

‘THAT YOU MAY KNOW THAT YAHWEH IS GOD’

A STUDY IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEOLOGY AND
HISTORICAL TRUTH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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The Christian church, and within it Christian scholarship, has received the Old Testament from Christ, and recognized in it the voice of God speaking ‘in many and various ways’.¹ This divine-human communication has come down to us expressed predominantly in narrative forms, which dominate in the Torah and Prophets, and are prominent in the Writings. Now narrative forms may be used for many purposes—historiography, the novel, the fairy-tale, and so on. Why does the Old Testament use narrative? How far is its narrative intended to be historiographical? How far does its teaching depend on history? And how far, therefore, must our acceptance of the truthfulness of its teaching depend upon our being sure of the historicity of the events it narrates? If we could prove by the historical method that certain of the Jews’ forbears escaped from slavery in Egypt in the thirteenth century BC, and even if we were prepared to see a supernatural agency at work in this, such a measure of verification of the narrative in Exodus would not necessarily bring with it the validation of the Old Testament’s theological interpretation of this event²—such historical verification does not ensure theological validation; but is historical veracity nevertheless a *sine qua non* of theological validity? Does the Old Testament’s revelation-value hang on its history-value?

Although in many circles it seems axiomatic that history is the essential, even the exclusive, medium of revelation,³

¹ Heb. 1:1.

² Indeed, R. Tomes is prepared to grant in part the Exodus account of the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt, but not its mainstream interpretation of the event, *SJT* 22 (1969) 455–78.

³ Almost at random: G. E. Wright, *God Who Acts*, SCM, London (1952), 50,

elsewhere it is regarded as highly questionable whether the idea of revelation in history is after all peculiar to Israel in the ancient Near East,⁴ whether it is an adequate formulation of the Old Testament's attitude to revelation,⁵ and even whether the idea of revelation is appropriate to Christianity at all!⁶ We must therefore begin with some reconsideration of the appropriateness of these terms.

The *prima facie* impression that the Old Testament gives, of a close interest in certain events that happened on the historical plane, is surely neither misleading nor surprising. The Books of Kings, at least (which admittedly offer the clearest example), seek to give precisely this impression, by their providing of relative dating and of references to other sources, for instance. And this interest is only to be expected in the light of the widespread assumption that the events of history have meaning.⁷ Nevertheless, if it were possible to proscribe theological terms, as John Robinson once wanted to do to rather a fundamental one, then 'history' might make a good candidate for such treatment. It has long been a word with 'value-status' attached to it in theology,⁸ so that any theological position must claim to be 'historical' if it hopes to be taken seriously. Thus someone who believes that the Old Testament literature, the tradition, has a revelatory value independent of whether the events it speaks of happened, or that truth is known through personal human experience in the now, *ipso facto* does not believe in a revelation through history. But because of the 'value-status' attached to history the tradition comes to be described as 'historical tradition' and experience as 'historical experience'; whereas the rationale for a theology of tradition or a theology of experience should lie elsewhere.⁹

'the primary and irreducible assumption of Biblical theology is that history is the revelation of God'; A. Richardson, *History Sacred and Profane*, SCM, London (1964), *passim*, e.g. 240; but recently especially the work of W. Pannenberg and his associates—cf. the title of their symposium *Revelation as History*, Macmillan, New York (1969), and Pannenberg's own essays on this theme in *Basic Questions in Theology*, SCM, London (1970), e.g. 15. (References to Pannenberg are all to this last volume unless otherwise specified.)

⁴ B. Albrektson, *History and the Gods*, Gleerup, Lund (1967).

⁵ J. Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation*, SCM, London (1966), 65–102.

⁶ F. G. Downing, *Has Christianity a Revelation?*, SCM, London (1964).

⁷ Albrektson, *passim*.

⁸ Barr, 65.

⁹ Thus M. J. Buss defends the non-historical nature of the Old Testament on

It is the ambiguity of the word 'history' that has facilitated its wide use in theology.¹⁰ Oscar Wilde capitalized on two fundamentally different areas that the word covers, 'things that have happened' and 'our account of things that have happened', in the remark 'Any fool can make history, it takes a genius to write it', but he has had many theological successors. Without intending to trade on them, von Rad uses 'history' and 'historical' in half-a-dozen senses in his discussion of the proper subject-matter of Old Testament theology;¹¹ and the adjective 'historical' applied to the tradition or to experience seems to mean no more than that they came into existence on the plane of human history, as part of the historical process—but then how else could they?

But as well as being both loaded and ambiguous, 'history' is in another connection too narrow a word. Its use in Old Testament study relates primarily to the great events of Israel's national experience, of her *kerygma*, as opposed to the events of ordinary life that the wisdom literature is more concerned with. This distinction, and the value-status attached to 'history', combine to divorce the historical and prophetic works from the wisdom books, and to make the former seem more important than the latter, when in reality historian and prophet on the one hand, and wise man on the other, agree in picturing God making His presence felt (revealing Himself) in events on the historical plane, but the former concentrate on those of national history, the latter on those of everyday life. Even this distinction should not be sharply drawn, for (as we shall have cause to note later) Kings, for instance, is very much concerned with God's activity in everyday affairs, and in the world of nature—which is also often distinguished too sharply from that of history.

I suggest therefore that the word 'events' is more useful for correlating with 'revelation' with regard to the Old Testament, as less loaded and less ambiguous than 'history', but at

the grounds that in the subatomic world categories of time and space do not apply, from which he infers that ultimate reality is Being rather than History (in J. M. Robinson and J. B. Cobb eds, *Theology as History*, Harper and Row, New York (1967), 137 f.; henceforth cited as 'Robinson'). Philosophy of language might provide a comparable basis for a belief in the revelatory value of tradition apart from a historical reference.

¹⁰ Barr, 66–70.

¹¹ *Old Testament Theology* I, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh and London (1962) 105 ff.; further, Albrektson, 87.

the same time better suited to the breadth of what the Old Testament has to say in this area.¹² I shall try to use the word 'history' only in a neutral way as a still convenient way of speaking of things that happen (primarily to the nation) as part of the historical process.

But is it appropriate to speak of 'revelation' in connection with events, whether of history or of personal experience or of nature? Perhaps the word 'revelation' should be allowed to go the same way as 'history', for the Old Testament does not speak of 'God revealing Himself' anywhere near as often as modern theologians do, and such language is rather rarely used in connection with events of history.¹³ No doubt we need a reminder that the problem of epistemology is a modern concern that we must beware of reading into the Bible, which is more concerned about religion without morals than about morals without religion, and normally speaks 'from faith to faith'. It sees man's essential predicament not as ignorance, but as sin, and therefore his essential need not as revelation but as reconciliation.¹⁴

Nevertheless, the Old Testament does speak of God revealing Himself, making Himself known. The niphal of *הִרְאָה*, *הִרְאָה*, and *הִרְאָה* seems to have been used of God originally in connection with His theophanic encounter with man, and its use in the Psalms (*e.g.* 9:17; 48:4; 102:17) probably has theophanic overtones. Some verses in the prophets come nearest to speaking of divine self-revelation in events of history (Is. 40:5; Ezk. 20:5, 9; 35:11; 38:23).¹⁵ Although the modern stress on God 'acting to reveal Himself' invites the comment that when God (or anyone else) acts, He does so primarily in order to effect something, not just 'for show', yet precisely because it was believed that in His actions God is effecting His will, throughout the ancient Near East 'it is thought to be possible for men to know how the gods are disposed by observing what happens. . . . Defeats and disasters are interpreted as evidence of the anger or displeasure of the gods, and similarly

¹² Barr, 26f., suggests the word 'situations' to indicate the setting of the revelatory action of God; 'events' denotes where the activity is seen and the revelation thus verified. Richardson, 223-7, speaks of 'disclosure situations'.

¹³ Cf. Downing, 20-47.

¹⁴ C. Braaten, *History and Hermeneutics*, Lutterworth Press, London (1968), 14; cf. Downing, 123ff., 274-83.

¹⁵ Cf. further below, pp. 67-71.

success and prosperity are held to reveal their favour and mercy.¹⁶

But this does not mean that there is a revelatory character inherent in history as such.¹⁷ Historical events are not self-interpreting; they can be given such an interpretation only within an already existing framework of beliefs—that the gods may be assumed to be active, powerful, purposeful, consistent, moral, merciful, and so on. An event can be understood as an act of God only by being associated with the accepted truths about Him.

But even within the tradition interpretation cannot be assumed to be unnecessary, as the differences of opinion between Jeremiah and his prophetic contemporaries, for instance, show;¹⁸ although when God reveals His **דוד** to His servants the prophets,¹⁹ it does not seem always to be a concession to unbelief.²⁰ Exodus and conquest show God's benevolence and faithfulness to Israel, but not their grounds—is it her faithfulness or His love? 'The difference between these two alternatives is immense: it is the difference between law and gospel, between man's merits and undeserved divine grace. But no naked events will decide which alternative is right; they are mute—or rather, they are ambiguous. Something must be given in addition to the events: the *word* of revelation.'²¹

And if this is true of the great moments in Israel's history such as the exodus, it is even more true outside these—especially in as far as the events of Israel's history are in large part the working out of the frustration of God's will, rather than the fulfilment of it. The regular process of history is anti-revelatory;²² any fool can make history, it takes God to right it. It is this negative view of history as the tale of man's

¹⁶ Albrektson, 100. Pannenberg, 16–22, seeks to elucidate wherein the uniqueness of Israel's historical consciousness lay.

¹⁷ As Richardson (*e.g.* 225f.) and Pannenberg (*e.g.* 61, 66) sometimes seem to imply.

¹⁸ *E.g.* Je. 23:9–40. Cf. R. Davidson on Jeremiah and the tradition in *VT* 14 (1964), 407–16.

¹⁹ Am. 9:7.

²⁰ As R. Rendtorff (in Robinson, 129) seems to suggest.

²¹ Albrektson, 118.

²² Buss, 145ff. R. Bultmann expounds the thesis that Old Testament history is a history of failure in his essay on 'Promise and Fulfillment' included in *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation*, ed. C. Westermann, SCM, London (1963), especially 72–5. Pannenberg, 30f., draws attention to the extent to which the Old Testament is anti-typological.

opposition to God that comes to the fore in apocalyptic, where God's revelation comes with His acting to end history and bring in the new age, and comes not as 'the last candle at the end of a history-long candelighting service' but as light bursting in on darkness.²³

The very nature of history, then, seems to demand that if God is to communicate by means of it He will need to speak in order to do so. And indeed the natures of man and God themselves make the same demand. The faculty of verbal communication is a basic constituent of personality²⁴—as Heidegger puts it, language constitutes our humanity, it is what distinguishes man from the rest of the animate and inanimate world; and furthermore a basic means of personality making itself known—'through speech the essence of a personality receives expression more fully than through any other means of self-expression'.²⁵

It is presumably (though this is indeed only a matter of inference) for reasons such as these that the God of the Old Testament not only acts but speaks. What then is the relationship between His speaking and His acting? As far as the effecting of His will is concerned, it is no doubt mistaken to try to distinguish too closely between speaking and acting (and indeed willing); decision, word, action are all one. In the area of epistemology, however, it is important to distinguish word and deed, for they function in different ways. It is His words that reveal God's nature and purpose, but precisely because words that really come from God find such inexorable fulfilment in events, the events, His actions, do fulfil an epistemological function, not so much as revelation but as confirmation of purported revelation. 'Yahweh's history with Israel is the place where the truth of his revelatory word is knowable in that it is carried out.'²⁶ Thus word and deed are both important to God's making Himself known; the Old Testament writers 'kept real historical facts indissolubly together with the accompanying words of interpretation. Facts without words are blind; and words without facts are empty, to paraphrase one of Kant's famous utterances.'²⁷

²³ W. R. Murdock, *Interpretation*, 21 (1967), 187.

²⁴ Barr, 77f.

²⁵ J. Lindblom, in Albrektson, 119 (my translation).

²⁶ W. Zimmerli, in Robinson, 45.

²⁷ Braaten's description of some nineteenth-century theologians, 23.

To sum up so far: 'revelation as history', far from being the central concept in the Old Testament, is not really a biblical notion when put simply thus. But it is true that events on the historical plane, both those of national and those of everyday personal experience, fulfil an essential function ancillary to the words by which God makes His will and His ways known, in that these events provide an external check for, a vindication of, the purported divine words. Theological assertions appeal to events for their validation, the former depend upon the historical veracity of the latter, and thus the historical verification of the events will make possible the acceptance of the theological assertions. They will not guarantee it or force it—although the event fulfilled and proved Jeremiah's words, the devotees of the Queen of Heaven 'read' the fall of Jerusalem in a very different way from him,²⁸ and those without ears to hear will continue to fail to understand.²⁹ But for those with a gleam of insight, the Ebed-melechs and the Baruchs,³⁰ the event that confirms the word also enlarges their vision.

On the other hand, if a prophet's words remain unfulfilled, this will, to say the least, cast doubts on his theology; and if a historian, through the inadequacy of his sources or because of the construction he places upon them, makes assertions about the events that are not justified by them, then his theology, too, has doubts cast upon it; not so much because historicity has some mystical significance, but because this is the ground upon which historian or prophet has chosen to stand; by historical verification he commits himself to stand or fall.

So far my discussion has been rather general and orientated to current debate. I shall try now to see what justification this kind of approach may have by a closer exegetical look at the approach to revelation and verification of the Books of Kings and of Job, which exemplify something of the diversity of the books in the Old Testament.

REVELATION AND VERIFICATION IN THE BOOKS OF KINGS

The diversity of the means by which God makes Himself known or speaks, both in Kings and in Job, deserves noting; and others might be added from elsewhere in the Old Testa-

²⁸ Je. 44:15-23.

²⁹ Cf. Is. 6:9.

³⁰ Je. 39:15-18; 45.

ment, notably revelation through personal encounter (human relationships), especially in the Song of Songs and Hosea. It might be said of the Old Testament that 'there is no reality, thing, or event which cannot become a bearer of the mystery of being and enter into a revelatory correlation';³¹ nor is any one of these media normative and the rest secondary. As they appear in Kings, however, they may be divided for convenience into three main categories.

1. The coming of the personal presence of Yahweh, manifesting Himself to His people, is experienced in various ways. Twice a self-revelation of God to Solomon is described (יהוה ירד 1 Ki. 3:5ff.; 9:1ff.), in terms reminiscent of theophany in earlier books. Even a cursory comparison shows that the Deuteronomist,³² however, is adapting an old form to give expression to his distinctive teaching, for these theophanies lack most of the formal characteristics of theophanic narratives.³³ On the other hand, the account of Micaiah's vision (22:19-22) seems to have fitted well into D's work without needing extensive working over. The breakdown of the old theophany form by the time D comes to use it only serves to highlight a characteristic that all three narratives have in common with other accounts of the self-manifestation of God and of being taken into Yahweh's council, that the climax and purpose of the experience is not the experience itself but the verbal exchange, and especially the divine word, to which it leads.³⁴ The writer's real interest lies here, and the fact that the word comes in the context of such an experience of God guarantees with regard to Solomon or Micaiah the authority and fulfilment of the word that they are given or that they give. Elijah's theophany similarly leads into a verbal exchange and divine word (19:13-18), whatever the significance of the קול יהוה ירד (verse 12).

There is also in Kings another kind of theophany, in the cult, which is not of secondary importance to an accompanying

³¹ P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology* I, Nisbet, London (1953), 131.

³² For convenience I use this conventional description of the author(s) or editor(s) of Kings, henceforth abbreviated as D, without necessarily wishing to commit myself to the belief that the 'Deuteronomic history work' is as much of a unity as is often envisaged.

³³ Cf. the analysis of J. K. Kuntz, *The Self-Revelation of God*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia (1967), 47-72.

³⁴ Kuntz, 68f.

word. A major theme of Kings is Yahweh's causing His name to dwell in Jerusalem (*e.g.* 11:36; 14:21), Solomon's building a house for His name (*e.g.* 5:3, 5). Solomon's dedication prayer (1 Ki. 8) makes it clear that the name (verses 16–20) is D's favourite surrogate for God Himself (verses 12f.—a pre-D quatrain³⁵), a 'spiritualization of the theophany' in as far as 'the name is regarded as to such an extent an expression of the individual character of its owner that it can in fact stand for him, become a concept interchangeable with him'.³⁶ Yahweh's dwelling in the temple is also spoken of in terms of His glory in the cloud (verses 10ff.) and of the presence of His eyes and heart (9:3). Even though the temple theophany may have often led into the utterance of a word from God, as the Psalms suggest, the stress in Kings reminds us that 'revelation' in the Old Testament does not mean so much the revealing of a God (or of theological truths) previously unknown, but the coming of the presence of the already-known God.

2. Nevertheless, the theme of God speaking is prominent in Kings—as has been noted above, theophany often leads to theology; indeed God's speaking is described in terms of 'the word of Yahweh came to . . .' (*e.g.* 6:11; 17:2, 8; 19:9) probably with the purpose of suggesting something as real as the theophany in verbal form—Yahweh is present speaking.³⁷

The forms of the divine utterances are very varied. Many are words of promise, of Yahweh's presence and blessing to king and people (*e.g.* 6:11ff.; 11:37f.) or of His action to deal with some particular situation (*e.g.* 20:13f.; 2 Ki. 7:1; 19:7). On the other hand, they may be words of warning, especially of the disastrous consequences of disobedience, upon which Yahweh's judgment is declared (*e.g.* 1 Ki. 13:1–5; 14:7–16;

³⁵ Cf. J. Gray, *I and II Kings*, SCM, London (1964,² 1970) *in loc.*

³⁶ W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament II*, SCM, London (1967), 40.

³⁷ This is even clearer in 1 Sa. 3, especially verse 7, 'the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him' (יְגִלֶה), and verse 21, 'the Lord appeared (הִרְאָה) again at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself (נִגְלֶה) to Samuel at Shiloh by (ב) the word of the Lord', but also *passim* in the description of this audio-visual experience. Cf. also Is. 22:14. Note also Zimmerli's description (in Robinson, 43f.) of the phrase 'I am Yahweh' as a self-presentation formula which expresses Yahweh's making Himself present in His word—though this interpretation has been the subject of debate (*cf.* J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, SCM, London (1967), 112–16, also n. 48 below).

2 Ki. 17:13; 20:16ff.). They may be words of command and commission (especially the Elijah stories), of information and guidance (again Elijah, also *e.g.* 1 Ki. 14:5; 22:5ff.; 2 Ki. 3:11ff.; and note Elisha's surprise that the Lord has not told him something, 4:27). Most striking is the attribution to Yahweh of false promises, misleading guidance, untrue information (1 Ki. 22:15–23; 2 Ki. 8:10).

Kings does not picture Yahweh's speaking thus as a novel phenomenon. The words of the prophets have to be seen against the background of the body of Yahweh's words that have been handed down from the past but have maintained their relevance to each new generation. Again this tradition included words of promise—especially the divine commitment to David's house made through Nathan which legitimated the succeeding line (*e.g.* 1 Ki. 2:4; 8:15–26; 2 Ki. 21:7f.). It included a whole range of words of command, 'the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses' (2 Ki. 18:6, *cf.* 14:6; 17:12–16, and the description of, and reaction to, Josiah's lawbook, which he is pictured as regarding as part of the tradition albeit new to him). It included warnings of judgment that were bound eventually to come about (1 Ki. 2:27; 16:34), and in at least one area, the exodus, theological interpretation of earlier activity of God (8:53).

3. As well as by appearing and by speaking Yahweh makes Himself known through His acting in the world. The range of this activity is as wide as life itself, covering the affairs of nations, the phenomena of nature, life and death, health and prosperity, whole peoples, kings, prophets, priests, and ordinary individuals. Most of this diversity can be seen just in Solomon's prayer (1 Ki. 8:12–61), a chapter which also makes clear that it is a mistake to try to categorize this activity into areas such as 'nature' and 'history' sharply distinguished from one another in a modern way, still less to speak of Yahweh as, for instance, God of history rather than God of nature.³⁸ He is the God of all the earth and all the events that occur on the earth may be viewed as His work.

Hence the wisdom and prosperity of Solomon (1 Ki. 5:7; 10:9), the flourishing of Israel (8:59f.), the answering of prayer or the meeting of challenge (8:43; 18:24, 36–39; 2 Ki. 5:15)

³⁸ *Cf.* Albrektson, 11f., 19, 22f.

may lead to the acknowledgement that 'Yahweh, he is God'. The uniqueness of Yahweh, His reality and power, His favour and wrath (though that is all³⁹), are made known to men through events interpreted as His actions.⁴⁰ Yet it is not that the will of God is regularly 'read off' from events through their inherent revelatory character (though this may be the assumption of Adonijah, 1 Ki. 2:15, and it may be the attitude lying behind the enigmatic 'there came great wrath upon Israel' in 2 Ki. 3:27⁴¹). Events may only lead to people asking the right questions (1 Ki. 9:8; 2 Ki. 3:9-12), they will often be susceptible of more than one interpretation (Isaiah and the Rabshakeh looked at the Assyrian invasion rather differently, 19:22ff.; 18:25), and *prima facie* they may suggest implications that would be difficult to accept (the violent deaths of Joash and Josiah, two faithful kings, are not interpreted by D, though the Chronicler later seeks to fill in the gap). Events, even when regarded as the works of God, are mute or ambiguous. If lessons are to be learned from them, then they must be explained. And Kings matches its picture of events as the outworking of the will of Yahweh with a picture of Yahweh linking His word with the event, the two bound together for the purpose of revelation.

The precise relationship between word and event varies. Sometimes the word provides a retrospective interpretation of the event (1 Ki. 12:24—Yahweh explains that the revolt of the ten tribes was His will). But characteristic of Kings is the pattern of word preceding event, so that they provide each other with interpretation and confirmation. Before they occur, major events, especially the rise and fall of kings, are announced and interpreted. D's impressive exposition of the breaking up of the Solomonic state provides the best example of this. Yahweh declares His rejection and coming punishment of Solomon, for his failure to abide by the received words of Yahweh (11:11ff.). A note of the adversaries Yahweh raised up against Solomon is placed to follow this (verses 14-26), and it leads into Yahweh's word through Ahijah to Jeroboam, declaring that he is to receive the ten tribes (verses 27-39),

³⁹ Cf. Albrektson, 113f., following Köhler.

⁴⁰ Cf. 'natural revelation' according to Paul (Rom. 1:19f.), which is similarly limited.

⁴¹ Cf. J. Gray on both these verses.

which was 'the reason why he lifted up his hand against the king' (verse 27a). This word once given cannot be frustrated, whether by Solomon (verse 40—*cf.* Ahab's futile efforts to avoid the fulfilment of Yahweh's word, 22:29–38), or by the wise counsel of the old men (12:1–15—'it was a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord that he might fulfil his word'), or by Rehoboam (verses 16–24—'you shall not go up . . . for this thing is from me'). The miserable cycle of word–resistance–inevitable fulfilment is hardly complete before it begins again (13).

Without the tradition, which is the background of the whole, and the prophetic words given by Yahweh to the particular situation, which reveal the meaning of the sequence of events, these events would say nothing, or invite the inference that history has no meaning. Why should the achievement of the Solomonic age come to nothing? Why should bad counsel triumph over good? Why should an undistinguished but good man lose out to a flamboyant but wicked one? If this is the working out of a divine purpose, what is that purpose? The event needs the word, of tradition and of prophet, if there is to be an answer.

On the other hand, without the events that 'establish' (עִמָּדִים *e.g.* 1 Ki. 2:4) or 'fulfil' (קָבַל *e.g.* 2:27) or 'confirm' (אֶמְצָא 8:26) the words of warning or promise, if the words 'fall' (נָפַל, *e.g.* 8:56), they are worthless. If the prophet's word is not fulfilled, then Yahweh has not spoken by him (22:28). Yahweh, who answers the prophet by fire, is God, Baal, who fails to do so, is not (18:24, 36–40; it is interesting that the area of God's activity here is, in our terms, not history but nature and cult). When Yahweh's word is fulfilled, then people will be forced to acknowledge that He is God (*e.g.* 20:13, 28). The word needs the event, if it is to be validated.

How the mechanics of the relationship between word and event, of the functioning of Yahweh's word in history, are to be conceived is a complex question. No doubt one element is that feeling in the ancient Near Eastern consciousness that there is power in the words (especially of blessing and cursing) of a man of strong soul,⁴² a feeling expressed in David's concern

⁴² *Cf.* J. Pedersen, *Israel I–II*, OUP, London (1954), 169.

about Shimei's curse which hangs over his house (2:8f.). To put this in modern terms, words have creative possibilities, a self-fulfilling potency; they can 'do things', create new historical situations.⁴³ They never return void. They have a power which is not limited to (though no doubt it includes) the effect they have on the psyche, the morale, of the person to whom they are addressed.

This conception of the power of the prophetic word as word needs to be distinguished from that of God speaking and thereby effecting His will, independently of whether the word is announced through a prophet—that is, it is addressed to the situation it is meant to affect, for instance to some part of the natural world (*e.g.* Ps. 33:6ff.⁴⁴). The 'model' here seems to be not the power of word as word but the authority of the command of a king, which inevitably finds fulfilment (*cf.* verses 8ff.).

There is, however, also a more subtle feature of the relationship between word and event that needs to be taken into account: 'as a rule the promises do not enter so literally into a fulfilment as one would assume that they would if they were the word of God effecting history',⁴⁵ and the same is true of the warnings. This surely reflects the fact that the object of the declaring of promises and warnings is as much to win faith and repentance as to set Yahweh's power at work, and it is in this moral way, too, that God's word affects history, by affecting people. God's words are both conditional and situational—they are not cold announcements of what is inevitably predestined to occur; how they are fulfilled will depend on what reaction they meet with, and on how the total situation has changed when the time for fulfilment comes.

D's viewpoint may include all these three angles on the relationship between word and event at one time or another.

We might systematize the way D pictures the means by which Yahweh and His truth are known as follows. At any moment of time the nation and the individual stand within or under a

⁴³ *Cf.* A. Richardson, following Heidegger, *Religion in Contemporary Debate*, SCM, London (1966), 97ff.

⁴⁴ Albrektson, 53–67, quotes this passage and others from the Old Testament and other documents, though without drawing this distinction.

⁴⁵ Pannenberg, in Robinson, 259.

received body of divine teaching which should form their self-understanding, their hopes, and the aims and principles according to which their lives are lived. The tradition derives its authority from the fact that it is the tradition and that it does illumine man's situation. This does not mean, however, that hope for the future is based on 'the tradition of Yahweh's saving acts', not on any acts themselves;⁴⁶ if anything, the opposite would seem to be the case—Solomon surely appeals (1 Ki. 8:51ff.) to what Yahweh did at the exodus and not just to the tradition about it. But this is in any case a false antithesis, because it is on the basis of verification in events that new material is continually being added to the tradition, so that although a man would hardly ask each time he sought the tradition's insights whether its teaching had been verified in events, in principle it could in fact be assumed to be so verified. Then, secondly, at any moment of time the nation and the individual know the presence of God in self-manifestation in the temple.

At particular moments, against this double background, Yahweh may manifest Himself to king or prophet, either in response to some situation that has arisen or spontaneously, sometimes to the eyes but perhaps more often just to the ears, and declare His will by way of promise, warning, command. This experience of the real presence of Yahweh is self-authenticating and provides authentication for the word to which it leads—indeed it makes it possible to hold on to a belief in what has been declared even when events for a time seem to belie it⁴⁷ and when it would indeed be much easier to forget it (*cf.* Jeremiah's 'confessions'). But the word receives verification that no-one ought to doubt when events, if only in the long term, bear it out; and as they verify the word they will prove that He is Yahweh.⁴⁸

REVELATION AND VERIFICATION IN JOB⁴⁹

The Book of Job raises urgently the question, 'How may God

⁴⁶ R. Rendtorff, in Robinson, 47f.

⁴⁷ *Cf.* D. N. Freedman in *Interpretation* 21 (1967), 32ff., with regard to the conviction that Yahweh was Lord of history.

⁴⁸ *Cf.* Zimmerli's debate with Rendtorff, 45ff., on the phrase 'you/they will know that I am Yahweh'.

⁴⁹ I assume that Job was compiled, if not by one man then within a coherent

be known?'; indeed, 'May God be known?' Job sees his life fall apart without apparent reason and finds himself alienated from the God he thought he knew well, the God of grace and faithfulness and love. He seeks to reach this God again, to receive an explanation of his suffering from Him, but as in a nightmare he finds when he embraces Him that He is a different God, an ugly, unjust adversary. From the supernatural side, too, the possibility of a genuine relationship between God and man is questioned, for the Satan 'maintains that there is a terrible unreality in the relations between God and man . . . honour and integrity are not basic in them' in that 'man, even in his relations with God, is inescapably and incurably selfish'.⁵⁰ How then may God and His truth be known?

1. Through the tradition. 'Inquire, I pray you, of bygone ages, and consider what the fathers have found. . . . Will they not teach you, and tell you, and utter words out of their understanding?' (8:8ff.). Bildad⁵¹ voices a fundamental assumption of wisdom thinking, that beliefs that have proved themselves over the generations deserve respect. But Job's friends represent a tendency to treat the tradition as the last word. They forget that its formulations have the drawbacks as well as the virtues of generalization and, like scientific theories, are always open to refinement. Instead, they treat them as absolute, in a scholastic way, and deny the reality of experience that seems to conflict with them—'rather than revise their theology, they are prepared to rewrite Job's life';⁵² and if he questions the tradition, they soon put him in his place (15).

Job desperately wants to hold on to the received picture of God, but the inflexible exposition of it by his friends has robbed it of any strength (13:12), made it windy words that only comfort the speaker (16:1-5). Fancy the tradition marvelling at the attention God pays to man—indeed, He gives him attention, but only to give him trouble (7:17f.; contrast Pss.

(rather than a self-contradictory) tradition, and that therefore one may make use of the whole of the book in assessing its attitude to this question.

⁵⁰ J. Wood, *Job and the Human Situation*, Bles, London (1966), 33.

⁵¹ As explained on page 75 below, I assume that the teaching of the friends is to be taken into account in picturing the teaching of the book.

⁵² R. Davidson, *The Old Testament*, Hodder and Stoughton, London (1964), 173.

8:4; 144:3). Thus while Job reaches out toward new truth (16:18ff.; 19:23ff.; 23:1ff.—perhaps the difficulty of interpreting these passages ‘is an allegory’ of this factor of ‘reaching out’), his friends, as even Elihu sees, can do no more than reiterate old irrelevances (32:6–15). Instead of going back to the tradition to see if there might be yet new truth to find there,⁵³ they have ossified it.

2. Through experience. The wisdom tradition is ‘the accumulated folk wisdom of a coherent traditional culture, based on the observation and evaluation of human experiences’;⁵⁴ this openness to what the events of everyday life have to contribute towards an understanding of life is one of the distinguishing marks of wisdom throughout—it is the grounds of Ecclesiastes’ pessimism (1:12–2:26) and of the paternal instruction in Proverbs (*e.g.* 7:6–26). There is furthermore a tendency for wisdom teaching to become linked with the life of a wisdom teacher, which provides part of the authentication of what he goes on to say.⁵⁵ Certainly the wisdom literature promises that its teaching will be validated by the listeners’ own experience (*e.g.* Ps. 34:4, 6, 8); its teaching works (Pr. 3:1–10), even though sometimes it may be tempting to doubt this (*e.g.* Ps. 73). Thus, as the prophet’s word is validated by the events of history, the wise man’s teaching is verified by the events of his own life and the consequent experience of his pupils. But as the concrete events of human living were the rock from which the tradition was hewn, so that it reflects their complexity and the element of the capricious in human life (*cf.* the paradoxes in Proverbs, *e.g.* 26:4f.), so its link with human experience remains its lifeline. And as the tradition ossifies it cuts the lifeline and sacrifices its capacity to speak in relation to future experience.

Wisdom’s purported, but insincere, appeal to experience recurs in Job (*e.g.* 4:7f.; 5:2–7, 19–26). The patriarch himself accepts that the truth about life can be known from experience. That is the trouble, in as far as his gross suffering really cannot be said to be the result of gross sin (see the protests of chapters

⁵³ As our Lord does in dealing with the Sadducees, Mt. 22:29ff., and in interpreting the nature of His messiahship, *e.g.* Lk. 4:16–21; 7:18–23; 24:26f.

⁵⁴ R. B. Y. Scott, *Interpretation* 24 (1970), 29.

⁵⁵ So H. H. Guthrie, *Wisdom and Canon*, Seabury–Western Theological Seminary, Evanston (1966).

6 and 21, especially in relation to the confident assertions that precede them). Job and his friends seem to be describing different worlds—indeed, Job himself errs, in the opposite direction from them; he too generalizes too whole-heartedly from his limited experience, and in his agony sees things blacker than they really are (chapter 24). But neither he nor his friends have recourse to the leap of faith solutions to the problem of human suffering accepted by other nations—belief in an afterlife or in magic or reincarnation or demons. All agree that truth must be verifiable, and vindication after death is very much second-best!⁵⁶

Job will not belie his experience, avoid the facts of human life, or abandon his claim to (relative) innocence (chapters 29ff.); but neither will he abandon his belief in a fundamental order in the universe, deriving from the just God who is behind it. He is left with the tension between ‘the protecting God of the tradition and the destructive God of Job’s experience . . . (who) both exist together’,⁵⁷ until after the theophany, which points to an area of the tradition where a way of coping with the tension may be found. Then Job is approved, precisely because he has faced up to the facts (42:7f.);⁵⁸ he is restored and given even greater blessings than before, perhaps with the implication that ultimately the tradition must be right and experience will reflect the love and justice of God to those who are faithful to Him. Yet on the other hand Job’s restoration cannot be taken to imply that all men in such a predicament will be similarly restored (the book’s aim is precisely to refute such thinking), any more than can the escapes of Daniel and his friends guarantee those of other men in such situations; but these ‘special cases’ do assert the faithfulness and power of God, even though ultimately they do not solve the problem of how that faithfulness and power are proved in our experience—they only embody a conviction that somehow they will be.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ I think that belief in an afterlife is more justifiably taken into account by a Christian as the resurrection of Christ has rescued such a belief from being mere speculation.

⁵⁷ Von Rad, 415.

⁵⁸ Cf. N. H. Snaith, *The Book of Job*, SCM, London (1968), 5.

⁵⁹ 2 Maccabees, with its account of the martyrs dying cheerfully in their confidence of resurrection, expresses the same conviction. Again we see how the Old Testament needs the resurrection faith, though it cannot yet have it (cf. n. 56 above).

3. Through human reason. It is Elihu who expresses wisdom's confidence in and commitment to the use of reason in attaining spiritual understanding. He is confident of the perceptiveness of his God-given mind (32:8, 18; 33:4), and encourages the friends to use theirs too (34:1-4). But Job, who is also open to intellectual adventure (*e.g.* 16:18ff.), has long ago concluded that their minds are closed, and that of Yahweh's doing (17:4). They resist any challenge to accepted patterns of thought (20:1ff. may indicate explicitly that Zophar is tempted to follow Job in his speculation—but he manages to control himself!).

Reason has its limitations (11:7f.; 28:12f.); its rigorous exercise in Job provides no solution for the book's problem. Yet it does demonstrate that it is not impossible to envisage solutions (the cosmic significance given to this particular man's sufferings by the prologue). And its whole approach is to see the problem as one to be thought and argued through to the limits to which his God-given reason will take man.

Thus it is dealt with not by theological assertion but by posing the question and then discussing it from various angles in order to grasp the whole—portraying it 'in the round'.⁶⁰ The book provides a series of snapshots and leaves the resultant whole to speak for itself: Job attacks divine justice, the friends human justice, but both are wrong in what they attack, right in what they affirm, for even when it is near impossible to do so, 'man must not relinquish his own righteousness, nor must he relinquish God's. . . . Even if the righteous fails, he must still believe in righteousness as the supreme law, firmly resting in God.'⁶¹ In that they make this point, the dialogues must not be misunderstood, under the influence of the saga framework, as the story of Job, the faultless hero of faith, versus the friends, who are totally misguided; in the dialogues Job does everything but curse God, while the friends do their best to interpret the situation with the limited resources available to them. In understanding the teaching of the book as a whole we must take account of the contributions of the friends as well as that of Job, both being subject to the judgment of the book as a whole.

⁶⁰ P. Humbert, *VTS* 3 (1955), 155, notes how this gives Job an almost Hegelian flavour, though L. Köhler, *Hebrew Man*, SCM, London (1956), 158ff., connects it rather with the courtroom.

⁶¹ J. Pedersen, 373.

Thus Job has a distinctive place in the Old Testament as the consciously creative product of the human mind, the nearest thing in the Old Testament to a drama or a philosophical discourse, the testament of the author's own trust in the spirit that God breathed into him.⁶²

4. Through religious experience.⁶³ In his opening exposition Eliphaz claims that his teaching has the backing of visionary experience as well as of the tradition (4:12ff.). He has listened in at God's council (15:8), seen (הָיָה) the fate of the wicked (verse 17). Elihu, too, speaks of God communicating with man through dreams (33:14-18) and angels (verses 23ff.).

But at the book's climax no angel but Yahweh Himself answers Job out of the whirlwind. Job is granted the confrontation with God that he has sought all along, but it turns out to be not his grilling of God but God's of him, reducing him to silence (40:1-5; 42:1-6). Job is granted a place in God's council so that he can look at the universe from God's angle. Again⁶⁴ God's self-manifestation does not mean His making known some new truths; rather He points Job to the world that God had created, which was important in the tradition of wisdom thinking,⁶⁵ was part of the wise man's (indeed all man's) experience, and gave man scope for the exercise of his reason.

Though refusing to answer the question, 'Why am I suffering thus?', God promises that there is an answer. But He does not tell Job what the reader knows about the background to his affliction in the scene in the heavenly court. Job has come near aspiring to the total knowledge that is only God's,⁶⁶ whereas God insists on Job accepting limits, on being God and keeping His secrets—indeed, He lifts the veil a little so that Job can see how many more riddles and marvels there are that Job has not yet thought of.⁶⁷ Thus He leads Job to 'the point where

⁶² Humbert sees this as the chief mark of Job's 'modernity' (see especially 153).

⁶³ I do not wish to set up a false antithesis between sacred and secular, but it seems necessary in Job to distinguish between the wisdom to be gained from everyday experience of (primarily secular) life, and the special supernatural revelations that come through visionary and theophanic experiences. It is interesting that such revelatory experiences, which are so important in Job, are among the non-wisdom features listed by J. L. Crenshaw (*JBL* 88 (1969) 129ff.) as indications that the Joseph narrative ought not to be described as a wisdom narrative.

⁶⁴ Cf. page 66 above.

⁶⁵ Cf. below on page 77.

⁶⁶ Cf. E. Jones, *The Triumph of Job*, SCM, London (1966), 105.

⁶⁷ Cf. von Rad, 416.

he can continue to suffer, trusting God without understanding'.⁶⁸

5. Through the created world. Job comes to a climax in the theophany, but the medium is the vehicle for a message. Job is reduced to silence not merely by a new vision of God but by a new vision of God's world.

The wisdom tradition 'thinks resolutely within the framework of a theology of creation',⁶⁹ providing an extended commentary on different aspects of Genesis 1-3. Creation's theological importance is much more immediate than it is in the history-works; here 'creation' suggests not just a long ago first event but the present status of the world and man in relation to God. By looking at creation thus, wisdom is able to learn from nature, without being bewitched by it; and it can assert both that serious attention to wisdom's creation theology will help one to have right religious attitudes (Job, especially 38-42) and that 'true religion is the first principle of wisdom' (to paraphrase Pr. 1:7), virtually its converse.

Thus Eliphaz, whose first speech anticipates so much of what follows, urges on Job something very like the solution he eventually accepts from God—to commit himself to the God of creation (5:8ff.). But at this stage the creation speaks to Job more of God's awesomeness than of His grace (chapter 9; also 26:5-14, though this is often transferred to Bildad). And 'these are but the outskirts of his ways; and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?' (26:14). Like Eliphaz, Elihu believes in a 'faithful creator' (34:12-15), but like Job (and in substantial anticipation of the theophany) he is even more overawed at the majesty of the creator (35:1-8; 36:24-37:24).

The theophany provides the definitive statement of this theme. God scans the created world and points to how it embodies His wisdom, authority, and power (chapters 38f.); but not only these, for this much Job has been prepared to grant already, though without making the response now dragged from him (40:1-5), also His goodness—and this is what Job doubts (40:6—41:34 seem to make this point though their significance is not easy to delineate). Job can do nothing about unjust power in the world, but Yahweh has put the chaos-powers in their place, reduced Leviathan to a plaything

⁶⁸ Jones, 110.

⁶⁹ Zimmerli, *SJT* 17(1964), 148.

(41:5).⁷⁰ God's wisdom and power are thus shown to be constructive, purposeful, and gracious; He is the basis of order and stability in human life. Job comes to acknowledge and trust His power and His purpose, and, seeing God (not in the temple or in His mighty acts but) in the created world, repents before Him (42:1-6).

A comparison of the epistemologies of Kings and Job reveals closer parallels than one might have expected.

1. Both Job and Kings stand firmly within a tradition of accepted beliefs from within which they interpret the situations they face. For Kings these include the special relationship that exists between Yahweh and Israel, in which the Davidic king plays a key role; Yahweh's undertaking to look after king and people in the future as He has in the past; and the moral demands He makes upon them that are a condition of all this being realized. For Job these include that if a man is blameless and upright, fears God and turns away from evil, God will grant him protection, blessing, and increase.

2. Both Job and Kings expect this teaching to be actualized and thus validated in experience. Job, however, is concerned with the events of personal experience and everyday life (though God's activity in history is mentioned, 12:23 and the rest of the paragraph verses 13-25); God is expected to be active here, showing that He honours those who honour Him. Kings is more interested in the events of national experience, incidents that have dates (though again the contrast should not be too sharply drawn, for Elijah and Elisha have dealings with ordinary individuals).

3. Both Job and Kings accept that the tradition keeps on being supplemented or applied or refined through God's speaking, either in person or through intermediaries such as angels or dream experiences (more in Job) or prophets (Kings). Normally in Kings, and sometimes in Job (the experiences of Eliphaz and Elihu), these revelations are intimately linked with the events of national or personal experience in that they either interpret past events or predict future ones, just as the tradition as it stands at the moment

⁷⁰ With this demythologizing compare Ps. 104:26, though contrast Job 26:5-13; 38:8-11.

consists of interpretations of earlier events and warnings and promises about the future. New such prophetic and other words continued being added to the tradition until this process ceased and the canon was regarded as closed; henceforth the tradition as a whole functions as the sole 'word'.

4. But neither Job nor D knows all the answers; there are points at which the tradition's teaching seems not to be proved by experience. It is in what they do with this problem that the distinctiveness of the two approaches may be seen.

We have already seen that D offers no explanation of the violent deaths of two good kings, Joash and Josiah;⁷¹ the 'problem' does not seem to bother him. If it occurred to him, perhaps he trusts that the positive teaching he puts forward and can verify through most of the history he relates would be applicable to these problem areas too if all the facts were at his disposal, or at least that there are explanations of these apparent exceptions that prevent them invalidating his general thesis. But, even though his functioning as a creative historian implies the exercise of his mind and human discernment,⁷² he does not seem to have exercised these very hard in seeking out such explanations, unlike the Chronicler (contrast, for instance, 2 Ch. 35:20ff. with 2 Ki. 23:29).

In contrast, Job is more concerned with the exceptions than with the general truth that righteousness and unrighteousness ultimately get their reward. No doubt D might be if he were not convinced that Israel's experience in the exile was in fact a good illustration of the general truth. In seeking to ease the problem, the book emphasizes the part that can be played by human reason, even more perhaps by human imagination, both in its own approach, and by the words it puts into the mouths of its protagonists. It suggests that the thesis that God is just and good is overwhelmingly verified by the activity of God as it is seen in the created order, and its grounds for trust that the apparent exceptions to the thesis do not in fact invalidate it lie here.

The contrast between these two approaches to revelation and verification might be summarized as follows. D asserts: 'The exile is to be understood as the judgment of the Holy

⁷¹ Page 68 above.

⁷² Cf. Luke's description of his historical method, Lk. 1:1-4.

God on His disobedient people, in fulfilment of the many warnings and chastisements He has given her over the years. To see that this is true, you only have to look at the history of God's dealings with His people to see that He is such a God and they are such a people.' Job asserts: 'No matter how strong may be the appearances to the contrary, it is always true nevertheless that God is just. If you doubt this, look at the created world and see how it manifests the power and goodness of that God.' Consequently, the books offer us two falsification principles: Kings, 'If the history did not happen like this, then my thesis about our situation and about God is unproven'; Job, 'If creation is not orderly and reliable, if the cosmos is not after all a friendly place, then, Job, you still have your problem.'

As we return to the relationship between theological validation and verification in history, it will be apparent that the latter is crucial for Kings in a way that it is not for Job; by it Kings commits itself to stand or fall. It claims to explain why the exile came about, and in doing so to explain the ways of God, and the two explanations depend on each other. Its use of a narrative form, its relating of things that are supposed to have actually been said, actually happened, is seriously meant. The theology is dependent on the events, their veracity is a *sine qua non* of the validity of the theology.

The narrative form in Job fulfils an essentially different function. While a modern theologian would tend to discuss theodicy or suffering in an abstract, theoretical way, the biblical writer (like the modern dramatist or novelist) is usually concrete in his thinking and communicating. Thus the writer of Job chooses a narrative form for his theological or philosophical reflection. 'The poet describes not so much his own personal experience as one of the great misfortunes that in our youth we would read about in classical literature, examples of the destiny of man in all ages . . . Job is undoubtedly an individual, but he is also a type, a type of man.'⁷³ With Aeschylus, or with Camus, it is inappropriate to ask, 'Did this actually happen?' So it is with Job. For if we ask the book, 'How do you know that what you say about God and about suffering is true and is relevant to me?', the affirmation 'It

⁷³ Humbert, 153 (my translation).

happened' would be insufficient, if only for the reason that Job is through and through a special case; the fact that Job saw God is no guarantee that I will. The answer to the question is rather, 'Look in the direction that the book points, at the created world, and see that it is like that.' It is by this, not by its historicity, that Job stands or falls; here (and as these lines were first written in the week of the Peruvian earthquake it is a serious matter) lies its falsification principle.⁷⁴

If then we conclude that there is little historical truth behind Job, this will not have serious consequences for our estimate of its theological validity.⁷⁵ On the other hand, with Kings, or with the other Old Testament history-works, the converse will be the case, because they do appeal to history, to actual events which they base their teaching on, for their validation. It is of great importance that they should be historically trustworthy. But they are widely regarded as being far from this. In fact 'two pictures of Israel's history lie before us, that of modern critical scholarship and that which the faith of Israel constructed, and for the present we must reconcile ourselves to both of them. . . . The fact that these two views . . . are so divergent is one of the most serious burdens imposed today upon biblical scholarship'⁷⁶—precisely because the biblical historians elect to stand or fall by their interpretation of history. What are we to do about the divergence between these two pictures?

HISTORIOGRAPHY ANCIENT AND MODERN

I think part of the problem is that we are not really reconciled to the fact that the Israelite historians, like their ancient colleagues elsewhere, practise their art in a way so different from that of our post-enlightenment age; although of course the *nature* of the differences is well understood, at least at a

⁷⁴ It is a nice question what difference would be made to this sharp differentiation of Job from Kings' interest in history if S. Terrien (*IB* III, 888ff., 897; cf. *IDB* II, 914) is right in locating the composition of Job substantially in the exile, as at least in part a reaction to this experience—which would certainly make the comparison of Job and Kings even more interesting. But it would not alter the fact that it is to creation that Job appeals.

⁷⁵ The same will be true with Jonah, which may be regarded similarly as a dramatizing of a theological point in concrete form; it also appeals to creation (4:6–11).

⁷⁶ Von Rad, 107f.

scholarly level,⁷⁷ we are so wedded to our modern way of writing history that the ancient way cannot appear to us as perhaps an alternative way and not just a primitive and inferior one. The difference between history and non-history and the real importance of the former is very real to us and we assume that the historian's first duty is to relate only what he knows actually happened, 'as it actually happened'.

In this area, however, the pendulum has begun to swing again—in McLuhanesque terms, we have entered an era of cool communication. We are indeed in danger of letting the medium be more important than the message, but at least we have become aware of the importance, and of the diversity, of media. The film 'Oh what a lovely war'⁷⁸ provides an example of the relevance of this to an appreciation of the ancient history works. It is both drama and propaganda and history, looking back to what actually happened in the First War and letting the facts it relates more or less speak for themselves. Speeches from the war years are repeated verbatim, actual news headlines read and statistics quoted, mock-ups presented of life in the trenches and in battle. And yet the whole is cast in a surrealistic kind of framework, of a pierrot show, which contrasts starkly with the reality and horror of battle. This is a history-work—it is concerned with events that actually happened and with their interpretation and relevance—and its point depends on the accuracy of its history; but it makes its point by utilizing diverse material with a diverse relationship to what actually happened. The authentic speeches are delivered in a make-believe context; officers turn into merry-go-round figures; scenes in the trenches or on the field come from the imagination of the author, although they are meant to exemplify the kind of thing that went on or to express the kind of attitudes that people had. There is very little attempt to recreate the actual event, as there is for instance in the film 'The Battle of Britain', and yet this might be judged a more serious historical presentation than the latter. It is indeed a propaganda piece, but one whose very propaganda

⁷⁷ Though, as K. Koch points out in *The Growth of Biblical Tradition*, A. and C. Black, London (1969), 155f., at a more popular level it tends to be avoided—I think because we have not really come to terms with it theologically at a scholarly level.

⁷⁸ *Theatre Workshop*, Charles Chilton and others, Methuen, London (1965).

validity depends on its being a veracious interpretation of what actually happened.⁷⁹

The biblical history-works are closer to this than they are to most modern history-works. D, for instance, is certainly interested in what actually happened from Solomon to the exile⁸⁰ and his theological points are about these events.⁸¹ But within his historical and theological framework he includes material diverse in form and in relationship to events as they actually happened.⁸² I shall not attempt a strict formal analysis of this material,⁸³ since this would not in itself bring out what relationship the different kinds of material have to actual history—this is of course not the aim of form criticism,⁸⁴ but will look at the content of some of the narratives and, utilizing some of the insights of form criticism, seek to infer what the relationship might be, for what kind of purposes the writer has given us something other than what actually happened.

1. The succession narrative, which comes to an end with 1 Ki. 1f., certainly concerns itself with actual people and events, but the recounting of the protagonists' conversations presumably stems from the author's use of his imagination. It is in this way that he seeks to represent the attitudes and relationships of the period; probably the historical method is unable to tell us whether he does so fairly. But the fact that he thus works more like a modern historical novelist than a modern historian does not mean that he cannot have done so.⁸⁵

2. The Rabshakeh's speeches in 2 Ki. 18 seem to have been written up in such a way as to bring out their theological significance, for they signify a contempt of Yahweh and thus a challenge to trust Him nevertheless and not to trust in men or

⁷⁹ Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* provides a similar kind of example of the imaginative, dramatic retelling of a historical event; see especially the author's 'note on the historical accuracy of this play' (Penguin edition, Harmondsworth (1968), 11).

⁸⁰ Cf. page 59 above.

⁸¹ Cf. pages 79f. above.

⁸² Cf. Barr, 81.

⁸³ Koch deals with many of the sections in Kings, however.

⁸⁴ It is often averred that the form critical discipline is an exclusively literary one whose results carry no necessary implications about the historicity of the material analysed. Similarly, E. R. Leach rather grudgingly grants that his valuable sociological explanation of the Old Testament stories connected with 'the legitimacy of Solomon' does not decide the truth or falsity of the incidents related in this connection, *Genesis as Myth and other essays*, Cape, London (1969), e.g. 42, 83.

⁸⁵ As R. N. Whybray, *The Succession Narrative*, SCM, London (1968), seems to assume.

resources. All this is regarded as implicit in the Rabshakeh's words and it is therefore given expression as from his lips.⁸⁶ Such an attempt to bring out the implication of events needs to be assessed in its own right, and not according to exclusively positivist assumptions; it is something to be grateful for, as more meaningful than bare chronicle.⁸⁷ On the other hand, interpretation can very easily become the imposition upon a story of preconceived ideas which ill fit it; it has been said of Spengler and Toynbee that 'they have written some good poetry but a lot of bad history',⁸⁸ and if this is true of the biblical historians, then they have failed in the task they set themselves.

3. A similar kind of interpretation and theological judgment can be seen in D's practice of arranging narratives in an order that is not chronological but theological. We have already noted the skilful arrangement of the account of the dissolution of the Solomonic empire.⁸⁹ This begins with an account of Solomon's sins, particularly in the matter of foreign marriages, which has been kept so that it can be associated with the troubles of his old age (1 Ki. 11). Then in the case of Josiah, D, to underline the importance of the reforms that followed the discovery of the lawbook, holds back his account of miscellaneous reforms that probably date from before the discovery so that it can be given prominence (2 Ki. 22:1—23:3; 23:4—20).

4. The main Josiah narrative (22:1—23:3, 21ff.) and the earlier description of Hezekiah's conduct during the Assyrian crisis (especially 19:14—19⁹⁰) exhibit a different kind of writing up which seems to be intended to glorify the heroes and set them forth as examples; Hezekiah is 'the type of the faithful king'.⁹¹ In such a 'tale . . . told in order to edify' in which 'the contrast between good and bad is brought out sharply',⁹² and more so later in those in Daniel and in Ben Sira, the hero figures not so much as an actor in the divine-human drama as an embodiment of divine-human wisdom and righteousness.⁹³

⁸⁶ Cf. B. S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, SCM, London (1967), 84—90.

⁸⁷ Cf. Richardson, *History Sacred and Profane*, 234—40; D. E. Nineham in *JTS* 11 (1960), 262ff.

⁸⁸ D. Thomson, *The Aims of History*, Thames and Hudson, London (1969), 24.

⁸⁹ Pages 68f. above.

⁹⁰ Childs, 99f.

⁹¹ Childs, 103.

⁹² Koch, 198.

⁹³ Cf. Guthrie, *op. cit.*

5. Some of the stories already referred to might also be considered in the light of the distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte*, which on at least one definition is similar to that between history-writing and saga: 'saga has a different effectiveness from that of historical writing, bridging the gap between the present and the past, and showing that what appears as past events contains a hidden relevance to the present. The narrator and his hearers identify themselves with the deeds and sufferings of their forebears. . . . The later narrators' experiences of God and the world affect the stories of earlier periods.'⁹⁴ And yet, to show the relevance of the past to the present is at least one possible valid aim for the historian himself. Furthermore, although saga cannot be ruled out *a priori* as a means by which God might reveal His truth, it may be worth asking how the historical interest of at least the Books of Kings affects the question of the purported inclusion there of saga which is substantially unhistorical. If the historical orientation of Old Testament faith precludes the forming of myths,⁹⁵ does it not also threaten saga?

Similarly the distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte* is widely regarded as questionable.⁹⁶ If it is allowed, however, 'can anything become *geschichtlich* which was not first *historisch*? Can anything become historically significant, if it did not first actually happen? If words mean anything, the answer must be No.'⁹⁷

Biblical scholars rather frequently accuse those who disagree with them of importing modern western ideas into their approach to the Bible, but it may not be unfair to suggest that we do this with our idea of what constitutes history-writing. D seems to have worked with a different ideal, but this does not make him necessarily less responsible or less valuable. Nor does it apparently conflict in his mind with a deep concern for what actually happened, in that he seeks to trace the working out of the will and word of God precisely in what happened in Israel's history. But this commitment to matching word and

⁹⁴ Koch, 154-7.

⁹⁵ Cf. A. Weiser, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London (1961), 58; B. S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, SCM, London (1960).

⁹⁶ Cf. Braaten, 40; R. Batey and J. H. Gill in *SJT* 23 (1970), 13-26.

⁹⁷ S. Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament*, OUP, London (1964), 234; cf. von Rad, 125.

event, interpretation and historical actuality, means that even when we have made due allowance for a different attitude to historiography, we must still grapple with the serious problem that the existence of the two pictures of Israel's history presents us with.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORICAL VERACITY

The exile means that the Jews are at last forced to ask fundamental questions about the nature of their relationship with God, as they strive to find meaning in the situation they are in. D suggests to them the 'perspectival image'⁹⁸ that the tradition puts forward for looking at their situation. It has the nature of an aetiology, explaining the present situation in terms of the tradition's account of God's dealings with Israel in the centuries leading up to the fall of Jerusalem. Is the validity of such an image independent of a correlation between the tradition's account of the events it relates and the events themselves?

'If one thinks of revelation as a paradigmatic event that casts up images that alter our interpretation of all events, this requires that we distinguish between two kinds of belief, and accordingly between two kinds of certitude: the belief that the actual Jesus [or Israel] was as the perspectival image pictures him, and the belief that the perspectival image does illumine our experience and our relationship to that upon which we are absolutely dependent. . . . Faith finds its certitude, its confirmation, in the viability of the image for relating one to present reality.'⁹⁹

Is this a valid approach that can thus be applied to the Old Testament, so that what matters is not whether Jerusalem was delivered from Sennacherib, but the perspectival image this story throws up, its anthropology (that is, 'its understanding of man before God'¹⁰⁰)?

The argument so far on revelation and verification would suggest that this is not the case. Theological (or anthropological) validity is tied up with historical veracity. Further, the very

⁹⁸ The phrase is explained by V. A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer*, SCM, London (1967), 266–89; it refers to the 'memory impression' that may be left by an event or series of events and which we may then use to interpret our own experience.

⁹⁹ Harvey, 281ff.

¹⁰⁰ Harvey, 289.

perspectival image we are concerned with is of a God who has been active in guiding and protecting His people, and who has proved His graciousness and power by these actions. If this picture does not correspond to historical reality, then the fact that it illumines our experience and our relationship to that upon which we are absolutely dependent is neither here nor there except as a psychological prop. If Yahweh did not speak and then fulfil His word, if He did not punish evil, if He did not rescue Jerusalem, then promise and fulfilment, divine justice working itself out among men, and Zion theology, are but nice ideas. 'In Israel, and in her alone, these historical narratives could develop so profusely and in such perfection' because 'the faith needed them'.¹⁰¹

Because Israel's faith, the perspectival images she offers, is so bound up with history, this feature of the Old Testament viewpoint cannot be treated as a husk that can be discarded without affecting the kernel. And even if it were legitimate to seek to separate kernel from husk in this way,¹⁰² the possibility of doing so is questionable; 'it hangs the passion of faith on the slenderest of threads'.¹⁰³

An attempt has been made to outflank the problem of the apparent unhistorical nature of Old Testament historiography by pointing out that really it is historical in the sense that, just as much as the events it describes, it is the result of the activity of God in history. "The working out of the "interpretation" is itself an historical event. . . . In speaking of God's activity in the history of Israel we cannot be satisfied with the alternative between the two versions of history, the one produced by historical-critical research and the other portrayed by the Old Testament. For Israel's history occurred both in the outer events which are customarily the object of the critical study of history, and in the various stratified inner events which we bring together in the concept of tradition."¹⁰⁴ Thus Kings, whatever its value as a source for the history of the monarchy, is of first importance for an understanding of the exile.

¹⁰¹ Von Rad, 109. The assertion of the uniqueness of Israelite historiography may need to be modified in the light of the work of Albrektson and that of J. R. Porter on Arabic historiography, *JBL* 87 (1968), 17-26.

¹⁰² As Buss seeks to do, 144f.

¹⁰³ Harvey, 193f.; cf. the whole section 187-94.

¹⁰⁴ R. Rendtorff, in Braaten, 113. Cf. Pannenberg in his appreciation of von Rad's *Old Testament Theology*, especially 90-3.

This conception of the formation of the tradition as the result of God's activity is one we shall have to return to, and to see it as part of Israel's history and thus as a factor in her history is important in understanding both the tradition and the history. Nevertheless in this approach the words 'historical tradition' seem to have been retained while their meaning has been transformed—we have been cheated. The tradition can be described as historical after all, it is implied, so all is well; but the assurance is given only by trading on the word 'history' 's ambiguity and on the value-status attached to it,¹⁰⁵ and furthermore at the price of implying a wrong kind of theological priority of history over the tradition.

More seriously, however, this approach seems to suffer from the same drawbacks as the 'perspectival image' solution, and indeed to sharpen the problem. For it suggests that, whereas the tradition makes no real claims to being itself produced by the activity of God, but many assertions that His activity may be seen in the events it records, in fact the opposite is the case—a divinely-produced tradition, but little by way of divinely-produced acts. And precisely this tradition which is said to be divinely-produced gives a profoundly misleading picture of the area of the activity of the one whose activity produced it. If God was really active in the production of this tradition, then surely the events it describes must have happened.

This objection still seems to hold if it is maintained that there are historical events to which the tradition corresponds, but that these are later events which the tradition has back-projected—for instance, if later military exploits 'impressed on the historical memory the picture of a conquest and drove from the consciousness the much less dramatic and, in parts, the less glorious events of the period of peaceful settlement'.¹⁰⁶

In fact, if the events were otherwise, then the tradition that bases itself on them must be abandoned. This is an alternative reaction to von Rad's dilemma. The events as they actually happened, as we now know them through historical research, are the real *Heilsgeschichte*, and we must seek to interpret the meaning of these.¹⁰⁷ The string between the kite of interpreta-

¹⁰⁵ Cf. pages 59f. above.

¹⁰⁶ M. Weippert, *The Settlement of the Israelite Tribes in Palestine*, SCM, London (1971), 141.

¹⁰⁷ Franz Hesse takes this position; his work actually antedates Rendtorff's

tion and the ground of events is cut, not so that the kite can fly free, but so that it can get lost.

Again there is value in this position. First, the assumption that some history can be known at all is worth noting. It is easy to swing from the false thesis of positivism to the false antithesis of historical relativism, 'nothing can be known'.¹⁰⁸ 'Neither the fact that much historical knowledge is missing nor the fact that much historical knowledge wavers in the twilight zone of conjecture and minimal probability means that all historical knowledge is problematical and must be less certain than knowledge gained by immediate sense-perception.'¹⁰⁹ Or, as Aristotle put it, 'you can tell an educated man by his expecting in each field that degree of certainty which the nature of the case allows'.¹¹⁰ Writing history or administering justice are different from doing science.

Furthermore, it seems mistaken to exclude *a priori* the possibility of historical certainty even about extraordinary events, of which the resurrection of Christ is the paradigm case. If it is unscientific to be gullible about what purports to be miracle, it is also unscientific arbitrarily to rule out the possibility that an event may be unique, miraculous. Historical sources must be treated on their merits as sources, rather than prejudged by means of presuppositions.¹¹¹ Indeed a religious understanding of events such as the exodus can be relevant to determining that they are historical events; religious insights may not only help to interpret events known otherwise but 'may also help to find solutions to historical problems as such'.¹¹² Not that 'intuitions' operate independently of evidence,¹¹³ but they may lead to a different interpretation of evidence.

Nevertheless with regard to the Old Testament events, it would still have to be granted that the nature of the sources

and provided the stimulus for it, cf. J. M. Robinson in *The Old Testament and Christian Faith*, ed. B. W. Anderson, SCM, London (1964), 125ff.

¹⁰⁸ Though aware of this danger, Harvey seems close to doing this, cf., for instance, 282.

¹⁰⁹ D. P. Fuller, *Easter Faith and History*, Tyndale Press, London (1968), 258; cf. Pannenberg, 54ff.

¹¹⁰ H. Palmer, *The Logic of Gospel Criticism*, Macmillan, London (1968), 31.

¹¹¹ Cf. Pannenberg's discussion of the historical method, 38-80, also Braaten, 98-101.

¹¹² H. D. Lewis, *Our Experience of God*, Allen and Unwin, London (1959), 150.

¹¹³ Cf. Pannenberg, 50f., n. 91.

precludes a confident historical judgment with regard to much of the history. For some of it—notably the end of the pre-exilic kingdom—a measure of certainty is possible; but for the details of the monarchy that is the concern of Kings, or the key Old Testament complex of events from exodus to conquest on which such varied views are held concerning the value of the sources, certainty on historical grounds is impossible.

But we must accede to the insistence that we cannot accept interpretation when the events behind it have been falsified—the events as they actually happened are the *Heilsgeschichte*. How are we to relate the negative results reached by the application of the historical method to these events, to our recognition of the authority and value of the Old Testament tradition that makes it impossible for us to write it off?

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE HISTORICAL METHOD

Long ago Troeltsch raised the question of how the church would deal with the revolution that the historical method must bring to theology, and to this we must return. 'Once the historical method is applied to biblical science and church history', he wrote, 'it is a leaven that alters everything and, finally, bursts apart the entire structure of theological methods employed until the present.'¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, three reasons are advanced why it must be so applied. Firstly, 'Christianity must build its religious thought upon it or else be consigned to the limbo of those countless other antiquated forms of religious belief that were unable to make their own accommodation to the *Zeitgeist*'.¹¹⁵ Or again, 'for men who live in the sphere in which the Enlightenment has become effective, authoritarian claims are no longer acceptable' and we must look for 'a manifestation of divine reality which meets the test of man's matured understanding as such'.¹¹⁶

It is not, however, just by concession to the modern non-Christian world that the Christian reasons thus; it is because he too is post-Enlightenment man. 'Actually, Troeltsch believed the church had no real option, because it is impossible even to think without the new assumptions. They have already

¹¹⁴ Harvey, 5.

¹¹⁵ Harvey, 5f.

¹¹⁶ Pannenberg in Robinson, 226, 229.

penetrated to the deepest levels of Western man's consciousness. They are a part of the furniture of his mind.¹¹⁷

But then, thirdly, the post-Enlightenment 'morality of knowledge' is itself to be regarded not as an unChristian expression of unbelief, but as a form, albeit a secularized one, of faith. As the dialectical theologians have pointed out, faith is not to be identified with assent, even to the Bible as the Word of God; it is, in Tillich's words, 'the courage to be', to accept the total ambiguity of the human situation, to trust in being itself, 'the accepting of the acceptance without somebody or something that accepts'.¹¹⁸ The integrity and autonomy of the historian are an aspect of this 'faith', and he is 'justified by faith' as he faces up to his data with the radical honesty of the historical method. Conversely, 'the really destructive atheism is fear of facts . . . it is the existential denial that the world is God's'.¹¹⁹

The rigorous exercise of the historical method, however, need not lead to agnosticism about biblical history, unless presuppositions about what may and may not be allowed to have happened are permitted to prejudice the way it is exercised;¹²⁰ such presuppositions set aside, the historical Jesus is not quite so elusive. Now, it is from this Jesus, as I began this essay by noting, that we received the Old Testament, it has His authority.¹²¹ This complicates our position as we seek to look at it through the eyes of the historical method. Indeed, faith is not to be equated with assent, even to the Bible as the Word of God; but neither is it to be identified with a brave and autonomous stand before impersonal Being. It is rather a humble bowing before the personal God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—and this God, through Christ, declares Himself the author of the biblical tradition and of the events which the tradition relates. Our act of faith will thus be not in Being and in the historical method, but in God and in the tradition. As a result of this act of faith (itself, however, it is important to remember, a reaction to historical

¹¹⁷ Harvey, 6.

¹¹⁸ Harvey, 147.

¹¹⁹ Alexander Miller, in Harvey, 137.

¹²⁰ See page 89 and n. 111 above.

¹²¹ My point here is rather parallel to that of Pannenberg, 94, n. 20, from his perspective, that because of Jesus' relationship to the God and the tradition—history of Israel 'one may . . . in retrospect perceive a deed of the true God even in the history of Israel'.

knowledge of Jesus Christ) a certainty about the validity of the Old Testament tradition is gained which can survive without the support of the historical method. It is in this sense, in regard to the Old Testament, that one can agree that 'the real call of today . . . is to make a turn of 180 degrees and bring historical science, especially in so far as it has gained a dominant position within theology itself, under the judgement of revelation'.¹²² The pressure to attribute ultimate authority in Old Testament studies to the historical method is to be resisted; like the scientific method, it stands under the revelation of God in the tradition, not over it. This being the case, the pressure to yield to the consensus viewpoint on the ultimate importance of the historical method is simply one that will have to be resisted, like other epistemological and moral pressures.

The historical method does have a subordinate function in our study of the Old Testament, as an aid to investigating and establishing the events that the tradition tells us of. But when it leads to negative results—for instance, when we find that historical science cannot substantiate the deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib¹²³—we need not feel obliged to be sceptical or agnostic about the incident, because of our radical trust in and commitment to God and the tradition. We are like the man who 'can be confident that a jury will find his friend innocent of a crime—since he "knows" independently that this friend is innocent, although he must wait for the judgement of the jury'.¹²⁴ We know that Israel's account of the events of her history will not be discredited.

I think then that if we are committed to God and to the tradition, we may, indeed must, believe that the tradition and the events do in fact correspond, even where we cannot demonstrate how. Where they seem to conflict, we must be either misinterpreting the tradition or misinterpreting the data available to us as historians—we recognize that we are far short of the total amount of information we need on the one hand as exegetes of ancient documents from an alien culture and on the other as historians of remote events.

This means that the verification that the Old Testament

¹²² Erwin Reisner, in Harvey, 128.

¹²³ So Childs, 118f.

¹²⁴ Harvey, 196; though (as Harvey himself avers) the analogy cannot be applied to that historical-critical investigation that may precede faith in Jesus.

regards as indispensable to the validation of its theology is not one that can normally be attained by the application of the historical method, unless the data available to us increases dramatically. In D's day the situation was different—you could go and look the matter up in the archives, at least in theory. For us, certainty about the historical trustworthiness of the Old Testament historical narratives has to be grounded on the validation they receive from Christ.

We must, of course, continue to live with the 'two histories', abandoning neither the events as they actually happened nor the Old Testament's picture of them; but we must do so believing that there is in reality but one history, experienced by Israel and described and interpreted in her tradition, both of them under the hand of God who is thus the guarantee of their unity and the grounds of our confidence that the 'credibility gap' between them will be closed in the fullness of time. In the meantime, we whose concern is that theology should be seen to be validated by history, that the world may know that Yahweh is God, must work at the points of tension (to change the metaphor) in the expectation that they may be resolved.