

**Catholic Opinion.** Despite the fact that Catholics were among the first to cast doubts on the literary unity of the Pentateuch, the history of Pentateuchal criticism has been marked chiefly by Catholic opposition to its results. The opposition was to a great extent justified by the failure of the critics to distinguish properly between literary and historical criticism. The conclusions of the former were bound to have an undue influence on the latter. Also, the rationalistic philosophy of the 19th century vitiated much of the work of the liberal scholars and made all their conclusions suspect to the more conservative Christians. Toward the end of the 19th century a few Catholic scholars, notably, M. J. \*Lagrange, made an attempt to extract what was scientifically valid in the work of the critics. Lagrange, for example, accepted the distinction of the four sources, admitting that D and especially P represented, for the most part, post-Mosaic development. This Catholic beginning in literary criticism was again hampered by the flowering of the Modernist crisis early in the present century. \*Modernism accepted the most radical of the conclusions of the literary critics, including the evolutionary concept of Israel's religion. Catholic scholarship was placed once again on the defensive, and Pentateuchal criticism, as exercised by Catholics, was practically brought to a standstill. In a four-part decree, issued June 27, 1906, the \*Pontifical Biblical Commission stated that, although the use of sources and of secretaries by Moses could be admitted along with the introduction of some post-Mosaic modifications, the arguments of the critics were not at all convincing. Despite the guarded wording of the decree, it had a strong negative influence on Catholic scholarship in the area for many years.

Between the two world wars some attempts were made by Catholic scholars to adopt the most certain of the conclusions of the literary critics and combine them with the theory of substantial Mosaic authenticity. In non-Catholic circles, where scholarship had already done much to correct some of the exaggerations of the Wellhausen school and had forged ahead in new areas, these attempts were little noted. But they played their part in paving the way for the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* in 1943, which opened the door to Catholic scholarship in all areas of Biblical study. This remarkable document must be read in the light of all the controversy that preceded; only then will its vigorous championing of scientific investigation in all fields be fully appreciated. The Pentateuchal question is not brought up *ex professo* in this encyclical. Pius XII is rather dealing with the general principles that must underlie all Biblical work. But these principles are such that their application would necessarily involve a broader interpretation of the Pentateuch.

This conclusion is confirmed by a letter, sent on January 16, 1948, by the secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission to Cardinal Suhard of Paris. It was in response to a query regarding the liberty of Catholic scholars to investigate the two problems of Pentateuchal sources and the historicity of the first 11 chapters of Genesis. The secretary first states that, in the light of the encyclical of Pius XII, the earlier decree of the Commission can be interpreted as not opposing "further and truly scientific examination of these problems." For this reason the Commission did not wish to promulgate a new decree at the time.

Going into more detail, it has this to say about the origin of the Pentateuch: "There is no one today who doubts the existence of these sources or refuses to admit a progressive development of the Mosaic Laws due to social and religious conditions of later times . . . . Therefore, we invite Catholic scholars to study these problems, without prepossession, in the light of sound criticism and of the findings of other sciences connected with the subject matter." Attention should be called here to the complete objectivity of scholarly approach urged by the Commission in this letter. It is in marked contrast to the historically conditioned defensive attitude of the earlier decree.

The incentive given to Catholic scholars by the encyclical of Pius XII and again by the letter to Cardinal Suhard produced its fruits. The most recent studies in Pentateuchal criticism by Catholic scholars will, as a result, show few differences from those of respected non-Catholic scholars, and most of the differences would not be on the confessional level. Among the modern Catholic studies that reflect this new attitude mention can be made particularly of the commentaries on Genesis where the acceptance of the classical sources (more commonly called "traditions" by Catholics to indicate their long historical development) is presumed. J. \*Chaine (1948), H. Junker (1949), De Vaux (1951), A. Clamer (1953) and B. Vawter (1956) are among those who accept them or develop their own reconstruction of the complex problem.

**Moses and the Pentateuch.** With regard to Mosaic authenticity a more subtle approach, but one more in keeping with the primitive concepts of authorship, is taken. Lagrange had long ago (1897) remarked that the modern concept of the inviolability of the author, with its repugnance to successive and extensive redactions of material over a long period of time, is a development of the Christian Era. It was not shared by the ancient Near East or by Israel. For them authorship was seemingly determined more by the one who provided the initial and pervading spirit of the work than by the one who oversaw its final redaction. This is evidenced, for example, in the tradition of the Davidic authorship of the Psalms and, in a much more remarkable way, in the completely pseudonymous attribution of Ecclesiastes and Canticle of Canticles to Solomon. Moses' historical role in the events of the Exodus, of Sinai and of the wandering, a role which must be accepted if only to explain the unity that is found in the Pentateuchal traditions, provided the basis for the literary role, which flowed from it and was conditioned by it. Because Moses, therefore, is at the heart of the Pentateuchal history and theology, Israel had no hesitation in attributing the entire literary work to him.

See also BOOK OF THE COVENANT; COVENANT (IN THE BIBLE); COMMANDMENTS, TEN; DESERT JOURNEY OF THE ISRAELITES; EXODUS FROM EGYPT; LAW, MOSAIC; PATRIARCHS, BIBLICAL; PRIMEVAL AGE IN THE BIBLE; SINAI, MOUNT.

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