

The Old Testament

1) General Outlines

Who is the author of the Old Testament? One wonders how many readers of the Old Testament, if asked the above question, would reply by repeating what they had read in the introduction to their Bible. They might answer that, even though it was written by men inspired by the Holy Ghost, the author was God. Sometimes, the author of the Bible's presentation confines himself to informing his reader of this succinct observation which puts an end to all further questions. Sometimes he corrects it by warning him that details may subsequently have been added to the primitive text by men, but that nonetheless, the litigious character of a passage does not alter the general "truth" that proceeds from it. This "truth" is stressed very heavily. The Church authorities answer for it, being the only body, with the assistance of the Holy Ghost, able to enlighten the faithful on such points. Since the councils held in the Fourth century, it was the Church that issued the list of Holy Books, ratified by the Councils of Florence (1441), Trent (1546), and the First Vatican Council (1870), to form what today is known as the Canon. Just recently, after so many encyclicals, the Second Vatican Council published a text concerning the revelation which is extremely important. It took three years (1962–1966) of strenuous effort to produce. The vast majority of the Bible's readers who find this highly reassuring information at the head of a modern edition have been quite satisfied with the guarantees of authenticity made over past centuries and have hardly thought it possible to debate them. When one refers however to works written by clergymen, not meant for mass publication, one realizes that the question concerning the authenticity of the books in the Bible is much more complex than one might suppose a priori. For example, when one consults the modern publication in separate instalments of the Bible in French translated under the guidance of the Biblical School of Jerusalem Pub. Cerf, Paris. , the tone appears to be very different. One realizes that the Old Testament, like the New Testament, raises problems with controversial elements that, for the most part, the authors of commentaries have not concealed. We also find highly precise data in more condensed studies of a very objective nature, such as Professor Edmond Jacob's study. The Old Testament (L'Ancien Testament) Pub. Presses Universitaires de France, Paris "Que sais-je?" collection. . This book gives an excellent general view. Many people are unaware, and Edmond Jacob points this out, that there were originally a number of texts and not just one. Around the third

century B.C., there were at least three forms of the Hebrew text: the text which was to become the Masoretic text, the text which was used, in part at least, for the Greek translation, and the Samaritan Pentateuch. In the first century B.C., there was a tendency towards the establishment of a single text, but it was not until a century after Christ that the Biblical text was definitely established. If we had had the three forms of the text, comparison would have been possible, and we could have reached an opinion concerning what the original might have been. Unfortunately, we do not have the slightest idea. Apart from the Dead Sea Scrolls (Cave of Qumran) dating from a pre-Christian era near the time of Jesus, a papyrus of the Ten Commandments of the second century A.D. presenting variations from the classical text, and a few fragments from the Fifth century A.D. (Geniza of Cairo), the oldest Hebrew text of the Bible dates from the ninth century A.D. The Septuagint was probably the first translation in Greek. It dates from the third century B.C. and was written by Jews in Alexandria. It was on this text that the New Testament was based. It remained authoritative until the seventh century A.D. The basic Greek texts in general used in the Christian world are from the manuscripts catalogued under the title Codex Vaticanus in the Vatican City and Codex Sinaiticus at the British Museum, London. They date from the fourth century A.D. At the beginning of the fifth century A.D., Saint Jerome was able to produce a text in Latin using Hebrew documents. It was later to be called the Vulgate on account of its universal distribution after the seventh century A.D. For the record, we shall mention the Aramaic version and the Syriac (Peshitta) version, but these are incomplete. All of these versions have enabled specialists to piece together so-called 'middle of the road' texts, a sort of compromise between the different versions. Multi-lingual collections have also been produced which juxtapose the Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Syriac, Aramaic and even Arabic versions. This is the case of the famous Walton Bible (London, 1667). For the sake of completeness, let us mention that diverging Biblical conceptions are responsible for the fact that the various Christian churches do not all accept exactly the same books and have not until now had identical ideas on translation into the same language. The Ecumenical Translation of the Old Testament is a work of unification written by numerous Catholic and Protestant experts now nearing completion. Translator's Note: Published December 1975 by Les Editions du Cerf and Les Bergers et les Mages, Paris. and should result in a work of synthesis. Thus the human element in the Old Testament is seen to be quite considerable. It is not difficult to understand why from version to version, and translation to translation, with all the corrections inevitably resulting, it was possible for the original text to have been transformed during the course of more than two thousand years.

Origins of The Bible

Before it became a collection of books, it was a folk tradition that relied entirely upon human memory, originally the only means of passing on ideas. This tradition was sung. "At an elementary stage, writes E. Jacob, every people sings; in Israel, as elsewhere, poetry preceded prose. Israel sang long and well; led by circumstances of his history to the heights of joy and the depths of despair, taking part with intense feeling in all that happened to it, for everything in their eyes had a sense, Israel gave its song a wide variety of expression". They sang for the most diverse reasons and E. Jacob mentions a number of them to which we find the accompanying songs in the Bible: eating songs, harvest songs, songs

connected with work, like the famous Well Song (Numbers 21, 17), wedding songs, as in the Song of Songs, and mourning songs. In the Bible there are numerous songs of war and among these we find the Song of Deborah (Judges 5, 1–32) exalting Israel's victory desired and led by Yahweh Himself, (Numbers 10, 35); “And whenever the ark (of alliance) set out, Moses said, 'Arise, oh Yahweh, and let thy enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee be before thee’”. There are also the maxims and proverbs (Book of Proverbs, Proverbs and Maxims of the Historic Books), words of blessing and curse, and the laws decreed to man by the Prophets on reception of their Divine mandate. E. Jacobs notes that these words were either passed down from family to family or channelled through the sanctuaries in the form of an account of the history of God's chosen people. History quickly turned into fable, as in the Fable of Jotham (Judges 9, 7–21), where “the trees went forth to anoint a king over them; and they asked in turn the olive tree, the fig tree, the vine and the bramble”, which allows E. Jacob to note “animated by the need to tell a good story, the narration was not perturbed by subjects or times whose history was not well known”, from which he concludes: “It is probable that what the Old Testament narrates about Moses and the patriarchs only roughly corresponds to the succession of historic facts. The narrators however, even at the stage of oral transmission, were able to bring into play such grace and imagination to blend between them highly varied episodes, that when all is said and done, they were able to present as a history that was fairly credible to critical thinkers what happened at the beginning of humanity and the world”. There is good reason to believe that after the Jewish people settled in Canaan, at the end of the thirteenth century B.C., writing was used to preserve and hand down the tradition. There was not however complete accuracy, even in what to men seems to demand the greatest durability, i.e. the laws. Among these, the laws which are supposed to have been written by God's own hand, the Ten Commandments, were transmitted in the Old Testament in two versions; Exodus (20, 1–21) and Deuteronomy (5, 1–30). They are the same in spirit, but the variations are obvious. There is also a concern to keep a large written record of contracts, letters, lists of personalities (Judges, high city officials, and genealogical tables), lists of offerings and plunder. In this way, archives were created which provided documentation for the later editing of definitive works resulting in the books we have today. Thus in each book there is a mixture of different literary genres: it can be left to the specialists to find the reasons for this odd assortment of documents. The Old Testament is a disparate whole based upon an initially oral tradition. It is interesting therefore to compare the process by which it was constituted with what could happen in another period and another place at the time when a primitive literature was born. Let us take, for example, the birth of French literature at the time of the Frankish Royalty. The same oral tradition presided over the preservation of important deeds: wars, often in the defense of Christianity, various sensational events, where heroes distinguished themselves, and were destined centuries later to inspire court poets, chroniclers and authors of various 'cycles'. In this way, from the eleventh century A.D. onwards, these narrative poems, in which reality is mixed with legend, were to appear and constitute the first monument in epic poetry. The most famous of all is the Song of Roland (La Chanson de Roland) a biographical chant about a feat of arms in which Roland was the commander of Emperor Charlemagne's rear-guard on its way home from an expedition in Spain. The sacrifice of Roland is not just an episode invented to meet the needs of the story. It took place on 15th

August, 778. In actual fact it was an attack by Basques living in the mountains. This literary work is not just legend; it has a historical basis, but no historian would take it literally. This parallel between the birth of the Bible and a secular literature seems to correspond exactly with reality. It is in no way meant to relegate the whole Biblical text as we know it today to the store of mythological collections, as do so many of those who systematically negate the idea of God. It is perfectly possible to believe in the reality of the Creation, God's transmission to Moses of the Ten Commandments, Divine intercession in human affairs, e.g. at the time of Solomon. This does not stop us, at the same time, from considering that what has been conveyed to us is the gist of these facts, and that the detail in the description should be subject to rigorous criticism, the reason for this being that the element of human participation in the transcription of originally oral traditions is so great.

2) The Books of The Old Testament

The Old Testament is a collection of works of greatly differing in length and many different genres. They were written in several languages over a period of more than nine hundred years, based on oral traditions. Many of these works were corrected and completed in accordance with events or special requirements, often at periods that were very distant from one another. This copious literature probably flowered at the beginning of the Israelite Monarchy, around the eleventh century B.C. It was at this period that a body of scribes appeared among the members of the royal household. They were cultivated men whose role was not limited to writing. The first incomplete writings, mentioned in the preceding chapter, may date from this period. There was a special reason for writing these works down; there were a certain number of songs (mentioned earlier), the prophetic oracles of Jacob and Moses, the Ten Commandments and, on a more general level, the legislative texts which established a religious tradition before the formation of the law. All these texts constitute fragments scattered here and there throughout the various collections of the Old Testament. It was not until a little later, possibly during the tenth century B.C., that the so-called 'Yahvist' text was written. So called because God is named Yahweh in this text. This text was to form the backbone of the first five books ascribed to Moses. Later, the so-called 'Elohists' text was added, so called because God is named Elohim in this text. Also added was the so-called 'Sacerdotal' version. From the preachers in the Temple at Jerusalem. The initial Yahvist text deals with the origins of the world up to the death of Jacob. This text comes from the southern kingdom, Judah. At the end of the ninth century and in the middle of the eighth century B.C., the prophetic influence of Elias and Elisha took shape and spread. We have their books today. This is also the time of the Elohist text of the Pentateuch which covers a much smaller period than the Yahvist text because it limits itself to facts relating to Abraham, Jacob and Joseph. The books of Joshua and Judges date from this time. The eighth century B.C. saw the appearance of the writer prophets: Amos and Hosea in Israel, and Michah in Judah. In 721 B.C., the fall of Samaria put an end to the Kingdom of Israel. The Kingdom of Judah took over its religious heritage. The collection of Proverbs dates from this period, distinguished in particular by the fusion into a single book of the Yahvist and Elohist texts of the Pentateuch; in this way the Torah was constituted. Deuteronomy was written at this time. In the second

half of the seventh century B.C., the reign of Josiah coincided with the appearance of the prophet Jeremiah, but his work did not take definitive shape until a century later. Before the first deportation to Babylon in 598 B.C., there appeared the Books of Zephaniah, Nahum and Habakkuk. Ezekiel was already prophesying during this first deportation. The fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. marked the beginning of the second deportation which lasted until 538 B.C. The Book of Ezekiel, the last great prophet and the prophet of exile, was not arranged into its present form until after his death by the scribes that were to become his spiritual inheritors. These same scribes were to resume Genesis in a third version, the so-called 'Sacerdotal' version, for the section going from the Creation to the death of Jacob. In this way a third text was to be inserted into the central fabric of the Yahvist and Elohist texts of the Torah. We shall see later on, in the books written roughly two and four centuries earlier, an aspect of the intricacies of this third text. It was at this time that the Lamentations appeared. On the order of Cyrus, the deportation to Babylon came to an end in 538 B.C. The Jews returned to Palestine and the Temple at Jerusalem was rebuilt. The prophets' activities began again, resulting in the books of Haggai, Zechariah, the third book of Isaiah, Malachi, Daniel and Baruch (the last being in Greek). The period following the deportation is also the period of the Books of Wisdom: Proverbs was written definitively around 480 B.C., Job in the middle of the fifth century B.C., Ecclesiastes or Koheleth dates from the third century B.C., as do the Song of Songs, Chronicles I & II, Ezra and Nehemiah. Ecclesiasticus or Sirach appeared in the Second century B.C.; the Book of Wisdom and the Book of Maccabees I & II were written one century before Christ. The Books of Ruth, Esther and Jonah are not easily datable. The same is true for Tobit and Judith. All these dates are given on the understanding that there may have been subsequent adaptations, since it was only circa one century before Christ that form was first given to the writings of the Old Testament. For many this did not become definitive until one century after Christ. Thus the Old Testament appears as a literary monument to the Jewish people, from its origins to the coming of Christianity. The books it consists of were written, completed and revised between the tenth and the first centuries B.C. This is in no way a personal point of view on the history of its composition. The essential data for this historical survey were taken from the entry The Bible in the Encyclopedia Universalis Paris, 1974 edition, Vol. a, pp. 246–263. by J. P. Sandroz, a professor at the Dominican Faculties, Saulchoir. To understand what the Old Testament represents, it is important to retain this information, correctly established today by highly qualified specialists. A revelation is mingled in all these writings, but all we possess today is what men have seen fit to leave us. These men manipulated the texts to please themselves, according to the circumstances they were in and the necessities they had to meet. When these objective data are compared with those found in various prefaces to Bibles destined today for mass publication, one realizes that facts are presented in them in quite a different way. Fundamental facts concerning the writing of the books are passed over in silence, ambiguities which mislead the reader are maintained, facts are minimalized to such an extent that a false idea of reality is conveyed. A large number of prefaces or introductions to the Bible misrepresent reality in this way. In the case of books that were adapted several times (like the Pentateuch), it is said that certain details may have been added later on. A discussion of an unimportant passage of a book is introduced, but crucial facts warranting lengthy expositions are passed over in silence. It is distressing to see such inaccurate

information on the Bible maintained for mass publication.

The Torah or Pentateuch

Torah is the Semitic name. The Greek expression, which in English gives us 'Pentateuch', designates a work in five parts; Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These were to form the five primary elements of the collection of thirty-nine volumes that makes up the Old Testament. This group of texts deals with the origins of the world up to the entry of the Jewish people into Canaan, the land promised to them after their exile in Egypt, more precisely until the death of Moses. The narration of these facts serves however as a general framework for a description of the provisions made for the religious and social life of the Jewish people, hence the name Law or Torah. Judaism and Christianity for many centuries considered that the author was Moses himself. Perhaps this affirmation was based on the fact that God said to Moses (Exodus 17, 14): "Write this (the defeat of Amalek) as a memorial in a book", or again, talking of the Exodus from Egypt, "Moses wrote down their starting places" (Numbers 33, 2), and finally "And Moses wrote this law" (Deuteronomy 31, 9). From the first century B.C. onwards, the theory that Moses wrote the Pentateuch was upheld; Flavius Josephus and Philo of Alexandria maintain it. Today, this theory has been completely abandoned; everybody is in agreement on this point. The New Testament nevertheless ascribes the authorship to Moses. Paul, in his Letter to the Romans (10, 5) quoting from Leviticus, affirms that "Moses writes that the man who practices righteousness which is based on the law..." etc. John, in his Gospel (5, 46–47), makes Jesus say the following: "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" We have here an example of editing, because the Greek word that corresponds to the original (written in Greek) is *episteuete*, so that the Evangelist is putting an affirmation into Jesus's mouth that is totally wrong: the following demonstrates this. I am borrowing the elements of this demonstration from Father de Vaux, Head of the Biblical School of Jerusalem. He prefaced his French translation of Genesis in 1962 with a general introduction to the Pentateuch which contained valuable arguments. These ran contrary to the affirmations of the Evangelists on the authorship of the work in question. Father de Vaux reminds us that the "Jewish tradition which was followed by Christ and his Apostles" was accepted up to the end of the Middle-Ages. The only person to contest this theory was Abenezra in the twelfth century. It was in the sixteenth century that Calstadt noted that Moses could not have written the account of his own death in Deuteronomy (34, 5–12). The author then quotes other critics who refuse to ascribe to Moses a part, at least, of the Pentateuch. It was above all the work of Richard Simon, father of the Oratory, Critical History of the Old Testament (*Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*) 1678, that underlined the chronological difficulties, the repetitions, the confusion of the stories and stylistic differences in the Pentateuch. The book caused a scandal. R. Simon's line of argument was barely followed in history books at the beginning of the eighteenth century. At this time, the references to antiquity very often proceeded from what "Moses had written". One can easily imagine how difficult it was to combat a legend strengthened by Jesus himself who, as we have seen, supported it in the New Testament. It is to Jean Astruc Louis XV's doctor, that we owe the decisive argument. By publishing, in 1753, his conjectures on the original writings which it appears Moses used to compose the

Book of Genesis (Conjectures sur les Mèmoires originaux dont il parait que Moyse s'est servi pour composer le livre de la Genèse), he placed the accent on the plurality of sources. He was probably not the first to have noticed it, but he did however have the courage to make public an observation of prime importance: two texts, each denoted by the way in which God was named either Yahweh or Elohim, were present side by side in Genesis. The latter therefore contained two juxtaposed texts. Eichorn (1780–1783) made the same discovery for the other four books; then Ilgen (1798) noticed that one of the texts isolated by Astruc, the one where God is named Elohim, was itself divided into two. The Pentateuch literally fell apart. The nineteenth century saw an even more minute search into the sources. In 1854, four sources were recognised. They were called the Yahvist version, the Elohist version, Deuteronomy, and the Sacerdotal version. It was even possible to date them: 1) The Yahvist version was placed in the ninth century B.C. (written in Judah). 2) The Elohist version was probably a little more recent (written in Israel). 3) Deuteronomy was from the eighth century B.C. for some (E. Jacob), and from the time of Josiah for others (Father de Vaux). 4) The Sacerdotal version came from the period of exile or after the exile: sixth century B.C. It can be seen that the arrangement of the text of the Pentateuch spans at least three centuries. The problem is however even more complex. In 1941, A. Lods singled out three sources in the Yahvist version, four in the Elohist version, six in Deuteronomy, nine in the Sacerdotal version, “not including the additions spread out among eight different authors” writes Father de Vaux. More recently, it has been thought that “many of the constitutions or laws contained in the Pentateuch had parallels outside the Bible going back much further than the dates ascribed to the documents themselves” and that “many of the stories of the Pentateuch presupposed a background that was different from, and older than, the one from which these documents were supposed to have come”. This leads on to “an interest in the formation of traditions”. The problem then appears so complicated that nobody knows where he is anymore. The multiplicity of sources brings with it numerous disagreements and repetitions. Father de Vaux gives examples of this overlapping of traditions in the case of the Flood, the kidnapping of Joseph, his adventures in Egypt, disagreement of names relating to the same character, differing descriptions of important events. Thus the Pentateuch is shown to be formed from various traditions brought together more or less skilfully by its authors. The latter sometimes juxtaposed their compilations and sometimes adapted the stories for the sake of synthesis. They allowed improbabilities and disagreements to appear in the texts, however, which have led modern man to the objective study of the sources. As far as textual criticism is concerned, the Pentateuch provides what is probably the most obvious example of adaptations made by the hand of man. These were made at different times in the history of the Jewish people, taken from oral traditions and texts handed down from preceding generations. It was begun in the tenth or ninth century B.C. with the Yahvist tradition which took the story from its very beginnings. The latter sketches Israel's own particular destiny to “fit it back into God's Grand Design for humanity” (Father de Vaux). It was concluded in the sixth century B.C. with the Sacerdotal tradition that is meticulous in its precise mention of dates and genealogies. We shall see in the next chapter, when confronted with modern scientific data, the extent of the narrative errors committed by authors of the Sacerdotal version on the subject of the antiquity of man on Earth, his situation in time and the course of the Creation. They are obviously errors arising from manipulation of

the texts. Father de Vaux writes that “The few stories this tradition has of its own bear witness to legal preoccupations: Sabbatical rest at the completion of the Creation, the alliance with Noah, the alliance with Abraham and the circumcision, the purchase of the Cave of Makpela that gave the Patriarchs land in Canaan”. We must bear in mind that the Sacerdotal tradition dates from the time of the deportation to Babylon and the return to Palestine starting in 538 B.C. There is therefore a mixture of religious and purely political problems. For Genesis alone, the division of the Book into three sources has been firmly established: Father de Vaux in the commentary to his translation lists for each source the passages in the present text of Genesis that rely on them. On the evidence of these data it is possible to pinpoint the contribution made by the various sources to any one of the chapters. For example, in the case of the Creation, the Flood and the period that goes from the Flood to Abraham, occupying as it does the first eleven chapters of Genesis, we can see alternating in the Biblical text a section of the Yahvist and a section of the Sacerdotal texts. The Elohist text is not present in the first eleven chapters. The overlapping of Yahvist and Sacerdotal contributions is here quite clear. For the Creation and up to Noah (first five chapters), the arrangement is simple: a Yahvist passage alternates with a Sacerdotal passage from beginning to end of the narration. For the Flood and especially chapters 7 and 8 moreover, the cutting of the text according to its source is narrowed down to very short passages and even to a single sentence. In the space of little more than a hundred lines of English text, the text changes seventeen times. It is from this that the improbabilities and contradictions arise when we read the present-day text.

The Historical Books

In these books we enter into the history of the Jewish people, from the time they came to the Promised Land (which is most likely to have been at the end of the thirteenth century B.C.) to the deportation to Babylon in the Sixth century B.C. Here stress is laid upon what one might call the 'national event' which is presented as the fulfillment of Divine word. In the narration however, historical accuracy has rather been brushed aside: a work such as the Book of Joshua complies first and foremost with theological intentions. With this in mind, E. Jacob underlines the obvious contradiction between archaeology and the texts in the case of the supposed destruction of Jericho and Ay. The Book of Judges is centered on the defense of the chosen people against surrounding enemies and on the support given to them by God. The Book was adapted several times, as Father A. Lefèvre notes with great objectivity in his Preamble to the Crampon Bible. The various prefaces in the text and the appendices bear witness to this. The story of Ruth is attached to the narrations contained in Judges.

Table Of The Distribution Of The Yahvist And Sacerdotal Texts Genesis: Chapters 1–11

The first figure indicates the chapter. The second figure in brackets indicates the number of phrases, sometimes divided into two parts indicated by the letters A and B. Letters: Y indicates Yahvist text, S indicates Sacerdotal text. Example: The first line of the table indicates: from Chapter 1, phrase 1 to Chapter 2, phrase 4a, the text published in present day Bibles is the sacerdotal text.

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Phrase</i>	<i>to Chapter</i>	<i>Phrase</i>	<i>Text</i>
1	(1)	2	(4a)	S
2	(4b)	4	(26)	Y
5	(1)	5	(32)	S
6	(1)	6	(8)	Y
6	(9)	6	(22)	S
7	(1)	7	(5)	Y
7	(6)			S
7	(7)	7	(10)	Y adapted
7	(11)			S
7	(12)			Y
7	(13)	7	(16a)	S
7	(16b)	7	(17)	Y
7	(18)	7	(21)	S
7	(22)	7	(23)	Y
7	(24)	8	(2a)	S
8	(2b)			Y
8	(3)	8	(5)	S
8	(6)	8	(12)	Y
8	(13a)			S
8	(13b)			Y
8	(14)	8	(19)	S
8	(20)	8	(22)	Y
9	(1)	9	(17)	S
9	(18)	9	(27)	Y
9	(28)	10	(7)	S
10	(8)	10	(19)	Y
10	(20)	10	(23)	S
10	(24)	10	(30)	Y
10	(31)	10	(32)	S
11	(1)	11	(9)	Y
11	(10)	11	(32)	S

What simpler illustration can there be of the way men have manipulated the Biblical scriptures? The Book of Samuel and the two Books of Kings are above all biographical collections concerning Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon. Their historic worth is the subject of debate. From this point of view E. Jacob finds numerous errors in it, because there are sometimes two and even three versions of the same event. The prophets Elias, Elisha and Isaiah also figure here, mixing elements of history and legend. For other commentators, such as Father Lefèvre, "the historical value of these books is fundamental." Chronicles I & II, the Book of Ezra and the Book of Nehemiah have a single author, called 'the Chronicler', writing in the fourth century B.C. He resumes the whole history of the Creation up to this

period, although his genealogical tables only go up to David. In actual fact, he is using above all the Book of Samuel and the Book of Kings, “mechanically copying them out without regard to the inconsistencies” (E. Jacob), but he nevertheless adds precise facts that have been confirmed by archaeology. In these works care is taken to adapt history to the needs of theology. E. Jacob notes that the author “sometimes writes history according to theology”. “To explain the fact that King Manasseh, who was a sacrilegious persecutor, had a long and prosperous reign, he postulates a conversion of the King during a stay in Assyria (Chronicles II, 33/11) although there is no mention of this in any Biblical or non-Biblical source”. The Book of Ezra and the Book of Nehemiah have been severely criticized because they are full of obscure points, and because the period they deal with (the fourth century B.C.) is itself not very well known, there being few non-Biblical documents from it. The Books of Tobit, Judith and Esther are classed among the Historical Books. In them very big liberties are taken with history. Proper names are changed, characters and events are invented, all for the best of religious reasons. They are in fact stories designed to serve a moral end, peppered with historical improbabilities and inaccuracies. The Books of Maccabees are of quite a different order. They provide a version of events that took place in the second century B.C. which is as exact a record of the history of this period as may be found. It is for this reason that they constitute accounts of great value. The collection of books under the heading 'historical' is therefore highly disparate. History is treated in both a scientific and a whimsical fashion.

The Prophetic Books

Under this heading we find the preachings of various prophets who in the Old Testament have been classed separately from the first great prophets such as Moses, Samuel, Elias and Elisha, whose teachings are referred to in other books. The prophetic books cover the period from the eighth to the second century B.C. In the eighth century B.C., there were the books of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Michah. The first of these is famous for his condemnation of social injustice, the second for his religious corruption which leads him to bodily suffering (for being forced to marry a sacred harlot of a pagan cult), like God suffering for the degradation of His people but still granting them His love. Isaiah is a figure of political history. He is consulted by kings and dominates events; he is the prophet of grandeur. In addition to his personal works, his oracles are published by his disciples right up until the third century B.C.: protests against iniquities, fear of God's judgement, proclamations of liberation at the time of exile and later on the return of the Jews to Palestine. It is certain that in the case of the second and third Isaiah, the prophetic intention is paralleled by political considerations that are as clear as daylight. The preaching of Michah, a contemporary of Isaiah, follows the same general ideas. In the seventh century B.C., Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Nahum and Habakkuk distinguished themselves by their preachings. Jeremiah became a martyr. His oracles were collected by Baruch who is also perhaps the author of Lamentations. The period of exile in Babylon at the beginning of the Sixth century B.C. gave birth to intense prophetic activity. Ezekiel figures importantly as the consoler of his brothers, inspiring hope among them. His visions are famous. The Book of Obadiah deals with the misery of a conquered Jerusalem. After the exile, which came to an end in 538 B.C., prophetic activity resumed with Haggai

and Zechariah who urged the reconstruction of the Temple. When it was completed, writings going under the name of Malachi appeared. They contain various oracles of a spiritual nature. One wonders why the Book of Jonah is included in the prophetic books when the Old Testament does not give it any real text to speak of. Jonah is a story from which one principle fact emerges: the necessary submission to Divine Will. Daniel was written in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek). According to Christian commentators, it is a 'disconcerting' Apocalypse from an historical point of view. It is probably a work from the Maccabaeian period, second century B.C. Its author wished to maintain the faith of his countrymen, at the time of the 'abomination of desolation', by convincing them that the moment of deliverance was at hand. (E.Jacob)

The Books of Poetry and Wisdom

These form collections of unquestionable literary unity. Foremost among them are the Psalms, the greatest monument to Hebrew poetry. A large number were composed by David and the others by priests and levites. Their themes are praises, supplications and meditations, and they served a liturgical function. The book of Job, the book of wisdom and piety par excellence, probably dates from 400–500 B.C. The author of 'Lamentations' on the fall of Jerusalem at the beginning of the sixth century B.C. may well be Jeremiah. We must once again mention the Song of Songs, allegorical chants mostly about Divine love, the Book of Proverbs, a collection of the words of Solomon and other wise men of the court, and Ecclesiastes or Koheleth, where earthly happiness and wisdom are debated. We have, therefore, a collection of works with highly disparate contents written over at least seven centuries, using extremely varied sources before being amalgamated inside a single work. How was this collection able, over the centuries, to constitute an inseparable whole and with a few variations according to community, become the book containing the Judeo-Christian revelation? This book was called in Greek the 'canon' because of the idea of intangibility it conveys. The amalgam does not date from the Christian period, but from Judaism itself, probably with a primary stage in the seventh century B.C. before later books were added to those already accepted. It is to be noted however that the first five books, forming the Torah or Pentateuch, have always been given pride of place. Once the proclamations of the prophets (the prediction of a chastisement commensurate with misdemeanour) had been fulfilled, there was no difficulty in adding their texts to the books that had already been admitted. The same was true for the assurances of hope given by these prophets. By the second century B.C., the 'Canon' of the prophets had been formed. Other books, e.g. Psalms, on account of their liturgical function, were integrated along with further writings, such as Lamentations, the Book of Wisdom and the Book of Job. Christianity, which was initially Judeo-Christianity, has been carefully studied (as we shall see later on) by modern authors, such as Cardinal Daniélou. Before it was transformed under Paul's influence, Christianity accepted the heritage of the Old Testament without difficulty. The authors of the Gospels adhered very strictly to the latter, but whereas a 'purge' has been made of the Gospels by ruling out the 'Apocrypha', the same selection has not been deemed necessary for the Old Testament. Everything, or nearly everything, has been accepted. Who would have dared dispute any aspects of this disparate amalgam before the end of the Middle-Ages, in the west at least? The answer is nobody, or almost nobody. From the end of the

Middle Ages up to the beginning of modern times, one or two critics began to appear; but, as we have already seen, the church authorities have always succeeded in having their own way. Nowadays, there is without doubt a genuine body of textual criticism, but even if ecclesiastic specialists have devoted many of their efforts to examining a multitude of detailed points, they have preferred not to go too deeply into what they euphemistically call difficulties¹. They hardly seem disposed to study them in the light of modern knowledge. They may well establish parallels with history, principally when history and Biblical narration appear to be in agreement, but so far they have not committed themselves to be a frank and thorough comparison with scientific ideas. They realize that this would lead people to contest notions about the truth of Judeo-Christian scriptures, which have so far remained undisputed.

3) The Old Testament and Science Findings

Few of the subjects dealt within the Old Testament, and likewise the Gospels, give rise to a confrontation with the data of modern knowledge. When an incompatibility does occur between the Biblical text and science, however, it is on extremely important points. As we have already seen in the preceding chapter, historical errors were found in the Bible and we have quoted several of these pinpointed by Jewish and Christian experts in exegesis. The latter have naturally had a tendency to minimize the importance of such errors. They find it quite natural for a sacred author to present historical fact in accordance with theology and to write history to suit certain needs. We shall see further on, in the case of the Gospel according to Matthew, the same liberties taken with reality and the same commentaries aimed at making admissible as reality what is in contradiction to it. A logical and objective mind cannot be content with this procedure. From a logical angle, it is possible to single out a large number of contradictions and improbabilities. The existence of different sources that might have been used in the writing of a description may be at the origin of two different presentations of the same fact. This is not all; different adaptations, later additions to the text itself, like the commentaries added a posteriori, then included in the text later on when a new copy was made, these are perfectly recognized by specialists in textual criticism and very frankly underlined by some of them. In the case of the Pentateuch alone, for example, Father de Vaux in the General Introduction preceding his translation of Genesis pages 13 and 14, has drawn attention to numerous disagreements. We shall not quote them here since we shall be quoting several of them later on in this study. The general impression one gains is that one must not follow the text to the letter. Here is a very typical example: In Genesis (6, 3), God decides just before the Flood henceforth to limit man's lifespan to one hundred and twenty years, "...his days shall be a hundred and twenty years". Further on however, we note in Genesis (11, 10–32) that the ten descendants of Noah had lifespans that range from 148 to 600 years (see table in this chapter showing Noah's descendants down to Abraham). The contradiction between these two passages is quite obvious. The explanation is elementary. The first passage (Genesis 6, 3) is a Yahvist text, probably dating as we have already seen from the tenth century B.C. The second passage in Genesis (11, 10–32) is a much more recent text (sixth century B.C.) from the Sacerdotal version. This version is at the origin of these genealogies, which are as precise in their information on life spans as they are improbable when taken en masse. It is in

Genesis that we find the most evident incompatibilities with modern science. These concern three essential points: 1) The Creation of the world and its stages. 2) The date of the Creation of the world and the date of man's appearance on earth. 3) The description of the Flood.

The Creation of the World

As Father de Vaux points out, Genesis “starts with two juxtaposed descriptions of the Creation”. When examining them from the point of view of their compatibility with modern scientific data, we must look at each one separately.

First Description of the Creation

The first description occupies the first chapter and the very first verses of the second chapter. It is a masterpiece of inaccuracy from a scientific point of view. It must be examined one paragraph at a time. The text reproduced here is from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Pub. w. M. Collins & Sons for the British and Foreign Bible Society, 1952. Chapter 1, verses 1 & 2: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.” It is quite possible to admit that before the Creation of the Earth, what was to become the Universe as we know it was covered in darkness. To mention the existence of water at this period is however quite simply pure imagination. We shall see in the third part of this book how there is every indication that at the initial stage of the formation of the universe a gaseous mass existed. It is an error to place water in it. Verses 3 to 5: “And God said, 'Let there be light', and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.” The light circulating in the Universe is the result of complex reactions in the stars. We shall come back to them in the third part of this work. At this stage in the Creation, however, according to the Bible, the stars were not yet formed. The “lights” of the firmament are not mentioned in Genesis until verse 14, when they were created on the Fourth day, “to separate the day from the night”, “to give light upon earth”; all of which is accurate. It is illogical, however, to mention the result (light) on the first day, when the cause of this light was created three days later. The fact that the existence of evening and morning is placed on the first day is moreover, purely imaginary; the existence of evening and morning as elements of a single day is only conceivable after the creation of the earth and its rotation under the light of its own star, the Sun! Verses 6 to 8: “And God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.’ And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.” The myth of the waters is continued here with their separation into two layers by a firmament that in the description of the Flood allows the waters above to pass through and flow onto the earth. This image of the division of the waters into two masses is scientifically unacceptable. Verses 9 to 13: “And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be

gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.¹ And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind upon the earth.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.” The fact that continents emerged at the period in the earth's history, when it was still covered with water, is quite acceptable scientifically. What is totally untenable is that a highly organized vegetable kingdom with reproduction by seed could have appeared before the existence of the sun (in Genesis it does not appear until the fourth day), and likewise the establishment of alternating nights and days. Verses 14 to 19: “And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmaments of the heavens to separate the day from night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth.’ And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.” Here the Biblical author's description is acceptable. The only criticism one could level at this passage is the position it occupies in the description as a whole. Earth and Moon emanated, as we know, from their original star, the Sun. To place the creation of the Sun and Moon after the creation of the Earth is contrary to the most firmly established ideas on the formation of the elements of the Solar System. Verses 20 to 30: “And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens.” So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.” This passage contains assertions which are unacceptable. According to Genesis, the animal kingdom began with the appearance of creatures of the sea and winged birds. The Biblical description informs us that it was not until the next day—as we shall see in the following verses—that the earth itself was populated by animals. It is certain that the origins of life came from the sea, but this question will not be dealt with until the third part of this book. From the sea, the earth was colonized, as it were, by the animal kingdom. It is from animals living on the surface of the earth, and in particular from one species of reptile which lived in the Second era, that it is thought the birds originated. Numerous biological characteristics common to both species make this deduction possible. The beasts of the earth are not however mentioned until the sixth day in Genesis; after the appearance of the birds. This order of appearance, beasts of the earth after birds, is not therefore acceptable. Verses 24 to 31: “And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw

that it was good.” “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion (sic) over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth”. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” “And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.” This is the description of the culmination of the Creation. The author lists all the living creatures not mentioned before and describes the various kinds of food for man and beast. As we have seen, the error was to place the appearance of beasts of the earth after that of the birds. Man's appearance is however correctly situated after the other species of living things. The description of the Creation finishes in the first three verses of Chapter 2: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host (sic) of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation; These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.” This description of the seventh day calls for some comment. Firstly the meaning of certain words. The text is taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible mentioned above. The word 'host' signifies here, in all probability, the multitude of beings created. As for the expression 'he rested', it is a manner of translating the Hebrew word 'Shabbath', from which the Jewish day for rest is derived, hence the expression in English 'Sabbath'. It is quite clear that the 'rest' that God is said to have taken after his six days' work is a legend. There is nevertheless an explanation for this. We must bear in mind that the description of the creation examined here is taken from the so-called Sacerdotal version, written by priests and scribes who were the spiritual successors of Ezekiel, the prophet of the exile to Babylon writing in the Sixth century B.C. We have already seen how the priests took the Yahvist and Elohist versions of Genesis and remodeled them after their own fashion in accordance with their own preoccupations. Father de Vaux has written that the 'legalist' character of these writings was very essential. An outline of this has already been given above. Whereas the Yahvist text of the Creation, written several centuries before the Sacerdotal text, makes no mention of God's Sabbath, taken after the fatigue of a week's labor, the authors of the Sacerdotal text bring it into their description. They divide the latter into separate days, with the very precise indication of the days of the week. They build it around the Sabbatic day of rest which they have to justify to the faithful by pointing out that God was the first to respect it. Subsequent to this practical necessity, the description that follows has an apparently logical religious order, but in fact scientific data permit us to qualify the latter as being of a whimsical nature. The idea that successive phases of the Creation, as seen by the Sacerdotal authors in their desire to incite people to religious observation, could have been compressed into the

space of one week is one that cannot be defended from a scientific point of view. Today we are perfectly aware that the formation of the Universe and the Earth took place in stages that lasted for very long periods. (In the third part of the present work, we shall examine this question when we come to look at the Qur'anic data concerning the Creation). Even if the description came to a close on the evening of the sixth day, without mentioning the seventh day, the 'Sabbath' when God is said to have rested, and even if, as in the Qur'anic description, we were permitted to think that they were in fact undefined periods rather than actual days, the Sacerdotal description would still not be any more acceptable. The succession of episodes it contains is an absolute contradiction with elementary scientific knowledge. It may be seen therefore that the Sacerdotal description of the Creation stands out as an imaginative and ingenious fabrication. Its purpose was quite different from that of making the truth known.

Second Description

The second description of the Creation in Genesis follows immediately upon the first without comment or transitional passage. It does not provoke the same objections. We must remember that this description is roughly three centuries older and is very short. It allows more space to the creation of man and earthly paradise than to the creation of the Earth and Heavens. It mentions this very briefly (Chapter 2, 4–7): “In the day that Yahweh God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up, for Yahweh God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a flood went up from earth and watered the whole face of the ground, then Yahweh God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” This is the Yahvist text that appears in the text of present day Bibles. The Sacerdotal text was added to it later on, but one may ask if it was originally so brief. Nobody is in a position to say whether the Yahvist text has not, in the course of time, been pared down. We do not know if the few lines we possess represent all that the oldest Biblical text of the Creation had to say. The Yahvist description does not mention the actual formation of the Earth or the Heavens. It makes it clear that when God created man, there was no vegetation on Earth (it had not yet rained), even though the waters of the Earth had covered its surface. The sequel to the text confirms this: God planted a garden at the same time as man was created. The vegetable kingdom therefore appears on Earth at the same time as man. This is scientifically inaccurate; man did not appear on Earth until a long time after vegetation had been growing on it. We do not know how many hundreds of millions of years separate the two events. This is the only criticism that one can level at the Yahvist text. The fact that it does not place the creation of man in time in relation to the formation of the world and the earth, unlike the Sacerdotal text, which places them in the same week, frees it from the serious objections raised against the latter.

The Date Of The World's Creation And The Date Of Man's Appearance On Earth

The Jewish calendar, which follows the data contained in the Old Testament, places the dates of the above very precisely. The second half of the Christian year 1975 corresponds to the beginning of the 5,

736th year of the creation of the world. The creation of man followed several days later, so that he has the same numerical age, counted in years, as in the Jewish calendar. There is probably a correction to be made on account of the fact that time was originally calculated in lunar years, while the calendar used in the West is based on solar years. This correction would have to be made if one wanted to be absolutely exact, but as it represents only 3%, it is of very little consequence. To simplify our calculations, it is easier to disregard it. What matters here is the order of magnitude. It is therefore of little importance if, over a thousand years, our calculations are thirty years out. We are nearer the truth in following this. Hebraic estimate of the creation of the world if we say that it happened roughly thirty-seven centuries before Christ. What does modern science tell us? It would be difficult to reply to the question concerning the formation of the Universe. All we can provide figures for is the era in time when the solar system was formed. It is possible to arrive at a reasonable approximation of this. The time between it and the present is estimated at four and a half billion years. We can therefore measure the margin separating the firmly established reality we know today and the data taken from the Old Testament. We shall expand on this in the third part of the present work. These facts emerge from a close scrutiny of the Biblical text. Genesis provides very precise information on the time that elapsed between Adam and Abraham. For the period from the time of Abraham to the beginnings of Christianity, the information provided is insufficient. It must be supported by other sources.

1. From Adam to Abraham

Genesis provides extremely precise genealogical data in Chapters 4, 5, 11, 21 and 25. They concern all of Abraham's ancestors in direct line back to Adam. They give the length of time each person lived, the father's age at the birth of the son and thus make it easily possible to ascertain the dates of birth and death of each ancestor in relation to the creation of Adam, as the table indicates. All the data used in this table come from the Sacerdotal text of Genesis, the only Biblical text that provides information of this kind. It may be deduced, according to the Bible, that Abraham was born 1,948 years after Adam.

Abraham's Genealogy:

	Date of birth after creation of Adam	Length of life	Date of death after creation of Adam
Adam		930	930
Seth	130	912	1042
Enosch	235	905	1140
Kenan	325	910	1235
Mahalaleel	395	895	1290
Jared	460	962	1422
Enoch	622	365	987
Methuselah	687	969	1656
Lamech	874	777	1651
Noah	1056	950	2006
Shem	1556	600	2156
Arpachshad	1658	438	2096
Shelah	1693	433	2122
Eber	1723	464	2187

Peleg	1757	239	1996
Reu	1787	239	2026
Serug	1819	230	2049
Nahor	1849	148	1997
Terah	1878	205	2083
Abraham	1948	175	2123

2. From Abraham to The Beginnings Of Christianity

The Bible does not provide any numerical information on this period that might lead to such precise estimates as those found in Genesis on Abraham's ancestors. We must look to other sources to estimate the time separating Abraham from Jesus. At present, allowing for a slight margin of error, the time of Abraham is situated at roughly eighteen centuries before Jesus. Combined with information in Genesis on the interval separating Abraham and Adam, this would place Adam at roughly thirty-eight centuries before Jesus. This estimate is undeniably wrong: the origins of this inaccuracy arise from the mistakes in the Bible on the Adam–Abraham period. The Jewish tradition still founds its calendar on this. Nowadays, we can challenge the traditional defenders of Biblical truth with the incompatibility between the whimsical estimates of Jewish priests living in the Sixth century B.C. and modern data. For centuries, the events of antiquity relating to Jesus were situated in time according to information based on these estimates. Before modern times, editions of the Bible frequently provided the reader with a preamble explaining the historical sequence of events that had come to pass between the creation of the world and the time when the books were edited. The figures vary slightly according to the time. For example, the Clementine Vulgate, 1621, gave this information, although it did place Abraham a little earlier and the Creation at roughly the 40th century. Walton's polyglot Bible, produced in the 17th century, in addition to Biblical texts in several languages, gave the reader tables similar to the one shown here for Abraham's ancestors. Almost all the estimates coincide with the figures given here. With the arrival of modern times, editors were no longer able to maintain such whimsical chronologies without going against scientific discovery that placed the Creation at a much earlier date. They were content to abolish these tables and preambles, but they avoided warning the reader that the Biblical texts on which these chronologies were based had become obsolete and could no longer be considered to express the truth. They preferred to draw a modest veil over them, and invent set-phrases of cunning dialectics that would make acceptable the text as it had formerly been, without any subtractions from it. This is why the genealogies contained in the Sacerdotal text of the Bible are still honored, even though in the Twentieth century one cannot reasonably continue to count time on the basis of such fiction. Modern scientific data do not allow us to establish the date of man's appearance on earth beyond a certain limit. We may be certain that man, with the capacity for action and intelligent thought that distinguishes him from beings that appear to be anatomically similar to him, existed on Earth after a certain estimable date. Nobody however can say at what exact date he appeared. What we can say today is that remains have been found of a humanity capable of human thought and action whose age may be calculated in tens of thousands of years. This approximate dating refers to the prehistoric human species, the most recently discovered being the Cro-Magnon Man. There have of course been many other discoveries all over the

world of remains that appear to be human. These relate to less highly evolved species, and their age could be somewhere in the hundreds of thousands of years. But were they genuine men? Whatever the answer may be, scientific data are sufficiently precise concerning the prehistoric species like the Cro-Magnon Man, to be able to place them much further back than the epoch in which Genesis places the first men. There is therefore an obvious incompatibility between what we can derive from the numerical data in Genesis about the date of man's appearance on Earth and the firmly established facts of modern scientific knowledge.

The Flood

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 are devoted to the description of the Flood. In actual fact, there are two descriptions; they have not been placed side by side, but are distributed all the way through. Passages are interwoven to give the appearance of a coherent succession of varying episodes. In these three chapters there are, in reality, blatant contradictions; here again the explanation lies in the existence of two quite distinct sources: the Yahvist and Sacerdotal versions. It has been shown earlier that they formed a disparate amalgam; each original text has been broken down into paragraphs or phrases, elements of one source alternating with the other, so that in the course of the complete description, we go from one to another seventeen times in roughly one hundred lines of English text. Taken as a whole, the story goes as follows: Man's corruption had become widespread, so God decided to annihilate him along with all the other living creatures. He warned Noah and told him to construct the Ark into which he was to take his wife, his three sons and their wives, along with other living creatures. The two sources differ for the latter, one passage (Sacerdotal) says that Noah was to take one pair of each species; then in the passage that follows (Yahvist) it is stated that God ordered him to take seven males and seven females from each of the so-called 'pure' animal species, and a single pair from the 'impure' species. Further on, however, it is stated that Noah actually took one pair of each animal. Specialists, such as Father de Vaux, state that the passage in question is from an adaptation of the Yahvist description. Rainwater is given as the agent of the Flood in one (Yahvist) passage, but in another (Sacerdotal), the Flood is given a double cause: rainwater and the waters of the Earth. The Earth was submerged right up to and above the mountain peaks. All life perished. After one year, when the waters had receded, Noah emerged from the Ark that had come to rest on Mount Ararat. One might add that the Flood lasted differing lengths of time according to the source used: forty days for the Yahvist version and one hundred and fifty in the Sacerdotal text. The Yahvist version does not tell us when the event took place in Noah's life, but the Sacerdotal text tells us that he was six hundred years old. The latter also provides information in its genealogies that situates him in relation to Adam and Abraham. If we calculate according to the information contained in Genesis, Noah was born 1,056 years after Adam (see table of Abraham's Genealogy) and the Flood therefore took place 1,656 years after the creation of Adam. In relation to Abraham, Genesis places the Flood 292 years before the birth of this Patriarch. According to Genesis, the Flood affected the whole of the human race and all living creatures created by God on the face of the Earth were destroyed. Humanity was then reconstituted by Noah's three sons and their wives so that when Abraham was born roughly three centuries later, he found a humanity that was already re-formed

into separate communities. How could this reconstruction have taken place in such a short time? This simple observation deprives the narration of all verisimilitude. Furthermore, historical data show its incompatibility with modern knowledge. Abraham is placed in the period 1800–1850 B.C., and if the Flood took place, as Genesis suggests in its genealogies, roughly three centuries before Abraham, we would have to place him somewhere in the Twenty-first to Twenty-second century B.C. Modern historical knowledge confirms that at this period, civilizations had sprung up in several parts of the world; for their remains have been left to posterity. In the case of Egypt for example, the remains correspond to the period preceding the Middle Kingdom (2,100 B.C.) at roughly the date of the First Intermediate Period before the Eleventh Dynasty. In Babylonia it is the Third Dynasty at Ur. We know for certain that there was no break in these civilizations, so that there could have been no destruction affecting the whole of humanity, as it appears in the Bible. We cannot therefore consider that these three Biblical narrations provide man with an account of facts that correspond to the truth. We are obliged to admit that, objectively speaking, the texts which have come down to us do not represent the expression of reality. We may ask ourselves whether it is possible for God to have revealed anything other than the truth. It is difficult to entertain the idea that God taught to man ideas that were not only fictitious, but contradictory. We naturally arrive therefore at the hypothesis that distortions occurred that were made by man or that arose from traditions passed down from one generation to another by word of mouth, or from the texts of these traditions once they were written down. When one knows that a work such as Genesis was adapted at least twice over a period of not less than three centuries, it is hardly surprising to find improbabilities or descriptions that are incompatible with reality. This is because the progress made in human knowledge has enabled us to know, if not everything, enough at least about certain events to be able to judge the degree of compatibility between our knowledge and the ancient descriptions of them. There is nothing more logical than to maintain this interpretation of Biblical errors which only implicates man himself. It is a great pity that the majority of commentators, both Jewish and Christian, do not hold with it. The arguments they use nevertheless deserve careful attention.

4) Position Of Christian Authors With Regard To Scientific Error In The Biblical Texts. A Critical Examination

One is struck by the diverse nature of Christian commentators' reactions to the existence of these accumulated errors, improbabilities and contradictions. Certain commentators acknowledge some of them and do not hesitate in their work to tackle thorny problems. Others pass lightly over unacceptable statements and insist on defending the text word for word. The latter try to convince people by apologetic declarations, heavily reinforced by arguments which are often unexpected, in the hope that what is logically unacceptable will be forgotten. In the Introduction to his translation of Genesis, Father de Vaux acknowledges the existence of critical arguments and even expands upon their cogency. Nevertheless, for him the objective reconstitution of past events has little interest. As he writes in his notes, the fact that the Bible resumes "the memory of one or two disastrous floods of the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates, enlarged by tradition until they took on the dimensions of a universal cataclysm" is neither

here nor there; “the essential thing is, however, that the sacred author has infused into this memory eternal teachings on the justice and mercy of God toward the malice of man and the salvation of the righteous.” In this way justification is found for the transformation of a popular legend into an event of divine proportions, and it is as such that it is thought fit to present the legend to men's faith, following the principle that an author has made use of it to illustrate religious teachings. An apologetic position of this kind justifies all the liberties taken in the composition of writings which are supposed to be sacred and to contain the word of God. If one acknowledges such human interference in what is divine, all the human manipulations of the Biblical texts will be accounted for. If there are theological intentions, all manipulations become legitimate; so that those of the 'Sacerdotal' authors of the Sixth century are justified, including their legalist preoccupations that turned into the whimsical descriptions we have already seen. A large number of Christian commentators have found it more ingenious to explain errors, improbabilities and contradictions in Biblical descriptions by using the excuse that the Biblical authors were expressing ideas in accordance with the social factors of a different culture or mentality. From this arose the definition of respective 'literary genres' which was introduced into the subtle dialectics of commentators, so that it accounts for all difficulties. Any contradictions there are between two texts are then explained by the difference in the way each author expressed ideas in his own particular 'literary genre'. This argument is not, of course, acknowledged by everybody because it lacks gravity. It has not entirely fallen into disuse today however, and we shall see in the New Testament its extravagant use as an attempt to explain blatant contradictions in the Gospels. Another way of making acceptable what would be rejected by logic when applied to a litigious text, is to surround the text in question with apologetical considerations. The reader's attention is distracted from the crucial problem of the truth of the text itself and deflected towards other problems. Cardinal Daniélou's reflections on the Flood follow this mode of expression. They appear in the review *Living God (Dieu Vivant)* No. 38, 1974, pp. 95–112) under the title: 'Flood, Baptism, Judgment', (Deluge, Baptême, Jugement') where he writes “The oldest tradition of the Church has seen in the theology of the Flood an image of Christ and the Church”. It is “an episode of great significance”...“a judgment striking the whole human race.” Having quoted from Origen in his *Homilies on Ezekiel*, he talks of “the shipwreck of the entire universe saved in the Ark”, Cardinal Daniélou dwells upon the value of the number eight “expressing the number of people that were saved in the Ark (Noah and his wife, his three sons and their wives)”. He turns to his own use of Justin's writings in his *Dialogue*. “They represent the symbol of the eighth day when Christ rose from the dead” and “Noah, the first born of a new creation, is an image of Christ who was to do in reality what Noah had prefigured.” He continues the comparison between Noah on the one hand, who was saved by the ark made of wood and the water that made it float (“water of the Flood from which a new humanity was born”), and on the other, the cross made of wood. He stresses the value of this symbolism and concludes by underlining the “spiritual and doctrinal wealth of the sacrament of the Flood” (sic). There is much that one could say about such apologetical comparisons. We should always remember that they are commentaries on an event that it is not possible to defend as reality, either on a universal scale or in terms of the time in which the Bible places it. With a commentary such as Cardinal Daniélou's we are back in the Middle-Ages, where the text had to be accepted as it was and any discussion, other than

conformist, was off the point. It is nevertheless reassuring to find that prior to that age of imposed obscurantism, highly logical attitudes were adopted. One might mention those of Saint Augustine which proceed from his thought, that was singularly advanced for the age he lived in. At the time of the Fathers of the Church, there must have been problems of textual criticism because Saint Augustine raises them in his letter No. 82. The most typical of them is the following passage: "It is solely to those books of Scripture which are called 'canonic' that I have learned to grant such attention and respect that I firmly believe that their authors have made no errors in writing them. When I encounter in these books a statement which seems to contradict reality, I am in no doubt that either the text (of my copy) is faulty, or that the translator has not been faithful to the original, or that my understanding is deficient." It was inconceivable to Saint Augustine that a sacred text might contain an error. Saint Augustine defined very clearly the dogma of infallibility when, confronted with a passage that seemed to contradict the truth, he thought of looking for its cause, without excluding the hypothesis of a human fault. This is the attitude of a believer with a critical outlook. In Saint Augustine's day, there was no possibility of a confrontation between the Biblical text and science. An open-mindedness akin to his would today eliminate a lot of the difficulties raised by the confrontation of certain Biblical texts with scientific knowledge. Present-day specialists, on the contrary, go to great trouble to defend the Biblical text from any accusation of error. In his introduction to Genesis, Father de Vaux explains the reasons compelling him to defend the text at all costs, even if, quite obviously, it is historically or scientifically unacceptable. He asks us not to view Biblical history "according to the rules of historical study observed by people today", as if the existence of several different ways of writing history was possible. History, when it is told in an inaccurate fashion, (as anyone will admit), becomes a historical novel. Here however, it does not have to comply with the standards established by our conceptions. The Biblical commentator rejects any verification of Biblical descriptions through geology, paleontology or pre-historical data. "The Bible is not answerable to any of these disciplines, and were one to confront it with the data obtained from these sciences, it would only lead to an unreal opposition or an artificial concordance." Introduction to Genesis, page 35. One might point out that these reflections are made on what, in Genesis, is in no way in harmony with modern scientific data, in this case the first eleven chapters. When however, in the present day, a few descriptions have been perfectly verified, in this case certain episodes from the time of the patriarchs, the author does not fail to support the truth of the Bible with modern knowledge. "The doubt cast upon these descriptions should yield to the favorable witness that history and eastern archaeology bear them." Ibid., page 34 In other words, if science is useful in confirming the Biblical description, it is invoked, but if it invalidates the latter, reference to it is not permitted. To reconcile the irreconcilable, i.e. the theory of the truth of the Bible with the inaccurate nature of certain facts reported in the descriptions in the Old Testament, modern theologians have applied their efforts to a revision of the classical concepts of truth. It lies outside the scope of this book to give a detailed expose of the subtle ideas that are developed at length in works dealing with the truth of the Bible; such as O. Loretz's work (1972) *What is the Truth of the Bible? (Quelle est la Vérité de la Bible?)* Pub. Le Centurion, Paris . This judgment concerning science will have to suffice: The author remarks that the Second Vatican Council "has avoided providing rules to distinguish between error and truth in the Bible. Basic considerations

show that this is impossible, because the Church cannot determine the truth or otherwise of scientific methods in such a way as to decide in principle and on a general level the question of the truth of the Scriptures". It is obvious that the Church is not in a position to make a pronouncement on the value of scientific 'method' as a means of access to knowledge. The point here is quite different. It is not a question of theories, but of firmly established facts. In our day and age, it is not necessary to be highly learned to know that the world was not created thirty-seven or thirty-eight centuries ago. We know that man did not appear then and that the Biblical genealogies on which this estimate is based have been proven wrong beyond any shadow of a doubt. The author quoted here must be aware of this. His statements on science are only aimed at side-stepping the issue so that he does not have to deal with it the way he ought to. The reminder of all these different attitudes adopted by Christian authors when confronted with the scientific errors of Biblical texts is a good illustration of the uneasiness they engender. It recalls the impossibility of defining a logical position other than by recognizing their human origins and the impossibility of acknowledging that they form part of a Revelation. The uneasiness prevalent in Christian circles concerning the Revelation became clear at the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) where it took no less than five drafts before there was any agreement on the final text, after three years of discussions. It was only then that "this painful situation threatening to engulf the Council" came to an end, to use His Grace Weber's expression in his introduction to the Conciliar Document No. 4 on the Revelation. Pub. Le Centurion, 1966, Paris. Two sentences in this document concerning the Old Testament (chap IV, page 53) describe the imperfections and obsolescence of certain texts in a way that cannot be contested: "In view of the human situation prevailing before Christ's foundation of salvation, the Books of the Old Testament enable everybody to know who is God and who is man, and also the way in which God, in his justice and mercy, behaves towards men. These books, even though they contain material which is imperfect and obsolete, nevertheless bear witness to truly divine teachings." There is no better statement than the use of the adjectives 'imperfect' and 'obsolete' applied to certain texts, to indicate that the latter are open to criticism and might even be abandoned; the principle is very clearly acknowledged. This text forms part of a general declaration which was definitively ratified by 2,344 votes to 6; nevertheless, one might question this almost total unanimity. In actual fact, in the commentaries of the official document signed by His Grace Weber, there is one phrase in particular which obviously corrects the solemn affirmation of the council on the obsolescence of certain texts: "Certain books of the Jewish Bible have a temporary application and have something imperfect in them." 'Obsolete', the expression used in the official declaration, is hardly a synonym for 'temporary application', to use the commentator's phrase. As for the epithet 'Jewish' which the latter curiously adds, it suggests that the conciliar text only criticized the version in Hebrew. This is not at all the case. It is indeed the Christian Old Testament alone that, at the Council, was the object of a judgment concerning the imperfection and obsolescence of certain parts.

5) Conclusions

The Biblical Scriptures must be examined without being embellished artificially with qualities one would

like them to have. They must be seen objectively as they are. This implies not only a knowledge of the texts, but also of their history. The latter makes it possible to form an idea of the circumstances which brought about textual adaptations over the centuries, the slow formation of the collection that we have today, with its numerous subtractions and additions. The above makes it quite possible to believe that different versions of the same description can be found in the Old Testament, as well as contradictions, historical errors, improbabilities and incompatibilities with firmly established scientific data. They are quite natural in human works of a very great age. How could one fail to find them in the books written in the same conditions in which the Biblical text was composed? At a time when it was not yet possible to ask scientific questions, and one could only decide on improbabilities or contradictions, a man of good sense, such as Saint Augustine, considered that God could not teach man things that did not correspond to reality. He therefore put forward the principle that it was not possible for an affirmation contrary to the truth to be of divine origin, and was prepared to exclude from all the sacred texts anything that appeared to him to merit exclusion on these grounds. Later, at a time when the incompatibility of certain passages of the Bible with modern knowledge has been realized, the same attitude has not been followed. This refusal has been so insistent that a whole literature has sprung up, aimed at justifying the fact that, in the face of all opposition, texts have been retained in the Bible that have no reason to be there. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) has greatly reduced this uncompromising attitude by introducing reservations about the “Books of the Old Testament” which “contain material that is imperfect and obsolete”. One wonders if this will remain a pious wish or if it will be followed by a change in attitude towards material which, in the Twentieth century, is no longer acceptable in the books of the Bible. In actual fact, save for any human manipulation, the latter were destined to be the “witness of true teachings coming from God”.

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