

# THE PROBLEM OF HISTORY IN OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

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The OT has somewhat unexpectedly become a "new frontier" in contemporary theology. This is due in large measure to the "epoch-making" *Old Testament Theology*<sup>1</sup> of Gerhard von Rad, who is generally recognized as "the world's most important Old Testament Theologian."<sup>2</sup> The publication of this two-volume work has triggered a chain reaction of responses and challenges, both pro and con, from colleagues in his own as well as other fields of specialization. A group of young theologians<sup>3</sup> trained under von Rad at Heidelberg University, whose spokesman is the systematic theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg,<sup>4</sup> ventured to use von Rad's traditio-

<sup>1</sup> The German original is entitled, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 2 Bände (München, 1957, 1960), hereafter cited as *TAT*, I and II. An English translation by D. M. G. Stalker appeared as *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1962, 1965), hereafter cited as *OTT*, I and II. Three essays by von Rad which anticipated his *magnum opus* need to be pointed out: "Grundprobleme einer biblischen Theologie des Alten Testaments," *ThLZ*, LXVIII (1943), 225-243; "Kritische Vorarbeiten zu einer Theologie des Alten Testaments," *Theologie und Liturgie*, ed. by L. Hennig (München, 1952), pp. 11-34; and "Typologische Auslegung des Alten Testaments," *Evangelische Theologie*, XII (1952), 17-33, which is translated as "Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament," *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. by Claus Westermann (Richmond, Va., 1963), pp. 17-39.

<sup>2</sup> Carl E. Braaten, *New Directions in Theology Today*, Vol. II: *History and Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia, 1967), p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> The group known as the "Pannenberg circle" consists of Wolfhart Pannenberg, Rolf Rendtorff, Trutz Rendtorff, Klaus Koch, Ulrich Wilckens, Dietrich Rössler, and Martin Else. This group received its main stimulus on the one hand from von Rad and on the other from the Lutheran dogmaticians Peter Brunner and Edmund Schlink.

<sup>4</sup> The recent publication in the series, "New Frontiers in Theology," edited by James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr., under the title, *Theology as History* (New York-London, 1967), brings the theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg into focus for the English-speaking world.

historical analyses for their own goals, which they describe with the catchword "revelation as history." This catchword serves also as the title of the programmatic collection of their essays.<sup>5</sup> It remains an open question to determine how far these scholars turned against their master or drew from his thought certain latent tendencies. The principal point of connection of the Pannenberg circle with von Rad is the latter's significant observation "that in principle Israel's faith is grounded in a theology of history. It regards itself as based upon historical acts, and as shaped and re-shaped by factors in which it saw the hand of Jahweh at work."<sup>6</sup> Von Rad is also of the conviction that faith in Christ needs principally the OT view of history in order "to be saved from falling into the traps of mythology and speculation"<sup>7</sup> and he, therefore, demands a new understanding of history.<sup>8</sup> In von Rad's view the OT writings are statements which instead of referring to timeless religious truths refer to the "word and deed of Jahweh in history."<sup>9</sup> Yet these statements present neither pure revelation from above nor pure perception and presentation of historical facts from below, but are statements of a confessional character which are "drawn up by faith."<sup>10</sup> In this sense the subject-matter of an OT theology, corresponding to the form and content of its writings, are the "testimonies"<sup>11</sup> of the OT, *i.e.*, the confessional statements of the "continuing divine activity in history"<sup>12</sup> which is "a presen-

<sup>5</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, ed., *Offenbarung als Geschichte*, "Kerygma und Dogma," Beiheft I (Göttingen, 1961; 2d revised ed., 1963).

<sup>6</sup> *TAT*, I, 112; *OTT*, I, 106, cited by Pannenberg, "Kerygma und Geschichte," *Studien zur Theologie der alttestamentlichen Überlieferungen: Festschrift für Gerhard von Rad*, ed. by Rolf Rendtorff und Klaus Koch (Neukirchen, 1961), p. 135.

<sup>7</sup> *TAT*, II, 400; *OTT*, II, 386.

<sup>8</sup> *TAT*, II, 401; *OTT*, II, 387: "There is even reason for hoping that the Old Testament itself will force theologians to reconsider the concept of history."

<sup>9</sup> *TAT*, I, 120; *OTT*, I, 114.

<sup>10</sup> *TAT*, I, 113; *OTT*, I, 107.

<sup>11</sup> *TAT*, I, 117; *OTT*, I, 111.

<sup>12</sup> *TAT*, I, 112; *OTT*, I, 106.

tation of God's history with Israel" <sup>13</sup> as the faith of Israel understood it. <sup>14</sup> Since von Rad is the catalyst of the recent debate on the problem of history in OT theology, this study will first investigate von Rad's own understanding of history as it receives expression in his two-volume *Old Testament Theology*. This will occupy the sections I through III below. We will then discuss the major critical reactions to von Rad's understanding of history. And finally our investigation will turn to some critical considerations and questions which are raised in regard to the present status of the problem of history in OT theology.

### I. *The Center of Interpretation in von Rad's OT Theology*

The basic thesis of von Rad is the establishment of God's self-revelation in his acts in history: "History is the place in which God reveals the secret of his person." <sup>15</sup> With the thesis that history is the place of the revelation of God, von Rad has won a "heuristic measuring rod" <sup>16</sup> with which all statements, all witnesses of faith of the OT, are measured as to their theological relevancy and legitimacy. The reason for the formulation of such a canon of interpretation lies in von Rad's contention that the OT lacks a center (*Mitte*): "Thus, on the basis of the Old Testament itself, it is truly difficult

<sup>13</sup> *TAT*, I, 7; *OTT*, I, v.

<sup>14</sup> See here the penetrating essay by Christoph Barth, "Grundprobleme einer Theologie des Alten Testaments," *Evangelische Theologie*, XXIII (1963), 342-372.

<sup>15</sup> I have supplied my own translation of this key sentence from *TAT*, II, 349: "Der Ort, an dem Gott sein Personengeheimnis offenbart, ist die Geschichte." In the translation of *OTT*, II, 338, part of its significance is lost: ". . . that it is in history that God reveals the secret of his person." Von Rad does not follow the usual distinction made in German between *Historie* and *Geschichte*. He employs the term *Geschichte* almost to the complete exclusion of *Historie*, which according to the index is used only once, *TAT*, II, 8.

<sup>16</sup> This phrase stems from Martin Honecker, "Zum Verständnis der Geschichte in Gerhard von Rads Theologie des Alten Testaments," *Evangelische Theologie*, XXIII (1963), 145, to whom I am indebted in many places in this article.

to answer the question of the unity of that Testament, for it has no focal-point [*Mitte*] as is found in the New Testament." <sup>17</sup> The view that the OT has in Yahweh its center or focal-point <sup>18</sup> is rejected by von Rad. <sup>19</sup>

Von Rad is very emphatic to point out that the OT is not a book that gives an account of historical facts as they "really happened." He states: "The Old Testament is a history book [*Geschichtsbuch*]; it tells of God's history with Israel, with the nations, and with the world, from the creation of the world down to the last things, that is to say, down to the time when dominion over the world is given to the Son of Man (Dan. VII. 13f.)." <sup>20</sup> Already the earliest confessions (the Credo of Dt 26) were historically determined, *i. e.*, "they connect the name of this God with some statement about an action in history." <sup>21</sup> Von Rad explains, "This history can be described as saving history [*Heilsgeschichte*] because, as it is presented, creation itself is understood as a saving act of God and because, according to what the prophets foretold, God's will to save is, in spite of many acts of judgment, to

<sup>17</sup> *TAT*, II, 376; *OTT*, II, 362; *Theologie und Liturgie*, p. 30: "So müssen wir uns wohl noch bewusster und konsequenter dem uns im Grunde unheimlichen Phänomen der Mittellosigkeit des AT stellen. An die Stelle der Mitte tritt der Weg oder wie Jesaja es für das alttestamentliche Ganze gültig formuliert hat, das 'Werk' Jahwehs (Jes. 5, 15, 19; 10, 12; 22, 12)." *ThLZ*, LXXXVIII (1963), col. 405, n. 3a: "Was hat es überhaupt mit dieser fast unisono gestellten Frage nach der 'Einheit,' der 'Mitte' des AT auf sich? Ist das etwas so Selbstverständliches, dass ihr Aufweis sozusagen zur *conditio sine qua non* einer ordentlichen Theologie des AT gehört? Und auf welcher Ebene soll sich diese (von vorneherein als vorhanden akzeptierte) Einheit aufweisen lassen, auf dem Gebiet der geschichtlichen Erfahrungen Israels oder in seiner Gedankenwelt? Oder handelt es sich bei diesem Postulat weniger um ein Anliegen der historischen oder theologischen Erkenntnis als um ein spekulativ-philosophisches Prinzip, das als bewusste Prämisse wirksam wird?"

<sup>18</sup> This is the point made against von Rad by H. Graf Reventlow, "Grundfragen einer alttestamentlichen Theologie im Lichte der neueren deutschen Forschung," *ThZ*, XVII (1961), 96.

<sup>19</sup> Von Rad, *ThLZ*, LXXXVIII (1963), col. 406; cf. *OTT*, II, 415.

<sup>20</sup> *TAT*, II, 370; *OTT*, II, 415.

<sup>21</sup> *TAT*, I, 127; *OTT*, I, 121.

achieve its goal.”<sup>22</sup> As a result of this view the Psalms and Wisdom literature of the OT are accorded the position of “Israel’s answer”<sup>23</sup> to the early experiences of Israel with Yahweh. The OT prophets, on the other hand, are not reformers with a message of an entirely new kind. “Instead, they regarded themselves as the spokesmen of old and well-known sacral traditions which they reinterpreted for their own day and age.”<sup>24</sup> Thus it becomes apparent that von Rad employs his understanding of OT history as a hermeneutical schema for interpreting the OT. The type of history of which von Rad speaks finds its clearest formulation in the Deuteronomist, whose view of history is described in the following way: “The history of Israel is a course of events [*Zeitablauf*] which receives its own peculiar dramatic quality from the tension between constantly promulgated prophecies and their corresponding fulfilment.”<sup>25</sup> This explains why in von Rad’s OT theology cultic and wisdom elements recede,<sup>26</sup> for his view of history is neither interested in secular history nor in the history of faith and cult, but is concerned solely “with the problem of how the word of Jahweh functioned in history.”<sup>27</sup> Fundamentally expressed, this means that the “Deuteronomistic theology of history was the first which clearly formulated the phenomenon of saving history, that is, of a course of history which was shaped and led to a fulfilment by a word of judgment and salvation continually injected into it.”<sup>28</sup>

The prophetic message is by von Rad likewise interpreted with the schema that is based on the Deuteronomistic theology of history.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly one of the greatest achieve-

<sup>22</sup> *TAT*, II, 370, 371; *OTT*, II, 357, 358.

<sup>23</sup> *TAT*, I, 352 ff.; *OTT*, I, 355 ff.

<sup>24</sup> *TAT*, II, 185; *OTT*, II, 175.

<sup>25</sup> *TAT*, I, 338; *OTT*, I, 340.

<sup>26</sup> Honecker, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>27</sup> *TAT*, I, 341; *OTT*, I, 343.

<sup>28</sup> *TAT*, I, 342; *OTT*, I, 344.

<sup>29</sup> The problem of this one-sided interpretation of prophecy is appar-

ments of prophecy "was to recapture for faith the dimension in which Jahweh had revealed himself par excellence, that of history and politics."<sup>30</sup> The essential step of the prophets beyond the tradition of saving history handed down to them, which was oriented in the past, consists in their opening the future as the place of the action of God.<sup>31</sup> This projection of God's acts to the future, which is felt to be an "eschatologizing of concepts of history,"<sup>32</sup> takes up the old confessional traditions and places them with the help of "creative interpretation"<sup>33</sup> within the horizon of a new saving event. "Projecting the old traditions into the future was the only possible way open to the prophets of making material statements about a future which involved God."<sup>34</sup> The eschatological character of the prophetic message consists of a negation of the old historical bases of salvation, and in that it does not remain with past historical acts, it "suddenly shifted the basis of salvation to a future action of God."<sup>35</sup> The kerygma of the prophets thus takes place within tensions created by three factors: "the new eschatological word with which Jahweh addresses Israel, the old election tradition, and the personal situation, be it one which incurred penalty or one which needed comfort, of the people addressed by the prophet."<sup>36</sup>

In short, von Rad gains his understanding of history from the Deuteronomistic theology of history according to which saving history is led to its goal, its fulfillment, by means of

ently known to von Rad, since he points to the question of how far the prophet was "a spiritual man who stood in direct religious relationship to God" and a proclaimer of "the universal moral order." "In all probability, the questions considered by earlier criticism will one day require to be taken up again, though under different theological presuppositions." *TAT*, II, 311; *OTT*, II, 298.

<sup>30</sup> *TAT*, II, 192; *OTT*, II, 182.

<sup>31</sup> *TAT*, II, 129 ff.; *OTT*, II, 115 ff.

<sup>32</sup> *TAT*, II, 125 ff.; *OTT*, II, 112 ff.

<sup>33</sup> *TAT*, II, 313; *OTT*, II, 300.

<sup>34</sup> *TAT*, II, 312; *OTT*, II, 299.

<sup>35</sup> *TAT*, II, 131; *OTT*, II, 118.

<sup>36</sup> *TAT*, II, 140; *OTT*, II, 130.

the word of Yahweh. This seems surprising if one considers that von Rad's research had its starting point in the Hexateuch from which it moved to the prophets as the closing interpreters of the transmitted events of salvation. The eschatologizing thought of prophecy is, however, interpreted by von Rad with the help of the Deuteronomistic theology of history and in this way is bound to the primitive *heilsgeschichtliche* confession. Thus von Rad introduces not only the historico-relational concept but also a certain historico-theological concept, that of the theology of history of the Deuteronomistic historian, as a determinative hermeneutical schema into OT theology whereby it is to be interpreted.

## II. *The Relationship of the Two Versions of Israel's History*

We are now ready to turn to von Rad's understanding of history as it concerns and determines the problem of history and faith within the sphere of OT theology. It is the reconciliation of history and faith within the OT that constitutes the point of departure for the comprehensive systematic theology of history of Pannenberg and his circle. This is the foundation on which his program stands or falls. Von Rad poses the problem in its acutest form when he contrasts the two versions of Israel's history, namely that of "modern critical research and that which Israel's faith has built up."<sup>37</sup> In a dispute with the NT scholar Hans Conzelmann,<sup>38</sup> von Rad emphatically states that "there are no *bruta facta* at all [in the OT]; we have history only in the form of interpretation, only in reflection."<sup>39</sup> First, the picture which Israel herself has drawn up of her history must be understood for what it is. Her confes-

<sup>37</sup> *TAT*, II, 8. This important section is unfortunately not translated in *OTT*.

<sup>38</sup> See Hans Conzelmann, "Fragen an Gerhard von Rad," *Evangelische Theologie*, XXIV (1964), 113-125.

<sup>39</sup> Gerhard von Rad, "Antwort auf Conzelmanns Fragen," *Evangelische Theologie*, XXIV (1964), 393; *ThLZ*, LXXXVIII (1963), cols. 410, 411; *OTT*, II, 416.

sional descriptions of her own origins and experiences in history are "ever new attempts to make the divine acts of salvation relevant for every new age and day,"<sup>40</sup> and are presented by her as a *Heilsgeschichte*, that is, as a redemptive history of God's saving acts. The traditio-historical interpretation of the OT is the appropriate method with which a "biblical" theology has to present Israel's concept of her own history in its kerygmatic interpretation. Second, there is the version of Israel's history as reconstructed by modern historiographers employing the historico-critical method, that is, the method of historical science—without a God hypothesis. In this picture of Israel's history no premises of faith or revelation are taken into account. If therefore one should speak within an OT theology of "divine acts in history" one must understand these as "those which the faith of Israel regarded as such—that is, the call of the forefathers, the deliverance from Egypt, the bestowal of the land of Canaan, etc.—and not of the result of modern critical historical scholarship, to which Israel's faith was unrelated."<sup>41</sup> The dichotomy of the version of the history of Israel's own confessions and that as reconstructed by the historico-critical method is felt by von Rad as a "difficult historical problem,"<sup>42</sup> because OT theology has to begin with the confessional description of Israel's history and not with the reconstructed historico-critical version. And in that it takes the confessions as its starting-point, it has to deal with the "specific kerygmatic intention"<sup>43</sup> of these confessions, which do not report a rational and objective historical event, but reflect upon the past from the vantage point of faith. Therefore von Rad holds that the two versions of Israel's history may be different. He points out that "historical investigation searches for a critically assured minimum

<sup>40</sup> *TAT*, I, 8; *OTT*, I, vi.

<sup>41</sup> *TAT*, I, 112, 113; *OTT*, I, 106; cf. *Theologie und Liturgie*, pp. 18 ff.; *ThLZ*, LXXXVIII (1963), cols. 409 ff.

<sup>42</sup> *TAT*, I, 112; *OTT*, I, 106.

<sup>43</sup> *Loc. cit.*



—the kerygmatic picture tends toward a theological maximum.”<sup>44</sup> Since von Rad looks for the disparity between the kerygmatic or confessional and the historico-critical versions of Israel’s history in the concept of history itself and not in the methodological problem connected with the radical disjunction of kerygmatic and historical statements, he has himself opened the door to misunderstanding. Franz Hesse,<sup>45</sup> for instance, has understood von Rad to indicate that the historico-critical version of Israel’s history is theologically irrelevant.<sup>46</sup> Is he right in thinking so?

It has been argued, on the other hand, that von Rad’s separation of the two versions of Israel’s history is not sharp enough, because he asserts that only the “world made up of testimonies . . . is above all the subject of a theology of the Old Testament.”<sup>47</sup> In so contending he makes himself vulnerable to the fatal objection that he bases his OT theology upon events which never happened in the way in which the OT reports them to have happened. His answer to this objection denies that *Heilsgeschichte* is to be identified with history as reconstructed by modern historico-critical research.<sup>48</sup> However, the problem, according to Honecker, consists of von Rad’s attempt to save a “reality”<sup>49</sup> for the kerygmatic version of Israel’s history which is really not there. Von Rad in turn points out that “our final comment on it should not be that it is obviously an ‘unhistorical’ version, because what is in question here is a version fashioned throughout by faith.”<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *TAT*, I, 114; *OTT*, I, 108.

<sup>45</sup> F. Hesse, “Die Erforschung der Geschichte Israels als theologische Aufgabe,” *Kerygma und Dogma*, IV (1958), 1-19; also Hesse, “Kerygma oder geschichtliche Wirklichkeit?” *ZThK*, LVII (1960), 17-26.

<sup>46</sup> Honecker, *op. cit.*, pp. 150, 151.

<sup>47</sup> *TAT*, I, 117; *OTT*, I, 111.

<sup>48</sup> *TAT*, II, 9: “Die historische Methode eröffnet uns nur einen Aspekt in das vielschichtige Phänomen der Geschichte und zwar einen, der über das Verhältnis der Geschichte zu Gott schlechterdings nichts auszusagen vermag.”

<sup>49</sup> Honecker, *op. cit.*, 151.

<sup>50</sup> *TAT*, I, 300; *OTT*, I, 302.

The impression is given at this point by von Rad that faith can support or build up the historicity of a version of history which was seemingly destroyed by historical criticism. But such an answer is not quite satisfactory. Is it possible to cover at once the historical and theological interpretation of a text as von Rad makes us believe? <sup>51</sup> Is Hesse better off in identifying the historico-critical interpretation with the theological one? <sup>52</sup> Or should one not rather take an alternative, one which does give more justice to the OT record as it stands without making artificial distinctions upon presuppositions which are alien to the material itself? These questions will receive due attention later.

### III. *The Relationship of Word and Event*

It is significant to observe that von Rad attributes priority to the event over the word: "From first to last Israel manifestedly takes as her starting-point the absolute priority in theology of event over 'logos.'" <sup>53</sup> This does not mean that Yahweh's self-revelation does not take place in "word and deed," <sup>54</sup> in "words and acts." <sup>55</sup> It means that Israelite theological thinking clings to "historical events." <sup>56</sup> The event has absolute theological priority <sup>57</sup> over the word, <sup>58</sup> that is, there is a "remarkable preponderance of the matter-of-fact

<sup>51</sup> *TAT*, II, 12: "Die theologische Deutung der alttestamentlichen Texte setzt aber nicht erst da ein, wo der literarkritisch und historisch geschulte Exegete (so oder sol) seine Arbeit getan hat, so dass wir also zwei Arbeitsgänge hätten, einen historisch-kritischen und dann einen 'theologischen.' Die theologische Deutung, die in dem Text eine Aussage von Gott zu begreifen sucht, ist vom ersten Anfang des Verstehensprozesses wirksam."

<sup>52</sup> Hesse, *Kerygma und Dogma*, IV (1958), 10; *ZThK*, LVII (1960), 26.

<sup>53</sup> *TAT*, I, 121; *OTT*, I, 116.

<sup>54</sup> *TAT*, I, 120; *OTT*, I, 114.

<sup>55</sup> *TAT*, II, 371; *OTT*, II, 358.

<sup>56</sup> *TAT*, I, 123; *OTT*, I, 117.

<sup>57</sup> This seems true in spite of the ambiguity which Honecker, *op. cit.*, 152, n. 25, feels is present at this point.

<sup>58</sup> *TAT*, I, 121; *OTT*, I, 116.

historical over the theological . . . of the witness of Israel.”<sup>59</sup> What does this really mean? Does it refer to an undeniable temporal priority of the historical event over its interpretation? Or does it indicate a material superiority of the *brutum factum* over the word? According to von Rad the “self-revelation of God”<sup>60</sup> takes place in historical events as well as in “revelation in word.”<sup>61</sup> Revelation in historical event and revelation in word are for von Rad two like forms in which God makes known his nature and his will: “God revealed himself by means of his words, and God revealed himself by means of his acts.”<sup>62</sup> Yet emphasis is placed upon the glorification of God, on his *doxa*, through his act, and such an “event could only be recognized as a ‘sign,’ and indeed as an actual miracle.”<sup>63</sup> Thus history does not become revelation only through its interpreting word, but it is revelation already by virtue of the inherent character of the event in its punctiliar temporality. There exists, however, a corresponding relationship between history and word: “History becomes word, and word becomes history.”<sup>64</sup> This seems to mean that word follows history interpreting it, and word precedes history announcing it. Due to von Rad’s hermeneutical schema, which is determined by the Deuteronomistic theology of history, he is confronted with the difficulty to conceive of word only as announcement and interpretation of history and to understand history only as event which legitimizes word. Because of the use of this restrictive methodology, it appears correct for him to say that “re-telling” is the most appropriate form of theological interpretation of the OT: “Thus, re-telling remains the most legitimate form of theological discourse on the Old Testament.”<sup>65</sup> The historical

<sup>59</sup> *TAT*, I, 130; *OTT*, I, 125.

<sup>60</sup> *TAT*, II, 371; *OTT*, II, 358.

<sup>61</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>62</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>63</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>64</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>65</sup> *TAT*, I, 126; *OTT*, I, 121.

element is "perceived,"<sup>66</sup> "interpreted,"<sup>67</sup> and "reflected"<sup>68</sup> by faith in order to arrive at an all-inclusive "combination"<sup>69</sup> and conception<sup>70</sup> of the facts. At a later time it was important to make the acts of salvation "relevant"<sup>71</sup> or to "actualize"<sup>72</sup> them—a task which was accomplished by Israel through "reinterpretation,"<sup>73</sup> "adaptation,"<sup>74</sup> and "co-ordination."<sup>75</sup>

A constant reinterpretation of the same past event was made possible by the way of the OT thought about history, which in one form or another is "inherently open to a future."<sup>76</sup> Israel remembered various separate historical events which brought her to an epoch-making realization, namely, "that there was a long road, that is to say, a history which led up to her formation."<sup>77</sup> It was in this way that Israel had broken through to the "concept of a linear historical span [lineare Geschichtsstrecke]."<sup>78</sup> To express von Rad's view differently one can say that history is the succession of events in the schema of promise and fulfillment.<sup>79</sup> The bed-rock fact in Israel's way of looking at history "may be called salvatio-historical: that is to say, a way of looking at history which in a specific sense understands each period it surveys as a realm of tension between a promise revealed and its realisation, between a prophecy and its fulfillment."<sup>80</sup> Pannenberg and his group

<sup>66</sup> *TAT*, I, 114; *OTT*, I, 108.

<sup>67</sup> *TAT*, I, 115, 122; *OTT*, I, 109, 116.

<sup>68</sup> *TAT*, I, 142; *OTT*, I, 138.

<sup>69</sup> *TAT*, I, 122, 158; *OTT*, I, 116, 154.

<sup>70</sup> *TAT*, II, 120 ff.; *OTT*, II, 106 ff.

<sup>71</sup> *TAT*, I, 8, 352; II, 6; *OTT*, I, vi; II, vi.

<sup>72</sup> *TAT*, I, 123; II, 6, 178, 187; *OTT*, I, 119; II, 6, 414.

<sup>73</sup> *TAT*, II, 255, 333; *OTT*, II, 240, 322.

<sup>74</sup> *TAT*, II, 61, 338, 399; *OTT*, II, 48, 328, 385.

<sup>75</sup> *ThLZ*, LXXXVIII (1963), 409; *OTT*, II, 418.

<sup>76</sup> *TAT*, II, 374; *OTT*, II, 361; cf. *ThLZ*, LXXXVIII (1963), 415; *OTT*, II, 462.

<sup>77</sup> *TAT*, II, 119; *OTT*, II, 106.

<sup>78</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>79</sup> *ThLZ*, LXXXVIII (1963), 406; *OTT*, II, 416.

<sup>80</sup> *ThLZ*, LXXXVIII (1963), 415; *OTT*, II, 426. Hans Heinrich Schmid has further grounded the linear concept of saving history as the key concept of the Deuteronomist's view of history in "Das Ver-

build upon this linear concept of history.<sup>81</sup> The difference between the Pannenberg circle and von Rad at this juncture is that the latter attempts to unlock the succession of historical events by means of the traditio-historical interpretation while the former attempts to unfold it with the aid of a synthetic historical methodology.

A full discussion of von Rad's understanding of history should include a treatment of his exposition of saving history as it moves in the tension between promise and fulfillment to be finally fully consummated in the Christ event. This would carry us, however, beyond the immediate scope of this study. For our purpose it will suffice to point out that what is at work here is the interrelatedness of a twofold methodology: first, the "structural analogy," which consists of the "peculiar interconnexion of revelation by word and revelation by event";<sup>82</sup> and, secondly, "typological thinking," which is not based "on myth and speculation, but on history and eschatology."<sup>83</sup> The many questions that are raised by such a twofold methodology cannot be treated at this point.<sup>84</sup> In short, we must say that von Rad arrives at the crowning consummation of saving history in the Christ event as a result of the combination of three conceptions: the concept of linear history; the predominance of event over word; and the interpretation of history from the movement of the tension between promise and fulfillment.

ständnis der Geschichte im Deuteronomium," *ZThK*, LXIV (1967), 1-15, concluding on p. 5: "Das Geschichtsbild [des Deuteronomiums] . . . ist als linear-heilsgeschichtlich zu kennzeichnen."

<sup>81</sup> Pannenberg, *Offenbarung als Geschichte*, pp. 112 ff.

<sup>82</sup> *TAT*, II, 376; *OTT*, II, 363.

<sup>83</sup> *TAT*, II, 378; *OTT*, II, 365.

<sup>84</sup> For these questions see Hans Walter Wolff, "Zur Hermeneutik des Alten Testaments," *Evangelische Theologie*, XVI (1956), 337-370; "The Hermeneutics of the Old Testament," *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, pp. 160-199; "Das Geschichtsverständnis der alttestamentlichen Prophetie," *Evangelische Theologie*, XX (1960), 218-235; "The Understanding of History in the O. T. Prophets," *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, pp. 336-355; Walther Eichrodt, "Ist die typologische Exegese sachgemässe Exegese?" *VT*, Supplement IV

#### IV. *The Debate on the Problem of History in Old Testament Theology*

The reactions to von Rad's understanding of OT history have been many and mostly negative. Walther Eichrodt, who himself produced two highly important volumes on OT theology, affirms with von Rad that "God's acts in history" are the subject-matter of the OT witness. At the same time he strongly denies that the scholarly concern of the OT theologian has to consist in a "re-telling" <sup>85</sup> of the historical discourse of the OT. <sup>86</sup> An emphasis on event or objective historical fact in the OT message can only be undertaken "at the expense of the testimony of faith to the divine revelation" <sup>87</sup> and will lead "to an uncontrolled and arbitrary attestation of God in individual facts of history." <sup>88</sup> Eichrodt fears that this involves isolating the activity of God in history "in such a way as to ignore the testimony of faith evoked in response to it from the OT community." <sup>89</sup>

It seems that Eichrodt's negative reaction is centered in his distinction of the "external facts" of saving history in the OT from the "decisive inward event," namely, "the interior overmastering of the human spirit by God's personal invasion." <sup>90</sup> Here, in the creation and development of God's people, in the realization of the covenant relationship, the "decisive" event takes place "without which all external facts must become myth." <sup>91</sup> Here, then, is the "point of origin for all

(1957), 161-180; "Is Typological Exegesis an Appropriate Method?" *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, pp. 224-245; Jürgen Moltmann, "Exegese und Eschatologie in der Geschichte," *Evangelische Theologie*, XXII (1962), 61, n. 75.

<sup>85</sup> *TAT*, I, 126; *OTT*, I, 121.

<sup>86</sup> Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Teil I (6th ed.; Göttingen, 1959), pp. vi ff.; *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, 1961), I, 13-16, 512-520; the latter is hereafter cited as *TOT*.

<sup>87</sup> *TOT*, I, 14.

<sup>88</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>89</sup> *TOT*, I, 15.

<sup>90</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>91</sup> *TOT*, I, 15 f.; also Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Teil

further relation of God in history, here is the possibility and norm for all statements about God's speech and deed." <sup>92</sup> With such an understanding of the matter it becomes clear that the "external facts" of history can have no more than a secondary meaning.

Eichrodt also objects vehemently to von Rad's dualistic versions of Israel's history. He feels that the rift between the two pictures of Israel's history "is wrenched apart with such violence . . . that it seems impossible hence-forth to restore an inner coherence between the aspects of Israel's history." <sup>93</sup> Von Rad dissolved the "true history of Israel" into "religious poetry"; even worse, it is drawn up by "Israel in flat contradiction of the facts." <sup>94</sup> In reality, however, the faith of Israel is "founded on facts of history" and only in this way can this faith have "any kind of binding authority." <sup>95</sup> Thus it appears that a reconciliation of both versions of Israel's history is in Eichrodt's thinking not only possible, but in the interest of the trustworthiness of the biblical witness absolutely necessary. <sup>96</sup>

Franz Hesse <sup>97</sup> has attacked von Rad's disjuncture of the two versions of Israel's history even more radically and he is

II/III (4th ed.; Göttingen, 1961), p. XII; *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, 1967), p. 11. It is to be regretted that the important discussion contained in the introductory section of the German edition is omitted in English.

<sup>92</sup> *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Teil II/III, p. XII.

<sup>93</sup> *TOT*, I, 512; cf. *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Teil II/III, p. VIII.

<sup>94</sup> *TOT*, I, 513; cf. *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Teil II/III, p. IX.

<sup>95</sup> *TOT*, I, 517; cf. *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Teil II/III, p. XI.

<sup>96</sup> *TOT*, I, 516: ". . . it is realized that in the OT we are dealing not with an anti-historical transformation of the course of history into fairy tale or poem, but with an interpretation of real events. . . . Such interpretation is able, by means of a one-sided rendering, or one exaggerated in a particular direction, to grasp and represent the true meaning of the event more correctly than could an unobjectionable chronicle of the actual course of history."

<sup>97</sup> Hesse, *Kerygma und Dogma*, IV (1958), 1-19, and *ZThK*, LVII (1960), 17-26. See von Rad's reaction to it in *TAT*, II, 8-11.

seconded by Johannes Hempel<sup>98</sup> and from a slightly different perspective also by Victor Maag.<sup>99</sup> Hesse turns against what he calls von Rad's "double tracking,"<sup>100</sup> namely, that the secular history is to deal with the history of Israel while the kerygmatic version as formed mostly by the post-exilic community is theologically meaningful.<sup>101</sup> Hesse recognizes correctly that with von Rad "kerygma theology has broken with all might into the field of Old Testament studies."<sup>102</sup>

Hesse marks out the difference between the two versions of Israel's history with designations such as "real" and "unreal" or "correct" and "incorrect." He maintains that the version of Israel's history as drawn up by historico-critical research is alone theologically relevant, because the picture which Israel herself has drawn up is not only open to error but in very fact contains too often error. An OT theology must consist of "more than pure description of Old Testament tradition. . . . Our faith lives from that which happened in Old Testament times, not from that which is confessed as having happened. . . . Kerygma is not constitutive for our faith, but historical reality is."<sup>103</sup> Thus Hesse attempts to overcome the dualism of the two versions of Israel's history by closely identifying<sup>104</sup> the historical picture of Israel's history with salvation history. He states: "In what the people of Israel in the centuries of its existence experienced, what it did and what it suffered, 'salvation history' is present. This [salvation history] does not run side by side with the history of Israel, it does not lie upon another 'higher' plane, but although it is not identical with the history of Israel it is

<sup>98</sup> J. Hempel, "Alttestamentliche Theologie in protestantischer Sicht heute," *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, XV (1958), 206 ff.

<sup>99</sup> V. Maag, "Historische und ausserhistorische Begründung alttestamentlicher Theologie," *Schweizer Theologische Umschau*, XXIX (1959), 6-18.

<sup>100</sup> *Kerygma und Dogma*, IV (1958), 5.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-8.

<sup>102</sup> *ZThK*, LVII (1960), 21.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 25.

<sup>104</sup> See also Honecker, *op. cit.*, pp. 158, 159.



nevertheless there; thus we can say that in, with, and beneath the history of Israel God leads his salvation history to the 'telos' Jesus Christ, that is to say, in, with, and beneath that which *happens*, which *actually* took place."<sup>105</sup> Hesse therefore contends that "a separation between the history of Israel and Old Testament salvation history is thus not possible . . .," for "salvation history is present in hidden form in, with, and beneath the history of Israel."<sup>106</sup> From this it follows that the totality of "the history of the people of Israel with all its features is the subject of theological research . . ."<sup>107</sup>

Hesse grounds saving history solely in the historico-critical version of Israel's history, insisting upon the "facticity of that which is reported,"<sup>108</sup> so that "the witness of Israel about its own history is not to concern us in as far as it wants to be witness of history, because it stands and falls with the historicity of that which is witnessed."<sup>109</sup> This seems to indicate that the kerygma of the OT as well as the kerygmatic version of Israel's history is to be judged by the historicity of that which is witnessed by it.<sup>110</sup> We must of necessity ask whether Hesse does not fall prey to historical positivism.<sup>111</sup> If the modern historico-critical method is employed as the sole means for establishing historical "facticity" for verifying the kerygma of the OT and its picture of history, will this not bring about a decisively shortened picture of saving history? It seems that Hesse overestimates the "facticity" produced by the

<sup>105</sup> *Kerygma und Dogma*, IV (1958), 10.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>108</sup> *ZThK*, LVII (1960), 25.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>110</sup> *Kerygma und Dogma*, IV (1958), 17-19.

<sup>111</sup> Von Rad points out that the version of Israel's history given by modern historiography, which works with the historico-critical method, also is already interpreted history; *TAT*, II, 9: "Auch das Bild der modernen Historie ist gedeutete Geschichte und zwar von geschichtsphilosophischen Prämissen aus, die für das Handeln Gottes in der Geschichte keinerlei Wahrnehmungsmöglichkeiten ergeben, weil hier notorisch nur der Mensch als der Schöpfer seiner Geschichte verstanden wird."

application of the historico-critical method while greatly underestimating, if not completely denying, any "facticity" whatever to the version of Israel's history as drawn up by herself. Von Rad replies to Hesse by pointing out that it is not as easy to distill that which is historical and factual from that which is confessional and kerygmatic as Hesse seems to indicate.<sup>112</sup> Von Rad states: "Also the best supported event of 'real history' remains silent in relation to the divine guidance of history; its relevancy for faith can be in no way objectively verified. For this the 'Witness' is needed."<sup>113</sup> Thus von Rad points to the inadequacy of the historico-critical method for saving history.

It seems that Friedrich Baumgärtel's<sup>114</sup> criticism strikes von Rad at a more vulnerable point. He points out that in von Rad's OT theology the "struggle of Israel for constantly new interpretations and actualizations" is emphasized to such an extent that that which is actually relevant, that is, "the struggle of God with his people and his messengers" and "the self-actualization of God . . . through his tools"<sup>115</sup> is not given its due. In other words, von Rad needs to be more "theocentric." This criticism appears to be justified. Furthermore, the weakness of von Rad's starting-point is, in Baumgärtel's view, not so much the discrepancy between the two versions of Israel's history<sup>116</sup> as it is the question concerning the meaning of Israel's confession for Christian faith. This question cannot be answered by historical research but must be answered theologically.<sup>117</sup> This criticism is directed against von Rad's attempt to solve the theological question concerning

<sup>112</sup> *TAT*, II, 8-9; cf. *TAT*, I, 473.

<sup>113</sup> *TAT*, II, 9.

<sup>114</sup> F. Baumgärtel, "Gerhard von Rads Theologie des Alten Testaments," *ThLZ*, LXXXVI (1961), 801-816, 895-908; also "Das alttestamentliche Geschehen als 'heilsgeschichtliches' Geschehen," *Geschichte und Altes Testament. Festschrift für Albrecht Alt* (Göttingen, 1953), pp. 11-28; cf. Braaten, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.

<sup>115</sup> *ThLZ*, LXXXVI (1961), 812 ff.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 804-805.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 805.

the meaning of the OT for Christian faith phenomenologically with the aid of traditio-historical interpretation. For Baumgärtel neither of the two versions of Israel's history possesses theological relevancy for Christian faith. Why? Because the problem is that the whole "Old Testament is witness out of a non-Christian religion."<sup>118</sup> "Viewed historically it has another place than the Christian religion."<sup>119</sup> Thus according to Baumgärtel, von Rad's error lies in assuming that Israel's witness to God's actions in history can be taken at face value and as relevant for the Christian church. The apt reply of another OT theologian, Claus Westermann, is hardly an overstatement: "Ultimately he [Baumgärtel] admits, then, that the church could also live without the Old Testament."<sup>120</sup> The essential weakness of Baumgärtel's criticism of von Rad at this point lies in his ultimate denial of the relevancy of the OT for Christian faith.

A positive reconciliation of the two pictures of Israel's history has been attempted by Wolfhart Pannenberg<sup>121</sup> with

<sup>118</sup> Baumgärtel, "Das hermeneutische Problem des Alten Testaments *ThLZ*, LXXIX (1954), 200; "The Hermeneutical Problem of the Old Testament," in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. by C. Westermann (Richmond, Va., 1963), p. 135.

<sup>119</sup> *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, p. 145.

<sup>120</sup> Claus Westermann, "Remarks on the Theses of Bultmann and Baumgärtel," *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, p. 133.

<sup>121</sup> Significant for our discussion is Pannenberg, "Heilsgeschehen und Geschichte," *Kerygma und Dogma*, V (1959), 218-237, 259-288; "Redemptive Event and History," in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, pp. 314-335; "Kerygma und Geschichte," *Studien zur Theologie der alttestamentlichen Überlieferungen*, ed. by Rolf Rendtorff und Klaus Koch (Neukirchen, 1961), pp. 129-140, hereafter cited as *Studien*; Pannenberg, ed.; *Offenbarung als Geschichte* (Göttingen, 1961; 2d revised ed., 1963), hereafter cited as *OaG*. Noteworthy critiques of Pannenberg and his group are by Hans-Georg Geyer, "Geschichte als theologisches Problem," *Evangelische Theologie*, XXII (1962), 92-104; Lothar Steiger, "Offenbarungsgeschichte und theologische Vernunft," *ZThK*, LIX (1962), 88-113; Günther Klein, "Offenbarung als Geschichte?" *Monatsschrift für Pastoraltheologie*, LI (1962), 65-88, to which Pannenberg replied in the "Postscript" of the second edition of *OaG*, pp. 132-148; Klein, *Theologie des Wortes Gottes und die Hypothese der Universalgeschichte. Zur Auseinandersetzung mit Wolf-*

the aid of members of his "working circle" such as Rolf Rendtorff,<sup>122</sup> Ulrich Wilckens,<sup>123</sup> and Dietrich Rössler.<sup>124</sup> Their approach can be characterized by their key phrase, "revelation as history."<sup>125</sup> While von Rad attempts to keep open the tension between the two versions of Israel's history, that is, between the historical event and its kerygmatic interpretation, his students, Pannenberg and his group, venture to solve this problem methodologically. They go beyond their teacher,

*hart Pannenberg*, "Beiträge zur Evangelischen Theologie," XXXVII (München, 1964); Hesse, "Wolfhart Pannenberg und das Alte Testament," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, VII (1965), 174-199; Gerhard Sauter, *Zukunft und Verheissung. Das Problem der Zukunft in der gegenwärtigen theologischen und philosophischen Diskussion* (Zürich/Stuttgart, 1965), pp. 239-251; Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London, 1967), pp. 76-84, and the highly important volume dedicated to Pannenberg's theology as a whole by James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. eds., *Theology as History*, "New Frontiers in Theology," Vol. III (New York, 1967). Pannenberg took issue with those who criticized his theology in his "Response to the Discussion" in *Theology as History*, pp. 221-276.

<sup>122</sup> R. Rendtorff is the OT theologian of the group whose following writings are important for the issue at hand: "Hermeneutik des Alten Testaments als Frage nach der Geschichte," *ZThK*, LVII (1960), 27-40; "Die Offenbarungsvorstellungen im alten Israel," *OaG*, pp. 21-41. Both essays are criticized by W. Zimmerli, "Offenbarung im Alten Testament. Ein Gespräch mit Rolf Rendtorff," *Evangelische Theologie*, XXII (1962), 15-31, to which Rendtorff answered in "Geschichte und Wort im Alten Testament," *Evangelische Theologie*, XXII (1962), 621-649. The following two essays by Rendtorff pertain also to the question of history in the OT: "Die Entstehung der israelitischen Religion als religionsgeschichtliches und theologisches Problem," *ThLZ*, LXXXVIII (1963), cols. 735-746; "Alttestamentliche Theologie und israelitisch-jüdische Religionsgeschichte," *Zwischenstation. Festschrift für Karl Kupisch zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. by Helmut Gollwitzer and J. Hoppe (München, 1963), pp. 208-222. Noteworthy is also the critique of Rendtorff by Arnold Gamper, "Offenbarung in Geschichte," *ZThK*, LXXXVI (1964), 180-196.

<sup>123</sup> U. Wilckens, "Das Offenbarungsverständnis in der Geschichte des Urchristentums," *OaG*, pp. 42-90.

<sup>124</sup> D. Rössler, *Gesetz und Geschichte. Untersuchungen zur Theologie der jüdischen Apokalyptik und der pharisäischen Orthodoxie*, "WMANT," III (2d ed., Neukirchen, 1962).

<sup>125</sup> This is also the title of the programmatic collection of essays of Pannenberg and his group, *Offenbarung als Geschichte* (*supra*, n. 121).

feeling that his distinction is inadequate<sup>126</sup> and that one cannot be satisfied with the "alternative between the picture of history which is arrived at by historico-critical research and that which is painted in the Old Testament."<sup>127</sup> Rendtorff explains that "Israel's history takes place in the external events which are commonly the subject of historico-critical research of history *and* in the manifold and stratified inner events, which we have gathered under the term tradition."<sup>128</sup> Therefore the historico-critical method is to be transformed and extended so as to be able to verify at the same time God's revelation in history. Pannenberg speaks in a similar vein when he refers to "history" as "reality in its totality."<sup>129</sup> He traces the development of this concept of history as "reality in its totality" from ancient Israel to the present. Pannenberg argues against the common distinction between historical facts and their meaning, evaluation, and interpretation by man. He feels that this common procedure in modern historiography, which employs the historico-critical method, is a result of the influence of positivism and neo-Kantianism. Pannenberg proposes that against such an artificial distinction "we must reinstate today the original unity of facts and their meaning."<sup>130</sup> That is to say that "in principle, every event

<sup>126</sup> Rendtorff, *Studien*, p. 84.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>128</sup> *Loc. cit.* It is pointed out that the adjectives "external" and "inner" are used because of a lack of better terminology. Rendtorff is not alone in making this point in the Pannenberg circle. The chief spokesman, Pannenberg, *Kerygma und Dogma*, V (1959), 287, points to the same thought: "Eine derartige Theologie der Geschichte unterscheidet sich vom herkömmlichen heilsgeschichtlichen Denken dadurch, dass sie prinzipiell historisch verifizierbar sein will."

<sup>129</sup> Pannenberg, *Kerygma und Dogma*, V, 232; *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, p. 314.

<sup>130</sup> Pannenberg, "The Revelation of God in Jesus Christ," *Theology as History*, "New Frontiers in Theology," III (New York, 1967), 127.

Pannenberg states on p. 126: "Such a splitting up of historical consciousness into detection of facts and an evaluation of them (or into history as known and history as experienced) is intolerable to Christian faith, not only because the message of the resurrection of Jesus and of God's revelation in him necessarily becomes merely

has its original meaning within the context of occurrence and tradition in which it took place. . . ."<sup>131</sup> Pannenberg's objective, in light of this analysis, is to create a situation in which faith can rest on historically proven fact in order to be saved from subjectivity, self-redemption, and self-deception.<sup>132</sup> In this connection both Pannenberg<sup>133</sup> and Rendtorff<sup>134</sup> have much to say about the relation of word and event. Rendtorff is of the conviction that "word has an essential part in the event of revelation."<sup>135</sup> But this should not be understood to mean that word has priority over event. Quite on the contrary, the word does not need to be the mediator between the event and the one who experiences the event, because "the event itself can and should bring about a recognition of Yahweh in the one who sees it and understands it to be the act of Yahweh."<sup>136</sup> Pannenberg holds that "the knowledge of Yahweh's divinity is not due to the events which were announced by his word, since the latter can be conceived

subjective interpretation, but also because it is the reflection of an outmoded and questionable historical method. It is based on the futile aim of the positivistic historians to ascertain bare facts without meaning in history."

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>132</sup> Pannenberg, "Response to the Discussion," *Theology as History*, p. 269: "The knowledge of history on which faith is grounded has to do with the truth and reliability of that on which faith depends; these are presupposed in the act of trusting, and thus logically precede the act of faith in respect to its perceived content. But that does not mean that the subjective accomplishment of such knowledge would be in any way a condition of fellowship with God. . . . Such knowledge is thus not a condition for participating in salvation, but rather it assures faith about its basis."

<sup>133</sup> *OaG*, pp. 112-114; most recently in *Theology as History*, pp. 121, 122, 260.

<sup>134</sup> *OaG*, pp. 40, 41.

<sup>135</sup> *OaG*, p. 40.

<sup>136</sup> *Loc. cit.*; Zimmerli countered Rendtorff in "'Offenbarung' im Alten Testament," *Evangelische Theologie*, XXII (1962), 15-31, to which Rendtorff replied with "Geschichte und Wort im Alten Testament," *Evangelische Theologie*, XXII (1962), 621-649. A summary of the debate is now given by Robinson, "Revelation as Word and as History," *Theology as History*, pp. 42-62.

as mere effects of the word.”<sup>137</sup> Instead, the event has priority, because “time and again the course of events surpassed the words, giving them new meaning and a new reference.”<sup>138</sup> Proclamation “as event itself is not revelation, but it is report about revealing history and explication of the language of facts implicit in this history.”<sup>139</sup> In this sense the “language of facts” contains revelation which the word of proclamation, then, reports. Thus the Pannenberg circle is in essential agreement with von Rad on the priority of event over word and represents an alternative to the “theology of the word.”<sup>140</sup> Von Rad would agree that the event itself is revelation and does not only become revelation through its interpreting word. While Pannenberg says that “word relates to revelation as prediction, as command and as report,”<sup>141</sup> von Rad has seemingly the same in mind when he says that “history becomes word, and word becomes history,”<sup>142</sup> that is, that word

<sup>137</sup> *Theology as History*, p. 120.

<sup>138</sup> *Loc. cit.*; *OaG*, p. 112: “History is never made up out of so-called *bruta facta*. As human history, its occurrence is always interwoven with understanding, in hope and memory, and the transformations (!) of understanding are themselves events of history. The two cannot be separated even in the initial occurrences of a history. Thus history is always also the history of the transmission of traditions, and even the natural events which affect the history of a people do not have their meaning outside of their positive or negative relationship to the traditions and expectations in which the men of that history live.” *Theology as History*, p. 260: “. . . every individual event has its meaning and thereby its essence (i.e., what it is) only in relation to the whole. But the whole of reality is not yet completed, by virtue of its historicity. Nevertheless words ascribe to events, things, and even persons whom we encounter their essence, their meaning. In consequence of the above, that implies an *anticipation* of the whole of reality.”

<sup>139</sup> *OaG*, p. 114.

<sup>140</sup> Pannenberg’s theology is not only intended as an alternative to the “theology of the word” of such representatives as Bultmann, Gogarten, Fuchs, and Ebeling, but also to the Barthian position. The Pannenberg circle is indeed the first theological school to emerge in Germany from a generation that was born well after World War I had passed and is not in one form or another a development of the dialectic theology of the twenties.

<sup>141</sup> *OaG*, p. 112.

<sup>142</sup> *TAT*, I, 121; *OTT*, I, 116.

follows history interpreting it, and word precedes history announcing it. To sum up, a decisive difference between the Pannenberg group and von Rad lies in methodology. Von Rad unlocks historical events with the aid of traditio-historical interpretation. The Pannenberg group works with a synthetic historical method which emphasizes the original unity of facts and their meaning—thereby freeing it from the limitations of outmoded positivism and neo-Kantianism.

### V. *Some Critical Considerations*

Von Rad believes that the OT lacks a center (*Mitte*) from which it is to be interpreted, quite unlike the NT, whose center is Jesus Christ. Therefore von Rad believes to have found the center from which to unlock the OT in the Deuteronomistic theology of history. This, in fact, becomes his hermeneutical schema for the interpretation of the entire OT. He has, however, failed to justify the right to use such a concept as a hermeneutical key; that is, he has been satisfied with the phenomenological utilization of his method. Of necessity one must ask whether with the same right one could not use the Priestly schema for interpreting the OT or the apocalyptic universalism of history of the Pannenberg group?<sup>143</sup> On the other hand, cannot the theophanies and epiphanies of the OT be understood as an unerring sign that God is the center of every certainty and confession?

It must also be asked how far von Rad himself is responsible for the new turn in theological thinking represented by the Pannenberg circle. In other words, von Rad's basic thesis

<sup>143</sup> Pannenberg speaks of the concept of the apocalyptic universalism of history in terms of an "universalgeschichtliche Konzeption" and an "universalgeschichtliches Schema" in *Kerygma und Dogma*, V (1959), 237, and in his "Geschichtsverständnis der Apokalyptik," *OaG*, p. 107; cf. U. Wilckens, *OaG*, pp. 53, 54, and Rössler, *Gesetz und Geschichte*, pp. 111 ff. For a critique of Rössler, see Philipp Vielhauer, "Apocalypses and Related Studies: Introduction," Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. by Wilhelm Schneemelcher, tr. by R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia, 1965), pp. 581-607, esp. p. 593.



that "history is the place in which God reveals the secret of his person" <sup>144</sup> is open to a variety of interpretations. Does it mean that history itself is the real and full medium of revelation, *i.e.*, that inherent in it is the essential quality of revelation? This is obviously the conviction of the representatives of "revelation as history." Opposed to this is a statement such as this, taken from Karl Barth, "Revelation is not a predicate of history, but history is a predicate of revelation. One can and must first of all say the noun revelation, in order to say afterwards, as an explanation, history." <sup>145</sup> According to this view history as such can never reveal God. Or is it possible that von Rad is simply concerned to point out that God does not reveal himself "from above" in a transcendental or mystical way? If so, history would, then, only be the place, but not the origin and medium of revelation. Revelation would thus be dependent upon the "word" which is proclaimed in the "place" of history. <sup>146</sup> This points out the validity and importance of the "theology of the word." Salvation comes to man in the word, Ro 10: 17: "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." This appears to support the emphasis which is recently placed upon the "word" by Gerhard Ebeling <sup>147</sup> and Ernst Fuchs. <sup>148</sup> Faith would thus not be established by the "language of facts" <sup>149</sup> nor by the historical proof of the events, but by the fact of language, which brings the event with the word and thus becomes a "word

<sup>144</sup> TAT, II, 349: "Der Ort, an dem Gott sein Personengeheimnis offenbart, ist die Geschichte," the English translation of which is obscured, OTT, II, 338: ". . . that it is in history that God reveals the secret of his person."

<sup>145</sup> Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (1948 ed.), p. 64.

<sup>146</sup> See especially Honecker, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>147</sup> Mention should be made of the following works by G. Ebeling: *The Nature of Faith* (Philadelphia, 1961); *Word and Faith* (Philadelphia, 1963); *Theology and Proclamation: Dialogue with Bultmann* (Philadelphia, 1966); *God and Word* (Philadelphia, 1967); *The Problem of Historicity* (Philadelphia, 1967).

<sup>148</sup> E. Fuchs, *Hermeneutik* (Bad Cannstadt, 1954; 2d ed., 1958); *Studies of the Historical Jesus* (London, 1964).

<sup>149</sup> Thus Pannenberg, *OaG*, pp. 100, 112.

event"<sup>150</sup> or "language event."<sup>151</sup> In this theological system only the "word" as interpretation of event transmits salvation to faith.

Our next consideration concerns the problem of the radical disjunction between Israel's witness to her own history and the historico-critical reconstruction of Israel's history. The essential weakness of von Rad's theology of the OT is that his theological exposition shows no organic connection<sup>152</sup> with his historico-critical exposition.<sup>153</sup> Against von Rad we must question whether historical research can be limited to a certain method or philosophy of history as that of E. Troeltsch, who is cited by von Rad.<sup>154</sup> Troeltsch's premises may indeed have been binding for historical criticism for a long time but they do not need to remain binding forever. Against Hesse, who seems to make the opposite mistake in grounding saving history solely upon the historico-critical method and its version of Israel's history, it must be pointed out that the so-called "scientific" version is not as absolute as it claims to be. We should remind ourselves of the problems inherent in the historico-critical version: First, there are two versions of the pre-history, *viz.* the version of Alt and Noth<sup>155</sup> on the one hand and that of the Albright school on the other; second, there are still many unsolved problems in the later period according

<sup>150</sup> Ebeling's terminology; see *Word and Faith*, pp. 305-332.

<sup>151</sup> Fuchs's terminology; see *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, pp. 213-251.

<sup>152</sup> Von Rad's almost 800-page exposition of OT theology is prefixed by a treatment of Israel's history as modern historiography covering 102 pages.

<sup>153</sup> See especially M. Sekine, "Vom Verstehen der Heilsgeschichte: das Grundproblem der alttestamentlichen Theologie," *ZAW*, LXXV (1963), 145-154.

<sup>154</sup> *TAT*, I, 114; *OTT*, I, 107.

<sup>155</sup> See especially H. Weidmann, *Die Patriarchen und ihre Religion*, "Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments" (abbr. FRLANT), XCIV (Göttingen, 1968), 126-167; M. Weippert, *Die Landnahme der israelitischen Stämme in der neueren wissenschaftlichen Diskussion*, "FRLANT," XCII (Göttingen, 1967), 14-140.

to these historico-critical versions, so that a closed picture of the history of Israel is not available.<sup>156</sup> Many of the arguments against the OT version of Israel's history are not so secured by historical proof that they can be thought of as binding forever. Thus it would be utterly fallacious to think that an approximation of the two versions is not within the possible. John Bright<sup>157</sup> has demonstrated this by his reconstruction of the early history of Israel, and of a number of details in her later history, against the presentation of Martin Noth.<sup>158</sup> On the whole, however, it seems inadequate to distill "saving history" from the witness of the OT by means of the traditio-historical method to the exclusion of historico-critical research as is the case with von Rad. In the present writer's opinion it is equally inadequate to ground "saving history" solely on the historico-critical method as is the case with Hesse. Why? Because, as Rendtorff points out, both history and tradition are so intertwined together that they cannot be separated.<sup>159</sup> Research has shown that these methods, employed either alone or combined, will not bring about the effect of a "total picture"<sup>160</sup> of Israel's history. Therefore, no matter how we evaluate the way in which Pannenberg and his group worked out their theologies, Pannenberg's proposal—that "we must reinstate today the original unity of facts and their meaning,"<sup>161</sup>—calls for serious consideration

<sup>156</sup> J. A. Soggin, "Alttestamentliche Glaubenszeugnisse und geschichtliche Wirklichkeit," *ThZ*, XVII (1961), 385-398, has put his finger on this spot.

<sup>157</sup> John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia, 1959); cf. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London, 1961); Helmer Ringgren, *Israelite Religion* (Philadelphia, 1966).

<sup>158</sup> Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (rev. ed.; New York, 1960).

<sup>159</sup> Rendtorff, *Studien*, pp. 84-94; von Rad in criticizing Hesse makes the same point and thus entangles himself in contradictions with his own exposition of saving history which is, of course, based upon the traditio-historical analysis, *TAT*, II, 8-9. The Pannenberg circle, on the other hand, seeks to avoid such contradictions and pursues its own way.

<sup>160</sup> Rendtorff, *Studien*, p. 93.

<sup>161</sup> Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 127.

as a new starting-point for overcoming the artificial dichotomy by which modern historiography has wrenched apart the history of Israel under such outmoded and questionable influences as positivism and neo-Kantianism.<sup>162</sup> Thus when we speak of God's acts in Israel's history, there is no reason to confine this activity to a few bare events, *bruta facta*, that the schema of historical criticism can verify by cross-checking with other historical evidences. Nor is it adequate and appropriate to employ the hermeneutical schema of von Rad, because with neither schema has scholarship been able to reach a fully acceptable understanding of historical reality fitting to the modern time due to serious methodological, historical, and theological limitations, restrictions, and inadequacies. God's acts are with the totality of Israel's career in history, including the highly complex and diverse ways in which she developed and transmitted her creedal formulations. Thus we must work with a method that takes account of the totality of that history under the recognition of the original unity of facts and their meaning.

#### *Postscript*

This paper was already in the hands of the printer when G. Fohrer's article, "Der Mittelpunkt einer Theologie des Alten Testaments," *ThZ*, XXIV (1968), 161-172, appeared. His discussion relates to the problem of the "center" of the OT and it is his thesis that the "Mittelpunkt" (center) of an OT theology is not God, but rather the "*Herrschaft Gottes und Gemeinschaft zwischen Gott und Mensch*" (p. 163; cf. p. 171). Space does not permit to deal at this point with his thesis, which is of course open to question, for it places chief emphasis on God's reign and the divine-human relationship as *the* key to unlock the problem of OT theology.

<sup>162</sup> The OT theologian Christoph Barth argues in "Grundprobleme einer Theologie des Alten Testaments," *Evangelische Theologie*, XXIII (1963), 368, against a critical methodology which declares every "supra-human and supernatural causality" unhistorical, as well as against a "rational-objective method" which believes itself able to distinguish without great difficulty between "real" and "interpreted" history.