CATHOLIC PENTATEUCHAL STUDIES (1906-56)*

It was at a very indecisive stage of Catholic Pentateuchal studies that the Pontifical Commission for Biblical Studies issued a Decree on the authenticity of the Pentateuch in 1906. This decree was fundamentally a disciplinary measure, and in no way did it solve the question; its gist was that the documentary theory as a whole, as proposed and defended by the independent critics, was not yet apodictically proved as to command unreserved assent. Neither did the decree condemn those Catholics who adopted critical methods as such in their Biblical studies; on the contrary the Commission, in admitting the possibility of later additions and even of scribes in collaboration with Moses, encouraged such lines of investigation. All Catholic critics as distinguished from traditionalists admitted the Mosaic origin of the Pt but not in the strict sense of the term. Notwithstanding all this the Decree, promulgated in the height of the Modernist crisis, was not fully understood. Non-Catholics launched a sarcastic campaign against it, conservatives hailed it as their Magna Charta and Catholic critics practically desisted from their investigations. It happened then that Pt criticism was slowed down, so much so, that Fernandez himself admits that the literary problem of the Pt has been little studied by Catholics. Fortunately the Pt has again drawn the attention of the Catholic scholars, who are increasing in number.

Like their predecessors the Catholic writers of this period fall into two classes: the conservatives and the critics.

Among the conservatives are included: MANGENOT (1907), HETZENAUER (1901), ALLGEIER (1911), MURILLO (1919), FERNANDEZ (1920), SANDA (1924), MERK-CORNELY (1928), BEA (1935), and H. POPE (1938). They do not admit authenticity in its strictest sense. They accept the possibility of additional matter and glosses and documents in Genesis. The distinction of later material from the earlier one has not been forthcoming in a way as to satisfy the enquirer. Mangenot explains the edges in the Pt by having Moses working in collaboration with others. So also

4 E. Mangenot, 'Ce recour à des sources antécédentes, cet emploi de main
Hetzenauer\(^5\), whilst Allgeier denies the duplicates\(^6\), Murillo defends the traditional view to the minutest apex, without proposing any one of his own\(^7\). Fernández attacks Touzard but he appeals for more study of the Pt, within Catholic circles. The position of this school, if it may be called so, is adequately summarized by Pope in these words: 'There is evidence for the documentary theory. The only question is whether that evidence affords a sufficiently broad basis for the huge superstructure now erected upon it. That the Pt is a compilation no student would deny. But that we have in the Graf-Wellhausen theory the clue to its compilation, that we can by its means unravel the various threads woven into its compilation, is quite another proposition. That documents lie behind the Pt may be a fact; but attempts at dissecting them out can never be more than hypothetical. Precisely here lies our quarrel with the critics. For however much they depreciate such a charge, they persist in regarding their analysis as a demonstrated fact at any rate in the use they make of it\(^8\).

There are other Catholic scholars, the Critical wing so to say, who, rejecting partially or wholly the dating of Wellhausen, admit with certain modifications more or less radical the rest of their theories. They are mostly expansionists. They use to its fullest extent the liberty granted by the decree in attempting to frame a theory as to meet all the points of the problem. Lagrange thus comments on the decree: 'Nous croyons cependant qu'on peut conclure que la Commission tient moins à l'authenticité littérale de Moïse qu'à une authenticité substantielle. De plus, cette authenticité, dans les cas des additions faites après sa morte, serait une authenticité resultant du même esprit\(^9\). On this basis they framed various theories to solve the problem.

Brucker (1907) explained the origin of the Pt on this principle: "Il nous est parfaitement loisible de penser que l'auteur du Pt a procédé par voie de composition successive, en produisant séparément plusieurs écrite ayant chacun son object et son unité propres, dans les goutes de ceux que les critiques reconnaître\(^10\). Moses wrote the four documents étrangères expliquent non seulement les differences de style et de rédaction des parties du Pt, mais encore des repetitions et certaines diversités de fond,' L'Authenticité Mosaïque du Pentateuque (Paris) 1907, 327.

\(^5\) M. Hetzenauer, l.c. 54.
\(^7\) L. Murillo, El Génesis precedido de una introduction al Pentateuco, Rome 1914.
\(^6\) A. Allgeier, Uber Doppelberichte in der Genesis, Freiburg 1911, 13.
\(^9\) RB (1938) 164.
extant in the Pt separately: first P for apparently official use, then J and E for popular edification in support of their religious sentiments. These last two writings were later fused in one JE. When Israel’s wanderings in the desert were nearing their end Moses concentrated all the lessons of history and all the precepts in the Dt. It may at least be admitted that these mutually independent writings were transmitted separately. Later on they were combined into one. Various changes were introduced into the text through the daily use by the priests who were bent on accepting in it the language spoken at their particular age. Jewish scrupulosity in O.T. times was not so great as to withstand such textual changes. In spite of the redactional elements the substantiality of Mosaic authorship is not impaired.

Brücker then accepted the documentary theory as traced by the critics but rejected their datings. In other words he reconciled the existence of these documents with Mosaic authorship as defined by the Biblical Commission. His solution is plausible but very vulnerable especially with respect to E and J; the liveliness of the latter in contrast to the monotony of the former does not stand so easily with common origin, under identical or similar circumstances, as postulated by Brücker.

Schulz (1908) befriended duplicates. He reconciled the possibility of sources with inspiration and admitted that Moses in fact used documents.

Hoberg (1908) upholds the Mosaic authorship in a wider sense. Moses drew upon sources actually untraceable in the compilation of Gn. The rest of the Pt was expanded through the addition of non-Mosaic matter. 'The Pt, writes Hoberg, is a result of a religious development in the people of the promise from Moses down to the time of the Babylonian exile on the basis laid down by Moses, which in space and significance forms the greatest part of the O.T. law-book'. It resembles the Breviary and the Missal which despite the many additions still bear the name of Pius V.

Touzard (1919) went further in his views; he restricted so much the literary activity of Moses that the Holy Office declared that his explanation tuto tradit non potest. J and E were written at the time of Moses and joined into JE in the ninth or eighth century B.C. The historical sections of the Pt betray the signs of a third document going back to Moses to which various sections were added by an inspired writer. Moses

---

11 A. Schulz, 'Doppelberichte im Pentateuch', series Biblische Studien xiii, 1908.
12 G. Hoberg, Die Genesis, Freiburg I, B2 1908, xii-xiv.
wrote the Decalogue except for its amplifications in Exodus and Deuteronomy, the book of the Covenant (Ex 20, 22-23, 33), the renewal of the Covenant (Ex 34, 11-26) and the Priestly Code excepting additional matter of exilic or post-exilic times. There is a Mosaic nucleus in the Dt relating the renewal of the covenant and the reinculcation of the Law in the plains of Moab; the rest consists of post-Mosaic accretions of the times between Samuel and Josiah. This is a sort of an expansionist-documentary theory.

NIKEL (1924) framed a form of documentary theory. Moses left behind him a nucleus of legislative and historical writings; this his successors took up and worked out into our actual Pt. Much material had been added by way of geography, history, archaeology and new enactments. There is a lot of historical accretions drawn out from well-founded traditions, oral or even written sources dating from Mosaic times. The law was based on the principles of Mosaic precepts.

HEINISCH (1930) construed again a fragmentary hypothesis: He combined into one documentary theory the scribes' interference and the ever present enlargements. Moses utilized sources in certain sections of Gn and scribes in the other books. It is practically impossible to pick up what he himself had actually written, except for some fundamental laws and certain historical sections of special import. He rejects the opinion that all the history from Adam down to the wanderings in the desert was all written at a time and not gradually through the accessions of heterogeneous records from time to time. According to Heinisch the Pt is an inexplicable labyrinth; but we have to remark that the unity of the whole and of Gn in particular on which Heinisch worked does not lend support to this.

H. JUNKER (1933) insists on the evolutionary character of the Law. Israel could have never lived with a static written law. Her law was in constant contact with prophetism, which exerted its own influence and was ever being adapted to new conditions throughout the centuries. Since however this law kept on evolving itself on the same fundamental principles on which it was based by Moses in its inception, it kept the name of its first legislator.

G. RICCIOTTI holds that there are two important stages in the history

---

15 P. Heinisch, Das Buch Genesis, Bonn 1930, 43.
16 H. Junker, Das Buch Deuteronomium, Bonn 1933, 14-16; Genesis (Echter Bibel), Bonn 1952.
of the Pt. The legislation of D is substantially Mosaic and it was codified by the men of Ezechias after the fall of Samaria as a means to meet the disasters which had befallen the nation. During Manasseh’s reign it fell into oblivion to be recovered and enforced again by Josiah (621). During the exile the scribes took upon themselves the arduous task of collecting and putting in order all the historical and juridical material handed down from the past orally or in a written form. To the traditional stories of the Patriarchs they attached later narratives forming thus a corpus historicum; the juridical collection formed the corpus juridicum. These two collections combined together, gave the Israelites in a single collection and in an orderly manner all the patrimony, historical and legal, of the past. Ricciotti, therefore, defending the antiquity of the sources, admits later elaborations of the same until the actual Pt came into being in Exilic times.

W. STÖDERL admits and takes for granted the literary conclusions generally held by critics. He dissociates himself, however, from their historical conclusions. The fundamental principles of the several documents go back to the times of Moses; these original documents went on evolving themselves in line with these principles so that they may rightly claim Mosaic authenticity.

A. ALLGEIER believes that the Pentateuch reflects the religious development of Israel since the days of Moses till post-exilic times.

A. VACCARI (1937) outlined a more far-reaching solution in a conference in the presence of his Holiness, which he later expanded. He marked out the weakness of the critics’ analysis of the Pt into four documents JEDP and struck at their arbitrary dating.

Vaccari stated that in the Bible there is a kind of literary dualism parallel to the political dualism of Jewish history and perhaps connected with it. In the Psalter two series of David’s psalms are extant, two collections of Solomon’s reached us in the Prov., and a double version, one in Greek and one in Hebrew of Jer. exists. A parallel phenomenon may have happened in the case of Pt. This theory is in some way related...
to that formulated by Hummelauer in 1901.

This explanation is radical in attributing stylistic differences in certain sections of Pt to its peculiar transmissions. It is plausible with respect to the narrative parts; but what of the legislative parts? Lagrange objects to the view that a duality of versions of the work is a constant law of text-transmission and hence that it may explain the internal inconsistencies in the Pt; a redactor aiming at recovering the original text does not fuse into one two lines of tradition; few if any critics admit only two sources; it is unlikely that a single work developed itself into two apparently distinct writings and, finally, while multiplicity of sources is the point of departure for the Diatessaron with which Vaccari compares the history of the Pt, in our case unity of sources would have had resolved itself into multiplicity. Lagrange rejects this theory as purely hypothetical and Vincent retains that it creates more difficulties than it solves.

LAGRANGE proposed a new solution which is nothing else but the classical documentary theory without its dates. He applied his principles to Genesis. He starts to define the limits within which the Catholic critic is free to move. On the one hand there is the substantial authenticity defended by the Commission, on the other there is the peculiar historiography of the Easterners as Guidi has shown. Their historians used to join together documents at times contradictory in spirit to one another. It is for the exegete then to identify each of these ingredients. Lagrange insists that he as far back as forty years before, had believed the documentary theory as framed by Wellhausen but for its system of dating as substantially proved. He has no reason whatever to retract that view. He tries to reconcile the sources hypothesis with tradition and is even ready to relegate P to post-exilic times. E is of a pre-Mosaic origin; J was written by Moses himself. Hence their chronological order is EJP.

Lagrange takes the Revelation of God's name YAHWEH in Ex 2,13-15 and 6,2 as the point of departure. Since a J narrative before this
Revelation is inadmissible, we have here a chronological datum of great importance and a strong argument for the separation of E from J. Lagrange at this point accentuates P’s insistence on the transcendency of God as master of all peoples. Immediately after this Revelation it was but natural that history would be written under the patronage of Yahweh. Moses utilized E, either he himself or one of his co-workers inspired by him. If Moses is the author of J and E of which P is only a resume, Moses is indeed the author of Gn, making allowance for additions here and there which by no means impair their historical value. The enquiry is not extended to the whole Pt, but Lagrange does not leave it obscure that P is post-exilic in date.

Lagrange rejects the unity of E and J taken together because this would require a change in the history of the religious development; in other words history itself as it is expounded in the Scriptures goes against it. The anthropomorphism of J does not necessarily argue its antiquity. It might be the result of two simultaneous tendencies within Israel itself; the fact is not improbable when one considers the unabating battle that the leaders of Israel had to fight against the worship of alien gods throughout her history. E, which paints a golden past in contrast with the gloomy one of J, cannot be attributed to the same writer. The familiarity between God and man so prominent in J is explained by Israel’s consideration of God as their peace-time friend and their war-time chief; E on the other hand insists on the universality of God. Neither was it likely for Moses to change the EL of the earlier document into Yahweh. It would be exactly against his purpose and too mechanical a process. In accepting E and joining it with J, Moses proved to the Hebrews that the God who befriended their forefathers in the past was then leading them into the rich land of Canaan. But is it likely that once E was extant Moses would have written a second account not divergent in substance from the first, and then amputate it to make place for E? It is much more easy to understand how Moses compiled Gn if J and E were existing separately. ‘Mais, les deux ouvrages existant, on comprend

28 ‘Au moment où la promesse faite à Abraham allait être remplie par l’entrée en Canaan Moïse faisait entrevoir pour Israël un rôle plus glorieux qui s’étendrait à toutes les nations. Lui, le grand législateur, aurait fixé ainsi les deux pôles de l’existence d’Israël, la Loi et le Messianisme. Il est le seul, connu de nous auquel on puisse attribuer cette vue profonde dans le dessein de Dieu. Et si par impossible, il n’a pas rédigé ou même approuvé E et J, il aurait encore sûrement pose les deux fondements de la foi, dont le souvenir pleasant recueilli aurait abouti à la redaction du Pt. Mais nous ne voyons pas d’obstacle au fait que Moïse ait été vraiment de son vivant l’instigateur et ainsi l’auteur des récits de la Génèse, qu’il aurait ensuite approuvés.’ Ibid, 175.
29 Ibid., 179.
tres bien que Moïse se soit fait l’arbitre entre eux en les fondant dans une même tout, ce qui réalisait au mieux son but de changer le nom de Dieu pour l’usage national, sans abolir tout à fait, et de manière à rendre son unité très sensible: une seule foi dans le passé, une même espérance pour l’avenir.

In 1943 five years after these clear statements of Fr Lagrange Pope Pius XII issued an Encyclical Letter De Sacrorum Bibliorum Studiis Provehendis, in which he summed up the progress realized in the fifty years since the publication of the Encyclical Letter Providentissimus Deus in 1893 by Pope Leo XIII, and he laid down principles of fundamental importance for future biblical studies. This pontifical document is characterized by a tone of satisfaction with what had been done and of optimism for the future. It is remarkable for its confidence in modern methods and for the liberty conceded to the Catholic exegete; indeed it opened the door for more intensive studies in all branches of Biblical learning.

The Pope did not deal with any question in particular except perhaps for the authenticity of the Vulgate; still less did he deal with the Pentateuchal question. In his statements however we find much that concerns us. Without in any way condemning literary criticism as such, he insists on the importance of studying well the structure of the several books against the background of the ancient oriental method of writing and ways of expression. Antiquorum denique modus loquendi narrandi scribendi et artibus multa dissolvi poterunt quae contra Divinarum Litterarum veritatem fidemque historicam opponuntur; neque minus apte eiusmodi studium ad Sacri Auctoris mentem plenius


illustriusque perspiciendam conducet.

No one would fail to see how Pentateuchal literary criticism which deals with the origin of the Mosaic work enters into this programme of studies proposed by the Supreme Pontiff. He himself states that historical writing among the Orientals was not based on the same principles and method of the Greeks or Romans, or of modern historiography. Therefore it is legitimate to enquire into the constitution of the Pt to see how it came into being, and by doing so one may apply certain principles and methods which are not applicable to European narrative. This would in no way detract from the authority of the Sacred books, provided that it does not lead to conclusions against the sanctity and infallibility of God (p. 315). The author of the Pt wrote in the East making use of ordinary methods used by his contemporaries.

All this has been confirmed five years later when the Pont. Bibl. Commission addressed a letter to Cardinal Suhard of Paris in 1948 under the heading *De tempore Documentorum Pentateuchi et de Genere Literario undecim priorum capitum Genesios*. The Commission unequivocally stated that the Church allows full liberty to her exegetes within the limit of traditional teaching (p. 45) and that the pontifical decrees of the years 1905, 1906, 1909 relating to Pentateuchal literary and historical problems do not preclude or hinder further research (p. 46). Having made these general remarks the Commission tackles our problem directly, unequivocally stating that no one to-day dares to deny the existence of documents in the Pt or the progressive growth of the Mosaic legislation: *Il n'est plus personne aujourd'hui qui mette en doute l'existence de ces sources et n'admette accroissement progressive des lois mosaiques du aux conditions sociales et religieuses de temps posterieures, progression qui se manifeste aussi dans les recits historiques. (p. 46).* Not only the possibility of documents is here admitted but also the fact itself. There is no agreement however within the critics' circles as to the nature, number, denomination and date of these documents or sources. Various methods have been applied and experimented upon to find a way out of this confusion. P. Vosté concludes this first part of his letter with an earnest appeal to Catholic exegetes to tackle these problems with all seriousness: *C'est pourquoi nous invitons les savants catholiques à etudier ces problemes sans parti - pris, à la lumiere d'une saine critique et des resultats des autres science interesses dans ces matieres et une telle etude etablira sans doute la grande part et la profonde influence de Moïse comme auteur et comme legislateur.*

---

One cannot pass unnoticed the intimate connexion between the Encyclical and this letter. The former laid down the principles on which Biblical studies should be based; the latter applied them in particular to the literary criticism of the Pt and the exegesis of the first eleven chapters of Genesis, which do not concern us here. No less than the Encyclical, the letter is inspired by a tone of optimism and confidence for the future. Commenting on this letter Voste, under whose signature it has been issued, maintains that Catholics are free to hold that there are documents in the Pt, provided that they reject the low datings of the Wellhausen school and others, and that they would keep to the substantial Mosaic authenticity. Bea explaining the same letter to the readers of Civiltà Cattolica insists on the great part played by Moses in the origine of the Pt; this however does not exclude his use of documents nor the usual redactional procedures. Later legislation was based on much older Mosaic laws; therefore neither these escape from Mosaic influence.

One may conclude, after thorough perusal of these Pontifical documents, that Ecclesiastical authorities, far from condemning critical studies as such, encourage Catholic scholars to take them up in all earnestness. It is not only an advice in general but it has a special reference to the Pt problem.

In the revised edition of the Höpfl manual in 1946 the reviser holds that Moses wrote the greater part (permagnam partem) of the Pt in the legislative sections, and that some slight additions and modifications had been introduced to meet new situations. The Pt may have been written from sources, oral or written, combined into one whole, either by Moses himself or by some other writer later than Moses; in the latter case the sources go back to Moses in their greater part. It is impossible however to go beyond a general analysis to the single words.

A. Clamer, upholding Mosaic authorship of these books and the whole Pt in the terms of the Biblical Commission, admits the insertion of new laws and the adaptation of the older ones to the new conditions. He follows the steps of modern Catholic interpreters such as Goettsberger, Heinisch, Junker without presenting any theory of his own.

H. Cazelles defends the Mosaic authorship of the Covenant Code.

Th. C. Vriezen states that the JEDP theory is no more than a working

---

33 P. Höpfl, Introducitio Specialis in Vetus Testamentum, Rône 1946, 110.
36 Th. C. Vriezen, ‘Oudisraelitische Geschiften’, in Miscellanea XVIII a XXIII
hypothesis. The formation of the Biblical literature was not simply due
to a mechanic combination of written documents but the result of a slow
evolution in which oral tradition, successive redactors, amplifications
and additions played their own special part.

J. Renie\(^\text{37}\) admits legislative evolution and also that the narrative in
the Pt is historical in its main outlines but not necessarily in all its
details.

De Vaux\(^\text{38}\) himself outlines his own theory in one of his latest publi-
cations. The Pentateuch is the resultant of a combination of no less
than four lines of traditions, and not written documents, which are iden-
tifiable by the recurring fixed 'constants'. The several traditions cor-
respond to JEDP because the same criteria are used for their separa-
tion, but one should not speak of documents but of a Jahwistic or Elo-
histic or Priestly tradition. For the dating of the several traditions one
should speak of epochs. Deuteronomy belonging to Josiah's reign, but
of much older origin, affords us a fixed point on which to build the chro-
nological order of the four traditions. Jahwistic and Elohistic traditions
are much older. The priestly tradition is exilic. The Jahwistic is of
Judean while the Elohistic if of northern origin. The Deuteronomistic code
neglects the Northern atmosphere, and the priestly tradition belongs to
the Jerusalem priesthood. These traditions started in the various shrines
where the events of olden days were recited from time to time; laws
were promulgated to meet recurring needs. All these traditions, which
betray an ancient common background go back to Mosaic times; indeed
ancient traditions of ancient peoples, neighbours of Israel, such as the
Ugaritic texts, show that even before Moses literary activity far from
being something rare, was much valued and resorted to keep alive the
various traditional beliefs and culture of the nation. In the Pentateuch
we have the history of the promise and its partial fulfilment on which
were based all the hopes of Israel.

Chaine\(^\text{39}\) upholds the existence of documents identical with those of
Wellhausen. He goes so far as to distinguish them in the text itself. He
rejects the later datings of the independent critics without however go-
ing back to the Mosaic age, in all cases following Lagrange: P is not
Mosaic; J and E would suffice by themselves to save Mosaic authenticity

(Analecta Lovaniensa Biblica et Orientalia II, 8) ed. by J. Coppens, Gembloux,
Duculot 1948.


and even if one would not assign J and E to Moses he would have to admit that they are based on Mosaic material, because J betrays the inclusion of much earlier narratives. P, written after D, represents the final development of Hebrew legislation; P idealized the past in its narrative sections which form a literary genus having nothing to do with modern historiography just as Ezechiel idealized the future when he depicted the restoration to be effected after the exile. Besides these three main strands, JEP, there are other fragmentary sources such as ch. 14 as the ancient names clearly indicate, the list of the Edomite Kings 36, 31-39, Jacob's poem 49, belonging to the times of the Judges and introduced in Gn by the redactor of JEP.

The history of Genesis may be reconstructed thus; JE were first dovetailed together by a redactor by a process of compilation inserting redactional elements to harmonize the narratives. A later redactor taking P for his framework combined JE with P.

Criticising its lack of emphasis on the literary beauty of the Book and its doctrine, De Vaux hails the work as a step forward in literary criticism within Catholic circles. The above survey leads to this conclusion: Catholic works on this problem are relatively small in number, and even these are divided into two main classes; those tending to defend strict Mosaic authorship without providing reasonable explanation of the inherent difficulties in the Pts; and the others, taking into full account the arguments of the independent critics and realizing that somehow or other the objections raised against the authority of the Holy Scriptures must be met, propose new methods of approach. In these works the substantial Mosaic authenticity of the work and posterior redactions are admitted. Can one say, however, that so far an adequate solution of the whole problem has been framed? Brucker, Hummelauer, Touzard and Heinisch defend expansionism, which, we believe, is in contrast to the unity of purpose of the whole Pentateuch and of Genesis in particular. Lagrange and Vaccari are more radical, but they stopped with outlining fundamental principles, without applying them in detail; Chaine went further by applying the source theory to the whole of Genesis as also did De Vaux and the other translators of the Jerusalem Bible. Catholics to-day are taking a more positive approach to solve this highly complicated and important problem.

C. Sant

40 RB 56 (1949 455 f.)