

The Bible in Modern Scholarship, edited by J. Philip Hyatt (Abingdon Press: Nashville) 1965

Bruce Vawter, C.M. Response to Arvid S. Kapelrud's "The Role of the Cult in Old Israel"

p. 57 It is, perhaps, always somewhat premature to speak of consensus in a science as vigorous and as questing as that of biblical interpretation. We know too well how many of the assured positions of the past century have been subjected to a complete reexamination in our own. However, we also know how much that is lasting and unassailable has been bequeathed us by the literary and historical criticism of the nineteenth century. Particular conclusions have altered, only to reveal their underlying principles as more firmly established.

p. 58 As they stand in the Bible, the patriarchal legends have been woven from the threads of many etiologies, etymological, geographic, and ethnic as well as the cultic, so that it is difficult if not impossible to disentangle them satisfactorily.

p. 59 It must be admitted that Noth's reconstruction of the patriarchal history makes sense. That is to say, it offers an hypothesis that reasonably accounts for the phenomena. Things very well could have happened this way. However, form critical hypotheses must be tested by some standard other than their intrinsic reasonableness if they are to avoid the easy pitfall of circular arguments. It would not be altogether unreasonable to assume that the entire Hexateuchal story of Moses and Joshua (that is to say, *Ἰησοῦς*) is an etiological invention to explain John 1.17 and the rest of the Moses-Jesus typology of the NT, did we not know better. John Bright has offered an illuminating series of instances in American history where etiologies could be just as reasonably assumed, and just as incorrectly. This sort of thing does not, of course, prove that Noth and Ait were wrong, but it does put us on our guard against too easily acceding to an hypothesis merely because it is plausible.

p.60

Footnote 10. Early Israel in Recent History Writing (Naperville, Illinois: Allenson, 1956), pp.94-110.