

**A REVIEW**  
by  
**Thomas F. McDaniel.**<sup>1</sup>  
of  
**WILLIAM F. ALBRIGHT'S**  
***HISTORY, ARCHAEOLOGY, AND CHRISTIAN***  
***HUMANISM***<sup>2</sup>

The scholarly contributions of William F. Albright need no introduction. To the contrary, they have been widely recognized and acclaimed in the United States, Europe and Israel. In the past twenty years, Albright has received twenty honorary doctorates from such universities as Harvard, Yale, Hebrew Union College, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Saint Andrews University, the University of Oslo, the University of Uppsala, etc. He is one of three humanistic scholars ever to have been elected to the American Academy of Sciences. Albright's first scholarly paper appeared in the *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* in 1913, and they have poured forth ever since. The bibliography of Albright's works (including books, articles, reports, and book reviews) listed at the end of the Albright *Festschrift*, (entitled, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, edited by G. Ernest Wright) is a list of over 825 published scholarly contributions which appeared between 1911 and 1958.

The present book under review is the first in a series of books to be published by McGraw-Hill which will (1) gather together previously published articles which are now

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<sup>1</sup> This review was published in 1966 in *Seisho to Shingaku*, which was the journal of the College of Theology of Kanto Gakuin University, Yokohama, Japan.

<sup>2</sup> New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964, ix/342 pages.

thoroughly revised, annotated, and indexed, and (2) present the results of Albright's continuing research and writing. This first volume includes fifteen selected lectures, essays and review articles—three of which have never been published before.

The book is divided into four parts: Part One, consists of three chapters, namely, "Toward a Theistic Humanism," "The Human Mind in Action: Magic, Science, and Religion," and "The Place of the Old Testament in the History of Thought." Part Two, "Surveys of Special Areas," consists of five chapters entitled respectively, "How Well Do We Know the Ancient Near East?" "The Ancient Near East and the Religion of Israel," "Islam and the Religions of the Ancient Orient," "Historical Adjustments of Political Authority in the Near East," and "Some Functions of Organized Minorities." In the third part, "Some Scholarly Approaches," Albright contributes a critical chapter on each of the following scholars: James Breasted, Gerhard Kittel, Arnold Toynbee, Eric Voegelin, and Rudolf Bultmann. The last section of the book, "More Personal," consists of two chapters entitled, "Return to Biblical Theology," and "William Foxwell Albright (Autobiographical Sketch)." The book concludes with an appendix containing some chronological data on Albright's career and a full index of names and subjects. In his own words, Albright notes that "the first chapter, 'Toward a Theistic Humanism strikes the keynote; the remaining fourteen chapters are supplementary and illustrative" (p. v).

Since the first chapter is the keynote to the whole book, it deserves the careful attention of the reader and reviewer. In presenting his own views which lead "toward a theistic humanism," Albright begins with a discussion of the three main types of humanism: (1) classical, (2) modern atheistic,

and (3) recent theistic. With reference to the classical humanism of the Renaissance, Albright notes the indebtedness of the West to the mediating Arab and Jewish scholars who introduced Aristotle and Galen to the West in translation and the impetus given to classical studies in the West when the flood of Greek manuscripts and teachers entered Europe after the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

Albright traces the rise of atheistic humanism back to the nineteenth century, beginning with Auguste Comte's attempt to establish a "religion of humanity." Through the efforts of Ernest Renan, Gilbert Murray, James Breasted and the signers of the "Humanist Manifesto" (including John Dewey), the movement has continued through to the present day. (The journal, *The Humanists* should be consulted for contemporary leaders of the movement.) The atheistic humanists in general are criticized by Albright for devoting their energies to opposing religion rather than in a love for humanity—altruism in its highest sense (p. 66). John Dewey comes under Albright's severe criticism, not only for his optimistic meliorism, but for his dislike of history, his over-optimistic predictions on the Chinese Republic, and his treating of man as a subject for detached experimentation on the part of a scientific elite (i.e., materialistic experimentalism).

Albright gives his definition of theistic humanism as "the study and cultivation of our higher cultural heritage in light of Judeo-Christian religious tradition" (p. 10). Albright includes the following scholars among those who incorporate this ideal of theistic humanism: Christopher Dawson, Arnold Toynbee, Herbert Butterfield, Etienne Gilson, Jean Denielou and Henri de Lubac. There is not a German or an American scholar whom Albright would include in this list of theistic humanists. German professional specialization

prohibited a scholar from crossing boundaries into other academic areas. German philosophers remained primarily metaphysicians. Historians (like Eduard Meyer and Leopold von Ranke) remained historians; and “earlier twentieth-century German thinkers were philosophical idealists who seldom paid more than lip service to theism” (p. 11). The situation in America was somewhat different. Albright called attention to the earlier “intellectually underdeveloped” Roman Catholicism and the “evolutionary meliorism” of liberal American Protestantism which left out history and dismissed theology as irrelevant.

Albright notes that the decline of evolutionary meliorism after World War II and the advent of the nuclear Age has *not* produced a theistic humanism in America or on the Continent, but various forms of neo-orthodoxy, existentialism, and a historico-philosophical theology (going back through Kierkegaard or Barth to earlier German thinkers). In this context Albright reviews and criticizes the contributions of Niebuhr, Tillich, Bultmann and Bultmann’s disciples. For Albright, Tillich’s ideas are often vague and contradictory: “through his (Tillich’s) career he has shifted philosophical and theological notions and terms in a most bewildering fashion.” On a protean substructure of Schelling’s idealism and a strong vein of neo-Platonism “have been superimposed strong influence from Jung, less from Freud, and an increasing use of existentialist ideas and terminology.” Of particular importance for Albright is the fact that there is no place for history in Tillich’s system: “the revelation of God in history is replaced by direct intuition of God as “ultimate concern” and of one’s current aesthetic preference as ‘ultimate reality’” (p. 15). (His critique of Bultmann will be given later in this review.)

Since theistic humanism is rooted in a study of the higher cultural heritage in light of the Judeo-Christian tradition, Albright deals at some length with the scientific method of archaeology and the revolution in historical method. Natural science has had an impact on archaeology, not only through the radio carbon counts of nuclear physics, but in the discovery by geophysicists “that careful measurement of magnetic declination in iron molecules of ancient pottery ovens and baked-clay objects” is opening up a new method of determining archaeological dates. Furthermore, Albright notes, “the most important scientific triumph of archaeology is its autonomous development of scientific method . . . . (i.e.) the analysis of stratigraphic sequences and the classification in categories of all objects made by the hand of man (artifacts).” “The typology of human artifacts is just as Aristotelian in principle as is that of genetic variation,” and philological and linguistic studies apply the standard principles of induction and classification, deduction and analogy.

The revolution in historical method as outlined by Albright consist of the methodology employed by archaeologist and by the philologists, the awareness the historian of his own “proto-philosophy” (his underlying logical postulates and philosophical principles), and the clear differentiation made in the types of historical cognition. Following Maurice Mandelbaum, Albright distinguishes five types of historical cognition/judgment: judgments of typical occurrence, judgments of particular facts, judgments of cause and effect, judgments of value, and judgments about personal reactions. The first three of these are objective in character, while the last two are almost purely subjective and affected directly by existential considerations. In this context, Albright states that “the epistemo-

logical importance of archaeology and comparable fields ancillary to history, is that they deal almost entirely with judgments of fact and typical occurrence rather than with judgments of cause and effect, value or personal reactions, thus redressing the imbalance which has given rise to exaggerated forms of historical relativism” (p. 27).

In a brief survey of areas where archaeological discovery has affected our understanding of the Bible, Albright deals with the following areas:

- (1) the patriarchal narratives and the Mari excavations.
- (2) the *‘Apiru*, the *‘Ibri*, and the donkey-caravan traders.
- (3) ancient legal codes and Wellhausen’s Hegelian views.
- (4) Syro-Hittite suzerainty treaties and biblical covenants.
- (5) Hebrew inscriptions, Babylonian records and Israelite history.
- (6) the Qumran recensions, the Septuagint, and the complexity of the textual tradition.
- (7) Psalms and North-West Semitic philology.
- (8) Egyptian papyri and the Semitic substratum of *koine* Greek.
- (9) Qumran scrolls, the Essenes and the New Testament background.
- (10) Chenoboskion (Nag Hammadi) codices, the origin of the gnostics, and Bultmann’s view of New Testament dualism.
- (11) the New Testament in relation to the Essenes and Gnosticism.

In a subsection of Chapter One entitled, “Religion and Civilization,” Albright makes some general observations with which most scholars would agree. For example. “there is no known past culture of any kind without religion, and no experienced archaeologist expects to find one.” But his

statement that “archaeologists have now proved the historical as well as the contemporary primacy of Western civilization” will surely cause some disagreement among Japanese scholars, especially with reference to the “contemporary primacy,” for most would disassociate technology from civilization. Although Albright does not give any documentation of this proof he has in mind, a statement toward the end of the book (p. 293) will show precisely what he means:

The Near East was thousands of years in advance of any other focus of higher culture, and it is becoming more and more probable that other such foci (China, Middle America) owed part of their original stimulation to borrowing across continents and oceans. The tremendous advance of modern Western civilization when transplanted to Japan little over a century ago, is a vivid illustration of a process familiar to all serious historians. The great progress of the West in science and technology since the fifteenth century has come precisely because we stand on the shoulders of our Greco-Roman predecessors, not because we are in any way more gifted than the ancients.

Despite the fact that religion is the nucleus of all cultures of the past, philosophical idealists tend to agree with positivists and naturalists that religion will no longer be needed when a “rational” culture can be developed. But Albright notes that two such contemporary “rational” cultures have been propagated by dictators who actually had to introduce “emotional and ceremonial practices in imitation of older religions, particularly Germanic paganism and Eastern Christianity,” i.e., the Nazi *Blut und Boden* and emphasis on *die heilige Urquell deutscher Macht* and the assorted communist “personality cults.”

The first chapter of this book closes with a theme that is encountered again and again throughout the book, namely

that there are three distinct stages in the history of thought. For Levy-Bruhl's "prelogical" label for primitive thinking (later rejected by Levy-Bruhl, himself) Albright prefers the term "proto-logical." The following stages are "empirico-logical" and classical "formal logic." Proto-logical thought (which survives today in much modern art and poetry) was the thought pattern of early Egyptian, Sumerian, and Babylonian literature, but Israelite thought is primarily empirico-logical. Formal logic dawned with Thales of Miletus. It is in the third chapter that Albright develops this concept more thoroughly. There he states,

"I place the Old Testament, from the standpoint of the history of the ways of thinking, between the protological thought of the pagan world (which includes non-metaphysical Greco-Roman and Indic polytheism) and Greek systematic reasoning . . . . The religious literature of Israel is therefore mostly later than the now known canonical religious literature of Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, the Hittites, Canaanites, etc. Nearly all these literatures reflect mythological, i.e. proto-logical ways of thinking . . . . On the other hand, the literature of the Bible is earlier than any clear evidence of specific Greek literary or philosophical influence" (pp. 85-86).

In the Hebrew Bible we have something quite different from what preceded or followed it, and as an example of the empirico-logical thinking of the Israelites, Albright cites Israelite monotheism.

"There is good reason to suppose that Moses was just as monotheistic as Hillel, though he could certainly not have employed the logical reasoning in support of his beliefs that was possible later . . . . Formal creeds were impossible before classification, generalization, and syllogistic formulas were invented by the Greeks . . . . The implicit monotheism of the Old Testament was derived from Hebrew empirical logic,



i.e., “The intuitive (subconscious interpretation of empirical information) discovery that the incongruities of polytheism flouted the empirically realized unity of nature” (pp. 57, 91, 99).

By way of summing up Albright’s views given in the first section of this book, this reviewer would call attention to Albright’s views on the function of religion. He notes that,

philosophical analysis remains essential, but all philosophical systems are Hellenic or post-Hellenic in conception; they are, therefore, based on either explicitly stated or presupposed postulates or assumptions. Since the ultimate postulates are not themselves subject to proof, philosophers have to reason logically from what George Boas calls their proto-philosophy, seldom explicitly developed. The more rigorous the internal logic of any system, the more uncertain are its conclusions, given the fact that one cannot rigorously prove any of the basic presuppositions in a philosophical system . . . . Religion alone unites the intellectual and aesthetic in man with the affective and altruistic. If man’s biological and psychological evolution have required the synergistic collaboration of his genetic structure and environmental background, surely we cannot reject the religious feelings and aspirations of man as irrelevant to the evolution of the human spirit (pp. 81–82).

More briefly we consider the main themes in the remaining sections of the book. In Chapter Four, “How Well Can We Know the Ancient Near East?” Albright notes the rise of American research in the area of Near Eastern studies (due to the brilliant career of James Henry Breasted) and the decline of such studies in Germany where, for example, the classical historian of Leipzig, Helmut Berve, affirmed that studies of the ancient orient were condemned to inactivity and lost their right to exist in the new standard of values within the realm of the German intellectual spirit. The bulk

of the chapter is given to a recital of the steps made in Near Eastern research since 1835, listing the many scholars and their significant contributions.

In the Chapter Five, "The Ancient Near East and the Religion of Israel," Albright points out how the great Semitic and biblical scholars of the 19th century (including Nöldeke, Wellhausen, Robertson Smith, Budde, Driver, etc.) neglected and disregarded the new literary and philological material from the ancient orient, preferring instead to arrange the data of Israelite history according to the evolutionary philosophies of Hegel or the English positivists. Albright examines the four main groups of Ancient Near Eastern literature now available (Egyptian, Mesopotamian, West Semitic, and Hurro-Hittite) and comes to the following conclusion,

the henotheistic form constructed by scholars sinks below the level attained in the surrounding ancient orient, where the only alternatives were polytheism or practical monotheism, henotheism in the sense used by most modern Biblical scholars being apparently unknown (p. 156).

In Chapter Six, "Islam and the Religion of the Ancient Orient," Albright seeks to demonstrate that the "Islamic civilization is essentially an outgrowth of Hellenism, just as Islam itself is an offshoot of Judeo-Christian religion." This is the opposite position of Winckler for whom the literature and folklore of late pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabia were filled with reflections and carry-overs from the ancient Orient.

Chapter Seven deals with the historical patterns of political authority. Albright traces from the third millennium to the Roman period the two general patterns, namely, absolute royal power on the one hand and gerontocratic reaction against it on the other. It is in this chapter that the author

corrects a common error by many New Testament scholars In dealing with the Roman occupation of Judah: “Actually the Roman conquest (of the eastern Mediterranean basin) gave a new freedom and security to the common man—however little he might appreciate it when oppressed by publican exactions. For the first time in history a relatively uniform system of codified law—public law, not arbitrary royal decree or legal interpretation—spread over most of the civilized world. Under Augustus and the Antonines the Near East was probably more peaceful and more prosperous than ever before in history. But while republican forms were sedulously preserved in Rome itself, in the East the emperor became a real divinity both in official theory and in private belief. Jewish and Christian opposition to Rome was nearly always the direct result of irreconcilable hostility to emperor-worship” (p. 190).

Of interest to this reviewer in Chapter Eight, “Some Functions of Organized Minorities,” is Albright’s evidence that no religious majority has been guiltless in respect to intolerance and religious persecution. He recalls, for example, the persecution by Asoka of Brahman and Buddhist heretics, the Vitasoka story of the kings slaying of 18,000 Hindus in a single day because a statue of Buddha had been destroyed, and the Brahman account of a king’s issuing a proclamation that he would execute any subject of his that did not participate in the slaughter of the Buddhists.

The third section of this volume presents Albright’s critique of the ideas and activities of five scholars. James Breasted (in Chapter Nine) receives his highest esteem for his Egyptian studies, his work in founding (with the aid of a Rockefeller grant) of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, and making America the focus of interest for the recovery of the Ancient Near East. Albright, however, does not share Breasted’s meliorism or humanism.

The chapters on Arnold Toynbee and Eric Voegelin are expansions of rather recent reviews that appeared in the 1957 edition of *From Stone Age to Christianity* and *Theological Studies*, 22, 1961, respectively. Since these works are rather readily available, they need not detain us in this review.

The harshest words in this volume are found in Chapter Ten, "Gerhard Kittel and the Jewish Question in Antiquity." Gerhard Kittel, the youngest son of Rudolph Kittel,

"was a distinguished Protestant theologian, professor of New Testament at Tübingen and Vienna. . . . yet he became the mouthpiece of the most vicious Nazi anti-Semitism, sharing with Emanuel Hirsch of Göttingen the grim distinction of making extermination of the Jews theologically respectable . . . Hirsch and Kittel were between them clearly responsible for much of the guilt resting on German Protestant churches for their silence while the Nazis were carrying out the liquidation of the Jews" (pp. 229 and 233).

Albright supports these statements with a careful analysis of *Das antike Weltjudentum*, written by Kittel in collaboration with Eugen Fischer. We need not review here either Kittel's work or Albright's analysis, but should note the closing sentence in this chapter, "And what happened in Germany can take place wherever the human intellect turns its back on the spiritual traditions which we have inherited from their sources in ancient Israel" (p. 240).

Chapter Thirteen, "Rudolph Bultmann on History and Eschatology," should be of interest to both the critics and disciples of Bultmann. The chapter is an expansion of a review which appeared in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* 77 (1958). Albright first registers his difficulty with Bultmann's acceptance of the "modern scientific world view" of the 20th century, for the following reasons: (1) the

supposed modern scientific world view is itself fluid, (2) Christianity is not dependent for its spiritual impact on the cosmology of any age, (3) there is no need to demythologize accepted metaphors, (4) “we know so little about ultimate scientific reality that we cannot base theological revolutions on consensus of cosmological opinion in any period.” When Bultmann states that there can be no intervention of supernatural powers in the inner life of the soul, he “demythologizes just as though we really knew something of the relation between man as a ‘phenomenon’ and the universe in which he lives” (p. 275).

And so Albright proceeds to hammer away at Bultmann’s views on John’s gnosticism, Essene gnosticism, the transmutation of eschatology into existential decisions of the “here-and-now” and the general human feeling of *Angst* in face of death and extinction. Bultmann is also accused (and rightly so) of distorting the chronological perspective by dealing with Greek historians first and then discussing Israelite historical writings against the background of Greek thought. In closing Albright calls attention to Bultmann’s silence on the “Nazi Abomination of Desolation”—not as a personal criticism of Bultmann himself, “but rather (as) an emphasis on the stoic neutrality toward the problems of others which Bultmannian existentialism fosters” (p. 284).

The last section of this book, being more autobiographical than anything else, is better read than reviewed. So this reviewer would encourage the careful reading of this broad and stimulating book. Other volumes in this series are anxiously awaited.