

## PENTATEUCHAL CRITICISM IN 'LA BIBLE DE JERUSALEM'<sup>1</sup>

IN his special introduction<sup>2</sup> Fr de Vaux gives a detailed survey of the three main traditions J E and P in the Book of Genesis. This survey (pp. 25-29) is not a mere copy of what literary critics before him determined, referring to the *documents* J E and P. Apart from the difference of *traditions*, the question-marks and shades of expression ('cuni à la tradition', 'traces dans la tradition') show the author's prudence and personal judgement. The classification of the passages justifies the author's opinion considering J and E as two parallel traditions with a common origin (see especially the history of Joseph). The E-tradition is taken as beginning in chapter xx and indeed the reasons for putting it in chapter xv are weak (p. 81, note a). In footnotes throughout the book the author, according to his principles, tries to indicate the primitive origin of a passage, how and in what main-tradition this primitive tradition was taken up, and explains its meaning in the actual context (e.g., Gen. iv, 1-16; vi, 1-4; ix, 20-27). He shows us how the different traditions, especially J and E, often deal with the same subject (e.g. the same theme in Gen. xii, 10-20 J; xx, 1-17 E; xxvi, 1-14 J; parallel traditions on Isaac and Abraham in xxvi, 15-33 J and xxi, 25-33 E J; the same subject in Gen. i, 1-11, 4a P and Gen. ii, 4b-25 J; in Gen. xv J and Gen. xvii P; we find a different explanation of the dispersion of mankind in P x, 32 and in J xi, 1-9). His principles allow him more scope and so he explains chapter xv as the result of two original independent but coherent narratives (p. 81, note a); he attributes chapter xxvii only to J, admitting a development from a primitive tradition (p. 125, note d). Regarding chapter xxxiv we read 'it is a historical remembrance of an unhappy attempt of certain Hebrew groups to gain ground in the region of Sichem, which took place in the time of the Patriarchs', and he refers to Gen. xlix, 5-7 (p. 154f). Many will accept these two points but one would ask for a more detailed explanation on the unity of this narrative.

A point of general interest is the historical character of Genesis (pp. 33-36). Dealing with chapters i-xi, the author refuses all forms of 'concordisme' with the data of our positive sciences on the same subject. The fundamental truths of our Faith are told in a simple and figurative way. These truths are warranted by the authority of Sacred Scripture. 'But these truths are at the same time facts, and if the truths are sure

<sup>1</sup> 'La Genèse', R. de Vaux, O.P., 1951, pp. 221, and 'Le Lévitique', Abbé H. Cazelles, P.S.S., 1951, pp. 133, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris.

<sup>2</sup> For the general outline of the book and the author's view on the composition of Genesis, see my article 'Moses and the Pentateuch. A New Approach to an Old Problem', in Scripture, July 1952, p. 60.

then the facts are real' (p. 35). In this way the author explains the historical character of the first chapters.<sup>3</sup>

In reference to the remaining part of the book, the history of the Patriarchs, the author warns us that these chapters are not to be judged according to the modern rules of the writing of history. They give us a family-history, told in a popular way. But above all it is a religious history and this for two reasons. The direct influence of God is behind all the important events ('This theological conception is certainly correct, but is not the conception of a modern historian, who searches for secondary causes which direct the concatenation of the facts', p. 33), and all the facts are told with the special purpose of supporting a religious thesis: 'One God, one people, one country' (p. 34). In spite of this difference from our modern methods of writing history, these narratives are really historical, for 'they tell in their own way real facts, give us a faithful image of the origin and migration of Israel's ancestors, inform us of their geographical and ethnical relations, and tell of their social, moral and religious behaviour' (p. 34).

The explanatory notes for doctrinal purpose are also interesting. To give only a few examples: the notes on the first three chapters of Genesis, emphasizing the 'religious and eternal teaching' (p. 39, note a; p. 43, note d). Regarding Gen. xviii, 22-32, a note is given; dealing with 'the enormous problem of all times: have the good to suffer with the wicked and because of them?', a short look at the doctrine of collective and individual responsibility (p. 92, note d). The importance of Gen. xxiii and xxxiii, 18-20 is stressed as a first realization of the promise of the possession of Canaan (p. 108, note a; p. 154, note b). Gen. I, 20 and xlv, 5-8 are indicated as the key-texts to understand the meaning of the history of Joseph (p. 166, note a; p. 219, note a; p. 197, note a). On the famous text: 'Tres vidit et unum adoravit', with reference to chapter xviii, the author informs us that this text is given for the first time by St Hilarius with the meaning: Abraham saw three men, he adored One, recognizing the two others as angels (p. 89, note c).

The translation is good and a special effort is made to preserve characteristics of the Hebrew text (e.g. Gen. xlix, 3f., 19). 'asum (powerful) omitted in verse xviii, 18, is probably a mistake, as the omission of *haqqaton* in xlvi, 19. In xxxvi, 8 'Ainsi Édom s'établit dans la montagne de Séir', M.T. and lxx have Esau instead of Édom. Misprints, I noticed, are: Marc, vii, 10 for Marc x, 4-5 (p. 9); Tradition 'elohiste', xlvii, 1-2, 7-22 for xlvi, 1-2, 7-22 (p. 27). Having read the explanation of Gen. i, 2 as a threefold description of our abstract concept 'nothing',

<sup>3</sup> The redaction of the whole paragraph is not so clear. In the beginning the author certainly writes on the first eleven chapters of the book, but soon we get the impression that he is only dealing with the first three chapters in spite of 'these first chapters', and at the end of the paragraph 'the first chapters'.

the reader is disturbed by footnote c page 60; 'C'est le retour au chaos' and by the remark on page 30, 'Tout a été créé par lui (God), même la matière informe, i 1-2'. In footnote b, p. 42, we are told that 'image' include a physical similarity (cf. v, 3) and ii, 8 is added to explain that Hebrews did not always conceive God as incorporeal. But ii, 8 is a text of J, in which we can understand such a primitive conception, but in P such a conception is difficult to admit. Does it go back to an older tradition and if so, did the P-tradition take this expression as having the same meaning?

Further explanations could be asked of other footnotes, but the edition is not meant to be a complete commentary. Yet it is made in such a way, that it makes us ask for more, and I believe that if Fr de Vaux would publish a full commentary on Genesis, even in these expensive times it would certainly be sold! For the time being this edition will undoubtedly be very helpful in offering us many suggestions.

Passing on to the book of Leviticus, people are apt to close this book as soon as possible. It is nothing more than a collection of laws, and who takes delight in reading a code? Yet Abbé H. Cazelles, P.S.S., with his short introduction of fourteen pages and numerous footnotes (about 400), is able to change the reader's mind. Admitting that the chapters xviii-xx form a kind of moral treatise and that chapter xxvi has the character of a prophetic discourse, he stresses that the whole book, according to its substance, is a real ritual: ritual of the feasts (xxiii), ritual of purification (xiv) and of expiation (xvi), ritual of the installation of priests (viii-ix) and ritual of sacrifices (i-vii). Consequently the book has its interest for the study of the history of religions and it also contains many elements especially necessary for a full understanding of the Christian cult and its symbolism. The author therefore places the different religious usages against their appropriate background. Israel, living in Palestine between the two great civilization centres of Mesopotamia and Egypt, owed to its environment many forms of religious life. They inherited from their ancestors, and they borrowed from the Canaanites and via both from prehistoric times; they borrowed from Egyptians and Babylonians and via the latter from the old Sumerians. But having borrowed, they purified the old usages and made them fit to serve in the practice of the religion they had received through Moses. Throughout the book the author tries to indicate the origin of these usages and in the introduction he deals especially with the sacrifices (e.g., p. 23, note e; p. 37, note c; p. 38, note b). Passages of interest for a proper understanding of our liturgy are also indicated. After the analysis of the sacrifices the author applies the different aspects of the levitical sacrifice to the one of the New Testament (pp. 11-14). By this application Abbé Cazelles gives us a good example of biblical theology.

Dealing with the literary composition of the book and the dates

of the different parts, the author recognizes the difficulties of these questions, but at the same time he gives a more or less definite answer. The 'Code of Holiness' is certainly the oldest part and dates from the last phase of the monarchy. It is especially in this part that we find the Mosaic character. Jahve is the Holy-One of Israel. He is the only master of the Israelites and of their country. It was He who brought them out of the land of Egypt. The influence of old Mosaic prescriptions and of the Decalogue can be noticed (v, 20-26, p. 37, note a and xix, 18).

The translation is agreeable to read. One would ask for an explanation of the word 'tête' in v, 7 and xii, 8, which is not in the M.T. The translation of XI, 45 'monter *au pays d'Égypte*' can hardly be justified. There are some misprints among the references. Noteworthy is the translation of Lev. xviii, 21 'faire passer en *molek*' (p. 89, note b). The author seems to be correct in stating that in this verse the rite probably applies to Jahve.

Other points could be brought forward, but our space is limited. The edition shows the author's acquaintance with the matter, and his familiarity with the texts of the Old Testament. May his publication be a stimulus to increase interest in the Old Testament, the knowledge of which is necessary for a full understanding of the New.

W. M. VALK, S.C.J.

*St Joseph's College, Malpas (Cheshire).*

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

*Is there any reference in the Old Testament to the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, or was Christ the first to reveal to us the truth of God being Three-in-One?*

There is no clear reference in the Old Testament to this doctrine. Some have seen in the use of the plural in Genesis i, 26 'Let us make man to our image and likeness' a reference to the plurality of persons in God. Others have suggested that the threefold repetition of 'Holy' in Isaiah vi, 3 indicates the Three Persons in God. A more fruitful line of investigation is to examine the passages suggesting the divinity of the Messiah and those which speak of the Wisdom and Spirit of God. There are of course passages in the Old Testament which indicate in a reasonably clear manner that the Messiah to come will be divine. Thus for example, Psalm 109 (110) 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand till I make thy enemies thy footstool'. Jesus sought to show from this text that He was more than human, when He said to the Jews 'If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?' (Matt. xxii, 45). One may quote also Isaiah ix, 6 where the Child to be born is named