ERRATA

page 5, line 16, for evaluation, read evaluation
page 6, line 4, for confirm, read confirm
page 7, line 9, for conceived if, read conceived of
page 9, line 8, for states, read stated
page 13, line 33, for event, read events
page 13, note 53, should read: Anderson, op.cit. pp. 8, 9
page 14, line 16, for presupposition, read presupposition
page 15, line 3, omit the word

note 61, insert 'writing or' between the words 'of' and 'ability'

page 17, note 63, for idem, read Jewett, op.cit.

page 18, line 23, omit 'he' placed between 'extent' and 'pointedly'

note 67, for idem, read op.cit.

note 73, line 6, for he Old Testament, read The Old Testament

page 19, line 11, for will, read will

note 75, for idem, read op.cit.

page 20, line 4, for given, read givens

page 21, line 22, insert 'Theology' between 'Testament' and 'lies'

note 78, for ibid, read Rowley, op.cit.
OLD TESTAMENT HISTORICITY AND DIVINE REVELATION

(Lecture delivered by the Rev. Prof. G. Van Groningen, on the occasion of his installation on March 7, 1962 as Professor of Old Testament in the Reformed Theological College, Geelong Victoria.)

Mr. Chairman, Directors of the Association, Faculty of the Reformed Theological College, Students and Members of the Association and Friends:

"Confirm to Thy servant what Thou hast said, which is for those who revere Thee" (Ps. 119:38 RV).

The Psalmist’s plea is our plea. Revering the Lord, we know His revealed Word is for us; and in this Living Word we long to be increasingly confirmed. More, it is our deepest longing to see many young people, particularly young men preparing for the sacred ministry of the Word and Sacraments, to be rooted and grounded in the Word of God, and to be increasingly confirmed in it and in the Reformed Faith by that same Living Word.

The intent of this lecture is specifically twofold. We wish to state our awareness of the nature of one of the problems confronting the students of the Old Testament. We refer particularly to the historical character of the Old Testament. The intent is not to enumerate and proffer specific answers and solutions to all the various aspects of the problem currently studied and discussed in Old Testament scholars’ circles. We are not yet prepared to do that.

The second intent is to assure you that we recognize the Bible as the inspired, infallible Word of God. In all our studies, we will begin with, hold to, and conclude with that supposition. We also wish to assure you that we do not in any way consider this supposition to hinder our studies, nor our formulation of statements and/or conclusions. Rather, we wish to indicate that we are convinced that this grand supposition assures us of attaining the goals set before us.  

The subject of this lecture is “Old Testament Historicity and Divine Revelation”. A definition of two of the terms used is in order.

Historicity means having the state or character of being historic. Old Testament Historicity means that the Old Testament has the specific characteristic of being historic. Obviously, reference is not to how the Old Testament has been dealt with in history, in past times and circumstances. Rather, reference is to the fact that the Old Testament has come to us in the process of history and is a part of, and participates in the events and products of the past. By contrast,

we refer to the Koran; the Mohammedans say that their "book" was dictated by an angel at one point of history, and then it was placed in a completed form within the stream of time and its events.

When speaking of Old Testament historicity, one must refer to Old Testament historiography also. Since the Old Testament came to us in the process of history, aspects of that history became part of the material content of the written message. Hence, we must of necessity take into consideration the actual writing of that history which was included in the message of the Old Testament. A searching student is unavoidably confronted by such questions as: How is that history told? Is it true to fact? Does the Old Testament's account of historical events agree with secular accounts?

"Divine Revelation" is the second term we wish to define. Revelation refers to the act of disclosing, making known. Divine Revelation means that God performed acts of self disclosure. He made Himself known. He communicated Himself and truth concerning Himself to man. God did this in times past. He did it in words, in propositions. He did it in deeds, small and great. He did it by means of clarifying explanations. He did it through man's experiences, songs (Psalms), discussions (Job). These words, deeds, explanations, human experiences, songs, discussions, etc., were spoken and took place in time, not all at once, but in the course of centuries, and they were recorded in writing, faithfully and inerrantly, by men under the Spirit's guidance. These writings, telling of God's self disclosure to man before Jesus Christ, the culminating self-revelation of God to man, comprise the Old Testament of the Holy Scriptures.

II

Having defined our terms, we turn to some of the specific problems that confront us in the field of Old Testament Historicity.

A recent writer wrote, "Christianity has inherited an historical view of revelation. We Christians believe that the divine revelation found in the Bible has been mediated historically, that is, through the life and experience of a particular historical people, Israel, and that it culminates in the most unique historical appearance, Jesus Christ." P. K. Jewett corroborates this statement, "History is the medium through which the eternal God has revealed Himself once for all. The foundation (of the Biblical idea of revelation) is laid in the Old Testament concept of the history of Israel." "Along with and in the stream of world history there moves a divine history. God is active in Israel's history in a way that life is not in other nations."

Undoubtedly very few Old Testament scholars would disagree with the above statements. But, that does not guarantee universal agreement as to the interpretation of, implications to be drawn from, and conclusions deducible from these statements. At this point we

2. S. J. De Vries, "Recovering A Historical Revelation", "Reformed Journal", April 1961. We agree with this statement, assuming that the phrase "through the life and experience of a particular historic people, Israel", does not exclude acceptance of divine revelation mediated historically through men who were before Israel (North) or through men who were outside Israel (e.g., Job, Balaam, Cyrus, etc.).

begin to see the scope and intensity of the problems and difficulties confronting Old Testament scholars.

We take up the concept "history". What is understood by "history"? R. Abba points out "that the term refers primarily to events — what actually happens; but it is also used, in a secondary sense, of a record of events, which constitutes the evidence for their having happened." Thus events themselves, and or the record of events, constitutes history. Does this mean that everything that has happened is history? One might expect an affirmative answer. However, Abba quoting other scholars, rightly limits the concept. "Not every event however is an historical event. To be such, it must have sufficient significance to be remembered in the community in which it occurs." He would have us distinguish between a mere chronicle (enumeration of all events in order of their occurrence) and an historical record which is a record of things worthy to be remembered. It follows then that a process of selection and evaluation underlies the historical record.

Now comes the question: Is the Old Testament truly historical from Genesis 1:1 to Malachi 4:6? Are all parts relating events in the Old Testament historical and is no part a mere chronicle? Is it possible to see a process of selection and evaluation behind each event or chronology recorded? Is every statement meaningful? Indeed, it is difficult to grasp the significance of some recorded events. However, one who is committed to the presupposition that the entire Old Testament is inspired of God, answers in the affirmative to each question. But his "yes" has not answered the specific questions that may be placed before him concerning the historical exactness or historical relevance of certain recorded events. However, many of these "problems" are not as insolvable as some would have them appear.

A related question is raised in this context. If the Old Testament is an historical record of selected and evaluated events, which took place primarily in the community of Israel, and was recorded by members of that community, will the record, if it is true to these events, include the mistakes, failures, sins of the people? More, will not the weaknesses and failures of the historiographers also be included in that record? We must carefully distinguish between the points of these two questions. A sin or failure can be faithfully and trustworthily recorded. Indeed, much of the Old Testament is a record of sin and failure on the part of God's chosen people particularly and all men in general. But, this record is God's message to us concerning how men sinned and failed; it is God's revelation of how He expected obedience and service, of how He set the stage for the same, but found pride and rebellion instead. In these records God reveals

5. Ibid, p. 76.
6. These problems can be treated properly. See K. Runia on "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture", Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1962, chap. 4.
7. Two articles written in the "Reformed Journal", April 1961 (see note 2); Nov. 1961 (Infallibility report, 1961) ask these questions and indicate an affirmative answer is expected, not only because of the nature of the case, but because the record (the Old Testament) gives evidence for such an affirmative answer.
Himself either as patient, slow to anger, abundant in mercy at one time, or at another time full of wrath, executing vengeance. Thus, the actual sins and rebellions that are recorded do not in any way question the Old Testament’s historicity; rather, they confirm it. The second question deals with the historiographer. If he selected and evaluated events, did not his own failures and misconceptions become part of the historical record? Does the actual text of the Old Testament not present evidences of this?

We are confronted with questions of great importance. The Lord, however, has graciously solved the first aspect of this problem. The Holy Spirit so influenced the writers in their selection, evaluation and recording of events that though their personal characteristics and abilities are clearly manifest, they were kept from erroneous selection, evaluation and recording of vents. The writers wrote a trustworthy historical record. Thus, because the writers were finite, fallible men, it does not follow that they were unable to produce an infallible account.

This does not mean however, that we have answered every question placed before us concerning certain statements which appear to be untrue or contrary to a faithful historical account.

The first task one has is to re-examine his criteria or standard by which Scriptural givens are judged to be untrustworthy and/or completely untrue. It may well be that the science of modern historiography is that normative standard. But, we immediately assert that the Scriptural writers did not know modern science, nor did they attempt to be modern scientific historiographers. Rather, they wrote the story of God’s redemptive communications and deeds as men would do it in their day. However, we do notice that the Biblical historians are dignified, sane, reasonable when compared with writers of whom we learn through archaeologists’ endeavours, and whose writings are often considered “true”, and to which the Scriptural data must conform.

Secondly, every Biblical scholar must carefully study the entire context of the supposed “errors” of the historiographer, as well as other parts of Scripture that refer to the problem (e.g., parallel passages, supplementary passages, etc.). Some of the problems will be resolved in this way; others will become the more intensely difficult to solve. When confronted by such instances, e.g., intensely difficult problems, one can better admit inability to answer, than present a poor answer. Admitting inability allows for a ready acceptance of possible forthcoming solutions, which have come, are coming, and will undoubtedly continue to come as men continue their study of the Scriptures and of the environment in which Scripture was written.

Meanwhile we continue to uphold the historical trustworthiness of the Old Testament. We are constrained to do this by the testimony of the Scriptures itself. Scripture claims to be the revelation of God, which was given in words and historical deeds. If, concerning the historical trustworthiness of Scripture, unshakable evidence to the contrary is firmly established, we must weigh that evidence against

8. Though some would present unassailable proof against this trustworthiness today, we are mindful that what once was considered proof is no longer substantiated proof today. We refer to the historicity of the patriarchs as an example.
the very weighty testimony of Scripture itself. Surely scientific scholarship could not permit anything else, for it insists on having all relevant factors brought into consideration, studied, evaluated and given their due respect.9

III

We turn to a specific current view of the Scriptures which presents an interpretation of the Old Testament as an historical record of God’s Self-revelation. The proponents of this view contend that the Old Testament is a Divine Revelation coming to us in history and only in history, conceived if in its first and primary meaning. History refers to events. Thus God is said to reveal Himself only through deeds, events, activities. The Old Testament records only revelatory acts. The divine “Spoken Word”, the “Interpreting Word” are not means of direct Self-revelation. Rather, God is a God of action. He can only be known by his deeds. This view is widely held and has considerable popular appeal.10

S. Mowinckel, of Oslo, Norway, has written a small book11 in which he clearly and pointedly presents this specific historical view. He begins his discussion by stating that the Old Testament is Word of God,12 but, “one cannot close one’s eyes to the fact that the Old Testament contains many statements of historical, geographical, chronological and biological nature, and so on, that simply cannot be harmonised with the present stage of our knowledge, statements which, therefore, to that extent are erroneous.”13 “The Old Testament is not a homogeneous entity . . . it bears the clear marks of a diverse human history with many cross current lines. Or in other words, the Old Testament appears to us as a very human book.”14 However, he goes on to emphatically state “the conviction that the Old Testament contains the revelation of God is certainly one that the church cannot give up without compelling reason”.15

The question Mowinckel posits is; How can the Old Testament as an historical entity at the same time be the revelation of God? His answer to this question is, “We see a history unfolding, a con-

9. It is truly incredible, how in the name of scientific endeavour, the testimony of the oldest and most read accounts of the past, the Scriptures, is cast aside, ignored, or wrested because of some recently propounded theories or on the basis of inconclusive investigations and unwarranted and/or premature conclusions in the fields of literary criticism, archaeology, etc.
10. D. B. Knox, writing in “The Reformed Theological Review”, Feb. 1960, quotes various theologians who hold this view. D. Hodgson, J. C. Vockler, J. Burnaby, W. Temple, G. Tyrell. We are not suggesting that these men, including Mowinckel, all hold to precisely the same details, but in general they are agreed. E. F. Osborn, writing in “The Reformed Theological Review”, Vol. XXI, No. 1, says, “Revelation through event keeps the idea of objective revelation without the idea of propositional revelation. Propositional revelation is no longer a live option. However well formulated, it raises insuperable difficulties” (p. 22). Osborn has presented his view in detail in “The Australian Biblical Review”, 1960, pp. 29-37.
15. Ibid p. 19.
unity and a series of breaks, changes, growth, the discarding of the old and the creating of new forms. It is life in motion — God’s life of creation and development.”16 “History is the workshop of God.”17 “The Old Testament ties its ideas concerning the origin of the sacred places and the sacred acts to historical persons. By this is meant, it is in the real, daily world that God shows Himself as active.”18 Referring to the cultus of the feasts Mowinckel states that “in the keeping of the feasts Israel experienced a real repetition of God’s mighty work in history.”19 And then he adds, referring to the great acts of deliverance, e.g., deliverance from Egypt and the Red Sea, “because God does these mighty works he is ‘revealed’.”20

Mowinckel refers to revelation specifically “not as a communion of knowledge, of theoretical truths from and about God. Yes, it is too, but only secondarily and derivatively. Primarily and essentially revelation is deed.”21 But what about the Old Testament’s testimony that God spoke, that He gave His Word? Mowinckel answers, “The word itself to the Israelite (was) a deed, a miracle. The word of God is dynamically acting power.”22 To drive home this thought “revelation is by deed only”, Mowinckel states “Revelation in reality becomes an unfolding of the creative work of God. Creation and revelation are correlative terms, or rather, realities.”23 A summarising statement is: “To say, therefore, that God reveals Himself really means, according to the Bible that He gives Himself. Not knowledge about Himself, but Himself.”24

Beyond a doubt, Mowinckel holds to the historicity of parts of the Old Testament. However, in his hands the Old Testament is bereft of some of its history, its actuality, its truth, and more seriously, Mowinckel refuses to acknowledge the most effective means that God used to reveal Himself, and thus ignores much of God’s specific Self-revelation.

Attempts to mediate or harmonise revelation in word and deed and revelation by deed have been made. We refer to a very plausible explanation by J.G.S.S. Thomson.25 Beyond a doubt, Thomson gives clear cut evidence that he wishes to adhere to and uphold the Scriptural view of the historicity of the Old Testament, its inspiration and infallibility.

Thomson begins his discussion stating that in the Old Testament God is both the subject and object of revelation. By revelation the Old Testament does not mean that God communicates some kind of esoteric knowledge, it quite simply means that God makes Himself

17. Ibid p. 35.
24. Ibid p. 41. See also p.45, paragraph 21.
known. "Revelation is personal encounter with God."26 Thomson writes, "Everywhere in the Old Testament the activity of God as a medium of His self-disclosure is wedded to the Word of God. So closely connected are they that the act and the Word are sometimes synonomous, and if not identical, they are simultaneous."27 Happily we take note of a further statement, "It would seem that often the activity without the Word could not be a medium of revelation."28 However, having states this, Thomson attempts to satisfy those who propound that historical view, e.g., as of Mowinckel. In his discussion of the mediums of revelation, he discusses the Word of the Lord. He makes a careful philological study and concludes that "in the Old Testament the Word of the Lord was a powerful agent. It was synnomous with His will. God's Word was dynamic, creative, effective."29 In short, God's Word, God's Will and Act became so closely related that His Word virtually became deed. Thomson says of Jeremiah, "The Word of the Lord came to him with all the immediacy of an objective experience."30

We must be careful not to deny the fact that Hebrew terms present scenes of action, depict lively acts, but the terms themselves are not deeds, acts. When God spoke, He was active, but His act was an act of speaking, of propositional communication.

It is of utmost significance that we tenaciously hold to and defend the truth that God revealed Himself in words, in propositions as well as in deeds. True, the Lord revealed Himself in the process of history, but He did so speaking as well as performing His wondrous acts of salvation.

We are well aware that Mowinckel conceded that God spoke, but he contended that it was secondarily that the Lord did so. If we turn to the Old Testament itself we find that God primarily spoke. He first of all communicate with man. He spoke to man in Paradise. Immediately after the fall into sin, God came and spoke, promising deliverance through the seed of the woman. The Lord spoke to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses, to the prophets. He communicated His love, His promises, His intentions. He did this basically in propositions. But what the Lord said He would do, He also did. Again, at times when the Lord had acted, the act was meaningless until the Lord had spoken, and had interpreted the deed. In fact, had the Lord God only performed deeds, without a preceding or succeeding explanatory word, the deed would not have been self-revelatory of God to man. Man in his sinful state required the explanation of God's revelatory deeds. Left to himself, man could not discern the message of the act, nor could he know the acting Person and His virtues.31 Without this propositional revelation, surrender to and trust in God as a personally known God is very difficult, if not impossible.

27. Ibid p. 13.
29. Ibid p. 57 ff.
30. Ibid p. 61.
31. D. B. Knox has stated the case for the necessity of God's communication of propositional knowledge to man. See note 9.
IV

We refer to another very important Old Testament school of interpretation which directly involves the Historicity of the Old Testament — the Form-criticism school. So doing, we are confronted with a baffling array of opinions, theories, suggestions and conclusions.

A brief survey of events pertaining to Biblical criticism taking place from about mid 19th century to the turn of the century, may be helpful. The Wellhausian school gained great prestige and exerted a strong influence in this period. This school adopted the four sources higher criticism had discovered in the text. Wellhausen and his collaborators applied the principles of Darwinian evolution to the Old Testament message. It was concluded that Israel’s religion moved from the lower to the higher, from the simple to the complex. In the development of its main thesis, the adherents to this view also followed the pattern of Hegelian philosophy of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

This evolutionistic view militated against the long adhered to Biblical teaching concerning the authorship and unity of the Pentateuch and also the dating of the various Old Testament books, particularly some of the Psalms and Prophets. A new view concerning the origin of the Pentateuch in particular, and the whole Old Testament in general was adopted. In other words, the accepted view of the historicity of the Old Testament was discarded, and a new view propounded.

As stated, the Wellhausians agreed that the Pentateuch was compiled from various sources. Four main documents were said to have been discovered. J (Jehovah), E (Elohim), D (Deuteronomy) and P (Priestly). J was to have been written about the time of Solomon; E was produced a century later; D was originated in the days of Josiah, 632 B.C. and P, containing the laws and rituals in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, was repeatedly identified with the book of the law Ezra had with him when he came from Babylon to Canaan after the exile. Hence, P was post exilic. Evolutionistic principles reversed the order of the Old Testament to — Prophets — Law — Psalms.32

Students and adherents, working in the spirit and with the methods of Wellhausen, were soon floundering with gross absurdities. Meanwhile, new data were discovered, chiefly through archaeological activities. Simultaneously a change came in the spiritual climate. Men, realising the barrenness of a scientific search for the source of Israel’s religion, began to ask, “What is the message of the Old Testament?” A new school arose, fathered primarily by Hermann Gunkel. It is known as the “Form-criticism School”. On the whole it accepted the general outlines of Wellhausian source analysis but it attempted to go back beyond the various sources. It sought to find out what materials and which sources the four source writers

32. For a concise, illuminating review and discussion of Old Testament criticism and its history, consult the essay of N. H. Ridderbos, “Reversals in Old Testament Criticism” in “Revelation and the Bible” (see note 3).

10
employed. Form critics attempted to discern various traditions, orally transmitted throughout the ancient past, which became the kernels of the materials the four major source writers produced. Form critics are of the opinion that the ancient traditions and songs (Psalms) stem from the ancient cults which constituted a major influence in the life of the ancients. Hence, the Old Testament had a religious historical origin indeed.

Many Old Testament scholars follow the general pattern of the Form-criticism School. From among the various contemporary scholars adhering to this school, we select G. Von Rad as a contemporary influential spokesman.33

Von Rad is of the opinion that a compiler who is called the Yawhist (J of the source analysis school), gave the entire Hexateuch (Genesis-Joshua) its form and compass about 950 B.C. (other writers disagree with this date, some placing it earlier, a few later). J was the collector of the countless old traditions which until then had circulated freely among the people.34 These traditions were not born consecutively, rather they existed side by side from ancient times. Then the Elohist added parts to the writings of the Yahwist about two centuries later. The P writer, strictly a theologian, added his additions after the exile. Deuteronomy, literally distinct, was produced and added shortly before the exile. Von Rad emphasises; the dates given are the dates of composition, not of the origin of the material,35 since these were, on the whole, from ancient times, transmitted orally from generation to generation.

The question, with which we are concerned, and which we hasten to ask is: Can the Old Testament be considered historically reliable and trustworthy if we adhere to Von Rad's theory of its origin?

Undoubtedly, some of the historical parts of the Old Testament are considered historically true to fact. There are some factual biographical accounts. But, by no means, are all parts of the Old Testament historical accounts considered thus. Three specific instances are dealt with by Von Rad in such a manner which indicates he does not consider these are truly historical. The Sinai tradition (black type mine, VG) was not originally part of the main, old tradition of ancient times. But the Yahwist united this Sinai tradition to the conquest tradition, which was in itself not factual history, but sacred history.36 The second instance mentioned is the Patriarchal tradition. The materials of the patriarchal history are extended, given a new inner direction when united to the ancient tradition which the Yawhist put in writing. A third instance cited is primeval history.

33. Gerhard Von Rad has written "A Theology of the Old Testament", which has appeared in English. His commentary on Genesis has also been translated. His introduction to his commentary furnishes us with his concise and well defined view of Old Testament historicity. "Genesis, A Commentary", G. Von Rad, translated by John H. Marks, S.C.M. Press Ltd., Bloomsbury St., London. Published in German in 1956, in English in 1961.
34. Ibid p. 17.
36. Ibid p. 20.
Gen. 2:4b to 12:3 (Gen. 1 to 24a is doctrine, i.e., P). This primeval history section in Genesis, the "Yahwist constructed from elements of very different kinds. . . ."37

The three traditions which the Yahwist supposedly wove on to the main conquest tradition, thus forming a unified account, are not to be considered factual history. The life of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob as presented in the Scriptures are not strictly biographical accounts. But, Von Rad insists they are historical but of a special nature. They are to be seen as sacred history (heilsgeschichte). By this Von Rad means that these traditional narratives were like little fictional poems, more precisely, these very old traditions are for the most part sagas, the background of which we can investigate no further.38 A saga is not to be defined as information about events in the past which lack historical verification, rather, a saga narrates an actual event that occurred once for all (black type mine, VG) in the realms of history. It is not to be taken as a fairy tale, the saga is to be believed. By no means is saga merely the product of poetic fantasy; rather it comprises "the sum total of the living historical recollection of peoples. In it is mirrored in fact and truth the entire history of a people. It is the form (black type mine, VG) in which a people think of its own history."39

How did the saga come into existence? In the religious setting of ancient peoples, in the setting of the cultus, the historical traditions experienced a progressive spiritualization or religious transformation. "In ancient Israel, the principal power in the forming of saga was faith."

Repeating our question concerning the Old Testament's historicity upon the basis of Von Rad's theories we indeed feel we will get a threefold answer. Parts of the Old Testament are not historically reliable.40 Other parts are historically factual, and still other parts are sacred history, a special kind of supra-mundane, religious history.

Before we proceed to a limited discussion of this threefold answer, we must remind ourselves that Von Rad does not stand alone. In fact, this view in various forms is the current and most accepted view in many influential Old Testament scholars' circles today.

H. H. Rowley is an outstanding contemporary Old Testament scholar in the English speaking world. Beyond a doubt, many students have benefitted much from his studies and teaching. Seeming to agree with Mowinckel's teaching, Rowley stresses that "God came to man through the events of history to reveal his nature and will."41 But Rowley goes on to say that "history is not the most significant

37. Ibid p. 29.
40. Von Rad's dating of the hexateuch is one obvious and direct evidence of this.
41. H. H. Rowley, "The Faith of Israel", S.C.M. Press, 1956, p. 20. We are well aware that there are pointed differences on various details between Rowley and Von Rad, yet fundamentally they are agreed as to basic approach and conclusion regarding the historicity of the O.T.
medium of revelation in the faith of Israel.” In the chapter on “Revelation and its Media” Rowley discusses various media used by God — nature, dreams, visions, written word, personalities, priests. Rowley maintains the historicity of Moses, though he adds, “In many ways tradition may have developed the story, but in its broad lines, it seems to me to bear the marks of its own truth.” However, Rowley stands with the critics on the basic question concerning the Old Testament’s historical trustworthiness. “That we are not to understand these narratives (concerning Adam in the garden, God appearing to the patriarchs) literally is made plain in the Bible itself.” This quote is an indication of his stand. Furthermore, in his book “From Joseph to Joshua” (1950), he indicates that he regards considerable Old Testament data as untrustworthy.

C. R. North, writer of an essay entitled “Pentateuchal Criticism” states: “So far as the period of history covered by the Pentateuch is concerned, to the death of Moses — it has been long recognised that the Pentateuch is not history in the modern sense of the word.” “As Heilsgeschichte, we must now regard the Pentateuch.” “Petersen is right when he says that the story (of the Red Sea episode) is in a different dimension from ordinary history.”

B. W. Anderson’s study of Old Testament history readily informs one of his views. Anderson begins his study of Old Testament history with the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. He writes “the decisive event — the great watershed of Israel’s history — was the Exodus from Egypt.” Further he states, “Actually, when we begin with Genesis, and read Exodus we are reading the story backwards, as it were, for the period before Moses was remembered and interpreted in the light of events that brought Israel into existence in the Mosaic period. Properly, the book of Genesis must be regarded as a prologue to the time when the curtain rises on the scene of the oppression of the Hebrews in Egypt.” Anderson stresses that the Biblical faith is fundamentally historical in character, its doctrines are event and historical realities including the events of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but these must be understood in the light of God’s revelation to Moses.

A student must not conclude however, that Anderson adheres to the historicity of the Old Testament in its entirety. Under the
section entitled "The Nature of Tradition" he states, "The various inconsistencies, repetitions and stylistic differences (of the Pentateuch) reflect the way in which the story was relived, reworked and reflected upon in different historical periods. In this literary 'Mosaic' the original meaning of the Mosaic faith has been preserved and blended with the overtones of meaning experienced by the community down through the years."

A further reading of Anderson's work clearly confirms the suggestion of the above quotation that the later Genesis accounts are historical, but of a special kind of history, a relived, theologized history. Basically, Anderson does not differ in his conclusion concerning the historicity of the Old Testament from Mowinckel, Von Rad, North or Rowley.

A study of Martin Noth's history book convinces the student that the scholar's approach to the Old Testament is dominated by the a priori presupposition that Scripture as we have it today is not a Divine revelation, including reliable historical material throughout. Noth attributes at best, a supra-mundane historical character to some of the Genesis accounts and doubts the reliability of many historical events recorded in the Pentateuch and former prophets.

Another Old Testament scholar, Prof. John Bright, has written a history of the Old Testament. In his foreword he stated his doubts about completing his book when Noth's work was published in English. However, because Bright disagreed with Noth regarding a number of factors, one of which was "The historicity of the patriarchs", he published his work. But Bright does not give proper due either to the historicity of the Old Testament Scriptures. E.g., Bright agrees that on the whole, a genuine historical character must be ascribed to the patriarchs, but he intimates that what is prior to that is not factual history. Later he indicates that he wishes to avoid prejudicing the historical worth of the entire hexateuch, neither positively nor negatively. Bright discounts genuine historicity as assured by the doctrine of Inspiration. Historical research, literary criticism has to determine the answer regarding the Old Testament's historical character. "As regards the historicity of most of its (the Old Testament's) details the external evidence of archaeology renders no verdict pro or con... Form criticism... cannot in the nature of the case pass judgment on historicity in the absence of external evidence... The only safe and proper course lies in a balanced examination of the traditions against the background of the world of the day and, in the light of that, making such positive statements as the evidence allows."

56. John Bright, "A History of Israel", S.C.M. Press, London, 1960, p. 9. We are well aware that Prof. Bright does not subscribe to many of the Form Critical postulates, and that some would say that he should not be considered as an adherent. Prof. Bright's book can probably best be described as a mediating work between the liberal and conservative approach and conclusions.
57. Ibid p. 60.
58. Ibid p. 69.
The result of this method is threefold: unacceptance of some events recorded, doubt regarding other events, and acceptance of others. The end result basically is uncertainty regarding all the entire accounts.59

V

What are we to do in the face of such a strong, onward sweeping tide of scholarly research, conclusions and dictums? Should we, as conservative scholars retrench and say "The majority of scholarly opinion is against us, therefore we cannot uphold the historical trustworthiness of the Old Testament"?

No, never!

Is there a reason for rejecting the approach and conclusions of the various scholars referred to above? We are convinced there is.

(1) We refer to Von Rad’s position, i.e., that three contemporaneous traditions were woven into the Old Testament account. Recall that not one of these three traditions was considered historically factual or reliable.

In the first place, we would emphasize that the story of Israel’s departure from Egypt, the wandering in the Wilderness, and the conquest of Canaan is altogether factual and reliable. We can appeal to external evidences and to conclusions of various scholars.60 But these appeals do not give final conclusive evidence. However Scripture itself does give this evidence.

Von Rad’s view does not stand up under a careful reading of the books of Genesis and Exodus. There is no conclusive evidence that these traditions existed contemporaneously for a long time and were then woven into one account. Rather, a reading of the material gives a first, and upon continued study, an increasingly convincing impression that these accounts were consecutive accounts. The patriarchal account reads as reliable history, it is a brief factual account of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. What is called the Sinai tradition is a most natural development coming forth from the patriarchal environment and experiences. So also the conquest account is a most natural and logical development following the previously recorded events. Rather than contemporary traditions existing side by side for centuries later woven by theologians into a pattern, we have living, throbbing history. We see lives lived purposively, fruitfully, and we see each generation taking its place and carrying on the life of God’s people and the plan of God is unfolded step by step.

Furthermore, there is no weighty evidence that the three traditions could have existed side by side a long time. To the contrary. When the events of the Sinai and conquest account took place, they were recorded within a short time — a time so short that they could

59. A study of many Old Testament History books certainly confirms this uncertainty. E.g., the recent survey which was edited by G. Cornfield, published by MacMillan, New York, entitled "Adam to Daniel", reflects evidence of this uncertainty.

60. E.g., Prof. Albright has defended the historicity of the Patriarchs, as does R. K. Harrison in their published works.

61. We need not discuss the question of Moses' knowledge of ability to write. cf. Ex. 17:14; 24:4-8, 34:27; Num. 33:1, 2; Deut. 31:9. Centuries before Moses, men wrote.
not have become narratives told around firesides. We appeal to the express statements of God commanding Moses to write, and to those statements which speak of Moses writing.61

(2) We refer to the conclusion of various scholars that there are various kinds of history: the false, the actual, the "sacred", the supra-mundane.

It is our conviction that a study of the Old Testament as a whole, or of any individual book that claims, (or implies) historicity for itself, gives weighty internal evidence opposing that categorizing of Biblical history. A thorough study of the text convinces us that the facts related are factual, and that they have a deeply sacred and theological character as historical facts. Some of these facts are more evidently theologically meaningful than others. But that is no reason to deny any recorded fact a genuine historical character.

In this context we are also including Genesis I to II. The events related here were not experienced by the writer of Genesis. Nor did he give a detailed account. Rather, we find a brief historical survey, at times it is as a mere outline, with supplementing notes. But again, lack of personal experience or brevity of account does not make an account a saga, a legend, a creed. History, whether outlined or written in detail, is still factual history! History, written by an author who died 500, or 5000 years later, remains history in spite of the late author.

Furthermore, when the Scripture claims to be purposive in its selection, reliable, trustworthy in its historicity, is it responsible scholarship to deny this without conclusive evidences gained from external sources and only meagre phantom evidences from Scripture itself? Is it not presumptuous to say, only parts are historical, other parts have a mere historical kernel? Does it not result in irresponsible, unauthoritative subjectivism to stand in judgment over recorded facts of centuries ago, and to divide these facts into various imagined categories?

(3) We refer to the fact that many Old Testament scholars speak of tradition: We have no quarrel because of the use of the term, if properly used in the context of Scripture. Very likely, various Old Testament authors relied upon traditions when writing their books. Moses likely did when he wrote. The writer of Chronicles likely had written records (possibly oral) at his disposal for reference and as sources. But again, tradition, whether orally or graphically transmitted, is not therefore per-se unreliable as history. If a tradition claims to be historically factual, only weighty conclusive evidence to the contrary may give reason to doubt the tradition's testimony. Again, the Old Testament's testimony is: this what is recorded is true — whether it was once "tradition" or not. And, the evidence (internal or external) raised to the contrary is not conclusive.62 Hence

62. This conclusions is based upon a serious study of the Old Testament text, as well as careful studies of the writings of those who posit contrary conclusions. Space will not permit a detailed explanation. The author hopes to be able to develop various points of this paper in a more detailed study.
we conclude that those traditions employed by authors are genuine history.

(4) Much of our discussion has been centred around the material of Genesis and Exodus. This does not mean that only Genesis and Exodus are basically involved. Rather, the entire Scriptures are involved, for the Scriptures as a whole assume and restate the historical factuality of the Pentateuch. The claim of Scripture is that Genesis as well as e.g., I Kings is reliable in its historicity. The prophets and apostles were assured of the genuine historicity of the entire Scriptures. Thus, if some parts of the Scripture are impugned as historically non-factual and unreliable, the entire witness of the Scriptures on that point is impugned. The alternative facing men then is; subjectively determine what is reliable or doubt the entire Scriptures' testimony. Either involves an assumption of falsity, or at the least, the appearance of deception, on the part of the Biblical historians.

(5) If men maintain and defend various concepts of history and historiography as referred to above (saga, myths, "sacred history", legendary tradition) then basically Scripture is not a direct and immediate revelation of God, if revelation at all. In fact, Scripture is then largely the record of human deeds, of human reflections, or subjective theologizing. We, by no means, wish to discount the human factor of the Bible, but we insist that the Bible is first of all a divine record of divine communications and activities. This divine record was produced through God employed and inspired men. And, if this record is indeed an authoritative voice, it can only be that, if it is taken as it claims to be.

VI

The scholar of today who wishes to be true to the Biblical revelation as it is before him in the Bible does not stand alone. There is at the present time an increasing number of dedicated, devoted, scientifically minded scholars who staunchly uphold and defend the Historicity of the Old Testament, historicity in the traditional sense.

P. K. Jewett, a theologian sums up the case for many of the Old Testament scholars thus: "God is active in Israel's history in a way that He is not active in other nations. To be sure, these revelatory acts of God may, by the analogy of history, be explained away. The opening chapters of Genesis may be dismissed as myths of the primitive mind calculated to illumine such naturally intriguing phenomena as why snakes have no legs, why weeds grow . . . "63 "The history of Israel involves more than a miscellany of primitive myths, oriental codes, religious ceremonies, and tracts for the times, interlarded with pious aspiration. Deeply embedded in this history . . . is divine purpose."64 "History is not a series of recurring cycles . . . there is real forward movement on the hand of the clock of the

64. Ibid p. 47.
universe." 65 "Redemptive history (i.e., history of one kind) moves from creation to consummation." 66

N. H. Ridderbos asks a pertinent question: "Has the historical trustworthiness of the Old Testament... through... reversals in contemporary criticism been vindicated?" 67 He answers, "The majority of present day critics think the stories of the patriarchs are (not) in all respects historically trustworthy." 68 Then he adds, "Through excavations we now possess rather conclusive evidence that the ancestors of the Israelites immigrated to Canaan out of Northwest Mesopotamia. But that this occurred on orders from God, and with a world-embracing promise from God, naturally disregards all historical arguments and all historical dispute. Nonetheless, it is exactly this divine direction that finally gives value to these narratives." 69

In a very recent article written in a theological journal, N. H. Ridderbos discusses the origin of the book of Numbers. He unavoidably faces the question of the historicity of the material, various parts of which are quoted or referred to in other parts of Scripture, as if they were historically trustworthy. Ridderbos discusses chapter 16 ff. as an example of the problems Numbers presents. He discusses the view of the Roman Catholic theologian A. Clamer, 70 who presents a "mild critical approach". But Ridderbos, though prepared to concede that it is possible to consider source analysis legitimate, and to employ the critical method to an extent, he pointedly states, "This writer has objections against (the view) that the Biblical record contains historical inaccuracies." 71 Another quote from Ridderbos is still more pointed, "This writer does not have the liberty to accept the view that the accounts, recorded for us in the Old Testament, are historically untrustworthy on certain points." 72

Unashamedly we stand with those scholars 73 who adhere to the basic presupposition regarding Scripture's inspiration, infallibility and inerrancy. With steadfast conviction that the Lord will bless, we pledge to do our utmost to increase the number of dedicated, devoted, scientifically minded scholars who will staunchly uphold and defend the historical trustworthiness of the Old Testament. This does not

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65. Ibid p. 47.
68. Ibid p. 344.
69. Ibid p. 345.
70. A. Clamer, "Les Nombres", in La Sainte Bible.
72. Ibid p. 49.
mean, however that we are going to allow anyone justifiably to level a charge of obscurantism against us. We will study the text of the Old Testament, we will delve into detailed philological studies. We will eagerly follow the reports of archaeologists busy in ruins and research centres. We will read, critically evaluate and learn from as many Old Testament publications as possible. We will continue to study the writings of men like Pedersen who emphasized a psychological approach to the faith of Israel. We will not ignore the sociological emphasis of Max Weber. The science of Anthropology will be considered a constant source of possible aid and fuller understanding of Old Testament materials. But, doing this, we will not depart from the greatest and most reliable source of knowledge we have concerning our faith, the Holy Scriptures.

Think not that we need special sympathy, nor consider us deluded, in search of the proverbial pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Think not that we are dedicated to a cause hopelessly encumbered with impossibilities and that the so-called open-minded objective, scientific scholar who accepts the postulates of Higher Criticism is without insurmountable difficulties.

VII

There are a number of good reasons why a scholar will find himself in an advantageous position when he allies himself with those who adhere to the historic conservative position.74

1. Historic, conservative Biblical scholarship has heartily accepted and jealously maintained the uniqueness of God's revelation to man. This unique revelation comes to us in the Old and New Testament. Refusing to accept this position, if men adhere instead to an evolutionistic philosophy and/or its consequences for Old Testament historicity, or if men consistently follow a rationalistic pattern in their study, they find themselves constrained to deny in various respects the uniqueness of God's revelation in the history of Israel. All history becomes the bed and means of divine self-revelation.75 The religious ideas of all men and nations are considered revelatory. Israel is said to have borrowed, imitated, and learned from neighbouring religions. Israel's history may provide the clearest account, yet it is not the only and sufficient source. For a full conception, the lives and religious activities of all men must be studied. How unenviable a position that is! It involves a study of grossly contradictory religious ideas, of confusing attempts to fit together and align that which is hopelessly at variance. As men thus attempt to articulate a theology that is reasonable, convincing and satisfying, they are defeated at the very outset by their own presuppositions and methods. Granted, the study of comparative religions can be of value for the understanding of man, society, etc., but it does not, nor can it, contribute much to the knowledge of God, and nothing to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the only Name given under heaven among

74. In the following points we also intend to give additional answer to the theories of the Form Criticism School.
75. See Mowinckel. Idem pp. 68-84.
men whereby men can be saved (Acts 4:12). Furthermore, it is claimed that a study of “Comparative Religions” enriches our theology. It is our contention that confusion born of attempting to reconcile contradictory given does not enrich, rather it impoverishes theology, for the meaningful revelation of the Sovereign Creator and Redeemer is thus obscured and/or denied.

2. The Bible is the oldest, most widely read and studied book in our Christian, cultured world. This Bible has spoken consistently, and still speaks, to all men concerning its own veracity and trustworthiness. It purports to give us true, factual statements. Higher criticism, all too often based on evolutionistic philosophy, has spoken (and some critics still speak) of “pious frauds” of which Scripture writers are guilty. Critics openly aver that there are untruths, half truths and fabricated “truths” in Scripture. To arise in the name of an ever changing science and to presumptuously stand in critical, condemning judgment over a testimony that has stood for centuries, is still standing and will stand until our Lord returns, is not a laudatory deed. It is an unenviable position, to say the least.

3. Accepting the Old Testament in its entirety as a trustworthy account of God’s self revelation before Jesus’ incarnation, a scholar has his material delineated for him. More, this same material provides him with an objective standard and guide. A scholar is not left to his own predilections or subjective fancies. Accepting the Old Testament as a trustworthy revelation of God, a scholar is assured that the Lord God Himself has decided how and what to reveal and also the purpose of this revelation. Rejecting this position, a higher critical scholar has no objective basis. All his lofty scientific ideals and methods are shackled by subjectivism. This has dire consequences for a consistent treatment of Old Testament history and Biblical Theology.

4. The Old Testament purports to give a reliable account of the history of salvation. It simply and unhesitatingly recounts events that have taken place which are meaningful for the salvation of mankind. It does not give us a mere chronicle. Nor does it pretend to give a full and detailed history of the creation of the world and its inhabitants, of the entrance of sin into this perfect creation, nor of the plan Almighty God had and began to execute step by step the moment man fell into sin. But the Old Testament does consciously and deliberately record various steps in the outworking of God’s plan. They are so recorded that we today can trace the footprints of God in the life of the human race (from its very beginnings) in such a way that we can produce manuscripts which relate a consistent, developing scene of Divine activity. What is more, all those who study and write in the field of the Old Testament, find themselves in basic agreement with all likeminded fellow scholars. These scholars, with confidence in each other, can learn and profit immeasurably from each other’s work, build on each other’s work, and thus cooperate in the blessed work of bringing to clearer light God’s blessed plan of salvation.

How unenviable is the position of the Higher Critics whether Wellhausen, Form Critical, etc. Each one stands alone within the
wider framework of the presuppositions under which they labour. A consistent Old Testament history is impossible. Each alone writes according to the "light" he has.

5. In the last number of decades an increasing number of Old Testament Biblical Theological studies have been published. Men, who do not hold to the historicity of the Old Testament, have nevertheless been asking, "What is the message of the Old Testament?" How gratifying it is that this important and necessary query is repeatedly asked. But, in seeking an answer to this question bewilderment and confusion is most evident. Since there is no agreement as to which facts are reliable, there is no agreement as to which facts to study, listen to and to interpret. Added to that, there is, on the part of many, no assurance at all as to which facts are the first ones to be dealt with. The result of all this is that students and writers are at a quandry as to where to begin and how to proceed. 76

H. H. Rowley has produced a book in the field of Biblical Theology. It is comprised of a series of lectures, with the title of "The Faith of Israel." 77 In the introduction Rowley states, "In so far as there is revelation of God there is something timeless and of enduring validity; yet this timeless element is mediated through an historical moment and historical circumstances. It is precisely here that the essential difficulty of writing an Old Testament lies." 78 Rowley stresses the difficulty in finding the timeless message mediated through history. Indeed it is difficult, when one is certain of a reliable historical record. But Rowley has made the task insurmountably great by refusing to accept the entire Old Testament as historically trustworthy. 79

Indeed, how unenviable is the position of the scholar who is not able to come to certainty concerning which recorded facts he must deal with or which facts can be assumed to be reliable as he seeks to answer the question: What is the message of the Old Testament? If these scholars accepted the claim of the Scriptures regarding its historical trustworthiness, they could, and only then, profitably address themselves to the question of the message.

VIII

In conclusion we unhesitatingly declare our adherence to the historic confessions of the Reformed faith. More, in the light and under the guidance of these confessions we will study the Scriptures, formulate the truths therein taught and teach them either in speaking or writing.

We are well aware of what these confessions state: We quote from two:

76. All know where the climax is: in Jesus Christ. We can thankfully take note of the fact that all Old Testament Biblical Theological writers see Christ as the culminating self-revelation of God, and that the Old Testament points to and leads the way to this culmination.
77. See note 41.
78. Ibid p. 21.
79. Ibid p. 15.
The Belgo Confession

Art. III, The Word of God

We confess that this Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of man, but that men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit, as the Apostle Peter says and that afterwards God, from a special care which He has for us and our salvation, commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit His revealed word to writing.

Art. IV

We believe that the Holy Scriptures are contained in two books, namely, the Old and the New Testament, which are canonical, against which nothing can be alleged.

Art. V

We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt all things contained in them, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they carry the evidence thereof in themselves.

The Westminster Confession

Specific statements found in the first chapter are:

Paras. 1 and 2

All sixty-six books “are given by the inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.

Para. 4

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of man or the church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof, and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

Para. 5

Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.”

In 1943 Presbyterians celebrated the tercentenary of the convening of the assembly of divines which produced the historic Westminster standards of faith. During and immediately after that celebration a series of urgent questions were asked by the faculty of Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. “Did this celebration of the labours of the 17th century divines also evoke a cordial re-affirmation of their faith? Can we in particular, after three hundred years of discovery and research, still accept their doctrine of Scripture? Can we now in good conscience subscribe, as Presbyterian officials are still called upon to do (bold type mine VG) to belief in the Scriptures as ‘The Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice’?”

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These questions motivated the faculty members to produce a symposium. The faculty readily conceded that "it has been the vogue in many circles to represent this view (of the divines) of the Bible as a hopelessly outmoded point of view, which long ago should have been totally abandoned or radically transformed. Yet, this historic view of Scripture will not down."81

"We welcome the illumination of the Scriptures which discovery and research provide. We are as much concerned with the light which may yet break forth from the Scriptures and with the knowledge to be gained from a study of the world in which the Scriptures originated, as any student of the Bible. In that sense we have no desire to remain where the Westminster divines of the 17th century stood. However, their formulation of the doctrine of Scripture in our judgment remains valid today. It does not need to retreat in the face of modern scholarship.

"It is no obscurantism that accounts for our intransigence on this matter. The fundamental issue is ..., whether the total view of the world and of life which the Bible presents is true. Unless this fundamental matter is recognised at all times in the modern debate, confusion and distortion must result."82

This stand, consciously and deliberately taken in faith by the faculty of Westminster Seminary is the stand we take and vow to maintain as student and teacher of the Old Testament.

So doing, I sincerely hope and pray that I will fulfill my task as your directors, faculty, student body and members of the Association expect me to do it.

Directors: Our humble thanks to you for the confidence you expressed in me. Thank you for the honour bestowed.

Faculty members: We express our appreciation to you for nominating me to be your colleague in this work of the Lord. You have indicated a readiness to have me join your ranks; we pray that you may not be disappointed.

Students: Thank you too, for your readiness to accept me as one of your "school masters". Be assured that our deepest desires are none other than to help you sit at and be instructed at the feet of our common Master, Our Lord Jesus Christ. A real part of our work as professor will be to enter into a close and living relationship, as father and sons. We look forward to that. May God bless us in this.

Members of the Association: We are grateful to you for your interest, support and prayers. We rest assured that there will be a mutual increase in these things as we labour together for the Lord in this His work.

Thank you.

81. Ibid p. VI.
82. Ibid p. VI and VII.