

Smith, Mark S. *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*. San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row Publishers, 1990. xxxiv + 197 pp. \$26.97.

The discovery of ancient texts of the Levant, especially the Ugaritic texts, has produced major attempts to understand the relationship of Yahweh to Canaanite deities. The most widely known of these studies is W. F. Albright's *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, published more than twenty years ago. Smith's work moves beyond the work of Albright and others to consider the implications of major epigraphic and archaeological discoveries, in particular the ongoing publication of the Mari letters and Ugaritic texts which provide new data. This development brings Smith to adopt four new perspectives to inform his work: Israel's cultural identity which now seems similar to that of the Canaanites; the nature of the Yahwistic cult which early contained Canaanite features, and later experienced modifications due to a break with Israel's Canaanite past; the role of the monarchy in influencing the inclusion of various deities in Israel's religion; and finally the role of goddesses in Canaanite religion which impacted on Israelite religion.

Smith finds that while the cult of Yahweh was dominant in the early religion of Israel, Israel's religion seems to have included worship of other deities as well, e.g. El, Asherah, and Baal. This picture eventually changed due to the convergence of other deities' features to the figure of Yahweh. El came to be identified with Yahweh, while Asherah lost identity as a separate deity. In addition, some features of El, Asherah, and Baal were absorbed and became features of Yahweh. Even the influence of Anat may be responsible for the martial characteristics of Yahweh, even though no features of Anat are visible in the Hebrew texts.

Differentiation was a second factor that brought change to the polytheistic picture. Features of the earlier Israelite cult were rejected as being Canaanite and alien to the cult of Yahweh. Baal Worship was condemned along with Asherah; solar worship, the high places, and other objectionable practices were suppressed. A complex historical development of Yahwism which earlier accommodated other gods eventually became monolatrous and monotheistic, although this statement must be made with a recognition of the difference between Israelite belief and practice which is easily confused by viewing it from the Christian perspective which easily separates them.

The conservative scholar may have questions about Smith's work, and wonder about the presuppositions which motivate his historical reconstruction. But he/she need not wonder for long, because Smith has clearly stated them in the introduction to the work. The more important ones are:

The Bible is not a history book in the modern sense, although the writers believed the data they worked with was historical; personal bias, both theological and nontheological must be recognized as affecting reconstruction; often most of the data desired is missing in the Bible, necessitating that scholars consult other sources such as archaeology, iconography, and inscriptions, which also suffer from the same problem. The study focuses on Israelite religion in its institutional expressions rather than individualistic expressions, and on Israel's religious practice rather than credal beliefs. The study is also motivated by contemporary interests such as the continuing interest in monotheism by major world religions, and interest in Northwest Semitic goddesses and the gender language applied to Yahweh. Lastly, the difference between the history of Israel's religion and the normative expressions of belief must be made clear; the latter are matters of personal faith, not historical reality. In other words, the "essence" of the religion is a secondary abstraction. Smith admits that given these considerations the picture portrayed will always be partial and subjective.

The book demonstrates impressive scholarship. About 30 percent of the text consists of notes in reduced print size. Regardless of one's agreement with Smith's assumptions, the book contains a wealth of information on Israelite religion and the environment in which it took shape.

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Tomson, Peter J. *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles*. *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990. xix + 327 pp. \$29.95.

In this work Tomson presents an argument against F. C. Baur and his influence on modern Pauline studies. He writes, "The basic Tübingen approach, which as Munck wrote is still widely supported, involves an antithesis between the revolutionary Paul of his own letters and the harmonizing Paul, who makes compromises with the Jews, created by Acts" (269). For his part, Tomson proposes that "while the working of Pauline motifs in Acts is unmistakably secondary, the basic correspondence between Paul and Acts on the significance of halakha constitutes a situation fundamentally different from the one presupposed by dominant post-Tuebingen scholarship" (269). Of course, Munck wrote in 1954, and at that time the Tübingen paradigm was *still* basically intact. Studies into Christian origins during the last 35 years have greatly modified and nuanced Baur's work. Apparently Tomson wishes to uproot it. His efforts in this regard, however, prove rather inadequate. Even if Hegelian