THREE OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGIES FOR TODAY

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THREE OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGIES FOR TODAY

HELGE S. KVANVIG, WALTER BRUEGGEMANN AND ERHARD GERSTENBERGER

Hallvard Hagelia

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To the memory of our grandchild, Adine,
who died the day before her birth,
August 15, 2001.
We miss her

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Preface

The present work examines how three prominent Christian Old Testament scholars from, respectively, Scandinavia (Professor Helge Steinar Kvanvig, University of Oslo, Norway), the United States (Professor Emeritus Walter Brueggemann, Colombia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia) and Germany (Professor Emeritus Erhard Gerstenberger, University of Marburg) have approached the presentation of a theology of the Old Testament. In particular, this study looks at how these three scholars have explained how the message of the Old Testament should be addressed to our time. It explores how postmodernism has influenced the writing of Old Testament *Theologies*,[1] and how the three *Theologies* treated have been responded to by the guild of mainly[2] Christian Old Testament scholars in the Western hemisphere. I write 'Christian' Old Testament scholars, because writing Old Testament *Theologies* is a particularly Christian undertaking (cf. below). The present volume ends with an attempt at sketching the future directions for the study of Old Testament theology and the writing of *Theologies*.

The study of Old Testament theology has been under heavy pressure from different angles for decades, and it is fair to say that there has been no real consensus during the last half century about how to write an Old Testament *Theology*. The contributions published since the *Theologie des Alten Testaments* by Gerhard von Rad have been of very different character.

R.W.L. Moberly says:

> Within the last generation the face of academic biblical study has changed almost beyond recognition. In place of the overwhelming predominance of the 'historical-critical approach' (which involves a cluster of assumptions and methods rooted in Enlightenment), which had once been liberating and eye-opening to many but which had increasingly become mired in its own scholasticism, the field is now characterized by a plurality of pin-poses and methods rooted in 'postmodern' philosophical and theological assumptions. To be sure, there are lasting insights from 'historical-critical' work which must still be taken seriously; yet they are no longer considered to have the finality once generally ascribed to them (Moberly 2006: xiii).

1. In the present work the term '*Theology*' (with capital, in italics) is used to refer to books on theology, that is, Old Testament *Theology*, while 'theology' (lower case, no italics) refers to the discipline of Old Testament theology in general.
2. One Jewish scholar will be referred to, namely, Joel S. Kaminsky (1999).

In the same way, Walter Brueggemann claims that 'the development of the last fifty years have brought us to a quite new place in Old Testament theology' (2002: 412).[3]

Moberly and Brueggemann are just two voices addressing the issue of how the study of Old Testament theology has changed over the last decades. Numerous similar scholarly statements could have been presented. We need not go into more detail—it serves simply to state that these changes are the background against which the present study should be read.

Brueggemann has also pointed out that as long as the earlier models for what an Old Testament *Theology* should be like prevail, 'the new efforts do not seem to be "biblical theology", [because] they do not meet our preconceived notions of what the task is' (1994b: viii). Already in 1992, in the article 'Futures in Old Testament Theology' (p. 111),[4] he claimed that the only two things that could be claimed with certainty regarding Old Testament *Theology* are (1) that the ways of Walter Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad are no longer adequate, and (2) that there is no consensus among Old Testament scholars about what comes next. The reasons for this pluralism are obvious. On the one hand, we see a general difference in Christian and Jewish attitude to the concept of Old Testament *Theology*. Jews do not use the term 'Old Testament', preferring to speak of 'Hebrew Bible' or 'Tanak'—it is not necessary to go into the the reasons for this difference in terminology—yet Jewish scholars do not write '*Theologies*' either. The reason for this, it seems, is that writing Old Testament *Theologies* is a characteristically Christian enterprise, one that originated in the Christian tradition's Graeco-Roman legacy and within a framework of the Aristotelian way of thinking. Christians of Western tradition are prone to systematization.[5]

Another, and more important, reason is the pluralism and diversity within the Old Testament itself. There are so many aspects with the Hebrew Bible that it invites scholars to form different interpretations, to make differing selections with different emphases. Not only are the texts themselves of extremely different character, but also their relation to history and historiography is perceived very differently.

3. In this article W. Brueggemann reflects on developments in the US, with particular reference to postmodernism, the disintegration of the concensus claims of 'history', Norman Gottwald's *Tribes of Yahweh* (1979), Phyllis Trible's *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978), the discussion surrounding the so-called Biblical Theology Movement and the 'creation' of and return to a 'history of religion' approach. In particular, Brueggemann discusses Bernhard Anderson's *Contours of Old Testament Theology* (1999), James Barr's *The Concept of Biblical Theology* (1999) and Brevard Childs' *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testament* (1993), before responding to criticism raised to his own *Theology of the Old Testament* (1997), from B. Anderson, J. Barr and B. Childs.

4. In Brueggemann 1992.

5. Cf., e.g., Mead 2007: 4.

The big changes we have seen the last decades have another basic cause. Moberly uses the catchword 'postmodern' to characterize this new era, and Brueggemann is one eminent theological representative among others of this new era in Old Testament studies. Now seems to be a good time to take a closer look at some new interpretations of the Old Testament, and investigate how, for example, postmodernism actually influences the study of the Old Testament, evaluating its value for the study of the Old Testament. It is the objective of the present study to offer such an investigation. As will be shown, influences from postmodernism can be seen in different fields of Old Testament studies. Postmodernism impacts on introduction, exegesis, thematic studies, theology, and homiletics. Since taking up all these aspects would be too big a task, it is necessary to focus on a narrower angle.

The selection of the three scholars studied here is not done by chance. Geographically, the scholars analysed represent Scandinavia, continental Europe and the English-speaking world: that is, Norway, Germany and the United States of America. While I would not claim that those three scholars are representative for how Christian Old Testament scholars in these three parts of the world think about Old Testament theology—they do not represent a particular Scandinavian, German or American tradition per se, and their contributions are too original to be representatives of localized trends—they are undoubtedly three prominent voices in this scholarly field, ones worth listening to. Together with the reviews and responses they have garnered, the work of the three scholars discussed in the present volume opens up a window to an important aspect of how Christian Old Testament scholars approach the Old Testament at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

I have chosen to concentrate on these three scholars' respective Old Testament *Theologies*. All three scholars have written other articles and books. Walter Brueggemann has especially prolific in his scholarly output. Except for, to some degree, Helge S. Kvanvig, I have chosen to base my investigation on their *Theologies* alone. Therefore, my critics will easily miss references to other literature from Kvanvig, Brueggemann and Gerstenberger. I am fully aware of that. But a biblical *Theology* represents somehow the author's theological legacy, a summary of the research of the scholar concerned. I am therefore confident that these *Theologies* are representative for those scholar's theological scholarship. To be sure, D.G Spriggs (1974, cf. below) also concentrated on the *Theologies* of the scholars he studied—in his case Walter Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad—and not so much on other writings by the same scholars.

Why actually these three *Theologies*? Why not include Brevard S. Childs' *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, or Horst Dietrich Preuss' *Old Testament Theology*, James Barr's *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An*

Old Testament Perspective, Rolf Rendtorff's *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*—or others? For one thing, it is a question of capacity. Investigating all these *Theologies* would have produced an extremely large tome. Were the only idea to compare some groundbreaking *Theologies*, works that do not follow already well-worn tracks, then Childs' would certainly have been included. Had the idea been primarily to trace postmodern influences, then Kvanvig and Brueggemann would be good candidates for inclusion, but not Childs. Some critics will probably ask whether this criterion would justify including Gerstenberger. As I hope to demonstrate, I have my reasons for including him.

As will be shown, each of these three scholars has written a distinctive Old Testament *Theology*, the outcomes of which are very different. Yet they deserve to be called Old Testament *Theologies* (this is especially the case with Brueggemann). All three works are in some way, more or less, influenced by a postmodern way of thinking. Some might protest, but to my knowledge these three are, or are among, the most postmodern Old Testament *Theologies* so far written.[6]

Of the three works examined, Kvanvig's is the least well known—from the international perspective—for the simple reason that his *Theology* is written in Norwegian (*Historisk Bibel og bibelsk historie*).[7] Brueggemann *Theology* is the best known of the three. No doubt because of his extensive and impressive scholarly output over the decades, Brueggemann's *Theology* has received extensive attention. It is not to be overlooked that Gerstenberger's '*Theologies*', originally written in German and translated into English and Italian, has got significant attention.

As for methodology, one possible model to follow is that of D.G. Spriggs (1974) and his comparative and critical study of the *Theologies* of Walter Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad. He first presents Eichrodt's federal *Theology*, followed by von Rad's *Heilsgeschichte Theology*, before comparing them. I do something similar, here presenting, in turn, the approaches and conclusions of Kvanvig, Brueggemann and Gerstenberger. Yet I will also let their critics have their say, since these three theologians are undoubtedly engaged in a dialogue. Bringing in the views of the critics helps to broaden the perspectives of the debate. Spriggs finishes his book with a short *Conclusions* chapter. I want not only to conclude my study, but to try to open up new perspectives on the future of writing Old Testament *Theology*.

6. Some would probably call attention to John Goldingay's three-volume *Theology* as postmodern. Goldingay's work has not been taken into consideration here, since the volumes were unpublished at the time of writing.

7. Kvanvig is actually an internationally renowned expert on the book of Enoch and the Enoch tradition.

Investigating the Old Testament *Theologies* of these three scholars is the primary task of this book and, as stated, my main focus is on their *Theologies*. Nevertheless, side-glances are also taken to a few other works produced by these scholars, since it cannot be ignored that these scholars, and Brueggemann in particular, have made signficant contributions to the debate. But it is important to emphasize that this book does not seek or claim to give a complete summary or review of the scholarly output of Brueggemann—or Kvanvig and Gerstenberger. This is a study dealing with an aspect of their work, a study primarily of their postmodernist orientation, as it emerges from their *Theologies*.

That these Old Testament *Theologies* are individually very different is no surprise, since postmodernism is a very variegated matter. As Adams (1995: 1) claims: 'Postmodern thought is not one thing. Indeed, most postmodern thinkers would argue that it cannot and should not be just one thing; most varieties of postmodernism strike out against the very notions of identity and unity in one way or another. As a result, there are as many varieties of postmodernism as there are people who want to talk about the subject.' Any postmodern presentation of Old Testament theology is expected to differ from others' presentation.

The last few decades have seen postmodernism become increasingly influential. Postmodernism has influenced several aspects of culture and interpretation, theology included. This demonstrates that theology is a contemporary task. Any representation of a *Theology*, whether in Old Testament, New Testament, Systematics, or whatever, will inevitably be influenced by the age in which it was produced. People in general, including theologians, are children of their times and talk and write with the tongue and pen (presently *computer*, actually!) of their time.

The concluding chapter of this study, 'The Future of Old Testament Theology', is meant to be a prolongation of the project. My question are: What perspective does the development of Old Testament theology open for future writing of the study of Old Testament *Theologies*? Will more Old Testament *Theologies* be written? And if any Old Testament *Theologies* show up, what will they be like?

The presentation of Kvanvig's *Theology* differs somewhat from that of Brueggemann and Gerstenberger. Since Kvanvig writes in Norwegian, and because his *Theology* is not well known (if at all) outside of Scandinavia, I feel it is necessary to summarize more fully the contents of his work, thereby making it more accessible to an international readership.

I have purposefully sought to avoid discussing the *Theologies* of Kvanvig, Brueggemann and Gerstenberger with the authors personally, since my intention from the outset has been to present my own interpretation of their work. I purposefully avoided giving the authors an opportunity to review,

correct, adjust or steer my understanding of them. While Brueggemann and Gerstenberger live and work far from me (I am located in Kristiansand, Norway, while they are located in, respectively the US and Germany), Kvanvig is a fellow Norwegian with whom I meet regularly.[8] Nevertheless, I am keen to stress that I did not engage in any extensive discussion of Kvanvig's *Theology* with him (other than expressing my hope that I would one day see his work translated into English). To be sure, discussing the present project with Kvanvig and not with Brueggemann and Gerstenberger would have been unfair to the latter two. By implication, if I have misunderstood and misinterpreted any aspect of these three scholars' *Theologies*, the fault is entirely my own.

I would like to acknowledge a number of scholars in particular for their help in bringing the present work to completion. Among my own colleagues at Ansgar College and Theological Seminary in Kristiansand, Norway, I will mention Professor Dr Markus Zehnder, Professor Dr Antonio Barbosa da Silva and Senior Lecturer Reidar Salvesen. From my period as Visiting Fellow at University of Durham, England (February through April 2007), I thank in particular Professor Dr R.W.L. Moberly. I also wish to thank the participants of the research seminar at the University of Durham for the responses I received when I presented elements of the present study in that forum. Last but not least, I thank Duncan Burns for his proofreading of my English and the preparation of the text for publication.

Hallvard Hagelia
Professor of Old Testament Studies
Ansgar College and Theological Seminary
Kristiansand,
1 April 2011

8. Kvanvig and I are both members of the translation committee of the *Norwegian Bible Society* and are currently engaged in the preparation of an updated Norwegian translation of the Bible, which was published in October 2011.

Chapter 1

What is Old Testament Theology?

It is not the intention of the present study to offer a full-scale discussion of what Old Testament *Theology* actually is. There are inevitably different definitions, as scholars approach the Old Testament from different angles, with a variety of presuppositions and interests. When consulting the different Old Testament *Theologies* on the market, we soon discover their vastly different characters. Nevertheless, there is scholarly consensus about the possibility of talking about something called 'Old Testament *Theology*'—however it should be defined or written. This short chapter is intended simply to alert the reader to the existence of a problem and to highlight the need for further work. But, first, I offer some preliminary deliberations.

1. *History*

From of old, no differentiation was made between fields of theology. Theology was simply the doctrine of the Church. The first to differentiate between theology as Church doctrine and biblical theology were the German theologians Gotthelf Traugott Zachariae (1729–1777), with his four-volume *Biblical Theology* from 1771–72,[1] and Johann Philipp Gabler (1753–1826). Gabler presented his program in his groundbreaking inaugural address at the University of Altdorf, Germany, on 30 March 1787. Though Gabler never wrote a *Theology* himself, he is nevertheless considered—along with Zachariae—a father of biblical theology as an independent discipline.[2]

Gabler distinguished two steps in the production of biblical theology. The first step was in a broader sense to collect and systematize all conceptions concerning the divine in the Bible. This process implied a distinction between Old and New Testament, and between individual authors. His next step was to investigate which conceptions related to the unchanging form of Christian teaching and which were intended only for a particular time.

1. 'Zachariae has generally been recognized as the father of biblical theology in the modern sense of the term', according to J. Sandys-Wunsch (quoted in Mead 2007: 24).
2. See, for example, Boers 1999 and Bartholomew 2005, esp. 85B-86B.

The writing of Old Testament *Theology* reached a peak in Germany with Walter Eichrodt (1890–1978) and Gerhard von Rad (1901–1971), and in the USA with the Biblical Theology Movement, represented not least by George Ernest Wright (1909–1974).[3] Eichrodt and von Rad represented individually very different positions, positions that were very different from those adopted by the Biblical Theology Movement. Nevertheless, despite the difference in approach, the middle part of the twentieth century can be considered as the golden age for Old Testament *Theology*.[4]

Eichrodt built his *Theology* around the concept of covenant (*berit*), while von Rad wrote his *Theology* on the basis of his perception of ancient Israel's history of traditions. Few Old Testament *Theologies* have to such a degree set an agenda for writing Old Testament *Theology* and the study of Old Testament theology in general as these two works.

In the years following the publication of Eichrodt's and von Rad's work, a series of Old Testament *Theologies* have been written, works which will not be surveyed here.[5] Since von Rad, the development has gone in different directions: some following relatively traditional routes; others, mostly in monographs, dealing with aspects of Old Testament theology;[6] and others, notably by Brevard S. Childs, combining both Old and New Testament *Theology*. Yet, no one work has attained the landmark status accorded to Eichrodt and von Rad. Possibly the work of Brueggemann is the exception—time will tell.

To indicate the significance of Brueggemann's *Theology*, it is notable that Brevard S. Childs (2000: 171) places it in a lacuna that Childs observed to exist after the great *Theologies* of Walter Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad.

In response to this lacuna Brueggemann mounts a case for the urgent need for a fresh approach, which he then characterizes as postmodern. It would seek to do justice, to the radical unsettlement evoked by the new postmodern epistemological situation with its insistence on pluralism of faith

3. Eichrodt 1933–39 (Eng. trans. 1961–67); von Rad 1957–60 (Eng. trans. 1962–65); and Wright 1952.

4. For a discussion of why the middle part of the twentieth century was 'a great age of biblical theology', see Mead 2007: 39-48.

5. For a survey of the history of Old Testament *Theology*, see, for example, Kraus 1969; Sandys-Wunsch 1999; 2005; Ollenburger 1999. On New Testament *Theology*, see Boers 1999. See also Brueggemann's two 'Retrospects' (Brueggemann 1997). Several Old Testament *Theologies* have separate chapters on the history of writing Old Testament *Theology*. For a discussion dealing mostly with the post-von Rad era, see, for example, Perdue 1994 and 2005; Stordalen 2003; and Collins 2005a and 2005b.

6. Cf. the volumes appearing in the Overtures Biblical Theology series (edited by W. Brueggemann and published by Fortress Press) and Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine series (edited by D.W. Hardy and published by University of Cambridge).

affirmations, pluralism of methodologies and pluralism of diverse communities, all of which have shattered the earlier hegemonic assumptions of biblical studies.

In summary, writing Old Testament *Theologies* has existed as an academic subject field since the end of the eighteenth century, and has had its ebbs and flows since then.

2. *Old Testament Theology and History of Religion*

The relation—and tension—between Old Testament *Theology* and Old Testament *History of Religion* has been the focus of the so-called History of Religion School. This 'school' is usually associated with Albert Eichhorn (1856–1926) in Germany with its heyday being at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Several prominent names within the study of the Old Testament are found in this scholarly field, such as the German scholars William Wrede (1859–1906), Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932), Hugo Gressmann (1877–1927) and the Norwegian Sigmund Mowinckel (1884–1965). The debate between a theological and a religious understanding of the Old Testament was resurrected in a new fashion with Rainer Albertz's *Religionsgeschichte Israels in alttestamentlicher Zeit* (1992). The question of Israel's *Religionsgeschichte* was never really a dead issue, since Israel's religion actually had a history, as was made evident, not least with the 'Yahweh and his Asherah' formulas found at Kuntillet 'Ajrud in northern Sinai in 1978. Of the three scholars to be investigated in this book, Erhard Gerstenberger in particular stands in the historical tradition of the History of Religion School.

It cannot go unrecorded that the history of religion approach to the Old Testament made a positive impact. Indeed, the Old Testament testifies to a religion with a history. Ancient Israel worshipped Yahweh as their national god, and this religion has to be understood against the backdrop of the general religious situation in the ancient Near East. Ancient Israel's religion was merely one religion among many in the area. And these religions were to some degree not only interrelated but also mutually integrated; there were not always definable borders between them. To be sure, syncretism was a most significant aspect shared by them.

However, there exists a general scholarly consensus that it is both possible and fitting to handle the theology of the Old Testament as something distinctively particular. The Old Testament does not only mirror the religious pluralism of its time—it also stands out as opposing this pluralism. The Old Testament mirrors different religious stands or strands, from polytheism and syncretism to henotheism, monolatri and monotheism. In writing an Old Testament *Theology*, attention should be given to this religious situation. The Old Testament represents a religious culture that ran counter

to ancient Israel's actual religious life. The history of the religion of ancient Israel is a broader concept than Old Testament theology—broader because the history of this particular people's religion in principle comprises their religion as it actually was, while writing Old Testament *Theology* relates to the variegated theology representative of the Old Testament itself.

The relation between a religious and a theological approach to the Old Testament can be summarized in three points, as demonstrated by Hans-Joachim Kraus (1969) and James K. Mead (2007). Kraus summarizes the gains of the religio-historical approach: (1) it opened up new fields for historical research; (2) it provided a groping interpretation with more certainty; (3) it extended exegesis principally (p. 331). Mead highlights the differences between a history of religion approach and a theological approach. For Mead, the two enterprises possess different goals, different methods and different purposes (p. 35).

There has been much discussion surrounding the sources for writing Old Testament *Theology*. While Tertullian, for instance, asked 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?', others, for example, Walter Eichrodt (1961: 25), claim that: 'No presentation of Old Testament theology can properly be made without constant reference to its connections with the whole world of Near Eastern religion'. Leo Perdue (2005: 343) argues that also 'other understandings present in noncanonical literature and implied by material culture must be given equal weight in setting forth the understanding of theological expression in the biblical world'. James K. Mead (2007: 71) states that 'scholars tend to agree on the necessity of other sources to assist biblical interpretation, but disagree on their status and function in discerning the theological message of the Bible'.[7] Mead himself claims that 'comparative studies reveal affinities between biblical literature and ancient Near Eastern traditions on a number of fronts, making it imperative that we learn as much as possible about them' (p. 69). But he also offers a more nuanced position, arguing that

> when one envisions biblical theology mainly in terms of *the content of the written sources*, then it makes sense to think of the Bible as the primary source, with all other sources providing the 'background'. However, if the emphasis is on the context of the biblical writers as theologians, then greater emphasis may be placed on other sources of information to understand the writers themselves. As with so much of biblical theology, there is a fine line here as well, but continued, careful study of both the context and the content of the Bible can only serve scholarly and faith communities (p. 74).

7. Mead (2007: 71) states: 'The disagreement can be traced in large part to different definitions of biblical theology. Those that limit the scope to the canonical books usually define biblical theology in terms of the theological content of the writings, while those urging the inclusion of extrabiblical sources tend to think of the discipline more as a history of religion, with the Bible being one (perhaps primary) source among many.'

In conclusion, the principal source for writing an Old Testament *Theology* should be the Old Testament itself, while a study of ancient Israel's religion should freely use whatever sources are available, including the Old Testament, as well as other possible data provided by, for instance, archaeology. And yet, studying Old Testament theology does not imply forgetting about the religious background. On the contrary, knowing the Old Testament's religious background is of vital significance. Even though the source of Old Testament theology is the Old Testament itself, this theology has to be compared, that is, to be seen in the light of or contrasted with its religious background (cf. section 6, below).

3. *Theology and History*

The relation between theology and history is a fundamental question in the debate surrounding modernity and postmodernism. To modernist thinking, historicity is basic, while for postmodernism 'what happened' (cf. Brueggemann, later) is of secondary significance.

How should Old Testament *Theology* be described? William Wrede's position is perceived as too limiting; was there not more to it than 'the history of early Christian religion'? Or concerning the Old Testament: Is everything said when the history of Israel and its religion are surveyed? This is the essence of a history of religion way of thinking. But that is unsatisfactory for theologians. A traditional modernist theologian will work historically and critically, but will not be content simply with writing history; he/she will also investigate the theology.

In the aftermath of this discussion came the differentiation between what the text once *meant* and what it *means* today.[8] This differentiation is in itself of great importance, based as it is on an acceptance that a text has a history, either as a spoken or a literary unit. It was once spoken in and/or written for a concrete historical situation. It once had a particular meaning. The possibility of our uncovering this original meaning is often limited. But as a text stands, as, for example, in the Old Testament, it is possible to read a meaning out of it, perhaps several meanings. It is the task of exegesis to uncover a text's original meaning. If the text has a literary context, it is the task of exegesis to find its contextual meaning. Biblical theology, at least in its traditional modernist form, pretends to synthesize and systematize what exegesis has revealed into more comprehensive presentations, either in a

8. Cf. Stendahl 1962. Stendahl has himself explained the historical background for this differentiation between 'meant' and 'means', in referring to his own engagement in a debate on the ordination of women in the Church of Sweden in the 1950s; see Stendahl 2000. Cf. the comments of Adam (2006: 26) and Mead (2007: 8).

full-scale way, trying to comprise all of the main themes of the Old Testament, or limiting itself to a selection of themes or one particular theme.

As for the difference between biblical theology and systematic theology, Krister Stendahl claims that the task of biblical theology is descriptive, while the task of systematic theology is prescriptive or normative—a distinction he makes in relation to what the Bible 'did mean' and what it 'does mean'. Biblical theology intends to describe what the Bible—be that Old or New Testament, or a particular biblical book—says in general and/or what it says about a particular theme. Systematic theology is more focussed on the Church and/or the contemporary world, and with presenting a message from or based on the Bible. In this task biblical theology is a resource for systematic theology.

Behind this way of thinking is the fundamental conviction that theology cannot be separated from historical reflection without losing something essentially Christian. Practitioners of systematic theology are obliged by the very character of Christian faith to seek out the historical truth about Jesus or in general the historical background for Old and Testament theology.

4. *Postmodern Objections*

Postmodern interpreters have objected in many ways against traditional theology. Here I will present some preliminary observations.

The programme of the radical postmodernists, among whose ranks Jacques Derrida may be included, has been to deconstruct the Old Testament and its theology. More moderate representatives, who are more or less influenced by postmodernism, consciously or otherwise, include the three scholars to be investigated here. Since postmodernism is extremely diverse, all kinds of objections to traditional theology can be found, including attitudes to the Old Testament.

One prominent postmodernist is Andrew K.M. Adam. Against a more modernist and historicist reasoning Adam (2006: 27-31) objects in four points:

1. 'The alleged source for modern biblical theology…can just as well be read in a way that undercuts the assumptions that the history of the discipline justifies reliance on history' (p. 27). It is misleading to depict the biblical theological quest simply as a search for the historical truths about early Christianity.
2. The distinction between what a text meant and what it means (cf. Stendahl) 'is no better founded'. It is 'quite arbitrary' to concentrate on discontinuity in interpretation without considering that when a text has been interpreted every day for over 1900 years, 'there will be important continuity in interpretation'.

3. This continuity in interpretation provides a defence against the claim that historical research is necessary for understanding, since we rely on historical knowledge in every aspect of interpreting the Bible. Even though the quality can be disputed, Adam argues that 'the continuity of interpretation transmitted indirectly through cultural influences and directly through homiletics and catechesis provides ample historical guidance for most Bible readers' (p. 29).
4. Lastly, he argues that there is a 'common fear that if we let go our death grip in historical verification, we will be conceding defeat to the fundamentalist (or relativist) hordes' surrounding us. Adam responds that this does 'not justify the claim that historical criticism is necessary across the board' (p. 30).

Adam seeks to demonstrate that 'the criterion of historical verification is not a necessary to biblical theology, but is contingent upon the interests of a particular cultural and academic tradition' (p. 31). He reserves himself against two misunderstandings: first, that one can make any sort of claim about biblical theology without having to justify the claim historically, though if one wants to make historical claims, one has to be prepared with historical arguments; second, that we are left altogether without criteria for doing biblical theology, because criteria are contingent upon the situation of the critic, and distinguished between necessary and *contingent* criteria. The absence of the former leaves a multitude of the latter.

But Adam does not propose to throw out historical criticism altogether. He simply wants to stress that 'the degree to which historical criticism is the source of legitimation for biblical theology is determined not by dictates of modern reasons, but on the basis of prior judgements about the importance of history to theology' (p. 34).

Adam concludes that 'we should abandon historical criticism when developing a biblical theology; since historical criticism is involved—in nontrivial ways—with such fundamental tasks as translation and text criticism, we would not escape resource to historical-critical research even if we wanted to. I simply claim that there is no necessary reason for making historical criticism the defining authority for our biblical theologies' (p. 35).

The three theologians I am going to investigate in this book are not among the most radical postmodernists, even though their attitudes to postmodernism vary. They have not commented on those claims by Adam, but Brueggemann is supposedly the one who would most clearly subscribe to them, as he is the one who is most negative towards relying on 'what happened'.

5. *Theology and Revelation*

A theologically basic aspect is brought in by Leo G. Perdue (2005: 73; cf. 1994: 301), who claims that

> Biblical theology…has to do…with revelation, that is, the effort to find a divine voice that exists within the multiple voices of the text that addresses Israel and Judah, as well as the church. This effort, of course, is based on the commitment of the scholar to the Christian faith. Without this commitment, the Bible becomes simply an antiquarian document of Israelite religion no more than the views and practices of people from the distant past that have no obvious relevance to contemporary Christian life.

But this is also a problematic aspect in biblical criticism. What actually is revelation? In the citation from Perdue, revelation is taken as 'a divine voice that exists within the multiple voices of the text that addresses Israel and Judah, as well as the church'. But how can we, in a scholarly way, detect the divine? Is such an enterprise actually possible? Perdue discusses the matter, claiming: 'The primary question that stimulates Old Testament theology is the knowledge of God and how it is obtained' (2005: 340). But there is no agreement on where the knowledge of God resides (pp. 340-41). Is it behind the text? Is it in the original or the present community? Is it in the interaction of text and reader, in the experience of the reader, in the narrative world, in the multivocal expressions? Or is it in the order and continuation of creation? These are theological questions residing behind all methodologies and constructions, Perdue argues.

In the biblical text different voices speak: God and satan, good people and bad people, kings and ordinary people, priests and prophets (false and true) and so on.[9] Perdue (2005: 343) argues that the Bible is 'at times a patriarchal, racist, and homophobic book that denied women, ethnic minorities, and homosexuals the right to speak out their own experiences'. How, then, do we recognize the revealed word of God? Perdue argues that 'a descriptive approach cannot bring into question and then undermine texts, religious ideas, cultural forms, and social roles and institutions that are stereotypical of and demeaning to marginal and oppressed groups. The necessary step is to use oppressed people's experience as a source, even a norm, for the evaluation of biblical theology.' Here he refers to 'liberation theologies of various kinds' as providing 'a significant contribution to new efforts at the reconstruction of theological language, because they open themselves to correlation and judgement'.

9. Cf. Moberly 2006.

Perhaps we could explain at least something if we make a comparison with the ecology of nature. Nature has an ecological balance between what we perceive as good and bad. Something is edible, other things are poisonous; some animals are dangerous, other animals we have domesticated. But we understand that extinguishing poisonous or otherwise dangerous species might have disastrous consequences, since all species are necessary for an ecological balance. Nature in ecological balance is the basic precondition for our existence. This ecologically balanced nature provides us with food and other basic preconditions for life. The Old Testament has a similar 'ecological counterbalance', or should we rather say a dialectics between different voices, as far as divine word and other voices are concerned. No voice should be silenced; they all, in an 'ecological counterbalance' or dialectic, contribute to sending the reader a message—or messages. It is the task of Old Testament theology to detect this/these message(s). Whether it is a divine message is not for scholarly criticism to decide—it is a question that lies outside of the competence of scholarship, it is a matter of faith.

As claimed by Adam, postmodernism demands extensive reference to non-biblical material and the acceptance of the premise that 'Christian faith is out of place in biblical theology'. Adam points out that 'the canons by which modern interpreters judge biblical theology finally rely on historical criticism as a necessary criterion for theological interpretation'. He claims as his goal the demonstration of 'how this necessity is something that modern biblical theology itself posits, rather than being a natural necessity' (cf. Adam 2006: 23, 25).

6. *Conceptions of Biblical Theology*

The designation *biblical theology* presupposes at least two common criteria, as pointed out by Adam (2006: 32).

First, biblical theology works with theological concerns—it is not exegesis, though it often works with results derived from exegetical study. One might say that there can be no serious biblical theology without serious exegesis. Biblical theology is not history, even though it traditionally relates to historical questions, historical religion and theology. It does not focus on Israelite religion or the religion of the first Christians, yet for traditional Old Testament theological studies the study of religion will often be an important prerequisite for doing serious theology. While closely related to the study of religion, Old Testament theology is a separate and distinct field.

Secondly, the theological content should be handled in a way that is arguably *biblical*. The text of the Hebrew Bible should be the primary source for writing an Old Testament *Theology*. That is not to say that other sources, such as extra biblical texts and archaeological finds are irrelevant for biblical theology. Such sources could actually be of vital importance for

understanding biblical matters. For the study of Old Testament theology, however, they will always be of secondary significance compared with the Old Testament itself.[10]

Adam claims that these criteria 'rule out much of what has been published as biblical theology under the influence of modernity' (p. 32). 'In short, the terms *biblical* and *theology* serve to mark out the boundaries within which the arguments will be conducted, and we may decline to consider works that argue outside those boundaries' (p. 33). The latter claim is rather self-evident. The designation 'biblical theology' is somewhat self-defining. Adam's former claim is more disputable. Yes, the criteria presented here 'rule out much of what has been published as biblical theology', but it should not be limited to being 'under the influence of modernity', as claimed by Adam (p. 32).

Adam also directs attention to aesthetics and ethics as criteria for biblical theology. With 'aesthetics' he refers to whether something is fitting. With 'ethics' he refers to whether we live by this biblical theology. Such criteria are open to objection and could be challenged as too subjective. Nevertheless, they 'focus our judgement toward grounds for evaluating biblical theologies' (p. 33); no one makes ethical or aesthetic judgments outside the context of a group or a tradition.

The challenge of defining Old Testament theology is dealt with in particular by Mead in his 2007 work, *Biblical Theology: Issues, Methods and Themes*. In the first chapter Mead discusses the problem (pp. 1-12). After offering his preliminary definition (p. 1), he then, after discussing the various issues, methods, and themes (whence the book's subtitle), presents his understanding of biblical theology, whether Old or New Testament: '*Biblical theology seeks to identify and understand the Bible's theological message, that is, what the Bible says about God and God's relation to creation, especially to human kind*' (p. 241, Mead's italics).

Of the three scholars who are the focus of the present study, Helge Steinar Kvanvig is notable in saying (in the lecture he delivered at launch of his *Theology* [see later]) that he himself has no absolute definition of what an Old Testament *Theology* is, or even what it should be like. He pointed out that such a *Theology* could be written in many ways. As for himself, he claimed to have written a kind of 'manual', which sounds like something of a manifesto: 'An Old Testament Biblical Theology aims at reading Old Testament texts in a way that seeks interconnecting patterns of historical and literary kinds with a theological relevance' (my translation). This is a rather structuralistic description. In his manual, the following conceptions are important to Kvanvig: the meaning of the reading; the Old Testament as a historical document; the Old Testament's literary character; interconnecting

10. Cf. what was said on the sources of Old Testament theology in section 2, above.

patterns; and theological relevance. These conceptions are the points of departure for his *Theology*, which is as much a hermeneutical and methodological discussion of how or what an Old Testament *Theology* actually is or should be as an actual Old Testament *Theology*. More will be said on this matter later. His book can be read as an experiment—on its own premises a successful experiment. His *Theology* is relational, as it is written with a sideward glance to the reader. It is as if the author will both show the reader his method and then, at the same time, help the reader to implement this method for his own reading of the Old Testament. The author functions as the reader's mentor.

Erhard Gerstenberger does not define what he means by an Old Testament *Theology* either. Yet he does perceive the Old Testament as a collection of many testimonies of faiths from around a thousand years of the history of ancient Israel, a conglomerate of faith experiences from different historical and social situations (2002: 1), and offers some general considerations worth noting. Gerstenberger underlines that the designation 'Old Testament' is a Christian term, one that could be taken as discriminating to Jews (p. 3), pointing out that in Jewish tradition Tanak is the current designation. He opposes to the designation 'Old Testament *Theology*', in singular. 'Those who want to depict the theology of the Old Testament must declare that one element, one stratum, one idea of their choice is the dominant voice of the great Old Testament chorus of faith' (p. 2), adding that 'theology in reality has exclusively to do with time-conditioned experiences of faith, statements and systems, and in short with ideas of God and not with God in person or essence. Old Testament theology—formulated as orientation for our day—should be content with the contextual images of God in the Hebrew Bible and in a similarly provisional and time-conditioned way venture to make binding statements or statements which nevertheless have only limited validity.' In reality, Gerstenberger's *Theologies* is as much a reconstructed history of Israel's religion, as will be argued later on.

Walter Brueggemann organizes his *Theology* around the basic conception of a trial between Yahweh and Israel. In opening his book with two introductory chapters under the heading of *Retrospect 1* and *Retrospect 2*, he traces the history of research in, respectively, the past and the contemporary situation. Then follow the book's five main parts: Part I, 'Israel's Core Testimony'; Part II, 'Israel's Countertestimony'; Part III, 'Israel's Unsolicited Testimony'; Part IV, 'Israel's Embodied Testimony'; Part V, 'Prospects for Theological Interpretation'. As for 'doing Old Testament theology', Brueggemann defines biblical theology not as commenting on one text at a time, but as construing out of the texts a thematized presentation of God (1997: 267). Such a thematization of Old Testament theology he sees as a 'great hazard', yet one that is nevertheless required. It is a generalization that can never take into account all available data, 'but must accent or

deemphasize, include or exclude, some testimony'. Such inclusions or exclusions are never innocent; they inevitably follow presuppositions, whether historical-critic, canonical, liberal, conservative, or whatever. Brueggemann has a dynamic conception of the Old Testament. He has no confidence in any coherent statement concerning theological substance or themes in the Old Testament, 'unless the themes or substance be framed so broadly and inclusively as to be useless'. Instead, he claims that to avoid premature reductionism, Old Testament theology should focus on 'the *process*, *procedures*, and *interactionist potential* of the community present to the text' (p. xvi, Brueggemann's italics). Since there is a pluralism of faith affirmations and articulations to Yahweh in the text itself, there should be a pluralism of interpretive methods. This concern for processive, interactionist modes of adjudication has led him to the subtitle of his book: *Testimony, Dispute and Advocacy* (cf. pp. xv-xvii). In particular, he is critical of what he calls 'Christian supersessionism' in Old Testament interpretation (pp. 107-12).

Like Kvanvig and Gerstenberger, Brueggemann will not do Old Testament theology in an isolated space. He sees the task of Old Testament theology as 'an articulation of a metanarrative that is a strong contrast to the metanarratives currently available in our society'. He sees what he calls 'military consumerism' as the currently most dominant metanarrative in our society (p. 718).

It is nevertheless not difficult to agree with Mead (2007: 7) that

> the challenges inherent in defining biblical theology—whether in the terms or in ourselves—do not mean that attempts to define the discipline are useless. In fact, such challenges are helpful insofar as they make us aware of the complexity of the task. Nevertheless, in spite of its multifaceted nature, biblical theology still suggests its own set of methods, issues, and themes, not all of which would be equally pertinent to linguistic or historical study, for example. While we may discover that the search for an adequate definition is finally more important than the precise definition itself, that very search will point to particular topics and concepts that, in turn, yield insights into the meaning and the message of the Bible.

7. *Summary*

Old Testament *Theology* as a separate theological subject has a history dating back to the latter part of the eighteenth century. Traditionally it has been perceived as a historical subject, distinct from church doctrine and history of religion. This understanding has been challenged by postmodernist scholars, who tend to ignore 'what happened' (as we will see in the case of Brueggemann). As for defining what biblical theology in general and Old Testament theology in particular actually are, we have seen that opinions

differ. Such differences of opinion become clear when we explore how Kvanvig, Gerstenberger and Brueggemann approach the subject. Even if theologians do not explicitly define the concept of 'biblical theology', the outcome, how their *Theologies* are actually written, reveal how they perceive it.

This short survey of basic problems in writing an Old Testament *Theology* is by no way exhaustive. The present work does not venture an Old Testament *Theology*, but instead seeks to illuminate how three prominent contemporary scholars have sought to solve the task for themselves. To advanced scholars this survey is elementary. To students it hopefully gives some guidelines for a basic understanding of Old Testament theology as written by Kvanvig, Gerstenberger and Brueggemann.

Chapter 2

HELGE STEINAR KVANVIG

1. *Introduction*

Helge Steinar Kvanvig is professor of Old Testament Studies at the University of Oslo. His main contribution to Old Testament *Theology* was published in Norwegian in 1999.[1] This was the first comprehensive Old Testament *Theology* to be published in Norwegian. The two volumes of Old Testament *Theology* (1979) by the late Professor Ivar P. Seierstad should not be forgotten, but these two volumes were never officially published as ordinary books, just as photocopies, published internally at MF Norwegian School of Theology in Oslo.

Prior to writing his *Theology*, Kvanvig had published an article on narrative reading of biblical texts (1996), a study which in many ways paved the way for his *Theology*. Translated into English the Norwegian title of his article is 'The Hebrew Story: Narrative Reading of Biblical Texts'. In this article Kvanvig describes and defines narrative and literary analysis. In particular, he describes the structure of Hebrew narrative, including the *w^{e}qatal–wayyiqtol* structure, and the difference between syntagma and paradigma in narratives. Such problems are basic also in his *Theology*.

In a later article (2004) Kvanvig presents some long perspectives, which can be read as corollary thoughts, excerpted from the basic ideas presented in his *Theology*. Translated into English, the Norwegian title of this article is 'What Kind of Text Is the Bible? Unity and Plurality in the Book of Books'. In this article Kvanvig defines what he means when he speaks of the Bible as 'holy text': 'To describe the Bible as holy is to describe a hermeneutical process between the text and its context, where both parts are both creative and recipients' (2004: 401 [my translation here and elsewhere when citing

1. Kvanvig's earlier works include *Gamle ord i ny tid* (1977), which was an Old Testament *Theology* for 'Mellomfag' (lower academic degree in the Norwegian university educational system at that time), a book Kvanvig himself calls 'a product of the theology of the 1970s', and a work that can be placed in 'the intersection point between von Rad and Zimmerli' (1998).

Kvanvig]). As 'text', the Bible is described against the background of the different ancient versions of the Bible and the several different text editions. As a 'normative' text and a book of power, the Bible is described historically from ancient times until the post-Enlightenment era. As a 'multicultural' book, the Bible is described against its ancient religious background. As examples of different layers of understanding, Kvanvig points out the religious and literary background of the Flood story and the Prologue of the Gospel of John. At the end he describes how this pluralistic reading of the Bible can be seen both as a menace and as a challenge to theology. His article is something of a popular summary of consequences to be drawn from his thinking around Old Testament theology, as presented in his *Theology*, but this will not be dealt with in detail here.

More important for our study is an unpublished lecture, which concerns his *Theology* directly. This lecture is fundamental for understanding Kvanvig's *Theology*. Kvanvig's book was launched at the annual meeting of the *Norsk Gammeltestamentlig Selskap* (NGTS)[2] in Oslo in December 1998, and was presented by Kvanvig himself in a lecture titled 'Om å skrive en gammeltestamentlig teologi i dag' ('On Writing an Old Testament *Theology* Today'). It offers a key to understanding Kvanvig's methodology, the intentions of the book and his own view of it.

Kvanvig comments explicitly that there is no direct connection between his *Theology* and his earlier book, *Gamle ord i ny tid* (1977), the reason being that his books were written in a quite different time. If any biblical *Theology* should be written at all, Kvanvig maintains it has to be written in a way quite different from how such a study was approached in the 1970s.

Kvanvig is reader oriented, and stresses that it is not possible to write an Old Testament *Theology* as if the reader does not exist. This reader orientation is evident from his pedagogical skills as an author. Different readers of a text have different horizons for understanding it. Therefore, writing a 'monolithic bible theology' would be impossible to him, because that would have been a 'monologic' undertaking. To use a different metaphor, Kvanvig has not built an Old Testament *Theology* as a complete house. Rather, he has invited the reader to participate in both the planning and the construction of the 'house'. The book is intended as an invitation to the reader to join in theological reflection on how to read Old Testament texts (cf. p. 9).[3]

In teaching Old Testament theology to students, it is very important to him that the reader does not simply exist in a narrow scholarly tradition. Whether the reader exists in the past or in the present, 'she' (as he recurrently calls the reader) lives with different patterns of understanding,

2. The NGTS is the professional society of Norwegian Old Testament scholars.
3. Unless otherwise noted, references are to *Historisk Bibel og bibelsk historie*.

crossing the borders between the scholarly subject fields. 'I can not invite them on an exotic journey into ways of thinking that do not correspond to what generally happens within the humanities', he claims. The Old Testament is in itself exotic, and in our thinking around it we must stay in touch with our own time. Kvanvig chooses explicitly to stay in contact with our own time.

In his *Theology*, Kvanvig refers to a series of scholars with whom he argues. In this book I have surveyed these scholars in groups, according to Kvanvig's thematic discussion, rather than treating them separately. It is not my intention here to reproduce Kvanvig's engagement with the scholarly material, but rather to concentrate on the resulting nuances of Kvanvig's theology.

2. *Kvanvig's Theology*

Helge Steinar Kvanvig's *Theology*, which bears the Norwegian title *Historisk Bibel og bibelsk historie. Det gamle testaments teologi som historie og fortelling* (in English: *Historical Bible and Biblical History: Old Testament Theology as History and Story*), consists of three main parts: Part I, *Forståelsesformer* ('Patterns of Understanding'), Part II, *Lesemåter* ('Ways of Reading') and Part III, *Tekstmønstre* ('Text Patterns').

The reader immediately recognizes that this way of approaching and arranging an Old Testament *Theology* deviates significantly from 'traditional' *Theologies*. Kvanvig's part divisions refer to linguistics, literary forms and epistemology, and not explicitly to theology. Kvanvig's topics are thus ones that we might conceivably find in an introduction or a prolegomenon to a *Theology*. Nevertheless, in Kvanvig's book these questions constitute the very basis or frame on which or within which his theology is presented.

Engaging more closely with the text of Kvanvig's book, we see further that this *Theology* is different from what we have seen in previous Old Testament *Theologies*.

Since this book is written in Norwegian and has not yet been translated into English, I offer here a somewhat more detailed summary of Kvanvig's book. (In what follows, I will use English translations of Kvanvig's chapter, section and subsection titles.)

In a very short Preface (pp. 10-11) Kvanvig explains why and how he chose to write a very different Old Testament *Theology*. Since these reasons have already been dealt with in the discussion of the lecture Kvanvig delivered at the launch of his book (above), there is no need to discuss this section here.

3. *Part I, 'Patterns of Understanding'*

In the first main part of his book, 'Patterns of Understanding', Kvanvig asks, rhetorically, whether the Bible is 'historical'. His answer is that it is impossible to answer with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Most theologians would be embarrassed by such a question, he argues, since it is asking too much in one go. It is not possible, Kvanvig maintains, to classify texts of the Bible as solely 'historical' or solely 'fictitious', since that kind of classification would presume a very narrow understanding of what 'history' actually is, as well as how the relation between history and literature functions.

It is for this reason that Kvanvig titles his book *Historical Bible and Biblical History*. With this formula, Kvanvig focuses on the basic challenge to Old Testament theology since the emergence of historic-critic scholarship. How shall we understand the relation between the Bible as a historical and as a literary document? Basically, Kvanvig maintains, we approach the Bible with two different horizons of understanding: we read it as seen from history, and we read it as a book.

In relation to history, we read the Bible with four aspects in mind: (1) the Bible emanated in a historical context; (2) it refers to a history; (3) it has created a history through its texts; (4) it speaks into a history of which we humans are a part. When we read the Bible we do not read history—we read a book, a collection of texts that are bound together according to some literary and linguistic laws. These texts belong to a historical space that is not ours, and which is often even strange to us. The Bible exists in our own time, but it belongs to another time.

These texts were not written to form part of the Bible. They emerged at different times, with different preconditions and for different purposes; they were formed very differently. Not until a long literary and historical process had elapsed did they merge to form the Bible. In this tradition history there has been a mutual influence between oral and literary formations. Therefore, it is too simplistic to call the Bible 'one book', not least because there are different canonical traditions in Christianity and in Judaism.

This indicates how complicated the relation between history and literature actually is in the Bible. In reading the Bible we waver between the literary aspects of the texts themselves and the history that caused and created them, the history they caused, the history they refer to and the history we are a part of ourselves.

All the time this provokes questions related to what history and literature is and how we should perceive the relation between them. These questions concern the Old Testament as well as historical and literary scholarship, such as (cf. p. 15): (1) questions related to theory of history and philosophy;

(2) questions related to theory of literature and philosophy of linguistics; (3) questions on the relation between language, literature and history. Kvanvig pays particular attention to the latter question. Modern history books give a successive presentation of 'history'. This is very different from how history was written in antiquity, including in the Bible. The issue is whether modern history books are 'history' and ancient history books are fictional literature.

Such questions have consequences for our understanding of the Old Testament. Presentations of Old Testament *Theology* somehow have to come to a decision on such issues as: What is the history of Israel? What is the relationship between the Old Testament and literature, and how is this relationship to be understood? Modern scholarship has assumed it is possible to reconstruct a chronology for the history of Israel as a people and a nation, and for the literature of the Old Testament—elements which serve as the basis for an Old Testament theology.

Here Kvanvig is critical because such a theology, in his opinion, would be an amalgamation built on a synthesis between the historical and literary chronology (cf. p. 17). Doing biblical theology presupposes the possibility of reading texts together in a reasonable way. Since the first synthesis is historically oriented, built on two chronologies, any synthesis of biblical theology will also have a historical character, built on a historical and literary chronology, around a centre which could be interpreted in light of different historical and literary periods. The scholarly dialogue partner is the scholarship of history, while the methodological tools are literary criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism and redaction criticism. Kvanvig argues that any scholarly synthesis builds on a hermeneutical spiral, one which runs the risk of creating a circular argument. In our case, the problem is that the two chronologies are mutually dependent. Then the system staggers, because a synthesis of Old Testament history and archaeology has become more and more problematic, and because historical-critical scholarship has led to an ever more detailed division of the Old Testament into different layers—all without a scholarly consensus behind it. When both syntheses come under threat, the synthesis collapses.[4]

This development has led to a series of inter-connected questions, ones which, Kvanvig argues, are not easy to answer. For him, the collapse of history in Old Testament scholarship has led to a paradigm shift. Old Testament scholarship is not so interested in the history of the various biblical texts, but is now more attentive to their final form, the actual literary documents. The historical-critical diachronic methods have been substituted by methods from literary criticism, and the whole perspective of Old Testament

4. This provoked Perdue to write his *The Collapse of History* (1994).

scholarship has been altered to be more synchronic. The emphasis is no longer on biblical history, as perceived by historiographers, but on biblical narrative.

a. *Language and History*

In his section titled 'Language and History' (pp. 19-44) Kvanvig takes up a series of different patterns of understanding:

i. *Patterns of Understanding as a Tool for Analysis.* For Kvanvig, a 'pattern of understanding' is a particular way of understanding reality (cf. p. 19). Kvanvig uses this concept on analogy with the concept of 'ideal type', as used by Max Weber, which is often used when discussing styled patterns of actions characteristic of a group or a period. T.S. Kuhn often uses the term 'paradigm' in a similar way, though he uses 'paradigm' when referring to a scholarly tradition.[5] The concept is also used in sociology, concerning an interaction between scholars in a scholarly milieu.

To Kuhn, theology is more complex than the sciences. Theology builds on a series of methods with different basic theories, and operates within a span of time—which is rare in sciences or other scholarly milieu. Theology implies patterns of understanding that are pre-scholarly, but which develop by way of adapting different scholarly paradigms and patterns of understanding.

ii. *The Semiotic Triangle and Understanding of Language*. According to Kvanvig, the 'pattern of understanding' concept is so broad that it can embrace almost anything. Therefore it should be focused on something particular. Since Kvanvig discusses the relation between language and history, he takes up the semiotic triangle and the relation between the designation HOUSE, the meaning of 'house' and the actual house, that is, the building itself. The combination of these three factors, organized in a triangle, is called a 'sign'. In this model, language is taken as a collection of signs.

The important point with this model is that different patterns of understanding the relation between language and reality will interpret the relation between designation, meaning and the case circumstance differently (p. 21).

A basic question is 'What is outside of language?' In daily speech we refer to what is possible to imagine. In scholarly language we would refer to what could be the object of research. In the study of history, this would be events of the past. The problem is that events are not items.

5. Reference is made to Kuhn 1992 (translated into Swedish from *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* [2nd edn, 1970]).

The semiotic triangle illustrates the problem of the relation between language and reality, but it does not solve it. The relation between designation, meaning and case circumstance are perceived differently. This is decisive for how we understand texts, not least narrative texts from the Old Testament.

Kvanvig (p. 22) combines such semiotic reflections with models from history of language taken from, respectively, N. Frye (1982) and H.C. Wind (1987). According to Kvanvig, these three approaches may be summarized as a mythic-metaphorical understanding, a metonymic-metaphysic understanding and a descriptive-pragmatic understanding.

iii. *Mythic-metaphoric Understanding*. Mythic-metaphoric understanding refers to antiquity, before Greek philosophy. The Old Testament is placed into this phase of language. A metaphor is an expression used to characterize something which does not fit in a literal way. When language is called metaphoric, there is an association between language and reality. A metaphoric narrative presupposes an association between the narrative and the event outside of the narrative; the event 'happens' in the narrative, the metaphor explains reality.

The best example is myth. A myth is a narrative about deities and their activity, a metaphorical expression for how reality actually is. Metaphorical language explains, for example, the vegetation myth and the annual rhythm. When myth is recited at the New Year festival, the mythical narrative actually occurs.

In this perception of language there is an identity between the three expressions in the semiotic triangle—designation, meaning and case circumstance—all three of which belong to the sign. That way of understanding language is synthetic in relation to reality: nature, culture and society are knit together and given a meaning in a linguistic structure.

If the Old Testament narrative is read that way, there is no difference between the sequence of events in the biblical texts and what actually happened; the events rest in the texts. The sacral language is powerful and creates the reality it talks about (cf. the recitation of Exod. 12.24-27 at Easter).

iv. *Metonymic-metaphysic Understanding.* Historically, this understanding is connected to the period from Greek philosophy to the Enlightenment. Much of the history of biblical interpretation belongs to this period. The term 'metonym' refers to a word that substitutes another concept, like 'Uncle Sam' for an American citizen or 'Ola Nordmann' for a Norwegian citizen. It refers to something outside of the text. Metonyms bring such phenomena into language and make them typical.

This presupposes a basic conformity between the structure of language and the world outside of it; it should be pictured linguistically. There should be 'something', something metaphysical, some powerful reason, that unites language and reality. In Greek philosophy this could be *logos*; in the Bible it is God.

A reader of Old Testament narratives will not see this as myths. There is no association between the language and the events themselves. Language is one matter; reality outside of language is another matter. A narrative is not an event in itself; it refers to an event. But it is difficult to differentiate between the two levels. Both narrative and event witness to God's revelation. Narratives picture divine events in linguistic categories. This is the background for using allegorical interpretation, as in Paul's interpretation of the Sara–Hagar story in Genesis 16 in the letter to the Galatians 4 (p. 24). Allegory plays on the relation between designation and the meaning of the sign.

v. *Descriptive-pragmatic Understanding*. This understanding refers to the period from Enlightenment until the 1970s. This is the era of modernism, as distinct from postmodernism. Kvanvig concentrates on positivism, hermeneutics and structuralism.

(1) *Positivism*. The designation 'positivism' was coined by Auguste Comte, who concentrated on hard facts rather than absolute truth. These facts are inherent in laws, which could be found by reason. Truth is not something objectively given, it has to be gained through investigation. This implies that the semiotic analogy between sign and actual matter is broken, as the criterion for what is true or false does not lie in the sign itself but in the case circumstance, that is, in 'reality itself'.

The vantage-point for positivism was the dawning of natural sciences, which came to unveil natural laws. The idea of natural laws was transferred into social and historical studies; with the requisite methods, structures of 'reality itself' were supposed to be readable. By means of adequate methods the 'true and right' about natural laws, the structures of society and the chains of causes and effects could supposedly be unveiled (p. 27). Thus, positivism turned the relation between sign and case circumstance upside down; language is no key to understanding reality—on the contrary, reality is the key to understanding language. There is no analogy between sign and case circumstance, but they can correspond in different ways.

The difference from metonymic-metaphysic understanding is that the analogy between sign and case circumstance is broken. However, positivism and metaphysics are similar at one important point—both assume that there are truths outside of humanity, which humans can perceive. Yet they differ on the question of where these truths are found. In Christianity they are

connected to revelation in both sign and case circumstance. The biblical narrative is true because it refers to God as present in his own language and tells about a historical reality created by God. In positivism, truth is present in the laws of reality, the natural laws, which can be unveiled by scientific research.

The new historical sciences with their historic-critic method emerged as a corollary of the Enlightenment. This method builds on three main principles (pp. 27-28): criticism (what is probable?), analogy (does it fit with other knowledge?) and correlation (does it fit with a chain of causes and effects?). There are two core points in historic-critic method: ascertaining that an event is possible within a historical sequence, and establishing a literary method which enables conclusion from text to event.

This has had far-reaching consequences for biblical scholarship and brought about a new pattern of understanding, in clear opposition to the metonymic-metaphysic understanding. It can be schematized this way (p. 28):

	Pre-critical reading:		Critical reading:
1.	The Bible describes real events.	1.	The Bible describes events that have not happened.
2.	The Bible describes the great history, from creation to consummation, in a coherent book.	2.	The Bible comprises a series of literary levels and traditions. It is not a unity, but fragmentary, manifold and ambiguous.
3.	The Bible describes the reader's own time, because the reader belongs to the great history.	3.	The Bible is a document from the past, and describes past events.
4.	Biblical texts prefigure the situation of the reader.	4.	Biblical time is radically different from our time.

These two radically different approaches to the Bible are based on two different perceptions of the relation between the Bible as a literary document and as history. For the Bible this implies two different perceptions of history: a scientific reconstruction of what actually happened, and the history the Bible witnessed to. Which of these two perceptions of history is the right one? The historical-critical method came to be the basic paradigm in biblical scholarship. This created a problem for theology, because as theology it had to save at least some metaphysic understanding. Excluding God from theology would be self-contradictory.

Positivistic science led to two different results: an enormous increase of knowledge about nature, history and society, and a perception of the role of science in the historical development. History was no longer perceived as God's history. Now human reason tended to replace God, cf. the philosophy of Auguste Comte and Francis Bacon (pp. 29-30). The positivist language

became reductionistic, and reality was reduced to quantifiable facts that could be analyzed objectively. All subjectivity was shunned (p. 31).

(2) *Hermeneutics*. Hermeneutics represented a reaction to positivism (p. 31). Against positivism, hermeneutics claimed that there is a meaning inherent in language itself, one which does not primarily reveal scientific laws but rather expresses humanity's interpretation of its world. The vantage-point was the understanding of historical literary texts. A text should not be read only as a historical source but as an expression of and an interpretation of human conditions of life.

In that way a text's historical character does not lie in its reference to history but in its reference to its author as a historical figure. The interpreter's task is to conceive of the writer's intention with the text. This combination of historical criticism and author intention came to be very influential in theology, because it focused on the biblical message.[6]

In this hermeneutical understanding, there is no truth independent of the interpreter (p. 33). Sense and truth merge when an expression takes a meaning in a particular context. The sign then becomes the truth carrier, though there is no eternal or general truth. The sign's truth is intertextualized.

Hermeneutics became very important in biblical scholarship, especially in its criticism of positivism. If any understanding is preconditioned on the interpreter's own preconceptions, then it is impossible to operate with an objective 'scientific' topic of biblical history, in opposition to the Bible's own images of history. The scholarly issue of biblical history was no objective description; it was based on particular theoretical and methodological preconditions.

In summary: positivism disintegrated the traditional metonym-metaphysic images of history behind the Christian traditions, which were replaced by a 'scientific rendering' of history. Hermeneutics criticizes positivism's historical constructions by doubting its objectivity. Biblical history can only have meaning in relation to the interpreter himself.

This opened up for dialogue with biblical history, either with Heidegger's existential philosophy, with Gadamer's hermeneutics, or Habermas' critical hermeneutics, or with the more political liberation theology or contextual theology (cf. Kvanvig, p. 34).

(3) *Structuralism*. Structuralism, with its background in Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic model, used by Kvanvig himself, holds, like positivism and hermeneutics, that there is no unity between sign and case circumstance. Yet structuralism is more radical and separates these two completely. The world comes to humans as something linguistically ordered. Humans are born to language and will always see the world through language. The

6. Here Kvanvig discusses in detail M. Heidegger, H.-G. Gadamer and J. Habermas (pp. 31-34).

relation between sign and case circumstance is not decisive. Instead, it is the relation between designation and the meaning in the sign.

When this conception is moved from a single word to a complete saying or text, then the designation becomes the text's formal structure, and its meaning becomes the content of the text. A saying gets its meaning through how its content is formed. A text has a meaning derived from its linguistic structure, independent of the interpreter. Through its structure a text reveals how humans generally interprets reality.

In particular, structuralists have worked with narratives. The general features of a narrative emerge from word patterns in the text, which are often bipolar or binary patterns (p. 35). Such patterns mirror human ordering of life. In finding these features, the surface structure of the text gets new meaning.

A structuralist does not bother about the relation between a text's content and what the text could refer to historically; the Bible's historicity is subordinated, because the narrative is seen just as literature.

A biblical narrative can be read out of three different linguistic structures (p. 35): saying structures, cultural structures and deep structures (cf. Patte 1976). Saying structures relate to the author, cultural structures relate to the meaning of the narrative in a certain culture and deep structures relate to how the narrative mirrors general human conditions. Saying structures and cultural structures are analyzed within traditional historic-critic exegesis, the historical situation or period from which it emerged. Structuralists work through these first structures down to the deep structure, to find the narrative's alleged a-historic and general meaning.

Structuralist exegesis surmounts historical problems of the biblical narratives in two ways: by interpreting them solely as literature, and by analyzing 'down' to the general text level.

Positivism ended up in fragmenting reality and language. Hermeneutics tended to subjectivism and relativization. Structuralists claim that they have surmounted the problems inherent in positivism and hermeneutics, and also claim to have established a new 'objective reality' through their linguistic analysis, which was supposed to attain generally valid sayings about humanity's conditions for life.

vi. *After Modernism*.

(1) *Postmodernism and Deconstruction*. This section is somewhat one-sided, as Kvanvig purports to present postmodernism. In reality, however, he describes deconstructionism, as derived from Jacques Derrida (pp. 36-40).[7]

7. Derrida 1981 and 1993 (1972).

Kvanvig points out, as many do, that defining postmodernism is difficult, and that the very existence of a phenomenon called postmodernism is debated. However, that modernism came under heavy criticism during and since the 1970s and 1980s is not doubted.

Kvanvig presents four important presuppositions for deconstructionism, and compares them with how Derrida deconstructs texts. Kvanvig's points are presented here in short form (p. 37):

	Structuralism:		Derrida's deconstruction:
1.	A text has a form, which can be defined and analyzed in fixed structures.	1.	It is not possible to hold that texts have fixed forms.
2.	There is a necessary correlation between a text's form and its content.	2.	The relation between a text's significant and signifié is not fixed.
3.	It is possible to analyse a text on a deep level, where it expresses itself in bipolar structures.	3.	Bipolar deep structures in a narrative mirror the human condition(s) of life, but depend on an ideological interpretation of reality, where the two poles always express something positive or negative.
4.	A text is a closed system, in need of no case circumstances with which to relate.	4.	A text is on no level a closed system. On the contrary, all structures break down from within.

In transferring the meaning of a text to the reader's interpretation, deconstruction can remind one of radical hermeneutics. Also, deconstructionist criticism of positivism reminds of hermeneutics (p. 37). It is not possible to differentiate scientific facts from theory and the experiments which have brought them up. Scientific facts are based on the researcher's 'universe of interpretation'. In hermeneutics, it is important to find frames that prevent interpretation from being accidental. To deconstructionism it is important to disintegrate these frames.[8] Deconstruction dissolves all internal relations of the semiotic model; there is no 'real' or 'true' case circumstance the sign can refer to. Nor is there any stable relation between designation and meaning to give the sign general meaning. Therefore, the possibility of making general statements is blocked. The truth of the text is for the readers to decide, and the readers' interpretation becomes *their* interpretation, among many other possible interpretations (p. 38).

Postmodernism is characterized as a decay[9] of the great narratives, the *metanarratives* (p. 39). The term 'narrative' is taken to refer not only to traditional narratives from the Bible and antiquity, but also to modernism's

8. Kvanvig demonstrates how this is done by Heidegger, Gadamer and Habermas (p. 38).

9. Cf. Groothuis 2000.

'scientific stories' about evolution. Also modernism's scientific syntheses are stories or narratives. Scientific understanding in modernism is webbed together with the story's alleged truth, which takes its legitimacy from tradition.

Here Kvanvig points out two important features related to interpretation of the Bible (p. 39). First, in positivism there emerged a division between biblical storytelling and history as a historian would reconstruct it. For postmodernism there are two kinds of narratives, one following the biblical texts, another historically reconstructed. Secondly, biblical texts do not have one particular meaning; a text has as many interpretations as the interpreter wants to give it. In hermeneutics, sign is contextualized but not disintegrated. In deconstructionism, sign is disintegrated in an unstable relation between saying and meaning. This lays the field open for allegory.

Then we have a problem for theology. Postmodernism is somehow a protest against institutionalized scholarship. The problem is that it can be esoteric—we can end up with innumerable postmodernist groups who do not communicate with each other, or who communicate only among themselves and with a few converts.

(2) *Narratology and History*. In this section Kvanvig thinks along the lines of Paul Ricoeur (pp. 40-41).[10] Ricoeur is generally important to Kvanvig's thinking. Ricoeur's claim is that the project of postmodernism is to deconstruct modernism's ways to knowledge. Ricoeur has responded to modernism by challenging it constructively rather than deconstructively.

Ricoeur builds on the three main paradigms of modernism: positivism, hermeneutics and structuralism. His project is to demonstrate that any argumentation with necessity has to incorporate some elements from these three paradigms. Humans approach reality by explaining, as in positivism and structuralism, and by understanding, as in hermeneutics. These approaches follow each other consecutively in any scientific operation, and seem to be fundamental aspects of human existence. As humans, we are both *bios* and *logos*, physical life and part of a linguistic world, re-creating the world linguistically by giving it sign character. As linguistic beings we develop linguistic patterns and interpret them from our situation in life.

In emphasizing narrative as a basic category in literature and historiography, metaphor becomes important (p. 41). Narrative can be seen as an 'imaging' of events. Out of history, narrative creates a new linguistic world. As interpreters we have no admittance to history as such, just history as narrative. Such a conception of metaphor stands in both continuity and discontinuity with mythic-metaphoric understanding. Continuity emerges when sign and case circumstance come together in the narrative. Discontinuity

10. Kvanvig refers to a Swedish edition; see Ricoeur 1992.

emerges from what this metaphorical language is actually imaging. By implication, there is a world 'out there', as in positivism, which language influences.

In the intersection between narratology and historiography there is a special challenge for biblical theology, because the basic structure of the Old Testament is narrative. Narrative presents for us a narrative world, which at the same time can be connected to a particular period in the history of Israel, Kvanvig claims.

b. *Biblical Theology Paradigms*

If we follow the modern paradigm, Kvanvig points out (p. 41), we assume a historical sequence of current historical stages, aiming at a steadily deeper knowledge where *we* would be in the last phase. If we follow the post-modern paradigm, we are assumed to produce new narrative, with basic features from the beginning of modernism.

In this way, postmodernism reminds us of something important, Kvanvig argues (p. 42). We should not necessarily think of historiography as a development where one way of understanding replaces another. We could as well think of it as an accumulation of understanding.

Kvanvig explains that he has presented this as a historical typology, where he has cultivated different ways of understanding to profile their characteristics. None of them are antiquated; they live with us in our use of literature and language. These ways of understanding are important for two reasons: any scholarly field gets its own history with its own prerequisites and problems, and it would soon be clear that different paradigms implicitly and explicitly refer to different ways of understanding.

c. *Summary*

This chapter, 'Patterns of Understanding', is fundamental in Kvanvig's book. This is essentially Kvanvig's own prolegomena, from which the reader should understand his way of thinking throughout the remaining parts of his book. It is for this reason that its contents is surveyed in detail.

This chapter signals that Kvanvig is well schooled in philosophy and history of ideas—perhaps more than the other authors discussed in this book (at least, that is the impression one draws on the basis of the *Theologies* examined here).

This chapter has also revealed that Kvanvig thinks and presents his material in a postmodern way. Or, to be more precise, he writes in a way that aims at communicating with postmodernism. This emerges from how he relates language and history and his differentiated conceptions of under-standing. Kvanvig has not sold his soul to postmodernism or plunged completely into it, but he has postmodernist leanings.

4. *Part II, 'Patterns of Reading'*

In the next two main parts of his book, Kvanvig goes further into the theology of the Old Testament, but not in a way we would expect if one is accustomed to traditional Old Testament *Theologies*. His approach is to investigate different ways of reading the texts (Part II) and different text patterns (Part III).

We will follow his presentation, but not as closely as we did in the treatment of Part I. Part I, as just stated, is fundamental to perceiving his patterns of understanding, while in Part II and III he applies these patterns of understanding to Old Testament theology (Part II, 'Patterns of Reading') and exegesis (Part III, 'Text Patterns'). In Part II, Kvanvig presents, in five sections, some main lines in the development of the understanding of Old Testament theology since G.E. Wright (Chapter 2) through Gerhard von Rad (Chapter 3), A.H.J. Gunneweg (Chapter 4), liberation theology (Chapter 5), Brevard S. Childs (Chapter 6) and the relation between text and history (Chapter 7).

a. *The Structure of Old Testament Theology*

In this section Kvanvig describes how Old Testament theology, since the eighteenth century, has developed from dependence on, on the one hand, systematic theology and, on the other hand, history of religion (p. 45). There has always been a tension between Old Testament theology and history of religion on the perception of history, as we have already seen. Should the Old Testament be interpreted from secular or religious premises? Does the Old Testament have a *Mitte* (a centre)? How are we to deal with the question of revelation?

After a critical survey of the debate during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (p. 46), Kvanvig asks: 'Is it possible to read a structure from the Old Testament itself which takes into consideration both its particularity and its manifold?' (p. 47). To him, this structure is found in the biblical history itself, read as salvation and revelation history. This history can be interpreted in a positivistic way, on the basis of sources, but it can also be interpreted theologically, on the basis of the Old Testament itself, read as a testimony of faith instead of as a historical source.

Combining these two approaches is problematic, depending on which of the two approached is preferred. If the approaches are simply laid side by side, we would have a kind of 'double entry booking', where something is 'historical' while others are 'theological'. This was the position of the American Biblical Theology Movement.

The presupposition for this movement was that the Old Testament presents a history that is in accordance with archaeology, but seen from the vantage-point of revelation. This implies that the history of Israel is the

frame of reference for the Old Testament, and any understanding of the Old Testament as a source for theology has to be based on the history of Israel as source of theology. But, Kvanvig asks: On which history?

After a schematic survey of the history of Israel (pp. 48-50), as built on positivistic critical scholarship, Kvanvig points out that this is the history on which the theology of the Biblical Theology Movement, as represented by G.E. Wright and John Bright, was built. Here real history, 'what happened' (cf. Brueggemann), was basic, beginning with exodus and conquest.

i. *Approaches to Old Testament Theology*. Kvanvig then proceeds by presenting the *Theologies* of G.E. Wright, G. von Rad, W. Zimmerli, A.H.J. Gunneweg, N.K. Gottwald and liberation theology and B.S. Childs (Chapters 3–6, respectively). He does not explain why he concentrates on these theologians in particular. I include a short survey of Kvanvig's presentation of these scholars, since this helps to set his own *Theology* in relief. Kvanvig's presentation of these scholars is important as points of orientation for his own theology and how he organizes his *Theology*. However, this literature is internationally well known, and needs no comprehensive survey here.

(1) *G.E. Wright*. G.E. Wright represented the Biblical Theology Movement, which focussed attention on God's acts of salvation in history.[11] In Wright's thinking theology is retelling; sayings about God are meaningful only when they refer to acts of God. The basic events in history were God's acts of salvation, in particular exodus and conquest, that Israel as a nation came into being at Sinai, that Jesus actually lived, died on a cross and revealed himself for his disciples. Facts of history are facts of God. To Wright, there was an inherent interconnection between real history and God's revelation, and this interconnection was of basic significance for the understanding of biblical faith.

Kvanvig's critique of Wright (p. 52) concerns the alleged interconnection between facts of history, facts about God and tradition. In particular, Kvanvig finds with Wright a continuation of the metonymic traits in Barth's theology, because he creates an unambiguousness, where complex phenomena are reduced to one single basic idea, the interconnection of *facts of history*, *facts of God* and *tradition* (p. 55, Kvanvig's italics). His questions are: How do we interpret facts of history? How do we decide whether something represents the facts of history? What are facts about God? What is the interconnection between event and language? Can archaeology really be used to prove that the biblical texts are truthful? If God's revelation is exclusively webbed with history, what then about other parts of the Old Testament theology?

11. Cf. Wright 1952.

In summary (pp. 55-56), problems connected to the history of salvation theology arise from knowledge of both language and history. It is not possible to harmonize the history of Israel, as we know it from critical scholarship, with the biblical presentation of it. Nevertheless, Kvanvig sees two reasons why it is impossible to stop using history as a frame of reference for Old Testament *Theology*: the Old Testament came into being in a particular period of the history of Israel, and the Old Testament always uses history as reference for its sayings about God. Yet the relation between the Bible and history is far more complicated than assumed by the salvation history theology, Kvanvig argues.

(2) *Gerhard von Rad.* Generally, Kvanvig claims that von Rad possibly is the most influential Old Testament scholar of the twentieth century both within Old Testament scholarship and in other theological disciplines as well.[12] Von Rad, for Kvanvig, influenced a whole generation of Old Testament scholars, even though he scarcely had a single disciple himself (pp. 57-58).

Von Rad sees the Old Testament as a history book, one which presents a history inaugurated by God from the creation of the world until the appearance of the Son of Man. Also, the prophetic books are 'history books', von Rad has claimed, in so far as they anticipate eschatological events. Kvanvig comments that this sounds very similar to Wright (p. 57), since von Rad's frame of reference for understanding the Old Testament is history. Yet von Rad should be read against the backdrop of the more critical German tradition, compared to the more conservative American tradition, in which Wright belongs.

Kvanvig presents a lengthy survey of von Rad's *Theology*. We will here pay attention to his critique of von Rad (pp. 73-75), since this critique mirrors important aspects with Kvanvig's theological thinking.

Tradition- and form-critical scholarship, of which von Rad was a part, is still vital to and highly influential in Old Testament scholarship. And yet several of von Rad's basic theses have been left behind today. In particular Kvanvig points out five such points:

1. The historical *Credo* in Deut. 26.5-10 (etc.) is no longer held to be part of an ancient cultic liturgy from the times of the Judges, as von Rad supposed; instead, it is a product of the Deuteronomists.
2. The concept of *berit* (covenant) does not refer to an ancient covenant feast in Israel, and it does not describe the relation between God and people either. It is, rather, a *theologoumenon*, which interprets the relation to God in a particular direction, and which has attained its significance in Deuteronomistic theology.

12. Kvanvig refers to von Rad 1968; excerpts are from von Rad 1952–53 and von Rad 1957–60.

3. The reconstruction of particular feasts as *Sitz im Leben* for different traditions in early Israel is considered very hypothetical.
4. The theory of a Hexateuch has scarcely any adherents today. Now, Deuteronomy is rather taken as a bridge, an epilogue to the Tetrateuch and/or a prologue to the Deuteronomistic history.
5. Source criticism no longer has the following it once had.

This has consequences for how we today assess von Rad's Old Testament *Theology*. Kvanvig points out that some will claim that reconstruction of tradition history and literary history has broken down, whereas others will claim that these methods should basically be revised. Yet Kvanvig will not say that 'all is gone' in von Rad's *Theology* (p. 74). First, we should allow for the existence of oral traditions behind the written sources. Von Rad has supposedly seen the basic traditions. Secondly, there are really literary blocks, different 'schools', in the Old Testament, such as the Tetrateuch (which can be divided into a literary and a priestly stratum), the Deuteronomistic history and the Chronicler's history.

Another question is whether von Rad's way of writing Old Testament *Theology* is fruitful. His way of doing theology is always vulnerable in relation to different theories of history. Kvanvig points out that we operate with three different perceptions of history (p. 75): (1) history reconstructed on social and political bases; (2) reconstructed tradition and literary history, (3) Old Testament history narratives. Kvanvig places the history of salvation theology (Wright) in a synthesis of the three, but with the main emphasis on a synthesis of (1) and (3), while tradition history theology (von Rad) has made a synthesis of (2) and (3), with (2) as its vantage point.

Kvanvig's own position is to take (3) as his vantage point, with the main emphasis being on the Old Testament's own literary presentation, and ask to what degree this concerns other images of history.

(3) *Walter Zimmerli*. Kvanvig finds many similarities between Zimmerli and von Rad in their *Theologies*.[13] However, one significant difference between them is that Zimmerli finds a centre in the theology of the Old Testament in the divine name, Yahweh.

Kvanvig responds (pp. 81-82) that while it is indeed plausible to put the divine name at the theological centre, Zimmerli is not radical enough. The question is when in the history of Israel this name became the hallmark we associate with Old Testament belief and for whom. To traditional scholars there was a 'strict congregation' from the time of the Judges onwards, against, on the other hand, a 'fallen Israel'. Kvanvig is not sure whether this is a correct picture. There are also indications that ordinary Israelites saw little difference between Yahweh and Ba'al. Perhaps true faith in Yahweh is

13. Cf. Zimmerli 1972.

as late as exilic or post-exilic times, he indicates. The key to interpreting the history of Israel in the light of the name of Yahweh is probably to be found at the end of this history, Kvanvig supposes, rather than at the beginning of it.

Kvanvig doubts whether Yahweh's name or his revelation through this name can be taken as the centre of Old Testament theology. We should differentiate between hallmark and centre, he argues. As soon as we contextualize it in different literary genres, we see the theological variety attached to this name.

The question is whether we can fix a theological centre at all, without asking for whom this theology is intended, and who it is that reads and interprets it. The quest for a centre is to the highest degree a hermeneutical question.

(4) *A.H.J. Gunneweg—Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur*. Gunneweg challenges von Rad, asking whether a linear history can really be the point of departure for writing an Old Testament *Theology*.[14] Reconstructing such a history is in fact a historical task. For Gunneweg, it is possible to identify an objectively judged history, in which God has acted, and which can be the object of scientific research (p. 83).

In his deliberations on Gunneweg's *Theology*, Kvanvig points out positive as well as negative features (pp. 94-95). As positive, he mentions how Gunneweg attaches his *Theology* to Heidegger's existential philosophy (p. 94), which has shown the way into the existential space and has demonstrated a dimension of meaning in life. Another positive feature, as Kvanvig sees it, is that Gunneweg's interpretation implies a concentration on the texts' sustainability. The existential interpretation can help us to find deeper features of human life in the texts.

On the debit side of Gunneweg's *Theology*, Kvanvig first mentions that emphasis on existentialism does not imply that other spaces in human life disappear. Our existential space is intertwined with our historical, social and political spaces. Gunneweg's existential interpretation implies a narrowing of perspective on human life. Secondly, Gunneweg is selective in relation to both the Old and the New Testaments. He argues that here is a break between the two testaments, though he does not say what gives this break meaning. Without understanding the continuity between the testaments, the break has no meaning. Thirdly, Gunneweg equalizes a theological interpretation of the Old Testament in our present situation with a theological understanding of it in its own theological context. That Old Testament theology in many ways should not be preached in Christian churches does not imply that it was illegitimate in Old Testament times, Kvanvig argues (p. 95).

14. Cf. Gunneweg 1993.

In summary, Gunneweg's *Theology* is, as seen from its vantage point in existentialistic philosophy, a consistent attack on any attempt to anchor theology in an outward series of events. On the basis of Heidegger, he interprets any such linear understanding of history as camouflaged positivism. The existential side of history can also be read into history and understood as a past current of events, as we find with Gadamer, Kvanvig claims (p. 95).

Here Kvanvig inserts an analysis of Hans-Georg Gadamer's perception of understanding and history and its significance for text interpretation (pp. 95-97). Kvanvig summarizes Gadamer's argument in six points: (1) humans are bound to a linguistic universe of interpretation; (2) when we meet a text we do not meet an author, we meet what the text will say to us; (3) we interpret the text from our prejudices; (4) our prejudices, our interpretation of the world, is our horizon of understanding; (5) this horizon of understanding is not subjective, as it is bound to a dialogue with what we try to understand—understanding occurs in a fusing together of horizons; (6) a historical text does always come to us as part of reception history. This reception history binds us and the text together and demonstrates for us different ways of interpreting the text.

Kvanvig concludes that Gadamer's hermeneutics raises an important concern for Old Testament theology, one which underlies his own reflection. What is important is how Gadamer develops Heidegger's hermeneutic circle, where the interpreter becomes a part of the interpretation. In Gadamer's opinion this occurs not in countering the text; rather, it is in the frame of existential understanding, as part of the text's reception history.

As a corollary, a text's reception history cannot be read merely as an expression of human existence; the text has to be interpreted in a historical progress (p. 97). It is an interconnected course of events with causes and effects, socio-political and cultural, that brings us the text. We can analyze the course of events, but this analysis will not by itself seize what the text expresses. The text stores human interpretation of life, which talks to our interpretation of life, and in that way conveys meaning. Then history can be interpreted in a double perspective: we can ask for both causes and effects and for meaning (p. 98).

Then Kvanvig proceeds by investigating how meaning and causes and effects can be traced in a series of Old Testament texts (pp. 98-99).

If we focus on causes and effects, we are delving behind the texts, and have to reconstruct a political and social history the tradition had a relation to. But nothing of this can give us a satisfactory answer regarding the text's meaning. We should also ask for the text's meaning. A text is not just a product, an effect of a cause or a cause of an effect. A text is creative, because it expresses a faith and a hope that speaks existentially to the reader's faith and hope.

This is what Paul Ricoeur calls explaining and understanding.[15] History comes to us as a linguistic report, which will convey understanding. At the same time we try to explain, to get behind the reports to the factors which created it. This Ricoeur derives from an understanding of human existence. Humans are both *bios* and *logos*. As *bios* we are conditioned by and condition others. As *logos* we act from a consciousness of meaning and express meaning in what we do. As *bios* we are part of history. As *logos* we create history. As *bios* we are part of a historical continuum. As *logos* we create an expression of existence.

(5) *N.K. Gottwald and Liberation Theology*. Kvanvig connects history and liberation, which implies that history is relevant for theology. History is seen in the light of liberation (p. 101). This is a deliberate choice by Kvanvig, because history should not only be seen from the perspective of human salvation, human faith or divine revelation. History should be seen from the perspective of human social and political liberation. There is no particular political theory behind this attitude, but a theology where God's acts are primarily concerned with the suppressed and marginalized, the victims.

Liberation theology implies a shift of perspective on two levels. First, against salvation history theology, it claims a theology from below, not from above. History is not interpreted from revelation; on the contrary, revelation can only be interpreted from the perspective of the suppressed, as part of historical and sociological processes. Secondly, methodologically this means a shift from the traditional historical-critical methods to methods of social sciences. Liberation theology is not one single matter (p. 102); there are a series of liberation theologies in different parts of the world. The shift of perspective mentioned above should be applicable to all these variations. It is important to pay attention to how methods from social sciences are used in Old Testament scholarship. It is the correlation between the hermeneutical paradigm shift and the methods of social sciences that creates the perspective of liberation theology.

Kvanvig concentrates on the hermeneutical paradigm in liberation theology (p. 102). His main focus is on the historical and social conditions related to the origin of Israel, which have been under special attention in Old Testament scholarship, and in that case what the methods of social sciences imply for Old Testament theology. As a case study he pays particular attention to N.K. Gottwald.[16]

Since Gottwald's scholarship is well known, we shall not survey it here, but proceed to Kvanvig' critique of him (cf. pp. 130-31).

15. Kvanvig refers to Ricoeur 1992: 67-98.
16. Cf. Gottwald 1980.

The critique of Gottwald's presentation of the allegedly revolutionary Israel has been twofold. His research has been important for liberation theologians and their emphasis on the close affinity between faith and society. Nevertheless, he has been met with heavy resistance from Old Testament scholarship.

(a) As for his historical reconstructions (p. 130), Gottwald has been criticized for his use of the Old Testament as a source: the Old Testament texts cannot be used as historical source, it is argued, because they primarily mirror the history of the author.

He has also been criticized for his conflict model. There is nothing in the extra-biblical material that necessitates this model. The breakdown of Canaanite villages could just as easily have been caused by internal political reasons.

Also, Gottwald's description of an egalitarian society has been met with criticism. He has changed his terminology from egalitarian to communitarian, but Kvanvig is not sure whether that is historically adequate. The ancient societies were neither egalitarian nor communitarian, even if they did lack a central institutionalized power and hierarchy. Such societies had persons of power, Kvanvig claims, but they were legitimized either by kinship or by individual charisma, and used to be strongly patriarchal.

There is more consensus that Israel came into being via a fusion of a supernumerary 'Canaanite Israel' and a 'Yahwistic Israel' from Egypt. Kvanvig argues that it is difficult to find another model that better explains the sources (p. 131).

(b) As for hermeneutic relevance (p. 131), Kvanvig asks whether Gottwald is right when he seems to claim that this kind of society and faith in God is interwoven. At the same time, he does admit that it is easy to read out of the Old Testament different theologies formed under very different conditions of life. Here we see clear similarities between Gottwald's and Gerstensberger's way of thinking. Kvanvig seems to be reluctant to claim without reservation that Gottwald is right.

Another question is whether a political liberation paradigm is suitable as a basis for theology (p. 131). Kvanvig will not deny that there are close ties between society and faith in God in the Old Testament. Yet Gottwald works according to a Marxist model of society and history, where history is interpreted hierarchically from below, and where the material preconditions and productions are decisive for the forming of society and history. Kvanvig questions whether such a paradigm matches biblical faith in God, since this faith comprises much more than human political and social relations.

Gottwald has also been criticized for reading a modern liberation model into the Old Testament. Kvanvig thinks this is also a question of where the reader is located (p. 132), reminding us that most Old Testament scholars are

found in academic institutions located in the northern hemisphere, and that problems can appear differently when viewed from another vantage point, for instance, from the perspective of the city proletariat.

Kvanvig points out (p. 132) that Gottwald does not deal extensively with the relation between society and literature. Gottwald identifies an early Israel, one which is visible in both history and texts. Yet the texts do something with both history and society. When Gottwald draws a picture of early Israel as something similar to the early church, it is a literary image, not history; it is theology, an expression of hope, written into a particular historical situation. This is also the case with the exodus narrative and the humanitarian laws in Deuteronomy. These texts express a hope of how things could have been.

(6) *Brevard S. Childs*. Kvanvig's main issue with Brevard S. Childs's canonical approach to Old Testament theology and his *Theology* (1992) is whether Childs mixes redaction history and canon history (pp. 136-39): Isn't John Barton right when he claims that Childs seeks to have his cake and eat it? Childs reads the texts historically and diachronically and redaction historically or literarily when it suits him. What, then, is the difference?

Kvanvig illustrates this with reference to three texts, texts with which Childs also deals.[17] Kvanvig does not conceive of these texts as historical reports of actual events; their relation to actual history varies. These pericopes demonstrate how texts became canonical as a consequence of how their authors saw them. These authors lived in a period when the canonical process was underway. What canonizes these texts? If it is the texts' Mosaic origin, then we have to think in the category of 'Moses schools' and writing of texts using his authority (p. 138). However, the question is not how the texts were written, but rather how Torah became canonical, that is, how it gained authority as canon when being read to the people. The important point is the history of its reading, not its origin. The text acquired authority when it was read and led to new practice. People canonized the texts in their life by living according to them.

The problem with Childs, as Kvanvig sees it (p. 138), is that he mixes history of origin with history of reading. He mixes author and reader/hearer of the texts.

Nevertheless, Kvanvig claims that Childs is right in many respects. Childs sees the value of the texts as canonical texts. He sees importance in the relation between the text and the reading congregation,[18] yet, Kvanvig claims, Childs merely sketches the rudiments of a literary theory. When

17. See Deut. 31.9-13; 2 Kgs 22–23 and Neh. 8–9; cf. Kvanvig, pp. 136-37.

18. Kvanvig should perhaps be more careful concerning the term 'reader', since most people in Old Testament times were illiterate and *listened* to the texts as they were read out.

these rudiments are converted into practice, he uses historical methodology. Here Kvanvig argues that one has to choose between describing the texts from their tradition history or redaction history, or taking them at face value, as we actually read them. It is not possible to do both simultaneously, as he charges Childs with doing.

Kvanvig finds that Childs uses three ways of reading texts: redaction-historically, intertextually and using thematic survey (p. 138). These ways of reading have three different theoretic bases: historical-critical method, literary analysis and dogmatic theology. These different approaches are held together by Childs' own way of reading and his own theological context in an American theological framework (p. 139). He is a Protestant, representing academic historical-critical reading. He will not provoke well-established American middle-class Christendom, politically or theologically. He is concerned with canonical scripture exposed to an American believing church. Kvanvig imagines that Childs would protest vehemently to such a claim, objecting that he is concerned with the canonical scripture, not the canonical reader. Kvanvig reads Childs as being both a-historical and a-contextual (p. 139). He operates more with 'congregation' as a theological category than with 'historical readers', to accentuate the religious aspects of the texts. Childs says nothing about this congregation, and is therefore open to a very narrow use of therefore significantly reduced.

Why, then, has Childs gathered so much support, Kvanvig asks. One reason is that he does not provoke anybody, as far as the Church is concerned. Kvanvig, however, sees 'good timing' as a more important reason, since Childs' *Theology* came out just as the frustration of historical-critical scholarship reached a peak. For Kvanvig, Childs' work was published 'In a time when people outside of the church were increasingly interested in the Bible, [when] theologians were still splitting it in pieces. In a time when people increasingly asked religious questions of the Bible, theologians were concerned with rewriting the texts into social and political paradigms and burying them in a historical veil of fog' (p. 139).

In brief, Childs had re-discovered the Bible as a complete book, and claimed that the Bible had survived owing to people's faith. This attracted people to the pews.

b. *The Relation between Text and History*

After surveying the theology of G.E. Wright, G. von Rad, A.H.J. Gunneweg, N.K. Gottwald and B.S. Childs, as we have sketched above, Kvanvig returns in Chapter 7 to the more basic question of the relation between text and history. This is a chapter of paramount importance for Kvanvig's *Theology*.

i. *History as Imaged in the Text*. Here Kvanvig discusses (pp. 141-44) V. Philips Long and his book *The Art of Biblical History* (1994), which Kvanvig sees as a prolongation of the salvation history theology espoused by the American Biblical Theology Movement. Long's book draws connections from this movement to the debate in the 1990s on the Bible as a literary narrative and history.

Long differentiates between historical narrative and fictional narrative, categories that are often mixed, in his opinion. 'Fiction' is used to designate the narrative's literary hallmarks, while 'historical' is used as a designation for its historical content. Long proposes another terminology: 'fictional' should be used of something fictitious or fabricated. To characterize a narrative's literary features, the designation 'artistic' should be used. On the basis of such a distinction, Long classifies the biblical text as 'artistic narrative'.[19]

Long raises questions in two directions: against a naïve biblicist belief in historical facts, without interpretation, and against a postmodern view of historic narrative, where reality does not become history until it is presented in narrative. This problem concerns very much the relation between the Old Testament and history of Israel. At which point did history of Israel emerge? This is a question with wide theological implications. Long connects this question to the question of the Bible as the revelation of God's truth.

Kvanvig notices that Long does not lapse into naïve biblicism, nor dogmatic fundamentalism, and follows an argumentation that many historians in principle would follow (p. 142). Long uses as an analogy the relation between an artist of figurative arts, who creates an object, and a historiographer, who writes a historical narrative. In both cases the product is assumed to represent something real outside of itself. However, both the artist and the historiographer encounter a problem: the object they create stands in opposition to non-representative art and invented narratives. The artist and the historiographer have to choose a particular angle from which to view the object they produce, and both have to make aesthetic choices as to their form of presentation. Accordingly, the biblical narrative consists of historiography and theology, and has a literary character.

Long's understanding of the relation between narrative and general history and the Old Testament and history in particular raises serious questions to Kvanvig (p. 143).

The first problem lies in the comparison between representative art and historical narrative. Long assumes that the key to understanding representative art or a historical text is found in how the object outside of the painting or text is recreated—in lines and colours as literature. Kvanvig asks how

19. Cf. the title of Long's book, *The Art of Biblical History*.

such a comparison should be done when we have no landscape or historical object with which to compare.

Secondly, Kvanvig sees a problem in the different historical periods' assumptions of how images or signs picture reality outside of themselves, as this reality outside of an image can be rendered very differently, whether pictorially or literarily. Biblical authors did not write like modern historians. When texts are so different from our texts, it is much more difficult to get behind them to find out what they present.

As for the relationship between history and narrative, Kvanvig points out that Long here enters a deep debate in historical research. Long profiles two different opinions, as represented by H. White (1984) and D. Carr (1986) (p. 144). Whereas White argues that historical narratives do not render reality, Carr argues that there is continuity between reality and narrative. The disagreement between the two concerns whether history has a narrative structure.[20] Long is sympathetic to Carr, who claims that a narrative can report a reality outside of itself. Carr argues that there is no division between a narrative's literary way of expression and life itself, because we experience other people's actions precisely the way the narrative says. We start an action with an intention, which stretches out until its end. Life consists of sequences with a beginning and an end, like narratives.

However, Kvanvig argues, Long has not understood White's point (p. 144). White holds that a narrative can serve as a historical way of presentation, but he denies that it can depict reality as it actually was. Any discourse is a linguistic allegory of reality.

In general, Kvanvig argues that what we experience historically and biographically is a long series of events floating through life, which can be construed in very different ways (cf. p. 146). The narrative form is something we add to this series of events. This is seen in particular in what we call the 'history of Israel', as we read it in the Bible's history books (i.e. Samuel, Kings, Chronicles). These books are not history in the modern sense, but narrated theology, Kvanvig claims.

This has important implications for how we find theology in the Old Testament (p. 147). In the Old Testament's witness to history of Israel Kvanvig sees a duality: This history was a history of apostasy, because the people served Ba'al instead of Yahweh. But in this history of apostasy Yahweh was present—in the cult of the minority groups or ambiguously in the official cult. This implies that a reconstruction of Israelite religion is not the same as Old Testament theology, even though Israel's historical religion was rather dominant in Old Testament times.

20. 'Narrative structure' here refers to a series of events with a definite beginning and end, which give a reasonable sequence of events.

The traditional books on Israel's political-religious history, and the derived tradition and literary history, have mainly the Old Testament's own history presentations as their vantage point. In modern scholarship the theological-literary history of the Old Testament narrative books is somehow secularized, to be adjusted to modern understanding of history. That this theological literary perception of history is held together by theological and literary criteria, ones which preclude converting it into modern historiography, is overlooked.

This implies that the relationship between text and history is impossible to explain as a depiction, even if the depiction depends on an interpretation. Therefore Kvanvig proceeds into an investigation of text reading as production of meaning.

ii. *Text Reading as Production of Meaning*. With reference to G. West (1995: 131-73), Kvanvig points out three different ways of reading the Old Testament (pp. 147-48): reading diachronically behind the text, reading the text itself literarily and reading in front of the text, applying it personally. West emphasizes in particular the latter, which is referred back to J.S. Croatto (1987), whose intention is to demonstrate that the meaning of the text lies in front of the text, not in the text as a closed system.

Croatto places the text in a semiotic model. The text consists of signifiers and significates, where the signifiers refer to something outside of the text, a referent. Decisive for Croatto is to demonstrate that the meaning of a text is in the text itself and not in its referent. The referent is behind the text and not in the text.

By way of demonstration, Croatto treats the Servant Songs of Deutero-Isaiah (pp. 148-49). Who is the Servant? Is he the collective Israel or an individual? The original referent is not known to us—we merely have the texts themselves. Yet the history of reading reveals that the meaning flows from the texts, not from the referent. The texts have a surplus of meaning which is liberated by reading. Every text is a concentration of several possible meanings, and every reading of a text is a production of meaning in new codes, codes which create new readings.[21]

What, then, about texts which refer to identifiable events outside of the text, and are an integrated part of the text (pp. 150-52)? Particularly important events are put in words, and words demand an interpretation. An event continues to live in the words describing the event, but any description is selective compared to totality—it is not the event itself.

One example from the Old Testament is the exodus event, put in words in Exodus 1–15. Repeatedly, the original exodus is used as a theological motif,

21. The process is illustrated graphically by Kvanvig (p. 150).

not least to describe the homecoming from exile in Babylon as another 'exodus' (cf. Deutero-Isaiah). In this way the Bible has theological 'axes' that hold it together intertextually as a book. These 'axes' serve as keys in an ideologically critical way of reading.

Kvanvig finds features of salvation-history theology, tradition-history theology, existentialist theology, liberation theology and canonical reading in Croatto's theological thinking (p. 152). The difference is how Croatto builds his presentation on a linguistic and literary theory, which makes the text a meaning-creating subject. Meaning emerges from the text and not from the events the text refers to. The theological meaning of the events lies in the texts, which have caught the events and given them a linguistic structure. The text is seen as a potential source of meaning for future interpretations.

This opens the way for a new type of hermeneutics, a literary hermeneutics, which concentrates on how text structures meaning. This causes Kvanvig to ask: Why move from event to text? If it is the text that mediates the theological meaning, why not go from text to event? (p. 152). In the following he takes 'the first steps' in such a reading, his point of departure being the work of Paul Ricoeur.

iii. *From Text to History—a Literary Perspective*.

(1) *Paul Ricoeur*. The relation between narrative and historical presentation is studied by Paul Ricoeur,[22] who distinguishes between fictional narrative and historical narrative (cf. Kvanvig, pp. 152-55). Ricoeur is an important deliverer of premises to Kvanvig.

Ricoeur claims that historical presentation is a kind of narrative that has similarities with fiction narrative; he therefore calls it 'historical narrative'. What holds historical narrative and fiction narrative together is their plot, which is constituted by a sequence of events and the involved persons' experience of that sequence.

This is evident when we see a historical presentation from the vantage-point of the reader. We have to keep up with the sequence of events described to understand it. We ask and the historian answers and explains. Fiction narratives have two dimensions, one episodic and another configurative. The configurative dimension explains and summarizes the episodic sequence. This is also how texts are organized and how exegesis functions.

Both historical narratives and fiction narratives are dual; they are literary and they refer to a reality outside of themselves. Ricoeur makes two limitations, against a positivistic understanding of historiography and against

22. Kvanvig refers primarily (n. 253) to Ricoeur 1978, but also to a series of commentators to Ricoeur.

structuralism. A narrative is a *mimesis* of reality (cf. Aristotle), a creative rewriting of reality, or metaphor, as Ricoeur calls it. Narrative as metaphor makes a heuristic model of reality.

Fiction narrative and historical narrative have two basic features in common: They are literary expressions, carrying a meaning with them, and they refer to a reality outside of themselves, they have a reference. The difference between them is that fiction narrative and historical narrative have different references: Fiction narrative re-writes the reader's historical conditioning, while the historical narrative has two references, the world of the reader and the world where the event happened.

In this way Ricoeur claims that historical narratives are more fiction than we imagine, and fiction narratives more history than we imagine. And people seem to need both. This is why we can write both 'story' and 'history'.

(2) *Fiction Narrative and Historical Narrative in the Bible*. Kvanvig illustrates the difference between fiction narrative and historical narrative in the Bible with reference to the narratives of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4), the tower of Babylon (Gen. 11), the exodus-event (Exod. 1–14) and the siege of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18–19), and concludes (cf. p. 159) that there are three different types of reference in such tradition narratives:

1. The primary reference is the narrative's fiction, with its inherent meaning. This reference points at the reader himself; the reference is in front of the narrative, not behind it.
2. Historical references will very often not lie in the narrative's past fiction, but on another level. The historical reference can only be indirectly visible, as an originally historical event wrapped into poetry.
3. Tradition narratives can also contain fictions that can be historically documented, as in the narratives about the siege of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18–19). This depends on available historical sources.

So far, Kvanvig summarizes (p. 159), this has been a first discussion of the relation between biblical narratives and history. Before he returns to the hermeneutics of the biblical language and texts, he investigates how texts form a meaning for us, which is perceivable in a linguistic web.

5. *Part III, 'Text Patterns'*

In his Part III, 'Text Patterns', Kvanvig investigates poetic patterns, in particular in Wisdom texts, Psalm texts and prophetic texts, the relation between chaos and cosmos (Chapter 8), narrative structures (Chapter 9) and the hermeneutics of narratives (Chapter 10), following the literary perspectives of Paul Ricoeur. Kvanvig's dialogue partners are linguistics and

literary science. Methodologically, texts are followed from the smallest linguistic unit right up to book-length works. Texts are interrogated as to how they, through their linguistic structure, create a structure of meaning and thereby shape a theological reflection (cf. p. 163).

a. *Poetic Patterns*

When reading a text, we read in two different ways, Kvanvig explains (p. 164): we read linearly and we read word patterns.[23] This is basic to Kvanvig's reading of any kind of text.

Kvanvig offers a study of small text units to reveal such orders. The examples are taken from Wisdom literature, the Psalms and the Prophets (Chapter 8, pp. 165-71). This survey will not be traced here, and we shall proceed instead to a summary of his conclusions.

His summary of Wisdom literature is set out in five points, five instructions about cause and effects (pp. 171-72): (1) life experience, (2) ethos (with reference to personal manners and human fellowship), (3) theology, (4) the combination of experience, ethos and theology implies ontology (defined according to K. Hübner[24]) and (5) ontology coming forth in Proverbs as a theory of action, in human action.

In the Psalms Kvanvig concentrates on the linguistic structure, such as parallelism and different psalm categories (pp. 172-83). In poetic parallelism reality is ordered as contradictions and similarities, what fits together and what does not fit together. The linguistic play in poetry creates different crossing and intersecting lines. Narrative intends to chronologize reality, while poetry thematizes it (p. 180). In parallelisms reality is re-created outside of language by testing the possibilities of language itself, and by playing words against words. This reality is brought about by language and is not an image of the outside world (cf. p. 180).

However, language also refers to a social reality of ethnic and political conflicts, which Kvanvig briefly demonstrates with reference to Psalms 1, 10 and 113 (pp. 181-83).

In the poetic language of the prophets, Kvanvig points out sequences of words of judgment and words of salvation in a structure of introduction, description of situation, with transition sayings (the prophet formula), and prediction for future (illustrated in tables, pp. 184-85). There is a linguistic description of a series of events, which intends to disclose the culprit (an individual or a group) and his/their responsibility before Yahweh. This sequence of events reveals a theological pattern with charges and judgment. Judgments are held together in both a linear structure and in word patterns, where word patterns are more open than the linear structures.

23. In structuralism this is called 'syntagmatic order' and 'paradigmatic order'.
24. Cf. Hübner 1988: 29.

Words of judgement have a historical reference in particular events, yet their literary structure can be used repeatedly with reference to different historical situations.

As for 'the history of the future', or eschatology, in the prophetic literature (pp. 189-91), Kvanvig points out:

1. The concept of eschatology can be misleading if used in a narrow way with reference to 'the latter things'. There is no support for the idea that the prophets talked about an absolute end of history. The prophets proclaimed a turning point, not an absolute ending point.
2. The prophets proclaimed a time of salvation after the end of judgment.
3. The description of the time of salvation stands in stark contrast to the time of judgment; the time of salvation is transcended historical experience, something qualitatively new.
4. As readers of the prophetic books, we are on the side of the receivers. We reflect on several prophecies from different prophets in different periods. When read together, we see a general linguistic pattern in them.

Originally, prophecies were talked into a historical situation. But the texts as we read them have been through a tradition history, implying that the original historical situation is lost. The texts are now put into a linguistic and literary context they did not have at the outset. This is the context from which we understand them.

This implies that the prophetic *kerygma*, as found in these texts, both brings in history and creates history by creating historical images, which have come to stamp humanity's expectations and horizons of acting. They have their own prophetic style of language, which sets them apart from the Old Testament narratives; nevertheless, they convey a sequence of events. The prophets extend the possibility of interpreting history not only as something past, but as a sequence of events that pass by the present of the reader into his future.

i. *Chaos and Cosmos*. The poetic interplay between linear text and word patterns also refers to Yahweh and the divine fight against chaos (p. 194).

This fight against chaos should not be understood solely as something past. Myth always talks about the present as something past. Yahweh's fight against chaos is something constant, against a demonic other ontology, an anti-ontology. The mythic past is something present. The linear sequence is attached to Yahweh's actions; he fights the personified demonic monsters by pushing them back and filling in the emptied space with life. This is a continuous fight, one always raging, mirroring human existence.

Wisdom is described as a woman (Prov. 8), Yahweh's architect and co-constructor at the creation of being. Wisdom has a role as mediator in the struggle between the two ontologies. She chains together the cosmic order and is the man's escort. She has built a cosmos for humans.

ii. *Poetry and Theology*. Kvanvig summarizes (pp. 198-200) on poetic patterns, offering four points with reference to form and five points with reference to content.

With reference to form, he argues (p. 199): (1) word patterns are most significant in poetic texts; (2) in poetic texts word patterns are decisive for understanding their content—the texts create reality by playing words against words; (3) the literary structure of the texts appears in different ways in Proverbs, Psalms and the Prophets; (4) meaning is created by morphology and syntax. The linear structure creates meaning when a grammatical sequence connects the individual words.

As for the content of texts, Kvanvig finds (pp. 199-200): (1) there is no automatic connection between linear structure and word pattern—linear structure and word pattern can transform any reality into a sequence or into associative themes; (2) the action–effect ontology belongs to the human sphere and comprises an ethos, because humans stands responsible for their actions—there is both an antithesis between the righteous and the wicked and a basic synthesis, as effect is inherent in actions, whether good or bad; (3) a theology belongs to the action–effect ontology—this theology is dual, as, on the one hand, it expects a divine intervention and, on the other hand, we see an interconnection of righteousness and suffering; (4) the chaos–cosmos ontology belongs to the divine sphere and implies that the world is split between life-threatening and life-promoting forces; (5) also, the chaos–cosmos ontology contains a theology, because it is connected to Yahweh's mythological fight for a world in which humans can live.

In relation to the Old Testament as a whole, Kvanvig points out (p. 200):

1. In these two ontologies, the action–effect ontology and the chaos–cosmos ontology, we find two theologies that recur as basic patterns in the Old Testament. Yahweh acts for the individual and for the people to support the righteous, and he acts to create the world as a safe house for humans. These theologies cannot be read independently from word patterns, as they are inherent in the linear sequence of events that create history narratives, creation narratives and combat narratives.
2. In these two ontologies we find the stuff on which many Old Testament narratives are built upon—humans have to live with the consequences of their own actions. Old Testament narratives bring up these ontologies, play on them, play them against each other, polemicize them and sometimes completely crush them.

b. *Narrative Patterns*

In his analysis of narrative patterns (Chapter 9),[25] Kvanvig to some degree follows the conceptions of the structuralists, without using their language of philosophy (cf. p. 203). The structuralists talk about syntagmatic structure and paradigmatic structure. These concepts re-appear in Kvanvig's *Theology* as linear structures and word patterns (p. 203; cf. above, pp. 43-45).

Kvanvig points out three necessary preconditions for creating narratives: humans, actions and a story-teller.

Narratives tell about humans.[26] In narratives humans get individuality and character and become actors. Yet they can be presented in different ways. Narratology differentiates between 'flat' and 'round' characters, as to whether they are fixed images or change character in the narrative (p. 205). The 'round' characters are the interesting ones.

To see the characters as 'round' presupposes empathy and psychological insight, and puffing them into inter-human relations. These aspects are often overlooked in traditional exegesis, as the interest has primarily been in finding the text's message, Kvanvig complains (p. 206). In narrative exegesis the exegete asks questions of the narrative. In narratives also animals and plants can have human features and speak, and God is described with human features and presented in anthropological language. When God is brought into the narrative a tension emerges—the elevated Divine Being comes too close to humans. Then a need for a mediator appears, often emerging as 'Angel of God'.

Kvanvig sees two problems with reading Old Testament narratives (pp. 208-209). First, in general, he asks how we are to find fixed structures in narratives related to such an irregular being as human. In narratology this problem is solved, under influence from structuralism, by changing humans into points in the narrative's structure. Humans become actants (typified actors), and the relation between such actants can be reduced to a limited number, which can be analyzed. The second problem is specific to the reading of the Old Testament—concentration on persons excludes a continuous and coherent reading of the Old Testament. As yet, no narrative biblical *Theology* has been written. The reason is that Old Testament theologians have fallen in love with humans in the narratives, Kvanvig argues (p. 209). However, it is not the cast of characters that creates interconnection in the

25. Kvanvig is actually somewhat inconsequent in his vocabulary, as he calls Chapter 8 'Poetic Patterns in Old Testament Texts' (*Poetiske mønster i gammeltestamentlige tekster*), while Chapter 9 is titled 'Narrative Structure in the Old Testament' (*Narrativ struktur i Det gamle testamente*). The significant variation is between the use of 'pattern' and 'structure'. This variation indicates that Kvanvig sees no significant difference in meaning between the two terms.

26. Kvanvig says nothing about narratives on animals or nature.

Old Testament—it is events. A gigantic series of events is the backbone of the Old Testament. In this series Yahweh and humankind are both teammates and adversaries.

i. *Narrative Plots*. Common for a series of narratologies is that they see actions or events as constitutive for the narrative. Fixed structures in narratives are found in how events are organized. Behind this concentration on events Kvanvig finds Aristotle's poetics, which he follows up with a survey of Ricoeur's reading of Aristotle on the question of plot:

> A plot is something after something else and something because of something. Something after something else is the episodic character. It comprises a series of sequences. Something because of something else is the logic of the plot (p. 210).[27]

In Kvanvig's own opinion, this causes a general impression of a narrative's linear structure (cf. p. 210). A narrative organizes actions or events as a plot that leads up to something; a plot has a *telos*. There is an introduction and a conclusion. The plot emerges in a bow of tension (illustrated graphically by Kvanvig, pp. 211-14) between an introduction and a conclusion. A text has a series of sequences and an inherent dynamic. Something is set in motion, a problem or a lack, and the narrative is supposed to solve the problem or fill in the lack, and at the end reach a *telos*. This problem is exemplified and illustrated from Genesis 1–3, but the pattern is frequent throughout the Old Testament narratives.

However, a narrative can also be threatened by internal disintegration. This is what Ricoeur calls *discordant concordance*, a concept taken from Aristotle, who claimed that every plot has an inherent *metabolé*, a revulsion, that works against the events' necessary or plausible context. This is a resistance inherent in a 'tension bow' (a favourite term to Kvanvig) between a lack or a hindrance that has to be surmounted, or a conflict that threatens the sequence of events. Old Testament narratives are full of such enigmatic features.

In particular, Kvanvig discusses the *metabolé* problem in relation to the Cain and Abel narrative (Gen. 4) and the book of Job (p. 216). In the Cain and Abel narrative the problem is why God accepted Abel's sacrifice but not Cain's. The biblical narrative itself does not solve that problem. In the book of Job there are two such problems. One is the tension between Job and his friends' action–effect ontology and how life is actually experienced by Job. Another is the tension in the dialogue between Job and his friends, based on their nature ontology and God's dialogue with Job (chs. 38–41). Does God's answer relate to Job's problem at all? God seems to talk about something

27. This is my translation of a citation in Norwegian. Kvanvig does not give the source for his citation.

else—and that seems to be the actual point, Kvanvig argues (p. 217). Job and his friends talk about life as if all problems could be solved, whereas God talks about the world as the habitat in which humans are placed. This is a world with an unsolved tension between cosmos and chaos. The book of Job is on all levels built around the paradox of *discordant concordance*, Kvanvig claims (p. 218).

The Old Testament has a particular Hebrew concept for humanity's position in a situation of *discordant concordance*, √ *ns'* (*qal* and *piel*), which can be translated as 'test' or 'prove', a word used in situations of crisis, Kvanvig explains.

ii. *Narrative and Narrator*. Every narrative has a narrator (p. 218). Though we cannot understand an ancient or biblical narrator in the modern sense of an author, these ancient texts are the result of a long history of tradition and redaction.

In historical-critical reading we ask for the author's voice in the text. In a literary reading we ask for the narrator's voice in the text (p. 219). The author is the person who has actually written the narrative. The narrator is the voice in the text created by the author. The narrator is more important than the author, because the narrator 'was there' at the event, the author was not present. The Bible is a narrative with a narrator present in the text, who passes on the narrative. Sometimes the narrator leaves the narrative and addresses himself directly to the reader with a message. He can also be an active part in the narrative.

iii. *Miscellanies on Narrative Patterns.* A narrative can characterize a person's appearance (e.g. as good looking) or events (contrast, irony, etc.). Kvanvig also gives a series of examples of characteristics given by repetitions (p. 219). Events can be seen from outside and from inside (cf. the narratives of Moses and the burning bush in Exod. 3 and Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Gen. 2–3). Different narrative techniques are used, individually or combined (cf. the Aqedah narrative in Gen. 22, discussed by Kvanvig on pp. 221-22).

Kvanvig often finds an omniscient narrator (p. 222) who not only tells a story, but who enters into and out of it. He is omnipresent and omniscient, knowing the beginning and the end of it, what God and people know about the event while it is going on, and so on.

There is a difference between the sequence of the narrative and the narrative's rendering of this sequence (cf. p. 222). This phenomenon is described differently in the literature. M. Bal calls it *fabula*, while S. Rimmon-Kenan calls it *story*.[28] The point is that a narrative's sequence does not always

28. Kvanvig refers to Bal (1985: 5) and Rimmon-Kenan (1983: 2).

follow a chronological order; it can begin with the conclusion or it can conclude with the beginning. The narrative, however, will always have an inherent chronology of the event. This implies that we have a linear structure and a structure of actions built into a narrative structure. Kvanvig exemplifies this by looking at Judges 1–2 and the two creation narratives in Genesis 1–2 (p. 223).

c. *Narrative Linguistic Structure*

Kvanvig goes into detail regarding the linguistic structure of Hebrew narrative (Chapter 9, section 1.3), such as the emergence of linear grammatical structure (*wayyiqtol* and *w^{e}qatal*), as well as direct and indirect speech and different word patterns, inclusive play of words, and so on. His presentation of this problem builds mainly on the syntactic studies of A. Niccacci,[29] with Gen. 1.1–2.3 as the text example (pp. 224-28). From this he concludes that Hebrew narratives as a rule contain three main elements: actions (*wayyiqtol*), commentary and direct speech.

Direct speech is characterized by (cf. pp. 227-28): (1) the *wayyiqtol* form of a verb, often *wayyo'mer*, 'and he said', which means that speech is an important part of the event; (2) in several cases speech is not addressed to anyone—it is a monologue; (3) when narrative is speech, there are often two exits—one exit lies in the direct speech itself, the other lies in the action, which emerges in the future as the effect of a cause—and in particular Kvanvig refers to the promises of descendants and land; (4) in that case the narrative opens itself up to the future with a promise, though future can also relate to something the addressee of the speech shall do—the whole Pentateuch can be read that way; (5) this means that Old Testament narratives move in the direction of a future horizon—this move characterizes the great narrative from Genesis to 2 Kings.

The *wayyiqtol* formula is the most significant marker of narrative linear structure (p. 228). It forms reality as a series of events, organized as a plot. This is different from poetry, as the formula is specific for narrative, while poetry is primarily characterized by word patterns (cf. pp. 43-45, above).

But also narratives have word patterns, especially play on words. Kvanvig underlines this, referring to Ellen van Wolde (1994), who calls such play on words in narratives analogical, in opposition to a text's logical structure, which is equivalent to what Kvanvig calls linear (p. 228).

Logical reading is to read a text according to a particular linguistic code. Analogue reading is to read a text according to iconic relations between words in the text and what the words mirror in reality outside of the text (pp. 228-29). Analogies are expressed through parallel parts of the text.[30]

29. Cf. Niccacci 1990 and 1994.

30. As examples Kvanvig refers to the word-play appearing in Gen. 11.1-9; 2.25–3.7; 1.1–2.3 and 2.4–3.24, respectively (pp. 229-31).

6. *The Old Testament as Narrative*

In Chapter 9, section 2, Kvanvig presents the Old Testament as narrative, small and big narratives (section 2.1), the Bible as a narrative (section 2.2) and thematic axes in the Bible (section 2.3).

a. *Small and Big Narratives*

Regardless of length, all narratives are told into another narrative (p. 232). Narratives can be told in sequence, but biblical narratives are also part of bigger narratives, such as the Pentateuch or the Deuteronomistic history, where small narratives are incorporated into bigger narratives. Individual narratives can also be read as part of narrative circles, as in the Patriarchal narratives (Gen. 12–50).

The Patriarchal narratives can be read in three different ways (p. 232): they tell how a group of nomads lived with their faith in God and promise of land and family; there is a great narrative arc from the Patriarchs to the book of Kings, where the individual narratives are set in a perspective that concerns the whole of humankind. Kvanvig finds all three perspectives in Gen. 11.27–12.9 (p. 233). Yahweh's address to Abram has a perspective far wider than the patriarchal narratives themselves, extending right into the history of the people, exodus from Egypt, immigration in Canaan and the kingdoms of David and Solomon.

In their *Credo* (Deut. 26.5-10) the Israelites confessed, in a narrative form, what their God, Yahweh, had done (pp. 233-34). The narrative is a concentration of the most important events in the early history of the people.

Kvanvig reads this narrative as episodic, as a series of events. The narrative's meaning is not detected until its plots are laid bare. The plots are found in the dynamics between the events, 'something because of something else' (cf. pp. 47-48, above). He finds as a basic word pattern (p. 235), an arc from not having land to having land, a polarity between submission and liberty, and a peak in the juxtaposition of a screaming people and a hearing God. The interchange between small and big narratives is found throughout the Bible, Kvanvig claims, referring to examples from the Pentateuch.

b. *The Bible as Narrative*

Kvanvig sees the Old Testament itself as a big and coherent narrative with a reception history that has formed European culture (p. 235).

Yet reading the Old Testament as a coherent book has a series of inherent problems. The Old Testament as a book is not like other books, as it consists of a series of different books. It exists in different editions, as the Hebrew Bible (or *Tanak*), the Greek Septuagint and the Christian Bible, all with different canonical shape (pp. 236-39).

c. *Thematic Axes in the Bible*

As for thematic axes, Kvanvig refers to a bundle of words interconnected around a common theme (p. 239).[31] When texts within such axes are read together we read intertextually. Here Kvanvig builds on Ellen van Wolde (cf. above), who argues that intertextuality can be used in two ways: as text production and as text reproduction. The first way of reading is diachronic, the latter is synchronic.

Kvanvig finds this way of reading useful for understanding Gerhard von Rad's *Theology* (pp. 240-41). Von Rad uses intertextuality in a diachronic reading of the Old Testament, following the traditions of promise through the Patriarchs, Exodus, Sinai/covenant/Torah, conquering of the land, David and Zion and the temple traditions. These thematic axes are webbed into the great narrative world of the Old Testament.

All the way through the Old Testament the thematic axes have two functions. On the one hand, they are the basic narratives in a linear reading. They function as a red thread running throughout the Old Testament: Creation–Patriarchs–Exodus–Sinai–Conquest–Election of Zion and David. On the other hand, these narratives are a web criss-crossing the Old Testament.

7. *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Narrative*

In his concluding chapter (Chapter 10), Kvanvig deals with narrative as *mimesis* (section 1), Bible reading as dialogue (section 2) and the variability of the biblical language (section 3).

a. *Narrative as Mimesis*

Kvanvig singles out three problems for discussion in biblical narrative hermeneutics (p. 245): (1) historical hermeneutics refers to the relation between the text then and the modern reader in our time; (2) ethical hermeneutics refers to the relation between the reader and other humans in the reading; (3) linguistic hermeneutics refers to the relation between the language of the text and the language of the reader. These three hermeneutics cannot be separated. We meet them in all kinds of biblical texts, in the history of the text as well as in our history, in the world of other people as well as in our own world.

Kvanvig discusses these problems from the vantage point of *mimesis*, a term Ricoeur (1984–85) has brought in from Aristotle. Aristotle used this term with reference to how tragedy imitates human actions. Ricoeur extends the concept to concern all types of narratives, where *mimesis* becomes a

31. Kvanvig takes the term 'axis' from Croatto 1987. Croatto refers to 'semantic axes'.

linguistic recreation of life. In *mimesis* the three hermeneutic challenges meet: history, the other human being and language are recreated in mimesis. Ricoeur operates with three *mimeses*—m_1, m_2 and m_3 (pp. 246-48). For Ricoeur, m_1 refers to the material the narrative is taken from—pre-figuration; m_2 refers to the coherent narrative itself—configuration; m_3 refers to how the narrative is applied to the receiver, its reception history, and how the horizons of the text and the reader have melded together—new figuration.

We will not survey Kvanvig's exposition on how this functions, but go directly to his summary (p. 251): (1) m_1: Fiction narratives reflect on human activity, while historical presentations trace the past. (2) m_2: Fiction narratives form a plot over a quasi-past, as presented in a literary narrative, while historical presentations form a plot over a documented past, created by a critical historian. (3) m_3: Fiction narratives represent a general truth about human life, while historical narratives render a past sequence of acts to which we are in debt.

This model is transferred to Old Testament narratives, where Kvanvig excerpts four points (pp. 252-53): (1) all *mimeses* are inherent in the narrative, none of them can be separated from it as independent parts; (2) if we ask behind the text, we do not necessarily ask for the text's historical context, we ask for what the text brings up; (3) this has important theological consequences, which are based in m_2; (4) we have no admittance to m_2 except for through m_3.

b. *Biblical Narrative as Tradition Narrative*

After discussing the biblical narrative as tradition narrative, with reference to P. Ricoeur, E. Bluhm and S. Niditch (section 10.1.4),[32] Kvanvig concludes that we read the Old Testament as a dichotomy between poetry and history writing, which is strange to the Old Testament itself (p. 255). The Old Testament has no critical opinion on which version of a narrative was 'historically true', when different versions existed. This does not imply that the Old Testament was fictitious or that it was historical in the modern sense. On the m_2 level, the Old Testament is a hybrid, being fictitious and historical. The Old Testament is tradition literature, where the power of persuasion is not in the truthfulness of the author but in the narrative's own weight.

Here Kvanvig sees two pitfalls (p. 255): on the one hand, the salvation-historical interpretative trap, where the persuasiveness of the Old Testament depends on the historicity of the text; on the other hand, the literary trap, where the persuasiveness of the Old Testament depends on whether it is 'good literature'. When we ask whether something has happened, the Old Testament responds: Yes, several times! The Old Testament narratives

32. Bluhm 1996: 11-23; Niditch 1997: 108-30.

vegetate on identification, on narrating life experience into the fiction of the narrative. Human flesh and blood has pumped life into the m_1 narratives. This experience of life has come into the narratives through generations of re-telling. They are brought in and stored in m_2 and triggered off in the readers' life, m_3.

Understanding a narrative's three *mimeses* helps us to see the relation between biblical narratives and our narratives, Kvanvig argues. We use narrative *mimeses* when bits of life are put together to make a whole. Narrative hermeneutics are also found in human life. We bring fragments (m_1) to create a coherent narrative (m_2) which results in new pictures of our life (m_3). Changing life into a narrative plot in m_2 is our struggle to hold life together, creating concordance in a world of discordance.

c. *Bible Reading as Dialogue*

i. *Narrative and Time*. Kvanvig's chapter on Bible reading as dialogue (Chapter 10, section 2) goes deeply into philosophy of time. Following Ricoeur, who refers back to Aristotle and Augustine, Kvanvig reviews different aspects of time (p. 256). Time is perceived as a unit, but since antiquity philosophers have discussed two conceptions of time division.

First, time is described as a phenomenon within us and outside of us. Time within us is oriented around ourselves and our perception of the world around us. In time outside of us we are placed in relation to the world's time. Kvanvig calls these two aspects human or lived time and cosmic time.

The second conception refers to a division between two times. In human lived time there is a division between Presence (the presence of the present), Memory (the presence of the past), Hope (the presence of the future). All three aspects of time rest in the present. Talking simply about past, present and future is therefore not quite adequate. We have admittance to past and future only through the present. In cosmic time there is no future or past, because there is no human being to define presence. In cosmic time we can merely talk about before and after.

Paul Ricoeur, with reference to W. James (1993 [1886]), imports and discusses a 'third time', with a division between previous, contemporary and later. This is what he calls historical time. Here Ricoeur builds on three phenomena, which he argues are constitutive for historical time: calendar time, sequence of generations and footprints of the past. His aim is to demonstrate that historical time is a coherence of human time and cosmic time. In this coherence narrative time plays an important role.

As for biblical narratives and time, the question is to what degree the narrators have configured the narratives according to a pattern which coincides with this 'third time'.

Kvanvig looks at a series of narrative texts from those perspectives: calendar time, sequence of generations and footprints of the past (pp. 258-64), and concludes (pp. 264-65) that the Old Testament narratives can be read according to two models: as a narrative line and as narrative circles.

When we read narratives as a line, they are chained together in a series. When we read them as narrative circles, they are narrated into one-another. These are two ways of giving reality narrative structure. In the first case, linear narrative, narrative configuring of cosmic time is the vantage point; reality follows chronologically in a time line. In the second case, circular narrative, human-lived time is the vantage point. The inner narrative circle is connected to humanity's fate. If we read a narrative as a line, the great historical coherence is the centre. If we read a narrative as a circle, human existence is at the centre.

Here our own life meets our life stories and the Old Testament narratives, because our life is formed as narratives the same way. Either we start outside of ourselves in a wide context and place ourselves into it, or we start with ourselves and narrate ourselves out into a wider context, thereby operating with what Ricoeur calls 'third time'. We focus differently, either in the broad context we are part of in cosmic time, or without life in the centre of human-lived time.

ii. *Biblical Narratives and Ethics*. In another section of Chapter 10 (section 2.2), Kvanvig studies the ethical side of biblical narratives. That narratives have an ethical aspect does not imply that they propagate a particular moral (p. 265). It means that they invite ethical reflection. They are not ethically neutral, but challenge our ethical judgment. The basic theological problem in Old Testament ethical narratives is that the main person often is God himself.

Most of Kvanvig's discussion is a contextual reading of the book of Joshua and its conquest narratives, where Yahweh is the ethical responsible person, acting through the warfare of Joshua. Central in this biblical book (27 times, p. 271) is the concept of ban (*ḥerem*), which implies the killing of humans as well as animals (cf. Josh. 6.21), but on the other hand also consecration for Yahweh.

Here Kvanvig (p. 266) uses two hermeneutical 'spirals' he identifies in the work of Norman K. Gottwald (1995). One spiral goes between the text in the book of Joshua and the different socio-political contexts the book has taken up. The other spiral goes between us as readers of the text and the different socio-political contexts we are part of. In the first spiral, the book is read as a collection of traditions, ones which bear the footprints of tribal, monarchic, exilic and post-exilic time.[33] The second spiral is a repetition of

33. This is not much different from how E. Gerstenberger describes the understanding of God in different historical stages.

the same with us as readers. When we read the book of Joshua, it is given a new socio-political context, which is decisive for the meaning we give the book.

Kvanvig sees three different intertextual arcs interconnecting the beginning and the end of the book of Joshua (pp. 270-71): from the death of Moses to the death of Joshua, from promise to fulfilment, and from initial cultic ritual to the establishing of the covenant at Shechem. The whole book is a plot with contradictions between Yahweh and other deities, Israelites and Canaanites, and the Promised Land and other countries. These plot-patterns express three aspects—religious, ethnic and territorial—and are central in the book of Joshua.

Our problem when reading the book of Joshua is that we judge it ethically, not cultically (p. 273). We are not able to identify ourselves with Yahweh and Israel's religious, ethnic and territorial project. We do not accept ban (*ḥerem*) as a solution or human wickedness as an ethical explanation, because the 'wicked' people have not done Israel any harm. As a corollary, we associate it with racism or ethnic cleansing (p. 274).

When the book of Joshua meets us in m_3, there is an encounter between two narratives: the book's narrative and our life's narrative. Kvanvig describes this encounter with Ricoeur (p. 275). In any narrative the human character is given roles as acting and suffering in three areas:

(1) In action theory it concerns the difference between act and event. Are human actions merely events, or are they acting initiatives?
(2) Ethically, it is a question of encounter with other humans.
(3) These are the aspects of human actions that narrative configures, because it presents humans as able to act, but in a way conditioned by others.

These three levels are, according to Ricoeur (cf. p. 276), to be summed up in the Latin verb *patior*, 'suffer', from which we derive the term *passive*, which again functions on three levels: as linguistic structure *passive* is a form of a verb; as acting structure *passive* refers to a passive situation of life; and as ethical structure it is put into a relation between the characters of a narrative. In this relation there is the possibility of a move between the acting (*agent*) person and the suffering (*patient*) person.

Contextual theology has coined the concept of 'empowerment' to describe the dynamic element between *agent* and *patient*, which implies that by suffering one comes of age (p. 276). Empowerment is therefore never something static, but refers to a dynamic rhythm of life.

Kvanvig applies this way of thinking as a hermeneutic key for understanding the book of Joshua (p. 277). In this biblical book the Canaanites are the suffering ones, suffering under the Israelites' violence. The narratives are triumphant. We see the narrative's *concordance* and look for some

discordance. One reason for our reaction is that these narratives meet our own narratives, and we see agents and patients, assailants and victims. We also use other biblical narratives as a critical norm, which sometimes have caused the church to use the same triumphalist language.

iii. *Inner and Outer Landscape of Biblical Narratives*. In a third section (section 2.3) Kvanvig studies biblical narrative language, its inner and outer 'landscape' (p. 277). The difference between these 'landscapes' is compared with the difference between thinking and acting. Kvanvig's presentation builds upon metaphors from narrative analysis in therapy.[34] The idea is that a narrative has a 'landscape' of action and a 'landscape' of consciousness. In a therapeutic situation we ask questions to the confidant out of his 'landscape'. From this examination emerges a narrative with hallmarks from written narrative with an exchange between the three *mimeses* (cf. above).

It is Kvanvig's contention that such knowledge from written narrative illuminates oral narrative (p. 278); when the confidant creates a narrative from her own life, she creates a narrative in the narrative, that is, she creates a narrator in order to illuminate her own life.

This narrative is not just a series of actions or events, chained together to a plot; another landscape is narrated into the plot. This is what therapists call a 'landscape' of consciousness, which refers to 'an imaginary territory where people plot the meanings, desires, intentions, beliefs, commitments, motivations, values and the like, that relate to their experience in the landscape of action'.[35] Personalities in a narrative are involved in outer series of events. When we read the narrative we recognize features with them in our own life; the narrative has an echo in our inner life, and plays on experiences stored in our life.

This experience Kvanvig transfers to biblical interpretation (pp. 279-80), with reference to the story of Hannah in the sanctuary (1 Sam. 1.9-18) and the narrative of Saul's attempt to kill David (1 Sam. 18.6-12), to underline that telling a story is not simply to describe a series of events, but also to anchor them in human life and transfer them to acts anchored in humanity's inner life.

In theory we can differentiate between actions and events. There exists a category of conscious actions, based in human motifs, aiming at a result, and there are events on the level of cause and effect. In real life these are interconnected. Yet there is a difference when humans are interconnected; then, the events get a human aspect, and we can read to and fro between the outer of the event and the inner of the human (p. 281). This is what Kvanvig finds

34. Cf. Freedman and Combs 1996: 96-99.

35. Cited from Freedman and Combs (1996) by Kvanvig (p. 278). The English translation is mine.

referred to in the Saul narrative, signalled by the consecutive *wayyo'mer*. Correspondingly, when God is involved into the narrative, he is ascribed human attributes, which Kvanvig illuminates with reference to Num. 32.9-13. In addition, the 'landscape' gets a divine aspect (cf. 1 Kgs 19.8-13) (p. 282).

On the basis of the work of the Norwegian social anthropologist J. Solheim (1998), Kvanvig illustrates how the human body constitutes some kind of structural basis for our epistemology, in a 'landscape' where traces of culture are inscribed (p. 283). It is through these traces that we meet and experience the world. This is illustrated from Old Testament use of human metaphors to describe humanity's inner life, such as nose, womb, heart, kidney, throat and breath, and dust, to describe human perishability. The human body has an inherent language that describes humanity's inner and outer world (pp. 283-93).

This perspective is extended to comprise also a 'landscape' based on narratives as a whole. Narratives paint pictures that place humans and events in particular situations. This is illustrated with an ancient Jewish narrative by Noah Ben Shea about Pharaoh, the slave and Moses and the biblical narrative about Cain and Abel (Gen 4.1-17), which is, next, read into the book of 1 Enoch 22 (pp. 293-302).

iv. *The Inner and Outer Landscape of Myth.* On this background, Kvanvig pays attention to the two 'landscapes' of myths, citing S. Kierkegaard (p. 302): 'Myths let what happens inside happen outside'.[36] This Kvanvig connects to Carl G. Jung's (1968) archetypes and the collective unconsciousness. Jung's archetypes could very well have been used about Cain and Abel as representative figures, Kvanvig argues.

Jung keeps together two theses, which Kvanvig will separate, asking two questions (p. 303): Are there really inherited archetypes, expressed in symbols, similar for all humans for all times? Do myths really tell the soul's inner drama in the outer world? To the first question Kvanvig refers to modern genetics: How much genetic information can a DNA molecule contain? To the second question he answers with an unconditional 'yes', but with modification: myths are different and function differently, he argues. It is for this reason that scholars do not reach a consensus on what myth really is.

Kvanvig points out three important aspects with mythic language, even though they are emphasized differently: mythical language has an existential, a cognitive, and a cultic and social aspect (p. 303); myths are stories, with a narrative structure (p. 304), which implies that it is not possible to conclude immediately from psychic to mythic symbols; myths can originate

36. My translation. Kierkegaard's Danish wording is 'Mytene lader det foregaae udvortes som er indvortes' (Kierkegaard 1963: 140).

in different ways, from original narrative material as well as from listening and reading. An original narrative (m_2) creates an echo in humans (m_3), which is narrated in another narrative (another m_2).

This is illustrated by Kvanvig by means of Genesis 1, which can be read as a creation narrative, a story about something that once happened (p. 304). But we can also read Genesis 1 as a myth, as a narrative that describes something that happens all the time, in the natural cycles in time, the animal and human world and in the basic tension in creation between chaos and cosmos. Myths do not describe nature as isolated from humans; they describe being as a situation in which humans and their struggle for life are inherent. Myth can, in general, be seen as a description of humankind's surrounding world from the vantage point of a kind of a *mental map*. Also, cosmological myths can be read from that perspective (p. 305).

In such a perspective the mythical narrative of Genesis 1 tells us that being rests in God's power to create. It does not say that God eliminated chaos, but that he separated chaos from cosmos. Chaos still exists, just as darkness is part of the cycle of day and night. Good and evil is still there, but they are placed in a created order.

Genesis 1 is a cognitive text, which is revealed in how it catalogues and lists, as in Wisdom texts. It is a cultic text, which is revealed in how it relates to days and times and how it runs through a week to a day of rest (cf. the Sabbath week).

Genesis 1 describes the space around us (p. 305), as observed by an Oriental eye and interpreted from how contemporaries imagined cosmos. In cultural geography this is called a 'mental map'. Myth can be imagined as a description of humanity's surroundings from a mental map. From this perspective we read cosmic myths. Such ancient Middle Eastern myths usually have three different elements: chaos, cosmos and wind—all three of which are found in Gen. 1.1-5.

Myths do not describe nature isolated from humans (p. 306). They do not describe nature, but rather existence, being, where human struggle belongs. Myths describe being as surroundings. As a mythic narrative, Genesis 1 describes how being rests in God's power as Creator. In this chaos the divine *ruach* creates life; chaos is still there as part of cosmos, but it is consigned to a special place, just as night has a special place in relation to day (p. 306).

This is an image far away from and more realistic than modern humanity's 'good at the bottom' philosophy. It demonstrates the soul's unimaginable deep and provides images for understanding the basic struggle between chaos and cosmos.

Genesis 1 should not be interpreted as a narrative about the outer world (p. 307). This is a mythic text, which says something about being as experienced by humans. Before all moral choices, humankind is thrown into a

reality we have not decided on for ourselves. Humans are victims in the struggle between cosmos and chaos, a struggle in which humanity itself is thrown back and forth.

v. *The Variety of Biblical Language*. In his concluding sections of his Chapter 10 (section 3), Kvanvig describes the variety of biblical language. It is here that he presents the different areas of meaning of biblical language (section 3.1), myth, historiography and nature philosophy (section 3.2), mythic language and allegory (section 3.3) and *sensus literalis* and narrative reading (section 3.4).

Section 3.1 of Chapter 10 is largely a summary of the preceding presentation, graphically illustrated with the semiotic model he often uses in his book (pp. 308-309). In particular Kvanvig summarizes that he has observed constellations of word, narrative sequences and scenes, a vacillating between three fields of meaning (p. 307): a concrete outer reality, an inner reality and a divine reality. These meanings are stored and inter-connected in the language of the narratives. We can emphasize them differently, but not separate them from each other. This is what Kvanvig has called the mythic-metaphoric understanding of language (cf. pp. 147-51). There is an identity between the meaning of the narrative and its referent. Reality is created through the narrative's linguistic expression.

The point graphically illustrated is that we cannot find a unitary reference outside of the words or narratives that covers the meanings inherent in language. Out of words and narratives emerges a reality which is held together by language. If we leave words and narratives in search of a reference, a series of meanings will be left behind. If we claim that just one such reference is right or true, we banalize the narrative, Kvanvig argues (p. 309).

Section 3.2 of Chapter 10 studies the difference between metonymical-metaphysical understanding and mythical understanding, with reference to the Greek way of thinking and the emergence of rational historiography, natural philosophy and the idea of *logos* as the inherent order of being.

1. Rational historiography is referred back to Herodotus and Thucydides, who created a historiography based on an assumed analogy between written history and what actually happened (p. 310). A division developed between history and poetry, as defined by Aristotle: history portrays what happened, poetry portrays what could have happened (p. 311).
2. Greek natural philosophy had developed since Thales (c. 625–550 BCE), Anaximander (c. 610–545 BCE) and Anaximenes (c. 580–530 BCE). They all stood at an intersection point between Greek and Oriental cosmology and a theoretical reflection on how cosmos was constructed and functioned. At this point of intersection the

mythical narratives are radicalized. Cosmological myths personified natural elements as gods. Here (p. 311) Kvanvig points at the possible relation between the Babylonian sea monster Tiamat and the binary concept of *tohu wabohu* ('void and darkness') in Gen. 1.2, and the view that, according to Hesiod's theogony, chaos is the first yield, then comes earth, which hovers over chaos, and then comes the divine worlds, which carry in them cosmos in all its variety.[37] The logic, Kvanvig argues, is not important here; rather, it is the basic thinking (p. 313). From the myths emerges a language that functions in quite another way, a language of physics and biology, which describes humanity's outer world, a language that connects the human world to the world of nature.

3. To this comes the idea of *logos* as the inherent order of reality. Anaximander talked about *apeiron* as the expression of a cosmic order of balance between opposites, but also as an expression of a cosmic justice inherent in human cohabitation and democracy. Heraclitus uses the term *logos*, which became particularly important in Greek philosophy and in Jewish and Christian theology as an explanation of being. *Logos* is imagined as existing in the world outside of humans. Humans are not able to think, but are imparted with *logos* by opening themselves to the outside world. According to Heraclitus, *logos* is the comprehensive law that connects humans and nature (p. 314). When humans become partakers in *logos*, they obtains insight into being's hidden relations.

Through rational historiography and natural philosophy a new understanding of reality emerged. History was created by human actors, and could be tested on the truthfulness of the traditions. Nature could be explained from the elements, which changed according to certain laws.

This understanding of being implied another understanding of the relation between language and reality than the mythical understanding. The new metonymic-metaphysical understanding implied a limitation of the meaning of language, because linguistic expression referred to a certain phenomenon outside of language. For philosophers of the new rational tradition, the ancient myths could no longer be read on their own premises—they had either to be refused or they had to be interpreted. The vantage point for both was the same: the understanding of reality was different from that of the myths.

37. Kvanvig goes into more detail with Hesiod, Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes and Heraklit (pp. 311-13), but it is not necessary to survey his discussion here.

vi. *Mythic Language and Allegory*. In section 3.3 of Chapter 10, on *Mythic Language and Allegory*, Kvanvig presents and briefly analyses Greek, Jewish and Christian allegory, which he, in conclusion (p. 319), calls a rationalization of the mythic language. Allegory establishes a system of reference between tradition narratives and the reader's own world, and intends to systematize the mythical language's rationalization on different levels of meaning, corresponding to different readings. In that way allegory takes care of language's ambiguity into a new perception of reality.

vii. Sensus Litteralis *and Narrative Reading*. In section 3.4 of Chapter 10 Kvanvig presents, in brief, two historically important hermeneutical incisions, *sensus litteralis*, as represented by Martin Luther, and postmodern[38] narrative reading. Luther was important for the emerging Enlightenment, as the theologians of the Enlightenment developed his *sensus litteralis* into *sensus litteralis historicus*, which later developed into the historical-critical method (pp. 319-20). The *sensus litteralis historicus* hermeneutics means two things, Kvanvig points out: a saying cannot have more meanings at the same time, and it has one definite message. This message can only be interpreted on its historical background.

The latter point can be interpreted in two different ways: it can be interpreted scientifically, in relation to natural sciences or history—which has led to conflict between biblical interpretation and modern sciences and historiography. Secondly, its message can be investigated via a consideration of the question 'What did the originator mean?' This has led to an ever more refined methodology for finding the text's origin and *Sitz im Leben*. In both cases the text is a delimited and finished unit, to which, Kvanvig underlines, is ascribed a definite meaning and truth or falseness in a certain historical space.

d. *Summary*

Kvanvig himself has no formal summary in his book. The book suddenly ends on p. 321. Nevertheless, the latter part of p. 320 and the few lines on p. 321 actually function as his summary.

As we have seen, Kvanvig has written a very different Old Testament *Theology*, compared to conventional *Theologies*. It turns out to be in a category of its own. It is not its postmodern approach in itself that makes it distinctive; rather it is how this postmodern approach comes out. Kvanvig's *Theology* is also different compared to Gerstenberger and Brueggemann, who also have a more (Brueggemann) or less (Gerstenberger) postmodern emphasis.

38. Kvanvig does not use this term himself here (cf. pp. 320-21).

Kvanvig does not disregard historical-critical method. He does not deny its historical significance or its importance for understanding the Bible, but he underlines its limitation (p. 320). This is a basic and important recognition of the value and limitation of the historical-critical method.

However, the historical-critical method belongs to the past, he argues. It is a legacy of the Enlightenment, grown out of a positivistic understanding of being. It not only places texts in a historical space, it locks them into this space by giving them a single and unambiguous meaning once and for all. Reading the Bible becomes an exercise in memory, a situation in which the important thing is to remember what the biblical experts have decided the text's *sensus litteralis historicus* to be. It locks the texts into fixed interpretations, and does not answer the needs of a postmodern society and the way people think at the end of the twentieth century. Kvanvig will break these shackles.

Kvanvig himself has tried to give another interpretation of the biblical texts on the basis of an interaction between the three mimeses. This way of interpretation brings up material from life, recreates it into a plot, and gives it a new shape, when it is read or listened into the life of others. The biblical narrative should not be locked into m_1, but should be opened forward to m_3. This is because the biblical narrative opens itself for new interpretations in an encounter with our life's narratives; in the literal there is an ambiguity.

This is where Kvanvig closes his book—and this is where the rest of his book could have begun. The small section 10.3.4 gives his motivation for writing this book and could have served as a short introduction to it. At the same time, this is also where another part of his book could have begun.

Before evaluating Kvanvig's book, I present Kirsten Nielsen's response to it.

8. *Kirsten Nielsen's Response*

a. *General*

The only printed response to Kvanvig's *Theology* known to this author comes from Professor Kirsten Nielsen, University of Aarhus, Denmark (1999). Most of her short review refers the content of the book, following it through all its ten chapters.

Her attitude to the book is generally positive. It is called 'a successful attempt to write an Old Testament theology from a new perspective', though Nielsen says nothing about postmodernism or Kvanvig's attempt to communicate with postmodernism. Instead of a usual 'ready to wear' synthesis of the exegetical analyses of the Old Testament, Kvanvig presents something different. His idea is that theology is something that happens when one reads the texts. Nielsen therefore sees Kvanvig's book as 'an invitation to participate in the theological reflection on how to read the Old Testament'.

b. *Methodology and Theology*

Does Kvanvig's book only deal with methodological questions, leaving the biblical text itself to the reader? Not at all, Nielsen claims. 'One of the advantages of this presentation is the combination of methodological discussions and short presentations of biblical texts'. She points out how Kvanvig not only describes different Old Testament themes, but handles them along with his methodological considerations. He combines methodological deliberations with actual theological work.

Nielsen admits that this book is different from how professors and theological students of the Old Testament generally expect Old Testament *Theologies* to be written. However: 'It recognizes the importance of being well informed about how contemporary scholarship deals with texts and reading and shows how fruitful it is to reflect on various approaches to biblical texts'.

In particular she points out Kvanvig's pedagogic skill. This is a book written with conscious thought for the student readership. Kvanvig sees what students need in order to be able to read the biblical texts, and Nielsen commends him for his skill in teaching, mentioning in particular his figures, diagrams, summaries and headings, his clear language, his relevant critique of other scholars, and his careful choice of citations.

c. *Theology or Methodology?*

This is not to hide away that other teachers might have preferred to underline different aspects of Old Testament theology. Nielsen misses 'a more thorough treatment of some of the classic issues like suffering, the existence of evil, eschatology', but immediately she adds that 'nothing would prevent me from elaborating on these themes if I used this textbook in a classroom'. Her hope is that the book will eventually be translated into English or German.[39]

On the whole, Nielsen claims that 'Helge Kvanvig has offered us the necessary background for treating other texts and other themes as well; and first of all, he has forced us to reflect on what we are actually doing'. But when she asks, rhetorically, 'Is this an Old Testament theology?', she answers frankly, 'I don't know. It is a book about how theology came into being and still comes into being, and how readers are to deal with biblical texts. If I could make any students understand that much, it is more than good enough for me.'

Kirsten Nielsen hits the target very well with her short review of Kvanvig's *Theology*.

39. I have expressed this same hope to Kvanvig in person.

9. *Kvanvig's Theology Evaluated*

a. *General*

I have followed Kvanvig's *Theology* closely, more closely than I will follow Gerstenberger's and Brueggemann's *Theologies*, mainly because he is inaccessible for non-Scandinavian readers.

Except for Kirsten Nielsen's review, I have not come across any other response to Kvanvig' *Theology*.[40] If I am right in my observations, the book is not generally known in the Old Testament scholarly world outside of Scandinavia, a situation that contrasts markedly with the *Theologies* of Gerstenberger, and especially Brueggemann, which have received a lot of scholarly attention. Nielsen has reviewed his book in English, but its Norwegian language is a hindrance for international attention. The book is used as a textbook in some theological institutions in Scandinavia, but seems to live a rather anonymous life in the scholarly world in general. I have seen no review of Kvanvig's *Theology* in any Scandinavian language. As mentioned elsewhere in this book, Terje Stordalen does not mention it in his survey of recent Old Testament *Theologies* (2003). That is a pity—and remarkable, because this is a very important and substantial contribution to the debate on Old Testament theology.

This lack of scholarly attention to Kvanvig's *Theology* is remarkable. It invites a number of questions. Is Kvanvig's *Theology* too untraditional to be taken seriously? Supposedly, few scholars would argue that way. Has he as a theologian a philosophical training few other theologians match or dare to challenge? If that were the case, it would be a scholarly pity. Is the Old Testament scholarly guild in Scandinavia so small that colleagues feel embarrassed to go into profound discussion with each other? While they are relatively few in number, the members of the Scandinavian guild nevertheless review each others' books critically. Or is the issue that Kvanvig had a passive publisher,[41] one who has not promoted the book adequately? Whatever the case, the book deserves much more attention than it has received, for several reasons. Perhaps the main reason for its anonymity is simply the fact that it is written in Norwegian.

In general, Kvanvig's book is a scholarly and pedagogical masterpiece. His thinking is brilliant, and so also is his method of presentation, which is generally logical in its arrangement. Perhaps Chapter 10, on the hermeneutics of biblical narratives, is the exception. (More will be said about this

40. The only other written comment on Kvanvig's book known to me is a full-page interview appearing in Kvanvig's home-town (Kristiansand) newspaper, *Fædrelandsvennen*, 6 February 1999. This newspaper article is not, of course, a scholarly publication.

41. Norwegian Academic Press/Høyskoleforlaget in Kristiansand, Norway.

chapter below.) Any author of professional literature would have much to learn from Kvanvig. The book is written as a textbook for students; it is clear that the book functions best for students with some philosophical training.

Kvanvig's *Theology* is different from any other Old Testament *Theology* I know of. Presentations of biblical *Theology* are usually organized via a discussion of the biblical text itself, either around some assumedly central idea or ideas or else around particular traditions. The vantage point for this presentation is outside of the Bible, not from within the Bible itself. This easily emerges from the titles of its main parts: 'Forms of Understanding', 'Ways of Reading' and 'Text Patterns'. Behind this choice of approach we sense a postmodern way of thinking. The author's intention is to communicate with a postmodern world.

James K. Mead, under the sub-heading 'What New Developments Arose in the Closing Decades of the Twentieth Century', describes 'Hermeneutics: New Methods for Approaching Biblical Theology?', presenting 'New Hermeneutics after Bultmann' and 'Old Testament Hermeneutics and the Challenge of Literary Criticism' (2007: 51-53). This would have been an apt section in which to discuss Kvanvig's *Theology*, if Kvanvig's work had been known to Mead, because this is what his book is mostly about. Leo Perdue has underlined (both in 1994 and 2005) that what unites the development of the new approaches to Old Testament theology is their incorporation of the two fundamental features of human existence: historicity and language (1994: 302; 2005: 341), because 'history and text belong together'. It is in the intersection between these two aspects that Kvanvig works in his *Theology*.

b. *Particulars*

Kvanvig's Part I, 'Patterns of Understanding', raises hermeneutic and epistemological problems that are not usually found in biblical *Theologies*. These are questions usually discussed in special literature on hermeneutics. Including such questions in a textbook on Old Testament theology, Kvanvig somehow crosses a border, and stands with one foot in Old Testament scholarship and the other in philosophy, hermeneutics and linguistics. That kind of crossover between categories belongs to postmodernism, and is found in several cultural fields. Such crossovers open up new perspectives and new ways of thinking. This is certainly the case in theology, and Kvanvig is an excellent representative of this way of working.

Kvanvig's Part II, 'Ways of Reading', is a parallel to research histories that often introduce biblical *Theologies*, and it is somehow a parallel to Brueggemann's two introductory 'Retrospects'. In this sense Kvanvig does not differ so much from other presentations.

Kvanvig says nothing explicitly about why he has chosen to concentrate on just these scholars for his survey (G.E. Wright, G. von Rad, A.H.J. Gunneweg, B.S. Childs, and others). Yet his intention seems not to be to write a general 'Retrospect' (like Brueggemann) or research history, such as those found in other *Theologies*. His approach is to trace theology rather than the actual scholars: salvation history (Chapter 2), faith history (Chapter 3), existential interpretation of life (Chapter 4), liberation history (Chapter 5) and canon history (Chapter 6). In all these chapters the focus is on history, different aspects of history and different ways of seeing history. 'History' is a central concept to Kvanvig. The term 'history' is, after all, mentioned twice in the very title of his book.

However, compared to Gerstenberger and Brueggemann, Kvanvig has a radically different approach to history, as will be demonstrated in the present book. Brueggemann is not at all interested in 'what happened'. His hermeneutical method is to describe Old Testament theology a metaphorical trial between Yahweh and Israel (cf. my chapter on Brueggemann). Gerstenberger has a more traditional and positivistic approach to history since he works within a frame of historical understanding of religious development within ancient Israel.

Kvanvig has a predominating philosophical approach to history. He does not deny that something 'happened' (cf. Brueggemann), and even has a short survey of 'History of Israel as Biblical Theological Structure' (Chapter 2, section 2, pp. 42-51). This is a survey of what was seen as the historical backbone of the Biblical Theology Movement. He has no explicit reservations or exceptions from it anywhere in his book, except that his interpretation of the Patriarchal age and the exodus and conquer traditions are not interpreted historically.

However, Kvanvig does not work as an ordinary historian at all. His approach is to investigate the relation between text and history, as best presented in Chapter 10. This last chapter is where his theories, as presented in the preceding chapters, are put into practice.

Such disinterest in history as historiography is a typical feature of postmodernism. Traditional modernist theologians will focus on both text and history, but 'text' would mean text analysis, text criticism, text history, and so on. This is a historical approach to texts. They would also investigate history, but for them 'history' would mean a series of events in a sequence of causes and effects, and their research would end up in historiography, presentations of *History of Israel*, *History of Israel's Religion*, historical-critical *Exegesis*, historical *Introductions* (Isagogics) and historical *Theologies*, and so on. Kvanvig has none of this. He asks philosophical, epistemological and hermeneutical questions about the relation between text and history.

His Part III, 'Text Patterns', differs radically from what is found in traditional *Theologies*. His approach is not like any earlier *Theology*. This is the part of the book where his postmodernist narrative analysis of the Old Testament texts in particular comes to the fore. There is no systematization of the theology of the Old Testament at all. His interest is in poetic patterns, narrative structures and hermeneutics. Rather than systematizing the great themes of Old Testament theology, he looks at literary patterns and structures. He investigates the glue that binds things together into a unit, rather than the unit or units themselves. Patterns and structures contribute to coherence, but Kvanvig's focus is rather on variety and diversity than on unity. Kvanvig definitely does not search for any central message or theme in the Old Testament. Also, this is a kind of crossover between traditional categories in search of new categories, such as patterns and structures, in poetry and narrative.

While Kvanvig's understanding of poetry is rather traditional, his understanding of narratives crosses traditional borders. To him, a narrative is not just a story. A story is a narrative, while a narrative is much more than a story—it extends to greater units, such as the Pentateuch, the Deuteronomistic history or the Chronicler's history, or the Bible as a whole. These are great narratives, comprising lesser narratives, where textual material is theologically interconnected in great intertextual arcs. The concept of intertextuality is not often used by Kvanvig, though the idea of intertextuality is important to him, even fundamental for his theological thinking.

Even though Kvanvig divides and handles texts in poetry and narrative, he is not overly occupied with traditional form-critical questions, detailed classification and grouping of different poetic or narrative forms. That kind of categorization belongs to the traditional modernist way of investigation, and is a historical child of Enlightenment and modernity, with its roots back in Aristotle. Kvanvig does not take exception to this kind of classification, but that is not the way he works.

Chapter 10 of his Part III is the last chapter of his book, and works on biblical narrative hermeneutics. Placing this chapter as part of his Part III, 'Textual Patterns', does not seem quite logical (cf. above). It could possibly be defended as a concluding chapter to this main part. But to this writer, it would have served better as a separate part, after Part III.

As for its content, Chapter 10 is fundamental for understanding Kvanvig's book, in particular his presentation of the three *mimeses*, to which he returns at the very end of Chapter 10, where some of his basic ideas within this book are summarized. A general critique of Chapter 10 is that it tends to be too centred on philosophical and epistemological questions. In spite of Kvanvig's indisputable pedagogical brilliance, a less philosophically trained reader will easily get lost in this comprehensive and compact chapter.

The function of Chapter 10 is also somewhat unclear. As it stands, it is part of his Part III, but I have just argued that it should rather have been a separate Part IV. In some way it functions as a summary chapter of his book, but it is more than a summary, as it takes up new elements not treated previously. If any part of his book should have been rewritten or revised, it is Chapter 10.

For me, the book lacks a real summary chapter. Without it, I have a feeling that his presentation is cut off somewhat sharply. In my view, the book lacks a well-defined and definite conclusion, which in a brief and yet useful way could re-trace the track from the beginning of the book to a well-formulated summary of its basic content. In short: the book lacks a well-formulated thesis at the beginning as well as a useful conclusion at the end.

I also miss what Kirsten Nielsen herself misses, namely, 'a more thorough treatment of some of the classic issues' of substantial themes of Old Testament theology. The book somehow ends where I would wish its main part had begun.

c. *Summary*

Kvanvig's *Theology* is the most philosophical of the *Theologies* investigated in the present book. Although Kvanvig is no systematic theologian, he is an exponent of a more hermeneutic-conscious tendency within theology, one which has developed its own interest in methods of reading and in text theories and thus has become a potential dialogue partner for all disciplines concerned with text interpretation, including biblical studies (cf. Jeanrond 1996: 233-34, 239-40). Kvanvig is well trained in hermeneutics, epistemology, ideology and linguistic philosophy, at least as it is relevant for his own use. His great philosophical lodestar is Paul Ricoeur, whom he cites repeatedly. Ricoeur's theories are central to Kvanvig's way of thinking.

Kvanvig's *Theology* is basically postmodern in its approach. Kvanvig himself does not explicitly call his presentation postmodern; he would rather say that his book is written to communicate with a postmodern public. Repeatedly he refers to the need for a *Theology* that communicates with a postmodern way of thinking. We have seen a series of features with this *Theology* that fit with what many would recognize as 'the postmodern'.

Is Kvanvig's *Theology* really an Old Testament *Theology*? This question has also been raised by Kirsten Nielsen, who responds that she is not sure. The answer depends on how Old Testament *Theology* is defined. If it is defined in a traditional way, as a thematic and systematic presentation of the theology of the Old Testament, in difference from Old Testament or ancient Israelite history of religion, it is scarcely a *Theology*. It is definitely no 'History of Religion' book, nor is it a 'History of Israel' book. But it is no traditional *Theology* either. It is more of an introduction to Old Testament hermeneutics.

Kvanvig's book takes up very basic questions for writing Old Testament *Theology* or, more generally, understanding and interpreting the Old Testament. These are question more befitting a prolegomenon to an Old Testament *Theology*. Would it be possible to write something like Kvanvig's book as a prolegomenon to a more traditional Old Testament *Theology*? The question is worth considering, as Kirsten Nielsen herself indicates.

It could be argued that Kvanvig becomes somewhat one-sided, because he concentrates on filling in on what he sees as the limitations or shortcomings of traditional modernist historical-critical method. That is of course legitimate and even commendable; we actually need that kind of supplement to Old Testament *Theology*. But this implies that no Old Testament *Theology* is completed until it has investigated the Old Testament both as read according to a traditional historical-critical understanding and according to such basic questions as taken up by Kvanvig in his *Theology*.

After reading Kvanvig's brilliant book, taken as a hermeneutic prolegomenon to Old Testament *Theology*, I nevertheless find something to be wanting. I miss a discussion of central Old Testament theological questions such as those found in traditional Old Testament *Theologies*—without idealizing any particular one of these on the market. When Kirsten Nielsen misses a treatment of more 'classical issues' of substantial themes of Old Testament theology, she indicates that she sees no major problem with adding such dealings to a presentation like Kvanvig's. Kvanvig would probably respond that it was not his intention to write that kind of book, it was not on his agenda. That is all fine, but would he ever consider writing such an Old Testament *Theology*?

Indirectly he has answered that question in the negative. When he launched his *Theology*, at the annual meeting of the *Norsk Gammeltestamentlig Selskap* (December 1998), he commented explicitly that there is no direct connection between this book and his earlier book, *Gamle ord i ny tid* (1977), because with his later book we are in a quite different time. If any biblical *Theology* should be written at all, it has to be written in a quite different way, he claimed.

With these two books Kvanvig has somehow turned things upside-down. The logical sequence would have been to begin with a prolegomenon, like his *Historisk Bibel og bibelsk historie*, before writing a *Theology*. But Kvanvig has somehow done the opposite, and in addition placed some distance to his *Gamle ord i ny tid* when writing his *Historisk Bibel og bibelsk historie*. The polarity between these two books, and the development in research on Old Testament theology over the two decades between them, would have been an interesting topic to investigate.

Leo Perdue argues that 'epistemology and the construction of faith may be used together but are not to replace each other' (2005: 350). Does

Kvanvig replace the construction of faith with epistemology? With 'construction of faith' understood as a presentation of Old Testament faith and theology, some critics would probably say that. Kirsten Nielsen seems to be saying that. That is also how it looks to this author. Leo Perdue has not commented on Kvanvig.

Nevertheless, taken as it is, on its own premises, Kvanvig's book is a scholarly and pedagogical masterpiece.

More will be said about Kvanvig's *Theology* in the last chapter of this book, when his *Theology* will be more explicitly compared with those of Brueggemann and Gerstenberger.

Chapter 3

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

1. *Introduction*

Professor Walter Brueggemann, of Decatur, Georgia, USA, has been an exceedingly productive author of popular and scholarly literature on the Old Testament, books and articles, for more than a generation. This literary production culminated, in 1997, with his *Theology of the Old Testament* (1997). In the present investigation the 1997 work will be the primary focus.

Even though Brueggemann's work is not difficult to follow literarily—he is without doubt a fine writer—at first glance Brueggemann's *Theology* is imposing and rather complex. It is a voluminous book of 750 pages of text. The complexity is illustrated by the fact that he presents two different tables of content, one detailed 'Contents' and another more simple and lucid 'Summary of Contents'.

To present Brueggemann's substantial *Theology* in a short way is a precarious business. Such an enterprise will almost necessarily be a reductionistic project. There are so many aspects within his book that should be taken into account. On the other hand, his book is widely available. As such, I limit myself to focusing on the most significant aspects of Brueggemann's work, without claiming to have grasped all of it. The important point is to get a general impression of what this book is all about.

The main concept or model of Brueggemann's *Theology* is the metaphor of a lawsuit trial. Before entering deeper into this metaphor, I will single out and pay attention to some basic thoughts and ways of thinking in his book, so as to have them in mind when reading the book.

2. *Central Concepts in Brueggemann's Theology*

a. *Postmodernism*

In an article titled 'The ABC's of Old Testament Theology in the US' (2002: 415), Brueggemann presents six new 'facets' in the field of Old Testament scholarship, facets which have contributed to a sense of 'disorder and confusion' over the last two decades. (These same aspects are referred to

briefly in the Preface to this book.) As the first of these six facets he mentions the postmodern pressures, by which he means that there was a 'growing awareness that the dominant patterns of interpretation were seen to be an interpretative monopoly that served and maintained a certain kind of hegemony' and that 'long before people in the field had heard of Derrida or Foucault there came to be a sense that interpretative discourse is indeed a mode of power' (2002: 415 [reprinted 2004: 100]). This Brueggemann sees as the reason why 'the older consensus, sustained by a relatively homogenous community of interpreters, came to be deeply under assault'.

As we will see, Brueggemann's *Theology* is profoundly influenced by a postmodern way of thinking.

b. *The Old Testament and History*

Historical questions about what happened, when it happened, or whether it happened at all is of subordinate significance to Brueggemann. However, Brueggemann has not completely lost his soul to postmodernism; the value of historical-critical research is not completely disallowed: 'Good interpretation surely moves back and forth between *critical historical awareness and the pursuit of meaning in contemporary context*' (2006: xiii, Brueggemann's italics). Indeed, he is somewhat ambiguous, because on the one hand he is highly appreciative of historical criticism, as when he claims that 'the gains of historical criticism are immense, and no informed reader can proceed without paying attention to those gains' (p. 14), yet in the next line he claims: '*What has not been noticed is that such scholarship is not as innocent as it imagines to be*' (Brueggemann's italics). He refers to Hans-Georg Gadamer's argument that 'the Enlightenment has "a prejudice against prejudice"'. Brueggemann steadily fights the legacy of Enlightenment, which is not least complained about by James Barr (see below). Later on, Brueggemann refers to 'historical-critical judgments that carried with them theological presuppositions alien to the material itself' (p. 45). On the whole, 'so much is included under the rubric "historic criticism" that it is difficult to make precise statements about the relationship between historical criticism and Old Testament theology… It is clear, however, that historical criticism as an interpretative tool used in the service of Old Testament theology must be held under close scrutiny' (p. 103).

Further, Brueggemann argues that historical criticism has 'emerged in a variety of methods congruent with modernity, as an alternative to ecclesial authority for interpretation, [and] is reflective of a certain set of epistemological assumptions that go under the general terms of *objective*, *scientific* and *positivistic*, assumptions that sought to overcome the temptations of fideism' (Brueggemann's italics) . Therefore, he argues, 'I believe it is urgent to attend in imaginative ways precisely to the odd, hidden, dense,

and inscrutable dimensions in the text that historical criticism, in principle, is disinclined to credit' (p. 105).

It is in Chapter 28, in particular, that Brueggemann discusses 'Old Testament Theology in Relation to Historical Criticism' (pp. 726-29). Brueggemann concedes that 'no doubt Brevard Childs is correct in his contention that the relationship between Old Testament theology and historical criticism is of crucial importance to any advanced Old Testament Theology. Equally, there is no doubt that historical criticism, broadly construed, is crucial for responsible theology, especially Reformed versions of it' (p. 726—with special reference to Gerhard Ebeling). On the other hand, Brueggemann argues that 'in my judgement, historical criticism…was committed to a Cartesian program that was hostile…to the main theological claims of the text… The outcome is a "history of religion" that not only resists theological metanarrative, but resists any notion of Yahweh as an agent in Israel's life' (p. 727). Brueggemann therefore proposes three considerations to resettle the relation between history and theology (here shortened down): (1) serious energy needs to be given to discerning what of the older historical criticism is to be retained and how it is to be used; (2) there is much in emerging methods—sociological and rhetorical—that can be valued; (3) since historical criticism has dominated scholarship completely, it has been assumed that criticism is the lead figure, which is inevitable in a period of high positivism. Yet 'with the emergence of a hermeneutical dimension in criticism that has moved beyond sheer positivism, this widely assumed relationship might be re-examined and reordered' (p. 728), moving in the direction of a 'second naiveté' (p. 729, cf. p. 727). This is a fundamental problem which should rather have been discussed as a prolegomenon to Brueggemann's *Theology*.

c. *The Rhetoric of the Old Testament*

As an implicit part of this postmodernism, Brueggemann has a rhetorical reading of the Old Testament. This fact is crucial for understanding his work.[1] This aspect of his book is explained in the section 'The Role of Rhetoric' (pp. 64-71). Brueggemann sees the Old Testament as a whole as a piece of rhetoric, centred around the key metaphor of a lawsuit trial between Yahweh and his people, Israel.

Brueggemann was educated under James Muilenburg, and learned rhetorical exegesis in the shadow of Muilenburg's lectern. However, in this case the student has moved some steps beyond and away from his mentor.[2]

1. According to James Barr, Brueggemann's work is 'the first work on biblical theology to be centred specifically in rhetoric' (2000: 29).

2. P.D. Miller states in his 'Editor's Foreword' to Brueggeman's 2006 volume that Brueggemann 'has carried over that learning into his own modes of communication'

What Brueggemann does is not exactly according to the manual of rhetorical methodology. Brueggemann's rhetorical criticism has moved somewhat forward, compared with his teacher. Basic to rhetoric criticism is James Muilenburg's address 'Form Criticism and Beyond' from 1968, published in 1969. In a continuation of Muilenburg's work, Norman Gottwald developed his sociological criticism. When commenting that 'rhetorical criticism has emerged as a major methodological investment, less in dispute than Gottwald's sociological program' (p. 55), Brueggemann implicitly also comments on the program of the by then (1997) not yet published *Theologies* by Gerstenberger (2001); Brueggemann is evidently not confident in the efficacy of a sociological methodology as used by Gottwald and later by Gerstenberger. On the other hand, he writes appreciatively about other adherents of rhetorical criticism, such as the approaches taken by Phyllis Trible (pp. 55-56), David J.A. Clines (p. 56), David M. Gunn (p. 56) and the philosopher Paul Ricoeur (pp. 57-59).[3]

Brueggemann's basic and introductory argument is that 'because the work and life of the Old Testament text is primarily to state competing claims, primary attention must be given to the rhetoric and the rhetorical character of faith in the Old Testament' (p. 64).

Brueggemann identifies three 'common rhetorical propensities that characterize the text' (p. 110): (1) it is saturated with *metaphors*, (2) it is rich with *hyperbole*, and (3) the rhetoric of the Old Testament is characteristically '*ambiguous and open*' (Brueggemann's italics). These three rhetorical propensities 'are not marginal or incidental to the text. They are the very stuff of the Old Testament. We have no Old Testament text without them…' (p. 111).

This conceptualization has far-reaching consequences, and serves to determine completely his understanding of the Old Testament and its theology. In his exegesis it implies that he lays more emphasis on concepts, such as verbs, nouns and adjectives, than on pericopes and contexts. This has substantial consequences for his concept of history, and leads him to a lack of interest in 'what happened'. Even God himself, Yahweh, is not conceptualized in relation to history but to rhetoric. Yahweh is seen as the product of the Old Testament rhetoric.

(p. ix). Brueggemann, in his 'Preface', himself claims (p. xi): 'I have never extricated myself [from the rhetorical force and cunning of Jeremiah]'.

3. On the relation between Ricoeur and Muilenburg, he comments: 'Ricoeur's program of generative imagination goes well beyond anything that Muilenburg articulated in his disciplinary approach to the text. It seems clear to me, however, that even without such articulation, Muilenburg understood intuitively, given his great sensitivity to the artistry of the text, that *rhetoric is indeed capable of construing, generating, and evoking alternative reality*' (p. 59, Brueggemann's italics).

As we will see later, this is an aspect of Brueggemann's thinking that has been met with substantial objections by several scholars.

To Brueggemann, the concept of 'testimony' and 'rhetoric' are fundamental to the writing of an Old Testament *Theology*, as 'our proper subject is *speech about God*', which in turn implies that 'our work has to do with rhetoric' (p. 117, Brueggemann's italics). The basic question therefore is: 'how does ancient Israel, in this text, speak about God?' In the Old Testament there are also sayings spoken by God to Israel, but Brueggemann does not explicitly make a distinction between the two modes of speech, 'because even when God speaks, the text is *Israel's testimony* that God has spoken so' (Brueggemann's italics). 'What we have available to us is the speech of this community, which has become text, and which is our proper subject of study' (p. 118), whether spoken about Yahweh or spoken by Yahweh. Therefore Brueggemann's 'largest rubric' is that of 'testimony' (p. 119).

Israel's speech about God is central to Brueggemann's interpretation; for him, 'the speech is the reality to be studied' (p. 118); 'the utterance is everything' (p. 122); 'speech constitutes reality, and who God turns out to be in Israel depends on the utterance of the Israelites or, derivatively, the utterance of the text, [and] the very character of God in the Old Testament depends on the courage and imagination of those who speak about God' (p. 65).

Brueggemann insists with particular emphasis, that

> it is characteristic of the Old Testament, and characteristically Jewish, that God is given to us…only by the dangerous practice of rhetoric. Therefore in doing Old Testament theology we must be careful not to import essentialist claims that are not authorized by this particular and peculiar rhetoric. *I shall insist, as consistently as I can, that the God of Old Testament theology as such lives in, with, and under the rhetorical enterprise of this text, and nowhere else and in no other way*, [because] speech constitutes reality, and who God turns out to be in Israel depends on the utterances of the Israelites, or, derivatively, the utterances of the text. (p. 66, Brueggemann's italics)

This is a claim many of his critics have noticed and commented on.

Barr argues (2000: 29-30) that Brueggemann goes as far as suggesting that Yahweh is created or 'generated' by Israel's own rhetoric, citing Brueggemann: '*The rhetorical mediation of Yahweh in the Bible is not a disembodied, ideational operation*… Yahweh is generated and constituted…in actual practises that mediate… [I]t is a question of characteristic social practice that generates, constitutes, and mediates Yahweh in the midst of life' (p. 574, Brueggemann's italics). The speech about God is uttered by, respectively, the lips of Israel, the lips of God, and the lips of God's adversaries. Yet Brueggemann's basic question is: '*what* is uttered about God?' (p. 118). This also requires attention to *how* Israel has read about God, 'for the "what" of Israel's God-talk is completely linked to the "how" of that speech' (p. 119, Brueggemann's italics).

The image of Yahweh emerging from this rhetoric is pluralistic. Yahweh is a God with many faces, even with inner tensions, aspects that not so easily, or not at all, can be harmonized. The picture of God drawn in his book is full of tensions.

d. *Thematization of the Old Testament*

Brueggemann does not thematize Old Testament theology like traditional presentations; this he sees as reductionism. He emphatically underlines that '*Old Testament theology, when it pays attention to Israel's venturesome rhetoric, refuses any reductionism to a single or simple articulation*; it offers a witness that is enormously open, inviting, and suggestive, rather than one that yields settlement, closure, or precision' (p. 149, Brueggemann's italics). He also calls it 'a temptation and a bane of Old Testament theology to try to thematize or schematize data excessively, and I have no wish to impose a pattern on the material' (p. 552).

Towards the end of his book, he concedes: 'I am aware that I have reached a high level of thematization and consequently a high level of reductionism' (p. 700). This is supposedly said with particular reference to Chapter 26, 'Modes of Mediation and Life with God', which the citation is taken from. This saying also reveals a basic idea within Brueggemann's book: any thematization implies reductionism. Brueggemann explains explicitly that: 'I deliberately choose the word "*thematization*" for this aspect of our study for it is a much more modest term than systematization. Thematization, unlike *systematization*, aims only at a rough sketch and not a close presentation… But thematization, as I attempt it here, intends to stop short of systematizing closure, for it is in the nature of the subject of the thematization to resist such closure' (p. 268, Brueggemann's italics).

This conforms to how his book is actually formed or edited. His book does not systematize the theology of the Old Testament, as similar *Theologies* traditionally do, but is thematized around a lawsuit trial metaphor, which is his key hermeneutical metaphor.

e. *The Theological Polyvalence of the Old Testament*

Brueggemann argues that the Old Testament is an 'open' document, repeatedly underscoring its ambiguity, playfulness and lack of systematic closure, promoting 'the awareness that more than one construal is available… The text is remarkably open and refuses simple or firm cognitive closure, that is, the text is available for many readings of particular texts, and seems at many points to delight in a playful ambiguity that precludes certitude' (p. 110; cf. Olson 1998: 163). The biblical text has an inherent 'polyvalent' quality (cf. p. 81). This polyvalence is taken as an inherent ambiguity in the text. That is why he refuses to generalize or systematize the content of the texts. Rather,

he presents 'one text at a time, and is not vexed about juxtaposing texts that explicitly contradict each other' (p. 82). This pluralistic openness Brueggemann ascribes to the Jewishness of the text.

f. *The Old Testament and Judaism*

One important point in Brueggemann's *Theology* deserves special attention. Both in his 'Retrospect 2' and in his 'Prospect for Theological Interpretation' (Part V), Brueggemann writes about Jewishness: 'The Jewishness of the Old Testament' (pp. 107-12) and 'Old Testament in Relation to Jewish Tradition and Jewish Community' (pp. 733-35). Yet already in a section on 'The Jewishness of the Text' (pp. 80-83), Brueggemann contrasts the Jewish mode of speech to classic Christian Western theological discourse, 'which wants to overcome all ambiguity and give closure in the interest of certitude' (p. 82). Important to him also is that the Jewish Old Testament is 'concrete and particular, refusing any ultimate transcendentalism' (p. 81), in contrast to how Western Christianity 'has long practiced a flight to the transcendent' (p. 83).

It is very important to Brueggemann that Old Testament theology faces 'the ways in which Old Testament theology must attend the Jewish character and claims of the text' (p. 107). Brueggemann distances himself from Brevard S. Childs and his 'inclination to distinguish at the outset Christian from Jewish reading' (p. 108). In Brueggemann's judgment, '*what Jews and Christians share is much more extensive, much more important, much more definitional than what divides us*. We [Jews and Christians] must seek to sort out those commonalities that have been distorted by later interpretive impositions in the church that are no essential part of our faith' (p. 108, Brueggemann's italics). To claim that Old Testament theology is and should be a Christian affair and part of Christian theology is to offend Judaism, Brueggemann claims.

Brueggemann argues for mutual respect between Christian and Jewish interpretation of the Bible: 'As Christians must allow for legitimate Jewish readings, so common reading requires that Jews allow for readings by Christians that are integral to their lived faith' (p. 109). Both must part company openly and candidly with each other, citing the papal declaration, 'Spiritually we are all Semites'. In this papal declaration he sees 'something glib and romantic', but also 'something crucially true'. In the opposite attitude he sees 'something diabolic' and 'demonic'.

As for the relation between the Old Testament and the 'fulfilments in Jesus Christ', he claims that the 'fulfilments' are 'read from the side of the fulfilment rather than from the side of the promise'. Therefore, a Christian reading of the Old Testament 'does not pre-empt or foreclose how and in what ways God's future may come'. He sees the Jewish waiting for a

Messiah and the Christian waiting for a second coming as 'a common waiting that stands against a despairing modernity'. Thus a Christian reading should not foreclose but attend to the rich possibilities of the text (p. 109).

On pp. 733-35 Brueggemann treats the question of Old Testament theology in relation to Jewish tradition and the Jewish community as a counterpart to his preceding section, 'Old Testament Theology in Relation to the New Testament and to Church Theology' (pp. 729-33). He insists that since the Church has no interpretive monopoly on the Old Testament, 'it must recognize the legitimacy of other interpretive communities, of whom the primary and principal one is the Jewish community' (p. 733), adding, 'it is impossible to overstate the significance of religious Judaism for contemporary theology, because Judaism makes unmistakably clear that this text… continues to nourish and summon a serious community of faith other than the church and alongside the church' (pp. 733-34).

There is no doubt that God's power is evident in the Jewish community, he argues. This concrete, visible reality might cause Christians to lower their voices in the proclamation of exclusiveness, for it makes abundantly evident that Christian faith has no exclusive lock on the attention of the God of the Bible. This recognition of Judaism might suggest that 'serious theological-liturgic engagement with actual Jewish communities of practice is an appropriate dimension of the practice of faithful interpretation' (p. 734).

Also important is that theological interpretation is preoccupied with the ancient texts in a particular circumstance. That was the case with Christian interpretation in the first century. Therefore, it is legitimate and necessary to draw the Old Testament text closely to our circumstances.

With this in mind, 'it is clear that Jewish faith and an actual Jewish community must be on the horizon of Christians'. More specifically, Brueggemann claims that Old Testament theology, as a Christian enterprise, must be done 'in the light (or darkness!) of the Holocaust and the unthinkable brutality wrought against the Jewish community in a society with Christian roots' (p. 734).

g. *Christian Supersessionism*

'Supersessionism' is a very negative term to Brueggemann. He explicitly warns against Christian supersessionism towards Judaism and Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament (p. 109), a risk he sees as 'intrinsic in the attempt of a Christian Old Testament'. Special attention should be given to supersessionism, because this phenomenon is not simply confined to the question of 'Jesus or not', as the text itself is 'remarkably open and refuses a simple or firm cognitive closure…[and] is available for many readings…and seems at many points to delight in a playful ambiguity that precludes certitude' (p. 110).

Brueggemann sees an important contrast between the rhetorical modes of the Old Testament and conventional Christian theology, as the latter is 'bent toward the rational, the philosophical, and the ontological' (p. 111). Brueggemann suspects that 'it is the overriding of this playful, open rhetoric, rather than a christological claim, that constitutes the most elemental and characteristic practice of a Christian supersessionism' (p. 111).

Brueggemann also raises a question about the Jewish dimension of Christian theology, which he claims 'is seldom addressed': 'Must we make allowances in our interpretation in response to the long history of anti-Semitism that marked the Christian use of the Bible?', he asks (p. 111). His answer is that the Old Testament has been used by Christians to assault Jewish faith and to foster anti-Semitism. Brueggemann finds the roots of this phenomenon in the Reformation as well as in the nineteenth-century developmentalism, citing Solomon Schechter: 'Higher criticism is a higher form of anti-Semitism' (p. 112). Against this backdrop he claims: 'The supersessionist inclination of Christian scholarship simply kept Jewish reality off the screen of perception, so that *silence in the scholarly community, even concerning scholarly questions, amounted to collusion in the systemic violence against Jews*' (p. 112, Brueggemann's italics).

Theological supersessionism, which breeds practical anti-Jewishness, must be re-examined, both theologically and politically. This 'invites us to the difficult task of recognizing that absolutist claims for the Christian gospel are not only practically destructive but theologically inimical to the gospel itself. But the point at issue matters enormously to the mood and sensibility in which a Christian Old Testament theology is construed', he claims (p. 112).

Brueggemann sees a link between Christian supersessionism and the Holocaust, even though the distance between them is far removed. Therefore, Christian Old Testament theology 'must make important and generous adjustments in our conventional and uncritical exclusivist claim on the Old Testament' (p. 735)—even though our most passionate affirmations of Jesus as the 'clue' must not exclude other 'clues', he claims, adding: 'this applies to none other so directly as it does to Judaism'.

Thus, while Christians can say that the Old Testament is 'ours', they should add 'not ours alone'; this is because the Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament text is 'a legitimate theological activity'. 'More than that, Jewish imaginative construal of the text is a legitimate theological activity to which Christians must pay attention' (p. 735). Brueggemann, however, is afraid that 'Christian supersessionism…has made it nearly impossible for Christians to attend to the riches of Judaism'.

On this background, it is remarkable that Brueggemann is so critical of Jon D. Levenson's Jewish reading of the Old Testament (pp. 93-95). He

calls it a 'misleading' and 'unacceptable' reading, unacceptable because 'it violates the character of the text itself' (p. 95). This leads Dennis T. Olson to ask: 'Is something wrong here?' (1998: 167).

h. *The Metanarrative Question*

In postmodernism there is a profound scepticism toward any kind of metanarrative, defined as some kind of overruling understanding of society or being, or a kind of common denominator to measure anything against. The designation 'metanarrative' is probably created within postmodernism, its reference being the modernist idea that society is coherent, that in all its diversity there is something that binds things together in a coherent overall unity. The search for a *Mitte des Alten Testaments* is part and parcel of this idea. Such an idea is profoundly unacceptable in postmodernism and its basic pluralist way of thinking.[4] Brueggemann repeatedly refers to this problem. Here he has reservations about postmodernism.

On the one hand Brueggemann argues that there is a metanarrative in our society. What he calls 'military consumerism' he sees as the currently most dominant metanarrative, defined as a 'construal of the world in which individual persons are reckoned as the primary units of meaning and reference, and individual persons, in unfettered freedom, are authorized (self-authorized) to pursue well-being, security, and happiness as they choose' (p. 718).

On the other hand, 'against the hegemonic vision of military consumerism', Brueggemann refers to 'Israel's testimony', which invites 'the court' into a world of 'undomesticated holiness', 'originary generosity', 'indefatigable possibility', 'open-ended interaction' and 'genuine neighbourliness' (pp. 719-20); in other words, 'Israel's testimony yields a world deeply opposed to military consumerism as it is to every alternative metanarrative that lacks the markings of the central Character [i.e. Yahweh]… Only in the presence of the richer, more dense narrative of Yahwism can the inadequacy of the dominant metanarrative be observed' (p. 720). Brueggemann sees the task of Old Testament theology as an articulation of a metanarrative that is a strong contrast to the metanarratives currently available in our society.

Yet, Brueggemann claims to be 'profoundly ill at ease' (p. 558) with using the term 'metanarrative' with reference to Old Testament theology. When nevertheless using 'metanarrative' with reference to Old Testament theology, he means 'a more-or-less coherent perspective on reality'. His problem with using the term this way is that he is 'impressed with the plurality, diversity, and fragmented quality of the Old Testament text' and has 'no wish to engage in reductionism'. In addition, he is 'ill at ease' with using this term, because 'I take seriously' Jean-François Lyotard's suspicion of the concept of metanarrative, 'with its hegemonic potential'.

4. Cf. 'Postmodernism as the End of the "Metanarrative"' in Grenz 1996: 44.

In summary, the task of Old Testament theology is 'to evidence the ways in which a counter metanarrative may have authority' (p. 720). Yet, Brueggemann steps further forward with a summation of the Old Testament's testimony appropriate for a North American context at the end of the twentieth century (his book was published in 1997), claiming (p. 741):

> Israel's testimony, with its uncompromising and irreducible commitment to justice, stands as the primary alternative to the deathly ideology of technological, military consumerism. In a variety of ways, in an endless variety of textual utterances, Israel's testimony is to the effect that Yahweh's passion for justice, passion for the well-being of the human community, and passion for the *shalom* of the earth will refuse to come to terms with the power of death, no matter its particular public form or its ideological garb.

i. *The Old Testament as a Lawsuit Trial*

As is evident from the headlines of his book, and was already noticed, Brueggemann's presentation of his *Theology* has the character of a lawsuit trial metaphor on the relation between Israel and Yahweh,[5] which is a corollary of his specific attention to speech about God. The choice of this metaphor model sets the premises for how his book is edited.

To Brueggemann, this model fits adequately with its theological purpose. The Old Testament is seen from a vantage point which opens up for untraditional perspectives. Like in court, in this book we find surprising contributions or testimonies, not least in Part III, 'Israel's Unsolicited Testimony'. Brueggemann's presentation not only refers to what God and humans say, but also what these sayings unspokenly imply, what they reveal concerning evident and not so evident aspects with God, humans and peoples.

But any decision at court is provisional, because: 'Interpretation as advocacy is an ongoing process of negotiation, adjudication, and correction. This means, most likely, that there can be no right or ultimate interpretation, but only provisional judgments for which the interpreter is prepared to take practical responsibility, and which must always yet again be submitted to the larger conflictual conversation. Therefore, any adequate interpretive conclusion is likely to enjoy its adequacy only for a moment' (p. 63). There are certain conclusions about God, humans and the world, but the Old Testament as a whole 'treats such constancies as highly provisional' (p. 83).

The trial metaphor implies a particular underlining of the concept of testimony. As 'the court…has no access to the "actual event" besides the testimony', the term 'testimony' becomes an important key concept in his presentation (p. ii). '*The utterance is everything*' (p. 122, Brueggemann's italics). The metaphor of testimony is 'particularly suited to the disputatious quality of Old Testament interpretation' (p. 715), because 'testimony for

5. Presented in short on pp. 120-22.

Yahweh is deeply in dispute with other available metanarratives in the contemporary world, as it was in deep dispute with ancient imperial systems and ancient religious alternatives'.

When Brueggemann uses the rubrics of 'core testimony' and 'counter-testimony', he refers to 'the undeniable fact' that Israel's own testimony in the text has both 'good claims' made for Yahweh and the opposite; Israel asserts that 'the sustainer is not always reliable and the transformer is sometimes ineffective' (p. 715).

Brueggemann summarizes the value of testimony in court in five points (pp. 719-20, Brueggemann's italics): it invites 'the court' into a world of (1) *undomesticated holiness*, (2) *originated generosity*, (3) *indefatigable possibility*, (4) *open-ended interaction* and (5) *genuine neighbourliness*. 'In rough outline, Israel's testimony yields a world as deeply opposed to military consumerism as it is to every other alternative metanarrative that lacks the markings of a central Character… Only in the presence of the richer, more dense metanarrative of Yahwism can the inadequacy of the dominant metanarrative be observed.'

In conclusion: 'It is the task of Old Testament theology, set in the large arena of competing alternatives, to evidence the ways in which a counter metanarrative may have authority', he argues (p. 720). More on this matter later.

i. *Israel's Core Testimony*. In 'Israel's Core Testimony', Brueggemann presents what he sees as Israel's basic conception of Yahweh, 'Yahweh Uttered', but not in an ordinary thematizing or systematizing way. His approach should rather be called lexical or grammatical, with focus on characteristic verbs, adjectives and nouns.

First, he traces the testimony in verbal sentences: God who creates (*br'*, *'śh*, *qnh* and *yṣr*), makes promises (*šbr* and *dbr*), delivers (*yṣr*, *pdh*, *yš'*, *'lh* and *g'l*), commands (*ṣwh*), leads (*nhl* and *nḥh*), feeds (*'kl*) and tests (*nśh*) (Chapter 4). These words Brueggemann calls 'strong verbs of transformation' (p. 145), pointing out that verbs underline the concrete actions of God, instead of the more abstract character, nature, being or attributes of God. Verbs also commit us in profound ways to a narrative portrayal of God, where Yahweh is the one who is said to have performed these actions. Verbal descriptions of Yahweh are of primary importance to Brueggemann.

Secondly, he traces testimonies about Yahweh expressed in adjectives, which report what Yahweh 'characteristically does' (p. 213). 'The God to whom the Old Testament bears witness is known primarily and characteristically through these concrete statements of the way in which the circumstance of Israel was changed by Yahweh's direct enactment of transformative verbs.' As central texts, Brueggemann refers to Psalm 136 (pp. 213-15),

with the refrain 'for his steadfast love endures for ever', and the 'credo of adjectives' in Exod. 34.6-7 (pp. 215-18), where Yahweh is called merciful (*rḥm*), gracious (*ḥnn*), slow to anger (*'rk 'ppym*), abounding in steadfast love (*ḥsd*) and faithfulness (*'mt*) and forgiving. Exodus 34.6-7 is frequently referred to by Brueggemann, these verses having a central position in his theology. He groups the adjectives (pp. 224-28) as generalizing, relational, focusing on fidelity and warning, summing up with the repeated conclusion that 'there is no one like Yahweh'. 'Yahweh's incomparability is not in any of these affirmations, but in the odd collage of them together' (p. 228).

On the relation between verbs and adjectives, he holds that 'the two-way interaction between concrete verbal sentences and larger adjectival generalization is important for understanding Israel's testimony concerning Yahweh' (p. 214).

Thirdly, Brueggemann presents Yahweh-related nouns. Nouns have a more static function, describing Yahweh as a constant. 'By using nouns to name and characterize Yahweh…Israel assigns to (or recognizes in) Yahweh elements of constancy and substance that make Yahweh in some ways knowable and available to Israel' (p. 229). Describing God with nouns is a more conventional way of doing theology. Brueggemann suggests that 'nouns are used as a gathering of adjectives for Yahweh, so that nouns are much less settled and substantive than our use of them might suggest' (p. 230). Nouns used for Yahweh in the Old Testament are metaphors. '[T]here is no one-to-one match between the metaphor and that to which it refers. In fact, the noun as a metaphor always stands in a tenuous and proximate relation to the One to whom it bears witness'.

In particular, Brueggemann mentions (pp. 233-50) nouns as metaphors for governance, with Yahweh as judge, king, warrior and father, and metaphors of sustenance, with Yahweh as artist, healer, gardener-vinedresser, mother and shepherd (pp. 250-61). These metaphors he calls 'an enactment of Israel's testimony of Yahweh as incomparable', with reference to the rhetorical question 'who is like Yahweh?', or the proclamation 'there is none like Yahweh' (p. 266).[6]

As for the relation between describing Yahweh with verbs, adjectives and nouns, Brueggemann claims: 'Thus I propose that in speaking about Yahweh, Israel regularly moves from the particular to the general, from the verb to the adjective to the noun' (p. 230). As for the relation between using adjectives and nouns, he claims: 'in order to maintain the generalizing nouns, Israel must regularly be prepared to return to the more particular adjectival claims, and behind that to the most particular verbal sentences of testimony' (p. 230).

6. Bob Becking comments that this is a 'workable distinction', suggesting 'a comparable multidimensionality' in Yahweh (1999).

In summary, Brueggemann claims:

> the central Character of the Old Testament [i.e. Yahweh]…is known in concrete verbal sentences, which give accounts for powerful sustenance and radical transformation. Those verbal sentences, moreover, fund *generalizing adjectives* of sovereignty and fidelity… And the generalizing adjectives invite *a rich panoply of nouns* which recognize in…Yahweh remarkable authority, but also a kind of hands-on attentiveness to the way life is at close range. This field of noun-metaphors…means that the Subject [i.e. Yahweh] of the verbs is decisively present in every phase of Israel's life. (p. 266, Brueggemann's italics)

Fashioning 'a larger, coherent portrayal of Yahweh is the proper work of an Old Testament theology', Brueggemann explains (p. 267), arguing that 'its work is to construe out of the texts a rendering of God'. But immediately he adds that 'this work of thematization (not systematization) is the great hazard of an Old Testament theology', or even more strongly: 'This thematization is our required work and our most profound hazard' (p. 267).

In Chapter 7, Brueggemann presents a problem he calls '*Yahweh Fully Uttered*', or a 'disjunctive rendering of Yahweh'. 'The substance of Israel's testimony concerning Yahweh, I propose, yields a Character who has a profound disjunction at the core of the Subject's life' (p. 268). This disjunction he calls 'the engine that drives Israel's testimony' and 'a theological datum of substance'. Brueggemann finds this disjunction expressed in particular in Exod. 34.6-7 and Num. 14.18-24, pericopes that state 'what is most crucial about Yahweh'. 'Yahweh's capacity for solidarity and for sovereignty is the primary reality that Israel finds in the character of Yahweh' (p. 271). This in turn implies that Israel's relationship with Yahweh 'is one of heavily freighted possibility', since Yahweh 'may act in any circumstance in gracious fidelity', but may also 'act in any circumstances in ferocious sovereignty'.

The important point in Chapter 7 is the attention to metaphors of governance, Yahweh's power. These aspects are found in terminology for Yahweh as judge, king, warrior and father (p. 273). Yahweh is a God of order.

But Yahweh is also a *pro nobis* God, presented as potter, gardener, shepherd, mother and healer (pp. 277-80). 'The largest thematization concerning God, as testified by Israel, is that Yahweh is at the same time sovereign and faithful, severely preoccupied with self-regard and passionately committed to life with the partner' (p. 283). Brueggemann sees a 'considerable tension' between these two themes, 'they have their proximate—but no more than proximate—resolution in Yahweh's *righteousness*' (his italics).

Brueggemann finds that 'Israel speaks about Yahweh's uncompromising, unaccommodating sovereignty in three different ways', exposed in the following (pp. 283-96) as his glory, his holiness, his jealousness. 'The

oddness and the enduring power of Yahweh to compel attention is that the sovereign One who is marked by glory, holiness, and jealousy is the One who has engaged Israel in a relationship of enduring fidelity' (p. 296). This fidelity he finds in Yahweh's covenant and his pathos and passion for his people (pp. 298-302), and at the end a 'move toward incarnation' (p. 302).

Brueggemann sums up this chapter in four observations on Israel's core testimony concerning Yahweh: first, a convergence of Yahweh's self-regard and his commitment to Israel; secondly, the tension between Yahweh's sovereignty and his loyalty; thirdly, the tension between Yahweh's love and power; and fourthly, asking whether there is a resolution to these tensions at all (pp. 303-13).

This latter point opens the door for his attention to what he calls 'Israel's Countertestimony' (Part II).

ii. *Israel's Countertestimony*. Part II, 'Israel's Countertestimony', concentrates on the conception of what is traditionally called *Deus absconditus*, the Hidden God (Isa. 45.15; cf. p. 333). This 'countertestimony' is compared to a judicial cross-examination (p. 317), which is caused by 'an uneasiness about that marvellously positive testimony'. A truthful person is honest to God, also and especially in times of trouble; therefore this is countertestimony. But Brueggemann underlines: 'The cross-examination is not intended by Israel to obliterate the core testimony. In the disputatious propensity of Israel, rather, core testimony and cross-examination belong to each other and for each other in an ongoing exchange' (p. 317). At the beginning Brueggemann underlines that 'it is the work of a witness to present a coherent narrative account of what happened' (p. 317). This coherence also includes the hiddenness, ambiguity and negativity with Yahweh (p. 318), for which he gives account in Chapters 9, 10 and 11.

The cause for this cross-examining countertestimony is that there were in Israel objections to Yahweh, because life is not always as straightforward as could be imagined in Israel's core testimony. There is also another and much darker aspect with Yahweh, which should be taken seriously. That is what Brueggemann aims at explaining with this special focus on Israel's countertestimony.

The 'profound tension' between Israel's core testimony and countertestimony should not be eliminated—it should be openly maintained. In Chapter 12, 'Maintaining the Tension', Brueggemann argues: 'The tension between the core testimony and the countertestimony is acute and ongoing. It is my judgement that this tension between the two belongs to the very character and substance of the Old Testament faith, a tension that precludes and resists resolution' (p. 400).

After arguing more in details on the question, he sharpens his position: 'To choose either mode of testimony to the disregard of the other is in my judgement not only to cheat the testimonial corpus, but to misunderstand the dialectical, resilient, disputatious quality that is definitional for this faith. … Lived faith in this tradition consists in the capacity to move back and forth between these two postures of faith, one concerned to submit to Yahweh, culminating in *self-abandoning* praise, the other concerned to assert self in the face of God, culminating in *self-regarding complaint* that takes a posture of autonomy' (pp. 400-401, Brueggemann's italics).

Brueggemann becomes rather personal when he claims, 'Right faith… recognizes that in different contexts, each of us will be required and permitted to align ourselves with one sort of testimony or the other, which will be adapted in the context' (p. 401). All of us are in individual situations, and he confesses for himself: 'I have tried to stay within the bounds of the Old Testament itself and to heed its unmistakably Jewish propensity. At the same time, I live my life and practice my faith as a Christian. Thus I have pondered the fact that in the face of this unresolved and unresolvable dialectic, the Christian tradition of interpretation and theology has tended toward closure in the direction of testimony' (p. 401).

Brueggemann finds the same dialectics in the Christian tradition, because 'Easter has not singularly settled all'. Easter proclaims that 'Christ has died, Christ has risen', but it must add 'Christ will come again'. The New Testament 'ends with an acknowledgement of waiting, albeit full of belief; confident waiting, but nonetheless waiting' (p. 401). 'The unresolved is as profound in the New Testament as in the Old', he concludes (p. 403).

iii. *Israel's Unsolicited Testimony*. In Part III Brueggemann presents what he calls 'Israel's Unsolicited Testimony'. The concept is taken from the courtroom and refers to how witnesses in court sometimes want to give 'extra, unsolicited testimony, even though warned against by the judge or attorney' (p. 407). Such witnesses Brueggemann also finds in the Old Testament: 'It is evident that in the Old Testament, Israel gives a good deal of "unsolicited testimony" [and] continues to talk about many other matters beyond what has been asked' (p. 408).

It is these 'other matters' that constitute what he calls 'Israel's unsolicited testimony'. Brueggemann suggests three possible reasons why Israel gives such 'unsolicited testimony' (p. 408): (1) the attention it attracts in being a witness; (2) willingness to be helpful with more details to the trial; (3) peculiar insight in the matter. All three reasons are taken from experiences in court.

This 'unsolicited testimony' is understood from the vantage point of being in 'partnership' with Yahweh (cf. pp. 408-12). The term is used neutrally, leaving open the dynamic of the relationship. Yahweh in Israel's testimony is never seen as 'alone', he is always seen in a relation; Yahweh is always in a partnership. In the words of Rolf P. Knierim, 'The Old Testament, strictly speaking, does not speak about Yahweh. It speaks about the relationship between Yahweh or God and reality' (cited by Brueggemann, p. 409). In Brueggemann's own words: 'Yahweh is committed to Yahweh's partners in freedom and in passion. It is this odd linkage of freedom and passion that constitutes the space for Israel's unsolicited testimony' (p. 410; cf. pp. 410-12).[7]

This partnership is unfolded and related to 'Israel' (Chapter 14), 'The Human Person' (Chapter 15), 'The Nation' (Chapter 16) and 'Creation' (Chapter 17) as Yahweh's partners, while 'The Drama of Partnership' is reported on in Chapter 18. For all these chapters the drama is the interchange between a positive statement, the 'fissure' (cf. p. 560) of a break, and a final restoration, as Brueggemann illustrates schematically on p. 555:

	Statement	'Fissure'	Restoration
Israel	Chosen	Scattered	Gathered
Humans	Created	Pit	Raised
Nations	Summoned	Nullified	Promised
Creation	Formed	Relinquished	Restored

This drama of statement, brokenness and restoration is the primary outcome of the transactions between Yahweh and Yahweh's partners, as Brueggemann sees it (p. 558).

iv. *Israel's Embodied Testimony*. In Part IV, 'Israel's Embodied Testimony', Brueggemann immediately has to 'step away somewhat from our governing metaphor of testimony' (p. 567), which he has followed so far.

The problem is that Yahweh's relatedness to Israel, human persons, nations and creation 'remains unsettled and unsettling because of the character of Yahweh, who is at the same time non-negotiably sovereign (incommensurate) and endlessly faithful (engaged in mutuality)'. 'Israel can find no way in its testimony to resolve the jaggedness of a relationship marked by both incommensurability and mutuality' (p. 567). Therefore, the relatedness of Yahweh is problematic. 'What in fact is the nature of this relationship?'

7. It is to be noted that with the phrasing 'Yahweh is committed to Yahweh's partners' (and elsewhere) Brueggemann seeks to avoid using gendered personal pronouns when referring to the Godhead. Cf. the kind of inclusive language Helge S. Kvanvig uses when referring to the reader as 'she'.

To explain or illuminate the problem Brueggemann makes a comparison with Michelangelo's painting of creation in the Sistine Chapel. In this painting 'God appears to have flung out the human creatures into creation'. God and the created humans have their arms and fingers stretched out toward each others, but heir fingertips do not touch. 'In that moment of touching, Michelangelo has articulated the strange otherness of the Creator God, with whom the creature has no direct contact' (p. 568). But in Israel they do make contact, even though their incommensurability would seem to require that they should not make contact. 'Yahweh…moves out of incommensurability (kenosis) for the sake of contact; but it is contact that does not compromise Yahweh's sovereign incommensurability' (p. 568). This is the difficult problem under discussion in this part of Brueggemann's book.

In 'Israel's Embodied Testimony' Brueggemann presents the reader with Yahweh's modes of mediation, modes whereby the fullness of Yahweh's sovereign, faithful self was genuinely available to Israel. Brueggemann goes as far as saying that 'the rhetorical mediation of Yahweh in the Bible is not a disembodied ideational operation', because 'Yahweh is generated and constituted, so far as the claims of Israel are concerned, in actual practices that mediate… Thus, the question of mediation is not a question of right theology (as in orthodoxy), a great and pervasive theological temptation, but it is a question of characteristic social practice that generates, constitutes, and mediates Yahweh in the midst of life' (p. 574). This comes close to claiming that Yahweh is created or 'generated' by Israel's rhetoric (p. 544; cf. Barr 1999).

Brueggemann differentiates between Yahweh's mediated and unmediated presence. As far as Yahweh's unmediated presence is concerned, he refers to theophanies and personal encounters with Yahweh; mediations of Yahweh's presence are understood to be direct mediations to Israel, mediations through text, communal practice and daily practice (cf. pp. 575-77).

Next, Brueggemann proceeds to review 'five prominent mediations' in the Old Testament, 'Torah' (Chapter 20), 'Kingship' (Chapter 21), 'Prophecy' (Chapter 22), 'Cult' (Chapter 23) and 'Wisdom' (Chapter 24), before summing up in Chapter 25, 'Modes of Mediation and Life with Yahweh'. Each of these modes of mediation (Chapters 20–24) are 'instituted as Yahweh's gift to Israel' (p. 695). They are also situated 'in the midst of real-life circumstances' (p. 697), and they are authorized and legitimated by Yahweh as actual 'concrete human enterprise', but therefore also 'subject to profound perversion' (p. 698). Each of these modes of mediation makes Yahweh available to Israel (p. 700).

v. *Prospects for Theological Interpretation*. In the last main part of his book (Part V) Brueggemann presents some 'Prospects for Theological Interpretation'. This part of the book is both a retrospective of the four previous parts of the book, with a discussion of why the book is written as it actually is, as well as a tentative prospect for the future of such an enterprise, writing a *Theology* of the Old Testament. In some respect his retrospective has the feel of being a review of his own book. This part of his book is also important for understanding Brueggemann's foundational assumptions when writing the book, and could profitably be read before reading the preceding four parts.

Part V is where Brueggemann's postmodern assumptions come most clearly to the fore. Yet, he had already in his analysis of 'The Contemporary Situation' (Chapter 2) summarized that 'our postmodern situation, which refuses to acknowledge a settled essence behind our pluralistic claims, must make a major and intentional investment in the practice of rhetoric, for the shape of reality finally depends on the power of speech' (p. 71).

Brueggemann identifies two well-established and dominating assumptions about Old Testament theology (pp. 707-708): (1) as a Christian enterprise, Old Testament theology 'could assume that it was dealing with the normative socio-religious-moral convictions of the West', entertaining a direct flow into the New Testament; (2) Old Testament theology has been largely an academic matter, shaped in German universities and slightly altered in North American academic teaching. This academic Old Testament theology is an enterprise and a product of Enlightenment, Cartesianism and Kantianism (cf. p. 708). The epistemological assumptions laying behind the enterprise were committed to historicism ('what happened'), evolutionism (a progress from the primitive to the developed) and rationalism (a need for explanation and harmonization of problems).

Brueggemann's purpose is not to attack or malign this phase of scholarship, because 'there was nothing sinister about this enterprise'. It is rather his judgment that 'Old Testament interpretation, and theological interpretation more generally, cannot escape the epistemological and political context in which it operates' (p. 708). His purpose is also to recognize that this interpretation was 'intensely context-bound, in this case bound to the context of positivistic historicism'.

Moreover, Brueggemann sees an alliance between what he calls 'triumphalist Christendom' and critical positivism, which he thinks 'produced a pattern of hegemonic interpretation' (p. 709), which 'now is in enormous jeopardy'. This 'hegemonic interpretation' is represented 'almost exclusively by white, Western males', whom he sees as 'both a cause and a consequence of its dominance'. In addition, he sees an undesirable monopoly of interpretation, because 'only a few did it with any visible influence or effect, and everyone knew who they were'.

Fundamental to Brueggemann's conception is the current pluralism of our time. This problem is studied in Chapter 26, 'Interpretation in a Pluralistic Context'. Brueggemann sees an interpretative development 'From Hegemonic Interpretation to Pluralism', as formulated in a section (p. 707). There has been a 'disestablishment of our usual modes of interpretation' and a 'parallel disestablishment of the institutional vehicles for such interpretation'. This institutional disestablishment concerns both epistemology and socio-political factors, and is 'an exceedingly important matter' for Old Testament theology.

Nowadays we have 'an amazing pluralism' both inside and outside the Church. Also the Enlightenment, with which the Church had allied itself, is disestablished, with the consequence that 'confidence in positivistic rationality is much challenged', and we have entered a postmodern era, which signifies the break-up of any broad consensus about what we know or how we know what we know. '[N]o interpretive institution, ecclesiastical or academic, can any longer sustain a hegemonic mode of interpretation… [I]nterpretation is no longer safely in the hands of certified, authorized interpreters, but we are faced with a remarkable pluralism'—which he evidently appreciates (pp. 709-10).

Brueggemann takes the consequences of this pluralistic situation and proposes '*a contextual shift from hegemonic interpretations*' (cf. Eichrodt and von Rad) '*toward a pluralistic interpretive context*' (cf. the texts themselves, the biblical interpreters and culture at large) (p. 710, Brueggemann's italics).

From this recognition Brueggemann draws out three observations (pp. 710-13):

First, the biblical texts themselves witness to a plurality of testimonies concerning God and Israel's life with God. Old Testament theology has to live with that pluralism and the corollary disputes and compromises, with the result that 'the texts cannot be arranged in any single or unilateral pattern' (p. 710).

Second, this pluralism within the texts themselves is matched by a pluralism of dispute among the interpreters, with the result that 'Old Testament theology is now an active process of dispute that does from time to time end in some compromises, accommodations, or acknowledged settlements, albeit provisional ones', with the corollary that 'we are now able to see that every interpretation is context-driven and interest-driven to some large extent' (p. 711). Now, 'the ecclesial–academic enterprise of interpretation…is a pluralistic one of dispute and accommodation'.

Third, the new intellectual situation in the world is now 'widely dubbed "postmodern"', he explains (p. 712). Here Brueggemann enters a discussion with the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, who has claimed that

there is no longer any confidence in metanarratives. Brueggemann himself claims that there is rather a conflict between different metanarratives. The important point for his consideration is that the metanarrative of the Old Testament no longer enjoys any hegemonic privilege, but must enter into a pluralistic context of interpretation to see what kinds of dispute and accommodation is possible.

Against the backdrop of this pluralistic situation Brueggemann asks whether doing Old Testament theology will survive in time to come (p. 713).[8] Brueggemann notes that 'we are at a moment of Old Testament theology when we might reconsider the categories in which the power of Israel's testimonial utterances might be reconsidered, apart from every heavy-handed enforcer, ecclesial as well as academic, confessional as well as rationalistic' (p. 718). His immediate answer is yes, it will survive, but then he deepens his answer with reference to testimony, specifically, whether it is impossible or unwelcome. Lastly, Brueggemann relates it to what he calls the metanarrative of 'military consumerism' (see above).

Brueggemann calls it a 'hallmark' of his own approach that he honours the variegated nature of the texts themselves. It is his assumption that 'speech is constitutive of reality, that words count, that the practitioners of Yahweh are indeed *homo rhetoricus*', and, further, that 'Yahweh lives in, with and under this speech, and in the end depends on Israel's testimony for an access point in the world' (pp. 713-14).

In settling on rhetoric, he distinguishes Old Testament theology from historicism ('what happened') and being 'seduced by the ancient Hellenistic lust for Being, for establishing ontological reference behind the text' (p. 714; cf. his polemic against Brevard S. Child's search for the 'Real').

In relation to the current pluralism, the question is whether Old Testament theology is impossible or even an aberration. Some even argue that Old Testament theology 'is *an unwelcome and ignoble project in principle*' (p. 716, Brueggemann's italics). Brueggemann thinks the notion that Old Testament theology is impossible is derived from the sense that theological interpretation is inherently reductionistic, whereas the notion that theological interpretation is an unwelcome aberration stems from the sense that theological interpretation is inherently authoritarian. 'Indeed, a long history exists of wounding theological interpretation that is both reductionist and coercive' (p. 716).

On the one hand, he is curious about how, 'back in the days of unified historical criticism', scholarship seemed to tolerate a gap between critical conclusions and theological assumptions, hidden by 'a slippery language'. On the other hand, he is also curious about the unfortunate mark of current

8. Cf. Chapter 5 of the present volume, 'The Future of Old Testament Theology'.

scholarship, that many scholars have moved beyond historical criticism in its older modes, while they have at the same time 'moved into the kinds of rhetorical and literary studies that are sceptical if not resistant to theological interpretation'. These studies may have many insightful observations, but they are nevertheless un-attentive to the testimony to Yahweh (pp. 716-17).

Brueggemann indicates that such resistance to theological claim is rooted 'in old wounds of reductionism and coercion, wounds that are kept hidden or are denied in the name of scientific distancing'. This is characterized as 'the great problem for Old Testament scholars'; 'such scholars tend to regard Enlightenment rationality with a kind of naïve innocence, as though that perspective were not as ideology-laden, and ultimately as reductionist and coercive, as any ecclesial interpretation could ever be' (p. 717).

It is Brueggemann's expressed hope that he has 'modelled a responsible way of doing Old Testament theological interpretation that is a genuine alternative to these stereotypical modes that so deeply offend and so profoundly wound' (p. 717). It is his expectation that 'Old Testament theological interpretation that is viable in our new interpretive situation need not and dare not be reductionist'.

A third important aspect, for Brueggemann, is that our wider social context is Western culture, 'where another metanarrative is more powerful and compelling' (p. 718). We are living in a pluralistic culture, but that does not mean that anything goes; we are met with only a few choices, each of which is situated in a metanarrative.

Within this context, with such a dominant and powerful metanarrative, Brueggemann asks whether Old Testament theology is possible in the wider social context of the West. He finds no obvious answer to that question: 'If Old Testament theology…is to be credible in authorizing an alternative life in the world, then I suggest that an interpretive community must attend to the issues that stand between this construal of reality and the claims of military consumerism' (p. 719).

3. *A Synthesis of the Critics' Responses to Brueggemann*

a. *General*

Walter Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament* is a monumental and magisterial work, a kind of drama, just as any court trial is a drama. It is a literally heavy scholarly contribution, written for academic students and scholars. Yet large parts of it are easily accessible also for ordinary readers, those without academic theological training. Brueggemann is an excellent academic teacher with a broad readership, from lay people in the pew to ministers in the pulpit and academic teachers at the lectern.

Yet he has also turned out to be a controversial scholar, not least because of his *Theology*, which stands as an inevitable challenge for anybody working with Old Testament theology. His *Theology* immediately started a veritable academic storm, which is evidenced from the dating of the responses referred to here. Except for a few reviews from the year 2000 and later, the bulk of them are from 1998 and 1999. The book was published in 1997. It is illustrative of the intensity of the debate that Brueggemann himself at least a couple of times responded to several of the reviews he got. He evidently felt the pressure of the debate.

It is worth noting that a book on Old Testament *Theology* was met with such an intense debate. This response is probably comparable to the responses provoked by Gerhard von Rad's *Theology* four decades earlier. The reason for this intense debate is that Brueggemann presented something completely new. He was already one of the leading American Old Testament scholars, with a broad readership in academic as well as ecclesiastical circles. This *Theology* should be his theological legacy to posterity.[9] His *Theology* was a postmodernist surprise to many readers. Nobody had ever seen an Old Testament *Theology* like this one before. Brueggemann's work caused excitement as well as disappointment—and debate.[10]

The responding scholars have almost univocally expressed deep respect for Brueggemann's general scholarship, the comprehensiveness of his *Theology*, and its importance as a monumental contribution to the scholarship of Old Testament theology. Some scholars have been almost unreserved in their admirations; yet most scholars have also some critical remarks, while some have come out with rather fundamental criticism of his *Theology*.

In particular, James Barr (1999: 542) compares Brueggemann's theology with the book of Job, because it has what he calls a 'Prologue' (two retrospects on, respectively, previous and contemporary writings on Old Testament theology) and an 'Epilogue' (a prospect on the contemporary and future situation or Old Testament theology). Barr does not say it, but Brueggemann's 'Epilogue' (he does not use that term himself) could be read as a prolongation of his 'Prologue' (he does not use that term either). Between the Prologue and the Epilogue Brueggemann's four Main Parts

9. In Walter Moberly's opinion (1998), this *Theology* 'sums up much that Brueggemann has been speaking and writing about in recent years' (p. 100). Yet Moberly also notices that his *Theology* 'does not take the form that we expected from some of Brueggemann's preliminary essays, which suggests that Brueggemann's thinking is still developing (a point which both admirers and detractors need to bear in mind)'.

10. Moberly first called the book 'a major work, by a leading scholar, written throughout with lucidity and passion' (p. 100), but in his conclusion he is more reluctant: 'Yet, the book is, in my judgement, insufficiently rooted in the disciplines of theology to be fully persuasive' (p. 104). This ambivalence is typical of a number of the reviews.

constitute the *corpus* of his book. James Barr is particularly critical of Brueggemann's use of the term 'reductionist'. To Brueggemann, any systematization is reductionistic. After reeling off a series of cases where Brueggemann uses this term, Barr concludes: 'In fact, almost everyone who has ever said anything about anything is a reductionist…' (p. 546).

This summary synthesis intends to catch the points most frequently commented upon, as well as significant points commented upon by some individual scholars. There is no reason to refer to every aspect of the reviewers' responses to Brueggemann's work. Such a synthesizing summary will necessarily be reductionistic—to use a term Brueggemann himself often uses with negative connotations. Though reductionistic, my intention is to point out the main criticisms Brueggemann has met, and refer back to the critics themselves for further reading.

The categories used in the following are chosen according to my best understanding. They are categories chosen by myself, not by Brueggemann or any other of the reviewers. Whether the choices are good or not so good will be a matter to discuss. But to me this categorizing seems reasonable. It will not be possible to make waterproof walls between the categories chosen here, because discussion of one matter will necessarily influence and even include a discussion of other matters. The whole is a web of ideas closely or more remotely related. Ideas are not so simple that they can be isolated from each other. Also, the sequence in which the categories are ordered could be a matter of discussion.

b. *Theological Position*

An overarching question is how Brueggemann should be classified theologically. What kind of theologian is he? Where does he stand in the theological landscape? To place Brueggemann under traditional theological labels is not easy, as the following survey tries to document.

Some responders to his *Theology* trace influences on Brueggemann from both his teacher, James Muilenburg (methodology), and from Karl Barth (theology), while the scholars he is mostly profiled against are Brevard S. Childs (himself influenced by Barth) and James Barr. This profiling is mutual, from Brueggemann to them and from them to Brueggemann.

Brueggemann positions himself in particular in relation to Brevard S. Childs (1992), whose *Biblical Theology* appeared just five years before Brueggemann's. Brueggemann commends Childs as 'the most formidable practitioner of biblical theology' (p. 89), but he also charges him with being 'massively reductionist', concluding that Child's approach is 'completely unacceptable' (p. 92) because 'such an overtly Christological reading of the Old Testament is not credible or responsible' (p. 93). According to Brueggemann, there has come 'a contextual shift' in biblical theology, a movement

from 'hegemonic interpretations', like that of Childs's canonical approach, toward his own vision of 'a pluralistic interpretative context (reflected in the texts themselves, in biblical interpreters, and in the culture at large)' (p. 710).

The main aim of Margaret S. Odell's review (1999) is to examine the way in which Brueggemann develops and expounds an alleged Barthian heritage.[11] Generally, she argues that Brueggemann himself 'has absorbed and deployed the themes and agendas of four decades of biblical scholarship… [But o]ne can hardly think of a less coherent period of biblical scholarship [than this].' Against this background, she questions whether coherence is actually possible: 'To put it bluntly, is it really possible to be a Marxist, liberationalist, postmodern Barthian? Can all of these different and apparently contradictory strands come together, particularly in the advocacy of the Old Testament?' She is 'astonished to find that they do come together in Brueggemann's remarkably sensitive readings of the Old Testament texts'. How is that possible? Brueggemann must with necessity have 'a central organizing point', she argues, and she finds it in 'an insistence on the normativity of the view of reality that is present in the Old Testament'. She concludes that Brueggemann's 'postmodern appropriation of Barth's conception of speech as constitutive of revelation leaves far too many unresolved questions. If there is coherence in this theology, it is a fragile one which exists in Brueggemann's own unique clustering of passions and commitments.'

Walter Brueggemann admitted (1999) that 'Professor Odell has voiced difficult and important questions'. He agreed with her that his programmatic assertions are not worked out. His response is that since 'we are at a beginning point of a relatively new venture, informed by the past but moving into issues and categories not yet fully clear, the offer of unfinished business is unavoidable'.

On Odell's allegation that he is a 'Marxist, liberationalist, postmodern Barthian', Brueggemann underlines that he will not be judged by slogans. He admits to have learned from Barth, but 'I have no interest in being a Barthian'. Childs has called his *Theology* 'quasi-Marxist', while Brueggemann claims he has 'no interest in being a Marxist' either. He admits to being 'deeply informed by liberation hermeneutics', but 'I do not mind the slogans', he repeats. He does not, like Odell, find inconsistency in his way of thinking, because 'Barthian theology with its polemic against idolatry is deeply matched to Marxian exposes of self-deceiving ideology. And wherever idols and ideology are exposed comes the chance for obedient freedom.'

11. Cf. what Brueggemann himself says about Karl Barth (pp. 16-20).

Odell argues that 'Barth's challenge to modernity not only makes it possible for Brueggemann to embrace such ideological criticisms as Marxism, it actually invites them'. This argument is difficult to digest: if Barth challenged modernity, how could that lead an alleged Barthian like Brueggemann to 'embrace' a modernist ideology like Marxism? Furthermore, is Brueggemann really an ideological Marxist? He is basically critical of the American political system, which is evident in several of his books. But does that make him an ideological Marxist? As seen from a European and Scandinavian vantage point, it is natural to classify him closer to Scandinavian and European social democracy than to Marxism. This claim from Odell about Brueggemann's political thinking seems far away from what sounds reasonable in Europe and particularly in Scandinavia. Europeans see very clearly a difference between social democracy, which has dominated Scandinavia since World War II, and the absolutist and dictatorial Marxism we have seen in Eastern Europe in the same period. Ideological Marxism and social democracy are two very different matters indeed.

R.W.L. Moberly (1999) senses Brueggemann's 'deep dismay at the battle for the Bible' business in the US and its fight for control of American theological seminaries (pp. 475-76). 'But even if Brueggemann were entirely right about such recent events…it remains a gross travesty to tar all classic and ecclesial Christian theology with the brush of its abuse. One must always insist that abuse does not remove right use, and…the answer to poor use of Christian theology must be good use, not its caricature and abandonment', Moberly counters (p. 476).

Leo G. Perdue (2005) describes Brueggemann as a Protestant theologian who has 'enjoyed the status of being Western, white, and male'. 'Yet he speaks as a troubled soul…as one who is deeply concerned to assist in recharting the course of the church into new channels that will reinstitute the humanity of all people' (p. 252). In accordance with the Reformation's principle of *sola scriptura*, his vehicle for this aim is the Bible. Brueggemann 'is especially compelled to enter into some of the features of an epistemological shift in a postmodern era, because of what he sees as the breakdown of many important modes of theological interpretation, [e.g. by] the end of modernity [or] scientific positivism' (p. 252).

As we have already seen, Brueggemann himself claims as his theological and methodological position 'a *contextual shift from hegemonic interpretation*…toward a *pluralistic interpretive context* (reflected in the texts themselves, in biblical interpreters, and in the culture at large)' (p. 710, Brueggemann's italics). This focus on 'a pluralistic interpretive context' connotes to Gerstenberger's *Theologies*, even though Gerstenberger's *Theologies* is never mentioned in Brueggemann's *Theology*.

c. *The Biblical Theologian*

Brueggemann is properly a biblical theologian, with close attention to the texts and a brilliant ability to see some of the not-so-evident aspects within the texts. As a reader of texts Brueggemann is an explorer. It is important for him to read 'the text itself'. He regrets that in the academy Scripture has become and object of study in the context of a metahistory of positivism that 'in principle had to distort or deny the most defining characteristics of the text itself' (p. 15). In this way, modern criticism has 'made the text unavailable on its own terms, as it has become available according to the canon of modernity' (p. 85). But nevertheless, opinions differ on Brueggemann as a biblical theologian.

As a biblical theologian, Brueggemann has been met with both positive and negative responses. The present presentation reflects responses to his *Theology*, where the latter has been the most dominant. This is remarkable, because Brueggemann is a theologian who generally has a broad readership and who is widely respected as a theologian and Old Testament scholar. Nevertheless, the conception of his *Theology* has been a surprise to the Old Testament scholarly guild, and appears as something of a theological experiment.

Of the positive responses, M. Daniel Carroll R. (1998) reads Brueggemann as 'at his best' when he explores 'the power of the text to express life with God', even though 'some will be uncomfortable with his explicit decision to avoid issues of historicity and ontology', and when 'language itself becomes the grounding of his theology'. Brueggemann 'is right to highlight the impressive variety of and conflict between views and experiences of God in the Old Testament', but Carroll realizes that 'evangelicals once again might see great coherence because of their own theological presuppositions', compared to what Brueggemann does.

Ellen F. Davis (1999) claims that Brueggemann is at his best 'when he goes beyond the individual sentences and works with large themes'. 'Probably his most valuable contribution in this book is to demonstrate exegetically how we may move beyond the inadequate dichotomies that have characterized so much Old Testament theology: creation vs. salvation [etc.]. Brueggemann impressively demonstrates that it is only through a more comprehensive view that the full pastoral, ethical, and political dimensions of Israel's testimony become evident' (p. 53 C). In particular she commends him for his comprehensive exploration of the theological meaning of Israel's worship, a subject that has received far too little attention in Protestant Christian (i.e. historical critical) scholarship, which is generally contemptuous of cult (p. 53 C). In his study of Israel's worship, Brueggemann 'moves to its greatest theological depth'. As for Brueggemann's presentation of the cult, Davis comments: 'This lengthy treatment

demonstrates just how manifold concrete practices of speech and gesture maintain Israel's peculiar and always precarious identity as the community living in ineluctable relationship with YHWH' (p. 54 A).

Tim Meadowcroft (2006) commends Brueggemann for being 'a creative and highly competent student of the Old Testament and, notwithstanding the methodological problems in this approach, the achievements of his Theology are many' (p. 45). In particular, Meadowcroft highlights that 'perhaps none speaks more clearly into our own age than his insistence on understanding God from the standpoint of God's relationality rather than his attributes' (cf. Brueggemann, pp. 201-28). Meadowcroft recognizes that such an approach 'arises evidently from the nature of the Old Testament corpus itself, which is overwhelmingly relational in emphasis, it is a difficult approach to take'.

Nevertheless, it is the critics' objections that dominate the debate on his *Theology*.

In spite of Ellen F. Davis's many positive evaluations, she argues that Brueggemann's exegesis is problematic, because he works with small text units and sentences, taking short sayings at face value without giving due attention to their context. Brueggemann 'is rightly worried about the domestication of the Bible through contextless, intellectual activity, in either the academy or the church'; why then does he not 'sufficiently acknowledge the ultimate context in which engaged, transformative readings of the Bible occurs', she wonders (Davis 1999: 52 B).

Rolf Rendtorff (1999) and Terje Stordalen (2003: 14) are of a similar opinion. Rendtorff underlines that biblical texts do not consist of isolated sentences but of text compounds that should be read contextually. He misses a contextual reading of texts in Brueggemann's work. For Rendtorff, 'The Bible as a book or as a collection of books do not come in block' ('Die Bibel als Buch oder als eine Sammlung von Büchern kommt nicht in Block'). For Stordalen, it is a problem that Brueggemann is less reflective on how sentences are contextually or intertextually connected in stories and narratives. In this way the text sometimes becomes a witness for irrelevant opinions.

Davis seems to criticize Brueggemann for being hermeneutically diffuse in his text-reading. As she reads him, many different interpreters with different presuppositions are at work on the text, and there is no longer any court of appeal beyond the text itself. Brueggemann argues that this is congruent with the nature of the biblical text itself, as Israel's varied and mutable witness of faith (cf. Davis 1999: 50 B). A major goal for him is to show that the Old Testament not only tolerates but even encourages multiple 'bids for a truth-statement' among its interpreters (p. 50 B, cf. Brueggemann, p. 64). But Davis charges him for having committed 'the error of importing ideological claims not present in the biblical text itself, namely, contemporary philosophy's valorization of human speech as being itself

powerful to create reality' (p. 50 B). She actually seems to argue that Brueggemann knocks himself off his own feet, when compared to his previous writing. She can agree that the actual event to which Israel witnesses 'is enormously supple and elusive and admits of many retellings' (Brueggemann, p. 120). But even though the Old Testament is 'probably unparalleled' in its variability, 'it is a serious misrepresentation to vaunt Israel's rhetorical boldness and creativity, while falling to observe its foundational existence that God transcends all human capacity for description' (p. 51 A).

To James Barr (1999) Brueggemann's choice of biblical texts is problematic since the majority of texts quoted are speeches. In particular, Barr misses narrative texts, legal passages, sacrificial rituals, military campaigns, Deuteronomistic formulas for kings, design for temples, genealogies, list of cities and boundaries, tribal poems like Genesis 49 and treatment of Song of Songs, even though the latter is quoted. 'Thus very large areas of Israel's traditions are under-represented' (p. 558). This is all the more remarkable, given that an outstanding aspect of the biblical material is its historical rhetoric, Barr underlines.

James Barr also argues that 'Brueggemann sometimes writes as if the text was a living person, who can decide how it is to be treated, "presenting itself" for this and "refusing" that, "closing itself to something else"' (p. 550),[12] commenting that 'all these, surely, are really Brueggemann's own decisions not those of the text'.[13]

Dennis T. Olson (1998: 178-79) seems to argue that Brueggemann is negligent of both intertextuality and tradition history, arguing that 'Scripture is always in dialogue with some tradition in the act of interpretation'. Brueggemann claims that the Bible should be read 'without tendentiousness' and that a theologian should 'be vigilant against importing claims from elsewhere' (p. 65). Olson responds that 'no reader or interpreter can avoid bringing some interpretive framework to impose on a text such as the Bible'. 'No meaning exists "in the text itself".' A text is 'inevitably caught up in dialogic encounter with a complex constellation of voices that we bring to the text from the outside'. In particular Olson sees Brueggemann's appeal to the *sola scriptura* principle as 'entirely misguided' because this principle assumes the use of Christian tradition to guide biblical interpretation.

12. Cf. Brueggemann (p. 732): 'The Old Testament vulnerably and willingly tolerates such [Christian] use, for which it seems to present itself'.

13. John J. Collins (2005a) comments that the Bible does not speak for itself any more than any other book. For Collins, the Bible 'can only be viewed through whatever interpretive lens and filter of human interests that we bring to it' (p. 146).

Brueggemann (1999) responded to Olson that this is 'a point well made', but he argues that 'the most difficult matter' when writing an Old Testament *Theology* is 'to find a beginning point'. Brueggemann himself decided to start with Israel's 'most characteristic speech', utterances that 'recur in many genres and many circumstances'. Such utterances are regularly embedded in larger textual units, but it is the short utterances that can be traced across genres and context, he argues.

This critique is a serious hermeneutical charge, which Brueggemann himself partially admits. Texts should always be read in context. In traditional positivist and modernist reading contextual exegesis refers to the actual literary context as well as the broader historical context. When these scholars charge Brueggemann for neglecting contextuality, the reason is found in Brueggemann's postmodernism; literary and historical conceptuality is no longer so important to him and his interpretation.

John J. Collins (2005a) attacks Brueggemann's very close text-reading. He admires 'the scope and courage of Brueggemann's undertaking and the irenic spirit in which he carries it out' (p. 143). But he sees problems with the project 'both in regard to its relationship to postmodernism and in regard to its own coherence… There is no recognition here that any reading of a text involves a construal, whether one construes the text as history or as testimony, and Brueggemann seems to have forgotten his own declaration that no construal or interpretation is innocent or interest-free' (p. 144).

R.W.L. Moberly (1999: 476) raises another problem, and questions the way Brueggemann handles with false and true prophecy. This is a matter of special interest to Moberly.[14] Brueggemann claims that 'prophetic mediation makes a claim of authority that is impossible to verify', since there is no objective evidence to measure against (p. 631). Moberly responds that 'Brueggemann lapses into the language of pure positivism, with its clean, clear dichotomies of "objective"…and "subjective"…where encounter with God is entirely relegated to the latter…' and 'tends to sever the artery between humanity and the reality of God that is foundational to the Old Testament' (p. 476).

To summarize, much of the criticism surveyed here concerns Brueggemann's attitude to the biblical text, his concentration on words and short units, even his choice of texts, his alleged incoherent text-reading and neglect of context, intertextuality and tradition history, being hermeneutically diffuse and being, in Moberly's opinion, negligent to the question of true and false prophecy. This is basically a confrontation between a postmodern and a historical-critical text-reading.

14. Cf. Moberly 2006: 78-79.

d. *Rhetorics*

Brueggemann has written his *Theology* on the basis that Old Testament theology focuses 'on Israel's speech about God…[because] speech is constitutive of reality, that words count, that practitioners of Yahweh are indeed *homo rhetoricus*. Yahweh lives in, with, and under this speech, and in the end depends on Israel's testimony for an access point in the world' (pp. 713-14). His reason for concentrating on speech is a wish 'to distinguish Old Testament theology from two temptations that characteristically vex Old Testament interpretation', on the one hand, the temptation to ask for historicity, 'what happened', on the other hand, the ancient seduction of asking for Being. In a statement often quoted by his critics, Brueggemann underlines emphatically: '*I shall insist, as consistently as I can, that the God of the Old Testament theology as such lives in, and under the rhetorical enterprise of this text, and nowhere else and in no other way*' (p. 66, Brueggemann's italics; cf. p. 714).

This position has been met with both recognition and substantial criticism from a series of scholars.

Ellen F. Davis (1999) calls attention to Brueggemann as a preacher, 'the Old Testament scholar most widely known today as a preacher and (even more) as one who strengthens the hand of preachers'. But as for his *Theology*, she charges him for a 'prevalence of unpreachable language', which 'undercuts' his larger project. 'To put it sharply', Brueggemann has 'turned away from his primary audience, the church', even though it is done 'in the hope of gaining a new audience' for the Bible. Yet the larger public 'feels no particular obligation to the text and its peculiar representation of reality' (p. 51 C). '[T]he most crucial question' is 'whether the assertion of particular, essentialist claims of faith does in fact defeat open dialogue with those who do not share those claims' (p. 52 A).

James Barr (1999) is of a similar opinion. On the one hand he commends Brueggemann for his focus upon rhetoric. Barr notes, 'The outstanding characteristic of this work…is its being centred upon *rhetoric*, to an extent nowhere near approached, as far as I know, by any other Old Testament theology' (p. 544, Barr's italics). This 'huge emphasis on rhetoric can be creative', because it can lead us 'into a careful examination of the texture of passages' (pp. 544-45). On the other hand, Barr points out, rhetoric is a double-edged instrument. It is in fashion in modern academic speech, but 'Brueggemann seems blind to the other side of this: that rhetoric is despised' (p. 547); when something is 'rhetoric' the fact might be that there is no reality in it!

Like Ellen F. Davis, Barr sees this emphasis on rhetoric against Brueggemann's own background as a rhetorician; he 'is often carried away by his own rhetoric…and fails to make these qualifications or to make them clear'

(1999: 545). 'The preaching, homiletic element in his style is so much more obvious than the reasoning, the argumentative' (p. 546).

Here Barr misses a hermeneutical consciousness and methodology in Brueggemann's work, a 'synchronic linguistic procedure involving tests, matrices, paradigmatic substitutions, statistics, pragmatic relations with the speakers, length of speeches and alternation in conversation, and so on'. Brueggemann 'just fails to provide any sort of method other than that of complementing the Bible's rhetoric with his own' (p. 557).

James Barr also attacks what he sees as Brueggemann's rhetoric abstractionism. Brueggemann claims (cited by Barr, p. 546 [though Barr omits Brueggemann's original italics]): 'Old Testament theology, when it pays attention to Israel's venturesome rhetoric, refuses any reductionism to a single or simple articulation'; it offers a witness that is enormously open, inviting, and suggestive, rather than one that yields settlement, closure, or precision' (Brueggemann, p. 149). 'This kind of talk may be rhetorically effective, but not in the sense that it makes the matter clear to the reader', Barr responds (p. 546). It rather 'leaves a distinct impression that the long vague words are there for another reason: to enable the author to back away from some of his more extreme statements when someone asks if he really means them!'

Also Margaret Odell (1999) reads Brueggemann as philosophically, ideologically or even theologically unclear on the connection between reality and speech and his use of rhetoric. Brueggemann 'has fused postmodern cultural-linguistic analysis of religious language with Barthian understanding of the living word of God [and] left us to puzzle out how the character of Yahweh is dependent on our speech about him… Brueggemann certainly seems not to have worked out the details himself.'

Also Rolf Rendtorff (1999) is critical of Brueggemann's claim that speech constitutes reality (p. 65). Are spoken words and text the same? Brueggemann is clear that written and spoken texts are different matters; he will not minimize the difference, but the distinction is not important for what he is out for here (cf. p. 713 n. 17).[15]

Walter Brueggemann (1999) admits that the metaphor does not serve as well and directly for what is written. Nevertheless, he argues that Susan Niditch (1996) 'has made a strong case for seeing the oral and written of a piece'.

15. 'Hier habe ich große Schwierigkeiten', Rendtorff complains. 'Sprache ist *per definitionem* gesprochen, Texte im sinne von "Schrift" (Scripture) ist geschrieben. Sprache kann nur gehört, Text muß gelesen, immer wieder gelesen und ausgelegt werden' (Rendtorff's italics).

In summary, Brueggemann's stance on rhetorics and reality, speech and historicity is controversial. His critics accuse him of having turned away from the church to a secular audience, an audience that does not listen to him. He is further charged with being too abstract and hermeneutically, philosophically, ideologically and theologically unclear, confusing spoken and written language. To Paul D. Hanson (1999: 449) Brueggemann is even unbiblical. If Brueggemann's God exists merely in rhetoric (cf. p. 714), his conception of God becomes very abstract. Is such a God actually real? These matters will be treated later (cf. pp. 113-14 and 124-26, below), as will be his attitude to 'what happened' (cf. pp. 126-30, below).

e. *Ethics, Politics and Society*

Brueggemann is a politically conscious theologian. In his literature there are often political markers, which are found also in his *Theology*. He is frequently critical of the American social, political, ethical, theological and ecclesial establishment, and such is the case in his *Theology*. In a section titled 'Yahweh in Geopolitical Scope' (pp. 525-27), he admits that he brings political aspects into his *Theology* in a way not usually found in such books. The reason for this is, first, that the Old Testament is 'preoccupied with Yahweh's powerful commitment to Israel', and, secondly, that 'if the theological dimensions drops out of international purview…then the world becomes one in which might makes right' (p. 525). He is also impressed by how the turn of the millennium (his book was published in 1997) 'is a circumstance, in which we may courageously reconsider the forfeiture of Yahwistic rhetoric'. Hence his outlook to contemporary politics. Brueggemann's broad ecumenical perspective has been commented upon positively by some scholars.[16]

R.W.L. Moberly (1998) claims that Brueggemann's *Theology* is a work of biblical study 'which needs to be heeded' (p. 102). As for Brueggemann's ethical, political and social attitudes, he recognizes that 'there will be many, not least in the USA, whose theological and political positions are not those of Brueggemann'. But that is no excuse. On the contrary, it is 'all the more important…to engage with the theological and moral issues Brueggemann raises with the seriousness which they require, and to allow Brueggemann's work to help move biblical interpretation into fresh categories of understanding which can help us escape from some of the old labels and trenches'.

Tim Meadowcroft (2006: 46) points out how Brueggemann, in his *Theology* as in his previous works, focuses on what he calls the 'social practice that…mediates Yahweh in the midst of life' (Brueggemann, p. 574).

16. Brueggemann uses the term 'ecumenical' not in its ecclesial but its geopolitical sense.

This is why he 'emphasises both the private and the public responsibility for our times, on the link between obedience and the care of creation (Brueggemann, p. 201) and, from within his own perspective, worries about the conduct of the Unites States in the context of a reflection on the nations as YHWH's partner' (cf. Brueggemann, p. 527). This focus on 'the public and applied aspects of theology' means that his *Theology* 'succeeds in achieving coherence at one point where many fail to do so, in its incorporation of the wisdom strand into his theology. The category of "mediation" is a key to this achievement.'

Not unexpectedly, Erhard Gerstenberger (1998), with his European and Latin American background (cf. his *Theologies*), commends Brueggemann for standing out as a theologian with an open and critical eye on today's reality, looking 'firmly into the face of our pluralist world, thus opening up opportunities for a new theological discourse of our own', concluding that his *Theology* 'is a formidable, exciting, new, and immensely rich approach to a theology of the Old Testament, which…ponders the texts in ecumenical perspective, Jewish and Christian dimensions, and current world-prospects'. In particular, he points out the changed world situation and its consequences for Brueggemann's way of theological thinking, his ecumenical perspective and open eye for the problems of our time.

Such side glances to contemporary questions are untraditional in a *Theology* of the Old Testament. There are clear postmodern aspects within Brueggemann's *Theology*, as was already indicated several times. Some readers will probably see this as a controversial aspect of his book, both in that it is actually there and because of the opinions he utters. The book will certainly be provocative to some politically and ecclesiastically conservative circles. But this is an aspect to which those critics surveyed here have generally responded positively. Some readers would probably see this as a source for preaching.

f. *Enlightenment and Postmodernism*

Brueggemann's attitude to Enlightenment, modernism/modernity and postmodernism/postmodernity is a matter central to his *Theology*, and one which has received significant attention in the debate. Already in his 1993 work, *Texts under Negotiation*, Brueggemann himself (pp. 13-18) acknowledged his debt to postmodernism and his commitment to theology as imagination. He is critical to Enlightenment and positivism, which to him is hegemonic. Postmodernism is a viewpoint that involves imagination, but only one type of imagination out of many, a thinking that includes theological assessment, the ability to activate what is imagined in the reality of human experience and knowledge of the world.

Aspects of Brueggemann's postmodern perspective have been commented upon by a series of responders, some not so critically, others more so. These comments have been directed more at his criticism of Enlightenment, positivism and certain aspects of his postmodern way of thinking and interpretation than to postmodernism *per se*.

One of the first to place Brueggemann's *Theology* within a postmodern tradition was R.W.L. Moberly (1998), who states that 'Brueggemann situates Old Testament Theology unambiguously within a post liberal context' (p. 101), a position others have called 'non-foundational' (cf. Brueggemann, p. 86). Implicitly, Moberly also calls Brueggemann's position postmodern (p. 100), without defining the difference or similarity between those concepts. Even though it has been demonstrated elsewhere in the present work that Moberly has many reservations about Brueggemann's *Theology*, he is not absolutely negative in his criticism of Brueggemann's position, when he comments: 'There is a clarion call to the integration of Old Testament study and life which goes way beyond the standard fare of Old Testament Theologies, and which opens to us vistas vital to the future of the theological study of the Old Testament' (pp. 101-102).

An even more positive evaluation comes from Leo Perdue (2005) and Tim Meadowcroft (2006).

Meadowcroft sees 'a certain genius' in Brueggemann's approach (p. 43), one that 'induces a careful listening to all the voices of scripture' rather than foreclosing on which voices should be privileged and which silenced in interpretation. In taking account of the final form of the text, it 'counters the inability of the historical-critical method to uncover theological truth within the text'. In particular, he points out how Brueggemann's *Theology* 'provides a way into the subject for those who bring a postmodern suspicion of metanarratives to the reading', this because he 'neither presents the Old Testament as a metanarrative nor asks the reader to accept a thematic metanarrative imposed by the biblical critic' (p. 43; cf. Brueggemann, p. 559). Meadowcroft commends Brueggemann for exploiting in a helpful way for a new generation how the 'postmodern rebellion against an emphasis on propositional expresses of truth has alerted us to the importance of the particular discernment of truth'.

Leo G. Perdue (2005: 251) is also careful in his critique of Brueggemann's postmodernism, claiming that he

> does not adopt many of the fundamental assertions of postmodernism. Writing as a theologian of the church, Brueggemann sees postmodernism, not as a threat to mainline faith, but rather as a much-needed vehicle to challenge what he calls 'regnant' and 'conventional' theologies… [It is] abundantly clear that Brueggemann has not sold himself totally to postmodernism. However, he sees in some of its affirmations elements to take seriously in the interpretative and theological process.

He also mentions Brueggemann's 'postmodernist leanings' (p. 254), but is generally more interested in presenting essential aspects—in particular postmodern aspects—with Brueggemann than discussing Brueggemann's postmodern positions.

A nuanced critic of Brueggemann's postmodern *Theology* is Ellen F. Davis (1999), who claims that she has 'persistently criticized' his postmodernist commitment to pluralism (p. 52 C). Nevertheless, despite Brueggemann's alleged alienation from 'classic Christianity', Davis recognizes that Brueggemann states 'the fundamental "theological datum" about all human beings', citing Brueggemann himself (p. 488): 'Everything depends on this relation to the One who is utterly reliable. This utterly reliable One is the primary truth about human personhood' (p. 52 C). This statement 'deserves more prominence than it receives' (p. 53 A); it shows that Brueggemann, 'is guided in his reading by some rules… he perceives some theological data to be more fundamental than others' (p. 53 A). Brueggemann is not afraid of examining the biblical testimony at length and recognizing that 'God's behaviour is puzzling and contradictory' (p. 53 A).

Terje Stordalen (2003) is among those who most clearly points out how Brueggemann writes from a postmodern position, criticizing aspects with modernity, though conceding it is not without value. Stordalen himself lays more emphasis on Brueggemann's aesthetic attitude to biblical theology, that he will not go to any ontological reality behind the biblical texts, but claims that the reality of the text is the reality created by the reader. Therefore, imagination becomes a key concept with Brueggemann. Stordalen also calls attention to a strong existential undertone in Brueggemann's book, an emphasis on 'interested reading'. What is normative is what is worth going for with the risk of one's life (cf. Brueggemann, p. 58). Yet it is difficult to write Brueggemann off in his description of our culture as postmodern (Stordalen 2003: 14-15). His hermeneutics reveals a religious, moral and political engagement. When Brueggemann emphasizes the world in front of or before the text, he refers to Ricoeur. But the way Brueggemann cultivates this perspective is problematic to Stordalen.

A more critical stand is taken by John J. Collins, who identifies Brueggemann's *Theology* as postmodern in two respects: in the role he gives to rhetoric and in his characterization of the biblical material as 'testimony', in particular what Brueggemann labels 'countertestimony' and even 'unsolicited testimony' (2005a: 143). With reference to Brueggemann, Collins (p. 148) claims:

> A consistently postmodern biblical theology, or for that matter a consistently historical-critical one, can describe these claims, deconstruct them by noting problems and countertestimonies, and clarify and explain them to some extent, but any positive claims it makes must be "under pressure" [Derrida].

> In short, a postmodern theology would have to be considerably more modest, and less convinced in its claims, than any proposed hitherto, even those proposed in the name of antifoundationalism.

Even though Collins admires 'the scope and courage' of Brueggemann's undertaking, his postmodernism is problematic to him (pp. 143-44).

The two most ardent critics of Brueggemann's postmodernism are James Barr and Brevard S. Childs.

James Barr (1999) sees 'the main fault' (p. 561)[17] with Brueggemann's book in 'the constant reiteration of the error of the Enlightenment', to which is added every sort of vice: '…it seems that Brueggemann is the really great hater of Enlightenment and should win the prize' (p. 554). Barr reads Brueggemann as if postmodernism should be the only remedy against Enlightenment. It is self-contradictory to him when Brueggemann both expresses general gratitude to modern scholarship and has such a negative attitude to the legacy of Enlightenment. Brueggemann is critical of history, but not of postmodernism, Barr argues, and 'fails to reckon with the problems of consistency that this raises'.[18] Barr is both satirical and sarcastic. On the one hand, Barr insists that: '[A]nything like historical criticism has to be looked at with the utmost suspicion and approved, if at all, only after severe examination' (Barr, p. 556). Yet, on the other hand, '[A]nything coming from the fashionable postmodern sources is fully accepted with only occasional critical examination'. When Brueggemann takes such a position, Barr is not surprised that Foucault is treated with 'respect' and Derrida 'comes close to Moses himself', while Descartes and Kant 'are treated like fools' and Plato as an 'elitist' inferior to the Sophists—the Sophists being rhetoricians like Brueggemann himself (cf. Brueggemann, pp. 54 and 64).

In conclusion, Barr claims that 'Brueggemann seems to stand for a total surrender to the postmodern Zeitgeist' (p. 557), but 'not so much to postmodernism in all its forms, as to the sort of liberal/postmodern mixture influential in the so-called "liberal" churches and theological schools, where the gospel is a combination of altruism, egalitarianism, anti-elitism, pluralism, multiculturalism and political correctness' (p. 561). Therefore Barr asks whether 'a new post-critical Enlightenment has dawned' (p. 561), where 'all the faults of Enlightenment and liberalism…are now repeated'.

Brevard S. Childs (2000) launches another broadside attack on Brueggemann's hermeneutics, calling him a Gnostic. '[I]t may be that one is philosophically justified in characterizing Brueggemann's approach as postmodern. However, from a theological perspective the closest analogy is

17. Cf. 'the real fault' of his Prologue and Epilogue (p. 559).

18. Cf. Barr's critique of Brueggemann's understanding of Rainer Albertz and Jürgen Moltmann (1999: 555-56)

found in the early church's struggle with Gnosticism, especially in the second century of the Christian era' (p. 174). After this theological cannonade, it comes as almost an anticlimax when Childs ends his review abruptly by claiming that he agrees with Brueggemann that 'the challenge of postmodern interpretation of the Bible is real, and that the issue may well dominate the theological debate for many decades to come. It is also true that how Christians respond will also decide the identity of the church for future generations' (p. 175).

Walter Brueggemann (2005) reacted strongly to Child's allegation: to call his perspective 'Gnostic', noted Brueggemann, is 'a caricature of my work' (p. 177; cf. pp. 175-76), adding: 'I do not believe that this is a deliberate caricature by Professor Childs, but one that derives from his determined interpretive agenda. Indeed my work is no more Gnostic than is that of Childs docetic…' (p. 177).

Brueggemann's critics have taken different positions toward his post-modernism. Some have given wide concessions, others have been more critical; in particular, Barr and Childs have been harsh in their critique. But no-one commenting on his postmodernism has been indifferent to it. This is such a marked trait and so different an aspect of his *Theology* that it does not go without a comment. James Barr's critique of Brueggemann's attack on Enlightenment and the positivist tradition is relevant. But calling Brueggemann a Gnostic is a shot off target. As will be commented on later, Brueggemann's indifference to 'what happened' is problematic, as is also the relativism inherent in postmodernism.

g. *Brueggemann versus Brevard S. Childs*

Walter Brueggemann published his *Theology* in 1997, whereas Brevard S. Childs had published his *Theology* in 1992. Both *Theologies* are substantial contributions to the study of Old Testament theology, but they are indeed very different, so different that an intense debate emerged between the two authors. It is remarkable that this has been a debate that has extended beyond the writings of Brueggemann and Childs; several other scholars have joined in this debate.

Walter Brueggemann defines in his *Theology* the theological difference between himself and Childs. Brueggemann writes about what he calls 'the interpretive crisis', and claims that the church discovers 'that the Enlightenment is not its natural habit', adding: 'In this regard I am in complete agreement with Brevard Childs, contrary to his judgment of my work'. On the other hand, 'I differ markedly from him in how to go about that task' (p. 14 n. 33). Brueggemann's main critique of Childs's *Theology* (expressed on pp. 89-93) concerns Childs's christological reading of the Old Testament; 'such an overtly christological reading is not credible or responsible… [W]e do indeed read in the Old Testament about the same God who is known in

the New Testament. But the Old Testament is a witness to this God that cannot be closely forced into a witness of the one received by Christians as God's Messiah' (p. 93).

Walter Brueggemann (2005) also comments on his relation to Childs after the latter's review of his *Theology*. He sees the differences in their perspectives as arising from 'different mind-sets and different senses about what is needed' (p. 177). He identifies his own approach to interpretive issues as 'through the drama of liturgy and through the pastoral reality of the church', while Childs, 'so it seems to me, is drawn in a dogmatic direction and for that reason wants to find an articulation that is comprehensive and, so to say, "foolproof"'. Brueggemann is 'unpersuaded by a "canonical" approach that knows an outcome to all these matters that can be final, absolute, and not open to further examination and adjudication. In my estimation, such a reading is much too costly for the faith of the church… [S]uch a "canonical" perspective functions, *mutatis mutandis*, too much like historical criticism in its propensity to reduce or eliminate texts that are unwelcome in a certain interpretive horizon' (p. 178). Brueggemann acknowledges that 'Professor Childs's "canonical" approach occupies the centre of the field and will continue to do so' (p. 178), and sees 'the slight variation between his approach and mine' to be 'a more benign variation than his rhetoric suggests'. The real question at issue, as Brueggemann sees it, is 'the endlessly tricky relation between "The Great Tradition" and the "little texts"' (p. 178). Here Brueggemann sees a different emphasis between them. Childs is claimed to champion 'The Great Tradition', while Brueggemann himself will 'pay attention to the life, the text, the sensibility that is too soon excluded and censored by The Great Tradition'. He hopes that 'in future generations, the church will be able to attend to the "little texts", even as it commits to the "Great Tradition"' (p. 178).

In his review of Brueggemann's book, Brevard S. Childs (2005) discussed it from three vantage points: 'What does one understand by the Testimony of the Old Testament', 'The Identity of God in the Old Testament' and 'The Hermeneutical Choice', of which the latter is characterized as 'the far more substantive' (p. 172) than the former. It is here that Childs charges Brueggemann with Gnosticism.

Of those critics involving themselves in the Brueggemann–Childs debate, Dennis T. Olson (1998) and James Barr (1999) are perhaps the most interesting.

Dennis T. Olson (1998: 167-72) argues that the paradigm shift toward a more postmodern approach to biblical theology has implicitly begun already with Childs[19] and continued more explicitly with Brueggemann, whereas

19. John J. Collins is of another opinion when claiming that Childs 'is certainly no postmodernist' (2005a: 143).

Childs is not so tied up with the old modernist paradigms of Eichrodt and von Rad, as Brueggemann argues (p. 171, cf. p. 167). In particular Olson comments on the concept of reductionism. Brueggemann has claimed that Childs is reductionistic, while Olson claims that Brueggemann has underestimated his own reductionism (pp. 166-67).[20] On the other hand, Brueggemann is charged with exaggerating Child's approach as a 'massive reductionism' designed to fit the diverse Old Testament witnesses into some univocal 'consensus Protestantism' (p. 167, cf. p. 169).

Olson singles out six particular points where he demonstrates similarities between Brueggemann and Childs—certainly reasonably argued, here rendered in short form (cf. p. 170): (1) biblical theology should build on the present form of the biblical text, not on a reconstructed text; (2) biblical theology should appreciate and explicate the wide diversity of the biblical witness without reducing the different biblical voices; (3) some thematizing, summarizing, generalizing and analogizing is required, and a degree of reductionism is necessarily inherent in doing biblical theology; (4) understanding biblical theology is enhanced by a dialogue among co-readers from different social, cultural and religious contexts, such as Christian, Jewish, secular academic, ancient and modern; (5) doing biblical theology is always an ongoing process—it is always provisional and adequate only for a time; (6) meaningful biblical interpretation is always contextual. In general, Olson characterizes Brueggemann's and Childs's biblical theologies as representing 'impressive, erudite, and valuable culminations of a lifetime of biblical studies. We are in debts of both of them for their work and contribution in the field' (p. 179).

Before turning to James Barr, R.W.L. Moberly and Tim Meadowcroft should be mentioned. Moberly is basically in agreement with Olson, whereas Meadowcroft seems to lean somewhat toward James Barr.

Together with Olson, Moberly (1999) claims that Brueggemann misrepresents Childs, and regrets that 'it is disappointing that Childs and Brueggemann, who both have much to offer, seem to have no real dialogue with each other and tend to present their approaches as mutually exclusive alternatives'. They seem almost to neglect each other, either discounting each other or else using harsh and brusque phraseology against each other, Moberly complains (p. 477). As Olson has documented, the theological gap between Brueggemann and Childs should be bridgeable. The stalemate between them has its reasons, but in crucial matters they are on a common field.

20. Olson (1998: 167) opines: 'Brueggemann has understated his own significant reductionism which issues in broad generalizations, summations, patterns, metanarratives, paradigms, and analogies that tame largely disparate traditions into rhetorically manageable arguments about meaning and significance'.

Tim Meadowcroft (2006) sees Brueggemann's *Theology* as 'a beneficiary of Child's trailblazing emphasis on canonical form' (p. 43), but sees also 'some deep points of difference' with Childs. In particular, he underlines two points where he sees Brueggemann's 'desire to let the text both reflect and construct an understanding of God' revealed. Meadowcroft takes issue with Childs's concern for a 'reality' beyond the text, and he 'eschews Child's explicitly christological approach' to the Old Testament. It is 'intriguing' to Meadowcroft to find Barr and Brueggemann on different sides of the fence on the question of rhetoric versus history (p. 44). He finds the reason for this in their 'different complaints about realistic approaches', which he sees epitomized in their different evaluation of Childs's *Theology* and his insistence on the final form of the text and predetermined theological categories on the text.

James Barr (1999) interfered more directly in the Brueggemann–Childs debate. Brueggemann charged Childs's canonical reading with being 'massively reductionist' (p. 92), and claimed that 'if the Old Testament text is as polyphonic and elusive as I take it to be', then Childs's way of writing a biblical *Theology* is 'inherently reductionist, because it reduces the polyphonic, elusive testimony of the Old Testament to one single, exclusivist construal, namely the New Testament construal, hereby violating the quality of generative openness that marks the Old Testament text' (p. 732). Barr argues that Brueggemann is actually more of a canonical interpreter than Childs, because of his close reading of the biblical texts (cf. Barr 1999: 551). Barr notes that he found Brueggemann and Childs to be 'in a striking disagreement' on the matter of biblical unity or polyphony (p. 550).

Brueggemann is not particularly interested in canon—the main issue for Childs. Brueggemann can say that the Old Testament has both a Priestly and a Deuteronomistic theology, and that 'it is important that *the canonization process retained both, assigned both to Moses, and refused to choose between them*' (p. 673, Brueggemann's italics). But references to canon are rare in Brueggemann's *Theology*. He is interested in the actual texts, and has extensive citations of texts. Speaking of this difference from Childs, James Barr argues that 'Brueggemann can perhaps be thought of as being more canonical than Childs, in that Childs so often and so obviously starts out from historical criticism and seeks to progress to the canonical reading, while Brueggemann for the most part, though condemning historical criticism if anything even more absolute, in the handling of actual texts simply ignores it from the start' (p. 551).

Childs is also accused by Brueggemann of allegedly having 'generated a reading of the Old Testament text in and through the categories of Christian systematic theology', a reading that 'overrides and distorts the specificity of

the text' (p. 85). To this Brueggemann argues that 'Old Testament theological articulation does not conform to established church faith… There is much that is wild and untamed about the theological witness of the Old Testament that church theology does not face… [T]he Old Testament is not a witness to Jesus Christ, in any or primary sense, as Childs proposes, unless one is prepared to sacrifice more of the text than is credible' (p. 107). Toward the end of his book, Brueggemann claims that 'it is so clear that the Old Testament does not obviously, cleanly, or directly point to Jesus or to the New Testament' (p. 731).

In James Barr's opinion, Brueggemann is right when he argues that the Old Testament does not univocally point to Jesus, as Childs claimed. On the other hand, when Childs insisted that Old Testament theology was a Christian enterprise, this was not to the exclusion of the Jewish aspect, but to the intended exclusion of historical-critical interpretation. According to Barr, 'Brueggemann at this point attacks Childs for the *narrow authoritarianism* of his theology, which in itself is quite true and is also a good post modern viewpoint, but not for its being a wrong theology, both contradicting biblical evidence and being a partisan opinion rather than "church theology", which is my own opinion' (pp. 552-53, Barr's italics).

In common with Childs, Brueggemann is very much in opposition to the legacy of the Enlightenment. Yet James Barr sees a key difference between them; whereas Childs's ideal was the Reformation (recast into Barthianism), Brueggemann perceives that (in Barr's words) 'the Reformation is just as full of traps and defects as any other period in intellectual history' (p. 553).

Against both Brueggemann and Childs, Barr straightforwardly claims that 'I simply do not believe their accounts to be historically true'. Yet he is less in opposition to Childs than to Brueggemann, who 'seems much of the time just to repeat popular stereotypes of anti-Enlightenment hatred'. Brueggemann and Childs are both considered to be 'accounts basically generated out of apologetic, partisan, theological drives, and are full of ill-informed popular misconceptions of people like Descartes, Locke, Kant and equally of the way in which theology, biblical study and church life were interlinked in the relevant times' (p. 554).

As the survey of this debate hopefully has demonstrated, the relation between Childs and Brueggemann has been somewhat tense, as Moberly's statements clearly reveal. As Moberly and in particular Olson have demonstrated, there should have been a basis for a closer association between Brueggemann and Childs. James Barr is the one who has most directly engaged in the debate between Brueggemann and Childs, without aligning himself theologically with either of them.

h. *Hermeneutics*

Brueggemann does not discuss hermeneutics in particular to any extent; he has no chapter on hermeneutics. Yet his hermeneutic thinking is everywhere evident in his *Theology*. It shows itself in particular via his postmodernism as well as his lawsuit metaphor.

Terje Stordalen (2003: 14) assumes that epistemology and hermeneutics, together with the lawsuit metaphor, will characterize future discussion of Brueggemann's book. Stordalen sees weaknesses with both Brueggemann's hermeneutic position as well as with the way he has organized or edited the material of his book. The worst methodological problem, for Stordalen, is how Brueggemann breaks the biblical material down into singular sentences, and reconstructs its sequence and content. Consequently, his *Theology* is not actually oriented against the Old Testament's textuality, Stordalen argues. As a corollary, context and interconnections in the biblical texts are lost. The texts sometimes also become 'witnesses' for irrelevant opinions, he argues.[21] In spite of Brueggemann's broad orientation and evident wit, his reading of the Old Testament is somewhat shallow—it is not at all demonstrated how the texts are 'fraught with background' (cf. Brueggemann, p. 110), Stordalen argues. Stordalen sees two causes for this: Brueggemann removes the texts from their origin and their history of interpretation, but nevertheless intends to cover the complete Old Testament. This prevents Brueggemann from going into depth on particular texts.[22]

As for epistemology, Brueggemann has underlined that all our reasoning and experiences are significantly affected by our location in the world. Since these locations differ, our epistemology leads to pluralism, while 'objectivity has been revealed to be what the dominant group within a society has wanted the entire society to believe and unquestioningly accept' (Perdue 2005: 252). Even though Brueggemann, according to Perdue, 'draws back' instead of plunging directly into relativism, he can be read as coming 'to the edge of relativism' (pp. 252-53). Brueggemann concedes that any interpretation is contextual, local and pluralistic, that our claimed objectivity could be objective only to us in our context.

Brueggemann approaches hermeneutics from the position of 'perspectivism', the idea that reality is filtered through and interpreted according to one perspective that makes sense of it. From a postmodern vantage point we

21. As an example, Stordalen (2003: 15) refers to how Brueggemann (1997: 255-58) presents Yahweh as a gardener. The texts Brueggemann uses support the conventional garden metaphor. It is unreasonable to read these passages as primarily witnesses of God as 'provider'. These passages talk about those who are provided for and their attitudes.

22. As an example, Stordalen (2003: 15) refers to how Brueggemann (1997: 244-47) surveys the conception of God as Father, without investigating the metaphor's social-historical background or related metaphors, such as God as 'mother'.

cannot say that one particular interpretation is the correct one, since 'texts continue to be interpreted over and over again', as Perdue underlines (p. 253). In our post-critical age the status and power of white, male, Western colonialists has been seriously challenged. The new worldview requires new readings of the Bible, not the disbanding of historical criticism. Yet these new readings should not be shackled by the new worldview either. As interpreters of the Bible we should recognize the shortcomings of our worldview and the epistemology on which it is based (cf. p. 253).

As for understanding the concept of 'testimony', Childs (2005) finds Brueggemann to be siding with 'those scholars who view the Hebrew Bible simply as a record of the religion of Israel to be studied phenomenologically, and thus recognizes in the biblical text the confessional element of Israel's voice offering a witness to its experience with its God' (pp. 172-73). The crucial hermeneutical question is 'how one evaluates Israel's own testimony'. Childs sees Brueggemann's description of 'countertestimony' as a contrast to 'how Israel shaped its literature confessionally', and argues: 'When Brueggemann assigns an independent role to such traditions as countertestimony, he is running in the very face of Israel's canonical witness' (p. 173). Childs sees a major task of Old Testament interpretation in 'understanding the rich variety of ways in which the complaint truthfully depicts Israel's life with God'. In contrast, 'when Brueggemann sets up the relationship as a countertestimony to be constantly juxtaposed in a contrived "dialectic", he cuts the real access to the theological significance of the complaint as a constitutive element in Israel's true faith' (pp. 173-74).[23]

Childs's comment can serve as a transition to the next point.

i. *The Lawsuit Trial Metaphor*

Brueggemann's lawsuit metaphor has frequently been commented on, and opinions differ widely. In general, his critics are negative, even though they argue differently.

The most positive of his critics is R.W.L. Moberly (1998), who argues that the lawsuit trial metaphor 'works reasonably well, though it is surprising only to encounter Election under Unsolicited Testimony, and some of the material in section 4 lacks the freshness of some of the other sections' (p. 101). In particular Moberly commends the contents under the main heading 'Testimony' as breaking 'fresh ground'.

Other scholars are more critical of the lawsuit trial metaphor. In particular, they comment on what they see to be a lawsuit trial uninterested in 'what happened'.

23. For Brueggemann's comments and objections, see Brueggemann 2005: 175-79.

James Barr (1999) is somewhat paradoxical in his criticism of the lawsuit trial metaphor. He commends Brueggemann for using the metaphor (p. 544), which 'is the great and original contribution of this work', a scheme which 'is not dictated either by Judaism or by Christianity: it seems to come from his own intuition and imagination', a scheme which 'enables the reader to see different directions in the total biblical text, to distinguish them and also to correlate them'. Nevertheless, this metaphor 'is less happy' (p. 544). The problem is his non-interest in 'what happened'. 'And just here his crowning metaphor of "the court" breaks down', Barr claims (p. 548). Brueggemann claimed that the court must accept the testimony and cannot speculate about what happened. To Barr, this implies that the court apparently has no place for evidence and no interest in examining its probability. 'Surely this is absurd!' (p. 548). Margaret Odell (1999) argues the same way.

Paul D. Hanson (1999) is generally critical towards Brueggemann's main model and how he uses the concepts of testimony, counter-testimony and unsolicited testimony. With this model Brueggemann in reality places himself among those arguing for a centre in the Old Testament, those he earlier denounced (p. 452). Brueggemann's distinction between core and counter is 'simply born out of his master metaphor of the court' (p. 453), and it is a corollary of limiting Old Testament theology to Israel's speech about God, a theology that has 'excluded as "positivist" the attempt to reconstruct the historical, social context of biblical texts as an aid to interpretation'. Hanson is also critical of the category of 'unsolicited witness'. What determines whether a witness is solicited or unsolicited? Are not all biblical testimonies responsive to religious experiences? Hanson seems to argue that it is the use of the court metaphor that has forced Brueggemann to a distinction between solicited and unsolicited. Yet the biblical metaphor of *rîḇ* (court proceedings) is not that important in the Bible itself.

Rolf Rendtorff (1999) and Terje Stordalen (2003) think along similar lines. To Rendtorff, it is evident that Brueggemann can use the concept of testimony as *Leitmotiv*. However, using the lawsuit as a metaphorical key concept is more questionable to him. Who is, for example, supposed to pass the sentence? On the whole, Brueggemann has no discussion of the usefulness of this metaphor, he underlines. The latter is also taken up by Stordalen, who argues that the central lawsuit trial and witness model Brueggemann uses is never given apt justification and rests generally on a weak basis. When Brueggemann squeezes the texts into his trial metaphor, the texts are bereaved of their historical, literary and intertextual setting, Stordalen concludes (p. 15).

Despite those counter-arguments, Brueggemann (1999) argues in response that the metaphor of testimony 'functions well' because it remains metaphorical and is open in many directions. It is the nature of a metaphor

not to be too specific. Yet it goes without argument that his lawsuit trial metaphor is a model not endogenous to the Bible itself. The Old Testament uses such a metaphor several times, but using it as the master plan for the entire theology of the Old Testament is imposing upon it something strange. This is why most scholars have been critical of it, even though not straightforwardly rejected it.

j. *Divinity*

Divinity is a central point in Brueggemann's *Theology*—as it should be in any *Theology*. To focus on different aspects within this broad field, I have sub-divided the present discussion into five sections: 'Transcendence', 'Ontology', 'Perception of God', 'Normativity' and 'Revelation', since these are the main sectors of the Divinity field I find Brueggemann's critics have concentrated on. In particular Brueggemann makes a strong claim on p. 66, one which emphasizes with italics: *'I shall insist, as consistently as I can, that the God of the Old Testament theology as such lives in, with and under the rhetorical enterprise of the text, and nowhere else and in no other way'.*

i. *Transcendence*. Ellen F. Davis (1999) comments in particular on Brueggemann's attitude to transcendence. She argues that Brueggemann bases his non-essentialist position on the view that the Old Testament 'shuns the transcendental' (Brueggemann, p. 83). To Davis, 'it would have been more accurate to say that the Bible everywhere holds the transcendent in tension with concrete, historical experience', referring to Psalm 102 as a case where 'the sharp contrast and tension between God's eternity and human frailty' is evident (p. 51 A). Davis finds a similar tension in prophetic oracles and the accounts of the prophet's own calls, claiming: 'Far from shunning the transcendent, the biblical writers turn toward the transcendent at the same time that they carefully articulate their historical experience. This dual awareness serves to relativize our own stultifying preoccupation with the immediate, which is itself a form of despair' (p. 51 A). It is disappointing to her that Brueggemann demonstrates 'too little caution about importing ideologies from another context and imposing them on the biblical text' (p. 51 B), a feature she finds revealed in phraseology such as 'the shaping of Yahweh' and 'Yahweh is a concrete practice in the embodiment of Israel' (Brueggemann, pp. 302 and 701), which she reads as 'a telling reversal' of the unambiguous and repeated Israelite claim: 'I, YHWH, make…everything' (Isa. 44.24). Such phraseology derives from 'contemporary philosophy's hostility to transcendence'. To Davis, 'such language points to the unsatisfactory consequence of the extreme non-essentialist position: namely, formulations like these don't preach' (p. 51 B).

ii. *Ontology*. Brueggemann regrets that the Old Testament in the modern world 'is endlessly vexed by and tempted to historicity' and 'seduced by the ancient Hellenistic haste for Being' (p. 713). As a corollary, several critics have touched on or criticized his attitude to ontology.

In particular, Paul D. Hanson (1999) asks why biblical theology should 'shy away from questions of ontology when Israelite religion assumes an historical ontology that sets it apart from the mythopoetic worldviews of surrounding cultures. It is an ontology predicated on the perception of divine initiatives in profane history' (p. 449). Such a claim could be used of the mythic system Israel's religion developed in opposition to, but not of Israel's own religion. 'It is not the Enlightenment or the contemporary historical critic who first discovered the connection between concrete, profane history and theology, but the ancient tradents of Israel, who claimed that their speech about God was not limited to a rhetorical phenomenon but stemmed from discernment based on experience of divine presence in the stuff of actual human history', Hanson claims (p. 450).

As the 'most radical' of Brueggemann's proposals, John J. Collins characterizes his insistence that 'speech is constitutive of reality' (2005a: 146), citing Brueggemann himself: 'Yahweh lives in, with, and under this speech, and in the end depends on Israel's testimony for an access point in the world' (p. 714). To this Collins claims, 'if one wishes to be nonfoundationalist, and treat the text as if it were a novel or a drama [cf. Brueggemann, p. 66], then one has to forego any claim of ontological reality… Brueggemann is right that the biblical text can seldom if ever be construed as an ontological argument. What we have, indeed, are writings in various genres that make claims about God that defy any process of verification, by philosophy, history, or any other means… In short, a postmodernist theology would have to be considerably more modest, and less convinced in its claims, than any proposed hitherto, even those proposed in the name of antifoundationalism' (pp. 147-48).

R.W.L. Moberly (1998: 103) has three comments on Brueggemann's 'concern to free Old Testament theology from being endlessly seduced by the ancient Hellenistic lust for Being, for establishing ontological reference behind the text'. First, Brueggemann is accused of misrepresenting Childs, who is simply rearticulating the Classic Jewish and Christian concern to speak via the biblical text, on the historic/classic/orthodox assumption that there is more to God than biblical religious language, ancient history, and contemporary human actions' (p. 103; cf. Brueggemann, p. 714). Secondly, Brueggemann is accused of seeing 'only history and philosophy as the prime disciplines which might be offended…with no sense that theology itself might be a discipline which could take exception to his dismissals of history and ontology'. Thirdly, Moberly accepts that it is all right to say that 'if one

believes the testimony, one is near to reality', but asks 'how is one to assess testimonies which conflict?' This is the classic issue of truth in relation to language about God. About this Brueggemann has little to say, and what he does say, says Moberly, 'is disappointing' (p. 103).

In his 1999 article Moberly points out more controversial parts of Brueggemann's *Theology*. Again he charges Brueggemann with severing the biblical testimony from any ontological claims about the reality of the Old Testament (cf. Brueggemann, p. 66). Moberly admits that Brueggemann has put his finger on something central to the biblical material and regularly absent from modern biblical scholarship—namely, that valid language about God cannot be separated from human engagement in particularly demanding forms of living (Moberly, p. 475)—but he regrets that the way Brueggemann does it 'creates great unease'.[24]

Brueggemann himself responded (1999) to Margaret S. Odell and 'many others', on his 'strategic decision to bracket out ontological claims'. This 'strategic decision' should 'not be taken as a great philosophical manoeuvre, but as a characterization of pastoral activity', Brueggemann claimed. When taken as true, 'the biblical testimony yields ample ontology that is offered to those who come without any such assurance'. If one, on the other hand, 'refuses the claims of these witnesses, one is left, so I suggest, without ontology'. As Brueggemann sees it, the problem is that 'if one argues that ontology is given to Israel prior to the text or outside of the text, then one is at pains to say from where does that ontology come, and if from elsewhere, how does it qualify for Israel's faith?'

Brueggemann's alleged intention is 'not to be anti-ontological', but 'rather to insist that whatever might be claimed for ontology in the purview of Israel's speech can be claimed only in and through testimonial utterances' (p. 713 n. 21). There is a reality of God behind the text, but God is known only through faith and only through Scripture. John J. Collins, in his 2005 book *The Bible after Babel*, concedes that 'this is not as radical a departure from traditional Protestant theology as it may have seemed', it is no 'Derrida deconstruction' (pp. 146-47). Yet if God is supposed to be the God of creation, it is problematic to say that this God can only be known through the Bible, 'and indeed there is considerable material in the biblical corpus that can be marshalled against Brueggemann's position on this point' (p. 147).

24. To be more explicit: 'He consistently sets up classic and ecclesial Christian theology as a rigid, constricted, and constricting straitjacket from which the Old Testament theology must be liberated…rather than as a context of disciplines that precisely enable language about God to be true rather than idolatrous, faithful rather than manipulative, and to be rightly related to human living' (p. 475).

iii. *Perception of God*. Brueggemann points out tensions between different aspects of the perception of God, as power and solidarity cannot easily be reconciled, nor sovereignty and commitment or patriarchy and equality. The substance of Israel's testimony concerning Yahweh yields a character which has already a profound disjunction with it. The Old Testament's bears witness to a series of unsolved theological problems, and portrays self-contradictory aspects with God, without any harmonization (cf. 'Israel's Countertestimony', Brueggemann's Part III). This problem is evaluated differently by Brueggemann's critics.

Not unexpectedly, Erhard Gerstenberger (1998) commends Brueggemann for not harmonizing the problems, and acknowledging 'the deep contradiction…of the Old Testament message that is due to the inscrutability of God himself'. Gerstenberger appreciates that Brueggemann recognizes that Yahweh is at the same time 'sovereign, just, and mercifully committed to his people', attitudes that 'are not to be harmonized into smooth doctrinal affirmation'. God is really a self-contradictory God!

Paul D. Hanson (1999) is of another opinion. He agrees with Brueggemann that 'the primary witness to the God of the Old Testament is found in Israel's testimony' (p. 449). Yet he is particularly critical of what he reads as Brueggemann's dual view of God. The character of God in the Old Testament 'is the most important issue raised by Brueggemann', Hanson claims. He does not neglect that God has two aspects: one as the creator, who 'lives true to promises', and another as the strict, stern and punishing God (pp. 454-55). The question is how to relate these two aspects. Is he the wild and capricious God, exercising 'sovereignty without principled loyalty', a God whose 'self-regard is massive, savage, and seemingly insatiable', 'an unprincipled bully' with an 'excessive self-regard', or is he a 'loose canon', as claimed by Brueggemann (pp. 296, 303, 457 and 556; cf. Hanson, p. 455)? The problem is that this God is embodied in the rhetoric of the Old Testament texts. Hanson will read these texts differently from Brueggemann, within the setting of Israel's life, not in an a-historic rhetorical metacourt, as Brueggemann does. Hanson charges Brueggemann with embracing 'a rhetorical approach that rejects concern for historical setting of texts and denies the significance of aspects of divine reality apart from their embodiment in biblical speech' (p. 448).[25] The problem lies actually in Brueggemann's limitation of Old Testament theology to a discussion of the God embodied in the rhetoric of the texts. When the texts are read in their historic contexts, the conflicting views of God would be traced to 'the

25. Hanson concentrates his critique of Brueggemann on three issues: (1) the Old Testament as nothing more than speech, (2) the division of the biblical source material into core, counter-, and unsolicited testimony, and (3) the tension between divine compassion and judgment.

struggling efforts of finite humans to understand the Infinite in their midst and to inevitably ensuing phenomena like controversies between different religions and political parties, priestly families, and regional representatives' (p. 455). The difference between an a-historic rhetorical reading and a historical reading is important for how God is perceived, Hanson argues.

Brevard S. Childs (2004) asks whether Brueggemann is actually able to find a final testimony about God at all. Childs pays attention to how Brueggemann deals with the identity of God in the Hebrew Bible, as evident from the dialectic between a core testimony and a counter-testimony, charging him with seeing 'the task of interpretation to be a never-ending activity of negotiation between conflicting voices. There is never a final testimony, but every interpretation is described as provisional and shaped by shifting "social-ecclesial-political-economic contexts" within this active process of disputation' (p. 174). The result is a series of inner conflicts in God, who is both gracious and merciless, truthful and deceptive, powerful and impotent, which is constitutive of the very nature of this deity' (p. 174), a God unacceptable in both Jewish and Christian theology.

Bob Becking (1999) questions a citation from Brueggemann (p. 176) from the field of history of religion: 'At the core of Israel's God-talk is the persistent claim that Israel knows no God except the One who in ancient, remembered time acted in a way that made life of Israel as a people a genuine historical possibility'. Does this refer ontologically to the existence of God, or is it a historical claim about the emergence of monotheism in ancient Israel? Becking evidently supposes the latter alternative, which provokes his next question: To what extent do we, theologically, 'have to account for the nonmonotheistic phase in Israelite religion and the not yet fully monotheistic strata in the Hebrew Bible?' Would it not be better to stress that the monotheistic phase in ancient Israel is based not only on the encounter with the divine, but also on a deliberate choice for exclusive monotheism and an-iconism?

Tim Meadowcroft (2006) sees a contradiction in how Brueggemann describes God. Brueggemann raises the question of theodicy, which, he argues, 'is not consistent with the tone of the rest of the book' (p. 46). On the matter of Yahweh's creation of evil and woe,[26] 'Brueggemann seems to depart from his usually unrelieved attention to the contradictions of YHWH and resorts to a more traditional theology of excuse for YHWH' (p. 46; cf. Brueggemann, pp. 352-55). On the question of whether Yahweh on occasions is abusive,[27] Brueggemann suggests that 'Jeremiah, in his imbalance and extremity, exposes a sense of Yahweh that is less than honorable' (p. 46; cf. Brueggemann, p. 362). 'At this point Brueggemann dances a little

26. Cf. Deut. 32.39; 1 Sam. 2.6-7 and Isa. 45.7.
27. Cf. Hos. 2.24 and Jer. 20.7.

uncertainly between ontology and witness and hence denies his own insistence on the constructed reality of the text. This illustrates how difficult it is finally to do Old Testament theology without some partnership with a moral or dogmatic theology', Meadowcroft comments (p. 46).

R.W.L. Moberly (1998) points out another aspect, namely, how Brueggemann in his language about God involves humans living in a particular way. Because Yahweh is a relational God: he never comes 'alone', he is always 'Yahweh-in-relation' (cf. Brueggemann, p. 409), he is the generous one (cf. Brueggemann, p. 562) and the just God (cf. Brueggemann, p. 735). God is the real One in practicing of justice (cf. Moberly, p. 101). On the other hand, Brueggemann is charged with detaching Old Testament language about God not only from history, but also from ontology (cf. Moberly, p. 102, and Brueggemann, p. 86). This implies that 'classic Christian concerns about the "reality" of God are misplaced' (cf. Brueggemann, p. 66). As for language about God, Moberly points out 'two basic options in Old Testament theology' (p. 102). One is that 'we have no access to God except via the language of the scripture and appropriate ways of living'. The other is 'that the language and living themselves constitute the reality of God and that there is no further reality beyond them'.[28] The latter alternative Moberly calls a 'postmodern' position, and this is where he places Brueggemann. In so doing, Brueggemann has 'surrendered something that Jews and Christians alike down the ages (*mutatis mutandis*) have believed to be integral to their faiths', Moberly comments.

I have called the present section 'Perception of God', not, for instance, 'Understanding of God', because theology is not just a question of intellectual understanding, as if God could be placed in an intellectual formula. It is as much a question of perception, how God is perceived from the biblical texts. As I read Brueggemann, it seems that he would prefer talking about perceiving God rather than understanding God. A feature no critic has mentioned is that Brueggemann never calls God 'him'; Brueggemann always writes 'God' or 'Yahweh'. Unquestionably, there are tensions in the biblical sayings about God, Yahweh, tensions which are important to Brueggemann's perception of Yahweh. But the inner divine tension can be emphasized and interpreted differently, as we have seen from his critics. It should not be necessary to straightforwardly call God contradictionary. Perhaps it would be more apt to call the biblical picture of God a kind of tableau or collage, where the individual parts can be mutually disharmonious, but with a superior harmony; God is diversified, but always God, never no-God.

28. Moberly adds carefully: 'At the risk of oversimplifying', and 'as far as I can see (unless I misunderstand him), [Brueggemann] has opted for the latter'.

iv. *Normativeness*. Normativeness has always been a central concept in theology; Scripture as normative for living and teaching. Should a biblical *Theology* be normative? The study of biblical theology is a historical discipline. All theologians are children of their time, asking the questions of their own times, reading Scripture with contemporary eyes, finding the answers they ask for. Writing a *Theology* is a historic undertaking and the *Theology* itself is a historic product. Yet a *Theology* can discuss the question of normativeness, i.e. the status of Scripture. This is a question in particular Margaret S. Odell (1999) and Ellen F. Davis (1999) have raised when discussing Brueggemann's *Theology*.

Ellen F. Davis pays particular attention to Brueggemann's courage in doing theological interpretation that will 'permit texts of partisan power to be at the same time, and without denying their concrete role in power conflicts, statements of meaning that may be received as normative' (cf. Brueggemann, pp. 52-53). This takes courage, because 'normativeness is that on which one will stake one's life' (Brueggemann), a statement which 'clearly separates Brueggemann from the dispassionate speculation that characterizes much contemporary scholarship' (Davis, p. 50 A). Davis points out how Brueggemann 'seeks to establish a style of interpretation that is fideistic and acknowledges the normative status of the biblical texts' (p. 50 A), without negating that 'faithful interpretation is a matter of rendering provisional judgement'.

Margaret S. Odell also focuses on the issues of normativeness and the status of the biblical text. She supposes it is Barth's 'Bible against culture' model of normativeness that enables Brueggemann to weld the other agendas into his approach, and argues that Barth's emphasis on speech as the locus of revelation is the key source of Brueggemann's understanding of the vitality of the biblical text. Odell sees 'an almost seamless transition' from Barth's assertion of the priority of the word of God against modernity and Brueggemann's insistence that we tend to take the 'metanarrative' of the Bible as opposed to contemporary culture, Brueggemann's 'military consumerism' (Brueggemann, pp. 558-64 and 718-20). Brueggemann is 'perhaps at his best' in his sweeping statements about the contrasting options of reality shaped by biblical speech about Yahweh and speech about God shaped by human cultures.

Yet Odell is critical of how Brueggemann handles the tension between normativeness and ideological criticism. On the one hand, he refers to biblical texts as normative. On the other hand, 'normative statements are characteristically and inescapably statements wrought in conflict' (Brueggemann, p. 53). Odell questions whether this problem should be explained or solved, and cannot see that Brueggemann addresses the issue adequately. She cannot see that Brueggemann has shown the required courage when

confronted with problematic texts. It is not sufficient that Brueggemann says he has bridged gaps; 'perhaps he has', but 'one would like to know how courage plays itself out' in actual cases, for example, in the case of feminism.

When Brueggemann explains that 'one reason for undertaking a fresh attempt at Old Testament theology is to consider whether we are in a cultural, epistemological circumstance that may permit a re-articulation of the grounds for facing the normative-description' (p. 20), Odell sees this as the programme of Brueggemann's book: to work out the connections between normativeness, on the one hand, and critical analysis, on the other hand. But she cannot see that he has succeeded in that matter. He simply 'talks his way through it', notes Odell—he is an 'obscurantist, not courageous'.

Walter Brueggemann responds (1999) that the connections between normativeness and critical analysis are 'indeed acutely problematic'. He admits that he does not know how to work that out. With reference to Brevard S. Childs, he points out generally 'how problematic critical study has become'. It is not possible to act as if nothing has happened, 'for it is part of our interpretive history', and 'this is an issue anyone must face' when doing Old Testament *Theology*. The problem 'is intrinsic to the project itself, and I believe there is no one, clear resolution of the issue'.

As demonstrated above, Ellen F. Davis opines that Brueggemann is courageous, whereas Margaret S. Odell is of another opinion.

v. *Revelation*. The question of revelation has never been central to the debate surrounding Brueggemann's *Theology*, yet several scholars have implicitly touched upon it. The critiques discussed above question Brueggemann's attitude to ontology, transcendence and perception of God. These are basic questions in theology, questions which Brueggemann is accused of not answering in a confident way. Bernhard W. Anderson (1999: 27) is the one who in particular charges Brueggemann with not saying explicitly that the biblical testimony 'reveals God', but that the testimony is adjudged to be truthful and is '*taken* as revelation'. To this Anderson objects that more clarity is needed on the identity of this 'ecclesial community of the text' (the jury) in which the testimony *becomes* revelation. 'Brueggemann maintains that the new revelation occurs, and will occur, through the dialectical conflict between Israel's core testimony of God's saving power and the countertestimony of God's maintenance order… The question of the true linguistic portrayal of God is debateable, and a final verdict has not been reached' (p. 27).

Revelation has always been a central concept in the Old (and New) Testament, but to deal with revelation *per se* in theological studies is not so simple. What we have are testimonies. Whether these testimonies convey

revelation is a question of faith. Handling revelation *per se* is as elusive as handling God *per se*. Nevertheless, a belief in revelation can be studied; that is what Anderson asks for with Brueggemann.

k. *Attitude to History*

Many reviewers have commented on Brueggemann's non-interest in 'what happened', his lack of interest in 'history' and the consequences of his trial metaphor for the concept of history. Brueggemann himself gives no particular discussion of biblical theology and history until the end of his book, which he discusses in a chapter (28) titled 'Some Pervasive Issues'. It is here that Brueggemann discusses 'Old Testament Theology in Relation to Historical Criticism' (pp. 726-29).

Brueggemann's critics have not taken up the content of this section in any sustained way. Nevertheless, some have discussed other matters concerning Brueggemann's *Theology* and history. A main problem discussed is Brueggemann's non-interest in a relation between a trial lawsuit and any historical reality behind it. When Brueggemann claims that 'the court cannot go behind the testimony to the event' (p. 118), Bernhard W. Anderson (1999), for example, objects that 'here the analogy of a trial seems to break down, for generally the court seeks factual evidence other than the testimony… There is a problem here, I believe, that cannot be resolved by "bracketing out" historicity' (p. 26).

As a consequence of Brueggemann's reluctance to refer to history,[29] James Barr (1999) complains that practically nothing 'happens' in his book, 'it is all about thoughts and utterances and attitudes' (p. 558). Even exodus does not 'happen'. There are hardly any people either, no biographical sketch and no depiction of a personality (Barr, pp. 558-59). 'Nobody does any thing' and 'no one ever has a theological idea'—there are only texts rhetorically rendering depictions of God. This is particularly evident in Brueggemann's handling of the prophets. Even though Chapter 26 presents 'The Prophet as Mediator', little is said about the lives of the prophets or what they did. Brueggemann writes about what he calls 'the Mosaic revolution' (p. 735), but little is said about what kind of revolution this was. 'Perhaps there was no revolution', Barr muses (p. 559), adding: 'But to present the entire Bible in this way…cannot be satisfying'.

29. In Brueggemann's own words: 'In principle, the hearer of this text who listens for its theological cadences refuses to go behind these witnesses. This means that theological interpretation does not go behind the witness with questions of history, wondering "what happened". What happened, so our verdict is, is what these witnesses said happened. In complementary fashion, this means that theological interpretation does not go behind this witness with questions of ontology, wondering "what is real". Nothing more historical or ontological is available. But this mode of "knowing" finds such a claim to be adequate' (p. 206).

Paul D. Hanson (1999) finds it 'too limiting' to dismiss as irrelevant the light shed on that testimony by historians, epigraphist and historians of religion. It is 'amazing' how Brueggemann can dismiss hard facts and philosophical reflection by simply claiming: 'What is real, so our "verdict", is what these witnesses say is real. Nothing more historical or ontological is available' (p. 448). To Hanson, this is simply 'unbiblical' (p. 449), arguing that biblical theology cannot refrain from working historically. Because Israel described God by rendering an account of its history and natural phenomena, and embellished that account with references to testimonies of witnesses, this should have consequences for biblical theological methodology. Biblical theology cannot refrain from working historically and investigating history, nor can it refrain from reflecting upon the importance of nature in the Bible. Hanson claims (p. 451):

> It seems unwise, as an aspect of attacking foundationalism, to restrict the reflection of biblical theology to the rhetorical dimensions of the Old Testament… [I]t seems entirely in the spirit of the Bible to enrich our understanding of the God of the Bible by activities as diverse as studying Immanuel Kant, glimpsing stars aborning and dying through the lens of Hubble, exploring the mysteries of DNA, excavating ancient archaeological sites, and engaging in open discussion with thoughtful persons whatever their philosophical or religions convictions… Audacious openness, not parochial defensiveness, seems to capture the spirit of biblical faith.

Hanson adds: 'The confessional testimony of Israel is the primary datum of biblical theology, with epigraphic, archaeological, historical, social scientific, and comparative studies simply serving to add clarity, depth, and precision to our understanding of that testimony and to remind us of the earth-groundedness of our own theologizing' (p. 452). Brueggemann charges historical criticism and theological discussion about the 'real' God behind or beyond biblical speech for being positivist and rationalist in a way Hanson calls 'caricatures'. 'Is it really that simple?' (pp. 448-49).

Also John J. Collins (2005a) charges Brueggemann with paying no attention to the historical contexts of the biblical texts, 'an omission all the more surprising since he has paid attention to these contexts in the past' (p. 145).[30] When Brueggemann insists that '"what happened" (whatever it may mean) depends on testimony and tradition that will not submit to any other warrant' (p. 714), Collins comments that Brueggemann expresses himself 'in good antifoundationalist fashion' (p. 145). Here Brueggemann's metaphor of testimony becomes problematic to Collins (p. 146). The proper setting of 'testimony' is a lawsuit, where the different witnesses are actually supposed to tell 'what happened', as seen from their respective vantage points, and let

30. With reference to his essay, 'Trajectories in the Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel' (1979).

the court to decide what is true. 'In any serious trial, no unchallenged testimony can expect to carry the day easily', Brueggemann underlines (p. 715). But in the case of biblical theology, 'Brueggemann allows no other testimony than the Bible itself: this testimony will not submit to any other warrant', Collins counters. What kind of trial is this? 'Here Brueggemann's position is illustrative of the basic problem with all nonfoundational theology that tries to exempt the Scripture from external warrant', Collins says, adding: 'No one in modern pluralist society can live in a world that is shaped only by biblical narrative' (p. 146).

Brueggemann is right in his contention that biblical scholarship has been too committed to a 'Cartesian program', and that a re-orientation is much needed (cf. p. 727). Nevertheless, his critics have a serious argument against him on how he argues against Enlightenment and positivism. One issue is Brueggemann's general refutation of 'what happened'. Is it actually true that nothing happened? Another thing is how he argues by means of a trial metaphor, assuming that 'nothing has happened'. Could a lawsuit be held as if 'nothing has happened'? Here Kvanvig could have contributed to the debate with his use of Aristotle (cf. pp. 51-52, above). Something has happened (m_1). On the basis of this 'something', research establishes a narrative about it (m_2), which the reader has to relate to (m_3)

l. *The Old Testament and Christianity*

The Old Testament is part of the Christian Bible—defined as the Bible comprising both the Old and the New Testaments. The designation 'Old' Testament is Christian, as it presupposes the existence of the Christian 'New' Testament. Old Testament *Theologies* used to be written by Christian theologians. Yet, while the 'Old' Testament itself is not Christian, it is not exactly Jewish either (cf. Becking, below). Rather, it is Yahwistic and belongs to the Jewish tradition. Therefore, the relation of Christians to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible or Tanak) is a crucial question.

Brueggemann's attitude to Old Testament theology and Christianity and Judaism has been met with a series of reactions. His attitude to Jewishness and the Old Testament is described in pp. 77-78 and 78-80, above (cf. Brueggemann, pp. 107-12 and 729-35). Brueggemann repeatedly writes about Christian 'hegemony', 'reductionist' Christian Old Testament theology and what he calls Christians 'supersessionism' (cf., e.g., Brueggemann p. 109).

Methodologically, Brueggemann's view on the relation of Old Testament theology and Christianity and Judaism could be handled either under the same heading, as it can be seen as two sides of the same coin, or it could be handled separately, in two chapters. I have chosen the latter alternative, since, in my view, it affords a better focus on both aspects. Even so, I will offer occasional side glances to Judaism in this section. In practice, those

Christian theologians who have commented on this are handled in the present section, while his only (to my knowledge) Jewish opponent, Joel S. Kaminsky, is discussed in a separate section (see pp. 130-33, below).

Walter R.L. Moberly pays particular attention to what Brueggemann sees as a 'too easy' Christian approach to the Old Testament text, in which interpreters are inclined to prejudice the answers before they have even formulated the right questions. Moberly (1998: 100) comments: 'On the one hand, Brueggemann resists the Christian attempts to downgrade the value and significance of the Old Testament by categorizing it as "law" or "promise"' (cf. Brueggemann, p. 710). On the other hand, Brueggemann 'insists that Christians must recognize the extent of common ground and task which they share with Jews, and so take with full theological seriousness the nature of Israel's witness to God as scripture for Jews independently of Christ' (p. 100, cf. Brueggemann, p. 734). The problem Moberly sees, is that Brueggemann firmly roots these emphases 'in a postmodern context in which the arrogant claims of Christian hegemony…must become more humble and fully recognize their position as one claim among others, with no special privilege'. Brueggemann is accused of having dismissed classic Christian theology 'in favour of a rather easy appeal to contemporary postliberal theologians' in a way that fails 'to grasp Christian theology's true significance' (p. 103). With such a statement Moberly has distanced himself from Brueggemann very clearly on a crucially vital point of biblical theology.

Dennis T. Olson (1998) offers several concrete responses to Brueggemann, two of which should be mentioned here. First, Jewish and Christian traditions are not 'entirely alien imports onto the biblical text'. Olson charges Brueggemann, saying: 'But these venerable traditions are products of centuries of human and community struggles in their multiple particular contexts which have arisen as readings of Scripture' (p. 176). Secondly, Brueggemann 'severely monologizes the whole rich and variegated history of the Christian tradition of theology' when he claims[31] that it has a consistent 'propensity to flatten, to refuse ambiguity, lose density, and to give universalizing closure' through flights to the transcendent. Olson's counter-argument to Brueggemann is simply that 'Christian traditions over the centuries have hardly formed a singular monolith', with reference to the four Gospels, the Pauline epistles, the multiple voices of the New Testament, and so on (p. 177).

Bernhard W. Anderson (1999: 27) argues that 'it is questionable whether Brueggemann does justice to the fact that Old Testament theology 'is in a special sense a Christian discipline', as the designation 'Old Testament'

31. With reference to Handelman 1983. Cf. Olson's objections to Handelman (1998: 176).

suggests. Is it really so that 'the so-called Old Testament stands by itself, independent of the Jewish and Christian communities, and therefore may be understood in its own right with the modern rhetorical criticism'? Anderson objects that 'this does not do justice to the canonical status of these writings in the Jewish and Christian Bibles. This literature is inseparably related to a community of faith, "the people of God", that produced it and interpreted it during its historical pilgrimage' (p. 27).

James Barr (1999) seems to be sympathetic to Brueggemann's attitude to Judaism (cf. p. 549), but argues that it would have been 'more tactful not to identify Moses as the initiator of a religious authoritarianism which later (even if within Christianity) leads to infallibility and the Inquisition [Brueggemann, p. 579]!' As for the inherent 'openness' and 'polyphonic character' of the Old Testament message, Brueggemann claims that 'Christians do not need to crowd the reading of the Old Testament into a confessional corner' (p. 109). 'But then what *can* a Christian reading achieve?' is Barr's counter-question. On the whole, Barr charges Brueggemann with treating the Old Testament as a complete corpus in itself for Christians as for Jews. If 'acknowledging Yahweh requires reordering of everything', as Barr reads Brueggemann (p. 549), his counter-question to him is: Does belief in Jesus reorder it? 'It seems to me that Brueggemann has taken the Christian belief that with Christ the whole world is made totally different, and applied it as if it was valid for the Old Testament in itself' (pp. 549-50). When Brueggemann refers to declarations in Vatican II that 'Jews and Christians are co-believers' (p. 112), Barr replies: '[T]his may be a good idea for Christians; but I am not sure that Jews want to be "co-believers" with Christians' (p. 550). When Brueggemann claims that 'by the end of the nineteenth century, the Old Testament had ceased to be part of Scripture with any authoritative claim for the church' (pp. 14-15), Barr responds that 'this is just ludicrous: it is so far from my own experience that I cannot believe Brueggemann had seriously thought about it' (p. 560).

In Bob Becking's opinion (1999), Brueggemann has an unclear appreciation of the Hebrew Bible as a Jewish book. He agrees with him that any Christianizing of the Hebrew Bible 'should be avoided'. Becking can appreciate books written by Christian or Jewish scholars who openly say they read the texts from their religious point of view: 'It should never be forgotten that Christianity only borrowed the Hebrew Bible from the synagogue(s)'. The Hebrew Bible is not a Christian book, but for historical reasons it is not a Jewish book either, Becking explains, because a distinction has to be made between Yahwism and Judaism. Judaism was the form the ancient Yahwistic religion took as late as in Hellenistic times: 'The Hebrew Bible is a document of Yahwism and not of Judaism'. It is unclear to Becking 'whether his depiction of the Hebrew Bible as a Jewish document is only a phrase to be gentle toward the living Jewish community or a

programme'. Becking's own view is that 'a model should be elaborated in which the Hebrew Bible is seen as a document of ancient Israel that served both Judaism and Christianity, in all their different forms'.

Ellen F. Davis (1999) agrees with Brueggemann's claim that 'the modern situation has thrown Jews and Christians together to stand over against the dominant culture, in a sense closer than they have been since the conversion of Constantine' (p. 50 B). Where Jews wait for the Messiah, the Christians wait for Christ's second coming (cf. Brueggemann, p. 109). Yet, on the other hand, 'it is in the interest of promoting openness in the interpretive conversation that the most troublesome aspect of Brueggemann's argument arises', she argues, with reference to his emphasis on rhetoric (p. 50 B-C). In giving rhetorical primacy, Brueggemann repudiates the 'essential notion' of Christian theology. Here Davis disagrees deeply with Brueggemann, claiming that 'his non-essentialist argument is deeply flawed in both its genesis and its consequence, and…in both respects it runs counter to the fundamental aims that are evident in the larger body of Brueggemann's work' (p. 50 C; cf. Brueggemann, pp. 65-66). Brueggemann upholds the Jewish tradition 'as a model of openness and playfulness in the interpretation', but Davis objects that 'he overestimates the openness of both the Old Testament and of Jewish tradition…[and] seems motivated more by a prior commitment to pluralism than by a plain-sense reading of biblical and post-biblical traditions'. Davis finds Brueggemann's reading of Jewish tradition to be dubious (p. 52 C; cf. Brueggemann, p. 143). In summary, Davis (p. 54 A-B) commends Brueggemann:

> in all his recent work [Brueggemann has] consistently issued to the disestablished church a call to be realistic about our situation [and] urges us to learn to be a responsible minority… It is a call we cannot afford to ignore; nostalgia is not likely to carry Western church beyond another generation or two. But heeding that call means that ordinary Christians must now practice what ordinary Jews have practiced for nearly two millennia: talking and arguing about faith, studying seriously, teaching our children just what it means to look at and speak about reality in this odd way.

Rolf Rendtorff (1999) appreciates (in his own original German) Brueggemann's 'so klar und eindeutig Position' on the relation between the Christian and the Jewish community.

> Nach einer viel zu langen Periode von christlichem 'supersessionism' gegenüber dem Judentum, d.h. der Idee, daß das Christentum 'heilsgeschichtlich' an die Stelle des Judentums getreten sei und das Judentum damit beerbt—und das heißt faktisch: enterbt—habe, wird es nun hohe Zeit, die historische und theologische Rangordnung wiederherzustellen, nach der das Judentum nicht nur vor dem Christentum da war, sondern nach der vor allem das Alte Testament (…) von Juden geschrieben und von den Juden als ihre Heilige Schrift gelesen wurde, bevor das Christentum entstand.

It is therefore important that a Jewish understanding of the Hebrew Bible, independent from Christianity, is recognized, Rendtorff argues.

While Stephen D. Lowe (1999) is evidently a great fan of Brueggemann, he is critical when Brueggemann claims that absolutist claims for the Christian gospel are counterproductive and inhibit the stance of openness that one must assume when interpreting the Old Testament text, since it does not mandate a specifically promised future (cf. Brueggemann, p. 112). Lowe objects that 'evangelicals are going to take issue with Brueggemann at this point, and rightly so'.

When Brueggemann argues that 'the Old Testament is not a witness to Jesus Christ' (cf. p. 107), Tim Meadowcroft counters that 'this is a problematic position for a Christian to countenance' (2006: 45). Nevertheless, he sees a softening in Brueggemann's methodology in his postscript, when 'he admits of the possibility that Christ is a fulfilment of the Old Testament, but also places a bet the other way by insisting that it may only be so from this side of the New Testament' (p. 45; cf. Brueggemann, p. 732).

In addition comes the Jewish criticism voiced by Joel S. Kaminsky (see below).

In summary, opinions have been strong and diverse on Brueggemann's attitude to the Old Testament and Christianity, with attention to his postmodernism and postliberalism, alleged dismissal of classic Christian theology, repudiation of the essential notion of Christian theology, monologization of Christianity, not doing justice to the canonical status of the Old Testament in Christianity and Judaism, the question of Jews and Christians as co-believers, whether the Old Testament is a Jewish or a Christian book and so on. Yet Brueggemann has also been appreciated for his clear position on the relation between Christianity and Judaism.

m. *The Old Testament and Judaism*

Joel S. Kaminsky (1999) writes explicitly from a Jewish angle. He appreciates Brueggemann's book deeply 'for many reasons'. But he explains his job as one of 'conducting an honest critique, which means I will spend more time pointing out the problematic aspects of this book than praising it'. Kaminsky concentrates his critique of Brueggemann on three main points: his understanding of Israel's ritual life, his reading of the rabbis and the midrashic process and his presentation of Jon Levenson.

(1) Brueggemann's attempt to deal with aspects of Israel's ritual life reminds Kaminsky of his own struggle to teach Pauline theology in a positive fashion. One thing is to explain, another thing is to convince. Kaminsky charges Brueggemann with espousing a view that 'either sees this system as intimately superseded by his understanding that the New Testament finally elevated ethics over ritual. Or he sees a dimension of purity that still functions in the modern Christian community, but only in a

negative fashion.' Brueggemann's reading is not only problematic, but might even be questioned from a Christian position, he argues. Kaminsky admits that Brueggemann 'works hard to challenge the negative view of ritual one finds in the works of many Christian biblical scholars', but he cannot see that 'he does fully succeed in finding a positive explanation for such ritual behaviour'.

Brueggemann speaks of two trajectories, social justice, primarily found in Deuteronomy, and purity, primarily found in Leviticus. To Kaminsky, 'this particular dichotomy seems to flow from a series of anachronistic assumptions that ultimately stem from certain Christian and secular attempts to split the ethical from the ritual and to give priority to the ethical', which causes Brueggemann to conclude that 'the two accents of these twin traditions of obligation cannot be harmonized' (p. 429). Kaminsky responds that 'while this may be true from a modern critical perspective, it is false from a rabbinic perspective in which the two sets of ideas are brought in harmony'.

In Kaminsky's opinion, Brueggemann's 'lack of positive attention to ritual and its organic connection to ethical notions [is] connected to his liberal Protestant bias to overemphasize and distort somewhat biblical notions of justice'. When Brueggemann assumes that the major thrust of the theology of the Hebrew Bible is 'focused squarely on issues of social and economic justice', Kaminsky responds that he both underemphasizes central ritual notions connected to the identity of Israel as holy people, and that he misses much of the particularism inherent in the notion of biblical justice.

(2) Brueggemann's reading of the rabbis and the midrashic processes is also 'troubling'. Brueggemann sees the rabbis as early deconstructionists and midrash as primarily an attempt to expose 'the oddity that destabilizes and questions the main flow of the text' (Brueggemann, p. 326), and Moses is seen as involved in 'protesting, deconstructive work at Sinai' (Brueggemann, p. 332). To Kaminsky this is an attempt to link Moses' iconoclasm and rabbinic midrash to Derrida's deconstruction programme, which 'overlooks the fact that the biblical and rabbinic thought systems both hold fast to certain absolute beliefs and thus have no obvious connection to the deconstructionist movement'.

Kaminsky also sees a propensity with Brueggemann to portray Plato, Western Christendom and modern historical scholarship as a unified tradition of thought and reason, while on the other hand characterizing Judaism as a tradition that 'relishes the disjunction that disrupts the large claim and that attends to the contradiction as the truth of the matter' (Brueggemann, p. 325). Kaminsky admits that Jews often challenge rather than defend the *status quo*, and is thankful that Christian scholars 'are finally taking account of Jewish interpretive techniques'. Nevertheless, Kaminsky warns for oversimplification of it or idealizing it: 'Although being idealized is preferable to being demonized, it is better to be understood and respected'. Kaminsky

finds it odd that Brueggemann and many Christian thinkers 'call for greater sensitivity to the Jewish community, yet they continue to vocalize the *Tetragrammaton*, an act many Jews finds offensive'.

(3) Kaminsky's last criticism of Brueggemann refers to his presentation of Jon Levenson: 'Levenson finally must assert that any reading of the text, Christian or critical, that is not Jewish is a misreading' (Brueggemann, p. 95). This 'misrepresents Levenson's position', Kaminsky claims. Levenson 'would not label a Christian reading as illegitimate', but he would criticize the propensity of supposedly critical academics to read the Hebrew Bible from a Christian theological perspective without ever admitting that they are moving beyond historical criticism.

Kaminsky sees an interpretive inconsequence with Brueggemann (p. 732). On the one hand, he is charged with mis-characterizing Levenson's position as one that 'prohibits a Christian or critical reading of the text', while, on the other hand, his own acceptance of the critical model 'prevents him from fully accepting the validity of either a Jewish or Christian reading of the Bible'. Brueggemann's 'failure to link the two testaments cloaks, but in no way mitigates, the Christian theological ideas that pervade his reading. The whole endeavour of Old Testament Theology flows from a Christian approach to the text.' Indeed, Brueggemann's central concept of a lawsuit 'reveals a deep indebtedness to a Christian outlook'. Such a reading is legitimate, but it is 'illegitimate to assert that this reading flows from the text itself'. It rather emerges 'from a complex web of most Protestant assumptions about how the text should be read', Kaminsky comments.

In his response to Kaminsky, Walter Brueggemann (1999) immediately and humbly claims that he takes Kaminsky's 'trenchant criticism…as an important instruction'. Brueggemann admits that he has 'much to unlearn and to relearn if we are to engage, as I think we must, in an interpretive conversation that is respectful, instinctive, and in the end healing'.

Brueggemann admits that he has 'not fully understood' the priestly traditions adequately, claiming in three points that: (1) the priestly traditions are of an earlier date, but they were 'codified into the final form' around the exile, and what Mary Douglas has said on danger and purity does not strike him as 'completely besides the point'; (2) 'Kaminsky is surely correct' that Deuteronomy and Leviticus imagine 'a unity of justice and purity'; (3) 'It may well be' that the concepts of purity and justice do 'not admit of a single Jewish response to a Christian misreading, for in both Jewish and Christian communities, different folk come out differently'.

Brueggemann sees the point at issue when Kaminsky explains how difficult it is for him, a Jew, to understand Paul, because it is equally difficult for Brueggemann, a Christian, to understand Jewish ritual and purity rules. In the end 'a tone of accusation finishes his comments', when Kaminsky charges him with cloaking his Christian ideas. Brueggemann already on p. 1

in his *Theology* explicitly confessed that 'I write and exposit as a Christian interpreter'. When Kaminsky himself 'boldly operates with a stereotype (caricature?) of the way Christians do believe', Brueggemann responds that 'I am not the kind of Christian Kaminsky assumes me to be', arguing that Kaminsky 'needs a different kind of Christian, so that contrast between us may be sharp'.

The overall impression is that Brueggemann humbly admits his inadequate understanding and dealings with Kaminsky's concerns—with a few adjustments of Kaminsky's arguments.

4. *Summary*

In this synthesis I have consciously tried to let the commentators speak for themselves, without too much interference with them. The scholars referred to should recognize in my references their own arguments and say 'this is actually what I meant to say'. Yet opinions have been many, different and strong, sometimes very strong. As this chapter has demonstrated, Brueggemann's *Theology* has been met with a remarkable array of responses. Is the image this chapter has given of Brueggemann's *Theology* fair? Negative criticism is more dominant than positive criticism, for the simple reason that critics most often air disagreements more frequently than agreements. When they agree, there is no need for argumentation. Therefore, this survey of Brueggemann's *Theology* might be considered more critical than justified.

The responses referred to here are what have appeared in reviews, articles and literature that have been brought to my attention. Nothing is said about oral responses and debates appearing at theological conferences (for example, at SBL Annual Meetings and elsewhere) and in the various theological institutions where his *Theology* is used as textbook and has otherwise been the object of discussion.

Enough has been shown to demonstrate that this is a *Theology* that has left a deep impact on the study of Old Testament theology. It is a book that will be referred to and discussed for years to come.

As this survey has demonstrated, the responses also cover a wide range of topics, perhaps even broader than the problems Brueggemann himself has explicitly discussed in his *Theology*. This is a corollary of the wide implications his *Theology* possesses.

As for his main hermeneutic metaphor, the model metaphor of a lawsuit trial can be good pedagogy, but it forms a grid on the presentation that easily restricts it in a reductionist way—'reductionism' is actually a bad word to Brueggemann, as we have seen. Nevertheless, Brueggemann argues that the divergent testimonies in a trial are set in 'profound conflict and disputation through which Israel arrives at its truth claims' (p. xvi).

There is a tension between using the metaphorical model of the lawsuit trial and the claim that 'in doing Old Testament theology, one must be vigilant against importing claims from elsewhere' (p. 65). The trial metaphor is used several places in the Old Testament itself, particularly in the prophetic literature, where Yahweh is said to sue his people. But this is not the same as seeing the whole Old Testament from the vantage point of a lawsuit. This model is imported into the general interpretation of the Old Testament as a heuristic tool. That is not to say that this interpretive model is completely misleading and out of place—nevertheless, it could be seen as somewhat contradictory to the claim referred to.

This kind of text reading implies a certain deconstruction of the biblical text itself. Many would probably say that God himself is in some way deconstructed away when he is given existence solely in the biblical rhetoric. Nothing happens around God any more. This is why Childs goes to the extreme of calling Brueggemann a Gnostic; God is only recognizable in something abstract. Nevertheless, Brueggemann's God is real, but he is not acting in history, he is transcendent in the biblical rhetoric.

This is a consequence of a consistent postmodern way of thinking—consistent to a certain point: because God himself is not completely deconstructed away. He certainly is there. Some would say that he has faded away into something too abstract. Others, at least Brueggemann himself, would say that he is not in history, but is as present in rhetoric as in history. More precisely, he emerges in, with and from verbs, adjectives and nouns. Brueggemann will probably claim that his divine presence in rhetoric is no more abstract than his presence in history.

Walter Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament* is a landmark, both for its comprehensiveness, but also for its basic postmodern approach to the study of Old Testament theology. This was the first substantial postmodern *Theology* of the Old Testament ever published. Its postmodernism is partly admitted by the author himself, and implicitly evident throughout the book, especially in its rhetorical approach and how it reads theology basically and solely from the actual texts, without regard for historical matters. The text itself, its rhetorical speech, is what matters. Yahweh, the God of Israel, is present in the text itself, nowhere else, Brueggemann explicitly underlines.

Chapter 4

Erhard Gerstenberger

Erhard S. Gerstenberger was professor of the Old Testament at the University of Marburg, Germany; he now has emeritus status at that institution. His *Theologies of the Old Testament* builds on lectures given in Brazil and Germany, and is, according to the author himself, offered in a form that reflects the original oral delivery (p. ix).

Gerstenberger's book should be read against the backdrop of the old discussion about the unity and diversity of the Bible, a question not only referring to the differences between the two testaments, but to differences in form, content and historical references within the testaments as well.[1] Some scholars would stress *unifying* elements, while others would stress *diversifying* elements. Some scholars would strive to *harmonize* the tensions, while others would not only accept the *tensions* but see *contradictions* and even appreciate the diversity and plurality. Gerstenberger is one of those appreciating diversity and plurality: 'I simply want to emphasize that I in no way regard the plurality and the clearly recognizable syncretism of the Old Testament tradition as a disaster, but as an extraordinary good fortune' (p. 1).[2] Later in this chapter we will see that those problems have been an important feature of the debate generated by Gerstenberger's book.

Gerstenberger's book is meant to be a *theo*logia proper, organized around the understanding of God, as seen from different vantage-points. These vantage-points are explicated in Chapters 4–8: 'The Deity in the Circle of Family and Clan' (Chapter 4), 'Deities in the Village Community' (Chapter 5), 'God and Goddess in the Tribal Alliance' (Chapter 6), 'Kingdom Theologies in Israel' (Chapter 7), and 'The Faith Community of Israel after the Deportations' (Chapter 8). Before these chapters—after his 'Preliminary Remarks' (Chapter 1) and 'Introduction' (Chapter 2)—Gerstenberger gives 'A Sketch of Israel's Social History' (Chapter 3), where he sketches the framework for the following Chapters 4–8. After these chapters, two additional chapters on, respectively, 'Polytheism, Syncretism, and the One God' (Chapter 9) and 'Effects and Controversies' (Chapter 10) follow. The

1. The problems are discussed in some detail by, for example, Mead 2007: 74-80.
2. Cf. Brueggemann, p. 710.

book concludes with his farewell lecture at the University of Marburg in 1997, an Appendix titled 'God in Our Time'. This appendix is somewhat of an encore to the book proper, which in an excellent way excerpts the content of the book; a reader might well wish to begin reading the book with this Appendix—and Chapter 3.

The fundamental idea of this book is that God is perceived differently by people at different historical and social stages, following the historical and social development from pre-Israelite to Israelite family and clan society through village community, tribal community, monarchic era and exilic period. Every époque is supposed to reveal different aspects of God; or, said differently, every époque causes people to perceive God differently, as the image of God is profoundly influenced by the actual preconditions of life.

From such an angle of reading it is given that Gerstenberger sees not one but several theologies in the Old Testament, which is reflected in the use of the plural in the book's title, *Theologies of the Old Testament*. His presentation has a social anthropological taint, and is in reality something of a history of Israelite religion, as I will argue later.

His claimed aim with this book is 'to attempt a conversation with the urgent demands of today', adding that 'only in this way, in my view, can we arrive at theological results which are viable in our apocalyptic times' (p. 18).

This claim is interesting. Gerstenberger uses loaded terms like 'conversation', 'the urgent demands of today', 'theological results which are viable' and—not least—'our apocalyptic times'. With such terms and phraseology Gerstenberger expresses a very strong opinion about the times we are living in today, about the value of Old Testament theology, and about an intended relation between Old Testament theology and our time. This signals that this textbook on Old Testament *Theology/Theologies* is consciously written as a crossover project, connecting history, history of religion, theology, sociology and social anthropology, with a concern for communicating with our time.

In this way Gerstenberger implicitly signals, without explicitly saying so, that he has written a book with an inherent and basic postmodern aspect. Yet this is done somewhat differently from how Kvanvig and Brueggemann pursue the same concern.

1. *Unity or Diversity?*

As I already pointed out in my Preface, Gerstenberger perceives the Old Testament as a collection of many testimonies of faith from around a thousand years of the history of ancient Israel, a conglomerate of faith experiences from different historical and social situations (p. 1).

Already the designation '*Old* Testament Theology' is problematic to him, because this is a specific Christian label. Jewish theologians do not write '*Old* Testament *theology*'. Such a designation defines this part of the Bible in relation to the New Testament. For Gerstenberger, Christians (Gerstenberger says 'we Christians') are 'intruders' (p. 3) in this field. Yet finding another adequate designation is difficult for him.

The Old Testament itself has no unitary theology, nor can it have a unitary theology, Gerstenberger argues. The Old Testament has no hidden centre. Rather, Gerstenberger emphasizes 'a unity of belief in God' (p. 1) to be his subsidiary 'centre' of the Old Testament. He does not see this unity in the texts themselves; he sees it solely as a reader's perspective.

This lack of unity, the Old Testament plurality, and the implied syncretism, is absolutely not seen as a disaster. It is rather seen as an extraordinary stroke of good fortune. '[T]he diversity of the theologies opens up for us a view of other peoples, times and ideas about God; it relieves us of any pressure to look anxiously for the one, unhistorical, immutable, absolutely obligatory notion and guideline in the ups and downs of histories and theologies' (p. 1).

Gerstenberger is conscious that he breaks with tradition, since the singular *Theology* is the long-established designation. Yet since most modern theological scholars have been trained in historical criticism and cannot overlook the diversity of the collections of writings, 'such unification cannot be achieved without violent means' (p. 2). 'Those who want to depict *the* theology of the Old Testament must declare that one element, one stratum, one idea of their choice is the dominant voice of the great Old Testament chorus of faith.' Such choices he characterizes as 'arbitrariness'.

When Christian theologians search for a centre or editorial systematization of Old Testament theology, 'this is to overlook that as theologians we do our business in immanence…and have no adequate notions or categories of the depth dimension or the universal dimension of all being… [T]heology in reality has exclusively to do with time-conditioned experiences of faith, statements and systems, in short with ideas of God and not with God in person or essence.' Gerstenberger's claim is that 'Old Testament theology should be content with the contextual images of God in The Hebrew Bible' (p. 2).

2. *Gerstenberger's Own Introduction*

In Chapter 2, 'Introduction', Gerstenberger sketches out the core ideas underlying his book. One basic question is from what context we should consider the Old Testament. After considering the historical canonization, different traditions of interpretation, the change of worldview in our time

compared to in antiquity, the technological development of our time, how life is perceived in our European and Western cultures, our materially privileged situation and how we are trapped in androcentrism, Gerstenberger concludes (p. 12) that:

> a critical consideration of the horizon of our own questions and our own context compels us to make certain demands on theological work from our own situation. It is no longer a matter of simply investigating the biblical texts for norms or ideas which are timeless and beyond history, and which could have immediate validity for us. The epistemological, social, economic and gender-specific conditions of our time are so different from those of antiquity that we must first relate any statement of the Bible, however good and relevant, to this reality of ours and discuss it before it can be a stimulus and criterion for our theological decisions.

For example, Gerstenberger sees the Decalogue as a document from a sixth- or fifth-century BCE society, and its ideas about God and ethics 'have stamped us down to the present day… But they are not an eternally abiding law of "nature".'

'What is the status of the Old Testament writings today?', Gerstenberger asks (p. 12). Even why we read the Old Testament today demands an explanation (p. 13). Gerstenberger ascertains that both the reading of and preaching from the Old Testament has declined. Nevertheless, the Old Testament is important for investigating our origin as humans, because 'the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible contains such a mixture of human self-knowledge and such a critique of both society and religion, which is still not exhausted, that time and again repeated reading can only prove life-giving' (p. 13).

Without mentioning Brevard S. Childs explicitly, Gerstenberger objects against the canonical approach to the Bible, claiming that canonical theology is 'in fact following a fundamentalist path' (p. 13). Further, Gerstenberger argues that (p. 14): (1) there is not one uniform coherent canon; (2) it is impossible to ignore the preliminary stages prior to the completion of the books; (3) the present has to be brought into theological statements.

As for the status of the Old Testament writings, Gerstenberger refers to Martin Luther's claim that we are dealing with faith and life and should not keep to any 'paper pope' (p. 15). 'We cannot want to limit ourselves to the great historic acts, as the so-called "salvation-historical theology" has often done.' All Old Testament texts are deeply woven into the world of the ancient Near East, 'so it is no longer possible to understand them without in principle bringing in the neighbouring cultures and religions' (p. 16).

There is no way of doing objective theology. We are all biased. As scholars we should be conscious that 'we are not approaching the Old Testament with absolutely no intentions, but are always bringing along quite

specific ideas which we shall be reading into the text' (p. 17). The Old Testament should not be treated as a museum artefact. Rather, it is a book full of life, and it should be 'our dialogue partner in the most difficult questions of life and faith'.

The term 'dialogue partner' (p. 17) used with reference to the Bible signals Gerstenberger's view of the Bible, as does also his criticism of canonical theology for following a 'fundamentalist path'. This indicates an anti-fundamentalist, and anti-foundationalist attitude, where the Bible is no longer representing anything absolute. It is a religious source, along with other religious sources. Its value is as dialogue partner. The Bible as religious source is on equal footing with its reader. Readers bring questions and their lives to it, read it, listen to its message, relate to it, yet their own opinion is as valid as that of the Bible. The Bible and its readers are enriching each other.

We recognize such attitudes to the Bible from the historical liberal theology, but also from our contemporary relativistic postmodernism.

3. *Israel's Social History*

In Chapter 3 Gerstenberger presents in brief his programme for the following five chapters. This is a key chapter in the book—as I have already said also about his enclosed Appendix, 'God in Our Time', which in reality summarizes the content of his *Theologies*, even though it is an independent lecture, and functions as an encore to his book.

Gerstenberger's scholarly programme is claimed as an attempt to 'try to demonstrate the typical ideas of God and other theological configurations in each of the social contexts and to demonstrate their consequences for social ethics' (p. 19; this is a more academic version of the aim he formulates on p. 18; cf. p. 24, discussed below).

Chapter 3 is his short presentation of this programme, where he sketches the five social stages of family and clan, village and small town, tribal alliances, the monarchical state, and lastly confessional and parochial community under the exile. His programme is to investigate what these social stages implied for religious life in pre-historic society and historic Israelite/Judahite society, in other words, to 'investigate the social conditions in which the belief in God was lived out and formulated, and attempt to understand this faith contextually and functionally'. It 'seems natural' to him to assume that 'the different interests of the individual social groupings, often existing side by side, produced group-specific theologies which also existed side by side'.

In conclusion (p. 24), Gerstenberger claims that 'in our quest for the different theologies of ancient Israel we are not starting from the revealed

word of God, [as] revelation is a category of faith which cannot be examined by a third party'. Instead, Gerstenberger will start his investigation with 'the social conditions in which belief in God was lived out and formulated, and attempt to understand this faith contextually and functionally', because 'the different interests of the individual society grouping…produced group-specific theologies which existed side by side'. This claim is significant. Here Gerstenberger reveals a modernist aspect to his academic way of thinking. There is an ideological tension between a modernist and a post-modernist way of thinking in Gerstenberger's *Theology*, as we will see later.

It is not possible to go into details with Chapters 4–8, even though this is the central part of Gerstenberger's book, since that would extend the frames for this study.

In brief, the content of these chapters is a history of religion presentation of the themes indicated in the chapter headings. Most of it is rather conventional history of religion and will not be commented on further here. Nevertheless, a few notices should be made.

Chapter 4, 'The Deity in the Circle of Family and Clan', is subdivided into five sections: (1) the horizon of faith, (2) cultic action, (3) ideas of God, (4) the ethic of family and clan and (5) theology from the family—theology of the individual. All five sections refer to family and clan at an early or prehistoric age, and are not necessarily related to early Israel in particular.

Gerstenberger summarizes the content of Chapter 4 in five points (pp. 88-91), points 'which take account both of the abiding value and also the dangers of any family theology':

First, the relationship to God within the family alliance is marked out by its personal character. There is a direct and mutual relation between humans and deity. The problem is that humans are unpredictable and 'cannot be calculated like mathematical entities or manipulated like material'. Extreme situations cannot be ruled out, in which 'the unpredictable happens either from the divine or from the human side'. However, the unpredictable is remedied for with rites of petition, purification and the forgiveness of sin (p. 88).

Secondly, the ancient families lived together in close relation to each other and to nature. They were more oriented to the past than to the future, and were content with their modest way of living. 'The relationship with God rested on tangible experiences. Everyday life was embedded in a numinous reality' (p. 88).

Thirdly, family religion did not understand itself as exclusive, as it lacked universal claims. The deity was not perceived as omnipotent or omniscient. There was a natural tolerance and a certain narrowness and independence in the family circle, as the whole world turned around the family group, and responsibility towards outsiders was of secondary nature, or there was even hostility against outsiders (cf. p. 89).

Fourthly, as modern Westerners we are used to thinking individualistically, within the frame of a Western way of thinking, for example, being 'personally Christian'; the content of faith is defined by a superior order, the church. Also, the Third World has put its mark on how people think. All this might be a problem for us and a hindrance to understanding the social and religious structures in an ancient Near Eastern society (cf. pp. 89-90).

Fifthly, Gerstenberger takes up and comments on such modern problems as family disintegration, thechnologization of the world, shifts in mentality towards the greatest possible profit. This he profiles against Joshua's challenge to take an individual stand for Yahweh, which implied the whole community (Josh. 24.15). From the Babylonian exile onwards Gerstenberger sees a freedom of choice developing, a tendency to self-determination, but far removed from our theoretical and practical individualism (pp. 90-91).

Leading up to these conclusions, Gerstenberger works with a positivist modernist mind, trying to establish a historiographic image of a past social situation. His presentation is popular and generalizing. His methodology is primarily that of social history and sociology, working within a frame of history of religion.

On the other hand, he also works in a postmodern way. He is one-sided in his use of sources for establishing this historiographic picture of a far past. References to historical sources such as archaeology and ancient texts are mainly absent, though secondary historical sources do appear in footnotes. He uses modern sociological methodology and projects sociological models back to ancient times. The conclusions and solutions he comes up with seem generally not unconvincing, but this is a precarious way of handling history. What can we actually secure this way, when the historical gap is thousands of years?

Also, Gerstenberger's frequent reference to modern times is a typical postmodern crossover between history, theology and sociology. He makes broad use of references to religious and ecclesiastical phenomena of our time to illustrate what he will say about family religion in ancient Israel or pre-Israelite time. In particular, in the five points referred to above, he looks almost synoptically on the sociology of religion then and now—with the 'now' being identified with churches in the Western and the Third Worlds. Gerstenberger often refers to his own observations in Latin America and Brazil.

In Chapter 5 Gerstenberger escalates historically to a higher stage in ancient Israelite society, and studies the deities of the village community, with particular attention to: (1) the social history of Palestine, (2) village structures, (3) rituals and cults, (4) ethics and the administration of justice and (5) the theology of the settled community.

This is also a rather conventional sociological and history of religion presentation of how a small town in ancient Israel is supposed to have functioned socially and religiously, with a few postmodern references to our time in the fifth sub-section, on the theology of the settled community.

In this chapter Gerstenberger is more attentive to historical sources than in the previous chapter, though he scarcely refers to any directly; there are more references to secondary sources. His style is still popular and avoids technical discussion.

Crossover references to modern times are less dominant in this chapter, though they do arise in what can be taken as a summary, or rather as a conclusion, of this chapter—'The problems of the community in the village, small town or urban district, which was manageable, have essentially remained the same down to the present day'—where he elaborates further on what is different in our world, compared to the ancient world (pp. 109-10).

In Chapter 6 Gerstenberger studies the social level of tribal alliances in ancient Israel, concentrating on (1) the biblical picture of the tribal system, (2) the origin of Israel, (3) the structure of the tribes, (4) cultic actions, (5) ideas of God, faith and ethics, (6) 'Ideologies of war? Liberation theology?' and (7) 'How were the larger societies organized?'

For most of these sub-sections, Gerstenberger works traditionally and historically, and his approach is mainly sociological, with emphasis on history of religion. Yet in sub-sections 6 and 7, and especially in 6, he leaves traditional history of religion and asks what modern humans can learn from this tribal religion. With a dash of postmodern and postcolonial colour, he deals with liberation theology, the treatment of primal populations and the exploitation of suppressed groups, minorities and women.

Chapter 7 concerns kingdom theologies in ancient Israel, discussing (1) the sources, (2) internal organization, (3) foreign policy, (4) theology of king and state, (5) the opposition from peripheral groups (prophecy), (6) 'Were there special features in the northern kingdom of Israel?', (7) the theology of the southern kingdom after David (Jerusalem theology), (8) popular belief and (9) 'National Religion?'

Again, the presentation of these sub-sections is conventional history, history of religion and Old Testament theology, with the main focus on history of religion. A few postmodern features are discernible, for example, when he remarks, with reference to hierarchical monarchy, that 'this fundamentally hierarchical view is completely unacceptable to our present "democratic" sensibility' (p. 168). Such a comment is something rather unheard of in a traditional modernist Old Testament *Theology* or a presentation of Israelite religion. This is a crossover to a Westernized know-it-all attitude, where ancient social society is evaluated according to popular or even populist opinion of our time, without regarding that these texts describe

remote societal terms, which should be evaluated in their own right before any other judgments are given. Some parts of Gerstenberger's book actually abound with those kinds of remark.

On the other hand, this way of thinking is also modernistic, and implies the idea of an ethic development from a bad past to a better present. The world has moved forward; now we know and understand better.

This demonstrates how modernist and postmodernist way of thinking can go hand in hand in Gerstenberger's *Theologies*; they need not exclude each other.

In Chapter 7, the crossover feature is particularly present in section 7.9, 'National Religion', which is mainly a thought-provoking analysis of the function of authoritative religion in a modern democratic society—a feature completely at odds with traditional textbooks to Old Testament, but in itself a very valuable contribution.

It is probably not by chance that this sub-section is written by a German. Given that the German nation was once so imbued with National Socialism, and suffered so heavily under it and because of it, would a non-German have taken up such a problem? National Socialism was itself a product of modernism, actually one of history's most striking and bizarrely consequent examples of modernism. In this sub-section on national religion in ancient Israel, Gerstenberger actually leaves biblical history aside, except for a brief reference to Gen. 11.6-7 (the story of the tower of Babel), at which point he makes the general claim that 'Power intoxicates the powerful' (p. 204); power makes corrupt.

In what can be seen as a summary of this chapter (the latter half of p. 205), Gerstenberger does not actually sum up the content of Chapter 7, but argues generally: 'It is interesting how strongly people can identify with the greater organization of a state'. This short summary is primarily a dialogic comparison between Israel's ancient past and our present Western world, where our time and Israel's ancient history are profiled against each other, to illuminate modern political, ethical and religion problems.

In Chapter 8 Gerstenberger comes to the last sociological level of his presentation, 'The Faith Community of "Israel" after the Deportations'. The sub-sections focus on, respectively, (1) the political and social situation, internal structures, (2) the origins of the Holy Scriptures, (3) Yahweh, the only God,[3] (4) the cult Temple and synagogue, (5) popular belief, (6) the ethic of Yahweh community and (7) 'What Remains?'

In this chapter, like in Chapters 4–7, the main focus is on understanding Yahweh: How was Yahweh perceived in exilic and post-exilic times? As in

3. With special attention to the name and exclusiveness of Yahweh, the legacy of family and village religion, the power and impotence of God, justice and peace, creation and history, and guilt and atonement, with a summary.

his preceding chapters, Gerstenberger's presentation in Chapter 8 is a conventional history of Israel's religion, with a few postmodern asides referring to our own time.

Gerstenberger's postmodern approach comes more to the fore in the small concluding sub-section 8.7, titled 'What Remains?' Here he states:

> In the light of the changed presuppositions and conditions of life, of course theology and ethics have to be rediscovered in and for this world society, but they must take into account the sub-divisions down to the individual… All that is said by the Old (and New) Testament is up for debate. There are no timeless statements of precepts of faith. Even in the deepest insight in the Old Testament. 'There is only one God, and no others', is debatable as a statement of faith. We must know what this means; we must understand it in terms of its genesis and original intention and ask whether it still corresponds to our faith. I personally think that monistic faith cannot be abandoned, because it is the best explanation of the present state of the world. Any dualism is pernicious because we cannot endure polarization of the world… The world is one and 'in need of redemption', but it is not corrupt beyond salvation. The patriarchalism, matriarchalism and monarchianism of the old world are outmoded and are unusable as models for our world. Human claims to domination are totally outmoded because they will cause catastrophe for our planet. Technology and science today show human beings their own limits, which they must learn to observe if they are not to perish. We must make a beginning by discussing a selection of these fundamental questions (p. 272).

Here Gerstenberger presents the basics of his theological thinking as related to the old liberal theology, with postmodern relativist claims about the Old Testament and contemporary religion relying on it. In the rest of his book we will find more of the same material.

Through these five chapters on deities/God, as related to the circle of family and clan (Chapter 4), the village community (Chapter 5), the tribal alliances (Chapter 6), the kingdom in Israel (Chapter 7) and the 'Israel' after the deportation (Chapter 8), we see that Gerstenberger on the whole works as a traditional historian, in particular as a historian of religion, as well as a social anthropologist, yet with several postmodern crossovers to the Western culture of our own time.

We have also seen that he uses modern sociological models and projects them back to ancient times. This is done frequently in modern scholarship, and has proved fruitful in many ways. But it is a precarious methodology, more precarious the further back we go and the broader the historic gap is, as seen from our own time. When applied to an ancient Near Eastern society of 3000 or 4000 years ago, the risks are multiple.

Using social sciences this way is not necessarily a postmodern strategy, since social sciences are not postmodern in themselves. Yet crossing over from primarily describing ancient times to illuminating modern societal terms is a typical postmodern way of working.

This does not necessarily mean that something wrong is being done. On the contrary, as I will argue later, this kind of crossover can take historiography and the study of posterity out of a possible backwater and enable important steps forward to be taken.

4. *Polytheism, Syncretism and the One God*

Chapter 9 is a short chapter (nine pages) on 'Polytheism, Syncretism and the One God'. It is subdivided into three sections dealing with (1) conceptual clarifications, (2) changes—the accumulation and interdependence of images of God and (3) tensions between the theologies of ancient Israel. In this chapter Gerstenberger brings together his remarks on the different levels of testimony in the Old Testament (p. 273). Such a strategy gives us reason to look somewhat closer at this short chapter, where some of his more postmodern approaches are clearly mirrored. Here his main ideas are surveyed, whether postmodern or not.

Gerstenberger claims that 'any attempt…to penetrate to the very being of God and so to speak explain the world from God's perspective is a priori doomed to failure' (p. 273). None of the Old Testament messengers dared to describe God's being, but they allegedly brought specific messages from him. This is something special, compared to modern theologians. 'No modern theologian makes comparable claims to have had a personal vision of God… All present-day talk of God is based on ancient texts, not on the experience of the presence of God.'

As a corollary 'theology cannot be done from a transcendent sphere but only from belief, from the perspective of those concerned; consequently it is a necessarily limited and conditioned truth' (p. 273). Theology must 'always and everywhere start from the very different images of God. These are incompatible; each of them has its own justification, and we need to evaluate and investigate them separately' (p. 273).

In his section on conceptual clarifications (section 9.1), Gerstenberger defines the concepts of 'polytheism' and 'syncretism', which should not be explained in current popular ways: 'In reality it is all quite different' (p. 274). These concepts should be explained from 'lived worship of God, not in theory'. With reference to the *Shema'* (Deut. 6.4-6) and Isa. 45.22-25, Gerstenberger argues that 'fundamentally the whole monotheism of the early Jewish community is a great, impressively presented, monolatry, which arose in a situation of confession and at a few points is theoretically supported by statements of uniqueness verging on an ontology. The oneness of Yahweh remains an appendix to the strict demand to hold firm in practice only to the one God, the God of Israel, for the sake of the existence of the community' (p. 275). The Old Testament itself never theorizes about the

question of polytheism, syncretism, monotheism or monolatry, but all alternatives are mirrored.

As for theological endeavours, Gerstenberger explains that 'so far no faith community and no academic theologian have succeeded in grasping the one, exclusive God and realizing the consequences of this insight in life. Even the strongest advocates of theoretical monotheism necessarily recognize other forces than those of God in this world…' (p. 275). Against this background Gerstenberger claims in a short and pregnant wording: 'We are and remain born polytheists, regardless of how much lip-service we pay to the one God'.

As for the question of polytheism and monotheism, Gerstenberger points out, in peaceful times the people of Israel 'presented a quite colourful religious spectrum in religion and places' (p. 276). Should this be called 'polytheism'? 'That is possible', Gerstenberger responds. But then we are talking about a 'fixed, homogeneous religious society…which tolerates other units alongside itself', and that is a kind of uniform society there never was in Israel. Different names can be used for God, but that is not polytheism.[4] On the other hand, he will not regard different activities, manifestations and effects deriving from God automatically to be monotheism.

The postulated unity of God is at most an intellectual construct. 'We cannot test whether the effects of God which we can recognize in our world of experience really lead up to a transcendent point of intersection' (p. 276).

Gerstenberger also discusses the question of dualism and monism, claiming that whether God is one 'makes sense as a way of interpreting our world, which is a unity, and which we do not want to hand over to the polarizing forces of two or more grounds' (p. 276). This is precisely what dualistic systems do, 'they maintain the polarity and fundamental division of the world and the ultimate annihilation of the "evil" or "dark" part'. Such a dualism is foreign to the ancient Near East and Israel before the Persian period, when dualism gradually permeated both Hellenism and Gnostic Christianity. Here Gerstenberger finds 'the decisive theological quest: we do not have to choose between Israel and Canaan—both cultural systems were built on the same foundation', that is, monism.

In section 9.2, on changes in the understanding of God, Gerstenberger points out that the understanding of God took up ideas from different periods and areas in an accumulating way, which caused the actual understanding of God to be changed. Or better, 'the ideas of God in individual epochs and groups have to a great degree converged syncretistically and have also driven apart syncretistically' (p. 277).[5] The claim is illustrated with examples from Indian and Zulu mythology and Hosea 2 (pp. 277-78). Of the latter

4. Cf., for example, the discussion surrounding the designations for God, Yahweh and *El Shadday*, in Gen. 4.26; 17.1; Exod. 3.14 and 6.2-3, in Moberly 1992.

5. As support for this claim he refers in particular to Schmidt 1983.

case, Gerstenberger claims: 'On this frontier between semi-nomadism and sedentary life, if it ever really existed, an extraordinary great amount of syncretistic work was necessary to shape belief in God and for the necessities of peasant and village life' (p. 278).

The same applies for the transition from tribal to state religion, he claims. The new structures called for new definitions of the image of God: 'In the time of the monarchy a new faith developed from the "syncretism" of the new social structures which was composed from the tradition with the old name Yahweh; that is perhaps the only authentic, deliberately syncretistic feature' (pp. 278-79).

To describe this process, 'the term syncretism is not quite suitable', Gerstenberger moderates (p. 279). 'It is more important and more accurate to imagine creative processes at many levels on the basis of changing structures, goals and values'.

Here Gerstenberger breaks out of a strict religio-historical description and speaks more generally and ontologically. It is called an illusion to imagine that 'prefabricated elements of the images of God can break completely with the past and be brought into our present'. We are always influenced both from the past, the present and our own environments. As humans we tend to present our theology and ethic as 'old' and 'revealed', not as produced by ourselves. 'But in seeking to be responsible to the God of the present or the ground of being, it is our task to try to engage in constant, corrective dialogue with the old witnesses; we must look for the new form and formulation of faith which is valid today, appropriate to present conditions and human groupings, and "right" for them' (p. 279). This 'dialogue with the old witnesses' is a characteristic postmodern attitude, where the interpreter stands in front of the text as in front of a mirror.

In section 9.3, dealing with the tension between the theologies of ancient Israel, Gerstenberger argues that 'because every situation and every human social grouping is mainly responsible for its faith, and because no human formation is completely homogeneous, but always carries around within itself its own internal contradictions, the statements of faith made in a particular era are contradictory, and each has to be taken seriously on its own terms' (p. 280).

Claims of truth and exclusiveness should be treated with suspicion, because they 'are usually coupled with the ideologies of power and rule'. The history of designations for God 'shows with an unavoidable clarity how changeable and transitory the statements of faith are'.

In this chapter Gerstenberger refers to an important question for the development of religions. Religions have always been under development, and will always be. No religion is 'pure', as every religion takes up elements from other religions and emits elements to other religions. The history of religion is a history of religious fluidity. To present one religion at a time

might be pedagogically useful as an introduction to the history of religion, but it absolutely runs the risk of being reductionistic.

Yet this kind of development implicitly forces to the fore the question of how theism should be perceived; should we hold to polytheism or monotheism, monolatry or syncretism, or whatever? This development complicates any definition. It is easy to find relativizing aspects in such a development.

It is not particularly postmodern to see such development and relativism, since the problem has been well known throughout modern research of history of religion. Such religious development has been well known from all over the world, as far back as we can see. Yet this kind of religious development is *gefundenes Fressen* for postmodernism. At the core of postmodernism lies basically an inclination toward crossover thinking. This religious development is a constant crossover beyond religious borders, it actually tends to erase religious borders and relativize the validity or truth of any religion.

Gerstenberger's *Theologies* implicates a relativizing of God himself—or the gods. Who is actually God, or: What is God?

This is the focus of Gerstenberger's attention in his Chapter 9. In this chapter he works primarily as a historian of religion and as a theologian. On the basis of his survey of this problem, he says:

> The question of true or false faith or images of God does not arise from assertions aimed at self-preservation along the lines of 'we are right and the others wrong'. Such claims to exclusiveness are usually coupled with the ideologies of power and rule and are therefore in themselves deserving of criticism. Those who claim to want to determine the true faith universally for all peoples of all times must arouse suspicion, because it is a basic human insight that our discourse is always limited and conditioned and cannot be universal. That also applies to central terms like 'God' (p. 280).

With such a claim, Gerstenberger places himself centrally in postmodern relativism.

5. *Effects and Controversies*

Chapter 10, titled 'Effects and Controversies', consists of 15 short subsections and is important for revealing Gerstenberger's basic thinking and his further thinking in prolongation of his *Theologies*. Here also his postmodern approach comes most clearly to the surface; as such, this motivates a closer look into this chapter.

Gerstenberger's basic assumption and overall view is to be 'in dialogue with the old witnesses' (i.e. the Old Testament, p. 283). To get into that dialogue, we need (1) to know the characteristics of our time and their

demands on our theological thought, and (2) to relate the basic concepts of the Hebrew Scriptures from the different social situations to these definitions in the present.

First (section 10.1), Gerstenberger argues that 'the Christian element in reading and understanding the Hebrew scriptures lies in our tradition and not in the Old Testament texts' (p. 283). Gerstenberger writes as a Christian theologian, claiming: 'we do not need first to incorporate a Christian filter into our reading of the Old Testament. It is already there in ourselves and in our tradition, in our perception and interpretation' (p. 284). On the other hand, however, he claims that the Hebrew Scriptures also need our Christian and post-Christian positions as a corrective. We should also observe how different Christians in the Middle East understand the Hebrew Scriptures. Not least, we need the Old Testament to understand the Jewish Jesus.

According to Gerstenberger (section 10.2), theology in our time has to be ecumenical, with a global focus on the whole of humankind. With the term 'ecumenical' Gerstenberger does not refer to ecclesiastical but to global *oikoumene*. 'That is a tremendous task which seems almost impossible' (p. 284). The world stands under a destiny which is common to all beings. This justifies speaking of 'the one and only God' (p. 285). This also concerns our attitude to other people. 'Insight into the nature of the other individual and the other group is the indispensable basis here.' As for religion, Gerstenberger argues: '*De facto*, every stratum and group on this globe has its own deities. They represent its right to exist, [and] any discrimination against any group on religious grounds is forbidden' (p. 285).

Human beings are autonomous to Gerstenberger (section 10.3). Since the Renaissance individuals are at the basis of human society and at the centre of the world—at least in theory and in the Western world. Freedom, autonomy and human dignity are the great slogans of modern times, and 'we have to adopt a theological attitude to them' (p. 286). This autonomy is foreign to the Hebrew Bible. In antiquity people worked together in families, sharing each other's work. This implies that 'the biblical ideas of God which are oriented on the patriarchal model of the family are not directly available for our atomized society' (p. 287). Gerstenberger concedes that the egotism of our time in part also has an Old Testament footing (Gen. 1.26-28), and sees that the individualism of our modern time is a direct consequence of freedom and human dignity.

In section 10.4 Gerstenberger underlines that the world is unjust: 'The (theoretically) strong position of the individual in modernity does not wholly correspond to our daily experience that the predominant majority of all men and women are helpless victims of the social, economic, political and indeed religious forces of society. The idea of the self-determining individual is a utopia, a beautiful dream, which is significant as the notion of a goal [but] the raw reality is so devastatingly different…' (p. 288). Gerstenberger

attacks 'monarchical notions' (p. 289), which 'plays a major role in human religious behaviour. They derive from the hierarchical state structures of antiquity, and have been superseded in an order the theory and constitution of which is obligated to democracy. So a discussion of the right notions of authority is urgently necessary.' In addition come secularization, privatization of religion and separation of state and church, which 'is synonymous with allowing freedom to all confessions and religions…synonymous with an almost unimaginable diversity of faith communities in our environments' (p. 290). This is a situation the great churches have not internalized, as they continue to live in the tradition of state-sanctioned monopolies.

In particular, Gerstenberger focuses on how churches have used the term 'Israel' and Old Testament election theology to justify their dominion, with the result that 'an accord between the faith community and society is read out of the Bible'. The church is perceived as today's 'Israel', and the faith in the one God is identified as the church's faith. This Gerstenberger sees as an imperialist way of thinking.

Gerstenberger asks (section 10.5) whether God is personal or impersonal, with reference to the natural sciences. A mechanistic, causal, physical and chemical explanation of being has become plausible to us. How are we to think about God on such a background? As a rule our normal scientific explanation of the world cannot be reconciled with the ancient ideas of personal direction of the world by divine powers. So, we are challenged to develop new ideas of God for the anonymous spheres, perhaps in dialogue with Jewish and Christian (and Muslim) mysticism and with the Far Eastern religions, for which the category of person has quite a different status (p. 291).

In section 10.6, on 'The Liberating God', Gerstenberger argues that 'today…the expectation of the transcendent world has declined markedly in Northern Europe' (p. 291). The question of resurrection is not interesting any more. 'People's feelings about life are predominantly this-worldly… It is a matter of perceiving God's will for endangered humankind and creation here and now' (p. 292). In particular, in liberation theology, 'the certainty of the world to come has become the basis for self-assertion in this world. Thus we really get back to Old Testament categories: The justice of God and human justice is important' immanently, in this world. This also relativizes the preliminary decisions for the world to come.

In section 10.7 Gerstenberger points out how modern ethics in America and Europe 'is stamped by the individual quest for happiness' (p. 293), argued for on the basis of the Old Testament. The ethical norm is what is good for me as an individual and what furthers my quest for happiness. 'Here it is highly remarkable that the link between ethical precepts and the singular "I" is practiced and proclaimed almost everywhere, in complete contrast to the link to the plural "we" in the Hebrew scriptures' (p. 293).

The Hebrew Bible has strong formulas on what was abominable or an atrocity in the ancient Israelite society. Gerstenberger underlines with emphasis that 'temporary social conditions must not in any way be made norms or idealized. Such idealization hinders responsible exegesis in our time. But it is a legitimate task to develop ideas on the basis of the ancient witnesses' (p. 293). In particular, Gerstenberger refers to the Jewish scholars Hans Jonas (the 'I' question) and Emmanuel Levinas ('ethic of the other').

Gerstenberger himself argues that 'schemes of Christian ethics have to grapple far more with the formal problem of revelation, the dogmatization of individualism of salvation, a one-sided imprisonment within the parameters of a wider society, with traditional notions of law and gospel, the two kingdoms and the coming world. Consequently they find it difficult to go into the interest of our world' (p. 295).

Section 10.8 begins with Gerstenberger claiming that 'The modern world-view and images of God cannot be repeated mechanically' (p. 296). Despite all possible changes, Gerstenberger notes,

> most people [today] unconcernedly keep to old ideas of God or the origin and destiny of the world which derive from theologies of family, people or community. It may also be that there is little readiness to change anything here. People naïvely suppose that a personal God resides somewhere in space. Or they think of a God spiritually present in all things and events who guides life in broad outline, not in individual actions. The divine in human beings and the loftiness of nature are such images of God which have relatively no contours… [O]ur contemporaries seem to prefer to rely on human power and brilliance [and the] far-reaching knowledge and skills in the spheres of science and medicine… (pp. 296-97).

As for the Old Testament, our social structures are different. Yet Gerstenberger also finds questions and insights which have persisted since the exilic and post-exilic period in Israel. 'In any discussion we should always be aware of the way in which all theological statements are conditioned by time and society' (p. 297).

Next (section 10.9), Gerstenberger comments on questions about parallel theologies and theological pluralism:

> Family theology is not identical with community theology; tribal theology does not correspond completely with national theology; and none of the four levels mentioned already produce universal or global theology itself. All levels have their relative justification. It will never be possible to harmonize these theological levels completely, but it is urgently necessary to attune them to one another as far as possible. Every theology must remain capable of criticism… (p. 297).

As for our own time, Gerstenberger argues that 'the primary issue will be the theology of the individual…and global theology… At both extreme ends of the scale the Old Testament can give only qualified advice' (p. 297). On

the background of the development of humankind, 'we face authentically new theological tasks'. Yet Gerstenberger is sure that 'human life has the core which makes it worth living in interpersonal relations' (p. 298).

From this it follows that 'the micro-social sphere is paramount; all the larger systems…are to be subjected to it in theology and ethics' (p. 298). Theology and ethics of the larger groups should advocate the interests of regions, nations and the planet with relation to the reality in which people live to protect them. The 'supreme principle "of the market"' should not be determining. 'Larger societies must create a framework within which people everywhere can live in a human way, and in which peace prevails and nature is preserved' (p. 298).

In section 10.10 Gerstenberger points out that 'the knowledge of truth is always limited' (p. 298), and that the time when German and European theology dominated 'is long past'. The opportunity on offer is 'a description of divine truth from different perspectives, shaped by the context… [T]heological truth must display an ecumenical breadth and colour'. Theological orientation has to be broader than that from the European and American perspective.

This also applies to inter-faith relations. On Old Testament grounds, we cannot confess the one God and in principle exclude any other religion. Any human attempt to talk about God, the 'ground of being', the 'future of the world', 'the absolute claim on us', is suspicious to him. Any discrimination or oppression should be resisted, unmasked and condemned (pp. 298-99).

In section 10.11 Gerstenberger profiles Old Testament monism against the dualist legacy from the Persians. The Old Testament conceives of one God, one source of life and one world; there was no dualism in the ancient Semitic religions. Creation began after chaos had been destroyed. Dualism is a later phenomenon, a heritage from the Persians, one which nevertheless came to cause a fundamental schism between good and evil in the world.

Today 'we are still very strongly attached to monistic models and explanations'. Monism 'does not lead to a harmonious notion of God. By contrast, dualistic models explain fundamental and actual evil as an independent power, but cannot give full expression to the unity of the world. They have to solve the problem by the radical overcoming of evil, usually on a distant day of judgement' (pp. 299-300).

In section 10.12 Gerstenberger argues that 'our anthropology and ethics are strongly stamped by the models and of the Old Testament and today need to be changed or developed. We can no longer simply…blindly accept the pattern valid in Old Testament antiquity… Our time calls rigorously and with despair of those who fear for their survival for new criteria of being and action' (p. 300).

In particular Gerstenberger attacks the patriarchal and non-individual attitudes present in the Old Testament. Today single existence is more and

more the norm and the ancient impossibility of individual life outside of the family is no longer valid. 'The biblical texts cannot give us precise models for our social formation. But they can be striking challenges, and from a distance show us possibilities of shaping life together which we can then reflect on and work on under our changed conditions' (p. 302).

In section 10.13 Gerstenberger argues that 'time, history and the eschaton are treated in a highly differentiated and contradictory way in the Hebrew scriptures' (p. 302). Earlier exegesis tended to see the Old Testament conception of history as unilinear, in difference to the Greek cyclic understanding. Yet Gerstenberger points out that the Old Testament also has a cyclic understanding of time, expressed in the festal calendar. With special reference to the books of Zephaniah (3.8) and Zechariah (14.3, 8-9), Gerstenberger argues that there is also an eschatological and apocalyptic understanding of history.

By contrast, 'today the expectations of the end time come from quite different contexts and angles, and the big question is whether we have the right…to rely on the intervention of Yahweh, who in sovereign manner brings history to an end and gives a new form to the world… The fact that humankind today is bundled together for better or worse…should make us sceptical about an eschatology and apocalyptic concentrated on God' (p. 304). Today the ending of the world is better understood in the form of 'a creeping death for the ecosystem of planet earth'.

In section 10.14 Gerstenberger argues that (p. 304) 'the images of God corresponding to our time have in part still to be found'. The problem is that 'our religious imagination is impoverished; it has constantly fixated itself only on what is there in the Bible and has regarded these images as the only possible metaphors… [This] learned insistence on the remote revelations of God has stunted our capacity to perceive the God who is present' (p. 304).

In particular, he attacks the monarchic understanding of God, which does not fit our democratic understanding of highest leadership. 'God is not therefore the king of all kings but perhaps the president or presidential adviser.'

Also the gender assumptions of God as male are problematic. Gerstenberger points out as 'my view' that 'on the personal level, our God today remains a God who can be addressed personally. How can we imagine he/she/it in a direct relationship in other than personal terms?' (pp. 304-305).

If imagining God as 'father' is a problem, why not call him 'friend'? The point is that 'God is not—or is not constantly—the transcendent, majestic, wholly other, who rules and commands from far above the world' (p. 305). Through Jesus Christ God is also 'the one who has compassion, who is immersed in time and the human world, who collaborates both actively and passively… [W]e human beings have a share in God's activity; we are above all collectively responsible for the fate of the world.'

In the final section, 10.15, Gerstenberger presents this 'God for all', focussing on a double aspect: 'All in all, in the old canonical scriptures God played the role of the supreme ruler and judge of the world, who intervened in events along human lines and directed them as he wanted. Alongside and below this a personal God acted as the protector of his particular clientele… supreme ruler [and] personal God' (p. 305).

As for our time, God 'has been involved far more in the business of the world and is inseparably bound up with the human creative forces. That has led to a completely new perspective on an appropriate and "correct" theology'.

Gerstenberger's final argument (p. 306) is that our views of God are 'not in themselves tremendously important. What is decisively important is the dynamic developed by faith, the way it has an effect on world history. A belief in God which was "contemporary" would have to be oriented on Christian and human goals, on justice, peace and the preservation of creation' (cf. Isa. 45.18).

In Chapter 10 Gerstenberger draws his own conclusions from what he has argued in the previous chapters. More than that, he points out what he sees as the theological effects or corollaries of it for our time and our society. These corollaries are of sociological, ethical, political and theological character. We meet a Western theologian, a historian of religion, educated in a German theological tradition, who has, through his visits to Latin America (Brazil), developed a postcolonial, political and ethical attitude, influenced by liberation theology and feminist theology, with one foot in traditional liberal theology and the other foot in postmodernism. Such basic positions will, almost by necessity, imply that when he writes an Old Testament *Theology*, it will be a different book from traditional *Theologies*.[6]

6. *A Synthesis of the Critics*

Whereas Kvanvig has been met with few responses and Brueggemann has been met with a long series of responses, some of which have been extensive and comprehensive, Gerstenberger has received a reasonable amount of scholarly attention in journals and elsewhere.

Attitudes to Gerstenberger's *Theologies* have been diverse—as could be expected. A range of opinions is detectable in the responses. Some of the

6. I will not survey Gerstenberger's Appendix, 'God in Our Time', since it does not treat significantly new aspects. Neverthless, the Appendix is helpful as a distillation of his main ideas (which actually makes it a good introduction to Gerstenberger's work). The Appendix is not part of the book proper, but is actually a kind of 'encore' to his book. As already mentioned, the Appendix consists of Gerstenberger's farewell lecture as professor in Marburg.

most important comments can be synthesized as follows. Here the responses are presented thematically. My particular synthesis, of course, is open for discussion, as are the categories employed to arrange the responses. There are no watertight divides between them, but hopefully they are adequate enough for the heuristic purposes intended.

a. *Sociological Methodology*

Gerstenberger's sociological methodology is commented upon by several reviewers.[7]

Sociology and social-scientific models in biblical interpretation have been usual for some time. For example, Philip F. Esler has characterized the sociologically oriented study of the Bible as a thirty-year-old 'thriving movement' (2005: 3), and refers to two conferences on 'Old Testament Interpretation and the Social Sciences' (p. xiii) at St Andrews, Scotland, in 1994 and 2004, with the papers from the latter conference gathered together in Esler's 2005 edited volume.

In general, Esler presents social-scientific interpretation of the Bible as 'a heuristic process. It fires the social-scientific imagination to ask new questions of data, to which only the data can provide the answers' (p. 3). Esler points out that social-scientific models should be evaluated according to whether they are helpful or not (p. 4). When Esler and others accept social-scientific models in biblical interpretation, it is because they 'accept the existence of certain regularities in social life' (p. 4). Esler presents Max Weber as a pioneer in general social-scientific studies and Bruce J. Malina as a pioneer in adapting social sciences to New Testament interpretation (pp. 8-9), before discussing some basic and principal problems in relation to Wayne Meeks and Susan Garrett, including the question of 'social law'. Esler goes on to conclude that, 'To my knowledge, no biblical critic using social-scientific models appeals to or believes in "social laws"', and that he himself has 'been denying that there were "social laws" since my first academic publication, which heavily utilized social-scientific models, in 1987' (p. 14). Esler's acclaimed case is 'for the intellectual integrity and value of seeking to interpret the Old Testament using models drawn from the social sciences' (p. 15).

In a second chapter in Esler's volume, Esler himself and Anselm C. Hagedorn present an essay titled 'Social-Scientific Analysis of the Old Testament: A Brief History and Overview'. In this study, the authors document how the sciences of anthropology and sociology have influenced the interpretation of Israel's origin, ritual, politics, prophecy and law.

7. For references, see the Bibliography. Since these references are mostly to short reviews, page numbers are generally omitted here.

Neither Esler, nor any other of the contributors to Esler's volume, deal with or mention Gerstenberger's *Theology*; Gerstenberger is absent from his index of authors, as well as from his bibliography. Why isn't it at least mentioned in Esler's and Hagedorn's 'Brief History and Overview'? Indeed, Esler's book was published in 2006, but contains papers from a 2004 conference, which seems sufficient time for scholars to have engaged with Gerstenberger's work (which was first published in 2001 [German] and 2002 [English]). It is remarkable that a *Theology* so much based on social-scientific premises is not at all mentioned. It is inconceivable that Gerstenberger's book was unknown to the readers at the 2004 conference. Is it consciously ignored by Esler and Hagedorn? It is not mentioned by Robert B. Coote either in his essay on 'Tribalism' in the same book—this in spite of what Gerstenberger writes in his *Theology* on tribalism.

I would argue that Gerstenberger's book is an important contribution in that it tries to relate Old Testament theology to social sciences. To my knowledge, nobody has tried such an experiment to that extent before. It could be called époque-making. Whether it is a successful attempt is another question.

Yet Gerstenberger has been criticized for how he deals with the theology of the Old Testament. In particular, he has been criticized for letting sociology override theology.

Samuel D. Giere (2002) hears what he calls 'a prophetic tone' in Gerstenberger's book. He observes that 'the foundation for this book is the social-scientific study of the ancient world' and that 'sociocultural context is a, if not the primary, factor for shaping religious belief and practice'. In his opinion Gerstenberger's 'focus on the contextuality of the Old Testament witness is where he has the most to offer. Reading the diversity and sociocultural embeddedness of the Old Testament witness encourages contemporary theologians to dialogically engage and correct, among other things the intrinsic patriarchy in the text'. This is an almost unrestrained positive critique of Gerstenberger's use of social-scientific study as a basis for writing an Old Testament *Theology*.

James West (2006) argues that Gerstenberger's sociological methodology has its weaknesses, noting that 'perhaps classic historical criticism has seen its day', but argues that Gerstenberger 'does a fine job', even though he is not oblivious to the fact that sociological method 'has its weakness'.

Patrick D. Miller (2002) sees the best definition of Gerstenberger's method in his claim 'I am investigating in particular the specific constructions of notions of God and ethical conceptions in the different forms of community which becomes visible in the Old Testament'. Miller is evidently critical when Gerstenberger says that in working out the theologies of the Old Testament, one does not start from the revealed word of God but from

'the social conditions in which the belief in God was lived out and formulated'. As for Gerstenberger's five main loci, Miller objects against his assumption 'that the spheres and forms of religion he analyzes are separate and distinct, not interacting'. Generally, Gerstenberger is accused of not documenting his sociological claims; he 'makes all sorts of unsupportable value judgements throughout the book: for example, the claim that "if at all, pre-exilic Israel knew belief in Yahweh only at the state level". This statement flies in the face not only of the biblical data…but also contradicts frequent references to Yahweh in pre-exilic inscriptions…'

Michael S. Moore (2002) has profound objections to the social-scientific methodology of Gerstenberger's *Theology*. He mentions both at the beginning and the end of his review how 'sociology persistently trumps theology. So focused is it on the sociological approach, in fact, it often leaves the impression that the social sciences alone are sufficient for conceptualizing and bringing to life Old Testament's pulsating theological core'. In particular, Moore brings to the fore Gerstenberger's claim (p. 163): 'Social structures are extraordinarily important for religion, whether this is lived out or reflected on. Consciously or unconsciously, faith relates to the institutions, roles, and balances of power in society and is also shaped by them'. Moore does not deny that such a thesis 'is at one level true', but adds that 'one also needs to critique the presuppositions upon which the social sciences are based. Yet such a critique is lacking in his book'.

Waldemar Janzen (2003) points out Gerstenberger's 'social-religious panorama, together with repeated warnings against any form of abidingly authoritative revelation' and claims that this 'doctrine, or canon, creates the impression that, in G.'s view, societal need and aspirations are the source of all religion/theology'. Janzen questions Gerstenberger's 'highly hypothetical historical reconstruction and employing very confident sociological observations and theories from all times and regions'. Nevertheless, he argues that 'from my perspective, the main strength of G.'s work, besides a wealth of insightful details, are its consistent attention to Old Testament ethics and its passionate search for Old Testament's contemporary relevance. Its major problem is that G. confidently awards to *sociological* interpretive constructs the capability of providing an integrative coherence of the ancient and modern theologies, whereas he categorically disqualifies *theological* constructs in that task. Is sociology really an adequate instrument for understanding and shaping theology?—This is a stimulating but troubling book' (p. 608, Janzen's italics).

The profiling of Gerstenberger as sociologist and theologian is valid and serious. He is a theologian by training, doing theology on the basis of the Hebrew Bible, but using social-scientific methodology. Does he balance theology and sociology duly? His critics tend to answer to the negative, or at

least some question whether sociology is 'really an adequate instrument for understanding and making theology' (p. 608). On the one hand, Janzen seems to appreciate that Gerstenberger 'offers a comprehensive sociological and theological perspective on the Old Testament'. At the same time, Janzen regrets that 'a strong pragmatism pervades the work', and that Gerstenberger uses the Hebrew Bible merely as a dialogue partner. Janzen is obviously not satisfied with how Gerstenberger uses the sociological methods. Here the theological waves break on deep water.

b. *Attitude to the Bible*

Again, it should be noted that Gerstenberger is a theologian by training. As a theologian he is a trained Bible scholar. But what actually is his attitude to the Bible, as read out of his *Theology*? In particular, Gerstenberger's approach to the Hebrew Bible as a dialogue partner, on equal footing with its readers(?), has been debated widely.

Michael S. Moore (2002) argues against Gerstenberger when the latter claims that the biblical reports of Exodus are 'exaggerated by faith' and one 'virtually unusable for reconstructing the history of Israel' (Gerstenberger, p. 112). Gerstenberger argues that 'from a historical perspective all this is extremely improbable. Israel cannot have formed itself in Egypt, nor travelled through the wilderness to Palestine…' Moore calls this 'modernist scepticism'. In addition, Patrick D. Miller (2002) argues that Gerstenberger's *Theologies* 'are not tied to written documents, much less to the Old Testament texts, though he does explore the Old Testament writings and draws upon them significantly', in addition to a number of other sources.

Waldemar Janzen (2003) seems to be fascinated by Gerstenberger's dialogue with the Old Testament, especially as it emerges in Chapter 10. For Janzen, Gerstenberger's approach is 'evocative, corrective, and even guiding value'. In general, Janzen points out how Gerstenberger 'addresses hermeneutical questions throughout. Indeed, he has a passion for dialogue with the Old Testament, which should transpire between our family religion, for example, and analogous intimate groupings today.' Janzen finds this dialogue throughout Gerstenberger's book, but mentions Chapters 1 and 2 and especially Chapter 10, and refers in particular to how the Hebrew Bible is supposed to dialogue with our time.

Terje Stordalen (2003) argues that Gerstenberger gives a better reason for why it is impossible to summarize the Old Testament as a coherent whole than Brueggemann does, and sees in Gerstenberger's argument a combination of a postmodern understanding of the situation and the task of Old Testament theology with a social-historical analysis of it. 'The road to knowledge of God is a wavering from reality to the biblical text and back to reality, and every participant has the right and the obligation to stand

morally and ethically responsible for his own understanding. In that context a dialogical reading of the Bible and the plurality of the Old Testament is not a problem, it is a resource' (p. 13, my translation from the Norwegian).

Samuel D. Giere (2002) finds dialogue to be Gerstenberger's goal with his *Theologies*, citing Gerstenberger himself: 'it is our task to try to engage in constant, corrective dialog with the old witnesses; we must look for the new form and formulation of faith which is valid today, appropriate to present conclusions and human groupings, and "right" for them' (Gerstenberger, p. 279). The key word in this citation is 'dialogue', reading the Old Testament as a dialogue partner, and Gerstenberger's attention to 'them', that is, people of our time. Giere argues that Gerstenberger's 'focus on the conceptuality of the Old Testament witness is where he has most to offer… [as it] encourages contemporary theologians to dialogically engage and correct, among other things, the intrinsic patriarchy of the text'.

For a theologian to be written off as not writing a biblical or Old Testament *Theology* on the basis of biblical texts, as Patrick D. Miller indicates, is a serious challenge. When writing an Old Testament *Theology* it is of basic importance to have a clarified opinion about the role of the Bible and the Old Testament.

An Old Testament *Theology* should by definition articulate the theology found in the Old Testament, whether seen as a unified or a plural theology. Since writing an Old Testament *Theology* should be a historical task, presenting a historical theology as it proceeds from the Old Testament, the biblical theologian should utilize all available historical-critical methods. Yet the theologian should be conscious of being a theologian, not an archaeologist, sociologist, historian, literary scholar and so on, even if such methods are used. Using the Hebrew Bible as a dialogue partner is of course theologically legal and necessary. The question is how it is used as a dialogue partner. The Hebrew Bible contains messages, ones that are relevant to people of our time, and we should listen to them. At the same time, we have questions to ask the Hebrew Bible and its messages to us. But is Old Testament theology normative or is it just a historical witness, one which we can describe? Are the Old Testament and modern humans conversation partners on equal footing? When talking about dialogue, such questions have to be clarified. Here Gerstenberger has been charged with being relativistic, in putting Old Testament theology on the same plane as any other opinion.

c. *Unity and Diversity*

On the question of the unity of Old Testament theology, opinions differ among Gerstenberger's critics. This is an old question. Earlier scholarship searched for a formula for the unity of the Old Testament and its theology

(cf. Smend 2002). The one who most notably broke down this endeavour was Gerhard von Rad, with his *Theology*. Today the question of a centre or *Mitte* in the Old Testament and its theology is dead. But 'killing' the question of a centre is not necessarily 'killing' the question of a unity in Old Testament theology; it could be possible to imagine a basic unity in Old Testament theology, even if a particular centre or a single basic formula is not identifiable. To my knowledge Gerstenberger is the first one who explicitly uses the plural, *Theologies in the Old Testament*. This has of course been noticed by his critics, and opinions have differed.

Roland E. Murphy (2002) agrees with Gerstenberger on the plurality question, claiming that the Old Testament has 'no biblical theology as a unified corpus', and that 'the title expresses what is now the common view, that there is no biblical theology as a unified corpus, but there are biblical theologies that depend on the construal of the theologians, such as von Rad and others'.

Samuel D. Giere (2002) notices that the title of Gerstenberger's book signals that he 'takes a decidedly different approach to theology in the Old Testament', as 'his theological motivation is not to synthesize the Old Testament witness into theological themes or a single theology but rather to highlight the diversity of theological systems that are at play within the Old Testament. It is in the light of this diversity that he reads the Old Testament theologically for the present.' Gerstenberger nevertheless finds as a common denominator 'that the whole world is in need of redemption'. Everything else is up for debate, even the *Shema'* in Deut. 6.4, 'because of the socio-cultural gap between the Old Testament worlds and today'.

Also James West (2006) points out that the plural, *Theologies*, in Gerstenberger's title is the key to understand his ideas and finds the apex in his book in Chapter 9 ('Polytheism, Syncretism and the One God'), which to him is 'the very core of the book and the goal toward which it ends.

Patrick D. Miller (2002) notices on the '*Theologies*' question: 'What is less obvious from his title but equally important in his work is that those theologies are not tied to written documents, much less to the Old Testament texts, though he does explore the Old Testament's writings and draws upon them significantly'. 'In working out the theologies of the Old Testament, one does not start from the revealed word of God but from the "social conditions in which belief in God was lived out and formulated"'—Miller here citing Gerstenberger, whom he opposes.

Even though opinions differ on the unity-plurality question, it is mainly a question of nuances. Not every *Theology* written in the last decades has been equally explicit on the matter, but implicitly they all reveal that, in the words of Murphy, plurality of the Old Testament theology 'is now [the] common view'. There is no particular centre in the Old Testament, and there is no

particular or definable theological unity. Miller does not criticize the idea of 'theologies', but rather how Gerstenberger builds up and bases his theology—namely, 'not tied to written documents'. In Miller's opinion, this is seriously off-target.

d. *History of Religion or Theology*

The relation between the religion of the Old Testament and its theology is an old question, as we have seen. The old *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* focused on the religion of the Old Testament and ancient Israel. Later on, focus was split on, respectively, religion and theology, with the main emphasis on theology, until Rainer Albertz (1992) brought new attention to Old Testament religion. Religion is a central concept in Gerstenberger's book, as is often remarked on.

Waldemar Janzen (2002) comments on what he calls one of Gerstenberger's 'disclaimers', namely, that 'The Feuerbachian view of religion is justified but completely one-sided'. Janzen complains that Gerstenberger 'struggles to uphold some religious reality that transcends mere human construction', referring to his 'emphatic campaign against traditional understanding of transcendence'.

Patrick D. Miller (2002) claims that Gerstenberger's book 'is less a theology of the Old Testament than a history of religion, with a strong interest in that religion's theological dimensions', and that 'the spheres and forms of religion he analyzes are separate and distinct, not interacting'.

Roland E. Murphy (2002) commends Gerstenberger for organizing his book well. Yet Murphy asks whether there is enough pertinent material in the Bible to document the five stages he describes. Nevertheless, Murphy is impressed, and claims that 'one can only admire the clever and imaginative treatment of the biblical texts from which G. teases out real living conditions'. Murphy argues that 'a reconstruction of the religious understanding reflected in families is difficult to achieve', since 'no one in the family, even the patriarch, articulates a "theology"'. Yet Murphy concedes that 'it is possible to approach this problem in an oblique manner' from the vantage point of the day-to-day needs.

Again, Miller takes up an important question: Is Gerstenberger's *Theologies* really 'theology'? No other critic has raised that question so directly as Miller. As will be claimed later in my conclusion, I think Miller hits the target; Gerstenberger's book should rather have had another title.

e. *Ethics*

The ethics of the Old Testament has been much debated in recent decades. What kind of ethics does the Old Testament reveal? How and where is it revealed? Focus on Old Testament ethics can be different, either descriptive

or prescriptive. A descriptive presentation of the ethics asks what the sources say and possibly try to systematize it. A prescriptive presentation is more focused on what the sources have to say for our present lives. This is the approach Gerstenberger has to Old Testament ethics. The critics are generally positive toward Gerstenberger's approach to Old Testament ethics, even though few comment in particular on it. No comment might be taken as an expression of no serious objection.

Michael S. Moore (2002) commends Gerstenberger for his ethical engagement and his objections to 'the ham-handed way many theologians and politicians deal with international problems of violence and terrorism', whereas Waldemar Janzen (2002) claims that the 'consistent attention to Old Testament ethics and…passionate search for the Old Testament's contemporary relevance' is a main strength with his book.

Janzen's comment is appropriate. Gerstenberger is generally an ethically very conscientious Old Testament scholar, at least as experienced from his *Theology*. The ethical incitement is evoked from both the Old Testament texts and his background from Latin America, Brazil in particular. His book is to a great extent a compilation of his lectures in Brazil (p. ix). Gerstenberger's experiences have clearly influenced him in the direction of liberation theology and feminist theology, with often explicit ethical criticism of Western culture and church life. Within these areas we also notice some of the postmodern aspects Stordalen in particular has identified.

f. *Revelation*

Should Old Testament theology be based on or seen as revelation? On such a question we are at a theological crossroads.[8] Critical scholarship can say something about what the Bible is, how it is and what it says—on equal footing with how scholarship can treat, for example, Augustine's *Confessiones*. Critical scholarship works historically, without any significant differences between the handling of the Bible or how the church historian treats with *Confessiones*. In *Confessiones* we read what Augustine wrote, in its literary and historical context. In the Bible we read what its different authors or recorders of tradition wrote, in their literary and historical contexts. If critical scholarship asks about revelation (are the texts revelation?), it either asks historically (are the texts held to be revelation?) or it moves beyond its historical competence and asks as a believer (are the texts really revelation?). As God himself and his revelation belong to the transcendent sphere, he is not up for scholarly investigation, nor is revelation *per se*. Biblical scholarship should be conscious of being a historical discipline and

8. Cf. Perdue's statement that 'This fundamental question resides behind all methodologies and theological constructions' (1994: 301).

be aware of the difference between immanence and transcendence. This problematics has been raised in relation to Gerstenberger's *Theologies*.

Michael D. Moore (2002) objects against Gerstenberger's definition of divine revelation, which he finds to be just a redefinition in naturalistic categories.[9] 'Gerstenberger does not simply define the concept of divine revelation—he redefines it in naturalistic categories. In particular, Moore refers to how, for Gerstenberger, revelation has to do with biblical writers' attempts to present their theology and ethics as old, well tried and objective, not as produced by themselves, but with the label 'revealed' (cf. Gerstenberger, p. 279). He also refers to Gerstenberger's dismissal of the exodus reports as 'exaggerated by faith' and 'virtually unusable for reconstructing the history of Israel' (Gerstenberger, p. 112), which he calls 'modernist scepticism'.

Patrick D. Miller (2002) argues, with a critical understatement, that Gerstenberger 'does not start from the revealed word of God but from the "social conditions in which belief in God was lived out and formulated"'. This criticism hits the liberal aspects of Gerstenberger's *Theology*, but also his postmodernism. To Miller, the core of Gerstenberger's *Theologies* is his claim that 'I am investigating in particular the specific constructions of notions of God and ethical conceptions in the different forms of community which become visible in the Old Testament' (without page reference).

Should a *Theology* be a historical presentation or a devotional book? Traditionally, *Theologies* are historical works. No scholar writes a *Theology* of the Old or the New Testament as devotional literature. Whether such a *Theology* functions devotionally depends on how the reader reads it. I would claim that a *Theology*, as well as an exegetical presentation, could be read devotionally. Then the reader reads more out of the text than the writer intended to say. This is not an unusual way of reading a text. Whether a text conveys a 'revealed' message is a matter of faith, not scholarship.

g. *Modernism and Postmodernism*

Gerstenberger's book was published in a postmodern period, or at least in a period on which postmodernism has left its mark. Gerstenberger himself is not evidently conscious of this problematics; at least he says nothing about it and does not discuss any influence from postmodernism or his own relation to it.

Terje Stordalen (2003) is the one who has most explicitly noticed influence from postmodernism. Nonetheless, other scholars have seen hints of postmodern influence in Gerstenberger's *Theologies*. Stordalen sees this profile especially in how Gerstenberger makes use of sociological, social

9. Cf. Waldemar Janzen, who charges Gerstenberger with espousing a theology of immanence.

anthropological and religious models, and how he emphasizes the complexities of the sources, the limitations of scholarship and the need for interdisciplinary research.

As for the question of modernism and postmodernism, Michael S. Moore (2002) argues that in Gerstenberger's *Theologies* the story of the exodus is 'exaggerated by faith' and 'virtually unusable for reconstructing the history of Israel' and its story is 'extremely improbable' (cf. Gerstenberger, p. 112). Moore calls this 'modernist scepticism'. Gerstenberger's theological liberalism is not actually profiled by any of his reviewers or critics. Waldemar Janzen claims generally that 'a strong pragmatism pervades' in Gerstenberger's book.

As for the minimalism–maximalism debate, Samuel S. Moore comments that Gerstenberger is no minimalist, and that he is not on the side of the minimalist scholars in Copenhagen or Sheffield.

As mentioned elsewhere in this book, postmodernism is an elusive concept, hard to define and difficult to grasp. Therefore, what I and other would call 'postmodern' would possibly not be called 'postmodern' by other scholars, or the other way around. Even if just a few reviewers have commented on Gerstenberger's postmodernism, it is there in his *Theology*, often as a mere subtle undercurrent, but sometimes very present, not least in Chapter 10, 'Effects and Controversies', as commented on previously.

h. *General*

As for general characterizations of Gerstenberger's *Theology*, opinions differ.

Ralph W. Klein (2003) is the only one who comments on Gerstenberger's attention to feminist theology, when he claims that the latter has been a 'close observer of the role (or lack of it) of woman in the Bible'. Samuel D. Giere (2002) calls his book 'prophetic'(!), not least in how it provokes the churches. James West (2006) is the one who is most positive to Gerstenberger's *Theologies*: 'I recommend it heartily'. Waldemar Janzen (2003) concludes his review by calling the book 'stimulating but troubling'. Terje Stordalen (2003) claims that Gerstenberger's *Theologies* 'falls sadly short', specifying: 'It has no vision of the fact that the Old Testament was actually gathered, and that it has functioned as a religions and social foundation for Judaism and Christianity—in spite of its pluralism' (p. 13, my translation).

Patrick D. Miller (2004) opens his review by claiming that Gerstenberger is 'one of our best Old Testament scholars, with a passion for justice and freedom and a deep knowledge of the Scriptures. His work is always insightful and informative.' Nevertheless, whether his *Theologies* 'really gives a new and clearer picture of theologies of the Old Testament…is less certain' to Miller. 'Indeed, there are sections in the book where he simply

lets go of his task to engage in discussions of war, violence, and the oppression of women—matters having no connection to what he is saying about Israelite religion or Old Testament theology'.

Michael D. Moore (2002–2003) argues in general that Gerstenberger is more idiosyncratic than persuasive, and 'embarrassingly parochial' in his own logic. Gerstenberger is charged with suffering from 'a lack of depth and focus', keeping 'dialogue with other viewpoints to a minimum', ignoring 'much recent work on the sociology of Israel'.

In the end, Samuel D. Giere (2002) asks about the book's sustainability (he is the only one to ask such a question), his answer being that 'time and further critical examination will tell what the affect of his contextual theology of the Old Testament will be on academia and church'.

7. *Summary*

Erhard Gerstenberger can stand as a representative of theologians who have rediscovered the large spectrum of theologies within the Bible (cf. Jeanrond 1996: 234). As already pointed out, for understanding Gerstenberger's conception of Old Testament theology, the best angle to see him from is Chapter 3, 'A Sketch of The Social History of Israel', where he presents his social-historical levels in the development of the religious history of Israel, as well as Chapter 10, 'Effects and Controversies', and his Appendix, 'God in Our Time', which outlines Gerstenberger's theological thinking throughout his *Theologies*. This Appendix, his Farewell Lecture in the University at Marburg, 23 July 1997, is *de facto* a résumé of his theology as presented in his *Theologies*.

On the whole, Gerstenberger works as a historian of religion. His book is a history of the Israelite religion more than a theology in the traditional meaning of that term. As this religion was so manifold, Gerstenberger talks in plural about Old Testament *Theologies*. This plural refers both to its development from family and clan to village and small town society and further through monarchic and exilic and post-exilic times, and the pluralism that dominated each of these periods.

As for the problems surrounding postmodernism and historiography, Gerstenberger takes a rather positivist attitude on whether history is of any interest and whether it is at all possible to reconstruct a 'history' historiographically.[10] In general he seems to have a rather traditional conception of the history of Israel, as can be seen when he describes it from patriarchal times down to post-exilic times. Gerstenberger does not identify the

10. Gerstenberger has actually written a history of Israel in Persian time, *Israel in der Perserzeit, 5. und 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (2005).

patriarchs (and perhaps Moses) as historical individuals, though he does seem to think that David and Solomon were historical persons. Gerstenberger does not subscribe to 'minimalist' positions on these matters and does not engage in historical deconstruction in a postmodern way. Yet, as Stordalen has most clearly pointed out (p. 13), in his short but well-targeted review, a postmodern way of thinking lies at the basis of his *Theology*.

When we read Chapters 9, 10 and the Appendix, we perceive that Gerstenberger's is not a typical voice from modernity, or at least that this is a voice with an evident postmodern tone. Gerstenberger is not satisfied with writing a presentation of Israel's history of religion or its theologies, he goes further to investigate its consequences for modern humans, in particular its consequences for the Christian church. Its consequences for Judaism are of lesser importance to Gerstenberger as a Christian theologian—his thought is probably along the lines of 'let me speak for the church and the Jews speak for themselves'.

When reading these chapters, we perceive distinct traces of traditional liberal theology. This is remarkable, since liberal theology was a legitimate child of Enlightenment and modernity. However, Gerstenberger is not a typical representative of Enlightenment or modernity. There is a tension within Gerstenberger's way of thinking; he is somehow also a 'good old' liberal theologian.

But more than liberal, Gerstenberger is an exponent of liberation theology, postcolonialist, anti-imperialist, and anti-hierarchical thinking, republicanism, and so on. He is a conscious political theologian, and his many years in a Latin American setting are evident. Gerstenberger offers a critical approach to Western attitudes and thinking, especially its imperialist attitudes.

Chapters 9, 10 and the Appendix mediate a wealth of ethical thinking, thinking of the kind not found in traditional presentations of Old Testament theology (except for Brueggemann). Here Gerstenberger takes steps demonstrably out of modernity and into postmodernity.

This vacillation between different thought aspects is typical of a postmodern way of thinking. Gerstenberger is not postmodern in methodology (postmodernism itself is, of course, not a methodology), but his way of thinking is somehow postmodern in orientation, as mirrored in his pluralist approach.

How does a book like this one function as a *Theology* of the Old Testament?

Methodologically, Gerstenberger's use of sociology and social anthropology is in principle valid. Yet it is precarious when used to write a *Theology* of the Old Testament. Sociology and social anthropology are modern scientific methods elaborated in modern times for a modern society.

When such methods are used to examine a society and texts going back three or four millennia, there is a vast historical and cultural gap to bridge. The methods used in such modern sciences are not quite adequate for such an investigation, since we do not have the data from the ancient societies that such methods are dependent upon.

When the author makes himself so dependent upon such modern sciences, and even seems willing to let them rule out biblical scholarship, as several reviewers have argued, then his credentials as a theologian are set in jeopardy. Can a theologian, as a theologian, let modern sciences such as sociology and social anthropology rule out theology and still claim to work as a theologian?

Completely consistent postmodernism ends up in relativism, questioning all kinds of absolutism. Gerstenberger veers toward such a position. On the one hand, he will not do away with the idea of something divine. Yet he is basically critical toward all kinds of absolutism. The Bible is no longer representing anything absolute in religious matters, and in section 10 of Chapter 10 (pp. 298-99) he argues that any human attempt to talk of God, the 'ground of being', the 'future of the world', 'the absolute claim on us' is 'suspicious', and that in our confession of the one God, 'we cannot in principle exclude any other religion'.

Gerstenberger titles his book *Theologies in the Old Testament*. It is not necessary to repeat here why he uses '*Theologies*' (in plural). Yet, compared to the content of his book, this designation is disputable. Gerstenberger does not discuss explicitly whether the title of his book should be '*Theology*' or '*Theologies*', except for claiming that the Old Testament is 'a collection of many testimonies of faith from around a thousand years of the history of Israel, [and that it] has no unitary theology, nor can it [have]' (p. 1). On the one hand, Gerstenberger works with sociological and social-anthropological methods; on the other hand, he works as a historian of religion. His attitude to the Hebrew Bible is to take it as a dialogue partner. Against this backdrop a more adequate title would have been, for example, *The Religious Growth of Ancient Israel*. This is also one of Patrick D. Miller's main arguments against his book: 'For one, the whole project is less a theology of the Old Testament than a history of Israel's religion, with a strong interest in that religion's theological dimension'.

But it could also be claimed that one of Gerstenberger's strengths is actually his crossovers from ancient Israel to modern times. He never gets lost in posterity and ancient times. In this way his book is an exciting read. Gerstenberger has important messages for modern theology, church, politics, ethics and so on, messages based on his theological thinking. He is never negligent or dull. The engaged lecturer is never far away. This postmodernist feature is in itself a valuable aspect of his book.

The problem, for me, is how Gerstenberger bases his postmodernism in a somewhat old-fashioned rationalist-liberal theological way of thinking. The result is that the Hebrew Bible and theology is relativized to being merely a dialogue partner, which is actually not more reliable than any philosophy. This raises questions about the status of theology, and should have been discussed more broadly in his book.

To conclude, when Gerstenberger calls his book a *Theology* (actually *Theologies*), it should be evaluated against that standard. As a textbook in Old Testament theology it is inadequate, both because it is more of a *Religion of Ancient Israel*, and because a series of Old Testament themes are inadequately treated or not discussed at all. The book is innovative, interesting, provocative and in many ways an important contribution, yet it is too much of a history of Israelite religion, or a social history or social anthropological history, and too less of an Old Testament *Theology*.

More will follow on Gerstenberger's *Theologies* in the final chapter when I compare Gerstenberger's work with those of Kvanvig and Brueggemann.

Chapter 5

THE FUTURE OF OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

1. *Introduction*

The intention of this chapter is, on the basis of the *Theologies* investigated in the preceding chapters and the responses to them, to line up some perspectives for future writing of Old Testament *Theology*.

Theological thinking has always been contemporary, coloured by its own time and culture. This is evident in the long as well as the short perspectives; we see remarkably different ways of theological thinking on the basis of the same biblical texts, not only when we compare writings from our own time with that of the primitive church or the Middle Ages, but also when we compare writings from, say, the 1960s and around the turn of the millennium, the era when the three *Theologies* investigated here appeared. The most remarkable feature of the theological thinking from the last decades is the influence of postmodernism, which has come under some attention in this book.[1]

Has a writing of Old Testament *Theology* any future? Given the wide array of approaches to the Old Testament, the lack of consensus as to how the Old Testament should be interpreted, with increasing pluralizing views of its origin, its content, its function and its message, asking about the future of Old Testament *Theology* is certainly apposite.

Nevertheless, my answer is, at the outset, very simple: in some way or another writing of Old Testament *Theology* will prevail and has a future, for the simple reason that the Old Testament texts are and will be forever among us, with their religious and theological content. There are words claimed to be said by God, words spoken in the name of God, stories about God, human ideas about God, and so on. In short, the Old Testament has a theology. As long as we have these texts, people will reflect on them and theologians will write theological texts about them, including *Theologies*—however formed or formulated. In this chapter I will elaborate on and nuance my—initially—simple claim.

1. Cf. the citation from R.W.L. Moberly in the 'Preface'.

2. *Modernism versus Postmodernism*

Common to most *Theologies* published until the end of the twentieth century has been their modernist, positivistic approach, where the goal has been to systematize the message of the Old Testament, condensed down to basic formulae[2] or around basic traditions.[3]

By the end of the twentieth century these modernist approaches have been challenged by more postmodern approaches, such as the *Theologies* of Kvanvig, Brueggemann and Gerstenberger. Postmodern approaches to the Old Testament are a natural corollary to the general postmodern way of thinking unfolding in secular society and gradually influencing theology in general. It had to come also in Old Testament studies.

Postmodernism should generally be perceived against the backdrop of modernism, which emanates already with the designation '*post*modernism'. Without 'modernism' there would have been no 'postmodernism', as far as the literary concept is concerned. Modernism has been the given paradigm since the Enlightenment. Thomas C. Oden identifies, simplistically, the epoch of modernity as the 200 years between the French Revolution in 1789 and the fall of Communism in 1989 (2001: 23). Now, this paradigm is under attack by the postmodern paradigm in different cultural areas. Whereas modernism can be described as the rule of rationality, postmodernism is a designation—hard to define—for a series of partly interconnected and new orientations within intellectual and cultural life in the latter part of the twentieth century, in particular within architecture, literature, philosophy, theology, visual art and music.

But far from taking over the scene in Old Testament theology, postmodernism has come under heavy attack from Old Testament theologians of the last decade.

James K. Mead (2007: 243) underlines that 'there is always the temptation for scholars of every era to set themselves over against the past'. In particular, he points out, 'this characteristic is applied especially by postmodern scholars to the modern era'. Yet 'the truth is that postmodernism sets itself just as strongly over against modernism as modernism did the pre-Enlightenment era', Mead comments, adding that 'a variety of forms of theological interpretation existed for millennia, long before the advent of the modern discipline of biblical theology, and these "premodern" scholars were often concerned with the same basic issues as their modern counterparts, namely questions about sources, the canon, and interpretive methods'. Mead does not deny that postmodern scholars 'have pointed out the genuine

2. Cf. the search for a 'Mitte des Alten Testaments'; see, e.g., Smend 2002.
3. Cf. von Rad's *Theology*.

weaknesses within modernism', but it should be admitted that 'they too have relied on principle of logic, reason, and argumentation common to scholarship throughout centuries'.

Leo Perdue (2005) has been 'especially critical of postmodernism' for two reasons, namely, its celebration of the 'senselessness' and its 'cavalier treatment of truth as something that is not objective'. As for the former argument, Perdue objects the notion that 'all meaning is construed by a person shaped by and living within a variety of contexts and issues forth from and captures his or her own self-interest'. As for the latter argument, Perdue rejects that truth should be something invented of a person 'operating out of self-interest'. If reason and truth are negated, then the moral question is, 'How do I assess the rightness or wrongness of a position?' 'Postmodernism seduces us into the black hole of nothingness. In its quest to reject authoritarianism, postmodernism, ironically, has opened wide the gate to this same evil. Postmodernism allows authoritarianism to enter and provide the basis on which to deprecate all human values and any human groups it so chooses' (p. 345).

James Barr is no milder in his criticism of postmodernism. We have already seen how Barr in his *Theology* (1999: Chapter 31) attacks Brueggemann's anti-Enlightenment attitude and postmodernism. He offers two separate chapters on 'Postmodernism' (Chapter 6) and 'Postmodernism and Theology' (Chapter 7) in his *History and Ideology in the Old Testament* (2000/2005). Barr summarizes his view of postmodernism as a whole with a citation from another distinguished Old Testament scholar, John Barton:

> As 'a theory' (sometimes, with staggering imperialism, just 'theory' with no article!) claiming to explain or expose culture, art, meaning, and truth, I find postmodernism absurd, rather despicable in its delight in debunking all serious beliefs, decadent and corrupt in its indifference to questions of truth;I do not believe in it for a moment. But as a game, a set of *jeux d'esprit*, a way of having fun with words, I find it diverting and entertaining. I enjoy the absurd and the surreal, and postmodernism supplies this in ample measure (Barton 1996: 235).

To this, Barr adds: 'I fully agree with this (especially with the first part of it)' (2005: 161).

It should also be noted that the last decade of the twentieth century saw several significant Old Testament *Theologies*, in addition those of Kvanvig, Brueggemann and Gerstenberger, of which the most important were those of Brevard S. Childs (1992), Rolf P. Knierim (1994), James Barr (1999) and Rolf Rendtorff (1999). These are *Theologies* that in no way follow a postmodern trail.

The paradigm of modernity is not supposed to disappear. The two paradigms, that of modernity and that of postmodernism, co-exist, and will

supposedly do so in the future. Presumably, postmodernism will be most influential in different areas of humanities, not so much in natural sciences. The two paradigms may not always co-exist peacefully, since it is not possible to hold humanities and natural sciences completely apart; they will frequently meet. All scientists are human beings, and even the most hardcore scientific question will easily have philosophical or even theological implications and bring the paradigms to meet—and in some cases with tensions.

Biblical scholarship belongs to humanities—even if we call it *theo*logy, because any theology is actually a human endeavour to formulate rational talk about God; it is always theology from below, because we as theologians and human beings are caught by human paradigms and preconditions of life. We may think along different paradigms, but they remain human, implying that they are always of a limited and insufficient character.

In the *Theologies* investigated here, we have seen different models of more or less postmodern Old Testament investigation. None of these authors have written historical interpretation off completely, not even Brueggemann, but traditional historical interpretation is markedly toned down by all of them, in particular by Kvanvig and Brueggemann. Positivistic modernist historical interpretation has not been particularly important to them, perhaps with the exception of Gerstenberger. The one who has been most heavily criticized for his indifference to 'what happened' is Brueggemann. But that could simply be because he is the most reviewed one of these scholars.

While this work has concentrated on the *Theologies* of Helge S. Kvanvig (Oslo), Walter Brueggemann (Decatur, GA, USA) and Erhard Gerstenberger (Marburg) and their postmodernism, that is not to claim that these three scholars are the only postmodernists in the field of Old Testament studies. Rather, it demonstrates that postmodernist thinking is a significant aspect with three prominent Old Testament professors in Scandinavia, Germany and the United States. In itself this is evidence that postmodernism has become a factor to reckon with in Old Testament scholarship.

Posterity will tell how influential these scholars and their theologies will actually be, yet something is already evident, just a decade after their *Theologies* were published. Brueggemann's book is the one that most deservedly could be called a 'landmark' among the more recent Old Testament *Theologies*, as this book has received most international attention. Brueggemann's book is more explicitly an Old Testament *Theology*, while Gerstenberger's book is more a history of religion with aspects of social anthropology. Kvanvig has written more of an epistemological, hermeneutic and linguistic introduction of Old Testament *Theology*. We will return to this deliberation at the end of this chapter.

3. *Is Dialogue between Modernist and Postmodernist Interpretation Possible?*

My cheerful contention is that there actually is a basis for dialogue between representatives of the modernist and postmodern paradigms. On the one hand, few postmodern Old Testament theologians will abandon modernist historiography completely. On the other hand, few positivistic modernist Old Testament scholars will reject any form of postmodern position completely.

In most postmodern Old Testament scholarship, as also with Kvanvig, Brueggemann and Gerstenberger, there is some degree of positivistic modernist thinking. Implicitly, they are themselves evidence of a dialogue between a modernist and a postmodern way of thinking. Even though they are critical of traditional historical-critical scholarship as insufficient, they will not completely abandon it. On the other hand, most modernist Old Testament scholars will agree that after historic-critic exegesis there might still be more to discover in the text, which can be illuminated through, for example, more postmodern-oriented approaches. One-sided historical-critical interpretation is not able to open all the 'rooms' of the text.

Burke Long (1996: 277) underlines, with reference to Ihab Hassan (1987: 88), that 'modernism and postmodernism are not separated by an Iron Curtain or a Chinese Wall, for history is a palimpsest, and culture is permeated to time past, time present, and time future'. Speaking of himself, Long explains that 'I stand implicated in such ambiguities, trying to honor both filiation and revolt. I live out of modernist pathways of study that have been very productive for biblical scholarship, and yet I am discovering added layers of scholarly endeavor that can be built on altered, but not entirely distinct, epistemological assumptions.'

James K. Mead (2007) is cited for his critical approach to postmodernism. Yet he is more nuanced than he appears (cf. pp. 101-108). Mead discusses the postmodern challenge to biblical theology in particular, pointing at questions of methodology as well as the readers' role as readers, claiming that 'it is still possible to make some general observations of its [postmodernism's] impact on modern biblical theology' (p. 105). Mead finds no examples of a thoroughgoing 'postmodern theology', but refers to Brueggemann and Adam as examples of biblical theologians who 'share many postmodern concerns'. As 'positive contributions' he refers to Adam, who does not deny the usefulness of modern methods of biblical criticism, but who challenges 'the modern *mind*-set' (Adam's italics) and its demand for absolute correctness in all relevant matters. He highlights as an ongoing major concern, in both academic and ecclesial perspectives, what becomes of the question of 'truth' if human knowing is bereft of all its foundation (p. 106), and what to do with the historical method in a postmodern setting.

We cannot completely escape balancing between subjectivity and objectivity, because the texts are complex and human beings are fallible. Mead's conclusion is, nevertheless, that 'if some aspects of postmodernism are compatible with some aspects of modern biblical theology, then we again see that the contrast is one of tension, not contradiction. Biblical theologians negotiate and adjudicate between different emphases and methods, seeking ways of coherence but also appreciating differences'.

Such argumentation opens up the possibility of some kind of common theological basis to work from.

Postmodernism and liberalism should not be confused; they are different—or even opposite—phenomena. Liberal theology had its hey-day over a century ago, while postmodernism belongs to more recent decades, a century later than liberal theology. Liberal theology was a child of the Enlightenment and modernity, while postmodernism is a reaction to modernity. However, I think we can see a kind of combination and side-by-side existence of these ways of thinking with Gerstenberger, as argued in Chapter 4.

Traditional conservative theology is basically modernist in its approach. However, the tension between modernist and postmodern interpretation is not necessarily a variable in the traditional conservative–liberal tension, since traditional liberal theology was also modernist in its approach. Yet such positions are not that important any more, since conservatives have discovered that critical positions are not always against them and that they can actually be valid. Furthermore, 'liberal' and even postmodern scholars do not always straightforwardly reject what more conservative oriented scholars defend. The former confrontation between conservatives and critical scholarship has softened considerably.

Scholars of conservative or evangelical tradition do usually come from conservative or evangelical churches. These scholars are used to homiletic treatments of biblical texts and themes, and are possibly active preachers themselves—as is the case, in particular, with Walter Brueggemann. Homiletic and postmodern interpretation of biblical texts can often have features in common, as preachers do not always keep strictly to historical-critical exegesis. A good preacher knows that scholarly historical-critical exegesis does not always play all the tunes in a text. Homiletics will often look for perspectives in a text in the same way as postmodern interpreters would tend to. Of course, we should be careful not to take too much value out of this 'bank'. Conservatives and evangelicals will probably always tend to have a basically more positive attitude toward biblical texts as historical sources than traditional postmoderns and liberals do. But we should not overlook the similarities between them.

Former tensions have been lessened, and there is more of an 'atmosphere of dialogue' or mutual respect—which is good for biblical scholarship. Leo

Perdue (2005) is right that 'it is only through dialogue that a new, changing future of Old Testament theology will emerge' (p. 341). Real dialogue presupposes mutual understanding between the dialogue partners. 'And it is through the many entrances into the various worlds of the Bible, through conversation with other experiences of the biblical stories, and through dialogues with cultures past and present that the believer's faith is constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed', Perdue continues (p. 344).

We should not argue generally that a modernist way of writing Old Testament *Theology* is better or more correct than a postmodernist way of doing it, except that a consistent postmodernist way of thinking has an inherent relativistic and even deconstructive aspect with it that easily conflicts with the Old Testament claim of one sovereign God, Yahweh. That is not to say that a modernist way of writing Old Testament *Theology* is without conflicts, for example, on its zeal in relation toward systematizing. Is it really possible to systematize the Old Testament, or to reduce Old Testament theology to a formula? Scholars have mainly given up attempts to formulate a '*Mitte des Alten Testaments*'.[4] Nevertheless, Leo Perdue (2005) is right in claiming that 'conceptualization of symbols, metaphors, and themes in the Old Testament should…take place. This is a necessary step in order to do systematic theology in the contemporary period, but it is also necessary for biblical theologians, if indeed they want to move beyond the enormous varieties and nuances of literally thousands of texts and distil them into major understandings. Only then can these conceptions be scrutinized critically and ultimately used in constructive theological work in the present' (pp. 344-45).

In conclusion, we should not be too pessimistic as to whether there might one day be a shared common platform for postmodern and modernist scholarship.

4. *The Problem of History*

Part and parcel of this problem is another important question: Can the paradigms of modernity and postmodernism be approximated—or even combined? At the least, they can work hand-in-hand in some theological areas. Yet there is an inherent tension between these paradigms, and particularly with regard to the concept of history.

In modernity history and historiography is an important matter. Positivistic historical research will, *ad fontes*, find the facts and uncover relations. In other words, it will understand, systematize and write history, and Old Testament theology is perceived as a historical matter. On the other

4. Cf. n. 2.

hand, postmodernism is basically sceptical of historiography: What is 'history' except construction? Postmodernism is more prone to deconstructing history.

But even after deconstructing the constructions, also postmodernism is left with something. Completely nihilistic postmodernism is rare. Will anyone deny that there is a 'past', that something 'happened', that something 'exists'? Can anyone with any sense deconstruct or in any other postmodern way explain away space and time, our philosophical bedrock? Should we from this bedrock write Old Testament *Theologies* on the basis of Descartes' epistemology, or is there another basis besides and independent of him? Modernity builds on the basis of the Cartesian subjectivist formula *cogito, ergo sum*, while postmodernism looks for other bases—not yet formulated in any Latin *mantra*.

It is possibly not important to die-hard postmodern interpreters, but our knowledge of ancient history is as limited as our knowledge of the ancient languages. New archaeological finds of artefacts and texts continually cause us to rewrite history. Actually, we possibly know more about ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian history and culture than the history and culture of the central geographic area of the Hebrew Bible, that is, Israel and Judah—in spite of the content of the Bible—because we do not have many ancient extra-biblical monumental texts from this part of the Middle East, the Levant. This should cause any interpreter of the Hebrew Bible to be humble and cautious as to the possibility of adequate historical interpretation of the material available.

Historiography is a complicated matter, and seems to become more and more complicated. This is perhaps a paradox. On the one hand, we get more and more historical documents, also from ancient times, and, at least as modernist positivist scholars will say, we develop better and better methods for analyzing what we find. But this implies that we currently have to revise and rewrite history, and also the history of the Old Testament period. Some of a more 'minimalist' orientation will go very far in their postmodern deconstruction of this history. Others will not go as far as the minimalists do, but the history of ancient Israel is a complex matter, especially in early or pre-monarchical times.[5] A comparison between, for example, J. Bright's *A History of Israel* (which can be aligned with the Albright school) and more recent *Histories* illustrates the problem.[6] Much of what we previously believed to know is today written off as legendary, pre-historic or completely non-historical by many scholars.

5. Cf. Grabbe 2007.

6. Cf. especially the 'minimalist' presentations by, notably, N.P. Lemche, P.R. Davies, K.W. Whitelam and T.L. Thompson.

From ground zero, the philosophical bedrock, it is easy, and even tempting, to think in extremes, in a maximalist or a minimalist way. If we see modernity as a positivistic way of thinking, it seems logical to call deconstructing postmodernism a negativistic, or even nihilistic,[7] way of thinking. Reality is usually to be found somewhere between the extremes.

In the field of biblical historiography we have witnessed the infamous battle between so-called minimalists and maximalists, exemplified in, on the one hand, the minimalists in Copenhagen and Sheffield (some talk about a Copenhagen–Sheffield axis) and, on the other hand, most of(?) the remainder of the Old Testament guild.

Such naming is of course extremely simplified. Those labels are used in an antagonistic or hostile way, to name the 'other'. No scholar would identify him- or herself as a 'maximalist' or a 'minimalist'.

The term 'minimalism' emerges from the philosophy of arts and architecture, and designates a particular style, without necessarily being antagonistic. In this debate the term 'maximalism' is coined as a counterpart to 'minimalism', to sharpen the fronts antagonistically. In biblical historiography this has been a devastating fight, between those who allegedly accept anything uncritically, and those who allegedly refuse anything that for any reason could be refused or deconstructed away. The incredible and partly toxic debate surrounding the Tel Dan inscription and its use of the term *bytdwd*—a term most scholars translate as 'House of David'—was not the cause of this battle but rather a symptom of it.[8]

We have not had that belligerent situation in the debate surrounding biblical theology. There are real and deep differences and disagreements between the various positions, as we have indicated. The debate has been intense, but it has been civilized.

Nevertheless, there is a historical core left. There really was a historical Israel, but our knowledge of it has changed. On the one hand, we today know somewhat less about it than we previously believed we knew, thanks largely to new (mainly archaeological) data and the conflicting interpretations of them. On the other hand, because we do have more sources, we also know more about it than before. The question of what 'history' is will not be discussed here. Nevertheless, this author agrees when Perdue claims (2005) that 'history and text belong together', and that 'one should not dispense with history in the theological enterprise of reconstructing the major and varied expressions of Israelite and early Jewish faith' (p. 340). With an anti-postmodernist address, Perdue adds: 'To do so is to invent a philosophy (actually revive an old one) in which there is no objective or attainable knowledge and every view is capable of acceptance or rejection' (p. 341).

7. Cf. W. Dever on the 'minimalists' (2000: 128).
8. Cf. Hagelia 2006, 2009.

While we still have to make comprehensive revisions of our historiography, as scholarship moves on, from the literarily creative era of the eighth century down to exilic and post-exilic time we have reason to believe that we have historical knowledge of importance for understanding biblical theology, knowledge still open to revision, but substantial enough to reckon with. We should not exclude the possibility of historical knowledge going even further back, based on archaeological sources and biblical texts, and their even older traditions.

5. *Interpreting the Old Testament*

The Old Testament is a book of metaphors. All metaphors are illustrative, demonstrating an aspect within something; they are open to different interpretations. Yet metaphors are also limiting; no metaphor says everything. Theology could be claimed to be an attempt to catch the unutterable in words. Jeanrond (1996: 243) refers to Peter Berger and Heikki Räisänen as theologians who 'describe and reflect on attempts to talk about God'. The Norwegian poet Arnulf Øverland (1889–1968)—himself a claimed atheist, but all his life intensely concerned with religion—says in his famous Norwegian poem, *Ordet* ('The Word'—a work whose full poetic power can only be fully captured by a skilled poet/translator):[9] 'In my whole life I have struggled to find the one single word, which should go from my heart to your heart… I would say to you all, what I know and believe, with this single word. It should open itself like a lily…' This is an intention I would wish theology to have. Yet this is also metaphorical talk. Theology is destined to be expressed in metaphors, with the possibilities and limitations inherent in metaphors. Doing theology is an attempt to catch and formulate the unspeakable in words.

Metaphor is the language of postmodernism, expressed in images, narratives or poems. Images, narratives and poetry are also the linguistic styles of the Old Testament.[10] Old Testament language abounds with metaphors. Here is a basic dissimilarity between the Semitic and the European way of mediation. Western cultural tradition lives on the Greek–Roman–European philosophical legacy, where not least the legacy from Plato and Aristotle dominates. Traditionally, we Europeans and Westerners are philosophical and theological system builders, thinking systematically and logically—as is epitomized in, for example, Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*. Yet that is not the language of the Old Testament, which is more impressionistic, setting up great collages, without being concerned with harmony. Tensions

9. The translation given is my attempt at capturing the nuances of the Norwegian original.

10. Cf. Gibson 1998.

and contradictions come in a polyphony of different voices, without any attempt at counterbalancing the differences. This is similar to the language of postmodernism.

The Old Testament also tells stories and describes history. Great parts of the Old Testament are narratives. These narratives tell us about mythical beings, legendary personalities as well as historic persons and institutions that we know from ancient history, named persons as well as events and social institutions. The stories are not told as modern storytellers would tell them, and history is not written as modern historiographers would write it. The stories have an agenda, they are biased. The intention is not to design an objective 'history'; there is a message to be told in the narratives. This is also similar to the language of postmodernism.

This is, of course, not to say that the Old Testament is postmodern literature. Far from it, the Old Testament is pre-postmodern, pre-modern, pre-almost anything. It is ancient literature, scarcely comparable to any other literature, except for other ancient literature. It does not fit the categories of our time. It can be investigated with modern as well as postmodern literary methods, yet these methods fit best to literature from our own time. When our methods have exhausted their ability to interpret these ancient texts, we still feel that there is more to it. There is something in the character of these texts that seems difficult or impossible to extract with the methods available to us.

This should at least indicate that there are possible aspects of contact between the Old Testament and a postmodern way of thinking, implying that a postmodern way of thinking is not completely strange to the Old Testament. Old Testament theology should not in principle shun any postmodern way of thinking.

Interpreting ancient texts makes strict demands on us. For one thing, our knowledge of ancient languages is often limited. Even after centuries of scholarly investigation of Hebrew, Aramaic and the other around seventy documented Semitic languages (Sáenz-Badillos 1993: 3), we have to confess that there is much more we do not know. Any substantial find of ancient texts is capable of correcting or adjusting our knowledge of biblical and cognate languages and may cause us to re-write our grammars.[11] This illustrates how limited our knowledge of these languages are.

As for writing an Old Testament *Theology*, the Old Testament itself, as we have it, could be postulated as an in itself comprehensive and coherent basis for investigation. Yet, in spite of postmodern indifference to the matter, the fact that this literature originated in and developed in an ancient Near Eastern culture, to which it repeatedly refers, naturally implies that

11. Cf., for example, the impact of the language of the Tel Dan inscription, which was discovered in 1993–94.

understanding its cultural background is an important precondition for understanding this literature. Even if we take the Old Testament as an in itself comprehensive and coherent basis for investigation, we need insight into its cultural environment to understand it adequately.

On the other hand, the Old Testament is also a literature that invites us to mirror ourselves and our time against it. This implicitly invites modernist interpreters to lift their eyes from a meticulously close reading of the text to actualizations. Reading behind the text and in front of the text are two alternative ways of reading, ways which should not be mutually exclusive. Both have their value. Reading behind the text can even help reading the text better as a mirror.

The history of biblical interpretation shows up a number of époques of understanding, ways of interpreting about which I cannot go into detail here. It suffices to say that the modernist époque, which has dominated the scholarly field since the Enlightenment, is just one period of the intellectual history. Much interpretation from earlier periods, also from earlier periods of the modernist era, is today left behind. On the other hand, features of what we today call postmodernist interpretation are traceable far behind in the intellectual history. There has always been an interaction, a dialogue or dialectic, between old and time-honoured interpretations and challenges from more recent ways of interpretation. This interaction has caused the refinement of previous ways of interpreting, and will never cease. This is the case in all sciences and scholarly fields, including in biblical scholarship.

This is, of course, a positivistic way of seeing a development from bad to good and good to better, of which a postmodern interpreter would be basically critical. Yet it underlines the fact that no single way of interpreting a text should be absolutized as the sole and forever valid way of interpretation. There will always be the possibility of other, better or supplementing methods of interpretation—postmoderns would emphasize *supplementing*.

The Old Testament is not a Christian book, nor are the individual books of the Old Testament Christian. They are not straightforwardly Jewish either. It depends on how the concepts of 'Jew' or 'Jewish' are defined. If these terms are defined in terms of being a citizen of the Persian province Yehud, or a descendant of the population of Yehud, or by some other criterion, most or at least several books of the Hebrew Bible should be called pre-Jewish, though belonging to the Judaic literary tradition.

There is a particular, Jewish reading of the Hebrew Bible, one found in Jewish tradition. But there is also a Christian reading of the Hebrew Bible, as found in the Christian tradition. There are actually many Jewish and Christian readings of the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew Bible is incorporated into a Christian version of the Bible and called, by Christians, the 'Old Testament', in contrast to the Christian New Testament—which is mainly

(possibly except for Luke and Acts) written by Christian Jews. In this incorporation Christians have somehow 'Christianized' the Hebrew Bible. A Christian reading of the Hebrew Bible is primarily recognizable from its New Testament perspective; the Hebrew Bible is read from a vantage point in the New Testament, and the two parts of the Bible are read as two parts of the one more or less coherent book, *The Holy Bible*. In a Christian reading of the Hebrew Bible, a messianic aspect is seen as something of a foreboding of the New Testament Messiah, Jesus Christ. This is the traditional watershed between a Jewish and a Christian reading of the Hebrew Bible; Christians accept Jesus from Nazareth as the Messiah, the Christ, Jews do not.

How should this be reflected in the writing of an Old Testament *Theology*?

Traditionally, *Theologies* are written as either Old Testament or New Testament *Theologies*. Few *Theologies* have taken the Christian reading of the Old Testament seriously, with the effect that the relation between the two parts of the Bible has usually not been explicitly discussed in *Biblical Theologies*. Often, the problem has been silenced, consciously or unconsciously. Old Testament *Theologies* have not followed the theological trails into the New Testament. New Testament *Theologies* do usually discuss or at least refer to the roots of New Testament theological ideas in the Hebrew Bible, but they have seldom discussed the relation between the testaments explicitly.

Also, monographs on different topics usually discuss their respective themes through both testaments as well as in inter-testamental literature, without always discussing the theological relation between the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible principally or explicitly.

It has been pointed out in this book that Old Testament *Theologies* are written by Christian scholars, not by Jewish scholars,[12] because this kind of theological synthesizing is more a part of a Christian and Western tradition than a Jewish tradition.

One scholar who devoted much energy to exploring the relation between the Old and the New Testament is the late Henning Graf Reventlow. In his *Problems of Biblical Theology in the Twentieth Century* (1986), Reventlow includes a section titled 'The Relationship between the Old Testament and the New'—a section that comprises three-quarters of the whole book(!). James K. Mead (2007) presents different approaches to the problem under

12. Jon Levenson is perhaps the one Jewish scholar who has been most renowned for his attempt at writing a *Theology* of the Hebrew Bible. Marvin Sweeney delivered a lecture at the University of Oslo on 30 May 2007 on the theme 'Jewish Biblical Theology: Prospect for a Theology of the Tanak', and published his book *Reading the Hebrew Bible after the Shoah: Engaging Holocaust Theology* in 2008.

the heading 'The Relation of the Old and New Testament' (pp. 62-68), and in his Chapter 4 (pp. 169-240; cf. pp. 246-47) he traces how particular themes are developed through both testaments.[13]

The scholar who in recent times has made the most famous attempt to write a *Biblical Theology*, with equal focus on both testaments, is Brevard S. Childs (1992). His *Theology* has been in the background of the present investigation, in particular in the discussion between Childs himself and Walter Brueggemann and the responders' discussion of them. Childs approaches the problems by studying 'The Discrete Witness of the Old Testament' (Chapter 3) and 'The Discrete Witness of the New Testament' (Chapter 4), followed by 'Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible' (Chapter 6), where he focuses on central theological themes, such as the identity of God, God as creator, covenant, election and the people of God, Christ the Lord, reconciliation with God, law and gospel, humanity, old and new, biblical faith, God's kingdom and rule, and ethics—all of which themes are traced through both testaments. How far Childs has succeeded is a matter of debate (and his book has been much debated, indeed!), but it will not be surveyed or discussed here. Yet if there is something like a Christian reading of the Hebrew Bible, it should be expected that—somehow—a Christian Old Testament *Theologies* could be written.

Childs's Christian-profiled *Theology* of the Old and New Testament was definitely a worthy attempt. Indeed, however much he has been objected to, such an attempt was very much welcome. Childs was the first scholar in modern times to embark seriously on such an undertaking. His attempt was perhaps not wholly successful—at least not according to many of his critics—yet this should not prevent others from experimenting further on such an undertaking. For example, Walter Moberly's books could be read as an attempt to plot a course for future integrated theological readings of both testaments.[14]

6. *Comparison of Kvanvig, Brueggemann and Gerstenberger*

The investigation of the scholars presented in this book has demonstrated that it is Brueggemann, of the three, who has generated most debate. The series of reviews and other responses to Brueggemann's *Theology* is imposing. While Kvanvig has been met with virtual academic silence, except for Kirsten Nielsen's review,[15] Gerstenberger has been met with a reasonably

13. For further literature on the problem, cf. Mead 2007: 265 n. 2.

14. In particular, see Moberly 2000, 2006.

15. Even Terje Stordalen (2003) does not mention Kvanvig in his survey of recent Old Testament *Theologies*. From 2006, Stordalen and Kvanvig have been colleagues in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo.

frequent and engaged response. Nonetheless, Brueggemann has completely stolen the show. Supposedly, Brueggemann is the internationally most influential of the three scholars, not least by dint of his *Theology*, but also by way of his generally broad authorship. Even in Scandinavia, where Kvanvig is read, Brueggemann is probably at least as influential as him. Brueggemann's output, including his *Theology*, is studied and used as textbooks in several Scandinavian theological faculties and schools of theology.

In spite of their more or less postmodern approaches, the *Theologies* of the three scholars treated in the present volume are individually very different, as has frequently been pointed out here. To repeat their stances, Helge S. Kvanvig's vantage-point is that of linguistics and hermeneutics. He takes up basic linguistic and epistemological questions related to Old Testament theology in a more fundamental way than Gerstenberger and Brueggemann do. Kvanvig is the most philosophically oriented of the three. He deals with questions that are basic to any book on Old Testament *Theology*, which qualifies his book as something of a prolegomenon to Old Testament *Theology*. Walter Brueggemann builds his *Theology* as a construction around the idea of a lawsuit trial. He is the one who comes closest to what could be called a comprehensive and coherent postmodern Old Testament *Theology*. Together with Gerstenberger, Brueggemann intends to write a theology proper. Erhard Gerstenberger has a religio-historical angle, with particular attention paid to Old Testament theology. His book places itself in the intersection between Old Testament *theology*, history of Israelite *religion* and the social-anthropological study of the ancient Israelite *society*. These are aspects absent in Kvanvig's and Brueggemann's books.

These theological presentations have in common that they borrow a frame of presentation from outside of the Old Testament itself, using this as the frame around which their respective *Theologies* are built. Kvanvig uses conceptualizations from linguistics. Brueggemann uses a concept from a court trial. Gerstenberger uses a framework from history of religion, sociology and social anthropology.

The attitudes of these scholars to postmodernism are most clearly evident in their reading 'in front of the text' rather than 'behind the text', with some exception for Gerstenberger. The texts are used more as a mirror than as a window, a metaphor not used by themselves, but one that in different degrees covers a reality with their different approaches to the texts.

As we saw, Kirsten Nielsen (1999) has asked whether Kvanvig's book actually is a *Theology* at all, and answered reluctantly, 'I don't know'. I would argue that it is a linguistic-hermeneutical prolegomenon to what could be elaborated further to become an Old Testament *Theology*, a conclusion which Kirsten Nielsen also expresses when she says she misses an exposition of more basic Old Testament themes. Kvanvig never came to any

systematic study of the Old Testament themes. His book appears as a prolegomenon to an Old Testament *Theology*. Neither Brueggemann nor Gerstenberger has this kind of principal discussion of basic linguistic, epistemological and hermeneutical preconditions for writing a *Theology* of the Old Testament. On this matter Kvanvig has broken new ground. Kvanvig deals with questions basic for doing Old Testament *Theology*, questions not usually found in similar *Theologies*, at least not in so penetrating and thorough a way as Kvanvig has done. Kvanvig demonstrates a linguistic, philosophical and hermeneutical training not found in Brueggemann's or Gerstenberger's *Theologies*—or any other Old Testament *Theologies*, to my knowledge.

Walter Brueggemann's approach is fundamentally different from both Kvanvig's and Gerstenberger's. He is completely uninterested in theoretical hermeneutics or linguistics, as well as the history of religion—or even history for that matter. What matters is a rhetorical reading of the Old Testament as seen from the vantage point of a lawsuit trial.

Erhard Gerstenberger is the one of them who reads most behind the text, using the text as a window onto ancient history, that is, in a modernist way seeking a historical reality behind the text. But also Gerstenberger frequently reads in front of the text, paying a series of visits to our own time to see how the texts relate to our own lives and society. For the most of his *Theologies*, Gerstenberger works as an ordinary positivist modernist historian of religion. One exciting point with Gerstenberger is how he uses modern methodology from sociology and social anthropology on an ancient source, the early religious history of the people of Israel. Using such methods on ancient history has become more and more usual since the establishment of these methods.[16] Gerstenberger's postmodernism comes more and more to the fore in the latter chapters of his *Theologies*, where he applies his religio-historical and theological findings to his overall understanding of the Old Testament. It is here that he ends up offering a mixture of traditional positivist liberal theology and pluralistic postmodernist approach. This religio-historical approach is completely absent in both Kvanvig's and Brueggemann's *Theologies*. Though Kvanvig is very much occupied with history, his linguistic-hermeneutic approach to history is completely different to that of Gerstenberger, while Brueggemann is notoriously indifferent to 'what happened'. Searching for traditional liberal-theological aspects with Kvanvig's and Brueggemann's *Theologies* is more or less inadequate.

However different these three *Theologies* are, they have in common an urge not to get lost in posterity but mediate a message to the present—and even the future. When placing themselves in front of the text and reading the

16. See, for example, Chalcraft 1997; and Esler 2006.

text as a mirror, they see the text as a partner for a dialogue or a dialectic crossover between past and present.[17] In this way they individually break new ground for writing Old Testament *Theology*, in contrast to previous *Theologies*.

These three *Theologies* can be used as vantage-points for looking ahead into the future of the field. All three could be perceived as initiating something new. Their respective positions could be prolonged and projected into the future. In that case Gerstenberger's project could be seen as either a dead-end for the *Theology* project or the opening up of a new theology–religion discussion, implying a possible u-turn away from theology to history of religion. The theology–religion discussion will likely continue, as our knowledge of ancient Near Eastern religions grows. Gerstenberger's *Theology* fits perfectly into such a trend. Actually, the joint forces of religious scholarship, social sciences and historiography create a synergistic effect that could thrust scholarship in the direction of synoptic study of religion, society and theology—the path suggested by Gerstenberger. Gerstenberger's book can be perceived as initiating a synthesis of several scholarly fields: history of religion, theology, social sciences, social anthropology and so on. Whether his point of departure is theology or religion could be disputed, but theology, religion, social sciences and anthropology are the scholarly fields he moves between. A more adequate title of his book would have been, for example, *The Religious Growth of Ancient Israel* (as mentioned above, p. 167).

There is a similar series of intersections in Kvanvig's *Theology*, but here we see intersection between theology, linguistics, hermeneutics and epistemology. It could perhaps be discussed where his point of departure lies. Yet since Kvanvig, like Gerstenberger and Brueggemann, is a theologian by profession, it is obvious that his vantage-point is in theology. Where Gerstenberger converses with history of religion and social sciences, Kvanvig converses with philosophy. In this way he is totally differently oriented compared to Brueggemann and Gerstenberger.

Brueggemann is the one who is most explicitly working as a biblical theologian; in all his writings Brueggemann reveals this. In his *Theology* the problems Kvanvig and Gerstenberger discuss are absent. He takes no detour to history, history of religion, social sciences, linguistics or hermeneutics—he goes straight to the biblical text. His project is understanding the text, nothing more, nothing less. Yet inherently he is in dialogue with jurisprudence; as a heuristic method or model for understanding Scripture he imposes upon it the court trial metaphor, appreciated by, for example,

17. In general, interdisciplinary study and cooperation is something of a *mantra* in contemporary scholarship.

Moberly, but disputed by several others. But a biblical theologian he is, definitely, more so than Kvanvig and Gerstenberger, when compared to the *Theologies*.

When compared, these three *Theologies* might, as an imaginative experiment, be related and positioned as follows: Kvanvig's *Theology* could be placed as a prolegomenon to a biblical *Theology* like Brueggemann's. Kvanvig would possibly not be happy with his book as a prolegomenon to Brueggemann's book, and Brueggemann would possibly not be happy with having Kvanvig's book as a prolegomenon either. These two books cannot be simply joined or merged. Nevertheless, Kvanvig's book would be an excellent prolegomenon to a biblical *Theology* like Brueggemann's. There is something basically significant in the relation between such a prolegomenon and such a *Theology*. Before writing a *Theology* like Brueggemann's, such basic questions have to be discussed, as Kvanvig does.

In relation to Kvanvig and Brueggemann, Gerstenberger's *Theologies* occupies a category on its own. Gerstenberger's concept is not easily compatible with Kvanvig's or Brueggemann's. Gerstenberger does rather follow the path opened up by Rainer Albertz (1992) and Karel van der Toorn (1996: 1 and 3), combined with current social-anthropological studies of the ancient Middle East.

In short, were the three *Theologies* investigated here taken as a token for the future, the three could be seen as representing two main axes: a Kvanvig–Brueggemann axis and a Gerstenberger axis. The former axis moves from epistemology to theology. The latter axis moves from theology to religion—or vice versa. Or, to use perhaps a better metaphor: in Gerstenberger's conception theology and religion are two feet of the same body. This causes us to look for a way ahead in the study and writing of Old Testament *Theology*.

7. *A Way Ahead?*

Is postmodernism a way ahead in Old Testament theology? The reason for my question is the emergence of *Theologies* such as Kvanvig's, Brueggemann's and Gerstenberger's, and the general influence from the postmodern way of thinking. Postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon has possibly come to stay—in some way—and I have so far given some concessions to postmodernist biblical interpretation. But it should be admitted that the question of postmodernism and biblical theology is not a simple one. We have already seen that postmodernism has come under heavy attack from prominent Old Testament scholars.

Nevertheless, postmodernism is here, with postmodernists claiming their rights and 'preserve', also within biblical scholarship and Old Testament theology, with all its implications.

Will postmodernism result in a de-historicized Old Testament theology? At least Brueggemann demonstrates a lack of interest in 'what happened', as frequently noticed. If future Old Testament *Theologies* will be consistently postmodern, we would supposedly see many a-historic or de-historicized and synchronic contributions.

However, on the basis of the present analysis it can be argued that postmodernism has not—and will not—completely conquer the field of Old Testament scholarship. Postmodern ways of thinking have become a significant factor in the thinking of humanities. Nevertheless, it will supposedly be but one aspect within human culture, rather than the one dominating factor. We will see more postmodern-influenced Old Testament *Theologies*, but we will continue to see traditional modernist Old Testament *Theologies*, very probably with postmodern aspects, but modernist in content and structure. Old Testament *Theologies* will naturally be coloured by current cultural developments, where both modernist and postmodernist thinking will continue to play a role. Since the three *Theologies* investigated here, we have seen the emergence of substantial *Theologies* by James Barr (1999) as well as Rolf Rendtorff (2005)—neither of which is postmodern in structure or content.

We should also be aware that postmodernism, at the moment so influential in humanities, will some day supposedly pass its noontime and decline in significance—like most -isms in history. No cultural époque or way of thinking should be absolutized. All eras have had their way of contributing to the art of understanding, and most of them should not be completely neglected.

There is reason to notice a claim from the authors of the recent Norwegian book *Tekst og Historie*,[18] who underline an intention to use terms such as 'text', 'history', 'language', 'writ', 'narrative' and so on, not as slogans for controversial traditions of theory, but in a more neutral way (p. 10). Their intention is to be above the controversies of the last decades of the twentieth century. Those controversies are not regarded as unimportant; on the contrary, they were vitalizing for the field of humanities. Yet at the same time it created unfortunate divisions within the humanities. The claimed and primary intention of their book is to problematize these divisions. The

18. Asdal *et al*. 2008. The title of the work in English would be *Text and History: Reading Texts Historically*. A number of Norwegian academics (scholars from the fields of history, literature, linguistics and language) contributed to this volume: Kristian Asdal, Kjell Lars Berge, Karen Gammelgaard, Helge Jordheim, Tore Rem, Trygve Riiser-Gundersen and Johan L. Tønnesson.

authors argue that the concepts of 'text' and 'history' should be places where the different humanities disciplines *meet*, rather than being a means to divide them from each other. Could this book be a signal that the influence of postmodernism, which the authors explicitly mention as one of the controversial slogans, is entering another stage or even decline?

We do not know how biblical and Old Testament *Theology* will be written in the future, say fifty or a hundred years from now. By then our understanding of the ancient past will have been both enhanced and changed, perhaps substantially. Inevitably, that will influence our understanding of the biblical texts and its theology, postmodernist or not.

We will also have a quite different society, for better or for worse. For example, forecasts are not too good for the environment. If my youngest grandchild, Julianne,[19] born in 2005, reaches the same age as my mother, 97 years, she will live to see the year of 2100. That opens up interesting perspectives. My mother would recall the moment when she first saw a car in her rural community and how she was raised a society without trains and electricity. What will my grandchildren see and experience?

Will Old Testament theology still matter? The Old Testament, a collection of books from a far-away culture, both in space and time, could be supposed irrelevant for people of our time. In Norwegian the term 'gammeltestamentlig' ('Old Testament', used as an adjective) has partly negative connotations, referring to something outdated, sombre or brutal. On the other hand, the Old Testament is full of famous and fabulous narratives and beautiful poetry, still read and remembered by some. Most people still have some idea of, for example, the Decalogue.

The Old Testament texts addressed living people. They did not deny forecasting a future. There are long perspectives in some Old Testament texts. Some of them are taken up and elaborated on in both the Hebrew Bible itself and in the New Testament, and we can follow them into the theology of Judaism and the church, even in Islam. While modernist Old Testament *Theologies* interpreted and systematized a theology of the past, postmodernist interpretation is not content with interpreting the past. This is actually in good biblical, Christian and Church tradition, as texts were continually interpreted and epitomized into a message to its contemporaries. This feature will continue into future theology, and also in the writing of Old Testament *Theology*. It will probably be thought more and more meaningless simply to describe ancient times and beliefs. In that way, postmodernism can be a bridge between theology and homiletics, ethics and politics, as we have seen in the *Theologies* investigated here.

19. Sister of Adine, cf. the dedication to the present volume.

The Old Testament is not a Christian book, it is part of the Jewish tradition, as argued above, but it is nevertheless fundamental to Christianity; Christianity without the Old Testament is like a tree without roots. Writing Old Testament *Theology* is culturally closer to Christianity than to Judaism, because Western Christianity historically is as much a part of the Greek–Roman–European heritage as Judaism, which is closer to Oriental heritage. According to its Platonic–Aristotelian legacy, to systematize belongs to the European, Greek–Roman way of thinking.

Walter Brueggemann has been the editor of the series Overtures to Biblical Theology, published by Fortress Press. This series has not published any comprehensive Old Testament *Theology*; instead, it has produced a series of monographs of current theological interest, from the Old as well as the New Testament.[20] The series Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine (edited Daniel W. Hardy), published by Cambridge University Press, is not a particularly 'biblical' series, but aims at making sense of theological questions in a secular context, 'without losing the sight of the authority of scripture and the traditions of the church'.[21] Several of the books in these series have some postmodern aspects; they do not restrict themselves to describing how it was, 'what happened' and how people believed in ancient times. These are books on theological issues from antiquity with a message to our time. Several of them have evident homiletic features or ethical and political messages to actual problems in our time. Most of the books in Brueggemann's Overtures have an American background, and several of them convey a political message to the American people. The Cambridge series has a more British background. These series open up for us another way of writing *Theologies*, with a broad basis in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Walter R.W.L. Moberly's books, referred to above, are published in both series.

Such features will probably follow us into future writing of Old Testament *Theologies* and monographs. This is also the essence of what Leo Perdue (2005: 345-46) foresees, when he claims:

> Old Testament theology should be both descriptive and constructive. That is, it should attempt to reflect as accurately as possible the theology of the Old Testament texts but then move on to constructive work that attempts to valorize their ethical judgements and theological representations, if and when

20. Such as land theology (Habel 1995 and Brueggemann 2002), God and the rhetoric of sexuality (Trible 1986), the suffering of God (Fretheim 1984), prayer in the Hebrew Bible (Balentine 1993), Torah's vision of worship (Balentine 1983/2000, 1993), a biblical theology of exile (Smith-Christopher 2002), the Old Testament of the Old Testament (Moberly 1992), and so on.

21. Here quoting from the series' statement of intent, as printed in each volume of the series.

> these are appropriate for the modern communities of faith in the construction of their faith and moral behaviour. No biblical theology can by the very nature of the enterprise be purely descriptive, since the questions that are addressed to the text at the means of interpretation arise from the interpreter and his or her contemporary world.

It was claimed at the opening of this summary chapter that in some way or another, writing biblical—and Old Testament—*Theologies* has a future. Yet a host of problems are inherent in such a claim, as we have seen throughout this book and summarized in this chapter. That is why Burke Long has written that 'biblical theology has a future, but only insofar as it can recognize the pluralism *within* (the diversity of biblical traditions, the contestatory construction of the canon, the history of pluriform interpretations of the Bible) and pluralism *without* (the increasingly interconnected world of not always reconcilable methods of biblical criticism and its social locations)' (1996: 283, Long's italics).

How should so different aspects as surveyed in this chapter be incorporated into something like an Old Testament *Theology*? A few guidelines are necessary.

Werner G. Jeanrond (1996) has written a thought-provoking article titled 'Criteria for New Biblical Theologies'. Though his work is only partly relevant to the question of writing Old Testament *Theology*—Jeanrond's target is the relation between biblical theology and systematic theology, and by 'biblical' he means mainly New Testament theology—his article was written around the time that Kvanvig, Brueggemann and Gerstenberger published their *Theologies*, and thus mirrors much of the same debate lying behind their *Theologies*.

Jeanrond presents no fewer than eleven 'Criteria for New Biblical Theologies' (pp. 246-47), underlining among other things its multidisciplinary theological character, that it should not necessarily be an ecclesial exercise—it could be academic as well[22]—how it challenges systematic theology and non-dogmatic questions, the question of its hermeneutical basis, how it should be defined and so on.

Leo Perdue concludes his book on *The Collapse of History* (1994) by sketching 'The Future of Old Testament Theology' (pp. 301-307), which he summarizes in ten points[23] (and which are updated in a 'Postscript' [titled

22. Actually, the article is mainly a discussion with Heikki Räisänen on whether biblical theology should be a purely academic matter or whether it should have ecclesial interconnection and also be considered contemporary theology or ethics.

23. Cf. the critical comments by Burke Long (1996: 282-84), who, from a more postmodern stance, hears him 'as prescribing the terms for conversation and limiting its potential for irreconcilable difference', asserting 'the self-evident normativity of historical analysis (a biblical scholar has to decide what the Bible *meant*), systematic rendering

'The Changing Future of Old Testament Theology', pp. 340-52], which was included in the updated version of Perdue's work, retitled *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology* [2005]). His 2005 update proposes a series of steps 'designed to lead to a biblical theology engaging in contemporary faith'. Perdue registers the many and disparate voices, speaking out against different methodologies, contexts, and often conflicting epistemologies. Yet, 'they should be heard and become dialogue partners in theological conversation that seeks to express both the Old Testament's and the current church's religious understanding' (p. 340).

Perdue (2005) sets forth as his proposal 'A Paradigm for Old Testament Theology', concentrated in four stages (pp. 347-49). He underlines how important it is for the biblical theologian 'to engage in self-disclosure' (p. 347), to be conscious of his own identity. As a first stage the interpreter should 'articulate the more convincing possible meanings of the text', deriving from a historical understanding of the texts in their cultural context. The second stage is 'conceptualizing of multiple images, ideas, and themes', which leads to the systematic rendering of multiple theologies of Old Testament texts within the dynamic matrix of creation and history. The third, and most difficult—but critically important—stage 'envisions the recognition of how biblical texts and their theologies have been construed within history of interpretation'. In the fourth stage Perdue describes how 'hermeneutics requires critical reflection in order to correlate the theologies of the Old Testament and past interpretations with the horizons of meaning that derive from contemporary discourse involving theology, ethics, self-interest, and moral issues of pressing concern' (p. 348). With reference to postmodernism, he holds forth that abandoning critical evaluation 'is to obstruct the possibility of dialogue between biblical, historical, and contemporary theologians', adding: 'To deny history is to deny a substantial feature of what it means to be human. We cannot pretend the Enlightenment did not take place…' Nor should we 'attempt to return to a pre-Enlightenment worldview…' (p. 349).

James K. Mead (2007) has given important guidelines in his Chapter 4, on 'Methods Used in Biblical Theology' (pp. 121-68), describing the challenges of organizing methods of biblical theology, methods that focus on the Bible's theological content, methods that focus on the shape of the Bible's theological witness and methods that focus on our human perspectives as

under a unifying principle (biblical scholars have to organize the Bible's disorder), and masterful corrections (biblical theologians have to play a large role in helping decide what the Bible might mean for contemporary Christians)'. In his 2005 update of the volume (*Reconstructing Old Testament Theology*, Chapter 9, 'The Changing Future of Old Testament Theology: A Postscript'), Perdue largely ignores Long's critique, leaving it uncommented.

readers of the Bible. His conclusion is that no single method should be completely cultivated. With reference to Gerhard Hasel, he argues cautiously for a 'multiplex approach' (p. 166), implicitly excerpting the best of each method, without overlooking the weaknesses also inherent in the different methods. The point is that no single method catches all needs to be taken into account for writing a biblical or Old Testament *Theology*.

I find the arguments set forth by Jeanrond, Perdue and Mead extremely valuable, but will not comment on or discuss them individually here, except to claim that their points are valuable questions to consider when writing Old Testament *Theology*. Here their arguments are put in the background for my own thinking about these questions, together with Kvanvig, Brueggemann and Gerstenberger.

At the risk of being either too specific or too simplistic, let me try to indicate some guidelines.

Every *Theology* should open with a discussion of questions that are basic for the whole presentation: epistemological questions, how it should be edited or redacted, including how it should relate to its New Testament reception. This is the place to take up methodological and hermeneutical questions, such as the value and/or limitations of the historical-critical method and the value of and/or limitations of postmodern ways of thinking. After such deliberations a presentation of the actual theology of the Old Testament should follow: how actually the enterprise should be configured. This is why I argue that Kvanvig's book could be read as a prolegomenon to a presentation of an Old Testament *Theology*, rather than as an Old Testament *Theology* on its own.

This implies that Kvanvig's *Theology*—or, for that matter, Brueggemann's and Gerstenberger's *Theologies*—should not be read as an indication that the more traditional ways of writing Old Testament *Theology* are or should be done away with. A postmodern way of thinking has not completely replaced all kinds of positivistic or historical-critical ways of thinking, as the *Theologies* of Childs, Barr and Rendtorff indicate. But more postmodern-oriented *Theologies*, such as those of Kvanvig, Brueggemann and Gerstenberger, could be both important and necessary supplements, or even correctives, to more traditional presentations.

In short, modernist and postmodernist features will supposedly continue to characterize future writing of Old Testament *Theology*.

However, the appearance of comprehensive contributions, 'wall to wall' presentations, will likely be less frequent. Scholarship becomes more and more specialized, as also does Old Testament scholarship. Any specialization opens up new fields of investigation, which implies a progressive fractualization which implies more specialization in a never-ending process. As Old Testament scholarship will not only relate to the Hebrew Bible (and

New Testament), but also continually relate both to questions raised by general Near Eastern scholarship and to questions current in secular society, we will likely rather see monographs taking up theological, personal, cultural, ethical, environmental and political questions, written from a Hebrew Bible (and New Testament) perspective.

Whether written from a modernist or a postmodernist vantage-point, Old Testament *Theologies* will inevitably be written in different ways, as scholars have different conceptions of Old Testament theology. We will never come to a point where the riddle of how to write an Old Testament *Theology* is solved. From the beginning of writing Old Testament *Theology* until our time, the genre has undergone constant mutation, and so will it will continue so to be. It is not possible to claim that one particular way of writing Old Testament *Theology* is *the* right one. There are certain requirements that should be taken into consideration: it should be biblical, that is, its basis should be the Hebrew Bible, and it should be theological, that is, it should somehow be a presentation of the theology of the Old Testament.

An Old Testament *Theology* can be good or bad, successful or not successful, adequate or inadequate. As we have seen, reviewers and commentators have different opinions as to whether the *Theologies* investigated here are good or bad, successful or not so successful, adequate or not so adequate. There is no objective and once-and-for-all-time right answer to such a question. Theologians evaluate differently, and they can evaluate some parts of a *Theology* as good and other parts as not so successful, and so on. This is how it will always be.

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