

OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY FROM 1978-1987

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The decade from 1978-1987 saw major trends in the development of OT theology, with totally new issues having emerged. The developments from 1969-1978 were presented in my earlier essay, "A Decade of Old Testament Theology: Retrospect and Prospect," published in *ZAW*.¹ The year 1978 was a landmark in OT theology. No fewer than seven volumes on the subject were published in English by Continental, British, and North American scholars, such as Walther Zimmerli,² Claus Westermann,³ Ronald E. Clements,⁴ William A. Dyrness,⁵ Samuel L. Terrien,⁶ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.,⁷ and Elmer A. Martens.⁸

In the last ten years a variety of articles was published addressing the development of OT theology or special aspects and proposals thereof by scholars from several continents. These include: Robert

¹G. F. Hasel, "A Decade of Old Testament Theology: Retrospect and Prospect," *ZAW* 93 (1981): 165-184. For part of the present decade, see my "Major Recent Issues in Old Testament Theology 1978-1983," *JSOT*, no. 31 (1985), pp. 31-53. See also n. 16 below.

²W. Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline*, trans. by D. E. Green (Atlanta, 1978) (Eng. translation of *Grundriss der alttestamentlichen Theologie* [Stuttgart, 1972; 5th ed., 1985]).

³C. Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology*, trans. by D. W. Stott (Atlanta, 1982) (Eng. translation of *Theologie des Alten Testaments in Grundzügen* [Göttingen, 1978]).

⁴R. E. Clements, *Old Testament Theology: A Fresh Approach* (Atlanta, 1978).

⁵W. A. Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL, 1979).

⁶S. L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (New York, 1978).

⁷W. C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1978).

⁸E. A. Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1981), co-published in Great Britain under the title *Plot and Purpose in the Old Testament* (Leicester, 1981).

Martin-Achard,⁹ Henning Graf Reventlow,¹⁰ F. F. Bruce,¹¹ A. H. J. Gunneweg,¹² Walter A. Brueggemann,¹³ Rolf Rendtorff,¹⁴ Hans M. Barstad,¹⁵ Gerhard F. Hasel,¹⁶ Eckart Otto,¹⁷ R. Smend,¹⁸ Horst Seebass,¹⁹ Alberto Soggin,²⁰ Rolf P. Knierim,²¹ Hans Strauss,²² George W. Coats,²³ Samuel L. Terrien,²⁴ and others.²⁵

⁹R. Martin-Achard, "A propos de la théologie de l'Ancien Testament: Une hypothèse de travail," *TZ* 35 (1979): 63-71; idem, "La théologie de l'Ancien Testament après les travaux de G. von Rad," *Etudes Théologiques et Religieuses* 47 (1972): 219-226.

¹⁰H. Graf Reventlow, "Basic Problems in Old Testament Theology," *JSOT*, no. 11 (1979), pp. 2-22; idem, "Zur Theologie des Alten Testaments," *TRu* (1987): 221-267.

¹¹F. F. Bruce, "The Theology and Interpretation of the Old Testament," in *Tradition and Interpretation: Essays by the Members of the Society for Old Testament Study*, ed. G. W. Anderson (Oxford, 1979), pp. 385-416.

¹²A. H. J. Gunneweg, "'Theologie' des Alten Testaments oder 'Biblische Theologie'," in *Textgemäss: Aufsätze und Beiträge zur Hermeneutik des Alten Testaments. Festschrift für Ernest Würthwein zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. A. H. J. Gunneweg and O. Kaiser (Göttingen, 1979), pp. 38-46.

¹³W. A. Brueggemann, "A Convergence in Recent Old Testament Theologies," *JSOT*, no. 18 (1980), pp. 2-18; idem, "Futures in Old Testament Theology," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 6, no. 1 (1984), pp. 1-11 (hereinafter *HBT*). More recently Brueggemann advances his proposal for an OT theology in "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I: Structure Legitimation," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 28-46; idem, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, II: Embrace of Pain," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 395-415.

¹⁴R. Rendtorff, "I principali problemi di una teologia dell' Antico Testamento," *Protestantesimo* 35 (1980): 193-206.

¹⁵H. M. Barstad, "The Historical-Critical Method and the Problem of Old Testament Theology: A Few Marginal Remarks," *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 45 (1980): 7-18 (hereinafter *SEÅ*).

¹⁶In addition to the essays mentioned in n. 1 above, see G. F. Hasel, "The Future of Biblical Theology," in *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology: Papers from the Thirtieth Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society*, ed. K. S. Kantzer and S. N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI, 1979); idem, "Recent Contributions to Biblical Theology," *Catalyst* 9 (1983): 1-4; idem, "Biblical Theology: Then, Now, and Tomorrow," *HBT* 4, no. 1, (1982), pp. 61-93; idem, "Biblical Theology Movement," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W. A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI, 1984), pp. 149-152.

¹⁷E. Otto, "Hat Max Webers Religionssoziologie des antiken Judentums Bedeutung für eine Theologie des Alten Testaments?," *ZAW* 94 (1982): 187-203; idem, "Impleta est haec scriptura—Zum Problem einer christologischen Interpretation des Alten Testaments im Anschluss an Traugott Kochs Christologiekritik," in *Die Gegenwart des Absoluten: Philosophisch-theologische Diskurse zur Christologie*, ed. K. M. Kodalle (Gütersloh, 1984), pp. 156-162.

Inasmuch as a single essay cannot cover the entire range of areas relevant to OT theology, this article will be restricted to major publications of this decade that (1) provide monographic surveys of the entire discipline of OT theology, (2) discuss problems and issues related to methodology and structure for OT theology, (3) show in what directions the "center" (*Mitte*) of the OT moves in relationship to OT theology, and (4) address OT theology, or the theology of the Hebrew Bible, as descriptive and/or normative.

¹⁸R. Smend, "Theologie im Alten Testament," in *Verifikationen: Festschrift für Gerhard Ebeling zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. E. Jüngel, J. Wallmann, and W. Werbeck (Tübingen, 1982), pp. 11-26.

¹⁹H. Seebass, "Biblische Theologie," *Verkündigung and Forschungen* 27 (1982): 28-45.

²⁰A. Soggin, "Den gammaltestamentliga teologin efter G. von Rad," *SEA* 47 (1982): 7-20; idem, "Teologia dell' Antico Testamento oggi: dopo Gerhard von Rad," *Protestantesimo* 39 (1984): 1-17.

²¹R. P. Knierim, "The Task of Old Testament Theology," *HBT* 6, no. 1 (1984), pp. 24-57; idem, "On the Task of Old Testament Theology," *HBT* 6, no. 2 (1984), pp. 91-128, which is his response to the following respondents: Walter Harrelson, "The Limited Task of Old Testament Theology," *HBT* 6, no. 1 (1984), pp. 59-64; Roland E. Murphy, "A Response to 'The Task of Old Testament Theology,'" *HBT* 6, no. 1 (1984), pp. 65-71; W. Sibley Towner, "Is Old Testament Theology Equal to Its Task? A Response to a Paper by Rolf P. Knierim," *HBT* 6, no. 1 (1984), pp. 73-80.

²²H. Strauss, "Theologie des Alten Testaments als Bestandteil einer biblischen Theologie," *EvT* 45 (1985): 20-29.

²³G. W. Coats, "Theology of the Hebrew Bible," in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. D. A. Knight and G. M. Tucker (Philadelphia, 1985), pp. 239-262.

²⁴S. L. Terrien, "Biblical Theology: The Old Testament (1970-1984). A Decade and a Half of Spectacular Growth," *BTB* 15 (1985): 127-135.

²⁵W. Zimmerli, "Biblische Theologie. I. Altes Testament," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (Berlin, 1980) 6: 426-455; Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer, "Christian Old Testament Theology: A Time for New Beginnings," *JES* 18 (1981): 76-92; John J. Collins, "The 'Historical Character' of the Old Testament in Recent Biblical Theology," *CBQ* 41 (1979): 185-204; Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Old Testament Theology and the Jewish-Christian Connection," *JSOT*, no. 28 (1984), pp. 3-15; F. Charles Fensham, "Die verhoudingsteologie as 'n moontlike oplossing vir 'n teologie van die Ou Testament," *Nederduitse gereformeerde teologiese tydskrif* 26 (1985): 246-259; W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Theology of the Old Testament," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. F. E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI, 1979), 1: 285-305; Bruce C. Birch, "Old Testament Theology: Its Task and Future," *HBT* 6, no. 1 (1984), pp. iii-viii; Jose M. Abrego, "Teologia del Antiguo Testamento: perspectivas actuales," *Iglesia Viva* 113 (1984): 391-399; John Barton, "Gerhard von Rad on the World-View of Early Israel," *JTS* 35 (1984): 301-323; Marten H. Woudstra, "The

1. *History and Development of OT Theology*

Prior to 1972 there were no full-fledged monographs surveying in detail the origin, development, and history of OT theology from its beginnings in 1787 to the present,²⁶ with the possible exception of a short volume by R. C. Dentan.²⁷ The focus of H.-J. Kraus's *Die Biblische Theologie* (1970) included parts of OT theology, but did not treat OT theology as a separate subject on its own terms.²⁸

Gerhard F. Hasel first published his *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* in 1972. A second, revised edition appeared three years later, and the third edition, revised and enlarged, came off the press in 1982.²⁹ An updated edition is in preparation for publication in 1989.

In 1982 Henning Graf Reventlow published *Hauptprobleme der alttestamentlichen Theologie im 20. Jahrhundert*, which appeared in English three years later as *Problems of Old Testament Theology in the Twentieth Century*.³⁰ The translation cites more English and non-English literature than does the German original, covering more or less the same ground as Hasel but with different emphases.

Reventlow begins his volume with a 44-page history of OT theology, with primary emphasis on the period from World War I to the 1950s. Written for the expert, Reventlow's work is not for

Old Testament in Biblical Theology and Dogmatics," *Calvin Theological Journal* 18 (1983): 47-60; Timo Veijola, "Vinn det en gammaltestamentlig teologi?," *SEA* 48 (1983): 10-13; idem, "Onko Vanhan testamentin teologiaa olemassa," *Teologisk Tidskrift* 87 (1982): 498-529; Ben C. Ollenburger, "Biblical Theology: Situating the Discipline," in *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honor of Bernhard W. Anderson*, ed. J. T. Butler, E. W. Conrad, and B. C. Ollenburger (*JSOT Supplement Series* 37: Sheffield, 1985): 37-62.

²⁶Gustav F. Oehler, *Prolegomena zur Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Stuttgart, 1845) was the first systematic study of the history and methodology of OT theology in monograph form.

²⁷R. C. Dentan, *Preface to Old Testament Theology* (New Haven, CT, 1950; rev. ed., New York, 1963).

²⁸H.-J. Kraus, *Die Biblische Theologie: Ihre Geschichte und Problematik* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1970).

²⁹G. F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 3d ed., enl. and rev. (Grand Rapids, MI, 1982).

³⁰H. Graf Reventlow, *Problems of Old Testament Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, 1985) (Eng. translation of *Hauptprobleme der alttestamentlichen Theologie im 20. Jahrhundert* [Darmstadt, 1982]).

beginners in OT theology. The second chapter, "The Problem of a Systematic Account," focuses on methodology in OT theology. Unfortunately, the author distinguishes only between an old and a "new systematic programme." The former follows the classical dogmatic, or what is more appropriately called "dogmatic-didactic," approach of a God-Man-Salvation scheme of presentation, while the latter is exemplified in Walther Eichrodt's three-volume *Theologie des Alten Testaments*.³¹ From a methodological perspective, it is confusing to group together as "new systematic programme" such diverse methodological approaches to OT theology as those of W. Eichrodt, L. Köhler, O. Procksch, O. J. Baab, Th. C. Vriezen, P. van Imschoot, E. Jacob, G. A. F. Knight, J. B. Payne, M. G. Cordero, W. Zimmerli, C. Westermann, R. E. Clements, and others. Nevertheless, all of the above approaches are briefly mentioned, since they were written after the epoch-making tomes of Eichrodt.³² The OT theologies of W. C. Kaiser, Jr., William Dyrness, Elmer A. Martens, Samuel L. Terrien, Georg Fohrer, Gerhard von Rad, and others are not mentioned in this chapter on methodology.

Reventlow's third and longest chapter focuses on "The Problem of History," particularly the traditio-historical investigation of the OT. Here Gerhard von Rad's *Theologie des Alten Testaments* is the major starting point of discussion.³³ A variety of issues involved in history, such as "actual" history versus believed history, history and revelation, salvation history, and the OT as *Geschichtsbuch* (storybook)—including a discussion of J. Barr's view on the OT as "story"—receives attention.

The succinct discussion on "The 'Centre' of the Old Testament" summarizes what has been published previously (see Hasel above), reaffirming forcefully that God is the center (*Mitte*) of the OT—i.e., "God acts dynamically." He "is free and not at man's disposal, yet is consistent in his faithfulness, keeping his promises

³¹W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia, 1961, 1967) (Eng. translation of *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 5th ed., 2 vols. [Stuttgart, 1957, 1961], originally published in 3 vols. [Leipzig, 1933, 1935, 1939]).

³²See Hasel, "A Decade of OT Theology," pp. 167-181; idem, "Major Recent Issues in OT Theology," pp. 32-37; idem, *OT Theology: Basic Issues*, pp. 51-92.

³³G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols., trans. D. M. G. Stalker (Edinburgh, 1962, 1965) (Eng. translation of *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 2 vols. [München, 1957, 1960]).

despite all the unfaithfulness and apostasy of Israel." This God is the God of the whole Bible, the one of whom Jesus Christ spoke.³⁴

The concluding chapter focuses on "The World Horizon of Old Testament Theology," with particular emphasis on three topics: "creation," "myth," and "wisdom."

Reventlow's book is a gold mine of bibliographical information on the topics covered from the Continent and North America (in the English edition). It is highly rewarding for the advanced student and essential for anyone seriously interested in OT theology. Several aspects of the subject move beyond what Reventlow considers to be OT theology proper and are treated by him in a companion volume on biblical theology,³⁵ a topic receiving much recent scholarly attention.³⁶

Beyond works by Hasel and Reventlow, 1982 also saw the publication of *Old Testament Theology: Its History and Development* by John H. Hayes and Frederick C. Prussner.³⁷ The first part is an expansion, revision, and updating of Prussner's unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Methodology in Old Testament Theology," completed at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago in 1952. Prussner died in 1978, and Hayes did the revising and updating.

Hayes and Prussner's work has five chapters, of which the first four relate "The Earliest Developments in Old Testament Theology" from its dawn in the seventeenth century through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to "The Rebirth of Old Testament Theology" after World War I to about 1950. Without doubt, this presentation is the most extensive historical survey (over 200 pages)

³⁴Reventlow, *Problems of OT Theology*, pp. 132-133.

³⁵H. Graf Reventlow, *Problems of Biblical Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, 1986), which is an enlarged and corrected translation of *Hauptprobleme der Biblischen Theologie im 20. Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt, 1983).

³⁶Emphasis should be given here to the work of Terrien (above nn. 6 and 24), Hasel (above n. 16), Seebass (above n. 19), Strauss (above n. 22), and the volumes of essays by Klaus Haacker *et al.*, eds., *Einheit und Vielfalt Biblischer Theologie*, *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie*, vol. 1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1986). See also the volume by Wilfred Harrington, O.P., *The Path of Biblical Theology* (London, 1973) and more recently S. M. Mayo, *The Relevance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith: Biblical Theology and Interpretative Methodology* (Washington, D.C., 1982).

³⁷J. H. Hayes and F. C. Prussner, *Old Testament Theology: Its History and Development* (Atlanta, 1985).

covering the period from the "proof-text" method of Sebastian Schmidt in 1671 to the early post-World War I period. Hasel covers this same historical span in but 20 pages,³⁸ whereas Reventlow devotes 41 pages to it (of which only 8 pages cover the period from about 1700 to World War I).³⁹ As we shall see below, however, the survey is very inadequate in the period from 1950 onward, when most of the changes have occurred.

The final 60-page chapter in Hayes and Prussner's work is devoted to "Recent Developments in Old Testament Theology" (ca. 1950 to 1982). Its organization is unclear, since it shifts from brief descriptions of OT theologies (such as those by Th. C. Vriezen, G. E. Wright, E. Jacob, P. van Imschoot, G. A. F. Knight, E. J. Young [who wrote only *about* OT theology], J. B. Payne, and G. von Rad) to a reevaluation of the Biblical Theology Movement, and then concludes with some contemporary trends in the discipline.

There are some significant lacunae in the concluding chapter. The reader will never learn, for instance, that Vriezen rewrote his whole third Dutch edition (1966; translated as the second English edition [1970]) in order to counter the OT theology of von Rad.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, of the seven OT theologies published in 1978, only five are briefly mentioned⁴¹ (four pages), and that mention fails to acknowledge their vast divergencies from each other and their reactions to von Rad.⁴² Furthermore, Hartmut Gese's "theology as tradition building" is barely touched (about one-half page).⁴³ Without question the strength of Hayes and Prussner's work, as noted above, rests in their presentation of the development of OT theology from its beginnings to 1950. For an adequate and comprehensive survey of OT theology during the last four decades, one will have to look elsewhere.

³⁸Hasel, *OT Theology: Basic Issues*, pp. 15-34.

³⁹Reventlow, *Problems of OT Theology*, pp. 2-10.

⁴⁰Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, 2d ed., rev. and enl. (Newton, MA, 1970), p. 8. Vriezen explicitly refers to G. von Rad and notes that "a rewriting has also taken place which tries to stress more firmly the unity of the whole [OT]," whereas von Rad argued for various disparate traditions.

⁴¹See above nn. 2-8. Those mentioned are Westermann, Clements, Kaiser, Terrien, and Zimmerli.

⁴²See Hasel, "A Decade of OT Theology," pp. 168-178.

⁴³Hayes and Prussner, p. 262. Cf. Hasel, "Major Recent Issues in OT Theology," pp. 32-34, and Oeming below.

2. Structures of OT Theology

Time has shown that there is no generally accepted convergence of methodologies for the structuring of OT theology.⁴⁴ A variety of models has been proposed to answer the "fundamental question of methodology and content [that] concerns the cohesion of the subject."⁴⁵

The Cross-section Method

The year 1933 saw Eichrodt's pioneering presentation of OT theology,⁴⁶ utilizing for the first time the cross-section method based on the covenant concept.⁴⁷ Subsequently, D. G. Spriggs has ably defended the cross-section method without adopting the covenant concept as the only possible organizing principle.⁴⁸

The cross-section method is utilized with vigor in the 1970 edition of Vriezen's *Outline of Old Testament Theology*, in which the "communion" concept functions as the unifying center of the OT.⁴⁹ The same method is used by Kaiser in *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (1978), which utilizes the "blessing-promise" theme.⁵⁰

In 1981 the Roman Catholic scholar Anselmo Mattioli published the first OT theology by an Italian.⁵¹ The structure is a mixture of dogmatic and cross-section approaches. Part I is entitled "God and Man as Creator and Creature." It contains five chapters

⁴⁴Brueggemann, "A Convergence," pp. 3-8, sees a convergence in the approaches of Westermann, Terrien, and Hanson in the sense that each one deals with its own set of dialectics or polarities.

⁴⁵Coats, p. 239.

⁴⁶Eichrodt, *Theology of the OT*.

⁴⁷Among recent literature on his approach, see Hasel, *OT Theology: Basic Issues*, pp. 50-54; Reventlow, *Problems of OT Theology*, pp. 49-52; Coats, p. 244; Hayes and Prussner, pp. 179-184.

⁴⁸D. G. Spriggs, *Two Old Testament Theologies: A Comparative Evaluation of the Contributions of Eichrodt and von Rad to our Understanding of the Nature of Old Testament Theology*, SBT, 2d ser. 30 (London, 1974), p. 101.

⁴⁹See above n. 38.

⁵⁰See Kaiser, *Toward an OT Theology*. See also Reventlow, "Zur Theologie des AT," pp. 239-240.

⁵¹A. Mattioli, *Dio e l'uomo nella Bibbia d'Israele: Theologia dell' Antico Testamento* (Casale Monferrato, 1981). Previously the only OT theologies available in Italian were translations of works of other scholars.

covering such topics as the genetic development of monotheism in ancient Israel, the name Yahweh, the origin and absolute dependence of all things on Yahweh, and the identity of man and his history before Yahweh. Part II is designated "The Origin and Religious Role of Evil." Part III, "The Most Important Saving Gifts of Yahweh," contains chapters on "Israel as a Covenant People";⁵² "Expectation of an Israel with Authentic Spirituality for the Future," including postexilic Messianic expectations; "Reception of Revelation Among the Prophets"; "Holy Writings as Inspired Witness of Revelation," including the development of the OT canon, which was supposedly concluded at Jamnia (ca. A.D. 90);⁵³ and "Expectations of Future Life After Death," including discussions on the Apocrypha, Qumran, and especially the Wisdom of Solomon. The book concludes with Part IV, "In the True

⁵²The discussion reveals nothing about the recent debate about the supposedly late arrival of the covenant concept in Deuteronomic circles as argued by L. Peritt, *Die Bundestheologie im Alten Testament*, Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 36 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1969) and E. Kutsch, *Verheissung und Gesetz*, BZAW 131 (New York, 1973) who suggests the meaning of "obligation" (*Verpflichtung*) for the Hebrew term *b'erit* with "covenant" as a relatively late meaning. For opposing views, see the magisterial second edition of D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, Analecta biblica 21A (Rome, 1963); W. Eichrodt, "Darf man heute noch von einem Gottesbund mit Israel reden?" *TZ* 30 (1974): 193-206; J. Halbe, *Das Privilegrecht Jahwehs. Ex 34, 10-26*, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 114 (Göttingen, 1975); E. W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1986). The latter argues forcefully for the "covenant" idea as early as the prophet Hosea, who may have originated the idea or who may have borrowed it from earlier Israelite tradition.

⁵³Mattioli still holds to the outdated idea of a "council of Jamnia" as fixing the canon. See Peter Schäfer, "Die sogenannte Synode von Jabne. Zur Trennung von Juden und Christen im ersten/zweiten Jh. n. Chr.," *Judaica* 31 (1975): 54-64, 116-124 (reprinted in his *Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie des rabbinischen Judentums* [Leiden, 1978], pp. 45-64); Jack P. Lewis, "What Do We Mean by Jabneh?" *JBR* 32 (1964): 125-132 (reprinted in *The Canon and Masorah of the Hebrew Bible: An Introductory Reader*, ed. S. Z. Leiman [New York, 1974], pp. 254-261); S. Talmon, "The Old Testament Text," in *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text*, ed. F. M. Cross and S. Talmon (Cambridge, MA, 1975), pp. 1-41. For recent views on the pre-NT, second-century B.C. or earlier canonization of the OT, see David N. Freedman, "Canon of the OT," *IDBSup* (1976), pp. 130-136; S. Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of the Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (Hamden, CT, 1976); R. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1985), pp. 276-278.

Yahweh Cult Towards Liberation and Peace," with chapters on the Hebrew cult, conversion, and forgiveness.

Mattioli intends "to present the major religious ideas which the Bible contains,"⁵⁴ but organizes his OT theology on the basis of "ideas" concerning God and man which reveal a "dogmatic principle."⁵⁵ The individual chapters, on the other hand, follow roughly a cross-section method, since the respective themes/topics are supported from various parts of the Bible. At times there is a genetic presentation, such as the chapters on the expectation of future life after death and the reception of divine revelation among the OT prophets. This mixture of approaches lacks consistency.

The most recent extensive support for the cross-section method is John Goldingay's *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament* (1987), which began as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Nottingham (1983).⁵⁶ Goldingay enlarges on many features discussed in his *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation* (1981).⁵⁷ He is also known from several essays dealing with OT theology or aspects thereof.⁵⁸

In *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation* Goldingay begins by discussing the "aims and approach" of an OT theology, rejecting the either/or of a descriptive or normative method. Rather, he opts for a "middle ground," concluding that "the task of OT theology is to mediate between the religion of the OT and the religion we believe and practice today."⁵⁹ As regards the form or structure of an OT theology, he sees the covenant (Eichrodt), communion (Vriezen), election (H. Wildberger), or twin concepts (G. Fohrer, R. Smend) as helpful but too limiting in scope. "In one sense," he writes, "the search for the right structure of an OT

⁵⁴Mattioli, p. 14.

⁵⁵See Reventlow, "Zur Theologie des AT," p. 237.

⁵⁶J. Goldingay, *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1987), p. viii.

⁵⁷J. Goldingay, *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL, 1981).

⁵⁸J. Goldingay, "The Study of Old Testament Theology: Its Aim and Purpose," *Tyndale Bulletin* 26 (1975): 34-52; idem, "The 'Salvation History' Perspective and the 'Wisdom' Perspective Within the Context of Biblical Theology," *EvQ* 51 (1979): 194-207; idem, "Diversity and Unity in Old Testament Theology," *VT* 34 (1984): 153-168; idem, "The Chronicler as a Theologian," *BTB* 5 (1975): 99-126.

⁵⁹Goldingay, *Approaches to OT Interpretation*, pp. 17-24.

theology, and for the right central concept from which to view OT faith as a whole, has been fruitless (or over-fruitful!).” Since “we have not yet discovered the single correct key to producing a satisfactory synthesis of OT faith, this suggests that there is no such key.” While it is true that “no such solution to the problem of structuring an OT theology will illuminate the whole; a multiplicity of approaches will lead to a multiplicity of insights.”⁶⁰

Having thus outlined the nature and methodology of OT theology in his first chapter of *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation*, Goldingay develops in the remaining four chapters the themes of “The Old Testament as a Way of Life,” “The Old Testament as the Story of Salvation,” “The Old Testament as Witness to Christ,” and “The Old Testament as Scripture.” In some ways this volume is a sort of prolegomenon to OT theology.

Goldingay’s recent monograph, *Theological Diversity and Authority of the Old Testament*, in many ways complements and enlarges his earlier writings and demonstrates his superb acquaintance with relevant European and American literature. The major concern is to deal with the “theological diversity” of the OT. One is immediately reminded of Paul D. Hanson’s *Diversity of Scripture* (1982),⁶¹ which also seeks to come to grips with the posited diversity of scripture and possibilities of recognizing coherence and unity in all diversity. For Goldingay, however, the most critical issue is that if contradictory diversity in the OT precludes any theological unity, then no OT theology is possible.

That is essentially the argument made by R. N. Whybray in his 1987 essay, “Old Testament Theology—A Non-existent Beast?”⁶² Whybray argues that the diversity of the OT is such that we should write only a “study of the religion of ancient Israel and of the Old Testament,”⁶³ because any OT theology is so determined by some sort of a center or principle of coherence that other equally meaningful parts are left aside or relegated to silence. This has been true

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 27-29.

⁶¹P. D. Hanson, *The Diversity of Scripture: A Theological Interpretation* (Philadelphia, 1982).

⁶²R. N. Whybray, “Old Testament Theology—A Non-existent Beast?” in *Scripture: Meaning and Method. Essays Presented to Anthony Tyrrell Hanson*, ed. B. P. Thompson (Pickering, North Yorkshire, 1987), pp. 168-180.

⁶³Ibid., p. 179.

all too frequently, particularly as one thinks of such neglected aspects in OT theology as creation, wisdom, cult, and the like. Nevertheless, Whybray's argument that there can be no OT theology will hardly be sustained.

Goldingay is fully aware of the issues of diversity in OT faith and the problem of stepchild topics, such as creation, wisdom, and cult. To come to grips with the diversity of the OT, he develops his study after a careful "Introduction," in which "Theological Diversity in the Old Testament" is addressed. Part I, "A Contextual or Historical Approach," covers different viewpoints appropriate to varying contexts—namely, "what it meant" to be the people of God from patriarchal times to the late OT period. The modes of the diachronic approach of a wandering family, a theocratic nation, an institutional state, an afflicted remnant, a community of promise, and so on, lead to a synchronic method in which there are "certain constants about the OT's underlying understanding of the people of God, 'family resemblances' which generally appear."⁶⁴

Part II treats "An Evaluative or Critical Approach," which "begins from the variety in attitudes which sometimes appears within the same document, or which in some other way does not seem to reflect primarily historical factors."⁶⁵ Scholars make evaluations of the OT material on the basis of "moral concerns," "developmental levels," "Mosaic or prophetic spirit," and "a comparison with NT concerns." The critique of these approaches presupposes "the assumption that the OT itself ought to be allowed to determine what is central to its faith and what is peripheral."⁶⁶ The OT material is to be evaluated on its own terms, which involves a critical understanding of *Sachkritik* (content criticism) and the matter of "the canon within the canon." The book of Deuteronomy is selected as an illustration to show its behavioral values, theological perspective, and pastoral strategy.⁶⁷

In Part III, "A Unifying or Constructive Approach," Goldingay devotes a full chapter to the issue of whether it is possible to formulate a single OT theology. His answer is affirmative (*pace* Whybray). He is influenced by Spriggs in affirming that a "cross-

⁶⁴Goldingay, *Theological Diversity*, p. 87.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 116-166.

section method" is appropriate, but not one that is limited to a single principle of organization. Goldingay points out "that the trouble is that the search for a right principle or organization for writing OT theology has been not so much fruitless as overfruitful, and all the principles [i.e., centers] that have been proposed are more or less illuminating when applied to the OT material itself." For Goldingay there is no single center, but "many starting points, structures, and foci can illuminate the landscape of the OT; a multiplicity of approaches will lead to a multiplicity of insights."⁶⁸ Thus he denies OT theology based on one "center" as its organizing structure.

Goldingay takes further Eichrodt's cross-section method,⁶⁹ again in the wake of Spriggs's suggestion,⁷⁰ by opting for a constructive approach. "OT theology," he writes, "is inevitably not merely a reconstructive task but a constructive one."⁷¹ "It is actually unrealistic to maintain that OT theology should be a purely descriptive discipline; it inevitably involves the contemporary explication of the biblical material."⁷² This position puts Goldingay in the camp of Vriezen and others⁷³ who are sympathetic to this emphasis of Eissfeldt⁷⁴ in his debate with Eichrodt.⁷⁵ Goldingay also opposes thereby the dichotomy posited by Krister Stendahl between "what it

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 115.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 184: "The OT theologian's task can be expressed in terms of a mathematical analogy. The cross-section approach suggests that OT theology seeks the Highest Common Factor in the various versions of OT faith. Preferable is the view that OT theology seeks the Lowest Common Denominator of the various versions of OT faith, that entity into which all the insights that emerge at various points in the OT can find a place because it is large enough to combine them all. It does so taking seriously the historical particularity of the OT statements, yet setting these in a broader context shaped by the OT's total range of particular, concrete theological statements."

⁷⁰Spriggs, p. 89; Goldingay, *Theological Diversity*, p. 181.

⁷¹Goldingay, *Theological Diversity*, p. 111.

⁷²Ibid., p. 185.

⁷³Vriezen, p. 147.

⁷⁴O. Eissfeldt, "Israelitisch-jüdische Religionsgeschichte und alttestamentliche Theologie," *ZAW* 44 (1926): 1-12 (reprinted in his *Kleine Schriften* [Tübingen, 1962], 1: 105-114).

⁷⁵W. Eichrodt, "Hat die alttestamentliche Theologie noch selbständige Bedeutung innerhalb der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft?" *ZAW* 47 (1929): 83-91.

meant" and "what it means" or between the descriptive and the normative tasks of biblical theology.⁷⁶ "Indeed a Christian writing OT *theology*," says Goldingay, "cannot avoid writing in the light of the NT, because he cannot make *theological* judgments without reference to the NT. Admittedly the converse is also true: he cannot make theological judgments on the NT in isolation from the OT."⁷⁷

It is evident that this enlarged "cross-section method" is radically different from that used by Eichrodt, Kaiser, and others, because it is not at all tied to a center, whether single, dual, or multiple.⁷⁸ One actually wonders whether it should still be considered a "cross-section approach." This question emerges since Goldingay himself notes that he also employs other "theological constructions" that are based on "diachronic approaches."⁷⁹ The attentive reader keeps wondering how the "cross-section" method and the "diachronic" one can come together without both becoming so transformed that neither is what it is known to be.

The Formation-of-Tradition Method

It was Gerhard von Rad (1901-1971) who inaugurated a totally new approach to OT theology through his development of the

⁷⁶K. Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," *IDB* (1962), 1: 418-432 (reprinted in his *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide*, [Philadelphia, 1984], pp. 11-24); idem, "Method in the Study of Biblical Theology," in *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, ed. J. P. Hyatt (Nashville, 1965), pp. 196-209. See the critique of this distinction in Hasel, *OT Theology: Basic Issues*, pp. 136-139, and also in Langdon B. Gilkey, "The Roles of the 'Descriptive' or 'Historical' and of the 'Normative' in our Work," *Criterion* 20 (1981): 10-17; Brueggemann, "Futures in OT Theology," pp. 1-4; Ben C. Ollenburger, "What Krister Stendahl 'Meant': A Normative Critique of 'Descriptive Biblical Theology,'" *HBT* 8, no. 1 (1986), pp. 61-98; B. S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia, 1986), pp. 6-17.

⁷⁷Goldingay, *Theological Diversity*, p. 186 and *passim*. Goldingay is influenced by Norman W. Porteous, *Living the Mystery: Collected Essays* (Oxford, 1967), p. 45, and opposes John L. McKenzie, *A Theology of the Old Testament* (New York, 1974), who "wrote the theology of the Old Testament as if the New Testament did not exist" (p. 319).

⁷⁸G. F. Hasel, "The Problem of the Center in the OT Theology Debate," *ZAW* 86 (1974): 65-82; idem, *OT Theology: Basic Issues*, pp. 77-103; Reventlow, *Problems in OT Theology*, pp. 124-133; Hayes and Prussner, pp. 257-260; Manfred Oeming, *Gesamtbiblische Theologien der Gegenwart: Das Verhältnis von AT und NT in der hermeneutische Diskussion seit Gerhard von Rad*. (Stuttgart, 1985), pp. 182-185.

⁷⁹Goldingay, *Theological Diversity*, pp. 197-199.

diachronic traditio-historical OT theology⁸⁰ that has generated so much discussion.⁸¹

Hartmut Gese's⁸² approach to OT theology, or biblical theology, aims at the tradition-building process that began in the OT and is continued in the NT, or "brings about the OT . . . [and thus] brings the so-called OT to an end."⁸³ The method of biblical theology is tradition history because it "describes the living process forming tradition."⁸⁴ The tradition-building process provides for continuity between the testaments and gives them unity, so that it is not necessary to look for or to propose a center (*Mitte*) common to both Testaments.⁸⁵

The recent dissertation of Manfred Oeming describes Gese's roots in von Rad's traditio-historical theology and shows at the same time the deep indebtedness of Gese to such philosophers as Hegel, the later Heidegger, and particularly H.-G. Gadamer.⁸⁶

Gese has found a supporter in Seebass,⁸⁷ while other contemporary scholars have voiced reservations and a variety of reactions. Kraus has argued that Gese transforms "theology into a phenomenology of tradition history" built upon a new ontology.⁸⁸ Hans Heinrich Schmid has pointed out that Gese's approach suffers from a "*methodische Verengung*,"⁸⁹ because the tradition-building process is not as unilinear as suggested. Siegfried Wagner⁹⁰ and

⁸⁰See n. 33.

⁸¹For bibliography, see Hayes and Prussner, p. 233; Reventlow, *Problems in OT Theology*, pp. 59-71; Hasel, "A Decade of OT Theology," pp. 178-179.

⁸²Hartmut Gese, *Vom Sinai zum Zion: Alttestamentliche Beiträge zur biblischen Theologie* (München, 1974), pp. 11-30; idem, *Zur biblischen Theologie* (München, 1977); idem, "Tradition and Biblical Theology," in *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament*, ed. D. A. Knight (Philadelphia, 1977), pp. 301-326.

⁸³Gese, *Zur biblischen Theologie*, p. 11.

⁸⁴Gese, "Tradition and Biblical Theology," p. 317.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 320-322.

⁸⁶Oeming, pp. 108-110.

⁸⁷Seebass, "Biblische Theologie," pp. 34-35; idem, *Der Gott der ganzen Bibel* (Freiburg, 1982), p. 219, n. 4.

⁸⁸H.-J. Kraus, "Theologie als Traditionsbildung?," in *Biblische Theologie heute*, ed. K. Haacker (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1977), pp. 67-73.

⁸⁹H. H. Schmid, "Unterwegs zu einer neuen Biblischen Theologie?," in *Biblische Theologie heute*, p. 81.

⁹⁰S. Wagner, "'Biblische Theologen' und 'Biblische Theologie'," *TLZ* 103 (1978): 793.

Zimmerli⁹¹ see the tradition-building processes in both testaments as more differentiated than is suggested by the Gese paradigm. Oeming's analysis led him to the conclusion that "the alleged unity of the biblical tradition claimed by Gese is historically unsupported." ⁹²

Georg Strecker, a *Neutestamentler*, raises serious objections about Gese's claim that the OT canon is a result of the NT and that the NT gives rise to the OT.⁹³ Gese, for instance, states that "the Old Testament originates by means of the New Testament. The New Testament forms the conclusion of the tradition process which is essentially a unity, a continuum."⁹⁴ Strecker counters that the canonization of the NT is a process that goes on into the latter part of the second century A.D. and beyond, providing historical evidence that the NT canon is a later fact of history than the OT canon.⁹⁵ Accordingly, the OT canon has historical priority over that of the NT.

The alleged late closing of the OT canon at Jamnia (ca. A.D. 90) remains in itself very problematical and can hardly be maintained.⁹⁶ If the arguments of David Noel Freedman, Sid Z. Leiman, and Roger Beckwith⁹⁷ concerning a pre-Christian or even very early closing of the canon should hold, then the approach of an OT-NT biblical theology of tradition building is severely undercut at its foundation. In our opinion, the "formation-of-tradition" theology proposal of Gese is an attempt at a theology of the history of tradition building, but is not a theology of the OT. Beyond that, it is too problematical an approach for biblical theology.⁹⁸

⁹¹W. Zimmerli, "Von der Gültigkeit der 'Schrift' Alten Testaments in der christlichen Predigt," in *Textgemäss: Festschrift für E. Würthwein*, pp. 193-194.

⁹²Oeming, p. 115.

⁹³G. Strecker, "'Biblische Theologie'? Kritische Bemerkung zu den Entwürfen von Hartmut Gese und Peter Stuhlmacher," in *Kirche: Festschrift für Günther Bornkamm zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. D. Lührmann und G. Strecker (Tübingen, 1980), pp. 425-445.

⁹⁴Gese, *Vom Sinai zum Zion*, p. 14; cf. idem, *Zur biblischen Theologie*, pp. 11-13; idem, "Tradition and Biblical Theology," p. 323.

⁹⁵Strecker, p. 427.

⁹⁶Lewis, pp. 254-261; Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, pp. 120-124. See above n. 53.

⁹⁷Freedman, "Canon of the OT," pp. 130-136; Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, pp. 131-135; Beckwith, pp. 276-277; B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, 1979), pp. 46-68.

⁹⁸Hasel, "Biblical Theology: Then, Now and Tomorrow," pp. 63-67.

Bipolar Dialectic Approaches

Brueggemann⁹⁹ has pointed out that the apparent stalemate in OT theology between the "history-of-traditions" approach of von Rad and the more "systematic" cross-section method of Eichrodt is apparently overcome by those scholars who suggest bipolar dialectics in OT theology. It is believed that the presentations and proposals of Terrien's *Elusive Presence*, Westermann's *Theologie des Alten Testaments in Grundzügen*, and Hanson's *Dynamic Transcendence* (all published in 1978) contain a convergence of bipolar dialectics. Each of these three scholars depicts a different governing dialectic. Terrien depicts the "ethic/aesthetic" dialectic; Westermann, the "deliverance/blessing"; and Hanson, the "teleological/cosmic."¹⁰⁰ Brueggemann proposes the dialectic "of 'providence/election' which itself," so he states, "bespeaks an important tension."¹⁰¹

In *The Diversity of Scripture* (1982), Hanson speaks of the twin polarities of "form/reform" between kings and prophets, and the "visionary/pragmatic polarity" involving apocalyptic seers and priests.¹⁰² Hanson sees largely an interfacing of sociology and faith. He contributes to a sociological/theological understanding of the OT with dynamic tensions as essential for biblical faith. Like Terrien, Hanson sees the polarities also at work in the NT, and he envisions them to be the paradigms functioning in both testaments and beyond.¹⁰³ A convergence exists in the recognition of various dialectics or polarities. The fact that Brueggemann's proposed dialectic of "providence/election" is to encompass the "ethical/aesthetic," "deliverance/blessing," and "teleological/cosmic" ones reveals that the latter are too delimiting. This is explicitly admitted by Hanson, who speaks in his recent work of twin polarities.

Most recently, Brueggemann seems to have abandoned his bipolar dialectic of "providence/election" in favor of a more comprehensive bipolar dialectic. Now he advances "one particular

⁹⁹Brueggemann, "A Convergence," pp. 2-3.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁰¹W. Brueggemann, "Canon and Dialectic," in *God and His Temple*, ed. L. E. Frizzell (South Orange, NJ, 1981), p. 25.

¹⁰²Hanson, *The Diversity of Scripture*, pp. 14-36, 37-62. The polarity of 'visionary/pragmatist' was already elaborated in Hanson's monograph *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia, 1975).

¹⁰³Hanson, *The Diversity of Scripture*, pp. 107-135.

proposal for an OT theology," suggesting that "any theology must be bipolar to reflect the central tension of the literature." At one pole this tension is reflected by the approach of "how we got the text" based on "*the process and character of the text.*"¹⁰⁴ Here the concern is the social process of how the text reached its present form and shape by being "in the fray" along the line of Norman Gottwald's *The Tribes of Yahweh*.¹⁰⁵ At the other pole Brueggemann seeks to follow Brevard Childs, for whom the text that matters theologically is the canonical form of scripture. This pole, in the words of Brueggemann, is "above the fray." "The *bi-polar* construct I suggest is that OT faith serves both *to legitimate structure* and *to embrace pain.*" Brueggemann's thesis of bipolar dialectic for OT theology is as follows: "OT theology fully partakes in 'the common theology' of its world and yet struggles to be free of that same theology."¹⁰⁶

Brueggemann derives the idea of a bipolar dialectic from Westermann, Terrien, and Hanson; he gets the concept of the pole "in the fray" from Morton Smith and especially Gottwald, who applied a rigorous sociological method to Smith's categories; and he claims to derive the concept of the pole "above the fray" from Childs, who insists that OT theology (as well as biblical theology) must also relate to the (contemporary) community of faith.¹⁰⁷ Brueggemann's dual polarity of the social forces that shaped both the text and the faith community that was and is to hear the text stands in a dialectic relationship to each of its components.

Does Brueggemann's approach do justice to the full argument of Childs? After Brueggemann had published his programmatic essays, Childs took his pen again to react to Gottwald's sociological approach, claiming that "Gottwald's attempt to replace biblical theology with biblical sociology . . . illustrates the high level of reductionism at work."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴Brueggemann, "A Shape for OT Theology, I," p. 30 (Brueggemann's italics).

¹⁰⁵N. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh* (Maryknoll, 1979).

¹⁰⁶Brueggemann, "A Shape for OT Theology, I," pp. 30-31 (Brueggemann's italics). Brueggemann adopts the expression "the common theology" from Morton Smith, "The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East," *JBL* 71 (1952): 135-147. The expression means, according to Brueggemann, "a set of standard assumptions and claims of religion that are pervasive in the ancient Near East and are shared in the literature of ancient Israel" ("A Shape for OT Theology, II," p. 395, n. 1).

¹⁰⁷Brueggemann, "A Shape for OT Theology, I," p. 45, n. 46.

¹⁰⁸Childs, *OT Theology*, pp. 24-26.

In no case does Brueggemann embrace as comprehensively the position of Childs as he does those of Smith and Gottwald. His bi-polarity seems to allow him to move beyond the Smith-Gottwald paradigm by bringing in the "structure-legitimation of pain which changes the calculus."¹⁰⁹ Brueggemann sees the pole of "structure-legitimation" in tension with the counterpole of "pain embracing," which is "an ongoing tension, unresolved and unresolvable." He insists that "that tension must be kept alive in all faithful biblical theology."¹¹⁰ It remains to be seen how Brueggemann's proposal will be received and in what direction he himself will take it. It seems evident already that his descriptive task is not rooted in the canonical text itself, but "in the fray" of historical-critical reconstructions of the shaping of the traditions, which is constructively and thus theologically related to the faith community. Brueggemann has no center for OT theology. His bipolarity approach is different from those of his predecessors. His methodology is creative and imaginative but bound by the limitations of both the sociology of the past ("in the fray") and that of the present. He, too, is going beyond the "what-it-meant" approach for OT theology.

Canonical Approaches

In 1986 Childs published his *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*.¹¹¹ This publication is the result of labors begun in the programmatic essay, "Interpretation in Faith" (1964).¹¹² In 1970 he presented his influential *Biblical Theology in Crisis*.¹¹³ He followed this with a number of essays¹¹⁴ and a commentary on Exodus,¹¹⁵ all of which remained on the same track. In 1979 his

¹⁰⁹Brueggemann, "A Shape for OT Theology, II," p. 398.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 414.

¹¹¹See above n. 76.

¹¹²B. S. Childs, "Interpretation in Faith: The Theological Responsibility of an Old Testament Commentary," *Int* 18 (1964): 432-449.

¹¹³B. S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia, 1970).

¹¹⁴B. S. Childs, "The Sensus Literalis of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem," in *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. H. Donner, R. Hanhart, and R. Smend (Göttingen, 1977), pp. 80-93; idem, "The Exegetical Significance of Canon for the Study of the Old Testament," *VTSup* 29 (1977): 66-80; idem, "Some Reflections on the Search for a Biblical Theology," *HBT* 4, no. 1 (1982), pp. 1-12.

¹¹⁵B. S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia, 1974).

magisterial *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*¹¹⁶ was published, followed by his *New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* in 1984.¹¹⁷ His *Introduction to the Old Testament* aroused extensive reaction,¹¹⁸ to which Childs responded in measured, but uncompromising, ways.¹¹⁹ Childs's OT theology is methodologically unique, inasmuch as it is the only presently-published OT theology based on what he calls the "canonical approach." The intention of this method is to provide a "fresh approach to the discipline by resolving many of the crucial methodological issues at stake, but [it] also opens an avenue into the material in order to free the OT for a more powerful theological role within the life of the Christian church."¹²⁰ In the latter aspect, Childs shares the same concern for the relevance of the OT for the church as others have in the last couple of decades.

The name "canonical approach," as used by Childs of his methodology for OT theology, is the unequivocal assertion that "the object of theological reflection is the canonical writing of the Old Testament" and that it "is consistent in working within the canonical categories."¹²¹ In *Biblical Theology* (1970) he had already maintained "that the canon of the Christian church is the most appropriate context from which to do Biblical Theology."¹²² What Childs emphasized then as the foundation of a "new Biblical Theology"—namely, the absolute normativity of the canon of the OT and NT—he applied in 1986 to the theology of the OT. The entire canon of the OT and the NT is the Christian canon. "The Christian canon maintains the integrity of the Old Testament in its own right as scripture of the Church."¹²³ It is, therefore, a logical "contention that the discipline of Old Testament theology is essentially a Christian discipline, not simply because of the

¹¹⁶See above n. 97.

¹¹⁷B. S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia, 1984).

¹¹⁸The entire issue of *JSOT*, no. 16 (1980) is devoted to it.

¹¹⁹B. S. Childs, "Response to Reviewers of *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*," *JSOT*, no. 16 (1980), pp. 52-60; idem, "A Response," *HBT* 2 (1980), pp. 199-211.

¹²⁰Childs, *OT Theology*, p. 6.

¹²¹*Ibid.*

¹²²Childs, *Biblical Theology*, p. 6.

¹²³Childs, *OT Theology*, p. 9.

Christian custom of referring to the Hebrew Scriptures as the Old Testament, but on a far deeper level.”¹²⁴

Childs makes the point that “the term ‘Old Testament’ [in OT theology] correctly recognizes that the discipline is part of Christian theology, and that the Jewish scriptures as they have been appropriated by the Christian church within its own canon are the object of the discipline.”¹²⁵ It is to be noted in this connection that there is a fairly new trend among some OT scholars to designate the discipline of OT theology as the “theology of the Hebrew Bible,” as is the case with Coats¹²⁶ and the section heading (for the last two years) in the program for the annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature. Childs’s point is that the theology of the OT is never based on a purely descriptive method.¹²⁷ Indeed, Gabler’s heritage—namely, the sharp separation between “the analytical task of describing what the biblical writers themselves thought” from “the constructive task of interpreting how the church later thought to appropriate and use the Bible”¹²⁸—is to be rejected and replaced (*pace* Stendahl).

The “canonical approach,” in the words of Childs, “envisions the discipline of Old Testament theology as combining both descriptive and constructive features.” The “descriptive task” is one in which the OT text is correctly interpreted as “an ancient text which bears testimony to historic Israel’s faith.”¹²⁹ This is formulated so as to oppose the “formation-of-tradition” method of Gese and von Rad before him. The real bone of contention “is not over the theological significance of a depth dimension of the tradition. Rather, the issue turns on whether or not features within the tradition . . . can be interpreted apart from the role assigned to them in the final form [of the canonical text] when attempting to write a theology of the Old Testament.” Childs goes on to state: “Even more controversial is the usual method of reconstructing an alleged traditio-historical trajectory which does not reflect actual

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 7.

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Coats, pp. 239-262.

¹²⁷Here the dichotomy of “what it meant” (i.e., the historical reconstruction which is supposedly objective), and “what it means” (i.e., what its present interpretation and its theological and normative meaning is for today) is rejected.

¹²⁸Childs, *OT Theology*, p. 2.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 12.

layers within Israel's tradition, but is a critical construct lying outside Israel's faith." The reason for this rejection of the tradition-building approach is that "at the heart of the canonical proposal is the conviction that the divine revelation of the Old Testament cannot be abstracted or removed from the form of the witness which the historical community of Israel gave it."¹³⁰

In regard to the "constructive features," it is impossible to describe an historical process of the past (*contra* Gese); rather, one must recognize dimensions of flexibility. Therefore, there can also be no "center," because the "center" approach usually views OT theology as but an historical enterprise.

How does Childs's "canonical approach" for OT theology fare in terms of "the structuring of a modern Old Testament theology"? There is no single answer, because (1) the element of flexibility consonant with its canonical shape should be maintained in its modern actualization, and (2) a theological interaction based on the present is warranted and is open for "innumerable other options within the theological activity of interpreting scripture which are available for grappling with the material."¹³¹ It is at this point, where there is such a degree of indefiniteness, that one wonders why Childs has not more to offer.

Childs's presentation of the theology of the OT in *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (1986) is given in 19 chapters: (1) "The Old Testament as Revelation," (2) "How God Is Known," (3) "God's Purpose in Revelation," (4) "The Law of God," (5) "Knowing and Doing the Will of God," (6) "The Theological Significance of the Decalogue," (7) "The Role of the Ritual and Purity Laws," (8) "The Recipients of God's Revelation," (9) "Agents of God's Rule: Moses, Judges, Kings," (10) "The Office and Function of the Prophet," (11) "True and False Prophets," (12) "The Theological Role of the Priesthood," (13) "Benefits of the Covenant: The Cultus," (14) "Structures of the Common Life," (15) "Male and Female as a Theological Problem," (16) "The Theological Dimension of Being Human," (17) "The Shape of the Obedient Life," (18) "Life Under Threat," and (19) "Life Under Promise."

¹³⁰Ibid., pp. 11-12.

¹³¹Ibid., p. 13, 15-16. On the idea of "actualization," see the dissertation of Joseph W. Groves, *Actualization and Interpretation in the Old Testament*, SBL Dissertation Series 86 (Atlanta, GA, 1987).

As a reader seeks some sort of coherence in these chapters, one can perceive chaps. 1-3 as dealing with the nature of "revelation"; chaps. 4-7 with the content of revelation in the moral, ritual, and purity laws; chap. 8 with the recipients of revelation: chaps. 9-12 with community leaders (Moses, judges, kings, true and false prophets, and priests); chaps. 13-14 with cultic and secular institutions; chaps. 15-16 with anthropology; and chaps. 17-19 with life in obedience, under threat and promise.

Compared to Childs's earlier works—which are weighty tomes of scholarly discussion, critical reflections, and constructive proposals—we find this canonical theology of the OT to be more or less a sketch or outline of OT theology. Although it is in a number of instances quite engaging and stimulating, this OT theology hardly matches the breadth of others published in the decade from 1978-1986.

The concluding chapter, "Life Under Promise," is a case in point. The first section identifies four classical problems; the second deals with "methodological issues" in the scholarly debate; the third handles patterns of canonical shaping which are reconstructive in nature; while the fourth refers to forms of the promise, such as "judgment and salvation," "the messianic kingdom and the Messiah" (with reference to but seven texts to the Messiah and none to the kingdom), "the land," and "eternal life." It is affirmed that Isa 26:19 and 56:5 give a "veiled hint of individual after-life,"¹³² but such texts as Dan 12:3 are not emphasized. This brevity of treatment is the most painful, since it has been shown quite convincingly that future hope on a broad scale is part and parcel of Yahwistic faith.¹³³

In short, Childs is methodologically innovative and challenging, but, unfortunately, is too brief in the execution of the "canonical approach."

3. Conclusion

Today there is a greater multiplicity of methods employed for OT theology than at any other time: (1) The "dogmatic-systematic" approach, with the God-Man-Salvation schema, is supported by

¹³²Childs, *OT Theology*, p. 245.

¹³³H. D. Preuss, *Jahweglaube und Zukunftserwartung*, Beiträge zur Wissenschaft von Alten und Neuen Testament 87 (Stuttgart, 1968).

R. C. Dentan, D. F. Hinson, and García Cordero. (2) The “genetic-progressive” method is utilized by Chester K. Lehman and Roland E. Clements. The latter squarely breaks away from a purely descriptive task by his “fresh approach” of arguing for a “Christian study of the Old Testament.”¹³⁴ (3) The “cross-section” method, pioneered by Eichrodt and followed by Vriezen, is adopted and adapted by Mattioli and in another way by Goldingay. (4) The “formation-of-tradition” or traditio-historical diachronic method, pioneered by von Rad, is advanced by Gese and Seebass. (5) The bipolar dialectic approach is used by Terrien, Westermann, Hanson, and has a most ardent supporter in Brueggemann. (6) The “canonical approach” is most extensively and creatively conceptualized and executed by Childs.

Changes in the discipline of OT theology include: (1) a move away from a center (*Mitte*) oriented approach, (2) the dissolution of the “what-it-meant” and “what-it-means” or the descriptive and normative distinction (*pace* Stendahl and followers), (3) a growing recognition that OT theology is a Christian enterprise that is also constructive in nature, and (4) a recognition that OT theology is part of biblical theology.

In view of these changes, we are in a position to reassert the “multiplex canonical OT theology” approach,¹³⁵ as follows:

1. The task of OT theology is to provide summary explanations and interpretations of the final form—i.e., canonical form—of the individual OT writings or blocks of writings.

2. The aim of this procedure is to let the various motifs, themes, concepts, and ideas emerge in both their uniqueness and their relatedness.

3. The content of OT theology is indicated beforehand by the entire OT canon. OT theology must inevitably be a Christian theological enterprise, or it should be renamed “theology of the Hebrew Bible,” as some call it.

4. The structure of OT theology follows the procedures of the multiplex approach. This means that there is no single, dual, or multiple center or focal point that will allow the full richness of the OT to emerge. The theologies of the various OT books or

¹³⁴Clements, p. 186.

¹³⁵See Hasel, *OT Theology: Basic Issues*, pp. 169-183, for a more detailed presentation of these summary statements.

blocks of writings will need to retain their diversity, while exhibiting a unity of mutual complementation.

5. The two-pronged approach of book-by-book presentation and inherent themes, motifs, and concepts seems best presented in the historical sequence of the origin of the OT documents.

6. A second step of the presentation of OT theology is the bringing together of the longitudinal themes and to penetrate through these varieties of theologies and themes to the dynamic unity that binds all theologies and themes together.

7. The Christian theologian recognizes the OT as part of a larger whole—i.e., the entire scripture of OT and NT. The NT will not be superimposed upon the OT. The OT must be seen as providing its own witness. Yet the Christian sees the OT as pointing to Jesus Christ, and the Christian cannot disengage himself in such a way as to read the OT as a member of another religion, ancient or modern. It is both historically and theologically anachronistic to attempt to read the OT as if we were living before the coming of Jesus Christ. The Christian OT theologian will refrain from Christianizing the OT, but will allow it to speak on its own terms in all its richness and diversity, without distorting its text, purpose, and hopes.

In short, OT theology is a theological-historical undertaking that is oriented by its canonical form. It is both descriptive and constructive. As such, it can reassert its role as the crown of OT and biblical study.