

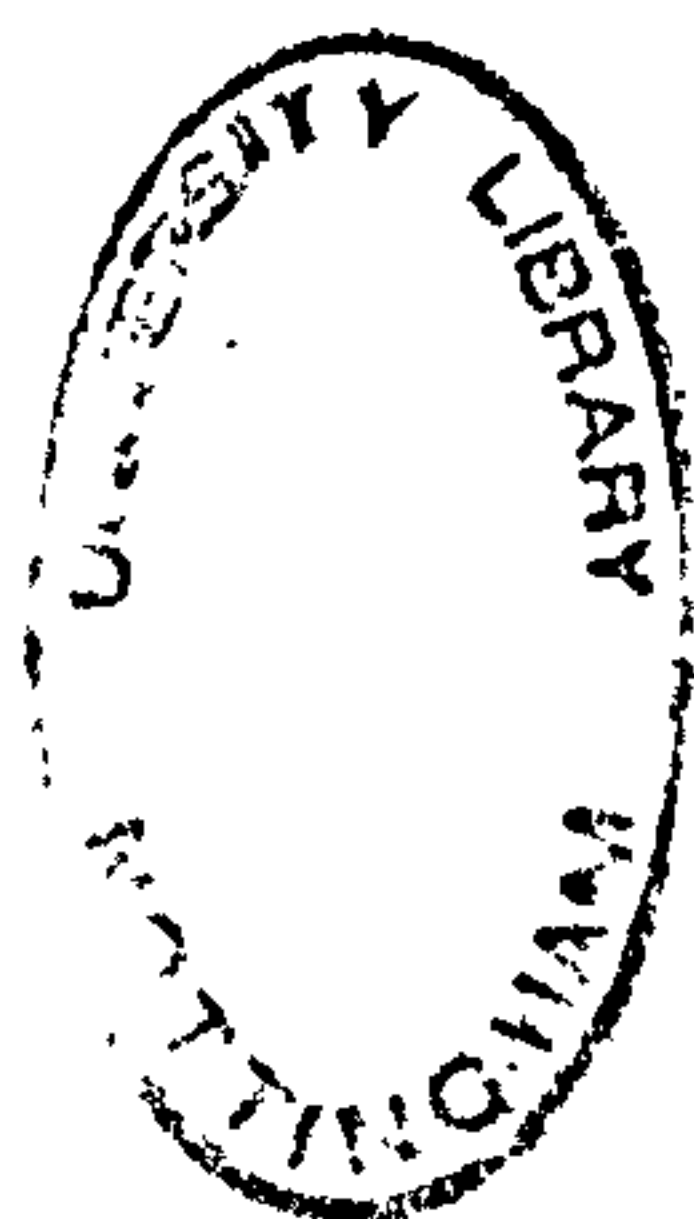
'Theological diversity and canonical authority: an examination of  
how diverse viewpoints in the Old Testament may be acknowledged,  
interrelated, and allowed to function theologically'

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## Abstract

1. The OT manifests considerable theological diversity. But if it is in some sense 'one' book, its diverse viewpoints should be capable of being brought into a coherent mutual relationship.
2. One approach sets the OT's varied viewpoints against the background of their varied contexts. It is necessary to go on, however, to ask whether certain contexts allow individual theological themes to emerge more clearly or more profoundly than others. Examples are considered.
3. The theme of the people of God in the OT is considered at greater length. What it means to be the people of God varies in different periods, but the eras of the theocratic nation and of the afflicted remnant allow the deepest insights to emerge.
4. A second approach is to see some theological perspectives as preferable to others. If we are to continue affirming the scriptural status of the whole OT, it is necessary to make clear that such a judgment evaluates the relative worth of different viewpoints, rather than totally rejecting some.
5. The varied levels of material in Deuteronomy illustrate the point. Its behavioural values and its theological perspective are accompanied by a pastoral strategy which starts where people are as sinners and where they are in their cultural context.
6. A third approach seeks to formulate one OT theology, by constructing a new whole in which all the diverse material can find its own place. Examples are considered.
7. The tension between creation (order, cosmos) and salvation (history) is considered at greater length. The OT material as a whole suggests that the world God redeems is the world of God's creation; the world God created is one that needed to be redeemed; man is redeemed to live again his created life before God; redeemed humanity still looks for a final act of redemption/re-creation.



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In the text and footnotes of the thesis, books and articles are referred to by the author's name and a brief title or periodical reference. Full information concerning these works appears in the bibliography. Abbreviations are those used in the Journal of Biblical Literature (see 95 [1976] 335-46).

Emphasis in quotations is that of the original author unless otherwise stated. In biblical references, I follow MT versification.



# 1 Theological diversity in the OT

1.1 Over its two-hundred year life as a scholarly discipline independent of dogmatics, biblical theology has had difficulty in doing justice both to the conviction that there is a coherence about the teaching of the one book 'the Bible', and to the awareness that the actual statements of the various 'scriptures' are rather diverse in content. Pre-critical biblical study read the scriptures in a static way, assuming that the same truths were taught in both Testaments and that Christian beliefs could be read out of the OT in ways that now seem to pay insufficient attention to the meaning that statements had for their writers and their original readers. The nineteenth century set its mind to tracing the history of biblical religion, and perceived vast differences not only between OT and NT, but also between earlier and later forms of OT faith, and between Jesus and Paul. Neo-orthodoxy and the biblical theology movement, seeking not to ignore biblical criticism but to build on it, nevertheless re-emphasized the one biblical faith's content, truth, and relevance. Now during the past three decades the theological pendulum has swung once again to an affirmation of 'the multiplex nature of the Old Testament tradition' which includes representatives of 'completely divergent "theologies"' and 'struggling contradictions' /1/. The concern of this present study is to re-consider how the theologian is to handle the diversity of viewpoint within the OT.

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/1/ So respectively Barr, Old and New 15; von Rad, TLZ 88:404 (ET Theology 2:412); Eichrodt, Theologie 1:266 (ET Theology 1:490). Käsemann (e.g. NTS 19:242-3) speaks similarly of the NT.

For a Christian, that theological question cannot ultimately be considered without reference to the NT. Yet questions about diversity and unity in the NT and about the relationship between the Testaments are major topics in themselves which require study in their own right. Reference to the NT cannot be omitted, then, but it can be attempted only here in a marginal way.

1.2 Forms of diversity in the viewpoints represented in the OT

1.2.0 The diversity of viewpoint in the OT with which we are concerned takes various forms. These may be instanced as follows.

1.2.1 (a) Diversity in the meaning of concepts, themes, and institutions

Themes, concepts, and institutions often have widely diverse meanings in different books. If we ask what the OT means by God /2/, we discover that it is ambivalent over whether Yahweh is the sole divine being or whether in some sense divinity attaches to other supernatural beings. He sometimes belongs to a particular place, at other times he can be encountered anywhere. While his power and involvement in his worshippers' lives is generally emphasized, and one psalmist denies that he ever sleeps, another psalmist challenges him to awake from the sleep of inactivity (Psa 44:24; 121:4). He can often be described as changing his mind, and can be seen withdrawing a commitment he has made to a particular people or individual or city, even though his consistency and faithfulness are emphasized and it is specifically denied that he changes his mind (e.g. 1 Sam 15:11,29,35). Further, while the OT as a whole sees Yahweh as supremely the just God, the NT places more emphasis on his love. It is thus possible to speak of 'the transformations of God' /3/: he is known in changing ways as times change.

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/2/ Cf Schmidt, Das erste Gebot 7-11.

/3/ Bultmann, ZTK 60:344-8; the phrase die Wandlungen Gottes comes from the work of Ernst Barlach, the dramatist and sculptor. Cf Landau, Werden und Wirken des AT 335-8.



The theme of the people of God is a main focus of OT thinking correlative to that of the person and activity of God himself, and there is also considerable diversity over the meaning of this theme. The people of God can be a pastoral clan, constituted by kinship but separated from the world and called to live by faith in God's promise; it can be a theocratic nation, directly governed by God and challenged to live in the world by his standards; it can be an institutional state, ruled by human kings like the nations and open to the nations' influence on its faith, its administration, and its culture; it can be an afflicted remnant, revealing God's standards by experiencing his judgment on its sin, and called to accept affliction as a strange form of real service to Yahweh; it can be a religious community, in various ways living with a tension between its self-understanding before God and its position in the world; it can be, in the NT, both the Israel that rejects its messiah and the Israel that recognizes and proclaims him.

The contexts or forms by which God and his people relate show further diversity. History can be Yahweh's means of fulfilling his purpose for Israel and for the world, or it can be Israel's means of fulfilling her own purpose until Yahweh intervenes to bring history to its end; or history can simply be ignored. The covenant can be a relationship of promise between God and the ancestral clan leader; it can be a relationship of commitment between Yahweh as the one who brought Israel from Egypt, and this redeemed people who at Sinai pledges herself to live by his demands; it can be a relationship modelled on that of secular treaties and law-codes between Yahweh, the emperor and law-giver, and Israel in the Plains of Moab, the underling and subject,

whose disobedience would lead to the annulling of the relationship; it can be a special relationship between Yahweh and the Israelite king; it can be a relationship not yet actual and dependent on new acts of Yahweh which will be needed to bring all Israelites into personal commitment to Yahweh; or it can be, in the NT, a relationship between the God and Father of Jesus Christ and those who believe in him.

The monarchy as an institution can be radically rejected (in one strand of Judges, 1 Samuel, and Hosea), can be accepted with qualification (Deuteronomy), can be accepted whole-heartedly (another strand of Judges, Samuel-Kings, and Psalms), can be accepted as a right hope for the future even though it is one not yet realized (the 'messianic hope' of some prophets), or, in the NT, can be reinterpreted as essentially not of this world (cf John 18:36). The law, as the God-given means of Israel's expressing her commitment to Yahweh, can be the seal of her relationship with him, or can constitute a threat of judgment for those who ignore it, or can be the means of making clear how those who heed its warnings can avoid judgment, or can explain judgment for those who have been judged; it can thrill the believer's heart with joy and delight, or, in the NT, it can be so much rubbish compared with the joy of knowing Jesus Christ. Israel's future with Yahweh can be seen as his involvement with her in her own this-worldly political decision-making and acts, or as his own bestowing of a marvellous redemption from exile which nevertheless still presupposes a this-worldly experience, or as an even more supra-naturalist transformation of people, land, and temple, or as a thoroughly other-worldly creating of a quite new order; such hopes may centre on an earthly leader, a new David, or may reinterpret the traditional



Davidic idea, or may ignore it altogether; or national and cosmic hopes may themselves be ignored and the focus of hope may be on personal release of some kind, personal renewal or personal resurrection. The Day which is the object of such hope may be seen as far off, or near, or at hand, or actually present, or past.

Different Israelites had different understandings of the nature of the response to God which he looked for. In the patriarchal stories, it is a trustful following of his promise. In Exodus to Deuteronomy it is a wide-ranging and detailed subordination of the whole of life to Yahweh; but the laws in Exodus place more stress on the demands of life in the world, while Leviticus is more concerned with the offering of worship according to right forms, and Deuteronomy emphasizes both the overall attitudes of trust, fear, and commitment, and (in its regulations regarding actual behaviour) recourse solely to the shrine which Yahweh chooses. The Psalms are much more concerned with the life of praise and prayer lived by the believer and the believing community. The pre-exilic prophets, however, so stress justice and faithfulness rather than temple worship of any kind that they can be plausibly portrayed as rejecting the latter altogether; yet their post-exilic successors take a quite different attitude to the temple. Meanwhile the wisdom writers, while not ignoring morals or even worship, show more interest in the living of everyday life in a successful and satisfying way, an interest markedly different from that of prophets who urge their hearers to trust in Yahweh rather than in worldly wisdom.

God's commitment to Israel can be seen as unqualified and permanent, made for her blessing as an end in itself; or it can be seen as



inherently conditional and always open to being terminated, and as intended not to exclude other peoples but to be a means of drawing them to Yahweh. Further, that commitment can be seen as working itself out with manifest fairness and justice for each generation, community and individual, or as a rather more complex affair in which the individual sometimes suffers because of the sin of the community as a whole or of other individuals within it (especially its leaders), or as one in which the community as a whole suffers because of the sins of others within it, or as one in which one generation's sin has consequences for another generation, or as only working itself out with fairness if there is judgment and reward after death, or as an inherently mysterious process which we can hardly pretend to understand at all.

The total thrust of Israelite faith may thus be seen in quite varied ways. How is one to understand and approach one's life in an ever-changing world? /4/. By clinging to the forms of the past (as the Nazirites and Rechabites did)? By seeking God's blessing through the outward rites of cultic worship or by a detailed obedience to laws governing the conduct of everyday life? By trusting in a special commitment of Yahweh's to the Israelite people? By investigating the order embodied in the world itself and the laws by which life may be successfully led? By hoping for a future act of God which will be the key to life in the present? By accepting a challenge which is itself present, a challenge to repentance before God, trust in God, and

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/4/ For what follows, see Fohrer, Theologische Grundstrukturen 51-94; also Crenshaw's study of the difference between prophet, priest, and sage, and between Yahwism and wisdom, in Tradition and Theology 237-9, 245-9.

commitment to God, which will issue in living for him in his world and transforming it? All these diverse overall approaches to life are represented in the OT.

1.2.2 (b) Diversity in the messages brought by different OT books and traditions

Discussion of OT theological themes or concepts has to proceed largely by abstraction from actual OT material. Any writer, teacher, prophet, or traditionist works with some understanding of the world and life and of God and man, even if it is only half-conscious, and we may validly seek to articulate and explicate his work's implicit theology. But generally the OT material itself does not take the form of a series of discussions or presentations of such a worldview or theology; this is not the expressed message of the writer's work. The latter is something more specific, pointed, concrete, conscious, and addressed to a particular situation. One may thus investigate the overt messages of OT books as well as their underlying theologies, and one will find as considerable a diversity among the former as among the latter.

This diversity has been particularly illumined by Gerhard von Rad. His Theologie des AT makes clear, first, a basic distinction between the approach of Israel's historical traditions and that of her prophetic traditions. The former utilize stories about the great events of Israel's past to suggest how God's people are currently to see their position in the world; von Rad sees this approach as characteristic of the books from Genesis to Kings. Then, when he comes to the prophets, von Rad sets on the title page of Part One of his treatment the words 'Remember not the former things nor consider the things of old, for



behold I purpose to do a new thing' (Isa 43:18-19). There is 'a definite break between the message of the prophets and the ideas held by earlier Jahwism'. The prophets turn their backs on finding the meaning of Israel's existence in events of the past, and testify to 'the approach of entirely new and terrifying divine acts of salvation' /5/.

Nor is the break between narrative and prophetic traditions the only major disjunction within the OT. Although von Rad divides his Theologie into these two major parts, each includes other strands of thinking which do not entirely fit under either heading. Wisdom is a particularly significant such strand. Developing his earlier treatment in his Weisheit in Israel, von Rad in effect adds a third volume to his Theologie /6/. Prophecy, with its forward look, was not Yahwism's only alternative to history, with its backward look. Wisdom's empirical, existential approach stands alongside these as a third way.

The diversity of the OT's messages is illustrated further by the divergences that appear within such overall strands, divergences (for instance) between different pentateuchal sources or between Kings and Chronicles, between prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, and between different wisdom books (notably Job or Ecclesiastes over against Proverbs). It is also illustrated by contrasts between works from different strands. The hierocratic or theocratic view of P or the

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/5/ Theologie 2:17, 312 (ET Theology 2:3, 299).

/6/ Cf Bryce's comments in Theology Today 30:436-42.



Chronicler is the one contested by a prophet such as Amos /7/. Deuteronomy and Isaiah 40 - 55 both speak of Yahweh's sole power and deity, Israel's blessing, victory, and fame, the covenant theme, and the servant theme; but the meaning, role, and importance of these motifs in the two books differs. The same theological statements function in different ways, and 'one must not ask simply what was said, but rather which way what was said cut, what happened when the language was used' /8/. Deuteronomy and Isaiah 40 - 55 have individual themes in common, yet the thrust of their messages is quite different. In the NT, Deuteronomy finds its affinity more with James or nomism, Isaiah 40 - 55 with Paul or antinomianism.

Diversity among the messages contained within the OT also appears in the varied responses offered by contemporary documents to the same historical situation. For instance, the considerable body of material connected with the exile sets forward a variety of possible understandings of this experience /9/. For Lamentations, the exile is especially the result of placing false trust in the security of Jerusalem; for the Deuteronomistic history, of ignoring the fundamental

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- /7/ Cf von Rad, Gesammelte Studien 1:234 (ET Problem of the Hexateuch 253); Smend, EvT 23:404-23; Geyer, EvT 25:222-3; Schmitt, Textgemäss 149.
  - /8/ J M Robinson, Trajectories 69.
  - /9/ On what follows, see R W Klein, Israel in Exile; Janssen, Juda in der Exilszeit; Ackroyd, Exile and Restoration; Nicholson, Preaching to the Exiles; Albrektson, Studies in Lamentations 214-39; Westermann, Jesaja 40 - 66. If P is exilic, it adds a further distinctive strand to those mentioned here.

Deuteronomic requirement that Yahweh be worshipped exclusively at the shrine he would choose; for Ezekiel, of the unfaithfulness of the temple worship itself; for Jeremiah, of the people's political, social, and moral waywardness, as well as the unfaithfulness of her worship.

The practical responses to the exile expressed or urged by these books also varies. Lamentations bewails it, the Deuteronomistic history by implication simply accepts it, Jeremiah urges people to submit to the Babylonian yoke and settle down under Babylonian authority, the Jeremiah prose tradition urges the taking up of a life of obedience to God's word.

The books vary, too, in the way they look to the future. Lamentations casts itself on God's mercy without indicating explicitly what its hope is. The Deuteronomistic history merely hints that the God who promised to restore those who return to obey his law, to listen to prayer directed towards the temple even from exile, and to be faithful to David's line for ever, may not have finished with Israel. In the Jeremiah prose tradition and in Ezekiel there appears explicit hope for a new David, a fresh branch to grow from the Davidic tree. But Isaiah 40 - 55 turns its back on such ideas, re-allocating the Davidic role to the servant, to Cyrus, and to the people as a whole. Isaiah 40 - 55 promises a revelation of Yahweh in a new exodus and restoration of Jerusalem, but Ezekiel (at least in the book's final form) gives most prominence to the new temple to which Yahweh will return to dwell.

An even more striking diversity of approximately contemporary and apparently rival views can be documented for the post-exilic period (see section 1.4.3 below).



1.2.3 (c) Diversity in the significance found in particular events or motifs

One of the ways in which OT writers formulate and express their message for their particular hearers is by considering the significance for their day of archetypal events or motifs such as the exodus or God's covenant with David, which belong to their people's history and are continually reinterpreted and reappropriated in the context of Israel's tradition. The kinds of significance that an event can come to have for later generations can be quite diverse.

The OT's first 'event' is the creation of the world /10/. In Gen 1:1 - 2:3 the significance of creation includes the fact that it is the act of the God of Israel in his freedom and sovereignty; he has no conflicts to resolve in his work. The sun, moon, and stars are not gods to be acknowledged (as the Babylonians believed), but mere lamps in the sky; nor does the establishment of the state go back to creation. The sabbath, however, is part of the pattern of God's activity, revealed to Israel so that she might follow it, yet not (as the exiles might be tempted to believe) a merely Israelite peculiarity. In Gen 2:4 - 11:9, however, creation suggests God's loving provision of life and all else that man needed, which contrasts with the manifold alienation of man (from woman, from his work, from the world, from his brother, from God, from life itself) which the chapters also portray; so that the story claims that these issues do not arise from the imperfection of

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/10/ For what follows, see von Rad, Gesammelte Studien 1:136-47 (ET 131-43); B W Anderson, Creation versus Chaos; Westermann, "Schöpfung" 29-47 (ET Creation 17-31); Lindeskog, Root of the Vine 1-22; Mowinckel, Psalms 1:106-92.



the creation or from the problems, the bloodiness, and the bloody-mindedness of the supernatural powers, but from the acts of man himself.

The creation event has further meanings for the book of Exodus. One way of linking the creation event with the event of redemption which Exodus celebrates is to see the former as preceding the latter in time; Israel's redemption has its background (via the patriarchal promise) in the creator's concern for his world. But another is to describe the redemption event itself in terms of creation: the exodus is an occasion of creation (see the creation imagery of Exod 15) and the gifts of creation are the gifts of redemption (see the significance attached to Israel's harvest festivals in Exod 34:22-3; Deut 26:5-10). Yahweh's grace and power shown in creation appear again in Israel's hymnody, and encourage a hope that they will also be experienced in his people's own history (Psa 74; 89); but his creative power can also be applied to the punishing of Israel for her failure to respond to him (the creation hymn in Amos 4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6). Elsewhere in the Psalms, creation is simply the basis for worship of God. Thus in Psa 104, the sky speaks of his splendour (1-4), the act of creation itself reflects his power (5-9), and its living things experience his continuing creative provision (10-30) (see also e.g. Psa 8; 29; 33). When Israel celebrates Yahweh's kingship (perhaps in the context of a special festival designed to celebrate his taking up his kingship for a new year), she affirms his kingship as the creator (Psa 93; 95 - 99), the one who once again guarantees the rebirth of nature, the renewing of creation which each new year brings (Psa 65; 67).

The events of history as well as the annual cycle of nature bring their experiences of creation seeming to collapse; God's judgment is an act of uncreation (cf Jer 4:23-6). One way of coping with such an experience is to recall that things were not always this way: the world came into being through an act of purposeful creation, so that emptiness and formlessness are not history's intrinsic characteristics. This is part of the significance of Gen 1 - 2 as introductions to the narrative from Genesis to Kings. This narrative closes with the exile; in that same context, however, the exilic Isaiah again appeals to the creation theme as one familiar from Israel's worship ('Have you not known? Have you not heard?'), to remind his hearers of the present significance of creation faith (Isa 40:12-31). The exiles are naturally impressed by the nations' power (Israel is a humiliated remnant), by their idols (her temple lies desolate), by their rulers (her king Jehoiachin is in prison), and by their cosmic deities (her Yahweh has disappeared). But they are encouraged to recall that this Yahweh is the creator of the whole world; their experience of abandonment is therefore not their final destiny. Yet another response to the experience of uncreation is to look to the future, not to the past, in a different way, by projecting onto the future the vision of a created order which is the antitype of present experience, a new heaven and a new earth (Isa 65:17-25). Thus creation comes to be a way of thinking about the End.

The wisdom books see the significance of the creation event in further directions. Prov 1 - 9 as a whole is concerned to inculcate wisdom in the sense of insight, prudence, sense, and shrewdness about life. Ch 8 commends wisdom for its value in connection with doing right (1-11) and with the exercise of leadership (12-21), and then points to



God's own use of his wisdom in creation (22-31). When you look at creation, it suggests, you can see what God achieved by using his mind; therefore creation encourages you to use your own. Job suggests links between an appreciation of creation and an understanding of human suffering. At the climax of the book Yahweh directs Job's attention to the creation, which challenges him to acknowledge both Yahweh's power and also the purposefulness of his government of the world: he is the one who put Behemoth and Leviathan in their places (Job 40 - 41). The world of God's creation is not one in which chaos rules (cf Isa 45:18), and this should provide the context for interpreting the chaos which apparently prevails at present in Job's life. Creation provides reason for trusting God even when one cannot understand him.

In each of these examples, the writers allude to creation because of an interest in other themes which are their real concerns; they are thus able to attribute to creation quite diverse significances. The process continues in the NT, where the question now is 'How are we to understand Jesus of Nazareth?'. Here, one way of expressing his significance is to associate him with creation, as the means of God's self-expression through whom all things were made (John 1:2-5, cf Prov 8:22-31), or as the image of God, his first-born heir of his creation, in whom all things were created and now hold together (Col 1:15-17).

Succeeding archetypal events in the OT story such as Yahweh's special dealings with Abraham /11/ and his rescue of Israel from Egypt /12/ are

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/11/ See Martin-Achard, Actualité d'Abraham; Clements, Abraham and David.

/12/ See Sahlin, Root of the Vine 81-95; Nixon, Exodus in the NT; von Rad, TLZ 88:404 (ET Theology 2:413).



the subject of parallel sequences of reapplications. In Genesis, for instance, Abraham is the bearer of a promise of blessing which is ultimately designed to benefit all the nations (J), he is the committed believer who submits to God's will even when God's demand seems to imperil God's own promise (E), and he is also the recipient (on behalf of his heirs) of an irrevocable covenant between God and his chosen people (P). Elsewhere in the Hexateuch, God's word to him is the basis for confidence that Yahweh will complete the purpose of redemption which he has begun, for the conviction that the land of the Canaanites does belong to the Israelites, and for a challenge to commit oneself to the God who had kept his word to Abraham. Abraham influences the portrayal of David; his testing on a mount in Moriah is now part of the justification for building a temple there, and his acknowledging of Melchizedek is part of the justification for acknowledging David, who has inherited Melchizedek's position. In the prophetic books, God's commitment to Abraham is the basis for confidence that God will once again grant blessing, land, and increase to Abraham's descendants; but that argument from the story of Abraham can be denied (Ezek 33:24) as well as affirmed (Isa 41:8-10; 43:5; 51:1-3). In the NT, too, the argument from God's commitment to Abraham can be both affirmed (Acts 3:25-6; Gal 3 - 4) and denied (Matt 3:9; John 8:31-40).

The exodus is, in the book of Exodus, the magnificent and unique act of Yahweh's power, faithfulness, and justice, whereby the descendants of Abraham are freed to serve and acknowledge Yahweh as his own people. In Hosea, too, the exodus is the paradigmatic act of Yahweh's love and the act that made him her God. But Yahweh now declares that it is not a once-for-all event; for failing to maintain her commitment to the

God of the exodus Israel will return to Egypt (where for political reasons she is inclined to resort anyway) - even though Yahweh then promises that his love will have its way in a new exodus from there in the end. Amos, too, sees Israel's apostasy as having dissolved the commitment that the exodus signified; he declares that it was merely one of the many ancient near eastern migrations of which Yahweh has been Lord. In Jeremiah, the exodus period is the time of Israel's first love (Jer 2:1-3), but in Ezekiel it is merely the time of her initial faithlessness (Ezek 20). Isaiah 40 - 55 takes up Hosea's vision of a new exodus, but its own vision of the servant role reinterprets the significance of the exodus in a radical way. Then, in the NT, the exodus motif is reapplied as a metaphor for another kind of deliverance that Jesus' dying will achieve (see especially Luke 9:31).

More generally, von Rad notes that the 'foundations' or 'bases of salvation' or 'initial appointments' upon which OT traditions build (the patriarchal covenant, the Sinai covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the foundation of Zion) are highly heterogeneous in content. Further, 'as a result, each promise gave its own characteristic theological stamp to the progression of historical events which led to its fulfilment', and to the prophetic preaching which takes these same initial appointments as its model for looking to the future /13/. So diversity is an essential characteristic of OT tradition.

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/13/ TLZ 88:403 (ET Theology 2:411-2).



1.3 Reasons for the diversity of viewpoint represented in the OT

1.3.0 One normally expects a book to manifest a unity of perspective, theme, conceptuality, and aim; one might expect the same of the text acknowledged by a religious community. Indeed, the Bible's failure to fulfil this expectation marks it out in the history of the world's religions /14/. Why does it do so?

1.3.1 (a) Some of the reasons are historical. The Bible is a compilation of biblia, of scriptures; the words are plural. A collection of shorter works published as one volume is not necessarily expected to have the same unity as a single work, even where all are by the same author. These works are not all by the same author: the Bible is more a symposium than someone's collected works. Prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel speak different messages, even where they address the same people, because they are different men with different backgrounds, experiences, and attitudes to life. Similar results follow from the variety in the tradition circles that influenced the OT. Multiplicity of authorship is bound to imply some diversity of viewpoint.

The books of the Bible were written to a variety of audiences, living in varying periods and situations. Jeremiah and Ezekiel differ, though they are contemporaries; Isaiah and Jeremiah or Jeremiah and Zechariah differ in other ways because they are not contemporaries, and their message is related to the circumstances and attitudes of their hearers. The book of Jeremiah specifically enunciates the principle that God's

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/14/ So Vawter, Biblical Inspiration 1-2.



dealings with people varies with the response he meets from them (Jer 18:7-10) and the story of Jonah's self-falsifying ministry illustrates this principle at work (Jonah 3 - 4). Chronicles' emphasis on the importance of Israel's worship and Amos's dismissal of it both reflect the kind of attitude to God and the kind of spiritual need which the writers find among the people of their day. Different 'appointments' (e.g. the call of Abraham, the exodus, the covenant with David) disclose different contents as they find different 'actualizations' when set in different perspectives by different contexts /15/. One side and the other of the fall of Jerusalem in 587 a different message is brought not only by different prophets (e.g. Jeremiah and the second Isaiah) but also within the ministry of a single prophet (especially Ezekiel). Different social contexts may need to be addressed in different ways: the same message may not seem appropriate for Abraham's pastoral clan and for David's urbanized state; patriarchal religion reflects the former while J and the wisdom writings reflect the latter. Like any religion, Israelite faith changes with the changing world; theology is an historical affair /16/.

The variety in the external contexts of Israel's world also contributed to the variety within the OT itself. These contexts affect Israel's faith partly by direct influence, partly by constituting an aspect of the situation which has to be addressed. The occupation of Canaan, for

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/15/ See again von Rad, TLZ 88:404 (ET Theology 2:413).

/16/ Cf Hempel, Das Ethos des AT 1-19 on the variety of backgrounds, political and economic situations, and ideologies to which OT teaching on behaviour has to relate.

instance, leads to Israelite faith being expressed in terms derived from the Canaanites (e.g. in the 'Zion theology' represented particularly clearly in the Psalms), and also in terms which show that it is different from that of the Canaanites (e.g. in the stress on avoiding Canaanite practices which appears in many laws).

The exile leads to renewed influence of near eastern myth but also to polemic against it; both may be evidenced in Isaiah 40 - 55 and in the P creation story.

- 1.3.2 (b) A theological account of this diversity may sometimes be appropriate, insofar as the OT pictures God himself as having different things to say at different periods. In part this is because he is responding to varying situations in the way described above. It is also because the ongoing historical process requires something different to be said at one period from what was said earlier, partly as a consequence of what was said earlier and on the basis of what has followed from it. Whereas Yahweh once spoke much about the exodus from Egypt, later he wants his people to look forward to a new event in history. Indeed, where he once seemed to work within history, a time comes when he seems to have abandoned history.

The changes in God's speaking and acting are not merely responses to particular human situations or to the point reached by the ongoing historical process. In part these changes emerge directly from his own initiative, independent of external stimulus such as the biblical writer can observe. There is an unpredictability about how God will choose to act or speak. Why should the 'new thing' of prophecy have happened when it did? Perhaps the factors which decide this arise in



part from God himself, and one cannot necessarily explain why God should at this particular moment have something different to say from what he has said before; such changes are involved in living as a person, for God as much as for man /17/.

1.3.3 (c) The complexity of the realities of which the OT speaks accounts for some of the diversity within the OT. While there are many matters of which one can give straightforward explanations on which competent authorities can be expected to agree (characteristically, subjects studied by disciplines such as mathematics, geography, and the natural sciences), there are other realities (and questions about what lies behind the concerns of these disciplines), belonging more to the realm of the humanities, where straightforward explanations are rarer and disagreement among competent authorities is more common. What is man? What is right? What is the nature of Being? What is ultimate reality? Where is history going? Such questions are complex because the realities that they are seeking to grasp are complex, and it is not surprising if within a document such as the OT a variety of aspects of these complex wholes appears. If there were no tensions in the Bible, this would suggest that it was too simple in its understanding of them /18/. The variety of 'actualizations' of

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/17/ See further Bultmann, ZTK 60:344-8 (cf n 3 above); also Ogden, Reality of God 144-63. Cf also the NT's picture of God knowing throughout OT times that he would cause his gospel to be proclaimed throughout the world through the 'gentile mission', yet keeping this mysterion secret until he decided it was time to reveal it (Eph 1:9-10; 3:1-13).

/18/ Cf Rahner, Schriften 5:47 (ET Theological Investigations 5:35-6).



'appointments' such as the call of Abraham similarly reflects the depth of these symbols, which are inherently capable of a wide range of application.

- 1.3.4 Imagine, then, 'Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, the collected poems of T.S.Eliot, the Textus Roffensis, Hamlet, Robinson's Honest to God, The Canterbury Tales, Holinshed's Chronicle, the Cathedral Statutes of Rochester, Hymns Ancient and Modern (Revised), Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison, Hammersjkold's Markings, The Thoughts of Chairman Mao, Pilgrim's Progress, the Sixteen Satires of Juvenal and the Book of Kells' deprived of indications of date and authorship, all printed in the same format and bound together as a single volume /19/; the analogy suggests that it is natural that the library comprised by the Jewish and Christian scriptures manifests such diversity of viewpoint.

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/19/ Blanch, The World our Orphanage 16.

1.4 Degrees of diversity and forms of contradiction

1.4.0 'The Bible is full of contradictions' /20/. If this is so, then it will be a tour de force to interrelate its various viewpoints. But the statement is an exaggeration, partly arising out of a rather loose use of the word 'contradiction'. Such a looseness of usage is instanced by Bultmann's describing as contradictory features of the NT that 'the death of Christ is sometimes a sacrifice and sometimes a cosmic event. Sometimes his person is interpreted as the Messiah and sometimes as the Second Adam' /21/. Such variations, like the OT's various reapplications of the creation event or of the Abraham story (see section 1.2.3 above), indicate that the Bible is highly diverse, and they invite the interpreter to take up the challenge of relating them to each other as part of the task of their theological explication, but they do not involve mutual opposition. It is quite possible for one person to be both the Messiah and the Second Adam; the descriptions are very different, but can both be accepted without inconsistency. Such variations do not raise a problem of contradiction versus harmony.

On the other hand, some diversity does entail opposition and not mere difference. At least four forms of contradiction may then be

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/20/ Dahl, STK 45:22 (ET Studies in Paul 159); the essay deals with the approach to this issue in the Hebrew Bible as it appears in Jewish exegesis and in Paul.

/21/ Kerygma und Mythos 23 (ET Kerygma and Myth 11).

distinguished /22/.

- 1.4.1 (a) Formal contradiction involves a difference at the level of words which is not a difference at the level of substance. P D Hanson opens his study of The Diversity of Scripture (pages 1-4) by noting that such inconsistency is natural to 'the language of confession' as it expresses depth of personal response. Material in which symbolic language has a prominent place particularly raises this problem. As we noted in section 1.2.1, the OT both states and denies that God changes his mind, even in the same chapter (1 Sam 15.11,29,35; each time  $\square\square\square$ ). There is a clear formal contradiction, but the presence of both assertions in one text invites us to seek to relate them as well as to contrast them. To speak of God changing his mind about an act or regretting it suggests the reality of his interacting with people in the world. People make real decisions which do not necessarily correspond to the will of God, and which thus introduce an element of novelty into history; they are not the result of God's direct determination. God thus reacts to them as a person reacting to the deeds of other persons, with pleasure or surprise or sadness or regret, and as a person reacting to the deeds of other persons he relates his own subsequent decision-making to these acts. On the other hand, to speak of God not changing his mind, as a man does, safeguards his

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/22/ Cf Martin's discussion in SR 8:143-52, which also takes up Lonergan's work in Method in Theology, especially 128-9, 235-7. Of the nature of the case, opinions may vary as to which category different examples may belong to, though in itself this hardly makes attempts at categorization questionable.



faithfulness and consistency (לֹא יִשְׁקַר). His reactions to the deeds of others reflect a coherent pattern rather than randomness. Further, whereas human beings make their decisions unaware of all their consequences, so that the latter can catch them out, God (so the OT assumes) can foresee not only the consequences of his own actions but also the nature of the responses they will meet with and the nature of other human acts, so that he can in turn formulate his response to these in advance. So the interaction between divine and human decision-making is real (there are genuine human acts to foresee), yet God is not caught out by the latter, and in this sense he does not have to change his mind. The affirmation and the denial are thus both part of a coherent analogical description of God's involvement in the world, and each would be misleading without the other. There is a formal contradiction between them, but the statements can be seen as complementary /23/.

There is a formal contradiction involved in `the prophetic "no"

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/23/ On the relationship between God's consistency and his mutability, see Barth, Dogmatik II, 1:558-61 (ET Dogmatics II, 1:496-9). The affirmation of an element of contingency in God's acts as developed in process theology is applied to the OT by L S Ford in Lure of God 15-44 (cf Interpretation 26:198-<sup>209</sup><sub>1</sub>); by Janzen in Magnalia Dei 480-509 and in Encounter 36:379-406; also by Cooper in USQR 32:25-35; but this approach questions whether divine foreknowledge (probably implied by the denial that God changes his mind) can be reconciled with this contingency and with real human freedom (cf Ford, Interpretation 26:208).

to Israel's traditions' /24/. Amos, for instance (5:18-20), denies that Israel will experience a coming Day of light and salvation, as contemporary tradition apparently believed /25/ and subsequent canonical material certainly declares. But in doing so he was 'restoring the theology of the tradition that had got lost', pointing to that tradition's actual witness to Yahweh as opposed to its mere outward form /26/, a witness to 'the nearness of the One who is free, the One who shows himself as the Lord' /27/. Elsewhere, Amos utters the 'heresy' that the exodus is no more significant than the migrations of other nations (9:7); yet we must not interpret literalistically a challenge designed to startle Israel out of her complacency regarding Yahweh's commitment to her /28/. Isaiah and Micah contradict each other over the destiny of Jerusalem; but in Micah 'Jerusalem' stands for the leadership of an oppressive state, in Isaiah it stands for the presence of Yahweh in judgment as well as in grace /29/.

In the study of the NT, Bultmann himself suggests instances of merely

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- /24/ Zimmerli, Tradition and Theology 69; cf Smend's study of Amos's 'no' to Israel's understanding of history (EY 23:409-13). See also ch 2, n 102 below.
- /25/ The question of the origin of the idea of the Day of Yahweh remains controverted; cf Zimmerli 75.
- /26/ Laurin, Tradition and Theology 269.
- /27/ Zimmerli 76.
- /28/ Cf Schmidt, Zukunftsgewissheit und Gegenwartskritik 79-80, with Gese's response, Textgemäss 33-8.
- /29/ So Hermisson, KD 27:98.



formal contradiction: for example, Paul says that the earthly Jesus was emptied of his glory, while John declares that glory shines out from the earthly Jesus. Both would agree that there was no 'heavenly luminosity' about the earthly Jesus, but that the cross does reveal a paradoxical glory visible to the eyes of faith /30/. More generally, if we are given the impression both that human life is determined by cosmic forces and that we are challenged to decision, then the former is a metaphorical equivalent of the latter /31/. A comparable approach might be taken to the differences between ways of conceiving the End in the OT. All are metaphorical projections (whether or not they require demythologizing in order to interpret them existentially), and the divergence between them may be formal rather than substantial. Widely divergent conceptualizations can reflect the same pre-conceptual vision of reality /32/.

OT attitudes to nations other than Israel also vary in ways which are in part formally rather than substantially contradictory. A number of OT passages envisage the nations as sharing with Israel in the worship of Yahweh and in the blessing of Yahweh. Isa 2:2-4 (= Mic 4:1-3) pictures the nations converging on Jerusalem to receive Yahweh's teaching and his judgment which go forth from there; Isa 19:18-25 portrays Egypt (and Assyria) praying for deliverance and healing from

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/30/ Glauben und Verstehen 1:263-4 (ET Faith and Understanding 281).

/31/ Kerygma und Mythos 23 (ET 11-12).

/32/ So Griffin, Theology Today 28:281-3. As Voegelin puts it, diversity of symbolization disguises 'equivalences of experience' (Eternità e storia 215-34).

Yahweh and receiving his blessing through Israel; Psa 117 exhorts all nations to praise Yahweh. But elsewhere (e.g. Joel 4; Nahum) the nations' destiny is only punishment.

The difference between these two descriptions of the nations' destiny is in part formal rather than substantial, firstly in that both descriptions are essentially Israel-centred. It is for Israel's sake, as a measure of his blessing of her, that Yahweh will make her an indispensable means of blessing to the world. The function of such a statement as a reassurance of Yahweh's attitude to her is similar to the function of an assertion that the nations who have oppressed her will be judged. Secondly, insofar as such prophecies declare Yahweh's actual purpose for the nations, they implicitly place two possible destinies before them as comparable passages place two possible destinies before the people of God themselves. Either they respond to Yahweh and receive his healing and blessing, or they resist him and expose themselves to his punishment. The function of the two types of passage is to open up alternative scenarios rather than to offer contradictory predictions.

A formal contradiction, then, is one which is more a matter of words than of substance. Beneath the words at the level of substance are statements which are complementary or at least reconcilable.

- 1.4.2 (b) Contextual contradiction denotes a difference reflecting the variety in circumstances which different statements address; if the two speakers were confronting similar circumstances, one might find them speaking in similar terms. Isaiah urges Judah to trust in God's



commitment to Jerusalem and to David, in the assurance that he will not leave them; Jeremiah denies that Judah can trust in such a commitment and warns that God will leave them. But the two prophets address different audiences (a people who are over-fearful and a people who are over-confident). Hananiah may be seen as proclaiming the same message as Isaiah, but he is a false prophet because that message is inappropriate to his particular audience. It is at least possible that, addressing Jeremiah's age, Isaiah might speak like Jeremiah rather than like Hananiah.

Similarly Ezek 33 denies, but Isa 51 affirms, the possibility of taking God's dealings with Abraham as a paradigm for the way he may be expected to deal with his people in the exile. Ezekiel addresses people at the beginning of the exile, when they have not yet learned how searching must be God's chastisement of his people, while Isaiah 40 - 55 addresses people near the end of the exile, who have become demoralized by their experience of it /33/. Again, the pre-exilic prophets indict Israel for her preoccupation with worship at the expense of morals, and imply that the temple means nothing, while post-exilic prophets and the Chronicler emphasize worship as much as morals, and imply that the temple means everything. The former confront misapprehensions of one day and the latter misapprehensions of another. Similarly, the Chronicler's 'corrections' of Samuel-Kings (e.g. 1 Chr 21:1) in part reflect the fact that a different religious context from the one in which Samuel-Kings was written may demand the clarifying or safeguarding of different theological points (e.g. the

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/33/ See Sanders, Canon and Authority 29-41.

emphasis on God's fairness which especially characterizes Chronicles). Different national and personal contexts may require different explanations of the problem of suffering: some experiences may be the direct result of wrongdoing (Ezek 18), some may result from wrongdoing which goes back to earlier generations (Kings), some may reflect a presence of evil in the world that goes back to man's earliest days (Gen 2 - 3), some may be a means of dealing with evil and restoring right relationships (Isa 40 - 55), some are not explicable in moral terms at all (Job, Ecclesiastes, many laments in the Psalter).

1 Kings 19 may be taken as an instance of contextual contradiction. J Gray sees the theophany here as implying an abandonment of eschatological hopes of supernatural judgment, once fostered in the cult, and an outgrowing of belief in a revelation of God in phenomena such as storm, earthquake, and fire (expressed in Judg 5; Psa 18; 68; Hab 3). These are replaced by human political initiatives arising out of revelation in the form of intelligible communication, 'an advance in man's conception of God as personally accessible and intelligible to man within the framework of human experience, anticipating the prophetic conception of the expression of the divine will in contemporary history and the divine revelation in Jesus Christ' /34/. The developmental understanding embodied here is questionable. The story's view of God, as Gray describes it, is as old as any material in the OT, and the eschatological hope of supernatural judgment, with the attendant picture of storm, earthquake, and fire, continues to appear

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/34/ Gray, Kings 365, <sup>2</sup> 410-1; cf Fohrer, Theologische Grundstrukturen 36-7, referring to Eichrodt, Theologie 2:4 (ET 2:20-1).



through subsequent OT material and in the NT. Further, it is dubious whether this story is to be seen as denying that God once appeared at Horeb to such accompaniment; the main thrust of Elijah's concern is that people are not affirming the commitment made there /35/. If the story is concerned to deny anything, it may be a denial that Yahweh is like Baal /36/, or a denial that this particular moment is one when God is acting in judgment by means of tempest, earthquake, and fire /37/; but it does not thereby deny that he can be so portrayed, or that he so acts, in other contexts.

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/35/ Note the parallel references to the covenant and to destroying altars, and the correspondences between Yahweh's appearance to Moses and to Elijah, which emerge from a comparison of 1 Kings 18 - 19 with Exod 19 - 24; 32 - 34; Deut 4 - 5. See further Carlson, VT 19:416-39. Lust (VT 25:110-5) thinks that the קול דממה דקה is itself 'a roaring thundering voice' like the one at Sinai. This view removes any suggestion of contradiction from the passage.

/36/ So Cross (Canaanite Myth 190-4) and Macholz (Werden und Wirken des AT 325-33).

/37/ Perhaps these phenomena are to be understood as a means of judgment, rather than as accompaniments of revelation; they are directly analogous less to the phenomena of Horeb or those of Psa 29 (Macholz) than to the tempest, earthquake, and fire of judgment (cf Isa 29:6). קול דממה דקה is then the sound of gentle stillness (RV mg) which replaces catastrophe and turmoil (cf Psa 107:29) rather than a revelation in a still small voice. Cf Coote, Traditions in Transformation 115-20, for the view that the event reveals that Yahweh is not coming in judgment.

1.4.3 (c) Substantial contradiction involves a true divergence in viewpoint on the part of speakers whose disagreement is not merely verbal nor merely contextual. It arises rather out of differences in their own background, overall perspective, or personality which cause them to see a situation differently or to perceive different aspects of it or to assess it differently and thus to respond to it in different ways. They have divergent views on what Yahweh is concerned about at a particular point and thus on what his word is. B Vawter suggests that Jeremiah and Ezra, for instance, have quite divergent religious attitudes; they would have been 'completely at loggerheads over the first principles of man's relation to God' /38/. Their differences cannot be explained on a mere contextual basis.

In some instances, speakers were contemporary and may have been consciously confronting each other. Particularly marked tensions appear in post-exilic OT material /39/. A major feature of the period

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/38/ Biblical Inspiration 2, 3.

/39/ These have been analysed by Plöger, Theokratie und Eschatologie (ET Theocracy and Eschatology); Steck, Israel, also his articles in EyT 28: 445-58 and in Tradition and Theology; Hanson, Dawn of Apocalyptic. In Post-exilic Theological Streams, a critique of such analyses, Hall warns against too sharp a dividing of these 'streams', which are capable of intertwining and mingling; cf Peterson, Late Israelite Prophecy, and Williamson, Israel in the Books of Chronicles. Indeed, Steck (EyT 28:453) begins his contrast over against the Chronicler's position with the penitential prayers in the Chronic work itself. Brueggemann (JBL 98:180) sees Steck's analysis as too diffuse, though



is the fact that the experience of the Jewish community fell considerably short of that described and implicitly promised in earlier narratives of Israel's history /40/, and of that explicitly promised by Israel's prophets. Many post-exilic documents embody responses to that situation. The differences between them may be portrayed by characterizing the nature of the beliefs and message of Chronicles and contrasting the emphases of other post-exilic writings with these. Chronicles suggests the response, 'You have returned and rebuilt the temple as the prophets said you would, you do enjoy the privilege of knowing Yahweh as his people and of worshipping Yahweh in his temple as David arranged, you can experience his blessing as you respond to him with simple trust and obedience in the concrete present in which you have to live; so do not undervalue what Yahweh gives to you and what it means to have him among you'. But each of these statements was a controversial one, contradicted by other strands of post-exilic material.

First, post-exilic prophecy (e.g. Isa 56 - 66) is inclined to respond to this situation by pointing to what Yahweh is going to do rather than to what he has done. 'Yes, it is true that Yahweh's promises have not

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when he traces these streams into the pre-exilic period Brueggemann has to acknowledge the diffuseness of the picture there (see 173-4).

Kellermann (Nehemia) and Ackroyd (e.g. TD 27:323-46) show the diversity even within a work such as Ezra-Nehemiah.

/40/ For the essential, though implicit, forward-looking orientation of OT narrative, see Barr, Explorations in Theology 7:60, 126-7; cf section 6.5.7 and n 111 below.

been fulfilled, but one day they will be - even more spectacularly than earlier prophets said. So keep your eyes watching keenly for that future day when Yahweh acts'. Two quite divergent contemporary viewpoints are expressed in Chronicles and Isa 56 - 66 /41/.

Secondly, the questioning of Job and Ecclesiastes may plausibly (though more inferentially) be seen as a protest at another aspect of the thinking represented by the Chronicler, his emphasis on the manifest fairness of Yahweh's dealings with each king and each generation, which he pictures at work in Israel's history much more systematically than do the books of Kings with which this 'Deuteronomic' principle of 'retribution' is often especially associated /42/. Job and Ecclesiastes fundamentally dispute the claim that Yahweh's fairness can be perceived at work in human life, whether in the experience of the individual (Job) or in the events of history (Ecclesiastes).

A third central feature of the Chronicler's theology mentioned above, his stress on the privilege of worshipping Yahweh in the company of Yahweh's people in the temple, may be implicitly contested by the spirituality of Psa 1, 19 and 119, which places paramount stress on

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/41/ But Peterson (ch 3), taking up Welch's investigations in The Work of the Chronicler 42-54, notes that prophecy is an important feature in Chronicles.

/42/ On this protest in wisdom's 'literature of dissent', see Crenshaw, Tradition and Theology 249-58. More directly, of course, Job and Ecclesiastes are disputing the general tone of Proverbs: see further ch 7 below.



the individual's response to God expressed in his keeping the law /43/. Such an attitude may be more characteristic of Diaspora Judaism, for which Jerusalem could not be an everyday physical focus of spiritual life as it could be in Judaea. For the writer and readers of Esther, too, Diaspora Judaism, not Jerusalem Judaism, is the locus of God's activity. Esther also emphasizes the significance of human initiatives and decision-making in a way that Chronicles with its stress on a passive trust in Yahweh does not /44/.

A fourth feature of the Chronicler's work is his emphasis on Israel and his concern with the definition of the community. Even if Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah take different attitudes to Judaeans who had not gone into exile or to the inhabitants of Samaria /45/, both assume that 'Israel', however defined, must maintain a distinctive identity over against other peoples; it is doubtful if the author of Chronicles would be any more sympathetic to intermarriage than Ezra and Nehemiah were. There is thus a contrast between the attitudes of Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah and those of Ruth, Jonah, and Isa 19:18-25, which are commonly

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/43/ Cf Mantel, HUCA 44:55-87; also Noth's discussion of the absolutizing of the Law (Gesetze 112-36 [ET Laws 85-103]); see further section 2.5.1 below.

/44/ Cf Berg, The Divine Helmsman 107-27. See further section 2.5.2 below.

/45/ So Williamson, Israel; cf R L Braun, VTSup 30:52-64. Braun's understanding of the origin of Ezra-Nehemiah as a continuation of Chronicles within the same tradition but with some differences in views now seems to me the right one.

connected with this period. Here an ancestor of David marries a Moabite, an Israelite prophet is rebuked for resenting God's forgiving the Ninevites, and another prophet promises that Egypt will enjoy deliverance and (with Assyria) blessing like Israel's.

There are direct contradictions between these various viewpoints. Historically those who held them do sometimes seem to have been opposed to each other. On the other hand, for all the differences between them, all arise from faith in the one Yahweh; in this sense they are 'on the same side' /46/. This distinguishes such contrasts from a fourth form of contradiction.

- 1.4.4 (d) Fundamental contradiction denotes a disagreement which is a matter of substance and which indicates a basic disharmony at the level of 'ethical stance' or 'religious outlook' /47/. The ultimate form of this disharmony related by the OT is the conflict reported in Elijah's day, for instance, over whether Baal is God or Yahweh is God. In Jeremiah's day it is the question of allegiance to Yahweh or to the Queen of Heaven. In analysing the theological tensions of the post-exilic period, referred to in section 1.4.3, Morton Smith sees the fundamental conflict which has 'shaped the Old Testament' as that

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/46/ Barrett's comment on the NT writers (Horizons in Biblical Theology 3:4); Barrett goes on, 'even though, like the armies in King John, in attacking the same city from opposite points they sometimes succeed in shooting each other'.

/47/ Lonergan 235.



between the 'Yahweh-alone party' and the 'syncretistic cult of Yahweh' /48/.

Even some conflicts within 'mono-Yahwism' may be seen as instances of fundamental contradiction. Jeremiah might have seen his conflict with Hananiah in these terms, for the two prophets ultimately differ quite radically over the meaning of the name Yahweh and over the actual content of Yahwism. G Fohrer implies that the approaches to life of the wisdom material, the cultic material, the classical prophetic material, and other strands in the OT are so distinctive and mutually exclusive that they deserve to be seen as basic disagreements of this kind /49/. That possible view raises most sharply the question whether or how far one may expect to find a theological coherence in the OT.

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/48/ Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the OT e.g. 81, 82. Smith's work is also discussed by Hall (see n 39 above).

/49/ Theologische Grundstrukturen 51-94; cf Vawter's remarks on Jeremiah and Ezra quoted at n 38 above. Clavier sees these divergent outlooks as merely different 'currents' (the more traditional term 'means of revelation' has similar meaning) carrying similar content (see Les variétés de la pensée biblique); but this understates the difference.

1.5 Is it appropriate to look for theological coherence in the OT?

Given the fact that the OT documents are of such diverse viewpoints, for the reasons we have outlined, it may seem questionable whether we should look for any form of theological unity in them. It has been objected that this quest mistakenly posits some metahistorical entity standing behind the various historical expressions of OT faith, risks betraying the historical significance and distinctiveness of witnesses who were sometimes opposing each other, ignores the OT's own reticence over any quest for a systematic view, takes no account of the primitive mind's tolerance of what the western analytic mind calls contradiction, and disregards the deliberate concern of those who collected the scriptures with accepting representatives of divergent views /50/.

Objections to this quest are thus both theological and historical; equally the possibility, the likelihood, and even the inevitability that some form of theological unity can be expected of the OT can be argued on both theological and historical grounds.

P D Hanson suggests that it is dishonest to attempt to account for contradictory perspectives within a document in theological terms if the document itself does not point to a theological explanation for the contradiction /51/. Perhaps it is correct that such an

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/50/ Cf Otto, Kairos 19:60; Smend, EvT 23:423; Gottwald, Contemporary OT Theologians 52-3; Koester, Trajectories 115; von Rad, Theologie 1:121-2 (ET 1:116); TLZ 88:415-6 (ET Theologie 2:427).

/51/ Canon and Authority 118.



activity is extrinsic to the exegesis of the actual document (though no more so than the attempt to uncover the factual historical events referred to by a narrative and to investigate similar questions which have been the classic concerns of exegetes). This does not make the task illegitimate, however, except on the assumption that historical exegesis of individual documents is the sole valid interpretative activity. An alternative assumption is that while this is one valid enterprise, another possible one takes account of the fact that these documents became part of the scriptures of particular religious communities. τὰ βιβλία became τὸ βιβλίον /52/. To look for theological explanations for contradictions in such documents seems, on theological grounds, a possible task. It is important to acknowledge that we are engaged in a quest which may not have concerned the individual OT writers; but it is also important to acknowledge that this may be a valid quest from other perspectives /53/. Indeed, the theological perspective which sees the various OT writings as part of that defined collection of scriptures which express the self-understanding which the Israelite tradition developed over a long period and portray the character of the one Yahweh /54/ compels the expectation that the OT scriptures as a whole can be brought into some coherence. Even if it rejects the traditional view that God was the real author of scripture and that its historical features were incidental to its true nature, a community which believes that in some

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/52/ Clavier xi-xii.

/53/ Cf Spriggs, Two OT Theologies 90-1; also Wood, Formation of Christian Understanding 19-22, 67-75.

/54/ Cf Zimmerli, EyT 35:99-100; Grundriss 9-10 (ET Theology 13-14).

sense it receives the scriptures from God and not merely from men will find it quite natural to look for such a coherence. It will then be only by presupposing that such a coherence exists that we shall be able to discover what that coherence is (or to confirm whether or not it exists)/55/.

The expectation that the OT will be theologically coherent has historical as well as theological grounds. First, the suggestion that historical priorities even rule out the possibility of looking for such theological coherence should surely be rejected. A historical approach to interpretation indeed presupposes that we seek to understand documents in terms of their meaning in their historical context as exercises in communication between an author and his readers. But this approach does not <sup>6</sup>exclude the possibility that the diversity of views in a particular collection of documents (such as 'the Old Testament') can be embraced within some larger coherence, whether or not the conviction that they do so cohere had its origin in historical considerations.

Indeed, this is more than merely a possibility, even on historical grounds. It is a reasonable working assumption that a religious community will believe that documents which it accepts as its scriptures mutually cohere. Certainly this assumption is appropriate to the Jewish community in the period during which the Hebrew canon was coming into its final form. Jewish exegesis of the period between 200 BC and AD 200 is particularly interested in the coherence of the

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/55/ Cf C A Baxter's comment on Barth, Movement from Exegesis to Dogmatics in Barth 221.



biblical text, whose apparent inconsistencies it works hard to resolve: 'the first and foremost of all exegetical imperatives was harmonisation and reconciliation' /56/. If the formal reason for the forming of a collection of Hebrew scriptures was to make them available as a resource for worship and teaching /57/, it was natural that such activity followed.

It is not by accident or oversight that a collection of scriptures made by people of this period embraces diverse or conflicting material. Such people are aware of a need to unify divergent material that they cannot disregard /58/. So 'through canonization various separate strands of tradition, which were originally self-sufficient and were not orientated towards mutual supplementation, were accommodated to one another', to the huge enrichment of the tradition /59/. And while it is true that 'no one redacted the Bible as a whole' /60/, so that no one author's work can be the focus of an attempt to interpret the Bible as one document, the process of collecting and defining the scriptures is nevertheless one with implications for the interpretation of the resultant collection as a unified whole. Indeed, the midrashic

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/56/ Vermes, Cambridge History of the Bible 1:209.

/57/ Cf Barr's definition of 'canon', JTS 25:274, though I have here avoided the word canon both because it is a 'hurrah' word for some and a 'boo' word for others, and because it is difficult to define the distinctive connotations that cause it to provoke these reactions.

/58/ Cf Vawter, Inspiration 6.

/59/ Ebeling, Studium der Theologie 15 (ET Study of Theology 15).

/60/ Barr 274.

instinct features within the individual books that eventually came to be regarded as scriptures. It appears at a late stage in the process of re-editing, re-reading, and supplementing whereby earlier works are accepted but also modified so as to speak to different situations and so as to solve problems felt by later readers. A unifying concern also underlies the earlier, broader development of the OT tradition, which worked in such a way as to portray the one God of the one community, and only allowed that tradition to embrace works in which he could be recognized /61/.

It is historically certain, then, that the Jewish community believed that its scriptures were theologically coherent and that the divergent material they included was capable of coalescing into a form of unity, and the first Christians naturally shared such a belief /62/.

Further, although the conviction that the OT documents belong together did not arise from historical considerations, it is in part capable of being tested historically. It need not be (and ought not to be) in conflict with historical considerations. The exegetical methods by which Jews and Christians two millennia ago sought to vindicate this conviction do not find acceptance in the world of twentieth century scholarship. Our attempt to see 'how diverse viewpoints within the Old Testament may be acknowledged, interrelated, and allowed to function theologically' is in part, then, an exercise in discovering whether

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/61/ So Patrick, Rendering of God 56.

/62/ See e.g. Dahl, STK 45:22-36 (ET Studies in Paul 159-77); Laurin, Tradition and Theology 271 (with disapproval).



this conviction can be vindicated by the methods now used by scholarship. But more broadly, it is concerned to see how we can speak of theological unity in such a way as to release rather than to lose the value of the OT's diversity, in the context of Christian theology and biblical interpretation.

In the investigation which follows, we shall examine three chief approaches to the diversity of viewpoint in the OT, each of which may offer some insight on how OT texts in their diversity can function theologically in the church and in the world.

A contextual or historical approach2 Can we explain diverse theologies by their contexts?2.1 Diversity within the boundaries of membership of one 'family'

One approach to theological diversity in the OT is simply to acknowledge the variety of viewpoints and to accept all of them as potentially instructive. The OT writings may then be likened to a collection of paintings of a landscape, portrayed from various angles during different seasons and in various periods; some in the manner of van Gogh, some in that of Cezanne, some in that of Picasso; some portraying a whole vista, others concentrating on a stream here or a ruin there. Our response to such a collection is not to try to unify them in some way, but to enjoy each of them individually. In turn, it is precisely the range of insights incorporated within the OT which opens up the possibility that among them I may find some insight that relates to the situation I find myself in. S Mowinckel speaks of 'God's word - concrete and relevant' /1/; its concreteness, far from threatening its relevance, enables it to be relevant.

In what sense, then, do these viewpoints cohere? To refuse to harmonize conflicting viewpoints by reducing their individual distinctiveness is not to deny the existence of any form of unity in their theological perspective /2/. That unity can be envisaged in formal or in material

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/1/ OT as Word of God 119.

/2/ Barth, for whom the unity of scripture is of great importance, himself warns against a failure to do justice to historical particularity (Dogmatik I, 1:187-8 (ET 179-81)).



terms.

Formally, all these writings belong to one history; they are the deposit of the historical experience of Israel in her pre-Christian period. Together they are thus also the deposit of one unified religious tradition /3/, whose development is one aspect of that history. Further, and more specifically again, they all belong to the form of that tradition which came to have the status of a canon of normative writings in Judaism. While the OT is not 'a consciously formulated propositional confession', neither is it merely a collection of 'disiecta membra'; it is 'a corpus, or, if you prefer, a collection of corpora, which both issued from and moulded the life of a religious community', embodying that community's many-coloured confession of faith, and manifesting not the structured unity of a carefully articulated statement, but 'the organic unity which is given to it by a worshipping community' /4/.

Certain books within this canon themselves model the formal unifying of highly diverse viewpoints within one document. Job, for instance, offers a range of responses to the questions about the nature of the relationship between God and man which are raised by the fact of human suffering: the beliefs expressed by the prologue, by each of the three

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/3/ Gese's emphasis: e.g. Tradition and Theology 307-17; ZTK 67:424-6; Zur biblischen Theologie 9-30 (ET Essays 9-33).

/4/ G W Anderson, SJT 16:280, 284. Anderson is here referring both to the Psalter and to the OT as a whole which he believes the Psalter exemplifies (see the next paragraph).

friends, by Job himself at different points, by the wisdom poem, by Elihu, by the Yahweh speeches, and by the epilogue, all contribute insights on these questions /5/. In Proverbs, 'individual fragments of knowledge are listed one after the other, and contradictory experiences are not reconciled, but consciously opposed to one another, in order to attain a comprehension of reality as full and extensive as possible' /6/; the juxtaposed antinomies of Prov 17:27-8; 26:4-5 illustrate particularly vividly the book's willingness to hold together diverse facets of experience /7/. Ecclesiastes, too, though working out the balance of various types of saying very differently, embraces material of different viewpoints, while OT apocalyptic (specifically Daniel) holds together law, prophecy, and wisdom with their different dynamics /8/. The Pentateuch combines material of highly diverse viewpoint into a formal narrative unity /9/; thus the story of the crossing of the Red Sea in Exod 13 - 14 and the story of the spies in Num 13 - 14 allow at least two different understandings of the relationship of

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- /5/ Jacob (Grundfragen alttestamentlicher Theologie 23-4) sees Job as the OT's deepest statement on the nature of God, made in the course of insisting on the complexity of his one person (over against the limits set by systems and dogmas).
- /6/ Lohfink, Siegeslied 199 (ET Christian Meaning of the OT 138-9).
- /7/ Cf von Rad's comments, Weisheit 395-6 (ET Wisdom 311).
- /8/ See Beauchamp, L'un et l'autre Testament 200-28.
- /9/ Cf Clavier, Les variétés de la pensée biblique 2; also von Rad's observations on the interweaving of J, E, and P (Genesis 19-20 [ET 27, revised ed 28]).



divine and human acts and of how Yahweh can be both judging and merciful to interweave in the final form of the narrative /10/. The book of Isaiah holds together materials which both confront and reassure the people of God; they both challenge its readers to responsible action themselves, envisage God's action in their own experience, and promise God's action at the last great Day; they both look forward to new growth from the tree of Jesse and see Cyrus as Yahweh's anointed. The Psalter embraces a wide variety of responses to God, of adoration, wonder, gratitude, commitment, testimony, trust, repentance, grief, doubt, complaint, anger, perplexity, resentment, longing. It rejoices in (or misses) his activity in nature and in history, in the story of Israel and in the experience of the individual. It acknowledges Yahweh in all the multiplex aspects of his character. Thus in its 'comprehensive variety' it 'supplies the data for an epitome of Old Testament theology' /11/, so that H-J Kraus can describe his Theologie der Psalmen as 'a kind of OT theology in nuce' /12/. Each of these OT books thus models a formal unifying of diverse

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/10/ See Schmitt, Textgemäss 139-55; Sakenfeld, CBQ 37:317-30. See further section 6.5.4 below.

/11/ H W Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation 269; cf Anderson 277-85, also Kapelrud, Tradition and Theology 113-23.

/12/ ET from p 5; he notes that Luther in his 'Preface to the Psalter' suggests that the Psalter 'might well be called a little Bible', comprehending as it does everything in the entire Bible (WA, DB 10, 1: 99 [ET Luther's Works 35:254]). Kraus himself later (p 11) calls the theology of the Psalms a biblical theology in nuce.

perspectives /13/.

Scholars who urge that OT theology must take seriously the contextual variety of theological viewpoints expressed in the OT do not assume that they constitute merely a formal unity. They believe that these viewpoints also have a degree of material unity about them. First, they not only derive from and belong to one people: they concern one people. What it means to be the people of God varies over the centuries (see section 1.2.1). But a concern with Israel as the people of God runs through the OT /14/. Secondly, since the OT's concern is Israel as the people of God, a further unifying strand in its thinking is the person of that God himself. He is the keystone that holds the OT's diverse materials into one building /15/. He may change his mind

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- /13/ In The Varieties of NT Religion 285-96, E F Scott suggests that later NT books such as Matthew, Acts and John seek a more comprehensive perspective than earlier books or traditions which strongly asserted one view: e.g. Matthew both affirms and denies the significance of the Law, maintaining both views but not indicating how they may be related. Cf J M Robinson's comments on 'early catholicism' in the NT, JES 3:46-51.
- /14/ Cf von Rad, Theologie 1:123-4 (ET 1:118); see ch 3 below.
- /15/ See Jacob, Grundfragen 41; cf Schmidt, Erste Gebot 7-11; McKenzie, Theology 26; Zimmerli, EyT 35:102-17 (illustrating how this includes the wisdom literature) and TLZ 98:81-5; Kraus, Biblische Theologie 384; Laurin, Tradition and Theology 266-7; Ebeling, Studium der Theologie 38 (ET Study of Theology 36); Patrick, Rendering of God 56-60 (emphasizing the coherence of the OT's portrayal of God).



or change his name or change his way of acting in relation to Israel and to the nations, but the OT assumes that he remains the one Yahweh. The fathers were addressed in many differing ways, but by the same God (cf Heb 1:1). Thirdly, as Israel's history provides a fundamental aspect to the OT's formal unity, so her history constitutes one aspect to its material unity. The OT comprises not a collection of mutually contemporary descriptions of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, but the story of a people living in history and changing with history. This history can be seen as the story of a struggle with some basic issue or question, to which a variety of approaches is possible: the nature of God's purpose /16/, or the establishing of 'order' and meaning /17/, or the tension between unpredictable divine initiative (symbolized by Abraham) and regular historical institution (symbolized by Moses) /18/, or an experience such as God ever turning to man to speak what needed to be said in different situations /19/. But throughout it is one story, 'a single drama of divine and human action' which embraces the diversity of different times, personalities and viewpoints as the plot develops, but locates all within the outworking of one purpose /20/. Even the development of forms of faith that rather turn their backs on history as the locus of God's activity with

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/16/ So von Rad, e.g. Theologie 2:371-2 (ET 2:357-8).

/17/ Voegelin, Order in History 1: Israel and Revelation ix.

/18/ So Leenhardt, La parole et le buisson de feu (ET Two Biblical Faiths).

/19/ Cf Wagner, TLZ 103:794-5.

/20/ H R Niebuhr, Meaning of Revelation 135-6; cf B W Anderson, Theology Today 28:326-7; Laurin 267.

Israel is part of that history /21/.

The World Council of Churches Study on Biblical Hermeneutics /22/ speaks of an acceptance of the manifold richness of the Bible and a satisfaction with identifying 'family resemblances' among its varied witnesses. The notion of family resemblances was developed by L Wittgenstein /23/ in the course of seeking to define a 'language-game', to penetrate the essence of language. He compares the proceedings we call games: nothing is common to all games, yet games manifest a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing, which are like the various resemblances within a family, such as build, features, colour of eyes, and temperament. Thus 'games' form a family. The varied messages of the OT might also be seen as sharing a family resemblance. None may manifest all aspects of the family profile, but all share common features visible when they are compared with each other or with those who are outside the family. All may therefore be treated as members of the OT family, and all should be taken seriously.

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/21/ Cf Barr, RTP III, 18:210-2.

/22/ New England Group Report 14; cf Bright, Authority of the OT 124.

/23/ Philosophical Investigations paragraphs 65-7.



2.2 Diversity of viewpoint and diversity of context

If these viewpoints are so diverse, however, it will be easy for some to be ignored or dismissed. How can they be explained and acknowledged? One response to this question is to emphasize that the OT material is related to different historical contexts and needs to be viewed in the light of this variety of contexts. Isaiah and Jeremiah or Ezekiel and the second Isaiah can speak opposite messages because they address very different situations (see section 1.4.2 above). The differences between such writers are not to be toned down; they arise from the directness with which each is responding to a particular context, and their oneness lies in the way they are doing this in Yahweh's name, not in a unity at the level of the content of their messages /24/.

L. R Bailey offers a contextual explanation of different biblical perspectives on death: 'It is precarious to speak of the biblical response to death. Rather, there is a variety of responses, depending upon the time and circumstances.... Since all of the responses are (at least to some extent) historically conditioned, and since all of them have been preserved (canonized) by communal decisions, any one of them need not automatically be considered superior to the others. Since more than one stance was "normative" for its time and proved to be an effective coping mechanism, all of them may have a contribution to make to the attitudes of members of the believing communities (synagogue and church) in the present. Rather than a priori hierarchical values (such as early is authentic; latest is fullest revelation; the NT alone is

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/24/ Cf Diem, Dogmatik 204-8 (ET Dogmatics 234-8).

binding on the church; Jesus' perspective is ultimate), it may be that the communities' situation in the present will ultimately determine which biblical response is the most meaningful, after dialogue with the entirety of the canon' /25/.

The diversity of OT attitudes to suffering /26/ may also be understood as reflecting the possibility that God is involved in suffering in different ways in different contexts. Sometimes he is punishing sin, sometimes fulfilling some purpose of edification, sometimes acting (apparently) arbitrarily, sometimes taking people through an unpleasant experience which has a positive purpose for others, sometimes caring for people whose suffering comes through some other agency, sometimes promising future relief from suffering which comes through some other agency. Corresponding to this range of contextual possibilities is a range of possible human attitudes to God in the contexts of suffering: repentance, submission, trust or uncertainty, anger or protest, acceptance, relief, hope.

Contextual differences also underlie instances of diversity that amount more to difference than to contradiction. If the story of Abraham issues a challenge both to a realization of Yahweh's interest in other nations (J), to fear of God (E), and to confidence in his irrevocable commitment to his people (P), this perhaps reflects the circumstances

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/25/ Biblical Perspectives on Death 97.

/26/ See recently Gerstenberger and Schrage, Suffering; Simundson, Faith under Fire.



of the united monarchy, the northern kingdom, and the exile /27/.

Differences between the ethical stances implied by different parts of the OT may also be explained contextually, for the Israelite attitude to life is concrete and temporal, not timeless and theoretical; it is a matter of specific response to God in a particular situation /28/. OT commands are not so much universal absolutes, designed to be applicable in any circumstances, as specific enactments made in particular historical, social, and cultural situations, and designed to function in those particular situations /29/.

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/27/ Cf Brueggemann and Wolff, Vitality of OT Traditions.

/28/ Cf Hempel, Ethos des AT 89-90.

/29/ Cf Barth, Dogmatik III, 4:11-12 (ET 12); cf II, 2:751-2 (ET 673-4) with reference to many of the commands in Exodus.

### 2.3 The usefulness and limitations of this contextual approach

2.3.1 Simple acceptance of the diverse viewpoints expressed in the OT has several considerations in its favour. First, it can take seriously the breadth of the OT canon. Theology can easily be selective in its approach to the sources which in theory it acknowledges as normative. By its variety, the Psalter, for instance, sets before the OT theologian an example which can help safeguard him against selectivity by not allowing him to forget the perplexingly comprehensive and divergent subject matter which must be incorporated in an OT theology /30/. Secondly, it can take the actual text of the OT seriously, allowing passages and books to speak for themselves, rather than to be assimilated to the perspective of other books or replaced by an alleged underlying theology. It can thus avoid exaggerating either their intrinsic disharmony or their intrinsic harmony. On one side, it recognizes that the difference between the message of Isaiah ('Relax; Yahweh is with you; he is not going to let the city fall') and that of Jeremiah ('Wake up; Yahweh has abandoned you; he is going to let the city be destroyed') does not necessarily imply that the two prophets are contradicting each other; they spoke to different contexts. On the other side, it recognizes that there are real differences between such attitudes as the confident generalizations of Proverbs and the sceptical empiricism of Ecclesiastes, and does not read the latter as if it were the former in disguise.

The insight that the varying messages in scripture address varying

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/30/ So G W Anderson, SJT 16:283, 284.



situations is also of significance for the task of seeking to identify what aspects of scripture especially confront us today. On one hand, where the questions raised in some OT contexts are similar to those raised in our context, we can learn directly from the message addressed to that context. The believing community seeking inspiration for its worship, or unsure of the security of the world, or uncertain of the power of its God when its own fortunes seem to be at a low ebb, or finding it difficult to trust in his goodness, can learn directly from the way the creation theme is brought into relationship to these questions /31/. Thus we give formal recognition to all the scriptural material, yet we find that certain elements within it especially grasp us, because the message addressed to their context is also that which especially speaks in the context in which we live /32/. On the other hand, the path the 'creation trajectory' takes as it reacts to OT questions may also enable us to extrapolate the path it might be expected to take in relationship to questions which are not raised in the OT, such as ecology, world development and world food needs, and the search for meaning in life. Thus the contextual nature of the OT also functions as a model for our attempt to see what new thing God may have to say in contexts that were unknown in ancient Israel.

2.3.2 An acceptance of the diverse viewpoints expressed in the OT thus makes a good starting-point for an attempt to allow the OT to function theologically. Yet it is only a starting-point for this task. First, the OT material often has more the character of raw material for a

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/31/ See section 1.2.3 above.

/32/ Cf Laurin's comments, Tradition and Theology 272.

portrayal of some aspect of belief (e.g. God's nature) than that of the coherent and finished portrayal itself. Simply accepting the OT's statements about God falls short of the properly theological task of analysing these statements reflectively and building with them.

Without this, even if the themes of God, his people, and the story of the relationship between them hold together so much of the OT, what these themes mean varies so extensively that the unity they give to the OT remains rather formal /33/. H Gese argues that acknowledgment of the variety of OT theologies is saved from relativism by recognition that all these theologies belong to one tradition-process; but it is not clear why this fact saves us from relativism /34/.

Recent study of the land as an OT theme illustrates this point. W Brueggemann /35/, notably, studies this theme diachronically as it appears in various periods in biblical times. But this means that he does not consider the theological questions which the material as a

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/33/ Cf. Clavier 319-23; Zimmerli's treatment of the presence of God or of forms of leadership such as kingship illustrate this point (see Grundriss 58-93 [ET Theology 70-108]). Schlier (Be-sinnung auf das NT 20 [ET Relevance of the NT 20]) makes a parallel observation regarding the thesis that the unity of the various NT witnesses lies in the Christ they refer to.

/34/ ZTK 67:425-6.

/35/ The Land. See also Diepold, Israels Land; Eckert (ed), Judaisches Volk = gelobtes Land (especially Rendtorff, 153-68); H-R Weber, Promise of the Land (Study Encounter 7:4); von Waldow, A Light unto my Path 493-508.



whole raises, such as 'Is ownership of real property necessary for either individual or group fulfilment? Is the life of the fellah intrinsically better than that of the bedouin (many romantics have thought quite the contrary)? What basic principles governed land-ownership in ancient Israel? Do these have any relevance to the possession of land by the nation (surely they do)? By what moral standard can one justify the divine gift of land once occupied by the Canaanites to people who were historically not even their enemies? Why did the historical greatness of Israel emerge only in the age when she was becoming detached from the land?' /36/.

Questions such as these also point us to a further aspect of the stress on context as a key to seeing how scripture applies today. This stress means putting considerable weight on a historical understanding of both scriptural text and modern situation. Misunderstanding of either may then easily generate misconceived paralleling of biblical message and modern situation and mis-appropriation of biblical text. Sometimes we do not know what circumstances saw the emergence of a particular text. Sometimes the same context (e.g. the exile, or the post-exilic situation in Judaea) generates several types of response and the differences between them cannot be explained contextually. Sometimes scripture offers several possible paradigmatic responses to a recurrent set of circumstances: for instance, for a landless or insecure people, is the matching scriptural message that of Joshua (attack), that of the exile (wait for Yahweh to act), or that of some post-exilic thinking (accept the situation)?

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/36/ Dentan, JBL 97:578.

Decisions between alternatives are involved here. Even if we accept a theoretical commitment to all these varied perspectives, we do not expect to maintain such an undifferentiated commitment in practice. All the OT's perspectives on the people of God or on the land may contain insights, but all those insights cannot be normative in the same way at the same time. The interpreter has to move from a theoretical commitment regarding the whole OT to a practical commitment regarding some aspect of it rather than others. On what basis is he to do so? If he makes a choice on the basis of his own preferences and person, or his understanding of the world and the church to which he wishes to relate the OT's insights, or on some similar basis, from the perspective of the OT tradition as a whole, his approach will be arbitrary /37/, and ignores the possibility that some perspectives are appropriate to some situations but not to others, or that some perspectives are theologically preferable to others.

Similar consequences follow in practice from the fact that it is not actually the case that even the most fundamental OT theological themes appear throughout the OT. The people of God and the history of the relationship between God and his people are missing from the wisdom books, while some of the prophets attack the idea that Yahweh is tied to Israel and assert Yahweh's concern with all peoples /38/. Indeed,

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/37/ Cf Schmitt, Textgemäss 141.

/38/ Schmidt, Erste Gebot 51; cf the passages noted by Schmidt, p 9. Wisdom's creation- and experience-based theology is also rather in tension with it (see further ch 7 below).



even God receives no overt mention in Esther or the Song of Songs /39/.

For some years OT study emphasized the distinctiveness of the Israelite emphasis on God's activity in history, and rather neglected the wisdom books because of their relative independence of this perspective. Over the past two decades, however, the wisdom literature has become a focus of interest. While this is partly the correcting of an earlier ill-balanced perspective, it also reflects the fact that theology generally has taken a more philosophical turn. Wisdom's concern with secular life, its empiricism, its internationalism, and its concern with the individual all currently make wisdom's perspective attractive; it might even seem to be the gospel for our time, as W Brueggemann suggests in another work with a strikingly twentieth century title, In Man We Trust.

It is inevitable that different aspects of the biblical material speak particularly clearly in different periods, and advantageous in a pluralistic culture that people of different backgrounds can find

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/39/ Admittedly Yahweh's involvement in history on his people's behalf may be a covert theme of Esther (so e.g. Berg, Esther 178-9; but it no longer seems plausible that the relationship between God/the messiah and Israel is the covert theme of the Song of Songs. There may be indirect allusions to the name of God in the Song (see Gordis, Song of Songs 26-8; also JBL 100:360-4, 375-8); while Cant 8:6 may include the divine name as an expression of the superlative (cf JB; but Tromp, La sagesse de l'AT 88-95 takes the expression to refer to love as a creative divine power). But these exceptions prove the rule.

different traditions with which to identify /40/. But it is consequently easy for the Bible to become merely a means of confirming what we are already inclined to believe or hope for other reasons; we look down the well and see our own faces at the bottom. The parts of the Bible that seem more alien are the ones that provide needed correctives to the partial insights which we have already grasped and thus find mirrored in parts of the Bible with which we feel more at home. An acceptance of the variety of OT messages must therefore be followed up by a consideration of how they are to be interrelated and allowed to function in practice, so that we hear all of them and not only those we are already attuned to.

Similar considerations emerge from Bailey's approach to the variety of Biblical Perspectives on Death. We noted in section 2.2 his suggestion that different situations may make different perspectives more meaningful than others. He instances 'the modern Christian's increasing inability to accept the idea of an afterlife' and suggests that 'at a time when ability to believe in that doctrine is on the wane ... it might be helpful to remember other perspectives within the tradition', such as the general OT acceptance of mortality as natural and its rejoicing in the ongoing life of one's own people, in the survival of one's own memory, and in the eternity of God himself /41/.

Bailey does not raise the question whether the idea of an afterlife might be a truth rather than merely something helpful if we find it

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/40/ So B W Anderson, Theology Today 28:327.

/41/ pp 102-3, 105-6; cf 47-61.



congenial. If the former is the case, then it cannot simply be abandoned because those other perspectives seem more congenial. Bailey speaks of 'dialogue with the entirety of the canon' /42/, but he does not make it clear how his approach lets the whole canon be canonical. Nor does the contextual emphasis explain the fact that sometimes the same context in Israel's life meets widely different theological responses, or that sometimes different contexts utilize the same elements within the tradition (which then 'cut' in varying ways /43/).

Although the unity of OT faith has often been overestimated in the context of monolithic theology, it would be as mistaken to settle too simply for mere acceptance of diversity in OT faith. An emphasis on the contextual variety of theologies in the OT may be just as much an unhistorical mirroring of our pluralistic culture and theology (or of existentialist concerns) as was the emphasis on one system of biblical doctrine an unhistorical mirroring of a monolithic culture and faith /44/.

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/42/ p 97.

/43/ Cf J M Robinson, Trajectories 69.

/44/ Adapted from an observation on NT theology by Robinson, loc cit; for its application to the OT, see B W Anderson loc cit.

2.4 Are some contexts more illuminating than others?

The work of James M Robinson, who makes the observation just noted that an emphasis on contextual diversity may in part mirror our own pluralistic attitudes, suggests one way of safeguarding against this danger (though he does not himself develop the point). With Helmut Koester, Robinson has applied the model of trajectories to the development of movements of thought such as the Christian faith. His suggestion is that such movements of thought need to be seen not as fixed collections of specific beliefs or attitudes, but as processes on the move. He contrasts this view with one in which 'the fixed point was taken for the historical fact, whose degree of reality was hardly equaled by the penumbral areas of influences that led up to it and consequences that grew out of it', so that 'the movement itself would tend to be a deficient mode of reality, the space between discrete atoms of factual reality' /45/. On the contrary, Robinson suggests, the historic reality is the movement itself. This is true both for the Christian faith and for the other movements which have been viewed as the 'background' against which it has to be understood (rabbinic Judaism, gnosticism, hellenism). These are not static, fixed contexts but moving trajectories, jostling each other and modifying each other as they move, and also affected by the gravitational pulls of the plurality of spinning worlds between which they move. The Christian trajectory inevitably shared many features of the trajectory (trajectories) of its overall culture(s). Thus what is distinctive about it is not what distinguishes it from our own way of thinking ('We

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/45/ Trajectories 11.



talk a lot about the uniqueness of Christianity; but on further study much of its uniqueness, at least on the surface level, turns out to be the unusualness of Hellenistic thought patterns in the American culture' /46/). It is how it related to the trajectories among which it was inevitably caught up /47/.

So a statement about Jesus - or about Yahweh's activity in Israel - gains its meaning from its place and function in a trajectory. This both facilitates and hinders (even both enables and prevents) the grasping of what the event means. As well as making it clear, it obscures it, because the terms used bring the overtones and nuances that history has given them, and these contribute negatively as well as positively to apprehending and expressing the point that needs making. There is a potential tension between point and language /48/. Further, the cultural conditions that facilitate an apprehension of certain aspects of an event's significance also prevent the apprehension of other aspects where that same context lacks the symbols or questions or

/46/ Robinson, JES 3:53-4.

/47/ Cf Robinson, Trajectories 15-16. As well as the other essays in that volume see also Koester, Zeit und Geschichte 61-76 (ET Future of our Religious Past 65-83); Brueggemann, JBL 98:161-85.

/48/ Cf Robinson, JES 3:42-3; also Hart, Unfinished Man 27, 87: apprehension has to create a new 'house of meaning' using the available 'linguistic débris' (Merleau-Ponty, Signes 108 [ET 87]) if it is to execute its 'raid on the inarticulate' (T S Eliot, 'East Coker' v [Complete Poems and Plays 182]).

framework which make a response to them possible /49/. There may be quite a sharp conflict between the historical particularity, the 'facts', to which the faith feels compelled to witness, and the cultural and religious expectations and ideologies available in a certain culture to express the meaning of those 'facts' /50/. In a context in which testimony to these facts has become written scripture, a new aspect of this reality emerges: there are certain aspects of this written witness which one generation can 'hear' in the way that another cannot, so that the interpreter who wants to appropriate the text's significance as fully as possible is willing to look at it through the eyes of other generations' exegesis as well as those of his own, which are inevitably blinkered in certain respects.

Some conceptualities, questions, symbol-systems, or frameworks, then, will provide a better match than others do to some realities. The fullest and most challenging understanding of any reality will be the one that emerges from the context that happens to allow it to emerge most fully.

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/49/ Cf Koester, Trajectories 208-9. Saggs's contrast of the patriarchal and the Mosaic God (Encounter with the Divine 37-8), though overstated, perhaps provides an OT instance: the exodus context allows certain features of God's character to emerge more clearly (his dynamism and the real interweaving of his decisions and men's) but also brings overtones and nuances that obscure other features (his concern for the whole world and his prosecuting a coherently thought-out purpose).

/50/ Cf Koester 279.



Now it is possible to see a work such as G von Rad's Theologie des AT as following the trajectory of the OT kerygma through the OT period. It is also possible to see historical treatments of OT themes such as M Noth's study of Law /51/, W Zimmerli's study of Der Mensch und seine Hoffnung im AT, W Brueggemann's study of The Land, or various individual chapters of W Eichrodt's Theologie des AT, as seeking to follow the trajectory of a particular symbol or concept, freezing that trajectory at various points so as to see what aspects of its possible meaning are allowed to emerge in various contexts.

A strictly contextual approach to diversity in the OT simply notes that different statements are then appropriate in different contexts. But Robinson's observation that a particular cultural context both facilitates and hinders the interpretation of an event or a concept suggests the possibility that more of the event's or the concept's intrinsic meaning or depth will be allowed to emerge in some contexts than in others. All may be illuminating, and all are of theological significance. But some may be more illuminating and of more theological significance than others. This can be illustrated from the NT by E Käsemann's analysis of the way the NT deals with the tension between Spirit and order. There the church starts off manifesting the dynamism of the Spirit, but is threatened by enthusiasm and gnosticism and, beginning to appeal to the authority of tradition and ministry, comes to manifest even within the canonical period the characteristics that were to come to full flower in catholicism - order without Spirit. Käsemann has no doubt that it is the church manifesting the dynamic of the Spirit that is the real

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/51/ Gesetze im Pentateuch (ET Laws 1-107); see further section 2.5.1 below.

church; nevertheless `the historical necessity of this transformation should not be overlooked. The Pauline understanding of office, worship, Christian freedom and responsibility was apparently unable to curb the ferment of enthusiasm in the churches.... The revolution can be called legitimate` in that `the Holy Spirit manifests itself in the Church most clearly when, in the midst of pressing need and perplexity of men, it awakens the courage and spiritual gifts for new ways which are appropriate to the situation`. Nevertheless we have to ask about `the price which early catholicism had to pay for the preservation of the Christian Church in the defence against enthusiasm`, namely that `the Church was compelled to bind the Spirit to the office`, and thus rejoice in the uncomfortable fact that occasionally `the real Paul ... is rediscovered` through the fact that `the Church continues to preserve his letters in her canon and thereby latently preserves her own permanent crisis` /52/.

Clearly the fullest understanding of any reality is in theory available at the end of the trajectory, when it can be surveyed as a whole. In this sense the end of the trajectory contains or reveals the significance of the whole. And yet, this instance makes clear that the most penetrating grasp of some reality may emerge at a much earlier point. Further, while the fullest understanding only becomes theoretically available when the trajectory is complete, it may not be actually accessible to people at that point. As seems to have been the case with early catholicism, they may be able to perceive the trajectory only from their perspective.

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/52/ Exegetische Versuche 2:249, 250, 251, 252 (ET NT Questions 247, 248, 249, 250).



2.5 Instances of themes emerging at their most illuminating in particular contexts

2.5.0 In the OT, too, there is a tension between ideal and history.

Particular contexts allow some themes to be stated with particular degrees of truth or depth. The trajectory traced by a motif may allow that motif to be seen with special clarity at certain points.

2.5.1 (a) Covenant and law. What is the place of a stress on human obedience to God's commands, in the context of a relationship between God and people? In his influential essay on 'The Laws in the Pentateuch', Martin Noth emphasized that the starting-point for understanding the OT's theology of the law is that the law belongs to the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel (essentially Israel as the people of God; the law is not state-law). Further, the order of these two concepts is significant. The covenant relationship existed first, established on the initiative of Yahweh. The giving of the law followed Yahweh's establishing of his relationship with Israel; it was designed to demonstrate and safeguard the distinctiveness of Israel as Yahweh's covenant people. To put it theologically, grace is prior to law in the OT /53/. It can further be noted that the Pentateuch itself (or,

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/53/ Noth, Gesetze 9-81 (ET 1-60); cf G A F Knight, Law and Grace 25; von Rad, Theologie 1:193-7, 2:404-9 (ET 1:192-5, 2:390-5). Von Rad relates the giving of the law more integrally to Israel's election by describing the proclamation of the law (embodying Yahweh's will) over her, as a means of putting her election into effect. Cf Barth,

better, the Hexateuch, since the story finds its conclusion in Joshua) is, after all, really a narrative in which laws are set, rather than a lawbook /54/.

Noth goes on to observe that the exile signified the terminating of this covenant relationship, upon which the law's own validity depended. Some of the prophets spoke of the establishment of a new covenant, but the reorganization of the community under Persian patronage recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah hardly constituted the fulfilment of such a hope. The covenant had been the basis of Israel's community life in relation to God, and thus of the validity of Israel's laws. Now it was in abeyance, and, in contrast, the acknowledgment of the law by Israel constituted the basis of the covenant relationship between God and people. Eventually, the law comes to have a status of its own, independent of the covenant, and emphasis swings completely from divine activity to individual human behaviour. Instead of God taking the initiative and man responding, now man's conduct is decisive and God only reacts to this behaviour according to the standard laid down by the law. Noth draws attention to the stress on the individual's attitude to the law in Psa 1, 19, and 119, and sees this development bearing fruit in the legalism which Paul attacks /55/. By implication, Christians are ill-advised to try to let OT law shape their obedience

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Dogmatik II, 2:564 (ET 509): the law is 'the form of the Gospel', that is 'the sanctification which comes to man through the electing God' (624-6 [ET 562-4] apply this to Deuteronomy in particular).

/54/ J A Sanders, Torah and Canon 4.

/55/ So Noth 81-141 (ET 60-107).



to God, lest they repeat Israel's mistakes and end up in legalism /56/.

Noth's scheme embraces understandings of the history, social structure, cultic practice, religious faith, and theological significance of OT Israel, and many specific features of it have been questioned. Since the early creative work of Eichrodt and Noth, emphasis on the covenant's importance has swung right into fashion but then, partly through its being used uncritically, right out of fashion /57/.

Similarly, Noth's belief that the original covenant community to which the laws belonged was the 'sacral confederacy of the twelve tribes of Israel' or 'amphictyony' first earned widespread acceptance, then became widely questioned /58/ - though even if the amphictyony has to be abandoned, something rather like it may nevertheless have to replace it /59/. Among the questions of immediate theological significance which have been raised are the following.

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- /56/ The classic Lutheran position: see e.g. Luther's own sermon 'Wie sich die Christen yn Mosen sollen schicken' (WA 16:363-93 [ET Luther's Works 35:155-74]); also his prefaces to the OT (see WA, Deutsche Bibel 8 - 12 [ET Luther's Works 35:235-333]).
- /57/ Some criticisms are noted in section 6.3.5 below.
- /58/ For varying views see e.g. Mayes, Israel, also VT 23:151-70; de Geus, Tribes; Smend, EvT 31:623-30; Fohrer, TLZ 91:801-16, 893-4; G W Anderson, Translating and Understanding the OT 135-51; Gottwald, Tribes 343-86, 748-84.
- /59/ So Gunneweg, Vom Verstehen des AT 88-91 (ET Understanding the OT 100-4).

(i) One aspect of the overstress on covenant was the emphasis on the covenantal context of OT ethics. In its pentateuchal setting, most OT law is indeed linked with covenant(s). But much of this law - in particular, central features of its fundamental moral ethos - has an earlier background outside the covenant, reflected also in the appearance of a similar ethos in the prophets and wisdom books without explicit reference to the covenant. The content of the laws can thus be seen as reflecting ordinary human experience, as embodying a conformity to natural order, and as applying as much outside as inside Israel; it constitutes a means of response to the creator as well as to the redeemer, and can be connected with the doctrine of creation as well as with the covenant /60/.

(ii) Walther Zimmerli /61/ has pointed out that in the prophets God's commands are recalled not merely in connection with exhorting his people to keep their side of the covenant, but also as a means of warning them of the danger they risk in ignoring Yahweh's stipulations. Not that the prophetic corpus is finally negative about Israel's future; on the other side of judgment there will be renewal. But God's commands and God's judgment are connected, and thus Paul's connection

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/60/ Cf Barton, JSOT 9:44-64; JTS 30:1-14; 32:1-18; Levenson, HTR 73:17-33; Gerstenberger, Wesen und Herkunft des 'apodiktischen Rechts'; JBL 84:38-51; Gehmann, Biblical Studies 109-22; (Stamm and) Andrew, Ten Commandments 75; Audet, Twenty-fifth International Congress of Orientalists 1:352-7.

/61/ TLZ 85:481-98; Law and the Prophets 46-92 (especially 60); cf Ebeling, Wort und Glaube 275-7 (ET Word and Faith 265-6); Gunneweg 115-20 (ET 134-40); von Rad, Theologie 2:392-9 (ET 2:395-402).



of law and condemnation is by no means foreign to the OT.

(iii) R E Clements /62/ has noted that the law-centred approach to the OT was not imposed on it, as something alien, by post-biblical Judaism. The Pentateuch itself is dominated by law, despite its narrative framework, and the Pentateuch as the law provides the concept which co-ordinates the whole canon. Indeed, the very concept of canon (normative rule) presupposes a quasi-legal approach to the role of the scriptures. Thus even narrative is appealed to as halakah in the NT as elsewhere in Judaism.

(iv) H-J Kraus has pointed out that Psa 1, 19, and 119 do not have to be read in a 'legalistic' way. At most they are ambivalent /63/. On a broader front, E P Sanders has demonstrated that the picture of Judaism's law-centred piety as legalistic and guilt-ridden is neither that given by Judaism nor that implied by Paul. Paul and Judaism agree on the relationship between grace and works. What distinguishes them is the embodiment of grace which they respond to, and the character of

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/62/ OT Theology 104-20; Creation, Christ and Culture 1-12; cf Gunneweg 85-92 (ET 96-105).

/63/ EvT 10:337-51; Psalmen in loc; cf von Rad's observations in EvT 13:408-9 on Baumgärtel's interpretation of Psa 1 in the latter's Verheissung (and subsequently in EvT 14:312); Wolff's stance on von Rad's side in EvT 16:366-7 (ET Essays on OT Interpretation 195-6), taking up his own study of Psa 1 in EvT 9:385-94; also von Rad's comments on Psa 1; 119 in his Theologie 1:378-9 (ET 1:381-2); cf Gunneweg 112-3 (ET 130-1). Conversely, Psa 44; 74; 79 might express a legalistic attitude to the covenant itself: so Eichrodt, Theologie 1:23 (ET 1:64).

the works responsive to it which they emphasize. For Judaism generally it is the making of the Sinai covenant, and the response of keeping its laws. For the Christian Jew it is God's power manifested in Jesus as Lord, and the response of faith in him. Thus for Paul, 'what is wrong with [the law] is not that it implied petty obedience and minimization of important matters nor that it results in the tabulation of merit points before God, but that it is not worth anything in comparison with being in Christ (Phil. 3.3-11)'/64/. It is not the Torah which is to be identified with the eternal Wisdom or Word, as happens in Ben Sira and the rabbis; it is Christ.

Although Noth's work is thus subject to modification, his essay and these other studies show clearly that the law fulfils many theological functions within scripture /65/. It provides a basis for the declaration of judgment, the key to avoiding judgment, and the explanation for the experience of judgment. As such it prepares the way for a proclamation of God's forgiveness which can only come from beyond the boundaries of its own perspective. But it functions in connection with judgment in these ways because it first expresses the will of God the creator, which he expects his creatures to obey because they are his creatures, and the will of God the redeemer, which he expects his people to obey because they are his people. Israel's hope of salvation is of a day when the law will be obeyed (cf Jer 31:31-4),

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/64/ Paul and Palestinian Judaism 550.

/65/ Cf Hübner, KD 22:250-76; Stuhlmacher, ZTK 75:251-80. Many of these features can be noted in Deuteronomy (see P D Miller, Interpretation 23:459).



perhaps of a day when a new law will be given /66/, but not of a day without law.

A contextual approach to the place of law in scripture notes that the law functions in these varying ways in different situations, acknowledges in principle the validity of all of these, and asks whether one of them is particularly instructive in a specific contemporary context. This seems entirely appropriate. But one needs to go on to ask whether any particular biblical context allows the essential significance of law to emerge more clearly than others. Does the trajectory traced by the law have a highpoint?

Noth's thesis, granted the refinements referred to above, implies that it does. Specific instructions on the content of human behaviour before God are most at home in the context of a declaration of the Lordship of God over the lives of the beings on whose behalf he has acted in love and power, both in creation and in redemption. His instructions concern the life to be lived by those to whom he has given life and freedom. That understanding of the relationship between covenant and law which Noth especially emphasized brings out the most fundamental theological significance of instruction material in the OT, an understanding present in contexts where לֹא does not have its developed Deuteronomic significance (e.g. some occurrences in Exod 24

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/66/ So W D Davies, Setting of the Sermon on the Mount 109-315. But the evidence is thin (cf Banks, Reconciliation and Hope 173-85).

and 34) or is it not used at all (e.g. Gen 1 - 3)/67/.

One justification for this view is that the other significances of the law noted above depend on or derive from this fundamental 'covenantal' significance. A theology of law which begins here is able to give a satisfactory account of the other significances of law; without questioning their value, it sets them in an interpretative context. A theology of law which starts at some other point (e.g. law as judgment, antithetical to gospel; or law as the object of delight by the person

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/67/ I assume here that, even if the developed use of ברית in the OT is Deuteronomic (so Perlitt, Bundestheologie, also Fohrer, BZAW 115:84-119, following Wellhausen, Prolegomena 442-4 [ET 417-9] - though see e.g. McCarthy's response, Biblica 53:110-21), elsewhere its use is pre-Deuteronomic, less obviously comparable to treaty-forms, but still suggesting fundamentally the same relationship of covenant and law. I also assume that while ברית itself may mean 'commitment' (offered or demanded) without any inherent implication of mutuality (so Kutsch, Verheissung und Gesetz), the implication of mutuality, with the law taking the role referred to here, is present in the way the relationship between Yahweh and Israel is described in contexts where ברית and law appear. The problem over the actual translation of ברית is probably greater in relation to German Bund, which rather suggests a mutual contract, than it is in relation to English 'covenant', which is a more open expression (so Barr, Beiträge 23-38; see also Eichrodt's responses to Kutsch [Interpretation 20:302-21; TZ 30:193-206]; the contributions of Weinfeld [Biblica 56:120-8] and McCarthy [VTSup 23:65-85]; and the discussion in Brekelmans, Questions disputées d'AT).



who approaches God /68/) cannot do so; its base is too narrow.

2.5.2 (b) The relationship between divine and human activity. For some years it was a truism of OT study that the OT is the story of Yahweh's acts in history /69/. What, then, is the relationship of God's activity to human activity in history? Emphasizing the acts of God suggests a distinctly interventionist, supranaturalist understanding of God's involvement with the world, one which underplays the significance of man's role in making history. This view appears most clearly in apocalyptic's portrayal of events which are future from the perspective of its visions, though mostly already past from the perspective of the visionaries' own experience. Thus in P D Hanson's words, apocalyptic eschatology focuses on the disclosure to the elect of a vision of Yahweh's sovereignty which 'the visionaries have largely ceased to translate into the terms of plain history, real politics, and human instrumentality.... The visionaries, disillusioned with the historical realm, disclosed their vision in a manner of growing indifference to and independence from the contingencies of the politico-historical realm, thereby leaving the language increasingly in the idiom of the cosmic realm of the divine warrior and his council' /70/. The grand scale portrayals of aeons of history in apocalyptic also reflect the view that what matters in history is the divine act which brings it to

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/68/ So Wallis, TLZ 105:321-32 - the post-exilic period represents the highpoint of insight on הוֹרָא, as Yahweh's means of making his world-order available to the man who seeks it.

/69/ See e.g. Wright, God Who Acts 38.

/70/ Hanson, Dawn of Apocalyptic 11, 12.

a climax rather than the human initiative embodied in it, which it exposes to be mere pretension /71/. The phrase 'by no human hand' (Dan 8:25) epitomizes apocalyptic's loss of connections with politico-historical realities /72/.

A near-exclusive emphasis on God's acts is not confined to apocalyptic. Another post-exilic work, Chronicles, contrasts with apocalyptic in portraying the decisive events of Israel's history with Yahweh as lying in the past, yet agrees with apocalyptic in seeing Yahweh's as the decisive hand in those events. It is the might of God that decides battles. One man with God is a majority (cf 2 Chr 13; 25:5-12); indeed, the one does not necessarily even have to fight (20:20-4). Conversely, a majority without God will fail (24:24). The Psalms also view history as the sphere of God's activity. When they speak of Israel's history it is of the wonders that Yahweh has done (e.g. 68; 105). When an individual (admittedly perhaps the king) speaks of affliction and his release from it, it is in terms of what Yahweh could do or has done (e.g. 18; 22). Again, Genesis emphasizes the distinctiveness and finished-ness of God's creative work; man makes no contribution to it /73/.

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/71/ For a modern reassertion of the apocalyptic view that God is not active in history (except in exceptional events such as the Christ event) see Sontag, RelS 15:379-90.

/72/ Hanson, Interpretation 25:476.

/73/ Cf Landes, USQR 33:84-6. Landes notes the difference between Genesis's own emphasis and its interpretation by writers such as Gutierrez (see section 7.9 and n 133 below).



These books do assume that there are righteous deeds in history, but they are mainly in the private realm of personal acts of faith, love, and loyalty such as are illustrated by the story of Daniel and professed by the Psalmist. Human acts affect political history itself primarily in a negative way, constituting the sinful deeds that God's own acts have to counter. It is this stress on God's acts and a consequent underplaying of man's role as creative participant in the making of history that characterizes salvation history as a theological theme of recent years /74/.

It is at the beginning and end of the OT, especially, that we find the nearest thing to a pure expression of an interventionist, supranaturalist view of history. Even here, the picture is not a wholly supranaturalist one. Daniel is deeply involved in the politics of Babylon and Persia. In the Psalms, the king himself shatters the nations like a man shattering pottery (2:9) and exercises authority and bloody power among his enemies (11:2,6) /75/. In Genesis, man's original task is to subdue the earth; while man's achievements East of Eden are deeply

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/74/ See e.g. Cullmann's comments on the sense in which salvation history is history, Heil als Geschichte 59-60, 131-46 (ET Salvation in History 78, 150-66); also Tupper's comments on Pannenberg, Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg 301.

/75/ I am not clear that this 'royal theology' has as markedly a 'static (mythic) view of reality' as Hanson suggests, Dawn of Apocalyptic 18, also RB 78:43-4. A worship text should in any case perhaps not be expected to translate the vision of divine activity into the terms of real history.

affected by sin, they are not wholly evil (see especially Gen 4). A visionary such as Habakkuk envisages having to wait patiently for the moment of God's action (2:3), yet assumes that precisely the expectation of God's moment arriving encourages us to 'run' actively (2:2) in an involvement with the necessities of the present. The vision encourages engagement, not escapism /76/.

Exodus, a book which gives more classic expression to the theology of 'God who acts', also asserts the contribution played by human activity. If there is an ambiguity about Moses' original initiative in Egypt, there is no ambiguity about his subsequent initiative in Midian (Exod 2:11-20). If Moses is the speaker and Yahweh is the real actor in the exodus story, as is characteristic of Yahweh war narrative /77/, nevertheless there are aspects of the heroic about Moses' role in Exod 17 in the battle with Amalek, about his intercession in Exod 32 where his act shapes the future, and about the accounts of his end in Num 27 and Deut 34 where he dies as the model (though tragic) leader /78/. The

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/76/ See Janzen, CBQ 44:404-14.

/77/ There may be hints in 14:20 of a military encounter at the Reed Sea (see Hay, JBL 83:397-403); but if so this highlights the absence of explicit reference to such on the surface of the text (cf Coats, ST 29:57; also more generally von Rad, Theologie 1:354 [ET 1:356-7]; Der Heilige Krieg; Lind, BR 16:16-31; Yahweh is a Warrior).

/78/ See Coats, VTSup 28:29-41; Canon and Authority 107; CBQ 39: 34-44. Schmitt (see n 10 above) sees a stress on Moses' activity in the 'prophetic' as opposed to the 'priestly' account of the Reed Sea event (see pp 150-2). This feature is taken up by process theology: see section 1.4.1 and n 23 above.



exodus story, then, combines a belief in the active power of God with a belief in creative human initiative /79/. In a similar way, the victory over Sisera comes about because Yahweh routs him, because God subdues Jabin, because of Yahweh's מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם, because the stars fought from heaven (Judg 4:15,23; 5:11,13), but also because Barak actually musters his army, because people came to the help of Yahweh (!), and because a woman saw to the bloody end of an enemy general (4:10; 5:23,24-7).

Isaiah 40 - 55 reaffirms the 'exodus gospel' that Yahweh has once again raised his arm to liberate his people from bondage in an alien land, but although much of the language used to describe this act of liberation is full of symbol and metaphor, the prophet is referring to a historical people (Judaean exiles in the sixth century) under a concrete overlord (Babylon) who will be put down by a specific 'anointed' king (Cyrus) so that the people can return to an actual city (Jerusalem) - 'this world was still viewed optimistically as the context within which the fulfilment of the divine promises could occur' /80/.

Nevertheless here Israel is the passive benefactor from Yahweh's acts.

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/79/ Cf P D Miller's description of Holy War as a 'synergism', 'a fusion of divine and human activity' (Divine Warrior in Early Israel 156; cf Hanson, Dawn of Apocalyptic 17). Miller grants that the OT text stresses the divine side, as Lind emphasizes especially with regard to the exodus (see n 77 above).

/80/ Hanson, Dawn of Apocalyptic 25.

Elsewhere she is the actor herself. The book of Esther places special emphasis on this, avoiding all reference to God's activity. It is an especially striking feature of the book if it is to be seen as a novel diaspora version of the new exodus /81/. 'The survival of the Jews ... results from their own actions. The responsibility for saving the Jewish people rests with the queen who must decide whether to risk her own life. The Book of Esther suggests that each individual Jew who is in a position to do so must use his/her power and authority to assist the people of Israel'. Even if God's providential hand is to be seen behind the events in the story, its explicit emphasis lies on the human initiative related by it; it 'points to the hiddenness of Yahweh's presence in the world' /82/.

Esther's stress on human responsibility for history is particularly marked, but is only relatively greater than that in the stories of the Judges, Ruth, Saul, David, Solomon, and Nehemiah /83/, and also in that of Joseph (which counterbalances the subsequent exodus traditions at this point) /84/. In differing ways these give overt expression to the conviction that God is at work in history, yet they also strongly

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/81/ So Gerleman, Esther 11-23.

/82/ Berg, Esther 176, 178; cf Loader, ZAW 90:417-21; C H Miller, ZAW 92:145-8.

/83/ Cf Seeligmann, TZ 19:385-411; Kegler, Zum Verständnis politischen Geschehens im Israel (cf TLZ 102:315-8); Brueggemann, In Man We Trust (!), also Interpretation 24:18-19. Brueggemann examines this as a wisdom emphasis; cf McKane, Prophets and Wise Men 128-30.

/84/ Berg 176-7 and elsewhere; cf Coats, From Canaan to Egypt 86-90.



emphasize the initiative of human actors. Here, at least, decision history (Entscheidungsgeschichte) seems as appropriate a description of the OT as Heilsgeschichte /85/, and the narratives seem not far from the understanding of history as a continuous chronological sequence of human acts, linked as cause and effect, which we generally take for granted.

The prophets share the conviction that God is at work in history, but that history also reflects human acts and initiatives. Hanson contrasts them with the apocalyptic visionaries by noting that the prophet announcing his vision of Yahweh's plan for Israel and for the world 'translates [it] into the terms of plain history, real politics, and human instrumentality ... the level of the politico-historical realm of everyday life' for which king and people bore responsibility /86/. The prophets were 'the ones responsible for historicizing Israel's religion ... the ones who forged the visionary and realistic aspects of the religious experience into one tension-filled whole' /87/. For Isaiah, then, history is both the sphere of God's fulfilling

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/85/ Fohrer, Studien zur atl Prophetie 289-91; Biblical Essays 31-9 (though Fohrer has in mind human acts in response to God, good or bad). The term fits these narrative works better than the prophets. Cf also Zimmerli, VTSup 29:19; Baumgärtel, KD 9:229; Blank, JBL 72:1-13 (on 'the Promethean element in biblical prayer').

/86/ Hanson, Dawn of Apocalyptic 11, 12. Hanson (p 19) instances Isa 6 - 7, which he contrasts with Dan 8:26; 12:4; cf RB 78:44-6; Interpretation 25:459-60.

/87/ Hanson, Dawn of Apocalyptic 17.

his promise and the locus of man's fulfilling his answerability to God; the two are essentially linked because for both the object of history is the exaltation of Yahweh as the holy one in וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח (5:16; cf 2:10-21; 11:4-5) /88/.

The integration of divine and human activity in history features also in the Deuteronomistic history. J Ellul observes that 2 Kings 'displays concretely the play of what Karl Barth has called the free determination of man in the free decision of God. We are constantly in the presence of the relation between man's action and God's' /89/. But the relationship between these acts is different from the prophetic one. There the emphasis is on men's being invited and challenged to act in history in fulfilment of God's will. Here in 2 Kings God's will is fulfilled whether they are interested in it or not. 'Deliberate acts which men do for their own reasons and according to their own calculations are the very ones which accomplish just what God had decided and was expecting (even though the men often do not know this or are not aware of it at first). These acts enter into God's design and bring about exactly the new situation which God planned' /90/. Thus, 'whereas Isaiah began with the vision of the cosmic Yahweh and translated that vision into reality, thus balancing vision and reality, the Deuteronomic historian found the historical realm transparent to

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/88/ Wildberger, VTSup 9:108-9.

/89/ Politique de Dieu 16 (ET Politics of God 15); cf Deuteronomy's understanding of the land as both God's gift and Israel's achievement (so Miller, Interpretation 23:453-6).

/90/ Ellul 17 (ET 16-17).



Yahweh's will.... A one-to-one ratio was seen between events of this world and divine action`/91/.

The OT, then, allows for seeing God as virtually the sole actor in history (Daniel, Psalms) or at least as the dominant actor (Exodus, Isaiah 40 - 55), for seeing his acts interweaving with men's without the relation between them being quite clarified (Judges, Saul, David, Solomon, Nehemiah) or immanent in the decisions of human actors (Exod 17, 2 Kings) or interacting with the decisions of human actors (pre-exilic prophecy), or for seeing God's acts as hidden behind or yielding importance to human acts (Esther). It is likely that different documents take their individual perspectives because of contextual factors: for instance, Hanson suggests it was the special features of the post-exilic period that generated apocalyptic eschatology, 'a pessimistic view of reality growing out of the bleak post-exilic conditions within which those associated with the visionaries found themselves' /92/. Those who had no power to influence the policies of their people could only look for what they saw as the right policies to be implemented immediately by God himself. 'In certain "bottleneck" phases of historical epochs, the requirements of causal efficacy are

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/91/ Hanson, RB 78:47. Hanson is deeply critical of the Deuteronomistic approach; in my view he underestimates its strengths, and makes insufficient allowance for the differences between prophecy and history which arise from the fact that the former is prospective (events are open), the latter retrospective. Cf Zimmerli's contrast between them (VTSup 29:13-15).

/92/ The Dawn of Apocalyptic 11-12.

massive, and the alternatives for negotiation are extremely narrow`; there is little room for manoeuvre /93/.

At different points on its trajectory, then, the theme of divine and human activity appears in different forms. Hanson's thesis is that the ministry of the eighth century prophets embodies this theme in its most profound form. In particular, the account of Isaiah's dealings with Ahaz illustrates 'the delicate balance achieved by prophetic Yahwism between the visionary element and the pragmatic integration of the cosmic vision into the events of that time. Isaiah, the visionary who received his call by being drawn into Yahweh's divine council (Isaiah 6), was at the same time the statesman standing at the side of the king and relating every major event of his nation to divine will'. 'In his prophecy vision was integrated into politics without thereby losing its normative character'; he was 'a man of faith living out his career within the field of tension between the vision of Yahweh's Kingdom and a sense of responsibility for an earthly community' /94/.

It is not that the problem is 'solved' in Isaiah. Indeed, perhaps it is the highpoint because it looks most steadfastly in the face the fact that the challenge is to believe and act as if this will work, despite the fact that it often does not, as the experience of Hezekiah and

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/93/ Janzen, Encounter 36:399. It is not merely a question of date, of course; the apocalyptic and the theocratic view are contemporary, as are Esther and Chronicles (cf Berg, Divine Helmsman 107-27). Sociological factors are involved.

/94/ Hanson, Dawn of Apocalyptic 19, 410.



Josiah perhaps showed /95/. In the light of the cross the assumption that suffering and salvation are invariably opposites will be put in question by the reality of the one leading to the other /96/. Yet Isaiah's ministry remains the highpoint of insight on the two realities we have been considering, because it holds them together in the sharpest way, neither letting one overcome the other, nor simply interweaving them, nor assimilating them. Circumstances may make it difficult for this perspective to be maintained in many contexts, but this is the perspective which the OT at its most profound encourages.

- 2.5.3 (c) Life, death, and the possibility of afterlife. N Lohfink /97/ illuminates this theme by contrasting the attitudes of Israelite wisdom at various stages in its history. Proverbs affirms that life is Yahweh's gift and is good and meaningful. A full life and a long life is to be enjoyed, even though (or because) it ends in death, which must be accepted realistically as something not inherently fearful, though

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/95/ The presentation of Hezekiah in Isaiah itself reflects the need to cope with this.

/96/ Cf Gunneweg KD 27:170-3.

/97/ Siegeslied 198-243, 271-3 (ET Christian Meaning of the OT 138-69). On this subject see also Bailey, Biblical Perspectives on Death; Brichto, HUCA 44:1-54; Brueggemann, IDBSup 219-22; Burns, SJT 26:327-40; Eichrodt, Theologie chs 16, 19, 24; Gese, Zur biblischen Theologie 31-54, 216-22 (ET Essays 34-59, 239-46); Gibson, SJT 32:151-69; Tromp, Primitive Conceptions of Death; Wolff, Anthropologie 150-76 (ET Anthropology 99-118); Martin-Achard, De la mort à la resurrection (ET From Death to Life).

the new form of existence it brings lacks the positive joy and fulfilment of life with Yahweh. For Ecclesiastes, however, human life is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short' /98/. The entire landscape of human life is dominated and spoilt by the death which ends it and thereby establishes the limitations of human wisdom and the relativity of human joy in this life. Others respond to the same awareness about present life by looking for a full life to continue in some way despite death (Psa 73:23-6), or for an end to death (Isa 25:6-8) or for resurrection to a new life for some (Dan 12:2-3) /99/. The sequence of views which appears here is in part chronological: Ecclesiastes' emphasis is a reaction against an existent confidence about the meaningfulness of this life; belief in an overcoming of death often has as its background the kind of questioning of meaning which appears in Ecclesiastes, even if one cannot say whether (e.g.) Psa 73 antedates or postdates Ecclesiastes itself.

Confidence about this life, uncertainty about this life, and confidence about an overcoming of death, may all be valid in their context. Nevertheless, each follows from the other and seeks to set it in a broader framework. Ecclesiastes would be impossible without Proverbs, Psa 73 without the perplexity expressed in Ecclesiastes. Furthermore, Proverbs must not finally be read in isolation from Ecclesiastes, nor

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/98/ Hobbes, Leviathan ch 13; though this was not in its original context a description of the universal condition of human life.

/99/ Lohfink, keeping within a strictly wisdom tradition, confines attention to the book of Wisdom. But the point can also be made by reference to books in the Hebrew canon.



Ecclesiastes in isolation from Psa 73. The variety of views in the OT accumulate, and the earlier have to be read in the context of the later. One cannot simply revert to an earlier view as if the later ones had not emerged /100/.

H Gese generalizes this point in discussing the theological significance of the traditio-historical process. This process does not imply that what is older is rejected and replaced by what is newer, even where the new clashes with the old. The old is not abandoned but preserved and set in a new light. The history of revelation is not a journey towards truth, but a journey which starts from truth - though not a static doctrinal truth. Gen 2 - 3, for instance, is not rendered untrue or half-true by having Gen 1 placed in front of it. When we appropriate Psa 49 and 73, we do not abandon psalms that plead for rescue from death in the conviction that this life is all we have. Prayers arising out of such convictions express in the only way possible an attitude which treats life itself with absolute seriousness, and which is therefore in a position to value the notion of resurrection and of a new world /101/. Nor do we abandon old wisdom when we have Job. Indeed, we can only have the latter by way of having the former. As Gese puts it, 'In order to become Job, it is necessary first to be his friends'; and the views of Job's friends are to be

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/100/ See the comments on Bailey in section 2.3.2 above.

/101/ Cf Rahner, Schriften 12:235-6 (ET Theological Investigations 16:186-7); Bonhoeffer, Widerstand und Ergebung 112-3 (ET Letters and Papers 50, enlarged edition 157).

treated as potentially illuminating, not as inherently erroneous /102/.

In this instance, then, the trajectory keeps rising and reaches its highest point at its furthest distance; this is the vantage point from which the OT's varied statements about life and death have to be appreciated as a whole.

The 'trajectory' model might, indeed, suggest that the ultimate destiny of the journey travelled by a particular theme gives the natural perspective from which to understand its path. Thus the history of Israel as the OT tells it (patriarchal promise and exodus/conquest, judges and monarchy, exile and return, submission to Persia and oppression by Antiochus) has a shape or plot that may suggest ways of interpreting individual episodes in the story. The whole is a pedagogic process, a series of responses to the unfolding of a story,

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/102/ Gese, Zur biblischen Theologie 18 (ET Essays 19). Cf Zimmerli's observations on the way that prophets sometimes have to say 'No' to the way traditions are being appropriated and the tradition process is thereby developing (he instances Amos 9:7; Isa 43:18-19) (TLZ 98:90-2; see also section 1.4.1 and n 24 above). Despite that 'No', one may affirm that these traditions were God-given in the context to which they belong, and that they are still fulfilling a paradoxical positive function even in this later context: in order to become a second Isaiah, it is necessary first to have been an exile looking back wistfully to the good old days (see Westermann's comments on Isa 40:6-8, Jesaja 40 = 66 36-8 (ET Isaiah 40 = 66 40-3)).



forming altogether a total theological statement /103/. But this does not imply that each theme reaches greatest clarity only at the end of the OT period /104/. We have suggested that the OT offers clearest insight on the position of law near the beginning of its story (whereas the position at the end is rather ambiguous), and profoundest wrestling with the tension between divine and human activity in pre-exilic prophecy. Its understanding of the people of God becomes clearest in the exile /105/.

It is for special reasons that this particular trajectory needs to be appreciated from its end. The point it has then reached (the notion of eternal life) radically affects the significance of the whole, whereas later perspectives on law or on the relationship between divine and human activity do not as fundamentally affect the significance of earlier insights. Indeed, whereas the other trajectories reach their highpoint before the end of the OT period, this trajectory is still rising as it leaves the OT /106/.

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/103/ See further ch 6 below.

/104/ See further section 4.2 below.

/105/ See ch 3 below. Zimmerli sees exilic prophecy as also the climax in the OT understanding of God (VTSup 23:48-64) (cf section 4.3 at n 36 below).

/106/ And 'disappears behind a wall' (Lys, Meaning of the OT 106), so that from an OT perspective it could end up in Judaism or in Christianity.

It seems, then, that the world and the people of God are nearer to or further away from fullest insight regarding different aspects of the faith at different periods. Some situations lead to perception in one area but blind-spots in another. Thus part of studying the OT's approach to different themes will be to identify the interrelationships between perspectives that emerge from different contexts, and to look for the high points of insight or the points of most creative tension reached by the various trajectories that themes follow. As in other forms of theological study, the insight of interpreters themselves will contribute to their identifying these highpoints. Their analysis nevertheless aims at an objective understanding of the dynamic of the themes, so that their work is part of OT theology's descriptive task. They can say of their analyses, 'Here is a way of interrelating the various OT viewpoints on this particular theme, a way of seeing them in a pattern which is natural to them rather than imposed on them', and they can argue meaningfully with each other as to whether one understanding of a trajectory or another does better justice to its inherent dynamic.



3     The people of God in the OT

3.0     The question 'What does it mean to be the people of God?' received different answers in different historical contexts in OT times, and consideration of this theme thus illustrates the approach to diversity and unity in the OT described in chapter 2. This chapter examines the theme in its various contexts, notes the insights particularly associated with each context and the issues that recur in different periods, but suggests that the period of the afflicted remnant (the exile) allows the deepest insights on the question to emerge, those associated with the idea of theocracy as it is then juxtaposed with the image of the servant.

The people of God is one of the most prominent themes in the Bible. This need not have been so: a religion could give theological significance only to people in general, or to the relationship between God and individuals. It has not always been acknowledged to be so: while Jewish theology has naturally recognized and wrestled with the theme /1/, Christianity has found it easier to be predominantly individualistic, and biblical theology has not always given appropriate centrality to the theme of the community /2/.

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/1/     In his survey Understanding Jewish Theology, Neusner sees the three central issues of Jewish theology as God, Torah, and Israel.

/2/     Contrast the revised edition of Vriezen's Hoofdstlijnen (ET Outline), which is largely structured by this theme, with the original edition, where it is virtually absent. On the vital place of the theme see von Rad, Gottesvolk im Deuteronomium 20-1.

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As far as the OT is concerned, what it means to be God's people is bound up with history, and that in two senses. First, it is worked out in concrete and changing human situations, with all the diversity we have already noted. We thus find ourselves examining the changing face of the people of God. Second, what it means to be God's people is bound up with 'history' in the sense of 'socially significant, public events'. God's people is a clearly identifiable social entity, for a significant period an actual nation. She has a culture of her own and is involved in changing mutual relationships with other cultures. Her life has to be lived in this context; her changing social structure affects her faith /3/, and her social and historical experience affects what it means to be God's people.

As Israel herself tells it, her story divides itself by major events that herald new developments. The most significant are Abraham's leaving Haran, the Israelites' departure from Egypt and occupation of Palestine, the institution of the monarchy, the exile, and the partial return of exiles to Palestine. These epochs of salvation history may be seen as a history of her covenant with Yahweh: the Abrahamic covenant, the Sinai covenant, the Davidic covenant, the covenant broken (with exile) and renewed (with the return). Each epoch brings a change in the mode of being of God's people. She begins as a family (בְּיָחִיד), one of the families of the sons of Shem (Gen 10:31-2). The fulfilment of God's promise makes her more than a family, a people (עַם; e.g. Exod 1:9; 3:7), and indeed a nation (אֶמְלָה) alongside other nations, a political entity (e.g. Gen 12:2; Judg 2:20). The monarchy turns her into a state, a kingdom (מַלְכוּת and related words; e.g. 1 Sam 24:20; 1

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/3/ Instances in Fohrer, Grundstrukturen 126-32.



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Chr 28:5). The exile reduces her to a mere remnant (שארית and other expressions; e.g. Jer 42:2; Ezek 5:10). She is restored, to her land and to her relationship with Yahweh, as a religious community (קהל; e.g. Ezra 2:64; Neh 13:1).

3.1 The wandering clan

Strictly, Israel's history begins only in Egypt or in Palestine; as the Torah sees it, however, the story of God's people goes back to the family of Abraham (cf e.g. Neh 9:7; Matt 1:1-18) if not that of Seth (Gen 4:25-6). God's people is thus portrayed as a genetic unit, and in a sense it always remains that /4/. The name Israel marks it as the seed of one man. It is a family (e.g. Amos 3:2; Mic 2:3), a brotherhood (e.g. Deut 15), a tribe (e.g. Jer 10:16), a household (e.g. Exod 16:31; 2 Sam 1:12)/5/, a people (עַם, too, suggests a kinship relationship; unlike the English word 'people', it is rarely used to mean merely 'persons in general').

Nothing outward distinguishes Abraham from many other second millennium figures. It is God's call that marks out from other emigrations his

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- /4/ Mendenhall believes that these kinship terms are only expressions for social links produced by some other cause, ethnic feeling being a post-exilic phenomenon (Tenth Generation 5, 27, 155, 171, 174, 220; cf Gottwald, Tribes of Yahweh 235-341). But the expressions are too pervasive and their implications are worked out too systematically for this to be plausible. See further sections 3.5 and 3.8.1 below (especially at notes 76 and 116). Mendenhall's attack on understanding the patriarchs as nomads or semi-nomads is more compelling.
- /5/ Pedersen suggests that this term, indicating people actually living together, 'represents kinship in its most intimate sense' (Israel 1:51).



departure from 'the ancient and renowned city of Ur' /6/. Genesis calls it 'Ur of the Chaldaeans'; the designation probably must belong to the neo-Babylonian period and suggests the might and pomp, as well as the arrogance and superstition, associated with the Chaldaeans from the seventh century /7/. Abraham leaves such a background in 'the first Exodus by which the imperial civilizations of the Near East in general receive their stigma as environments of lesser meaning' /8/. It is a calling out of the world.

Yet Abraham is called out of the world for the world's sake. God's purpose is that he should experience such blessing that the world will pray to be blessed as he is blessed (Gen 12:3 NEB). Out of its context, such a promise might seem good news only for Abraham - it does not say that this prayer will be answered. In the context of Gen 1 - 11, however, it more likely affirms that seeking blessing from Abraham's God is the way that a world under the curse can experience the fulfilment of God's original purpose of blessing. Specific stories (e.g. Abraham and Sodom) offer particular illustrations of the international and open stance of the traditions in Gen 12 - 50 /9/.

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/6/ Speiser, Genesis 80.

/7/ Sarna, Understanding Genesis 98.

/8/ Voegelin, Israel and Revelation 140.

/9/ So Reventlow, Beiträge 354-70; cf von Rad, Genesis 128-9 (ET 150, <sup>2</sup>154-5); Wolff, EvT 24:73-97 (ET Interpretation 20:131-58); Lind, Yahweh is a Warrior 40-1; Ellis, Yahwist 204-11; Macquarrie, Faith of the People of God 19-22.

The stress on genetic relationship implies that individuals have no choice whether or not they belong to God's people. They have to be born into it; if they are born into it, that settles the matter. Yet if no prior confession of faith or acceptance of obligation is a necessary, or even a possible, condition of belonging to this people, this reflects the fact that it is God's sovereignty, not man's initiative, which brings it into existence. It is not a merely natural entity. A special act of God creates it. The notion of election is a key to understanding the notion of Israel. It is not even that God makes an already existent people his own; he brings a people into being. She only exists as a people because of an act of God /10/. More specifically, a special act of a specific God creates it. What is distinctive about Israel is not that she sees herself as God's people (most peoples would make that claim) but that she sees herself as Yahweh's people, and it is this latter phrase that the OT nearly always uses /11/.

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/10/ Cf Macholz, Judaisches Volk = gelobtes Land 172-7.

/11/ Cf Lohfink, Probleme 275-305; Macholz, 171-2. There has been much recent interest in the theme of the people of God, especially since Vatican II (see 'De ecclesia', AAS 57:12-21 [ET Documents of Vatican II 24-37]; articles in Concilium 1/1 [especially by Congar, Schnackenburg, and Dupont]; Rücker, Dienst der Vermittlung 39; Sloyan, Standing Before God 103), but it tends to ignore the particularity of the usual OT phrase (cf Leonard's warnings, Communio Viatorum 19:35-60; also Lohfink 275-305 on the specificity of the OT usage). Like the term 'covenant', 'people of God' has come to be a theological technical term of broader meaning than it has in the OT.



In Genesis itself, the divine initiative takes the characteristic form of Yahweh's summons to the particular family of Abraham and his promise to them of blessing, a special relationship to him, and concretely of land and increase. Thus Israel is constituted the people of the promise, a people brought into existence by God's word /12/. The populousness that is intrinsic to being a people will come about not by natural growth but by divine gift which ignores ordinary human expectation, let alone the particular inability of Abraham and Sarah. The land which is also intrinsic to being a people will come to be theirs not by natural inheritance or by natural right, nor by human achievement, but by divine gift which is also of a magnitude to belie both ordinary human expectation and the particular obstacles to its fulfilment which confront Abraham in the land. Thus faith is required of God's people: trust in the promise of their God. Obedience is also required of her: yet not a life of obedience to a system of ethical, cultic, and social regulations such as Israel later received, but a commitment to Yahweh's calling which follows where he directs on an individual pilgrimage towards a goal known only to him /13/.

Abraham's call out of the world also involves an exodus from politics; Abraham's family stands outside the power structures of the land they come to live in. Perhaps the description of them as עֲבָדִים places them among the many 'apiru people outside the social structure of second millennium Canaan. Yet they are not the freebooting mercenaries of the Amarna letters. Military and political involvement comes to Abraham

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/12/ Von Rad, Gottesvolk 22; Kraus, People of God 14.

/13/ Cf Watts, Basic Patterns in OT Religion 45.

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exceptionally and accidentally<sup>a</sup>, and even then Abraham undertakes only a limited rescue operation, by which he refuses to be personally profited (Gen 14) /14/. Such an attitude puts Abraham in an exposed position in a ruthless world. But Yahweh will see that he and his descendants are enriched (the term נָכַס appears in 14:21 and 15:14). Yahweh will be his protector (the term יָגֵן appears as a verb in 14:20 and as a noun in 15:1). Yahweh, not a human ally, will be his covenant Lord (the term בְּרִית appears in 14:13 and 15:18) /15/.

Political involvement with the cities of the Arabah brought also religious involvement. The priest-king of Salem attributes Abraham's victory over the Mesopotomian kings to 'El Elyon, maker of heaven and earth' (14:18-19). Abraham neither rejects Melchizedek's blessing nor accepts it without qualification: 'Yahweh El Elyon' is his Lord. He can accept that the Canaanite high god is God and express his faith in Canaanite terms, as the patriarchs elsewhere happily worship at Canaanite shrines, accept Canaanite observances such as the sacred

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/14/ Cf the negative judgment passed on the violent revenge of Simeon and Levi on Shechem in Gen 34 (Lind 42-5). Mendenhall (Tenth Generation 136-8) and Gottwald (Tribes of Yahweh 391-425, 493-7) exaggerate the significance of Abraham's 'apiru link. Weippert thinks עֲבֵרָא in Gen 14 has an ethnic sense (Landnahme 100-1; ET Settlement 100-1; cf more generally Herrmann, History 54, 60 and his references). This undercuts that emphasis.

/15/ On this movement from Gen 14 to 15 see Sarna 121-2, Voegelin 192-5. Voegelin (p 194) comments on מִצְרַיִם in 14:13 and 15:18, 'the symbol of bondage has become the symbol of freedom'.



tree, and acknowledge the Canaanite high god by names such as El Roi and El Olam (though they do not seem to identify with Canaanite Baal worship) /16/.

Yet this is not the whole of patriarchal faith, nor its distinctive characteristic. The personal name of the patriarchal God, according to passages such as Gen 14:22, was Yahweh, though if the name was actually known before Moses' time, its significance was only to be revealed then. The distinctive designation of the patriarchal God is as the God of the fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Such phrases identify God by linking him with a human individual and with the clan that he leads, wherever they may be. The distinctive faith of the people of God in patriarchal times was thus one suited to their way of life. As they moved about, they needed God to guide them, provide for them, and be accessible to them as they travelled, not limited to particular places. As a small landless group their concerns were with progeny and land, and these were their God's promise. It was such needs that the God of the fathers met; he could be identified with El or with Yahweh, but this way of conceiving of God would not match their needs in the same way.

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/16/ For the religio-historical considerations here see e.g. Alt, Gott der Väter (ET Essays 1-77); Cross, Canaanite Myth 13-75; Vriezen, De godsdienst van Israel 85-102 (ET Religion 103-23); Eissfeldt, Kleine Schriften 3:386-97 (ET JSS 1:25-37); de Vaux, Histoire 255-73 (ET Early History 1:267-87).

3.2 The theocratic nation

Moses is both the last representative of patriarchal religion and the first adherent of the new faith of Israel which he mediates. God appears to him as the God of his father (Exod 3:6, following MT) and he keeps the clan leader's close relationship with the guiding and providing God. Sinai itself is a patriarchal manifestation writ large /17/, and Yahweh relates to Israel as one who chooses to attach himself to a group and then sets before them his expectations of them, his promise to bless them, and his undertaking to accompany them in the vicissitudes of life in the everyday world.

Yahweh, Israel, and the relationship between them are thus one with what we have seen before. Yet the people of God is now in a new situation. The clan has become a people, and one to be reckoned with (Exod 1:7,9,20). Expressions such as 'Yahweh's people', 'your people', 'my people', occur for the first time (Exod 3:7; 15:16; Num 11:29).

This increase is an evidence of Yahweh's blessing. On the other hand, Israel is a people in bondage. She has lost the freedom of the patriarchal clan and become an oppressed minority enslaved in a foreign country. By Yahweh's rescue of her from this bondage he makes her not only a עַם but an independent nation in her own right, a גּוֹי. The people of God becomes something not merely different in size, but different in nature. Israel is now a political entity with a place in

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/17/ So Fohrer, Geschichte 70 (ET History 81).



the history books /18/. A further aspect of God's promise becomes reality (Gen 12:2; Exod 19:6; 33:13) and a further stage in the fulfilment of his purpose is reached /19/.

Yahweh himself thus enters a new sphere of activity. The God of the clan becomes the God of history and the God of politics, battling with the Egyptian Pharaoh and defeating him. He meets his people's needs in a new mode of life, though this involves him in taking one nation's side against another in a way he has not before. He gains new stature as the lord of nature at whose bidding seas part and come together again, as the warrior whose fury brings a shiver even to the hearts of those he aids, as the master of the elements whose coming makes Sinai tremble (Exod 14; 15; 19 - 20). Although he is Israel's God, 'he is not a national god simpliciter .... Yahweh is too much himself, too free of Israel, for that' /20/.

While the OT excludes war from its ideal picture of Beginning and End,

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/18/ Cf the mention on Pharaoh Mer-ne-ptah's victory stela (ANET 378).

/19/ Cf Speiser, JBL 79:163, also Cody, VT 14:1-6. Rost sees a '12 as a group which understands itself as united in origin, speech, country, religion, law, and leadership, while a 19 is a body of citizens living on their own land and possessing the right to take part in war, justice, and cult (Das kleine Credo 89, 92; cf Gottwald 510; Bächli, Israel 114-6).

/20/ Vriezen, Godsdienst 110 (ET 132). But contrast Saggs, Encounter with the Divine 35-7, emphasizing the more nationalist side to the Mosaic Yahweh.

and implies that Yahweh is not essentially warlike, it accepts wholeheartedly the warring activity of Yahweh in Israel's history (on her behalf and against her) which is a corollary of his being involved with her as a nation at all. If he is to be the God of all of life, he must be a God of war. Even this area is embraced by Israel's calling 'to have the entirety of its life constructed out of its relation to the divine' so that 'the separation of religion and politics which stretches through history is here overcome' /21/.

This notion is summed up by the picture of Israel as Yahweh's kingdom (Exod 19:6); Israel's song of praise after the exodus comes to a climax with the assertion that Yahweh will reign as king over her for ever (Exod 15:18; cf Num 23:21). Israel is a theocracy (Josephus, Against Apion 2:17), Yahweh's personal property (חֵלֶק, סִגְלָה, נַחֲלָה: Exod 19:5; Deut 4:20), Yahweh's priesthood (Exod 19:6). Her human leaders do not reign by right as kings; they serve under Yahweh by his appointment and only for as long as he wills, and he is capable of directing Israel without using a human intermediary at all (Exod 13:21-2; 23:20-1) /22/. Her own priestly tribe cannot claim a position that goes back to the Beginning (the patriarchal clan had no priest except the head of the household himself) or one that will last at the End (see Isa 61:6).

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/21/ Buber, Königtum 647-8, cf 697 (ET Kingship 118, 119, cf 145); cf also Fohrer, Geschichte 109 (ET 118); Eichrodt, Theologie 1:28 (ET 1:74-5). See further section 5.3.3 below.

/22/ Judges 1 - 12 with its anti-monarchic attitude shows how the will towards actualizing Yahweh's kingship over Israel still lived in the Judges period (cf Buber 539-74 [ET 59-84, 164-9]).



She is a peculiar kind of nation with a peculiar kind of religion.

Israel has to be available to Yahweh to treat as his personal possession. Her status is her calling /23/. This calling is itemized at Sinai: the obligation of the people of God now includes a detailed obedience in the ethical, social, and cultic spheres. The covenant shape of Deuteronomy makes the point especially clear. Like a human overlord laying down the law in a treaty, Yahweh the divine overlord details his stipulations to his covenant people /24/. Mesopotamian (and perhaps Canaanite) law is the point of departure for Israel's, indeed, so that the most important distinctive feature of Israelite law may not be so much its origin or actual content but its context in the covenant, in 'the framework of relationship which breaks through that which is merely moral' /25/.

This context, however, decisively influences the content of Israel's ethic, insofar as it establishes the notion of the people of God as an ethical principle. In their behaviour the people of God are bound to

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/23/ Cf Dahl, Volk Gottes 4, 12.

/24/ I assume that even if the Deuteronomic notion of covenant (and the idea of Yahweh's kingship) is retrojected from later times, the belief that Israel is committed to this detailed obedience to Yahweh as her Lord is nevertheless at home in the period before the monarchy. (Perhaps we are compelled to regard nothing as historically certain for this period; if so, then all we can say is that this is the uniform picture of Israel's theological tradition!). Cf section 2.5.1 and n 67 above.

/25/ (Stamm and) Andrew, Ten Commandments 74-5.

one another /26/. Yahweh being their overlord, they have no human overlords. Theocracy and socio-political equality (radical theology and radical sociology) go together /27/.

By stressing the declaring and accepting of Yahweh's will, the covenant motif emphasizes that it is not mere natural kinship that makes

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- /26/ This is applied to the old clan ethos and the covenant by Macholz (Judaisches Volk 176-7), to Deuteronomy with its stress on brotherhood by Rücker (Dienst der Vermittlung 39-47) (see section 5.1.3 below), and to Micah with his sense of scandal at oppression among 'my people' by Willis (BZ 14:72-87).
- /27/ Cf Mendenhall, Tenth Generation 16, 19-31; Brueggemann, JBL 98:165-7. Gottwald, building on Swanson's The Birth of the Gods: The Origin of Primitive Beliefs, sees theocracy or mono-Yahwism as 'the function of sociopolitical equality' (Tribes of Yahweh 611, cf 622-49). Gottwald thus 'demythologizes' the OT into sociology (p 692) as Bultmann demythologizes the NT into anthropology in the sense of an understanding of the real possibilities of the individual's human existence (see e.g. Jesus Christ and Mythology 52-4; also H Braun, Das NT als Kanon 228-9). As Gottwald sees it, we are therefore not required to appropriate the OT's symbol system by believing what ancient Israelites believed, but to follow them into freedom and the mastery of our social circumstances, developing such transcendent images as will help us fulfil that task (pp 703-9). Social factors no doubt influence people's theology, but it seems unwarranted to deny that the reverse movement also takes place (cf Bowker's critique of Swanson, Sense of God 24-31, 37; also L L Thompson, JBL 100:353-8).



Israel a people. It is Yahweh's act and his announcing his will, and her submission to him as her covenant Lord, that make Israel his people and make her one people /28/. Indeed, being born into the right clan is not only insufficient but apparently unnecessary to give someone a place among Yahweh's people. A rather mixed company leaves Egypt with the Israelites (Exod 12:38; Num 11:4), Moses marries a Cushite (Num 12:1), only a Kenizzite matches the faith of Joshua (Num 13 - 14), and Yahweh's greatness is acknowledged by a Midianite priest, by a Jericho prostitute, and by the frightened inhabitants of Gibeon (Exod 18:11-12; Josh 2:1-11; 6:25; 9:9-10) /29/.

Most important may be the scene at Shechem where Joshua challenges his audience to be Yahweh's people rather than worshippers of Mesopotamian, Egyptian, or Canaanite gods (Josh 24). At this town whose conquest has not been recorded and which apparently accepted Joshua and his God without resistance, perhaps a very mixed multitude, including many who had not taken part in the exodus, the covenant-making, or the victories under Joshua, now accepts the united worship of Yahweh /30/. Even if this theory reads too much into Josh 24 /31/, the general point nevertheless holds that the covenant's stress on human response makes possible a greater openness to admitting foreigners into Yahweh's

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/28/ See Eichrodt, Theologie 1:8 (ET 1:39); also Rast, Joshua 42-5, on the theme of one people.

/29/ If Rahab was a cult-prostitute (so Fohrer, Geschichte 96 [ET 106]), this is the more significant.

/30/ So Bright, History 121-3, 127 (<sup>2</sup>131-3, 139).

/31/ So Gray, Joshua 36, 191.

people. Israel is still understood in kinship terms, and perhaps new members are effectively seen as adopted into the Israelite family and receive a genealogy in keeping with their adoption; there is thus no one who does not belong to one of the tribes. But the qualification for membership is not birth but willingness to commit oneself.

The biblical text itself suggests another reason for seeing Josh 24 as marking an important point in the story of the people of God. It marks the end of the major stage in Israel's occupation of the promised land, the land itself having now been distributed among the tribes. The final aspect of the patriarchal promise is fulfilled. The land becomes ארץ ישראל, the holy land, Yahweh becomes the God of this particular country, Israel becomes the people of the land. Land, people, and faith, are henceforth bound together /32/.

This line of thinking is a dangerous one. It threatens to reduce Yahweh's stature; it also obscures the fact that Israel had already become Yahweh's people before the settlement, so that actually possessing land was not intrinsic to the meaning of 'Israel'. Nor can she presume assured possession of the land, for this depends on continuing obedience to Yahweh. Her historians show how incomplete, precarious, and temporary was her lordship over it, while the fact that the land which before her had been named after the Canaanites was

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/32/ Cf Dahl, Volk Gottes 17; W D Davies, The Gospel and the Land; Borowitz, HUCA 40-1:391-408; Brueggemann, Land; Wirth, Judaisches Volk 312.



after her named after the Philistines is a parable of the uncertain, ambiguous nature of the relationship between ארץ ישראל and עם ישראל /33/.

The choice which Joshua presses on the people gathered at Shechem contrasts with the patriarchs' easy acceptance of Canaanite El religion. The difference in attitude reflects perhaps the inherently degrading nature of the Baal fertility-cult; perhaps the more exclusivist claims of the God of Moses, the jealous God; perhaps Israel's vulnerability to the religion of the more sophisticated Canaanites, a danger whether she absorbs them or they absorb her; perhaps the specific attractiveness of a religion geared to agricultural life, a realm in which Yahweh had not yet proved his competence. Allowing Baal practices to enter Yahwism will lead to disaster; 'saying "No" to the Canaanite cult' becomes 'articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae' /34/.

The danger that Israel and her distinctive faith would disappear after the occupation of Canaan was the more real as she entered a period when the clans were divided from each other by Canaanites and Philistines

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/33/ Cf Dahl 19; also M Weber's understanding of Israel as the model pariah people or guest people, sitting loose to their social surroundings (Gesammelte Aufsätze 3:1-5 [ET Ancient Judaism 3]; see also Rodd in SJT 32:457-69).

/34/ Von Rad, Theologie 1:33 (ET 1:25); cf Vriezen, Godsdienst 127-47 (ET 154-78); G W Anderson, Peake 132.

and when relations between them were rather loose /35/. Yet her inclination to turn her back on Yahweh goes back into the wilderness period; indeed her complaints and her attempts to go back on her election calling begin when she is hardly out of Egypt (Exod 14 - 17) /36/. At Sinai Moses only delays a while on the mountain and Israel has hastened into a well-meaning but guilty assimilation to heathen religion, while in the tabernacle story no sooner is the priesthood consecrated than alien fire is offered on Yahweh's altar (Exod 32; Lev 10). 'Embedded at the heart of the sacred tradition lies Israel's disobedience and rebellion' /37/; the OT acknowledges the original sin of the people of God, a rebelliousness that goes back to her beginnings (cf Ezek 16).

Yet Israel cannot get away from Yahweh. Formally she has opportunities to refuse the covenant relationship (Exod 24:3; Josh 24), but in reality it is too late for that, and these are only occasions for public plighting of troth. Israel cannot go back to Egypt. She can attempt to ignore Yahweh, but she will find that he will not let her alone.

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/35/ I take it that Noth's amphictyony model overestimates the extent to which the tribes of this period could gather for cultic, judicial, or military purposes, and that it is more likely that by the Judges period an earlier unity had been fragmented than it is that no unity has yet been reached (see references at ch 2, n 58 above).

/36/ On this theme see Coats, Rebellion in the Wilderness; Tunyogi, Rebellions of Israel.

/37/ Childs, Exodus 579.



### 3.3 The institutional state

The judges period establishes that Israel cannot exist in Canaan as a Yahwistic nation. Social, moral, religious, and political pressures threaten to demolish both her inner and outer life. Although God's promises have been fulfilled and Israel lives in Yahweh's land as Yahweh's people, her subsequent experience is an unhappy one. She returns to a life not so very different from the one she had once known in Egypt.

Although the rule of the individual leaders of this period was occasional and limited, it showed that with strong leadership, crises can be overcome, and the latter part of the book of Judges adds to its lament 'everyone did what was right in his own eyes' the explanation 'there was no king in Israel' (e.g. 21:35). There was thus a historical inevitability about the transition from (nominally) theocratic nation to monarchic state /38/. It takes Israel from fragmentation to the peak of her historical achievement in the time of David and Solomon. Both the writing of connected history and the development of wisdom may reflect the monarchy's opening people's eyes to the regularities and interconnections of human life /39/.

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/38/ Cf Flanagan's study of this process as an instance of an ancient and modern pattern (JSOT 20:47-73). A positive theology of the monarchy receives clearest expression in the Judaeen theology of 2 Sam 7; Psa 89, and later in Chronicles (see e.g. 1 Chr 28:5, with Zimmerli's comments, Grundriss 78 [ET Theology 92]).

/39/ Cf Eichrodt, Theologie 1:244-5 (ET 1:452-4); von Rad, Theologie 1:56-62 (ET 1:48-53).

The monarchy also brings developments in Israel's worship, as Canaanite forms are allowed to influence the worship of the Jerusalem temple and the worship of El is once more appropriated by the worshippers of Yahweh /40/. Like the development in her thinking just noted, this is a matter of inner beliefs, not merely of outward form. Yahweh becomes more explicitly the universal creator, who rules the world through his Davidic viceroy in his chosen city (see Psa 2; 46 - 48; 93; 96 - 99; Isa 2:2-4). The story of the acts of God continues in the covenant with David and the building of the temple, and even the failure of the kings generally leads not to disillusion with kingship but to the hope of a future king who will fulfil the kingship ideal - a hope which provides the most familiar way of understanding the significance of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ coming in his kingdom. Human kingship can be a means of Yahweh's kingship receiving more effective concrete expression in the encouraging of justice, peace, and true religion.

Von Rad thus portrays the 'Canaanisation of Jahwism' as an enriching of Israelite faith that enables its own inherent dynamic to emerge more clearly /41/. This 'paganization' of Israel can, however, be evaluated

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/40/ Cf e.g. Clements, God and Temple 40-62.

/41/ So von Rad, Theologie 1:28-41 (ET 1:19-30). Cf Koch's positive assessment of Israelite faith as a syncretism (KD 8:112), also L'Hour's suggestion that the contrast between Israel and Canaan lay in the former having the reason for living (in their experience of Yahweh) but not the means or structures for doing so, while the latter have the means but not the content or motivation (Documenta Missionalia 5:78-81). But the extent of the Canaanite contribution to 'Zion tradition' has been questioned (cf Roberts, JBL 92:329-44).



much more negatively /42/. It includes the narrowing of Yahwism to a matter of piety and worship and a divorcing of Yahwism from politics, justice, and fertility, and of these from each other. The monarchy encourages the replacement of a clan-system by a class-system with its inequalities, unfairnesses, and excesses (cf 1 Sam 8:10-18; 1 Kings 21). Like the transition from clan to people or nation, becoming an institutional state turned Israel into a different entity, and one with the same structure as other contemporary states: there was no other model to follow. The 'liberation theology' of the exodus tradition no longer began where an imperial society found itself, even if in reality the monarchy meant that 'Israel had reversed the Exodus and re-entered the Sheol of civilizations' /43/. Further, the request for a king implies the rejection of Yahweh as king (1 Sam 8:7). Theocracy is incompatible with any humanly-devised form of settled government; earthly leaders must be those he appoints, and they have authority only until he removes them.

Although Yahweh allows the introduction of institutional leadership, henceforth there is always the possibility of a clash between the

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/42/ So Mendenhall, Interpretation 29:155-70. See also BAR 3:19-22; Flanagan, JAAR 47:223-44; Neufeld, HUCA 31:31-53; Boecker, Recht und Gesetz 80-1 (ET Law and the Administration of Justice 92-3).

/43/ Voegelin 142. The anti-monarchic material in the OT itself has often been dated rather late; but see Eichrodt 1:237-8 (ET 1:441);

Weiser, ZTK 57:141-61, also Samuel 25-45; Mendelsohn, BASOR 143:17-22; Crüsemann, Widerstand gegen Königtum 122-7; McKenzie, BR 7:3-18. This little affects the theological discussion, however.

institution which he once established and the person without strictly institutional authority who nevertheless declares 'thus says Yahweh', and may be right. Indeed, the real activity of Yahweh is now more clearly seen confronting the institutions of Israel (not necessarily from outside, since prophets had a place in cult or court) because they have not taken the rule of Yahweh seriously and held together faith, fertility, politics, and social order. The prophets take up the key question of the relationship between the sovereignty of the human king and that of the divine king, the question of 'the politics of God and the politics of man' /44/.

The tension between prophecy and kingship is paralleled by those between prophecy and priesthood or prophecy and wisdom; the period of

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/44/ Cf Ellul, Politique de Dieu (ET Politics of God); Kraus, People of God 31-3. Renckens comments that what happens here is that the central locus of Yahwism, the real activity of God, is dissociated from the institution - and thus does not fall with it (Godsdienst 189-91 [ET Religion 237-9]). The prophetic hedging of the monarchy (designating kings, judging kings, directing holy war) especially characterizes northern Israel (cf Cross, Canaanite Myth 219-65; cf Galling, TLZ 76:133-8; Vawter, JES 15:267). While Genesis-Numbers is perhaps implicitly negative about the monarchy, as is Isaiah 40 - 55, Hosea takes the most unequivocally critical stance (pace Ackroyd, TD 27:337-8) (see especially Hos 1:4-5; 9:15; 13:11). Schmidt suggests that a concern to leave room for God's activity in Israel runs through the OT material critical of the monarchy (Probleme 440-61).



the institutional state is also the period of the first temple and of the development of Israelite wisdom. Priesthood can encourage stability in a vital religion by the use of sacred forms, application of that religion to life by means of teaching and counselling, costly self-offering to God in response to his self-giving, safeguarding of the true faith, and personal encounter with God; it can also encourage people to replace divine lordship by human authoritarianism, divine nearness by divine inaccessibility, ethical commitment by outward observances, and openness to God by attempts to manipulate God and man. The wise men can enable the affairs of state and family life as these are lived together before Yahweh to be conducted in accordance with the nature of the world as Yahweh makes it function; or they can enable people to organize their lives in such a way as to eliminate Yahweh from them. The verdict of the prophets is that the ambiguity of kingship, priesthood, and wisdom is generally resolved in the period of the institutional state by the latter sets of tendencies coming to predominate /45/.

The account of the monarchy's origin (1 Sam 8 - 12) illustrates the OT's ambivalence about kingship, which reflects the ambiguity of this institution itself. Without the monarchy, the Israel of the confederacy might have disappeared without leaving much of a trace in history; with the monarchy, it survived but betrayed the Mosaic

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/45/ Prophecy has its own ambiguity, of course, as kings, priests, and wise men would have emphasized. But the OT traditions regarding the pre-exilic period generally resolve its ambiguity the positive way.

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institutions' /46/. Apparently Israel could only develop this way. She could not ask whether it was better to be 'charismatic' or 'institutional'; she could only ask how she was to be what historical forces compelled her to be. She had discovered what it meant to be a Yahwistic theocracy, though she had not succeeded in realizing the ideal. Now she was challenged to discover what it meant to be a Yahwistic institution /47/.

She failed here, too, and ultimately the institutional state is put under the judgment of Yahweh which the prophets declared. yet this 'no' to Israel as she exists is not a casting off of Yahweh's elect people. It is, indeed, designed to elicit a response from her /48/.

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- /46/ Voegelin, Israel 180; cf Ackroyd 338; Brueggemann, Israelite Wisdom 86-7; Eichrodt, Theologie 1:237-8, 245-6 (ET 441-2, 455-6). Thus alongside the negative view expressed in 1 Sam 8 - 12, the appointment of a מלך is the gift of Yahweh's saving initiative (9:16), reference to המלוכה comes in 10:16, and Saul is made מלך before Yahweh (11:15). Judges, too, combines a negative attitude (8 - 9) with a positive one (17:6; 21:25). There is a contrast between these OT accounts and the Mesopotamian picture of kingship descending from heaven (cf Jacobsen, Treasures of Darkness 78-9, 83, 114; Frankfort, Kingship and the Gods 237-8, 398 [see also his comments on the Egyptian Memphite Theology, p 33]).
- /47/ There is a strand of idealism in the enthusiasm of Gottwald and Mendenhall for the 'Mosaic' period, which has not faced up to the failure of the theocratic order (see the comments in section 4.3 below).
- /48/ Cf Dahl, Volk Gottes 32.



3.4 The afflicted remnant

Prophecy thus demands a reversal of the paganization of Israel; the alternative is a judgment that would decimate her.

Although the picture of Israel surviving judgment as a mere remnant begins as a negative idea, the fact that a remnant will survive becomes a basis for hope. The felled tree can produce new growth; the decimated nation can increase again. Beyond judgment there will be salvation, because it is still true that Yahweh has taken hold of Israel and will not let her go.

In some sense the remnant pre-exists the exile; it goes back at least to Elijah and the seven thousand who refused to acknowledge Baal, and it persists in Jeremiah, Baruch, and those associated with them. When a remnant survives judgment, however, it does not do so because of its righteousness; its salvation is of grace. The call to the remnant to be righteous is made on the basis of the fact that it has been preserved. It is exhorted to give Yahweh the response which should characterize the whole people; after being a warning and a promise, the remnant idea becomes a challenge (Isa 10:20-1; Ezek 18) /49/.

Thus, when God abandons the people as a whole, it is not to the individual that he turns /50/. Perhaps one can say that the origin of

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/49/ On the remnant, see e.g. de Vaux, RB 42:526-39 (ET Bible and the Ancient Near East 15-30); Hasel, Remnant.

/50/ Cf Vriezen, Hoofdpijnen 388 (ET<sup>2</sup> 358), against Causse, Du groupe ethnique.

the idea of the church lies in the idea of the remnant /51/; even if so, the remnant idea does not signify the abandoning of the idea of a people of God. It is rather a means of its continuance.

The end of the northern kingdom comes soon after the emergence of the 'writing prophets'; Judah's political, moral, social, and spiritual disorder also portends her judgment. Before the axe actually falls to the tree, Josiah makes a final attempt to preserve it whole by providing the turning back which Torah and prophets demand, seeking to implement Deuteronomy's vision of a holy nation and insisting that the whole (surviving) people commit itself to living in the light of its election as the people of God, in every aspect of its life (inner attitude, cultic practice, social life, religious commitment, moral standard) /52/.

If their inadequacy was not apparent in his lifetime, Josiah's reforms died with him at Megiddo. His sons' reigns see religious, social, and ethical degeneration. The Josianic reform comes to a 'miscarriage' which reflects the story of the OT as a whole /53/. There is a more profound problem about Israel's human nature than can be solved by a lawbook. A new kind of circumcision, a new kind of relationship to the law, and a new kind of covenant are needed (Deut 30:6; Jer 31:31-4

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/51/ So Eissfeldt, TSK 109, 2:10, 13; Hertzberg, Werdende Kirche 12.

/52/ Cf Eissfeldt 15; von Rad, Gottesvolk 9-11, 14-16, 19, 50-1, 60 (noting the difference from the prophetic view, which had ceased to regard Israel as a whole as the chosen people).

/53/ Cf Bultmann, ST 2:42-4 (ET Essays on OT Interpretation 72-5).



/54/). The idea of Israel being the people of God becomes future prospect, not present reality (Jer 31:1; Ezek 11:20; cf Hos 1:9 - 2:1, 23).

As with the transition from theocratic nation to institutional state, there is a certain logic about the failure of the institution which turns it into a remnant. Insofar as the people of God is where the kingship of God is a reality (a notion given outward form by the theocratic nation), it forms a microcosm of what the whole world is called to be. But insofar as this kingship is in practice rejected, this people becomes instead a microcosm of what the world itself also is. If the state's importance and sovereignty compete with those of God, it has to be judged /55/. The people of God is not a means of God's revelation, but a threat to it; for the sake of that revelation Israel therefore has to be cast off. The people of God has no security independent of her obedience. She is not indispensable; rather, God will reveal himself through her by judging her, if not by blessing her. She thus represents in microcosm the judgment of all those who go against God.

Although the exile makes real the nightmare that Israel will be turned into a mere remnant, her religion absorbs the experience of exile rather than being absorbed by it. The survivors take up anew the challenge to keep Yahweh's law, meditate anew on the lessons to be

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/54/ See Nicholson, Preaching to the Exiles (especially 81-4) on these and related passages.

/55/ Cf Mendenhall, Tenth Generation 100.

learned from their history as a people, and ask anew whether there might be some future for them. It is, however, a demoralized remnant that hears a second Isaiah proclaiming that they are God's people, that they are not finished, that they are Yahweh's servant and have not been abandoned by him.

In Isaiah 40 - 55, the description of Israel as Yahweh's servant is the key motif to designate Israel as the people of God. Her servanthood is the guarantee of God's concern for her (41:8-10). It also implies her responsibility to him (42:1-4, 5-9). The trouble is that she is too deaf and blind to meet this responsibility, and in need of enlightenment herself (42:18-20) /56/. God first promises that he will restore her to the land, though the anointed king through whom he will do this is not a son of David - Jehoiachin or Zerubbabel - but the Persian Cyrus (45:1). She needs to be 'on the way', however, in another sense, on the way from sin to new creation /57/, and the prophet himself hears Yahweh calling him to minister to these inner needs, to be the servant to her, and to accept the affliction this will bring him (49:1-6; 50:4-9) /58/.

The last major servant passage (52:13 - 53:12) develops the motif of the

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/56/ I have argued for the understanding of the Servant passages presupposed here in VT 29:289-99, though the points made here are not necessarily dependent on this particular understanding.

/57/ Congar, Concilium 1/1:15.

/58/ I take the 'obvious' view that in 49 and 50 when the prophet says 'I' he means 'I': see further section 6.5.1 and n 87 below.



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servant's affliction, which has been gaining increasing prominence through chapters 40 - 55. The portrait of Yahweh's arm revealed in his servant's humiliation suggests that it is through his acceptance of affliction and suffering, not through his exercise of triumphant power, that humanity's inner needs find their fulfilment. It would be an over-simplification to say that Israel is this servant (earlier chapters have made it clear that she needs to receive such a ministry) or that the prophet is the servant /59/. Yet insofar as Israel is God's servant at all, this is her calling; and both the nation's experience of exile (which for some Israelites was undeserved - though Isaiah 40 - 55 does not explicitly refer to this point) and the prophet's experience of opposition contribute to the insight expressed in this portrait. The calling of the people of God is the calling of the servant; the calling of the servant is a call to die. That is the exile's deepest insight on what it means to be the people of God.

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/59/ The same logic that points to the prophet being the servant in 49 and 50 (the use of 'I') works against it here. Whybray advocates this identification (Isaiah 40 - 66 169-83, cf Thanksgiving for a Liberated Prophet), but has to ignore the context.

3.5 The community of the promise

In later times, the notion of exile or diaspora deeply influenced both Jewish and Christian thinking about the people of God /60/. The same is true of the servant idea, which both Jews and Christians see as a (if not the) highpoint of the OT. Yet the idea all but disappears from the OT after the exile, except for enigmatic passages such as Zech 12:10 - 13:1 and Dan 11:32 - 12:3 /61/. It seems to have exercised little influence on ideas of what it means to be God's people after the return. Not unnaturally, the glorious promises of restoration were what caught people's enthusiasm.

In the event, the restoration fell far short of the glory of these promises, as Haggai, Zechariah, and Ezra 1 - 6 make clear. It is no triumphant return winning all the nations' acknowledgment of Yahweh. Though free to return to her land, Israel remains a subject people. In a way history does repeat itself; the situation in Ezra 4 resembles that of the judges period. The question now is, how can such a subject people live faithfully as the people of Yahweh? /62/.

Israel actually threw off statehood along with monarchy with remarkable ease - 'the state as such was somewhat of a borrowed garment for

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/60/ For the latter, see e.g. 1 Peter 1:1.

/61/ Cf Chary, Aggée-Zacharie-Malachie 200-7; D R Jones, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi 161-2; Plöger, Theokratie und Eschatologie 26-7 (ET Theocracy and Eschatology 16-17); Ginsberg, VT 3:400-4.

/62/ Cf Ackroyd, Age of the Chronicler 10.



Israel' /63/. She had been the people of Yahweh before, and could be after. She had been the Israelite הָאֱלֹהִים, the assembled community, before, and she could be again /64/. Becoming a community does not mean becoming a church in the sense of a body with no awareness of itself as a people; the הָאֱלֹהִים bears a people's traditions and hopes /65/. Yet as a people she is in a different position because she has been through nationhood, the experience of Yahweh acting in her political history, and the receiving of his promises that he would do so again. She is now the community of promise. We noted in section 1.3.3 that the failure of the promise to live up to expectations forces her to find ways of living with God's promises; it leads to the emergence of at least four models of what it must mean to be the people of God now /66/.

(a) The OT's chief post-exilic narrative presentation of Israel's story portrays Israel as a worshipping community. This understanding

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/63/ Von Rad, Theologie 1:97 (ET 1:90).

/64/ Eichrodt notes that these terms referred originally to the assembly of the Israelite tribes (Theologie 1:8-9 (ET 1:40); cf Macholz, Judaisches Volk 170, 175-6).

/65/ Cf Dahl, Volk Gottes 36.

/66/ The analysis which follows may be compared with Baumbach's division of Judaism from the second century into a pietist-nomistic tendency (embracing (b) and (c) here), a particularist hierocratic tendency (corresponding to (a) here), and a universalist tendency, prepared to abandon Jewish distinctives, much of it with a wisdom connection (a descendant of (d) here?) (see Kairos 21:30-47).

presupposes that God's promises have been fulfilled in the restoration: he is still present and active with his people. The 'branch' may have disappeared, but the high priest has not /67/: Yahweh's activity is seen in political events (the Persian authorities serve him), though more significantly in Israel's religious life, which he established in the first place and where the promises of the prophets are fulfilled. He calls the Israelite קהל to be also the עדת, the community gathered for worship. It is this that Ezra established /68/, and this that the Chronicler provides with its ideological base - still, significantly, in the form of narrative history. It was of course true that Israel had been a worshipping community from the beginning, and that Ezekiel's prophecies had this at the centre of their vision. Indeed 'we must always ask whether a theology which saw Israel's existence in the eyes of Jahweh as so strongly conditioned by praise could have strayed so very far from the proper road' /69/.

In theory, at least, the community welcomes all who are willing to join God's people in Jerusalem to worship with it; yet there is an unresolved tension in its attitude to outsiders. It is still a people, organized by tribe and family - as the Chronicler especially emphasizes. Indeed, community leaders such as Ezra and Nehemiah perceive a need to close the ranks against alien influence if Israel is to survive as a distinct entity in the pressures of their time, and to be less tolerant of the 'mixed multitude' than Moses had been (Neh

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/67/ Cf Vriezen, Hoofdpijnen 390 (ET<sup>2</sup> 360).

/68/ So Koch, JSS 19:173-97.

/69/ Von Rad's comment on the Chronicler, Theologie 1:351 (ET 1:354).



13:1-3). Such a protectionism may have enabled Judaism to survive, even if it could not enable it to triumph /70/.

(b) Other Jews approached exilic prophecy in a different way and saw the people of God as called to be a waiting community. If God could not be seen as presently active in history, faith's response was not to narrow his sphere of activity to a cultic focus, but to look to God's future. One should not despise the day of small things, but one should not be satisfied with it either. The time will come when he brings to an end this God-forsaken order of history in judgment and salvation.

Some of the tensions between the vision of the worshipping community and that of the waiting community perhaps reflect the respective positions of different groups in the power structure of the post-exilic community as a whole /71/. Yet they are also intelligible as alternative responses to a real problem of faith. Nor should the tensions between those who hold these viewpoints be exaggerated. As well as visionaries such as Ezekiel, Haggai, and Zechariah having a distinctively temple-focused faith, worship-focused figures such as Ezra and the Chronicler still look to the future for God to bring about a more satisfactory restoration of his people's fortunes than the one they experience in the present /72/. The cultic and the apocalyptic

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/70/ Cf Chamberlayne, Man in Society 176. Williamson in Israel in the Books of Chronicles argues that Chronicles takes a less protectionist stance than Ezra and Nehemiah.

/71/ So e.g. Hanson, Dawn of Apocalyptic.

/72/ Cf Koch 197.

are both concerned for purity over against outside influence; they stand together over against the views of the Samaritans, of the Jews of Elephantine, and of those who were prepared to accept (or to take up arms against) the hellenizing pressures of the Maccabaeen crisis /73/. A concern for purity over against outside influence thus involves a concern for purity within the people of God, and this, too, apocalyptic and Chronicles both share. The division between righteous and wicked is not only one between Israel and the world but one within Israel /74/.

(c) A third approach is to emphasize obeying the pentateuchal law. We noted in section 2.7.1 that in the framework of the covenant the law functioned as an expression of God's grace which provided his people with the framework for a response to his redemptive acts. After the exile, the law seems to function more independently of the covenant, and gains a central place in its own right as a means of people relating to God. The law is the direct object of the believer's meditation, delight, hope, longing, trust, and love (e.g. Psa 19:7-14; 119:14-16,40-9).

In Mendenhall's view, post-exilic Israel becomes for the first time

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/73/ There is some Persian influence on apocalyptic, but it is of a marginal kind and provides new ways of expressing tendencies inherent in Yahwistic faith rather than introducing quite alien features to it (cf Ackroyd, Israel 340-4).

/74/ Cf Mowinckel, Psalms 1:207.



ethnocentric, not least in connection with its observance of the law (see Neh 13) /75/. It is implausible in this way either to remove the ethnic base from early Israel, or to remove the confessional base from the post-exilic community, for the idea of conversion to Judaism, of becoming a Jew by taking on the demands of the law, begins in post-exilic Judaism /76/. It is the post-exilic community's focusing on the law which opens up the possibility that anyone who responds to God's law, whatever his race, can belong to his people - the openness illustrated by Ruth and Jonah, if they belong to this period. Yet this same focusing on the law issues in the exclusivist attitudes of Ezra and Nehemiah, noted earlier in this section.

There are other drawbacks about an emphasis on law. Turning Israel's faith into a religion of a book releases her from having to listen for the living word and from the tension of living with God in history /77/. It may imply that the God-man relationship depends on man rather than on God, and may turn the religion which had been Israel's freedom at the beginning of her story into her bondage at the end of her story

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/75/ Tenth Generation 5.

/76/ Cf Milgrom, JBL 101:169-76; Neusner, Understanding Jewish Theology 63. Mendenhall himself later notes (p 153) that a concern with exogamy in passages such as Deut 7 actually arises from ethical or religious considerations; it is not merely ethnic.

/77/ So Jacob, Théologie (1955 edition) 108 (ET Theology 133-4); Voegelin Israel 374.

/78/. Yet with this faith, Jews can live without national existence, staying on in Babylon and Egypt. They can find a unity based on commitment to the Torah /79/, a commitment which embodies Deuteronomy's demand for a response of love, trust, and fear, and brings a partial fulfilment of the vision of people's hearts being circumcised and of the law being written on them (Deut 30:6; Jer 31:33). Here is the birth of a confessing church.

(d) A fourth response is questioning; even more than the third, it appeals as much to the individual as to the community as such. The post-exilic community is usually reckoned to be the home of the OT's most serious wrestling with doubt and uncertainty, in Job and Ecclesiastes. Here the exceptions to such confident affirmations as characterize Proverbs are felt more keenly than are the rules themselves. The fact that the rules do not always work must have been apparent before the exile, and doubt and uncertainty about basic affirmations of the faith find periodic expression throughout OT times /80/. The exceptions can be accommodated as long as people retain a living conviction that the world does make sense, a conviction reinforced in Israel by the experience of God's great acts of

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- /78/ So Mendenhall, BA 25:86-7, with Blenkinsopp's comments, Sketchbook 69. Wellhausen saw individual commitment to the Torah as the essence of post-exilic religion and evaluated it negatively (Prolegomena e.g. 450-1 [ET 424-5]).
- /79/ Cf Koch, JSS 19:197.
- /80/ See further section 6.5.5 below.



redemption in her history /81/. The exodus is now ancient history, however, and it is a demanding venture of faith to recognize the restoration as a genuine new exodus. Disappointment with historical experience of this kind seems likely to have contributed to doubt becoming so articulate in Job and Ecclesiastes. In their circles within the post-exilic community, it feels impossible to make the ancient faith very meaningful. They recognize that there is nowhere else to look for answers; the situation can be faced only by discovering new bases for believing in Yahweh. But they find it is easier to pose questions than to reach satisfying answers.

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/81/ Cf Bowker, Problems of Suffering 9.

3.6 The continuing story of the people of God in Judaism and Christianity

We have reached the end of the story of the people of God as the Hebrew Bible reflects it, yet that story has not come to a proper conclusion. 'Colonial dependence' in the Persian and early Greek period is followed by 'wars of independence; controlled independence; and then a last revolt leading to annihilation' /82/. From either a rabbinic or a primitive Christian perspective this post-canonical history of the people of God involves a re-politicization which is discredited by its results /83/.

Rabbinic Judaism sees itself as taking up where the OT leaves off. The ghetto comes to stand not only for the Jewish people's continuing calling to a distinctive obedience, but also for her continuing election to the suffering of the servant, in which once again her God seeks to reveal himself /84/. Zionism preserved the vision of being 'a model for the redemption of the entire human race' /85/.

Understandably tired of being treated as the afflicted remnant, however, she has once again re-politicized her life and sought to be a nation like the other nations, guided as much by Joshua, the Maccabees, and Bar Kochba as by Moses, and experiencing the same effectiveness as she once enjoyed under David and Solomon, with the same risks.

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/82/ Dumas, Political Theology 118.

/83/ So Mendenhall, Tenth Generation 101; Schoeps, Church and the Jewish People 65.

/84/ Cf Rengstorff, Church and the Jewish People 34-5.

/85/ D Ben Gurion, quoted in Elon and Hassan, Between Enemies 12.



A Christian perspective is more impressed by the lines that lead from the OT to Jesus than by those that lead to rabbinic Judaism; it finds the continuing existence of the Jewish people a theological puzzle. Among the streams of thought represented in the late OT period, Jesus has obvious affinities with the community waiting for the coming of the Day of God, but it is to representatives of the worshipping community that the coming of this Day is first announced (Luke 1:5-25), while the community concerned with obeying the law ought also - so Jesus claims - to find itself drawn to him (John 5:39) /86/, and the new revelation and new events he brings offer some response to the doubt and questioning of those for whom the traditional faith no longer carries conviction.

Thus Jesus addresses himself to Israel and forms around him the nucleus of a responsive remnant of Israel: not a replacement people of God, but a group through whom Israel as a whole will be reached /87/. In fact, Israel as a whole rejects him. As there were lines that could lead from the OT to Jesus, there were others that could lead to rabbinic Judaism, to his rejection, and to the OT's own miscarriage. Thus the OT functions both positively and negatively in relation to Jesus, and Christianity's relationship to it is ambivalent /88/. In rejecting

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/86/ Baumbach, too, sees equivalents in subsequent NT theologies to his three types of ecclesiology in Judaism (see Kairos 21:46-7).

/87/ See e.g. Flew, Jesus and his Church; K  ng, Die Kirche 90-3 (ET The Church 72-4); E Schweizer, Gemeinde und Gemeindordnung (ET Church Order) ch 2.

/88/ Cf Barr, Old and New 161.

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Jesus Judaism in general stands self-condemned as the anti-people of God, and the nucleus becomes only a remnant. Not that the church can dispense with Israel; to attempt to do so is 'perilously like playing Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark' /89/, and Israel still belongs to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile it is this remnant that receives the Holy Spirit, the distinctive foretaste of the End with its blessings, which makes it the community which both lives by and looks for the End of all things. It becomes the Church, the gathered community (Christian faith is no less corporate, no more individualistic, than OT faith was). Far from settling down as a remnant, it is expected to take an essentially outward-looking, open stance, expectant of growing into not only the fullness of Israel but - as a means to that - the fullness of the gentiles, who are fellow-heirs with the saints in a body which sees itself as the same old people of God yet at the same time as a new entity in which ethnic distinctions cease to count. All become one in Christ Jesus, for the people of God now focuses on a person, on shared relationships with him, and on a shared acknowledgment of him as Lord; the people of God itself is thus less central than it was in OT times

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/89/ Sloyan, Standing before God 113.



/90/. It is called to preach and to embody his calling as the crucified one, relying on the cross, accepting the cross, and preaching the cross.

On the way to the cross, Jesus had gone through stages in his ministry which in part parallel Israel's experience /91/. He has the power to be the mighty one of Mal 3, exercises the ministry of liberator and saviour described in Isa 35 and 61, has the opportunity to become the messianic King of Israel; but finds his true calling in the role of the afflicted servant of Isaiah 40 - 55.

The church's own story also manifests parallels to Israel's /92/.

Perhaps the patterns and recurring developments which can be perceived can be accounted for in sociological terms: the turning of theocracy into state and of church into institution are examples of developments one can perceive in culture and history /93/, while any beleaguered

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- /90/ C W Williams asks whether the church is central to God's purpose, or whether ecclesiology is but a paragraph from Christology (The Church 17-19). The former is true in the OT, the latter in the NT, as messianism is an aspect of eschatology in the OT, but fundamental to the NT.
- /91/ For what follows, see J A T Robinson, Human Face of God 80-3.
- /92/ For what follows, see in part Seebass, WD 8:34-5; de Waal, What is the Church? 9-19; Reid, Elaborate Funeral 163-70; Rahner, Sendung und Gnade 31-2 (ET Mission and Grace 1:31-2); Shape of the Church to Come 29-34.
- /93/ See e.g. Melly, Revolt into Style on this phenomenon in music; Reich, Greening of America on its place in the development of the 'corporate state' in the USA.

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remnant may well cope with and survive its minority situation by turning in on itself /94/. Thus, like Israel, the church begins as a family and spreads through the known world under God's direct leadership. Then it begins to need ordered leadership and to institutionalize the Spirit's lordship. With Constantine, it comes to be accepted by the world and to operate in the world like the world, often on the basis of the world's agenda. With the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, it becomes an exiled remnant, though in some ways thus finds itself. Like post-exilic Israel, it now lives with a tension between the way scripture describes the church's significance and the insignificance of its place in the world, often coping with this experience by means of similar devices to Israel's: the agnostic faith of the theological community, or individualistic piety, or a concentration on the church's internal affairs and life of worship, or an escape into hope and striving for a coming Kingdom which contrasts with the present one.

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/94/ So Berger, Rumour of Angels 31-4. Hanson's work in Dawn of Apocalyptic opens up the possibility of a broader sociological analysis of post-exilic OT material in particular; see also the general survey by Long, Interpretation 36:243-55. The studies of patriarchal religion against the background of parallels among other peoples in a similar social situation by scholars such as Alt and Cross (see n 16 above) take another incipiently sociological approach to that period. Such approaches need not have reductionist implications, as Berger's work in Rumour of Angels and in Facing up to Modernity illustrates.



3.7 Permanent insights and recurring questions

3.7.1 The contextual approach to the varied theological material we have examined in this chapter begins by noting that these models of what it means to be the people of God are all part of the canonical history; all thus contain material open for our appropriation. The question it then suggests is whether the self-understanding to which Israel gave expression in one or other of these OT contexts is distinctively helpful to us in our context in enabling us to perceive what it means for us to be the people of God.

Yet it is not enough that we should simply feel free to choose from the OT tradition those insights which we find immediately helpful. The very way in which the tradition develops reflects the conviction that the insights of earlier periods must be brought to bear on later ones; what it meant to be the people of God in Abraham's time does not cease to be relevant when Israel is no longer a homeless clan. J and P, for instance, speak to the institutional state and the afflicted remnant by retelling the stories of the clan, with their radical implications for each /95/. Arguably the latter traditions become more, not less, important when they offer insights that derive from a quite different social and historical experience.

Conversely, the subsequent history of particular OT traditions or motifs is relevant to our interpretation of the significance of these

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/95/ Cf Lind on J, who 'promoted a politics developed in a period of weakness for a time of political strength' (Yahweh is a Warrior 36).

traditions as they appear earlier. This later history may allow hidden tensions to be revealed or visible tensions to be resolved, intrinsic difficulties to emerge or open questions to be faced, confident affirmations to be qualified or situational overemphases to be set in a broader context. Even if we find it instinctively easy to identify with one model of being the people of God, we must see this model in the context of the others to which it is historically linked. Precisely because the various modes of being the people of God were linked historically and developed from each other, they may be expected to convey insights of permanent significance.

(a) Being a wandering family speaks of closeness of relationship, in the present and through the generations. It speaks of mutual love and concern, of the people of God as a brotherhood in which conflict is overcome by reconciliation, and to which all belong as equal partners /96/. Here 'the whole of existence is defined by the communal form of the family, a pre- and a-political form of existence' /97/. It speaks of being a people on the way, between promise and fulfilment, and dependent on the one who brought it into being by his will (not by the initiative of human beings individually or corporately) to take it

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/96/ Cf Dumas, Political Theology 24-42; Lind 39-42; also the awareness that the theme 'people of God' attracted interest in Conciliar Roman Catholicism because it brought out the fact that the church is the total Christian community, not just the clergy (cf Grillmeier, Die zweite Vatikanische Konzil 1:156-209 (ET Commentary 1:138-85); see also n 11 above.

/97/ So Westermann, What Does the OT Say About God? 83.



to its destiny by whatever route he chooses, willing to sacrifice all securities (even God-given ones) in order to keep receiving the good things of this world anew as the gifts of the God of this world /98/. It must not mean a group turned in on itself, which rests on the mere fact of genetic relationship rather than acknowledging the importance of historical choice, and which may even become settled in an unsettled way of life.

(b) Being a theocratic nation speaks of the evident blessing of God demonstrated in the increase he gives; of the experience of him fulfilling his promises; of his direct leading and his people following, of human leadership not allowed to obscure his kingship and of the priesthood of the whole people not annulled by the existence of a priestly tribe. It speaks of living in the world and of learning from it, but of standing over against the world and its religion, though being willing to welcome others to the same commitment to Yahweh as King and Lord which his people themselves must make. It must not mean a confidence in God which produces a false confidence in themselves, in their position and in their response to him; the theocratic nation especially has to recognize that it is the rebellious nation that cannot exist in the world as theocracy because of its sin.

(c) Being an institutional state means that God starts with his people where they are; if they cannot cope with his highest way, he carves out a lower one. When they do not respond to the spirit of Yahweh or when

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/98/ Cf Gunneweg, Vom Verstehen des AT 142 (ET Understanding the OT 170); Macquarrie, Faith of the People of God 21-2.

all sorts of spirits lead them into anarchy, he provides them with the institutional safeguard of earthly rulers. It speaks of an openness to learn from the world, to let the world provide the vehicles for expressing the faith, and to attract the world to that faith. It must not mean that the style of the nations becomes the style of the people of God, or that the institution quenches the Spirit and its rulers replace God, or that the gifts of God come to be viewed as inalienable possessions or as rights which God has to defend /99/.

(d) Being an afflicted remnant means recognizing that the final purpose of God cannot be effected in the regular course of human history, because of the waywardness both of God's people and of other nations. It means that God's people are subject to his judgment, but that all is not lost when God cuts his people down to size. It means reaching one's furthest influence on the world not through the exercise of the world's power or by sharing the world's faith and attitudes but by accepting the affliction that comes from confronting the world, in the awareness that the call of the servant is a call to die. It must not mean trusting in being those who (by God's grace) have escaped judgment, or settling down to being the remnant in a ghetto, or morbidly courting martyrdom.

(e) Being a community of promise suggests a complex set of challenges of its own: of a people that faces up to facts yet recognizes that even when history ceases to be the sphere in which God fulfils his ultimate purpose through her, it does not cease to be the sphere in which she

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/99/ Cf Gunneweg 142-3 (ET 169).



actually has to live; that is honest about what she can believe yet pledged to making sense of the old faith; that is committed to personal discipleship if the corporate seems to lapse; that lives as a people dedicated to the praise of Yahweh for what he has done, yet to hope in him for what he is yet to do /100/.

(f) Being God's people means being especially his, especially responsible to him, and especially likely to reject the messiah.

(g) Being God's people means being grasped by the Holy Spirit without being susceptible to the influence of other spirits, being taken out of the world without becoming isolated from the world, accepting the lordship of Christ, the mission of Christ, but also the cross of Christ /101/. It means recognizing that the church remains sinful and that even the NT embraces a concern with law (Matthew), with institutional ministry (the Pastorals), with individualism (John), and with the apocalyptic future (Revelation).

These insights suggested by what it means in different periods to be the people of God may be set up thus as antitheses: she should be this, she should not be that. But the tragic paradox of the people of God is that she is both at once. She is 'my people' but 'not my people'; a means of God's purpose being effected and also the biggest obstacle to

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/100/ As Congar puts it, the not yet must not be allowed to take all the truth from the is now (Concilium 1/1:16) - or vice versa.

/101/ See further Käsemann, Exegetische Versuche 2:256-7 (ET NT Questions 257-9).

that end; the agent of God's revealing himself and the means of his being obscured; a microcosm of what the world is called to be and a microcosm of what the world already is; set apart and sanctified but also rebellious and indistinguishable from the sinful world; separated from the nations and also a mixed multitude; the event by which God gives expression to his will and the anti-event by which his will is frustrated.

3.7.2 Such generalizations lead from a diachronic approach to the material on the people of God - that is, an approach which looks at what it means to be God's people in different ages - to a synchronic approach, which asks what issues recur throughout this material. There are certain constants about the OT's underlying understanding of the people of God, 'family resemblances' which generally appear. God's people is that entity which is brought into existence by his historical choice, which lives by his promise and is the heir of his blessing. It is that entity where his kingship is to be made a reality corporately, in a body and not merely in individuals /102/; that entity which accepts Yahweh's lordship and follows his leading. It is a visible body; even where there is a distinction drawn between so-called Israel and real Israel,

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/102/ Cf Hertzberg, Werdende Kirche 5-7, 24, suggesting that the question of the relationship between corporate and individual in the Psalms (who is the 'I'?), Isaiah 40 - 55 (the servant), and Deuteronomy (which varies over addressing people in the singular or the plural) reflects the fact that both are intrinsically important in the OT; von Rad, Gottesvolk 100, noting that even Jeremiah's vision is of a renewed people - it is not individualistic.



that is not a distinction between a visible church and an invisible one, and it lives in the world and in history in order that it may model there the calling of a people of Yahweh, which it is the destiny of all peoples to share /103/.

Such constants which underlie the changing form of the people of God may, however, be less striking and less illuminating than the series of questions which recur through the material.

(a) What is the relationship between life in the Spirit and life in the world? In Abraham's time, God's people ignores the world and lives before God, but eventually finds herself under the world in Egypt. With Moses begins the glorious experiment in which the tension between religion and politics is overcome. But eventually Israel finds herself in a state of religious and moral anarchy - one indeed presaged from the start by the rebellions of Israel - and of political subjection. The monarchy triumphs in the world (at first) but on the whole fails in the realm of the Spirit. The exile again brings earthly humiliation, but new insights to some (though one should not assume a responsiveness on the part of the exiles as a whole). These include the belief that outward affliction may be the means of (others') growth in the Spirit (the servant), though the prophets and preachers of the exile do not abandon the parallel vision of political triumph. The restoration sees

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/103/ Contrast Baumgärtel's view that Israel mistakenly turned God's promise of a relationship with him into a this-worldly promise involving land (see his Verheissung, with Gunneweg's comments, 140-2 [ET 166-9]).

only a partial realization of either vision /104/, and the OT thus leaves us with a vision unfulfilled. Israel's story suggests that the relationship between life in the Spirit and life in the world is insoluble. The people of God cannot live as a political theocracy ruling the world in Yahweh's name, but neither can she take the way of separation which evades life in the world /105/. Nor is there any way of living in obedience to God and being organized for existence in history /106/. History, politics, and statehood, though inevitable, make it difficult to live as the people of God. The NT has little to add to this OT picture, and church history confirms it.

(b) What is the relationship under God between divine rule and human leadership, and between institutional order and individual freedom and responsibility? The clan leader is taken hold of and guided by God and there is no question of others deciding for themselves where and how

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/104/ Cf Eissfeldt's contrast of Deuteronomy with Lev 17 - 26, which lacks reference to warmaking and foreign policy and implies acceptance of foreign overlordship (TSK 109, 2:16).

/105/ Cf Hertzberg 23, following H M Müller, Das AT: Christlich/Jüdisch/Weltlich 59-61.

/106/ Cf Voegelin, Israel 183; also Mendenhall's observation that the biblical tradition has always been most creative when the community lacked political or economic power, while the most corrupt periods are those when it enjoys power (Tenth Generation xi-xii); and Yoder's that the more closely a people is related to God, the less its existence can be tied to the political structures of the institutional state (Karl Barth and the Problem of War 79).



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they will live their lives, or - as far as one can tell - of their relating directly to God themselves: the clan leader is father, king, and priest. The theocracy emphasizes Yahweh's lordship but the people are slow to follow and both kingship and priesthood fulfil a need for institutional leadership, though not without compromising Yahweh's own position - as the rise of the prophets as an alternative order witnesses. The NT sees the Spirit given to the whole community (or perhaps vice versa), but still the community can be led astray by individuals, and the NT itself comes round to developing the features of an institution for similar reasons to the OT's.

(c) What is the relationship between triumph and affliction? The story of the patriarchs is arguably one that takes them from glory to humiliation (in precise contradiction to what had been promised to Abraham), and for no apparent purpose. In the exodus and conquest Israel experiences triumph, but this is followed by humiliation again in the judges period; the pattern repeats itself in the monarchy and exile. Here, however, while political restoration is promised, a new vision appears: it may not be the case that only triumph can win men for God. Affliction may do so too. Though the notion of Israel's call to suffering is not further developed in the OT, it has become significant in later Jewish theology. Israel's very election seems to be one to suffering. In the NT, suffering is seen as both preceding glory and as itself a peculiar form of glory, both for Jesus and for the church.

(d) What is the relationship between 'Yahweh the God of Israel' and 'Yahweh the lord of the world'? Israel's story is set on the broadest

canvas - the creation of the whole cosmos and the forming of the first human pair by Yahweh Elohim, Yahweh who is God, who is worshipped as such from the beginning. The experiences of the patriarchs and of Israel were to be only a paradigm of what God purposed for the whole world. Yet Yahweh's concern with the rest of the world for its own sake is not prominent in the OT. The world is as often seen as the locus of sin before God and enmity towards Israel (and therefore to be punished) as it is seen as living in ignorance and need (and therefore to be saved). Even Jesus' ministry is only concerned with Israel; and - despite the great commission - even the NT's suggestion that the purpose behind the delay in the consummation is that this should provide an opportunity for the gathering in of the gentiles, has the air of an afterthought /107/.

(e) What is the relationship between faith in Yahweh and the cultures of other peoples? /108/. When the world's concerns are marginal to hers and the world's beliefs are less misguided than they might be, God's people is not afraid to identify with it. When she is confronting the world and the world is more degenerate, she resists and attacks its beliefs; she thus gives expression to her calling to be the people of Yahweh. When she is a power in the world herself, she allows them to influence her, though not without a price being paid. When she

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/107/ On 'nationalism' and 'universalism', see further sections 5.2.1 and 6.5.3 below.

/108/ Cf now Dietrich's study in his Israel und Canaan of how these two peoples relate (e.g. coexistence, confrontation, integration, secession, infiltration, repression).



is being reduced to a remnant and dominated by the world, she again resists the world's beliefs and emphasizes practices that distinguish her. When she is lord of her own domain but still under the world's higher overlordship, she is wary still of alien influence and increasingly longing for people to make their individual commitment to Yahweh's way. When she ventures confidently with the gospel into the gentile world she is not afraid to reconceptualize it in the terms of hellenism/gnosticism. Her willingness to be influenced by other cultures is part of her own theologizing; it is also a chief way in which she falls into sin and fails to maintain a distinctive faith in Yahweh. The tension between the positive and the negative aspects to this willingness cannot be resolved.

(f) What is the relationship between the people of God as a vision and the people of God in reality? The theological statements made about Israel are characteristically larger than life and, insofar as they never correspond to visible reality, are always open to the explicit eschatological reinterpretation that they eventually receive. The designation of Israel as God's people is not merely a descriptive statement; it is promissory or eschatological, and also prescriptive. There is a danger inherent in the descriptive interpretation (cf Jer 7:10; Matt 3:9). The image may be absolutized and turned into an idol /109/. If it is not taken prescriptively it is not true at all and becomes only a hope for the future (Hos 1:9-10; Jer 31:1,33) /110/. The tension between vision and reality is not to be resolved by

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/109/ Cf Marks, Theology Today 29:26.

/110/ Cf Dahl, Volk Gottes 38.

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abandoning the visible people. Throughout the OT the people of God is visibly organized yet based on faith, and has to be viewed in this-worldly terms yet also viewed theologically /111/. The NT people of God, too, lives with this tension; not least, it both asserts that Christ's community ignores all ethnic boundaries and also believes in the continuing significance of the actual people Israel (see especially Rom 9 - 11) /112/.

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/111/ Cf Hertzberg 10, 25. Contrast the view that there is a development from people/nation towards church in the OT (e.g. Eissfeldt TSK 109, 2:9-23).

/112/ On this see e.g. W D Davies, NTS 24:4-39.



3.8 What Does it Mean to be the People of God?

3.8.1 We began section 3.7 by noting that the contextual approach to the diverse OT insights on what it means to be the people of God may encourage us to appropriate this perspective or that from within the tradition by pointing to similarities between a specific OT context and our own. For instance, if we locate ourselves as the people of God in a period analogous to that of post-exilic times, then it may be natural for us to find the self-understanding of the community of the promise especially helpful; conversely, the church which no longer lives in a period when it exercises political power need not feel guilty at its inability to exercise the power in the world that the institutional state did.

It is a genuine encouragement to find within scripture itself the people of God coping with different modes of being with the ambiguities that we ourselves experience. God has said 'Yes' to each of these. The monarchy was part of God's will, even though it had its earthly origin in an act of human rebellion. The community has to find ways of living with the experience of God's promises not being fulfilled, and the OT as a whole includes responses such as the development of apocalyptic eschatology and of the Chronicler's realized eschatology; even if cultic observances have a low place on God's theoretical list of priorities for his people, when she is in danger of disillusion and loss of identity, the Chronicler's emphasis on God's presence with her in her worship helps to sustain her and keep her alive. How she understands herself and lives out her calling has to vary with circumstances; the mode appropriate before may be inappropriate now.

The Rechabites' anachronistic way of life was their calling even in the time of Jeremiah, but it was not that of the majority.

The danger is that our choice of a perspective from the varied ones the OT offers to us may be arbitrary. A pre-determined understanding of what it means to be God's people may be bolstered exegetically by appeal to biblical warrants which support a stance chosen before coming to the Bible /113/. Even the appeal to context may only provide a rationalization for using the OT to justify a pre-determined stance without examining the possibility that the OT points in other directions - in other words, it may function ideologically.

It needs to take account, for instance, of the fact that some of these modes of being are of more lasting significance than others. Contrary to common popular assumption, Israel was not always a nation; still less was she always an institutional state. On the other hand, she always remained a collection of families, a people, and she was from the beginning a קהל that gathered together for worship, judgment, and war (e.g. Exod 32:1 - the verb; Judg 20:1-2; 1 Sam 17:47). Her history

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/113/ E.g. Congar appropriates the model of the institutional state presupposed by Deut 17 - 18 in justifying the church's possessing a priesthood, despite accepting that the whole church is God's priesthood - for Israel possessed kingship and priesthood even though seeing the whole people as a kingly priesthood (Exod 19:5-6) (Concilium 1/1:12). Vincent shows how diversity in the NT view of the church similarly enables different Christian groups to appeal to different NT images of the church (Study Encounter S/E 55).



cannot be portrayed as a simple development from clan to state to religious community /114/, nor in the reverse direction from a community with a distinctive ideology via a state to a society that now emphasized kinship bonds /115/. She was always a community of faith, though always also an ethnic one /116/.

Further, while various contexts enable certain aspects of what it means to be the people of God to find expression, they also impose limits on what can find expression there. Living with the tension between vision and reality is both the strength of the post-exilic community and also its limitation. Historical practicalities determine what aspects of

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/114/ So Causse, Du groupe ethnique à la communauté religieuse; cf Watts, ExpT 67:233.

/115/ So Mendenhall, Tenth Generation; Magnalia Dei 132-51; Gottwald, Tribes of Yahweh 235-341; cf sections 3.1 and 3.5 above, especially at notes 4 and 76.

/116/ Cf Vriezen, Hoofdpijnen 376 (ET<sup>2</sup> 346). Thus Bossmann points out that Israelite law and custom always opposed intermarriage, though for changing reasons (BTB 9:32-8, following L M Epstein, Marriage Laws); while the importance of kinship in the Bible is further reflected in its interest in genealogies, which are used for a variety of theological purposes (e.g. in Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah and in the gospels) (see M D Johnson, Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies especially 77-82). An awareness of, or a claim to close relationship found its 'natural' explanation in kinship terms. Further, it is the family, not the city or the temple, which is traced back to creation (Vriezen, Hoofdpijnen 422 [ET 217,<sup>2</sup> 371-2]).

`being the people of God' emerge in this context.

Indeed, this is true of any context. Israel finds herself at different points a clan, a nation, an institutional state, a defeated remnant. Each of these experiences has corollaries for what it means to live as the people of God - being unsettled, involving oneself in politics and warmaking, taking on the structures of statehood, beginning to be scattered over the known world. It cannot be simply assumed that any of these are intrinsic to being the people of God; they may simply be the chance results of historical particularities, part of the context in which Israel had to discover what it means to be the people of God and not part of the meaning itself /117/. We need to look not only at the historical accidents of the form of the people of God, the ways in which they could not help following the drift of history, but at the way they modified the trajectory.

By implication, then, the people of God cannot take it for granted that each of these models of what it means to be the people of God is equally available for appropriation. Although God says `Yes' to each of them, at each point his activity with and through his people necessarily means he involves himself with them where they are; he does not thereby designate that place as an ideal one. Although he then takes them some way along a road, this does not mean that they have thereby arrived. His purpose and his vision for his people has to interact with the intransigent realities of the situation and the flaws

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/117/ Craigie emphasizes this point in his study of The Problem of War in the OT (see also SJT 22:183-8).



in the raw material he has to deal with. His 'Yes' to war, kingship, urbanization, cult, apocalyptic, and early catholicism may thus be a qualified one. His grace in the story of his people manifests itself not least in his staying with them out of his willingness to adapt his will to historical and human realities - yet without abandoning his ultimate will and vision.

3.8.2 So 'when is Israel really Israel?' /118/. Hardly at the very beginning of the story, in the patriarchal period, despite the far-reaching significance of both the emphasis on kinship and that on promise. The OT itself recognizes this period as prehistory, as the time of the ancestors; Israel in the strict sense is not yet even present.

John Macquarrie suggests that the trajectory reaches its highpoint at the end. On his view, the post-exilic community's self-understanding is the noblest and clearest, recognizing as it does that peoplehood is based on faith and is not bound to any natural community, nation, or political institution /119/. But this perspective oversimplifies the post-exilic community's self-understanding, under the influence of a churchly perspective which prefers to regard nationhood and land as accidental rather than intrinsic to the being of the people of God. Whether or not this view does justice to the NT, it makes an inadequate starting-point for the dynamic of the OT's own perspective on 'when is Israel really Israel?'

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/118/ Gunneweg, Vom Verstehen des AT 145 (ET 172).

/119/ p 25. Cf Saggs's reasons for preferring the patriarchal God to the exodus God (see n 20 above).

Nor is Israel really Israel at the centre of the story, in the period of the monarchy, for the story makes quite explicit that the trappings of state are at best ambivalent in significance, that the dynamic of God's dealings with Israel during this period resides in the prophets, not in the official institutions of state, and that the exile constitutes an eventual negative judgment on the period of being a state like other states.

The modern State of Israel has found its model and support for its self-understanding and stance in political affairs in the exodus from bondage among the nations and the confident aggressiveness of the conquest of the promised land /120/. For liberation theology, too, the exodus was the paradigm experience of Israel which the church sought to experience for herself /121/. It will hardly do, however, to reassert the triumphalism of the theocracy as if it had not collapsed into the disorder of the judges period and, via the monarchy, into exile. If we will not learn from history, we are condemned to repeating it. A central question for modern Judaism has to be the relationship of the humiliation of the holocaust and the triumphs of the State.

Precisely because being cut down to size by exile was God's act of judgment, Israel is admittedly not really Israel when she is the afflicted remnant. Increase, not decimation, was her destiny (Gen 12:1-3). Yet

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/120/ Cf Grollenberg, Palestine Comes First 130-1.

/121/ The exodus is 'the original principle on which the whole biblical concept of God and faith is based' (Assmann, Practical Theology of Liberation 35).



### Chapter 3

in certain respects Israel 'found herself' in exile, and the vision of the afflicted servant has often provided Israel with the model that has most meaningfully interpreted her position in the world to her, even if (as we noted in section 3.6) after Auschwitz the Jews have shown signs of declaring that enough is enough.

Similarly, Latin American Christians cannot be expected to accept that humiliation and oppression are their lot for ever. Yet they, too, need a theology of exile /122/. In the light of the experience and the achievement of Jesus, the vision of the afflicted servant has also often seemed to Christians the point of deepest insight and moment in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, whether or not the question of the relationship between humiliation and triumph is raised for the church by its present experience, it is raised by the church's origins: both the experience of Jesus and that of his apostle to the Gentiles (see especially 2 Cor 4) open up the question of the relationship between suffering and death on one hand, resurrection and gift of the Spirit on the other. Either a Jew or a Christian might be in danger of imposing this question on the OT if it were not there; but it is there, in the issue raised by the relationship of Israel's two paradigm experiences, exodus and exile.

So the trajectory traced by the motif of the people of God reaches its first highpoint with the theocratic nation, but (to allegorize) blows a fuse at this point which ultimately requires a massive mid-course

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/122/ Cf Yoder, Missionalia 2:29-41; Dumas, Political Theology 87-106. See further ch 6, n 91 below.

correction with the afflicted servant.

While it will not do to ricochet back from the exile to the exodus as if intervening history had not taken place, neither can we regard exile as the people of God's ultimate destiny. The mid-course correction does not go back on the fundamental insight of the theocratic nation; this is reasserted in the exile. It does, however, suggest a radical reformulation of what is involved in being the theocratic nation. So we discover what it really means to be Israel when the vision of the theocratic nation and the vision of the afflicted servant come together in the exile.

The two do so, in particular, in Isaiah 40 - 55, though not in such a way as to make the relationship between them completely clear. Indeed, as these chapters unfold, both visions come into increasingly sharp focus, but the relationship between them becomes less and less clear. Yahweh makes bare his arm before the nations in the triumphant restoration of the suffering exiles and in the suffering and triumphant restoration of his servant (52:10; 53:1); but these two very different manifestations of his might are juxtaposed without being brought into relationship with each other. It is when the two come together, however, that Israel is really Israel. It is from this vantage point that the OT material on the people of God can most satisfactorily be perceived as a whole. What precedes, leads here; what follows, leads from here without exactly taking us further - until (if we see the continuation of the story of Israel in the NT) Jesus brings glory and humiliation together in his own person and passes on this vision to his followers.



The people of God, then, is called to follow God's lead wherever it takes them, expectant of being led into its inheritance, yet also obliged to accept that its calling takes it via affliction and death. The church is the community led by the Holy Spirit in the way of the crucified one. Neither aspect of this calling comes naturally, and neither has the church found it easy to accept; to hold them together is a fortiori more difficult. Like Israel, often the church has only been able to fulfil some less demanding calling, but God's way of relating to Israel shows that, even so, he will not abandon her. If the church's situation most resembles that of the post-exilic community and she can only subsist as (for instance) a cult community, the acceptance of the cult community in OT times and the presence of Chronicles in the canon indicate that God will not cast her off. She may not fulfil his highest will, and triumph, but she may at least survive.

Nevertheless, theocracy tempered by the call of the servant remains the calling.

An evaluative or critical approach4 Can we affirm some viewpoints and criticize others?

4.0 In chapters 2 and 3 we have noted how different parts of the OT reflect varying levels of insight as different historical contexts allowed these to emerge. Analysing these involved a form of critical evaluation of the material, made in the light of the shape of a trajectory as a whole. The critical evaluation we consider in chapters 4 and 5 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. In chapters 2 and 3 we began from contextual diversity, and the response of formal commitment to all the diverse material in the OT which is apt accidentally to collapse into an actual commitment only to those parts of the OT that seem directly applicable to the interpreter himself; his world, and his church. This phenomenon reflects the fact that certain parts of the OT speak to me in a way that others do not. In itself this carries no implication that these other parts were never God's word; they may simply be parts that are irrelevant to me at present. I inevitably operate in practice with a 'canon within the canon' /1/, an effective canon narrower than my formal one.

In this chapter, however, we begin from a different response to the diversity of viewpoints represented by the canon. Since the Reformation and the Enlightenment it has become the common view that

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/1/ On this phrase, see section 4.7 below.



Christian theology can and must seek to identify within the formal canon of the OT that element which is truly normative for it. Thus G Fohrer speaks of the need to decide which of the various human understandings of life embodied in the OT are the true ones, to discern where the OT is right and where wrong; he instances the contrast between the attitudes of Elisha and Isaiah to involvement in political insurrection, and between Psa 137:9 and Psa 46 or Isa 2 in their attitude to other peoples /2/. In what sense can we affirm some viewpoints and criticize others, and what are to be our criteria for doing so?

Interpreters have undertaken this evaluative task in a variety of ways; I have categorized these in sections 4.1-5, though no doubt they overlap at various points. Sections 4.6-7 relate the discussion to recent theological study of Sachkritik and of the canon within the canon. The view of the chapter as a whole is that an evaluative, critical approach to diversity in the OT has to seek to do justice to the OT as a whole, and not to simplify its diversity by discarding some elements of it.

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/2/ Theologische Grundstrukturen des AT 31-2.

4.1 Evaluation on the basis of the material's moral concern

Many of the early biblical critics and other thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were not consciously or overtly seeking to question the truth or authority of parts of the biblical canon. Thomas Hobbes, for instance /3/, is concerned to apply scripture to life, J G Herder /4/ to appreciate it as the inspired creation of the human spirit; neither declares a concern to criticize it. Even Benedict de Spinoza claims to attribute to scripture 'as much, if not more, authority' as his correspondent William van Blyenbergh, despite the latter's willingness in the end to subordinate the findings of reason to the findings of scripture if the two conflict /5/. Overtly, Spinoza is concerned with interpreting scripture in the appropriate way - that is, in a less partial and less literalistic way than many of his contemporaries /6/.

But his 'impartial' study of the Bible leads him to the conclusion that the authority of the prophets' teaching 'has weight only in matters of morality, and that their speculative doctrines affect us little ....

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/3/ Leviathan (1651) (see especially chs 12, 32, 33).

/4/ Vom Geist des hebräischen Poesie (ET Spirit of Hebrew Poetry).

/5/ Spinoza, letter 21 (1665) (Opera 4:132 [ET Wolf 179], in reply to letter 20 from van Blyenbergh (Opera 4:97 [ET Wolf 152])).

/6/ See his criticism of eisegesis in his Preface to Tractatus (1670) (Opera 3:8-9 [ET Elwes 1:7-8]), and his discussion of the parabolic aspect to scriptural language in letter 21 (Opera 4:132-3 [ET Wolf 180])).



The Word of God has not been revealed as a certain number of books, but was displayed to the prophets as a simple idea of the Divine mind, namely, obedience to God in singleness of heart, and in the practice of justice and charity .... Revelation has obedience for its sole object' /7/.

Spinoza's concern is the general moral improvement of mankind, and this is also (he believes) the real concern of the Bible. Thus his Tractatus Theologico-Politicus has been described as 'the first attempt at biblical theology, that is, as the process of winnowing out of Scripture what is of enduring worth from what can be dismissed as irrelevant', by a 'philosophically determined' process /8/.

There are links between Spinoza and J S Semler, though Semler was more directly concerned with biblical study than was Spinoza. Semler's Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon (1771-5) also insists on the distinction between the canon of holy scripture (a collection of books determined historically by the church), and the actual word of God. The former can (and must) be 'freely investigated' so that we can discover the word of God within it. Further, Semler's interest, like Spinoza's, lies in what contributes to the betterment and edification of man, so that he does not expect a person to approve of aspects of the scriptures which conflict with his own moral awareness just because

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/7/ Preface to Tractatus (Opera 3:9-10 [ET Elwes 1:8-9]); cf chs 12 - 14.

/8/ Sandys-Wunsch, ZAW 93:339.

they belong to the formal canon /9/.

Immanuel Kant, too, in his Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft (1793, <sup>2</sup> 1794), described by H R Niebuhr as 'the most profound and illuminating of all attempts to interpret Christianity solely in ethical terms' /10/, affirms that since 'the moral improvement of men constitutes the real end of all religion of reason', so 'it will comprise the highest principle of all Scriptural exegesis' /11/. Scriptural narrative exists only to encourage moral living and must always be expounded in that interest /12/; if a passage of scripture (Kant cites Psa 59:11-16) seems to contradict morality, Kant asks 'whether morality should be expounded according to the Bible [as J D Michaelis remarked in connection with the passage cited /13/] or whether the Bible should not rather be expounded according to morality' /14/.

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- /9/ Semler sections 5 and 11 (Scheible edition pp 26-9, 46-7; partial ET in Kümmel, The NT 63-4). Semler uses the word moralisch frequently, but Scheible (pp 5-6), following Hirsch (Geschichte der neuern evangelischen Theologie 4:48-89) notes that this word refers to the realm of mind and spirit generally (it is opposed to physisch), not only to the sphere of the ethical.
- /10/ See the cover of the Harper Torchbook edition of the ET, Religion within the limits of Reason Alone.
- /11/ III,1:vi (Schriften 6:112; ET Torchbook edition 102).
- /12/ III,2 (Schriften 6:132; ET Torchbook edition 123).
- /13/ Kant cites Michaelis's Moral 2:202.
- /14/ III,1:vi (Schriften 6:110; ET Torchbook edition 101).



Kant was able to allude to Jas 2:17 to support his contention that 'historical faith "is dead, being alone"' -that is, mere creed without implications for life is pointless /15/. Such an emphasis on the fact that the Bible is designed to affect the way people live corresponds to an intrinsic concern of OT and NT themselves, a concern that could easily be underestimated by those who stressed 'faith alone' in Luther's sense or 'the true faith' in the sense of seventeenth century confessionalism. The Jewish exegetes who always saw haggadah as ultimately subordinate to halakah /16/ and the liberation theologians who emphasize praxis and suspect ideology /17/ are able to appropriate a major thrust of the OT. The very idea of scripture as canon (rule) or of the Bible as a locus of authority suggests more naturally scripture's relationship to people's behaviour than to their beliefs, because behaviour can more easily be made subject to rules than belief can.

On the other hand, scripture itself holds together beliefs and life, haggadah and halakah, ideology and praxis, more intrinsically than do the views we have just referred to. Not that OT stories and creeds can be taken as really only covert statements about behaviour; the

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/15/ III,1:vi (Schriften 6:111; ET Torchbook edition 102).

/16/ Cf Bowker, Targums and Rabbinic Literature 43, with Loewe's comments in JTS 21:462.

/17/ See e.g. Miranda, Being and the Messiah 28: the God of the Bible 'has no connection with ontology ...; rather God is identified with the ethical imperative'; cf Gottwald, Tribes of Yahweh especially 703-5.

relationship between the two is more subtle and more dynamic than that /18/. Our commitments do reflect our understanding of God and the world (as well as vice versa). A different set of assumptions about God and people would quite likely issue in a different set of commitments, and commitments often appeal to their framework of belief when they are questioned. Writers such as Spinoza accepted this; they worked out their understanding of the world and life empirically and rationally, and their behavioural priorities related to this understanding. But one cannot accept his claim to do justice to the Bible if he neglects the way it emphasizes both how one thinks and how one behaves, and interrelates the two.

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/18/ See further n 27 in ch 3 above.



4.2 Evaluation on the basis of the material's developmental level

In the biblical study of the past two centuries, an evolutionary approach to the development of ideas and ideals has suggested that the OT, too, should be seen as reflecting an unfolding development, the evolution of Israelite faith; the truly normative material in the OT is then that which expresses this faith at its most mature, while other material which reflects more primitive beliefs may be ignored.

Some classic expressions of this developmental or evolutionary view of the OT belong to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus S R Driver declares his assumption that 'progress, gradual advance from lower to higher, from the less perfect to the more perfect, is the law which is stamped upon the entire range of organic nature, as well as upon the history of the civilization and education of the human race' /19/. More recent OT scholars express similar evolutionary beliefs /20/.

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/19/ Genesis 56; cf the statements of Simpson (Psalmists vi-vii) and Fosdick (Modern Use of the Bible 11-12; also his Guide to Understanding the Bible).

/20/ See e.g. Rowley, Re-discovery of the OT 11, 14; Speiser, Genesis xlix; Otto, ZAW 84:187-203, taking up the work of M Weber (Gesammelte Studien 3:139, 311 [ET Ancient Judaism 129, 297]; Shepherd, ExPT 92:171-4, taking up the 'social evolutionism' of Kohlberg (Cognitive Development and Epistemology 178), in turn based on Hobhouse's Morals in Evolution (1906); Eissfeldt's treatment of Jonah and Ruth, Einleitung 547, 654 (ET The OT 405, 483) (cf Orlinsky's comments, Translating and Understanding the OT 230-2).

There are, indeed, specific aspects of biblical faith (e.g. beliefs about Satan, about messianism and eschatology generally, and about the possibility of resurrection and a positive afterlife) which reach fullest or most mature form towards the end of the OT period. Further, beliefs about God that correspond most closely to monotheism appear in the prophetic period, in Amos and Isaiah 40 - 55, while earlier material reflects beliefs of a more polytheistic appearance.

Nevertheless, an evolutionary understanding of OT faith as a whole does not satisfactorily match OT data. It has been described as a theory which is now quite passé, a mere 'historical curiosity' /21/. Yet even if the great 'myth' of evolution is dead /22/, it refuses to lie down, as the above references illustrate. The weaknesses of developmental approaches thus still need to be pointed out.

(a) The clearest alleged example of doctrinal evolution in the OT is

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/21/ Smart, Interpretation of Scripture 250; cf Westermann, Probleme AT Hermeneutik 102-3 (ET Essays on OT Interpretation 123-4); Wright, OT against its Environment 9-15. They refer to the remarks of Driver, Simpson, and Fosdick referred to in n 19; cf also Bright, Authority of the OT 120. Rowley (p 18) rejects the idea of an 'evolutionary process' at work in the OT, despite the remarks referred to in the preceding note.

/22/ So C S Lewis, who delivers its funeral oration in Christian Reflections 82-93. Eichrodt describes Fosdick's Guide to the Understanding of the Bible as the 'obituary' of an approach to the Bible based on an 'evolutionary historicism' (JBL 65:205).



the development from animism via polytheism and henotheism to monotheism. But it is doubtful whether any of these appear in the OT. There are only the enigmatic relics of animism, while commitment to Yahweh alone is part of the essence of Israelite faith from its beginning. It is doubtful whether the explicit assertions of Isaiah 40 - 55 (themselves the result not of the development of ideas reaching a certain point, but of a particular situation provoking particular new assertions) add very much to what is implicit in statements about Yahweh's lordship in creation and history from the earliest period that we have them; indeed, 'express references to monotheism are comparatively rare in the post-exilic books of the OT' /23/. The tension of 'the one and the many in the Israelite conception of God' /24/ remained through the OT period, and when monotheism came to be taken for granted, it had to be accompanied by doctrines of angels and hypostases to cope with the awareness that there was both oneness and plurality in heaven. A scheme such as the evolutionary one cannot do justice to the material, which has various ways of coping with this tension throughout Israel's history.

(b) Tracing development in OT ideas often involves circular argument. Put crudely, the presence of 'developed' ideas on individual religion in Psa 51 shows that the psalm cannot be earlier than the time of Jeremiah; thus the psalm witnesses to the development of individual religion in the time of Jeremiah. The expectation of an individual messiah develops from the exile; therefore material in Isa 1 - 39 that

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/23/ Ringgren, IDBSup 603.

/24/ The title of a monograph by A R Johnson.

refers to an individual messianic-type figure is exilic or post-exilic.

(c) Wellhausen assumed that J was early and P late partly because of a concept of development. But 'what evolution there was, was really devolution, for it was a backward movement from the life of the green tree to the dead wood of legalism' /25/; the development/evolution/progress metaphor is thus more complicated than it looks at first sight. On Wellhausen's own assumptions, not all theological maturity belongs to a later period in Israel's history, for J's achievement signified a peak in Israel's theological thinking on creation, sin, salvation, grace, history, and election at a relatively early period. Conversely, the later period marks decline as much as achievement. Although its notable achievements deserve positive theological assessment and it has generally been excessively downgraded /26/, it can plausibly be portrayed as having certain epigonic character; it cannot as a whole be regarded as the peak of the OT's development.

(d) It is questionable whether the idea of gradual development, comparable to the growth of an organism, does justice to the way ideas, culture, or religion change in history. This change involves the dynamic interaction of particular human needs, challenges, and crises with the personalities of insight who can speak to these moments.

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/25/ R J Thompson, Moses and the Law 36, paraphrasing W L Baxter, Sanctuary and Sacrifice 102. On the romantic preference for the old, primitive, instinctive, see also Gese, Zur biblischen Theologie 22 (ET Essays 24).

/26/ See section 4.3 below, especially at n 38.



There is something radically historical and occasional about the message of J to the united monarchy, that of Amos to eighth century Israel, and that of Isaiah 40 - 55 to the exile. It is not simply that ideas had reached this stage of development.

The evidence suggests that the model of evolution, development, or progress is quite misleading if regarded as a key to discerning what is most profound or most true in the OT. There is, of course, development in the sense of change, but this development 'follows a zigzag line' /27/, an up-and-down one in which insights are lost as well as gained. Tracing historical movement means perceiving not 'development in God's revelation or manifestation, only what is now called Lichtungsgeschichte - a similar pattern at various successive crises in the history of Israel's religion' /28/. Insofar as there is advance, it is as likely to be by the refinement or explication of earlier insights as by their transformation or replacement. Where something new emerges, it is likely to be added to the old, rather than

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/27/ Smart 250; cf Ackroyd, EvQ 25:69-82; M Smith, JBL 71:146-7.

/28/ Schofield, commenting on Procksch's Theologie in Contemporary OT Theologians 96. Lichtungsgeschichte seem to mean more literally a series of patches of clearing in the jungle; according to J M Robinson (Later Heidegger and Theology 25-7; OT and Christian Faith 152-3), the term comes from Heidegger.

supplanting it /29/. The OT must be interpreted historically, but this need not mean developmentally.

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/29/ Thus Shepherd's examples (see n 20 above) show that 'earlier' moral 'stages' persist throughout the OT (and into the NT), while the attitude expressed by the latest stages is actually already present in very early material; his typology may be valid, but the 'stages' seem more concurrent than consecutive. Similarly Weber is aware that more rational, more universalist, more transcendent features of Israel's theology, which Otto notes as more developed (see n 20 above), were present in Israelite faith from the beginning (see Weber 143-9 [ET 133-8]).



4.3 Evaluation on the basis of the material's Mosaic or prophetic spirit

As we have just noted, though there were evolutionary aspects to his understanding of the development of Israelite religion, Wellhausen was very attracted by its early period, before it became affected by the restrictions of institution, law, and cult, when a 'freshness and naturalness' characterized people's behaviour and 'the divine right did not attach to the institution but was in the Creator Spirit, in individuals' /30/. The 'properly creative period in Israel's history' is the time of Moses, even though the prophets 'gave ... greater distinctness to the peculiar character of the nation' /31/.

Over the past century, much OT scholarship has followed Wellhausen in emphasizing the supreme significance of the Mosaic and prophetic contribution to the OT, though the tendency has been to reverse their relative significance. Thus in his explicitly evaluative comparison of the diverse approaches to life represented in the OT, Fohrer takes the view that the faith creatively shaped by the experiences of the Mosaic period reaches its highpoint in the refined form of the prophetic experience. The inner history of Israel is the story of the struggle between her distinctive faith with its approach to life (Daseinshaltung) and those of hostile powers that embody typically human approaches to life, namely magic and wisdom. These latter are man's two great ways of mastering life and finding his security, and of protecting himself from the breaking in of that more or less known

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/30/ Prolegomena 437 (ET 412).

/31/ 'Israel', in ET of Prolegomena 432.

transcendent foreign power which would throw him into shock and bewilderment. OT faith was formed in interaction with these two approaches to life, and the OT itself is the deposit (or rather the scene) of this struggle. The magical approach appears in OT taboos and elsewhere, but also and especially in the cult and in national religion (e.g. J), which constitute attempts to control and manipulate God and history. This and the wisdom approach effect a compromise between the distinctive Israelite vision and the ordinary human approaches to life. Only prophecy (pre-exilic prophecy; the epigones begin with Isaiah of the exile) brings to fulfilment the potential of the Mosaic faith in the thoroughgoing rejection of these approaches and an acceptance of the paradoxical security of naked uncertainty before and active submission to the mighty God. It is this which constitutes the permanently significant feature of OT faith /32/.

Although Fohrer's approach is suggestive, difficulties are involved in locating the normative feature of OT faith in this feature of prophetic religion.

(a) Fohrer does not offer evidence for the view that this 'prophetic approach to life' is the fundamental insight of OT faith, and one wonders whether he has simply highlighted the feature he himself finds most congenial. Nor does he offer evidence that the other approaches

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/32/ See Theologische Grundstrukturen 51-94. In his discussion of diversity and unity in biblical thought, Clavier also seems to see prophecy as the highpoint of OT thinking (Les variétés de la pensée biblique 362-3).



to life embodied in the OT are inherently questionable. The notion of God effecting his worldwide purpose through Israel could easily degenerate into mere national religion, but it need not do so. The notion of salvation history needs critical handling, but one cannot dismiss it as easily as Fohrer does /33/.

(b) The prophets, even those of the pre-exilic period, are not unequivocal advocates of 'the prophetic approach'. It is doubtful whether promises of salvation can be eliminated from the pre-exilic prophets to the extent that Fohrer believes /34/; the manifold positive connections discerned by scholars between the pre-exilic prophets and the cult on the one hand and wisdom on the other /35/ set a question-mark by the thesis that the prophetic approach to life is incompatible with the latter two; to describe the prophets as universalist rather than nationalist is at best an oversimplification.

(c) The converse of the fact that the prophets are not unequivocal advocates of the prophetic approach is the fact that this approach is not confined to the prophets. Job, notably, embodies a similar rejection of the idea that man's destiny is in his control, and calls for humble submission before the power of God.

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/33/ pp 42-6; cf Geschichte der israelitischen Religion 278 (ET 275-6).

/34/ See Geschichte 274 (ET 272); cf e.g. his comments on Isaiah in (Sellin and) Fohrer, Einleitung 405-6 (ET Introduction 370-1).

/35/ See the critical discussions in e.g. Rowley, Worship 144-75; Clements, Prophecy and Tradition 73-83; and their references.

(d) The pre-exilic prophets cannot be identified as the exclusive highpoint of OT insight. The OT's approaches to suffering may be instanced. Jeremiah and Habakkuk wrestle with this issue, but not as profoundly as Job and Isaiah 40 - 55. The OT's concern with creation is rather marginally represented in the pre-exilic prophets compared with Genesis, Psalms, Isaiah 40 - 55, and Job. W Zimmerli suggests that the highpoint of the prophets' significance is not reached until the exile, with the exilic prophets' emphasis in that context that we can only live before God by grace /36/.

Fohrer's method of approach to the prophets and to the OT generally is reminiscent of the one we noted in Spinoza. The aspect of the OT and of the prophetic books of which he takes serious notice (in Fohrer's case, their receiving of a personal revelation which urges them to a personal commitment) is the approach to life which the interpreter himself already valued. Thus N K Gottwald accuses Fohrer of reading into the OT his own existentialist, personalistic idealism and finding there only the 'sensitivities and value judgments which other cultured bourgeois thinkers reach without any appeal to the Bible' /37/.

Gottwald's own personal commitments lie elsewhere. On the basis of a Marxian approach to the OT material, in The Tribes of Yahweh he relocates the authentic revolutionary Israelite faith (or rather praxis) in that of Mosaic Yahwism. His emphasis on this early period

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/36/ See VTSup 23:48-64.

/37/ JBL 93:594-6.



corresponds to the stress which much of the OT itself places on it, as is reflected in the emphasis traditionally given in the study of OT religion and theology to Moses, the exodus, and the covenant.

But Gottwald himself has more than once noted the danger of emphasizing pre-exilic religion and theology at the expense of post-exilic; 'early Judaism' is part of the OT, and it cannot simply be ignored /38/.

Further, Gottwald's presentation of Israel's earliest period rather idealizes it, resolving likely ambiguities; it also underestimates the positive significance of the monarchic period /39/. The Mosaic or prophetic contribution to OT faith can no more be seen as the highpoint of it than can any other individual contribution.

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/38/ ExpT 74:212; Contemporary OT Theologians 48, 56; cf Barr, RTP III, 18:209-17; Judaism 12-13; Ackroyd, Exile and Restoration 1-7; Steck, EvT 28:449.

/39/ Cf the reviews by Buss and Lenski in RelSR 6:274, 276, and by Mayes in JTS 32:476, 482-3; also Brueggemann's analysis of the Davidic and Mosaic 'trajectories', especially in Israelite Wisdom 86-7.

4.4 Evaluation on the basis of a comparison with NT concerns

A developmental understanding of the growth of OT faith is often accompanied and aided by the assumption natural to Christian interpreters of the OT that the person and teaching of Christ himself provide the criterion for distinguishing between material which may be affirmed and material which must be abandoned. Thus T C Vriezen speaks of submitting scripture to the judgment of the preaching of Jesus Christ, judging the message of the OT in the light of the message of the NT, while F Baumgärtel sees the Christian as considering the OT's self-understanding, its piety, and its religion in the light of Christ to see where in actual fact (as opposed to where the OT writers thought) God was relating to his people in judgment and salvation /40/.

Faith in Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Christ carries bound up with it the assumption that his teaching provide the supreme key to understanding God and his relationship to the world. Things that were ambivalent or ambiguous in the OT become clear and sharply-focused in the light of the Christ event /41/. Things that perhaps seemed quite clear turn out to be only partial insights when they are seen in the

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/40/ See Vriezen, Hoofddlijnen 158 (ET Outline 122,<sup>2</sup> 149); also 118-20 (ET 88-90,<sup>2</sup> 111-3); cf Bright, Authority of the OT 200, 211-2. (On pp 95-109 Bright rejects the view that the OT is to be judged in the light of the NT, but here he seems to reappropriate it). For Baumgärtel's view see TLZ 76:262 and elsewhere, especially his Verheissung.

/41/ Cf Ebeling, Studium der Theologie 35-7 (ET 33-5); Vriezen 106 (ET 87,<sup>2</sup> 100); Mowinckel, OT as Word of God 56-9; Kaufman, Interpretation 25:106-7; G W Anderson, Peake 167; Wagner, TLZ 103:797.



light of Christ's incarnation, cross, and resurrection /42/. Thus the NT's own criterion for deciding which aspects of the Hebrew Bible to take up is the person and work of Jesus. It is material which illuminates his significance that the NT finds valuable. Jesus himself sometimes offers explicitly negative assessments of material within the Hebrew Bible, rejecting aspects of OT law, moral, religious, and social (e.g. Matt 5:38-9; 15:1-20; 19:3-12; and parallels).

At the same time, however, Jesus and the NT writers share the assumption common to contemporary Jews of all persuasions that the Hebrew Bible is the word of God. For them to assume that certain parts were more important than others implied a relative judgment on the latter, but not an absolute one that effectively de-canonized it. This is even true about the attitude that Jesus took to the Torah. By issuing more rigorous moral demands than those of some laws, Jesus does not abrogate these laws (as if the punishment need now no longer fit the crime, or that adultery is now permitted); rather he indicates that they do not go far enough. By 'declaring all foods clean' (Mark 7:19) he does abrogate many OT laws, though this need not imply denying that they had had their rightful place in the law before, and it was not taken to imply that OT cultic law no longer functioned as scripture

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/42/ See e.g. Kraus, Psalmen 1:21-2, 329, 337-8 on the revolution brought by the cross to one's understanding of the glory of the king of Israel (cf Dietrich, ZTK 77:267-8); Gunneweg, Vom Verstehen des AT 193 (ET 230-1) on the new approach to the this-worldly saving gifts of the OT necessitated and facilitated by the NT understanding of salvation; Vriezen 103 (ET<sup>2</sup> 98) on the need to confront OT understandings of theocracy or erotics and marriage with the cross.

(the NT writers utilize such law for theological purposes, even though they see its legal function as over; it is still the word of God, even if it is no longer the command of God). By connecting the divorce law with people's hardness of hearts (Matt 19:8), Jesus indicates that God does not approve of divorce, but he hardly implies that (given the fact of marriage breakdown) Moses was wrong to provide Israel with regulations to give order to divorce when it happens. Nor does he here indicate that he himself brings a new standard. On the contrary, his concern is to reassert the ultimate standard taught by the Torah itself /43/.

It is even less likely that the NT writers assume that they are in a position to decide which parts of the OT are to be regarded as the word of God and which are not. Indeed, if anything the question had to be posed the other way: the issue was not 'whether the Old Testament was Christian' but 'whether the NT was biblical' /44/.

So the NT as a whole presupposes the theological and moral foundation

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/43/ On Jesus' discussion of divorce, see Westerholm, Jesus and Scribal Authority 123-5; von Campenhausen understands the reference to 'hardness of hearts' differently, though this does not affect his overall view of the passage (Entstehung der christlichen Bibel 13-14 [ET Formation of the Christian Bible 8-9]).

/44/ J A Sanders, Magnalia Dei 552; cf JR 39:233-5; Freedman, Theology Today 21:227-8; Wildberger, EvT 19:80-3; cf the reaction of van Ruler, who speaks of the OT as the real Bible, the NT as its explanatory glossary (Christliche Kirche und das AT 68 [ET Christian Church and the OT 72, 74]).



laid by the OT, and concentrates on saying what now needs to be said in the light of the Christ event, which it sees as the climax of the OT story. It implies that we must interpret the OT in the light of the coming of Christ, but also that we must see the Christ event against the background of the OT's broader concerns. Differences between OT and NT which indicate that the latter is emphasizing matters that it regarded as especially important may have various implications.

Sometimes they provide the Christian with his way in to understanding the OT, but point him towards broadening that pre-understanding when he discovers the wider range of material contained by the OT (rather than confining himself to accepting only what conforms to what he already knows) /45/. Sometimes they provide the Christian with a definitive slant on how to read the OT, resolving ambiguities or setting statements in a broader context. Sometimes they bring out the relatively lower standard of material written in the light of people's sin and stubbornness. But they do not suggest that we serve either the OT or the NT by attempting to use the latter as the criterion for deciding which elements in the former we find acceptable.

In the pre-critical period the NT often functioned as a covert norm in relation to the OT, by determining how the OT was understood; while possessing the form of canonical authority, the OT thus lost much of the reality. Mediaeval allegorism provides one example of this process, protestant confessionalism another; both show how the norm is actually

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/45/ Thus, while faith in Christ helps him to understand the OT, the OT then helps him to understand Christ. Cf the comments of Kraus, Biblische Theologie 320-1; Wildberger 73-80; Mays, Magnalia Dei 512-3; Barr, Old and New 139-40; Grech, NTS 19:318-24; BTB 5:127-45.

not the NT itself but the NT as interpreted within a later theological scheme. In the modern period (when scholars sought to interpret the OT on its own terms, which are by definition pre-Christian, and thus exposed the differences between OT and NT), the NT became no longer a norm of interpretation, but instead an overt norm of evaluation - so that the OT lost even the form of canonical authority /46/.

Even the NT, however, is usually reckoned to contain material that falls short of an absolute standard. J D G Dunn suggests that the norm for evaluating the OT is the NT less 'passages which remained within the limitations of the old covenant in the light of the overall NT witness to Christ', such as 1 Cor 11 /47/. Thus the line between absolute and more relative material cannot be identified with the division between OT and NT; it lies somewhere within the latter.

Jesus' approach to the divorce question, however, suggests that it also passes through the OT. Indeed, the understanding of man and woman's unity and equality by creation in Gen 1 - 2 could well function as a critical norm in relation to subordinationist aspects of the NT's perspective on man and woman which Dunn notes. The norm for evaluating OT and NT, then, is the biblical witness as a whole in its most demanding form. Christ may be the key to perceiving that witness in the right way; but it is its witness to which he draws attention. He helps us to perceive how to interpret it; he cannot impose on it interpretation that it resists.

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/46/ Cf Ebeling, Studium der Theologie 31 (ET 30).

/47/ Churchman 96:225.



4.5 Evaluation of the material on its own terms

We noted towards the end of section 4.4 that pre-critical biblical study practised a form of covert theological criticism of the OT by means of allegorizing or by interpreting it in the light of confessional statements; the text's own assertions were thereby avoided. The equivalent post-critical manoeuvre is to regard parts of scripture which we find theologically questionable as witnesses to human sinfulness which point us to Christ in a negative way /48/. Now such manoeuvres at least seek to come to some positive interpretation of the material (they differ on how the positive interpretation is to be offered when the material seems resistant to it). Indeed, strictly any attempt to interpret 'the Old Testament' (as opposed to interpreting pre-Christian Jewish religious literature) implies a confessional stance in relation to it /49/.

The problem is that their interpretation of this material contrasts with that intrinsic to the material itself (and that which - as far as we can tell - led to its finding a place in the canon). Indeed, generally

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/48/ See Mowinckel's treatment of Esther in OT as God's Word 109-10; Baumgärtel's approach to the OT's (mis)understanding of God's promise, in Verheissung 27, 64-6 (cf Hesse, Probleme AT Hermeneutik 280-94 [ET Essays on OT Interpretation 299-313]); and the common understanding of Ecclesiastes as pointing us to Christ in a negative way, by its doubts (e.g. Lauha, Kohelet v, 24, 37, 60); see also more generally Porteous, ExpT 75:72.

/49/ Cf Barstad, SEA 45:16-17.

the preceding critique of approaches to the OT which evaluate material on the basis of its moral concern, its developmental level, its Mosaic or prophetic spirit, or its Christian connections, presupposes the assumption that the OT itself ought to be allowed to determine what is central to its faith and what is peripheral /50/.

Now admittedly there is a tension here. In chapter 6 we shall argue that the task of writing OT theology is inevitably not merely a re-constructive task but a constructive one. We are not merely re-formulating the faith explicitly expressed or implicitly presupposed by a believing community of OT times, in order to understand OT faith for its own sake, but formulating the theological implications of that faith in a way that brings them home to us as members of a believing community in our own time.

Nevertheless, when we seek to understand OT faith, we really are seeking to allow this faith itself to have its impact on us. Our aim is not merely to use it as a mirror or aid to reflection which will enable us to express what we believe already, ignoring the meaning of the material for writers and readers of OT times. Nor is our aim merely to utilize it as a resource from which we choose material that deals with questions we are already asking in ways that immediately strike us as helpful, ignoring other tracts of the work and priorities of importance that may be intrinsic to the material itself

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/50/ Cf the 'Report of the Dutch-German Group' (Smend, Dinkler, Flesseman-van Leer, and others) in the WCC Study on the Authority of the Bible 1 - with a recognition of the difficulty of the enterprise.



as a whole. Sometimes our study does involve these two features; they are not in themselves wrong, are probably inevitable features of any process of understanding, and may be our way into a fuller understanding of something or someone. My presupposition here, however, is that this fuller understanding (of the OT or of anything else) ultimately involves the attempt to do justice to the material as a whole, understood and evaluated on the basis of interconnections and priorities suggested by the material itself.

Interpreters themselves often explicitly accept this, and their (generally unconscious) utilization of some principle from outside the OT sits in uneasy juxtaposition with their attempt to identify some focal point within the OT itself, such as the theme of communion between God and man (Vriezen), or, alongside that, the concept of the rule of God (Fohrer) /51/.

Other scholars offer a wide range of suggestions regarding a focal point which provides us with a principle for interpreting the OT as a whole. Indeed, the location of the centre of the OT has been discussed so extensively that R Smend has been able to fill a small book with opinions on the matter /52/. Nevertheless these can be categorized fairly clearly. Some locate the OT's theological centre in some aspect of God himself: God as the holy one, God as the Lord, God revealing

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/51/ See Vriezen, Hoofddlijnen (ET Outline); Fohrer, Grundstrukturen.

/52/ Die Mitte des AT; cf Hasel, OT Theology: Basic Issues (revised ed) 77-103; also ZAW 86:65-82.

himself, God as the sole deity to be acknowledged, God's involvement in history, God's name, God's presence, God's promise, God's reign /53/. It is simplest to say straightforwardly that God is the centre of the OT /54/, though this may seem a truism which is only the beginning of the real discussion /55/. The major alternative to the view that God is in some way the centre of the OT is the suggestion that God's relationship with Israel should be the focus of our examination of OT faith. This view is instanced by those who emphasize God's covenant with Israel, his election of Israel, the speaking and responding of 'I am Yahweh', 'You are Yahweh', or the mutuality of Yahweh as Israel's God and Israel as Yahweh's people /56/, as well as by the approaches of Vriezen and Fohrer just noted.

An alternative approach to identifying a structure intrinsic to the OT

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- /53/ So respectively Sellin, Theologie 2:19; Köhler, Theologie 11-17 (ET 30-5); Reventlow, TZ 17:96-8 (but in KD 20:211-7, Reventlow stresses Yahweh's claim to exclusive acknowledgment); Schmidt, Erste Gebot 10-11; von Rad, Theologie 1:111-34 (ET 1:105-28); Zimmerli, Grundriss 10 (ET 13), cf EvT 35:102-17; Terrien, Elusive Presence; Baumgärtel, e.g. Verheissung; Seebass, WD 8:30-47.
- /54/ See Hasel 99-103, with references to other works.
- /55/ Cf von Rad, Theologie 2:376 (ET 2:362-3); TLZ 88:406 (ET Theologie 2:415); Wagner, TLZ 103:791-2; also (regarding the NT), Koester, Zeit und Geschichte 66-7 (ET Future of our Religious Past 72).
- /56/ So respectively Eichrodt, Theologie 1; Wildberger, EvT 19:77-8; Zimmerli, Probleme biblischer Theologie 638-45; Smend, Die Mitte des AT 48-56, following Wellhausen (and for this view see also Jacob, Theologie [second edition] xii; Clements, OT Theology 53-103).



itself is to consider the implications of the way the canon is formally structured. Traditional Jewish thinking analyses the canon as the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. These may be understood as concentric circles, the Torah at the centre, the Writings on the periphery: only the Torah and the Prophets feature in the weekly lectionary, and the Prophets are essentially preachers of Torah. Although the Pentateuch has a narrative structure, it is dominated by instruction material; it is thus not inappropriate if the key influence of Deuteronomy as Torah has led to seeing the Pentateuch as a whole in this way. Similarly, although there is a more radical side to prophecy, the 'Former Prophets' themselves present the prophets as preachers of repentance who called Israel back to the teaching of Moses /57/.

J A Sanders, however /58/, emphasizes how significant was the reshaping of the opening books of the OT in the post-exilic period, which sought to give especial emphasis and authority to the Torah as the basis for the life of Judaism. Although this made hermeneutical sense, it involved dividing the continuous story from creation to the exile, and made both the Pentateuch and the so-called Former Prophets into torsos. J Blenkinsopp offers another understanding of the relationship between Torah and Prophets. Torah stands for normative order, needed to undergird the community's life; prophecy exists to ensure that the normative order is free to change rather than bound to freeze in a

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/57/ So Clements, OT Theology 104-30, also Creation, Christ and Culture 1-12.

/58/ Torah and Canon.

form that is appropriate only to circumstances now past, yet is prevented from change which merely assimilates to the pattern of a new set of circumstances. Torah becomes canon only after it has allowed itself to take account of the prophetic perspective; Prophecy becomes canon alongside Torah, but the price of this status is its independence. The juxtaposition of law and prophecy in the canon as a whole suggests 'an unresolved tension, an unstable equilibrium between rational order and the unpredictable and disruptive, between the claims of the past and those of the present and future' /59/.

Other scholars have sought to identify further significance in the threefold structure of the canon as a whole, seeing the three divisions as referring to past, future, and present, or as relating God's deeds, God's words, and man's response /60/, but neither of these understandings quite corresponds to the content of these divisions. On either understanding, Chronicles, for instance, belongs with Kings in the first section. In fact, the basis for these divisions more likely lies in historical and/or liturgical considerations (the Writings are the books which became canonical last and/or the ones which were not used in the weekly lectionary) than in questions of content or even of relative authority.

It is easier to see a structure based on form or content in the

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/59/ Prophecy and Canon 151.

/60/ See e.g. Wolff, Bibel - Das AT (ET The OT); Westermann, What Does the OT Say about God? Cf Jacob's identification of a threefold rhythm of the word of God, as law, prophecy, and wisdom (VTSup 28:120).



canonical arrangement which appears in English Bibles, which may be viewed as narrative (or narrative/law) - poetry - prophecy, or as past - present - future. This order, which has come down to us via the Septuagint, has often been assumed to be secondary to the Hebrew one, but P Katz argues that it is as old as the Hebrew order, which artificially divides Joshua-Kings from Genesis-Deuteronomy, separates Daniel from the prophets, and places Chronicles after Ezra-Nehemiah, while J C Lebram believes that the oldest approach to the canon, identified on the basis of hints in Ben Sira, emphasizes its prophetic aspect, as testimony to the work of God's spirit in the history of Israel; Torah is linked to prophecy from the beginning in the canon's history, and the law-centred understanding of the canon is only introduced by Ben Sira himself /61/. Such theories at least indicate that differences in approach to the structure of the canon do not necessarily indicate that the whole enterprise of canonical criticism is a subjective one; the extant canons reflect a variety of historical shapings.

Nevertheless, even if one grants that ideally our interpretation and evaluation of the diversity in the OT should reflect its own intrinsic dynamic, so that data from within the OT itself function as a check on ours views regarding what is central to OT faith and what is peripheral, the trouble is that the search for a right principle of organization for writing OT theology has been not so much fruitless as over-fruitful; and all the principles that have been proposed are more or less illuminating when applied to the OT material itself. If,

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/61/ See Katz, ZNW 47:191-217; Lebram, VT 18:173-89.

however, we have not yet discovered the single correct key to producing a satisfactory final synthesis of OT faith, this suggests that there is no such key. Understanding the OT resembles understanding a battle or a person or a landscape /62/ more than understanding the layout of an architect-planned new town. We can appreciate a landscape by starting from its roads, its contours, or its water supplies, or by taking as its centre a hill or a church or an inn or a bus stop, and each perspective will lead us to a different aspect of its understanding. Similarly, many starting-points, structures, and foci can illuminate the landscape of the OT; a multiplicity of approaches will lead to a multiplicity of insights /63/. The possibility of a variety of approaches to appreciating and expressing the thought of the OT does not render impossibly subjective the task of understanding the OT in a way faithful to its own dynamic. The aim of a critical, evaluative approach to interpreting the OT will then be to sense what norms of critical evaluation are suggested by the OT material itself, as we seek to appreciate it in its own terms.

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/62/ For these similes, see McKenzie, Theology of the OT 20-7, 324-5; Barr, JTS 25:272; Explorations in Theology 7:115; Fohrer 54-5.

/63/ Kermode (Genesis of Secrecy 16, 147; also 136-7) observes that interpreters may similarly illuminate a literary work by focusing on several different 'impression points' (Eindruckspunkt: Kermode refers to Dilthey, apparently to Gesammelte Schriften 5:281-2, where Dilthey speaks of a work developing from a Mittelpunkt into a world of its own, and of understanding a person by beginning from an Eindruckspunkt or point of contact (cf Müller-Vollmer, Towards a Phenomenological Theory of Literature 151-5)).



4.6 Sachkritik

In modern German study, the kind of theological commentary and evaluation of biblical material we are considering in this chapter is often referred to as Sachkritik, a term which came into prominence with the Barth-Bultmann debates of the 1920s /64/. In his Preface to the second edition of his commentary on Romans, Barth declares that 'true apprehension can be achieved only by a strict determination to face, as far as possible without rigidity of mind, the tension displayed more or less clearly in the ideas written in the text. Criticism (κρίσις) applied to historical documents means for me the measuring of words and phrases by the standard of that about which the documents are speaking .... Everything in the text ought to be interpreted only in the light of what can be said, and therefore only in the light of what is said .... The Word ought to be exposed in the words' /65/. Barth here implies that the reality of which the words speak is greater than the words; the latter inevitably fall short of the former, just because they are human words. Here dialectical theology follows a tradition represented by Chrysostom, Augustine, and Calvin. Barth himself later quotes Augustine's homily on John 1:1: 'For to speak of the matter as it is, who is able? I venture to say, my brethren, perhaps not John himself spoke of the matter as it is, but even he only as he was able; for it was man that spoke of God, inspired indeed by God, but still man. Because he was inspired he said

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/64/ According to R Morgan (Nature of NT Theology 175), the term goes back at least to I A Dorner's History of Protestant Theology 2:186.

/65/ "Römerbrief xii-xiii (ET Romans 8).

something; but because a man inspired, he spoke not the whole, but what man could he spoke` /66/. The words may be the best that could be; the reality to which they refer is nevertheless much bigger than they are. The biblical writers are involved in `saying the unsayable`, so that even they cannot escape the problem of `the relativity of the word` /67/.

To allow this point is in principle to admit the propriety of Sachkritik, critical study of the actual theological contents or message of scripture. Barth and Bultmann agree, however, that Barth does not practise Sachkritik in the sense that the term has actually possessed in biblical study. Barth says that one must measure the text by the subject matter; but (so Bultmann complains in his review /68/) he does

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/66/ PL 35:1379-80 (ET NPNF I,7:7); cf Barth, Dogmatik I, 2:563-4 (ET 508).

Chrysostom speaks of `condescension` (συγκατάβασις / συγκατέβη):

see e.g. his homilies on Tit 1:12-14 and Heb 6:13-16 (PG 62:678; 63:91 [ET NPNF 13:528-9; 14:419]); cf Vawter, Biblical Inspiration 40-2.

Calvin speaks of God `accommodating` (accommodare/atemperare): see Institutio I, 14:3; 17:13; II, 11:13; 16:2; commentaries on Gen 2:8; 1 Cor 2:7; cf Battles, Interpretation 31:19-38. See further Rogers and McKim, Authority and Interpretation, passim.

/67/ So Bultmann, reviewing Barth's Römerbrief in Anfänge der dialektischen Theologie 1:142 (ET Beginnings of Dialectic Theology 120).

/68/ Bultmann 140-2 (ET 119-20). Morgan (Nature of NT Theology 42-3) sees Barth's refusal to practise Sachkritik as the fundamental distinction between him and Bultmann; cf the quotation from Dinkler at n 81 below. The encounter between Barth and Bultmann has recently been re-enacted by Stuhlmacher and Grässer in ZTK 77:200-38.



not actually do this. He writes his commentary as if the biblical writer always gave adequate expression to the subject matter, and Bultmann suspects here a revival of some dogma of inspiration.

Barth has both a theoretical and a practical response to this observation. The theoretical one appears in the Romans prefaces: it is that if you are trying to interpret someone, it is appropriate to assume that he is talking sense; this principle applies to books both inside and outside the Bible, and, indeed, may sometimes raise more problems when applied to the former than when applied to the latter /69/. Elsewhere, in keeping with the approach stated here, Barth refuses any a priori doctrine of scriptural inerrancy, though he claims no right to pronounce on where scripture has erred: 'from what standpoint can we make any such pronouncement?' /70/.

As far as Bultmann is concerned, practising Sachkritik does not imply that 'the text is criticized from the standpoint of modern

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/69/ Römerbrief xv-xvi (ET Romans 11-12); cf later, in response to Bultmann's review, xx-xxiii (ET 16-19). Kermode speaks in similar terms of Austin Farrer's attempts to trace the 'narrative coherence' of Mark, contemplating 'the apparently flawed surface of Mark's narrative' until seeming 'fractures of the surface became parts of an elaborate design' (Genesis of Secrecy 62, referring to Farrer, Study in St Mark and St Matthew and St Mark). Kermode compares such an approach to biblical narrative with ones to extra-biblical literary works (see his ch 3 as a whole).

/70/ Dogmatik I, 2:565 (ET 510).

consciousness' /71/, but that it is criticized in the light of that to which it refers. After all, the way a writer expresses his vision of that reality is affected by various factors apart from the inevitable relativity of all words, which make it likely that his words will need criticism in the light of the nature of the reality itself. One factor is his own fallibility; he will not see everything equally clearly. A second is his historicity; he inevitably formulates his views by means of contemporary forms of thought and language (including ones that belong to a pre-faith way of looking at reality) and these forms may only facilitate a rather 'primitive or crude' approximation to reality. A third is the contextuality of his audience; he formulates his views in the light of the forms used by those to whom he has to communicate, and this may introduce not only further 'primitive or crude' approximations, but also tensions and contradictions with ways he expresses himself elsewhere /72/. Thus, Bultmann suggests, one cannot forgo the use of Sachkritik, insofar as it 'stems from the text itself' /73/.

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/71/ Anfänge 2:54 (ET 241).

/72/ See Bultmann's review of Barth's Römerbrief (Anfänge 1:141-2 [ET 120]); his essay on the problem of a theological exegesis of the NT (Anfänge 2:54, 69-71 [ET 241, 254-5]); his review of Barth's Auferstehung der Toten (Glauben und Verstehen 1:43-4, 52, 54-5 [ET Faith and Understanding 71-2, 80-1, 83-4]); his essay on NT Christology (Glauben und Verstehen<sup>1</sup> 2:46-8, 262-7 [ET 263-5, 279-84]); also his Theologie 587 (ET Theology 2:238). Cf Barth's own remarks in Dogmatik I, 2:562-8 (ET 507-12).

/73/ Glauben und Verstehen 1:44 (ET 72).



The actual task of Sachkritik may proceed on any of several bases. It may involve criticizing the statements in a document on the basis of other statements in the same document /74/; or on the basis of other statements elsewhere by the same author /75/; or on the basis of statements in other documents within the canon (thus Bultmann interprets the NT documents which embody 'the development toward the Ancient Church' in the light of Paul and John /76/, and Paul and John in the light of each other /77/).

But to most readers, criticizing the text from the standpoint of modern consciousness is precisely what is involved in Bultmann's approach to the Bible. He is offering us an understanding of the reality to which a biblical author points (in his fallible, historically-conditioned way) evaluated in the light of the reality itself as Bultmann perceives it (in his fallible, historically-conditioned way). As Robert Morgan puts it /78/, Bultmann's Sachkritik is really a theological and not merely a historical task. The historical task involves evaluating

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/74/ Cf Bultmann 54-7 (ET 83-6), on 1 Cor 15:1-11.

/75/ Cf Bultmann 64 (ET 93-4), criticizing Barth.

/76/ Theologie 446-584 (ET 2:95-236). Thus he sees his Sachkritik as in line with Luther's approach to James and Revelation (p 587 [ET 2:238]).

/77/ Cf Käsemann, Exegetische Versuche 2:25-6 (ET NT Questions 17).

/78/ Nature of NT Theology 42-62; cf Dahl, TR 22:24-6 (ET Crucified Messiah 93-5); also Appel, Kanon und Kirche 296-305 on modern man's self-understanding functioning as the criterion for a right understanding of the NT. For the background (or a parallel) to Bultmann's thinking in Heidegger, see Achtemeier, Introduction to the New Hermeneutic 47, 53-4).

formulations in the text on the basis of other statements in the text (or even elsewhere in the canon). The interpreter is then claiming to be 'true to the author (perhaps understanding him better than he understood himself)' /79/. But the task of evaluating formulations in the text on the basis of one's own grasp of the reality to which the text refers is a theological, not a merely historical one, though one which (as Morgan sees it) is inevitable in the modern age because the alternative - that the interpreter accepts the text's statements even where he cannot see how they can be preferable to his own - is impossible. The interpreter is concerned not merely to be true to the author but also to be true to the subject (perhaps understanding it better than the author did). He tells us not merely what the author meant as opposed to what he said, but what he should have meant as opposed to what he actually meant.

It may be that German Protestant theologians find it difficult to allow that their criterion for identifying the Sache to which the Bible refers does not come from the Bible itself, and hard to make the distinction between a historical and a theological interpretative task because of their commitment to the principle of sola scriptura. Anglo-Saxon theologians, uninhibited by such a commitment, have been readier to suggest that 'metaphysics and biblical theology, then, stand in a reciprocally constructive and critical relation to each other' or that the criteria for making crucial theological judgments may not come from

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/79/ Morgan 46.



the Bible at all /80/.

In discussing biblical authority and biblical criticism, Erich Dinkler suggests that Barth and Bultmann resemble each other in that both interpret scripture by utilizing insights from church history and contemporary Christian experience as well as from the ancient world; but that 'for Barth the meeting of human subject and divine revelation is a heuristic principle, for Bultmann the dialectic [involved in the theological study of the contents of scripture] is a critical principle' /81/. For Barth, our own meeting with God is a means of understanding scripture, for Bultmann it is a means of evaluating scripture. The same distinction can be made in OT study by comparing the work of Walter Brueggemann and that of Georg Fohrer.

Brueggemann's studies of wisdom, In Man We Trust, and of The Land as a key biblical theme, are in part prompted, and certainly facilitated, by his awareness of questions, needs, and instincts in the contemporary world and church; these fulfil a heuristic function for him in approaching the OT. Fohrer's work on OT theology in his Theologische

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/80/ Janzen, Magnalia Dei 485; cf the 'Report of British Working Party on hermeneutics' (including J Barr, C F Evans, E Flesseman-van Leer, D E Nineham, M F Wiles, and others) in the WCC Study on Biblical Hermeneutics 47-9, with Barr's comments 54-5; also Flesseman-van Leer's observations on sola scriptura in the Evans volume What About the NT? 235, and Bowden's comments on Bultmann's conservatism at this point in his 'Translator's preface' to Schmithals, Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann xiv.

/81/ ET from ZTK 47:89-90.

Grundstrukturen des AT also profits heuristically from his looking at the OT in the light of his own faith, though the latter also provides the basis for his critical evaluation of the OT.

In Barth's case, however, although (or because) he is inhibited from overtly disagreeing with the Bible (as Bultmann is not - even if he feels less free in this respect than some Anglo-Saxon scholars), he does do so covertly by imposing an interpretation on the Bible when the Bible's surface sense seems to him to be non-sense. 'Barth's "criticism" consists mainly in "re-interpretation" /82/. His treatment of 1 Cor 15 illustrates this point. According to Barth, in 1 Cor 15 Paul was not appealing to the verifiable historicity of Christ's resurrection, and he was right (as the rest of his argument shows) /83/. Here, as Bultmann himself asserts, Barth is practising a surreptitious form of Sachkritik (like that of allegory). Bultmann's own understanding is that Paul was appealing to the verifiable historicity of the resurrection, and he was wrong (as the rest of his argument shows) /84/. Bultmann's Sachkritik is quite overt. More plausible (in my view) is W Pannenberg's position, which (if applied to this particular question) would seem likely to be that Paul was appealing to the verifiable historicity of the resurrection, and he

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/82/ Runia, Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture 105.

/83/ Auferstehung e.g. 75-6 (ET 137-9); cf Dogmatik IV, 2:160 (ET 143).

/84/ Glauben und Verstehen 1:54-7 (ET 83-6); so also Fuchs, Marburger Hermeneutik 129; Glaube und Erfahrung 216. Cf Morgan 47, 175-6; Achtemeier 112, 159-62, 176, 183.



was right (and is consistent with his argument elsewhere) /85/.

Translated into OT terms, Deut 25:4 was concerned about oxen, and it was wrong to fret about such topics - so Marcion /86/. Or, Deuteronomy was concerned about men, not about oxen, and was right to concern itself along these lines - so Paul /87/. Or, Deuteronomy was concerned about oxen, and was right to be so concerned - so H Cunliffe-Jones /88/.

One major aspect of the debate between Barth and Bultmann, then, is a debate over how far we can affirm some biblical viewpoints and criticize others. Bultmann's approach involves evaluating biblical viewpoints on the basis of one's own grasp of the reality to which they point; Barth's (overtly) allows only an evaluation of them based on their own internal dynamic. The present study presupposes an attitude to the canon which makes the latter approach more appropriate; to put the point another way, we are here bracketing the question whether a canonical theology is true (whether it has reference) and concentrating on the question what it would be and whether it could be coherent

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- /85/ See e.g. Grundzüge der Christologie 47-112, especially 86-7 (ET Jesus 53-114, especially 89); Grundfragen systematischer Theologie 22-78, especially 57-60 (ET Basic Questions 15-80, especially 53-7).
- /86/ Cf Tertullian's appeal to Deut 25:4 in Adversus Marcionem 4:21 and 24 (PL 2:409, 419 [ET ANF 3:380, 387]).
- /87/ 1 Cor 9:9; so also in a different sense Carmichael (e.g. Women, Law and the Genesis Traditions 71-2) who takes the passage as an exhortation to fulfil the Levirate requirement of the following verses.
- /88/ Deuteronomy 140.

(whether it has sense). In the light of Bultmann's work, we are aware of the need to be self-conscious over allowing extrinsic theological considerations to affect our evaluation and criticism of the biblical material; but in the light of Barth's work, we are aware of the need to be self-conscious over allowing extrinsic theological considerations to affect one's interpretation of the biblical material. As in the case of the debate between Bultmann and Barth, the work of those who are not committed to a confessional stance in relation to the canon is likely to be of especial help to those who are so committed, in enabling them to see where they are fudging the interpretative task if at certain points the material ill fits the 'biblical stance' to which they aspire.



4.7 The canon within the canon

4.7.0 The attempt to identify that element in scripture which should be given positive evaluation may be facilitated by, or may result in, the identification of an inner canon within scripture, a canon within the canon. Although widely used, this phrase is a confusing one, with various senses /89/. Understandings of the nature and function of the inner canon, as well as its form and identity, need to be distinguished clearly. As regards its form and identity, it has been understood in at least four ways.

4.7.1 (a) It may denote a particular book (or books) within the canon.

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/89/ For instances of the confusing usage see Wright, OT and Theology 179-83; Ebeling, Wort und Glaube 84 (ET Word and Faith 92-3); WCC Study on the Authority of the Bible 1-11; O Weber, Grundlagen der Dogmatik 1:291-4; Wood, Formation of Christian Understanding 106-8. The phrase Kanon im Kanon goes back at last to Alexander Schweizer's Christliche Glaubenslehre 1:165 (1863) (cf Lönning, 'Kanon im Kanon' 45). But the issues encapsulated in the phrase can be traced further back to Semler's Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon (1771-5) and via him to Luther (see Lönning; also Strathmann, TBl 20:295-310). Semler claims Luther's spirit on his side in distinguishing within scripture between what is or is not God's word - e.g. on how far Moses should be accepted by Christians (2:126-9, apparently referring to Luther's sermon noted in ch 2, n 56 above). The theological issues involved are also surveyed in Käsemann, Das NT als Kanon (see also EvT 11:13-21 [ET Essays on NT Themes 95-107]).

Romans has often seemed to have this position in the Bible as a whole /90/. For the OT, Exodus has been a central book for theologies which stressed the theme of the acts of God in the OT /91/; it is also the 'privileged text' for liberation theology /92/. Partly because it more systematically holds together divine initiative and human response, Deuteronomy may alternatively be said to express all the fundamental questions of OT theology in a concentrated form and thus to constitute the natural centre for writing a theology of the OT /93/. For the editors of Interpretation, Genesis to Kings as a whole 'gives the central exposition of the subject of the Old Testament and furnishes the organizing context for its other books' /94/. For other scholars,

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- /90/ Strathmann (p 295) calls Rom 1:17 Luther's 'canon of the canon'. In his preface to his translation of the NT, Luther himself describes John, 1 John, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians and 1 Peter as 'the true and noblest books of the NT which tell you all you really need to know' (ET Luther's Works 35:361-2); O Weber (1:292) thus describes these as Luther's canon within the canon.
- /91/ E.g. Wright, God Who Acts; thus Wright (pp 102-5) excludes wisdom. Cf Murphy's comments on Preuss's exclusion of wisdom from his inner canon, which includes only salvation history (No Famine in the Land 123-5, referring to Preuss, EvT 30:393-417; VTSup 23:117-45).
- /92/ So Kirk, Liberation Theology 95.
- /93/ So Herrmann, Probleme biblischer Theologie 156, following von Rad, e.g. Deuteronomium-Studien 25 (ET Studies in Deuteronomy 37); cf Wright 75; Deissler, Grundbotschaft des AT 7; also Spriggs's comments on Eichrodt (Two OT Theologies 24-5, 109).
- /94/ J L Mays and P D Miller [?], Interpretation 29:115.



however, the pre-exilic prophets /95/ or Isaiah 40 - 55 are given supreme significance /96/. In each of these cases, the true locus of revelation or authority may be reckoned to lie in the experience of the great creative individual, or the stream of tradition which underlies the books, as much as or rather than its eventual literary crystallization /97/.

(b) The canon within the canon may denote a key theme within the canon, a theme such as justification by faith or God acting in Israel's history or the covenant or Yahweh alone being Israel's God or the holy God challenging his people to a life of justice or the suffering servant /98/. It is often a conviction regarding the importance of some such theme that leads to the attaching of central significance to Romans, Exodus, Deuteronomy, eighth century prophecy, or Isaiah 40 - 55; little importance is attached to Rom 16, Exod 26, or Isa 15 where

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/95/ See the work of Fohrer referred to in section 4.3 above.

/96/ See Westermann's observation (AT und Jesus Christus 11-13 [ET OT and Jesus Christ 16-19]) that in Isaiah 40 - 55 prophecy, national history, and the people's response to God in praise and prayer are uniquely held together.

/97/ Cf Harrelson's discussion of core traditions, Tradition and Theology 18-30.

/98/ See, for instance, Cullmann's assertion of the key significance of salvation history, in the course of considering the question of the canon within the canon (Heil als Geschichte 273-4 [ET Salvation in History 297-8]); but see further the discussion of where the centre of OT faith can be located (section 4.5 above).

the favoured theme is less prominent.

(c) The normative element within the canon may be what Bright calls 'the essential structure of the biblical faith, which is visible behind the ancient forms and institutions through which it found expression', the 'overarching structure of theology, which in one way or another informs each of its texts', and which constitutes what is characteristic, central and constant, as opposed to what is peripheral, incidental, and transient /99/. The canonical element of the OT, then, is its distinctive underlying theology or perspective on human existence (even, then, its underlying anthropology /100/). Or the inner canon may denote a particular characteristic or tendency which runs through the canon, 'its own particular variant on the cultural trajectories' /101/, such as the liberating dynamic of community ideals such as equality, compassion, and the integrating of social, cultic, and moral concerns which (P D Hanson suggests) tend to characterize laws with a background elsewhere in the ancient near east once they are taken into the laws of Israel /102/.

(d) The canon within the canon may denote something which the canon refers to but which is itself outside the canon. If the revelation

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/99/ Authority of the OT 144-5. On Bright see further sections 6.1-2 below.

/100/ So H Braun, Das NT als Kanon 228-9.

/101/ J M Robinson Trajectories 16; see section 2.4 above

/102/ Hanson, Canon and Authority 115-31. Cf Ruether's identification of a norm critical of patriarchy within biblical religion itself (JSOT 22:55).



itself lies in the events scripture refers to rather than in its actual words /103/, then it is these events that constitute the canon within the canon. Whether we think of the line of events that runs through OT times,<sup>or of</sup> a particular constitutive event such as the exodus which continually receives new interpretations throughout the biblical period, the event lies behind and is primary in relation to concepts or symbols or imperatives or narratives which are built on it; and the event provides the reference point and criterion for what is built upon it.

The referent which constitutes the canon within the canon of the NT for many scholars is naturally Jesus Christ himself /104/. H Koester notes that the NT indicates that Christianity has no distinctive language, concepts, or images; the early Christians simply took up contemporary ones to express the significance of Jesus. He himself 'did not simply confirm or contest the correctness of certain apocalyptic expectations in his preaching, but rather he announced their fulfilment' /105/. The Jesus event had to call forth many different kinds of responses, for it was an event of complex significance; the heart of the canon and the reality which actually constitutes the 'historical criteria and canons'

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/103/ See e.g. Wright, God Who Acts 12-13; Pannenberg, Offenbarung als Geschichte (ET Revelation as History); Grundfragen 22-78 (ET Basic Questions 15-80); cf Kraus's remarks, Biblische Theologie 345.

/104/ E.g. Dunn, Unity and Diversity 375-6; Strathmann 309; Marxsen, NT als Buch der Kirche 65 (ET NT as the Church's Book 61).

/105/ Zeit und Geschichte 68-9 (ET Future of our Religious Past 75).

(or canon within the canon) for us, is the Christ event itself /106/. For many Christian interpreters Christ has a similar status in relation to the OT. 'The New Testament witness to Christ serves as the primary norm' or 'canon within the canon by which to measure and interpret the rest of the canon - the Old Testament' /107/.

4.7.2 The identity of the canon within the canon has thus been understood in a variety of ways. There is a parallel diversity of approaches to its function.

(a) It may constitute the real locus of truth, which provides the key to determining the truth of material within the formal canon and outside it. For W M L de Wette, the NT being the canon by which we must measure the OT meant that what is canonical in the OT is that which corresponds to the canon of the NT /108/. For Mendenhall, in effect 'the Mosaic-Sinaitic moment in the history of the religion of Israel' has 'the status of a "canon within the canon", making it the touchstone which enables us to assess the authenticity of any other complex of ideas in the Hebrew Bible' /109/. For Fohrer, the pre-exilic prophets provide the criterion for a negative assessment of OT material which

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/106/ Koester, Trajectories 205-7.

/107/ Dunn, Churchman 96:216.

/108/ Das Wesen des christlichen Glaubens 366. Cf Jepsen, TLZ 74:65-74: what is canonical is what pointed to Christ; Vriezen, Hoofddlijnen 120 (ET Outline 90, <sup>2</sup> 113).

/109/ So Levenson, CBQ 41:214.



takes a positive attitude to the cult /110/. For von Rad, the theme of God's acts in history provides the criterion for a negative assessment of Ecclesiastes /111/. For Hanson, the 'liberating dynamic' which has to different extents affected different parts of the OT is to be accepted, rather than material not yet affected by it /112/.

(b) In some instances such as these, however, the inner canon may constitute the locus of the deepest insights within the formal canon, compared with which material elsewhere is of a lower status. As is the case with the first approach, here the inner canon provides a norm for evaluation, but the evaluation is one of relative value rather than of absolute truth and untruth. Thus for Zimmerli, the OT's portrayal of the God of Israel and of humanity's encounter with him 'achieves its radical depths' in OT prophecy /113/.

(c) The canon within the canon may constitute those aspects of the canon which are directly binding. When Dunn speaks of the NT being the canon within the canon, he does so in connection with Christ's abrogation of OT laws, either because of their 'covenantal relativity' (they belonged to the old covenant), or because of their cultural relativity /114/. Some aspects of the canon, then, are directly binding. Others were once binding on people, but are so no longer.

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/110/ Theologische Grundstrukturen 51-94.

/111/ Theologie 1:112, cf 451-2 (ET 1:106, cf 453).

/112/ Canon and Authority 115-31.

/113/ Grundriss 7 (ET Theology 10).

/114/ Churchman 96:216-7.

As we noted in section 4.4, it might be that they could still function as norms for belief or behaviour in an indirect way: for instance, OT cultic laws provide the NT writers with normative concepts for their working out the significance of Christ's 'sacrificial' death. But they are not directly binding.

(d) The canon within the canon may constitute the centre or focus of the formal canon /115/. It comprises 'central statements and concepts which offer a perspective or horizon as comprehensive as possible and which therefore can appropriately be treated as the starting-point for derivative statements. Beyond this centre are inner circles of statements which bring out its immediate implications, and further circles which bring out remoter ones' /116/. As such, it relates closely to the canon as what is directly binding; but it suggests central (and therefore of greater significance) over against peripheral (and thus less significant), or primary (and therefore more fundamental) over against derivative (and therefore secondary) /117/.

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/115/ Cf Lönning 16; see further the discussion of the centre or focus of the OT in section 4.5 above.

/116/ 'Report of the Dutch-German Group', WCC Study on the Authority of the Bible 1, 10-11. The group distinguish this Sachmitte or Beziehungsmitte from a canon within the canon consisting of writings in the formal canon; yet the group describe the centre as binding in a way that the outer circles are not.

/117/ Cf Küng, Strukturen der Kirche 155-6 (ET Structures 148-9) = TQ 142:421-2 (ET Living Church 288-90).



(e) The canon within the canon may constitute those parts of aspects of the formal canon which are especially important to a particular generation or community. For rabbinic Judaism, for instance, it was halakic material in the OT that especially mattered; for Christian Jews, it was prophecy (or narrative and prophecy) /118/. In our own century, Brueggemann has noted how the situation of the Confessing Church in Germany led to<sup>a</sup> stress on historical/covenantal traditions in the OT at a time when the 'German Christians' had appropriated something more like a natural religion. At this point, as after the war in East Germany in another way, 'cultural pressures and responses to those pressures contributed to that functional "canon within the canon"'. Brueggemann urges that we recognize the appropriateness of that kind of commitment to particular strands within scripture in certain contexts, and recognize the possibility that an insistence on balance functions ideologically /119/; so, of course, can commitment to a canon within the canon.

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/118/ For illustrations regarding the NT's inner canon, see Dunn, Unity and Diversity 375; O Weber, Grundlagen 1:293-4; Cullmann, Heil als Geschichte 273-4 (ET 297-8). Effectively it is Küng's criticism of much Protestant scholarship in its selective use of the NT (e.g. TQ 142:408-14 [ET 269-79]); though Küng, too, is selective: the index to the 572 pages of Die Kirche lists only one passage from James (but over 400 references to passages in 1 Corinthians) (cf Lönning 229).

/119/ JAAR 38:367; cf JSOT 18:11-14. See further ch 8, n 1 below.

4.8 An evaluative or critical approach to diversity in the OT

In what sense, then, and on what basis, can we affirm some of the diverse viewpoints in the OT, and criticise others?

In the approaches we have considered in this chapter, interpreting scripture in its diversity and evaluating it in its diversity are often interwoven, and this can be confusing. At least three forms of this interpretive task needs to be distinguished.

The first is the task of understanding the interrelation of themes or motifs, where questions of priority do not arise. For instance, sometimes the OT hope of salvation gives a prominent place to an individual redeemer figure, sometimes such a figure has no place in this hope. Neither form of expectation seems to be theologically prior to or superior to the other; each gives expression to important insights (see further section 6.5.1 below). The interpretive task involves seeking to interrelate the two forms of hope to see what theological insight emerges from setting them alongside each other. It does not involve evaluating one or other as more or less important or as more or less true.

A second form of the task involves analysing what is more central to OT faith and what is more peripheral to it. Suggestions regarding the central focus of the OT noted in section 4.5 imply that the OT is concerned more about the nation than about the individual, more about Israel than about the world, more about salvation than about creation, more about God's activity in history than about his activity in nature,



more about an election relationship than about a natural relationship (in ch 7 we shall note reasons to qualify such perspectives, but we may assume them for the purpose of illustration here). Such central themes then provide us with vantage-points for surveying the OT landscape; they constitute the OT's more important themes, as the OT itself sees it. Interpreting the OT in this way involves an evaluation of the relative importance of diverse materials, though not an evaluation of their degrees of truth.

A third task involves assessing what is more true or more appropriate and what is less so. As we noted in section 4.4, Jesus makes an assessment of that kind regarding the Torah's diverse teaching on marriage. Interpreting this teaching does not involve merely setting Gen 1 - 2 and Deut 24 alongside each other on the assumption that they are mutually illuminating, nor merely regarding the former as nearer the centre of the OT's concerns (the opposite might be maintained), but evaluating the former as the more profound insight, the latter as a concession to human sinfulness.

We shall consider the first form of this interpretative task at greater length in chs 6 - 7. At this point we are more directly concerned with the second and third forms, which do involve evaluating some insights as more or less central or more or less profound than others.

With regard to the second, it is illuminating to identify central themes which can suggest linkages between otherwise rather diffuse material; but these interpretive clues are not, as such, a basis for affirming some aspects of the material and setting other aspects on one

side. Insofar as interpretation includes identifying what is more central and what more peripheral, it does involve an evaluative task; yet this is not an evaluation of degrees of truth or profundity, but one of degrees of importance. Even the peripheral is true and demands attention; it is on the periphery, not outside it. Distinctions within the biblical material between what is directly and what is more indirectly normative or between what is central and primary and what is more peripheral or derivative are useful ones, though those who emphasize such distinctions do not make clear how distinguishing what is central from what is peripheral helps in the actual interpretation of the latter; it more evidently tends to lead to its being dismissed as of lower value /120/. Nor is it self-evident that later, less primary testimony is necessarily of lower value than earlier material /121/. Further, we have noted that attempts to identify central themes tend to cancel each other out. If central themes constituted a canon within the canon in the sense of a basis for affirming some aspects of the material and setting other aspects aside, this would raise major difficulties. The central themes would need to be unequivocally identified. But if they are only clues for the interpretation of the material as a whole, there is no absolute necessity for them to be delimited in a defined way. Many clues will be more or less illuminating regarding different aspects of the material.

Acknowledging a canon implies an openness to measuring any critical

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/120/ Cf Barr, WCC Study on Biblical Hermeneutics 54.

/121/ So K  ng, TQ 142:421-4 (ET 288-92) = Strukturen 155-7 (ET 148-50), with his quotation from Schelkle, Petrusbriefe 245: the Reformed churches may hold to sola scriptura, but not to tota scriptura.



norm against the richness of the whole canon (which can, indeed, be seen as a complexio oppositorum) and a resistance to being more biblical than the Bible /122/. Indeed, part of the point of acknowledging a canon is that it faces me with material that confronts me. Even though a particular generation may find particular parts or aspects of scripture immediately helpful and others less so, it is challenged to face and invited to enjoy the whole. 'One ought not to make the canon within the canon into the canon' /123/. The notion of 'the Old Testament' implies that the canon itself is the canon.

This does not necessarily mean that interpreting the OT is only possible for someone who personally adopts this confessional stance /124/. In relation to any religious document, one valuable form of understanding is open to a reader who suspends questions about the status of what he is investigating and cultivates an empathy with it which is willing to learn to breathe its atmosphere and put himself in the place of those who do acknowledge its authority /125/. But it

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/122/ K  ng, TQ 142:407-8 (ET 268-9) = Strukturen 153-5 (ET 145-7), with his further quotation from Schelkle, loc cit; cf Appel, Kanon und Kirche 228-65, especially 235-7.

/123/ ET from L  nning 271; cf Dunn 376-8, 419; O Weber 294; K  ng, opp citt; Wood, Formation 107, 125; Gese, Zur biblischen Theologie 29 (ET 32).

/124/ As Porteous seems to imply (Living the Mystery 23, 44-5); cf G A F Knight, Christian Theology of the OT 19 (<sup>2</sup> 20).

/125/ Cf H W Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation 281-2; Dentan, Preface to OT Theology 114-6; Watson, ExpT 73:200; Gunneweg, Vom Verstehen des AT 83 (ET 93); Crenshaw, Samson 21-2.

does mean that insofar as we are seeking to interpret the OT, it is the OT itself and not some abstract from it that we must interpret. In this sense, we cannot accept some parts or views and reject others.

This fact has to be kept in mind as we take up the third form of the interpretive task referred to above, which does involve explicit evaluative judgments about levels in the material, not least in the light of the difficulties involved in maintaining that all the theological perspectives of the OT are equally valid. Recognizing that some perspectives are more profound or more creative than others, many of the evaluative approaches we have been considering draw attention to the need to go beyond formal commitment to the whole OT (without flattening its diversity) by acknowledging that various levels of insight are expressed within it. We do have to look for ways of distinguishing among them. But if we are to maintain an acknowledgment of 'the Old Testament' as scripture, this evaluative task must satisfy two criteria that have often not been applied to it.

First, it must be fulfilled on the basis of the intrinsic dynamic of the OT itself, rather than on some base outside the material. A Christian may also allow the dynamic of the Christian canon as a whole to clarify something which the OT leaves uncertain (that, too, is implicit in the fact that we are studying 'the Old Testament' - whose identity presupposes the existence of a 'New Testament' /126/; we are not studying merely the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings). But

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/126/ Cf Nielson, Beiträge 288; Gunneweg, Textgemäss 46.



even the NT does not decanonize or emasculate the OT /127/. Still less can a modern reader 'interpret' it by concentrating on an inner canon which he himself determines /128/.

The second criterion an evaluative study of the OT needs to fulfil, if the concept of the canon is to retain its meaning, is that we should seek some positive assessment of material which we regard as less close to reflecting ultimate reality. Even if comparing the messages or theological perspectives expressed in the OT reveals that they vary in their depth of insight into truth, and thus in their validity, raising for us the need to seek a way of distinguishing among them and measuring them against each other, nevertheless we will be obliged to offer some positive theological interpretation of the material that seems to be of less relative value. In this way we may be able to work out the implications of the fact that the material we are studying is of varied value, yet that the whole is to be acknowledged as 'the Old Testament'. Here, too, interpreting 'the Old Testament' involves seeking to relate diverse approaches to each other, rather than to separate insight from error /129/.

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/127/ See section 4.4 above.

/128/ Cf K  ng's criticism of the subjective nature of K  semann's approach to the NT (TQ 142:403-8 [ET 263-9] = Strukturen 151-4 [ET 143-6]).

/129/ Cf Childs, Interpretation 18:438-40. Contrast Stoebe's approach, which involves affirming diverse viewpoints as all responses of faith, yet viewing this as an 'erring faith' (Gottes Wort 207: the phrase irrender Glaube comes from Hempel, Apoxysmata 174-97).

An alternative framework to that of Sachkritik for questioning how far biblical material expresses ultimate truth is provided by the 'hermeneutic of suspicion' formulated by Paul Ricoeur /130/. In interpreting people's statements, we do not take them at face value or presume them to be true just because they are made in apparent good faith; we often look behind them for the real truth that is masked by their rationalizations. People see things as they do because of their prejudices, commitments, vested interests, and limitations; the interpreter seeks to penetrate behind these. But Ricoeur places in tension with his hermeneutic of suspicion a hermeneutic of recovery, which once again affirms the significance of and seeks to listen openly to what one has been approaching 'suspiciously'. Critical approaches enable one to move beyond the naïveté of a surface reading of a text, a straightforward taking of it at its face value. Then, by means of an interaction between a hermeneutic of suspicion and a hermeneutic of recovery, one aims to proceed past this 'first naïveté' to a 'second naïveté'. This second naïveté is once again able to 'hear' the text as a whole in an open way, but it 'is postcritical and not precritical; it

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/130/ E.g. De l'interprétation 40-4 (ET Freud and Philosophy 32-6). Cf

Segundo's 'suspicion of ideological interpretation' in the biblical text itself (Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity 5:125) as well as in the utilization of biblical material in Christian doctrine (Liberation of Theology 40-7).



is an informed naïveté<sup>131</sup>/131/.

To Ricoeur's analysis Bernard Lonergan adds that the dialectic between a hermeneutic of suspicion and a hermeneutic of recovery means that while the former facilitates the removing of obstacles that hinder our apprehending what is authentically true in some statement, the latter also 'discovers what is intelligent, true, and good in the obstruction' /132/. Post-critical naïveté even brings to light what is of positive significance in material which is of lesser value.

A useful instance is provided by Hartmut Gese in his study of the relationship between faith and conceptions of the world, where he discusses the theological significance of creation stories such as Gen 1, which are often dismissed in the name of a scientific worldview. Gese is concerned to recognize the insight expressed not merely in the theological implications of such a chapter, which are less open to criticism in the name of science than many of its direct statements are (though perhaps less immune to such criticism than is often assumed), but also the insight embodied in statements about the world itself: for instance, the 'firmament' expresses the perception that space is not endless; the presence of light before the sun's appearance suggests

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/131/ Ricoeur 478, cf 36-40 (ET 496; cf 28-32). See also Brueggemann's utilization of Ricoeur's work in JSOT 17:3-32; and Stuhlmacher's 'hermeneutics of consent' (see e.g. Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation 83-90).

/132/ SR 6:355. Cf Rahner's observations on the theological truth of the OT in Schriften 12:224-40 (ET Theological Investigations 16:177-90).

that physical light is secondary in origin to the light of God's glory which it reflects and symbolizes /133/. To express Gese's point in Ricoeur's terminology, the critical, suspicious hermeneutic that queries the scientific factuality of Gen 1 and facilitates a much deeper perception of its kerygmatic significance needs to be accompanied by a hermeneutic of recovery which manifests enough postcritical naïveté to perceive the depth in what has been subjected to criticism; it is willing to allow it to question in return our dismissal of the ancient way of perceiving the world, a perception which is always open to a spiritual, second-level reading of material realities, such as is actually invited by any symbolic or poetic statement about realities that are deeper than the material /134/.

Variation in levels of insight in the OT can be perceived in matters of theology (such as understandings of God, man, and nation), religious observance (such as attitudes to the temple and to sacrifice), and social life (such as attitudes to violence, the city, and the monarchy). As it happens, a number of these are raised by the book of Deuteronomy, and in chapter 5 we shall examine Deuteronomy from this perspective.

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/133/ Gese 210-5 (ET 231-8); cf Knierim, Horizons in Biblical Theology 3:74-80; also Ricoeur's allusions to 'earth, heaven, water, life, trees and stones', p17, cf 38-40 (ET 7, cf 30-1).

/134/ Cf Gese 205-9, 212, 221-2 (ET 226-31, 234, 245-6).



5 An evaluative study of the teaching of Deuteronomy

5.0 Deuteronomy illustrates particularly clearly how the standards of attitude and behaviour expected within the OT can vary substantially in level. The book has a particularly comprehensive and clearly articulated theology, which as such has deeply influenced modern OT theology. It manifests an attractive emphasis on the love of God and on love for God, and on values such as justice and mercy. Yet its comprehensive theological and ethical perspective may also seem nationalistic, discriminatory, and legalistic /1/, while specific requirements such as the slaughter of entire Canaanite communities, the stoning of a rebellious son, and the banning of the deformed, the illegitimate, and foreigners from Yahweh's assembly, may seem to clash with its other features. If we are to perceive how these diverse emphases may be related to each other, we need to investigate the principles or values which underlie Deuteronomy's injunctions (e.g. those revealed by recurring themes or expressions, or stated in motive clauses /2/); sometimes injunctions which are more or less congenial to us, because of our values or presuppositions, all reflect one single aspect of Israelite values. We must also seek to discover the values left implicit in other commands, a more hazardous task which can produce disagreement among interpreters /3/, but a potentially rewarding one which can reveal the aspects of a society's thinking

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/1/ Cf Ruether's comments on the Bible's 'two religions', JSOT 22:55.

/2/ On these, see Gemser, VTSup 1:50-66; Gilmer, If-You Form.

/3/ See e.g. Mayes's survey of approaches to 23:1 (Deuteronomy 315).

which are taken for granted but thus particularly significant /4/.

## 5.1 Deuteronomy's behavioural values

5.1.0 Deuteronomy affirms many values, norms, or imperatives, such as prohibitions on murder and theft, which are standard features of ethical codes in cultures generally. It lays particular emphasis, however, on the following values.

5.1.1 Justice. Deuteronomy's first major challenge to Israel motivates its commands by asserting the supreme justice of them (4:8), a perhaps polemical parallel to Hammurabi's claim /5/. Specific commands seek to guard against business dishonesty, misappropriation of land, and abuse of the right to sustain oneself by eating grapes or corn on the way through someone's land (25:13-16; 27:17; 19:14; 23:24-5); though there is little property law in Deuteronomy compared with Exod 20 - 23. A number of laws concern the administration of justice in general (1:16-17; 16:18-20; 17:8-11), the handling of evidence (5:20; 13:14; 17:4; 19:15-21), and the limiting of legal responsibility (4:41-3; 19:1-13; 24:16) /6/. Yahweh is the God of justice, and Deuteronomy's overt motivation for a concern with justice lies in the character, behaviour, and expectations of Yahweh, whom Israel is expected to resemble, imitate, and obey.

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/4/ See e.g. Daube, Juridical Review 85:126-34; Douglas, Implicit Meanings ix-x, 3-4; Neusner, Religion 5:91-100.

/5/ So Weinfeld, Deuteronomy 150-1; cf ANET 177.

/6/ On this last, see Greenberg, Kaufmann Volume 20-8; JBL 78:125-32.



5.1.2 Concern for the needy. Israel is to see to the needs of various groups who might have no sure means of livelihood, especially through possessing no land: Levites; widows, orphans, and immigrants ( אֲנִיָּא ); the poor; and slaves. Where necessary this obligation overrides property rights and the right to family privacy.

As members of the priestly tribe, the Levites' need arose out of their calling, and they are to be supported (especially by means of tithes) whether they live in their home area or join the staff of the (central) shrine (14:22-9; 18:6-8).

Yahweh concerns himself with the rights and needs of orphan, widow, and immigrant, as he had with those of Israel in Egypt. He expects Israel to mirror that concern, guarding them from exploitation and taking practical steps to see that they have enough to eat (10:18-19; 14:28-9; 24:17-22; 26:12-13; 27:19) /7/. Thus, while Deuteronomy does not disallow property, it requires public tithing and thus public 'accounting', and makes possessing things the means by which one expresses a concern for the needy /8/. Yahweh also hears the cry of the

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- /7/ Widows were also offered some protection by the levirate law (25:5-10 [cf Neufeld, Ancient Hebrew Marriage Laws 29-31; E W Davies, VT 31:138-44]); immigrants can also be given as food animals that have died a natural death (14:21), and they are to be allowed to enjoy the sabbath rest along with Israelites (5:14). Israelites are to 'love' them as Yahweh does (10:18-19); here as elsewhere, 'love' denotes practical commitment in action, as well as attitude (see at n 45 below)
- /8/ On Deut 14, see Boissonnard and Vouga, Bulletin du Centre Protestant d'Études 32:21-32.

poor, those who own land but are impoverished through circumstances such as poor harvests. He expects Israel to take practical steps to protect them and help them re-establish themselves, in an attitude of brotherhood, generosity, respect, and honour (5:1-11; 24:6,10-15,17).

A man who could not escape from impoverishment by means of loans could sell himself into temporary slavery. But the God who acted on behalf of slaves in Egypt also cares about those who are enslaved now, and he expects Israel to treat slaves not as mere chattels but as members of the family, who share in the joy of its worship (as do orphans, widows, immigrants, and Levites) and in the rest of the sabbath (5:14-15; 12:12,18; 14:26-7; 16:11-12,14; 26:11). Escaped slaves are not to be returned to their masters (23:16-17) /9/; when slaves are due to be set free they are to be given generously of their masters' sheep, corn and wine, or allowed to stay on as permanent slaves in the household if they wish (15:12-18).

5.1.3 Brotherhood. Deuteronomy frequently uses the term 'brother', more commonly to refer to fellow-Israelites than to literal siblings; it thus motivates commands concerning relationships within Israel by encouraging the hearer to see Israel as the family writ large. This motif appears in commands concerning suspending debts, making loans, releasing slaves, dealing with perjury, forgoing interest, kidnapping, slave-trading, and avoiding excessive legal penalties (15:2,3,7,9,11,12; 19:18-19; 23:19-29; 24:7; 25:3 /10/); also

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/9/ Perhaps the reference is to slaves of foreign masters (cf Mendelsohn, Slavery 58-64); but see Carmichael, Laws of Deuteronomy 186-7.

/10/ Contrast earlier versions of these laws, Exod 21:2,16; 22:25-7.



concerning the Transjordanian tribes' commitment to the rest of the tribes (3:18-20) /11/. Even Edomites are to be treated in a special way as brothers (23:7; cf 2:4,8 /12/). Not that Israelites have the right to treat non-Israelites as they wish (see 24:14; also 21:10-14 and the unlimited prohibition on murder, theft, and coveting, 5:17,19,21). But how one treats foreigners is a less pressing everyday question than how one treats one's fellow-countrymen; it is among such that one's enemies are probably located, and it is such that Deuteronomy bids one treat as brothers (cf the law on accepting responsibility for the animals or property of others, 22:1-4) /13/.

Deuteronomy emphasizes that Israel's leaders or representatives (judges, kings, Levites, prophets) are leaders among brothers (1:18; 17:14-20; 18:1-5,15-18 /14/). The kings are not to be foreigners who are not brothers, the Levites' needs are to be the concern of their brothers, the prophets as brothers bring Yahweh's word by straightforward, non-fearful means (contrast 18:9-14,16-17), and none

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/11/ Contrast Num 32:20-4.

/12/ Contrast Num 20:14, where 'brother' appears only as a collective noun.

/13/ The earlier version of this law (Exod 23:4-5) makes explicit that the 'brother' (Deut 22:1) is an enemy. Some other occurrences of 'brother' which appear less freighted (e.g. 1:28; 25:11) are also additions to earlier versions of the material (cf Num 14; Exod 21:18-22) and presumably do therefore carry moral overtones. So also perhaps 25:5-10.

/14/ There is no reference to 'brothers' in the earlier passages on judges and Levites, Exod 18; Num 18.

are to elevate themselves above their brothers (see specifically 17:20: the king 'is simply to be the model Israelite' /15/). All Israelites are entitled to a common freedom, as those Yahweh rescued from Egypt, and to a common enjoyment of the land, as those to whom Yahweh promised it.

5.1.4 Womanhood. Another aspect to Deuteronomy's interest in attitudes to fellow-Israelites is its emphasis on the privileges and responsibilities of women as well as men /16/. It is concerned to encourage family stability (see section 5.1.5 below), but it does not seek to strengthen the position of the male head of the family in order to do so. It stresses attitudes to mothers, wives, and daughters, as well as to fathers, husbands, and sons.

Thus both mother and father have a right to a son's obedience and an obligation to see to the punishment of his rebelliousness (21:18-21). A wife has a right to marital security or to freedom, even if she is a foreigner (21:10-14), and to her son receiving the extra

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/15/ Wolff, Anthropologie 286 (ET 196-7). In Deut the verb 'to choose' for the first time has Israel, not merely David, as its object (4:37; 7:6; 10:14; 14:2) (cf von Rad, Gottesvolk 27-8; Clements, VT 15:306; Nicholson, Deuteronomy and Tradition 103); cf Deut's little concern with the Levites' role and its stress on the whole people's joyful worship and involvement in the covenant (e.g. 29:10-13) rather than on the role of the clergy.

/16/ Cf Carmichael, Women, Law and the Genesis Traditions 3-7 and generally; Carmichael sees these laws as taking up incidents in Genesis.



inheritance if he is the eldest, even if his father prefers the child of another wife (21:15-17). A daughter or a female slave has the same right to share in worship and sabbath rest as a son or a male slave (5:14; 12:12,18; 16:11,14), and a female slave has the same right to freedom as a male slave (15:12) /17/. Daughters as well as sons are protected from intermarriage and from being offered in sacrifice (7:3; 12:31; 18:10) /18/. The needs, and also the responsibilities, of women as well as men are the concerns of laws on sexual conduct and marriage (22:13-29 /19/; 24:5; 25:11-12 /20/), and on apostasy (17:2-3; cf 13:7).

5.1.5 Family order. There is considerable Deuteronomic material concerning the family, marriage, and other sexual relationships, but this material offers little explanation of the basis of its commands. Suggestions as to its underlying values are therefore hypothetical.

The decalogue and its context emphasize the responsibility of children to parents and that of parents to children (5:16; 4:9; 6:7,20-5; 11:19; 21:15-21; 27:16; 32:46). The assumption here is that children need their parents' instruction, and parents need their children's care

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/17/ Contrast Exod 21:2-11.

/18/ Elsewhere in the OT only the offering of sons is mentioned.

/19/ See Phillips, JSOT 20:6-13; Weinfeld 284-91.

/20/ A converse of Exod 21:22-5 - see Daube, Orita 3:36-8; Eslinger, VT 31:369-81.

/21/. A related concern that paternity should always be clear underlies the laws about sex outside marriage. A Phillips notes especially the description of illicit sexual activity (זלזל) as an outrage (נבלה) (22:21). The former term denotes extra-marital sex, not as positively directed to a financial or religious end ('prostitution'), or as indiscriminate ('promiscuity'), or as unethical ('immorality'), or as specifically involving either unmarried persons or married persons ('fornication' or 'adultery'), but as illicit and socially unacceptable. The second term then designates it as an act of crass disorder, threatening the structured arrangement of marriage and the family /22/. The fulfilment of a person's natural right to have children is part of the concern of laws about levirate marriage and sexual assault (25:5-12) /23/ and about a newly married man's exemption from military or other public service (20:7; 24:5).

Two passages impose limitations on whom a man may marry or have intercourse with (22:30; 27:20,22-3). They seem to proscribe such relationships with one's step-mother, half-sister, or mother-in-law, out of a desire to preserve proper order within the (extended) family

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/21/ If 5:16 at least includes a concern for aged parents (cf Albertz, ZAW 90:348-74). On the rights and responsibility of primogeniture, see Mendelsohn, BASOR 156:38-40; Neufeld 267; Yaron, Gifts 9-10.

/22/ VT 25:239. Phillips also sees a concern with paternity in the divorce law of 24:1-4 (Ancient Israel's Criminal Law 117-8).

/23/ Cf Neufeld 47; Phillips 94-5. Noonan finds the same aim in 25:4, which he sees as prohibiting the prevention of conception (JQR 70:172-5).



/24/. The same aim perhaps underlies the expectation that a bride shall be a virgin (22:13-21, 28-9). The safeguarding of the marriage relationship itself is a concern of the decalogue and of other laws (5:18; 22:22-7); these probably include that banning remarriage to one's former wife (24:1-4) /25/, though the latter of course presupposes that divorce will happen.

5.1.6 Happiness. Only Psalms and Proverbs use the verb נִדַּח more often than Deuteronomy. It occurs in distinctive Deuteronomic contexts in connection with a joy in Yahweh's provision for his people, which finds expression when people gather for festivals and worship; Deuteronomy emphasizes the sharing of this joy by the whole family and other members of the community (12:7, 12, 18; 14:26; 16:11, 14; 26:11). The verb recurs in the exhortation to give a newly married man time 'to make his wife happy' (24:5; Targum 'to be happy with his wife'). Further, this book which urges people not to desire other people's possessions encourages them to indulge their desires with regard to what belongs to them (5:21; 12:15, 20, 21; 14:26), and rejoices in the idea of eating and being full (6:11; 8:10, 12; 11:15; 14:29; 26:12) even though it recognizes the danger of this experience (31:20) /26/. Its joy is thus a rejoicing in the concrete blessings which come to Israel as Yahweh fulfils his promises to give her a good and fruitful land as

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/24/ See Porter, Extended Family; Stendebach, Kairos 18:277-9; Evans-Pritchard, Rules and Meanings 44. Wenham sees this principle also behind 24:1-4 (JJS 30:36-40).

/25/ Cf Carmichael, Laws 203-7; Women, Law and the Genesis Traditions 16.

/26/ Again, only Psalms and Proverbs use נִדַּח or נִדַּח more often.

a secure possession in a situation of relief from the attacks of enemies (see the collocation of words and ideas in 12:7-21; 14:22-9; 16:9-17; 26:1-15) /27/.

D Daube has drawn attention to a less concrete aspect of human happiness or fulfilment which Deuteronomy emphasizes, honour or good standing as opposed to shame, embarrassment, or degradation (e.g. 22:13-21; 24:10-11, 25:3,9; 27:16). The opposite of blessing/the feeling of happiness is curse/the feeling of shame (חלל ), and Deuteronomy is concerned to avoid this being the experience of its hearers /28/.

Deuteronomy emphasizes, however, that continued enjoyment of this happiness depends on obedience to the laws it sets forth (e.g. 14:29). One underlying feature of some of these laws, and at the same time an aspect of the life of blessing which Deuteronomy wants Israel to enjoy, is an observing of order in the community by means of keeping distinct things which are distinct: mother and child, war and peace, life and

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/27/ See the emphasis on the land as God's gift in Diepold, Israels Land 76-104; Miller, Interpretation 23:451-65; J Plöger, Literarkritische Untersuchungen 61-91; Wildberger, EyT 16:404-22; Brueggemann, Land 45-53.

/28/ See Orita 3:27-52; Neotestamentica et Semitica 236-9; cf Carmichael, Laws 45-7.



death (22:1-11) /29/. Such external structuring of life is an important expression of order, both supporting the feeling that there is order in the community and thereby encouraging that order. The more overtly social and ethical interests of the law, including their concern for consistent legal practice, also play an important role in supporting social stability /30/. Such order contributes to Israel functioning as a people: for Deuteronomy is concerned with the people as a whole as Yahweh's people. It is a community that is addressed, is reminded of its common history and calling, is challenged to a communal obedience, is invited to its common worship, and is promised its communal blessing /31/.

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/29/ So Carmichael, JJS 25:50-63; HTR 69:1-7; one might add, man and animals (27:21). Carmichael suggests that Deut's attitude to animals, birds, and trees (14:21; 20:19-20; 22:6-7) and its prohibition on eating blood (12:23-5) have the same background (cf also Carmichael, Laws 150-66; Keel, Das Böcklein in der Milch; Wenham, EvQ 53:6-15). Some of Carmichael's other examples (e.g. VT 29:129-42) I find less convincing. For the broader anthropological background, see e.g. Bulmer, Rules and Meanings 167-93; see further section 5.2.2 at notes 64-7 below.

/30/ Cf Hanson's comments, Canon and Authority 124-5.

/31/ Cf von Rad, Gottesvolk 10-19.

5.2 Deuteronomy's theological perspective

5.2.0 Deuteronomy's behavioural values probably commend themselves to the modern ethicist. But they have their ambiguities. It is excellent to treat one's fellow-countrymen as brothers, but Deuteronomy's stance is not really humanitarian; it takes a very different attitude to foreigners (e.g. 15:3; 23:20). The basis for this lies in its fundamental theological perspective, which is frequently articulated within the book. It involves two correlative convictions: Israel is Yahweh's people and Yahweh is Israel's God (see e.g. 26:17-18; 29:13). It is these foundational convictions which are then explicated in the covenantal structure of Deuteronomy's message.

5.2.1 'You are Yahweh's special people'

Yahweh is Lord of the whole cosmos, and no other power rules anywhere on earth (4:39). He made all the nations and thus has a natural relationship with them all; but he has a special relationship with Israel by election. He chose Israel to be his special personal possession, and to be thus holy to him (26:18,19; cf 7:6; 14:2; 28:9; 32:8,9); holiness designates not Israel's calling (as in Leviticus), but her status as a result of Yahweh's choice of her.

This special relationship between Yahweh and Israel implies a special practical commitment of the one to the other. He loves her, made promises to her ancestors, rescued her from bondage in Egypt. He is close at hand whenever she calls to him for help (4:7). He is committed to her survival and success, and in particular to giving her a



land which she can possess and regard as her own (נחלה, ירשה; e.g. 2:12; 4:38).

Such a commitment to Israel raises the question of the significance of other nations before Yahweh; indeed O Bächli makes the question of Israel and the nations the focus of his study of Deuteronomy /32/. What it means to be Israel can emerge from consideration of how she differs from the nations, what dangers other nations bring to her, and how she can avoid these.

Bound up in Yahweh's particular commitment to Israel is his ensuring the defeat of enemies who prevent Israel leaving their land (4:34; 6:20-3), hinder her journey toward the land Yahweh intends to give her (1:4; 2:16 - 3:11), currently possess this land (4:38; 6:19; 7:1-2, 17-24; 11:23-5), or inhabit cities which subsequently attack her (28:17) or which she seeks to conquer in extending her empire (20). Israel is to be greater than any other nation on earth (2:25; 11:24-5; 26:19; 28:1, 10, 12, 13). Yahweh fights for Israel and 'delivers them all into her hands', enabling her to defeat them herself (2:33; cf 20); and each experience of victory should then build up confidence in Yahweh for the next battle (1:30; 3:21-2; 20:1-4).

Deuteronomy emphasizes, however, that the first three groups of enemies experience defeat at Yahweh and Israel's hand not because they are mere innocent obstacles to Israel's destiny but because they are wilful rebels against Yahweh's moral will. The Egyptians had treated Israel

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/32/ Israel und die Völker

as slaves (6:12,20-3), so that the Egyptian experience had been like being smelted in a furnace (4:20). Sihon of Heshbon and Og of Bashan had made unprovoked attacks on Israel on her journey towards the land west of the Jordan (2:24 - 3:17). The Canaanites had forfeited that land by their 'wickedness' (רשעה) (9:4-5) or by their 'abominations' (תעבות) (18:9-14) - that is, unacceptable religious practices such as child sacrifice, divination, and magic, which were designed to influence the deity, make things happen, or discover the future /33/.

Thus Israel herself has to learn the appropriate lessons from such warning examples. Possession of the land is not the fruit of her own achievement, but Yahweh's gift (6:10-13). It is not given to her as a reward for her uprightness; it is a fulfilment of a promise that has its basis in Yahweh himself and his decision to commit himself to this particular people (4:37-8; 7:6-8; 9:4-5). The wickedness of the Canaanites makes it possible for him to fulfil this purpose, but it also makes clear that Yahweh has certain standards, which apply to Israel as much as to the Canaanites. His commitment to her is not unconditional. In relation to Israel, too, Yahweh can manifest himself as 'a devouring fire, a jealous God' (4:24; cf 5:9; 6:15). She can lose the land and be annihilated, her few survivors scattered and condemned to worship the empty images to which they were so strangely attracted (4:25-8). Indeed, Israel's own story

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/33/ Cf Bächli's observation (p 14) that the two main poles of Deut's treatment of the nations is their cult (as wicked and dangerous) and their land (as forfeited by them and to be given to Israel). On תועבות see further section 5.2.2 below at n 49.



already illustrates this, for Yahweh has had cause to punish her for rebellion already (1:37-8; 4:21-2; 32:48-52). So it can be that Israel will experience trouble rather than success if she ignores Yahweh's expectations of her (28); he has enjoyed watching her grow, but he could as readily then watch her die (28:63).

Yet for all the warning of annihilation, death, and destruction, Deuteronomy does not picture such punishment as necessarily final. If it brings the scattered remains of Israel to their senses and they seek Yahweh again, they will find him (4:25-30). Because Yahweh was gracious enough to reveal himself to them, they will pay for rebelling against him; but because he was gracious enough to reveal himself to them, he will not avert his ear from their cry even then (4:31-9). He will restore them not only outwardly but inwardly (30:1-10). Although Moses will not set foot the other side of the Jordan, he casts his eye over the land as the last act of his life (32:1-4) /34/.

Neither is punishment Yahweh's only word for other peoples. The fourth group of nations referred to above were ones which have not oppressed Israel, hindered her progress to her land, or (apparently) offended Yahweh by their religion; they are destined to be ruled by Israel because that is Yahweh's will, which they are invited to accept, and only if they resist will they be forcibly subjugated (20:1-18). The OT includes no precise examples of the implementing of this set of

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/34/ Perhaps thus taking possession of it in symbol (so Daube, Studies 24-38).

instructions, though it describes several partly parallel situations (e.g. 2:26; Josh 9:15; 10:1; Judg 1:27-36). Perhaps the instructions would apply to Edom, Moab, and Ammon, peoples who received their land from Yahweh, as Israel did (2:4-22). Thus he controls the destiny of these nations around Israel, and concerns himself with their well-being /35/. Admittedly he only asserts this regarding the other Abrahamic peoples, the descendants of Esau (who are thus Israel's brothers) and of Lot (2:4,9,19). While Deuteronomy speaks of Yahweh destroying Rephaim and the Horites before Ammon and Edom, it offers no such interpretations of the displacement of the Avvim before the Caphtorim (2:23; contrast Amos 9:7).

Other passages may speak more or less narrowly than this. Deut 23:4-9 permanently bans Ammonites and Moabites from Yahweh's assembly, even after ten generations, and allows Edomites or Egyptians to be admitted only after three generations (cf Ezra 9 - 10; Neh 9). The passage's background and interpretation are complex. Perhaps a concern to exclude people of uncertain religious commitment or explicitly of other religions underlies these verses (as it may 23:2-3) /36/, though they themselves give the ban an ethical rationale which also underlies the permanent punishment imposed on Ammon and Moab (23:5-7; cf 25:18-19 on Amalek). In any case, the acceptance of Ruth into the community and the promise of acceptance to the convert (Isa 56:3) need not conflict with this law, if its concern is primarily religious/ethical, not

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/35/ Cf Gese's observations, Textgemäss 36-7.

/36/ Cf Gallinger, Festschrift Bertholet 176-91; Bächli 85-7.



racial /37/.

As in relation to the Ammonites and Moabites, Deuteronomy takes an uncompromising stance in regard to the Canaanites. Their worship is abhorrent to Yahweh and they themselves are to be annihilated, not least lest they lead the Israelites astray (7:1-5,25-6). Apparently Canaanite worship is seen as distinctively objectionable and dangerous. The Song of Moses (32:8-9) takes a broader view of other nations' worship:

When Elyon gave the nations their inheritance (לַחַיִּים),  
when he divided up mankind,  
he set the boundaries of the peoples  
in accordance with the numbers of the sons of Israel /38/.

But Yahweh's share (קִלְקַל) is his people.

Yahweh allocated (קִלְקַל) the planets and stars to the other nations to worship, but expected Israel to worship him because he had taken her as his own people (עַם נִחְלָה) (4:19-20). The statement that Yahweh was involved in the destiny of the Abrahamic tribes is here generalized.

Deuteronomy does not make entirely clear the basis of Yahweh's

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/37/ Cf Bächli 111, drawing a contrast with Ezra 9. Cf the combination of rigour and openness in Exod 12:43-9; also in Josh 1 - 12 (cf Bächli, Wort = Gebot = Glaube 21-6). Admittedly Deut itself shows no signs of a concept of individual foreigners being able to be converted to Yahwism (cf von Rad 39).

/38/ LXX 'sons of God' may be right, though the reasons for such a change in MT are not obvious.

relationship to Israel. Its origin lies explicitly in Yahweh, not in Israel's own achievements or potential. But Deuteronomy is ambivalent over whether its continuance depends finally on Yahweh himself, as the promise of restoration and renewal in 30:1-10 might imply, or depends on Israel's (repentance and) obedience, as Deuteronomy's many exhortations suggest (cf even 30:1-2, also 4:29-30). Its hortatory emphasis implies that disobedience could finally undo Israel's relationship with Yahweh; but the possibility of being finally cast off is never made explicit.

An unclarity over this point appears throughout both Testaments, and perhaps denotes a tension that one should not try to resolve. The relationship between God and his people begins with his initiative, but it cannot survive without their response; even that response is inspired by him, yet it is still their personal response. Which of the poles in this tension needs emphasis will vary. Israel between Sinai and the promised land (or on the verge of the Josianic reform) particularly needs to be reminded that the continuance of her relationship with Yahweh depends on her obedience to him. Israel in exile (presupposed by 30:1-10) also needs to be reminded of the persistence of Yahweh's commitment to her.

Deuteronomy is also unclear - at best - in its understanding of the relationship between Yahweh, Israel, and other nations. While it sees Yahweh as Lord of the nations, it does not work out the implications of its own hints regarding his positive purpose for them. Its perspective is almost entirely Israel-centred. It only concerns itself



with the nations insofar as they are relevant to Israel /39/.

This characteristic of Deuteronomy no doubt relates to the crises it confronts, overtly or covertly, the threat to Israel's survival as the distinctive people of Yahweh constituted by the occupation of Canaan and the apostasy of seventh century Judah /40/. In such contexts, Deuteronomy has to emphasize the distinctiveness of Israel's calling by Yahweh and her calling before Yahweh, the privilege of her position and the potential of Yahweh's commitment to her /41/. Yet the assumption that Israel's life and calling has to be seen in the context of Yahweh's worldwide power and concern surfaces in the wider literary work to which Deuteronomy belongs, the narrative which begins in Genesis and extends to Kings before it comes to an unequivocal end. This work focuses on the tragic story of Israel from the twin peaks of the exodus-occupation of Palestine and united monarchy to the disaster of exile, but it sets this story in the context of the creation of man and of Yahweh's promises to Israel's ancestors. Deuteronomy notes that it is these promises of Yahweh's blessing (e.g. Gen 12:1-3) which are now being confirmed and fulfilled (e.g. 1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 13:17; 19:8;

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/39/ Thus Altmann describes it as particularist and nationalist (Erwählungstheologie 13-18).

/40/ Cf Bächli, Israel 12; Martin-Achard TZ 16:333-41; Nicholson, Deuteronomy and Tradition 105.

/41/ Gese, however, suggests that the denial of Israel's distinctive election in Amos 9:7 is a piece of Deuteronomistic redaction, designed to goad Israel towards obedience (so Textgemäss 33-8). If so, a 'non-nationalist' point is being made, though for 'nationalist' reasons!

29:13; 30:20), not least in the nations' acknowledgment of Israel (cf 4:6-8; 26:19; 28:1,10-13). This context, however, sees both promise and fulfilment as part of Yahweh's way of dealing with the curse which has come upon all mankind /42/.

### 5.2.2 'Yahweh is your God'

Correlative to Yahweh's commitment to Israel is Israel's commitment to Yahweh. 'You are our God' answers to 'You are my people'.

Yahweh's expectations of his people begin to be expressed in ch 4; the general attitudes he looks for are prominent in chs 4 - 11 and continue to feature as the background to the remainder of the book. Deuteronomy is not seeking a mere formal, external obedience. It repeatedly affirms that Yahweh's people are to obey him, to fear him, to love him, to follow him, to conform to his ways, to hold fast to him, to trust him, to rejoice before him, to remember him, to serve him, to worship him, and to take their oaths in his name. He alone is to be the object of those verbs: they are to love him wholeheartedly, and thus not to love anyone else (6:4-5) /43/; to trust him completely, and not to trust in other resources (17:16-20); not to follow other gods or conform to their ways, not to serve them or worship them. Israel is to be ד'וּן with Yahweh (18:13), wholly committed to him. Her offerings are to be unblemished ones (17:1; 15:21). Her vows are to be kept

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/42/ See further sections 3.1 (and n 9) above, and 6.5.3 below.

/43/ Bächli sees 6:4-5 as the key to Deut; the whole of the rest is elaboration on this point (pp 29-30; cf Alt, Kleine Schriften 2:253-4).



(23:22-4) /44/. She is to avoid misapplying his name (5:11) and is to keep his sabbath (5:12-15).

The OT understands the relationship between Yahweh and his people by analogy with human relationships such as those of husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers, friends, and teachers and pupils, and the commitment of which Deuteronomy speaks has all these in its background. But particularly immediate to it is the relationship of an imperial overlord to a smaller nation, expressed in the near-eastern political treaties of the second and first millennium. These, too, expect the smaller nation to love its overlord (in the sense of being totally committed in loyalty to him /45/), to serve him alone, to follow his policies, to fear him, to hold fast to him and to obey him. They emphasize the exclusiveness of this commitment: the smaller nation's loyalty to its overlord excludes any similar relationship with any other power.

It may be significant that the divine overlord is not referred to as Israel's king. Where the term 'king' occurs, it refers to the human leader Israel is envisaged as seeking. A human king is allowed, but human kingship is not to be permitted to compromise Yahweh's sole authority (cf the discussion in sections 3:2-3 above). So the king must be Yahweh's choice, his life must reflect Yahweh's standards, he must rely on Yahweh and not on other resources, and he must pay

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/44/ On this, see Weinfeld, Deuteronomy 270-2.

/45/ Cf Moran, CBQ 25:77-87; though this is also a wisdom characteristic (cf McKay, VT 22:426-35; Malfroy, VT 15:49-65).

particular attention to the contents of Yahweh's law, so as to give the exclusive and complete obedience to Yahweh that is expected of the whole people (17:14-20).

Yahweh, then, looks for an exclusive commitment to him; any other commitment (specifically, one to the local deities of Canaan) is impossible /46/. This is where the ten covenant words begin (5:7); it is the content of Israel's basic belief in one Yahweh (6:4-5); it is implied by his being a jealous God, who tolerates no other loyalties (6:10-15); it in turn implies a fierce policy towards rebels (17:2-7; cf 29:18-28; 30:15-20) and such as encourage rebellion (13:1-18) /47/.

Worshipping other gods than Yahweh is only slightly more reprehensible than worshipping Yahweh himself in ways in which other gods are worshipped but which he forbids. Thus the ten words immediately follow the prohibition on worshipping other gods by a ban on images in worship (5:8-10; cf 8:25-6; 27:15). Although these would be strictly or theologically images to represent Yahweh, they arouse Yahweh's jealousy, for worshipping an image comes to be merely another way of worshipping a god other than Yahweh.

The importance of the ban on images is emphasized by its being the central concern of the opening chapter of Moses' actual instructions

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/46/ Hence von Rad's overstated observation that in Deut the direct link between religion and farming is broken (Gottesvolk 30).

/47/ Note the political terminology; cf Weinfeld 91-100, also Bächli's remark (pp 68-9) that Deut is only concerned with Israel's attitude to other peoples because it is concerned with her attitude to their gods.



to Israel. The chapter begins with reference to obeying Yahweh's commands and holding fast to him (4:1-5), but almost imperceptibly comes a transition to the ban on worship by means of images, based on their inappropriateness to a God whose self-revelation did not have a shape which could then be imitated, but comprised only words which were to be obeyed as expressing the will of one who was personally responsive to his people's call and personally active on his people's behalf (4:6-40). An image suggests another kind of God altogether /48/.

The principle that total loyalty to Yahweh demands not only avoiding the worship of alien gods but also avoiding alien ways of worship underlies many other laws. It is epitomized by the description of various practices as abhorrent to Yahweh (נִבְזֵי). The term applies especially to features of Canaanite religion and to attempts to introduce these into Israel (7:25-6; 12:29-31; 13:14; 17:4; 18:9-14; 20:18; 23:18-19; 27:15; 32:16) /49/.

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/48/ Cf Deut's stress on remembering (cf Blair, Interpretation 15:41-7), which reflects the fact that Yahweh is the kind of God who speaks and acts memorably.

/49/ See also 17:1 (a practice regarded as just as bad as following Canaanite ways, rather than as actually Canaanite practice?); 23:8 (the denominative verb נִבְזֵי). On נִבְזֵי see L'Hour, RB 71:481-503; Humbert, ZAW 72:217-37. Deut 24:1-4 more resembles the application of the word to non-cultic sexual irregularities in Lev 18:22,26-30; 20:13; so also Deut 22:5, though this might refer to a Canaanite cultic practice (so Driver, Deuteronomy 250; Römer, Travels in the World of the OT 217-22). Deut 25:13-16 uses the word as a more general expression of disgust, resembling that in Prov (e.g. 11:1; 20:10,23).

As Deut 23:18-19 illustrates, Deuteronomy's concern with sexual behaviour arises in part from the latter's link with religion. In ancient near eastern religions, this link might involve a girl experiencing sexual initiation in the shrine, as a way of opening herself to the god's power of fertility /50/; or temple personnel engaging in sexual intercourse to represent the marriage between god and goddess which was the key to the land's fertility; or lay devotees of a god or goddess seeking divine life and power by intercourse with such temple personnel. Deuteronomy bans Israelite involvement in such practices and the payment of vows to Yahweh out of the proceeds of participation in them (23:18-19) /51/. Its exclusion of the גִּדּוֹן and his descendants from Yahweh's assembly may presuppose that these are children born as a result of this involvement (23:3) /52/.

Deuteronomy is violently anti-Canaanite, and it is possible to overstate its rejection of Canaanite forms of worship. While it condemns some Canaanite practices that are accepted elsewhere in the OT (see 14:1-2 /53/; 16:21-2; 26:14 /54/), presumably because it

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/50/ Cf Wolff, Hosea 14, 106-11, (ET 14, 85-8), on Hos 1:2; 4:13-14; Rost, Festschrift Bertholet 451-60; Boström, Proverbiastudien 103-55; though there is some danger of reading too much into the evidence (Rudolph, ZAW 75:65-73; Fisher, BTB 6:225-36).

/51/ On 23:19 see Thomas, VT 10:424.

/52/ 23:2 may similarly refer to intentional mutilation in connection with the service of one's god (on 23:1-2, see Galling, Festschrift Bertholet 178-9; Craigie, Deuteronomy 296-7).

/53/ See Mayes, Deuteronomy 238-9.

/54/ See Cazelles, RB 55:54-71.



believed they could particularly easily carry Canaanite connotations, many aspects of worship remained common to Canaan and Israel.

As a concern for loyalty to Yahweh leads to the proscription of certain Canaanite forms of worship, so this proscription leads to a further ban on the use of the former Canaanite shrines, and the concentration of worship on the shrine 'which Yahweh your God will choose out of all your tribes' (12:5). This requirement is integral to the opening chapter of detailed commands (12:1-31) with its concern for avoiding pagan rites (12:29-31). It means that if it is impracticable for a rite to take place at Yahweh's chosen shrine, it must nevertheless not take place elsewhere; such rites must cease to be sacral occasions. Thus Deuteronomy permits people to kill animals for food at home and to convert tithes and firstlings into monetary offerings (12:15-16, 20-5; 14:22-7), and it removes the cultic aspect to the provision of justice, to the ceremony whereby a slave opted to become a permanent family slave, and to the provision of asylum for someone who has committed homicide (15:16-17; 16:18-20; 19:1-13; contrast Exod 21:5-6; 22:7-8; 21:12-14) /55/. Its law of unsolved homicide (21:1-9) achieves a delicate compromise between the need for the cultic rite to take place at particular locations in the land and the principle that sacrifice itself is confined to Yahweh's chosen shrine. It is difficult to imagine a rite which is nearer to being a sacrifice without actually

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/55/ Weinfeld (p 237) comments that the place of asylum, which is a shrine in Exod 21:13-14 (מִקְדָּשׁ - cf Deut 12:5!) and Num 35 (a place to stay until the death of the high priest), is solely a place of protection and not a place of atonement in Deut 19:1-13.

being one /56/.

The effect of several of these measures is to remove various activities from the sphere of the sacred to that of the secular and/or to change their motivation and effect from a sacral one to a humanitarian one. But it is misleading to describe Deuteronomy's ethos as secularizing or anthropocentric /57/.

While Deuteronomy makes certain events less sacral occasions, at other points it makes people more dependent on Yahweh's shrine.

Passover/Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles must be celebrated here (16:1-17) /58/; all offerings and sacrifices are to be brought here, and account is given here of the worshipper's faithful distribution of tithes at home (12:6; 15:19-20; 26:1-15). Appeal beyond a local court is made to the priests and the judge here (17:8-13). Whether Deuteronomy is desacralizing rites or transferring them to the

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/56/ I think Weinfeld (p 210) underestimates the sacral nature of this rite (cf Roifer, Tarbiz 31:119-43; McKeating, VT 25:62-4; Zevit, JBL 95:377-90). There is miasma needing to be removed, and expiation is effected not by confession (there is no confession) but by the rite itself.

/57/ So Weinfeld, e.g. Deuteronomy 188-90, 214-7); cf Milgrom's objections and Weinfeld's clarifications in IEJ 23:156-61, 230-3; also von Rad's remarks, Gottesvolk 34.

/58/ Exod 12 presupposes that the whole community has easy access to the/a shrine, so the assumption that people sacrifice there and eat at home is not impractical.



chosen shrine, it does so out of the same concern to ensure that Israel's religious life is focused on Yahweh. The fact that it pays little attention to 'how' offerings and sacrifices were to be made reflects its central concern with 'to whom' and 'where' /59/.

Indeed, it is not only its cultic law which is concerned with the acknowledgment of Yahweh. Religious life, social life, and family life are all interwoven in Deuteronomy /60/. Its interest in the family, the community, and the nation all relates to its concern that Israel should live her whole life before Yahweh /61/; it is not really so much a book of law as a book of preaching, a book of Yahwistic moral wisdom /62/. Matters that are of strictly legal concern elsewhere in the ancient near east (e.g. adultery or even murder), and matters of purely private morality, are treated as part of the people's relationship with Yahweh; hence the way they are approached and the punishments

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/59/ Cf Bächli 94-7. Von Rad questions whether 'centralization' is of focal importance to Deut (Deuteronomium-Studien 47 [ET Studies 67]). The wide range of passages related to this concern suggests it is (cf Nicholson, Deuteronomy and Tradition 54-5).

/60/ Note also its concern with the home's religious significance (6:7-9; 11:19-20) - a different matter from its sacral significance (Carmichael seems not to distinguish the two [see Laws 56-7]).

/61/ Cf von Rad, Gottesvolk 55-6; Horst, EvT 16:49-75.

/62/ Cf von Rad, Deuteronomium 13-17 (ET 19-24); Gesammelte Studien 2:154-64 (ET Interpretation 15:3-13); Carmichael, Laws 17-52.

applied to them /63/.

If an anthropological approach to them is right, instructions regarding the external structuring of life also carry a significance in relation to people's religious and ethical commitment to Yahweh /64/. Preserving distinctions is part of Israel's holiness; it is for Yahweh's sake that Israel embodies the distinction between life and death (see 14:2,21 in the context of 14:1-21 /65/). It is also a metaphor for the distinctiveness she is to maintain in relation to the nations (7:1-6), and a means towards it - because these laws are part of Israel's distinctiveness /66/. Holiness is embodied in wholeness; this, too, may underlie the categorizing of clean and unclean animals (14:1-21) /67/, as well as the concern about bodily emissions (23:11-15) and about completing what you have begun (20:5-7). Thus every aspect of life is capable of reflecting the confession that 'Yahweh is our God and we are his people'.

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/63/ Cf McKeating, VT 25:61-8; L'Hour, Biblica 44:1-28; Kornfeld, RB 57:92-109; Horst 58-67.

/64/ See section 5.1.6 and n 29 above.

/65/ Cf Soler, Annales 28:943-55 (ET NY Review 26, 10:24-30).

/66/ Some backing for this approach to such laws is provided by the way that in apocalyptic clean animals symbolize Israel, unclean ones or hybrids the gentile nations or Israel's enemies (cf J M Ford, JSJ 10:203-12).

/67/ Cf Douglas, Purity and Danger 51-6. It is, however, a problem that this approach can suggest several different explanations of the same passage.



5.2.3 The strength and the limitation of Deuteronomy's theology is this systematic focusing on Israel as Yahweh's people and Yahweh as Israel's God. Its strength lies here because it makes possible a sustained exposition of the central message that Deuteronomy sees Israel to need in the period it addresses. Its limitation is that this is not all that needs to be said about Israel or about Yahweh. By focusing on Israel's privileged calling and responsibility and the importance of her distancing herself from the nations, Deuteronomy obscures the fact that it is ultimately for the sake of the nations that she is called at all. This, apparently, was what it saw the situation to demand; and 'it may well be the case, in any given situation, that that which we can say, responsibility and intelligibly, is not that which, were we to abstract from the two poles of concrete speech, we might have wished to say, or felt entitled or obliged to say' /68/.

Similarly, in focusing on Yahweh as the exclusive object of Israel's actual commitment, Deuteronomy takes the existence of other gods for granted (they are worshipped, therefore they exist). It satisfies itself with mono-Yahwism; it does not explicitly press towards mono-theism. Yet in an inherently polytheistic context, perhaps a person who commits himself exclusively to Yahweh is nearer the God of Israel and the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, and closer to the truth, than a person who attempts the impossible task of being a theoretical monotheist /69/.

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/68/ Lash, Theology on Dover Beach 39.

/69/ So Rahner, Schriften 12:235 (ET Theological Investigations 16:186).

There is a specific tension between Deuteronomy's stress on the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of womanhood, and its masculine understanding of God himself (sic), though it has a little of the 'appeal to the maternal side of divinity' which can sometimes be found in the OT /70/: Yahweh does appear as the eagle caring for her young as they learn how to fly, and as the mother who gave birth to Israel (32:11,18). Nevertheless Deuteronomy distinguishes itself over against Canaanite religion in its reticence over the feminine in theology. In Canaanite religion, however, women were seen so predominantly in sex and fertility terms, to the exclusion of personal ones, that avoiding a feminine portrayal of God may have been the most radically non-sexist response Deuteronomy could have made to its context /71/.

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/70/ Terrien, Elusive Presence 310, cf Horizons in Biblical Theology 3:141; also Tribble, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality 31-71; Hamerton-Kelly, God the Father 38-51.

/71/ Cf Ruether, JSOT 22:59; Segal, JJS 30:121-37; Hanson, Ecumenical Review 27:317-8; de Boer, Fatherhood and Motherhood. To speak of a patriarchal understanding of God is misleading, for the OT rarely describes Yahweh as father, partly for similar reasons to those which may have led to avoiding female terms for deity generally (so Hamerton-Kelly 13-18).



### 5.3 Deuteronomy's pastoral strategy

5.3.0 Deuteronomy's behavioural values would be acceptable to most ethicists, and its theological perspective (with the further values this implies) would be acceptable in the context of biblical faith as a whole to anyone who was fundamentally sympathetic to that faith. Other features of Deuteronomy that seem odd, embarrassing, or objectionable, need to be considered in connection with the practical object that Deuteronomy shares with other pentateuchal law collections. It wishes to influence people's actual behaviour. To do this involves inculcating certain values and encouraging a certain perspective. But these are rather rarified and demanding, whereas instructions regarding behaviour also need to start where people are and point out specific steps that lead towards where they should be.

Deuteronomy itself urges obedience to its law on the grounds that it is not נִסְתָּר, not rarified, incomprehensible, or inaccessible (30:11-14). It is not that, partly because OT law starts from the same legal tradition as Israel knew from her environment in Mesopotamia and Canaan, as well as from the ethos of the clan as this had developed over the centuries. Israel's versions of such laws are set in a revolutionary new context, that of a personal relationship with Yahweh, but they are not always markedly different in content /72/. Sometimes Deuteronomy's behavioural values give its law a more exalted spirit than that of Mesopotamian law /73/, but this is not invariably

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/72/ Cf (Stamm and) Andrew, Ten Commandments 75; cf section 2.5.1 above.

/73/ Cf Eichrodt, Theologie 1:28-33 (ET 1:74-82).

the case /74/. Israelite law (like any law) has to start where its own people are. Its relationship with Mesopotamian and Canaanite law, however, presupposes that it starts where people are as sinners, and starts where they are in their cultural context.

### 5.3.1 Starting where people are as sinners

A suggestive insight on the nature of Deuteronomic (and other) law emerges from Jesus' discussion with the Pharisees concerning divorce (Mark 10:2-9), noted in section 4.4 above. The Pharisees, invited to answer their own question concerning the legality of divorce, do so by referring to Moses' acceptance of divorce in Deut 24. Jesus responds by drawing their attention to other passages from the Torah relevant to the topic under discussion, Gen 1:27 and 2:24; these by implication make divorce a much more questionable practice. Jesus explains the difference between them and Deuteronomy's provision by seeing the latter as given because of their stubbornness and unteachability (σκληροκαρδία).

Jesus' suggestion that within OT law we may distinguish between what expresses the absolute will of God and what is given as a result of human sin and to limit sin's consequences is not alien to Deuteronomy itself /75/. Throughout the framework to its laws, it places great emphasis on the sinfulness of those to whom they are given. The historical survey of Israel's journey from Sinai to the Plains of Moab

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/74/ Hammurabi's code limits slavery for debt to three years (ANET 170-1).

/75/ Cf Daube, JJS 10:1-13.



which opens Moses' speech begins by recalling the burden that the people's contentiousness (לִּבִּי) placed on Moses; this contentiousness against God and against Moses continued in their rebellious unwillingness when challenged to enter the land from the south (1:26-7,32,41,43). Exodus and holy war traditions are turned upsidedown /76/. After their forty years' chastisement, the land is about to be given to Israel. Now Moses reminds them that they are an inherently sinful people, as their rebellious idol-making at the very moment of the covenant's inauguration had illustrated (9:6-29). The land is to be given them despite their sin rather than because of their righteousness. In describing their stubborn rebelliousness, Moses picks up the expression used to describe them in Exod 32 - 34, (Deut 9:6,13) /77/, the description in turn taken up by Jesus in Mark 10. Moses urges Israel not to continue to be stubborn (10:16), but he fears that her commitment will not last (5:29), and the Deuteronomic covenant offers more warnings about the consequences of disobedience than it does promises of blessing that will follow on obedience (Deut 27 - 28). Moses does not believe that Yahweh has yet given Israel a mind to understand what Yahweh has done for them (29:4), and he foresees the chastisements that their stubborn rebelliousness will bring upon them (29:18-28; 31:27-9). Thus Moses' 'Song' is dominated by an awareness of this blindness and rebelliousness (32:4-25 /78/).

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/76/ Cf Lohfink, Biblica 41:105-34; Moran, Biblica 44:333-42.

/77/ Similar expressions in 9:27; 10:16; 31:27. σκληρά/σκληρότης and compounds are the LXX's equivalents to expressions such as קָרַב-לֵב. σκληροκαρδία itself occurs in 10:16 (elsewhere only Sir 16:10; Jer 4:4).

/78/ The blindness and rebelliousness referred to in the rest of the Song is probably that of other nations (cf Mayes, Deuteronomy 389-92).

Only when Yahweh 'circumcises' her mind and provides her with the ability to commit herself to him will she begin to live in obedience to his law (30:6-10).

Given that the framework to Deuteronomy's laws so forcefully portrays Israel's sinfulness, it is not strange that the laws themselves presuppose acts and events which are less than ideal. The common casuistic form of the laws (e.g. 13:1-2,6-7,12-13) assumes that Israel will sin; the laws' concern is with how that sin is to be dealt with, so as to eliminate the evil from Israel, deter others and open oneself to Yahweh's mercy and blessing rather than his wrath (13:5,11,17).

The casuistic laws presuppose various realities of a sinful world, such as slavery through impoverishment (15:12-18), the desire to have a king, as other nations do (17:14-20), legal disputes (19:15-21; 25:1-3), war (20:1-20), marital and other family problems (21:10-21; 22:13-29; 24:1-4); they do not forbid slavery, monarchy, war, polygamy, or divorce. Each of these is open to the same statement that Jesus actually makes regarding the last of them (Mark 10:6), that they were not part of the way God created the world as the Torah itself describes it; indeed each of them fits ill with Deuteronomy's ideals considered in section 5.1 above.

Yet in the light of Israel's sinfulness, simply to ban them would be unrealistic. Deuteronomy's policy is to circumscribe them by and to harness them to the values and the theology it propounds. Thus slavery has a time limit set to it, a slave is to be regarded as a brother and allowed to worship as a member of the people of God, and when he is released he is to be given gifts to facilitate his re-establishing



himself as a free man. The king is to be chosen by Yahweh, is to remember that he remains only brother among brothers, is not to use his position for his own gains, and is to apply himself to setting an exemplary standard of obedience to Yahweh's teaching. The administration of law is to safeguard the innocent, and be objective but not excessively vindictive with the guilty (for they, too, are brothers). War is Yahweh's means of his people entering into their blessing and of sinful nations being punished, but it does not justify a scorched earth policy. In marriage a man has much of the power, but he cannot sell a captive wife when he tires of her, he cannot lightly accuse a wife of promiscuity, he cannot play fast and loose with a single girl's honour, and he cannot change his mind when he has divorced his wife.

The instructions concerning how one treats a man who becomes impoverished (15:1-11) illustrate most explicitly the tension between ideal and sinful reality within Deuteronomy itself /79/. Moses promises that there will be no poor in Israel, Yahweh will so bless her in the land (15:4,6). Yet the instruction concerning giving loans and cancelling debts (15:1-3,7-11) presupposes that people will become poor and need loans. It does so rightly, because the promise depends on obedience to Yahweh (15:5) - which will not be forthcoming. Thus, despite this promise that there need be no poor people in the land, Deuteronomy can also make the prediction that there will always be poor people in the land (15:11); and just as well, because it can therefore give thought to how their position can be alleviated, including taking

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/79/ Cf L T Johnson, Sharing Possessions 92-3.

into account the sinful nature of those who are more prosperous and will want to look after their own interests (15:9-10, cf 18).

### 5.3.2 Starting where people are in their cultural context

In a sense any corpus of instruction has to begin where people are in their cultural context. Jesus' expectation that a disciple will volunteer to walk two miles with someone if compelled to walk one presupposes a particular setting in the Roman empire. There, however, the actual command introduces a quite new feature into its context. OT law characteristically works in a different way. It takes up a command or practice which itself belongs to a cultural context, and affirms it. An Israelite is thus commanded, for instance, to drain the blood from meat before eating it, to kill and burn animals in worship of God, and to treat his eldest son ('the beginning of his strength', 21:17) more favourably than his other children. These were practices assimilated by OT laws, rather than ones devised by them /80/.

Some of the standards that the laws assimilated were ones that are widely evidenced elsewhere. A concern for protecting and providing for

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/80/ On this phenomenon, see Clavier's study of archaic survivals in OT faith (Les variétés de la pensée biblique 62-94); Fohrer's treatment of the relationship between Yahwism and magical views, taboos, and rites (Theologische Grundstrukturen 51-71, 113-20); Horst's similar discussion (EyT 16:55-67); and Brichto's examination of the curse, which may have begun as a magical idea but is transformed in contexts such as Deut 29:19-20; 30:7 (Problem of 'Curse' 31-2).



people such as widows, orphans, and the poor, and for justice for all men, appears throughout the ancient near east, and in other cultures /81/. Sexual requirements such as a ban on adultery and bestiality are also common to ancient near eastern and other ancient and modern, 'primitive' and 'civilized' cultures. Here there is little difference between one cultural context and another.

Practices such as abstaining from eating blood are more culture-bound. While adopting these, Deuteronomy frequently transforms their significance by giving them new meaning. This is a common feature of how cultures develop. Within Christianity, it appears in the NT's utilization of contemporary cleansing rites in baptism and of contemporary leadership structures in the position of elders, and in the later appropriation of the feasts and rites which lie behind festivals such as Christmas and Easter.

Deuteronomy takes over various taboos in this way, including that on working on certain days or in certain years, on eating the whole of each year's produce and of the animals born each year, on eating the flesh of certain creatures /82/, on association with a man who has just

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/81/ Cf Fensham, JNES 21:129-39.

/82/ Including the pig? Cf the evidence for this being a pre-Israelite taboo associated with the pig's role in magical/demonic rites (see de Vaux, Bible et Orient 499-516 [ET Bible and the Ancient Near East 252-69]; Stendebach, BZ 18:263-71). The religio-anthropological explanation of the taboo on pork could complement rather than rival this interpretation (cf sections 5.1.6 and 5.2.2 above).

built a house, planted a vineyard, or married a wife, on appropriating the property or even the persons of cities given over to the worship of another deity, as well as on eating meat with blood in it. Thus it enjoins rest on the sabbath (5:12-15), release of debts in the sabbath year (15:1-11), draining off blood before eating meat (12:16,23-5) /83/, offering the first of one's crops, the first of the offspring of one's animals, and tithes of one's crops to God, and leaving the final remnants of the harvest uncollected (14:22-9; 26:1-15; 24:19-22), abstaining from the flesh of unclean species (14:3-20), excusing from military service the man who has just built a house, planted a vineyard, or married a wife (20:5-7; cf 24:5), and destroying the persons and property of alien cities (20:15-17; 13:15-17). It perhaps even devises new taboos, on mixing seed, animals or fabric (22:9-11).

Similarly, Deuteronomy takes over various rites, including erecting altars and burning animals as a way of offering them to God, hanging a man who has been executed (if this was originally a way of 'showing' God that his crime has been dealt with) /84/, killing an animal in a

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/83/ Weinfeld (p 214) believes Deut abandons the dogma that blood is sacral. Actually Deut still treats the blood of sacrificial animals as sacral; it rather changes the definition of sacrificial animals. Blood as such never was sacral (game animals never had to be offered to Yahweh when they were slaughtered), though it was taboo, and remains so in Deut - with emphasis, indeed (Deut 12:16,23-5). Deut's lack of reference to covering the blood may mean it has abandoned one feature of the taboo, or may be insignificant.

/84/ So Phillips, Ancient Israel's Criminal Law 25-6, though bodies could also be exposed as a warning to others (cf Saggs, Iraq 25:149-50).



community act of contrition following an unsolved murder, and roasting a lamb and daubing its blood on one's doorway on a certain day in spring (27:1-8; 21:1-9,22-3; 16:1-7).

Deuteronomy also takes over certain property laws. It adapts from Exod 21 - 22 a law of slavery and a law of seduction (Deut 15:12-18; 22:28-9; cf Exod 21:2-11; 22:16-17). In Exodus these are aspects of the law of property, because the master bought the slave (21:2,7; note 21:21), and because seduction threatens to deprive a man of his daughter's dowry (cf 22:16-17). The law of levirate marriage (25:5-10) is also in a sense a property law, in that it concerns a man's wife and inheritance, as is the requirement that a man shall not deprive his firstborn son of the firstborn's rights (21:15-17).

In adapting such practices, Deuteronomy characteristically transforms their significance by subordinating them to its theological and ethical concerns. Thus it is interested in the laws of slavery and of seduction because they concern the welfare of human beings, and its development of these laws expresses this concern. The other Deuteronomic marriage laws are also primarily concerned 'with the violation of family morality rather than with financial liability' /85/.

Deuteronomy also transforms the rites it enjoins, by reinterpreting their significance. Passover recalls the exodus; the heifer rite safeguards justice and expresses contrition; the cultic rites on the Jordan banks express joyful worship, mutual fellowship, and the

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/85/ Weinfeld 284.

importance of the law (16:1-7; 21:1-9; 27:1-8) /86/.

The process of adapting and transforming is particularly evident in the handling of ancient taboos. The sabbath day enables people to rest, and it recalls being freed from slavery in Egypt (5:14-15). The release of the sabbath year involves not merely letting the land lie fallow but letting debts lie uncollected, for the benefit of one's poor brethren (15:1-11). Surrendering the first of one's crops and of one's flocks, tithes of one's crops, and the final remnants of the harvest enables one to express one's reverence, joy and gratitude to God and to give to the needy (14:23,26-9; 24:19-22; 26:3-15). Excusing a newly married man from military service gives him the opportunity to make his wife happy (24:5, cf 20:7) /87/.

The practice of דָּרַן reflects another taboo. Israel is to give to God (and thus to kill or destroy) the nations she displaces when she occupies her land (7; 20:16-20), the inhabitants of any Israelite city that goes back on its commitment to Yahweh (13:12-18) (it is not only דָּרַן but כָּלִיל), and the adult inhabitants of any foreign city that refuses to make peace with the Israelite army (20:10-15) (cf the treatment of Sihon and Og, 2:34-5; 3:6-7, though there the whole population was involved). The Amalekites are also to be destroyed (25:17-19), though

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/86/ See further section 5.2.2 on the introduction of the principle that sacral rites must take place only at the place Yahweh chooses.

/87/ Cf Seitz's comments regarding 20:5-7 on the turning of a practice with a demonic background into something of humane value (Redaktionsgeschichtliche Studien 156-7).



here the technical term  $\text{דָּרַן}$  does not occur, as it does in the story of Saul's actual defeat of the Amalekites (1 Sam 15:6,15,20). Although some passages see Israel as free to profit from what she finds in a conquered city (2:35; 3:7), elsewhere even inanimate objects are to be destroyed (13:15-17). The nations' objects of worship are particularly contagious; they are to be given over to Yahweh, and their holiness will affect any Israelites who appropriate them (7:26). The taboo reflects the metaphorical contagion of the objects and their owners. If Israel does not destroy the nations, their false worship will infect Israel by leading her astray into the worship of their gods (7:4-6,16) or into their abhorrent forms of worship (  $\text{תַּעֲבֹדֹת}$  ) (20:18). It is because of such abhorrent practices that these nations are being punished (20:9-13); herein lies their 'wickedness' (9:1-5). The custom of  $\text{דָּרַן}$  is thus made to serve the characteristic Deuteronomic stress on loyalty to Yahweh and is the execution of his judgment on his enemies. In the case of the Amalekites, however, Deuteronomy sees them as guilty of a particularly inhuman attack on Israel which indicated that they had no religio-moral standards at all ('they did not fear God'; 25:18) /88/.

There are taboo features about Deuteronomy's concern with the shedding of other human blood. Israel is to see that murderers are to be executed, but that accidental homicides are protected, both lest 'blood be upon you' and so that you 'eliminate innocent blood [or the blood of the innocent] from Israel' (19:10,13; cf 22:8). The law of unsolved homicide is designed to wipe away this innocent blood (21:8-9)

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/88/ Cf Weinfeld 274-5.

/89/. A magical rite designed to deal with an irrational taboo is thus harnessed to serving an ethical end within a Yahwistic religious context /90/.

It is thus precisely by taking on such legal practices, rites, and taboos that Deuteronomy seeks to make its own ethical values and theological perspective influential on the everyday life of Israel.

5.3.3 Compared with more radical stances, Deuteronomy's compromise over ritual and over taboos yields considerable concessions. Regarding ritual and worship, it takes a mediating position between attitudes expressed elsewhere in the OT which are more or less critical /91/. It is less enthusiastic than prophets such as Ezekiel and Zechariah, the Priestly and Chronistic narrative works, and many of the Psalms; compared with them, it may seem to be cutting the shrine (and the ark) down to size /92/. On the other hand, it accepts the key place of worship in

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/89/ For נָסָה as having the basic meaning 'wipe away', see Levine, In the Presence of the Lord. On the concern with blood as pollution in 21:1-9, see also section 5.2.2 and n 56 above.

/90/ Seitz (pp 139-40) draws attention to the addition of the prayer in the Yahwistic/Israelite version of this rite, which transforms it from being simply magical (cf von Rad, Deuteronomium 97-8 [ET Deuteronomy 135-7]).

/91/ Cf H W Turner's study of OT attitudes, From Temple to Meeting Place 68-78; also Brueggemann's analysis of the tension between Yahweh's freedom and his accessibility (IDBSup 680-3).

/92/ Cf Clements, VT 15:300-12, partly following von Rad, Deuteronomium-Studien 27 (ET Studies 40).



Israel's life, and offers no equivalent to the dismissive stance of many pre-exilic prophets to the temple and its worship (see Isa 1:11-17; Jer 7:21-3; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21-5; Mic 6:6-8; cf also the awareness expressed in 2 Sam 7:4-7; 1 Kings 8:12-13,27; taken further in Isa 66:1)/93/.

The setting where Moses delivers Deuteronomy as his final sermon is the setting where Jesus declares that questions about the right 'place' are becoming meaningless (John 4:20-4). Nevertheless the NT does not suggest they were inappropriate in OT times, and the OT is not on the move from a more cultic to a less cultic view /94/; acceptance of cult and attacks on it coexist through OT times. Nor does the coming of Christianity abolish cult or sacred space in practice, even though it may do so in theory /95/. The condescension that Deuteronomy shows in relation to people's instincts in his day still seems to be needed. Perhaps it reflects the fact that human beings are physical creatures; as long as they live in this world they may appreciate a house of God they can see.

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/93/ Samuel-Kings takes a similar stance to the temple to the one it takes to the monarchy: neither is Yahweh's idea or his ideal, but in the end he accepts each and, indeed, commits himself to each in a far-reaching way. Deut, too, takes a similar stance to both temple and monarchy: each is accepted, but each is circumscribed. These two perspectives could be interdependent, though they need not be.

/94/ Pace e.g. Ringgren, Sacrifice in the Bible 73.

/95/ On cult, see Mowinckel, Psalms 1:15; on sacred space, see H W Turner, 323-45.

Deuteronomy's concern with ritual and worship might seem misguided, but fairly harmless. Its concern with slaughtering one's enemies, however, can offer justification for genocide in the name of religion, truth, morals, or even national identity, and it sits in sharp tension with the love and forgiveness of Jesus' teaching.

A theological understanding of Deuteronomy's attitude might begin from its realism. Talk of love and forgiveness in the context of international politics can look like escapist romanticism /96/. War is a fact of international relationships and thus of national life. Nations come into existence through war and maintain their existence through war; even a nation that seeks to remain neutral does not thereby avoid being involved. The question then is, does God involve himself in human life as it actually is, and thus in war as a recurrent feature of it? The assertion that he is a God of war expresses the conviction that he is so involved and can be known. 'To describe God as a warrior is thus to say that God participates in human history, through sinful human beings, and through what have become the "normal" forms of human activity' /97/.

In making this affirmation, OT Israel was taking the same perspective as other nations did. Talk of 'holy war' in the OT might imply that there

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/96/ Cf Gottwald's critique of Deut, RevExp 61:307-10. Tribes of Yahweh suggests he has now moved to the opposite pole from escapist romanticism.

/97/ Craigie, Problem of War 41.



is something distinctively holy about war, and something distinctively Israelite about the idea of holy war. Neither of these inferences is correct. In itself, war is no more holy than sheep-shearing /98/; it is simply part of life with God, because all of life is to be lived before God. In itself, furthermore, there is nothing distinctively Israelite about the belief that the nation's God involves himself in her wars. The attitude of the Moabites or the Assyrians was quite similar to Israel's /99/.

Deuteronomy, then, accepts war as a fact. It then controls, circumscribes, directs, and harnesses it to Yahweh's purpose. It places it under Yahweh's control; the one who decides whom to fight and how is not an earthly leader but Israel's heavenly Lord, who wins victories despite his people's feebleness rather than through her strength /100/. It thus harnesses it to a moral purpose; Israel's defeat of the Canaanites is the act of Yahweh's just judgment on a

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/98/ Craigie 49. 'Yahweh war' is nearer to being an OT phrase ('Yahweh is a warrior', Exod 15:3; 'Yahweh will have war', 17:16; 'the wars of Yahweh', Num 21:14); cf the comments on 'people of God' and 'people of Yahweh' in section 3.1 at n 11 above. Writers such as Smend (Jahwekrieg [ET Yahweh War]) thus prefer this phrase to 'holy war', which was long more usual, especially through the influence of von Rad's Heilige Krieg; cf the discussion in G H Jones, VT 25:642-58.

/99/ For the Moabites, see the Mesha stela (ANET 320-1); for the Assyrians, see Weippert, ZAW 84:460-93.

/100/ Cf Weippert 488; Lind, Yahweh is a Warrior 50-3, 146-8.

distinctively wicked nation /101/. In case Israel is tempted to treat that as merely a way of providing ideological justification for acts of aggression based on mere self-aggrandizement, it reinforces war's moral significance by warning Israel that Yahweh will make war against her if she begins to behave like the nations that are displaced before her (e.g. 8:20; 28:45-68; 32:21-5).

As with the divorce law, Deuteronomy itself does not draw attention to ideals as opposed to sinful realities, though these are again implicit in the wider context of the Torah (in Gen 1 - 4 with its attitude to peace and violence). Outside Genesis-Kings, the prophets relate their vision of a harmonious world /102/, though that vision also presupposes that violent judgment has to take place before such a world is reached; the prophets are not embarrassed by the דָּרַךְ idea (cf Mic 4:13; Isa 34:5 /103/). This conviction is maintained in the NT. Part of the unease raised by the דָּרַךְ law is an unease at the theme of judgment in any form.

The above approach presupposes that the דָּרַךְ law is to be taken at its

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/101/ Cf the comment in Gen 15:16 that Yahweh's promise of the land to Israel could not yet be fulfilled because 'the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full'.

/102/ Gottwald notes Isa 2:1-4; 19:18-25 (RevExp 61:308); cf the comments in section 3.2 at notes 20 and 21 above. Craigie (pp 79-81) wonders whether Israel could develop a vision of peace only on the basis of an experience of war.

/103/ Cf Malamat, Biblical Essays 46.



face value, as designed to bring about the actual slaughter of peoples such as the Canaanites. Whatever its origin, however, this may be an inappropriate understanding of it, for it does not correspond to what actually happened in OT Israel. The Canaanites were not eliminated. Now there is a gap between law and practice in other areas of law, in Israel and elsewhere, and not one simply attributable to human lawlessness. It seems that laws were not always intended to be enforced; they were promulgated to indicate the moral and social priorities of the lawgiver /104/. The דן law is then a statement of an attitude to be taken to Canaanite religion rather than a military policy to be implemented. This view of its significance is the more compelling if this Deuteronomic law has its origin in the seventh century, when the question of a military campaign to eliminate the Canaanites was hardly a live one.

Either way, such nations are 'no longer ... simply peoples living in the land which Israel is settling. They are symbolically potent entities whose very existence poses a threat. They are extensions of destructive forces residing in the nature of the gods whom they worship and represent' /105/. 'All such sanguinary fictions whether in the form of history or prophetic anticipation [or of law] reflect in the contemporary mode of imagination men's acute sense of the struggle against the encroachments

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/104/ Cf e.g. McKeating, JSOT 11:66.

/105/ Rast, Joshua 47.

of the primeval chaos and for the viability of the human' /106/. The law, then, draws attention to the need at certain moments of history to take decisive action in the face of life or death threats from alien ideological forces, and to commit oneself to resist the forces of disorder that threaten destruction. There are moments when compromise is impossible.

5.3.4 Perhaps it is difficult to see how we could evaluate whether Deuteronomy's compromises yield too much; its decisions were contextual ones, and at this distance we can hardly re-enact and criticize them. The question which may underlie unease at some of its material, however, is whether compromise is acceptable at all, or whether affirming the radical, revolutionary stance more characteristic of the prophets implies rejecting the reformist compromises of the law. Thus Fohrer suggestively sees the OT as making various kinds of compromise between deep-rooted human approaches to life and the revolutionary, distinctive Israelite one with its far-reaching vision and demands; but he regards the compromise as tainted and only approves the revolutionary perspective /107/.

In contrast, Boissonnard and Vouga see Deuteronomy's positive significance as lying in its attempt to do something about things that the prophets (merely) lament /108/. It assumes that half measures are

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/106/ Wilder, New Voice 59. Contrast Meyers's radically anti-symbolic understanding of the purity and דן laws as designed to combat the danger of plague and other health problems (CBQ 43:108-9).

/107/ See his Theologische Grundstrukturen 51-94.

/108/ Bulletin du Centre Protestant d'Études 32:39-40.



better than no measures, in accordance with Bonhoeffer's observation that 'you cannot and must not speak the last word before you have spoken the next to last. We live on the next to last word, and believe on the last, don't we?' /109/. Deuteronomy remains a paradigm of a task that ethicist, social worker, social reformer, and legislator have to undertake, as they seek to draw social praxis as near as possible to ideals they may accept, without being unrealistically far away from the ones society actually accepts. They have to be practical. The tension between the praxis they are seeking and the one they start from cannot be too great, or it will simply snap. The necessity of adaptation as a society changes is especially clear with regard to law and praxis regarding marriage, divorce, family, and sexual relations generally.

Like other parts of the OT, Deuteronomy thus both undergirds and subverts the social order it presupposes; it accepts the Davidic institution, with a view to imbuing it with the Mosaic spirit /110/. Formally, it accepts many features of that social order, yet its 'creative, egalitarian, and liberating dynamic' /111/ explicitly undermines other aspects that it formally leaves untouched. It works

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/109/ Widerstand and Ergebung 112-3 (ET Letters 50 [enlarged edition, 157]).

The Torah (and Jesus), of course, express this as a tension between now and the Beginning rather than between now and the End.

/110/ Cf Ruether, JSOT 22:55; L'Hour, Biblica 44:26-7).

/111/ Hanson, Canon and Authority 129. Hanson is discussing the Book of the Covenant; his argument applies the more clearly to Deuteronomy. Cf also Russell, JSOT 22:68.

not by stating theoretical theological and ethical principles and working out their implications, but by offering a critique of the theological and ethical praxis of specific sinful human beings in their concrete social setting.

Rahner suggests that, though we can recognize that this phenomenon had a right place in OT Israel, it can hardly be appropriate within the Church now that 'the absolute future' has arrived in Christ /112/. The Church, however, still lives with that tension between the present age and the age to come (or the age that is lost) to which Bonhoeffer draws attention. Thus the Church also finds itself driven into compromises over areas such as divorce that change as society's attitudes change - because Christians also live in history. This was already the case in NT times. The issue of divorce illustrates it, if Matthew's *μὴ ἐπὶ πορνείᾳ* is not merely an explicating of what is presupposed in Mark, but a softening of Jesus' stance to meet the pastoral needs of the church /113/. Less disputably the NT's attitude to slavery illustrates it. Although slavery in NT times was often a harsher institution than the one OT laws envisage /114/, and although the fact that all men were created free is now reinforced by the fact that in Christ there is neither slave nor free, the NT accepts slavery, urges slaves to submit to their masters, and offers no hints that their owners should question their position.

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/112/ Schriften 12:240 (ET Theological Investigations 16:190).

/113/ Cf also Paul's approach to questions of sexual practice in 1 Cor 7.

/114/ Vawter notes that Hebrew has no special word for slave (JES 15:268); and 'slavery' was, of course, limited to seven years.



The NT as well as the OT, then, incorporates a tension between what is and what ought to be, and in both the latter is often expressed in the stories of the 'early days' (creation, the exodus, the judges period; and the ministry of Jesus and the pre-Pauline church) /115/.

Deuteronomy offers us one instance of that tension, instructive both for its actual content and as a model for our own theological and ethical thinking.

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/115/ A Y Collins, JSOT 22:48-9.

A unifying or constructive approach

6 Can we formulate one OT theology?

6.0 In chapters 2 - 5 we have discussed and instanced two related approaches to the variety of perspectives in the OT, both of which involved some form of evaluation of the material. In chapters 6 - 7 we consider approaches to the interrelating of diverse material which do not involve judgments on where a trajectory peaks or where a writer is accommodating himself to his readers. Often diverse material may all seem to be of comparable value. How may it then be interrelated?



6.1 The search for a unity underlying the OT as a whole

Scholars who have sought to consider directly and systematically what form of theological unity can be attributed to OT faith in its varied manifestations have often posited a uniform structure of faith underlying the outward diversity we surveyed in ch 1. Like different human beings sharing the same anatomy or a changing landscape built on the same geological features, the OT books in their variety presuppose the same underlying set of beliefs about subjects such as God and his people or man and the world. If we wish to discover 'the unchanging truth hidden under [the OT's] bewildering diversity', then, we must take a 'cross-section' approach, by which 'both the total structure of the system and the basic principles on which it rests can be exposed to view. In other words we have to undertake a systematic examination with objective classification and rational arrangement of the varied material' /1/.

This cross-section approach can be a considerable aid to the interpretation of individual OT passages. As an awareness of the OT's historical framework aids an interpreter in his attempt to understand the historical significance of a particular passage, so an awareness of the OT's theological framework aids his attempt to understand the theological issues involved in a passage. While such a framework must

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/1/ Eichrodt, Theologie 1:266, 2 (ET 1:490, 27); the cross-section metaphor appears also in the work of Eichrodt's teacher, Procksch (see Theologie 420). Cf also Bright, Authority of the OT 124-6; Harvey, BTB 1:6-7; Jacob, Théologie (first edition) 9 (ET 11).

not be imposed on a text which is not open to it, a provisional understanding of a passage's overall OT theological context may aid detailed understanding of the parts before this latter understanding in turn is allowed to lead to a more refined understanding of the whole. Alternatively, an awareness of the theological framework presupposed by a writer and his culture may help one to make explicit what is actually present in the text, though only implicitly so.

The cross-section approach also effectively translates or converts the kind of statements that appear in the OT into the kind of statements that fit a twentieth century western Christian scholar's framework of reference. It may thus facilitate the OT's influencing that framework of reference and thus affecting both contemporary Christian theology and contemporary biblical interpretation. In both cases it may then fulfil a positive and a negative function. The positive function is to provide a resource input: systematic theology can be influenced by OT theology, and contemporary preaching can be influenced by the emphases of OT faith. Negatively, it provides a preliminary check on contemporary restatements of the faith and contemporary biblical preaching: if these are inconsistent with the underlying structure of biblical faith, a question-mark is thereby placed by them.



6.2 Drawbacks and limitations about the search for a unity underlying OT faith

6.2.0 Eichrodt's Theologie des AT remains, with that of von Rad, one of this century's two classic OT Theologies. Nevertheless it is often illuminating not because of its stated methodology, but despite it, because the search for a structured unity of faith underlying the OT text suffers from marked drawbacks.

6.2.1 (a) The converse of the point made at the end of section 6.1 is that this search does not deal in the kind of statements that the OT actually makes, but only in what hypothetically underlies them. What is reckoned to underlie them is influenced by the interpreter, precisely because he is seeking material that can be related to his own framework of thinking. Von Rad's criticism of it is thus that it makes too far-reaching concessions to systematic theology, risking the imposition on the material of questions and categories that are foreign to it, when it would be wiser to concentrate on 'Israel's own explicit assertions about Jahweh' /2/.

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/2/ Theologie 1:111 (ET 1:105); von Rad contrasts his approach with Köhler's in his Theologie (von Rad 1:118 [ET 1:112]). He does not deny the existence of an underlying structure of Israelite faith, and examines some features of it (2:112-37, 347-69 [ET 2:99-125, 336-56]), but he is more interested in what is 'characteristic' or 'typical' of it - by which he means the process of reactualization (TLZ 88:416 [ET Theology 2:427, 428]). Cf Clements's warnings about the danger of systematic theology submerging the OT itself, because the latter is more concerned with institutions, rites, and persons than with ideas (OT Theology 2-3, 155).

6.2.2 (b) The underlying structure which this approach seeks to identify is one step removed from a living reality. To examine the frame of a building, the chassis of a car, or the anatomy of a person tells one a little about the reality itself, but by no means all. The examination reveals indispensable features of the reality, but not (necessarily) what is most significant about it. Bright relegates the concrete, living form of the text itself to a secondary place as 'transient' and 'incidental' /3/. Yet the concrete, 'incidental' features of the OT portrait of God or Israel are what gives that portrait its identity. What is meant by the confession 'Yahweh is God' is only indicated by the specific detail of OT text and story. The abstraction can only live on the basis of it /4/.

6.2.3 (c) It is not clear how moving normative status from the text to the principles of which it is an incidental embodiment (as Bright proposes /5/) helps to allow the text of the OT itself to speak today. Concentrating on the principles that underlie the actual text means bypassing the problem of theological diversity and canonical authority rather than solving it, since it treats the text's diversity as inessential to its significance. It does not help us to clarify the relationship between or relative status of Exodus and Ecclesiastes or Amos and Chronicles, even if these are all particular embodiments of

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/3/ Bright 125.

/4/ Cf Wood, Formation 101-5.

/5/ Bright 125, cf 140-9. See also the discussion in section 4.7 above.



the same underlying faith, or to see how specific books should influence doctrine and preaching. Nor does the cross-section approach in itself facilitate the making of strong links between OT and NT. Although it is often assumed that one needs to look beneath the surface of the text to its underlying principles if one wishes to see how the text speaks to today, it is not clear how this procedure helps to this end /6/.

- 6.2.4 (d) What can be said by means of a strictly cross-section approach is rather limited. The range of beliefs explicitly accepted throughout the OT is narrow; it may be virtually non-existent. Bright summarizes the unique 'structure of theology that undergirds the Old Testament' /7/ as the belief in one God, to be worshipped aniconically, and to be essentially distinguished from all cosmic and natural phenomena; and the belief that the theatre of his activity is the history of Israel, his chosen, covenanted people, whose past, present, and future are the objects of his lordship and the contexts or subjects of her faith, obedience, and hope. Yet even this bare bones of a faith does not actually run through the whole OT: notably, the theme of

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/6/ Similar objections (and others) apply to the attaching of special theological significance to the 'Hebrew way of thinking' which is said to lie further behind the text and its underlying theology (cf e.g. Pedersen, Israel; Boman, Hebräische Denken [ET Hebrew Thought]; G A F Knight, Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity; with Barr's critique in Semantics, also Porter in ExpT 90:36-40).

/7/ Bright 126; for what follows, see 126-36.

Israel as God's people is missing from the wisdom books /8/.

6.2.5 (e) Conversely, as we noted in ch 3, where a theme such as the position and calling of the people of God features prominently, at least as much theological interest attaches to insights and emphases that occur and then disappear (which would thus not strictly appear in a cross-section) and to a series of recurrent questions to which the OT material gives different answers at different points, as attaches to consistent aspects of the way the theme is presented. Thus Gottwald compares Eichrodt's cross-section with Max Weber's 'ideal type' of culture, and comments that neither can do full justice to the historical data presented in the OT /9/.

A great cross-section OT theology such as Eichrodt's achieves much more than this implies, because it does not limit itself to what all the OT books have in common. Thus when Eichrodt studies topics such as covenant, law, the spirit of God, or the relationship between the individual and the community /10/, he does so historically, not merely synchronically. He draws attention to insights which emerge in different books or in different periods, as well as to features that are consistently characteristic of the material. Eichrodt is thus most illuminating when he is not drawing a cross-section /11/.

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/8/ See the comments in section 2.3.2 at notes 38-9 above.

/9/ Contemporary OT Theologians 31.

/10/ See respectively Theologie 1:6-26, 26-41; 2:18-31; 3:1-18 (ET 1:36-69, 70-97; 2:46-68, 231-67).

/11/ On this ambiguity in Eichrodt's work see further section 6.4.1 below.



6.2.6 (f) Contrary to the desires or convictions of many of its advocates, a cross-section approach highlights the similarities between Yahwism and many other religions, ancient and modern, as much as the distinctiveness of Yahwism, for many such religions hold a set of beliefs regarding the deity and his relationship with the world of the kind that Bright lists /12/. Even the conviction of a special relationship between a God and a particular people is a common feature of religions /13/. Theologians of Memphis were proclaiming Ptah as the one God who created by his word two millennia before Israelite theologians made such claims for Yahweh /14/; Mesopotamia knew an equivalent concept to that of the patriarchal 'personal God' /15/, and saw divine activity in its history in a way less distinctive of Israel than has often been maintained /16/.

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- /12/ Cf the summaries in Heiler, History of Religions 142-53; Lonergan, Method in Theology 109; M Smith, JBL 71:135-47; Gottwald, Tribes of Yahweh 667-78; and Saggs's treatment in Encounter with the Divine in Mesopotamia and Israel.
- /13/ Cf Wright, OT against its Environment 15; Gottwald 678.
- /14/ See ANET 4-6 with Koch's comments, ZTK 62:253-84; cf also Koch, KD 8:100-23.
- /15/ See Cross's reference to Jacobsen in HTR 55:259 = Cross, Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic 75; Jacobsen's own views are now available in his Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion (see especially 145-64, 254-6).
- /16/ See especially Albrektson, History and the Gods; but with Lambert's qualifications, Or 39:170-7; OTS 17:65-72.

This is not to imply that Israelite faith lacks distinctive features: the Israelite high God occupies the entire sacred domain; he alone is active in the world; as the transcendent God he is even sovereign over (and not immersed in) the natural realms of death and sex; he is mostly pictured in human rather than in animal or inanimate terms, and he cannot be represented plastically in such terms; he is asexual; his people is a body of equals and its leaders are egalitarian rather than authoritarian functionaries /17/. There are differences between the theology of Memphis and the theology of Jerusalem, and we may well prefer the latter /18/. Yet even features central to the total character of Israelite religion, such as the theme of land and of Yahweh's involvement in Israel's history which gave her the land, are what one might expect given Israel's history and geography; and for the same reason some of her peculiarities compared with Mesopotamia and Egypt are points of comparison with Ugarit and even Greece /19/. The distinctive features of Yahwism were functions of its social form /20/.

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/17/ Gottwald 679-91; cf M Smith, JANESCU 5:395, also JBL 71:146-7; Gray's emphasis, Legacy of Canaan 162, 203-4, 217; also Saggs's careful treatment, 61-3, 92 (with special stress on Yahweh's negative distinctiveness), 151-2; Spriggs, Two OT Theologies 83 (summarizing material in Eichrodt and von Rad).

/18/ Cf Koch, ZTK 62:284-93; in a debate with Koch, Baumgärtel rather emphasizes the differences: see ZTK 64:398-416; KD 9:223-33 (responding to Koch, KD 8:100-23).

/19/ So M Smith, JANESCU 5:390-5.

/20/ So Gottwald 679-702; see the comments in ch 3 at n 27 above.



6.2.7 (g) The nature of a cross-section ought to be a fairly uncontroversial question; yet scholars who agree on the cross-section approach offer significantly different understandings of the cross-section, none of which has won universal acknowledgment in the way one might expect. Eichrodt's own classic attempt to describe a structure inherent in the biblical material rather than one introduced into it from outside has been subject to various criticisms /21/; subsequent OT theologians such as Vriezen, Zimmerli, and Fohrer have analysed that structure differently, yet each of them illuminatingly. This reinforces suspicion of the view that OT faith is a structured entity with an invariable sub-structure /22/.

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/21/ See especially Spriggs, Two OT Theologies, and Gottwald, Contemporary OT Theologians 23-62.

/22/ See further section 4.5 above.

6.3 OT theology and OT symbols

- 6.3.1 Von Rad's suggestion that the common systematizing approach to OT theology runs the risk of missing the thrust of the OT message points us towards a further problem which affects the study of OT theology more broadly. In what sense does the term 'theology' apply to the OT?

While the term can be used loosely to refer to any talk of God, more strictly it denotes a particularly analytic, conceptualizing, reflective, systematic way of speaking about God. Eichrodt emphasizes these features of his approach to the OT. Von Rad's point is that these are not characteristic features of the OT's own talking about God: 'Israel was always better at glorifying and extolling God than at theological reflexion' /23/. Biblical writers tell stories, declare judgment, expound hope, write letters, lay down laws, offer advice, lament affliction, and celebrate blessings, but they do not do theology as such.

If von Rad wished to expound the significance of the OT in its own terms, the logic of his position is that he should have called his work not 'the theology of the OT' but 'the message of the OT' or 'the faith of the OT' /24/. In the context of Christians attempting to grapple creatively and rigorously with their faith, however, the term

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/23/ Theologie 1:128 (ET 1:122).

/24/ Cf his fondness for the word 'kerygma' and his publication of the bulk of Band II of his Theologie as Die Botschaft der Propheten (ET Message of the Prophets).



'theology' has value status. Christians concerned for such a grappling with the religious significance of the OT will therefore naturally use the term 'OT theology' for this enterprise, and for von Rad not to use that term would have risked his work not being taken seriously theologically. Perhaps similar considerations underlie Childs's describing his attempt to forge a new approach to biblical hermeneutics as a quest for a 'new biblical theology' /25/. Both von Rad's study of the kerygmatic intentions of Israel's explicit assertions about Yahweh and Childs's study of canonical hermeneutics are open to the comment 'magnifique, mais ce n'est pas théologie'; conversely, Eichrodt was right that theological study of the OT has grounds for taking a systematic approach, whether or not the OT itself reflects a systematic way of thinking.

The question is, indeed, whether Eichrodt went far enough. In sections 6.3-4 we shall consider ways in which his work might be taken further.

- 6.3.2 D G Spriggs has suggested that despite the consciously different approaches to OT theology taken by Eichrodt and von Rad, underlying their work are certain fundamental similarities /26/. One similarity which Spriggs hints at, without developing, is that both are concerned with the ongoing use and re-use of symbols in the OT. While Eichrodt organizes his work around the topics God and Israel, God and the world, God and man, he shows himself equally concerned with the OT's own

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/25/ See his Biblical Theology in Crisis 91-122 (my emphasis); cf P D Miller's comments, JBL 90:210.

/26/ See Spriggs, Two OT Theologies 60-3.

symbolism when he superimposes the notion of the covenant on this framework (at least for the first part). He also traces the history of the covenant motif /27/.

Although von Rad, too, from time to time discusses the history of motifs such as the covenant, his approach is more decisively shaped by his related concern with the development of Israelite traditions, since this development (as he sees it) takes the form of a series of reinterpretations of the variety of 'foundations' or 'bases of salvation' or 'initial appointments' of Israelite faith, the patriarchal covenant, the Sinai covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the foundation of Zion /28/. In whatever sense these 'appointments' were initially historical events, they soon became symbols by which subsequent experiences were understood and future hopes were articulated - that is, became types /29/. Thus, although on the surface von Rad's work is structured by tradition-complexes and authors, at a deeper level it is structured by a study of the developing significance of OT symbols.

The view that biblical theology is to be seen as the explication of biblical symbols is more explicit in F F Bruce's work on 'The New

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/27/ Theologie 1:12-26 (ET 1:45-69).

/28/ TLZ 88:403 (ET Theologie 2:411); cf section 1.2.3 above. Von Rad outlines the history of the covenant relationship in Theologie 1:135-40 (ET 1:129-35).

/29/ Cf von Rad's comments on typology in EvT 12:17-33 (ET Essays on OT Interpretation 17-39); also Theologie 2:375-87 (ET 2:362-74).



Testament Development of Some Old Testament Themes' /30/. Bruce suggests that the way to organize an OT theology is to follow the model of the NT's presentation of the OT's theology by studying the ongoing significance and re-use of images such as God's rule, God's salvation, God's people, and God's servant.

- 6.3.3 The study of symbols and the task of theology cannot actually be equated, however, because symbolism and theology operate on different principles and according to different dynamics.

While theology is characteristically a reflective exercise which involves thinking through the nature, significance, and implications of religious experience and convictions in an essentially cerebral way, symbolism, imagery, and metaphor characteristically work at a more intuitive level and facilitate a more immediate response to and understanding of an experience. They involve the whole person's feelings, memories, experiences, and attitudes, as well as his conscious thought-processes. They thus directly and inevitably influence the whole person himself, by a feedback process. Symbols do things, they do not merely communicate. To identify an event as redemptive or to describe God as a father is not merely to define but to change the event or the relationship. Symbols participate in the power of that to which they point /31/.

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/30/ The subtitle of Bruce's This is That (and of the title of the American edition); see especially p 20.

/31/ So Tillich, Systematic Theology 1:265.

As a disciplined, reflective exercise theology depends on clear definition, measured statement, and careful nuancing. But when one uses symbols for relationships with God (such as fatherhood or covenant) or for evil (defilement, sin, guilt) /32/, the associations or resonances of these words are as important as their dictionary meaning.

Theology is essentially analytic. It emphasizes the making of clear distinctions, not least between related realities. It probes for the answers to subtle, intricate questions. It will not be satisfied with allusiveness. Its terms are defined so as to be capable of being related to other terms; they are part of a quasi-technical system. Symbolism, however, has a holistic instinct. It is characteristically interested in the links between things. It manages to mean more than it says (and to do more than it says) because it trades on these deep links. It is at home with the paradoxical, living as it does by bringing and holding together things that are not 'naturally' compatible. In contrast, theology's analytic instinct nudges paradox into becoming contradiction or dualism or over-simplification /33/.

Symbols such as covenant are thus inherently plurivocal. The language of theology is that of the univocal sign, studied by semantics. It presupposes that we exercise a discipline in using religious terms which extends, where possible, to making one word mean one thing and

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/32/ See especially Ricoeur, Symbolique du mal 31-150 (ET Symbolism of Evil 25-150).

/33/ Cf Bridge, Images of God 135.



another mean something else; we do not encourage them to interchange. Theology uses terms in a technical way; plurivocity is a vice which produces misunderstanding. Symbols, however, change their meaning and reference. This is not merely incidental to their nature, but inherent in it. If they did not do so, they would cease to function as interpreters of experience; they would then die, and the depth in experiences might no longer be understood or appropriated. Their plurivocity thus facilitates understanding. Part of the point of symbols is that there is no one-to-one correspondence between symbols and defined concepts. So a motif from everyday life (perhaps one which was already of symbolic significance) such as לֵוִי is taken up by a biblical writer and turned into a symbol for the relationship between God and man, because it can express familiarly and powerfully certain aspects of that relationship which the writer wishes to emphasize /34/. But as a symbol (and because it has several meanings in everyday life) it is then capable of various applications. It is 'open-ended', like a parable; it has 'the hermeneutical openness of the "proverb", which offers no ready-made interpretation and places no restraint on intuition' /35/. It can be re-used in new situations with fresh meanings, and it can survive substantial changes in what it expresses. If theology relates to semantics, symbols, which mean more than they say, invite hermeneutics.

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/34/ I here ignore the (nevertheless helpful) classification of symbols into e.g. personal, cultural, and archetypal (cf Wheelwright, Metaphor and Reality 102-11; Perrin, Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom 62, 84-5).

/35/ Ricoeur, Semeia 4:134 on parable; McKane, Proverbs 23, on לֵוִי.

Further, theology of course moves between analysis and synthesis; it does believe in the formal coherence of a systematic understanding of reality. Perhaps the archetypal symbols belong to an overall 'symbolic and mythic universe' and 'unfold a structure of the World' /36/. But if form, coherence, and system belong to symbolism at all, they are of quite a different kind from those of theology. 'Each image will have its own conceptual conventions, proper to the figure it embodies', and the various images will not be open to a single overall conceptual analysis. Admittedly 'they attract one another and tend to fuse, but they have their own way of doing this, according to their own imagery laws, and not according to the principles of conceptual system' /37/.

6.3.4 The Bible characteristically lives in the dynamic, intuitive, holistic, plurivocal, open-ended world of symbolism, not in the disciplined, reflective, conceptual, analytic, measured world of theology.

This point can be expressed very radically. Austin Farrer, for instance, approves of the view that 'in Scripture there is not a line of theology, and of philosophy not so much as an echo'; not even Paul or John work with a system of theological concepts. Thus what theology since the fathers has done is, however inevitable, alien to the nature of the biblical material itself /38/.

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/36/ So respectively Ricoeur, De l'interpretation 48 (ET Freud and Philosophy 40); Eliade, History of Religions 99.

/37/ Farrer, Glass of Vision 45.

/38/ Glass of Vision 44-5; cf Bridge 132-8. According to Hart, the actual word theologia is not found until the Alexandrians and comes into extensive use only with the high Middle Ages (Unfinished Man 398).



This is, however, too sharp a drawing of the line between biblical symbolism and biblical theology. First, theology itself, for all its concern with definition and analysis, cannot do without symbols. Paul Tillich argues that nothing non-symbolic can be said about God except that statement and, perhaps, the statement that God is being itself /39/. If theology concentrates exclusively on being disciplined, conceptual, analytic, measured, etc, it will quite fail to represent its subject even with such adequacy as human language can. In practice, theology inevitably uses the same range of terms as symbolism does, because it needs the kind of facility offered by these symbols if it is to approach its subject at all /40/.

Secondly, symbolism itself invites, or at least is open to, conceptual explication. Though it is concerned to do more than communicate at the cerebral level, it is not concerned to do less than that. There is a dynamism about symbols which, Paul Ricoeur suggests, 'is the primary condition for any move from figurative expression to conceptual expression. The process of interpretation is not something superimposed from the outside on a self-contained expression; it is motivated by the symbolic expression itself which gives rise to thought. It belongs to the essence of a figurative expression to stand for something else, to call for a new speech-act which would paraphrase the first one without

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/39/ Systematic Theology 1:264-5; 2:10.

/40/ Cf Hart's comments (p 294) on theology's becoming de-generate when symbols cease to generate life for it.

exhausting its meaningful resources' /41/. Symbols 'push toward speculative expression'; they are themselves 'the dawn of reflection' /42/.

Further, and thirdly, this movement from symbol to system and conceptualization is (despite Farrer and Bridge) already taking place within scripture. If theology is the fruit of an interaction between Palestine and Greece, it is not surprising if Paul and John are par excellence the Bible's two reflective, analytic theologians, whose rethinking of the scriptural message under Greek influence sets the pattern for the work of later theologians /43/. One can, indeed, see the beginnings of dialogue between Palestine and Greece in the later parts of the OT, while there is already evidence of a reflective, systematic way of thinking before the period of Greek influence, notably in Isaiah 40 - 55 and in wisdom's philosophical theology /44/.

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/41/ Semeia 4:133; cf Conflict of Interpretations 288. This does not imply that Ricoeur sees the philosophic as more 'masterly' (so Vance, Interpretation of Narrative 120-1): contrast Ricoeur's remarks in La métaphore vive 32-3, 177-8 (ET Rule of Metaphor 22-3, 138; cf Crossan, BR 24:23-4).

/42/ Ricoeur, De l'interprétation 47 (ET 39).

/43/ Cf Ricoeur, Semeia 4:135-8; Ebeling, Wort und Glaube 85-6 (ET Word and Faith 93-4). On other NT 'theologians' see Rahner, Schriften 5:38-9 (ET Theological Investigations 5:28-9).

/44/ Ricoeur 129; cf Mack, Interpretation 24:46-60, also Logos und Sophia; Beardslee, Interpretation 24:62; and Clements's observation that Israelite faith is becoming more amenable to theological treatment the more it becomes a religion of a book (OT Theology 23).



Symbolism and reflective, analytic theologizing are not alien to each other, but they are different. Part of biblical theology's reflectiveness, then, will be to take account of the distinctiveness of symbolism's dynamic and to seek to do justice to its special characteristics, in the process of seeking to explicate its capacity for articulation in the conceptual terms with which we are at home /45/. It will recognize that translating symbols into theological terms inevitably risks misunderstanding them and loses some of their significance; not all of their significance can be conceptualized /46/. It will also recognize that, because theology uses many of the same symbols as the Bible does, particular care needs to be given to avoiding reading the biblical use of symbols as if it were in fact measured theological use of the same terms /47/.

6.3.5 'Covenant' provides a convenient and important example /48/. Covenant can have various meanings in the OT, all drawing attention to aspects of the relationship between God and man, but varying in their emphases. Indeed the differences in the understanding of the relationship between God and man which are expressed in Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy (not to say subsequent books) by the covenant symbol are as notable as the similarities. Conversely, similar emphases concerning this relationship appear (for instance) in Genesis and in Isaiah 40 - 55, or

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/45/ Cf Ricoeur 132.

/46/ Farrer 148; Eliade 98-9; Ricoeur 36.

/47/ Cf Baker's remarks in What about the NT? 167.

/48/ On the historical and critical questions, see section 2.5.1 (especially n 67) above.

in Deuteronomy and Amos, even though in Genesis and in Deuteronomy covenant is an important symbol, while in Isaiah 40 - 55 and Amos it is relatively unimportant. Indeed, more significantly, when it does appear in these latter books, it refers to other relationships as well as to the central one between Yahweh and Israel (see Isa 42:6; 49:8; 54:10; 55:3; Amos 1:9).

If covenant were a clearly defined key concept from a systematically thought out theology, then the unevenness with which it appears in the OT (e.g. its virtual absence from Amos) would be more surprising than is necessarily the case if it is actually, on the contrary, a symbol which a writer may or may not use. As Eichrodt acknowledges, the relationship which he denotes by the term covenant is present in the OT both in books such as Genesis and Deuteronomy which use the word rather frequently (though with different emphases in its meaning), and in a book such as Amos where it does not use the word (indeed the idea is missing where Amos does use the word). It is present in a book such as Hosea on some occasions where Hosea uses the term ברית (6:7; 8:1) and also in other parts of the book where instead and more characteristically Hosea speaks of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel in terms of marriage. He could, perhaps, have used the word of the latter (cf Mal 2:14; ? Prov 2:17), but does not. When he applies it to human relationships, it is to political ones (10:4; 12:2), so perhaps for Hosea ברית suggested a less personal relationship than the one which he wanted to indicate obtained between Israel and Yahweh in the light of his marriage experience /49/. There is thus a

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/49/ Cf Carroll, When Prophecy Failed 14-16.



distinction between covenant as a possible technical theological symbol for the relationship between God and Israel (both as pictured by political treaties and as pictured by other relationships) and ברית as an intuitive symbol (which refers in Hosea, and perhaps commonly in the OT, mainly to the former).

If theology is to use words such as covenant which are familiar as translations of OT symbols, then at least it needs to be wary of the danger of confusing the two usages. Eichrodt himself explains that he is using covenant not simply as an equivalent to ברית, but as a general term for the relationship between Yahweh and Israel established by God's free act in history which makes her his unique people /50/. Nevertheless, it is understandable that critics have misunderstood him at this point /51/. Vriezen preferred to use the word communion to describe the relationship between God and man suggested by the OT, and to treat

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/50/ Theology 1:18 (Preface to the ET); cf also his treatment of the history of the covenant idea, which draws attention to the diversity of the OT's own thinking (Theologie 1:12-26 [ET 1:45-69]).

/51/ Indeed, Eichrodt himself can sometimes speak of 'on the one hand the covenant, on the other the symbols of sonship, marriage ...' (1:26 [ET 1:69]). Vogels in his recent study of God's Eternal Covenant treats covenant in the Bible as if it were a term of univocal, technical meaning in a systematic, ordered theology. Levenson suggests that scholars have been misled into systematizing (or antithesizing) Moses and David by the mere presence of the word ברית in both contexts - as if this in itself meant that there must be a significant theological relationship between them (see CBQ 41:215-8).

covenant as one (central) symbol of this relationship /52/, and this procedure seems preferable to the adoption of one of the OT's terms which is so plurivocal.

- 6.3.6 Although at one level the unity of the OT lies in the set of symbols which run through it, this unity is not strictly a theological one. Sometimes the language is the same but the meaning or reference changes; sometimes different symbols refer to aspects of the same reality. As diversity of symbolism may obscure theological continuity, so continuity of symbolism may obscure theological diversity. The study of symbolism may give us the impression that there is more theological unity about the OT than is actually the case, or that there is less /53/. Further, it is in principle impossible to identify one central OT symbol or to systematize the OT's symbols as a whole /54/.

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/52/ Hoofddlijnen e.g. 167-76, 181-5 (ET 128-36, 139-43; <sup>2</sup>153-62, 166-70).

Cf Gottwald, ExpT 74:210; also, again, Eichrodt's own remarks on covenant and other relationship symbols, 1:24-6 (ET 1:67-9).

/53/ I find many of Tillich's sermons (e.g. in The Shaking of the Foundations) illuminating and helpful, partly because I can identify with the symbols he brings to life. But Tillich's more academic works (and indeed, sometimes the sermons themselves) suggest that his underlying view of reality is somewhat different from mine. Eichrodt makes a parallel observation regarding symbolic practices such as sacrifice, which can change their meaning even while their form remains the same (1:80-2 [ET 1:167-72]).

/54/ Cf Porteous, Living the Mystery 25-7.



These considerations suggest that studying OT symbols cannot itself be the basis for writing OT theology, though it is an important part of the preparation for this task, insofar as the scholar can go on from tracing the background, significance, and history of symbols to consider the things symbolized, moving from one symbol to the various realities which it may refer to, and from a variety of symbols to the same or related realities, and thus from intuitive symbols to clearly defined concepts or conceptual symbols. Although the study of OT symbolism is an aspect of OT hermeneutics, theology itself is not to be reduced to hermeneutic.

6.4 A constructive approach

6.4.1 There is a second sense in which Eichrodt's approach to OT theology needs to be taken further. We noted in section 6.2.5 that there is a tension in his work between a methodological commitment to a cross-section approach and an interest in the material's historical diversity which he shows in the course of his actual study of OT themes. Eichrodt can speak of seeking to identify 'the unchanging truth hidden under its bewildering diversity', yet also acknowledge that 'the variety of the OT testimonies' is 'the result of observing a complex reality from various angles in ways which are in principle concordant one with another' /55/; the nature of God is such that sometimes only contradictory formulations do justice to it /56/.

Faced with a plurality of approaches to diversity and unity in OT theology which feature in Eichrodt's work, Spriggs suggests that his fundamental view is the one which allows various perspectives to contribute to a larger whole /57/. Eichrodt himself, however, does not work out the implications of this promising insight, apparently because of his emphasis on underlying unity. Only rarely does he seek to portray the whole to which the various testimonies refer. He does offer

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/55/ Theologie 1:266 [ET 1:490] and Theology 1:517 (part of an excursus in the ET). Eichrodt also allows here for contextually-derived diversity and for fluctuation between profound insight and relative impoverishment.

/56/ Theologie 1:44-5, 101 (ET1:104, 205).

/57/ Two OT Theologies 89



a 'synthesis' of the OT picture of God, as holding together the idea of power without limit (with which holiness and wrath are associated), and the idea of self-limitation in making himself known as a person in love and righteousness through his entering into his special relationship with Israel /58/. He also analyses the interweaving of 'the individual and the community in the Old Testament God-man relationship', acknowledging that the OT is not to be seen as evolving from primitive community thinking towards the developed individualism of the NT, but as holding together an individual and corporate view /59/. But such analyses are the exception rather than the rule.

After tracing the changing 'forms of the Old Testament hope of salvation' Eichrodt does consider their implications for 'a right understanding of the divine revelation' as a whole: that they portray salvation as something historical, concrete, and earthly (and such therefore is the God who brings it); that nevertheless salvation is of supernatural origin; and that the eschatological hope opens up the possibility of resolving the tensions of Israel's unfulfilled destiny as a nation, of her unfulfilled calling before God, and of the relationship of the individual to the community. He does not go on to reflect on the diverse and contradictory features of her hope of salvation which he notes (whether that hope is for Israel or for all

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- /58/ Theologie 1:149-50 (ET 1:286-8). Cf his observations on God's immanence and his transcendence, represented by the Ark and the Tent, 1:48-9 (ET 1:109-12); and those on the names of God, 1:101 (ET 1:205).
- /59/ Theologie 3:1-18 (ET 2:231-67), though still rather exaggerating the significance of the individual emphasis in Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

nations, whether it is achieved by political/military means or by non-political/peaceful ones, whether a personal redeemer figure is integral to it or not). Nor, in consequence, does he seek to identify the truths these tensions witness to or the way the alternatives complement each other. Nor does he make it clear how such theological needs are 'fully met in the NT confession of Jesus as the Messiah' /60/.

Eichrodt cuts the ground from under much constructive theological work of this kind by appealing to the fact that God is beyond reason and can only be described by means of contradictory formulations; Gottwald perceives the influence of Eichrodt's neo-orthodox background here /61/. Certainly Barth speaks of the impossibility of gaining a systematic conspectus at points where the OT does speak in contradictory ways /62/.

The warning against a rationalist systematizing is an appropriate one, but it hardly disallows us from thinking systematically about God at all (as Eichrodt and Barth, each systematizers on the grandest scale, must

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/60/ Theologie 1:255-68 (ET 1:472-94); quotation from p 266 (ET 490).

/61/ See 1:101 (ET 1:205); cf Gottwald Contemporary OT Theologian 54-5.

/62/ See e.g. Dogmatik I, 1:187-8 (ET 179-81) on Exod 19 - 20 and Jer 31 (and prophecies of judgment and salvation generally). Barth here dismisses harmonizing, systematizing, measuring one by the other, and balancing one by the other, and allows only a listening to each witness separately. In II, 1:558-61 (ET 496-9), however, he indulges in such a comparative exercise, in discussing divine constancy and mutability. Cf C A Baxter, Movement from Exegesis to Dogmatics 230-1, 416-7.



grant). Neither can it determine a priori where the attempt to think constructively about the truth as a whole as the OT witnesses to it reaches its boundary. Eichrodt's own examples point us towards further attempts to explicate the theological significance of the OT material in a way that he did not, partly because he was primarily concerned with his cross-section.

6.4.2 The problem is that the cross-section approach does not encourage the interpreter to take up the fact that the OT writers have all perceived some aspect of God and his ways, and provide us with a series of complementary portraits of him. As is the nature of a portrait, all these reflect the perspective the artist brings to the subject, yet this perspective also unveils aspects of the real nature of the subject himself. To gain maximum insight into the subject, we look not merely at what they have in common, but also at what they suggest cumulatively; and in studying OT theology, we are concerned not merely with the beliefs actually expressed by individual OT writers and in particular OT books, or with the assumptions which underlie these beliefs, or with the OT faith as 'an entity given in finished form at the start and merely unfolding itself in history' /63/, but with the total perspective that these portraits together offer when all have been painted /64/.

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/63/ Gottwald, Contemporary OT Theologians 52-3, commenting on Eichrodt; also Johnstone's comment that Bright speaks of a theology antecedent to the text, whereas actually a theology is built from it (SJT 22:206-7).

/64/ Cf McKenzie, Theology of the OT 20-9, 321-2.

OT theology is thus a constructive, not merely a reconstructive task. The OT itself comprises building blocks (or quarried stone) which theology can then work with. The building materials were finally collected by the Jews who determined the bounds of the OT canon, but they themselves were putting in order materials which had accumulated over centuries; it is not necessarily their vision of the building that is to be implemented, even though in a sense we receive the materials from them. The building must be appropriate to the materials themselves; and (to strain the analogy further) the builder must work on the assumption that even where the stone may seem to have come from several different quarries, the whole of it can be shaped into a satisfying whole. OT theology is more like building than it is like dissecting a body; its new whole is more than the parts it began from, not less than them. But it is even more like the creative activity of a poet or a novelist. He brings something quite new and fresh into existence; yet (if I understand it aright) he feels himself to be not merely determining something's existence but allowing something to be born.

OT theology's constructive task involves not cutting all the blocks down so that they are the same size, but utilizing them in the potential of their variety. The wisdom books, for instance, contribute to it in their distinctiveness, despite (or rather because of) the fact that their themes are not the more pervasive ones of OT thinking; indeed, especially at those points will they make a key contribution. This is possible precisely through their being set in the context of the rest of the building. Alone they might seem unusable and consequently they are often left on one side. But in the context of a whole building, they



can have a key place (in the foundation, not least, in fact). Working with these materials, we seek to construct a whole which does not correspond to anything that any individual OT writer knew, but which does justice to what he knew. Recognizing the complexity of reality itself, we attempt the task of comprehending as fully as we can that complex reality as a whole, in the light of the witness which the OT has given to various aspects of it in unsystematic ways.

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 OT statements, yet setting these in a broader context shaped by the OT's total range of particular, concrete theological statements /65/.

6.4.3 OT theology's task is a constructive one in a further sense. In analysing, explicating, articulating, and defining the theological implications of OT faith, an interpreter is not merely describing that faith; he is creating new concepts of God and the world through the interaction between what the OT actually says and the tools he brings to

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/65/ In everyday speech 'Lowest Common Denominator' is a pejorative phrase, though not in mathematics and not in the way I use it here.

it /66/. Not that his work is necessarily alien to the OT's own concerns, even though his task is not one undertaken, to any systematic extent, within the OT itself. The biblical material, Ebeling remarks, 'is certainly capable of theological explication' by us, if we need to study it in this way because of who we are, when we live, and how our minds work; indeed, Ebeling goes on to claim (perhaps more disputably for much of the OT), 'it does press for theological explication' /67/. Such explication, however, by definition goes beyond what the OT actually says.

It is actually unrealistic to maintain that OT theology should be a purely descriptive discipline /68/; it inevitably involves the contemporary explication of the biblical material. Indeed, nothing short of such a task would really deserve the description 'theology'. 'It is in the very nature of theology to concern itself with living

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/66/ Cf Clements, OT Theology 191.

/67/ Wort und Glaube 86 (ET 94). Cf Kaufman, Essay on Theological Method 33; he instances Mary Douglas's Purity and Danger, with its treatment of Levitical law, as an example of explication of what is hardly perceived by the original writer.

/68/ So classically Stendahl, IDB 1:418-32; also Bible in Modern Scholarship 205-7. Cf Gottwald's criticism of Eichrodt's blurring the lines between what ancient Israelites thought of their faith and what he does as a Christian and modern intellectual (Contemporary OT Theologians 54).



faith, rather than with the history of ideas' /69/; it is interested in the theological question 'What are we to believe the truth to be?', not merely in the phenomenological question 'What have various other people believed the truth to be?' OT theology, in particular, then, is naturally concerned to analyse and articulate insight from the OT which remains significant for mankind.

In the 1920's, in the early years of neo-orthodox theology and of the revival of interest in OT theology, Otto Eissfeldt published a famous article in ZAW urging that the historical study of scripture should be carried on independent of theological considerations, and that theology's response of faith to purported revelation should be made without having to subject itself to this critical study. Eichrodt replied by insisting that historical study of the OT ought to include a concern with identifying the constants in OT faith, which systematic theology can then take account of /70/. Eichrodt is usually reckoned to have had the better of this exchange; but perhaps his solution to the question of how to relate historical and theological study was not as satisfactory as it was neat, while Eissfeldt's presupposition that theology belongs in the realm of faith merits more serious consideration from OT study than it has often received. Eichrodt himself wanted not only 'to construct a complete picture of the OT realm of belief' but also 'to see that this comprehensive picture does justice to the

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/69/ Clements 20, also 10, 155; cf Porteous, Living the Mystery 22-4, 32, 35-7, 44-6; Reventlow, JSOT 11, especially 3-5.

/70/ See respectively ZAW 44:1-12 and 47:83-91; the latter is then Eichrodt's programme for his Theologie.

essential relationship with the NT<sup>71</sup> which Eichrodt attributes to the OT /71/, and this itself indicates how an interpreter studies the OT out of his own context of faith.

Now admittedly if OT and NT in fact belong together, and the coming of Jesus is the climax of the purpose Yahweh was concerned with in OT times, it will not in itself be unscientific to allow this link between OT and NT to affect the way one presents the OT material. Indeed, this may enable one to see what someone else might miss, or to clarify issues it raises but does not resolve. Ebeling notes that Paul himself seeks to clarify the relationship between the Abrahamic emphasis on faith and the Mosaic emphasis on law which is not made clear by the OT, and adds that the question who Jesus is makes it possible to understand the enigma that the OT exposes but leaves unexplained, the question who Yahweh and Israel are in their mutual relation and contradiction /72/. Nevertheless, a theological judgment interwoven with one's faith in Christ is involved here. Without it, the OT can be read as pointing in one of several directions; written in this faith, OT theology is influenced by judgments which are extrinsic to the OT itself, so that the OT will appear, considered theologically, not other than it actually is, but with the emphasis laid in a particular way because of the known

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/71/ Theologie 1:1, 2 (ET 1:25, 27); cf Jacob, Théologie (first edition) 11 (ET 12-13).

/72/ Studium der Theologie 35-7 (ET 33-5); cf sections 4.4 and 4.7 above.



sequel` /73/. Indeed, a Christian writing OT theology 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. Each Testament has to be set in the context of the other, and ultimately biblical theology will be the Christian scholar's concern.

This coheres with N Lohfink's suggestion that we can properly only predicate inspiration (and truthfulness) of the Bible as a whole, and not of its individual authors or of its individual writings, because the latter cannot now be seen as all self-contained and of independent significance. In their diversity they confront and correct each other; but if they all came to be part of one canon, the distinctive assertions and denials of any one part have to be seen in the light of the whole /74/. If the canon comprises a collection of deliberately divergent convictions, this does not mean that the word 'canonical' loses its normative reference /75/; it means that all these convictions must be taken into account in attempting to formulate a canonical

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/73/ Porteous 45; cf Lys's suggestion that one can determine the general direction of trajectories as they leave the OT, even if it is a conviction of faith that they reach their natural target in Christ (Meaning of the OT 103-10) - rather as it is a conviction of faith that lines of development in the NT converge in post-biblical orthodoxy (cf Schlier, Besinnung auf das NT 30 [ET Relevance of the NT 33]).

/74/ Siegeslied 56-65 (ET Christian Meaning of the OT 33-9).

/75/ So Koester, Trajectories 115.

theology /76/.

Nevertheless, the fact that the emphases of OT and NT are not identical means that the Christian investigation of 'biblical' or of OT faith may be in danger of underplaying distinctive and fundamental OT themes such as Israel, the land, law, and worship. There is a case even for Christian scholars to try to write 'as if the New Testament did not exist' /77/, in order to do justice to OT faith as a whole. Even the scholar who makes that his aim is influenced by principles and experience extrinsic to the OT /78/, and is making a statement about beliefs people today ought to take seriously (rather than merely describing beliefs people held in the past), but he is doing so by standing at a particular point in the biblical landscape, which enables aspects of it and links within it to emerge with clarity, whereas they may be missed if one does not for a while take one's stand at that particular point.

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/76/ For an example in the realm of ethics, see Childs's treatment of sex ethics in Biblical Theology in Crisis 130-8 (also 184-200).

/77/ McKenzie 319; cf Fohrer's questioning of the dogmatic assumption that the OT must be understood from Christ and thus from the NT (Theologische Grundstrukturen 29); also Porteous 45. Works such as Zimmerli's Grundriss (ET OT Theology) and Martens's Plot and Purpose in the OT seem to share McKenzie's ideal.

/78/ McKenzie 20-1.



6.5 Instances of the need for theological construction with OT material

6.5.1 In section 6.4.1 we noted that Eichrodt does not take as far as he might his theological consideration of the diverse and contradictory features of Israel's hope of salvation. One aspect of this diversity concerns the place of an individual redeemer figure in the OT hope of salvation. What is the significance of the various perspectives on this question?

First, there are certain features of this hope which appear indiscriminately whether or not it refers to an individual redeemer. These include the expectation of justice for the needy and upon the wicked, of war and conflict yielding to or leading to peace and safety, of the renewal of an earthly paradise and of personal relationships with Yahweh, of recognition for Israel and through that of blessing for the world. Isa 2:2-4 and Isa 11 instance most of these features without and with reference to an individual figure through whom these hopes are fulfilled.

When an individual figure has a prominent place in these hopes, this presumably reflects Israel's understanding of the way Yahweh has actually acted among his people, particularly in persons such as Moses and Joshua, the judges and the kings, and also the priests and the prophets. This experience in turn no doubt reflects the way that human life and history generally work: a significant role is played by particular individuals. Once God had begun to work in this way in Israel, particularly through the monarchy, there is a further reason why an individual figure is integral to Israel's hope. Despite the theological ambivalence that surrounded the origins of Israelite

kingship as these are recorded in 1 Sam 8 - 12, Yahweh committed himself unequivocally to the Davidic monarchy (2 Sam 7). The OT assumes that this commitment cannot simply have been abandoned later; hope of an individual redeemer figure is contained within faith in Yahweh's faithfulness to his commitments. It is a hope of what Yahweh will do 'for David' (Jer 23:5).

The hope of an individual redeemer is qualified, however, by some of the significance attached to it. As the king was not to regard himself as more than the leader among brothers (Deut 17:14-20), 'the model Israelite' /79/, so the future leader can be pictured less as a redeemer than as one who himself enjoys the blessings of the renewed world, 'more a type than a mediator of the Golden Age' (Gen 49:11-12) /80/. As the king held authority not for his own enjoyment but for the people's benefit, so the portrait of the future redeemer's activity can yield to that of the world enjoying the fruit of his achievement, so that he disappears from the picture as the prophet enthuses over this prospect (Isa 11:6-9) /81/. As the monarchy for a century held the fissiparous tribes in an (admittedly fragile) unity, so the two nations of Israel and Judah will be reunited under one new David (Ezek 37:22-5). As the first Man both modeled and reflected the king's calling, with the result that man as such is called to a royal role as well as the

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/79/ Wolff, Anthropologie 286 (ET 196-7); cf section 5.1.3 above.

/80/ Eichrodt, Theologie 1:256 (ET 1:474).

/81/ These verses may be of separate origin from 11:1-5 (though see Clements and Wildberger on the passage). Even so, 11:1-9 is a redactional unit with 9 closing off the whole.



king being called to fulfil God's purpose for man (or Israel) as man (Gen 1 - 3) /82/, so the son of Man represents Israelite man in general when he is given kingly authority (Dan 7). In these various contexts, then, the picture of an individual redeemer figure is tempered by that of the community without which his significance cannot be understood. Further, as the king could never be rightly understood except as Yahweh's servant, Yahweh's anointed, Yahweh's adopted son, and thus as 'merely' Yahweh's agent (e.g. Psa 2; 72; 110), since Yahweh is the real King (1 Chr 28:5; 29:23), so the hoped for redeemer is 'merely' Yahweh's means of fulfilling his promises to his people /83/.

This second focus, on Yahweh and the beneficiaries of his coming act, dominates a set of passages where the individual redeemer does not appear. Particularly significant is the polemical treatment of this theme in Isaiah 40 - 55. Here Israel corporately is a major focus, and the traditional Davidic hope disappears. There is a new exodus, but no new Moses. It is Israel who is Yahweh's servant, whose hand Yahweh grasps, whose fear he reassures, whose strength he upholds, whose

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/82/ See e.g. Brueggemann, CBQ 30:156-81; B W Anderson, Creation versus Chaos 177.

/83/ Cf Gese, Zur biblischen Theologie 130-1 (ET 114-5), and Gese's subsequent observation that the OT uses priesthood and prophecy, as well as kingship, as models of past and future leadership (pp 134-7, 140-1 [ET 147-51, 155-6]).

victory he promises (41:8-16) /84/: such undertakings would be most familiar as made to the king. It is to Israel that Yahweh's commitment to David now belongs: as Yahweh once worked through David, soon he will work through Israel as a whole (55:3-5) /85/. However one is to identify the servant figure in 52:13 - 53:12 /86/, at the heart of his significance is his existing for the sake of the 'many' needy and guilty whose testimony the passage includes, and his fulfilling his ministry both in his humiliation and in his triumph by the will of Yahweh.

As the individual element in Israel's hope is tempered by the presence of the corporate, however, so the corporate element is tempered by the presence of the individual, not least in Isaiah 40 - 55. While the servant calling and the Davidic commitment belong to Israel, aspects of the Davidic role are nevertheless attributed to King Cyrus. Yahweh's purpose (יְצֹן) is also fulfilled through him (44:28; cf 53:10). He is Yahweh's shepherd and Yahweh's anointed; Yahweh also takes his hand,

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/84/ See further 42:1-9, if this describes Israel's calling (see section 3.4 and notes 56-9 above for the assumptions about the servant made here and over the next page). N.b. the royal features of the portrait in 42:1-9, in this connection (see e.g. Jeremias, VT 22:31-42).

/85/ For further possible treatments of the nation as the royal son, see Becker, Messiaserwartung 63-73 (ET Messianic Expectation 68-78).

/86/ In my view, the section describes the calling of the servant (whoever that may be) without identifying him; the passage is a vision or a challenge, not a description of some specific referent, past, present, or future. See especially Clines, I. He. We. and They 59-65.



goes before him, names his name (44:28; 45:1-4). Further, a significant individual role is played in these chapters by the second Isaiah himself /87/. He is called to fulfil Israel's own servant role in relation to needy Israel, and thus to be the means of light shining even beyond her to the gentile nations (49:1-6). Again, the openness of 52:13 - 53:12 at least allows for the possibility that an individual should be the unidentified fulfiller of this vision (to which the individual figure of Moses offering himself for Israel contributed). So even these chapters which avoid the traditional individual redeemer figure allow their corporate emphasis to be modified in recognition of the need or possibility of various individual roles being fulfilled in Yahweh's name for the sake of the community.

6.5.2 In the case of a number of OT themes, a theological approach requires consideration of the relationship between opposed but related polarities /88/. Ebeling has suggested that Luther's thought is constructed around such polarities; he instances letter and Spirit, law and gospel, faith and love, the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of this world, freedom and bondage, God hidden and God revealed /89/. Elsewhere Ebeling notes that such a polar structure goes back to scripture itself, and that scripture's polar structure reflects 'its comprehensive relation to life. If life itself is determined in a polar

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/87/ Against Westermann, who says that the prophet only lets himself be seen in 40:6-7 (Jesaja 40 = 66 10 [ET Isaiah 40 = 66]).

/88/ Cf Hanson, Diversity of Scripture 4, 148, with his reference to Gebser's Ursprung und Gegenwart on the theme of polarities.

/89/ Luther 16 (ET 25); cf 'Dogmatik und Exegese', ZTK 77:276-7.

way - one thinks of birth and death, creating and receiving, subject and object, passivity and activity, the fulfillment and the failure of life, and the like - then when the question involves true life, attention must be directed to the polarities that are determinative and that set it right'. In the OT it is the (polar) relationship of Yahweh and Israel, counterparts who belong together and stand in contradiction, which constitutes 'the red thread of the Old Testament', and which draws attention to further tensions, between election and universalism, Israel as a political entity and Israel as a religious community, cultic piety and prophetic piety, individual and community in relation to God, openness to the world or to other religions and insistence on distinctiveness or purity, suffering and confidence in God, judgment and grace, law and promise /90/. It is easy to extend this list: creation and redemption (cf ch 7 below), exodus and exile /91/, word

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/90/ Studium der Theologie 20, 35 (ET 19-20, 34). Cf Brueggemann, JSOT 18:2-18.

/91/ It might once have seemed possible to understand the OT (like the NT) as based on an original salvation event, the exodus. But only by an implausible tour de force can the whole OT be seen as a series of outworkings and reinterpretations of the significance of that primal event (as the NT is, in relation to Christ). It would be as feasible to analyse the OT as a series of anticipations of and responses to the exile. Exile, failure, miscarriage (cf Bultmann, ST 2:42-4 [ET Essays on OT Interpretation 72-3]), offers a suggestive paradigm for understanding the OT. See also Kitamori, Theology of the Pain of God 69. More appropriately exodus and exile may be seen as two of the poles between which the OT moves; cf Meeks, JRT 33:44.



and event /92/, praise and lament /93/, structure and freedom /94/, form and reform /95/. The model of 'polarity' is complemented by that of counterpoint, the interweaving of two independent tunes which combine to form a greater harmony /96/.

6.5.3 We will consider the theological task involved in taking up these polarities by looking at four OT themes; first, universalism and nationalism. As we noted in section 5.2.1, a book such as Deuteronomy focuses on Yahweh's concern for Israel; his concern for other peoples appears only very marginally. Deuteronomy may then be compared with Nahum, Malachi, Joel, Esther, and the E material in the Tetrateuch

/92/ Belief in revelation in history (see section 4.7.1 and n 103 above) arose in reaction against belief in revelation as word. But 'facts without words are blind; and words without facts are empty' (Braaten, History and Hermeneutics 23, paraphrasing Kant). I have discussed this point further in Approaches to OT Interpretation 74-7, 126-8.

/93/ See Westermann, e.g. What Does the OT Say about God? 22.

/94/ The OT exemplifies V Turner's thesis that any enduring social system (including a religion) must hold together structure and anti-structure (cf institution and community) (see Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors especially 266-7; cf Cohn, Shape of Sacred Space 22).

/95/ Hanson 14-36. Hanson sees a fundamental polarity between the visionary and the pragmatic (see sections 2.5.2 above and 7.5 below) as the factor which underlies OT diversity in general (Hanson, Dynamic Transcendence 67).

/96/ See Lévêque, Questions disputées 183-202, with special reference to salvation history and wisdom.

(insofar as this can safely be isolated). The pre-exilic prophets, Ezekiel, and the Priestly Work also focus on Yahweh's special relationship with Israel, though their direct emphasis lies more on the demand of holiness that this makes on Israel, and they contain more explicit references to Yahweh's lordship over all creation /97/. In contrast, Isa 19:19-25 envisages Assyria and Egypt enjoying the same relationship with God as Israel, Ruth and Jonah take a very positive stance in relation to some Moabites and Ninevites, at least, while the wisdom books make no reference to Yahweh's special concern for Israel, and presuppose that he is involved in the life of people as people.

The question of the relationship between the more 'nationalist' and the more 'universalist' perspectives is raised by their juxtaposition within individual OT books, as well as within the OT as a whole. The OT does not suggest that universalist theology 'overcomes' election theology; both viewpoints are present in earlier and later OT books, and in the NT /98/. The theological question concerns the right

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/97/ Von Rad notes P's universal context, though its purpose is to help to understand Israel in the light of creation, rather than vice versa (EyT 24:65-6, 72 [ET Problem 155-6, 163]).

/98/ Against Altmann, Erwählungstheologie 29-30. For their interwovenness, see Danell, Root of the Vine 30-1; Orlinsky, Translating and Understanding the OT 206-36; Martin-Achard, Israël et les nations (ET Light to the Nations). Specifically, the more 'universalist' patriarchal God precedes the more 'nationalist' Mosaic God (cf again Saggs, Encounter with the Divine 36-8), while the missionary concern of



relationship between them, acknowledging their respective insights but avoiding their respective dangers. The OT's universalist perspective assumes that Yahweh is Lord of the whole world, is creator of that world, cares for the whole world, looks to the worship of the whole world, and makes his ways known to the whole world. Its election theology assumes not that he is ultimately arbitrary or that on its basis Israel can behave as she likes, but that he made a special commitment to Israel in connection with his reaching his world through her, and that his purpose and the pattern of his activity can be seen especially clearly through her /99/.

- 6.5.4 A related polarity is the tension between the picture of Yahweh as the God who is irrevocably committed to his people, ever acting in mercy towards them, and that of him declaring his judgment on his people and threatening to abandon them. This tension appears in the Pentateuch, which speaks both of a permanent covenant commitment to Israel on Yahweh's part and of a covenant which depends on Israel's obedience for its perseverance. The former does justice to Yahweh's sovereign grace,

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Judaism suggests that OT faith itself remains open to a concern for the whole world (so I Epstein, Judaism 144), and the NT mission to the gentiles has its background in the OT (see Jeremias, Jesu Verheissung [ET Jesus' Promise]; Hempel, ZAW 66:244-72).

- /99/ Gottwald comments that election is only a problem when the ideology alone is left and the impetus the belief gave to social liberation is gone (Tribes of Yahweh 702-3).

but puts his holiness at risk; the latter does the opposite /100/.

The tension between judgment and mercy is particularly overt in the prophecies of Hosea. Hosea emphasizes the inexplicable and paradoxical character of God's love, which is portrayed in terms of the wooing of a wanton, and which is capable of coexisting with anger. "I will love them no more" (9.15) and "I will love them freely" (14.4) ... are allowed to stand side by side with no attempt at reconciliation, signifying that on the basis of the prophetic faith at any rate there is no method of reconciling them. The only answer is to flee from the wrathful to the loving God /101/. Hosea's own concern is not with clarifying theoretical metaphysical questions but with setting before Israel two possible scenarios from which she has to choose. What are the theological implications of Hosea's words, then, and what is the relationship between the two texts and the two 'gods'? It is such questions that a theologian like Paul cannot help but take up (see Rom 9 - 11). What has to be said here may be similar to what Paul says in Romans. It is love which is of the essence of deity or of holiness; Yahweh is most clearly the holy God when he is declining to execute

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/100/ Sakenfeld thus comments on Num 14 that no one model can represent the fullness of God's relationship with his people (CBQ 37:330). Cf also the discussion of Isaiah by Wildberger (VTSup 9:100-8); of second Isaiah by B W Anderson (Magnalia Dei 339-60); and the comments on the prophets generally by Fohrer (TLZ 89:481-50), Zimmerli (VTSup 23:48-64), Carroll (When Prophecy Failed 16-27), and Eichrodt (Theologie 1:246-78 [ET 1:457-511]).

/101/ So Eichrodt 1:129 (ET 1:253).



his wrath (Hos 11:9). Acts of wrath can be his acts, but they are his 'strange' work (Isa 28:21): he is not to the same extent 'being himself' when he acts in judgment as when he acts in mercy. Love is his more overarching characteristic, and a positive purpose for Israel is one that he is committed to fulfil in the long run. But his love can turn aside from a particular generation, and it is this possibility which faces Hosea's audience.

This resolution of the tension we are considering also appears in the pentateuchal context referred to above. In Exod 32 - 34 and Num 13 - 14, Yahweh speaks of utterly destroying Israel because of her sin, but tempers his decision to a punishment of the present generation. In these passages, it is the human response to Yahweh's announcement of judgment (namely, Moses' prayer) which explains the change from destruction of the people as a whole to judgment on the present generation. Such announcements are categorical in form without necessarily being so in reality. They are threats designed to be self-frustrating, by eliciting prayer and repentance /102/. The story of Jonah and the Ninevites well illustrates this point: Jonah knew that his categorical threats were implicitly conditional (Jonah 4:2). The point is explicit in the story of Jeremiah at the potter's house (Jer

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/102/ Sakenfeld (pp 320-3) suggests that even repentance cannot avert judgment for abandoning Yahweh, but of the passages she refers to, 1 Sam 3:11-14 only states that offerings will not avert judgment; Num 13:39-45 is not clearly describing repentance rather than remorse and presumption; 2 Sam 12:10-14 implies that David's repentance averts his death, even though not all other consequences of his wrongdoing.

18:1-11). It also underlies Hosea's portrait of 'two gods'. The two gods stand for two possible scenarios that lie before Israel. Ultimately, God's positive purpose will be fulfilled, but each individual generation determines by its response to God's message which of the gods it meets. How it is that love is more intrinsic than wrath to the personality of Yahweh, or on what basis the former is bound ultimately to prevail over the latter, is only further clarified later, as the cross of Christ becomes both the locus of God's activity in judgment and of his activity in mercy /103/.

6.5.5 A further example of opposed but related polarities which require theological consideration is the relationship between faith and uncertainty. In keeping with Ebeling's thesis that the polar structure of scriptural thinking reflects a polar structure which determines life itself, behind this polarity one may perceive a dialectic between orientation or equilibrium and dislocation or disorientation which characterizes human experience in general /104/. Equilibrium or faith is generally seen (and certainly felt) as preferable to disorientation or uncertainty. But as likely the latter is to be viewed positively, for faith develops not least in the light of experiences which cannot be accommodated by an existent orientation. A new orientation can only develop as the subject accepts and embraces such dislocation, rather

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/103/ Cf Eichrodt's comments, 1:82 (ET 1:171-2); Eichrodt also notes that OT sacrifice already holds judgment and mercy together.

/104/ Ebeling, Studium der Theologie 20 (ET 19-20); Brueggemann, JSOT 17:5-16, 24-30, building on the work of Ricoeur (cf the allusions to his work at the end of ch 4 above).



than resisting or denying it in holding on to the old orientation. Thus a hermeneutic of suspicion encourages the relinquishing of an old orientation, while in dialectic with that a hermeneutic of recovery encourages the recapture of meaning in a renewed orientation. It is this dialectic that is at work in the alternation between lament and praise in the Psalms. Faith and questioning are essential in relation to each other. Without the context of faith and reorientation in faith, questioning would end up as pessimism. Without the context of doubt and continuing openness to questioning, faith would become sluggish, and atrophy; thus in Job 'skepticism is the handmaid of religion' /105/. It is because faith and questioning belong together that Ecclesiastes manifests both, whether because an originally more unequivocally sceptical book has been tempered by the assurances of the orthodox or because the assurances of the orthodox are Ecclesiastes' own point of departure. It is also for this reason that an uncertainty about basic affirmations of Israel's faith such as God's goodness and accessibility is not confined to Israel's late, decaying years or to periods of historical crisis but appears from early times in reaction to over-certainties which seem to ignore contrary evidences /106/. Conversely, the emergence of a 'crisis in wisdom' does not mean that people ceased believing that the creation order was intact and secure; 'the world of Ps.104 is not untrue because of Job's situation' /107/.

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/105/ So Priest, JAAR 36:323; cf Davidson, ASTI 7:41-52.

/106/ See Crenshaw, Divine Helmsman 1-19.

/107/ Knierim, Horizons in Biblical Theology 3:89, referring to Schmid, Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit.

6.5.6 The relationship between oneness and plurality in the OT understanding of God, a fourth example of a polar tension in OT theology, may be connected with the relationship between individual and community at the human level /108/. The OT affirms that Yahweh alone is God: he is the creator, he alone acts in history (see especially Isa 45:18-23). Such a conviction is not a merely contingent fact (the right answer to the statistical question 'How many gods are there' happens to be 'One', though it could have been otherwise); it is a necessary fact (truly understood, the word 'God' can only have one referent). Further, this conviction suggests that behind the multiplex nature of reality there is a principle of unity. But the conviction finds expression in specific OT situations not out of abstract metaphysical interests but in connection with some contextual affirmation or denial. It can, for instance, be a response of worship to an experience of Yahweh proving himself Lord over Egypt and its gods and over the natural order (Exod 15). Not that the belief that her God is Lord of all is merely ideological support designed to bolster Israel's self-image as his people (though no doubt it is that); it can be a challenging reminder to her not to overestimate her own significance or underestimate the possibility and the awfulness of being judged by this same God (Amos), or not to infer that her God is to be reckoned powerless or insignificant merely because she has been defeated (Isa 40:12-31).

Once the sole lordship of Yahweh has been asserted, however, it has to

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/108/ See Eichrodt, Theologie 3:1-18 (ET 2:231-67); cf at n 59 above. See also A R Johnson, The One and the Many in the Israelite Concept of God; G A F Knight, Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity.



be matched by statements which indicate that there is a certain plurality about heavenly reality. The one transcendent God is nevertheless involved in this world in multiplex ways; human experience of the complexity of life and events suggests that these are influenced by a variety of forces, not merely by one will; Yahweh's own personal nature encourages the assumption that he was involved in interpersonal relationships before there were created beings to relate to. Perhaps considerations such as these underlie the fact that the OT assumes that Yahweh is not alone even though he is unique. There are many sons of God or holy ones or messengers or fighting forces in his heavenly assembly or court or congregation or army. Such talk may sometimes be metaphorical (e.g. Psa 148), but it is hardly always so (e.g. Psa 82). Again, while Yahweh is one, nevertheless the reality of his involvement in the world can be affirmed by speaking of the presence of some part of him (his wisdom, his face, his spirit, his arm) or some expression of him (his name, his word, his glory) or some embodiment of him (his angel).

A tension between oneness and plurality in understanding God can be traced in Israel, in other religions of the ancient and the modern world, and in Christianity. Like other religions, the OT is sometimes willing to acknowledge the continuity among heavenly beings by using its word for deity of them all. But precisely where it calls other beings as well as Yahweh אלהים, in Psa 82, it makes quite clear that all apart from Yahweh lack power and ultimacy (they can die). Here there is an 'exclusive exaltation of the one source of all power, authority,

and creativity' /109/. From a Christian perspective, it is not surprising that further clarifying of the relationship between oneness and plurality in God had to await the Christ event; but this Christian understanding nevertheless still finds itself having to acknowledge the same tension between these two aspects of an understanding of God /110/.

6.5.7 The instances of theological construction sketched in sections 6.5.1-6 arise out of the cross-section approach to OT theology. Other instances are suggested by more diachronic approaches. Von Rad classically noted the difference between the past-orientation of OT narrative and the future-orientation of prophecy. To these might be added a more overtly present concern in wisdom and elsewhere.

OT theology, then, has to hold together an involvement with the past, with the present, and with the future, and the attitude to God the OT looks for thus embraces remembrance, faith, and hope. The narrative books major on remembrance, and imply that God's constitutive acts lie in the past; the prophetic books, von Rad suggested, invite Israel to turn from what God has done to what he is going to do; the psalms and the wisdom books express faith in (and uncertainty about) him in the present. But the narratives do not speak of the past out of antiquarian interest, but because of its relevance to the present and future of their readers, a relevance which is written into the story as they tell

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/109/ Wright, OT against its Environment 39.

/110/ See e.g. Tillich's analysis of the ways that various types of monotheism handle this tension (Systematic Theology 1:250-4).



it; the Bible is a book that 'though on a first level narrating the past, on a deeper level was speaking of the future and for the future' /111/. The prophets speak of the future in the light of the past and in the symbols which have emerged from past events, and they speak of the future in order to affect life in the present. The psalms often praise God for his deeds in the past and/or look to his deeds and their response of praise in the future; the wisdom books offer advice for the present which is based on the experience of the past encapsulated in the tradition of the past, which as such is believed to hold for the future also /112/. Of course, people may not hold present, past and future in right relationship. They may be over-preoccupied with the past (wallowing in guilt or reminiscence) or with the present (refusing to face up to guilt or to responsibility for the future) or with the future (escaping into speculation which avoids the implications of the future for the present, or declining to look at the future in the light of the past). Thus at particular moments one or other may need emphasis in the light of the corrective which people's perspectives need. But because all are significant, in principle all need maximum emphasis at

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/111/ Barr, Explorations in Theology 7:60.

/112/ This point also emerges from C F Evans's study of 'The Christian Past - Tradition', 'The Christian Present - Existentialism', 'The Christian Future - Eschatology' (Explorations in Theology 2:141-82, 194-5), where Evans is unable to discuss the gospel narrative, for instance, without noting that it is written in the light of Jesus' present activity, or to discuss eschatology without noting that it has implications for protology, or to refer to creation without noting that it has implications for our future expectations.

each moment, so that the tension between them may produce its fruits.

Another form of diachronic study examines the varied theological approaches that may be perceived in a particular period. R W Klein closes his study of Israel in Exile by suggesting how the various OT responses to the exile need to be allowed together to offer insight on our 'exile'. Exile is a time for prayer (Lamentations), for examining ourselves and for turning to God (Deuteronomistic history), for facing facts yet not being overcome by them (Jeremiah), for re-appropriating God's old promises (Ezekiel), for re-affirming God's power to save (Isaiah 40 - 55), for restoring old institutions in the hope that God may remember his old promises (P) /113/.

These various responses also have to be allowed to complement and confront each other. Re-appropriation and re-affirmation for the future, for instance, are only legitimate in the context of self-examination and acceptance of responsibility for the past, otherwise they are irresponsible romanticism; restoring old institutions requires the context of turning to God (or it is a reaffirmation of external religion) and of openness to God's power to save (or it is an affirmation of self-salvation).

A parallel approach needs to be taken to the 'streams' of post-exilic tradition' noted in section 1.4.3 above. These are responses to a real 'theological ambiguity' in the situation of post-exilic Israel /114/.

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/113/ Israel in Exile 154; see further 149-54.

/114/ ET from Steck, EvT 28:455-6.



One has to affirm both the reality and the incompleteness of what Yahweh has done in fulfilment of his promises. One has to live both in joy and in hope. One has to affirm both Yahweh's fairness, and the hard cases which test that affirmation quite severely. One has to affirm a commitment both to the worship of the temple and to the obedience of the individual. One has both to safeguard the identity of the community and affirm Yahweh's openness to people from outside it.

Analyses of this kind form a proper part of any descriptively-understood theology of the OT as a whole. They certainly form part of any attempt to consider the OT's ongoing theological significance. Their findings may be complex and closely nuanced; but that is more likely to mean that they do justice to the OT's own grappling with the complexity of reality itself.

## 7 A unifying approach to 'creation' and 'salvation' in the OT

7.0 This final chapter examines at greater length one aspect of OT theology which is amenable to the approach instanced more briefly in section 6.5. There is a wide divergence between the treatment of God, man, and the world generally characteristic of the OT's narrative and prophetic traditions and that which characterizes Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. The former assume that God made himself and his redemptive purpose known especially to Israel in the course of a particular series of historical events through which that purpose (in which Israel as God's special people had a key place) was put into effect. Motifs such as exodus, covenant, and prophecy are central to this approach. In contrast, the poetic books refer rarely to specific historical events, to an unfolding purpose, or to a particular people; indeed, outside some Psalms they do not do so at all. They concentrate more on the world and on everyday life than on history, more on the regular than on the once-for-all, more on the individual (though not outside his social relationships) than on the nation, more on personal insight and experience than on sacred tradition.

OT study has found it difficult to do justice to both approaches at the same time. Within the OT itself, however, both have a certain importance, and our concern here is to see how they may interrelate theologically.



7.1 Salvation history emphasized and subjected to critique

The former of the two sets of emphases we have described in section 7.0 has often been described as the salvation history approach. During the middle third of this century it was over-emphasized and the theological significance of the approach which focuses on God's involvement in the regularities of life was somewhat neglected. More recently, interest in the latter has increased, while the emphasis on salvation history has been subject to a wide-ranging critique. Its reference is ambiguous; was it really salvation that Israel found in history, and was it really history that brought Israel salvation? Its importance had been overstated; it could not provide the comprehensive framework for understanding the OT that had been attributed to it, and even the salvation events themselves could not reveal God's purpose without the word of interpretation which explained their meaning. Its basis seemed uncertain; both tradition historians and theologians questioned whether the events of the salvation history had actually happened. Its relevance no longer seemed self-evident: what meaning attaches today to the claim that God is 'the God who acts'? Its uniqueness (compared with other religions) was questioned: did not all nations, after all, believe that their gods were active in their history? /1/.

Franz Hesse responded to such questions by suggesting that we say

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/1/ See e.g. Childs, Biblical Theology in Crisis 13-87, 223-39; Gunneweg, Vom Verstehen des AT 146-82 (ET 173-217), and their references.

'goodbye to Heilsgeschichte' /2/. This would be an overreaction.

While not omnipresent, the salvation history approach outlined in section 7.0 is very prominent in the Bible. The first half of each Testament, for instance, comprises narrative works which, while 'pre-critical' rather than 'twentieth-century-western' history, offer a series of connected interpretations of events of the past which were regarded as significant for the time of their writers; they assume that certain historical events in the life of one people were of key significance for the unveiling and effecting of the ultimate saving purpose of God. The same assumption is explicit in most of the non-narrative works (the prophets and the epistles) which follow; and it is not absent from some of the other remaining books (e.g. Psalms; Revelation).

The emphasis on salvation history drew attention to the fact that OT and NT faith is not characteristically a system of abstract truths but a message related to certain concrete events. The events only become meaningful as they are understood within a context of interpretation, or are accompanied by words of interpretation, but the 'propositional' truth itself is characteristically expressed in the form of comments on historical events.

It is expressed, in fact, as a story. It is not a story like a children's tale or a western, which gives fictional embodiment to what we hope life is like (the goodies win in the end). It is an

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/2/ See his Abschied von der Heilsgeschichte, echoed by McKenzie, Theology 325, and by Bickert, Textgemäss 11.



interpretation, but an interpretation of factual events: these things come to pass so that you will know that Yahweh is God; if Christ is not raised, then our faith is vain. The story is only valid if the events it relates actually took place. Thus, even though talk of 'the God who acts' may now raise problems, this way of speaking is too prominent in the Bible for it to be easily sidestepped in biblical study. Indeed, while this way of speaking can be paralleled elsewhere, no other people's literature gives the central place to their gods' involvement in their history that the Bible's does. The religions of the ancient near east, gnosticism in the hellenistic period, existentialism and other philosophies in the contemporary world, have all offered world views which did not give prominence to once-for-all historical events; they thus contrast with the Bible's perspective.

Nevertheless, the notion of salvation history has long been used uncritically in theological study, and has been allowed to overshadow other biblical themes.

## 7.2 Nature overshadowed and re-acknowledged

7.2.1 Works such as Eichrodt's and von Rad's Theologies underplay the theme of God's involvement with nature. Various reasons may underlie this neglect. First, 'nature' as a self-contained structure with inherent creative power is hardly an OT idea; in OT thinking, the unity and dynamic of 'natural' phenomena derive from their dependence on Yahweh. Secondly, when the OT does refer to Yahweh's lordship over the natural realm which he created, it generally links this lordship with the theme of redemption (so e.g. Genesis; Amos; Isaiah 40 - 55; and such Psalms as 33; 74; 89; 136; 148). Even Hosea and Deuteronomy, where the question of lordship in nature is a point at issue, do not appeal to Yahweh's activity as creator in isolation from his redemptive activity. This appeal develops only under foreign influence, in Psa 19A; 104. It is historically late and theologically secondary. Thirdly, scholars believed that the alien-ness of such a religious interest in nature was of theological significance. It was the 'nature religions' that focused on this interest, and the polemic of Hosea reveals where such an interest leads. Authentically OT faith historicized the farmer's instinctive involvement with the cycle of nature, subordinating the agricultural significance of his festivals to a relationship with the salvation events whereby Israel came into possession of the land, and thus encouraging in him a faith absolutely



different from that of Canaanite religion /3/.

The German-speaking theology of the Eichrodt-von Rad era was also encouraged to emphasize the negative aspect to a religious interest in nature by seeing the faith of the 'German Christians' as a nature religion from which theologians who identified with the confessing church dissociated themselves in stressing the particularity of what God did with the Jews /4/. Embarrassment with the clash between Gen 1 and Darwinian science perhaps also encouraged the focusing of attention of other aspects of the OT, though if so the clash between the OT's view of history (or the role attributed to history by OT theological study) and the critical historian's view of OT history now provokes at least equal embarrassment.

7.2.2 Even before the ecological awareness of the 1960's some scholars who affirmed the primary significance of salvation history wrote as if they

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/3/ For these reasons, see e.g. von Rad, Gesammelte Studien 136-47 (ET Problem 131-43); Theologie 1:140-4, 424, 2:117 (ET 1:136-9, 426, 2:103-4); EvT 24:63 (ET Problem 152); H W Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation 1; Peacocke, Creation 364-6; B W Anderson, Creation versus Chaos 52-5; cf Knierim's analysis, Horizons in Biblical Theology 3:63-71. Cf also Barth's emphasis that God can only be known as creator on the basis of his being our redeemer (e.g. Dogmatik III, 1:1-44 [ET 3-41]).

/4/ Cf Brueggemann, JSOT 18:12; Young, Creator, Creation and Faith 17-20.

half-recognized the imbalance of this emphasis /5/. After all, Israel had to reflect on Yahweh's relationship to nature, because she came to be involved with land and agriculture and had to face the question whether Yahweh was the source of fertility for her, not least in the light of her contemporaries' convictions regarding the link between gods and nature, and this is part of the significance of Gen 1 - 2, as well as of Hosea, Deuteronomy, and Psalms such as 47; 65; 67; 93; 96 - 99 /6/. While asserting that Yahweh was lord of the material world and the source of its life, she recognized that this world is a unity characterized by recurrence and regularity, with a life of its own, and although this is not a view of nature as a system possessing an inherent dynamic, it is a view of nature /7/; it is both interesting to compare with the western metaphysical view of nature which underlies the use of metaphor from nature in poetry, and instructive for our formulating an attitude to God and natural resources /8/.

Some of the OT's own interest in nature has a practical concern, with

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- /5/ Cf von Rad, EvT 24:57 (ET 144); Jacob, Théologie (first edition) 110 (ET 136); Grundfragen 36.
- /6/ Cf e.g. Harrelson, From Fertility Cult to Worship 12-18; Rogerson, OTS 20:67-84; Westermann, Schöpfung 168-70 (ET Creation 118-9); Cross, HTR 55:253-4. Contrast von Rad's observation that Deut dissolves the direct link between religion and farming (Gottesvolk 30).
- /7/ Cf H W Robinson 1-48 (with his references especially to Genesis and Job); Rogerson 69-73.
- /8/ Cf Wicker, Story-Shaped World 1-8, 50-70; Janzen, Encounter 36:385.



learning from it about human life /9/, but elsewhere its joy in the specifics and in the total wonder of nature seems less pragmatic (see e.g. Psa 139:14; 145; 147). Both in its order and its wonder it reflects something of its creator, declares his glory (Psa 19; 24; Isa 6:4), and fulfils his will, even when becoming his means of chastisement and not just of blessing for men (Gen 3; Deut 28; Joel 3:3-4). It thus shares life with man; yet it enjoys God's blessing independently of man and can be set over against him - so that he sows in tears even though he reaps in joy (Psa 126:6) /10/.

The fullest OT review of nature in its mysterious detail is given to a man who sows in joy but reaps in tears (Job 38 - 39). The revelation of its mystery is given neither to explain everything to him nor (ultimately) to confound him, but to reassure him that the mystery of God which lies behind the mystery of nature is one that can be accepted as nature itself can be /11/.

Israel's 'reticence about creation in her early traditions' /12/ should not be exaggerated.

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/9/ Cf McKane's comments on Proverbs' interest in nature, and that attributed to Solomon, which is probably practical rather than incipiently 'scientific' (La sagesse de l'AT 167-70, against von Rad, Theologie 1:422-3 [ET 425]); also Cant's appreciation of natural beauty which is fired by and in service to a rejoicing in human love.

/10/ H W Robinson 48; cf Pedersen, Israel 1:479-80.

/11/ H W Robinson 6-8.

/12/ B W Anderson, Creation versus Chaos 52.

### 7.3 Blessing overshadowed and re-acknowledged

7.3.1 To concentrate exclusively on the once-for-all acts of God whereby he effects his purpose in history also involves neglecting God's involvement in the regular and the everyday affairs of birth and death, marriage and the family, work and society, which are essential to human life. Salvation is treated as effectively co-extensive with these acts of deliverance, and the theme of blessing in everyday life is missed /13/. The overshadowing of this theme appears also in the longstanding neglect of the Song of Songs' overt concern with sexual love. It is still illustrated in Barth's extensive treatment, where the Song is seen as written on the basis of the nature of God's love for Israel; the covenant between Yahweh and Israel is the original of which the relationship between men and women is a copy /14/.

7.3.2 As is the case with the theme of nature, even the apologetic concern that has emphasized the OT's interest in history (because it has seen the cutting edge of the OT's significance for our own day to lie here) ought to be motivated also to emphasize the OT's interest in blessing, with its concern for concrete personal experience and feelings; Yahwism

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/13/ See especially Westermann, Segen 23-4 (ET Blessing 15-17); Westermann's work is of particular significance throughout this section. ברך and 'bless' refer both to the experience of blessing in fertility etc, and to the verbal act of blessing. Here 'bless' will refer to the former except where the context makes clear that the latter is meant.

/14/ Dogmatik III, 1:357-77 (ET 311-29).



must have a relevance to everyday human life /15/. Yahweh is involved in the contingencies of the individual's personal history as well as in those of the history of the nations, involved in the blessings of life itself, of fertility, success, happiness, good health, prosperity, honour, and of peace in the community; of all the good that comes from having Yahweh with you. This is illustrated by the stories of people such as Ruth, Saul, and David, but (again like the theme of nature) it becomes a focus in the Psalms and Job. In the praise and lament of the Psalms all the positive and negative experiences of everyday life are treated as part of people's relationship with Yahweh /16/, while Job focuses on the experience of calamity in everyday life, of blessing becoming curse. Of the narrative works, Genesis has most to say about blessing. The concrete blessings given to all humanity and the struggle between blessing and curse are a key motif in Gen 1 - 11, while Gen 12 - 50 is structured by the theme of blessing promised, sought after, imperilled, sacrificed, bought and sold, fought over, but always vouchsafed and, at least in part, actually experienced. Blessing is also a central theme in Deuteronomy, where it is set before Israel as a prospect to enjoy in the promised land (see e.g. 7:13-14; 28:3-6; 30:19) /17/; it is prominent in the prophets' vision of a

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/15/ Cf Janzen 385; Murphy, No Famine in the Land 119-20, 125.

/16/ Cf Westermann, What Does the OT Say about God? 69, 71.

/17/ It is das Heilsgut  $\kappa\alpha\tau'\epsilon\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\chi\eta\nu$  (von Rad, Gottesvolk 42).

future state of salvation /18/; and it is the gift that God gives people in Christ /19/.

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/18/ See Westermann, Segen 16-19, 36-8, 65-6, 79 (ET Blessing 8-11, 33-4, 63-4, 81).

/19/ See Westermann 28-31, 66-97 (ET 24-6, 64-101); cf Bonhoeffer, Letters 126-7, enlarged edition 374.



7.4 Wisdom overshadowed and re-acknowledged

- 7.4.1 In OT study the term 'wisdom' is used in confusingly varied ways /20/; here it chiefly denotes the approach to reality which surfaces especially in the classical 'wisdom books'. For them, wisdom is both the way to blessing and the embodiment of blessing. The man of insight is the one who can see how to live the blessed life - how to find peace, prosperity, success, and happiness; the blessed man is the one who can give wise counsel and formulate a wise purpose /21/.

As long ago as 1910, Ernst Sellin lamented the overshadowing of wisdom by history and prophecy /22/. One reason for this overshadowing has been the assumption that wisdom is historically and/or theologically dependent on or subordinate to law, prophecy, salvation history, or the covenant /23/.

A disparaging of wisdom can, however, claim a rather contrary

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/20/ On the problem of definition, see e.g. Crenshaw, OT Wisdom 16-25, also Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom 3-5, 481-94.

/21/ Cf Westermann, Segen 40-2 (ET 37-40) (noting Job's concern with blessing); Pedersen 183-4, 198-9.

/22/ Einleitung 114; cf Priest, JBR 31:279.

/23/ So respectively Wright, OT Against its Environment 44-5; H W Robinson 241; von Rad, Theologie 1:352-3, 451 (ET 1:355, 452-3), also EvT 24:65-73 (ET Problem 155-65); Hubbard, Tyndale Bulletin 17:3-34.

justification /24/. It notes the contrast between wisdom and the Yahwism of the rest of the OT, which can make wisdom seem an alien body in the world of the OT. The wisdom writings are the books of the OT most like parallel writings of other peoples, and their understanding of God and man reflects the common theology of Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Egypt. Only when they cease to speak in wisdom terms do they begin to speak in distinctively Israelite terms /25/. Indeed, God is really dispensable from wisdom's understanding of reality. Wisdom is an essentially secular, man-centred, non-authoritarian, self-sufficient, pragmatic approach to life, picturing events working out in accordance

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/24/ Bryce notes these two strands to contemporary attitudes (Legacy of Wisdom 189-92, 245-6). They are well illustrated by H W Robinson's diagrammatic understanding of wisdom as one of God's means of revelation (p 238), after he has earlier described it as based on experience rather than revelation (p 231). Von Rad, too, emphasizes both that wisdom is thoroughly secular and that it is thoroughly Yahwist in presupposition: cf Towner's discussion of von Rad in Canon and Authority 135-42.

/25/ Cf Crenshaw, Studies 2 (with his quotation from Gese, Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der Alten Weisheit [Tübingen: Mohr, 1958] 2); Preuss, VTSup 23:117-45; Würthwein, Wort und Existenz 197-216 (ET Studies 113-33); Schmid, Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit. Mendenhall notes that Solomon received the gift of wisdom at a great pre-Israelite shrine (A Light unto my Path 324).



with cause-effect forces built into them /26/. Israel's wise men are committed to taking Yahweh into account (e.g. Prov 16:1,9; 21:30-1), but the prophets are as rude about them as they are about the wise men of other peoples (see Isa 19:11-13; 29:14; 31:1-3). The wise men's occupational hazard is to walk by calculation rather than by faith.

Further grounds for the conviction that the wisdom writings are of rather secondary significance lie in the nature of the development which the wisdom tradition undergoes. J L Crenshaw /27/ describes it as first secular, then religious, then theological, then nomistic. Old wisdom, that is, had a purely this-worldly concern with finding the successful way to live this life; it was baptized into Yahwism by being set into the context of the fear of Yahweh. Then in Proverbs 1 - 9 wisdom is not merely a useful aid to living a successful human life before God, but the very companion of God himself at creation (8:22-31), while in Job the wisdom tradition wrestles with ultimate questions about the nature of God and the relationship between God and man. Job 28, however, recognizes how elusive wisdom is, and declares that it is to be found in the fear of Yahweh (28:28); similarly, the apparently latest collection in Proverbs is the most explicitly Yahwistic and repeats this motto (1:7; 9:10 - a bracket round Proverbs 1 - 9). Even as Job and Proverbs 1 - 9 become more 'philosophical' and more

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/26/ Cf Koch, ZTK 52:1-42 on cause-effect thinking in the OT (Koch begins from Proverbs); Zimmerli, ZAW 51:177-204 (ET Studies 175-207); Priest, JAAR 36:312-3; H W Robinson 231; McKane, Prophets and Wise Men; Fohrer, Theologische Grundstrukturen 86-93.

/27/ Studies 24-6.

sophisticated, they come more to appeal to an act of faith in Yahweh, Israel's God.

The wisdom writings reveal in other ways that their resources do not quite enable them to answer the questions they ask. Proverbs is dominated by confident assertions about the way the world works, but these contrast with the questioning of Job and Ecclesiastes, witnessing to a crisis in wisdom: `Proverbs seems to say, "These are the rules for life; try them and find that they will work". Job and Ecclesiastes say, "We did, and they don't" /28/.

Of course, Proverbs itself acknowledges that facts must always be preferred to theories; even though it is concerned to wrest order from the chaos of experience, such order cannot be forced to emerge when it is not really present. Job's friends do have to ignore Proverbs' nuances and qualifications in order to generate the dogmatic confidence of the wise men who think they know everything (also derided by Ecclesiastes). Yet the development from generalization to dogma to scepticism has a certain inevitability about it. The crisis through which wisdom's way of thinking has to pass is built into its very approach to reality and its quest for understanding /29/.

So how does wisdom handle this threatened scepticism? Job avoids it

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/28/ Hubbard 6; cf Gese, Vom Sinai zum Zion 168-79; Schmid, Wesen und Geschichte.

/29/ Cf Crenshaw, Prophetic Conflict 123; Preuss, Questions disputées d'AT 168-71; EvT 30:396-406.



by working towards an unexpected climax, a theophany, a special revelation, without which the story of Job would come to a stop rather than an end. This event brings no new data for the resolution of the book's theological question, but it brings Job to a trustful submission to Yahweh through the experience of being personally confronted by him. Such a device, however, has no place in a truly wisdom book; theophany is a distinctly non-rational, non-generalizable, non-everyday phenomenon. So the Book of Job only solves the problem it examines by looking outside the wisdom tradition, and it does not offer an intellectual solution to the intellectual problem of theodicy, but a non-rational, religious solution to the religious problem of how one relates to God /30/.

Ecclesiastes has a more negative final atmosphere than Job, because the author refuses to introduce what he might call a deus ex machina. Ecclesiastes is Job without the theophany. The author is both more rigorous in (and earns more admiration for) his unremitting insistence on a verifiable worldview, and in the end more wrong (if taken as the whole truth). Ecclesiastes takes the wisdom approach to its logical conclusion and proves this to be actually a dead end. He too shows that there is no escape from theological impasse within the wisdom tradition itself /31/. Wisdom records 'an unfinished and even unfinishable

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/30/ Cf Rylaarsdam, Revelation 74-90; Crenshaw, ZAW 82:381.

/31/ Cf Crenshaw 389-90; Würthwein 207-16 (ET 123-31); Preuss, Questions disputées 175. Whybray has a less extreme picture of Ecclesiastes' position, reckoning that he keeps faith in a God who is portrayed in a way not totally alien to that of the rest of the OT (Two Jewish Theologies e.g. 15; Sagesse et religion 65-81).

dialogue about man and world' /32/; it can only operate on the basis of an epistemological consensus and with the assumption of an order brought into creation at the beginning, and cannot deal with a recurrent threat to that order or with a questioning of that consensus /33/.

Beyond the OT wisdom books, the wisdom tradition's religious and theological development continues, and escape from the deadlock may be ventured. In Wisdom and Sirach wisdom moves further from being a minority report within Israelite faith towards becoming 'the custodian of the centralities of the faith', 'the form par excellence in which all Israel's later theological thought moved' /34/. At this 'nomistic' stage חכמה comes to be identified with חסד; God's eternal wisdom is seen as embodied in Israel's law, general revelation in special revelation. From the wisdom tradition's own perspective, this is a step forward; wisdom comes to the centre of the stage and the adding of grace to nature points to a way out of Job and Ecclesiastes' impasse /35/. Yet a wider view suggests that it may be a retrograde step if either wisdom is limited to the contents of the torah, or if salvation history becomes only an instance of a generalization. Wisdom's value

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/32/ Von Rad, Weisheit in Israel 404-5 (ET Wisdom in Israel 318).

/33/ Cf Hermisson and Brueggemann, Israelite Wisdom 47-54 and 86.

/34/ Von Rad, Theologie 1:438-9 (ET 1:440-1). See Sheppard, Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct, for an approach to this development from the perspective of Childs's canonical criticism.

/35/ Rylaarsdam (pp 26-46) notes that mercy, a theme absent from the canonical books, features in Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon.



lies partly in its independence of testimony to God and his truth, in its accessibility to all, and its universal appeal. The identification of wisdom and torah in extra-canonical writings solves one problem but exposes a larger one /36/.

The theological limitations of wisdom, brought out by this development, may be seen as underlined by the NT's approach to wisdom. The NT contains no wisdom book. To bring the transcendent creator God near, the NT identifies God's wisdom not with torah but with the foolishness of the cross /37/. The NT has a certainty about the truth, in the light of the Christ event, which contrasts with the tentativeness and uncertainties of wisdom's insight and advice; it represents a revival of salvation history. It underlines hesitancy over whether wisdom's answers offer an adequate gospel. The NT's failure to quote from Ecclesiastes (and subsequent Christian interpretation of the book as the testimony of man outside of Christ) is no coincidence; wisdom has come to a dead end, a miscarriage /38/.

7.4.2 Despite emphasizing salvation history, von Rad offered important insights on both the Israelite view of the natural world and on the theme of blessing. His work on wisdom sits in most systematic tension with his stress on salvation history. Yet its suggestiveness made it an important stimulus to renewed theological interest in wisdom which

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/36/ Cf Rylaarsdam 90-8; Hubbard 24.

/37/ Cf Hermisson, Israelite Wisdom 55.

/38/ Preuss, EvT 30:405, 416, alluding to Bultmann's view noted above (e.g. ch 6, n 91).

has been reflected already in section 7.4.1.

This interest was encouraged by factors in theology and society generally. One is an appreciation of the radical way in which the question of meaning and the meaningfulness of 'revelation' is faced in Job and Ecclesiastes /39/. Both works speak to or for a situation in which the values of society are questioned (as they were in the decade which produced books such as T Roszak's The Making of a Counter Culture [1968-9] and C A Reich's The Greening of America [1970]), in which there is an ever pressing awareness of the problem of human evil and suffering (as there was in the Viet Nam decade), and in which traditional ecclesiastical teaching is questioned (as it was in the decade of 'the death of God' and of the 'crisis' in 'biblical theology').

Wisdom's methodology, moreover, is more akin to the more philosophical style of theology which succeeded 'biblical theology' than is the methodology of other biblical traditions. Wisdom is empirical, rational, and experience-centred. It does not appeal to special revelation. Its congeniality to the mind of the 1960's may be seen by comparing its approach with that of an important paperback from somewhere to the right of the 'death of God' movement, Peter Berger's A Rumour of Angels (first published in 1969), in which he looks for a way of 'starting with man' in doing theology without ending up merely

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/39/ Cf Crenshaw, ZAW 82:395. Cf Preuss's observation (p 416) that interest in wisdom merely represented one facet of the decade's reduction of theology to anthropology and ethics.



'glorying in man' as secular theology does. Berger suggests that ordinary human behaviour and experience manifest certain 'signals of transcendence': phenomena within 'natural' reality which point beyond that reality. People's attitudes presuppose that there is an underlying 'order' in the universe; that the ugly realities are not the final realities, and that to escape from these into creative beauty is not escapism; that a curse of supernatural dimensions - a commitment to hell - is appropriate in response to grossly outrageous behaviour; that human finitude can be overcome and can therefore be laughed at. As Berger notes, his examples could be added to: for instance, atheists may sometimes feel grateful for life and the world, even though they believe that they have no-one to express their gratitude to. People everywhere desire to say thank you.

The point about these experiences is that they presuppose belief in the transcendent. If God is not there, everything is not all right, play is escapism, there is no hope, evil may triumph, there is nothing to laugh at and no-one has given us anything. But people do not believe this and they do not experience life like that.

In starting from these experiences, Berger's methodology is essentially comparable to that of the wisdom books. Both 'start from man' and seek to do theology on the basis of how everyday life actually is in the world. It is not surprising if increased attention is paid to the

wisdom books at a time when the cultural and theological situation is open to their approach /40/.

A further feature of the theology of the 1960's was its interest in the secular city and in situation ethics. Wisdom's interest in the secular world as the aspect of the OT to speak to the modern world was most emphatically asserted by Walter Brueggemann. He expounded his perspective most systematically in his book In Man We Trust. The title (with its implicit contrast with America's more familiar 'In God We Trust') expresses his fundamental assertion, that God has committed himself to man, who is 'the trusted creature', called to live life itself responsibly and enthusiastically, joyfully, openly, and positively. This attitude to life Brueggemann sees in Proverbs, as well as in the story of David and in other literary productions of the united monarchy (J, the Succession Document). The wisdom tradition is decidedly world-affirming in its attitude to life and learning, and although this characteristic has led to its being neglected by the world-denying church, it may enable it to be God's way in to a world-affirming world.

Features of wisdom that had long seemed its shortcomings now became its assets. Topics such as Jesus as a wisdom teacher, Wisdom as a Christological category, and NT documents as wisdom writings gained new

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/40/ Cf B W Anderson's observation that most people are more at home in the wisdom literature than in the historical books (Living World of the OT 466, 2489, 3529) - though McKenzie (JBL 86:1) says this has not been his experience! See also Towner, Canon and Authority 132-47.



interest within NT scholarship /41/. Wisdom has even been called a key to the relationship between the Testaments and to the development of the doctrine of the incarnation, and described as the 'pivot of canonical growth'; after a period of neglect, she is queen, at least for a day /42/.

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/41/ As well as works cited in n 42 and at the end of sections 7.7, 7.8, and 7.9.4 below, see e.g. Robinson and Koester, Trajectories; Wilken (ed), Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity (especially the essays by Robinson, Fiorenza, and Pearson); Suggs, Wisdom, Christology and Law in Matthew's Gospel; Beardslee, Interpretation 24:61-73, JAAR 35:231-40, and Literary Criticism of the NT 30-41; Bonnard, La sagesse de l'AT 117-49; Carlston, JBL 99:87-105. An important exception to the earlier relative neglect of wisdom in the NT, and a stimulus to further study, was Bultmann, Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition 73-113 (plus Ergänzungsheft 13-15) (ET History of the Synoptic Tradition 69-108, 393-7).

/42/ See respectively Gese, SEA 44:78-9 (ET Horizons in Biblical Theology 3:24-5); Dunn, Christology in the Making 163-212, 324-38; Terrien, Horizons in Biblical Theology 3:139; Crenshaw, Studies 1.

7.5 The polarity of God's involvement in the regularities of life (creation) and his acts of deliverance (redemption)

The OT embraces, then, both the theme of God's acts of deliverance in the history of Israel as his special people, and his involvement in the regularities of life which makes it possible for the natural world to be a place of blessing if it is approached in wisdom. How do these two themes relate to each other?

W Zimmerli has observed that 'wisdom thinks resolutely within the framework of a theology of creation' /43/. That unequivocal statement can be questioned. Proverbs, at least, specifically appeals to self-interest more often than to creation, while Job's relationship to creation is ambiguous - the theophany appeals essentially to creation, yet Job only sees creation's message when God intervenes to point out what it is; Ecclesiastes is thus the OT's most unequivocally creation-orientated wisdom book /44/. It would be wiser to describe creation as wisdom's premise or domain assumption, rather than as its direct teaching /45/. Nevertheless, a theology of creation, which emphasizes God's

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/43/ Gottes Offenbarung 302 (ET SJT 17:148). Cf von Rad, Theologie 1:143-4, 451 (ET 1:139, 452-3); Gesammelte Studien 143-7 (ET Problem 139-43); Procksch, Theologie 400.

/44/ Cf Zimmerli himself on Proverbs in his much earlier article on the structure of OT wisdom, ZAW 51:177-80, 188-92 (1933) (ET Studies 175-8, 185-8), and on Ecclesiastes, Gottes Offenbarung 311-5 (ET 155-8) (cf also H-P Müller, ZAW 90:238-53).

/45/ Cf Crenshaw, Studies 33-5; Hermisson, Israelite Wisdom 43-4; Barton, JTS 32:16-17.



ongoing involvement in the regularities of the world which he created and maintains in existence, underlies wisdom; as it underlies an emphasis on God's blessing in everyday experience and an emphasis on his involvement in nature. This suggests that we may speak of the two themes we are considering in terms of the theological expressions 'creation' and 'redemption'.

A polarity between God's more occasional historical acts of deliverance and his ongoing involvement in the regularities of life has been noted on various occasions and analysed in various ways: e.g. as Abrahamic/Mosaic, as Abrahamic/Deuteronomic, as deliverance/blessing, as teleological/cosmic, or as reform/form /46/. Most commonly it is focused in terms of Moses and David /47/. These analyses overlap and contradict each other /48/, showing that the models <sup>n</sup>cannot be set up in a sharp-edged way, even though it is heuristically useful to polarize them in one way or another.

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- /46/ See respectively Leenhardt, La parole et le buisson de feu (ET Two Biblical Faiths); P D Miller, Interpretation 23:462; Westermann (see section 7.4 above); Hanson, Dynamic of Transcendence 67-9 and Diversity of Scripture. For further examples see Brueggeman, JSOT 18:3-8; Herion, JSOT 21:49-50; Eichrodt, Theologie 1:24 (ET 1:66-7).
- /47/ See classically Rost, TLZ 72:129-34; also Rylaarsdam, JES 9:249-70; recently Brueggemann, JBL 98:161-85.
- /48/ Compare with each other the analyses of Leenhardt, Rylaarsdam, and Brueggemann; see also the critiques of Brueggemann's view of David by Fishbane (JBL 93:458) and Myers (CBQ 35:368).

A second issue raised by the study of this polarity is that of the relative status of the two models. Generally, one of them is treated as ultimately more significant than the other. To express them as Mosaic-Davidic (or as Abrahamic-Mosaic), for instance, is itself to presuppose terms of reference which emphasize once-for-all acts in history. An interest in nature, blessing, or wisdom is then made to fit a historical scheme, following the OT narratives' own linking of these with the original creation event and with David and Solomon /49/. The assumption that the Torah is normative over the Writings may also make it seem desirable to bring the concerns of the latter under the umbrella of the former. In recent OT study, furthermore, as represented both by the Eichrodt-von Rad axis and the Mendenhall-Gottwald axis, between these two models the Mosaic (standing for a

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/49/ Following Genesis, Zimmerli links Proverbs with Gen 1 - 2 (Gottes Offenbarung 307-8 [ET 151-2]), Barth links the Song of Songs with Gen 2:24-5 (Dogmatik III, 1:357-70 [ET 311-24]), Hertzberg links Ecclesiastes with Gen 3 - 4 (Prediger 230), while Dubarle sees wisdom's theological background as lying in the Noah covenant (ETL 44:419). Hendry notes that systematic theology since Origen has generally followed Genesis in seeing creation as God's first act (Theology Today 78:409). Prussner notes that wisdom can be integrated with OT theology via David (Transitions 40-1), while Preuss affirms that linking wisdom to OT history is the way to integrate wisdom into biblical faith (EvT 30:406-12); cf von Rad's concern lest wisdom bypass salvation history and legitimate itself directly from creation (Theologie 1:452-3) [ET 1:451]).



strong interest in history) has the value-status.

Such an assumed ordering of priority is to be questioned /50/. Indeed it is possible to invert the comparative evaluation of the two models and avoid conceiving of the polarity in terms of once-for-all history at all. Thus G E Bryce speaks in terms of theocracy/law and kingship/wisdom; H H Schmid sees creation with its assertion of order and pattern in the world as the leading feature of OT faith and the true horizon for biblical theology; while R Knierim, in a wide ranging study of 'Cosmos and history in Israel's theology' turns the whole emphasis on history on its head: the just and righteous order of Yahweh's creation is the fundamental salvation reality to which history belongs, from which it separated, by which it is evaluated, and to which Israel's history of liberation witnesses /51/.

Others vacillate over the question of the two models' relative status

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/50/ Cf Murphy, Interpretation 23:279; Levenson, CBQ 41:210-5; and comments on the broader neglect of creation in theology in Hendry 406; Schmid, ZTK 70:1; Landes, USQR 33:81-2 (noting especially K  ng's Christ sein [ET On Being a Christian]). Brueggemann, however, sees process theology as located on the Davidic trajectory (liberation theology being located on the Mosaic) (JBL 98:184).

/51/ See respectively Legacy of Wisdom 209-10; ZTK 70:1-19; Horizons in Biblical Theology 3:95, 98. Cf Priest's stress on creation's fundamental importance in the OT (see JAAR 36:315).

/52/. This itself perhaps points towards recognizing the relationship between creation and history, creation and redemption, or cosmos and history as thoroughly dialectical /53/. The OT itself both interconnects them (in the Hexateuch) and sets them side by side (if one considers the broad sweep of the narrative books and that of the poetic books over against each other), without clearly making one subordinate to the other. The OT, then, speaks both of God's everyday

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- /52/ See e.g. H W Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation 238 (emphasizing wisdom), 231, 241 (subordinating wisdom); Westermann, Segen (emphasizing the blessing theme), What Does the OT Say about God? 11-12, 99-100 (stressing story and events, and excluding wisdom from OT theology); Brueggemann himself, JBL 98:161-85 (enthusing especially over the Mosaic trajectory), In Man We Trust and Israelite Wisdom 86-7 (advocating the importance of wisdom and the positive features of the Davidic trajectory) (see also JAAR 38:267-80 for this ambivalence).
- /53/ So Hanson, Dynamic Transcendence 29-30, also now Diversity of Scripture. Cf R B Y Scott, 'Priesthood, prophecy, wisdom and the knowledge of God', JBL 80:1-15, seeing these as parallel ways whereby God communicates with man; also Whedbee, Isaiah and Wisdom 152-3 on the way both visionary experience and empirical observation fed into the insights of Isaiah (cf Wildberger, VTSup 9:83-117). The three formulations of the dialectic expressed in the text here are those of Westermann (Gospel and Human Destiny 11-38); Lindeskog (Root of the Vine 1-22); and Knierim 59-123. The last has the advantage of referring clearly to the ongoing state of the world, not merely to an original once-for-all event (which 'creation' easily suggests - in line with the OT's own usage of the term).



involvement in the ongoing life of nature and cosmos, of nation and individual, with the insights that emerge from an empirical study of these realities, and of his once-for-all acts of deliverance on behalf of his particular people Israel, with the specific insights that are given in association with those acts, and raises the question for us here of how we correlate them without subordinating one to the other.

One approach to doing so would involve noting what they have in common. Both seek to bring order (continuity, generalization) to the specific and concrete, or to allow such order to emerge from it. Both presuppose a trust in Yahweh as one whose actions are an embodiment of wisdom, ordered, not random, yet free, a trust based on experience of his ways. Both require as well as trust, insight; as well as a sensitivity to God's activity, an openness to a secular way of looking at events and their interconnections. Both contrast with myth in offering paradigms of the relative, changing, temporal nature of all human experience. Wisdom and other ways of thinking that link with the creation trajectory develop in history and find links with history in the person of Solomon and in the ministry of prophets such as Amos and Isaiah; historical thinking depends on assumptions about God's regular activity and is actually put into writing by 'wise men' /54/.

Redemption might thus be spoken of as an act of creation, and creation

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/54/ Cf Rendtorff, EvK 9:216-8; also Beiträge 344-51; Schmid, WD 13:9-21, also Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit; Collins, CBQ 41:185-204; Pannenberg, Gerhard von Rad 43-5; Ricoeur's observations on the similarity between history and fiction (Semeia 13:177-202); McKenzie, JBL 86:1-9; Hermisson, Probleme biblischer Theologie 136-54.

as God's first act of salvation /55/.

Creation and redemption are not to be set in too sharp a disjunction. But neither are God's universal involvement in life's regularities and his particular redemptive acts in Israel's history simply to be assimilated to each other. The OT does not systematically integrate statements about creation into the acting of God in history; it does not see creation itself as an act of liberation in the way that other peoples did /56/. The polarity we are concerned with is not to be dissolved by subordinating one pole to the other, or by assimilating the two poles. Our concern is to tease out the various ways in which the two poles relate to each other, preserving the tension between them. Four facets of the relationship between creation and redemption which emerge from the OT material will be considered in sections 7.6-9.

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/55/ So Gutiérrez, Theology of Liberation 153 (paraphrasing von Rad). Cf Luther's 'in created things lies the forgiveness of sins' (I have not been able to locate the source of this quotation).

/56/ Westermann, Gospel and Human Destiny 15; Landes notes that there had been no bondage antecedent to creation from which the world had to be liberated (USQR 33:79-81). It is difficult to instance the OT speaking of creation as an act of liberation; it is not clear that the passages quoted by Knierim (p 98) to make this point (e.g. Psa 74; 77; 89; 136; 148; Isa 51:3-10) refer to creation rather than to the exodus. As Cooper notes (USQR 32:25-35), this raises problems for liberation theology's approach to creation (see n 55).



7.6 The world God redeems is the world of God's creation

The two ideas, creation and redemption, correspond to two aspects of man's understanding of his position in the world. Although the OT sometimes relates these to each other as a chronological sequence (man was first created, then redeemed), even Genesis recognizes that the world does not cease to be God's ordered creation when man is in a state of rebellion and in need of redemption. The redemptive revelation presupposes an existent relationship of the world and man with the creator. Creation is not only the preparation for redemption but its permanent horizon; the total view of created reality expressed in Gen 1 - 2 continues to take precedence over the narrower concern with a particular redeemed people which follows /57/.

The creation-wide perspective of Gen 1 appears also in many Psalms, especially the hymns, which respond directly to the wonder of God's handiwork still perceptible in his world, and call the whole cosmos to praise him. The poetic books sometimes refer to creation as a historical event, like Genesis, but characteristically they stress the ongoing activity of God in his creation. To suggest that they think in terms of continuous creation would be anachronistic /58/, but they emphasize that as well as giving life at the beginning, God ever gives life to the world and man; as well as establishing order in the world at the beginning, by his creative power he goes on maintaining the

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/57/ Cf Knierim 82-9 and 122 (n 60); Westermann, Genesis 241.

/58/ Cf Westermann, Gospel and Human Destiny 23; Genesis 241.

world's order and restrains forces that oppose it /59/. Thus in the poetic books man is not just 'lost', and the world is not just the sphere of Satan's activity. Man in the world is given life by God; he forms each individual as once he formed Adam (e.g. Psa 139:13-16) and man is in continuing dependence on God for the breath of life, as originally Adam was (Job 34:14-15). Before God as creator, sustainer, and saviour, he is invited to enjoy life fully, to live it responsibly, to master it actively, to understand it intelligently /60/.

An understanding of God, man, and the world which comes from creation, reason, and human experience to man as man will not be confined to the particular people on whom the salvation history focuses. It is based on principles common to humanity at large. There is therefore a theological rationale for its manifesting parallels to and being overtly open to the thought of other peoples (e.g. Prov 22:17 - 23:11; 30:1; 31:1; Job). It encourages us to be open to what there is to learn from all of human endeavour and insight, without abandoning the conviction that there is something distinctive about the biblical tradition.

Conversely, God's creation relationship with man as man implies his

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/59/ Cf Hermisson (Israelite Wisdom 48-51) on Psa 84; 93; 104; H W Robinson (p 23) on Neh 9:6; Westermann (Genesis 2, 64-5) on the different treatments of creation order in Genesis and Psalms; Landes (USQR 33:79-80) on Psa 124:8 as holding together present experience of Yahweh's activity and his past creative activity.

/60/ Cf Murphy's comments on the stimulus here towards 'theological anthropology', Interpretation 23:292.



concern about all men; this concern is not limited to those within the stream of salation history. `By me kings reign`, says the Wisdom inherent in creation (Prov 8:15-16), drawing attention to God's universal revelation of how to live successfully, while Gen 1 - 11 indicates that `the so-called sal<sup>y</sup>ation history can ... never be seen apart from the universal acting of God` /61/. Indeed, his concern is not only with humanity but with the whole cosmos in its own right, with which Genesis begins and to which Yahweh directs Job to warn him against thinking that the universe circulates around him.

Man's life as God's creature has its ethical norms, and creation morality is similar in content to the covenant expectations emphasized by salvation history, and just as authoritative as these /62/. Its basis, framework, and motivation, however, lie elsewhere, in the ordered nature of the world, man's assumed inherent moral awareness, his experience of life, and his reasoning about it /63/.

Convictions about the ordered nature of the world and life suggest a confidence in the world's trustworthiness which in the OT reflects a

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/61/ Westermann, The Gospel and Human Destiny 17; cf Schöpfung 168 (ET Creation 118); Dubarle, ETL 44:417-9. Landes (pp 83-4) notes that ultimately this implies God's concern for the liberation of oppressor as well as that of oppressed.

/62/ Cf Gemser, Adhuc Loquitur 144-9; Crenshaw, Prophetic Conflict 116-23; Nel, ZAW 93:418-26; against Zimmerli, ZAW 51:181-8 (ET Studies 178-84), with which cf Gese, SEA 44:81 (ET Horizons in Biblical Theology 3:27).

/63/ See at n 60 in section 2.5.1 above.

confidence in Yahweh himself - or, as the OT itself more often puts it, a fear of Yahweh /64/ - and a mutuality between experiences of the world and experiences of God /65/. Among the poetic books the Psalms, of course, take an overtly religious approach to creation. This is inherent in their form; if people were not responding to creation in a theistic way, it would not be psalms that they wrote. The opposite is true about the form of the wisdom books and the Song of Songs, which are intrinsically secular, man-centred, experiential, rational. These features are not felt to be in tension with a religious perspective. For Israel secular did not mean secularist, man-centred denoted a starting-point but not necessarily a total perspective, experiential included experience of God, and rational did not mean rationalist; it included an intuitive aspect. Religious or secular is thus a false

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/64/ On 'Fear of God' and the world view of wisdom', see Barré in BTB 11:41-3. Westermann notes that the OT itself does not speak in terms of faith in creation or in God as creator; faith applies to the 'special' acts of God, to God as deliverer (Segen 19-20 [ET Blessing 11-12]; Genesis 58-9). The place occupied by 'faith' in the NT as an overall term for man's response to God in Christ is taken in the OT by 'praise' (so What Does the OT Say About God? 69-70). Nevertheless, the OT's attempt to claim Yahweh's sovereignty over nature and its working was in our terms an act of faith, not something inevitable (cf Rogerson, OTS 20:77-9, 84). They could have seen Baal there instead.

/65/ Cf von Rad, Weisheit 87, also 250; cf 245-9, 390, 403-4 (ET Wisdom 62, also 194; cf 190-3, 307, 317-8). Von Rad actually says experiences of Yahweh, not merely of God; the formulation is open to Rogerson's criticism (see n 64).



antithesis. It is doubtful whether the poetic books - even apart from Psalms - are less religious than the histories /66/.

Indeed, it is the revelation of God that men receive from the created world; created things teach, declare, recount, make known ( נִגַּד, סִפֵּר, יָדַע ) (Job 12:7-9) /67/. As well as speaking to God in praise, creation speaks to man in wisdom. It speaks in grace: not actually using that word, but revealing the creator as the great giver, entrusting life with all its wondrous joys to man and not giving up on man despite his abusing of that ongoing trust. 'Creation is grace' /68/. In creation God reaches out in grace to all men, and in living in an ordered, created universe man has the prior contact with God and his ways upon which conversation about the possibility of redemption can build.

Not that there is any inevitability about wisdom's revelation reaching humanity (it needs a human teacher to speak for it). Indeed, 'revelation' may be a misleading category to apply to creation. First, the concept emphasizes divine initiative and human receptiveness,

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/66/ Cf von Rad 87, 375-8 (ET 62, 296-8); Priest, JAAR 36:314-5; Whybray, La sagesse de l'AT 153-65; Crenshaw, ZAW 82:382; also Lys's discussion of the theological significance of the Song of Songs, Lumière et Vie 144:35-53.

/67/ Von Rad, EvT 31:151-2; cf Weisheit 211-3, 382-5 (ET 162-3, 301-3); EvT 24:69-70 (ET Problem 159-61).

/68/ Barth, Dogmatik im Grundriss 56 (ET Dogmatics in Outline 54) (quoted in Young, p 90). See also Whybray, Two Jewish Theologies 16; Brueggemann, Interpretation 24:12-19; In Man We Trust 119-20.

whereas learning from creation involves human initiative - even if one sees the task as that of opening oneself to the cosmic, moral, and social order, present in the world by God's creation. The discovering of and the living in accordance with the cosmic order are hard work; they are not simply given. They are a 'response to God' in the form of a 'striving after knowledge' /69/.

Secondly, the concept of revelation suggests an extraordinary activity on God's part, an unveiling of what otherwise conceals itself, whereas the notion of learning from creation presupposes that there is a resource of insight permanently available in creation, not one which manifests itself only occasionally /70/.

Thirdly, 'revelation' suggests the manifest, inescapable unveiling of something otherwise hidden, whereas the wisdom books suggest rather that reality is divided between matters of clear meaning (no revelation being required in order to see them) and matters of such deep mystery that they cannot be grasped (no revelation being given in order to grasp them). Their mystery may be sensed, but not entered into. For Job, being confronted by this perspective is ultimately reassuring. Ecclesiastes, however, makes a vice out of the necessity that the mystery of meaning is beyond man's grasping.

Part of what creation reveals, or of what creatures discover, is that God

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/69/ Von Rad, Theologie 1:363 (ET 1:365); Weisheit 159 (ET 119).

/70/ Westermann especially disputes the use of revelation language for creation: e.g. Genesis 240-1; What Does the OT Say About God? 21.



is active in the regular, interrelated features of the world, as well as the irregular, the 'miraculous', the 'acts of God' which 'break natural laws'. God is the God of the normal chain of cause and effect, who is involved in every historical event. Indeed, a belief in such a presence of God in the mysterious depths of reality as a whole (an understanding which holds together faith, reason, and experience) is the presupposition of faith in a divine activity in particular historical events. The latter depends on the former. It is because the whole of history can be seen as the act of God that particular events can be seen as his acts of special significance for mankind's salvation /71/. It is because Yahweh is the creator that he can be expected to act in history (cf 1 Sam 2:8; 2 Kings 19:15-19), both to judge his people (1 Sam 12:17; the doxologies in Amos) and to save them (Josh 10:12-13; Isa 40:12-31).

In the NT, the creation revelation of God is treated directly by Paul in Rom 1:18-20; the actual language of revelation appears here (ἀποκαλύπτω, φανερώω), though the revelation fails to achieve its goal. The Paul of Acts appeals to what people can know as creatures (and to the limitations of that knowledge), to pave the way for his proclamation

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/71/ Cf Pannenberg's comments on von Rad, Gerhard von Rad 51, also Hanson, Dynamic of Transcendence 101; Buss notes the affinities with wisdom detectable in Pannenberg (Theology as History 148-9). The link between wisdom and philosophical theology is illustrated by the taking up of the relationship between all events and particular events as acts of God by writers such as Gilkey (JR 41:194-205), Ogden (JR 43:1-19) and Kaufman (HTR 61:175-201).

of Christ. Jesus' own treatment of this theme is less explicitly theological, but in the end more far-reaching. It is he who appeals to the creator's concern for his world, to the rain falling on the just and the unjust, to nature's embodiment of the ways of God and man (see especially the parables), assuming that those whose eyes are open to the world will also be open to God /72/.

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/72/ Cf Carlston's comments, JBL 99:105; also Edwards, Theology of Q 58-79.



## 7.7 The world God created is a world that needed to be redeemed

7.7.1 As God's creature, man has to accept certain limits /73/. He is not God, and part of his submission to God is to accept the limits that God places upon him. The OT narrative expresses this in terms of a prohibition of access to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, a prohibition issued at the moment of creation.

Proverbs recognizes its limits by declaring that in principle a grasp of wisdom depends on a prior commitment to Yahweh (1:7), and then by acknowledging that we cannot by thinking, observation, and analysis solve all the questions and problems which our experience of life raises. There remains an element of ambiguity and unpredictability about life, before which the wise man can only acknowledge the hand of God, the 'act of God' (see e.g. Prov 16:1,9). 'The future is largely determined by our present decisions so we should act responsibly', but 'in spite of our best planning there is an inscrutable mystery about our experience which we cannot master or manipulate' /74/. The wise men do seek to bring order to the manifold nature of human experience, but they also recognize the limitations of what they can achieve in this venture /75/. Trust in Yahweh or fear of Yahweh replaces confidence

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/73/ On this theme, see especially von Rad, Weisheit 131-48 (ET 97-110).

/74/ Brueggemann, In Man We Trust 60; cf Collins's treatment of the open implications of both a proverb's form (concrete, analogical) and its epistemology (appeal to experience, which is intrinsically historical and unpredictable) (Semeia 17:1-17).

/75/ Murphy repeatedly emphasizes this point: see e.g. Israelite Wisdom 36; Interpretation 23:294).

in order; as long as limitations continue to be recognized and trust continues to be the wise man's stance, there is no need for the crisis brought about when dogma devoid of contact with experienced reality causes trust in order to give way to doubt or scepticism. True wisdom involves an unfinished dialogue rather than the construction of a comprehensive system /76/.

The tension between the search for order and the acknowledgment of limits is heightened by Job and Ecclesiastes. Job's friends take their stand on the dogma of order, but they are not rationalists: their world 'is surrounded by the insurmountable wall of the inexplicable' /77/. Job himself agonizes for an overall perspective that can do justice to his experience, and Eliphaz accuses him of wanting to know too much (15:8). But he early on acknowledges that God the creator can neither be resisted nor comprehended (9:4-14) and returns to this theme near the end of the dialogues (26:7-14); it is expounded in the wisdom poem (ch 28) and taken further by Yahweh himself in his reply to Job (chs 38 - 39). Ecclesiastes, too, sets the question of a total understanding in the centre of his work, and has to acknowledge more grudgingly that he cannot reach the tree; man cannot come to any deep comprehension of

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/76/ Von Rad 404-5 (ET 318-9); cf Crenshaw, RevExp 74:364-5, also noting that מַחֲסֵם is thus not too easily to be identified with ma'at (cf von Rad 143-4 [ET 106-7]; Murphy, CBQ 29:414; Halbe, ZTK 76:381-418; against Schmid, Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung; Würthwein, Wort und Existenz 201-7 [ET 116-23]).

/77/ Von Rad 372 (ET 293).



what God is doing (3:10-11) /78/. Ecclesiastes is thus the frontier-guard who leads wisdom back to an awareness of the limitations of her empirical approach - or is himself a danger signal on a dangerous road /79/. Whatever of the ways of God can be perceived in his world, something beyond the witness of nature, reason, or everyday experience is needed if one is to perceive creation's deepest mystery or the creator's identity /80/.

7.7.2 The barring of access to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil suggests limitations which are behavioural as well as cognitive. Man is not given total freedom. In Genesis, his power over the created world is given positive direction and is also negatively hedged. There is a certain ambiguity about his position: he is sent into a world which he will have to tame, deprived of access to what looks like a potential key resource, and subject to the blandishment of at least one rather wily fellow-member of God's creation.

The negative aspect of life in God's world is alluded to in material such as the Psalms that majors on the world as God's good creation. Psa 104 contrasts with J in portraying creation not as a quality of life now diminished or lost but as a present attribute of the natural world /81/. Yet even Psa 104 is aware of the dark side to the created

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/78/ Cf Crenshaw, Studies 28-30.

/79/ So respectively Zimmerli, Gottes Offenbarung 314 (ET 158); von Rad 303, 401 (ET 235, 315-6).

/80/ Cf Knierim 91-2.

/81/ Steck, World and Environment 79.

world: the need for the waters to be restrained, hinting at the experienced threat of their bursting their bounds (6-9), the darkness of night itself (20), Leviathan albeit reduced to the Loch Ness Monster (26), the suffering and death that follow Yahweh's mysterious turning away of his face and taking away of his breath (29), the trembling of the earth despite its allegedly secure foundation (32), the presence in the world of moral evil yet unpunished (35). Psa 93 affirms that Yahweh reigns and that the world stands immovably firm, yet it does so in the context of acknowledging that the floods hurl themselves against his order. Psa 113 makes similar affirmations in the context of acknowledging the existence of the poor, the downtrodden, and the barren.

The dark side to life also appears in the background of the thanksgiving Psalms, which look back on some experience of it. Proverbs recognizes it when it acknowledges or presupposes the inequalities of life, and when it portrays man wooed not only by Miss Wisdom but by Miss Folly, so that the 'organizing voice' of wisdom can be lost if it is not heeded, with catastrophic consequences /82/.

- 7.7.3 The negative aspect of life becomes more prominent in Genesis with ch 3. Man's response to hedges is to tear them down (cf Ezek 28 as well as Gen 3). His need of redemption now arises not merely from the

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/82/ See Crenshaw, RevExp 74:366; von Rad 210 (ET 161). Von Rad also discusses Proverbs' treatment of some of life's inequalities and unhappinesses, though he notes the substantial absence of value-judgments in this material (pp 153-6 [ET 115-7]).



intrinsic limitations of his creatureliness, but from the added limitations of his sinfulness, climaxing in personal death and cosmic destruction. His inclination to use power in whatever godless way he likes is now not merely possible but actual, in the story of Cain and Abel, in the violence that leads to the flood, and in the instincts expressed in building a tower that will reach heaven. A hedging of man's power by God's words is therefore reinforced by his chastisements /83/. That confidence about life in its Gen 1 - 2 aspect which also predominates in the Psalms of praise, Proverbs, and the Song of Songs, thus gives way to a more sombre perspective in Gen 3 - 11.

There is, however, an ambiguity about Gen 3 - 11, the reverse of the ambiguity that appears in Gen 1 - 2. Life east of Eden is not a reversion to total dis-order. When man oversteps his limits, he is not thereby deprived of God's effective blessing, nor indeed of his saving acts. Even Cain in his deserved vulnerability is saved by the mark Yahweh puts on him. Even the profoundly violent humanity and the profoundly spoilt world is saved by the preserving of a human and animal remnant and the ebbing of a flood. After that event, furthermore, the permanent preservation and blessing of the world is promised and covenanted (8:15 - 9:17) /84/. There is nothing wrong with the realm of creation in itself. The cosmos was created whole and secure and remains so (Gen 1) even if man and history have put themselves out of joint in relation to it, and even if it becomes God's

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/83/ Coats, Interpretation 29:233-4.

/84/ Cf Westermann, Schöpfung 171-2 (ET 120-1).

means of chastising man (Gen 3; Deut 28). It still serves God's will; it is not spoilt in itself. The world is established and cannot be moved (Psa 93:1). If the OT comes to promise a new creation it is because man's rebellion makes him experience the present cosmos as a locus of disorder. It is thus history which is the real locus of disorder /85/.

The Gen 3 - 11 aspect of life is the focus of the Psalms of lament, Job, and Ecclesiastes. In a lament, sometimes a renewed confidence about life in its Gen 1 - 2 aspect may appear, so that a lament becomes a psalm of trust or confidence; but alternatively, any residual such confidence may dissolve, so that the afflicted person's eyes focus exclusively on his experience of suffering, isolation, and abandonment, never to be raised again (so Psa 88 /86/). In Job and Ecclesiastes the entire books concern how one copes with the experiential and intellectual consequences of life east of Eden, where the creator's revelation seems invisible and his grace obscured. Job (by including the friends' speeches and by ending the way it does) and Ecclesiastes (by including much proverbial material) acknowledge the truth in the more positive teaching of Proverbs - there is an ambiguity here, too - but they insist it is not absolutized, as if we could still live in Gen 1 - 2. When understanding faces the ultimate questions of reality, it may well feel that it encounters a 'merciless darkness' /87/.

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/85/ Knierim 80-1, 94-7, 119-20; Kraus, Biblisch-theologische Aufsätze 157, 168, 172.

/86/ On Psa 88 among the laments, see Brueggemann, JSOT 17:8-9.

/87/ Knierim 91-2, quoting von Rad, EvT 24:69 (ET 159, 'hopeless gloom').



7.7.4 The poetic books and the histories offer different strategies for coping with man's situation thus conceived. The poetic books explore the redemptive potential of the creation order itself. As creation is an ongoing activity of God and a present human experience, so is redemption. Salvation comes to man through 'factors inherent in creation itself'; 'creation theology has a soteriological character' /88/.

The Psalms of praise, Proverbs, and the Song of Songs still focus more on life in its Gen 1 - 2 aspect, the Psalms of lament, Job and Ecclesiastes more on life in its Gen 3 - 4 aspect; but both seek to overcome the limitations imposed in Gen 3 - 4, if not those of Gen 1 - 2. In the Song of Songs 'love is represented [in 8:6-7] as a force which is able to overcome the negative forces which threaten the very existence of world and mankind .... Love gains the victory over chaos and creates wholesome order and life' /89/. In this new paradise-garden with its fruit trees (4:12-13) the tension of Gen 2 - 3's garden is gone. 'No serpent bruises the heel of female or male'; love's lyrics are redeemed and redemptive /90/.

Once more, however, there is an ambiguity in the picture. Ecclesiastes, too, re-creates the outer form of paradise garden with its fruit-trees, but he acknowledges that he has not re-created the inner reality (2:5,11). The Song of Songs is aware of the point: even here death,

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/88/ ET from Schmid, ZTK 70:8; cf von Rad, Weisheit 399 (ET 314).

/89/ Tromp, La sagesse de l'AT 94.

/90/ Tribble, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality ch 5 and p 156.

shame, separation, and domination are still realities of experience, and perhaps the rareness with which the positive note struck in the Song is heard in the OT (and is echoed in the Song's interpretation) reflects the need to see the topic in the light of the limits of life east of Eden /91/.

A comparable recognition that creation theology's resources cannot solve all the problems it can perceive may be implied by the building of bridges with the histories' approach to creation and redemption. Psa 19 and Job 28 recognize that the voice of God cannot be properly heard in creation and that the secret of the universe cannot be found; they go on to express the conviction that one may better understand the cosmos and God's involvement with it, if one understands Israel and God's involvement with her /92/.

7.7.5 Genesis also seeks to relate these two understandings, but from the opposite direction, setting Israel against the background of an understanding of the world. After its gloomy portrayal of the intrinsic limitations of man's creatureliness and the added deprivations of his rebelliousness, it reaches a turning-point when God takes hold of Abraham and his family and declares his intention to make him a model of blessing and thus a means of blessing to the world. The

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/91/ Cf Landy, JBL 98:524; Pope, Song of Songs 668-9; Barth Dogmatik III, 1:357-77 (ET 311-29).

/92/ Cf von Rad, EVT 24:66-71 (ET Problem 156-63). Von Rad also considers Prov 8 (where, however, it seems to me that a concern to relate creation wisdom and redemption revelation is less marked), and Sir 24.



ambiguity between the two aspects of human existence, which it portrays as arising in history, was - or has begun to be - solved in a particular sequence of events beginning with Abraham and Moses. This sequence of events offers a resolution of the twofold need suggested by Gen 1 - 11. One need is of a revelation of the mystery of man's place in the world and the meaning of reality as a whole. The wisdom books recognize this mystery and do not expect to resolve it; the historians are confident that they can see the heart of its meaning /93/.

The other need is of a release from the bondage into which man's longing for freedom had taken him. So alienation from God is replaced by a covenant with him, family disruption (Gen 4; 9:20-7) by a family relationship with him, insecurity by a place to possess, violence and oppression by liberation and a concern for justice. This begins to take place through the once-for-all historical events of the call of Abraham, the exodus, the meeting at Sinai, and the occupation of Canaan. Henceforth the power of creation is enjoyed only through the explicit celebration of the events of God's salvation for his people in her history. They cannot relate to and appropriate the power of

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/93/ Cf von Rad, Weisheit 371-3 (ET 292-4). Von Rad also suggests that, whereas wisdom teaching was in need of legitimation, for the histories legitimation was superfluous (p 370 [ET 291-2]). Surely both wisdom and history found their legitimation in the same place, in the factuality of concrete experiences? It is these experiences (historical events) that the histories actually relate; their legitimation is contained within them, in their factuality and meaningfulness.

creation `direct`; order is not allowed to triumph over liberation /94/.

The difference between the poetic books' approach to redemption and that of the histories should not be drawn too sharply. Psa 19 and Job 28 build bridges between the two from one side. The stories of Saul, David, and Solomon do so from the other side, for they take the wisdom approach and challenge people to follow David's way and avoid Solomon's. Admittedly even they raise the question whether this call can be heeded, whether man inevitably fails to live up to the trust placed in him. Even David is, after all, an ideal type; the historical David betrayed trust and misused power /95/. Nevertheless the histories assume that it is the God of creation who redeems in history, it is the God who is lord of all history who exercises his lordship in particular in Israel's history; redemption as well as creation is an embodiment of the creator's wisdom, and redemption history serves creation by taking steps towards its restoration.

The creation which history serves also becomes the instrument of history, as Yahweh uses creation (flood and storm, earthquake and plague) as his means of salvation and judgment. The events of Israel's history were of unique significance for the granting of insight into God's ways and for the achieving of man's redemption; these events were not merely one manifestation of the creative power that forms the

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/94/ Cf Coats 238; Brueggemann, JBL 98:172-4.

/95/ Cf Brueggemann, In Man We Trust 64-77, with Coats's comments, Interpretation 29:236.



world, but a universally important expression of it /96/. Thus the creation perspective of the poetic books provides the presuppositions for the redemption story, but the poetic books themselves are set in the context of a whole which is shaped by the salvation history approach.

Such conclusions are confirmed by the NT, where wisdom appears in several contexts that are reminiscent of the OT. In the synoptic tradition Jesus proclaims a wisdom designed for life in the last days, its basis modified by the fact that the rule of God is at hand /97/; further, Q's collection of the wise teaching of Jesus is earthed in salvation history by being incorporated in a gospel. In John 1, the notion of the Logos takes up ideas and terms from the wisdom tradition as well as from Gen 1, but reconnects them with salvation history in declaring that 'the word became flesh'. Romans asserts that the disorder of sin and guilt is replaced because of the Christ event by the order of righteousness and forgiveness /98/. 1 Corinthians both utilizes and attacks a concern with gnosis, as Isaiah both utilizes and opposes the wisdom approach, while Colossians 1 reflects the 'foundational significance' of wisdom theology outside the area where OT influence was inevitable, and brings together creation and

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/96/ Cf Steck 125-6; Knierim 97-8.

/97/ Cf Edwards, Theology of Q 78; Gese, SEA 44:97-102 (ET Horizons in Biblical Theology 3:40-5).

/98/ Cf Schmid, ZTK 70:12-14, trading on his identification ma'at = מֵטֶרֶם = δικαιοσύνη .

redemption, wisdom and cross /99/. Blessing becomes a motif expressing what God has done in Christ, fulfilling in him the promise made to Abraham (Gal 3:8-9,14; cf also Acts 3:25-6) and bestowing on us in him every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3) /100/. God's involvement in the regularities of life and his acts of deliverance in Israel's history intersect in the life and the achievement of Jesus.

At a moment when the trend of scholarship is to query the notion of salvation history and reaffirm the significance of creation theology, one needs to note how central to the Bible is its stress on particular once-for-all events which are God's means of bringing salvation to the world. It does encourage us to learn from creation, from reason, and from experience, but its understanding of how salvation came goes beyond this, and if this understanding raises difficulties for us, it nevertheless remains part of the skandalon of its message which as such requires close attention /101/.

This is not, however, to resolve the creation-redemption polarity in favour of the latter, for this would be to miss the object of redemption itself.

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/99/ Cf Gese 104-8 (ET 47-50).

/100/ On blessing in the NT, see Westermann, Segen 28-31, 66-97 (ET 24-6, 64-101).

/101/ Cf Cullmann's comments on Bultmann, Heil als Geschichte v-vi, 1-10 (ET 11-12, 19-28).



7.8 Man is redeemed to live again his created life before God

The object of redemption is the restoration of creation. Man is redeemed so as to live again his created life before God, the life God still intends for all his creatures.

Most people do not live at a moment when one of the great redemptive events occurs; they have to learn to live their lives before God nevertheless. Even the generation that does live at such a moment has to make the transition from that experience to ongoing life. The climax of the salvation history is thus only the beginning of ours, and salvation history's concern with once-for-all redemptive events achieved by God is its strength, but also its limitation. The salvation history tradition cannot stand on its own; the events it speaks of have to be earthed and applied, and their consequences for ordinary life worked out. We have to live historically in Pannenberg's sense - to live in the light of those once-for-all past historical events which shape the possibilities of life in the present. We have to live historically in Bultmann's sense, too - to make the decisions pressed upon us by our own historicity; and to live historically in Beardslee's sense - to live in time as the 'little history' in accordance with the continuities of our existence from day to day and from year to year /102/.

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/102/ JAAR 35:231. Rendtorff sees the most significant difference between wisdom and historical thinking as the former's concern with the present life of the individual, the latter's with the future of Israel as a community (Beiträge 352-3). Cf also Bultmann's understanding of

In the OT itself, creation is not a mere subordinate preamble to history; history's purpose is to fulfil the purpose of creation. The OT is as concerned with the mythicizing of history (the bringing out of history's permanent significance for ordered life) as it is with the historicizing of myth; as concerned with the cyclization of history (salvation history's fulfilment in the blessing of the ongoing agrarian life-cycle) as it is with a turning away from cyclic to linear history /103/.

This is reflected in the structure of the Pentateuch itself. Exodus (the salvation event) has Genesis (creation and its blessing) behind it; it also has Deuteronomy (renewed blessing in living the created life) after it. The promise to Israel's ancestors is of blessing in the form of increase and of land; the object of the occupation of the land is then life in the land. The promises of God are fulfilled, the Day of Yahweh's blessing is here, Israel has entered into her inheritance and begun to enjoy Yahweh's rest, she has begun the life of love and rejoicing that can be her privilege to the end of the age. The manna, the bread of saving, is now replaced by the produce of Canaan, the bread of blessing (Josh 5:12), as the God of salvation

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statements about God as creator as confessions of one's dependence on God (Jesus Christ and Mythology 69; cf EvT 1:175-89 and ZMR 51:1-20 [ET Existence and Faith 171-82 and 206-25]); with Young's comment that the doctrine of creation thus refers to man's historicity, not the origin of the cosmos (Creator, Creation and Faith 130).

/103/ Cf Schmid 8-10; Knierim 99.



history becomes also the God of fertility /104/.

Deuteronomy holds together Yahweh's special acts of deliverance and his involvement in the regularities of life in a variety of ways. It portrays Israel at the transition point from the one kind of experience to the other, celebrating her arrival in the settled, agrarian existence of her 'rest' in the land of her secure possession, an existence embedded in 'the structure of the cosmic space and its cyclic time', the life in the presence of the order of God's creation which was salvation history's goal (cf 26:1-11) /105/. A life of blessing in this land thus becomes part of the covenant relationship with its focus on the historical relationship between Yahweh and Israel. The covenant relationship in turn makes blessing in the regularities of life dependent on obedience to Yahweh; failing that, Israel will experience God's curse and once again stand in need of his act of deliverance /106/. The laws which Yahweh gave in history are also an embodiment of wisdom which the nations will recognize (4:6) /107/. Israel's cultic laws introduce her to living in accordance with the orders of creation in the realm of time (especially annual festivals, months, and days), food and sex; 'Israel's arrival in this seasonal-cyclic life is celebrated as the fulfilment of Yahweh's salvation-history with Israel'

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/104/ Cf Westermann, Segen 34 (ET 30); What Does the OT Say About God? 46; von Rad, Gottesvolk 61-4.

/105/ Knierim 99; cf Miller, Interpretation 23:461-5.

/106/ Cf Westermann, Segen 50-2 (ET 47-9).

/107/ See Weinfeld's study of links between Deuteronomy and wisdom, Deuteronomy 244-319; also works cited in ch 2, n 60 above.

and she now participates in the creation rest of God /108/.

Creation order is also implemented in the life of Yahweh's redeemed people in a life of justice and steadfast love in society. Justice and steadfast love constitute the essence of Yahweh's moral character as the holy one (see Isa 5:16; Hos 11:9), and therefore the essential character of the created world as he purposes it to be (see Psa 33:4-5 leading into the treatment of creation and history which follows; also 85:11-14; 89:10-15) /109/. Salvation history frees Israel to provide history with a paradigm of this creation order in her social life. If she does not (and often she does not), the creation order itself can be called to witness against her. It is the natural world which is the context of Israel's little history, blessing which is God's ongoing gift that brings it to its fulfilment, and wisdom which shows us the way to grasp that gift and to live the life of God's redeemed creature in God's created world. The 'worldliness' of the OT as a whole reflects its conviction that man's redemption by God releases him to live life in the world which God created, not out of it /110/.

It is perhaps Israel's subsequent experience of 'world-wide' empire that leads her to ask questions about the cosmos as a whole and Yahweh's relationship to it. While Israel's significance, and the significance of salvation history, can only be fully appreciated in

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/108/ Knierim 84, 103. Cf Eichrodt's treatment of time in priestly thinking (Theologie 1:228-33 [ET 1:424-33]).

/109/ Cf Knierim 87-8, 96, 99-100; also Schmid's thesis that  $\text{p}74 = \text{ma'at}$ .

/110/ Cf Zimmerli, Die Weltlichkeit des AT.



the light of creation, by a feed-back process creation is only fully appreciated in the light of Israel and of salvation history /111/. This involvement with the nature of the whole creation connects also with an awareness that the fulfilment of creation's purpose involves not just Israel but the world. Even if tradition-historically the primeval history is secondary to salvation history, and even if it is added to aid an understanding of Israel's significance, this does not establish that the object of the creation of the world is the existence of Israel rather than that the object of Israel's existence is to stand in service of God's creation of the world /112/. Salvation history finds its context in creation theology and is the context for it.

Thus the creation approach of the poetic books is the presupposition for the histories; yet the poetic books belong within the life of the redeemed people. This is rarely explicit in the way they actually speak, except in some of the Psalms. Elsewhere it appears in the use of the divine name Yahweh - though that is not universal. But a wisdom literature is given a distinctive flavour by its own cultural stream - hence 'every wisdom has its own history'; it is only people who know the Yahweh who made himself known in Israel's history who experience and describe life and the world as Proverbs and Psalms do /113/.

Historically, however, of course, these books belong in the life of

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/111/ Steck, World and Environment 125, quoting Link, Die Welt als Gleichnis 103.

/112/ Cf Knierim 69.

/113/ ET from Schmid, Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit 198; cf Steck 178.

the redeemed people in that they were composed (or adopted) here. In the OT itself, they follow the salvation story; they do not precede it /114/. The Psalms, then, are the praises and prayers of the redeemed people of God, whether or not they refer to events such as the exodus; Proverbs teaches a man how he may live before God the everyday life of a redeemed creature; the Song of Songs models for him what it means to love and be loved; Job pictures him coping with suffering; and Ecclesiastes reveals the believer wrestling with the doubt that can affect even those who have been on the receiving end of God's saving acts.

Even salvation history itself is only fully grasped in the light of the approach of wisdom. To see Israel's histories as actually deposits of wisdom thinking may be an exaggeration, but these histories do emerge from an interaction between on the one hand an awareness or conviction about certain once-for-all events and on the other a set of assumptions or questions which are similar to those of wisdom. Wisdom is thus the means of analysing, understanding, and testing salvation history. It will refuse to let salvation history keep its head in the clouds, and insist on clear thinking even in the area of faith's response to the 'acts of God'.

The NT is not as 'worldly' as the OT, yet it too sees that people have to live their everyday life even when they have been redeemed. It portrays Jesus blessing children, blessing bread, and blessing those he

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/114/ Cf Murphy, No Famine in the Land 123-4; Zimmerli, TLZ 98:92-5.



leaves with a peace that will stay with them /115/. It develops the parenesis in Paul's letters (sometimes, as in Romans, manifestly the working out of salvation history's implications for ongoing life). It preserves Q (albeit in its new narrative context), formulates the 'new law' of Matthew, and accepts James as a 'compendium of wisdom' /116/ despite its lack of specific redemption-content. It was natural, perhaps, for Luther, at a moment when the Pauline gospel came to life again, to inveigh against James, but life - Christian, redeemed, but created life - has to go on. The cross of Christ is God's wisdom; but Christ's concern with creation theology, as with law, is not to destroy but to fulfil it /117/.

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/115/ Cf Westermann, Segen 82-8 (ET 83-91). Cf Bonhoeffer's observations on blessing in the NT in his letter of 28 July 1944 (ET Letters 126-7; enlarged edition 374).

/116/ Hubbard, Tyndale Bulletin 17:23.

/117/ Cf Hermisson, Israelite Wisdom 55.

## 7.9 The redeemed humanity still looks for a final act of redemption/re-creation

7.9.1 In section 7.7 we noted that created humanity needed some further act on God's part because of the limits placed on his understanding and because of the bondage imposed on him as a result of his rebellion against the creator. God's redemptive acts might be expected to deal with these two needs, but they do so only partially.

We find further reasons why we cannot foreclose discussion of the relationship between creation and redemption by simply declaring that salvation history has solved the problem described by Gen 3 - 11; the ambiguity of human life remains after Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and David - and after Christ /118/. Genesis 12 - Revelation is as ambiguous in its way as Gen 1 - 2 and 3 - 11 are in theirs. Something of the tension between Gen 1 - 2 and Gen 3 - 11, the Psalms of praise and the Psalms of lament, Proverbs/Song of Songs and Job/Ecclesiastes continues. The inherent limitations and pressures of the created order remain; the added bondages of the rebellious order are not wholly overcome. We live as children of two ages, of this age and of the age to come, or of this age and of the age that is lost.

Still living east of Eden, man continues to experience limits; sage (or philosophical theologian) still finds himself unable to formulate satisfying answers to fundamental questions. Indeed, it is God's redeemed people, invited to live full lives in the created world, who

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/118/ Westermann, Beginning and End in the Bible 34.



most urgently discover the absence of God from their history. It is often in such a situation that an appeal to God's activity in creation becomes particularly forceful - as in Job and in Isaiah 40 - 55 /119/. God the creator is, of course, central also to Ecclesiastes. 'YHWH the Name, has disappeared for Koheleth. Only Elohim remains; but perhaps when one enjoys life and light, the Name, the Presence will reappear' /120/. Certainty and doubt, recognition and puzzlement, coexist in the believer's mind /121/.

In some ways Christ is the 'answer' to Job and Ecclesiastes /122/. Questions about the relationship between man and God, especially as they are raised by the experience of suffering, cannot be the same after the cross, and questions about death cannot be the same after the empty tomb. Nevertheless Christians can, and do, find themselves in the same position in relation to the tradition of their salvation events as some Jews evidently did in relation to theirs. These events come to seem rather remote (historically they are very remote). Christians can then find that Job and Ecclesiastes speak as powerfully today as they presumably did in post-exilic times. The questioning of Job and Ecclesiastes and the reading of earlier parts of the canon through wisdom's eyes may still facilitate a survival of faith which would

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/119/ Cf Brueggemann, JBL 98:176-9; Cross, Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic 343-6; Steck 209-13.

/120/ J G Williams, Studies 191, following Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent 450-60.

/121/ Cf Lévêque, Questions disputées 200.

/122/ Cf G C Morgan, Answers of Jesus to Job; Lauha, Kohelet v, 24, 37, 60.

otherwise be impossible /123/. Israelites experience suffering, defeat, and death, and then a renewed saving activity of God in which his creation power is reasserted (e.g. Psa 18:6-9,18-19), yet such experiences are never final, and thus they look for a future climactic experience of this same creative-redeeming activity (e.g. Psa 74; 77) /124/.

7.9.2 The ambiguity about Israel's position arises not only out of what happens to her but out of her own life. Rebellion against God is not merely a general human phenomenon which made salvation history necessary. It is also (and more strikingly) a consistent feature of Israel's own relationship with God, from the very moment of the sealing of that relationship (Exod 32 - 34) /125/. Saving acts of God in history were needed because the insights and energy of the created order itself were insufficient to solve the problems caused by humanity within the created order, but even the saving acts of God in history do not solve these problems. The works written for the redeemed people (laws, wisdom teaching, narrative, prophetic books) have that people's continuing sinfulness as a key focus.

In the end, Israel had to give up mythologizing history. It seems to be a good means of bringing judgment, but an ineffective way of implementing creation order. Even Israel's own history does not offer the paradigmatic implementation of Yahweh's creation order on earth

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/123/ Cf Guthrie, Wisdom and Canon.

/124/ Young 66-7.

/125/ Cf Westermann, What Does the OT Say About God? 55.



that it was meant to be, still less can it take the place of Yahweh's creation and sustaining of the world as a whole. Indeed, Israel's existence and form in history easily becomes an end in itself rather than the means of Yahweh's presence in the world, and when this happens that very history has to be imperilled by Yahweh himself in order to preserve an inverted form of witness to the priority of Yahweh's creation purpose. His aim in choosing Israel and involving himself in her history (that he should thereby take steps towards the restoring of creation order in the lives of all nations) remains unfulfilled except in this Pickwickian form /126/. History is then both the locus of Yahweh's activity and of <sup>his</sup> hiddenness from his people. History itself is not unequivocally revelatory; there is a plan of God being implemented in history (cf Isa 8:9-10; 14:24-7), but it is a plan that cannot be perceived by human wisdom (cf Isa 28:21; 29:14) /127/.

- 7.9.3 As well as continuing divine mystery and continuing human sin, a third factor makes for dissatisfaction with the redeemed order: continuing worldly mortality. To compare humanity with grass which springs up in the morning but fades and withers by evening (Psa 90:7; cf Isa 40:6) is explicitly gloomy about humanity but also implicitly gloomy about the world around him which mirrors his sad experience. Conversely, to contrast Yahweh's eternity with the perishable, aging, throwaway nature of his creation (Psa 102:26) explicitly exalts him but implicitly downgrades it.

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/126/ Cf Knierim 61-2, 97, 100-1, 108-9, with his reference to von Rad, Theologie 2:387-97 (ET 2:374-82) on the hiddenness of God.

/127/ Cf Zimmerli, VTSup 29:7-9.

7.9.4 The story of God's involvement with his people in the OT (and in the NT) is thus one that comes to no final resolution; it continues to drive forward. It cannot merely be seen as a 'study in crisis intervention' designed episodically to 're-establish a "steady-state" universe' /128/ (fullness of blessing in the created order). It must have its goal in some fuller realization of his purpose than history has yet seen. Thus some in Israel came to look for a new world, more intelligible, more just, more lasting, more fulfilled than the present one. Von Rad sets at the beginning of his treatment of prophecy in his Theologie the exilic Isaiah's exhortation, 'Remember not the former things nor consider the things of old. For behold I purpose to do a new thing' (Isa 43:18-19). The words are at least open to referring back beyond Israel's history to the event of creation, and forward beyond Israel's history to a new creation (as they do in 65:17).

Such hopes cluster in the book of Isaiah, though they do appear in other prophets and they take up aspects of poetic oracles and other promises of blessing located in the pentateuchal traditions (e.g. Gen 12 - 13; 49; Exod 3; Num 22 - 24; Deut 33) /129/. No doubt they reflect the diversity of the book's origins, which is matched by their own diversity of portrayal; yet it is striking that they surface in most of the various parts of the book, and give its whole a particular cast. Here Israel's royal ideal is explicitly projected onto the future Davidic ruler she hoped for, and the ideal keeps the notes of

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/128/ Patrick, Rendering of God 101.

/129/ Cf Westermann, Segen 36-8 (ET 32-4); Forschung am AT 235-8 (ET OT and Christian Faith 208-11). Schmid notes that they also correspond to wider ancient near eastern beliefs and hopes (ZTK 70:10-11).



wisdom, peace, justice, and harmony in nature; nature will now contain no threat to man, and the whole world will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh (9:5-6; 11:1-9; cf Jer 23:5-6). The 'Isaiah apocalypse' portrays final judgment as an act of de-creation affecting both the inhabitants of the world and the powers of the heavens (24:1-23); it also portrays a scene of final blessing and feasting which includes the abolition of death itself (25:6-8), that first undoing of God's creation which Genesis sees as the result of man's first rebellion. The further picture of restoration in Isa 35 portrays a blossoming of nature which turns desert into joyful abundance; human disability into joyful strength and wholeness; human danger, sin, and folly into joyful security, holiness and freedom.

Isaiah 40 - 55 relates overtly to a specific historical context, unlike most of the other material we are considering here; and these chapters provide evidence for the view that a concern with creation serves a concern with history. Transformation of nature is a means of Yahweh's purpose being effected in history (40:3-4; 43:19-20), or a metaphor for it (41:17-20; 44:3-4), or a sign of it (55:12-13). This last, however, also implies that renewed experience of creation blessing (progeny, land, peace, justice, security) is the object of God's activity in history (cf 54:1-17).

In several ways, the final chapters of the book of Isaiah go beyond this. They, too, relate specifically to Israel; even the existence of a new cosmic order serves her needs and is part of the transformation of historical experience which she will enjoy (60:19-20). The new

creation is embodied in the new Jerusalem (65:17-25). The security of that new heaven and new earth is also the security of Yahweh's people (66:22). At the same time, however, the new life that is here promised is the new life of a new creation; the best that can be promised to Yahweh's people is that they will enjoy long life and security, live in the homes they build, work and eat the fruit of their labour (65:17-25). Paradise is regained. In this sense what the book of Isaiah finally envisages is a restoration of creation order and a reintegration of human history into that order /130/.

In Christ all the promises of God find their 'Yes' (2 Cor 1:20). That assertion must include the promise of a new creation. What is true of all those promises is especially clear with this one, that this 'Yes' means not that in him they are all (yet) kept, but that in him they are all confirmed /131/. As the one in whom the whole creation holds together and in whom God's wisdom is embodied, and as the resurrected one, he brings new creation now to those who belong to him (2 Cor 5:17); he also guarantees that there will be a new heaven and a new earth (cf especially Revelation). The Gospel of John begins as the OT begins; the Revelation <sup>to</sup> ~~the~~ John and thus the NT itself ends as the OT (in its Greek/English shaping) ends.

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/130/ See further Knierim 104-8; Knierim also discusses the alternation between consummation of creation and new creation in Isaiah.

/131/ Cf Vischer, Christuszeugnis 1:28 (ET Witness of the OT to Christ 24), referring to Barth, 'Verheissung, Zeit-Erfüllung', Münchener Neueste Nachrichten 23.12.1930; Dahl, Israel 112-3 (ET Studies in Paul 136); Vriezen, Hoofddlijnen 131 (ET 100-1 [<sup>2</sup>123-4]).



7.9.5 In his study of Creator, Creation and Faith, Norman Young considers four theological approaches to his theme: the ontological (Tillich), the transcendentalist (Barth), the existentialist (Bultmann), and the eschatological (Moltmann) /132/. The categorization is strikingly similar to the four approaches to creation and redemption that we have been considering, though coincidentally so (I did not discover Young's book until after drafting this chapter). The sharpest contrast, once one considers the content of the theologians' work that Young studies, appears in his chapter on Moltmann, for here the prospect of a new creation becomes centrally a stimulus to Christian action 'designed to overcome the gap between what God has promised and what remains to be fulfilled' /133/. There are hints of such an understanding in the NT (notably in 2 Peter 3). Generally, however, the point of creation language is precisely to emphasize the transcendent origin of what God has done, is doing, or will do. The praxis Moltmann desires may be right, but its ideology lies elsewhere.

The biblical material on creation and redemption invites the reader to a highly paradoxical perspective. Each of the four facets of the

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/132/ Young actually deals with Barth first.

/133/ Young 154; see e.g. Moltmann's Theologie der Hoffnung 15-17, 304-12 (ET Theology of Hope 19-22, 329-38). Gutiérrez and Alves take a related approach to creation theology more generally: see their discussion of 'self-creation' and creation as a 'joint enterprise' (Gutiérrez, Theology of Liberation 155-60; Alves, Theology of Human Hope 136-45). Cf Cooper's analysis of process and liberation theologies' approach to creation, USQR 32:25-35.

mutual relationship of these two poles is in tension not only in itself but also with the other facets. The temptation is to opt for one rather than another /134/. The challenge of a constructive approach to OT theology is to hold them together as the varied facets of the dialectic or complementarity or counterpoint suggested by the OT's treatment of God's involvement in the regularities of our lives and his acts of deliverance in history, so that the whole can be fruitful for our own faith and living.

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/134/ Cf Knierim 107 on P and Isa 56-66.



8 Conclusion

This conclusion can be very brief. It is not designed to extend the argument of the thesis or to work out its implications further, but merely to summarize what its thrust has been.

We have been concerned with how theological study is to handle the diversity in viewpoints represented in the OT, and have examined three approaches to that question: that different viewpoints are appropriate to different contexts, that they reflect different levels of insight, and that they are all expressions of one underlying theology. We have suggested that some contexts allow themes to find more profound expression than others do, that levels of insight should be evaluated on the basis of criteria internal to the material so that we come to some positive evaluation of even the material that speaks to people's 'hardness of hearts', and that the one coherent OT theology which the interpreter seeks cannot be discovered beneath the surface of the OT but must be built up from the raw materials that the OT provides.

We have considered some themes of OT theology in the light of these approaches, and hinted at how each approach could be applied to other themes. Several themes have appeared in the context of more than one approach, for it is not implied that only one approach is appropriate to each. Probably for each theme one approach will be particularly illuminating, but each will generate insights /1/.

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/1/ How one theme can be considered in the light of all three approaches is illustrated by Lohfink's study of 'Man face to face with death' (Das

The chief implication of the thesis is that OT theology of the kind we have discussed can and needs to be written. In theology, as in other arts and sciences, correct method does not in itself guarantee worthwhile results, but it can help to sharpen insights, test hypotheses, and point the creative mind in the right direction. This seems to me to be the usefulness of the OT theologian studying approaches to the interrelation of diverse viewpoints in the OT. The content of the OT theology that he might write cannot be covered here; it would need to form the body of a work to which chapters such as these would constitute merely part of the preamble.

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Siegeslied 198-243, 271-3 [ET Christian Meaning of the OT 138-69]; cf section 2.5.3 above): differences between biblical perspectives on this theme reflect differences in context (see ch 2), variations in what people can accept (see ch 4), and the complexity in the range of attitudes appropriate to the subject (see ch 6). Note also Brueggemann's observation in JSOT 18:11-14 that a concern with balance and holding tensions (ch 6) can be a way of avoiding the particular commitment required by a context. Smend similarly observes that, though one can build bridges between Amos and P, as Amos's followers did (Smend refers to Weiser, Profetie des Amos 324), this is to betray Amos himself, because these were the bridges he was seeking to destroy (EvT 23:422-3); Smend adds that the cross is both a bridge breaking and a bridge building, both God's 'No' and his 'Yes', though even this gives us no excuse for a cheap avoidance of the thrust of Amos's message.



## Bibliography

The bibliography lists all works referred to in the text and notes of the thesis. Some of the work underlying the thesis has reached published form while I have been undertaking the research; I have not generally referred to this in the text or notes, but include the items in the bibliography.

Where more than one edition of a work is listed here, the use of = does not necessarily indicate that editions are identical; a later one may well be an updated version. The reference in text or notes is to the latest (British) edition, except where otherwise indicated. As is indicated in the prefatory pages, the form of reference and abbreviation is based on that used in the Journal of Biblical Literature (see Volume 95 [1976] 335-46).

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