

the present narratives might suggest, and 'the traditions undoubtedly underwent a process of selection, refraction, and normalization'.

Since it is impossible by any objective means to get within the details of the traditions, 'we would do well to confine ourselves to a method as rigidly objective as possible. The only safe and proper course lies in a balanced examination of the traditions against the background of the world of the day and, in the light of that, making such positive statements as the evidence allows. Hypothetical reconstructions, plausible though these may be are to be eschewed. Much must remain obscure. But enough can be said to make it certain that the patriarchal traditions are firmly anchored in history.'

Bright then surveys the evidence that the stories fit 'unquestionably and authentically in the milieu of the second millennium, specifically in that of the centuries sketched in the preceding chapter, and not in that of any later period. This may be registered as a historical fact'. He first surveys the early Hebrew onomasticon in relation to that of the 'Amorites' in the Middle Bronze Age as distinct from the greatly mixed situation in Palestine, beginning in the Late Bronze Age. He then deals with patriarchal customs, mode of life, date, traditional relation to northern Mesopotamia, to the Aramaeans, to the Khapiru, etc. He concludes that the patriarchs were historical figures, a part of that migration of semi-nomadic clans which brought a new population to Palestine in the early centuries of the second millennium. 'These were clans such as we read about in the Execration texts and elsewhere. Many of them soon settled where they could find land, and organized themselves into city-states with a feudal pattern . . . No doubt all of them had traditions of migration, most of which were in the course of time forgotten. Since many of these peoples were ultimately to contribute to the bloodstream of Israel, we are warned that Israel's origins were actually exceedingly complex. Nevertheless, that they ultimately stemmed from 'the plain of Aram' in Mesopotamia cannot be gainsaid. It is not unlikely also that as early as the Hyksos period some of their number (e.g.,

Joseph) found their way to Egypt, to be followed subsequently, under pressure of hard times, by others.

As for patriarchal religion, Bright continues, in spite of the difficulties of saying anything about it, it surely is now quite wrong to dismiss the Biblical evidence as simply anachronistic. It is clearly of a type at home in its world; a clan religion in which the clan was considered the family of a patron deity, with a simple cultus which, however, was never completely localized but always the cult of the clan wherever it was. And the promise and covenant embedded within it became the means whereby Yahwism was later to interpret God's gift of the land as fulfilment. In spite of the great gaps in our knowledge, the patriarchal era stands in the truest sense at the beginning of Israel's history and faith. Not only did certain dominant components of Israel move into Palestine at this time, but 'their peculiar beliefs helped to shape the faith of Israel as it later was to be. With them, too, there began that restless search for the fulfilment of promise which, though fulfilled in the giving of land and seed, could never be satisfied with that gift; but, like a pointing finger through all the Old Testament, must guide to a city "whose builder and maker is God" (Heb II¹⁶).'

The amount of space which Bright accords the patriarchal narratives is, of course, more extensive than that of Noth. And in the brief space here available I have not done full justice to the position of either scholar. Perhaps the purpose of this article has been fulfilled, however, if some of the basic issues confronting the Biblical historian to-day have been assessed. It should be noted, however, that for the Biblical teacher, at least, the disagreements noted between the form-critic, on the one hand, and the historian who would employ archaeology to its full extent while remaining fundamentally suspicious of the use of Form Criticism as the sole basis for historical judgments—this is not a purely academic matter. Before one can teach a course in the Old Testament, one can teach a course in the Old Testament, one can expound a text from the early epic, he must have given some thought to this matter and have decided where he will take his stand.