

Retrieving the Tradition:

Excerpts from Past Issues of *Melita Theologica*

Peter Paul Saydon, “Recent Developments in Old Testament Literary Criticism,”

Melita Theologica 2/2 (1949-50): 79-96.

Daniel criticism during recent years has gradually become more conscious of the literary problems of this prophetic book, more progressive in its tendency and more uniform in its conclusions. An echo of the traditional opinion attributing the whole book to the prophet of the 6th century B.C., still rings in Father A. Vitti’s paper *Il libro di Daniele nella recente critica*.¹ But since the beginning of this century opposition to strict Danielic authorship has been growing increasingly stronger. These points seem to have been definitely established; (i) the book contains at least a Danielic nucleus including the Visions chapters; (ii) the book received its actual form during the Greek domination, that is not later than the year 300 B.C., or perhaps, during the Maccabean age; (iii) in the hypothesis of a Greek origin interpolations from the Maccabean age are admitted.

The latest commentaries on the book of Daniel, though representing different points of view, embody the main results of recent criticism. J. Linder S.J. (*Commentarius in librum Daniel*, 1939, which is a revised and modernized edition of Knabenbauer’s commentary in the series *Cursus Scripturae Sacrae*) explains the origin and composition of Daniel in this way: 1. Daniel himself wrote the Visions chapters; 2. The stories chapters were written either by Daniel

¹ (1) *Atti della Settimana Biblica*, 1931, 76-91.

himself or by a contemporary writer and later translated into Aramaic; 3. The book received its final form about the year 300 B.C. L. Dennefeld (*La Sainte Bible*, Tome VII, 1947) after referring to the opinions of recent critics concludes: "As regards the origin of the book of Daniel it is better that one contents oneself with general conclusions, namely, that it presents an apocalyptic character, that it received its definite form at the age of the Maccabees, but that its contents are derived from a tradition that goes back to the times of the exile" (p.638). Giov. Rinaldi (*La Sacra Bibbia, Daniele*, 1947) brings the final redaction of the book down to the year 300 B.C. without excluding, however, later retouches and amplifications made during the Maccabean age. Mention must also be made of the opinion of Dom A. Miller and A Metzinger who in the 5th edition of Höpfl Introduction (1946) describe the book of Daniel as the work of unknown author writing not later than the year 300 B.C. and making use of older material.

Another important feature of modern Daniel studies is a fuller appreciation of the historical background of its prophecies. While the messianic character of the prophecies is strictly maintained, the historical outlook of the writer is fixed within the limits of the Maccabean age. Hence, the identification of the fourth kingdom with the Roman Empire is being gradually abandoned, the anointed prince in the prophecy of the Seventy weeks is Cyrus, not the Messiah, and the Anointed One in the same prophecy is the high priest Onias. Naturally, the conservative school has a more uncompromising attitude in its messianic interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel.

The brief survey of the results of literary criticism in its application to the Old Testament studies, far from falling into a stagnant, unscientific, uncritical conservatism, are slowly, but steadily, marching forward under the unerring guidance of the Church and keeping up with the progress of profane sciences. Though Catholic research has been less extensive and less varied than non-Catholic research, its results are unquestionably more sound and less conflicting. Looking back upon the last decade we notice that Pentateuchal criticism has now been placed on a sound and a broader basis. The problem is no longer: Whether Moses has written the Pentateuch and what really belongs to him and what to later editors. Criticism of the historical books has received a powerful impulse from the Encyclical *Divino afflante*, and further developments are expected. As regards the Psalms interpreters are evermore realizing the necessity of determining not only the historical but also the psychological and religious background for a full comprehension of the sense intended by the inspired poets. Isaias is still a thorn in the eyes of critics. While it is generally agreed that the second part of his book in its actual form can hardly be referred to him, no satisfactory theory has

an yet been proposed that would explain how the work of an unknown prophet came to be regarded as the work of the great prophet of the 8th century. Daniel is no longer a mysterious prophet cut off from his contemporaries, predicting only a gloomy future to far distant generations and utterly unconcerned with his fellow-exiles. His book is a message to a living generation, and it is in this light that it must be read and interpreted.

Much has been done in the field of literary criticism, but more remains to be done. There still remain many problems the solution of which we, perhaps, shall never see in our lifetime. "But, to conclude with Pope Pius XII' warning, this state of things must in no wise daunt the Catholic interpreter; prompted by a practical and ardent love of his science, the sincerely devoted to Holy Mother Church, he must grapple perseveringly with the problems so far unsolved, not only to repel the attacks of opponents, but also in the effort to find an explanation which will be faithfully consonant with the teaching of the Church, particularly with the traditional doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture, while being at the same time in due conformity with the certain conclusions of profane sciences".