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Oral Tradition. by Eduard Nielsen. ("Studies in Biblical Theology," No. 11.) London: Student Christian Movement Press (Chicago: Blessing Book Store), 1954. Pp. 108. 75¢ in Chicago \$1.25).

In the Foreword to this monograph H. H. Rowley remarks that so far as he knows the four chapters "offer a better introduction to traditio-historical criticism than can be found elsewhere in any of the international languages of scholarship" — a judgment with which this reviewer heartily concurs. The author's purpose is to present "the modern problem of oral tradition together with some analyses of Old Testament traditions, illustrating, I hope, that literary criticism is not the only legitimate scientific approach to the texts of the Old Testament."

In the first chapter he stresses the term "modern problem," and means by it the problem of oral tradition posed by the "Uppsala School." After a brief survey of the work of the leading Scandinavian scholars, beginning with Nyberg's *Studien zum Hoseabuche* (1935), the author turns in Chap. II to the subject of oral tradition in the Near East. His basic position is summarized by a quotation from Plato to the effect that the invention of writing is not necessarily one of the greatest of all good things in human culture because it has tended to "produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it" so that "they will not practise memory." Our "modern contempt for learning by heart . . . is not exactly characteristic of the ancient Semites." Their world was dominated by a genuine, living oral tradition in which the written word was not considered an independent mode of expression. Writing was the business of the specialist, and used mostly for commercial and diplomatic purposes. Literature was reduced to writing only in periods when there was a general crisis of confidence and when faith in the spoken word began to waver.

In Chap. III the author applies these generalizations to the OT. He believes with Nyberg that "the written Old Testament is a creation of the post-exilic Jewish community; of what existed earlier undoubtedly only a small part was in fixed written form." He attempts to show the relatively insignificant role which writing played in pre-exilic Israel. The change from oral to written literature took place, not because a cultural and literate summit had been reached, but because with the fall of Israel and then of Judah, a crisis of confidence was reached. Even then, however, the written did not put an end to the oral, as the rich oral tradition of later Judaism flowered even after a fixed canon came into being.

In the final chapter he contrasts the variant approaches of literary criticism and the history of tradition to three OT passages. First, in regard to Jer 36 he discusses the modern attempt by literary criticism to solve the riddle of a prophetic book. He maintains that this attempt has not succeeded because of the refractory nature of the material. The circumstances of Jer 36 were very peculiar and the light it "throws on the literary genesis of scriptural prophecy as a whole is very small indeed."

Next, in treating Mic 4-5, he points out that literary criticism in the prophetic books has pursued a double aim. One is to establish certain criteria by which the original words and book of the prophet can be segregated; the other is to trace the history of the book through the identification of the various glosses, usually of an "inferior"

order. In Micah this has generally meant that the prophet composed the first three chapters dealing with doom, but the remainder dealing largely with hope is a series of later appendages. After a searching examination of the complex of traditions in Chaps. 4-5, the author concludes that the work of former scholars has oversimplified a problem that can only be solved by traditio-history.

Finally, the author turns to Gen 6-9 as a classic example of source criticism in the Pentateuch. He first summarizes the work of Gunkel and others on these chapters, and then shows that by their own methods many unanswered questions remain, some of which have forced the literary critic to "solve" them by recourse to a Redactor. Yet a mechanical division of the present text into two independent written sources does not do justice to it because it "is a work of art, composed of different traditions, it is true, but in such a way that a unified work has been the result." The author who is responsible for the arrangement of the traditions has tried to compose a definite chronological scheme; if he is "P (to use the terminology of literary critics), it is no longer possible to regard this P as an independent source beside the older traditions or strata." Nor is he merely a redactor, harmonizing traditions which he did not create; he is indeed a very great artist.

According to the author, the methods of traditio-history do not disregard literary sources, but they presuppose as fact that the complicated history of oral traditions cannot be solved by the scissors and paste method of literary criticism. With this the reviewer finds himself in hearty agreement. Yet at one point in particular he would register some reserve. The tendency of the oral traditionalists is to emphasize the great importance of the oral and to minimize the importance of the written. In order to make their case stronger they almost systematically date the written as late as possible (or even later). There is no space here for examples. Suffice it to say that this tendency is not a necessary part of the methodology itself. Certainly by the 10th century there was a great deal of literary activity in Israel; there is no need to mar one's results by preconceived assumptions regarding the dates of present literary forms unless there is some definite evidence.

G. ERNEST WRIGHT

Yahweh y su Pueblo, by Felix Asensio, S. J. Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1953. Pp. 254. \$3.60.

This essay in biblical theology follows the same author's *Misericordia et Veritas*, which appeared in 1949. Father Asensio here studies the covenant and related ideas: election, the presence of Yahweh, the people and the land of Yahweh, the messianic perspectives of the covenant and the universalism implicit in the covenant. The thesis of the book, if it can be summarized, seems to be that the covenant is an ancient idea, not superimposed upon the patriarchal traditions by a later age; that it includes in its earliest forms the elements of universalism and messianism, although less explicitly than these elements appear in later literature; that the covenant exhibits consistency in form and content throughout its development.