

## SOME FORMATIVE ASPECTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF GERHARD VON RAD'S IDEA OF HISTORY

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The critical and theological climate out of which Gerhard von Rad's work and thought emerged obviously had considerable influence on his understanding of history and his assessment of its relationship to theology.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Von Rad's work on the OT emerges chronologically from his studies on Deuteronomy. In 1929 he published *Das Gottesvolk im Deuteronomium*, *Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament*, 47 (hereafter BWANT). During the next eighteen years he returned twice to Deuteronomy, in 1938 publishing *Das formgeschichtliche Problem des Hexateuch*, BWANT, 78, sect. 5, "Das Formproblem beim Deuteronomium" (Eng. trans. in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* [London, 1966], pp. 26-33), and in 1947, *Deuteronomium-Studien*, *Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testament*, 58 (Eng. trans.: *Studies in Deuteronomy* [London, 1963]). Von Rad concluded these latter studies of Deuteronomy with the essay, "The Deuteronomistic Theology of History in the Book of Kings." While von Rad's analysis of the Yahwist's work is found in *The Problem of the Hexateuch*, between his works on Deuteronomy he published, in 1930, *Das Geschichtsbild des chronischen Werkes*, BWANT, 54, and, in 1934, *Die Priesterschrift im Hexateuch*, BWANT, 65. In 1943 he published what would be the first preparatory essay for a theology of the OT, "Grundprobleme einer biblischen Theologie des Alten Testaments" (*TLZ* 68, cols. 225-243). Here the Deuteronomistic dominance in his theological thinking emerges. In 1944 appeared "Der Anfang der Geschichtsschreibung im alten Israel," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 32 (1944): 1-42; now in *Gesammelte Studien* (München, 1965), pp. 148-188 (Eng. trans. in *Problems of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, pp. 166-204). "Theologische Geschichtsschreibung im Alten Testament," appeared in 1948 in *TZ* 4: 161-174; and in 1952 came the second and third essays preparatory to his theology of the OT: "Kritische Vorarbeiten zur einer Theologie des Alten Testaments," *Theologie und Liturgie*, ed. by L. Henning (München), pp. 11-34, and "Typologische Auslegung des Alten Testaments," *EvT* 12: 17-33 (Eng. trans.: "Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament," *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. C. Westermann [Richmond, 1966]). In the latter article typology is defended as the correct alternative to the analogical approach of critical methodology, and all other historico-theological delineations in the OT are subsumed under the theological trend of the Deuteronomistic history. In 1957 von Rad's work

### 1. *Backgrounds to Heilsgeschichte*

If we go back to the beginnings of the ideal of *Heilsgeschichte*<sup>2</sup>, a central concept in von Rad's theology, several formative factors appear that were instrumental in the formulation of this idea and that have persisted to the present time. These factors are the aims of rationalism and Pietism, and the results of historical criticism based on the dogmatic presuppositions of rationalism.

Rationalism denied any kind of certainty based on history. The greater the distance between the present time and the historical event, the greater became one's uncertainty about the event. Certainty, it was thought, could be attained through reason. Because of this assumption, rationalism stimulated a search for a theology of immediacy and inwardness.

Pietism was basically reactionary, standing between the controversies of Orthodoxy and the more innovative approaches to theology. The basic concern of the Pietists was religious experience—thus the common ground of immediacy between the rationalists and the Pietists, although achieved on different bases, is obvious. Johann Bengel, the Pietist, attempted to demonstrate that in Scripture there was revealed a divine economy from the beginning to the end of all things. As the Christian viewed this economy he was permitted to see the universal aims of God,

received comprehensive theological expression when he published *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, bd. 1: *Die Theologie der geschichtlichen Überlieferungen Israels* (München) (Eng. trans.: *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1: *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions* [New York, 1962]), and in 1962, when he published *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, bd. 2: *Die Theologie der prophetischen Überlieferungen Israels* (München) (Eng. trans.: *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2: *The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions* [New York, 1967]).

<sup>2</sup> We cannot consider here the arguments as to whether or not we should begin our search for understanding the development of *Heilsgeschichte* with J. Cocceius or with J. Bengel. Such questions are treated in G. Weth, *Die Heilsgeschichte* (München, 1931), pp. 17-20. See also K. G. Steck, *Die Idee der Heilsgeschichte*, *Theologische Studien*, 56 (Zollikon, 1959), pp. 14-15; G. Schrenk, *Gottesreich und Bund im ältern Protestantismus* (Gütersloh, 1923), pp. 300-332.

but the comprehensiveness of this divine intention was visible only to the one reconciled to Christ.<sup>3</sup> The historical dimension of Bengel's work betrays the influence of Johannes Cocceius' Federal Theology in Pietistic circles.<sup>4</sup>

The failure of rationalism to attain its theological goals tended to turn the theologian's attitude inwards, toward religious experience. F. Schleiermacher is the most notable example of the rationalistic quest for certainty and the Pietist's preoccupation with religious experience.

While rationalism had tended to be antihistorical in its quest for immediacy, romanticism revived an interest in history. It attempted to feel a relationship to the past.<sup>5</sup> In theology both J. G. Hamann (1733-88) and J. G. Herder (1744-1803) emphasized history as the bearer of revelation for the rational thinker. According to Hamann, there is no experience of reality and of the divine except that which is given in the external facts of history. Certainty of the divine can only be conveyed to man by a revelation appropriate to his rational nature. The entire world history and nature, therefore, constitute the sphere and medium of divine glory. This means, however, that the revelational character of history—and of biblical history in particular—is only a symbolic one, because eternity does not appear in its supernatural character among men, but in a form suitable for their power of comprehension and faith. All history is a prophecy of something higher, and is symbolic of the eternal world which is the goal of all history, sacred history, and personal faith.

Thomas Wizenmann (1759-87) stressed that the problem of

<sup>3</sup> See C. T. Fritsch, "Biblical Typology," *BSac* 103 (1946): 419.

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of Cocceius' theology see Charles Sherwood McCoy, "The Covenant Theology of Johannes Cocceius" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1957), esp. pp. 147-156.

<sup>5</sup> The romantic movement in Europe is of immense importance in considering the emergence of the emphasis on religious experience as a way of knowing. Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) stressed the superiority of the feeling to the intellect, and the romantic emotional literature which nourished Europe from 1789-1848 produced a corresponding revival of religious feeling over against the skepticism of rationalism. See W. Durant, *The Story of Philosophy* (New York, 1961), p. 197.

theology is the problem of a historical knowledge of God. God is not the result of thinking or an ethical idea, but is an active agent in a real relationship which comes into being in history. When a man turns to God, the goal of revelational history has been attained. Wizenmann understood revelational history as the history of a personal relationship, the aim of which is God-likeness.<sup>6</sup>

The status of the personal experience of salvation was a dominant factor in the *Heilsgeschichte* theology of J. C. K. von Hofmann.<sup>7</sup> Von Hofmann saw two ways of treating Scripture that were worthy of a scientific standing. The first emanated from Christian experience; this experience was a fact for the believer. Because this experience was a fact, that which preceded it was a fact; that is, the theologian recognized the fact of rebirth and in this rebirth the entire "Holy History," the beginning and movement of which could be derived from its end—personal belief. The other approach was an historical one, but operated according to similar idealistic laws of development. In this approach, one reconstructed the "Holy History" from its center identified by the Scriptures. The unity and self-consistency of this history would then be valid for everyone who, through the experience of salvation, was able to understand it. Where personal experience of salvation did not exist there could be no theology.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For a resume of the thought of Hamann, Herder, and Wizenmann, see Weth, pp. 32-38.

<sup>7</sup> Von Hofmann produced three principal works: *Weissagung und Erfüllung*, 2 bde. (Nördlingen, 1841-1844); *Der Schriftbeweis*, 3 bde. (Nördlingen, 1852-1856); and *Biblische Hermeneutik* (Nördlingen, 1880), published posthumously by D. W. Volck (Eng. trans. by C. Preus, *Interpreting the Bible* [Minneapolis, 1959]). As far as we have been able to determine, von Hofmann was responsible for coining the word *Heilsgeschichte*, contra O. Piper, "Heilsgeschichte," *A Handbook of Christian Theology* (London, 1958); Alan Richardson, "Heilsgeschichte," *A Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London, 1969), and Eric Lord and Donald Whittle, "Heilsgeschichte," *A Theological Glossary* (Oxford, 1969). See my article, "A Critical Note on the Origin of the Term *Heilsgeschichte*," *ExpTim* 87 (1975-1976): 118-119.

<sup>8</sup> *Grundlinien der Theologie Joh. Christ K. v. Hofmanns*, ed. J. Hausleiter (Leipzig, 1910), p. 5.

The reasons for this subjective and inward movement of *Heilsgeschichte* seem clear. Theories of the natural development of man had raised the question about the supernatural concept of salvation, and historical criticism was bit-by-bit cutting away at the accuracy and unity of the historical picture presented in the Bible. Von Hoffmann was motivated to answer the question of Christian certainty by suggesting that certainty was rooted in one's saving faith, and that this faith apprehended the saving truth witnessed to by Scripture. The certainty did not apply to facts that in isolation were the objects of natural knowledge.<sup>9</sup> In being concerned with "Holy History" and its requirements in contrast to objects of natural knowledge and development, von Hofmann gave theological priority to the personal experience of salvation in Christ.

Thus, in harmony with previous elements in this particular theological development, theology tended to move inward. While history is viewed as a means of revelation, emphasis is placed actually on the experience of salvation that one has in history and on the comprehension of the goal of history through this experience rather than on the critical determination of the external facts of history. This situation in theology made it possible for the philosophy of German Idealism to provide a structure for historically-based theology. G. W. F. Hegel made history the prime source of knowledge, but for him history followed the laws of logic, and developed according to the canons of reason. A philosopher of history was to understand his task as unfolding the development of reason in its historical course; thus, the philosopher was concerned with the laws of logic that govern the development of history. Because the course of history could be rationally demonstrable there was no need for the empirical methods of the historian.

Along with a growing rejection of philosophies of history as pure speculation, criticism turned upon *Heilsgeschichte* and soon

<sup>9</sup> Von Hofmann, *Interpreting the Bible* (Minneapolis, 1959), pp. 64-76.

rendered it unacceptable, especially in light of the many different ways in which the *Heilsgeschichte* theologians constructed their systems. History eventually became identified with objective historical research, and the idea arose that if one were to believe and ground his faith in history, he must wait for the critic to discover some historically reliable element upon which to rest his faith. But historical criticism could arrive at nothing other than a greater or lesser degree of probability for assumed historical occurrences, and its methods operated with a presupposition that could detect no divine activity in history. Historical criticism produced skepticism about history's being the basis for faith. This skepticism that was later compounded by the results of form criticism, which tended to fragment Israel's picture of her history into many originally unrelated traditions. The same methods applied to the New Testament picture of Jesus that we could know nothing about Jesus with any certainty except the bare fact of his existence.

Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann both wrestled with the problems caused by rationalistic historical criticism, each going his own way in attempting to deal with the implications that criticism presented to faith. Barth took refuge from historical criticism in *Heilsgeschichte*. Historical criticism did not come to grips with the testimony of Scripture to God's self-disclosure, nor did it recognize any redemptive events. Faith depended on the Christ in whom God was acting for man's salvation, the Jesus in the proclamation.<sup>10</sup>

This latter point Barth shared with Bultmann. While Bultmann did not take the *Heilsgeschichte* route in order to escape the implications of historical criticism for theology, he placed exclusive importance on revelation as an event occurring here and now in the proclamation of the church. All theology begins

<sup>10</sup> Barth's views are contained in *The Epistle to the Romans* (London, 1933). For a brilliant analysis of Barth in relation to the understanding of historical criticism by E. Troeltsch, see T. W. Ogletree, *Christian Faith and History* (New York, 1965).

from the *kerygma*—which is not the message of Jesus, but the proclamation of the church. Faith begins only here and is grounded only in the *kerygma*, not in the results of criticism. The real historical event lies in the existential decision that the believer makes to the word preached by the church. The significance of history thus lies in the historicity of the individual.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. *Analysis of von Rad's Heilsgeschichte*

Von Rad who, like his nineteenth century predecessors, thinks that theology should take the form of *Heilsgeschichte*, rejects the idea that the *Heilsgeschichte* should be subjected to historical criticism. Rather, he declares that Israel's faith is unrelated to the critical picture.<sup>12</sup> This negative attitude is surely at least partially dependent upon his historical skepticism, a trait born largely out of his acceptance of the Alt-Noth school of historical research, and nourished by his own historical criticism utilizing the same methods of research.

Of the Exodus, von Rad suggests that the tradition reflects perhaps only the account of a group of slaves who escaped from Egypt. Only later, he feels, did this story achieve the significance it had for the faith.<sup>13</sup> The credo (Deut 26: 5-9) does not provide a natural course of events even in broad outline, he states, but is the result of a chance arrangement of originally unrelated traditions in a confessional situation.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See *The Theology of the New Testament*, I (New York, 1951): 1.

<sup>12</sup> F. Baumgärtel, "Gerhard von Rad's Theologie des Alten Testaments," *TLZ* 86 (1961), cols. 804-805, reflects that von Rad's opposition to submitting Israel's report of her history to historical criticism rests on the idea that because the phenomenon of the faith cannot be explained in a rational or logical way, the picture of the history constructed by faith cannot be the object of religio-historical investigation. The object of investigation, however, states Baumgärtel, is not the faith, but the product of the faith, the confessional description of the history. Equating faith and the witness of faith as a phenomenon makes religio-historical work appear impossible. History demands inner, logical, organic connections. Therefore in light of what we know of Israel's history by critical methods, the task at hand is to reconstruct a history of "inner" events by critical means, in other words to write a history of Israel's piety.

<sup>13</sup> *Old Testament Theology*, 1:13. (Hereafter cited as *OTT*.)

<sup>14</sup> *OTT*, 1:3-14, 106-109.

Even in considering the later period of Israel's history, for which more complete historical sources are available, von Rad is disinclined to depend upon the decisions of the critical historian. For instance, according to the historian, the Fall of Jerusalem was the result of external causes, but he ignores the biblical testimony that this was an act of God.<sup>15</sup> Besides placing many critical questions against Israel's own picture of her history, the critically constructed picture does not have any natural place for God's activity; therefore, like Barth, von Rad finds it inappropriate to bring it to bear upon *Heilsgeschichte*. For von Rad, *Heilsgeschichte* is a history formed and moved by God's word; a word of judgment and salvation is injected into it, moving it to a fulfillment.<sup>16</sup> While we may detect that this is an "inner" history because of von Rad's passive attitude toward critical history, von Rad would refuse to admit that we have here "inner" events that may be reconstructed by critical means into a history of piety.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Theologie des Alten Testaments* 1:9-10. (Hereafter cited as *TAT*.)

<sup>16</sup> D. G. Spriggs, *Two Old Testament Theologies* (London, 1974), p. 36, cites evidence which he feels suggests that von Rad does not know what he means by *Heilsgeschichte*. We question this criticism on the grounds that von Rad uses the word with such familiarity and with so many meanings according to different contexts that it is difficult for those of us not so familiar with his usage of the word to reconcile the differences. Nevertheless, the movement from promise to fulfillment, such as we find in the Deuteronomistic theology of history, together with the tendency for the theologians of Israel to encompass ever wider areas of the history in its survey, placing each period concerned within the tension between a promise and its realization—this is the primary functional meaning of *Heilsgeschichte* in von Rad's work. The question we would direct toward von Rad is the legitimacy of his loose usage of the term *Heilsgeschichte* without adequate explanation in each context, especially where he directs his attention to Ecclesiasticus (*OTT*, 1:445; cf. 1:327, 2:306). If *Heilsgeschichte* in one case can refer to a summary of events (*OTT*, 1:122), but if in another case a book containing a catalog of the events involved is not concerned with *Heilsgeschichte* because it is not characterized by the hidden or obvious examples of God's hidden guidance or the tension between promise and fulfillment, then von Rad should tell us clearly why the catalog of events does not now count as *Heilsgeschichte*.

<sup>17</sup> Von Rad wishes to avoid the impression that an OT theology is involved with the spiritual consciousness of the narrator or with what Baumgärtel calls "inner" events, yet Baumgärtel has made a case that to some degree von

The clearest formulation of von Rad's idea of *Heilsgeschichte* is found in the Deuteronomistic theology of history. The Deuteronomist was not interested in presenting a secular history of Israel or a history of the faith, but in showing how the word of God operated in history.<sup>18</sup> All of the earlier biblical attempts at historiography are to be interpreted according to the theological trend found in the Deuteronomistic history.<sup>19</sup>

The prophetic books are also concerned with history. The prophets make a break with *Heilsgeschichte* by denying the saving efficacy of the old divine actions or ordinances; but by projecting the old actions into the future, where they are actualized and again come to have saving efficacy, God creates a link to what he had formerly done.<sup>20</sup>

Rad is concerned with "inner" events. Focusing on the movement of *Heilsgeschichte* from promise to fulfillment, Baumgärtel states that in the case where the prophets project the old traditions into the future, no historical events are effected; therefore it is the faith, not the history, that has come into motion. This is an inner movement. Likewise, to speak of the heart as the field where the control of history operates (*OTT*, 1: 316) is to be concerned with inner events. Deuteronomy also has something that appeals to the heart (*OTT*, 1: 232). Mastering the material so that the history could be seen from within from the perspective of faith (*OTT*, 1: 302) also depicts an inner character for history. Baumgärtel states that it is difficult to know what von Rad means by the *Heilsgeschichte* being moved by the injection of God's word, because it is impossible to know into what it is injected: Is it into the way Israel thought about the faith or into the theological understanding? The movement from promise to fulfillment, according to Baumgärtel, describes something that is accomplished in an act of faith, not in outer events; and because von Rad denies that he is concerned with inner events, it is impossible to know how to understand his idea of motion. (See Baumgärtel, cols. 806-808.)

<sup>18</sup> *OTT*, 1: 343.

<sup>19</sup> Von Rad twice mentions this in essays preparatory to his theology of the OT: first in "Grundprobleme einer biblischen Theologie des Alten Testaments," cols. 225-243, and again in "Typologische Auslegung des Alten Testaments," pp. 17-33 (Eng. trans. of latter article: "Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament," in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. C. Westermann [Richmond, Va., 1966], pp. 17-39).

<sup>20</sup> Von Rad submits that the only way possible for Israel to have a future that involved God, since the prophets had broken with the *Heilsgeschichte*, was to project the old saving actions as types into the future where they are fulfilled in the sense of antitypes. *Heilsgeschichte* again comes into being only by the future actualization of the old divine acts by the prophets. In speaking

The historian may have many questions about von Rad's idea of history, but von Rad points out that the kerygmatic picture tends towards a "theological maximum," not a "critically assured minimum."<sup>21</sup> Von Rad does not deal with the question of how such a theological maximum arose.<sup>22</sup> The important thing is Israel's confession, not the historical core of the material. There is some elusive event behind the tradition, but the experience of Israel in her historical life is also an historical event. Von Rad makes it clear that in the process of actualization through interpretation, the primary experience is of diminishing importance, and that the authentic element lies in the secondary experience. Thus, the importance of the historical basis of Israel's faith fades out, and the *kerygma* becomes all important.<sup>23</sup>

In von Rad's presentation of the kerygmatic picture of Israel's history and its relation to the critically constructed picture, an

of the abolition of the old saving acts, von Rad uses a number of terms alternately which Baumgärtel, cols. 808-809, has been quick to criticize. In one place von Rad states that the prophets proclaim to their contemporaries that the "saving ordinances" (*Heilssetzungen*) have lost their "saving worth" (*Heilskräftigkeit*) and in another place says that the prophets deny the saving worth of the "divine actions" (*göttlichen Setzungen*) for their contemporaries (*TAT*,<sup>9</sup> 1: 142, 9; *OTT*, 1: 128, vii). By employing these terms alternately von Rad attempts to allow the old divine actions to be in effect by their new interpretation or actualization by the prophets, while at the same time affirming that they were abolished. He not only makes the saving worth of the events appear to be abolished, but the events themselves.

It is interesting to note how much dialectical theology has influenced von Rad's interpretation of the OT, esp. the prophets: He speaks of the prophets as being outside the *Heilsgeschichte*, yet of their message being rooted in it (*OTT*, 1: 128; 2: 303); of the old as being present in the new "in the mysterious dialectic of valid and obsolete" (*OTT*, 2: 272); also of the preaching of the eighth century prophets as being "a continuous dialogue with tradition" (*OTT*, 2: 273), and of the prophets moving within the realm of the earlier witness of Yahwism "in an extraordinarily dialectic fashion" (*OTT*, 2: 327).

<sup>21</sup> *OTT*, 1: 108.

<sup>22</sup> See the criticism by R. Davidson, "Faith and History in the Old Testament," *ExpTim* 77 (1965-1966): 100-104.

<sup>23</sup> The history of German biblical interpretation from Hermann and Kähler through Barth and Bultmann is essential for an understanding of von Rad's position here: that is, that faith is not dependent upon historical criticism, but on the proclamation. For an illuminating insight into the problem of belief and the German critical tradition, see H. A. Nielsen, "History and Happening: Notes on a Barth-Bultmann Dispute," *CJT* 16 (1970): 67-73.

inconsistency or contradiction appears to develop. While on the one hand he informs the reader that we are not to bring the historico-critical principles to bear on the *Heilsgeschichte*, on the other hand he states that the kerygmatic picture does not misrepresent what happened in real history.<sup>24</sup> We are thus placed on the horns of a dilemma: We are tempted either to identify the *Heilsgeschichte* very closely with the critical picture of Israel's history, as does Hesse<sup>25</sup> or, like Bultmann, to divorce the *kerygma* from history altogether and concentrate on the historicity of the individual.

A major reason for this dilemma lies in the relationship of von Rad's kerygmatic theology to that of Bultmann. The kerygmatic theology of Bultmann was developed to counter the consequences of the historical method for theology; thus, it tended to lose the historical basis for the biblical testimony. Von Rad, while developing a kerygmatic theology, has attempted to overcome Bultmann's isolation of the *kerygma* from history. But von Rad has not provided an adequate solution. He has not developed a critique of the historical method, nor has he attempted to come to grips with its basic philosophical assumptions. In the fashion of a dialectical theologian, he has set up and approved of two ways of looking at history, each of which contains an element of truth, but which mutually excludes the other.<sup>26</sup> There simply is no third position in von Rad's theology that synthesizes these two views of history. If we wish to discover methodological solutions to this problem, we have to appeal to the program of the Pannenberg school or to some similar attempt to reconcile history with the witness of faith.

<sup>24</sup> *OTT*, 1: 108.

<sup>25</sup> See esp. "Die Erforschung der Geschichte Israels als theologische Aufgabe," *Kerygma und Dogma* 4 (1958): 1-19.

<sup>26</sup> This ultimately seems to be the reason behind having two parts to his theology: the history of Yahwism and the theological exposition of the *Heilsgeschichte*. Logically, according to his methodological guidelines, he should be developing only the *Heilsgeschichte*. The history of Yahwism, however, which presents the historical place of the subject matter of the *Heilsgeschichte*, opens up a dialogue between these two parts.

### 3. *Wilhelm Dilthey's Influence on von Rad*

But, we may ask, whence comes von Rad's confidence that Israel's testimonies do not misrepresent what happened in history, that she did not lose contact with real history?<sup>27</sup> Is there any philosophy of history on which von Rad betrays a dependence? We may perhaps search for our answer in his statement that "the way faith perceives things has its own peculiarities. . . ."<sup>28</sup> This is closely followed by the statement, "Historical poetry was the form in which Israel, like other peoples, made sure of historical facts, that is, of their location and their significance."<sup>29</sup> Poetry made it possible for Israel to make the past "absolutely present,"<sup>30</sup> and allowed the narrators to surpass the limits of "exact historiography."<sup>31</sup> In connection with this, we should include von Rad's statement that Israel was involved with her history to the point of fervor.<sup>32</sup> Von Rad cites Wilhelm Dilthey on two points regarding the nature of poetry and how it relates to Israel's historical presentations: It is an organ for the understanding of "life," and by it a concept is produced that "transcends reality."<sup>33</sup>

If we examine Dilthey's philosophy of historical understanding, we will note that he attributed to history an "inner" subject matter.<sup>34</sup> History is the facts of human consciousness, the inner life; and the techniques of historiographical science developed from the natural sciences cannot be applied to it.<sup>35</sup> These inner

<sup>27</sup> *OTT*, 2: 424.

<sup>28</sup> *OTT*, 1: 108.

<sup>29</sup> *OTT*, 1: 109.

<sup>30</sup> *OTT*, 1: 109.

<sup>31</sup> *OTT*, 1: 111.

<sup>32</sup> *OTT*, 1: 107.

<sup>33</sup> *OTT*, 1: 109, n. 5; 111, n. 9.

<sup>34</sup> The material used here has been largely drawn from H. N. Tuttle, *Wilhelm Dilthey's Philosophy of Historical Understanding* (Leiden, 1969). (Hereafter cited as *Philosophy*.)

<sup>35</sup> Dilthey rejected the positivistic position of subsuming historical science under the natural sciences. History had its own unique subject matter and methods (*Philosophy*, p. 5).

elements provide the material for his theory of "lived experience" (*Erlebnis*) which, when applied to the subject matter of history, would provide valid knowledge of individual experiences and make it possible to combine them into more meaningful wholes. The historian is to relive the *Erlebnis* in his own historical consciousness, making it objectively verifiable in his own present experience. The historian's understanding is immediate and true even if the "outer event" has been lost. The outer event thus becomes merely a supporting condition for the inner event, which is the real object of investigation.

This sympathetic reliving of the inner life of another, according to Dilthey, describes the method of historical interpretation designated "understanding" (*Verstehen*). It presupposes that the status of a past event and our evaluation of it are only equal to our present experience of the inner side of that event. *Verstehen* is directed to three types of life "expressions," the fullest of these being an artistic one. Thus the highest form of *Verstehen* is the understanding of an artistic symbol, a life expression which is in turn representative of an *Erlebnis*. One must relive the cognitive and emotive life of the artist.<sup>36</sup> The highest expression of *Verstehen* is poetry; it transforms experience into another existence, so that one may understand what he could never experience himself. It is interesting to note that Dilthey admired those who attempted to grasp the meaning of life intuitively in artistic rather than in rational ways.<sup>37</sup>

These ideas of Dilthey's seem to have contributed substantially to von Rad's philosophy of historical understanding, and they aid in explaining his passive attitude toward the question of the objectivity of the historical data behind the books of the OT. In von Rad we find a refusal to apply principles of historical criticism to Israel's picture of history, and an elevation of the

<sup>36</sup> *Philosophy*, pp. 9, 25.

<sup>37</sup> W. Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Leipzig, 1914-1918), 6: 94, 98. See also E. W. Gritsch, "Wilhelm Dilthey and the Interpretation of History," *LQ* 15 (1963): 60, 63.

secondary element of historical experience over the primary. Interpretation is given a higher rank than the historical facts, and there is an emphasis on the historicity of the faith without concern for the historical basis of that faith. Thus, the emphasis is on what Dilthey called the "inner" side of an event or the inner side of history.

When von Rad speaks of Israel's testimonies as not misrepresenting what happened in real history, he evidently does so on the strength of this inner side of the event. The fact that he attaches such importance to poetry for the understanding of life, and that he credits it with the ability of making the past absolutely present for Israel, leads me to suspect that for von Rad faith perceives things by a *Verstehen* method which rests upon an artistic and poetic understanding of life expressions. This type of *Verstehen*, then, supposedly permits one to make adequate historical judgments through the identification of the inner state of others with our own inner state. Furthermore, this inner side of events provides the condition for the empirical grounds of historical judgment to exist in the present, because, according to Dilthey, the true object of historical inquiry is always the "inner" side of history, the "consciousness" that accompanies the outer side of the event. This seems to come quite close to what von Rad means by a history with God.

Another area of Dilthey's philosophy of historical understanding which, in my judgment, lies behind von Rad's understanding of history is the idea of historical causation. Motives, for Dilthey, are the causes in history, and as such the methods of the natural sciences were inappropriate for causal explanation. The causal relationship between the facts of "mental life" are immediately perceived and this "self-perception" constitutes their entire relationship. The historian's task consists of bringing the "motive deliberations" to light that are the "inner" side of past action.

This kind of causal explanation was called *Wirkungszusam-*

*menhang* ("the lived system of cause and effect") by Dilthey.<sup>38</sup> Behind this idea is the concept that the subject matter of history is "Life" and self-experience, not the external world. Reference to motives also explains the teleological character of "historic"<sup>39</sup> action by giving a reason for something. The only way such knowledge is possible, however, is by the *Verstehen* method. One must understand the entire *Wirkungszusammenhang*, and this involves re-experiencing the structure, end, and meaning of the whole system.<sup>40</sup>

Von Rad's idea of history moved by God's word involves a concern for something like a "lived system of cause and effect" which is concerned with the inner side of history. Like Dilthey, he does not believe this movement is to be determined by modern scientific laws of causation, but by causes appropriate to the history constructed by faith. This history has its own law. We need only consider, for instance, how the Deuteronomist in his concern for showing how God's word operated in history, and in his attention to correspondence between promulgated word and historical fulfillment, incorporated so many prophecies into his work. These predictions and their fulfillments gave the historical course of events its "inner rhythm" and "theological proof."<sup>41</sup> Everything that these prophets spoke became history. However, von Rad does not mean by this that everything which had been prophesied came to pass according to the necessity of cause and effect. This history constructed by faith is a matter for determination by the biblical historian. The method involved would seem to be similar to *Verstehen*.

Of further importance for our study are certain aspects of Dilthey's idea of typology.<sup>42</sup> H. N. Tuttle states that Dilthey's

<sup>38</sup> *Philosophy*, p. 63. This and other various renderings of Dilthey's technical terms into English are attributable to Tuttle.

<sup>39</sup> Although he does not specifically define the term, the word "historic" is employed by Tuttle to refer to the data which is the subject of Dilthey's theory of historical understanding.

<sup>40</sup> *Philosophy*, pp. 62-78.

<sup>41</sup> *OTT*, 1: 340.

<sup>42</sup> In this context it would be well to note that Dilthey places considerable

end-oriented idea of motive explanation in history is incomplete without considering his theory of ideal types.<sup>43</sup> Because Dilthey rejected the idea of law-like relationships between historic data, these relationships are determined typically. Types refer ultimately to values and ends, etc., or to the "inner" side of events. Thus, these factors provide what is typical in historic data. Types determine what is like or unlike among particular phenomena, and provide the means for generalizing the relationship among historic data. The value-meaning complex involved in the types makes it possible to combine data into a coherent whole. All of these procedures obviously fall under the category of the *Verstehen* method. There is a reliving of the inner side of events, i. e., values, volitions, feelings, etc. In this way, the data are assigned to type relationships. It is only by referring to the specific value-meaning complex involved in the respective historical contexts that types are understandable.

Typological thinking, according to von Rad, is present already in the OT.<sup>44</sup> It is one of the essential elements of prophetic prediction, and it is a characteristic of the manner in which the NT expresses its relationship to the OT. Typology means determining what is typical in the OT and the NT; it is a central feature that joins them together, something analogous between them. A single thing cannot be appreciated in isolation, but must be placed in a larger context. This wider context is not a system of religious values, but a specific history which is set in motion by God's acts and words and which sees its "goal" in the coming of Christ. Only in the Christ-event is it possible to look for what is analogous and comparable. Typological interpretation is not con-

emphasis on knowing by analogy or coherence. "Knowing the past by analogy means we associate particular past experiences with particular types of life assertions in our contemporary experience" (*Philosophy*, p. 39). "Knowing by coherence, . . . is the present activity of finding meaningful relations between parts and wholes in empirical data" (*Philosophy*, p. 43).

<sup>43</sup> *Philosophy*, p. 79.

<sup>44</sup> For von Rad's understanding of typology see, "Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament," pp. 17-29; *OTT*, 2:319-335; 357-387.

cerned with correspondences in historical details between the Testaments; it is only concerned with the witness to the divine event, the *credenda*. Von Rad is thus concerned only with presenting the "structural relatedness" in the "experience" of God in both Testaments.<sup>45</sup> The typological correspondences are between analogous experiences.

Von Rad speaks of the forward-looking character of the OT which points beyond itself and is fulfilled in the NT. This statement is possible because the same laws of interpretation at work in the OT are continued by the NT, and thus we are able to see the law that determined the *Heilsgeschichte* in the OT in operation again in the NT. But how are we to understand this law and its relation to causation or movement from the OT to the NT? Basically, we are given no satisfactory answer. The history is one which is set in motion and moved to its goal by the words and deeds of God, and its linkage with the NT can be grasped only from the vantage point of the NT.

Von Rad seems essentially to have adopted, once again, Dilthey's *Verstehen* method. The connections between the data in the OT and NT are made by "understanding" what is typical. The divine events for von Rad (which are actually experiences of God, and typical to those persons who have them) are about the same as the "inner" sides of events in Dilthey's thought. The causes of history and the interconnections between typical events (the *credenda*) are perceived by the historian (a man of faith, who produces the history constructed by faith), who relives and reconstructs the course of history caused by God's word. He does so, of course, from his own position and in the light of new facts of history. Connections between events in the scheme of promise and fulfillment are made on the basis of what is typical of salvation and judgment in the events of history (the *credenda*) that fulfill them.

If in Dilthey's thought, motives (the causes of history) are

<sup>45</sup> W. Eichrodt, "Is Typological Exegesis an Appropriate Method?" *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, pp. 244-245.

so closely aligned with teleological historical action, and this end orientation belongs to the constitution of the motive, then we have a possible model for understanding what von Rad means when he speaks of the OT as seeing its goal in the NT while at the same time suggesting that such traits were not visible to the writers of the OT. Typology unites what is alike in the respective actions by assuming that the historical agent is applying a *Verstehen* method (which makes it possible to understand the entire *Wirkungszusammenhang*), having typical experiences himself. Thus, he is able to unite the parts of history into a whole by the application of the *Verstehen* method. The agent is both causal and teleological.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, while in all historical action we have teleology because of the teleological nature of cause, this end cannot be understood according to the laws of the natural sciences, but only by the *Verstehen* method. It can thus be understood only from its end, from the perspective of event, the inner side of which is perceived by the historian to be its goal.

#### 4. Conclusion

We have seen in this study the factors at work which stimulated a search for a theology of immediacy. Some of these forces did not have the same goal in mind, but in combination they moved the search for certainty inward. E.g., the effect of rationalism, which was anti-historical and prompted a search for a theology of immediacy, combined with the results of historical criticism to move the quest for the grounds for faith inward. These factors are responsible for the subjective or existential character of *Heilsgeschichte*.

*Heilsgeschichte*, in attempting to keep the historical basis for faith, yet recognizing that the philosophical presuppositions within rationalism and historical criticism did not recognize any divine activity in history, became an inner history, a history of

<sup>46</sup> See *Philosophy*, pp. 65-72, for further information on the nature of the historical agent.

experiences with God that was recognizable to faith. Von Rad's dependence on this type of thinking is clearly recognizable in that he attempts to keep the *Heilsgeschichte* apart from the historico-critical picture of the history of Israel. Von Rad's justification for such a separation lies largely in the acceptability for him of dialectical theology.

Von Rad's dependence upon the philosophy of historical understanding formulated by Dilthey is evident in his adoption of the following ideas: that poetry is an organ for the understanding of life; that the connections and associations between divine events are made on the basis of typological correspondences; that history is moved by God's word alone without considering any external factors, a concept akin to Dilthey's motive-causation theory; and that the Deuteronomist, who was the first to clearly formulate the *Heilsgeschichte*, seems to be involved in an activity similar to what Dilthey advocated in his *Verstehen* method.