

von Rad of the University of Heidelberg. Developing his own unique approach to the formation of the Hexateuch and the historical books of the Old Testament, von Rad wrote a major two volume theology of the Old Testament¹⁶ and a number of commentaries including one on Genesis¹⁷ and one on Deuteronomy. ¹⁸ His work is still highly regarded, and he would certainly have to be considered one of the most influential Old Testament scholars of the 20th century.

The details of his approach to divine revelation and history would take far too long to review in this article. But the thing that von Rad did which is of particular significance for our own discussion was to give the divided field of knowledge already discernible in Gunkel's thought much greater visibility and clarity. Von Rad distinguished between two sorts of history of Israel. For one form he uses the German term *Historie* which has reference to modern scientific historiography and deals with "history" in the sense of what actually occurred. But according to von Rad this "Historie" can no longer be established from the biblical source materials. The biblical narratives in his view do not give us *Historie* but rather they give us *Heilsgeschichte* (his second term) which is a history that is the construct and expression of Israel's faith. The *Heilsgeschichte* is, to use his own terminology, "confessional history." It is a history in which Israel expresses something of how she understood her own relationship with God. For von Rad the history of Israel in the sense of what happened, and the history of Israel as formed by Israel's faith, are two very different matters. Von Rad is concerned only with the latter. He says:

These two pictures of Israel's history lie before us -- that of modern critical scholarship and that which the faith of Israel constructed (i.e. the Old Testament)¹⁹ -- and for the present we must reconcile ourselves to both of them ... The other activity is *confessional* and personally involved in the events to the point of fervor The fact that these two views of Israel's history are so divergent is one of the most serious burdens imposed today upon biblical scholarship.²⁰

Von Rad really has no solution for this problem. He opts, however, to utilize the *Heilsgeschichte* or "confessional history" for his own theological reflection rather than the *Historie*, i.e., what actually happened.

The radical dualism in von Rad's system is, however, a stumbling block not only for those who take the historical trustworthiness of the Old Testament seriously, but even for many who have accepted the historical-critical method. Franz Hesse, himself an advocate of the historical-critical method, says in criticism of von Rad, our faith lives from what happened in Old Testament times, and not from that which is confessed to have happened. Our faith needs to rest upon "that which has actually happened and not that which is confessed to have happened, but about which we have to admit that it did not happen in that way."²¹ Certainly Hesse is correct in insisting that faith must rest on what has happened -- but as an advocate of the historical-critical method he too is forced (by means of his method) to remove supernaturalism from the pages of the historical narratives of the Old Testament. His view is that the only history which has theological relevance is the history reconstructed by the historical-critical