METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDY 1)

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Much of what is taken up in this paper may seem both elementary and self-evident. But when it comes to the point much that is elementary does not turn out to be self-evident. The purpose of this paper is also to a great deal to be thought-provoking, to point to the problems more than to claim to solve them. Probably all O.T. scholars also agree that the general situation in their field of study is just now more complicated and controversial than ever—even if it is possible at the same time to find certain typical and common trends in the development of recent research.

The first aspect which will be considered is certainly elementary, but also important from the point of view of principle. For I should like to start with the question about the scholarly, the scientific character of O.T. study. Is O.T. study scientific? And if such is the case, what kind of science does it represent and what is it that makes it scientific? In the first place I am aiming here at the question of "theology" versus "humanities".

Whether an O.T. scholar should belong to a faculty of theology or a faculty of humanities seems to me to be a mere question of organization and tradition. 2) The important thing is that this does

1) The title of the paper should be taken in a wider meaning since it is the author's intention to deal with certain basic problems of principle, not only with methodological questions in a narrow sense. Naturally only certain selected aspects will be taken into consideration, by no means all, from considerations of space as well as because the writer does not feel competent enough within the whole realm of O.T. study. It should be added, too, that it is the author's intention not only to keep his exposition on as general a level as possible, but also as free from polemics as possible.

2) In Sweden there are to-day not a few persons in leading positions who are on the war-path against the (two) theological faculties seeking their scalps. This may sound strange to continental, English, American and other scholars. Personally I cannot see any reason why the oldest faculty of our universities should be done away with.
not imply any difference in principle. For there is no, there must be no specifically "theological" method, differing in character from that of humanities. This is the basic claim on O.T. exegesis: if it is to be scientific, it must work with what is called the humanistic method, which means a historical method that is in its nature unbiased, or, rather, as unbiased as possible, since as we all know the perfect freedom from bias, from preconceived notions, is an ideal impossible to realize fully, but in spite of that an ideal which we must always keep in sight, trying to realize the impossible. 1)

But what does this mean in concreto? First and foremost, that scientific exegesis must not have an apologetical aim—no Christian apologetical aim, Catholic or Protestant, neither any Jewish apologetical aim. Apologetics must not in any way or under any circumstances determine the exegetical investigation. 2) Many, perhaps most, perhaps even all my readers may hold this to be a truisim. But how many exegetical papers, lectures, treatises, and books do really satisfy this claim for complete absence of apologetics? Very few, indeed. For there is not only the conscious apologetical attitude, there are also the non-conscious bonds which are much more difficult to get rid of. We might perhaps summarize these ties in the following points. First we have the Christian—or the Jewish—confinement of faith. Secondly there is the inescapable personal and individual subjectivity, always to be fought against. In the third place we have the seemingly also inescapable bonds of the different so-called "schools", bonds which we should always try to free ourselves from, too. And in the fourth place we have the confinement that lies in the dependence on our general cultural situation, always implying special presuppositions and assumptions, which it is often very hard to become aware of and to free oneself from—whereas it is very easy to exemplify the fact by pointing to times and schools (for example the so-called "liberal" school) that now belong to the past. 3)

However, if O.T. study is to be recognized as really scientific, the

1) In JBL LXXVIII (1959), pp. 1-12, W. A. Irwin, starting from a criticism of W. Eichrodt, makes a plea for the historic-critical method in Biblical exegesis. I am willing to subscribe to most of what is said in this paper, provided that “the critical age” is not equivalent with the period of literary criticism.

2) It may be added that this does not mean that the writer denies the raison d’être of apologetics. But apologetics forms a special discipline, borrowing its arsenal not least from exegesis.