

BOOK REVIEWS

The Growth of the Biblical Tradition, Klaus Koch. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969. 220 pages. \$2.95 (paperback).

Form criticism has been a popular method of studying the Scriptures for several decades now. Since the method was devised by German scholars it is to be expected that a German scholar could best explain its procedures. Klaus Koch has done the best job yet of setting forth clearly what form criticism is all about. For each aspect of the study he illustrates the method by analyzing the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament and the Beatitudes in the New Testament. The exegesis of these passages contains helpful insights but also possesses serious shortcomings.

There are five aspects to form criticism: a) a study of literary types, b) a determination of the setting of life for each type, c) a study of the history of each literary type, d) a study of the transmission history of each type through its oral stages, e) a study of the redaction history of each type through its written stages. Each of these aspects of study has its own criteria and a set of assumptions undergirds each study project.

Isolating Literary Types. The first step in separating a literary type (also called a literary genre) from the biblical text is to determine the beginning and ending of a literary unit, the identification of an introduction and a conclusion, both of which are thought to be stereotyped formulae which recurred repeatedly in a specific type. Another criterion is a structure which, in a brief and independent manner, comprises a unity of thought. This criterion, plus choice of words, manner of expression and sentence structure, make up the next step, namely, the identification of the literary type. The units of a type are sometimes called forms or motifs.

The following assumptions, sometimes pure assumptions but at times based partially on observation, govern the procedure of isolating literary types: a) a speaker must use established ways of expressing himself, b) the modes of expression are completely independent units of speech, c) not sentences but types are the basic units of communication, d) a literary type governs the contents of the unit and marks out its function.

The Setting in Life. The techniques of determining the setting in life of each type is basically interrogative. The exegete must ask questions about the identity of the speaker, the kind of audience he spoke to, the mood of the speaker and audience, and the effect sought by the speaker. Word studies are necessary to make clear the nature of the setting in life.

For example, the setting in life may be a nomadic narrator telling his listeners, as they sat around a campfire, about the traditions of their forefathers, a peasant village with its concern for crops, a market place, the council of elders at the city gate, the soldier's camp, the courtroom, the royal court, the home, or a cultic festival.

Underlying the search for a setting in life is the conviction that: a) every literary type arises out of a specific life situation and corresponds with it, b) the variety of types point to the variety of social settings which existed in the ancient communities, c) a literary type is a social event in a verbal "nutshell," d) a particular setting in life may be so complex that a number of literary types may be associated with it, e) the settings in life were often closely related, if not identical with institutions, f) as long as the institutions existed the types remained functional, and g) the researcher must know as fully as possible what ancient Near Eastern institutions and thought patterns were like in order to delineate the setting in life adequately.

The History of Literary Types. Koch does not favor any attempt to limit form criticism to the determining of literary types and their setting in life; he insists that form criticism must include a search for the details of a type's contents and their origin in the history of Israel. The same procedure must apply to the type itself. Its very earliest configuration must be ascertained, and its changes through the years must be marked out.

The basic criteria for reconstructing the history of a literary type are a) the researcher discovers as many forms or motifs, i.e., small units, as possible within the literary type, b) he does not study the motifs themselves as much as the rise and fall of the type as a whole, c) he brings together for comparison duplications of stories, poems, sayings, laws, etc., which can be found in the Pentateuch, or can be paired with similar material in ancient Near Eastern literature. d) from the parallel literature, he isolates as the earliest specimen of the type, simple sentences and a simple structure which embodies a homogeneous flow of thought. This earliest specimen is the tradition which had been part of the heritage of Israel. The procedure of applying these criteria is pointed to the past, prior to 1000 B. C. and pierces the memory of Israel to its beginnings.

Certain assumptions guide the researcher as he unravels the history of each type. They conclude that a) it is essential that the history of each type be made clear, b) the farther back the history can be traced, the better one understands the present passage in the Scripture, c) the history of a type was from a simple structure and content to ever more complex structures and sentences, d) the combined histories of a number of literary

types provide invaluable insights into the actual history of Israel before the kingdom period and even during that period.

The Oral Transmission of the Type. The criteria for tracing the history of the transmission of a type from generation to generation are much the same as for determining the history of a type. The basic difference is in the direction of movement. The study of the history of a type unravels two or more parallel portions of literature until the earliest, simple content is exposed. The study of the transmission of the type moves forward from this earliest, simple content to the very last stages of oral transmission i.e., just before the type was written down. Since interrogation of the texts being studied has already isolated items which succeeded the original literary form of the type, the task now is to peg these items to settings in life in different periods of Israel's history. One criterion consists of changes in pronouns, verbs and nouns and this must be paired with another criterion, namely the relationship of the people in the literary type to each other. A third clue is the presence or absence of motive clauses or of explanatory glosses and their relationships to a changed setting in life for the type. Another clue is the presence of a negative or a positive emphasis; a fifth is the presence of interpretative clauses, and finally evidences of merging of a type with other types. All of these criteria must be related as closely as possible to dated events; if these are lacking, uncertainty persists. The goal is to follow the changes through which a tradition passed in order to bring out the background of the biblical text.

Guidelines which supposedly aid the researcher to produce a history of oral transmission are a) the retelling of stories, laws, poems, etc., over a period of time caused changes in the literature itself, b) the changes which are observable in the text can be arranged in a sequence which leads to ever greater complexity, c) tying the changes in the text to specific periods in Israel's early history, kingdom period history or exilic events provides a better understanding of the Old Testament, d) this process will reveal tendencies of growth in Israel's belief, thought and teachings, e) this reconstruction of Israel's past will not so much bring to light facts as it will clarify her traditions. f) almost all of the stories, most of the legal sayings, and some of the cultic rules had a long history of oral transmission, g) the larger the piece of literature the more profitable its study, for it can give a historical outline for interpreting Israel's early history, and h) this procedure can ferret out information for periods in Israel's history for which no contemporary documents are available.

The History of Redaction of Written Documents. Gunkel and a few of his followers did some work in redaction history; but as it is practiced now, the method developed since World War II, G. von Rad was the first to popularize the idea that changes in the written text must be studied as well as changes in oral transmission.

Redactors were popular with many of the literary critics who understood them to be faceless individuals, whose function was to edit the four

great documents. Most did a clumsy job of it (Redactors collected the literary units, organized them and wrote them down.) The form critics regard the redactors as compilers who gave order to the already formed literary types.

Redaction history is much like textual criticism in that both are primarily interested in written documents, but they move in opposite directions. Textual critics start with late manuscripts and work their way back to families of texts, seeking to bring to light the archetype or ancestor of the several families of texts. Redaction history endeavors to begin at the moment oral tradition was written down and work forward to the presently existing manuscripts.

In redaction history, clues are of a different kind than those of transmission history. The researcher first looks at the introductions and the conclusions of present books of the Pentateuch as evidences of the redactor at work. He then looks for transition passages between literary types or sections of the books. He looks for an overall framework, a unifying theme, or underlying principles which give the book a structure. In addition he selects sentences which link people to each other, or people to places. He picks out late words, phrases, thoughts which are out of place in an old literary type. He takes note of interpretive passages or explanatory details bearing on chronology or geography. Finally he has interest in clues which indicate that the redactor had inserted some of his own opinions in the speeches of his ancient heroes.

Form critics, for the most part, have assumed that: a) no book of the Pentateuch, and no other book in the Old Testament, still retains the form it had when it first was written down, b) the written text must be interpreted against its background of literary type, its setting in life and its oral transmission, hence, redaction history must rest on them, c) the redactors put oral material into written form and thus slowed down change, to some extent freezing the material in a manuscript, d) many form critics regard the first redactors to be the Jahwist, Elohist, etc., using the symbols of the JEDP theory as their clues, e) there were also generations of redactors, f) the texts were rewritten, modified and enriched with new doctrines, g) most redactors had great reverence for the text so the additions were not many, h) period of transmitting the text was lengthy so redaction history is vital and i) the setting of life was now different, for the literary types and evidences of this new setting crept into the text.

Evaluation. There is much in the procedures of form criticism which is commendable. Each of the aspects of form criticism, as Koch defines them, are legitimate concerns for the Old Testament scholar. The study of literary types has been a most neglected phase of biblical studies, though the raw material for such a study has been present as long as manuscripts have been written. It is a pity that those responsible in the Middle Ages for our present format of chapters and verses were not aware of the basic

literary types and their confines. The Bible would be easier to read and study if they had had this awareness and divided the text into chapters and verses accordingly.

Of the several phases of form criticism a study of literary types is the most objective. Its material is the text itself and the conclusions of a researcher can be checked directly against the witness of that text. There is, however, one major failing in form criticism at this point. Many form critics have castigated other scholars for interpreting the Old Testament from the standpoint of Western thought patterns and customs. Yet the names given to Pentateuchal literary types and the criteria for isolating and labeling these types are Western to the core. The observation that names for types do not occur often in the Pentateuch does not justify this procedure. Efforts must be made to devise labels which accord with, and arise out of the biblical materials themselves.

A study of the setting in life for each literary type is a legitimate task. A tendency to ignore the historical rootage of the biblical text has been a malady in both traditionalism, which has stressed doctrine or piety, and liberalism, which has emphasized universal, abstract ideas or truths. The Pentateuch has its "feet" solidly planted in the rugged, realistic affairs of this world; therefore, to understand fully the Pentateuch one must understand the settings in life of its literary units.

The manner in which many form critics have reconstructed settings in life for many Pentateuch literary types has some serious shortcomings. No one can object when clear-cut biblical data is employed to clarify a setting in life, but some attempts, such as the several examples in Koch's book, range far and wide to gather isolated bits of information and tend to proof-text a setting in life for a particular type, or the history of a type. Nor can one seriously object when pertinent data is drawn from other ancient Near Eastern religions, if that data is used judiciously, but any assumption or assertion that the Hebrews were pagan in their thinking during the Middle Bronze and Late Bronze Ages can only prejudice a setting in life which is reconstructed for a type. It is remarkable that many form critics have only selectively drawn data from the discipline of archaeology for their studies.

Research in both the oral and the written transmission of the biblical text is a proper occupation. We need to know much more than we do at present about how the Pentateuch was passed from generation to generation until we reach the manuscripts in the Dead Sea Scrolls. An informed understanding of this history of transmission can only enhance and clarify our understanding of how the Pentateuch was preserved for us. Participants in the traditional stream of scholarship need to do their share in this discipline.

It is in the area of the oral transmission history and of redaction history that form critics, e.g., Koch, are too cock-sure. They could even be charged, with some reason, with an attitude of imperialism toward

other disciplines. Koch frankly claims that form criticism is the master discipline, that literary criticism, archaeology, sociology, psychology, theology, anthropology, history of religions and textual criticism must all be subsumed under form criticism.

In the studies of transmission history and redaction history, there is presently too much room for subjectivism, too much opportunity for the researcher to mold Israel's past into a contrived, even a pseudo-history. If one marks provisional or tentative phrases, i.e., "It is likely," "we may suppose", "likely to have been," etc., in discussions of the above "histories" with a highlighter pen, one soon has pages which appear to have a bad case of scarlet fever. Dependable histories should have a more firm base than that.

Another disturbing element is the average form critic's resistance to an association of the element of sacredness or divine authority with literary types at an early date. His concept of growth demands that oral transmission be kept open ended and fluid for long periods of time. He understands the origins of early or intrusive motifs in a type as coming out of the creative matrix of the community. All things come from the community; as a whole nothing comes from the creative individual or from a speaking God. This is the reason the reduction of much of the Pentateuch to writing is placed well into the kingdom period and later. Both sacredness and writing tend to fix or at least seriously slow down changes within a type.

A traditional scholar can accept a period of oral transmission, for instance, of the literary units of Genesis, if it is understood that the Patriarchs and their descendents accorded the contents of these units divine authority and related them to their children with a deep sense of reverence. Neither does a traditional scholar regard the event of putting these stories into written form a near catastrophe. Manuscripts, also marked as sacred, merely aid and abet oral transmission; there is no reason why they could not have functioned side by side from early times.

G. H. Livingston

Whose Land Is Palestine?, by Frank H. Epp. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970. 283 pages. \$3.95. (Paperback)

This book could be regarded as a refutation of the thesis of the Billy Graham film His Land, which shows Israel's return to Palestine to be a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. Frank Epp is a Mennonite who has been active in the peace movement and in religious writing. This book grows out of a seminar the author conducted in 1969 in several countries of the

Middle East. His approach is historical. He traces the history of the land from biblical times through the struggles involving Islam, Christianity, Zionism, Arab nationalism, and the United Nations.

The author's perspective is pro-Arab, which he regards as a corrective to the prevailing pro-Jewish attitude on the part of the West. He finds that the anti-Semitism formerly directed against Jews and now directed by Western Christians against Arabs has a tendency to be overlooked, partly through ignorance. His position will find sympathy not only among those with the pro-Arab viewpoint but also among Jews who are not Zionists. The author is convinced that Christians can perform a mediatorial role between Jew and Moslem. He calls for a Christian unarmed peace force which would come between the contending parties. This peace corps, at the risk of life, would help the Jordanian farmers and likewise the Israeli kubbutzim, even while being shelled by "the other side." In short, he challenges Christians to become suffering servants to both Jews and Arabs in an effort to heal the wounds.

The effectiveness of the volume is somewhat impaired by the author's failure to take into account all the complexities of the situation, and by his pro-Arab stance. The work lacks even a relative objectivity.

George A. Turner

The Shape of the Christian Life, by David C. Duncombe. Nashville: Abingdon, 1969. 208 pages. \$5.00.

David Duncombe speaks from wide experience. He is currently chaplain of the School of Medicine at Yale and was formerly lecturer at Yale Divinity School, where this reviewer studied psychology of religion with him. He has also served as chaplain and religious instructor at a boys' preparatory school. It was this experience in Christian nurture that first raised the questions treated in this book, a revised form of his doctoral dissertation at Yale.

On a theoretical level, the problem faced here is that of relating theology and behaviorial psychology. On a more practical level, the issue is to describe concretely and to measure empirically the elements of Christian growth and maturity. The author develops five characteristics of the Christian. Most basic is a freeing sense of security (related by Duncombe to the theological principle of justification by faith), which is evidenced in self-knowledge, honest expression, accurate perception, and adequate response. As each characteristic is developed, an extended sketch is given of the person who would evidence this characteristic and also of the opposite

type of person. The author then lists the empirical tests available to measure each facet of the "mature Christian" as he defines it. Introductory and concluding chapters set the stage and offer some rationale for this approach.

Dr. Duncombe has surely raised issues of importance. If Christian experience has any validity, there should be measureable results. And all of us, whether we admit it or not, do have empirical criteria by which we judge the growth and development of parishoners or other Christians. Surely it is not inappropriate to attempt to be scientific and objective about these criteria bringing to bear all the knowledge that we have at our disposal.

But having said all of this, I am still somewhat troubled by the book. Frankly, I still feel more comfortable with the virtues listed in Galatians 5:22-23 in spite of Duncombe's suggestion that they must be superseded (p. 174). Although Duncombe is much more theologically and religiously sensitive than many writing in this area, one still gets the feeling that Christian faith is reinterpreted almost completely in psychological categories and that it is viewed rather innocuously as primarily attendance at the institutional church. The Christian has become the average, well-adjusted church-goer; and the radical demands of the Gospel, the depths of sin and human perversion, and the tensions of the Christian life seem to have faded into the background.

Donald W. Dayton

Latin American Church Growth, by W. R. Read, V. M. Monterroso, and H. A. Johnson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969. 421 pages. \$8.95.

This is one of the most significant pieces of research that has been done in the area of Church growth during the last decade. It took almost three years to complete the work. The three authors serve under the Presbyterian Church, the Latin American Mission, and Assembly of God respectively.

The first part of the book is historical, tracing the development of the various forms of Protestantism on the Latin American continent, all the way from the Lutheran Church to the Pentecostal Churches. The next part deals with the context of Church growth: ethnic structures, social classes, cultural environment, urbanization, economic development, and Roman Catholic resurgence. The final section deals with the focal points of the Church and guidelines for future strategy. Throughout the study

the major emphasis is on those factors which retard and those which accelerate the establishment of sound Christian churches. One of the assets of the publication is the large number of charts, graphs and maps, plus the complete bibliography that it contains.

This volume will be of interest not only to missionaries in the republics of the Latin American continent, but it will afford insight and guidance to mission board executives and Christian workers in other lands. The principles and methods that are discussed have universal validity.

John T. Seamands

Encounter With Books, A Guide to Christian Reading, by Harish D. Merchant (editor). Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press. 262 pages. \$3.50 (paperback).

From among the maze of books on Christian faith and practice, the editor and his more than sixty associates have garnered those volumes felt to be fairly representative of the whole. Written within the framework of the historic evangelical Protestant tradition, the "guide" to Christian literature is published in the hope of establishing better reading habits among ministers and laymen. The volume is arranged in eight sections, each with a brief illuminating introduction, and then divided into sub-sections. Each sub-section introduces a specific subject and discusses, one at a time, ten or more books in point. The annotation of each book covers its content, significance to the broader field, and doctrinal viewpoint (evangelical or shades of liberal). Most of the books referred to are available through U. S. or British publishers. Among its contributors are William M. Arnett and Harold B. Kuhn of the Asbury Seminary faculty.

James D. Robertson