

attitude to oral tradition opens the eyes to fresh possibilities of interpretation. The student reads the texts with a new alertness. The older sharp distinction between the authentic oracles of a prophet and the unauthentic or secondary elements is often impossible. What was formerly taken to be editorial addition may be convincingly argued to be a form taken by the tradition of the master's oracles. "Nucleus and deposit" is often a better language to use than "authentic and secondary". And so on. Again there is great gain.

But much of the argument does not necessarily follow from their traditio-historical method. It is simply alternative theory. This is shown very clearly in this book in the treatment of Gen. cc. 6—9. The conclusion that P was never a separate tradition source or stratum (a view held also by Engnell) is an interesting alternative theory: it in no wise owes its appearance to traditio-historical method but rather, in the main, to an argument worked out by Cassuto on the basis of chronology. It is true that eyes freshened by a new approach fastened on the possibility, but it is not strictly correct to give this as an example of traditio-historical method. In the same way Engnell gives us much which is less the fruit of this method than the illumination of ancient oriental culture.

The impression that Mr. Nielsen, in his enthusiasm, does not see clearly enough to strike the right balance is confirmed by the quotation of some texts from the Accadian Irra myth to illustrate the importance anciently attached to learning by heart. This is contrasted with "the modern contempt for learning by heart". But these brief references out of the blue are not in themselves impressive. As well might one generalize to the contrary about modern education from a recent letter in the *Manchester Guardian* by the Sub-Warden of St. Deiniol's Library that a like respect for the memory is still among us: "Learning by heart . . . is still a necessary accomplishment for men reading Honour Mods. at Oxford. Dr. R. R. Marrett, Rector of Exeter in my day, used to commend this method to all whose memory had not reached saturation point. At Balliol under Jowett, he would say, it was considered nothing to learn fifty lines standing with one's back to the fire after breakfast. He thus made himself able, while still in his teens, to repeat in Latin two books of the *Aeneid*, with several of the *Bucolics*, the first book of Lucretius and the *Peleus* and *Thetis* of Catullus; and in Greek the *Agamemnon* and the *Oedipus Coloneus*, choruses and all". Mr. Nielsen may be right in his general conclusion, but his argumentation at this point is thin. Undoubtedly these Scandinavians are engaged in a real and important chase. Our impression is that a more balanced judgement and attitude will be possible when they cool down from the heat of pursuit. They are both chasing the truth and running away from it at the same time.

Meanwhile it is probable that more secure results are obtained by those who scrutinize scientifically variant texts for the concrete signs of oral and written tradition, as, for example, Ringgren, who employed scientific criteria in the study of parallel psalms and oracles. Mr. Nielsen does not meet Professor Albright's criticism that, while the emphasis on oral tradition is right in principle, the Scandinavians go too far in lowering the

date of the reduction of oral tradition to writing in general to a date as low as the exile. Albright appeals to recent researches in Hebrew orthography as direct evidence for the reduction of some poems to writing as early as the tenth century B.C. This is evidence of a more objective kind, and provides a challenge to one of the cherished positions of the Scandinavian school. Engnell, it is true, states that "especially collections of law and cultic-poetical texts, above all the Psalms, have been taken down in writing already in early pre-exilic times." He is right to emphasize that the manner of transmission varies highly within different species of Old Testament literature. But then the very conviction with which the prophets are associated with the cult ought to create a probability that their work would be reduced to writing reasonably quickly. Circles which preserved written laws, cultic poems and psalms, in which therefore writing was a highly practised art, would tend naturally, once the oracles of a prophet had achieved a more or less sacrosanct authority, certainly within a generation, to reduce them to the same familiar form, that is the written form. This is of course an assumption to be tested in minute scrutiny of the texts, but it is a better assumption than the entirely hypothetical one of a crisis of confidence as the motive for writing down the prophetic oracles.

These are serious criticisms, and mean that the truth has been distorted in the violence of a highly-spirited debate. We have not to unlearn so much as we are told. On the other hand, this book should show to English readers that something of lasting importance is being said which should make a positive and welcome difference to our new commentaries when they come to be written.

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MORE ABOUT DEMYTHOLOGY

DEMYTHOLOGIZING AND HISTORY. By FRIEDRICH GOGARTEN. Translated by NEVILLE HORTON SMITH. S.C.M. Press. 7s. 6d.

It is time that these Demythologizers and anti-demythologizers had a good dose of logical analysis. Here is another book, from Professor Friedrich Gogarten of Gottenburg, purporting to make it all clear. How clear, the reader must judge: it needs a lot of existentialization to understand sin as "the responsibility for the world in so far as the right to it has been forfeited but the obligation of it still remains" (p.29), and that in history "an event unconceals itself and is to be perceived only by means of a corresponding self-unconcealment on the part of him for whom or to whom it happens" (p. 80). But such quotation is unfair to Professor Gogarten, for his explanation of the demythologization controversy is perhaps the best yet given and, if one has the patience to follow its intricacies, it is definitely comprehensible. Like Angus Maclan's pibroch in *Bab Ballads* it "distinctly resembles a tune" in its general effect.

To elucidate what it is all about one should first deal with the existentialist suppositions on which Bultmann's and Gogarten's views are based;