

BOOK REVIEWS

Childs, Brevard S. *Biblical Theology in Crisis*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970. 255 pp. \$ 8.00.

The author, Professor of OT at Yale University, is prompted to write this book as an attempt to understand the shift in the winds in contemporary theology, specifically that which is related to Biblical studies. Both professional theologians and informed laymen know that theology is undergoing at present considerable change, that much of the so-called theological consensus has come to an end, especially as it is identified with "neo-orthodoxy," and that therefore there is an opening up of new theological fronts.

In Part I (pp. 13-87) Childs describes as the initial purpose of his book the emergence of a distinctive American way of understanding theology in its relation to the Bible. He believes that the period that followed World War II in America can be best described in its approach to Biblical studies as the "Biblical Theology Movement." It emerged as a distinctive American way of combining modern theology with the study of the Bible and arose largely in response to certain European influences and American problems. Critical scholars were faulted for having lost themselves in the minutiae of literary, philological, and historical problems which resulted in a hopelessly fragmented Bible whose essential unity was distorted and forgotten. "Biblical scholarship had deteriorated into an exercise in trivia, in which tragic process the profound theological dimensions were overlooked" (p. 15). The peculiar historical and sociological matrix of America which led to the "Biblical Theology Movement" was the aftermath of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy which had been waged from about 1910-1930. It had split major denominations and rocked others to a degree not known before. By the middle thirties it had become apparent that the liberals had won the battle. At the end of World War II the wounds of the battle between liberals and conservatives were far from healed. A new alternative to the "liberal-conservative syndrome" was offered by those who at that time suggested the possibility of accepting Biblical criticism as carried on with the use of the historical-critical method as a vital tool, while at the same time recovering a robust, confessionally oriented theology. The "Biblical Theology Movement" emerged thus by joining a historical-critical approach to the Bible with a confessional theology. It attempted to bridge the long-standing gulf between conservatives and liberals. Its elements consisted of an emphasis on the theological dimensions of the Bible under the conviction that the Scriptures were highly relevant for modern man. Other emphases of the "Biblical Theology Movement" stressed the dynamic unity of the Bible in terms of a unity in diversity, the conviction that

God's revelation was mediated through history along the lines of "revelation in history" which considered history as the medium of revelation. It also generally agreed that there is a distinctive Biblical mentality, which was used polemically against both liberals and conservatives. The final special feature of the "Biblical Theology Movement" in America was a concentration on the Ancient Near Eastern setting of the Bible and the Bible's relation to its environment. The Bible reflects the influence of its environment and "yet in spite of its appropriations the Bible has used these common elements in a way that is totally distinct and unique from its environment" (p. 48) so that the differences between the Bible and its environment are so remarkable that one cannot speak of derivation, but of originality.

The decade of the fifties witnessed the return of unresolved problems such as the failure to understand the Bible as a fully human book, as affirmed by the historical-critical approach, and yet as the vehicle of the revealed Divine Word, the problem of relating the Old and New Testaments to each other in a consistent and unified way, the problem of the authority of the Bible, and the problem of having a "canon within the canon." These and other unresolved problems brought about a cracking of the walls of the "Biblical Theology Movement" which was a beginning of the breaking up of the older theological alliances that constituted the "Biblical Theology Movement" in America.

Childs speaks of "the collapse" of the "Biblical Theology Movement" as a dominant and cohesive force in American theology which resulted from the impact of "erosion from within" precipitated by the influence of disparate views of scholars (Eichrodt, von Rad, Cullmann, Bultmann) on American theologians. This influence showed itself in regard to the questions of the nature of history and revelation in history, the unity of the Bible, the distinctive Biblical mentality, and the theological dimension. Alongside the forces of erosion from within another set of pressures made itself felt from without, namely economic, social, and political developments of American culture in the sixties on the one hand, and the writings of J. A. T. Robinson, Harvey Cox, and Langdon Gilkey, on the other. The "Biblical Theology Movement" was thus brought to a "virtual end as a major force in American theology in the early sixties" (p. 87).

In Part II (pp. 91-147) Childs engages in the quest of "seeking a future" for a Biblical theology by asking the question, Where do we go from here in the use of the Bible? He affirms the need for a "new Biblical theology." He sees this need arising out of the failure of the "Biblical Theology Movement" and the trend of American OT and NT studies in the seventies which is in danger of dealing with historical, literary, and philological studies so that the Biblical disciplines will again be fragmented. The "new Biblical theology" as a discipline "will attempt to retain and develop a picture of the whole, and . . . will have a responsibility to synthesize as well as analyze" (p. 92). Its task lies not primarily in sifting, simplifying, and ordering, but "in ap-

proaching the material in a theologically significant way and addressing questions that are not only compatible to the Biblical material but relate to the theological task as well. . . . It simply will not do to limit Biblical Theology to the descriptive task" (p. 93). The "new Biblical theology" must benefit from active confrontation with the new questions of our age and society and would seem to have a decisive role to play in meeting the challenge of a "new American theological liberalism that finds its warrant for social action in a vague reference to 'making human the structure of society' " (p. 94). Another need for the "new Biblical theology" comes from the Christian pastors who will be informed and in turn will inform the "new Biblical theology" of the future on the front lines of the church's confrontation with the world.

As a fresh alternative, Childs defends the thesis that the most appropriate context for the shape of the "new Biblical theology" is the canon as a normative body of tradition contained in a set of books which God uses as a channel of life for the continuing church. He states that "one of the major factors in the breakdown of the Biblical Theology Movement was its total failure to come to grips with the inspiration of Scripture" (p. 103). Approaching the Bible with all the assumptions of liberalism and using at the same time orthodox Biblical language for the constructive part of theology proved in the end to cause an impossible tension. In Childs' understanding, "the claim for the inspiration of Scripture is the claim for the uniqueness of the canonical context of the church through which the Holy Spirit works" (p. 104), which is to be distinguished from the theology of Scripture as revelation during the period of the "Biblical Theology Movement." Childs moves here along the lines of a Calvinistic-Barthian approach. He rightly rejects the old proof-text method as well as the more recent approaches which work primarily with themes and motifs. Accordingly the proper approach or method for the "new Biblical theology" is "to begin with specific Old Testament passages which are quoted within the New Testament" (pp. 114, 115). This provides a Biblical category from the outset and the variation in usage of the OT by the NT serves to resist the temptation of moving into the abstract. Childs' method includes as the first task to determine how an OT text functioned within the OT setting. The question here is, What did it mean to the ancient Hebrew people? The second task is to see the function of this text within the NT canon. Once the relation between the original function of a passage and its later theological role within the Biblical canon is assessed, then the third task must be engaged in, namely, to wrestle with the Biblical witness in constant relation to the extra-Biblical witness of the community of faith (the church). In other words, the "new Biblical theology" must also bring to bear the history of interpretation of the church in the "precritical" and historical-critical periods upon the Biblical passage for the elucidation of the reality it contains. Childs is daring enough to speak of the inadequacy of the historical-critical method for the theological task as it concerns the extent to which "it sets up

an iron curtain between the past and the present . . ." (pp. 142, 143). On the other hand, he maintains that "precritical interpretation of the Bible has much of great value to offer the modern Biblical theologian" (pp. 143, 144).

Part III (pp. 149-219) tests the method for the "new Biblical theology" by outlining concrete examples in support of the new model. A study of Ps 8 stresses the different roles which a text can have within the context of the canon and the significance of these roles for theological reflection. An investigation of Moses' slaying in the theology of the OT and NT and its later interpretation points out steps which are involved in genuine theological reflections. A third example, Pr 7, is used to explore the Biblical approach to sex, and the final attempt deals with the question of the God of Israel and the Church. Footnotes on the three chapters are given on pp. 225-246 which provide references to authors and studies pertinent to the discussions. Indexes of authors, subjects, and Scripture references are included.

This highly stimulating book shows that its author is quite familiar with current issues in his own and other fields. He has provided in his first part an invaluable description of recent movements in Biblical theology and shown in which areas the pendulum has been swinging back and forth. No informed student and scholar can afford to neglect these issues. He has answered in a twofold way the question, "Toward Biblical Theology?" which is the title of the last chapter of E. G. Kraeling's well-known book, *The Old Testament Since the Reformation* (1969²). The kind of Biblical theology of which Kraeling spoke has apparently collapsed in America. Childs' proposal for a "new Biblical theology" is rather different from the new step taken by G. E. Wright of Harvard University, who was a champion of the "Biblical Theology Movement" and who dissociated himself from his own earlier approach of "a God who acts" in history (cf. *God Who Acts. Biblical Theology as Recital* [1952]) at the time he moved close to G. von Rad's theological views. Wright now maintains that the correct approach to OT theology must be seen in relation to the work of W. Eichrodt (cf. *The Old Testament and Theology* [1969], pp. 61 ff.). Whereas Childs speaks of a "collapse" of the "Biblical Theology Movement," Wright gives the impression merely of a reorientation, reshuffling, with a new emphasis. The future alone is able to determine whether Childs has drawn his distinctions too sharply or whether in fact his proposed new method will prove to be a catalyst for a really "new Biblical theology."

We have arrived at a point where we need to pause in order to reflect critically on some problem areas in the proposed new approach and method of Childs. Space in this review does not allow a detailed discussion. Thus we must be brief. First, the argument of the context of the Scriptural canon, as understood with reference to the claim that only those NT ideas which have their roots in the OT determine the categories of Biblical theology, is hampered with crucial shortcomings. This procedure seems to lead to "a canon within the canon"

unless one assumes that all OT categories are reflected in one way or other in the NT. One will first of all have to determine what the OT writers mean on their own terms without recourse to the NT. On this basis it will become apparent whether or not all aspects of the theology of the OT are directly or indirectly reflected in the NT. The concept of the Scriptural canon necessitates that a Biblical theology will also contain categories that are not reflected in the NT. Contrariwise, the NT may contain categories which are not clearly or not at all contained in the OT. These must also receive justified attention in a Biblical theology. On the whole it is to be affirmed that there is a movement from the OT to the NT and a current of life is also flowing from the NT to the OT. It appears that the "new method" of Childs is another "selective method" now based singularly on NT categories. This approach is too restrictive and one-sided.

Second, it is not at all clear how Childs' new approach is to solve the problem of the authority of Scripture in view of his apparent emphasis on the history of the interpretation of Scripture as a theological reflection on equal footing with the canonical reflection in both OT and NT. It appears that at this point distinctions are needed in order to move beyond the present impasse. Finally, in view of the fact that Childs has pointed out that one of the major factors for the dissolution and collapse of the "Biblical Theology Movement" was its total failure to come to grips with the inspiration of Scripture, one wonders whether his new method resolves the "impossible tension" (p. 103) between the inspiration of Scripture and its reinterpretation. Does Childs' affirmation to take seriously the confession of a canon in conjunction with his affirmation of the historical-critical method of research, which *a priori* rules out the inspiration of Scripture, really provide an alternative to the ill-fated liberal attempt to reinterpret the inspiration of Scripture as a quality of imagination? Unless the alternative proposed by Childs proves to come to grips with this problem, his proposed "new Biblical theology" may be also doomed to collapse. These points are not raised to diminish in any sense the Herculean effort of Childs to move beyond the collapse of the "Biblical Theology Movement" while attempting to affirm some of its basic tenets. It is not difficult to agree with him that his method is not being proposed by him as a "final solution" (p. 114). We are deeply indebted and grateful to Childs for having stimulated us to re-evaluate and question yet more consistently and radically.

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Fuller, Reginald H. *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971. xiv + 225 pp. \$ 6.95.

New methods of study call for the reexamination of old material and a reevaluation of former conclusions. Reginald Fuller does this in applying the tools of form and redaction criticism to the study of the resurrection narratives.