He gives a detailed description of its "strange adventures": how it was taken by the Philistines who were smitten with hemorrhoids in their secret parts, how the Philistines returned the ark with costly gifts and the images in gold of their hemorrhoids, how they laid the ark on a cart pulled by two milch cows and sent them where they might go, how the cows headed straight for the frontier and how David carried the ark to Jerusalem in a ceremonious procession, dancing and playing before it. David's chief virtue in the eyes of the author lay in his devotion to the ark. The author himself believed in its miraculous power. He believed that there is no better prescription for barrenness than to swear to dedicate one's expected son to the service of the ark. Hannah, whom Yahweh awarded with a son, does so; her son later became the prophet Samuel.

The author had a profound knowledge of the cult; he was particularly well versed in the practices of the priests of the high places. He observed how with hands shading their eyes they peered impatiently into the dust in the roads as they looked out for the pilgrims. And small wonder! They were entitled to a portion of the flesh sacrificed to the Lord and to lie with the wives of the pilgrims. In the First Book of Samuel, the sons of Eli pulled scraps from the seething pots and lay with the women who came to Shiloh. To spend the night in the tabernacle where the Lord would descend to them

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in the guise of His priest was a remedy for barrenness often resorted to by women pilgrims.

The beginning of the First Book of Samuel transfers into a distant past the polemic of the sons of Zadok against the priests of the high places. This fact is most clearly apparent in the prophecy of "a man of God" who came to Eli to tell him of the disasters that would fall on the heads of his sons. The office would be taken from the house of Eli and the Lord would choose a priest and build him a sure house where he would "walk before the king." The descendants of Eli would come to that priest and beg him for bread, silver and for one of the priest's offices (I Samuel 5:27-36). There is a triple allusion here: to the prophet Samuel who was to succeed the sons of Eli, to Zadok the first high priest of the temple of Solomon, who lived a hundred years later, and to Hilkiyah, whom, after Josiah's reform five hundred years later, the expelled priests begged for money, bread or an office. We have here an example of a pseudophecy or "vaticinium ex eventum" whose purpose is to legalize current policy.

There is ample evidence, however, that the original story did not take cognizance of the "Eli-Samuel" antithesis, that Samuel was actually extraneous to it. As a matter of fact Hannah's son should have been called Saul and not Samuel. The Bible derives the names of children from the mother's words spoken before their birth. The word that appears on Hannah's lips repeatedly is "shaol"—to ask for. Her son is therefore Saul (Shaoul)—or "asked for." It might be that in the original version he was the fruit of sacral debauchery begotten by Eli's two sons. The information that the two priests "lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation" (I Samuel 2:22) would therefore prove to be a link in the original action. This would also explain why at first the Scriptures place the sons and not their father at the center of the events. We read in I Samuel 1:3 "And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there."

That Samuel was introduced at a later date is also indicated by the fact that there are parts where his biography seems a copy of that of Eli. He too had two sons who made evil use

of their office (I Samuel, 8:2, 3). He too was unable to find a worthy heir in his family and so was forced to seek a successor elsewhere. Even the name sounds fictitious. Samuel means "The name of El" or God; it is too didactic for a real name. Besides it was so chosen that it may also be derived from the word "shaol" which Hannah repeated.

Many arguments lead us to assume that, wishing to move contemporary conflict into the distant past and to introduce into it the current antithesis of the two lines of priests, the author of the 7th century B.C. had added the figure of Samuel to the original story.

III. THREE SONS OF THE UNLOVED WIVES AND THE BELOVED BASTARD (10TH CENTURY B.C.)

The end of the Books of Samuel⁴ and the first chapter of the Books of Kings are clearly the work of one author. They are in fact an eye-witness account of events by an author who, as Eduard Meyer writes, "betrays a deep knowledge of what happened at the royal court in David's time and who must have been in close touch with him."⁵ The composition is remarkable for its unity of subject. It deals with the struggle for succession between David's four sons: Absalom against Amnon, Solomon against Adonijah. The struggle has a pre-history, namely the sinful love of the king for Bathsheba, the wife of the Hittite Uriah.

The fruit of what was the greatest passion of David's life—Solomon—was to succeed him on the throne even though his accession to royal power was illegal. Solomon was one of the youngest children, the tenth, and so long as his older brothers lived he could not inherit the throne; and Adonijah,⁶ we know was alive. The law clearly stated that the younger sons of favorite wives may not be given preferential treatment.⁷ The only

⁴ Notably I Samuel 9 to 20. Chapters 21 to 24 are unanimously considered by the Biblists as later additions.

⁵ *Geschichte des Altertums*, 1931, Vol. II, 2, p. 285.

⁶ The Scriptures remain silent regarding the fate of the remaining brothers.

⁷ This was to be formulated later in Deuteronomy 21: 15, 16 "If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated... and if the firstborn son be hers

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basis for Solomon's claim to the throne was the fact that David promised his beloved wife Bathsheba to make Solomon his successor.

We might begin with the author of "The Memoirs." There have been various suppositions regarding his person. Some have sought to identify him with Zadok's son Ahimaaz, others with the high priest Abiathar who was deposed by Solomon for being a sympathizer of Adonijah.⁸ "He gazes upon the events," Eduard Meyer says of the author, "with cold objectivity, even with supercilious irony... Religious constructions of any tinge and any idea of supernatural providence are totally alien to him... He presents events objectively as befitted an eye-witness. Nemesis emerges from the very development of events. It would seem from the above that the narrator could not be a priest, he was too secular in his outlook."

He draws his characters without illusion—cynically and in a modern style. We might take David, a later day ideal of a monarch, as an example. During Uriah's absence, who was away fighting at the front, David took his wife to his house. When he learned that she was pregnant, he summoned her husband to establish an alibi. After hearing his report from the front, David bade him go home "to wash his feet." But Uriah was not eager to wash his feet preferring to sleep at the door of the king's palace than to lie at the side of his wife. The king then summoned him, entreated, offered gifts and made him drunk but to no avail. Uriah replied, "the servants of my lord are encamped in the open field; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and drink and to lie with my wife?... I will not do this thing" (II Samuel, 10:11). The king gave up further attempt and sent his rival to the front giving him a letter in which he instructed Joab that Uriah be sent to his doom. In his last word this same David annulled the pardons he had granted during his lifetime. His successor Solomon must deal with the adversaries whom he had to spare for one reason or

that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated."

⁸ These hypotheses are enumerated by K. Budde in the commentary *Die Buecher Samuel*, 1902, p. 17.

another. Yet the same David wept at the news of Absalom's defeat instead of rejoicing at his own victory over the son he lost. Is he a villain or a hero? It does no good to ask because the memoirist does not evaluate, he simply chronicles the events as they happened.

With one exception only he does not relate "guilt and punishment." The Deuteronomists had a good deal of trouble with his memoirs later; they excluded them from the Biblical canon and then restored them. "The story spoke," Budde, a scholar who has reconstructed the history of that fragment with a great degree of probability, explains, "of drastic matters which showed David, the national hero, in a bad light." That they should not particularly like this masterpiece, shorn as it was of all prejudice, is not at all surprising. The surprising thing is that they restored it.

This might be accounted for by the fact that it contains a section which differs from the rest of "The Memoirs;" this fragment constitutes the exception referred to earlier. Chapter 12 of the Second Book of Samuel, where it is found, is composed of two parts. The purpose of the first (12: 1-15a) is to demonstrate that the misfortunes that descended upon the house of David were a punishment for the sin he committed with Bathsheba. "A man of God" appeared before the king. This time it was the prophet Nathan. He announced that David would be punished for his sin. He had taken Uriah's wife secretly but his wives would be taken from him before the eyes of the people,⁹ his sons would be killed in fratricidal battle and Bathsheba's child would die. But the prophet softened at David's first words of remorse and predicted that he would be forgiven.

Actually Nathan was Solomon's teacher. In the conflict with Adonijah he was his pupil's most faithful mainstay. It was Nathan who induced Bathsheba to tell the old king of Adonijah's usurpation of the crown and to prevail upon him to name Solomon his successor: a moment later Nathan came before the king to confirm her words. In later ages, when his figure

⁹ This is an allusion to Absalom's sexual prowess. He was to possess ten of his father's concubines on the palace roof to the accompaniment of applause of the enthusiastic mob.

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became surrounded with legend, he received the epithet "prophet."¹⁰ This would explain the role attributed to him in the mystical passages discussed before. Based on the principle of pseudo-prophecy they are clearly a later addition.

Equally baffling, though for other reasons, is the next section of the chapter (v. 15 b-25) which describes the death of Bathsheba's illegitimate child. Yahweh, in the words of "the man of God," promised David that he would make up the loss of the child. Indeed, upon the death of Uriah and marriage to Bathsheba, a legitimate son Solomon was to be born. From the point of view of plot construction, the description of the death of the first child, remarkable though it is in the literary sense, is totally unnecessary. The Bible had not habituated us to scenes from the lives of infants and so there must have been some other aim in introducing the account. It might be assumed that the first child did not die at all and that this child was Solomon.

But was it fitting to admit that the successor to the throne was a bastard? It was in the interest of the state to allay suspicion on that point. The author therefore pretends that the child had died and that Solomon was born after the union between David and Bathsheba had been legalized. This would explain the puzzling fact that Nathan gave Solomon a second name, calling him Jedidiah, "beloved of Yahweh." The apotropaic nickname was designed to avert the evil spell that public opprobrium could have cast upon the child of sin; the custom of giving the bewitched child a second name in order to mislead the demon is practiced by the Jews to this day.

Thus, the author of "The Memoirs" can be neither Ahimaaz nor Solomon's enemy Abiathar but someone who was wholly dedicated to him, notably his teacher Nathan. It is not irrelevant to mention the fact that the "Chronicles,"¹¹ written at a much later date, speak of him as of the author of the "History of David," a work which has been lost. It is likely that

¹⁰ The word "prophet" had a different meaning in the 10th century than it had later. It did not denote "a man of God" but an ecstatic dervish (see scenes from the life of Saul).

¹¹ Written about the mid 4th century B.C., the work contains many earlier data.

"The Memoirs" are the surviving remnants of that history. The writer lived in the 10th century B.C., a time when according to the assumptions of Biblical scholars, an anonymous Yahwist also flourished. It was he who "on the basis of the treasury of folk legends laid the foundations for the principal stories of Genesis, including among others, the story of Rebekah and Joseph."¹² Since it is highly improbable that two authors of comparable genius lived in one and the same era, one is tempted to identify them with each other. The temptation is all the greater as certain stories in Genesis seem like a mythical transposition of the kind of observations the author could have made at first hand at David's court. We might turn now to see to what extent this temptation finds support in fact.

IV. THE POLICIES OF DAVID'S COURT AND THE BOOK OF GENESIS (10TH-16TH CENTURIES B.C.)

The stories of Genesis do not represent a free play of imagination; they reflect a sum total of knowledge about the world and are typical in character. The old author packs the genealogical tree with everything he knows about the ethnography and psychology of neighboring peoples and others. Since there are three linguistic families within the compass of his experience, notably Semitic, Japhetic and Hamitic, the patriarch Noah is given three sons, Shem, Japheth and Ham. Since Ishmaelite brigands, mixed with Egyptians, camp out in Sinai, Ishmael when he is cast into the wilderness marries an Egyptian woman and becomes a roving bandit. Since Israel broke up into twelve tribes, the patriarch Jacob-Israel must necessarily have twelve sons and so on.

The twelve biographies are ethnographic in character; they are in fact the histories of twelve separate groups. And so the story of Jacob's curse of Reuben, Simeon and Levi, the three oldest sons born of the unloved Leah, for their wicked ways, is in fact the history of the three tribes. They were considered

¹² Elias Auerbach, *Wüste und heiliges Land*, Berlin, 1932. Auerbach believes that Abiathar is identical with the "Yahwehist" author of "The Memoirs".

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the oldest for they had settled in Canaan earlier than the others. Only remnants of these tribes were extant at the time of the writing of Genesis so it might be said that they were indeed cursed.

The two most powerful tribes in the days of David were those of Judah and Joseph: the first was preeminent in the south, the second in the north. Throughout his life David was locked in contest with the separatist tendencies of the ten northern tribes, the most powerful of which were the Ephraimites.¹³ David's purpose in moving the capital from the south to centrally located Jerusalem, was to consolidate the state whose existence was threatened by the trend toward decentralization. The situation is mirrored in the author's depiction of the death-bed scene of Jacob-Israel. After cursing the three oldest sons, he extols the future greatness of Judah and Joseph. Since Judah was the oldest and since Joseph was his most beloved son, Jacob divided the birthright equally between the two.

By emphasizing that in his last testament Jacob had made Joseph equal to Judah, or the north to the south, the author clearly sought to follow the policies of the throne and to placate the tribes of the north. The latter were irritated by the fact that David, born in Bethlehem, the land of Judah, hence a representative of the south, had dethroned Saul who came from the north. "We have no part in David" (II Samuel, 20:1), said the Benjamites, the kin of the deposed king Saul. In defense of David's interest, the author created a new fictitious genealogy in the light of which David although born in Bethlehem-Judah was an Ephrathite by descent.¹⁴ The south and the north were therefore united in his person.

¹³ "Ephraim" was one of two halves of Joseph's tribe, the other was "Manasseh". The Manassites settled earlier, but the Ephraimites were numerically stronger. This balance of power is expressed in the story where Joseph brings his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, to be blessed by his father Jacob. He places them in the order of their birth: Manasseh on the right and Ephraim on the left. But Jacob deliberately guides his right hand so it rests on Ephraim's head and by this token Ephraim receives the birthright.

¹⁴ See I Samuel 17:12. This is the author's hypothesis. Biblical scholars assume that the word Ephrathite stands here for the inhabitant of Bethlehem which is also called Ephrathah in several places of the Bible. We feel that these are additions made at a later date by authors who wished to impart meaning to an epithet that they no longer understood.

The motif of the infraction of the principle of primogeniture, a right which is of basic importance to dynastic succession, recurs with astonishing persistence in Genesis. The law is violated by Abraham when, for the benefit of his younger son Isaac, he sends Ishmael away from him; Isaac gives Esau's birthright to Jacob and finally Jacob raises Joseph above his brethren.¹⁵ And as Joseph so Solomon is a younger son of a beloved wife. He too is advanced not in accordance with the law and, to make the analogy complete, at the expense of the three oldest brothers. As Reuben, Simeon and Levi had, by drawing upon their heads the curse of their father, made way for Joseph, so Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah had to leave the road clear for Bathsheba's son Solomon.¹⁶

The similarities are too great to be attributed to coincidence. In composing Genesis the author seems to have borne in mind the events he had witnessed. It seems highly probable that the reason why the breach of the right of primogeniture was brought up with such obsessive persistence was to point to the fact that since the patriarchs had indulged their paternal prejudices, then the contemporaries have every right to do so. The deciding factor in exceptional cases, such as the designation of the leader of the people, should be not physical chance but choice based on divine guidance. Not primogeniture but spiritual qualities, which in the given instance were represented by the author's pupil Solomon, predestined him for the role of ruler.

CONCLUSION: LITERATURE AND THE INFINITE (20TH CENTURY A.D. $\rightarrow \infty$)

With the belief in El Olam, the One God whose attributes are eternity and omnipresence (the Hebrew Olam means both

¹⁵ The motif of infringement of the right of primogeniture appears also in the story of Ephraim and Manasseh and in the story of the travail of Tamar. Zarah put out his hand first but drew it back and Pharez, the younger of the two, made the breach first. (Genesis 38: 28-30).

¹⁶ Even the sin of Reuben, who lay with Jacob's concubine, has its archetype in Absalom's sin.

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universe and eternity), there emerged a new idea whose meaning was to attain crucial importance and to extend beyond the province of religion: infinity. The word was not familiar to the ancients, Aristotle did not know it,¹⁷ it was unfamiliar in the Middle Ages as well. Its meaning, together with the antinomies it implies, was to emerge in full in modern times.

The term originated in the Bible, the Biblical Yahweh is or rather became infinite, not only in the physical but also in the moral sense. "Became" because He did not emerge at once as a perfect and eternal being, but grew perfect and eternal by a gradual process. Earlier layers describe Yahweh as an unpredictable kobold. It was the prophets who finally invested Him with the attributes of omnipotence, omniscience and unbounded goodness. Had He been invested with these attributes earlier, His greatness would have overwhelmed every story, foiled every action. His omniscience nullifies man's free will, His omnipotence any action (if He had been truly omnipotent the first parents would have never left the Garden of Eden and history would never have started). His unbounded goodness precludes the existence of Evil. Contact between the infinity of God and the finite nature of man is extremely difficult.

How is Evil, a necessary condition of any action, possible in a world governed by a Perfect Being? The question occurs in the Bible from the story of original sin to the Book of Job. We, the inhabitants of a world which had once made claim to perfection, know it only too well. Since Evil cannot come from an infallible authority, it must be the work either of an external agency or of internal provocation.

The role of that agency in primitive Judaism was performed by the worshipers of foreign idols of the Baalim and the Molochs. Old Biblical authors did not deny the existence of these gods. They are an "abomination" to them but they are real. It was not yet monotheism but monolatry. Among the gods

¹⁷ "According to Aristotle the space of the whole universe is finite..." Werner Heisenberg writes, "It exists thanks to the existence of tensile bodies... There is no space where there are no bodies." (*Physics and Philosophy*). On the whole, classical antiquity, although the term limitless space appears in it from time to time, concentrated its attention on objects and phenomena. This was also a characteristic of ancient art which had not yet developed the concept of infinite space behind the objects.

Yahweh was the only one worthy of worship. The story of original sin is not consistently monotheistic in character: Yahweh is not the One God,¹⁸ the serpent is not yet Satan but a being independent of God.

For Satan, who was to emerge only with the rise of a logically developed monotheistic system, has to God an attitude of, we might say, seditious dependence. There is an excellent term for him in the language of politics—provocateur. He provokes citizens to sin, living under an authoritarian government in order to test their loyalty. Does he act at the behest or only with the consent of Yahweh? The later Deuteronomists could not afford to concede that it was Yahweh who tempted man; they were too timorous. The “monolatrism” of the much earlier Book of Samuel can still afford to do so. We read in II Samuel 24:1 that, angered at Israel, Yahweh had tempted David to sin, that is to number Israel and Judah,¹⁹ but when he obeyed the Lord punished him severely.²⁰

However, in the Book of Job,²¹ composed a couple of centuries later, it is not Yahweh but Satan who, with the Lord’s consent, leads man into temptation. Satan wished to prove to God that He can rely on no man, not even on “the perfect and upright” Job. Knowing of Yahweh’s omniscience, how could Satan challenge Him and knowing of his omnipotence, how could he rebel against the Lord? The fact is that Satan is an illogical creature; will does not go hand in hand with knowledge. In this respect he is a forerunner of the modern contradiction that rives the human soul, the forerunner of the Kirillovs and Lafcadios.

We have given here a fairly cursory review of the problems raised in the human mind by the omniscience, omnipotence and unbounded goodness, that is by the moral aspect, of the Infinite Being; no less problematic is the physical boundlessness,

¹⁸ “... the man has become as one of us” (my emphasis) (Genesis 3:22).

¹⁹ Budde (*op. cit.*, p. 328) explains the condemnation of the numbering of the people by the fact that “Yahweh, who gives and takes life, cannot abide to have anyone count the souls,” and by the fact that “the natural aversion of the population for the census, which could mean new burdens, assumed the character of a religious injunction.”

²⁰ The same story is repeated literally by the “Chronicles”, written a few centuries later. But here the instigation of Yahweh is replaced by that of Satan.

²¹ Written about the 4th century B.C.

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especially that of time. Wishing to be as eternal as the being that is object, monotheism must resist historical treatment. That there was a desire to establish monotheism as the primal religion is evident from its very substance; the purpose of the revisions we have discussed was to prove this point. They were made, we might note here, contrary to all evidence. The founders of monotheism had a multitude of examples around them—cemeteries and altars, rocks and tree stumps—all these testified to the contrary. Why, their own names bore the marks of paganism.²² Yet, in order to protect their religion they had to deny the obvious. Yahweh, if He was indeed the eternal God, El Olam, could not appear to the people late in history. He had to be with the people from the beginning.

But is not our assertion contradicted by fact? In early Judaism, God appeared on earth time and again. In Christianity, which is derived from Judaism, He even came down on earth in a given year. We have said that contact between eternity and time, between God and man is difficult, we did not say that it was impossible. Aware of the difficulty, Christianity delegated for the purpose a special being endowed with a dual nature—Divine and Human. In the Bible that contact was possible so long as Yahweh, even though He might have been more worthy of veneration than other gods, was only one of many deities.²³ But as he became “eternal” as El Olam, Yahweh ceased to appear in person. “The word of the Lord,” the First Book of Samuel 3:1 states clearly, “was precious in these days; there was no open vision.” He is seen in dreams or heard as the voice of conscience. The earlier revelations are now superseded by the authority of tradition. To that purpose the Deuteronomists constructed a legitimistic chain of blessings and annointments (beginning with Abraham and ending with their

²² The history of the falsification of old pagan names in the Bible remains to be written. The name Eshbaal (man of Baal) is replaced in later texts by the damning name Ishbosheth (a man of shame). The editors attempt to defend the pagan name at times by giving it an appropriate interpretation. The name Jerubaal actually means “fearful of Baal”. In Judges 6:32 it is interpreted as “the struggler against Baal”.

²³ Reference is made here not to monotheism, which arose much later, but to monolatry, according to which Yahweh is the only one of the many gods who deserves to be worshiped.

time) which, with one exception, is continuous in character; that exception is Moses.

Moses received no blessing nor was he anointed. His vision is unique in character. Yahweh appeared to him anew in a burning bush and renewed the covenant, made so many times with the patriarchs. He even felt it appropriate to introduce Himself as is customary at any first encounter: "And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of our fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exodus, 3:13, 14).

Other facts testify that this was the absolute beginning. At the time of this encounter, Yahweh was still the old demon who assaulted Moses at night when at His behest Moses set out to the children of Israel (Exodus, 4:24, 25). The covenant of circumcision God had made with Abraham seemed no longer binding; Zipporah, the wife of Moses, renewed it, when she circumcised her son in order to save her husband and cast the foreskin at the demon's feet.

All this seems to indicate that God's appearance in the burning bush came before the other appearances and that the history of the patriarchs was evolved backwards from this event by repeating the same triple pattern: the appearance, the covenant and the promise of land. This also explains why in the light of later versions, the religion had been called Mosaic. The true founder was not Abraham but Moses. The description of the spontaneous combustion of the burning bush has something about it that indicates a primal experience. The Midianite shepherd may have had the same unearthly sensation as he looked upon the action of the sun's rays as we do when we come face to face with the creative power of nature, with "natura naturans."

The Biblical method of multiplying the same motif backward in time took its beginning, according to our hypothesis, in the experience of Moses. Although it might have been the first, it was by no means the only experience to be duplicated. The present study, as we recall, began with the story of King Josiah

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who restored the faith in the One God by force. Upon closer examination, however, we discover that he was not the only one to do so. His story is the initial one, it is not, however, unique. This motif has also been evolved backward in historical time. We discover a similar story in the later Chronicles (II Chronicles, 29) concerning Josiah's great grandfather King Hezekiah who like Josiah destroyed the idols and desecrated the high places.

Consequently, the appearance of the Infinite Being in a literary work destroys the order of events, causing them to be multiplied and moved back in time. From time moving in a straight line, we enter here upon time moving in a circle, upon the eternal return. The multitude of versions in which the Biblical motifs appear are the result of this concept: although Biblical time moves in one direction, it also has cyclical attributes.

The same tendency may be observed in European art ever since it has been faced with the task of expressing infinity, that is since Romanticism. The paradoxical fact is that this occurred just when European culture had ultimately freed itself of the chains of religion. Although religion also raises the question of infinity, there is a deference here which lies in the fact that what religion gives as dogma, looms as potential in art. The liberated artist, one who is under no compulsion to anyone but who is free to choose any theme, faces an infinity of possibilities.

Modern art is also faced with a theme which is too big to be encompassed, its name is not *El Olam* but potential infinity. What in the Bible was the result of a process lasting centuries, now is a consciously applied method. So we have come full circle around. The spool of history has turned and as in its beginning so now European culture has come face to face with infinity.